

Socio-Cultural organizations of Dalit communities: A case study of Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha

**A Dissertation submitted to the University of Hyderabad in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In

POLITICAL SCIENCE

By

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To

My Parents

&

The Departed soul of
My friend P. Reddy Giri

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the work embodied in the present thesis entitled “*Socio-Cultural organizations of Dalit communities: A Case study of Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha*”, submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of Dr. K.Y. Ratnam Department of Political Science, is a bonafide research work which is also free from plagiarism. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other University or Institution for award of any degree or diploma. I hereby agree that my thesis can be deposited in Shodhganga/INFLIBNET.

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Certificate

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “*Socio-Cultural organizations of Dalit communities: A Case study of Andhra Pradesh Dalit MahaSabha*” submitted by **Valthati Vijaya Bhaskar** bearing Regd. No. 2KSPPH08 in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science is a bonafide work carried out by him under my supervision and guidance which is a plagiarism free thesis. The thesis has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

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Acknowledgements

It is my pleasure to remind all the persons to acknowledge my gratitude for assisting me in many ways while writing my dissertation.

Primarily, I am highly indebted to my supervisor Dr. K.Y.Ratnam for his sheer love and constant encouragement throughout my work. I also owe a great deal for being the constant support of my studies.

I am also thankful to my teachers in the Department of political science, University of Hyderabad and the office staff for their continuous inquiring and valuable help during my course.

I am gratefully indebted to my friend Dr.Murali Manohar Gogulamudi for assisting me technically in many cold nights without which this work could not come in this form. My thanks also go to Praveen, Dharma, Vijay Kumar Konidala, Sarish, VP, Milton, Vamshika for being the constant supporters and strengthening all my efforts in to the form of this dissertation and also for their cozy company and for all the hours they spent on me, which encouraged me a lot.

My heartfelt thanks to Kanaka Rao, Suneetha and my colleagues Arjun, Dr. Bhumaiah, Galenna, Eshwar, Suresh, Nagaraj and Suresh Bandari and my friends Kiran, Ramesh, Raju for their affection and continuous support.

It is also my obligation to remember my friend Late P.Reddy Giri for his good will and encouragement.

I also take this opportunity to thank all my colleagues of Palamuru University who rendered their services whenever I needed in fulfilling my work.

I thank all my well-wishers and friends for being there always with me in each and every moment and kept me happy during my work.

I express my deep sense of gratitude to my parents, family members, my better half and soulmate Deepthi, my son Vihaan and my loving daughter Blessy for their Love, support and continuous encouragement.

-Valthati Vijaya Bhaskar

Chapter-I

Introduction

The Hindu Social System is characterized by a rigid system of ascriptive hierarchy in which the existence of polarity, principles of purity and pollution, the social rank and social equality are determined and governed by the values of the Hindu socio-cultural system. Social inequality is a unique feature of the Indian inequality in all spheres between the higher and lower castes. The most critical form of inequality is the acceptance of the ideas of ritual ranking and their legitimacy in social relationships. The Dalits are considered not only impure in terms of their occupations, their very existence, their dwellings, their moments and even their fall of shadow creates a state of impurity among all the upper casters throughout the country.

Social Stratification and Dalits:

The Dalits referred to as *chandalas* in ancient Vedic period seemed to have come into existence during the early stages of Hindu caste system. In fact, it is hardly possible to trace the exact origins of the caste, for the distinction and maintenance of social relationships. Indian society was stratified into *varnas* and it was called as *Varna system*. Varna refers to or literally means colour; and it was in this sense that the word seemed to have been “employed in contrast to the Aryans and *dasas* referring to their fair and dark complexions respectively”¹. In the Varna scheme of the Vedas there were only four orders namely Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras. Finally those, outside this four-fold classification were called *Panchamas*, the fifth group and also known as untouchables, *atisudras*, *avarnas*, *antyajas*, *namashudras* etc, and currently known as Dalits.

¹ Ghurye G.S., Caste and Class in India, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1950, p.176.

Ambedkar perceived the Indian society as a Caste society. The Hindu society as a major component of Indian society is "but a collection of castes. Each caste is conscious of its existence"². Further he observes that there is not 'common consciousness' among the castes. He states that the "caste system prevents common activity and by preventing common activity it has prevented the Hindus from becoming a society with a unified life and a consciousness of its own being"³. The Brahmins whose primary concern is to protect their interests against those of non-Brahmins and non-Brahmins primary concern is to protect their interests against those of Brahmins. "The Hindus therefore are not merely an assortment of castes but they are so many warring groups each living for itself and for its selfish ideal"⁴.

The caste system is a unique characteristic of the Indian society. Although it underwent repeated changes, the fundamental structure of the values underlying it remained the same. Gradually, the concepts of 'pollution' and 'purity' entered into the Hindu society and it determined the hierarchical social status of all the castes. Untouchability emerged as a corollary of the caste system. The social structure was based on hierarchy, characterized by caste system. Since the Hindu traditional society was largely based on principles of caste, to that extent it was particularly a closed system. To understand social stratification, it may be necessary to consider the functioning of the caste system in brief. Caste is a system of social organization. From Vedic times to present day, caste has been the determining factor of Hindu social organization. G.S. Ghurye, an eminent sociologist observes six important features of caste system. They are: 1. Segmental division of society; 2. Hierarchy of groups; 3. Restrictions on feeding and social intercourse; 4. Civil and religious disabilities and privileges of different sections; 5. Lack of unrestricted choice of occupation, and 6. Restrictions on marriage.⁵

² Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, (AW&S) Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1979, Volume I, p.51

³ Ibid.

⁴ AW&S, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1987, Volume III, p.52

⁵ Ibid.

This follows that membership in caste is hereditary and for life. Any caste group exhibits this features. Hence, it may be drawn that the traditional Hindu Society was a closed one and no mobility was possible in it. The caste system as it is characterized by a status of hierarchy; the Dalits are at the base, in fact, at the lowest social ritual status. They were subjected to a variety of disabilities under the traditional system. They had suffered from social injustice and exploitation. They were denied all privileges and benefits as had been enjoyed by the upper castes. Their moments, their entry into temples, public places, educational institutions, their field of activities in respect of worship, practice of rituals and customs were restricted. As consequence, these castes have remained socially, economically culturally and educationally backward for several centuries.

Different classes, in every society, may have been formed on grounds of race, religion and other factors. In India, "the problem of classes is seen primarily in the form of castes"⁶. According to John Gunther, "Caste is as old as India. It is the inner citadel of Hinduism. It is the institution, which makes India unique, the device breaking up Indians into fixed categories that has no approximation elsewhere in the world. 'Every Hindu... is born into a caste and his caste determines his religious, social, economic, domestic life from the cradle to the grave'. No man may leave his caste, except to be expelled. It is impossible to progress from caste to caste"⁷.

The anthropological interpretation of caste system in terms of principles of mutually exclusive behavior of members of each caste assumes the caste system as a static social structure. Their interpretations also deal with only those principles of practice or behaviors set by each caste for itself. They essentially deal with the intra-caste relationship of member of each caste. If every caste accepts the principles of ritual hierarchy completely, then there would be little to deal with inter-caste relationship.

⁶ A.M. Rajasekharaiah, *Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: The Quest for Social Justice*, Uppal Publishing House, New Delhi, 1989, p.35.

⁷ Quoted from A.M. Rajasekharaiah.

But the problem in caste system is that hierarchically higher castes impose certain rules of behavior on the lower castes.

But no social structure has ever been static in the world. The caste structure has undergone various changes from time to time. The process of change has been very complex and defies precise assessment. The socio-political power is distributed between people along the caste lines. The ritual hierarchy which legitimizes this caste system consequently upholds the social backwardness of the Dalits in the name of karma theory. Thus, the caste system proposes a principle of institutionalization of inequality between different castes in terms of socio-cultural, politico-economic privileges. Any challenge therefore to caste structure is tantamount to threat to economic and political power, of the dominant castes.

The various disadvantages faced by the Dalits in the caste system and the various social mobility options that were available to them have led to the generation of many ideologies against inequality in the caste system and identity processes of Dalits. The process of social mobility has been an opportunity for the Dalits in reinterpreting their past as well as visualizing a future with self-respect and dignity as the main components. The various attempts at understanding the past had democratic and egalitarian goals as the axis. "The caste system in India is not only a structure of cultural values, but also a certain pattern of inequitable distribution of power and wealth of different kinds along the finds of caste hierarchy."⁸ Similarly, the inequalities within the caste system are not merely religiously ordained but are a consequence of the unequal distribution of power and privileges in the society. Accordingly, high castes have a monopoly over scarce goods or have relatively greater access to power and privileges.⁹

⁸ Nagaraj, The flaming Fleet: A Study of the Dalit movement in India, South Forum Press, Bangalore, 1993, p.6.

⁹ Pimpley, Social Reform for the Untouchables: Some Issues for Examination, in Rajeshwar Prasad ed. Social Reforms: An Analysis of Indian Society, Y. K. Publications, Agra, p.167

The 'Untouchable' possesses a distinct ideology, identity and pragmatism from the 'Hindu'. The 'Untouchable' discovers a ground from which to consolidate his positive self-definition. A positive cultural ideology and identity are always very precious gains for the socially deprived. The more pronounced the deprivation, the more socially sensitive, coveted, and contested are these gains generally. Above all, for identifying the Untouchable's ideological categories, it is crucial that a distinction be maintained between 'the Hindu' and the earlier 'pre-Hindu' roots of civilization. In a situation in which, widening social gaps and rising conflict between the caste-Hindus and the 'Untouchables' are making the 'Untouchables' present initiatives difficult to understand.¹⁰

Throughout the history of the caste system, the various attempts made by the 'untouchables' to regain a respectable social position for themselves in the society, through submission and opposition, have made them more rebellious and the caste Hindus more aggressive towards the 'untouchables'. These untouchables, "articulate their distinctive cultural perspective, as well as a serious awareness of their changing role in Indian society. The received knowledge from ancestors and their own day-to-day experiences guide them to formulate their opinions about the society. The Untouchable is expressing himself through a distinctive culture, which negates the Hindu order in order to claim spiritual as well as material equality."¹¹

The process and fruits of modernization was initially not accessible to all castes. Even among caste-Hindus, the degree of mobility, to a great extent, depended on their location in the caste hierarchy. Those who enjoyed a better social and economic status traditionally, by virtue of their caste, moved up more easily than those who were placed 'below' them in the caste hierarchy. In all, the process of modernization largely reflected the traditional status system rather than any other criteria. In a way, the modern social order is super imposed on the traditional social order. Caste plays a

¹⁰ For details see Khare, *The Untouchable as Himself: Ideology, Identity and Pragmatism among the Lucknow Chamars*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1984, p.x.

¹¹ Ibid.

significant role in one's access to education particularly with regard to one's attitudes, consciousness and participation in social relations.

Socio-Cultural Aspects of Dalits:

The social status of all the Dalits was more or less equally degraded in the view of the caste Hindus. Dalits naturally thought that all the miseries were caused by the oppressive Hindu religion and caste Hindus. Thus they could rightly identify their common enemy as orthodox Hinduism and caste Hindus. Over the centuries, wrenching stories of poverty, exploitation, violation and unparalleled human suffering have been the reality of Dalits. The problems are even more severe in rural areas. They have existed in the apartheid conditions, not allowed to cross the line dividing their part occupied by the caste Hindus and not allowed to use the same wells, drink from the same cup of water or tea and enter into temples. For the majority of Dalits, life is still limited by caste barriers most of these Dalits still live in rural areas and economic exploitation remains their most acute problems. Even today, discrimination against Dalits and the practice of untouchability persist.

Dalits as people without a history of their own have been marginalized, as objects and subjected to various types of social discrimination by the upper castes in Indian society. The caste discrimination against Dalits continues to persist in all spheres of life. The Dalits who occupy the lowest places in the Hindu social order are socially under privileged. This caste discrimination is not only sanctified by the Hindu religion, but is also upheld by the continuing economic and political inequality. Though the Dalits have been collectively attempting to come out of this rigid social structure, there is no much change in their social status. Mahatma Phule in Maharashtra, fought against this social order in 19th century. The various attempts of Hindu social reforms in the same century against the fight of the Dalits, strengthened

the caste further. The self-respect movement by Periyar and later by Ambedkar could gain only few concessions for the Dalits in political system¹².

The practice of untouchability is still prevalent in some form or other in various parts of the state. The Dalit do not have access to temples and other places of public worship. They do not have access to drinking water resources, tea stalls and hotels. Even if they were allowed in to tea shops separate tea glasses are maintained for them which is known famously as 'Two-Glass system'.¹³ Thus their status needs to be uplifted and all the atrocities met out against them, put to check. For this we need to provide conditions which give them a chance to avail facilities or opportunities and thus emancipate themselves further in the mainstream of the life.

The political and economic concessions granted by the political system to the Dalits could not bring major change in the social status of the Dalits. The problem of the land to the Dalits was not resolved by the land reforms. The illiteracy and the poverty, continue to the features of the Dalits. However, the reservations in education and employment have created a sizeable section of middle class among Dalits who become socially more conscious. The urbanization and modernization of the society in general have created more spheres of social interaction between the Dalits and upper castes. The seemingly secular spheres of urban society have its impact on the rural society. The Dalits in the rural society are also asserting for equal status along with the other castes.

The assertion of the Dalits for social equality is creating intolerance among the upper castes. The distinctive emergence of the Dalits as a community is also threatening the

¹² See O'Hanlon, Rosalind (2002), *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India*, Cambridge University Press; Geetha, V. and S.V. Rajadurai, (1987), *Towards a Non-Brahmin Millennium: From Iyothee Thass to Periyar*. Samya: Calcutta; Gail Omvedt (1994), *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India*, Sage Publications, New Delhi.

¹³ See Ghanshyam Shah (2006) et.al, *Untouchability in rural India*, Sage, New Delhi

traditional social hegemony of the upper castes. The tension between the Dalits and the upper castes is resulting in eruption of violence against the Dalits. The increased political power and economic prosperity of the upper castes is a contributing to inflict violence on the Dalits in a systematic manner.

Dalits are considered as one of the most disadvantaged group because of the process of social stratification and job distribution in the past has resulted in their present socio-economic plight and their entire and perpetual backwardness. The Dalits (the term Dalit is used in lieu of the term scheduled castes or untouchables) constitutes of 59 sub castes among them in Andhra Pradesh, however, two pre-dominant sub-castes are the malas and madigas and they together constitute the majority of the Dalit population. The traditional occupation of the malas is agriculture labourers and madigas is of leather work. Even though many of the Dalits carry on with their caste based and service oriented traditional occupation as well as agricultural work. The insignificant returns on the service they render and the landlessness have made them face appalling poverty.

Simultaneously, the process of modernization and industrialization has replaced most of their caste occupations. These peoples have become helpless to make up for the loss by adapting to new enterprise or entrepreneurship. Caste system is undoubtedly an obstacle for the economic prosperity of Dalits. Even though unsociability is fading from the urban milieu and among the educated, the principle of heredity in occupation has been segregating them from the socio-economic main stream of the country. There is not yet full and free access to Dalits to have an alien profession beyond their heredity occupation. This sort of psychological restriction is not conducive for the upliftment of the backward people. Hence, there is a need to provide them free mobility in every field and walk of life and allow them to improve their standard of living just like others.

Social hierarchy in terms of caste occupation, caste barriers and untouchability are some of the distinct features of a Hindu Society found nowhere in other parts of the world. Even more surprising is the question of untouchability and claiming of superiority within the sub-caste of Dalits itself. However, in spite of caste pollution, such stratifications have served even today as a cementing force for group formation; for within the structure of the caste oriented society, individual behavior is largely regulated in terms of expected and accepted norms in which the individual is born. Thus, caste represents a close clustering of members at different levels. Especially in rural areas, people are more caste-bound and remain rigid within caste boundary.

The roots of the caste system are so deep that, apart from its symbolic value, it does have functional importance in the society. There may have been changes in inter-caste or intra-caste relationships, but in its functioning, caste is an important factor as ever in maintaining social distance as well as social solidarity. The notion of private property is minimal given their economic conditions and even their social institutions like marriage and divorce are relatively flexible.

Religion is one of the broad groupings of cultural complex. It is an important part of all human activities which is closely associated with life from conception through birth to death. This religion plays an important role in regulating the lives of Dalits. Religion has two interrelated constituents namely, beliefs and practices. Belief is the mode of conception and ritual is the mode of action. They throw light on social relations expressing the structural adjustment arrangements of the society. They are the part of interpersonal communicative system and are symbols and representations and they have the religious sanctions. Religion is the belief in supernatural. It refers to the existence of supernatural beings which have a governing effect on life.

Religion may very well be said to constitute the whole life of Dalits. They believe in various dieties, ghosts and spirits guiding every walk of life. Dalits are religious-minded and more strictly speaking superstitious. Dalits are concerned more with their

ancestral gods or caste gods which are known as *intidevatalu* or *kuladevatalu* or *ilavelpulu*, mostly they worship female deities. To mention few were Yellamma, Maisamma, Maremma, Peddamma, Poleramma etc., Besides these, they celebrate Jataras in different areas like, Gangamma, Maisamma, Kuru Murthy etc., thus, the culture of Dalits is in no way similar or identical but rather antithetical in its very nature to that of a upper caste- Hindus¹⁴.

The present social awareness and assertion of identity among Dalits is a result of social change, historical developments and various attempts by the Dalits themselves to overcome their 'untouchable', 'marginalised' and deprived status into the contemporary Dalit identity.¹⁵ The various factors that contributed towards this include the religious movements during the Bhakti period, the social reform movements in the 19th and 20th centuries, the anti-caste movements led by Jyotiba Phule and Periyar, the Dalit movement initiated by Ambedkar and, in the post-independence period, a number of Dalit movements in various states asserting Dalit ideology and identity.¹⁶

With the colonial education and welfare programmes of the modern government, Dalits got benefited during this period particularly in coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh. Some of the learned Dalits occupied prominent positions in government and acquired privilege. With the increasing dignity and self-respect they does not want to tolerate the discriminatory policy of the upper castes who attained political power and some of them became the landlords in rural areas.

Social consciousness among the Dalit masses was increased due to various reasons like improvement of water facilities for irrigation and the development of agriculture,

¹⁴ See Kancha Ilaiah (1996), *Why I am not a Hindu: A Sudra critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and political Economy*, samya, Calcutta.

¹⁵ See Tewari, Semiology of Dalit Consciousness: A North Indian Experience, *Eastern Anthropologist*, 51:2, 1998, Pp. 180-181.

¹⁶ Shah, Ghanshyam, *Social Movements in India: A Review of Literature*, Sage Publications, 1990, Pp. 108-116.

spread of education by Christian missionaries etc. During the post-independence period many social changes and social mobility occurred among the *Sudra* peasant classes like Reddy, Kamma and Velama. These groups also acquired the Brahminical values and exploited the lower caste groups. They could not tolerate the cultural development and social awareness among the Dalit masses and caused for the attacks on Dalit groups.

In the last two hundred years, Dalits have availed every opportunity within their reach to rise from the subjugation, marginalization and various other exclusions imposed by the caste system. This modern awakening began with the utilization of the nominal representative provisions under British rule and the various constitutional safeguards available to them later in the post-independence period. Since then, resisting the increasing opposition to their social mobility and the growing number of atrocities being committed upon them by the ‘upper castes’, the Dalits have come together as a collective identity.¹⁷

The first incident of attack and brutal assassination of a Dalit person by name Kotesu in a village called Kanchikacharla in Krishna district in 1969 by the upper castes is remarkable in the history of Dalit movement in Andhra Pradesh. Since it was occurred during the transition period, this event became significant and was recorded in the police file as a first atrocity case on Dalits after independence. As there were no Dalit organizations during this period many such atrocities and attacks took place individually in Andhra.

On the other hand the Naxalbari movement also broke out in Andhra during this period. Since the movement was based on Marxist Leninist and Maoist philosophy as well as working classes it had large numbers. Though the Naxalite movement declared that it is practical towards the proletariat but the specific identity of Dalits was relegated in it. As a result, the discrimination towards Dalits is being continued also

¹⁷ Zelliott, E. *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1992, p.267.

during this period in rural areas Andhra Pradesh.

The social consciousness engendered by various forces and factors like the Dalit organizations and their movements, government welfare programmes, modern education, contact with wider society etc., have resulted in rising aspirations among the Dalits. Having realized their rights, the Dalits now participate in all the important spheres of national life. The last few generations of the Dalits have been consciously nurturing a fascination for a modern lifestyle, democratic values and a secular outlook that have accorded them a distinct identity - the Dalit identity.¹⁸ Since then, the Dalits have been incessantly taking to modern education, it being a source of increased economic and social status.

Dalits today are not mere 'passive participants' they now have a systematic programme, their aspirations for social, economic and political equality lead them to strategies and the means for their realization. They have not restricted themselves merely to government jobs; they have entered various other occupations and professions as well and achieved a considerable level of improvement in their socio-economic status. However, they are now also nurturing aspirations equal to that of caste-Hindus in educational, occupational, political and cultural fields, though their entry has had a short and sometimes unsuccessful history compared to the caste-Hindus.

Though various development and social justice policies initiated by the British, and continued by the independent Indian government, helped Dalits to become upwardly mobile move up in economic and political status but, at the same time, led to increased instances of atrocities upon them. Consequent to their economic development and social mobility, Dalits had to face many threats, atrocities, and massacres. Wherever Dalits asserted their rights and fought for equality, they faced social boycott, forestalling of social interaction, denial of work, etc. These kinds of repressive

¹⁸ See Tewari, Op Cited, *for evolution of the Dalit identity from 'untouchable' identity*, Pp. 170-171.

activities, singling out the Dalits, are in response to the increasing socio-cultural organization of Dalits in cities as well as in rural areas.

Caste-Hindu response to Dalit socio-economic development and mobility is very aggressive and violent most of the time. Often, it demonstrates weakness and fear of caste Hindus at losing their privileges, especially when along with economic development; Dalits try to gain social respect and equality on an equal footing with others. Consequently, the 'upper' castes not only lose free labourers but also feel hurt and 'reduced' vis-a-vis Dalits.

Often caste-Hindus who grew anxious that these hitherto inarticulate and politically subordinated sections were posing a threat to them economically and politically; resorted to atrocities and massacres on Dalits (Chundurur, Karamchedu, Vempanta, etc., in Andhra Pradesh). Incidents like these have been occurring all over the country, this variation rather depends on geographical area and the castes affected by the Dalits' economic and social mobility.

Significantly such incidents in Andhra Pradesh during 1980's have given rise to the emergence of socio-cultural Dalit organizations. During the same period, the massacre of Karmchedu, perhaps the richest village in the whole of India took place on 17th July, 1985. The upper castes who were unable to bear the assertion of self-respects of the Dalits, attack in large numbers with spears and crowbars and all sorts of weapons followed and chased the Dalits over fields. They killed six persons, raped nine women and wounded as many. The socialists, communists and left oriented parties turning a blind eye in this incident is the cause for the evolution of an independent organization for Dalits and by the Dalit leaders themselves. The Dalit intellectuals decided to create a plat-form for themselves and they formed Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha to fight against the atrocity over Dalits.

The Dalits, with the massacre of Karamchedu got awakened and began to organize themselves on the caste lines all over the state as a force independent of existing political parties. Since the inception of the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha, Dalits have been ceaselessly struggling with their clenched fists raised, and asserting their rights for the first time in an organized way. They have established for themselves a movement against such oppression through so many rallies, dharmas and picketings, rasta-rokos and so many forms of protests that include the participation of women and children. The Dalits have grown in their sense of self-respect with this movement through this organization of Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha. In many a place they were able to fight the oppression of the landlords. The left parties have, in the whole process, gained themselves the status of silent spectators. Some progressive revivalists have debated and blamed the movement as a casteist movement carried out by the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha. Dalits never believe in casteism since they gain nothing by caste on the other hand, Dalits believe in annihilation of caste. Dalits are never recognized as an exploited class of agricultural labourers in the analyses of the so called communists.

Notwithstanding such oppression coming from the landlords on one side and their government on the other side, more and more Dalits are joining their march towards freedom. With the evolution of Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha, there has been a growing awareness and concern for the degraded condition of the Dalits and for this efforts have been made in collaboration with different organizations and institutions to inculcate and encourage the Dalits to enter the main stream. Serious and systematic efforts in this direction are made to help these groups to overcome the social conditions.

In this background, the present study intends to focus on Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha, a socio-cultural organization, which made the word “Dalit” to occupy a definite place in the agenda of the present day politics. This organization was established during 1985 with response to Karamchedu incident, which radically

restructured the content of political discourse in Andhra Pradesh. Karamchedu is a point of departure both for Andhra Political History and also for the Ambedkarite movement in Andhra Pradesh. Since then, the state politics began to undergo a metamorphosis in terms of its very political discourses. All political parties since then began to change their strategy and programmes. With the establishment of the Dalit Mahasabha, for the first time, Ambedkar was made as their guiding symbol and spirit. And his image was reconstructed as a movement builder and political and ideological emancipator.

Till 1985, for many Dalit bahujans, Ambedkar really remained undiscovered and Mahatma Phule's name was not known at all. The post-Karamchedu period was like opening a new chapter in their life. For the first time they realized that they can create history. This consciousness forced them to break from the one-dimensional thinking. This period changed the political atmosphere radically.

Review of Literature:

Dalits are deprived, disposed and dehumanized segments of Indian society. They are not only deprived of the basic minimum facilities of life like education, housing, health but are also dispossessed of access and control over resources. They are also outcasted to a dehumanized existence. Thus culturally too, they are the most destitute sections of the society. Further in terms of culture, Dalits of India are deprived of their own thinking, behaving and living.

The emanating point of Dalit discourse is the caste discrimination that Dalits suffer in their daily life. The historical nature of this deprivation and the dehumanization has reduced them to non-beings. Central to the Dalit discourse is the ability to carry on their lives against all odds and in unfavorable conditions. Thus the oppression of Dalits and their attempts for emancipation on one hand and atrocities and assertions on the other constitute the central and crucial cause on Dalit discourses.

Covering different facets and periods of socio-cultural protests and movements in different regions of the country as well as elaborating different dimensions of empowerment of Dalits, there are many important studies by scholars. However such studies are very few in the context of Andhra Pradesh. Some of the important works worth reviewing in the specific context of the study are detailed here.

Gail Omvedt¹⁹ (1994) is one the important analytical accounts of Dalit movement in colonial period. It defines the history of Dalit movement in Maharashtra, Andhra and Karnataka as a leading part of a broader anti caste movement which has been central democratic movement of Indian society. It traces the history of Dalit movement from the beginning of 19th century to the demise of Dr.Ambedkar. in the pre-independence periods, anti-caste movements had emerged in various parts of the country like Ad Dharm movement in Maharashtra, Punjab, the Adi Hindu movement in western Uttar Pradesh, Namashudra movement in Bengal, Narayan guru's movement in Kerala, Adi dravida movement in Tamilnadu, Adi Andhras and Adi Hindus in costal Andhra Pradesh and Hyderabad with the Dalit movement as its major component. It focuses Dalit movement on three major linguistic areas of India and its interaction of these movements with nationalist movement and the class struggles of laborers as well as with major ideologies of Gandhism and Marxism. Keeping in view the role of Ambedkar who was an historic leader and formulator of its ideology and the active organizer of movement has made a critical analysis of Ambedkarism, the dominant ideology of the Dalit movement in the country.

Gail's work also evaluates the achievements of the movement in the early 19th century during the pre-colonial period and also suggests the background for the re-emergence of Dalit movement in 1970's like Dalit Panthers movement and poses the problems it faces today. This study is very insightful for Dalit movements in general and communists in particular to draw several lessons. It has a great value for the scholars

¹⁹ Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India*, Sage Publications, New Delhi.1994.

who are engaged in understanding the essence of the Dalits and democratic movements.

Swapna H Samuels²⁰ (2004) is a historical study of the movements of lower castes during the colonial period in Kerala, Karnataka, Tamilnadu and Andhra. The main theme of this work is that, it deals with socio economic, political and cultural background for the emergence of such movements in the society and dealt with the influence of these movements on the upliftment of these lower castes. A detailed account of the emergence of organizations of background communities is also elaborated in this work along with the analysis of the uprisings of Dalit communities.

Sandeep Pendse²¹ (1994) is a collection of papers presented by scholars and various activists on the complex question of the Dalit movement and the practices in the contemporary society. This work present a detailed analysis of the multiple struggles of Dalits in various regions and their transformation from destitute, poverty and un organized groups of the society in to an emerging non negligible factor in the socio cultural and political arena.

Ghanshyam Shah²² (2001) is noteworthy works which bring together the various scholars and activists of the Dalit movement. This volume examines the many facets of ongoing Dalit protests to improve their position. It traces the history of various Dalit movements and highlights the importance of these movements in different regions of the country both separately and collectively. Though the book covers different dimensions of Dalit identity and politics, its source material comes largely from the Western India and Uttar Pradesh experiences. A closer look at Dalit politics in the states from a comparative outlook representing other regions too could provide a

²⁰ Swapna H Samuels, *Dalit movements in south India 1857-1950*, Serials Publication, New Delhi, 2004.

²¹ Sandeep Pendse, *At Cross Roads: Dalit Movement Today*, Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, Mumbai, India, 1994.

²² Ghanshyam Shah, *Dalit Identity and Politics: Cultural Subordination and the Dalit Change*, Sage, New Delhi, 2001.

different picture. This work is an extremely useful contribution to the growing literature on Dalits.

S. M. Michael ²³ (1999) is a collection of scholarly papers which explores the socio-political and cultural aspects of the Dalit articulation and its relevance for the country both for today and for future. The papers of this book were elaborated in four sections dealing with the issues of the origins and development of untouchability, Dalit confronting dominant ideology of Brahmanism, a critique of the sensibility which made parallel the Indian tradition in the context of the impact of new economic reforms of the country on Dalits.

The prominent aspects of socio-economic, political and cultural relations revolve around issues of inequality based on caste, class, race and gender (and needs an attention) is a major trend in Indian society and needs an attention to focus on this issue. He argues, throughout history, socio cultural and political situations have been changed by the power of ideals of visions. The profound change in contemporary Indian society has been the Dalit transformation. Their vision of Indian society is different from the upper castes and therefore it needs to explore the socio economic and cultural content of this transformation. Hence, it studies the aspiration and struggle of these Dalits for a new humanity based on the modern ideals of social justice, human dignity and equality. This work has been a source of inspiration to a large number of scholars to understand the term Dalit and who have taken research on the marginalized groups of the society in India.

Ghanshyam Shah²⁴ (2002) focuses on an important question concerning the Dalits of India in the post-independence period. Shah examines the changes that took place in the socio economic status and cultural aspects of the Dalits and the role played by the state in this process. This work explains the various aspects of the Dalits in different subjects as Dr. Ambedkar's concept of social justice and the role of the state, the

²³ S.M.Michael, *Dalits in Modern India: Vision and Values*, Vistaar, New Delhi, 1999.

²⁴ Ghanshyam Shah, *Dalits and the State*, Concept, New Delhi, 2002.

educational status of Dalits, the nature and extent of untouchability in urban areas and especially in rural areas, the conditions of scavengers, the various atrocities against the Dalits and reservations. This work provides an understanding of Dalits in various aspects of life and in various issues of the marginalized groups of the society.

Neeru Sharma²⁵ (2012) is a threefold objective study to examine the caste system in Punjab, to discuss the issue of political marginalization among the SC's and finally to analyse the current phase of assertion among the two largest SC's groups till the Ad Dharm and Mazhabi's in Punjab. The study argues that there is an absence of strong political force to represent the interest of SC's and hence, cultural activism has become an important strategy of assertion of the SC's in Punjab which is considered with highest Scheduled Caste population. This cultural activism has led to greater conflicts in the state. The study says that the presence of Sikhism and Islam and the relatively less presence of Brahmins and the influence of Hinduism in this region has not only weakened the notions of purity and pollution but also made the caste system less oppressive as compared to other states. The social and occupational structure of Punjab continues to be compartmentalized along caste lines even though known as region without caste. However the caste structure and its hierarchies continues to be different from the rest of the India.

Rapid social mobilization, economic development followed by green revolution and the socio- religious reform movements among various religions and autonomous political mobilization of these communities had the impact of making the people of the importance of their numbers. The current phase of cultural assertion of the SC's the study states, can be witnessed in the emergence of Deras, large scale construction of separate gurudwaras, and increasing number of cases of caste and community related violence could be regarded as end products of Social exclusion and the lack of long term consciousness of economic development and political marginalization of SC's in the state. The study is a critical assessment of the structure of caste system which is

²⁵ Neeru Sharma, "Caste in Punjab: Political mobilization and Cultural assertion of SC's in Punjab", *Journal of Punjab Studies*, Vol.19, No.1, 2012.

peculiar in the state with religious affiliations, helps to understand the dynamics of caste system especially in Punjab.

Ronki Ram²⁶ (2004) says that the Dalit assertion in Punjab should be traced back to the Ad Dharm movement of the early 20th century which emerged along with several similar movements in a number of regions of the country. The study states that the movement in Punjab aimed at carving out a distinct identity for the untouchables, independent of various religions existed in the society. The purely low caste character and vehemence of its struggle against the structures of social discrimination made this movement particularly important. In fact this was the only movement of its kind in the northern Western region of the country.

The author states that, in all the movement and struggles that took place in India, the contribution of the lower castes and untouchables that took place in India, the contribution of the lower castes and untouchables was considerable, as was the caste in *bhakti* movement. The study explores the genesis of Ad Dharm movement, its socio-political settings, its leaders, dominant castes and violence and the strategies of this Dalit movement to regain Dalit identity. The study also focuses on the rejuvenation of this Ad Dharm movement during 1970's and it attempted to widen the scope of the Ad Dharm religion by including various other sub castes in its fold.

