

Post-Chundur and Other Chundurs

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One only has to contrast Guntur with the Rayalaseema districts to realise that Chundur happened not because the dalits of Guntur are more oppressed than elsewhere, but precisely because they have fought oppression and have put themselves on an unrelenting path of social and economic advancement and political autonomy

ONE reason why Chundur caught the whole nation's attention is the magnitude of the massacre. Eight dead bodies were fished out of the irrigation canals and the drains of Chundur and surrounding villages within three days of the gruesome assault of August 6; the whereabouts of another nine men are not known to this day, six weeks after the killing, which means they too were killed and thrown into the canals but did not float up at the places that were searched. This makes a total of 17 dead. The number becomes 18 if one adds Mandru Parishudha Rao who died of shock the day after the carnage after seeing the mutilated dead body of his younger brother, 21 year old Mandru Ramesh. And it becomes 19 if one adds Kommerla Anil Kumar, an articulate young dalit who survived the massacre of August 6 to give a graphic account of the incident but was shot dead by the police on September 10 in the course of an attempt by the latter to remove a hunger strike camp set up by the dalits a Chundur. Such a large casualty figure is such a natural and sufficient reason for the attention Chundur has received that one does not search for other reasons, and therefore one does not see other Chundurs.

In Andhra Pradesh, assaults by forward castes (and in a few cases, by backward caste landowners) on dalits have received the most attention when they have taken place in the politically important central-coastal districts of Guntur, Krishna, Prakasam, west and east Godavari, and there too mainly when these have taken place against the two principal untouchable castes, the Malas and the Madigas. Assaults that have taken place against dalit communities, including Malas and Madigas, outside these districts, and against other oppressed communities in these districts, have received much less attention, not only from the government and politicians but also from the democratic movement. Perhaps the most neglected of the victims are the Erukals and Yanadis, once officially and still popularly regarded as criminal tribes. Apart from the political importance attached to anything that happens in the canal-irrigated area of the Krishna-

Godavari river basins, perhaps the main reason for this lopsided attention is precisely the same reason why the attacks take such a ferocious and mass form in these districts. Malas and Madigas of these districts are better educated, assertive and identity-conscious than other dalit communities there or elsewhere. Perhaps more significantly, the younger generation has started rejecting the social and political subordination to the forward castes that has traditionally been the lot of the dalits, and as a consequence has started rejecting also the submission to one or the other of the ruling class parties, a submission that was structured through the traditional caste-domination. It is this socially and politically effective advancement and assertiveness of the Malas and Madigas that the forward castes find so intolerable, leading to assaults such as Karamchedu and Chundur, and yet this is also the reason why the assaults attract considerable attention and protest. The protest has already brought to centie-stage the necessity of incorporating the struggle to annihilate caste as an integral element of the total democratic struggle. When the protest takes an equally assertive and effective form in regions outside the river basins and in defence of all dalit communities, its job will be already partly done. Obstacles will still remain, not only the obstacles defined by the theoretical and practical problems relating to the incorporation of the anti-caste struggle within the total democratic struggle, but also the obstacles on the other side, whose principal forms are the armed might of the state and the organised counter-assertion of the casteist forward caste forces of which we had a very ugly preview in the ami Mandal agitation, but nevertheless the stage for a full battle against caste will be set.

OTHER CHUNDURS

At Chinakada, a remote hamlet of the very backward and remote north coastal district of Vizianagaram, on July 31, 1989, four tribals of one family, Tekkali Bagam Dora and his three sons Adenna Dora, Ramanna Dora and Arunna Dora, were slaughtered by a 30-strong mob of 'savar-

na' Hindus from neighbouring village Kannam. The explanation offered was that the tribals were thieves, and that the harassed 'people' had killed them. In truth it was an act of vengeance perpetrated on behalf of an excise contractor. This tribal family, like most tribal families, was making and selling liquor on its own, thereby violating the official monopoly granted to the contractor.

At Kaspas Gadabavalasa, close to but outside the legendary Parvatipuram Agency, in the same district, on November 22, 1990, four tribals and a man of a scheduled caste were chased and hacked to death by a mob of about 400 men of a heterogeneous mixture of cultivating castes. This village and its neighbours had been recommended by the district collector for inclusion in the Agency to protect the tribals' lives and land, but before the government could take a decision, a gruesome justification was provided by the mass murder of Eedara Phakir, Gorle Ramulu, Misala Pentaiah, Doni Rattalu, all tribals of Kaspas Gadabavalasa, and of Garugubilli Pothaiah, a harijan of neighbouring Kichada who tried to intercede on behalf of the tribals while the killing was going on. The conflict was over 18 acres of land which Eedara Chinnaiah, father of Eedara Phakir had obtained from the Kurupam Zamindar in pre-independence days. In recent years, the non-tribals have started claiming that the land had been sold to them by Eedara Chinnaiah, and there ensued litigation which was finally settled in favour of the tribals. The project officer of the Integrated Tribal Development Agency, Parvatipuram, was to visit the village and put the settlement on record. At this stage, the non-tribals raided the land apparently to harvest the standing crop, and when the tribals protested and threatened to go and get the project officer, they were chased and massacred.

