

Agrarian Class and Caste Relations in 'United' Andhra Pradesh, 1956–2014

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This article traces the trajectory of agrarian relations in terms of class and caste in Andhra Pradesh from 1956 to 2014. The analysis shows that land remained in the control of upper castes in coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema in Telangana, landownership came into the hands of Other Backward Classes primarily due to peasant movements. The contradictions of agricultural workers, tenants, and the landless with the rich peasant class led to intense caste conflicts in coastal Andhra, factional violence in Rayalaseema, and struggles against the state and propertied classes in Telangana.

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How did class–caste dynamics change in (erstwhile) united Andhra Pradesh (AP) between 1956 and 2014? Is there a significant difference in the agrarian structure of the two states (Telangana and (residual) Andhra Pradesh), and if so, what are the implications for agrarian change in these two new states? What is the correlation between the changing landownership patterns and the eruption of caste conflicts, caste violence, and other such manifestations?

The discussion on class–caste relations was well articulated in the "mode of production" debate that took place in the 1970s in India. Several scholars argued that the Indian agrarian economy in its contact with capitalism led to the emergence of a capitalist class—one that was independent of caste identities. Hence, class-based exploitation was mediated through caste identities (Omvedt 1978; 1982; Rudra 1978; Gough 1980). Similarly, subaltern studies scholars such as Ranajit Guha (1983), enriched our understanding by questioning nationalist historiography by emphasising the narration of social history from below. Extensive debates indicated that caste does perform certain crucial economic functions—caste determines access to land (the principal means of production), control over the labour process, and the forms of exploitation (or the manner in which surplus is appropriated from direct producers). Indeed, Irfan Habib (1995: 176) has shown that in medieval India the caste system was an important pillar of the system of class exploitation.

Class and caste identities are interconnected in complex ways and the nature of the interconnections certainly varied with time and space. Just as caste may

take on various forms and meanings, class should not be regarded as a fixed category either. The ways in which these types of social identities are defined and articulated with one another in concrete situations should be a matter for empirical investigation rather than absolute theorising. While many debates have taken place about the relationship between class and caste, the dichotomisation of the two has hardly ever been challenged (Upadhyaya 1988). The conceptual insights and observations mentioned here have a bearing on understanding the current agrarian scenario. In the three regions of united AP too, class–caste articulations have been complex and different.

For the purpose of this article, the post-independence period of AP has been divided into four phases; from 1956 to the mid-1960s; mid-1960s to the late 1970s; early 1980s to the mid-1990s; and the last is from 1995 to 2014. These phases have been classified based on the structural changes that occurred in the agrarian sector with implications for class–caste relations. The first phase was dominated by state-led agricultural development with huge investments in irrigation projects, implementation of land reforms, etc. The second phase saw accelerated agricultural development due to Green Revolution technologies. The third phase saw agricultural development in non-irrigated regions due to a "lagged Green Revolution" (Vakulabharanam 2004). In the fourth phase, the agricultural sector witnessed a crisis and a steep rise in land prices due to neo-liberal policies. Agrarian change in these four phases also reflects deeper changes in social relations. The classification of the first three phases was earlier attempted by A R Desai (1986) and Balagopal (1986). Similarly, in their recent paper, Vakulabharanam and Sripad Motiram (2014: 59–60) divided the period 1956–2010 of AP into four phases based on growth patterns and relations among various groups. The present paper has adopted the periodisation from these studies.

Period 1: 1956 to Mid-1960s

Several scholars pointed out that the Krishna and Godavari deltas qualitatively

influenced the dynamics of Andhra's economy and politics (Washbrook 1973; Baker and Washbrook 1975; Rao 1985; Upadhy 1988; Reddy 1989). In the post-independence period, coastal Andhra's feudal agrarian relations (for example, old zamindars) witnessed a transformation of feudal agrarian relations (for example, old zamindaris) into owner-cultivator practices through land reforms and peasant struggles (Rao et al 1984). The advancement of commercial agriculture began the process of economic differentiation in the agrarian sector, which gave rise to a rich peasant class. Commenting on this process of change, Srinivasulu (2002: 5) says:

