

Swapan Dasgupta (19 April 1949—2 February 2010)

Swapan Dasgupta, the editor of Bangla People's March, published from Kolkata, died in jail custody as the first political prisoner to die as a UAPA/Unlawful Activities Prevention (Amended) Act of 2008 prisoner. He breathed his last on 2 February 2010 in the ITU, Mackenjee ward of SSKM hospital, Kolkata as a result of physical and mental torture in the police lock-up since his arrest on 6 October 2009 and utter negligence on the part of the government to give him proper medical treatment both inside Presidency Jail, Kolkata as also in the SSKM hospital. Many people and democratic forums described his death as murder and sections of urban literati have raised the demand for enquiry about the circumstances leading to his death. Swapan Dasgupta was the editor of Bangla Peoples' March since its inception in August 2004 and carried on his task to the best of his ability with courage, dedication and sincerity. Even when the English People's March was banned by the government, he continued to publish the journal disseminating revolutionary ideas and news about revolutionary struggles in different parts of the country and also beyond, braving all odds. Intimidation from the state could hardly make any impact on his mind. Swapan Dasgupta's case is a case of deliberate brutal state-sponsored murder in custody. The following information about his life and his days under detention has been collected from the members of his family as also his friends who stood by his side till he finally closed his eyes at the age of 61 and was cremated at Keoratala crematorium.

Swapan Dasgupta was born on 19 April 1949 at Timarpur in Delhi in a middle-class family. His father was Sisir Kumar Dasgupta and mother was Manika Dasgupta. His father was central government employee and connected with swadeshi activities and the *Anushilan Samiti* –the revolutionary organization in British India. Swapan Dasgupta had three brothers and two sisters, of whom he was the middle brother. At the time of his death, he had one younger brother and disabled sister, who was totally dependent on him. Swapan Dasgupta did not marry.

Swapan Dasgupta studied at the Bengali Boys' Higher Secondary School in Delhi till Class VIII. After that he came to Kolkata and settled at Jadavpur Garfa in south Kolkata. There he got enrolled in Dharendra Nath Memorial High School and passed his Higher Secondary from in 1967. For getting jobs, he learnt typing, shorthand (stenography) and sat for examination. In 1972, he got a job in central excise and worked as the PA to the Collector, Sambalpur Central Excise in Orissa. In late 1974, he left his job to work underground as a political activist. He was offered reinstatement in the job if he agreed to disown his ideology. Remaining true to his commitment to the people's cause, he disdainfully turned down that offer. After his father's death in 1980, he returned to Kolkata. In order to make both ends meet, he had to do a number of low-pay jobs such as doing type-writing in High Court premises, working as steno-typists under court lawyers, doing stenography in a Bombay Dyeing branch office. As he was involved in office workers' movements, he was dismissed from office by the employers in 1992. After that he worked as a stenographer under many advocates in the Kolkata High Court.

Political Career: He took part in the anti-price rise movement that engulfed large parts of Bengal in 1966 as also in the movement for the release of political prisoners. As a student, he first joined the CPI and then the CPI (M). When the 'a peal of Spring Thunder crashed over' Naxalbari in north Bengal, he developed close relationship with the revolutionary comrades associated with the martyr Ashu Mazumdar. (A student in the Political Science department of Jadavpur University, Ashu Mazumdar was one of the many revolutionary youths influenced by Charu Mazumdar's leadership, and was killed in cold blood by the Indian army in 1971 in south Kolkata). Swapan Dasgupta also

had links with the MCC; known as the *Dakshin Desh* group (Dakshin Desh was the mouthpiece of the MCC, which stood apart from the CPI (M-L) at that time and, after many decades, merged with the CPI (M-L) People's War to form the CPI (Maoist)). When the CPI (M-L) was formed in 1969, Swapan Dasgupta joined it and got associated with youth squads activities. In 1971, he was once picked up by the CRPF when his locality was encircled by the security forces. However, as there was nothing against him, he was released.

After the break-up of the CPI (M-L), Swapan Dasgupta joined the CPI (M-L) group led by Kishore-Santo-Mahendra Singh in Orissa in 1973. At that time that organization was fighting against the SNS (Satyanarayan Singh) parliamentary line and the left adventurist line. One section of this faction (led by Santo) later set up the CT, CPI (M-L) in 1978, but Swapan Dasgupta did not join it. The organization led by Kishore became defunct after Kishore's death. From 1992 to 1996, he participated in different programmes organized by the MCC. It was in such a situation that he came into contact with Vara Vara Rao at the time of the first conference of the AIPRF when he had been working as a stenographer. Later on, he came into contact with the leading comrades of the CPI (M-L) Party Unity. That was the time when Radical Publications was set up and Swapan Dasgupta became associated with it. When the CPI (M-L) PW and the CPI (M-L) PU merged to form the CPI (M-L) People's War, he was associated with a number of publications of the new organization. This process culminated in his being the editor of *Bangla People's March* since its inception.

