CHAPTER VI

THE CONCLUSIONS

The Communists in Maharashtra, born in the fiery days of national freedom struggle succeeded, in spite of all odds and repression, in popularising basic Communist ideas, in laying the foundations of organized trade union and peasant movements, and in creating a viable Communist party. They propagated rationalist ideas. They also fought for secularism which rises above the unscientific, conservative and traditional outlook.

According to Gangadhar Adhikari......

The CPI in Maharashtra has an impressive record of achievements, despite some serious failures...... "The first aspect of the party's contribution is to bring into existence what is popularly known as the 'Red flag movement' of the industrial workers. Peasants and revolutionary youth - which is born in the later part of the 20th century. It is the CPI which impressed on the national movement for independence the importance and significance of the role of the workers and peasants to make the movement irresistible and give it the necessary revolutionary tempo and sweep." In Maharashtra, the CPI built strong bases in industrial centres like Bombay, Nagpur, Sholapur etc.

The Communist led peasant movements organized and radicalized to some extent the peasant masses all over Maharashtra; and specially the (Adivasis) aboriginal tribes in the Thana district. According to report....
Following the agitation by the Communists under the leadership of Mrs. Godutai Parulekar in 1945 and subsequent years, the system of bonded labour has almost come to an end in Dhahanu and Talaari areas. My recent visit to Adivasi areas showed that there still are Lagna Gadis engaged by some well-to-do farmers. But they are not treated as brutally as before. Now a days the Lagna Gadis are having a weekly off on Sunday.

Nevertheless the impact of Communism upon the socio-economic and political set up in Maharashtra, is marginal. The Communists did some useful work on the trade union front though it was in the Textile industries only and organised a few peasant protests; but on the whole, they failed in radicalizing the Congress party and the Gandhian movement. The Communists could neither give a new turn a new mode to the bourgeois - liberal movements; nor could they change the course of history by setting the masses against the bourgeois - landlord landlords in Maharashtra.

The impact of Communism on the working class movement in Maharashtra has been sometimes very deep. (Specially in the 1930's). At other times it has been rather negligible. Even in the case of the working class the Communists are very weak in key industries like Railways, mines, plantations, B.E.S.T. and Municipal Workers and Hotel workers etc.

* The Bombay University students visited nearby Adivasi area. They have established 'rural communes'. This idea of 'rural communes' been taken from the Communists. - A report 'Kesari' 26-2-1978.

** Please refer to the 'Kumar Mangalm Thesis - advocating dual policy of cooperation and conflict with Congress'. Referring to this policy, one party member remarked that it was more cooperation and less conflict with the Congress.
There is a curious anomaly about the impact of Communism on the working class. Whenever the historical situations create a possibility of revolutionary change and provide opportunities for struggle, the working class responds to Communism in every field and sphere of life. But as soon as the battle is lost, the army is disbanded and no discipline holds them together.

Such tendencies of the working class have definitely resulted in 'Economism' and weakened the movement.

According to B.T. Randive-

"The trade union movement which is largely conducted by the left and democratic forces cannot be said to have reached a proper level of consciousness. It picks up the challenge only when it reaches the factory and affects the party pay packets. Such questions as deficit financing, export-import policies of the government, wage and income policies, virtually remains a sealed book not only to the mass of the workers but to the militants and cadres on a large scale. The economism of partial and immediate benefits absorbs all attention and the main classes whom are responsible for the plight of the workers escape with verbal saltries and nothing more. The trade unions do not fight for the peasants to eliminate the semi-feudal conditions in the villages and the domination of the landlords."

However, the Communist have succeeded in keeping the working class front alive and functioning. They have failed to adopt a clear cut mass line on other fronts.
There was no peasant movement as such with the only exception of the Warlis from the Thana district. It is the traditional weakness not only of the Maharastrian but of the Indian Communists also that they failed to influence the peasantry at large. The Telegana and Tibhaga movements in pre-Independence period were an exception. It is the general complaint that party units at all levels make no conscious effort to help building such mass movements in their respective places.

