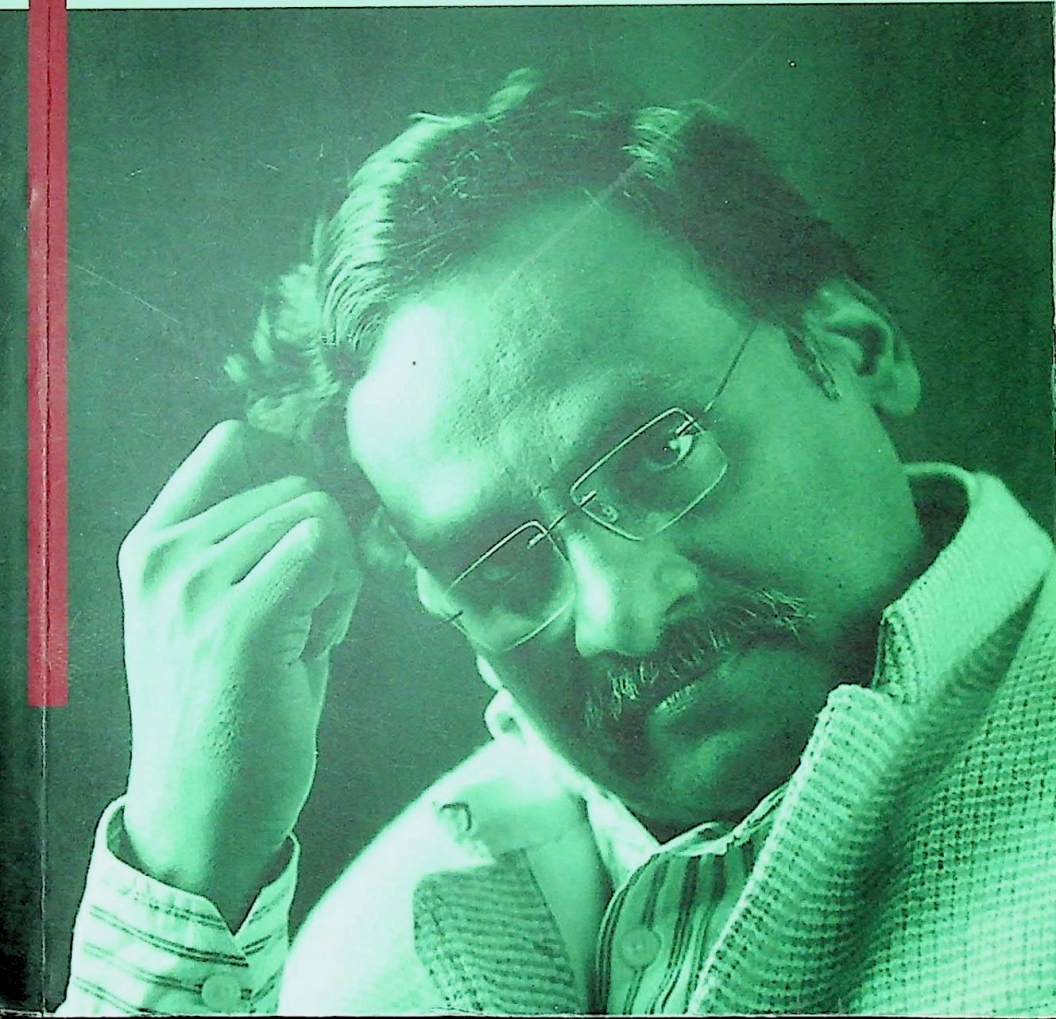




# HE WHO DEFIED DEATH

LIFE AND TIMES OF PROF. G.N. SAIBABA





# **He Who Defied Death**

**Life and Times of Prof. G.N. Saibaba**

**March-2025**

***Committee for the Defense and Release of Dr. G.N. Saibaba***

**He who defied death: Life and times of Prof. G. N. Saibaba**

An anthology of remembrances, memoirs, obituaries

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Death in the life of Saibaba

Was not just the physical demise

Death approached him in many ways

His entire life

As polio

As poverty

As a hanging sword on his neck

Throughout his consistent struggles

As a false case

As criminal indifference of judiciary

As cruel conviction for life

As inhuman treatment in Anda Cell in Nagpur jail

As systematic, deliberate destruction of each of his organs...

Yet

***He Defied each of all these Deaths***

With incomparable determination and grit

***Committee for the Defense and Release of Dr. G N Saibaba***

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## **Timeline of Prof G. N. Saibaba's life**

1967 July 24	Born to Gokarakonda Satyanarayana Murthy and Suryavathi at Sannavillinear Amalapuram, East Godavari district, Andhra Pradesh
1972	Affected with Polio Paraplegia due to lack of vaccination
1977-1982	School education at St. John's High School, Amalapuram
1982-84	Intermediate(Mathmatics, Physics and Chemistry) at SKBR College, Amalapuram
1984-87	B.A. (English Literature)Andhra University, SKBR College, Amalapuram
1987-89	M.A. (English),University of Hyderabad
1990	Registered for M.Phil. at University of Hyderabad but could not complete
1990 Feb	Nizam College meeting – revolutionary balladeer Gaddar'spublic appearance after four years exile
1990 August	Participated actively in the movement to implement Mandal Commission recommendations in favour of reservations for Backward Castes
1991	PG Diploma in Teaching English (PGDTE) at the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages – CIEFL, Now EFLU)
1992	Agitation for regularization of daily wage mess workers of CIEFL
1992	Worked at Warangal FM Radio Station
1992	Joined as Lecturer in Government Polytechnic, Kakinada
1992	Joined Virasam (Revolutionary Writers' Association)
1992	Qualified for UGC-NET-JRF

1992-93	Registered for Ph.D. at CIEFL but could not complete
1993-94	Joined as Lecturer in Institute of Printing Technology, Secunderabad
1995 Action	Campaign in solidarity with prisoners' struggle – Joint Committee for Democratic Rights
1995	AIPRF Andhra Pradesh State secretary
1996	International Seminar on Nationality Question in New Delhi
1996	Publication of Symphony of Freedom– Papers on Nationality Question published by AIPRF
1996	Became All India General Secretary, AIPRF
1997	Organized Democratic Telangana seminar and release of Warangal Declaration
1998	Forum against Imperialist Globalization (FAIG)
2000 June 9	Saibaba's sister Com. Bhavani, was killed in a fake encounter in Kanagal, Nalgonda district
2003	Joined Ram Lal Anand College, Delhi University as Assistant Professor
2004	Mumbai Resistance 2004
2005	Government of India began war on Adivasis of Central Indian forests in the name of Salwa Judum. Saibaba organized intensive campaign against it.
2006 Sept 25	Saibaba's father Satyanarayana passed away in Hyderabad
2006	Became Assistant Secretary, Revolutionary Democratic Front (RDF)
2007 Mar 23	Formed Visthapan Virodhi Jan Vikas Andolan (VVJVA) at Ranchi
2009	Government of India began Operation Green Hunt, a new phase of war on Adivasis. Saibaba organized intensive campaign against it
2009	Forum against War on People was formed
2011	Supreme Court strikes down Special Police Officers – Salwa Judum

2012	RDF's first conference, Hyderabad
2013	Awarded Ph.D. by Delhi University for his thesis – Indian Writing in English and Nation Making
2013 Sep 12	Maharashtra Police Raid on Saibaba's house at Delhi
2014 May 9	Abducted from Delhi by Maharashtra Police and announced Arrest
2014 May	While taking him to Aheri from Delhi, he was not allowed to have a wheelchair, and his left hand was pulled to drag him leading to rupture and permanent damage of muscle and nerves
2015 June	Interim Bail on medical grounds granted by Mumbai High Court from 15 June to December 2015. But Mumbai High Court bench at Nagpur ordered him to surrender back to Nagpur Central Jail
2016 April	Regular Bail granted by Supreme Court
2017 Mar 7	Conviction Judgment by Gadchiroli Sessions Court pronouncing Life Imprisonment to five accused including Saibaba
2018	Appeal on the Judgement at Mumbai High Court bench at Nagpur
2018 Feb	Yuddhakaalamlo Swapnaalu (Telugu: యుద్ధకాలంలో స్వప్నాలు), G N Saibaba's Telugu translation of Dreams in the Times of War by Ngugi waThiongo, published by Malupu Books, Hyderabad
2018	Reports on deteriorating health of Saibaba with multiple issues - Apical Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, brachial plexus injury, hypertension, Fatty Liver Grade I, Gall Bladder stones, pancreatitis, syncope, Cyst in brain, kidney stones, Scoliosis. Frequent reports of fainting and losing consciousness in jail. Suffered without any assistance and Medical care
2020 Aug 01	Saibaba's mother Suryavathi passed away fighting cancer in Hyderabad. Jail authorities did not allow him to attend his mother's funeral despite several requests. Several appeals for bail and parole were rejected by the judiciary.
2021 Mar	Delhi University dismissed Saibaba from the job

2022 Mar	'Why Do You Fear My Way So Much' Poems and Letters from Prison by G N Saibaba, published by Speaking Tiger, New Delhi
2022	Published Nenu ChaavunuNiraakaristunnaanu (Telugu: నేను చావును నిరాకరిస్తున్నాను) – Collection of poems by G N Saibaba in Telugu, published by Virasam
2022 Oct	Nagpur bench acquittal on technical grounds (first acquittal Judgment)
2022 Oct	Supreme Court stayed Nagpur bench acquittal within 24 hours, with unusual haste
2023	Supreme Court returns the case to Nagpur bench
2024 Mar	Nagpur division bench judgment pronounced acquittal (second time) on both technical grounds and on merit
2024	Government of India appeals to Supreme Court to strike down the acquittal judgment
2024	Hospitalization at AIIMS, ILBS, New Delhi and NIMS, Hyderabad
2024 Sept 28	Gall bladder removal surgery at NIMS, Hyderabad
2024 Oct 12	Demise at NIMS, Hyderabad fighting with multiple organ failure
2024 Oct 12	Donation of eyes to LV Prasad Eye Hospital
2024 Oct 14	Donation of body to Gandhi Medical College, Secunderabad

## **Preface**

In the recent past, no struggle and sacrifice evoked as much of national and international response as Saibaba's demise. The reflections on Saibaba's martyrdom have come from a wide range of democratic individuals and progressive sections of the society. At a time when the state has been employing varied weapons to silence the democratic voices, Saibaba's death broke the silence reassuring that the vibrancy of the democratic society is fully alive. Saibaba's voice is reverberating through the Social Democratic climate all over India. One thing common in almost all the voices included in this volume relate to his rural background, his mother's anxiety, the polio attack crippling his body, his tireless and successful pursuit of education, his commitment for revolutionary transformation, the movements that he participated, his courage of conviction and clarity of the purpose, his decade long failing health and incarceration, the fascist nature of the state and its institutions. It also includes the collapse of the rule of law, and the cruelty of prison authorities. This also includes his intimate and friendly relation with Vasantha and his daughter Manjeera.

Saibaba was continuously battling with his body at one level and structural violence and injustice at another level. He was fearless and uncompromising. It is unbelievable that he survived attack of Corona and innumerable ailments. The letters that he wrote to me were worrisome. The last letter that he wrote from jail in 2024 was totally upsetting. He wrote that he was not sure that he would survive

the Nagpur summer that year. Yet he sent an extensive list of books for his reading in the jail. What prolonged Saibaba's life perhaps was his dream for an alternative social economic order and dawn of a humane, equal, fair and just society and unflinching faith in the struggling people.

Each paper in this volume is in terms of concerns and appreciation and admiration of Saibaba's courage and iron determination. The reflections of Meena Kandaswamy, Professors Karen Gabriel and Saroj Giri to mention a few, are not only pieces of precious literature, but touch higher historical, philosophical, and theoretical heights. They raise some very fundamental questions.

This volume will not only have contemporary relevance, but will be of historical significance. The life of some individuals and their memories remain as lamp posts of the times that they lived. Their lives are both products of history and their contributions to making history. How history chooses some individuals to articulate the transformative process, to me, continues to be a puzzle. Saibaba belongs to that category of rare human beings. This volume will not only impact the contemporary social and political processes but will form a part of lasting collective memory and source of inspiration for generations to come.

*Prof. G. Haragopal, Chairperson,*

*Committee for the Defense and Release of Dr. G. N. Saibaba*

## **Foreword**

### **Sai's Clarion Call to the People**

**“Spring cannot arrive without summer”**

Comrade Sai was released on 7<sup>th</sup> March last year and now we complete a year after his acquittal. How many more times could they have prevented his release? The State was compelled to release Sai on 7<sup>th</sup> March as the Supreme Court sternly issued a warning: “we do not want to take away their freedom by issuing a stay, if you want, you can approach the court as per the due process”. When the word State is used, it doesn't just mean the State of Maharashtra. As per the court records, it doesn't just refer to the Maharashtra Government but also refers to the Central Government. It refers to not just the present BJP government in power, but also to the previous Congress Government and the BRS government in Telangana. One can read the conspiracies orchestrated from 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> March 2024, even after the verdict was given, to curtail the freedom of the acquitted by State and Central Governments in the article written by Sai's younger brother Ramdev, where they delayed the release of Sai from Nagpur Jail, Prashant Rahi from Amaravati Jail, Hem Mishra from Kolhapur Jail and Mahesh Tirki from Nagpur Jail.

In the writings of Ramdev and Prof. Kasim you will find an uncovering of the social roots of this revolutionary democrat that made Brahminical Hindu Fascist force treat him like a prisoner of war from the very first moment of his arrest. One can grasp the political context from Pani's work. The details of his work since 1990, the movements he planned, the united struggles he organized and

the way his personality expanded into a universal figure can be understood from K. Ravi Chander's essay. He was released exactly ten years after his arrest. He was first kidnapped on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2014 while returning from evaluation duty in Delhi University and sent to jail as an accused in the Aheri case. After Bombay High Court's bail, which was canceled by the Nagpur bench, another medical bail was granted by the Supreme Court, he was only out for 14 months out of a decade. The Sessions Court commented that since it was bound by law it could only sentence him to life imprisonment, even though it expressed its interest to award "capital punishment (death penalty) to the dangerous brain". He was sent to jail on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2017 and the date of his release after seven years is also 7<sup>th</sup> March, 2024.

It is true that spring has arrived. It is also true that in the month of March, the cuckoo that grazes the sprigs of the mango trees sings its spring song. But this is life, this is society, this is our environment. In this environment, in this society, in this system, in Sai's life (read how much he loved birds, plants, trees, nature in the poem written by his companion Vasantha), the cuckoo has to eat even the sprigs of the neem tree. It is also the season for flowering of Neem trees. That is why spring also brings summer.

It has been five months since Sai left us. But in these five months he has never been separated from our hearts.

After ten long years apart,  
immersed in the joy of your return  
Your sudden departure has wrenched my heart  
Made fragile with the endless pain,  
And my eyes, brimming with frozen tears  
Yearn for the touch of your love-filled lips.  
Hold me in one last embrace,  
Strong enough to carry me through



On the journey of my life ahead

Wake up once and come, Sai, my darling!

Filled with this yearning, Vasantha led a rally with Sai's dead body in Hyderabad, the first that took place in the city after a decade. She safely handed the body over to Gandhi Hospital, with his "dangerous brain" included, and with a deep final hug, promised to continue his work. He has filled her with enough confidence and strength to go ahead without him.

That is why Nalluri Rukmini named her memoir "Vasantha's Sai" as she wrote that she could not claim to have much friendship or many meetings with either Sai or Vasantha. Saibaba's intelligence and personality was such, he could attract any friend. But acceptance as a spouse is not a simple matter at that age. It is the ultimate testimony for Vasantha where she has given a great deal of respect to the emotional bond – not just to physical attraction. Before, Vasantha's companionship played a role in the formation of Sai's flawless personality, there were others who played a role. It was the atmosphere fostered by his mother Suryavathamma in his childhood, his younger sister Bhavani's decision to give up on her studies to support his conscious intellectual activity and her desire to work on the cultural and ideological front that he set out to build that influenced him. Her martyrdom in a fake encounter modeled that household into a revolutionary family. All these perspectives that shaped him have been touched upon by Nalluri Rukmini in her article.

The harvest of Sai and Vasantha's revolutionary dreams and the spirit of the Telangana struggle has flown into their lives as their daughter Manjeera. Manjeera saw her father as a friend and a teacher, one of the best teachers. It is not the person that stands, it is thoughts that remain forever. These thoughts are the ones that flow naturally. That is why she saw her father, who was not only in jail for ten years, but also in movements and struggles all over the country since her birth, as a running stream of thoughts and practice. Because

of that she never said goodbye to him after meeting in the jail and now also she is not willing to do the same.

“I know you wanted to live. You are a fighter. You had this immeasurable passion to live, something I could see in your eyes and hear in your voice every time you spoke. To others reading this piece, Dad, I only hope they never forget you. Never forget your infectious smile, your unwavering resilience, your patient conversations. I hope we will take all your dreams forward and keep up your passion, a passion that is now all of ours to share. You have been taken from us far too soon, but your dreams will live on forever, because something as abstract as death cannot snatch the essence of who you are from us.”

The reason why I quoted Manjeera so much is that Saibaba's target is the youth of this age.

One of his concerns was to motivate the youth in schools, farms, factories and unemployment. He wanted to fill them with passion and imbue them with energy. He did that until he went to jail. He did the same for eight and a half years in prison.

Who did he want to do it for? He wanted to stand up for the Adivasis in this country who are vulnerable targets of the imperialist corporatization and militarization—who have declared war on them, who wanted to turn them into migrants or dead bodies by robbing their Jal, Jangle and Jameen and Izzat. He heard the words of B.D.Sharma in his hometown Amalapuram, when his childhood was turning into adolescence. Sai told B.D. Sharma that he if speaks in English, not in Hindi, he can translate the speech to his people in their mother tongue. What B.D. Sharma conveyed were the tearful stories of the sisters and brothers of Biladilla during the 1960s when he worked as the Collector of Bastar. But by the time Sai heard this story during 1980s, it was the time when the People's War movement had entered Bastar. There, in Amalapuram, in Andhra Pradesh, it

was the time when the Naxalbari-Srikakulam witnessed a setback and new perspectives of Dandakaranya emerged.

As a baby, Sai opened his eyes exactly during the roaring spring of Naxalbari. He grew up with Naxalbari and Srikakulam struggles. Just like how these struggles faced setback after a glorious time of running, singing and playing, Sai was also affected by polio.

Ramdev in his article writes, "time will shape circumstances and prepare individuals to move forward. Both our parents and we siblings have never regarded Sai as a physically challenged person. Sai himself has never entertained the notion of being one. Our mother fostered a supportive environment, creating a social sphere where both close and distant relatives, friends, and the entire neighboring community embraced Sai as one of their own. The people around us have consistently supported Sai, helping him maintain a high level of morale."

Ashok Kumbamu, even though he came in touch with Sai's family a decade later, wrote the article '*The Heart that never surrendered: A mother's Fight for G.N Saibaba*' with the empathy and perspective of a mother's shattered heart. This was not just Sai's case, but also for the case of Bhavani, who remained under ground and was martyred in an encounter in the year 2000. Ashok had met Sai's mother on Bhavani's final journey where she told him that it seemed as if grief would break her heart. She had to bear the ordeal again as she stood resolute and suppressed her sorrow at her beloved son Sai's arrest. All in all, her children Bhavani and Saibaba instilled her with heroic strength and courage. She even told Ashok that, "I want to go to Modi and ask – not to release my son, but to tell me what crime he committed".

Sai molded mothers, fathers, elderly people and children to take a role in such battles. Haragopal says, Sai's refusal to die came from standing up for his convictions. All those who addressed the commemoration webinar '*Remembering in Solidarity: Com. GN*

*Saibaba* organised by All India Forum for Right to Education (AIFRTE) recognized his contributions to make the education in this bourgeois system accessible to everyone because he understood the true meaning of education is in the light of life and struggle. Anand Teltumbde says, "*Sai's sheer power of grit defeated the sad system*", because he understood this system very deeply as "*the Republic of Caste*", which he fought against it.

Both Prof. Haragopal and Anand Teltumbde participated very actively in the Committee for the Defense and Release of Prof. G.N. Saibaba along with Arundhati Roy. Prof. Haragopal is the chairman of that committee. He tried to shift Sai to Hyderabad Jail after the life sentence. He is still leading the legal battle with Delhi University administration in the Delhi High Court along with Nandita Narain to get Sai the pending salary from the time of his arrest and post-retirement benefits and post death pension to Vasantha as Sai was acquitted without any charges. Prof. Haragopal is a big pillar of support for the family.

B.S. Raju who worked with Sai in the Visthapan Virodhi Jan Vikas Andolan (VVJVA) along with Ajay, Damodar Tuli, Mahesh Rawat and B.D. Sharma, illustrated Sai as "A brain with wheels". He shared very interesting facts about the breadth of his field of work. B.S. Raju wrote in the essay "I was made to spend all my time outside the venue facing local area police teams and intelligence wing. It was quite tough for me to answer them all as guest arrived from various places across India. The situation continued all throughout the RDF proceedings because of which, I missed the opportunity to participate in the convention, despite being the chairman of the invitation committee." He also explained Sai's ability to mobilize and how much he expanded the scope of his work and organization even after moving to Delhi.

Though Sai built many united movements throughout his life, but he dedicated a huge part of his individual energy to All India

Peoples Resistance Forum (AIPRF) and Revolutionary Democratic Front (RDF). A real testament to Sai is his effort to wage anti-imperialist struggles and achieve revolutionary democracy from the grassroots. There are some people who believe that the liberal Congress party is an alternative to fascist BJP. The real political stand was identified by Sai long back that Indian fascism can be faced only with revolutionary democracy. Consider this Sai's message in his life and death. I need to talk more about the fantastic experiments he made possible with AIPRF and RDF, with immense grit and enthusiasm.

Remembering Sai's struggles and how he started teaching the alphabet to tribals in jail, provided them with a basis of education and made them write exams and get degrees, Manjeera recounts in her article that he wanted to establish a university accessible to Adivasi students. Perhaps he would indeed have done it if his body had supported it. He was the one who explored and exploited his disadvantages and advantages for the sake of the revolution. Not only was he a 'work-monster' but he also turned his disability, illness and detention in Andam Cell into weaponry and fought as part of a people's struggle against the State. Similarly, due to the privileges of reading English literature, he went from a lecturer at a Polytechnic college to a professor in Delhi University and received a Ph.D. degree from the hands of the Indian President. He meaningfully used all these social resources he gained to build people's movements going on not just in Dandakaranya, but across the globe. For that he founded the platform 'Forum Against War on People' along with Jan Myrdal, Arundhati Roy and Rajendra Sachar, not only to bring public awareness about the waging war on people, but also to give a hopeful message to the world that the adivasis are resisting this war of occupation together with the people's liberation guerrilla army under the leadership of Janatana Sarkaar. We will understand this clearly by reading the messages of the revolutionary parties and democratic organizations from all over the world in this book.

I would like to talk about what the well-known journalist Paranjoy Guha, who was jailed for exposing corporate money investment robbery, wrote after his release in October; he analyzed Saibaba in one sentence that can also be used as the title of this book: "Judicial death of Professor Saibaba from peasant family"

"Since you have come from a family of a farmer of this country and have become a university professor in the capital city", when one asks Sai, "how will you pay back to the poor agricultural laborers with calloused knees and people who have raised you on their elbows and shoulders?", he will reply: "Not only for them, but starting from Aheri in Gadchiroli, spreading to Bastar which has been looted all over by the corporates, till the resolute cry of the adivasis, the cry of Jal, Jangal, Zamin, Izzat, echoes true, till the defeat of occupation forces in the war against people is ensured, and the adivasis implement their own chosen Janatana Sarkaar, I will sprout and rise again like blades of grass that cannot be trampled". That is why he said, "The sad thing is that they don't know how to make me die. Because I love so much the sounds of growing grass". What is more surprising is Paranjoy Guha quoted the poem penned by Janjarla Ramesh Babu, President of Telangana Forum Against Displacement, to pay tribute to Sai about his immortality legacy after death.

On one hand, letters of condolences were sent to Manjeera and Vasantha by the German Ambassador and the French Ambassador to India respectively, on the occasion of Sai's death. On the other hand, The State is propagating that Saibaba is the urban connect of Maoists, playing a key role. Even if the High Court acquitted him twice, the central government still maintains and treats him like a Maoist, as a terrorist who needs to be eradicated before 16<sup>th</sup> March 2026. A lawsuit was also filed in the Supreme Court to review the verdict as it weakened the UAPA which was meant to prevent terrorism. Coming back to the Ambassador's condolences, they are not just mere superficial messages.

The German ambassador in his message to Manjeera, he recalled the impact of Saibaba's words on him when they met him along with his French colleague in April. He wrote, "Even though our meeting was brief, it left me with a deep impression: Your father's story, his long imprisonment and his unwavering commitment to civic rights in India commanded a tremendous amount of respect from me."

I have mentioned only the articles that appeared in Arunatara in Telugu and were translated or were written in English by Telugu people. I would like to reiterate the words, "Saibaba lives forever", which Venu wrote in his article which I had received separately later. I repeat these words because people's justice and values will always remain eternal, and I humbly pay tribute to our martyr Saibaba.

1<sup>st</sup> March 2025

*Fellow Traveler*

*(Translated from Telugu by G Manjeera.)*

## **Dad, my last letter to you**

**- G Manjeera**

### **Dear Dad**

I always used to start my letters with that- “dear Dad” and I never wrote a goodbye at the end. I was too afraid it will actually end up being our final farewell. Now the reality is such that I cannot write another letter to you and I never got to say goodbye. Your body is submerged in formaldehyde in Gandhi Medical Hospital, where it will be used to teach young doctors for the next three years. I can't bear to think of your cold, frozen body- inanimate and soulless- resting in a small box slowly absorbing preservation chemical. Your brilliant mind- ‘you’ - what some people call the soul and some the consciousness -the intricate intersection of electric pluses via neurons that defines us at that moment- left us on 12<sup>th</sup> October late evening. Dad, why are you not with us anymore? You last spoke and made your conscious decisions on 11<sup>th</sup> night, when you interrogated the doctors about what was wrong with you, why were you suffering from intense abdominal pain and the process they suggested to fix you up. You told me confidently before they put you on ventilator, that you'll be fine, we'll talk tomorrow, and I should be ready to discuss the book we wanted to read together. Your confidence eased me so much that even when the doctors told us that your condition was critical the next day, I didn't want to believe it. Dad, I believed that you could face anything. You were



the Übermensch, the superman to me- the person who can do anything and everything (even though both of us disagree with that concept philosophically). You were the indestructible supporting pillar for our family. I only broke down when they told me your heart stopped beating and that they'll try to revive you with CPR. I had a foreboding inkling from the look in the attending doctor's bloodshot eyes and shaking hands. Mom still held on after that, she told me- your dad will be back, he won't leave us, his life just started again. But the reality is much crueller than our precious hopes and little wishes and when the doctors declared you dead at 8:36 pm, the whole world came crashing down on me and mom. I want to erase history after that moment, I want to get a time machine and go back to that time, that time when you were with us. That short time that didn't even last seven months, when all three of us were finally reunited after 10 years of gruelling struggle with the Indian State and Judiciary.

Dad, for the longest time, I was afraid that they'd never let you out of hellish Anda cell. It certainly sounded like a death trap, a colonial legacy meant to torture and break people down mentally in utter isolation. I was afraid because I knew their true intentions- they wanted to kill you inside the jail, at least that's how I felt then. I was so very happy when you came out. You were not just my dad; you were my best friend. I looked up to you and respected you like no other. You were very close to me and had more impact how I formed my sense of self, more perhaps, than any other parent to their children. So much of what I think, my ideology, my outlook towards life- had starting points in what you said, believed in and stood for, that now, without you here, I feel like there's a hole in my soul. I feel like I'm doing everything mechanically, like there's a

dense haze between me and the reality- as I said, I don't want to accept it. You said you are rejecting death in your poem- "I stubbornly refuse to die" and you did refuse to die for ten long years even though your body was breaking down. When you came out the doctors were surprised that you were laughing and talking so well- your whole body was riddled with ailments. Your tissues were decaying, and your organs were barely hanging on, but your passion for life, your love for the people and your determination not to bow down got you out of that hellhole of a prison, back to us, into the arms of the ones who love you. Even though it was for a short time, I am so glad you were here with us and several friends and comrades from across the nation and the world. You did not deserve to be in a tiny cell. You deserved the world.

When the doctors took out your gallbladder, they were shocked to find severe infection across the organ and the connecting tissue. Usually, infections don't get that bad because people will feel the pain and they'll get it checked out and removed. You also felt the pain back in 2017 and were due for a surgery in March of the same year. But you insisted on going back to Gadchiroli on March 7th where on that fatal day, the courts convicted you as a criminal under UAPA, without any crime and without any evidence. You went with full confidence that you'll be acquitted that you didn't even prepare me and mom for the worst-case scenario and the precautions we must take. That judgement was akin to a death sentence and since then this infection festered in your belly for eight years, slowly yet painfully eating away at your organs. The judge went as far as to say that he can only award you the highest penalty under law- life imprisonment- otherwise he would give you something worse. But Dad, didn't he end up giving you both the sentences? The rest of

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your short life you had to spend in the dreadful Anda cell and when you came out, the continuous lack of treatment, abuse and purposely neglect led to such deterioration that it essentially served as a death sentence.

I have many regrets. We didn't even get to spend proper time together. Didn't get to banter like we usually do and read all the books we want. You were planning to condense your Ph.D. and publish it. You wanted to write articles and do new research. You wanted to travel and try new foods in different places. But most of the seven months that you were free were spent in the hospital. You did everything you could to get better. You controlled your diet to improve liver and gallbladder functioning. You did physiotherapy every day to try to regain some of strength in your broken left hand. I was honestly inspired after seeing your penchant to live and work for the future you dreamt of, especially as my own understanding of reality was submerged in a sea of pessimism.

You had a whole Pandora's jar full of ideas that could never be opened. You wanted to pen down youth prison experiences, write more poems, write stories. Dad, your dreams and relentless optimism for the future were infectious. You said after all your time in jail, you had this conviction that a university that is accessible to Adivasi students must be started. So many young Adivasis in the jail, locked up for no reason, had this burning desire to study, to make a name for themselves, to be recognised and to protect their homes. They deserve a space to study within their own homes and areas, without being displaced and dragged to cities so that their lands can be exploited of their natural wealth.

I know you wanted to live. You are a fighter. You had this immeasurable passion to live, something I could see in your eyes

and hear in your voice every time you spoke. To others reading this piece, dad, I only hope they never forget you. Never forget your infectious smile, your unwavering resilience, your patient conversations. I hope we will take all your dreams forward and keep up your passion, a passion that is now all of ours to share. You had taken us far too soon, but your dreams will live on forever, because something as abstract as death cannot snatch the essence of who you are from us.

I wanted to end this letter with a goodbye. But I can't bring myself to do that. I don't know how long it'll take me to accept your death, accept that you aren't actually here. I can't write a goodbye yet, I'll carry on writing to you as if you were perhaps just away from us, in another Anda cell from which there is no material or immaterial escape.

Instead, I'd like to end this one of Faiz's poems that is close to both of our hearts:

aaj bazaar main pa bajolanchalo  
let us walk in bazaar in shackles  
Chashm-e-nam, jaan-e-shoreeda kafi nahin  
wet eyes and restless soul is not enough  
Tohmat-e-ishq-posheeda kafi nahin  
being charged for nurturing concealed love is not enough  
aaj bazaar main pa-bajolanchalo  
let us walk in bazaar in shackles  
Dast afshanchalo, mast-o-raqsanchalo  
let us go with afshan in hand, in trance and dancing  
Khak bar sarchalo, khoonbadamanchalo  
go with dust on head and blood on garb  
Rah takta hai sub shehr-e-janaan chalo  
Go as the city of my beloved is waiting

Hakim-e-shehr bhi, majma-e-aam bhi  
City's ruler and crowd of commoners  
Teer-e-ilzam bhi, sang-e-dushnam bhi  
arrow of false charge, stone of accusation  
Subh-e-nashaad bhi, roz-e-naakaam bhi  
morning of sorrow, day of failure  
Unka dum-saaz apnay siwa kaun hai  
who is their friend except me  
Shehr-e-janaan main ab baa-sifa kaun hai  
who is untainted in the city of beloved  
Dast-e-qatil kay shayan raha kaun hai  
who deserve the killers or executioner's hand  
Rakht-e-dil bandh lo, dil figaro chalo  
get ready for the journey of heart, go wounded heart  
Phir ham eenqatlho aainyaro chalo  
let me go to be executed

*Manjeera is the daughter of Prof. G.N. Saibaba  
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Nov-Dec 2024)*

## My dear Sai!

*-A. S. Vasantha Kumari*

From the deep eternal slumber  
Wake up once and come, my dear friend!

Your toothpaste, brush, and soap  
are peeping from the bathroom  
Steaming black Chikmagalur coffee, the plate of Upma  
are on the table, waiting for you

Your round comb whispers to me  
To straighten out those curly locks  
“Don’t forget me,” says your pen,  
tugging at your shirt pocket  
“It’s nearly time for physiotherapy,”  
your wheelchair urges impatiently

Like a free bird,  
blowing plumes of smoke by the doorway  
Wake up once and come, my dear friend!

The chalk trembles in anticipation,  
yearning to follow those elegant letters,  
Flowing from your long fingers  
on the blackboard once again

Numerous students coming from distant shores  
are waiting with a new enthusiasm,  
To listen to the lessons brought alive.  
Step into the classroom, full of life  
Wake up once and come, my dear teacher!

The millets you bought for the new diet  
Watch dumbly, still in jars  
Your favourites, fish stew and fried prawns  
Competing with each other to be relished by you

I have bought white brinjals from the market  
Washed and dried them  
Mustard, sesame, chilli powder, salt and oil  
All laid out for you, to transform into pickle  
Wake up once and come, my dear partner!

The bay leaf plant you brought from Brazil,  
Nurtured with care, grew tall and strong  
Yet, before you could see it, withered away,  
Never to sprout those leaves again  
I was helpless, how should I tell you?  
How deeply I grieved its silent demise.

After you came back from jail,  
The seedlings we planted  
together in the backyard,  
Have shrivelled away without you

You wanted to plant roses, marigolds, chrysanthemums,  
Let's go to the market then, buy the new pots

Wake up once and come, my dear gardener!

Your inspiration captured by the student's pencil strokes,  
Our Tofu looks at your portrait,  
And circles your wheelchair every day  
Searching for you, meowing in vain

The tiny birds huddling on the railing,  
Chattering in endless dispute—  
Let's settle their quarrels . . .  
Wake up once and come, my nature lover!

Countless people inheriting your spirit and practice  
Flooding the doorstep of our home  
To hold and fill you in their eyes  
Share with them your final message, your last handshake  
Wake up once and come, my much-loved universal friend!

Our boundless love and practice  
Reflected as a mirror –  
In our Manjeera, hovering outside the ICU door  
with fistfuls of matters to discuss with you  
Let's make those future plans with your dearest daughter  
Wake up once and come, beloved father!

Beneath the golden rays  
Piercing through the coconut fronds,  
Where the fragrance of the Neem flowers lingers,  
You stroked my hair effortlessly  
Without my friendship and love, you said  
Life had no meaning



We are each other's companion, each other's shadow  
Fulfil your childhood promises to your Amani\*  
Wake up once and come, my dearest life mate!

After ten long years apart,  
immersed in the joy of your return  
Your sudden departure has wrenched my heart  
Made fragile with the endless pain,  
And my eyes, brimming with frozen tears  
Yearn for the touch of your love-filled lips.

Hold me in one last embrace,  
Strong enough to carry me through  
On the journey of my life ahead  
Wake up once and come, Sai, my darling!

*December 2024*

*A.S. Vasantha Kumari is life companion of*

*Prof. G.N. Saibaba*

*\* Since childhood, Sai called Vasantha his Amani, his everlasting spring, invoking this name in their letters to each other.*

*(Originally published in Arunatara, Telugu monthly, Nov-Dec 2024)*

## **Saibaba's Life Expedition: A Visionary and a Fearless Fighter of People's Movements**

**- Dr. Gokarakonda Ramadevudu**

Prof. Saibaba's name is no more a mere proper noun, it has become synonymous with the people's movement. Saibaba's memorial meetings are being organised in every town, in every city, in every village and even in other countries. I would like to share with you some of my own personal experiences with my brother Saibaba, some details about our family background and his political activity. We are still struggling to come to terms with the fact that Sai is no more. Even now it feels as though he is still imprisoned in Nagpur Central Jail, like the last ten years, and we need to travel there to visit him and I am troubled because I was unable to send a money-order to Sai in the first week of the month.

### **His Childhood**

Saibaba was born on 24 July 1967 in a remote village Sannavilli, situated near Amalapuram town that is a part of the present Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Konaseema District (erstwhile East Godavari district). The place where he was born encompassed the green lands, cows, buffaloes and oxen. That was our grandmother's native village. After their marriage, our parents lived for some time in Janipalli village. When they shifted to Sannavilli, my brother Saibaba was born. Two or two-and-half years after that, our elder sister Ganga Bhavani Mahalakshmi was born. My sister was known as Bhavani in the revolutionary movement and would later succumb on 9 June 2001 to a false encounter near the village Kanagal in Nalgonda district and become a martyr. She had spent eleven years incognito at that

point. During this time she met me once or twice, but our mother, father and Manjeera could meet her only once. I was born two and half years after my sister was born.

The first five years of Sai's life were spent happily amidst his maternal uncles and close relatives. Sai would run and explore every nook and corner of the entire house. But all of a sudden, he started stumbling and could not walk properly. My parents were worried. Mother used to take rounds visiting nearby doctors while holding Sai on her shoulders, but nothing was helping. Eventually, he was taken to senior doctors at Visakhapatnam Government Hospital where they diagnosed that his legs were losing strength due to the 'polio' disease and there was no proper remedy to cure polio at that time. It was running rampant and there was little awareness about polio disease in the 1970s, especially in India. The World Health Assembly only chalked out a programme on Prevention of Polio in the year 1988. Every newborn baby now is given polio drops, but there were no such government programmes back then. Yet, our mother tried persistently to make Sai to walk normally, even though doctors had expressed their helplessness. Not knowing what to do, our parents took Sai to Puttaparti Saibaba to get his blessings. Mother was a devotee of Puttaparti Saibaba from the beginning. She was elated that Puttaparti Saibaba had noticed her and Sai especially when they were sitting in the Conference Hall among many other devotees. With a lot of devotion to that Baba, she named her elder son Naga Saibaba. It was a test of time for my parents who were witnessing their son suffering from a disease that could not be cured with medical science. They soon realized that the disease could also not be cured with Tantric chanting. Our mother tried every recourse possible, even trying out esoteric anecdotes. She even acquired the meat of a special species of crow, the *Jamudu* pheasant, and fed that to Sai while also massaging his feeble legs with its oil. But all attempts were futile.

