CHAPTER-II

TELANGANA PEASANT INSURRECTION: A HISTORICAL STUDY

In the history of Left politics in India the Telangana Armed Struggle of peasants against tyrannical, feudalistic, and autocratic rule of Nizam constitutes an indispensable chapter. This Chapter traces the trajectory of the Left Movement in Telangana from the beginning including the conditions that laid the foundations for the rise of Left Movement through the wide range of primary sources. We have even first person accounts of the Communist leaders of the struggle, memoirs of nationalists, historical accounts based on primary documents, sociological analysis of the insurgent villages and oral histories.

Before the discussion on the movement led by the Communists, and the conditions that have led to the movement; it is important to study the geographical character and socio-economic and political conditions of the erstwhile estate of Hyderabad. Agricultural farming was the main occupation of about 60-70 per cent of the people in the state; therefore land becomes the central issue around which socio-political and economical conditions in the state depends. Hence, this chapter is organized accordingly; first it gives detailed description of geographical features; second it discusses economic and political conditions that led to the social settings that have finally favored the leftist movement.

GEOGRAPHIC FEATURES OF TELANGANA:

Nizam’s state was the biggest of all the 600 odd princely states in India. Telangana is the Telugu-speaking eastern part of the formerly princely state of
Hyderabad. It is situated at an average height of 1250-1500 feet above sea-level.\(^1\) Hyderabad encompasses an area of 82,700 square miles in south-central India. It was divided into three linguistic regions: Marathwada with six districts, Karnataka with two, and Telangana with nine. When the States Reorganization Commission's recommendations were adopted in 1956, Telangana was merged with the Telugu-speaking areas of Madras Presidency to form the Andhra Pradesh.

Being hilly, Telangana was covered mostly with sandy soils, good for growing jawar and bajra (different kinds of millet). Some areas had fertile black soils, used mainly for dry cultivation. The average annual rainfall was about 30 inches but it fluctuated greatly from year to year. Most of it fell during the period from roughly June to September. The main food crops were jawar, bajra, rice, wheat and pulses. The major cash crops were peanut, castor, linseed, sesame, tobacco and sugarcane. Double-cropping was commonly practiced, the crop being harvested in October and late January to early February. Jawar and bajra were the main crops in Mahboobnagar; Nalgonda was the chief source of castor and an important producer of rice; Warangal, benefitting from good irrigation and heavier rainfall, produced rice as well as peanuts and tobacco.

Irrigation was provided by tanks, wells and canals. Telangana, where tanks were important, had 80 per cent of the state's irrigation facilities. The percentage of irrigated area to total cultivated area, though, was low in the Nizam's Dominions, just


six percent in 1931 compared to twenty percent for the country as a whole.² Rain water filled the tanks during the monsoons; by the end of the following summer they were dry. The river Godavari, defining the eastern border of Telangana and the river Krishna demarcating the southern border are both rain fed. They too dried up during the summer. However, the torrential monsoons caused the rivers to swell. The current in the Godavari was particularly strong, making it virtually uncrossable.

All along the Godavari, between it and the plains of Warangal and Karimnagar where agriculture is the main occupation, were thick forests. That was not true, though, of the entire state, only 12 per cent of which was forested. Adilabad had even larger portions covered with dense forests. Here tigers and leopards, bears, antelopes, wild boar, many species of snakes, and various small animals were to be found. There were forests along the Krishna too, in the southern parts of Nalgonda and Mahboobnagar but these were smaller and less dense.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STRUCTURE OF TELANGANA

Hyderabad state was divided for administrative reasons into four Subahs -Viz Aurangabad, Gulbarga, Gulshanabad (Medak) and Warangal - headed by a subahdar each. These subahdars were entrusted with the responsibility of revenue collection and other duties according to the new system introduced in 1867 called “Zilla Bandhi”. These Subahs were further divided into 15 districts headed by the first Talugdar (Collector) with revenue as well as administrative functions. There was also one subdistrict with an Amaldar. These districts consisted of 101 (and later increased

to 117 talugas) under a Talugdar with a Peshkar (assistant) and a Girdavar (revenue inspector). The Department of land revenue and survey settlement set up in 1873 sought to streamline the land tenurial system.

As far as Telangana is concerned (in the two subahs of Warangal and Medak) the department of land settlement effected a thirty years tenancy settlement for four districts of Warangal, Nizamabad, Medak and Mehboobnagar, a fifteen years settlement in the four districts of Karimnagar and Nalgonda which were partly assessed. In the two remaining districts of Adilabad and the crown district of Atraf-I-Balda (Hyderabad) land was not surveyed at all.

In Hyderabad State, as a whole, broadly two land tenurial and revenue systems came into being one, Diwani (or Khalsa) lands and another non-Diwani comprising about 60 per cent and 40 per cent of the entire Hyderabad State respectively. Sarf-e-Khas or crown lands amounted to roughly about 50 lack acres in about 3335 villages of the State out of which 646 villages are in Telangana but mainly concentrated in the Hyderabad district. There were about 573 such villages in Hyderabad, 25 in Karimnagar, 15 in Nalgonda, 15 in Mehboobnagar, 13 in Medak, and 4 in Warangal districts which contribute about Rs. 2 crore per annum in a state with a budget estimated at Rs. 20 crores.

Land revenue collected by the officials in these villages was sent to the Tehsil office from where it was deposited with the Nizams treasury. This was extracted mainly from the 15 lakh peasants who occupied these lands.  

non-Diwani lands are Paigahs - lands granted by the Nizam to his close relatives (mainly through matrimonial ties) or his army commanders of a high rank. Paigah, hence meant “prompt and high rank”. The land revenue in these estates amounted to Rs. 30-54 lakhs. These covered an area of about 4134 square miles of the state.4

Samsthanas and Jagirs are the other major aspects of the non-Diwani tenures. There are about 10 samsthanas located in Gadwal, Anegondi, Paloncha, Gopalpet, Wanaparty, Jatpole, Narayanapur, Medak, Amarchinta and Gurgunta. There were former rulers (rajahs) in these territories that patched-up with the Nizam and retained about 94 per cent of the gross income from the land. They pay a nominal peshkash to the Nizam. They also possess village grants on a fixed assessment.5 Jagirs were granted by the Nizams to Pathans and Arab Jammandars and others for the services rendered to the state. The Jagirdars in turn granted ownership rights in lieu of the payment of a Nazrana. These Jagirs acquired judicial and administrative powers. The number of the grants of these Jagirs increased from about 1,100 in 1992 to 1,500 in 1949 and so do the number of Middlemen leading to the “sub-infeudation” process.

