CHAPTER IV

PEASANT MOVEMENT IN MAHARASHTRA

PHASE-I

The latter half of the 19th century saw sporadic peasant revolts, but in an isolated context; i.e. Santhal rebellion of 1855 and the 'Blue Mutiny' of indigo cultivators in Bengal, the Deccan riots in 1875 in Maharashtra etc.

The peasant movements were the natural outcome of the Permanent Settlement Act. According to the fifth report of the House of Lords: "The permanent settlement has produced more distress and beggary, and a greater change in the landed property of Bengal, than has, perhaps, happened in the same space of time, by the mere effect of legislation."

The conditions which led to the agrarian uprising in Maharashtra and specially in Ahmednagar and Poona were in the main typical of conditions in the entire Rayotwari area. During this period Maharashtra was suffering acutely from famines, scarcity of food and water, epidemics etc. Rain or no rain, the government demands had to be satisfied. Fluctuating prices of food grains and other articles added to the difficulties of the peasant and the common man. Under such circumstances, the farmers, to save their land from forfeiture and public auction by the government for failure to pay revenue demands, had to turn to the moneylenders.

* For details also refer Kathleen Gough's article in Economic and Political Weekly, annual 1974, pp. 1392-93.
And the moneylenders used to fleece the indebted peasants with the help of the laws passed by the British government. Mr. Taylor, the Collector of Ahmednagar in a report to the government in 1858, stated:-

"The aid given by our courts is all on the side of the Marwari, who alone knows how to turn that aid to his own advantage. The position of the litigants is not, therefore, simply of debtor and creditor; it is the fraudulent Marwari, backed by civil courts, versus the helpless Ryot, signing any bond without even a true knowledge of its contents and powerless to oppose any decree that may be passed."

Thus, the peasants were suffering, but they were yet unaware of the nature and working of the system which was oppressing them. Their debts were mounting, decrees were being handed out against them; their houses and lands were passing into the hands of the moneylenders. Meanwhile the farmers' conditions were deteriorating rapidly because of the general fall in agricultural prices and economic depression.

The enraged and desperate peasants of Poona and Ahmednagar districts at last let loose their accumulated anger against the bonds, documents and decrees which the money lenders held against them.

**THE FIRST SOCIAL BOYCOTT.**

*In 1874 the villagers of Kardeh from Sirur Taluka boycotted the Marwaris on account of rampant exploitation. The water-carriers, the barbers, and even the house servants of the money lenders joined the villagers in this boycott. The villagers opened a grocery shop the*

*Kathleen Gough has also mentioned this incident in his article ... 'Indian peasant uprising' .... in Economic and Political Weekly Annual 1974., p.1402*
moneylenders’ attempt to flee failed because of non-cooperation
from the cart-drivers. At last the moneylenders could escape only
with police protection.

The news of this boycott spread like wild fire attracting the
attention of thousands of the villagers in the vicinity. Slowly, the
reaction against the money lenders was intensified, culminating in
a serious threat to the very lives of the moneylenders.

The government utilized the available police force without any
effect. Ultimately the government sent military troops to maintain
law and order. Punitive police and military posts on a large scale
were established and collective fines were levied on villages to meet
the expenses. Arrests on an unprecedented mass scale were carried out.
Vasudeo Balvant Phadke, who organized the Bhils and Ramoshis from sou-
thern Maharashtra against the money lenders was hanged for his offence.

The active phase of the uprising in Poona, Ahmednagar and the
southern part of Maharashtra lasted only three weeks. The peasants,
unprepared to withstand the onslaught of terrific repression by the
government, had no alternative but to abandon active struggle.

However, the Maratha peasant uprising forced the imperialist
rulers to pass the Deccan Agriculturists’ relief Act of 1879, offering
some protection to the peasants against usury and appropriation of
their lands.

* Natrajaj observs: “The persons arrested during these peasant uprisings
in Poona and Ahmednagar districts in 1875 was in point of fact greater
than in the biggest non-cooperation movement launched by the Indian
National Congress... Natrajaj: Op.Cit., p.63
According to Kathleen Gough:

"Indian peasants have a long tradition of armed uprisings, reaching back at least to the initial British conquest and the last decades of Moghul government. For more than 200 years peasants in all the major regions... Bengal, U.P., Kerala, Maharashtra, Amdhra, Bihar etc. have arisen repeatedly against landlords, revenue agents, moneylenders, police and military forces. During this period there have been at least 77 revolts, the smallest of which probably engaged several thousand peasants in active support or in combat. About 30 of these revolts have affected tens of thousands of peasants, and about 12, several hundreds of thousands. The uprisings were responses to deprivation of an unusually severe character, always economic, and often also involving physical brutality or ethnic persecution."

