

# Emergence of Backward Castes in South Telengana

## Agrarian Change and Grass Roots Politics

Anil Kumar Vaddiraju

*Studies of two villages from Telengana, Andhra Pradesh, tell us a story of the emergence of backward castes in local politics. These unirrigated villages have not seen green revolution or any improvement in agricultural technology, which has prevented the strengthening of earlier class/caste power structure. It has allowed backward castes to improve their position socially and also in landownership.*

THIS article deals with two village studies from the unirrigated part of Nalgonda district, Telengana, Andhra Pradesh. Much of the Nalgonda district – like much of the rest of Telengana – is unirrigated and drought-prone. This article studies changes in landownership as well as grass roots political power in this region.

It is argued that absence of green revolution and rapid development of the productive forces such as irrigation is the main reason why the dominant castes could not strengthen their hold between 1960-96. On the other hand the backward castes and lower castes emerged to take political power for precisely the same reason. The recently introduced electoral reservations following the 73rd constitutional amendment also strengthened the backward and lower caste claims to power. Thus both structural as well as political tendencies worked in favour of the emergence of backward castes at the grass roots (village and mandal) level.

This trend towards the emergence of the backward castes however is a nascent one and is limited to grass roots level only. This article argues that the further consolidation of backward and lower caste struggle for power needs another round of land reform which would reduce the unequal power held not only by upper castes but also by some backward castes.

While making the above broad point, it is also argued that (a) emergence of the backward castes is only partly state-induced but it is influenced by larger forces and is partly a historical process; (b) that the upper caste semi-feudal class in the region investigated faces dilemma about its reproduction; and (c) that the dilemma of the semi-feudal class, which is confronted with challenges from below, is its larger historical dilemma.

In Section I we present these arguments for Ramannapet Mandal. Section II and III present two village studies.

### I Ramannapet Mandal

#### BACKWARD CASTE PEASANTRY

The emergence of backward castes took place in nearly all the villages of the mandal roughly since 1970. Since then they have consolidated their position. This process was two-pronged. At the political level the backward castes challenged the authority of upper castes – mainly reddy; and succeeded to a large extent. At the economic level they challenged semi-feudal practices. Practices such as 'vetti' have completely disappeared. Now labour relations are almost entirely on the basis of free wage labour. The researcher could not find un-free labour or extra-economic coercion anywhere in the two village studies.

Commercialisation of the village political economy has also not led to the process of creation of 'capitalist landlords', who combine traditional caste power with modern economic power, for two reasons. First, there has been no drastic development of infrastructural facilities or productive forces such as irrigation canals, etc. Second, there were other pressing social reasons such as heavy dowries for upper caste endogamous marriages and division of landholdings among heirs. This led to decline of landlords economically, socially and politically.

At the political plane the periodic panchayati raj elections with reservations for OBCs and women have contributed much to the forming of caste solidarity among backward castes challenging upper castes. The emergence of backward castes was confirmed by the fact that in the June 1995 gram panchayat elections 14 out of 20 villages in the Ramannapet mandal elected backward caste sarpanches; five elected scheduled caste sarpanches (together making it 19) and only one village elected a forward caste candidate to a seat reserved for women. Thus by 1995, 19 out of 20 villages were under the political control of backward and scheduled castes.

This was partly due to state intervention such as enforcement of panchayati raj and reservations partly due to autonomous lower caste development. The process was partly state-induced and partly historical.

Finally, was there a proletarianisation/polarisation process in the field area? The answer is no. The process observed was deconcentration of big landholdings and strengthening of small and middle holdings and thereby the backward caste peasants.

In the village Bogaram the land passed from gampala reddy families to padmashalis, and particularly to the master weavers. Though there is substantive land concentration still in the village and another round of land reform is necessary, it is much lower than till 1970. More importantly small and middle peasants were not reduced to agricultural labourers. The export-oriented, multilayered handloom industry has absorbed some agricultural labour.

In the village Janampally, the process of deconcentration is even more clear. The brahmin landlords sold lands after family partition and later owing to unmanageability. This land was bought by backward castes: weavers, yadavas and toddy tappers. In this village the 'vatandari' power structure was already in the hands of yadavas and later they further strengthened their position.

