

PRESS RELEASE

We would like to report to the public the atrocious behaviour of the police of Adilabad towards us.

We went to Adilabad to attend the public meeting held annually at Indravelli in commemoration of the tribals killed in police firing on 20 April 1981. The first two of us were invited as sepakars and the other two attended the meeting as part of their ICSSR research project on tribal development. We reached Nirmal by 3.00 p.m. of 20th April, made sure that the police had given permission for the meeting, and rented a jeep and proceeded towards Indravelli. Later we saw a xeroxed copy of the permission letter issued by the Addl. Supdt. of Police to the organisers of the meeting. Along with us in the jeep was a writer by name B. Sriramulu, who has been given the Kodavatiganti Kutumba Rao award for his short stories.

Throughout the way from Nirmal to Indravelli we saw armed policemen stopping and searching all vehicles and pulling down people whom they suspected of going to Indravelli. All RTC buses going past Indravelli was cancelled. At Gudihathmur, where the road branches off towards Indravelli, the police had set up a barricade of stones and arrested anyone who took the turning. Our jeep was also stopped rudely and we were accosted by two inspectors (one of them carrying a name plate with the name V.V. Narasinga Rao), accompanied by armed constables. We identified ourselves and asked whether the public meeting was cancelled in which case we would go back. But without listening to us, the inspectors pulled out our bags and started throwing our clothes and books on the road. When we asked them why they were doing so, they manhandled us and beat us with fists. Suddenly one inspector caught hold of us and said 'you are under arrest.' We asked him under what section and he said 'Sec. 151 Cr. P.C. (Preventive Detention for 24 hours)'. We were walking towards the jeep but they pushed us and beat us. Even after we sat in the jeep they continued to beat us with rifle butts. They aimed loaded rifles at us and threatened to shoot us.

We were taken to Adilabad police station and along with the driver and clearner of the jeep and a friend of theirs (totally 8 in number) were locked up in a dark and smelly lock-up. The SI again told us that we were arrested under Sec. 151 Cr. P.C. and that we would be released the next day.

Throughout the next day (21 April) they continued to give us the impression that we were under preventive detention and would be released 'in half an hour' in one hour' etc. At about 10 a.m. they started interrogating us one by one. They took our photographs and 4 sets of 14 finger and palm prints, as if we were rowdy-sheeters. We insisted on meeting the S.P. of the district, but we were not allowed the privilege. We represented repeatedly to the SI Mr. Satyanarayana Rao that Professor Mohanty had a reservation by the next morning's flight from Hyderabad to Delhi, and that he had to attend a UGC-sponsored seminar and so he may be released

immediately but this plea fell on deaf ears.

After giving us the impression throughout that there was no case against us but only preventive detention, suddenly at 9 p.m. of 21st we were put in a truck and taken forty kms. to Utoor to be produced before a magistrate. Only then we learnt that we had been charged under Sec. 506 IPC (Criminal intimidation) and sec. 7 Criminal Law Amendment Act, the charge against us being that we had threatened the people of Gudihatnur that we would kill them if they did not go to Indravelli and that we incited them to attack the police and go to Indravelli. (This incredible charge, incidently, proves that the police really prevented people from going to Indravelli.) The jeep driver, the cleaner, and their friend were also implicated along with us in the case, inspite of our repeated requests to the SI that they may be released. We can only presume that they get some sadistic pleasure from such totally arbitrary action.

The next day, at the Court, the Police Prosecuting Officer (PPO) did his best to prevent us from getting bail. He even questioned our claim that we were University teachers, and challenged us to prove the claim. It was with great difficulty that we could obtain bail.

This harassment we were subjected to is only part of what the police did to prevent the meeting. Though permission was granted in writing for the meeting, the police got all the RTC buses cancelled, all the roads towards Indravelli barricaded, and all the forest routes blocked by posting pickets. The tribals who were coming to the meeting were driven away. We have even heard of a case where a group of about 100 tribals who were coming to the meeting were pushed back by driving a jeep into them. The organiser of the meeting, Mr. Ganji Ram Rao was arrested on 17th at Indravelli, and later the S.P. invented the fiction that he had been arrested at Asifabad while forcibly collecting funds. Two students, Nagendra and Jayaram, who were carrying a plaque to be fixed on the monument were also arrested and taken into custody along with their jeep. To this day their whereabouts are not known. Hundreds of tribals and youth were arrested. We do not know how many of them are still in detention, since the S.P. has acknowledged only the arrest of 60 persons.

We are unable to understand why a memorial meeting held in memory of martyred tribals should cause such unease to the State that every year it adopts such severely repressive measures to prevent it. Nor are we able to comprehend why the State should go to such lengths as fabrication of totally absurd cases, to prevent intellectuals and civil rights activists from attending and addressing meetings of such a nature. We severely condemn this repressive activity of the State, demand that all the arrested persons should be immediately produced in Court, and hope that atleast from the next year, the State will desist from employing such methods to prevent the tribals annual meeting at Indravelli.

sd/-

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