

# Drought and TADA in Adilabad

K Balagopal

*If one is not constrained by the usual subaltern scholars' hostility towards any objective assessment of popular consciousness, one will see that the question of 'moral outrage' is quite complex. What is really involved is the legitimacy of rebellion, which is neither an immutable absolute nor is determined autonomously in popular consciousness by the way the oppressed masses relate to the situation of oppression.*

THERE is half an hour yet for the district courts complex of Adilabad to open. The wide and clean road—roads are usually wide and clean in drought-hit areas, for land has no premium and there is no water to make mud—running past the courts and out of the town is just now coming to life. A stray lawyer or two, starched and black-coated, walks into the court compound, bearing an unaccustomed air of dignity with some difficulty. Opposite the compound the tea stalls have already come alive with the clatter of china and court gossip. The purveyor of the gossip—whether *muzrim*, *munshi* or middleman—wears the air of casual cynicism that affects all places that are visited by people in distress: courts, hospitals and jails, to wit. A certain moral stink envelops the court; it is just now gathering, and will reach a depressing intensity by about midday.

But in the meanwhile, there is a clean young man—by his looks a tribal—coming along the road walking beside a bullock cart laden with wood. One calls it a cart for want of a better word, just as one calls them bullocks for want of a better word. The cart has the tiniest of wheels and the barest of frames, and the bullocks look like mere calves. Since no more elaborate contraption than this cart would make it over the undulating land to the godforsaken Gond hamlet to which it is no doubt destined, the cart could be called 'appropriate technology' (though, on second thoughts, one is bound to ask *what* it is appropriate for, as there is no earthly reason why the terrain should forever remain so uneven and impassable), but there is nothing appropriate about the bullocks: they are merely underfed.

Just as the tribal and his cart come into the shadow of justice, there is a shout from the left and a middle-aged man rushes at him from a bylane. He is slight and awkwardly built but the tribal cringes before him and stops in his tracks. The man goes up to him, and they have an argument. As the curious bystanders near the tea-stalls look on, the argument ends quickly, with the man hitting the tribal across the face and detaching the bullocks.

The cart kneels forward and the wood it is carrying tumbles onto the road. The tribal looks miserable, and the man who has hit him ties the animals to a pole and walks triumphantly to the tea-stall. Unbidden, he explains his behaviour to the people gathered there. He speaks the gutter Urdu that is the language of street brawls in the erstwhile dominions of the Nizam of Hyderabad. It transpires that he is a petty trader, a marwari no doubt but a poor one for all that, and he has newly entered this business of buying up plough-cattle from the tribals and renting them out again on an annual basis. How foolish of the tribals to allow such a business, comments a lawyer's *munshi*, whose *paan*-stained lips give him a look of wisdom; no doubt it would be a foolish thing to allow in normal circumstances, assents the trader, but last year was not a normal one. There was a near-total failure of both the *kharif* and the *rabi* crops, for as you all know it rained too much in the first season and not at all in the second, and soon the peasants—especially the tribals, many of whom do not have title-deeds for the land they cultivate and therefore cannot raise loans from banks—were close to starvation. They started selling their plough-bullocks at the weekly fair. The Jainur fair soon started looking like an exclusive cattle fair. A man needs a moral reason for doing selfish things, as we all know, and so the tribals would say they are selling the cattle because there is no fodder to feed them with, but in reality the selfish fellows are selling the dumb animals so that they can feed themselves. At this point a dhoti-clad listener, a litigant by his looks, interferes to say that all (his nonsense about starvation is so much hot air because the government is supplying rice to the poor at Rs 2 per kg, or has this marwari not heard of the scheme that has made NTR famous all over the land? The others look suspiciously at the litigant's yellow shirt, and one of them answers that to buy NTR's rice you must have the right amount of money at the right time, neither of which is easy for the poor. When the dealer has stocks you don't have the money, and when you

manage to gather enough money the dealer says there are no stocks. That is really why the tribals are selling their cattle; to make NTR's scheme operational.

