

ADIVASIS OF ADILABAD

*Investigation into Indervalli Firing*

PEOPLE'S UNION FOR DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

DELHI

May 1981

# Factors Behind Indervalli Police Firing

A fact finding team sponsored by the People's Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR) visited Adilabad to get a first-hand report on the police firing at Indervalli on April 20, 1981. The team consisted of Prof. Manoranjan Mohanty of Delhi University, Dr. V. Sivalinga Prasad, Reader in Public Administration, Osmania University, Dr. Murali Manohar of Kakatiya University, Shri T. Laxshma Reddy, advocate and President of AP State Civil Liberties Committee, Warangal unit, and Dr. A. Ramanatham, medical practitioner, Warangal. It was assisted by Shri K.V. Ramana Reddy, Jawahar Bharati, Kavali. The team visited Adilabad town, Utnoor, taluq headquarters, Indervalli and some villages surrounding it on May 2 and 3, 1981.

The committee set out to ascertain the facts leading to the police firing and the socio-economic background to the tension which prevails in the region.

After talking to villagers in Utnoor taluq, meeting political activists from various parties including the Congress (I) and interviewing officials including the Superintendent of Police, the committee arrived at the following preliminary findings:

1. The Girijana Rytu Coolie Sangham meeting was by no means a sudden development. Sufficient advance notice had been given about the rally on April 20, 1981, which was fired upon.

2. There is evidence to suggest that the police, acting on the advice of the local opponents of the Girijana Rytu Coolie Sangham, were determined to prevent the rally from taking place.

3. The police were stationed half a kilometre outside the heart of Indervalli and they resorted to firing without giving sufficient warning.

4. The number of the dead is far more than 13, the figure given by the police. Some sources put the figure of dead at 60 and the injured at 100. In fact the manner in which the police disposed of the bodies makes it difficult to arrive at a correct figure.

5. The tensions which prevail in the area arise from the fact that the poor Gonds have been conti-

nuously alienated from their land and forest produce on which they survive. The unimaginative policies of the State Government, the officials working in league with non-tribal merchants and other middlemen are the prime causes of tribal discontent. In the process of Government has also created a communal schism among tribals and non-tribals and also between Gonds and Lambadas. Efforts by the tribals to organise themselves are facing stiff resistance by the establishment.

Adilabad, which was part of the former tribals kingdom 'Gondwana', is on the western side of Andhra bordering Chanda district of Maharashtra. A predominantly forest region, rich in mineral resources, it is listed as Andhra's most backward district by the State planning authorities. The tribal uprising of the forties, known as the Babejari revolt led by Komaran Bhim, and the efforts of the Austrian anthropologist, Christoff Von Hemendorff, brought the district into the limelight shortly before it was merged into the Indian Union after the integration of the Nizam's princely state and various tribal development programmes have been taken up since then. Yet large tracts of interior forest villages have remained outside the benefits of development in the last three decades.

Fourteen per cent of the district's over 16 lakh population are tribals. Gonds (70 per cent), Kolmas Koyas and Pradhans constitute the bulk of the tribal population. Agriculture, which is the major source of livelihood for the population, is very backward with negligible cropping intensity and only five per cent of the land having any irrigation facilities. Land holdings indicate a high degree of inequality.

The district has the lowest literacy rate (14.15 per cent), lowest medical facilities (111 doctors for over 12 lakh population), lowest electrification (728 out of 1609 villages), lowest transport facilities (860 km road length for 16,000 sq. km. area) in the State.

But the significant development in the district has been the growth of coal mines which are part of

Singareni collieries, south India's biggest collieries. Besides forest-based industries (like teak, paper), and others like cement, fertiliser, etc. have also developed. More than ten per cent of the State's industrial income originates from this district. Yet it has not benefited the local tribal population. Of the 20,000 workers in the mines only 7 per cent are tribals.