The study states that this Ad Dharma movement aimed at securing a separate and respectable space for the Dalits through cultural transformation, spiritual regeneration and political assertion rather than seeking equality within the Hindu society. It has carved out a new identity and given them a new name 'Adi Dharm' which insists in the minds of the lower castes, a sense of pride. More curiously, the study states that the Dalits became victims of their own Dalit consciousness which instead of transcending castes and its hierarchies, strengthened caste identities. This movement has succeeded in bringing the consciousness of the lower castes in Punjab. It is in this

²⁶Ronki Ram, "Untouchability, Dalit consciousness and the Ad Dharm movement in Punjab", *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Vol No. 38-39, Sage, New Delhi.2004.

context, that the contribution of Ad Dharm movement is crucial. Never the less, it is a peculiar study in a state like Punjab where the challenges against oppression and violence has always been progressive and secular.

Gopal Guru²⁷ (2001) offers a close and critical examination of cultural movements of Dalit in Maharashtra. The author finds many problems with literary movements as well as cultural movement. While during initial stages the Dalit cultural movements played a progressive and positive role. In the next stage, they have been appropriated by the state and tend to have a regressive impact on the development aspect of the Dalits. The Dalit writers were also become in accessible to the common Dalits and were busy in evaluating their livelihood with their growing professionalism. This article engaged deeper in to the substance of Ambedkar thought.

Lata Murugkar²⁸ (1991) gives a useful insight and thorough account on the rise and fall of the Dalit Panther movement in Maharashtra, setting its origin in early 1970's in the increased militancy of members of Dalits. The Panther movement was deliberate imitation of Black Panther movement in United States of America. This work could be a substantive contribution in the unexplored area of research on social movements. The study has an importance in terms of comprehending the changes that have been taking place In India after independence. This work helps in understanding the objective trends and directions of the Dalit struggle and impacts on Dalit lives in wider perceptive. The study was also an attempt to give a full length account of struggle and presents the complete picture of Dalit Panther movement in Maharashtra during 1972 to 1979.

²⁷ Gopal Guru (2001) "The interface between Ambedkar and the Dalit cultural movement in Maharashtra", in Ghanshyam Shah, *Dalit Identity and Politics: Cultural Subordination and the Dalit Change*, Sage, New Delhi, 2001.

²⁸ Lata Murugkar, *Dalit Panther movement in Maharashtra: A Sociological Appraisal*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1991.

Nandu Ram²⁹ (2008) is a collection of eleven papers based on the field studies in different parts of the country. It highlights the positive and assertive face and the effort of Dalits to gain self-respect and human dignity and gives a fresh look on Dalit issues. The articles in this book address the issue of social discrimination and the response, assertiveness of Dalits from across the country. This volume is divided in to three parts. The first part as Dalit assertion in socio-historical perspective deals with Dalit movement in various forms. These movements were treated as an isolated or individual cases, yet these may be taken as representative of the totality of Dalit assertions from various parts of the country. These papers tried to demonstrate that the Dalits have been misrepresented and ignored in the documentation of Indian history.

The second part of the book deals with the issue of collective social identity of Dalits in the country in the process of discrimination and of their exploitation and subjugation. The last part of the volume deals with the issues of caste prejudices against the Dalits and the conflict between them and the others which resulted in atrocities on Dalits. The selection of papers in this volume not only shows the different stages of contemporary issues of Dalits, but also gives new perspectives to the methodology and theoretical aspects of Dalits. The study is useful to those who are interested in understanding the socio-political developments that are taking place in the country and the challenges it poses in contemporary India.

V.T.Rajashekhar Shetty³⁰ (1978), Dalit movement in Karnataka is a result of a sociological research, conducted over a decade, which probes in to one of the most crucial problems of the country in general and Karnataka in particular. The different facets of the Dalit problems are viewed in all India perspective. The problem dealt in this book is that of the voiceless millions of Dalits and the discrimination they face in all walks of life i.e., socially, economically, politically, religiously, physically, mentally and morally. The author opined that these sections were denied self-respect,

²⁹Nandu Ram, *Dalits in Contemporary India, Vol. 1, Discrimination and Discontent*, Siddhant Publications, New Delhi, 2008.

³⁰V.T.Rajashekhar Shetty, *Dalit movement in Karnataka*, The Christian Literature Society, Madras, 1978.

education and the right to live a decent human life in a civilized society over centuries. In fact this is the first study of its kind in Karnataka and made it a point to make the pursuit of truth as a sole objective. It is a simple treatise on the society as it exists today. The study aspired to cover every aspect of Dalit movement and followed the whole process of the development of the Dalit movement at close quarters.

China Rao Yagati³¹ (2003) focused on the broader area of Dalit movement at the national level. It covers the in-depth analysis and wide ranging issues like social discrimination against Dalits in education, protest literature and political participation which were crucial for the development of the Dalit consciousness and socio-political development of the Dalits in India. This work recognizes the liberative potential of education and highlights the role played by the Christian missionaries, social reformers, colonial policies and Dalit intelligentsia on one hand and explains the caste discrimination in the education system on the other. It contextualizes the dual role played by the education in the society as a liberator and oppressor. It also looks the process of political participation of Dalits.

The author is of the view that the commercialization in Andhra, the political changes and the growth of education gave a space for Dalits who were neglected over centuries. The study put forward the emergence of independent Dalit movement in Andhra and the group rivalries coupled with ever increasing influence of power politics that have been a great factor in bringing a disastrous end to the movement, it also focused on the Dalit literature which presents an alternative to the various dominant caste literary trends. Overall, this book has discussed many issues and answered many untouched questions related to Dalits especially in Andhra.

³¹ China Rao Yagati, *Dalit's Struggles for Identity: Andhra and Hyderabad 1900-1950*, Kanishka publishers, New Delhi, 2003.

Jayashree Gokhale³² (1993) is a study of the Mahar movement in Maharashtra which focused on the relevant points. First, the author attempts to understand the Mahar movement against the back ground of various pre Ambedkar social movements by situating this emergence with in the socio-economic changes that took place in the 19th and 20th century in Maharashtra. Secondly, the politics of the Mahar movement in terms of political strategies, the forms of political participation, political organizations that were used by the Mahars to register their protest. It also highlights Ambedkar's growing political concern behind developing an independent political identity for Mahars. Thus, strategical shift from socio-economic sphere to the political sphere constitutes the primacy of the political. Thirdly, despite the historical failure to relate the caste class overlaps to the Mahar situation, the study nonetheless attempts to critically asses the role of different political organizations led by Ambedkar and later by his followers. The study is certainly a useful addition to the existing literature on the Dalit movement in general and Maharashtra in particular.

Elaborating on Dalit movements in general and analyzing the role of Dr.B.R.Ambedkar and other leaders in empowerment of Dalits, there are certain other significant works to be detailed as Eleanor Zelliot's³³ scholarly treatise on Ambedkar movement examines the plan of this great leader and visionary to bring the untouchables from a state of dehumanization and slavery into a dignified human beings through the use of education and the exercise of political and legal right.

Owen M. Lynch³⁴ (1974), in his study of Jatavs of Agra city, shows how they neglected sankritisation and caste system and opted to participate in political affairs and parliamentary democracy for their social and economic mobility. Juergensneyer's study deals with the *Ad Dharm* movement against untouchability in Punjab during 20th

³² Jayashree Gokhale, *From Concessions to Confrontation: the Politics of Indian Untouchable Community*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1993.

³³ Elenor Zelliot, *Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on Ambedkar Movement*. Manohar, New Delhi, 1992.

³⁴ Owen M.Lynch, *The Politics of Untouchability: Social Mobility and Social Change in a city of India*, National Publishing house, New Delhi, 1974.

century. It argues that the untouchables constituted a 'Quam', a distinct religious community like other religious and existed in India from time immemorial.

Surinder S Jodhka³⁵ (2014) is a study locating the process of social and economic transformation witnessed in the two villages of Haryana after the green revolution and in the later phase with the introduction of large scale industrial projects. This study tries to explore the nature and changes of the agrarian economy as well as the changing nature of the relationships in terms of employment and aspirations. It provides a historical overview of the process of socio-economic transformation of the rural villages in Haryana after the green revolution.

Jagpal Singh³⁶ (1998) is a study to seek the impact of ideas and life of B. R. Ambedkar on Jatavas who were politically most conscious and more assertive among Dalits in Utter Pradesh. The Dalits protest against the oppression through everyday form of resistance is in informally organized ways, litigation or political intervention. The study states that, from the late 1970's there has been a tremendous growth in the consciousness among the Dalits about the ideas and life of B.R.Ambedkar.

The Dalit protest against the dominant culture can also be observed in their research for an alternative mode of idol worship and construction of temples. In order to continue the struggle, the Dalits not only want a party based on Dalit ideology but they also set up various socio-cultural organizations like *Dalit Sangarsh Vahini*, *Bharatiya Mazdoor Union*, *Ambedkar Kalyan Samittee*, *Ambedkar Committees*, *Jatav Mahasabha* etc., while many of these organizations claim to be 'apolitical'. They have the issues related to socio-economic and cultural problems of Dalits and their adoration for Ambedkar. The study says that these socio-cultural organizations are the reflection of growing awareness among Dalits and an impact of the process of Ambedkarisation. The significance of these socio-cultural organizations is that they

³⁵ Surinder S. Jodhka, "Emergent Ruralities: Revisiting Village Life and Agrarian Change in Haryana" *Economic and Political Weekly*, June 28, 2014, Vol.XLIX, No's 26 and 27, 2014.

³⁶ Jagpal Singh. "Ambedkarisation and Assertion of Dalit Identity, socio- cultural protest in Meerut district of western Utter Pradesh", *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 3, 1998.

fight against socio-economic and political-cultural discrimination of Dalits, unlike the political parties which work for the power. During the last one and half decade, the issues relating to Dalit protest and their identity have gained priority on the agenda of socio-cultural organization, political organizations, intellectuals as well as political parties.

This study has focused on the Dalits of Western Uttar Pradesh, particularly the Jatavs, who have resorted to diverse means to register their protest for betterment of their lives, religious conversion, supporting mainstream political parties and launching various socio-cultural organizations were some of the strategies adopted by these communities to redress grievances. Nevertheless, this study is useful to understand the various strategies adopted by various socio-cultural organizations of Dalits to achieve improvement in their living standards.

Surinder S Jodhka³⁷(1999), is an essay related to the concepts of community and identity. It argues that politico-sociological analysis of identity has not been wide spread in academic and attempts to improve this gap. It offers a good review of literature analyzing the process by which culture has been playing an increasing role in identity and politics. This article examines a number of conceptual and practical issues related to the concepts of community and identity and investigates the paradigm of 1990's which negated the social reality by the then dominant theoretical and political paradigm of development. The shift after 1990's noticed in the theoretical orientation and research agenda has put up new categories, wherein community and identity rooted in culture, provide new horizons.

Ilaiah, Kancha³⁸ (1996), it is a text that intended to fuel, strengthen and debate among India's many lower castes or *Dalit Bahujans*, as the author terms them. Drawing on

³⁷Surinder S Jodhka, "Community and Identities: Contemporary Discourses on Culture and Politics in India", *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 9, 1999.

³⁸ Ilaiah, Kancha, *Why I am not a Hindu: A Shudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy*, Samya, Calcutta, 1996.

childhood memories from rural Andhra Pradesh, the author describes how herdsmen (Yadavs) and other low caste communities practice different social values and worship different deities than those presented in Hindu system. In the author's view, the Hinduism is an upper caste culture with hegemony that threatens the egalitarian and democratic local traditions. That is why the author insists that he is not a Hindu.

According to Iliaiah, the Oppressed castes must not only resist Hinduization, but also turn the upper-caste temples in to educational centers in which the upper-castes can be *re-educated* and *re-humanized*. The author admits that his intention of an *anti-caste revolution* could well parallel the Cultural Revolution in China; but this might be the price one has to pay for the justice. This work is certainly useful to understand the social values, culture and the traditions that were practiced by the lower castes in the rural villages which is entirely different from that of Hindu culture dominated by the upper-castes.

R. S. Khare³⁹ (2006), is a selected Indian discussions of Dumont's works in three parts, beginning with some accessible over views, summaries and early reviews of Dumont's work. The first part is essentially devoted to introducing new readers to an accessible summary and overview of Dumont's major works and his methods, along with a couple of early Indian reviews of *Homo Hierarchicus*. The selection of the second part examine Dumont's major works more closely and critically and very often make a range of empirical and methodological as well as theoretical commentaries and evaluation. The third part of the book reflects a general shift in Indian sociology and anthropology towards post-colonial discourses and debates and accordingly, evaluates Dumont's work from British colonialism, critical ideological, historical and social theoretical discourse. The book concludes by offering the reader excerpts from some of the Dumont's writings, which would help expose the reader to how Dumont conceptualized, wrote and argued in his own way, in his view remained, uncompromisingly accurate and precise in his writing. Altogether, this volume is an

³⁹ R. S. Khare, *Caste, Hierarchy, and Individualism: Indian critiques of Louis Dumont's Contributions*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi.2006.

appropriate and invaluable addition useful to the research scholars of Indian readings in sociology and social anthropology.

J. H. Hutton⁴⁰ (1980), is a study of caste in India which is divided in to three parts. In part one, background, the author reviews the principal caste and caste like groupings according to areas. Part two analyses on structure, sanctions and functions of the caste respectively. Part three of the book deals with origins of Varna system and other native traditions. There is a brief chapter of conclusions and appendices on exterior castes namely, the depressed are outcaste or sub caste system groups and on the relations of Hinduism to primitive relations. The author inclines to derive Hinduism mainly from pre Vedic sources. There is also a good bibliography and glossary mostly of caste names, also of relevant native terms. Of the many books on caste in India, this is certainly one of the most influential, open minded and thoroughly balanced. It is truly modern and scholarly.

Michael Mahar⁴¹ (1972), book is divided into various parts apart from introduction. The first part deals with the role of untouchables in rural communities, the second part deals with the religion and reform through various organizations. Part three deals with the efforts of governments to abolish untouchability and the last part social and psychological response to change the status of untouchability. A number of common topics are treated from various perspectives throughout the collection with a concern to access the consequences stemming from one of the oldest attempts to improve a lot of socially, culturally depressed minority through government action. The author sought to integrate the cumulative insights of a variety of scholars within the disciplines of anthropology, economics, history, law, political science and sociology which is useful to the scholars in the area of caste in India.

⁴⁰ J. H. Hutton, *Caste in India: its nature, functions and origins*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1980.

⁴¹ Michael Mahar (ed), *The Untouchables in Contemporary India*, The university of Arizona press, Tucson, Arizona, USA, 1972.

The above review of literature shows that most of the scholarly works focused on the socio-cultural aspects of Dalits in general and Ambedkar as a symbol of Dalits socio-cultural protest. However, the present study makes an attempt to investigate the historical evolution and development of Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha, a Socio-Cultural organization which has vehemently worked for the Dalit cause and their rights, therefore deserved a serious study.

The Dalit masses got awakened and began to organize themselves for the first time after independence as an independent force and the organization called Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha emerged in the bloodshed of Karamchedu. The movement led by this Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha organization can be considered as a demarcating line between the previous Dalit movement which urged for self-respect and pleaded for the humanity.

The present movement took the form of revolution and demanded for the punishment of the culprits caused for the atrocities. The debates put forward by the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha have produced Dalit literature and art. The Dalits began to reclaim their history of identity and struggle for social equality through literature, especially through poetry. The identity of the word Dalit acquired a definite place in the political discourse. On the whole an attempt was made to redefine the Indian social reality on the basis of caste. The primary aspiration of Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha is annihilation of caste and the demolition of caste based hierarchy. This Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha organization, which put forward many debates in understanding the reality and worked seriously for the emancipation of Dalits in reclaiming their self-respect and dignity.

Objectives of the Study:

The Dalit culture has raised many fundamental new questions and redefinitions by reflecting on their cognitive identity. Present day Dalit socio- cultural organizations are as inevitable spontaneous upsurge of the age-long dumbness and the suppressed

voice of Dalit masses. In some of the instance, the Dalit intended struggle has taken different forms to forcefully advance in keeping with the requirements of the time and the opportunities provided by History. Its course was not decided by any preconceived revolutionary blue print. It was not even fundamental to Ambedkar's thought. On the contrary, Ambedkar's thought itself has been reconstructed and determined by the course of the Dalit movement.

In this context, this study has the following objectives:

- To trace the historical evolution of Dalit Mahasabha in Andhra Pradesh.
- To study and analyze its ideological background.
- To study the organic leadership of Dalits.
- To study whether their ideology is convergence or divergence with Ambedkar's ideology.
- To study their strategies, Programmes which adopt to carry forward the socio-cultural movement.
- To study critically their limitations/positions.

Scope of the Study:

The broader scope of the present study is to cover the organization of Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha historically, while concentrating on its pattern and variation of mobilization and consciousness. Specifically, the study would like to confine from the period of 1985-2000.

The Dalits are in many ways a unique community in the social history of modern India. The Dalit movement, against social deprivation and disability, which dates from the late 19th century, is distinguished both by its longevity and continuity as well as its relative autonomy in developing a distinctive ideology and organizations. During this period, Dalit question and identity occupied prominent place in academic discourses. The social scientists and literary scholars agreed that the history of Dalit movement,

evolution of various, independent Dalit organizations, sub-caste movements and literature need to be studied more seriously than before.

Methodology:

The present study is based on the historical and analytical perspective. The historical roots of Dalit socio-cultural organizations have been contextualized for the study and analyzed their issues and contents. Further, the role of these socio-cultural organizations in building up of the Dalit ideological base for the socio-cultural movements in India has been presented analytically. The material for the Present study has been gathered from books and published articles and also publicity material issued by the Dalit Mahasabha and other Dalit organizations in the State. In addition to this, depending on the necessity and requirement of the study, data has been collected from the leaders and activists of the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha. For collecting the authentic resource material, extensive face to face personal interviews with the Dalit leaders and activists, who were closely involved with the organization right from its evolution have been recorded and used in the thesis accordingly.

Information was also collected from the Telugu and English Daily new papers that were available in the state. The Reports and statements of the leaders of Dalit Mahasabha published in the above dailies were gathered and used in the study. The information that was elicited by the leaders and activists was mostly in Telugu. The information collected during the field work has been transcribed by the researcher and translated into Telugu and used according to the context.

Limitations of the Study:

As an academic enquiry, the present study has certain limitations. Firstly, this study is limited to particular socio-cultural organization namely Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha in the context of a larger and border canvas in which it is operating. Secondly, the non-availability of adequate literature and records on the subject has been a constraint in conducting this study. According to the nature and dimensions of

this study, it is confined mainly to the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha, a Socio-cultural organization which has emphasized on the Socio-cultural empowerment of Dalits and not on the differences of sub castes within the Dalits. Due to many reasons, this organization could not publish or maintain necessary literature, documents and records regarding their activities and programs regularly. However the experiences shared by the senior Dalit activists and the interviews with the office bearers of this organization have helped to overcome this limitation to a great extent. No serious research has been so far conducted in the concerned area of the study, particularly on an organization like Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha. As such the task of this study has been laborious and challenging.

Chapterization:

The **First chapter** discusses the Hindu Social System, the issue of caste and its critiques. It focused on the essential features of social stratification, caste system, untouchability and the role of Hindu religion in Indian society. Further, it explains about Socio-Cultural aspects of Dalits followed by significance of the study, review of literature, objectives, scope and the limitations of the study.

The **Second chapter** provides an overview of the different organizations and movements that took place at national level like Anti-Caste and Anti-Brahmin Movement, the role of Christian Missionaries and various Dalit organizations like Satnami movement, South India Buddhist Association, All Bengal Nama Sudra Movement, Depressed India Association Jat Pat Todak Mandal and Jagan Mitra Mandali, Adi Hindu Social Service League, Adi Andhra Organization and so on started at all India level both in pre and post-Independence period.

The **Third Chapter** discussed the Various Socio-Cultural organizations and its leaders, the Dalit literature in Andhra Pradesh during 19th and 20th centuries. It also traced the evolution of Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha which was started to launch a Dalit movement and discusses about the causes that led to the formation of this

organization which unified the Caste-ridden community of Dalits for achieving their rights and fight against the Karamchedu incident and to seek justice for the Dalits (victims) who have meted out with various kinds of discriminations and atrocities in rural areas.

The **Fourth Chapter** explores a brief analysis of the Manifesto, the programmers and strategies followed by Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha dealing with the incidents and against all kinds of discriminations and their fight against State's response. This chapter is also devoted to delineation of the thunder incident including the reasons for the violent action of the upper castes to strengthen their hold on Dalits.

The **Fifth Chapter** offers a critical assessment of Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha. It tries to assess how the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha carried forward the Dalit movement regarding atrocities and discriminations, which have shown radically a new path for the Dalits as a whole and for the transformation of the society as well as the limitations of this organization to carry out the movement.

Finally, this study concludes by mentioning the crucial role played by Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha and its thrust for the up-liftment of Dalits in the context of overwhelming competing perspective to the rights of Dalits.

Chapter-II

Socio-Cultural Organizations of Dalits in India: An Overview

The recent Dalit consciousness, movements and literature are not without historical antecedents. Many social movements broke out against the caste system and Brahminical values. During the ancient period charvakas, lokayats, the materialist philosophers fought against the superstitious beliefs spread by the Brahmanical Hinduism. The Buddhist attitude towards the Dalits and women is considerable and it questions the caste discrimination. Buddhism invited all the oppressed social groups into its fold and provided them an equal status along with the other privileged classes of the society.

Bhakti movement worked as vehicle for social reforms in medieval period in India and Andhra in particular. For the first time, the Bhakti movement facilitated the Dalits to raise their voice against religious restrictions on worship. The alternative anti-caste voices like Vemana and Pothuluri Veerabrahmam have highly influenced the masses to fight against the existing unequal social order. Bhakti Saints and poets greatly negated the caste system and Brahmanical rituals. By these efforts of questioning the existing oppressive social order it is clear that the Dalits have been fighting against the social and cultural discrimination through the centuries. All though the Indian social history was filled with the struggles between the Brahminical caste system and the lower castes but those events were not recorded in the history due to the bias followed by the upper caste intellectuals.

The nineteenth century social reform movements have mainly addressed the ritual degradation and cultural repression. Specifically their thrust on the education and economic betterment motivated the mobility among the oppressed. Cleanliness and purification were preached among the 'untouchables' to bring them into the Hindu fold. However, this model could only make a partial progress in gaining caste Hindus' acceptance of Dalits. To some extent, a new identification as a clean caste with new

status was made possible within this mobility, but overall this mobility was not successful because of the prejudices of the upper castes. Conversions into religions like Buddhism, Islam and Christianity were attempted and encouraged. With conversions, often, a new religion and a new culture were achieved but discrimination based on caste continued. This model was mainly followed by only the lowest among the Dalits and was partly successful.

Dalit and Dalit Identity:

Dalits mean all those people of different castes who were traditionally subjected to various discriminations on the grounds of unsociability and categorized as the untouchables, downtrodden, exterior classes or the scheduled castes. The term 'Dalit' is derived from the sanskrit language *dal*, which means burst, split, broken or torn asunder, down-trodden, scattered, crushed, destroyed¹. It is a contemporary usage to specify a section of people of India who have suffered oppression throughout the history under prevailing religious and social norms.

The origins of untouchables are obscure and its developments are difficult to trace, but it is clear that "untouchability and the presence of untouchable caste in India is based on the concept of purity and pollution"². Untouchables are persons of a discrete set of low castes, excluded on account of their extreme collective impurity from particular relations with higher caste human beings.

The word Dalit is used to identify by most downtrodden Indians in the current political terminology. It means broken people. It implies a condition of being under-privileged and deprived of basic rights and refers to people who are suppressed on account of their lowly birth. We can identify them by other terms/various names such as out castes (since they are outside the formal caste system), ex untouchables and scheduled

¹James Massey, *Downtrodden: The Struggle of India's Dalits for Identity, Solidarity, Liberation*, WCC Publications, Geneva, 1997, p.1

² Chinna Rao. Y., *Dalits Struggle for Identity: Andhra and Hyderabad, 1900-1950*, Kanishka Publications, New Delhi, 2003. p.21

castes (the government's legal terms under its equivalent of an affirmative action programme)³.

In different phases of the Indian caste history, the Dalits were addressed differently in relation to the then Hindu religious and societal conservatism. However, at the national level the Dalits had not faced the same degree of untouchability or the other forms of oppression uniformly; they were called by different names in different parts of the country. As a result of the continuous efforts to search, for a self-identity and for the articulation of a collective political interest, the term "*Dalit*", for the first time, was used in a cultural context in Marathi literature by the followers of Babasaheb Ambedkar or the neo-Buddhist writers, the Dalit Panthers of Maharashtra in 1972, with the inspiration taken from the American Black Panthers. Since then the term has been gaining popularity and is being widely used.⁴

The other names which are popular to identify are '*Harijans*', (a term coined by Narasimha Mehta and adopted and popularized by Gandhi), exterior castes (used by J. H. Hutton), depressed classes (by British Officials), outcastes, pariahs (commonly) but undoubtedly derived from Tamil word *Para* or *Parai*, the drum. In ancient time, the terms like 'Mlecha', '*Chandala*' used by Manu. The Panchama (the fifth class), Avarna (outside the four varnas). Nishada, Paulkasa, Antyaja, Ati-sudra etc. were used⁵. As an effect of being made '*untouchable*', the Dalits, suffered socio-cultural, economic and political sanctions imposed by the caste system. It was during the British period, the first concerted efforts by state to end their apathy had begun.

The term 'Scheduled Castes' appeared for the first time, when the British Government issued the Government of India (Scheduled Castes) order 1936, specifying certain castes, races and tribes as scheduled castes/Tribes. Prior to that, these groups were

³ John G. Sommer, *Empowering the Oppressed: Grassroots Advocacy Movement in India*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2001. p.18

⁴ Zelliot, E., Op Cited, P.170.

⁵ S.M. Michael, (ed). *Dalits in Modern India: Visions and Values*, Vistaar Publications, New Delhi, 1999, Pp.12-13.

known as depressed classes⁶. However the Term ‘Scheduled Castes’ was officially recognized by both Pre-Independent and Post-Independent States.

Evaluating the various facets of the Dalit identity, Kananaikil observes that, Indian society has witnessed the ‘emergence of a new consciousness and a new identity among the ‘untouchables’ in the last two hundred years. “Today the Dalits the new name they have coined for themselves- demand aggressively their share in the shaping of the destiny of the nation.” Further, he observes, “The term Dalit is no more another name for ‘untouchables’. It connotes dignity, pride and self-identity of a people.”⁷

Similarly, K. L. Sharma, delineating on the implications of Dalit identity, observes that, the notion of Dalit is not the same as those of ‘Harijan’ and ‘Scheduled Castes.’ The terms ‘Harijan’ and ‘Scheduled Castes’ connote ‘socio-cultural’ and ‘legal’ meanings, respectively. The word ‘Dalit’ symbolizes ‘knowledge’ and ‘power’ of the oppressed people, particularly belonging to the untouchable caste/communities. It refers to the genesis and expression of their consciousness. ‘Identity’ of the ‘oppressed people’ is central to the term ‘Dalit’. Thus, the emergence of the identity of the Dalit has created a new social language, a language of protest and struggle, of deconstruction and reconstruction of meanings of social situations, contexts and status parameters. It is an ‘oppositional’ side in creation of new cognitive structures.⁸

Webster traces the origin of the term Dalit historically and argues, “Dalit (‘oppressed’ or ‘broken’) is not a new word. Apparently, it was used in the 1930s as a Hindi and Marathi translation of the ‘Depressed Classes’, the term used by the British for what are now called the Scheduled Castes.” The ‘Dalit’ is a politically-loaded term.⁹ Zelliott explicates Dalits as “those who have been broken, ground down by those above them in a deliberate and active way. There is in the word itself an inherent denial of

⁶Ibid p.13.

⁷Kananaikil, Jose, “The Emerging Dalit Identity”, *Social Action*, Volume 43, October-December. 1993, Pp. 401-411.

⁸Sharma, K. L., *Re-conceptualizing Caste, Class and Tribe*, Rawat Publications, New Delhi, 2001, P.98

⁹ Webster, “Who is Dalit?” in S. M. Michael, ed., *Dalits in Modern India: Vision and Values*, Vistaar Publications, New Delhi, 1999, P.68.

pollution, Karma and justified caste hierarchy.”¹⁰

Zelliot observes that today, “Dalit is not a caste. He is a man exploited by the social and economic traditions of this country. He does not believe in God, Rebirth, Soul, Holy Books teaching separatism, Fate and Heaven because they have made him a slave. He does believe in Humanism. Dalit is a symbol of change and revolution”¹¹ Locating the origin of the category ‘Dalit, Zelliot points out that, in the 1970s, some writers from the “untouchable” castes compared Indian ‘untouchables’ with the Blacks of America, took inspiration from Black Panthers movement, and called themselves ‘Dalit Panthers. It soon became a dominant trend in Marathi literature and later inspired Dalit politics. According to her, the term ‘Dalit’ seems to be more secular and self-respect oriented than other categories such as the Scheduled Castes or Harijans. However, Zelliot feels that the term Dalit overemphasizes aspects of culture and fails to explain the changing trends among them.

Dalit identity arose as a result of exposure to modern education, social reform movements, Bhakti movements and finally Ambedkar’s Mahar movement for social equality. The followers of Ambedkar spread his ideology not only in Maharashtra, but also in states like Karnataka, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Those who are politically conscious of the “untouchables” position in society searched for a solution in a political identity such as ‘Dalit identity’, which is more secular and self-respecting than the other names used for the Scheduled Castes, which do not explain the changing trend among them i.e., social status, political identity and economic aspirations under the cultural identity of Dalit. The question of Dalit Identity, its context and content was identified among five phases in which the collective identity was made up through the ages and through the dichotomy of the self and the other. In the first phase, the pre-Aryan categories were caught up in the process of assimilation in and exclusion from Aryan/Hindu identity. The non-assimilation and

¹⁰Zelliot, E., *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement*, Manohar Publications, 1992, P. 267.

¹¹ Ibid, P.172

loss of identity led to their entry into Hinduism; with a stigmatized status as 'untouchables' or *Panchamas*. In the second phase, Bhakti tradition tried to enhance Dalits by professing human equality and rejecting the authority of the Vedas, Brahmin priesthood and ritual practices. In the third phase, the nineteenth century British rule began recognizing Dalit problems, and the terms 'depressed classes' and 'exterior caste' were coined during this period. This was the time of social reforms in India. Status mobility was initiated in this period. Sanskritization and conversion to Christianity and Buddhism were the distinct features of this phase. The term Scheduled caste was also coined in this period to group them together for legal purpose and give them some specific benefits.

The fourth phase involved Gandhi and Ambedkar. Gandhi called them Harijans. He wanted to absorb Harijans into the Hindu fold to fuse their identity with Hinduism. Ambedkar opted for alternatives other than Hinduism to renounce caste status. Gandhi aimed at a change *in* caste system whereas Ambedkar aimed at a change *of* caste system. In this context, Gandhi was a reformer and Ambedkar, a revolutionary. The final phase starts with a new self-definition as 'Dalits' from within, with the formation of Dalit panthers in Maharashtra in the 1970s.¹²

The word Dalit is a descriptive word evocative of bondage and agony, the anguish and frustrated aspirations of a vast victimized section right down the ages. It particularly emphasizes the dehumanizing 'Caste oppression'; that makes them outcasts and untouchables. The word Dalit is now being used by the low castes in a spirit of pride and militancy. It is not merely a rejection of the very idea of pollution or impurity or untouchability but it reveals a sense of unified class or a movement towards equality, social status, economic and cultural dignity.

¹²Oomen, T. K., "Panchamas to Dalits: The Context and Content of Identity" in *Times of India*, 11th May, 1994.

Socio-Cultural Movements against the Caste: All India

The emergence of the Anti-Caste and Anti-Brahmin movement is understood best in the context of the attempts of the British government to create a clerical class to serve their needs, the liberal education and modern outlook provided by this attempt and the social equality brought forth by the socio-religious reform movement, urbanization, etc., which facilitated the middle castes to become economically dominant. Their urge for better economic positions and for a social status equal to that of Brahmins and the twice born castes resulted in the non-Brahmin movement.

Some of the factors that contributed to the emergence of such movements were:

- The politics of colonial intervention
- The British policy of elite recruitment
- The desire for upward mobility among the lower castes and,
- The urge to fight the hegemony of Brahmins in government jobs and to secure proportionate jobs for every caste.¹³

The non-Brahmin movement is described as “... a deliberate, organized and conscious effort on the part of the lower castes and social groups. They chose to fight the hegemony of superior castes through gradualist and constitutionalist methods that they had learnt from their white masters.”¹⁴ While it primarily involved the middle castes and lower castes fighting the Brahmin hegemony in education and jobs, it also took anti-Brahmin, anti-Hindi and anti- Sanskrit issues in Tamil Nadu.

The Dalits were subjected to new forms of exploitation by colonial rule with the lack of education and consciousness. As a result, struggles of these communities were slow to develop, and organizing themselves under a few educated or semi-educated activists. The main figures were Phule, Periyar, Narayana Guru and Ayyankali who deeply influenced by liberal values and attacked the institution of caste in a regional

¹³Nagaraj, D. R., *The Flaming Feet: A Study of the Dalit Movement in India*, South Forum Press, Bangalore, 1993, Op Cited, p.5

¹⁴Ibid

society where the Adi Sankaracharya had argued centuries ago of essential ‘oneness of things’ his meta-physical formulation of *advaita* (non-dualism) as the true basis of reality. All of them attacked the system of exploitation at all levels socially, culturally, economically and politically.

Many of the prominent figures had made efforts to bring consciousness among the Dalits at all India level. Perhaps the first modern Dalit voice was that of Phule, a power full advocate of social and gender equality based in Maharashtra. He established *Satya Shodak Samaj*, which worked more revolutionary but less well-known outside Maharashtra, *Satya Shodak* movement was the first in India to champion the cause of the depressed castes untouchables and women¹⁵.

Phule realize the importance of education in improving the lot of untouchables and backward castes and thought that education was an effective instrument of social change and restoration of cultural values. For this reason, from 1848-1852, he could establish altogether 18 schools in the vicinity of Pune”¹⁶. Phule worked throughout his life for the cause of the oppressed people. His philosophy of social reformation and eradication of untouchability had a far reaching influence on Dalits in Maharashtra.