In the last quarter of the Nineteenth century in Ahmednagar district the movement against the moneylenders had become very intensive. In 1914, nearly 10,000 peasants encircled the Tahsil office. The enraged peasantry burnt alive the Mamlatdar (Tahsildar).

In 1928, the British government passed the fragmentation on land act. The peasantry was badly affected by this act. The enraged peasants from Satara, Sangamner, Akola, Poona etc. launched morchas consisting of more than 10,000 peasants. A peasant conference was called in Poona and more than 25,000 peasants attended it. Ultimately the British government had to withdraw the act."

In 1930, S.G. Sardesai, from Bombay, took a leading part in the Jungle (Forest) Satyagraha in Sholapur. During this movement he developed
his contacts with the peasants and aboriginal tribes in Ahmednagar, Sangamner, Akola, Nasik etc. under the leadership of the Communists, the peasants gave a good fight with the police; and more than 6000 peasants encircled the Taksil office.

All these peasant uprisings were occasioned by several common factors, besides the basic factors of increasing impoverishment and indebtedness. The following reports from the press throw light upon the intensity of the peasant struggles.

A) "After a struggle extending over about 2 years, the peasants, tenants of Thana district have scored a decisive victory over their landlords. The tenants (all belonging to agricultural caste) had refused to till about 250 acres of paddy lands as the landlords refused to reduce their share of produce in spite of the heavy fall in prices. The extra-ordinary solidarity of the tenants had compelled their masters at long last to agree to receive 50% instead of 75% of the produce as rent in future. The settlement was effected on June 21st and the tenants have resumed the cultivation of their ancestral land."

B) "Two peasant unions have already been founded in Rahuri and Vadgaon areas of Ahmednagar district; and arrangements are already on foot to form similar peasant unions in Sholapur district. The Ahmednagar workers have launched a weekly 'Yugantar', to focus attention on peasants and allied problems and the Sholapur comrades have begun to issue a fortnightly bulletin on similar lines. Closely allied with peasant unions in Ahmednagar district are the two unions of Agricultural and factory workers employed by the Belapur and Maharashtra sugar company."
Large mass meetings of these workers were held during the last fort-
night and addressed by comrade Dange, Bhuskute and Kulkarni etc."

Thus the peasantry emerged as an important and radicalised
constituent of the modern anti-imperialist and national democratic
movement under the nationalist and the Communists. In spite of the
nationalist efforts to channel and control the movement, it began by
the 1930's to get seriously out of hand. Slowly the Communist influence
was increasing. Kisan Sabhas emerged with great strength in Bihar,
Andhra, Kerala, Maharashtra etc. and by 1934 had coalesced into the
A.I.K.S. The Marxists (The Communists and the Socialists) were domi-
nating the A.I.K.S.

The semi-official history of the Congress party states:--

"There were hordes of Kisans organising themselves into huge
parades marching hundreds of miles along the villages and trying to
build up a party, a power and a force more or less arrayed against the
Congress. They found a cause, a flag, a leader. The flag they chose
to favour was the Soviet flag of red colour with the hammer and sickle.
This flag came in vogue as the flag of the Kisans and the Communists,
and even loud and repeated exhortations of Jawaharlal Nehru would not
keep it to its place or proportions."
With the emergence of the A.I.K.S. and its domination by the Communists, the peasant movement got its momentum. Mass Marches were launched, mass rallies were gathered to develop and strengthen consciousness and solidarity of the peasantry and to get their grievances redressed. In the heyday of the national freedom struggle, the Communists wanted to utilize the platform of the Indian National Congress to give vent to the grievances and the discontent among the peasantry.

So on 10th December 1936, the Communists arranged a huge Morcha to Faijpur where the Congress was to hold its annual session. More than 10,000 peasants from all over Maharashtra had participated in that historical morcha. The following passage from the press report gives a very graphic description of the morcha on the Assembly in 1937.

400 peasants belonging to Nasik, Poona, Satara and Ahmednagar districts began their march from Ahmednagar on September 8 to present their grievances to the Congress Ministry. They made the following demands—

i) Complete remission of arrears of land revenue due last year.

ii) Stay of all proceedings of collection of arrears of rent.

iii) Reduction in land revenue by 10-15%.

iv) Repeal of land revenue code and its substitution by new land-tax laws levying taxes on net agrarian income of Rs.500 and above.

* The A.I.K.S. was formed in 1936 with its branches all over India.
v) Substantial reduction in the irrigation charges etc.

The government report on this subject clearly indicates how the communists were getting a hold over the peasantry in Maharashtra.

