

India: Delhi Police Spreads Riots 'Conspiracy' Net, Drags In Eminent Academics and Activists

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Using identically worded 'confessions' of students in custody, the police have named renowned economist Jayati Ghosh, DU professor Apoorvanand, CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury, Swaraj Abhiyan leader Yogendra Yadav and documentary filmmaker Rahul Roy in a chargesheet.

New Delhi: In trying to buttress its claim about the Delhi riots being a “deep-rooted conspiracy” by anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) protesters, the Delhi police have dragged in Communist Party of India (Marxist) general secretary Sitaram Yechury, renowned economist Jayati Ghosh, Delhi University professor and public intellectual Apoorvanand, Swaraj Abhiyan leader Yogendra Yadav and documentary filmmaker Rahul Roy, among other prominent personalities, as persons who had encouraged the protesters as part of a ‘plan’.

The names of these eminent personalities have emerged in the supplementary chargesheet filed by the Delhi police for FIR 50/20 in connection with the alleged role of three students, two from the women’s collective Pinjra Tod - Devangana Kalita and Natasha Narwal of Jawaharlal Nehru University - and Gulfisha Fathima of Jamia Milia Islamia - in the Jafraabad violence, from where the Delhi riots spread to other parts of north-east Delhi. The two founding members of Pinjra Tod, Kalita and Narwal, were arrested in the last week of May, while Fathima was taken into custody in late July. All three are now facing charges under various sections of the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

Curiously, the chargesheet annexed two entirely identical ‘disclosure statements’, in which the Delhi police claimed that Kalita and Narwal admitted to not just their complicity in the Delhi riots but also named Ghosh, Apoorvanand and Roy as their mentors to carry on the anti-CAA protests, even if it leads to violence at some stage. The disclosure statements - supposedly made independently of each other but with identical language, right down to misspellings like ‘massage’ for ‘message’ - have quoted Kalita and Narwal as saying that they organised the Daryaganj protest in December and the Jafraabad *chakka jam* (road block) against the CAA on February 22, 2020 at the behest of Ghosh, Apoorvanand and Roy.

In some pages of these ‘disclosure statements’, which are included in the charge sheet, one can see that Kalita and Narwal have written ‘I refuse to sign’. Nevertheless, the Delhi police, which reports to Union home minister Amit Shah, says in its chargesheet:

“Accused Devangana Kalita has disclosed that ‘In the month of December after passing CAA (Citizenship Amendment Act) Jaidi Ghosh, Professor Apurva Nand, Rahul Roy had explained that we have to protest against CAA/ NRC for which we can go any extreme due to which we can through the Govt and Umar Khalid had also given some tips for

doing protest against CAA/NRC ”

It further quoted Kalita as saying:

“On the directions of these persons Umar Khalid’s United Against Hate Group and JCC (Jamia Coordination Committee & members of our Pinjra Tod together started protest in different parts of Delhi. On 20.12.2019 I along with other members of Pinjra Tod Group participated in the protest called by Chander shekhar “Rawan” in the area of Darya Ganj. When police tried to stop to move towards Jantar Mantar we instigated the protestors to be violent due to which protestors . . became violent and several persons were got injuries (sic).”

Regarding Apoorvanand’s role, the police quote the Pinjra Tod founding members thus:

“Professor Apurva Nand told them that JCC (Jamia Coordination Committee) is going to start protest at 20-25 places in Delhi. As per directions of Umar Khalid and others we chosen the local girl of North-East Delhi namely Gulfisha @ Gul and she along with Taslim and others had taken responsibility that they will gather the crowd for the protest against CAA/NRC (sic).”

The police also claimed that the activists informed officials that Ghosh, Apoorvanand and Roy coordinated with the the Islamist group Popular Front of India (PFI) and the JCC to mentor the Pinjra Tod members to carry forward their militant campaign against the CAA.

To corroborate this alleged versions of events, the police produced Fathima’s statement which alleges that CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury, Bhim Army chief Chandrasekhar, Swaraj Abhiyan leader Yogendra Yadav, lawyer Mahmood Pracha, United Against Hate activist Umar Khalid and leaders from the Muslim community like “ex-MLA Mateen Ahmed, Anas, Sadaf, and MLA Amannatullah Khan also aided the conspirators of the violence”.

Goaded by the Pinjra Tod activists and JCC, the police claimed, Fathima, a strong opponent of CAA, organised the Seelampur protest from January 15 onwards. While quoting Fathima, the police said that she was told to organise the protest to “malign the image of the Government of India”.

“The crowd had started growing and according to the plan, big leaders and lawyers started coming in to provoke and mobilize this crowd, including Omar Khalid, Chander Sekhar Ravan, Yogendar Yadav, Sitaram Yechury, and lawyer Mahmood Pracha, Chaudhary Matin, etc., the lawyer, Mahmood Pracha, said that the sitting in demonstration is your democratic right and the rest of the leaders filled the feeling of discontent in the community by calling CAA/NRC anti-Muslim [sic]”

Both the Pinjra Tod activists, the police claimed, used their “educational qualification to misguide the common Muslim people that we have knowledge about the CAA/NRC and it is against the Muslim”.

