



Unlawful Arrests of Sudha Bhardwaj and other Human Rights Defenders in India - Protect Rights.

On 28 August 2018, five well-known lawyers, journalists and human rights defenders in India were arrested under anti-terror laws. A similar wave of arrests of academics, lawyers and activists also took place in June that year. Among the arrestees is Advocate Sudha Bhardwaj, a High Court lawyer who teaches law at the National Law University, Delhi; also, Professor Soma Sen who teaches English at Nagpur University, Varavara Rao, renowned poet and literary critic from Hyderabad who is 78 years old, and other individuals of similar calibre known for their standing by the marginalised people and speaking up the truth. Were these professionals engaged in unlawful activities? Or, were they arrested unlawfully?

Prominent citizens in India have protested including renowned historian Ramachandra Guha who described the arrests as a 'witch-hunt' and 'illegal misuse of police and state power' with 'utterly fabricated' charges. UN human rights experts have expressed concerns saying that the terrorism charges are a pretext to silence human rights defenders.

We urge all to join for the release Sudha Bhardwaj and others falsely accused on fabricated charges.

Maharashtra police who led the arrest allege that these individuals instigated communal violence at an event near Pune (Maharashtra), and that they have links with Maoists rebels who are at war against the Indian government. No specific charges have yet been filed against them though. The ruling party of the current government (the same party in power in the state of Maharashtra) together with the media who are influenced by the political party have portrayed the arrestees as the

mastermind behind the Maoists rebellion in parts of the country, naming them as 'urban naxals' implying that they are Maoists but live in cities. On 9 November 2018, Prime Minister Narendra Modi at a meeting in Chhattisgarh in favour of his party's election candidate, elaborated the meaning of 'urban naxals' saying "urban Maoists live in AC rooms in cities, look clean, build their stature by rubbing shoulders with sensible people; their children study abroad; they move around in good

cars; but they sit there and through a remote system, they work to destroy the lives of tribal children". Well, it does seem a ridiculous comment from the head of a country - but this is not unusual whether in India or US or elsewhere. It is our choice how we respond.



Sudha Bhardwaj: Is she a terrorist, a plotter to kill Modi?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's definition of 'urban Maoist' does not really match with Sudha's life - she neither lives in a luxury apartment with 'AC surroundings', nor her daughter studies abroad.¹ Will anyone in India go with Indian Prime Minister's statement that Sudha Bhardwaj has been ruining the lives of poor adivasi youth in Chhattisgarh? Even Prime Minister's supporters in Bastar would find it hard to believe. Mr Modi, while describing 'urban Maoists' at an election meeting in Bastar, Chhattisgarh, carefully avoided naming Sudha Bhardwaj as a Maoist terrorist. That would not have been a wise act because people there would not have believed him.

Sudha Bhardwaj is a popular name across

¹ Narendra Modi at an election meeting in Chhattisgarh <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/sitting-in-ac-rooms-urban-maoists-have-ruined-the-lives-of-advasis-pm-narendra-modi/articleshow/66554597.cms>

Chhattisgarh, particularly among indigenous (adivasi) population in Bastar. As a lawyer she has been taking up cases on their behalf - villagers who were forcibly displaced by mining companies, cases of torture and rape, and families whose members were killed in 'fake' encounters by the police and para-military forces. She helped set up Jagdalpur Legal Aid, a collective of young lawyers, also for the same purpose.

At the time Sudha Bhardwaj was arrested from her residence on the outskirts of Delhi, a modest 2-room apartment in a 3-story housing society building, she was teaching law at the National Law School in Delhi. She was not a regular Delhite. A highly educated woman, who had her schooling in the UK, studied mathematics and later law, worked in the state of Chhattisgarh for the last three decades - first in Dalli Rajhara, a small mining town near Bilai Steel plant, teaching children of unskilled miners, and later in Bilaspur practising law at the High Court taking up cases on behalf of unskilled workers, police atrocities, custodial deaths and on behalf of displaced villagers who lost their land because of mining.

It is no secret that there is a war between the armed Maoist insurgents and the government forces in India - in Chhattisgarh and adjacent states. Very little is known about the atrocities committed by the government forces on innocent villagers; the government of India does not allow the UN or international organisations like Red Cross to enter the areas as observers. It is also no secret that the government has made an easy path for mining companies, national and foreign, allowing them to indiscriminantly mine the mineral-rich state of Chhattisgarh - coal, iron, bauxite, gold and so on.

Sudha Bhardwaj, and all others accused as 'urban Maoists' have been exposing the government and corporate nexus for illegal land grabbing and atrocities on innocent people. In the past intellectuals like Bela Bhatia, Prof. Nandini Sunder of Delhi university, Dr Binayak Sen, all who worked in Chhattisgarh were branded as Maoists and

faced consequences - from false charges, threat to solitary confinement, and in the case of Soni Sori, an adivasi teacher from Bastar, torture and sexual assault in police custody. Thousands of innocent people are languishing in India prisons

Sudha Bhardwaj and other intellectuals accused as urban Maoists are in solitary confinement waiting for their trial.

Also read, 'urban maoist' AC life exposed by the Prime Minister: <https://www.telegraphindia.com/india/urban-maoists-ac-life-exposed-by-pm/cid/1674620>.



Women in Chhattisgarh demanding unconditional release of Sudha Bhardwaj - the little girl's placard in the picture says, 'I am Sudha Bhardwaj'.



Renowned historian Ramchandra Guha in a television interview said, 'these charges are utterly fabricated arbitrary and illegal misuse of police and state power ... to divert attention partly to ease capture natural resource from adivasi areas from corporate class close to the government an attempt to divert attention from failures of government.'

