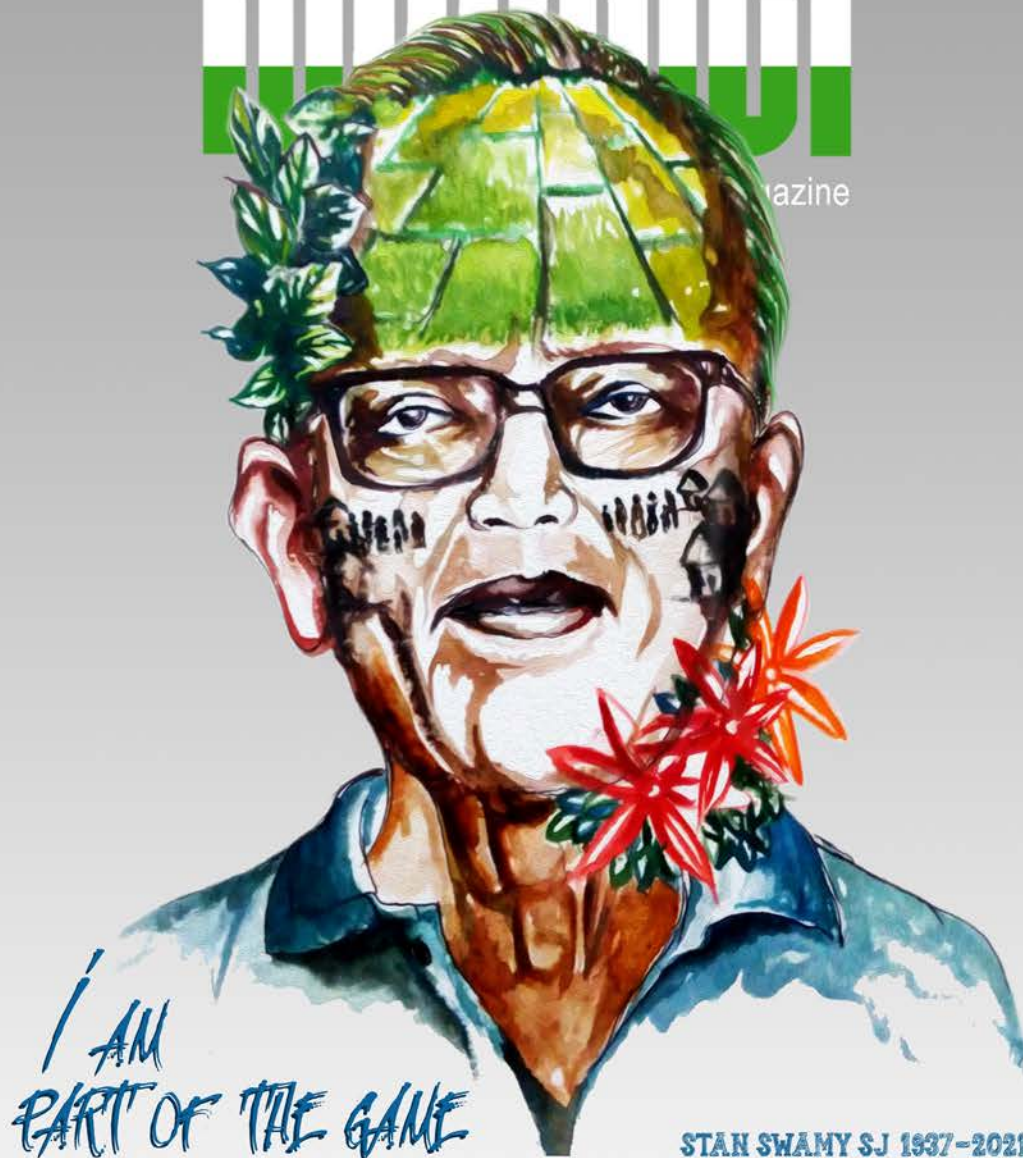


together

magazine



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Writings of
Stan Swamy

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Together is a national family magazine. It is a monthly, published by the Franciscans (OFM) in India. It was started in 1935 in Karachi, now in Pakistan. It got its present name in 1966.

The magazine **Together** is a conversation platform. Nothing changes until our families change. It is an effort at making worlds meet by bringing down fearful, pretentious and defensive walls. **Together** is a journey, an ever-expansive journey—from me to us, from us to all of us, and from all of us to

all. Let us talk, let us cross borders. The more we converse and traverse, we discover even more paths to talk about and travel together. **Together** is an effort to uncover our shared humanity.

Your critical and relevant write-ups, that promote goodness, inclusivity and shared humanity, are welcome. Your articles must be mailed to editor@togethertmagazine.in before the 15th of every month.

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Freedom at Midday

1937–1947–2021

Freedom, the celebrated realisation at a midnight in August 1947, was seen caged in Talaja in 2021. The caged bird still sang. At midday on 5 July 2021 Stan Swamy was free at last for all eternity. Stan continues to sing. All is not lost.

SAJI P MATHEW OFM

Stan Swamy was born a decade before India's freedom. He was born into the thick of our freedom struggle. The baby must have felt the heat of it, though was not yet in know of the great fire of countless Indian souls waging a nonviolent war against the British. Being born into the blaze of Indian freedom struggle seems to have made him an unyielding, non-melting metal. What sprouts in fire will not wither in the summer heat. Fr Stan's death was as touching and radical as his 84 years of life.

"At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom," announced the first Prime Minister of our country in his *Thyst with Destiny* speech. The hour of it's happening, and stressing it by mentioning it is quite metaphoric. The liberty envisaged by the founders of our great nation was freedom for all, even at the darkest hours of the day. We have drifted hours away from that dream. Atrocities against the tribals, and unconsented grabbing of their land continue to happen in the bright daylight, and with the consent of the ruling dispensation. When will the soul of our nation, the soul of Stan Swamy, long oppressed find utterance? The popular song "Apna time aayega" is heard from the loud speakers as India launch the year-long celebrations from August 2021 to commemorate 75 years of Independence with programmes and projects to showcase 'development, governance, technology, reform, progress and policy' over the years. Will their time ever come?

Freedom Begins Only When One Is Ready to Die

Our independence was hard fought. Our heroes stood up and refused to give up. They sacrificed many things that were dear to them; and they were even ready to die. No establishment would be stress-free once they know that the people are fighting for justice; and they are ready to even die for it.

People close to Stan say, that as standing with the tribals attracted the fury of government machineries and became dreadfully dangerous, Stan began to show 'a mysterious calmness and determination'. He was ready to pay the price, even with his life: 'Only a prophet closer to his God and people can exhibit such readiness'. That led to the incarceration of Stan Swamy; and freedom is not far away.

Incarceration Then and Now

The idea of imprisonment is quite terrifying. Shreya Goswami, in her article in India Today, *Bhagat Singh to Jawaharlal Nehru, Here's What Our Leaders Experienced in British Jails*, throws light on the state of those detained by the British. Incarceration was a common form of punishment as far back as the 1790s, when the British were just consolidating their rule in India. They established prisons in the many forts of India for security reasons, and turned the Andaman and Nicobar Islands into a penal settlement. We have learned in our history books about the hor-

rible conditions and atrocities thousands had to undergo in jails during our pre-independence freedom protests.

Though in retrospection there is some amount of romanticisation attached to jail-time back then, even if it was detainment for just a day, there's a lot more to forced detention; it wasn't easy. Our first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, wrote in *The Discovery of India*, "Prison is not a pleasant place to live in even for a short period, much less for long years." Bhai Parmanand, who was associated with the Lahore Conspiracy Case of 1915, described how severe was the incarceration in his prison diary, *Aapbeeti*. Even the long journey from Delhi to the Andamans via Calcutta took a toll on many prisoners.

Bhagat Singh, who was incarcerated in the Central Jail Mianwali near Rawalpindi, started an in-prison hunger strike to demand all the rights they were denied - equality in food standards, clothing, toiletries, and other hygienic necessities, as well as access to books and a daily newspaper.

Aren't there striking similarities between the incarcerations then and now with the stories of Stan Swamy and other undertrials, arrested under UAPA? Both had long journeys to reach their prisons, and are deprived of basic necessities. It is good to note that there were exceptions too: considering and observing that Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru etc. were nonviolent and are working

at a larger vision, though they did not want to admit it then, the jail authorities provided them with fundamental provisions; they were even given paper and pen. In fact, Gandhi wrote his autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments With Truth*, while serving time in Yerwada Jail in Pune in 1932! Nehru did the same with *The Discovery of India*, which he wrote being in Ahmednagar Fort Jail.

Fr Stan Swamy, aged 83, ailing from Parkinson's disease, was denied a straw and a sipper, even after repeated requests. Even at 75th year of country's illustrious independence, the struggle for even one's basic human rights is still on, leave alone the struggle to protect one's water, jungle and land. Are people and parties who fought against unlawful detentions, and fought for one's right to dissent, during the British era becoming perpetrators of the same today?

Two epochs, pre-independence times and post-independence times are united with one reality – undertrial prisoners. During the British rule Indian prisons were teeming with people who asked for political freedom. Fast forward 75 years, *The Hindu* in September 2020 reported that the number of people lodged in Indian prisons as undertrials increased at a faster rate between 2001 and 2019. There are more than 3.28 lakh undertrial prisoners in India. 1.6 crore criminal cases are pending judgement for more than a year across courts in India.

Incarceration was a common form of punishment as far back as the 1790s, when the British were just consolidating their rule in India.



Perspicacity is a quality of prophets. It is a profound understanding and insight into things. It is keen-sightedness. It is understanding people, issues and situations quickly and accurately. Stan had the capacity to see what is happening beneath, what is happening behind, what is happening besides, and what would happen further.

The End of Tribals Uprising

The tribals seem to be at a second independence struggle? They have lost their Mahatma (Mahatma Swamy). What is next? What conversations are possible with them? The answer is with the corporates and multinationals who are the favourites of the Government. There has to be a radical change.

The privileged must learn to say 'no', learn to say 'enough'. That is the deeper sense of option for the poor; that is voluntary reservation for the deprived and underprivileged. Let others too have opportunities and privileges. Never saying 'no' and 'enough' is the disaster of corporate behaviour. The world is ruled by handful of corporates, not because others have no abilities, but the corporates never say 'enough'. They even swallow the others through mergers, acquisitions, and by influencing government policies.

Stan Swamy Worked with Perspicacity and Courage

In his interview with Indian Development Review (IDR) Stan recalls, "through friends, I came to know of the indigenous Adivasi people in central India – a place where despite the tremendous natural wealth in the region, the people were very poor. He did not think twice, he declared solidarity with the tribals.

Stan reached Jharkhand tribal belt; so are many others, corporates, politicians, religious preachers; all had their own agenda. Some converted, some exploited, and some others even

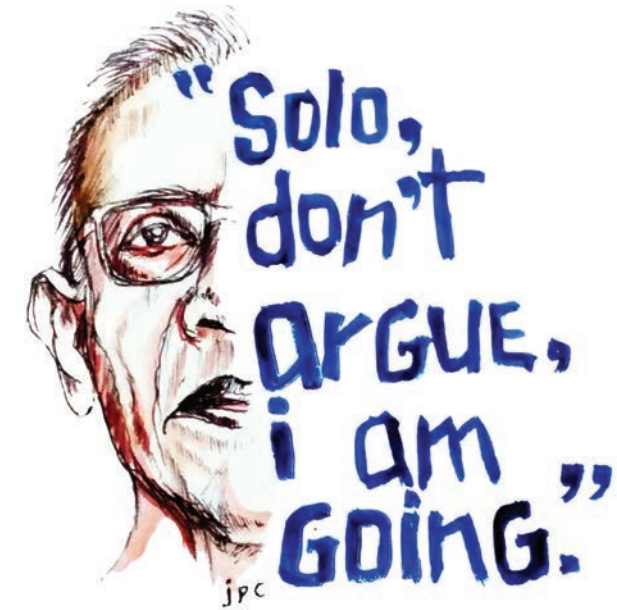
looted. Stan Swamy had empathy for them, he stayed with them, accompanied them. When many others made profit out of the tribals and their water, forest and land; Stan became a prophet for them.

