Chapter II

Political Mobilization and Growth of Dalit Consciousness

Three streams of political thought have contributed to the process of political mobilization and the growth of Dalit consciousness in post-independence Andhra Pradesh. These are: the Congress, the Communists and the Ambedkarites.¹ The present chapter seeks to analyse their involvement in the formation of Dalit consciousness in Andhra Pradesh, to explain their strategies and programmes, and to have a bird’s-eye view of Dalit axiomatic activity from the post-independence era to the mid-eighties.

The Dalits and the Congress Party

The Congress Party in Andhra Pradesh, as elsewhere in India, consistently projected itself as a mass organization representing all classes, castes and communities, the Dalits included. Its strategy in sustaining this claim was a highly complex process of co-option or absorption and patronage. This strategy had a profound historical significance for Dalit consciousness in Andhra Pradesh. In 1917 the Congress passed a historic resolution, which categorically stated:

---
¹ For this argument, see Kula Nirmulana—Oka Marxist Drukpatham (Telugu) (Nuutana Praja Swamy vedika, Hyderabad, 1987), Gail Omvedt, Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India (Sage, New Delhi, 1994).
This Congress urges upon the people of India the necessity, justice and righteousness of removing all disabilities imposed by custom upon the Depressed Classes, the disabilities being of a most vexatious and oppressive character, subjecting those classes to considerable hardship and inconvenience.²

Under the leadership of M.K. Gandhi, the Indian National Congress kept alive the question of caste and untouchability while undertaking the task of removing these evils. In the interests of carrying on an effective crusade, Gandhi started an All-India Anti-Untouchability League in 1932, the name being subsequently changed to Harijan Sevak Sangh.³ Through the Sangh, the Congress confidently entered Dalit colonies and villages and initiated the process of mobilizing and absorbing Dalits as ‘Harijans’ or ‘children of god’. Harijan Sevak Sanghs were established throughout India. Branches were opened enthusiastically in the Andhra region and in the Hyderabad state in 1932 itself.

The Sangh actively undertook several programmes for ‘Harijan uplift’, also called ‘constructive programmes’. Mainly, these concerned education of the Dalits, eradication of untouchability in public places, installation of cooperative

---

² Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, vol. 9 (Government of Maharashtra Education Department, Bombay, 1990), p. 1.

³ Ibid., p.126.
societies, and so on. Through these programmes, the Dalits were integrated into the Congress. This policy of co-option and patronage, while it attracted the Dalits to fill the ranks of the Congress, also made them dependent on it. It enabled the party to absorb a greater part of the autonomous Dalit leadership and mass activity. The result was that autonomous Dalit activity, which had mainly taken the form of Adi-Andhra movement, became diffused.⁴

The legacy of the Harijan Sevak Sangh did not change after independence. Perhaps no need was felt for a change, since the Congress party became the single largest ruling party, virtually unopposed. When Andhra Pradesh became a separate state in 1956, the Congress party absorbed as many Dalit leaders as possible through statutory reservations in the electoral process. In 1957, there were 43 Dalit members in the Legislative Assembly which had a total strength of 301, almost all the Dalit MLAs having been elected on the Congress party ticket. Many of them had cut their political teeth through the Harijan Sevak Sanghs. Prior to joining the Sangh some of them had disassociated themselves from the Adi-Andhra movement or from the All-India Scheduled Caste Federation, which was started by Ambedkar.

Some of the important Dalit leaders who emerged through the Harijan Sevak Sanghs were: Damodaram

⁴ Omvedt, chapters 9-10.
Sanjeevaiah, Vemula Kurmayya, Raghavulu, Kota Punnaiah, Goka Ramaswamy, Naralashetty Devendrudu, Sardar Nagappa, K.R. Veeraswamy and B.S. Murthy. Notable among those who joined the Congress ranks from the autonomous Dalit movement was Arigay Ramaswamy (1885-1973) and Butti Raja Ram (1911-79). A powerful autonomous Dalit leader, Ramaswamy had close association with All-India Depressed Class Association, and led the delegation from Andhra at its national conference held at Nagpur in 1942. Before joining the Congress he was also actively engaged in organizing Dalits in the Telengana region. Ramaswamy also started an Independent Scheduled Caste Federation in 1944.

Butti Raja Ram was initially with Ambedkar. He worked vigorously to build the base for the Scheduled Caste Federation (SCF) in the Telengana region and got elected for the Hyderabad Legislative Assembly in 1952 on the SCF ticket.5

The absorption of many powerful Dalit leaders like these by the Congress made the autonomous Dalit movement diffused and insubstantial. Nevertheless, these strategies of the Congress produced their own implications for Dalit consciousness. The Congress Dalit leaders, who were elected to the State Assembly through the reserved constituencies played a relatively important role in the growth of Dalit consciousness. Basically, they acted as pyraveekars or

---

negotiators. Since they came from the reserved constituencies, it became obligatory for them to build a positive communication with their constituency by informing them about the state administration, its policies and programmes. In that process, they mobilized the Dalits to participate in various types of developmental programmes. They also were engaged in vocalizing the Dalits by arranging public meetings and community functions. While these activities rallied the Dalit masses behind them, they also consolidated the Dalit Congress leaders' position in their constituencies and in the party. Also, having secured some ministerial posts, these leaders demanded budgetary bargains, reminding the government about the minimum fulfilment of promises for the education, housing and employment of the Dalits. Inevitably, such developments produced a considerable impact on Dalit consciousness.

The Congress also used the Dalit leadership effectively to checkmate and defeat groupism and factionalism within the Congress party. Politics in Andhra Pradesh, especially of the Congress which ruled the state for nearly thirty years unopposed, was characteristically dominated by regionalism, casteism, groupism and bitter factionalism. The power

---

6 K. Ilaiah, *Caste or class or Caste-Class: A Study in Dalit Bahujan Consciousness and struggles in Andhra Pradesh in 1980s* (Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, 1995).

structures in Andhra Pradesh are the monopoly of the rich landlords and the capitalists belonging to the Kamma caste in coastal Andhra and the Reddys in Rayalaseema and Telengana along with the Brahmins and Velamas. They have among themselves been the traditional power holders and have always monopolized the sectors of agriculture, industry and commerce. They also have a long record of conflict, marked by fights over land rights and frequent struggles for the dominance of village panchayats, samitis and zilla parishads, which are the real constituents of political power.\(^8\)

Often, their cut-throat struggle for power itself has been responsible for the political crises in the state. To minimize the negative fallout of this conflict and to avoid mutual destruction, they successfully used the Congress Dalit leadership as checkmates. Such strategy was evident in Andhra Pradesh in more than one case.