A significant aspect of rural transformation that has occurred since the late 19th C is the differentiation of peasant society and the emergence of enterprising agrarian stratagem belonging predominantly to the *Kamma*, followed by *Reddy* and to a lesser extent *Kapu* communities. The educated elites of these peasant castes were catalytic in the emergence of caste-specific assertion movements against *Brahmin* domination. They also played a leading role in *kisan* movements and anti-Zamindari struggles by rallying the lower agrarian strata. Later, the ryots and tenants of these peasant castes gained access to most of the fertile lands.²

Colonial accounts indicate as many as 80 *polegars* (powerful local elite) in Rayalaseema used violence and domination to extract money coercively from the peasants. Understanding the "polegar culture" in Rayalaseema is important for analysing landownership patterns, caste domination, and wealth accumulation processes (APCLC 1996). In the post-independent India, due to land reforms and peasant struggles, the land transfers took place from absentee landlords and Brahmins, to that of agrarian castes Reddys and Kammass. It was through the Reddy-Karanam, a local self-governance mechanism, that Reddys gained effective authority, and eventually own large tracts of land in the four districts of Rayalaseema (Narayana 2012).

The Telangana region, part of Hyderabad state, was under the Nizam's feudal rule. The *jagirdars* were so powerful that they could grab land by fraud, which in countless instances reduced the actual cultivator to the status of a tenant at will or a landless labourer. As

Srinivasulu (2002) pointed out, the Muslim jagirdars and Hindu Deshmukhs (belonging to the Reddy, Velama, and Brahmin castes), locally known as *doras*, were dominant as they were moneylenders-cum-village officials. Moreover, jagirdars, zamindars, and Deshmukhs exploited their tenants and labourers through such pernicious practices as *vetti* or feudal labour. The landless agricultural labourers of the Madiga and Mala castes were the immediate victims of the *vetti* system, and had a sub-human level of existence. The situation of peasant women particularly from the lower castes was even worse. The disappearance of virtually any distinction between tenants and agricultural labourers led communists to build a peasant movement during 1946 to 1951 (Sundarayya 1972; Reddy 1989: 276).

The sustained peasant resistance provoked land reform inquiry and legislation (Inamdari Act) that led to significant changes in the agrarian social structure of the Telangana region. Although all the agrarian classes participated in the armed struggle, it was largely the Reddy ryots and tenants who benefited from land redistribution, while Dalits and lower castes had to be content with common pastures and waste lands (Srinivasulu 2002). With the cultivation of commercial crops, subsistence agriculture underwent a gradual transformation giving way to a market economy in which Patel-Patwaris from upper castes controlled land and resources while the middle- and lower-caste groups had to depend on these landowning groups in Telangana.

Period 2: Mid-1960s to 1980s

It was expected that with land reforms there would be far-reaching changes in the agrarian system including changes in landownership patterns as well as social relationships. However, it had only limited "perceptible change" with some variations among the three regions. The Green Revolution, initiated during this period, marked a significant landmark in the agrarian history of India. In coastal Andhra, the owner cultivators accelerated the process of capitalist development in the region even as wage labour

became "free" in the sense that they came out of the old *watana* system, which entailed attached labour practices and kind-wage payments. The new capitalist class of farmers, who already had assured canal irrigation, got higher rates of return only with the Green Revolution (Parthasarathy 2004). It is this rich peasant class which contributed to changes in inter-caste relations and hierarchy, and provided support and leadership in coastal Andhra politics. As Carol Upadhy (1988) says, these rural capitalist classes were not only visible because of their economic and political power, but they also appeared to be culturally distinct. The dominant class in coastal Andhra (Kamma and Reddy) emerged out of landed peasant cultivators (*kulaks*).

In the post-Green Revolution period, this new capitalist class utilised new technologies of high-yielding inputs, irrigation technologies, tractors, etc, to maximise rates of return on investment. Apart from higher profitability for these classes, the other important development was that tenancy showed a rapid decline through these decades. By the 1980s, only one in eight cultivators was a recorded tenant as opposed to a ratio of one in five earlier. Tenants had joined the ranks of agricultural workers. Combined with high demographic pressure on marginal landholdings, there was an increase in the agricultural labouring population (Parthasarathy 2004).

