

THEORY OF PROTESTS AND ANALYSING LEADERLESS PROTESTS WITH A SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON THE RECENT DELHI PROTESTS

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Abstract

Social movements and protests are a fundamental right of the citizens in any democracy. The underlying concept of protests is to disrupt the status quo to draw attention of the concerned authorities towards their cause and it is facilitated by a network of communication which helps it transmit its 'message' to the public at large. In the era of modern democracies, the concept of leaderless resistance or mass protest is emerging as a new trend. Protests across the world namely The Black Lives Matter protests, Hong Kong democracy protests, Indonesian protests against a bill criminalising extramarital sex and protests in India against the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019; these are/were leaderless at large. The scope of this research is purely sociological. My research includes understanding the themes of protests and different categories of the protests classified by the sociologists. This paper explains the many facets of 'leaderlessness' and importance of communication and coordination of logistics in such protests. Using secondary media sources, I have analysed the Anti-CAA protests in Delhi on the lines of its effectiveness, impact and success by evaluating its various facets. This paper proposes that the emergence of 'phantom cells', lack of a leadership to steer the protest in a positive way and presence of various self-acclaimed leaders, led to the disintegration of the people from the protest and it became ineffective and wasn't successful.

Keywords: Protest, Leaderless, Communication, Phantom Cells, Ineffective

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INTRODUCTION

Article 19(1)(a) of the Indian Constitution gives the citizens of India the right to freedom of expression and Article 19(1)(b) of the Indian Constitution gives citizens the right to peaceful assembly without arms. These two articles act as a joint force in ensuring that social movements and protests are a fundamental right of the Indian citizens. It was reiterated by the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in *Re: Ramlila Maidan Incident v. Home Secretary, Union of India & Others*¹.

Recently a protest wave swept across the world which saw groups of citizens taking to streets and demanding whatever is theirs. This included the Black Lives Matter protests across the world, Hong Kong democracy protests, Indonesian protests against a bill criminalising extramarital sex and protests in India against the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019. All these protest movements were leaderless at large.

A 'model' protest site in a place in Delhi called Shaheen Bagh came up which garnered support from all across the country. 'Mini Shaheen Baghs' were set up all across India.² However, the protests in India lost their vigour quickly and were disintegrated and this was credited to reckless statements made by people present at a protest site and a lack of a leader or a platoon of leaders who could control such incidents. In this paper, I seek to understand the concept of 'leaderless movements' in-depth and present a sociological perspective of such movements.

METHODOLOGY

The scope of my research is purely sociological. My research delves into understanding protests and different categories the protests have been classified into. This part of my research is purely based on classifications done by sociologists and I have referred to their studies. Then the research goes into analysing leaderless protests, the concept of a protest leader and communication effectiveness for which I have referred to various studies. I have also cited sociologists, political scientists and given examples of different protests around the world to explain the many facets of 'leaderlessness' and importance of communication. Then

¹ Re-Ramlila Maidan Incident Dt ... vs Home Secretary And Ors on 23 February, 2012, Available at: <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/17021567/> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

² Sharp upsurge in Shaheen Bagh model; 291 protest sites emerge across India in 60 days: MHA to states, Available at: <https://www.timesnownews.com/india/article/sharp-upsurge-in-shaheen-bagh-model-291-protest-sites-emerge-across-india-in-60-days-mha-to-states/562131> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

I have established the facts of the situation of the Anti-CAA Delhi protests using secondary media sources and also, I have analysed the Anti-CAA protests in Delhi on the lines of its effectiveness, impact and success by evaluating its various facets.

UNDERSTANDING PROTESTS

Protests are movements by the masses aimed at bringing about a change in society and can be concerned about a variety of issues from human rights to euthanasia. The basic concept underlying protests is to disrupt the status quo to draw attention of the concerned authority(ies) towards their cause and it is facilitated by a network of communication which helps it transmit its 'message' to the public at large.