Damodaram Sanjeevaiah, who was the first Dalit Chief Minster in Andhra, was appointed to the post more to contain the growing aggressive factionalism within the Congress than for his innate ability alone, though he did not lack in it.\(^9\) The time in which he was chosen bristled with this internal divisiveness within the Congress. However, this strategy of the ruling class produced political implications for Dalit

---


consciousness which the ruling class may not have consciously intended. As soon as he got the opportunity, Sanjeevaiah started the consolidation of Dalits, minorities and other bahujans within the Congress party. During his tenure, for the first time, not only in Andhra, but in India, instructions were issued for the Development Departments to earmark 15 per cent of funds to be spent on the welfare of these communities. The state government also issued an order that, until suitable persons were found for reserved vacancies in the public sector, they should be kept vacant. Moreover, the reservation benefits were extended to the other bahujan castes by including more sub-castes in the reservation list.

What the upper caste-dominated Congress wanted, however, was not the Dalitization of the Congress but that the Dalit leaders should work as subordinates of the upper castes within the Congress. The growing consolidation among the Dalit bahujans and minorities within the Congress could not have come as a welcome development for members of the upper castes with their entrenched interests. Sanjeevaiah’s pro-Dalit bahujan policies were, therefore, negated by the dominant upper castes, who targeted him for public criticism. Many of the dominant Reddys and

---

10 Report of the Commissioner for SCs & STs, (henceforth RCSCST) 1975-76 and 1976-1977, Appendix VII.

11 Innaiah, p. 98

12 Ibid.
Kammas rebelled against him and Sanjeevaiah was removed from the Chief Ministership within two years.

In the early seventies, Andhra Pradesh became the scene of two massive and violent agitations under the Congress regime, with considerable implications for Dalit consciousness. The first was the separatist Telengana agitation in 1969; the second was the separatist Andhra movement in 1972. The Telengana agitation was basically the result of the indifference of the ruling class to the naturally deprived Telengana region, which had suffered in consequence of the neglect. In 1956 the ruling class had promised special safeguards for the Telengana region.\(^\text{13}\) Their non-implementation, however, created an enormous discontent among the Dalits and other bahujans. Over the years the living conditions of the Dalits and other bahujans, who mostly lived in the backward, underdeveloped areas, had further deteriorated. Unemployment had become rampant, and the lack of confidence of these deprived sections in the upper caste leadership led to the demand for bifurcation of the state.\(^\text{14}\) According to Rasheeduddin Khan, the caste configurations also provided a socio-legal basis to the rise of the Telengana separatist agitation.\(^\text{15}\)

---

\(^{11}\) K.R. Acharya, "Telengana and Andhra Agitations", in Ram Reddy and Sharma (ed.).

\(^{14}\) Ibid.

\(^{15}\) See Link, XII, 24 August 1969.
The Telengana agitation was abruptly defused by electing the leader from Telengana, P.V. Narasimha Rao as the Chief Minister in 1971, without any substantial benefits to the agitating Dalit bahujans. Narasimha Rao, a brahmin who was not favoured by the Reddys and Kammas, tried to mobilize the support of Dalits, minorities and the bahujan classes, in order to survive in office without the support of the dominant castes of Andhra. To weaken their traditional stronghold, he took on a political challenge. The Dalit leaders in the Congress, all of a sudden, were given weighty representation in the state cabinet, raising their representation in the state cabinet from about 17 per cent before the 1970s to about 30 per cent. In Narasimha Rao's ministry comprising 29 cabinet Ministers there were 10 Dalits and backwards castes. Having brought the influence of the Reddys and Kammas by considerable notches, Narasimha Rao attempted to force the pace of land reforms. He introduced the Land Reforms (Ceilings on Agricultural Holdings) Bill, in 1972. The landed gentry of coastal Andhra, fearful that the land ceiling was going to hit them very hard, pleaded for its withdrawal and led a delegation to the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi with a similar plea. Narasimha Rao also initiated a change in the panchayats and zilla parishads, to bring down the dominance

---

16 Prasanna Kumar et al., p. 17.
17 The Hindu (Madras), 10 August 1972.
18 Ibid.
of the Reddys and Kamma in these local political bodies. In the early 1970s the chairmen of 15 zilla parishads out of 21 were Reddys, and out of 324 samiti presidents half were Kamma or Reddys. 19 About 64 per cent of the panchayat presidents and all zilla parishad chairmen were also from these two castes. Besides, all the forward castes had near monopoly of these institutions. As many as 81 per cent of the sarpanches, 83 per cent of the samiti presidents and chairmen of zilla parishads belonged to the forward castes. 20 Narasimha Rao brought about certain changes in the electoral process, and streamlined the working of these local bodies.

The resistance of the upper castes to these measures resulted in the separatist Andhra agitation in 1973. Since it was an agitation led by the land owning upper castes, most of the Dalit leaders within and outside the Congress maintained their autonomous stand vis-a-vis the agitation. They issued a statement demanding that their views should be ascertained whatever decision the government took. Without committing themselves either to bifurcation or to integration they stressed that "the views of the effective representatives of the weaker sections and submerged sections such as Dalits, tribals, bahujans, and minorities, who constitute about 80 per cent of the population should be ascertained." 21 They

demanded certain safeguards for these sections. The signatories to the statement hailed from the three regions of Andhra, and included M.R. Krishna, B.S. Murthy, K. Punnaiah, Nanadas, T. Anjaiah, Konda Lakshman Babuji, Devanand Rao, A. Chakrapani and K. Rajamallu.\textsuperscript{22}

A development of note under the Congress government in Andhra Pradesh was that, for the first time, a state level conference was held on Dalits in April 1970, at Hyderabad. The purpose of the exercise was to help the state government to undertake an intensive time-bound and practical action programme for the development of Dalits.\textsuperscript{23} After the conference, the Andhra Legislature passed a resolution to set up a body on the welfare of the Dalits. Subsequently in 1976, the state government constituted several committees on the welfare of the Dalits. The objective of these committees was to examine the representation of the Dalits in various government departments, public undertakings, corporations and other statutory bodies, the pace of the educational facilities for the Dalits, and cases of untouchability and atrocities against the Dalits.\textsuperscript{24}

The contribution of the Congress party to Dalit fortunes basically was external. While it created a climate under which the Dalits gained some material benefits through