That is all very well, but what does the marwari do with the cattle—does he buy up the tribals' land too for the cattle to plough? No, this marwari has not yet acquired land (others have), nor does he sell the bullocks to anybody else. He has discovered a more lucrative business, which has become quite popular this year. The tribals who have sold the bullocks to feed themselves want them back now that it is monsoon time; and since their need is desperate the traders are now dictating the terms. Instead of selling the bullocks back they are renting them out on an annual basis. The rate? Well, to tell a lie would give displeasure to the gods, so the trader confesses that he charges an annual rent of Rs 400 or more for a pair of bullocks that he has bought for Rs 500. He takes the rent in advance, for these fellows who look so innocent are capable of bluffing you out of your own home, and if you don't collect in advance, you don't collect, ever. A nice business, murmurs an envious listener; yes says the marwari, the gods have been kind to him. After a while somebody asks what was the meaning of the recent scene, pointing in explanation to the tribal crouching by the roadside opposite the tea-stalls. Here the trader's tone becomes almost piteous with injured righteousness. That ingrate you see there is a Gond son-of-a-dog from Tiriani, he says. Three months ago he sold his cattle at the Jainur fair and fattened himself and his bitch of a wife on rice, ghee and curds. Now the monsoons are close at hand, there is a film of cloud in the sky and a strong breeze blowing across the land, and he again wants bullocks to plough his fields. He comes begging, with tears in his eyes, for a pair of bullocks—nice strong animals they are, as you can see—and promises to pay the rent in a week's time. Now, continues the trader, one has always been kind-hearted to a fault, it is a congenital trait, and anyway, my brethren, this world is such an unkind place, if one man does not help another in need, where would we all be? And so he gave the tribal son-of-a-dog the pair of bullocks on the agreement that he would pay Rs 400 in a week's time. A week passes by, two weeks pass by, and the third is drawing to a close, but there is no sign of the dog. Just as the honest trader is contemplating a police complaint he spies him quite by accident now. He has harnessed the animals to a cart—the perfidious liar, he said he wanted them to plough land—and with your own eyes you saw that he was smuggling wood and sneaking out of the town. A fair-minded listener interjects at this point that you do

not smuggle wood *out of* the town, it should be the other way round, but the trader's sime of injury is too intense for mere reason. Ignoring the interference the trader continues his narration. He stopped the wretch and demanded an explanation; and do you know what he replies, that arrogant so-and-so? He says his land does not grow a crop in one week; it takes time for the seed to be sown, to sprout, become a plant, and bear a crop—as if one did not know all that. And he even adds—here the good trader is livid with anger—that his land is not like a marwari who lends to one man now and one man then so that there is always some crop coming home. That, of course, was when he hit the fellow across the face, detached the bullocks, and tied them to (he pole.

But by this time the listeners have lost interest in this conflict

The district of Adilabad has been constantly in the news in Andhra Pradesh these days. There has been news about tribal youth picked up from their villages and shot dead by the police (and described as 'unidentified naxalites killed in encounters'); news about naxalites laying land mines and blowing up police jeeps; news about Tflugu Desam Party leaders going on hunger strike demanding an end to fake 'encounter' killings; and news about raids by starved tribals upon the houses and shops of traders and moneylenders living in towns and big villages, raids of the kind that historians have found fascinating material for spinning theories about popular struggles and popular consciousness. The first raid took place at the village of Pemb in Khanapur taluk on October 3, 1988; and after that there have been raids at Pcnchikalapeta, Thosham, Jainath, Talamaddi, Rajura and Dandcpalli, as well as a few other places across the border, in Maharashtra. In each incident, about 200 to 300 tribals, accompanied by armed naxalites, have raided the houses of moneylenders and taken away money as well as some of the pawned articles; they have raided the shops of grain dealers and taken away rice and jpwars to be eaten and sown; and they have also generally broken into the houses and shops of traders of all varieties and taken away money, clothes, jewellery, anything they could lay their hands on.