The Communists in Maharashtra succeeded in rousing the Warlis against the local landlords and money-lenders because these hill-tribes were out of the purview of the nationalist as well as the communal forces. In the pre-Independence period, the red flag of the Communists was the only emblem that promised them emancipation. (For this reason, the 'Naxalites' might have struck roots in the hill-tribes of Bengal and Andhra) with the entry of other political forces into this area, such as the Congress, the Socialists, the Lal Nishan Party etc., whatever influence the Communists had upon the hill-tribes (specially, upon the Warlis) was slowly eroded after independence. Taking into account the party bosses all these facts, they confessed in a secret report in 1950 that they failed on many fronts. The situation in Maharashtra has not improved so far. The report stated clearly.....

"Coming to the present position of the party it has to be characterised as extremely serious. It faces all round crisis - political, organizational and financial.

* It is interesting to note that no party in Maharashtra has succeeded in launching massive peasant struggles.

** Please refer to the appendix of Chapter IV of this thesis.
Politically, great confusion prevails inside the party. This confusion has almost paralysed the party into inaction. Of course exceptions are there with regard to certain party units in certain territories but these do not alter the general picture. The party members, disappointed by the successive right reformist and left-sectarian mistakes of the leadership, have come to a stage where they are not able to put faith in any leadership at any level - from the central committee down to the lowest unit, nor able to act with conviction and determination.

"The organizational position is equally bad. In the absence of factual organizational reports from most of the provinces no current numerical strength of the party can be ascertained. It is not an exaggeration to state that the majority of the party members are not yet organized in properly functioning cells or other party units. A tendency of anarchy has been raising its head inside the party throwing winds all party forms. In the name of inner party democracy and fighting bureaucracy, anti-party, opportunist and disruptive trends have been raising their head which if unchecked will breed factional tendencies that will seriously threaten the unity of the party."

The urban and middle class orientation of the Maharashtrian Communists has led them to neglect the peasant front. While the agrarian reality has changed beyond recognition in the past 25 years with the development of capitalism in agriculture, the establishment of a network of development blocks extension services, Panchayats, Cooperatives and the steep rise in the prices of agricultural produce, the Communists

* Most of the party members expressed these feelings.

** Ultimately the party was split in 1964.
and the left as a whole, continue to have more or less the same approach to the peasantry and the same style of work in the countryside as in the pre-Independence era. They have not changed either their slogans or their forms of struggle in accordance with the changed class-relationships in the villages. The slogans 'land to the tiller' and 'Abolition of landlordism' lose significance and fail to catch the pulse of the peasantry because of the rayotwari system prevalent in Maharashtra. The Communists all over India, committed the mistake of pitting the landless against the small and middle peasants and converting the partial struggle for land into the final struggle for power. The Maharashtrian Communists sincerely followed the footprints of their counterparts in the country. On the contrary, the Chinese Communists under the able leadership of Mao did not jeopardise the interests of the middle-class peasants. In 1956 Teng Tse Hui - the director of the rural programme for C.P.C. clearly stated...

"Had the C.P.C. neglected the interests of the middle peasantry, and not associated them with the leadership of small peasant associations and cooperatives; the C.P.C as well as the peasantry in China might have been isolated in the struggle for power."

But the Communist in Maharashtra turned a blind eye and a deaf ear to the experiences of other Communist parties in the world. Mr. Dange S.A. who has dominated the party from the very beginning, may be held responsible for the sorry state of affairs on the peasant front. Because of his urban-middle class orientation on the one hand, and staunch, faith in the Marxist dictum that 'the working class must be the vanguard of revolution' on the other, Mr. Dange has totally neglected the peasant front. Unfortunately, there seems to be no

* A sizeable group of the party members expressed this feeling.
alternative to the leadership of Mr. Dange as no one could rise to
challenge him. The Communists will not be an effective political
force without being effective on the countryside.

While the CPI (Maharashtra unit) released no information on the
social base of its membership, it tacitly admitted that it was a pre-
dominantly middle class. Parliamentary politics, it confessed, had
developed 'bourgeois habits' in the party. Members developed love
for an easy-going life, selfishness, hankering after money and places
in bourgeois parliamentary institutions, scant respect for collective
decisions, individual functioning, indulging in individual praise
mongering; . . . in some cases corruption also crept in.