Two sources of social tension that is, the relationship of tribals to the forest and to the land, need to be examined in detail to understand the present conflict.

Forty-four per cent of the geographical area of Adilabad consists of forests. Various varieties of teak-type forests are predominant in the region occupying 54 per cent of the forest area. Of the rest of the area 27 per cent consists of bamboo forests. A large part of the area is notified as reserve forest by the State Government as part of its afforestation programmes.

The Government usually leases out forest for industrial purposes to private houses or contractors. For over a decade now thousands of acres of bamboo forest are under contract with Birlas for their paper mill at Sirpur. In the areas controlled by the private houses as well as by the Government, private labour contractors are engaged for felling trees. Though due to mounting labour movement for implementing the minimum wages the Government has abolished private contractors in its own forest, they continue to dominate the forest controlled by the industrialists. The State earns about Rs 200 million from this forest every year.

Besides, large parts of forest area are also used for agricultural purposes where private land-owners dominate the scene, particularly in the area which was acquired by the Government by the nationalisation of former forest estates, under the Nizam. Notwithstanding various laws and regulations to prevent deforestation, parts of the forest are continuously dereserved by the Government to facilitate private trade. Thus, of the five lakh acres of forest dereserved in last twenty years in the State, more than 1.5 lakh acres are from Adilabad forest.

The net result of this contradictory policy of afforestation and deforestation has been the progressive alienation of the forest from the tribals who were reduced to daily wage labourers at the mercy of the private contractors and forest officials. Besides, this also creates serious ecological imbalances with long-range implications.

In essence there are three types of agricultural land in the region; the land at the foot of the forest generally controlled by the Sahukars (traders), land in the former forest estates, and land brought to cultivation by the tribals 'illegally' in the reserve forest area. A host of laws and regulations, often in conflict with each other, are applicable to the region. The protective regulations are enforceable only in scheduled areas which cover only 409 of the districts 1609 villages. Besides, two Government departments, the forest department and the revenue department, overlap each other's jurisdiction.

The land owned by the Sahukars originally belonged to the tribals but over the course of time it was acquired by the Sahukars who came from the plains of Andhra and Maharashtra as money-lenders but

settled here as prosperous land-owners. In large parts of areas where the tribal land protection regulations do not apply, their reign is virtually unchallenged.

In 1952 almost entire the forest area including the former forest estates of the Nizam came under Government control and ownership. In parts of these area, the 'AP Scheduled Area Ryotwari Settlement Regulation' is applicable by which anybody (not necessarily a tribal) who can prove that he is cultivating the land since 1945 can acquire a *patta*. Either in giving substantive evidence or in convincing the revenue officials the tribals with their illiteracy are in a disadvantageous position relative to the non-tribals, resulting in the alienation of their land.

In 1949 the Government brought its first law aimed at protecting the tribal land in the scheduled areas by which the Government acquired the right to evacuate the non-tribals from the tribal land. But the right was hardly exercised. In 1963 the Government brought another amendment by which the AP Scheduled Area Land Transfer Regularisation Law (1959) hitherto in existence in the Andhra and Rayalaseema regions became applicable to Telengana and hence Adilabad. This law explicitly prohibits transfer of land and other immovable property by way of mortgage, tenancy, sale, etc., from the tribals to the non-tribals. In 1971 the Government brought yet another regulation in the wake of the tribal uprising in Srikakulam, amending the 1959 law. By this regulation the onus of providing evidence of ownership of land in scheduled areas will be on the non-tribal land-owners. In 1978 it enlarged the scope of the law by introducing another amendment by which immovable property includes not only land but also crop and trees.