Perspicacity is a quality of prophets. It is a profound understanding and insight into things. It is keen-sightedness.

It is understanding people, issues and situations quickly and accurately. Stan had the capacity to see what is happening beneath, what is happening behind, what is happening besides, and what would happen further. He saw more than what others saw; and gave up fear of standing up for it. Having a mind of one's own is a rare asset today. Having to speak up one's mind is even more rare; and for anyone, to speak up one's opinion, takes significant effort and energy, especially when he/she is alone or part of a minority. Fr Stan had grown weaker and feeble as time went.

Suzy Kassem, an American thinker, and social commentator, says, "stand up for what you believe in, even if you stand alone." She clarifies further in her book, *Rise Up and Salute the Sun*, "Stand up to hypocrisy. If you don't, the hypocrites will teach. Stand up to ignorance, because if you don't, the ignorant will run free to spread ignorance like a disease. Stand up for truth. If you don't, then there is no truth to your existence. If you don't stand up for all that is right, then understand that you are part of the reason why there is so much wrong in the world."

COVER STORY



STAN SWAMY: A PROPHET OF OUR TIME

DAVID SOLOMON SJ

I was the director of Bagaicha (a social action centre founded by Stan Swamy, and he resided there for the last 15 years) from July 2018 to 2020. I have accompanied Stan from the time of the first raid in his room till his arrest in Bagaicha, Ranchi. I had known him for ten years prior to my joining as the director. Though I have been part of the social action team of the Jesuits for the past 15 years, radical thinking of Stan Swamy has indeed opened up new ways of looking at the realities of the tribals. He was ahead of his time and his methodology actually, would require complete overhaul of our understanding of the institutionalised Church and its mission.

The last moments before his arrest could be understood and perceived only within the framework of the Jesus' entry into the Passion and crucifixion. He was interrogated for nearly 20 hours, from 25th July to 6th of August. Ever since, we made every effort to stall the arrest. Yet, Stan, in his heart was preparing himself. The

way he prepared himself, articulated the reasons for his imminent arrest in a video statement, was a faith statement that has summed up his life. I witnessed a restlessness in him from the second half of August 2020. However, from 15th of September 2020 I began observing a new grace on his face; a mysterious calmness and determination. Stan, like his Master Jesus, had the courage to pronounce that "I am part of the game, I am ready to pay the price." Only a prophet closer to his God and people can proclaim such readiness. On the night of his arrest, I kept on arguing with the officers and Stan said, "Solo, don't argue, I am going". From then on a silence descended and he stopped talking and a determination took hold of him.

Promoting Social Action

Stan Worked in three geographical locations. The first one was in Bangalore, as the director of the Indian Social Institute at Bangalore. The

second assignment was at Tribal Research and Training Centre and Jharkhandi Organisation for Human Rights in Chaibasa, Jharkhand. The third location was in Ranchi at Bagaicha.

Stan gave a strong foundation to Bangalore institute as to how it can contribute to the people's initiatives for the transformation of the social order based on equality, peace, justice and brotherhood. He trained volunteers, animators, youth, and students on scientific analysis of society so that they may take transformative actions. The Dalits needed Land and he sided with their demands.

The second place was in Chaibasa with a tribal population in majority amidst rich natural and mineral resources. Stan witnessed a communitarian living, harmonious with nature by the tribal community; but he also observed serious human right violations by the state and the powerful in order to exploit these resources for their greed and selfishness. Stan 'heard the cry of the people' and responded by uniting the voices and fighting with the instruments provided by the Constitution of India. His researches on the destruction of the forests, human right violations became basis for Public Interest Litigations on behalf of the tribals. He joined hands with other individuals and groups to bring about justice.

The last stage of his life was founding and providing a vision to Bagaicha in Namkum Ranchi. The external structure of the institution reflected the life philosophy of the tribals. The activities were designed to accompany them in actualising, preserving and promoting philosophy of Indigenous culture and world view. While training and research were the modes of intervention for the cause of the people, he focused on accompanying and participating in the movements that were happenings against the displacements and alienation of the people, jal (water), jungle (forest) and jamin (land). He demanded the implementation of the constitutional provisions that could guarantee political participation of the tribals in decision making process, access to resources for their development according to their own space and preserve their identity and culture.

A Thorough Going Researcher and Writer

Mr. Gladson Dung Dung, a human right activist and an acclaimed writer says, "Stan was fearless, compassionate, determined, well qualified, grass root human right activist, dissenter, trainer, researcher and a writer". I briefly mention the themes and topics he has worked on:

- The administrative and judicial intervention for 6000 tribal under trials through research, formation of a committee and legal helps.
- Protesting the constant, illegal displacement of tribals and forest dwellers without the consent of their gramsabhas (village councils), weakening of protective laws of their land and Black laws used for imprisonment of the weaker sections.
- Demanding Implementation of PESA Act, 1996 to the fullest in order to empower the traditional consensual political governance system so that natural and mineral resources could be fruitfully used for the development of the communities.
- Demanding full application of the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution to the Scheduled Areas.

Stan protested against the government efforts to bring about alienation of land through enacting Executive actions such as Land Banks for the benefit of the Multi National companies. Stan participated in the movements, related to individuals on issues, gave trainings to village elders, youth and leaders, worked closely with academic bodies, wrote articles to newspapers, critiqued the anti-people policies, collaborated with everyone in drawing up alternative policies or economic programmes. Stan dissented strongly against the imprisonment of tribals on the suspicions of being extremists. The last of the work, by way of research and filing of Public Interest Litigation in the Jharkhand High court and formation of a committee to oversee more of such work in the Central India, is perhaps what angered the government more. Stan said, "he, working for the undertrials, trying to free them, has now become under trial himself."

Concern for the Commons

When we talk of commons, we mean those geographical spaces that contribute to the inter connectedness of the well-ordered ecological systems sustaining all life on the earth. It could be oceans, mountains, rain forests. Laudato Si in the number 174 talks about the governance of these commons based on global Justice, poverty and the perspective of the marginalised sections. Indigenous people, especially in the Central India, have a holistic understanding of their universe. The inter connectedness to one's own community, to ancestors, to water (jal) forest (jungle) and land (jamin) is conceived as a spiritual heritage; their traditional governance system in fact preserves and sustains such heritage. PESA Act of 1996 permits village traditional governance system to uphold and sustain such practices. It is in this context we perceive Stan's writings, protests, exhortations and call for the full implementation of the PESA and the 5th schedule. He was fond of relating anecdotes that demonstrated values of deep connections to the vast universe, nature and sharing in indigenous practices. Dictums drawn from everyday life such as 'Don't pluck the fruits on the top branch, leave them for the birds of the air', guided him and his fight for justice. Stan promoted the values of integral ecology in his own life. He would sit in meditation remembering ancestors in front of stone plaque where names of tribal movements and martyrs are written; he would prefer medicines prepared by Horopathy (Indigenous medical system) system; His austerity too reflected his longing for values of sharing, communitarianism and having only for one's own needs. His struggle for the common home incorporated the age old system and spirituality of indigenous people.

Sit in Community and Walk Alone

Stan was interrogated by National Investigation Agency (NIA) in Bagaicha from 25th of July 2020 to 6th of August 2020. In one of the fearless answer to a question, Stan said that he trains youth, contacts victims, empowers them and approach the administration for solution for the

problems or approach the judiciary for directions through forming organisations for particular purposes. This process is fulfilled, Stan said, by bringing organisations, individuals, ordinary villagers, traditional leaders, and youth under one umbrella-organisation. He would make sure that all leadership roles in these organisations were in the hands of the local populations and tribal leaders. 'They must increase and I must decrease' was his guide in working with them. While participating in any of the movements, Stan will be at the background. He had initiated fact finding missions along with humanright groups. There were moments, even at the age of 75, when he would travel deep in the hills without food and water offering solace to the families whose kith and kin were killed by the police on mere suspicion of being Naxalites. Stan was in touch with state, national and international social movements and human right organisations and prominent socially compassionate individuals. He worked along with them. When and where his efforts did not elicit good responses even from his own Jesuits, he did not hesitate going all alone. Convinced of his mission he followed Rabindranath Tagore's exhortation of 'Ekla Chalo' (if no one answers your call, then walk alone).

He joined others in formulating alternative policies, economic programmes that would be suitable to the life and culture of adivasis and presented to political leaders for making them into laws. He would regularly meet the high officials to present them his write ups and articles.

In conclusion, It was a privilege for me to accompany such a great prophet. We know that 'injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.' Hence like Stan we are invited to stand for justice and peace but with a compassionate heart of love. Stan will be the last person to desire the prefix 'saint' to his name; As he says in his departing video, that it is the cause that matters and he was ready to pay the price; and indeed paid it.

■ David Solomon is social activist, worked with Stan; and was with him during the prolonged interrogation and arrest in Bagaicha Social Centre.



Murder of a Prophet

“I now have only three things I can call my own: my body, my mind, my conscience”, said Stan Swamy.

ALEX TUSCANO

Father Stan was murdered. He was murdered because he believed in the truth. He had the courage to speak truth to power. But the power did not have the honesty to listen to the truth. The power was and is wedded to the economically powerful. The power works for and defends the interests of the economically powerful.

They Took Stan Out of Their Path

Stan could not have been killed like Gowri Lankesh, Gowind Pansare and M. M. Kalburgi. Stan was living in the midst of Adivasis in Jharkhand area. The Adivasis' organized nature was a great protection to Stan, whom they considered as their leader and saviour. The state could not find any ground on which they could arrest him. They had to plant incriminating documents into his computer to show to the world that he was plotting against the Indian State. He was linked to the Bhima Koregaon case. He never went to Bhima Koregaon, nor did he have any link or knowledge about the event there.

Stan Swamy was killed because he was working with the Adivasis, fighting along with the Adivasis for the implementation of “Forest Right Act” (FRA, 2006) and of PESA (Panchayat Extension to Schedule Area, 1996) that ensured the right of the Adivasis for their self-rule, guaranteed in the fifth Schedule of the constitution of India.

Stan had heavily relied on the scientific understanding of the society. He has been analysing the economic, political and social structures of the society. If there is a massive poverty in India it is because there are massive rich people in India. Poverty is a direct consequence of the fact of rich having control on the wealth of the world. The rich not only have the control on the wealth of the society, they have political power to keep them in

their position of wealth and power. The entire economic, political and social system in the country begets poverty. He used to quote Julius Nyerere, the then President of Tanzania saying. “Just as when it rains, the water flows from the driest region to the lakes and seas where there is abundance of water the wealth from the hands of the poor flows into the hands of the rich who are already very rich.” The rich not only have wealth but they have power over the lives of the poor. The economic and political system that exists in the society functions in such a way that the rich become richer and the poor become poorer as a consequence of naturally functioning of the organization of the society.