Time will shape circumstances and prepare individuals to move forward. Both our parents and we siblings have never regarded Sai as a physically challenged person. Sai himself has never entertained the notion of being one. Our mother fostered a supportive environment, creating a social sphere where both close and distant relatives, friends, and the entire neighboring community embraced Sai as one of their own. The people around us have consistently supported Sai, helping him maintain a high level of morale.

### **Education**

Our house in Sannavilli was a two-room terrace covered with palm leaves. There was a Shiva Temple beside our home and there was a pond in front of it. The priest of that Shiva Temple was Sai's first teacher. There were no Government Schools in Sannavilli village nor were there any private schools during those days. So loving the priest was, he used to teach lessons to the children of that village in the temple itself. There was caste discrimination to a great degree in rural areas during the 1970s. Yet, it was because of the factor that ours was an agricultural-based village, people had to depend on each other. The 'two-glass' system was strictly followed in the village. We, as children, used to wonder why there should be such a kind of discrimination, but this experience helped Sai to understand the social inequities.

Our father's financial condition worsened due to heavy debt. He had made a name for himself as a good cultivator of crops and the villagers used to call him 'Nawab'. Our mother was also beloved and irrespective of their relationship the villagers affectionately addressed her as "surakka". The tragedy struck when some relatives cheated my father out of money, taking advantage of his innocence. We ended up having to shift to the nearby town Amalapuram after handing over two or three acres of cultivated land.

There, Sai took admission in Government Primary School directly in fifth class. Later, he joined Saint John's High School (it was an Aided Christian Missionary School) in sixth class and he continued there till his 10th. Our father joined a private organisation as a clerk and maintained the household with a meagre salary. Reverend Father B.E. Harper was the Headmaster of that High School. He was very friendly with students and wished them to be ahead in all fields. To encourage students, he used to conduct essay writing, elocution, quiz, science exhibitions, drawing, chess, kabaddi, badminton and other competitions. He used to distribute marbles to students and play with them. Sai was perfect at making kites with newspaper pages and asked us and his friends to fly them. Sai was a good reader, and he always came first in his class. He won many competitions in chess, essay writing and such others and secured prizes at district and State levels. Because of all these qualities Father Harper liked him exceptionally and thus he grew intimate with our family. There was a hostel attached to the school for the students who came from other villages and my mother used to pass on the vegetables that were grown in our home garden.

We bought some land in Amalapuram and built a small house. It was a two-room house roofed over with palm leaves and clay walls covered with coconut leaves. Most of this house was constructed by our father, mother and me. There were raised platforms in front of our house. There was a vacant open place all around the house. Sai used to plant all kinds of vegetables like spinach, snake-gourd, chillies, asparagus, capsicum, okra, tomato, cucumber and others. Bhavani and I watered them. He was very interested in growing plants and taking care of them and he used to grow a marigold flower patch every summer. These things symbolise Sai's special bond with nature.

High school students were given two options: they could choose either Composite Mathematics or General Mathematics. Those who had an interest in mathematics, including Sai, opted for Composite Mathematics. However, it was quite challenging to pursue Composite Mathematics, so Sai enrolled in tuition classes, which Vasantha also attended. The two became acquainted during this time.

Between 1979 and 1981, Sai successfully passed the Prathama, Madhyama, and Uttama Hindi examinations conducted by the Hyderabad Hindi Prachar Sabha. In 1982, he topped the Purana Prabodha Examination, held by the Tirupati Tirumala Devasthanam, and was awarded a Gold Medal. Sai aspired to pursue technical education and secured a seat at Andhra Polytechnic in Kakinada. However, the college authorities rejected him, citing the difficulty of accommodating a person with his condition, as computer courses were not in demand at the time and there was little awareness of such programs.

Subsequently, Sai enrolled in the M.P.C group for Intermediate studies at Konaseema Bhanoji Ramars College (SKBR) in Amalapuram. The college was not accessible at that time and he had to climb the stairs on his hands to attend classes on the first floor. Sai later completed his B.A. in English Literature at the same college, graduating in 1987. His interest in literature developed as early as his tenth standard, when he began reading the works of Chalam, Sharath (translations in Telugu), and Ranganayakamma.

Every evening at 4 o'clock, I would take Sai on my bicycle to the Amalapuram Local Library, where he read most of the books in the collection. The SBKR College also introduced Sai to many lasting friendships. Among his close friends was Karri Madan Mohana Ramprasad, who became like family to us. Sai and Prasad were inseparable, often exploring the area on Prasad's bicycle, frequently visiting the banks of the Godavari River and the seashore.

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After he successfully completed B.A., he wanted to study further in a standard university, and he joined Hyderabad Central University for his master's in English literature. After that, he did his PGDTE course in the erstwhile CIEFL (Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages) and he got his Ph.D. degree in English Literature from Delhi University in 2013.

### **Job**

He worked as Transmission Executive in the Warangal F.M. Radio station for a few months in 1992. They broadcasted a programme in the radio channel wherein they would play the songs as requested by the listeners. During his tenure, Sai gave priority to Gaddar songs. He joined as a Lecturer in Andhra Polytechnic College, Kakinada in June 1995. But, by that time he was already getting treatment in Nizam Institute of Medical Sciences, Hyderabad, and had also registered his name as a research scholar for Ph.D. in CIEFL and hence he requested the authorities to transfer him to Leather Technology Institute situated in Gachibowli. After working for some months in Gachibowli, he was again transferred to West Marredpally centre of the same organisation. Later, he resigned from his job and went to Delhi, as it was the beginning of his political activity, and his work prospects expanded. In Delhi, he worked as a part-time Lecturer in Sri Venkateswara College in the beginning and in 2003 he joined the Ram Lal Anand College which was affiliated to Delhi University as a permanent Lecturer. He continued there till his arrest.

### **Political Activity**

The Hyderabad Central University and the M.A. (English Literature) course (1987-89) brought a big change in Sai's attitude. His political activity expanded, and he was attuned to Marxist outlook. The 90s was a period when pro and anti-agitations regarding the Mandal Commission's report were at their peak. It is apt to say

that Sai's political activity started with his pro-BC reservation attitude. In that process, he got acquainted with the student movement. He participated actively in the movements opposing the privatisation of education spearheaded by the student unions, left parties, Telugu Desam Party and other non-congress parties, except for BJP. He was active in mobilising people for the agitation against the decision taken by Chief Minister Nedurumalli Janardhan Reddy to permit medical and engineering colleges in the private sector. The student bodies gave a Hyderabad Bandh call. It was so effective that Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao came to Hyderabad in a hurry and took a decision to remove Janardhan Reddy from the Chief Minister's post. Ironically, even Chandra Babu Naidu who initially opposed privatisation of medical and engineering colleges granted permission to several private medical and engineering colleges in the private sector after he became the Chief Minister. Thus, he exposed the true nature of the ruling class.

Prisoners suffering in jails started a struggle in the year 1995 for their rights and for getting the requirements guaranteed by the Law. Sai and Pavan started a movement in support of the prisoners' struggle from outside. Pavan was blind by birth and Sai was a sufferer and crippled due to polio disease. Both these warriors took the initiative to start a Joint Action Committee for Democratic Rights (JACDR) and led the struggle victoriously. They started a Dharma camp before the Andhra Pradesh Secretariat which ran for three months. People like Gaddar, Sivareddy, Kondapalli Seethatamayya and representatives from different political parties and mass organisations participated. As a result, Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao came down and accepted most of the demands put forth by the Struggle Committee and ordered the jail authorities to take up further action in this matter. Accordingly, Inspector General for Jails, S R Sukumar issued a memo (1257/3A4/94) on 20 January 1995 as per which the political prisoners of a revolutionary party should



be kept together in one barrack and books, newspapers, T.V., VCR should be supplied to them and a separate kitchen should be set up exclusively for them. From then onwards, conditions in the jails of Andhra Pradesh improved to some extent.

Realising that the policies of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation (LPG) which were initiated during the tenure of P V Narsimha Rao as Prime Minister and implemented vigorously afterwards were detrimental to the interests of the people at large, Saibaba took active part in the movements against Imperialistic policies that were beneficial to the multinational companies. Sai played a pivotal role in the struggle opposing the American President's visit to India with the banner "Clinton Go Back". He observed that the Indian peasantry would be in deep crisis due to the ever-increasing monopoly of the multinational companies on crop seeds, fertilizers, pesticides as a part of imperialistic policies, and the mass organisations should take up the responsibility supporting the peasantry. Saibaba also played a key role in organising nationwide protest programmes against the multinational agro companies like Monsanto, Kargil, Dupont that were producing BT cotton seeds and genetically modified seeds. He participated in the movements the motto of which was to secure fair price for the harvest the peasants produced and that the peasants should get fertilizers and seeds for subsidized prices. Hundreds of cotton growing farmers and handloom workers committed suicides in the United Andhra Pradesh State at that time. Sai used to get in touch with experts like Prof. K.R. Choudhary of Agricultural University, Hyderabad and formed Fact-finding Committees to probe into the suicides. He took the committee members to the places where the suicide incidents occurred and after the fact-finding, he himself would prepare the reports. In this process he formed a broad united platform with peasant unions belonging to different States all over the country. He organised several movements condemning the anti-farmer policies

of the Government by joining hands with people like Prof. M D Nanjunda Swamy who was working in Rammanohar Lohiya Law College, Bangalore and was also a prominent leader of the Karnataka Rajya Raitu Sangha (KRRS), Mahender Singh Tikayath (Leader, Bharat Kisan Union, Uttar Pradesh) and peasant organisations in Punjab, Haryana and many other States.

It was the time when both the Central and State Governments were implementing oppressive measures on people's movements, civil rights, revolutionary movements and on the whole the Indian people at large. It was necessary to oppose and to resist those oppressive and coercive policies. A broad platform supporting people's struggles, All India People's Resistance Forum (AIPRF), was formed and Sai was first its State Secretary and later he worked as its National Secretary. He built it as an organization that would oppose and strongly resist imperialism. As the National Secretary, he was instrumental in the formation of several people's movements and united forums. He was the one who gave political direction to the activists. As per the requirement of the united struggles, Sai worked with many individuals, left parties, mass organisations, civil rights organisations, intellectuals and supporters of civil society. He worked with intellectuals like A.B.K. Prasad, Prof. K. Chakradhar Rao, popular cardiologist Dr. Bhaskar Rao, Editor of Andra Jyoti Daily K. Srinivas, Allam Narayana. He also worked with Maraju Veeranna, U Sambasiva Rao, Goutam, Gaddar, Kaloji Narayan Rao, Prof. Jayashankar, Prof. Kesava Rao Jadav, all of whom advocated Telangana separate state, and backward class and Dalit leaders like R. Krishnaiah, Manda Krishna Madiga, Muslim leaders like Latif Khan, Mahabub Ali (Darsgah-Jihad-O-Shahadat- DJS), Moulana Naseeruddin (TTNI), Prof. Moujam Ali (HCU), Amanulla Khan (MBT), Zaheed Ali Khan, Zaheer Ali Khan (Siasat) and Virasat Ali Khan. He worked along with activists in people's resistance movements like Goru Madhava Rao, Ganti Prasadam, Nagamuni,

D. Punna Rao, Raj Kishore, Darshan Pal, Datti Sudhakar Ra and mass leaders like Anand Teltumbde, Gautam Navalakha, Thomas Mathew, B.D. Sharma (former Collector, Bastar district), Stan Swamy, Swami Agnivesh. He befriended Artist Mohan and requested him to draw pictures for the backdrop on the banners for the many meetings and conferences he conducted. He maintained a good friendship with Alisetty Prabhakar and his family.

He vigorously questioned the attacks of RSS and BJP Hindu fanatics on Muslim minorities, and he was proactive in the formation of the Struggle Committee for Protection of Minorities Rights. In 2001, he conducted a public meeting in Yakutpura (in the old city of Hyderabad) to condemn the tyrannical approach against Muslim youth and invited the former Supreme Court Justice and ex-Chairman Minority Commission Justice Sardar Ali Khan to inaugurate the conference. Thus, Sai became part and parcel of the struggle for the protection of Minority Rights. Not only he served as a member in the fact-finding committee on Gujarat Riots, but he also published a book on it. With Naveen Babu as the main convener, Saibaba conducted an international Seminar in Delhi on the question of Nationalities. He firmly believed that nations have the right of self-determination and that is not against the law of natural justice.

Sai was an active participant in the Separate Telangana Movement. Those who worked actively in Telangana Movement are fully aware of the role Sai played in conducting Separate Telangana Meeting in 1997 in Warangal and also the part he played in drafting the Telangana Declaration document. He organised nationwide programmes opposing the attack of American imperialists on Afghanistan. When the AIPRF and several student organisations were distributing pamphlets opposing the American Warmongering; the police took five students into custody and raided Saibaba's house in Delhi (October 2001) and harassed him by confining him to the

house for twelve hours in the name of a house arrest. Saibaba maintained that imperialism was nothing but warmongering. This statement has stood the test of time and in recent years, imperialist warmongering to exploit the land has escalated to its peak, which can be seen in the war-torn regions of Palestine and Ukraine, among others.

Sai took active part in every movement that opposed the saffronisation of education and Hindu fanaticism as he believed they were tools that would suppress the Minorities, Dalits, Adivasis, women and low caste people by using Manu Dharma and casteism as weapons. The officials in Hyderabad Central University expelled 10 Dalit students from the University in January 2002. At the same time, they subjected the Dalit faculty members to severe harassment. It was an act done for the sake of buttressing the upper caste students. Saibaba propagated the partisan attitude of the University officials and in the capacity of National Secretary of AIPRF, demanded that the banishment orders and police cases should immediately be withdrawn. In the year 2016, Vemula Rohith, a Dalit research scholar committed suicide and Saibaba viewed the suicide as a part of the conspiracy of the ruling classes and the upper caste fanatics.

Some organisations that are happy to dedicate themselves to the service of imperialism and globalisation have formed a "World Social Forum" in Bombay. As a counter to this move, more than 300 mass organisations collectively convened a meeting with the title "Mumbai Resistance - M.R. 2004" with a message that people's resistance movements are the only right answer to the expanding imperialism. Saibaba struggled hard to conduct this meeting. The ruling classes felt that Saibaba who was always questioning the anti-people policies of the government was a threat to them if he continued to stay out.

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In the year 2004, when Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy was the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, the 'peace talks' between the government and Naxalites took place. The AIPRF, Telangana Janasabha and other mass organisations planned to conduct a series of 'people's assembly' sessions to chart out the problems people were facing and make a list of them to hand it over to Naxalite leaders to raise those points in the 'peace talks'. Saibaba took active part in conducting meetings to discuss the peasants' issues, land crisis, student problems, employment and other issues and he prepared a list of them and gave it to the Naxalite leaders and the government.

The multinational companies for a long time, were eyeing the illimitable natural resources like coal, iron, bauxite, limestone, dolomite that were available in the States of Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. The Indian government wanted to clear the way for them. Jaiswal (Narayanpur), Bailadila Iron Company (Dantewada), Dev mining, Adani mining, Tata, Essar, Jindal were making attempts to plunder the mineral wealth by collaborating with the foreign companies. For this, the Central Government utilized the services of armed forces to drive away the adivasi people from their villages and from the forests. This resulted in a massacre of thousands of adivasis. Saibaba tried to lend voice to the voiceless adivasis who firmly believe that we have every right over the forest. In the guise of eliminating Naxalites and Maoists, the government was trying to create terror in the forests and villages. Both the Central and State governments together had created an anti-constitutional organisation which was named 'Salwa Judum' and propagated a false development agenda. But, their main intention was to hand over the forests and villages which have abundant mineral wealth to the corporate bodies. Saibaba was one of the teams which questioned the Salwa Judum massacre. Sai and others gathered several parties and organisations to denounce the illegal activities of Salwa Judum.

The Supreme Court ordered the Chhattisgarh government to surrender all the weapons held by Salwa Judum members by declaring that its constitution itself was against law.

After that, the Congress government at the Centre started an outfit by the name 'Operation Green Hunt'. The purpose was to suppress the Maoist movement which was spreading through Andhra Pradesh to Bengal and to displace Adivasis from forests. Sai became one of the leading voices who spoke out against Operation Green Hunt and spearheaded an organized movement protesting against brutal atrocities, both at a national and international level. He met Jose Maria C. Sison, a prominent leader in the Philippines Communist Party who was elected as the President of the Forum, ILPS. Saibaba visited England, Hong Kong, Germany, Netherlands, America, Brazil in order to coordinate the people's movements and also to participate in the education-oriented Seminars. Varavara Rao sir used to say that Sai worked like a monster because he never took a moment's rest and was always seriously involved in managing and shaping the people's movements.

Repression increased and governments across the world started taking brutal measures to suppress the people's movements. In India, protests were suppressed, students beaten up, activists and lawyers locked up behind bars in false cases and implicated under draconian laws like AFSPA and UAPA. After witnessing the level of mobilization, the Central Government was irked by Sai's momentum and sought to crush the honest work he was doing.

### **Arrest and Punishment**

The State needed an excuse to curb Saibaba's voice that became a mouthpiece for the voiceless. The excuse they found was ridiculous; it came as a house search warrant for a theft that occurred in Aheri village in Maharashtra. The thief, whose identity is still undermined, supposedly hid the stolen property in the Delhi

University quarters of Professor Saibaba. Till date, we do not know what that stolen property was. The Maharashtra police barged in Sai's residence by obtaining a warrant from the Ahri Court to impound the stolen property. None of us even knew about Aheri till Sai's arrest. Even that thief too might not have known Delhi. One day, 9th May 2014, when Sai was returning home after evaluating answer scripts, the Maharashtra police cornered him in the middle of the road and whisked him away to first Nagpur and then Aheri. In spite of the Supreme Court directions, the police did not inform the family members about his arrest. Only after Vasantha's attempts to report a missing persons case did the Delhi local police inform us about the arrest. We met Sai in Aheri Court next time, on 11th May 2014. Sai told us that in the process of transporting him, the police threw him around "like a sack" and his left shoulder was in immense pain as he was constantly dragged around. The Delhi University, with unwarranted swiftness, served suspension orders to Sai on 15 May 2014. The Maharashtra Police imprisoned Sai to the Anda Cell of Nagpur Central Jail.

The Bombay High Court granted six months temporary bail from 30 June to 31 December 2015 on medical grounds. During that time, Sai received treatment for multiple ailments in CIIMS, Nagpur, and in Indian Spinal Hospital and Fortis Hospital in New Delhi. Since the medical bail was cancelled abruptly, Sai returned to the hellish Anda Cell again on 26 December 2015. Later, the Supreme Court of India granted full bail to Sai on 14 April 2016 and also passed an order to complete the proceedings of the court at an early date and deliver the judgement. During the bail period, Sai came to Hyderabad and got treatment in Care Hospital for one month. While the arguments were going on in Gadchiroli Sessions Court, Sai, me, Surendra Gadling (an advocate from Nagpur now implicated in the BK16 case), his junior advocates and Jagdish

Mesram (another advocate practicing in Armoor) were present. After the arguments, the Gadchiroli Sessions Court declared that the judgement would be delivered on the morning of 7th March 2017. Ravi Chander and I reached Gadchiroli Sessions Court early in the morning at 6 o'clock on that day. Heavy police deployment was already there. About a thousand policemen were deployed. Most of the policemen were equipped with modern weapons. CCTV cameras were fixed all over the court building. At 10 in the morning, the Gadchiroli Session Court Justice Suryakant S. Shinde occupied his seat of justice. The others who were arrested along with Saibaba were Hem Mishra, JNU student from Uttarakhand, Prasant Rahi Sanglikar, a journalist from Uttarakhand and three were Adivasi youth living in a small village near Gadchiroli— Mahesh Kariman Tirki, Pandu Pora Narote, and Vijay Tirki. The judge declared that the allegations levelled against all these people were true and he would specify the quantum of punishment in the afternoon session at 3 o'clock. The punishments as per the Indian Penal Code 120 - B read with 235 (2) and the UAPA were awarded as follows:

- Seven years rigorous imprisonment and one thousand rupees fine to Saibaba, Mahesh Tirki, Pandu, Hem, and Prasant Rahi as per the Section 13 of UAPA
- Life imprisonment and one thousand rupees as fine to Saibaba, Mahesh, Pandu, Hem and Rahi as per Section 18 of UAPA
- Ten years rigorous imprisonment and an additional fine of one thousand rupees to Sai, Mahesh, Prem, Rahi and Pandu as per Section 38 of UAPA
- Ten years rigorous imprisonment and one thousand rupees fine as per section 18 of UAPA and five years' imprisonment and one thousand rupees delinquency fine to Vijay Tirki



The judge ordered in his judgement of 827 pages that the time they had spent in jail so far should be reduced from the punishment and all the punishments should be implemented simultaneously. He did not read the judgement fully, but he read only the punishment part, that too speedily and without raising head even once. He vacated his seat immediately after he finished reading. We wanted to convey the punishment details immediately to Vasanta, other relatives, friends, Varavara Rao, Venugopal, Prof. Haragopal, but there were heavy disruptions in the phone signals. With a lot of difficulty, Ravi Chander and I could later inform them of the judgement details. Saibaba and others were taken to Nagpur Central Prison amidst strict security.

### **Prison Life**

The facilities and living conditions of the prisoners in Nagpur jail are absolutely abominable. Saibaba was kept in a cell which was in a round shape like an egg (hence the name Anda cell) and was given prisoner number C-9556. Sai had to spend 10 long years in that small Anda cell in which it was very difficult for him to move freely in his wheelchair. It was very hard for a person like Sai, to live in a place where it was very cold during winter and very hot in the summer, and I do not know how my brother could manage it for 10 years. Everything was an uphill battle for Sai, where he struggled to even take care of his basic needs. Sai was already suffering from Cardiomyopathy of the heart, and prison yet introduced more ailments on his crippled body. The functioning of his heart was reduced to 55 percent and used to fall unconscious in jail several times because of sleep apnea. Formation of stones in the kidney, gallbladder, deterioration of shoulder muscles, pain in spine, cyst formation in brain— countless ailments stifled him. He was infected with Covid twice in jail. He was taken to Nagpur Government Medical College several times where the doctors would perform the diagnostic tests but never implement treatment. Later on, he

was also taken to AIIMS, Nagpur. In spite of doctors' prescriptions and advice, proper medication and remedies were not given to him. The doctors in Government Medical College had suggested some diet restrictions to Sai, but that too were never followed by the jail authorities. They also advised that Sai should be given six pillows (to place under his feet) and a hot bag due to his poor physical condition, but they neither provided the material nor did they allow us to supply them from outside.

Jail authorities stipulated terms that family members of Sai could meet him twice a month and the advocates could meet whenever it was needed. Every month for the first 15 days, my sister-in-law Vasanta would go there, and the next fifteen days was my turn. Travel to Nagpur from Hyderabad was 10 hours and from Delhi it was 16 hours; but the time allowed to talk with Sai was only 20 minutes at maximum, sometimes less. We were allowed 'mulakat' with Sai only after all the people finished their 'mulakat' time. Inside, we were separated by grill bars and a tempered glass window full of dirt. We talked through phones on either end which would cut off once the time was up. If Sai requested the jail authorities, they would allow five more minutes only. Jail authorities did not allow Sai's friends even to meet him or talk to him. Sai's best friend Prasad came to Nagpur three or four times from Kakinada, but he could only see him through the window from far away. Ravi Chander talked to him two or three times. Prof. Haragopal could meet Sai once. The Supreme Court order facilitated the family members to speak to Sai over phone during the Covid time. Our mother talked to him once or twice. She was suffering from cancer during that time and would pass away soon.

Sai's health dwindled due to lack of proper diet, proper medication and proper medical facilities and narrow Andam cell. We tried our level best to provide him some relief. His jail mates who

were arrested along with him in this case, mainly the Adivasi youth, helped him a lot. Vijay Tirki secured bail from the Supreme Court and was released. Thinking that if Prasanth Rahi, Hem Misra and Sai were together, it might lead to some unforeseen problems, the Government shifted Hem to Kolhapur jail and Rahi was sent to Amaravati Jail. We addressed letters to Superintendent of Nagpur jail and Additional Director of Prisons, Maharashtra requesting them to provide some attendants to Sai, but to no avail. Our mother was not in a position to go and meet Sai in Nagpur jail. We wrote many letters to Governor Ch. Vidyasagar Rao and the then Chief Minister of Maharashtra in order to shift Sai to the Cherlapally jail because our mother was with me in Hyderabad. Prof. Haragopal also did his best. But, the officials informed us that it was not possible to shift from one State to the other State especially when the case is pending in court. But, Sai informed us that many of the other prisoners were shifted to other States from Nagpur jail by using some sort of leverage, monetary or otherwise.

Even before Covid-19 had spread, we filed a petition in Nagpur Bench of Bombay High Court to grant medical bail to Sai because he was not being given proper medical attention in the jail. The Nagpur Bench gave an order that the family members of Sai could bring a team of three doctors of their choice to Nagpur Government Medical College Hospital to conduct medical tests and submit the report to the court. It also instructed the doctors of the Medical College to cooperate with this scheme and made it clear that the jail authorities should make all the necessary arrangements. We submitted a list of three doctors, one from Delhi and two doctors from Telangana to the court. Prosecution raised objections against the names and argued that their report would be biased. But the High Court did not take their argument into cognizance and said that doctors are doctors always and aspersions need not be levelled against them. Out of those three doctors, two doctors could not come to Nagpur

owing to pressure from the Government, police and officials. Dr. M. F Gopinath conducted a heart checkup on Saibaba on 26 December 2018 in Nagpur Government Medical College Hospital. With the cooperation of the local hospital doctors all the tests were also conducted. Dr. Gopinath and I took Sai to all the departments in the hospital and saw to it that all tests were conducted without any complications. A detailed report was submitted to the Court on 1 January 2020, but due to the gradual increase in Covid cases, Saibaba could not get bail.

Before the Covid pandemic, my mother and I met the Director of Telangana Jails, S.P. Singh in order to request him to shift Sai to Cherlapally jail. He said that the matter was in the purview of the DGP and he could not do anything about it. Later, Vasanta, mother and I met DGP of Telangana Mahender Reddy in his office. He did not heed to our request. It is known, as per the reliable sources, that the then Chief Minister of Telangana was not interested in bringing Saibaba to Cherlapally jail.

We again approached the court to grant parole to Sai in order to provide proper medical treatment. Our request was rejected on the ground that our house in Hyderabad was situated in a containment zone and there was every possibility that he might be infected with Covid. In fact, our house was not in the containment zone. I contested this in the Nagpur High Court. The judge allowed my petition and advised me to apply again for parole. The truth is, Sai was already infected with Covid twice in jail. I again filed a petition to grant parole to Sai because he needed to see our mother as her health was speedily failing. The police reported to the court that Ramdev did not like Saibaba coming to his home. Based on this report, my appeal was rejected. I vehemently condemned this false reporting and wrote a strong letter addressed to DGP Mahender Reddy, but there was no reply. Mother passed away from cancer on 1 August

2020. We requested the jail authorities to allow him to at least attend the last rites. They were so inhuman that they did not heed our request. After a year I again requested the court to grant parole to Sai as we had to perform the first death anniversary of my mother. The parole was not granted as the Government expressed its apprehension that leaders of several organisations would come to meet Saibaba and there would be breach of land and order situation.

I and Prof. Laxman, the President of the Civil Liberties Committee, met the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court N.V. Ramana, in Nalsar University in Hyderabad and handed over to him a memorandum explaining Saibaba's critical position. As family members, we did whatever we could do. The people at large expressed their resentment at the events that were happening right from Sai's arrest, cancellation of his bail, court granting stay on his acquittal to subjecting him to hardships in the jail. Different mass organisations, individuals, intellectuals, common people, democrats, leftist parties, revolutionary organisations stood in solidarity with Sai and they conducted meetings, conferences, dharnas, rallies and performances both physically as well as in social media. Many essays and poems were written on him. The Human Rights wing of the United Nations and the Special Reporter on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities wrote letters to the Prime Minister Modi, Central Home Minister and Home Minister of Maharashtra State several times asking them to take steps to release Saibaba.

Sai had to resort to going on hunger strike three or four times because of the jail authorities denying him basic rights— they did not hand over the books we sent, the letters written by Vasantha and Manjeera, and would not give medicines and water bottles sent by the advocates. They fixed a CCTV camera in front of the Anda cell focussing on the place where he took bath and the lavatory. This was nothing but a violation of personal privacy and aimed to chip

away at this dignity as a person. Sai protested this harassment by the only form of resistance he could offer—a hunger strike. Sometimes we (Vasantha, Sailaja and I) told him not to resort to the extreme step of going on hunger strike because his health was not so good. The higher officials used to come down and solve some of the demands.

Saibaba's advocate Surendra Gadling was arrested in the Bhima-Koregaon case. The 84-year-old Dalit and Adivasi rights activist Christian Father Stan Swamy who was implicated in the Bhima-Koregaon case died in Mumbai jail. Pandu Narote (35) who was a co-accused in Saibaba's case also died of Swine flu because he could not get proper medication. He died with his hands shackled lying down on the floor of Nagpur Medical College Hospital on 25 August 2022. Such was the negligent attitude of the Nagpur jail authorities. Sai and other prisoners denounced the jail doctors' inhuman behaviour towards the ailing prisoners. Prof. Haragopal once said, jails should be like rehabilitation, correctional and help centres, but now they have become retribution centres. The ten-year long jail life had completely damaged Sai's health. He had to lose his life for the crime he did not commit.

Two High Court benches attested to Saibaba's innocence in their judgements. This will go down as a first in Judicial history. It will also be recorded as a dangerous example of enmity of the ruling class towards honest people who aspire for peace and tranquillity in society. First, the Nagpur Branch of Bombay High Court declared on 14.10.2022 that Sai and the remaining others are innocent. Ravi Chander and I went to Nagpur on the same day. Advocates were getting the formalities for release ready. But the Maharashtra and the Central Governments were not happy with the judgement. Within an hour of the delivery of the judgement, the Deputy Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Fadnavis issued a press statement that they were

going to challenge it in the Supreme Court. A few hours later, Tushar Mehta, the Solicitor General, went to the Supreme Court to file a petition on behalf of the Maharashtra Government before the bench of the then Chief Justice U.U. Lalith, asking to squash the High Court judgement. But, by that time, CJI had already left the court. Then Mehta approached the next senior most judge, Justice Chandrachud who expressed his inability to stop the judgement of Nagpur High Court pointing out that a fresh petition could be filed on the next working day i.e Monday. He also suggested that if they were so particular about getting a stay on the judgement, they could follow the administrative procedure. The next day was Saturday, and on Saturdays and holidays, the vacation bench generally takes up urgent cases. The prosecution filed the petition before the vacation bench. Justice M.R. Shah and Justice Bela Trivedi reviewed the judgement given by Nagpur bench. The Solicitor General pressed that Saibaba was the “mastermind” behind all the destructive events in the area and he posed a great danger to the internal security of the nation. The advocates representing Sai strongly condemned the Solicitor General’s argument, but Justice M R Shah commented that as far as “Maoists or terrorists” were concerned their ‘brain’ itself was a big problem. This comment reveals the mindset of the seniors in judiciary towards people involved in struggles to protect the people’s rights. The same judge showered praises on Narendra Modi, calling him an affectionate, enthusiastic and visionary leader.

We were still in Gadchiroli, unaware of these developments. The local court hindered the release and delayed matters till sunset. We met the Jail Superintendent and requested him to complete the preliminary work for the release of Saibaba, as the court order would reach the jail authorities online as per the official procedure. But no one heeded our request. Perhaps they had been given some prior information. Had Justice Chandrachud given a judgement that the

Nagpur bench of the Maharashtra High Court could not be stayed as per the rule of law: Saibaba would have been released on that day itself.

In due course, SC passed an order that a fresh bench of Nagpur High Court will examine the technical aspects and merits of the case in which Saibaba was implicated and deliver a judgement in three months. The Maharashtra government engaged a Special Public Prosecutor to argue in this case from Delhi. After the arguments and counter arguments, the Court reserved the judgement and finally delivered it on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2024 in which it was clearly mentioned that all including Saibaba were innocent. The Nagpur High Court judge Justice Rohit Dev, who declared in his judgement that Saibaba was innocent announced in the open court “I do not want to compromise my self-esteem. I am resigning as the Judge of this court”.

This time too, both the Maharashtra and the Central Governments knocked the Supreme Court door, but in no uncertain words the Highest Court declared that the Nagpur High Court judgement was very rational and there was no question of squashing it. Sai would have been released from jail on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2014 itself, but because of the ill intentions of the government, his release was delayed. Even on 6<sup>th</sup> March too, the necessary signatures were not obtained till the evening. Though the jail authorities received orders online at 7 o'clock in the evening, they did not take any action. Nihal Singh Rathore, a reputed advocate associated with the case, argued vehemently with the jail authorities that if they tried to stall the release of these persons, it would amount to contempt of court. Even his vehement argument did not yield any result. He lodged a complaint with the High Court Registrar at midnight, over phone. Vasantha and Ravi Chander reached the Jail premises early in the morning by 7 o'clock and demanded that Saibaba should be released



immediately as per the law. In view of our previous experience, as a precautionary measure, I had filed a petition in the Nagpur High Court. At last, Saibaba was released from Nagpur Central Prison in the morning of 7th March 2024 as innocent. Mahesh Tirki, who was there in the same Jail, was released at 7 in the evening. Hem Mishra and Prasanth Rahi who were lodged in different jails were let free in the afternoon of the same day.

### **Demise**

After the release, Saibaba straightaway travelled to Delhi and received treatment in AIIMS. Doctors informed him that his shoulders, which were damaged in the jail, could not be set right. Since Sai was unable to attend our mother's last rites when she passed away four years ago, we held her memorial meeting again on 18th August 2014 in our home. He was also admitted in Nizam's Institute of Medical Sciences (NIMS), Hyderabad for treatment, but he had to leave for Delhi to file a case for his reinstatement. The Delhi University authorities who suspended Saibaba did not take steps to reinstate him even after seven months after his acquittal. His health took a turn for the worse there and he got such a severe stomachache that he had to be admitted to the intensive care unit (ICU) of a hospital twice. This was due to Gallbladder stones that had been festering since 2017 for which we had requested medical intervention earlier in jail. As the waiting list for the surgery in AIIMS was long, he returned to Hyderabad and was readmitted to NIMS, where the Gallbladder removal surgery took place. The operation was successful, and his Gallbladder was removed on 28th September 2024. He was recovering well. Anil (TVV), Dontham Charan and Anil (SFI) were there in NIMS to help Sai. Five days after the surgery, pus started forming at the site of operation. He suffered severe stomachache and a temperature of 102 degrees. Doctors

had done all the tests and were giving proper medicine, but there was no respite from the pain.

CT scan tests were again done on 9th October and after examining the results, the doctors deducted three conclusions. The first one was that the pus oozing out from the operation site should be removed; the second was to remove the stunt that was placed in the common duct while removing the gallbladder and the third one was to do both simultaneously. On 10<sup>th</sup> October, they again went to the operation theatre and removed the pus. As a second thought they decided not to remove the stunt so early. Sai was there in the ICU of the operation theatre for two days. On 10<sup>th</sup> October, Sai suffered from high intensity of pain. Doctors were administering different kinds of medicines and injections. There was no change in his condition even on 11<sup>th</sup> October. It was found through an ultrasound test that a new kind of liquid leaked from the abdomen. That was nothing but blood. As much as one litre of blood leaked out from the abdomen. In this process, the kidneys were affected and the blood supply to the liver was drastically reduced. He was kept in the ICU again but despite the blood transfusions, his body could not take it, and he went under cardiac arrest. He could not recover in spite of CPR and DC shock. Saibaba breathed his last on the 12<sup>th</sup> night at 8.36 pm.

I, along with Vasantha, Manjeera, Chikkudu Prabhakar, Sai's best friend Prasad, Anil, Dontam Charan were there in the final hours of Saibaba by his bedside. While the doctors were explaining the conditions leading to demise, his best friend Prasad wailed and said that such a big hospital like NIMS could not save an internationally renowned person Saibaba by conducting a comparatively small operation.

Many days after that, on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2024, I accompanied Manjeera and Ravi Chander to meet the NIMS Director. We asked

him for some clarity on what happened in the last few hours leading up to Sai's death. He said that Sai had several deficiencies in his blood circulation, and they could not set them right in spite of serious attempts. His organs were weakened due to a persistent history of ailments and lack of treatment. The doctors who treated Sai in NIMS hospital also expressed their profound grief and said that there was no defect or lapse in their treatment. They said that the gallbladder problem had persisted for such a long time that it resulted in serious consequences. There was a problem in his cell-system too. The cluster of cells in the area where liver, pancreas, gallbladder are situated was drastically affected. Obviously, this damage was due to the fact that the stones in the gallbladder were not removed for a long time. Doctors told us that various organs failed because of this reason. Saibaba looked good from outside, but all the internal organs were damaged because of his jail life for ten long years. Hence, Sai's death is a murder committed by the Government, as several intellectuals, mass organisations and democracy-loving people declared.

### **After the demise**

Sai who had the background of people's movements, had intimacy with thousands of individuals, lakhs of activists, hundreds of mass organisations, tens of political parties, revolutionary organisations, labour unions, peasants unions, poets and artists. He was a part of many State-wide, Country-wide as well as World-wide united fronts. He led many struggles in the jail too. He wrote petitions for the illiterate prisoners. He took classes to the jail-mates. He read many books in the jail. Sai was a voracious reader. He loved the Urdu language. While he was in jail, he wanted to learn to read and write Urdu. I obtained some Urdu learning material from the Siasat, the Urdu daily published from Hyderabad and sent it to Sai. He penned poems while in jail. He wrote letters and also did

some translations. He maintained live contacts with many groups of people. That is why people's response that came from the nook and corner of the world was beyond comprehension. Everybody identified himself or herself with Saibaba. After his death, several mass organisations and united front are organising his memorial meetings.