Protests can be classified under various heads. The most basic classification could be on the basis of duration. This classification was given by Bert Klandermans. Some protests are short-lived due to various factors. Even the goal can contribute to a protest being short term. This happens if the demands of the masses are met promptly. For example, protest against setting up of a factory in a residential area.³ Some protests are long-lived. This happens when there is a lack of communication between concerned authorities and the protesters and due to this the demands are not met or a compromise is not reached at. Most protests are long-lived. For example, the protests in Poland against the nation's constitutional court's decision which restricted abortions in the country.⁴ However, this classification is largely relative in nature. There is no bar above which a protest is classified as long-lived.⁵

Another classification could be whether the movement is general, specific or expressive as given by Herbert Blumer. General Social movements are the ones which aim for a cultural drift in the society in general. For example, movements aiming for a change in status of women. Specific social movements have a crystal-clear objective and have a well-defined organisational structure. For example, protest against extradition bills in Hong Kong.⁶ Expressive social movements don't seek to change social order rather are concerned with

³ People protest against factories in residential area, Available at: <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/32144-people-protest-against-factories-in-residential-area> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

⁴ Masha Gessen, *The Abortion Protests in Poland Are Starting to Feel Like a Revolution*, THE NEW YORKER, Available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/the-abortion-protests-in-poland-are-starting-to-feel-like-a-revolution> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

⁵ KATHY S. STOLLEY, *THE BASICS OF SOCIOLOGY* (2005).

⁶ Anti-extradition Movement, HONG KONG FREE PRESS HKFP, Available at: <https://hongkongfp.com/anti-extradition-movement/> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

influencing personalities of the people involved much like fashion movements.⁷

Rudolf Heberle has also classified social movements into 3 categories. The first category is the 'movement of limited goals'. These movements have a very restricted set of goals and due to that they don't attract a large crowd. He defines such movements as protests. However, he feels that these movements can also acquire the characteristic of mass movements when they are concerned for the rights of a large group. For example, the Black Lives Matter movement transformed from a protest to a mass movement. The second category Heberle talks about is a 'movement aiming at comprehensive and fundamental change'. For example, the movement in Turkey on violence against women. Such a movement aims to bring a change in the fundamental thinking of the society. It transcends boundaries of nation states. These are true mass movements. He also describes another type of social movement: 'socio-psychological types'. In such movements, participants recognise with the fellowship, the charisma of the leader or there can also be a utilitarian association for individual interests. For example, religious movements.⁸

Neil J. Smelser has categorised social movements in 2 categories – 'norm-oriented' and 'value-oriented'. Norm oriented movements consists of action which has been mobilised in the name of a general belief which aims to reconstitute norms. For example, protests against the new farm laws in India. Value oriented movements consist of action which has been mobilised in the name of a general belief which aims at reconstitutions of values. For example, the Black Lives Matter protests aim to change the systemic racism embedded in the minds of the society.⁹

Joseph R. Gusfield has also classified social movements on 2 bases. First classification is between – directed and undirected movements. This is very similar to the classification by Hans Blumer mentioned above. Undirected social movements are similar to General social movements and Directed social movements are similar to Specific social movements. The second classification is on the basis of goals. Under such basis the movements can be categorised into 2 categories. Public policy oriented movement and private persuasion

⁷ STOLLEY, *Supra* note 5.

⁸ Sujata Patel, Biswajit Ghosh & Jyotiprasad Chatterjee, *14963812761.TextModule3.pdf*, in *TYPOLOGIES OF SOCIAL MOVEMENT* (SM03 ed.), Available at: http://epgp.inflibnet.ac.in/epgpdata/uploads/epgp_content/S000033SO/P001493/M017963/ET/14963812761.TextModule3.pdf (Accessed on: Dec 14, 2020).

