



Protests in the 21st Century: India's Historical Context with a Glance Towards its Present

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On March 20, 2020, all major national dailies featured a striking headline: "Ranjan Gogoi, former Chief Justice of India, nominated as a member of Rajya Sabha by the President." The same headline also highlighted that many members of parliament, particularly those from the opposition, protested the oath-taking ceremony. The purpose of mentioning this news is not to pass judgment on whether the protest was justified or not, but to provide an example of how protests serve as a means of expressing disagreement. It's important to note the distinction between protest and revolt; protests do not involve the use of violence. Hereby, it can be concluded that

Protest + Violence = Revolt

The grains of systematic protest have been sown in the Indian atmosphere since the British Raj. The key player in instrumenting the tool of Protest in the then diabolic circumstances was

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Being called "Father of Nation", he successfully helped the masses to raise their voices against the British rule. Under his leadership, many movements such as Civil Disobedience, Satyagraha were launched. Gandhi made sure that the element of Violence abstains from these processions. Even in certain situations, he called off the protest just because violence got mingled with the protests. One such incident was Chauri Chaura, where on 5th Feb 1922, in Gorakhpur district of United Province (now, Uttar Pradesh) clash between demonstrators and police, resulted in an attack on the Police Station, killing 3 civilians and 22 policemen. Gandhi called off Non-Cooperation at the national level. After the incident, Violence was majorly distanced from the protest guided by Gandhi, or Congress.

This one concept in particular, not only helped the country achieve freedom but also helped in setting an example worldwide to fight for the rights of the ordinary and brought to its knees a mighty colonial empire. It also helped the nation to come into consensus with different ideologies of people for a common goal, i.e., betterment of every individual. India's way of protest actually used the Gramscian theoretical perspective of a war of position.

The Indian style of Protest was used worldwide by different leaders. Lech Walesa consciously tried to incorporate the principles during the Solidarity Movement of Poland.

It can be concluded that India's struggle for Independence in its true sense is the model that was able to overthrow the then strongest colonial empire with the use of non-violent protests. It has created a roadmap for the coming generations on how to maintain checks and balances with the authorities and what is the right way of raising the voice against the powerful.

As rightly said by the scholars, history should be learned to understand the mistakes and find the right solutions which can be used in the present so that the duplicity of the same errors can be avoided. The history which has given the whole world the way of nonviolent protest, by the use of spaces provided by the constitution effectively also teaches that wherever violence is used, it becomes easier for the authorities to suppress the voices. Whether it be the Revolt of 1857 or many other civilian and peasant revolts. In no way, it is meant to

undervalue the importance of these incidents. These were the heroic moves made by the countrymen which were enough to ignite the patriotic feeling in every individual. But it is hard to ignore that results from these moves were overshadowed by the casualties that took place. This is sufficient to understand that protest with violence is not an effective tool.

Our forefathers understand that and also foresee that as the nation would march forward more complex situations would arise so they guarantee the citizens with Article 19.

Article 19 - Right to Freedom, guarantees six rights to all citizens among which Sub Clause (a) of Article 19 (1) gives right to freedom of speech and expression and sub-clause (b) of Article 19 (1) gives right to assemble peacefully and without arms. The Indian Constitutional makers firmly believe that in independent India, it is important to listen to the citizens for better governance and therefore, Article 19 was inserted as Fundamental Right.

Whether it be to fight against corruption- Jan Lokpal Bill or agitation against crimes like rape- Nirbhaya Movement (2012). These protests and agitations helped in shaping society.

It is to be noted here that the Right guaranteed by the constitution does not mean vandalism. The recent anti citizenship laws movement is one such example. The mass movement across the country gradually took the ugly turn of violent protests. Though losses were of humongous nature, the bill still completed its journey of becoming an act.

It can be simply observed that violence cannot and should not be used as modus operandi. It is a futile means. As guaranteed by the "Rule of the Land" protests should be guided by the common objective of achieving goals for welfare in general with the application of nonviolence. As change is inevitable and so is protest, what is important is to understand what is the right way to do it.