One needs to recognise subregional variations within coastal Andhra. For instance, north coastal Andhra is more backward compared to other districts in the region. Social differentiation between classes, castes, and tribes is altogether different from central and south coastal Andhra. The Srikakulam uprising in the late 1960s was not a sudden outburst of discontentment of the peasantry in north coastal Andhra. This armed struggle, like all other peasant struggles in history, had its genesis in the accumulated deprivation of the peasantry and various other forms of social and economic exploitation and domination in the agrarian economy (Singha 2004).

In Rayalaseema there was limited canal irrigation. Peasants there relied on

tank irrigation. With large tracts of dryland agriculture and a small proportion of irrigated land, the Green Revolution had a limited impact. Both fertile irrigated lands and unirrigated lands were owned by the dominant castes—Reddys and Kammās. Apart from agricultural income, the major source of non-agricultural income came from civil contracts, arrack contracts, barites, cement factories, and other mining activity. These economic resources of the region and the income from it are also controlled by the same dominant-caste communities. Unlike coastal Andhra and Telangana, Rayalaseema has a distinct (violent) faction culture at the village level which is probably built on the earlier polegar system (APCLC 1996). While the contending leaders in every village normally come from the dominant caste, all the other fellow caste inhabitants of the village become the supporters of one or other faction.

Normally backward castes are pitted against Dalits as two different warring factions. Village panchayat elections become the pitched battlefields for demonstrating each faction's supremacy over the other. Use of violence to win local panchayat elections, arrack contracts, civil contracts, commissions from factory managements, were skilfully executed to pave the way for regional- and state-level leaders. In fact, Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee (1996) document points out that the dominant-caste leaders became arrack contractors, later became mandal- district- and sometimes state-level political leaders. The rich peasant class continued their domination through agricultural income in their respective villages and non-agricultural income from outside the village. The small farmers and agricultural workers survived through meagre incomes from agriculture, dairying, and through migration incomes. What sustained the domination and exploitation in Rayalaseema region was both economic and social capital by bomb- and gun-wielding factionist gangs of Reddy warlords (Balagopal 1991: 2400). The power was derived from the village Reddy-Karanam system as well as the upper-caste leaders' access to the state government.

The communists of the mainstream parties and Maoists in Rayalaseema thought that they would be able to break the faction (feudal) power of the upper castes by supporting the weaker ones among them. However, in the process, weaker faction groups actually used and appropriated the communists. These upper-caste landlords, both strong and weak faction leaders, gained eventually in terms of contracts, commissions, and tenders and grew as the capitalist class, while the communists and Maoists lost their support base both within middle peasants and agricultural workers (Balagopal 1991: 2401).

In Telangana, agricultural development took place partially as there was limited assured irrigation. Land was in the control of Reddy and Velama landlords. With growing disparities among social groups, rising unemployment, poverty and limited scope of mobility for agricultural wage labourers and tribals, this region witnessed a strong influence of the Maoist movement (Srinivasulu 1994, 2002). When the conflict between upper-caste landowners and that of agricultural workers and tribals intensified, Maoists exerted tremendous pressure on the landowning classes. This paved the way for a second wave of land transfers, as the upper-caste landowners in Telangana sold their lands and fled from villages. These landowning groups relocated to urban locations as they had the advantages education and entrepreneurial activities through caste and kinship networks. Thus the lands sold by them in the villages got transferred to middle castes particularly the Gouds, Yadavs, Munnuru Kapus, Mudiraj, etc, while upper castes purchased properties in and around Hyderabad. Although there was redistribution of landownership from upper castes to Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in Telangana, several studies (see for instance Singha 2004) pointed out that government interventions during this period were ineffective in terms of irrigation and other agricultural development. Also the serious neglect of educational and employment opportunities, distribution of water resources and overall development of the Telangana region gave rise to the demand for a separate

state during 1968–72 and subsequently the current movement from 2002 to 2014 culminating in Telangana statehood on 2 June 2014.

By the mid-1970s, small farmers from south coastal Andhra belonging to the Kamma caste sold one or two acres in their region to buy 20 or more acres of dryland in Telangana and Rayalaseema. By investing in tube well irrigation, these lower-class Kamma peasants established themselves as middle peasants in these two regions. Also, Kamma middle and rich peasants bought lands in *ayacuts* of Nagarjuna Sagar, Sriram Sagar, KC canal, Tungabhadra, Pennar River, all of which altered agrarian class relations in Telangana and Rayalaseema regions (Chandralatha 1997). That is how Kammās joined the ranks of Reddys and Velamas and staked claim for political power in a few districts even in Telangana.

