



# Dalit Enlightenment through Social Movements in Andhra Pradesh

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## Abstract:

*A new phase of social reform movement was taking place in Andhra Pradesh in the lower castes from 1980s. The movement's ultimate goal is an equitable reconstruction of the social order, where caste should not dictate how well or poorly a person is treated. The Dalit movement focuses its fight on "countering socioeconomic exploitation, improving access to opportunity, and achieving self-respect and respectful social equality.*

*The Caste Question's dual structure underscores the tension between Dalits' ongoing experience as helpless citizens susceptible to violence and their successful 3 fights for recognition and rights on the one hand.*

## Introduction:

Several significant Dalit movements took place in Andhra Pradesh. I took four big movements which brought Enlightenment in Dalits.

- Adi Andhra Dalit Movement (May 11, 1984 - June 1987, Srikakulam district)
- Karamchedu Dalit Movement (July 17, 1985, Prakasam district)
- Neerukonda Dalit Movement (July 1987)
- Tsunduru Dalit Movement (August 6, 1991)<sup>1</sup>

## The Broader Anti-Caste Movements

The Dalit movement is part of a larger anti-caste movement in India, seeking to eradicate caste-based oppression and promote social equality <sup>1</sup>. Pre-independence, this movement manifested as non-Brahman movements in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu, as well as Dalit movements in Punjab, Kerala, and Hyderabad.

## Renewed Assertion and Analysis

After two decades of relative quiet, the Dalit movement regained momentum in the 1970s with the formation of the Dalit Panthers <sup>1</sup>. The 1980s saw Dalits asserting their political power, particularly in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. This study analyzes the roots, socio-political context, leadership, and limitations of the Dalit movement in Andhra Pradesh.

### Goals and Challenges

The ultimate goal is to create a society where caste doesn't dictate one's treatment <sup>1</sup>. The movement focuses on combating socioeconomic exploitation, improving access to opportunities, and achieving self-respect and social equality. However, Dalits face ongoing violence and marginalization, highlighting the need for sustained collective action <sup>1,2</sup>.

The Dalit movement in India was a significant socio-political transformation aimed at eliminating exploitative and discriminatory practices against the Scheduled Castes, formerly known as untouchables. Here are key points about the movement:

#### 1. The Adi Andhra Dalit Movement

The Adi Andhra movement, which emerged in the 20th century, sought to eliminate social evils and promote equality. The term "Adi" means "original" in Hindi, signifying the community's indigenous status <sup>1</sup>. This movement gained recognition in 1984-1987, with the government officially acknowledging the Adi Andhra community.

### Phases of the Dalit Movement

The Dalit movement developed in three phases:

- Phase 1: Social Reformation - Combating inequality and injustice.
- Phase 2: Identity Formation - Creating a distinct cultural and social identity.

- Phase 3: Radicalized Protest - Asserting equal rights and social justice.

## Key Milestones

- The Bhakti movement (15th century) promoted equality and social justice.
- The Dalit Panther movement (1972) marked a significant victory.
- The Adi-Hindu movement developed a new cultural identity.

The Dalit movement has been successful in achieving its goals, despite facing numerous challenges <sup>1</sup>.

## 2. The Karamchedu Dalit Movement

The Karamchedu Dalit Movement was a pivotal event in India's struggle against caste-based oppression.

Here's a concise overview:

### Incident and Aftermath

On July 17, 1985, Kamma landlords attacked Dalits in Karamchedu, Prakasam district, Andhra Pradesh, killing six and injuring many <sup>1</sup>. The violence was sparked by a minor incident where a Dalit boy protested a Kamma boy polluting the water tank used by Dalits <sup>1</sup>. Hundreds of Dalits fled their homes after being targeted, and many sought refuge in nearby Chirala.

### Caste Dynamics

The Kamma caste held economic and political power, while Dalits worked as farm laborers for minimal wages <sup>1</sup>. This incident highlighted the deep-rooted caste hierarchies and discriminatory tendencies in Indian society [2].

