

The Dalit-Muslim Political Alliance in Nizam State:**Reevaluating the Role of B. S. Venkat Rao****Dr. B. Venkat Rao**Dept. of Literatures in English
EFL University, Hyderabad, Telangana.**Abstract:**

This paper sets out to explore the kernel role of B.S.Venkat Rao who attempted, in early twentieth-century, for the Dalit-Muslim political understanding for the welfare of Dalits reform, education and representation in Nizam's Hyderabad Domain. B.S. Venkat Rao became an educational minister in Nizam state by all his phenomenal politics. Intriguingly, he was popularly known as the 'Hyderabad Ambedkar', for all his uncompromising conviction for the welfare of the Dalit community. He was a staunch follower of Ambedkar. He took forward and carried out Ambedkar's mission in Hyderabad State by actively attending to many conferences in Maharashtra being organized by Ambedkar. He became close intimate of Ambedkar and subsequently he started an organization called *Youth League of Ambedkarities (1936)* in order to propagate and promote Ambedkar's political and philosophical ideas in the Nizam state. Incidentally, the provision for separate electorate also elevated their expectations of being able to enter into the political arena as an independent force rather than to be used by the Arya Samaj or Brahma Samaj or being subsumed in Congress politics. Gail Omvedt points out that the mobilization of the oppressed and exploited sections of society—the peasants, Dalits, women and 'low castes' that Jyotiba Phule had spoken of as *shudras* and *ati-shudras*—occurred on a large scale in the 1920s and 1930s, under varying leaderships and with varying ideologies (Gail Omvedt, 34)¹. She further states that many low-caste activists of the 1920s, organizing as non-Brahmins and Dalits, were drawn to an anti-caste, anti-Brahmin, even anti-Hindu, ideology of the kind that Phule had formulated. Similarly, in the Nizam domain, B.S. Venkat Rao made serious efforts to have Dalit-Muslim political alliance as he felt that the Hindu Social reformers and the Congress activists were staunch followers of Hinduism, which sanctions caste hierarchies.

Key words: Nizam State, Education, Representation, Separate electorate, Reform, Congress and Dalit-Muslim political alliance.

B.S. Venkat Rao (1890-1953)

B.S. Venkat Rao, who was popularly known as the ‘Hyderabad Ambedkar’, was the most prominent among those who dominated the socio-political and religious scene in the Nizam’s domain for two decades. Bathula Ashaiah, popularly known as Venkat Rao, born to parents in the domestic service of the Europeans, was a resident of Ghasmandy. During the period of the First World War (1914–18), Venkat Rao was not in Hyderabad. He worked as a sculptor in Poona where he married a Maharashtrian woman. In the year 1919, he went to Basra as an Overseer in the Civil Engineering Department. He returned home in 1922 and entered the service of Public Works Department of H.E.H. the Nizam’s Government as an Overseer. After some time, he was appointed as an Assistant Recruiting Officer in the Nizamsagar Project.

In Poona, he worked in the engineering department for some time. Later he quit his job and immersed himself in political activity. Earlier in 1922, he had formed Adi-Dravida Sangham with the assistance of M. Govindarajulu and M. Venkataswamy. Later in 1927, he formed the Adi-Hindu Mahasabha along with C.S. Ethiraj, K. Ramaswamy and Arigay Ramaswamy and tried to bring a new awakening among the Dalit masses. He was a powerful and magnetic speaker, leading the movement through his personality as well as financial sponsorship. In fact, this paper draws many extracts from P.R. Venkat Swamy’s two historical volumes of records on dalit activities.

It is important to note that while Bhagya Reddy Verma initiated the movement mostly with the guidance and support of liberal Hindus in his early days (though towards the end, he was completely disillusioned with them), B.S. Venkat Rao, who had shared Bhagya Reddy’s reformist agenda up to 1930s, became truly radical as a result of his association with Ambedkar. So one can study Venkat Rao as a radical follower of Ambedkar and as one of his strong supporters in the Nizam’s domain. Venkat Rao was invited to the Maharashtra Aspirishya Youths Conference at Pune in 1936, which was presided over by N. Shivaraj and addressed by Ambedkar. Influenced by the speeches and activities of the Maharashtra leaders, People who participated in the Youth Conference organized the Youth League of Ambedkarites in Hyderabad with Venkat Rao as president and Venkatswamy as secretary. Its aims were to

organize the youth to support Ambedkar in leading the untouchables out of the Hindu fold, to enlighten the people about the evils of Hinduism and to organize a vigorous campaign on socio-economic disabilities. On the invitation of Ambedkar, Venkat Rao presided over the Bombay Presidency Mahar Conference at Bombay held on 30th May 1936. In this significant meeting he made a scathing attack on the Hindu religion and tried to defend the move towards conversion. In his own words:

