

# CASTE VIOLENCE IN ANDHRA PRADESH AND STATE RESPONSE

SANTHOSH J.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>ICSSR Doctoral Fellow, Centre for the Study of Discrimination and Exclusion, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

## ABSTRACT

*Despite the few changes in Indian society by and large it is the caste based. As far as the caste influence in the country the Andhra Pradesh is no exception. Rather the rural society of the state is more caste ridden. Therefore violence on the basis of caste has become almost an everyday practice at times it acquires more violent forms. The protracted and brutal violence on Dalits is the strapping evidence on the fact. Traditional caste based hierarchies in collaboration with economic and more so the political power made the condition of Dalits more pathetic and resulted in to massive resistance against the caste violence. And also the Dalit movement in various directions challenged the authority of dominant castes. However the state and its departments continue to discriminate Dalits and as far as punishing the culprits concerned it is often remain silent. The parties who are running the governments and their caste men are the perpetrators of violence across the political spectrum. The courts are also pronouncing biased verdicts and ultimately supporting culprits of the crimes. Notably the dominant political classes are such that by appropriating Dalit leaders makes them futile and insecure. Accordingly it is evident in the study that the elected representatives of Dalits from reserved constituencies are not compassionate to their community in critical times.*

**KEY WORDS:** Caste, Violence, Dalits, Andhra Pradesh, Karamchedu, Chunduru, Laximpeta

## INTRODUCTION

There is wide ranging literature on caste in contemporary India mainly from sociologists have argued that caste is no more and there is no traditional villages in the country. Some scholars go on to also pay their obituary to caste. No doubt there is some evidence that Indian society is becoming modern and caste relations also changing. On the other hand there are various studies demonstrates us that the practices of exclusion and discrimination in India are deeply entrenched whether in rural or urban areas.

In case of rural Andhra Pradesh caste is still had predominant presence. The dalits are not able to live as human beings and denials of basic amenities are everyday practice. There is large history in the state as far as caste violence against dalits is concerned. Starting from very brutal attacks and killings of dalits in 1985 in *Karanchedu*, *Chundur* massacre in 1992 and a brutal attack and killing of dalits at *Laximpeta* in 2012 are the glaring evidences of caste based violence in the state. Despite being evidence and proper witnesses all the cases could not stand in the courts. In the recent verdict of

Andhra Pradesh high court in *Chunduru* case acquitted all the accused. At the same time in *Laximpeta* the mass violence and five dalit men been killed have to wait for three years the trail as to begin. The dalits of the village are not able to claim any of the government welfare programmes and not able to find work for livelihood. It is not only interesting to study the dynamics of caste politics and violence in Andhra but also important. The interesting aspects of these cases are that the party which is in power at state level, that particular party leader's caste people led the attacks on dalits in all the three cases. Despite being there are so many acts to prevent such crimes that the implementation agencies and state are remain silent. Therefore looking at the state response would be critical in the study of violence on dalits.

In this context the paper seeks to answer some of the questions, why there is violence on the basis of caste? Does the violence on dalits to do with their lack of political mobilization? Why the ruling party leaders' castes are more inclined to rage violence on deprived communities? What are the reasons for violent attacks on dalits in *Karanchedu*, *Chunduru* and *Laximpeta*? Why the

state is silent on these atrocities? What should the state do?.

## UNDERSTANDING VIOLENCE

What is violence? Before we go into understand violence as a concept one need to look at the human nature, before spread of civilization, whether that human nature may be good or bad. Therefore one could argue we can't understand human progress without knowing prehistory including war and peace. The archaeological and ethnographical evidence clearly shows us that in the prehistoric or primitives before civilization was not had peace.(Keelay, 1996,p25-41) In a way the violence and conflict is everywhere and it existed all the times.