### Consequences and Reactions

The Supreme Court sentenced one man to life imprisonment and 30 others to three years in jail, 23 years after the incident <sup>1</sup>. The massacre led to widespread outrage, inspiring the formation of the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha, which advocated for Dalit rights and fought against untouchability <sup>1</sup>.

## 3. The Neerukonda Dalit Movement

The Neerukonda Dalit movement was a pivotal event in India's struggle against caste-based oppression. In July 1987, the Neerukonda Massacre took place in Andhra Pradesh's Guntur district, where Dalits, specifically the Mala community, were attacked by the Kamma caste <sup>1</sup>. This brutal incident was sparked by the growing

social, political, and economic empowerment of Dalits, which threatened the dominance of the Kamma community.

### **Key Factors Leading to the Movement:**

- Historical Oppression: Dalits faced continuous harassment and social-political backwardness inflicted by the ruling classes <sup>1</sup>.
- Growing Empowerment: Dalits were gaining equal power and status, as guaranteed by the Indian Constitution, which was unacceptable to the Kamma community <sup>1</sup>.
- Social and Economic Progress: The Mala community's development in Sibiram village was seen as a threat to the Kamma caste's superiority.

The Neerukonda movement is a significant example of the ongoing struggle for social justice and equality in India, highlighting the need for continued efforts to combat caste-based discrimination.

### **4. The Tsunduru Dalit Movement**

The Tsunduru Dalit Movement was a pivotal event in India's struggle against caste-based oppression. Here's a concise overview:

#### **The Tsunduru Massacre**

On August 6, 1991, Reddy men, allegedly assisted by police, murdered 21-22 Dalits in Tsunduru, Andhra Pradesh <sup>1</sup>. The violence was sparked by a minor incident where a Dalit accidentally touched a Reddy woman, leading to social ostracization and economic hardship for Dalits.

#### **Key Factors Leading to the Movement**

- Caste-Based Violence: Dalits were targeted to maintain the Reddy caste's dominance.
- Social Boycott: Dalits faced a month-long boycott, forcing them to seek necessities and employment elsewhere.
- Economic Exploitation: Dalits relied on daily wages from laboring in Reddy-owned paddy fields.

#### **Prosecution and Aftermath**

- Charges were filed against 212 individuals, but 33 defendants died, and the Supreme Court dropped charges due to lack of evidence <sup>1</sup>.
- The Andhra Pradesh High Court's senior public prosecutor, Bojja Tharakam, fought for justice.

- The State of Andhra Pradesh filed appeals against the High Court ruling in 2014.

The Tsunduru movement highlights the ongoing struggle against caste-based violence and discrimination in India.

### **5. The Madiga Reservation Porata Samiti (MRPS)**

The Madiga Reservation Porata Samiti was founded on July 7, 1994, in Edumudi, Andhra Pradesh, with the goal of ensuring equal distribution of state allocations for all Scheduled Caste (SC) communities <sup>1</sup>. Led by Manda Krishna Madiga, the movement sought to categorize SC reservations into ABCD groups, addressing disparities in benefits distribution.

#### **Key Objectives:**

- Equal Distribution of Benefits: Ensure fair allocation of state resources among all SC communities.
- Categorization of SC Reservations: Divide SCs into four groups (A, B, C, D) for reservation benefits.

#### **Movement Milestones:**

- Justice Ramachandra Raju Commission (1997): Recommended categorization of SCs into four groups.
- Usha Mehra Commission (2008): Submitted report to Government of India, recommending amendment to Article 341 of Constitution.
- Ongoing Efforts: MRPS leaders continue to advocate for categorization, submitting a 92-page report to parliamentarians.

The MRPS movement has led to significant development for the Madiga community, but the struggle for justice persists <sup>1</sup>.

### **6. Mala Maha Nadu and Dalit Movement**

Dalit agricultural laborers, known as Mala, reside in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Karnataka. Classified as Scheduled Castes, they play a crucial role in assembly and parliament elections <sup>1</sup>. Despite this, political parties have exploited them as vote banks without ensuring justice.

#### **Need for Separate Reservation**

The Mala community demands separate reservation, similar to BC communities. Chandrababu Naidu's temporary separation of reservation in 1998 sparked this movement. Manda Krishna Madiga led the MRPS movement, advocating for categorization of Scheduled Castes into A, B, C, and D groups.