⁹ *Ibid.*

oriented movement. Public policy oriented movements are the ones which aim to bring changes in policies in government or public institutions. Private persuasion oriented movements focus on persuading individuals in positions of change.¹⁰

David Aberle has classified social movements on the basis of area of change and amount of change. Area of change can be an individual or a supra-individual level and the amount of change can be partial or complete. Taking these two bases into account, Aberle classified social movements into 4 types viz. Redemptive, Alternative, Reformatory and Transformative. While redemptive movements seek a complete change in individuals, alternative movements seek a partial change in individuals. Reformatory movements focus on a partial change at the supra-individual level, while transformative movements focus on full change at the supra-individual level.¹¹

Another basis on which the protests could be classified as is on the basis of leadership. Protests can be leaderless or with a leader. Leader doesn't need to necessarily be an individual. It could also be a decentralised leadership in segments or different geographical areas. This results in a battery of leaders. However, there is a problem with defining someone as a 'leader' which will be explored further.

UNDERSTANDING LEADERLESS PROTESTS

Louis Beam, a white supremacist, originally popularised the concept of leaderless resistance in 1983 and 1992 in the articles he wrote. He developed this concept of leaderless resistance as a way to fight a government in power. He attributed it to Colonel Ulius Louis Amoss who was fearful of a communist takeover of the USA in the 1960s.¹²

Beam talked about convincing similar minded individuals to organise into decentralized cells to fuel resistance. He called this 'phantom cell'. Phantom cells are small groups of people who don't have any central command centre. They operate due to persuasion of their ideology. The caveat to this is that the phantom cells must be fully aware that what they are doing coincides with the thinking of the movement. Beam seems convinced about this as he assumes that because people of the movement share the same ideology their actions will

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ STOLLEY, *supra* note 5.

¹² Simson L. Garfinkel, *Leaderless resistance today*, FIRST MONDAY, ISSN 1396-0466 (2003), Available at: <https://journals.uic.edu/ojs/index.php/fm/article/download/1040/961?inline=1> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

always coincide with the group ideology. It doesn't factor the individual motivations of people. According to Beam, the entire purpose of phantom cells is to reach the objective of the movement regardless of the means. He has advocated that the ideology of the movement is to be cultivated in a certain way that people react to events through resistance and sabotage.¹³

Before discussing how have leaderless movements evolved in modern times, it is important to understand who can be called a leader? Leader is essentially a perceived identity. The three main attributes of a protest leader are visibility, mobilizing ability and professionalization. Visibility seeks to determine as to what extent is the leader perceived to be the face of the protest. This factor looks into the management of symbolic resources as well which include Facebook posts, slogans, signs, placards, etc. Mobilizing ability takes into account the acumen of a leader to mobilize people to support his cause of action. It need not be a direct mobilization. It can also be that leader makes the first move and his follows in turn mobilize other people. This is done through various platforms like TV or radio shows, Social media, etc. Professionalization includes distancing oneself from the ordinary crowd and being able to dictate behaviour and lead the protest for a long term.¹⁴

This idea of leaderless resistance has evolved in a different way in the era of modern democracies. In modern democracies, the ideology of the protest, even though is the centre stage, is not that prominent across the decentralised factions of the protest. In this era of globalised world when a mass protest takes place, it usually transcends global boundaries and individual ideologies unique to certain nationalities or certain societies infuse with the overall objective of the protest. This could be seen in the Black Lives Matter protest. In the UK, the hatred against slavery infused with the idea of respect for rights of black people and historical figures such as Winston Churchill were also criticised.¹⁵

The first and foremost thing absolutely crucial to the success of any protest is communication. The ideas and the ideology and the overall message of the protestors must be the same and to ensure that communication is necessary. Where to gather? Where to march? When to protest? Are all questions whose answers can be efficiently communicated through

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ LISA MUELLER, *POLITICAL PROTEST IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICA* (1 ed. 2018), Available at: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/identifier/9781108529143/type/book> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

¹⁵ Why was Churchill's statue defaced? BBC NEWS, Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/uk-england-london-52972531> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

social media? But this communication becomes absolutely important in the case of leaderless protests. In an interview given to the Atlantic, an anonymous protestor in Hong Kong said that they use Airdrop and Telegram to communicate between protestors so that they know where the police have been deployed and due to that they are able to plan appropriately.^{16,17} There also needs to be communication of plans and coordination of logistics. In a study done by Wired.com it was found that in the Black Lives Matter Movement - Vine, Instagram, Twitter, Telegram, WhatsApp and Facebook were used to communicate ideas and information which is a drastically different situation from when the protest first started in 1950s.¹⁸