### **The Future**

After his release from jail, Sai felt that his participation in the mass movements was still needed. The ruling classes in the country and throughout the world are working jointly to create communal tensions in the public at large. He wanted to organise movements by coordinating intellectuals and mass organisations to oppose the onslaught of communalism. He realised the necessity for massive people's struggles opposing the excessive measures adopted by the Government. He argued that people should oppose vicious schemes like Operation Pahaar and Operation Kaagar to protect the rights of adivasis and safeguard not just their, but all of our futures.

Sai, the one who participated in the agitation supporting the implementation of Mandal Commission recommendations, opined that the caste in which he was born does not need any reservations because of its social and economic background. Sai, who participated in many struggles against the draconian UAPA, was himself implicated in many UAPA sections that ended up leading to his demise. Sai, who lent his voice to the struggles for the Rights of Prisoners, was kept in an Anda Cell.

Sai left, leaving the responsibilities of a great movement on our shoulders. Sai had many dreams. He thought of publishing his Ph.D. thesis in a book form and also the translated versions of Kabir and Faiz Ahmed Faiz's poems.

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The Government tried to crush Saibaba who struggled for the rights of Adivasis. He defied death for 10 long years under gruesome jail conditions and came back to us alive and gripping his innocence in his broken hands. When he came out of jail doors, some journalists asked him how he felt about his release. He answered very calmly. "It is like coming out of a smaller jail into a bigger open prison". When they asked about the ten years he lost, he said "I will do the things that I could not do in these ten years, with a greater speed right now". The ten years of jail life could not change Sai's will, ideology and the way he understood society. This is Sai's greatest success and greatest defeat of the anti-people Government and the ruling classes

In this long history of people's struggle, Sai is a beam of light. His light continues to shine even now, and it is this light that will guide the next generation of activists who will take the struggle further and give rise to new movements.

Along with family and friends of Prof. G N Saibaba, let us remember the lines penned by the poet Neruda:

a drop of blood has fallen on these lines  
will remain living upon them as love

Tributes to my sister Bhavani and brother Sai!

*(translated by Rajendra Babu Arvini and edited by  
G. Manjeera)*

*Dr. Gokarakonda Ramadevudu is the younger brother of  
Prof. G.N. Saibaba*

*(Originally published in Arunatara, Telugu monthly, Nov-Dec  
2024)*

## **Continue to speak for the people's resistance and liberation**

**-Meena Kandasamy**

*(This is the transcription of the Speech delivered by Meena Kandasamy in the memorial meeting of Prof. G. N. Saibaba held on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2024 at SVK, Hyderabad)*

Good morning, everyone. I never expected that this kind of day will happen, you know? Because last year, in May, we released Sai's poetry, in 2023. Arundhati Roy was there, Comrade D. Raja was there, Comrade Vasantha was there. And at that time, our biggest dream was that Sai should come out of prison. And in our minds, we always thought that when he was out of prison, he was going to live forever. The fact that something so tragic could happen it did not even cross our minds.

I met him for the first and last time on April 5, in Delhi, in his Delhi home and we spent some time together; we had dinner together, that Vasantha akka had cooked. Even at that time, he was so joyful, so political, and, you know, full of energy and happiness, that nothing could foreshadow what had happened. So, to stand today at his memorial and speak about Sai in the past tense feels like a cruelty has happened to us. It feels like one more extension of the many atrocities that we face that we could not even enjoy one year of Sai's life outside prison. That it's only been 200 days or so, and what happened to him during those 10 years in jail it took away his life.

So, I want to start, because I'm speaking in English, and Comrade Lakshman has told me to talk slowly. I have made a lot of

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notes. I will not take more than 15-20 minutes, but please hear me out. I hope there is at least a summary, if not a translation. The first thing I want to say, and it's not even about Professor Sai, it is about what led us herewhat led us to this meeting, what led us to this auditorium, what has led us to, you know, seeing Sai as a photo and not as a living presence? I think the first culprit of this whole thing is P. Chidambaram, is UAPA, and it is Operation Green Hunt.

Today, his son goes on Twitter and says, "The State killed him." Karti Chidambaram, who is the State? The State was your own father. The State was Operation Green Hunt. The State was what went after people who supported people's resistance. The State was what went after academics. Today, you cannot blame the State just because it's headed by Modi. It was P. Chidambaram's brainchild, this UAPA, which sees my comrades in prison in Bhima Koregaon, which sees what has happened to Professor Sai Baba.

It is easy now for a lot of us to even consider Rahul Gandhi as progressive, but the history of what the Congress has done has only been continued by the BJP, sharpened by the BJP, and made into a total instrument of terror by the BJP. And I also think that, after the culpability of, you know, the blood on his hands that Chidambaram has, the second blood on the hands, and primarily the first, is possibly Narendra Modi. You went everywhere and talked about "Urban Naxal, Urban Naxal, Urban Naxal." You said that "these are the most dangerous people in this country." "These are the people who are terrorists." And what did it lead to? It led to Marxist voices, it led to poets, it led to intellectuals spending years and years in prison. What has it led to? It's not just the fact that, you know, Professor Sai has died or that Professor Anand was in jail, or that poets like Varavara Rao were in jail. It has also led to a silence.

Today, I sat in a meeting, and I saw, okay, everybody is my age or older than my age. Everyone is around 40 or older. Where are all the young people? The young people cannot come or are not

here because they cannot speak. We are living in this culture of silence. Only if you have intellectuals of one generation speaking can the next generation follow. The next generation can come and fight, the next generation can stand up for what is right. But what have you done? What have you done with this “Urban Naxal” thing? Is that you have silenced all the voices. You have made everyone afraid of jail. You have made everyone saying that if you speak if you’re in the academy and you speak, if you’re a poet and you speak, if you’re a journalist and you speak what happens to you is what happened to Gauri Lankesh. What happens to you is what happened to Professor Sai Baba, what happened to Professor Anand Teltumbde, what happened to Varavara Rao. This is the kind of intellectual terrorism and climate that has been created in this country. This is such an urgent, important thing to speak about.

I want to talk about Sai Baba, but yesterday I went through my emails, because, you know, memory is short, especially in the age of social media. I found that my first interaction or knowledge of Sai was 10 years ago. In May, the Maharashtra police had basically kidnapped a professor from Delhi University. He was kidnapped, abducted, and then, you know, imprisoned, and then terrorism and other charges were filed.

You tell me, is it possible in this country that such a thing can happen in broad daylight? So much of what happened shows the complete collapse of law and order. In the last 10 years, a lot of people who fought for his release whether it was Rona Wilson, whether it is Professor Hany Babu, whether it is Anand Teltumbde, whether it is Gautam Navlakha, whether it is Shoma Sen people who spoke for Sai, just like Sai spoke for the victims of Operation Green Hunt, the people who are encountered because of the Adivasi resistance on the in the State oppression on that, everybody who spoke for Sai were also targeted under the same UAPA. Under the same UAPA.



And I know secondly of Professor Sai Baba, and in fact, in a way in which I no longer can divide between what is personal and what is political is that I know him through comrade Vasantha., and then I know him through his writings, because I had both the honour and privilege of reading his poetry and trying to get it published. And fourthly, I know him through my very brief meeting with him.

When I talk about all of this, the first thing I want to discuss is his arrest, because, as I said to you, it wasn't just an arrest it was a kidnap. The second is the kind of custodial torture that happened to him. We have to speak this because it has happened so many times to so many people that we've a culture of numbness about it. We no longer are outraged about the kind of things that happen. I think at some place, Professor Sai actually talks about when he was asking for medical help to be taken to a hospital, he said, "I was treated like a garbage bag. I was just thrown around. I wasn't even given basic care." This lack of medical care today, if he dies from something as simple as a gallbladder surgery for something that as become as common as appendicitis what have they done to his body over those 10 years in jail? How much did his health has deteriorate?

When we talk about this prison system, it's not just the life inside the prison, but also the mental prison which the Indian court occupies. Because the Indian Supreme Court sat on a Saturday, these are judges who take vacations for two months, these are judges who don't turn up when they don't feel like turning up. And the same people, who take vacation for two months who have this infinite backlog of cases, they sat on a Saturday just to deny bail to him Justice Bela Trivedi and Justice M.R. Shah. We should never forgive or forget these names.

And then what we also see, and which is our responsibility, is to fight against the same law against which he was incarcerated. This is a trial that went on for so long. We should not forget what they said in court. I think on October 16, 2022, literally two years

before his demise, they said, "The brain is more dangerous, and direct involvement is not necessary. This brain is more dangerous." This idea that the judiciary upholds, then Modi goes to every meeting and talks about Urban Naxals. This idea of the brain is more dangerous is how there is a clampdown on speech, there is a clampdown reporting, there is a clampdown organising, and a complete silencing of all media.

I also think that the worst aspect of what happened in terms of prison, apart from the health abuse, apart from the custodial torture, apart from the mental torture being in a solitary cell was that all his letters were vetted. He could not even express himself. For 10 years, you know, we read the prison notebooks of Gramsci. We are able to even in an Israeli prison, Yahya Sinwar, the leader of Hamas who was assassinated, was able to smuggle his novel out. Even in Israeli prisons, it was possible to do this. But with Sai, what could he write in prison? His hand was in pain. It took him enormous effort even to finish even a small letter. What was smuggled out were letters that were addressed to many people was basically fractured poetry. You cannot even write poetry and call it poetry. It was fractured poetry in the form of letters that he managed to send to people. That is what remains in some sense of Sai's creative, artistic, and intellectual contribution.

Most of all, let us never forget that, just like Pragya Thakur is not in prison, just like Ram Rahim and other Babas are out on bail all the time, Sai was not even given parole to visit his mother, his mother's funeral. This is the extent to which the State has—you know—cracked down and tried to break this person. And yet, he showed the fiercest spirit, the fiercest resistance in order to make out of it alive, in order to tell us that this system, the horrors of the system have an end, that it cannot go on forever.

I also want to talk about Professor Sai, in the particular context of Indian academia. In Tamil Nadu, this is a very common

conversation, but I don't know how in Hyderabad it's going to go down. I am not a supporter of identity politics. I am a Marxist, but we still have to say that Indian academia is the most Brahminised entity that exists ever.

Sanatana Dharma is not upheld in Indian temples. It's upheld in Indian universities. Sanatana dharma, patriarchy, the sexual oppression of women, the exploitation of the working class, the consideration that people who are not Brahmin do not have intelligence—everything, every single aspect of this system manifests itself in the Indian university system. The Indian university system is the one which upholds neoliberalism, which upholds all the oppression of the Indian State, basically whose ideology is basically a counter-revolutionary ideology. And when you understand that you understand why they did to Professor Sai Baba what they did to him.

If you are an academic who does not subscribe to their statuesque ideology, if you are an academic who talks about class and caste at the same time, this is how they made an example out of Professor Sai. They wanted to send a message to other academics Bahujan academics, Dalit academics, Adivasi academics, even academics who are Marxist but with an outlook on caste. They wanted to tell them: this is a lesson. If you speak out, if you challenge the Indian State, if you challenge State terrorism, if you talk about Mandaland this I know because my mother fought for the

Mandal Commission for 18 years in an IIT We will finish your story. We will put you through the worst kind of torture, and nobody will speak, nobody will be allowed to speak. And I speak about this also as an academic. Like Professor Sai, but not with his experience, I also taught English in a university for four years. This is where I am very disappointed with the response of the English professors, the English faculty we have to step up, this kind of lukewarm response, this kind of, you know, writing a tweet what has the English teaching

fraternity, the English faculty, what have we done to grieve, to commemorate, to take forward Professor Sai's work? Because I think, there is something about English teaching in India that no other subject has that scope, which is that you address everybody. Whether it is science students or math students or political science students, everybody has an English class. So English becomes this one place where you can teach to transgress. It becomes this one place where you have the freedom to express some ideas which may be considered radical.

And Professor Sai was somebody it has happened to one of our own. It has happened to somebody who was part of the English faculty. When I see that there's either a very lukewarm response or no response in many places, a lot of people are thinking, "It is an activist who died," but it's also one of us who died. And I think this silence of the academic community leaves a lot to be desired. The way Professor Sai saw the classroom, the way he looked at the teaching of texts, the way he looked at novels, the way he looked at literature never considered them subsidiary, he never considered them outside of the political sphere, never considered them in isolation.

In the one very brief encounter I had with him, we were sitting on his couch in his Delhi home and speaking. He was talking to me about Indian writing in English. I don't want this to be a detour—I think it's very essential and central to who Professor Sai was. He was telling me that part of his research was to look at the post-colonial novel in English, the post-independence novel in English, and he said, "All of Indian writing in English, all of Anglophone literature in English, is basically Brahmin literature in English." And he said it does not address rural India at all, does not address the problems of the working class at all, does not address the lived reality of the Dalit-Bahujan communities at all. It is a very elite, upper-crust literature.

And this is what Professor Sai was doing not only in his human rights work, where he talked about Adivasi resistance, talk against corporatism, against militarism—but even in the intellectual domain. Professor Sai wanted to change things. He wanted to show a mirror to society, to shame society into thinking, “This is what we have.” Literature is a very powerful weapon, What are you doing with it? What are you doing with this very powerful thing?

Losing somebody like Professor Sai is a loss that I don’t think we can ever bridge, but we can honor his memory in so many ways. And I also think, and I want Vasantha akka to forgive me for saying this, that it’s very hard to find romantic revolutionaries. You think, maybe Che Guevara was the last romantic revolutionary, but Professor Sai was so deeply in love, so much in love. And it’s not just the poems because I am a poet. You can sit anywhere and write anything, but we were taking selfies, and I stood next to Vasantha akka, and he said to me, “No, no. You both look like you are friends. You both are looking like you are a couple. Please come and stand on this side.” And I could see in his eyes this beautiful possessiveness that he had towards his wife. I cannot capture it in words, but even in my brief meeting with her, just standing close to her for five minutes, he was like, “You come this side,” and I felt, “This is love.” It is so hard and so rare in this very corrupt world, in this very laid back or whatever it is you want to call it neoliberal capitalist world, people are so emotional.

Especially Professor Sai, he really believed like all of his letters from prison not only do they address the colonial system, not only do they bear witness to oppression, not only do they talk about resistance, not only do they talk about what it means to be a prisoner, but, also what it means to a prison guard, he was also who looked at love as a very political project, to Professor Sai, love was about optimism, to Professor Sai love was about how we will defeat oppression, and love was about how the revolution will be successful.

Because love contains in its heart hope. And to see that kind of this very idea of romantic revolution for me is beyond anything for me, because today everyone is pessimistic. I mean, young people, I don't know, Tinder, Grindr I don't know where you find love. But there is places in the world where love exists.

What I want to say is that at least from my experience and my understanding and the way I have tried to talk or write about Sai, running signature campaigns for Professor Sai, is that comrade Vasantha is one half of Sai. it's not a joke-it's very sincere. She represents one half of him, and now that Sai is no longer with us, she represents all of him. Comrade, you have to carry the torch forward. I mean that. I'm saying this as your sister, I'm saying this as your comrade. We all look up to you. You have a huge gap to fill, and your memory, your presence, your words mean so much to us.

I think for the rest of us, how do we continue Professor Sai Baba's legacy? First, we must learn to grow a spine. Professor Sai's spine was deformed from imprisonment, from polio, from 90% disability, from being in a wheelchair. But I think all the rest of us do not have any excuse for not having a spine. We must continue to speak for the people's resistance. We continue to speak in support of the atrocities being committed against people in this country, because that's what Sai was doing, that's what he would have done if he continued to be with us.

Second thing is, we also learn from Professor Sai to organize and work in collectives. I say this as a writer, and there is no other profession in the world that is more individualistic than a writer. But history comes in cycles, and we have now come to a moment where we have to work together. And I think we are at this juncture in history where people have to learn to work in collectives.

A very pressing issue is what is happening in Central India now. For those of you on social media, I'm not sure how much the mainstream media is covering it. In the name of Operation Kagar, in

the name of what was earlier Operation Samadhan Prahar, all of this is continuation of Operation Green Hunt, and now you know there's a lot of corporatisation, lot of land grabs, and a lot of militarisation happening in Bastar. But It's also happening in Hasdeo, where you see these 1 million trees being felled for an Adani project. So I think you know People have been displaced, and there are encounters and the State is proudly claiming that since January, 180 Adivasi people have been encountered, in the name of being Maoists.

So this entire Naxal scare, this entire Maoist scare, but also the killing of Adivasi people is labelled as terrorism, and goes away scott free. I think we will have to talk about it. If we claim to be Indian, if I am a Tamil woman standing here in Telangana—am speaking to you, what brings us together is being Indian. Then we have the same responsibility toward our brothers and sisters, our Adivasi brothers and sisters in Central India, in Bastar, in Hasdeo, in Chhattisgarh, and wherever land grabs are taking place. And I think this is one of the ways which we can truly pay homage to Professor Sai Baba, to salute him and continue the work he was doing.

I think the last two demands we must make as a collective is for the demand for the repeal of the UAPA. An act like the UAPA has no place to exist in a democracy. The fact that some of the greatest intellectuals of our time are in jail, the greatest young activists like Umar Khalid are in jail, the fact that the Bhima Koregaon prisoners have to go on a fast, in order to demand to be produced in court for a trial that hasn't even started this makes us understand that the UAPA is an instrument of torture, is an instrument of State terrorism, is an instrument of State violence. And I think we have to stand out and stand up against it.

We also need to demand and continue the actual work that Professor Sai was doing which is demand for the release of all political prisoners. So everybody who has been in charge of the Committee

for the Release of Political Prisoners whether it's Rona Wilson, whether it's Hany Babu—they find themselves in jail. This cycle cannot continue. This cycle has to break. This circuit must break. Unless the demand comes from all the people, if there is only one individual making the demand, that individual is going to be jailed again under UAPA. So this is something that we have to think about, collectivise, and work about.

And finally, I just want to end on something that going beyond the circumstances of today, which is to realise as a society think about what the word “terrorism” means. Because In today's imperialist world order, the word “terrorism” is used to silence activists, professors, poets, is used to paint entire resistance movements. So whatever happens to the people in Palestine, whatever happens to the people in Gaza, whatever happens to the people in Lebanon, they are all called terrorists. Whatever happens to the people in Central India, whatever happened to the Tamil Tigers—the minute you apply the word terrorism, you can do anything to people. You can kill them in custody, you can commit a genocide.

And I think This is a broader conversation, but I really think we need to start calling out State terrorism—the State terrorism that killed Professor Sai Baba and you know look at what is happening to language in general. Having said this, thank you so much to the organizers comrade Lakshman, comrade Venugopal, and Vasantha akka for giving me this opportunity.

Red salutes, Lal Salam, and Johar, Professor Sai Baba

*Meena Kandasamy is a poet, novelist and activist.*



## **Judicial Death of Saibaba, English Professor from a Peasant Family**

**- Paranjoy Guha Thakurta**

Gokarakonda Naga Saibaba was born in 1967 to a family of poor farmers from Amalapuram in East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh. The exact date of his birth is not known, as his parents did not record it. He died on October 12, 2024, aged 57, in Hyderabad following post-operation complications after a surgery to remove stones from his gall bladder.

After he was afflicted by polio, he used a wheelchair from the age of five. A brilliant student, Saibaba topped his batch of undergraduate students at the Sree KonaseemaBhanojiRamars (SKBR) College, Amalapuram, went on to complete a Master's Degree in English from the University of Hyderabad, and then a Ph.D degree from the University of Delhi in 2013. His doctoral thesis was on "Indian Writing in English and Nation Making: Reading the Discipline." He wrote in Telugu and English. His writings often dealt with the lives of the downtrodden and underprivileged Dalits and Adivasis.

Saibaba was arrested in 2014 after he was accused by the government of India of having ties with outlawed Maoist organisations and was sentenced to life imprisonment by a sessions court in Gadchiroli, Maharashtra, in 2017 on the basis of charges under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (or UAPA). He was then kept in the Nagpur Central Jail. The professor had been arrested by police officials of Maharashtra and the former undivided state of Andhra Pradesh, and the Intelligence Bureau which works under the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, headed by Amit Shah. He was arrested

while he was on his way home from the University of Delhi, where he taught.

The UAPA is often described as the most draconian of all laws in India's statute books because it lays down stringent conditions for obtaining bail. Nevertheless, in October 2022, the Nagpur bench of the Bombay High Court acquitted Saibaba of the charges and ordered that he be released on bail.

But the relief from the High Court proved short-lived for the disabled man. The state government of Maharashtra rushed to the Supreme Court within hours of the High Court order and the case records were translated from Marathi to English overnight on Friday.

On Saturday, October 15, 2022, during a special hearing of a bench of the Supreme Court comprising Justices M R Shah and Bela Trivedi, the order of the Bombay High Court was suspended.

Saibaba's lawyer, senior advocate R Basant, sought to refute the Indian government's allegation that his client, a 90% physically disabled man, who was a "respectable" professor, was the "brain" behind Maoist activities and that his fellow accused were mere "foot-soldiers".

The Supreme Court bench remarked that generally "as far as terrorist activities are concerned, the brain plays a very important role... A brain for such activities is very dangerous."

The request to transfer Saibaba for "house arrest" in order to "preserve his health" was not accepted by the bench comprising Justices Shah and Trivedi. The Solicitor General of India Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Maharashtra government, remarked: "These requests are coming very frequently from Naxals, especially urban Naxals... In UAPA offences, accused have to be kept confined. You don't need to go somewhere to stab someone, you don't need to go somewhere to shoot someone."

Senior Advocate Basant suggested that guards could be posted outside Saibaba's house and his telephone lines disconnected. He

said he was making a humanitarian request on medical grounds and that the professor “did not have any criminal antecedents, not even a prosecution. . .” “Isolation in prison is the only condition for UAPA offenders,” Mehta said.

The Bombay High Court had set aside the lower court judgment and ordered the release of Saibaba and other accused persons and noted that no sanction for his prosecution existed at the time the court took cognisance of the case and even while charges were framed against him.

The Supreme Court bench, however, found, after giving “anxious thoughts” about the facts and circumstances, that the case was a “fit” one to suspend the Bombay High Court’s order of discharge.

Mehta argued that the offences against Saibaba were serious, grave and affected the sovereignty and integrity of India. The so-called urban Naxalites wanted to “overthrow the parliamentary form of democracy,” he claimed.

The Supreme Court asked the Bombay High Court to re-evaluate the case. On March 5, 2024, Saibaba (as well as five other individuals who were tried along with him) were once again acquitted by a bench of the High Court comprising Justices Vinay G Joshi and Justice Valimiki S Menezes. The court declared the prosecution’s case invalid, said that the evidence presented was dodgy and inadequate and that the life imprisonment verdict by the trial court in Gadchiroli was a “failure of justice.”

Besides Saibaba, those who were charged under the UAPA were journalist Prashant Rahi, Mahesh Tikri, Hem Keshwdatta Mishra and Vijay Nan Tikri. The sixth person in the case, Pandu Narote, died in August 2022, awaiting a favourable verdict. The Maharashtra government claimed the accused were all members of the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist).

Incidentally, Saibaba's defence in the trial court was handled by the Nagpur-based human rights lawyer Surendra Gadling, who, soon after the completion of trial, was himself arrested in the Elgar Parishad case.

The second acquittal by the Bombay High Court was challenged in the Supreme Court by way of filing a special leave petition the same day and prior to the delivery of the High Court's judgement and even before a copy of the 293-page judgement was made available.

This account indicates how the judicial system in India works, especially if some of the most powerful persons in New Delhi are determined to go after a person. He had to be acquitted not once, but twice by one of the country's leading high courts.

After he came out of jail, Saibaba remarked that it was a wonder that he was alive. Seven months later, he was gone. His case, like that of Father Stan Swamy, can be aptly described as an instance of "judicial murder." Saibaba donated his body for medical research.

This tribute to him was written by his comrade Janjerla Ramesh Babu, president, Telangana Forum Against Displacement:

Dear Doctors,  
When you remove Saibaba's eyes,  
Please add a touch of gentleness,  
For in them lie traces of the world he dreamt of, that might  
unfold within someone else.  
Please extract his heart with utmost skill,  
For in that tenacious heart that denied death  
In the fascist Manuvadi regime's prison, You may find the roots of  
tender compassion  
For the Adivasis and the oppressed masses.  
In constant captivity, grappling with illness, He stood firm for his  
beliefs.

Please check, perhaps, those polio-stricken legs  
Could leave a mark on the faces  
Of the chameleon activists who preach a new ideology every day.  
One more, final request...  
Please preserve that brain even more carefully for the future  
generations,  
For though ninety percent disabled,  
His “thinking mind” made this exploitative system tremble with fear.  
Someday, it may help someone identify the system’s weak link.

*(Originally published in NEWSclick on 19<sup>th</sup> Oct 2024)*

*Paranjoy Guha Thakurta is a journalist, writer and  
Documentary film maker*

## **How the NHRC Failed to Protect G.N. Saibaba**

**- *Henri Tiphagne and Edgar Kaiser***

The story of Professor G.N. Saibaba is unique and heart-wrenching. A former English professor at the University of Delhi, a person with 90% disability and bound to a wheelchair, yet labelled an urban naxal by the state. Saibaba's disability did not stop him from fighting for the rights of Adivasis. Like the fate of many other human rights defenders (HRDs) in India, he was falsely implicated in a case and subjected to a long incarceration, despite two acquittals in the same case by the Bombay high court.

The prison conditions affected his health, which led to his death a few months after his release from jail. His death marks the failure of our judiciary, the government, prison authorities and the police. Most importantly, it is the failure of an independent body with a mandate to protect and promote human rights – the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). Despite several appeals to the NHRC regarding Saibaba, the commission found every reason to dismiss them.

Human Rights Defenders Alert (HRDA) is a network that initiates action on behalf of HRDs under threat or with security concerns. The HRDA filed several complaints in this case before the NHRC but none reached their intended outcome. On September 13, 2013, the police raided Saibaba's residence inside Delhi University and put his whole family under house arrest in different rooms for around four hours, even threatening his daughter.

The HRDA filed an urgent appeal (Case No. 6191/30/4/2013) with the NHRC, praying for inquiry, protection and to ensure that no false criminal case is registered against Saibaba. No proper action was taken and the complainant was not heard for a year. Instead, the case was linked with one filed by Saibaba's wife, Ms Vasantha, after his arrest on May 9, 2014 (Case No.2850/30/4/2014). The commission sought arrest documents and Saibaba's medical reports and directed the Nagpur prison authorities to provide adequate medical treatment to him. The NHRC found the arrest documents to be proper despite a discrepancy in the place of arrest and said it found no reason to pursue the complaint and closed the case saying 'no further action required'.

On June 19, 2015, the HRDA filed a second urgent appeal with the NHRC regarding his poor living conditions in prison. He was lodged in an 'Anda' barrack of Nagpur prison and went on a hunger strike on April 11, 2015 to demand proper medical treatment and food. The HRDA prayed for an independent investigation into his prison conditions, appointment of non-official visitors and action against the prison authorities. However, the NHRC dismissed the appeal. On January 2, 2016, the HRDA filed a third urgent appeal with the NHRC regarding the violation of his right to bail and inhumane treatment in jail, despite his disability. The HRDA requested independent prison visits, an

investigation into false charges, NHRC's intervention in accordance with Section 16 of the Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 concerning his solitary confinement, compensation for the HRD and intervention in the bail petition before the Supreme Court. The NHRC clubbed this case with another case filed by one Yogesh Mahajan from Delhi (Case No.2428/13/17/2015) and ordered DG prisons to investigate the prison conditions. The HRDA case was closed by the NHRC on January 27, 2020 stating that the report

from the prison showed otherwise and that the complainant could not substantiate the case.

The most ironic aspect of the NHRC's failure comes here. Retired Indian Administrative Officer (IAS) S. Jalaja, who was once NHRC's joint secretary and had served as the NHRC's special rapporteur, studied Maharashtra prisons and submitted a report on July 17, 2017. The report revealed harsh truths about the Nagpur prison where Saibaba was detained. This included staff shortage and overcrowding of prisoners among other things. She specifically noted Saibaba's poor medical condition and recommended that "an independent medical team from AIIMS should assess his condition." This NHRC report directly contradicted the investigation report submitted to the commission in the cases filed by the HRDA. While the NHRC relied on the investigation report provided by the police, it chose to overlook its own special rapporteur's report on the prison where Saibaba was detained. If the prison had adequately met his needs, his health would not have deteriorated so severely as to endanger his life. This issue was central to the HRDA's fourth and fifth appeals, filed in 2022 and 2024, concerning prison conditions and compensation respectively.

In addition to these appeals by the HRDA, there were several complaints filed by different activists in this case, all of which were closed in a similar fashion. Even the international community appealed to the Indian government to take proper action in this case on several occasions, including The UN special rapporteurs who issued statements in 2019 and in 2023. None of this prompted the NHRC to act. More recently, on October 17, 2024, The UN special rapporteur on HRDs referred to

Saibaba and said, "There are so many violations against human rights defenders in India and we saw the disabled human rights defender released after [10] years last march and he died last week.



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He was acquitted but he was left in prison all these years. So India should clean up [its] act". Despite the international community – and even individuals within the NHRC – becoming aware of the poor prison conditions that contributed to Saibaba's deteriorating health, it was disheartening for an institution with such a mandate to simply dismiss these concerns. The NHRC and its former chairpersons – Justices K.G. Balakrishnan, Cyril Joseph, H.L. Dattu, Arun Kumar Mishra and Vijaya Bharathi Sayani – are answerable to this democracy for the institution's wilful silence on Saibaba's mistreatment. They all owe an apology to the people of this country for failing to exercise their powers to prevent the death of a dedicated academician who devoted his life to civil liberties and the socio-economic and cultural rights of India's vulnerable populations.

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## **Acquitted not just once but twice:**

### **His freedom was short-lived**

**- Manu Sebastian**

A brilliant academic, who took up the cause of human rights, had to suffer ten years of brutal incarceration for trumped-up charges under the notorious anti-terror law Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act 1967, simply because his social activism displeased the State. Though he was acquitted not just once but twice, his freedom was short-lived.

Within a few months after the Bombay High Court, in March this year, acquitted former Delhi University Professor GN Saibaba and five others after finding absolutely no evidence against them for Maoist links so as to attract the UAPA provisions, he died at the age of 57 years due to post-surgical complications on October 12. He had undergone a gallbladder removal surgery, following which he developed complications. He had to suffer over 10 years of brutal incarceration as an undertrial prisoner before the Court found him innocent. The stringent provisions of the UAPA allows the State to inverse the 'bail is the rule' and 'innocent until proven guilty' principles, enabling the trapping of activists and dissidents, who raise uncomfortable questions at the establishment.

Saibaba, who lived with 90% disability and relied on a wheelchair for mobility, suffered immense physical deterioration during his imprisonment. He developed serious ailments in prison, affecting various organs, including the heart and gall bladder. In his prison memoir titled "Why do you fear my way so much?", Saibaba wrote that the prison term put him under "excruciating relentless

pain”, and “one after the other, my organs started bursting”. He said that the prison conditions have reduced him to subhuman and inhuman levels

*My vocal chords acquired lesions making my voice a thin and inaudible squeak. My heart broke with hypertrophic cardiomyopathy. My brain has started having blackouts with a condition called syncope. My kidneys are silted with pebbles; my gallbladder gathered stones and pancreas grew a tail of pain called pancreatitis. Nerve lines in my left shoulder broke under the conditions of my arrest, known as brachial plexopathy. More and more organs of silence replaced the original. I have been living with explosive and shooting pain day in and day out. I am living on the margins of life,” he wrote*

Despite his deteriorating health, the Courts repeatedly rejected his applications seeking bail on medical grounds. He was even denied parole to attend the funeral of his mother. In a public interaction after his release in March this year, Saibaba was in tears when he spoke about how he could not meet his mother for the last time. *“I couldn’t see my mother one last time before her death because I was denied parole. This is a denial of basic Human Rights,”* he said, breaking down. In a country where rapists and murderers and rioters with political patronage get parole and remission at the drop of a hat, the denial of the basic rights to those persecuted for ‘thought crimes’ should trouble anyone with a conscience.

One must remember that Saibaba was acquitted not just once, but twice. In October 2022, the Bombay High Court found that the trial was vitiated as there was no valid UAPA sanction, and discharged Saibaba and five co-accused, ordering their immediate release. However, the very next day, in an extraordinary sitting held on a Saturday, the Supreme Court stayed their release.

The Saturday sitting to stay their release raised troubling questions. Eventually, the Supreme Court remitted the matter to the High Court, for fresh consideration by another bench.

In the second round, the High Court acquitted the accused on merits. It is to be noted that it was not an acquittal on mere technicalities or on the benefit of doubt. Rather, the High Court found that the evidence in the case was wholly unbelievable and found absolutely no basis for the UAPA charges. The malicious nature of the investigation and prosecution is evident from the manner in which the High Court discarded the alleged seizures of incriminating materials from Saibaba's Delhi University residence, after elaborately laying down several reasons. The Court was surprised to note that the police chose an illiterate person as a seizure witness, despite the availability of educated persons in the University campus. Also, the seizure was a closed-door affair with Saibaba, and the witness kept out. The failure to record the hash-value of the electronic gadgets also raised the High Court's suspicions, leading it to conclude that the prosecution has not proved the seizure of the materials from Saibaba's residence. The Court further held that the UAPA offence of terrorism can't be established merely based on alleged downloading of materials containing Communist or Naxal philosophy.

*"No evidence has been led by the prosecution by any witness to any incident, attack, act of violence or even evidence collected from some earlier scene of offence where a terrorist act has taken place, in order to connect the accused to such act, either by participating in its preparation or its direction or in any manner providing support to its commission,"* the High Court observed.

In the GN Saibaba case, the Bombay High Court observes that the seizure of alleged incriminating materials by the Police from his University residence is doubtful. "...we hold that prosecution has

failed to prove seizure and search of incriminating material from the house search...

Although the prosecution rushed to the Supreme Court appealing against the judgment, in the second round, the Supreme Court refused to stay it, *prima facie* saying that the High Court's judgment was "well-reasoned" and pointing out that the accused have the benefit of two orders of acquittal.

While discussing Saibaba's predicament, one must not forget the name of another co-accused in the case, Pandu Pora Narote, who died as an undertrial prisoner in August 2022, before getting to see his name cleared.

The predicament of Saibaba and Narote immediately evokes memories of the shocking death of Father Stan Swamy while under custody in the Bhima Koregaon case, another UAPA case against activists over alleged Maoist links. These cases illustrate how the process itself becomes the punishment under UAPA, with the accused enduring prolonged detentions without a trial. The words of former Supreme Court judge Justice Aftab Alam in a public address in 2021 resonated deeply : *"Where has this draconian law in the world's largest democracy taken us? The results are all there for everyone to see. It stares us in the face in the death of Father Stan Swamy without a trial. There are scores of Indians who get acquitted and come out of jail, with a broken life and practically no future! I submit that the UAPA has failed us on both counts- constitutional freedom and national security!"*

It is high time that the human costs extracted by these unjust detentions under UAPA are calculated and accountability is fixed on those investigating officers who trapped innocents by misusing the statute. The Courts, instead of merely acquitting or discharging the accused, should think of measures to compensate them for their liberty and dignity lost during prison term. The State should extend a healing touch to the UAPA victims, through rehabilitation measures

to enable them to piece together their shattered lives. Otherwise, the constitutional guarantee of personal liberty will remain only an empty promise.

In a recent judgment, the Supreme Court made a pertinent observation that in cases of clean acquittal, where the accused had undergone long years of custody without trial, a claim for compensation might be possible against the State. *"Someday, the courts, especially the Constitutional Courts, will have to take a call on a peculiar situation that arises in our justice delivery system. There are cases where clean acquittal is granted by the criminal courts to the accused after very long incarceration as an undertrial. When we say clean acquittal, we are excluding the cases where the witnesses have turned hostile or there is a bona fide defective investigation. In such cases of clean acquittal, crucial years in the life of the accused are lost. In a given case, it may amount to violation of rights of the accused under Article 21 of the Constitution which may give rise to a claim for compensation,"* the Court said.

Professor Saibaba's death should be a wake-up call for meaningful reforms to prevent the misuse of draconian laws against dissenters. The outpouring of grief and outrage following his death must lead to positive systemic changes. Because Saibaba himself despised sympathy and wanted only solidarity.

*"I hope none of you should feel sympathetic to my condition. I don't believe in sympathy; I only believe in solidarity. I intended to tell you my story only because I believe that it is also your story. Also because I believe my freedom is your freedom."- Why do you fear my way so much?-Poems and Letters from Prison*

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*Manu Sebastian is the Managing Editor, LiveLaw*

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## **I Refuse to Die:**

**He did as long as he was in the jail**

**- Prof. Haragopal**

*(This talk was delivered by Prof. Haragopal, at the '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. 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 wheelchair. So, he used to crawl wearing gloves on his hands. He used to use his hands for walking and my room, was unfortunately 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 Literature of University of Hyderabad. That's my first memory of Saibaba that, somebody so disabled was so determined to continue his education. And the way he would attend some of our meetings which were general meetings. It was uncomfortable for him to even come to the hall. But he would struggle. He would struggle. Then of course, he was with the civil

rights and other democratic movements and several movements. And 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 awestruck to see that somebody engaging himself in a dialogue, on the entire agrarian structure, oppression and all that. Such was his understanding of the Indian agrarian structure.

But I would like to say something that Anand touched upon, the Committee for the Defence and Release of GN Saibaba. Once he was arrested, first arrested and then released for some time before his second arrest, he came to Hyderabad and his health was very bad. So, we admitted him to the Care Hospital, 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 Care 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 told me that since he works for a cause and struggles for a cause, "Our hospital would absolve the entire cost" and they did not take a single pie from us.

