Chapter Three

Formal Organisational Structure

For any analysis of the actual functioning of political parties it is necessary to understand their formal rules and structures. Although parties seldom function according to the rules of the constitution these rules are often invoked both by the ruling cliques/factions to legitimise their decisions and actions against the dissenters and by the latter to challenge the power of those who are at the helm of affairs in the party. Secondly, one may also observe that the actual functioning is influenced to some extent by the nuances embedded in the framing of the rules, which are often latent. What is more obvious is that every formal organisation has to have a set of rules for it to function.

Most of the parties in the contemporary world, operating in a liberal polity, have a democratic framework. They also maintain that they are based on democratic rules and principles. The three parties under study are no exception to this. In this chapter an attempt is made to present briefly the rules of party organisation of the Congress, TDP and CPM. How these rules are actually observed in practice or to what extent they are reflected in the behaviour of leaders and activists will be examined in the later chapters.

Indian National Congress

The Congress 'movement' during the freedom struggle was given an organisational structure in 1908. Scattered units of the nationalist movement were assembled into a three-tiered structure. The basic local units were Congress Committees at Taluka and District levels which coincide with the basic local administrative units of India. At the next ascending level was the Pradesh (provincial/state) Congress Committee. The Congress constitution of 1920 established twenty-one such provincial organisations to coincide with the country's principal linguistic regions. The constitution of the party has been altered several times since Independence. What is presented in the following pages is the Congress structure as it stood
at the time of study, based on the rules of the party constitution and the modalities for the state organisation worked out by the Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee.2

Its structure includes the president of the party, the Working Committee and the All India Congress Committee (AICC) at the top, the Pradesh Congress Committees (PCC) at the state level and the District Congress Committees (DCC) at the local level. The Pradesh Congress Committees have the authority to decide the pattern of Committees 'subordinate' to the District Congress Committees. The party organisation in the state has Mandal Committees and at the lowest level the primary committees i.e., at the village/ward level.

Party membership:

There are two categories of members in the Congress party, namely primary and active members. Any person who is 18 years and above and who accepts the party objective, on payment of biennial subscription of Rs. 1.00 (US$ 0.03 cents) becomes a primary member of Congress provided he is not a member of any other political party which has a separate membership, constitution and programme. A person becomes a primary member at his place of residence or at a place where he carries his business or work. All primary members are not eligible to be active members. Those who are members of elected public bodies, who have been primary members for one full year and who are actively connected with various front organisations and cells are eligible to become active members. An active member has to be 21 years and above, willing to perform minimum tasks as may be prescribed and shall not, openly or otherwise, adversely criticise the accepted policies of the party, except through party forums. Every active member shall contribute an amount of Rs. 24 (US$ 0.75 cents) biennially and deposit it along with his active membership form or enrol 24 primary members along with himself. Further each active member shall contribute Rs. 1.00 (US$ 0.03 cents) per month for net monthly income up to Rs. 500 (US$ 14.5) and 1% of net monthly above Rs. 500. The concerned active member shall send this contribution directly to the PCC office annually or at regular intervals (not more than 12 instalments a year).

The term of membership, primary or active, is usually for the calendar year. The register of primary members within their jurisdiction is maintained by the subordinate committees with copies sent to the DCC. The Register of active members is maintained by the respective DCCs. The DCC issues
identify cards with photographs of the active members pasted on the cards under the signatures of the presidents of the DCC and PCC concerned. Renewal of membership is deemed to have been completed by depositing requisite membership fee. Membership will cease by resignation, removal or non-payment of biennial subscription/contribution and non-renewal of membership. The subscription amount collected from primary members is to be distributed in the following proportion among various Congress Committees: AICC 10%; PCC 25%; DCC 25%; and subordinate CCs 40%. The concerned PCC determines the proportion in which the 40% of their share is to be distributed among the subordinate committees. The contributions received from the active members is to be distributed in the following manner: Central Election Fund 50%; AICC 25%; PCC 12.5%; and DCC 12.5%. The subordinate committees below the DCCs are given a share of the contributions out of the DCC portion as determined by the PCC concerned.

The minimum tasks to be performed by the active members are listed in detail. They include enrolment of primary and active members; collection of party fund; minimum one week's manual labour every year which may include padayatras (foot-marches), construction of approach roads, digging of canals and channels, tree plantation, cleaning of slums, village sanitation, etc., enrolment of subscribers to party periodicals published by any Congress Committee; work in the field of social reforms, such as campaign against dowry system or child marriage, and work for family planning, etc.; and should usually use swadeshi or indigenous goods. They shall also promote one or more of the following constructive activities: education; prohibition; khadi (homespun cotton cloth) and village industries; organisation of youth, students, kisans (farmers) and labour; village sanitation, health and hygiene; work in the constituencies; adult education and literacy movement; sale of party literature, etc. The list includes 18 such items. The active members shall perform any other task specially laid down by the CWC from time to time.