Some Jagirdars cultivated their land through forced labour or vetti and Bhagela.6 These were Swantha Kamatham lands or serî lands. On the whole since the revenue to collect from the tenants was not mentioned in the grants, the land taxes and rents were


4 See “The Paigas” in AISPC File No. 65, 1938-49 (Manuscript Section, NMML) Pp. 6-7. This booklet studied three big Paighas in the State and came to the conclusion that these Paighas owners were a “typical feudal class,” p. 17.

5 See for the conditions in these ‘Samsthanas,’ a research note by Nippani Ranga Rao “ Misrule in Gadwal” in AISPC File No. 65, and 39, 1939, Pp. 1-5.

exorbitant in these jagirs in comparison to the land tax in the Diwani areas. There were as many as 40 such taxes in the Jagirs at times.

Thus through rack-renting and exorbitant taxes, Jagirdars, Samsthandars and others acquired considerable influence in the society. Ten families in this section acquired revenue and taxes worth Rs. 10 crores with the Nizam at its head with about Rs. 2 crores as rental income and a personal fortune worth $2 billion and thus become “the richest person” in the world at that time.\(^7\)

In the Diwani lands to the influence of jagirdars, Deshmukhs and other can be seen. Though the settlement in these areas was known as Ryotwari i.e. the owner of the land is in direct relationship to the state on payment of a fixed land revenue - a varietable tenure systems emerged, namely pattadars, Jagirdars, Inamdars, Ljaradars, Banjardars, Sarbastadars, Agraharas, Maktadars and so on.\(^8\) The land occupancy of the Pattadars was dependent on the regular payment of the land revenue, but these pattadars more often than not had partners called Shikmidars, from whom the former received a percentage of the agricultural produce depending on the agricultural inputs (implement, seeds, cattle etc.) Shikmidars were permanent tenants where as another group of tenants called Asami-Shikmidars or Kashtakars were tenants-at-will. Liara (contract) lands were granted for the purpose of extending cultivation lands without the tag of any revenue payment for the first 30-40 years but gradually land rent

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See also A.M. Khusro. Economic and Social Effects of Jagirdari Abolition and Land Reforms in Hyderabad, Hyderabad: Government of Andhra Pradesh, Pp. 3-4.

increased after this period. There are about 465 villages in Telangana above of such grants which occupied about 95 lakh acres.\textsuperscript{9}

\textit{Inam} lands were granted to the non-cultivating classes for the services rendered to the state or for charitable purpose, either free of revenue or subject to a quit rent. The patels and patwaris were the major beneficiaries of these lands at the local level.\textsuperscript{10} Sarbastadars came into existence after Salar Jung abolished the system of revenue farming, the previous revenue farmers given watans or Inams. Deshmukhs payed a fixed revenue to the state and here too the exact amount to be collected from the tenants was not mentioned, leaving Deshmukhs free to employ force labour. Moneylenders too joined their ranks.

Makta resembles the Jagirdari system, with the exception that the grant holder has to pay a fixed rent. This system prevailed in about 664 villages. Though the intention here was to make the actual cultivator a pattadar, in practice the Maktadar retained the patta by evicting tenants at his will and so on. Agraharas were grants made to Hindu temples and Brahmanas without any revenue payment. They numbered about 309. Banjardars cultivated the forest lands.\textsuperscript{11}

These Jagirdars, Samsthanadars, Deshmukhs, Banjardars and so on exerted formidable influence on the rural socio-economic structure. They have extensive


\textsuperscript{10} See Inam Lands, File No. 29/13/50, Record No. 20 (HAS) and The Imperial Gazetteer, No. 2, p. 279.

powers in the villages including judicial and administrative functions. The small Jagirdars and Deshmukhs indulged in money lending, secured abkari (today, liquor) contracts. Even though they numbered about 0.5 per cent of the population, they as rent receivers and land holders trampled upon the rural folk by vetti and bhagela. However, there were many gradations within the landlord sections. For instance, on the one hand we see a Jannareddy Pratap Reddy possessing as many as 1,50,000 acres of land, a Visnoor Ramchandra Reddy with above 40,000 acres, a Suryapet Deshmukh with 20,000 acres, and a Kallur family about 80,000 acres.¹²

The compilation of the name of the landlords possessing extensive lands is difficult. But a glimpse can also be had from the fact that about 77 holdings in Warangal District and 53 holdings in Karimnagar District ranged between 1.000 acres to 2,500 acres. About 10 holdings in Warangal and 7 in Karimnagar Districts varied between 2500 acres to 5,000 acres. On the other hand we find small landlords with a few hundred acres who live in a single village who invariably indulged in money lending (grain lending to be precise) land grabbing and so on.