Some people are criticizing us that our intention of conversion is the sign of our defeat. But our answer is that it is not at all our defeat. We are not going to be succumbed either by giving up our right to convert or by stopping our struggle for liberation. We are changing our strategy. Stage will change. Struggle will continue. We will choose the religion which upholds the democratic values. If there is no such religion, we will create it. We have not degraded the religion. But the religion in which we are practicing has degraded us and it eventually has been degraded. There is no humanity, no equality, and no justice in that (Hindu) religion. If we want self-respect we cannot continue in Hindu religion. In our opinion Hindu religion is equal to poison – we do not want this poison.... We have to spread the message of Ambedkar in our colonies(P.R. Venkatswamy, 84).

Formation of Youth League of Ambedkarites

The deliberations of the Poona Conference and the lively spirit of the young Maharashtrians infused a new life in the Hyderabad group. P.R. Venkatswamy writes:

After our return from Poona, I seriously thought over the revival of our activities which were at low ebb at that time. I waited till I had finished my university examinations. During the summer I had a long deliberation with B.S.Venkat Rao regarding the probable consequences of Dr. Ambedkar's movement to leave the Hindu-fold which was spreading rapidly all over the country. We were convinced of necessity of establish an organization to support the cause, Doctor's vigorous campaign against Hinduism. I suggested the name "Youth League of Ambedkarites" and Venkat Rao was much delighted with this mouthful of a

name. We decided to completely suspend the activities of the Adi-Hindu Mahasabha of which he was the President and myself General Secretary. He consented to become the President of the new organization with me as its Secretary. Then I drafted the aims and objects of the League(P.R. Venkatswamy,71).

P.R. Venkatswamy convened a meeting in the New Bhoiguda Temperance Building on 17th May 1936, under the chairmanship of B.S. Venkat Rao to announce the formation of the new organization. While inviting members to the meeting, precautions were taken to keep out all those who would oppose the new organization. Venkat Rao explained the mission of Dr. Ambedkar and enumerated the various atrocities committed by the caste Hindus against the Depressed Classes, who were denied the benefits of culture and civilization in the existing inflexible order of society. He sounded a note of warning that they should not be carried away by the sweet words of the so-called reformers who belonged to the privileged classes and vested interests. He exhorted them to get rid of the demoralizing influence of the monstrous Hindu religion and support Dr. Ambedkar in his fight for the emancipation of the Depressed Classes.

It was unanimously decided to form the new organization under the name ‘Youth League of Ambedkarites’ with its office at No. 110, New Bhoiguda. B.S. Venkat Rao and P.R. Venkatswamy were elected President and Secretary respectively. A number of young men, including M.B. Govindrajulu, Puli Mallikarjan and Boda Narsimlu, were elected to the working committee of the League.

The following were the aims and objects of the League:

- 1) To organize the youth of the so-called Depressed Classes into one united body;
- 2) To support Dr. Ambedkar in his mission to lead the community out of the Hindu-fold;
- 3) To enlighten them on the evils of Hinduism;
- 4) To urge on them not to embrace any religion at present;
- 5) To obliterate existing caste differences among them;
- 6) To start a vigorous campaign to ameliorate their social and economic disabilities (P.R.

Venkatswamy, 72).

The Proselytizing Activities of Missionaries

The League's whirlwind campaign to spread the message of Dr. Ambedkar gave an impetus to the proselytizing activities of the Christian and Muslim missionaries, who began to spread their work in all directions. Revolt was in the air as a result of the League's propagation of the message of Dr. Ambedkar. The League, however, never advocated any specific change of religion while urging the community people to leave the Hindu fold. The proselytizing activities of the missionary bodies created a baffling problem for League. P.R. Venkatswamy was compelled to issue the following communication to the Press on 7th July 1936, to clarify the League position and to warn the community people from falling prey to such conversion activities:

I wish to sound a warning to Harijans of the Hyderabad State that the implications of the divine message of Dr. Ambedkar to leave the Hindu-fold is not to effect an immediate change of religion. His move is to create a spirit of revolt against the tyranny of caste Hinduism... the grave disabilities under which Depressed Classes have laboured and continue to labour are a blot upon Hinduism. Realization of this injustice has led to a reformist movement known as Gandhiji's Harijan campaign, which apparently is not able to make any effective impression on the Hindu majority. We appreciate the sincerity with which Gandhiji is carrying on his campaign of removal of untouchability. But unfortunately his lieutenants have taken it in a different sense which is nothing but political wire-pulling. Some sporadic attempts to give us equal rights in matters metaphysical or spiritual, without touching the acute socio-economic problems, are only an eye-wash. What we really want is a better social status and more humane conditions of life... We don't want a single member of our community to become a convert to any religion at present. Our resolve is to found a new democratic religion and convert ourselves to it 'en masse'. Only when the final decision is taken in an all-India representative conference--or we revive our ancient religion keeping away from the Hindu-fold(P.R. Venkatswamy,98-99).

In spite of protests against the proselytizing activities of the Christian and Muslim missionary bodies, the League found that their activities were getting intense responses and the people of the community were going ahead and embrace other religions. The one great benefit conferred on them as a result of conversion was their escape from the inhuman ‘forced and free labour’ (*veti*) which was rampant all over the Nizam’s State. P.R. Venkatswamy issued a lengthy statement to the Press on 17th March 1938. I quote below an extract from it:

We are not seeking spiritual salvation through change of religion. What we demand is the complete change in the present economic and social structure of society and the removal of the gross injustices. It is a disgrace on the part of the missionaries of certain creeds who have taken undue advantages of the situation to intensify proselytisation. We shall continue our class struggle, but shall not tolerate the disintegration of the solidarity of our community...(P.R. Venkatswamy, 109-110).

The activities of League were gradually taking political shape. Venkat Rao was in constant touch with Dr. Ambedkar and kept him informed about the League’s activities. He had personal talks with him regarding the constitutional reforms in the State and sought his help in representing the case of the untouchables to the Governor of Hyderabad to safeguard the communities’ political interests in the forthcoming reforms. He tried his best to persuade Ambedkar to accept the League’s invitation to visit Secunderabad; but being too busy a man, Ambedkar could not fulfill the League’s appeal. But Ambedkar did speak to Mohammad Ali Jinnah, president of the Muslim League, about political safeguards to influence Bahdur Yar Jung, President of the Ittehadul Musalmeen of Hyderabad, to support their political demands.

The General Body Meeting of the Youth League of Ambedkarites

During the two long years of League’s intense activities of campaign against Hinduism, the League was able to spread knowledge and enlightenment among the young and educated section of the Depressed Classes. That was the period of agitation for acquiring political rights and introduction of constitutional reforms in the state. Venkat Rao had introduced a new spirit in

activities of the League to cover a wider field taking on the social, economic and political demands of the Depressed Classes.

In view of the impending constitutional reforms, the working committee of the League decided to broaden the scope of its activities. The League had limited aims and objects and could not take on the wider responsibility of achieving political rights for the untouchables. Therefore it was decided to alter the name of the League into “The Hyderabad State Depressed Classes Association.” In P.R.Venkatswamy’s foreword to the proposed Association he said,

Since the inauguration of the Youth League of Ambedkarites its activities were confined only to the enlightened section of the youth of the so-called Depressed Classes. In view of the constitutional changes imminent in Hyderabad the League found it necessary to expand its activities. After prolonged deliberations, it is decided to convert the League into “The Hyderabad State Depressed Classes Association”. The scope and object are further widened in a manner calculated to embrace the rights and interests of the entire 25 lakhs of Depressed Classes of the Dominions. Through our intellectual conviction, necessity and experience we have rightly come to know what is good for us. We have become conscious of our rights and potentialities and it is our firm conviction that if artificially created inequalities and privileges are removed and if equal opportunity is given to us we can attain the highest level of creativeness and intellectual progress. For the attainment of these objects we shall do our utmost through this association.

Then they announced the following aims and objectives for the proposed Hyderabad State Depressed Classes Association and they were all unanimously approved.

- 1) To organize the so-called Depressed Classes into one united body.
- 2) To foster the spirit of brotherhood and to obliterate the existing caste differences among them.
- 3) To educate them to sever their connection with the Hindu-fold and to form a separate body.