There also needs to be communication of plans and coordination of logistics. Communication of ideas, especially through social media these days helps to gain support in the protest from no affected communities as well who understand what the communities are going through. The need to send a message to the protestor as to what the protest aims to do and how it aims to achieve goals is important to synchronise the efforts and prevent certain 'phantom cells' to take over the protest and create a havoc and undermine the ideology and the change that the protest aims to achieve. For example, certain groups used cocktail bombs in Black Lives Matter protest in various US States which helped in racist leaders naming them as terrorists. Some people vandalised shops which led to protestors at large, including those protesting peacefully, being labelled as looters.¹⁹ Hence, to prevent such labelling of the protests it is imperative to maintain a pristine flow of communication. There is also always a risk of rumours spreading which hinders the progress of these movements.

Paolo Gerbaudo, a political sociologist has stated that though the concept of 'leaderless' protests is not new and has been there since quite a long time but in these days the success of such protests these days can largely be credited to social media. Social media makes such

¹⁶ Yasmeen Serhan, *The Common Element Uniting Worldwide Protests*, THE ATLANTIC (2019), Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/11/leaderless-protests-around-world/602194/> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

¹⁷ A. B. C. News, *How tech has fueled a "leaderless protest" in Hong Kong*, ABC NEWS, Available at: <https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/tech-fueled-leaderless-protest-hong-kong/story?id=66158665> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

¹⁸ How Black Lives Matter Uses Social Media to Fight the Power, WIRED, Available at: <https://www.wired.com/2015/10/how-black-lives-matter-uses-social-media-to-fight-the-power/> (Accessed on: Dec 14, 2020).

¹⁹ CGTN, *U.S. President calls Black Lives Matter protesters "looters" and "anarchists"* (2020), Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bDGKclh5C_g (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

protests much difficult to repress and enables ‘leaderlessness’ as all the ideas and directions of the protests that one thinks will come from the leader are available on the social media platforms to see and contribute to.²⁰

The importance of control over the narrative is important for protestors as these days whatever the media presents is taken as truth. Hence there needs to be, first, a control over the message to protestors stating clearly the fundamentals of the protest as to the Why’s, How’s, What’s and When’s, and; second, a control over the message to the media so that the real concern of the protests can reach the public and not some narratives by a self-appointed spokesperson. For example, during the farmer protests happening these days attempts have been made to change the narrative and label protestors as *Khalistanis* as some micro groups present in the protests and even abroad have raised *Khalistan* slogans and flags. However, the *Bharatiya Kisan Union*, which is leading the protest, distanced itself from such groups.²¹

This is where the role of a centralised control centre comes into play as leaderless protests in the modern world are essentially an embodiment of the decentralised decision-making process of an organisation. In such organisations it is to be noted that even though here is decentralization at a large scale but the ultimate direction of the company is still in the hands of top management who help the organisation to stay within the contours of its strategy which isn’t the case in many protests. For example, in many states of the USA the Black Lives Matter protests got out of control and clashes happened.²²

Any leadership is essential so that the objectives of the protest can be properly communicated and presence of the authority figure also ensures compliance and this has been reiterated by Civil rights scholar, Clayborne Carson. He studied the recent Black Rights Matter Protests and also saw how the protests got out of control in many regions. He notes that to prevent losing control over the protests it is imperative that goals are made clear by an articulate spokesperson. The one major disadvantage that arises with these leaderless protests is that when there is outrage of the accumulated public there is no one to steer it in a positive way or

²⁰ Serhan, *Supra* note 16.

