

(A Monthly, Peer Reviewed Online Journal) | Impact Factor: 7.580|

Visit: www.ijmrsetm.com

Volume 4, Issue 10, October 2017

Democracy and Protest- An Interlinked Phenomenon

DR. ARCHANA SINGH

Associate Professor in Business Administration, BBD Government College, Chimanpura, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India

ABSTRACT: Protest has been instrumental in forcing the introduction of most of the freedoms that now exist in liberal democracies. Direct action, mostly nonviolent, played a major role in the ending of slavery, extension of the franchise, curtailing ruthless aspects of the exploitation of labour and extending rights to women and minorities. But we cannot ignore this fact that even in complete democratic state or society like India, protest is allowed so long as it doesn't have much impact due to rising corruption and inefficiency of ruling government. Once protest on a massive scale develops in way that threatens powerful and dominant interest groups, police or military force is brought to bear against it. The article reviews the current democratic system, the success & failure of protests and importance of peaceful protests. 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.' It is discussed that now the time has come when we, as the citizens of a democratic state, should stand in solidarity without fear and demand for our democratic right to protest against wrong and corrupt practices and participate in the governing system. 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. To conclude, we can say that in the world that we live in today, fanatics resort to guns and bombs to make their point but if protests are nonviolent—as rare as that is—we should appreciate them and embrace them for the betterment of our future. No matter what part of the world we live in, we should live by the ideas of democracy, peace and justice.

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

I. INTRODUCTION

The final defeat of the Emperor Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815, after 22 gruelling years of war, saw peace celebrations but no 'peace dividend' – at least for working people. Half a million soldiers and sailors were demobilised into an economy just as wartime industries were contracting. On top of this came deep trade slumps in the northern manufacturing districts in 1816-17 and 1819, and the terrible 'lost summer' of 1816 caused by the dust from a massive volcano in Indonesia. Social unrest was inevitable; radical reformers sought to harness this to build a mass movement for political change.[1,2]

Radicals, like Joseph Mitchell of Liverpool in his 'Address to the People', argued that the true causes of distress were political. Wealthy landowners and financiers who had profited from the war continued to milk the public purse in peacetime, exacting high interest on loans to government and drawing huge unearned state salaries. While the propertied classes welcomed the end of the wartime income tax, the poor continued to pay taxes on essentials like soap, salt, malt and candles. The Corn Law of 1815 protected the incomes of farmers and landowners by keeping out foreign corn – but this raised the price of flour and bread for consumers: it was known as the 'bread tax'. A radical reform of Parliament was needed to put power back in the hands of the people.

In the autumn of 1816, reform societies were founded in towns all over the country, but particularly in the industrial midlands and north. Open-air public meetings were held in Birmingham, Manchester and elsewhere to demand the right to vote, which (it was claimed) England's 'ancient constitution' had once allowed to all male citizens.[3,5]



(A Monthly, Peer Reviewed Online Journal) | Impact Factor: 7.580|

Visit: www.ijmrsetm.com

Volume 4, Issue 10, October 2017

At the second of two mass meetings in London's Spa Fields, addressed by 'Orator' Henry Hunt, a small group of ultras led a section of the crowd off towards the Tower of London. It was a dramatic attempt to stage an English version of the storming of the Bastille, the event which had set off the French Revolution in 1789. The elite, London-based Hampden Club launched a national petitioning campaign for parliamentary reform: a printed petition form survives in The National Archives.

Hundreds of petitions, sent in from all over the country, were rejected by the House of Commons in early 1817. Radicals in Manchester responded by organised a march on London: several thousand men carrying blankets and knapsacks, the so-called 'Blanketeers'. 'I am a trew reformer,' wrote young Jonathan Hulton to his parents from Ashbourne in Derbyshire, just before the last remaining marchers were turned back by troops. Further risings were again attempted in Manchester, Huddersfield, and in Pentrich in Staffordshire, aided and abetted by the government spy and agent provocateur 'Oliver', who left his own, self-serving account of the affair.

Dozens of reformers were imprisoned without trial. Some sent touching letters home, including the Lancashire radical Samuel Bamford who told his beloved Jemima that a reformer's wife should be a heroine.