In the context of the Jharkhand tribal areas, he perceived that the Adivasis who are original inhabitants (indigenous people) of the place were cheated, exploited and oppressed by the urban rich. These people have right to the land on which they have been living for thousands of years; they owned that land. Their land possessed world's richest minerals. The Adivasis were the owners of the land; therefore they were

also the owners of the wealth beneath their land. The urban sharks, like Adanis wanted to displace the Adivasis and extract the minerals from the Adivasis' land. Several corporations had come to the area with money and technology to mine the place. The Adivasis were united and they wanted to know what plans these sharks had and how the wealth beneath the soil going to be shared. They demanded that they should get 50% of the wealth beneath their land. These cronies had to go empty handed. Father Stan and the Organization of the Adivasis were the biggest hurdle in the path of the Adanies of India. Hence it was essential to take Fr Stan out of their path.

Fr Stan has been part of the Jesuit Society, a society which has made the largest contribution to India in the field of education.

Stan was booked under UAPA. UAPA does not allow the accused bail. Once accused the onus of proving innocent lies on the accused. UAPA deprives the accused their citizenship. Going

by the treatment Stan received UAPA treats the accused unfit for any human care.

Fr Stan has been part of the Jesuit Society, a society which has made the largest contribution to India in the field of education. They have the most prestigious education institutions in which many of our politicians, even from BJP party, have studied. Fr Stan did not believe in violence. Due to his vow of poverty, he did not have a bank account and for his needs he will have to go to his superiors to get money. He was never involved in any conflict or social disturbance. The investigating agency had to fabricate evidences and plant them in his computer. Both investigating agency and the judiciary hatched a plot to kill him exactly in the manner he died. They have blood on their hands. There is no way we can explain why he was not given medical care, his multiple illnesses were not taken note of, he was not provided sipper to help him to drink water. They allowed his health to deteriorate to the point of no return. They now feel they have no role in his death. But the world knows that they have blood on their hand.

What would his sacrifice mean if not his whole life, a life that brought him to his death; killed by the powers that he stood up against because of the oppression of the poor and the weak.

Indian Social Institute and Beyond

Father Stan came to Indian Social Institute, Training Centre Bangalore in 1975. He took over the charge of the institute from Fr. Henry Volken SJ. Indian Social Institute was known for training social activists from across the country. The core of the training was to understand what is development and what is poverty. There was no doubt in the minds of the institute, represented by Fr. Volken, Fr Stan Lourduswamy and Duarte Barreto, that the poor and the rich are the two sides of the same coin.

The direct consequence of this analysis is that we cannot overcome poverty by feeding the poor. The poor are creators of the wealth of the society. They are the ones who toil in the land and in the factories creating wealth. What they get in return is their wages. Along with many social scientists Indian Social Institute believed that organizing the exploited people is the only way to empower the poor who can fight for their rights. He had no doubts in his mind that among the toiling masses the Dalits and the Adivasis were the most exploited people. He opted to work for the Adivasis of Jharkhand where he had spent a lot of time as a young Jesuit.

After his stint of about 15 years, he left to Jharkhand to work for Adivasis. He was convinced that he was needed in Jharkhand the most. I have no better words to describe his conviction and commitment to the cause of the Adivasis. I will quote his reflection on his 50th year of priesthood.

"Living and sharing life with Indigenous Adivasi People, accompanying them in their struggles against forcible unjust displacement, deprival of their rights over their natural resources, denial of their due share in the rich minerals dug out literally from beneath their feet, and to add insult to injury, when they stood up to protest against injustice meted out to them, were thrown into jails in umpteen numbers. I started asking myself what

'priesthood' would mean in this heart-rending reality.

What would his sacrifice mean if not his whole life, a life that brought him to his death; killed by the powers that he stood up against because of the oppression of the poor and the weak.

I then decided to take on the oppressive but mighty State: filed a case on behalf of the thousands of under-trial prisoners most of whom, everybody knows, are innocent; it was then that the State decided to put me out of the way.

Multiple cases filed against me: cases as serious as 'sedition', not a small solace to remind oneself that Jesus was also accused of 'sedition' and paid the supreme sacrifice of his life.

Arrest-warrant issued on me, was declared 'an absconder', my work-cum-living premise raided three times (August 2018 – October 2019) all my personal belongings (computer to mattress & pillow) confiscated! I now have only three things I can call my own: my body, my mind, my conscience. If I were not a Jesuit, I would be literally on the street.

Life with uncertainties, like a swinging pendulum: in one case, 'arrest warrant', which can be activated anytime. In the second case, can be 'promoted' from being a 'suspect' to 'accused' and thrown behind bars.

But one thing is certain, I feel privileged to walking the Way of the Cross with Jesus and our people being crucified. Earnestly hoping to share his death, a death that brought life, a new life, the life of the Resurrection."

Alex Tuscano is close associate of Stan when he was in ISI; and was a comrade to him till his last breath. He is the founder of Praxis research and training centre.

Fr Stan – Victim of a Farcical Executive and Legislative System

Stan believed in the Constitution of India and made others also to believe in it.

DR. SAHAYA PHILOMIN RAJ SJ

The entire nation is shocked and stunned by the demise of the Octogenarian Fr Stan Swamy. Stan's demise is not a natural one but a well-planned murder by the State. Yes, it is a murder by the state which considered Fr Stan as a dangerous person – a terrorist – capable of empowering the illiterate and the marginalised. Anybody who is capable of empowering the powerless and the voiceless is a dangerous person for the anti-people regime. Such a regime was determined to kill Fr Stan; and finally executed its plan.

All through Mr Modi's regime, right from 2014, the nation is witnessing so many killings, lynching and broad day light murders. During this regime, many sensible and knowledgeable individuals are either killed or put behind bars for years. Great Scholars and social reformists like Narendra Dhabolkar, Govind Pansare, Kalburgi and Gowri Lankesh were shot dead in an eerie pattern for enlightening and educating the people. A lot many Muslims and Dalits were killed by well-trained groups like 'Cow-Vigilantis' and other right wing fringe elements. In the



name of “Love Jihad” again a great number of Muslims have been killed or lynched by various other specially trained groups. In most of these incidents, the accused are scot free by the regime that is constantly encouraging such individuals and groups to involve in many more similar activities. This regime is changing its strategies time and again and now during its second term, it is using the legislations like UAPA and NIA, the “Controlled Judiciary” and other prominent government agencies to silence and subdue the great personalities who fearlessly fight the anti-people regime.

Fr Stan’s demise has undoubtedly established that the Judiciary has become a “Controlled Judiciary”. It has also exposed the farcical executive and legislative system of our nation in the hands of the present regime. His case and other similar cases have further established that this country is not run by the parliament or legislative according to the Constitution of India but by an Extra Constitutional Body which is controlling the entire system from behind.

Fr Stan is neither a criminal nor a law breaker; but a law-abiding citizen, who have perceived rightly the unjust structures of the Society which are not allowing the poor and the marginalized communities to have a dignified life. He was striving to uphold the rule of law. He believed in the Constitution of India and made others also to believe in it. He was providing legal awareness to them and teaching them to make use of the law to fight against the injustices done to them by the State. By doing this, he wanted to bring justice to the voiceless people; especially to thousands of Adivasi youths who have been imprisoned for no other reason than trying to exercise their fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution. Fr Stan strongly believed that the Constitution would help him in securing justice; he even moved the Jharkhand High Court through public interest litigation for the release of thousands of undertrials who have been languishing in various prisons for more than four–five years.

The Case of Stan Swamy

The corporates with the full backing of

the Central government are continuously plundering the earth and damaging the environment mainly in the tribal belt where they find precious minerals worth many trillion dollars. To facilitate the undisturbed mining operation, the government used its forces to forcefully and unlawfully evict the Adivasis from their own lands. On the other hand, Fr Stan was consistently and relentlessly working among the Adivasis and equipping them with legal knowledge and helping them to legally fight the illegal eviction by the state. Irritated by these activities, the government in connivance with the corporates determined to put an end to the activities of Fr Stan. And thus the government hatched a conspiracy and included his name in the Bhima-Koregaon case and booked him under UAPA and put him behind bars, knowing fully well that he could not survive the precarious prison condition at this age with the Parkinson ailment. That is how the state has killed Fr Stan.

First, the Pune police raided his room, seized his computer, cell phone, books and some classical music cassettes after registering an FIR against him on 22nd August 2018. Another raid took place in June 2019. Finally, on October 8, 2020, Fr Stan was arrested. Fr Stan was arrested on flimsy evidence of some propaganda material and communication with other activists in the field, such as Sudha Bharadwaj and Varavara Rao, who were also arrested for similar charges. The authenticity of the alleged documents have been questioned by an international forensic data experts’ Consultancy namely Arsenel. The experts have found around 13 noted mails being generated and implanted in the computers of these activists using a malware. And the very report of the Forensic experts was brought to the knowledge of the Court for considering the bail application of Fr Stan. In spite of this, the NIA Court refused to consider his medical bail favourably. Repeated pleas for a sipper and a straw to the 84-year-old Jesuit Priest who was suffering from acute Parkinson ailment were consistently ignored for about a month. When his lawyer applied for medical bail, the court kept adjourning the matter, and merely offered him the services of a government hospital. Fr Stan politely refused to accept the offer saying

that he would rather prefer to die in the prison than to be treated in the hospital. All that he appealed earnestly to the High Court Judges through the video conference was for the grant of interim bail, so that he could go and stay with his people in Jharkhand for some time. He was aware that hospitalization would be detrimental to his health further. Finally, when he became critically ill, the High Court permitted him for treatment at a Private hospital. That is how he was taken to the Holy Family Hospital. This demonstrates a lack of sensitivity and arrogance on the part of the judges, which is greatly disheartening.

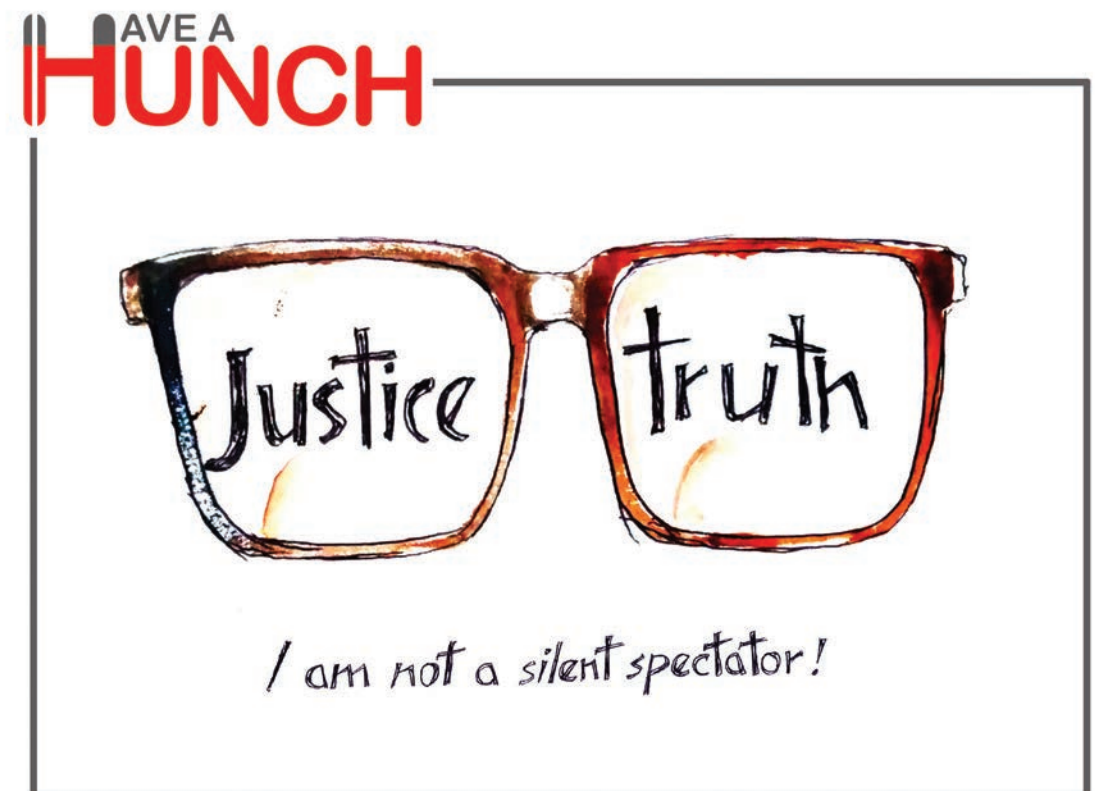
Why Fr Stan?

