

Bulletin

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Prof GN Saibaba

AIFRTE

All India Forum for Right to Education

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Online public meeting in memory of Prof. GN Saibaba

On behalf of the All India Forum for Right to Education (AIFRTE) an online public meeting was organised in memory of Prof. GN Saibaba on Tuesday (October 15). He passed away on October 13 because of post-operative complications in a Hyderabad hospital.

Saibaba, a former professor at Delhi University's Ram Lal Anand College, was arrested in 2014. In 2017, a trial court in Maharashtra found him and five others guilty of waging war against the government and convicted them under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA). They were acquitted after 10 years in March 2024

by the High Court as there was no evidence in support of the allegations.

A polio patient, Saibaba was paralysed below the waist and developed life-threatening complications in Nagpur prison due to poor living conditions and inadequate medical treatment. He went on hunger strikes several times in protest. UN special rapporteurs had repeatedly called for his release on health grounds.

The stones affecting his pancreas were detected in 2017 but surgery could only be done now in 2024. By these years, his health had deteriorated and his body couldn't tolerate the strain of surgery. The speakers said, "It is an institutional murder." The speakers criticised UAPA and other similar laws. The meeting was presided over by Professor Jagmohan Singh, chairperson of the All India Forum. Prof. Anand Teltumbde, Prof. Hare Gopal, Prof. Madhu Prasad and Prof. Vikas Gupta spoke on the meeting.



AIFRTE Statement on Prof. Saibaba's institutional murder

13th October 2024
New Delhi.

AIFRTE is deeply saddened by the news of the passing away of Prof. Saibaba erstwhile professor of the Department of English, University of Delhi. A leading figure in the struggle for democratic rights and the defence of the marginalised, Prof. Saibaba, who was 90 percent disabled and wheelchair-bound, had been convicted for being a member of the banned Maoist party on flimsy grounds of having some Maoist literature in his house. With no further evidence he had been incarcerated ten years ago and had been kept in conditions which utterly disregarded his

physical condition and resulted. In continuing deterioration of his health with no regard to his need for proper medical attention. Finally, the Maharashtra High Court acquitted him of all charges and he was discharged recently. However, his condition could not take the stress of gall bladder surgery and he passed away due to haemorrhage and cardiac arrest.

Prof. Saibaba's death is nothing short of an institutional murder and the Indian state and judiciary which failed not only to protect him but actually subjected him to the most brutal and inhuman conditions of incarceration, denying him even the basic medical attention and keeping him jailed, must be held accountable for this tortuous behaviour.

Even as it offers its deepest condolences to his wife Vasanta Kumari and his daughter, AIFRTE appeals to all democratic organisations and individuals to unite against state institutions that continue to murder such fighters for the people's rights while providing access to legal relief to convicted rapists and criminals.

We demand that they be held fully

accountable and their conduct be subjected to investigation to place responsibility on those who have led to his death. They cannot be allowed to get away with this murder.

Prof. Jagmohan Singh (Chairperson)

Prof. Madhu Prasad (Spokesperson)

Dr. Prasad V (Organizing Secretary)



Talk by
Prof. Anand Teltumbde



(This talk was delivered by Prof. Anand Teltumbde at the 'Remembering in Solidarity: Com. GN Saibaba' webinar organised by All India Forum for Right To Education (AIFRTE) on October 15, 2024)

(This talk was delivered by Prof. Anand Teltumbde at the 'Remembering in Solidarity: Com. GN Saibaba' webinar organised by All India Forum for Right To Education (AIFRTE) on October 15, 2024)

I saw Sai first during the Mumbai resistance in 2004. Many of you might be aware that in the World Social Forum, we had organised Mumbai Resistance - 2004 and I saw him for the first time there. If I remember it correctly, those days Sai did

not have a wheelchair and travelled all over using his slippers as support for his palms. Thereafter, I kept seeing him off and on until his arrest in 2014. Whenever I went to Delhi, there used to be meetings in JNU and DU and some other public events in all of which Sai used to be there. I was happy to see him graduating to a wheelchair and then, to a car. He had invited me to a couple of lectures in Delhi University too. Like many others, I was struck by his courage and commitment.

Frankly, when Sai was first arrested in 2014, I thought he would die in prison itself. It was the sheer power of his grit that he came out victorious, defeating the sad system. I was part of The Committee for the Defence and Release of GN Saibaba set up for him. Almost everyone who tried for a release stands rounded up by the state, into what is called a Bhima Koregaon or Elgar Prashad case.

Before that, one should remember to understand the pattern. Arun Ferreira and Murali were arrested in a very similar case with similar charges. When it created an

outrage among his friends - Arun's friends because he is a Bandra boy, and there was lot of outrage in Bombay, the Nagpur Anti-Naxal Police had issued a threat that whosoever came to his support would also be arrested. At the end, the courts could find nothing in him and he was acquitted.