The attempted risings and rebellions of 1817 may appear futile from a present-day perspective, but this was a time when there was no democratic process to give hope of real change to working people. The mass petitioning campaign had nonetheless mobilised between half a million and a million people for reform – an effort not far short of the first petition for the People's Charter, which mustered 1.2 million signatures from a larger population in 1839.[7,8] Working people were rapidly learning about mass politics.

II. DISCUSSION

"I would like to punch him in the face," Donald J. Trump bellowed into the microphone with a schoolyard bully stare in his eyes as a protester was escorted from a campaign rally in February 2016. The attendees cheered and applauded emphatically. Trump paused, looked out over the crowd, and took in the favorable response. As he basked in the appreciation of his followers, he smiled contentedly, pleased to have shown up the protester. It was clear Trump was not a fan of the protests. In that moment, however, Trump had done something more than just express his disdain for a disruptive protester: he established a political narrative. To the rambunctious crowd at the rally and some viewers at home, the protester became the villain of this American story, and the contrarian political message he espoused was the evil that Trump would guard against.

Trump strove to make it clear that this and other protesters did not reflect the public's concerns. Rather, they were isolated and erratic abnormalities—distractions that needed to be shunned. The rooting crowd of potential voters was "us," and the rude protesters were "them." This creation of a wedge between the public and protest activists, while far from original, warrants a closer look. In order to understand the contemporary narrative surrounding political protesters, we must understand the background story, which began nearly fifty years ago with the birth of the silent majority.[9,10]

The Back Story

On November 3, 1969, President Richard Nixon appeared on televisions across the United States to make an important speech about the Vietnam War. The opening wide-screen video shot showed Nixon in the Oval Office, sitting at the Wilson desk. California gold-colored drapes framed the background, and the American flag hung behind his right shoulder. It was a classic presidential shot. He firmly grasped his prepared remarks with two hands. Repeatedly glancing downward at his written statement so as not to misspeak, Nixon discussed his approach to the Vietnam War moving forward. Despite cries for him to rapidly end the war, Nixon told the American people that he would not immediately remove troops from Vietnam but rather would offer a peace proposal. This peace proposal would include a complete withdrawal of all outside forces within one year, a cease-fire under international supervision, and the pursuit of free elections in Vietnam.



(A Monthly, Peer Reviewed Online Journal) | Impact Factor: 7.580|

Visit: www.ijmrsetm.com

Volume 4, Issue 10, October 2017

Toward the end of his speech, Nixon grappled with the opposition that he predicted would arise from those who disagreed with his plan. In an attempt to ward off criticism, Nixon recounted his interaction with a protester in San Francisco—an experience that stuck with him. The protester held a sign that read, "Lose in Vietnam, bring the boys home." Nixon acknowledged the freedom that the citizen had to voice this opinion. Yet he considered this protester and the activists accompanying him as belonging to a small minority in the nation.

Nixon used this experience as an opportunity to push back against antiwar protesters: "I would be untrue to my oath of office if I allowed the policy of this nation to be dictated by the minority who hold that point of view and who try to impose it on the nation by mounting demonstrations in the street. . . . If a vocal minority, however fervent its cause, prevails over reason and the will of the majority, this nation has no future as a free society." In concluding his speech, the president made a heartfelt appeal to those not participating in the antiwar demonstrations. He pleaded, "Tonight—to you, the great silent majority of my fellow Americans—I ask for your support."[11,12]

Nixon's speech introduced the notion of a "silent majority" to many in the public. The term had not been widely used at the time, but it had a nice ring to it. It made individuals in the majority feel as though they had power, but they were modest and measured in how they implemented their power. If these individuals who sat quietly watching the political activism from a distance were referred to as the silent majority, then the protesters in the streets could appropriately be referred to as the "loud minority." Although the president did not verbalize this latter term, the implicit antithesis of the silent majority was a small group of whining complainers who did not reflect the true concerns of the American public or the reality of the times. Hence through his rhetoric, Nixon separated the concerns of protesters from those watching events unfold from the comfort of their homes.