## Categorization and Controversy

The Chandrababu Naidu administration divided 59 sub-castes into four groups, allocating percentages accordingly. However, this move was met with opposition from the Mala Mahanadu movement, led by Pothula Vigneswara Rao. The Supreme Court ultimately ruled that micro-classification of scheduled castes into sub-groups was unconstitutional in 2004.

## Dalit Struggle and Awareness

The Dalit community continues to fight against systematic oppression, seeking equal rights and justice. With the Indian Constitution replacing Manu Dharma, Dalits have made progress socially, academically, and professionally. However, the caste system remains a complex issue, with over 3,000 castes and subcastes in India.

## Key Figures and Movements

- Manda Krishna Madiga: Led the MRPS movement for categorization of Scheduled Castes.
- B.R. Ambedkar: Fought against the caste system and advocated for Dalit rights <sup>1</sup>.

## References:

- 1) Fact Finding Team, 1985
- 2) Andhra Pradesh High Court's senior public prosecutor in the Tsundur massacre case. On July 30, 2014
- 3) On August 5, 2010, the submission of Report by the Justice (Retd.) Usha Mehra
- 4) Himansu Charan Sadangi, Dalit: The Downtrodden of India, Isha Books, New Delhi, 2008, p. 60; James Massey, The Bible and Dalits in Subhadra Mitra Channa, Joan P. Mencher, Life as a Dalit: Views from the Bottom on Caste in India, Sage Publication, New Delhi, 2013, p. 201.
- 5) Oliver Mendelsohn and Marika Vicziany, the Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty and the State in Modern India, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, p. 4.
- 6) The other two were Buddha and Kabir, a saint in Bhakti lineage with extremely radical outlook for his times. Eleanor Zelliot, 'Ambedkar's Life and His Navayana Buddhism', in Knut A. Jacobsen (ed.), Routledge Handbook of Contemporary India, Routledge, New York, 2016, p. 362.
- 7) In October 1966, in Oakland, California, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale founded the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. See Paul J. Magnarella, 'The Black Panther Party's Confrontation with

Ethnicity, Race and Class', in Santosh C. Saha (ed.), *The Politics of Ethnicity and National Identity*, Peter Lang Publishing, New York, 2007, p. 54. 8) 9)

- 8) Eleanor Zelliot, *From Untouchable to Dalit Essays on the Ambedkar Movement*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2001.
- 9) There were state-wide demonstrations against Basavalingappa, leading to his dismissal from the state cabinet. In its wake, the educated Dalit youth met in a conclave in Bhadravati and formed the 'Dalit Sangharsha Samiti', to resist their oppression. See Mendelsohn and Vicziany, *The Untouchables*, p. 215. 10)
- 10) Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1994, p. 337.
- 11) The Christian population as per the 2011 census is 27.8 million, of which the population of Christian Dalits is estimated around 70-80 per cent. See Carol Henderson, *Culture and Customs of India*, Greenwood Press, London, 2002, p. 40; P. Radhakrishnan, *Perfidies of Power: India in the New Millennium*, TR Publications, Chennai, 2005, p. 23; M. Azariah, *The Un-Christian Side of the Indian Church*, Dalit Sahitya Academy, Bangalore, 1985, p. 5.
- 12) <http://idsn.org/india-official-dalit-population-exceeds-200-million/> / Last accessed: 27 December 2015.
- 13) See list of the countries from CIA World Fact Book 2005 and population for the years 2009-2015.
- 14) Based on the census figures 2011. However, the Provisional Data of Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011 for Rural India released in July 2015 by the government shows much lower percentage of urbanisation for both Dalits and total population. The urbanisation for Dalits as per these data is 18.5 per cent and that for total population is 27 per cent. The SECC 2011 data also revealed that the bulk of India's rural households subsist on very low incomes.
- 15) The Government of India (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1936. Available at the site of Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment: [socialjustice.nic.in/schst.php](http://socialjustice.nic.in/schst.php). Last accessed: 27 December 2015.
- 16) Ibid.