The Operation Greenhunt came in 2005. By 2009, Sai became a voice against Operation Greenhunt: a brazen anti-constitutional and sinister campaign one could say. Even Supreme Court had criticized it and on that, asked the government to stop it. Sai became a prominent voice against Greenhunt along with many others. He and his co-accused became the next preys. It created bigger outrage. Whosoever came to defend them, was threatened and later arrested in the next case, that is our case. The size went on. Initially, Arun and Murli were two. Then, Sai and his co-accused became six. And Bhima Koregaon fell short by two for a multiple of three. That is, it ended with sixteen. So, BK-16 as it acquired upon the short name. Saibaba's defence figure as a prominent charge in our charge sheet.

Surendra Gadling, was his defence consulate at trial court. He is running his seventh year in jail in the Bhima Koregaon case. Hany Babu, who was the secretary of the Committee for the Defence and Release of GN Saibaba is running his fifth year and I, as a member of the defence committee already spent 31 months before I got a bail. When the Gadchiroli trial court convicted them all, we were shocked. They were all awarded life imprisonment excepting for one. We are more shocked reading the verdict. For a layman like me, it read ridiculous. Legal people commented more sensibly. It did not discuss any evidence and was replete with opinions. It said something like this, that if the judge had his way. he would give them all death sentence.

We kept hearing in jail about the torture, both physical and mental [which] the state was inflicting on Sai. His petitions for seeing his dying mother, was rejected.

The saga of the viciousness of the state and Sai's endurance will be remembered for times to come. They would be the

beacon for the struggling humanity. Sai of course, becomes a symbol for hundreds of people who died his death. At this moment, we should not forget Pandu Narote, an Adivasi man [and] his co-accused who died in custody.

Naturally, when the high court acquitted all the accused in Sai's case, we were very happy. But this happiness remained short lived as the state appealed the verdict. The Supreme Court faulted the high court judgement for not having considered the merit and taken a shortcut in validating the case for want of proper sanction order. Sanction order is an important check. When the UAPA was being legislated, that time, Chidambaram had told that there is a something like a sanction order that is required to register a case. But, for the Supreme Court, it was as if the sanction [order] in UAPA was a mere formality. It passed an unusual order, that the case would be heard again by a new bench of the high court. It implied doubt on the integrity of the bench. In consequence, one member of the bench had resigned. The Supreme Court bench had verbally

observed that brain is more dangerous and direct involvement is not necessary. The high court took another two years and again acquitted him and all his co accused. Again, the state went to the Supreme Court appealing [against] the acquittal, saying that Sai's release would be dangerous for the security of the nation. The 90 percent disabled person that he was: who could not do a damn thing without assistance; who was completely hollowed out bodily in the prison; was a security trade to the nation lest with nuclear weapons and which flaunts as an emergent super-power. Fortunately, the bench of the Supreme Court rejected this irrational plea and let him come out. We were happy, happier that he came out, albeit in a dilapidated health. He was struck twice by Corona that seriously weakened his arms and contacted many other ailments. But he had a strong will to fight them out and was determined to live. I for one, now believed, he would soon come out and be in his elements soonest. Alas, he barely lived for seven months. Those who tormented him, may rejoice that his death spared this nation; a

threat to its security. I am sad, beyond words for these brainless creatures. Sad for this country of 1.4 billion people which has lost its moral spine before them. I feel sad for Vasantha and Manjeera. Manjeera, whom I had seen as a child in his house and was pleasantly surprised to see her on TV the other day having grown into an intelligent young girl. Their suffering cannot be assuaged by words. I just wish them strength. I would end with my red salutes to Sai. Thank you all.

The speech has been transcribed by Shashank SR, PhD Scholar at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru.



Talk by
Prof. Haragopal



(This talk was delivered by Prof. Haragopal at 'Remembering in Solidarity: Com. GN Saibaba' webinar organised by All India Forum for Right To Education (AIFRTE) on October 15, 2024)

I think it is befitting that AIFRTE should hold this meeting remembering Saibaba and his contributions because the central question that is involved is the very autonomy of the university and freedom of a teacher in a university. That's how AIFRTE was concerned even on earlier occasions when we discussed Saibaba and later Anand and other colleagues. Our concern was about what was happening to

the freedom of the teachers because, gradually, it was being squeezed.

Of course, my memory of Saibaba goes back to his days in University of Hyderabad where he was a student and, in those days, there was no wheel chair. He used to crawl wearing gloves on his hands. He used to use his hands for walking and my room, was located upstairs. So, he would climb all those stairs sometimes to come to my room. He was by then, known as a very intelligent student in the Department of English of University of Hyderabad. That's my first memory of Saibaba that, somebody so disabled was so determined to continue his education. His family members recall that otherwise innocent mother used to carry him on her shoulders to the school. She knew that was the only way her son would cope up and settle down in his life, she was not wrong. Saibaba rose to the expectation of his mother, whenever I met her, she would ask the question that when we will get him out from the prison. Saibaba was not only a serious student but interested in larger questions. And the way he would attend some of our meetings which were usually on contemporary

challenges. University of Hyderabad at that point of time was a very lively and vibrant place. It was physically uncomfortable for him to even come to the meeting. But he would struggle. Later, of course, he was with the civil rights and several social and political struggles. As already pointed out by Anand, his determination, courage and conviction were something very hard to believe.