#### SEMI-FEUDAL CLASS

The semi-feudal class consists of upper caste landlords in the region. In the field area they come from the reddy and brahmin castes. It will be shown that their economic, social and political importance has declined owing to the emergence of backward castes. But we have also noted that the state could not carry out thoroughgoing land reforms and these semi-feudal classes still command some economic power though declining. But why such decline? Why does economic growth not benefit these classes more than it does the other classes?

Political economists like Utsa Patnaik have argued that after the green revolution the traditional semi-feudal landlords have become capitalist landlords. But we have noted that such a phenomenon did not take place in the field area. This is owing to a combination of reasons. The historical dilemma of the semi-feudal classes is that either they modernise and compete with the emerging classes, castes (such as padmashalis and yadavas in our case), or they decline under the pressures created by the larger polity, economy and society. In our field area the semi-feudal classes started to decline because they could not modernise – by modernisation we mean modernisation of productive forces – and thereby strengthen their economic position. The state has also not strengthened the productive forces by improving the infrastructural facilities such as irrigation and canals. The physical conditions of economic production have not changed much over the last 30 years. In these conditions the semi-feudal class could neither accumulate much capital nor re-invest existing capital. This is the reason why the reddy and brahmin landlords could not become affluent capitalist landlords. This also explains why the phenomenon of capitalist landlordism is more pertinent to green revolution areas than to non-green revolution areas. (It may be noted that Utsa Patnaik draws her conclusions largely from studies done in green revolution areas, particularly Haryana.)

Thus the semi-feudal class in the study area had either to modernise – which it could not – or decline. As noted earlier the social pressures within these castes, such as heavy dowries during marriages and partitioning of family lands have contributed further to the decline of these classes/castes. The pressure to get the younger generation educated and placed in urban employment was added to this. Many landlords spoke with great anxiety about the difficulty of getting their sons and daughters educated and employed. So did the youth belonging to the landlord families for many of them have graduate or postgraduate degrees but no jobs.

How do landlords ensure their survival? How do they ensure their reproduction? First, they make use of whatever ‘free’ labour is available. Second, they too make use of whatever advances have taken place in productive forces – electric pumpsets and tractors.

It is by both making use of the capitalistic labour relations as well as the modest advances in productive forces that the landlords of the erstwhile semi-feudal class ensure their reproduction. For the back-

ward castes family labour and the traditional caste occupation are great strengths in ensuring reproduction. These arguments are illustrated in the two case studies below.

## II Bogaram Village

The red soils Bogaram village are not richly fertile and cannot yield lucrative commercial crops. Bogaram has 1,500 acres of land, of which total irrigated land is about 400 acres. It is all well-irrigated. During droughts irrigated area goes down to 100 acres.

More importantly the area does not have any traditional irrigation system. There are no canals. The village does not even have a tank. Whatever irrigation there was, and is, depends on rains or more importantly on wells. Oral historical accounts tell us that well irrigation always played a prominent part in the village economy, and continues to do so even now.

The principal crops grown in the past, and to a large extent at present, are paddy, groundnut, castor and millets. Of these groundnut and castor are commercial crops. Paddy, which is the most important of all crops grown, is both a commercial and a subsistence crop.

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

From 1900 to 1950, the village Bogaram was the jagir of Gulam Mohammed Khan, granted by the nizam. The Gulam Mohammed Khan and his family lived in Hyderabad. But his control of the village was total. He had the right to the entire land revenue and had substantial landholdings. These lands were cultivated through the system of ‘vetti’ or labour service.

The ruler showed no interest whatsoever in the development of the village. He and his ancestors were primarily interested in the land revenue and the product from their personally owned lands. They left the village largely to the vicissitudes of nature. Chronic drought, at times near famine conditions, prevailed. Failure of crops, inability to remit land revenue in time, were usual features of the condition of the peasantry. This as we see below led to the evolution and shaping of the agrarian structure in the village in the succeeding period.