With the growth of such bourgeois tendencies, the Communists
have been completely isolated from the working class and peasant masses.
They merely pay lip service to the working class and peasant revolu-
tion, while safeguarding their vested interests and positions in the
establishment.

There are certain misconceived notions about the Communists' failure in Maharashtra. Most thinkers and even many Communist leaders
also feel that the anti-national record of the CPI is perhaps the most
important single reason for its stagnation.

If this was the sole reason for the failure of the CPI one
might ask why other leftist parties which did not adopt this line also
failed to enlist the support of the masses.

* G. Adhikari in his Thesis 'CPI and Indian Path to national
regeneration and Socialism,' has confessed the isolation of the
CPI from the mainstream of national freedom struggle.
No doubt, the CPI committed Himalayan blunders and got the stigma of being an anti-national party. The bourgeoisie and the anti-Communist forces added fuel to it. But these mistakes were committed on a national level. At the same time, however, the Communists enjoyed a better position by mustering overwhelming support from the masses in Kerala, Andhra and Bengal; and they miserably failed to enlist the massive support from the people in Maharashtra. Can we say that only the Maharashtra Communists were anti-national. The fact is that the people have followed the Communists when they were serving the people's cause and fighting for the people. Unfortunately, in Maharashtra, the Communists did not show an identity with the people's cause - their appeal was largely to the urban sections of the population and the industrial workers. Naturally, they failed to strike strong roots among the people in general.

Harrison argues that, where Communists have been successful mobilizers they have 'exploited' regional nationalism and based themselves on large non-Brahmin caste lobbies.

The Andhra Communists' success was based on linguistic nationalism, plus a social basis among the large Kamma caste who were competing against the Reddis who had reposed their loyalties in the Congress. In Kerala, a similar combination of regional slogans plus a footing among the numerous Ezhava and Nairs was the 'recipe for the success'. While in Bengal, Communists capitalised on Bengali regionalism but did not find a rural caste base and thus tended to be localized in Calcutta. In Maharashtra, Communists failed because they were cut off from the Marathas and Mahars.

* Please refer to the reports of 'Times of India', 'Tarun Bharat (Marathi)', 'Maharashtra Times', 'Marmik' (Marathi weekly), just after the Chinese aggression. Generally, anti-Communist line is adopted by these papers. Please refer to the Appendix of Chapter-III.
If this is true, the question arises, how did the Communists manage to do this in some regions but not in others? Despite the exploitation of 'regional nationalism' in Maharashtra, the Communists failed to win much support for themselves. Harrison apparently sees this as more or less an accident of history, but it needs explanation.

The region by region analysis of the Communist shows that nowhere does Harrison's argument fully explain the basis of Communist power.

A distinguishing feature of the policy of the Andhra Communists is its social content. It was a party not only of the peasant masses, but, of the rural proletariat and rural poor of every category. The rural intelligentsia, numerically stronger and politically more mature than elsewhere in India has provided the party the leadership that knows the mind and mood of the people. The Andhra Communists strove for the satisfaction of the day to day demands of the people - i.e. for everything from obtaining a ration card to the regulation of queues in front of the food shops.

They could gain the confidence of the people because of their willingness to challenge both the established structure of the CPI and international Communist authority. Though Andhra Communists are intellectuals, they are mass leaders. Ravi Narayan Reddi the immensely respected, popular, charismatic leader had obtained more votes (in 1952) than any other candidate for the Lok Sabha from the whole of India (Mr. Nehru was second). He was regarded by the peasant masses as the 'Gandhi' of Andhra.

* The CPI was a constituent part of the S.M.M., Dange being its chairman.
The Kerala Communist leadership tended towards a practical rather than an intellectual orientation and leaders of low caste origins have risen to positions of importance in the party. The social distance of the C.P. leaders from the masses in the countryside was far less than that of most other state leaders in India.

The Kerala Communists have the strongest, most consistent, most reliable base among the rural poor. As Kerala stands first in India in terms of literacy, pressure on land and landlessness, the combination of landlessness and literacy is co-related to an extraordinarily high degree with the Communist votes. Moreover, Kerala being densely populated, the rural peasants are more receptive to change than poor peasants in sparsely settled areas. Because in the more crowded rural areas, generally speaking, there is more trade, more economic and political organization, a greater division of labour, more urbanization, higher levels of communication etc. For all these reasons, peasants in crowded areas may be more ripe psychologically for change and for mobilization under Communist leadership than peasants in isolated, sparsely settled areas.