- 4) To launch a vigorous campaign against the missionary propaganda in the Depressed Classes.
- 5) To seek their political rights by adequate representation in various organs of Government.
- 6) To effect the removal of their social and civic disabilities.
- 7) To assume any other work which will further the advancement of the abovementioned objects.

In his concluding remarks B.S. Venkat Rao said,

Let me sound a note of warning to the missionaries, such as Arya Samaj, Brahma Samaj, Christian and Islam, to desist from their disgusting propaganda among the Depressed Classes. Conversion will not solve their economic problem, with which we are concerned more, on the other hand it will accelerate their economic ruination and ultimately they will be left in the lurch. Such propaganda should not be left unchecked; I would suggest the formation of a Special Committee to boldly combat the missionary propaganda among the Depressed Classes and do their utmost to bring back to their fold the innocent masses that fell victims to the missionary propaganda(P.R. Venkatswamy,111-112).

The announcement of constitutional reforms in the state found no favour with any political or communal body in the state, except the Ittehadul Musalmeen, which got the lion's share as a ruling community. Some Hindu leaders were trying to enter into a secret pact with the state. It was rumoured that they had already come to a settlement. The Association issued the following statement to press protesting against the settlement:

The Depressed Classes in Hyderabad State will welcome the communal settlement between the Muslims and the Hindus. But this settlement shall in no case be binding upon the Depressed Classes, as they are entirely outside the pale of the Hindu Society. None but the representatives of the Depressed Classes only can speak on their behalf with confidence. The Hindus in the State by indulging in activities like the removal of Untouchability are trying to create an impression that the Depressed Classes have no political rights and the ameliorative measures

for the social welfare will solve their problem. The claims of the Depressed Classes for political rights and economic welfare are historical facts and they shall not be satisfied unless those rights are recognized and duly fulfilled. If the Hindus in the name of the Depressed Classes are coming to a settlement with the Muslims it is only with the desire to wrest the political power into their hands and maintain it with their distinctive majority. I would therefore suggest to H.E.H. the Nizam's Government to call a conference of the chosen representatives of the Hindus, the Muslims and the Depressed Classes and the various interests before which the Government will place its policy and ask the conference to a decision. The president of such a conference can only [be] His Excellency the Rt. Hon'ble Sir Akbar Hydari himself. This will possibly solve the communal problem and the political issue now lying before the country(P.R. Venkatswamy,152-153).

After the announcement of the constitutional reforms by the Hyderabad Government, the leaders of the Hindu and Muslim communities were striving their best to come to an agreement between themselves for the preservation of their political rights. The parleys were going on under the name of "Unity Talks". These prolonged talks ultimately ended in failure. At this critical juncture the Nizam issued a *firman* to the people of all communities to come to an amicable settlement among themselves in the larger interests of the State. The editor of the *Deccan Chronicle* invited the views of some leading members of the public on the *firman*. The statement of Venkat Rao was as follows:

On behalf of the Hyderabad Depressed Classes Association, I, as President, enthusiastically welcome the Firman-e-Mubarak since they are proclaimed for the superior safeguard of the country and the people. As such, the Depressed Classes of the State as unflinching loyalists sincerely obey every letter of the command given through these Firman-e-Mubarak by our August Ruler H.E.H. the Nizam of Hyderabad and Berar... as regards Unity Talks; I venture to say that such talks only by two communities politically or socially will never result in success. Hence, I pray all communities to unite themselves to help the wishes of our

beloved Ruler rather than resuming in any other talks at this juncture when there is much to be done for the social and economic welfare of the people and county at large(P.R. Venkatswamy,176).”

The most important business of this Conference was the adoption of a resolution against the conversion of Depressed Classes to other religions. The magic name of Dr. Ambedkar pervaded the whole atmosphere of the conference. In the Marathwada region, his name had become a household word which captivated the hearts of young and old. Other resolutions comprised of demands relating to political, economic and social rights and appealing to the government to provide facilities for the emancipation of the downtrodden from the thralldom of the Hindus. Venkat Rao addressed the gathering on the second day of the conference.