²¹ Farmers’ Protest: Despite Rightwing Propaganda, “Khalistani” Angle Finds Little Traction, , THE WIRE, Available at: <https://thewire.in/agriculture/farmers-protest-despite-rightwing-propaganda-khalistani-angle-finds-little-traction> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

²² Peter Jamison, *In Gettysburg, Trump supporters clash with Black Lives Matter protesters as election nears*, WASHINGTON POST, Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2020/10/26/gettysburg-trump-black-lives-matter-clashes/> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

the nonviolent way and there is always a possibility of a crowd turning violent.²³

The very strength of ‘leaderless protests’ is that they are decentralised and the protests are spontaneous but this is also its Achilles heel. The authorities against whom the protest is happening take the excuse of out-of-hand law and order situation and use force to suppress the protest which results in more violence and deviation from the goals of the protest. Clayborne Carson also stresses upon the fact that there needs to be some central leadership or a control centre to monitor the activities. He says this because there is always a chance that a minority of the protestors or even imposters may use tactics not endorsed by the protest in general.²⁴

It is common for authorities to crackdown on any accumulated crowd and a presence of a leader ensures a peaceful negotiation of a protest site or even a peaceful dispersal. However, lack of leader may induce tensions and ultimately violence. This is not desirable as the non-violent nature of the protests is the only thing that ensures longevity of these protests. Hence the ‘Leaderless’ nature of these protests inherently a double-edged sword.²⁵

I have examined the major importance, advantages and disadvantages of the system of communication of the leaderless protests and the importance of the leader. There are many other advantages. The leaderless protests ensure better local management as the local protestors know the area better. The protests also help fulfil the social needs of the persons involved and they get a sense of contribution. However, there are some other disadvantages as well which include ‘too much decentralisation’ as this leads to deviance from the overall strategy and ideas which may lead to complete disintegration.

PROTESTS IN DELHI

Protests in Delhi were primarily against the passing of Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), 2019 in the parliament. The Citizenship Amendment Act was passed in the parliament on 11th December and the protests started from 12th December. The protests were largely restricted to two university campuses: Jamia Milia Islamia and the Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi. To control the protests Delhi Police was posted outside campuses and that eventually led to

²³ Stanford University, *Leaderless protest is a strength and weakness*, STANFORD NEWS (2020), Available at: <https://news.stanford.edu/2020/06/04/leaderless-protest-strength-weakness/> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

scuffle between the police and the protestors at the JMI campus where bullets were fired. This happened on 15th December, 2019.^{26,27} The protestors alleged that police forcibly came into the campus and beat up the students however, the police in their official response claimed that the violence was initiated from the protestors' side and they razed buses in the capital²⁸. This was a classic case of a protest resulting in violence. There was no 'leader' of this 'protest' so to say.

This led to people coming to protest against both CAA and The JMI incident at Shaheen Bagh in Delhi on a regularly used and a very busy road which connected Delhi to Noida (UP). The protestors at Shaheen Bagh had only one demand which was to repeal the CAA. They weren't ready to come to the negotiation table and engage in a compromise with the government.²⁹

The protest site started to take its shape slowly. A stage was made, tents were put up, sound system was arranged, medical desks³⁰ and a library³¹ were set up and even blankets were arranged. People started coming from various areas. The majority of people present at the protest included women and children. A tricolour was put up and graffities were made³². Certain influential leaders came to the site and delivered speeches on a variety of issues including Ram Mandir and triple talaq which were listened to by children as well and petitions were filed in Delhi HC concerning how the human rights of children would be

²⁶ Sidharth Ravi, *Anti-Citizenship Act protests: violence hits Delhi, over 50 injured*, THE HINDU, December 15, 2019, Available at: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/police-enter-jamia-millia-islamia-campus-in-delhi-as-anti-citizenship-act-protest-turns-violent/article30312133.ece> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

²⁷ Staff Reporter, *After denials, police admit they did open fire on December 15 during anti-CAA protests*, THE HINDU, January 6, 2020, Available at: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/after-denials-police-admit-they-did-open-fire-on-december-15/article30489076.ece> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

²⁸ Violence rocks south Delhi during anti-citizenship law protest, buses torched, nearly 60 injured - The Economic Times, Available at: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/citizenship-act-protest-violence-arson-in-south-delhi-buses-torched/articleshow/72681998.cms?from=mdr> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