This was the social stratum which the Hyderabad state backed to the hilt. The state sponsored reforms committae of 1938 said it in as many words: its report said that the heads of the Samsthanas, Jagirdars, Zamindars have permanent attachment with the state and the Royal House…. [their] loyalty to the Ruler and his Government, on which rests their stability, has always remained unshaken. In the words of the Nizam himself:

“You Jagirdars belong to a class of gentry who stand in special and distinctive relations to the state of Hyderabad. My principle has always been that, as far as possible, Jagirs should be continued to be preserved and that they should be saved from extinction.”¹³

Beneath these sections are the “Lower” classes-agricultural workers, who constitute roughly about 10 per cent of the population (including farm servants and farm labourers but excluding those who perform general labour and earth work comprising about 13 per cent of the population), tenants of various gradation who pay a land rent to the landlords forming about 31 per cent and others, Caste-wise the break-up is according to the following pattern. There are about 21 castes and sub-castes; they were roughly Kapus or Kunbis (based on the land) numbering about 26 per cent of the population. Next in strength were Malas or Madigas in Telangana or Mangs in Marthwad comprising about 14 per cent of the population. The rest was occupied by other castes: Brahmana formed about 6.21 per cent, Vaishyas or Komtis (Traders) 4.91 per cent, Gollas (Shepherds) 7.47 per cent, Gaundlas (toddy-tappers and liquor vendors) 2.55 per cent, Koriwas 4.78 per cent, Salas (weavers) 3.8 per cent, Banjaras (gypsies) 1.54 per cent, Gonds (tribals) 0.49 per cent and so in 1903. As population grew so did the numbers of these castes but almost in the same proportion.¹⁴ When survey settlements were made the state did provide lands to washermen, barbers, malas, carpenters, blacksmiths etc to perform labour for the villagers but without permanent rights over the land or disposable rights. These


¹⁴ See also Golconda Patrika, 13-8-1936 for the big landholdings in various districts.

See also Syed Sirajul Hassan, Castes and Tribes of HEH The Nizams Dominions (Bombay: 1920, and Census of India, 1941, Hyderabad Vol. II, Pp. 673-674.
sections were the most vulnerable, as the dynamics of the countryside showed, to the exactions of the state landlords, moneylenders on the one hand, and famines and natural calamities on the other side.

Hyderabad had a population of just over sixteen million in 1941, at an average density of 198 people per square mile. Though this was far lower than the all-India average of 246, it represented a two-thirds increase over the last sixty years. In a predominantly agrarian economy where well over half the population depended on agriculture for their livelihood, population per square mile was a less important statistic than population per cultivated square mile. In this regard, in 1931, Telengana with 476 people per cultivated square mile was nearly twice as densely populated as neighboring Marathwada which had 243 persons per cultivated square mile.\(^\text{15}\)

As in the rest of the country, the rural population, about 89 per cent of the total population, lived in villages in the plains and in small hamlets in the forests. The major portion of the rural population either came from untouchable castes like the Malas and the Madigas or tribal groups like the Hill Reddis, Chenchus, Koyas, Lambadis, Banjaras, and further north the Gonds.\(^\text{16}\)

The cattle population, at about 12.5 million, was almost as large as the human one. The dominant breed was called the Deccani. The quality of the cattle can be gauged from two facts. A good pair of bullocks could cover just three-fourths of an


\(^{16}\) D.N. Dhanagare. "Social Origins of the Peasant Insurrection in Telengana", *Contributions to Indian Sociology*. Delhi: Vikas, 1974, p. 113

acre of dry land and half an acre of land in a day. In Telengana, a cow yielded just over half a liter and a buffalo around 1.25 liters of milk a day. This was enough to provide a meager 4.3 ounces of milk per day per head, whereas nutritionally minimum requirements were estimated at 10 ounces per day per person. Sometimes, as in the homes of some deshmukhs and zamindars these cattle shared a roof with the families of the domestic servants of the household.

In such places, as elsewhere, hygiene was poor, medical facilities nearly non-existent, and epidemics of cholera and malaria frequently proved fatal to physiques already weakened by malnutrition. Life expectancy was a mere 25.9 years and had increased little over the forty years since 1891. Tribal groups had an even lower average lower life expectancy.

But if health services were poor, "infrastructural" development was worse. Warangal boasted just 443 miles of metalled road until 1950. Adilabad, sprawling over 7000 square miles, had 307 total miles of roadway; Nalgonda had merely 300 miles of metalled roads. These roads probably extended from one commercial center to another; almost certainly, they led to the big train junctions that were the main vertical links through which trade was conducted. The postal service was minimal: one post office for each 48 square miles or ten thousand people. The entire state had just 64 telegraph and telephone services. All these details may seem incidental; as we shall see, however, they were to shape in a critical way the content and nature of the armed struggle that followed.

18 Ibid, P. 342.
POLITICAL ORGANISATION IN HYDERABAD

Formally, the supreme authority was the Nizam, presiding over a "political and social structure from medieval Muslim rule (that) had been preserved more or less intact" (Smith, 1950:28). This was certainly true as far as the jagirs were concerned but it was also true in another respect: the Nizam had the equivalent of a royal retinue, consisting of big industrialists, administrators and government officials. These were usually Muslims;\(^\text{19}\) though Hyderabad's population was predominantly (81 per cent) Hindu.\(^\text{20}\)

The Nizams of Hyderabad had ruled since 1723 when Asaf Jahi had founded the dynasty by breaking away from the Moghul Empire. They had retained close relations with the British who stationed a permanent force of 9000 troops in Secunderabad, on the northern outskirts of the city of Hyderabad.

In the second quarter of this century, when British withdrawal from India was imminent, the Nizam was placed in a tenuous situation. His power base within the state was extremely narrow, limited to a small group of noblemen in the urban areas, a few jagirdars in the countryside, and those Muslims in the city who benefitted directly from the State's Islamic character. On the other hand, the British were increasingly reluctant allies. The concerted efforts of the communal Majlis-i-Ittehad-ul-Mussulman\(^\text{21}\) to raise the slogan of Anaal Malik (literally "I am the King") can be

\(^{19}\) In 1931 Population Sensus Report Muslims formed about 13 per cent of the State’s population.


interpreted in this context. With the Nizam's blessings, the Ittehad (as it was popularly called) was engaged in a last ditch legitimating campaign but it was to be too little too late.

In the last few years of the Nizam's rule, the Ittehad was to play an increasingly important political role, especially in the armed struggle. Thus, it might be useful to trace its origin and character.