"In various centres in Bombay State, more active participation by the Communists in peasant agitation is noticeable; and its tone has correspondingly reddened. An increasing number of red flags, is reported in peasant marches. The message of the red flag is said to have been spread from factories to villages by workers returning to their homes. Leading Communists are training local leaders in the art of conducting peasant agitations, based on 'class struggles'; Kisan leaders stress the distinction between Kisan and agrarian agitation and the importance of popularising the peasant movement in the name of the former. The CPI has no more than a few hundred members. But its influence is to be measured not so much by its size as by its ability to guide other groups and organizations. The ease with which Communists have been able to penetrate labour and peasant bodies throughout the Congress organization and assume the role of 'local leaders' is well illustrated by the success of CPI in the Bombay T.U.C. in obtaining the passage of a resolution in favour of one day strike in Bombay on October 2nd against the wishes of the moderate non-Communist majority. The Communists dominate the labour, peasant and youth movements."

With the emergence of the A.I.K.S. and its domination by the Communists; the nature of peasant struggle was radically changed. What was once a heterogeneous class was now well organized by the Communists
and became politically conscious and strong enough to put up stubborn fights not only against the British imperialists but also against the local landlords and moneylenders. 'Down with landlordism and moneylenders' was the catchy slogan popularised among the peasantry.

But with the outbreak of world war II the Communist influence started eroding rapidly. The outbreak of the war created great difficulties for the Communists. The Communists, Congress socialists and other radicals were working together in the pre-war period as a united front. But there were differences among the political parties regarding the character of the war, its international implications, and its implications for the national democratic movement in India. Each of them had different conceptions as to how the independent class organizations of the Kisan should behave in the period of war. When Russia entered the war and when Gandhi launched the 'Quit India Movement' in August 1942, it was extremely difficult to continue the united front. A large number of Congressmen (radical) and Congress socialists left the A.I.K.S. in 1942. Tens of thousands of peasants were rallied against the Communists in the 'Do or Die' struggle. They were not rallied against the national bourgeoisie, but behind it. Hostility to the Communist party and to the Soviet Union developed on a considerable scale.

During the same period i.e. 1940-42 tens of thousands of peasants (Muslim) were being rallied by the landlord bourgeoisie leadership of the Muslim league, behind its reactionary, disruptive slogan of 'Two Nation'.

* The Communists had adopted contradictory positions regarding the war. According to them the war before 1942 was a struggle for power between two imperialist blocks. But with the Russian alliance with the allied powers after 1942, the nature and character of the war changed. Now it was the war between the democratic versus fascist forces. So they supported the British government against the Fascists. Whereas the national Congress under Gandhi's leadership started 'Quit India Movement'. The inconsistencies in the policies had ultimately resulted in tarnishing the image and shatterin
Moreover other radical groups like the Congress socialists and the Scheduled Caste Federation (established by Dr. Ambedkar); Hindu Mahasabha and the R.S.S. etc. stood firmly against the Communist. Especially, Ambedkar, wielding charismatic influence upon the Scheduled Castes (particularly upon the Mahar community) was firmly against the Communists. Gandhi, who had a tremendous influence upon the Indian masses as well as on the national freedom struggle, was never in favour of the Communist movement. All these forces branded the Communists as 'anti-national.'

The isolation of the Communists from mainstream of the national freedom struggle had adverse effects upon the Communist movement. Whatever base they had created among the peasantry was lost for ever in Maharashtra. The only exception was the 'Warli' region in the Thana district. After Independence, the Communists tried their best to forge ahead once more. They succeeded in Kerala, Bengal, Andhra to a great extent but failed in Maharashtra.

* Dr. Ambedkar's views regarding Communism are given elsewhere in this Chapter.
** Dr. G. Adhikari in his thesis CPI and India's path to Socialism and national regeneration accepted that his party (CPI) committed serious mistakes in assessing the role of the national bourgeoisie, the Indian National Congress and of Mahatma Gandhi.
THE PEA SANT MOVEMENT

PHASE-III

* THE WARLI MOVEMENT: -

According to the census of 1971, the Scheduled Tribes population in Maharashtra is 29.54 Lakhs and 5.86% of the total population. The tribes in Maharashtra can be divided into three major groups. The Adivasis of Maharashtra are predominantly settled agriculturists. Of the total population of the Adivasis 90% are engaged in agriculture and 40% of the in agricultural labour. The land which originally belonged to the Scheduled Tribes was grabbed by the local moneylenders, traders and contractors from Bombay etc.

The Warli's are mainly from the Thana district. Their number in the Thana district is 2,51,851, and this forms 50% of the total population. Hundred years back the Warli's were owning and cultivating land. But with the advent of the British Raj, and with radical changes in the economy, the moneylenders, traders and the contractors slowly appropriated the lands of the Warlis. On 25th September 1939 Mr. Morarji Desai, then Home and Revenue Minister for Bombay provinces clearly stated:-

"In these tracts of Thana district some years back all the land was held by these Adivasis. But in bad times, during the famines and scarcity times, the lands passed from their hands into the hands of Sawkars for trifling amounts. There are instances in which land has been parted - some acres of land - for 5 of grain and in some cases at the rate of Rs.5 per acre, or a rupee per acre or 8 annas per acre."