The creation of this juxtaposition also established an atmosphere of "us versus them." But who belonged to "them"? Historian Rick Perelstein indicated that protesters against the Vietnam War constituted a wide array of individuals that included feminists, hippies, students, and even rock and roll bands. "It was everything that threatened that kind of 1950s' Leave It to Beaver vision of what America was like," said Perelstein (quoted in Sanders 2016). This wasn't just a distinction in political beliefs: the people in the "them" group were othered in more ways than one.

Opposition to Nixon's military actions emerged from all walks of life, but some of the most ardent critics of the Vietnam War came from the black community. Thus not only was the loud minority a statistical one in the eyes of Nixon but it also constituted a large percentage of racial and ethnic minorities. Adding the contentious state of race relations to political difference about the war only increased the distinction between Nixon's "us" and the protesters' "them." The negative connotation of racial division that became attached to the silent majority now reflected another prominent divide in the United States at that time.

By the late 1960s, the civil rights movement had won many battles, not least of which were the sweeping Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act in 1965. The civil rights movement's attention quickly turned to the Vietnam War, however, when it became clear that a disproportionate number of African Americans and Latinos were returning home in body bags (Appy 1993; Baskir and Strauss 1978). Unfortunately, racial and ethnic minorities were more likely to be placed on the front lines of the war, and thus were exposed to a greater level of danger than their white counterparts. Furthermore, to civil rights leaders the deaths of many innocent Vietnamese children and destruction of land were unacceptable by-products of war. The fights for civil rights and international peace were inextricably linked.

Up until his death, Martin Luther King Jr. was adamant in his opposition to the Vietnam War. In his speech "Beyond Vietnam," delivered in the heart of New York City at Riverside Church, he encouraged fellow racial minorities to push back against the war. He went as far as imploring young college recruits seeking military service and ministers of draft age to become conscientious objectors, which meant they would refuse to serve in the armed forces due to a sincerely held moral or ethical belief that war is wrong. In referring to Vietnam, King (1967) stated that "these are the times for real choices and not false ones. We are at the moment when our lives must be placed on the line if our nation is to survive its own folly. Every man of humane convictions must decide on the protest that best suits his convictions, but we must all protest."[13,15]

Indeed, protesting the Vietnam War became a priority for the civil rights movement—a fact well known to the American people at that time. So when Nixon asked for the silent majority to stand up and push back against the loud minority, the suggestion had a racial bent that insinuated a hard line of competition between voices in the minority community and broader US preferences.

The divisive "silent majority" term and racial connotation that it carried in the 1960s died out in political discussions over the next several decades following Nixon's presidency. Yet this hiatus from the use of this term in political discourse came to an abrupt close as the controversial millionaire mogul Trump entered the world of politics. During



(A Monthly, Peer Reviewed Online Journal) [Impact Factor: 7.580]

Visit: www.ijmrsetm.com

Volume 4, Issue 10, October 2017

his campaign for president, much of Trump's rhetoric tugged at the nostalgia felt by some of his supporters for the "good old days" of America.

Walking along and fielding questions from reporters in 2015 early in his campaign, Trump turned to a camera to address the momentum he had gained in the polls. "You see what's happening and now they say I'm going even higher. The country is fed up with what's going on." Trump continued his explanation by resurrecting the famous phrase from Nixon: "You know, in the old days they used the term 'silent majority'; we have the silent majority back, folks." President Trump's revitalization of the phrase "silent majority" cleverly linked his campaign with that nostalgia. By indicating that the silent majority was back, Trump established that his supporters, "us," were the majority, and quite different from the disruptive protesters, branded as the less popular "them."

Trump would go on to make this tagline a staple of his presidential campaign, now rebranded and with more vigor. In a rally hosted in Alabama on August 21, 2015, he announced, "We are going to have a wild time in Alabama tonight! Finally, the silent majority is back." In Arizona on October 29, 2016, he declared, "The silent majority is back. In ten days, we are going to win the state of Arizona."

