



DANDORA : THE MADIGA MOVEMENT FOR EQUAL IDENTITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN A.P.

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All over India, Dalits have been organising themselves to fight against caste based inequalities and for respectable identity for the last eight decades. Liberation movements of various Dalit sections really began to take off from 1920's in the context of strong social reform anti-caste movements¹. Adi-Dharm movement of Punjab, Mahar Movement of Maharashtra, Adi-Andhra Movement of Andhra, Adi-Dravida Movement of Tamil Nadu, Adi-Karnataka Movement of Karnataka, created a struggle history of their own during this period against caste system.

The Madigas, one of 59 sub-castes of Dalits of A.P. have been struggling for respectable identity from as early as 1920's, but entered a unique phase with the struggle phase of Madiga Reservation Porata Samithi (M.R.P.S.) which is popularly known as Dandora. The Madiga consciousness reached a militant phase after passing through eight decades of search for respectable identity. The M.R.P.S. has been fighting for last 9 years for categorization of 59 scheduled castes into A.B.C.D. groups for equal distribution of reservation benefits among all sub-castes under the leadership of Manda Krishna Madiga². To counter the M.R.P.S. the Malas, one of the Dalit sub-castes, which has been cornering reservation benefits disproportionate to its population, has been opposing categorization under the auspices of "Mala Mahanadu" stating that categorization divides the Dalits in A.P.³. The Malas have been advancing all the arguments of anti-reservationists in order to enjoy lion's share of reservation benefits in the guise of Dalit unity⁴. In response to the demand of M.R.P.S. the government of A.P., under the leadership of N. Chandrababu Naidu issued orders categorizing scheduled castes into A.B.C.D. groups. The Malas challenged categorization in court on grounds that it is unconstitutional and is intended to divide the Dalits. Now, the Madigas are fighting for Justice in Honorable Supreme Court of India. The Dandora organised various programmes to exhibit its popular strength, and high level consciousness in fighting for their rights. It also triggered similar sub-caste movements among the tribals in the name of Tudumdebba of Koya Tribes, Banjara Bheri of Lamboda tribes and Doludebba of Yadavas, in Andhra Pradesh.

Identity Formation and Struggle for Respectable Identity

From the beginning the Madigas have been struggling for respectable identity while Brahminic class has been designating them as low or polluting. Arundatheeya Mahasabha was the first pioneering association that began search for respectable identity and awakening of Madigas. The first generation educated Madigas have gone through oral and mythological tradition of literature to locate their respectable identity and their genesis. The Madigas realised that the

love story of the pious woman Arundhathi and Vasistha reveals the genesis of Madigas that they were the first born on the planet earth. Based on the love story of Arundhathi, the Madigas believe that they are the grand children of the aborigine king, Jamabavantha, and Arundhathi the daughter of Karthamaprajpathi. The Madigas identify their genesis with Arundhathi – Jambavantha and believe they were first rulers of Indian land. A Telugu Madiga L.C. Guruswamy established “Arundathiya Mahasabha” in 1920 in the Madras Presidency to initiate the struggle for respectable identity. Guruswamy propagated the story of Arundathi and Vashistha and tried to project a high self-image of Madigas indicating Brahminic matrimonial relations with Madigas⁵. The story of Arundathi and Jamvavantha gives a proud account of Madigas. Today, the mythological woman, Arundathi, is an ideal and pious woman for all Hindus in India.

Arundhatiya Bandhuseva Mandali was established in 1981 by first generation Madiga employees under the Presidentship of Dr. Kishan Lal which inaugurated the era of prayers and petitions. There was a proposal to name the association as Madiga Sevemandali. That was discussed and rejected by majority of members, as the name Madigavaru is a perverted form of Madiguvarar which means people below us. For the first time Madhava Rao, former President of Bandhu Seva Mandali, used Madiga as a suffix and was the only activist known as Madhava Rao Madiga, much against the untouchable stigma of the caste. Bandhu Seva Mandali organises DASARAMILAP every year in Twin Cities, a cultural function of Madigas. Various cultural programmes were conducted on these occasions. Through this association the organisers strengthened the kin feeling among the Madigas in Twin Cities¹¹. In 1982, the Mandali published a booklet with the title “Status of Arundhathiyas” with detailed statistics showing the inequalities between Mala and Madiga sub-caste in various fields. Through this document, the Mandali demanded categorization of SCs into A.B.C.D. groups for the distribution of reservation benefits in proportion to population of each sub-caste¹². This document marks the turning point in Madigas movement. The Mandali had chosen prayer and petitions as a method to ventilate their demands. The Mandali gave representation to the successive Chief Ministers of A.P. demanding proportional representation in all the fields. Political response to the demand of Madigas in the form of promise came from Telugu Desam Party in 1982 Assembly election.