* The 'Warli-movement is the only worth-mentioning peasant movement occurred in Maharashtra. But no proper attention has been paid to this movement in Communist literature published so far.
THE CONDITIONS OF THE WARRILIS.

The Warrilis were poverty stricken, illiterate and unorganized and their living conditions were the most deplorable. They were the victims of rampant exploitations by the moneylenders and traders; they were forced to work tirelessly and ungrudgingly on the farm or at the home of the landlord or the Sahukar. They were the victims of *the Vetti system. Apart from forced and bonded labour, all sorts of injustices were inflicted upon them.

The Thana Gazette, says-

"Under the Marathas, many of the tribes had been the bondsmen of the Pandharpeshas (upper class people) or high caste villagers. The name of the bondage ceased with the introduction of the British rule, but, with many of the more settled of the wilder tribes, the reality of slavery remained and nominal freedom only served to bring them under new and harder masters. Formerly their masters used to pay their marriage expenses. Now they had themselves to find funds. And as almost none of them had the necessary funds, most of them had to pledge their labour for a term of years. This term of years often developed into life long, and sometimes into the hereditary servitude."

In Maharashtra, these hereditary serfs were known as Jam Lagangadis. The Adivasi used to borrow the necessary amount from the Sahukars in order to meet the marriage expenses and other expenses of the household. The agreement he entered into with the lenders was such that he and his wife had to serve the landlord till the loan was repaid. But the repayment was impossible since the interest was 75%.

* Vetti-system is a system of forced labour, i.e. The Ramoshis etc., were forced to run along with the horses of the 'Deshmukhs' or 'Patils' - the chief of the villages. Free services were to be rendered in favour of these village chiefs.
or more. Also, Lagangadis were not paid any wages during this period; neither were they allowed to work anywhere else. These Lagangadis were treated like slaves. They had no choice of work, but had only to carry out the orders, whims and caprices of their owners. The wives of the Lagangadis were treated as the wives of the landlords and Sahukars. They were often molested and even raped. The Symington report throws sufficient light upon the conditions of the Warlis.

"If the debtor is slow or recalcitrant in making payments or rendering services, he is threatened, assulted or beaten by Sahukar's agents who are often Pathans or Bhayyas. A man refusing to give his work for which he has taken a loan is sometimes improperly prosecuted and I regret to say that the Magistrates have sometimes taken a strangely perverted view of such prosecutions."

The landlords were not satisfied with extracting excessive work by beating the Warlis like animals. Sometimes the landlords burnt Warlis alive. The government and the law used to give protection to the landlords and the Sahukars. Mr. B.G.Kher in a letter on behalf of the Adivasi Seva Sangh reported on 1st July 1940: "The fact that such a big mass of humanity should be rotting in a condition of life more debasing than that of slaves within 50 miles from Bombay and that our citizens should be in a complacent ignorance about their hardships and tortures is certainly disgraceful."

Unfortunately, 'Adivasi Seva Sangh' could not do anything more than express its sympathies towards the Warlis. It was the Communists under the leadership of Mrs. Godutai Parulekar who organized the Warlis movement. *

* Godutai Parulekar is popularly known as 'Godurani' among the Warlis. While commenting on this movement, Mr. Chapalgaonkar categorically stated that it was purely Mrs Parulekar's movement. The Communists had nothing to do with this movement.
and gave a stubborn fight against the landlords and Sahukars.

The Warlis who had become lifeless because of the rampant and colossal exploitation, severe atrocities, and inhuman cruelties inflicted upon them by the landlords and Sahukars in alliance with the government; slowly developed an awareness of their wretched condition and began to understand its causes. The credit for this awakening goes entirely to Mrs. Godutai Parulekar, the renowned Communist storm trooper.

Because of the deep and penetrating influence of the Communists, the Warlis organised themselves into a class, and braving suffering and persecution, they started resisting the landlords, Sahukars and even the government. The correspondent of Australian 'Daily Telegraph' remarked in 1945—"A woman Communist is leading a revolt of the aborigines, Warlis, in the thick jungles of Thana district of Bombay."

The Bombay Chronicle wrote:

"The Adivasis who were tame and docile till this day suddenly became class conscious and they began to collect in large numbers under the red flag. Mass meetings were held throughout these Talukas. People marched miles and miles to attend the meetings. They carried sticks in their hands. Their enthusiasm appeared to be unprecedented."

**IMPACT OF THE MOVEMENT:**

Following the agitation by the Communists under the leadership of Mrs. Parulekar in 1945 and in the subsequent years, the system of bonded labour, i.e. the serfdom, the system of Legangadi, the 'Vetti system' and the system of rampant exploitation and repression has almost
come to an end in Dahanu and Talasari areas. Still the system of
not Lagangadi exists, but it is/as brutal as it was before. The Warlis
could achieve success by asserting their strength through peaceful
methods and, sometimes resorting even to arms.