²⁹ WHAT IS SHAHEEN BAGH PROTEST, BUSINESS STANDARD INDIA, Available at: <https://www.business-standard.com/about/what-is-shaheen-bagh-protest> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

³⁰ Fatima Khan, *This is how Shaheen Bagh plans to continue its anti-CAA protest despite coronavirus scare*, THE PRINT (2020), Available at: <https://theprint.in/india/this-is-how-shaheen-bagh-plans-to-continue-its-anti-cao-protest-despite-coronavirus-scare/383062/> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

³¹ Watch | Why Has a Library Been Set Up At the Protest Site in Shaheen Bagh?, THE WIRE, Available at: <https://thewire.in/books/watch-shaheen-bagh-library> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

³² WHAT IS SHAHEEN BAGH PROTEST, *Supra* note 29.

affected listening to polarizing speeches³³. Many celebrities supported the protests through social media.^{34,35} A four-month-old child also died at the protest and this led to state government questioning as to why such a young child was present on the protest site.³⁶

Moreover, there was no specified leader at the protest who could direct the protest to stay on course and fight for its real issue. As discussed earlier, this was both strength and a weakness. This problem surfaced when the Supreme Court appointed mediators came to the protest site to make peace and negotiate to empty the road but they were unable to communicate as there was no one to understand them and take any action as such.³⁷

Adding to this, the protest wasn't decentralised as such but separate branches of this protest tried to set themselves up in different parts of the country³⁸ but were largely unsuccessful.

Some parallel protests kept on continuing. For example, JNU students gathered around the Delhi Police HQ late at night to protest against police action against the violent mobs at JMI campus.³⁹ Some protests also happened in Lucknow⁴⁰, Ludhiana⁴¹ and Bangalore⁴² but these

³³ Rights Body Flags Shaheen Bagh Protest Over "Mental Trauma" To Children, , NDTV.COM , Available at: <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/caa-protest-shaheen-bagh-ncpr-flags-shaheen-bagh-protest-over-mental-trauma-to-children-2167855> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

³⁴ JNU violence: Swara Bhasker, Taapsee Pannu condemn the attack, THE HINDU, January 6, 2020, Available at: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/jnu-violence-swara-bhasker-taapsee-pannu-condemn-the-attack/article30491194.ece> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

³⁵ Press Trust of India, *Agitations continue in the city on New Year's Day; Swara Bhaskar attends protest at Jamia*, THE HINDU, January 2, 2020, Available at: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/agitations-continue-in-the-city-on-new-years-day-swara-bhaskar-attends-protest-at-jamia/article30454940.ece> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

³⁶ Prathma Sharma, "Can a four-month-old go to protest at Shaheen Bagh?": SC on infant's death, MINT (2020), Available at: <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/-can-a-four-month-old-go-to-protest-at-shaheen-bagh-sc-on-infant-s-death-11581341998963.html> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

³⁷ Staff Reporter, *Mediators continue talks with Shaheen Bagh protesters*, THE HINDU, February 20, 2020, Available at: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/court-appointed-interlocutor-continue-to-speak-to-protesters-at-shaheen-bagh/article30870826.ece> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

³⁸ Sharp upsurge in Shaheen Bagh model; 291 protest sites emerge across India in 60 days, *Supra* note 2.

³⁹ JNU news: Students gather outside Delhi Police headquarters, seek action | Delhi News - Times of India, , THE TIMES OF INDIA, Available at: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/students-gather-outside-police-hq-seek-action/articleshow/73114129.cms> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

⁴⁰ Tribune News Service, *Lucknow's Ghanta Ghar Park turns into Shaheen Bagh*, TRIBUNEINDIA NEWS SERVICE, Available at: <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/lucknow's-ghanta-ghar-park-turns-into-shaheen-bagh-28267> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

⁴¹ Ludhiana: At this 'Shaheen Bagh' where peace is key, cops keep an eye on every speech, , THE INDIAN EXPRESS (2020), Available at: <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/ludhiana/ludhiana-at-this-shaheen-bagh-where-peace-is-key-cops-keep-an-eye-on-every-speech-6293390/> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

are out of the scope of the study as the study focuses on protests in Delhi.