In order to develop a 'well informed and ideologically-oriented cadre', the primary and active members at all levels (including the office-bearers of the organisational committees and party legislators) shall participate in the study and training programmes as directed and laid down by the CWC from time to time and organised at various levels. Failure on the part of the active members to participate in the training programmes so laid down may attract disqualification in the organisation.
Party Committees:

There is a Village Congress Committee (VCC) for every revenue village, which has at least 25 members. Primary members of the village unit elect its president and an Executive Committee. The president appoints a Secretary from amongst the members of the Executive Committee. The president shall be an active member. Any primary member can seek election to the membership of the Executive Committee. The election of the president and Executive Members of the Village Committee is by show of hands.

The rules of the Congress as framed by the Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) provide for the creation of an intermediary level (Mandal) between the VCC and the DCC. Each Mandal area is divided into a number of 'basic units' at the rate of one member for about 2,000 population. If such a unit has at least 25 primary members, it can elect one member of the Mandal Congress Committee (MCC). Those who seek election for membership in the MCC shall be active members. All those representatives elected by the units (one each) and the presidents of the Village Congress Committees together constitute the Mandal Congress Committee. However, there shall be at least 25 active members on the whole, in the Mandal area to form an MCC. The MCC elects a president and an Executive Committee. All the members of the MCC are invariably active members. Only an active member is eligible for election as a member of any Congress Committee at Mandal level and above. The Town Congress Committees have the status of an MCC.

The District Congress Committee (DCC) occupies an important place in the structure of Congress Party. The DCC keeps the membership records, communicates to all subordinate committees and takes a great variety of decisions at local level. It is laid down that "every PCC shall ordinarily function through the DCC." It receives information from the PCC and the AICC directly. Its structure is elaborately given and powers and responsibilities specified. The DCC consists of (1) two members elected by the unit representatives to each of the MCCs. (2) all ex-presidents of the DCC who have completed one full term (full term signifies the interval between two DCC elections or 365 days whichever is less). (3) Members of the PCC who reside in or have been elected from the district. (4) Presidents of Mandal Congress Committees. They, however, are not eligible to become either President or Secretary of the DCC. (5) Members of the Congress Legislature parties, both Central and State from the district. (6) Leaders
of the Congress party in Municipal Corporations, Municipalities and Zilla Parishads. (7) Members co-opted by the DCC Executive as per rules prescribed by the Working Committee. The front organisations include (i) the Indian National Trade Union Congress, (ii) Indian Youth Congress, (iii) National Students’ Union of India, and (iv) Congress Seva Dal.

Regarding the election of the members of the DCC it is laid down that a candidate for election to a DCC need not necessarily be a member of a subordinate committee. Any active member is eligible to be a candidate. A candidate for election to a DCC should ordinarily be a resident of the district concerned. Voting in the election of members of a DCC by the unit members of the subordinate committee shall be by secret ballot. The DCC elects from amongst its members a president, vice-president, treasurer and members of its Executive Committee. The president of the DCC appoints the secretary of the DCC from among its Executive members. Presidents of the DCCs are ex-officio members of the Pradesh Congress Committee. However, they are not eligible to become either president or secretary of the PCC.

On the failure of a District or subordinate committee to be constituted or to function in terms of the constitution or in accordance with the directions of the superior committee the latter may suspend the existing committee and form an ad-hoc committee to carry on party work in the area. However, no DCC shall be superseded, suspended or ad-hoc committee constituted by the PCC without the prior approval of the CWC and similarly DCC shall supersede or form an ad-hoc committee so constituted shall ordinarily function for a period of three months. This period can be extended by three months at a time up to a total period of one year with the approval of the immediate superior committee. The CWC has the right to extend the period of an ad-hoc committee beyond one year under special circumstances. Unless otherwise specified an ad-hoc committee shall enjoy the same powers and privileges of a normal committee.

The rules further say that no person shall be a member of any two parallel committees. A committee may delegate any of its powers to a smaller committee or individual. The co-opted members at any level do not have any voting right in any organisational election, let alone the right to contest any election in the organisation. However, any co-opted member has the freedom to seek election to full membership in the normal manner. The front organisations have their own constitution, rules and a separate
hierarchical structure. They are guided by the AICC and the CWC. There are different cells for students, youth, peasants, industrial workers, teachers, women, harijans (Scheduled Castes) and girijans (Scheduled Tribes), freedom fighters and minorities functioning at the DCC level. The members of the DCC cells are chosen from amongst the active members of the district.

A brief description of the Congress Party organisation at the state and all-India levels is necessary to appreciate the functioning of the Party as a whole (see Diagram 3.1). The PCC is constituted in a way similar to the DCC. Its members are elected by electoral colleges, comprising of active members from constituencies, each having about a lakh of population. The PCC includes several ex-officio members like presidents of the DCCs, former presidents of the PCC, AICC members who reside in the state and members elected by the Legislature wing. All members of the PCC will be delegates to the plenary session of the party to be held once in two years. The PCC sends to the next higher body, the AICC, one-eighth of the number of the PCC members, elected from amongst themselves according to the system of single transferable vote. The PCCs have extensive powers as far as the organisation in the state is concerned. It can even frame its own constitution, of course, not inconsistent with the party constitution. It is incharge of the affairs of the Party committees within the state.

