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MAPPING BACKWARD CLASS MOVEMENTS IN RESIDUARY STATE OF ANDHRA PRADESH: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Backward class movements (BCMs) have developed with the support of caste associations. This has paved the way for the identity questions of backward classes, especially after the declaration of Mandal Commission recommendations. The paper vividly analyses the trends of BCMS in the residuary state of Andhra Pradesh. Further, an attempt is made in the paper to bring forth the limitation of these movements and their impact on the future movements of backward classes.

Keywords: Caste, Backward Class, Identity, Movement, Associations, Andhra Pradesh.

Introduction

Andhra Pradesh is one of the two states in the country to initiate democratic decentralisation a process on the lines of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee Report in 1959 (Daftary, 2020; de Xavier, Lolayekar & Mukhopadhyay 2021; Dutta,1982; Mukherji & Ghosh,2017; Nadkarni, Sivanna & Suresh,2018; Rodriguez-Pose & Sandall 2008; Sanwal,1985; Suresh,2017; Williams & Thampi,2013). The process of decentralisation in the state can be broadly divided into six phases. In every phase, the successive governments, except during the 1960s and 1970s, where the Panchayati raj institutions (PRIs) positions were occupied by the rural upper class and upper castes, evaded the implementation of its own expert committees' recommendations and undermined the PRIs and their leadership. This is more so when the other backward classes (OBCs) and weaker sections, during the 1990s, entered into these institutions through reservation or in open competition; the state curtailed the powers, funds, functionaries and the status of PRIs and made them 'decorative ornaments' or 'institutions'. There have been no serious efforts made by Government, during the last five decades to make the decentralisation process more meaningful in terms of empowerment of citizens and improving in the delivery of services at the local level and altering the rural socio-economic structure. The state leadership, which has been controlled by the upper caste and class over the years in the state, is not willing to allow the marginalised sections of the society to participate in the development process of the state.

Therefore, the decentralisation process in the state has to be understood more from the class and caste perspectives, along with the other variables such as economic reforms, the conditionality of donor countries. Thus, the genuine empowerment of marginalised sections and also PRIs in the state is still a work in progress. (Bala Ramulu & Ravinder, 2012). Caste associations, which came into existence during the pre-independence period while working for their caste interests, helped to the emergence of Backward Classes Associations. The Backward Classes Association or federation of caste associations emerged in the post-independence period. This paper analyses the trends and limitations of these organisations in the Backward Castes mobilisation. The Backward Castes Mobilisation in the residuary State of Andhra Pradesh, despite its humble beginning, has been gaining from strength to strength, and today the Backward Castes constitute one of the most preponderant forces in the fast-moving dynamics of state politics.

Andhra Pradesh is unique in several respects. Some of these features are: its history of social movements; it was one of the few states which adopted the green revolution and resulted in widening the disparities between regions, classes and castes; the disempowerment of democratic institutions (PRIs) and empowerment of participatory institutions such as self-help groups (SHGs), poverty alleviation strategies; its remarkable progress in technical education and information technology; expansion of service sector; emergence of middle class, close nexus between upper class contractors and dominant political parties; increase in the aspirations of SCs, STs and BCs have share in the political power; concentration of economic and political power in the hands of a few castes – Reddis, Kammas, Velamas, demand for formation of State- in the limited land due to poverty, unemployment, economic disparities; increase in the religious symbolism, communication of social life; the State is at forefront in economic reforms; soft State for international agencies, corporate bodies, etc. which presents a complex process of socio-economic and political development.