Mr. Narhari Parekh - a leading Gandhian commented on Mrs.
Parulekar's work and wrote:-

"The riots of the Adivasis (Warlis) in Dahanu Taluka should be
an eye opener to us. No doubt the Police and the military will
suppress the riots and peace will be restored. But that does not mean
that the problem is solved. Such riots are outward symptoms of a
serious disease in the body politic. So long as the root cause of
this disease is not removed, a superficial treatment of outward sym-
ptoms will not be of any avail.... So long the exploitations, suppre-
ssion and injustice are not removed, it is futile to hope for a lasting
peace..... Is it any wonder if they (Warlis) are exasperated and
resort to violence? The spirit of the exploited and the suppressed
people has awakened."

According to Mrs. M. Parulekar-....

The movement brought out radical changes not only in the appearance
of the Warlis - i.e. their dress, behaviour etc. but in their attitudes
and outlook in general. They have now got accustomed to civilized life.
No more are they going to submit to exploitation, injustice, suppression
and atrocities - inflicted by the landlords and the Sakhars. If at
all they have to face this, they have been tough enough to retaliate
boldly. They have been convinced about the importance of education;

* Mrs. Parulekar in an interview.
so the younger generation of the Warlis is striving hard for getting *
educated.

Dr. Govind Gare (an aboriginal himself) told me that the Communists
in the Thana district had succeeded in bringing out radical changes in
the psychology of the Warlis. The tame, docile, subservient, lifeless,
poverty-stricken, Warlis became very conscious of their strength and
anxious to uproot the socio-economic and political system which deprived
them of all the opportunities of development. Now their ambitions **
have risen. They have realized that they too can live as humanbeings.

This movement of the Warlis from Dahanu, Umargaon, Palghar,
(Than district) is very significant in the history of the peasant
movement in Maharashtra. No doubt, the Communists achieved great success
in organizing and leading the struggles of the Warlis from the Thana
district; they failed to carry this movement to the other areas of the
aboriginals - i.e. Nasik, Dhuliya, Ahmednagar, Poona, Nagpur (districts)
etc. Moreover, the Communists failed to strike deep roots among the
Warlis also. After 1960, the Congress could easily rout the Communists
even in their own stronghold. Mrs. Godutai Parulekar (who is regarded
as a Goda Rani by the Warlis) was defeated from the Warli constituency
itself.

She attributed the failure to two main causes.

i) Lack of funds and lack of trained, and experienced party cadre.

ii) The fraudulent methods adopted by the Congress to divide and
misguide the Warlis.

* I heard a young Warli speaking fluently in 'Marathi' in the X session
of the A.I.K.S. (CPM) held at Parbhani in 1972.
** A free talk with Dr. Govind Gare - a Professor from the Gokhale
Institute, Poona.
*** The Warli movement may be compared with the 'Telengana movement' and
the 'Tebhaga movement' which occurred during the same period in Andhra
and Bengal; the movement of the Warlis is treated as a localized event
even by the Communists. For details please refer to the appendix.
No doubt these two factors are responsible for the failure of the Communists; but these are not the decisive factors. The Communists failed to create strong roots because:

i) The problem of the Warlis is multi-dimensional. It is an economic, political as well as a cultural problem. The Communists overestimated the economic aspect and totally neglected the socio-cultural aspects.

ii) Because of the different socio-cultural set up, the Adivasis have not been able to move up to the level of the socio-culturally advanced strata of society. Moreover, the Adivasis themselves are divided into different socio-cultural groups. These socio-cultural differentiations have widened the gulf between sections of the Warlis for which the Communists have been unable to offer a remedy.

Moreover, after the successful struggle of the Warlis, no constructive work was carried out by the Communists, as a necessary follow up for bringing about institutional changes in the socio-economic set up. Unfortunately, the Communists turned a blind eye to this task.

As the energy that was thrown into the economic struggle was not maintained on other fronts, the initial gains could not be maintained or carried forward. It seemed as though the energy itself was wholly withdrawn when these limited gains were registered. This was to prove a tactical mistake.

* Mrs. Parulekar in the interview flatly denied that the Warlis problem is a cultural problem.

** Please refer to the Chapter I of this Thesis.

*** The Communists have no faith in constructive activities. They believe that it is a Gandhian activity. Only the late Mr. D.K. Bedekar had expressed his faith in constructive activities. But he had left the party (GPI) in 1950.
Moreover, Mrs. Parulekar, who has provided leadership to this movement is pretty old now. She cannot be expected to continue to work as in the past. But unfortunately, no one is coming forth to take her place and accept the challenge.

If at all the Communists have to regain their old position among the Warlis, they will have to bear in mind that reliance on agitational and violent activities alone would not do.

