

And the Devil takes the hindmost....

By Gautam Pingle

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The issue of the division of the Andhra Pradesh has many facets. One facet is the attitude and interests of the Dalit community.

The 12-million strong Dalit community in AP is divided into two major distinct groups - Mala and Madiga. The Malas at 42% and Madigas at 49% make up 91 % of the Dalits. But the proportions vary between the three regions. Of the Dalit community: the Malas constitute 55% in Coastal Andhra while the Madigas are 61% in Telangana and in Rayalaseema, the Madigas are again the majority with 52 %.

Their economic, social and political development is seen to be uneven. In the words of the SKC: "The Malas shared in the educational development and prosperity brought to the region under British rule (especially through the introduction of education in standard Telugu or in English language) and also from later capitalist development of the region brought about mainly by Kamma castes. Among Malas, those who embraced Christianity (about 60%) are able to avail of reservations by calling themselves Adi-Andhras or declaring themselves under other Dalit categories. The Madigas, especially those in Telangana region suffered economically and educationally under the Nizam's and hence remained backward. They are therefore less able to compete with Malas for positions in education and employment (p.370)."

As a result, the Usha Mehra Committee pointed out: "Mala and its allied castes are enjoying 70% representation in Class I and Class III posts in the State Services (para 22)". This has provoked the formation of the Madiga Reservation Porata Samiti (MRPS) and its agitation for sub-categorization, which the Supreme Court - believing the Dalits are an "indivisible homogenous entity" - has rejected.

The issue has since surfaced in the bifurcation debate where the Malas and the Madigas have come to believe that they can only benefit if the state is divided. The SKC itself quoted the leaders thus: "Despite uncertain advantage, Dalit leaders feel that separate states would resolve the Madiga/Mala dispute and at the same time increase political representation of the Dalits and allow them to exercise greater political power (p.371). This may not fit into the calculations of the ruling elite.

But the Dalits have driven the Telangana movement. As SKC found: "Large scale involvement of students including those from Dalits and Backward Castes in the current movement for Telangana seems to testify to this. A large proportion of student leaders of the movement located in Osmania and Kakatiya Universities is known to be from Dalit/BC background. According to many sources, purported student suicides during the course of the agitation are also largely by Dalit and Backward Caste students." (p.163)

This has led to an interesting situation, which the SKC detected: “The SCs of Coastal Andhra differ in their stance on the issue of separation. While the Malas of this region seem divided in their outlook, the Madigas are consistent in their demand for a separate state..... Thus Madigas from Telangana and Coastal Andhra prefer separate states, reflecting a regional and reservation oriented perspective.” (p.368)

In December 2009, Dalit leaders led by Amalapuram MP G V Harsha Kumar, Bapatla MP Panabaka Lakshmi and K Sivaji, were said to be backing a Dalit organisation, Mala Mahanadu, to launch a separate Andhra (“Jai Andhra”) movement, which would support the creation of a separate state of Telangana on the basis that it would help Malas of Andhra.

Also, the Andhra Dalit Mahasabha demanded a separate state for Rayalaseema and Coastal Andhra with its leader Katti Padma Rao declaring: "Only two castes are dominating all others in the two regions. Formation of separate Andhra state by excluding Telangana would herald equitable development”.

In 1956, Dr Ambedkar warned of the dangers to Dalits from the new reorganization, but was not heeded. In 1969-73, the Dalit presence was not significant with the Telangana and Jai Andhra movements being led by the middle class in Telangana and by the kulak farmers in Coastal Andhra.

Now at least with the stakes for Dalits so high and their contribution and sacrifices so significant, their interests need to be taken into account .In the entire imbroglio over the separation issue the voice of the most deprived community, which hopes for real material benefits from separation, is hardly heard in all the political machinations that go on in Delhi.

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