Why Fr Stan along with other 15 persons and some selective Muslims/Dalits activists and why not the others? There are thousands of Jesuits, priests and other religious serving in the country in various capacities. Similarly there are so many individuals all over the nation

working among various sections of people. The Jesuits and other religious are running premier educational institutions and involve in producing super brains for the elite companies and for the so called corporates. Why such a powerful government did not touch the other Jesuits, priests, other religious and individuals? And why Fr Stan along with 15 persons and a good number of selective activists alone have been targeted by the government?

What difference Fr Stan along with other 15 persons and the targeted individuals are making from others? This is the pertinent question which should penetrate our minds and hearts. Responding proactively to this question alone would be the real tribute to Fr Stan.

Sahaya Philomin Raj is a human rights activist and an advocate practicing at Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court. He has a PhD in Criminology and Criminal Justice. At present he is in IDEAS, a Jesuit Social Action and Research Centre at Madurai.



The Caged-Bird, Fr Stan Swamy Flies Away!

Stan Swamy wanted to “convert” the rights of the Adivasis, their water, land and forests, their persons and voices, into dignified humane realities.

SIDNEY J M MASCARENHAS OFM, PhD



The Jesuits were always known for their staunch cultivation and defense of the “Catholic” Faith & Research. My Alma Mater school in Bandra, Mumbai, was a Jesuit Institution, St Stanislaus. Even as Day Scholars, we had a monthly recollection in the Jesuit Tradition of The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyala! Our School’s motto was: Natus ad Maiora! (Born for greater things!)

It was in my school days at St. Stanislaus in Bandra, that I had come into contact with the Ranchi Jesuit Mission. Fr. Michael Albert Windey SJ (1921-2009), founder of the Village Reconstruction Organization (VRO). Fr. Michael Albert Windey SJ had started XISS as the “Social Service League” at St. Xavier’s College, Ranchi. Initially the classes were held under the staircase of the college due to the paucity of space. Who could have imagined that this small program would one day grow into a huge and renowned B-School, which is today the Xavier Institute of Social Service, Ranchi.

Jesuits Plunge into the Social Justice Dimension

The Ranchi Mission and the Social Center at Ranchi, are the fruit of the labours of the Jesuits. On 18 March 1885, Constant Lievens SJ reached Ranchi to explore new possibilities for the Church. First, he settled in Jamgain. He visited the people for a few months to learn about their conditions and culture. Then, Constant Lievens moved on to Torpa. It was a more developed

location. It had a post office and a police station. It is there that he came to know the people’s long struggle for justice against the landlords. Thus he began to legally assist the people to recover their land. Consequently, tribals flocked to him.

What Constant Lievens discovered was a disheartening situation: forced labour, indebtedness, systematic land usurpation. He understood that to speak of Christ and of the Gospel had little sense and purpose if the Mundas were not first reestablished in their basic rights, possessions and human dignity, and their Jal (Water), Jameen (Land) and Jungle (Forest). He began to gather information about tribal customs and law. His legal social sense was of great help here.

He started defending the tribals in the local courts, and even rode on horseback, to defend their cases in New Delhi in the English colonial Courts, the rights of those whose land had been taken away by deceit. In particular, he succeeded in having the English magistrates accept that the non-written customary law be taken into consideration, when dealing with tribal cases. Repeated successes at the “white man” Court of justice won him the heart of the Mundas.

However, he fell sick. He had to go to Belgium for treatment. Evidently, he had put the Jesuits in Ranchi on a new field of Apostolate --- Social Justice!

Through experience Jesuits would learn what it means to spend a whole life in humble circumstances, to be a member of the lowest class of humankind, to be ignored and looked down upon by other men; to be unable to appear in public because one does not have decent clothes nor a proper social training; to be the means by which others grow rich.

The Jesuits were always involved with social causes. For instance, in 1964 the Social Institute at Pune sent Fr. Henry Volken, SJ, to the refugee camps in Assam where about 1,70,000 Hindus fleeing from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) found shelter. They felt the urge not to write about sociology, but to meet the people. They continued setting up social institutes to address the social realities of India, and to provide training for social workers.

Fr Stanislaus Lourduswamy and Jal, Jungle & Zameen

It was in the 1980s that I first came in contact with Fr Stanislaus Lourduswamy. He succeeded Fr Henry Volken, SJ, as Director of the Social Institute in Bangalore. I invited Stan to give some sessions to our students in Philosophy. We had some sessions in his Institute too. Fr Stan, along with others helped me to plan the Social Programmes (‘Exposure’ and ‘Regency’) for our OFM students. As an effect of this joint exercise, I along with the youth of our parish, OFM students, and St. John’s Medical College students, organised a seven day Creative Slum Children Camp. There were about 200 slum kids and sixty animators. The focus was on getting the slum children creatively express themselves. The task of the animators to elicit the observations and experiences of the slum kids through activities. The children told, played, sang, painted, role-played, the stories of their daily lives, frustrations and hopes. Fr Stan was deeply impressed and interested in the methodology and results.

Fr Stan Lourduswamy worked for the Poor Tribals through the Social Center in Ranchi, after being the Director of the Bangalore Social Center. He defended the rights of the tribals: Jal, Jungle and Zameen (Water, Jungle and Land) from the interests of the Multinationals. For this, he was an “Anti-National.” Is that so? He was arrested in Ranchi and jailed in Mumbai, along with other Criminals. Was that his reward?

Stan was to appear before an earthly judge on 5th July 2021. But instead, he appeared before his heavenly judge. Stan passed away on 5th July 2021 at 1: 24 pm. The Caged Bird flew heavenwards on the day of his earthly judgement! At 84 years, he blossomed in works of justice towards the rights of the Adivasis of Chota Nagpur. Stan Swamy wanted to “convert” the rights of the Adivasis, their water, land and forests, their persons and voices, into dignified humane realities. He only tried to leave the world a better place than when he entered it. Now, though he is gone, one can definitely feel the ripple effect.

Sidney J M Mascarenhas is a philosopher. He is a great admirer of Stan Swamy and had collaborations with him.

Stan Swamy Chose to Embrace Vulnerabilities

DR JOSEPH XAVIER SJ



Stan was understood and loved by several persons; and many also equally misunderstood him, which included the Church personnel as well as the Jesuits. Those who closely worked with him and many who had attended social analysis courses at Indian Social Institute, Bangalore from 1976 – 1990 admired him. Many who came in contact with him were transformed to be better humans. However, some used to complain that he was not celebrating the Eucharist. He was not just a ritual priest. His life and mission were rooted in the life of Jesus. He was the happiest person when the life stories of the poor, their pain and suffering, hopes and aspirations, struggles and vulnerabilities and strengths and sacrifices were brought to the altar of the Eucharist. He wanted to connect the life narrative of historical Jesus and struggles of the poor. He saw Jesus' suffering today in the lives of the poor.

While he was in Bagaicha, his daily morning prayer was in front of the 'pathal' – a stone kept in the centre of Bagaicha in which names of the Adivasi martyrs are engraved. Everyday he used to stand silently in front of the pathal for 15 minutes. He will collect flowers and offer them. Once I asked him, "What do you do in front of the pathal?" He said, "I pray that my spirit may be infused with the spirit of the Adivasi martyrs". His dream came true. He is one with Adivasi martyrs today.

A Heart Turned to the Other

In November 2020, he asked me over a phone call, "Could you send me a pair of pants, 36 inch in size and a shirt, 42 inches and a lungi". I was surprised. I said, "I am sure it is not for you, Stan". He said, "Lungi is for me. Even if it is used one, it is fine. But the pants and shirt are for a co-prisoner. He has no decent clothes". I managed to reach them only after 45 days. On another occasion, he sent details of another prisoner, with name and case details. He said, "This prisoner has no one to reach out to. He does not know the charges against him. Could you take out the charge sheet and send it to me. I would like to help him". In yet another letter, he wrote, "Mr. Varavararao is suffering. Please do something urgent so that he may have good medical treatment".

Stan was not familiar with most of the accused and falsely implicated in the Bhima Koregaon case. After going to the prison, he picked up friendship with them. Listening to their life stories, he said, "The co-accused have done much more to the poor for their dignity and rights than me. These are all married persons. They have families. I am a religious priest. I

should have done much more than these people. When I compare myself with their works, my contribution is very little."

While in Taloja prison, he never complained. Our telephonic conversation was about the court case, the health of his companions, and the needs of other prisoners. Whenever I asked about his health, he had a routine answer. "I am finding it difficult to get up from bed. My knees are in pain. But I am managing."

Zero Tolerance for Injustice

Stan was non-comprising on principles. He was an advocate for combining Gospel ethics and Constitutional ethics. Within the framework of the Constitution and various laws of the country, he demanded that justice be done to the Adivasis. He questioned the governments when the Constitutional provisions were violated brazenly by the state and authorities, in nexus with corporate companies. He said, "We live in a country where law and order agencies neither follow the provisions of the Constitution nor the judgements of the Supreme Court. Panchayatraj Extension in the Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act is only the tip of an iceberg. How long will the Adivasis be victims of systemic oppression?"

The Gospel ethics of Stan was neither philosophical nor theological. He propagated acts of mercy, compassion, solidarity and justice. In public meetings, he would quote from the Bible and from the Jesuit documents and demand that the Jesuits faithfully follow what we proclaim. What we own is the patrimony of the poor and we should always be on their side. His words were so powerful and uncompromising that some found his words and thinking unpalatable. He would reiterate that we are called to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:6-8).

He was so much one with the communitarian worldview of the Adivasis. Trained in Marxism and social analysis, he transformed into an Adivasi, as he felt that the Adivasi world view had much more to counter a caste-ridden and profit-oriented corporate world, and make it more humane.

I Am Not a Silent Spectator...

The words of Stan Swamy, 'I am not a silent spectator but ready to pay the price whatever it might be', was coming true. He accepted it magnanimously. But he was angry with the justice system as it favoured only the rich and powerful and denied the due rights of the poor. The laws are made to serve the human and organize the society to make it better. In Stan's death, it became very clear that human beings are inferior to Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). Though Stan was in prison for nine months, not even once he was interrogated. He extended full cooperation to the inquiry. He was deceived and arrested. On 8 October 2020, the NIA officials met him in Bagaicha and told him, "We want you to come with us to Ranchi NIA camp office and answer some questions of our higher officer. He believed them and went, never to return".

