

**CONGRESS POLITICS IN ANDHRA PRADESH:
Strategy and Social Base of the Party in
Opposition, 1983—1989**

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Certificate

Certified that the dissertation entitled **Congress Politics in Andhra Pradesh: Strategy and Social Base of the Party in Opposition, 1983-1989** submitted by **G.Partha Sarathi** is in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy**, is his bonafide work and has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other University.

We recommend that this dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


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INTRODUCTION

This study is an attempt to understand a specific phase of politics of Andhra Pradesh for a period of six years when the Congress party lost power to Telugu Desam and finally re-emerged with a thumping majority in 1989. The subsequent emergence of Congress after its initial decline in 1983 on the one hand, and the emergence of TDP as a force to reckon with in the state on the other, indicated a definite shift in the political loyalties of certain specific socio-economic groups, which comprised social base of these parties. This dissertation focusses attention on the shifting patterns in the social structure that have contributed to the decline of the Congress in Andhra Pradesh. The changing nature of social base and the shifts in political loyalties of the groups comprising it, brought an end to the long standing one party dominance of Congress and heralded a "competitive two party system of sorts". Also the performance of Congress as an opposition and TDP as a ruling Party in determining the outcome of 1989 elections indicated an increasing political consciousness and maturity of the electorate.

An in-depth study of Congress party politics with regard to its electoral performance and social base as well as its functioning as an opposition party, is imperative to

understand the seemingly unpredictable nature of political behaviour of various social groups and instability of electoral coalitions in the state politics of recent years.

Most studies of the Congress have focussed attention on the party in power. Significance of this study lies in shifting attention to the role of the Congress as an opposition party. By analysing the changing social base and strategy of Congress it is possible to uncover the process of decline of the Congress and the reasons that might explain its strengths and weaknesses. This exploration of the functioning and strategy of the Congress during this phase will also bring to light the bases and possibility of the re-emergence of the party and the ways in which the party was able to recover the lost ground.

The aim is to explain the changes in Congress party as a whole since 1967, resulting in the decay of state level party organisation and its electoral defeat and also to explain the re-emergence of Congress party in 1989 as a phenomena specifically autonomous in its own right. The decline of the Congress party in Andhra Pradesh is symptomatic of the decline of the once very powerful party in the country as a whole.

The point that needs to be underscored is the change in the nature of organisation and functioning of the Congress

party over a period of time viz. the increasing tendency within the party organisation towards centralisation and emergence of personality based politics, consequently undermining the federal nature of the organisation and thereby its ability to establish and mediate an effective state - society relationship, articulate political demands increasingly made by the newly emerging classes. It is with this perspective in mind, that one should try to understand party politics at the state level. As long as there was a symmetry established between the federal political institutions and the federally organised Congress party, there were strong vertical linkages established between the party at the Central level and state level, thereby facilitating a two way flow of political demands within the party and also through formal institutional channels of the institutionalized polity. Consequently party organisation and its executive wing mutually reinforced each other enhancing their respective abilities in demand management at both levels of party and political institutions. Since 1967, when Congress party lost power in half of the states and could remain in power at the Centre only with a slender majority, it heralded an increasing tendency of centralisation and dominance of personalities over the organisation by various factors like charisma etc.

As a consequence, the earlier phase of federal party organisation came to an end. State level party organisations come to be controlled from the Centre rather than functioning autonomously. The crucial result of this process is that the Congress party - which established and mediated the state-society relationship through articulation of demands and supports through vertical linkages - no longer, with its federal nature lost, could do so.

The increasing mobilisation of new classes with the changing political economy, resulted in new demands being made by new classes which were incorporated at the state levels. As a result Congress party organisation resulted in new factions competing with the ones already entrenched in the party organisation. The conflict and competition, between the factions vying for political power and other scarce political goods, could have been solved to a large extent through democratic conflict resolution mechanisms - in other words through "inner party democracy". But in a situation where such a role being exercised by the Centre without cognising the specific aspirations of the state level factions, it results in a dissatisfaction to those factions which are not favoured by a powerful but indifferent Centre. This also leads to intense and bitter factionalism to begin with, opposing and subverting the factions in power and favour of the Centre, and finally

fragmentation of the party with the disgruntled factions breaking away at the opportune moment to form opposition parties. In the phase of federally organised party, at every level factionalism resulting from incorporation would have been solved if the Centre played the role of a neutral empire, ensuring that the rules of the game would be adhered to rather than imposing the result of the game.

This is the logic which one needs to keep in mind when trying to study the dynamics of state level Congress party organisations. In the specific case of Congress party organisation in Andhra Pradesh, the story repeats on the same lines.

Right from the formation of the state of Andhra Pradesh, Congress party remained in power until 1983 when, for the first time a regional party led by film actor turned politician N.T.Rama Rao came to the forefront. 1983 remains a watershed year in Andhra Pradesh politics since, the "dominant party" phase was put to an end by the emergence of a regional opposition party which electorally captured power, bringing a "competitive two party system of sorts" (of Atul Kohli). What is the latent and manifest logic which led to the emergence of a political situation like this? The initial argument posited that the breakdown of vertical linkages between central and state levels of

Congress party organisation as a result of increasing centralisation provides, to a certain extent, the plausible answer.

The increasing centralisation and dominance of personalities over the Congress party organisation as a whole resulted in constant central intervention, imposing its own support logic rather than giving room for the Andhra Pradesh Congress party organisation to articulate the demands and aspirations of various competing factions through autonomous and inner party democracy. As a result, within the Andhra Congress, Reddy factions were given Chief Ministerships and other plum party positions by the Centre for their loyalty to the personalities at the Centre. On the other hand, Kamma factions were ignored and were accommodated through other governmental and party positions inspite of their numerical and economic position. The constant indifferent intervention of the central leadership and the disgruntlement of the out of favour factions led to an increased popular perception that "Hyderabad is ruled by Delhi", with no strong leadership at the state, since such leaders were perceived to be a threat to the central leadership and were sidelined by bringing weakmen - in some cases without even a mass base. Congress party and the government came to be seen as weak, ineffective and having

no courage to provide stable and effective governance. As a consequence, when a regional party like Telugu Desam staked a claim that Andhra Pradesh should be governed from Hyderabad rather than from Delhi, it captured the popular imagination. In contrast to a party sunk by weaklings, Telugu Desam was perceived to be different since the party was led by N.T. Rama Rao a charismatic film actor. Being a Kamma himself he could provide a platform for the disgruntled and out of favour Kamma factions and to the Kamma community which was dissatisfied for the lack of political power to match its socio-economic power. All these factors created a situation whereby in 1983 Assembly elections the Congress party lost its power and Telugu Desam became the ruling party.

If one correlates the centralisation and loss of federal nature of Congress party and its consequent breakdown of vertical linkages, thereby state level Congress party increasingly becoming dissented, factionalised, fragmented ineffective and finally losing power, then how does one explain the state level Congress party coming back to power after a gap of more than six years in 1989 assembly election, when the central party organisation showed no signs of any organisational restructuring.

Common sense explanations, the subsequent corruption and nepotism within the ruling Telugu Desam, increasing

autocratism of N.T.Rama Rao, promotion of Kamma caste as a dominant group both within the party and in the government to the exclusion of newly mobilised and increasingly articulate intermediary castes like Kapus, blind populism with no long - term vision, thereby bringing state exchequer to the brink of bankruptcy, may suffice to understand the phenomena superficially but will fail when probed deeper - their contradictions becoming apparent. Hence a more in-depth understanding of the phenomena is essential.

To undertake an exercise towards such an understanding is the aim and task of this dissertation.

This dissertation makes an attempt to link two levels of explanations. The manifest level being analysed in terms of electoral performance of the Congress party and its role as an opposition and ruling party within the wider narrative account of party politics in Andhra Pradesh from 1983-1989. However, such a manifest level is not exhausted by the explanation of that level only. But to understand the events of this level by taking recourse to a deeper and latent level explanations viz. the changing social base of Congress party. Here the attempt is to understand the nature of social base in terms of those classes and castes which were supporting Congress till 1983 election and the nature of their demands and mobilisational strategies and the nature

of social base of the party when it regained power in 1989. What was the caste/class coalition and its location in the changing political economy which led to the defeat of Congress party in 1983 and the victory of Telugu Desam; and finally what was that social nature of winning coalition that helped Congress to regain power in 1989. Thus by linking up both these levels of explanation, this dissertation tries to understand a phase which is absolutely a watershed in Andhra Pradesh politics.

On the evolution of party politics in Andhra Pradesh during this period, there have been several journalistic accounts apart from available official documentation and published secondary sources, but practically no academic research. The analysis follows a case study design, as it attempts to understand the Congress party at the state level. The data for this study has been collected from various sources, both primary and secondary. These are Election Commission Reports, literature on elections ranging from books of Indian and foreign authors, newspaper reports, periodicals and journals.

This dissertation is divided into four chapters. These are:

- 1) Dominance of the Congress party in Andhra Pradesh - from pre-independence to 1983.

- 2) Electoral Performance and Social Base of the Congress Party
- 3) Congress as an Opposition - 1983 - 1989
- 4) Conclusion

First chapter attempts to explain and analyse the dynamics of dominance and decline of the Congress party in Andhra Pradesh from pre-independence period to 1983. This chapter essentially is a historical review of the role of the Congress party in the state upto 1983, which attempts to provide a historical backdrop and set the tone of discussion for the subsequent chapters.

Second chapter deals with description and analysis of the electoral performance and social base of the Congress party in the state. Congress support between 1983-1989 is examined in terms of social collectivities that are central actors in public life in Andhra Pradesh. In view of the dominant and pluralistic character of the Congress, two questions are addressed in this chapter. One is the question of what were the reasons for the electoral success or failure of the Congress in the state. Second is the question of what communities, classes and regions have made up the winning coalition forming the support base of the Congress in the elections in which the party won or lost.

Third chapter deals with the new and unfamiliar role of the Congress as an opposition in the state from 1983-1989. It also provides a balance sheet of the performance of the ruling Telugu Desam and opposition Congress within and outside state legislature.

In the concluding chapter, major findings have been summarised and a bird's eye view of the dissertation is presented.

Chapter 1

**DOMINANCE OF THE CONGRESS PARTY
IN ANDHRA PRADESH: FROM PRE-INDEPENDENCE TO 1983**

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to explain and analyse the dynamics of dominance and decline of the Congress party in Andhra Pradesh from the pre-independence period to 1983. Through the course of this discussion, certain aspects of the Congress party in Andhra Pradesh are examined: the socio-economic and political factors that paved the way for the successful one-party dominance by the Congress party in the state; the problems faced by the party in sustaining itself locally and the role of the local elite towards the same; and, the reasons for the decline and defeat of the party in the 1983 elections.

In common with other states, the Congress party led the struggle for independence in both Andhra and Telengana regions.¹ The struggle for separate Andhra state, and responsible government in Telengana, in the early twentieth century were led by political organisations closely allied with the Congress and the Communists. However, the unique feature of Andhra Pradesh is that the Congress was in power right from independence (or the first General Election in 1952) to as recently as 1983.

While the Congress governments either crumbled or sustained in power in coalition with other parties and groups in most of the states in India since 1967, Andhra Pradesh presented a different case altogether. The percentage of votes since 1967 increased in the state and it has been described as a "citadel of Congress"² in 1960s and 1970s. No other evidence better demonstrates this description than the victory of the Congress in the state in 1977-78 elections. In these elections the victory of the Congress had been viewed as a culmination of the faith reposed by the electorate in "Mrs. Gandhi's image as the protector of the interests of the poor and deprived and symptomatic of the ^eh_kighted expectations of the masses concerning the obligation of the government."³ But political advantage gained by this victory was quickly frittered away with the split in the party, increasing factionalism and encroachment of the central leadership over state politics. Therefore, the 1983 elections produced an alternative to the Congress party in Andhra Pradesh.⁴

In this context, following questions need to be considered regarding the dynamics of dominance, decline and defeat of the Congress party in the state:

- 1) How did the Congress derive its legitimacy to govern?
- 2) What was its social base within the electorate?

- 3) What strategies did it pursue in competing with other contending parties?
- 4) What were the reasons for its fall from political grace in the state which had consistently provided it with strong electoral support in both national and state elections for more than three decades after independence?

SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF THE STATE

The state of Andhra Pradesh was formed on 1st November 1956 by merging nine Telengana districts of the erstwhile Hyderabad state with the Andhra state that was carved out from the old Madras Presidency. Incidentally, it was the first ever linguistic state established in India. Andhra Pradesh consists of three distinct regions viz., coastal Andhra or Circars, Rayalaseema and Telengana. Coastal Andhra is substantially more developed than the other two. It has better natural productive endowments and has been exposed to the process of modernisation as it was under the direct rule of the British Raj.

Rayalaseema has all the natural disadvantages with rocky and barren land, scanty rainfall, lack of good irrigation facilities and is prone to droughts. Telengama, a part of the princely state of Hyderabad^e, was ruled by the Nizam in a typical feudal style which left the region

totally bankrupt ridden with corruption and inefficiency. He was assisted in his rule by the powerful Reddy and Velama communities who owned large tracts of land.⁵

Substantial regional differentiation emerged once the English East India Company succeeded in ousting their rivals for profitable export trade in Andhra textiles. The British power over Andhra was subsequently erected on firm foundations. The construction of the railways in 1862, together with the construction of the barrage or anicuts over Godavari and Krishna rivers in 1847 and 1853 respectively, resulted in an unprecedented prosperity of the coastal districts of Andhra. "The Krishna-Godavari anicuts qualitatively influenced the dynamics of Andhra's economy and politics". After the construction of the anicut agriculture became lucrative, and there was a sudden rise in the tenants and agricultural labourers. Agricultural labour as a proportion of the total agricultural work force increased substantially in the coastal districts. Although there was an increase in agricultural production there was no perceptible increase in the wages of this labour class as there was a rise in the number of agricultural labourers.⁶ Concentration of land and large scale migration of landless labourers from the neighbouring districts were the factors that accounted for the stagnation in the condition of agricultural labourers.

Prior to this economic transformation, "caste and class coincided for some time to produce a local structure of dominance that placed the Brahmans at the apex."⁷ According to the 1921 census, Brahmans accounted for 3 percent of the total population in all the districts of Andhra Pradesh. Kapus/Reddys constituted the largest group of over 15 percent among forward castes. The Kammas, second largest caste groups among forward castes, totalled at 4.8 percent. There are other sections of the forward non-Brahman cultivating castes, present in disproportionate strength in the advanced coastal districts, although they are smaller in total members than the Reddys and Kammas. The backward castes constituted a very large proportion of the population at 46 percent in 1921. However, they were unevenly distributed, and divided into a large number of small groups. Among the scheduled castes, two caste groups together constituted 17 percent of the population - the Malas (7.3%) and Madigas (9.7%). They were, however, divided by caste and sub-caste distinctions. Muslims and Christians made up another 7 percent of the population.⁸

The advance of commercial agriculture set in motion the process of economic differentiation in the agrarian sector which gave rise to a new middle class among the cultivating castes in coastal Andhra . On the other hand, it also resulted in increasing urbanisation and occupational

changes. In terms of occupational changes, the Brahmans took to new avenues in the shape of education and employment in professions and government service. It is these new middle classes in both agrarian and urban sectors which contributed to changes in the traditional status hierarchy and provided the support and leadership to the Andhra renaissance, and later the freedom movement.⁹

On the other hand, the conditions in the Telengana region, which was a part of Hyderabad state during the 19th century, were entirely different. The state was under the Nizam's feudal rule, being virtually bankrupt, with a depletion in its resources as the more affluent districts were transferred to the British. Also, rampant corruption and inefficiency proved to be major stumbling blocks to development.¹⁰ Besides this, the agrarian structure was particularly oppressive. Dhanagre describes it as a 'page from medieval feudal history'. The jagirdari system of land administration was the most important feature of political organisation of Hyderabad. The jagirdars were so powerful that they could grab lands by fraud which, in countless instances, reduced the actual cultivator to the status of a tenant at will or a landless labourer. Moreover, the jagirdars, zamindars and deshmukhs exploited their tenants and labourers through such penacious practices as vetti

or forced labour. The disappearance of virtually any distinction between tenants and agricultural labourers eased the way for the Communists to build a peasant resurrection at a later stage.¹¹

ORIGIN OF CONGRESS PROVINCIAL COUNCILS IN ANDHRA AND
TELENGANA AND THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT

In the first quarter of the twentieth century, the Andhra region had witnessed two movements. First, it was drawn into the nationalist movement which also had in it the other movement i.e., the movement for a separate state for Andhras.¹² Participation in these movements had initially been confined to the urban upper class intelligentsia and the richer commercial classes, but it gradually extended to the rural middle classes.¹³ The visit of Bipin Chandra Pal in 1907 to Andhra increased the nationalist fervour of the people. Andhra towns were vibrant with the spirit of nationalism.

On the other hand, the idea of linguistic reorganisation to form a Telugu speaking state and the formation of separate Congress Organisations (Andhra Provincial Council and the Hyderabad Pradesh Congress) have a common history behind them.¹⁴ The idea of a composite Andhra state combining the areas of Andhra, Telengana and Rayalaseema was first conceived as early as 1908 in

Machilipatnam. The demand for a separate Andhra State was articulated at Bapatla in 1913 where the Andhra Conference held its first conference. The Conference hoped "to use Telugu Congress as a means to achieving a separate Telugu province with a university for Telugus".¹⁵

The creation of the Andhra Provincial Congress Committee in 1917 gave a distinct political consciousness to the people of Andhra. The seeds of linguism sown in 1908 stuck roots in 1917.¹⁶ The Congress party officially committed to the principle in 1920 by accepting the Andhra plea for linguistic redistribution of provinces. Although Hyderabad District Congress was formed by Vaman Naik in 1918, a full fledged Hyderabad Pradesh Congress Committee was found in 1938 only. But the ban imposed by the Nizam forced the Congress to work under the banner of Andhra Maha Sabha which carried the struggle against the Nizam rule as well as the British Raj.¹⁷

CONSOLIDATION OF THE CONGRESS POWER IN THE STATE

From 1913, when the demand for a separate Andhra state was first articulated, till almost independence, the leadership of the Congress party was in the hands of the Brahmans, "who constituted the upper castes and middle classes most responsive to new opportunities arising from modernization."¹⁸ Though Brahmans never functioned as a

homogeneous caste group, they were bent upon exercising power and influence because of their commanding position in education, administration, professions as well as in the national movement. This was said to be the reason for some Reddys and Kammās joining the Communist party at that time.¹⁹ The steady rise of the Communist party in Andhra brought to the forefront leaders coming from the non-Brahman peasant caste groups. Simultaneously, these dominant agricultural castes consolidated their position in the advanced coastal districts and thus made their presence felt in the Congress party too.

