

COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA (MARXIST)

WEST BENGAL STATE COMMITTEE

<http://cpimwb.org.in/>

FEATURES

Voice From Behind The Bars

Testament of a Prison Life Under Mamata Regime

Madhuja Sen Roy

Dear readers,

At the outset accept my sincere apologies in the delay in reaching out to you. Physical tiredness and overwhelming mental agony weighed too heavily on us causing the warranted delay in recounting before you the horrific experience we have had in our four day jail custody.

9th March, 2017. The Students' Federation of India and The Democratic Youth Federation of India had hit the streets of Kolkata to protest against the rampant nepotism and corruption indulged into by the State administration in the recruitment process of Primary teachers to the State Government aided Primary schools across the State. The date was fixed with the prior permission of the concerned authorities who allowed us to hold our peaceful demonstration only after unnecessary dillydallying.

At around 3 pm hundreds of students and youth assembled at College Street and the protest rally began. The procession attended by thousands, crossed Wellington Square, S N Banerjee Road and reached Esplanade area where the effigy of the corrupt Education minister was set afire. The protest rally was drawing to a close when the dogs of war were unleashed upon the peaceful demonstrators at the behest of the top Police Officials. Blows rained. Boys and girls were abused in the filthiest languages and beaten up mercilessly. A policeman beat up one of the female protesters. This triggered fresh agitation on the spot. The Police resorted to indiscriminate arrests. One protester was picked by six hoodlums and thrown into the prison van. The picture inside the police lock up was appalling. Several protesters severely injured by the police lay writhing in pain while the police smiled gleefully over their plight. Medical help was not forthcoming. It was only after an intense altercation that arrangements were made to take the injured to the hospital. Upon returning from the hospital we found that the arrest memo was being written. Most of the arrested protestors declined to sign the bail bond in the police lock up. 10th March 2017. Arrangements were made to

produce us before the court. I, along with Ahana, Rupsa, and Ananya were asked to board the same prison van where Sayandip, Indra, Soham and Sandipan were boarded. It was clear that a conspiracy had been scripted. The State had charged us with non-bail able sections. Soon we were communicated by our lawyers and our leaders that we had been remanded to judicial custody for four days. Far from being dejected, a sense of pride seized us. Proud indeed we were to be jailed for taking up the righteous cause of the cheated youth of the State. Respecting the established norms, we handed over our belongings to our comrades and friends and boarded the prison van. It was 7:30 pm and the rain was torrential- lashing hard on the Court premises. Hundreds of comrade had thronged the court premises. Their resolute sloganeering muted the noise of the torrential shower. The resolve of our comrades shouting 'INDEPENDENCE-DEMOCRACY- SOCIALISM' as we boarded the prison van shall remain ever etched in our memory and shall continue to provide us the strength for our struggles in the days to come.

At around 8 pm I along with Rupsa, Ahana and Ananya were led to the Alipore female Correctional Home. At the office room our names and addresses were noted. Then began the body search. Each one of were led to a small room-one at a time. Ahana was the first to be summoned. She was asked to put off her clothes. She refused. The lady officer did not press further. Next was my turn. The Lady Officer pulled away my dupatta and threw it on the floor. Next, I was forced to pull off my salwar and then my kammez. The uncouth arms of the State apparatus now groped around my private parts in search of that elusive dangerous item that I might have imported inside the jail premises. What followed next was outrageous, barbaric. The lady officer asked if I was having my periods. I answered in the affirmative. She asked me to sit down and strip. Shocked, I refused. She was clam but stern. I had no option but to obey. Rule of the Law seemed not to prevail inside to four walls of the lawkeeper's custody. I bled. I bled all over. I bled in my body, I bled in my mind, in my consciousness. I came out of the room desperately trying to hide my emotions for any betrayal of the same might demoralize my comrades. Next in the line were Ananya and Rupsa. Their reservations were approved or disapproved according to the discretions of the abusive, authoritative Lady Officer who was evidently more inclined to obey the diktat of her bosses than in bona fide discharge of her public duties. Rights that are inalienable of a human being were violated at sweet will under the watchful eyes of custodians of law.

We enquired whether our prayer for being treated as political prisoners were allowed. The sarcastic smile on her face revealed that our prayer had been turned down.

At around 8:30 pm we were led inside the jail premises. We were forced into Room no 3 which is called the 'Amdani ghor'(Import room).An ugly stench greeted us. The dingy, dimly lit room had around 25-30 women and children lying in two rows along the narrow passage that led to the wash room. The room's maid asked us to clean ourselves. We tried in vain to wash off the pain, the agony and the insult that we had to endure in the course of the day. Finally we were allowed our quota of food, plates, water and blankets. Hurriedly we finished our dinner. Three blankets were allotted to each one of us. Placing one on the floor, maneuvering another as the pillow we laid down in whatever little space we could manage.

