

LETTERS

'KASHMIR TODAY'

I write this from Srinagar, Kashmir. This morning's papers say that I may be arrested on charges of sedition for what I have said at recent public meetings on Kashmir. I said what millions of people here say every day. I said what I, as well as other commentators have written and said for years. Anybody who cares to read the transcripts of my speeches will see that they were fundamentally a call for justice. I spoke about justice for the people of Kashmir who live under one of the most brutal military occupations in the world; for Kashmiri Pandits who live out the tragedy of having been driven out of their homeland; for Dalit soldiers killed in Kashmir whose graves I visited on garbage heaps in their villages in Cuddalore; for the Indian poor who pay the price of this occupation in material ways and who are now learning to live in the terror of what is becoming a police state.

Yesterday I traveled to Shopian, the apple-town in South Kashmir which had remained closed for 47 days last year in protest against the brutal rape and murder of Asiya and Nilofer, the young women whose bodies were found in a shallow stream near their homes and whose murderers have still not been brought to justice. I met Shakeel, who is Nilofer's husband and Asiya's brother. We sat in a circle of people crazed with grief and anger who had lost hope that they would ever get 'insaf'—justice—from India, and now believed that Azadi—freedom— was their only hope. I met young stone pelters who had been shot through their eyes. I traveled with a young man who told me how three of his friends, teenagers in Anantnag district, had been taken into custody and had their finger-nails pulled out as punishment for throwing stones.

In the papers some have accused me of giving 'hate-speeches', of wanting India to break up. On the contrary, what I say comes from love and pride. It comes from not wanting people to be killed, raped, imprisoned or have their finger-nails pulled out in order to force them to say they are Indians. It comes from wanting to live in a society that is striving to be a just one. Pity the nation that has to silence its writers for speaking their minds. Pity the nation that needs to jail those who ask for justice, while communal killers, mass murderers, corporate scamsters, looters, rapists, and those who prey on the poorest of the poor, roam free.

Arundhati Roy
October 26, 2010

SHRINKING DEMOCRATIC SPACE

The West Bengal police continues its harassments of civil liberties activists. Naba Datta, General Secretary, *Nagarik Mancha*, an eminent environment-movement and civil-liberties activist was arrested on August 17, 2010 by West Midnapur Police.

Mr Naba Dutta along with his 3 companions; Ms Proгна Paromita Dutta Roy Chowdhury, Mr Gautam Ghosh and Mr Dipankar Mazumdar all attached with *Nagarik Mancha*, a civil society organization mainly focused on environmental and labor issues

proceeded for a preannounced programme of sit-in; in front of the Block Development Officer's office at Narayangarh block of West Midnapur. The programme was organized by *Lodha Shabar Vumij Kalyan Samiti*.

The police personnel who arrested Mr Naba Dutta and his associates were in plain clothes, which is sheer violation of the guidelines laid down by the apex court of India in DK Basu case (AIR 1997 SC 610) regarding procedure of arrest. While arresting them they not even prepared memo of arrest at the place of arrest, which is again a violation of the said guideline and Criminal procedure Code.

The whole episode was not only illegal but proving the whims of police and district authorities. Misdeeds of police again establish the fact that rule of law is on the verge of collapse, where every dissenting voice is going to be maimed by authoritarian approach of the state and its machinery.

Kirity Roy (Secretary,
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