

A PRISON DIARY

SNEHALATA REDDY

What do you achieve by all these unnecessary harassments? It only lowers your prestige. It's a question of deep shame - and nothing else. Harassing a woman must only bring you a perverse satisfaction not, you gain nothing - If you think you can break my spirit - I'm afraid you are wrong, these acts of yours only make me firmer in my beliefs of truth, humanism and freedom of individuals.

My body may suffer ~~hard~~ humiliations but my spirit ^{the human spirit} cannot be suppressed for long -

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7th Sept., 1976. Sofia [the Head Warder] returned. Funny woman. She never wants to be nice to the other warders.....

8th Sept., 1976. Sofia is behaving strangely.....My God! What is she yelling at R. for? Telling her not to enter the room—screaming at all the girls. Honestly, is the woman insane? Two girls came crying to me. What am I to do with her? I better write to Desai [] to talk to her. She is showing her real colours now. Why is she so unfair and vindictive? Wrote letter to Desai. . .

9th Sept., 1976. Screaming from morning to night. Threatened. Beat up two girls, one by banging her head on the wall, and the other, hit her on the head repeatedly with the stick. The girls had lumps all over. What's come over her? Threatening everyone, searching everyone, except her favourites.

10th Sept., 1976. All the girls are tense and frightened. What's wrong with Desai. He hasn't yet come. It's two-days since I complained.

10th Sept., 1976.

Dear Mr. Desai,

I hear you visited our prison yesterday afternoon. I'm very suprised and puzzled why you did not call on me!
I believe you came to inquire. I'm sure I must be quite old-fashioned. I thought inquiries were held differently—I have never heard that the tormented are questioned before the tormentor! These methods must be rather new—maybe something that Delhi has acquired and you imbibed in your recent training.....If yesterday's was a real inquiry, then you are a very good actor—I must recommend you to my husband. Yesterday was a "mock inquiry". Why were the girls not asked individually so that fear could be removed from their minds? I'm sure you first came to see how things were and yesterday was not the real thing—but you would and will do the right.....? I have complained about cruel beatings and they should be inquired into immediately, not after two days, and that too in such a manner.

With good wishes,

Yours Sincerely
(Mrs.) Snehalata Reddy

APPENDIX II

WELLTREATED

Sir.—with reference to the letter by Jaya Chandran (Feb. 5). I wish to clarify the arrangements and treatment given to Snehalatha Reddy while she was in the Cetral Jail, Bangalore, as well as other detenus under MISA.

Mrs. Reddy was detained from May 7, 1976. She was asthmatic from her childhood. She was seen by physician from Victoria Hospital for the first time on May 18, 1976 after her detention and treatment was prescribed for her complaint. Subsequently on May 20, 26 and June 18, 1976 she was treated by specialists from Victoria Hospital. From Oct. 8, 1976 she was under the treatment of her family physician as desired by her. Government provided the medicines prescribed by her family physician. She was on parole from Dec. 14, 1976, and her detention was revoked on Jan. 13, 1977. During her stay in the prison she was occupying a room 15'×20' with attached bathroom and toilet facilities. Throughout her stay she was getting food from her home. In addition, she was being provided with milk, bread, sugar, chicken and eggs by the prison authorities as prescribed by the medical authorities. In addition to the treatment in the hospital she was being daily examined by the jail medical staff and the district surgeon.

Detenus under MISA are not subjected to the same kind of prison conditions as convicts. The rules for detention of political prisoners provide for special facilities for food, clothing etc. They are allowed to prepare their own food and also allowed the facility of getting food from their homes which is not the case with convicts. The convicts are put on labour whereas the detenus are not. It is clear that the author of the letter is not aware of these facts.

The conditions in the prisons in our State are not snb-human as made out in the letter. There is a board of non-official visitors for every prison, the function of which is to visit the prison and satisfy themselves about the treatment given to the prison inmates. There is also a State Advisory Board for Prison

which met recently and offered suggestions regarding prison administration. A number of schemes are in operation for the rehabilitation of prisoners after their discharge with the help of the probation department in the State.

C. S. MALLAIAH
Inspector General of Prisons,
Bangalore.
Indian Express, Feb. 11, 1977

III-Treatment

Sir,—With reference to the letter by Mr. Malliah, Inspector of General of Prisons (I. E. Feb. 11), concerning the late Mrs. Snehalatha Reddy we would like to make the following observations.

We happen to know that Mrs. Reddy made many written and oral representations to the IGP and in fact Mrs. Reddy thought of him well and kindly. She also found and recorded that behind his back some of the prison staff seemed to be able to do what they pleased Mr. Mallaiah might be right in what he has said if one went solely by what the laws and rules provide and by his own considerate instructions. But the facts were far from bearing these out in the case of Mrs. Reddy and her fellow prisoners.

It is true Mrs. Reddy was periodically asthmatic, but prison conditions caused her asthma to become chronic and crippling. She may have had a 15"×20" room, but ventilation was poor and polluted owing to the proximity of a lavatory as well as the constant dust from ragl and rice being cleaned all around her. Throughout she was kept with C-class prisoners—either by higher direction or because of the callousness of prison authorities.

