CHAPTER - 6

Strikes and Agitations of the Physically Handicapped: Impact on Public Policy
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STRIKES AND AGITATIONS OF THE PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED: IMPACT ON PUBLIC POLICY

The chapters on differently disabled categories of people reveal not only casualness and callousness but enormous neglect. That no systematic studies have been done, that no experiments have been done to find alternative solutions is indicative of poor quality of the public policy. The able bodied people can influence the policy through their interest groups or exert continuous pressure but the handicapped categories do not have these advantages. If the state fails to formulate proper policy measures, there are bound to be its ripples in the form of social unrest and consequent protest. That is precisely the reason why they resort to strikes and protests not only to pressurise the Government but mobilise the community opinion. The study of strikes and agitations is one way that provides an insight into the whole interface between the people and the handicapped at one level but more so the interaction between the handicapped and the public policy dynamics.

This chapter is an attempt to bring out the existing gap in policy making and implementation. It is not only the legislations themselves are weak but the implementation is all the more worse. The failure to give what is due to any category as their right precipitate into strikes and agitations. This chapter proposes to highlight the reasons for the major strikes by the handicapped in the State of Andhra Pradesh, that have taken place in 1978, 1992, 1995, 1998 years.
Strike by definition is to cease work and enforce a demand by paralyzing the routine functions. Agitation on the other hand is much more wider which keeps a matter constantly before the public to stir up public interest for a cause. Strikes and agitations as forms of protest are not a new phenomenon. They are as old as mankind. However, in India they are used on a large scale more during the modern phase, particularly during colonial period. This reached its height during the Gandhian era particularly in its fight against the British Rule. In a democracy strikes and agitations are strong weapons in the hands of the aggrieved men and women to ventilate their grievances, and draw the attention, sympathy and support of the public. This, in turn, can generate inputs for policy making. It is in this backdrop the strikes by the disabled or differently abled is studied.

In the recent past, there were some agitations held by the blind people in Madras and Delhi. In Andhra Pradesh there were agitations during the year 1978, 1992, 1995 and 1998, by the visually handicapped in particular and handicapped in general. The 1978 struggle lasted for more than three months. The governments intervened and responded. They did come up with some token packages for

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ameliorating the conditions of the visually handicapped. The following are the strikes and their patterns.

The 1978 Agitation

Many government orders that existed prior to 1978 such as 3% of reservation for the handicapped and 1% for the visually handicapped in the employment did not materialise. This led to the protest and demand from the blind students who, though qualified and eligible for the posts were not recruited.

The Andhra Pradesh Blind Welfare Committee spearheaded the agitation consisting of more than 400 blinds all over the state. The office bearers of the committee submitted petitions and memorandums to the concerned departments, i.e. Department for Women and Child Welfare, Social Welfare Department, District Collector, Hyderabad, Departments of Secretariat, Education Department. When no response came forth from them, a "group sitting" of nearly 300 blind students before the Secretariat (from 23-01-1978 to 27-01-1978), was launched. From 28-01-1978 the blind went on a relay hunger strike. The stir continued as 250 blind students belonging to government school for the blind, the government home for the disabled and the government home for the blind, took part in the relay hunger strike sponsored by the "Blind Welfare Committee". During this period of 56 days, a delegation of the blind also met the then Governor, Mrs. Sarada Mukherjee and submitted a memorandum recounting their grievances.
The stir continued in other forms. On 3rd Sunday of every March, which is being celebrated as the "World Handicapped Day" all over the world, in Andhra Pradesh, the "World Day of the Disabled Celebration Committee" of the city organized for a rally, which was joined by physically handicapped employees working in government, semi-government and private establishments and also officers working in the city. Many blind students joined the rally. The rally started from Osmania Medical College grounds enroute Koti, Legislative Assembly, Abids to Secretariat. Covering six to seven kms through the heart of the city. The Convenor of the rally submitted a memorandum to the Social Welfare Minister. The purpose of the rally was to appeal to the government and the general public of the need to give a helping hand to the less-privileged sections of the society and more so to the handicapped to combat with their disability.