The Trump campaign and supporters even created signs that stated, "The Silent Majority Stands with Trump." These signs continued to be sold online on Amazon for the low price of \$14.35 even after the election. What was once an implicit divide, alluded to by President Nixon, was now Trump's explicit line drawn in the sand separating protesters from nonprotesters. And if protesters crossed that line, they would be met with unwavering hostility.

Trump's words not only established a divisive political mood; they were demeaning and vitriolic to protesters. In June of the 2016 election year, Trump could be heard stating that he longed for the good old days when people could directly confront protesters and send them out of events on stretchers. Just a few months earlier, a protester was beaten to the ground and repeatedly stomped in the head by Trump supporters at a campaign rally. When asked about the situation, the then presidential hopeful confidently replied, "Maybe he should have been roughed up."[17,18]

Even after Trump was elected to office he acknowledged that he knew there was a negative perception of the divisive term and how it related to protests. In remarks given at a roundtable discussion with county sheriffs and reporters, Trump (2015) stated,

And a lot of people agree with us, believe me. There's a group of people out there—and I mean much more than half of our country—much, much more. You're not allowed to use the term "silent majority" anymore. You're not allowed, because they make that into a whole big deal. . . . But there's a group of people out there—massive, massive numbers, far bigger than what you see protesting.

Trump's words, like Nixon's statements a half century prior, indicate that protesters in the streets and the nonprotesters observing them at home have conflicting political perspectives on issues. It is therefore widely assumed that the act of protesting is the sole indicator of political discontent, and inaction is a validation of the status quo. The duality suggested by notions of the silent majority poses important questions: Do protesters remain on the opposing side of the political aisle from nonprotesters, or do protests resonate with the American public and shape political preferences? Do protests affect the outcome of elections and shape our democracy? This line of questioning rekindles an old debate regarding whether the silent majority, nonprotesters, is influenced by the loud minority, the activists in the streets.

This book attempts to answer these questions by making a bold shift away from separating protest and elections, and instead showing how protest activity spills over into the electoral process. Historically, political protest has been spurred by voices within marginalized groups, by those people who express the concerns of the repressed, and are seen as belonging to radical and isolated segments of society. Conversely, electoral outcomes in democracies demonstrate the will of the people and represent majoritarian preferences. As a consequence, political protest is often viewed as being a contrarian perspective to the outcome of political elections. I posit, though, that protests are a part of the social learning process, and act as an avenue of social communication between activists and nonactivists. In particular, protests serve as an informative cue that voters use to evaluate candidates as well as social conditions. The increasing engagement with social media by members of all social groups has allowed protest activists to interact more directly with citizens and politicians. Activists connect through popular media outlets, which disseminate persuasive information on the particular details of an issue. Protesters can now reach the silent majority in ways never before possible, figuratively moving the public ever so closer from the comfort of their homes to the activists in the streets. Protesters and nonprotesters now occupy the same rhetorical spaces for political deliberation.[19]

Because protests place issues on the political agenda, and work to make those issues salient to the public and individuals in power, protests have the potential to shift voters' evaluation of political candidates. These informative protests can act as a mobilizing force that draws passion from constituents, heightens their interest in a relevant topic, and later increases the likelihood that they turn out on Election Day. At the heart of this influence is partisanship ties;



(A Monthly, Peer Reviewed Online Journal) | Impact Factor: 7.580|

Visit: www.ijmrsetm.com

Volume 4, Issue 10, October 2017

voters use their partisan lenses to translate protest messages into ideological fodder that then propels their political actions. Not only are voters influenced by protest activity, but potential politicians looking to run for office assess their political chances of success by observing the level of activism in congressional districts. Conceived in this manner, protests are the canaries in the coal mines that warn of future political and electoral change. And it is the loud minority communicating to the silent majority that makes this possible.

