



In Memoriam:
Justice Hosbet Suresh
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Justice Hosbet Suresh

July 20, 1929 – June 11, 2020

Justice Hosbet Suresh had sharp legal acumen; firm grip and deep understanding of law and legal jurisprudence; wisdom to know that law should work for empowerment of the most marginalised and had the energy, vigour and passion of an activist to get the law to work for the oppressed. Yet these were not his only qualities. Justice Suresh was a simple person and an unassuming judge with remarkable humility.

When four organisations – Majlis Law Centre, Centre for Study of Society and Secularism, People’s Watch and Human Rights Law Network got together to felicitate the former judge of Bombay High court on completion of silver jubilee of his post-retirement dedicated service to human rights,

he repeated his usual statement – “I am retired but not tired”. The Darbar Hall of the Asiatic Library was full for his felicitation and people were sitting on the floor to listen to him. Among those attending the function were other retired judges of Bombay High Court and well-known legal luminaries and senior civil servants in their suit and tie in the audience. However, the man being felicitated himself was in his typical simple khadi kurta and a trouser. In that meeting, while acknowledging the felicitation he spoke with the fervour, passion, optimism and energy of a human rights activist as well as the rigour, knowledge and wisdom of a judge and jury bringing to bear all his experiences – bitter as well as positive. He was not talking of

his achievements, but the state of human rights, the plight of the marginalised and lots of work that needed to be done.

Justice Suresh's humility and attire both made him most accessible to the humblest of activists and he would be happy to chat as an equal – without any feeling that he was a legal luminary and a retired judge. Even when invited by the smallest of grassroots activist groups to address, he would never refuse if he had the time. The number of activist groups and NGOs with which Justice Suresh associated himself and mentored is mind boggling, and throughout the length and breadth of India. He was President of Majlis Law Centre, Trustee of Human Rights Law Network, a jury member in many hearings held by Indian People's Human Rights Tribunal on the issue of violation of human rights to name just a few. He was also actively associated with the Centre for Study of Society and Secularism. Treading kilometres through forests to meet adivasis and collect testimonies and crossing rivers in a canoe are some of his achievements. Justice Suresh accessed some of those adivasi villages to hold hearing of Indian

People's Human Rights Tribunal where even most of the senior activists had not reached.

Justice Suresh would often say, "my voice is my conscience". This is evident in how as a High Court judge, his expertise came to the rescue of the weaker sections of the society while he was sitting on the bench.

He stood for strict accountability structures of governance and the right to transparency. In losing Justice Suresh, India has lost a person who spoke for the oppressed and marginalised and a voice of conscience. His loss will be felt for generations to come.





Tribute to
Justice Hosbet Suresh

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Justice Hosbet Suresh was a fearless champion of human rights. He was one of the most respected judges of the Bombay High Court. He played a pivotal role in giving life to the notion of people's inquiry, carrying on in the footsteps of his mentor, late Justice V. R. Krishna Iyer. Justice Suresh headed various commissions to investigate human rights violations. For instance, with Justice Tiwatia, he was appointed in December 1991 to investigate the Kaveri Riots in Bangalore. He was judge of Bombay City Civil and Sessions Court (1968–1980) and subsequently Bombay High Court (1986–1991). His historic judgements reflect the constitution's pledge to the common person. Justice Suresh was also Chairperson, Board of Trustees of Human Rights Law Network.

He authored a book entitled All Human Rights are Fundamental Rights for which Justice Rajinder Sachar had written a foreword. He worked with Justice Daud investigating the Bombay riots, which was published as People's Verdict. His whole life has been his work for humanitarian causes. Given his deep knowledge of law and human rights, Justice Hosbet Suresh also lectured on Law and Human Rights to students at the Department of Civics and Politics, University of Mumbai. He brought his legal expertise to illuminate the academic world through his lectures. An alumnus of the University of Mumbai (that was formally Bombay University), he has fought for the cause of human rights fearlessly all his life. He has conducted large number of public

hearings organized by various people's tribunals and human rights groups on violation of human rights. On 6th March 2020, Justice Hosbet Suresh delivered the 5th Chief Justice Chagla Memorial Lecture on "Seven Decades of Human Rights and India" at Convocation Hall, University of Mumbai.

Justice Hosbet Suresh will continue to be special for his humility, integrity and commitment for justice for all without any exceptions and will ever be remembered by all.