The handicapped who had no other option to vent their agony and anguish went on fast "unto death", that commenced from 13-03-1978. They also released to the press their resolve that any damage to the lives of the three blind students who were on "fast unto death" would be followed up with an extreme step of self-immolation of the blind students. In the meanwhile, the blind students also went on a procession to the state legislative Assembly. The procession was stopped on the way. Later, a delegation, on behalf of the blind students' welfare committee, met the then Assembly Speaker. The Speaker asked the delegation to see him on 27th March.
The blind students continued the stir with an insistence that all their long-standing demands were conceded. The students giving slogan in front of the Assembly demanding their rights were arrested and all the sixteen members were released later on personal bonds; as the self-immolation threat was on the three blind students fast unto death - one of them being a women were forcefully taken away by the police and were admitted to the Osmania General Hospital. During this whole episode the slogans against the police rented the air "Police Rajyam Nashinchali" (Defeat the Police raj).

The very next day, a special rally was taken from the Secretariat to Gandhi Bhavan for mobilising the opinion of the public and the press. The visually handicapped, who were firm and determined to activate the state and draw the attention of the public released a press note drawing the attention to the fact that even after 60 days of their agitation nothing came out and hence resolved to resort to self-immolation, which was to commence from Raj Bhavan and touch all the places of public importance viz., Assembly, Secretariat, High Court, Collectorate Office, etc. Nearly 60-70 students prepared for self-immolation took out a procession the next day. It was at that stage her excellency, the then Governor intervened. The programme of self-immolation was postponed as the government decided to hold talks with the delegates of the "Blind Welfare Committee" and discuss their demands. Discussions were held on 26-04-1978 between the committee for the blind welfare and the social welfare department, Government of Andhra Pradesh.
Demands put forth by the Committee and Government's Response

- **Demand 1:** Eight blind postgraduates who were interviewed two years ago be absorbed immediately and remaining seven be called for interview and appointed on the basis of 50% marks as concession.

- **Response:** Eight blind postgraduates who were interviewed would be absorbed before the end of June 1978. In respect of remaining seven, they will be appointed in a phased manner in a period of about six months from the commencement of the next academic year.

- **Demand 2:** Immediate appointment of trained blind graduates and language Pandit's by the end of July 1978.

- **Response:** This will be discussed with the education department and efforts will be initiated to get them appointed before the end of July 1978.

- **Demand 3:** Strict implementation of 3% reservation for physically handicapped by allotting certain minimum quota for the blind and carry forward system should be followed with regard to reserved vacancies.

- **Response:** Orders have been issued already to all appointing authorities to ensure strict implementation of 3% reservation of physically handicapped. Specific cases where violations taken place would be remedied immediately. With regard to carry forward rule, same principles of carry forward as followed in the case of scheduled caste and scheduled tribes will be adopted and orders in this respect
will be issued within a period of one month - (Memo No. 958/SC & ST Cell, B/78-1, dated 20-04-1978).

- **Demand 4:** To set up a job surveying committee consisting of representatives of the blind to explore the avenue for employment of the blind.

- **Response:** A job survey committee consisting of officers will be appointed in a few days, association of non-officials with the committee will be considered separately. (The Committee has been appointed vide GO MS No. 128, dated 12-05-1978).

- **Demand 5:** Commencement of the diploma training course in teaching the blind and admission of blind into intermediate training course for teachers' before 30th 1978.

- **Response:** This will be discussed with the education department and suitable action be taken for this purpose before the end of June 1978. (A committee has been appointed for Model Training Programme vide GO Ms. No. 4751/GLOBALIZATION/77-4, dated 20-04-1978).

- **Demand 6:** Immediate absorption of qualified blind students before June 30, 1978.

- **Response:** As there are a few qualified blind musicians, they will be absorbed by the beginning of the academic year i.e. on or before 20th June 1978.

- **Demand 7:** Establishment of vocational and pre-vocational training centres for the blind.
• **Response:** Orders have already been issued to organize training programme for blind persons in typewriting and similar skills, vocational and pre-vocational training centres for the blind will also be established by the commencement of the forthcoming academic year.

• **Demand 8:** Appointment of blind additional officers in the special employment exchange for the physically handicapped, vocational rehabilitation centres and special section (blind) in medical welfare, women's welfare, children welfare department and the office of the director of school education within a period of six months.

  • **Response:** As this involved creation of staff, it would take time. However, in the meantime, an officer will be nominated in each directorate specially to deal with the problems of the blind. Proposals for the creation of staff and appointment of blind persons will be taken up separately within six months. (A committee has been formed vide government memo No. 1628, GL/78, dated 9-5-1978. Another committee has been formed vide government memo No. 1764, OP/ML Sc/78, dated 20-05-1978).

• **Demand 9:** An unemployment allowance of Rs. 300/- for blind postgraduates and graduates and Rs. 250/- for matriculate and above both trained and untrained blind, be sanctioned.