* Mrs. Parulekar told me about her retirement from active politics in the near future.
After the withdrawal of the 'Telengana struggle' in 1951, the Indian as well as the various state governments tried to suppress the Communist movement. Naturally, the peasant movement was reduced to a standstill. The Communists were facing a very critical position in Maharashtra. Because of the tarnished and shattered image of the party, the membership of the Kisan Sabha in Maharashtra was reduced from 1500 to 700. Dissensions, pessimism, cynicism, and passivity were on the increase among the party. Virtually the party was without any leadership.

Despite this unfavourable situation, the Communists in Maharashtra launched a few peasant movements demanding abolition of Jamindari (landlordism) and Savkari (money-lending), more jobs and better wages, reduction of rent and taxes, stabilization of and parity of prices, more facilities for improving production, adequate supply of foodgrains at fair prices, and stopping eviction from land, etc. No doubt these movements were of a local nature. Yet they took place in a few districts and were widespread i.e. Ahmednagar, Thana and Bhir (Marathwada).

* Please refer to the foot-note on page - of this Chapter.

** The Communist led peasant movement got a good momentum in Bhir district. So Bhir in 1956, was regarded as a red district. According to Mr. R.D. Deshmukh, the party unit of the Bhir district was supposed to be the strongest of all the units in Marathwada. In one of such movements, R.D. Deshmukh was arrested by the Police. But near about 5000 peasants attacked the police. Four of them died. But they freed R.D. Deshpande... (An interview with R.D. Deshpande - a leading advocate and ex-member of the party).
STRUGGLE AGAINST SUGAR INDUSTRIALISTS:

In Maharashtra, small owners had leased their lands to sugar cane plantations for 40-90 years. The plantation owners paid them a nominal rent of Rs.2-00 per acre, per year. So, they agitated for return of their land and as a compromise settlement demanded that the rent be fixed by law at 1/6 of the produce. The peasants started a struggle and they began occupying the land for cultivation. The Police arrested their leaders. After the second round of struggle, the government agreed to reduce the period of lease to 30 years since its commencement and increase rent to 30 to 40 per acres.

Some of these notable peasant struggles are - 1) the struggle against the fragmentation of land and eviction of tenants by the landlords, supported by the government. This struggle was specially concentrated on Marathwada. During this period, 'Kisan Sabhas' were formed in 27 out of the 45 Talukas of Marathwada. 264 meetings were organised by the Kisan Sabha and the CPI. 31000 members were enrolled in the Kisan Sabhas. However, these movements were suppressed by the government.

Such movements were launched against the sugar industrialists in Shrirampur. An arbitration commission was appointed by the government. According to the decision of the commission, the landless and those who were having less than 3 acres of land, got 3 acres of land.

The struggle of the landless labour in 1958 is also worth noting. The landless labourers from West Khandesh launched a struggle demanding adequate housing facilities. Slowly this movement spread to other regions.

of Maharashtra. In August 1959, the R.P.I. and the CPI jointly launched the struggle of the landless people. This struggle lasted more than 2½ months and more than 45000 people joined the Satyagraha movement. Most of the Satyagrahis belonged the Scheduled Castes. The Scheduled Tribes from Nasik too joined this movement. The government conceded to the demands and the movement was successful.

The Communist led Kisan Sabhas launched a few movements here and there during the period 1952-64. But all these movements being strictly local in character, could not attract the masses from all over Maharashtra. Throughout this decade, the peasant movement meant no more than a meeting here or a procession or a morcha there; Satyagraha in various forms was organized (of course on local grounds) from time to time. But all these attempts were futile, because the Communists failed to touch the poorest section of the cultivators and agricultural labourers.

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* During this period the CPI had joined the 'Samyukta Maharashtra Movement' along with other political parties. The Chinese aggression in 1962 created a serious rift between the Indian Communists. Since then the Communist movement is a divided house.

**The figures seem to be exaggerated. No latest figures of the Maharashtra Kisan Sabha are available.
The A.I.K.S. in Maharashtra has a stunted growth. Especially after Independence, there was no peasant movement as such. There were a few activities, only on a very limited scale. The membership of the Maharashtra A.I.K.S. was less than 20,000. But the membership rose up to 87,000 in 1954; and in 1955 it reached to 100,000. The peasant movement was strong only in the Thana and Ahmednagar districts and the CPI could strike some roots in this area. After Independence, the CPI has expanded its field of activities to Nasik, Satara, Poona, Marathwada regions but has not gained any considerable influence. In 1954 the Communist led A.I.K.S. and the S.K.P. led A.I.K.S. joined hands and the union of these two political parties, promised to be effective in influencing the peasantry in Maharashtra. But the union of the two parties did not last long, and the strength of the CPI led A.I.K.S. was considerably reduced and its influence declined.

