

# Tsunduru massacre: 26 years after brutal killings in Andhra, justice eludes victims

A trial court was set up in Tsunduru at the place of the crime, but even this hasn't stopped justice being delayed to the victims.



It has been over quarter of a century since August 6, 1991, the date of the Tsunduru massacre in Andhra Pradesh – one of the most brutal lynching's of Dalits in the country - which unleashed a new wave of Dalit movements across the state.

Eight Dalits in the small village were killed in the massacre, and several others were injured, after a planned attack by upper caste men.

Despite this, Dalits are still awaiting justice while the case is being heard in the Supreme Court.

In 2014, the High Court of Andhra Pradesh quashed the verdict given by the trial court set up in Tsunduru. The trial court had sentenced 21 persons to life term and 35 others to one-year imprisonment. The trial court set up in Tsunduru, was the first of its kind in the country, where the court was set up at the place of the crime.

Ironically, even this didn't stop justice being delayed to the victims.

### **The fateful day**

One of the persons at the forefront of the legal and political struggle right since 1991, is Jaladi Moses, (44), president of the Tsunduru Dalita Badhitula Porata Committee. Moses was elected as the president of the committee in December 1991, when he was hardly 18 years old.

Of the eight Dalits killed by the mob belonging to the Reddy and Kapu community on that fateful day, three of them belonged to Moses's family, which included his father.

Moses says the memories of that day are still fresh in his mind.

"The caste heads of the Reddy community met with the then Home Minister Mysoora Reddy in a private hotel on August 5 (1991), and decided to put us in 'our place'," says Moses, hinting to the support the dastardly attack had from people in the high echelons of power.



(Moses. [Image Credit](#))

Another politician from the Reddy community, Nedurumalli Janardhan Reddy of the Congress, was the Chief Minister during this time.

“The Reddy’s entered into a secret agreement with the police and influenced them by wielding power and money. On that morning, the police hounded the Dalits from their houses into the fields. The upper caste mob, waiting at the outskirts of the village attacked the Dalits with deadly weapons like daggers and agricultural tools like ploughs and sickles,” explains Moses.

Moses is devoid of emotion as he narrates the brutal incident, as he has repeated the events of that night hundreds of times, over the last 26 years.

The mutilated bodies were then dumped into nearby irrigation canals and were recovered after three days on August 9.

Dr. Ravi Kumar, one of the doctors who performed a post-mortem on the



dead bodies, later killed himself by hanging. The horrifying site of the mutilated bodies is suspected to have depressed the doctor.

Mr. Ravi Kumar was a Dalit himself, and the brother of former minister and TDP leader JR Pushparaj.

## History

Tsunduru is a mandal headquarters in Guntur district, and falls in the Vemuru constituency. Vemuru was reserved as a Scheduled Caste seat after the massacre, and is now represented in the Andhra Pradesh Legislature by Nakka Anand Babu, who is the state's social welfare minister.

Tsunduru is located on the Chennai – Kolkata railway line, which the villagers state as a reason why the village was accessible to freedom fighters like Subhash Chandra Bose even before independence.

The Britishers established one of their first police stations in this region, thanks to the railway line.

Tsunduru is 15 kms away from Tenali, which is also referred to as Andhra's Paris, considering the riches of the people in the region based on the surplus produced from the highly fertile agricultural land in the Krishna Delta. The region is well irrigated by canals and one can find them on both the sides of the road from Tenali to Tsunduru.

Agriculture in the region is quite profitable because of which the wage rates for the agricultural labourers are also high.

The village has 3,000 acres of agricultural land of which more than 2,500 acres are owned by the Reddys, while the Dalits work as agricultural labourers in the fields.

## Repercussions

The Dalits of Tsunduru live in Ambedkar colony which is on one side of the road while the upper castes live on the other side of the road. The stark division of colonies and boundaries is clearly visible even now.



*(An Ambedkar statue on the main road which separates the Ambedkar colony, from the upper caste colony)*