Medical bail petition was delayed for five months by the Sessions Court in Mumbai. His age was never considered, despite established international conventions. It was obvious that there were no plans to begin the trial. So, bail was the only option. Fundamental principles of jurisprudence that bail is rule and jail is an exception, and the presumption of innocence were thrown to the wind, just because a case has been filed under the UAPA. When he was suffering in Taloja seriously, Ayurveda doctors were providing antibiotics. The prison has no allopathic doctor. Under the court order, he was taken to JJ hospital for medical checkup three times. RTPCR test was not done. He was given one dose of vaccination after an antigen test. In the last two months in prison, his letters were withheld. These scenarios raise many questions about the intentions of the State. It looks like the state was interested in punishing Stan even before he was proved guilty. If the state says this is the law of land, such a law has no place in a civilised society.

Joseph Xavier SJ is the director of Indian Social Institute (ISI), Bangalore. A longer version of the article is published in *Indian Currents*. This article is made available to *Together* by the author.



COVER STORY

Stan Swamy As I Know Him

Here was a man, a Jesuit Catholic priest ruthlessly honest, fearlessly courageous to question the systems, be they secular or religious! As a priest he was embarrassingly open to let the students question even authorities, debate, argue on rules and rubrics, existence/non existence of God.

JOEL URUMPIL SCN

Stan's mortal remains is laid to rest; and we know that his spirit and commitment will live forever in me, you, and in the whole world. I want to speak about the Stan I know over the 30 plus years; a very vibrant man totally committed for the liberation of the society and world. Two aspects of Stan stand out – a man of intellectual rigour, and a grass root level activist.

Stan was part of the Jesuit operated Tribal Research and Training Center (TRTC) in Chaibasa, Lupunguttu. For Stan, not only books and library were sources of data for his research, he would go out to the outlying villages, to learn about the people, their culture and life. He was a great help to the Sisters in their ministrations, be it health, night classes in the villages or

youth formation. He was very much part of the movement to oppose the National Emergency, and a leading figure in the Social Action Forum where young women, men, and other likeminded secular/religious would meet and plan.

Another period of his life, which is very close to me and changed my life totally, was my association with him as a student at the Indian Social Institute, Bangalore. He was the director and later one of the professors. At this institute, socio political analysis was taught. Those who attended mostly were Christian missionaries who were working at the grass roots or students aspiring to become social activists or teachers. As Catholic missionaries many are trained for managing institutions in the corporate style. A few leave these institutions, choose the road less travelled by (Stan was one) and engage themselves in grass root activities.

Indian Social Institute primarily was meant to prepare persons to work for systemic change in the society. Stan Swamy took his role very seriously; his grass root experience came very handy to direct the students to 'read between the lines' and 'think out of the box'. A very important role/responsibility Stan exercised in this institute and later in his field of action (Karma Bhoomi) was to help individuals and institutions to get out of the age-old systems and practices, which prevented them from getting involved with the marginalized people for systemic change. Stan navigated the students to get out of the dotted lines of the outdated social norms, religious rules and dictums and get involved with real people with real issues. He repeatedly used the quotation from the Bible, law is made for people, and not the other way. This same principle was used in his dealings with the government officials questioning the anti people rules and practices.

A Fiery, Uncompromising Messiah

As a student of the Indian Social Institute, I, even after many years of grass root involvement, realised that I knew very little about systems and politics. Stan helped me see a world of corruption, exploitation, and war. I was a pious person 'bandaging wounds' and did not have

the analytical skills. Even though I had many encounters with great social activists, attended lectures and workshops, I was not able to let go of the 'service' mindset. One of the reasons could be that I was ingrained for years in the rules and teachings of the Church, which gave priority to service without analysis, which portrayed a false Jesus who was meek, humble, obedient, and ready to die for the sufferings but never question. Contrary to this, here was a man, a Jesuit catholic priest ruthlessly honest, fearlessly courageous to question the systems, be they secular or religious! As a priest he was embarrassingly open to let the students question even authorities, debate, argue on rules and rubrics, existence/non existence of God. He allowed his students to look squarely into the issues of the notorious laws which allow the powerful to live above the laws of the land.

After he returned from Bangalore and as part of his involvement with secular forces he kept up with some of us his previous students. Many more joined him as collaborators and friends in the struggles. Stan was a fiery, uncompromising messiah for the oppressed and exploited. Being primarily a Jesuit priest with rather pliable regulations, compared to other strict groups, I saw in him an urgency to bend Church laws. He repeatedly spoke in workshops and in individual conversation of the need to collaborate and network and to harness secular forces and to learn from common people. He urgently advised and pressurized Church authorities who are accustomed to living in comfort zones, to get out and mingle. His repetitive urgent utterances created for him many enemies in the Church leadership even among his own Jesuit brothers. His theory was to help people not in the name of God or Jesus but simply for the sake of the oppressed.

A priceless contribution of Stan Swamy to the Christian missionaries, in fact to the society at large is to bridge the gap between religions, castes, communities, and institutions.

Joel Urumpil SCN aka Jyoti Bahen is a social activist who has been working with tribals in Jharkhand for over 30 years.

IN PICTURES

THE ONLY AUTHORISED MAKER OF THE NATIONAL FLAG

B P ANAGHA

Enter the month of August; the tricolour flag flutters in many sizes in every nook and corner of India. Have you ever wondered as to from where do the Indian flags, that flutter on the Red fort, Rashtrapati Bhavan, Supreme Court, other government buildings, etc. come from? It comes from a small village called Bengeri in Hubli city, Dharwad district of Karnataka. There is the head office of Karnataka Khadi Gramodyoga Samyukta Sangha (KKGSS), who enjoys the honour of being India's only authorised National Flag makers.

KKGSS is spread across 17 acres of land where all the processes except the weaving of the cloth is carried out. The cloth is first woven in Tulasigeri village in Bagalkot district of Karnataka, and then the cloth is

sent to the unit in Bengeri, where it is dyed, printed, stitched, toggled, and packed.

The Flag is made from hand spun and hand woven cotton Khadi bunting. It comes in nine different sizes where each flag size has its own purpose. The ratio of the width of the flag to its length is 2:3. The National Flag is a tricolour flag consisting of colours saffron, white, and green with the Ashoka Chakra at the centre of the white band. The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) has set up some rules and regulations in design constructional details that need to be religiously followed, like the colour, size, thread count, strength of the yarn, fastness of the colours used for dyeing etc. And any defect in the flag will be considered a serious offence with consequences.



Stan Came, Stood with, and Challenged; Our Lives Will Never Be the Same Again

Stan Swamy's death exposes the cruelty, injustice, and the dictator-like attitude of the government who suppresses voices of dissent.

ANMOL BARA OFM

Stanislaus Lourduswamy, popularly known as Stan Swamy: a champion of the poor and the marginalized, a Jesuit Priest, a human right activist, who dedicated his whole life for the upliftment of the adivasis in Jharkhand, breathed his last as a prisoner behind bars, waiting for bail which in fact the court never granted.

He Came, Stood With, and Challenged

Stan Swamy, born in a village named Virahalur near Trichy, Tamil Nadu opted to work among

us in Jharkhand. He rendered his service as the director of the Jharkhandi organization for Human Rights known as JOHAR (a Jharkhandi word used for wishing) for almost 12 years. He established the organization called 'Bagaicha' in 2006 primarily meant for training, research, campaign and advocacy works which focuses on the adivasi identity, dignity, justice and empowerment.

Stan was highly critical of the government and the multi-national companies who invaded the mineral-rich land of adivasis. Hundreds of adivasis were displaced from their land with no compensation by the government. The injustice done to the voiceless adivasis disturbed

Stan; and he resolved to stand with the displaced. Fr Stan spoke of the injustice and put pressure on the governments of Jharkhand through his protests and writings. His position was that the adivasis are the true owners of Jal (water), Jungle (forest) and Jameen (land).

According to Stan, the PESA Act of 1996 empowers the Gram Sabha as the highest authority for the development of villages. But the Gram Sabha was never taken into consideration as the multi-national companies began to extract minerals from adivasi land. Therefore he opposed the government's

projects such as Netrahat Field Firing project and Koel Karo dam project, which would literally displace thousands of villagers and a number of adivasi hamlets in Jharkhand.

In the recent years in Jharkhand, the Pathalgadi protest (the erecting of stones engraved with excerpts from PESA) became strong in Khunti district, as the big number of adivasi villagers opposed the BJP led government and their plans to amend the CNTA and SPTA Acts, which removes restrictions on the use of adivasi land by owners or tenants for non-agricultural purposes. The government also aimed to allow the transfer of adivasi land for linear projects like road, canal, railway, schools as well as "other government purposes".

The government subsequently labelled the Pathalgadi protestors as anti-nationals and along with 19 others the BJP led government filed an FIR against Fr Stan for supporting Pathalgadi in 2018. Since then Stan was referred as "dreaded criminal". However, with the new non-BJP government all the Pathalgadi cases were withdrawn, they were no more looked at as anti-nationals but pro-adivasi movement for the rights of adivasis.

In the same year in 2018, Fr Stan was implicated by Maharashtra Police in Bhima Koregaon case to which Stan had never been. The Bhima-Koregaon is a place in Maharashtra where a big number of Dalits gathered to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the battle fought by Dalits against the rulers. But the violence took place during the celebration which was attributed to the upper caste right-wing forces who wanted to disturb the gathering.

Stan's name was not found in the original FIR; and it was argued that he was only a suspect and not an accused. Hence, Police had no intention of arresting him on this case. But before the non-BJP government in Maharashtra could withdraw the case, the BJP at the centre forced the Maharashtra government to handover the case to NIA. This resulted in the widespread arrest of the intellectuals, human right activists, professors and lawyers. Stan was consequently arrested under the draconian law of Unlawful

Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA); and was taken to Taloja prison.

He said "in the last 8 months in Taloja prison, my organs have deteriorated. My desire is to go back to Ranchi and be with my people." Without a bail the court permitted him to be treated in a Mumbai hospital. His health grew weak; and on 5 July we lost him.

Messiah of the Tribals

Today Fr Stan Swamy is a beacon of light for the adivasis' rights for Jal, Jangal and Jameen. His death on the one hand is prophetic in terms of suffering he endured for the adivasis in Jharkhand; and on the other hand, it exposes the cruelty, injustice and the dictator like attitude of the government who suppresses voices of dissent. Fr Stan had said, "what is happening to me is not something unique, it is a broader process taking place all over the country. We are all aware how prominent intellectuals, lawyers, writers, poets, activists, student leaders are put in jail because they have expressed their dissent or raised questions about the ruling power in India."

The UAPA law is dehumanizing, fatal and it kills the very freedom and dignity of the individual. The conviction rate of the accused in UAPA is abysmally low. According to the data, the registered cases under UAPA between 2016 -2019 that resulted in conviction is only 2.2%. Those arrested suffer the same fate like Fr Stan, waiting for the bail, most even without trial. It is high time that we give a thought to it. People who are committed to the cause of the marginalized and underprivileged are being persecuted and eventually done away by the government.

The work of Fr Stan can never be suppressed. His strong determination, courage, strength and dedication have inspired hundreds more to stand for, stand with, and challenge the powerful.

Anmol Bara is one among many young people who look up to Fr Stan for inspiration to live a relevant religious life today.



Why Truth Has Become So Bitter, Dissent So Unpalatable, Justice So Out of Reach?

