CHAPTER SEVEN
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THE GIRIJAN MOVEMENT IN SRIKAKULAM

After making a study of the peasants' and agricultural labourers' movements in the previous chapters, a study of the tribal movement in the agency area may look apparently disjointed because the area, base and the environment of the movement are different. But any study of agrarian movement in Andhra is incomplete without understanding the tribal problem and movements. We have to note that the tribal movements constituted an important part of the agrarian movements in Andhra before and after independence. The early agrarian struggles in Andhra, in fact, were the tribal struggles. In the third chapter we have mentioned some of the early tribal revolts starting from the early 19th century. These revolts were caused by the hardships imposed on them by the new Rules and Regulations on their rights on forests, alienation of land, oppressive moneylending and landlordism and the atrocities of the Forest Department, Revenue and Police officials. In the periods prior to the emergence of the modern working class these
revolts remained spontaneous, short-lived, mostly unsuccessful and ended as tragedies. In the periods when the prevalent social relations among these communities were becoming obsolesce, the tribal leaders were only able to incite the masses in an outburst against the immediate oppressor. We have several examples of such struggles in Andhra, including in the tribal regions which are now a part of the Srikakulam district, which the Britishers called as 'disturbances'.

One of the early agrarian struggles in modern India that resisted the British rule was that of the tribal people in the Godavari agency, under the leadership of Sitarama Raju. He, a non-tribal himself, organised the koya tribals purely on local problems but he was able to link this struggle with the national liberation struggle. Despite this the Congress and the Communists also for a long time failed to correctly assess this movement and see the link between the tribal movements and the freedom struggle. Though Raju was glorified as a martyr, died heroically in the cause of tribal people putting up armed resistance to the British forces, it was not
properly understood that in which sections he was planted in and how practical he was in conducting the movement. Thus they failed for a long time to penetrate into these tribal tracts, which were made by the Britishers as 'reserved' areas. However, from the late 30s onwards the tribal movement grew as a part of the larger agrarian movement and some Congressmen did make efforts to voice tribals' problems and organise them into Ryots' Associations.

It is also appropriate to discuss the tribal movement in Srikekulam, which once attracted the country-wide attention during 1967-71, after we made the study of agricultural labourers' movement for two reasons: (the Communists organised the girijans into agricultural labourers' union and this was the important movement in the 60s, especially after the split in the Communist Party.) Such a study also gives an assessment of one of the three-trends in the agrarian movement in Andhra — viz., the Congress, the Communists and the Naxalites; of one of the three sectors of the agrarian movement — viz., the peasants, the agricultural workers and the girijans.

This chapter thus, deals with the girijan movement in Srikekulam district, which, as we shall show,
was basically caused by the disintegration, during both the colonial period and after, of the primitive and communal mode of production leading not to any betterment of the girijans' life but to worsened conditions. The girijans' aspirations for a better life breaking the domination and oppression of the landlords and merchants found expression through the CPI and later the CPI(M), which transformed the backward girijans into a class politically conscious and united to fight for their demands unlike the desperate and spontaneous girijan uprisings of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The then critically examines, in this context, the programme and actions of the Naxalites and how the movement was transformed into one of guerilla armed warfare ultimately ending in the liquidation of the mass movement of the girijan peasants and labourers.

I. Social and Economic Background of the Movement:

In order to have a correct estimate of the agrarian struggle in Srikkulam, the northern most part of coastal Andhra, the nature of the changing social and economic conditions during the British period and
after has to be studied in depth. The Srikakulam district may be divided into two natural regions, namely the hilly region called the Agency, and the plains area. The Agency areas lie in portions of Salur, Parvathipuram and Palakonda taluks. According to the 1971 Census, the district has a total area of 9,743 sq.kms., of which an area of 1,318 sq.kms., is Agency tract. 83,353 persons live in the Agency area out of the total district population of 2,589,991. The percentage of scheduled tribes population to total population is 8.2 in the district, whereas the average for the State is 3.8 per cent.

The tribal people of this area mainly belong to two tribes, namely Jatapus (numbering 69,204) and Savaras (74,250). These two tribes together constitute nearly 68 percent of the total tribal population of the district (212,459). The other main tribes in the district are Konda Doras (35,585), Cadebas, Rhonds, Manne Doras and Mukha Doras. The Savaras are considered to be the least developed among these tribes.

The economy of the girijans in Srikakulam is agro-forest based. Since the availability of flet
land is limited, the majority resorts to podu or shifting cultivation. There are two forms of podu: (a) an ordinary or chilaka podu is on flat ground and carried on for several years and, (b) the practice of hill or konda podu carried on hill slopes and normally the plot is abandoned after harvesting two or three crops. The tribes of Salur, Parvathipuram and Palakonda Agencies mainly depend on konda podu. Due to the primitive technology and low productivity of the soil, the yields are meagre. It is sufficient only for a part of the year; hence they partly eke out their living on forest produce.

Socio-Economic Transformation in the 20th Century

The British, who were primarily interested in making use of the riches of the forest, imposed several rules and restrictions upon the tribes. Under the provisions of the Madras Forests Act of 1882, the forest areas which were considered valuable became 'Reserves' and podu was prohibited in the reserved forests. Even in the unreserved areas the government clamped several limitations, viz., (a) no family could cultivate more than a few acres per year, and (b) no land within a distance of half-a-kilometre of
reserved forests could be brought under Poda cultivation. All these measures deprived a large number of hillmen of their only means of living. Nothing was done to compensate this loss of the tribal, at least by way of granting them unreclaimed banajrs nearby. These uprooted tribals became the main source of supply of labour for the forest department and contractors. The contractors paid the tribals very low wage inadequate even for subsistence. The forest department was not far behind in exploiting the tribal labour. Reporting in 1952, R.S. Malayyappan the Special Agency Development Officer, stated:

The payments made by the Forest Department are inadequate, and there is no promptness in payment. Very often they are not paid at all; sometimes payment is made to the pattadar or village munsif who never pays the actual labourers. They are being taken to workspots ten or twelve miles away from their houses and called for work during their cultivating season. This shows that though Vetti (bonded labour) system had been abolished long ago, it is still followed by the Forest Department...the lower subordinates of the Forest Department are under the impression that the hillmen need not be paid fully as they are enjoying certain forest concessions.