Struggle Phase of Madiga Movement

Andhra Pradesh Madiga Sangham was the first Dalit Association established with stigma carrying sub-caste name in the year 1982 under the leadership of Dr. Vidya Kumar¹³. It began the militant struggle phase of Madiga movement. This sangham gave a number of representations to the governments in 1980's for equal share in the fields of education, employment and politics by providing separate quota for Madigas. The activists of Madiga sangham entered State Assembly in 1982 while the session was going on and threw pamphlets from visitors gallery titled “separate reservation for Madiga” demanding separate reservation for Madigas. Consequently twelve activists of Madiga sangam were convicted by State Assembly for throwing pamphlets violating the rules of Assembly proceedings¹⁴. The activists also demanded the appointment of Inquiry commission for the redressal of Madigas grievances. After some time the Madiga sangham gave up its struggle for categorization as its activists felt categorization will have to be done only by the Parliament of India.

Assertion of Madiga Identity

Dandora Movement emerged in changing socio-economic and political conditions of the state. The conditions prior to the launching of Dandora Movement clearly indicate factors that shaped the Dandora movement of Madigas. By 1980s Madigas were released from leather goods work which they inherited in the form of Traditional occupation as the land lords stopped buying hand made leather chappals and leather goods of Madigas and started buying from urban chappal shops made of synthetics and rubber. As a result, Madigas who depended on the leather work became unemployed and

started searching for alternative modern occupations¹⁸. Madigas are late starters in education. Yet few of those who started primary school education in late 1970s and completed their school and Intermediate were thrown into mob of unemployed. By that time, in every village, Madigas compared themselves with Malas and find more number of unemployed educated youth among themselves and more number of employees among Malas. The Madigas feel that their due share from reservation benefits has been concerned by Malas. Anti and pro Mandal movement in the State of A.P. has given rise to new terms of political discourse. Mandalisation of politics questioned the continuance of upper caste leadership in Marxist and Non Marxist parties in the state. Naxalites like K.G. Sathya Murthy and Gaddar who were prominent leaders in People's War Group of CPI(ML) left the party over questions of caste politics. Mandal discourse reduced the caste blindness of Madiga youth working in Marxist and Non-Marxist parties and its sharpened their caste consciousness¹⁹. During early 1990's BSP's slogan "Vote Hamara Raj Tumhara Nahi Chelega, Nahi Chelega" had gone to every Madiga street and enlightened them on the importance of their votes as a source of political power in India. The whole process sharpened Madiga consciousness particularly of the youth in favour of struggle for their rights.

Struggle for Equal Identity Social Justice

Madigas struggle for equal opportunities is the struggle for equal identity and social justice from the very beginning. Due to their relative backwardness the Madigas. They are not able to avail reservation benefits equally compared to their co-suffers, the Malas. It is a fact the special treatment benefits have often been appropriated by more educated articulate and organised in S.C Communities²¹. As per the census of India the Madigas, and Malas Constitute 37,37,609 (46.94%) and the Malas 32,63,675 (40.99%) of SCs population. But the Malas have been cornering reservation benefits disproportionate to their population. These new inequality triggered Dandora Movement in Andhra Pradesh. The table given bellow gives a clear picture of disparity between Madigas and Malas in the field of Education, Employment and Politics.