The class dynamics within Kammās in Krishna delta are interesting to note. While small farmers belonging to Kamma from Krishna delta³ migrated to Telangana and Rayalaseema to become middle, in some cases even rich peasants, the upper-class Kammās reinvested their surplus in urban centres in coastal Andhra. The small farmers from among this caste had to migrate out as the existing economic and social conditions were not conducive for their dignified existence (Chandralatha 1997: 17). This migration of capital and people ultimately forged unity among the different classes within Kammās and were able to politically emerge by the 1980s as a force in and outside the region.

Period 3: 1980s to 1994

Post-1980s, a dramatic transformation occurred in the deltas of coastal Andhra. The class of capitalist farmers generated huge surpluses that were channelled into aquaculture, large coconut farms, rice milling, petty investments (for example, in cinema halls, hotels and restaurants) in semi-urban and urban towns in the region (Balagopal 1987). Later, this class reinvested its surplus in Hyderabad in various “new economy” enterprises (for example, shares in the information technology companies and pharma

enterprises). There was also significant investment in education (engineering and medical colleges) and health (corporate hospitals) across urban centres in the region and Hyderabad (Damodaran 2008). The Kamma, Reddy, Rajus, and Kapus constituted the rich-peasant class. They consolidated their economic and political power, and controlled the economy in the region and in Hyderabad. They also constituted the interlinked moneylender-merchant-input-agent class that managed all kinds of agricultural transactions related to commissions, inputs, credit, and marketing of agricultural produce of the coastal Andhra region.

Table 1: Distribution of Social Groups by Region in 2010

Region/State	(in percentage)						Total
	SCs	STs	OBCs	High Castes*	Muslims	Other Minorities	
Andhra Pradesh	16.2	6.6	44.5	22.0	9.2	1.7	100
Telangana	15.8	8.9	50.7	10.7	12.4	1.5	100
Rayalaseema	16.7	2.9	43.0	24.2	12.5	0.9	100
Coastal Andhra	16.3	6.0	39.0	32.0	4.5	2.2	100

* High castes, upper castes, and dominant castes are interchangeably used in this article. This category includes: Reddys, Kammas, Kapus, Rajus, and Velamas. Although the numerical strength of Brahmins and Vysyas is not significant in rural areas, they are also included in this category.

Source: Srikrishna Committee Report (2010).

During this period, with the emergence of the Telugu Desam Party in the 1980s, two important developments took place. First was the abolition of the Patel-Patwari system in Telangana, Reddy-Karanam in Rayalaseema, and Munasabdari system in coastal Andhra, all of which served the interests of the rich-peasant class in Andhra Pradesh. It was primarily used as a weapon to exploit and socially control the small and marginal farmers belonging to lower castes by manipulating land records. The abolition of this system led to radical changes in rural Andhra Pradesh, reducing feudal control over the lower castes and land poor. Second, large-scale violence in coastal Andhra took place. The violence that took place in Vijayawada between the agrarian castes Kamma and Kapus (murder of Chalasani Venkataratnam, Vangaveeti Ranga) was to establish caste supremacy in the political domain (Parthasarathy 1998). Also, caste violence between agrarian Kammas and landless Dalits (Karmachedu in 1985; Neerukonda in 1987), Reddys and Dalits (Chundururu in 1991) were conflicts between contending agrarian classes. In fact Balagopal (1991) lists 13 such instances of caste conflicts between rich peasant class Kammas, Reddys, Kapus,

Rajus and that of landless, tenants, and Dalits during 1985–91.

By the 1980s, a lagged Green Revolution took place in both Telangana and Rayalaseema. Intense commercial agriculture led all agrarian classes towards high investment, high-risk agriculture leading them deeper into agrarian crisis. While the dominant castes had some social support mechanism in crisis situations, the small and marginal farmers, and tenants from OBCs and Dalit communities became vulnerable. Liquor contracts increased when Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao (popularly known as NTR), the actor-turned chief minister

and founder of the Telugu Desam Party implemented Varuni Vahini, a scheme by the government to open numerous belt shops (unregulated small liquor outlets) in villages. These liquor contracts and belt shops became important sources of revenue for rich peasant classes in all three regions. Through this liquor economy, upper castes maintained their political and social domination over lower castes, creating neo-bondage in the process.