In Maharashtra, the CPI led peasant movement has not yet passed through its infancy. It could not expand its activities beyond a few conferences, resolutions, seminars, meetings and enrolment of members. Naturally, with the only exception of the Warli movement, the peasant movement was never (and still it is not) a militant mass movement. The A.I.K.S. is nowhere powerful except in a few Talukas and villages in the Thana and Ahmednagar districts. At present the CPI led A.I.K.S. is passing through a stage of stagnation. If the situation is to be changed, the A.I.K.S. will have to review and reform its politics and performance thoroughly.

* The period of the union of the Communist led Kisan Sabha and the P.W.P. led Kisan Sabha is not mentioned.
'little father'. When the Narodniks assassinated the Tsar in 1881 with the expectation that this would precipitate a peasant revolt against the regime, the peasants were appalled and blamed the nobles for depriving them of their only defender, i.e., the Tsar. Lénin suggests that Stalin was similarly exonerated by the Russian peasantry for the Communist rape of the countryside during the phase of collectivization.

In Maharashtra, the tiller and the landless peasantry regard their landlords as 'Swami' (Owner); and they express their gratitude whenever the landlords help them in meeting their miscellaneous expenses. Moreover, the landlords and the moneylenders belong to the class of high caste Hindus. And the tillers and specially the landless labourers belong to the low castes. Traditionally, the low caste Hindus bow down before the high caste Hindus and regard them as their masters. This typical social relationship between the landlords and the landless people never allows the peasants to revolt against the landlords whatever may be their grievances. Psychologically, the peasantry is in a state of slavery. The Communists have failed to educate the peasantry and organize them on a class basis.

That is the reason why there is no powerful large scale peasant movement comparable to the 'Telengana struggle, and the Tibhaga struggle. The Communists in Kerala, Andhra and Bengal paid comparatively more attention to the peasantry. This has never happened in Maharashtra.

* Please refer to the appendix.

** After the split in the party in 1964 the renowned peasant leaders like A.K.Gopalan, E.M.S.Namboodripad, P. Sundarayya, Harekrishna Kumar, Mrs. Godutai Parulekar, etc. joined the CPI. The CPI criticises the CPI for its prejudiced attitude towards the Indian peasantry.
R.D. Deshpande, a prominent Communist leader from Marathwada (who left the party in 1964, but continues to help the Communists both 'right' and the 'left' in the elections and other activities) categorically stated that the leaders concentrating on peasant activities in rural areas were looked down upon by the working class leaders in Bombay. This throws sufficient light upon the mentality and attitudes of the Maharashtra Communists.

Dr. G. Adhikari also told me that when he was in Germany, his brother had written a few letters to him complaining against the high brow attitude of the Indian Communists towards the peasant front in 1930 and onwards.

The Communists in Maharashtra are facing a great dilemma. Confronted with the conflict between peasant proprietors and the untouchable 'rural proletariat', the party is forced to make a choice between the high caste and the outcaste; and invariably expediency forces the Communist to prefer the landed peasant (Generally high caste Hindu) over the low caste or outcaste peasant or farm labourer. The president of A.I.K.S. (N. Prasad Rao) frankly stated that the Communists too follow caste lines, recognizing separate agricultural labour unions alongside parallel poor peasant and rich peasant organizations. Rao expressed that "irrespective of the size of the holdings, any peasant who actually cultivates his land, if he himself is a cultivator, should be neutralized and should not be disturbed."

Thus the Communists failed to adopt a clear cut policy regarding the various sections of the peasantry. The Maharashtra Communist totally neglected the landless labourers (The agricultural labourers' organization was established in 1968).
The unfortunate fact is that the CPI was not able to grasp the significance of the profound changes taking place in rural society quickly enough to be able to work out new tactics and a new mass line for developing the peasant movement under the given conditions.

For about a decade and a half after 1952, the leading party members remained in a state of confusion on this question and could not lay down a firm line of action. Two trends of thought emerged within the party in regard to the assessment of the agrarian situation. One trend over-emphasized the development of capitalism in Indian agriculture and treated it as an all-pervading phenomenon. The other trend underestimated the growth of capitalist relations in agriculture and considered feudal relations to be still dominant throughout the country.

But these generalizations were obviously made on the basis of local experience, since the process of transformation was uneven and differed from state to state and even from one region to another within a state. The result was that the peasant movement got in a sense atomized among different local areas.