Before and after independence the tribals were placed at the mercy of petty officials of the Forest Department who had neither sympathy for, nor
an understanding of their problems. They appropriated the tribals' minor possessions, forest produce, sheep, fowl, etc., with threats of punishment for false offences and in the name of fines. At every harvest time tribal had to give mamools (bribes) to the forest officials.

The Muttadari System: The British depended upon the zamindars of the erstwhile feudal estates for the collection of revenue. The zamindars in turn had appointed a number of Muttadars, the intermediaries who collected revenue on the basis of rough and ready calculations. Rack-renting became the norm of the day. Aiyyappan reported:

The Muttadars ill-treat the ryots. Vetti labour is being extracted. They do not issue receipts for the kist collected. They collect Rs.2 for every plough. At the time of the marriage of the people of the village the Muttadars take some katnam (fees) from them....The Muttadars compel the ryots to plough their lands free. They also extract jatti work, i.e. carrying loads without wages. Each ryot, both men and women, has to work for the Muttadar for about a week to ten days a year. Often only meals are given. Wages are never given.

Despite the enforcement of the Estates Abolition Act of 1948, the Muttadari system existed unscathed for more than twenty years. The study team on
Tribal Development Programmes (1969) observed:
"With no rights in the land which they have been cultivating for generations, tribals have been reduced under this inequitable system to the position of serfs by the high handedness and exacting demands of the Mutadars." 8

Trade, Money-Lending and Land Alienation: The inaccessible forests of the tribes, their isolation from other communities and their self-sufficient social organisation gave way in 20th Century to modern mechanisms of market, revenue and interaction with other communities. The Britishers proposed that 'to help in the development of Agencies and thus indirectly help in the advancement of the tribesmen, additional population will have to be imported into the Agencies.' 9 The plainsmen, attracted by valuable land and forest produce entered the Agency as petty traders and sold the daily necessities like salt, kerosene, etc., and liquor. As an exchange, the tribals gave them forest and farm produce like tamarind, grains, red gram, honey, etc. For trading facilities, the merchants organised markets or santas all along the foothills and at important centres in the Agency. In the initial stages barter
system was the mode of exchange. The credulous tribal was cheated by the skillful merchant in every conceivable way. The essentials were sold at exorbitant rates; forest and agricultural produce was purchased from the tribals at throw away prices.

The traders also lent petty amounts of money and grain to the tribals. They maintained and manipulated the accounts in such a manner that the debt could never be paid off. The ignorant and illiterate girijan had to accept whatever the moneylender said. Promisory notes were executed in the moneylender's favour. In some cases the thumb impression of the girijan was taken on a plain sheet of paper, and the date, amount, etc., were later filled up by the creditor himself. The girijan went on paying large amounts of money or forest and agricultural produce, five or six times more than what he had taken. There were various ways by which the moneylender exploited the tribals.\(^{10}\) The rate of interest on loans extracted by the Sondis (merchants of this caste) is 100 per cent and if this is not cleared off in the first year, compound interest at 100 per cent is charged on the balance. The result is that in many instances the cultivators
are unable to pay in cash or kind and they become gotis or serfs of the sowcars (merchants) for whom they have to work for mere batta (subsistence allowance). The exploitation of the tribals by plainsmen resulted in 80 per cent of the tribal families being in debt. They were forced to sell away their crops in the fields itself to pay off the debts. They gave away their lands to the merchants for khandagutta for twenty to twenty-five years. Indebtedness had driven the tribals to starvation, landlessness and migration. Malayappan notes in 1950: 'The Agency people are very poor and their standard of living is deplorably low. They are poorly clad and ill-fed...The hillmen in general are very much exploited by the plains traders to whom they are eternally indebted...All their best lands have passed into the hands of plainsmen. Thus land alienation was the biggest tragedy of the Srikekulam tribes.

The non-tribal settlers, though numerically small in number, wielded great economic and social influence over the tribal community. They assumed a stranglehold on tribals life with their usurped
economic status. Tribal women were lured away by inducements and attractions provided by non-tribal land-owners and became concubines to the settlers. This concubinage fetched a great deal of land to the non-tribals, who registered it in her name and enjoyed the produce upon it. Through the influx of the plainsmen, the percentage of the tribal population was highly reduced in these once exclusively tribal areas. This factor transformed the uni-ethnic communities or villages into multi-ethnic communities or villages.

Once self-sufficient and independent, the economy became monetised and dependent upon the non-tribal land owners, merchants and moneylenders. The barter system was replaced by currency. (The tribals who were ignorant of market, economy and price system, fell an easy prey to the merchants and landowners.) All this resulted in private ownership of land by a few, and erosion of the foundations of the communal mode of production. People who knew little about surplus production, were forced to produce more and more in order to
pay off their debts. Initially the British, and later the Indian Government and the merchants-cum-moneylenders succeeded in their attack on the corporate life of the tribals, their sources of livelihood and their rights on land.

**Protective Legislation:** We see, therefore, that the problems of the tribals in the Srikakulam area were mainly three-fold: (a) exploitation by merchants-cum-moneylenders; (b) deprivation of the tribal rights on forests; and (c) land alienation. By the turn of the present century, the British Administration noticed that the moneylenders were charging the tribals exorbitant rates of interest and taking possession of the lands of the tribals. With the object to regulate the rate of interest and the transfer of the land of hill tribes, the Agency Tracts Interest and Land Transfer Act, 1917, was passed. It provided that the interest on any debt or liability against a member of a hill tribe should not exceed the principal amount. Also the 'transfer of immovable property situated within the Agency tracts by a member of a hill tribe shall be absolutely null and void unless made in favour of another member of a
hill tribe, or with the previous consent, in writing, of the Agent, or of any other offices prescribed.'
In 1940, the Andhra Agency Debt Bondage (Abolition) Regulation abolished the system of gothi. The labourer got the right to pay off the amount due and free himself from the obligation to perform labour.