Lawyers say the fact that the disclosure statements of both Kalita and Narwal are entirely identical, including even the typos and grammatical errors are evidence of the fact that these have been drafted by the police themselves.

Also, the police version of the anti-CAA protest, as mentioned in the chargesheet, is eerily similar to the Bharatiya Janata Party’s criticism of it. The police have used terms like “anti-national elements” and “rioters” to describe the Pinjra Tod members, JCC and anti-CAA protestors who delivered “hate speeches to poison the mindset of common people”. The police’s politically partisan understanding

of the contentious law also came out when it said that the accused persons “started misinterpreting the provisions of CAA and NRC” to claim that Muslims will be thrown out of India if they are implemented.

Ever since the investigations began into the anti-Muslim riots [that claimed 53 lives, mostly Muslims, and injured hundreds, and damaged properties worth crores](#) in north-east region of the national capital, the Delhi police have sought to link the largely peaceful anti-CAA protests with the violence that unfolded between February 23 and February 26. Around 751 FIRs have been registered in different police stations.

The Delhi police’s probe initially began as a regular exercise with people charged with rioting, possessing weapons, assembling unlawfully and criminal conspiracy. However, it gradually morphed into what is being seen as a roving witch-hunt against students, activists and academics who have been critical of many of the Narendra Modi government’s policies, and especially the contentious citizenship law and proposed National Register of Citizens in the months preceding the Delhi riots.

The Wire had [earlier reported](#) how Delhi Police turned one anti-CAA WhatsApp group chats into a riots conspiracy in what appeared to be a clearly politically-biased probe. Apoorvanand, who was part of that group, was called by the police [for questioning](#) recently, and his phone was seized. Similarly, based on the chats in the group, the police also claimed that Roy was one of the masterminds of the Delhi violence, in which Muslim properties and lives were damaged the most.

At the same time, the Delhi police [have turned a blind eye](#) towards the role of BJP leaders like Kapil Mishra, Anurag Thakur and Parvesh Verma, who openly threatened violence if the anti-CAA protestors didn’t withdraw their protests.

The chargesheet in FIR 50/20 relates to the Jafrabad protest site from where the first incident of communal violence was reported on February 23 before proliferating to other parts of north-east Delhi. Earlier that day, [BJP leader Mishra publicly declared](#) in front of a DCP rank official that if the police fail to remove the demonstrators from the Jafrabad protest site, he and his supporters would take the matter in their own hands and have them removed forcibly. Yet, no FIR has been registered by the Delhi police against him.

Similarly, the BJP ran a high-pitch communal campaign against anti-CAA protestors and Muslims in the run-up to the Delhi assembly polls in February. Among other BJP leaders, Thakur and Verma threatened Muslims of dire consequences and called on their supporters to uproot the anti-CAA protest at Shaheen Bagh in televised speeches. However, their role has gone have not even been investigated, even as the police have left no stones unturned to link the violence in the last week of February with the peaceful, democratic protests which had been going on across India since late November.

The Delhi police appear to be intensifying its targeting of critics in this much-criticised riots’ probe by suggesting economist Ghosh and leaders like Yechury and Yadav were part of a conspiracy to unleash violence. While the primary targets of the Delhi police remain students, activists and on-ground anti-CAA Muslim protesters, the aim also appears to be to rope in prominent intellectual critics of the Modi government’s policies.

After Apoorvanand and Roy, who have been at the forefront of registering their protest against many of the Modi government’s decisions, Ghosh has now been dragged into the Delhi police’s “riots conspiracy” case.

Ghosh will retire at the end of this month as a senior professor of economics at the Jawaharlal Nehru

University, New Delhi. An author of multiple books, consultant for various international organisations like ILO and United Nations, and member of several major global commissions, she has received international acclaim for her contributions to the discipline of economics. Her contribution to India's development has also been recognised. She has advised various state and national governments in India from time to time, and held positions including chairperson of the Andhra Pradesh Commission on Farmers' Welfare in 2004 and member of the National Knowledge Commission of India (2005-09) reporting to the then prime minister.

When contacted, Ghosh declined to comment on the grounds that she wasn't aware of any charges against her.

However, speaking to *The Wire* on the development, Apoorvanand said, "The Delhi riots conspiracy case has an eerie similarity with the Bhima Koregaon case. In both the cases, the actual act of violence is not being investigated at all. In both the cases, the police are not interested in finding out the truth behind the violence at all. Here, they have launched an entirely separate exercise to criminalise anti-CAA protests and protestors, which is an ideologically-biased unbecoming of a professional force like police."

"A Hindu right group called Group of Intellectuals and Academicians (GIA)' submitted its [vindictive, false report](#) on the riots called '*Delhi Riots 2020: Report from Ground Zero - The Shaheen Bagh Model in North-East Delhi: From Dharna to Danga*' to the Union home minister Amit Shah on March 11. The home minister repeated some of its unsubstantiated contents, which took aim at dissenting activists and intellectuals, in parliament. It looks like the Delhi police is running a scripted investigation, and have been specifically targeting those persons whose names are mentioned in that report," he said, adding that the investigation into the Delhi riots is not only flawed and malicious but also politically partisan.

Disclosure: Professor Jayati Ghosh is the mother of a journalist who works at The Wire

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