The 19th session of the A.I.K.S. in 1968 clearly stated:

"Unfortunately, in the past we never made an attempt to study systematically the structural changes that have come about in our agrarian economy during the past independence period — the impact of Congress agrarian legislation on class relations in the countryside, the transformation which the erstwhile semi-feudal agrarian structure
In 1952-53, the CPI activised the peasants for getting relief against the famine and scarcity in draught affected areas in Maharashtra. But whatever pressure the CPI exerted upon the ministry in order to get aid and relief for the draught affected people, it did not pay any attention towards the proper distribution of the relief fund. Naturally, the needy persons did not receive necessary attention. It badly affected the popularity of the CPI. The CPI failed to convince the working class and the middle classes, that, the problem of the draught affected people are the problems of redistribution of land; and the working class and the middle classes must unite with the peasantry in fighting out such socio-economic inequalities.

Moreover, the Communists concentrated more on local issues - i.e. anti-fragmentation, anti-eviction and the problem of uncultivated land etc. The problems vary from place to place. The party did not assess the experiences of each struggle, and workout the correct line from time to time. Naturally the ruling bourgeois circles i.e. - the sugar syndicate, the cotton kings, the landlords and the capitalists exploited the backwardness, illiteracy, caste consciousness etf. to keep the peasant mass unorganized.

The Communists failed to help the peasants in solving their day to day problems or to educate and enlighten them in this respect, or on the policies and enactments of the government Acts relating to allotment or transfer of land to the tiller, moneylending, Khoti and the Inami system, the land revenue code were never dwelt upon by the
CPI so as to enable the Kisans to grasp their meaning and significance. Naturally, the peasants turned to the Congress or the government officers like Talathis, for solving their difficulties. Thus the CPI failed to represent the whole of the peasantry.

It is the general complaint of many of the party workers from rural areas, that the functioning of the A.I.K.S./AIKSA bureaucratic. The functionaries take all the decisions and they are enforced on the units and carried out on the peasants. It maintains no living contact between the units and the mass peasantry. The leader - follower pattern has been rigidly maintained. This hampers mass initiative and energy.

The Communist led AIKS follows an outdated style of work such as general agitation and propaganda. Immediate orientation towards multiform activity and a positive attitude towards problems of development projects is badly needed.

* R.D.Deshpandee - ex-member of the United party (CPI), recognises that the P.W.P. is paying attention to the day to day problems faced by the peasantry. Naturally, the P.W.P. has struck roots (of course in a few pockets) among the peasantry. As the CPI failed to pay much attention to this problem, the Communists failed to acquire a base among the peasantry.
Appendix

THE TELEGANA AND THE TEEBHAGA STRUGGLE.

The most successful Communist led peasant movements were those of Telengana and the Teebhaga (then Bengal) occurred during 1946-48. In Telengana, the peasantry demanded the abolition of illegal exactions by the Deshmukhs and Nawabs - the feudal lords and also agitated for the cancellation of peasants' debts. It was the largest and the longest revolt encircling 2000 villages in an area of 15000 square miles, with a population of 4 millions and a peasant army of 5000.

The Teebhaga movement began with a demand for reduction of the occupying tenants (Jotedars) rights in the crop from half to one third and a corresponding increase in the rights of poor peasant share croppers (adhiars or bargadars).

In these struggles, the peasant unions were able to secure temporary liberated zones which they governed for several weeks or months through peasant committees supervised by the Communist party.
List of Books on Telengana Movements.

1. P. Sundarayya - The Telengana Struggle and its People. P.P.H.
2. Sunil Sen - The Peasant Struggle in Bengal 1946-47. P.P.H.
6. New Age - 26 January, 1975
21 Godutai Parulekar - Manus Jenvha Jaga Hoto (in Marathi) 
This is the only book which deals in detail with the Warli movement. Even the history of the A.I.K.S. by M.A. Rasul has
given scanty references about the Warli movement.

22 Thana Gazetteer, pp. 155-156.


24 Ibid., p.5.


27 An interview with Mrs. Parulekar.

28 Ibid.

29 Political Resolution of the CPI - (Maharashtra Council) CPI's 

30 The report of the IV session of the Maharashtra A.I.K.S. pp. 3-4.

31 Yugantar (Marathi), 21-3-1955.

32 Ibid., 19-5-1955.

33 For details please refer to 'Kisan Aghadivaril Karyacha Ahwal'(in 
Marathi) October 1960. CPI (Maharashtra Council) publication, pp.2-10.

34 A.I.K.S. Session IV, Thana dated 1.1,1956.


36 M. Lewin - Russian peasants and Soviet power: A study of Collectivi-

37 Ibid., p.452.

38 An interview with R.D.Deshpande.

39 Dr. G. Adhikari in an interview at Delhi. Dr. Adhikari did not 
show the letters to me.

40 Agricultural Labour's organization. New Bulletin of A.I.K.S. 

41 Z.A. Ahmed: in an article 'CPI and the Peasantry', New Age, 

42 Ibid., p.22

44 Political resolution of the CPI (Maharashtra Council) - Marathi pp. 16-17, 1953.


46 Free discussion with Gangadharappa Burande, Bapusaheb Deshmukh, Bhanudasrao Deolekar etc.