The experience of the State with these unique and complex features raises several far-reaching issues and challenges for empowering socially excluded sections of society. The Government of India and the Government of Andhra Pradesh, during the last six decades or more, launched several socio-economic and political development programmes to empower the social groups informs of an



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increase in the educational and health status, economic conditions, skill formation, employment opportunities, opportunities to occupy the political positions etc. But the studies unfold that the government measures could not make significant positive change in the status of the Dalit Bahujans particularly in Andhra Pradesh (Berg, 2011 & 2014; Gorringer,2016; Ilaiah,2009; Mendonca, D’cruz & Noronha, 2022; Singh,2019). The economic reforms and globalisation process further deteriorate the conditions of these groups, as the State is withdrawing from its socio-economic responsibilities and leaving them to the market economy. This situation is causing for unrest in different parts of the State and also for formation of 'Caste Associations', i.e., Madiga Reservation Porata Samithi (MRPS), Mala Mahanadu, Tudum Debba (ST), Mokudebba (Gowda), Doludebba (Yadav), Chakirevu (Washer men) etc., to protect their identity (Alam,2014; Ankit,2018; Arora,2001;Aurora,1981;Boratti, 2022; Chuyen,2004; Das,2009; deZwart, 2000; Ferry,2022; Hegde,2021; Iyer,2019; Jayal,2014; Johnson,2012; Kapoor,2011; Kumar,Pratap&Aggarwal,2020; LaRocque,2006; Lee,2021; Murthy,2016; Oommen,1984; 2010; Pachua, 2014; Pani & Iyer ,2015; Pankaj, 2007; Parthasarathy, 2017; Singh, 2022; Somanaboina & Ramagoud, 2021; Tejani,2013; Velayudhan, 2018; and Verma, Verma & Singh 2002; Yadav,2011). And share in the fruits of development. Caste associations or caste/social identity groups-which can be called as social movements, have contributed to resolving the contradictions among different classes and groups and brought social change/ transformation in the State.

In this context the study of socially excluded groups, their ideology, aspirations and demands, articulation of their problems, the modus operandi in asserting their demands outside the institutional framework, leadership, the response of the State to the demands of the groups, and their occasional efforts at overthrowing the existing State power, etc. are the major concerns of the social scientists, particularly the Political Science academia. The objectives, ideology, programmes, leadership and organisation are important components of social movements. They are independent, influencing each other. The objectives of the movement changed from narrow particular local issues to aims for social transformation. Sometimes a movement which begins with broad objectives may, in the process, get bogged down in one or two particular issues. Ideology also undergoes change. It provides direction for evolving strategies and programmes; and also keeps the participants together by developing feelings of 'we-ness'. Various strategies and programmes are evolved to mobilise the people. They sustain the movement for a longer period. Leadership which initiates or emerges in the course of the growth of the movement, plays a crucial role in articulating the ideology and objectives evolving strategies and programmes and maintaining the spirit of the participants (Shaw, 2001). These issues and others need to be discussed to make sciences, particularly Political Science, more relevant to society. The present study is a modest attempt in that direction.

Backward Classes in Andhra Pradesh

The history of backward classes⁴ goes back to the colonial state of India. It is difficult to give any precise acceptable definition of caste (Sharan ,2003; Venkatesu ,2021). The task becomes all the more difficult when we try to define backward castes as they do not enjoy a uniform socio-economic status. However, most of scholars in social anthropology consider all the castes other than dwija⁵ (the twice-born who have the right to wear the sacred thread) as backward castes (Jassal, 2001; Jha,2002; O’Hanlon ,2010; Rout,2017; Srinivasan,1980). In Andhra Pradesh, the commissions identified 103 castes as BCs. The socio-economic background of these castes is not uniform and there are wide variations among them. However, most of them are agricultural labour, and marginal and small.

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Backward Class Movements (BCMs)

Major Issues and Challenges of Backward Class Movements

The success of any movement, including BCs depends on the identification and raising of issues which are concerned with the majority of the affected groups, sections, collective action, methods, goals of the group, leadership, organisational strengths etc. The experience with the BCs in Andhra Pradesh unfolds that the movements are encountering innumerable problems. One of the most important reasons is the lack of continuity of the struggle in raising the issues and leaving the issues unresolved. This is mostly due to the lack of unity among the BCs; the members of the groups are locked up in their family burdens; the oppressive methods adopted by the state machinery to curtail the movement, the steep opposition from the upper castes and classes, lack support from the Press and Media to the issues and sometimes negative to the issues and movements, as it is dominated and controlled by the upper castes/classes; launching the policies/programmes on an ad-hoc basis by the Government and suppressing the movements by co-opting or providing some concessions/benefits to the articulated sections among the BCs; corrupting the leadership; etc. which are collectively contributed/contributing for discounting of presenting the demands and resolving on a long last basis.