Phule, Periyar, Narayana Guru and Ayyankali had challenged the Hindu-Nationalism. They attacked Hinduism itself by arguing that “It was in essence Brahminical, caste – bound and irrational”¹⁷. Phule tried to formulate a new, theistic religion; Periyar promoted atheism and Narayana Guru formulated one religion, one caste, one god. Phule’s was the first historical materialist theory of caste, and it heralded major themes of the Dalit and non-Brahmin movements that were to develop in the twentieth

¹⁵K.R. Thakkar, “Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Social Reforms Movements” in Kavelekar and A.S. Chusalkar (ed), *Political Ideas and Leadership of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar*, Vishanil Publications, Pune, 1989, p.14

¹⁶ Krshirsagar, R. K., *Dalit Movement in India and its leaders 1857-1956*, M. D. Publications, New Delhi, 1994, p.44

¹⁷ Omvedt, Gail., *Dalits and Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, p.12

century.¹⁸

The Dalit and Non-Brahmin movements developed their own theories of caste and focusing by using these theories as a guide for achieving the abolition of caste and the exploitation and oppression it involved. The educated sections from among the lower Sudra castes expressed such sentiments and made emotional appeals. They were in the forefront of various social and cultural movements. It was against the background of growing aspirations and hopes for socio-cultural and economic betterment among the Dalit bahun castes, that the justice party initiated and led socio-political protests against Brahmin domination which began to play an important role in moulding consciousness. The emergence of non-Brahmin consciousness was given concrete organizational shape and developed into a movement. This movement was perceived as “self-expression” of the majority. Dalit bahun ideologues articulated notions of “equitable distribution of resources”, “equality of opportunity”, “equal rights and privileges”, “proportional representation” and emphasized democratization of civil and political society.¹⁹

On the other hand, the 'untouchables' movements' before Ambedkar, in which the 'untouchables' fought the caste system since its inception, were not organized at a striking level, nor were they ideologically driven. The medieval period's individual untouchable saints like Ravidas, Chokkamela, etc., broke their traditional occupations and sought “*Moksha*” as a solution to end the troubles of ‘untouchables’. Though breaking up of the traditional occupational structure and the pace to become an ascetic might have been radical developments in so far as that period is concerned, but their urge/call for equality was mostly spiritual than material. However, it is largely understood in a context that, the advent of Muslim rule, the threat of Muslim culture and religious conversions facilitated the *Bhakti* movement in the medieval period and similarly, the British rule and expansion of Christianity gave rise to socio-religious

¹⁸ Ibid; p.23

¹⁹ Satyanarayana, A., “Nation Caste and the Past : Articulation of Dalit Bahun Identity, Consciousness and Ideology”, *Indian History Congress*, 28-30, December, 2004, p.41

reform movements of the 18th and 19th century.

Ayyankali, is another social reformer of Kerala started his fight against untouchability. In the year 1905, Shri Ayyankali founded *Sadhujana paripalana Yogam*, an organization for Dalits. The main principles of this organization were to pray to god, but not to idol; not to sacrifice animals for propitiating god; to educate the children; to practice cleanliness; to take daily bath and use sandal paste on forehead, and to settle the disputes, if any, among themselves without filing complaints with the police or filing suit in the court, which would otherwise cause great loss. He could secure fee concessions, mid-day meals and other facilities for the students. He asked his brethren to live with self-pride and with his efforts of convincing Maharaja of Travancore, untouchables got the right to enter any Hindu temple in the state. All most all the untouchables irrespective of their sub-castes became the followers of his organization.²⁰

Hindu reformist organizations like *Arya Samaj*, *Brahma Samaj* and *Prarthana Samaj* also actively worked and contributed to the emergence of Dalit consciousness. These movements were led by the upper caste reformers who were mainly concerned themselves with the question of religious orthodox and also attacked the social evils of the existing society like child marriages, sati etc. These movements were always considered as an organized effort on the part of a deprived section of the Indian population by involving collectively and mobilized on the basis of an anti-caste, anti-religious and anti-orthodox ideology to bring about changes whether partial or total in the overall social system.

To some extent, these liberal ideologues from upper castes did facilitate a ground for the lower castes and 'untouchables' to raise their voice against the caste system in the future. The material helps provided by these socio-religious reformers and movements created some space for educational and occupational development of the

²⁰Kshirsagar, R. K., *Dalit Movement in India and its Leaders 1857-1956*, M.D Publications, New Delhi, 1994, Pp.170-172.

‘untouchables’. Their various activities and spread of new values of equality and humanitarianism in long run helped the ‘untouchables’.

The efforts of these movements were merely adjustive to the changes being introduced in the society in keeping with the new values of equality and egalitarianism. They were humanitarian in nature, which was in keeping with the Hindu philosophy of Karma, as well as in maintaining the *status quo* as far as the power structure of the society was concerned. Such an approach leads to conceptions like Brahminization and Sanskritization. But this does lead to upgrading of the entire stratification scale. It does not lead to structural changes in terms of power relations of the different elements of the social structure. As promised, the low status of the Scheduled Castes is a result of deprivation of power and privilege and not in their low ritual status, so the efforts of the socio-religious reform movements which maintained the *status quo* of the society were bound to fail.²¹

The Other Dalit organizations which started in the context of strong social reform and anti-caste movements were *Adi-dharm Movement* in Punjab (1926); the movement under Ambedkar in Maharashtra which had its organizational beginnings in 1924; the *Namasudra Movement* in Bengal; the *Adi-dravida Movement* in Tamil Nadu; the *Adi-Andhra Movement* in Andhra, the *Adi-karnataka movement*; the *Adi-Hindu movement* mainly centered around Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh.²²

Ideologically, in spite of their very diverse origins, it is remarkable how many themes the Dalit movement shared in common. Central to their thinking was the ‘adi’ theme, a definition of themselves as the original inhabitants of the country, a claim that their own inherent traditions were those of equality and unity, and a total rejection of caste. Along with this they stressed on the necessity of modern education, the rejection of traditional superstition and traditional ritual sub-ordination.

²¹Pimpley, P. N., “Social Reform for the Untouchables: Some Issues for Examination”, in Rajeshwar Prasad ed., *Social Reforms: An Analysis of Indian Society*, Y. K. Publications, Agra, 1990, p.167.

²²Bharat Patankar and Gail Omvedt, *Dalit liberation Movement in Colonial Period*, Critical Quest, New Delhi, 2004. p.13

They made spectacular mass campaigns to break down the restrictions barring Dalits from use of common temples and water tanks. The biggest and very carefully planned, campaigns took place in Maharashtra (the Mahad tank Satyagraha of 1927, which culminated in the burning of Manusmruthi, the Parvathi temple Satyagraha in Nasik of 1932-35 and in Kerala, the Vaikom temple road Satyagraha of 1930-32)²³.

The Dalit consciousness that had been brought about by various factors could get momentum during pre-independence period. It was properly institutionalized and formed into a mass-based movement. In the caste-based society individual qualifications and achievements have no significance as such and hence it became necessary to form organization in order to form or bring about some structural and cultural changes. In view of growing democratization and socialization especially during the British period, the Dalits were naturally inclined to build up organizational strength in order to raise the upward mobility of their people. Thus, several organizations came into existence to strike squarely at the decaying institution of caste and untouchability.

Satnami Movement:

This organization was founded by Shri Ghasidas in Chhattisgarh region in 1830's. According to its teachings all men are equal irrespective of caste. He believed in one creator or 'satnam'. He had no faith in Hindu deities. He asked his people to maintain high morals and cultural standards. This movement tried to bring about a new awakening among the ignorant masses of the region. It could raise the self-pride of the untouchables²⁴.

The Formation of this organization occurred within the wider context of the contradictory economic and cultural pulls, which stemmed from the administrative measures. The Sub-altern religious endeavor at once drew from popular traditions and the ritual hierarchy of purity and pollution, rejected the divine and social hierarchies

²³Ibid, p.16

²⁴Kshirsagar, R. K., Op. Cited, P.104

that centered on the Hindu pantheon, and re-positioned the signs in a new matrix. It questioned and challenged the ascribed ritual status of Dalits as low untouchables²⁵.

The organization has set out the different approaches to the study of caste associations and movements. The Satnami Movement drew upon the symbols and resources of the language of colonial administration and situated them alongside a set of key signs within 'Satnampanths'. The Sathnami participation in the wider elaboration of caste associations in the first half of the twentieth century also brings up another significant issue, the group's negotiation of the culturally and politically constituted categories of Hindu and Hinduism, particularly as they were played out alongside Government measures with regard to religious and caste communities in the domain of institutionalized politics of the colonial state²⁶. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Satnamies constructed their vision and practice by carving out a separate identity through re-workings and contestations of the intertwined hierarchies and centers of ritual power within the caste order. This fashioning of a different Satnami identity occurred within an avocational field of Hindu symbols and practices, but it also served to deepen and broaden an awareness of distinctions between the Satnamis and the other Hindu castes, which were elaborated in different ways depending on concrete and changing contexts²⁷.

South India Buddhist Association:

It was founded by an untouchable leader, Pandit Iyodhi Dass in 1890's. It was primarily concerned with the betterment of its untouchable primarily concerned with the betterment of its untouchable members. On 21 November 1920, P. Lakshmi Narasu presided over a conference held at Mayo hall, Bangalore. The conference requested the movement of India to initiate for the depressed classes, political reforms and free compulsory education and facilities for higher education. It tried to revive

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid.

Buddhism in South India because of which a good many untouchables were attracted towards this religion.²⁸

Adi-Dravida Mahajan Sabha:

It came into existence in 1890. It was then named a *Pariah Mahajan Sabha*. It worked on agrarian concession, to lower the standard of the qualifying test prescribed for admonishing to subordinate medical services²⁹. In 1918, the *Sabha* appealed to the government to abandon their disgraceful name 'pariah' and to give them the highly respectable name 'Adi-Dravida' denoting the original inhabitants of Dravida land. This has submitted a memorandum to the Indian statutory commission headed by Sir John Simon in 1927 requesting the constitution of separate electorate for the depressed class. Its chief spokesman was shri. M.C. Rajah³⁰.

All Bengal Nama Sudra Movement:

It was founded by Jana Nayak Shri Mukunda Mullick in the year 1912 at Calcutta. He stated that the franchise should be enlarged to all the depressed classes. He advocated that the reservation for the depressed classes should be 17 percent of the total seats of the legislation. This association was mainly instrumental in bringing awareness among the untouchables in Bengal.³¹

This is a forum to espouse the demands for separate political representation of the untouchable communities in the society. It was formed prior to Bengal Depressed Classes Association³². They tried to integrate their movement with the All India Depressed Classes Movement. This organization in its memorandums sent to the Government clearly stated that the creation of separate electorate would give a great deal of political advantage to the Depressed Classes in Bengal³³. In other words, they

²⁸Ibid, p.106

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid, p.72

³¹Ibid, Pp.74-75

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

felt that, by gaining more political power, the Depressed Classes would be able to free themselves from much of the social and economic disabilities³⁴.

Depressed India Association:

It was founded by Ganesh Akkaji Gawai in 1917 at Pune. However it came into existence in Vidarbha region of central provinces and Berar in 1922. The main objectives of the association were:

- To spread education among the depressed classes.
- To develop their moral and material condition.
- To introduce social reforms³⁵.
- To protect the interests of industrial and agricultural laborers and
- To safeguard the political interests of the depressed classes³⁶.

In order to achieve these objectives, the Association has opened hostels and schools for girls and boys and run a newspaper to present the grievances of the depressed classes both in India and outside³⁷.

Jat Pat Todak Mandal:

Jat Pat Todak Mandal (organization to break caste) was founded in Maharashtra by Shri Sant Ram B.A., (1887-1988) in 1922. The main objective of the organization was to break caste system by arranging and promoting inter-caste marriages.³⁸

Ad Dharm Mandal:

The organization named *Ad Dharm Mandal* was founded by Shri Mango Ram in November 1926. Its first convention was held at Mugowal in Punjab. Its head office was situated at Jullunder city in Punjab. The Mandal was based on a firm philosophic foundation. It is believed that all the so-called untouchables including obviously, the *Chamars*, *Churhas*, *Sainsis*, *Bhangres*, *Bhils* etc., were the original inhabitants of

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid, p.88

³⁸Ibid, Pp.70-71

India. Their religion was *Ad Dharm*. They had a rich culture and civilization. However, the Hindu *qaum* came from outside and enslaved the original people, who were approximately 70 million³⁹. The Hindus destroyed the original *qaum*, destroyed their history and culture. Therefore, the organization called upon all the untouchables to unite to regain their communal place (*qaumiat*) and their religion (*mazhab*)⁴⁰.

The principles of the Ad Dharm Mandal were:

- In the beginning when Nature created human beings, there was no discrimination.
- They adopted non-theistic notion of divinity. Nature has created human beings from the original source, *Adi*⁴¹.
- The philosophy of Ravidas ought to be respectfully followed.
- To follow the *Granth* or *Shastras* is a sin.
- They should engage in *Satsang* (worship services) on the pattern of the Sikhs
- They adopted greeting *Jai Guru Dev* (Victory to the Divine Guru) to which the response was *Dhan Guru Dev* (blessed be the Divine Guru)⁴².

The Ad Dharm Mandal started *Adi Danka* (Drum of Adi people), a journal in Urdu⁴³. There were some *Pracharakas* or preachers of the Mandal who travelled in Punjab to preach the philosophy of the Ad Dharm Mandal. The Mandal had opened its branches at Ferozepur, Chumba, Jullunder, Kangra, Lyallapur, Banaras and Calcutta⁴⁴. It was because of the efforts of the Mandal and its leader Mango Ram that some of the untouchables were listed as *Adi Dharmis* and not as *Hindus*, in the 1931 Census. Their strength was 4, 18,789⁴⁵. The Ad Dharm Mandal was active from 1926 to 1946 in some parts of our country. It tried to bring about a new awareness among the people of the Depressed Classes⁴⁶.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid.

Adi-Keralotharana Sangham:

The *Adi-Keralotharana Sangham* was formed in 1927 in a conference of the Depressed Classes people at Calicut. Firstly it was known as Kerala Antyajodharana Sangam (KAS)⁴⁷. Later on it was named as Adi-Keralotharana Sangharm. It was led by K. Kelappan and C. Krishnan. The activities of the Sangham were mainly concerned with the education of the Dalits, freedom for them to walk along public roads, and starting hostels for the Dalit students⁴⁸.

Adi-Karnataka Sangh:

The *Adi-Karnataka Sangh* was formed in Mysore State in 1930. It was working on the lines met by Adi-Dravida Mahajan Sabha in Madras. Shri K. Madiiah was its Secretary⁴⁹.

Akhil Bharat Varshiye Nishad Sabha:

It was founded by Shri Rai Saheb Ramcharanji in 1920 at Lucknow. He was General Secretary of the sabha. The main objective of the sabha was to organize the Mallah untouchable community⁵⁰. He started Nishad Samachar, a journal, to bring a new consciousness among the Depressed Classes in the erstwhile United Province⁵¹.

All India Ramnami Mahasabha:

In 1901 Shri Parshu Ram Bhardwaj organized a '*Bhajan Ramnami Mela*' for the first time at village Jogideepa near Charpara in Bilaspur district in Madhya Pradesh. The *Ramnarni Mela* is organized every year in Bilaspur and Raipur districts. Shri Parshu Ram Bhardwaj tried to organize all the Ramnami people of the Depressed Classes in the Chattisgarh region of Madhya Pradesh⁵². The caste Hindus, with a view to opposing the organization of the untouchables, objected to their using the name of

⁴⁷Ibid, P-73.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid, P-74.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid, Pp.75-76.

Lord Ram. However, Shri Bhardwaj declared that their 'Ram' was not the hero of Ramayana, but the outcome of natural combination of fire, sun and moon⁵³.

The principles of Ramnami Mahasabha were:

- Not to believe in idol worship-
- Not to believe in any magic and not believe in the holiness of Ganga-water for purification of the sins, if any⁵⁴.
- Not to go to Hindu temples for worshipping their gods.
- Not to accept Brahmin supremacy and their holy books including Manusmriti anti-Ram Charit Manas.
- To believe in equality and human brotherhood⁵⁵

The main stress of the Ramnamis has been on improving the moral and materialistic 'condition of the Dalits. They stress on reducing the marriage expenditure. The parents of both the bride and the bridegroom come to the mela spot and perform the marriage under the auspices of the *Ramnami Mahasabha* without spending a huge amount⁵⁶. The *Ramnami Mahasabha* could successfully organize the untouchables believing ill 'Ramnam'. They developed a sort of new theology, thereby arresting the spread of Christianity among the untouchables. It favored certain social reforms among the community⁵⁷.

All India Shudra Mahasabha:

It was founded by Shri Bansilal Ramteke at Rajnandgaon in Madhya Pradesh (in Chhattisgarh region), along with others. The objective of the *Mahasabha* was to make efforts to bring a new social awareness among the Scheduled Castes in Madhya Pradesh⁵⁸.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid, P-80.

All Travancore Pulaya Mahasabha:

It was founded in 1938 at Trivandrum. Its President was T.T. Kesavan Sastry and Secretary was Ayyan Kali. It came into existence to work for the economic and political upliftment of the Pulayas in Travancore. The Mahasabha contributed to a great extent for the liberation of the untouchables in Travancore⁵⁹.

Anarya Dosh Parihar Mandali:

Shri Gopalbaba Walangkar founded Anarya Dosh Parihar Mandali at Dapoli, Ratnagiri district in Maharashtra In the year 1886. The main objective of this organization was to bring about social awakening among the Dalits and unite them to struggle for their human rights. He used to exhort the people to maintain moral and material standards. He used to preach that they should not drink and eat beef. He was of the view that the Aryans purposely imposed several restrictions on the untouchables and reduced them to mere chattel⁶⁰.

Bahujan Shikshan Sangh:

The *Bahujan Shikshan Sang* was formed in 1928 at Ahmednagar in Maharashtra. The main objective of the Sangh was to spread education amongst the Depressed Classes. Initially the Sangh was named as Ahmednagar Jilla Bahishkrit Samaj Seva Sangh⁶¹. Though it was established in 1928, it became practically active in 1948 when Shri D.T. Rupvate took charge of it as its President and Shri R. K. Gaikwad as its Secretary. The Sangh opened its first hostel for the Depressed Classes students in June 1948 at Sangamner in District Nagar⁶².

It was named as 'Siddharth Boarding'. Presently the Bahujan Shikshan Sangh runs Janata High School, Pune (1967), Siddharth Vidyalaya, Sangamner (1965), Sambodhi Vidyalaya, Nagar (1962), Siddharth High School, Sangamner (1970), Mahatma Pilule Vidyalaya, Ghulewadi (1970) and 23 hostels at various places in Nagar, Pune,

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid, Pp.80-81.

⁶¹Ibid, Pp.83-84.

⁶²Ibid.

Aurangabad and Thane districts in Maharashtra⁶³. The Sangh has been doing commendable work for the girls' education also. It has celebrated its Silver Jubilee in 1974. The contribution made by the Sangh to the uplift of Dalits cannot be ignored⁶⁴.

The Bharat Sant Samaj:

The Bharat Sant Samaj (the Saints organization) was founded in a meeting specially called for by Shri Patit Pawan Das at Shri Kshetra Ramtek on 10 April 1927⁶⁵. The saints from among the untouchables were present at the meeting. They had decided to build a *dharmashala* for the comfortable stay of the saints and pilgrims at Ramtek⁶⁶. The next such meeting was held at Akola on 18 February 1934 under the presidentship of Mahant Mangal Tulsiram Gajbhiye. It was attended by several saints and social reformers. They decided to support Babasaheb Ambedkar and to propagate his thoughts among the untouchables, to preach against superstitious habits and tradition and to stress the importance of education⁶⁷. The next meeting of the saints was held at Indora, Nagpur on 8 November 1936⁶⁸. It was presided over by Shri Dasrath Gajbhiye, a Kabir Panthi saint. The saints assembled there unanimously resolved to support the conversion move of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. Thus, the Sant Samaj tried to educate their traditional followers in the new ideology⁶⁹.

Bharatiya Dusadh Mahasabha:

It was founded by Shri Hari Govind Bhagat of Bihar in the year 1914. The objective of the sabha was to organize the Dusadh community and reform it. The Dusadh Mahasabha propagated against the payment of dowry, eating

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Ibid, P-84.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Ibid.

non-vegetarian food and drinking wine. It stood for discouraging divorce and encouraging adoption of sacred thread and spread of education. The Dusadh Mahasabha stated that the Dusadlias were branch of Rajputs or Kshatriyas⁷⁰.

Bihar Rajak Sangh:

The Bihar Rajak Sangh was founded in early 1940's. Shri Nayantara Das was the General Secretary of this organization from 1947 to 1951. The main objectives of this organization were as, under

- To educate the children.
- Not to take liquor at least on ceremonial occasions.
- Not to send young girls to collect the clothes from the customers' houses.
- Not to give or accept dowry.
- To maintain cleanliness in the locality⁷¹.

Charmar Daiva Sabha (Church of God of Charamars- Pulayas):

It was founded by a Pulaya Christian named Soloman Markose. He observed that the treatment which the Syrian Christians gave to the untouchable Christians was discriminatory and unchristian. Therefore, Shri Markose founded his new faith called Charmar Daiva Sabha. The sabha was active during 1950's and got enough followers⁷².

Cheramar Maha Jan Sabha:

The Cheramar Maha Jan Sabha was founded in Kerala by Pampady John Joseph on 14 January 1921. He was of the view that caste name 'Pulaya' was disgraceful as it denoted pollution. Therefore, he named it Cheramar which means 'Son of the Soil' of Kerala. The Cheramar Maha Jan Sabha attracted the

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Ibid, Pp.84-85.

⁷²Ibid, Pp.86-87.

coverts and non-converts towards it. It gave new awakening to the untouchables in Kerala⁷³.

Jammu-Kashmir Harijan Mandal:

The Jammu and Kashmir Harijan Mandal was organized on the pattern of All India Scheduled Castes Federation founded by Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar. Babu Milkhi Ram was its leader. Babu Milkhi Ram (1926-1989) contested on behalf of the Mandal in 1952 for the Legislative Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir but in vain. Again he contested on the ticket of the Mandal in 1957 Assembly⁷⁴. Election and got elected. Later, he joined the Republican Party of India and worked throughout his life for the mission of Babasaheb Ambedkar. It was because of Ambedkarite mission under Babu Milkhi Ram's leadership that the Scheduled Castes were treated as eligible to all the safeguards under the Constitution of India⁷⁵.

Jatav Veer Mahasabha:

This party was founded in 1917 at Agra by Prabhutanand Vyas and Pandit Sundarlal Sagar. Its objectives were, "to motivate the Jatavs toward education, sanskritization of their way of life and change of their identity."⁷⁶ It demanded representation for the Jatavs in the Legislature. Thus, in 1920, Shri Khemchand Bohare was nominated a member of the UP Legislative Council. It was a great achievement for the Mahasabha⁷⁷. Though it spread throughout Agra district and the neighboring districts, it came to an end in 1928 due to internal dissensions. However, a new organization called Jatav Youth League came into existence in 1930, which worked for the same

⁷³Ibid, P-87.

⁷⁴Ibid, P-92.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Ibid.

aims and objectives, which the Jatav Veer Mahasabha endeavored for in the past⁷⁸.

Karnatak Bahishkrit Sangh:

It was founded by Swami Deorai Ramji Ingle, School Board Member, Belgaon, in 1922. He used to propagate among the Depressed Classes people, especially those living in the villages that they should struggle for their human rights⁷⁹. He used to propagate among all the untouchables including Mahar, Mange, Chambhar and Dhor, and tried to unite them for all social activities. The Sangh was active till 1930⁸⁰.

Lok Seva Natye Mandal:

Shri Deenbandhu Shegaonkar (1926) founded Lok Seva Natye Mandal in 1942 at Akola in Maharashtra. It was an association to undertake cultural activities like staging dramas, organizing Bhajan parties and bringing a new awakening among the Dalit masses. The Mandal was active till 1953⁸¹. Thereafter, it was named as Deenbandhu kala Pathak. The kala Pathak tried to spread the message of Dr. Babasahed Ambedkar through cultural programmes. The kala Pathak was very much popular in Akola and the neighboring districts⁸².

The Sadhujan Paripalan Yogam:

The Sadhujan Paripalan Yogam (the organization to protect the poor people) was formed by Shri Ayyan Kali (Kerala) in the year 1905. He tried to organize the untouchables in Kerala under the banner of this organization. The members of the organization were to assemble on every Sunday in open

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid, P-93.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Ibid, Pp.93-94.

⁸²Ibid.

space where they prayed to God, but not to the idols⁸³. Ayyan Kali used to preach to them at such congregations to maintain cleanliness and maintain high moral standard. It was to act as a court to punish those who violated the rules and teachings of the Yogam. Shri Keshwan and Kunjan Krishnan were to assist him⁸⁴. The Sadhujan Paripalan Yogam was a comprehensive organization which tried to unite almost all the untouchable castes or sub-castes in Kerala. It gave a new awakening to the untouchables. It tried to regain all the civil rights which the untouchables were not allowed to enjoy⁸⁵.

The Sahitya Charcha Mandal:

The Sahitya Charcha Mandal or Literary Study Circle was founded at Nagpur on 9 November 1941. The objectives of this organization were to encourage writings and to undertake several literary activities⁸⁶.

Sanmarg Bodhak Nirashrit Samaj:

The Sanmarg Bodhak Nirashrit Samaj founded by Shri Kisan Fagu Bansod in 1903 at Nagpur⁸⁷. The objectives of the Samaj were as under:

- To spread education among all the Depressed Classes.
- To preach against drinking spurious liquor and against beef eating.
- To oppose conversion to other religions.
- To organize all the Dalits under one banner.
- To propagate moral and religious principles.
- To reform the untouchable society.

⁸³Ibid, P-101.

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Ibid, P-103.

- To struggle for human rights.

This organization was popular among the untouchables throughout the Vidarbha region of the present Maharashtra⁸⁸.

Sarvajanik Vyayamshala:

The Sarvajanik Vyayamshala was established by Shri Vasant Lal Chouhan at Hirpur, Ahmedabad in the year 1940⁸⁹. The main objective of the vyayamshala (gymnasium) was to develop physical strength of the Scheduled Castes and organize them so that they may be able to face the attacks of the caste Hindus. He established vyayamshalas at various places in Ahmedabad. He used to give physical training and discourses for bringing awareness among the Scheduled Castes at such places⁹⁰.

Shri Shankar Prasadik Somavanshiya Hitchintak Mitra samaj:

It was founded by Shivaram Janaba Kamble in 1904 at Poona. The main purpose of this organization was to unite and organize the Depressed Classes and to inspire them to try their best to improve their social status⁹¹. Shivaram J. Kamble proposed to establish a school and one library for the Depressed Classes. He believed that only education could bring some solace to the untouchables. The Samaj tried to bring about social reforms among the untouchables⁹². It gave stress on maintaining cleanliness and high moral standard. It was against Devadasi system. Kamble appealed to the government to start recruiting the untouchables in government services including police and military services⁹³.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Ibid, Pp.103-104.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Ibid, Pp.105-106.

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Ibid.

Valmiki Sabha:

It was founded at Jullunder in Punjab as early as 1910. Mahatma Fakir Chasid and Shri Gendu Ram were its founders. They tried to organize the sweepers (Churhas) under the banner of this organization⁹⁴. It became active after 1932 as most of the sweepers left the Ad-Dharm movement and joined the Valmiki Sabha. It was formed to achieve 'cultural' and 'social' organization of the Churhas. Later on, it was led by Shri Sant Ram, Chunnilal, Balmukund, Mohtan Singh and many others⁹⁵.

Vidarbha Asprushya Samaj Sudharak Seva Mandal:

This organization was founded by Shri Sambhuji Ansuji Khandare at Akola on 1 December 1926⁹⁶. The main objectives of the Mandal were as follows:

- To struggle for religious equality, and to reconvert those who had converted to Islam or Christianity.
- To propagate against sub-casteism among the untouchables to encourage inter sub-caste marriages; to propagate against drinking and beef eating.
- To spread education amongst the untouchables by opening schools, hostels, and to spread technical education.
- To work for getting due representation on the District Boards and legislature⁹⁷.

The Mandal proved to be very useful in uniting all the Depressed Classes in Vidarbha region of Maharashtra. It started several schools in the remote villages and appointed 17 teachers in the schools. It tried to reform the Depressed Classes. It tried to propagate for high moral, material and cultural standard among the Depressed Classes⁹⁸.

⁹⁴Ibid, P-107.

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Ibid, Pp.107-108.

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸Ibid.

There were several organizations which aimed at liberating the so-called untouchables. However, it is difficult to give their profiles in detail and sufficient information about their nature, working and achievements. With the exception of a few, those organizations were confined to the uplift of their respective castes. Many of them were local level organizations. A great majority of them were not registered. It is not known as to how long they continued to work.

All these Dalit organizations have addressed the prime issues like Untouchability and its related social disabilities of Dalits emanated from the Hindu religion and its Caste system, their concern for sharing political power and privileges, gaining self-respect and dignified social identity, their liberation from socio-cultural exploitation and bondage.

Role of Christian missionaries:

The Christian Missionaries also played an important role in bringing about a change in the status of Dalits. They were active from the early eighteenth century in spreading Christianity and converting the Hindus, particularly the lower caste untouchables. These Missionaries were involved in the localized, grass roots and simultaneously conversion movements. One of the major social issues that the missionaries have to deal with was the question of caste. They also addressed the caste and Dalit question intensively and consistently. Besides religious propaganda, humanitarianism was one of the important motives of missionaries in fighting against caste oppression.

The main contribution of the missionaries' lies in their indirect contribution in spurring up socio-religious reform, and reforms in the field of education. For them both conversions and spread of education were means to political power and the continuance of untouchability helped them to broaden their base for such a claim. It seems to me that there was a struggle for power between the higher Hindu castes and

the British. Socio-religious reform movements and the Christian missionary conversions were means through which they tried to establish their supremacy'.⁹⁹

The major Christian Missionaries which started functioning on these lines were London Mission Society (LMS), Church Mission Society (CMS), and The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG), The American Baptist Mission (ABM), the Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church (AELC), and The Canadian Baptist Mission (CBM) Salvation Army.

The London Mission Society introduced from Germany to India in early nineteenth century. Rev. Reingeltaube was a responsible person in India. This mission was founded in 1795. The main objectives of these missionary were:

- to spread Christianity,
- to spread education through establishment of schools and colleges and
- to spread health awareness through hospitals and treatment.¹⁰⁰

The role played by the Christian missionaries in promoting health' education and other social activities such as upliftment of Dalits through religious conversions are remarkable. Among the several reasons for conversions among the Dalits, the stigma of untouchability attached to them was the major factor. They denied access to wells, ponds, schools and temples. The upper caste people exploited them in all the spheres of life. Missionaries were able to convert the weaker sections because of this existing miserable conditions in which they were living. As a result, Missionaries were successful in converting them in large numbers. Poverty was the reason for Dalits getting attracted towards this religion. Economic misery, Social backwardness were some of the causes of conversion.

⁹⁹Pimpley, P. N., Social Reform for the Untouchables: Some Issues for Examination, in Rajeshwar Prasad (ed). Social Reforms: An Analysis of Indian Society, Y. K. Publications, Agra, 1990, P. 166.

¹⁰⁰Firth, C. B, An Introduction to Indian church History, The Christian Literature Society, Madras, 1983, p.145

These Missionaries changed the attitude of people with western ideas to alter their mode of life and customs. Schools became the centers of change in manners and dress, which were more refined than the native cultures. Initially, the Dalits were attracted towards Christian missionaries with the desire to gain social dignity and economic prosperity. With the efforts of Christian missionaries though the caste barriers were not completely disappeared, but certainly there was a change in the attitudes of the Caste-Hindus. As they have realized the consequences of Dalits leaving Hinduism, they started re-thinking over the issue of untouchability and their restrictions based on caste. This change among Caste- Hindus was one of the main factors behind the social reform movements.

Modern medicine was introduced by the doctors who themselves were missionaries. These Missionaries sent medical and social work teams to different areas which were suffering from serious socio-economic backwardness. The Dalits were relieved by the activities of the Christian missionaries though not completely but to some extent. Western education created a section of people who socially and culturally help the state to assimilate progressive ideas and carried to them not only the doctrines of the great political thinkers of the west but also Socio-religious and cultural supremacy of the west. They taught them self-dignity and essential equality with our fellow beings. Thus conversion was not only an individual act but also a social process. Thus the Missionaries saw themselves as agents to social change¹⁰¹. Thus they made the Dalits conscious of their freedom and rights.

Socio-Cultural organizations and Ambedkar:

Ambedkar has stressed that, “socio-economic transformation in India requires a cultural revolution, one that will not only destroy the culture of the part but also build something of value in its place”¹⁰². Though the Dalit voice was expressed itself eloquently from outset, it was left to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar to articulate the object

¹⁰¹ Satyanarayana, A., Nation Caste and the Past : Articulation of Dalit Bahujan Identity, Consciousness and Ideology, Indian History Congress, 28-30, December, 2004, Pp.21-22

¹⁰² Michael, S. M., Dalits in Modern India: Vision and Values, Vistaar Publications, New Delhi, 1999, P.109.

condition of his community in Indian society. It is indeed impossible to understand the contemporary socio-cultural organizations without understanding ideas of Ambedkar. For Dalits, he was became a symbol and a vision of freedom from social and economic injustice that can be achieved through the socio-economic struggles led by the Dalits. Ambedkar was inspired and guided by Mahatma Phule, and had an indelible imprint on Ambedkars mind. With the constant inspiration of his ideas, Ambedkar led the struggle of emancipation of the untouchables during 1919-1956.

Although the anti-caste movements that have fought relentlessly, against the orthodox Hindu social order and its oppressive caste system, they were sometimes absorbed and sometimes undermined. However, despite their world outlook ideals of universal brotherhood, democracy, equality and liberty, their limitation was that they were local in nature and could not spread their movements every nook and corner of the Indian society. It is against this background that one has to consider Ambedkar's efforts to build a new Indian society based on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity in which one finds the very foundations of moral and just social order against the caste and class oppression and exploitation.