Donald Zagoria emphasized economic correlation of peasant communism in India. According to him, 'landlessness and high density of population with higher percentage of education are the most powerful explanation of the rural Communist vote. He writes-

"The Kerala Communist voters, as compared to the West Bengal Communist voters, are more overwhelmingly rural, more likely to come from the lowest classes in the countryside who are landless or land poor,
more likely to come from the lowest income groups, but at the same time much more likely to be literate though not highly educated. In other words, Communism in Kerala is much more of a mass phenomenon particularly, in the countryside, than Communism in West Bengal, which remains top-heavy in terms of the class, caste and education of its supporters, and which has not established a state wide mass base among the rural poor."

Zagoria's arguments are accepted by Parkes Railey and Miss Gail Omvedt with certain reservations. Gail Omvedt has stressed the caste and cultural correlation of peasant Communism in India and specially in Maharashtra.

Before going through the arguments of Miss Gail Omvedt, we may consider the opinions of some experts on the Communist movement in Kerala and Bengal. According to Ratna Dutta -

'In Kerala, the Communist movement is unique in that it is the direct inheritor of the nationalist movement. The stalwarts of the Communist movement in Kerala, - E.M.S. Namboodripad, A.K.Gopalan, K. Damodaran etc. were the cream of the Congress leadership in the early days of the nationalist movement. So radical were their demands, so powerful was their hold on the electorate that the Congress high command was forced to nominate their representatives as office bearers and dismiss the existing Congress in Kerala in 1940."

B.T. Randive, arguing on these lines said that the anti-imperialist, anti-Gandhi, revolutionary minded middle class in Bengal was absorbed in the Communist movement. In Maharashtra, the middle class is not only out of the sphere of Communism, but it is hostile to it.
While dealing with the Communist movement in Maharashtra, Miss Omvedt has over emphasized the caste and cultural factors. According to her the negligence of the non-Brahmin movement by the Communists, and the predominance of the Brahmins in the leadership; have isolated the Communists from the masses in rural Maharashtra. In support of her proposition she has quoted Dr. Ambedkar: "The Communist party was originally in the hands of some Brahmin boys—Dange and others. They have been trying to win over the Maratha community and the Scheduled Castes... but they have failed...."

There is some element of truth in this argument; but it does not explain the phenomenon fully. Had it been so, the P.W.P. and the L.N.P. (which represent the Maratha caste) ought to have been successful in creating strong roots in Maharashtra. This did not happen. On the contrary, the R.P.I. has failed to mobilize behind it the backward communities on a large scale, whereas the Congress has done this with great ease. Moreover the Communist membership (however poor it may be) is mainly from the working class, peasant masses and other poor classes of society. Generally, the Brahmins in Maharashtra (as in other regions of the country) do not belong to these classes. All these facts illustrate the limitations of Gail Omvedt's argument.

The non-Brahmin movement was more a power struggle than a class struggle. Despite P.W.P.'s Marxist jargon, its orientation is communal and feudal. Naturally, the party represents the landlords and the rich peasantry. In fact, the P.W.P. is the creation of personal

* A local leader of P.W.P. (who does not want to disclose his name) criticised the party for safeguarding the interests of the rich peasantry.
feuds between some of its leaders and the Congress leaders. It is interesting to note that those who left the Congress and formed the P.W.P. in 1948, joined the parent institution, least bothering at about the future of the newly formed party. Naturally, the party does not have much influence upon the Maharashtra politics except in certain pockets in South Maharashtra and Marathwada. Thus, the P.W.P. - purely dominated by the Maratha caste; and the CPI - dominated by the Brahmins, have failed in creating strong roots among the masses.

Donald Zagoria's argument is more convincing when he says that-

"The Kerala Communist leaders speak the language of the peasant masses and have a long history of involvement with them - in this respect more closely resembling the Chinese Communist leadership of the 1930's and 1940's than any other state-level Communist leadership in India. They are the first to mobilize the landless labourers and the poor peasants right from 1940."