At the federal level, the AICC has the power to frame rules for regularising all matters connected with the party which are binding on all subordinate committees. It is empowered to deal with all matters and situations that may arise in the course of the implementation of party programme and policies. The highest and the most powerful body in the Party is the Congress Working Committee (CWC), popularly known as the ‘High Command’. The CWC consists of the president of the Congress (elected by the AICC members), the leader of the Party in parliament, and 19 others, of whom 10 members are elected by the AICC and the rest nominated by the president. The president also appoints a treasurer and one or more general secretaries, from amongst the members of the CWC. The CWC has the real power to frame rules, to issue instructions and to “superintend, direct and control” all Pradesh, District and subordinate committees. It also sets up a Parliamentary Board consisting of the president and seven other members, one of whom will be the leader of the Party in parliament, for the purpose of regulating and co-ordinating the activities of the Congress Legislature parties at the federal and provincial levels. There is a Central Election Committee, consisting of the members of the parliamentary Board, and seven other members elected
by the AICC for the purpose of making the final selection of the candidates of the central and state legislatures and for conducting election campaigns. 

**Diagram 3.1**

Formal Organisational Structure of the Congress Party

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**Disciplinary Rules:**

The DCC is primarily responsible for the enrollment of members in the District. The DCC may also report against the continuance of any active member to the PCC Executive, which thereafter decides to remove his or her name from the list of active members. The Executive Committee of a DCC is empowered to scrutinise the membership form of any primary or active member, and to enquire into complaints regarding membership rolls.

At the local level the DCC can take action against a member of the DCC, a subordinance committee or officé-bearer thereof who commits breach of discipline. Breach of discipline includes the following: (a) deliberately
acting or carrying a propaganda against the programmes and decisions of the party; (b) deliberately disregarding the rules or disobeying orders passed by a competent authority; (c) indulging in fraudulent action relating to party funds, enrollment of members or election to committees; (d) being guilty of offences involving moral turpitude, blackmarketing, adulteration, bribery, corruption, forgery, or doing business in liquor; and (e) deliberately acting in a way calculated to lower the prestige of the party or carrying on propaganda against Congress Committees or office-bearers. Notice for disciplinary action can be issued at the instance of the president of the competent committee (at local level, the DCC) to take disciplinary action, provided that he feels there is a prima facie breach of discipline against the committee or person concerned. Punishment prescribed in the case of a Congress Committee is its supercession; in the case of an office-bearer or member any committee, his removal from office or membership and fixing the period during which he cannot be elected or nominated to any office or membership in any committee or enrolled as a primary member; and in the case of a primary or active member, his removal from membership and disqualification from membership for a specified period. If any person, against whom disciplinary action has been taken and punishment awarded, is a member of any local body or holds any other position by virtue of his being a Congressman, he may also be called upon to resign from such bodies. It is open to any Party committee or person, against whom disciplinary action is taken, to appeal to the higher body.

The president of any Congress Committee has the authority to remove any of its office-bearers appointed or nominated by him provided he is satisfied that the said person is not discharging duties properly. However, due opportunity shall be given to the office bearer concerned to explain his position before initiating any action against him.

The Telugu Desam Party

The Telugu Desam Party, which was the ruling party during 1983-89, borrowed a great deal in organisational aspects from the Congress Party. This will be clear as one looks at the formal organisational structure of the TDP. However, there are crucial differences between the Congress and the TDP. It was a relatively new party, founded in the year 1982 and based on the charismatic leadership of its supremo, N.T.Rama Rao. Since it is a regional party, confined to the state of Andhra Pradesh, its organisational pyramid stops at the state level.
It took a few years for the TDP to crystallise its organisational structure. Its present structure includes the party president at the top; the Political Bureau and the State Executive next to him; and the presidents and Executives of the party at the district, mandal and the village levels. It has several high-sounding objectives, namely to gain political power through parliamentary democratic means, to work for the progressive transformation of society, to end social and economic exploitation of man by man and group by group and strive to establish a welfare state based on social justice and equality.