• **Response:** Though a general unemployment allowance is under consideration, the category of blind will be treated on a special footing, as their problems are peculiar in nature. Allowance in the range of Rs. 75/-, Rs. 100/- and Rs. 150/-
will be sanctioned sympathetically in view of the fact that blind are of a special category. No limitation as to the period for which their names are on the live registers is necessary. (Final decision on 2nd May 1978)

- **Demand 10:** Opening of blind schools and hostels for girls before next academic year.
- **Response:** A school and hostel for blind girls will be opened by the next academic year. Efforts will be made to appoint more teachers.

- **Demand 11:** Immediate appointment of adequate staff such as warden, matron, doctor, barber and watchman.
- **Response:** Action will be taken to appoint immediately the staff such as Matron, Doctor, Warden, Barber and Watchman in the existing vacancies. Suitable persons with proper orientation will be selected.

- **Demand 12:** Immediate allotment of additional budget provisions to meet the items a, b and c.

  - **a:** Additional expenditure incurred during the year 1977-78 to be approved (GO Ms No. 94/559/GI/Depy, dated 21-03-1978.)
  - **b:** Enhancement of reading charges for college students from Rs. 30/- to Rs. 60/-.
  - **c:** Immediate allotment of budget as per the enhanced rates of boarding charges, book allowances, clothing allowances for 1978-79.

- **Response:** Budget for enhanced rates accorded. The funds have been sanctioned by exempting treasury control, (vide GO Ms No. 84, dated 21-03-1978 and GO Ms No. 103, dated 21-04-1978).
• Demand 16: Admissions into educational institutions at all levels, including PG courses, for all the blind who apply with minimum qualifications.

• Response: This will be discussed with the universities and education department and efforts be made to get all blind people with minimum qualifications admitted before the end of July 7th.

Demand 17:

a) All the concessions extended to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes be extended to the blind on or before 1st June 1978.

b) Incentive for inter-caste marriage as between scheduled castes/scheduled tribes and others be extended to marriages between blind and non-blind.

c) Relaxation in minimum qualifying marks as is available for SC/ST be extended to blind.

d) Financial assistance to SC/ST advocates also be extended to the blind advocates before 1st June 1978.

• Response: All the concessions available for SC/ST will be available to the blind and all the concessions will be extended (GO Ms No. 150, dated 7-6-1978).

Demand 18: Implementation of sanction of the government for the reading charges for VII and X class as in intermediate class from 1978-79 academic year.

• Response: Reading charges will be given to class 7 to 10 where there are public examination from 1978-79 academic year (Memo No. 1632 - GI/78-2, dated 30-05-1978, Rs. 30/- per month per student orders issued).
• **Demand 19:** The hostel attached to the government schools for the blind in Andhra Pradesh should not be closed for orphans during the vacations.

• **Response:** Blind orphans in the schools for the blind will be allowed to stay in the hostel during the vacation. (Orders passed vide government Memo No. 1633-GI/78, dated 06-05-1978.)

• **Demand 20:** Supply of Brail’s textbooks to blind students and teachers.

• **Response:** Supply of Brail's textbooks as well as other stationeries will be arranged in the next academic year.

• **Demand 21:** Travelling concessions for the blind in APSRTC.

• **Response:** Travel concessions in RTC will be taken up with the APSRTC and suitable travel concessions will be extended.

• **Demand 22:** Establishment of transcription section in government high school for the blind in Hyderabad.

• **Response:** Supply of Braile's textbooks as well as other aids will be arranged by the next academic year.

• **Demand 23:** All the government schools for the blind attached with hostels in the state should be taken over by the social welfare department.

• **Response:** Government schools for the blind with attached hostels will be brought within the scope of the social welfare department as is already under contemplation.

• **Demand 24:** Supply of special aids to study the blind students and teachers.
• *Response:* Supply of Braille's textbooks as well as other aids will be arranged by the next academic year.

The demands put forward by the visually handicapped were genuine. The agitation was able to make the government in a way responsive to the most vulnerable segments of the society. The agitation received its support from various people's movement like the Student Federation of India (SFI), the Youth Congress, All India Students Federation of India (ASFI), All India Your Federation (AIYF), Progressive Democratic Students' Union and many more people's forums. With these support structures and the vigour and intensity of the visually handicapped themselves, a few policies got shaped during 1978 and after. The 1978 strike came to an end when the government called the delegation for talks, with assurance of immediate passing of G.O's in this regard.