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{23} RCSCST, 1975-76 and 1976-77.
\textsuperscript{24} P. Manikyamba, \textit{India’s Little Legislatures} (T.R. Publication, Madras, 1995), p. 149
the State machinery, the Dalits lost in terms of consciousness of their identity. The Dalit leadership in the Congress metamorphosed into Congress Dalits, losing their autonomous identity. They became passive and uncritical towards the ideological authority of the party leadership, rather than promoting Ambedkarism which in any case was impossible on the Congress platform. Though they acknowledged the power of Ambedkarism and its emancipatory potential, they became, what the Dalit Panthers called, lackeys of the Congress.\textsuperscript{25} The Congress Dalit legislators failed to ventilate the Dalits' grievances, even on the floor of the legislature. It became customary for the Congress party to allot the portfolios of Social Welfare, Labour, or Employment to the Dalit members whereas Ambedkar considered Finance, Home, Revenue and Industries as the most important departments.\textsuperscript{26} The Congress Dalit leaders' bargaining power was also not effective enough in getting laws passed in favour of the Dalits, like land reforms and other welfare programmes and implementing them.\textsuperscript{27} They left it to the Dalits who were outside the Congress, along with the progressive forces, to fight against the upper caste dominance in the socio-political life of Andhra Pradesh.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{25} J.B. Gokhale, "The Evolution of a Counter-ideology: Dalit Consciousness in Maharashtra", in France R. Frankel and M.S.A. Rao (ed.), \textit{Dominance and State power in Modern India: Decline of a Social Order} (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1990)
  \item \textsuperscript{26} Gopal Guru, "Dr. Ambedkar's Concept of Political power and the question of Dalit Movement," Lecture delivered at Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Memorial Trust, Hyderabad, 1993.
  \item \textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
The Dalits and Communists

The Communist movement as the working class movement had an altogether different political strategy and programme for the mobilization of Dalits. Taking the Dalit question as part of the universal class question, it mobilized the Dalits within the broad class struggle to fight against the landlords and the exploitative capitalist system. The Dalits’ adherence to the Communist movement and the Communist contribution to the emergence of Dalit consciousness may briefly be traced at two levels: at an organizational strategic level and at the level of the theoretical or ideological leadership.

The Communists contributed significantly to organizing and heightening the level of Dalit consciousness against oppression and all forms of exploitation and instilled confidence and self-respect among the Dalits. The Communist Party of India, Andhra branch initiated its activities in 1932 stressing agrarian revolution, worker-peasant alliance, and the unity of people against imperialism. The Andhra Communists slowly infiltrated into the Hyderabad state through the Nizam Andhra Maha Sabha, also called in revolutionary terminology as the Sangham. The Sangham’s leaders like Ravi Narayan Reddy, Baddam Yella Reddy, Davulapali Venkateswara Rao and V.

---

28 Omvedt, pp. 283-4.
Alwar Swamy developed close links with the Andhra Communist leaders like P. Sundarayya, C. Rajeswar Rao and M. Basavapunnaiah. A branch of the Communist party was established in Hyderabad State in 1939, working through the Andhra Maha Sabha.

The Telengana Communists (of Hyderabad state) launched their struggle with bases in Warangal, Nalkonda and Khammam while the Andhra Communists operated in the Krishna, Guntur, East Godavari and West Godavari districts of the Madras Presidency. The struggle of both groups primarily centred around the issues of landless labourers, small peasants, tribals and the urban middle classes. According to P. Sundarayya, the father figure of the Communist movement in Andhra, from 1944, the Andhra Maha Sabha conducted many militant struggles against the zamindars and deshmukhs, against the practices of vetti (begar—forced labour), against illegal exactions and against the eviction of the cultivators from their lands. 29

To organize the peasants and workers, particularly in Telengana, dalams or ‘guerrilla squads’ were formed, which launched simultaneous attacks on landlords, money-lenders and police stations. Dalams were of two types. The village squads, comprising about 10,000 members, consisted of youth, to carry out political propaganda amongst the people

29 P. Sundarayya, Telengana People’s Struggle and its Lessons (Calcutta, CPI(M) 1972), p. 28.
and enthuse them and help in the day-to-day functioning of the village committees. The village destruction squads, with more than 2,000 members, worked for the physical elimination of the 'class enemies'. With these guerrilla squads an armed struggle was developed rapidly in Telengana. In the innumerable struggles that took place nearly 2,000 militants and leaders lost their lives.

The success of the Vishalandra (Combined Andhra) unit of the Communist Party of India in leading the Telengana peasant struggle between 1946 and 1957 against the feudal landlords and State oppression instilled tremendous confidence in the Dalits. The struggles of the members of the dalams, and their sacrifices filled the thousands of the poor, landless Dalits with hope. At the peak of their struggle the dalams administered as many as 3,000 villages, the zamindars and deshmukhs of these villages having fled to the cities. The dalams distributed land, and organized education, health and all rural services. According to claims made by the Communists, nearly one million acres of land were distributed among the peasants and the Dalit landless labourers. Thousands of bonded labourers were also emancipated. These claims have,

30 Ibid., pp. 66 and 67.
31 Ibid., p. 60.
32 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
however, come for closer scrutiny of late, and certain apprehensions have been raised about the nature and character of the struggle, in particular about the role of Dalits in the *dalams* and the precise beneficiaries of the land distribution. Some ambiguity in the documentation of the struggle has also been noted and the concealment of caste identity has been imputed.

After the Telengana struggle the Communists got involved in internecine power struggles and broke up into many groups, primarily on the question of revolutionary strategy and the characterization of the Indian State. The traditional Left groups, the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)), forsook armed struggle and endorsed electoral politics to capture State power. But those who opposed this bourgeois electoral strategy continued with the armed struggle. These revolutionary radicals formed the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Maoist (CPI(ML) Maoist). They opted for extra-parliamentary armed struggle in order to capture the State machinery.