In this context Fanon (Fenon,1961,p1-52) in his thesis in *The Wretched of the Earth* defines violence and in a way he supports it. In the colonial context to fight back the violence and oppression in the form of the syndrome of massacre, mutilation, and savage reprisal that was decolonization for him was necessarily violent. By looking at the violence around him probably he regarded violence not just as a political necessity but as also as a form of social and moral regeneration for subjugated people.

In the post 9/11 world broader definition of violence had necessitated. In the direction Fretheim(Fretheim,2004,p18-27) had believed that one should go beyond the 'killing fields' perspective, and gave quite interesting description of violence "any action, verbal or nonverbal, oral or written, physical or psychical, active or passive, public or private, individual or institutional/societal, human or divine, in whatever degree of intensity, that abuses, violates, injures, or kills". He gave his definition while looking at certain ambiguity of the Bible toward violence. Why god becomes violent, where he explained that the God may respond in the violent way in order to accomplish his work in the world so that sin and evil do not go unchecked.

How does one understand Indian tradition and religious textual pronouncement of violence? The interesting and critical reading of these texts *Manusriti* by Ambedkar and others the Hinduism preaches inequalities and violence. Further he claims that in the Manu's varna scheme a very large number of people the so called shudras became slaves and to maintain that order the force and violence is inevitable. These texts also control all forms of socio, political and economic, family, and human relations; try to maintain Brahmins' authority throughout centuries.(Doniger,1991)

Two ways of looking at caste related violence one at culture, rapture between touchable and untouchable, ritual and other is conflict model in mobility studies framework. Violence is understood as result of changing dynamics of caste relations. One can look at it at increasing assertion by Dalits dangerous to social stability and pose challenge to the authority and legitimacy of dominant castes. Where the State agencies including judiciary are more complicit in dealing with caste massacres and they help in perpetuation of caste violence, and it becomes caste as violence.(Ramaiah, Special Lecture Jan 31<sup>st</sup> 2015)

Ramaiah argues that Caste as an Institution of violence and that violence is multiple forms not only physical. a. it not enables rational thinking, and divides peoples between thinking castes and doing castes. Accordingly some thinks and others had to work and follow. The Hindu's so-called sacred texts called priest Brhamin as a god on the earth, therefore nobody allowed to question his authority. b. educational violence, shudras and women has been not allowed to attaining education, if they do so physical violence would inevitable and different types of punishments are prescribed in the manu laws c. economic violence, shudras or present day dalits are not allowed to have any property of their own. d. psychological violence, by humiliating dalits in their day to day life.(Ibid)

Despite being there are stringent laws the perpetuation of caste based violence is persuade us to question the constitutional legitimacy of the state and its other institutions. The Human Rights watch report(Human Rights Watch,1999) starkly reveals, violence against the dalits is rampant and widespread in Indian society, perpetrated by both dominant castes and backward castes often with the active complicity of state agencies, added to mention the insensibility of mainstream society. Therefore it is not surprising then that a majority of these atrocities go unnoticed and unpunished. The report takes a critical look at the role of the Indian state in its constitutional role of protecting the rights of the dalits. Further Ramaiah elaborately discusses (Ramesh, 6Apr,2015) why caste-based violence in India is increasing despite the history of legislations against caste discrimination. He traces the history of the laws against inhuman treatment of Dalits, legal ban against caste discrimination and untouchability was introduced in British India under the Caste Disabilities Removal Act XXI of 1850. Later, the Government of India Act 1935 extended special protections to the Scheduled Castes

(SC). Between 1943 and 1950, 17 laws were enacted by different Indian states to end caste-based disabilities. However, no national legislation was put into place until the Untouchability (Offences) Act, 1955, which was amended in 1976 to make its provisions more stringent and renamed the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 (PCR Act). To deal with the atrocities committed against SCs, another law – the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 (POA Act) came into effect in January 1990, he elaborated. We all know that apathy of the successive governments in implementing this particular laws and increased demand from the movements to amend the act has been linger in the Parliament.