One day, I saw him discussing with an eminent agricultural economist about the entire agrarian crisis, classification of the peasantry and all that despite being a student of literature. I was quite surprised to see that a student of literature engaging himself in a dialogue, on the entire agrarian structure, and oppression. Such was his interest in the Indian agrarian structure and its crisis.

But I would like to say something that Anand touched upon, about the Committee for the Defence and Release of GN Saibaba. Once he was arrested, and was released for some time before his second arrest, he came to Hyderabad and his health condition was very bad. So, we admitted him in a corporate hospital.

because he needed that type of attention. He was there for 30 days and the expenses were running very high, coming to almost 13 lakhs. Then, I met the chairman of the Hospital. Since I knew him, I explained to him that we had to raise public funds and he had no savings or any income. We explained that we would be able to raise two or three lakhs. The chairman said, "Our hospital would absorb the entire cost" and they did not take a single pie from us.

The doctor explained that Saibaba was suffering from about 17-18 ailments. By then, he was not able even to raise his hand and then, the Hospital called a doctor from Delhi because they didn't have that type of expertise. When a specialist came, he said Saibaba required surgery that would help him to raise the hand thirty percent. But we thought it was not very desirable to have Saibaba undergo that type of a major operation for 30 percent improvement and then, the doctor said, "May be there would be some breakthrough as time passes. We'll see".

He carried on with his health problems and at no point of time did this deter him from what he was doing. But when he was

arrested the second time and was under a prolonged incarceration, his condition deteriorated. In the meanwhile, Anand also was arrested. The Indian state was continuously following what the defence committee was doing. when NIA officer came to my house, he asked about Saibaba and was probing more about four members of defence committee Anand, Gautam Navlakha, Hany babu and Rona Wilson. He went on asking "What I think of Anand and the other colleagues. I said these are all men of great conviction. They are persons with larger concerns The enquiry was more to gather evidence to be presented to the Court. He also inquired about Varvara Rao. These are the people about whom the State is bothered just because of their convictions.

Saibaba would write letters to me from prison. Once I went to Nagpur. They allowed me, but the Mulakath has become trivial in one sense. Neither you can see him nor he can see us. And, you have to speak on the telephone. He was constantly inquiring updates and discussing and in the meanwhile some officer from the intelligence was watching. Whenever we were inquiring about his health jail

authorities would reply "No, he is okay. We have a hospital, we have doctors". They assert "we have taken care of him". But that he was put in the Anda Cell itself was inhuman. If you know of Arun Ferreira and his experiences you know what Anda Cell means, and one gets terribly frightened. The type of punishment given is such that they are oblivious to Justice Krishna Ayyar's observation that Jail is not a punishing place. In some parts of India it is called correctional administration. What do you mean by correctional administration? If somebody commits a crime, you are supposed to be treating them humanely and sending them back. This is a political conviction. It's not a crime! Even Supreme Court sometime said that beliefs do not constitute a part of the crime. The Supreme Court has been saying this in certain cases. But when it comes to a person like Saibaba, he cannot participate in any action. This is what we were arguing. He can't participate in any action given the physical limitations of his body. As Anand was referring to the judgement, the judgement followed that he has a powerful mind. It is something that reminds me of [Antonio] Gramsci, when the judge said

that such a brilliant mind can't be outside. something of that kind happened to Saibaba. The judgement of the Gadchiroli session court is such a judgement that we were so shocked that when the judgement said that the UAPA has tied the hands of the judge not allowing him to award the death punishment! I can't just imagine judiciary asking for more powers to punish than protecting the rights of the citizen and the type of accusations made are frivolous. He fights for prisoners' rights, he fights this and that and therefore, it amounts to committing crime.

I spoke to Kishan Reddy because he is from my state and was the minister of state Home I said, 'you don't need to do anything but at least ask the jailer to give him support to take him to the toilet as he [Saibaba] was suffering a lot. He promised me that he would intervene. Since he could not stand, he needed always support of two persons. But, at one point, two of his jail mates were helping. These two persons stopped helping that they were exhausted. And from the defence committee, we were struggling to get him the minimum comfort. Then, I met governor of Maharashtra, Vidyasagar Rao who was

from my state and I knew him for a long time. I went and met him in his place in Bombay. Of course, Vidyasagar Rao said that he would definitely intervene and in front of me, he spoke to somebody saying he be given minimum facilities and that, just because he is a prisoner, we should not treat them that way. And, Mallepally Laxmaiah, one of the well-known Dalit writers wrote an article on Saibaba and governor got it translated into Hindi and sent it to the jail.