As the ‘dora’ (landlord) of the village Gulam Mohammed Khan performed three functions: (a) collection of the land revenue, (b) collection of various taxes, and (c) general village administration. This included law and order administration. As an absentee landlord and according to the administrative system of the nizam, i e,

the ‘vatandari’ system, Gulam Mohammed Khan appointed, on hereditary basis, three village officers. He ruled through these village officers. They were the ‘patwari’ (or a brahmin karnam); a ‘mali patel’ (reddy); and a ‘police patel’ (reddy).

It is during these 50 years that a single reddy family accumulated about 1,000 acres of land; its members acting as the village officers of Gulam Mohammed Khan. The ‘patwari’ or karnam (a brahmin) acting as the revenue officer accumulated about 200 acres of land. The method was often simple. Whenever a peasant could not pay the land revenue owing to drought, or some other misfortune, that land was transferred, in the records, into the account of either of the village officers. Oral accounts inform us that exorbitant taxes of the dora were often the other reason why land shifted into the hands of the patels. The reddy patels would pay the dora the taxes of those who could not pay and then take control of the land of that taxpayer. Thus one family, the gampala reddy, acting as village officers accumulated around 1,000 acres of land (which was later partitioned among five brothers).

Caste was no hindrance to this predatory process. Often fellow caste members were also victims. But it was mostly the other backward castes and untouchable castes who bore this burden. As is well known through any study of Telengana of this period the domination of the patels (and of the doras) was not just economic, but was also social and political. Landownership operated as the objective basis of socio-economic and political oppression.

The other prominent castes of Bogaram village the padmashalis (weavers), the toddy tappers, the yadavas (in that order) were prominent neither economically nor politically during this period. As is well known the system of free labour service (‘vetti’) to the local lords, i e, the patels encompassed all. But one must take care to add here that even during this period the padmashalis (weavers) were relatively free from its effects. Numerically predominant in the village as they were, weavers retained some relative autonomy from the system of oppression. Even so they did not possess any land whatsoever. Nor could they make much out of their caste occupation during this period. Weaving became profitable much later.

The end of the dominance of the jagirdar came with one, the larger political struggle of the Telengana movement; and two, owing the abolition of zamindari by the central government. But Gulam Mohammed Khan did not relinquish his landed

interests easily. Whatever was left by him was taken over by his erstwhile village officers. In the struggles that followed one Patel was shot dead by the 'razaakars'. Eventually, the struggle ended in favour of the local reddy patels, particularly the gampala family of reddy. And the influence of pateldom continued. Land continued to be concentrated in the hands of five gampala reddy brothers. With the solidarity of fellow caste members they continued to dominate village affairs.

Not all reddy patels in Bogaram village were big landlords. By 1950 more than 50 per cent of the reddy owned landholding of less than 25 acres. And often the land they owned was not productive. The absolute productivities of even big landholdings were dismal. It may be remembered here that in pre-green revolution period no Borlaug-packages were available. But what is important to note is that neither class differentiation nor low level of absolute standards of living affected caste solidarity. Considerable number of reddy families were self-cultivating but when it came to social relations with the other lower caste families, they were certainly discriminatory or semi-feudal. There was a strong element of dominance at the superstructural level even when it did not exist at the economic level.

#### PATELDOM, 1950-75

The period between 1950 and 1975 was a period of the continuance of the traditional patron-client relations. Though the dora Gulam Mohammed Khan was dispensed with, the gampala patels continued to rule the village. In this the mobilisation of caste solidarity was quite important. The first gram panchayat elections were held after the formation of Andhra Pradesh state, in 1959. In these elections Gampala Ram Reddy was elected as sarpanch of the village. He continued as village sarpanch for another term. Thus the single gampala family continued to dominate, *de jure* from 1959 to 1970. And *de facto* till roughly around 1975. In this period, and till today, the gampala reddy family was, and is, associated with the Congress Party.

The productive forces of the village were not much developed during this period. The land was concentrated in the hands of Patel reddy families. And the nature of productive forces supported this social structure. We can take irrigation for example. The entire village depended to a large extent on well irrigation. This means that in a period during which there was no electricity, it was the big landowners who took advantage of whatever technology that was available. The oil engines

which were used to pump water were within the means of big landholders only. Family farms and small holders certainly could not afford oil engines. The small peasants had to rely on 'mota bavis', a moat worked by oxen.