Vijaisri (19 Mar,2015) asks some fundamental questions as to whether there is consensus and coercion in caste system; does untouchables had their consent to their degradation. And what does homogenization of untouchables as a single group, what about their internal contradictions. What is the role of their particular caste based political mobilizations. Therefore the identities are not stable and they are changing, she argues. What about pollution and untouchability among SCs example Mala, Madiga and Dakkalis, how does one read ritual distance among them does it consensual or coercive? Therefore they are also shapers of caste cultures and hierarchies not just been victims of caste oppression, she asserts. By quoting Susan baily, she also said that caste is no more primordial and it is changing and every caste is emerged in particular political context, where the OBCs are becoming dominant and committing atrocities against Dalits. Therefore every member in the *Varna* order have certain powers to met out in safeguarding their caste identity as *Manu* sanctioned power to king to maintain the order but in present context all the castes have power to maintain divine order, she explained.

If one were to go by her argument would look at Foucault(Foucault,1982p777-794) while criticizing traditional definition of power which is so overwhelming but for him the power is not concentrated in one centre instead the power disposes within society and percolates into deepest part of the society. And James Scott in his 'every day forms of resistance'(Scott, 1989,p3-33) argued that people are not completely accepting dominance but they resist in their everyday life. He also say that resistance also has power it can alter the dominant structures.

In Indian context it is true that the marginalized sections are really challenging the power structure but

they do not actually exercising any power. In this context how the dalits entering into legislative bodies or aspiring for power like Parliament and state legislators? What are the problems they face while reaching those positions? How the dalit representatives engage with legislative processes? How far the leaders could make any impact on law making in the areas of concern for marginalized dalits?

One of the problems in implementation of reservation policy in India seems its concern only on outcome but not on process. As (Nancy,1995,p69-94) Fraser argues that the struggles for recognition or what one may call identity politics arises only when there is execrated material inequality that is in income and property ownership, which may be real in western societies. In contrary no matter what is your economic status, if you are come from a particular caste the rate of you been subjected to discrimination is very high. Therefore the 'identity' based politics which questions the existing exclusionary practices in India gains importance to study. I would like to link it with the Dalit movement in AP and caste violence.

## CASTE VIOLENCE IN ANDHRA PRADESH

As above discussed conceptual debates and the questions raised by Vijaisri brings me to the caste violence in Andhra Pradesh and the Dalit movement which resisted it. The collection of enormous material on the subject by (Nagaraju,2014pIX) is interesting to understand sustained caste violence, reports of such incidents, analysis and debates on the theme. The study also gave us Dalit resistance movements against caste violence in the state. As far as the history of Dalit movement and nature of caste in the states' politics there are various studies (Rao,2003, Adapa,1991) elaborately discussed and covered all aspects till 1950s.

In the post independence and after the state formation in 1956 how the *kamma* caste had developed and controlled the land and later on the political power.(Adapa,1994) In 1980s congress dominance came to an end and in 1982 then actor turned politician NT Rama Rao established political party called Telugu Desham Party (TDP). Rama Rao's caste *Kamma* dominance in land and business(Damodaran,2008,p92-122) added to the political power. This political power had given confidence in *Kammas* in coastal Andhra villages which led to caste violence in the state.(Nagaraju, op,cit,p80-95)

The relative and very little improvement in the educational and economic status and access to bureaucratic and political power is visible among dalits in Andhra. The small achievements came with the help of reservations in various fields like education, jobs and political. Instead of considering SCs' rise in political and bureaucratic structures as an achievement of parliamentary democracy, upper-caste Hindus often perceive it as a direct threat to their caste supremacy, leading to violent reactions throughout the country the state of AP is not immune to such caste violence.

### KARAMCHEDU

The massacre in Karamchedu village, Krishna dist of AP in 1985 was an evident of cumulative anger of *kammas* on dalits. In this case six dalits brutally killed and it was a turning point in dalit movement in the state. (Padma Rao, 2014, p67-74) The establishment of *Dalitha Mahasabha* has given new directions to militant dalit resistance in the state. (Berge, 2014, p383, 408) I will not go any further in to details about this case rather focus on very recent cases of caste violence.

