

NEWS / CRIME

"As we look into our parents' eyes, we see only pain": An open letter by Anand Teltumbde's daughters

PRACHI TELTUMBDE AND RASHMI TELTUMBDE

27 March 2020



The writer Anand Teltumbde with his daughters, Prachi and Rashmi. COURTESY PRACHI TELTUMBDE

On 16 March 2020, a Supreme Court bench comprising the judges Arun Mishra and Mukeshkumar Rasikbhai Shah rejected the anticipatory bail pleas of the civil-rights activist Gautam Navlakha and the writer Anand Teltumbde, in relation to the violence at Bhima Koregaon in January 2018. Navlakha and Teltumbde were booked by the Pune Police under the draconian Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act for alleged Maoist links in 2018. The Supreme Court asked Navlakha and Teltumbde to surrender on 6 April.

On 16 March, our father's fate for the next few years was decided by the Supreme Court of India. The state lays in wait to incarcerate him on 6 April—a fact that we

never imagined we would be speaking or writing about.

Since we heard the verdict, it feels like life has come to a halt, even as each day whizzes by in a deluge of calls and visits from well-wishers offering their sympathies and support. Sleepless nights and tired eyes have become routine occurrences. A constant feeling of frustration, restlessness and helplessness has set in, as our family tries desperately to cope with the situation. This is what an arrest of an innocent man does to his family and dear friends.

What started in August 2018 with a press conference where flimsy evidence in the form of fabricated letters bearing the words "Comrade Anand"—and no further details—were flashed in front of news cameras has now evolved into our father's impending arrest. When we look back at the series of events, only two questions arise: first, how can our father be implicated solely because he happens to have the same first name with someone mentioned in a letter retrieved from another person? How did the mention of an "Anand" become linked to our father, Dr Anand Teltumbde? The second question that frustrates us is the application of the UAPA law itself—why should an innocent man face incarceration without the option of a bail, with not a shred of real evidence against him? What bothers us is that the state can blatantly snatch away the constitutional rights and civil liberties of our father and the other accused, while the trial that will ultimately decide if they indeed committed a crime stretches on for years to come.

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From the time this ordeal began in August 2018, being law abiding citizens, we have peacefully allowed our house to be raided in our absence; our father has let himself be interrogated twice for numerous hours at a stretch; and he has provided the prosecution with sufficient evidence to refute the charges levelled against him. Yet, we are faced with the wrath of the state, not to mention the numerous ill-meaning posts on social media demeaning and insulting our father and the other accused, many of which are from people who seem to have no knowledge of the work of the persons they are attacking.

As we look into our parents' eyes, we only see pain. They are both above 65 years of age. Our mother is the great-grand daughter of Babasaheb, Dr BR Ambedkar. Our father is an immensely hard-working individual who has fought his way to become an overachieving student, a scholar and a corporate heavy-weight. He chose to write

in the interest of oppressed people, truly believing that he is doing it to protect the people of his own country, whom he so dearly loves. Is this the reward he gets for writing and publishing scores of books that the world appreciates, just because the establishment is uncomfortable with these?

The recent COVID-19 pandemic is adversely affecting the lives and livelihood of billions across the world. For us, this has meant not being able to fly to India to spend the precious few days remaining before the arrest with our family, at a time when our parents need us the most. Our father stood by us through every milestone of our lives, but today, it pains us that we are not around to hug him or hold his hands. We fail to understand what crime he is supposed to have committed that he needs to undergo this torture. But as we move ahead with the case and ready ourselves to face the battles that come our way without a choice, we would like to thank our family, our father's friends and supporters of his work, who have helped us endure this ordeal and stay strong through it. As we set out on this painful journey, we wish to leave you all with one thought. Imagine one of your loved ones was arrested without irrefutable evidence and kept in humiliating prison cells without proper food, clothing, sanitation facilities, hygiene or comfort—conditions that challenge one's very existence. Wouldn't this violation of human rights and dignity be sufficient for anyone to raise their voices?

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READER'S COMMENTS

sanjay chaudhury

30 Mar, 2020

Agreed with Prachi and Rashmi.Exprsed heartfelt solidarity. Have personal experience with Anand sir. He is so kind, caring and scholar par excellence that no sane and justice loving individual would ever believe fabricated and laughable story of police. It's very saddening that even SCI has failed to protect the liberty and dignity of Ananad teltumbde and Gautam Navlakha. Feeling of helplessness, frustration descends upon all directly or indirectly associated with human rights

crusaders. Only time and history will judge the Indian judiciary has failed to live up with the constitutional promise.

v kumar
30 Mar, 2020

It is truly unfortunate and bad luck that an RSS toady/flunkey like Arun Mishra and a gujju specifically chosen from Gujarat for supreme court by Modi and co. were involved in rejecting the bail of your father. Any other bench would have given bail to your father. Judges like nariman, chandrachud would i think have been more reasoned. That said, the indian supreme court is a third world judiciary and like any other third world outfit functioning under the trappings of english justice, there are bound to be third world approach/influences

Rajnish Kumar
27 Mar, 2020

You people are fighter parents' children. Just keep doing your hardwork and study more. Actually Power is other side of table, so just keep studying, shall get justice one day. There is a saying that In God's home, there is a delay, there is no dark.

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