The critiques of Green Revolution pointed out that only a particular class of farmers with higher resources benefited immensely. What has been undermined in this debate is about the social power of these caste communities that provided access to irrigation, land, credit, seeds, and other institutional sources. Therefore, it was high-value agriculture for

rich classes while it was high-risk agriculture for small and marginal farmers (Reddy 2006). The vulnerability of lower castes in bearing the burden of high-risk agriculture needs to be understood rather than being generalised in terms of “high value” and “high risk” cultivation.

Period 4: 1995 Till Today

In this section, we first look at the social composition and land-size categories across the three regions based on data of 2010–11. There is a high proportion (89%) of disadvantaged social groups—Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), OBCs and minorities—in Telangana, which gives a social character that is different from that of coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema (Table 1). The proportion of upper castes in coastal Andhra (32%) and Rayalaseema (24%) is more than double compared to those in Telangana (11%).

Current landholdings data indicates that 86% of landowners are marginal and small peasants, and 10.6% are semi-medium farmers. The rest (less than 4%) are medium and large farmers. Although land had become available to more small/marginal farmers by 2010-11 compared to 1956–57, the average size of holdings for large farmers is still high (15.33 hectares) compared to marginal farmers (0.44 hectares), and small farmers (1.41 hectares) (Table 2). The Koneru Ranga Rao Committee (2006) appointed by the Government of Andhra Pradesh estimated the extent of landlessness in the state. It estimates that 10% of rural households are landless and 36% own less than half an acre. In terms of operational holdings, 38% are of size less than 1/4 acre (half a hectare). The committee in particular noted that landlessness has actually increased among the SCs. Balagopal (2007) points out that

Table 2: Distribution of Landholdings by Size Classes, 1956–57 and 2010–11 in AP

Size Group	No of Holdings (Lakh)		% to Total		Operated Area (Lakh Hectares)		% to Total		Average Size of Holdings (Hectares)	
	1956–57	2010–11	1956–57	2010–11	1956–57	2010–11	1956–57	2010–11	1956–57	2010–11
	Marginal	16.38	84.25	38.58	63.95	8.16	37.27	7.90	26.08	0.50
Small	7.75	29.18	18.25	22.15	10.00	41.20	9.67	28.82	1.29	1.41
Semi-medium	7.53	13.99	17.73	10.62	16.69	36.85	16.15	25.78	2.22	2.63
Medium	7.11	3.97	16.75	3.02	29.04	22.09	28.09	15.46	4.08	5.56
Large	3.69	0.36	8.69	0.27	39.48	5.52	38.19	3.86	10.70	15.33
Total	42.46	131.75	100	100	103.37	142.93	100	100	2.43	1.08

(1 hectare = 2.47 acres).

Source: Directorate of Economics and Statistics.

the land owned by Dalits is usually of much poorer quality than the average landholdings owned by other castes. Thus the ownership of agricultural land continues to be an important aspect of rural power hierarchies. Although the official data shows a majority of rural workers being employed in agriculture, the number of households that depend only on agriculture has been declining (IDFC Rural Development Network 2013). A significant proportion of rural workers today are forced to supplement their agricultural income with other economic avenues in the informal sector both in and outside rural areas.

Post-1990s, neo-liberal policies increased speculation in real estate prices across the country. There was a significant change in the landowner's perception of agricultural land across the three regions of Andhra Pradesh. Land was valued not for its immediate income/rent but for its speculative (potential) value. An added impetus came from proposed special economic zones (SEZs).⁴ There was virtually no attempt by the rich peasant class to sell off their lands in villages across the three regions. This caused a rebirth of absentee landlordism in coastal Andhra (Vakulabharanam et al 2011). As the next generation of this class migrates to the United States, Europe, or Australia, or the rich new-economy sectors in urban India, and realises its acquisitionist "dreams", there is a great rush to buy agricultural lands mainly for future value. Price of land rose over the last 15 years (10–20 times) in all three regions, with some variations. Xiang Biao (2006) rightly comments about this rich-peasant class saying that they have lands in Andhra, a house in Hyderabad, and a job in America.