### CHUNDURU

Chunduru massacre in again coastal Andhra Guntur district relatively developed regions in the state. In 1991 killing of eight dalits and dead bodies plunge in to canal, magnanimity of violence caught whole nation's attention. The incident gave new direction to the dalit movement in the state. (Nagaraju, 2014, p110-149) After prolonged struggle of dalits then government had accepted for special court in the same village. The court verdict in the Chunduru dalit massacre case of August 1991 was an important case. The special court under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, convicted over 50 persons accused of attacking dalits in Chunduru, of whom 21 were found guilty of murder and imprisoned for life. The decision came 16 years after the attack, in what is the first major case in Andhra Pradesh to be brought under the SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. This is in fact what set the case apart from the earlier cases of collective violence and grave assault against dalits in Karamchedu, Neerukonda and Padirikuppam. (Kannabiran, 2007, p3915-16) This case went to state high court and recently on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2014 court rejected case and the two judges of court ruled that there was no evidence and acquitted all the accused. Dalits outraged at the judgment opposed it planned further movement. (Liang, accessed on 6 Apr 2015)

### LAXIMPETA

Laximpeta dalit massacre is stark reminder of caste embedded notions of hierarchies in Andhra. Laximpeta, a tiny remote village of Srikakulam district in Andhra Pradesh joined these ranks of massacre of helpless and poor Dalits who were demanding either self respect or land. Laximpeta has now become important case study where the combination of caste and political power had exposed its cruelty. (Tharakam, 2012)

It is a resettled village of the shelter less of an irrigation project "*Madduvalasa Project*". The entire original village of Laximpeta got submerged in the project and was relocated to its present place. There are two major communities in the village. One is the "Kapu". Though listed as a backward class, they are the politically and economically dominant caste in the north coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh. The other main community in Laximpeta is "Mala", a scheduled caste who have been landless agricultural labourers. The Kapus of Laximpeta owned land and houses, and hence got full compensation for their property. In addition, they got government jobs. The Malas did not own any land, hence got no compensation. They owned only small huts or houses and received a token amount towards compensation for their houses. Not even a single job was given to them.

Since the Laximpeta is a resettled village and house sites were provided by the government, the two communities constructed their houses adjacent to each other. They were compelled to stay side by side, with only a small road dividing their houses, in spite of the prevalence of the practice of untouchability. After the completion of the irrigation project, about 250 acres of land acquired by the government remained surplus. It was of no use to the project. Since there was no chance of its submergence even with full tank capacity of the reservoir, the villagers of Laximpeta started cultivating this land, which, prior to acquisition, belonged to them. Legally it was no longer their land. The Kapus started cultivating about 190 out of the 250 acres. The Dalits joined them and started cultivating the remaining 60 acres. These 60 acres were left by the Kapus because that land was not owned by them earlier. Out of the 60 acres, 40 acres belonged to cultivators from Devakavada village and the owners, after receiving compensation, settled far away. The remaining 20 acres belonged to Kapus of the village, but these owners too, after receiving compensation, left the Laximpeta and settled elsewhere. The 60 acres were thus left fallow, without any erstwhile claimants. The government did not object to the cultivation of this left



over land. The Kapus also did not, initially, have any objection to Dalits cultivating this land along with them.