The harrowing experience of being filed an FIR, being issued 'arrest-warrant', being declared an 'absconder', being issued 'attach property' notice

STAN SWAMY SJ



4 pm 27th June, 2019: my Jesuit colleagues in Bagaicha rushed into my room and told me to pack up. I asked 'why?' They said order of 'imminent arrest' of me and four other Jharkhandi activists had reached the local police station and they might land up anytime to arrest me. My spontaneous reaction was, okay let them come and take me, after all, are not thousands of adivasi/dalit youth languishing in the jails of Jharkhand with no succour reaching them? But they prevailed over me saying that I/we can help them more effectively staying outside and challenge police action legally by pursuing the case we had already filed in Jharkhand High Court. Very reluctantly I agreed and put together a few things without knowing where all I would be going, for how long, who would be willing to take me in etc. The following day I landed up in Bangalore where there were some friends/comrades who not only received me but welcomed me in their midst. Indian Social Institute, Bangalore was the epicenter of my initiation into Marxian tools of social analysis decades ago. As such it was kind of home-coming. Quickly got in touch with those old comrades who have all along ploughed through hard times but consistently kept up their commitment for the cause of deprived marginalized people of our society. It was exhilarating to meet them, share our experiences of past decades, assess the present socio-political dynamics, always looking for allies with whose solidarity we can push forward.

This search led me to different places in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka meeting them in small and big groups. They all were eager to understand the situation in the tribal belt of central India as they are seeing so many young men and women from these states doing odd jobs especially big numbers in construction work, waiters in small hotels, embroidery units, even to doing agricultural work.

Grieved as they were to hear the tragic tale of the 'migrant workers' from central India, my socially concerned friends asked me how they could help them as long as they are in their

midst. I suggested and prayed to them that they take some time out to meet and talk to them wherever they see them. This alone will help these young men to realize that at least some people in the south are humanly concerned about them and their wellbeing. Sure, one cannot do much as individuals. I proposed to them that they can form some groups and go and meet the migrant workers in their places of work, places of living etc. This will enable them to know whether the migrant workers are getting at least the minimum wages, their living conditions, the availability or non-availability of health service when they get ill/sick, any harassment from the employers, contractors, middle-men etc. I persuaded my friends that once they get to know the actualities, to take it to the general public through local print/electronic media and take up specific cases of exploitation/cheating with relevant government officers and public personalities. All my friends assured me they would do whatever they can. This is a little solace in the face of the enormous difficulties the migrant labourers are facing.

Police Cases, Multiple Cases, Including 'Sedition', Chasing me

How does a comment in social media [Facebook] which the Supreme Court has declared is part of 'freedom of thought and expression' [Article 19, 21 of Indian Constitution] be made out to be 'sedition' is beyond comprehension. My comment was made when in mid-2018 the state government was harassing the Adivasi people of Khunti Dt. for the assertion of their right to self-governance as per the constitution and PESA Act. People were beaten up, houses raided, cases filed on innumerable persons (named & unnamed) including tribal village heads. They were all accused of sedition. Seeing this I felt I could not keep quiet. So I through social media reminded Jharkhand state government of the suggestion the then Union Home Minister made that 'where Pathalgadi is taking place, let Jharkhand government enter

The Bhima-Koregaon case is a plot by the powerful Hindutva forces to save the embarrassment of its leaders inciting a condemnable communal violence against Dalit community on the occasion of the latter celebrating Elgar Parishad.

into a dialogue with them to find out why they are doing this'. In addition, I quoted the three-time M.P. of Khunti, who is an adivasi himself, in an interview to electronic media had said 'if real development of adivasis had taken place, Pathalgadi problem would not have risen at all'. I had in my intervention pleaded with the state government to go to the people and dialogue with them. What is wrong in this is beyond my comprehension. But the hard fact is I, together with 19 other writers, journalists, human rights activists were booked for 'sedition'. The legal experts whom we consulted on the matter told us the government really has no case and that it cannot even take it to the court. And it was left at that. No affidavits or charge sheets were filed by the state.

Alas, a good one-and-a-half years later suddenly Khunti police approached the lower court and got order to arrest just five of the 20 of us. My name was 17th in the original list, but I was made number one in the 'arrest-warrant'. *Is there not a well-designed plot behind this is for anyone to ponder?*

In the meantime, as per my custom of coming South every three or four years to visit my family-folks and other activist-friends, I had come to the southern states. I visited them in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka. Then there was a long pending health problem I needed to attend to. I am till now (mid-October 2019) recovering from a surgical intervention.

Unfortunately, Jharkhand police has proclaimed in court that I am an absconder and evading arrest. That is far from the truth. *I am not absconding.* Besides, my physical absence does not in any way impinge the court proceedings. Even if a modicum of truth will be acknowledged, the HC should quash the FIR. I will return to Jharkhand when my doctor certifies that I am fit to travel and resume my normal work.

The Bhima-Koregaon case haunting me and eminent legal professionals, authors, poets, cultural artists, human rights activists

This is a plot by the powerful Hindutva forces to save the embarrassment of its leaders inciting a condemnable communal violence against Dalit community on the occasion of the latter celebrating Elgar Parishad, an annual festival, on 1st January 2018 at Bhima-Koregaon. Initially a case was registered with Pune Rural Police against two Hindutva leaders but was left in cold-storage. Instead, a follower of one of the two accused filed a 'Complaint case' with Pune Urban Police accusing above-mentioned intellectuals from all over the country as the ones who instigated the dalits to violence. Witch-hunt was launched, nine are in jail in Pune, two have interim relief from court, and one (me) still a 'suspected accused'. I've been raided twice by Pune Urban Police, they are looking for ways to implicate me.

Where will it all lead, will there be an end to this harassment, and when will that 'end' come... is difficult even to guess. But even now, irreparable damage has been done to them... their reputed standing in society seriously affected... their financial assets have dwindled thus severely affecting their respective families... even after more than a year in jail, the nine accused are being denied bail... the clients of the lawyers, the reading public of the authors & poets, the marginalized deprived people in various people's movements & organizations who were helped by human rights activists, the audiences which were inspired by the cultural artists are painfully missing their presence in their midst.

Will at least the highest court of the land uncover truth and expose the malignant conspiracy of the Hindutva forces and thus come to our rescue is the flickering hope that is still left.

QUESTIONS



Am I A 'Desh Drohi'?

As for the Pathalgadi issue, I have asked the question, why are Adivasis doing this? I believe they have been exploited and oppressed beyond tolerance.

STAN SWAMY SJ

During the past two decades I have identified myself with the Adivasi people and their struggle for a life of dignity and self-respect. As a writer I have tried to analyse the different issues they are faced with. In this process I have clearly expressed dissent with several policies, laws enacted by the government in the light of the Indian Constitution. I have questioned the validity, legality, justness of several steps taken by the government and the ruling class.

As for the Pathalgadi issue, I have asked the question, "why are Adivasis doing this?" I believe they have been exploited and oppressed beyond tolerance. The rich minerals which are excavated in their land have enriched outsider industrialists and businessmen and impoverished the Adivasi people to the extent there are starvation deaths

taking place. They have had no share in what is produced. Also, the laws and policies enacted for their well being are deliberately left unimplemented. So they have reached a situation where they realise 'enough is enough' and are seeking to re-invent their identity by empowering their Gram Sabhas through Pathalgadis. Their action is understandable.

Some questions that I have raised are as follows:

I have questioned the Non-implementation of the 5th Schedule of the Constitution [*Indian Constitution, Article 244(1)*] clearly stipulates that a 'Tribes Advisory Council' (TAC) composed solely of members from the Adivasi community who will advise the Governor of the State about any and everything concerning the protection, well-being and development of the Adivasi people in the State. The Governor is the constitutional custodian of the Adivasi people and he/she can make laws on his/her own and can annul any other law enacted by the parliament or state assembly always keeping in mind the welfare of the Adivasi people. Whereas the reality is that in none of the States during all these nearly seven decades has any State Governor ever used his/her constitutional discretionary power to reach out to the Adivasi people proffering the excuse that they have to work in harmony with the elected government of the State. The meeting of the TAC takes place rarely, and it is convened by and presided over by the Chief Minister of the State and is controlled by the ruling party. TAC has thus been reduced to a toothless body. Verily a constitutional fraud meted out to the Adivasi people.

The rich minerals which are excavated in their land have enriched outsider industrialists and businessmen and impoverished the Adivasi people to the extent there are starvation deaths taking place. They have had no share in what is produced.

I have questioned why the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act [PESA], 1996 [No: 40 of 1996] has been neatly ignored which for the first time recognized the fact the Adivasi communities in India have had a rich

social and cultural tradition of self-governance through the Gram Sabha. Whereas the reality is this Act of the parliament has deliberately been left unimplemented in all the nine states. It means the capitalist ruling class does not want the Adivasi people to self-govern themselves.

I have questioned the silence of the government on Samatha Judgment, 1997 of the Supreme Court [*Civil Appeal Nos : 4601-2 of 1997*] which came as a huge relief to the Adivasi communities in Scheduled Areas. It came at a time when consequent to the policy of globalization, liberalization, marketisation, privatisation, national & international corporate houses started to invade particularly the Adivasi areas in central India to mine the mineral riches. The govt machinery gave its full cooperation to these companies. Any resistance by the Adivasi people was put down with an iron hand. The judgment was meant to provide some significant safeguards for the Adivasis to control the excavation of minerals in their lands and to help develop themselves economically.

Whereas the reality is that the state has ignored this verdict of the highest court. Several cases have been filed by affected communities but the 'law of eminent domain' of the colonial rulers are invoked to alienate Adivasi land and to loot the rich mineral resources.

I have questioned the half-hearted action of government on Forest Rights Act, 2006: [*Act of Parliament No: 2 of 2007*] Jal, jangal, jamin, as

we know, are the basis of the economic life of the Adivasi people. Of particular importance is their traditional rights in the forest have been infringed upon systematically over the decades. At long last, the govt came to the realization that a historic injustice has been done to the Adivasi and other traditional forest-dwellers. To correct this anomaly it enacted this Act.

Whereas the reality is far from desirable. From 2006 to 2011 of its operation, about 30 lakh applications were made all over the country for title-deeds, of which 11 lakhs were approved but 14 lakhs were rejected and five lakhs were pending. Of late the Jharkhand government is trying to bypass the Gram Sabha in the process of acquiring forest land for industrial set up.

I have questioned the inaction of the government to carry out the SC order 'Owner of the land is also the owner of sub-soil minerals'. [*SC: Civil Appeal No 4549 of 2000*] wherein it has said, "we are of the opinion that there is nothing in the law which declares that all mineral wealth sub-soil rights vest in the State, on the other hand, the ownership of sub-soil/mineral wealth should normally follow the ownership of the land, unless the owner of the land is deprived of the same by some valid process."

The rich minerals in their lands are being looted by the government and private companies. The Supreme Court has declared 214 out of the 219 Coal-Blocks in the country illegal and ordered their closure and levied a fine on them for their illegal mining. But the Central & State Governments have found a way out by re-allotting these illegal mines through auction to make it look legal!

I have questioned the reasons why SC observation is being ignored that:

'Mere membership of a banned organisation will not make a person a criminal unless he resorts to violence or incites people to violence or creates public disorder by violence or incitement to violence. [*SC: Criminal Appeal No: 889 of 2007*]. The court rejected the doctrine of 'guilt by association'.

It is common knowledge that very many

young men and women are held in prison on the suspicion of being "helpers of Naxalites". After arresting them other penal clauses are added on. It is an easy label that can be put on any one whom the police want to catch. It does not require any proof or witness. Supreme Court says even membership in a banned organisation does not make a person a criminal. How far removed are the law and order forces from the judiciary!