After the independence, in 1959, the Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Areas Land Transfer Regulation declared that 'no immovable property situated in the Agency tracts owned by a member of the Scheduled Tribe shall be liable to be attached and sold in execution of a money decree'. The Andhra Pradesh (Scheduled Tribes) Debt Relief Regulation 1960, fixed the rate of interest payable on debts incurred after the commencement of the Regulation at 9 per cent per annum simple interest. The Andhra Pradesh (Scheduled Areas) Moneylenders Regulation (Regulation II of 1960) aimed at controlling moneylenders who were not license holders.

The non-tribal settlers took advantage of the numerous defects and loopholes in the Acts and Regulations, which were made by the successive governments
with the aim, not to end but to moderate the intensity of the exploitation of the tribals and the process of land alienation. Apart from this the discretionary power given to the Officers, actually led to the large scale transfer of land from tribals to others. Maleysppan reported: 'It is understood that the taluk officers are assigning the Government lands only to the plains settlers and do not even grant pattas to the hillmen, although they have been cultivating the lands for a number of years under Sivajama right. A number of plainsmen have been granted lands on dark holds upto 100 or 200 acres each.' He also recorded that the zamindars disposed large extents of lands, including the forests, to the plainsmen and that 'bogus relinquishment and sales of hillmen's lands were taking place at a large scale'.

A study in the process of alienation of land in Mondemkhal Village of Parvathipuram taluka reveals that as much as 74% of the land was passed into the hands of non-tribal settlers. The number of landowning families among the tribals, who once owned the entire land and exclusively populated the
village till three generations back, were reduced by half owning about one-fourth of the total land. The author states that his study 'conclusively proves that the non-tribal households have systematically exploited the tribals, taking their ignorance as advantage, and acquired considerable extent of land during the course of the past three generations. This has also resulted in the changing of power structure in the village since the non-tribals have become rich land owning groups and have a big say in the village affairs.'

The non-tribals also successfully stalled the implementation of several of these Regulations, by resorting to Court. The forest officials turned a blind eye to the rights of the tribals and some of the tribal lands were encroached upon by the forest department, while demarcating the reserved forest area. The tehsildars and the Revenue Divisional Officers, who belonged to the class of non-tribal land owners, were not much interested in restoring the lands to the tribals or to ensure certain minimum rights as provided in law. Thus we see that because the constitutional and legal safeguards were defective in both their framing and implementation, the government
failed to protect the tribals' rights and land transfers took place on a large scale. The Regulations relating to moneylending and debts also could not prevent exorbitant rates of interest, which remained far higher than 24 per cent 'the maximum prescribed by the Act and accumulated interest, several times the amount of the principal, are being collected by the sowcars'. The Report of the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission for the year 1960-61 concluded that the constitutional provisions for safeguarding the interests of the tribals cannot be considered inadequate but the hope that these would be effectively followed up has not materialised.

Developmental and Welfare Measures: The Congress government undertook certain developmental and welfare measures like Land Colonisation Schemes, Tribal Developmental Blocks, Girijan Cooperative Corporations, etc. The Land Colonisation Schemes were started during the first two Five-Year Plans with the aim to wean away the tribals from mudu, to make them settle permanently and take to improved methods of cultivation. The Schemes envisaged providing (free of cost) cultivable land, irrigation
facilities, plough, bullocks, housing, drinking water, educational facilities, etc., and providing assured supply of credits to the colonists. But the Land Colonisation Schemes clearly evaded the fundamental question of restoring to the tribals the land that was taken away from them. Studies on the operation of the schemes showed that all the projects had, failed in all aspects and that 'the expectation that the Land Colonisation Schemes would improve the economic conditions of the tribals has not been realised.' 20

In 1956, special Multipurpose Tribal Blocks were created to bring about multifaceted development of tribal life. During the Second and Third Five Year Plans special emphasis was given to the development of communications, agricultural and other welfare programmes. Due to maladministration, misappropriation and organisational defects the Tribal Developmental Blocks did not yield the anticipated results. In the same year in 1956, the Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Tribes Cooperative Finance and Development Corporation was set up. The objects were to (a) prevent the exploitation of the
tribals by middlemen, (b) provide them with credit facilities, (c) procure for them their daily requirements, and (d) arrange for the marketing of their agriculture and minor forest produces. The Corporation got monopoly rights to purchase the forest produce, but it never paid fair prices to the tribals; its personnel also cheated the tribals with false weights and measures. The latter faced cumbersome procedures of the Corporation in advancing money. They could not raise credit for agricultural purposes, since many of them did not have proprietary rights on the lands. The moneylenders advanced money without asking all these details and accepted repayment of loans both in cash and kind. They were also compelled to give away their produce to the moneylenders, instead to the Corporation, as they were already indebted to them. Consequently they were forced to fall back on the private money lenders and were mercilessly fleeced by them. The Study Team observed that the Corporation failed in its primary purpose of rescuing the tribals from the stranglehold of middlemen and moneylenders and promoting their welfare. The Panchayat Raj System also failed both in increasing the involvement
of the tribals in these institutions at various levels which were dominated by the Congress Party for long, and in bettering the life of the tribals in the Villages. A Monograph on Gadabavalasa village (Parvathipuram taluka) in 1961 reveals that 'there has been no change in the economic set up of the village for the last ten years...Since the last two decades, government has initiated very many welfare measures for the socio-economic development of the tribals of the State and yet the people are in the same stage as they were before in all aspects'.

Thus we see in the foregoing pages that the tribals in Srikakulam area, as elsewhere, were reduced to a position of accepting the grudging concessions of the British and later the Indian government. The plainsmen, who entered the Agency area as petty-traders, acquired substantial portions of land. The feudal oppression of the muttadars continued unabated. The tribals were heavily indebted and became bonded labourers to the trader-cum-moneylenders. The defective Regulations and their ineffective implementation and the half-hearted attempts of the government at the
welfare of the tribals resulted in the increased misery of tribal life. In the next section we shall see how, in this social and economic background, the tribals were organised and transformed into a militant class to fight against the unjust social relationships and the oppression of the landlords, traders and moneylenders.