At Mandadam in Guntur district, in the second half of 1989, two Erukala tribesmen were abducted, tortured and killed by men of a fishing contractor, for the sin of violating the exclusive contract he had obtained from the government to catch and sell fish in some tanks in and around Tenali. This conflict between various fishing communities with traditional rights over fishing in tanks and canals, and government-designated contractors who buy that right in auction, is one major arena of struggle in this state, and has resulted in considerable violence against the fishing communities.

At Reddypalli in Ranga Reddy district (named so after the late father-in-law of twice-chief minister Chenna Reddy), a landlord close to Ram Reddy, MLA of Pargi (presently one among the host of

Reddys populating Nedurumilli Janardhan Reddy's council of ministers), dragged out of the house and burnt alive an Erukala peasant by name Venkataiah on February 12, 1990. The victim had been sold some land by the landlord, but there had been no registration of the sale, as there never is in such matters. By and by the landlord sold the same land to somebody else, and when Venkataiah questioned this duplicity, he was branded a 'sorcerer', dragged out of his house in broad daylight, a pyre was lit and he was thrown into it. His misfortune was that he had a religious streak in him and was something of a cross between a popular hakim and soothsayer in the village, thereby making the accusation of 'sorcery' credible to the credulous.

All the victims mentioned above are tribals of one kind or the other. Tribals are frequently romanticised and patronised as the only or principal victims of oppressive social structure/distorted development. This romanticising is rubbish. Exclusive pity for only one of the oppressed people can even be dangerous. But the tribals we have mentioned above, a minuscule minority caught in the plains and frequently suspected of being thieves, are particularly vulnerable. Those tribals who live in the forests have the security of numbers, of exclusivity, of a blemishless—even an idyllic—reputation, and (in recent years) of the armed squads of the Naxalites. The Malas and Madigas of the developed regions have the advantage of better education, awareness, a proud political identity deriving from Ambedkar, and in recent times a vocal dalit movement, as well as a growing Naxalite presence among their youth. The rest of the untouchable or tribal communities are much more vulnerable.

We have mentioned one example of a dalit killed on the pretext of sorcery. Belief in witchcraft based on the principle of sympathetic magic (called 'Banamati' of 'Chetabadi' in Telugu) is quite widespread in the south and west of Telangana, that is the districts of Medak, Mahbubnagar, Ranga Reddy and parts of Nizamabad, as well as in the territorially and culturally contiguous Karnataka districts of Raichur, Gulbarga and Bidar. The sorcerers are invariably tribals, harijans or persons of the artisan or service castes. They are men as well as women. One among the many undesirable consequences of the belief in and the practice of sorcery is the frequent lynching of sorcerers by villagers. While some of the cases are genuine instances of lynching by misguided masses, there is a substantial number of cases that are plain murders of inconvenient dalits by village strongmen. A sorcerer usually has a smattering of literacy if not learning

(and literacy itself has a magical quality to the unlettered). He or she is feared and sometimes respected. And the audacity to tamper with fate encourages the audacity to question the landlords. In an area where there is no widespread advancement of dalits, none of the extensive education and aspiration for social honour and respect that one finds in the central-coastal districts, the individual 'sorcerer' can very well become a vehicle or at least a symbol of protest, and therefore kiliable material. Perhaps more commonly, sorcery is merely a socially legitimate label to be stuck upon an inconvenient person who one wants to get rid of.

One only has to contrast Guntur with the Rayalaseema districts to realise that Chundur happened *not* because the dalits of Guntur are more oppressed than elsewhere, but precisely because they have fought oppression, through Christianity (all the victims of Chundur as of Karamchedu are Christians), through education, through entry to government jobs using reservations, through wage rates commensurate with green revolution productivity, and through thousands of individual acts of mini-rebellion day in and day out, and have put themselves on an unrelenting path of social and economic advancement and political autonomy. Where they have not done so, they are not killed *en masse* as in the central coastal districts, but individual rebels—men and women of exceptional courage and intelligence—are isolated and subjugated by murder, rape, ostracism and arson. Of these, rape is perhaps the most common, for it works as a weapon against the woman as well as her husband, whichever of the two is politically targeted, but it is also the least reported of all the 'atrocities against dalits'.

