



The fear of a black flag

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Highlights

- Last year, another student from U.P., Pooja Shukla, had to spend nearly a month in jail for showing black flags to U.P. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath.
- There are two pertinent points to consider here: the black flag, and the person waving it, a university student.

What is it about this combo that seems to terrify the state so much?

Form of Non-violent Protest

- Waving a black flag is perhaps the most innocuous form of non-violent protest imaginable. It is not a dharna, it is not a march or a public rally, and it doesn't involve the narrative build-up of a rousing speech — all of which are legitimate means of protest protected under the Indian Constitution.
- However, while all of these are collective expressions of dissent, requiring resources and coordination among a good number of like-minded people, waving a black flag requires nothing more than a piece of black cloth or a rag.
- It is a form of protest that is available to the lone individual, to a citizen unaffiliated to any political party or group but who nonetheless wants to communicate her dissent to a representative of the state that she believes has grown deaf to her complaints.
- Unlike a hunger strike, which, too, is a means of protest available to the individual, waving a black flag doesn't even need publicity from the mass media to build pressure in favour of the demands.
- All that is needed is for a few others — fellow citizens, onlookers — to witness the few seconds of the gesture, and it is done.
- But today even this modest symbolic protest seems intolerable to the public servants of a country that prides itself on being a democracy.
- It is a worrying sign when a government that has seen scores of elected representatives emerge from student politics begins to display zero tolerance for political activism among students.