Government of Maharashtra was determined. I think the whole purpose of incarcerating Saibaba was not only that he should be made to suffer, but the Indian state wanted a message to be sent that anybody having any political convictions would face these types of consequences. They had a totally different kind of intention in putting Saibaba behind bars. Then, we went to Sharad Pawar and wanted his intervention. Saibaba was telling me last time that when Sharad Pawar group came to power, they had sent the Home Minister to Nagpur jail. When Saibaba was trying to explain the conditions in the jail and the conditions of the prisoners, he said, "We do not want

you telling us about others. You tell me what you want." Saibaba was worried about others, the conditions are very wretched in the jail. So, Saibaba was narrating that "the minister went only to discuss his problems but not the entire conditions in the jail".

Some of these are efforts we did make but the university, the court; then the jail, You take any institution of the state they are all collapsing. Institutions have collapsed. Take for instance, the way Delhi University treated Saibaba when he was acquitted. He came for medical checkup to Hyderabad from the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences after a checkup they said his case would come three months later treatment. He came to Hyderabad. He got admitted in the NIMS one of the very good public institutions, even in the hospital, he was continuously talking about going back to Delhi getting reinstated and starting teaching. He was not talking anything about his health. He said that, "I want to be reinstated". And when the doctor said that there is a stone in his gallbladder, he rushed to Delhi to attend to the court case about his reinstatement. By the time he returned that stone in the gallbladder had dropped into pancreas. The doctor was

telling that, "If only we had undertaken the surgery at that point of time, this complication could have been avoided". Now, when he had to be operated, doctor was continuously telling us it was very critical. The damage that was done to his body during those 10 years [of incarceration] was almost irreversible. The way he had been treated; the way he had been punished was so bad. I think, the Indian state, if it has any morality should have to answer why a person was treated in such a cruel manner.

Manoranjan, Prof Narasimha Reddy and I went to see him he was continuously talking about his reinstatement. In the whole of one hour, he didn't say anything about his surgery or his body. He wanted to talk to Justice Sudershan Reddy who was one of those democratic judges who gave the Salwa Judum judgement. Justice Sudershan Reddy wanted his appointment order, the terminal order and the order of the person who was appointed in his place. But in the mean while Saibaba's complicated health and the damage that had been done to his body, was something he could no longer withstand. He withstood the toughest times when he was in the

prison. As Anand said, once he was out, we were all happy that he would go back to his profession and he will continue his struggle. But then, it's so upsetting that suddenly, he developed a complication that there was a bleeding inside his abdomen and then he developed kidney problem. All this is because of the damage done to his body in the jail because they completely neglected his health. They never took him to a good doctor. I must say this whole treatment of Saibaba is a reflection of the nature of the Indian state.

The will power and the determination with which he fought, both his body and the system is something, that would perhaps stand as a testimony of how human beings stand for convictions even in the most adverse conditions. He passed away in Hyderabad which he loved, and yesterday we had his final rites. I must tell this at this All-India forum that the way the people responded: top writers; top poets; literary figures; and the people working with civil rights movement; Dalit movement; the youth movement; several representatives of varied movements; political parties - CPI, CPM, CPML, Congress and then the BRS; all of these political parties came to

pay tribute to Saibaba and hundreds of people were there. I think, here is the tribute to a person of courage, of conviction. AIFRTE takes the case of Saibaba as a case of collapse of our institutions and criminalization of our institutions. But here is a man who reminds the shining example of Socrates who died for the truth, And the type of letters he used to write to me from the prison of four to five pages. He would send big list of books. he wrote powerful poetry. And one of the poems that he has written is I refuse to die. This is a very powerful poem he has written; I refuse to die: that he did as, long as he was in the jail. But once he was out, I think, the damage done to his body, was so irreversible and he is no longer with us. But I think, his conviction, his courage, his capability to withstand the toughest condition, his belief systems, and the passion for teaching, the passion for writing will stand as an inspiring example.

I only wish that he captured his experience in the prison. It would have been very insightful on the nature of Indian state, which he could not do. But I think all of us have to remember Saibaba and then raise the questions keeping Saibaba as a

reference point about autonomous institutions; nature of Indian state; nature of Indian prisons; nature of the health systems. ugly reality of Indian society is frightening about the future of Indian society

Saibaba will be remembered, as a martyr who died for his convictions. His memory will stand as an inspiring example for the younger generations. That here was a person who died for his own convictions.

(The speech has been transcribed by Shashank SR, PhD Scholar at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru.)



Talk by
Prof. Madhu Prasad



(This talk was delivered by Prof. Madhu Prasad at 'Remembering in Solidarity: Com. GN Saibaba' webinar organised by All India Forum for Right To Education (AIFRTE) on October 15, 2024)

All though words, normally at a time like this don't really mean much, the two words that are lingering in my mind, listening to you [Prof. Anand Teltumbde and Prof. Haragopal who had spoken just before Prof. Madhu Prasad spoke] and also the experience that I had of my limited contact with Sai, but much more

with Vasantha are "courage and dignity." When one heard about how Saibaba was being treated in the jail and what his condition was, we did of course have the background of the way people were treated. Later, we were to see Pandu Narote and before that Father Stan Swamy lose their lives because of the callous neglect and insensitivity of the jail authorities and the judiciary. We were also to witness and experience at the Delhi University what had happened with our colleague, SAR Geelani which was all really so very painful. He was tortured before his young children and even after his acquittal shot by the police outside his lawyers office. But what was really painful was not just to see the courage of these people but to see the weakness and the inability of those who were in the system: whether they were there as administration; whether they were there as judiciary; and more particularly the judiciary. Because, they could have been far more independent. They could have taken stronger positions. How did they who, today, allow convicted rapists and criminals to get all kinds of benefits of legal conditions, never provide for people

like Stan Swamy; like Sai; like Pandu Narote, when he was down with swine flu; like Gilani, who was shot by the police outside his lawyer's house.

