

Statement (India) condemning the institutional murder of Father Stan Swamy

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Father Stan Swamy dedicated his life living and working with tribal communities in Jharkhand. He fought capitalist exploitation and state repression brought upon the people living in mineral rich areas. For these crimes of standing with and speaking up for people's rights, he was falsely implicated along with many others in the Bhima Koregaon case by the notorious National Investigating Agency (NIA).

While Modi sings paeans on democracy and Amit Shah writes op-ed pieces in a leading English language daily about the roots of democracy and fundamental rights, the state continues to zealously crackdown on any voice of dissent or criticism whether it be by journalists, concerned citizens, intellectuals or students. We have seen this in the way they have dealt with the protestors against CAA, the way they have vilified and attacked those involved in the ongoing farmers' protests, activists who spoke up against the organized Delhi pogrom in 2020 among many others. The pursuing of the Bhima Koregaon activists by a vindictive state under draconian legal provisions is probably the most harrowing for the activists and intellectuals involved as well as exemplary of the government attitude.

These are all methods of silencing dissent and hollowing out of whatever shell of liberal democracy that India was. The plight of these activists, students and intellectuals are meant to be examples of the very heavy price that people will have to pay should they dare to question the official line of the government, which is a toxic combination of the worst excesses of capitalist exploitation in agriculture (farm laws) and industry (labour code), and a politics of exclusionary ethno-nationalist Hindu chauvinism which helps them bury any criticisms by bringing up the question of building temples or fanciful claims of conversions whenever faced with material questions of hunger, poverty, employment etc.

The Bhima Koregaon case in which Father Stan Swamy was falsely implicated, along with many other activists, is similarly fabricated to stifle all voices of dissent. The courts, which in many such cases have simply acted as an extension of the executive arm of the state, denied Stan Swamy bail, despite him being 84 years of age and suffering from a serious degenerative disease such as Parkinson's. His condition had debilitated to the extent that he could not even hold a cup properly. His bail pleas, along with his simple request to be allowed to use a sipper cup in jail, was greatly delayed by repeated rejections by the NIA courts showing a complete lack of basic humanity and compassion. He was forced to languish in jail with Covid, which was only detected later when he was transferred to a hospital when his condition deteriorated further. This deliberate and slow torturing of an activist to set an example out of them is nothing but an insidious attempt by the ruling regime to deter anyone who dares to dissent. Father Stan Swamy did not just die, he was institutionally murdered!

Radical Socialists demand a repeal of the draconian UAPA and the NIA Acts, and the unconditional release of all political prisoners. We join the thousands among tribal communities in Jharkhand, and many others across the country, in mourning the murder of a life dedicated to fighting injustice.

P.S.

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