It started in 1927 with a cultural organization called the Anjuman-e-Tabligh-ul- Islam, which engaged itself in converting untouchables to Islam. The Arya Samaj responded by converting (on the name of shuddi) them back; communal clashes resulted and both organizations were banned. Bahadur Yar Jung, the leader of the Tabligh, then took over another social and cultural forum - the Ittehad. Under his leadership, the Ittehad became an aggressive political organization dedicated to the Nizam's rule. However, it was not until the lawyer Qasim Razvi became the leader of the organization that it attained its reputation for fanaticism. He created an armed wing called the Razakars which became an informal army parallel to the Nizam's


Nalla Narsimhulu, a contemporary of Ravi Narayana Reddy and P. Sundaraiah also gives the details regarding in his autobiography titled “Telangana Sayudaporatam: Naa Anubhavaalu, Gnapakaalu.”


24 Reformist Hindu organization formed in Bombay in1875

25 Bahadur Yar Jung was a nobleman, perhaps that has something to do with the direction taken by the Ittehad.
regular army. It was then that the Ittehad obtained the dubious distinction of being identified with autocracy, communalism, and fascism\textsuperscript{26} at the same time.\textsuperscript{27}

Religion was just one of the ways in which group loyalty was divided - there was class, culture, and caste, and there was language.\textsuperscript{28} The Nizam patronized Urdu, making it the only medium of instruction in the State's schools.\textsuperscript{29} Urdu and English were the official languages: while none of the other languages prospered, Telugu was singled out for derision.\textsuperscript{30} Even among elite Hindus, Telugu was not favored; resentful of the treatment of their native language in their own land, some of these people formed an organization called the Andhra Jana Sangham (literally "Andhra Peoples' Association"). Its objective was to secure "a proper place for (the) Telugu language and culture in Hyderabad city." In a couple of years by it had become a statewide organization and was given a new name - the Andhra Kendra Jana Sangham. The Jana Sangham in turn became an umbrella organization for other similar groups; finally, in March 1930, a new organization called the Andhra Mahasabha (literally "Andhra Convention") was formed at a conference in Jogipet. The emergence of this organization is significant: it indicated some slippage of the Nizam's hegemony. Previously, there was strict control of libraries; public meetings, even of a literary

\textsuperscript{26} Pavier (1981:51) describe Ittehad specifically using this term.
\textsuperscript{28} There are five languages. In descending order by number of speakers, they were: Telugu, Marthi, Urdu, Kannada, and Lambadi.
\textsuperscript{30} In Urdu there is a saying- \textit{telangi bedhangi}. Pejoratively used, it equated everything telangi with that which is deficient or inapt.
nature, could only be organized with prior permission from the state; newspapers were closely regulated; and civil liberties were in general few. Composed largely of the urban petite-bourgeoisie the prospering merchants and traders, and professionals like lawyers, government officials and teachers - the Mahasabha represented the lower strata of the ruling class, divided from the upper echelons by linguistic, cultural and other factors. Its class composition was reflected in its concern, which consisted of passing resolutions aimed at social reforms.

From its inception, the Andhra Mahasabha fused linguistic and regional concerns with cultural and later social ones. This is best seen from Ravi Narayan Reddy's description of the incident that started it:

It was 1922. A Hindu social conference was held in Vivek Vardhini Theater where all the speeches were in Urdu and Marathi. Only one speaker tried to speak in Telugu but he was hooted and shouted down. The number of Maharashtrians in Hyderabad city was small, yet they exhibited their superiority in all walks of life.

In the fourth conference at Sircilla, a resolution was passed requiring all speeches to be delivered in Telugu. This orientation stayed with the Mahasabha well into the Telengana movement. At its sixth conference, the Mahasabha elected Ravi

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Narayan Reddy, already a secret member of the Communist Party, as Secretary. By its eighth conference in 1941, the Mahasabha was well on its way to becoming a front organization for the communists. Before we go on, it would be helpful to take a brief look at the history of the Communist Party of India (CPI).

The Communist Party of India (CPI) was founded at Tashkent in October 1920 by a group of Indians in exile headed by M. N. Roy by July 1924, it had been admitted into the Communist International. From the start, the Communist tradition has leaned very heavily on Moscow.

From a small base in the Indian intelligentsia, the illegal CPI working with the active participation, and under the influence of, the Communist Party of Great Britain (henceforth CPGB), convened an all-India conference in December 1928 of its "front" organization, the Workers and Peasants Party. By this time, the Sixth Congress of the Comintern (an acronym for Communist International) had adopted its famous resolution entitled The Revolution & Movement of the Colonies and Semi-Colonies. The colonial thesis advocated an aggressive attitude towards the bourgeois national-reformist parties but did not rule out temporary agreements in the name of anti-imperialism. One year later, specifically addressing the CPI, the Comintern's tenth plenum discredited the two-class Workers and Peasants Party.

On the Comintern's advice, the CPI denounced the nationalist movement. However, this only succeeded in isolating it from any mass following. In addition, 31 of the CPI's most important leaders were put into jail in the Meerut Conspiracy


At the seventh Congress of the Communist International in August 1935, the CPI was severely criticized for its "left, sectarian errors". The CPI was urged to work with the nationalist movement to create an anti-imperialist united front. The CPI politburo issued a statement:

The concrete application to the present stage of the anti-imperialist movement in our country of the line of the Seventh Congress is a historic affair.

A two-pronged strategy was decided upon: individual CPI members were to infiltrate the Congress; at the same time the Party would continue to build a base of mass support. The communists' efforts to infiltrate the Congress were greatly aided by the Congress Socialist Party (henceforth CSP), the "left" group within the Congress. Working within the Congress gave the CPI access to the students and trade unions while freeing them from an "outward-oriented" image. When the communists were finally expelled from the CSP in 1939, they already had significant backing. In Kerala, for example, the entire CSP cadre reconstituted itself as the CPI.

The communists had been active in the coastal districts of Andhra since 1934; however, it was not until 1939 that some organization was established in Hyderabad. The Nizam State Communist Committee, which brought together four small groups, registered the nominal start of the CPI involvement. However, it was the Andhra Mahasabha that provided the first substantial gain: in the eighth conference in 1941,

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37 Ibid., p. 5.
39 Ibid., p. 59.
Ravi Narayana Reddy was elected President. Resolutions were passed demanding the abolition of vetti, jagirdari, the tax on tapping toddy, and the eviction of tenants; the reduction of land taxes, rents, and compulsory survey settlements was proposed, as was the confirmation of land-titles. Before this time, the Mahasabha had done little to organize the peasantry; they were content to pass resolutions or at most make "representations" to government officials.