The following orders pertaining to the twenty four demands put forth during the 1978 agitation, indicates that how the agitational inputs engender policy outputs.

I) On 6-6-1978, a circular (Memo No. N3/24237/78) was issued to the directorate of employment and training regarding the caution needed to be taken in the placement of physically handicapped persons. It stated, "the employment officers are aware of the reservations in service, both central and state government allowed to the physically handicapped applicants. Despite
these instructions, the placements of physically handicapped appointment is found to be far from satisfactory. In some cases, it may be due to the reason that several employers reject the applicants sponsored by the employment exchanges on the ground that the handicap suffered by the applicants comes in the way of discharge of the functions of the job. In some other cases, the employer is willing to appoint a particular physically handicapped candidate but the employment exchange is not in a position to sponsor him. After reviewing the placements of physically handicapped applicants and the provisions relating to the placements of the physically handicapped in the National Employment Service Manual, it is decided that physically handicapped applicant or applicants who are suggested to the employment exchange by appointing authorities may be sponsored irrespective of their seniority of registration on the registers. Any instance of misclassification of applicants as physically handicapped by employment officers in contravention of the definition given in National Employment Service Manual would entail serious consequences”.

II) The Secretary, Andhra Pradesh Public Service Commission, issued a GO relating to carry forward, (Government Order Ms No. 521, 04-07-1978) of 3% reservation in services - through the principle of carry forward of vacancies. The above order was passed in the light of the welfare committee of the blinds’ request that the carry forward rule in respect of unfilled
vacancies should be made applicable to physically handicapped persons in the same manner as in the case of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. The government considered it fair and just to adopt the same procedure for physically handicapped persons. Accordingly, the government directed that the unfilled vacancies meant to be filled by the physically handicapped persons according to the provisions of various relevant special rules/adhoc rules be carried forward for the succeeding recruitment years, and those vacancies be allowed to lapse thereafter as is the case with the scheduled caste and scheduled tribes.

III) **Social Welfare:** Welfare of physically handicapped, blind students, rates of charges for readers - were enhanced to Rs. 60 per month per student. Order in this regard were issued (GO Ms No. 103, dated 21-04-1978) This GO states the enhancement in the rates of charges for the readers to read out the course books to the blind students studying in government junior and degree colleges, and ordered that the rate of payment be enhanced from Rs. 30/- to Rs. 60/- per month per blind student.

IV) **Social Welfare:** As a part of the Welfare of the blind, financial assistance to law graduates who are blind was extended by the Social Welfare Department (GO Ms No. 150, dated 7-6-1978.) Government decided, inter alia, that the financial assistance given to scheduled castes, scheduled tribe advocates may
also be extended to blind advocates. It has, accordingly, been decided to sanction financial assistance to law graduates who are blind at Rs.500/- for enrollment fee, including stamp duty and Rs.1000/- for the purchase of law books.

V) In accordance with the Government of India - Sanctioning of Conveyance Allowance - the state government, after examining the suggestions and looking into the demands (one of the 24 demands mentioned above), it issued orders extending the benefits to the blind and orthopaedically handicapped employees employed under the state government.

VI) The government issued the order for unemployment allowance to the totally blind and the totally crippled persons who are on the rolls of the employment exchange for more than one year - at the rate of Rs.30/- per month the (GO Ms No. 135, dated 24-09-1981). In addition to this, there are a few more grants made by the state government for the handicapped like a) reserving stalls to physically handicapped persons at the bus stations of corporation at concessional rates, b) civil supplies - allotment of fair price shops - reservation of 3% fair price shops for physically handicapped candidates. Enhancement of diet charges and cosmetic charges to the inmates of
homes/hostels and residential schools/training-cum-production centres of Handicapped.

1992 Agitation:

The wide gap that persisted between the policy formulation and implementation of the said policies for the handicapped. In general and visually handicapped particularly with respect to employment. The decade of nineties saw a sharp decline in welfarism. The market driven capitalism rendered the people vulnerable. This shift led to enormous insecurity among different sections of the society. The directions of development of the nation at large and the state (Andhra Pradesh) in particular started drifting which in turn resulted in agitations and strikes to compel the state to adhere to its constitutional mandate. There were three strikes in quick succession in the decade of nineties.