I have questioned the recently enacted Amendment to 'Land Acquisition Act 2013' by Jharkhand government which sounds a death-knell for Adivasi Community. This does away with the requirement for "Social Impact Assessment" which was aimed at safeguarding the environment, social relations and cultural values of affected people. The most damaging factor is the government can allow any agricultural land for non-agricultural purposes. So any and every thing can be included.

I have questioned 'Land Bank' which I see as the most recent plot to annihilate the Adivasi people. During 'Momentum Jharkhand' in February 2017 the government announced that 21 lakh acres in Land Bank of which 10 lakh acres is ready for allotment to industrialists.

Gair-Majurwa" land (= uncultivated land) can be 'khas' (= private) or 'aam' (= common). As per tradition, individual adivasi families or communities have been in possession and use this land [jamabandi]. Now the government shockingly cancelled all 'jamabandi' titles and claims that all 'gair-majurwa' land belongs to the government and it is free to allot it to any body (read industrial houses) to set up their small and big industries.

People are in the dark about their land being written off. The TAC has not given its approval as is required by the 5th Schedule; the respective Gram Sabhas have not given their consent as required by PESA Act; and affected adivasi people have not given their consent as required by Land Acquisition Act (2013).

Above are the questions I have consistently raised. If this makes me a 'desh drohi' then so be it!



Am I To Say Farewell?

STAN SWAMY SJ

“Life and death are one, even as the river and the sea are one.”

Kahlil Gibran

There is a strong belief among the Indigenous Adivasi People that when someone dies, he/she comes back in spirit to the near & dear ones, to the persons he/she had shared life with, to the communities he/she had struggled with in resisting injustice. To celebrate this ‘coming back’, a few days after the demise of the person the whole village community gathers in front of his/her house and the village priest calls upon the departed spirit and invites him/her to come back and dwell in the house, to be a witness to all that happens to the dear ones, to guide and accompany them in their journey through life. Then the priest announces in what form the spirit has come back to the house...it can be a plant, a tree, an animal with which he/she was close to or associated with during life. The priest then leads the spirit to the adig (the place where food for the family is prepared). From then on, when the family members sit down to have their meal the eldest male member of the family takes a few grains of food from his plate and places it

outside his plate and prays the spirit to be with them as they nourish their bodies with food so they can live a healthy life and work for the good of the family and community.

This sentiment is echoed in other traditions as well. Martyrs are referred to as ‘amar’ (beyond death). Some religious texts interpret death as ‘life is changed, not ended’. Poet Gibran’s saying “the river and the sea are one” means the fresh water of the river when it flows into the sea becomes salty water, but water is water. The form may change but the substance is the same.

I have been inspired by this thought and attitude, and I have been relating to those who have played a significant role in my life and now mother earth has taken them into her bosom as being close to me at every step, guiding, strengthening, and standing in never fading solidarity.

This is the way I wish to be to those who have been near & dear, colleagues, comrades, people whom I have tried to accompany in their struggle for truth and justice.

But life is still there to live. May we all live our life and live it to the full.

Thank you, Fr Stan Swamy

Whenever I met him he enquired about me and my people, how I was and how my people were in Jashpur, Chhattisgarh.

YACUB KUJUR SJ

A gallant salute to Fr Stan Swamy SJ. He was a man of deep spirituality, not in the traditional sense but rooted in Ignatian spirituality; that is finding God in everything. Often, I saw him praying to God the Creator of the universe, he prayed with the nature, he prayed to the tribal heroes and martyrs at the Pathalgadi, that is a stone erected with names of tribal fighters for liberty, as per the tribal culture. He drew inspiration and strength through prayer, to fight against injustice and dehumanizing forces.

Fr. George Pattery, the former Provincial of South Asia says, “What affects one’s life is spirituality.” Fr Stan was deeply affected by the life of marginalized and tribals; and gave life for their causes. He was sincerely concerned with the plight of people. Whenever I met him, he enquired about me and my people, how I was and how my people were. What were the difficulties and movements going on in my place (in particular Jashpur district, and Chhattisgarh State in general)? What I was doing for the people and what was my future plan for them. He patiently listened to me, encouraged me and advised me. He used to share with me his feelings for his people, with

regard to displacement, and violation of human rights. Physically he was old, yet I saw him attending many “Padayatras” and rallies against displacement and other issues. He was a real tribal, for he deeply understood the value of jal, jangle, Jamin in tribal life. Jal, jangle, and jamin are the sources of tribal livelihood and identity. I heard him in every meeting at Bagaicha, Ranchi, speaking against land grabbing for corporates in the name of “land bank”. He raised the issue of under trial prisoners, (most of them are tribals and Dalits put in jail for years without charge sheets). He became the voice of the voiceless, a true prophet against violation of rights of tribals and Dalits, which posed a threat to the government, so he was put behind the bars, and lost his life there, lacking medical care. Justice delayed is justice denied. It is not mere death but a judicial death. Fr Stan is no more with us but his spirit will be with us and especially with the tribals for guiding and inspiring to fight against dehumanizing forcers to bring justice and peace, which is the true Kingdom of God.

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Stewardship as a Way of Life

Three cars sally forth from one compound for Sunday Service – one for the parents and one each for the sons. Sure. They are entitled to their trappings of prosperity but does it entitle them to pollute the environment by using three cars when one would do?

MONICA FERNANDES

We human beings have become too big for our boots. We have deluded ourselves into believing that we are the masters of the universe and all creatures are subservient to us. An invisible virus has taught us how wrong we are. The Christian teaching is that as a part of God's family, we are all entrusted with an awesome duty – to be God's stewards of creation, each according to our abilities.

A steward is someone entrusted with efficiently managing whatever is entrusted to him or her. He/she is accountable for his or her discharge of this awesome responsibility and challenge of managing God's bountiful gifts. It is a life long vocation, an honour and a privilege. What are God's gifts?

Our body: We have all heard the airhostess' instructing us that in case of an emergency, we should first put own breathing masks before helping others. Similarly we are duty bound to look after our own body first, mentally, spiritually and physically for, since we are created in the image of God.

Relationships: Since the family is the microcosm of society, relationships within the family need to be nurtured. This is easier said than done during these troubled times when the pandemic has forced the family members to spend a lot of time together. We could get on each other's nerves after a point. It is important to express our angst instead of letting it bottle up perhaps over the dinner table. But this is also the time to do fun things together such as watching a comedy on TV, playing scrabble, singing together.

There are a lot of lonely people out there who are left bereft of any company, thanks to Covid. Sunita is bed ridden with Multiple Sclerosis. She lost her husband and is estranged from her daughter. She has a caregiver who cooks, does all the housework, bathes and cleans her during the day. Sunita is all alone until the caregiver comes the next day. She looks forward to a phone call, an encouraging or entertaining message on WhatsApp. There are many such Sunitas in this world and we are called upon to reach out to them as stewards.

Wealth: Money in itself either earned by the sweat of our brows or inherited or due to wise investments is a good thing. It is something we are meant to enjoy, to grow our businesses with, to give our families a better life. But all our earthly wealth is by the grace of God. Hence we should neither indulge in wasteful expenditure on material goods such as tons of clothes, shoes, watches nor should we hoard. With so many of our countrymen facing hard times, we should spare some money for a good cause.

Our Time: The moments gone can never be retrieved. Hence we should use our time wisely. First, we need to reflect on how we use our waking hours – the time spent with the family, at studies or work, for leisure, for assisting others. We can then set goals and make out a plan, allocating our time to different activities according to their importance.

Talents: We have been given different talents and to varying degrees. Imagine how boring the world would be if every painter was a Michaelangelo, and every author a



We are custodians of the environment but it's a sorry mess we have made of it.

need to simplify our lives by using clothes and accessories longer, recycling wherever possible and growing plants if feasible.

There is this wealthy businessman who lives in a large house with his two unmarried sons with many fancy cars, which of course, need to be shown off. During pre-Covid times, three cars would sally forth from their compound for Sunday mass – one for the parents and one each for the sons. Sure. They are entitled to their trappings of prosperity but does it entitle them to pollute the environment by using three cars when one would do?

In the parable of the talents, a master was setting out on a long journey. Before leaving, he called his servants and gave each one talents (a significant amount of money) according to his ability. One received five talents, another two and the third, one talent. Upon his return the master called his servants to account for what they did with the talents. The first and second explained that they had doubled the talents. The master exclaimed, "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things." The third had merely buried the talent and had not increased its value. He was justly reprimanded and punished by the master. Are we like the first and second servants or do we fit the bill of the third servant?

In a fit of jealousy, Cain killed his brother Abel. When God questioned him, Cain lied, "Am I my brother's keeper?" 'Brother' when used in a broad sense, means all those who need our help. During these tumultuous times when people are dying for lack of oxygen, when many are going hungry, when jobs are being lost, when our friends feel low and need a few cheery words, when people cannot afford medical expenses, we are indeed our brothers' keepers.

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Shakespeare. These are truly God's blessings and should be used wisely. Setting aside time and developing our talents gives us a satisfaction of achievement. It keeps our mind active. Comparing ourselves adversely to others is not going to increase our talent. God is pleased when we use our talents for the greater good instead of hiding them under a bushel.

The Environment: Last and not the least is the fact that we are custodians of the environment. It's a sorry mess we have made of it. But it is not too late to make amends. Are we wasting water while bathing? Are there leaking taps in our homes? Are we putting off the lights and fans when we leave the room? We

Who Is PEOPLE?

Abused – Exploited – Dumped! Sheep without a Shepherd.

GERRY LOBO OFM

The word “people” is abused and exploited (Pope Francis) frequently in literature and in everyday communication. Generic nature of the word has almost erased its in-depth significance in common parlance. In the background of the American Revolution, for Abraham Lincoln, by declaring “Government of the people, for the people, with the people and by the people,” people were real flesh and blood existents never to be taken for granted by anyone. The concept of people for him, in the words of *Fratelli Tutti*, was “in fact open-ended. A living and dynamic people, a people with a future...” (FT 160).

People: Abused, Exploited, Dumped

Today all talk about people is a superficial and impersonal chatter aired freely on all platforms and discourses. For most, people are a mass of anonymous objects filling empty spaces of the earth. For the political leaders people are massive election rallies, mere tools for exercising their franchise at the time of elections; once done, they are dumped into oblivion. For the Religious gurus they are a mela at holy rivers or shrines or churches. For others people are just statistics displayed on the digital screen, particularly obviated in the frequent broadcast to the nation by the Prime Minister of India or the Minister of Health, especially during the present pandemic crisis which has gripped the mortals. No feeling of solidarity, empathy and compassion with the suffering people ever manifested; instead people are treated as cases, calculated by statisticians.

People are a faceless physiological mass of flesh that like a fly on a cold winter night comes in by one window and exits by the other and disappears. Their vanishing from this earth today as Covid-19 asphyxiates them in millions causing a mortal blow, evokes only an ounce of sympathy, and there the human trajectory ceases. For our fast moving world nothing should be lost because one's profit must keep exploding and ‘progress’ become an unending process. People in this linear progress are only a means of plentiful prosperity and are machines for instant production to fill the markets of mammon.

Populism is not people-oriented governance but a totalitarian regime which comes to power, as it does in India, by cheap publicity and empty promises in the name of religion and development. People are often manipulated in this system by leaders who, putting on a ‘god-man’ appearance increase their public image. It is certainly no love of people as vulnerable and sacred human beings; rather an insult towards a Transcendent One who is aggrieved by the pain and misery of his Creatures. At times despots even deploying soldiers, as during the fascistic rule, arrest and torture people if they disobeyed orders. Many mortal souls in history have disappeared this way.

