



johar* इतान!





On 6th July 2021, as I blessed the mortal remains and said, “Stan, Rest in Peace”, I asked myself, what do I carry with me? I approached him with a sense of reverence. He inspired and taught many lessons on what it means to be a Christian and follower of Jesus, by his life and works, pains and sufferings, forgiving and surrendering. As a Jesuit, I felt very proud of him as he had already risen in the hearts of many people of goodwill, who were in search of meaning for their lives.

During his life on earth, he loved and embraced the poor, especially the Adivasis, Dalits and marginalized communities.

He walked with them and learnt valuable lessons from their communitarian life filled with compassion, solidarity, sharing and a sense of justice from their traditional governance system. At the same time, he was angry whenever he witnessed the poor being exploited and treated as objects. He found Jesus struggling with them in their search for truth and justice and took it upon himself to live fully the Jesuit charism of ‘Faith that does Justice’ (GC 32 D 4) and ‘Companions in a Mission of Reconciliation and Justice’ (GC 36) as his way of life, whatever be the cost. I have heard from some persons that he had been living in an ideal world. To me, he was a prophet of hope, despite all adversaries.

Even while he was in prison, he vibrated Christian hope, that death is not the end of life. I remember his words from Taloja: “Please do not worry about me. I am an old man. Let us together fight till truth prevails and the poor get justice. Paying the price is part of the game”. Even in prison, he had a positive outlook of humanity and wrote, “Despite all odds, humanity is bubbling in Taloja” and “A caged bird can still sing.” Stan truly believed that the mission of Jesus cannot be stopped until it is fully realized. His admirers and followers increased multifold at his death. Now, he can rest in peace as he has taught us to understand the word of St. Paul, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim: 4:7).

STAN WAS A MYSTERY

From the moment he was arrested and put behind the bars in Taloja, learning that Solomon and I were his contact persons, many friends and well-wishers inquired about his health status. I knew that he had not taken food from the time of his arrest until he was lodged in prison the following evening. After discerning God’s will and listening to his jail-mates, he changed his mind. All that I could tell the Jesuits and his friends was that he was fine. I did not have much to share as Stan never made any complaints. Until he was affected by Covid-19 in mid-May 2021, Stan repeatedly said, “I am managing”. Accepting solidarity support, Stan wrote on 24th November 2020, “All of you have expressed hope that I will be released soon. Much as it may be desirable in itself, I’m beginning to question

if it is proper. I’ve met all my co-accused lodged in this prison. They are all such precious human beings who have given the most and best of themselves for the cause of the deprived. They have been in jail for more than two years but have not been able to get bail. I’m the last (16th) to be arrested in the same case. I think that my release in the near future will be justifiable only if it somehow provides an opening for others to get bail”. More than his wellbeing, he was concerned about others and the larger cause. He was unequivocal that UAPA must be challenged, and all political prisoners must be tried

soon and if found innocent, must be released. As Stan completed 100 days in prison, he wrote, “Another strength during these past hundred days, has been in observing the plight of the undertrials. A majority of them come from economically and socially weaker communities. Many such poor undertrials don’t know what charges have been put on them, have not seen their charge sheet, and remain in prison for years without legal or other assistance. Overall, almost

all undertrials are compelled to live with a bare minimum, whether rich or poor. This brings in a sense of brotherhood and communitarianism, where reaching out to each other is possible even in this adversity.” This experience led him to write a poem, “Prison life, a great leveler”:

‘You’ comes first

‘T’ comes after

‘We’ is the air one breathes

Lo, this commonality is wrought by compulsion

If only all human beings embrace it freely and willingly

All would truly become children of Mother Earth.

LOVE MUST SURPASS PROPHETIC ANGER

Stan was strongly rooted in love and compassion. Like his Master Jesus, Stan, on the one hand, expressed his prophetic anger on systems and structures that enslave humans and never hesitated to question these. But on the other hand, he was gentle, polite and respectful. NIA officials knew that Stan was speaking the truth. During one of the telephonic calls, he told me, “In all honesty, I can say that all the ‘incriminating’ documents supposedly found in my hard disk were planted without my knowledge, either before or after seizure. But the NIA officers did what they were commanded to do.”