### POLITICAL POWER OF CASTE

The last three years i.e. 2009 onwards have seen a change in the political scenario of Srikakulam district. The already powerful community of the Kapus found their political command further strengthened in the region of the north coastal districts as the president of the state Congress, Botsa Satyanarayana, belongs to their caste. He was also a minister in the state cabinet. Further, it was rumoured that he controls, through *benami* accounts, a large number of liquor shops in the north coastal belt. Laximpeta village falls in Rajam constituency of the AP Legislative Assembly, which was reserved for scheduled castes. The member of the Legislative Assembly from Rajam, Konduru Murali, was also made a minister in the state cabinet. He however has been polite partner to the dominant communities of the district and would not dare to go against their wishes. The inability of the SC representative to stand his political ground was an addition in the armour of the dominant communities. The Kapus have found further support in the rise of Chiranjeevi, actor turned politician, who was recently elected to the Rajya Sabha. Even the president of the Mandal Praja Parishad (MPP) belongs to the Kapu caste. Ironically, the lowest rung of state administrative power the village head *Sarpanch* post was occupied by a scheduled caste woman, thanks to reservation. Of course she could not wield any real power, not even being allowed to sit in the chair of the sarpanch during the entire period of her term. Given this larger context where the Kapu dominant caste was finding its political power strengthened day by day, in Laximpeta, the Kapu landowners started threatening the Dalits to leave the 60 acres of land that they had been cultivating. The Dalits refused. They pointed out that the land does not belong to the Kapus of the village. Further, the Dalits were also paying lease amount to the erstwhile owners of the land, even though they were not obliged to since this land had been acquired and now belongs to the government.

The Kapus, having found that oral pressure did not work, started attacking them, in the beginning at a smaller level. In an attack by Kapus in the year 2010, three women including the sarpanch, received grievous injuries and one of them succumbed to her injuries, but there was no police case despite complaints by the Dalits. On the other hand, the Dalits were implicated under section 107 of the criminal procedure code for breach of peace. This further emboldened the perpetrators. The

local police inspector belongs to a scheduled caste while the additional superintendent of police is from a scheduled tribe community. But both failed to provide protection to the Dalits. The cabinet minister who represents Rajam constituency also failed to render any help to the Dalits in getting the land assigned to them. On the other hand, he dissuaded them from cultivating the land against the wishes of the Kapu landowners. (Tharakam, 2012) The president of the MPP, though his term was over, continued to wield political power and warned the Dalits, when approached, to leave the land. He warned them that otherwise they would have to face grave consequences.

The non-interference of the local minister, the public support of another local political leader and finally the reassuring political protection the state Congress chief encouraged the dominant community to take matters in their own hands. Sensing the danger, the Dalits of Laximpeta approached the police for help and a police picket was posted in the village. A conspiracy appears to have been hatched, with the former president of MPP, to attack the Dalits, and terrorised them in a manner where they would dare not cultivate the land. In year 2012 it was the month of June had arrived and the monsoons were advancing, the Kapus decided not to allow the Dalits to start agricultural operations on the land that season. Probably, as per the design and conspiracy, the police picket was removed on the pretext that forces are needed for bye elections elsewhere in the district. However, there was only one by-election to in the entire district and there was no dearth of police personnel. The lifting of the picket clearly seems to be a ploy, Tharakam suspected. A day prior to the attack the Dalits observed some movement in the Kapu locality in the village. On the 12<sup>th</sup> June 2012 morning, sensing danger, the husband of the former Sarpanch, informed the police inspector and requested for immediate help. The police station is hardly three to four kilometres from the village. The expected police help did not come. Perhaps, this was seemed also deliberate. Soon, a violent group of Kapus, armed with spears, axes, sticks and bombs as my respondents' claimed, (Authors Field Interview) swooped on the Dalit habitation, hurling bombs. Shocked by the sudden sound, the Dalits came out and the assailants attacked them.

The mob entered the houses from both sides and attacked. Most people were either taking breakfast or attending to their daily chores. Women were not spared either. People who were trying to escape were also not spared. The attackers swung their weapons and inflicted

multiple injuries on legs, hands, and heads. They speared eyes and aimed at breaking limbs of the Dalits. When women pleaded with folded hands, their hands were broken. A woman was trying to give water to her dying son had her hands broken, respondents alleged. Doors were smashed, household articles broken. This mayhem went on for a few hours. In the process four people died there itself and a fifth succumbed to injuries after five days. About 50 people have received injuries of which about 20 have been grievously hurt and may not be in a position to do manual work even after they are treated. For Dalit agricultural labourers, who had to survive on their toil, this may be worse than death. Almost each Dalit family has one or more person injured. Out of the five dead, three belong to one family. Under the Scheduled Castes and Tribes (*Prevention of Atrocities*) Act, 1989, the district magistrate and the superintendent of police should immediately visit any place where scheduled castes or tribes have been attacked, assess the damage, render immediate help and relief, and send a report to the government. None of the two main district functionaries visited Laximpeta, Tharakam explained. Under the Act, it is also the duty of the district magistrate to identify the atrocity prone area and take all necessary precautions to avert any attack on the SCs and STs.