Chittoor, a district whose landlords felt very close to the seal of power during the reign of N T Rama Rao, for it is the native district of his politically powerful son-in-law Chandra Babu Naidu, saw a series of assaults on dalits during 1983-89. The worst was at Bandlapalli where, on November 27, 1987, four dalits were beaten and stabbed to death in a dispute over half an acre of cultivable waste. The murderers were a mixture of Reddys and other forward caste landowners. The sessions court sentenced just one of them to imprisonment.

At Kothapoolavandlapalli in Anantapur district, on June 6, 1990, a Madiga by name Kullayappa was burnt alive by a mob of Reddys and other castes. The immediate reason is too petty to even describe in detail, but as his wife Lakshamma says, "he would not tolerate the authoritarian behaviour of the village headmen, and would talk back at

them". That was sufficient, given the slightest pretext, to pull him out of his house, break his bones, drag him to a public place, light a pyre, throw him into it and stand watch as he burnt to death.

At Moodurallapalli near Allagadda in Kurnool district, in a region dominated by a total feudal control of murderous armed Reddy factions, on March 18, 1991, a mob of Reddys beat to death Yesudas, a Mala-Christian. Incidentally, it is in this taluk that the fugitive murderers of Chundur are taking shelter as we write these lines. They put the dead body in a sack and kept the sack at the centre of the village till nightfall, as a gruesome symbolic statement of what would happen to anyone who questioned their authority. After dark they took the sack to the neighbouring hillock and burnt it. The victim's crime? Yesudas was originally from Cuddapah district and had migrated to this region in search of work. He had settled down as a farm servant with a Reddy landlord. He was sufficiently independent of spirit to resist the total submission demanded in his new home. When a friend of his employer started harassing his wife Istaramma he complained to his employer and 'made a fuss in public'. That was sufficient to cause his brutal murder.

The name of Y S Rajasekhara Reddy is quite familiar now even outside this state. He has been the most longstanding dissident within the Congress(I), hell-bent on becoming chief minister at whatever expense. He is from Cuddapah, a district as much a byword as Kurnool for bombs-and-guns factionalism led by gangs of Reddy warlords. A vintage warlord is the chief minister-aspirant's father Y S Raja Reddy, sarpanch of Pulivendula. The family, incidentally, are Reddy-Christians, and Rajasekhara Reddy made a pointed reference in his condemnation message after Chundur to the fact that the victims were Mala-Christians. Christian pity, however, has never deterred father and son from behaving like any other warlord. On February 16, 1990 the father personally presided over a seven-hour orgy of arson with one inspector of police and two sub-inspectors at his side in his native village of Pulivendula. More than 150 houses of Erukala tribespeople were burnt, blown up and destroyed in that orgy. He said later that the Erukalas were thieves, and the 'people' had burnt their houses, and he himself went there only to control and minimise the damage with the help of the police, which great duty they collectively performed by standing by and watching. In truth, the Erukalas had been his henchmen from his youthful days and had done all the nasty work his faction ordered. They rigged his elections, beat up his enemies, organised his bandhs and

roadblocks, and obeyed all his commands. However, the need to pamper the rest of his constituency made it inevitable that he gave the Erukalas a sound beating now and then, especially whenever there were a spate of thefts in the area and people started grumbling about big men protecting the thieves.

And so on, incident after incident. A full list of all the recent major incidents of murder and arson against dalits, or at least such of them as have become public knowledge, is attached at the end of this article.

POST-CHUNDUR

It has been remarked by all observers that the forward castes this time round are aggressively defending the massacre that was perpetrated in Chundur. They did not do so at the time of Karamchedu or any major assault thereafter, at least not so that one could notice. While all those observers accept without much discomfort the argument that the deepening political and economic crisis affecting our society, which makes democratic aspirations from below intolerable for the dominant sections, and the consequent degeneration of our political and social culture, are the principal factors underlying the new-found shamelessness of the forward castes, not all of them would feel equally comfortable with the supplementary argument that it was the anti-Mandal agitation and the way it was hailed by the press and the intelligentsia that legitimised this shamelessness. That agitation was the first time after independence that the forward castes organised themselves across the nation in explicitly caste terms without being branded communal, and on the contrary being hailed as principled fighters against narrow, casteist, vote-bloc politics. Those chickens have now come home to roost, in the form of the widespread acceptance by the forward castes of slogans like 'long live unity of the forward castes', 'those who beg every morsel of food should not be arrogant', 'beggars should behave beggar-like', etc, slogans which are the staple of the anti-dalit mobilisation post-Chundur. The Reddys have roped in the Kammas, the Brahmins, the Vyshyas, the Kapus and the Rajus in a 'Sarvajanaabhyudaya Porata Samiti' (Struggle Committee for the Advancement of All People) and are organising dharnas, bandhs, processions, roadblocks, to publicise the 'injustice' done to them. For those who watched the anti-Mandal agitation, it was a revelation to observe the same faces going round in these processions talking about 'the oppression suffered by forward castes at the hands of dalits in the villages'. As with the