The traditional Left, who entered the State Legislature, also made an important contribution for the development of

---

15 Omvedt, pp. 310-11.

Dalit consciousness. Though their position was marginalized in the State Assembly after the Telengana struggle, they played an important role in articulating the demands of the Dalits within electoral politics. Although they did not announce any separate programmes for the Dalits, they articulated the aspirations of the peasants and Dalits, who were broadly included under the category of landless peasants. The base of the traditional Left among the Dalits was insignificant. However the Communists, both CPI and CPI(M), as opposition parties, used to question government responsibility—sometimes more effectively than the Congress Dalit leaders—in implementing the policies and programmes designed for the Dalits. They also expressed concern for the welfare of the Dalits in the State Assembly while demanding more outlays in the State budget for their education, health and employment. When the state government passed the Andhra Pradesh Vacant Land in Urban Area (Prohibition of Alienation) Ordinance, 1972, the CPI Andhra Pradesh unit organized a massive signature campaign and a mass demonstration in front of the State Legislature in July 1972 demanding the immediate implementation of the ordinance. The CPI also urged the Congress government to amend the ordinance to include urban assets like buildings and estates. The party expressed its concern over the adoption by the landowners of ingenious methods to tamper with the land records.  

37 The Hindu, 9 June 1997.
Against the state government’s indifference to the severe drought situation in the early seventies, the CPI(M) state unit organized a state-wide programme of dharnas, picketing and hunger marches. It demanded that the drought-affected people should either be given work or provided foodgrains, pointing to the massive hoarding done by the upper caste feudals to exploit the opportunity provided by the drought to make money.\(^{38}\) At the end of 1972, the CPI(M) gave a call to all the Left parties and progressive organizations for a united struggle against the anti-people policies of the state government. The Central Committee of the CPI(M) said that "out of these struggles must grow the consciousness among the masses that they should fight for a reversal of the anti-people policies of the government".\(^{39}\) It adopted a resolution listing twelve issues over which a united struggle was called. These included:

- takeover by the state of the wholesale trade in all foodgrains and essential articles of consumption;
- minimum support price for all agricultural crops and ensuring it through state agencies;
- security of tenure to all tenants;
- wage increase and improvement of working conditions to agricultural labourers;

\(^{38}\) Ibid., 17 August 1972.

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 11 November 1972.

- provision of work and relief to the people in famine-affected areas.\textsuperscript{40}

Thus at the organizational level, the traditional Left parties CPI and CPI(M) led many agitations and fought within the electoral politics. They used the state institutions and consistently demanded of the state government to provide due share for the Dalits. The Communists made common cause with the Dalits on many occasions by taking up their economic problems along with the peasants and workers and condemned the indifference of the Congress party to the problems of the Dalits and the perpetration of violence on them.

The emergence of the Naxalite movement in the early seventies as an ultra-radical force in West Bengal and its percolation into the neighbouring Andhra Pradesh had its reverberations among the Dalits in that state. To the Dalits, frustrated by the policies and inaction of the Congress and the Congress Dalit leaders, the ambivalence of the traditional Left forces and, the unassertiveness of their own organizations, the new revolutionary stream of Naxalism offered fresh hope.\textsuperscript{41} Here, perhaps, was a movement that would give them solace from their multiple oppression, humiliation and atrocities perpetrated on them by the upper castes. The Naxals' mode of mobilization was novel in its

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{41} For more details see S. Banerjee, op. cit.
radical mode. Their staunch revolutionary determination and their politically conscious agenda of liberating the oppressed, as seen by the Dalits, instilled in them an enormous degree of confidence. The formation of the CPI(ML) on 22 April 1969 to coincide with Lenin’s birth anniversary, represented a turning point, marking a break with the revolutionist theory and practice of the traditional Left. The Andhra Pradesh State Committee of the CPI(ML), which rebuilt the revolutionary movement in Andhra Pradesh, characterized Indian society as semi-feudal and semi-colonial. The programme of the party said that “since the victory of people’s war in China, people in the backward countries firmly believed that it is only people’s war that is to be adopted in these countries for their liberation” and “people’s war is inevitable in this country.” It added: “We can raise the consciousness of the peasants only by intensifying the armed class struggle in villages and thereby annihilate the class enemies.” In the party’s programme, the centre of gravity of its work had to be in the villages. The peasants were the most exploited people of India living in semi-starvation and pauperization. To emancipate them, the CPI(ML) raised two principal slogans: “All land to the real tillers” and “All power to the peasant committees.”

\[^{42}\textit{Liberation},\ vol.\ 63,\ 1970\]
\[^{43}\textit{Ibid.}\]
The party took up the task of building up mass organizations to lead the intended struggle. The CPI(ML) in Srikakulam rapidly extended its struggle from the mountains to the plains and the eastern coast. The party organ *Liberation* noted: "The Srikakulam District Committee of the CPI(ML) armed forces have turned 300 villages into red area and set up preliminary organs of people's political power called 'Councils for the People's Uprising', to take charge of administration and production and lay the groundwork for land distribution." 'People's courts' were also set up in all villages to try the 'enemies' and pass judgments on them. It was to be an intensive battle of annihilation led by the poor and the landless peasants.

The Rytu Coolie Sangham (RCS) or Peasants and Agricultural Labourers Union was the first mass organ of the party, started in the early 1970s, through which the CPI(ML) entered the villages. Soon the RCS units proliferated, initiating and leading the struggle against the local landlords. The RCS as a mass organization took up multiple struggles against the oppression structured around the rural agrarian society. These concerned the feudal oppression of *vetti* or *vettichakiri* in Telengana, *jeetam* in the Andhra region, enhancement of daily wages, the distribution of land, the struggle against caste, sex, corruption and drink.45

44 Ibid.
The success of the Nimmapally land struggle in Nizamabad district by the RCS became the prologue to the expansion and consolidation of the CPI(ML) movement in Telengana. In this struggle, the Dalits occupied 22 acres of fertile land of an upper caste landlord. After this beginning, massive strikes for wage increases, rigorous campaigns for the release of bonded vetti labourers, and persistent resistance against the different types of caste and gender discrimination became the order of the day. The struggle against the exploitation of beedi leaves-tendu leaves workers resulted in increasing the meagre wages from Rs. 3 per 100 bundles to between Rs. 15 and Rs. 18.

With the strong backing of the RCS, which worked under the leadership of the CPI(ML), the peasants and the landless Dalits asserted themselves and started social boycott of the most oppressive upper caste landlords. The CPI(ML) installed praja panchayats (people's courts) to solve the people's age-old problems of oppression and exploitation by upper caste landlords. The issues of harassment of peasant men and women were taken up and the punishment meted to culprits sent shivers down the spines of the landlords.