I mean, why are these things allowed and why do we call ourselves a democratic country; when this is happening to our citizens, and there's not even any evidence or basis for the incarceration of these people? It just seems to be enough for the agency to say, we think that this person is dangerous for the state. We want to tell them that the state is not separate from its people. There is nothing which is threatening for the state if there is no law and no justice for the people. I cannot understand how a judiciary which finds it so easy to give benefits to criminals, finds it impossible to be able to state firmly that these people are being subjected to the worst kind of torture only because they are standing up in defence of democratic rights.

We used to receive information about what happened with Saibaba through Vasantha. One used to get this information in the university whenever

we met, and we would meet fairly frequently, because she was always present. This was the important thing. They never fought only for themselves. They were always there when other people's democratic rights were being trampled upon. When Anand, Hany Babu, were arrested for no other reason except that these were people who were members of the Committee for Defence and Release of GN Saibaba. That was the only reason why they were being picked up and therefore, I feel it is something very important for us. We must take up these issues. We must take up this issue of why the judiciary in particular, and why the state violates its own rules and regulations? Why the judiciary does not provide facilities for those who so desperately need them? When people are in conditions where their health and their survival is in question, how is it that you can allow these things to happen when you don't even have evidence for anything against them?

So, I think it is important for us to raise these issues, these laws which they are bringing in. Laws which allow the state

to punish a person who has not even been tried; who's not even been charged properly. How are these laws allowed to exist and to be used?

And second is, how are people denied the essential humanitarian medical facilities which are required by them? I don't think that these are issues that we are calling for are too much. These are issues we fought for even during the freedom struggle when the British were keeping people in jail. People were asking and even now, we have to ask why does this happen? How can we allow them to get away with this? And I think that it's really very important for us to raise these issues now, particularly because of Saibaba's case because of his severe disability and health requirements and because of his stature as a professor at the university and a person with so much love and respect from his students. Because of this, even the media has had to take note of the situation; has had to take note of the way in which he has been treated, and so this is something which has reached people. And I think we really should take

up these issues and pursue these questions.

I hope the committee for Defence and Release of GN Saibaba will continue and I hope, that the committee will take up these issues so that, we can continue this fight which Sai actually wanted. He was not worried only about himself. He wanted to struggle for everyone else. And I think, given the fact that we have so tragically lost him just in 7 months after he was released, it's very important for us to take these issues up.

And, it is very important for us to stand by Vasantha and Manjeera who, I feel terribly distraught by the fact that a young girl was denied the experience of being with her father. Not just that he was in the prison for ten years, but even after that when he comes out. she only has seven months with him. This is so tragic and somebody has to be held accountable for these things. Otherwise, these people will just carry on doing the things they do. They have to be held accountable; they have to be ashamed of themselves; and they have to realise that what they have done is inhuman;

and inhumanity has to be paid for. So, the feeling that we have for Vasantha and Manjeera and also for Sai, for his courage, for his commitment is something which will always inspire us. But I think that because of a commitment to someone like him, and to Vasanta who fought with so much dignity through this whole period, it is very important for us to take up this issue of how the state behaves with the people that it incarcerates. Incarceration cannot be an excuse for murder. And what is happened with Sai is not just that he was put in jail; not just that they said that he thought differently from them; but they actually are responsible for murdering a person who certainly did not deserve anything of this kind. And therefore, I think that it's very very important for us to take this up, and I hope that we will all move forward in this direction collectively.

(The speech has been transcribed by Shashank SR, PhD Scholar at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru.)

Talk by
Prof. Prof. Vikas Gupta



(This talk was delivered by Prof. Vikas Gupta at 'Remembering in Solidarity: Com. GN Saibaba' webinar organised by All India Forum for Right To Education (AIFRTE) on October 15, 2024)

Before I say anything about my long association with Sai, I also want to share with friends here that I'm sitting in the same study room where I literally burst into tears a few years back when I was conducting an online meeting as the Organizing Secretary of the All India Forum for Right To Education (AIFRTE)

where I was missing my friend Anand, our Presidium Member. When I heard the news of the untimely demise of Sai, I was feeling additionally bad, because that evening I had gone out with kids for some festivity. I generally don't want to bemoan anything, because the struggle has to go on. And therefore, in my recollections of Sai in the limited time available to us today, I would prefer to recall certain things and link them up with larger issues that we are continuously facing.