The Communists in Maharashtra failed to organize the landless labourers and the poor peasants. Naturally, the peasant movements have not become a force to be reckoned with. The Congress has skilfully exploited the situation by declaring some land reforms though implementing them haphazardly. The Communists have failed to take any steps against such haphazard implementation of the land reformers.

Despite the heterogeneity of the peasant masses as a class; lack of communications and other disadvantages; the landless labourers and the share croppers in Maharashtra were left at a distance from the

* Mrs. Godutai Parulekar told me that the Communist leaders generally prefer to work in cities like Bombay; that too as trade union leaders. Because it is a paying and more comfortable job than to organize the poor peasants in rural areas.
main current of the Communist movement. The level of the rural proletariat remained relatively low all over India except in Kerala and Andhra.

According to Kathleen Gough and Sharma,-

"The Indian Communist movement has received strongest electoral support in states which have the poorest food supply and the highest proportions of landless labourers, and in which both these conditions have been exacerbated in the past 20 years - i.e. Kerala, Andhra, Bengal etc, where between 45-89% of the people are not getting adequate food supply and where between 34-40% of the agricultural population were landless or near-landless labourers in 1963-64."

Maharashtra lags behind Kerala, Bengal and Andhra in this respect.

Along with these, certain other factors also are responsible for a weak Communist movement in Maharashtra.

The Congress government in Maharashtra is neither classical feudalist; nor classical capitalist, but has adopted modern liberal capitalism as its creed. Before and after Independence, the Congress adopted liberal, reformist policies in order to bring certain social reforms in the traditional society; it stood for the abolition of landlordism and domination of the money-lenders. It passed certain laws for the wellbeing of the working class and the peasants. The adoption of the programme of rural industries, free primary education, free education at all levels to the children of citizens whose annual income is below Rs. 1200, and the various social, economic and educational concessions given to the Neo-Buddhists and other socio-economically

* Please refer to the Chapters I & V and the appendix of this chapter.
** Now it is Rs. 4800/-
backward communities have already had an impact on rural society. This bourgeois liberal attitude of the Congress keeps the people in a state of contentment. Thus, the Congress led government has been successful in creating an impression that it stands for socialism and progressive ideas. The various development schemes adopted by the Congress have not only reduced the tension between different socio-economic and political forces; but has successfully thwarted the growth of the left political parties.

Moreover, the rich peasantry, which is the powerful and dominant class in the rural areas has derived the maximum benefit from the extensive, intensive and well knit cooperative sector and the sugar industries. The capitalists in the urban area and the rich peasantry in the country-side stand solidly behind the Congress to safeguard their vested interests. Thus the Congress has used its power skilfully and retained its hold over rural Maharashtra and denied any solid base to the Communist party.

The CPI, like most of the left parties, therefore, is an urban phenomenon; and though it enjoys some rural support, by and large the rural classes which are supposed to be its natural allies, are outside the radius of its politics. The CPI's indefinite and largely favourable attitude towards the government's agricultural policies and its well paid industrial and white collared workers ensure that the party remains petit-bourgeois in character.

* In the recent assembly election (February 1978) the people did not favour the Congress. But at the same time they have not given a free hand to the Janata party also.

** The concept of 'green revolution' (which safeguards the interests of the rich peasantry) has been successfully exploited by the Congress to its benefit.
Bhavani Sen Gupta has aptly described the dilemma before the Indian Communists.

"... The Communists are pitted against a state and a political system created, devised, evolved by the bourgeoisie, to which the Communists could make very little positive contribution of their own. The choice that has baffled them all these years is whether they should work within the political system and use its institutions and instruments to gradually change its qualitative character, or whether they should try to overthrow the system and replace it with another based on a radical realignment of productive relationships. The united CPI began with 'overthrow' tactic then swung to the opposite tactic of "working within".

The policy of working 'within the system' was strongly advocated and supported by Dange in Maharashtra.

But Dange failed to create any effective organization to carry-out his policies. A prominent member of the party has compared Dange with Nehru so far as the organizational problems are concerned. Just like Nehru, Dange too believes in a one man show. He does not care to take party members into his confidence. It is therefore likely that a vacuum will be created in the ranks of the Maharashtra Communists after Dange.