In coastal Andhra, the major trend has been that landownership is concentrated in the hands of upper castes. In the absence of land transfers to middle and lower castes, they are either tenants or agricultural workers. The proportion of tenants has been more than 70% and that the proportion of agricultural workers also increased significantly in the last decade (Vijay and Sreenivasulu 2013). Even as policymakers are talking about second-generation land reforms,

the land-poor have not received effective land titles. As a result, upper-caste landowning groups have diversified their portfolio, while Dalit and OBC small farmers and tenants have only to diversify their distress and remain in high-risk agriculture. One is not arguing that caste forms of oppression and subjugation have not altered at all, but the relations of production are still regulated by caste and kinship networks.

In Rayalaseema too agricultural lands have not been sold by the landowning groups belonging to Reddys and Kammas for speculative purposes. Given persistent droughts and high-risk agriculture, the upper-caste groups derive only a small proportion of income from agriculture while a large share is through other economic avenues particularly contracting.⁵ Mining activity in this region is in the hands of private contractors. As Rayalaseema is mineral-rich with iron, barites, asbestos, gold, talc, cement-grade limestone, clay, dolomite etc, the mining mafia controlled by upper castes extract surplus which was re-invested in Hyderabad, Bengaluru and Visakhapatnam.

In Telangana, a significant proportion of agricultural land was diverted to non-agricultural purposes during 1990–91–2007–08. Rangareddy District accounts for the highest proportion of diverted land (31%), followed by Karimnagar and Nalgonda (27% each), Nizamabad (18%) and Medak (15%). The reason for diversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural purposes includes, real estate, private educational institutions (engineering, medical colleges, private schools), infrastructure projects, development of information technology (IT) parks, SEZs, outer ring road, etc. Out of the 115 SEZ projects in AP, 50 are located in Rangareddy District (Seethalakshmi 2009).

A new offensive was launched on the farm sector by corporate and industrial units, land mafia, real estate developers, and the government in the name of SEZs, public-private partnerships (PPP), and other developmental projects. In the name of industrial development and urbanisation, the state is trying to grab *patta* lands from small farmers and

assigned lands from Dalits and OBCs (Seethalakshmi 2010: 5). The state invoked the antiquated colonial land acquisition act of 1894 to evict peasants from their land and handed over lands to private companies and justified indiscriminate use of force against small peasants and poor people. In the process, several lakh acres of land were acquired and thousands of peasants and others dependent on land were evicted and deprived of their livelihood. As a result, bitter and violent struggles by lower class/caste groups took place in Sompeta in north coastal Andhra, Kakinada SEZ in East Godavari District, Polepally in Mahaboobnagar in Telangana, to resist the forcible acquisition of land by the state and corporate entities (Sarma 2010). Moreover, the corporate sector has been allotted vast tracts of forest land as well as the so-called waste land and farm land by the state. This whole process can be explained in terms of what David Harvey (2004) calls "accumulation by dispossession."

Discussion

There are three broad trends that emerge from the analysis of agrarian classes and castes in "united" Andhra Pradesh from 1956 to 2014. First, there is a rise in the proportion of marginal and small farmers over these six decades. However, the average landholding size is lower (0.44 and 1.41 hectares, respectively) for these categories while large farmers still hold an average of 15.3 hectares. The region-specific accounts indicate that these large-size holdings are controlled by the upper castes in coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema, but a significant shift in the landownership has taken place from upper castes to OBCs in Telangana due to various democratic movements.