Ambedkar had his own understanding of Indian society. He perceived the Indian society as caste society. He states that the caste system prevents common activity and by preventing common activity it has prevented the Hindus from becoming a society with a unified life and a consciousness of its own being¹⁰³. The caste system is a unique characteristic of Indian society. Although it underwent repeated changes, the fundamental structure of the values underlying is remained the same. Gradually, the concepts of Purity and Pollution entered into the Hindu society and it determined the hierarchical social status of all the castes. Untouchability emerged as corollary of the caste system. The social structure was based on hierarchy, characterized by caste system.

¹⁰³ A.W.&.S, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1979, Volume, I, p.51

He has in his critical style assessed the Indian social system. He is critical of the system because it did not foster the spirit of critical inquiry. He had shown that “the caste has become out a place and is a barrier to social progress and individual advancement of freedom”¹⁰⁴. Thus caste system is the most formidable social and to some extent economic and political problem. The gravest evil of the caste system is that “it has rendered our society undemocratic and a sociological myth”¹⁰⁵.

Ambedkar wanted the contradictions in Indian society should be removed at the earliest possible moment. Equality and justice were the key elements of his life and mission. The most important contribution of him, is the consistent and relentless struggle against the institutional of caste. Several people have written on caste in India and abroad. But none of them except Ambedkar has used it as a political weapon to fight against it.

Ambedkar’s social reform scheme of abolition of caste and untouchability was an integral part of his radical outlook. His emphasis was on reason and rationalism. He stood for all scientific and artistic activities, which enhanced the cause of human progress. He attacked two central features of Indian order-social and economic inequality. Under his leadership, many untouchables united and organized for bringing about reforms intended for their self-development as individuals and as citizens. He advocated abolition of caste system, fought for the rights of the down trodden by movements such as temple entry Satyagrahas, the right to use water from public wells and tanks and social assimilation. He asserted along with social reforms, the importance of political rights. In order to put his ideas into practice he started organizations namely;

¹⁰⁴A.W.&.S, Op. Cited, 1987, Vol.III, P.III

¹⁰⁵Michael, M. J., (ed) , The Untouchables in Contemporary India, University of Arizona Press, Tuscon, 1972, p.109

Bahishkrit Hitakarni Samaj:

In order to bring about a new socio-political awareness among the so-called untouchables, Baba Saheb Ambedkar established this organization on 20th July 1924 at Bombay¹⁰⁶. The aims and objectives of the sabha were:

- To promote and spread of education among the depressed classes by opening Hostels or employing such other means as may seem necessary or desirable.
- To promote the spread of culture among the depressed classes by opening Libraries, social centers and classes or study circles.
- To advance and improve the economic condition of the depressed classes by starting industrial and agricultural schools.
- To represent grievances of the depressed classes¹⁰⁷.

The founding principles of the Samaj were “Educate, agitate, and Organize.” The sabha started one hostel at Solapur for high school students belonging to the depressed classes on 4th January 1925. He launched the famous temple Satyagraha at kalaram temple, Nasik on 2nd March 1930. He represented the cause of Dalits in the round table conference during 1930-32¹⁰⁸.

Samata Sainik Dal:

This was founded in March 1927. It was to enlist the support for the Mahad Satyagraha and maintain discipline in the satyagraha and in the Society. Previously it was known as swayam sevak dal and it was not a centralized organization. It was however, formally organized at a national level on 20th July 1942 at Nagapur¹⁰⁹. Its first conference was held under the presidentship of Sardar Gopal Singh of Punjab. Ambedkar addressed the conference. The activities of this organization were revived by leaders such as Bhagwan Das and L.R. Bali. This organization was very strong and

¹⁰⁶Ibid, Pp.82-83.

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

¹⁰⁹Ibid, P-102.

well-disciplined organization which gave a new vigor to the Dalit liberation movement.¹¹⁰

Peoples Education Society:

Considering the importance of education in the liberation of Dalits, Ambedkar founded the People's Education Society at Bombay on 8th July 1945¹¹¹. The aims and objectives of the society are:

- To provide facilities for the education- secondary, collegiate, technical, Physical and the like.
- To start, establish, conduct educational institutions such as schools, colleges, hostels, libraries, playgrounds etc. as suitable places in the state of Bombay as well as in any other part of India, or give aid to such institution
- To provide facilities for the education of poor
- To create and foster general interest in education amongst the Dalits and in Particular to give them special facilities and scholarships for higher education in India and abroad.
- To promote science, literature and fine arts and to impart useful knowledge.
- To cooperate, amalgamate or affiliate the society or any institution or institutions run by or belonging to the society, to any other institutions or society with a view to securing further advancement of the aims and objectives of the society¹¹².

Bombay State Inferior Village Servants Association:

The Bombay State Inferior Village Servants Association was established by Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar on 31 August 1955. Its office was at Gokaldas Pasta Road, Dada, Bombay¹¹³. The main objectives of the Association were as follows:

- The Vatan land should be given to the inferior village servants.

¹¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹¹Ibid, Pp.97-98.

¹¹²Ibid.

¹¹³Ibid, P-85.

- The inferior village servants should be treated as government servants for the purpose of salary and other benefits
- The duty time and particulars of their work should be decided¹¹⁴.

It was obviously meant for hereditary village servants such as Mahar, Mange, Ramesh, Juggle, Bill, and Kola. Its membership fee was Rs 10 for all the servants of the village. The Maharki and other- hereditary jobs were very much exploitative and oppressive for the so-called untouchables in Maharashtra¹¹⁵. Hence Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar was bent upon to abolish the same. He, however, introduced a Bill to amend the Bombay Hereditary Offices Act of 1874 on 19 March 1926 and again on 17 September 1937 in the then Bombay Legislature, but in vain. Ultimately, the Mahar Vatan was abolished under the Bombay Inferior Village Vatan Abolition Act 1 of 1959 under the provision of Article 23 of the Constitution¹¹⁶.

Buddhist Society of India:

The Buddhist Society of India founded in 1955 by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. It was under the auspices of this society that he was initiated into Buddhism at Nagpur on 14 October 1956 along with his five lakh brethren¹¹⁷.

The objectives of the society were:

- To spread the knowledge of Buddhism in India.
- 2 To build viharas at as many places as possible in order to strengthen the faith of the new converts.
- To establish schools and colleges where education will be provided in Buddhist literature and philosophy.
- To establish orphanages and hospitals and undertake other social work.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

¹¹⁵Ibid.

¹¹⁶Ibid.

¹¹⁷Ibid, Pp.85-86.

- To train workers to carry the message of Buddhism to all parts of India and to establish study circles for the purpose.
- To encourage the comparative study of religions in order to foster the study of Buddhism in right perspective.
- To publish popular literature in Buddhism including pamphlets, brochures, etc.
- To form a new monk order in India.
- To hold conferences of Buddhists in India to bring about uniformity in religious practices, rites and ceremonies¹¹⁸.

After the death of Babasaheb Ambedkar, the first conference of the Buddhist Society of India was held at Nagpur on 3 October 1957 under the presidentship of Shri Yashwantrao Ambedkar. Presently, Smt Meeratai Y. Ambedkar is the President of the Society¹¹⁹.

Ambedkar is the most prominent articulator of Dalit rights. He caused a paradigm shift in the Dalits' social vision, ideology, identity and political action. He propagated 'social revolution' as the solution to Dalit development; the annihilation of caste system, and the creation of a new society based on social, economic and political equality. He was multifaceted; he was a professor, lawyer, journalist, educationalist, social reformist, great economist and visionary, the architect of the Indian Constitution and leader of downtrodden classes in India. He, being one of the few highly educated among the depressed classes, led the movement among them for social reform and political education.¹²⁰ For the first time, Ambedkar planned a systematic approach for the economic as well as the social development of Dalits. Combining these two, Ambedkar visualized that only the socially and politically developed Dalits could destroy the caste system.

¹¹⁸Ibid.

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰Desai. A.R, Social Background of Indian nationalism, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1984, p.198

“Ambedkar”, in his new ideology of integration, “provided a totally different perspective on an autonomous social and cultural space for the Dalits, markedly different from the one they had in Brahminical Hindu society”. Ambedkar is also seen as a ‘dynamic and charismatic leader in life, who posthumously became a cultural hero a demigod for ‘untouchables’ having led them thorough the processes of counter-caste demarcation, competition, confrontation, and routinization of politics’.¹²¹

Dr B.R. Ambedkar transformed the Dalit vision. He prepared the ‘untouchables’ to fight the caste system and its discrimination. He led the Dalits with a vision, envisioning an ideology to educate Dalits politically. He not only fought for the economic development of Dalits, but also argued for the thinking of an alternate identity as against the Hindu identity, which kept them low and degraded. Ambedkar’s vision and initiatives continue to inspire and guide the contemporary Dalit movement.

The mission of Ambedkar was not only to annihilate the caste system but also to remove all the man-made barriers. The social inequalities are removed by the equality of opportunity, social dignity and equal rights to social and political life. Even though the human society has marched into modernity, it was presumed that the older order and all its vestiges including the denominational identities was bound to melt down and that the basis for a new order will revolve around the rational and egalitarian principles. But then medieval notions did not merely survive but remain entrenched in modern life to sustain an even more exploitative socio-economic structure.

Many socio-cultural and political organisations like Dalit Panther Movement, Mass Movements, Dalit Liberation army, Youth Republican, Dalit Sangharshan Samithi, Ambedkar Yuvajana Sangham/Associations etc, were struggling at various level in villages and cities. These organizations dominated mostly by the youth wings of Dalit force, work as pressure groups for educating and mobilizing the Dalit masses and demonstrating in order to get their problems resolved.

¹²¹Khare, The Untouchable as Himself: Ideology, Identity and Pragmatism among the Lucknow Chamars, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1984, p.143.

Dalit consciousness is also expressed in events like the formation of Bhim Sena, Dalit sena, Dalit Sahitya Movement and the emergence of Dalit Rang Bhoomi (Dalit Theatre). These things certainly have an impact on the socio-economic and cultural life of the Dalits. The other organizations of Dalits working at different parts of the country are Dalit Sangarshan Samithi in Karnataka, Indian Dalit Federation in Kerala and Andhra Pradesh Dalit MahaSabha in Andhra Pradesh.

Chapter- III

Evolution of Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha

The emergence of the Dalit consciousness and its organizations with the articulation of a distinct Dalit self-perception, sensibility and ideology was related to the specific form of the socio-cultural and socio-political upheaval in Andhra Pradesh which was characterized by the growing social reforms and non-Brahmin movements. Major issues focused and highlighted were related to their socio-cultural and socio-economic upliftment. It mounted a serious attack on the notion of caste hierarchy and sought to create popular unity based on rationalism and humanism. Thus humanism became a fundamental feature of Dalit ideology. The movements in which the Dalits took part in colonial India, prior to the leadership of Ambedkar, adopted methods and ideologies that by and large failed to better their socio-economic status in the caste hierarchy.

Ambedkar who constructed many ideas in his works have a qualified meaning. They are the derivatives of his thought process, the source of which could be traced to his basic objective of annihilation of castes and creating a society based on equality, liberty and fraternity. It is important to appreciate that Ambedkar employed the search process that is essentially rational and the underlying objective undoubtedly radical. There could be flaws in the specific design or the application of the search process, depending upon the State of his knowledge and complexity of the situation to which it is applied. Besides this, the end result depends upon the repertoire of alternatives used for the search, which means that the specific method, thought or action of Ambedkar may constitute the historical facts but they cannot be taken in their face value if one wants to comprehend the ideological aspects of Ambedkar.

The greatest thing about Ambedkar is his consistent anti-dogmatic stance. He always approached problems with a student's sincerity and researcher's

intellectual honesty. He gave a vision that even the ideologies are bound by the tenet of impermanence and nobody should claim them validity beyond their times. His followers therefore can assume absolute liberty to think through things as per their own experience in changing times.

Ambedkar's thoughts are variously presented by scholars. Some tend to put them in familiar academic slots, viz., social, political, economic, religious etc. The other method may be bracketed as biographical. The problem with the former is that it tends to be narrational and scarcely analytical. Both of them are likely to miss out the underscoring vision and more so the futuristic dimension, which are essentially the attributes of the holistic conception.

Dalits as a social group are still the poorest of poor. A negligible minority has managed to escape poverty limits and to locate itself on to a continuum ranging upon to a reasonable level of prosperity with the help of certain State policies. In social terms, however all Dalits, irrespective of their economic standing, still suffer oppression. This social oppression varies from the crudest variety of untouchability, still being practiced in rural areas, to the sophisticated forms of discrimination encouraged even in the modern sectors of urban life. Although, the statistics indicate that Dalits have made significant progress on almost all parameters during the last five decades, the relative distance between them and non-Dalits seems to have remained the same or has increased.

Dalit movement emerged in the early decades of the 20th century in Andhra. However, an examination of the historical process of evolution of Dalit Democratic revolution and a shared identity reveals a significant break with the early reform movements both in terms of ideology and organization. The Dalit movement expressed the new found solidarity among the lower castes and their determination to struggle. The Dalit movement ideologically fought for structural changes in the society whereas the other caste Hindu movements aimed at changes

within the existing social structure. The Dalit transformation movement sought to challenge the established in egalitarian social order, the value system and the patterns of dominance with a rigid intellectuals in colonial Andhra was aimed at the destruction of caste hierarchy, discrimination and oppression¹. The basic thrust was to critique the ideology of Brahminical Hinduism and counter the socio-cultural hegemony of the upper castes. It also sought to organize the Dalit masses for achieving socio-economic and political equality².

In view of growing democratization, Dalits were naturally inclined to build up organizational strength for achieving political power for progress. As a result they established their own independent organizations, an ideology, leadership, specified goals and strategies. The Dalit liberation movement in Andhra Pradesh established several organizations through which they organized Dalits to fight against untouchability.

Social awakening among Dalits in India and Andhra Pradesh in particular was started in 19th century with the welfare activities of the Christian missionaries. They opened schools hostels and hospitals and made the Dalits to utilize the opportunities of education and health. On the other hand, the social reform movements were sympathetic towards the issues of Dalits. The programmes of the Gandhian movement such as temple entry, “Harijan” upliftment etc., were launched to integrate the Dalit masses into the fold of national movement³. The progressive writers in Telugu like Kandukuri Veeresalingam, Gurajada Appa Rao, Unnava Lakshminarayana, Sri Pada Subrahmanyam Sastry etc., denounced the caste system and untouchability in their writings. Unnava lakshminarayana’s novel ‘Malapalli’ and N.G.Ranga’s Novel ‘Harijana Nayakudu’ depict the miserable life of the Dalit masses. Sri Pada Subrahmanyam’s story ‘Ilanti Tavvayi Vaste’

¹ Chinna Rao Yagati, *Dalits’ struggle for identity: Andhra and Hyderabad 1900-1950*, Kanishka Publishers, 2003.

² Ibid.

³ Satyanarayana .A., “Dalit Protest Literature in Telugu – A Historical Background”, *EPW*, Jan. 21, 1995, Pp.171-175

explains the Dalit struggle for fetching drinking water in public wells and tank in villages.

Majority of these writers belong to upper caste middle class background. Their attitude towards the Dalit issues is sympathetic and sensible. They suggest that with the slight changes the system could be maintained. They did not continue the dissent and protest against the existing social order like the Bhakti poets.⁴

During the early decades of 20th century the Dalit intellectuals launched the struggle against caste system in Andhra. Leaders like Bhagya Reddy Varma, Arige Rama Swamy, Kusuma Dharmannna, B.S.Murthy, Sundru Venkaiah, Nakka China Venkaiah etc., initiated the social protest and movement against the Varna hierarchy and its worst form of untouchability. These leaders launched the programmes like abolition of arrack, abolition of eating meat, eradication of devadasi system, solving the social disputes, panchayats, construction of schools, libraries, bhajan halls etc. simultaneously the Dalit leaders laid great stress on the emancipation of women and started schools and hostels for them.⁵ It is remarkable that all the activists of the protest movements were involved, happened to be Poets and Journalists. The poets like Jala Rangaiah, Kusuma Dharmanna. Nakka China Venkaiah, Sundru Venkaiah, Kusuma Venkaiah etc., produced a valuable and powerful literature. They used the literature as a weapon against the Caste system. Kusuma Dharmanna's 'Makoddi Nalla Dorathanam' reflects the aspirations of Dalits towards liberation. Jala Rangakavi's poems 'Antarani Varevvaru and Mala Suddi', Nakka China Venkaiah's 'Antu Dosham' etc., express the desire of Dalits for Self-respect, Liberty, Equality and Humanity.

The Journals like 'Jaya Bheri' by Kusuma Dharmanna and 'Navajeevana' by B. S. Murthy established some journalistic values in print media. They focused on issues of atrocities on Dalits and questioned the Gandhian philosophy regarding the

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Prasad, Kalekuri, *Dalit Udyamam-Dalit Sahithya Udyamam*, Sakshi, Hyderabad, 1999.

upliftment of 'Harijans.' Writers of Adi-Andhra Mahasabha established an alternative philosophy and the emancipation of Dalit masses and they proclaimed themselves as original inhabitants of the country or the 'sons of soil' and called themselves as 'anaryas' or 'mulavasis'. They owned the Anti-Caste theory of Vemana and Veera Brahmam and continued it through their writings.⁶

Dalit Organizations in Andhra Pradesh:

During the first quarter of the 20th century, the growth of various socio-cultural and political movements in colonial Andhra facilitated the assertion of Dalit identity and self-respect. Apart from the Christian Missionaries, a numbers of social reformers, liberal nationalists and progressive forces also denounced caste discrimination and untouchability. Among the caste Hindu social reformers Shri Kandukuri Veeresalingam Pantulu was the 19th century pioneer, "beginning with a bold widow remarriage movement and taking up issues such as dowry, prostitution, corruption of officials and removal of untouchability. He established Brahmo Samaj in Andhra, and it was through this that the most important caste Hindu sponsorship of Dalit social advance took place."⁷ He started a school for the panchama children with the aid of a liberal financial grant of Rs.70, 000 from the Maharaja of Pithapuram. The Maharaja, Shri Rao Venkata Mahipate Surya Bahadur (185-1965) established two hostels for the boys and girls of the depressed classes and established four primary schools for the⁸.

By the early 20th century, the Brahmo Samaj and other reformers were establishing ashrams for training untouchable cadre-including a *sevashram* at Gudivada (Krishna district) started in 1912 by Sir Guduru Rama Chandra Rao which called the most well-known ex-touchable activists of the time to work in all Telugu-speaking districts. Among those, many were to be active later during 1920's

⁶ Satyanarayana, A. "Dalit Protest Literature in Telugu-A Historical Background", *EPW*, January 21, 1995. Pp. 171-175.

⁷ Omvedt, Gail., *Op Cited*, p.115

⁸ . Kshirsagar, R. K., *Op. Cited*, p.381

including Sundur Venkaiah, Kusuma Venkatramaiah, Kusuma Dharmanna and others⁹.

The other social reformers like Chilakamarti Lakshmi Narasimham ((1867-1945), R.Venkatratnam Naidu (1862-1939) Shri Nallapati Hanumantha Rao, Shri Vellanki Krishna Murthy has contributed for the upliftment of depressed classes. The Dalit leaders who worked in Andhra Region were Sri Gurram Joshuva (Guntur), Gothipati Brahmayya (Masulipattanam) Kusuma Dharmanna (Rajahmundry), Vemula Kurmayya (Vijayawada) B.S. Maurthy (East Godavari), Sardar Nagappa (Kurnool), Geddala Brahmaiah (East Godavari), Koda Surya Prakasha Rao (Vijayawada) V.C. Keshav Rao (Krishna) Damodaram Sanjivayya (Kurnool) Vavuri Ekambaram (Vijayawada), Nandanar Harish Chandra (W.G), Bojja Appala Swamy (Amalapuram) Mangalagiri Nanda (Nellore), B.V. Ramanayya (EastGodavari).

In Telangana region, Dalit leaders like Shri M.L. Audiah (Secunderabad), Arigay Rama Swami (Hyderabad) M.V. Bhagya Reddy Varma (Hyderabad), Eashwari Mallaiah (Golkonda), Puli Rao Swamy (Hyderabad), Butti Rajaram (Karimnagar), M.B. Goutam (Hyderabad), Smt. B. Sumitra Devi (Hyderabad), K.R, Veera Swamy (secunderabad), G. Venkata Swamy (Hyderabad) B. Machandar Rao (Secunderabad) Ambedkar Rao (Medak), M.R. Krishna (Hyderabad), D. Rajaiah (Hyderabad, Vemula Yadagiri Rao (Hyderabad), Edla Gopaiah (Nalgonda), Smt. Leelavathi Nathan (Hyderabad) Acharya Sondeva Sastri (Secundrabad), S.R. Laxmaiah (Secunderabad), Suuthrapu Babaiah (Hyderabad), K. Anantiah (Medak), J.H. Subbaiah (Secunderabad), Sunkum Achalu (Nalgonda), Gangaram (Adilabad), Pandit Prem Kumar (Secunderabad), J.H. Krishna Murthy (Secunderabad) and many others had endeavored for the uplift of the Dalits¹⁰.

⁹ Omvedt, Gail., Op Cited, p.115

¹⁰ .Krshirsagar, R. K., Op. Cited, Pp.381-383

The Dalit consciousness in Andhra also took its inspiration from Phule's Satya-Shodak Samaj movement in Maharashtra, Periyar's non-brahmin movement in Tamil Nadu and Sri Narayana Guru and Sri Ayyankali's social reforms struggles in Kerala. Along with the mass radical anti-colonial struggle the, Dalits in Andhra started the autonomous Adi-Andhra self-respect movement¹¹. The rise and the growth of self-articulation of Dalit identity were symbolized by the formation of *Jagan Mitra Mandali*, *Manya Sangham*, *Adi Andhra Mahasabha* and *Adi Hindu Jathiyonnathi Mandali*.

Shri Madari Bhagaiah, popularly known as Bhagya Reddy Varma (1888-1939) was the pioneer of the Dalit consciousness in Telangana and Andhra. He engaged himself in conscientizing the Dalits as their identity and plight. He campaigned against not only social evils but the roots of those evils that are Hinduism and caste order. After having seen the pitiable condition of his own untouchable brethren, he switched over to their uplift. At first he founded Jagan Mithra mandal in 1906, perhaps the first Dalit popular organization in Andhra Pradesh started by Dalits to enlighten the illiterate masses through harikatha performances and Bhajans. In the year 1912, he founded Manya Sangham which after a decade was given the name of Adi-hindu social service league. The main objective of this organization was to eradicate the social evils/customs that had crept into the society. In order to achieve these objectives he organized a band of 35 volunteers, named *Swastik Dal*. He also found an organization called *Adi-Hindu Murali Nivaran Mandali* to eradicate prostitution. He opened a printing press of his own and started a Telugu weekly *Adi-Hindu* in the year 1930¹². The activities of the Dalit organizations in Andhra are as follows.

Jagan Mitra Mandali:

It was founded in 1906, by Shri M.V. Bhagya Reddy Varma at Hyderabad. The organization used to arrange Harikatha programmes and Varma explained to the

¹¹ Omvedt, Gail. Op Cited, P. 115.

¹² .Khirsagar, R. K., Op. Cited, Pp.179-181.

untouchables “that they were the real and original inhabitants of India and that the others have migrated from central Asia for their livelihood and have migrated from central Asia for their livelihood and the main cause of their backwardness was their ignorance and illiteracy”¹³. It inspired a new awakening among the untouchables in Hyderabad.

Adi-Hindu Social Service League:

This organization was founded by Bhagya Reddy Varma in 1911 at Hyderabad. However till 1921 it was known as *Manya Sangham*. The objectives of this organization were:

- To eradicate the social evil of intemperance.
- To eradicate the system of animal sacrifice.
- To eradicate the custom of dedicating girls to deities.
- To prevent child marriages and
- To create friendly relations between all the untouchable castes and the people of the high castes.

For the propagation of these objectives, the organization started an English monthly known as the *Panchama* which was edited by J.S. Muttiah¹⁴.

Adi-Andhra Organization:

The term Adi-Andhra arose in the post 1917 period when Dalits all over the south, influenced by the non-aryan themes of the Dravidian movement, were identifying themselves as Adi-Dravidian, Adi-Andhras and Adi-Karnataka, original sons of the soil. For coastal Andhra, the decisive year was 1917. At this time, the reformer Guduru Ramachandra Rao called a conference in Vijayawada which was labeled a First provincial *Panchama Mahajana Sabha* with Bhagya Reddy Varma as President and Sundru Venkaiah as Chairman. In his presidential address Varma argued that the term *Panchama* was nowhere found in the puranas

¹³ Ibid, Pp.91-92.

¹⁴ Ibid. Pp.75-76

or other Hindu scriptures and that the so-called panchamas were the original sons of the soil and they were the rulers of the country. The delegates then rejected this term and constituted themselves as the first Adi-Andhra Mahajan Sabha. This organization appealed the government to nominate Adi-Andhras to the local bodies and the legislative council and to establish separate schools and wells in Mala and Madiga areas¹⁵.

Adi-Hindu Mahasabha:

The Adi-Hindu Mahasabha which at its inception was known as *Adi-Hindu Jatiyannati Sabha*, came into existence in 1922. It was founded by Shri Arigay Rama Swamy for the purpose of under taking activities of uplifting the Dalits. This organization arranged Bhajan mandals at several places, organized panchayats to settle internal disputes and it formed a batch of 75 persons as volunteer corps under the leadership of P.R. Venkata Swamy this organization played a very important role in the moral and cultural development of the untouchables.¹⁶

Arundatiya Mahasabha:

In order to organize the Arundatiya or Madigas in the Nizam State, Shri Arigay Ramaswamy founded *Arundatiya Mahasabha*. Shri Girkala Mallesh Rao and Shri. B.S. Venkat Rao helped him in the formation of the Mahasabha. It was founded in a specially called for meeting of the Arundatiyas at the Reddy Hostel, Hyderabad on 1 June 1931. This organization proved to be useful in organizing the Arundatiyas in Telangana region of the Nizam state¹⁷.

Audiah Memorial High School Committee:

This school was previously named after Sir William Barton, the then President of Hyderabad who donated the land to the school in Secunderabad. The school was founded by Shri M.L. Audiah, the renowned Dalit leader (1866-1938) in the year

¹⁵ Omvedt, Gail. Op Cited, Pp.117-118.

¹⁶ R.K. Krissagar Pp.72-73

¹⁷ Ibid.

1906. He was President of the School Management Committee and Shri C.V. Padmarao Mudaliar, a sympathizer of Dalits became its Secretary. It was run under the auspices of "The League to Help the Helpless".

Later the Scheduled Castes Trust Fund Bar Board took over the charge of the management, with J.H. Subbiah as its Chairman. In the year 1961 when K.R. Veeraswamy was appointed as honorary secretary of this institution, the name of the school was changed after its founder Shri M.L. Audiah. It was taken over by the Education Department of the Government of Andhra Pradesh¹⁸.

Hyderabad State Depressed Classes Association:

The youth league of Ambedkarites was formed by P.R.Venkata Swamy as secretary and B.S. Venkata Rao as president at Hyderabad on 17 May 1936. The aims and objectives of this league were.

- To organize the youth of the depressed classes under one banner.
- To support Ambedkar in his mission to lead the community out of Hinduism.
- To enlighten the community on the evils of Hinduism.
- To obliterate existing caste differences among them
- To start a vigorous campaign to ameliorate their social and economic disability.

Later this league was renamed as Hyderabad State Depressed Classes Association on 29 May, 1938¹⁹.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, numerous social organizations provided a source of direction channelizing the discontent and outburst of the lower castes. Many organizations flourished for some time, later in 1980's they revised and re organized the Dalit movement in Andhra state under Andhra Pradesh Dalit

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ R.K. Krissagar, Op cited.

Mahasabha. The growing movement of Dalits for dignity and equality with the construction of a positive self-identity necessitated a serious reflection on the problem of caste. In the process of creating their own identity, they not only deconstructed the articulated labels by caste Hindus from time to time, but also reconstructed their own identity. In the Andhra Pradesh, the Dalit movement rose from the blood of the martyrs of Karamchedu. Not surprisingly, therefore. Is that the fighting mood was the breath of its life. Its philosophic foundations were derived from a codification and reconciliation of the principles against caste domination in Indian society. As ours is an agricultural country, class conflict is represented by the opposition between landed gentry and the landed labor.

The difference between the upper castes, with their patriarchal tradition on the one side and the Dalits, founded on matriarchal culture on the other, can be called gender conflicts. The fights and programmes against the background of these conflicts were reconciled and codified by the Dalit moment under the banner of Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha.

The philosophical background of this organization is of Charvaka philosophy, which had challenged the Brahmin superiority which had built the Aryan political lordship with a fighting spirit ingrained in it. It questioned the dominance in terms of socio-cultural and political aspects. The more of their analysis were scientific in nature. This Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha has adjusted Charvaka's materialism as the first point in their philosophical manifesto, the second point is the Buddhist sangha philosophy. Buddha brought the sangha philosophy against the caste superiority religious dominance, Brahminical culture as an alternative to a society riven asunder by caste²⁰.

In the modern age, keeping in view upper caste superiority, a new comprehensive principle has been evolved for the liberation of the Dalits by the movements, by

²⁰ Katti Padma Rao, *Caste and Alternative Culture*, Gurukul Luthern theological college and research institute, Madras, 1995.

reconciling and coordinating the principles of social revolution followed by Mahatma Phule, Dr. B.R.Ambedkar, and Periyar in their fight for social justice. It is not possible to create a new society that could remove all conflicts of races, caste, class, sex and language without evolving a tenable alternative culture to the dominant Hindu culture. The Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha has sought to provide in it the philosophical foundations for Dalit movement and also forge the weapon for socio- cultural, economic and political liberation of Dalits.

The modern history of Dalit movement in Andhra Pradesh involves significant expressions relevant to the sociology of caste and Dalit studies. The center of the history was the Karamchedu massacre and how this even was decisive for the emergence of an independent/autonomous Dalit movement which transform ideologically, fully engaged in a struggle against untouchability, violence and caste based discrimination. The Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha was created, representing a collective emancipatory project in opposition to the dominant left wing revolutionary movement which blissfully ignorant of cultural prejudice based on caste. The initial struggle started from a camp that was established to support the Karamchedu victims. Ambedkar, moreover became the symbol for the new Dalit movement, providing the basis for a Dalit approach.

The post-emergency period has witnessed a new phase in the political history of India. It has seen the heightened social and political articulation and an intense ideological contestation through a wide variety of issue-based mobilizations and struggles in different parts of the country. The agrarian movements, the Dalit mobilization, the renewed struggles of the agrarian poor, women's discourse (feminist movements) and the new phase of student politics and civil rights articulation in a number of states. The State of Andhra Pradesh is also no exception to this situation/trend.

A massive mobilization of different sections of society, students and rural youths in particular, marked a new phase in grassroots politics in the State. The organization and political articulation of the rural poor took a more visible form and moved to the center of political discourse. These articulations posed an ideological challenge to mainstream politics. Andhra Pradesh, comprising the three regions of Coastal Andhra, Rayalaseema and Telangana, witnessed vast regional variations in socio-cultural and economic terms.

In terms of social movements and civil society articulation, these regions continue to display contrasting trajectories. While the backward Telangana region has been mobilizing of the rural poor and youth by the radical left on the basis of 'class', the developed coastal Andhra region has witnessed emotional mobilizations on the socio-cultural identity of 'caste'.

Caste has long been an important dimension of social articulation and political mobilization in Andhra Pradesh. In the domain of electoral politics, caste assumed an active role as the basis of political grouping and the mobilization of electoral support in the State. The opportunities provided by the colonial modernity – economic, educational and administrative institution were one major factor for the consciousness of Dalits. Hence, the 20th century witnessed many lower caste assertions and movements to their traditional social position and privileges.

Since 1980s, the advanced and prosperous region of coastal Andhra has witnessed unprecedented mobilization on the socio-cultural identity of caste by the rural poor belonging to the two major sub-castes of 'Scheduled Caste' viz., *mala* and *madiga* community. Although not new, mobilization along caste lines, especially along caste lines, by underprivileged sections, can be seen as the beginning of a new phase in the social and political history of Andhra Pradesh. While in the earlier period, such mobilization was limited and largely confined to the electoral sphere, this period marked a new beginning in terms of politico-ideological discourse,

organizational specificity and spatial spread. The emergence of Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha can be linked to various structural factors in the political economy of Andhra Pradesh. Firstly the Green revolution led to the emergence of economy based on wage labor which destabilized the feudal mode of economic organization. It liberated a small section of hereditary laborers from the shackles of feudal lords and acquired autonomy. Secondly, Nehruian nation state made available educational opportunities to Dalits by which they secure small jobs in government sector at local level. Thirdly, mobilization of Dalits by left parties created consciousness among them, the possibilities of autonomous Dalit organizations by themselves.

Karamchedu: The bleak side of Democracy and Development:

The Contemporary Independent Dalit Socio-Cultural organization Andhra Pradesh Dalit MahaSabha has originated with the massacre of Dalits in Karamchedu, in coastal district of Andhra Pradesh, in 1985. The Karamchedu massacre of Dalits had its roots in the complex politico-economic and cultural changes that the village witnessed over the past twenty five years. In the 1970's, the Kamma small peasants of karamchedu who were well versed with tobacco cultivation, began to migrate to far off districts like Karimnagar and began to cultivate tobacco on larger proportions of land. "While the migrant Kamma farmers struck the gold in tobacco and cotton cultivation elsewhere, the other in Karamchedu did experience the spillover effects."²¹

The Scheduled Castes filled this vacuum and graduated to share cropping and field tenancy and most of them graduated to become small peasants. Some among the youth of this community also got educated and acquired jobs. These changes in the economic position of the Scheduled Castes were in conflict with their extremely de-meaning social position in the village. Practices of Untouchability, extreme

²¹Fact Finding Report, *Karamchedu*, Salaha, Hyderabad, 1985, P. 5

sub-ordination, sexual exploitation of their women and bonded labor, were began to questioned and experienced in a changed context.

