

## Joseph Xavier, SJ

(Director, Indian Social Institute, Bengaluru. He was heading the legal proceedings in the case of Fr. Stan Swamy)



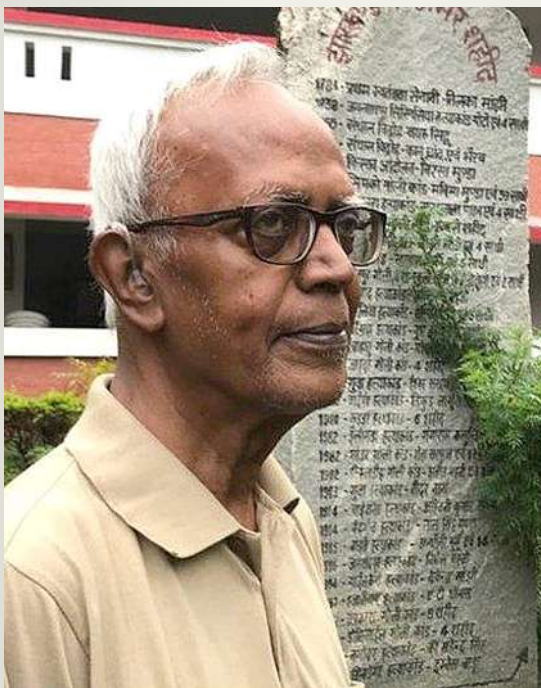
Fr. Stan (84) had spent his active life mainly in three places - Indian Social Institute, Bengaluru, JOHAR, a Jesuit Social Centre in Chaibasa, and Bagaicha, Ranchi in Jharkhand. Stan served as the Director of ISI Bengaluru for 11 years. In the late 80's, he was missioned as the Director, Jharkhandi Organization for Human Rights centre, popularly known as JOHAR (a word used in Jharkhand to wish one another), where he served for 12 years. He was much disturbed by the hard realities of the 'Ho' tribe. Soon, he learnt 'Ho' language and spent his time in educating and strengthening the hopes of the poor Adivasis.

In the 90's, as India was opening its economy to neo-liberal paradigm, a number of multi-national companies intruded into mineral-rich Adivasi lands. Many villagers were displaced from their habitats in the name of development. Fr. Stan rightfully

said, "Every mine that is dug, not only destroys the green forests, fertile lands and water bodies but also often displaces entire village habitations". By mid-90's, discourse on separation of Jharkhand from Bihar has been picking up momentum. Considering the new space emerging for the empowerment of the Adivasis, Stan was asked to move to Ranchi in 2000. He was staying in a rented house, establishing contacts, talking to different leaders and political parties on how Jesuits could be at the service of the Adivasis in the newly formed Jharkhand State.

In 2006, Bagaicha was established as a common venture of the central zone Jesuit provinces. During these years, various multinational corporations were bent upon extracting the minerals from the very rich sources in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. This process is generally preceded with a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the government and the industries. The Gram Sabhas were never taken into confidence, as mandated by PESA Act. Fr. Stan actively participated in the movement led by Adivasis, that opposed Netrahat Field Firing project, which was to displace thousands of villagers and a number of Adivasi hamlets in Jharkhand. He also opposed the large-scale Koel Karo dam project, that was to displace many Adivasi families. This can be counted as one of the 'wrong doings' of the man with a steel spine. He wrote on these subjects extensively in print media.

During 2014-15, indiscriminate arrests, of mostly Adivasi and Dalit youth, were taking



place. Stan convened a meeting of people of goodwill, and the group decided to form a common forum by the name, 'Persecuted Prisoners Solidarity Committee' (PPSC), so that they could collectively intervene in the court, on behalf of Under-Trial Prisoners (UTPs), seeking immediate bail and speedy trial. Some Adivasi villagers in Khunti district of Jharkhand, inscribed in the pathals the Constitutional provisions given to the Gram Sabhas as per Fifth Schedule of the Constitution and PESA Act. This, known as Pathalgadi movement, became popular.

To everyone's surprise, in 2018, Stan was implicated by the Pune Police in Bhima Koregaon case. Stan had never been to Bhima Koregaon in his entire life.

However Fr Stan was arrested and was interrogated for 15 hours in a span of 5 days in July and August 2020, by the National investigation Agency (NIA). Despite his age and illness, he fully cooperated with the interrogation. He was under judicial custody till death.

Personally, I was with Stan, for 3 days, before his arrest, spending time at his place of solace. It is always more than an experience to spend time with him. More than his ailing health, what was more prominent about him, like always, was the fact that he stays strong, and confident. He was ready to pay the price as a true follower of Jesus.

## Shashi Tharoor

(Member of Parliament)



I am here in solidarity with all those joining to mourn the death of the 84-year-old Father Stan Swami, suffering from Parkinson's disease and other ailments. He spent four decades of his life working for the poor and the tribal people and was inexplicably arrested by our Government. I must say, for our country, the challenge we are all facing as a civilization is how to make progress in the future of the most deprived and marginalized sections of our society.

Various people are trying to help, some of us as lawmakers, as writers and opinion shapers, as social activists, as religious and social leaders. Everyone has a role to play. Ultimately, the government has the responsibility entrusted to it by our voters and taxpayers to deliver justice, hope,

and progress for the poorest and weaker sections of our society. An 83-year-old man was arrested eight months ago from his residence near Ranchi and at the same time his computer, his mobile phone, all sorts of items had been confiscated. He was interrogated, and was detained without any regard for his health, his principles, and his own idealism. As one who has benefited myself from a Jesuit education, I am convinced that no Jesuit priest would ever be guilty of either violence or incitement to violence. The charges of these seem to me to be preposterous.