Our mindset often excludes the predominant place women have in the dynamics of human existence. During the migrant crisis the people most suffered were mothers. They are people, real ones, but undervalued by our governments and religions. Discrimination by segregation in work stations and worship places, homes

and institutions clearly projects a derogative image about women - the sacred humans of our common home! Women are real people, of flesh, bones and blood, of mind, memory and will, of pain, loss and death – susceptible to any factors. Populist measures extended to women in India are, again, a vote-bank plot but not a genuine affirmation of their human dignity.

People: Creation that is Good

The pandemic with its varied waves battering the fragile humans has brought home to reflective, sensible and critical thinkers that people are not utilitarian objects who could be manipulated at will or marginalized as slaves to serve emperors; instead they are “hearts” which supply energy to the entire earth through the veins of their active participation in the making of our world into a placid home. Being shocked and broken at the enormous death of living humans, the concerned thinkers and writers have voiced their mind and have pointed out that “No man is an island, Entire of itself.” People are not objects to be dumped in the quarries and ravines where not even a dog can approach for its prey. People are now understood as the foundation and firmament of all that exists. They are a face of the Divine in concrete presence and appearance.

Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti* challenges the rulers of nations that human beings cannot be denied their dignity and rights by prioritizing national sovereignty. A nation is not material resources but primarily human beings, the needy persons who are rightful owners of national wealth, whatever it be (FT 124). Hence people are not an impersonal crowd but revered individuals with their aspirations and dreams, hopes and anxieties, joys and sorrows. In this vein religions are not performers of rituals to appease gods, sooth consciences and keep them dulled and numbed about anything; instead voices for the common causes of human concerns such as justice, peace and truth. Religions are not an abstract concept but a reality intrinsically woven into the very fabric of human existence. Hence,



The pandemic with its varied waves battering the fragile humans has brought home to reflective, sensible and critical thinkers that people are not utilitarian objects who could be manipulated at will or marginalized as slaves to serve emperors

in a descending movement, the main concern of religions is concerns of the people - of bearing the wounds of humanity.

The pandemic keeps disclosing the truth that people are real and no powers can ignore it. Doling out material benefits in crisis times is not love of humans but a populist measure whereby men and women may be appropriated by egoist governments to further their hidden projects. If science and technology have avoided human vulnerabilities, human uncertainties and day-to-day human predicaments, the pandemic has concealed the truth that each and every person on this planet is connected at the core of existence. Therefore, compassionate solidarity and kindly care of each other is the only way for genuine humanity to reign over the world. People are life and breath, heart and love; not market consumer goods. People are a sign of Creation that is Good!

Gerry Lobo is a professor, writer and scholar in Franciscanism and Spirituality.

15 August

Independence Day

Philatelist, **Tom John OFM**, brings to memory Indian Independence.



BOOKS

Gazing Through the Rear-view Mirror

RUPA PETER

There are books that appeal to your mind. There are books that give wings to your imagination. And there are books that speak directly to your heart. The book, *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying* by Bronnie Ware is one such honest, transformative work that is truly heart-rending.

Written as a memoir, the book draws from Bronnie Ware's experiences as a palliative care provider for end-of-life patients. The book started out as a blog post written by the author on the same theme, which garnered eight million readers and was phenomenally popular across all countries and cultures. The success of the blog post inspired the author to put down her observations in this international bestseller.

Ware starts out by talking about the limitations of her 9-to-5 deadpan job and the free-spirited lifestyle that followed her quest for creative fulfillment. The need to work from the heart led Ware to take up palliative care work, despite having no qualifications in that particular field. The book poignantly traces her time with her patients who come from different walks of life but are slowly inching towards the same end; just like the rest of humanity.

In simple, succinct prose, Ware recounts the life experiences of several of her patients and writes about the remarkable clarity of vision that people gain when they are nearing the end. In doing so, Ware offers wisdom and learning that only people who have lived and loved till the very end can provide to the rest of us.

The first and most common regret as witnessed by Ware is the lack of courage to live a life true to oneself. This is beautifully expressed through the life of Grace, a tiny woman who is dying of terminal disease but is filled with regret that she has led the life expected of her rather than what she had dreamt of. "Most people had



not honoured even a half of their dreams and had to die knowing that it was due to choices they had made, or not made," writes Ware with great conviction.

Regret #3 has 94-year-old Jozsef grieving about always keeping his family at a distance and never really allowing them to know him. Jude, a young, dying mother adds her two cents, "We need to be brave enough to express our feelings." Words of the dying that truly add depth of understanding to those still caught up in humdrum living.

The book also meanders through how Ware has used the wisdom handed down to her by the dying in transforming her own life. She talks about how the lessons learnt during her time in palliative care had helped her in her own emotional healing journey. She is brutally honest about her battle with depression and the healing enabled by her experiences with the dearly departed. However, the writing here is a bit laboured and can get a little tedious for the quick reader.

One of the highlights of the book is its compassionate yet realistic approach to the process of dying. Our society shuts death out, Ware says, which leaves most people unprepared. The acknowledgment of our inevitable, approaching death gives us an opportunity to find greater purpose and satisfaction in life, she writes. Wise words indeed! Are we paying heed?

On Transmuting Death Anxiety for a Harmonious Life

SHAJI NICHOLAS OFM

The Covid-19 pandemic has intensified our awareness of the inevitability of death which renders all achievements, reputations and possessions appear insignificant. The question of “why” of human existence surfaces once again beckoning a fresh answer. Perhaps, this is a time to revisit the answer suggested forty-eight years ago by the Pulitzer Award winning cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker in his renowned work, *The Denial of Death*. Inspired by and building upon Becker’s insights, the 2003 documentary film, *Flight from Death – The Quest for Immortality*, explores the subtle yet radical and pervasive influence of death anxiety on all spheres of human activities. *Flight from Death* by Patrick Shen and Greg Bennick opens a window to understand a variety of issues that have been plaguing the humankind for centuries up to the present times – demonisation of the ‘other,’ clash of ideologies, totalitarianism at all levels, ethnic cleansing, annihilation of cultures, religious and racial violence, conflicts between nations, religious fundamentalism, terrorism - all of which could be understood as springing from the psychological disposition of death anxiety. The narration by Gabriel Byrne is complemented by a lot of neatly mixed footage of brief scholarly elucidation by experts from diverse disciplines. The archival footage of historical events and poignant life situations illustrate the ideas narrated. At the outset the viewers are warned that the film contains images of a graphic nature. In fact, not the images alone, but the radical views that the film expounds which question the founda-

tions of culture and religion could also disturb some viewers.

The film begins by explaining the origin of death anxiety in humans. Unlike animals, humans are aware that they are going to die. Haunted by the awareness of mortality, throughout history, humans have engaged in seeking immortality. Through a synthesis of the wisdom of the ages, Ernest Becker theorized that culture is a collective fabrication, a shared set of beliefs that helps us to deal with reality, especially the reality of our mortality, thus giving us a sense of security amidst vagaries of life. Culture provides us beliefs about the origin and destiny of human lives as well as guidelines for performing our social roles in an acceptable manner in keeping with the standards of valued conduct. Only through culturally constructed reality that we know what it means to be valuable. Human capacity to think symbolically plays a vital role in this. The beliefs, values, ideas and meanings that we cherish in our cultural/religious setting are given concrete manifestation through symbols. Identifying with symbols is a means by which we try to transcend our individual death. We seek a symbolic kind of immortality – ‘I may die, but the symbol lives on.’

It may create a sense of disillusionment in us when we realize that all creative works and accomplishments in every sphere of life are human striving for creating ‘immortality symbols’ as a means of coping with death anxiety. Without doubt, our ‘immortality striving’ within the setting of individual cultures has helped in



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enhancing the quality of human life. However, faced with a different culture with an alien set of immortality symbols, one is forced to question one’s own beliefs and one’s claims to immortality. Here begins the trouble as one experiences the culture different from one’s own as a threat to the certainty of one’s immortality. One may try to defuse the threat by derogating the other, or assimilating the other into one’s worldview or by incorporating the non-threatening aspects of the differing worldview into one’s own while cutting off the threatening aspects. When these methods fail one deals with the threat by resorting to annihilation, resulting in massive violence and killings in the name of God, nation, culture etc. We become intolerant of the people of other cultures when we do not share their death-denying illusions. *Flight from Death* also gives a clue into the empirical research done by a team of social psychologists to test the Terror Management Theory that was formulated based on the ideas of Ernest Becker. A series of such tests revealed that when reminded of death, test subjects react aggressively towards those who were different, and positively towards those who were similar. These studies point to the psychological source of almost all individual and collective violence.

Much of the film has an apparent pessimistic and melancholic tone. The background score accentuates the sombre mood. However, the gloom and disillusionment experienced on realizing that death-denying illusions provide the content for most of the cultural and religious practices can have a cathartic effect on an earnest seeker. Moving further, the film briefly explores the positive side of our ‘illusions’ or constructed reality, which are nothing but the explanations we come up with in order to give meaning to our experiences. We need to examine the kinds of illusions that we are pursuing. We have the capacity to use these illusions to better explore the facts rather than hiding the facts from us. In our search for meaning, the reality that we construct need not be destructive; rather they can be nurturing, life-sustaining, minimizing suffering, promoting harmony, freedom and dignity of all. Such illusions can always be found at the core of religions and cultures, though often not taken seriously, or even substituted with destructive illusions.

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SHORT STORY

Salma Stood Observing

SONU FAKIHA

Matching her pink floral pants with teal-colored flip-flops, Salma accompanied her mother to the local market. Her mother correcting her slippery georgette grey veil back on her head as she walked. The summers of Bengaluru didn't budge her tradition of wearing Abaya, even if it is to go shopping grocery. Salma did have an option of not carrying forward the tradition. She enjoyed walking with her mother to the local markets, though in her 20s she held her mother's hand like a five-year-old. The roads weren't smooth, they were potholed.

They walked by a fish stall, her mother said in Dakhni, "One thing good about the mask is that we are always protected from bad odors." Salma chuckled and agreed. "We also don't have to worry about familiar faces". "Careful," said the mother as they passed by the road which was patchy wet in sewage water. "It stinks so bad," said Salma.

They stopped by a store that looked small but included items available in a supermarket: from shampoo sachets to sacks of rice, everything was there. Salma's mother handed a list of items to the boy in the store. He was 15-16 years of age. He probably was done with the online classes. He was very quick in calculating fewer items but did require a calculator when the list was long.

The List Salma's mother handed to him included Samosa papad, Roohafsa, Sabja, Dates, and some nuts. Every year before the commencing of the Holy month of Ramadan, Salma and her mother set off to buy these special items. As Salma's mother was busy purchasing items needed for Ramadan, Salma stood observing people in the market.

Most women do their Burka with different colored headscarves. Some wore blingy ones, some wore black while some wore cotton ones.



Men in the bikes were screaming at people blocking their way. The auto-rickshaws, pulled in front of the shops, were bantering with the shop owners. The nearby meat stall owner minced thick chicken meat with his meat chopping knife. The meat scattered on the wooden log mixed with stains of blood. The skinned chickens were hung at the entrance of the shop like pieces of decor embellishing his stall.

"Come on let's go", said Salma's mother. Salma took the bag of special items from her mother, they walked back home. on their way back, they stopped by a mini stall that sold women's accessories. Salma's mother was examining glittery hairbands while Salma stood two steps away observing the sweet chaos.

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The Lord is inviting you, dear friend, to be part of our family.

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JOHN 17:21



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