---

46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 Twenty Five years of Naxalite Movement, An AIRSF Publication, 1933, p. 83
49 Ibid.
During the internal emergency declared in India in 1975, the CPI(ML) went underground but party activities were continued with the formation of broad-based student organizations. In 1975, under the leadership of the Andhra Pradesh State Committee of CPI(ML) the student groups in the various districts of the state united under a single banner and formed the Radical Students Union (RSU). The RSU launched Go-To the Village campaigns, bringing the student leaders closer to the peasants. The welfare hostels where the Dalit and tribal students stayed became the base for RSU meetings.

After the Emergency was lifted in 1977, the CPI (ML) party and its different organs resumed the struggle openly. In 1978 the Radical Youth League (RYL) was formed and its first state-level conference was held at Guntur in 1978. A huge youth gathering of almost 7,000 attended the conference from all over the state. In a landmark demonstration of its political muscle, the CPI (ML) with all its organs of RCS, RSU, RYL and Jana Natya Mandali (JNM) led a rally, named Jaith Yatra in Jagityal town (Karimnagar district) on 8 September 1978 under the banner of the RCS. The rally, of mammoth proportions, was reportedly attended by nearly 50,000 peasants.51

50 Ibid., p. 80.
51 Ibid., p. 81.
In the wake of the Jaitha Yatra, over 800 acres of land were occupied by the Dalits and peasants, and lakhs of rupees were collected as funds by the landless Dalits and peasants in thirty villages of Jagityala alone under the leadership of the RCS. The RCS banner was hoisted everywhere. It was reported that about 70 upper caste landlords belonging to Jagityal and Manthani taluks of Karimnagar district and Luxettipeata taluk of Adilabad district fled and settled down in Hyderabad.

It will be seen from the above narration that the Communists, at the organizational level could successfully mobilize the Dalits in the state. The Communists urged the Dalits to participate in the process of political activity as part of their programme of evolving a broad-based working-class movement. Because of the overwhelming presence of Dalits in the Radical Left movement it was even branded as the Dalit party.

At the theoretical and ideological level, the Communists’ understanding of Indian society and their characterization of the Indian state, however, had some fundamental limitations from the Dalit point of view. Their broad, non-specific, obscure theoretical construction of the ‘classes’, ‘national bourgeoisie’ ‘semi-feudal and the ‘working class’, ‘peasants’ underestimated the specific

---

12 Ibid., p. 83.

instance of the caste reality in Indian society. In India, caste relations are the most determining feature in social formation. Ambedkar’s rediscovery of the existence of specific caste-class divisions and the direct antagonistic relationship between the ownership of the means of production by the upper castes and the producer Dalits was not recognized by the Communists. Thus the Communists did not try to construct an ideological alternative against the hegemony of Hinduism in which caste operates successfully.

However, the significant emergence of an autonomous Dalit movement not only at the regional level but also at the national level, compelled all the Communists including the Radical Left to recognize the importance of the annihilation of caste theory. This is evident in the recently released CPI(M-L) People’s War document, “Special Features of Indian Revolution”,54 which says that there are several special features of the Indian revolution, but it recognizes only six important features in which caste has been included. The document admits that the caste question had been neglected throughout the history of the Indian Communist movement. According to it, “the complete resolution of the caste question is possible only after the present semi-feudal semi-colonial state and society are changed through the new

Democratic Revolution". It goes on to say that "the struggle of the downtrodden castes against social and cultural oppression by the upper castes who are firmly entrenched in positions of power forms an integral part of the wider class struggle going on in society for change". Thus having recognized caste as a concrete Indian social reality, the Communists applied Marx's famous words to the Indian context that "All hitherto history of India is the history of class and caste struggles".

At the same time, the crucial debate which was brought forth by Ambedkarism in Indian politics has been totally undervalued by the Communists. Though Ambedkar readily acknowledged the scientific status of Marxism and its aim to emancipate the oppressed in the world, the Indian Communists, on the contrary, banned Ambedkar's name in their literature. Some of their party documents which explained the course of the Communist struggle and elaborated the socio-economic conditions and multiple caste oppression of the Dalits, did not specify or construct any systematic programme/strategy to annihilate caste. P. Sundaryya's *The History of the Telengana People's Struggle*, Nagi Reddy's *India Mortgaged*, and Kondapalli Seetaramayya's *Agrarian Revolution* have been inspiring.

---

55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
works no doubt, but they fall far short of making any systematic critique of either Brahminism or Hinduism.

A major point of resentment for the Dalits as regards the Communist movement also concerns the ideological leadership of the party. According to Selig S. Harrison, "Since the founding of the Andhra Communist Party in 1934, the party leadership has been the property of a single sub-caste, the Kamma landlords." Thus Chandrasekhar Rao, Rejeshwar Rao, M. Basavapunnaiah, Ch. Hanumantha Rao and D.V. Rao all were Kammas. Similarly, the Reddys dominated the radical Left: P. Sunderayya, Kondapalli Seetharamayya (both of whom gave up their Reddy title), and T. Nagi Reddy. The traditional Left, which entered electoral politics, could not produce a single notable Dalit leader. Guntur Bapanaiah was an exception but in the pre-independence period.

The Naxalite movement, however, produced a good number of dynamic, energetic Dalit bahujan activists and leaders who were especially sensitive and vocal. K.G. Satyamurthy was an ideologue, writer and powerful poet. A close follower of Charu Mazumdar, he went underground in 1969 and continued up to the mid-eighties. K. Rajanna and

---

59 Ilaiiah, op. cit.
60 Ibid.
Kancha Ilaiah were other bahujan caste ideologues and state level leaders. In the literary and cultural sphere, the movement contributed many singers, lyricists and poets. Foremost among them is Gummadi Vittal Rao, with the pseudonym Gaddar. Gaddar is a ballad singer and lyricist of considerable merit. His songs reflect the anger, agony, pride and hope of the toiling Dalit masses. Vanga Pandu Prasad is a Dalit lyricist, singer and performer. Rama Rao, Venkanna and G. Anjaiah are all Dalit lyricists and singers. V. Sambasiva Rao is a writer, lyricist and singer. Allam Rajaiah is a novelist and short story writer. B.S. Ramulu, an emerging Dalit bahujan ideologue, is a powerful novelist on Dalit bahujan themes. Sahu is a short story writer and Dalit essayist. As victims of the caste system, all of them speak of caste oppression in their songs.

However, up to the Karamchedu incident in 1985, these writers and ideologues did not show any autonomous assertion within the CPI(ML) party on the question of caste and the anti-caste ideological struggle which was already taking shape. Although in their songs they lashed against the caste oppression perpetrated by Hinduism, they did not make a breakthrough within the party. It was the Karamchedu incident which forced them to identify themselves with the Dalit forces.