The rivalries between the dominant Brahman and rising non-Brahman leaders of the Congress led to caste-based, confrontational politics in the state. The commanding position of the Brahmans led the non-Brahman elites to suspect the Home Rule (demanded by the Congress in 1916) as a design for allowing Brahmans to dominate the province. On the other hand, the demand of the Congress leaders based in advanced coastal districts for a separate state of the Telugu speaking population in the Madras Presidency was also opposed by the non-Brahman leaders who feared Brahman pre-eminence in the new province.

The demand for a separate Andhra state also activated regional rivalries. The leadership of the more backward

Rayalaseema opposed the idea because it raised the prospect of domination by the more advanced coastal areas.

However, in 1937, leaders of the two regions-Andhra and Rayalaseema - came to an agreement popularly known as the Sribagh pact. The agreement proposed measures to provide equal opportunities for the development of both regions on equal footing by providing representation in educational, political and administrative fields, irrigation facilities etc.²⁰ This was the first major success of consensus and compromise in Andhra politics and it became a model for solving such problems later on.²¹ The agreement clearly indicated the intention on the part of the Congress to accommodate the interests of the urban middle classes for education and a share of political power, and the rural middle classes for water, in both regions as a price of consolidating their support.

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During the same period, conditions were undergoing a change in Hyderabad. The first quarter of the 20th century marked the beginning of a cultural awakening heralded by the establishment of higher educational institutions like Osmania University. Political activities also gained momentum. Once the state imposed a ban on the organisation of political parties, non-political organisations were established to take up serious social issues. Andhra Jana

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Sangham, later renamed as Andhra Maha Sabha, was the most important of them which worked in liaison with the Congress party in Andhra regions.

Another important dimension of pre-independence politics of Andhra was the rise of Communist and Socialist parties which sought to organise tenants and agricultural labourers. In 1923, N.G. Ranga established Kisan Sabhas to fight against the arbitrary powers assumed by zamindars.

The Congress party, which formed the government in 1937, received solid support from the rich peasantry. Consequently, a Committee was appointed under the Chairmanship of T. Prakasam to enquire into the zamindari system. This report submitted in 1938 strongly supported the rights of the peasants against the zamindars. The most important conclusion of the report was that the cultivator and not the zamindar was the proprietor of the soil. Although the Congress government accepted the recommendations of the Committee for zamindari abolition, it could not introduce the bill before the ministry resigned in 1938.

However, while the anti-zamindari agitation succeeded in projecting the economic interests of the rich and middle peasantry, the plight of the agricultural labourers remained largely ignored.

In Hyderabad, Andhra Maha Sabha, which initially included leftists among its membership, was in practice controlled by the 'moderates' who represented the interests of the rich peasantry. All sections supported the resolutions against the jagirdari system, including the abolition of vetti but not all were prepared to address the issues concerning poor peasants.

Serious differences between the moderates and the leftists resulted in a split in 1944, after which the leadership of Andhra Maha Sabha passed into the hands of the Communists. The Communist party built strong bases among the tenant cultivators and landless labourers and launched an armed struggle against the government, landlords and deshmukhs. The armed struggle shook the foundations of the state. But after the overthrowing of the Nizam in the police action in the year 1948, the armed struggle was successfully repressed.

POST-INDEPENDENCE POLITICS: THE DYNAMICS OF CONGRESS DOMINANCE IN ANDHRA PRADESH

The Congress party has been in power in the two component parts of Andhra Pradesh (Andhra and Telengana) since independence. After the formation of the state of Andhra Pradesh in 1956, in all the parliamentary and assembly elections till 1980, the party secured a

comfortable majority in the state Legislature and has been well represented in the Parliament. What Rajni Kothari called the 'Congress System' of one party dominance was in full working order in the state.²² Opposition parties, sharply divided among themselves, could not hope to mount an alternative to the ruling party but acted instead as pressure groups outside it. The success of the Congress is generally attributed to the pluralistic character and dynamic role it played before and after independence.²³ Although many opposition parties came into being, it was recognised that the Congress was the only party, representing a historical consensus and enjoying a continuous basis of support and trust.²⁴

But it is the consolidation of the Congress party by accommodation and absorption of the rich peasant castes and the erosion of the strength of the Communists in 1950's that helped to establish one party dominance of the Congress in Andhra Pradesh. Nevertheless, the regional and caste conflicts continued in the Congress, which became a fertile ground for the growth of 'factions'. Indeed, to sustain its dominance and to limit the growth of the opposition parties, the Congress usually adopted the latter's programmes and even tried to absorb their leaders.²⁵ If the same social forces in the state raised the spectre of political separatism, the Congress would become the voice of

regionalism just like when the Socialist parties appeared ascendant and socialist slogans dominated the political rhetoric, the Congress resolved to support the development of a socialist pattern of society.

In the post-independence period, the effect of 'politics of accommodation' on political developments in the state is clearly evident. The weakening of the once powerful Communists in the state can be traced to the way in which Congress mediated the diverse demands of important sections of the society.

The political scenario in both Andhra and Telengana regions immediately after independence was one of the emergence of the Congress and Communist party as powerful contenders. Under the pressure of the agrarian struggles in the zamindari areas as well as to undercut Communist support among the Andhra peasants, the Congress government of Madras had passed the Madras Estates Abolition and conversion into Ryotwari Act in 1948.²⁶ The legislation abolished all zamindari and inamdari estates and gave the ryots the pattas of their lands over the 33 percent of the area in the Andhra districts.

Nevertheless, the Communist party continued to concentrate on agrarian problems and emphasised the need for

structural changes that alone could alleviate the distress of the landless and poor peasants. In the first state election in Madras in 1952, the CPI pledged to work for the formation of 'Visalandhra', and to carry on the struggle against the exploitation of the poor peasants and landless labourers. In the Andhra region the Communists polled 20.9 percent of the votes and won 50 seats. Main support of the CPI came from the advanced coastal districts with large number of landless labour and poor peasants. Similarly, in the 1952 general elections held in Hyderabad state, the Communists won 36 out of 41 assembly seats they contested. A major reason for the poor performance of the Congress was, factionalism, provoked largely by Kamma-Reddy caste rivalry.²⁷ Factionalism within Congress had reached a boiling point by this time and two important leaders, N.G. Ranga, the Kamma leader, and T. Prakasam, a dominant Brahman leader, had left the party to form two separate parties.

As the merger of all Telugu speaking districts drew near, there was a strong feeling that the Communist party would form the government in a united Andhra Pradesh. Contrary to all expectations, mid-term elections in 1955 to the Legislative Assembly of Andhra State (formed in 1953), resulted in a clear and convincing victory for the Congress, leaving the Communists with only 16 seats. More

surprisingly, when the elections were held in the Telengana region in 1957 (after the merger of Andhra and Telengana in 1956) it contested. In Andhra Pradesh as a whole, the Congress triumphed in more than double the number of constituencies as the Communists, securing 75 out of 105 seats in the new Legislative Assembly.²⁸

The decline of the Communist party and the rise of the Congress resulted from a combination of events, calculated and fortuitous, during the period of 1952-57. The first event was the formation of Andhra Pradesh in 1956, uniting the Telugu speaking people of Andhra and Telengana. The demand for Visalandhra on a linguistic basis had been raised in the early twentieth century; it had been accepted in principle by the Congress in 1928.²⁹ Nevertheless after independence, the national leadership retreated from its earlier endorsement of the linguistic reorganisation of the states on the ground that it would harm the cause of national integration.

This position was considered unacceptable by the educated urban middle-classes of Andhra. The death of Potti Sreeramulu in 1952 triggered off a frenzy of violence in the Andhra region. The centre subsequently intervened and conceded the separation of Andhra state from Madras.³⁰ This series of events helped the Congress to strengthen its hold.

The Communist party, which had also supported the demand for Visalandhra, could no longer capitalize on the issue. On the contrary, the Congress received the credit for accommodating the Andhras.

The second reason for the victory and consolidation of Congress power in the state was the cooperation achieved by the party leadership with the splinter groups (led by N.G. Ranga and T. Prakasam) that had earlier deserted the united Congress party. Moreover, the support of the Soviet union to the national leadership of the Congress undermined the Communist strength nationwide.

Finally, and among the foremost reasons, it was the support gained from the cultivating peasant castes by the Congress party after the abolition of intermediary tenures, first in the Andhra region and then in Telengana for which the Communists had struggled for and built up public opinion. The reforms slowed down the process of polarisation between landed and landless classes, leading instead to the proliferation of small and marginal farmers.³¹ This in turn weakened the Communist base and contributed to the consolidation of the Congress rule. This change in the social base of the party is described as 'the first transition' in Andhra politics in which power passed from Brahmans to non-Brahman rich peasant castes.³²

The introduction of Panchayati Raj institutions in 1959 may be described as the last step in the consolidation of the Congress in Andhra Pradesh. These institutions enormously strengthened the party hold on the rural electorate.³³ Indeed, in 1950s and 1960s the party won the elections through intermediaries such as village headmen, landed gentry, Panchayati Raj functionaries etc. who were very influential in the countryside in mobilizing votes.³⁴ But the elections of 1959 to the various local bodies further accentuated the factional feuds in the party.

Therefore, the 1950s and 1960s witnessed progressive waves of mobilization of various dominant caste groups into the Congress politics as well as the crystallisation of the tradition of factional competition which was to characterise the Congress politics subsequently.³⁵ Also, the process of caste mobilization was accompanied and helped by the introduction of Panchayati Raj institutions in the state. This process of Congress consolidation sustained the hold of dominant castes over the party till 1970s.

Congress Dominance in 1970s (The Process of bringing backward classes and minorities into Congress fold):

A close analysis of election results in 1962 and 1967 reveals that the Congress was fast losing its momentum and

managed to win the elections with narrow margins. The greatest erosion of voter support was evident among the youth, illiterate and lower-income groups. The Congress was increasingly seen as a party that was represented as well as controlled generally by middle and well-to-do peasant castes.³⁶ This erosion of social base resulted in concomitant rise in radicalism and peasant movements in state politics. From the Telengana Armed Struggle (1946-51) till 1967, we find a comparative lull in peasant movements, part of the reason being the change in the strategy of Communists who tended to adopt a less militant and a more constitutional approach.³⁷ However, from 1967 one can trace the rise of radicalism and peasant movements - both peaceful and violent in the state. One of the main reasons for this is the impact of the Green Revolution in the state which resulted in the intensification of landlessness on the one hand and the concentration of land on the other.³⁸

In this context, the Andhra Pradesh Agricultural Workers Union, under the leadership of the CPI, started a series of struggles, both independently as well as unitedly with other peasant organisations, to ventilate the problems of the agricultural workers. The most important of these struggles were the Koolidandu March (1967), Land Grab Movement (1970) and Struggle for banjara land.³⁹

It should also be noted here that for the first time in 1967, the hegemony of the Congress was broken in many states and non-Congress governments were formed. Once the strength of the Congress was considerably reduced at the state as well as central level, the factionalism in the party came to the fore, in the form of power struggle between the so-called 'conservatives' and 'progressives'. In the face of social crises and economic stagnation the split in Congress took place in 1969. It was justified on the basis of ideological conflict between those with a vested interest in the status quo and those committed to 'socialist' change. The latter camp led by Indira Gandhi went to the people on a platform of populism and radicalism, though not intending to alter the existing state of society in any drastic manner. Mrs. Gandhi's faction emerged victorious and once again the rule of one party was established. But it brought about an important change in the structure, nature and operation of the Congress party, both at the national and at the regional level.

The Congress so far had relied upon important personalities to function at the state level while absorbing the leaders of the newly emerged dominant castes. After the 1967 split, Prime Minister Mrs. Gandhi wanted to eliminate any new formations of an alliance of powerful state leaders

which could threaten centre's authority.

In this context, the political process in the state during 1970s underwent a perceptible change, influenced by the personality and populist politics of Indira Gandhi.⁴⁰ Also there was a conscious effort to change the social base of Congress from the customary landed castes to the dispossessed groups.⁴¹ Mrs. Gandhi initiated a number of socio-economic programmes intended to benefit the dispossessed groups and consolidate her power by destabilizing the dominant castes who posed a potential threat to the centre's control. A number of anti-poverty programmes were launched as part of a strategy to reduce Congress reliance on dominant landed class and increase its support among those sizeable classes of small and marginal farmers. Simultaneously, programmes were devised to benefit specific target groups particularly scheduled castes, tribals, women and backward castes. These programmes succeeded in surrounding Mrs. Gandhi with a radical aura and strengthened her position among the weaker sections.

In tune with this 'radical' mood set by Mrs. Gandhi, the Congress Chief Ministers in Andhra Pradesh, first P.V. Narasimha Rao and then J.Vengal Rao, increasingly recruited the elite of the backward classes and weaker sections into the Congress hierarchy.⁴²

Another marked feature of state politics in 1970s is the weakening of the state leadership and the domination of the centre.⁴³ Apart from the above reasons, one major reason for this change is the intermittent factionalism in the state Congress and the limits set by it to the politics of accommodation.

Since the Congress party in Andhra Pradesh is a conglomeration of different factions and groups, it is always a policy of accommodation and adjustment that secured maximum support to the leader of the government. This was the policy adopted in the past by the Chief Ministers either in the composite state of Madras or the state of Hyderabad or even in the state of Andhra.⁴⁴ K. Brahmananda Reddy who succeeded N. Sanjeeva Reddy as Chief Minister in 1964, became an unparalleled leader in the state because of this strategy and continued in that position till 1971.

But his castle was shattered by the Telengana agitation in 1969 which could be considered as the first failure of accommodation in the Congress as well as in the state politics after the formation of the state in 1956.⁴⁵ Chenna Reddy - a dissident leader of Congress - led this agitation not only for the propagation of separate Telengana state and protection of Telengana interests, but also used it to fight against the state leadership of the Congress led by

Brahmananda Reddy.

This failure of accommodation and adjustment of mutual interests, within the party and the state, cost the Congress leaders very dearly because after the exit of Brahmananda Reddy as the Chief Minister of the state, the decision-making power in state politics went into the hands of the Congress High Command. P.V.Narasimha Rao was the first Chief Minister to be appointed directly by the High Command to succeed Brahmananda Reddy. It is during his tenure that the decision-making power of the state Congress gradually shifted to New Delhi. This is mainly because, Narasimha Rao was selected to the post of Chief Minister to carry out the so-called 'radical' politics of Mrs. Gandhi (such as land ceilings) as well as to widen the social support base of the Congress by weakening the hold of the rich peasant castes over the 'vote-banks' provided by the poor peasants and the landless. But this had the consequence of initiating the process of polarisation of Andhra politics along class and caste lines.⁴⁶

Narasimha Rao, in carrying out these policies initiated from above, had alienated the dominant castes, particularly in the advanced coastal districts, who felt that the Land Ceiling Act was going to hit them hard. On the other hand, Reddys who had ruled the state for over one and a half

decade started losing their power and influence.⁴⁷ With these grievances the Andhras started the movement for a separate state in which their dominance could be restored. The result was that the centre felt compelled to remove Narasimha Rao from office in 1973. A lesser dominant community leader, J.Vengal Rao, was installed as the leader of the party. Vengal Rao continued the policies of Mrs. Gandhi without, vigorously implementing the land ceiling legislation that adversely affected the interests of the landed upper classes. The emergency, declared in 1975, also conveniently helped him to implement some of the less controversial measures included in the Twenty-point Programme by activating the administrative apparatus - an achievement which was given wide publicity during this period.

Although Mrs. Indira Gandhi was defeated nationwide in 1977, in Andhra Pradesh the Janata Party could not make a dent into her hold over the poorer sections. The backward castes and the scheduled castes continued to identify Mrs. Gandhi with the poor, while the dominant agricultural castes in both the regions, to a large extent, aligned themselves with the Janata Party. The Congress victory with the support of the weaker sections indicated an increasing social polarization both along caste and class lines.⁴⁸

DECLINE OF CONGRESS DOMINANCE IN ANDHRA PRADESH (1978-82)

The political advantage gained by the victory of 1977 Lok Sabha elections was quickly fritted away. The senior leadership of the Congress party in the state remained severely divided and internal squabbles resulted in a split in the state party in 1978.⁴⁹ This is a result of the second split in the Congress party that occurred in 1978 as a consequence of the conflict between the followers of Indira Gandhi and the votaries of collective leadership and democratic functioning. In 1969, the split was a response to the changing situation of Indian society. There was atleast a pretention of ideological conflict and several of the "progressive" leaders remained with Mrs. Gandhi. But in 1978, the split was engineered by Mrs. Gandhi for personal reasons on the question of loyalty to her. Some self-seeking politicians rallied with her seeking to cash in on her "personal appeal" and the vast monetary resources at her command. It is reported at that time that "many of her supporters are either prickly personalities or controversial figures who lack in essential qualities of leadership for organising her party in the state or giving her greater poltiical credibility at the Centre".⁵⁰

The 1978 split had a direct impact on the Congress party in the state, which was considered as a "bastion of the Congress". The split in the state was vertical with the

the Chief Minister Vengal Rao choosing to remain with the official Congress led by Brahmananda Reddy (then AICC President) and only second rank political leaders remained with the Congress. As a result, the Congress organisation in the state was considerably weakened.

In this situation, Assembly elections were held in the state in the same year. The Congress won an absolute majority in the state and the Congress (R) was routed. The Janata party could manage to win only 60 seats out of 293.