anti-Mandal agitation, this time too the police are handling this very gingerly. On August 17, the forward castes gave a call for bandh of Guntur district, and enforced it with considerable rowdyism. They attacked Andhra Christian College in Guntur town, a college attended by scheduled caste Christians in large numbers, and burnt books, clothes and certificates in room after room. The police were present but were very considerate. It took considerable provocation for them to open *fire*, and that too so carefully that nobody was killed. Their response was different when the dalits sat on a hunger strike at Chundur demanding justice, and resisted the attempts of the police to remove the tent and arrest them. The police opened fire without hesitation, aimed straight at Kommerla Anil Kumar, and killed him. That was on September 10. Anil Kumar, a college student, was a near-victim of the massacre of August 6 and therefore an excellent witness. He was also one among those who took over the leadership of the Chundur dalits' protest movement after the police arrested Katti Padma Rao, secretary of Dalit Maha Sabha, and directed him to stay at his home town and not enter Chundur.

Every movement requires a moral justification and an ideology. The 'samiti' of the forward castes is yet to develop an ideology ('merit' is not an all-season ideology) but it has created and spread widely a certain moral justification. It is not very original, indeed it has come to be almost expected, but what it lacks in originality it almost makes up for with its viciousness.

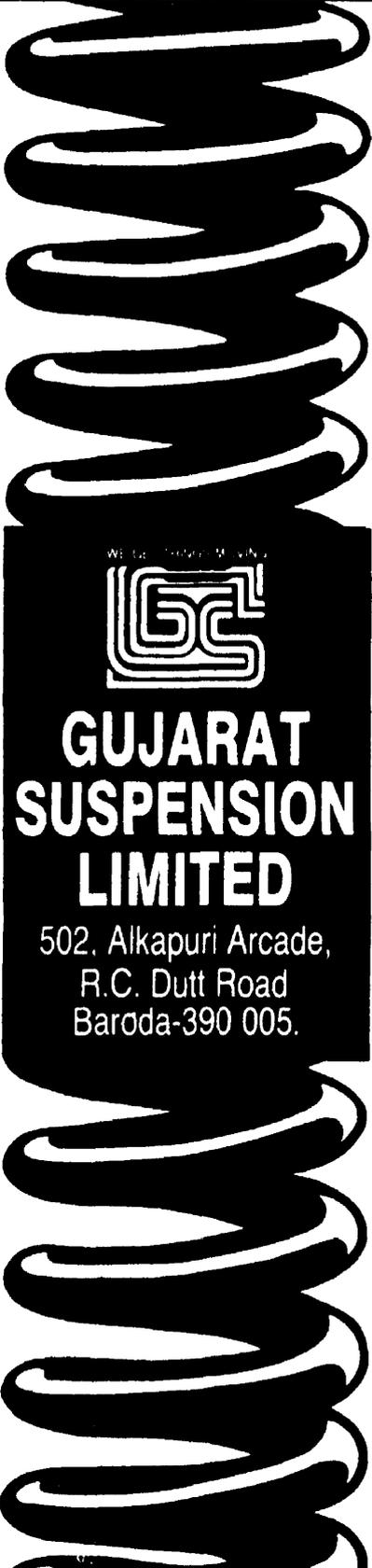
The dalits, it is said, had harassed women of the forward castes no end; it has even been said at the height of the campaign that forward caste women have been raped by dalits in every village around and including Chundur. It is further said that in the sub-divisional headquarters town of Tenali, forward caste girl students make a detour of dalit areas while going to and from school/college to avoid molestation. Perhaps the most explicitly ugly story invented in the course of this campaign is the following: the Reddys and Kapus of Chundur, during the month-long period of conflict and tension preceding the final assault of August 6, had stopped employing dalit labour for transplantation, etc, and women of land-owning families were themselves doing this labour, it is alleged that one day, while some of these women were transplanting paddy in their fields, the dalits went up to them and picked up a quarrel arguing that they would have to starve if the land-owners themselves started doing such work. This part of the story is quite credible, but the story does not stop here. The

next thing the dalits do is to strip the forward caste women naked, and force them to pull out the seedlings they have planted and replant them. All this is supposed to have happened at Chundur in broad daylight one day this transplanting season.

This campaign goes on unhindered, and is yet to be so much as condemned by any of the major political parties (just as none of them expressed protest at the explicitly casteist anti-Mandal campaign). The forward castes have held 'dharnas', demonstrations, blocked roads, etc, in protest against 'the oppression suffered at the hands of the dalits'. They have pushed the women to the forefront, as exhibits of the alleged acts of oppression.