Rooted in social analysis, Stan was able to analyze the root causes of the social problems and believed it is the poor and leaders from marginalized communities, who are rooted in an ethical value system, as opposed to capitalist and consumerist values, can be ambassadors of sustainable change. He also

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*Johar in tribal dialect is a common word for greeting, thanking or bidding Adieu.

felt the Adivasi value system, which of late was getting corroded, was strongly rooted in the Gospel values and the Constitutional principles. He used the same measuring yard, while challenging the State, the Church or the Society of Jesus. When he spoke in public or wrote in journals or newspapers, it created ripples. He raised 'uncomfortable' questions. While the State did not approve of his writings and implicated him in various cases, Stan always demonstrated that he was a law-abiding citizen. I was longing to speak to him longer whenever he made calls from the prison. But after 4 minutes, he would say, "My time is getting over, let me end our call".

His major concern was non-implementation of the Constitutional provisions, various affirmative laws and judgments of the Supreme Court. "We live in a country where law and order agencies neither follow the provisions of the Constitution nor the judgments of the Supreme Court. The Panchayatraj Extension in Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act is only the tip of an iceberg." Despite the fact that justice was out of reach for the poor, his only ammunition was exploring legal course of action, through well-documented study.

He was highly sensitive to the needs of the poor, and could easily empathize with them. In one of his letters he wrote, "There is a small request on my part. There is a person who has no family, friends or advocate to pursue his defense. Although he has spent more than two years in prison, he has not yet received his charge sheet. Can you seek the help of our lawyers and send me his chargesheet? I would like to help him". On another occasion when he asked for a pair of pants 36 inches and a formal shirt 42 inches, I knew that it was not for him. When I inquired, he said, "I want to gift it to a prisoner for Christmas." An undertrial prisoner is eligible to receive only Rs 4,500 per month from his guardian for his personal needs. The money will be kept in the account of the person. Twice a month when the prison shop is open, a prisoner can buy things and the amount will be deducted in his account. Knowing that Stan does not spend money on himself, I asked him, "Are you able to manage with Rs 4,500?" He said, "The Society of Jesus and the Adivasis have taught me to lead a simple way of life. I am spending part of the money to fulfil the basic needs of some poor prisoners". Stan found ways to be with the poor in all circumstances.

TRUTH, JUSTICE AND PAYING THE PRICE

In July 2020, after 15 long hours of interrogation by the NIA, Stan prepared a detailed dossier elaborating the questions posed to him by the NIA and his response. The dossier was shared with a Supreme Court Advocate Nitya Ramakrishnan. She said, "Stan has spoken the truth. Truth will set him free".

She is yet another person who was deeply affected by the life of Stan. Truth and justice were the foundational ethics of Stan's life and mission. He knew that justice cannot be realized without paying a price. Following his Master Jesus, he was ready to carry the cross. Imbibing the Gandhian principle of ahimsa, he could never imagine inflicting pain on others. It was unfortunate that the state completely misunderstood his value system and branded him as the enemy of the state. However, he was neither afraid of anyone, nor of the state, and said, "Truth must be spoken, right to dissent must be upheld and justice must reach the doorsteps of the poor."

By his simple and unassuming life, he touched the hearts of the prisoners. He asked me for the book, 'Jesus: An Historical Approximation', by José Antonio Pagola, and shared it with his fellow prisoners. He had a dialogue with them on how he understood the mission of the historical Jesus who continues to struggle with the poor even today. He was unequivocal that in a broken world, when inequality and exclusion of the poor was the order of the day, and ethical ways of living were commercialized, if one desired to work for justice, death in the hands of others was inevitable. Hearing the demise of Stan, on 6th July 2021, co-accused persons lodged in Taloja, with the permission of the jail authorities had a special condolence meeting and shared their experiences with Stan. He won the hearts of his co-accused though he never had close contacts with them in the past. Thank you, Arun, Vernon and Anand for being Stan's mother and companion.

HIS LAST WISH

Despite his ailing health and knowing that his end was near, he expressed his last wish in the court and to our

lawyers. "If I am granted bail, as regards where I will reside, I wish to make it clear that I don't have a family or blood-relatives in Mumbai. I left my family and kith and kin in Tamil Nadu 60 years ago. Ranchi in Jharkhand is the only place where I can be for the rest of my life. Since NIA has a jurisdiction in Ranchi, I will be able to fulfil the other conditions that may be imposed on me." For where your treasure is, there your heart will be (*Mat 6:21*). The Adivasis were his treasure.

By his life and mission, Stan has given a clarion call to the Jesuits and collaborators not to be silent spectators in a broken world. He has made us understand and appreciate the implications of walking with the excluded in the mission of Reconciliation and Justice (UAP 2). Truth and justice are inseparable, and love must be the foundation of all our actions, is the message that I carry with me.

Johar, Stan.

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