The All-India Depressed Classes Political Conference

The All-India Depressed Classes Political Conference was held at Nagpur on 18th, 19th and 20th July,1942. Rao Bahadur N. Sivaraj, M.L.A. (Central) presided over the conference. Dr. Ambedkar was to have presided over the conference, but he did not do so, in view of his nomination to the Executive Council of H.E. the Viceroy. Before assuming that office, he wanted to hand over the responsibility which he was carrying for the previous 20 years. A group of delegates, consisting of J.H. Subbiah, Arigay Ramaswamy, C.S. Ethirajan, B.G. Madre, P.V. Manohar, K.M. Rathnaiah and P.R. Venkatswamy, left for Nagpur to attend the conference. B.S. Venkat Rao accompanied by B. Shyamsunder also attended the conference. They did not attend in their private capacity, but represented the Depressed Classes Association(P.R. Venkatswamy,199-200).

Venkat Rao had maintained close relations with the Marathwada Dalit leadership. On one visit to the region to participate in a ‘Bhandara’, he was taken out in a procession followed by a mass of 20,000 people, on a cart drawn by eight white bullocks from Nanded to Surgaon, where the ‘Bhandara’ took place. In Surgaon he addressed a huge gathering. Referring to the constitutional reforms of the state, he wholeheartedly welcomed them and assured the government that the Depressed Classes were prepared to work them and make it a success. He

appealed to the government to widen the franchise and pleaded that all Depressed Class adults should be enfranchised. All Depressed Class members in government service should be empowered to vote. Expressing his views on social reforms he said that the Depressed Classes were not keen to enter temples, but they demanded equality in the services and legislatures with the members of other communities (P.R. Venkatswamy,233). He appealed to the congregation not to spend money on pilgrimages, but to donate it to the Depressed Classes Fund for the educational advancement of the community.

Venkat Rao soon became popular politician in the Nizam domain. Elections to the Legislative Assembly began on 16th December. Many candidates emerged unopposed from several constituencies. Some parties that were indifferent in the beginning altered their attitude and entered the arena. The electioneering campaign was in full swing, but there was surprisingly little recrimination or hatred displayed by the candidates. Many candidates withdrew their candidature one by one within the prescribed time limit.

Venkat Rao wanted to make a political point by contesting a seat in a constituency listed as a General Constituency. If he was successful in the contest it would add to the strength of the five nominated seats that the Depressed Classes had been allotted. In the event of his defeat, he was sure to be one of the five nominated candidates to the reserved seats. With this object in view, he filed his nomination from the 'Local Bodies' constituency. His rival candidates were influential caste-Hindus, but still they recognized the merit of Venkat Rao who was a leader of the Depressed Classes with a long service to his credit. So one by one, the other candidates withdrew from the contest leaving Venkat Rao unopposed. Thus Venkat Rao emerged successful in his first political venture(P.R. Venkatswamy,291).

Venkat Rao's support to the Nizam

Venkat Rao's role during the formation of independent Hyderabad state is also remarkable for its political astuteness. A 'Firman-e-Mubarak' had been issued by the Nizam on 11th June, 1947, declaring the independence of Hyderabad State. But there was some flexibility in the Firman. There was a possibility that the state would join the Indian Union, but the decision

was made to remain independent. Venkat Rao announced the celebration of Hyderabad's independence by the Depressed Classes Association on 29th June 1947. This was the only political body of the Depressed Classes which welcomed this declaration of independence.

At a meeting held under the auspices of Religious Leaders' Association of Hyderabad, Venkat Rao, moving the main resolution, said that the Hyderabad State Congress 'represented only a small fraction of the caste-Hindus and vested interests' and the position taken by it with respect to the political future of the state was 'unsound and untenable' and they were plunging the people into chaos by their 'negative and destructive attitude'. He said that it only showed that the Congress was afraid to face the realities. He declared that the 40 lakhs of Depressed Classes and 5 lakhs of Christians did not belong to the Congress and they were fully behind the stand taken up in the 'Firman-e-Mubarak'. He appealed to the Congress to save Hyderabad from the ruination which was the inevitable result of what he termed their 'totalitarian and fascist policy(P.R. Venkatswamy,323)'.

The Hyderabad Independence Day was celebrated with great ceremony by the two accredited leaders of the Depressed Classes Association. A public meeting was convened on 29th June 1947, the residence of Venkat Rao, who also chaired the meeting. He hoisted the Asaf Jahi flag and garlanded the portrait of the Nizam. A resolution expressing loyalty of the association to the Nizam was adopted. Shyamsunder was the principal speaker. Kasim Razvi, President of the Majlis and a few other leaders also spoke on this meeting at his residence.