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

Now, 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 when he 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. And then, when NIA came to my house, it was during the COVID period, and we were already in a terrible anxiety. And of course, whomever they picked up from Telangana to Bombay, to each person they were saying that they would pick me up. So, already the anxiety of Corona was there and this was added. But then for some reason, possibly because of my age, some NIA chap landed at my house, saying "No, we are not raiding. At the time being, we are not arresting you but, I want your assessment." What did I think of Saibaba? But they were inquiring about four people: Anand, Gautam Navlakha, Honey Babu and Rona Wilson. They went on asking me question after question, "What do you think of Anand? What do you think of Sai?" I said, look, these are all men of great conviction. They are brilliant people.

And what is it that you suspect? They were asking that as defence committee members, where do you raise your resources? I said, "Why do we need money? We hold some press conferences, we meet people and most of the members are from Delhi, others can afford to come. We don't need any resources. We spend our own money". But see, the NIA's inquiry was to trap people and whatever evidence they collected, of course, he filed that evidence. But that evidence, you know, went in favor of all the four members. Of course, they also inquired about Varavara Rao. Then I said that he is such a great poet that, if he was a mainstream poet, he would have got the Jnanapith award. These are the people who they were convicting.

Saibaba would write letters to me from prison. Once I went to Nagpur. They allowed me, but the Mulakath has become so stupid 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 fellow from the intelligence will be watching. I mean, I don't know what the character is of the Indian state? We were inquiring about his health and they said. "No, he is okay. We have a hospital, we have doctors". The jailer was telling, "No, we have taken care of him". But then, that he was put in the Anda Cell. If you know of Arun Ferreira and his experiences you know what Anda Cell means, and one gets terribly frightened. The type of punishment these fellows are given~ [they] have forgotten what is the jail meant for~ what is the purpose of a jail? In at least our part 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. I mean, the Supreme Court has been saying these in certain cases. But when it comes to a person like Saibaba, he cannot participate in any action. This 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. I mean, see, something of that kind happened to Saibaba. The judgement of the Gadchiroli session court is such a judgement that, in fact we were so shocked that 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 than protecting the rights of prisoners.

And the type of accusations he makes are so ridiculous. 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. I said, "Look, 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 was suffering a lot. Since he

could not stand, he needed always support of two persons. But, at one point, they withdrew these two persons. 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 because 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. Malepally Laxshmaiah, 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, but nothing happened.

Government of Maharashtra was determined. I think the whole purpose incarcerating Saibaba was not only that he should be made to suffer, but that 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. Sharad Pawar talked about a couple of cases and said that Bhima Koregaon case was fictitious. Nandita and I know, because she was around when five-six of us went to him. But Saibaba was telling me last time when he came, that when Sharad Pawar group came to power, then they had sent the Home Minister to Nagpur jail. I believe, 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 said no, I am worried about others, the conditions are very wretched in the jail. So, Saibaba was narrating that "You know, this chap came only to help me. But I thought that, I must present the entire conditions in the jail".

So, some of these efforts we did make but the university~ then the court~ then the jail. You take any institution of the state, and 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 because he already had a medical history. But, after a checkup they said his case would come three months later for treatment! Therefore, he came to Hyderabad. But we met him and admitted him in the NIMS which is a public healthcare but one of the very good institutions, but he was continuously talking about going back to Delhi getting reinstated and start 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 said "I'll come later but I have to go immediately", because his case was coming up for hearing. Then, he rushed up to Delhi. I thought he was in the hospital. I rang up in the evening saying that I'll come. he said "Sir, I am going to airport". I said, what happened? He said, "No sir, the case is coming up. You know, lawyer is advising me to go back to Delhi". So, he went back. By the time he returned that stone in the gallbladder had dropped into pancreas. The doctor was telling me that, "if only we had that 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. The way he was treated was very cruel.

When Manohanjan Mohanty came for some other work, Manoranjan, Prof Narasimha and I went to see him but 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 in that health condition. I said, I will talk to him, please don't worry. And then of course,

Sudershan Reddy wanted his appointment or the terminal order and somebody else was appointed in his place. But justice Sudershan Reddy when we met Rahul Gandhi during his Bharat Yatra explained to him for 10 minutes about Saibaba about how Indian state was treating Saibaba. But Sai'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 thought that 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, and he was rushed [to the hospital]. The doctor said that there was a bleeding inside his stomach and then when he developed kidney problem. All this is because of the damage done 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 reflects 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 different 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 an example of courage, of conviction.

AIFRTE takes the case of Saibaba and the collapse of our institutions and the criminalization of our institutions. But here is a man that I was reminded of Socrates when I spoke to him. "That, for the truth one would suffer". And the type of letters he used to write to me from the prison of four to five pages. He would give me

give a big list of books which he asked us to send to the jail and he wrote 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 and I think this 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 must 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~ the entire unfolding of this case~ the ugly reality of Indian society is perhaps which is worrisome for [all of] us. But Saibaba will be remembered, and yesterday we have seen how. What a massive response there was from the society as a tribute to a person who stood for his convictions lifelong and died for his convictions. I think this 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 S.R, Ph.D. Scholar at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru.)*

*Prof. Haragopal is the Chairperson, Committee for the Defense and Release of GN Saibaba and Former Professor of Political Science, University of Hyderabad.*

## **Sai's sheer power of grit defeated the sad system**

**- 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)*

I saw Sai first during the Mumbai resistance in 2004. Many of you might be aware that in the wake World Social Forum, we had organised Mumbai Resistance - 2004 and I saw him for the first time there. If I remember correct, he 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 victor, 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, and he was acquitted. Then came of course in 2005, the Operation Green hunt and by 2009, Sai became a voice against Operation Green hunt. 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 Green hunt 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 defense 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 of course. 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 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.

*(The speech has been transcribed by Shashank S.R, Ph.D.  
Scholar at the National Institute of Advanced Studies,  
Bengaluru.)*

*Prof. Anand Teltumbde, is an Indian scholar, writer, and civil rights activist and former Professor, IIT Kharagpur*

## **The Heart That Never Surrendered:**

### **A Mother's Fight for G.N. Saibaba**

*- Ashok Kumbamu*

I first saw Suryavati, lovingly called Amma by her children and their comrades, 24 years ago, weeping inconsolably during the funeral procession of her daughter, Ganga Bhavani, who had been killed in a staged encounter in Telangana in 2000.

The depth of her grief was overwhelming then, but it wouldn't be the last time the Indian state would break her heart. A few years later, her son, G.N. Saibaba, became the next target, falsely implicated in a state-concocted case in 2014 and sentenced to life imprisonment.

When I went to meet Vasantha, Saibaba's wife, in 2018 to learn more about his case, I encountered Amma again. I couldn't speak much with her at that time – there was a heaviness in my chest, a deep sense of guilt for the comfort in my own life while she endured unimaginable suffering. I feared the questions she might ask about her son's release, knowing I had no answers to offer.

But, months later, I decided to call her just to clear my own guilt of not talking to her before. I made a video call through Ramdev, her younger son. As soon as she appeared on the screen, I asked, "Amma [mother], how are you? Do you remember me? I visited your home last year." "I'm fine, dear. You must have come, but I don't remember," she replied, her voice soft and fragile, like her visibly weakened body. "Amma, you've become so frail in just a year," I said instinctively, unable to hold back my concern. "Yes, dear, I came close to death. It's the medicines that are keeping me alive now," she said, almost whispering now. But then she began

speaking in a slightly stronger voice. She spoke without pause, she began speaking of what was weighing on her heart: “Yes, son. We must talk. We must find a way to bring my son out. All my worries are about him. Why does the government target him so much? Can he even walk? Can he lift anything? Can he fire a gun?”

Her voice cracked under the weight of the injustice she couldn’t even begin to comprehend. I had feared this moment because I had thought she might believe that someone like me, an outsider living a ‘normal’ life, could help free her son. But in her words, I also heard a call to action – an unspoken plea to the world to keep questioning, keep pushing and not let her son’s voice be silenced.

This son, Saibaba, was no ordinary man. He was a scholar, a public intellectual and an activist who had dared to speak for the voiceless. But the state, relentless in its cruelty, propagated blatant lies about him – that he was conspiring with the oppressed to ‘overthrow the mighty state’ from the confines of his wheelchair. So, they thought they would silence him by throwing him into solitary confinement.

And here was his mother, who had nurtured him with unwavering love, still believing that the truth would set him free. Suryavati began recounting Saibaba’s early life. “We come from a small village called Janupalle, about three kilometres from Amalapuram [in Andhra Pradesh]. I have three children. The eldest is Sai, then Ganga Bhavani and the youngest is Ramdev. There’s a six-year gap between my older and younger sons.” Sai was walking fine until he was three, but by the time he turned four, he began stumbling. When we took him to the local doctor, he said, ‘It’s just leg pain, nothing to worry about.’” But one night, Sai couldn’t move from where he had fallen. We rushed him to the hospital. When nothing improved, and he eventually became completely immobile, like a lump, we took him to Visakhapatnam and Puttaparthi. One doctor there even told me,

'How did you manage to bring him here? I can't guarantee his survival.'

He stayed in the hospital for a month. Slowly, he regained some movement. But we spent everything we had, and when we couldn't afford to stay longer, we brought him home. From then on, my son began crawling, using his hands.

"He loved studying, but going to school was difficult. So, he studied at home until the third grade. After school, children from near our home would come to teach him. But in fourth grade, he started to crawl to school every day. When Ramdev turned six, he learned to ride a bicycle and would take his brother everywhere."

I asked, "Did you take Saibaba to the doctor again?" When Sai was in the seventh grade, our family doctor told us that some orthopedic surgeons were coming for a medical camp. They suggested surgery, and we agreed. We stayed in the hospital for four months. After the surgery, to strengthen his legs and stretch his muscles, we hung sandbags as weights from his legs." Sai bore the pain, but he never stopped asking about his exams. Even when they had to carry him from his bed to the exam hall, he stood first in the class. The doctors suggested that for further improvement, he would need bigger surgeries, but those could only be done in Russia. He wrote to them immediately, but they said there were no guarantees, and we didn't have the money to go anyway." As Amma spoke, two images formed in my mind. One, a young Sai, bedridden, enduring pain but worried about his exams. The other, Prof Saibaba in the anda cell, half-paralysed in solitary confinement, imagining the world through his poetry.

Both images revealed a resolute self-confidence and a dedication to his beliefs that no physical condition could break. He had put his life on the line for his political ideals. That is why he dared to declare, "I refuse to die." The state had long been defeated by his indomitable spirit.

As Amma talked about education, I asked, “Did all three of your children attend school?”

“Ganga Bhavani passed the seventh grade. After that, she said, ‘We need to make a living, Amma. How will we manage if we all continue studying? Let them both study,’ and she dropped out of school herself. She learned how to sew on her own and started stitching clothes. She worked very hard to support the household,” she said. Hearing about Ganga Bhavani, I wondered why, in society, it is often women who lead with love and sacrifice. She started by giving up her education for her family and then made the world her family. In the path she chose – fighting for the liberation of the oppressed – she ultimately sacrificed her very life.

Still, I thought Ganga Bhavani’s income from sewing wouldn’t have been enough to support her two brothers, and asked another question: “Did you have any other sources of income as well?” We had three acres of land. But their father lost all the land. Eventually, he just did whatever work he could find,” she said. I tried probing further, “How did you lose the land?” Their father was not in a position to farm, so he leased the land to a man who was a relative and we moved to Amalapuram to make a living. The man used to give us lease money once a year.

“One time, when we needed money for the children’s school fees, I sent them to ask for the lease payment. The man replied, ‘I will no longer give you any lease money. Your father borrowed Rs 4,000 from me and, unable to repay, sold the land to me.’ None of us knew about this loan, nor where the money had gone. That’s how he grabbed our three acres of fertile land for just Rs 4,000. From that point on, it was nothing but struggle.”

I wanted to know more about the land dispute. I asked Ramdev, who was sitting next to her, if he could clarify how they had been deceived by the man. He immediately responded, “The man who leased the land claimed he had lent our father Rs 4,000 and had the

land registered in his name. Now, the land is worth around Rs 60 lakh per acre. To fight for it, Sai and I filed a case through a lawyer we knew. At that time, Sai was in the tenth grade, and I was in the sixth grade.” But in court, our father wouldn’t open his mouth to defend himself. So, we had to settle the case outside. They agreed to pay us Rs 1,80,000, but after all the debts and expenses were deducted, we were left with only Rs 70,000.” However, we didn’t know where to keep that money. We didn’t even have a bank account back then. Our lawyer said, ‘If you keep the money, your father will waste it. I’ll hold it for you and give you interest every month.’ So, the money stayed with him for a long time and that was what we used to cover our household expenses. When we moved to Hyderabad, the lawyer gave us the remaining money.”

Ramdev continued, “On top of that, when the new NTR ration cards were being issued, the local tahsildar assigned the verification work to students like us who had some schooling. Sai and I went door-to-door, collecting details and verifying them for the issuance of ration cards. We earned forty paisa per card. Since we did this after school, we were earning around Rs 20 a week.”

Amma then added, “The children also earned some money during exams by providing water to the students. It wasn’t much, but it helped.” “What do you mean by providing water during exams?” I was intrigued as I hadn’t seen this kind of arrangement.” Back then, during the tenth-grade exams, if a student was thirsty, my younger son would pour water into a glass and serve them. They paid him a small amount for doing that,” she explained. I understood then that they did whatever work they found to make ends meet, while also continuing their own education.

“Can you tell me about Sai’s education, Amma?” And she began to speak. From the beginning, he loved studying. He always came first in everything, and because of that, all his teachers loved him. No one ever made fun of him or belittled him for not being able to

walk. Everyone took great care of him. When he was in the tenth grade, he topped the entire district. From that point, he began tutoring other students. But he never took a single rupee for it. Even though our house was small, we had plenty of open space, so all the kids would come and sit there to study. That's how he made many friends, and they all treated him like he was a part of their family.

"From the time he was in tenth grade, Vasantha, who was also in his class, became close to him. After tenth grade, when they all began to go to college, his friends would take him there. They'd tell Ramdev, 'You don't have to worry, Bujji, we'll take him ourselves,' and they would take him and bring him back." Perhaps it was out of gratitude to the students who came to his home to teach him until the third grade that Sai never accepted money for tutoring. Taking from society and giving back to it – this principle must have shaped Saibaba's deep sense of solidarity with the working class.

According to Ramdev, after tenth grade, Saibaba took the entrance exam for a polytechnic course and was offered a free seat at Kakinada Polytechnic College. However, when he arrived there, the teachers discouraged him, saying, 'You are disabled; it will be very difficult to do the practicals.' Disheartened, he returned home. Still passionate about science, he enrolled in the mathematics, physics and chemistry group at SKBR College in Amalapuram. However, the practical exams were difficult for him even in intermediate (the eleventh and twelfth grades), mainly because the lab was on the second floor, making it very hard for him to access it.

You have to wonder – will our society ever build institutions with physical infrastructure that accommodates people with disabilities? After intermediate, keeping his physical limitations in mind, he switched to doing a B.A. in English at the same college. That's where Vasantha also completed her intermediate and under-graduation.



After completing his bachelor's degree, Saibaba went on to pursue his postgraduate studies at the Hyderabad Central University. It was there that student movements, particularly the Mandal Commission movement, deeply influenced him. He began to explore the roots of societal issues related to caste, class, gender and race.

Later, while pursuing his M.Phil. at the English and Foreign Languages University in Hyderabad, he further sharpened his political consciousness. Around this time, he married Vasantha, and the entire family moved to Hyderabad. Once in Hyderabad, Ganga Bhavani, inspired by her brother, became involved in a women's organisation, and her growing commitment led her to become a full-time activist in the revolutionary movement. After working for nearly five years, she was killed in a fake encounter in Nalgonda district in 2001.

By then, Saibaba was in Delhi, pursuing his Ph.D. He also secured a job as an English lecturer at Ram Lal Anand College, Delhi University. Even until the time he left for Delhi, he couldn't afford a wheelchair. He crawled his way from Amalapuram to Delhi. From there, he stood in solidarity with the struggles of the oppressed as a public intellectual.

For this "crime", the state conspired against him and falsely implicated him in cases that led to the pronouncement of a life sentence. After discussing all this, I asked Amma, "They killed your daughter, they've imprisoned your son. After enduring so much pain, what do you think about their participation in social movements?" With pride, she replied, "My children have done nothing wrong. They are fighting for the betterment of others, and that makes me happy." I tried another question, "Maybe others will benefit, but what have you gained from all this?"

She replied again, "If everyone only thinks about what they gain, how will people live? We may endure suffering, but at least others will live better, right?" Isn't that the truth? Movements don't just shape the children; they also shape the mothers. Despite the

immense pain she has endured, this mother continues to embody the spirit of resistance.

Finally, she said, “I want to go to Modi and ask – not to release my son, but to tell me what crime he committed. One day, the government will realise its mistake, and my son will come out. I believe that. But people like you must write and speak out strongly,” she added. Her belief was unshakeable, even as her body withered away. And that belief triumphed when, on March 5, 2024, the Bombay high court dismissed all charges against Saibaba, declaring that he had committed no crime. But she was no longer there to welcome her beloved son, the one she had worried about her entire life.

When she was diagnosed with terminal cancer, Saibaba petitioned both the prison authorities and the court system to allow him to see his mother one last time. But both institutions turned their backs and refused him parole. She passed away in August 2020, leaving behind a heart-wrenching void.

Imagine the torment – the mother, waiting in vain to hold her son one last time, and the son, helpless and imprisoned, unable to be by her side in her final moments. The woman who raised him with strength and hope, who had endured so much, left this world with a broken heart. How must Saibaba have felt when he received the news of her death? Alone in that desolate prison, who was there to comfort him?

On March 8, 2024, when he spoke to the national media, Saibaba remained strong while discussing the inhuman conditions in jail, the persecution of Adivasis, the failures of the judiciary and the sheer cruelty of the state. But the moment he mentioned his mother, his voice cracked, and he broke down in tears before the cameras.

“It’s true,” he said. “All er worries were for me. She raised me with her own hands. But she never wanted us, her children, to live only for ourselves. She encouraged us to be part of the people’s movements.”

Before he was imprisoned, Saibaba had no severe health issues. It was the merciless brutality of the prison system that ravaged his body and health. This is exactly what the state intended – to push him to the brink of no return, to make sure he either remained broken or died. The state's wish has finally come true. But, if she were alive today, wouldn't this mother have asked the state, "Why did you kill my son?"

Her unasked question lingers, haunting us all.

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## **G.N. Saibaba's lifelong campaign was Against the violence of Silencing**

**- Rona Wilson**

The untimely death of G.N. Saibaba (fondly known as Sai among his friends and well-wishers) when he was about to start his life afresh after acquittal betrays the brutality and inhumanity that the state had meted out to him during his long incarceration. First as an undertrial and later as a convicted prisoner. When he was finally acquitted of all charges by the Nagpur Bench of the high court of Bombay –despite all attempts of the Indian state to prolong his incarceration by hook or crook – it was a moment of victory for the democratic rights movement and all those who shared the dream of Sai: of a society free of all forms of exploitation, oppression and discrimination.

Sai could have lived longer. Yet the short but eventful life of this 57-year-old activist, academic, public intellectual, organiser, and leader of people's movements is quite extraordinary for the expanse of the ideology and politics that enlivened his commitment tempered by the sheer will power and ambition emanating from his persona against all odds and adversities.

Having suffered from post-polio paralysis that rendered him 90% disabled from early childhood, Sai had to endure acute economic hardships striving hard to achieve education that would open up horizons to a new world. His parents, though economically poor, were pillars of great moral courage and character. His early school education at his native village, the picturesque Amalapuram

in coastal Andhra, at an institution run by progressive Christian missionaries, had lit the fire of his thirst for knowledge.

As a passionate student of literature, especially in Telugu and English, Sai had internalised the raging debates that defined the literary firmament in erstwhile Andhra Pradesh in the 1970s and 80s. Literary production in Telugu was undergoing a sea change with debates about the role of art and literature in society. The questions that it raised were not an exclusive concern among the literati. Infact this debate had captured the imagination of the radical/revolutionary student's movement in erstwhile Andhra Pradesh. The salient point that deeply influenced Sai was that serious art and literary production cannot escape the social reality it inhabits/is situated in. It is in the dissection and representation of concrete social reality, as it is in art and literary production, that universal values that are generated and celebrated. By showing the reality as it is, with all its nuances, art and literary production should conscientize the reader about the objective and subjective conditions that define their being. The progressive/revolutionary literary movement was the warp and weft of these debates that deeply influenced the world views of the student of English literature. Sai was an active participant of the Revolutionary Writers Association (VIRASAM) arguing for a literary language that authentically represented the social location of the protagonists in the literary artefact.

The same sensibility remained with Sai till his last breath as a scholar, passionate teacher, public intellectual, litigant for the most oppressed/ discriminated, an organiser of people's movements, a champion of democratic rights and civil liberties, and as an ideologue who espoused the cause of the most oppressed, exploited and discriminated. Sai moved to Delhi with his life partner and activist Vasanta and daughter Manjeera where he took up a job as Assistant Professor in English Literature at Ram Lal Anand College, Delhi

University, while pursuing his Ph.D. If the young differently abled boy was carried by his daily-wager labourer mother to school at native Amalapuram every day, in Delhi, the activist academic used to navigate unfriendly and inaccessible buildings with feet padded with rubber slippers. Later, when he managed to buy a wheelchair, those spaces that were still inaccessible in many of the buildings were reached with the help of his comrades who used to carry him.

In Delhi, Saibaba became actively involved in people's movements. There was not a single issue that was not of immediate concern for him. With a calm and friendly disposition, he was easily accessible to one and all. Sai was a natural glue which brought together various people's movements under a common agenda to fight unitedly for the people's cause.

The early noughts were also a critical moment – post 9/11. This saw the ascendance of the politics of “war against terror” dovetailing the anger and protests of vast sections of the people aggrieved of increasing strife and misery due to the policies of Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation (LPG). “War against terror” was a potent tool for the state to criminalise protests and people's movements under the garb of national security and national interest. The increasing onslaught on the lives and livelihoods of people who witnessed massive land acquisition, opening verdant forests and hills for mining resulting in the three dreaded Ds – Displacement, Destruction and Death. Draconian laws such as the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and Public Safety Act (PSA) were brought in to suppress the protests of Adivasis in Central and Eastern India, fighting for their jal, jungle, and zameen.

Likewise for people who were protesting against acquisition of their land in West Bengal, coastal Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. These were also the times of rising tide of the politics of Hindutva which found a fertile soil to

breed in a highly securitised state armed with draconian laws. Prisons were getting inundated with Adivasis, Muslims and Dalits – those who were largely affected by the policies of LPG – along with a sizeable section of the OBCs and those targeted for their political positions.

Saibaba took active initiative in constituting the Committee for the Release of Political Prisoners (CRPP) alongside a host of civil libertarians, intellectuals, human rights lawyers, academics, students campaigning for and offering legal defence to ensure the release of people who were targeted for their political beliefs/activities to better the lives and livelihoods of the most exploited and oppressed; those who belonged to the oppressed minorities such as Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims – the national minorities.

Sai played a key role as one of the founding members of the Visthapan Virodhi Jan Vibas Andolan (VVJVA) alongside the late Dr. B.D. Sharma and the late Father Stan Swamy to bring a wide range of people's movements against displacement throughout the length and breadth of the country in a single platform. VVJVA's historic vision document, called the Ranchi Declaration, brought forth a sharp relief to the pro-big capital, pro-monopoly, anti-people nature of the model of development forced by the Indian state on the peoples of the subcontinent. Such a model can only result in a Displacement, Destruction and Death that is socially, culturally and ecologically irreversible. As an alternative, the Ranchi Declaration propounded a People's Model of Development that was equitable and ecologically sustainable, keeping the interests of the people at the centre.

But the Indian state was going ahead with its policies, violating the constitutional guarantees in scheduled areas as well as the PESA Act, entering into more than 100 MoUs (Memoranda of Understanding) with various multinational corporations for mining in

the verdant forests in Central and Eastern India without the consent of the gram sabhas (of mostly Adivasis) of these regions. This was accompanied by heavy militarisation with the mushrooming of paramilitary camps in almost all these regions where the proposed MoUs were supposed to take off ostensibly to fight the Maoists.

After J&K, Central and Eastern India had become the most militarised regions in the world. Saibaba alongside late Dr. B.D. Sharma, prominent writer Arundhati Roy, late Professor S.A.R. Geelani and others had embarked on a countrywide and international campaign against the imminent danger to the lives and livelihoods of Adivasis among the poorest of the poor in the country. The genocidal dimension of this campaign was evident from the very name given to it – Operation Green Hunt (OGH) – a term used by the white colonisers in their extermination campaign of the native population in the Americas. It was this campaign that received international opprobrium to the Indian state for policies that threatened the very survival of the indigenous people of the subcontinent that further brought Sai in the crosshairs of the Indian state.

Sai became the joint secretary of the Revolutionary Democratic Front (RDF) at its conference in 2012 at Hyderabad. RDF as a political platform had been critiquing the anti-people policies of the Indian state from an anti-imperialist, anti-feudal perspective, locating the problems confronting the people of the country to the very nature of the Indian state. RDF was later banned by the state.

Arundhati Roy dismantles the myth shrouding the word ‘voiceless’. She points out the lack of agency subsuming the word while attesting that there are only the silenced and silences. Sai, till his last breath, had fearlessly talked against the violence of being silenced, sharply critiquing the deliberate silences of those who turned a blind eye to the injustices that mark our society. Be it the personal – his unique bodily condition and society’s lack of sensibility to his



specific situation, not to say the absence of a jurisprudence that is eyes and ears to the emergent needs and necessities of a differently abled – be it the larger question of comprehending freedom from the location of a Kashmiri Muslim, a Naga, a Manipuri, a Kuki, an Adivasi from Central and Eastern India, or from the vantage point of Dalits and the Muslims in India, all these concerns and questions were dear to Sai's heart.

His anger and anguish from the confines of the anda cell succinctly articulate the politics of silencing and the silences we endure, as he writes: "This has been my literary engagement. I count all the blank spaces between word and word, and between the lines... My friend, I am measuring silence because I am silenced."

The wheelchair-user's revolutionary legacy will live on... But only in our sagacity to live up to that legacy can we cherish our dreams of freedom of a society free from all the forms of exploitation, oppression and discrimination.

*Rona Wilson is a political Activist, Public Relations Secretary-Committee for Release of Political Prisoners (CRPP) and implicated in Bhima-Koregaon case*

**A stolen life: Remembering G. N. Saibaba  
who the State kept imprisoned over a decade**

**- Anjana Meenakshi**

*No matter how grave a crime, or how big a gangster, they aren't placed in the anda (egg-shaped) cell in Nagpur Central Prison. In the prison's 90-year-old history, I think I was the only one who was put there — Dr. G. N. Saibaba.*

On a dull day in May 2014, a posse of policemen stopped a car to drag out a wheelchair bound Literature professor. The events that followed hardly merit the term dull. What former Delhi University professor Dr GN Saibaba went through for 10 years since that May 9, till March this year, was aptly described by him as an Agni Pariksha (trial by fire), stoked by the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

Saibaba was arrested, along with five others, under the draconian UAPA for alleged association with the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist). It didn't matter that the evidence was flimsy — the prosecution named bananas, umbrellas, and newspapers as items used by Naxalites to identify each other and cited the presence of Naxalite literature as “proof of terrorist activity”.

The accused were charged under five sections of the UAPA, read alongside Section 120B (criminal conspiracy) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). Each time the accused were acquitted by a lower court, the state appealed to the Supreme Court to ensure that the acquittal was stayed.

In March 2024, Saibaba was released along with four other co-accused (the fifth, Pandu Narote, died in prison). From then on

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until his death, Saibaba, who had been paralysed by polio, underwent several health crises.

He drew his last breath on Saturday, October 12, at Hyderabad's Nizam's Institute of Medical Sciences (NIMS) surrounded by doctors attempting to resuscitate his collapsing heart. At 8.36 pm, the professor was declared dead. He was 58.

His death warrants that we return to a simple yet essential question — who is GN Saibaba? Those unfamiliar with his case can easily dub him a 'Naxal'. But for those who knew him and for the civil society and journalists who followed the case, many glorious splinters stand out and pierce. A staunch human rights activist of the Left, a beloved professor and comrade, and a doting husband form the parts that encapsulate his personhood.

### **A staunch human rights activist**

For Saibaba, the dream of being a teacher and fighting for social causes was first realised during his Master's at the University of Hyderabad (UoH). Up until then, his life had been confined to Amalapuram, a town in the former East Godavari district.

Their idealism led Saibaba and his wife Vasantha, who eventually joined him in Hyderabad, to participate in several mass movements as he pursued his PhD, and even after that. Saibaba toured several villages across India and until 2008 did so with crutches and the physical assistance of co-activists and villagers who showed him around.

In 1997, he participated in a seminar at the All India People's Resistance Forum to shed light on how the achievements of post-Independence India was nothing more than a "mere transfer of power". He spoke at length about the need for agrarian movements like those in Chhattisgarh's Dandakaranya, and in Bihar and Andhra Pradesh.

As the deputy secretary of the now banned Revolutionary Democratic Front (RDF), Saibaba spearheaded the All India People's Resistance Forum against state repression in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar in 1999. A total of 50 solidarity programmes were held for this campaign in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Punjab, Delhi, Assam, West Bengal, Maharashtra, and Gujarat.

While a part of the academia, Saibaba slammed any state offensive against Adivasis.

His critique of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government's Operation Green Hunt was scathing. A paramilitary offensive carried out in 2009, the operation made no distinction between arms-carrying militants and Adivasis residing in what was dubbed the red corridor, that is, certain districts between Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal.

Saibaba criticised the burning of Adivasi huts, the murder of men at random, and rapes.

"I gathered enough evidence that suggested that the ruling class wanted access to [Adivasi] resources, no matter what. Operation Green Hunt was launched to kill, maim, and dislodge them," Saibaba told *The Hindu* in 2012.

He played a key role in propelling the resistance launched by the RDF to stop investors from taking over tribal land for mining. He was also one among the many who pushed for the release of political prisoners like Afzal Guru. He protested in favour of SC, ST, and OBC students for the proper implementation of the reservation policy at Delhi University.

In 2021, Delhi University terminated his employment following the UAPA case against him. However, he was not reinstated after his acquittal.

Post his release, Saibaba wanted to work on education for the marginalised. "If you look at the current state of the education system, you will see that government schools and colleges are being left for

the SC, ST, and OBC students. All the private and central educational institutions are for the elite populations of the country. Dalit and Adivasi students don't have access to these institutions, these liberal universities, and they are constantly discriminated against in these spaces. This needs to change. The Dalit and Adivasi students are being pushed into government schools. The shiny corporate universities and central universities are for the rich. As a result, students from the marginalised communities are suffering," he told the *Supreme Court Observer* in March 2024.

In August 2024, Saibaba told media persons in Hyderabad that if there was one wish he wanted to fulfil, it was to teach again in a classroom. Sadly, that dream perished with him.

### **Assaulted by the State.**

For Saibaba's supporters, it is beyond question that it was his decade-long incarceration that led to his deteriorating health and painful death. At a cultural event held in Hyderabad last month, Saibaba spoke about how the prison authorities would take him to the hospital for appearances sake, only to bring him right back to the anda cell without proper medical attention. "They didn't give me the medicines I needed. They gave me sleeping pills, drugged me continuously, and gave me Diclofenac for pain. My left arm was broken in the rough handling during my arrest, and that affected my spine and nervous system," he said.

His wife Vasantha had spoken at length about how his health was disregarded and how he possibly contracted COVID-19 while in prison and was still denied treatment. Slowly, his paralysis worsened, he underwent a gallbladder surgery a week ago, and his kidney stopped functioning a day before his demise.

Saibaba's isn't the first account of the state's assault on a human body. In fact, the physiological torture of political prisoners jailed under UAPA is hardly news. In November 2020, tribal rights activist

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Stan Swamy was denied a sipper and straw despite the fact that he was coping with Parkinson's disease, which causes involuntary muscle spasms. Swamy passed away in jail after his bail was denied on several counts. Following Swamy's demise, Saibaba wrote to Vasantha, "You might hear of another Stan Swamy if no treatment is provided [to me]."

#### **A political separation**

The story of Saibaba's incarceration is also the story of Vasantha's ordeals. "Sai, do you remember?" she once wrote to him in jail, "When we met for the first time in class 10, you were having trouble solving a few questions in Maths. I was the one who taught you how to solve them. In turn, you taught me English grammar. It was very difficult for us in our adolescence to stay apart without seeing each other for even four days! Look at how things are now — we have to stay apart from each other, with countless obstacles and hundreds of miles blocking our meetings, for who knows how long."

Vasantha told me in 2021 that meeting Saibaba in jail was always tricky. "I can't speak English well. They didn't allow us to speak in Telugu. So several meetings passed without much being said." She was quick to add, "But no matter what, I refuse to cry. Even a single tear will be all the testimony the authorities need to flaunt their victory. I don't want that."

In several interviews, Vasantha has spoken about their all-encompassing love for each other. A partnership in equal measure, she was and still remains committed to social justice, keeping a part of Saibaba still alive.

His collection of prison poems and essays begins with Vasantha's 'Introduction: Letter to Sai'. She recounted how they read Tagore, Premchand, Periyar, Ranganayakkam, and several other revolutionaries together, strengthened by the confidence that "a new society would certainly emerge, where caste divisions, religious differences, and gender discrimination would perish."

### **A literary man, in his own words**

In multiple speeches since his release, Saibaba emphasised on how literature, specifically poetry, is the only medium to resist pain. “At first, I felt anger at how unjustly I was treated in prison. But then I met others — people who were incarcerated for stealing food, a man dying in front of me, people who were charged for crimes of necessity. To translate all that and to explain it, only poetry sufficed as a medium,” he remarked.

Saibaba spoke of a certain poetic empathy that replaced his anger or rather made it universal. As Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong’o wrote of Saibaba in the essay ‘A continuous ode to life’, “His personal anguish at being uprooted from his family and community becomes also that of the farmers and Adivasi people uprooted from their land to give way to mining corporations.”

This rings true as the deceased professor informed grievers: *The world of love takes shape in your acts of struggle for it* or when he makes a case for verse:

*It's poetry, stupid  
It's stupendous poetry  
It doesn't need weapons  
To smelt break the iron heels of history.*

G .N. Saibaba’s love, struggle, and literature trifecta is summarised in his letter to Anjum, the Muslim transwoman character from Arundhati Roy’s novel, “The Ministry of Utmost Happiness”, whom he wrote to from prison.

“You are a unique human being in the history of human society. That is the reason why I ask you to work for my freedom. Who else can be the befitting person to campaign for my release? I am sure that you will definitely take up my cause.”

*(Originally published in the News Minute on 13 Oct 2024)*

*Anjana Meenakshi is a journalist, the News Minute*

**G. N. Saibaba's Life is Not Just a Chronicle of his  
Times but also what the Times Refused to Chronicle**

**- Prof. Saroj Giri**

We must now think of Saibaba as someone who could not finish telling us his story. We must have imaginary conversations with him, so that we can hear him. We gasped for Father Stan Swamy, for Pandu Narote, to commune with them. Now, we are gasping for Saibaba, who has been snuffed out of our lives so suddenly.

A man lives to tell his tale. And here the tale is so drastic, so singular and yet of such universal significance. How can we cope with the loss of a man who had only just started to tell us this tale?

I want to ask him: Dear Sai, how do we survive this story, left untold? Your story would have been our story, guiding us along on our path.

The course of his life overshadowed his intentions and what he willed. Having spent several years as someone convicted for life, the last seven months after his release as a free man were still consumed by a kind of formal exchange of pleasantries. We were still thinking how to really talk about what he went through. We were yet to get there, the real conversations were yet to take place.

He was just beginning to find his inner poise in this world. Sai, after his decade-long incarceration, was once again discovering life and his passions. It feels like we have lost him utterly young. He had made it past so much only to fail in a tiny ordeal. His loss leaves us utterly devastated. There is a gaping hole in our lives now. It is as



though our own rise or fall is at stake, that is how acutely we feel this moment.

They say that a man's life is the chronicle of his times. But Saibaba's life is not just a chronicle of his times, it is also a chronicle of that which the times refused to chronicle. With Sai, the usual phrases must be turned on their head.

We were yet to discover the many ways his life would shine the light on what so many refuse to acknowledge or even notice. In fact, even the actual story of his release, his court battle, is yet to appear in the public domain because there are so many layers behind what went on.

Just the story of the twists and turns of his life takes us to hidden corners and crevices, the darkest corners of the dazzlingly well-lit spectacle this world hides securely. But forget for a moment, the pain and suffering inflicted upon him.

Think of how Saibaba's court case ended up inducing an instance of self-cannibalism within the establishment, splitting the Indian judiciary right in the middle. One such moment was the punishment meted out to Justice Rohit B. Deo of the Bombay high court for giving bail to Saibaba. The Judiciary punished one of its own. This punishment, decided by a collegium comprising no less than the Chief Justice of India (CJI) D.Y. Chandrachud, was based on shadowy 'intelligence inputs' received by the court, revealing the many hidden nexuses of power, not least of the higher courts.

Saibaba's life cuts open the curated masks of power. His life is the thread which ties together and yanks out the inner recesses of entrenched power. How, for instance, 'the basic structure doctrine' of the Constitution is consistent with Operation Green Hunt and Operation Kagar which devastated Adivasi lives on a mass scale.

There are metaphors here, as we talk about the dead. And yet, in Sai's life everything is a metaphor but again not just that. For the court of law so often turns them into something legalistic.

The courts singled out his brain. He is 'the brain', the court pronounced. The court has, as is evident, no interest in taking note of the great Adivasi struggle and resistance against big capital raging in central India. So they wanted to find a scapegoat, an instigator, a conspirator, a mastermind. To be regarded as the mastermind of "a conspiracy against the nation" – is that not the only way one can be a great man today?

The fact that the country found such a figure – and that, thanks to Saibaba, such a figure was indeed available – it is within these highly mediated, convoluted, and almost perverse logics that we must identify and locate Sai's greatness.

We all heard the hushed voices – no, let's avoid him, don't mingle with him, this will bring trouble. I remember those voices around me. Clearly, he wasn't everyone's man. But now, do you want to understand the opposite of "divisive"? It doesn't always have a negative connotation. "Divisive" can also mean what Mao called "One Divides into Two." It can mean separating the husk from the grain, a dialectical differentiation to capture what is often avoided for reasons of state or expediency. Saibaba's life – his political journey, as it unfolded, perhaps even despite himself – exemplifies this hidden wisdom in being "sectarian" or "divisive."

