

Father Stan Swamy (1937-2021), a martyr for the cause of the persecuted people of India

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Father Stan Swamy, founder of the Persecuted Prisoners' Solidarity Committee (PPSC) and one of its national conveners, a prominent leader of the *adivasi* rights movement and anti-displacement movements, died this afternoon, 5 of July 2021, while in state judicial custody at a Mumbai hospital. To put it very simply, this fascist state killed him.

Having been involved in the movement for the rights of the *adivasis* in Jharkhand for more than three decades, Father Stan found that almost someone or the other from every *adivasi* family was being harassed by the state in false cases. More than four thousand *adivasi* people have been imprisoned year after year as victims of state persecution without trial. From there the initiative began to build an organization to stand by these persecuted prisoners. The journey of PPSC started in October 2015. The first was a survey of 100 indigenous prisoners in Jharkhand, which found that 98 per cent of them were incarcerated for no crime or cause. This survey report was published in Hindi and English by Bagaicha, the centre for *adivasi* rights established by Father Stan. The survey report caused a stir at the national and international levels.

Then using the Chaibasa Jail as a model case PPSC began to gather the details of the cases of all the detainees under the repressive laws such as UAPA and sedition, and at the same time the work of appointing lawyers, depositing bail bonds, pursuing the trials continued. Through filing RTI applications, meeting the Jharkhand State Legal Services Authority, recruiting law college students as interns and carrying out data collection, the work continued. After making a rough list of the Chaibasa prisoners, Father Stan began to try to find out how many *adivasis* were being held under such repressive laws throughout Jharkhand. The state administration refused to give him this information. A public interest litigation (PIL) was then filed in the Ranchi High Court on behalf of Father Stan to this effect. The state government was ordered to give the full list of prisoners to Father Stan on the directions of the High Court. From then on, he was harassed in various ways. For the "crime" of trying to serve the most downtrodden people, Father Stan became a target of state oppression himself.

The Ranchi High Court was already scheduled to hear the PIL on why these people have been in jail for so long without trial, what are the faults on the part of the state and so on. But the state government has repeatedly asked for time, delaying the hearing of the case. Then began the episode of interrogation by Father Stan by the NIA in the fabricated Bhima Koregaon case, with which he had no connection, repeatedly raiding his office over various fictitious matters. He was charged under sedition for writing on the Pathalghadi movement, and his only possessions, a iron cot and a table, was seized by the police. Finally he was arrested by the NIA and sent to jail. Repeatedly, his bail application was rejected and he was pushed to his death. Father Stan was finally murdered by the same criminal justice system that he had started fighting against.

PPSC is an independent organization. It had no affiliation with any political party. It's not that the state doesn't know. Yet those who were intimately involved in the formation of the PPSC have been

subjected to extreme state terrorism, one is serving a life sentence, one is a prisoner without trial for more than two years, one was forced into exile, and Father Stan has been murdered. Organizationally, PPSC was branded as a frontal organization of a political party without any evidence. The only reason is that Father Stan, Sudha Bharadwaj, Prashant Rahi, Partho Sarothi Ray and PPSC all stood up for the oppressed adivasis and opposed this exploitative fascist state system. As a result, the state considered PPSC so dangerous that it destroyed the existence of PPSC in just 5 years.

But the lesson of history is that the last word is not said by oppression, the last word is that of the people. The exploited and oppressed people of India will surely respond to the murder of a compassionate, patriotic and socially conscious man like Father Stan and pay homage to all the martyrs of the revolutionary democratic movement, including Father Stan, by building an oppression-free India.

Long live Father Stan Swamy. His martyrdom will not be in vain.

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