The background to these raids is the unusually severe failure of crops last year. In a year when the rains were *reportedly* good (in terms of total precipitation), and in a district which is ringed on three sides by the Godavari and its tributaries—the Pranahita, Ptnganga, Swarna and Kadem rivers—there is nothing 'natural' about such a failure, but the failure was very real nevertheless, 45 out of the 52 mandals in the district were declared drought-affected by the government; the district collector reported partial failure of the *kharif* crop (cotton, paddy, jowar and pulses) and

total failure of the *rabi* crop (mainly jowar, pulses and sesamum). The district collector's estimate of crop loss is Rs 36.92 crore, but since crop loss is defined as the short fall in the yield of the crop that is sown, this does not reflect what the peasants themselves would regard as the actual loss. The actual loss should take into account what is not sown at all, which can be considerable in conditions of continuing crop failure. *Rabi* sowing, for instance, was about 40 per cent below normal in the district last year, though *kharif* Sowing was almost normal. For the peasant, this represents a very real loss of income, though official statistics never include it.

The crop failure was due to a peculiar combination of torrential rains in the south-west monsoon and practically no rains in the north-east monsoon. The unceasing rains of the first monsoon flooded the lands, washed away soil and breached tanks. This is one of the problems concerning which nothing has ever been done anywhere in the country, let alone a neglected district like Adilabad. With proper management of land and water sources, heavy rains—at least up to a point—can be a boon, but today they are a disaster. Cultivators in the plains region of eastern and southern Adilabad saw the village tanks breach one by one. The location and construction of irrigation tanks is such that five or six of them form a complex, with the overflow from those located upland flowing into those located below. This structural convenience leads to a cascade-effect when the upper tank breaches: the suddenly released water washes off the surrounding soil and rushes into the tanks below, and not only do the tanks below also breach, but the land all round is spoilt. The uplands are denuded of soil and the lowlands become a dumping ground for loose soil. By the time the rains stop the tanks are empty and the land is barren.

But the worst affected were the undulating highlands of the northern part of Adilabad, especially the north-central region consisting of the revenue mandals of Jainur, Sirpur, Narnur and Tiriani, which together cover a compact plateau located towards the north of the roadside village of Indravelli where the police fired upon a large gathering of tribals in April 1981. There are neither irrigation tanks nor wells here; the terrain is uneven and forested, and the population is largely tribal. Unevenness of the terrain is no reason why the region has remained un-irrigated, for such a terrain offers good scope for minor irrigation projects, and the tribals themselves will point out to a number of locations where water from forest streams can be trapped to irrigate a couple of hundred acres or more, but the government has never shown serious interest in exploiting such possibilities. Irrigation in the whole of Adilabad remains

at the low figure of 9.2 per cent of cultivable land (the state's average is about 34 per cent), and most of it is in the south and west, which are watered by tanks, wells, and irrigation projects on the Kadem, Swarna and Godavari rivers.

And so when the skies started belching water, the peasants of the north-central mandals just watched helplessly as the uneven terrain got water-logged; the rich 'black cotton' soil of the district makes it impossible to work in such conditions, even to the extent of removing the weeds that grow fast in the rains. The new shoots of jowar, cotton and *asmaan tari* (rain-fed paddy) drowned easily in the floods. It rained for weeks without end, but in the beginning the peasants were not altogether disheartened; let the rains stop and we will sow again and get a good crop with the moisture retained by the soil, they thought. The rains did stop, but once they stopped they stopped so completely that the soil—apart from that which was anyway denuded—lost moisture fast, and the freshly sown crop withered in the sun. There was not a drop of rain in November and December—the active months for the north-east monsoon—and the crop failure was total."