**Party Membership:**

Any person of the age of 18 or over, resident of Andhra Pradesh, and who accepts to follow the party's objectives, rules and discipline may join the Party as a primary member on payment of biennial subscription of two rupees (US$ 0.06 cents). Such a person shall not be member of any other political party or any other organisation which is opposed to the ideals of the TDP. Like the Congress Party, TDP too, has two categories of members, namely primary and active members. Any primary member who pays a special subscription of Rs. 30 (US$ 0.85) or enrolls 25 primary members into the Party becomes an active member.5

Active members alone are eligible to become office-bearers or members of the Executives from village to state levels, to get nominated as candidates in the elections to various representative bodies and to get various appointments the party makes. Every active member has to spend at least two hours every day or 14 hours in total in a week in party related activities. He should take part actively in recruitment of new members. He shall organise meetings or informal gatherings to explain Party ideals, objectives and policies. He supervises the activities of primary members. He should protect the interests of the Party and help in activities conducive to the survival of the Party at the local level. The primary members have to carry out Party instructions, cooperate with the party Executive, participate in election campaigns to secure voters' support for Party candidates and take up problems in the villages and work for their solution with the help of higher committees and leaders.

**Party Structure:**

All Party members in a village constitute the General Body (GB) of the Party in that particular village. The General Body elects a president, a vice-president, a secretary, and a treasurer from amongst themselves.
At the same time, the members of the General Body sit separately, ward-wise, and elect from amongst themselves one member (one from each ward) to the village Executive. The strength of the village committee’s Executive would be equal to the number of wards in the village. The wards in a municipal town have the status of a village. The party members in a ward in a municipality constitute the General Body and elect a President, vice-president, secretary and treasurer and five-member Executive.

The Executive bodies and office-bearers at the village/ward level propagate Party objectives and programmes among the people. They have to work for the resolution of local problems even by taking them to the notice of the government or higher Party committees, send information about the activities of the anti-social elements such as black-marketeers and law-breakers, ensure the effective implementation of the developmental and welfare schemes of the government, and assist the people in their difficulties like natural calamities. They have to send periodical and annual reports to the higher bodies about their activities and financial position and recommend names of candidates for representative bodies in their area and other positions, as they arise.

The Mandal General Body is composed of the presidents and secretaries of the village Party units, the village panchayat presidents who belong to the Party, presidents for co-operative societies in mandal area and Members of Legislative Assembly from the area. The General Body elects a president, a vice-president, a secretary, a joint-secretary, a treasurer, and a six-member Executive. A municipal town has the status of a mandal unit in the party. It consists of the presidents and secretaries of wards, ward councillors of the party, presidents of co-operative societies in the town, etc., and the co-opted members.

The Executive bodies of Mandal/Municipal committees are entrusted with several tasks, similar to that of the village units. Apart from this, they have to supervise the activities of the village units, coordinate the activities of the front organisations, MLAS, municipal chairmen, etc., send quarterly reports about the activities of the village units and annual reports about their own activities to the district and state offices. They have to recommend names of persons as candidates for elections to local bodies.

The district General Body of the TDP consists of party persons who are (i) Mandal panchayat presidents, (ii) Members of Legislative Assembly, (iii) Members of Parliament (iv) Chairman, Zilla Praja Parishad, (v) Presidents
of district level co-operative institutions, (vi) Chairman, District Libraries, (vii) Chairman of Municipalities in the district and (viii) the presidents of the party units of all Mandals/Municipalities in the district. The General Body (GB) of the TDP does not have any component directly elected by the party members. All of them become members of the (GB) by virtue of holding other party or public offices. The GB elects from amongst themselves, one president, one vice-president, one secretary, two joint-secretaries, one treasurer and 9 Executive Committee members.

The tasks of the District Executive of the TDP include propagation of Party policies and decisions among the Party members and general public, efforts to resolve problems, collection of party funds according to the direction and guidelines of the state office. The District Executive shall coordinate, review and supervise the activities of lower party units and front organisation within the district. It has to also coordinate the activities of the M.L.As, M.Ps., Zilla Parishad, mandal panchayats, co-operative societies, etc., and send monthly reports about their activities to the state office. It suggests names of candidates to various offices and elective posts in the district.

At the state level the party has party representatives conference consisting of all the members of the various district General Bodies. The state Party conference, known as Mahanadu, is held at least once an year. It elects the Party president, and formulates the broad parameters of Party policies. The Party president nominates all the members (26) of the Executive; out of them he appoints one vice-president, one general secretary, three secretaries and a treasurer. The top decision making body in the TDP is the Polit-Bureau, with 5 members appointed by the Party president. The general-secretary is an ex-officio member. The framework of the TDP organisation is provided in the Diagram 3.2.

In TDP the Party president has absolute powers and the entire party organisation revolves around him. At the state level, he presides over all meetings of the party Executive, Polit-Bureau, the General Body and all other front organisational meetings. He has the power to appoint special convenors and sub-committees to manage the affairs of party and front organisation at any level and whenever he deems it necessary. He also has the power to remove any party functionary, abolish General Bodies and Executives at all levels whenever he thinks that such a situation is warranted and to make alternative ad-hoc arrangements to manage the party affairs. He can take emergency decisions without consulting the
state Executive. He has complete control over the organisation and takes responsibility for the implementation of party programmes; he is incharge of party funds and expenditure.

