

Disha Ravi's Statement

All that is real feels far too unreal: Delhi's infamous smog; the cyber police station; Deen Dayal Hospital; Patiala House Court; and Tihar Jail. In all the years that someone had asked me where I see myself in 5 years, I would have never answered "jail" but here I was.

I kept asking myself what it felt like to be there at that particular moment in time, but I came back with no answers. I had coerced myself into believing that the only way I would be able to live through this was by tricking myself into thinking that this wasn't happening to me - the police did not knock on my door on 13 February, 2021; they did not take my phone and laptop, and arrest me; they did not present me at the Patiala House Court; the media personnel were not trying to find a place inside the room. As I stood in that courtroom, desperately searching for my lawyers, I came to terms with the fact that I would have to defend myself. I had no idea whether there was legal assistance available so when the judge asked me if I had anything to say, I decided to speak my mind. Before I knew it, I was sent to 5 days in police custody.

It's no surprise that in the days that followed, my autonomy was violated; my photographs were splashed all over the news; my actions were pronounced guilty - not in the court of law, but on flat screens by seekers of Television Rating Points. I sat there, unaware of the many abstractions made of me in order to satiate their idea of me.

At the end of the five days (19 February, 2021), I was shifted to Judicial Custody for 3 days. In Tihar, I was aware of every second of every minute of every hour of every day. Locked in my cell, I wondered when it became a crime to think the most basic elements of sustenance on this planet were as much mine as theirs. Why were millions paying the ultimate price for the greed of a few hundred? Their interest in the lives of those millions is dependent on whether or not they profit and even that interest has a short shelf-life. Unfortunately, so does humanity, if we do not act in time to stop this endless consumption and greed. We are inching closer to our own expiry.

I also realized, during my time in custody, that most people knew little or nothing about climate activism or climate justice. My grandparents, who are farmers, indirectly birthed my climate activism. I had to bear witness to how the water crisis affected them, but my work was reduced to tree plantation drives and clean-ups - which are important but not the same as struggling for survival. Climate Justice is about intersectional equity. It is about being radically inclusive of all groups of people, so that everyone has access to clean air, food, and water. As a dear friend always says, "Climate Justice isn't just for the rich and the white." it is a fight alongside those who are displaced; whose rivers have been poisoned; whose lands were stolen; who watch their houses get washed away every other season; and those who fight tirelessly for what are basic human rights. We fight alongside those actively silenced by the masses and portrayed as "voiceless," because it is easier for savarnas to call them voiceless. We take the easy way out and fund saviourism rather than amplify the voices on ground.

The immense outpour of love from the people gave me strength. I am grateful for everyone who stood by me. The past few days have been beyond painful, yet I know that I am one of the privileged. I was lucky enough to have excellent pro bono legal assistance but what of all those who do not? What of all those still in jail whose stories are not marketable? What of all

the marginalized that are not worthy of your screen time? What of those who face the world's brazen indifference? Although their physical forms are trapped behind bars because of our collective silence, their ideas continue to live on as the united resistance of the people. Ideas do not die. And, truth, no matter how long it takes, always reveals itself.

"We are threatened every day, our voices crushed; but we will continue to fight." Soni Sori

Still fighting for climate justice,
Disha A. Ravi