Very soon the people of the area were driven to the verge of starvation. Very little non-agricultural work is available after the close of the summer season. In summer the people pick *rendu* leaves in the forest, an activity available for two months a year; it pays reasonably well now, thanks to the sustained struggles conducted with the encouragement of the CPI-ML groups. The piece-rate for the picking of *tendu* leaf has increased more than six-fold in the last decade and a half all over the Godavari valley region. But with the coming of the rains there is no more picking of *tendu* leaf. The other source of non-agricultural work—laying of roads—is another activity that comes *jo* an end with the coming of the rains. Normally it would not have mattered that these avenues of work are closed but with the sudden and near-total crop failure the lack of other work became a serious matter. There was a considerable amount of migration to far off areas—the coal mines of the Singareni Collieries Company in eastern Adilabad, the canal-irrigated southern talukas where assured irrigation made the *rabi* crop possible, the coal mines and the thermal power plant in Karimnagar, etc. The non-tribal poor and the more mobile among the tribals like the *lambadas* migrated in proportionately large numbers, whereas the more backward and less mobile among the tribals, the Gonds and Kolams, migrated in smaller numbers. For those who stayed behind there were only two sources of succour: the forests and the moneylenders. From the forests they knew how to obtain food of various types and other produce which they could exchange against food. From

the moneylenders, who gave them crop-loans every season at the rate of 50 paise per rupee per cropping season—amounting to an annual interest of 100 per cent—they hoped to get some consumption loan to tide over the difficult days.

The forests did not disappoint them but the moneylenders did. Giving a crop-loan is one thing in a region where cotton is an important crop that occupies 21 per cent of the cultivated area (nearly double the area under paddy and almost half that under jowar, the staple cereal); the methods of cultivation remain what they were when the crop was first introduced to the area, and so the yield they get is hardly one-fourth of what the cotton cultivators of the coastal districts like Guntur get, but nevertheless for a moneylender a cash crop is a cash crop. And so every season the tribals borrow working capital from them at an annual interest of 100 per cent and repay it at the end of the season. The loan is usually given in the form of food-grains and seed, at a time when their price is high, but the repayment must be made in cash, for the price of grain declines after harvest time. The moneylenders are mostly marwaris, Tetugu Komatis and a few muslims, all of them grain merchants, cotton dealers or landlords. They live in the mandal headquarters towns or in big villages. Often it happens that a tribal defaults too often and becomes irredeemably indebted; he does not then become a bonded labourer, for as long as there is some forest left to be cleared and cultivated—whatever the consequences—a tribal will never bond himself the way a harijan in a village would. So what normally happens is that once the accumulated debt exceeds the value of the articles pawned, the tribal gives up his land to the moneylender, though of course there may not be any recorded transfer, first because the tribals themselves frequently do not have title deeds for the land they cultivate, and second because the law does not allow transfer of land from a tribal to a non-tribal in a scheduled area. Many of the moneylenders have become quite big landlords owning 70 to 80 acres of land, in the process.

In other words, Adilabad is more like a historical record left over from the nineteenth century than anything that belongs to the late twentieth century. At least so far as the tribal-moneylender relation goes,

When the crops failed so badly last year the tribals thought they would raise a loan from the moneylenders to see them through until the next monsoon. But the moneylenders were not willing. Lending working capital for a cash crop is one thing, but giving a consumption loan in a drought year to a people whose rate of saving even in a normal year is not such as to enthrone any pawn-broker is a different thing altogether. And so they refused bluntly. This angered the tribals a lot,

for they had never defaulted in the past, and moreover the moneylenders were still in possession of many of their valuables, pawned against previous loans. They regarded the refusal as a betrayal of trust, a breach of obligation. They were, in the words of the subaltern historian David Hardiman writing on the 'Bhils and Shahukars of Eastern Gujarat' (*Subaltern Studies*, Volume V), 'morally outraged'.

