

Calcutta Notebook

DRC

A Delhi Court has directed the police to lodge a FIR against Syed Ali Shah Geelani (leader of a Hurriyat faction), Arundhati Roy, Prof SAR Geelani (acquitted accused of the terrorist attack on the Parliament), Shuddhabrata Sengupta, Sheikh Showkat Hosain, and Sujato Bhadra. The targets are the speeches made at the Delhi conference on October 21, 2010 around the theme of *Azadi—the Only Way*. The mindset of the complainant is clear from the charges in the FIR, which relate to sedition, waging war against Government of India, promoting enmity between classes and imputations against integrity of the nation, as defined in the IPC and the UAPA. It is a common mindset within the affluent, communal, casteist upper stratum of northern and western India.

What is worrying is the importance given by the court to a complaint born of this mindset. The FIR will contribute to the attempt by the extremists of the political Right to promote xenophobia in this country. It bodes ill for pluralism when a political question like the present unrest in Kashmir cannot be discussed in all its facets. It is reported in the press that the stone-pelting youth on the streets of Srinagar have on their lips the slogan "Go India Go", that more than 100 unarmed protestors have been killed by soldiers and policemen this year, that people come out on to the streets in large numbers defying curfew, to mourn the dead, that 70,000 Kashmiris have been killed in the last 20 years by Indian armed forces and Pakistan-inspired terrorists, yet Indian citizens will not be permitted to examine the pros and cons of the Kashmiri desire for independence.. In particular the citizen is not to come to the conclusion that the Kashmiri desire for independence is genuine and has to be addressed democratically and not with guns. Even if he does come to the conclusion that the Kashmiri people do want independence (as opposed to the cross-border militants whose agenda was inclusion in Pakistan) and it is in , India's enlightened self-interest not to act as a prison-house of nations, he must not air his opinion. Which is better for India, an insurgent Kashmir province pinning down divisions of the Indian Army and concomitant money and other resources or a friendly, independent state of Kashmir acting as a buffer between India and Pakistan? One cannot discuss this matter. If someone does so he will be charged with sedition, waging war against the government and what not.

The complaint pursued by the Delhi court seeks to bring India down to the position of Pakistan which does not allow any inhabitant of the so-called Azad Kashmir to question the accession of Azad Kashmir to Pakistan. One is reminded of McCarthy's committee on un-American activities, which held a witch-hunt against communists, and interrogated leading American intellectuals. It was contemplating an interrogation of Einstein, but before it could do so, the American people kicked McCarthy and his committee out and into the Atlantic ocean.

Kashmir has never been centre stage in Kolkata, but now the Bandi Mukti Committee (BMC), 'Manthan', and other organizations and individuals are holding meetings and sit-ins to bring the happenings in Kashmir and Manipur before the citizens. The BMC has highlighted the case of Sheikh Farhad Mehmood, a Kashmiri young man who has languished in Kolkata jails for the last six years as an under-trial prisoner. Now in Presidency jail, Farhad demanded implementation of the rights of prisoners according to the jail code and protested against bad food. In retaliation he was beaten up badly and on October 15, was confined to a cell, stark naked. Farhad went on fast for two days in protest. Demonstrating against such an outrage on human rights, the BMC held a sit-in on November 22, at Metro Channel from 1:00 pm to 7:00 pm. The meeting was supported by Tarun

Sanyal, Sujato Bhadra, Meher Engineer, Miratun Nahar, Saibal Mitra, Bibhas Chakraborti, Tarun Naskar, Abhee Datta Mazumdar, Subhendu Dasgupta, Ajit Roy, and other intellectuals, including Mahasweta Devi, who attended the meeting. □□□