I met with Sai first when his two friends of Sai brought me in touch with him, because, those days we were fighting a disability rights battle. Sai came to my house which was on the ground floor but had one step. For the first time in the Delhi University I realized how my house could be inaccessible for people. We had to help him to lift his wheelchair and somehow enter the house. This issue is important because in the university after so many years, teachers with disability still face problems of housing.

Subsequently, Sai requested the University to accommodate him in the

Gwyer Hall hostel staff quarters. This request came to the Equal Opportunity Cell (EOC) of Delhi University. Those days, I was a core committee member and Professor Agnihotri was the chairperson of EOC. We discussed within the core committee of EOC and found that it was extremely difficult for somebody like Sai to get an appropriate accessible accommodation anywhere. The Government of India or the state governments have done nothing to make things accessible for persons with disabilities. So, we then followed up with the Vice-Chancellor and Sai was granted a residence at Gwyer Hall. This was the same residence for which, the university eventually started serving notices to Sai to vacate it. This started even before Sai's matter became a big issue in the media. This was actually prior to his incarceration.

This was the time when Sai had become quite active against the oppression of the tribal people and he was planning to raise the issue at international level. He became involved in organizing meetings at Gandhi Peace Foundation Etc. Therefore, the government thought that

it would have to stop Sai. One way to stop a person with disability is to remove him or her from the environment, where one has arranged things in order to become functional. Therefore, they started giving Sai notices to vacate Gwyer Hall residence.

I remember that one day I received a call from the then Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD), who has quasi-judicial powers. The idea was to seek some help from the office of the CCPD. This was also the time by when they had filed a case against Sai. So, we also wanted that this other case should be heard in Delhi.

Today, unfortunately neither the then Chief Commissioner, nor Sai are with us. This Chief Commissioner was a very good friend of mine. He was involved in the drafting of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2005-2006, which India also subsequently adopted in 2006-2007. This friend spoke with me off the record and asked, "what do we do?"

I narrated the whole story to the Chief Commissioner and said it's really a

genuine requirement and DU doesn't have alternative places in the colleges where Sai can put up himself. But the Chief Commissioner told me that The then Vice-Chancellor was not willing to cooperate since he had been informed that Sai was a Maoist sympathizer. However, I argued with the Chief Commissioner that I do not know whether Sai is a Maoist sympathizer or not, but neither the Constitution of India, nor the UNCRPD make a distinction in terms of the entitlements of citizens with disabilities on the grounds of their ideological convictions or social commitments. Therefore, I suggested to him to treat Sai's matter from the angle of disability, rather than on any other grounds. I am mentioning this here because people are often co-opted when they get a space in the system. However, Sai was not like them. Sai was not like this commissioner who did not help. Sai continued to fight, even though he rose from a very humble background. I think one of the reasons why they feared Sai was precisely because of this fact that he was unrelenting in his pursuit for social

justice.

The AIFRTE is engaged in a campaign for establishing a Common Education System as an mechanism to ensure equitable quality education for the most marginalized member of this society. Sai could have been one such person. He rose from that background of social, economic and regional marginalization and as a Person with Disability to becoming a Professor in Delhi University and not stopping even then but, rather fighting for the rights of the oppressed and discriminated people. He fought not just for one particular community. His struggle was for social justice and not for any one particular community. When he was involved with Hany Babu in Samajik Nyay Morcha in Delhi, we were fighting for the rights of Dalits, Adivasis and Other Backward Castes (OBCs) and students and teachers with disabilities and their reservation in Delhi University and other institutions of higher education.

Initially when I knew little less about Sai, I sometimes felt that he is not very vocal on certain issues but gradually, I realized

that Sai's spectrum of social thinking and commitment was something which was a learning lesson for all of us. If you are against inequality, then you have to be against inequality of all kinds. It is not just that you support of, or ignorant of one kind of marginalisation and champion the rights of people facing another kind of marginalization. One can do that, but one also has to maintain a synergy with all such struggles.

I have seen this large spectrum of concern and commitment not just in Sai, but also in my friend Vasantha. She has been, as Prof. Madhu Prasad rightly pointed out, present in all the struggles and she still keeps attending. I see her at the Jantar Mantar, at the Press Club, at Gandhi Peace Foundation and all other places which speaks for her commitment. I am sure that Manjeera is going to carry on that legacy.

When Vasanta came to my house after Sai's incarceration to inform me that Sai had written a letter remembering me, not just me, but even my wife had no words to say anything at that juncture. We were just feeling helpless. I

remember, when I wanted to meet him in Nagpur, Prof. Haragopal informed me how the prison authorities were unresponsive.

At various press conferences over these years which I addressed as a member of the Committee for the Defence and Release of GN Saibaba, I have been saying that as soon as you put somebody behind bars and then ask him or her to prove innocence, you already put the accused in an iniquitous situation. You are asking somebody to prove innocence while being inactive. Interestingly and courageously, even though this happened to Sai, his resilience ensured justice. We all were there with some greater and some lesser abilities to contribute but I think ultimately Sai's resilience is a lesson. And I saw that.