The protests continued but after failure of communication of issues and lack of management the protests disintegrated. The number of people at the sites reduced. With the advent of COVID-19, the protestors reduced substantially and at a time only 5 people sat at the site with slippers and footwear kept to symbolise support. On March 24th, the protest site was cleared out and the protest essentially ended.⁴³

ANALYSING THE DELHI PROTESTS

The analysis should be done from the context of coherence of communication and 'leaderslessness'. For the purposes of this analysis the referred protests in Delhi can be sorted into three main sub-events. The first one was the protest in the campuses of universities. It was based on a robust communication system. Mobilization of students happened due to people communicating and organising with others on WhatsApp groups, telegram, etc. Messages were passed on to protestors through loud speakers, slogans and speeches. The idea of protest was communicated but there was no concrete leadership to ensure compliance. The lack of leadership resulted in lack of control over the crowd and that led to an unforeseen chain of events of December 15, 2019.⁴⁴ Also, the communication towards the society, in general, through mainstream media was not monitored and self-appointed spokespersons who appeared on TV Channels didn't really contribute to the cause of the movement. Disruption of public life and destruction of public and private property didn't help the movement to garner the public sympathy.

The second sub-event which gained a major impetus in publicity was the protest in Shaheen Bagh. It presents a completely different case. If we look at it from the point of view of leadership, there was practically no leadership and hence the dissemination of ideas from a central figure was not possible. This led to the problem of a number of interpretations of the

⁴² 'Won't Budge': A Shaheen Bagh Awakens at Bengaluru's Bilal Bagh, Available at: <https://www.thequint.com/news/india/indefinite-protest-against-kaa-nrc-by-blurus-bilal-bagh-women> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

⁴³ Hemani Bhandari, *Shaheen Bagh protest site cleared by Delhi Police. 9 held*, THE HINDU, March 24, 2020, Available at: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/shaheen-bagh-protest-site-cleared-by-delhi-police/article31148867.ece> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

⁴⁴ Ravi, *Supra* note 26.

central idea being presented to the public.^{45,46,47} Many people feared that their citizenship was under threat and hence they joined the protest. The lack of a concrete central message/theme is always detrimental. This also leads us to conclude that communication to protestors was not effective. To further illustrate, many influential student leaders gave speeches on different topics at the protest site but there was no coherence and similarity in ideas of different individuals. It felt as if the messages weren't synchronised with the basic idea. This can be seen by the fact that a speech was given by Sharjeel Imam on 16th January, 2020 which conveyed the message of doing a *chakka jam* at the chicken neck, which is the narrow strip of land of West Bengal which connects it to Assam, to cut off that region.⁴⁸ That speech was circulated widely and this speech led to the Shaheen Bagh protest loses a part of its credibility. Following this incident Shaheen Bagh protestors gave out an official statement dissociating themselves from the speech but the damage was done.⁴⁹ However, this makes one curious that an official statement on behalf of protestors would require some centralisation, or someone speaking on behalf of the protestors at large but this still didn't happen. This brings us to the point that the communication with media to control the narrative was also not done and this can also be credited to a lack of leadership. The general public who viewed the protests from far, perceived the leaders who spoke for Shaheen Bagh to be politically motivated be it Mani Shankar Aiyar⁵⁰, Waris Pathan⁵¹, Harsh Mander⁵² and

⁴⁵ Puja Changoiwala, *India's Muslims Are Terrified of Being Deported*, FOREIGN POLICY, Available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/02/21/india-muslims-deported-terrified-citizenship-amendment-act-caa/> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

⁴⁶ Citizenship Amendment Bill: India's new "anti-Muslim" law explained, BBC NEWS, December 11, 2019, Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-50670393> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

