

Adivasi Rights Activist Stan Swamy's Life and Work Demonstrate Why the Powerful want him Silenced

The 83-year-old Jesuit has been accused of being a member of a banned Maoist party and being involved in a conspiracy to instigate caste violence.

Tony PM & Peter Martin



FATHER STANISLAUS LOURDUSWAMY'S

arrest on the night of October 8 has caused a stir among many people in Central India, where he has spent 70 years relentlessly fighting for the rights and values of the region's indigenous people.

The police allege that 83-year-old Jesuit priest is a member of the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist) and was involved in a conspiracy to instigate caste violence in the Bhima Koregaon village near Pune in 2018.

To those of us who have known Swamy, these claims are absurd. Through this account of his concerns and campaigns, we hope to offer greater insight into the reasons the authorities consider him so inconvenient.

To stand up and fight for justice and truth, no matter what religion, culture, and ethnicity one belongs to: that is the mantra of Stanislaus Lourduswamy, popularly known as Stan Swamy. What matters most for him is to be humane in all his relationships.

The breakthrough

Born on April 26, 1937, in a village in Tamil Nadu's Tiruchirappalli, Swamy went to the well-known St Joseph's School in the district. Inspired by the work of the Jesuit priests with whom he came in touch with during his school days, Swamy decided to join the order himself – but in undivided Bihar.

He started religious studies on May 30, 1957, committing himself totally to the cause of the marginalised and the poor.

The real breakthrough with regard to his ideas about social action came in 1965, when he began his regency, the stage at which trainee Jesuits spend two years taking up one or two works of the order. Swamy spent this time at St Xavier's High School Lupungutu, Chaibasa, West Singhbhum.

His experiences as a teacher and hostel prefect had a deep impact on him. He used to go to the weekly bazaar in Chaibasa on Tuesday (the Mangal-haat) with his students and saw for himself how the outsider merchants and their agents cheated the Adivasis. "I felt pain but could not do anything about it," he said.