There was little or no state intervention to augment productive force. Electricity came to the village in 1982. State intervention even in other rural development programmes was minimal during this period. The gram panchayat sarpanches wielded political power, often backed by social domination, but they lacked public, governmental funds of any kind.

During this period the gampala reddy families, as headmen, arbitrated the village affairs and, quite importantly, the village disputes. Besides this they managed their own substantially big farms through, what appears to be semi-feudal labour relations. Vetti of the untouchable castes in particular seems to have continued, in however feeble form, till 1970.

Backward castes/classes in the village, though numerically preponderant, were not politically assertive during 1959-70. First, they were divided along caste lines. Secondly, the socially dominant and numerically important among them, the weavers, lacked economic power. During this period the weavers were only weaving cotton/handloom cloth for the local market which was not lucrative. The handloom industry had not yet found a world market. We will argue below how the globalisation of handloom industry led to the creation of a class structure among the weavers which in turn led to their political assertion.

But we should hasten to add here that the assertion of the backward castes took place much before the political ascendance of the weaving caste. The political assertion of the backward castes occurred basically against the gampala reddy.

#### BACKWARD CASTES, 1975-95

The first sarpanch Gampala Ram Reddy worked from 1959 to 1970. The *de facto* domination of the gampala reddy family continued till 1975. But the emergence of backward castes took place prior to 1975. In 1970 pachayati raj elections, all the backward castes worked against the vatandari gampala families. A toddy tapper was elected as sarpanch and continued in the post till 1981.

The weavers in the village were a numerous and politically important caste. But they were united against vatandari reddy. Weaving till 1980 was only meant for the local market. The raw materials yarn, chemicals, etc, used to be brought

from Hyderabad and finished cloth used to be again marketed in Hyderabad. During the tenure of the toddy tapper sarpanch the most significant achievement was village electrification. This meant that even small peasants could buy pumpsets for their wells. This in turn meant that the backward class small peasants could strengthen their family farms. Interestingly during this period, from 1975 till as late as 1988, the party configurations did not change much. Both the vatandari gampala reddy and the backward caste leaders fought each other as different factions of the same Congress Party. The weaver caste which independently asserted itself in politics later was also a part of the Congress Party.

#### WEAVING AND WORLD MARKET

By 1980, the occupation of weaving became a lucrative one. The local weavers started sending their cloth to metropolitan cities such as Bombay, Delhi and Madras. The premium quality cotton cloth they produced was being exported from these metropolitan cities to America, Europe and Eurasia. Some cloth was also exported to Asian markets such as Japan. Along with cotton cloth of high quality they also produced silk cloth and saris. This process of internationalisation was complex and has produced a class structure among the weavers.

This is at first reflected in the emergence of master weavers and then to a stratification among the weavers. Firstly, the enterprising among the weavers started bringing in the raw materials and distributing among the middle-working weavers. The middle-working weaver in his turn employed a worker-weaver from any labouring caste of the village. The work was divided up as follows: master weaver – distributes raw material and markets the finished cloth; middle-working weaver – applies colours, dye, etc, and hires labour; and wage-worker weaver – weaves the cloth on either daily wage basis or piece rate basis. This structure worked, and still works, in favour of the first category of master weavers. The second and third category of weavers do not get more than their daily wage. This wage fluctuates with the fluctuating prices of finished cloth in the world market. What this system produced between 1980 to roughly about 1990 is an affluent master weaver class which also started asserting its dominance over not only the weaver caste, but over all the backward castes.

The affluence of the master weavers is visible in their houses. They own modern trucks, scooters, refrigerators, air coolers, etc, and a phone is also to be found in the

house of every master weaver to facilitate his communications with the local and metropolitan businessmen. None of these consumer durables are found either in reddy caste houses or in the houses of lower caste weavers. The standard of living indicated by these consumer durables is very high by local standards.