⁴⁷ ANI, *No threat to citizenship of any Indian Muslim or citizen due to CAA: Naqvi*, BUSINESS STANDARD INDIA, December 18, 2019, Available at: https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/no-threat-to-citizenship-of-any-indian-muslim-or-citizen-due-to-caa-naqvi-119121801648_1.html (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

⁴⁸ Amanpreet Kaur New Delhi January 29, 2020UPDATED: January 29 & 2020 23:19 Ist, *Sharjeel Imam: The man who "wanted to cut off" Assam from India*, INDIA TODAY, Available at: <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/sharjeel-imam-the-man-who-wanted-to-cut-off-assam-from-india-1641380-2020-01-29> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

⁴⁹ Web Desk New India Today, *No sole organiser of Shaheen Bagh: Protestors issue statement over Sharjeel Imam row*, INDIA TODAY, Available at: <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/shaheen-bagh-sharjeel-imam-organiser-protest-assam-agitate-video-1640170-2020-01-25> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

⁵⁰ Munish Ch et al., *Congress leader Mani Shankar Aiyar visits Shaheen Bagh, creates row with "kaatil" remark*, INDIA TODAY, Available at: <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/congress-leader-mani-shankar-aiyar-visits-shaheen-bagh-creates-row-with-kaatil-remark-1636863-2020-01-14> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

⁵¹ As Bluster Blows Up, AIMIM's Waris Pathan Dials Back on "15 Crore vs 100" Rhetoric, THE WIRE, Available at: <https://thewire.in/communalism/waris-pathan-speech-aimim> (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

⁵² "Long live Constitution, long live love": Full speech of Harsh Mander, which govt says "incited" violence during anti-CAA protests - India News, Firstpost, FIRSTPOST (2020), Available at: <https://www.firstpost.com/india/long-live-constitution-long-live-love-full-speech-of-harsh-mander-which->

even certain others. The public felt so, due to the connections of these leaders to opposition parties and they were opposing CAA for the sake of opposition and not because they found anything wrong with it. Here also the protestors failed to control the narrative. Another thing they failed to control was certain 'phantom cells' within the crowd which led to riots erupting in certain parts of Delhi and a rise in communal tension. All these factors led to the disintegration of the people from the protest and it became ineffective.

The third sub-event was the protests happening parallel to Shaheen Bagh. Even though they were happening at important protest sites including the Aligarh Muslim University campus but these sites were overshadowed by Shaheen Bagh itself and couldn't gain traction, however, these sites witnessed a certain amount of local participation.

This series of protests, so to say, made sure to give India a trailer as to what Indians are capable of, if they decide to oppose a policy matter. These protests were covered in media houses worldwide and could have been utilised in a better way if the inadequacies were addressed.

CONCLUSION

Protests are an important element of a democracy and help to keep the government on its toes. When we see the history of protests, we see that this idea of protests or even leaderless protests is not new. This idea has been endorsed by the Father of our Nation himself who protested his way out of colonialism. Leaderless protest is something which is really fascinating as it makes us ponder that Is a leader really necessary? or If there is self-monitoring then can a leaderless protest actually be successful? Mahatma Gandhi was the leader or the face of the Independence movement and helped the movement in retaining its Non-violent character. Such an example makes a strong case in favour of having a leader. Whereas, the Anti-extradition bill protests in Hong Kong make a case in favour of leaderless protests as it was also successful (assuming the definition of a successful protest to be when the demands of the protestors are met or any intended impact is created). In the modern ages, the development of these 'protests' has been such that there is always an important role of communication infrastructure. Technology and social media have largely facilitated this. In the Indian context the protests in Delhi were truly leaderless and though there were certain

according-to-sg-tushar-mehta-incited-violence-during-anti-caa-protests-8121401.html (Accessed on: Dec 15, 2020).

influential people who addressed the public but they didn't possess the power to control actions of certain 'phantom cells' within the crowd nor did the crowd recognise them as their leader. These protests, even though continued for a long time, were largely unsuccessful as they failed to meet their goal and consequently, lost public sympathy. But they sure left a lasting impression on the minds of the whole population, at large.