Backdrop for the 1992 Agitations:

Most of the students and other inmates in the hostels and homes became frustrated with the lopsided policies and their ineffective implementation. When some of the students and inmates of the home for the blind at "Bhavaninagar" went

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3 The information and evidence for the 1978 agitation of the blind students is drawn from the local newspapers of Andhra Pradesh Deccan Chronicle, Eenadu and Andhrabhoomi from March 13, 1978 to May 14th, 1978.
to the Directorate to submit a petition with a request to improve the conditions of the home - and other basic facilities including implementation of reservation in jobs, it is not only that there was no positive response but they were ill treated. The Director categorically refused to respond to the problems. Agitated students were persistent on their demands. The agitating blind were handed over to the police. The police department not having any reason to offer for their arrest released them after a few hours. However, a few days later the inmates of "Bhavani Nagar" hostel were roughed up twice by the workers of other homes in the city on the advice of the higher officials of the department. Launching of a complain at Saroo Nagar police station did not help them in any way. Some of the blind students were suspended from the homes on the grounds of discipline. They were denied food and shelter from the homes. The students protested against this act. For this they were assaulted in which four of them were seriously injured. The inmates of the various hostels and homes in Hyderabad formed into an action committee and submitted a memorandum representing the whole issue to the concerned authorities and demanded immediate action. After submission of the memorandum, when no action was initiated by the concerned authorities the committee decided to go on an agitation.

**Forms of agitation and state response:**

Protesting against the indifference of the authorities to their demands the blind students went on a relay hunger strike for 15 days in support of their demands.
The failure of the administration to respond led the blind students to stage a dharna in front of the office of the Collector. On information the police reached the spot and asked them to disperse. However, the blind students insisted on going ahead with their demonstration. A scuffle soon ensued between the students and the police. When the warning to disperse went unheard, police allegedly resorted to lathi charge. This further provoked the students who squatted on the road and obstructed traffic - leading to rastha roko. Police allegedly resorted to lathi charge and took 57 blind students into custody. Later the action committee for the blind in a press release condemned the lathi charge by the police and demanded fulfillment of their demands.

Homes for the blind in the twin cities took out a procession in support of their demands in which nearly 400 students joined the "Chalo Assembly rally" under the auspices of the action committee protesting against the attacks on the inmates of the home for the blinds at "Bhavaninagar". The procession began from Gandhi Bhavan and culminated in a public meeting near the state Assembly. It submitted a memorandum to the speaker and the chief minister.

Blind students stir continued and the students went on a hunger strike at the secretariat for one month. Many press meetings were organized in which the office bearers of the action committee for the blinds declared to intensify the agitation and announced to organise a state wide agitation if their demands not met. The media
extensively covers the issue which served the purpose of sensitisation. The laxity of
the government stood exposed drawing the attention of various concerned forums.

The demands, by and large included the following.

1. Setting up of a Home Committee which should submit its report
within three months on the implementation of reservation for theblind.

2. Increasing the seats in Braille diploma course to 30.

3. Raising the budget of the welfare of the Handicapped department to
Rs.20 crores and the monthly mess allowances from Rs. 150 to Rs.400
and cloth allowance from (Rs. 100 to Rs.400) and soap and oil
allowances from Rs. 10 to 20.

4. Provision of security and other amenities at the Home for the blind
girls, setting up of training-cum-production centre and jobs to
educated among the sightless.

5 Suspension of some officials of the Directorate for the Handicapped
in connection with the incident of violence at the home for the blind at
"Bhavaninagar".

Agitations too went in vain. It did not yield any fruitful results. Though the
agitation lasted for 45 days, the state government did not initiate any serious
negotiations. After the opposition parties and other organizations put a little pressure, the minister for women and child welfare intervened and promised that she would look into all the matters and try to meet the demands of the Blind within a week and persuaded the leaders to call off the strike. However she failed to fulfil the promise and did not initiate any positive action, in this regard. This only indicates how the policy making levels are turning out to be insensitive to the demands of the handicapped.