But if one is not constrained by the usual subaltern scholars' hostility towards any objective assessment of popular consciousness, one will see that the question of 'moral outrage' is quite a complex one. Granting for a moment (but only for a moment) that mere starvation has never led to a rebellion and that people have rebelled only when they are morally outraged by the violation of what they understand as social obligations—, what is really involved here is the *legitimacy of rebellion*, which is neither an immutable absolute, nor is it determined autonomously in popular consciousness by the way the oppressed masses relate to the situation of oppression.

Every unequal relation, every relation of domination, is a relation of tension. The very fact that it comes into being and reproduces itself implies the generation and internalisation on both sides of a certain *common morality* that legitimises the domination, while at the same time conceding something to the oppressed in the form of a line of demarcation beyond which the domination is regarded as 'excessive' and is condemned. This is not an equilibrium 'moral code' consisting of 'certain expectations' generated by the 'balance of power' or 'the *status quo* of the moment'; even if we concede Hardiman's contention that the Bhils and Shahukars of Eastern Gujarat constituted 'two systems of social organisation and morality interacting and coming into occasional conflict with each other', rather than two social classes *within* a single social organisation, the concluding tag that neither exercised 'moral hegemony' over the other is more a presumption than an inference. On the contrary, a relation of domination cannot reproduce itself except under the umbrella of a hegemonic ideology, including a hegemonic morality.

It is true that this legitimising morality is not a one-point ideology that forms the sum and substance of the consciousness of the masses, and to the extent that hasty Marxist exposition has tended to treat it as such, the subaltern scholars' criticism is justified (though even so one cannot avoid the feeling that their polemics are as laboured as their research is meticulous). But the internalisation, the legitimacy, is very real, and it is the moral standard which measures and certifies the legitimacy of the social behaviour of either party. This standard, which is the common social conscience of the oppressor and the oppressed, is *itself an aspect of*

*domination*. When the people are outraged at the breach of what they regard as a norm or obligation, they are not reacting from the standpoint of a moral code defined by their way of relating to the unequal relation, but from the standpoint of this social conscience. There is no 'autonomous and undominated region' of popular consciousness, as Partha Chatterjee (who distinguishes himself among the subaltern theoreticians by a laudable desire to make himself intelligible to ordinary mortals) would have us believe. Popular consciousness and the consciousness of the masses are not two separate entities, two separate ways of looking at the relation; they form an unbroken continuum, the *totality* of which is enveloped and penetrated by the hegemonic morality. The values and ideas generated by the material life of the masses are at every point coloured by the values and ideas—the 'ideology'—of what these scholars call the 'elite', 'folk to the tribals suffering from drought, and they will give you their analysis and evaluation, their fads and their myths, their reason and unreason, and go on without any break to brahminical notions of the inferiority of jungle-folk, and the ideology of bureaucratic patronage summed up by the term scheduled tribe. To break this continuum and separate the ideas of the masses from the ideology of the ruling classes requires struggle and political intervention—not necessarily from outside but not always from within either—but such a development through struggle is precisely what is denied in the notion of an autonomous and undominated region supposedly always present in the consciousness of the masses.

The legitimising morality, for the reason that it is legitimising the domination of the oppressors and therefore has to accommodate the resentment of the oppressed, has perforce to define a perimeter beyond which the behaviour of the oppressors becomes 'outrageous' and the rebellion of the oppressed becomes socially legitimate. The neglected wife is expected to suffer the neglect silently, but it will be understood if she rebels when he starts bringing the other woman home. This perimeter, this dividing line between what is legitimate and what is not in the behaviour of either class, is a product of the state of the struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed. In taking this struggle forward the role of political leadership—whether that is provided by advanced elements of the oppressed classes who are able to perceive that what is 'moral' merely legitimises domination, or by dissident elements of the dominant classes who are alienated from their class by their sensitivity or their private neurosis; or by the cultural influence of a different society—is crucial. That leadership can popularise, spread, and thereby *legitimise* the notion of struggle against oppression