Sphere of State Authority: State Vs Central Authority

Categorization policy formulated by Government of Andhra Pradesh brouht forth the controversy between state and central authority. In modern democratic system, State government is legal plural authority while central government represent monistic authority. In adjudication of categorization policy Madigas advanced pluralistic arguments while the Malas, advanced monistic arguments²⁹. The Malas under the auspices of "Mala Mahanadu" challenged G.Os issued categorizing 59 scheduled castes in the Honourable High Court of Andhra Pradesh stating that it is unconstitutional and categorization divides the Dalits.

Divisions and Unity

Brahminism divided Indian people into various endogamous caste groups, placing them in graded hierarchy and monopolized education, wealth and plitical power in the hands of few upper castes. This inequality produced Dalit movement in India. As a result of Dalit movement, reservation policy come into being for providing equality of opportunities for SCs and STs. But this policy could not distribute reservation benefits equally among 59 Scheduled castes in A.P. as the vertically structured system placed one scheduled caste bellow and above the other consequently new inequalities developed with in Dalits in the form of reservation benefits in A.P. Brahminism produced Dalit movement. Similarly Dalit Brahminism which believed in monopoly of one or two scheduled castes produced Dandora movement in A.P. creating divisions in Dalit movement the Dalit movement is caught in a paradoxical situation of having to unite the Dalits against the upper castes and to confront divisions with in Dalits. In other words the Dalit movement in A.P. is caught in dividing and uniting factors.

Brahminic values with in Dalits, social distance between their living quarters, political leadership with in Dalits inequality in reservation benefits, ruling class political parties are dividing factors of Dalit movement in A.P.

The caste system in India divided castes on the Brahminic values of purity and pollution which led to deprivation of lower castes by denying their legitimate share in the wealth of society, in political power and in education. After Independence, new inequalities are sharpening divisions. It is necessary to resolve these contradictions finding solution for these dividing factors.

The historical injustice suffered by the Dalits gave them a feeling of oneness vis-à-vis the upper castes. This feeling germinated from social and economic structure. The adversity resulted primarily from exploitation of caste system shaped uniformity in thought of Dalits. Untouchability, poverty, atrocities on Dalits and Dalit ideolog a synthesis of ideas of pioneering emancipatory thinkers are uniting factors.

Untouchability as a “touch me not notism” manifested itself in the form of social discrimination suffered by untouchables gives them a feeling “WE THE SUFFERERS OF UNTOUCHABILITY’. Even after 50 years of independence scheduled castes are suffering from disabilities of untouchability in various forms in Andhra Pradesh. Dalit consciousness, the realization of loss of prestige, societal benefits and need for togetherness to fight for lost rights exists among the Dalits in Andhra Pradesh. This consciousness is slowly growing to a stage where it breaks upper caste hegemony due to continuance of Brahminism within Dalits in form of separate wels, separate residence separate dining and wedding. The ideas of Phule, Periar, Ramasami Naiker and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar are sowing the seeds of fraternity and unity among Dalits. In a way their ideas are providing an ideological umbrella for Dalit consciousness against castism in A.P.

Identity Politics and Pluralistic Democracy

Accepting leadership from various social groups by parties and groups is a pre-condition for successful plural democracy. Politicians in Congress Party have been accommodating leaders from Madiga and Mala Communities in reserved constituencies from the beginning of electoral politics in A.P on the same condition of plural democracy.

But the issue of categorization was first linked up with electoral politics by political parties since 1982. In the initial stages politicians parties used to discuss inequalities between Malas and Madigas privately with Madigas and reminded them whenever there are elections to woo the Madiga voters the major chunk of Dalits in A.P. For the first time the congress party promised to do Justice to Madiga sangam in 1982 when they entered the State Assembly and threw pamphlets demanding proportional Justice. T.D.P. for the first-time proved to be pro-Madigas by allotting 20 seats out 39 Assembly tickets to Madigas in 1983 Assembly elections and to alienate Madigas from congress party. In subsequent elections held in 1985 the congress party entered into competition by giving more tickets to Madigas in the Assembly election to prove that the congress party is not lagging behind in giving political positions to Madigas. In 1998 the congress government in Andhra pradesh, headed by Vijay Bhaskar Reddy, elevated Koneru Ranga Rao, a Madiga, to the position of Deputy Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh before the parliament election to consolidate Madiga vote Bank⁴¹ in context of rising power of B.S.P in U.P. At this Junctures Madiga Reservation Poratha Samithi appeared on the scene and exhibited its strength in various rallies demanding categorisation of SCs, and succeeded in getting its demand conceded by T.D.P. Government.