II. The Growth of the Movement till 1957:

As part of the larger agrarian movement, during the 1930s the tribals' problems were voiced at the ryots' conferences. Branches of the APZRA were established in some zamindaris in the tribal tracts. The APZRA at its 4th conference held at Anakapalli on July 7, 1938 demanded in a resolution that the Muttadars should be removed and the task of shist collection should be entrusted to the village panchayats. Nearly 1,000 girijens from forty muttas met the President of the APZRA, R.M. Sharma, when the latter went to Madugula (Visakapatnam district) on November 15, 1938 to enquire into the atrocities of the muttadars over the girijens. On November 16, 1938, the first Hill Tribes (Girijen) Conference was held. It demanded the abolition of muttadari system,
and an amendment to the M.L Act protecting the podu rights, an enquiry into gothi, and the establishment of a Loan and Sales Society for the marketing of the goods produced in the Agency. R.M. Sharma also held an enquiry into the conditions of the tribal peasants of Parvathipuram area. He exhorted them to unite and work for solving their problems through peaceful methods. The APZRA in a meeting on 24 October 1939 demanded for an official enquiry into the problems of Parvathipuram tribals. A large number of tribals took part in the AIKS (fifth) session at Palasa (North Vizag) in March 1940. The Conference urged the kisans to initiate and intensify their day-to-day struggle against the British Government as well as the Zamindars and sorwars who formed the pillars of its power in the country. The leadership of the tribals in the region, however, remained with the Congress leaders during this period. After the independence the (third) Parvathipuram Taluka Tribals Conference was held at Kurupam on June 3, 1948, presided by Gouthu Lachanna, a Congress leader. It demanded for more rights on forests for the tribals, and steps by the government to free the tribals from indebtedness by way of
starting Tribal Cooperative Credit Societies and taking such other steps.\textsuperscript{29}

The Communists who were in the forefront in developing the Kisan organisation in a systematic and democratic manner and also in the formation of agricultural labourers' unions and in agitating for ending the vetti system, for more wages, and for distribution of land to the poor peasants and agricultural labourers, were naturally concerned with the problems of the backward and exploited girijan peasantry. They organised the Koyas, Gonds and Lambadas during the heroic Telangana armed struggle for the victory of people's culture and national liberation against the feudal Hyderabad princely State; the Warlis were organised in Maharashtra in their struggle against meagre wages and forced labour;\textsuperscript{30} and the tribal peasants took active participation in the Kisan organisations elsewhere led by the Communist Party. Their demands were voiced by the CPI and the Kisan Sabha. The Party in 1954 resolved to organise them on the following demands:

(i) 'reserve line to be kept one mile distant from the villages; liberalisation of rules relating to shifting cultivation'; (ii) 'all types of land-
lordism in tribal areas to be abolished and old debts liquidated'; and (iii) 'all exploitation by the contractors to be checked and fair prices for the forest collections of the tribals and proper wages for their work.' The fifteenth session of the AIKS (November 1957) demanded: 'Safeguarding their (tribals) land and forests from alienation; development of agriculture and shifting cultivation in particular; and reservation of a certain percentage of land for the landless tribals in territories inhabited by them'.

Thus the tribals in the Srikakulam agency were organised at some places on the issues like illegal collection of revenues and wages of forest labourers. Palle Ramulu, a school teacher of Manda, Palakonda agency and also a Communist, took the initiative. Later, he came into contact with Vempatapur Satyanarayana, an elementary school teacher at Kondabaridi, Parvati puram taluka. Together, they started in 1958-59 organising the girijan sanghams (associations) in the villages. The tribals, who were under the traditional control of and loyal to the zamindars in the beginning of the last India
Company's rule, who rebelled against the British imposition of new Rules and Regulations encroach­ing upon their communal life and customary rights, whose problems were voiced by the compromising congress leaders during the agrarian movements in the pre-independence period, came to be organised by the Communists. The Communists intervened to organise the tribal resentment into a radical people's movement. Without this direction there was the likelihood of this discontent flowing into channels of anarchic uprisings, only to end as a tragedy, or descending into tribal-tribal ethnic conflicts. By the year 1960, twenty-eight branches of the CPI were formed in the Sriekulam agency with a total of 200 members. The Agency Committee was set up with fifteen members including the educated young people like Vempatapu Satyanarayana, A. Kailasam and K. Mallaya. 33

In the beginning the grijens were sceptical about the Girijan Sanghams, organised by the communists at village, taluk and district levels. The low socio-political consciousness, dependence
on the landlords and the contractors and the fear of government officials made them hesitant in joining the Sangham activities. The Communists took lot of pains to explain how the landlords and the merchants had been exploiting the girijans. The Sangham organised meetings, which attracted a large number of people, including women, and showed the evil practices of the landlords and contractors through plays and burrekathas. The leaders took classes explaining in simple language the nature of Indian society and politics. Examples of various people's struggles were given; issues ranged from the corrupt officials and moneylenders in the area to American imperialism. The Sangham also tried to bring the tribals out of his world of blind beliefs. The Sangham activists worked as 'barefoot doctors' giving medicines for minor diseases. The village committees launched campaigns of haircutting for men and proper clothing for women. As part of the radical changes in their outlook and as they were convinced that by united action they could fight for their rights, the girijans gradually started ignoring the narrow loyalties to the tribal divisions.
In the year 1960, the Parvathipuram Girijan Conference was held at Gumma. Later the Srikakulam district Girijan Ryotu Sangham came into existence at the first girijan ryot conference held at Mondemkhal. In November 1960, the girijans of several villages (Neelakanthapuram, Panasabhadra, Debbamanuguda, Dandusura, Vusakonda, Podisa, Chermalakshmipuram, Jumbiri, Madimanuguda and others) cut the standing crops which were under the occupation of muttadars. When the landlords got twenty five Sangham activists arrested, the Pelerlu (farm servants) went on a strike demanding the release of their leaders. The girijans who earlier had an impression that they were born to do the menial jobs were surprised to see the landowners cleaning their cattlesheds themselves.