More importantly the master weavers started investing their money into buying lands, mainly from the reddy and sometimes also from other backward castes. Thus one master weaver who combines his government job with his master weaving activity has accumulated more than 100 acres of land. He is now one of the two big landlords of the village.

The deconcentration of land among the dominant reddy families appears to have taken place owing to two important reasons. First, land partition among family members; second, increasing cash dowries during marriages. Dowries in reddy caste often run into lakhs of rupees. This is one important reason for the sale of lands by reddy.

The weavers of the village are also organised into a co-operative society. Elections do take place for the society. But the entire society is dominated by master weavers. During the elections for the co-operative society money, liquor, etc. are lavishly used. The master weavers literally invest in these elections and in turn later use the co-operative society for furthering their business interests. In these elections weavers do fight among themselves on party basis. The master weavers were united under Congress Party and presently they are under the Telugu Desam Party.

Though the weavers are divided by class, when it comes to panchayati raj elections, they mobilise caste solidarity for electoral purpose. But even during the panchayat elections it is the handful of master weavers who dominate their fellow caste members. Since master weavers are engaged in the circulation of raw materials and marketing the finished product, they enter into patron-client relations with the other lower caste weavers. These patron-client relations help them in mobilising caste solidarity. Thus on its face it appears as if all the weavers belong to the same class and represent the same interests; but in reality they are divided into classes and contain inter-class exploitative relations.

In 1981 elections the master weavers asserted their political power. This time one master weaver got elected as sarpanch on Congress ticket defeating the toddy tapper candidate belonging to the rival faction of the Congress Party. It is clear

that by this time though the vatandari gampala reddy in the village were supporting Congress Party they had lost their place in the political scenario of the village. Certainly, a decisive shift took place on the social basis of political power from reddy to that of backward castes; and within the backward castes in favour of the master weavers.

In 1988 gram panchayat elections, the earlier sarpanch and master weaver changed over to Telugu Desam Party and mobilised his caste as well. Thus the anti-reddy feeling has also turned into anti-Congress politics. One can see the photographs of Congress leaders hanging on the walls in the houses of gampala reddy family but not in the houses of any backward caste villagers. Thus presently the backward castes are organised under the master weavers supporting the Telugu Desam Party.

#### LIBERALISATION AND WEAVING

For weaving things have changed since roughly about 1990. Prices of yarn, chemicals and other raw materials have doubled, while the price of the cloth exported has remained unchanged. The burden is transferred by the master weavers to the two lower rungs of weavers. This is done by cutting down the wage rates and/or piece rates. Thus it is the wage-workers who bear the burden of internationalisation.

Besides weaving and agriculture, the master weavers engage in moneylending. The money made out of weaving, agriculture and moneylending is now being invested in urban properties. For example, a master weaver and earlier sarpanch has properties in Hyderabad and has his son studying engineering in the US and he is himself active in district level politics. During 1970-90 the backward castes have consolidated their position economically and politically. Though a caveat is necessary here that there is a class structure within the backward castes.

#### CASTE OR CLASS

In this village study it is observed that a shift took place on the social basis of political power from upper castes to backward castes. But this shift took place only between the top layer of reddy to the top layer or upper class backward castes. State involvement was only by way of holding the gram panchayat elections. No decisive economic programme, such as land reforms, has been carried out by the state. The changes in the agrarian structure have come about owing to the commercialisation process on the one hand and on the other owing to the incorporation of the village

political economy into the world market. The social relations have definitely changed from semi-feudal to capitalist. Vetti or such practices are totally absent now. The traditional vatandar reddy families have declined in political and social importance though they still hold some economic power.

### III Janampally Village

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Janampally was a khalsa village in 1900. The nizam had three types of ruling systems: jagirdari, khalsa and sarf-e-khas systems. In the jagirdari system the jagirdar owned much or all the land of the village. In sarf-e-khas system the entire land was owned directly by the nizam's family and the land revenue went to their personal expenditure. In khalsa system, the land ownership rested with the villagers. It was much like the ryatwari system of the presidency areas under the British. The significant difference with the other two land systems was that the villagers owned the land in their names and the land revenue went neither to any individual jagirdar nor to the nizam but to the treasury of the nizam government.

