

India: Letter From Nagpur Jail - “Living in a prison within a prison”

Sunday 12 November 2017, by [SAIBABA G. N.](#) (Date first published: 31 August 2017).

GN Saibaba was sentenced to life in prison for his political convictions. Here we publish an exclusive letter from Nagpur Central Jail’s notorious Anda Cell.



GN Saibaba before his imprisonment.

In March, an Indian court sentenced a Delhi University English literature professor, GN Saibaba, to life imprisonment. His crime was having alleged connections with the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist).

Saibaba has been diagnosed with permanent post-polio paralysis of the legs; he is almost entirely dependent on others to perform basic functions. Yet since his sentencing, he has languished in solitary confinement, in Nagpur Central Jail’s notorious Anda Cell. In an earlier letter to his wife [1], Vasantha Kumari, he wrote, “Already I am shivering with continuous fever. I do not have a blanket. I do not have a sweater/jacket. As temperature goes down excruciating pain continuously in my legs and left hand increases. I am living here like an animal taking its last breaths.”

The jail authorities have done nothing to relieve his pain. His doctors say he is suffering from kidney and gallbladder stones, but he cannot access treatment. His family sends medicines, but he does not receive them. He needs pancreatic surgery, or he risks infection.

The small windows the public has into the conditions at Nagpur Central Jail come from Professor Saibaba’s letters. Kumari has shared her husband’s latest missive with Jacobin. This time, he directs his reflections to Anjum, a central character in Arundhati Roy’s new novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Through Saibaba’s creative dialogue with Anjum and other characters from Roy’s literary world, we witness the suffering endured in political persecution.



From rediff.com

Dear Anjum,

How are you? I hope you are doing well along with the entire Ministry in Jannet Guest House. I hope you still remember me six months after my disappearance from Delhi. I know it's easy to forget people who go to prisons or the otherworldly worlds. Life outside on the Earth has to go on.

I have been thinking of writing to you for the last two months. I couldn't really figure out for myself clearly what all I should write to you. But as days and months slip by in my solitary cell, I find that no one is interested any longer in reading my letters and respond to me. I would have written to you as one of my best friends, but indications from your latest life show that you are getting busier and busier with your team ever growing. I suddenly felt that you are the only person who would really take my letters seriously and do something concretely for my freedom. When this thought dawned on me, I have no doubt that I should write to you. Hence this letter.

Then another problem rolled on like a big boulder in front of my eyes. In what language should I write to you? I know it is ridiculous to write to you in English. But what can I do? I don't know the language you know well. One of the biggest blunders I committed in my life is not to learn Urdu. I tried to learn Urdu when I was in this very Andaa cell as an under trial prisoner in two spells in 2014-16. I seriously tried to correct my mistake in life, but I could not really become proficient in the language to write a letter on my own (with bail orders that pushed me out and in again into the cell playing with my life). The prison authorities allow me to write letters either in Hindi or in English. I don't know how to write in Hindi, though I manage to read in the language.



The handwritten letter.

I am not allowed to write in my mother tongue as there is no one in this prison staff to censor my letters in Telugu. Therefore, I am not fortunate enough to write to my love in Telugu. She can appreciate my letters only if I write to her in my mother tongue. She also wants to write letters to me in our language, but again they are not allowed. We use auntie tongue or uncle tongue. Finally, I decided to write to you as well in our great legacy of our colonial auntie's tongue. I hope Zainab or Tilo the Ustaniji or Dr Azad Bharatiya will read the letter for you and interpret it in Urdu without

missing a single word of mine.

I sincerely feel awkward to write to you about my deteriorating health condition. You must have already come to know about my failing health and serious ailments totaling twenty now. Earlier the High Court of Mumbai counted them as nineteen when I was granted bail on medical grounds. That count was accurate at that time. But in the last two years I acquired one more ailment called sleep apnea. The doctors in Hyderabad who discovered this new ailment on my body advised me to insert my nose into a machine that pumps air into my throat opening it all the time. I tried that in a Hyderabad hospital, but totally failed to sleep throughout nights.

I won't go into all the earlier nineteen ailments here, because Vasantha must have sent a WhatsApp message and FB post to Saddam Hussain. Vasantha and Muralidharan had already submitted a detailed report on my health condition to the NHRC and it was later circulated. I know you don't like to use WhatsApp or FB but I am sure Saddam must have shown you these details on his smartphone. Zainab must have translated every detail in Urdu for you. These days I am so conscious of my severe ailments that I tend to write about them elaborately to anyone whom I choose to write letters. I sound for myself these days very much like my maternal grandmother's younger sister. She used to talk about her health issues for five to six hours to any visitor. In our childhood we used to run away from her. But she survived well into her nineties though she started complaining about certainly more than nineteen to twenty ailments for over five decades. I hope I inherit her qualities and ultimately acquire the legacy. Though my ailments of very, very severe nature sound ridiculous when I go on complaining about them, but they are real. Believe me.



The many postscripts.

Now you have been living in a graveyard, I am in a cell called Andaa cell in a prison far away from the “dignified” society (the Duniya); both of us are banished from the larger society. Ironically, both of us love the larger society. However, there is this main difference in our conditions. You are absolutely free. But we are told all fundamental freedoms including the newly born right to privacy have reasonable restrictions legally ordained on them. However, you seem to enjoy unlimited freedoms without these restrictions. I am absolutely unfree, totally. Living in a prison within a prison. There are no reasonably delimited minor freedoms ordained by law for me. I am treated as a convicted terrorist under five sections of the famous UAPA. No. No. I forgot. I am not treated as one. I am really convicted as one.

You enjoy absolute freedoms and happiness that the rest of humanity lost several centuries ago. You are the unique human being in the history of human society. That is the reason why I ask you to work for my freedom. Who else can be the befitting person to campaign for my release? I am also sure that you will definitely take up my cause. Before I end this letter here I have a special request to you. If you happen to meet our common friend Ms A. Roy, please do convey her my greetings. My friends in Hyderabad have been looking for her to launch a book I translated two years ago. Please inform her that she should find time to go there and release the book. I hope you will also go for the release of the book for the release of Dr. G. N. Saibaba.

Before I forget, my love to Miss Udaya Jebeen.

Yours

With lots of love

G.N. Saibaba:

(Dr. G.N. Saibaba)
Andaa Cell

Central Prison
Nagpur
31 August 2017

P.S.:—Convey my greetings to Tilo, Zainab, Saddam, Saeeda, Nimmo, Dr Azad Bhartiya and all others at Jannet Guest House.

P.P.S.:—Convey my greetings to Musa, if he is still alive.

P.P.P.S.:—I hope to look for your early reply. You understand well how the people in prisons wait for letters. Even if you don't reply, I will still write to you, please mind it.

P.S.

* Jacobin. 11.11.2017:

<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/11/gn-saibaba-nagpur-central-jail-anjum-political-prisoner-naxalites>

* GN Saibaba is a disabled University of Delhi professor who has been sentenced to life in prison for connections to Maoists in India.

Footnotes

[1] <https://m.rediff.com/news/special/i-am-living-like-an-animal-taking-its-last-breaths/20171101.htm>