In fact she has recorded that seven different doctors saw her—presumably when she was taken as many times to Victoria Hospital, but her own pleas and the jail doctor's recommendation that should be hospitalised was never granted, despite the growing severity and agony of her asthma. To save the physicians

trouble, or as an act of perverse consideration, injectibles and a syringe were left with her so that she could inject herself whenever needed. In July, she had a near fatal attack with likely heart involvement, and she told Mr. Mallaiah about it herself. Her family physician was allowed to see her, but this was only once, nearly three months after she had reached a stage of near collapse. Moreover, this visit was permitted after the doctor was closely quizzed, first at his clinic and again for another 30 minutes when he visited the jail.

It is true she was getting food from her home but certainly not for the whole period of her detention. Once she had to go on a hunger-strike to wrest this 'facility' from the prison authorities. She has recorded the type of 'rations' she received but dumping these on her was no kindness at all when she was utterly exhausted and in pain, and was in no state to do any, cooking. As the I.G. says, to prepare her own food was, one of the special facilities she was entitled to as a political prisoner. Was it human to expect her to do this in her anxiety ridden and debilitated condition? Did he know that Mrs. Reddy for days after she complained to him about the Jail Superintendent was denied all contact with her family?

Rev. K. O. Abraham
P. Lankesh

Indian Express, Feb. 25, 77

APPENDIX III

Snehalatha Reddy —a tribute

U. R. Anantha Murthy

It is hard to believe that Snehalata is dead at the age of forty four. She will remain a vivid memory for her innumerable admirers among whom are people from all walks of life : socialist leaders and intellectuals, theatre artists from India and abroad, writers, and above all many young people still searching for a

meaning and purpose in life. You met them always in her bright and simple drawing room. She had a luminous, fiery personality which could never tolerate injustice and ugliness. Otherwise she would not have found herself in a jail with no charges against her. For many of us who knew why she had to suffer what turned out to be virtually a solitary confinement for eight months that ruined her frail health, she is one of the martyrs of our age. By her manner of life and death she has redeemed us who have had to live in a state of sin, because of our quietism and indifference in the face of evil.

When I met her last on December 25, she was on parole and felt guilty about it. But those who had worked hard for her parole knew the terror and anxiety of her lonely days and long nights in jail when she got her violent asthma attacks. Yet, what worried her was the plight of the women convicts, mostly prostitutes, whom she had left behind. She had taught them songs and games in jail, and fought with the jail authorities to improve their condition. She did not allow me to talk about her, but asked me what we could do for those unfortunate women in jail. I could not take my eyes off Sneha's beautiful concerned face which was disfigured by her intense and inhuman suffering in jail.

What killed Sneha? Was it the stupid law which forbids a woman prisoner meeting men prisoners?—for only across a wall were some of her dear political and intellectual friends, also detained under MISA like her. Was it the terror and anxiety of the unpredictable asthma attacks, when she could get no immediate help? Or was it what her sensitive soul saw in the prison—the plight of other women whose cause was most dear to her? She was always deeply agitated by the male cruelty and insensitivity in India, and wrote on the theme a moving play called '*Seetha*'.

When I saw her again, it was a mystery, but her face had regained its great beauty and peace. Her agony had come to an end in death. Most of her friends were there: socialists, artists, writers, young people, working-class men and their leaders, and just friends. It was always her endeavour to bring them

together—socialist politicians and creative artists. No one went from the house without a meal or at least a cup of tea. And we had our lunch that day too—for Pattabhi, Sneha's husband, insisted that it would have been her wish also.

Sneha was versatile. She was a dancer, trained in India and Spain. For me as the author of the novel *Samskara* which Pattabhi directed and produced into a film and which created a new wave in Kannada cinema, Sneha's acting in the heroine's role is a memorable experience. Sneha, along with her husband Pattabhi, who is a distinguished Telugu poet, planned the film, fought for it when it was banned, and ultimately won for the film the highest Indian award, the President's Gold Medal, and many international awards.

Sneha was also the moving spirit behind the theatre movement in Madras and became the centre of artistic and political activities when she and her family settled down in Bangalore. She was imaginative in whatever she did—whether it was a play she directed, or a role she played, or a room she decorated, or the way she entertained people without fuss. She could be very frank and critical in her opinions without hurting her adversary. Her daily life was full of those "little unremembered acts of kindness and of love". She had as much time for the personal problems of young people as she had for her concerns in art and politics.

Sneha was a very dear friend and follower of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia, one of the great creative thinkers of our country. It was said of him that he was one of the few Indian leaders for whom there were some at least who would lay down their lives. Yes—Sneha died in a cause that was dear to him. She leaves behind her a daughter Nandana, a charming person and artist, her son Konarak, a musician of great promise, her husband, Pattabhi, the most serene person I have known.

And also she leaves behind a cause that animates them as well as her innumerable friends, some of whom are still in jail.

Indian Express, Feb. 12, 77

A PRISON DIARY

SNEHALATA REDDY

he has treated me —

~~in the morning~~

Terrible days
28th July
29th "
30th "
31st July
1st Aug

In a real dark night of the soul, it is always 3' o' clock in the morning day after day " These were the times I wanted to die really die — •

Chakalani is a sadist of the meanest order he is also a coward + a liar I've never come across such an individual. He is

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