---

61 Ibid.
62 Ibid
Autonomous Activity

In the background of the discriminative attitude of the Congress led by the dominant ruling class, and the relative indifference of the Communists to the specific caste-based problems of the Dalits, an autonomous sporadic Dalit activity of equal strength also flourished. In this stream, Ambedkar’s thought was given pre-eminence and was propagated with enthusiasm.

Although there was an impressive forceful Dalit autonomous movement in Andhra and Telengana during the early twenties and thirties, that potential movement had been systematically diffused by the Congress. The stalwarts of that movement had faded away because of the Congress strategies of co-option and patronage. However, Dalit autonomous activity continued in post-independence Andhra Pradesh. Some aspects of this movement were: (a) the conversion movement; (b) the formation of the Republican Party of India (RPI); (c) the emergence of the powerful Dalit Panther movement in Maharashtra and its impact in Andhra; and (d) the massive growth of youth and workers’ associations.

Buddhist Movement

Andhra Pradesh did not witness any significant Dalit conversion to Buddhism, unlike Maharashtra, where the
Dalits were massively converted to Buddhism and created a separate identity for themselves. The Andhra Pradesh unit of the Buddhist Society of India played a very limited role in this regard. It continued to promote and spread Buddhism and the message of Ambedkar through the publication of leaflets and pamphlets with Buddhist themes on different occasions and limited itself to organizing gatherings and state conferences.

*The Republican Party of India (RPI)*

The Republican Party of India (RPI), founded in 1957, has played an important role in organizing the Dalits in Andhra Pradesh. The RPI as a broad political organization was actually devised and codified by Ambedkar just before his death, with a view to unite all oppressed and disadvantaged Dalit bahujans of Indian society. Ambedkar envisaged that the party would be consolidated on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. He also expected that the party as envisaged would be the “*summum bonum* for saving democracy from passing into the hands of a dictator”. The RPI has stood “for the parliamentary system of government as being the best form of government both in

---

63 Gokhle, op. cit.
64 Interview with P.V. Rao on 27 March 1997 (Hyderabad).
66 Ibid.
the interest of the public and in the interest of the individuals". 67

Initially, the RPI made rapid progress on the path envisaged by Ambedkar and formulated a broad alliance between the peasants and landless labourers. There is also evidence that it was successful in attracting support across caste and community lines. 68 The RPI channelled all its energies to organize landless labourers and peasants, who form the mass base of the Dalits. The Andhra Pradesh state unit of the RPI played a significant role in organizing and mobilizing the Dalits in Andhra. The state unit president B.V. Rmanayya hailed from the East Godavari district. The other prominent RPI leaders were party secretary J. Eswari Bai, Ganta Arun Kumar and P.V. Manohar. The RPI fielded a good number of candidates all over the state in the 1962 state assembly elections. Though it did not win a single seat, two of the candidates avoided losing their election deposits. 69 The latter fact created considerable confidence among the party workers who plunged into electoral activity more enthusiastically.

In the mid-sixties the RPI initiated a highly successful nation-wide struggle. It was a time of a painful economic

67 Ibid., p. 223.
68 Gokhle, op. cit.
decline in the country, which severely affected the Dalits’ very survival. A severe drought made food scarce, and the substantial fall in agricultural production led to industrial recession, causing severe unemployment among the Dalits. The drastic cuts in welfare expenditure worsened their plight.

In these conditions, the RPI launched massive country-wide demonstrations and strikes on 6 December 1964, bringing together all peasants and landless Dalit labourers. The RPI activists forcibly entered into government reserved forests, cut down trees, and entered into municipal and other government offices. They smashed public property which was remaining unused. Thousands of party workers and leaders courted arrest all over the country. The ‘Charter of Demands’ prepared by the party central leadership in Maharashtra contained ten demands, including the demand of land to the tiller, distribution of waste and idle land to the landless labourers, and full implementation of the Minimum Wages Act of 1948.70

The going seemed to be good for the RPI for some time, threatening the political base of the established parties, especially the ruling Congress. However, soon cracks appeared within the leadership, alleged to have been brought about by Congress manoeuvring. In the 1967 elections the Congress entered into an electoral alliance with the RPI.

70 Kuber, p.327.
which became the starting point of the cracking up of the RPI into many splinter groups.\textsuperscript{71} While the central leadership of the RPI from Maharashtra entered into an electoral alliance with Congress, the Andhra Pradesh state unit was against it and intended to contest independently.

In the 1967 elections, which were held simultaneously for the Lok Sabha and the State Assembly, the Andhra state RPI unit fielded eleven candidates for the Assembly and two for the Lok Sabha. The state unit president, B.V Ramanayya, who contested from Allavaram Assembly constituency and Amalapuram Lok Sabha constituency, got elected for the Assembly only. The party secretary J. Eswari Bai, who contested from the Yella Reddy reserved constituency, defeated her rival Congress candidate Sadalakshmi. Another winning Lok Sabha candidate from the RPI was Ganta Arun Kumar.\textsuperscript{72} Compared to the 1962 elections in which most of the RPI candidates could not even secure their deposit, this was a remarkable improvement. This was mainly because of the massive mobilization undertaken in 1964.

The two RPI leaders, the party president Ramanayya and the Secretary Eswari Bai, actively participated in the Assembly debates. They raised many issues which were basically of concern to the Dalits and other bahujans. They raised issues like land redistribution, increase in the wages

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., p.326.
\textsuperscript{72} Bhaskara Rao, p. 84.
of agricultural labourers, more housing facilities, employment opportunities for the Dalits, and scholarships and welfare hostels for Dalit students. They also attacked the Congress government for its indifference to the mounting atrocities on the Dalits. Eswari Bai also made a demand that the state government should declare Ambedkar's birthday as a state holiday.73 Compared to the Congress Dalit leaders, the RPI Dalit leaders were more articulate, frank and assertive in their demands.

