

The Sankrail episode: The story of the arrested women

By Partho Sarathi Ray. Oct 27 2009, [Sanhati](#)

On 20th October, 2009, Maoists attacked a police station in Sankrail, West Midnapur, West Bengal, taking the O.C. Atindranath Dutta as a prisoner, and demanding the release of fourteen women from police custody. This was a media sensation – the debate centered around whether this defined a hostage situation in India's heartland, whether this was a repeat of Kandahar, and whether the action is an example of violent turf expansion by the Maoists. Subsequently, the women were released and so was the O.C., who has become somewhat of a media celebrity and, much to the wrath of the Government, not condemned the Maoists.

What is being hidden under all the media blitz is *the story of the fourteen women* whose release from police custody was ensured by the Maoists.

These women had all been arrested from in an around Teshabandh village on 3rd September after the 2nd September "encounter" between the combined forces and "Maoists" near Madhupur ([there is a previous report on this in Sanhati](#)). The PSBJC had claimed that the encounter was really a firing by the combined forces on a rally of adivasis protesting against the rape of a woman. It had also condemned the arrests of these women from Teshabandh, who were subsequently charged with waging war against the state, as being arrests of innocent people.

Today their stand has been vindicated. The public prosecutor didn't oppose their bail plea at the Midnapore court, although the charges against them, which include rioting with deadly weapons, attempt to murder, waging war against the state, raising funds to wage war against the state, sedition and carrying illegal arms, are all non-bailable ones. This is an effective withdrawal of charges.

Now, the media has access to the stories of the women and people know who these "dangerous" people are, whom the Maoists were so intent on getting released from police custody.

One of them is Subharani Baskey, a grandmother of 55-60 (this correspondent knows her personally – she once treated him to a "nona", a fruit very similar to the custard-apple, just saltier, from her tree). What she has told to the media now is that she was at her home when she heard a commotion outside as the police were arresting the village women. When she went out to enquire, she was arrested for "waging war against the state" and dragged to the Kantapahari police camp.

You can hear the real story from these women, Padmamoni, a mother of two children, Pratima Patra, Sumi Mandi and the others, about what happened that day. When the police had raided their village, alleging that the "Maoists" had taken shelter there, they had stopped whatever chores they were doing and come out and surrounded the police, not letting them enter the village. They were not protecting Maoists, they were protecting themselves, as according to what Pratima Patra has said, the police entering the village means they would go door-to-door, beating up people indiscriminately, breaking furniture and looting household goods.

Even women from surrounding villages, such as Sumi Mandi, joined them when the news about the raid spread, as is the standard practice in Lalgarh. All these women were arrested, beaten up brutally and taken to the Kantapahari police station where there were charged with the above-mentioned crimes. On the way back to Kantapahari, the police also arrested Ramdulal Mandi, who was walking towards Kantapahari bazar, and charged him with the same crimes. He was also released yesterday. This constant arrests and charging

with false cases is the daily reality which Chidambaram- Buddhadeb has imposed in Lalgarh, and now wants to impose on the rest of the adivasi-populated region.

The other thing that we should understand about the reality in Lalgarh is that the adivasis think that the Maoists are their last resort, when everything else fails to protect them from exploitation and oppression, the Maoists are there. This is repeated by hundreds of adivasis when you talk to them, who express their confidence on the "*bon-er party*", the "party of the jungles". This confidence has now been reinforced by this action of the Maoists, where they have ensured the release of these innocent women, rather than their own party cadre, in exchange of the captured O.C.

Moreover, the action of the state which has consistently refused to release these women, and other innocent people who have been arrested in Lalgarh over the past four months, in spite of peaceful protests and demonstrations by the PSBJC and the civil society in Kolkata, but has bowed to the armed might of the Maoists, will further reinforce the idea that it is only a certain language that the state understands, and takes heed of.

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