The first Srikakulam Zilla Girijan Conference was held at Mondemkhal in January 1961 attended by nearly 4,000 girijans from hundred villages and addressed by Nanduri Prasada Rao, CPI state leader. The problems of people from various villages were identified; people came to know about the activities of the Sangham at different places. The Sangham then
resisted the moneylenders in the agency area, whenever they came to collect dues and also the forest officers who extorted *mamoolas* (customary bribes). In some villages merchants and moneylenders were held and released after assurances that they would forego all credits. Though these incidents were not particularly spectacular, they planted a certain amount of confidence among the girijans. After the second District Conference at Kurupam in November 1961, the girijan committees organised strikes demanding higher wages. In July 1962, the third District Conference took place. In the same year the Sangham gave a call to cultivate the forests until they were shown an alternative source of livelihood. Cases were registered against girijan peasants which usually included a large number of villages.

Despite the serious ideological debate that was going on in the party between 1962-64, the Communists' activity among the tribes intensified. However, it was only after the formation of the CPI(M) the girijan movement became strong and widespread. In August 1964, RamalAngachari, Vempatexpu
Satyanarayana, Adibhatla Kailasam, Chowdari Tejeswara Rao and some others of the Srikakulam District unit of the CPI declared their allegiance to the CPI(M). Party leaders like P. Sundarayya, N. Prasada Rao and T. Nagi Reddi frequently toured the district stressing the need to fight against revisionism, both at national and international levels, and to intensify the people's movements all over the country.

The Communist Party took up issues related to the girijan masses: mainly (i) the right of girijans to cultivate podu and waste land; (ii) increase in the wage rates for workers on daily wages and farm servants; (iii) restoration of the lands under the occupation of the non-tribals, in violation of the Land Transfer Regulation of 1917, to the tribals; (iv) reduction of interest on loans and ending of malpractices of merchants in purchasing the forest and agricultural produce; (v) ending of harrassment by forest and revenue officers and (vi) distribution of consumer goods and food grains at fair prices. After 1964 the movement spread to areas outside agency. In
Uddanam and other girijan areas of Sompete taluk, girijan sanghams were set up. The Sangham led people against the pettandars (village-heads) of the area.

(The Sangham in September - October 1964 forced the landlords and merchants, who used to export the grain produced in the agency to other areas and consequently no grain would be available in the local market, to sell thirty bags of paddy to the Sangham at fair prices for every 100 bags they sold outside. With food grains collected in this way, the Sangham opened grain depots at different places. Strikes became quite a frequent and effective instrument to extract concessions from the landlords and contractors; in November-December 1964 strikes were held at Neelakanthapuram, Pedagothili, Mondemkhal, Gumma, Gummalakshmpuram, Pedakarja, Kedaripuram, Kukkidi and Kukkidisivada centres to achieve Rs.30/- as wage rates for harvesting an acre. Then the question of attached labourers was taken up widely in May-June 1965. The Sangham also checked the false weights, measures and prices at the Girijan Corporation Depots, and forced the depot officers
to bring down the prices of the commodities sold
by the Corporation. Girijan Labour Co-operative
and Contract Societies started by the Sangham with
the hope that these societies would provide employ-
ment to the girijans and save them from the clutches
of the contractors, did not get financial assistance
and contracts from the Cooperative Department and
finally became dormant.\(^35\)

Besides the economic gains of the movement,
achievements in the social and political aspects
were substantial. The girijans so long gullible
and uneducated started understanding the need for
their united struggle against exploitation and suppres-
sion. Thousands of girijans holding the Red Flag in
their hands went to Parvathipuram, Palakonda, Salur
and other places to attend the meetings. Their real
participation in the Parliamentary institutions in-
creased and the Communists used Panchayats for
sometime as useful instruments for the consolidation
of the girijan strength.\(^36\) The main issue in the elec-
tion propaganda was the need to unite against the
landlord and the main rival was the Congress. As
they faced the same landlord in the elections, the
girijans at some places reached the polling booths
by dawn to see their Sangham candidates victorious.

(The tribal discontent found its expression through the Communist Party. Public meetings and campaigns were the main forms of the movement. Strikes and other mass actions were the effective forms of struggle. Communists successfully organised the backward and oppressed people into a militant class capable of resisting the perpetuations of the landlords, sowcasa and pettanders. By 1966 there were 16,000 members from Srikakulam district in the Andhra Pradesh Agricultural Workers' Union out of a total strength of 108,962. Vempatapu Satyanarayana, Panchadi Krishna Murthy, Ramleingachari, and Mamidi Appelasuri were elected to the State Committee of the Agricultural Workers' Union. 37

The initial response of the landlords to the challenge posed by the communists was one of continuous attacks on the Girijan Sangham activists, with the connivance of the police. They foisted false cases against the leading members. They also organised themselves. 'The landlords of the Agency formed a Sangham under the leadership of
Medida Satyanarayana, Gudla Satyanarayana Lebala Ramamurthy and others by 1967'. Most of the Rajas and landlords in the district were in the Congress, and they 'represented' these tribals in the legislatures and Panchayat Raj bodies. Though the Congress claimed that it provided several democratic safeguards to the girijans in the Constitution, it failed to reorganise the colonial revenue and forest administration, to stop the continuing land alienation, to restore the tribal lands, and to check the evil practices of the merchants and moneylenders. (The Congress accepted that the girijans were exploited, but whenever the girijans organised themselves to protest against injustices it sent police forces only to strengthen the oppressing elements in the area. It was generally observed: 'No political party apart from the Communists made any effort to redress the girijans' grievances against the landlords. The Congressmen of the area...were largely identified with the landlord classes and no top ranking Congress leader ever bothered to visit the reserve (agency)."39
III. The Naxalites’ Leadership and Liquidation of the Movement

When the movement among the tribals in Sri-kakulam was developing well, the split came in the CPI(M) as a consequence of the different line from that of the Party on ideological, programmatic, political-tactical, and organisational matters advocated by a section of the Party leadership. The whole District Committee and all the Taluk Committees in Srikakulam broke away from the CPI(M). All the sections which split away from the CPI(M) in AP were temporarily united under the Andhra Pradesh Coordination Committee of communist Revolutionaries. Soon after differences surfaced between the different factions of the Naxalites about the political line and immediate programme. For instance the Srikakulam leadership accused the provincial leaders (Nagi Reddy group) for not placing a correct programme for them and for trying ‘to put chains on the armed struggle’. They thought that only by armed struggle they could succeed in arousing the masses and that the struggle should aim at the seizure of political power. Thus, they
decided to pit the few thousand girijans against the Indian State, not for any partial demands but to capture political power. Armed struggle, once launched has to be at the same time against both the landlords and the coercive machinery of the State; it has to continue till one of the parties is defeated and subjugated. When the class struggles develop in the process into a qualitatively higher form of armed struggle, there is a greater possibility for success, because the greater the strength of the fighting masses, the more the weakening of the State's strength. But when is prematurely resorted the more the possibility for disastrous consequences. The experiences China and Russia on the one hand and that of Bolivia on the other stand testimony for this.