*Diagram 3.2*

Formal Organisational Structure of the TDP

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  President
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  Polit Bureau | Executive Committee | General Secretary
                 | City/District Party President | City/District Executive
                 | Mandal/Municipality Party President | Mandal/Municipal Executive
                 | Village Party President | Village/Ward Executive
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**General Rules:**

All Committees and individuals, whether elected or appointed, have a tenure of two years. Any office-holder may be removed from his position by a no-confidence motion backed by two-thirds members of the concerned General Body. The General Body meetings, at a particular level, will be convened for a specified purpose, if one-fourth of the members or one-third of the Executive serves a requisistion notice to the president of the higher committee. If organisational elections are held before the expiry of the incumbent committee, the latter will automatically cease to exist. However, the party president continues in office. The president is empowered to dissolve a committee at any level. In such an event the powers of the dissolved committees are exercised by the party president. The latter has the power to extend the life of the committee even after completion of tenure if he feels it necessary. No person, except the president of the Party, is allowed to hold two organisational positions at the same time. M.L.As., M.Ps., and presidents of local bodies, co-operative societies are not allowed to contest for elective positons in the TDP.

The village, ward, mandal, municipal and district General Bodies have to meet at least once in six months and their Executive bodies at least
once in every two months. If the Executive bodies fail to conform to this norm consecutively for three times in six months, the president and secretary at that level are deemed to have lost their positions. Likewise if a member of the Executive at any level fails to attend three meetings continuously, he will lose his membership.

The Telugu Desam Party has several front organisations. They are Telugu Yuvata (youth), Telugu Mahila (women), Telugu Nadu Trade Union Congress, Telugu Ryotu (peasants), Telugu Vidyarthi (students) and Telugu Bala (children). These front organisations have their own rules. The state Executive has the power to alter the rules, to give directions to the front organisations or to dismiss their executive bodies.

Communist Party of India (Marxist)

The formal organisation and ethos of functioning of the CPM have been influenced to a large extent by the Leninist-Stalinist model of party organisation. The organization of the CPM is based on the avowed principle of 'democratic centralism'. The control and supervision exercised by higher bodies over local committees is more extensive and rigid in CPM. It claims that it "is the revolutionary vanguard of the working class of India." Its aim is "socialism and communism through the establishment of the state of dictatorship of the proletariat."7

The Party adopted a new constitution after its formation in 1964 in the wake of its split from the undivided communist party. However, its organisational structure is a continuation of the constitution of the undivided communist party. The constitution of the CPM has not undergone any basic changes, until 1978 when the Party was characterised as a 'mass revolutionary party' after a prolonged controversy and internal party debate on the nature of party organisation and how to adapt it to the changing conditions. After 1978, the norms for recruiting new members were somewhat relaxed and the maximum number permitted in the 'branch' at the grassroots level was made flexible. The nomenclature of primary unit of the Party is the 'branch' (earlier called 'cell'). Above it is the 'division', comprising a few Mandals. A district is divided into a number of divisions, depending on the strength of the party in the area and the 'needs' of the movement. Above it are the district and state level committees controlled by the 'Central Committee' at the top for the whole country.
Party Membership:

Any person residing in India, eighteen years of age or above, who accepts the programme and constitution of the party, agrees to work in one of the front organisations, to pay regularly the membership fee and 'levy' as prescribed, and to carry out decisions of the party is eligible for Party membership. CPM, unlike the Congress and TDP, has only one type of membership. It, however, has a transitory stage after the admission through which a person graduates to become a full member. New members are admitted to the Party through individual application on the recommendation of two Party members. Party members who recommend a new person for membership are required to furnish the concerned Party branch full information about the applicant 'with due sense of responsibility'. The Party branch does not have the power to admit new members. It only makes recommendation to the next higher committee. The latter takes a decision on all recommendations. However, all Party committees higher to the party branch and upto the Central Committee level have the power to directly admit new members to the Party. If the applicant is admitted to the Party, he or she is regarded as a 'candidate member' for a period of one year commencing from the date of such admission.

Candidate members have the same duties and rights as full members except that they have no right to elect or be elected or to vote on any motion. After the expiry of the period of candidature, the party branch or party committee concerned assesses the candidate member's eligibility for full membership. If the candidate member is found 'unfit', the committee cancels his or her candidate membership. The names of the members recommended for full membership have to be forwarded to the next higher committee. The latter is empowered to approve, alter or modify any such decision of the branch or lower committees. Thus the District and State Committees exercise 'supervisory powers' over recruitment of candidates and members and have the right to modify and reject the decisions of the lower committees in this matter.