Village administration in all three types of land systems was run through the vatandari system. It meant a system of village officers who consisted of the vatan: these were the patwari, the mali patel and the kotwal or police patel. Janampally by 1990 had vatandari system. Under the system the patwari or village revenue officer belonged to a brahmin-karanam on hereditary basis. The mali patel and police patel posts belonged to a reddy family which lived away from the village. By 1990 the mali patel and police patel vatans were transferred into the hands of local yadavas, regionally called the gollas. The yadavas' basic occupation is sheep grazing. But one family, the meda family of yadavas, accepted the vatans. While the brahmin-karanam family ran revenue matters, other matters concerning village administration were run by the meda family of yadavas. Thus in this village, backward caste leadership has existed for 95 years. Unlike in the case of Bogaram village, it cannot be said in Janampally that the backward classes, emerged in village politics at a particular time after independence.

In order to run the village administration the yadavas educated themselves to some extent. But this is only true of the meda family of yadavas. The rest of the yadavas continued to be illiterate and backward.

Though the mali patel and police patel posts were held by the yadavas it is the brahmin-karanam and his family which dominated village politics from 1900 to as late as 1970. In this village there is no significant evidence that the vatandari families accumulated land during the nizam period under consideration, i e, 1900-50. Two reasons appear to be important for this: first, ownership of land existed in the name of the villagers, and second, the karanam patwari was himself a progressive man who participated in the struggles against nizam rule as a Congress Party worker under the umbrella of Andhra Maha Sabha. He even participated in armed struggle against the nizam. Thus unlike in Bogaram village the village officers did not resort to accumulation of lands or encroachment on lands.

The khalsa system itself allowed less room for accumulation of land by village officers. There was less arbitrariness in the land related accounts. This meant that in the Janampally village the possibilities of accumulation of land by village officers were much less than in the village Bogaram. Another reason for this was the village productive forces. The productive forces of Janampally village are better situated than that of Bogaram village. The village has 1,200 acres of land and a big tank and four small tanks. Both tank irrigation and well irrigation played important role in somewhat stable and assured subsistence for small peasants. Thus the politically progressive nature of local elites and better productive forces worked against the concentration of land in the hands of a few village officers. Thus in this village the agricultural scenario is characterised by the preponderance of the small peasants. Another important reason for the relative absence of much feudal or semi-feudal dominance is that village did not have dominant caste dora. Though there were some reddy in the village they were not the village officers and therefore their economic power was neutralised by the political power of the backward castes and therefore whatever upper caste domination existed in the village was that of the brahmin-karanam. But the progressive and politically active nature of this village officer also diluted the semi-feudal content of the social dominance. Thus the brahmin-karanam family had about 75 acres of land. They continued to dominate the village affairs partly from 1900 to 1970.

#### BRAHMIN DOMINANCE 1900-70

It was difficult to obtain much details about the period from 1900 to 1970 regarding social relations or political

dynamics. It became clear that owing to the absence of the dora from the village scene semi-feudal practices like the vetti were not prominent. The upper caste domination was also unnoticeable because of the fact that the two village officer posts were in the hands of local yadavas.

In 1959 panchayat elections a brahmin was elected as sarpanch. Again in 1964 elections another brahmin-karanam was elected as sarpanch. Both won the panchayat elections as candidates of the Congress Party. It should be noted that it is these people who participated in Telengana armed struggle against the nizam under the Andhra Maha Sabha. So they carried the popularity of having fought against the nizam. By the same token, as the interviews with them show they were also conscious of upper caste domination – particularly of reddy domination. It would not be correct to hold that the reddy doras were alone oppressive. But the main cause which ignited the Telengana armed struggle was reddy oppression. Having been conscious of the causes and consequences of the armed struggle the brahmin-karanams of Janampally were more liberal.

Nevertheless, the brahmin patwari and other karnams continued to be the top landowners in the village; they owned more than 75 acres of land. But they cultivated this land through hired labour rather than through tenants. This land was later partitioned within both the families.