Politically Karamchedu had a history of left politics which made a decisive difference to their consciousness. Almost isolating the land lords, the Kamma small peasants, tenants and agricultural laborers along with the Dalits aligned with the Communist Party. With the entry of Telugu Desam Party in 1983, the land lords wanted to support this party and forced the Dalits to vote for this party for which the Dalits were refused to. The contradictions between all these levels compounded were resulted in the ghastly massacre of Karamchedu on 17th July, 1985 where six Dalit men were killed and more than twenty five others including women, were severely injured. This incident has severe repercussion in terms of the physical and mental health of the Dalit community of the village.

As a symbolic representation of an autonomous struggle, Dalit leaders decided to have a Dalit organization and that ‘only Dalits’ would lead the organization and address the issue of Karamchedu incident. It was decided that no upper caste, however radical and sympathetic towards the Dalit cause, would be allowed to share the space. This demand of ‘only Dalits’ was one of the earliest forms in which autonomy was articulated in the history of Dalit organizations in Andhra Pradesh.

Ambedkarism, emerged as the guiding philosophy for an Independent Karamchedu incident, the Dalit leaders also urged that there is a need for ‘Dalit organic intellectuals’, who could alone conceptualize the aspirations of Dalits as the essential demand of an Independent autonomous Dalit organization and its movement. In this connection, we analyse the nature and patterns of the anti-Dalit riots by taking Karamchedu incident (massacre), to understand how they led to the emergence and expansion of the Andhra Pradesh Dalit MahaSabha.

Crucial to an understanding of Dalit mobilization and politicization is, the organized attack launched against Dalits by *Kammas* as Karamchedu in Prakasam district in July 1985. The Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha, formed in response to this event of extraordinary violence, soon became the organizational expression of Dalit assertion, spreading across the entire region. Educated and politically active elements responded to it, cutting across ideological moorings and even party affiliations.

Karamchedu is the center of a prosperous agricultural region on the eastern coast of the State of Andhra Pradesh. It is also an influential center of support for the State's then Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao, and the landed *kamma* caste that has been the backbone of his Telugu Desam Party (TDP). N.T. Rama Rao's son-in-law Venkateswara Rao, and himself is the independently powerful head of the youth wing of Telugu Desam Party. Mr. Venkateswara Rao's father is a prominent figure in the local *kamma* community in that village.

Karamchedu: Profile of Socio-Economic Structure

Karamchedu is one of the biggest villages in the erstwhile Chirala taluk of Prakasam district. The village, located seven kilometers west of Chirala town. It comprises of 16 wards, in which 8 wards comprised of *kamma* community and the remaining wards comprised of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Backward Classes. This presents the pattern of social stratification of the village.²²

The total arable land in the village was 9,000 acres. Most of this land was owned and controlled by the dominant *kammas*, who also owned around 2,000 acres in neighboring villages. Of the 325 *madiga* households, 20 families own 20 acres of land. 89 acres of the land is owned by 83 households of the backward castes. Rest of the 11,000 acres of land is owned by the dominant *kammas*. The temple/endowment land, land for management of irrigational tanks, panchayat land,

²² Padma Rao, K., *Jailu Gantalu (Telugu)*, Lokayat, Ponnur, 1995, p. 49.

common grazing land and other collective lands of the village is occupied and cultivated by *kammas*. *Kammas* bid the grazing land among themselves for low price. Thus *kammas* enjoy the benefits from the common lands of the village.

Most of the arable land in this village has been irrigated by the Krishna canal for almost a hundred years now. The Nagarjuna Sagar canal is also one of the sources of irrigation of the agricultural land. Basically, paddy is grown during August-January. As a second crop, the fodder crops are grown.²³ Benefiting from the irrigational facilities provided by the century old, British-built Krishna and the post-Independence Nagarjuna Sagar canals, the fertile irrigated land was the major source of prosperity of the *kamma* peasantry, which in the course of time diversified its wealth into business, rice mills, contracts, transport operation and film production.²⁴

Thus Karamchedu counts among its natives some well-known film producers and businessmen. A significant proportion of *kamma* farmers regularly migrated to other areas of the State and even the neighboring States. They were a presence in Karimnagar and Nizamabad districts in Telangana region and Bellary district in Karnataka, where they cultivated tobacco, cotton and other commercial crops on the leased or purchased lands.²⁵

It is interesting to note that, despite the diversification into urban economic activities and migration to far-off places, the *kammas* of Karamchedu retained on active connection with the village by owning properties there and some migrant farmers' families continued to live there. In the case of the tobacco-growing migrant farmers, the product was brought back to the village for fine grading and sold in the major tobacco market of Guntur. It is easy to imagine, therefore, the wealth the *kammas* accrued.

²³ Narasimha Reddy, D. "Karamchedu: A Dialectic without Development", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, September 14, 1985, p. 1546.

²⁴ Interview with Bojja Tarakam, 15th December, 2005.

²⁵ Interview with Bojja Tarakam, 15th December, 2005.

According to the report of the Fact Finding Team of 1985 (p.4) which visited the Karamchedu village, immediately after the carnage, reveals the various sources the most important are tobacco cultivation and paddy crop, and only for these two sources, there is some information, which would help to make a rough estimate of the annual income of this community in the village. Of the total produce from the paddy crop on the 11,000 acres of the village at least half would be the net accrual to the community which amount to about 1,37,500 bags of paddy, the market value of which works out to be about Rs. 1.37 crores. Based on the 'barns' used for curing the tobacco brought to Karamchedu, it is estimated that the total area of tobacco cultivatedwould be about 10,000 acres. Given the average the net income from an acre of tobacco has gone up to Rs. 5,000, the total earnings from tobacco cultivation works out to about Rs. 5 crore. Assuming, conservatively, that the income earned from the rest of the other sources would be at least as much as the net accruals from the paddy crop (Rs. 1.37), the total annual income of the Karamchedu *kamma* community works out to a staggering sum of Rs. 7.74 crore. The estimated 1,200 households with a population of 6,000, the average household income of a community is about Rs. 65,000 and per capita income about Rs. 12,500'.²⁶

During British period, Karamchedu was under Ryotwari System. The revenue system of cash payment led to the emergence of money lenders among *kamma* landlords. *Kamma* peasant cultivators gradually became indebted to *kamma* landlords and lost their lands to the latter. The economic differentiation within the *kamma* caste gave rise to parties like Congress Justice Party and Communist Party. The landlord moneylenders supported the Congress and the Justice Party.

The economic conditions of the Dalits, who comprised the bulk of agricultural labor, contrasted sharply to those of the *kammas*. The daily wages paid to the male

²⁶ Fact Finding Team (1985), *Karamchedu*, Salaha, Hyderabad.

and female agricultural laborers were even much lower than the minimum wage rates legally prescribed for this region.

Tenant cultivation existed on a significant scale in Karamchedu, with three kinds of tenancy practices present there. In the first kind of tenancy, payment, either in kind or cash, was fixed. In the second kind, share cropping, tenants were entitled to half of the product. Under this system it was the duty of the share-cropper to take care of all the investment without any help from the landowner. The third kind of tenancy, known as the 'one-third system' involved mostly Scheduled Castes. Under this system the tenant was actually a farm servant employed with an annual wage rate and was also allotted an acre or two for cultivation. The manure was supplied and expenses were paid by the landlord. At the time of harvest, the crop was shared with two-thirds going to the land owner and one-third to the share-cropper.²⁷

This 'one-third system' was obviously meant to ensure, and was in fact instrumental in supplying the land lord with a regular supply of labor, by enforcing the former's bondage to the latter. During the 1950s, there were three kinds of land in Karamchedu-the wet land, the dry land and the water-logged uplands. The wet land irrigated by the Krishna canal was cultivated by the landlords themselves. The dry lands were given to poor *kamma* peasants on lease. With the introduction of lift irrigation in 1956, dry lands and uplands were used for cultivation by *kamma* landlords themselves. Small *kamma* peasants who were hitherto growing tobacco were adversely affected by this change.

Since the *kamma* tenants who were experienced in cultivating tobacco found this cultivation profitable consequent to the dispossession of their land, they sought land on lease in order to continue to cultivate tobacco. These peasants migrated to areas like Northern Telangana, Atmakur and Yeleswaram taluks of the present

²⁷ *Karamchedu*, July 17, Hyderabad Book Trust, Hyderabad, 1985, p. 10.

Prakasam district in the South. Some of them migrated to Bellary and Nizamabad and started cotton cultivation.²⁸ Though many of the *kamma* peasants from Karamchedu migrated in search of better livelihood, their families stayed behind in the village. This meant that the *kamma* peasants still retained their link with the village. Moreover, the *kamma* peasants involved in cultivation of tobacco outside Karamchedu always bring back the produce since skilled labor for tobacco gradation is abundantly available in Karamchedu.

Apart from agriculture, *kammas* gradually involved themselves in diverse economic activities, such as ownership of rice mills, undertaking of contract work, private transport operation (in this village we can see private transport companies. This reflects the paradox of economy), film production (the famous film producer, D. Rama Naidu belongs to this village) and money lending.²⁹

All these activities together multiplied the wealth of the *kammas*. According to estimation, the total annual income of the Karamchedu *kamma* community works out to about Rs. 7.74 crores.³⁰ With the increasing prosperity through their cultivation activities elsewhere, the small *kamma* peasants and tenants were no longer interested in leasing in land in Karamchedu and therefore gave up tenant cultivation in the village. In fact, some of them started leasing out whatever little land they owned. The vacuum in the tenant cultivators was filled by the *madigas* of the Karamchedu, which enabled many of them to move from the status of agricultural laborers to share croppers and field tenants.

Though *kammas* were able to successfully emerge as an economically and socially dominant community in post-Independence Andhra Pradesh, they have been successfully kept away from corridors of political power by the Reddy dominated

²⁸ *Karamchedu*, July 17, Hyderabad Book Trust, Hyderabad, 1985, p. 7.

²⁹ For a detailed discussion on the economic development of *kammas* in coastal Andhra, See Upadya, Carol Boyak, "The Farmer-Capitalists of Coastal Andhra Pradesh", in *EPW*, July 2 & 7, 1988, pp. 1336-1382, 1433-1442.

³⁰ Narasimha Reddy, D., *Op. Cited.*, p. 1547.

Congress party. Though many *kammas*, particularly from Karamchedu, occupied several political positions in the past, there is general dissatisfaction among them over the distribution of power between the two dominant castes, viz., *reddys* and the *kammas*.³¹ After the emergence of the *kamma* dominated Telugu Desam Party, the Karamchedu *kammas* came closer to the center of political power. Mr. Daggupati Venkateshwara Rao, who belongs to Karamchedu, the son of Daggupati Chenchu Ramaiah, the dominant *kamma* landlord and also happens to be the eldest son-in-law of Mr. N.T. Rama Rao, the leader of the Telugu Desam Party, became a Member of Parliament as soon as the party swept the elections in 1983. These socio-economic and political developments resulted in changing perceptions and also power of the Karamchedu *kammas*.³²

The *madigas*, one of the Dalit castes in Karamchedu, is, next to the *kammas*, the most numerically dominant community in the village. In terms of their social, economic and educational status, the *madigas* are more backward when compared to the other Dalit caste, the *malas*. They are less exposed to urbanization. So, they remain confined to the profession of agricultural tenancy.³³ Therefore, all the tenants in the village are *madigas* and there are very few *malas* who are tenants. The *kammas* deliberately prefer *madigas* as tenants and laborers because they are supposed to be more submissive and the *malas* aggressive / assertive. Therefore as many as 200 out of the 325 *madiga* households are tenants or share-croppers cultivating about two to four acres each.³⁴

Under the three kinds of tenancy, Dalits are more engaged in the third kind of one-third system in which they were extremely exploited. The tenant is not allowed to work with other landlords once he enters into the contract with a particular

³¹ See Ram Reddy G., "The Politics of Accommodation: Caste, Class, and Dominance in Andhra Pradesh", in Francine Frankle and M.S.A. Rao Eds. *Dominance and State Power in Modern India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1989.

³² *Karamchedu*, July 17, Op.Cited. p. 47.

³³ Interview with Bojja Tarakam 16th December, 2005.

³⁴ Narasimha Reddy, D., Op. Cited., p. 1547.

landlord. In the context of their rising wealth and income, the *kamma* community has been zealously ensuring its dominance and authoritarian position in the village through various strategies. One such strategy is to hold village Katcheri, a kind of the court, the verdict of which is regarded as the law in the village. The Katcheri is not an elected village body, but a body of dominant *kammas* which is a symbol of *kamma* authority. Even for trivial acts of omission, the Dalits are hauled before the Katcheri.

The above description of the socio-economic structures of the village suggest the fact that the rigid social structure of the caste system and its corresponding iniquitous economic structure continue to dominate the social life of the masses of the Dalits ever after Independence. Though the policy of land reforms has showed very little impact on the life standard of the Dalits, the policy reservation in education and employment raised their expectations and consciousness. The influence of Christian missionaries in the field of education and their exposure to urbanization further increased consciousness. The active participation in the popular electoral politics by the Dalits especially by the younger generation has led to realize their importance in the society. It has created confidence among them. Now they no longer view themselves as social inferiors. All these changes in their attitude contributed to their assertion. Any critical analysis of the Karamchedu massacre must be made against the background of this socio-economic structure.

This oppressive socio-economic situation of clear social polarization based on the relationship between caste and land contained seeds of crisis. On the one side was the increasingly rich class of *kamma* landlords, on the other, the poor, socially and economically degraded Scheduled Castes. Yet, it is curious to note that, instead of taking the form of an economic struggle for better wages and better terms of tenancy, the crisis assumed a cultural and ideological form. Although there had previously been minor skirmishes and tensions between the communities, there

had not yet led to full scale conflict. “One obvious and significant reason for this was the decline in popular mobilization by the traditional left, which in the aftermath of the Telangana Peasant Struggle had become increasingly involved in parliamentary electoral politics. This in turn, in mutually reinforcing fashions, had actually paved the way for the decline of the left. This ground reality is thus reflected in the declining politicization and organization of the agrarian laborers”.³⁵

Viewed against this background, it should be of no surprise that the agrarian poor found a different form of registering their discontent. The crucial occasion for the manifestation of this was the 1983 Assembly Election in which the Telugu Desam Party emerged as a major contender for political power. Until then, the political contest in Karamchedu had been organized within the Congress Party (I), which had ruled the State without interruption since 1956, as the left’s presence was marginalized.

With the emergence of the TDP, the scenario underwent a major change with *kammas* in Karamchedu, shifting their loyalty to the TDP and the SCs still vowing their allegiance to the Congress Party (I). The *kammas* found the SCs, and particularly the *madigas*, reluctance, or rather resistance, to translating their economic bondage into political loyalty by voting for the TDP, as a sign of revolt, unexpected of the Dalits, this led to some tension but, did not escalate into any major conflict. But, *post facto* it would be no exaggeration to suggest that it caused sufficient injury to the cultivated pride of the dominant caste, which only waited for the pretext for retaliation.³⁶

Caste Violence on Dalits in Karamchedu

The *kammas* of Karamchedu have long history of attacking various (Dalits) and lower castes in the village. Ten years before the Karamchedu incident, *upparas*, a

³⁵ Interview with Bojja Tarakam, 16th December, 2005.

³⁶ Interview with Bojja Tarakam and Ganumala Gnaneswar 18th November, 2005.

backward community was attacked by *kammas* attacked Venkateswarlu, a leader of the backward caste Chundu Nayakulu, who organized people for hike in wages in the villages. Similarly, a leader of the *mala* community was injured by *kammas*. In all these cases, *madigas* came to the rescue of these people. *Madigas* gave shelter to them (victims). *Kammas* could not retaliate them and returned back. Because of this, the *kamma* caste a jaundiced eye on the *madigas*, speculating that it was now their turn to be taught a lesson. Though *madigas* was dependent for agricultural labours on *kammas*, there were never compromised on their self-respect and dignity, they used to retaliate in such instances.³⁷

After the formation of the TDP, election disputes between the Dalits and the *kammas* have become more common in the village. Traditionally as said above, the Dalits have been the supporters of Congress, because of its patronage politics. The erstwhile *kamma* supporters of the communist and congress parties in the village joined the Telugu Desam. Apart from the fact that the Telugu Desam is a *kamma* dominated party, Karamchedu is also directly related to N.T. Rama Rao, since his eldest son-in-law, D. Venkateswara Rao, contested the Assembly Elections from Karamchedu. The *kammas* were aware that the *madigas* would not vote for the Telugu Desam. Therefore, they entered the Dalitwada and seized the ballot papers from the Dalits and tried to vote for the Telugu Desam. The *madigas* strongly resisted this show of force by the *kammas*. This resulted in tension between the two castes. The *kammas* felt that the *madigas* were defying their dominance in the village.³⁸

Insulting Dalits in the name of their caste is a common weapon by which *kamma* dominance has been ensured. The *kammas* also insult Dalit youth by making sarcastic comments when they dress well. Abuses of the most vulgar kind are used as a routine form of addressing the Dalits and their meek submission or

³⁷ For details, see Katti Padma Rao's *Jailu Gantalu* (Telugu), Lokayat Publishers, Ponnur, 1986, P. 50.

³⁸ Interview with Ganumala Gnaneswar 18th November, 2005 and also see Katti Padma Rao's *Jailu Gantalu* (Telugu), Lokayat Publishers, Ponnur, 1986, P. 51

helplessness is accepted as a sign of the continuance of *kamma* authority/dominance. Exposure of the Dalits to the wild winds of social change/consciousness is regarded as a direct threat to *kamma* dominance.

There are stray incidents of defiance of *kamma* dominance by younger generation of Dalits. There are instances when *madigas* crossed caste hierarchy. For instance, Duddu Robert, a *madiga* youth of Karamchedu married a *kamma* girl from the same village several years ago. However, this marriage was broken up in a few years and he could not enter his own village for well over one year.³⁹ Notwithstanding the fact that resistance to upper caste dominance has not always been successful, there is growing evidence of many Dalit youth expressing confidence in their identity and asserting themselves. The Dalit youth used to resist with *kamma* youth for teasing the Dalit girls.⁴⁰

In particular, Dalit youth exposed to migration and urbanization have been increasingly challenging *kamma* dominance at various places. For instances, in buses, hotels and cinema theatres in the public places of the nearby town of Chirala, they have been demanding equal status with the *kammas*. A small section of Dalit youth among the *madigas* have come up who is assertive and defying *kamma* dominance.⁴¹

On 16th of July 1985, at about 3.30 P.M., a *kamma* youth by the name of Pothini Srinivas Rao (18) while feeding bran to his buffalo at the village drinking water tank, threw the bran water on to the steps leading to the drinking water tank. Since the ground water is saline in this area, the tank is the main source of drinking water for the Dalits and also other communities who draw water from it.

³⁹ Interview with Katti Padma Rao. 12th August, 2004.

⁴⁰ See Katti Padma Rao's *Jailu Gantalu*, Op. Cited., p. 51.

⁴¹ Interview with Bojja Tarakam 17th December, 2005.

A lame *madiga* boy, by name Katti Chandraiah, who was present at the tank, took objection to the way in which the drinking was being polluted. The *kamma* youth in return reacted violently and beat the *madiga* boy with his cattle whip. A young *madiga* woman named Suvatha intervened and the *kamma* youth turned on her. She in turn retaliated by throwing the drinking pot/water pitcher at him.⁴² An elderly person from among the *madigas*, Pandhiri Nageswar Rao, intervened and averted a clash.⁴³ That night, the *kamma* youth came to Suvatha's house and dragged her out. But the neighboring women interceded and sent the youth away.

Munnagi Ankaiah, the father-in-law of Suvatha returned late in the evening from his upland fields. He was summoned to the village Katcheri to given an explanation for the behavior of his daughter-in-law. Fear gripped him in anticipation of the Katcheri's verdict. He decided not to go to the Katcheri since it was already dark. Tella Moshe, the leader of the *madiga* sangham and four other that night tried to contact some *kamma* people of Chirala to work out for a compromise, but it was already 11 P.M and the effort was in vain.

The same night some *kamma* youth gathered at the brandy shop of Rayaneedu Prasad in the village and took a decision to attack the *madigas*. This was seen as a sufficient provocation for the *kammas* 'to teach a lesson' to the *madigas*. The *kammas* of the neighboring villages Veeranapalem and Kankulamarru were mobilized through openly communal and provocative slogan. (If you are born to a *kamma*, you come out, if you are born to a *madiga*, then don't).⁴⁴ An attack was meticulously planned and executed on the morning of the next day i.e. on 17th July 1985. Hundreds of *kammas* were gathered, armed with axes, spears, and clubs, most of them in an inebriated condition, to launch a full-scale attack from all sides on the Madigapalle (Dalitwada). The fact is that, it was meticulously planned and that nothing was left to chance was evident in the way, the whole operation was

⁴²See Katti Padma Rao's Jailu *Gantalu*, Op. Cited., p. 51.

⁴³ Fact Finding Committee Report, 1985, p. 9.

⁴⁴ Interview with Katti Padma Rao. 8th August, 2004.

conducted. To catch the *madigas* unawares, a team was sent with a proposal for compromise, which was approved by a section of the *madiga* youth. Even before they could sense the impending disaster, they were attacked.

The next day, that is on 17th of July 1985, at the early hours of the day, a mob of 500 to 600 gathered in tractors and motor cycles and surrounded the *madiga* houses from all the sides. The surprised *madigas* ran away for their lives. Some ran into houses, some hide under hay stacks and some ran into the fields. But, the pursuers were unrelenting. They ransacked the *madiga* houses, hacked at the doors and walls with axes. Duddu Vandhanam and Duddu Ramesh were caught running out of their houses and were attacked with axes. Vandhanam died immediately and Ramesh succumbed to the injuries four days later in the hospital. Those who ran into the fields were chased and murdered.

The manner in which the 70 year old Moshe was killed illustrates the goriness of the massacre. He initially begged them to spare his life, as he was an old man. When they paid no heed to his pleas and started beating him, he ran into the fields. They caught him up, hacked him with an axe and as he fell down, on his back they dug a spear into his groin and twisted it. Muttaiah and Yehoshua were also beaten with sticks, axed and speared to death in a similar fashion, taking the death toll to six.

About 20 other escaped, albeit with serious injuries, by pretending to be dead. Many of the terror stricken *madigas* ran all the way across the fields to the nearby village Chirala. The women were treated equally brutally. They were dragged out of their houses stripped and molested. Three young girls, Mariamma (11), Victoria (13) and Sulochana were raped. After raping them, a stick was dug into their

private parts and twisted. Sulochana, who was married and pregnant, was aborted in the hospital.⁴⁵

The Fact Finding Team of 1985 described this event as, “the attack, well planned and executed, that went on for hours in which the *madigas* regardless of age and sex were chased from their hovels, the *kammas* used all likely forms of transport, scooters, tractors etc., and the *madigas* ran helter-skelter for their lives in all directions. The more likely place to hide was the gaddi vamulu (fodder heaps) in the fields. Even there, they were not spared. The gory details of this are amply recorded by the various Fact Finding Committees and in the sympathetic accounts reported in the press. But, what is important to note is the fact that finally this left six Dalits murdered, three Dalit women raped and many more wounded, some of them very seriously and the huts burnt, whatever little was with them looted’.

The details⁴⁶ of the people who got murdered in this incident were: Duddu Vandanam; Duddu Ramesh; Tella Yehoshua; Tella Moshe; Tella Muttaiah; Duddu Abraham.

The sequel to the attack further underlines the nature and significance of untouchable identity, in the incident. A number of reports describe the victims as ‘Scheduled Caste’, but this is not strictly accurate. They were all untouchable *madigas*, but many were Christians. As Christian untouchables they are excluded from the official Scheduled Caste category and its attended programmes on the legal fiction that only Hinduism ever permitted untouchability. In social practice, however an untouchable is an untouchable. The *kammas*, made no religious distinctions in their attacks.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Balagopal, K., “The Karamchedu Killings: The Essence of the N.T.R. Phenomenon”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, August 3, 1985, p. 1299.

⁴⁶ For more details, see Katti Padma Rao’s *Jailu Gantalu*, Op. Cited., p. 52.

⁴⁷ Interview with Bojja Tarakam 16th December, 2005.

“Untouchable” symbolizes one of the several status systems that require some humans to subsist as dependent, subservient, and ultimately expendable populations serving the needs of others. As technologies and economic structures have changed, the nature of subordinate roles that serve the convenience of dominant groups have changed. Ideological rationalization have shifted recently, reliance on overtly hereditary definitions of ‘inferiority’ are being displaced by the theoretically achievement oriented concept of meritocracy combined with continuing dominant group manipulation of definitions of “merit” and the mechanisms by which one may achieve it.

A variety of controls once exercised locally and informally are increasingly being transferred to institutions of the modern state professional bureaucracy, police, courts, democracy, even as a utopian system of majority rule, does not necessarily serve the interests of minorities in a population, and where traditionally dispossessed groups are concerned, political reality is often shaped by economic inequality and dominant group exercise of sheer brute force.

Classical Hindu philosophy used the theories of karma and reincarnation to justify systematic suppression of the untouchable castes. Instead, the untouchables struggle today is shaped by the continuation of a very old pattern of exploitation and oppression that was legitimized and enforced through a variety of institutions – religious, social and economic, as well as political. This incident of Karamchedu should also be viewed in this caste dominance perspective of these *kamma* landlords over the lower castes.

Unlike previous atrocities which went unnoticed in the Telugu Newspapers, the Karamchedu massacre was reported extensively. Leading in this coverage was the daily “Udayam”. Its headlines, such as “pantapolallo pulichampina ledi netturu” (The deer’s blood in the fields, killed by the tiger), and ‘Hantaka Bhooswamulaku

Polisula Anda' (Police collusion with murderous landlords) were also bound to the inflammatory. The entire Dalit populace in Andhra was shaken by the event.⁴⁸

This incident, unprecedented in the history of the State, led the Dalits quite understandably to react with anger, and forged solidarity among them. The middle class intelligentsia, cutting across social and political differences, extended their support to the Karamchedu victims. This was translated into an expression of solidarity for the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha, the organization that was formed in the aftermath of Karamchedu to lead the Dalit movement to achieve self-respect, dignity and a decent position in society.

On July 17, all the victims of the Karamchedu arrived at the Church compound at Chirala for shelter. They had run all the way from Karamchedu chased by assailants on motorcycles and tractors. The victims themselves brought the bodies of their dead to the Chirala hospital. The police, who were present in Karamchedu at the time of massacre neither tried to prevent, nor helped the Dalits in bringing the dead bodies and injured to the hospital. "For the first time in the history of Andhra Pradesh the victimized Dalits enmasse left the village and took shelter in another village. The trickle of victims turned into a veritable flood. Men and women with blood-spattered clothing came running like hunted rabbits into the sanctuary of the Church. This mass of humanity was initially consoled and promptly assured a hope by the local young Ambedkarite leaders, Salagala Raja Shekar, Victor Samson, Tella Zedson and Koti James, "who exhibited spontaneous confidence and great courage".⁴⁹

The civil and police machinery had showed lot of indifference towards the victims. The District Collector visited the victims only on 18th afternoon. When the district collector came with 150 meal coupons and asked the shibiram members to move to

⁴⁸ K. Y. Ratnam's Unpublished Thesis, The Dalit Movement in Andhra Pradesh: a Study of Political Consciousness and Identity, p. 102.

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 103.

Rotary Club premises to receive coupons, the replied with a single voice, “No, we don’t want your meal coupons. If you want to feed only 150 there are 500 of us. Also, we don’t want to move anywhere”⁵⁰. Since they felt secure in Church compound itself. The Collector went off without helping the Dalits, with the pretext that they did not comply with the order. This act of the top official, even at this situation reveals the insensitive nature of the government machinery towards the socially deprived sections of the society.⁵¹

The state government offered to help only if the victims agreed to go back to Karamchedu. The shibiram members however, told government that going back to karamchedu would never solve their problems. They wanted justice. When the state welfare minister Pratiba Bharathi, herself a Dalit, visited the shibiram, Sundaramma one of the inmates of shibiram said, “if we live with these Rakshasas (Evil doers), they will kill our husbands, they will do what they want with us”⁵². When Chief Minister N.T.Rama Rao came to visit them with fruits and flowers, they did not allow him to address them. Veeramma, an inmate of camp said, “Ayya (Sir) we do not eat such fruits. You are rulers, these fruits are yours. We live on a hand full of rice we earn from our daily labor. Why do we need fruits? After you became Chief Minister, they made us their targets. We are now shattered, our families are broken and drowned in blood”⁵³. Not even the Dalit *pyraveekars* in the congress, Telugu Desam Party (TDP) or in any organizations whom the inmate characterizes as Dalita Dalarulu (Dalit brokers) were allowed admittance to the shibiram⁵⁴. The congress (I) representative M.V.Krishna Rao offered sarees and dhotis to the victims, but they said, “We will take them afterwards”⁵⁵.

⁵⁰ *Karamchedu*, 17th July 1985, Hyderabad book Trust, Hyderabad, 1985.

⁵¹ Interview with Katti Padma Rao. 8th August, 2004.

⁵² *Karamchedu*, 17th July 1985, Hyderabad book Trust, Hyderabad, 1985.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Kancha Ilaiah, “Caste or Class or Caste-Class: A Study in Dalit Bahujan Consciousness and struggles in Andhra Pradesh in 1980’s”, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, 1995.

⁵⁵ See *Karamchedu* op cited.

Having refused to government help, the local Dalits in Chirala swung into action to help the victims in all respects. They took charge of feeding them. The Dalits from various walks of life such as students, employees, factory workers, rickshaw pullers, brought over the necessities to the victims. When the State relinquished itself of the obligation of social welfare, the civil society responded in a tremendous way. This reflects the emergence of conscious civil society, which no longer is ready to depend heavily on the State. For the victims of karamchedu, much of the political and moral support came from the Dalit bahun leaders and other alienated minority communities. Gowthu Lachanna, the President of Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes, Back ward Classes and Minorities federation, reflecting on the incident said that this brutal incident should be eye opener to all weaker sections and minorities and asked all the oppressed to stand united to face the odds⁵⁶.

Two Dalit leaders, Bojja Tarakam and Katti Padma Rao, hastened to meet the sufferers. Their arrival instilled an immense confidence among the victims and enhanced their enthusiasm. Tarakam was a radical Ambedkarite who led the Ambedkarite Yuvajan Sangham movement in the seventies. He was also a Marxist-Leninist sympathizer, and civil activist. He was also a lawyer by profession and son of the RPI leader Bojja Appala Swamy; he resigned his government law practice in the AP High Court in protest against the Karamchedu incident and came to Chirala town. Katti Padma Rao was the General Secretary of the AP Rationalist Association. An erudite Sanskrit scholar, he became the youngest Sanskrit lecturer in the State at the age of twenty. He was also an excellent orator and a Marxist-Leninist sympathizer.⁵⁷

The Dalit political struggle was advanced by the holding of protest mass rallies, dharnas, blockades and issuing of pamphlets, all of which reflected their inner spontaneous unity and concrete aspirations for justice. Initially, the struggle was

⁵⁶ The Hindu, 22nd July, 1985.

⁵⁷ K. Y. Ratnam's unpublished Thesis, Op. Cited., Pp. 103- 104.

assisted by all the “democratic and progressive forces”, including congress whose interests are antagonistic to the dalits. The congress organized a state wide bandh on 31st July 1985, which was fully supported and participated by all progressive and Dalit organizations⁵⁸.

Meanwhile in Hyderabad, various Dalit organizations like Ambedkar Yuvajana Sangham, Andhra Pradesh Scheduled castes and Scheduled Tribes rights protection society, Andhra Pradesh Slum dwellers Association and other radical and progressive organizations came together and formed a temporary representative body called All India Dalit Coordination Committee on Karamchedu⁵⁹. On 13th August 1985, the committee organized a massive “Chalo Assembly”, where thousands of Dalits and sympathizers participated in the rally from all over the State. Describing political representatives of Dalits belonging to various political parties as donkeys, the donkeys were marched in front of the rally. The agitators described these Dalit representatives as political brokers.⁶⁰ The rally was addressed by almost all prominent Dalit leaders. The rallyists demand that the assembly speaker should come out instead of their representatives going to the speaker. When the speaker came out, they submitted a memorandum demanding the immediate arrest of the culprits and rehabilitation of the victims at the chirala town⁶¹.

As news of the massacre spread, a variety of Andhra untouchable organizations mobilized to demand the prosecution of the guilty and suspension of a Deputy Superintendent of Police (D.S.P) accused of active collusion with the attackers. This political struggle was advanced by the holding of protest mass rallies, dharnas, blockades and issuing of pamphlets, all of which reflected their spontaneous unity and concrete aspirations for justice.

⁵⁸ Interview with Katti Padma Rao, 8th August, 2004.

⁵⁹ Interview with Ganumala Gnaneswar, 9th November, 2015.

⁶⁰ Interview with Bojja Tarakam 17th December, 2005.

⁶¹ Interview with Ganumala Gnaneswar, 9th November, 2015.

The state assembly session which started on 13th August was rocked by karamchedu incident. The then Chief Minister N.T.Rama Rao, who declared himself as Harijan among Harijans”, was questioned by congress and obviously, tried to capitalize on the issue⁶².

After a prolonged debate and discussion in the state Assembly, the Home Minister Vasantha Nageswara Rao made a statement on karamchedu. According to him “nearly 150 upper caste Hindus with sticks, spears and axes attacked Harijana wada in which five members were killed and eighteen were seriously injured, some of their wealth was also destroyed in the incident. This statement politically implied the admission of the crime inflicted on dalits and an acceptance of government’s failure to provide necessary protection. The Chief Minister N. T. Rama Rao passed a resolution in the assembly condemning the atrocities on Dalits in general but there was no specific mention of karamchedu as such. The state government also appointed a retired judge of the Andhra Pradesh High court Justice Rama Chandra Raju to probe the incident. Later on the demand of the victims, a commission headed by Justice Desai was constituted⁶³.