Sai's death feels like the kind of martyrdom that inspires people to move forward and rise even higher, rather than to stagnate and wallow in loss and sorrow. I felt like this when Mallojula Koteswara Rao, popularly known as Kishenji, was killed in 2011.

However, with Sai's loss, I also feel something else that is eating me from within. I feel heavy, drawn towards a wallowing, melancholic

state of mind. I feel paralysed. Because we were right there, we were just beginning to celebrate his freedom. He was just letting us back into his life, enriched with all the pain and suffering he had endured. And then he was taken away.

And yet, I know that Sai's death is unlike any other – a perfect death for the courts, corporate capital, and the ruling dispensation, who, to say the least, wanted him brain dead. A dream come true for Indian democracy, so it can feel secure and robust. Such an eerily perfect fit between wishful thinking and reality.

*(Originally published in The Wire on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2024)*

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## Endurance and Legacy

- Prof. Karen Gabriel

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of May 2014, while he was on his way home from evaluation duty from Daulat Ram College in Delhi University, Sai was ambushed and covertly whisked away by a joint team of the Maharashtra police, Andhra Pradesh police, and the Intelligence Bureau. He was swiftly transported to the Nagpur jail where he remained for more than ten years barring a brief five-month respite from jail in July 2015, when he was granted medical bail. Through this period, Sai remained sequestered in an *anda* cell in Nagpur. In March 2017, he was convicted under the draconian UAPA and sentenced to life imprisonment. On 14 October 2022, he was discharged by the Bombay High Court, which observed that, “We hold that the trial held despite violation of mandatory provisions of law itself amounts to failure of justice.”

Nevertheless, less than 24 hours later, the Supreme Court stayed the order to discharge Sai. In an historically unprecedented action, the Supreme Court bench, consisting of Justice Bela Trivedi and Justice M.R. Shah, sat on a Saturday morning (a court holiday) to hear the Maharashtra state’s Special Leave Petition and suspend an order of discharge/acquittal. The High Court was ordered to consider all the incriminating material against him as well as the merits of the case. It did so, and in March 2024, the Nagpur Bench of the Bombay High Court once again acquitted G.N. Saibaba and the other 5 accused (one of whom – Pandu Pora Narote – had died from unattended Swine flu during imprisonment), on both the merits of

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their case and the technical violations committed by the state throughout the process. A few days later, Sai was released. However, the state's counsel immediately filed for another Special Leave Petition with the Supreme Court to stay the new HC order. Sai died on the 12<sup>th</sup> of October, before the pending matter could be heard.

During the period of his incarceration, Sai wrote many letters that gave some sense of what he was enduring. That many of these letters weren't very personal testified to Sai's awareness of constant state scrutiny and censorship: all the letters that he wrote and received were carefully and unfailingly appraised and then eventually delivered to or from him.

In many of these letters he speaks of the immense difficulties that he faced in prison as a 90% disabled person suffering from post-polio paralysis and the related medical syndromes that come with it, acute pancreatitis, a grave heart condition, an ever-aggravating Brachial plexopathy and later, COVID-related issues and other serious problems. Some of these were the result of medical neglect in prison, all of these exacerbated in jail. Some – like the severe loss of upper limb mobility – were caused by dragging him out of his wheelchair during and after his abduction by the state.

When I met Sai a short while after he moved to Delhi, he didn't have a wheelchair (that came only a while later). He'd propel himself on his chappal-clad hands and the momentum of his swinging torso. So, both heights and distances were always a bit of a challenge and this created a few conundrums for everyone who worked with Sai. But obstacles never prevented or discouraged Sai from doing anything that he needed to. He would travel around and move about on his hands with an unselfconsciousness that came from the dignity and purpose that were so much a part of him. It was later, after hearing about his childhood and after I met his incredible mother, that I gradually realized how the disadvantages of living in a society that

was fundamentally oriented toward the abled had been psychologically and intellectually offset by her to the point that Sai's wheelchair appeared to be supplemental. Of course, this was a misconception: Sai's wheelchair was of a part of him in the same way as the technologies that we rely heavily on in our daily life are a part of us. They are sutured and almost organically incorporated into our lives. And this was evident every time he faced stairs, needed a new one, or later, when his use of it was curtailed or prevented, as happened in prison.

Sai wrote about the difficulties of being without a wheelchair in prison, and of using it on the uneven surfaces there. Though unsurprised by it, he was frustrated and put off by the insensitivity and indifference to the difficulties that he faced regularly as a wheelchair-bound person. He was even more put-off by the indifference to his specific needs as a polio-stricken person, which included the requirement for a western-style toilet. He wrote about the difficulties of visiting the toilet, of the loss of privacy and of the acute pain of being suspended above a commode by his arms. These were things that Sai could not do very much about till much later when, some rudimentary but essential changes were made to accommodate to his specific needs. But by then much damage had been done to his body.

When we think about Sai, we will do well to recall that cognitive scientists and philosophers have argued that cognition is embodied, that thought is influenced by the physicality of our bodies. Even the most abstract thinking and vocabulary are rooted in bodily experiences. In crucial ways, we experience ourselves in the world directly through our bodies. This was something that Sai and I discussed in the context of a conversation that we had about the relative gender blindness of political organisations and formations, that are otherwise sharply aware of the meanings and implications

of materiality. I believe that it was his many experiences of restraint – physical, social and economic, whether in the poverty of his village, the wheelchair, the hospital or the prison – that enabled him to understand that the possibilities of a life are substantially expressed or restrained through the complexity of embodiment, our corporeality. The terms of our relations to creatures and things (be these objects or structures) is also inflected by our bodies. Our bodies (and I'm not excluding the mind here) are the material forms that interact with the physical world and are shaped by various social, political, biological and environmental factors. Our skin, muscles, bones, organs and all our sensory experiences, the scope of our minds, the terms on which we encounter the 'system', and are subject to control by the 'system', its politics, laws, and policies are all inflected by the social and political meanings that we come to embody. We 'drive' our bodies to escape the many inscriptions that are forced on it.

In such an understanding, the body is both a canvas for individual expression, a site of social meaning, where personal identity and complex subjectivity is lived as much as a form that is shaped through our corporeal interaction with the world. The question of balance, as always, is of the essence. Perhaps because of his own physical condition, Sai understood better than most people, in a physical, visceral way, the importance of collective strength and solidarity, to compensate for the deprivations that are written on the bodies and the lives of the poor, the destitute, the disabled, the disempowered and the marginalised. It is an understanding that comes from the perception that ultimately, we are all human, and social, beings, who must look out for each other.

When Sai eventually came out of prison, it was clear to me even when he landed at the Delhi airport, that he was disoriented by his release. Later, he repeatedly spoke of challenges of readjusting to life outside prison and remembering ways of being social, after

the long loneliness and solitude of his prison days and nights. While, I have no doubt that he would have soon found his bearings and swum into the ocean, I am also sure that he needed to heal first. It is now evident that his disorientation came from the profound paradox of the intense self-alienation that an intimate and ever-present pain causes. His body and mind had been pushed to the limits of their endurance, and it was soon clear, had crossed over to the other side. All he needed was a little time to heal.

But that he had endured as much as he did, in isolation and deprivation, must be remembered, by those of us who continue to build solidarities that endure. Ultimately his life and death are a poignant reminder of our common humanity, and the need to protect and cherish it with resolution, dignity and care.

*(Prof. Karen Gabriel, is a professor of English, St Stephen's College, Delhi University)*



## **They fought when other people's democratic rightswere being trampled upon**

**- 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 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 does the judiciary 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 has 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 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 S.R, Ph.D. Scholar at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru.)*

*Prof. Madhu Prasad, Presidium Member, All India Forum for Right to Education and former Professor of Philosophy, University of Delhi*

**India: A world of silence is  
blown into smithereens**

**- Ehtmamul Haque and Syed Affan**

There are but very few whose life leaves irrevocable marks on the hearts and minds of others, and there are scarcely a few who continue to inspire confidence, hope, resilience and an undying spirit of resistance to oppression, even after their death. One such story is of Dr. G.N. Saibaba, who led a life of struggles since his childhood and along the way, his life somehow intertwined with the struggles of the oppressed and exploited peoples of the country and the world. A lot many factors play a role in shaping a person's conscience to lead a life that Saibaba did- political ideology, comrades, material conditions and sacrifices- of innumerable unnamed fighters of justice who lay down their lives for a better tomorrow.

Dr. G.N. Saibaba was born into a poor peasant family on 24th July 1967 to Gokarakonda Satyanarayana Murthy and Suryavathi at Sannavilli near Amalapuram, East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh. The family was struggling to meet ends at the household when the conditions took a turn for the worse when Saibaba was diagnosed with Polio paraplegia at the age of five in 1972, due to lack of vaccination. Despite the polio resulting in paralysis of his lower limbs, he pursued his education with the support of his mother, who carried him in her arms to the school doorsteps. He did his schooling up to the matriculation from St. John's High School in Amalapuram from 1977-82. He went on to pursue his intermediate education at SKBR College in Amalapuram from 1982-84.

### **Start of a revolutionary life**

In the late 1980s, When Comrade Sai was in his college, it was an era filled with revolutionary energy emerging from revolutionary literature from the Revolutionary Writers Association (VIRASAM) and songs from Jana Natya Mandli, inspiring thousands of youth to plunge into people's struggle and Saibaba was not distant from it all. In August of 1990, Saibaba actively participated in the struggle for implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendation in favour of reservation for Other Backward Classes (OBC). In 1991, he joined the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL), now known as EFLU, Hyderabad, to pursue a P.G diploma in teaching English (PGTE), something that would shape his future as an academic in English Literature. During his days at CIEFL, Saibaba actively participated in the agitation for the regularization of daily wage mess workers there. In 1992, comrade Saibaba joined the Revolutionary Writers Association (VIRASAM). From 1993-94, he went on to work as a Lecturer at the Institute of Printing Technology, Secunderabad. Soon after, he joined the All India People's Resistance Forum (AIPRF), rising to the rank of State general secretary of the AIPRF Andhra Pradesh committee in 1995. Understanding the nature of the Indian state and its attitude towards political dissidents, he campaigned for the release of political prisoners, not knowing that he would be a political prisoner, most desired to be in jail by the Indian State. In 1996, he played a pivotal role in organizing the International Seminar on Nationality Question at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi, which was attended by delegates from Kashmir, North-Eastern States as well as delegates from the Philippines. The publication of 'Symphony of Freedom' was the result of the program organized by AIPRF at JNU. By then, he was the all-India General Secretary of AIPRF. At such a young age and in such a short period, Saibaba was in the leadership of AIPRF, leading thousands of Intellectuals,

students and youth and coordinating hundreds of people's struggles across the country. It was his ability to overcome limitations, physical or otherwise, and his political commitment that made him the desired candidate for the task that people bestowed upon him, not any privilege or position of influence as is seen in the oppressive state apparatus.

Dr. G.N. Saibaba also played an important role in the separate Telangana State movement, a demand for democratic Telangana, which was raised by democratic and progressive sections of the society, including Saibaba. In 1997, he was a key person in organizing the Democratic Telangana Seminar and release of the Warangal Declaration, which demanded a separate democratic Telangana State, one that would live up to the democratic aspirations of the masses. Dr. G.N. Saibaba was also conscious about the imperialist onslaught on the oppressed nations and how the struggle for a better society was interlinked with the anti-imperialist struggles. He was well aware that globalization was a multi-headed snake, sugar-coated as development and promoted by the imperialist powers to loot and plunder in their interest, which led him to be a strong advocate of anti-imperialism and anti-globalization. Therefore, Saibaba, along with other revolutionary, progressive and democratic forces, united to fight this multi-headed snake in the form of Imperialist-globalization and formed 'Forum Against Imperialist-Globalization (FAIG) in 1998 to build a campaign against the imperialist onslaught on the oppressed and exploited people of the country.

Comrade Sai also recognised that the struggle of Adivasi peasants of the country against displacement encapsulated the ideological struggle of two contending ideas of development. I.e., the corporate model of development and the people's model of development. While the corporate model of development is subservient to imperialism and draws the country deeper into the clutches of imperialism, the people's model of development was

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focused on developing the society based not on the needs of corporations but the people and their level of consciousness, thereby developing the productive capacity and independence in production. Affirming this political position among the intelligentsia and the broad masses, Visthapan Virodhi Jan Vikas Andolan(VVJA) was formed after the Ranchi Declaration in Ranchi in the year 2007. The Historic Ranchi Declaration extended support to anti-displacement movements against corporate plunder and affirmed the need for a people's model of development. The Ranchi Declaration and formation of VVJA was the result of ideological clarity and tireless efforts of Comrade Saibaba and anti-displacement activists Ajay Kumar and Damodar Turi, among others. While Comrade Sai has attained martyrdom owing to brutal incarceration, Activist Ajay Kumar has been incarcerated in a fabricated "NRB revival of Maoists" case, facing the same fate as GN Saibaba. Damodar Turi is also facing imminent threat of state repression from NIA, which has raided his residence and interrogated him in yet another fabricated "Maoist link" case. All these three have been National Convenors of Visthapan Virodhi Jan Vikas Andolan.

### **GN Saibaba and the struggle against war on people**

In the year 2005, the Indian state unleashed a murderous militia, a private gang funded by corporations and supported by the armed hand of the state. The name of this murderous militia was Salwa Judum( Peace March in Gondi). Spearheaded by the Notorious Congress leader Mahendra Karma, with the BJP government in Chhattisgarh and Congress government at the Centre, all in cahoots to aid loot of resources of the people of Bastar, This was not a "Peace march" by any means, rather it was a purification hunt in the jungles. While Salwa Judum was murdering and raping and burning their way through the forests of Dandakaranya (Bastar) with the aid of paramilitary personnel under the leadership of Notorious SRP



Kalluri, who would distribute liquor before sending the militia like an army of barbarians on pillage, Comrade G.N. Saibaba understood the political responsibility of the time and started organizing campaigns against this genocidal operation sugar-coated as a peace march. He worked with the likes of Dr. B.D. Sharma, Dr. Binayak Sen, Varavara Rao and many others built an all-Indian campaign against this so-called fight against Naxalism and exposed its original pro-corporate roots. After much uproar from the progressive and democratic sections of India and abroad, as well as the steadfast resistance of the adivasi peasants in Bastar, giving blow after blow to this murderous militia, Salwa Judum was finally disbanded by the Supreme Court of India in 2012. By the time Salwa Judum was banned, it had already burnt down 644 villages in Bastar, killing and raping hundreds leading to the displacement of almost seventy thousand Adivasi peasants from Bastar. Villages were raided by the Salwa Judum militia armed with guns supplied by the paramilitary, and they would force the villagers to inform the people who were sympathetic to the Maoists. Those identified were either killed, raped or brutalized and the villages were emptied, and people were thrown into big concentration camps. Threatening statements and messages were released by the Salwa Judum to vacate the villages and come into concentration camps that mimicked the age-old British tactic of Strategic Hamletting used in Malaysia and repeated by US Imperialist forces in Vietnam to quell the people's resistance. Those who refused to abandon their villages and shift to these hell holes called safe camps were considered Maoist sympathizers and, therefore, hunted and their villages burnt.

In 2009, the media first reported that there was a secret operation to root out the Maoists from the forests of Central India. The source was a police official who did not wish to be named. A well-concerted, multi-fold operation flying high the banner of CIA's 'Hearts and Mind' strategy to suppress rebellion was being

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undertaken at the behest of Congress Government at the helm in the centre. The then Home Minister, P. Chidambaram who unleashed this operation, termed it a figment of imagination of the media. But the reality was that such an operation was indeed underway and it was an enhanced and more concentrated form of scorched-earth war being waged already by Salwa Judum in Bastar and many other militias in other states. The strategy of the infamous Operation Green Hunt was to “clear, hold and develop”, but more like clearing the Adivasis off their land and handing it over to the corporate and developing (plundering) it in the interest of the big corporate. Dr. G.N. Saibaba understood the notorious intent of the infamous Operation Green-Hunt and began to mobilize democratic progressive forces across the country. He, along with many others framed in the Bhima Koregaon Conspiracy Case and still languishing in jail, came together to form Forum Against War On People in 2009. In 2010-11, when Operation Green Hunt was at its most brutal, a campaign against it began to gather speed and public meetings and rallies took place across the country. As soon as word of what was happening in Bastar and elsewhere started to spread, the media, particularly the international media, began to pay attention.

### **Resilience in face of repression**

Comrade G.N. Saibaba’s political commitment and his work to build solidarity for the people’s struggles happening in Bastar and the rest of the Central Indian forested region made him an eyesore for the Indian state. It is in the backdrop of the Union Ministry of Home Affairs affidavit filed in the Supreme Court that clearly spelt out their intentions, which said, “The ideologues and supporters of the CPI (Maoist) in cities and towns have undertaken concerted and systematic propaganda against the state to project it in a poor light... It is these ideologues who have kept the Maoist movement alive and are in many ways more dangerous than the cadres of the People’s Liberation Guerilla Army. The state’s targeting of the so-

called Over Ground Workers (OGWs) in the cities was up and about, and Dr G.N. Saibaba was one of the first on the hit list. On September 12, 2013, his house was raided by 50 policemen flaunting a search warrant for stolen property from a magistrate in Aheri, a small town in Gadchiroli District of Maharashtra. Although they did not find any stolen property, they, in turn, took away his personal laptop, hard disks and pen drives. Not much later, On the usual morning of 9th May 2014, Dr G.N. Saibaba was returning home from examination duty at Daulat Ram College for lunch when his car was intercepted near the School for Open Learning by another car. Some unidentified men forced open the door of his car and blindfolded his dumbfounded driver and even before Saibaba could understand the gravity of the situation, he was also blindfolded and hurled into a car and taken to Civil Lines Police Station, some 3 kilometres away from the spot.

The state wanted to project this abduction as a sensational arrest of a dreaded Maoist ideologue, a person who would be alleged to be in contact with the likes of Ganapathy, the then General Secretary of the CPI (Maoist). It was for this reason that he was flown to Nagpur on the same date and from there, driven to Aheri and back to Nagpur in a cavalcade of Mine proof vehicles and police jeeps filled with hundreds of police and paramilitary personnel armed to the teeth. The next morning's newspapers were telling the well-devised story that the police played out throughout the episode. On the front page of Nagpur newspapers, pictures of heavily armed personnel of Maharashtra Police were proudly posing with their trophy- "The dreaded Maoist". He was alleged to have been in contact with Narmada, a Central Committee member of the CPI (Maoist), through Comrade Hem Mishra, a JNU student and activist who was arrested from Balharshah Railway Station in August 2013. Another serious offence listed to have been committed by Comrade Saibaba was that he was the Joint Secretary of the Revolutionary Democratic Front, a conglomeration of revolutionary and democratic

forces formed in 2006, banned on suspicion of being a frontal organization of the Maoists in Orissa and Andhra Pradesh but neither in Delhi nor in Maharashtra.

From the time of his arrest, Comrade Saibaba had to undergo a lot of physical and mental abuse at the hands of the police. He was physically harmed during the abduction and his wheelchair was damaged, after which he was subjected to a long journey of 3 days without break. After being produced in Aheri Court, he was brought back to Nagpur Central Jail and thrown in Anda Cell where he was to spend almost a decade of his life. And so this is how they wrote his death sentence, slowly and slowly, over a prolonged period, by denying him humane living conditions that even a convict deserves by virtue of being a human, not to forget dozens of conventions mandating special treatment for disabled people. But all the special treatment that he received was in the form of denial of medical care, even his basic medications. He continued to have chronic back pain and his left hand, injured during the abduction and left untreated for months, became dysfunctional. Over the years, he developed serious cardiac complications, kidney stones, eyesight complications, rib caging, spinal problems and many more.

On March 7, 2017, Saibaba was convicted along with Hem Mishra, Martyr Pandu Narote, Vijay Tirki, Mahesh Tirki and Prashant Rahi and sentenced to a life term in prison. He was acquitted by the Nagpur Bench of the Bombay High Court on 14 October 2022, only to be kept incarcerated by the Supreme Court's stay order on a Holiday, showcasing the state's desperation to keep the voice against war on people silenced. He was finally acquitted by the same High Court on March 5, 2024, and released from prison, riddled with serious health complications owing to deliberate medical negligence in brutal captivity for almost a decade. Comrade Saibaba attained martyrdom at 8 PM on 12th October 2024 at NIMS, Hyderabad, leaving behind an inspiring legacy of struggle to be carried forward by his comrades and oppressed-exploited people of the country.

### **Carry forward the glorious legacy**

Comrade Saibaba's struggle against the War on people is far from over because Operation Green-Hunt and Salwa Judum continue in various forms like District Reserve Guards, Operation Kagaar, Operation Clean and Surajkund Scheme. The intensified war on people, now being carried out by state-corporate nexus has taken the lives of almost 250 people, half of them were either unarmed adivasi peasants or captured Maoists, flaunting every pretext of rule of law to displace the Adivasi peasantry from the forested mineral-rich regions and plunder the resources of country's people in the interest of foreign corporates and big Indian corporates. Bastar today has more camps than hospitals, schools and other basic amenities.

With the onset of Operation Kagar, for every 7 Adivasi persons in Abujmarh, there are now 3 paramilitary personnel. Forests of Bastar are being bombed by the Indian state using Israeli drones and US technology. Hundreds of MoUs are being signed without obtaining people's consent, and resources are being sold at dirt's cost, destroying people's lives, livelihood, culture and environment. Surajkund scheme aids corporatization through intensification of militarization of all parts of Society, particularly resource rich-regions.

Let us answer the call of Bailadila, Amdai Ghati, Surjagarh hills, Niyamgiri, Sijimali, Manjhingmali, Rowghat, Hasdeo, Kolhaan and plunge into the struggle to protect our country and its people from corporate plunder, carrying high the banner of Saibaba's revolutionary ideals. Let us vow to tread Saibaba's way that the state feared so much.

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*Ehtmamul Haque is an advocate and Member, FACAM and Syed Affan is a Journalist, anti-displacement Activist*

## Saibaba: Icon of People's Resistance Who Defied All Limitations

- K. Ravi Chander

*When I refused to die,  
My chains were loosened.  
My smile caused intolerance in them;  
I was shackled again.  
When I defied death again,  
Tired of my life,  
My captors released me.  
I still stubbornly refuse to die.  
The sad thing is that  
They don't know how to kill me.*

*(Cited from GN Saibaba's book: Why Do They Fear My way So Much? Poems and Letters from Prison)*

However, the State devised means to end him. Saibaba was tormented physically in the inhuman incarceration conditions and was gradually disembowelled in the Anda cell. Repeated denials of bail, concerted efforts to prevent him from seeing his dear mother after her death by refusing parole, moving heaven and earth to keep him detained even after the High Court acquitted him in 2023, and, to top it all, the continuous denial of proper treatment for his multiple ailments ultimately cost Saibaba his life. It was an institutional murder by design.

## **Childhood and Education**

Gokarakonda Naga Saibaba was born in Sannavalli village, Amalapuram, in East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh, into a peasant family on 24<sup>th</sup> July 1967. Saibaba's growth was normal until he was five when he was suddenly stricken with polio. His parents took him to Visakhapatnam for treatment, but all their efforts were in vain, and both of Saibaba's legs became crippled.

His education began in a street school near a temple, where the temple's priest taught the basics to children. Saibaba's family's main income was from two acres of land, but their relatives fraudulently tampered with the documents and dispossessed them of their only source of income. Thus, his family was forced to move to Amalapuram in search of livelihood. His father took up a job as a clerk, built a small hut, and started rebuilding their lives.

### **'His body might have been Crippled, but he has Mind'**

Saibaba later joined a Christian high school. His mother usually took him to school, carrying him on her hip. She argued with those who dissuaded her why she should insist her physically challenged kid be sent to school: "His body might have been affected, but he has a mind too." Occasionally, his father or brother, Ramdev, took him on a bicycle. He studied in St. John's High School and completed his Intermediate and graduation at SKBR College, Amalapuram. Vasantha Kumari, his school mate, later became his soul mate.

### **The Turbulent 90s: In Central University, Hyderabad**

Saibaba moved to Hyderabad in 1990 to pursue post-graduate studies at University of Hyderabad (UOH). He enrolled in an M.A. in English and soon became deeply involved in the struggle supporting

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the Mandal Commission's Recommendations to provide reservations for oppressed sections (OBC). UOH was the epicentre of pro- and anti-Mandal Commission recommendations. Saibaba joined the pro-reservation movement, *Jana Chaitanya Samithi* (JCS), and participated in several agitation programs as one of the leaders, along with other like-minded leftist and Bahujan student organizations. The protest programs spread to different institutes in Hyderabad and Kakatiya University in Warangal. Saibaba's active role was remarkable in leading JCS, the first movement that gradually moulded him as a distinguished agitator for future causes.

#### **At CIEFL: Integrates with Mess Workers**

Saibaba joined the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL) [present English and Foreign Language University (EFLU)], Hyderabad, for his M.Phil. Here, he raised his voice against the injustice faced by mess workers, whose labour was exploited by the authorities. He led a movement to increase the wages of mess workers and ultimately fought for their regularization as permanent employees.

#### **Prisoners' Struggles: Saibaba Leads the JACDR**

More significantly, Saibaba came into the limelight with the movement to protect prisoners' rights in A.P. under the banner of the *Joint Action Committee for Democratic Rights* (JACDR). This movement attracted a broad cross-section of people. It was led primarily by Saibaba, who had physical disabilities, and Pawan, who was visually challenged; both were research fellows at the same institute. The duo fought against the state administration, raising public awareness about prisoners' legitimate demands. They visited prisoners in jail, prepared a report on their findings, and brought it to public attention. If jails in Telangana and A.P. are considered better than those in other states, with improved jail manuals and



reasonable facilities, it is due to the JACDR struggle led by Saibabu and Pawan. This struggle also showcased the perfect harmony between the political prisoners' resolve to achieve their demands in A.P. prisons and the response from the public under the JACDR banner, leading to the successful fulfilment of prisoners' demands in A.P. prisons. This struggle for prisoners' rights in 1995 became a stepping stone in Saibabu's activism and marked a milestone in his future role as an activist and public intellectual. Little could he have known that one day, he himself would become a political prisoner, confined in the most hostile conditions, for his activism.

#### **1996: International Seminar on the Nationality Question, Delhi**

While India experienced turbulence with the VP Singh Government's acceptance of the Mandal Commission Recommendations and the upper caste and Sangh Parivar-backed anti-Mandal agitation, Western powers were reshaping the global order. The collapse of the Soviet Union and its reduction to a weakened Russian Republic with a devastated economy and near-anarchic political situation emboldened the USA's egregious imperialist ambitions, defined by the 'New World Order' of a unipolar world.

The Washington, DC-based Bretton Woods Institutions added the WTO to its family. It became a new weapon in the hands of imperialist financial capital to control, regulate, and dominate trade, commerce, services, intellectual property rights, and investment policies, and significantly weaken the sovereign powers of developing countries. Globalization was the continuation of imperialism by new means, assaulting the political and economic sovereignty of the developing world within the 'New World Order.'

The All India People's Resistance Forum (AIPRF) was formed on 30<sup>th</sup> April 1992 precisely to combat this latest phase of imperialism in a new avatar. AIPRF aimed to forge a broad united front of anti-

imperialist and anti-feudal struggles and began its work from Delhi as its headquarters.

Against this backdrop of globalization's onslaught, led by the triad—IMF, World Bank, and WTO—and the egregious military incursions into Iraq in 1991, the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a barrage of attacks on nations worldwide. *Operation Desert Storm* began the U.S.'s new aggressive military policy to quell any opposition to its authority within the New World Order. Another round of wars of aggression and occupation began, intended to bolster the U.S.'s morale after its debacle in Vietnam. This renewed military offensive was designed to demonstrate the U.S.'s unchallenged leadership within imperialism.

In February 1996, AIPRF organized a two-day 'International Seminar on the Nationality Question' in Delhi. Y Naveen Babu, who became martyr in 2000, was the main organiser of this event. This seminar served as an ideological response to imperialism's designs to thwart even the nominal independence of developing countries. It explored the implications of these actions on the national question globally. It was also an organizational effort to prepare for the imperialist offensive on the ground. The seminar aimed to understand the complexities of various nationality movements worldwide, particularly in Northeast India, Kashmir, Punjab, and other parts of India, from a Marxist perspective and to build solidarity with them. Eminent personalities like William Hinton and Ngig) wa Thiong'o, leaders of these nationality struggles, as well as leaders of various communist parties from the U.S., and Philippines participated in this seminar. Through this endeavour, AIPRF developed fraternal relations with different movements and individuals nationwide and internationally. The deliberations during this conference led to the formation of International League of Peoples Struggles, an international body of various organisation around the globe. Saibaba

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played a pivotal role in organizing and making the conference a success. AIPRF published a book, *Symphony of Freedom*, which is an anthology of articles presented and discussed during the seminar. Saibaba was one of the team members who skilfully edited this book.

### **Separate Telangana Movement**

In the name of forming 'Linguistic States,' the erstwhile Hyderabad State was merged with Andhra State to form Andhra Pradesh on 1st November 1956, against the wishes of the Telangana people. Since then, the movement for separate Telangana statehood gained momentum. During the 1969 agitation for Telangana State, 369 people were killed by police, and the government suppressed the movement.

The separate Telangana movement in the 1960s helped revive the Naxalite movement in Andhra Pradesh after setbacks in Srikakulam. In a peculiar twist of events, the subdued Naxalite movement—after severe repression during the height of the revolutionary movement in Andhra Pradesh, especially in Telangana—gave rise to the second wave of the separate Telangana movement, which ultimately succeeded in forming a separate state on 2nd June 2014.

Tiny sparks ignited a prairie fire. A meeting in Hyderabad in memory of Ghulam Rasool, a journalist killed by the police in cold blood, rekindled the spirit of intellectuals otherwise gagged by unprecedented state repression. It was followed by the *Bhuvanagiri Sabha* on March 8th and 9th, 1997, organized by the newly formed *Telangana Hakkula Samiti* (Association for Telangana Rights). The indomitable spirit of 20,000 people who defied Chandra Babu Naidu's police to attend the Bhuvanagiri meeting provided the necessary impetus for the irrepressible separate Telangana movement.

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### **Warangal Declaration: Saibaba's Key Role in Its Formulation**

The momentous Bhuvanagiri meeting was followed by a two-day convention in Warangal on the 28th and 29th of December 1997. Intellectuals, academicians, poets, students, employees, and the general public organised the Warangal meeting to further the Telangana movement in the coming days. There were threats that the stage would be bombed. Kaloji (People's poet) took the challenge and declared he would be the first speaker on the dais. Kaloji's stirring prose, Gaddar's electrifying songs, the informed speeches of Varavara Rao turned the Warangal meeting into a historic one where more than one lakh people attended. It was the Gaddar's first meeting after he was shot in April 1997.

A public document called the Warangal Declaration—a roadmap to achieve Telangana statehood—was released. This declaration was primarily drafted by Saibaba, who infused it with ideological insights and references from the ongoing revolutionary movement. Later, various forces utilized the 'Warangal Declaration' as a guiding document to advance the movement. By then, no political party supported the cause of a separate Telangana until the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) was formed by KCR in 2001. The Warangal Declaration played a pivotal role in the formation of Telangana, and Saibaba's instrumental efforts in creating this declaration were historic.

### **Saibaba Led the Campaign Against World Bank Policies**

While the Telangana Movement picked up momentum, to look after AIPRF activities, he moved to Delhi in 1998. He joined Ph.D. Programme in Delhi University and completed in 2004. His doctoral thesis was: *Indian Writing in English and Nation Making: Reading the Discipline*. He joined as a English lecturer in Ram Lal and Anand Lal College of Delhi University in 2002.

During Chandrababu Naidu's rule (particularly 1998-2000), Andhra Pradesh became a laboratory for implementing World Bank policies, leading to the removal or reduction of welfare schemes. The Chief Minister, who called himself the CEO of A.P., showed little concern for people's welfare, but more focussed on capitalist and corporate interests. Lives were pushed into veritable misery as welfare schemes were withdrawn or made nominal. Under Saibaba's leadership, AIPRF campaigned widely, organizing protests with massive public participation, demanding the restoration of welfare schemes and exiting the World Bank's influence.

### **Saibaba's Efforts in the Formation of FAIG: An Anti-Imperialist Front to Fight LPG Policies**

Aiming to counter the policies of Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization (LPG), an organization called the Forum Against Imperialist Globalization (FAIG) was formed, comprising various mass organizations, including revolutionary left parties across the country. FAIG organized the broadest campaign against LPG policies by conducting rallies and protests. A large rally in Delhi met with brutal police lathi charges on peaceful protesters, including Saibaba. FAIG became a novel united platform of communist revolutionary organizations unprecedented in India's history.

### **Mumbai Resistance-2004: Continuing the Fight Against Neoliberal Policies**

A large gathering under the World Social Forum (WSF) was organized in Mumbai, with a conglomeration of NGOs and corporate-sponsored groups under the guise of human rights and ecological organizations. The constituent organizations of the WSF primarily promote and protect the interests of neoliberal companies, disregarding the class-based nature of social issues. Issues like displacement, ecological destruction, and climate imbalance are analyzed from a laissez-faire, individual-centred approach rather than

a holistic perspective. To counter this paradigm, various mass, democratic, and civil rights organizations, including liberal democrats, united under a forum called 'Mumbai Resistance-2004.' This alternative event- held simultaneously when the WSF organized its meeting in Mumbai- conducted seminars, conventions, and round-table conferences for three days in Mumbai in 2004. Personalities like Arundhati Roy, Medha Patkar, and actor Nandita Das critically analyzed societal issues from a class-based perspective, attracting global attention. Saibaba played an essential role in this seminar.

Saibaba untiringly worked for the successful conclusion of the Mumbai Resistance. However, the most crucial point was his insights into differentiating the WSF, the epitome of NGOs, which advocated that *Another World is Possible*. WSF believed that it would be possible through lobbying and propaganda. Saibaba, while analysing incisively in an article: *Tale of Two Forums* in the magazine *People's Resistance*, the official magazine of AIPRF, unequivocally said that 'resistance and struggle' is the only path before the people to defeat the imperialists' neo-liberal policies. His distinction made a clear rupture with reformist trends in the fight against imperialism.

### **Campaign for the Release of Political Prisoners**

As anti-people policies were rigorously implemented, repression of people's movements intensified, with false cases and indiscriminate arrests becoming common under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and the Public Safety Act (PSA). Adivasis were falsely accused while fighting for 'Jal, Jangal, Jameen' (Water, Forest, Land). Saibaba observed how Binayak Sen, a renowned doctor and civil rights activist, and Jiten Marandi, a cultural activist for the people, languished in jail despite worldwide protests for their release. Moved by the plight of Adivasis incarcerated without trial, Saibaba initiated the formation of the Committee for the Release of Political Prisoners (CRPP), involving many, including SAR Gilani. CRPP state units

were formed throughout the country to work for the release of political prisoners, with numerous advocates engaged in legal support. Additionally, CRPP conducted meetings to raise societal awareness of the necessity of freeing political prisoners, who were often the active voices of oppressed people.

### **Struggle Against Displacement: The Ranchi Declaration**

The development model chosen by the ruling classes led to displacement and destruction, particularly in Central and Eastern India. Saibaba brought together like-minded individuals such as B.D. Sharma (Retired IAS), Father Stan Swamy, and various concerned organizations and movements under a single forum, Visthapan Virodhi Jan Vikas Andolan (VVJVA). This group was launched in Ranchi on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2007 (Bhagat Singh's Martyrdom Day) and released a historic document called the Ranchi Declaration. The declaration emphasized a 'People's Model of Development,' which is ecologically sustainable, free from forest destruction, and aims to prevent indiscriminate mining and resource exploitation. Saibaba played a crucial role in forming VVJVA and uniting Adivasi and other organizations nationwide.

### **The Hideous War on the People: Operation Green Hunt**

As a response to government policies, the 'Committee Against War on People' was initiated by Saibaba to expose atrocities against Adivasis committed by paramilitary forces under 'Operation Green Hunt' (OGH). Around 100 Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) were signed with multinational companies to exploit the rich mineral resources in Adivasi areas. Central India began militarizing, with hundreds of police camps set up to suppress Adivasi protests supported by Maoists. After Jammu & Kashmir and the Eastern states, Central India became one of the most militarized zones globally, as India effectively declared war on its people.

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Saibaba garnered domestic and international support from writers, activists, and journalists to oppose OGH.

### **State Retaliation and Efforts to Silence Saibaba**

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court of India struck down the 'Salwa Judum' vigilante organization, which aimed to suppress Adivasis. This judgement reflected the impact of the relentless campaign against the war on the people and was a significant rebuke to the government. In retaliation, the State targeted Saibaba. Efforts began to silence his voice, ultimately leading to his incarceration in Anda Cell with the sinister intention of causing his death in jail. The Committee Against War on People (CAWP) expanded its awareness campaigns worldwide, exposing the repressive nature of the State, which perpetuates violence against Adivasis in the name of 'Operation Green Hunt.' The architect of OGH, then Home Minister P. Chidambaram, personally named Saibaba, associated him with CAWP's activities and vengefully threatened that Saibaba would be held accountable.

Saibaba believed that large-scale public participation was essential for fighting against the government's anti-people policies. When it became challenging to continue activities under the name of AIPRF for various reasons, a large platform consisting of diverse groups was brought together as the People's Democratic Forum of India (PDFI). Along similar lines, Saibaba played a vital role in forming the Patriotic Democratic Movement (PDM) in A.P., which opposed imperialism and the anti-people policies of the State.

### **State Bans RDF**

Later, it was recognized that an organization was needed to stand in solidarity with the revolutionary movements. The Revolutionary Democratic Front (RDF) comprised revolutionary thinkers and individuals who believed in and practised revolutionary



methods, critiquing policies from anti-imperialist and anti-feudal perspectives. Saibaba was re-elected Joint Secretary of RDF during its conference in Hyderabad in 2012, though the State later banned it. The primary accusation against Saibaba was his alleged membership in the banned RDF, repeatedly cited in the chargesheet. This RDF affiliation was also referenced to accuse Varavara Rao, a renowned Telugu poet imprisoned in the infamous Bhima-Koregaon case.