keif, and not just against the breach of norms that are sanctioned by the oppressors. The annulment of the perimeter of moral legitimacy, and the definition of a new dividing line that has a lower level of tolerance of injustice, usually takes place hand in hand with the coming together in political solidarity of diverse individuals of the oppressed groups, To describe this annulment as an advance in consciousness will be decried by the subaltern scholars as an elitism that 'seeks to be a judge of what is best for the lower classes' (David Hardiman, op cit), but it is an advance in the precise sense that it is able to see evil in domination itself, and not in some outrageous consequence of domination. The fact that the lack of a 'strictly scientific-rationalist outlook' did not prevent the Bhils—and has not prevented any oppressed group anywhere—from rebelling need not lead us to the meaningless conclusion that a 'scientific-rationalist' understanding could (not) have served (the people) better'. And once the advance in consciousness takes place, mere inequality or oppression can make them rebel. Perhaps, on second thoughts, more food-riots have taken place because of mere hunger than David Hardiman would like to believe.

Coming back to Adilabad 1988-89, it is not very easy to predict whether the tribals would have attacked moneylenders if they had not had the benefit of naxalite leadership. The difficulty in understanding popular consciousness even in face to face conversation (let alone by reading official post-mortem reports) is that it expresses itself in socially legitimate terms, especially when talking to government officials, visiting scholars, civil liberties activists, or a court of law. And government officials writing reports on riots are also likely to find extenuating circumstances—if at all—within the frame work of the socially legitimate, if not as a matter of prudence then because that is their own social morality. The ease with which the subaltern scholars have assumed that they have no methodological difficulties in understanding popular consciousness is a little baffling even to one who is not a professional historian. When poor people in a village beat up a landlord, they usually have a hundred reasons for doing so, but when they are questioned they usually lay stress on acts like molestation of poor women, for such acts are objects of social opprobrium. Scholars then go on to conclude that there is no land question or class hatred but only 'honour' involved in the struggle. The fact that every act of rebellion is a penal offence makes the appeal to the prevailing social conscience even more imperative. If a labourer who has beaten up the master tells the inspector who has arrested him that he committed the crime because the master would not give him leave of absence to go to a

## FORM IV-A

(See rule 4A(1))

Form of general notice to be given to the members of the public before making an application to the Central Government under sub-section (4) of section 23 of the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act, 1969.

### NOTICE

1. It is hereby notified for information of the public that BLUE STAR LIMITED proposes to make an application to Central Government in the Department of Company Affairs, New Delhi, under sub-section (4) of section 23 of the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act, 1969, for approval to the take-over of the whole or part, MOTOROLA BLUE STAR PRIVATE LIMITED.

Brief particulars of the proposal are as under:

- (i) Name and address of the applicant : BLUE STAR LIMITED  
Kasturi Buildings, Jamsheedji Tata Road,  
Bombay 400 020.
- (ii) Name and address of the undertaking : MOTOROLA BLUE STAR PRIVATE  
the whole or part of which is LIMITED  
proposed to be taken over and the Blue Star House, 11, Magarath Road  
manner of take-over, i e, by acquisition Bangalore 560 025  
of shares, acquisition of control or  
management, whether by the acquisition Mode of take-over:  
of the ownership of the under- By acquisition of shares  
taking or under any mortgage, lease or  
licence or under any agreement or  
other arrangement.
- (iii) Management structure of the applicant : The applicant Company is  
managed by the Chairman &  
Chief Executive, the President &  
Vice Chairman and the Executive  
Director subject to the superin-  
tendence, control and direction  
of the Board of Directors.
- (iv) Capital structure of:  
(a) the applicant : Authorised Capital: Rs. 5 crores  
Issued, Subscribed and Paid up  
Capital: Rs.  
9,075 7.8% Cumulative } 9,07,500  
Preference Shares of }  
Rs. 100/- each }  
35,53,054 Equity } 3,55,30,540  
Shares of Rs. 10/- each }  
3,64,38,040
- (b) the undertaking proposed : Authorised Capital: Rs. 3 crores  
to be taken over Proposed Subscribed  
Capital Rs. 1.8 crores
- (v) Line(s) of business of the undertaking : Modems, Multiplexers and Net-  
which will or is likely to emerge as a working Products.  
result of the proposed take-over
- (vi) Consideration for the take-over : Being the Co-promoter.
- (vii) Scheme of finance indicating the : Company's share in the Equity  
source(s) of finance for the proposed Capital will be Rs. 72 lakhs which  
take-over will be financed by internal ac-  
cruals.