Now they tried to devise campaigns around themes like education, anti-forced labor, etc. Their most effective action however was against the levy of food grains mentioned earlier.

Two other factors were important for the Mahasabha's increased popularity. The Congress had been banned in 1938 and was rendered virtually powerless, leaving the field to the Mahasabha. By contrast, the CPI, which had also been banned, was now allowed to operate legally.

The reason for lifting the ban on the CPI was a remarkable about-turn in the Party's policies. Sensing revolutionary opportunities at home and seeking to capitalize on Britain's preoccupation with the fighting in Europe, the CPI started vigorously opposing the British war effort, calling it an Imperialist War. In the face of the


Congress' lukewarm opposition to the war, such activism greatly helped to win support for the CPI though inviting repression from the British, and in Hyderabad, from their loyal ally, the Nizam\textsuperscript{43} (Masani, 1959:79; Overstreet and Windmiller, 1959: 171-190).

Then in June 1941, Nazi Germany invaded Russia, throwing the CPI into confusion. After some internal debate on the merits of the antiwar nationalist effort and considerable pressure from the international organization, the CPI decided to abandon its earlier position and support the People's War of the Soviet Union against the German aggressor. The CPI joined the war effort at the same time that the Congress was launching the Quit India movement and popular opposition to British rule was growing.\textsuperscript{44} While the Congress was banned as a result, the CPI was encouraged in its activities.

With almost all the Congress leaders in jail, the CPI could consolidate its organizational gains; however, it had lost much of its credibility. Even Ravi Narayan Reddy, after giving a feeble justification for the switch, had to admit that

\begin{quote}
The Communist Party committed certain mistakes in implementing the people's war policy. It recognized the danger of fascism but underestimated the imperialist danger. Therefore it made the mistake of characterizing many patriots as fifth columnists.\textsuperscript{45}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., p.23.
Despite their mistakes the CPI, "grew substantially during the war period" 46 This was evident at the eleventh conference of the Mahasabha at Bhongir in 1944. Membership fees which had earlier been reduced from Rs. 1 to four annas 47 were further reduced to one anna. 47 A vigorous membership drive had been launched in the past year; 100,000 people had been recruited in the rural areas, 8000-12000 of whom had come to Bhongir. Faced with almost certain defeat, the "right" wing of the Mahasabha walked out. The CPI now had the organization to themselves and elected Ravi Narayan Reddy President and Badam Yella Reddy Secretary. 48

But the greatest gains of this period were to be found in the increase of grassroots organization: district, taluka, and village committees were formed and cadres trained. Most of these initial cadres came from rich peasant backgrounds. To discourage armchair revolutionaries, they were asked first to organize against the landlords in their own villages. "Training" was mostly intellectual. They discussed politics and read translations from Lenin, Stalin, Palme Dutt, 49 other Marxist classics, as well as Gorky's Mother and a local novel on the oppression of untouchables, Malapalli. 50

46 Ibid., p 35.
47 There were 16 anna to a rupee.

49 Palme Dutt was a member of the CPGB who was very influencial in the politics of CPI.

First the question of forced labor - vetti - and then problems of tenancy and eviction increasingly turned into minor skirmishes. The Nalgonda District Committee, led by former student leaders not strongly influenced by Gandhi and Mahasabha-style reformism, was particularly truculent, This strategy worked very well against small landlords who were quite unable to meet cooperative resistance.

But why did the State and the big landlords allow these initial organizational attempts by the CPI to succeed? What did they do about it? The evidence here is very sketchy. "The revolutionaries", according to D.V. Rao, "...had to face intense repression in the form of arrests and sentences of imprisonments." By this time in 1944, the CPI had not yet come out for the abolition of landlordism and the Nizam's rule. It even appealed for an Interim Government in which half the seats were reserved for the Ittehad. The end of the War also witnessed a quickening of the pulse of the national Independence Movement, forcing the Nizam to pay increasing attention to external events. These reasons are, however, not sufficient answers for the questions posed above.

The early success of the CPI was thus characterized by the following features: articulation of the long-standing grievances of the poorer peasants; action on issues which affected the economic conditions of these peasants in a direct fashion; an aggressive district committee in Nalgonda; the creation of a dedicated cadre; and most importantly mass participation. Reddy tells us that people joined the Party because


53 Ibid., Pp. 82-83.
“...membership by payment of one Ana was deemed by the people as a passport to their emancipation from these atrocities.”$$^{54}$$

It was in this context of increased agitation that the incident described at the start of the paper occurred the Telengana movement was on its way to a prolonged period of armed struggle.

We have noted that the Communists took control of the Andhra Mahasabha from about 1940. The Mahasabha slowly gained strength and popularity in the rural areas. Step by step the movement took the form of a peasant upsurge culminating in a major uprising between 1947 and 1950. This period of upsurge could be conveniently analyzed in three phases.

**THE FIRST PHASE: MASS RESISTANCE AND-UPSURGE**

We have earlier described the socio-economic structure of the state of Hyderabad and the oppression to which the peasants were subjected, and how the middle classes as well as the lower classes in the rural and urban areas were made conscious of the injustice meted out to them by the Nizam's government and the feudal lords.

These were the days of Second World War. There was food shortage all around. The government introduced rationing on commodities such as sugar, cloth, wheat, rice and kerosene. A system of levy on food grains was introduced. Under this system, each cultivator was required to give a certain quantity of food grains per acre to the government. While every cultivator was expected to perform this duty, the

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landlords managed to escape somehow or the other and the burden fell on the ordinary peasants. The price paid by the government was less than the market price. Merchants hoarded the daily necessities of life and sold them in the black market at a higher price. The government also forcibly collected money towards the war-fund. All these measures seriously affected the peasants. At the same time, the big landlords and deshmukhs continued their exploitation of the tenants, agricultural labourers and other service castes. Forced labour still continued. However, the masses were no longer as subservient as before and began to resist these exploitive measures.