But the progressive alienation of tribal land either in scheduled areas or in non-scheduled areas continued unabated in the course of the last three decades. Meanwhile another process went on unnoticed from the mid-sixties. Thousands of peasants, be they tribals, Maharashtra peasants or Lambadas, started clearing jungle land and brought it under cultivation. This land the Government does not recognise as agricultural land as the land brought into cultivation falls within the reserve forest area. In the course of the last ten years these peasants have spent their meagre resources in bribing forest and revenue officials and in some cases even politicians to get *pattas* which they were never able to acquire. Estimates of such land brought into cultivation by the hard labour of poor peasants range from 15,000 acres (revenue department estimates) to 30,000 acres (forest department estimates) to 80,000 acres (Girijana Sangham estimates).

The multiple authority of the revenue and forest departments has further complicated the situation for the tribals, resulting in widespread corruption. The revenue department, which is the authority to settle all land disputes, is situated in Nizamabad, outside the district, making it virtually inaccessible to the tribals. Of the 11 386 applications from the tribals under the new land regulations of 1971, only 3,792 have been upheld by the department. Some of the non-tribals managed to get stay orders from the

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courts delaying the process. On the other hand, the forest department, unmindful of revenue department activities, is busy evacuating the tribals from forest land. The forest department keeps its own records which often conflict with the revenue department records. To quote one source, the forest department records often show "the bazar in the centre of the town as forest and the real forest as barren land". In 1975 the State Government ordered a review of the forest department records in Adilabad district which is yet to begin. The confusion created by this multiple authority can be understood by the fact that the forest department, along with the census reports, put the forest area at 43.57 per cent, while the revenue department maintains it to be only 25 per cent.

In the course of years of such a chaotic policy of the State Government, new forces have emerged to dominate the economic as well as the political process. Non-tribal businessmen strengthened their influence over the established political parties. The Lambada community, which migrated into this area, began slowly to have a footing in the region as successful agriculturists. Over time they became the largest single beneficiaries of agricultural and tribal development programmes. Eventually they also became the leading political stratum in panchayat and Assembly constituencies and professional circles as well. Today we find sharp differentiation between the vast majority of the Gonds on one hand and the relatively smaller community of Lambadas on the other. The inclusion of the Lambada community in the list of Scheduled Tribes in 1977 further complicated the situation as the Gonds perceived this as a threat to their land and existence. In this situation some people have floated a non-tribal rights protection committee to counter the self-organisation efforts of the tribals, like the Sanghams.

Thus the tribal nature of the district has undergone changes with the gradual penetration by big industrial houses, the growth of state-owned coalmines, state control of forests and the continuous flow of plains people who came as money-lenders but settled as land owners. And the seeds of tribal non-tribal schism which the State policies are sowing, coupled with the fact that the tribals do not have legal rights to the land which they cultivate and the land which should belong to them remaining inaccessible to them, has aggravated the situation. All these developments have led to progressive alienation of the tribal population from their land and moorings, introducing inexorable contradictions into the social fabric of tribal society which today are maturing to result in the present violent social conflict.

THE recent movement in Adilabad district originated from the neighbouring Karimnagar district in 1978. Led by a CPI (ML) group, tribals organised themselves into Girijana Rytu Coolie Sanghams (tribal peasant labour associations) and began to wage struggles against money-lenders and forest officials. Beginning in Asifabad and Laxsettipet taluqs of the district, it slowly spread to Sirpur, Uttoor, Khanpur, Chennore and Adilabad taluqs. Occupation of Government land held illegally by the landlords, increase in the wages of tendu leaf workers, control over the forest and

illegal sale of forest produce by forest officials, and the wages of tribal labourers employed by the forest contractors are the planks through which the Sangham acquired a considerable mass base. Intense battles over the forest produce were reported in Uttoor and Asifabad and Sirpur taluqs, particularly since the middle of last year. The State responded with heavy repression. Adilabad, which has already the highest concentration of police forces with two Superintendents of Police and six DSPs, was brought under the new range of a DIG along with Karimnagar district. Over 600 tribals have been implicated in various cases. More than twelve police stations have been reinforced with additional armed police and in about 12 villages armed police camps have been opened. The movement also spread to the neighbouring Sironcha taluq of chanda district in Maharashtra.