In this context let me introduce the 'maid'. Each room has a designated 'maid'. The maid is an inmate of the respective room-either an accused or a convict for life or one who is serving a long term.

11th March, 2017, 6am. A morning hitherto unknown to us awaited us. Pushed awake from our sleep we heard the maid yelling "*Ginti hobe*" (Counting begins) 'come up in pairs'. We learnt that room no 3 had 27 women and seven children. After the counting was over, the door was closed. The siren blew at quarter to seven. We came out our room. Now it was our turn to learn how to go around with the daily chores in the jail custody. We were new and had too many instructors to lecture us. Ananya lost her cool and hardly had she spoken a word or two when the other inmates turned on against her. The ruckus altered the jail authorities who came running to 'address' the problem. We tried to ventilate our grievances-but to no avail. The situation though was normalized in sometime. Ahana went to fetch water. There she overheard the jail authorities instructing our maid to be rough in her dealings with us and not to cooperate with us in any matter whatsoever. So now we knew why things were going tough for us inside the jail premises. We also knew that the situation would worsen further and we had to hold on to our nerves, retain our cool till the morning of the 14th when we are scheduled to be produced before the court.

At 9 am tea was served along with a piece of stale bread. Making the best we could do of the unpalatable, distasteful breakfast, we set out of our room. We met Sharmistha *di* who was arrested in connection with the Bhangor incident. She was lodged in room no.2. From her we learnt that the correction home had a library of its own from where the inmates could borrow books. She also appraised us of the various rules and regulations of the jail premises which helped us a lot.

Next we were asked to attend the 'Case Table'. We were asked to provide our personal details and personal identification marks and all these were noted in a big Note book.

At around 11:30 am we were called for 'interview'-it meant we were to meet our relatives and friends who had come to see us. We decided that our sufferings notwithstanding, we would put up a brave face in front of our visitors and they should have no inkling of our sufferings. Our friends, relatives and comrades stood on the other side of the iron bars. We went up to them with a smiling face and in an elated voice we declared that all was well here. The meeting lasted a few minutes and we retired to our room. We were soon called to collect our belongings that our visitors had handed over to the authorities for our personal use. Clothes, biscuits were allowed inside, but not the sanitary napkins-this despite knowing my physical condition.

Since we were new entrants, we had the 'privilege' of having our lunch served at our room. At 1 pm after a second round of *Ginti* (counting), were locked up once again. We spent the afternoon talking to each other and resting for a while. We were allowed outside at around 3 pm. At 4pm we were once again summoned to the 'Case Table'. While going there we were told that we won't be allowed in the office without the dupatta. This betrayed all the established norm of rationale reasoning: for the dress code acceptable socially seemed unacceptable here. Questioning the practice was followed by moral lectures from convicts of heinous crimes like murder and trafficking.

At his juncture a sympathetic jail worker asked us if we had any requirement. We only requested that we four be allotted the same room. She pleaded her helplessness and said that our request could not be acceded to because we had indulged in anti government protests.

12th March was Holi- the festival of colours. The 'maid' sent instructions to ensure celebrations of the festival. I don't know whether we could send the message or not, but not a speck of colour was to be found on ourselves for we knew hundreds of comrades outside had shunned the festivities this year.

On the evening of 12th March, we were allotted different rooms. I was allotted Room no 5, Ahana room No 4, Ananya room no 8 and Rupsa Room no.10. The nightmare within the fortified walls of the custody intensified. Rupsa was made to share a room with a convict of 5 murders. We too had murderers, traffickers as inmates of our respective rooms. The maid at Ahana's room made it clear in the filthiest language that there were specific instructions to make our life a veritable hell inside the cell. The maid of my room was more discreet- her actions made her intentions clear-no words expended.

By now, it was clear that the so called correctional home was nothing short of a trauma center. Here people with history of lesser crimes are consigned to an ambience that turns them into potential seasoned criminals.

14th March 2017. It was the day we were waiting for so eagerly. This was the day we were to be produced before the court. Before putting us into the prison van, we were subjected to yet another round of checking. The same harrowing experience of being improperly touched and shoved followed-we felt molested all over once again.

We were granted bail the same. All the pain, agony, insult and humiliation we were subjected to were swept away in the slogans that rant in the air 'WITH LOVE, INQUILAB'. Comradely emotions, love and red abir that greeted us as we made our way out of the court premises made us forget all the horrors we had endured during our custodial days.

They tortured, outraged our modesty with the futile hope that their despicable actions would deter us from participating in another future agitation. Repressive howsoever their measures may be, they can never overwhelm our commitment to our ideology. Steadfast we shall remain ever for the cause of Independence-Democracy-Socialism. Our resolve to fight for the right cause is unflinching, for we know Victory shall definitely be ours.

Madhuja Sen Roy A bright scholar, President of SFI, West Bengal State Committee.

23rd March,2017