In a meeting held at Boddapadu in October 1968 a new Sriekulem Coordination Committee was formed, with C. Tejeswara Rao, as Convenor, as a part of the All-India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries headed by Charu Mazumdar. According to the 'programme of action' worked out some landlords' houses were attacked. In the pro-
cess they had to face police and a few constables were killed. They thought that their actions would deter the Policemen from entering the area; on the contrary the government sent reinforcements increasingly and the people could not withstand the greater repression let loose. However, people ranging from 200 to 1,000 participated in almost all the actions during 1968 and early 1969 both in attacking the landlords houses and in resisting the police forces, thanks to the extent of solidarity already built up among the girijans by 1967 through several partial struggles under the leadership of the CPI(M). The struggle, nevertheless was sliding into one of terrorist actions based on some kind of guerrilla tactics, because of the very logic involved in launching and continuation of armed struggle with such an understanding and under such conditions. Armed struggle in a small pocket like Srikakulam crippled the Naxalites to continue mass campaigns and people's resistance; their traditional weapons and a few locally made guns were no match to the increasing police strength. The mass forms of struggle — strikes, mass campaigns, political education — had to be pushed into the background, in fact, it
becomes impossible to conduct such struggles and they will have no relevance, once armed warfare is embarked upon - it becomes a contest between the State armed machinery and the armed people opposing it.

The AICCCK which was earlier opposed to the formation of ap political party decided in April 1969 to call itself as the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist). It declared that the Indian revolution must take the road of armed struggle and the war of annihilation was its guiding principle. In Srikakulam during the period between February and June 1969, a transitory one between the two stages of struggle involving masses and complete degeneration into conspiratorial murders, some landlords and policemen were killed at different places in Parvathipuram, Bobbili, Sompeta, Ichchapuram, etc., taluks. Also some Naxalite activists were killed in resisting the police attacks. The Srikakulam leadership did not realise the futility and dangers of the annihilation programme even though the cadres started deserting the struggle and beginning of the process of isolation from the masses was clearly seen. Any stray incident of attack on a
landlords' house or killing was regarded as a sign of revolutionary fire being spread to the area. No important lessons were drawn from these actions. A gradual change in the operation was taking place: in the beginning it was the people who executed actions with the assistance of the squads or dalmas, and later it was the dalmas with the assistance of the people attacked or killed the police, landlords or their 'agents'. The Srikakulam leaders claimed that 'red' political power had come to exist in 300 villages of Parvathipurem, Pathapatnam and Palakonda agency area.44

The second half of the year 1969 and the year 1970 marked the predicament of Naxalites transforming themselves into thorough adventurists and the movement into a mere squads' struggle of a conspiratorial character leading to the liquidation of the girijan movement. On June 19 the guerrillas dipped their hands in the blood of a merchant of Akkupalli village in Sompeta area, what they considered was to baptise themselves into 'true communism'. At some other places they painted slogans with the blood of the killed landlords, cut the latter's bodies into pieces and hung the heads from the
roof of the houses or on bamboo poles outside the houses.45

The government meanwhile declared in June 1969 the Parvathipurem, Palskonda and Pathapatnam talukas to be 'disturbed areas'. In July the 'disturbed areas' covered under the Notification were extended to include another three talukas - Sompeta, Tekkali and Ichchapuram. The squads suffered great losses as the Police started intensive 'combing' of the forests and villages. The people were so terrorised by the Police, they were scared to identify with the guerilla squad actions.

In such a situation in February 1970, Charu Nazumder instructed the guerillas that the method of forming a guerilla unit had to be wholly conspirational and the conspiracy should be on a person to person basis.46 But soon after the Naxalites suffered great loss when the Police on July 10, 1970 were able to capture two important leaders of the movement in the area – Vempatapu Satyanarayana and Adibhatla Keilasam – and shot them dead at Bori hills in Parvathipuram taluka. It was a period of
war of terrorisation indulged by the Naxalites and the Police. The former killed the landlords in such a way and with a hope to terrorise the landlords and the Police, while the Police killed the captured persons not only to weaken the squads but also to terrorise those who were participating in the struggle.

The transformation of the struggle was complete; from people executing actions with the assistance of the dalams - to dalams executing actions with the decreased people's assistance - to the dwindling dalams indulging in desperate actions without people's participation and support. The last phase witnessed a complete erosion of the girijan movement in terms of organisation, mass base and participation. Consequent upon the very anticipation that mass consciousness follow guerilla actions, the Naxalites were thoroughly isolated from the masses. (The loss of many a leading activists adversely affected the struggle.) Towards the end of the year 1969, they were left with only a handful of guerillas, a majority of them having enthusiastically come from the plains to join the guerilla dalams. The irony was that the majority
of the participants in the squad actions were non-tribals, but their 'actions' were aimed at the 'liberation' of the tribals. The number of dalsams which was 400 strong in the beginning came down to 15 or 20 by the end of the year 1970. 47

IV. An Assessment of the Giri\-\-jan and Naxalite Movement in Srikakulam:

In the history of proletarian revolutionary movements, Communist parties of different countries experienced the tendencies of both revisionism and sectarianism, two similar deviations from Marxism-Leninism, in opposite sense to each other. This left deviation had come to dominate by 1967 one of the CPI(M)'s key strongholds, namely Andhra, which occupied a proud place in the Communist movement in India for a long time. These differences and deviations caused immense harm to the advancing Communist movement and in the specific context of Srikakulam, the line chosen by the leadership stran-gulated the growing giri\-\-jan movement.