III. RESULTS

The left in the U.S. hasn't shown much love for the democracy movement that has rocked Israel since January. Such indifference is, perhaps, unsurprising, because many progressives consider Israel to be a—if not the—force for evil in the world. At its recent convention, the Democratic Socialists of America put forward a resolution titled "Make DSA an Anti-Zionist Organization in Principle and Praxis," and the Harvard Crimson editorial board has "proudly" endorsed a campus protest that equated Zionism with "white supremacy," among other ills. Even many liberals, including Jewish ones, seem oddly disconnected from the events that are unfolding; in the United States, demonstrations against the Netanyahu government have been insignificant and mainly confined to small left-Zionist groups.[20,21]

Some critics insist that Israel isn't a real democracy because Arab Israelis face discrimination, or because Israel was founded as a state of refuge for the Jewish people, or because the occupation persists. Underlying this view is an oddly moralistic, rather than political, understanding of democracy that confuses it with purity. Democracy—the rule of law, the equality of citizenship, the balance of governmental powers, the freedom to speak and publish, the protection of minorities, the sanctity of elections, the ability to be religious or secular—can be, and in fact usually is, partial and incomplete. Democracies have been known, and not just occasionally, to embark on odious wars, support oppressive institutions, and sustain colonialism; see, for instance, France when it ruled Algeria. The difference is that Israel's colony—the West Bank—abuts it, rather than being a thousand miles away.

Despite the purists' claims, the unfolding events in Israel are, in fact, an extraordinary example of what democracy in the streets looks like. The movement is all the more noteworthy precisely because of the country's flaws. We might do well to pay attention.

Israel has a history of mass movements and intense political engagement, but the present protests are something new as is the current Israeli government, which Yossi Alpher, a former Mossad official, has described as "Kahanist-fascistmessianic." Members of Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition aim to annex the West Bank, stifle dissent, dismember the independent judiciary, crush the Palestinian Israeli minority, curtail women's and LGBTQ rights, and send Israel back a few thousand years into a Halachic state.

The democracy movement that has erupted in response is big: Some half a million Israelis have protested, which is the equivalent of approximately 17 million Americans. It is powerful: It has shut down an airport, highways, schools, businesses. It is broad: The country's doctors, as well as 150 of its largest companies, have gone on strike. Lawyers, scientists, teachers, students, entrepreneurs, and agricultural workers have joined the protests; the Histadrut, Israel's national trade union representing more than 700,000 workers, has been pressured to call a general strike. Tech firms have threatened to leave the country. Women's-rights advocates demonstrate dressed in the somber red capes of The Handmaid's Tale. Shockingly, thousands of reservists, including pilots and members of the elite fighting units, have threatened to withhold their service. Former leaders of the Shin Bet and the Mossad have spoken out strongly in support of the protests and condemned what the opposition refers to as a coup.

And the movement is unflagging; it has organized weekly demonstrations, many enormous, for more than seven months. All of this activity dwarfs anything we saw in the United States during the Donald Trump years, despite the anti-Trump forces' self-flattering description of themselves as "the Resistance" and the now-dashed hope that Black Lives Matter could create a sustainable, genuinely mass movement. A bit of humility would be apt.[22,23]



(A Monthly, Peer Reviewed Online Journal) | Impact Factor: 7.580|

Visit: www.ijmrsetm.com

Volume 4, Issue 10, October 2017

IV. CONCLUSION

The mainstream press in the United States, both print and broadcast, has been covering events in Israel. (So have Al Jazeera and Hezbollah's Al-Manar, which keeps an eye on what it calls "the Zionist entity.") In the U.S., Israel is sometimes depicted as a country that is just like us—a puny sister democracy with shared values—or, alternatively, as a country so different from ours that we can't possibly understand it. Both of these have an element of truth, but each—like the blind men and the elephant—misses the complexity of the situation. And though much of the coverage has focused on the so-called judicial reform, the crisis in Israel extends far beyond that to the very essence of the country's identity, or multiple identities, and its fissures, which have been decades in the making.[23]