### **India: A Prison House of Nationalities – Saibaba Formed CCNDM**

Saibaba recognized that the Indian subcontinent consists of diverse nationalities with unique cultures and lifestyles specific to each region. Communities like the Nagas, Kukis, Bodos, Kashmiris, and Punjabis have long fought militantly for their right to self-determination, including the right to secession. To suppress these movements, the Indian government deployed heavy paramilitary forces in the Northeast and Jammu and Kashmir. Saibaba's initiative brought together all these national struggles under the 'Coordination Committee of Nationalities and Democratic Movements (CCNDM).

Later, it was felt that a broad-based platform was necessary to confront the 'mighty' State power. In this context, all People's Movements and National Movements were united under a vast network called the 'Joint Action Forum of Indigenous People' (JAFIP). This formation is regarded as a historic broad United Front.

### **AIPRF Becomes Part of ILPS: Saibaba's Role in ILPS**

Saibaba also played a pivotal role in the International League of Peoples' Struggles (ILPS), a united forum of leftist and democratic parties and organizations across various countries. Representatives from ILPS were invited to India to participate in several meetings, share experiences, and express solidarity with ongoing struggles.

Saibaba himself participated in seminars organized by ILPS constituents in foreign countries.

Saibaba was instrumental in founding and running these organizations, from drafting manifestos to defining aims and objectives. His skill in uniting various movements and individuals nationwide was remarkable. Jokingly called the 'Manufacturer of Manifestos,' Saibaba would respond with a gentle smile. On behalf of AIPRF, Saibaba played an instrumental role in editing its official magazines, Peoples Resistance, Jana Prathirodh, and Udyamam (Telugu). He presented numerous papers at national and international seminars from a people's perspective, delivered lectures, and wrote articles for various magazines including *Economic and Political Weekly*.

### **Operation Green Hunt and the Campaign Against 'Urban Naxals'**

Operation Green Hunt was part of a Low-Intensity Conflict aimed at crushing the Maoist movement and democratic people's movements against imperialism and semi-feudalism, as well as dissenting voices among intellectuals and activists, who the State labelled as 'urban Naxals.' The suppressive campaign against these voices began with the arrest of Saibaba, culminating in the imprisonment of six individuals, including him. Saibaba, along with others, was sentenced to life imprisonment and sent to Nagpur Jail, where his address for the next decade became his Anda Cell. Intellectuals worldwide appealed to the Government to release him. On 30 April 2020, a panel of experts with the United Nations OCHCR too called on the Indian government urging the authorities to immediately release G.N. Saibaba, due to his "seriously deteriorating" health condition. After his arrest, intellectuals formed a Committee for the Defence and Release of Saibaba.

### **Poems from the Anda Cell**

From his cell, Saibaba wrote poems that were later published under the title *Why Do You Fear My Way So Much?* Foreseeing the government's intention of keeping him in jail indefinitely, without bail or parole, he wrote a letter from his prison cell titled *They Don't Know How to Kill Me*.

### **One of India's Most Persecuted Political Prisoners Post-1947**

Saibaba left his experiences in jail in draft form, which ran into hundreds of pages. The relentless ill health caused by the horrendous prison conditions over a decade prevented him from fulfilling his desire to document his experiences. Like Julius Fucik in Nazi prisons and Antonio Gramsci in Mussolini's prisons, Saibaba endured untold suffering in the jails of Saffron fascists. He is one of the most persecuted political prisoners in post-1947 India.

A Telugu and English literature lover, Saibaba intensely studied works by veteran writers in both languages. He believed that literature should be 'People-Centred,' which led him to join the Revolutionary Writers Association (popularly known as Virasam), an organization grounded in Marxism, Leninism, and Maoism. Saibaba adhered to and practised these principles until his last breath.

### **An Icon of Resistance Against Neoliberal Policies**

Saibaba became synonymous with resistance to the neoliberal policies that have, since the 1990s, allowed economic juggernauts to crush people's lives. His efforts to forge broad, united fronts remain a model to emulate against the relentless fascist onslaught on the people. The coalescence of far-right neoliberal and Hindu Brahminical fascism intensifies the need for leaders like Saibaba to build broad anti-fascist organizations to confront the counter-revolution.

Saibaba breathed his last on 12th October at 8:36 pm. His death was not ordinary; it was institutional murder. Saibaba is no longer, but his work, struggles, writings, speeches, and life will continue to inspire generations until imperialism and feudalism are entirely uprooted. Saibaba remains an everlasting icon of people's resistance.

### **A Legacy of Resilience**

Throughout his 57 years, he fought numerous struggles with unyielding resolve. Despite being 90% physically challenged, he never turned away from any challenge. He was perhaps the only person with such a severe disability to endure ten years in the Anda Cell within Indian prisons. Saibaba was a dynamic and multifaceted personality—a poet, academic, intellectual, activist, strategist, skilled organizer, and relentless fighter—evident in his participation in multiple organizations at national and international levels. The inspiring life of Saibaba, a steadfast warrior unbound by physical limitations, is an unforgettable poem, a memorable tale, and an essential chapter in the history of the Indian Revolution.

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## Saibaba Continues to Live Forever

- N. Venugopal

The evident statement that Saibaba passed away on October 12, 2024, may be true in the conventional sense, but in reality, his life continues after October 12, in as bright as or more exhilarating than his earlier life. A number of instances demonstrate his posthumous life.

The doctors at the Nizams' Institute of Medical Sciences, Hyderabad declared Saibaba's heart stopped beating around 8.30 p.m. on October 12. The heart that had been tirelessly working for over thirty-five years, beating for the people, for promoting people's movements, using all its power to build bridges between movements across the country and worldwide, creating and managing almost a dozen platforms for these movements, overcoming immense suffering and harsh imprisonment in the Nagpur Central Jail's Anda cell due to a false case, would it just stop so easily, so suddenly, and go silent forever? Can it go into eternal sleep like that?

It is simply impossible. After his death, his spirit proves with every moment that no power can stop his dreams of a true democratic society in this country.

On the morning of October 14, Sai's body started its journey from the NIMS morgue. Sai's family and friends thought this journey should begin from the Martyrs Memorial, called Gun Park, in front of State Assembly and there was a reason. Sai had been thinking about Telangana since 1991, had organized the Democratic Telangana Conference in 1997 and issued the historic Warangal

Declaration, and Gun Park memorial is a symbol of sacrifices for Telangana. When the Telangana state was formed, he was in Nagpur Jail, and a year later, in 2015, when he was granted bail due to health reasons, he came to Hyderabad for medical tests and the first thing he did was visiting the memorial. However, the state was afraid of even his lifeless body and heavy police barricades were set up around the Gun Park. Restrictions were imposed on bringing the mortal remains there. We were threatened to leave immediately. But we persisted and it was Sai's spirit that defied the restriction. Even in death, Sai's body challenged the oppressive forces, and that was the first step in his posthumous activity.

The body then underwent an extraordinary public display near Sai's brother's house in Moulali for four to five hours. Thousands of people from various ages, political opinions, and backgrounds came from Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and other states to pay their respects, vowing to continue Sai's mission. That was a public display of solidarity that surpassed even what Sai had accomplished in his life in terms of unity and people's movements. It was the second step in his posthumous activity.

Sai had donated his body to medical education, so it had to be handed over to Gandhi Medical College. Some enthusiastic friends suggested holding a procession of at least ten kilometers. The spirit of Sai inspired this enthusiasm. Before his arrest and imprisonment, he had shown that even the most impossible tasks could be accomplished. The process to donate the body had a specified time, so the procession could not go on for long. However, the friends insisted that the first and last miles should be in a procession.

There had been severe suppression of fundamental rights in Telangana for over ten years, and a complete ban on processions. In a city where processions were prohibited, two kilometers of processions, chanting slogans of revolution and showing solidarity

with Saibaba, were not just about offering condolences but expressing solidarity with his ideals. This was the third step in his posthumous activity.

The number of memorial meetings held in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh across villages and towns shows how extraordinary his influence was. The memorial meetings were organized jointly by several people's organizations rather than just individual forums. Thousands of people from different political camps came together, united in the memory of Saibaba, condemning the regime's cruelty, and vowing to carry on the ideals he stood for. These memorials were also held across the country and internationally. It was also remarkable that the ambassadors of France and Germany were among those expressed condolences. There were uncountable tributes, and numerous articles, essays, poems and interviews, expanding Saibaba's legacy.

Thus, Sai continued to live in action and remembering him was not just about expressing sympathy for the suffering he personally faced but about embracing the larger cause for which he stood: social justice, democracy, and revolution.

But, after all, who was this Saibaba, to inspire so many people and to continue his life and struggle even after physical demise?

Gokarakonda Naga Saibaba was born on July 24, 1967, in the village of Sannavilli near Amalapuram in the East Godavari district (now Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Konaseema district). He was born into a lower middle-class agricultural family. His father, Sathyanarayana Murthy, and his mother, Suryavati, had three children—Saibaba, his younger sister Ganga Bhavani, and his brother Ramadevudu. At a young age, even before starting school, Saibaba contracted polio, which led to the loss of both his legs. Unable to walk, he had to rely on his mother, Suryavati, to carry him to school. Saibaba often spoke about how, from a young age, his mother would carry him to school

and insisted on education despite the hardships. His mother's determination led them to move to Amalapuram, away from their village, to provide him with better educational opportunities. With her unwavering support, Saibaba not only began his studies but continued despite all obstacles. Despite financial struggles and his physical disability, he emerged as a brilliant student and a champion in education.

In 1987, Saibaba joined the University of Hyderabad to pursue his MA in English. At that time, he became involved in the revolutionary student movement that was active during the period of repression let loose by the state and the general political unrest. Despite being 90 per cent physically disabled, he became more involved in social movements. After 1990, when there was a respite in state repression and peoples protests and activities resumed, Saibaba's desire to directly participate in these movements became a reality. It was during this period that he began cohabiting with his childhood friend, Vasanta.

In the summer of 1990, he actively participated in the movement to demand implementation of Mandal Commission recommendations and reservation for backward classes. In 1991, while pursuing his PG Diploma at the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL), Saibaba was involved in an agitation to support temporary mess workers at the institute. After taking up a couple of temporary positions in the FM radio station in Warangal and the Kakinada Government Polytechnic, he cleared the UGC NET exam and started his PhD. However, his increasing involvement in revolutionary politics and people's movements led him to join the Revolutionary Writers' Association and the All India Peoples Resistance Forum (AIPRF), for which he became the state secretary in two years.

Saibaba played a key role in several political and social movements, including the campaign to improve the living conditions



of prisoners in Andhra Pradesh jails in 1995. At that time under the leadership of political prisoners Patel Sudhakar Reddy, Sakhamuri Appa Rao and Modem Balakrishna, a valiant struggle of the prisoners for their rights began in Andhra Pradesh jails and Saibaba was one of the conveners of a solidarity committee that brought the struggle into the outside world. Finally the state government had come down to negotiate with the prisoners and their representatives and accepted several demands. He also helped organize a number of seminars conferences to raise awareness about issues related to imperialism, globalisation, GATT, WTO and human rights. Under the banner of the AIPRF, he held a democratic Telangana convention in Warangal in 1997 and released Warangal Declaration. This was one of the forerunners of the movement for separate Telangana, which fructified, though in a distorted form, in 2014.

He was also part of the historical international conference held in February 1996 in Delhi, which culminated in the publication of 'Symphony of Freedom,' a remarkable book discussing the problems of nationalities under imperialism.

In 1998, during the era of globalisation and the implementation of World Bank policies, Saibaba led a movement to resist the government's cuts in welfare programs, following the instructions of the World Bank. In his later years, he became a central figure in organizing solidarity among various state and regional movements, ensuring that people had a platform to voice their struggles.

By 2003, when Saibaba became an assistant professor at Ram Lal Anand College in Delhi, he was already deeply involved in the protests against corporate control of mineral resources in central India, specifically in Adivasi areas. He was particularly vocal about the government's crackdown on the Adivasi communities, which was justified as a fight against Maoists. Recognizing the connection between these military operations and the larger political dynamics

at play, Saibaba became a prominent leader in organizing national and international resistance to these actions.

In 2004, he became part of the Mumbai Resistance event to unite various movements under one banner and challenge the government's corporate-backed actions. Over the next several years, he continued to play a crucial role in coordinating efforts to resist the war on people. Despite the Indian government labelling him a "terrorist" and arresting him in 2014, Saibaba's leadership and advocacy continued to inspire numerous movements.

There is a lot written about the false case against him, his incarceration for over nine years, the state's intent to kill him in jail, his determination at ridiculing the probable death, the legal fight and finally his acquittal and release. Seven months after the release he succumbed to a not very serious surgery. The demise was not just due to health reasons, or the complications that arose following gall bladder surgery. In fact, gall bladder surgery is a routine procedure performed without harm to millions of people. Saibaba underwent the surgery successfully on September 28, 2024. For five days after the surgery, his health remained stable. However, he started developing infections at the surgery site, and fever set in. The infection was treated successfully. Later, internal bleeding began, and his organs started failing one by one. His heart stopped on October 12, at 8:36 PM.

The true cause of this untimely and unnatural death at 57 lies in the many health problems that surfaced during his years of imprisonment in the Nagpur Central Jail, particularly in solitary confinement. The jail authorities and the medical staff failed to address these health issues in a timely manner. Even though he lost consciousness several times and had two heart attacks during these years, proper medical attention was not provided at the time. If the authorities had sought help from larger hospitals in Nagpur, many of

these problems could have been addressed. The neglect, indifference, and inaction on the part of the jail system, medical authorities, and the state machinery led to the destruction of his body and organs over the years. His body, weakened by a decade of neglect, lost its ability to withstand even the slightest stress. Therefore, his death was not the result of gall bladder surgery but the culmination of a decade-year-long, deliberate process of violence and torture imposed on him by the state.

Saibaba's life of struggle was not just a series of personal battles but a journey of resistance against the state, injustice, and the oppression faced by marginalized communities. His involvement in various movements over the decades leaves behind important lessons for society. His life itself is a message, and this message can be understood in five main ways:

**1. Physical Disabilities Do Not Limit One's Ability to Serve Society:** Saibaba's life teaches that even with physical disabilities, one can contribute significantly to society. Despite his polio-induced disability, he travelled the world, participated in intellectual discussions, and led social movements. His resilience and determination serve as a powerful example that physical limitations should not prevent someone from fulfilling their social responsibilities.

**2. People are often Tested by History and Circumstances:** Even when opportunities or abilities may seem limited, history and society may place greater responsibilities upon individuals. The test lies in whether they rise to the occasion to meet those responsibilities. Saibaba stood up to the challenges placed before him, from fighting for marginalized communities to participating in larger historical struggles for justice and freedom.

**3. Solidarity and Resistance:** Saibaba's message underscores the importance of solidarity in the face of injustice. Whether it was his role in supporting the struggles of prisoners or his efforts in uniting various political movements, he demonstrated that collective resistance and united front is the key to social change.

**4. Commitment to Justice, Regardless of the Personal Cost:** Despite the immense personal cost—including years of wrongful imprisonment—Saibaba remained committed to the cause of justice. His refusal to back down from his convictions, even in the face of brutal state repression, exemplifies the depth of his commitment to truth and justice.

**5. The Endurance of the Struggle:** Saibaba's life teaches that while the struggle for justice is long and arduous, it is also necessary and unending. He remained a voice for the oppressed, and his work continues to inspire future generations to keep fighting against oppression and for a better world.

In the end, Saibaba's life is a reminder of the enduring power of struggle, the importance of solidarity, and the unbreakable spirit of those who fight for justice, regardless of the cost. His life is not just an example of personal resilience but also a lesson to us all: a call to rise against the injustices we face and to fight for a society based on social justice, equality, and humanity.

Two major aspects of his life and struggle are worth elaborating further: One is Telangana and the other is Globalisation, including the Indian state's corporatization and militarization.

### **Telangana:**

One may think that since Sai was born in Amalapuram, a town in coastal Andhra, he has no relation to Telangana. But there are many from Telangana who were born here but have betrayed or are betraying the aspirations of the Telangana people. Conversely, many from outside Telangana have thought, spoken, and sacrificed their lives for the cause of Telangana. Sai had been thinking, writing, speaking, and working for Telangana for over three decades.

In 1987, Sai moved to Hyderabad at the age of twenty, ostensibly to pursue an MA as a student of the Central University. But from then, until the time he donated his mortal remains to Gandhi Medical College on October 14, 2024, whether in Hyderabad, Delhi, or even in the Nagpur central jail, Sai remained focused on Telangana. He wrote, spoke, and breathed Telangana, striving for the betterment of the people's lives.

To explain how deep Sai's love for Telangana was, here's an incident: Saibaba, who spent more than two decades advocating for the creation of a separate Telangana, was in Nagpur Jail on June 2, 2014, the very day Telangana became a state. At that time, he had already been arrested a month earlier in a fabricated case. While the investigation was ongoing, Sai was granted bail in April 2016. When he came to Hyderabad to visit his mother after the formation of Telangana, he made it a point to visit Gun Park, the memorial of Telangana martyrs, before heading home. That is why his family decided to keep his body near Gun Park for a while before taking it home after it was moved from the hospital mortuary.

When did Sai's love for Telangana begin? After coming to Hyderabad in 1987, he became involved in the Mandal Commission recommendations movement around 1989-90. During this period, he recognized it as his responsibility to fight for the rights of marginalized castes and regions, especially for the rights of Telangana.

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It was at this time that he joined the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL) to pursue a Post Graduate Diploma in Teaching English. There, he befriended Prof. K. Jayashankar, the ideologue of separate Telangana movement, and together, they committed to supporting the Telangana movement in every possible way.

The AIPRF, under Sai's leadership, organized a People's Democratic Telangana conference in Warangal in December 1997, marking a turning point in the Telangana movement. It was here that the people of Telangana first openly declared why they wanted a separate state as Warangal Declaration.

His dedication to Telangana was shared by his family as well. His daughter was named Manjira after the river in Telangana, and his sister Bhavani was a revolutionary who was killed in a fake encounter in Nalgonda district. Sai's deep-rooted connection to Telangana is undeniable, and it is important to recognize him as a foundational figure in the state's history. His family, too, has become inseparable from Telangana. His father's passing in 2006 and his mother's passing in 2021 in Hyderabad are part of this unbreakable bond with the land.

### **Globalization:**

It is impossible to summarize Saibaba's vast contributions in a single article or lecture. Even when we talk about his individual contributions, the politics he firmly believed in and dedicated himself to were always central. Therefore, his work was never an isolated individual effort; it was an expression of his personality, nurtured in collective work.

The movement politics and constructive work that Saibaba engaged in can best be understood as resistance to imperialist globalization. Whether it was the fight for reservation for marginalized

students, the struggle for job security of unorganized sector workers, or the battle for the rights of prisoners, Saibaba worked on various fronts. It may have been the fight to restore welfare programs dismantled by the World Bank's instructions or the campaign to expose the evils of globalization. He displayed solidarity with the struggles of oppressed nations under imperialist dominance, coordinated them with democratic struggles, and opposed the growing regional inequalities and exploitation due to imperialist policies.

Saibaba was actively involved in all these efforts, both as a worker and as a leader with significant responsibilities. He helped design and write the strategies for these struggles. He stood as a bridge across these movements, highlighting their legitimacy and strengthening them with solidarity, presenting them to the world.

Although the formal onset of the globalization policies is recognized as June 1991, when the PV Narasimha Rao – Manmohan Singh government initiated the policies, the roots of imperialist control over India did not end with India's independence in 1947. Following the end of World War II, as colonial powers withdrew, they transferred the power to their local agents and retained control over markets and resources through economic and trade agreements. The Bretton Woods conference led to the creation of the World Bank and the IMF, tightening the grip on former colonies.

Thus, even after India gained transfer of power from direct British colonial rule, it fell deeper into the economic and imperialist governance of multinational corporations. Over time, with the decline of the Soviet Union, Anglo-American imperialism regained dominance, and the World Bank, IMF, and the World Trade Organization began pressuring countries, especially in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, to align with their economic goals.

By the 1980s, Rajiv Gandhi's government had started implementing policies to "modernize" India with slogans like liberalization, computerization, and taking India into the 21st century. However, these policies led to a significant decline in industrial production, widespread unemployment, and a sharp drop in foreign exchange reserves. Even though Rajiv Gandhi lost the 1989 elections, the effects of these policies were becoming evident.

In response to the economic crisis and rising unemployment, the government decided to increase reservations in government jobs to lure the backward castes. Though this decision had some merit, it was ultimately a political manoeuvre to escape the ongoing economic crisis. This decision also led to polarization, providing an opening for right-wing forces like the Sangh Parivar to launch a campaign against reservations.

Saibaba entered public life in this historical and political juncture. The first political movement he was actively involved in was the struggle to implement the Mandal Commission recommendations. On the surface, this seemed to be a fight for caste-based reservations, but on a deeper level, it was a struggle for equal opportunities for oppressed classes. Saibaba, though not born into a marginalized community, stood for their rights. This ideological stance became the foundation for his social, cultural, and political work over the next three decades.

As the political crisis deepened, the Congress government, unable to secure a majority in the elections, shifted fully towards imperialist-backed economic and industrial policies. Privatization, liberalization, and globalization policies, in line with the interests of multinational corporations, wreaked havoc on India's economy. In this context, Saibaba became involved in numerous public movements and struggles against imperialist globalization.



The formation of the All India People's Resistance Forum (AIPRF) in March 1992 was a response to the times in which the government initiated new economic policies, banned the People's War and other mass organizations in May 1992, and the demolition of the Babri Masjid in December 1992. As a revolutionary intellectual, student of literature, and social activist, Sai played a crucial role in the formation of the AIPRF. He was also a member of the Revolutionary Writers' Association and a central figure in the movement against imperialism and globalization.

Sai's engagement with various movements extended beyond just theoretical discussions or debates. He was actively involved in constructing grassroots organizations and broad-based coalitions that could resist the growing forces of globalization and imperialism. He helped form various platforms like Forum Against Imperialist Globalization and worked tirelessly with various farmer groups, coalitions, and trade unions to voice their opposition to the policies of multinational corporations and their effects on people.

The anti-globalization struggle took a new direction after 2004, especially with the growing militarization of imperialist policies in India. The Indian government's push for the exploitation of the vast mineral resources in central India, coupled with the displacement of Adivasis, led to widespread resistance. Saibaba, along with other revolutionary forces, participated in, supported and propagated these movements, which aimed at protecting the rights of the Adivasis and highlighting the violence against them.

In the post-2004 period, as corporatization and militarization strategies intensified under the guise of development, Saibaba continued his resistance. He was actively involved in campaigns like Campaign Against War on People and worked with various groups to highlight the brutal military operations in central Indian forests, like Salwa Judum and Operation Green Hunt. His leadership in these

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movements contributed significantly to raising awareness about the struggles of the oppressed against state and corporate oppression.

Saibaba's activism eventually led to his brutal imprisonment, as his participation in the resistance movements and his organizing efforts posed a direct challenge to the imperialist-backed Indian government. His imprisonment, however, stands as a testament to the powerful role he played in mobilizing resistance against imperialism and globalization over three decades.

Saibaba's contribution to the anti-imperialist struggle must be seen not just in terms of economic policies or mere political activism, but as part of a broader, deeper understanding of the historical, social, and cultural dimensions of resistance to global imperialism. His work was not confined to theory or activism alone but was grounded in the lived experiences of oppressed peoples, and it remains a significant chapter in India's ongoing struggle against imperialist forces.

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## Vasantha's Sai

- Nalluri Rukmini

*Vasantha's friendship and love were an unyielding pillar of support for Saibaba. This unwavering confidence emboldened him to confront the world and question society's entrenched hierarchies.*

Why is the title - *Vasantha's Sai*? Why can't the *Sai's Vasantha* instead? There might even be a flicker of disapproval. Haven't I diminished Saibaba's stature? Not at all. Today, Saibaba has gone beyond the boundaries of our imagination. It is an undeniable truth. We shall return to it later.

I never had a close acquaintance with Saibaba. By the time he became actively involved in social movements in the 1990s, particularly in Hyderabad, I had missed the opportunity to work alongside him. When he moved to Delhi, our distance grew even more expansive.

### **Sai: A Voice for the Voiceless**

Yet, I often heard of him through the words of others—his work ethic, involvement with the AIPRF (All India People's Resistance Forum), and the formation of the Revolutionary Democratic Front. During national seminars held in Delhi, I learned much about his contributions. Saibaba became a figure I deeply admired and respected through these accounts. His relentless advocacy for tribal rights and opposition to *Operation Green Hunt* resonated profoundly with me. He became a man of the people in these struggles, a voice for the voiceless.

Though physically distant, he felt intimately close, not only to me but to countless people. It was evident in the outpouring of love and respect during his final journey, as people from far and wide came to pay their respects from many states. Such was the impact of his life and work.

### **Prison Life: Litmus Test for His Grit**

There are many angles to Sai's personality. His interviews after his release and the poetry and writings he penned from prison revealed the depth of his humaneness. The thought of how he endured those years behind bars troubled many. Prison life, after all, is a litmus test for one's grit, and Saibaba had long since passed it. He walked in the most inhumane conditions with a grace that was nothing short of extraordinary.

### **Lived by His Words**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, when even family members were not allowed to meet the prisoners, Saibaba shared his limited medical supplies with his fellow inmates. Knowing full well that the medication was barely enough for one person, he divided it among three, risking his own life. The prison authorities warned that the dosage would be ineffective and potentially fatal, but he paid no heed. In the end, all three survived. What courage does it take to act so selflessly, knowing death could be the price? What kind of calm, what kind of resolve? He lived by his words, proving that he would never choose survival at the cost of another's life. With such values and integrity, is it any wonder he loved humanity so profoundly?

Saibaba's life was not a bed of roses. From his early days, hardship was his constant companion. Yet neither he nor Vasantha ever wallowed in self-pity. They bore their burdens with dignity. His profound love for his mother brought him to tears, especially when he realised, he could not see her one last time.

Few believed he would ever be released, let alone return to the world alive. Yet, he never sought to escape his confinement. He and Vasantha stood firm, resisting the oppressive state. Vasantha's quiet strength gave Saibaba the fortitude to carry on in this struggle.

### **Man of Steel**

Ten years of imprisonment, devoid of proper medical care and amidst squalid conditions, took a toll on his health. Had he not been released in March, he might have met the same fate as Stan Swamy, dying in custody. The term *man of steel* fits him perfectly.

His mind, intellect, and body were forged like steel, challenging the very foundations of the state and its systems.

Even after his release, he never blamed or criticised anyone for the injustices he endured. He never wallowed when he faced intense persecution. However, he exposed the systemic neglect that made his ordeal unbearable, exposing the cruelty of the prison system and, by extension, the violence of the state.

### **Undiminished Passion for Teaching**

Despite the daily torment of prison life, he never forgot his duty as a teacher. His passion for teaching was evident even in prison, where he educated fellow inmates. Illiterates learned to read under his guidance, and he instilled in them a broader understanding of the world. His desire to return to teaching was so strong that even during his hospitalisation, he expressed his wish to Prof. Haragopal: 'I long to be amidst students and do teaching'. This unwavering commitment to education and his hope for the future spoke volumes about his resilience despite his serious illness.

He educated himself, wrote prolifically, and shared his knowledge with others. It began in his early days with Vasantha and their friends and extended to students and fellow prisoners. His students used to be very interested in his lessons, which is evident

from his words. Not only did he relate classroom lessons to contemporary society, but he also generated interest and attracted students. We heard about Tripuraneni Madhusudhana Rao (TMS) was similarly an adorable teacher for students. Sai moulded his profession, his inclination towards anti-authoritarian struggle, and his culture to the students. He was able to build friendship and love with them. That is why, even under such repression, the university students supported him.

### **Literature: The Beat of Sai's Heart**

Though I never knew Saibaba closely, his profound understanding of literature always astonished me. Literature was his anchor, his solace. I felt happy when I learnt that he spoke critically of iconic Shakespeare, pointing out the limitations of European modern drama, which often captured complexity and crisis but failed to analyse their roots or solutions. He taught classical Roman and Greek literature to the students. Also, he took up the lessons that other teachers found challenging. He mentioned that he liked the novel 'The Death of an Anarchist' by 'Dario Fo' because it analysed the nature of the state very well. He used to relate the themes of that novel to the present context.

He admired Telugu literature, particularly *Kanyasulkam*, for its subtle critique of Brahminical society, colonialism, and caste oppression.

He believed that literature born during times of transition holds immense power. If it can capture the pangs of a changing world, the literature would leave indelible footprints, Sai argued. Reflecting on the World Wars, he noted how the uncertainty of life led people to lose faith in divine providence and rely solely on their strength. His ability to weave literature into social critique was masterful.

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Saibaba was not just a revolutionary or a human rights activist; he was a philosopher, a literary critic, and a teacher. His deep engagement with literature and history allowed him to understand societal depths and transformations. Through literature, he learned to love humanity, internalise values and cultures, and live by them. As Vasantha once said, *he practised what he preached, and his actions spoke louder than words.*

### **Vasantha: Unyielding pillar of support and Love**

The bond between Vasantha and Saibaba was extraordinary. From their school days, they were drawn together by their love for literature—works by Sri Sri, Gurujada, Rangayakamma, and Chalam. This shared passion laid the foundation for their lifelong partnership. Vasantha's uniqueness lies in her ability to value the person over superficiality.

Saibaba was neither strikingly handsome nor wealthy, yet Vasantha loved him deeply. She even paid his fees when he moved to Hyderabad, a testament to her selflessness. Their relationship was a marriage and a partnership rooted in mutual respect and shared ideals.

Vasantha's support did not end with their marriage. She actively participated in women's organisations, broadening her social awareness. This shared vision kept them united till the end. Saibaba's life was incomplete without Vasantha, his faithful companion in every sense.

Her uniqueness is such that anyone could be drawn to Saibaba's intellect and personality but accepting him as a life partner is not ordinary. Especially in that prime age! This is the ultimate testament to Vasantha's greatness—it is not about physical attraction but a profound respect for a mental and emotional bond. Here, one must recall Kodavaganti Kutumba Rao's story, *Kurupi*. Vasantha held

the kind of love and respect steadfast till the end. While Saibaba fought his battles inside prison for ten years, she fought for him outside.

I emphasise this because it resonates closely with my mother's attitude toward my visually challenged sibling. The way my mother handled my younger brother always amazed me. Since childhood, he had poor eyesight, and until her death, she protected him, stood up for him, and shielded him from others. Like the biblical parable of the lost sheep, where the shepherd focuses on the one that strayed, her love and responsibility for her child with a disability were unwavering.

### **Sai's Mother and Sister: Unflinching Support**

Here, we must remember Saibaba's mother, Suryavathamma, with heartfelt respect. Her determination was not just to ensure that Saibaba's disability did not hinder his future but also to make his education a foundation for his future. That's why she carried him on her shoulders to school and later moved their entire household to a nearby town for his sake. In this context, we must also mention Sai's sister, Bhavani. She stood by her mother as a pillar of support for her siblings' education. The seeds of selflessness and sacrificing her interests for others were perhaps sown here. This selflessness grew into a commitment to fight for the oppressed and marginalised, even at the cost of her own life. The time she spent with Saibaba filled her heart with compassion, compelling her to resolve the people's struggles.

Saibaba never faced the insecurity often faced by disabled individuals. This is because of Suryavathamma's support and Vasantha's companionship, which provided him with even greater protection. If there is a disabled person in a family, it is usually the mother and the spouse who stand by them. While a mother can



support them to a certain extent due to age, a spouse must stand by them for life. Vasantha stepped forward and stood by him. That's why I hold immense respect for her.

Though I did not know Vasantha and Sai well, I adore their relationships. (There is another couple- Karunakar and his wife from Ongole whom I like their relationship similarly.) I met Vasantha only a few times, yet she gave me the impression of being deeply connected to me. For a disabled individual, having a spouse and children instils immense self-confidence in them. I say this because of my own experience. My mother went to great lengths to arrange a marriage for my brother. I was not very supportive of the marriage, wondering how someone with poor eyesight could adjust to a new person. My mother was distraught with my questions. In reality, later and even now, he carries himself with such confidence that even those with perfect eyesight cannot match. Also, with my mother's support, he handled our village affairs and dismissed our relatives' interference. Our relatives often quarrel with my mother, saying, 'You're the one who brought him up like this.' Yet, she never once spoke against him. She always took his side. Later, his wife took over that role.

Precisely, Vasantha instilled such confidence in Saibaba before he turned twenty. Thanks to Vasantha's friendship and love, who stood as a strong pillar of support. Self-confidence became the driving force behind his confrontation with the world and questioning the class society. While it is true that Saibaba was inherently emotional and a nature lover, Vasantha became the guiding light that inspired him. Knowing that someone is by your side, standing for you, provides moral strength. For individuals like him, this strength is even more essential. That is why I refer to him as *Vasantha's Sai*.

She did not stop at just marrying him. She actively engaged with women's organisations and developed social awareness, and

that awareness kept them united till the end. Saibaba's actions complemented her efforts. Vasantha was the true half of Saibaba's life. In the truest sense of the term 'companion'—as a partner and a shadow—they continued their journey together.

Vasantha's unwavering support bolstered Saibaba's towering resilience and ability to withstand imprisonment and torture. Yet, his courage and faith in the people were innate, forged through a lifetime of hardship. Born into a struggling family, he witnessed his mother's sacrifices firsthand, which instilled a deep empathy for the poor.

### **Warrior till His Breath**

Even after his release, he remained committed to the cause of tribal rights and was ready to oppose *Operation Kagar*. Saibaba was a dreamer, envisioning a world where all could live equally and happily. He was a philosopher who recognised society's flawed foundations. He was a literary scholar, drawing wisdom from global literature to fuel his revolutionary spirit.

He was a warrior, using his actions to fight for human rights and environmental conservation. Even in death, he exposed the hollowness of legal systems and the complicity of the highest courts.

His ultimate victory lies in the enduring legacy of his ideals and the love he earned from the people.

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## Sai and the Revolutionary Democracy

- Pani

Comrade Sai is on the trot. His legacy, revolutionary practice, and ideals traverse the entire country and the world over. True, Sai is no more. But the revolutionary democracy he loved, lived for, and died for, along with his struggle towards it, remains alive.

His journey now carries a broader perspective than during his time in jail. The solidarity that emerged in response to his persecution over the past decade was never just about saving him. Sai understood this deeply. Even from the confines of a dark cell, he called for the building of a solidarity movement—one that connected with the struggles of the Adivasis and the injustices faced by Indigenous communities fighting for their rights.

### **Sai's Incarceration: A protest, a defiance, against State's War on People**

After his release from captivity, he was ready to embark once more on a mission to forge solidarity for the Adivasis across the nation. Yet, that opportunity never came to pass. Even in death, his spirit endures, weaving its way through the country's fabric, demonstrating solidarity with the adivasis. This spirit is not confined to India alone—it echoed globally. Commemorative gatherings remembering Sai are being held everywhere, from bustling cities to the most remote villages, in opposition to *Operation Kagar* (Final Operation).

These meetings are not merely expressions of sympathy for Saibaba, who endured unbearable suffering in prison. Time has

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seized upon his untimely death as a moment to manifest itself. From this tragedy, inspiration is being drawn and transformed into human action. Just as he connected with vast sections of people during his lifetime, even more sections of society are reviving Saibaba's ideals after his death. Victims of the system and champions of the people are reflecting the broadness of Saibaba's perspective in their own practices. This marks a significant chapter in the modern history of India.

Therefore, the commemoration of Sai is not merely a remembrance of a departed individual. It is not just a eulogy of his virtues, nor is it simple sympathy for the immense suffering he endured. It is not even a stunned reaction to an untimely death.

All these elements are present to some extent. But the core of it all lies in the historical struggle of this era. It is the life-and-death conflict of our times. Sai's sacrifice is a symbol of the sharp friction between opposing forces. Perhaps it is a protest, a defiance, against the violence that he endured in the dark cell for a decade and the violence that society outside has endured as well.

To put it more clearly, over the past ten months, under the name of *Operation Kagar* (Final Operation), hundreds of revolutionaries and Adivasis have been massacred in this war of annihilation. Witnessing this, countless people, silently grieving and unable to express themselves, have taken to the streets in the form of commemorating Sai. They have raised their voices in tribute to him. As Sai once said, quoting Kabir, 'Proclaim your love loudly and take to the streets,' they have reinterpreted this as an occasion to declare their love for revolution. Keeping Sai in their hearts, the bravest of them all, they attempt to channel their anger through commemoration.

This context of fascism has brought us to a point where we can say that life does not end with death and that death is an integral part of life. Therefore, standing in the context of death, people are speaking

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in Sai's voice, in their own words, about the rooting out of fascism and the liberation of humanity. Through Sai's eyes, they sharply observe the surrounding destructive, grotesque, and violent circumstances.

Those who have fought for solidarity over the past decade know that the case against Sai is spurious and illegal. They also know that he held Maoist political beliefs. Back then, his political beliefs were no obstacle to expressing solidarity against his persecution, just as there are no obstacles to organising commemorative meetings for him. Tributes are pouring in, even while recognising him as a Maoist. While people remember Saibaba in their own ways—as a rights activist, a union organiser, a teacher, or a poet—fundamentally, he was a Maoist thinker. His heart, intellect, life impulses, and attitudes were all rooted in that ideology. This is precisely why he became so close to so many. Today, Sai's spirit has merged into numerous sections of people.

These people are grieving for Saibaba and trying to comprehend the depth of his being. This is a collective effort by society to understand a human being shaped by that very society. What is he, after all? How did Sai evolve as Sai of the present day before our eyes? This is the quest to find answers to these quintessential questions.

### **Maoist Weltanschauung for Achieving Human Freedom**

As Sai once said, 'Everyone has their own Kabir.' Today, everyone has their own Sai. Each person's perspective may be their own to understand this infinite world. But the central point of it all is human freedom, the dignity of the human being, and the courageous journey to reach a way of life where people can live as human beings.

These tumultuous times have found resonance in countless individuals like ProfGN Saibaba. They have manifested in numerous people's struggles, acts of defiance, bloodshed, and incarcerations.

