

# State politics in Contemporary India

The defeat faced in election convinced Ambedkar that a separate political party was required which will have a wider political and electoral strategy. After his death in 1956, the AISC was dissolved and the Republican Party of India (RPI) was formed in 1957.

The party, the first of its kind accepted the fundamental provision of the constitution and vowed to pursue its objective through the medium of parliamentary democracy.

It functioned for almost two decades and was successful in establishing its base in the state of Maharashtra and to a limited extent in the state of Uttar Pradesh, though it is in the latter the RPI succeeded more in electoral terms than in Maharashtra.

The RPI was also able to launch some major agitation for example, the agitation for land distribution in 1959 and 1960-1965. These agitations, however, were ~~not~~ more of an aberration rather than a general feature of RPI politics, they were, in fact, isolated episodes and not harbingers of sustained mass movements. The sporadic nature of RPI politics was probably the main reason why the RPI could not keep its base intact and always had to confront the problem of losing its support base as soon as the agitation ended.

By the mid 1960s it had established itself in the state of Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. These were the states in which it had a strong presence. Very soon, however, the RPI weakened largely because of internal differences on the



issue of aligning with the Congress. A section of the leadership within the party was pragmatic and was entered in league hands with the Congress whereas others were of the view that an alliance with the Congress would lead to a dilution of the greater objective of the party of promoting solidarity of the SC population in the country.

On this issue some of the leaders broke away from the party and joined the Congress. It broke into several factions and today the various factions only a marginal role in the politics of Maharashtra.

The failure of the RPI to keep up to the lofty ideas of Ambedkar and to fulfil the aspirations of the Dalit youths led to the formation of the Dalit Panthers in Bombay in 1972. The Dalit Panthers drew its inspiration from the writings of Ambedkar and Marx. Its leaders criticised the RPI leaders for having failed to keep up to the ideas of Ambedkar and for its persistent splits and electoral failures.

They sought to project themselves as an alternative to the RPI and very soon were successful in attracting the Dalit youths and students. Though initially it tasted success in the state of Maharashtra, yet very soon the movement fell prey to the same problem that had confronted the RPI.