CONCLUSION

Respectable identity movement of Madigas launched by L.C.Guru Swamy eight decades ago entered the struggle phase with Dandora and succeeded in enbolding Madigas in using their caste name as suffix to their names like Reddy, Rao and

Sharma. Once, the word Madiga was a term of abuse, symbol of pollution and stigma, but today Madigas proudly say that they are Madigas forgetting the word as abusive and stigma attached to it. Slowly the word is turning to be a symbol of struggle and source of political power. Inspired by Dandora movement Lambada, Koya, Tribes, Yadava, Gouda and other backward castes came forward to fight for their rights using caste name as suffix in Andhra Pradesh.

Malas have been enjoying reservation benefits on the grounds of social and educational backwardness. But they have been opposing demand of Madigas to take the same logic to the logical end and categorize SCs into A.B.C.D groups for equitable distribution of the reservation benefits among 59 Scheduled Castes. The upper castes advance unity arguments whenever lower castes demand their due share. By advancing the same argument Malas proved themselves to be Dalit Brahminic in their attitude to continue their monopoly in reservation benefits.

Triple identities – Arundhathi – Jambavantha, the Madiga and Dandora worked as an ideology for mobilization of mass people for all the public meetings organized by Dandora Movement. Their traditional identity which project them as first rulers of land gave them a feeling of pride in asserting their respectable identity and high image through the movement. Today, Common Madigas also feel that they were first born on Indian land reminding place of Arundhathi and Jambavantha in Indian mythology.

The schedule of scheduled castes is not a single caste it is a list of castes. Every sub-caste in the list has an independent identity having its own place, privileges, occupation in structured plural society. Dandora won the battle in proving a need for the protections of rights of every sub-caste, by their categorization on the lines of their inherited diverse occupations and backwardness. The argument of Malas in support of singleness of scheduled castes proved to be futile exercise in plural democratic set up. It further established a precedent in formulating plural Principles of Social Justice on the basis of plural identity.

The Madigas are successful in forcing the State Government in conceding their demands as a plural legal authority and formulate categorization policy. The movement worked believing in the pluralistic principles that decentralized local authority is more competent to formulate a social policy since the state government is more informed of the socio-economic problems of deprived groups than the Central Government. It is a classic example to explain a political situation how a developed community or caste makes use of existing law and machinery to defend its stand on a public policy for further development of the caste or group and advances monistic arguments.

The Dandora is a movement for equal identity and social justice. It believed that rights of weakest among weak, rights of every caste whether it is minor caste or major castes have to be protected equally. Dandora demonstrate that monopoly is the foundation of inequality and emphasised that monopoly of any form whether it is the monopoly of Brahmins or monopoly of Scheduled castes have to be broken for realization of equal identity and equal justice.

In a plural society every caste or group has to assert itself for protection of its identity and rights. When a disadvantaged group questions the privileges of advanced group, it naturally gives scope for divisions in the society. These divisions can be dissolved by finding remedy for causes of division disproportionate distribution of reservation benefits is primary cause for divisions of Dalits in A.P. Equal distribution of reservation benefits by categorization of SCs and reconciliation of more advanced group is the solution for divisions of SCs in A.P.

Plural acceptance of single caste leader is a pre-condition for success of pluralist democracy. General rejection of the leadership of lower castes is a political crisis in caste structured Indian society. Rejection of the Madiga leadership for Mahajan Front fore tells transitory nature of caste alliances in electoral politics in caste ridden Indian Society. The experiment of Mahajan Front concludes that caste based pluralistic politics continues with emergence of new alliances

like Mahajan Sangharashana Samithi and Mahajan Party till political consciousness of electorate reaches the higher level maturity to accept lower caste leader and sub-caste leaders committed to general interests or interests of all castes.

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