In this context, it is important to mention the experience of the social movements of BCs in other States and take inspiration from their experience/s, which fought for social justice. The movements were launched by BCs in other States, such as like Nadars in Tamil Nadu, Jatavas in Agra area of Uttar Pradesh, Ezhavas in Malabar region of Kerala, Adidarmas from Punjab. Though Buddha, Jaina, Shaiva and Bhakti movements came against the Brahmin domination in the unequal Hindu society. Though these movements were not successful in liberating the B. Cs completely, they were successful to a great extent. In addition to the above, some of the people who benefitted from the British liberal education system contributed to the success of the social movements.

Capturing of Political Power by Upper Castes

Another important reason for the lack of progression in the BCs movements is that the political power was controlled by the upper castes – Brahmins, Reddys, Kammas, particularly in the initial period of independence. During the 1950s and later, the upper castes formed sangams (caste associations), i.e., Brahmin Sangam, Reddy Jana Sabha and Kamma Jana Sabha and availed the benefits from the government and also captured the political power at the local and State level. These groups acted as stumbling blocks for BC movements in the State. The BCs were not benefited from the development process, i.e., the green revolution strategy, which widened disparities among the regions, classes and castes. The BCs were subjected to deprivation of social and economic justice.

Politics of Accommodation by Political Parties

During the 1970s, the Congress Party advocated for reservations against BCs in education and employment to tide over the unrest among the poor and BCs as well. The then Congress Government tried to implement the recommendations of Anantharaman Commission for access to education and employment opportunities in the State. The Congress Government also appointed Muralidhar Rao Commission to study the status of BCs and recommend measures for the development of BCs in the State. But due to internal clashes in the Congress Party, the then Congress Government could not implement the recommendations of the Commission.

The Telugu Desam Party (TDP), a regional political party, which came into power in 1983 with the support of BCs, made efforts to implement the Muralidhar Rao Commission. In order to further consolidate its support base, particularly from BCs, the TDP Government enhanced the percentage of reservations of seats from 25 per cent to 44 per cent in the education and employment in public institutions. Through the BCs movements/organisations / associations have contributed for the enhancement of awareness and consciousness about their surroundings, they could not bring all different BC organisations/associations under one umbrella to fight against the exploitators / groups/agencies / State to ensure their legitimate rights and justice. This is mostly due to heterogeneity of castes/ associations, issues, common agenda, philosophy or ideology, leadership and support/patronage from the political parties.

Reservation

Accordingly, reservations in employment and educational institutions were raised from 25% to 44% by issuing G.O. As soon as the G.O. was released, pro and anti-reservation agitations were cropped up in the universities and government organisations all over the state in big way. These agitations have brought in differences in the so-called 'Class intellectuals', 'secular intellectuals' and different political parties and the real face of 'Caste' hegemony has come in the forefront. Taking into account the seriousness of the issue, the Telugu Desham Government approached the Honourable High Court of the state. But the Court quoting the earlier verdict of Supreme Court (Balaji vs Mysore) on the ground that the percentage of the reservation can't cross the limit of 50%, rejected the plea. Taking advantage of the court verdict, Telugu Desham advocated that though it is committed to the welfare of the Backward Classes, the courts are creating obstructions in its way. Therefore, it is clear that whatever may be the political party, they have no sincerity



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toward the development of OBCs. These developments have made all the backward classes unite and brought them to one forum on common agenda from 1990 onwards.