This incident was seen from different points of view by different political organizations. The congress asserted that the Harijans have no peace and security under the Telugu Desam government, and whole problem was termed as a collapse of law and order⁶⁴. The Hyderabad city congress Committee organized protest rally and another public meeting was organized in Nellore district which was addressed by the prominent Dalit leaders⁶⁵. The union home minister Ramdulari Sinha was deputed by the Rajiv Gandhi government to attend the rally and she simply attacked the Telugu Desam Party which was part of the opposition at the centre, the traditional communist parties, CPI and CPI (M) simply outlined the incident as a “wrangle between two groups” and maintained their political

⁶² Interview with Katti Padma Rao, 8th August, 2004.

⁶³ Interview with Katti Padma Rao, 9th August, 2004.

⁶⁴ The Hindu, 28th July, 1985.

⁶⁵ Andhra Jyothi (Telugu), 30th July, 1985.

taciturnity. In fact they join TDP in accusing the congress. The CPI (M) leader and the state committee secretary Lau Balagangadhar Rao said that “if karamchedu incident makes the Telugu Desam morally responsible and it should not continue to rule the state, then the congress does not have any moral right to rule the country, because under it only many atrocities have been committed on Dalits”⁶⁶.

From the Chirala Church premises, the Karamchedu victims shifted to newly erected tent houses called Shibiram. This Shibiram (camp) became the primary centre of the Dalit protest movement. Every Dalit mind in the Shibiram was filled with anguish and enthusiasm. They began their process of change by explicitly discussing the word harijan and emphatically asserting their identity as Dalits. The inmates of Shibiram also refused to entertain whoever used the word Harijan, and made their customary visits and promises of arrest of culprits, compensation and restoration of normalcy. They also disowned established political parties whom the dalits termed as “higher caste vultures”, making sympathetic noises with huge donations and various philanthropic activities. The victims of Karamchedu did not want these political office seekers to make the shibiram a “pilgrimage centre”⁶⁷

Two days after the incident, the political leaders and representatives of the political parties began to flee the Chirala Dalit Shibiram to address the victims. First of all, the Dalits rejected the sympathetic doles offered by political parties and officials. When the government announced Rs. 10,000 as *ex gratia* to the dead, the question the Dalits asked was that if we take this money, will our dead come back? We can rehabilitate ourselves by shedding our sweat, but what we want is justice.⁶⁸ All those political parties who wanted to gain the confidence of the victims failed to do so. Even the representatives of the most influential revolutionary parties were not allowed to address the victims. They even took objection to usage of the word Harijan by the visitors; they insisted that they should be called as ‘Dalits’, a

⁶⁶ Praja Shakti (Telugu), 28th July, 1985.

⁶⁷ See *Karamchedu*, op cited.

⁶⁸ Interview with Katti Padma Rao 12th August, 2004.

nomenclature, which symbolizes their struggle for social equality and injustice done to them by the Hindu social hierarchy. The activists presented their, decided to create a political platform for themselves and they formed Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha and constituted an Adhoc committee with Bojja Tarakam as its chairman, Katti Padma Rao as General Secretary and Prof. Kottapalli Wilson, E.V.Chennaiah, Battula Punnaiah, Vaman Das, Ganumala Gnaneswar, Rajan, Babu Rao, Ramulu, Katama Raju, Mastan Rao etc., as its members to carry forward the movement.⁶⁹ The Dalits under their leadership made political agitation in order to make the government accept their demands. The major demand of the agitators was the arrest of the culprits, especially, Daggupati Chenchu Ramaiah, relative of the then Chief Minister, N.T. Rama Rao, who involved in the massacre.

The indifferent and suppressive attitude of the State further politicized the Dalits who were already assertive. This politicization brought the Dalits of the State together, as an independent massive force, which further consolidated them through Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha.

Andhra Pradesh Dalit MahaSabha which formed in response to Karamchedu massacre is the first self-consciously Dalit organization led by the Dalit leaders, committed to fighting caste and community-based discrimination. Karamchedu movement is the symbol of Dalit struggle. It has given a shape to self-dignity and resistance among Dalits. It has mobilized the lower castes on a massive scale. There is no light or turnings in the life of Dalits without this incident. As Naxalbari/Maoist movement is the replica of Marxists and Leninists movement, Karamchedu is the symbol alike of this to Dalits social struggle. Many incidents, forms of struggles, cadre and leaders were born from this movement. Karamchedu is the main backdrop for all the changes/ transformation that occurred among the status of Dalits of the present day.

⁶⁹ Interview with Bojja Tarakam and Ganumala Gnaneswar 3rd November, 2015.

Chapter- IV

Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha: Manifesto and Struggles

The formation of Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha (APDMS) in 1985, following the Karamchedu massacre, is a crucial development in the recent history of Dalit socio cultural politics in Andhra Pradesh. Reaction to the Karamchedu event was overwhelming and unprecedented. It cut across the different shades of democratic public opinion and social constituencies. Support was not only political and ideological but also, significantly material.

Chirala town, where the victims of Karamchedu took shelter, became a hub of socio cultural activity, with Dalits from different parts of the State and belonging to different political persuasions visiting the Dalit camp there. The idea of Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha generated from this. The leaders at the shibiram continued with spontaneous and different operations. Initially, all these were done without much seriousness or systematic thought or plan of action. The increasing response from the hapless, impoverished Dalit masses, and their hopeful search for talented political leaders and organizers made it necessary for the leaders to give serious thought to an organizational work¹. This made them towards the formation of new autonomous revolutionary organizations for further growth and development of Dalit movement. In this process the Dalits began to radicalize their ideological position and their demands, while abandoning the past bankrupt political leadership².

On 1st September 1985, the historic Chalo Chirala huge public meeting was organized by Karamchedu victims struggle committee. Dalits from all over the State poured into Chirala town to attend the mammoth rally, in which three lakh Dalits marched with ferocious slogans. The strength of the Dalits, demonstrated in this rally, caused some consternation among the upper castes. In this meeting the

¹ K. Y. Ratnam Unpublished Thesis, *The Dalit Movement in Andhra Pradesh: A Study of Political Consciousness and Identity*, Submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 1997p. 111

² Ibid.

stage was reserved exclusively for the Dalits; no members of the upper castes, howsoever sympathetic to the Dalits, were allowed to share the dais. The Dalits did not want anyone to speak on their behalf; they could manage on their own. The meeting was inaugurated by Gaddar, the new democratic cultural revolutionary singer from the then People War Group (PWG). He composed a poem for the occasion.

Dalitapululamma,
Karamchedu Bhoswamatone,
Kalabadi nilabadi porusesina,
Dalita pululamma
(Dalit tigers, who boldly stood up and fought with Karamchedu landlords).³

After Gaddar's cultural presentation, which provoked considerable anger among the participants against their plight, many prominent Dalit leaders such as Bojja Tarakam and Katti Padma Rao addressed the meeting. The meeting ended with the decision to form a new State level autonomous Dalit organization called the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha in which Bojja Tarakam was elected as Founder president and Katti Padma Rao as founder General Secretary of the organization.

The primary objective of this newly formed Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha was to consolidate the strength of the Dalits, tribals, backward castes and the minorities. According to Padma Rao, "the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha would confine its activities to constructive work for the benefit of the downtrodden with class instead of caste as its character and organize the people to fight for their rights". He added that "Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha will launch a struggle against the scourge of untouchability which remains alive in many villages".⁴

He reiterated that the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha would attempt to rouse the conscience of the people and it would educate the Dalits against drinking and gambling, for the abolition of bonded labour, creation of more facilities for washer man and weavers, and for an end to the ill-treatment of backward castes and Dalits.

³Ibid.

⁴ Ibid. p. 112, quoted in *The Hindu*, Hyderabad, November 15, 1985.

The ultimate aim of the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha was “to see that when the Dalits come to power, it should be as an integral part of the process of building Dalit culture as an alternative.”⁵

With the formation of Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha, the struggle took an organizational form with the civil libertarian and advocates Bojja Tarakam as the founder President and the rationalist Katti Padma Rao as the General Secretary, and soon spread to other parts of the coastal region heralding the beginning of a statewide movement. The Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha was also gaining in membership mainly from the semi-educated and educated daily wage earners and agricultural workers. In the second week of February 1986, the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha held its first State level conference at Tenali town of Guntur district. At this conference, the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha manifesto was released, explaining the mode of Dalit struggle, strategy and principles.⁶

This has created interest among the various sections of the society in general and Marxist-Leninist groups in particular as it was the first attempt to articulate and conceptualize the idea of an autonomous Dalit socio-cultural organization to lead a Dalit movement independently. The acute and complex 21st century problem that would continue to plague Indian democracy is casteism. The clash between equality, fraternity and unity among the people of India, the grand vision of the basic structure built in the Preamble (constitutionalism) and the caste based discrimination, instead of resolution, even after 59 years of Independence, has been continually raging. Casteism and the wicked assertion of caste hierarchy have been much more menacingly raising ugly head. For failure to tackle this menace, the civil society, instead of integration, is getting further fragmented and disintegrated. The centrality of the issue therefore is to tackle casteism.

The social structure of India is predominantly based on hierarchical caste system, inculcating a sense of ascending scale of respect and descending scale of discrimination and denigration of the people. Due to untouchability, which was

⁵Ibid, Also See Padma Rao, K., *Caste and Alternative Culture*, Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, Madras, 1995, p. 145.

⁶ Interview with Katti Padma Rao, 9th October, 2005.

given social and religious sanctions for its perpetuation, the Dalits has been kept as outcastes, inflicting indignity; inhumanity and denigration have been heaped on them for millenniums. International human rights regime and the Constitution of India prohibit caste based discrimination, in particular, by Articles 14, 15 and 16 and abolished untouchability by Article 17, life has been protected under Article 21, and equality of status and dignity has been given in equal measure to the Dalits and adivas. By practicing untouchability, Dalits have been deprived of education, basic human right for intellectual excellence, cultural pursuits and economic empowerment, social justice, equality of status and of dignity and opportunity.

Karamchedu incident/movement, evolved from a philosophical foundation. The landlords of Karamchedu who involved in atrocities also had their own philosophy behind their actions. This philosophy is the philosophy of Brahmanism i.e., caste dominance. When the Dalits started revolting against the existing feudalism and their caste dominance, the upper castes brought the political, economic and caste power together and started victimizing the lower castes by killing, raping, maiming to prove to the outer world their caste dominance. This is the philosophy they followed to prove their caste hierarchy.⁷ This incident should not be viewed as an economic conflict or political suppression, but as an upper caste dominance and atrocity against lower castes. The only way of opposing the caste dominance is through the instrument of annihilation of caste. This was the philosophy, which strengthened the Karamchedu movement. This incident provided a practical example which brought to fore an alternative philosophy of annihilation of caste against caste dominance, which was until then opposed merely on the plank of economic inequalities perpetuated by the philosophy of Brahmanism.

Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha brought into its agenda, all the powers that stood to fought against this Brahmanism like Dalitism, Dalit literature, Dalit movement, and Dalit philosophy as an alternative culture. The culture as a lived social experience can be a useful tool in understanding society. The culture in India got its feudal character as every cultural form was decided by feudal lords, priests who denied space for the culture of lower castes. As a result of the rapid changes in the

⁷ Interview with katti Padma Rao, 12th August, 2004.

production process, social relations and cultural practice they are experiencing a decline in their importance and place. The impact of the process of the agrarian modernization was very perceptible on the lower castes who as a result of the decline of their rural occupations, lost a major source of their livelihood and joined the ranks of agricultural labourers. The Dalit movement carried away / led by the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha is rediscovering Dalit art and culture.

Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha- Philosophical Background:

In Andhra Pradesh, the Dalit movement led by Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha rose from the blood of the martyrs of Karamchedu. Not surprising, therefore, is that the fighting mood was the breath of its life. Its philosophic foundations were derived from a codification and reconciliation of the principles against caste domination in the Indian sub-continent. From the point of view of the historical interpretation of dialectical materialism, the main conflicts on the Indian sub-continent could be described in terms of race, caste, class, sex and language. The fights and programmes against the background of these conflicts were reconciled and codified by Dalit movement.

Charvaka philosophy is that which had challenged the Brahmin superiority. The questions asked and the answers given by them and the mode of their analysis were scientific in character. They had evolved a viable alternative to the Vedic ideology. The Dalit movement adopted Charvaka's materialism as the first point in their philosophical manifesto.

The second point is the Buddhist Sangha philosophy. Buddha brought this philosophy forward as an alternative to a society riven asunder by caste. As a foundation for the Sangha Dharma, Buddha saw to it that the alternative cultural forms were reflected in practice all over the Indian sub-continent. In the fight against caste domination, it was found it cannot be done in practice, without a reflection of Sangha Vada. That was the reason why Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha as chose to Buddhist Sangha Vada as a second point.

A third point is the Humanism of the activists in the movement for social rejuvenation. From time to time, those against the domination of the upper castes sang the songs of humanism all over India as poets, singers and devotees. In this music of humanism are hidden the anguish, agony and anger to fight against inequalities. All of them, however, preached different principles with different outlooks. The essence of these teachings was accepted as the third point by the Dalit movement, after a process of adjustment.⁸

In the modern age, upper caste superiority in which they joined hands with the imperialists and assumed a sinister form, a further step forward had to be taken. A new comprehensive principle has been evolved for the liberation of Dalits by the movement, after coordinating and reconciling the principles of social revolution followed by Mahatma Phule, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Periyar Rama Swami Naicker in their fight for social justice.

The Manifesto of Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha was an attempt to negotiate, incorporate and expand the consciousness built around Marxist struggle in the state. In this manifesto, Dalits were defined not as particular castes or social groups subjected to particular forms of discrimination and oppression. Instead, it has broadly widened the scope by defining all people belonging to various religions, castes and classes subjected to various forms of social, cultural and economic discriminations were referred together as Dalits. It is in a sense closer to the Marxist idea of a 'Universal Subject'. It in fact very specifically declares that those socially discriminated through the practice of the Untouchability are only a fraction of this larger identity called 'Dalit'. This is a part of the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha agenda/manifesto to struggle and to realize the 'hegemonic unity' between the poor peasants belonging to all castes including the so-called Upper Castes. This autonomous 'Strategy of Transformation' was part of the principles and organizational work of the earlier great leaders like Phule, Periyar, Ambedkar and Buddha.⁹

⁸ For more details, see K. Padma Rao's *Caste and Alternative Culture*, The Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, Madras, 1995, Pp. 143- 144.

⁹ Interview with Bojja Tarakam, 16th December, 2005.

Though the manifesto did not draw the kind of attention that the manifesto of Dalit Panthers did in Maharashtra, it certainly was an outstanding political text and its polemical formulations created contentious debate. The manifesto traced the historical emergence of Dalit struggles and stressed the “caste annihilation thesis” implying that Ambedkar’s philosophy was central to caste class discrimination.

Historically, Congress Party has offered only piece-meal benefits and welfare programmes to Dalits but never implemented the basic demands of socio-economic and cultural transformation. This manifesto of Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha clearly put forth the fundamental demands to transform the society by implementing land reforms, minimum wages and strong legislations against the practice of untouchability and bonded labor especially found in rural areas of Andhra Pradesh where people were not conscious of their rights.

Communist Parties on the other hand, suffered from ‘economic determinism’ and neglected various forms of ‘social discrimination’.¹⁰ Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha, an independent Dalit socio-cultural organization was therefore aimed at both a ‘social transformation’ as well as ‘cultural transformation,’ along with socialization of land and capital. Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha has declared that, in order to remain away from political temptations, it would not admit people who were earlier members of any political party.¹¹

In other words, it has wished to remain as a socio-cultural organization at the grass root level within the civil society, with its main demands being land, education, water, library facilities, rights etc., which would contribute to obliterate social and cultural discriminations. Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha has not only made focus on land for its struggle but also kept distance from parliamentary politics, to keep open its option of carrying out the joint activity with the Marxist-Leninist parties. It has recognized the need for militant-armed methods in order to achieve its demands.

¹⁰ Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha, *Pranalika* (Telugu), APDM, Hyderabad, 1985, P.6

¹¹ Ibid. P.13

History, in a sense was repeating itself with Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha formulating a programme partially similar to the Dalit Panthers movement in 1970's, which had the 'genuine radical left' or the revolutionary organizations carrying-out 'class struggle' as their immediate associates. However, their struggle was not just against the existing class system but, what they ingeniously referred¹² to as 'Hindu Feudal Order'. Dalit Panthers has very boldly conceptualized that all struggles based on caste, devoid of a generic and broader social and economic concerns are all "Casteist Struggles". They therefore believed that for the emancipation of Dalits, there is a need for 'total revolution', which fights for socialism and not for "Pseudo nationalism" and therefore legal petitioning, demand for subsidies and electoral methods were considered obsolete.

Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha, unlike the Dalit Panthers along with militant struggles took up legal battles against the upper caste culprits in most of the cases. For instance, it has filed cases against the accused in Karamchedu and Chundur massacres. Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha has argued or focused on to pursue legal and constitutional means as long as Dalits had trust in democratic means. It has seen that the struggle to expose the laws, judiciary, police and the entire state machinery of the caste bias as a part of the Dalit struggle or movement without denying the need for militant struggles and other forms of struggle. Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha believed that the specific form of oppression of Dalits made it necessary to carry-out struggle on different forms.

The manifesto has opened by giving an outline of the distinctness of Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha and portrayed it as the real united front of desperate social elements, for united action against the ruling upper castes. It defined the Dalits and characterized them as the "special class" which necessarily had the potential to overthrow the present class-caste exploitative society and to bring an intended new Dalit democratic revolution. It explained how the Dalits were systematically exploited and divided during the centuries in the Hindu social order. It also emphasized how the previous political struggles, including the communist movement, lacked political effectiveness and revolutionary purpose to annihilate

¹² Dalitha Pantherla Manifesto (Telugu), Navayuva Samakhya, Vijayawada, 1996, P.15.

caste and stressed the crucial importance of the Dalit organic party. Lastly, the manifesto said that the primary aim of the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha was to conscientize the Dalits about historical role of working class struggles at the global level, and their emancipatory zeal.

This rapid radicalization of Dalit consciousness and reinforcement of their solidarity polarized the upper castes rulers, with the state apparatus at their command. The so-called *Karamchedu Saghibhava Samiti* (Karamchedu Solidarity Assembly) was even formed, comprising upper caste reactionaries. As soon as this organization was formed, counter ideological propaganda was started against the Dalits.¹³ According to this samiti, the karmchedu massacre was a drama produced by the Dalits in order to escape from the heavy debts and loans taken from the upper castes. It was the samiti's contention that "the harijans who taken loans from the upper castes have thought the best way to get rid of them was by implicating them in the cases"¹⁴.

Meanwhile the Dalits voice was stifled. Though the victims of karamchedu carnage had identified the culprits, the state government did not even charge-sheet them. The state police arrested innocent people: ten Muslims, one dhobi and six dalits; that to in the guise of their being radicals¹⁵. The pressing demands of the dalits that the victims should be rehabilitated at Chirala town and justice rendered to dalits were not taken seriously by the government.

To protest the government indifference, the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha gave a call for a Statewide Rail Rokho and Rasta Roko on 8th September. The agitation was a total success, disrupting the communication system and the State administrative functions.¹⁶ The government in retaliation deployed a heavy police force at the shibiram. In a midnight attack on the shibiram, the police destroyed the tents, conducted a heavy lathi charge on the shibiram members, and arrested nearly 300 inmates. It was rumored that Padma Rao killed in an encounter with the

¹³ Interview with Bojja Tarakam, 16th December, 2005.

¹⁴ *The Hindu*, 4th December, 1985.

¹⁵ *Andhra Jyothi* (Telugu), 29th July 1985.

¹⁶ Katti Padma Rao. *Jailu Gantalu*, Lokayat Publishers, Ponnur, 1986, (Appendix), p. 62.

police.¹⁷ In the midst of this chaotic situation, the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha President Tarakam sent Padma Rao to conduct underground activities. Padma Rao toured all over the State, holding clandestine meetings about the objectives of the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha.

Meanwhile, Tarakam arranged for Padma Rao's arrest in order to get propaganda mileage for the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha out of the event and also to avoid his encounter killing. On 6th October, a huge public meeting was arranged at the Vijayawada municipal grounds, with an estimated crowd of one lakh, which Padma Rao was expected to address. The State Government deployed a heavy police force. When Padma Rao was about to address the meeting he was arrested along with Raja sekhar, the other leader of the movement and the son of Ex-Member of Parliament of Bapatla constituency on the dais and taken to the Visakhapatnam Central Jail. The enraged crowd has lathi charged.¹⁸

Padma Rao's public arrest led to an escalation of the Dalit agitation. The Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha along with the CPI (ML) groups, resorted to the roadblocks, massive rallies, silent marches and statewide demonstrations. In this mean time, a delegation team of Bojja Tarakam along with karamchedu victims struggle committee went to Delhi and met the then prime minister Rajiv Gandhi to explain the situation in state and requested for the release of the leaders who were arrested.¹⁹ This time, the leadership at the shibiram in the state, strategically utilized the women's militancy as a check against the State repression. The Dalit women's response and their participation was remarkable in this movement. A women activist from the Rationalist Movement, Hetuwada Laxmi who was a close associate of Katti Padma Rao, played an important role in organizing the Dalit women at the shibiram. The Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha along with the then Peoples War Group, led the demonstration under the leadership of Hetuwada Laxmi. Hundreds of women went to Hyderabad and staged a dharna in front of the

¹⁷ Interview with Bojja Tarakam and Ganumala Gnaneshwar, 8th November, 2015.

¹⁸ Details narrated by Katti Padma Rao, 9th August, 2004.

¹⁹ Interview with Bojja Tarakam and Ganumala Gnaneshwar, 9th November, 2015.

Chief Minister's house, demanding the immediate release of the leaders. As a result, Padma Rao was released the next day.²⁰

Apart from the agitational struggle, the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha also took up the legal battle against the upper caste culprits. As part of the pacification exercise, the State government filed a case on behalf of the victims, but ironically, none of the culprits who the victims identified appeared in the list of accused. Meanwhile the government constituted a judicial enquiry commission headed by justice Desai for probing Karamchedu massacre. After prolonged enquiry, the commission declared that "it coupled not find any clear cut reason behind the massacre, and hence it is inconclusive"²¹. Against this gross travesty of justice, the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha filed a separate private case citing as the accused the Karamchedu landlord, Daggupati Chenchu Ramaiah, who was the CM's relative and the real strategist behind the massacre. In this regard, Salaha, a voluntary legal organization in Hyderabad played a crucial role.²²

To answer the charges filed by the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha in its private case, the prime accused Chenchu Ramaiah was summoned by the District special court. A Dalit woman, Alisamma was the prime eye witness in the case. Her son had been killed to death in front of her in the massacre. Because of her detailed narration of the horrifying seen she was killed by the upper caste after her deposition²³.

Thereafter, the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha took up different forms of ideological propaganda. In order to create an ideological base among the Dalits, political classes were conducted on Phule-Ambedkar thought²⁴, and cultural programmes on Dalit identity were reinvented. The Andhra Pradesh Dalit

²⁰ Interview with Bojja Tarakam and Ganumala Gnaneshwar, 9th November, 2015

²¹ *Kranthi* (Telugu), CPI (ML), PWG Monthly, Vol.14.No.4, September, 1991.

²² Interview with Bojja Tarakam and Ganumala Gnaneshwar, 9th November, 2015

²³ Interview with Katti Padma Rao, 9th August, 2004.

²⁴ These classes were taken by Prof. Hara Gopal, Kancha Ilaiah, Katti Padma Rao, Bojja Tarakam and others.

Mahasabha started a fortnight called Dalita Shakti (Dalit Power), which chronicled various important incidents and day-to-day activities of the organization.²⁵

Meantime, the Government of India promulgated a comprehensive act to prevent atrocities on Dalits and to punish the culprits. The act was got the President's assent in September 1989, as the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes Atrocities (Prevention) Act, 1989. Also, after a prolonged struggle by the Dalits, the State government announced the construction of new permanent houses and self-employment schemes for the Karamchedu victims. The new colony constructed at Chirala town was named Vijayanagara Colony (Colony of the Victorians), symbolizing Dalit pride and reminiscing the victorious Dalit struggle.²⁶

The Dalit movement in Andhra Pradesh thus attracted wider intellectual support due to this background of massacres in advanced pockets and an increasing middle class Dalit presence in a wide range of civil society articulations, such as civil rights, Ambedkarite and caste associations and mainstream political parties. Its support base is thus reflective of the diversity in the Dalit situation; it comprised of middle class employed, educated unemployed, political and social activists with as many diverse backgrounds as the political scenario of Andhra Pradesh could present.

Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha Manifesto: The Text

What is DMS?

The 'Dalit Mahasabha' is a movement to unite the hitherto oppressed people who have been subjected to age-old socio-economic inequalities, and called by the upper castes as Harijans, Girijans and Backward Classes. The primary objective of the movement is to annihilate the untouchability and caste system which are impeding their solidarity and along with preparing them to annihilate socio-economic inequalities.

²⁵ Interview with Ganumala Gnaneshwar, 9th November, 2015

²⁶ K. Y. Ratnam's unpublished Thesis, Op. Cited, p. 118-119.

Who are Dalits?

All those who have been subjected to the socio-economic and political oppression for generations are all Dalits. The Dalits do not belong to a caste or religion. Since they are subjected to oppression, we call them as the “oppressed”. Slaves exploited by their master in slavery system. Peasants and agricultural labourers exploited by feudal lords and proletariats exploited by capitalist bourgeoisie – all those exploited masses are Dalits. Apart from the above economic oppression, those who have been exclusively subjected to social oppression come under untouchables. Not only are these, the rest of the castes who have been subjected to social oppression under the caste system all Dalits. All the upper castes are part of the feudal, and capitalist system, whereas, the lower and backward castes are constitute the working class, peasants and poor.

Oppression of Dalits in the History:

When we analyze the case of the exploited in India, it is imperative that, one should consider the social and economic inequalities. Historically, the classification of touchables and untouchables, has alienated one fifth of Indians from the society and imposed ruthless regulations. These untouchables have been alienated from the property, culture, civilization and production system. For thousands of years they remained outside being not allowed to become an integral part of the society. They have been distanced from the land, which is principal means for the human development. Their untouchability has been perpetuated by the creation of politico-legal statutes.

Manusmriti declared untouchables as mishappen, and unheeded. Parashrasmriti has kept untouchables voice and light away from others. Those who saw them or heard their voice were penalized. The Narada smriti and Apasthanda principles treated them severely. In the evolutionary sequence of society untouchables were not allowed to enjoy the faiths (fates) of human progress. Even the untouchables were divided into thousands of castes. The scriptures declare that the fourth class of the caste system consists of Sudras and Slaves. And among Sudras, but for those who have occupied land, rest of the castes were treated as slaves. Washer men, weavers,

potterers, barbers, carpenters, not only these, but those who were deprived of land sweated and worked for landlords. Their majority numbers notwithstanding, they could not get united owing to caste differences. Those who owned the land naturally held control over the socio-economic structure. Consequently, those engaged in tillage could not own the land. Neither could they secure their bargaining power. It is not enough, if we consider these as economic problems, but we must view oppression as social phenomenon.

Even though who thrived on land were not equals. They can be divided into landlords, affluent farmers, peasants, and agricultural labourers. And a large section of agricultural labourers were untouchables. Whatever, caste status they claimed the small peasant remained always Dalit. They could not get united with the working class owing to their caste differences. It is not possible to eradicate economic disparities ignoring inequalities and malaises, caste system has fostered. For generations, caste system and untouchability are central to economic inequalities. They have hindered the solidarity of the exploited. That's the inextricable relationship between economic exploitation and social oppression.

Apart from these, the tribals were also exploited for generations. Tilling the forestland and enjoying the fruits of the forest, they have developed a culture and tradition distinctly of their own. These tribals were yet untouched by the caste system. But the civilized people have started by encroaching upon the forestlands. They were looted as they were ignorant. The civilized have snatched away tribals life-sustaining means. Their lands and produce were burgled. They were deprived of education and basic amenities. Having confiscated their lands, the civilized have reduced tribals to wage laborers. The tribals, like Dalits were subjected to socio-economic exploitation.

Social Movements and the Dalits and Social Movements:

The Buddhists as part of social reform movement revolted against vedicism. While the lokayats fought on the intellectual plane, Buddhists fought in social realm. In the medieval south, veerasaivas under the leadership of Basava revolted against the untouchability. Prophets and poets from time to time advocated against the practice

of untouchability, but could not lead a consorted social movement to eradicate it. Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj have attempted to weed out this evil practice. Few Maharajas and Samsthanadhisas have established schools for untouchables and offered employment too.

They undertook the measures to better the economic conditions of the untouchables. The constructive work of Mahatma Phule to resolve the problem of untouchability before the independence has proved to be a light for the future course of action. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar during the freedom movement has for first time stressed the importance of social movements for Dalit emancipation. He delved deep into the past to recover the neglected history of untouchables and formulated social history of Dalits. His research has bequeathed a scientific course to today's incipient Dalit movement. His struggle for human rights and for the emancipation of oppressed will prove to be an animating spirit to the Dalit movement. With this broad perspective and deep commitment Dalit movement fears to fight for their rights.

The Dalits and Colonialism:

Many colonialists ruled India. But none of them were bothered about untouchability. They dare not meddle with Indian culture and caste system. Significantly, the Britisher's left Hindu system and caste system untouched. For proselytization, they had entered the villages. The British market policy had adversely hit the traditional crafts men and artisans. With the advent of capitalist system, products of artisans were devalued. Landlords in collusion with ruler's confiscated lands, suck blood out of tenants and started harassing agricultural labourers. Both landlords and capitalists have played a crucial role in mortgaging India to a foreign nation. For untouchables and weaker sections, but for few religious reforms, they were hardly any reforms on religious and social fronts. On the whole, during colonialism landlords regained a new strength. Colonialism did little to change socio-economic backwardness of Dalits.

The Dalits and Congress Party:

Just as Congress party was to assume political power, Dr. Ambedkar entered the political scene and asked “what about the untouchables, what do you plan to bring about a change in their socio-economic situation”. Only then did they begin giving serious thought to the question of Harijans. All of a sudden there was a “harijan”. They boasted to have undertaken many programmes for his emancipation. These measures were taken by the upper castes just to woo the Harijan voters. But never did it give rise to an active movement. This precluded the possibility of the rise of an Independent Dalit Movement. Now, the socially oppressed were politically exploited. This impeded chances of emergence of powerful Dalit leadership. After assuming power, each and every programme was undertaken with an eye cast on vote bank. It’s not possible to take cognizance of smaller developments as the land issue, which is central to their emancipation remains unresolved. Land reforms, minimum wage acts, acts for abolition of bonded labour, and for eradication of untouchability are ineffective in practice. Even if they are implemented the fruits never percolated down to the deprived and the desiring.

The Dalits and Communists:

Communists with the conviction that economy is the foundation of society, economic change shall lead to the transformation of social system have neglected the social inequality of Dalits. In India social and economic struggle are mutually inter-related.

Movements, which sprang up for the poor impressive as they are, did not help eradicate social inequalities. They saw no way out from the socio-economic slavery perpetuated for generations. Gradually the poor lost interest in the communist movement. The moment communist movement sided with the ruling party, “Dalits began drifting away from the communists, and Dalits were astonished to witness stigma of casteism in supposedly progressive communist movements too. Communists failed to keep the oppressed and exploited united under their flag. Dalits began running from pillar to post in search of an emancipatory movement.

The Dalits and Feudal Parties:

The parties which come into existence are all led by the landlords. Hence, they did not work against their class interest. They helped protecting the feudal culture. Though they claimed to have been borne for the poor, little did they do to further the interests of the poor people. None of the parties have come forward to emancipate the poor from socio-economic exploitation. Even the breakaway factions of the Congress party were no better. For the leaders would hail further upper classes and naturally protected the interests of their class. These conditions were not conducive to generate required revolutionary consciousness among Dalits. Having not undertaken any programme for amelioration of poverty, of agricultural labourers, the Congress, having captured power reduced Dalits to slaves. Hence, it is imperative that, Dalits emerge as an independent power.

Dalit Movement – Theoretical Background:

Caste perspective to Dalit movement does more harm to the society than good. Instead of bringing social revolution, it encourages casteism. In order to resolve the question of social disparities, it is necessary to formulate class perspective. Those who seek to destroy the caste system should not cling unto the same. To annihilate it, it must be enough to recognize its existence.

To bring Dalits into fold of solidarity and infuse revolutionary consciousness, it is necessary to be familiarized with the histories of struggles worldwide. To know about oppression, one must acquaint and apply the theories of revolutionaries who have tirelessly strove for social transformation. Importantly, the principles and struggles of Ambedkar and Phule should prove to be the breathing spirit of the Dalit struggle. At the same time, the principles of class struggle, which have enabled the emancipation of, oppressed, must be reconciled with the spirit of Dalit Movement.

Objectives of Dalit Movement:

- Annihilation casteism.
- Eradication of untouchability.

- Removal of caste differences among the oppressed classes.
- To prepare the oppressed for social revolution.
- To enable the success of Cultural Revolution.
- To continue with caste struggle, until the land and property are nationalized.
- To enable the success of social revolution.
- To infuse revolutionary consciousness by exposing the policies of the ruling classes.
- To enable the Dalits to avail of civil and human rights.

Nature of the Movement:

- AP Dalit Movement organizes its Mahasabha every year.
- Elections are conducted once in every two years.
- Creating units at Mandal and District level.
- Creating the unions of adult women, students and working classes.
- Creating wings of working class.
- Enrolment of members at the District and Mandal level.
- Membership fee is Rs. 2 of which local district union gets Re. 1 and the rest goes to the State union.
- Both District and Mandal associations should assemble every month, discuss local issues and send the respective reports to the State office.
- Since the movement seeks to stay away for the political manipulations, the members at the State, District and Mandal levels should not be members of any political party.