Second, the implication of these disparities in the agrarian social structure in different regions or two states is quite evident in terms of caste conflicts, violence, and dissent. In coastal Andhra there were intense caste conflicts between the rich peasant class and that of landless, tenants and agricultural workers belonging to Dalits during 1985 and 1991. The "crop holiday" movement in 2011 is another instance where landowning

classes tried to discipline tenants and agricultural workers belonging to OBCs and Dalits for demanding tenancy identity cards and higher wage rates respectively (Vakulabharanam et al 2011). Similarly, the Lakshimpet incident in 2012 in north coastal Andhra between Turpu Kapus (OBCs) and Dalits could be yet another instance of land conflicts not merely between upper and lower castes but also between OBCs and Dalits (Hyderabad Political Economy Group 2012; Tharakam 2012). In Rayalaseema, caste conflicts have always been between the upper-caste warring factions by mobilising OBCs and Dalits on each side. Use of violence to win elections, arrack, mining, and other contracts has in fact got intensified in the last two decades because of its high returns. In Telangana, the issues of inequality and underdevelopment cropped up time and again (1968–72 and 2002–14) against the state and propertied classes outside the region, thus culminating in a separate state in 2014. Therefore, it is important to understand these conflicting dynamics in each region and sub-region to analyse agrarian change in India.

Third, there is a huge rise in land prices across the country, which is evident in all three regions of undivided AP over the last two decades due to speculative capital. Land is valued not for its immediate income or rent but for its speculative value. With the rise in land values in both irrigated and dry areas, there is virtually no attempt to sell lands. In fact, the dominant caste network helped appropriate the purchase of landholdings owned by different classes to resell it at higher market price, thus paving the way for an increase in the role of middlemen, moneylenders and contractors. Moreover, the rich peasant class found increasing opportunities for accumulation outside agriculture as much as in agriculture in the last decade. Upper caste groups have already diversified their portfolio by investing in highways, road contracts, ports, airports, irrigation contracts, real estate, and SEZs.

One important consequence of this rise in land prices is the increase in absentee landownership, higher tenancy,

and increased land rents, which have all complicated class–caste relations. For instance, landowners across the caste groups have exited from practising agriculture, while non-owners belonging to different castes have become primary producers (Vijay and Sreenivasulu 2013). On the other hand, landless agricultural workers, and tenants have become more vulnerable, in a socially regulated economy.⁶ Commenting on this change process, Lerche (2013) rightly points out that agrarian capitalism in India may develop not only at different speeds but also in different regionally specific ways based on different regional class relations.

Now the prospective new capital⁷ city for Andhra Pradesh is also visualised as a real estate project to build a capital based on the Hyderabad model of development. In staking their claim to economic opportunities offered by the neoliberal state and markets in the last two decades, upper caste groups in the three regions or two new states that had hitherto competed with one another have now set up two different spirals of rapid capitalist accumulation. The market reforms in the last two decades in fact strengthened the role of caste in economic and political sphere rather than undermining it. The accumulation of economic capital relied on the manipulation of market principles by incorporating caste into it rather than eliminating it.

The development and redevelopment models being proposed in AP and the new state of Telangana depend on the struggles and the particular class alliances that may emerge among agricultural workers, tenants, and the landless in asserting their rights over land and livelihoods.

NOTES

- 1 The phrase “lagged Green Revolution” indicates the expansion of Green Revolution technologies in non-irrigated regions and new crop regimes after the success of Green Revolution in irrigated regions.
- 2 Kapu is a generic term that implied peasant or protector of the crops. In central coastal Andhra regions, Kapus are rich peasants, with an upper caste/class status, Turpu Kapus, Ontaris in north coastal Andhra are small peasants with a backward caste/class status. Similarly Balijs in Rayalaseema are upper caste/class while Munnuru Kapus in Telangana are backward caste/class. There is an ongoing

effort to politically forge unity among all these castes or jati clusters into Kapus to gain access to state and political power.

- 3 The middle and upper classes among Kapus from Godavari Delta did not migrate nor invest outside the region. This is because of the economic avenues available in terms of trade through Kakinada port, relatively better urbanisation, and other facilities. Therefore Kapus from Godavari delta remained as forward castes while other Kapus as backward castes thus contributing to the existing class and sub-caste distinctions.
- 4 Of the 588 SEZs in the country, one-fifth (115 SEZs) were in Andhra Pradesh.
- 5 Gali Janardhan Reddy from Bellary extracting minerals from the backward Anantapur District is one such instance.
- 6 Barbara Harris-White used this phrase “socially regulated economy” to explain the influence of non-economic factors, particularly caste and kinship networks, in Indian markets.
- 7 AP Reorganisation Bill 2014 states that a committee will be constituted by the central government to decide on the capital for residual Andhra Pradesh.

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