Besides the mainstream political activity, B.V. Ramanayya also founded a cultural and literary organ called the Ambedkar Memorial Society in Hyderabad. He also started a Telugu fortnightly called the Republican Jyothi, in 1972 renamed as Jai Bheem Patrika.74 The Patrika was edited and managed by B.H. Tirupathi, who was earlier the president of the Scheduled Caste Welfare Association. The primary activities of the Ambedkar Memorial Society were to translate Ambedkar's works into Telugu and propagate RPI activities through the Patrika. Under the auspices of the society about a dozen works of Ambedkar were translated, including Annihilation of Caste (translated by Boi Bheemanna), a part of Ambedkar's speeches (translated by Bojja Tarakam) and Who are the Untouchables? (translated by Uma Maheswara Rao).75 All

73 Andhra Pradesh State Legislative Assembly Debates, 10 February 1970.
74 Interview with P.V. Rao, 27 March 1997 (Hyderabad).
75 Interview with Ganumala Ganeswar, 21 January 1997 (Hyderabad).
these works created the intended consciousness among the Dalits about their plight about Ambedkar’s ideas.

The RPI had a more notable, if not solid, base in the Andhra region than in Telengana. Most of the RPI leaders—Ramanayya, Bojja Appala Swamy, Mohan Rao and Ganta Arun Kumar—came from the coastal region. The RPI’s student wing, the Student Federation (SF) was also very active in the region. Welfare hostels became the central points where the SF used to conduct meetings, organizing agricultural labourers, and celebrating Ambedkar’s birth and death anniversaries. In 1974, the SF state conference was held at Tanuku (West Godavari), and was attended by eminent RPI leaders from Maharashtra and Karnataka such as B.D. Khojragade the RPI Rajya Sabha member, D.A. Katti, the RPI General Secretary from Karnataka and Eswari Bai. P.V. Rao, a young and dynamic Dalit student leader was elected as the state general secretary of the SF.76

After this the RPI in Andhra started to dwindle and confined its activities mainly in the city of Hyderabad where most of the leaders were settled. The organizational base was not extended and financially the party was weak for obvious reasons. Though Eswari Bai, as party secretary, was very active in her political and social life, she also restricted her activities to the state capital, often giving newspaper

76 Interview with P.V. Rao, 27 March 1997 (Hyderabad).
statements about party meetings and conferences.\footnote{77}{Ibid.} By the mid-seventies, the RPI state unit was almost non-functional. This was also true of Maharashtra which was supposed to be the stronghold of RPI.

The decline of the RPI, at the all-India level, as an autonomous alternative Dalit political force, and the withdrawal of its combative political culture totally diverted the course of its political mobilization. Thereafter, the party focused its attention on bargaining politics, pressuring the government for the guarantee of facilities in education, employment and political posts involving dealings with other parties.\footnote{78}{He wake of “the persistent splits, electoral defeats, electoral contortions and compromises and defections to the Congress party, it became nothing more than a talisman that had lost its power”.\footnote{79}{Ibid.}

Ambedkar Yuvajan Sanghams

The failure of the RPI and its frustrating performance led the Dalit youth to commence a more assertive Dalit Panthers movement in Maharashtra in the early seventies.\footnote{80}{Ibid.} In Andhra Pradesh this was marked by the formation of a massive youth organization, which made a substantial impact.

\footnote{77}{Ibid.}
\footnote{78}{B.J. Turner Gokhale, “The Dalit Panthers and the Radical section of the Untouchables”. The Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics, vol. XVIII, March 1979, no. 1.}
\footnote{79}{Ibid.}
\footnote{80}{Ibid.}
on Andhra politics. This was the Ambedkar Yuvajana Sangham (Ambedkar Youth Association). Though the Sanghams did not become a formidable political force like the Dalit Panthers in Maharashtra, they did manage to register a strong protest against the upper caste rulers. The Sanghams resorted to agitationist politics, which included the propagation of Ambedkar ideas, the celebration of his birth and death anniversaries, installation of Ambedkar statues, translation of Ambedkar's writings into Telugu, and occasionally issuing pamphlets, holding rallies and demonstrations and submitting memoranda.

Bojja Tarakam became the moving force behind the founding of the first such Sangham in 1971 in Nizamabad district and registering it.\(^{81}\) Tarakam, a lawyer by profession, was a staunch Ambedkarite and Naxalite sympathizer. Under the banner of Yuvajana Sangham, Tarakam started organizing the landless agricultural labourers, and daily wage workers in the beedi and cigar rolling industry. The Dalits and other working classes themselves approached him to redress their grievances. Tarakam prepared memoranda on their behalf, submitted them to the authorities concerned, arranged protest rallies and argued the cases in court.\(^{82}\) In the process, the Sangham activities spread to several other districts such as Karimnagar, Medak and Adilabad. The Yuvajana Sangham,

\(^{81}\) Interview with Bojja Tarakam, 18 January 1997 (Hyderabad).

\(^{82}\) Ibid.
along with the CPI(ML) Rytu Coolie Sangham, led many struggles against the upper caste landlords. Both the Sanghams united in their demand for an increase in the wages of the landless agricultural labourers and the beedi and cigar industry workers and for better treatment of farm servants.

Legislation governing small-scale industries provided many benefits and welfare facilities to the beedi workers, but the indifference of government officials combined with the ignorance of these benefits by the workers, led to their poor living conditions. Tarakam, after he was elected president of the beedi workers’ union of Nizamabad, took up these issues and led many successful demonstrations and huge rallies and strikes against the lethargic bureaucracy and the state government. One of these strikes, lasting twenty-five days, demanding the implementation of the Beedi and Cigar Workers Act, resulted in its successful outcome.\(^3\)

The conscientization of the Dalits, however, led to general discontent and distrust against the upper caste Hindu establishment, adding to the general national crisis which culminated in the imposition of internal emergency in 1975-77. During this period, many Dalit leaders and activists were arrested. Tarakam was imprisoned. At Guntur, when the RPI

\(^3\) Ibid.
executive meeting was in progress, police entered and ordered the participants to leave immediately.\textsuperscript{84}

The revocation of the Emergency in 1977 resulted in the massive resurrection of Yuvajana Sangham activities. Many new Yuvajan Sanghams were formed and worked autonomously in their localities. Efforts were made to coordinate the work of these Sanghams, and to form a state level association. The result was the formation and registration of the Andhra Pradesh Ambedkar Yuvajana Sangham in 1977.\textsuperscript{85} Thomas Rao was elected president, and S.S.R. Bhupathi became the general secretary. The other leaders associated with it were P.V. Rao, S. Ramakrishna, J. Rajgopal Rao, M. Prem Kumar and J.B. Raju. The activities of the state level Sangham were limited mainly to the state capital. The Sangham along with the Scheduled Caste Employs Welfare Association started night schools for the Dalits, and nearly 220 slum dwellers were organized in Hyderabad city. P.V. Rao took up the charge of \textit{Jai Bheem Patrika} and opened a new column called ‘Raktastruvulu’ (Tears of Blood), chronicling the atrocities on Dalits.\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{84} Interview with P.V. Rao, 27 March 1997.