He should also identify the possible attackers and if necessary extern them from the district. Nothing of this happened. From 2010 onwards attacks on Dalits have been a regular feature and were increasing in impunity. Despite the death of one person who had been beaten earlier, no action had been taken. Such is the nature of the political domination of the *Kapu* community in the area. As usual, after the killings the government announced some compensation according to the rules governing the Act. Even the amount of relief announced by the then Chief Minister, Kiran Kumar Reddy, has not paid in full. The government has not assured the Dalits about the land for which five lives have been lost and several people received injuries. The Dalits were so brutally attacked and killed because they refused to follow the dictate of the dominant community and persisted in cultivating government land despite threats. Same story unveils everywhere. Only the names are changed and the numbers. Dalits are beaten, butchered, massacred for the only reason that they demand for human rights or for land. If the Dalits do not insist either of the two, there will be no attacks, no killings, no rapes, and no house burnings. On the other hand if they are docile and dormant, they will be patronage with a pittance and allowed to live at the outskirts at their mercy.

Under the 1989 Act, the investigation has to be conducted by an officer not below the rank of deputy superintendent of police. In fact, for this case, the additional superintendent of police has been appointed as the investigation officer. He has to record the statements of witnesses and complete the investigation within 30 days. Contrary to the statutory mandate, the investigation is being carried on by the police inspector and sometimes by the sub inspector. Both are not competent to conduct investigation. The bloodstained clothes in the houses were not taken as evidence, even after four days. The police inspector continued with his investigation, even after these defects in the investigation process was brought to his notice. If the charge sheet was filed and the case was prosecuted with such defective investigation, the whole case will collapse. Probably this is also a part of the game, trained lawyer Tharakam suspected.

The whole incident veers round the 250 acres of government land. The Dalits demand that, since they are landless poor they are entitled for assignment of that land. The Koneru Rangarao Land Committee, which was appointed by then the AP government, made some recommendations for land distribution for the poor, which were accepted by the government. One such recommendation is that surplus land which had been acquired for various projects and has remained unused can be assigned to the poor. The Supreme Court also said that such land need not be reverted back to the original owners and can be distributed to the poor. There is no impediment upon the assignment of the 250 acres of land to the poor. The Dalits of the rehabilitated area are all landless. But the Government has remained silent. It did not make any promise on that. Probably, it does not want to incur the wrath of the *Kapu* community who are presently emerging as a political power in the politics of Andhra Pradesh, like the *Reddys* and *Kammas*. After the carnage, the Dalits and other democratic forces started agitating for justice to the victims. The Dalits further demanded that a special court should be established in Laxmipeta village itself. The law provides for this. The Dalits should get justice at the same place where their blood was sprinkled and should get the land for which they have lost lives. That is the proper way to render real justice to the victims. The victims wanted stringent punishment to the culprits waiting for justice is continues.(Ibid)

## CONCLUSION

When there is a clash of interests, ministers representing reserved constituencies are unable to stand up against the dominant community. Fearing loss of political power, they remain silent. It had evidence in the laximpeta case; therefore one could pose further the relation between dalit political representatives in defending dalits rights. If there are unable to raise their voice as it is evident in this case it raises further questions and one is more interested in probe further the 'processes' in which these representatives have been discriminated and the dalit movement in general. This becomes pertinent when the state is indifferent to the cause of dalits self respect and dignity.

## NOTES

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