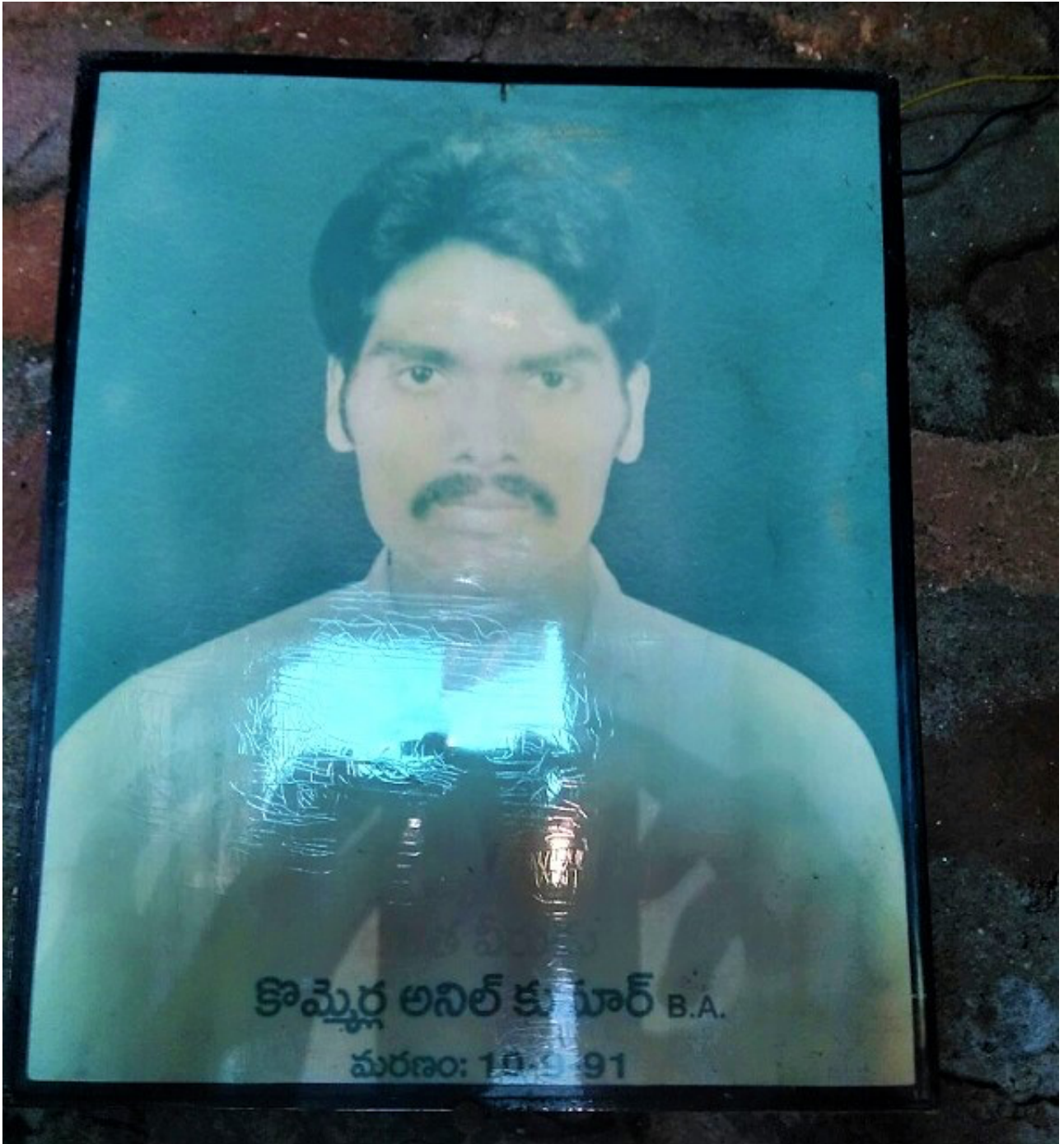
“In 1991, the movement of people and ideas, access to cheap transport and high agricultural wages had led the Dalit youth to Tenali, where most of them joined for their Bachelors degree in Ambedkar college. Having read Ambedkar, Phule and Periyar there, the educated youth started asserting

and organizing themselves. They organized classes to teach children in the village, converted to Christianity and took part in cultural programmes invoking Ambedkar and Dalit cultural icons amongst others. They slowly started breaking the stranglehold of traditional caste structures and boundaries in the villages, which angered the people from the dominant caste,” says Moses, who was a student at Chirala (a town 50 kms away from Tsunduru) when the incident happened.

“A couple of skirmishes between the Dalit and the Reddy youth preceded the massacre,” he adds.

One such young man, was Kommerla Anil Kumar, who was also a friend of Moses. Incidentally, Anil Kumar was Vice President of the Porata Committee when he was killed on September 10, 1991 (at the age of 22) in a police firing.

Kumar, along with three others, was on a hunger strike demanding justice for the victims.







“It was a cold-blooded murder. He was killed because they thought that the movement will die a slow death, if one of its leaders is killed,” says 82-year-old Kommerla Raja Rao, Anil Kumar’s father.

Raja Rao was working as an agricultural labourer in the fields of a Reddy landlord earning Rs 30 a day, when the massacre happened.

“I never went back to work after that day. However, some of us had to go back to work after a year of empty stomachs forced us to kill our self-



respect and dignity,” Raja Rao says.



*(Anil's brother and father)*

Raja Rao and his wife now live in a single roomed house which is hardly 100 meters from the spot where Anil was shot dead. They are now taken care by their second son, Ananda Rao, (55), who works as a watchman, a job which the government gave him after the death of his brother.

In the backyard of the house is a memorial built for Anil Kumar and the photos of Ambedkar, Periyar and Phule hang on the walls of the house even today.







The pictures explain Anil Kumar's penchant for Ambedkarite politics and why he was at the forefront of the struggle for justice only to be killed by the police, leaving behind his aged parents and a brother.