The backward classes group is a heterogeneous group and therefore, there are so many hindrances in the movement of backward classes. These are relating to “Caste class, issues and strategies”. First of all, backward castes are to be categorised into groups based on their numerical strength. These should be based on small numerical castes, medium castes and big numerical strength castes. In these three caste groups, there are three kinds of problems. The first problem is related to education, employment and political reservation. The second problem is related to the occupations of these caste groups. In backward classes a problem of a particular caste group may not be problem for other caste group. For example, the grazing problem of shepherds may not be a problem of weavers (Padmasalis). Like that, the problem of weavers arising out of new textile policy is not a problem of shepherds. The third one is Backward classes were classified as A, B, C, D groups on the basis of their occupations. There are also problems, like; the castes in one group are demanding that the government should change their group. The castes that belong to “D Group” are demanding to include "A Group" and "A Group" castes are demanding the government that they also should be recognised as Schedule Tribes (STs). How could this diversity of problems be brought to one platform?

Regarding the movement of the backward classes, a number of camps are claiming, but three camps are doing their jobs extensively. One is the democratic method led by old generation³³, working on general BC issues; the second is the radical movement led by students and youth³⁴ demanding education and employment issues. Third one is democratic and progressive in nature, articulating on political conscious issues. All these movements also don't have the capacity to shake the foundations and bring radical change in society. The reason is that the issues chosen by the leadership and strategies followed are of that nature. Most of these are temporary in nature, aiming to grab power as early as possible. This is not the spirit of any movement. These qualities are no exception for the caste movements also.

Reformation movements and Backward classes

To understand the limitations of movements of backward classes, it is necessary to understand the movements of others launched by other than the BCs. The movements can be categorised into three. They are: The first one is the social reformation movement, the second is emancipation, and the third is transformation. There is an inseparable relationship between these three movements. The first movement leads to the second one and the second one strengthens the third movement. The ‘reformation movement’ is not visible in the backward classes, but the movement is seen and continues to dominate in the upper castes. Due to the ideas of Ambedkar the movement also is visible among the Dalits. But in backward classes identification of the philosopher and guide is the problem. Though the thoughts of Mahatma Phule, Ambedkar and Ramaswamy Naikar can be followed, it was not done in backward classes’ movements like Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Historically, this social reform movement concentrated on three fields. First is caste reforms, second is professional reforms, and third in the field of educational reforms. If we have to understand 'Caste' reforms, we need to pose ourselves one question. On what base do the caste reforms have to be taken up? Whether they can be considered as anti-Hindu, anti-caste, or Hindu reforms. Of these, the backward classes are not in favour of the first two because they are not trained towards that kind of awareness. So, therefore, it needs to begin with 'Hindu reforms', and it also needs to understand the writings of the above-said philosophers historically. This necessitates that there is a need to concentrate on the 'Hindu reforms', understanding the writings of Dalit Bahujan intellectuals in the changed circumstances³⁶. First of all, to begin with, opposing the temple and faith in 'God' is not serious but demanding the rights in the temple affairs is more genuine and logical. The second one is to understand how 'Viswa brahmans' have released themselves from 'Brahmana thatvam” (Brahmanism). Understanding how 'Productive castes' have come out of 'Brahmanism' and where other castes also follow the footsteps of the production caste, it is sure will be a good foundation for Hindu reforms. It will be a death blow to Brahmanism. From birth to death, the role of Brahmins is to be avoided. These reforms are to be taken with strong and convincing alternatives. We have to take the essence of anti-Brahmin agitations in our neighbouring states and other 'self-respect' movements. In the coastal Andhra region, “Reddis” and “Kammas” questioned the Brahman hegemony in different forms, and finally, adjustments were taken place, and they became partners in the power. This kind of Hindu Caste reform should be taken up strongly in BCs also.