All Party members, including candidates, shall pay a Party membership fee of two rupees per year. This annual Party fee shall be paid at the time of admission into the Party and by March end of each subsequent year to the branch secretary. All Party fees collected from Party members is deposited with the Central Committee. Party members have to also pay a monthly levy, a portion of their income. The proportion of levy increases
gradually as the income goes up, which stands at 5 per cent at the top brackets. It is shared by different committees according to the proportion fixed by the central leadership. Those who fail to pay fee and levy within the prescribed time limit may be removed from Party membership. A 'check-up' of Party membership is an annual feature. Defaulters in 'Party life and activity' for a continuous period may be dropped from membership. A report on review of Party membership has to be sent to the next higher committee for confirmation and renewal of membership.

The Party members are assigned several, altogether eleven, duties. Important of them are: faithful execution of the policy and directives of the Party; endeavour to raise their understanding of Marxism-Leninism, behave in the spirit of proletarian internationalism; to place the interests of the people and the Party above personal interests; to serve the masses with devotion, strengthen their bonds with them; and to defend the party against the 'onslaught of the enemies of the Party' and the working class. The rights of the Party members, accompanied by several qualifications, are also listed. They have the right to participate in discussion in order to contribute to the formation of Party policies and decisions and to make criticism about Party committee and Party functionaries at Party meetings. When any Party member has differences regarding organisational or political matters, he may submit his opinion to the next higher committee. However, in all such cases the Party members shall carry out the Party decisions and the differences have to be resolved through "the test of practice and comradely discussions."

Party Structure:

The primary unit of the Party is the branch or unit. Party units are organised on the basis of their occupation or vocation (in a factory or an institute). A branch consists of 3 to 15 members in a village(s) or a factory. A branch has to meet at least once in a month to discuss the problems faced at local level and the plans to carry out the tasks assigned to it. The branch elects a secretary subject to the confirmation by the next higher committee. Analogous to the position obtaining in communist parties abroad, the secretary occupies a key role in the Party organisation at all levels. The Branch is considered as the 'the living link' between the Party and workers, peasants and other sections of the people within its area. There were about 150 branches in Guntur district in 1991, with 1650 members, including 241 candidate members.

The important tasks of the branch are to carry out the directives of
the higher Committee, propagate the party decisions among the masses in its locality or place of work, and to help the local and district committees in articulation and mobilisation work. Part of its mobilisational activity involves strengthening its base of sympathisers and enlargement of its membership. It has to provide political education to the candidate members, especially on the current policies and programmes of the party and monitor their development. The 1978 Resolution (1978) on 'Party Organization' states that the branch shall effectively function in order to enable every member to perform the minimum duties. Special attention has to be paid to them and they have to be maintained well regardless of the difficulties faced by the Party at local level.

At the intermediate level, i.e., between the village and district levels, there are division, taluka or town committees. CPM has flexible rules, for building party organisation below the District Committee or at intermediate levels. For this purpose, it takes into consideration the Party's strength, importance of the area and needs of the movement. In Andhra Pradesh it still takes the erstwhile taluka (consisting of four to five Mandalas) as the spatial unit of party organisation below the district level. Sometimes, a district is divided into different areas under taluka or division committees. Guntur Town committee has the status of a Division Committee. The executive body of Division or Taluka or Town Committee is elected in their respective conferences held once in three years. Delegates to the Party conference are elected by the primary units in their respective Party conventions. In actual practice, however, the outgoing committees propose names of members for the new committees and they are almost always approved by delegates. The members of the committee, in turn choose one among them as the secretary, usually on the suggestion of the observer or representative of the district leadership. Thus the election to the post of secretary at Division/Taluka/Town level is indirect, unlike in the Congress and TDP. Delegates to the district Party conference are also elected at the Division/Taluka/Town conferences.

The district conference, to be held immediately after the local level conferences, elects a District Committee, which, in turn, elects a Secretariat including the secretary. The State Committee decides as to who should be elected as the district secretary. This is conveyed by the observer deputed by the state leadership with the ostensible purpose of reporting the Party line on international and national matters. The district secretariat consisting of a small group of four or five top leaders, is invested with considerable
authority and exercises great deal of influence in the district Party organisation. The district Party organisation is also empowered to take important decisions concerning organisational matters at its level. The District Committee, by a majority decision, can admit or remove any member of the Party or Committee, including a member of the District Committee itself. All membership records are maintained by the District Committee. The district conference elects the delegates to the state conference. Unlike in other parties the District Committee cannot send any one directly to the national level Party Congress.

The state committee, chosen at the state conference, is the highest body in the state Party. It has the power to take decisions, subject to the approval of the central committee, on issues concerning the state. However, the secretary of the State Committee, elected by the state Party needs the approval of the Central Committee. In reality the secretary of the state Party organisation tends to be a nominee of the central leadership.

The Central Committee elected at the Party Congress, represents the Party as a whole and is responsible for directing the entire work of the Party. It has the right to take decisions with full authority on any question facing the Party. It normally meets once in three months to discuss and decide political and organisational issues, problems of mobilisation and to guide the state committees and all-India Party fractions of front organisations. As part of its supervisory role the Central Committee sends representatives to the state and district organisations. These observers/organisers/representatives shall work on the basis of the 'special instructions' given to him/her and ensure the enforcement of the directives of the Central Committee. However, in practice, much of the power is placed in the hands of a smaller and compact body called the Polit Bureau, consisting of 9 to 10 top Party leaders including the general secretary. General secretary and Polit Bureau are elected by the members of the Central Committee from among ethemselves. The framework of the CPM organisation is shown in Diagram 3.3.