The major reasons for Congress victory are as follows:

- a) Major issues as democracy versus dictatorship and emergency excesses did not have any impact on the electorate of the state;
- b) the splitting of the votes among the parties (or fronts) opposing the Congress;
- c) none of the four main constituents of the Janata party were strong enough to pose an electoral challenge to the Congress even in the earlier years; and
- d) "Mrs. Gandhi's image as the protector of the interests of the poor and the deprived which favourably inclined these socio-economic interest towards the Congress".

Nevertheless, the electoral victory of Congress was not as convincing as it appears to be if we look at the percentage of votes it polled in the 1978 election. Though the party won more than a simple majority in the Assembly it could secure only one-third of the total votes. In most constituencies the votes polled by the Janata party and Congress (R) put together were far higher than the votes polled by the Congress.⁵¹ So the decline of the Congress in terms of votes polled in the Assembly elections becomes clear in 1978 itself.

Chenna Reddy, then APCC(I) president, was elected as the leader of the Congress Legislative party. During his tenure, bitter criticism of governmental functioning came from Congress M.L.As rather than the opposition parties in the Assembly.⁵² His government was charged with corruption from the time he assumed office in 1978 and there were demands for his resignation^o from all quarters. Since Mrs. Gandhi was out of power and because Andhra Pradesh was the only state where Congress ruled between 1978-80, she took the position that the Chief Minister had the right to take decisions as far as the state affairs were concerned. But once she came back to power in 1980, dissident activity in the state Congress got intensified and this certainly had blessings and encouragement of some of the Central leaders.⁵³ This finally resulted in the removal of Chenna

Reddy. It was the third time when Chief Minister who enjoyed majority in the House was dislodged from office.⁵⁴

Therefore, this period was only an extension of the on going process in the Congress party and represents more a process of hastening centralisation of power and erosion of inner-party democracy as well as federal principles. Thus, the process of ministerial changes in 1970s by the central Congress leadership (or High Command) became the source of instability in the state Congress party.⁵⁵

The Congress leaders of the state were fully conscious of the charismatic leadership of Indira Gandhi. They gave her a free hand in state politics because their own electoral success mainly depended upon her favour. Under these circumstances, personal decisions of Indira Gandhi, instead of party politics, decided the fate of the state in 1970s, particularly since 1978.⁵⁶

The Game of Changing Chief Ministers

The game of changing the Chief Minister continued in the state even after the removal of Chenna Reddy in October 1980. Nadendla Bhaskar Rao and N. Janardhan Reddy, who tried to succeed Chenna Reddy, continued their attempts to capture the highest office in the state even after Anjaiah replaced Chenna Reddy as the Chief Minister. Not before long, the

High Command was sore at Anjaiah's weak performance and gave a green signal to the dissidents to forment trouble. It was alleged that the Congress lost its ground to the Janata and Communist parties in local bodies elections and Assembly bye-elections. Anjaiah also failed to weed out corruption which was institutionalised during the tenure of Chenna Reddy.

Finally, the High Command lost confidence in Anjaiah and Venkatram Reddy was made the Chief Minister mainly because of his close contacts with Indira Gandhi since emergency days. Venkatram Reddy's wife is a Kamma and the rationale behind his appointment the Centre peddled was that this would work for the unity of the two dominant castes in the state viz., Reddys and Kammas.⁵⁷ Venkatram Reddy promptly responded to the idea of the Centre and dropped 'Reddy' from his name. Nadendla Bhaskar Rao who was disillusioned by the above developments started negotiating with cine star N.T. Rama Rao to start a regional party.

The new Chief Minister Venkatram had to face more problems soon after he had taken over the charge. Four M.L.As resigned from Congress to join the new regional party which was in the offing under the leadership of N.T. Rama Rao (NTR), and the disgruntled Congress leader N. Bhaskar Rao. The state faced severe drought and the economy was

already crippled due to the extravagant expenditure by the predecessors. The conflict of interests, mud-slinging and bickering among the senior cabinet colleagues led to the erosion of the party image and disfunction of administration.

Though the High Command had given time to Chief Minister Venkatram to counteract the NTR wave, to contain the dissident activity, to implement the party programme, and to win the confidence of the people by attending drought relief, he had thoroughly failed to achieve the above ends. Moreover, he had given enough time to NTR to build his base among the masses.

The Congress High Command realised by the end of the August, 1982 that it was losing ground to NTR, and the state Congress became a divided house heading for a debacle.⁵⁸ They wanted to relieve the "weakling" Chief Minister, and to rejuvenate the party. K. Vijayabhaskar Reddy, M.P. from Kurnool and former detractor of Indira Gandhi and the follower of Brahmananda Reddy was selected as successor to Venkatram.

The Congress Debacle: Though the state Congress machinery was overhauled and attempts were done to solve some of the urgent problems of the state under the Chief Ministership of K. Vijayabhaskara Reddy, the indigenous disease of

factionalism weakened the party's hold on the electorate and led to its debacle. N.T. Rama Rao highlighted the failures of the Congress rule, promised to establish a clear government and won the confidence of the electorate. The Congress faced a crushing defeat in the Assembly elections on Jan. 5, 1983 by winning only 60 seats.

CAUSES OF THE FAILURE OF CONGRESS

(a) Erosion of Social Base: By the late 1970s, several policies initiated by the successive Congress governments in the state such as the programme for the distribution of government lands, house sites for the landless and the abolition of bonded labour, appeared to benefit disproportionately the Harijans who were the most easily identifiable members of the target groups. As a result, the Congress leadership was increasingly identified with the Harijans in the rural areas. The rich and middle peasantry among the upper castes also resented the increasing importance being given to Harijans who gained a sense of group identity and confidence.⁵⁹

Moreover, the poor peasants belonging to the backward classes also began to feel alienated. Their condition in many parts of the rural areas were found to be worse than that of the agricultural labourers. Thus the rural poor themselves became divided along caste lines.

The collapse of the Congress system alarmed the emerging business elites who believed that Mrs. Gandhi's type of 'popular accommodation' was threatening their basic interest in political stability.⁶⁰ The tremendous industrial growth in the state brought about a new regional economic process which was reflected in the political process. Of the two dominant castes in the state, the Reddys and Kammas, the latter proved to be more enterprising. While the social complexion of the elites largely remained the same, their economic base and interests underwent a change. The business classes desired not only an effective and efficient state but a government which could protect their interests. The state Congress was no longer able to present a dynamic image - its house divided and faction ridden. The frequent change of Chief Ministers and their obvious dependence on the Centre came to be resented by the educated middle classes.⁶¹

It was this disillusionment that gave rise to slogans such as the 'dignity' and 'self respect' of Telugu people. The youth, the educated middle classes, the backward classes and the industrial classes were all in search of an alternative to the Congress.

The limits of political accommodation also became evident in the case of the minorities. In the old city of

Hyderabad, with its concentrated Muslim population, politics took more and more a communal complexion. From the year 1978 there were intermittent communal riots in the old city resulting not only in arson and loot but considerable loss of human life. The emergence of 'Majlis' (MIM) as a political party was actually an indication of the growing isolation of minorities.

(b) The Chronic Dissident Disease: Since the Congress split in 1978, infighting in the party was never as acute as it was just before 1983 elections. As mentioned earlier, in five years three Chief Ministers were removed, while the Presidents of the Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC-I) were changed five times in 30 months. The split in 1978 created chaos in the state Congress which not only left it a divided house but also weakened it organisationally. Members joined the Congress at will and left at their convenience.⁶²

(c) Interference of the Centre: The loss of political autonomy at the highest level of state leadership led to proliferation in the number of aspirants for power. Such a trend was inevitable once the 'election' of the Chief Minister by the state Congress was replaced by 'selection' from the centre. This literally resulted in a situation where every MLA considered himself fit for a ministerial position, if not the Chief Ministership. The result was

considerable infighting and factionalism with its counter productive effects on electoral outcomes.⁶³

Under such conditions, elected legislators did not evince any interest in nursing their constituencies, since the patronage and charismatic leadership of Mrs. Gandhi were crucial both for securing a seat and winning the elections. This trend initiated the process of 'depoliticization' of party workers which ended in loss of credibility of Congress workers.

The state Congress leaders' insensitivity towards people's problems was articulated by the sixty year old Madras based multimillionaire Kamma cine star - N.T. Rama Rao. The dissatisfaction of the people with the functioning of faction-ridden Congress party made him enter the field of politics generating euphoria over the slogans of "restoration of Telugu self-respect", humiliation of Telugus by a system of imposing the Chief Ministers from Delhi and fight against the corrupt and inefficient Congress rule coupled with some populist measures like providing rice at Rs. 2 per kg. and a mid-day meal for the school children etc.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, none of these measures aimed singly or together at bringing about structural changes in the system.⁶⁵ The policies broadly covered a diversity of groups

and a variety of pressing problems; the populism in some of these measures is quite evident. The attempt to accommodate youth, women and backward classes indicated the continuity in political style.⁶⁶

CONCLUSION

Therefore, the rise of a regional party and its leader illuminates the socio-economic dynamics that contribute to the process of political change. The Congress party, which succeeded in consolidating its power base through the politics of accommodation, ultimately saw its social base eroding partly on account of the inherent limitations of accommodational politics, which, once pushed too far, displaced influential leaders of the dominant castes and middle classes. Since no new party organisation could be built to substitute horizontal mobilization of the poor for vertical patron-client networks, this whole process contributed to the excessive dependence on a single charismatic leader and increasing centralisation of power in state politics.

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Chapter 2

ELECTORAL PERFORMANCE AND SOCIAL BASE OF THE CONGRESS PARTY

INTRODUCTION

Andhra Pradesh witnessed unprecedented political change during the period between 1983-1990. For the first time since the formation of the state, the Indian National Congress, the dominant party in the state, lost in the elections to the Legislative Assembly in 1983 to a nine month old regional party - Telugu Desam. The rout of the Congress in the state was complete when Telugu Desam captured 30 of the 42 Lok Sabha seats in 1984 and emerged as the largest opposition group in the eighth Lok Sabha. Further, N.T. Rama Rao, thrown out of power by the Governor, had to be called back owing to popular pressure in the middle of 1984. It was during this period that the state witnessed the mid-term poll to the Assembly which saw further erosion of Congress strength in the state.

Meanwhile, rural and urban local bodies in the state underwent important structural transformation in 1980s, and direct participation of the political parties in the electoral process at the district and mandal levels has given a new direction to local politics.

Finally, the year 1989 is again a turning point in state politics as it witnessed the return to power of

Congress in the state.

This peculiarity of electoral behaviour in the state, and its possible consequences on the political process, needs an explanation. This explanation has to be sought in terms of electoral performance, support structure and legitimacy of the Congress in the state during the last one decade.

Various studies on the Congress party's continuation in power for more than three decades highlighted the legitimacy it derived from the landed gentry, agricultural labourers and industrial labourers, and in short all classes of people.¹ In terms of caste, which is an important element of political mobilization and support structure, the party enjoyed allegiance of principal castes in the state. Later on, the backward classes have been mobilized and their support was ensured to the party.

However, as mentioned earlier, due to factionalism, centralised politics, corruption and excessive hunger for power there was a decline in the credibility of the Congress among its traditional support groups. The emergence of market economy in the post-Green Revolution period also created new alliances and thereby leading to a shift in power structure.² An authority vacuum emerged as Congress party's organisation and electoral popularity declined. It was into that vacuum apparently, that NTR stepped in but

filled it only to the extent of winning few rounds of elections.

However, the failure of the Telugu Desam government to preserve democratic norms, to respect the rule of law and avoid undue strife as well as its insensitivity on the question of respect for weaker sections and minorities, over a period of time, reduced its capacity for accommodation and thereby created opportunities for the main opposition - the Congress.

Congress leadership adopted what Rajni Kothari has termed as "the rhetoric of all out confrontation", in which, (to be discussed in the next chapter) the opposition to NTR and his party Telugu Desam was primarily mobilized around the issues of corruption, caste violence and the dictatorial functioning of NTR Government. The failure of TDP to accommodate the groups it mobilized in early - 1980s left them vulnerable for mobilization by the Congress, thereby leading to the latter's victory in 1989 Assembly elections.

At first glance, it may seem that few dramatic changes have actually occurred in state politics. It may also appear that the victory of the Congress party in 1989 Assembly elections closely resembles those that have come before - the aberrations being 1983 and 1985 - and all that one needs is to dust off and update the classic studies of the party system. To adopt that view, however, is to overlook a number

of basic changes in the politics of the state over the last one decade that have radically altered conditions within parties, relations among parties, and partly because parties have provided the main link between state and society relations.³

Therefore, the second part of this chapter aims at describing and analysing the electoral performance and social base of the Congress party in the state from 1983 to 1990, while attempting to explain the factors that led to the decline in the credibility of TDP among its support groups and its defeat in 1989 Assembly elections.

In examining the 'electoral performance' of the Congress the primary focus is on the elections to Lok Sabha and Legislative Assembly held between 1983 and 1989. For the purpose of convenience this period has been divided and studied under two phases: first, 1983-86 which is characterised by complete rout of the Congress party and domination of electoral scene by NTR and the TDP; Second, 1987-89 which had witnessed the decline of NTR's popularity and also the strength of his party and the revitalisation and return to power of the Congress in the state.

The focus on 'social base' of Congress party is based on the assumption that no political institution comes into existence or operates in a vacuum. The institutions, after all, are products of a socio-historical process. The social

base refers to different castes and classes which are engaged in continuous competition and struggle for power and dominance.⁴ It is this process that determines their social consolidation and accumulation of material wealth. Thus the social and political institutions are essentially the manifestation of a deeper process. If this assumption is accepted, then the identification of broad interest groups locked up in competition can be made. And as a part of this exercise the role and function of the Congress party can be identified, if not located.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND POLITICAL SUPPORT OF THE CONGRESS PARTY: FROM INDEPENDENCE TO 1983

Caste and class have been important elements in the social and political structure of Andhra Pradesh both before and after independence. The Congress party which played a leading role in the national movement as well as in the formation of the state, riding on the popularity of popular support came to power in 1950s and continued in power till 1983. However, prior to independence, Congress influence was confined mainly to urban educated middle class and the higher caste Brahmans. The middle peasant castes and landless labourers, on the other hand, were under the influence of the Communist party. While the Congress leadership during this period came essentially from Brahmans, over the years, however, it gradually shifted to

the dominant agriculturist castes of Reddys, Kammas and Velamas. As an electoral study puts it, "the party leadership gradually shifted in the late 50s and early 60s from the urban centres to the rural periphery, from the educated middle class in the cities to the rural elite, from the higher urban based caste to the middle peasant caste."⁵ The lower castses or backward classes, during this period were either completely left out of mobilization or their support was not taken into consideration.

The other category of social structure that determines the social base and electoral fortunes of the parties is the existence of three regions in the state - the Coastal Andhra, Rayalseema and Telengana.

Among the principal agriculturist castes (or dominant castes), Reddys, Kammas, Rajus and Velamas are the most important. The caste group is not entirely homogeneous but has tended to be mobilized as one broad formation. However, difference in economic status of different layers of the population within the same caste as well as between various castes has introduced some complexities and contradictions in the political behaviour of this broad spectrum, particularly in recent years.

In the pre-independence period the bulk of dominant agriculturist castes or the rich and middle peasantry were under the influence of the Communist party.⁶ However, by

manipulating the policy instruments of accommodation⁷, the Congress party began to attract support from this caste group. Introduction of adult franchise, benefits of state patronage and most importantly, the adoption of agrarian reform policy, are some of the determining factors that led to considerable increase in popular support of the Congress party among the rich and middle peasantry.

It has been observed subsequently that in the rural areas of the state "the politics of adult franchise has raised the influence of non-Brahman middle peasants who are at once numerous and economically substantial. Men from these groups are more prominent in Congress than before".⁸

Thus, the introduction of democratic politics opened up opportunities for the rural middle peasantry and they were quick to realise the importance of political office for the maintenance and enlargement of their prestige and economic interests.⁹

The most important reason, however, for the shifting loyalties of the rich and middle peasant castes, from the Communist to the Congress party is said to be the introduction of land reforms in the state under the latter's government. With the abolition of zamindari and jagirdari system, the rich and middle peasantry acquired full rights on their land. They were also benefitted by the irrigation facilities and other concessions, such as bank loans and

subsidies, offered by the Congress government. Thus the landed gentry of Andhra State was accommodated in the Congress party.¹⁰

With the introduction of Panchayati Raj institutions, this particular class became more powerful in the Congress party. Not only the Chief Minister, presidents and secretaries of PCC belonged to this class, but also most of the legislators, Panchayati Raj functionaries and heads of cooperative bodies were from this class. This trend continued till 1972.

This elite-caste-dominated Congress party received vital support from scheduled castes and minorities and these groups were given adequate representation in the Congress party.¹¹ While they were accommodated in the party hierarchy, they did not wield any real power in the party or outside it. The reservation policy strengthened the Congress support among them. This group, as a distinct minority formation, has played an important role in stabilizing the support base of the Congress party, particularly in rural areas.

Between the weaker sections and the upper crust falls the caste group known as 'backward classes', which though numerically largest, is the most heterogeneous caste group in the state. They have gradually crystallized into another formation which despite many internal rifts and divergences,

has tended to act as a distinct political group in recent years. The politically conscious sections of this caste group were mobilized by the Congress in its favour during 1970s but the party had not been able to retain their support in the latter period.