The breakaway groups from the CPI(M), popularly known as Naxalites, held the view that the
Indian bourgeoisie was the lackey of the US imperialism. They ruled out any development of capitalism and held that what had taken place in India since 1947 was the increasing dominance of foreign monopoly capital and the strengthening of feudal and semi-feudal land relations. For them the contradiction between the nation as a whole on the one hand, and the imperialism and its comprador lackeys on the other assume the role of principal contradiction. They argued that the masses were tired of and fed up with petitions, demonstrations, elections and strikes and hence they refuse to be mobilised through these 'time-worn' forms of struggle; that the tasks of building the class and mass organisations, the building of a strong Communist party and a united front were impossible to be fulfilled unless they were integrated and carried side by side with the peasant partisan war. Also the significance of such an ideological framework, that the rulers in India were the puppets of American imperialism, they had no feet on the Indian soil and they could be pushed down at a blow by the people; that the people were ready to perform that as they see the Government to be a comprador one, not really belonging to them,
and that the Government stood completely exposed was to show that the CPI(M)'s leadership was timid enough not to deliver this simple blow on the baseless comprador Indian ruling classes when the situation in the country was ripe for the revolution.

The leaders of Srikakulam tribal movements likewise concluded that neither mass movement nor mass organisations were indispensable for waging successful armed struggle, on the contrary they increase the tendency for economism. It was believed that the spontaneous mass participation would follow the guerilla actions; hence there was neither necessity nor usefulness of activities to rouse the people's consciousness. What was needed was class hatred and only killing - 'annihilation' - of class enemy could rouse the class hatred; the people would rise as soon as the spark of armed struggle was lit. Implicit in it is the logic that people are not their own liberators, but a few militant revolutionaries are their liberators - a handful of people reshaping the social relations for the masses, whereas the aim of a revolutionary is to expose the weaknesses of the system and make the masses not only to realise the objective conditions, but also the necessity to change it. One
cannot bring revolutionary changes by imposing a form of struggle for which the people are not ready nor the objective situation warrants it. For Marxists the question of armed struggle and revolutionary techniques, as such, depend upon the concrete national and international conditions that might obtain at the time of such revolution. Any abstract discussion and exaggerated emphasis on it would only reduce the revolutionaries to phrase-mongering. They also believe in the use of varied means, methods and forms of struggle in proletarian revolution so as to successfully counter the class enemy's methods and forms of crushing the revolution. While not entertaining any illusions of peaceful transition, that is, the bourgeois-landlord government accepting the democratic verdict of the people and surrendering political power without resorting to the use of violence, Marxism-Leninism makes it clear that the working class does not desire violence or armed struggle, unless it is forced upon it by the exploiting classes. This is necessary to defeat the insidious propaganda of the ruling classes that the Marxists stand for cult of violence while they stand for *Ahimsa* or non-violence. If this
bitter lesson of history is not kept in mind, the violence of the ruling classes devours the people.

The lesson of the Telangana agrarian movement in a stronghold should be sustained and developed through struggles on partial demands without taking the advanced political sections of the people headlong against the ruling classes and the State until the revolutionary conditions mature, and the people, at large, throughout the country are ready to face and defeat the State repression through decisive battles, was not properly understood by the Naxalites, and the Andhra Naxalites in particular. The girijan movement in Srikakulam covered only an area of 200 villages or so in a country with nearly 560,000 villages. Even among the girijans here (with a total population of 212,459) only a section of them were to some extent politicised and they too considered their struggle as one for their basic demands, not as a struggle for the seizure of the State power. Also when we say strong pockets, it does not mean that communist consciousness was complete and there is overall development in all the fields - political, economic and cultural, etc., Strong pockets only
mean that here exists some organisation and movement, as this was absent in other areas; an advanced stage of the organisation and movement compared to other areas. The initial idea of the Communist leadership in organising the girijans in the Sri-kakulam Agency could be also that they could fall back upon this forest region in case the movement in the State in general, when developed, comes under heavy repression by the State machinery. To drag such an agrarian movement of this small tribal population into armed struggle was the fatal error of the Naxalites. Their rejection of the main task of building mass organisations, regarding every struggle on the basic demands as economism, refusal to mobilise the girijan peasants against land alienation and indebtedness and simultaneously raising political consciousness led to the destruction of the very agrarian movement and their isolation from the people. It is not difficult for the Indian State machinery to crush revolts so far as they are confined to isolated pockets. The few Naxalites, who were poorly equipped with no adequate training and supply of ammunition, were mercilessly stifled out by the armed forces. The Agency area, which was
thought to be a safe terrain by the Naxalites for conducting of guerilla struggles proved to be of little advantage. Battalions of armed police combed the forest area and were able to reach the remotest parts of Srikakulam with the establishment of transport and communication facilities.

As a logical extension of their erroneous programmatic understanding several other blunders were committed and attempts to justify desperate activities were made in the name of Marxism-Leninism and 'Mao Tse-tung Thought'. Though the fact was that it was difficult to procure and retain guns, a theoretical justification for using conventional weapons such as knives, spears, axes and sickles was given that their use involved physical contact with the victims which was believed to intensify the 'revolutionary hatred' felt for the exploiters. On several occasions persons who did not fit into the class-enemy category were also killed after being branded as 'agents'. The girijans who viewed the movement basically as a struggle between them and the oppressive landlords, mainly from the plains, resented the killing of fellowmen, and some even saw
in 'annihilation' nothing more than a murder of a co-villager by a petty-bourgeois terrorist from the plains. Even the people's Courts, a caricature of Chinese and Telengana experience, were not conducted in the right manner and the participation of people in them was negligible.