Emboldened by the mass support, the Sangham called for its first district-level conference in Indervalli village of Uttoor taluq on April 20, where the police firings took place.

The committee visited the Adilabad district hospital where 18 men and two women were undergoing treatment for bullet injuries, other injured persons being treated at Hyderabad, Nizamabad, Manchryal and other places. Out of them, except one man who had a finger injury and one woman who had a thigh injury, the rest had bullet injuries above the waist-line. Later when we enquired from the Superintendent of Police as to why their guns did not aim at the lower parts of the body as required under the rules he gave the stunning reply, 'Bullets do not abide by rules'. The large number of deaths of innocent tribals and injuries seem to have been caused by a vengeful firing spree by the police. It is unfortunate that in this melee a poor constable also lost his life as a result of mass fury which was caused by unwarranted police provocation.

The patients in the hospital as well as villagers of Pittabongaram, while narrating the incident, expressed surprise as to the cause of firing. Some said they had gone to the *Shandy* (weekly market) thinking it was open that day. The villagers of Pittabongaram, nearly all of whom had apparently joined the rally, said they were taking a procession to attend the meeting to be addressed by speakers from outside. (The poster had announced that Kobad Gandy of CPDR, Bombay, Ranganathan of APCLC, Hemajwala of RWA and Lingamurti of RSU were to speak). Asked whether they were carrying weapons like axes and spears as alleged by the police, the villagers firmly denied it, and said they were either carrying the flag of the Sangham or their familiar thin bamboo stick. The committee picked up one such stick from the scene of the firing. The small stick by no stretch of imagination could pose a threat to the rifle-wielding police. The villagers admitted that they pelted some stones but only when the police burst teargas shells.

The police however told us that they were apprehending mass looting of the shandy at Indervalli on that day, that is why they had taken preventive steps. A Congress(I) leader presented a similar viewpoint and said that he and some others were apprehending threats to their lives. He also told us that Rytu Coolie Sangham volunteers had put up posters

throughout the area and were collecting donations from the bazar since April 17. The Superintendent of police declined to disclose the exact magnitude of deployment of armed police on that day, but said that the fact that he himself was camping there indicated that they apprehended trouble.

Placing together these reports the committee is inclined to believe that the police were determined to terrorise the Girijans and break their morale for which purpose they resorted to firing. During the incident even those who were trying to carry the dead and take the wounded to safety were not spared by the police bullets. Some of the injured who were being taken to safety died on the way, some while quenching their thirst. The police claim that only 13 died, of whom nine have been so far identified. The committee notes with great anguish that the bodies were not handed over to the next of kin as required under the rules. The police did not try hard enough to trace the families of the deceased and the injured.

All these accounts are in sharp contrast to the arguments advanced by the State Government about the incident.

The Government's point was that the rally was a sudden development, whereas it had been announced at least a month in advance at Hyderabad and posters for the meeting were put up at least five days in advance in the area.

The argument that the meeting was denied permission because of the proposed non-tribal conference seems to be only a pretext as the non-tribal organisation which sprang up just a few days before the April 20 rally had cancelled its meeting. As for the tribal rally, it was virtually impossible to convey the imposition of Section 144 to the thousands of villagers coming from a number of villages of the forest area, who in any case were coming to Indervali for the market that day. Had the rally been allowed to be held as scheduled there would have been no threat to law and order. In fact in their anxiety to prevent violation of law and order the police themselves created an inflammable situation of a big magnitude.

The Government's point that the tribals were armed is deceitful since the "arms" they were carrying were only the sticks that tribals habitually carry.

The official figures put the death toll at 13. But discussions with various people, including private conversations with officials, indicate the number to be many more. Some sources give the number as 60. The police did not return the dead bodies to the families. Though the Gonds follow the custom of burial of the dead, the police cremated those who were killed. All these factors make it difficult to ascertain the exact number of deaths.