#### BACKWARD CASTE PEASANTRY

The break with brahmin dominance came in 1970. In the 1970 panchayat elections a yadava sarpanch was elected. This yadava sarpanch came from the meda family of yadavas to whom belonged the mali patel and police patel vatans. Thus it is since 1970 that the backward castes came to the forefront of village politics.

The yadavas' or gollas' main caste occupation is sheep grazing. In this village they combine it with agriculture. Most yadavas do own land and are small or middle farmers. Some yadavas own less than 10 acres and some less than five acres. The village productive forces are much better suited for the sustainability of dwarf holdings than in Bogaram. The village has four small tanks and one big tank as noted earlier. Most yadavas own their parcels of land under these tanks. (Since 1980 the four small tanks are used only as percolation tanks, i e, the water is stored and not used directly with the idea that the stored water would percolate into the wells dug in the ayacut area of the tanks. Thus tanks are used to enhance

groundwater situation.) Much like Bogaram, in Janampally also electricity came in the early 1980s. Since then almost all backward caste small peasants have acquired electric motors and pumpsets.

Yadavas are numerically the most preponderant backward caste in the village. The next most important backward caste in the village is the weaver caste or the padmashalis. Weaving in the village is qualitatively different from that in Bogaram. We turn to this aspect below.

Apart from yadavas and weavers the third most important backward caste in the village is that of toddy tappers. Together these castes form a political block in the village. They are deeply conscious of their political, economic and social backwardness and also conscious of their numerical strength.

Weavers in the Janampally village are basically subsistence weavers. They weave primarily for the home market. Cotton and silk cloth and saris are produced here. Unlike in Bogaram village there are no master weavers. Weaving is done by independent family units. The cloth is supplied to the local co-operative society. The local (village) co-operative society markets the woven cloth through Andhra Pradesh weavers co-operative (APCO). Each silk sari, for instance, sells for about Rs 1,000 to 1,500. It is precisely because there is no master weaver that there is little capital or land accumulation by weavers. In Bogaram village the master weaver system arose owing to the internationalisation of weaving. In contrast to this in Janampally village weaving is essentially for the national market.

Elections do take place for weavers' co-operative society. But the candidates do not use money, liquor, etc, for winning elections. The co-operative society chairperson is usually elected unanimously. Since liberalisation weavers have faced difficulties. As in Bogaram village, in Janampally also weavers face a rise in the prices of raw materials and stagnation in the prices of finished cloth. Besides this the weavers in Janampally also face competition from textile industry centred in and around Bombay. There is unequal competition between textile mills and handlooms. Often the market favours textile mills rather than handlooms. An inefficient system of marketing by local co-operative and APCO also aggravates the situation. The handloom weavers do not get payment promptly for the work done from APCO and consequently from the local co-operative. Padmashalis (weavers) of Janampally have not become landlords unlike those of Bogaram. There is

no internationalisation of handlooms; no master weavers; no three-tier structure of weaving; and no land accumulation.

#### LABOUR IN JANAMPALLY

Janampally has two kinds of labour relations: casual labour and attached labour. Casual wage labour is hired on daily basis. Wages for casual labour are around Rs 15 for women and Rs 30-40 for men. Under the attached labour or the 'jeethas' system the wage labourer is hired on annual contract basis. The rate for annual contract is Rs 6,000 to 7,000. Along with it the labourer is given a loan of about Rs 2,000 at 2 per cent per annum interest. Here the researcher could not find any debt bondage. Attached labourers never work for an employer for more than one year; the labourer usually pays off his debt at the end of the agricultural year and enters into contract for another year with another master. Usually attached labourers come from backward castes as well as from scheduled castes. Employers are either from upper castes, brahmins and reddyas or from other backward castes.

Since 1980 labour is increasingly turning from work in the village to work in the nearby town. Nearly 60 labourers travel each day to the neighbouring town Chityal to work as 'hamali' coolies in the rice mills. There they earn more than the daily wage in the village, i e, about Rs 70 to 80.

#### LAND OWNERSHIP

In Janampally village as we have noted earlier backward castes emerged in panchayat politics from 1970 onwards. They continue to hold on to village officer post – mali patel and kotval – which were bestowed upon them as early as 1900.

