



Readers' Forum

Madhavi's Ordeal

I wish to bring to the notice of your readers the illegal detention and torture of a teenage girl Madhavi in police custody in Mahaboobnagar, Andhra Pradesh.

Eighteen-year-old Madhavi is a poor backward class girl who ekes out a living by selling milk in Mahaboobnagar town of Telangana region. She was forcibly taken away at 10 p.m on November 16, 1997, by nine masked people claiming to be the special police to fight naxalites. The police ransacked the house in which she lives with her two sisters, two brothers and parents. They beat up Madhavi's parents and took her blindfolded to a guest house near the residence of the district superintendent of police. In detention, the police subjected Madhavi to electric shocks and pierced needles into her fingers. She was forced to confess that she was Sandhya, a naxalite activist of People's War Group. She was told that she would be given a job and got married if she made the confession. She repeatedly told them that she had nothing to do with naxalites.

After the protest of Stree Chaitanya Sravanti and other women's organisations, Madhavi was produced before the magistrate late in the night on November 17, 1997. On the advice of the judge, the police produced Madhavi in the court on the next day. In the FIR submitted to the court, the police alleged that Madhavi had confessed to being a naxalite and foisted a case against her under Section 121A (conspiracy against the state) of the IPC and under Section 8(1) of the A.P. Public Security Ordinance, 1992. The police recorded that she was arrested on November 17 at 4.15 p.m. They claimed that Madhavi possessed "incriminating material". After 25 days of custody in prison, Madhavi was released on bail on December 12, 1997.

Madhavi is a milkmaid known to many families in Mahaboobnagar town. She is a member of Stree Chaitanya Sravanti, a women's organisation working in Mahaboobnagar

district for several years (Stree Chaitanya Sravanti is one of the constituent bodies of A.P. Chaitanya Mahila Samakya, a federation of women's organisations at the state level). She has been active in Stree Chaitanya Sravanti, which takes up issues of gender discrimination (such as dowry deaths, sexual harassment, atrocities on women, etc.) and anti-people policies of the government.

Madhavi's arrest is an attempt to suppress the voice of women against police atrocities and gender discrimination. By arresting an innocent girl like Madhavi, the police are trying to threaten the women not to join organisations which fight against patriarchal and other forms of oppression on women.

Madhavi's arrest is a blatant example of police high-handedness. She was illegally taken into custody on baseless charges on November 16. She was produced in the court on November 18. The police violated the rule that women should not be taken or summoned

to police stations after dusk. They kept Madhavi in a guest house on the 16th night and again on the 17th night. The police had no proof to say that Madhavi is Sandhya, a naxalite.

"The incriminating material" the police claimed to have found with her include *Arunatara*, a literary journal of revolutionary writers; a booklet on the status of women during the fifty years of Independence; *Mahila Margam*, the official organ of A.P. Chaitanya Mahila Samakhya and a paper on the role of women in agrarian movement in North Telangana. This "incriminating material" in Telugu is publicly available in all the bookshops. On mere suspicion, the police illegally detained and tortured Madhavi, an innocent citizen who has nothing to do with naxalites. They foisted a very serious case, 'conspiracy against the state' on her.

Madhavi's arrest and torture is not an isolated case. Bharatibai, a tribal woman of Gollapur in Bodh mandal of Adilabad district, was forced by anti-naxal wing of police



to remove her blouse and show her breasts to prove that she is the mother of a child. Under the pretext of curbing naxalism, police are harassing and sexually assaulting women in Telangana districts. The excise police gangraped four women near the police station in Eluru, East Godavari district. The sub inspector of Chirala, Guntur district, kept two women in police custody and forced them to stay naked after they refused to sleep with the homeguards. The police killed Parvathibai, a tribal women and mother of three children, in firing in the West Godavai district where the tribals are agitating for their land rights for the last couple of months.

The detention of Madhavi is part of this policy of police lawlessness and high-handedness prevailing in Andhra Pradesh. The lifting of ban on arrack and the closure of a number of public sector industries have its disastrous social and economic consequences for women in the state.

But Madhavi's detention will not desist our organisation from fighting for the rights of women. With the support of several women's organisations and people's organisations, the fight against Madhavi's illegal detention will continue.

B. Anuradha, Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh

Kashmiri Anguish

Sadat Hassan Manto's problem was that he did not have a hide thick enough. Toba Tek Singh and his ravings about *moong ki dal* and everything else are not pure fiction, but a clear reflection of Manto's own state of mind. He died indigent, a man shattered by the horrors of Partition. At least two commentators — Salman Rushdie and Ashis Nandy — believe that Manto was the only writer who had the courage to face the reality of what Partition wrought and is the only one who has chronicled the chill-



JKLF arms training camp (Photo: India Today)

ing, monstrous tragedies that occurred after the decision that the nail would be severed from the thumb.

We, however, live in a post-Manto era. Our hides are much thicker. We know, for instance, that the greatest nation on earth, the most powerful, anyway, is in fact a country that avenged a suicide mission and a few deaths at Pearl Harbour by dropping atom bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, thus causing the death of over a million people.