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However, there is a singularity to Sai. He has metamorphosed from an individual into a representative of our struggles of the present time. He became an embodiment of a physical force in the battle between fascism and the people, between authoritarianism and democracy. In the context of financial capital and the rise of Hindutva through constitutional means, the regime at the helm recognised the Maoist **weltanschauung** within him. The state realised how dangerous he was to the fascist state. And so, with false accusations, it imprisoned him.

In truth, the state was not merely afraid of Sai, a man with a physical disability. It was terrified of the world of struggle that walked with him, that expanded alongside him. To confine the repression of Sai merely to a list of his actions would mean never genuinely understanding him. If one were to believe that he was imprisoned solely for his deeds, it would be akin to wrenching him from the times in which he was shaped and viewing him in isolation.

The state did not imprison Saibaba in a cruelly solitary cell merely to separate him from his actions. It sought to distance him from the radiant world of struggle that was being built amidst numerous adversities. That was their true intent. Similarly, if one were to see the repression inflicted upon him as oppression directed solely at an individual, one would fail to grasp the violence embedded within it. The rulers sought to drown society itself in violence, to instil fear through brutality. Frightened at every moment, they sought to terrorise the fighting masses, to push them into submission.

The violence inflicted upon Sai was a concentrated embodiment of the suffering experienced by society. That brutality was meant to break his spirit. He understood this all too well. He endured that torment for our sake, for our freedom. That is why he resolved to gather his courage and inspire us to do the same. He made a defiant proclamation of rejecting death. One cannot think creatively or live

actively if one does not fully understand the relationship between life and death.

Fascism despises the dynamism of the people. It cannot tolerate the thoughts of the masses. It craves only a herd mentality, or lifeless puppets drained of moral courage by fear. Sai lived and died standing in a position that could inspire the historical vision and hope needed to endure a fascist era. Perhaps even he did not realise he was destined to play this role. Yet, because he was part of the historical forces of progress because he possessed the moral courage to face fear, his life—as well as his existence beyond death—grew even more influential.

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Sai's political life can be divided into three phases. These phases are significant milestones in the history of modern India. At every turning point, he marched forward, guided by revolutionary politics.

### **Increase of Imperialist Stranglehold, Rise of Hindutva Forces to the Centre Stage**

In the early 1990s, some pivotal events unfolded, and crucial movements emerged. There was the student agitation demanding the implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations. The P.V. Narasimha Rao government introduced new economic policies. With the support of the Congress government, the Sangh Parivar demolished the Babri Masjid. In the erstwhile state of Andhra Pradesh, the state government banned six organisations, including People's War. Under a new leadership, the revolutionary movement expanded with fresh perspectives during this period.

All these events heralded a new chapter in our history. It was a period fraught with crises in the economic and cultural spheres. Yet, as a counterforce, secular democratic revolutionary consciousness surged forth. This era proclaimed a firm belief that an alternative to this system existed and must be achieved through struggle. Numerous

forms of resistance emerged from the people's lives. It was a time when anti-Hindutva and anti-imperialist united fronts gained prominence. This is where Sai's journey began.

### **AIPRF as the epicentre for the anti-imperialist Peoples' Struggles**

From Hyderabad, he became involved in united action on several issues. He undertook numerous tasks as a leader of the All India People's Resistance Forum. In Andhra Pradesh, the World Bank's development model was openly implemented. People experienced its atrocious implications firsthand. It became a topic of intense debate due to its inherent violence. Telangana's villages were shattered, and the bloodshed in rural areas was horrifying. The common people were acutely aware of these realities. From this turmoil, new struggles erupted. New forms of organisations emerged. The revolutionary movement brought forth novel organisations that could usher in models of alternative development.

### **Fledgling People's Power at the Grass Roots**

*Grama Rajya Committees* (Village Governing Councils) were established as a manifestation of the unity of oppressed masses. The revolutionary movement demonstrated in practice that genuine development could be achieved through the creativity of the people from the grassroots. Efforts at self-reliance by the people, which began at various levels in the struggle zones of Dandakaranya, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh, reached a rudimentary stage.

This served as an immediate and compelling impetus for Saibaba to move beyond the student sphere into broader arenas of struggle. The slogan of the 1980s—'Unity of Workers, Peasants, Students, and Intellectuals'—expanded into a much broader call for unity. The unity of revolutionary forces and oppressed nationalities striving for liberation became necessary. During this period, Sai's



attempts to build united fronts grew to a national level. He strived for unity among revolutionary and national liberation armed organisations.

Imperialist globalisation, Hindutva fascist repression, and the burden of bourgeois democracy that had become oppressive—culminating in a bourgeois dictatorship—brought new fighting forces onto the battlefield. Sai immersed himself in the practice of building these united fronts. This was the first phase.

**‘Naxalism is the single biggest internal security challenge’:  
State Response to the Rising People’s Power**

The second phase began in 2004. Manmohan Singh, who had served as Finance Minister under P. V. Narasimha Rao, became the Prime Minister. The ruling classes aimed to fully integrate India into the global capitalist system. They accelerated the pace of corporate development policies. During this time, a united front of revolutionary forces capable of confronting feudalism, comprador capital, and Hindutva forces began to take shape.

The revolutionary movement, which had grown to connect metropolitan cities, remote villages, forest regions, all oppressed communities, and all democratic aspirations, instilled fear in the ruling classes. The very next year, the Prime Minister declared that Maoists had become the greatest internal security threat to the nation.

The term ‘danger’ he used later became a catchphrase for all governments. Under that pretext, repression intensified. Saibaba, too, was labelled as dangerous. The judiciary declared that his ideas themselves were too perilous. By invoking the notion of danger, ‘our democracy’ granted the ruling classes the license to do anything. It became imperative to protect corporations from this so-called threat. Without eliminating the revolutionary movement, corporatisation would not be achievable. Manmohan Singh-Chidambaram government arrived at this conclusion.

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They realised that the revolutionary movement was not merely influencing the economic sphere but was also militantly shaping social and cultural ideological domains. The People's Guerrilla Army (PGA), formed in December 2000, evolved into the People's Guerrilla Liberation Army (PLGA) in 2004. The revolutionary movement rapidly absorbed new political and theoretical insights capable of influencing a swiftly transforming society. In essence, the revolutionary movement had reached a qualitative phase. The state decided to strike at all facets of the progress achieved through the strategy of people's war. The state waged a war on the people to counter the people's war. With imperialist backing, this began as military means but expanded into a multi-dimensional war encompassing political, economic, social, and cultural fronts. The low-intensity warfare strategy that started around 2000 escalated into *Operation Green Hunt*, which fell heavily upon the people. Perhaps this was more severe than any counter-insurgency war in India. This was not merely a confrontation between the Maoists and government forces. At this stage, the conflict intensified between the highly authoritarian Indian state—along with its development model and its upper-caste Hindutva character—and the people.

From the foundations laid in the first phase, Saibaba and his united front expanded into this second phase. He perceived *Operation Green Hunt* with a remarkably broader perspective. His distinctiveness lay in his role as an activist, intellectual, and skilful organiser of united fronts. Corporatisation accelerated in two forms: rampant mining in Adivasi regions and the wholesale handing over public wealth to corporate powers nationwide. The informal sector expanded, leading to the ruthless exploitation of millions of wage labourers. Displacement became a crucial issue due to the state's development model. People were not only uprooted from forests but also from all sources of livelihood.

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### **Bourgeois Democracy vs Revolutionary Democracy**

Sai did not view issues such as *Green Hunt* and displacement in isolation. He understood them as consequences of the corporate development model. In opposition to this, the revolutionary movement sowed the seeds of an alternative development model. The *Janatana Sarkar* (People's Government) emerged as a political, economic, and social practice to establish revolutionary democracy in place of bourgeois democracy. It represented the unity of the oppressed and the embryo of state power for the exploited classes. Precisely during this period, a Revolutionary Democratic Front emerged across the country. While the state aimed to crush and contain the revolutionary movement, which had spread across the nation's political and struggle fronts, the people endeavoured to expand revolutionary democracy through numerous platforms. Revolutionary democracy became the genuine counter-strategy to bourgeois democracy, which had transformed into authoritarianism. It took one form in revolutionary strongholds and another in the plains.

Despite some positive aspects, constitutional democracy, which legalised exploitation, naturally mutated into corporate democracy. This was not an unforeseen development. Post-colonial trajectories in India were always bound to reach this stage. The changes in global capitalist practices rendered even the minimal notion of democracy burdensome for bourgeois democracy. It became redundant. Shedding its pretence, bourgeois democracy reached the logical conclusion of openly proclaiming its dictatorial essence. Intellectuals often argue that after the events in Eastern Europe during the 1990s, the idea of revolution lost its relevance. Yet, the truth is that significant changes in imperialist globalisation since then caused parliamentary democracy to lose even its minimal 'goodness' and abandon its façade. In India, it metamorphosed into a corporate-sponsored scheme.

Amidst this political and economic scenario, the historical necessity of revolutionary democracy emerged. The Indian revolutionary movement grew from merely proclaiming this need to attain the implementation stage.

### **The Social and Political Journey of Saibaba**

Saibaba's social and political life was sculpted by the crisis within Indian society and the revolutionary movement that emerged to resolve it. In the face of crises created by the ruling class, the people seek solutions and propel history forward. In such times, questions arise: How do intellectuals perceive these circumstances? Where do they stand? How do they walk alongside the people? These questions carry immense significance. However, the Indian revolutionary movement has consistently reminded intellectuals of their tasks. It evolved to include them, demonstrating maturity and expanding its horizons.

Saibaba was prepared to embrace this role as an individual and became part of this magnificent journey. This is why he emerged as a key leader of the Revolutionary Democratic Front (RDF), founded in 2005. This national platform, launched from Delhi, swiftly reached international recognition. All his endeavours opposed the development model imposed by the ruling class and aimed to halt the devastation caused by imperialism. One of his notable campaigns was against *Operation Green Hunt*. As global revolutionary forces showed interest in the democracy established by the Adivasis in Central India, the need to inform them about Green Hunt also arose.

Therefore, Saibaba defined the war against Adivasis in India as a war against all the country's people. He conceptualised it as a war against the revolutionary movement guiding the oppressed masses. He framed it as a democratic struggle that must be waged against the Indian ruling classes and the international finance capital driving them. He envisioned it as a broad-based united movement

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to achieve revolutionary democracy, opposing comprador and bourgeois dictatorship. This necessity isn't limited to India alone; it is an international duty that must be fulfilled by all oppressed people's movements and revolutionary struggles worldwide. Saibaba played an active role in constructing platforms for this global unity.

**'Pen Naxals are More Dangerous than Gun Naxals': State's Narrative to Suppress Solidarity Movements**

When the Indian revolutionary movement transformed into the Maoist movement, the rulers sought to crush it, alienate it from society, and sever its leadership from the oppressed masses. Conversely, the people strived to uphold it. Saibaba propagated this essence internationally. The government accurately assessed his work and, in 2011, accused him of being the 'Urban Connectivity' for the Maoists. In a country marked by vast social and geographical inequalities, the revolutionary movement had already established connectivity from the forests to urban areas. To strike at this network such allegations were levelled against Saibaba, branding individuals like him as 'White-Collar Maoists.' The narrative that 'Pen Naxals' are more dangerous than 'Gun Naxals' was propagated to scare away the middle class and intellectuals in the progress of the revolutionary movement.

**'Intense Pressure from the State to Abandon Sai's Work'**

Despite severe warnings from the police, Saibaba remained unshaken and did not abandon his work. He moved forward with even greater resolve. Behind his moral fortitude in prison lay the moral strength he demonstrated in public life from 2004 until his arrest. However, this was not merely personal courage, boldness, or commitment. Such strength is rooted in the politics of class struggle. Class struggle draws out every ounce of creative power within individuals for a historical duty. It instils a commitment capable of

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sacrificing everything. It transforms ordinary humans into extraordinary warriors. Revolutionary politics fuelled Saibaba's determination. He transformed into an incredible human being because the historical conditions that could mould him had matured externally. He was forged in that crucible.

Behind the moral strength Saibaba displayed under severe repression lay specific values, all of which were drawn from revolutionary politics. The values upheld by a struggling society also shaped Saibaba's character. By birth, he possessed one of the frailest bodies, yet with revolutionary values essential for building a new society, it became a weapon. This is precisely why the state waged such relentless assaults against it. Even as his body collapsed repeatedly and edged close to death, he did not surrender.

From this point onward, the third 'phase of his life began. 1991, the Congress introduced its new economic policies and transformed the country into a corporate India. However, this did not fully satisfy the corporations in the country. They felt that corporatisation was progressing sluggishly. They desired an open and rapid corporatisation devoid of even superficial decency. They wanted the entire nation under their control. For this to happen, no resistance from society could be tolerated. A climate of passive consent was essential. Without a herd mentality, favourable conditions for the most destructive politico-economic agenda could not be created. The BJP could achieve this. Notably, only an ideology with a fascist outlook—capable of creating artificial issues to divert attention from the destruction of daily lives—could achieve this. If the majority of the population could be drawn into the social psyche of Hindutva, struggles against economic issues would naturally diminish.

Corporations handed power to the BJP in the 2014 elections as part of this strategy. Regardless of how elections are conducted, the corporations ultimately form the government. This is not surprising in our democracy; it is pretty natural. In a place where only numerical

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democracy exists, the election of governments need not necessarily occur through ballot boxes. The powers that truly rule behind the scenes in the name of democracy are the ones that change governments. They place in power the parties that serve their interests. By 2014, the parliamentary democracy deeply embedded in our country could no longer hide its true nature. What had long persisted as bourgeois dictatorship was now fully revealed as Hindutva corporate fascism.

### **Life in Anda Cell: Saibaba as the Epitome of the Persecuted Political Prisoner**

Sai's third phase of political life transformed entirely into a life of imprisonment. His activism, which once began in Amalapuram and later expanded to international platforms, was confined to the solitary confines of an Anda cell. The BJP government arrested Sai under a case filed during the Congress regime, and he was imprisoned in May 2014. He was briefly released on bail but again rearrested and sentenced to life imprisonment.

During the decade leading up to his release in March 2024, fascism triumphed over revolutionary people's alternatives. Countless intellectuals like him, activists, Adivasis, Muslims, and Dalit leaders were imprisoned or killed. This wasn't merely about illegal cases and prison sentences. It was the unfolding of a fascist expansion. Just as the nation experienced unprecedented oppression, it also witnessed the emergence of a new world of resistance that had never been seen before.

### **Class Hatred and Class Love**

Throughout this period, Sai endured unbearable suffering within the prison walls. The fascist rulers held no personal grudge against him, nor did he have personal enmities with anyone. Yet, they targeted him, seeing his intellect as a threat. It wasn't a coincidence or an

unintentional slip when the judiciary deemed his intelligence dangerous. It was an explicit acknowledgement that his Maoist ideology posed a grave danger to them. The hatred directed at his revolutionary politics was, at its core, class hatred—an insight he recognised with great clarity.

While the government harboured animosity towards him, Sai, from behind the prison walls, showered boundless love upon the people. He poured his affection into poetry, expressing his profound love for public struggles and the highest traditions of the people. From the depths of darkness, he drew moral strength from history's material foundations. He gained political power from the masses, their defiance, and revolutionary consciousness. Just as the Sangh Parivar, the Indian government, and the NIA worked relentlessly to prevent his release, Sai ceaselessly sang his cry for freedom as a hymn of liberation for the people.

This entire struggle was an intense class war of conflicting ideologies and divergent interests. Fascists believed they were suppressing class struggle, but in reality, they ended up creating new arenas for it. Every protest against fascism during this decade was, in essence, an expression of class struggle. The yearning, anguish, cries of agony, and solidarity voiced by society for Sai's release and for the thousands of activists like him were all manifestations of this class struggle.

The fascists incited majority sentiments, isolating minority groups so that their interests were served. They aimed to distort the sense of justice, corrupting the oppressed identity with the toxic narrative of Hindutva. They clouded society's vision, making it blind to class divisions. Yet, people's lives remained deeply rooted in reality. Despite all efforts to harden society, real-life retained its sensitivity, repeatedly revealing humanity. The struggle for Sai's release affirmed this humanity, transforming it into a class conflict.



Even while imprisoned, Sai continued to embody the aspirations of class struggle, just as he had done outside. From behind bars, he echoed a united voice against Indian fascism on a global scale, just as he had worked for unity among the vast masses outside. History chose him for this purpose, and through him, history moved forward.

Though the Indian Constitution declares federalism, governance has always been controlled by a single power centre. Even when regional parties ruled the states and proclaimed defiance against Delhi's dominance, ultimate power resided with the Centre. The Congress party governed in this manner from the time of independence. Since coming to power in 2014, the BJP has taken this centralised authority to an unprecedented level. In essence, ancient feudal absolutism was revived in Delhi.

It was against this hegemony that the Adivasis of Central India rose in rebellion. They didn't stop there; they established a parallel government, the *Janatana Sarkar*, proclaiming their intent to run a competing administration. An alternative power centre emerged for the first time since British rule began in the subcontinent.

### **From Operation Green Hunt to Operation Kagar: Indian Model of Counter Insurgency to Suppress the Revolutionary Movement**

The plan to crush this was first formulated by the Manmohan Singh-Chidambaram government. Operation Green Hunt was not merely about deploying police and military forces to massacre Adivasis or revolutionary leaders. It was about uprooting a rival state at its inception, annihilating the fledgling revolutionary democracy that has been taking shape, erasing the model of alternative development, and, ultimately, waging war against an emerging power structure that challenged the central authority.

From the Congress government to the BJP regime, three phases of *Operation Green Hunt* were completed, followed by *Operation*

*Samadhan. Operations Agni and Operation Prahar* were executed in tandem to eliminate any alternative to the Corporate Hindu Rashtra. Now, under the guise of *Operation Kagar*, this has escalated into a final battle.

**Saffrons may meddle and muddle, but they cannot create history.**

The Sangh Parivar can rewrite history books. It can weave veils of fabricated legends over the truth. It can even convince the slightly informed to believe those myths as reality. But confronting the march of history is beyond its grasp. It cannot overturn the very fabric of historical evolution. It cannot annul the course of history as effortlessly as deploying military forces to the farthest reaches like Maad. It cannot, like dropping bombs from the sky, lay concrete highways over the ever-emerging narrative of history that rises from the depths of the earth for the sake of corporations. It cannot entirely erase the struggle waged for the power of the people.

Sai understood this conflict of power structures with absolute clarity. He knew where he should stand. He rose in defense of the Revolutionary *Janatana Sarkar* in Dandakaranya, challenging the narrative imposed by the ruling class. This is why they targeted him. The Congress government fabricated the *Urban Connectivity* case against him. Under the label of *Urban Maoist*, the BJP handed him a life sentence.

The turmoil between two power centres, two forms of justice, and two conflicting class interests led to Sai's imprisonment and solitary confinement. He stood against bourgeois dictatorship, striving for revolutionary democracy, and fell victim to the all-encompassing Hindutva corporate fascism that seeks to destroy all alternatives.

Throughout his life, Sai built numerous united movements. Still, the defining elements of his character were his unwavering dedication to the All India Forum for People's Resistance and the Revolutionary

Democratic Front. To truly honour Sai's legacy, we must embrace his call for revolutionary democracy from below, opposing imperialism and building people's power.

Some may believe that Congress's liberalism is an alternative to BJP fascism. Yet, Sai's political assessment was crystal clear—only revolutionary democracy can counter Indian fascism. That is the ultimate message of his life and his death.

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## Warrior of our Times

- Prof. Chintakindi Kasim

Warriors are rarely forged. They emerge from the social conflicts, hostile dialogues, and progressive actions. Social perspectives shape the organic intellectuals and sons of the soil. Forces of production struggle tirelessly for a change in the relations of production. During this phase, the relations of production frozen in place tremble towards change. Social groups gain consciousness and become active. Expression shifts from the individual to the collective. Therefore, common people transform into the extraordinary. Every movement in society pushes the forces of production forward. In Indian society, disagreement primarily starts on the unequal social structure itself. Then, it slowly takes shape and moves on to political and economic practice. In that process, an active rebellion against the unbearable social dominance begins. Groups that were previously thrown aside are slowly rallied and formed. The structure itself produces its leadership. However, social entities significantly influence the thinking of individuals. The surrounding systematic and personal conditions such as family, education, social status, land, culture, physical structure etc. become the making of the heroes and the warriors. A person who overcame his physical challenges and influenced the entire country in this half a century is Prof. G.N. Saibaba. He is the warrior of our times.

Sai was born in 1967 in the village Sannavilli of Amalapuram taluka, East Godavari district (erstwhile Andhra Pradesh State). His father was Satyanarayana, and mother was Suryavathi. In the social structure, they belong to Kapu caste (which in that region is

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considered upper caste). Kapus means protectors and guardians of the land. Satyanarayana was a farmer of two acres of land and supported his family through agriculture. The bullocks and plough were deeply intertwined with his life. His living used to depend on cows and its milk. Satyanarayana was known as good farmer. He had diligent farming skills, and in those days, he used to produce thirty bags per acre. He believed in the land and that he was the son of the soil. Sai was the first child of this agrarian family. He was a very active and lively boy from the birth until the age of five years. He used to walk and run rampant, both at home and outside. Unexpectedly, at the age of five, his legs started to crumble. Sai was so innocent that he did not know why this sudden change was happening to his body. It was sad for the parents that their lovely and active boy had become dormant before their eyes. The family which is not financially sound was thrown into a state of helpless tragedy. They took him to the doctors in Amalapuram. But the disease was not diagnosed. There was no awareness among the people about polio at that time, and medical science did not evolve much to understand the disease. On the advice of the doctors, Sai was taken to the Visakhapatnam Government Hospital. The doctors who examined him confirmed that Sai had contracted polio. When the parents, who had never left their hometown came to a city like Visakhapatnam first time and learned about the dreadful disease of their child.

Sai, who was so active in front of their eyes, started crawling. His mother, Suryavathi, was left with no words and was filled with agony after seeing her child in that horrible helpless state. During the time of school going days, Sai used to crawl on his hands and followed his mother around. There was a Shiva temple near their house in the village. The priest used to embrace some children and teach them vernacular alphabets in the temple. That is how Sai also reached the priest. The Shaivite has the characteristic of

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compassionate for people. Perhaps that is why the priest must have felt that there is no greater worship of Shiva than providing education to neglected children. He was Sai's first guru. At this time, the Sai family faced another crisis. Sai's father Satyanarayana was cheated by his close relatives, and they seized their two acres of land, which was their source of livelihood. Satyanarayana, unable to do anything else other than agriculture, took the family and reached the nearby town of Amalapuram from his village. He rented a house and joined the job as a clerk. After some years, with the help of some relatives, he bought a plot of land in Amalapuram and built a hut. That's how Sai's childhood moved to a small town Amalapuram from the village Sannavilli.

He used to go to St. John's High School near to his house by crawling on the ground. He studied in that school from the sixth to the tenth class. In a Christian school, there were some teachers used to show a lot of concern for the wellbeing of other people. The father who is Headmaster of the school took Sai under his wing and nurtured Sai's mental development. Sai's mother, Suryavathamma, was a woman of unparalleled love, a compassionate woman who loved plants, birds and people, and looked after her child with care. From time to time, Suryavathamma used to send vegetables and green leafy vegetables grown in her backyard to the missionary school hostel through her youngest son Ramdev. She shared her motherly love not just with her own three children but with all the students in the school.

As time passed, Sai came to realize his bodily limitations much more sharply. He wanted to overcome all his disabilities and play, sing and run like all the other children. Since the medicine required to overcome his physical disability was not available in India; after knowing that the treatment was available in socialist Russia, Sai himself wrote a letter to the doctors there. But they asked Sai to come to Russia. He could not afford to go there. He heard that

doctors from America were coming to a missionary hospital in Amalapuram, Sai met them. Those doctors performed four operations on Sai before he was in tenth class. But those operations did not help to cure Sai's disease. Polio became a part of Sai's life. Sometimes his father used to take him to the school on a bicycle, and sometimes his younger brother Ramdev filled the role. After school, he did his intermediate (1982) and under graduation (1984) from SKBR College in Amalapuram, where his close friends used to take him to the college.

After completing his degree in Amalapuram, he joined the University of Hyderabad (1987) to study for his MA (English). This was the beginning of Sai leaving Amalapuram and moving to another place. Joining the university widened his world. Sai realized that studying was the best way to understand this world. So, he spent most of his time in the university library. He especially used to extensively read African literature. It was in this process that he was introduced to Ngugi wa'Thiango's literary works. Sai learned from Ngugi that which side the intellectuals in the society should take. During his days studying at the University of Hyderabad, the Mandal Commission movement (1990) came to the agenda. Sai had developed his interest in social issues and a certain understanding on political economy via reading literature. Therefore, Sai started his political activism by questioning the injustice being done to the BC community in the way he understood it. The implementation of new economic reforms, Mandal Commission politics, the demolition of Babri Masjid, and the Ambedkar centenary celebrations came one after another. Sai started his activities in this turbulent backdrop. He joined the Diploma in English Language Teaching course at the English and Foreign Language University (EFLU). It was here that he met an English teacher who was familiar with revolutionary politics. Through him, Sai found friendship with revolutionary politics.

During those days when Sai was studying in IFLU, Nedurumilli Janardhan Reddy was the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh (1990-92). He took a policy decision to privatize the education sector. The main issue was the privatization of engineering and medical colleges. A student and youth movement started across the state opposing the government's decision. This movement was led by the Left and revolutionary student organizations. When a call for Statewide bandh was given, people voluntarily participated and made it a grand success. The then Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao observed this and made the CM Janardhan Reddy to resign. Sai actively participated in this struggle.

On May 5 and 6, 1990, RythuCooli Sangam Sabhalu (Convention) held in Warangal. These meetings were organized by the then People's War Party. As a result, the influence of the revolutionary movement spread throughout the state. Then the government, stunned by this response imposed a ban on the People's War Party and its frontal organizations. Fake encounters began. Some revolutionary leaders were arrested and kept in jail. The jails did not have proper facilities for the prisoners and turned into cesspools. Instead of reforming the prisoners, illegal punishment methods became commonly employed. In that background, the revolutionary leaders in the jail, united all the prisoners and called for a prison struggle. The prisoners started a struggle inside the jail demanding the revision of the British-era prison manual and access to all the constitutional rights to the prisoners. In cohesion of this struggle, a solidarity committee was formed and worked outside the jail. A dharna camp was set up in front of the Secretariat in Hyderabad and protests were held for more than forty days. This solidarity committee was led by Sai and Pawan Kumar. As a result of this struggle, many reforms were made in the jail. A new prison manual was prepared.



All India People Resistance Forum (AIPRF) was formed in the year 1996. Saibaba served as the General Secretary of the All India Committee of this organization. At a time, when the Nationality question was the main issue of discussion in the country, he organized a seminar on the issue in Delhi. Sai played a crucial role in organizing the conference by bringing together intellectuals and scholars who were working on the issue of Nationality question at national and international levels. In this process, he also left his job as a lecturer at a government polytechnic college. Later, during 29-30 December 1997, Sai's efforts in organizing a two-day conference on the issue of Telangana and announcing the Warangal Declaration are unforgettable. After the announcement of small states in the country, the demand for separate statehood for Telangana came back on the agenda. A policy document declaring a clear stance on Telangana, titled 'Separate Telangana: Democratic Aspirations' was brought out. It was after this that the last phase Telangana movement gained momentum.

Before 2004, some NGOs organized a global program '*World Social Forum*', as directed by multinational companies and the World Bank and a week-long WSF Jatara (fair) was held in Mumbai. They worked with an aim to create a favourable basis for the capitalist development model. Their aim was to add a human face to globalization, as otherwise it will not be accepted. Some democratic intellectuals and progressive persons also participated in this venture that aimed to serve the capitalist's needs. In this scenario, Sai led a four-day program called the '*Mumbai Resistance (MR)*' as an alternative, resisting the World Social Forum. MR 2004 was organized to say that the struggle against imperialism is not a Jatara, not a simple fair, but a resistance struggle.

From 2000, Sai shifted his working field from Hyderabad to Delhi. He worked at Delhi University and fought on various public issues. Sai took the leadership of the Revolutionary Democratic Front

(RDF). He fought against the fee hike in Delhi University. He compelled the university authorities to follow the roster in filling up the faculty posts in central universities. He gathered public opinion worldwide against the war on the tribals in central India and raised voice. He cautioned the revolutionary and Bahujan groups to be vigilant about the spreading of the Hindutva Brahminical ideological intellect work everywhere.

The then Congress government registered a UAPA case against him in 2013 through the police of Gadchiroli district, Maharashtra to impose restrictions on Sai's work centred around Delhi. He was accused of collaborating with the Maoists and portrayed as an urban Naxalite and an urban connect to the Maoists. The District Session court of Gadchiroli sentenced Sai to life imprisonment. The judge commented that "even though his body is not functioning properly, his brain is still active, which is very dangerous". The judgment conveyed the idea that even having a thinking brain is a crime. He was subjected to severe sufferings in prison for ten years. He was not provided with even the minimum medical treatment. He was detained and denied fundamental rights. The prison authorities did not provide Sai, even according to the international legal principles, any of the rights that a physically challenged prisoner needed. Their behaviour revealed that they wanted him to die in prison. But in 2024, the Bombay High Court bench at Nagpur gave a verdict quashing the life sentence awarded to Sai. Justice was done in the High Court after ten years. But during these ten years, he lost his precious life and health. The question of who will get back all those years continues to haunt us all. Finally, Sai was released, but his body and organs greatly deteriorated in prison. His body was so ruined that it was not able to withstand even a minor medical intervention, and Sai became martyr within six months of his release. Sai's life companion Vasantha also became a part of this entire confinement, suffering and struggling for love and was left alone.

The mother who waited for Sai's return, passed away without even looking at her child. An incredible intellectual, a sensitive man, a lovable person of the people, a dreamer who wanted society to be built on the basis of equality has left us. But he left us with many questions. Only when we try to find answers to those questions, can we then preserve the humanity of our society.

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*This article is translated into English from Telugu by Dr.G. Ramadevudu*

## **Comrade Saibaba: A Fearless Teacher**

**- K. Sajaya**

I first met G.N. Saibaba and Vasantha shortly after their marriage thirty years ago. At that time, Saibaba was a research scholar at the English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU) (then Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages [CIEFL]). I was a research assistant in a project at the Anveshi Research Centre for Women's Studies, an autonomous women's studies centre located at the Osmania University Campus. Anveshi's library had many unique English books on feminist, political and economic topics, and many students from the Central University of Hyderabad and EFLU would come there regularly to study and attend meetings. The space allowed for constant interaction with academicians, intellectuals, writers and activists from across the country and abroad. It was very exciting for many activists and students. One such memorable meeting was when I met Saibaba and Vasantha for the first time.

When we first met, Saibaba was not a wheelchair-user. He used to walk with the help of his hands, wearing slippers. Having been afflicted with polio in his early childhood, his legs were very thin and weak. Someone would drop him on a scooter at the library in the afternoon, where he would read for about three to four hours, and then pick him up again in the evening. At the time, Vasantha also worked as a field research assistant in Area Studies at Osmania University for a year on Reproductive Health. The young couple would attend civil rights meetings in Hyderabad together.

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The time of the 1980s and 1990s was a period of vibrant civil movements. As contemporaries in different fields of activism—I was a full-time independent journalist and women’s rights activist—we frequently stood together in solidarity, defying constraints and understanding questions of subaltern groups and classes. At that time, in Hyderabad, Sai’s hunger strike for political prisoners created a discussion among many people. The fighting spirit that he showed beyond his physical disability increased the respect all of us felt for him.

However, the pressures of work sometimes kept us away. I was unable to meet Saibaba and Vasantha’s daughter, Manjeera, when she was born. (In fact, I saw Manjeera for the first time only two months ago in Hyderabad at the NIMS Hospital.) Subsequently, Saibaba joined Delhi University as a faculty member in the English department. When Rohith Vemula died at the Central University of Hyderabad, a big gathering was held at Jantar Mantar in Delhi in 2016 demanding justice. I met Vasantha there after many years, and for the first time, I also met Professor Shoma Sen, who would also go on to be detained for years under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). By then, Saibaba had already been arrested and jailed in Nagpur with many false allegations under the draconian UAPA.

While we used to join protest gatherings and solidarity meetings for Saibaba in Hyderabad, we rarely kept up with Vasantha. Saibaba’s mother and younger brother, Ramdev, along with Vasantha and Manjeera, bore the burden of these ten years of detention from outside.

When Saibaba was released in March this year, I asked Vasantha if we could meet when I came to Delhi. She said “yes” immediately. I went to their house along with three other friends who are also social activists and academics. None of them had any

direct contact with Saibaba previously, and yet both Vasantha and Saibaba received all of us very warmly. For almost two and a half hours, we were moved to tears as we heard from Saibaba himself about his experiences in the jail. He spoke about the atrocities in the *anda cell* (egg-shaped cell) of Nagpur Central Jail and the inhuman conditions in which he was jailed for a decade on trumped-up terrorism charges. A friend who came with us could not contain her grief and wept. Vasantha also listened to those experiences with surprise. Saibaba did not even get time to sit with her and talk to her calmly after being released. He had started going to AIIMS every day and underwent physiotherapy. His left hand was almost non-functional. That was due to the damage caused by the police forcefully grabbing and dragging him when he was arrested. Taking him to physiotherapy every day, and making arrangements for people coming for interviews, Vasantha said that she was hearing many things for the first time along with everyone else.

In these ten years of prison experience, more than ten tribal prisoners have passed their graduation under Saibaba's guidance. Our eyes got wet listening to how much Saibaba's daily life has helped people even in miserable places like the *anda cell*. We told him that he should record all of this. He accepted immediately. It was a great experience for us to meet both of them in their house, to talk and eat together. We said we would meet him again.

We did not think that day that Saibaba would be physically present for only six more months! In fact, within the short time that Saibaba was with us, we had noticed that he was struggling physically. But Saibaba wanted to talk. For ten years the state carried out a cruel mockery of his disability without hesitation. No medical help was received. He said that there was no such thing as nutritious food; people ate whatever food was given there because they needed to survive. The ten years of imprisonment shortened his life. The body was destroyed inside. Even the basic things that should be

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given to disabled people were denied. He described his daily life in prison to us in minute detail. Prison officials would give them a chance to come out of the cell only in the morning. The inmates would complete their routines and wait for that time as they did not want to miss those hours. He said that even if there were any quarrels between the fellow prisoners, they were all friendly with him, and perhaps his physical condition also contributed to that. Writing petitions for fellow prisoners and teaching them, he remembered the things that kept him alive there.

When I mentioned that I had translated Bhasha Singh's *Unseen*, a book on manual scavenging, into Telugu under the title *Asuddha Bharath*, he shared that in prison too, work was divided along caste lines. *Safai* (cleaning) work was done entirely by Dalits, and caste universalism was strictly enforced in prisons. We were not surprised to hear that. We continue to see how caste intertwines with inequality in different ways in our everyday lives.

During those ten years, his fellow prisoners took care of him as much as they could. He said that he wrote the necessary petitions for completing their formal education and taught them so that some of them could even graduate. Even there he stood firm for democratic rights despite the detention making his body weaker. A beautiful smile graced Saibaba's face as he said that secret praises from prison staff, along with fellow inmates, were regenerating and life-giving during his incarceration. However, senior police officers were constantly on alert in order to keep him under control. Saibaba mocked not only his disability but also the state's imprisonment.

In a poem titled "Why Do You Fear My Way So Much," written to Manjeera on May Day in 2019, he asked:

"Memories abound  
the tracks of history.

Socrates was given a glass of hemlock.

Galileo was walked upto the gallows

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for mapping the skies  
defying the sun going around the earth.  
Hikmet was incarcerated  
for the Turkish soldiers  
read his poems hidden  
under their pillows in army barracks.  
Faiz almost faced the death sentence  
for he sang paeans to labouring hands.  
Déjà vu...Déjà vu...  
Seeing the poet handcuffed  
and walking through the gates  
of an imprisoned court of law,  
a dazed scribe of eminence  
cried, heartbroken  
tears rolling down his cheeks.  
Decades have passed.  
Why Do You Fear My Way So Much?"

However, when the state did not allow him to see his mother for the last time before she died, it had a great impact on his mental state. That sadness and grief haunted him for many days, and tears did not stop whenever he remembered his mother. Although happy to be released from jail, he wanted to take control of his health, write about his experiences, elaborate and work on his writings that had stopped in these ten years, and spend more time with his wife, Vasantha, and daughter, Manjeera.

He wanted to help Manjeera with her Ph.D. studies. Who shall answer for the charges levelled against him, which have taken more than ten years out of his personal, professional, academic and combative life? When he came to Hyderabad, he was eager to improve his health and hoped to explore naturopathy soon after the



surgery. But nobody understood until he was gone forever that ten years of state imprisonment had made his body even worse. That is the tragedy.

What answer can we give to Vasantha, who wrapped us in tears and said, “He did not say goodbye and did not even give us a last kiss”? Vasantha faced several hurdles to bring Saibaba out from prison alive, but now he is physically absent. Yet, he gave her the courage to continue her journey.

If images from Vasantha’s family albums remain tangible forms of memory-keeping, seeing young students from different parts of the country come to pay their respects to Saibaba—hundreds of them walking in Saibaba’s funeral procession—is a reflection of their democratic aspirations and of his lasting legacy.

Comrade Saibaba is not dead. As per his wish, his eyes and body have been donated for medical research purposes. I was given the responsibility of handing over his body to the hospital, for which I am very grateful to his family members. Like he did in jail, now in death, he is conducting a silent conversation with hundreds of medical students using his own body as a lesson! In his own words,

“I still stubbornly refuse to die  
The sad thing is that  
They don’t know how to kill me  
because I love so much  
The sound of growing grass”

*(Originally published in Alternative South Asia and Photography and Art-ASAP on 12 Dec 2024)*

*K. Sajaya is an independent journalist, Social Activist and Member, Women and Transgenders’ organisations Joint Action Committee (JAC)*

## He Belongs to Everyone

- C.S.R. Prasad

It was an unassuming day. A day like all other days, until the evening news came. He was dead, I couldn't believe it. What! How is he dead? Why was he dying? Why was I still alive? He was born after me. Why did he die before me? Birth is so natural but so is death. But I could scarcely believe this news. His death was indeed unnatural. Someone killed him. So, who is he, this man I am taking about? I simply refer to him as 'he'. You don't know who he is, do you? We always call him as he. He is! Sai. Sai is not someone who should die. He is someone who should live. For whom should he live? For Dalits, for Adivasis, for minorities, for the betrayed sisters, for the workers.