2. Any person interested in the matter may make a representation to Secretary, Department of Company Affairs, Government of India, Shastri Bhavan, Dr. Rajendra Prasad Road, New Delhi, with a copy to the Company, within 14 days from the date of publication of this Notice, intimating his views on the proposal and indicating the nature of his interest therein.

For & on behalf of BLUE STAR LIMITED

P.S. RAMNATH

VICE PRESIDENT & COMPANY SECRETARY

Dated this 22nd day of November, 1989.

fair or attend a wedding, the inspector is likely to beat him up and deliver a lecture in the bargain on how such laziness on the part of the labouring classes is destroying the nation's economy; but if he says he wanted to attend his father's funeral, the inspector—if at all he is convinced—is likely to be more lenient. And what applies to the severity of the inspector's reaction applies also to the sympathy the judicial magistrate will later on show when the case comes up for trial. The penal institutions are permeated by the ideology of the legitimate, and rebellions are punished as much for their illegitimacy as for their lawlessness.

For the tribals of Adilabad who have looted traders and moneylenders, living as they do in an 'extremist-infested' area where there was one 'encounter' killing every week last year, the need, to find a 'legitimate' reason for the crimes they have committed is much more serious. It is not a matter of deliberate hypocrisy or sensible policy, but a matter of locating their class interest as far as possible within the framework of the norms of social morality. They certainly *do* feel outraged that though they have never defaulted on their debts without paying (the penalty and more, the moneylenders have now refused to come to their rescue in a time of crisis. But more importantly they know that this is an argument that will strike a chord of sympathy in the heart of the inquisitive journalist, the visiting scholar or the government official; and may help to soften the ire of the policeman. When one talks to the tribals they begin with this argument. As you go on conversing and slowly reveal that there is something slightly wrong with your own notions of morality, they open up bit by bit. The younger or the more audacious will suddenly ask why the traders grow rich without toiling one bit but the tribal who toils all day starves; why some people should have so much land and others none; why the non-tribal settlers get title deeds for their land so easily so that they can borrow from the banks but the tribals have to run to the moneylenders; why it is not called theft or dacoity if the moneylender collects double the loan amount at the end of the year, but it is called theft and dacoity if the tribals take back what was originally theirs. At this point the elder and the more conservative among them are visibly upset by the trend of reasoning. They react sharply and ask the impetuous ones to keep quiet; there is no point—they say—in lamenting the obvious. That is how things are, because that is how they were meant to be. This is the voice of the dominant morality, but the younger ones are not silenced. Their anger leaves the accepted moral code way behind and becomes distinctly seditious. What amount and intensity of 'reading' of commissioners' and collectors' reports on riots and famines can reveal this illegitimate

dimension of popular consciousness is a point well worth pondering.

