

Charu Majumdar: A new biography imagines the CPIM(L) leader’s interrogation by the police

Ashok Mukhopadhyay

The interrogation team swung into action. Arun Khasnabis (name changed) fired the first volley of questions: “Tell something about your identity first.”

Smiling, Charu, in bush shirt and trousers, did not open his lips. “Well, even if you don’t tell us, we know all about you; correct me if I am wrong.” Khasnabis started pouring out his “knowledge”. A junior officer went on writing; he had to adhere to the official format.

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Name with aliases: Charu Majumdar, Chandra da. Father’s name: Late Bireswar Majumdar.

Address: Permanent: Mahananda para, Siliguri; present: Middle Road Entally, Calcutta. Age: 54 years.

Height: 5 ft 2 inches/2.5 inches.

Build: Thin.

Nose: sharp and pointed, almost touching the lips.

Complexion: Once upon a time it was fair, now it was sun-tanned; Khasnabis directed his junior to write “wheatish”.

Date and place of arrest: The officer looked at his senior. Khasnabis started dictating, while taking a stroll in the cell. “He was arrested on Sunday 16 July 1972 early hours from the flat of Prabal Kumar Roy at 107 A Middle Road, Calcutta 700014 (easternside flat on ground floor).”

As if he had been the ghost writer of the autobiography of Charu Majumdar, Khasnabis continued –

I originally hail from village Harua, district Rajshahi (now in Bangladesh). My grandfather migrated from Rajshahi to Siliguri some time in the latter part of the 19th century.

In 1930, when I was a student in Siliguri, I became a member of the All Bengal Students Association (then affiliated to the Anushilan group) at the instance of Sewmangal Singh and Brojen Basu Roy Choudhuri.

The ABSA was formed some time in 1928 which at later stage was divided into two groups. While ABSA remained affiliated to Anushilan Group, the other part Bengal Provincial Students Association (BPSA) owed its allegiance to the *Jugantar* Group.

Through the ABSA, I remained attached with the Anushilan Group. In 1931, with the arrest of Satyen Mazumdar, then an executive committee member of the ABSA and a professor of Rajshahi College, the link of Siliguri students with the ABSA was virtually paralysed and all connections were cut off. I however continued studies...

Charu Babu wondered how much time the police honcho had spent on doing research on him.

...I discontinued studies in or about 1937. During my college days, I got addicted to liquor and consumed liquor regularly at the college hostel. I used to get Rs 25/- per month from my father of which I used to spend Rs 6/- as college fees, Rs 7/- as hostel charges and the rest Rs 12/- for liquor...

“What?” with a cynical glance Charu Babu commented, “you mean I was immersed in liquor during those days and the hostel superintendent of the Edward College was so liberal that he had accepted the nuisance? I am not impressed. Please engage a better-paid informer!”

...At later stages, I also became addicted to ganja, bhang, opium, charas and siddhi which I continued with for long –

“A bland concoction of the police variety,” Charu Babu clapped and burst into laughter. Khasnabis left the room in a huff.

In the evening came Mr Subrata Mukherjee, Minister of State for Home Affairs. With him were his disciple, Kumud Bhattacharya of Chhatra Parishad and the Commissioner of Calcutta Police, Mr RN Chatterjee.

The staff reporter of the *Hindustan Standard* filed a report headlined “Subrata Meets Majumder” for his newspaper of 17 July 1972 –

...if anyone had really supposed that there was an element of pathos in the meeting – the older politician seemed to be at the end of the road, the younger tasting the fruits of victory – he was mistaken. For even as Mr Mukherjee remarked that the political mistakes committed by both the older and the younger generations were responsible for the deaths of hundreds of youths, Mr Majumdar quietly observed that perhaps they had not died in vain.

This was the cue for Mr Mukherjee to request Mr Majumdar for a lengthier political discussion. Mr Majumdar agreed. “If you can convince me that your politics are correct, I may even join your party,” he told Mr Majumdar.

Mr Mukherjee went on to assure the CPI(ML) chief that his needs would be taken care of. He also paid tributes to his greater political experience. Apart from expressing a wish to see his daughter, who studied at the Calcutta National Medical College, Mr Majumdar said very little. Then, as Mr Mukherjee was on his way out, he quietly told the minister, “Do not think our movement has ended.”