Shyamsunder, another prominent dalit leader, vividly portrayed at great length the injustices that the Depressed Classes had suffered for thousands of years and "are still suffering at the hands of caste Hindus". Referring to the charge that both he and Venkat Rao had embraced Islam, he said that vested interests were carrying out "malicious propaganda" against them. The poor and innocent masses were thus misled. "I strongly refute this charge. We are cooperating with our Muslim brethren and that does not mean we have converted to Islam." Pointing to the Majlis leaders he said, "we have shaken hands with those who freely come to our house and sit with us and who have pledged their support to us (P.R. Venkatswamy,327)"

Then Shyamsunder moved a resolution reiterating the unflinching loyalty of the Depressed Classes and welcoming the timely declaration of Hyderabad Independence by the Firman-e-Mubarak.

Kasim Razvi, in the course of his eloquent speech, said,

As a Muslim it is my duty to give succor to every oppressed man and to lift the depressed people. There is no diplomacy in our befriending the Depressed Classes. I do not believe in counting heads. It is not the number of heads that matters but the inherent strength of the people that really matters. What can I expect to have from those who have nothing to give me? Islam did not spread by the force of sword, but by sheer force of the high standard of character of Muslims. Why should I go to the Depressed Classes and preach them to embrace Islam? Example is better than precept and Islam teaches us to convert people not by preaching but by example. If Muslims of Hyderabad see example of good character not only the Depressed Classes but one crore and forty lakhs of non-Muslims of the State will embrace Islam(P.R. Venkatswamy,327).

Once the Dalit leadership came out openly in support of the Nizam, rumors began to spread against them that they became puppets in the hands of the Nizam and that they were trying to convert the whole community into Islam. An unconfirmed news item from a Nagpur Correspondent was published in *The Hindu* of 15th October 1947, alleging that the Hyderabad state had launched a big conversion drive of Depressed Classes in Berar with the financial backing of two crores of rupees given by the state government. Venkat Rao immediately issued a strongly worded press statement contradicting the report. I quote below from his statement:

The news is fantastic in conception and an insidious propaganda that is being carried on by Congress emissaries even in the Dominions of Hyderabad... . The so-called Congress Satyagraha is an artificial movement and with all the money that they are lavishly distributing even among the Depressed Classes, it has not influenced even a tiny fraction of the community. Of late, the leaders among the

caste-Hindus have tried to bring economic pressure to bear on us and have gone to the length of subjecting individual members to unspeakable tortures in villages when they have refused to obey their dictates. It is certainly unbecoming of great State like the new India to tarnish its record by the type of propaganda it is conducting in our midst. It will recoil on the leaders of the upper strata of the Hindu society and lead to frightful conflict between the Depressed Classes and the Caste Hindus with the result that the poor and the innocent on either side will perish (340).

The masses in Hyderabad are intensely loyal to their sovereign and he is confident that by pursuing constitutional methods they will get more from their paternal Ruler than from any Government run by adventurers and self-seekers masquerading under the cloak of Congress leaders. No amount of sinister propaganda will wean the Depressed Classes away from following the path they have chosen. The question of conversion to Islam is simply a bogies and a mischievous creation of the Congress. It is not going to frighten them or throw them into the lap of the Congress.

He goes on to question the credibility of congress:

Much is made of the idea of [a] plebiscite by the Congress to determine whether Hyderabad should remain independent or become an appendage to the Indian Union. Let them try their hand at it and they will find out that even the meanest among us will stand for independence as every human being ought to. I am prepared to take the gauntlet thrown at Hyderabad for I am certain that the Depressed Classes, Muslims, Christians and the vast bulk of Hindus over whom the Congress has absolutely no hold, will rally round the throne of Hyderabad and prove before the world that Hyderabadis are prepared to lay down even their lives to maintain their independence and their own cosmopolitan Hyderabad's culture, and expression of lasting harmony between the different races and creeds who have flourished here happily for ages together. The Congress may even take it as challenge from me as the Leader of Depressed Classes. If I can instill

common sense in the Indian Union, my advice is: “accept with every sincerity the hand of friendship that Hyderabad has offered and enter into a treaty with Hyderabad such as may last, a treaty honourable alike to Hyderabad and the Indian Union (P.R. Venkatswamy, 340).”