I remember that when he was released and he came to Delhi, I went to meet him at his house. And I just said a few words and then for almost 20 or more minutes, Sai kept speaking. He was holding my hand with extraordinary strength and spoke so passionately.

Initially, he began talking about what can be done with the college to get him reinstated. But then, he started talking about the struggles going around and other issues.

I feel very sorry for this university. The reason being that if University has academic autonomy, then it should rise to protect academic autonomy of intellectuals. But what the Delhi University did was completely the reverse of it. Rather than helping someone, Delhi University was insisting that Sai vacate its premises. That was the background. They were trying to get rid of anything related to Sai and the college authorities took no delay in terminating him. Usually, in such matters, people are suspended, but the college terminated Sai despite all requests from Vasanta and from other people and that too when the case was still going-on and there was no other way for their survival.

We were there on both the occasions when the police raided Gwyer Hall where Sai was staying. A good number of teachers and other people were

standing there witnessing everything that was happening. However, we were not made the witness. A barber from a barber's shop just outside the Gwyer Hall was called to sign as the witness. And then, on that flimsy evidence, they dragged this case for so long.

I think, in this case, cognizance should have been taken to provide Sai an accessible environment to spend his time even within the jail, or the case could have been heard in Delhi. All these pleas went unheard because they wanted to teach lessons to the people. They wanted to shut up the people who are standing in support of the oppressed sections of this society against the corporate loot. They needed the strongest example for conveying that we will not spare anybody. So the strongest thing they could have thought was somebody like Sai - an academician who is wheelchair bound. Of course, they didn't stop there because they thought that it's not the body but the mind. This also came up in the court during the trial. They had the threat of the mind of Sai and not that of the body. That's what

they tried killing. But they were unsuccessful because Sai kept writing in his letters, in his poetry, and when he came back as well, he kept talking about the ways to continue the struggle. But, they had already done enough damage to the body that it didn't survive.

These are the status quoist forces. They are afraid of those voices who are championing the cause of change. And I think, Sai was one of the best, and he'll remain to be so for future, examples of the change that is possible within "Welfarist Model" where somebody with so much of difficulties, so much of inequality, so much of disadvantages can rise and fight for social justice and for the rights of other people. I think, that could have been, an in fact, it is an example to be emulated. They want such examples not to be emulated, because they want the society to remain iniquitous, and to become more iniquitous. So that, a few people can become richer and richer and the vast majority of this country continues to languish in poverty and hunger.

I don't think that this is going to happen

because the kind of response that the fate of Sai has got from people is going to trigger optimism, not depression. I stop here with my comradely salute to all those who have been involved with the battles that Sai was fighting, including Vasantha who just didn't settle down a small family with Sai. Their love did not settle down with the family. Their love materialised in extending that 'family' to embrace the whole of humanity. I really wish that this notion of love of humanity spreads, and not the evil deeds of the oppressor. I stop here.

(The speech has been transcribed by Shashank SR, PhD Scholar at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru.)



AIFRTE Statement on CBSE not allowing exams to be taken in Urdu but only in English and Hindi

24th September 2024
New Delhi

AIFRTE is shocked by this decision taken in the middle of the current academic year. It is not only an irrational position to be adopted in India which has schooling in its many developed and advanced languages, but is also insensitive to the situation of thousands of students studying in institutions functioning under the Maulana Azad National University in Hyderabad, in Nuh district in Haryana and Darbhanga district in Bihar.

AIFRTE has been demanding that

students be allowed to take exams in all Indian languages as it recognises and respects the linguistic diversity and plurality of our country. It also focuses on the significance of the federal character of decision-making and functioning in education.

To find that the central government has arbitrarily and irrationally taken the decision to exclude Urdu which was allowed previously is absolutely condemnable and we demand that this order be immediately withdrawn.

Prof. Jagmohan Singh (Chairperson)

Prof. Madhu Prasad (Spokesperson)

Dr. Prasad V (Organizing Secretary)



Press Release condoling the passing away of Com. Sitaram Yechury

13th September 2024
New Delhi.

AIFRTE is deeply grieved and shocked by the passing away of CPI(M) General Secretary, Comrade Sitaram Yechury on the afternoon of 12th September 2024. He had been admitted to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences at New Delhi on 19th August with a severe respiratory infection which unfortunately did not respond ultimately even to intensive care and the latest medication for his condition.

Com. Sitaram was 72 years old and a leading contributor to the establishment of an alliance of united left, progressive and

democratic movements in the country. The importance of such an alliance cannot be underestimated in present circumstances with the growth of right-wing, fascist forces and the control of the BJP/RSS over the institutions of power and governance in the country. The threat to the constitutional integrity and unity of the country required the theoretical and political acumen and maturity of a leader of Sitaram's stature and he never failed to be equal to the task before him. His death leaves a deep void that only the political will and unity of the people, which he worked so hard to mobilise, can fill.