It is needless to add that these stories are concocted. Their only real basis, if any, is in two likely facts: One, that with the rise of education and awareness among dalits there has been a certain reversal of the 'anuloma' norm of inter-caste sexual relations whether marital or extra-marital. Cases of dalit men developing intimacy and in some cases even marrying forward caste women are no longer very uncommon in these districts. And anyone familiar with caste-determined social culture knows how intolerable such intimacy is to the forward castes. Two, it is also likely that dalit college students, of whom there are a fair number in and around Chundur, have been indulging in eve-teasing the same way as 'savarna' students, for such behaviour has become part of the degenerate culture prevailing in campuses everywhere. But while eve-teasing by forward caste youth is regarded as a harmless if irritating prank, it becomes intolerable when a dalit youth teases a forward caste woman, for it is not her dignity that is seen to be violated but the community's 'honour'. In any case, if harassment of women is sufficient reason for the Chundur carnage, as otherwise intelligent persons including newspaper editorial writers in this state have been suggesting, then a very large proportion of the male population of this or any other state would have to be massacred, and almost all of them would be forward caste men. Indeed, harassment of dalit women by men of forward castes is such a common fact of village life that this accusation is an inversion of astonishing effrontery.

The dalits, refreshingly, have not been quiet. The dalits of Chundur itself, witnesses to the most horrible massacre of its kind in recent years, have courageously and steadfastly set a new trend of agitation and protest. They have rejected the hypocritical overtures of the ruling party, as well as the theatrics of the dissident Congressmen and the opposition leaders. It has become a customary



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chrade in all such cases that either the chief minister and his coterie succeed in projecting themselves as saviours who would have done everything to protect the victims if only they had had an inkling of what was impending, or the ruling party's dissidents or opposition leaders take the victims under their wing with the promise of giving them the very heaven once they come to power. The dalits of Chundur have firmly rejected all such overtures and sent back the 'netas' in a most insulting fashion. At first it was the activists of the Dalit Maha Sabha and the revolutionary groups who initiated the slinging of mud and abuse at the visiting netas, but soon the victims themselves started participating in the protest. The egoistic leaders of the Congress(I) and TOP are smarting under this unusual humiliation, but there is precious little they can do, except to curse the 'outsiders' and 'extremists' for poisoning the minds of the innocent dalits. Even if this situation does not last very long, it signifies a definite and positive Change from past experience.

The dalits of Chundur, dalit organisations, and other democratic forces are also agitating against the complicity of the police. As has been widely reported, the police played a criminal role on the day of the massacre. There was present in the village a large police force from the previous night, led by a CI of police. This force was mute spectator to the massacre. Its only activity that afternoon was to despatch its van at the request of the Reddy and Kapu women to a neighbouring village to bring back forward caste school children safe, because the women expressed the apprehension that "the Malas would harm their children". The police had eyes to see but chose not to see who was harming whom. But when accused of knavery the police plead foolishness. Their explanation for the shameful role they played that afternoon is that the Reddys had spread a rumour of an impending attack that afternoon from the dalits, and the police were taken in and were busy shooting away the Mala youth when the Reddys surprised them with a sudden attack from behind. Apart from being a voluntary confession of idiocy, this does not explain their inactivity once they saw what was actually happening. Nor does it explain why no information of the massacre reached the district headquarters till the next day; why the deputy superintendent of police, Tenali, sent a misleading message that evening to Guntur saying all was peaceful in Chundur; why, consequently, no news of the massacre was published in the next day's newspapers though Chundur is hardly 50 kms from Vijayawada, the headquarters of the newspaper publishing industry in coastal Andhra Pradesh.

The demand that the guilty policemen should be arrested for abetment of the crime is a major demand of the dalits and the democratic movement supporting them. But the government has insisted on viewing it not as abetment but as merely failure in the performance of duty, and so has persistently refused to book them for the crime they were party to. Whoever is giving legal advice to the government appears not to know that under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, section 4, even a 'neglect of duty' in such matters is a crime punishable with imprisonment, and the policemen should be arrested anyway.

Another important demand pertains to the setting up of a special court. In cases such as this, a quick investigation and trial is essential. The Karamchedu massacre took place six years ago. Lawyers handling the case are confident that, with the evidence available, at least 20 persons can be convicted to a minimum of life imprisonment. It is evident that if the trial had been completed and the sentence enforced, that would have acted as a powerful deterrent to the murderers of Chundur. But unfortunately the Karamchedu trial is yet to even start, let alone be completed. It is to ensure quick and effective disposal of such cases that the SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act mentioned above, which was enacted in 1989, provides for the setting up (section 14) of special courts, one in each district, to try offences of 'atrocities on dalits'. Two years have passed, and not a single special court has been set up till now. (This is in contrast to TADA, another legislation that provides for the setting up of special courts, with the difference that it is not aimed at protecting the oppressed, but at protecting the state from militant opponents. In the case of TADA, every district and sessions court in the state was declared a designated court, as the special court for TADA offences is called, within two months of the passage of the act by parliament, and upwards of 15,000 persons have been sent to jail for TADA offences in this state till now.)