Thus Dange's isolation from his own comrades on the one hand, and B.T. Randive's sectarian policies on the other have definitely hampered the growth of Communism in Maharashtra.

* Very recently Dange resigned Chairmanship of the CPI, and the membership of the politbureau. But again he has been re-elected as the Chairman of the CPI.
The Maharashtrian village structure is not in any way different from that described by Gunnar Myrdal in his Asian Drama.

Basav Punniah also has rightly pointed out that.......

"Ours is a society with predominantly petty-bourgeois class composition; that it is still politically backward with an extremely low level of class-consciousness, that the proletarian and semi-proletarian element is weak in the composition of the party, that Marxist-Leninist education is far from satisfactory and that it will have to travel yet a long and difficult path before it becomes a mass revolutionary proletarian party capable of fulfilling its heroic role."

Maharashtra is not an exception to this. But no steps have been taken in this direction.

Thus the impact of Communism on Maharashtra is on the whole unimpressive. The growth of Communism is stunted; but the impact is still palpable and has not lost its potentiality altogether. If the favourable objective and subjective situation can be developed, Maharashtra may come forward as a very advanced society, meeting the demands of Communism more than half way. What is necessary is that the party leadership should prepared itself to strike a new path and boldly disavow stereotyped patterns of behaviour. The objective conditions are ready, if not ripe for creative exploitation. The will and understanding necessary for this task remain to be summoned so that the objective condition may be properly exploited for the achievement of a new social order.

* Please refer to the 'Asian Drama' - Gunnar Myrdal Vol. I, chapter 1 - 3. Also refer to the Appendix B of this chapter.

** Comment by Mr. Page Balasaheb, a member of the CPI in Maharashtra.
### APPENDIX—A

**Poverty and Proletarianization of Indian States 1961**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>% of rural population below the poverty line</th>
<th>% of labour house holds.</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>with land</td>
<td>Without land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>90.75</td>
<td>24.83</td>
<td>11.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andhra</td>
<td>62.14</td>
<td>10.05</td>
<td>24.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>44.09</td>
<td>12.87</td>
<td>20.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maharashtra</td>
<td>61.04</td>
<td>8.67</td>
<td>21.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Donal Zagoria (Op.Cit.)
"The Indian villages are like a complex molecule among whose parts extreme tensions have been built up. Although the tensions crisscross in a manner that maintains equilibrium, it is conceivable that they may recognize in a way that would explore the molecule. This would perhaps not happen spontaneously but as a result of forceful onslaught from outside."

The immense heterogeneity of Indian society creates cultural and psychological problems inhibiting motivations for radical change in the social structure. Peoples in various layers in society live very different lives and consequently have very different outlooks toward their social universe.

The ideas of modernizations are pitted against these conflicting evaluations with the result that even among 'radical' individuals value conflicts lead to frustrating mental compromises. The Indian elite have to some extent assimilated western political concepts of representative democracy. However, the concept of democratic radicalism is still alien to them."

NOTE REFERENCES: CHAPTER VI -


17. Ibid., p. 43.

19 Ibid., pp. 145-60.
20 Please refer to the article 'Poverty, Literacy, and the Communist vote' Parker Riley, 'Asian Survey' Vol. XV, No.5 May 1975, pp. 543-58.
23 An interview with B.R. Randive.
Also see : Ashok Mitra 'Seminar' July 1974 cited in - That is why the Communist movement in Bengal is called a middle class movement.
25 Ibid., p.296.
26 The F.WP. is compelled to remain satisfied with few pockets in Maharashtra. Its dreams of being the D.H.K. of Maharashtra has not been materialised so far. In recent assembly elections (February 1978) it has cut a very sorry figure. The L.N.P. too has failed to make any break through.
27 Donald Zagoria : Op.Cit.,
p.31.
Also - In Maharashtra, the CPI has founded the landless labourers organization in 1968.
31 Lalji Pendse - an article on Dange and Randive in Navakal (Marathi) Desvali issue, 1963.
32 Basav Punniah - People Democracy, July 23, 1967, p.3
33