Com. Sitaram's involvement in the country's political life and in the unrelenting struggle for the people's rights began when he joined the Students Federation of India (SFI) as a graduate student of Economics at the then recently established Jawaharlal University (JNU). He would win its students union presidential election an unprecedented three times after the Emergency in 1977. He joined the CPI(M) and became a central committee member at the age of 32 years. At 40 he became a Polit Bureau member and was elected General Secretary in 2015, holding

that position until his death. He also served two terms as a Rajya Sabha member reaching out to members across political persuasions and impressing all with his intellectual and oratory skills.

AIFRTE delegations had met with Com. Sitaram Yechury several times in their efforts to bring education and opposition to the National Education Policy (NEP 2020) to the forefront of the political and electoral agenda of India's leading political parties. We were always received with a well-informed and sensitive response to the problems facing education even in states ruled by progressive, democratic parties. As in all other spheres of struggle, Sitaram worked to promote unity among students and teacher's unions and associations to further the fight against the policies of corporatisation and centralisation being aggressively pushed by union governments of all shades over the past 25 years.

No greater homage could be paid to Com. Sita as he was popularly known than to carry on firmly in our resolve to further the cause of a democratic public funded system of education based on the

scientific and secular constitutional values of equality and social justice.

AIFRTE offers its deepest condolences to Com. Sitaram's family as well as extended network of comrades.

Prof. Jagmohan Singh (Chairperson)

Prof. Madhu Prasad (Spokesperson)

Dr. Prasad V (Organizing Secretary)



Argentine university teachers hold class in the Street

Narandas Mohan

As part of a 48-hour national teachers' strike that began on October 21, 109 public classes and different educational activities are set to take place in Plaza de Mayo square, in front of the government house, also known as Casa Rosada.

In early October, Argentina's Congress failed to overturn Milei's controversial veto of a law that would have shored up university spending in line with inflation, following mass protests by students and university workers against the measure.

Milei argues that the law would jeopardize a fiscal balance he has promoted to tackle a long-running economic crisis, and has pledged to veto anything that threatens it. Argentina's health, pension and education spending have been the hardest hit by Milei's public cuts.

Argentina's General Confederation of Labour confirmed that the four teaching unions under its purview would wait for the outcome of wage negotiations before deciding whether to strike.

Teacher salaries are not the only source of conflict between the national and provincial governments. In recent days, all governors except Tucumán's Osvaldo Jaldo have lashed

out against Milei for refusing to transfer funding to provinces, backing Chubut governor Ignacio Torres, who warned that he would stop sending oil and gas to the rest of the country until his province receives its share of federal taxes.

Vehement protest marches under the leadership of various teachers' organisations had been held in Buenos Aires and 24 provinces in Argentina. The streets were echoed with the slogans to protect public education system in the country .The government recently had made cuts in the public education funds. The reforms started by the government were in tune with the neo-liberalisation policies of the -- government which is the same declared by 'the World bank and World Trade Organisation. The policy urges the governments to stop welfare measures and not to give any free services. All government services should be on the basis of payment. Privatisation of education is a part of

this decision taken by the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation.

Since the 1980s, the debate on education vouchers has been prominent along with the more general efforts to institute market forces, school choice, and privatisation in education sectors in many countries. Across the globe, school vouchers come in many forms, but essentially, a school voucher constitutes a certificate of public funding of a specific amount that parents of students are being offered to use in any school - usually private - of the parents' choosing that accepts such vouchers. The teaching community in Argentina protests against the education voucher scheme which the government have declared to implement. The result of this scheme will be the complete destruction of the public education system. The government want to stream out the public fund to private sector. Some parents will be influenced and allured by this promise

thinking that their children are fortunate to get quality education.

The advocates of education Voucher scheme claim that it gives the opportunity to all parents to choose school of their choice. It pressures failing schools to get better. It gives low income children a way out of public schools with bad environments. It also claims that it ends public school monopoly

But now the teachers of Argentina are well aware that these are all fake claims to attract the parents. They are convinced that the scheme takes money away from public schools. It decrease in services available to public school children. The public funds normally go to parochial schools. It is the violation of separation of church and state. Education Voucher Scheme treats learning like a commodity which can be purchased in the free market. Private schools have little or no accountability which could lead to

corruption. Undesirable groups can start their own school that will receive public funding. They divert attention from much needed reforms, such as smaller class sizes. The massive marches and demonstrations in Argentina reveal the reality that the intellectual section of the country starts to realize the intention of the global Corporate Commercial Groups.

Teachers are also dissatisfied with their salary system. University and secondary school teachers gathered to attend a national strike held in front of the National Congress to demand better salaries in Buenos Aires, Argentina on August 14, 2024. The first of the strike days, defined by the Trade Union Front of National Universities, received high support nationwide according to union sources and various public universities, with participation estimated to be over 90%. The measure of force is in demand for the deterioration of the salaries of teachers and non-teachers: the Trade Union Front estimates that

the loss of purchasing power is around 50% since the beginning of the year. The demonstrators protested President Javier Milei's decision to cut a national fund that contributes to teachers' salaries.

Argentina's teaching community has evolved as a role model to the fighting forces in education all over the world.



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Hundreds of thousands of Argentines have taken to the streets to voice outrage at budgetary cuts to higher education



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