Facts relating to his arrest and murder: On 6 October 2009, Swapan Dasgupta got a phone call from the Special branch of the Kolkata police around 3 PM when he was present at a press conference organized by the Lalgarh Manch in central Kolkata. He knew that he was going to be arrested and reported the matter to some of his friends who were present at the conference. While he was there, he received the news that his residence in Garia had already been raided by the police. He was arrested at night near a tea shop in the Garia railway station by one S.A.Khan of the special task force of the Special Branch (SB) of the Kolkata Police. He was arrested on the basis an FIR made by a special branch sub-inspector named Nabaranjan Mondal. He was kept in Bhawani Bhawan and Lalbazar police station for 28 days and had been subjected to continuous interrogation without hardly any break allowing him no sleep for nights together. He was forced to sleep on the floor without any sheet or blanket throughout those cold winter days; when he told the police that he was an asthma patient and would need bed and woolen garments, his request was disdainfully brushed aside. Such physical and mental torture told on his health and aggravated the situation.

He was booked under Sections 18(conspiracy), 20(organizing terrorist camps), 39(support given to terrorist organizations) of UAPA 1967 and 121/121A/124A of IPC that deal with sedition against the State.

On 3 November 2009, he was sent to Presidency Jail. When his relatives [and] friends went to meet him in jail, they learnt from him that he had been admitted in the jail hospital with inflammation of the gland. On 9 December, he was taken under police escort to the outdoor section of the Bangur Hospital for enlargement of the spleen and prostrate-related problems. On 17 December, he was admitted into the Mackenjee Ward (Bed no.20) of the SSKM Hospital with asthma and respiratory troubles. Blood test was made under Dr. Sumit Choudhuri and his friends came to know on 11 January that he had been suffering also from leprosy. When his friends went to meet him inside the ward and started talking to him, they were prevented from doing so by the policemen on duty. Swapan Dasgupta was kept in a general ward without any attendant, and the friends noticed blood oozing out from the mouth. When they sought to help him rub off and wash his face or to help him respond to the nature's call, the policemen stood in the way. Conditions thus further deteriorated.

Everyday altercations with the police followed. The second day, some friends (women included) entered again and started talking to Dasgupta. The policemen on duty poured out abusive words of all conceivable types and stated that had there been no women, they would have assaulted them physically. On that day, Swapan Dasgupta complained that the police were not allowing anyone to bring the medicines; even they were not giving the patients Horlicks biscuits which were handed over to them for Swapanbabu's consumption by relatives and friends. As blood was flowing out from the body, he needed blood transfusion. The government was doing absolutely nothing in this respect. When the friends asked the doctors, they said that they had been placing requisitions for many essential things, but the jail authorities were doing nothing; 'what can we do in such a situation?'

On 17 January, eleven democratic and civil rights forums issued a press statement charging the government with indulging in political persecution of dissident voices by refusing to give medical treatment to a political prisoner booked under the draconian UAPA, and in this way driving Swapan Dasgupta in a planned manner to his death. These bodies were BMC, APDR, LMSM, GPM, BSSKM, LM, UAPABM, NAPM, GMP, SU and MKP.

On 18 January, the doctors asked the friends to bring medicines, as the police were doing nothing. On 19th the friends discovered requisition papers signed by doctors under the bed of Swapan Dasgupta, which clearly showed that those were concealed by the policemen themselves. Then the friends raised money and went from one blood supply centre to another for collecting A positive blood. Blood platelets were procured with increased difficulty. On 26 January, the friends procured 12 such platelets. Meanwhile the news spread and more and more people were coming and putting pressure on the jail minister to intervene in the matter. The IG (Prisons) was then forced to come to the hospital and a medical board was formed. By then, it was too late. Swapan Dasgupta's condition further deteriorated and he was shifted to the ITU on 30 January and kept in ventilation. He died at 5 AM on 2 February and his friends who were on night duty as they had been throughout these days were informed about his death by the media at 8 AM. After post mortem, his body was taken to Peace Haven for the night and on 3 February; his body was taken out at 10 AM and taken to the Keoratala crematorium in a procession joined by around 200 people. His body was put on the funeral pyre around 2.30 PM. Processions were held on 2nd and 3rd February inside the book fair complex joined by many people. Among those who were present during the last journey at hospital as also on the road were Kabir Suman, sitting TMC MP, Bibhas Chakrabarty, playwright, Nabarun Bhattacharya, writer, Sujato Bhadro, civil rights activist, Ashim Chattopadhyay, Santosh Rana, Basudev Basu, Pradip Singh Thakur—political leaders, as also civil rights activists and other democratic people.

Swapan Dasgupta's death under custody is a case of state-sponsored murder.