Landownership is no more concentrated in the hands of upper castes. But holdings of more than 25 acres, which is above the ceiling imposed by the government, continue to exist in the hands of brahmin landlords. But the holdings have declined substantially (from about 75 acres in 1970 to about 20-25 acres now).

Weavers at first bought lands from brahmins. Later weavers sold their lands to other backward castes such as yadavas and toddy tappers. Now it is yadavas and toddy tappers who form a majority of middle and small holders and who also run the village politics – *de jure* and *de facto*. In this village commercialisation has had considerable impact on the agrarian structure. Land values improved from about Rs 400 per acre in 1960 to Rs 25,000 to 30,000 per acre in 1990. In 1995 well situated wet land sold for about

Rs 45,000 to Rs 50,000. Dry land now sells from about Rs 25,000 to Rs 30,000. Landlords declined because of partitioning of holdings, unmanageability and diversification of interests. Here no particular caste/class – such as master weavers of padmashali caste in Bogaram – acquired the lands. Many backward castes benefited from the decline of big landlords. Benefited in the sense that they bought the lands of erstwhile big landlords and strengthened their small and marginal farms.

No significant phenomenon of transformation of big landlords into 'capitalist landlords' was observable in the village, primarily because no drastic change occurred in the past 30 years in the productive forces or physical infrastructure of production. The advent of electricity and electric pumps has benefited the small and marginal peasants as much as the big landowners. Consequently no process of proletarianisation took place in the village.

#### References

- Athreya, V B et al (1990): *Barriers Broken: Production Relations and Agrarian Change in Tamil Nadu*, Sage, New Delhi.
- Bedford, I (1967): 'The Telengana Insurrection: A Study in the Causes and Development of a Communist Insurrection in Rural India (1946-1951)', unpublished PhD thesis, Australian National University, Canberra.
- Beteille, A (1996): *Caste Class and Power: Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village*, OUP, Delhi.
- (1974): *Studies in Agrarian Social Structure*, OUP, Delhi.
- Breman, J (1985): 'Between Accumulation and Immiseration: The Partiality of Fieldwork in Rural India', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol 13, no 1, October.
- (1993): *Beyond Patronage and Exploitation: Changing Agrarian Relations in South Gujarat*, OUP, Delhi.
- Breman, J et al (eds) (1997): *The Village in Asia Revisited*, OUP, Delhi.
- Byres, T J (1995): 'Political Economy, Agrarian Question and Comparative Method', *EPW*, vol 30, no 10, March.
- Das, A N (1996): *Changed: the Biography of a Village*, Penguin Books, New Delhi.
- Frankel, F R and M S A Rao (1989): *Dominance and State Power in Modern India: Decline of a Social Order*, 2 vols, OUP, Delhi.
- Grey, H (1970): 'The Landed Gentry of the Telengana, Andhra Pradesh' in E Leach and S N Mukherjee (eds), *Elites in South Asia*, CUP, Cambridge.
- Patnaik, U (ed) (1990): *Agrarian Relations and Accumulation: The 'Mode of Production' Debate in India*, OUP, Delhi.
- Rajasekhar, D (1986): *Land Transfers and Family Partitioning*, Oxford and IBH New Delhi in association with CDS, Trivandrum.
- (1992): 'Economic Mobility of Rural Households: A Study of Kurnool District in Andhra Pradesh (Circa 1860-1989)', unpublished PhD thesis, CDS, Trivandrum.
- Reddy, Ram M (nd): 'Agrarian Relations: A Case Study in Telengana Region', unpublished PhD thesis, Department of Economics, Kakatiya University, Warangal, Andhra Pradesh.
- Srinivas, M N (1996): *Village, Caste, Gender and Method: Essays in Social Anthropology*, OUP, Delhi.
- Srinivasulu, K (1988): 'Telengana Peasant Movement and Change in Agrarian Structure: A Case Study of Nalgonda District', unpublished PhD thesis, Jawahar Lal Nehru University, New Delhi.
- Yugandhar, B N (1996): *Land Reforms in India: Andhra Pradesh – People's Pressure and Administrative Innovations*, Sage, New Delhi.