The Movement and its Programme of Action:

- Uniting the exploited in order to annihilate the caste contradictions.
- To impart revolutionary inspiration to the exploited.
- Leading struggle with land as the central focus.
- District and Mandal organizations should be present whenever atrocities on the Dalits are committed in any form namely massacres, molestation, rape, murders etc. They should send the factual report of the events to the State

boards. They must support the oppressed and should relentlessly struggle to find the criminals and see of that they receive severe legal actions.

- Constructive movements for land acquisitions by inquiring into the records the surplus and uncultivated lands. Uniting the poor towards this struggle bring the caste differences.
- Consolidating the number of employed youth of every Mandal in view of sustainable development.
- Uniting the women of every Mandal in view of providing means of livelihood.
- Assisting projects for the betterment of education to achieve cent percent literacy in every Mandal.
- To work for basic amenities for every women in every village.
- To work towards solving water problem in every village.
- To work towards providing libraries for Dalits.
- Starting a weekly to assist the movement.
- A press needs to be established in order to bringing to light immediately atrocities unleashed against the Dalits.
- Starting Offices at Mandal, District and State level.

Dalit Cultural Wing:

There is the necessity of cultural wing, to inflame the oppressed class-consciousness and to augment it into revolutionary movement. The formulation of burrakathas, jamukula kathas, song troops and drama troops should be heartbeat of every social consciousness programme.

Dalit Writers Wing:

On the one side there are writers, who are stooges of the ruling class. On the other, there are writers who revolutionize the consciousness of the oppressed. However, the Dalit writers' wing should be formed to revolutionize social and cultural consciousness of Dalits, with social revolution as its basis. Andhra Pradesh writers of the oppressed classes should forge friendly relationship with other Dalit writers

across India. It is necessary to choose the appropriate language and apt themes to take literature nearer to the hearts of the oppressed.

Civil Rights Wing:

A civil rights wing is necessary to take proper action against the perpetrators of perpetual atrocities against Dalits and to help Dalits out.²⁷

Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha: Programs against Caste Atrocities

A major incident of rioting against Dalits occurred in Neerukonda within a couple of years of the Karamchedu carnage. What come out strikingly in this case are its similarities with Karamchedu, both in caste composition, political specificity and of course the nature of organization of the attack.

Neerukonda, situated a few kilometers from Mangalagiri town in Guntur district was, like Karamchedu, a *kamma* dominated village both in terms of numerical preponderance and land ownership. With about 200 families, the *kammas* were the biggest caste in the village, followed by the *malas* who households numbered around 150. Besides these two big communities there were 40 *golla* families.

Unlike Karamchedu, Neerukonda was a dry rain-fed village. Most of the land in the village belonged to the *kammas*, with half a dozen big landlords owning 50 to 100 acres. Due to agro-climatic conditions, the peasants there had long cultivated tobacco and, to a lesser extent, paddy.

The bulk of agrarian labourers there were members of the *mala* community. They worked for low wages in the tobacco and paddy fields for the *kamma* peasantry. The then prevailing wages for the grading of tobacco were around Rs. 7 and Rs. 5-8 per day for weeding and transplanting, while the minimum wage fixed for Zone I agricultural region such as Guntur was Rs. 13 per day.²⁸

²⁷ This manifesto was unanimously ratified at the first meeting of Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha held at Tenali Booklet issued by APDMS in Telugu which was translated by K. Y. Ratnam in Appendix of his Unpublished Thesis, op.cit., pp. 198-210.

²⁸ Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee, 1987.

Even these lower than minimum wages were reportedly not paid promptly. For tobacco grading the labourers are paid only after the entire crop is marketed. This means that often the labourers have to wait for six months before getting payment. The women complain that even for weeding paddy fields, they are only paid after the crop is marketed, which means a delay of at least three months.²⁹ This forced agricultural labourers to borrow money from landlords at high rates of interest. A high prevalence of indebtedness among agricultural labourers were noted precisely on this account.

As in most cases of attacks on Dalits, the immediate cause of provocation in Neerukonda was rather trivial. Dalits conducting a marriage procession in the village were prevented by the upper castes and asked to confine their procession to the dalitwadās. To this effect, an agreement was reached but the uniqueness prevailed.

The deeper causes of the *kammas*' disgruntlement in Neerukonda were the laboring *mala*'s assertion. For instance, they set up their own candidate in the 1981 local elections and showed that they were disinclined to follow the *kamma*'s political direction. This was seen as a case of lower caste disloyalty, which the *kammas* were not traditionally accustomed to. The crucial event that decisively strained relations between the land owning *kammas* and the laboring Dalits, were the 1983 Assembly Elections. As usual, the traditionally Congress supporting Dalits showed their preference for the Congress Party (I) while the *kammas* overwhelmingly sided with the Telugu Desam Party. The coming to power of the Telugu Desam Party was of direct consequence to Neerukonda. The local *kammas*, especially the youths, demonstrated their newly acquired power, evidence of which was the fact that 'there have been six assaults in total, each time a mob of youth would raid the *mala* street, with sticks and beat up the people randomly'.³⁰

The Karamchedu incident, which has occurred a couple of years earlier, seems to have set a precedent for the way of tackling assertive Dalits. Similarly to

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee, 1987.

Karamchedu, the *kammas* of Neerukonda also organized an assault on the Dalits as a show of their strength. Armed with axes, spears and sticks, hundreds of *kamma* youths attacked the *malas* on 15th July 1987. One *yadav* and four *malas* were killed in this attack.³¹

After the carnage, fearing the overwhelming presence of the *kammas* and their violence, the *malas* moved to Mangalagiri and have lived in a colony there ever since. Thus, Neerukonda became another chapter in the history of upper caste violence against Dalits.

Chundur Incident:

Chundur was a large village. It became a Mandal Headquarters following the NTRs government's restriction of the Panchayat Raj system in the mid-1980s. Located on the Chennai-Tenali railway line 15 kms. from Tenali town. Chundur's population was estimated 5,800. The *reddys* constituted a major community, accounting for about half of the village's population. The next biggest community was that of the *malas*, which accounted for a quarter of the village's population. The *telaga* (Backward Classes Community), *madiga* (*Scheduled Castes*) *yerukala* and *yanadi* (*Scheduled Tribes*) also constituted significantly large number in the village population.

Guntur district is in fact dominated by the *kammas*.³² However, a belt of eight villages, namely, Valiveru, Chundur, Modukur, Pedaparimi, Chinnaparimi, Mamidipalli, Tottimpalli and Angala-Kuduru, are dominated by the *reddys*. These villages are extremely traditional and conservative in their social outlook especially compared to the surrounding areas that are dominated by the *kammas*. The *reddys* of these villages maintain strong kinship relations which has strengthened clan loyalties among the community. Though most villages have

³¹ Interview with Bojja Tarakam, 16th December, 2005.

³² Ram Reddy, G., "Politics of Accommodation: Caste, Class and Dominance in Andhra Pradesh" in Francine Frankle ed., *Dominance and State Power in Modern India*, Vol. I, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1989, p.270.

small Dalitwadās, the fact that the numerical strength of the Chundur Dalits is comparatively greater explains, to a certain extent, their assertiveness.³³

Like Karamchedu, Chundur had also benefited from the century old Krishna canal. The assured irrigation made farm values high – said to be around Rs. 60,000-70,000 per acre. A look at the land distribution pattern provides important clues and insights into the emerging patterns of social tensions in the village. The total land under cultivation in Chundur was 2,400 acres, half of which was owned by the *Reddys*. Unlike Karamchedu, however, there were no major landlords, the rice peasants, needless to say, all belonging to the Reddy community, owned a maximum of 15-20 acres.

The *telagas*, a major Backward Classes caste in the village, possessed around 250 acres, and Brahmins and Vaisyaas owned 100 and 65 acres, respectively. The Dalits as a whole had just 90 acres in their ownership. Unlike the Karamchedu, there was no wide prevalence of the practice of tenancy; this is evident from the fact that only 100 acres were held as lease holdings and shows that most of the land was cultivated by small owner-cultivators. The caste composition and land ownership made Chundur markedly different from Karamchedu.³⁴

What further differentiated Chundur from Karamchedu was the relatively high level of literacy and fairly large-scale employment among the Dalits. Literacy was much higher than the *Reddys*. The railways were the major providers of employment for Dalits, in addition they were employed in the telephone department and banks. Employment in the public sector gave the Dalits of this village a high sense of security and confidence.

The capitalistic trends of wage labour and labour migration is also observed among the Dalits in Chundur. The Dalits of the Chundur travel to other villages and towns by train to engage in paid work. The relative independence of the Dalits from the

³³ Interview with Katti Padma Rao.

³⁴ Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee, 1991.

Reddys has made this migration possible. The developed transportation facilities, to some extent, reduce the effects of social boycott of Dalits by upper castes.

This mobility in geographic terms for education and employment has inevitably, led to a broadening of the Dalit perspective resulting in criticism of and challenge to caste dominance in the village. The Dalits of the village are able to secure better jobs through their higher level of education. Some of them are employed in Telephone Department, banks and a few Dalits have become Mandal Revenue Officers as well. The other castes, especially the dominant *reddys* and *telagas* are comparatively less educated and most of the *reddy* youth do odd jobs such as driving tractors or helping out in the fields.³⁵

Chundur, like any other village, is divided into two parts. The Dalitwada and the upper caste locality. All the public offices, such as Mandal Revenue Office, electricity office, railway station, police station, provision shop and schools are located in this area. On the other hand, the Dalitwada is entitled only to primary schools and public distribution shops. The development carried on by the ‘secular’ State after Independence has confined only to upper caste locality. Though the legal framework of the Constitution laid down rights and principles of equality and non-discrimination on the grounds of caste, it provided no institutional framework/mechanism for realizing the same. The upper caste dominated administrative structure cannot be expected to bring in a civic structure different from the one existing in Chundur.³⁶

Before going into the details of the massacre, it is important to foreground two incidents that substantiate the argument that the Dalits have been asserting their rights against upper caste dominance in Chundur. A few years back, the Dalits attempted to install a statue of Ambedkar at the center of the village. The upper castes of the village opposed this decision of the Dalits. For the Dalits, installation of the Ambedkar statue implies reclamation of their struggle against upper castes

³⁵ The Chundur carnage, August 6, 1991, Hyderabad: AP Civil Liberties Committee, August, 1991, p. 6.

³⁶ Upper caste domination in bureaucracy is evident from Mandal Commission Report cited in Omvedt, Gail, *Dalits and Democratic Revolution*, Sage Publication, New Delhi, 1994, p. 334.

for self-respect and dignity. Though the upper castes offered resistance, the Dalits succeeded in installing the statue. The upper caste regarded this move by the Dalits as a challenge and threat to their traditional supremacy. This act of Dalits wounded the ego of the upper castes.³⁷

The second instance of Dalit assertiveness of their identity took place during the Dasara festival in 1990 when the Dalits fought against the practice of untouchability by the upper castes. The upper castes of the area organize a Dasara drama. This is to symbolize their feudal prestige every year. The Dalits who are normally segregated to one side of the audience, tried to break the rule and mingle with rest of the audience in that particular year. Though the upper castes were initially objected to this defiance on the part of the Dalits, they were forced to accept the demand of the Dalits as the latter were united in their strength. This was a big blow to the upper caste superiority, jealously protected for thousands of years.³⁸ All these developments in recent past have created invisible rift between the Dalits and the upper castes in village.

The Socio-economic specificity of Chundur rendered the Dalits relatively less dependent on the *reddys* and, therefore, less vulnerable to *reddy* domination and manipulation. Due to modern education, public sector employment and easy mobility due to the railway connections, the Dalits of Chundur demonstrated a perceptible transformation in their lifestyle, a great sense of awareness of their rights and accordingly assertion.

The Dalits also displayed a significant presence in the political arena. Although both the *reddys* and Dalits traditionally supported the Congress (I), the upper castes did not take kindly to the Dalits' political ascendancy to higher levels of the political leader, such as Mandal Praja Parishad (MPPs), especially as a result of reservations to local bodies. This obviously was not the liking of the upper caste land owning *reddys* not only of Chundur but also of the neighboring *reddy* dominated villages. What happened on the fateful morning of 6th August 1991 has

³⁷ Interview with Katti Padma Rao., 8th August, 2005.

³⁸ Ibid.

to be seen against these changes in the ground reality and the accumulated frustration of the local *reddy* peasantry.

What initiated a series of events in a fast succession was a fairly trivial incident that occurred in a cinema hall. It may be noted that access to public places of entertainment and refreshment in Chundur, unlike in a large number of villages in other parts of the State, was less restricted – a fact symptomatic of Dalit awareness in Chundur. A Dalit youth, Ravi, studying in Nagpur his post-graduation, went to a cinema theatre in Chundur ‘rested his foot on a seat in front which was occupied by an upper caste boy Kurri Srinivas Reddy. A minor altercation ensued between Ravi and Srinivas Reddy, when the latter abused the Dalit youth in the name of his caste.³⁹

This happened on 7th July, 1991. In the following days, both the Dalit boy and his father, who was a school teacher in a neighboring village, were subjected to harassment by the *reddys* as a measure of retaliation. Fearing further reprisals from the upper castes, neither Ravi nor his father lodged any complaint with the police. This was resented by the Dalits who imposed a fine of Rs. 25 for submitting to the upper castes. This is illustrative of the fairly high level of awareness and assertion among the Dalits in Chundur. This obviously attracted a severe response from the *reddys* and their supporters in the village and even from those of neighboring villages.⁴⁰

The following extracts from a fact-finding report gave a graphic description of subsequent development. “On July 9, *reddys* and *telagas* formed into a committee and decided to enforce a social boycott of the Dalits (*malas*). The Committee was again headed by the village sarpanch. Since then, the Dalits were not allowed to work in the fields of upper castes nor were they permitted to enter the upper caste locality. Land tenancies of the Dalits were cancelled. The social boycott of the Dalits led to tension and at this stage Section 144 was promulgated in the village. While the upper castes engaged outside labour to work in their fields, the Dalits

³⁹ Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee, 1991.

⁴⁰ Details narrated by Katti Padma Rao, 11th August, 2004.

left to places like Tenali and Ponnur in search of work. A 50 strong police picket headed by Tenali Rural Circle Inspector was posted in the village since then”.⁴¹

The report narrates a sequence of events that clearly show that, while the *reddys* of Chundur and their fellow caste men in the neighboring villages were determined to show their might, the Dalits also showed a will to retaliate. The presence of the police deterred them from a head-on collision. The prohibitory orders were lifted on 29th July, and in two incidents that occurred on 4th and 5th August, two Dalits were attacked and injured and ‘the same night additional forces were rushed to Chundur even as prohibitory orders were re-imposed in village’.

The final assault on the Dalits came on the morning of 6th August. The ghastly incident was pre-planned and well executed by the upper castes with the alleged connivance of the police officials present in the village. “One version is that a few Dalit youth attacked and inflicted minor injuries on some *reddys*.... However, this was blown out of proportions, by the upper castes who spread the falsity that three *reddy* men were hacked to death by the Dalits... The upper caste men of nearby villages of Valiveru, Manchala Munnagivaripalam and Vellaturu were also mobilized for an assault on Dalits. Around 11.00 A.M., Saibabu, the Circle Inspector of Police and Vemuru Sub-Inspector Sheik Madarvali came to the Dalit quarters and asked them to flee as CRPF men from Mangalagiri might raid the village to pick them up following a complaint lodged by the upper castes. When the Dalits were hesitant to leave the village, the police virtually chased them away. However, all the Dalit women stayed back”.⁴²

What followed was reminiscent of Karamchedu. The only difference between was that in Karamchedu the *kammas* armed themselves to the teeth and chased the unsuspecting Dalits, while in Chundur, the Dalits were made to walk into a death trap. “The marauders, who came in tractor and scooters and were well armed, first caught the fleeing Dalits, beat them with iron rods and killed them with daggers and axes. They then leisurely packed some of the bodies in a gunny bags and

⁴¹ Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee, 1991, Pp. 8-9.

⁴² Ibid.

dumped them in the Tungabhadra drain and irrigation canal. Though the final tally of deaths could not be clearly ascertained immediately as most of the bodies were thrown in the canal, but at least eight Dalits are murdered in the heinous number and many more injured in what could be described as an unparalleled case of brutality”.⁴³

What can be clearly deciphered from the above incidents is a pattern that should provide insight into the larger processes at work. Most of the organized attacks on Dalits, involving large scale mobilization on caste lines and targeting specific Dalit castes, occurred in coastal Andhra districts of Prakasam, Guntur and parts of the Krishna district.

With the Chundur carnage, the Dalit movement reached a distinct phase, that of retaliation. Following the massacre, the family of the victims and other Dalits fled to Tenali and took refuge in the Salvation Army Church located at Ithanagar about 20 kms away from Chundur which is predominantly Christian area. The news of the carnage was purposefully suppressed with the help of the police force. But Katti Padma Rao, as soon as he heard of the carnage, reached the church where the Dalits took shelter. After two days of the massacre, leaders belonging to all political parties made a beeline to Tenali to console the victims. The then Chief Minister, Mr. Janardhan Reddy, and also the opposition leaders were gheraoed by the Dalits. They demanded the resignation of the Chief Minister. They also did not allow Mr. NT Rama Rao, the leader of the Telugu Desam Party to speak to the victims. They accused him of being responsible for the various attacks on Dalits during his tenure. They also abused Alapati Dharma Rao, the State Minister of Andhra Pradesh when the government and other officials met the Dalit victims and offered compensation and *ex gratia*, the latter refused to accept it. Instead they demanded the arrest of all the culprits involved in the attack on them.⁴⁴

Four days later, the Dalits decided to return to Chundur to carry out their struggle in the village itself. They also wanted to bury the dead bodies of those killed in the

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ For details, see Mastan Rao, D., *Dalita Dashabdam* (Telugu), Lokayat Publications, Ponnur, 1997, pp. 51-52.

carnage in Chundur itself. However, the Dalits did not have a cremation ground and they had been appealing to the government to grant them for a long time. The Dalits brought the dead bodies in a procession that started out with huge people. Throughout the procession which was led by Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha, was given slogans like “long live unity of Dalits”, “condemn upper caste arrogance”. Interestingly, radicals, civil liberties activists and the sisters belonging to the Church also joined the procession. This show of strength deepened the sense of unity among the Dalits and boosted their confidence. All the bodies of the dead were buried in the center of the village on the government land located at the periphery of the upper caste locality. This buried place / ground was named as “Raktha Kshetram” meaning the land of the blood (blood soaked field).⁴⁵

When the procession entered Chundur, the Dalits in their anger set ablaze the houses of the upper castes. The police force present in the village could not prevent the retaliation, given the mood of Dalits.⁴⁶ The Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha, pressurized the government to accept the demands of the Dalits. The Dalits demanded that all the police officers, including the Deputy Superintendent of Police of Tenali, Circle Inspector and Sub Inspector present in Chundur at the time of the massacre should be arrested and tried for abetment of crime. They also demanded that all the principal assailants involved in the murder of Dalits should be arrested or their property should be attached to the government according to SC and ST (Prevention) Atrocities Act 1989. Another demand was for the establishment of a Special Court in Chundur itself for speedy judicial process.⁴⁷

The Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha, with the help of other progressive organizations, organized ‘rasta rokos’, ‘dharnas’ and gave a call for statewide bandh. The Chundur victims struggle committee which was formed in the meantime, began a peaceful demonstration in Chundur. Katti Padma Rao, the leader of Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha was put under house arrest by the police in order to prevent him from entering Chundur.

⁴⁵ Interview with Katti Padma Rao.

⁴⁶ Interview with Devarapally Mastan, 10th October, 2005.

⁴⁷ Interview with Bojja Tarakam, 17th December, 2005.

Since their leader was not allowed to Chundur, the Dalits decided to go on an indefinite fast for justice to be meted and for full freedom of movement to be given to Katti Padma Rao. All the district units of the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha organized relay fasts, demonstrating unity and solidarity with the Dalits. In Chundur, on September 10, in an attempt to break the indefinite fast, the police opened fire on the Dalits without prior warning or lathi-charge. This resulted in the death of a young Dalit by name Anil Kumar, who was one of the principal witness in the Chundur massacre case, especially to the fact that the police had convinced with the upper caste. He was an able leader and the Secretary of Chundur Victims Struggle Committee.⁴⁸

After this ghastly incident, Katti Padma Rao mobilized nearly 10,000 Dalits along with the victims and gave a call for “Chalo Delhi”. This was the first time that such a massive number of Dalits from AP came to Delhi. They organized demonstrations and dharnas which rocked Delhi. They also met Prime Minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao. Initially, he was reluctant to meet them, but keeping in view of his forthcoming election, he agreed to some of their demands. Members of Parliament belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes from all political parties, numbering 120, also tried to meet and submit a memorandum on atrocities against Dalits’ to the then President of India, R. Venkata Raman, but he refused to meet them. Then these MPs, irrespective of their political differences, made a firm resolve that the next President of India should be from the Dalit community.⁴⁹

When P.V. Narasimha Rao contested the by-election from the Nandyal Lok Sabha constituency as the Prime Minister designate, all the established political parties except BJP, decided to withdraw from the contest on behalf of his Telugu bidda (son). But, the Dalits decided to field their own candidate, on the behalf of the wives of Chundur victims. The State Government then came for negotiations. After three days of hectic negotiations, the government agreed to pay Rs. One lakh compensation for the family of deceased, one-acre land, to build up an exclusive

⁴⁸ For more details, see Mastan Rao, D., Op. Cited. p. 55.

⁴⁹ Interview with Katti Padma Rao, 12th August, 2004.

residential school, to provide employment for all Chundur Dalits and a Special Court at Chundur. With this deal, three fourths of the Chundur victims' demands were fulfilled. As a mark of victory, nearly 60 inter-caste marriages were conducted on the site of 'Raktha Kshetram' under the organization of Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha. To mark the event, a new journal 'Dalita Rajyam' under the editorship of Katti Padma Rao was started.⁵⁰

From Karamchedu to Chundur, the Dalit movement in Andhra Pradesh witnessed a tremendous radicalization process which altered the whole political process in Andhra. The formation of an autonomous organization called DMS brought about three distinct features. One was the unprecedented politicization and ideological mobilization which was associated with the rapid radicalization of Dalit consciousness and identity. Secondly, there were profound signs of confluence between the revolutionary Naxalite movement and equally growing Dalit movement. Thirdly, this produced a direct dangerous threat to the established interests of the upper caste rulers, thereby polarizing them. Another important aspect which emerged in the course of the Dalit movement from Karamchedu to Chundur was that the Dalit movement was not confined to rallies, dharnas, and other forms of protests. They also started new propaganda organs like Dalila Shakti, Nalupu, Edureeta and Dalita Rajyam, which played a tremendous role in creating an alternative, ideological and cultural ethos among the Dalit bahun forces. Lastly, the BSP's entry into Andhra and its electoral experiment was well received by the Dalit bahun forces in Andhra, but because of its own internal organizational problems, as well as external factors, it could not produce expected hopes.

⁵⁰ For more details see, Mastan Rao, D., Op. Cited, Pp. 57-59.

Chapter- V

Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha: Alternative Culture

The Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha (APDMS) had acquired a nation character drawing on intellectuals and activists from all over the country and has become a focal point and space to interrogate Dalit theory and practice and formulate a framework of Dalit theory and models of Dalit engagement.

Ideological Contours:

The Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha is an organization whose objective is to challenge prevailing hegemonic discourse and to evolve shared understanding of the Dalit universe. This activity, we believe has emancipatory potentialities for society since it exposes the shadows in the hegemonic discourse and in doing so suggests different possibilities. However, what is noticeable from the very beginning of the Dalit movement's development and the expansion of Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha, is the tension between the different ideological orientations. This tension, though subtle in the early phases, became open, explicit and increasingly expressed in new organizational forms.

The Dalit movement attracted activists from different backgrounds like activists from the rational/ atheist movement, youths from the traditional Ambedkarite movement and activists from Marxist background. Apart from them, a large number of youths with no clearly identifiable politico-ideological orientation, except a shared experimental indignation against the upper castes were also attracted to the movement. It is instructive to note that while the leadership came predominantly from the rationalist / atheist and Marxist traditions, the movements' support base consisted of people whose attachment to the cause was largely emotional. Thus these two distinct ideological orientations were reflected in the Dalit movement, albeit in a very subtle fashion.¹

¹ Interview with Bojja Tarakam and Ganumala Gnaneshwar, 9th November, 2015.

It must nevertheless note that the rational orientation, in contrast to the Marxist, displayed a fairly well-articulated critique of Brahmanical religion, its irrational practices, and of course, the caste system. In contrast, the Marxist tendency hardly paid any attention to religious practices. Treating them as part of super-structural movement, Marxist theory and practice sought to predicate the resolution of the problem of religious practices, caste oppression and untouchability on the economic structure. Once the contradictions in the latter were resolved, it was expected that the former be resolved automatically.

Differences of Dalits with Communists - Dalit Movement and Communist Movement:

There was also a serious debate between the Communist Party of India (Marxist Leninist) People's War Group (PWG) and the Dalits. The PWG showed serious concern for the Dalits from its very inception, and the Dalits in turn had developed an immense of faith in it. But, Karamchedu created some differences between them. A PWG pamphlet on the Karamchedu incident was headlined, "Landlords attack on Karamchedu Harijans", and the ambiguous title of the pamphlet itself became a point of discussion among Dalits. The Dalits did not take kindly to the fact that the pamphlet concealed the caste of the oppressor and termed the victim as Harijan, a term detested by the Dalits.

Moreover the boy who whipped the Dalits at the water tank was not a landlord but a servant belonging to the *kamma* caste. In class terms the *kamma* servant was equal to the landless Dalits, but in terms of caste, he was superior. Concealment of these ideological and cultural differences, and the identification of the oppressor and oppressed only among class lines in the background of the conventional economic determinism have created rupture among the revolutionary forces.²

Communists with the conviction that economy is the foundation of society, economic change shall lead to the transformation of social system – have neglected the social inequality of Dalits. But, as far as India is concerned, social and

² See K. Y. Ratnam Unpublished Thesis, *The Dalit Movement in Andhra Pradesh: A Study of Political Consciousness and Identity*, Submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 1997. Pp. 107-108.

economic struggle are mutually inter-related. Movements which sprang up for the poor impressive did not help eradicate social inequalities. They saw no way out from the social economic slavery perpetuated for generations. Gradually Dalits lost interest in the communist's movement and began running from pillar to post in search of an emancipatory movement.

The attacks on Dalits in advanced agrarian regions definitely posed a major challenge to Marxist theory and practice. As far as the dominant Marxist mode was concerned, the problem of caste was either an enigma or a mere reflection of the class struggle between capitalist farmers and agricultural labor. The caste specificity or rioting was merely epiphenomenalism. What the Dalit movement, especially in the context of Andhra Pradesh, brought forth with clarity was the need to address the question of caste in its specificity, since the unfolding social conflict involved caste-specificity. It could not therefore, simply be seen as a class question, although the class dimension was closely related to it. In other words, the Dalit movement led by Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha brought the urgency of addressing the question of caste to the center of political discourse of Andhra Pradesh.

The impact of the Dalit agenda on the political parties, cutting across the politico ideological differences, was unmistakable. But, the most significant impact of the Dalit movement seems to have been on the left, both parliamentary and radical. A critical look at the Dalit Shakti, a fortnightly journal brought out by the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha for about a year in 1987, clearly shows the sensitivity of the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha leadership to the Marxist tradition; it attempted a sympathetic interpretation both of Marxism and of Ambedkar's writings. It would not be incorrect to see this as a reflection of the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha leadership's intention to attract the youths influenced by Marxist tradition into their fold. The Dalit youths, the backbone of the radical left in the State, displayed a consistent track record of struggle and dedication. The rift in the

radical left brought about by the Dalit movement was quite perceptible, as a fair number of activists of the Dalit Mahasabha were drawn from the radical left.³

The Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha manifesto, which reflected the influence of Marxism, could be read as a document that tried to balance Marxist and Dalit perspectives. It implies that the Marxist perspective, with its central focus on class, aimed at ending class exploitation by paving way for the annihilation of caste itself. The Dalit perspective's historical objective, on the other hand, was of caste annihilation. The Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha manifesto of 1987, spelt out a nuanced position, which tried to blend the questions of caste and class. Thus it stated:

If the Dalit movement has a caste perspective, it would instead of doing well would in fact do harm. The movement that should bring about social revolution would incite casteism. In the process of resolving social contradictions, we must formulate class perspective; those who want to destroy caste would not hand on to caste. To annihilate caste, the existence of caste system should only be recognized.⁴

In conformity with this position the manifesto argued that the Dalit movement was a movement for '*bhoomi kosam bhukthi kosam*' (land and livelihood), and that it must learn from the oppressed people's history of struggle. Further, it stated that 'to understand the oppressed class, it is necessary to understand the theories of social revolutions and apply them to the contemporary society'. It thus said, 'the theories, struggles and practice of Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and Ambedkar must be breathed into the movement. At the same time the class struggle theory which has emancipated the oppressed of the world must be balanced.'⁵

The attempt to integrate and emphasize the question of class in the anti-caste perspective was a significant cause of tension in the ideological formation of the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha. It may be noted that the initial positive approach

³ Interview with Bojja Tarakam, 9th November, 2015.

⁴ Interview with Bojja Tarakam, 9th November, 2015.

⁵ Interview with Katti Padma Rao, 11th August, 2004.

towards Marxist theoretical perspective. In the absence of this, and in view of the parliamentary left's close proximity to the Telugu Desam Party regime, which was seen as a major factor in the phenomenal rise of atrocities on Dalits, the movement distanced itself from Marxist influence. As the Dalit movement expanded its sphere of influence, it got into the ideological groove of Ambedkarism, what further contributed to it, may be noted, as the intellectual left tradition's failure to negotiate with Ambedkar.

As a consequence, the Dalit movement turned its attention away from the crucial issues of political economy of caste. It may be argued, therefore that the Dalit movement became in a significant ideological sense, a movement for the self-respect of Dalits.

Caste, Class and Dalit Question:

The Dalit movement today as a whole is basically led by the petty bourgeoisie and is representing their interest in society and politics. Even the so called Marxists, who claimed to have integrated Marxian theory with the concrete conditions in pre-capitalist Indian society, are only trying to 'appropriate' class into the framework of caste against Marxists attempt at interpreting caste within a Marxists framework. This only leads them to utopian ideas on abolition of the caste question, they tend to include caste in the 'basic structure' and class in the 'super structure', and thereby, liquidate the revolutionary essence of Marxist philosophy. The framework does matter as it involves the question of annihilation of caste. Marxists stand for the annihilation of caste through scientific analysis and through abolition of its material basis, the capitalist system and by mobilizing various sections of people along class lines against the exploitative social system – in Dalit bahun parlance, the brahminical and the varnashrama system.

It is true that the communist movement as a whole, in the early phase of its birth, had streaks of economic reductionist approach to Marxism. The emergence of Naxalism and the subsequent formation of Communist Party of India (Marxist Leninist) are the negation of social-democratic theoretical and political positions and of all streaks of dogmatism or mechanical interpretation of Marxism. They

recognized Ambedkar's radicalism as a radical bourgeoisie democratic vision in contrast to Gandhi's conservative bourgeoisie vision. They work for the accentuation of class differentiation among various castes.

Class is a universal category and looking for a 'pure' class category in an under developed capitalism with the dominance of semi-feudal or pre-capitalist production relations is nothing but self-deception. Eliminating caste is one of the major questions of New Democratic Revolution, because, the process of elimination of caste facilitates class formation, accentuates class polarization and makes class struggle more open, broad and direct, and brings out the class in a purer form. But, this can be accomplished only by mobilizing people along class lines and no other way round. The communists are exploring the ways of greater interaction with radical Dalit organizations even as many Dalit organizations are getting closer to status quoist parties like the Congress, Centrist parties and the Right wing parties. In this context, it is the task of communists to liberate various downtrodden castes from the shackles of the caste system that is backed by the semi-feudal, under developed capitalist society.

So, it is not the reductionism of Marxism but the reductionist approach to Marxism that categorizes class merely as an economic category and Marxist philosophy as a philosophy of 'economic revolution', devoid of the idea of elimination of caste and other problems.

The Disagreement of the Dalit and Communist Movement:

It is imperative for both the Dalit and Communist movement to converge for the purpose of working out a radical agenda for both. Because the communist movement in corollary takes a long-term view of the solution whereas, the Dalit movement is anxious to find immediate relief/solution for Dalits from caste oppression. Tracing the history of both movements, it is clear that they diverged from one another on account of their limited understanding of the Indian reality. Until Dalits come on a revolutionary path, the communist project will remain as a distinct dream.

Developments in the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha:

The tensions inherent in the DMS's Dalit position, support base, leadership and ideology surfaced during their second party conference in 1988. The first conference, held in Tenali after the Karamchedu event at the height of the movement in 1986, represents the movement's harmonious phase. It is reflected in the perspective elaborated in the manifesto. It was quite understandably the most, radical phase of the movement, with the Dalits 'land and livelihood' issues identified as the objectives the movements should strive for. The period between the first and second conference saw some remarkable developments in the national situation. "The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), which gathered momentum in north India, began to raise political ambitions among certain sections of the Dalit leadership. The visit of Kanshi Ram to AP in 1987-88 to establish contacts with Dalit leaders in the State had an impact on Dalit politics. Questions of participation in electoral politics, which were not central to the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha's initial statement, came up in their conference, in 1988. The movement, whose initial chief objective was building a 'social and cultural movement', shifted its focus to the question of political power. One leader who seems to have opposed the tendency of seeing the Bahujan Samaj Party in a positive light was Katti Padma Rao. He was objected to any temptation on the part of the leadership to move not only towards the Bahujan Samaj Party but also even towards electoral politics. It is different matter that he subsequently joined the Bahujan Samaj Party on the eve of the 1994 Assembly Elections".⁶

These issues formed the background of the second level conference of Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha in 1988 led to a split in Vishakapatnam, centred on the personalities of Bojja Tarakam and Katti Padma Rao, occurred in the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha. At the district level executive convention of Dalit Mahasabha should have political linkage with the Bahujan Samaj Party, which had emerged as an All India Dalit force. Padma Rao dissented advocating an independent existence for Dalit Mahasabha. Tarakam went ahead to bring Bahujan Samaj Party in to Andhra Pradesh. A delegation consisting of B.S.S. Swamy and Dr. P.Sundaraiah led by Trakam met the Bahujan Samaj Party president Kanshiram

⁶ Interview with Bojja Tarakam and Ganumala Gnaneshwar, 9th November, 2015.

in Delhi and held a series of discussions on the political climate in Andhra Pradesh. Subsequently Kanshiram toured Andhra Pradesh to assess the situation on the ground for Dalit activity in the southern states. On 4th July 1989, a meeting was held in the state, Tharakam issued a pamphlet to mark the occasion entitled “Bahujan Samaj Party Evarikosam, Endukosam” (BSP for whom and why). Padma Rao boycotted the meeting⁷. “The third and last conference was held separately in 1991 by the two groups, both of them claimed themselves as the leaders of Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha. Padma Rao group held its conference in Vijayawada and the other group headed by Tarakam, in Ongole”.⁸ It is unfortunate to note that despite deeper underlying causes, the split should come to be seen as only an issue of differences between personalities.