After Chundur, there was a widespread demand for the setting up of a special court. After some prevarication, Janardhan Reddy announces the setting up of not one special court for each district as stipulated by the act, but merely one in each of the three regions of the state, coastal Andhra, Telangana and Rayalaseema. And this he announces very graciously, in the manner of a deity granting a boon. The special court for Telangana, for example, is to be set up at Mahbubnagar, at the southern corner of the region. It is easy to imagine the plight of dalits, say, of Adilabad, a minimum of 10 hours away by a fast bus, whose com-

plaints are to be tried at this special court.

The next major demand pertains to the arrest of all the principal participants in the massacre. Though about 250 persons have been named in the case and about half of them arrested, of the four main organisers of the carnage, only one, the sarpanch of Chundur, has been arrested, and that too because he himself voluntarily surrendered to the police. The other three are absconding, and in spite of repeated announcements by the chief minister that the government would impose fine and if necessary confiscate their properties as well as those of the persons giving shelter to them, as it can very well lawfully do in view of section 16 of the SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act read with section 10-A of the Protection of Civil Rights Act, no such action has been taken till now.

What the government has done instead is to constitute a judicial enquiry commission with alacrity to go into the massacre, which is about the most meaningless thing anybody could think of; order a departmental enquiry into the 'failure' of the police; and announce monetary compensation of Rs 1 lakh each to the families of the dead. The immediate response of the dalits was to reject the offer of money in compensation for the killing. The dalits as well as the democratic organisations supporting them refused to participate in the judicial enquiry, and they insisted on continuing the agitation in all possible forms till the main demands were realised. The government, for its part, has made it a matter of prestige to have its way. Which way the matter will end is difficult to say for the situation is in daily flux, but it is instructive to take a look at the means the government is employing to achieve its ends.

Apart from the determination of the state to reassert its authority, what must be seen here is also the vengeance of the ruling class politicians, bitterly unhappy with the truculent response of the dalits to their overtures. Thus reinforced, the suppressive force of the ruling classes is working through a combination of political cajolery backed by police force, for this, they have found an ideal ally in Raghuvver Prasad Meena, superintendent of police, Guntur. This police officer is easily the most notorious man the state has seen after K S Vyas, who rose to dubious fame in the post-emergency years and dominated the state hand in glove with the TOP government during 1983-89, ending up as DIG in charge of anti-Naxalite operations. Meena is not yet senior enough to play exactly the same role but he is shaped in a mould that foretells the history of the days to come.

