

Role Of Protest In Democracy

Sourabh Batar

Assistant Professor

Teerthanker Mahaveer University

Dr. Nidhi Tyagi

Associate Professor

Teerthanker Mahaveer University

Abstract: Protests play a vital role in the most of the countries that now exist in liberal democracies. Direct action, mostly nonviolent, has been instrumental in forcing the introduction of ending of slavery, extending rights to women and minorities, and even freedom of countries. But this fact can not be ignored that in a complete democratic country like India, protest is allowed so long as it does not have much impact due to rising corruption and inefficiency of ruling government. When protest develops in a way that threatens powerful and dominant interest groups, police or military force is brought to bear against it.

This article reviews the anger of protesters that starts with the agitation of the movement but ends with the appearance of malefaction. Political parties instigating and leading violence between two groups of people is a frequent occasion. As Mahatma Gandhi held that- "Democracy is the art and science of mobilizing the entire physical, economic and spiritual resources of various sections of the people in the service of common good of all." In a democratic country like India, it is the person's democratic right to protest but protesting with peaceful means is extremely opposite to the rioting with violence. Today, despite of the large support of common man and noble cause, many campaigns get fail or are suppressed due to the use of violence and impatience.

Mahatma Gandhi and his non-violent movement for independence had a great impact on Indian society and history; his ideas inspired the entire world. So, we should try to follow him and his philosophy and demand for our rights in a peaceful way, then only India will be termed as a democratic state in real terms.

Keywords – Democracy, Non-Violence, Protest with peace, People's participation

“Non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man”.

A protest is an expression cause by words or actions in relation to particular events, policies or situations. Protests may take many different forms, from individual statements to mass demonstrations. Protesters may try to influence public opinion or government policies with the help of protest as a way of publicly making their opinions heard, or protesters may start direct action in an attempt to directly endorse desired changes themselves.

As Mahatma Gandhi held that- “Democracy is the art and science of mobilizing the entire physical, economic and spiritual resources of various sections of the people in the service of common good of all.” In a democratic country like India, it is the person’s democratic right to protest but protesting with peaceful means is extremely opposite to the rioting with violence. Today, despite of the large support of common man and noble cause, many campaigns get fail or are suppressed due to the use of violence and impatience. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in his last speech of Constitution Assembly told- “If we continue our democracy then we must believe in constitutional measures for the social and economic objectives and we must leave the path of bloody revolution”.

Democracy is not all about the vote we have every five years, in which we select our representatives to run our cities, states and our country, and few people get the elected politician of their choice representing them. But democracy is about more than just voting in elections to select our politicians. Democracy is about participating fully in civic life. Right to Protest is a important pillar in a fully democratic society. Government is not the master of the People; it is the servant of the People in a democratic country. The Law is also not the master of the people, but the servant of the people. When the Government and the Law enforcing bodies are acted against the interest of people, the People have a duty to make their views known through the medium of protest. In a democratic Country protests are the part of a organized and nonviolent campaign to achieve a particular objective, and involve the use of pressure as well as persuasion but in a peaceful manner. A fully democratic society provides its citizens a right to protest, so that they can enjoy their fundamental rights and give their opinion in case if they find anything against the interest of the citizens.

The preamble of Indian constitution assuring its citizens of justice, liberty, and complete democracy. It also enshrines that the constitution is made by and for the Indian people. In a fully democratic society like India, every citizen has certain basic rights to participate, interfere and protest in the government actions. The rights to protest, along with the right to form and join associations or groups, are also found in Articles 10 and 11 of the Human Rights Act. The negative image of many protests results due to violence from the entrenched fear of protesting felt by many people, which leaves the field to those few who are willing to take the risks of protesting and who are perceived as 'fringe' elements of the population.

In the Present India, number of movements start with the protest and are covered up or end unnoticed without any proper result, even though they have a very noble cause attached to them and useless and aimless words of economically and politically strong people are highlighted. The examples are like Anna Hazare's campaign or the unsung hero, Swami Nigamananda for preservation of the environmental health of the sacred river Ganga or Irom Sharmila's indefinite fast since 2000 to get the Armed Forces Special Powers Act repealed.

Now a Days, Dharnas, Anshan and Rallies become less effective in front of corrupt people because these are a bit slow ways to protest and thus, they need time and patience in order to get noticed. So, there is a need to come up with some innovative and peaceful ideas to protest which can immediately attract the attention of media, and thus, people at large and then concerned authorities.

There are several other innovative ways of protesting peacefully without affecting work like- Blacking out the website, Social Media campaign, Online petitions in order to aware large number of people about the cause and get their support and then finally make the authorities realize that such large number of people support or demand for this and thus, it is a meaningful protest like-avaaz.org, change.org, By switching off your lights for one hour – fix a time and switch off light- like-Earth Hour, Create your own website and add social plug-in to it, Organizing Marches (Candle) , rallies (bike, car, bicycle) with handing out flyers, Wear black ribbons on hands or cloths as a symbol of protest of an issue, Protest an issue by simply wearing a button or a pin stating your cause, Flag & Banner on the roof/vehicle with slogan or symbol of cause, Organize gatherings at MPs' or concerned officials' offices, Social boycott: the protesters may resort to social boycott. Don't attend rallies, functions, parties, social gatherings, even weddings of a corrupt officials, political leaders etc, Hunger Strike, which was the tool of Mahatma Gandhi at the time of freedom struggle and now it is being used by Anna Hazare.

In a fully democratic society like India, protests are very much efficient and essential too, but at the same time, protests should be attached with peace; patience; commitment; and ahimsa, otherwise, protests leave behind their cause.

We have the tradition of non violence protests. In ancient India, saints like Mahaveer, Buddha, Kabir, Ravidas, and many others practiced the non-violent means in day-to-day living as well as in order to check and control the governing bodies and socio-political system.

Satyagraha and Civil Disobedience movement of Mahatma Gandhi, in which thousands of common people participated and supported the father of nation, are such examples which attract the entire world. Anna Hazare's famous hunger strike against corrupt practices is an appropriate example of non-violent protest in a present democratic state. Thus, we can see that Indians are reliving their principles of non-violence taught by Mahatma Gandhi and other ancient saints and gurus.

We have seen Syrians, Egyptians, Libyans and millions of Arabs rebelling on streets, challenging their dictatorship in whatever ways they can. Unfortunately, these struggles have resulted in the loss of thousands of innocent lives. Amongst the riots occurred around the world, the Indian freedom struggle led by Gandhi caught the world's attention because of its peaceful and non-violent protest. So, it is a necessary reminder to us that the principles of peace, self-restraint, and non-aggression were effective in the past. They still work today and will work in the future, too.

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