While the first shift in the social base of the Congress party took place in the initial years after independence, the second shift in Congress support structure took place after 1969 split in the party.¹² Following the split, Indira Gandhi made a deliberate attempt to restructure the party support base. She tried to reduce the dominant caste representation and raise that of the lower castes in order to supplement the traditional Congress support among the customary landed castes. That means there was a conscious effort to change the social base of Congress from the customary landed castes to the dispossessed groups.¹³

The 1972 elections in the state saw the Congress government initiating public policies aimed at mobilizing other socio-economic interests in order to broaden the support structure of the party. The national policies such as the abolition of privy purses, bank nationalisation and state government policy of land ceilings were introduced for the purpose. Also, the state was ruled by leaders like P.V. Narasimha Rao and J.Vengal Rao who were committed to the

widening of the support base of the party. However, the mobilization of the lower classes was not merely a matter of egalitarian commitment; it was also essential for the political survival of this party as well as these leaders who came from numerically small, though high status, castes.¹⁴ Thus, Narasimha Rao, a Brahman and Vengal Rao, a Velama, were determined to dilute the influence of the dominant groups, such as Reddys and Kammas, who were firmly entrenched in the power structure of the state. Thus, "the split (in the Congress) resulted in the initiation of many radical programmes which sought to transform the Congress party from a party of the privileged to a party of masses".¹⁵

It is evident from the selection of the candidates for the State Legislative Assembly elections in 1972, when the Congress party increased the representation of the weaker sections to the extent of 53 percent (i.e. 173 out of 287 party tickets). Forward castes got 47 per cent of seats as against 58.8% of seats in 1967 elections. And yet the party took care not to alienate the dominant castes completely. Instead, the party leadership sought to break the Reddy and Kamma hold on power through a skilful exploitation of conflicts among and within these groups. As a part of the strategy to weaken the dominant caste hold, P.V. Narasimha Rao, a Brahman from Telengana was appointed as Chief

Minister. Mr. Rao curtailed the powers of the Zila Parishads which were dominated by the Reddys. Steps were also taken towards the implementation of land reform measures in order to weaken the powerful hold of the landed gentry i.e., Reddys and Kammas. To what extent land reform measures brought about socio-economic change is debatable. But the intent of the political strategy was to project the Congress as a radical party and to mobilize wider support among the downtrodden.¹⁶ The new strategy of support building paid high dividends and the Congress won a huge majority in the 1972 assembly elections.

A study of Narasimha Rao's cabinet in 1972 also shows that the representation of Reddys fell from 28.6% in 1969 to 13.8%, while that of the backward classes increased from 10.7% to 27.7%¹⁷ However, Rao's strategy to create his own support base by forging links between the Harijans, backward classes and minorities failed to materialise because this had the consequence of initiating the process of polarisation of state politics along caste and class lines.¹⁸ He was forced to quit due to a violent agitation in the state on the Mulki rules issue. It was widely believed that the dominant agriculturist castes had played a key role in the agitaion.¹⁹

A lesser dominant community leader, J.Vengal Rao, was then installed as the leader of the party. Deriving his

strength from the national leadership, Vengal Rao evolved a strategy to broaden the Congress base among the weaker section and minorities. He too sought to limit the hold of the dominant castes on his government by reconstituting the party and panchayat committees to prevent these castes from using their socio-economic positions to win elections and reassert themselves. The internal emergency proclaimed in June 1975 enabled him to further strengthen his hold on the party.²⁰

An election survey conducted at the time of the fifth Assembly elections, 1972 gives us an interesting insight into the shift ⁱⁿ support structure of the Congress party. The survey conducted by the Osmania University shows that among the various parties, the Congress was overwhelmingly favoured. Class and caste-wise break up indicates a wide support to the Congress from backward classes (58.7%), lower castes (34.1%) and minorities (43.1%).²¹

Even in the 1978 Assembly elections, the selection of the candidates by the Congress party followed the 1972 trend of allotting a large number of seats to the backward classes and weaker sections. Thereby, in 1978, the party claimed to have allotted 189 out of 289 seats it contested for the weaker sections and the remaining 100 to the forward castes. Subsequently, the Congress won 175 seats in the state assembly. Of this forward castes accounted for 42% and the

backwards 34%, while the scheduled caste and scheduled tribes was 21% and minorities 3.5%. Clearly, the Congress was much more representative of the various communities now than in the past²². However, the peculiar feature of the Congress during this period was its insistence on caste suffixes, an indication of caste, along with the names of the candidates. It was to demonstrate clearly the extent of representation it gave to minorities and weaker sections.²³

Another state wide survey conducted at the time of 1980 Parliamentary elections identifies a large number of Congress supporters. Among those who said that they were close to a particular political party, 70.07% identified with the Congress. Among them, 47.5% belonged to the BCs, 10% to the SCs and 27.7% to the minorities.²⁴ This data while compared to previous ones, reveals a gradual decline of Congress support among the backward classes and the minorities. According to the same survey, a majority of Congress supporters belonged to the illiterate, lower income and low status sections of the society. However, by the early 1980s, Congress had lost considerable support among younger age groups.

Gradual Alienation of Dominant Castes and the other Backward Classes

Meanwhile, the support building strategy that the Congress leadership had pursued with success in the state

began to run into trouble. This is primarily a result of changing political sympathies of the state's important socio-economic groups. The gradual alienation of the forward castes, particularly the Kammas and their acts of retaliation against the ruling party as well as the significant decline in Congress support among the backward classes is one of the major causes of Congress decline in Andhra during the late 70s and early 80s.

Therefore, by late 1970s, one can discern two important political developments in the state, which reveal the fast erosion of legitimacy of the Congress party among various sections of the society. One significant development that has taken place in the political economy of the state over a period that has changed the nature of the caste rivalries and the castes' relative power positions is that the Kammas proved to be more enterprising than the Reddys. They utilised their land wealth to bankroll expansion into numerous commercial activities and the changing economic base strengthened the power potential of the Kammas. Although some of that new economic power found expression in the increased number of ministerial positions to which they were appointed, Kammas continued to resent the failure of Indira Gandhi to appoint a Kamma Chief Minister in the state. The increasing disjunction between their economic power and their failure to capture the highest offices

alienated the Kammass. As a result, they aligned their financial and political support behind NTR.²⁶ When Telugu Desam party was formed by a charismatic leader, N.T.Rama Rao, who could attract support from cross-section of the society it provided an opportunity to this class to rally behind the TDP, by facilitating its easy victory in the 1983 election.

The second significant development that led to the erosion of Congress social base is the shift of the backward classes, who consist of a large number of heterogeneous castes such as artisans, tenants and poor peasants. After having experienced relative social mobility as a result of changing agrarian relations and the benefits flowing from the various welfare measures adopted by the government for them in the spheres of education and employment, they are slowly emerging as an important political force in the state. Significantly, some of these castes have increased their share in the ownership of land over a period of time. They were hitherto playing a subservient role to the dominant castes and for the first time acquiring their independence from the dominant castes.²⁷

The Congress party, which maintained its coalition of various castes and groups in the state, through a network of various welfare schemes, patronage, reservation etc. and by accommodating the emerging elite among the

backward classes, had failed to sustain it in the face of increasing demands for more benefits from the same sections of the society. The several welfare policies introduced by the Congress party such as the distribution of government lands, house sites for the landless etc. have bypassed the backward classes and appeared to have benefitted the scheduled castes disproportionately. This led to resentment among the poor peasants and agricultural labourer among the backward classes, who developed a sense of 'negligence' by the Congress. This segment gradually crystallized politically against the Congress party and their support was successfully tapped by N.T.Rama Rao in early 1980s. Thus, the competition between the scheduled castes and backward classes for the limited welfare benefits of the state led to the shift of the latter away from the Congress and rallying their support behind Telugu Desam with the hope that it will take care of its interests. As long as Congress had the support of the backward classes, it could win elections. As some of the backward classes moved away from Congress, however, Congress's electoral hold on Andhra became precarious.²⁸

SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND POLITICAL SUPPORT OF THE CONGRESS PARTY: FROM 1983-1989

The multi-class alliance achieved by the Congress party began collapsing once it alienated the dominant

agriculturist castes and subsequently, the backward classes. No less important is the significant decline of the party support among the urban voters. It can be seen in the gradual decline of electoral support to the Congress party after 1972 and the subsequent consolidation of the opposition parties.

A pre-election survey of the 1983 Legislative Assembly elections in Andhra Pradesh revealed that the Congress had lost considerable support among "younger age groups, educated urban voters, middle income groups and backward classes".²⁹ Interestingly, the survey reported no significant shift of the Congress traditional support from among the women, illiterates, upper castes, low income and rural voters. Rampant factionalism within the state Congress and Indira Gandhi's intervention probably delegitimised Congress in the eyes of the urban and the more active rural voters. Alienation of many of the middle income and well-off Kammas, as well as backward castes, has been discussed earlier. As Congress went into decline, both organisationally and in terms of popular support, there was no other organised political force available in Andhra to fill the growing political void.³⁰

Rise of Telugu Desam Party

In this context, the formation of Telugu Desam by

popular cine-actor-turned-politician, N.T.Rama Rao, generated a ray of hope among the large number of discontented sections of the society, who were already alienated from the Congress party but were looking for a viable alternative. And the failure of other opposition parties in the state in galvanising the anti-Congress sentiment had created a 'political vacuum', which was filled by the Telugu Desam. The charisma of N.T. Rama Rao enabled his party, TDP, to fast penetrate into various sections of the society.

Again, the decline of Congress credibility "provided the newly founded TDP the basis for an electoral appeal to regional sentiment in Andhra, namely, opposition to the "imposition" of Chief Ministers "from New Delhi".³¹ The importance of N.T. Rama Rao's victory lay precisely in his appeal to regional, linguistic sentiments of the people and transforming the anti-Congress sentiment into a solid support to Telugu Desam, without its fragmentaion among various non-Congress opposition parties as it happened in 1978. The evidence of anti-Congress sentiment in the state can be guaged from a comment on the birth of TDP by a pro-Congress newspaper which is quoted as follows: "...there lies the significance of the new party (TDP) which has the potential to erode the strength of the Congress many of whose leaders have, over the years, become unwarrantedly

complacent and provocably inefficient. To the extent that the new party acts as a corrective and makes the ruling party care more for the downtrodden masses than for the distinguishing and utterly futile intra-party squabbles, it is welcome."³²

The Congress party, on the other hand, severely attacked the Telugu Desam in its election campaign. It stressed that regionalism is fraught with danger at a time when the country was facing both external and internal dangers. Indira Gandhi appealed to the people for maintaining unity and integrity to safeguard the hard won freedom. She urged the people to elect a strong and stable government in the state which would cooperate with the centre for implementing various developmental programmes. Congress party expressed its commitment to promote the interests of minorities and women. It criticised TDP for lacking in programme and philosophy to show to the people. Also it lashed out at the opposition parties by stating that they had no policies and programmes except the one point programme of ousting the Congress party from power.³³

In the 1983 Assembly elections the TDP contested 287 seats along with Sanjay Vichar Manch which contested 5 seats. The Congress High Command did not seem to have confidence in the capability of the state leadership, and posted poll observers from northern India to monitor

elections in the state.³⁴ This election produced an alternative; and the Congress record of consistency in ruling the state was broken. The results show a powerful swing in favour of TDP which won 197 seats, polling 45.51 per cent of the popular votes. The Congress contested 294 seats but was successful in 60 seats, with 34 per cent share of the popular vote and emerged as the main opposition party in Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly.³⁵

A region-wise performance shows that Telugu Desam's impact was spectacular particularly in coastal Andhra districts and Rayalaseema which comprise 134 constituencies. In this region the party won 119 seats, the Congress winning only 9, the BJP, CPI and CPI(M)-4. The results also indicate that most of the candidates from the Congress party won their elections on their own strength. Unlike the 1978 Assembly elections, Mrs Gandhii's charisma was no more a factor. However, the impact of TDP's wave was limited in Telengana region where the Congress could get 41 out of 60 seats it won in 1983 elections.

Implications of Political Change on State Politics

The caste equation and support structures of the parties in the state have changed dramatically since Telugu Desam came to power in 1983. However, it was rather the anti-Congress sentiment rather than the pro-regionalist votes that enabled TDP's victory in the 1983 elections. For

instance, a survey conducted immediately after the 1983 assembly elections, to study elite perceptions of 100 days of N.T.Rama Rao government in the state, shows that more than 50 per cent respondents of all sections felt that people voted TDP only against corrupt Congress government.³⁶

Another survey conducted just before 1985 Assembly elections reveals that "the Scheduled castes at the lowest level and the Brahmans as the highest caste didnot feel, as other castes felt, that the TDP was voted due to the corrupt Congress rule. Significantly, 34% of the backward classes also felt the same way. Also 28% of the minority community supported the Congress. Whereas all the other upper castes like Kammas (47%), Velamas (45%), Vysyas (45%) and Reddys (41%) were against the Congress party.³⁷

Again on the question whether the TDP won the electons in 1983 against the ineffective leadership in the Congress, tribals, Velamas, Kammas and minorities were more against the Congress leadership than the Brahmans and backward classes. Once again, Kammas, tribals and Vysyas considered NTR as an alternative to the Congress but the Reddy's, Velammas and backward classes expressed less preference to N.T.Rama Rao's leadership. It is also evident from the survey that the elite sections considerably felt the loss of their self-esteem under the Congress regime.³⁸

When Parliamentary elections took place in December 1984, Congress party in the state was once again humiliated by the TDP as it had lost 35 seats to the TDP and its allies. Neither the sympathy wave created after the death of Mrs. Gandhi, nor the call for unity and integrity as well as the advocacy of one party rule in the Centre and states by Rajiv Gandhi could move the Andhra electorate. In a survey conducted during the elections, they overwhelmingly supported the fact that "they have voted TDP and defeated the Congress due to the undemocratic dismissal of N.T.Rama Rao Ministry (in August 1984).³⁹ Here too most of the urban educated voters supported the above view, while the rural, illiterates preferred to be silent and could not tell why people voted for N.T.Rama Rao. It is significant to note that only 21% of the respondents thought the TDP was voted because of its good government. Therefore, to quote Paul Brass, "the consequence of the Congress's interventionist strategy was the strengthening of a regional movement, whose organisational base is otherwise limited and whose life was probably extended by the very heavy-handedness of the intervention from Delhi."⁴⁰

From the above discussion it is evident that while all sections or groups in the state were disillusioned with, and alienated from the Congress party, a deep analysis of voting patterns and electoral performance shows that the Congress

support base was not completely eroded among its traditional support groups such as Brahmans, scheduled castes and minorities. One significant factor that resulted in the erosion of its traditional support base was the alienation of several sections of rich and middle agriculturist castes belonging to the upper castes as well as the younger, politically more conscious backward classes. Also the party lost considerable support among tribals and minorities. However, Congress party still retained the support of "adult sections" of backward classes, scheduled castes and illiterates and lower income groups. These sections along with the Brahmans constituted the social support structure of the party in 1980s, however, a feeble one, which was crucial in maintaining the Congress strength in the state, which was evident from the number of votes it polled during the elections to the Assembly and Lok Sabha between 1983 and 1989.

Evidently, it is the educated urban middle classes and the rich and middle agriculturist groups in the rural areas who looked for a political alternative to the Congress and shift of their vote led to a 'swing' in the votes in the form of "TDP wave".⁴¹

1985 Legislative Assembly Elections

Mid-term assembly elections in 1985 saw further erosion of Congress strength in the state. The party could win only

50 seats while the TDP improved its position by bagging 202 seats, besides securing for its allies - the CPI, CPI(M), BJP and Janata - 35 seats.

Thus, the electoral process and outcome after 1984 parliamentary and 1985 assembly elections are significant as the electoral behaviour of the Andhra voter was distinct from voters of most other parts of the country. Such behaviour may be attributed primarily to the impact of the "most indecent, hasty and undemocratic dismissal of N.T. Rama Rao government in August 1984 and subsequent reinstatement in September",⁴² which created resentment and widespread sympathy for the 'dethroned' leader. The sympathy was rooted in the sentiment that N.T.Rama Rao was dismissed just as he was recovering from major (heart bypass) surgery.⁴³

Secondly, the electoral alliance that N.T.Rama Rao struck with other non-Congress political parties went a long way in consolidating the vote base which normally becomes diffused in multi-cornered contests.

Thirdly, the Congress party could not project a single credible leader in the face of considerable infighting for leadership within the party.

Fourthly, the policies already implemented by N.T.Rama Rao were far more concrete and attractive than those that the Congress could promise. Populist programmes such as the

Rs. 2 kg. of rice scheme for the poor, mid-day meal for the school going children and the sale of dhothis and sarees at half the price, drew away significant support among the rural poor who had earlier constituted Mrs. Gandhi's electoral base.

Finally, the Congress reliance on the 'sympathy wave' in the elections did not take into account the positive attraction of N.T.Rama Rao. Not only did the Congress lose miserably but all the sitting Union Ministers from Andhra were defeated at the polls.⁴⁴

Therefore, the overall political success of N.T. Rama Rao and the subsequent consolidation of TDP's social base is largely accounted for by his personal charisma as well as the populist policies which sought to accommodate different social groups, including the rural people. N.T.Rama Rao, during electioneering, repeatedly highlighted the populist policies that his government initiated to benefit different target groups - the weaker sections, the farmers, women and agricultural labourers.

The Congress leadership, in contrast, focussed on regionalism and its impact on national unity. The party attacked the populist policies of the TDP as a recipe for bankruptcy. Ironically, Congress also claimed part of the credit for the rice and cloth subsidy schemes.⁴⁵

In addition to the most attractive and popular Rs. 2 per kg. rice scheme, the abolition of the customary posts of Village Officers and the creation of 1,104 Mandals in the place of 312 Panchayat Samitis are some of the measures which secured considerable electoral support to Telugu Desam. Mandals, compared to Panchayat Samitis, were to have smaller sphere of jurisdiction and to be closer to the people. They were expected to be able to accommodate a large number of political aspirants than the Samitis at local levels.⁴⁶ Also, certain changes brought about by TDP government in the field of education and general administration sustained N.T.Rama Rao's popularity among the urban electorate. Therefore, these schemes as political strategies have created a very strong but volatile rural, as well as urban, support base for the TDP.⁴⁷

A closer region-wise analysis of 1985 Assembly elections reveals a shift in regional support for the TDP towards the most backward Telengana region, and away from the coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema. In Telengana, TDP secured 36.9% of the popular vote (compared to 29.3% in 1983) and 59 out of 107 seats, an increase of 22 over 37 won in the previous elections. This offset its losses in the Rayalaseema and coastal Andhra region, where the Congress party cut in to the TDP's popularity and substantially improved its percentage of votes. In the Rayalaseema region

the Congress raised its poll by 6% and in the Andhra region it increased its total by 7.5%.⁴⁸

Elections to Local Bodies (1987-88)

Elections to the local self-government institutions in rural areas as well as to the urban municipalities were held in March, 1987. Panchayat Raj institutions in rural areas not only carry on developmental programmes of the government but they have also been considered influential and important in maintaining as well as strengthening the rural base of the parties in power.⁴⁹ In these elections local issues and contestant candidate's personality plays a vital role.⁵⁰ In general, power at the local level, including the ability to contest as a serious candidate depends upon the existence of a base of caste support in clusters of village in a constituency, a Panchayat Samiti zone or a Sugar cooperative area.⁵¹

These elections in the state, held on party labels for the first time, were popularly referred to as mini-general elections. The state witnessed a vigorous campaign mainly by the ruling TDP and by the main opposition, Congress party. A distinguishing aspect of these polls was that the principle of reservation had been extended to backward classes and women where they were allotted 25% and 9% respectively.⁵² These polls were also significant as CPI, BJP and Janata, the allies of TDP in 1984 and 85 elections, had since parted

ways, leaving behind the solitary CPI (M) to workout an understanding with the TDP.