However all that may be, the Gonds, Kolams and Lambadas of Adilabad started attacking traders and moneylenders by October 1988, and kept up the attacks right down to this monsoon. The unhelpful attitude of the moneylenders, and the lack of any drought relief activity undertaken by the government, forced them to depend upon forest produce by the time winter set in last year. They were soon living on mahua flowers, bamboo-rice, and poisonous tubers. Mahua is consumed in many forms, and bamboo-rice makes a tolerable cereal, but the tubers require so much effort to rid them of the poison that the very fact that the tribals bother to collect, cook and consume them indicates the desperate straits the drought has reduced them to. Here is a description of the collection and preparation of the tubers, published in a booklet issued by the Girijan Rytu Coolie Sangham (Tribal Peasant and Agricultural Labourers Association):

"These tubers, called by the name *matigadda* (gadda is Telugu for tuber) are not cultivated. They are found wild in the forests. The wild animals, especially pigs, dig them up and eat them. There are six varieties of this man tuber: *kehekkamati*, *noskamati*, *kirsimati*, *tetremati*, *bondimati* and *nulmati*. The first two of the six are the most widely available, but unfortunately they are the poisonous varieties. The other four are not poisonous but they are not widely found.

"A wife-and-husband team can collect about one or two kgs if they search and dig a whole day. The tubers must then be cut into fine pieces and washed in flowing water for three days. Then they have to be boiled seven times. With each boiling some of the poison leaves the tubers and enters the water. The water must be thrown out and (the tubers boiled again. After boiling seven times, the tubers must be washed in cold water and then boiled a last time. The whole process takes about five or six days. Only then the tubers become edible"

After so much treatment, it is unlikely that there will be any nourishment left in the food!

If such were the straits the men and women were driven to, one need not describe the travails of the animals. Selling them in the weekly fair rid the tribals of the burden of animals they could not feed, and at the same time put in their hands some money to buy food for themselves. Whether, in such a situation, they would themselves have thought of raiding the shops and houses of moneylenders and traders is a doubtful point, for there is no record in recent history of the Gonds of Adilabad ever having undertaken such adventures, but as it happens they were not left to their devices.

As this year's monsoon came near, the attacks on traders and moneylenders became more frequent, for at least two reasons: one, that with the need to prepare their lands for the *khari* crop they could not any longer find the time to search the forests for mahua flower and tubers; and two, that they needed jowar seed to sow the crop, and the easiest way of procuring it was to steal it from the traders. The announcement by the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) that jowar seed would be supplied on loan came very late, well after many of the raids had already taken place, perhaps *because* the raids had taken place. (This is no reflection on the personal integrity of the officers who staff the ITDA, some of whom are the best administrative personnel the state has.)

And then the police moved in. The state government may take its own time to react to ITDA's distress signals, and under the head of relief, may grant only Rs 45 lakh against the district collector's demand of Rs 43 crore, but there is neither such tardiness nor any shortage of funds when it comes to the reaction of the police. The police moved in fast and started arresting hundreds of tribals under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA). About 160 tribals were arrested in connection with the Dandapalli raid alone, from the villages of Jainur, Narnur, Sirpur and Tiriani mandals. The total arrests under TADA in connection with these raids must be about 600. They were all lodged in the far off prisons of Nizamabad and Warangal (*there is no proper prison in Adilabad*), and were put to tremendous hardship in getting bail. Many of them are yet to get bail. As it was nearing monsoon time this year by the time most of the arrests were made, they lost the few crucial weeks when the ploughing of the land and sowing takes place. If they lost last year's crop because of drought, they are likely to lose this *khari* season's crop because of TADA. In consequence that legislative monstrosity has become familiar (it is pronounced Tada, in two syllables) to the most illiterate tribal. They probably took a long time to say ITDA but they have learnt to say TADA in a matter of weeks.

Adding to these the hundreds of tribals of Khammam, East Godavari and Visakhapatnam districts, arrested under TADA in recent months for sympathising with, harbouring, sheltering, or giving food to naxalites, the total tally of N T Rama Rao, chairman of the National Front which is fighting these elections! with the promise of providing a democratic alternative to the authoritarian regime of Rajiv Gandhi, is about 1000 tribals booked under TADA in a matter of one year and a little more. So much then for Indian democracy and the alternatives it offers,