

## Araku 1966

Araku was an insignificant village, situated about 3000 feet above the sea level, upon the Eastern Ghats on the borders of Andhra and Orissa and about 120 kilometers from Waltair. The Dandakaranya– Bolangir – Kirandol Railway (D.B.K) was built from Visakhapatnam up to the iron-ore and manganese deposits in the state of Madhya Pradesh. It was a Japanese project and the trains were to bring down the iron-ore and manganese to Visakhapatnam port to be shipped to Japan. To build the railway track through the thick forest of Dandakaranya, many local tribal labourers were employed. They had to blast a number of tunnels through the solid rock. Thus, Araku had a railway station and the railway men and their families formed a separate colony in the village. In as far back as 1942, His Lordship Rt. Rev. Bishop Joseph Baud had foreseen that the development of Araku would present an opening for the evangelization of the tribal people of the district. Accordingly, he had purchased a site consisting of 15 acres for the Catholic mission. Towards the cost of this land, the then Provincial Superior Mother Jane Lucy had contributed 300 Rupees. It was agreed that when the priests started the mission and built a church, the Sisters would be given 3 acres of land on which a Convent would be built and it would serve them as a rest house during the summer months. Bishop Baud gave the charge of starting the mission at Araku to Father Xavier Dias. This news aroused fresh enthusiasm for the new mission in the Sisters. Mother Jane Lucy bought some more land in 1944 because the promised 3 acres would be totally inadequate for what was envisaged to happen in the mission. There was a hill and that was what the Catholic mission had set its eye upon. It took more than 20 years to acquire it.

The government had passed successive laws which forbade the purchase of it by an outsider without prior permission from the government. To obtain this permission, two conditions had to be fulfilled. First, the owner of the land, the tribal, must prove that he wanted to sell his land. Second, the purchaser must prove that he would use the land for a work that would further the development of the area. The railway employees took their demand for school to the state capital, Hyderabad, and from there the Sisters were asked to state their aim in wishing to buy the land. The Sisters in reply to the government stated:

1. The Sisters would open an English Medium School for the children of the government officials, the railway employees and the Tribals.
2. They would open a Gruhani school for poor girls still too young for marriage or incapable of perusing higher studies.
3. They would develop a model agricultural farm for the development of the Tribals.
4. At a later stage, the Sisters would initiate a health centre for the Tribals.

***By May 1966, a very small convent was ready at the foot of the hill at Araku.***