Fanciful slogans and fantastic estimates about the progress of the struggle, coupled with the glorifying propaganda in the Chinese press proved to be paranoid and self-destructive. The slogans such as 'Red Revolution in Srikakulam', 'Srikakulam peasants are fighting for political power', 'Srikakulam will be the Yanan of India', etc., were opposed to the character of the girijan movement and the actual situation in the area. The writings of the leaders during the period when the whole movement was getting completely crushed, that the peasants in Srikakulam were marching like storm, 'Flames of People's War burn brightly in Srikakulam', 'Persecution served to intensify the struggle', 'Red area of revolutionary struggle extends in Andhra' etc., were only aimed at boosting the shattered morale of the cadres.

The errors committed by the leaders of the Srikakulam struggle were not mere tactical, as some-
times some of them admit. They flow out of their failure to grasp the nature of contradictions in Indian society, the stage of revolution, the respective strength of the working class and the ruling class, the level of the consciousness of the people and the degree and maturity of the revolutionary crisis. Their impatient slogans of immediate peasants' armed struggle, people's war, etc., in a tribal pocket in Srikakulam harmed the developing girijan struggles, invited monstrous repression of the State over the girijans and ultimately resulted in isolating themselves from the masses. It disrupted the growing agrarian revolutionary movement, brought disorganisation in the party and decimation of the advanced guard at the hands of class enemy. It becomes evident then that when the Communist Party was not yet firmly based itself on a strong and organised working class movement and a powerful agrarian revolutionary movement, and when the unity of the proletariat and the peasantry is not yet forged, the task of defending and taking the movement to higher levels in the few strong pockets where the movement is only relatively advanced and on which the ruling classes concentrate
their attacks, becomes impossible without widening and extending the democratic movement to ever wider areas and sections of people.
The responsibility for providing justice and for the collection of revenue in the tribal tracts was entrusted to the Collector, who functioned as an 'Agent' of the Governor. Consequently these tribal tracts came to be known as Agency areas.


4. Podu cultivation is associated with simple technology. Its agricultural implements consist of an axe, hoe, digging stock, sickle, etc. The tribal selects a piece of land on the hill slope for cultivation. He formally obtains the consent of the village headman, the Naiko. Generally a mixed crop of millets and pulses is grown. The land is used for podu for two or three successive years and is left fallow for another three or four years. During this time some vegetation and trees will grow. The plot will be taken up again for cultivation. This rotation of lands is the main characteristic of podu cultivation. It is related to factors like pressure on the land, fertility and soil erosion, etc. Raghava Rao, D.V., Jatapu Kotepadu Colony: Evaluation of an Agricultural Colony for Shifting Cultivators in Srikakulam District, Waltair, Andhra University, Agro Economic Research Centre, 1975, p.12.


7. Aiyappan, p.25.


10. Some of them were (i) Namu, according to it, one who borrows cereals at the time of sowing has to pay double the amount of the quantity borrowed soon after harvesting the crop. A Monograph on Kalliti Village (Parvathipuram Taluka, Srikakulam District), Census 1961, vol.2, Andhra Pradesh, part 6, Village Survey Monographs; (ii) Bhaga Sundha, the land passes to the creditor, and the crop counts towards interest only. Aiyappan Report, p.77.


12. Under this, the land is given away for the enjoyment of the creditor for a certain period and the return of loan is to be by instalment, in the shape of crop every year.


14. For a comprehensive collection of Acts, Regulations and Notifications related to the Agency areas of Andhra Pradesh, see Koka Raghava Rao. The Law Relating to the Scheduled Areas in Andhra Pradesh, 1972. All the references to the Acts and Regulations are to this source.


22. Ibid., p.55.


24. The Saluru ZRA was formed in 1937, ZR, October 1, 1937.

25. ZR, July 29, 1938.


27. ZR, October 13, 1939.


29. ZR, June 11, 1948.


31. CPI, Our Tasks Among the Peasant Masses, Central Committee Resolution, April 1974, p.20.


34. A traditional form of story telling by a cultural troupe, consisting of three persons, popular in Andhra Pradesh.

36. In September 1962, elections were held to various Gram Panchayats and Panchayati Samithis. The candidates put up by the Communist Party were victorious in a number of Panchayats in Bhadrakiri and Seethampeta areas. The Seethampeta Samiti passed into the hands of the Communists.

37. A.P. Agricultural Workers' Union, Resolutions, of the 6th Conference held at Kodadu (Nalgonda District), Vijayawada, 1966.


39. W.M. Nair.

40. The alternative drafts (to the CC's draft) was accepted at the AP State Plenum in January 1968. Of about 233 present only 52 voted for the Central Committee's draft, 158 against and the remaining neutral or absent. Even of those State Committee members, of 20 who were present only four voted for the CC's draft, four remained neutral and the remaining voted against. Out of the 16,456 members of the CPI(M) in AP in 1967 only 9,048 had renewed membership by the time of the 8th Party Congress in 1968. These figures show the large scale division that was forced on the party in Andhra, unlike the units in Bengal, Kerala, etc. CPI(M), Political Organisational Report, April 1969, p.287. The discussion on the reasons for a large scale split in Andhra in the CPI(M) in 1967 is avoided because it is not directly related to the work.

41. Nagi Reddy Group advanced reasons like: (i) till today we are not at all prepared, (ii) it is not correct to start struggle without training, and (iii) this is not the season to start the struggle'. Pamphlet by the Coordinating Committee of Andhra Pradesh Communist Revolutionaries, dated 4 March 1969, in Parvathipuram Conspiracy Case Documents, vol.XI, Doc.No.p.2(a), pp.7-8.
42. Till January 30, 1969, twenty-nine policemen, including one Circle Inspector and one Sub-Inspector were killed. "The Revolutionary Girijans are Learning Warfare through Warfare", Liberation, vol. 2, no. 4, February 1969, pp. 15-17.


47. Agency Committee in its review of armed struggle after September 1969 noted that 'there is stagnation in the movement. There is no energetic recruitment of cadres. Even among the present cadre initiative has gone down. For the last three months no attacks are made on the enemy. Cadres are leaving for their homes. One would say that almost all the Grama Rakshana Dalams (Village Defence Squads) are no more in existence'. CPI-ML Agency Committee, 'Review of the Srikakulam District Armed Struggle', in PCC Documents, vol. XI, Doc. No.R-1, pp. 105-133.