**Support from Peoples Fora:**

The blind students strike lasted for 45 days. Notwithstanding widespread use of methods of intimidation throughout the strike the stir continued. The police came down heavily on the struggling blind students violating even the norms of rule of law. The ruling elite (both the state and bureaucracy) in the absence of legitimacy have come to depend on coercive force for their security and survival. This is sharply manifest in the consensus of the ruling groups on repression and the enthusiasm that the coercive armed wings exhibit in suppressing the peoples protest or dissent movements. The agitation under study derived its support from

- The Telugu Yuvatha
- The Andhra Pradesh Yuva Sangharshana Samithi
- The Andhra Pradesh Backward Caste Welfare association
- Progressive Democratic Students Union (PDSU)
- Action Committee of Hyderabad University
The Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee (APCLC) submitted its fact finding report to the government and demanded action against erring officials. The committee lamented that the administration was blind to the problems of blind students and their rights. The blind and the other such vulnerable groups need, if anything, special protection. The other democratic groups also had put pressure on the Government. One of the major outcomes of this strike was the transfer of the insensitive administrator - Director and Deputy Director, Welfare of the Physically Handicapped. It also led to a promise to meet some of the demands like enhancing the mess charges and filling up the allotted quota to the visually unemployed youth. The APCLC (Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee) and organisations for the protection of democratic rights, appealed to the state government to concede all the demands of the blind students. The OPDR also appealed to all democratic organisations and individuals to bring pressure on the government to immediately meet the demands of the blind.

In spite of the prolonged struggle and support from the various public interested groups, the response from the state was not all that encouraging. The strike was withdrawn on the promise from the government which was never fulfilled once the strike was withdrawn. The overall context has been changing in a way which is
unfavourable to the weaker sections over a period of time. This resulted in another
strike in 1995 within three years.

1995 Agitation:

On September 12, 1995, nearly 180 inmates from the home for handicapped
in Malakpet, Saleem Nagar Colony, Hyderabad, went on an indefinite hunger strike
drawing the attention to the conditions of the homes and hostels which was
horrifying and inhuman. This was a result of deprivation of basic necessities. The
conditions gradually deteriorated. The roofs of the homes were leaking, electric
wires were worn out, blankets and other bedding materials were not provided for
eight years, the fans given for repair never returned. Stationary was not provided on
a regular basis. The clutches that were provided to them in most cases either were
too short or too long making them more handicapped. Of the thirteen workers, only
five were regular. When this was brought to the notice of the authorities, they never
even bothered to inspect the place but started harassing the inmates.

On September 18, 1995, the blind girls of Malakept Home boycotted their
classes, as against their plight and insensitivity of the authorities who did not respond

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4 The information and evidence for the 1992 agitation of the Visually Handicapped is drawn from the
major newspapers of Andhra Pradesh - Deccan Chronicle, Eenadu, Vaartha and Andhrabhoomi from
to their repeated petitions. The home, which had nearly 300 blind girls, was understaffed. There were no teachers. The male teachers misbehaved with them. There was continuous insecurity. There was overcrowdedness. In a room with capacity of five more than fifteen were dumped. There was shortage of general study material in Braille up to upper primary standards in Braille except a few textbooks was made available. Failure to implement 1% reservation for the blind in the 18,000 teaching posts filled under DSC. This was the major reason for the outbreak of the 1995 strike. The 1% reservation that was promised to the eligible blind students, (according to the GO Ms No. 145, 1992) were not implemented. As a result, they were deprived of 450 non-teaching posts legitimately meant for the blind and nearly 180 teaching post. They were also deprived of their reservation quota in various appointments in group C and D in spite of the special recruitment orders by the government. The unemployed blind students, addressing a press conference, expressed their agony and help that the eligible candidates for various posts were becoming age barred. They also demanded recruitment in departments like the Secretariat, Corporations and Directorates.

The Action Committee of the Blind, submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister, Governor, MLAs and concerned authorities. All in vain. It evoked no response from the insensitive bureaucrats. When all channels for mediation to mitigate their problems failed, they resorted to indefinite relay hunger strike at the secretariat for nearly 60 days. This, as usual, did not move the state nor its
apparatus. It moved from relay hunger strike to indefinite hunger strike. This also produced no results. This led to "Chalo Assembly" rally and petitions were submitted to the speaker and other opposition leaders. Talking to the press, the Chairman of the blind students' Action Committee lamented at the chief minister "send the postcard" programme to immediately respond to the grievances. He said "though we are agitating for nearly 60 days, he has not shown any compassion, leave alone "through this postcard"

This period also witnessed administrative and Political Gimmicks. When the blind were observing indefinite hunger strike, this was the time that the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh Chandra Babu Naidu launched a new programme "Government at the Doorsteps". As part of this programme when the Chief Minister visited Karimnagar a lady from the crowd asked him the question, "when the blinds were agitating for nearly 58 days, though visiting the Secretariat every day, why did he not see them". This public protest made the government to come down. The Chief Minister appealed to the blind withdraw the hunger strike and come for talks. The agitated students declined to do so till their demands were conceded.