The Commissioner had accompanied Mr Mukherjee all through the brief interview. He apologised to Mr Majumdar for bringing in so many visitors. Mr Majumdar acknowledged this with a twitch of his lips that resembled a smile.

At around 11am on 17 July, Anita reached the central lock-up at Lalbazar. As arranged by the party, between 1970 and 1971, Anita, along with others in the family, had met her father secretly twice or thrice. The last she had met him was in February 1971.

At the sight of Anita, Charu Babu’s face lit up, “Anita you have now become a full-grown lady!” Anita smiled. An incident of her childhood days flashed in her mind. She was then a little more than two-and-a-half years old. Her father had bought her a glass jug. “This is yours, from now on you have to use this container when you feel thirsty; pour water from it in a glass and drink,” father had said.

The girl was so happy at this! She was allowed to have water like any other adult she had seen. Anita had realised later that it was a lesson for becoming self-reliant. She smiled again and looked around. There was no oxygen cylinder in the cell and father did not appear to be especially sick; in fact, she had seen him in much worse condition before.

“How are you?” Anita had asked. “Not bad,” smiled her father. Charu Babu then inquired about all the members of the family. Anita briefed him about everyone. All their conversation about their domestic and personal affairs was conducted under police presence. Hence, it could not proceed beyond five minutes.

With each passing day, the pressure of grilling was mounting. Apart from Khasnabis, there were three more members in the interrogation team – Haripada Bose, Chaitanya Sen and Naresh Roy (all names changed).

It was 2 pm. Charu Babu was sleepy. Haripada entered the cell along with an assistant. The session went on as usual – a heterogeneous mixture of truth and fiction. By this time, Charu Babu could make out the ingredients of the would-be police report on him. The fruits of investigation by the police intelligence, a very poor grade though, gleaned from statements of some of party comrades and inventions of the fertile police brain.

“Do you still believe in annihilation of class enemies?” Bose stared at him.

Charu babu nodded, “Yes I do...by class enemies I mean feudal enemies, the landowners. I fully endorse the annihilation of moneylenders besides the jotedars and landowners. I never meant annihilation indiscriminately...and I am, however, not against the annihilation of police personnel... This is inevitable as police is the striking force of administration...here I would like to mention that the police also did not spare my cadres and killed them indiscriminately.”

“These annihilations of class enemies are meant for the countryside, isn’t it?” the fox-eyed Bose questioned. Charu babu could see through the officer’s trick. He was trying to extract a statement which would go against the comrades in urban action.

“...it does not, however, mean that there will be no annihilation in urban areas. When there is a programme of snatching of arms, annihilation automatically finds its place there...hence, please write...”, averred Charu Babu, “annihilation of police personnel even in the urban areas will also continue.”

A visibly upset Bose remarked, “Do you have any idea, how many charges ranging from murder, conspiracy to bank loot are being framed against you?”

“Please add three more to it – I believe Mao Tse-Tung is the greatest leader under the sun. In 1962, it was India which attacked China and the Naxalbari path is the way of emancipation of the toiling masses of India,” answered Charu Babu.

“All right, you will have it,” Bose cut the interrogation short.

In the gruelling heat of July noon, Charu Babu had to bear the so-called interrogation. He understood the police intention – they wanted to get him excited, which was strictly prohibited at this state of his health.

Chaitanya Sen looked sheepish. “Charu babu, my information is that you insulted Sushital Roy Chaudhuri at the West Bengal State Committee meeting in August 1970.”

“All bogus,” Charu babu’s voice touched the higher chord, “Sushital babu was the most well-read person amongst all of us.”

But Sen continued on the same note “...Sushital Roy Choudhuri, I mean SRC first raised his contradictions and demanded clarification on the party’s movement in urban areas...”

Sen’s face melted out. Charu clearly visioned a mirror image of SRC sitting and staring into his heart.