While the TDP won 60% of the Mandal Praja Parishads and 42% of the Municipaities, the Congress party won 32% of the MPPs and 52% of the Municipalities.⁵³

The results show that although the 1983 and 1985 tidal wave of the TDP is conspicuously absent and the glamour of N.T.Rama Rao has waned to a certain extent in urban areas, his grip over the rural electorate has been significant.⁵⁴ The urban electorate which supported NTR since 1983 were clearly disillusioned with him. The major reason for this disillusionment can be cited as certain decisions taken by N.T.Rama Rao which have effected large sections of urban populace including government servants, teachers, doctors and students, which led to increasing unpopularity of N.T.Rama Rao and the decline of credibility of his government.

However, the unpopularity of the TDP in urban areas had been by and large neutralised by the successful implementation of several populist welfare and development schemes in rural areas. For a great chunk of the rural populace N.T.Rama Rao is still a champion of the poorest of the poor. To the poorest of the poor, Rs. 2 per kg. rice constitutes the most meaningful instrument for survival. In terms of the electoral process most of the voters in this

section of society, which is the most important electoral vote, for a party which appreciating their heightened expectations, does something concrete to meet these expectations, even if only politically.⁵⁵ However, the defective public distribution system of the essential commodities came under criticism in certain rural areas.⁵⁶

In absolute terms of votes polled, the Congress improved its position greatly in local bodies elections by getting 10,980,554 votes, representing 41.60% of the total votes polled as against 47.33% by the TDP. Thus the gap between Congress and TDP has been narrowing gradually.⁵⁷

1989 Lok Sabha and Legislative Assembly Elections

The ninth Lok Sabha, as well as Legislative Assembly elections were held in November, 1989. There were clear indications that these elections are possibly the most important event in the last 33 year old history of Andhra Pradesh politics. Not only did the polls signify the end of an era for the Telugu Desam party but, riding the crest of an anti-N.T.Rama Rao wave, the Congress party swept back to power in the state after nearly 7 years in the opposition.⁵⁸ The popular verdict in terms of seats was indeed a rejection of N.T.Rama Rao and his style of politics.⁵⁹

The defeat of Telugu Desam in the 1989 elections has not surprised many. But the vote against N.T.Rama Rao regime

has been surprising only in its extent and scale.⁶⁰ The party's performance in these elections is in sharp contrast to its spectacular performance in 1983, 1985 elections and its creditable showing in the 1987-88 local body elections.

In retrospect, N.T. Rama Rao came to power with a huge electoral majority not because of his own past or because of the role he played in the freedom movement but because of people's bitter disgust with the corrupt, overtly casteist and faction ridden politics of the Congress leaders.⁶¹ Soon thereafter he let it know that his reign would be different from that of the Congress, and that he would utilize his newly won power to chart a "new path" for the state. Among his priorities, as included in the objectives of TDP Manifesto were: to unite Telugu speaking people, to check and prevent corruption, to protect women's honour, to uplift the rural people by undertaking reconstructional programmes, to ban defections, to retain freedom of the press, reorganisation of police and effective maintenance of law and order.⁶²

However, N.T.Rama Rao's efforts in the above areas were far from successful. The reasons for many policy failures of his government can be traced back, theoretically speaking, to the conflict between maintaining popularity and implementing difficult decisions. Because institutions such as parties are weak, elections are won on general mandates;

when leaders attempt to translate such mandates into specific policies, potential winners and losers become politically divided, and the link between leaders and their supporters is quickly exposed for what it really is, namely, fragile. Since leaders cannot implement many of their policies, and thus cannot count on policy success as a vehicle for assuring electoral support, they tend to centralise power in their person and utilize leadership appeals and general "mood swings" as a means for a new round of electoral competition.⁶³

On the other hand, the main reasons for the decline and downfall of Telugu Desam government have been variedly described as some administrative failures of the TDP government; because of the party's organisational weakness; and the "unbrindled egoism"⁶⁴ or the "arrogant and individualistic style of functioning" of N.T.Rama Rao.⁶⁵

Among the administrative failures of the TDP government, there were several decisions to the credit of N.T.Rama Rao which alienated section after section of the people in the state. The denial of monetary benefits to NGO's and interfering in the functioning of the police force and the deadly blows he inflicted on the bureaucracy by ordering raids on upright administrators has left the administration totally demoralised and turned him into an anathema to the government employees.

Several administrative experiments of N.T.Rama Rao such as lowering of retirement age of government employees from 58 to 55 years, reforms in temple administration and hiking the percentage of reservations for the backward classes in educational institutions and employment from the existing 25% to 44%, got bogged down in prolonged legal battles. The hike in reservations which was initiated to consolidate his vote bank among the backward classes boomeranged, plunging the state into turmoil. The government servants and urban middle classes who had voted TDP in 1983 and 1985 turned against the party in 1989 elections mainly because of the above mentioned reasons.

Again, the neglect of the core sectors like power and irrigation and high priority accorded to social welfare and populist schemes led to an imbalance in the state economy. Power scarcity hit the industrial development. Unemployment grew at alarming proportions and youth, who constitute 7% of the total electorate, were totally disillusioned with the TDP Government.⁶⁶ Indeed, the rout of Telugu Desam in 1989 elections is primarily traced to the 'swing' of youth and women voters in favour of the Congress party.⁶⁷

Besides, the last two years of TDP rule was marked by overcentralisation and growing discontent and dissidence within the rank and file of the party. The party's organisational apparatus, built single-handedly by

Chandrababu Naidu for well over half a decade, had been systematically destroyed by N.T.Rama Rao with overcentralisation of power in his hands and its dispensation through his chosen few relatives which ultimately created a situation where the TDP's organisation never existed in reality.⁶⁸ N.T.Rama Rao's failure to institutionalise his party highlighted the difficulties of transforming personal power into institutional power. Personalistic power rests on diffuse and often fragile support of a leader by the masses; institutional power, by contrast, requires that link between state leaders and supporters to be systematically organised around a political programme via intermediate and grassroots leadership.⁶⁹

The authoritarian functioning of N.T.Rama Rao, which grew over the years, had distanced him from not only officials but also Ministers and other loyal workers of the party. The first major clash between N.T.Rama Rao and his cabinet colleagues had occurred in early 1988 when he sacked the respected leader of the Kapu community, M. Padmanabham from the Ministry on flimsy grounds. Padmanabham successfully rallied the backward classes, particularly the emerging prosperous Kapu community, under his leadership in the rich delta districts of Godavari, which were the vote banks of N.T.Rama Rao since 1983.

From the above analysis, it is evident that the adverse state of economy, the heightened expectations and the disenchantment resulting from the gap between promises and performance as well as bureaucratic excesses, played a major role in swinging voters' attitude away from Telugu Desam.⁷⁰

However, the real challenge to N.T.Rama Rao came in late-1988 when V. Mohan Ranga Rao, a powerful Kapu leader from Vijayawada, who was on a hungerstrike, was murdered, resulting in bloody clashes between Kammas and Kapus in the coastal districts. The failure of the TDP government to protect the life and property of common people and its casual attitude towards tracking down Ranga's assassins further alienated the backward classes in particular and the common people in general from TDP.

While anti-TDP sentiment was building up gradually, the increasing dissidence in the party burst out when N.T.Rama Rao summarily dismissed his 31 member ministry on the pretext of leaking the budget details. Though most of the ministers didnot protest, three of them, K. Jana Reddy, V. Nageshwara Rao and K.E. Krishnamurthy, resigned from TDP and, along with Padmanabham, became the rallying point for dissidence. Throughout this period, as if nothing was wrong in his party, N.T.Rama Rao had begun devoting more time on National Front and on shooting his film 'Vishwamitra'. While his association with National Front was welcomed, his time

consuming association with film shooting invited only derision and ridicule from the public.⁷¹

It is worth mentioning now that after 1985, the allies of Telugu Desam in the state began to drift away from it partly because of the necessity of keeping their identities in the state and partly because of the disappointment with N.T.Rama Rao style of decision making. As the opposition parties - BJP, Janata and Communists - have divergent opinions of N.T.Rama Rao's policies such as nepotism, land reforms, labour policies, various administrative decisions including strikes by different employee organisations, they accused him of being in the same mould as the Congress party.

Over and above, the TDP Government took a number of controversial decisions affecting the civil and democratic rights of the people in the state. N.T.Rama Rao adopted a most ambiguous and inconsistent stand towards the Naxalites and proved to be totally inept in handling their growing menace. From eulogising them as patriots before his party came to power in 1983, he talked of holding dialogue with them, and then declared one day that he could order bombing of Naxal zones.⁷² Subsequently, the brutal killings of Naxalites by the police reached such a stage that the Naxalites, in a desperate bid, started kidnapping Telugu Desam leaders as well as government officials in reprisal

actions. The killing of the TDP leader Malhar Rao by Naxalites further alienated N.T.Rama Rao from the general public and the party rank and file in Telengana. At the height of Naxalite menace, N.T.Rama Rao advanced another fancy idea of arming the citizens for self-defence, which invited all-round criticism, mainly from Congress circles, that his government is abdicating its primary responsibility of maintaining law and order. This decision invited derision and evoked fear among the common people.

Telugu Desam also alienated support among scheduled castes and minorities who increasingly felt that the government was incapable of protecting their interests. N.T. Rama Rao's manner of handling the affairs of the weaker sections were in shambles after the brutal killings of helpless dalits in Karamchedu in 1986. The continued killings of dalits and other weaker sections in a number of other villages involving the police and the landlords alienated N.T.Rama Rao from the people. No effective measures were taken to stop such unabashed use of state power against the weaker sections.

Meanwhile, serious attempts were made by the Congress party leadership to rebuild the party organisation between 1985-1989. The party leadership sought to reinvigorate the party as an organisation by restructuring the local and district units of the party as well as by reducing

infighting in the party. The failure of the TDP government on many fronts had been effectively exploited by the Congress party as the main opposition in the state. It attacked the TDP government's failure on every front and successfully projected itself as an alternative to the ruling party.

The steady strategy of the Congress leadership to mobilize and express local grievances through fasting and agitational techniques since Mandal elections in 1987 yielded dividends in attaining its original strength prior to the formation of TDP.⁷³

The state-wide rallies organised by the Congress and its youth-wing in the last one year before the Assembly elections focussing on the misrule of TDP and various other issues of public concern, received overwhelming public response revealing a change in the people's attitude towards the Congress party.⁷⁴

However, one should not look for dramatic failures of N.T.Rama Rao to explain TDP's defeat in the 1989 elections. As the discussion above suggests, there is no denying that N.T.Rama Rao's term in power was hardly exemplary. Policy failures must have contributed to some decline in TDP's popularity. More important than the relatively poor performance of Telugu Desam government, was the way in which N.T.Rama Rao squandered away the opportunity to build new

coalitions and to consolidate his considerable power base. Besides, his government had also been marred by charges of corruption and casteism. There is little doubt that such charges contributed to the displeasure of route of the urban middle class towards N.T.Rama Rao.

The opposition to N.T.Rama Rao, mainly led by the Congress party, mobilized primarily around the issues of corruption and caste violence. One of the main election strategies of the Congress party, which is also one of the major factors for its success in 1989 elections has been to largely supplement the "negative" factor of alienation of different sections of society during N.T. Rama Rao's rule with the good will generated by Rajiv Gandhi and the organisational skills of Chenna Reddy.

Another "negative" factor which the Congress leadership exploited for political and electoral purposes in their fight against N.T.Rama Rao, is casteism. Firstly, Congress leaders often tried to focus on the atrocities on Harijans in Padinikuppam (1983), Neerukonda (1986) and Karamchedu (1986) areas where the scenario of social oppression continued unabated with all its ugly and inhuman manifestation.⁷⁵ Secondly, casteist dimension to the murder of Congress M.L.A., V.M. Ranga Rao was evident from the caste oriented violence that convulsed the coastal districts. The murder of Ranga Rao had become a rallying

point for the Kapus who, disenchanted with their "hero" N.T.Rama Rao, were looking for a replacement outside the TDP fold.

However, it is significant to note that the social polarisation between the forward castes and backward classes which fragmented both TDP and Congress, did not result in a political polarisation between the party of the upper castes and a party of backward. On the contrary, all political parties, including Congress, tried to placate the backward classes. The backward class candidates, running on rival party tickets. split the backward class votes among them.

Finally, the Reddys, who are the traditional rivals of Kammas and who dominated the Congress party since early 50's, successfully mobilized, along with their customary supporters like Brahmans at one end of the spectrum and the scheduled castes at the other, a sizable backward class vote. Previously, some sections of backward classes, because of their increasing economic independence and the consequent desire for political positions, allied with the Kammas and voted TDP to power in early and mid-80s. But during the tenure of N.T.Rama Rao, they were thoroughly disillusioned and found the attitude of the Chief Minister partisan. The murder of Ranga Rao completely alienated them from TDP and led to their switch over to the Congress.

Last, but not the least, the capacity of the Congress party to work unitedly helped account for its victory in 1989 elections. This involved a commitment as well as arrangement to fight the TDP in every constituency with one candidate. Rajiv Gandhi, in a bid to wrest power from the TDP, pulled out Dr. Chenna Reddy, an old war horse of Congress, from moth balls, and made him the APCC-I chief. Chenna Reddy successfully rallied the diverse forces, within the party and outside, around him and thereby gave the party a united fighting image, by mass mobilization techniques.⁷⁶ Therefore, the acceptance of a new leader by a number of desperate forces and groups, the political learning that had taken place since the disastrous performance of the Congress during 1983 and 1985 elections, and a changing political situation in the second half of 80's which witnessed the erosion of Telugu Desam's popular support, bolstered the prospect of Congress victory.

RESULTS

The Congress party bagged 180 seats with 46.7% of valid votes polled while the TDP and its allies - CPI, CPI(M), BJP and JD - won 92 seats polling 42.89% of the valid votes. The Congress improved upon its performance by 9.5% between March 1985 and now, while the TDP and its allies lost 8.39% of their support.⁷⁷

A region-wise analysis shows that in Coastal Andhra region,⁷⁸ Congress polled 46.18 percent of valid votes bagging 85 out of the 134 seats. In contrast, the TDP polled 44.26 percent of valid votes, bagging only 43 seats. The rout of the TDP within Coastal districts appears to be the after-effect of the December 1988 Kamra-Kapu clashes in that region. Atrocities on scheduled castes in the Guntur-Prakasam belt also contributed to the TDP rout in those districts.

Coming to the Rayalseema region, the Congress did spectacularly well capturing 37 out of 53 seats and polling 49.48 percent votes. In contrast, the performance of TDP was the poorest in the region. It could get only two seats polling 40.60 percent votes. The poor performance of TDP in this region has been attributed to the more effective muscle and money power of Congress.

Contrary to popular belief, the congress did not do all that well in the Telengana region. In fact, Congress faced its toughest challenge from the TDP and its allies, especially Communists here. Out of 107 constituencies, the Congress could get only 58 seats polling 42.39 percent votes. On the other hand TDP and its allies got 37 seats polling 39.94 percent votes.

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Chapter 3

CONGRESS AS AN OPPOSITION, 1983-1989

INTRODUCTION: ROLE OF AN OPPOSITION

The party system in a country is an important factor in determining what the government does for its citizens. In a democratic country, with a classical two party system like the one existing in Britain, political parties assume a constitutional framework of government; they operate within the rules of the game of the "opposition" and "government" and, tend to be responsible to the demands of a large proportion of the population. The policy outcomes of the government and the realization of the demands and aspirations of the people at large truly depend upon a constant interaction of the "ruling" and the "opposition" parties. The latter not only tries to contain and put limitations on the possible excesses of arbitrary powers of the former, but also suggests and continuously cajoles it to do or not to do certain things.¹

As the basic assumption of democracy is the inevitability of differing views and the free operation of conflicting opinion, in a democratic system, therefore, the 'opposition' becomes as much an important part of the political process as is the ruling party. A strong, viable and responsible opposition is truly regarded as the first

sin qua non of an accountable parliamentary democracy. The main function of the opposition is to protect minority rights and modify government policies by ruthless criticism.² As a representative of the minority, the opposition party (parties) strive(s) to protect minority rights, tries to reduce administrative injustice and inefficiency by ruthless criticism and also to modify government's policy in line with its own programmes. The second important function of the opposition is to form an alternative government when given the opportunity, or in the event of defeat of the ruling party on the floor of the House or in the mid-term elections.³ As an alternative government, the opposition provides a means for peaceful change of administration, the overthrow of those in power, without resort to violence or revolution. The opposition therefore appeals to the electorate not to elect the ruling party again to power. The electoral results give authority to a certain party or group of parties to form the government, and other party (or parties), which represents the minority opinion, functions as an opposition. Once again, the opposition tries to win the support of the electorate by exposing the defects, loopholes and blunders of the government.⁴

Thus, the opposition, while maintaining the support of the solid core of voters, has to make itself attractive to

the voters by keeping a fire of sound and statesman like criticism and, if need be, by taking on its own programme, with embellishments and improvements, those items of government policy which seem most popular.