Instead of appreciating the problem, the administration pushes the police into action. The brutal force was used to thrash the blinds who gathered at "Potti Sree Ramulu's Statue". The students on fast unto death were dragged and forcefully admitted to Osmania Hospital as their health was deteriorating. This act of the police
should not surprise us, when they razed the tent where students sat for fast unto
death, demoralizing and dampening the assertive spirit of the vulnerable. As the
agitation became intensive, the political bosses started paying visits the spot. A
member of opposition party leaders raised the issue in the Assembly. One member
of the parliament criticized the government for its negligence.

This Agitation like the previous agitations did receive support from the people's
forums like:

Telugu Yuvatha

All India Democratic Students’ Association

Students' Federation of India

Progressive Democratic Students

People's Organization for Democratic Rights

All India Youth Federation and

Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee (APCLC), condemned the
government's apathy and extended their support to the ongoing strike. All the
forums for people's rights expressed their complete solidarity and pressurized the
government to act upon their demands. They submitted memorandums and met
various concerned authorities and insisted that the respective political parties raise
the issue on the floor of the house.
The demands of the 1998 strike included:

- Filling of reservation quota in various departments in group 'C' and 'D'
- To fill the 450 non-teaching posts meant for the blind and also 180 teaching posts.
- Recruitment in departments like the Directorate, Corporations and Secretariat.
- The Directorate for the Welfare of the Handicapped should be weakened by a handicapped person.
- To drastically improve the living conditions of the homes and hostels of the handicapped.
- Recruitment of female teachers in the homes, hostels and schools of the blind girl students.
- Periodic supply of teaching aids, enhancement of scholarships, mess and cosmetic charges, and increase the number of homes and hostels for the blind girl students.
- Increase in budget allocation to the handicapped.

Although the strike ended abruptly, its impact was there and the state government passed an order (GO Ms No. 165, 1996) for "a special drive in employment of the handicapped in teaching and non-teaching posts". This cold and partial response kept the unrest alive and there was another agitation in 1998. That
one agitation was followed by another agitation in quick succession indicates the growing indifference of the State and the restlessness of the handicapped.  

1998 Agitation:

One of the major strikes that happened during 1998 August 14th in Hyderabad was the strike of the visually handicapped. Failure to fill up the reserved 1% quota for the blinds in teaching posts during the 1998 DSC recruitment ignited the blinds to go on a relay hunger strike at Indira Park, hundreds of blind students all over Hyderabad from different schools, homes and hostels gathered on 12th August 1998 and commenced their relay hunger strike, which went on for nearly 76 days.

This strike began with the protest from the homes and hostels of the handicapped, Malakpet, Saleem Nagar Colony, Hyderabad. The inmates went on hunger strike for fifteen days in their homes, as their petitions and requests, produced no results. The immediate provocation was that even after three months of commencement of the academic year, the blind had not received their books and other stationaries. The wardens, instead of attending to the problems resorted to threats. The inmates demanded suspension of the warden. The protesting students were assured by the local MLA that their demands would be met. With the failure of

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5 The information and evidence for the 1995 strike of the Visually Handicapped is widely drawn from the leading dailies of Andhra Pradesh - Deccan Chronicle, Eenadu, Vaartha and Andhrabhoomi from August 10th 1995 to October 2nd 1995.
the promises of the legislative member, the handicapped students, on the eve of "Janmabhoomi" week for the physically handicapped, petition submitted to the Chief Minister drawing his attention to the trauma and government irresponsiveness. Addressing to the press, politicians and nodal officers of Janmabhoomi programme, the handicapped lamented the failure authorities to deliver minimum facilities such as hearing aids, walking sticks, wheel chairs as most of these given earlier became unusable. These were of not only low quality but the blind were not properly instructed of their usage. Though the inmates were planning for the protest on the Janma Bhoomi week for the previous one week, the concerned authorities just underplayed the whole issue. The Opposition party leaders extended their support to the demands the handicapped. They started talking of the misuse of crores of rupees allotted for the welfare of the handicapped. The (Seventh) 7th phase of the Janmabhoomi programme laid emphasis on the welfare of the physically handicapped under the grand scheme of 'Cheyoota' (Helping Hand) under which the distribution of tricycles and hearing aids were proposed to be distributed.