I have known Sai for a long time, I don't remember. I don't even remember when or how we met. But we have been friends for many years. Sometimes he used to call suddenly. I immediately recognized his voice. He would say, I am coming to meet you right now. I say come. And would come like a whirlwind. He entered the house like the cool spring breeze from the mountains. Even though many years had passed since we had last met, but somehow, I would always feel he is so close and dear to me.

He is younger than I am. Even my life companion knows Sai. When he comes, she makes hot coffee and serves it. Sai never comes without a reason. He comes with packed bundles. What bundles do you mean? Of course, they are not bundles of money, they are bundles of words. Words do not mean they were simple

words. They are not words that come from the lips. They are not funny words. They are not to pass time. He is not a magician with words. He is not even a gambler of words. His words are history, that is what it is! Do you think he has become history now after his passing? Listening to his words, I had always learnt a lot of history that I was not aware of.

What does it mean to know history? There are books: can't you read them? I have learned from his words about a history that I have never read or discovered in any of the history books. Is that surprising? What kind of history is that? A history that is not recorded anywhere, that is not even known to the authors of history books. Is your Sai a historian? No. He is a maker of history. That is why he has collected a lot of facts about history. He does not collect it in the library, he does not collect it by reading books. He collects it from the people of the land.

One can question, how can it be history if it comes from the people's narratives? Yes, in his opinion, it is history. He always said one thing. At first, it shocked me, but later, I liked it very much. He said that it is people who are the real makers of history. As I said, I was surprised. 'Why is it that people are the makers of history?', I questioned Sai. To answer this, he recounted many stories. They are not mere fantastical tales or everyday stories. *Narratives*. These narratives are the ones that become the core of people's history, a trustworthy history. He was so much in love with the common people, unpretentious simple people. I remember, he said that he had been like that since his childhood. So, he used to always come to my house carrying assemblies and bundles of historical stories and tales, tales of the people.

He would always unwrap the bundle in a sudden burst. The entire atmosphere of my traditional room would change instantly. All the old odours would be blown away. New smells, new words,

new empathies, new histories, new people, new places. Everything that is new to me would encompass the room. In the words of a popular traditional poet, a new fragrance would spread throughout the room. My partner would also say so and exclaim in amazement. Whenever Sai comes, the atmosphere in the house would undeniably change, as if he carried with him the fragrance of flowers from somewhere. And this fragrance was not that of jasmine. It was the fragrance of *vippapuvulu*, the *mahua* flowers used in winemaking, present in remote hamlets where the Adivasis live—the fragrance of unrest, rebellion, and of sacrifice.

Even after I have said so much, do you still not know who Sai is? Many people don't know him. That is because he spent most of his life more in jail than public. In jail you say! Yes, in jail. When all of us are all outside, why was he in jail? It is because he believed that we are all in an open prison. He had to go into government custody and be imprisoned to free the rest of us.

I mentioned that he is a bundle of words. It was not in his personal philosophy to mince words. He never spoke vaguely. His words for people like us were filled with deep affection, but for the enemies, they were like hooks piercing their hearts. They were stakes to the heart. They are like throwing daggers. What is that! Are you saying that your Sai has an enemy? He has no enmity against individuals. He has no anger against individuals. He has no conflicts with individuals. His enemy are not individuals, but the system.

My life companion asks me, "what did you say? A new word has come out of your mouth! You have never spoke that word before". I had learned it from him. He was my teacher. These words I am repeating were all new words. I understood that the system means the State. The State means the Government. And the government is angry with him. It wants revenge on him. That is why the government calls him a rogue. It calls him an urban Naxalite. It

calls him a Maoist. Sometimes it says that he is a good person who joined the side of the marginalised people. He fought against the State. For whom? Not for him. Not even for his sister who died in a fake encounter. Not for his mother who died recently with cancer. How is that possible? Everyone only works for the sake of their own and not for others.

If he was not so selfless, then how can he even be the Sai I know? If that was not the case, why would meetings in his memory be held in various cities, towns and villages everywhere to such an extent? This is not commonplace. Why did so many associations and groups talk about him? He found himself in the people. He saw himself, his mother and his sister reflected in all the other people of the world.

He knew a mysterious hidden secret. But the State was also aware that he knew. The State was aggravated that he was exposing this secret in front of everyone, that he was passing it on, that he was spreading it around as loudly as the beating of drums. If everyone discovered this secret, nothing else that the powers to be hiding could also maintain its secrecy. Till now, the only ones who held the key to this secret were those who had wealth, those who owned property, those who secretly hungered for dominance over the society. And yet, he had uncovered the secret all on his own. You might want to ask: how did he acquire the key? I do not know. He had those powers and abilities of observation from the moment he was born.

For someone like me, it was impossible. This is not an ordinary skill people possess. I couldn't even think of it in my wildest dreams. I could never have imagined that I could grasp that secret, I could unravel that mystery. But he grasped the secret. He knew the secret. When the government came to know that he knew this secret, they were terrified that their lives would be exposed, that their shelter

would be destroyed, and that all the magical clothes that had hidden their nakedness from the public for so many years would be removed. They told him to shut up. He said that he had a mouth only to speak. They told him, if you speak, speak of the Ramayana, speak of Mahabharat, speak Bhagavat Gita. If you want to speak, speak of Telugu poet Vishwanatha Satyanarayana. Speak of Telugu novelist Buchibabu, speak of the playwright Chalam, speak of writer Kodavatiganti Kutumbarao, or speak about Shakespeare. Speak of Goethe. They told not to speak about exploitation, inequality, oppression, persecution, and violence. They told him, do not raise your voice for freedom, rights, and revolutions. The state wanted him to live in the past. No, he said, I will live in the present and dream for the future. As someone said, the state is like a mad dog. It bites good people. It doesn't let them live. The same happened to Sai.

He made a pledge to talk about them. We call a person who is obsessed a fool. We call them ignorant. But he is not a fool. No foolishness in that stubbornness of his. He may not be tactful at times, but he is a person who knows the world. He is a person who had read the world, not just about it. There is a courage in his stubbornness. He is a great pioneer.

Many who have seen him say that he cannot walk properly for he is wheelchair bound. Some have tagged him as a disabled person. A crippled person shrinks. But Sai is not like that. He is as tall as the sky. He is as deep as the ocean. He is as wide as the earth. He is a champion who fought to correct the disability inherent in society.

That's why the State couldn't spare him. "What did the State do to him? Did it shoot him? Did it kill him in a fake encounter? Did it murder him? You did not tell us what happened. You are saying that he died, he died, but how did he die?" Externally, it looks like he died due to an illness. But as Sai said, you shouldn't look at

anything superficially. To realize the meaning, you must go deeper. If you go deeper, you will see that he was killed. He was murdered. "Murder? Who murdered him? Just now you said that he had no enemies, right?" I told you earlier that the State was his enemy. The State murdered him. The State took revenge on him.

The State hoped that, if his mouth is shut down, then mouths of all the people of the land will also be shut. But the history that Sai has read did not teach him that. My friend knew that if you trample on one voice, hundreds of voices will rise. The entire history from Spartacus to Sai reveals the same. I believe that Sai's physical body has perished but he remains live among the people.

Some friends ask, when Sai is such an extraordinary human being, how can you casually use "vaadu" to refer to him, which is informal in Telugu? The bond between him and me is not a blood relation. It is a bond forged from the struggle and movement. Calling him as "vaadu", is itself a respect. The very word "vaadu" expresses my love and affection towards him.

*Translated by G. Manjeera.*

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*CSR Prasad is a member of Revolutionary Writers Association*

## Sai's Reflections in me

- K. M. M. R. Prasad

*a tireless explorer;  
a constant adventurer;  
a persistent traveller;  
he stops at every junction, shares his love  
spreads his affection.*

Those unfamiliar with him are astonished that the government would oppress and prosecute an individual with 90 percent disability, a person who could only move with the assistance of a wheelchair. They express their pity for his condition. However, those who knew him are grieving the loss of a world-class intellectual. Professor G. N. Saibaba is a name increasingly heard in conversations, not only within the Telugu states but also across the borders of the country and the world. His life, encompassing his childhood, education, career, imprisonment and eventual death, has become a subject of widespread discussion. It has dominated headlines in newspapers and magazines and has inspired poets and singers alike.

He was a devoted student, an unwavering fighter, a staunch advocate for rights, and a helping hand to the oppressed. His contributions to society and his enduring commitment to justice are being remembered and honoured in many forms.

My friendship with Sai spans over 40 years, beginning in June 1984 during my undergraduate degree studies. This friendship transcended boundaries of caste, ideology, and other divisions,



sustained primarily by his remarkable personality and the deep love and affection he shared. Even during his time in prison, our bond remained unbroken. Before his arrest, whenever I called him, he would answer the phone, explaining that he was either in a meeting, teaching a class at the university, engaging with important individuals, or occupied with significant work. He would assure me that he would call me back later.

Just before his surgery at NIMS, he sent me a new mobile phone number, mentioning that his previous phone lacked signal, and instructed me to reach out to him on that number. His ability to express such warmth is something only he could truly offer. Reflecting on our conversations, I am often left in awe.

Every day, Sai maintained a list of tasks he needed to complete. He would carefully check off what had been accomplished and note the reasons for any tasks left unfinished. He kept a daily diary, emphasizing the importance of writing honestly and without concealment. In addition, he meticulously recorded every expense related to his family, ensuring that no unnecessary expenditure occurred. If there were any, he would adjust them the following month. He always advocated for maintaining a budget, reminding us that our expenses should never exceed our income. Such prudent practices were a hallmark of his approach to life.

When we were students in our S.K.B.R college, Amalapuram, G.P. Ramesham was our principal. Whenever he or his car was present on the college premises, there was an evident sense of apprehension among everyone, including the lecturers. Sai had applied for a seat in the MPC (Mathematics, Physics, and Chemistry) stream for his intermediate studies. The principal, however, expressed concerns, suggesting that attending laboratory sessions might be challenging for him and recommended that he apply for the CEC or

HEC streams instead. Sai firmly responded that it was his right to be granted a seat based on merit, and if his name appeared on the merit list, no one should deny him a seat. He further stated that if his name was not listed, then he would accept not being given a seat. Ultimately, it became unavoidable for the principal to allot a seat to Sai in the MPC stream.

In our college, there was a distinct tradition within the magazine committee. The student who takes the winning prize in the essay writing competition was nominated to be part of the editorial board of the magazine. Sai remained a member of the magazine committee for the entire five years of his time at the college, consistently contributing his talents.

Sai had thoroughly mastered *Wren and Martin's English Grammar* book and completed all the exercises during his first year of degree. He would also offer English tuition to students one class below him. Each year, a grammar test was conducted in our college, and Sai emerged as the top scorer for five consecutive years.

Our college operated in two shifts: in the morning, approximately 3,000 undergraduate students attended classes, and in the afternoon, around 2,000 intermediate students. The new principal of the college decided to extend the class duration from 50 minutes to 60 minutes. This decision led to a student strike. Sai and I attended college every day, and after some time, students and parents engaged in discussions with the principal. Eventually, an agreement was reached to maintain the 60-minute class duration, and the strike was called off.

Forty years ago, many parents were uncertain about the best course of action for their children. Parents from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds were especially unsure about the job

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prospects for their children. However, Sai had already made clear decisions regarding what he would study and how he would pursue his goals. He was a person who never spoke without careful thought and never decided in haste. Once he had decided, he was unwavering, regardless of the difficulty. This resolute nature is what made him a remarkable individual whose legacy continues.

I have always thought, “One can study history, write history, but creating history is remarkable.” He chose the MPC group in Intermediate and opted for Special English in his degree. Since he was proficient in reading and writing in Telugu, he chose Hindi as his second language instead of Telugu, recognizing the importance of multilingual knowledge at that time.

His studies began at seven in the evening and continued until three in the morning, often in a mud hut, with a kerosene lantern providing light. He would sit on a mat on the floor, using a pillow to support his arms as he studied. After joining the Central University in Hyderabad, he would often skip meals and go without sleep for days, dedicating himself entirely to his studies. Even after his surgery at NIMS, his photo with the caption *The Smell of Azadi* went viral. Despite facing the approach of death, he never abandoned his studies, displaying the resilience of a true warrior. As poet Manepalli once said,

*The brain must be trained to fight  
The heart must learn new beats  
The blood must become red  
When you study,  
it should be like a weapon focussing a target.  
You must be ready for war  
Care not for life*

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He was an avid reader of the works of renowned literary figures such as Gurajada, Kutumbarao, Sri Sri, Tilak, Gandhi, Premchand, Gopichand, AdaviBapiraju, Tagore, R.K. Narayan, Shakespeare, Milton, and Shelley, among others. One of the greatest influences on him was writer Gudipati Venkat Chalam. Sai deeply admired Chalam for his teachings on women's freedom, education, gender equality, and the concept of unconditional love between men and women. Additionally, Sai learned from Chalam the value of kindness toward children and the importance of cultivating friendships with them.

Sai was an extraordinary lover, not only in his personal relationships but in his deep affection for humanity. He treated Vasantha like a queen, writing her heartfelt love letters every day. His love extended beyond personal ties, embracing the poor, the oppressed, and the many individuals who worked alongside him in various resistance struggles. He actively spread love and compassion wherever he went.

Sai believed that those who study literature should engage deeply with the works of writers or poets, reading both the positive and critical reviews, ultimately forming their own independent opinions. After reading a book, Sai would often write 10 or 15 pages of notes, ensuring he could reference them when reviewing the text later. He was particularly fond of Tagore's *Geetanjali*, often translating the verses himself, while appreciating Chalam's translation as the best. Sai frequently sent his stories, short stories, and articles to newspapers and radio stations, leaving a lasting mark on the literary world.

Sai also loved nature, particularly the Godavari River, which he would traverse in the moonlight. We would often visit the seashore to watch the sunrise and sunset, enjoying simple moments together.

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Despite being born by the river, these experiences held a special significance for me. Even now, I carry the habit of anchoring the boat in the middle of the river at midnight, sharing conversations with my friend beneath the moonlight.

While I wrote poetry, Sai focused on prose—stories, short stories, and essays—and often argued that poetry was outdated, as fewer people read it. He emphasized the importance of writing prose to connect with others more directly. When I questioned him about his poetry written in prison, he smiled subtly, as if to acknowledge that he understood poetry’s potential to reach people and stir their hearts.

Sai’s poetic journey began under a kerosene lantern in the small town of Amalapuram, and it eventually expanded across cities, rivers, hills, and even prison walls, making him a renowned figure worldwide. My friend had a unique way of reading poems—he would mark unfamiliar words and look up their meanings in the Oxford Learner Dictionary. He often annotated important articles and stored them in separate folders according to content. He had a particular fondness for the “Know Your English” column published in *The Hindu* newspaper.

Sai’s honesty was one of his defining traits. He was always able to speak the truth, no matter the consequences. In an interview after his release from jail, he remarked, “Sita faced the test of fire only once, but I faced it twice.” Ten years in prison was a long time for anyone, and in that time, he lost his health and his job.

Professor G.N. Saibaba was a man determined to achieve his dreams, despite the oppressive forces of government. He refused to bow before authority, even when subjected to harsh conditions. The jail authorities confined him to an “anda cell,” denied him lifesaving medication, and provided minimal facilities. Despite these harsh

circumstances, he stood firm in his ideology. The State feared his actions in various sectors of society, which is why they disregarded his 90% disability.

What happened to Sai, my friend? Why did you leave us so quietly, without a word? You defied the death that was looming over you. You challenged your own disabilities and protested against the injustices of all governments. Why did you leave after a minor surgery, despite the eagerness of so many who wanted you to continue living against all odds? The answer lies in the legacy of people like Stephen Hawking. Sai, too, lived to challenge the limitations imposed upon him.

You never imagined death, my friend; you resisted it. How can Vasantha, who fought tirelessly for ten years for your release, continue without you? How can Ramdev, who stood by you since childhood and shared in your struggles, live without you? How did you pass away? What truly happened? These questions leave us in sorrow, as I struggle to answer them.

Sai, despite the hardships you endured in the anda cell, I always believed that you would remain strong. When I attempted to write about the moments we shared, my hands trembled. There is an absence in me, a silent pain in my heart. I cannot forgive myself if I fail to write about someone as remarkable as you. Life, as they say, presents us with tests first and then teaches us the lessons. But you, my friend, have left a legacy that will never be forgotten.

It has been 40 days since the passing of G.N. Saibaba, the leader of people's movements, the defender of the rights of the oppressed, and the voice of the silenced. He is no longer with us, but his voice continues to resonate, not just in India, but across the world. Memorials are being held in both Telugu states, across India, and internationally, as people express their admiration for Sai through

poems, songs, and gatherings. Even those who disagreed with his ideology have come together to honour his legacy.

Sai is among the farmers, the students, and the resistance movements. He left behind a powerful message: without united movements, no matter how powerful we are, we will remain isolated in our fight against imperialism.

In prison, you were deprived of everything except the passage of time. For 3550 days—85,200 hours, 5,112,000 minutes, and 30,672,000 seconds—you were confined. How did your body survive such confinement? What ambition, what belief kept you alive through it all? Your own words and your inner calmness sustained you. Has it been your love that has kept you alive all this time?

Prof. G.N. Saibaba was a powerful advocate for the rights of tribals, both in India and internationally, focusing on the protections outlined in the Fifth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, which recognizes the rightful ownership of forest lands by tribals. Despite his hardships, he continued to fight for their rights.

When his mother passed away, Sai requested to be allowed to see her one last time, but the government denied him that mercy. Both Sai and Stan Swamy sacrificed their health and their lives in defence of the tribals.

As I reflect on the state of the judiciary, I am perplexed. The Supreme Court says that an individual is not a criminal simply for their association with a political party, yet a lower court claimed that despite his disability, Sai's intellect posed a dangerous threat. Another court declared that the case against him was fabricated and dropped the charges, declaring him innocent. Who, then, will protect the truth in this country?

Sai, your love was not confined by age, wealth, or status. It was unconditional and unwavering, rooted in the simple humanity of

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loving others for who they are. You taught me to see beyond the material world, to love people simply as people. You believed, as I do, that all human relations are economic in nature, but beneath that, every person carries a potential that we must awaken.

Kaloji once said, "Birth is yours, death is yours, but life is for the whole country." You dedicated your life fighting for the rights of others. Your personal life became a gift to society, and now, though we are left in mourning, we know your work will live on.

*Translated by G. Manjeera.*

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*(K.M.M.R. Prasad is a childhood friend of Dr. G.N. Saibaba, He works as a teacher in a Government School in Andhra Pradesh)*



## **Comrade Saibaba: A brain with wheels**

**- B.S. Raju**

One may question me what this caption 'Comrade Saibaba, a Brain on Wheels' is all about. My reply to that would be, yes, Comrade. Saibaba's brain was equipped with wheels. Not only that, but those wheels were also mounted on double row ball bearings. Right from my first acquaintance till his last breath, Saibaba stood out as a man apart with rare qualities of vigour and power. So, it occurred to me that how could a person, that too a disabled person, could work with such a vigour and power unless his brain was special and equipped with wheels. That is the reason why I called him a brain on wheels.

In physics and engineering, one comes across two important phenomenon called inertia and friction. If an object has to move and gain momentum, it has to overcome inertia and friction. For that to happen, the object has to receive an external push, a motive force and the object shall have an arrangement to overcome friction. Com. Sai was the necessary motive force, the external push needed to propel people at rest, making them spring into action and participate in people's movement!

Com. Saibaba's brain was a wheeled vehicle that received its fuel from the ideologies of Ambedkar, Marx, Lenin, Mao, and the Communist Manifesto. The liberation theory of People's war illuminated his path of practice. I think Saibaba could overcome his deeply painful disability with this ideological energy. This gave him immense strength to work harder than any normal person. This

aspect embodied in him used to amaze me all the time and sometimes raised a doubt as to who was the one actually disabled: me or him?

All the times I had met him, I always used to find him in action mode. With Sai it was never like 'Let us do it later'. It was always like 'How soon shall we do? That is how the wheeled mind of Saibaba set to work, set to move on and march fast.

Another amazing feature Saibaba possessed was his eagle-sharp sense that let him quickly pick up ideas from debates or discussions or even from casual talks with friends. What he picked up was always useful, it was either an idea or a book of literature or something related to peoples struggles or socialist movements. He used to insist upon picking up new developments and ideas and tried to weave it into programmes on hand or in the future pipeline. In such matters, he never exhibited hesitancy or a sort of reservation for the sake of etiquette or nicety. I think his wheeled mind of action used to push off those niceties from the path of action. To get things done, he used to shut off doors and escape routes for his associates and co-activists while working on a scheduled programme.

The primary reason I am calling him a man with a wheeled mind is due to his dedication towards the peoples' movements. The second reason was his preference to action rather than unnecessary and hair-splitting debate. This attitude of Saibaba contributed much to our friendship and association. Now I will explain some major contributions of Saibaba to the people's organizations and how he pulled me into those, while I was exhibiting a 'Touch me or Touch me not' attitude towards all such struggles.

#### **All India People's Resistance Forum (AIPRF):**

AIPRF and Saibaba were synonymous. No one can deny that. The amount of physical and mental work put in by Sai to design and build this organization was extraordinary. It stands as a blueprint and

testament for present youth who wish to build movements against fascist forces in this country.

AIPRF's first State conference was conducted in Hyderabad. To appreciate his wheeled brain, one had to see Saibaba in action while organizing this important event and its successful conduction. First, I was only a casual outsider of AIPRF. It was Saibaba who pulled me into become a non-working insider of the organization. That is how I got hooked to AIPRF for a while. Comrade. Saibaba had a special talent that attracted people like a mystic magnet and linked them to people's organizations. His skill in utilizing their strengths and capacities effectively contributed a lot to the growth of people's movements and organizations. That was the positive element present in Saibaba. He instilled the same spirit in me too during my short association with AIPRF.

One afternoon, during the preparatory period of AIPRF's first convention, I received a phone call from Saibaba asking me to come his residence to discuss an essential and urgent matter. Accordingly, I went to his residence to find him with a group of people sitting around, deep in discussion. He invited me and made me to sit in another room. He joined me few minutes later and said AIPRF is looking for my help for a very essential matter. I thought it was for some funds for the upcoming convention. But no, it wasn't that aspect. It was something else which fell on me like a bombshell.

He sought an accommodation for 20 to 30 people for a period of one month. I was so disturbed after hearing this impossible task. I stood up to walk out. As I said earlier, Sai was a dedicated activist and knew how to close the doors and by-lanes for people trying to evade responsibility and slip off. He would somehow convince such people and get what he intends to get from them for the sake of the movement. He explained how important the AIPRF convention was and the importance of the cultural performances that were planned

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as part of the convention. "For that a cultural troupe, a combined team of senior and junior performing artists was assembled. This cultural team comprising of 20 to 30 requires accommodation so that they can train regularly in order to achieve a perfect perform on stage. So far, we couldn't get suitable accommodation. I heard that your new building had sufficient space ideal for that. You must own up this responsibility of providing the accommodation. The senior cultural activists in the cultural team will take care of all other arrangements required for the camp. You know how important this arrangement of accommodation for the troupe to hone their skills and make the event grand success".

Having heard this, I replied to Sai: "Yes I understand and agree, but how about my family members who will never allow me to accommodate this sort of team to reside in our building". To that Sai said: "Raju garu, how you are going to manage, you work that out. In a day or two our senior artist comrades will visit your place to fix up things. It is no more my job; it's your responsibility now to carry the task". With that I reached home, carrying the weight of this heavy responsibility entrusted to me.

Things rolled fast. Somehow with the help of senior artists I managed to convince my wife and the team arrived a couple of days later. This training camp was a historic event in terms of the political topics selected for stage performance, the off-stage trails, the teamwork of the troupe comprising of senior and junior artists and the dedication of the artists. I described all this in detail in a separate article I wrote on martyr Comrade. Dappu Ramesh, who played a leading role in successfully organizing the training camp and the cultural event. The other cultural front comrades like Rajanarasimha, E. Venkateswarulu also played a laudable role throughout the entire episode. Martyr Com. Prabhakar, an upcoming artist at that time, was in this camp as a teenage boy. These were memorable times.

Without an able architect like Sai who wisely and tenaciously worked long hours, we couldn't imagine the success of AIPRF's first all India conference.

### **Revolutionary Democratic Front (RDF):**

AIPRF went into oblivion. Another people's organization called Revolutionary Democratic Front (RDF) was formed as a platform to mobilize democratic forces throughout the country. Again, as that of AIPRF, the first all India convention of RDF was planned to be conducted at Hyderabad. In between the closure of AIPRF and the birth of RDF, Sai and I met on several occasions and discussed on several issues of the Indian and the international People's movements, I am not going to touch that aspect here and limit myself to briefly recount how Comrade. Saibaba again tried to pull me into RDF. As I thought that the time was not conducive to launch RDF, I told Sai that I will not join the organization. Still, he didn't leave me. He entrusted me with some coordination work to receive and accommodate teams from Kashmir, Delhi and some other places. It was taken granted and printed my name as chairman of the RDF conference invitation committee. The moment the teams arrived in Hyderabad, police officials started calling me and questioning me throughout the programme. But I need to work for the success of the responsibilities entrusted to me.

I was made to spend all my time outside the venue facing local area police teams and intelligence wing. It was quite tough for me to answer them all as guest arrived from various places across India. The situation continued all throughout the RDF proceedings because of which, I missed the opportunity to participate in the convention, despite being the chairman of the invitation committee. At the time Comrade. Dr. Saibaba in the capacity of Assistant Professor was teaching English language at Ram Lal College of Delhi University. Whether his presence was near or far from Hyderabad, Sai knows

how to mobilize people and meticulously engage them to take up the challenges fearlessly.

### **My Delhi trips and experiences with Saibaba:**

During Saibaba's stay in Gwyer Hall, the warden's quarter located in the Delhi University campus, I never missed the opportunity of visiting him and his life partner Vasantha. During these visits, he was always surrounded by people and was constantly engaging in serious discussions. Despite his busy meeting schedules, he used to pull out some time to spend with me. He has a very inquisitive and receptive mind. He used to equip and update himself on the happenings in Telugu state of Andhra Pradesh and particularly about the practice of people's organizations. At that time Saibaba's base altogether was shifted from Hyderabad to Delhi. Living in Delhi, he skilfully and vigorously worked with zeal to develop and maintain relationships with various political, social, trade union and cultural organizations in and around Delhi as well as outside India. At the same time, he maintained lively contact with his home state and the happenings there-in.

One day while having dinner at his home, I casually mentioned that Delhi jalebi is quite tasty compared to Hyderabad jalebi. Hearing that he said tomorrow I shall take you to a place in old Delhi where you get best jalebi and kababs, and he did so the next day.

### **Interaction with JNU Students:**

One day he surprised me by saying that I have to go to JNU students' hostel to share my experiences with a group of M.Phil. students and research scholars by staying there with them for a day. "What can I say to those students who are well read and quite knowledgeable", I asked Sai. "Your experiences with the revolutionary movement as well as your career experiences in the

Gulf countries will be inspiring for some of the students there in JNU", he replied.

The next day a sharp and active female student landed at Saibaba's house to take me to JNU hostel campus. We both travelled in Delhi Metro and became instant friends. We entered JNU hostel campus. I followed her and she led me to a group young male and female students, about 20 in number, who were sitting on cement benches under shady trees, bubbling, laughing and cracking jokes while puffing cigarettes, which were exchanged between them after 2 to 3 puffs each.

This was a dreamy scene for me which I heartfully reserved in my mind. She first introduced me to a young man with long curly hair with a laughing face saying, "meet Rona Wilson". She then introduced me to the entire group, who in turn introduced themselves one by one.

I understood that the programme was already discussed and planned. They offered me tea and once finished someone offered me cigarette, on hearing my 'No Thanks', the group jokingly said: yaarkyaakar rai thum, senior comrade ko cigarette offer karthahaai... what are you doing, you are offering a cigarette to a senior comrade! It was exciting and fun for me. Hem Mishra was there in the group. We all walked a while and reached a room which was shared by some students. Hem Mishra was one of the occupants. There were some more students sitting there already and the room is almost packed. Rona took the lead and started introduction and purpose of the interaction.

I was supposed to speak on the revolutionary movement among the student community as well as on the spread of the movement in Andhra Pradesh during 60s and 70s. I was also to talk about my professional life experiences in and out of India. Then a Q & A session follows. Rona and Hem set the platform and left it to other

students to take it forward. Except for a dinner break for an hour, it went on throughout the night till the early morning hours next day. Some left in between, some others joined. For most of the session the topics were on leadership comrades like K.S, Satyamurty, the role played by them in reorganizing and building up of the phase-2 revolutionary movement, their fall out, Srikakulam movement, the role of great heroic leadership and their martyrdom. There was wide discussion on literary and cultural movements like Virasam, Jana NatyaMandali. I also briefed them in between about my professional engineering experiences in the gulf region including my last assignment with Burj Khalifa(Burj Dubai). That was a memorable session of learning for me and probably for the JNU students who attended that session as well.

The Trio: Comrades G N Saibaba, Rona Wilson, Hem Misra who were instrumental in organizing such interactive sessions, playing vital role in creating an atmosphere of radical thinking. Its spread in the student community of Delhi was the main reason behind the right-wing reactionary Hindutvasaffron fascist state's deep conspiratorial plan in designing utterly false cases to implicate various public intellectuals, lawyers, student and social activists, writers, artists who stood firmly with oppressed masses of this country.

They were booked under UAPA and other draconian acts and were kept in jails for a long time. Some of these brave personalities died in the jails, some came out on bails in physically worn-out conditions, the cases still hanging on their necks like swords. Com. Saibaba was released from jail after 10 years of incarceration, he died due to horrible jail conditions which swapped his health. Several others are still languishing in jails without bails and trails in the courts.

#### **Saibaba and VVJVA:**

During my successive trip to Delhi, on one evening I went to see Saibaba and Vasantha to know their wellbeing. I found him in



his room working on a computer. He might have finished the teaching session of the day and looked somewhat in a relaxing mood. Pulling in a chair, I sat by his side and Vasantha came in, started inquiring about my health and the purpose of my visit to Delhi. Sai asked me how long my stay was. I said 2 more days and I booked my return flight ticket too for Hyderabad. I was shocked to hear his words expressed so casually and coolly like a knife spreading butter on a loaf of bread saying: "let us cancel your Hyderabad ticket and travel to Bhubaneswar instead by tomorrow evening flight". Red faced I questioned him "for what? Why the ticket cancellation? I have lot of work back home. Why do I have to travel to Bhubaneswar instead of Hyderabad?"

Sai's sharp reply to my questions disturbed and annoyed me. He said, "you are coming with me to attend the executive committee meeting of Visthapan Virodhi Jana Vikas Andolan (VVJVA) to be held in Bhubaneswar". "Are you crazy, Sai? In which way I am concerned with that organization, the name of which I couldn't even utter properly?" As cool as a summer water pot, he said, "it's all worked out. I know, once you read VVJVA documents, you will appreciate our decision. Please take these papers and read tonight. If you don't like the programme of VVJVA, tell me. Now give me your Hyderabad flight ticket for cancellation. Let me cancel it now, if required, we will rebook it, don't worry". Saying this Sai took my ticket, asked me to go back to hotel, read VVJVA papers and then sleep. That night I read 2 documents of VVJVA given to me. One was the Ranchi Declaration and the other, People's Model of Alternative Development. Having read, I immediately made up my mind to join the organization and work with it. Next morning, I called Sai first to pat him on the back for his decision and then to express my liking and conviction to join and work with VVJVA. I asked him to book my ticket back to Hyderabad from Bhubaneswar.

In the evening, Sai and I reached Delhi domestic airport to find a third person waiting there to receive us with a broad smile on his face, with backpack hung on his shoulders. Once we checked-in, Sai introduced that young man as Ajay, the president of VVJVA. It was like love at first sight with Com. Ajay. Later we worked together till things worsened with the constant onslaught of the State to suppress it. Arrested, Ajay is languishing in jail now like other democrat activists whose voices were sealed off from the public.

We reached Bhubaneswar that night and stayed in a hotel where the meeting was planned to take place. I being totally new to the organization, did not have any specific work and could finish my dinner early and go to bed. Saibaba and others were busy discussing the modalities and topics for the next day's meeting. I was with Sai in the same room. He had continuous meetings with several local activists till late night and probably he went to bed at 2 or 3 pm, so he woke up late. I woke up early morning, got ready, but none of the VVJA members in the hotel were available for me at that time to interact. I went to the reception to pick and read an English newspaper. But I couldn't do so as already an elderly man wearing a Dhoti and Kurtha was fully immersed in reading the English newspaper. I couldn't see his face as it was covered with the newspaper pages. I sat there in a sofa anxiously waiting to grab the newspaper once it comes out of the elderly gentleman's hands.

After a while, the gentleman turned his head, with that I could see his face. It was a pleasant surprise for me to comprehend that it was none other than Shri. B. D. Sharmaji whom I saw twice or thrice earlier on the dais of Sundaraiah Vignana Kendramin Hyderabad.

Without hesitation I approached him and said Namaste Sharmaji. It's now his turn to stare at me with inquisitive expression on his face. I introduced myself first and explained him how Saibaba dragged me here to participate in the VVJVA meeting. He said it is

good that Saibaba brought you here and we need more activists to work spreading the message of VVJVA. Then he asked: have you read today's news paper? I said, "no sir, you haven't given me that chance". Laughingly keeping the newspaper in my hand, his facial expression becoming serious as he continued, "if today's news is true, it is hard for the Adivasi movement in Bastar to survive. The report says the centre is deploying paramilitary forces in large numbers to penetrate Abhujamad, decided to establish strong police camps to build infrastructure in the struggle areas". He was not happy and said whatever that was happening there is very negative, they have to see how the Adivasi communities face this situation. He continued emphasizing that VVJVA has to be more active in propagating the anti-displacement and people's alternative development programmes. This was way back maybe two decades back from now. Sharmaji's worry has become a reality today under Operation Kagaar.

The meeting started and I was officially inducted into VVJVA organization. I enthusiastically participated in the 2-day proceedings of VVJVA. I never thought that I will be meeting in Bubhaneswar stalwarts like B.D. Sharma and K. N. Pandit. Here I have to mention the names of the architects of Visthapan Virodhi Jan Vikas Andolan, the stalwarts of Adivasi people's movements, martyrs Father Stan Swamy, B. D. Sharma, K. N. Pandit, Saibaba. We have their dedicated followers, Rona Wilson, Ajay kumar, Damodar, Mahesh Raut, Prashanth Paikray; the gems of people's movements languishing in jails. Comrade. Saibaba, the brain with wheels was responsible for opening a great opportunity for me to work with such persons who always stood by the oppressed and downtrodden masses of this country. I always think that Father Stan Swamy, B. D. Sharma and K. N. Pandit worked with Indian constitution in their hands and red flags in their hearts.

I will end this article with my observation on Bhima Koregaon case. This case was part of a deep conspiracy by the State to wipe off various ongoing people's movements in the country and to create a unitary Hindu Corporate Rashtra. I recall the incident just before the arrest of renowned revolutionary poet Comrade. Varavara Rao. That day I went to see him, he was surrounded by his family members, writers from Virasam and his well-wishers. He came out to the entrance room of his apartment to meet me. We hugged each other. I told Com. Vara Vara Rao that the state first identified the dots then draw the Bhima Koregaon Rangoli connecting all those dots. Hearing that, he hugged me again, saying: you described well in a simple sentence the Bhima Koregaon conspiracy.

The Hindutva State deeply studied which are the right dots to pick to prevent the spread of people's movements. It jailed those dots one after other with fabricated charges under draconian fascist laws. It either bought over or threatening the judiciary not to give bails and for inordinate postponement of trails. That is how it killed some. Some others are still languishing in jails, others came out on bail worn out physically. Saibaba died soon after his release suffering with several ailments acquired because of inhuman jail conditions and cruel negligence of the jail officials towards Saibaba's health.

All these fascist acts of the State aim to drive away the Adivasis from their lands and homes, their forest abodes with single minded intention of grabbing Jal, Jangal, Jameen from the original forest dwellers and handover the vast natural resources to domestic and foreign corporate houses. For this, the State requires absolute power, achieved by any means possible. To get and hold it perennially, it is ready to tamper the constitution and the entire bourgeois liberal democratic system. It is branding all opposition as Urban Naxalite organizations and its leadership as Urban Naxalites.

The working people of India have no alternative other than building united democratic as well as militant struggles to defeat the Hindu-Corporate nexus.

I salute all the people's heroes including Saibaba who sacrificed their lives struggling, resisting, and fighting this Hindutva Juggernaut.

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A black and white photograph showing a wheelchair in the foreground, slightly to the left. Behind it is a tall, dark wooden bookshelf filled with books. The scene is dimly lit, with light coming from the left, creating a somber and intellectual atmosphere.

## HE WHO DEFIED DEATH

LIFE AND TIMES OF PROF. G.N. SAIBABA

Prof. G. N. Saibaba (1967-2024) remains a red star on the horizon of people's struggles in India. He is always remembered not only as a revolutionary and human rights defender who resisted the brutal, deliberate violence unleashed by Indian state but also as a champion of several mass movements including struggles of Adivasis for Jal, Jangal, Jameen and Ijrat in the central Indian forests. His sudden demise is a shock to all those who are part of the struggle - the ones who lend their voice to the oppressed, cherish democracy, social justice and revolution. He is fondly remembered by one and all, from his beloved family, students, colleagues, to various social activists across the globe. His staunch commitment as an activist, both inside and outside of prison, is recognized by academicians, foreign diplomats, and thousands of people across the globe. His grit and determination to fight for the rights of people made him surpass the limitations of his 90% disabled body and survive in the notorious 'anda' cell of Nagpur Central Jail for 10 years, leading his story to be widely recollected by a wide spectrum of people including journalists, fellow travellers, comrades, friends, and common people. This anthology is a collection of those remembrances, memoirs, obituaries.

A large, stylized red maple leaf graphic is located in the bottom left corner of the page.

Committee for the Defense and Release of Dr. G.N. Saibaba