Tarakam meanwhile started a socio-political fortnightly called *Nalupu* (Black) in April 1989. Its inaugural issue clarified the aims and objectives of the *Nalupu* as working for the awareness of Dalits and common masses, and disseminating information about their legal rights and the atrocities on women and Dalits⁹. The *Nalupu* played an important role of politicization, education and the formation of Dalit ideology. It was financed and circulated by a popular progressive literary organization called the Hyderabad Book Trust (HBT), headed by a member of the upper caste, Siril Reddy. Notwithstanding this fact, the trust played a crucial role in propagating popular Telugu literature, including Dalit literature. It published some translations of Ambedkar's writings. The *Nalupu* also started a theoretical debate on caste annihilation theory, taking up the theme from Phule and Ambedkar¹⁰. Though its circulation was limited to Telengana, the *Nalupu* assiduously worked as a training camp for Dalit litterateurs. In its short lifespan of four years (1989-93), the fortnightly created a tremendous political and ideological awareness among the middle class educated Dalits and other backward classes. By the time it closed because of monetary constraints, "every educated Dalit and the whole Dalit community felt that their potent leader had vanished."¹¹

⁷ Interview with Ganumala Gnaneswar, 9th November, 2015.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ First issue of *Nalupu*, Editorial, April 1989.

¹⁰ Interview with Ganumala Gnaneswar, 9th November, 2015.

¹¹ K. Ilaiah, *Caste or class or caste-class: A study in Dalit Bahujan consciousness and struggles in Andhra Pradesh in 1980's* (Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, 1995).

On the other side, on 14 April 1991, the day of Ambedkar's birth centenary, Padma Rao announced the formation of a new party called the Poor People's Party. The manifesto of the party said that if it came to power, it would share the power with BCs, SCs, STs and minorities according to their proportion of population. The party contested the 1991 parliamentary elections fielding two candidates, from Narasapuram and from Tenali, both of whom lost their election deposits. The election campaign of the party was conducted by means of foot marches and on cycles¹².

The crucial phase in the history of decade-old Dalit movement of DMS was the 1994 Assembly Elections. In these elections, with the emergence of the Bahujan Samaj Party and the 'wave' it appeared to have created, different sections of the Dalit leadership, including the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha, gravitated to the Bahujan Samaj Party. In the battle of the electoral reckoning, however, the Bahujan Samaj Party lost its deposits in all except in one constituency. At Bapatla in Guntur district, Katti Padma Rao did quite well though he did not win the election battle.¹³

The Bahujan Samaj Party's poor electoral show and the leaders of Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha in particular, in 1994 had a dramatic impact on the Dalit movement. The move away from the stand that the Dalit movement is a social transformation movement and that it should not get into electoral politics, where a different logic is operative, did enormous damage to the movement. The direct experience of the most Dalit activists, who participated in the campaign of their candidates, of their leaders being absorbed by the electoral sphere, led to the credibility crisis of well-known Dalit activists. From this crisis, and gaining strength from the impasse in the movement, emerged the *madiga's* caste – specific movement for an entirely down to earth Scheduled Caste categorization for the purpose of reservations.¹⁴

¹² D.Mastan Rao, Sanksobamlo Venuka badina Taragatulu (Backward classes in crisis) Lokayata prachuranalu, ponnuru, 1999, Pp- 53-4.

¹³ Interview with Katti Padma Rao, 9th October, 2005.

¹⁴ Ibid.

A perceptible social distance exists between the two major sub-castes of *mala* and *madiga* Dalit untouchable castes. The *malas* and *madigas* live in separate palles (colonies) known as Malapalle and Madigapalle. Spatial separation therefore precludes the possibility of any substantial social interaction. This objective situation, in which a social distance existed between the *malas* and *madigas*, was further reinforced by the separate institutional structures and practices of Christianity an active ideological force in the lives of Dalits where they in coastal Andhra practice Christianity of various denominations. The Dalit movement should have tackled this situation, but instead, it failed to address it.

It is analytically important to note another significant aspect of Dalit social and economic life, which played an important role in reinforcing the differences in the structure of domination – subordination and the reproduction of labour process. This relates to the different approach of the dominant castes to these two laboring castes, which was promised on caste differences among Dalits.

These differences in ground reality were reflected in the social base of the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha, although the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha activists refuse to concede this; the subsequent emergence of separate *madiga* and *mala* movements was not a sudden developments but a reflection of the objective reality as much as an outcome of the Dalit movement and its adequacies.

The Madiga Reservation Porata Samithi (MRPS) is as much a reflection of the objective social distance that exists between *mala* and *madiga* castes as the failure of the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha to address these differences and inequalities. As a Madiga Movement, demanding categorization of the Scheduled Castes for reservation purposes, emerged as a powerful voice, the Telugu Desam Party, which was not known for any significant support among Scheduled Castes, sought to carve out a space for itself among the *madigas* by pledging support to the demand and showing a preference for the *madiga* candidates in the Scheduled Castes reserved constituencies.

It is pertinent to note that these developments, the Dalit organization, which could have emerged as a powerful voice in State politics and influenced the political and electoral agenda, have been reduced to a position where they can be manipulated, co-opted, controlled and subjected to the dynamics of macro-politics.

During the last four thousand years, so many social philosophers preached the need for an alternative as against Hindu culture. The ultimate aim of Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha is to see that when the Dalits come to power, it should be as an integral part of the process of building Dalit culture as an alternative. Culture means a way of life. This way of life is shaped by the social and historical forces of the country concerned. Hence, Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha has evolved program to have an alternative culture under eight heads.

1. Abolition of Caste:

The entire essence of Hindu culture is contained mainly in caste. If the foundations of caste are blown up, it is as good as Hindu culture collapsing. If the root of caste is cut, the poison tree of Hinduism will fall. We must, therefore work for the destruction of caste¹⁵.

Program for action:

- Intra-caste marriage must be banned, inter-caste marriage must become mandatory;
- Anti-caste marriage platforms must be built in every village, to facilitate inter-caste marriages;
- Caste-suffixes (at the end of names) like Sarma, Sastri, Choudhary, Gowd, Naidu, Reddi, Raju, Yadav etc., should be banned;
- In the villages, all the marriages should be celebrated only one day in the year, for encouraging inter-caste marriages and social solidarity¹⁶;
- The evil practice of dowry should be stopped altogether. Women and men should be given equal status and equal respect; and any women must be free to marry any man, irrespective of the caste;

¹⁵Katti Padma Rao, Caste and Alternative Culture, The Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, Madras, 1995. Pp.146-147.

¹⁶ Ibid.

- Just as upper caste women marry lower caste men, lower caste women must be free to marry upper caste men, in the same proportion¹⁷;
- Give up the traditional caste occupations through education and new sources of income. Giving up these occupations, try to force yourselves into cultural, financial and political fields; and
- Give up the Hindu culture, which preaches caste distinction and rejuvenate human culture¹⁸.

2. Building up the Culture of Equality:

- Don't give the children names that reflect Hindu culture – eg, Rama, Krishna, Anjaneya, Venkateshwara etc¹⁹.

Choose names of people, who fought against Hindu culture. Like the Charvakas or names relating to nature, for example:

Charvaka, Lokayat, Kapila, Siddhartha,
Sujatha, Rahul, Buddha, Akulan, Avarna,
Anarya, Prakrit, Anveshi, Vignan,
Vidya, Velugu, Vennela, Sramika and Ujwala.

- All the symbols of Hindu culture should be removed from the house. Sign of a new culture must be exhibited, the below mentioned instructions should be followed in the family²⁰;

- Remove the pictures of all Hindu Gods,
- Display the photographs of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Mahatma Phule and Periyar, E.V. Rama Swami Naicker²¹.

- Name the houses after our great leaders or with words that suggest equality, for example –

- Samata Nilayam,
- Ambedkar Nilayam,

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid, P-148.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

- Sneha Nilayam,
- Mahatma Nilayam,
- Charvaka Nilayam,
- Bouddha Nilayam,
- Manavata Nilayam,
- Kula Nirmulana Nilayam.

Our homes must be converted into humanist centers. Through this the family will become the nucleus of a new village²².

- d. Collect a personal liberty at home.
 - e. Put a stop to the celebration of Hindu festivals. Observe the following festivals to aid the new culture –
- New Year – 1st January;
 - Mother's Day – 15th January;
 - International Women's Day – 8th March;
 - Birthday of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar – 14th April;
 - Birthday of Karl Marx – 5th May,
 - Dalit Unity Day – 17th July,
 - Joshua Jayanti – 28th September,
 - United Nations Day – 24th October,
 - Phule's Death Anniversary – 28th November,
 - Death Anniversary of Ambedkar – 6th December²³.

3. Reconstruction of Rural Culture:

- Names of villages with caste identity should be changed;
- Giving up the practice of building houses and colonies on caste basis, we should set up common colonies, with equal status for all castes;
- Streets should be named after pioneers and thinkers;
- In village festivals, people's art forms should be presented as a sign of social harmony²⁴;

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.P-149.

- Indigenous arts like drum dances, group dances and other folk art forms should be presented in the interest of promoting social culture;
- The statues of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Mahatma Phule and Periyar, E.V. Rama Swami Naicker should be installed in the villages;
- Rural libraries should be started;
- Community halls must be built as venue for discussion of village problems;
- Efforts should be made to remove illiteracy and scientific knowledge imparted to all;
- Stupas should be built; and the alternate culture and its principles presented in the mother-tongue²⁵;
- Organizing health centers and improving the health of the people, we should teach basic rules of health to the villages; and
- Village-centred committees should be formed and the whole programme implemented on a long-term basis²⁶.

4. Propagation of People's Art and Culture:

In India, popular arts, different from those representing Hindu culture have been flourishing since ancient times. Non-Sanskrit languages, literature and arts are ancient, historical and famous. They had sprung from the people; and by propagating them, we would be giving a fillip to popular culture. The culture of the ruling class could thereby be effaced²⁷.

In a variety of ways, Hindu culture has been progressing, exploiting the superstitious and other weaknesses of the people. Popular literature, arts, sculpture and painting have to march ahead, in the programme for dismantling superstition and such other ideas²⁸. These includes –

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid, P-150.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid.

Literature:

The literature of the languages of the suppressed castes and tribes must be brought to light. The living literature closely linked with the life and culture of the people should be examined and compiled, providing it with historical background²⁹. The words and atmosphere forming part of the songs and labour of the workers must be collected and preserved.

It is necessary to create literary art forms which are celebrated to promote work culture and fighting spirit and propagate them. We should creatively shape all the art forms like story, short story, novel, geya and song through Dalit writers associations and Dalit art centers³⁰.

There are so many indigenous art forms which form part of the family tradition of certain castes, considered low in the society. For instance, there is a wealth of music and valuable literary heritage in the songs of the fisher folk, the rhymes of the shepherds, well known as Golla Suddulu (sayings of Yadavas and Kuramas), the proverbs of Rajakas (Washer men), familiar in countryside, the music of Nayi Brahmins (barbers) the extempore versification of Bhatrajus, with their mastery of language have to be preserved³¹. Also, the Pada songs of tappers and weavers, and the poetic wealth of so many other backward classes have to be collected. All this has to be done, if the foundations of Sanskrit literature are to be shaken.

Art form:

Instead of encouraging harikathas and purana pathanas, which are being used as the instruments for the propagation of Hindu culture, we have to promote new art forms that enrich people's literature like Burrakathas, jakkulakathas and jamukulakathas. We have to discover / create new heroes from the life stories of the common people and propagate their brave deeds. By bringing forward the group songs of the Dalit castes, we will be contributing to a cultural renaissance³².

²⁹ Ibid, Pp.150-151.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

Sculpture and Painting:

Hindu sculpture in India concentrated on the detailed description of the female anatomy and thereby vulgarized the physical personality of woman. Taking Buddhist sculpture as the ideal, we should take subjects of leaders of social revolution like Ambedkar, Phule and Periyar, the statues of martyrs, those of the lowly and the lost and the stupas of the great departed and, thereby help the revival of rural culture. In painting too, we should bring about a new awareness among the people, in keeping with new world trends in this field³³.

Flag:

As a support of social revolution, blue and red flags should be flown on every house, throughout all the villages as a sign of the new culture³⁴.

5. Spread of Education:

- Educational institutions should be started in every villages, named after Ambedkar, Mahtma Phule and Periyar;
- New text-books must be prepared for study in those schools;
- Schools, junior colleges, degree colleges, technological institutions and medical colleges should also be started;
- Educational societies should be formed³⁵;
- Dalit universities should also be set up;
- Ambedkar research centers, and research centers specializing in the history and culture of the Dalits should be established;
- The percentage of educated people is very low among the Dalits and other backward classes. So it is all the more necessary that education of women should be encouraged. In every institution, 50 percent should be reserved for women³⁶;
- Separate educational institutions should also be started for women;

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid, P-152.

³⁵ Ibid, Pp.152-153.

³⁶ Ibid.

- Students in these educational institutions should be trained, with special emphasis on discipline; physical exercise, understanding of theory, scientific approach and awareness of the movement;
- Special arrangements should be made for training in sculpture, painting and folk arts. State, district, mandal committees have the responsibility to build these organization and promote them³⁷.

6. Alternative Culture among Women:

- Apart from admitting girls in village schools, special training centers for girls should be started;
- Taking up the literary movement in a constructive manner, we have to ignite the self-respect and develop the personality of women;
- Enlightening the women on how they were suppressed by Hindu culture, we have to encourage them to resist the pressure of patriarchal domination and make them ready for equality with men³⁸;
- Organizing training camps to demonstrate that women are not the weaker sex, we must develop their physical strength by teaching them ‘karate’ and the like. They must be trained in self-defense against physical violence, and in hitting back, if necessary;
- Facilities must be provided to enable women to occupy equal status with men in political, economic, social, cultural and all other fields, for this professional educational centers must be started specially for women, so that they might develop their talents and universities to equip them for standing on their own feet³⁹;
- Efforts must be made to improve the psychology of women by organizing special camps for women in science, technology, medicine and other disciplines;
- Journalistic training should be given to women, so that Dalit women might be run their own journals;

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid, Pp.153-154.

- While forming political parties, women should be allotted 50 percent of the seats and helped to share power equally with men⁴⁰.

7. Economic Re-organization:

- Agitation must be carried on to nationalize land, industry and wealth;
- We must fight against the domination of India by the IMF and the World Bank;
- Fight, along with the Dalits, the backward and the minorities, for land in the villages⁴¹;
- The fight for land must continue, covering excess lands, banjar lands, and those under the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments, until the overlordship of the few over these lands is removed⁴²;
- Efforts must be made to unite labour, and forge links with other labour unions and fight for the liberation of all;
- Unorganized labour must be organized into unions⁴³;
- Training centers to be set up for workers in the different industries, to see that they are industrialized⁴⁴;
- Fight for the ownership of their lands and natural wealth by the tribals. The present agitation of the tribals to be studied for making them more powerful and speedy;
- At this stage, when the traditional professions of different backward classes are neglected it would be necessary to set up industrial estates to raise their standard of living⁴⁵.

8. Political Re-organization:

The Dalits must have political power, before thinking of forging an alternative culture, as a practical proposition. But, the latter has to continue, even after obtaining political power. Political power is vital for recognizing any system.

⁴⁰ Ibid, P-155.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Against the political authority of the upper castes, the Dalit, backward and minority classes have been conducting scattered agitations here and there. And these agitations are being suppressed with the use of physical force by the upper castes. The Dalit, backward and minority groups should seize political power, by unifying themselves and by education. This was exactly Dr. Ambedkar's line of thinking⁴⁶.

Guidelines for political re-organization:

- That the Dalits and backward minority groups are descendants of indigenous Indian tribes is part of history. They have been rendered backward at different stages of India's history. They must be told that after being dominated by different ruling classes for the last nearly 5,000 years, the historical necessity has now come forward for them to become united to be equipped for political power⁴⁷.
- It would be useful to enlist the help of Dalit, backward and minority groups now functioning in the different ranks of upper caste Hindu parties.
- These groups, now being used as part of the official machinery of the upper caste ruling classes, have to be united.
- The social and political obstacles in the unification of the Dalit, backward and minority classes should be removed⁴⁸.
- The industrial monopoly of the centre and its political structure has to be nullified by the unity of the various oppressed castes and tribes.
- Political organization has to be so shaped as to see that all the oppressed classes would have one party, one flag and one philosophy from the village up to the State level.
- Parties and other organizations formed in the name of different castes and tribes should come under the umbrella of one alliance to oppose the political authority of the upper castes⁴⁹.
- In the programme for replacing the Hindu rule with the rule of the Dalits, women, Youth, students, intellectuals, small traders, workers and ordinary people should put up a united fight.

⁴⁶ Ibid, P-155.

⁴⁷ Ibid, Pp.156-157.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

- The political struggle should be conducted, with “Achievement of Dalit Rule” as the slogan, under a blue flag with a red star in the centre.
- The movement must be organized with achievement of political power by the Dalits as the ultimate objective⁵⁰.

The Dalits began to realize that there would be no salvation for them as long as they continued to live in Hindu society and culture. They hoped to get liberated by a cultural revolt, and by a defeat of the Hindu point of view. They were convinced that the Dalit culture cannot progress without the destruction of Hindu culture. That was why the burning of “Manu smriti” was conducted on a large scale.

The cause for this campaign assuming the proportions of major movement was the spread of the religious fanaticism and caste arrogance of the upper caste Hindus, along with the oppression of the Dalits. Another factor was the inability of the economic oriented communists to understand the cultural foundation of society. That was why the Dalits sprang up, as a power for cultural rejuvenation.

The fight for liberation of the Dalits gave a new awareness to the Literary Movement of the Dalits as also a new power. The movements for liberation and fight began to stimulate each other. The contribution of the Dalit literary movement was significant – in bringing a new outlook in their ideas in the social, economic and political fields, - especially in reconciling them with the philosophical outlook of Ambedkar.

This literature played a tremendous role in creating an alternative, ideological and cultural ethos among the Dalit bahun forces. This Dalit literature carries the burden of suffering, agony and humiliation. In addition, it is encompassed by the profound objective of emancipation of all oppressed masses. It is resolutely determined to uncover the concealed contradictions of the hegemonic upper caste ideology and make concerted efforts to create an alternative socio-cultural identity.

⁵⁰Ibid.

Dalit literature had transformed from passive supplication and pleading of an earlier generation to the higher level of revolutionary consciousness while posing a challenge to the established order. It has created a vast space for the emergence of new organic Dalit intellectuals. They were the real actors in the new democratic revolutionary movement. They were also actively involved in the construction of new ideas, and were producers of new knowledge which was based on their real social experience. The secular form of Dalit literature could be noticed with the emergence of the new Dalit bahun literature encompassing the minorities, women and other bahun oppressed classes. Thus Dalit literature is evolving with a tremendous potential of emancipatory zeal and with humanizing content along with the Dalit movement.

It may be conjectured that one of the major drawbacks of a 'self-respect' orientation of Dalit movement led by Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha is the unlimited/unrestrained outburst of anger/indignation against the 'enemy', i.e., the upper caste. The 'self-respect' and dignity of the lower castes, though very significant dimensions in any movement of theirs, addressed to the exclusion of any serious and sustained engagement with the maternity of cultural degradation, it seems, would only lead to the decline of the movement.

This is not to undermine the historical significance of the Dalit movement in Andhra Pradesh. The polarization of social forces in civil society, the State's response to Dalit issues, and changes brought about by the movement, have largely been targeted and localized. Thus, for instance, some of the victims of the Karamchedu and Chundur massacres were given house sites and small pieces of agricultural land as compensation. However, in most cases Dalits remain victims of the divide. They have to travel long distances in search of work as they are not employed in their own villages by the upper caste landlords.

The second important limitation of the Dalit movement led by Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha relates to its failure to critically address the question of internal inequalities and hierarchies within Dalit communities. There is a perceptible social distance between the two major communities of Scheduled Castes viz., *mala* and

madiga, and between them and other communities. This distance, based not only on material issues, but also on casteist ideology which can be attributed to pernicious caste system. After the consciousness of the Madiga community and the emergence of MRPS, demanding categorization of reservation, the present APDMS though alive, has become passive in its activities and confined only to the statements in the media. There evolved many caste organizations among the various sub castes with in the Dalits. It then becomes the responsibility of the ideologically conscious Dalit movement to concretely address these internal problems, the resolution of which determines Dalit unity.

The pre-eminently cultural framework of the Dalit movement could be said to be the reason, in its preoccupation with an imaginary delineation of Dalit identity, for its inadequate attention to this crucial issue. It is a matter of serious enquiry that Dalit articulation may in a sense find the echoes of the dominant caste ideological framework within itself. In almost all cases, the upper castes attacks selectively targeted only one Dalit community and it is a matter for serious reflection that the dominant castes should evolve and follow a strategy of ‘dive and attack’.

In a historical society such as India, separation or division exist on a multiplicity of social markers; caste, tribe and ethnicity. The Dalit movement’s lack of attention to the caste divisions within its own communities was a major cause of the increased *madiga* demand for reservations, which led to a political division between the *mala* and *madiga* for a common struggle and platform. It is a reflection of the Dalit leadership’s complacency that the initial soundings of such separatist mobilization could not find a response, and then it is a commentary on its short sightedness that no adequate representation was given to the different communities.

The major lesson to be drawn from the impasse in Dalit articulation at the present juncture is that the lack of adequate attention to the internal as much as the external, and the material as much as the cultural-ideological, issues could prove to be suicidal. If an anti-caste movement is to move anywhere near its goal of caste annihilation or even to resist Hindu caste dominance, it must be internally

democratic, responsive to inner voices and vigilant towards emerging challenges and a program of action to fight against them.

Chapter-VI

Conclusion

Dalits in India, earlier known by different nomenclatures, have asserted through the ages, for their rights of equality and justice. To achieve this, they have organized numerous types of struggles or movements through different organizations in several parts of the country. A few of the organizations and their movements have acquired partial success in their goals, but many of them have failed miserably for different reasons like structural rigidity of the Hindu society being eulogized by the religious scriptures, economic vulnerability of the people involved in the struggles for socio-cultural changes, the resultant lack of their sustainability along with asserted leadership and financial problems and so forth and Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha is also no exception of these reasons.

Even though these socio-cultural organizations has failed due to various reasons, their attempt to bring socio-cultural changes in the society have left some indelible imprints in the history of Dalit struggles and made some marks on little improvements in socio-cultural conditions of the Dalits and proved to be instrumental, at least indirectly and inspired the next generations. They have forced the society for introspection and for undergoing various changes.

A New Dalit movement has started with Karamchedu incident. This movement even has changed the agenda in revolutionary parties. Even some of the revolutionaries who worked in the revolutionary parties has questioned for not considering caste as the major problem in their parties and differed with the party on these lines and came out of those parties and are engaged in Dalit movement through contributing Dalit literature.

Karamchedu struggle has brought into limelight many socio-cultural and Dalit organizations, leader and Dalit writers like Satish Chandra, Madduri Nagesh Babu,

Shikamani, Kalekuri Prasad, Yendluru Sudhakar, Pydi Theresh Babu and so on in hundreds. This is the result, how a movement can create writers and intellectuals. This Dalit movement made its indelible mark not only in the Dalit society but also in revolutionary politics.

The Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha was established during 1985 with reference to Karamchedu incident has radically reconstructed the content of political discourse of Andhra Pradesh. Karamchedu is a point of departure both for state political history and also for Ambedkarite movement. Since then, the state politics began to undergo a metamorphosis in terms of its very political discourses. All political parties since then began to change, their strategy and programmes. With the establishment of Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha, for the first time Ambedkar was made as their guiding symbol and spirit. And his image was reconstructed as a movement builder and political and ideological emancipator.

The formation of the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha was a radical departure from the past, a definite shift in Dalit consciousness. The Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha has accrued within itself the potential of being a self-activating historical agency of social change. It entered into a process of forming a collective identity and from a formative sporadic spontaneous movement transformed itself into an organization.

The Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha is the first self-consciously Dalit organization committed to fighting caste and community based discrimination. It knows the situation of Dalits and the Psychology of fear within which they live. They concluded that fear of violence was more influential in keeping the oppressive system in place and forcing Dalits to conform to century-old social norms than the trauma of actual atrocities committed. They considered fear as a major obstacle to growth and development.

The Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha has concluded that atrocities are not individual cases but are rather the product of a well-designed social system; hence they need for collective action. Redressing such injustices is clearly a fundamental goal of many of the empowerment movements. In case of Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha, its particular success has been due to its focus on the psychological bases of oppression, and on building up the strength and spirit of the Dalits to overcome their condition. They thus contributed a feeling of empowerment for the oppressed, a beginning that is followed up by continually suing for their just rights, freedom and of course reclamation of human personality.

Certain conclusions may be drawn from the emergence and formation of the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha:

First, the formation of the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha marked a historical departure in the course of Dalit movement in the state when there was vivid aggravation of fundamental caste-class contradictions in the society. The collective Dalit expression and their political potency posed a major challenge to existing caste-ridden social relations, threatening their collapse.

Second, the concept of “Dalit” acquired an altogether new, holistic, definition in Andhra Pradesh Political discourse. Parochial allegiances of division that fractured the movement were overcome and the Dalits came to recognize themselves as a single entity. This change resulted in more spirited political campaigning by the Dalits in the defense and advancement of their common interests.

Third, the formation of the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha also changed the language of Andhra politics, which had almost become traditional, with its penchant for domination – suppression. In the light of this change, all the established political parties, including the revolutionary Marxists – Leninist groups, effectively changed their major political propositions and statements, resulting in a change of their political strategy. At this juncture, the Dalit movement opened a new conceptual

space in which a creative interaction took place between Marxist – Leninist groups and the Dalits. In concrete terms, this was manifested in the creation, articulation and synthesization of Marxism –Ambedkarism.

Fourth, the emergence of the autonomous Dalit movement became the fountainhead for the emergence of a movement of intellectuals or organic intellectuals. Though their multiple activities, these movement intellectuals contributed to the formation of collective Dalit identity by articulating Dalit bahun knowledge, body of Dalit literature as an instrument of counter-hegemonic ideology, imbuing the Dalits with the ability of organizing themselves as agents of new democratic revolution. In addition to their literary contribution, these organic intellectuals became even more visible as organizers, leaders and spokespersons of Dalit consciousness.

Fifth, joining the mainstream of Dalit consciousness, all the hitherto oppressed castes/classes of the Dalits, tribals, minorities and other backward castes disconnected themselves from their earlier political affiliations and ideologies. Extremely significantly, they came together to form a new homogenous identity called bahun. This process was the culmination of the collective expression of discontent, challenging the dominant meaning systems and symbols.

Sixth, as a consequence of this ‘bahujanisation’ of Indian politics, the entry of the Bahujan Samaj Party on the Indian political scene created political tremors in the traditional political party systems of AP. With this development the traditional vote bank of the Congress Party, which had ruled the State for nearly four decades was weaned away. No less important was the impact on the TDP and the traditional communist base, which was jolted at their base and became insecure, leading to political uncertainty.

Seventh, the rapid radicalization of Dalit consciousness and their consolidation along with other oppressed forces witnessed the counter-polarization and consolidation of

the upper castes. To give an instance, in the wake of the Karamchedu atrocity, which they had unleashed on the Dalits, the upper castes formed their own Karamchedu Sanghibava Samithi (Karamchedu Solidarity Assembly). These militia of the upper castes, organized with the main purpose of committing atrocities on the Dalits, tribals, other backward castes and minorities, made it their mandate to start counter-ideological propagation against the Dalits and create psychological terror among their intended victims.

Eighth, the counter mobilization of the upper castes, launched on the basis of politico-religious nationalism and other ideological factors was reflected in the revival of Hindu fundamentalism, with a strong nexus in the State apparatus. As a result, whenever an atrocity was committed on the Dalits, the State apparatus was weighted towards the upper caste rulers, thus enabling them to perpetuate the hegemony of the traditional forces.

Finally, the response of the State apparatus to the growing consolidation of Dalit consciousness through the interaction of various organizations was the ruthless use of the repressive State machinery. The State adopted the political strategy of banning ultra-left or extra parliamentary organizations and even physically eliminating the activists in the name of 'encounter deaths'. These tendencies manifested not only the legitimate use of force, but also a determination to liquidate the advancement of Dalit consciousness and activity by every available means.

The Dalit movement charted a distinctive course highlighting the Dalit question, but at the same time making it integrated to the larger question of emancipation and enablement. But it is at crossroads today and the larger issues of emancipation and Dalit oppression, as integral to it seems to have been sidelined. The internal conflicts and fragmentation within the Dalit movement and its inability to set the course of public life are amply in evidence everywhere.

The distinct concerns of Dalit movement may be highlighted in this context. It recognized that the denial of self-hood to Dalits in the prevailing social relations that are embedded in both the public and social institutions from early on manifests in such deprivation as self-respect, human dignity and rights. It joined hands with concerns of other similarly oppressed groups in struggling for those sources, which would facilitate the development of a confident self. It can be said that even today this remains one of the primary drives of the Dalit movement holding out the possibility of bringing Dalits and the allied groups on a common platform.

The issue of dignity and self-hood are centrally related to the question of culture. Dalits laid claim to such resources as language, religion, symbols and traditions and on their basis attempted to carve out a distinctive cultural autonomy for their future. This legacy which it shared to a great extent with the self-respect movement remains in tatters today as a succession of ruling regimes have attempted to own up these resources and tried to use them and reproduce their dominance over Dalits. Besides, Dalits through their movement have generated their own cultural resources. But a fragmented Dalit movement has not been able to effectively make use of these resources. A number of concerns that the social movements of Dalit have raised closely reflect on their search for a self, which can elicit its due recognition and anchored in an egalitarian community.

Concerns of self-hood and culture are related to the issue of economy through innumerable ties. Among other things, land has been a central concern of the Dalits and many movements that they have launched revolve on this issue. These are other issues closely bound up with land and livelihood, which have been effectively employed over time to reinforce the degradation of Dalits. But, there are other concerns, which exacerbate the marginalization of Dalit in terms of land question. A political economy of untouchability is still widely prevalent in South India. Besides, the recent changes in the economy in the wake of globalization, affect the condition of Dalits, to say the least deleteriously.

The guiding ideology of the Dalit Socio Cultural organization of the country is mainly based on Ambedkarism which always opposed Casteism and Caste oppression vehemently. Simultaneously it also counted the education and consciousness as the best tool to liberate the downtrodden castes from their varied deprivations and aimed to empower them. As a sign of the emerging trend, it is noted that the Dalits have now began to articulate their own identity, launch struggles on various issues related to them.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar has provided the philosophical background for the Dalit movement. The annihilation of caste was a concept, initiated by him. Any movement, not based on the principle of abolition of caste, is likely to get stuck again in the mire of caste. This has been a familiar experience in the social history of India. Hence, the principle of caste abolition is an alternative to the caste system. This alternative principle is not a product of today, or of our making. The sub-continent had seen so many powerful philosophical and social movements. It was from the experience of these movements that we have been able to evolve a philosophical background and a programme of action. All this was made possible in the light of the philosophical approach of Mahatma Phule, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Periyar E.V. Ramaswami Naicker.

As part of the analysis of the philosophical foundation, it has become necessary to analyse the caste feeling that had crept into the communist movement. This had become necessary only to promote a friendly feeling between the communist movement and the Dalit movement.

The philosophy of abolition of caste was being dismissed as casteism and the philosophers of caste abolition as communalists by the communist movement in certain situations. Attempts were made to dismiss the Dalit movement also in a like manner. That was why we were obliged to explain which movements were really sliding into the world of caste.

At this stage, when the Dalit movement is marching towards capturing of political power, the philosophical foundation and programme of action are bound to prove useful. These are likely to give the activists of the Dalit movement more strength and bring clarity to those who want to be friendly towards the movement.

The Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha, whose objective is to challenge prevailing hegemonic discourse of economic domination by upper castes (*kamma*) and cultural hegemony by Brahmins and to evolve shared understanding of the Dalit Universe. This activity has emancipatory potentialities for society since it exposes the shadow in the hegemonic discourse and in doing so suggests different possibilities.

There is however, much discussion and dispute on the means of achieving the ideals of social justice. This problem is more worsened by the multiple divisions existing among Dalits. For instance, the Dalits are divided along sub-caste lines. They also hindered by the present political climate where the upper castes are trying to establish a unified Hindu cultural nationalism.

All the same, it is true that, if the goals of an organization to carry-out the movement are clearly outlined and well defined, and if it finds active support, the movement will become an organically living one. There is also no shortage of sensitive and committed people in the Dalit movement to take forward the movement, which has the vision of Phule, Periyar and Ambedkar. Hence, what is required is a strong unity among the poor, the marginalized and the outcastes. This will not be an easy task as they were internally divided into several castes and sub-castes, externally scattered almost throughout the vast country. Therefore, the Dalit leadership has to strive constantly for bringing about unity among the Dalits to fight against their common enemies and common problems.