This protests from the physically handicapped were in vogue through out the Janma Bhoomi programme. They gheroed and boycotted the asset distribution function held at Hyderabad and Warangal. When this did not move the institutions to respond, they moved on to indefinite hunger strike demanding immediate allocation of jobs to the 250 qualified blind students. This did not yield any result. They went on a procession from Raj Bhavan enroute Nampally, Public Gardens, Secretariat and
assembly. "The blind government shall be made to open its eyes through the movement", "Down with the Janmabhoomi Programme", etc. rented the air. Organizing the press conference at the Basheerbagh Press Club, they recalled and reminded the promises of Chief Minister Chandra Babu Naidu in the "National Seminar for the Blinds" where he assured them that the 1300 posts in teaching, non-teaching and various other departments would be filled shortly. His assurance that all efforts will be made to uplift the blinds, and his government will expedite the decision and not adhere to any formalities in allocating budget for the disabled".

With the fast unto death entering the 5th day, the determination of the blind went up. It was at this stage the APCLC - a popular democratic voice in Andhra Pradesh - mediated between the agitating students and the government. The APCLC assured the striking blind students to take up their issues and pressurise the government.

The main demands of 1998 strike were:

One: To improve the living conditions of the homes and hostels of the handicapped.

Two: To implement the government order of 1995, special recruitment drive for the filling up the posts for physically handicapped.

Three: Trifurcation of the reservation quotas.

Four: Immediate recruitment of the eligible blinds to the posts of teaching and non-teaching.
This movement, like the previous ones, received its support from all the people's organizations which include the following organisations.

- Telugu Yuvatha
- All India Democratic Students' Association
- Students' Federation of India
- Progressive Democratic Students
- People's Organization for Democratic Rights
- All India Youth Federation and
- Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee (APCLC)

**State Response:**

- Enhancement of reading allowances to teachers, lectures and school assistants under the GO Ms No. 70.

- Concessional telephone facility to blind persons as a welfare measure - (GO Ms No. 99, DHH.)
• Trifurcation amendments were done, specifying clearly the 3% allotted quota among the physically handicapped (GO Ms No. 388.) Almost all the eligible blinds were recruited in the teaching and non-teaching posts. This resulted in nearly 275 teaching posts being filled.

• Mess (Rs. 180/-, Rs.330/-, ) cosmetic charges (Rs. 17/-, Rs.27/-) clothing allowances (Rs. 100/-, Rs.250/-) increased in leap

**Summing up:**

The study reveals that the outburst in the forms of agitations do cause social tensions, but it is an outcome of a growing failure of the government. It is worth noting that the period under study, i.e. 1978, 1992, 1995 & 1998, one major and common cause of all the agitations was "recruitment" of the handicapped in general visually handicapped in particular and improvement in the living conditions of the homes and hostels. Employment is one critical means for providing security to the ever - insecure and vulnerable segments of the society. The unemployment among the physically handicapped is a serious problem. In case of physically handicapped they have to be absorbed carefully and suitable job need to be identified and provided to them. The problem of deaf, mute and blind is different from that of orthopaedically handicapped.

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6 The information and evidence for the 1998 strike of the Physically Handicapped and Particularly of the Visually Handicapped is drawn from the leading local newspapers of Andhra Pradesh - Deccan Chronicle, Eenadu, Vaartha and Andhrabhoomi from August 18th to October 18th 1998.
The present study reveals that state through rhetoric temporarily holds the groups but as they get disillusioned, the upsurge gets intensified. In other words, when the anomalies get accumulated and the state is unwilling to care, the aggrieved groups express their demands through agitations. Agitations, though cannot bring metamorphosis in the state policies nor can it play transformative role, they surely pressurize the state to formulate policies and enforce them. The inactive anti-people state and its agencies can be made reactive. The study indicates that every agitation evoked some response. This shows that there is no substitute for movements to make the repressive state more responsive. In these agitations the state did use the police in ruthlessly suppressing the agitation of the blind. For instance in "Bhavani Nagar Home for the Blinds" the police was brutal. In 1995, when the blind unemployed youths went on a fast unto death, their tents were demolished, they were beaten up and arrested. The solidarity that was shown by various people's forums suggests the need for consolidation of democratic forces to make democratic rights integral to the concept of development.

Although in all the cases of agitation the Government temporarily averted the agitation but not solved the problems on a lasting basis so that the agitations would not recur. As long as there are problems, frustrations and discontentment, there are bound to be organised protests. This leads to a more basic question that: will agitations make the governments become more welfare minded? Or will the increasing insensitivity to the welfare would give rise to more militant agitations by the handicapped in general and visually handicapped in particular?