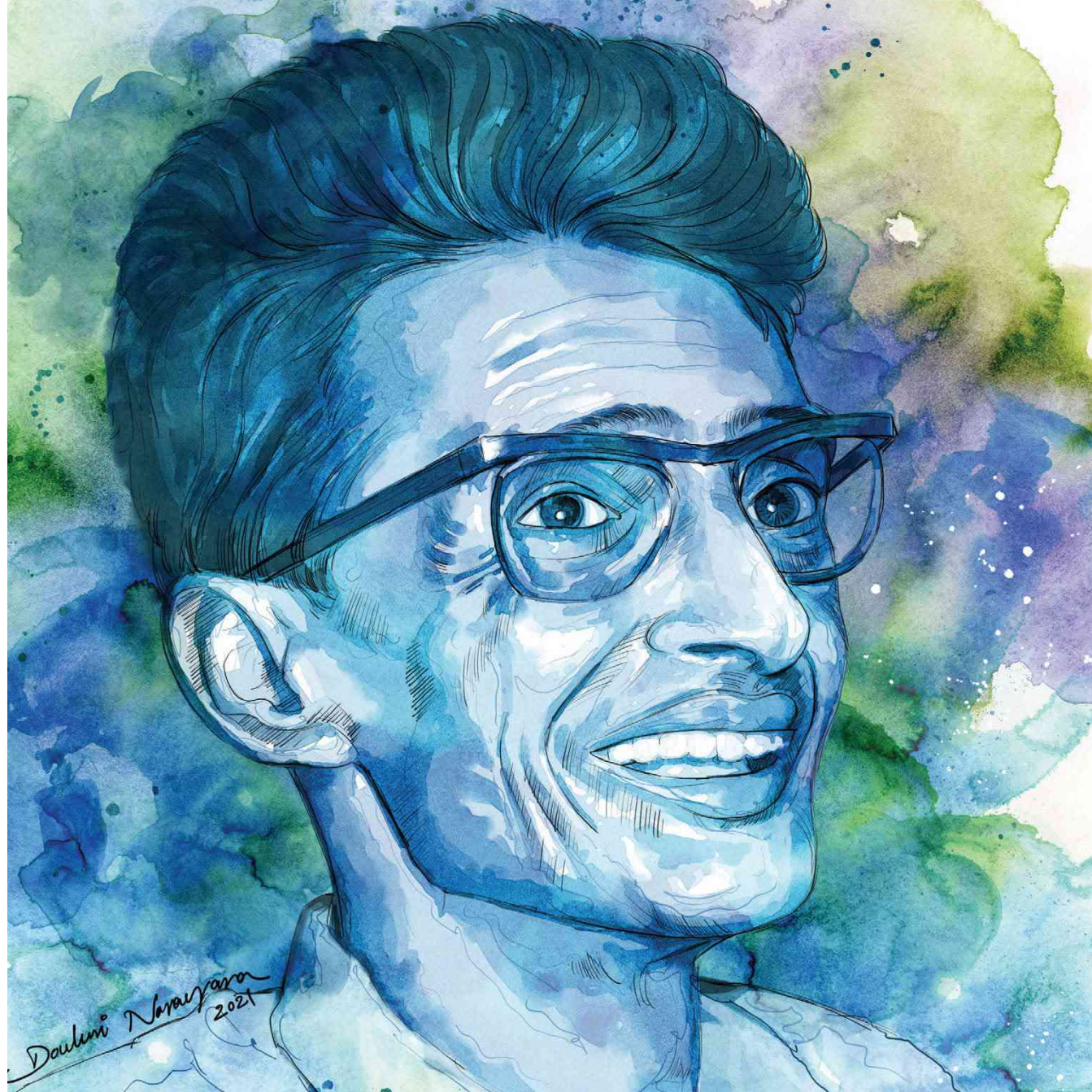
SRC smiled, “Charu Babu, if you remember, in the first party congress when the issue of your authority was raised, I simply quoted Mao to highlight the supremacy of politburo over an individual; in other words, I stressed the importance of collective leadership.”

“Right, Sushital Babu.”

“But thereafter, all the important party decisions were all your individual decisions. They were never discussed in the party committees.”

Charu Babu was silent.

PIONEERS OF MODERN INDIA



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