One striking feature of CPM organisation is that the elections to the post of chief party functionaries of all committees at various levels are indirect. The General Bodies or conferences can only elect a Committee, which usually takes the form of approving the list of names proposed by the outgoing committee. These committees in turn can elect a person as secretary decided by the next higher committee. The procedure enables the top party leadership to 'regulate' the functioning of the organisation by nominating 'loyal' people
to key posts. The resultant organisation is cone-shaped rather than pyramidal in which the whole party apparatus circles around the central axis, namely the top one or top few at each level, and each level is completely subordinated to the higher leadership.

**Democratic Centralism:**

The Party constitution proclaims that the structure of the party and its internal functioning are based on the principle of democratic centralism. It defines democratic centralism as "centralised leadership based on inner-party democracy and democracy under the guidance of the centralised leadership." Operationally, democratic centralism, is characterised by the following features:

(i) All party organs from top to bottom shall be elected.
(ii) The minority shall carry out the decisions of the majority.
(iii) The lower party organisation shall carry out the decisions and directives of the higher party organs.
(iv) All party committees shall maintain a two-way communication through periodical reports on their work to the committees.
immediately below and all lower committees likewise report to the committees at the next higher level.

In the sphere of internal life of the party democratic centralism in theory would mean:

(i) free and frank discussion within the party unit on all matters affecting the party, its policy and work;
(ii) encouragement of criticism and self-criticism at all levels, from top to bottom, especially criticism from below;
(iii) when differences arise in a Party committee, efforts should be made to arrive at an agreement;
(iv) consistent struggle against bureaucratic tendencies at all levels;
(v) impermissibility of factionalism and rival groups inside the Party in any form; and
(vi) strengthening of the Party spirit by developing fraternal relations and rendering mutual help.

Inner-Party discussion on any important policy matters can be organised by the State and Central Committees at their levels. However, all inner-Party discussions, including those at the state level, shall be conducted under the guidance of the Central committee, which is empowered to provide the agenda items for discussion. The latter also lays down the parameters in which the discussion has to be conducted.

Other Rules:

The Central, State and District Committees have the right to dissolve and appoint new committees and to take disciplinary action against a lower committees in cases involving persistent defiance of Party decisions and policy, serious factionalism, or breach of Party discipline. But the State and District Committees have to immediately report such action to the next higher committee for whatever action it deems necessary. A member may be suspended or expelled from the Party or removed from the post he held in the Party for anti-Party activities, violation of Party decisions or refusal to carry out the directives of the concerned or higher committee. The Party constitution says: "Discipline is indispensible for preserving and strengthening the unity of Party, for enhancing its strength, its fighting ability and its prestige, and for enforcing the principles of democratic centralism." The CPM constitution empowers the committees to summarily suspend or expel any member if the latter feel it necessary.
Party members elected to local bodies such as corporations, municipalities, town or area committees, zilla parishads, mandal parishads, gram panchayats, etc., function under the appropriate Party committee or Party branch. Party committees nominate candidates for election at the concerned levels. Salaries and allowances drawn by legislators and members of local bodies belonging to the CPM are considered to be Party money. The Party committee concerned decides on the amount of wages and allowances to be retained by members.

The members of the CPM are of two varieties: (i) Whole-timers, who are paid by the party: they are supposed to spend full time for the party by co-ordinating the work of ordinary members and activists and providing the main thrust for all political activity. They are the members who are said to possess a high level of political consciousness, ideological commitment and organisational capabilities. Usually, the Party committees are filled by the whole-timers only. They are the people who really matter in the decision-making process in the Party. (b) Members having independent livelihood and other occupations. They spend their time, to the extent possible, in party work.

No Whole-timer can be appointed by the District Committee without the prior permission and approval of the State Secretariat of the Party. Their pay and allowances are fixed by the State Committee. There are different rates of pay depending on several considerations: marital status, size of family, place of work (rural or urban), and the incomes of the whole-timer has from his own property.