The large-scale discontentment that gripped the middle classes and the poor peasants and workers was naturally favourable to the growth of the Andhra Mahasabha and the Communist Party. In many villages of Nalgonda district, struggles between the peasants and the propertied classes began to take place. The big landlords and the police joined hands with one another to resist this on rushing tide of resentment. But the masses fought the police and the goondas (hooligans) hired by the landlords. Attacks by armed police on villages in the Nalgonda district became a regular feature. The houses of important Andhra Mahasabha leaders were raided and many were arrested. Sundarayya and Ravi Narayana Reddy have provided detailed accounts of the methods which were adopted by the people to fight the Nizam's police and the types of clashes that took place in different villages. It would be sufficient to say here that during this period the Andhra Mahasabha and the Communist party trained many volunteers to fight the police with lathis and slings. Women volunteers used to throw chilli powder, stones and boiling water at the police.


Sundarayya writes that it was "only when under the incessant armed police attacks, the first upsurge of the peasant masses was suppressed and our cadre were forced to scatter, and the police and their landlord agents started combing villages and fields widely, that the party, with the sanction of the Politburo, allowed our cadre to arm themselves with muzzle-loaders and seize fire-arms (sporting guns, revolvers, and rifles) and allowed them to go in for armed self-defense."\(^{56}\)

Nonetheless the masses could not continue their fight against the army which established camps in many villages. The Nizam's government also banned the Communist party in November 1946. Thus the mass upsurge against the big landlords and the government came to a halt. But the ban on the state Congress unit had, however, been lifted by that time.

**THE SECOND PHASE: LIBERATION STRUGGLE**

Soon after the ban was lifted in April 1946, the State Congress began to mobilise people in favour of a struggle for the freedom of Hyderabad State. It began to pressurize the Nizam of Hyderabad to join the Indian Union in the event of the British granting independence to India. On 11 June 1947 the Nizam announced his desire not to join either the Indian Union or Pakistan and to remain independent. He also imposed a ban on the hoisting of Indian National flag in the state of Hyderabad.

The State Congress adopted a resolution moved by late Sri Burugula Ramakrishna Rao protesting the decision of the Nizam and decided to launch a State-wide Satyagraha. On 7 August 1947 national flag was hoisted all over the state of Hyderabad. Thousands of Satyagrahis were arrested. India became independent on 15

August 1947 and on 27 August 1947 the Nizam declared his independence. People of all sections were deeply disappointed by this decision of the Nizam.

While all the political parties supported the accession of the state of Hyderabad to the Indian Union, the Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen was opposed to this move. The Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen developed a cadre of volunteers who were called Razakars and these Razakars began to rouse the feelings of Muslims against Hindus. Under these circumstances political parties of all shades united under the leadership of the Congress led by Ramananda Tirth and planned statewide non-cooperation and civil disobedience campaigns. Except for a small number of Hindu feudal-lords all the Hindus and some Muslims supported these activities.

The Communists, Congressites, and also Socialists led the campaigns such as refusal to pay taxes on land and on palm and date trees, boycott of toddy shops and non-payment of customs tax. Customs check-posts on the borders were burnt down. In view of the government's ban on it, the Communist Party functioned from Vijayawada.

The army and the Razakars resorted to large-scale terrorism and even took to methods such as murder, arson and rape. In the beginning, the Congress and Communist squads worked hand in hand. The Congress set up its camps on the borders and from there made counter-raids on the police and the Razakars. While the Communists squad mainly worked from within the state, a few were set up on the borders and particularly in the Munagala enclave situated in the district of Nalgonda. Students boycotted schools and colleges, many village officials ceased to cooperate with the government, and clashes between the people and police became frequent. During the day, the Razakars and police forced the people not to cooperate with the
Congress and the Communists and in the night the Congress and Communist volunteers would force the villagers not to cooperate with the government.\textsuperscript{57}

Not being able to put up with these pressures and counter-pressures, some big landlords migrated to towns and others migrated to neighboring states of the Indian Union. Those who remained in the villages were mostly from among the middle class and the peasantry. The Communists took the later categories of people into confidence and with their help intensified attacks on the police. In fact, the Communist leadership made a study of the whole situation and arrived at the conclusion that the field was fertile for armed insurrection and guerilla type of warfare. They procured arms from various parts of the country and established regular, armed squads all over Telangana.

In addition, in keeping with its ideology, the Communist Party raised the slogan 'land to the tiller' and began to work against the landlords. Tenants were asked to occupy lands and government-owned waste land was distributed among the landless. The Andhra Communist Party extended its support to the Telangana movement in all possible ways. In a way, the Andhra leaders were really guiding the movement. By the end of 1947, it was estimated that the Communists had succeeded in distributing the land of the rich landlords among the poor and established local rule in about 3,000 villages. Munshi refuted this claim but felt that the number of liberated villages could not be less than 2,000.\textsuperscript{58}


This full-scale armed revolt was not supported by the Congress Party leadership both at the national and state levels. In January 1948, Ramananda Tirth dissociated the Congress from the armed clashes. Naturally, the talk of radical land reform and the sectarian policies of the Communists antagonized the landlords. The Congress was in favour of agrarian reform but was certainly not in favour of a class-conflict in any form. Consequently, the Congress, which initially worked along with the Communists in resisting the Nizam, withdrew and left the Communists all alone in the field. In fact, the Communists and the Congress were involved in some kind of infighting. They even began to throw bombs at one another's camps. Despite this, the way in which the Communists increased the number and the strength of their squads is note-worthy. Village squads 'with about 10,000 members and regular guerilla squads with more than 2,000 members were formed.\(^59\) A field survey of eight villages in Suryapet taluk revealed that in each village between three and twenty-three members joined the village Communist bands and a majority of them belonged to the lower caste peasant groups. Some also belonged to the locally dominant Reddi and Brahmin castes. In the liberated villages, Gramraj was established.