Around this time, Venkat Rao also toured across the region in his role as an Education Minister to study the conditions of Dalits and to provide help and support them as a minister. His extensive tour of the area infused a new life into these groups and raised the prestige and the dignity of the Depressed Classes Association. Wherever he went, he was accorded a warm reception by the proud untouchables. He visited their hovels and inspected their special schools. He was rudely shocked to find their ungrudging endless sufferings of economic exploitation, physical degeneration and mental degradation. He patiently listened to their pathetic stories and gave verbal orders on the spot for their redress. It is another story that these orders were rarely carried out by the officials. It is also reported that he gave liberal donations from his own money for the construction of school buildings, dwelling huts and provision of amenities. He addressed big gatherings, received representations and spoke to them in their own language, which went straight to their hearts. His unrestricted accessibility to those who hitherto had no access at all to those in power endeared him to the people under his charge.

B.S. Venkat Rao was able to push his political goals further. In addition to the 1941 national level census, Hyderabad state also initiated census enumeration. He saw this as an opportunity to demonstrate that Dalits were not part of Hindu society. He issued an announcement in the paper as president of the Depressed Class Associations that all the Dalit castes should carefully register their respective communities as a separate category stating that they were not at all related to Hinduism. He warned them that Dalits should not be trapped by the Hindu Arya Samaj’s false propaganda. He printed a large number of pamphlets and distributed them across the State. He has sent a team of fifty activists to the every district of Telangana, Karnataka and Marathwada regions to make it sure that Dalits were aware of the issue and that they would declare that they were not Hindus (P.R. Venkatswamy,156). Apart from creating a political awareness among the Dalits, he submitted a memorandum to the president of Nizam’s

Administration requesting that Dalits should be recognized as a special category without any relation to Hindus.

B. S. Venkat Rao played an impressive role by remaining supportive to the Nizam. He becomes Minister of Education in the Nizam's government, from which vantage point he obtained a 'One Crore Trust Fund' from the government for Depressed Class Education(Dr Simon Charsley,10). During his tenure, he travelled to every part of the kingdom and took pains to listen patiently to the problems of the Dalit community and to solve them. It is said that it was at his recommendation that the Nizam distributed government lands and wastelands to Dalits across the Nizam's domain. When there had been serious communal polarization at that time he took personal interest to diffuse the communal clashes by mediating between the Hindus and Muslims and he put in place committees for communal harmony.

Readers will have noted that B.S. Venkat Rao maintained a close association with Ambedkar and his activities at national level, while at the same time remaining close to the Nizam. Both were important positions, aimed at foregrounding the question of Depressed Classes as an integral part of the effort to retain plurality and demand justice for the oppressed. On the question of political complexity, he considered the Indian state and the Brahminical forces working in the Congress party as the root cause of communal clashes. Through effective lobbying, he managed to get Dalit representation in the Nizam's government. He visualized a Hyderabad State based on a powerful alliance between the Dalits and the Muslims. He blamed the Congress leaders including Nehru for the military action against the Hyderabad state, which was done, he said for their own vested interest and not for the good of the people of the region. After the military action of 1948, Venkat Rao was placed under home arrest. His vision of Dalit political assertion was shattered and his followers were gradually integrated into Congress politics. All the same, the position that he took and the politics of alliance between Dalits and Muslims in the Hyderabad region that he founded continues to be functional even today.

Notes and references:

Gail Omvedt. *Dalit Visions: The Anti-Caste Movement and the Construction of an Indian Identity*. Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2006.

- P.R. Venkatswamy. *Our Struggle for Emancipation*. Secunderabad: Universal Arts Printers, 1955
- Dr Simon Charsley. *Dilemmas of Dalit leadership: Hyderabad*. Edinburgh: 16th European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies, 5–9 September 2000Anand Teltumbde. *Myths and Facts: Ambedkar on Muslims*. Mumbai: Vak Publication. 2003.
- V. Ramakrishna. *Social Reform in Andhra (1848-1919)*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1983.
- Chinnaiah, Jangam. “Dilemmas of Dalit Agendas: Political Subjugation and Self Emancipation in Telugu Country 1910–1950.
- Chinna Rao Yagati. *Dalit’s Struggle for Identity*. New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers, 2003.
- Dr. Vivek Kumar. *Dalit Leadership in India*. Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2002.
- Braj Ranjan Mani. *Debrahmanishing History: Dominance and Resistance in Indian Society*. New Delhi: Manohar, 2005.