The second reform in the occupational sector by bringing gradual changes in this. This will not only bring changes in the culture, language and style but also it enables traditional castes-based occupational groups to move towards modern, commercial professions to improve the social and economic status of the BCs. The third aspect pertains to the educational sector. The experience reveals that those who studied English education with the British missionaries were active in the movements and provided leadership during the freedom movement. The dominant castes, more particularly the 'Reddis' and 'Kammas' have largely benefitted by their initiation into Christianity, without disturbing their roots. Some extent, 'Dalits' also benefitted by converting to Christianity. The 'Dalits'



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are able to secure 'equal status' by moving from unequal Hindu stratification and untouchability and being exposed to English education'. This has led to the emergence of a strong 'Dalit intellectual class' and for the strengthening of "Dalit Movement" in the state and elsewhere also. The above two developments have not taken place in the Backward classes. At least from now onwards, the Backward Classes people should give priority to learning 'English education' which enable them to bring reforms – in terms of identifying issues, agenda, philosophy, leadership, methods of articulation etc in the movements.

Liberation movements

The reform movement should spread to all the castes, and it should not be confined to a single caste. The reformists in different castes should come forward to liberate themselves from the social bondages. In order to understand this, we must know about different social, economic and political liberation movements that have taken place in different times. If we look at the world history pertaining to the liberation movements of social issues, we understand that these are linked with the political liberation movements. It is easy to intermingle to educate people about the social evils as part of the political freedom movement. But in the case of India in general and the state of Andhra Pradesh in particular, the social reform movements were not part of political movements. The leaders advocated that, first, let us solve the political problems i.e., gaining freedom from the Britishers. All other issues like caste, religion and region could be taken up later. Though there was mention of Gandhian notion of 'Harijan' for the upliftment of Dalits here and there, there was no comprehensive plan in this regard. The reform movements of Raja Rammohan Roy at the national level, Kandukuri Veereshalingam at the state level were not meant for the total transformation of the society but helped to the eradication of social evils in the Brahmin communities.

The problems like remarriage of widows, 'Satisahagamanam', were not the major problems of 'Dalit bahujans'. These reform movements should be treated only as 'Brahmin reform movement' but not social reform movements. Therefore, liberation among the backward classes is not possible unless the social problems are solved. The intellectuals coming from different caste groups understand the problems fully, and they can only strive for the liberation of their communities through their writings, comparisons and Maneuvers. The reformers who aspire for these kinds of changes and strive for caste reforms they can remain in the annals of History.

The liberation from Economic bondage is dependent on reforms in the occupational sector. If the Backward Classes turn from their traditional occupations to modern commercial occupations, they not only would be in a position to increase their income levels but also helpful in the liberation process. In the 'Andhra region', the 'Reddi Maha Sabha' has come out with a resolution stating that land and the product accrued through the land are uneconomical and suggested the idea of concentrating on Industries. This slogan enabled the Reddi Community's interest in centralising economic power and getting full hold of the political sphere. Likewise, up to 1965, the year, which sown seeds for green revolution, there was not much growth among the 'Kamma' community. They did not possess the economic capacity to face the 'Reddi Community'. But due to Green revolution, the Kamma Community was successful and was able to increase and spread its hold into other areas such as cinema and other industrial sectors. With this, the profits which were in lakhs has grown into crores. This economic centralisation has enabled them to get control of the political sphere. These factors have led to a cyclical approach where the Brahmans, Reddy's and Kammass came to power in rotation. As more economic centralisation was taken place in the private sector, the state's responsibility was to look after the welfare of its citizens. Under these circumstances, the then Mrs. Indira Gandhi Government Nationalised the Banks, Indian Airlines and life insurance to bring equality to society. This decision was taken on one side to provide employment guarantee to the 'Brahminical class' who were working in the private sector and maintaining political stability. Today in the name of Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation (LPG), the dominant castes are garnering wealth by privatising the Public Sector Institutes. Another danger is that in the Government sector is that there will not be any employment, and therefore, the reservation to the BCs doesn't arise. The process of keeping the Backward Classes out of higher education started with this; the rulers have taken care to stop the emergence of 'intellectual class' among the Backward Classes.