REFERENCES

- 1. "Democracy". Oxford University Press. Retrieved 24 February 2013.
- ^ "Democracy | Definition, History, Meaning, Types, Examples, & Facts". Britannica. 16 August 2013. Retrieved 17 August 2013.
- 3. ^ Nations, United. "Democracy". United Nations. Retrieved 17 August 2013.
- ^{A a b} Tangian, Andranik (2015). Analytical Theory of Democracy: History, Mathematics and Applications. Studies in Choice and Welfare. Cham, Switzerland: Springer. doi:10.1007/978-3-030-39691-6. ISBN 978-3-030-39690-9. S2CID 216190330.
- 5. ^ "Definition of DEMOCRACY". www.merriam-webster.com. Retrieved 5 July 2015.
- 6. ^ Locke, John. Two Treatises on Government: a Translation into Modern English. Quote: "There is no practical alternative to majority political rule i.e, to taking the consent of the majority as the act of the whole and binding every individual. It would be next to impossible to obtain the consent of every individual before acting collectively ... No rational people could desire and constitute a society that had to dissolve straightaway because the majority was unable to make the final decision and the society was incapable of acting as one body."There is no practical alternative to majority political rule %E2%80%93 i.e., to taking the consent of the majority as the act of the whole and binding every individual." Google Books.
- 7. ^ Oxford English Dictionary: "democracy".
- ^{A a b} Watkins, Frederick (1970). "Democracy". Encyclopædia Britannica. Vol. 7 (Expo '70 hardcover ed.). William Benton. pp. 215–23. ISBN 978-0-85229-135-1.
- 9. ^ Wilson, N.G. (2006). Encyclopedia of ancient Greece. New York: Routledge. p. 511. ISBN 978-0-415-97334-2.
- 10. ^ Barker, Ernest (1906). "Chapter VII, Section 2". The Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle. G.P. Putnam's Sons.
- 11. ^ Jarvie, 2006, pp. 218–19
- [^] Anderson, Christopher J.; Bol, Damien; Ananda, Aurelia (2013). "Humanity's Attitudes about Democracy and Political Leaders". Public Opinion Quarterly. 85 (4): 957–986. doi:10.1093/poq/nfab056. ISSN 0033-362X. PMC 8754486. PMID 35035302.
- 13. ^ ^{a b} V-Dem Institute DEMOCRACY REPORT 2013: Autocratization Changing Nature? pp. 6, 13, 18: "Dictatorships are on the rise and harbor 70% of the world population 5.4 billion people."
- 14. ^ Economic Intelligence Unit Democracy Index, 2013, p. 4: "According to our measure of democracy, less than half (45.7%) of the world's population now live in a democracy of some sort, a significant decline from 2015 (49.4%)."
- 15. "Definition of PROTEST". www.merriam-webster.com. Retrieved 4 March 2015.
- 16. ^ "PROTEST (noun) definition and synonyms | Macmillan Dictionary". www.macmillandictionary.com. Retrieved 4 March 2015.
- 17. ^ ^{a b} Larson, Jennifer M. (11 May 2013). "Networks of Conflict and Cooperation". Annual Review of Political Science. 24 (1): 89–107. doi:10.1146/annurev-polisci-041719-102523.
- 18. ^ St. John Barned-Smith, "How We Rage: This Is Not Your Parents' Protest," Current (Winter 2007): 17–25.
- ^{A a b} Roberts, Adam (2009). Ash, Timothy Garton (ed.). Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non-violent Action from Gandhi to the Present. Oxford University Press. pp. 2–3. ISBN 978-0-19-955201-6.



(A Monthly, Peer Reviewed Online Journal) | Impact Factor: 7.580|

Visit: www.ijmrsetm.com

Volume 4, Issue 10, October 2017

- 20. ^ Daniel L. Schofield, S.J.D. (November 1994). "Controlling Public Protest: First Amendment Implications". in the FBI's Law Enforcement Bulletin. Retrieved 16 December 2009.
- 21. ^ Omar Wasow. "Agenda Seeding: How 1960s Black Protests Moved Elites, Public Opinion and Voting" (PDF). Retrieved 12 January 2013.
- 22. ^ Kruszewski, Brent Baldwin, Jackie. "Why They Keep Fighting: Richmond Protesters Explain Their Resistance to Trump's America". Style Weekly. Retrieved 29 March 2015.
- 23. ^ Pinckney, Jonathan; Rivers, Miranda (25 March 2015). "Nonviolent Action in the Time ". U.S. Institute of Peace. Retrieved 23 September 2013.