\textsuperscript{85} This was told by Tarakam, P.V. Rao, and Ganeswar.

\textsuperscript{86} Interview with P.V. Rao, 27 March 1997.
Installation of Ambedkar’s Statues

Another important method adopted by the Yuvajana Sangham, apart from the occasional, sometimes spontaneous agitations, was the installation of Ambedkar’s busts and statues. The campaign produced remarkable consciousness and identity among the Dalits in Andhra. In villages and towns, the statues were installed in the centre of Dalit colonies. In big cities, they were installed mainly at the city’s crossroads. The statues, showing Ambedkar standing, symbolized self-realization and self-respect. His raised right hand would be pointing to the distant horizon, signifying the intended goal. His left hand held either his book *Kulanirmulana* (Annihilation of Caste) or the Indian Constitution. His keen eyes and broad forehead portrayed the maturity of his intellectual calibre. The statues were intended to create a strong effect not only on Dalits but on every viewer, reminding them of Ambedkar’s three mottoes: Educate, Agitate, Organize.

Ambedkar’s statues also became a focal point in the celebration of Ambedkar’s birth and death anniversaries. The statue at Tankband, Hyderabad, installed in 1968, became almost a pilgrimage every 14th April, which is Ambedkar’s birth anniversary, the event being marked by a distinct festive mood. In 1978, Chief Minister Chenna Reddy made it an official function. Thereafter, the event used to be marked by two functions near the statue, one by the state officials
with full state honours, and the other by the Dalits themselves. Dalits from different districts and taluks would pour into the city, holding aloft banners, shouting triumphant slogans, and singing songs of solidarity, accompanied by dance. The cynosure of the cultural function would be Gaddar’s performance.\(^{87}\)

Thus the installation of Ambedkar statues have their own historical importance, which profoundly reveals the whole spectrum of socio-cultural, political and psychological dimensions of the Dalit movement. The statues have both subjective and objective expressions. They have been used as the devices for the expression of not only the self-respect but also to communicate the social ideas. Moreover, they have been used as a powerful means of political agitation and reflects the publication of the future hope of the present oppressed Dalits. In many cases, experiences show that the Dalits have an emotional symbolic attachment with the statues. Any kind of dishonour and defile of the statue would result in the display of unrestraint indignation and protest from the Dalits. Thus the study about the installation of Ambedkar statues in a complex subject and comprises more than one factor, which had profound political implications for the Dalit consciousness and identity.

\(^{87}\) Interview with Ganumala Ganeswar, 21 January 1997.
The eighties opened with a marked degree of Dalit assertion in Andhra Pradesh. The Dalits expressed a distinctive, more active enthusiasm and participation to build up an effective youth and workers' movement. Their discontent was emphatically expressed by observing Independence Day and Republic Day as black days.

Under the Congress rule, atrocities on Dalits increased. Even the Congress Dalit leaders were publicly humiliated. The Congress Dalit MLA, Masala Veeranna was denied temple entry, and Jagjivan Ram was denied the opportunity to become the Prime Minister. In protest, the Yuvajana Sanghams along with all progressive and radical organizations gave a call to observe Republic Day 1982 as a Black Day. Black flags were hoisted throughout the state on that day. In Hyderabad, nearly 50,000 people were mobilized and gathered at the Ambedkar statue near Tankband in a peaceful procession carrying black flags. Chief Minister T. Anjaiah was greeted with black flags when he went to attend the Republic Day parade. Shocked by this display, Anjaiah ordered the police to take action. The police, without prior intimation, lathi-charged and teargassed the peaceful demonstration. The lathi charge continued for nearly six hours. The fleeing Dalit men, women and children were chased up to three kilometres.

* Interview with P.V. Rao: This was also reported in Telugu daily papers, see * fnadu*, 27 January 1982, Hyderabad.
The increasing oppression of the Dalits under the Congress rule and the ruling party’s indifference to their plight frustrated the Dalits who denounced the government. In the ensuing 1983 Assembly elections, the Dalits played a crucial role in defeating the Congress party, which had hitherto ruled the state unopposed. The newly formed Telugu Desam Party meanwhile made extravagant and attractive populist promises. The concept of pseudo-Telugu upper caste-dominated nationalism and Telugu pride, was capitalized in the form of votes. Against the Twenty-Point Programme of the Congress, the Telugu Desam formulated a Fifteen-Point Programme called *Pragathi Patham* (Progressive Path) which mainly addressed the weaker sections. Thus, expecting a better future for themselves, the Dalits voted in favour of Telugu Desam.89

The establishment of the Telugu Desam party rule under N.T. Rama Rao, however, strengthened the caste arrogance of the Kamma landlords. Almost every Kamma virtually felt that a ‘Kamma Raj’ had been established. Immediately after the Telugu Desam captured power in the state, the Kamma landlords unleashed enormous violence on the Dalits. In the first atrocity under the Telugu Desam dispensation Telugu Desam party members set on fire

---

hundreds of Dalits huts at Padirikuppam. In the ensuing conflagration, four persons were burnt to death.  

**Summing Up**

The advancement of post-independence Dalit consciousness in Andhra Pradesh has been coupled with various organizational settings. The Congress with its political process of co-option and patronage always tried to diffuse the autonomous Dalit movement. Though it succeeded to some extent, its strategies produced different implications for the development of Dalit consciousness. The Communists did organize the Dalits on many issues but their indifference to the caste-specific problems of Dalits, non-recognition of Ambedkarism as the caste annihilation ideology, growing atrocities on Dalits which centred around Hindu fundamentalism backed by the upper caste Reddy and Kammas made the Dalits suspect the Communists' political commitment. In this juncture, independent Dalit activity gained in strength by the end of the seventies.

However, the immediate post-independence autonomous Dalit activity in Andhra Pradesh was subjected to setbacks. Though the RPI emerged as an alternative for the Dalits, it could not sustain itself on the Andhra political scene. The phenomenon of the Dalit Panthers in Maharashtra

---

90 The Statesman (Calcutta), 24 January 1983; see also Enadu (Hyderabad), 25 January 1983.
could not make a visible mark in the state precisely because of the earlier arrival of the equally powerful Naxalite movement, which again pushed the Dalit independent activity to confine itself only to sporadic activity.