By about June 1948, civic life in Hyderabad state virtually came to a standstill. The Razakars terrorized the people. They killed a number of villagers who were suspected of anti-government activities. In one village, 19 Hindus, and non-muslims were made to stand in a line and (were) shot dead by the police.\(^60\) Similar incidents took place in many villages. Fifteen people were shot dead in one village on the same day; and in four villages of Suryapet taluk of Nalgonda district thirteen persons were

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killed. It was estimated that 'between April 1947 and March 1948 approximately 250 villages in the state had been looted or burnt. Four thousand houses set on fire, 500 persons killed or wounded and 450 women molested' by the Razakars.  

In the villages, the Communist inspired revolutionary spirit was on the increase and the influence of the Congress had waned. The Communists killed seventeen persons in the seven villages studied Jay the author. All those killed were either rich peasants or supporters of the Nizam's government. Three out of the seventeen were Razakars. In all the villages, the landlords left villages and took refuge in the towns or in the border villages. In three villages, the lands belonging to the landlords were distributed among the tenants and poor peasants. A government report said that 'From the 15th August 1946, to 13th September 1948, they (the Communists) brutally murdered nearly 2,000 persons, attacked 22 police out-posts, seized and destroyed village records, manhandled a large number of village officials, burnt 'chawdis' and customs out-posts, captured 230 guns, looted or destroyed paddy and robbed cash and jewelers worth more than a million rupees.' They attempted large-scale disruption of communications and lines of supply and transport and steadily and systematically adopted the technique of guerilla, fighting with the arms and resources at this disposal. Even so, the Hyderabad government lifted its ban on the Communists and put many Congress leaders behind bars. This further led to the growth of Communist power in the countryside. It was under these conditions that the

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61 Ibid., p. 137.


63 Ibid., p. 128.
Union government took police action in September 1948 against the Nizam, and made the state of Hyderabad a part of the Indian Union.

THE THIRD PHASE: ARMED STRUGGLE AND PEOPLES RESISTANCE

It is now clear that during the first phase the peasant movement came under the influence of the Communist Party and the Communist-led Andhra Mahasabha; and in the second phase, after Independence in 1947, the Communists and the Congress parties put up a joint front against the Nizam but soon the upsurge against the Nizam and the Razakars turned into an armed struggle against the Nizam's government led by the Communists, while the Congress and the Communist Parties fell apart. The anti-Hindu behavior, anti-people’s stand of the government was also a factor which encouraged people of all classes to support the united front of the Congress and the Communists. In both the phases, the Communist-led upsurge turned into a class struggle and this slowly alienated the Communists from the landlords as also from rich peasants. It was also evident that the Congress government at the centre looked upon the Communist-led armed struggle with resentment.

After the police action, military rule was established. The Razakar menace was curbed and the Razakar leaders, Kasim Razvi and others were put behind bars. People supported the army in arresting the Razakars. Those who had temporarily migrated to the towns and border areas settled back in the villages. Landlords made efforts to take back their lands which the Communists had distributed among the poor. The Congress Party was the main adviser to the military government and participated in the civil government established sometime later. This naturally went against the
Communists and their activities. Landlords and rich peasants began to support the Congress.\textsuperscript{64}

All these developments went against the gains made by the Communist Party so far and the Party, therefore, found itself in a strange situation. After serious deliberations, the Communist Party decided to revitalize its armed struggle against the new government with the avowed aim of consolidating the gains of their struggle in favour of the poor peasants and the rural labour force.

Guerilla warfare again spread to different villages and Communist squads took shelter in the villages in the plains and slowly moved to the forest-tribal areas as well. Consequently, the landlords and the village officials again moved to towns and cities for shelter.

But slowly the guerilla squads found themselves in a helpless situation. The army made large-scale arrests and killed the Communist guerillas and their supporters in the villages and tribal areas. The Congress and the local leaders openly supported the army in its raids on Communist hide-outs and the arrest of Communist leaders.\textsuperscript{65} The army intensified combing operations and tortured the Communists and their supporters. The Communist Party had taken arms from the Razakars when they were surrendering themselves to the Indian army but the quantity was not sufficient for their task. Hence the Communists established their own centers of production of arms in the forest areas.\textsuperscript{66} However, as the pressure from government increased and the

\textsuperscript{64} Mahojwala Telangana Rythanga Sayudha Poratam-Viluvyna Anubhavaalu, Vijayawada: Janashakti Prachuranalu, 1997, Pp. 18-20.


people began to withdraw their support, it became impossible for the Communist Party to continue the armed struggle. Ravi Narayana Reddy writes that

The party was in a state of disarray as a result of these large-scale arrests and many people were put in jails. Thousands of Comrades were either arrested or they resigned from the party unable to withstand cruel torture. Those who resigned were all put behind the bars. With a membership of thousands the party strength dwindled to hundreds by the end of 1948. Fifty to hundred members were left in each taluk. They were not able to face the army in the plains and as such it became essential to move into forest areas for self-defence.67

Sundarayya presents a vivid picture of the atrocities committed by the military and the activities of the Communist squads during the period.68

The Communist leaders began to differ on the question of the continuation of the armed struggle, its nature and the strategy to be adopted. Discussions were held for and against adopting the Chinese path and on the character of the struggle in Independent India.69 A delegation of the Communist Party also met the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and Comrade Stalin. It was observed that as the support of the people became less and less, the armed struggle was getting transformed into acts


of individual terrorism and, therefore, it was decided that the armed struggle be withdrawn.

It was clear that fighting the powerful Indian Union was not the same thing as fighting the crumbling regime of the Nizam which was supported only by the minority religious community. Before making an open declaration of the termination of the struggle, the Party tried to bargain with the government and obtain some concessions in favour of its leaders and the guerilla volunteers. In the face of an uncompromising attitude on the part of the government, the Party unilaterally declared, in October 1951, to withdraw the armed struggle unconditionally. The Party also took a decision to take part in the general elections of 1951-52. Since there was a ban on the Party, the Communists joined hand with other political elements and took part in the elections under the banner of People's Democratic Front. The Front won a big majority of seats in Nalgonda and Warangal districts. Thus, the Communist Party of India entered the era of parliamentary democracy in India.