The third important function of the opposition is to expose the failures of the party in power to fulfil the promises it had made at the election time. While exposing the weaknesses of the government on the eve of the general elections, the opposition keeps its eyes on the "floating voters".⁵

The need for an opposition arises from the fact that no leader or party can overcome the temptation of becoming dictatorial, autocratic and arrogant without the watchful eyes of strong, viable, well-informed and vigilant opposition. A.L. Lowell has noted: "The constant presence of a recognised opposition is an obstacle to despotism... the existence of the party in opposition, with a programme within the limits of a possible public opinion, is a bulwark against the tyranny not only of a despot but also of a fanatical majority."⁶

Thus, it is to prevent abuse of power and position by the ruling party as much as possible and to make the rulers responsible to the public opinion and people's needs, that the opposition works for in democratic countries.

Also, it is easy for any government or rulers to claim that they have been elected by the people in a free election, and that they therefore enjoy the confidence and backing of the masses. But in developing countries in particular where political consciousness of the masses, the sophisticated ideas of representative democracy and people's ability to examine, analyse and dissent every policy and all aspects of government activities are limited, it is easy to take shelter under the cloak of majority and popular vote. It is just such a government that needs to be carefully watched by the opposition to ensure that massive majorities are not used by the rulers to destroy people's liberties.

In order to perform the role of an opposition, it is vital that the opposition group/party should be strong, viable and responsible, both in quality and in content; that it should present to the enemy - the party in power - a solid front and that it should be well informed and vigilant.⁷ If the opposition does not have these qualities, the government might become apathetic to public grievances and disgraceful to the views expressed by the members of the opposition, and even dictatorial in its conduct. However, it must be remembered that it is not the business of the opposition to obstruct the government; its purpose is to criticise the government and not to hinder. Its main function should be to expose the lapses and acts of omission

and commission of the party in office. Obviously, under exceptional circumstances, of course, obstruction is permissible.

Therefore, an effective and purposeful opposition that will be vigilant every moment of the day, will keep an eye on every activity of the government, will fearlessly expose every activity of the government, will fearlessly expose every misdeed and failure of the rulers as a matter of duty and make the people conscious of the abuse of power by the rulers. It has to create a public opinion against their misdeeds and failures so that people themselves, through their disapproval of policies, pave the way for a change in government.

To conclude, the immediate purpose of the opposition is to check, prevent and rectify any abuses (of power) of which the government may be guilty. And the ultimate purpose is to replace the party or parties in power by the opposition, either as a result of a shift in (parliamentary) opinion, or as a result of a general election which gives the opposition a majority. To impel and to justify such turnover of power, the opposition normally advocates a programme of action which differs, though not necessarily in every detail, from that of the ruling party, and which the opposition pledges to effect it when able to do so.

ONE PARTY DOMINANCE AND ROLE OF OPPOSITION IN ANDHRA PRADESH
- FROM INDEPENDENCE TO 1983

A unique feature of the party system in India in general and Andhra Pradesh in particular, is the rise of multiplicity of political parties which is mainly attributed to "the variety of cultural, religious ways of life and political and economic conditions."⁸

The political enthusiasm generated through the first phase of Independence gave an impetus for the mushroom growth of political parties and other splinter groups. This has made the Indian opposition different from the two-party British political system. But the Indian opposition, because of its division into several heterogeneous groups and the unique position of the Congress by virtue of its role in the freedom struggle, continues to be numerically weak, ineffective and divided till very late.

Andhra Pradesh experienced the impact of multiplicity of parties and groups at different periods of its political history. However, it had proved to be an impregnable fortress of the Congress since the formation of the state. In every election, both to the parliament and the state Legislative Assembly, the people had expressed their unflinching support to it and consequently the state had stable ministries. It never experienced strong opposition, except the initial opposition from the Communists, and despite dissensions and intra-party squabbles, the Congress

enjoyed a commanding position in the legislature. Indeed, it is the dissidents of the ruling Congress who posed themselves as opposition. The different elections were fought between the official candidates and its unofficial candidates, the latter posing as opposition.

In retrospect, ever since the First General Elections in 1952, that is, even prior to the formation of Andhra Pradesh, the real tussle for political power in both the sub-regions, Andhra and Telengana, has been between the Congress and the Communists. In the First General Elections the Communist-backed People's Democratic Front with 42 members in the Assembly of 175 constituted the main opposition in erstwhile Hyderabad state Legislative Assembly. Similarly during the same time the Communist representatives in the Madras Assembly from Andhra region provided the backbone to the party's membership in the Assembly.

Although the Communist party has been the main opposition party in the state, it has always projected a regional character.⁹ It is perhaps the party's identification with the regional nationalism of the Telugu people, which shaped the forms of a demand for a linguistic state, that helped the promotion of Communist movement in the state. They played an active role in the struggle for a separate Andhra state. They carried the struggle to unite

all Telugu speaking people who were in different states. Finally, with their struggle against the feudal oppression in Telengana region of the erstwhile Hyderabad state and campaign for the abolition of zamindari, they established a firm popular base among the peasantry.¹⁰

Thus, on the eve of mid-term poll in Andhra in 1955, the Communists emerged as a potential force and threatened the hegemony of the Congress. The Congress in turn sought an alliance with KLP and Praja-Party to form United Congress Front (UCF) and foiled the Communist's hope by establishing its supremacy.

The alliance continued in 1957 general election in Telengana, the stronghold of the Communists. The UCF shattered the Communist hold in Telengana and the Congress consolidated its position in the entire state. The decline of the Communists could be attributed to a variety of reasons including the stability of the Congress Raj, ideological disarray of the CPI consequent upon the post-Stalinist lull in the world Communist Movement, and comparative increase in rural prosperity following some of the reforms introduced by the Nehru government.¹¹

However, despite their failure to occupy the power structure in the state, the Communists emerged as a major political force in the state politics and were officially recognised as the main opposition party in the state

legislature.

After the great split of the Communist party, the CPI and CPI (M) contested the 4th General Election (1967) separately and decided upon a course of direct confrontation to the detriment of their mutual interests. The combined strength of the CPI and CPI (M) in this election was 19 as against 51 in 1962 and the party "lost the status of a single largest opposition group in the Assembly."¹²

However, even after the split, the two Communist parties - together with their strength - were the main opposition to the Congress rule in the state till 1977. After the fall of the Janata Party in 1979, once again the left and the democratic parties constituted as the main opposition in the legislature. The leaders of the two Communist parties subsequently accepted that the split was due to ideological differences and agreed on the scope for united action on problems facing the people "despite the ideological and political difference between them."¹³

OTHER OPPOSITION PARTIES IN THE STATE

Since the First General Election in 1952, the state experienced the emergence of several regional and sub-regional political parties and groups. Particularly after the 1962 General elections, these minor parties and groups played a crucial role in the state politics. They wre

generally formed due to factionalism in the Congress or other parties, and were dissolved when accommodated in the power circles or absorbed by the parent organisations. They had no particular ideology except opportunistic alliances, alignments and power equations. Most of these parties such as Socialist Democratic party (1959-60), Telengana Praja Parishad (1969-70), MIM etc. were headed by disgruntled leaders of the major parties without any cadres or proper organisation.

On the other hand, the right wing parties like his Swatantra Party, the Jana Sangh, which fared well in 1967 elections, could not penetrate into the masses. They also failed to gain power in the Panchayati Raj institutions and local bodies, the nucleus of power politics in the state.¹⁴ Indeed, even their minor victories were not due to the strength of these parties, rather the factional fight among the Congressmen helped them to win a few seats in the state Assembly.¹⁵

JANATA AS THE MAIN OPPOSITION: 1977-80

The strength of the Janata Front in the state Assembly was 27 by the end of March 1977. Later some of the disgruntled Congressmen and independents jointed the Janata party. By the end of July 1977 the strength of the party had increased to 33 and the strength of the congress had come down from 243 to 232 under the leadership of Ayyapu Reddy

who switched over to Janata party from the Congress and was elected as the Janata Legislative Party leader in June 1977. The party further increased its strength to 43 by the end of December 1977, while the strength of the Congress diminished from 232 to 220.¹⁶

Then came the sixth General Election to the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly in 1978 which was the first general election in Andhra Pradesh held with the Congress party as a ruling party in the state and as an opposition party at the centre.¹⁷ Though Janata party could not secure majority in the elections, it emerged as the single largest opposition party till then, with 60 members in Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly, and G. Lachchanna, the floor leader of the party, as the leader of the opposition.

Although the Janata Party opposed the tyrannical rule of the Congress on several occasions, it could not grow to the stature of a viable alternative to the Congress in the state.¹⁸ It was too small a group and suffered from intra-party conflict. When the Janata party at the centre found itself in trouble, a good number of the party members in the state who had earlier defected from the congress started to desert the party and jumped back into Congress. As a result, once again, the opposition became nominal in Andhra Pradesh.¹⁹

CONGRESS PARTY AS AN OPPOSITION IN ANDHRA PRADESH (1983-1989)

In different ways, the elections of 1967, 1971, 1977, provided unexpected mandates to political parties in different parts of the country, but in 1983, Andhra Pradesh gave Mrs. Indira Gandhi a stunning defeat in her citadel.²⁰ For the first time, in the elections to the Assembly, the dominance of the Congress came to an end. The main focus of this chapter is to study the Congress party's experience as an opposition in the state and its role in ventilating the grievances of the people during the period of TDP's rule i.e., from 1983 to 1989.

In the Seventh General Elections to the State Legislative Assembly in 1983 the opposition secured 92 seats in the House of 294 seats. The Congress with 60 members with A. Madan Mohan as its leader was recognised by the speaker as the opposition party in the Assembly. The Congress-led opposition from 1983 onward dared to challenge the ruling party on various issues.²¹ The strength of the non-Congress opposition parties was following: CPI(M)-5, CPI-4, BJP-3, Janata and Congress (J) one each. Independents including CPI (ML) and Majlis secured 18 seats.²²

The results of the Eighth General Election to the state Legislative Assembly in 1985 showed that the opposition maintained its strength. In the House of 294 seats the

strength of the opposition was 93 (seats). But the numbers are deceptive for there had been an alliance between the Telugu Desam and the CPI(M), CPI, BJP and Janata parties which improved their strength from 1983 in fighting the elections against the Congress. These non-Congress opposition parties seemed to have supported the ruling TDP on matters of policy but in matters of detail voted with the opposition.²³ On the other hand, the Congress could manage to get only 49 seats against 60 it had in the previous House. However, not only did the party secure a higher percentage of votes in this election but it also increased its share in every election conducted thereafter.²⁴

The emergence of TDP in the state and the defeat of the Congress in the 1983 elections had a veritable impact on the state politics. As an opposition in the Assembly, the Congress members were very critical of the ruling TDP and had raised a large number of questions. They drew the attention of the government to the problems concerning their constituencies in particular and the state in general. They fought tooth and nail in the Assembly as well as outside it against all those changes that the ruling TDP had introduced in the fields of administration, revenue and Panchayati Raj institutions.²⁵ For the first time, therefore, when the Congress was the main opposition party in the Assembly, the

state witnessed a strong and viable opposition which was well informed and vigilant throughout the period from 1983 to 1989.

Role of the Congress in the Legislature

The opposition parties operate at two levels. One inside the legislature and the other outside the legislature. Let us first examine the role, strategy and tactics of the Congress party within the legislature.

In the Legislature, the Congress-led opposition ventilated public grievances through parliamentary methods such as questions, adjournment motions, privilege motions, votes of censure, general debates and discussions as well as walkouts, dharnas and criticism of government policies and its acts of omission and commission. Through these methods the Congress sought to bring to the attention of the TDP Government the grievances of the people whether those relating to rising prices or deteriorating situation of law and order or unemployment or inadequate supply of essential commodities or corruption in public life and public services.

An organised opposition party makes the use of various parliamentary methods to compel the government to admit its mistakes regarding the public grievances and adopt appropriate remedies towards solving them. Its members therefore ask questions to the ministers regarding their

departments and thereby initiate discussions in the Assembly. Every emergent issue that agitates the popular mind is brought forth to seek the explanation of the ministers on policy matters.²⁶ However, since a legislative assembly discusses a vast number of subjects, some of major importance, others of a routine nature, it is necessary for the opposition to remember that its ultimate appeal is to the electorate, and therefore to select such issues for its own offensive as are likely to receive wide publicity and attract the imagination of the electorate.

However, it is not necessary to concentrate on subjects of general interest in order to satisfy the needs of publicity and popular appeal. Local issues or even individual incidents, can, if properly handled, raise related wider issues and stimulate popular interest quite out of proportion to the magnitude of the individual issue or incident itself.

(a) Question Hour

The QUESTION HOUR, which starts legislative days, gives ample scope to the opposition to embarrass the Treasury Benches. During the Question Hour more light is thrown on several aspects of administration when members seek to obtain or elicit information on a matter of public interest, on the floor of the House.²⁷ But it gives an opportunity to

the member to bring omissions and commissions in administration to the notice of the government and prompts it to take immediate action on the matter. For example, Y.S. Rajashekhar Reddy, Deputy Leader of the opposition in the Assembly and D.L. Ravinder Reddy (both belong to Congress) asked one question each separately during the Assembly session. They related to (a) the necessity for constituting a committee to inquire in to the affairs of Singareni Collieries (coal mines); (b) the irregularities committed by Prof. M. Abel, vice-chancellor of Sri Krishna Devaraya University.²⁸

In a multi-member (starred) Question, J. Prasada Rao and K. Nagarjuna Reddy (Congress I) highlighted the irregularities committed in the Z.P. Engineering subdivision at Kothegudem and Bhadrachalam in Khammam District.²⁹

Many issues of public importance were also brought before the legislature by the opposition members. For instance, a number of Notices under Rule 329 were raised by the Congress party members regarding, firstly, the atrocities perpetrated against Harijans of Padinikuppam village in Chittoor district, secondly, the arrest of persons belonging to Rayalaseema United Action Committee, and finally, police firing at Tangutur in Prakasam district on tobacco growers for which the members demanded a Judicial inquiry. All these notices were tabled by A. Madan Mohan,

Leader of the opposition in the Assembly.

In each session, a number of questions were asked to embarrass the Government and to expose its underhand dealings. For instance, Y.S. Rajashekhar Reddy, D.L.R. Reddy and K. Nagarjun Reddy wanted to know the expenditure incurred by the Government in remodelling the house of the Chief Minister and other Ministers, staying in their own houses. On many occasions, however, the government had failed to supply adequate information asked by the opposition members and promised to supply it later or tried to divert the attention mainly through delaying tactics.

The Congress members demanded the setting up of Legislative Committees or Commissions headed by a High Court or Supreme Court judge to probe the "irregularities" in various government departments, Banks as well as into the excesses committed by the police. Sometimes the opposition members led by the Congress complained that many of the assurances given on the floor of the House remained unimplemented.

(b) Calling Attention Notice

After Question Hour next item on the Agenda is Call-Attention Notices. An urgent matter of public importance may be brought to the notice of the Minister by a member of the House through this notice. For example, on 11 April, 1984, B.Sammaiah raised the issue of the proposal of Pisciculture

Technological Research Institute in Kolleru Lake in Krishna District.³⁰ This notice concerned the Agriculture Minister. Another notice was raised by the opposition members over the question of curbing the adulteration of pesticides in July 1986. The members belonging to Congress and CPI vociferously demanded CBCID enquiry to probe into the large scale marketing of adulterated pesticides. While rejecting the opposition demand, the agriculture minister agreed to refer to the Crime Branch any specific case brought forward.³¹

(c). Adjournment Motions

During the period, the Congress-led opposition sparingly used the Adjournment Motion - an effective weapon in its armory. It is in the nature of censure against the government. It warrants a matter of grave situation or public importance.

Adjournment Motion is one of the important methods through which the opposition highlights the commissions, omissions and failures of the government. That is the reason why the ruling party defends itself against the motion with all resources and strength at its command. Generally, these motions are not allowed since there are other means to discuss urgent matters of public importance. Often, the speaker converts the notice for adjournment motions into calling attention notices, thus, providing an opportunity to

discuss them.³²

Among a few important adjournment motions introduced by the opposition members in the Assembly sessions during the period are, first, a motion introduced by V. Rambhupal Chaudhuri (Congress I) over the Chief Minister, N.T. Rama Rao, making 'derogatory" remarks about the Congress party during a speech in Kurnool district, and secondly, B.J.P.-led opposition over the "illegal sale" of the Chief Minister's land in Maheshwaram in Ranga Reddy district and distributing the same under Telugu Magani Samaradhan. The speaker, G. Narayana Rao, had disallowed both the above motions tabled by the opposition members, as they were not substantive enough to stall the proceedings.³³

(d). Walkout

Walkout by a member or members of the opposition from the Legislative Assembly is considered as a protest against the uncompromising attitude of the ruling party. The opposition can invite the attention of the government on a particular issue. If the ruling party does not pay heed to the repeated requests of the opposition and their attempts to invite the attention of the members of the ruling party, then the opposition members express their resentment by walking out of the Legislature in the midst of the proceedings, inviting the attention of the press and the public on the issue.³⁴

The following summarily provides an account of walk-outs, in the Assembly, sessions:

First, members of the Congress party along with other opposition parties, staged a walkout on 5 March 1984 in protest against the Government's refusal to the suggestions of the opposition members to modify the A.P. Educational Institution (Regulation of Admission and Prohibition of Capitation Fees) Second Amendment Bill.³⁵ Secondly, on 18 April 1984 the Congress members staged a walkout in protest against the government's refusal to refer the Andhra Pradesh Entertainment Tax (Amendment) Bill to a Joint Selection Committee.³⁶ Thirdly, the opposition led by Congress, and BJP, staged a walkout in 24 July 1986 in protest against the government's refusal to concede their demand for deletion of sub-clause 3 of clause 12 of the Bill to provide the setting up of a fund for financing of steps to promote the welfare of the labour in the state.³⁷

Generally, walkout of the Legislature is considered to be the final act of resentment by the opposition. A study of the circumstances leading to walkouts is important to assess the performance of the ruling party and the opposition parties. In few cases the ruling Telugu Desam responded to the requests of the opposition and in most of the cases it stubbornly maintained its stand without yielding to the pressures of the opposition.³⁸

Over the years, however, walkout of the Assembly Sessions has been increasingly resorted to by the opposition oblivious of the gravity of business being conducted in the House.