Meena took charge as SP, Guntur, the very morning the Chundur massacre took

Appendix

KNOWN INCIDENTS OF MURDER OR LARGE-SCALE ARSON PERPETRATED AGAINST DALITS BY CASTE HINDUS IN AP, POST-KARAMCHEDU

Place of Occurrence	Date	Nature of the Incident
Karamchedu (Prakasam dt)	July 17, 1985	Six dalits killed and three dalit women raped in a mass assault by hundreds of forward caste men of the Kamma caste. A politically active son-in-law of the then chief minister, N T Rama Rao belongs to this village.
Hasnapur (Adilabad dt)	June 13, 1985 July 18, 1985	Reddy landlords closely related to the MLA, Adilabad, killed two youth of the dhobi and barber castes on these two days respectively, for refusal to procure a prostitute on their demand.
Neerukonda (Guntur dt)	July 15, 1987	One elderly dalit murdered in a mob attack by men of the Kamma community, close relatives of the then health minister in the AP government.
Gudiada (Vizianagaram dt)	July 20, 1987	One dalit labourer killed in a dispute over a small patch of tank-bed land by a mob of backward caste farmers led by a forward caste (Raju) Congress leader.
Dontali (Nellore dt)	August 27, 1987	One person of a backward caste (Golla) killed in a mob attack by Kammas. He was instrumental in organising labourers.
Chirala (Prakasam dt)	August 13, 1987	A principal witness in the Karamchedu case, an elderly dalit women by name Alisamma, murdered by the Karamchedu killers.
Bandlapalli (Chittoor dt)	August 27, 1987	Four dalits beaten and stabbed to death in an assault by a group of Reddy and other forward caste men in a dispute over half an acre of cultivable waste.
Kodavatikallu (Krishna dt)	February 2, 1988	A dalit farm-servant killed by Kamma landlord for disobedience.
Beernakallu (Nellore dt)	January 19, 1989	A dalit, upasarpnch of the village, killed by goondas hired by forward caste TDP men for having worked against them in elections.
Gokarajupalli (Krishna dt)	January 16, 1989	Dalit labourer killed by youth of Kamma landlord families for coming in the way of their harassment of women.
Tangutur (Prakasam dt)	March 3, 1989	A dalit women raped and set on fire and killed by a TDP goon of Kamma caste.
Jabbargudem (Rangareddy dt)	April 27, 1989	A dalit killed in a mass assault at the behest of a Reddy landlord. Dalits of this area have organised and fought for land, wages, etc.
Pippara (West Godavari dt)	June 4, 1989	Dalit killed in a mass assault by forward castes (Rajus) directed by a local Congress leader. Dalits had protested against molestation of dalit women by Raju youth.
Chinakada (Vizianagaram dt)	July 31, 1989	Four tribals, father and three sons, killed in a mass attack by savarna Hindus at the behest of a liquor contractor, for illicitly brewing and selling liquor.
Mandadam (Guntur dt)	1987	Two Erukala tribals abducted, tortured and killed by men of a fishing contractor for catching and selling fish on the sly.
Pulivendula (Cuddapah dt)	February 16, 1990	More than 150 houses of Erukala tribes people set on fire and detonated by a mob of savarnas led by village sarpanch and Congress(I) leader, Y S Raja Reddy, father of prominent Congressman Y S Rajasekhar Reddy.
Nakkalampeta (Krishna dt)	March 19, 1990	Dalit farm servant murdered by youth of landlord's household on suspicion of intimacy with a woman of the house.
Jeerupalem (Srikakulam dt)	May 21, 1990	About 180 houses of fishing community set on fire by a mob organised by prominent Congress(I) BC leader, big landlord, former minister and former chairman, zilla parishad by name Gorle Sriramulu Naidu. The fishing people were fighting for return of 70 acres of their land grabbed by him.
Gutlapadu (West Godavari dt)	May 19, 1990	Two dalits killed in a mass assault by forward caste (Kapu) men numbering 200, for questioning their dominance.
Reddypalli (Rangareddy dt)	February 12, 1990	Erukala peasant burnt to death on pretext of sorcery by Reddy landlord close to local M.I.A, for questioning the latter's dishonesty in a land deal.
Kothapulavandlapalli (Anantapur dt)	June 6, 1990	Dalit burnt alive by a mob of Reddy and other castes for his rebellious attitude.
Vetlapalem (East Godavari dt)	November 4, 1990	Nearly hundred houses of dalits set on fire and destroyed by Kamma landlords-cum-mill owners in connection with a land dispute involving 18 acres of tank-bed land.
Kaspa Gadabavalasa (Vizianagaram dt)	November 22, 1990	Four tribals and a harijan killed by a mob of caste Hindus in connection with a land dispute involving 18 acres of land.
Chillakallu (Krishna dt)	November 28, 1990	A dalit SI of police shot himself dead unable to bear the casteist harassment of the forward caste (Kapu) CI, his immediate superior.
Moodurallapalli (Kurnool dt)	March 18, 1991	Dalit labourer beaten to death by Reddys for protesting against harassment of his wife by a Reddy.
Ambaripet (Adilabad dt)	May 19, 1991	A backward caste (Boya) farm-servant shot dead by his landlord, G Narayan Reddy, Congress(I) leader, former MP, former zilla parishad chairman and big landholder.
Chundur (Guntur dt)	August 6, 1991	17 dalits massacred by a large mob of Reddy and some Kapu men in a savage attack as a finale to a month-long period of conflict.
Gokarajupalli (Krishna dt)	August 3, 1991	Another dalit labourer killed in continuation of the incident mentioned above (dated January 16, 1989).

place, and therefore he had no option but to let the event surprise him. His normal preference is the other way round. Before coming to Guntur he was SP, Nizamabad, one of the 'extremist-affected' districts of north Telangana. During his three-year tenure in Nizamabad, 35 persons were killed in 'encounters', hardly one or two of them real. Here is a description of one of them, an 'encounter' which he personally supervised, something that few police officers of that rank normally do:

The village is Tippapur, a few kms to the south of the 7th National highway on its Hyderabad-Nagpur segment, about a hundred and twenty kms from Hyderabad.

In the early hours of July 23, 1990, SP of Nizamabad Meena personally led more than 100 armed policemen into the village. They came in four jeeps and two big vans, carrying automatic weapons of many kinds. The villagers were just jien getting up and going out. The police bolted the doors of all the houses from outside. They fixed a loud-speaker to a jeep and went round the village announcing the names of 7 wanted 'radicals'. They were asked to come out and surrender. When none of them did, the police got into action. Those people who had already come out of their houses to go to the fields or for morning ablutions were rounded up and herded at the building which the radicals used as venue for their People's Courts. About 200 persons were herded this way. Then the police raided the houses of the wanted 7, opened the doors and created havoc while the doors of all other houses were closed from outside. They broke household goods, abused women vulgarly...