After the police action, the Congress Party tried to spread the message of Gandhiji in different parts of the state of Hyderabad. As a part of this program, Ashrams were set up in some villages. Outside the State, Acharya Vinoba Bhave was propagating the Sarvodaya philosophy. In April 1951, a Sarvodaya Sammelan was conducted in a village near Hyderabad to which the Acharya was invited. After the Sammelan was over, the Acharya decided to undertake a two-month *padayatra*, and visited villages which had experienced the Communist-led armed struggle. People in the countryside were surprised to see him and his followers walking through the villages across the hilly terrain without any fear of the army or the Communists. He
also took every opportunity to meet the Communist leaders and wean them away from the path of armed struggle.

On 18 April, the Acharya camped at Pochampalli village where some local villagers had been killed by the Communists. In a prayer meeting which was attended by the villagers, the local Harijans requested his assistance for obtaining same land for cultivation. This request of the Harijans made Vinobave realize the importance of the problem of land in any effort to drive the peasants and labourers away from the path of violence. Instantaneously he immediately requested his audience to come forward with bhoodan to the Harijans. One rich farmer by the name of Ramachandra Reddi announced a donation of hundred acres of land.

Encouraged by this response, Vinobave took up the Bhoooodan movement and spread it all over the country. U. Kesavaro, a long time worker in the Bhoodan movement, explained the significance of 18 April and the Bhoodan movement. According to him the number eighteen is associated with a number of events in Hindu culture. The Bhagavadgeeta has eighteen chapters and the Kurukshetra war was fought for eighteen days with eighteen akshownee of troops. It is not our concern here to discuss the merits and demerits of the movement. What is, however, significant for us to note is the fact that a non-violent movement emerged out of the ashes of a violent revolution. The Bhoodan movement presupposes a change of heart on the part of the landlords. Even though Ravi Narayana Reddy did not agree with this ideology,

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he rightly claims that 'the peasant struggle for land was a prelude to the Bhoodan movement.'

It is difficult to pass any judgment on the failure or success of the Telangana armed struggle. The judgement depends on the indices we adopt for measuring its success or failure. One thing is clear—the Congress government could not be blind to the movement if it were to gain legitimacy and public acceptance. The objective conditions were of exploitation and underdevelopment, and the misdistribution of land was the most important of all the problems. Accordingly, the governments which were formed after the 'liberation' of Hyderabad state took reformatory measures one after the other.

The jagirdari system was abolished and progressive land reforms were enacted. Despite many loopholes in the implementation of the acts, the land reforms gave security to the tenant, and many became 'protected tenants' and subsequently became owners of the lands under their cultivation. The Communist-led peasant movements, with its ideology of class-struggle, definitely made the landlords feel that it would be difficult for them to continue to maintain large holdings, and encouraged them to dispose off a major portion of their lands.

The above are some of the most important reasons that led to the call off of armed struggle in 1951 and there was no significant communist activity till 1967. Some consider this period (1951-1967) as a dormant period in the history of communist struggle however there was high intellectual activity and introspection with the communist circles.

PERIOD OF INTELLECTUAL CHURNING :1951-1967

The communist parties have played the important role of mobilizing the discontent or the rural masses in Telangana. The CPI played this important role during the Telangana peasant movement of the 1947-49. In fact, as already discussed, this movement was the first major experiment of the CPI in insurrectionary revolutionary strategy.

The period of 1951-67 was the most important chapter in the Indian revolutionary movement. We can call this period as churning ideology decade towards revolution. Here, interestingly Telangana provides a base to the formulation and formation of revolutionary communist parties like CPI (M), CPI (ML) which are splits of CPI.

The Telangana struggle, as Sundarayya says, brought to the fore "almost all the questions concerning the strategy and tactics of the Indian people's democratic revolution for correct and scientific answers and realistic solutions." The origins of the 1962-63 Indian communist split can be traced to the difference over the Telangana line during its last two years. Sundarayya rightly observes that these differences crystallized into two hostile trends and those who opposed the struggle are by and large with the present day CPI, while those favoured it went to the CPI (M). Though the CPI split synchronized with the international schism and was hastened by it, it did not represent a straight Moscow-Peking polarization. The real ideological split in the Indian communist movement came after Naxalbari, in 1968

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The "national democracy" concept added a new dimension to the CPI's continuing struggle for a new programme to replace the 1951 document. As Nehru's domestic policies shifted to the right and tension grew on the Sino-Indian border, the attitude to the Indian bourgeoisie continued to be the central issue in the CPI debate which took a predictable form: national democracy versus people's democracy.

The right-wing of the CPI, which had the Soviet backing, contended that India's bourgeois democracy could metamorphose into a national democracy. It placed heavy reliance on Soviet aid as the instrument to secure national democracy. The left wing countered this by arguing that the bourgeoisie was compromising with domestic reaction and imperialism. Soviet aid, although necessary, was being used by the bourgeoisie to bargain for more aid from the West. Rival programme drafts were presented at the CPI's sixth congress and the split was averted only by the intervention of Mikhail Suslov,73 who headed the high level CPSU delegation to the CPI congress. Suslov, anxious to preserve CPI unity, managed to salvage the rightist line and to manoeuvre the congress into shelving the issue of a new CPI programme. The conflict continued behind the scenes until the CPI split in 1964, after which the CPI as well as what later came to be known as the CPI (M) adopted their own programmes.74

Thus the factors underlying the 1962-63 split date back to the Telangana armed struggle and the differences over it. The real significance of Telangana however lies elsewhere: it was the first application of the Maoist revolutionary model outside China even before the Chinese revolution had triumphed fully and China had


proclaimed itself a people's republic. Over 20 years later, Naxalbari brought to the fore once again all the theoretical and ideological questions concerning the strategy and tactics of the Indian revolution but in changed context: the international communist movement had split on issues of ideology and Moscow had ceased to be the sole centre of the International Communist Movement.  