Another important feature of the working of the Congress-led opposition during the period is the use of abuses, unparliamentary behaviour and noisy and uproarious scenes created by its legislative members, resulting in the frequent adjournments of the Assembly Sessions, and guillotining of the important work of the Assembly.

Very often, therefore, the proceedings of the Legislature had to be adjourned because of the noisy and uproarious scenes created by the opposition members - particularly belonging to the Congress party against the Telugu Desam government's insensitiveness towards their demands for change in the policy or any other matter regarding the people of the state. Though these adjournments led to loss of time and disruption of Assembly proceedings, it exposed the inefficiency and insensitivity of the government towards the problems of the state to the public and press. They also exposed government's passive attitude towards some of the important problems facing the people such as the misappropriation of funds for the welfare of the people by the administration or politicians or any policy measure being adopted by the government without much public

discussion and debate. As a case of illustration, one or two incidents can be quoted. The state Legislative Assembly was adjourned for a day when the opposition members moved a motion asking the government to refer the Bill empowering the government to form M.P.P., Z.P.P. and Zilla Pranalika Boards to a select committee. The leader of the opposition M. Baga Reddy (Congress I) said that this is necessary as the Bill was full of legal loopholes and was so hastily drafted and its proceedings so unconstitutional, that passing it would be an insult to the Assembly.³⁹

In another case the Legislative Assembly had to be adjourned as the Congress party members enraged by the government's refusal to constitute a House Committee to probe the misappropriation of Grameena Kranti Pathakam funds, stormed into the well of the House disrupting the House proceedings.

Unfortunately, however, there is also a steady decline in the quality of the debates and discussions, touching an abysmal level during the period when Congress worked as the main opposition. Deliberate adoption of aggressive postures by the Congressmen in the Assembly not only created frequent uproarious scenes but led to wastage of time as well as resources. For example, a record two hours of solid proceeding of the Andhra Pradesh Assembly have been expunged from the records on the ground that the debate touched a low

level with members trading abuses, which speaks volumes about the quality of debates. As the Minister for Legislative Affairs, C. Ananda Rao, explains it, "The Assembly has become a sort of a debating society, with members indulging in arguments during question hour to settle scores, rather than asking supplementaries to elicit information."⁴⁰

In conclusion, regarding its performance as the main opposition in the Legislature and as an alternative force to the ruling Telugu Desam Party the Congress party fulfilled its role as a responsible and viable alternative to NTR's Telugu Desam.⁴¹ As the main opposition in the Assembly, the Congress members were very critical and drew attention of the T.D.P. Government to the problems concerning their constituencies as well as the state. Whether it is in the field of law and order, agriculture or revenue or regarding the policy matters such as the abolition of the legislative council, reduction of the age of the retirement from 58 to 55 etc., not only did the Congress members expose the commissions and omission of the TDP government but they were also active in highlighting people's problems and TDP government's failure to solve them conveniently.

Role of the Congress as an Opposition Outside the Legislature

"The purpose of the party in Parliament (or state legislature) is to support the Government in carrying out the party policy or if the party is in the opposition criticize the government in so far as it fails to carry out the policy of the party in opposition".⁴² The primary function of the party is to canalise and crystallise opinion - to narrow the policy alternatives before the voters and to compromise diverse views of individuals, groups and sections. This is extremely important to the democratic process.⁴³

There are various methods which are widely used by the opposition parties outside the legislature to ventilate the grievances of the people. They are, for instance, press statements, strikes, bandhs, processions, railrokos, rastarokos, public meetings, jail bharos etc., which are conveniently adopted to criticise government policies. Through these methods the opposition parties seek to bring to the attention of the government, the grievances of the people. They also provide ample scope to the opposition parties to embarrass the ruling party.

During the period under study, the members of the Congress party used these methods with great skill and persistence. Unlike the previous years when the opposition parties were weak and fragmented and played a passive role

in highlighting people's problems, after 1983 the opposition led by the Congress party became more active in highlighting the blunders of the government. Being more organised and with plenty of resources at hand, the Congress as the main opposition party played a vital role in focussing Telugu Desam Government's failure to solve problems of people on various occasion.

Initially, sitting in the opposition for the state Congress leaders was a new experience about which they were not at all happy. However they had no option but to accept people's verdict. Even then, for some time after the new government was sworn in 1983 the Congress leaders were confident that they would be able to topple the TDP government within a short time. Soon the idea of toppling the government was postponed and the Congress Legislators reconciled to the idea of being in opposition till the next election.⁴⁴

The first attack of the TDP government came from the Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, who had gone on record saying that regional parties are harmful as well as dangerous to the unity of the nation. However, her opinion that only a strong central government could keep the nation unified was effectively countered by N.T. Rama Rao who was of the opinion that only powerful limbs could create a



healthy body. He was of the opinion that strong state governments are necessary for the unity of the nation.⁴⁵

Soon after T.D.P.'s assumption of office, several Congress leaders held Press Conferences, undertook padayatras and used all other tactics to regain public sympathy. The prominent leaders who attacked the policies of the TDP government were Y.S. Rajashekhara Reddy, Anjaiah, Govardhana Reddy and Kesava Rao. Y.S. Rajashekhara Reddy, who was deputy leader of Congress legislative party, was very vocal in his opposition to the TDP Government.

Seeing Y.S. Rajashekhara Reddy's defiant posture, Mrs. Gandhi made him president of the Pradesh Congress Committee APCC-I in 1983. Reddy was the youngest APCC President and was supposed to enthuse demoralised Congress cadre in the state as well as inject new spirit into the party workers. It was decided by the party leadership that all the senior Congress leaders should tour different regions of the state and explain to the people the programmes of the party; how the Central government headed by the party was involved in different development activities in the rural sector and its special schemes and programmes for eradication of poverty and unemployment.⁴⁶ Also the Congressmen in the state apparently realized the need for unity within the party which should go hand in hand with the strengthening of the party at the grassroots level.

Meanwhile, the APCC-I condemned the atrocities against the Harijans in Nagari Constituency and other places of Chittoor district on January 15, 1983, the polling day for the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly. In a resolution the APCC-I said that the TDP workers "have mercilessly burnt the huts of Harijans as a result of which four persons were burnt alive and many others injured."⁴⁷

On Jan. 17, 1983, A Madan Mohan, Leader of Opposition in the 7th Legislative Assembly, said that the "Congress would support the government (led by TDP) in all good things and function as a responsible opposition." K. Rosaiah, Leader of the Opposition in the Council, on Feb. 1983, criticised the ordinance amending the Panchayati Raj Act as politically motivated because all the Zilla-Parishads were in the hands of the Congress and the TDP was sore at this aspect.⁴⁸

On the issue of abolition of the Legislative Council in early-1984 by the Telugu Desam government, which is said to be used as a political asylum for defeated leaders of various political parties,⁴⁹ A. Madan Mohan asked the government to reconsider its plan. In a statement on Feb. 6, 1984, he said, "the Council was intended to provide functional representation to different groups like teachers, graduates and local authorities. The object of the founders of the Constitution was to see that these sections were

given a say in the legislation making. In the Upper House much light was thrown on various matters without the heat generally noticed with Lower House. A democratic system could not afford to dispense with the Council".⁵⁰

K. Rosaiah criticised the TDP government for reducing the retirement age of government employees from 58 to 55. He told newsmen that the Congress government had increased the retirement age in pursuance of the recommendation of the A.Krishna Swamy Pai Commission and after a discussion on the pros and cons of the move. "It is not my argument that the state government has no right to change the retirement age. But it should have been done after consultation with employees organisations", he said.⁵¹ Even the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi commented publicly on the decision of the Andhra Pradesh government to reduce the retirement age of the government employees. When the Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao sought an immediate clarification, the Prime Minister replied that she had voiced the stand of the party.⁵²

When the TDP government brought the whole question of Centre State relations on the national agenda, Rosaiah criticised the Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao for his "vituperative and unwarranted" attack on the central government and said it was only to cover up his failures."⁵³

Similar sentiments were echoed by various other Congress leaders as long as they were in the opposition. For

instance, Samarasinha Reddy criticised the Telugu Desam government that inspite of increasing Central assistance to the state over the years, the state government (under TDP) was constantly criticising the centre and was searching for an alibi for its failures."⁵⁴

Regarding the law and order situation in the state, A.Madan Mohan criticised the Telugu Desam government for demoralising the police set-up and not allowing it to discharge fearlessly its duties in maintaining law and order. In a statement on May 20, 1983, he said, dacoity, thefts and rapes had become a regular feature in the state.⁵⁵

Again, reviewing the performance of the 10 month old Telugu Desam government, K. Rosaiah told newsmen that "not a single day passed without a dacoity, robbery or theft, except making speeches the government has not taken any steps to meet this situation." He said that the law and order situation, particularly in the capital city of Hyderabad, was a concrete proof of government's failure."⁵⁶

The Executive Committee of the APCC-I held in late 1983 under the presidentship of Y.S. Rajashekar Reddy, urged the state government to extend all facilities to agriculturists of the drought affected areas like supply of water to the second crop, postponement of taxes till the next year, supply of fertilizers and seeds at subsidised

rates and advanced interest free loans for agricultural operations."⁵⁷

In early-1984, Congress party organised Panchayati Raj Convention at Vijayawada, which set the stage for confrontation with the TDP government on the twin issues of creation of Mandals and abolition of village officials. Congress leaders at the convention threatened to launch an agitation leading to the dissolution of the Assembly. According to the Newspaper reports, this threat had been in conformity with the party's strategy in other non-Congress states like Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka and West Bengal, to prepare the ground for central intervention.⁵⁸

The Vijayawada constellation of six former Chief Ministers was only an exercise in that direction. Fortunately for them, the TDP government, which had the dubious distinction of having taken many hasty and ill-conceived decisions, had offered numerous controversial issues to agitate for.

In this way, the efforts of the APCC-I President Rajashekar Reddy and other senior leaders of the state Congress during the first one and half years of working as an opposition outside legislature, made a remarkable headway in re-establishing its links with the people at the grassroots level. The party soon regained its vigour and within this short period it made its presence felt both

inside and outside the legislature. At this stage, the government and the ruling TDP were totally on the defensive on each and every issue. The victory of the Congress candidate in Peddapally bye-election and capturing of most of the lost ground by the valiant efforts of the Congress were indicative of not only the success of the party's unity efforts at the leadership level but also a change in people's mood towards the Congress in the state.

But the confidence gained in the Congress party, that it was not beyond the realms of possibility of staging a comeback of power in the state, had taken an altogether unexpected turn. The Congress role in the political coup that shook the state on Independence day (August 15, 1984) and the startling events that followed, had their impact on the subsequent Parliamentary and Assembly elections. Bhaskar Rao episode ruined whatever popularity and prestige the Congress had gained in the last one and half years. Neither the sympathy wave generated after Mrs. Indira Gandhi's death nor Rajiv Gandhi's call for national unity and integrity could penetrate people's mind in the state. Subsequently, the electorate gave an overwhelming majority to the Telugu Desam in both Lok Sabha and Assembly elections (1984 and 1985), indicating their rejection of undemocratic and corrupt politics.

After losing two consecutive elections, the Congress party leaders came to realise, though only lately, that the only way to get back to power was to work as a responsible opposition, criticise government's policies and expose its omissions and commissions, and last but not the least, to wait till the next election. It also realised that "the task of the Congress leadership is to win back the support of different sections of the people to the organisation and mobilize a vast section of the weaker sections behind it, while necessitating the leaders to sink their differences and work unitedly for the party victory".⁵⁹

The party's failure to win the 1985 Assembly elections led to the replacement of Y.S. Rajashekhara Reddy as AICC-I President by J. Vengal Rao. The latter was a popular chief Minister of late 70s. Vengal Rao's re-entry into active politics after a gap of six or seven years is said to be necessitated by his realisation that the state has reached financial bankruptcy and administrative chaos under the TDP rule.⁶⁰ He toured different regions of the state and explained to the people that "excessive concern with populist welfare measures is tending to divert the government's attention from projects designed to lay a firm foundation for the state's rapid economic development". He also stressed the need to make politics in the state performance oriented.⁶¹ While differences and groupism

among the Congress leaders (and workers) persisted, Vengal Rao succeeded, to some extent, in setting the Congress ranks in order and in bringing it under one umbrella.

Under the presidentship of Vengal Rao, Congress party called for a Bandh on July 31, 1985 to press the demands of judicial inquiry by a supreme court judge and for the release of a list of the accused, in the Karamchedu incident.⁶²

At a Press Conference on June 28, 1985, M. Baga Reddy said that the Telugu Desam government had belied the expectations of the people through its functioning. Referring to the scrapping of the mid-day meal scheme, abolition of elections to the syndicates of the Universities, abolition of the state Sangita Nataka Academy, Sahitya Academy and Nrutya Academy and removal from the purview of the state Public Service Commission recruitment to Group-IV Services, he said that these decisions could not be justified.⁶³

The Executive meeting of the APCC-I on July 5, 1985 urged the state government to amend the state Ceiling Act in the light of the supreme court judgment and implement land reforms effectively in the state. It also criticised the government for levying taxes through ordinances.⁶⁴

In a statement on July 12, 1985, J.Vengal Rao, President of the APCC-I, said that the Chief Minister N.T.

Rama Rao has "unnecessarily landed the Telugu Ganga project in a controversy, by taking credit for the project and giving it a political colour, due to his inexperience and lack of political accumen." He said the controversy raised by the Karnataka government would seriously dislocate work on the project, causing hardship and disappointment to the people in the Rayalaseema region.⁶⁵

In continuance of his virulent criticism of Telugu Desam government Vengal Rao charged on October 11, 1985 that the TDP government was spending huge amounts on "populist" schemes and thus hampering development works like irrigation and power projects. Addressing party workers, he observed that "the Congress party will honour the verdict of the people and wait patiently till they get disillusioned with the wrong policies pursued by N.T. Rama Rao and realised their mistake of foresaking the Congress".⁶⁶

The first major initiative to create a base among the backward classes, who constitute almost half of the state population, was planned by the Congress party in June, 1986. The party sponsored a conference of backward classes at Rajahmundry which was attended by as many as 93 backward community leaders, who were, in turn, guided by a dozen forums and were at constant war with each other.⁶⁷

By now the Congressmen realized that the old calculations based on two powerful but nonetheless minority

communities, Reddys and Kammas, would no longer work and that the future of this party rested on the support from the backward classes. What made such an exercise more urgent was the fact that the backward classes who stood by the Congress till 1982, shifted their preferences, thus balancing the scale in favour of Telugu Desam.

Since no attempts had been made during the TDP rule to consolidate the benefits or introduce new schemes for the backward classes, the discontent, coupled with the gradual realization of their strength, slowly surfaced among them. The Congress strategists exploited this opportunity and promoted the idea that whatever gains the backward classes had achieved in the state was during the Congress regime, particularly during the regime of Vengal Rao, who was now the APCC-I president.⁶⁸ It is around this time, K.K. Tiwari, Union Minister, while addressing Congress(I) workers in Tirupati, had given a call to organise "A.P. Bachao" movement to rescue the state from Telugu Desam government. He also outlined a programme which included taking the movement to the streets followed by a "jail bhara" programme, which necessarily had to be led by the local partymen.⁶⁹ However, this call did not mean anything to the people of the state who were still behind Telugu Desam.

But two issues - the failure of TDP government to solve the NGO's problems which led to two months strike by the

latter, and the student movement against the increase in reservations for BC's from 25 to 44 percent that took place in 1986 - led to the erosion of Telugu Desam's popularity among various sections of the society.⁷⁰

In a statement on 7 Sept. 1986, APCC-I President, Vengal Rao said that N.T. Rama Rao had no moral right to continue as Chief Minister in the light of the High Court's verdict on reservation hike. He felt that NTR was caught in a web of his own creation and in fact he should have consulted all parties before issuing the government order on reservations hike.⁷¹ He also criticised the government for its failure to form an all-party committee at mandal level to supervise flood relief works. He said he would submit a report to the Central government on the floods and exert his influence to get more funds sanctioned.⁷²

K. Rosaiah, while addressing a press conference on December 4, 1986, said that the financial situation in the state ruled by TDP was "almost in a mess" and demanded that the government should publish a white paper.⁷³ Again when the NGO's strike hit the administration, he demanded an immediate session of the legislature to discuss the continuing NGO's strike and other related issues. A resolution passed by AICC-I Executive meeting also expressed its sympathy with the striking NGO's and urged the state government to take immediate steps to resolve the crisis.⁷⁴

Meanwhile, to exploit the public discontentment against the TDP government arising out of the twin issues of reservation hike and NGO's strike, the AICC-I, Executive meeting held in December 1986 passed a resolution directing all the district units of the party to hold mass rallies on January 17, 1987 at the district headquarters to protest against the "corrupt, undemocratic and repressive policies of the TDP government".⁷⁵

In its resolution, the APCC-I accused the Telugu Desam functionaries of blatantly interfering with the day to day administrative affairs of the state, harassing Congress workers by foisting false cases against them, and indulging in nepotism. In another resolution, it urged the state government to set up all-party committees at the district and Mandal levels for ensuring the impartial use of funds earmarked for meeting the drought situation in the state. It also accused the state government for its callous indifference in providing relief in both the flood and drought affected areas.⁷⁶

J. Vengal Rao, while addressing a large public meeting at Visakapattanam on 29 December 1986, declared that the main task of the state Congress was to remove the TDP from power and said "we'll keep trying until we achieve the goal." Moreover, he repeatedly stressed that the Congress did not have to hatch a conspiracy to remove the TDP

government from power and that Congress would face no difficulty in replacing the new government in the following elections.⁷⁷

However, it is only in 1987 that the Congress party in the state began a concerted programme to revitalize its party cadre and organisation as well as to mobilize the people on a large scale. This was mainly a result of the increasing public response to its meetings as well as the impending Mandal elections in March 1987. A series of Zonal level meetings were held followed by public meetings attended by almost all the state party leaders. The public meetings had been attended by fairly large crowds, much larger than what the Congress had been receiving in the preceding four years since they lost power in the state. The crowds boosted the morale of the district level workers as well as leaders. As a result, the Congress party revitalisation programme had become increasingly aggressive which in turn had led to angry press statements from Telugu Desam Ministers. J. Vengal Rao, meanwhile, declared that "the mandal elections will be the start of Congress party's resurgence to power". He was confident that the party would secure a majority and be back in the saddle of power with the next Assembly elections.⁷⁸ The main theme of Congress campaign in the Mandal elections was that N.T. Rama Rao government had misgoverned the state in every respect and

had brought the state to total bankruptcy.⁷⁹

On the other hand, the already sour relations between Telugu Desam and its allies particularly CPI and B.J.P. came to utter breakdown as the latter decided to contest the Mandal elections on their own. This is not only because N.T. Rama Rao had practically disregarded all constructive suggestions from his friendly parties but he went on to the extent of describing the CPI and BJP leaders as those "eating the crumbs falling from his mouth."⁸⁰ The CPI leadership then launched a two year campaign against the "undemocratic, anti-working class, pro-landlord policies of N.T. Rama Rao" (much to the detriment of TDP's interests) leading to an embarrassing situation for TDP and its leadership.