When I first heard about the Ganderbal massacre, in which 23 Kashmiri Pandits, including women and children were gunned down by terrorists, my instant reaction was that of remorse. But I didn't feel shocked or outraged.

Who were the dead? Were they Pandits who had not left Kashmir at all? Had they then the friendship and support of their neighbours? Did they share camaraderie with them, often discussing universal brotherhood and pledging eternal friendship? Did they perhaps even dine at each other's places, Hindus eating food prepared by Muslims and Muslims returning the compliment. If these were Hindus who didn't flee six years ago, these things are quite likely.

I know one Hindu family who didn't flee to Jammu. The son is a good friend of mine and is working in another Indian city. He suffered a great deal of mental anguish because of his father's decision to stay back in Kashmir when most other Hindus were leaving Kashmir, convinced it could no longer to be their home. He told me, "When my father would leave home in the morning, all day I would be gripped by fear and anxiety that he may not return at all." He said that he had to take relaxants and tranquillisers to save his sanity and had a bad time generally.

This Hindu family was once interviewed on television because they had played host to a Muslim mystic. In the interview, the mother said that the idea that Hindus should leave Kashmir spread through the community like a "virus". This statement resulted in the family being considerably estranged from quite a few Pandits who had a rather different version of things.

It is not too difficult to guess how secure they feel after the Ganderbal killings. I wonder if my friend has felt the need for tranquillisers in the far-off city he currently lives in. The New Year card he sent me looks fine on the shelf. Should I go and reassure the family? Tell them that two dozen murders by the fanatics carrying the nomenclature of a particular community does not make the whole community evil? Or should I tell them to leave Kashmir, like another Pandit family I know was advised to by their neighbours who wished them well.

This is what another Pandit friend of mine told me when I visited him in Jammu a few years ago: "Initially, our neighbours told us that we wouldn't have to leave Kashmir

so long as they were alive. But when fanatics became powerful, the same neighbours told us they were helpless and said that they could no more give us an assurance that our lives were secure. So we left." Apparently the families massacred at Ganderbal were made of sterner stuff and chose to stay behind even if it meant death.

Or were they among those few who returned with the hope that things had changed in Kashmir and they would be able to live once again in their own houses rather than in tents. Bathe in proper bathrooms rather than in makeshift enclosures in open grounds. Meet once again their old neighbours and share warm relations with them. Had they been helped by their Muslim neighbours when they returned? Had they embraced each other and shed a few tears at the reunion? This too is not unlikely for it has happened at several places in Kashmir. And the Pandits who returned have been killed at several places in Kashmir after they had been aided in their economic rehabilitation by their Muslim friends and neighbours.

I do not have the gumption to go to Ganderbal and listen to the Hindus complaining about the government not giving them adequate security and Muslims expressing qualified grief, like they do in the educated households I associate with. "They should have left like all the others did," one comments. "It is the doing of the same people who engineered Shia-Sunni killings and counter killings in Pakistan," says another. Yet questions remain: Who were the murderers? What ideology were they motivated by? What convictions caused them to brutally kill 23 people?

Did the murderers know the murdered? Did they knock on the door, get admitted into the house as friends and then bring out the guns and spray bullets on each and every "enemy"? Did they know the names of the victims? Had they exchanged many a smile with each other?

Or were they strangers, even their unfamiliar faces not visible, hidden behind masks? Did they burst upon the scene out of the blue, bringing with them the message of sudden death? Surely there would be some difference in the attitudes of both the killers and their victims depending on whether they knew each other or not? I think it would make one's entreaties more pitiful if the murderers were known to one. The horror of being killed would probably be different and probably lesser than the shock and heartbreak of seeing a person one knows coldly pressing the trigger.

I am tired of analysis. I am tired of condemning madness and I am tired of justifying acts of violence. I am no chronicler, no reporter of facts. What is the point in pointing out the obvious that it was deliberately carried out on India's Republic Day in order to further widen the gulf between the two communities?

Those of us who want to believe that we are in no way responsible for what happened at Ganderbal are fooling ourselves. For we are the world.

The dead bodies could be seen on television. There was little to suggest that the dead were Hindus rather than Muslims. I saw no *tilak* on the forehead of any corpse and I saw no *sindoor* in any hair parting. A sneaky thought: perhaps there were some Muslims among the dead, friends who had come to visit the targeted families? Did the murderers know for sure that they were killing Hindus?

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Lopamudra

Ms Beautiful Eyes

(Kajol-bright)

Ms Silky Hair

(crowning glory at the right place(s) alone)

Ms Lovely Smile

(dentist-drilled and lipstick-thickened)

Ms Gorgeous Complexion

(bleached but fair)

Ms Lovely Long Legs

(duly shaved.....never swollen)

Ms Fingertips-n-Toes

(nani/pedi-cured)

Ms Photogenic

(of covetous angels)

Ms Perfect Figure

(the dieting angel)

The re(d) taped plastic Helen Jr.

in different degrees of undress.....

Your self construct

piece-n-part

for-n-by

Male Gaze Co. Inc. Ltd.

Let your unwitting tribe

tit the cult-walk

while

the feminine children of the l(e)ast Venus

forever suffer

third-degree humiliations

losing human face in the worldly marketplace.

Pratima Agnihotri □