It is also clear that it is the policies of the State Government and the corruption of the officials that are the prime reasons for the present conflict. While the State Government's immediate reaction, with the visits of State Cabinet Ministers including the Chief Minister, compensation to the families of those of the killed who had been identified, and the allocation of Rs. one crore for tribal development, etc. are welcome measures, they are an indirect admission of the State's responsibility in creating the situation.

IN VIEW of the above findings the committee recommends the following:—

1. A judicial enquiry should be instituted immediately to go into the events leading to the firing and determine the responsibility of the concerned officials in committing these excesses and punish them.

2. The lawful rights to hold public meetings and carry on organisational work to protect the rights of Girijans should be guaranteed and concrete safeguards should be provided by the Government to avoid recurrence of arbitrary official actions suppressing such rights.

3. Police terror in the area must be ended forthwith and armed camps removed.

4. In order to formulate a programme of structural changes in tribal areas and implement to protect the rights of Girijans, the Government must take the Girijans themselves into confidence and initiate steps to tackle the root of the recent tensions to avoid further deterioration of the situation.

5. The tribals must be given legal rights for all the land which they are cultivating.

*Manoranjan Mohanty  
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A. Ramanathan*

## APPENDICES

### I. Profile of Adilabad

Area	Density	Forest Area	No of Villages	Scheduled Villages
16,133 sqkm	80 per sqkm*	43.57%	1,609	409

### II. People

Population	Scheduled Tribes	Literacy
12,88,348	13.14%	14.15%

### III. Select Indicators of Backwardness

Electrified villages*	Dispensaries*	Doctors*
728/1609	581/1609	111/12 lakh population

(Source: Census, 1971 and Andhra Pradesh VARSHIKA DARSHINI).

Note: \*indicates lowest in the State  
(Estimates of population in 1981 census are 16 lakhs).

### IV. Sectoral Composition of Output

	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
Adilabad	61	15	24
Andhra Pradesh	60	9	32

(Source: Survey of Backward districts in Andhra Pradesh, NCAER, p 104).

V. ADILABAD: Inequalities in Land Holdings

Size	Class	(Figure in Hectares)	
		Total No	Holdings Area
0	— 0.25	22,118	2,947
0.25	— 5.0	1,32,313	2,68,219
5.0	— 20.0	37,856	3,24,845
20.0	— 30.0	1,507	35,905
30.0	— 40.0	368	12,553
40.0	— 50.0	158	6,970
50.2	— above	182	13,694
		<u>1,93,502</u>	<u>6,55,133</u>

(Source: AP Agricultural Census Report, 1970-71).

VI. Land occupied by Girijana Sanghams 1980-81

Taluq	No. of Acres
Asifabad	400
Sirpur	600
Laxsettipet	60
Utnoor	1500

(Source: Nageti Challalo Ragilina Ryotnga Poratam Kranti Prachoranal, Hyderabad, 1981.)

VII. Cases against Tribals

Taluq	Sections under which cases are registered	No. of persons involved
Asifabad	302, 307, 107	180
Laxsettipet	395, 394, 307, 124-A, 151	280
Sirpur	307, 124-A	60
Chennore	151	20
Khanpur	151	12
Adilabad	151	15
Utnoor	151	8

(Source: Same as above)

VIII. Villages with Armed Police Camps

Vankidi  
Kamana  
Venkatapur  
Kondapalle  
Tapalapur  
Lingapur  
Rapalle  
Daaba  
Indervalli  
Tjmmapur  
Nagapuram  
Pippaldhari

IX. Police Stations with Additional Armed Police Force

Police Station  
Asifabad  
Chennore  
Utnoor  
Bellampalle  
Laxsettipet  
Adilabad  
Khanpur  
Sirpur  
Mancheryal  
Bhiba  
Kagajnagar  
Mandamarri

(Source: Same as above)