Then came the case of corruption and nepotism against N.T. Rama Rao. D. Satyanarayana, Congress leader from Visakapattanam, had filed a Writ petition in High Court seeking institution of an inquiry into charges of corruption and nepotism against N.T. Rama Rao and Chandrababu Naidu and also for the prosecution of the Chief Minister for alleged violation of Wealth and Income Tax laws. The admission of the petition by the High Court cast a shadow over N.T. Rama Rao and his party in that it gave an impression that a prima facie case existed against the Chief Minister.⁸¹ The Congress leaders made a hue and cry and demanded Chief

Minister's resignation. They secured a great deal of political mileage out of this incident.⁸²

Another incident which shook the state around this time is the case of abduction of I.A.S., Officers by People's War Group (PWG) activists (a Naxalite faction of CPI (ML)). The Congress leaders criticised the Telugu Desam government for the declining law and order situation in the state.⁸³

It is evident that J. Vengal Rao's term as the president of APCC-I for more than two years is marked by virulent criticism of N.T. Rama Rao and his party and government. Secondly, reorganisation of the party cadre and organisation had also been done to a large extent. And finally, attempts had been made to project Vengal Rao as an alternative leader, (to N.T. Rama Rao) under whose proven leadership the state registered rapid strides all-round with negligible corruption and minimal interference from Delhi. Soon all factions in the party lined up against him and foiled these attempts.⁸⁴

In June 1988, N. Janardhan Reddy replaced J. Vengal Rao as the President of APCC-I. His brief period at the helm of Congress party affairs witnessed the most tragic murder of Congress M.L.A., Vangaveeti Mohan Ranga Rao and the consequent violence that saw four coastal districts on fire in the last week of December, 1988.⁸⁵ The murder of Ranga Rao, who was on a hunger strike with his two associates

demanding police protection, has been described by Congress leaders as a "vengeance killing" by a Telugu Desam MLA, Devineri Nehru.⁸⁶

Condemning the brutal murder, a number of Congress leaders blamed the Telugu Desam government for this. The APCC-I Chief N.Janardhan Reddy told newsmen on December 27, 1988 that the brutal killing showed the "Telugu Desam misrule" and the "total breakdown of law and order in the State". Union Minister and backward class leader P. Shiv Shankar termed the brutal attack on Ranga Rao as a "clear case of collusion and conspiracy of the state administration, with the Telugu Desam Goondas."⁸⁷

Massive protest rallies by Congress workers were held all over the state, condoling the death of Ranga Rao and a state wide bandh was organised on the day after the brutal murder. In a move to get maximum political capital out of the situation, the Congress leaders demanded the dismissal of the Telugu Desam government for its alleged failure to maintain law and order.

Added to this, in a condolence resolution, leader of the Congress opposition in the Assembly, M.Baga Reddy, regretted the "callous attitude of the state government which had not acted in a manner to protect an MLA, despite the fact that he was in danger".⁸⁸

Later on, the Congress leaders, while rejecting the judicial probe into Ranga Rao's murder, demanded that the investigation into the murder be conducted either by the CBI or by a sitting judge of the Supreme Court.⁸⁹

In this way, while the popularity of N.T. Rama Rao was on the wane and the credibility of his government declining, the Congress party moved on to regain its lost social base and was determined to make a comeback after seven years in opposition.

Meanwhile, N. Chenna Reddy, former Chief Minister, replaced N. Janardhan Reddy as the president of APCC-I. The Congressmen under Chenna Reddy commenced their concerted efforts well in advance of the elections, projecting the failure of the Telugu Desam government on all fronts. They exhausted all their energies and resources as a life and death question.⁹⁰

The first step that Chenna Reddy took on assuming the leadership of the Congress party was to organise a state level convention of Congress workers and activists in May, 1989. This was based on his realisation that the key to the Congress revival in the state lay in energising the party set-up. This had helped to instill in the Congress rank and file a sense of confidence and prepared ground to shake its diffidence. Reddy asserted that the euphoria created by the Congress convention should be stabilised through

enabling the Congress workers to keep in touch with the people and through establishing close links and rapport with them at the grassroots.⁹¹

The Congress party also capitalized on the outlandish and arrogant attacks of N.T.Rama Rao on Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. NTR had called Rajiv Gandhi, "a traitor" and launched his crude campaign of inciting the armed forces by saying that their lives were put in jeopardy by supplying them with what he termed as "rusted and useless Bofors guns". The leaders of the state Congress seized the opportunity and gave a call to Congress party workers to mobilize a crore of signatures expressing their resentment and protest against such unwarranted and vituperative remarks aimed at defaming Rajiv Gandhi. This had given the right opportunity to the Congress workers to approach the people and eventually they collected 1.4 crore signatures which were appended to a memorandum submitted to the President of India urging him to take proper action.

Congress party under Chenna Reddy, gave a call for Jail Bharo on Gandhiji's birth anniversary to mobilize people against "anti-democratic, corrupt, nepotist" Telugu Desam government.⁹² The main objectives behind this call were firstly, to make the people conscious about the misrule of Telugu Desam Government; secondly, to consolidate its support among the people who have been dissatisfied with TDP

rule; and, to organise and unite its own cadre and leaders.

The Youth Wing of the Congress also held several rallies all over the state, the main focus being unemployment, farmers problems and police brutalities.⁹³

The overwhelming response to these state wide rallies organised by the state Congress, their focus on the misrule of TDP and various other issues of public concern, the change in the attitude of the people towards the Congress, all these factors indicate that the Congress Party had succeeded in its functioning as an opposition, both in exposing the failures of the ruling party and in projecting itself as an alternative to it.

CONCLUSION

Opposition Parties play a vital role both inside and outside the legislature, by drawing attention of the government to the problems concerning the people and the state, by exposing the omissions and commissions as well as policy failures of the government and by educating the people about their own policies and programmes. Previously, the role of the opposition parties was weak and ineffective in Andhra Pradesh but the Congress members in the opposition were very critical of the ruling party and raised a large number of issues. Congress as the main opposition party in the state from 1983 onwards, conducted bandhs, strikes, hartals and relay hunger strikes in protest against the

decisions of the TDP government. From 1983 to 1989, the performance of the Congress as an opposition, particularly outside the legislature was very effective, and occupied a very pivotal place in Andhra Pradesh Politics.

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CONCLUSION

The study of the Congress in period 1983-1989, which included the defeat of Congress party in the 1983 assembly elections and its subsequent reemergence in 1989, has to be understood within a specific historical and political context. It cannot only be attributed to breakdown of Congress party organization nationally, due to the increasing centralisation and personalisation tendencies within the party. This specific context consists in correlating the electoral performance of Congress party - 1983-1989 - with the changes in the social structure and shifts in political loyalties of various groups forming the social base of the party. Such a correlational analysis had been attempted through arguments of preceding chapters.

The success of the Congress party since the formation of Andhra Pradesh to 1983 is generally attributed to the pre-eminent role that the party played in the nationalist movement and the remarkable degree of adaptability in recruiting members by accommodating various interests and avoiding fragmentation. However, as we argued, it is the ability of the Congress to mobilize, accommodate and form coalitions of dominant caste and community groups, which enabled the party to establish its dominance over the state. The successive Congress governments in the post-independence period have operated in the state in such a way as to

maintain an overall power structure in society dominated by the upper classes of the forward castes.

The political scenario in both Andhra and Telengana regions immediately after Independence was one of the emergence of Congress and Communists as powerful contenders. While the Congress leadership during this period came essentially from Brahmans, the rich and the middle peasant castes and landless labourers were, however, under the influence of the Communist party. But it is the consolidation and absorption of the rich peasant castes through state directed changes in political economy and the subsequent erosion of Communists' strength that helped the Congress to establish one party dominance in the state. During this period, the backward classes were either left out of the mobilization process completely or their support was not considered significant. However, this elite-caste-dominated Congress party received vital support from scheduled castes and minorities due to the policy of reservations etc. While gradually they were given adequate representation in the Congress, they did not possess any real power within the party or outside it.

Two factors - the declining electoral support and fortunes of the Congress in the state, and the national party split in the Congress - led to a critical realignment or shift in the Congress support base in the late 1960s.

Arguably, the political process in the state during this period underwent a perceptible change influenced by the personality and populist politics of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. It is not surprising that both the backward classes and scheduled castes were attracted towards Congress, mainly because of Garibi Hatao and its associated populist rhetoric.

During the late 1970s, while the scheduled castes largely continued their support for the Congress party, many of this backward classes were alienated. Some studies concluded that by the early 1980s there had been a significant decline in Congress's electoral support among backwards classes. An important reason for this being Congress's preferential policies towards the Harijans.

Throughout the 1970s, in addition to losing the electoral support of the backward classes, Congress lost significant electoral and financial support among the Kammas which is one of the most important social groups in the state. The increasing disjunction between their economic power and their failure to capture the highest political offices had alienated the Kammas from the Congress.

Coupled with this, by the early 1980s, Congress had lost considerable support among "younger age groups - educated urban voters, middle income-groups and backward classes". Rampant factionalism within the party and

increasing central intervention probably delegitimised the Congress among the urban and the more active rural voters. Since they perceived that Congress party was incapable of pursuing an independent line of action due to absence of strong leader with mass base, such a leadership was difficult to sustain, ^{as} the Centre perceived them as a threat to its authority. Organizational and electoral decline of the Congress resulted in a 'political vacuum', which was filled by the actor-turned-politician, N.T.Rama Rao riding a wave churned by regionalism and charisma, and capitalising on the anti-Congress sentiment. Thus, 1983 proved to be a watershed in the political history of the state with the Telugu Desam turning the tables on the Congress party, which began to perform as the leading opposition in the state.

NTR started with a small cabinet promising austerity and economy in governmental expenditure, punctuality and quick decisions in administration. Reduction in the number of state corporations, anti-corruption drive against higher officials, restrictions on employees in the interest of efficiency, passing a resolution on abolition of Legislative Council, reducing the retirement age of employees, ban on capitation fee in educational institutions—all these were undertaken in a few months. Above all projecting a strong charismatic leadership in contrast to a weak and indecisive Congress leadership. However, the level of governmental

performance was not commensurate with the initially raised high expectations of the people. In course of time, charisma gave way to autocracy, resulting in a party organization plagued with nepotism and casteism stifling the initial "inner party democracy" which held different caste groups to a platform of anti-Congressism.

One significant development in the Congress party within the state during NTR's rule was that it saw the closing of ranks among the factional leaders uniting them in their joint tirade against the ruling TDP. Within a year of NTR's coming into power, veteran state Congressmen like J. Vengal Rao, who were outside the state politics, reentered the fray. And right from the beginning, Congress in its unaccustomed role of opposition in the state concentrated on virulent criticism of TDP government's policies, and systematic obstruction in the legislature. The failure of the TDP government on many fronts had been effectively exploited by the Congress party as the main opposition in the state. It attacked the TDP government on every front and successfully projected itself as an alternative to the ruling party. The Congress returned to power in the state with a overwhelming majority in the 1989 elections. For the first time, therefore, the state witnessed a strong and viable opposition in Congress against the ruling TDP and its

allies, and articulate enough to give rise to a "competitive two party system of sorts'.

The casteism and nepotism along with corrupt practices of TDP had alienated most of its support groups which aligned with it in 1983 and 1985 against Congress. On the other hand Congress gradually rejuvenated its party organization by reabsorbing those dissatisfied support groups which hitherto defected by shifting their loyalties to TDP in 1983 and 1985, but subsequently alienated from it, back to its fold, thereby enabling it to regain the lost social base and consequent political support in the state.

Therefore, the defeat of the Congress party in 1983 assembly elections resulting in TDP's coming to power and its subsequent victory in 1989 elections, regaining the lost power from TDP, is a pointer towards certain new developments in the state politics, such as,

- i) a shift in the political loyalties of certain specific socio-economic groups like dominant peasant castes and increasingly important backward and scheduled castes;
- ii) crystallization of "competitive two party system of sorts" in the state party system; and
- iii) Increasing political maturity of an average voter resulting in performance and accountability as the determining factors of electoral performance.

To conclude, therefore, while factionalism and patronage network characterised the one party dominance in the state during the previous years, unstable social alliances and shifting political loyalties represent contemporary state party politics.

The seeming unpredictability in the political behaviour of various social groups and instability of electoral coalitions in recent years, it can be argued, is mainly because of the break in the previous pattern of politics that revolved around dominant caste leaders and their dependent followers (or vote banks), that is, backward and scheduled castes. With the declining authority of dominant castes over their 'vote banks' because of the emergence of backward classes and scheduled castes as significant political forces in their own right. Consequently, there is a perceptible change in vertical mobilisation, creating space for horizontal mobilisation.

Such a space, however, is not cognised by the political parties, steeped in mobilisational strategies based on vertical mobilisation. As a consequence, populism and personal charisma occupies the space which rightfully belongs to horizontal mobilisation strategies. Hence the problems of building authority on new lines of horizontal mobilisation.

In the light of changes in the social structure delineated above, any blueprint conducive for the emergence of a strong and stable competitive party system can only be drawn by political parties by reorienting their mobilisational strategies towards genuine mobilisation based on horizontal lines which is symmetrical with the changes that have occurred in the social structure and political support base of the parties.

Table 1

Lok Sabha Election Results in Andhra Pradesh 1957-1980

Name of the Party	1957		1962		1967		1971		1977		1980	
	% of votes	% of seats	% of votes	% of seats	% of votes	% of seats	% of votes	% of seats	% of votes	% of seats	% of votes	% of seats
Indian National Congress	51.50	94.50	47.63	79.00	46.82	85.00	55.73	68.00	57.36	97.00	—	—
Indian National Congress (Indira Gandhi)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	56.23	98.00
Indian National Congress (U)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	7.23	—
Swatantra	—	—	14.91	2.50	13.75	7.50	—	—	—	—	—	—
C.P.I.	12.01	5.50	21.01	16.00	12.62	2.50	5.94	2.50	2.67	—	3.67	—
C.P.I. (M)	—	—	—	—	6.20	—	2.82	2.50	4.72	—	3.55	—
Praja Socialist	3.63	—	0.07	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Jana Sangh	0.04	—	1.17	—	—	—	4.57	—	—	—	—	—
Janata (S)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Janata Party (B.D.)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	32.33	3.00	15.23	2.00
T.P.S.	—	—	—	—	—	—	12.73	24.05	—	—	—	—
R.P.I.	—	—	1.23	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
SSP	—	—	—	—	11.91	—	10.00	—	0.11	—	—	—
Independents	32.82	—	13.89	2.50	18.80	5.00	8.21	2.50	2.81	—	7.57	—
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: D.Sunder Ram, Role of Opposition Parties in Indian Politics: The Andhra Pradesh Experience, New Delhi, 1992, p.120.

Table 2

Assembly Election Results in Andhra Pradesh, 1957-1978

Name of the Party	1957		1962		1967		1972		1978	
	% of votes	% of seats	% of votes	% of seats	% of votes	% of seats	% of votes	% of seats	% of votes	% of seats
Congress	47.40	47.40	47.25	57.00	45.32	57.80	52.29	77.00	—	—
Congress (I)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	39.34	61.80
Congress (S) (Vengal Rao)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	17.18	9.63
Swatantra	—	—	10.40	6.50	9.84	10.50	1.98	0.65	—	—
PSP/SSP	5.70	6.50/ 6.10	0.30	—	0.57	1.20	—	—	—	—
CPI	6.90	26.00	19.53	17.00	7.78	4.50	5.98	2.50	2.32	4.90
CPI (M)	—	—	—	—	7.61	3.00	3.18	0.35	2.74	5.60
Janata	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	28.77	16.07
Independents	40.00	14.00	20.47	16.50	26.51	23.00	32.22	19.50	9.18	2.00
Other Parties	—	—	2.05	3.00	2.37	—	4.35	—	0.47	—
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: D.Sunder Ram, Role of Opposition Parties in Indian Politics: The Andhra Pradesh Experience, New Delhi, 1992, p.122.

Table 3
Electoral Performance of TDP and Congress
during 1983-1989

Year	Election	TDP	% of	Cong(I)	% of votes
1983	Assembly	202	46.3	60	33.6
1984	Lok Sabha	35*	53.6	6	41.8
1985	Assembly	233**	53.7	50	37.5
1987	Mandals & ZPPS	18	50.99	3	41.23
1987	Municipal Chairman & Mayors				42.98
1989	Assembly & Lok Sabha	91*** 2	43.7	182 40	46.97 45.33

* BJP-1, CPM-1, CPI-1, Janata-1 (T.D.P. 44%)

** BJP-8, CPM-11, CPI-10, Janata Dal-3, TDP-202 (46.44%)

*** BJP-4, CPM-6, CPI-8, Janata Dal-1, TDP-72.

Source: V.Bhaskara Rao, "The Debacle of TDP in 1989
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