In the liberation issues, the last one is 'political liberation'. To get liberated from dominant castes and power links, all those discussed above should have to be completed to make it possible to reach near the 'power status'. This may be seen as a long-term process. But without a proper foundation, whatever temporarily visible emotional status will not last long. Nowadays, what is happening is that many castes are exaggerating their number against reality. This they are using as a weapon to bargain with those who are in power. It is good to have a physical map showing the presence of different caste people in different places representing all the 93 backward classes⁴¹. In this process, we will come to know that certain groups spread throughout the state and certain groups are only represented in some pockets. Already there is a leadership tussle between the groups with fewer numbers and the groups with a larger number. Therefore, instead of dreaming with a utopian outlook, we must go forward by keeping reality in mind. If there appears an outfit of all backward classes as 'Democratic Federation', then only it is possible to come out of all internal problems.



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Conclusion

Transformation should be a continuous process. The intellectual groups should work on this and, from time to time, should inform the changes and developments that are taking place to the people. The intellectual groups should also come forward to study history and evolution of different castes; otherwise, there is a danger of misinterpreting the historical background of certain backward classes. As discussed earlier, if the reform movements and liberation efforts go in the right way, there is a possibility of strengthening this transformation process. Marching from traditional to modern will be a sign of Development. But going from traditional to sticking to 'roots' by saying that this is 'self-identity' in the name of 'self-respect' will be an act of backward thinking. All these aspects we must discuss logically, and the 'newspapers' should become a platform for these issues. For almost all-backwards caste groups to publish Caste magazines, and they mostly confined to marriages, advertisements, and felicitations of individuals. But they should publish the issues –social, economic, cultural, and political related BCs and educate the people.

The BCS groups/organisations should work unitedly by leaving their own caste identity and fighting for the liberation of BC communities. During the year 1917, in the Mysore state, under the leadership of C.R. Reddy all non-Brahmin groups were united i.e., Okkaliga, Lingayath, Muslims and formed as 'Prajamithra Mandali' and took power into their hands. In Andhra Pradesh also, the time has come for the historical event of 'Triveni Sangamam' of all the Backward Classes in the State for the overall development of BCs. In this regard, the intellectuals, and associations should play a vital role in uniting the BCs and enlightening the communities about their rights.

Lack of autonomous or independent backward castes movement from the time of Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy to contemporary rulers of Andhra Pradesh, all most all the Chief Ministers always tried to divide the backward castes organisations. Every Chief Minister created his own BC leader and association to weaken the mainstream movement and to protect the ruling class/caste from the threat of the backward caste's unity. Another disturbing development among the backward castes in recent times has been an unhealthy growth of elitist tendencies, thus restricting the benefits of socio-economic development to a privileged few. This tendency has to be curbed by the process of democratisation of the movement, ensuring distributive justice to the underdog as well. In recent times one more harmful aspect of the movement has been the rise of leadership crisis among the B.C. organisations. The identity crisis of the leaders goes against the very spirit of the Backward Castes Movement seeking equality. The introduction of power politics and group approach has led to factional politics in Backward Class Organisations. The best palliative for doing away factionalism in the Backward Class organisations is to put aside individual rivalries, and each identify himself with the movement of the downtrodden for the realisation of their common objectives.

Another limitation of the backward castes' mobilisation is that in the process of globalisation, the entire Indian economy is getting privatised, which is big threat to the reservation policy of the weaker sections. That is why the backward classes' movement is neither strongly opposing the privatisation process nor demanding reservations in the private sector. The entire process of mobilisation is limited to the demands of educated middle classes of the backward classes. Since it doesn't have a mass character, therefore, the backward classes in Andhra Pradesh are lagging behind in capturing political power when we compare it with the backward castes movement of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, where they have captured the leadership of the political parties, but in Andhra Pradesh still, the political parties sabotaging the backward castes rather than die latter capturing the form.

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