Hy and by they found four of the seven they wanted, some in their homes, some hiding in haystacks, some in cattle sheds... Three of them were taken to a cattle shed and shot dead there. The fourth was later shot dead in the haystack where he lay hidden...

At the end of the killing the SP walked up to (he people herded in the building and told them that an 'encounter' had just then taken place and four extremist youth of the village were killed.

This is the gentleman who is now SP of Guntur. Of course he will not do a Tippapur with the murderers of Chundur—indeed, he is conducting the investigation into the massacre in a most impeccably lawful manner—but his suppressive instincts are all to the fore at the sight of the recalcitrant attitude of the dalits. 'Extremists' being his phobia, he has from the start been seeing the hand of Naxalites in every act of protest, thereby unwittingly giving them more credit than is truly their due, though the presence of the revolutionary groups in the Chundur protest movement is an undeniable reality.

This SP shares with most of the new generation policemen a certain understanding of democracy in which there is no place for the autonomous right of the people to choose politics of their liking,

nor to participate in political struggles for the betterment of their lives. Worse, it has no place for the separation of the judiciary from the executive, or even the gun-wielding executive from the pen-wielding. He has publicly expressed the view that *all* executive powers should be handed over to IPS officers, and that the judiciary should subordinate itself to the interests and perceptions of the police. Any crank can express such or even worse views, but this is one man who has been doing his worst to implement these views with the threat of force and the implicit backing of the political government which is gradually reshaping our democracy into a nation ruled by corrupt and greedy politicians supported by the brute power of the 'forces of law and order'. While in Nizamabad, he frequently used to issue press statements such as this one: "I have come to know that in such and such village, the radicals are planning to occupy the land of so and so"—or to take out a rally against the sale of liquor—i warn them hereby that if they go through with their plans there will be serious consequences. I have issued shoot at sight orders and will not tolerate any violation!" If it sounds more like a mafia don issuing a threat to trouble-makers, then that is what most police officers have become.

He has started assuming this role in Guntur. He has imposed unending prohibitory orders in the district, making it impossible for the dalits and their supporters to organise any public activity. Bandhs, dharnas, processions, public meetings, are all banned in the district, and nobody who is not a resident of Chundur is allowed to enter the village. The police reply to the charge of suppression is to point out that the activity of the forward castes' samiti is also equally affected by the ban orders, and so there is no partiality. This is nonsense. The powerful and the dominant do not need to organise themselves politically, in defiance of ban orders or otherwise, for they are *structurally* organised; it is the oppressed and the weak who need to organise themselves explicitly, to overcome their structural disorganisation. If dharnas and public meetings are banned and broken up, processions are blocked, and those sitting on hunger strike are arrested under the ridiculous charge of 'attempting to commit suicide', the collective organisation that is essential if the weak are to ever become strong becomes impossible, and into this vacuum step in the patronising leaders of the ruling party. Scheduled caste MLAs and MPs have been despatched by the chief minister in a bid to win over the helplessly disarmed agitators—in the tradition of Devendra sending 'apparas' to break up the 'tapas' of

undesirable persons, as a dalit of Chundur colourfully put it to presspeople—and they make repeated bids to win them over. Their demand is: give up the agitation for the arrest of the police officers, co-operate with the judicial enquiry whose completion has now become a matter of prestige with the government, accept the one lakh offered in compensation to the families of the slain, reject the leadership of 'outsiders' and 'trouble-makers', and go back home.

This is the present scenario as far as Chundur goes, and may tilt one way or the other in a day or two. Across the district—and also neighbouring districts—the forward caste landowners are in an aggressive mood, and the dalits are in a state of apprehension. The immediate political need is a militant organisation of dalit self-defence, village by village. Nobody has as yet even begun to organise them, though all the democratic forces in this state have been very wholesomely vocal and active in organising protest demonstrations and solidarity meetings. They do have an important purpose to serve, but the real organisation of militant self-defence and resistance is not going to be very easy, and may indeed turn violent. But there is no option. The alternative, of trying to convince the lower middle class and middle class savarna farmers that their material interest lies in a class unity with the dalits, is a fruitless and pedantic solution. They do not think so, and will not really think so until they witness an exhibition of the strength of a militant political movement wedded to the goal of annihilation of caste and working concretely in defence of the life and livelihood of the dalits. The unity of the working and oppressed people is not an arithmetic unity but a political unity. It is only an arithmetic unity that starts with 50 per cent or more of the exploited people as its basis. A political unity can very well start, and indeed must start unless one's search for unity is confined to drawing room dialectics, with the most oppressed 10 per cent and expand through a demonstration of its strength, staying power, and political acumen. That is likely to be a rather violent way of fabricating the unity of the toiling masses, but it is only the arithmetic unity of the working people that is a peaceful 80 per cent vs 20 per cent. This would be true even without the caste system, but is particularly so in this benighted land of Manu.

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