CPM has several front organisations, covering various sections such as workers, peasants, agricultural labourers, students, youth and women. It has also front organisations in the fields of education (teachers), arts and civil liberties. They are controlled by Party committees at the respective levels. Party members working in front organisations and their executive bodies organise themselves into fractions or fraction committees and function under the guidance of the appropriate Party committee. Fractions control the leadership and functioning of the mass organisations. The Party members in the front organisations have to ensure that the Party decisions and directives are accepted by the executives of the front organisations.
A Comparative View of the Formal Party Structures

Some prominent features can be noticed when we compare the formal structures of the three parties under study. All the three parties have two categories of members. However the process of admission of members in the Congress and TDP on the one hand and the CPM on the other differ. In the Congress and TDP any person, by paying the prescribed membership fee can instantly become a member, primary or active, for a period of two years. The renewal of membership is also routine. However, in the CPM a person is kept on probation as a candidate member before he is considered for regular membership. The higher committees of the CPM also have full control over the admission and renewal of members. There is also a system of paying levy, a prescribed portion of income, to the Party in CPM, which is not there in the Congress and TDP. We also find in the CPM, a category of 'whole-timers', called 'professional revolutionaries', whose main job is party work. They receive a monthly pay from the Party towards maintenance. In congress and TDP there are no 'whole-timers'. That is one reason why CPM is called a cadre-based party and the Congress and TDP are regarded as mass parties.

As far as the party structure is concerned CPM has party branches, with a compact membership, each interacting only with the higher committees, with a corresponding deemphasis on lateral relationship with members of similar committees. In the Congress and TDP all members in a village form a General Body, and there is no limit to membership in a village unit. In these parties the village unit elects its president and the Executive Committee, and the election is final once it is over. However, in the CPM, the higher committees have the discretion to approve or reject a person proposed for election as secretary by a branch. At the division and district levels the outgoing committees propose the candidates for election which receive automatic approval from the respective conferences. If there are any problems, the higher committees depute their representatives to the conference to ensure smooth completion of the ‘election’ of the candidates favoured by higher leadership. Such a procedure is not there in the constitution of the Congress and TDP. Thus the higher level leadership have greater control over the choice of leadership at lower level in CPM.

Another important feature to be taken note of is the method of election. In both the Congress and TDP the chief of the party at all levels are directly elected by the delegates constituting the General Body meeting. There
is, however, an important difference in the process of forming the Mandal/District Committees in the Congress and Mandal/District General Body in TDP. While the delegates in the Congress Committee are supposed to be elected by Party members in a given locality, all the delegates in the TDP General Body are ex-officio or co-opted ones. In CPM the delegates to Division/District conferences are elected by Party members or delegates from lower level. However, at no level, the chief of the party organisation is directly elected. The delegates only approve a list of persons to become members of the committee, who choose, on instructions from the higher Committee, one among them as secretary. The divergent procedures adopted by the three parties for electing party functionaries have implications for their functioning which will be explored in the following chapters.

Another interesting aspect is the power of higher level leadership to remove persons from office at the lower level of organisation or even to dismiss the entire committee. In TDP, the Party president has the power to dismiss any functionary and abolish any committee and he exercises all the powers of the dissolved committee until a new committee is formed following the set procedure. In CPM too, the higher level committees have the power to dissolve lower level committees for ‘violation of directives’ or failure to adhere to party policies. Such a provision is not there in the Congress constitution. The implications of such powers provided in the constitutions of the TDP and the CPM will also be examined in the subsequent chapters.

It is also necessary to note here the fact that since the TDP is a regional party, its organisational pyramid does not extend beyond the state level, unlike the Congress and CPM, which are all-India parties. For the TDP, the top most committee is the State Executive headed by its supreme leader at the apex. In both the Congress and CPM the State Committees have to function under the direction of the national leadership. Thus one important level is not there for TDP compared to the Congress and CPM. This results in a different authority structure and party functioning among these parties.

Although all parties proclaim their adherence to democratic rules and functioning there are some variations in terms of oligarchic tendencies in the formal structures themselves. As per the formal structure, the CPM displays a centralising tendency since the key functionary of the Party at all levels, i.e., the secretary, for all intents and purposes, is a nominee of the higher
level committee. The CPM is also a tightly-knit organisation, relative to that of the Congress and TDP. An exposition of the formal party structure leaves an incomplete picture about various aspects of the party organisations which is reflected in its actual practice and functioning.

Although parties claim themselves to be democratic there is sufficient room for undermining the democratic principles in the name of party unity, emergency situations and discretionary powers. Such arbitrary powers vested in the top leadership promotes autocratic styles of leadership and causes strains in the party functioning.

Notes and References


3. Only when the MCC is duly constituted in accordance with the rules laid down for the formation of MCC, the unit representatives have the opportunity to elect two members to the DCC.

4. PCC members are elected by electoral colleges, comprising active members from constituencies having about a lakh of population each. Delimitation of the constituencies is made by the PCC.

5. In the case of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe persons, the subscription amount is less, at Rs.20.


8. The Resolution on 'Party Organization' adopted at Salkia Plenum in 1978 was considered to be a crucial one in the evolution of CPM organisation. It sought to strengthen the centralisation of power by shunning the 'undesirable federalist' tendencies that 'crept' into the Party functioning over a period of time. CPI(M), Resolution on the *Problems of Party Organisation*, adopted by the Plenum of the Central Committee, Salkia, Howrah, West Bengal, December, 1978.
