**The power of protests**

**[Raina Iqbal](https://nation.com.pk/Columnist/raina-iqbal)**

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The repeal of the farmer laws comes as a blow to ‘Modi’s India’. In the “largest democracy in the world”, democracy has finally won. The farmer’s protest achieved what it relentlessly fought for; scrapping the three agriculture laws that put the farmers at the behest of a few big corporations that will threaten their livelihoods. Politics, conspiracies and isolated incidents of violence aside, this protest symbolises what a successful protest looks like. It symbolises what sheer determination and persistence can do. It symbolises the true essence of a democracy, where “we the people” stands before anything else. Most importantly, it comes as a lesson to those fighting for their rights around the world. To not give up, to keep fighting and to be ready to make sacrifices.

This article does not serve as an anarchy-sympathiser, nor does it wish to be labelled as “Khalistani”. It neither aims to glorify the use of violence to achieve a cause, nor to challenge the writ of the state with unreasonable demands. The goal is merely to highlight the power of nonviolent, democratic protests that are fought for the rights of a country’s citizens. Rights that are being violated or not granted by the state which is acting against the democratic principles it stands upon. The goal is also to challenge claims that are often made by sceptics who question the efficacy of protests. Sceptics who often discourage people from “taking it to the streets” and completely disregard the principle behind protesting.

[US slams Russia for not implementing Minsk agreements](https://nation.com.pk/03-Dec-2021/us-slams-russia-for-not-implementing-minsk-agreements)

History is marred with examples of protests that have failed, protests that succeeded and more importantly protests that shaped history in remarkable ways. In fact, protests have been studied by political scientists to analyse what makes them work and succeed. Harvard University researcher Erica Chenoweth found that non-violent protests are twice as likely to achieve their goals as compared to violent ones. Looking at the farmer’s protest, we look at what lessons can be learned from such a successful campaign. What is behind the power of these protests?

First, numbers matter. When practically every farmer from India’s big northern heartland states is on strike, it hurts the supply chain all the way up the political, social and economic ranks. The rally in September 2021 saw 500,000 farmers gathered in the state of Uttar Pradesh, the largest gathering yet. The strength of the protest reflects the severity of the cause. It also corresponds to the amount of attention the media will pay.

[Saudi Arabia allows Umrah pilgrims to stay up to 30 days](https://nation.com.pk/02-Dec-2021/saudi-arabia-allows-umrah-pilgrims-to-stay-up-to-30-days)

Second, persistence matters. The farmer’s protest lasted 365 days, which is a long time considering the conditions the protesters had to endure. In the middle of a pandemic, far from their home and lands, faced with the state’s wrath, the protesters persisted. Yet, one year may seem small compared to similar protests in history. The suffragette movement in the United States, where women fought for their right to vote, took nearly 100 years until the right was granted under the 14th amendment. Even then, gender equality is an issue the US faces even today, with women rights protests taking place every year in January. The civil rights movement, which challenged unjust laws that discriminated against African Americans, took several decades to formally have the laws changed. However, real equality remains elusive to this day, and the fight for racial equality continues. Whether through protests, trials or campaigns, the persistence remains. Closer to home, the independence movement in the subcontinent was largely a product of non-violent protests spanning over nearly a hundred years. The defiant resistance against the British colonial rule, which led to Pakistan’s independence, is another example of how persistence matters when protesting.

[Govt to increase duty on imported luxury items in mini budget](https://nation.com.pk/02-Dec-2021/govt-plans-to-increase-duty-on-imported-luxury-items-in-mini-budget)

Third, organisation matters. The farmer protest was well-organised, well-linked and well-funded both within India and abroad. Inside India, the overlap between the religious and agricultural groups in Punjab helped in financing the protests. The protest ‘camps’, driven by Sikh values of unity and support, provided ample food and shelter to protestors. Medical camps were set up to deal with the onset of extreme weather conditions and the relentless waves of COVID-19. Abroad, the Punjabi Sikh diaspora played a pivotal role in harbouring international attention to this issue. Charities like the Khalsa Aid International provided financial support and other organisations in the UK, US and Canada also chipped in. Mobilisation of the diaspora outside Indian embassies and consulates in various cities across the world, coupled with a united effort on social media helped in making the issue global. Soon, the whole world was talking about the farmer’s world and the Modi government was scrambling to control and manoeuvre the narrative. Here, the passion blended perfectly with planning and the pay-off was massive support from all over the world, from Greta Thunberg to Rihanna.

[Maryam Nawaz pauses political activities ahead of son's reception](https://nation.com.pk/02-Dec-2021/maryam-nawaz-pauses-political-activities-ahead-of-son-s-reception)

Fourth, there will be backlash. It is important to note that any protest challenging the unjust laws of the state will be faced with some form of resistance. This protest in particular was met with the severest form of resistance from the Modi regime. The BJP Government, keeping in line with its draconian demeanour, cracked down on the protests using extreme force and media manoeuvres. Hundreds of protestors have been injured or lost their lives. This is not a small number. It may be seen as the ‘cost’ of protesting but it must also be seen as the pinnacle of violence ensued by state authorities upon a largely peaceful protest. Additionally, the international attention sent the Indian foreign policy makers into a frenzy. Twitter wars were fought, official statements were propagated to discredit any world leader talking about the issue and even arrests were made for speaking up about the issue. Members of the BJP labelled protestors as ‘Khalistanis’ or separatists. Such tactics are a common reaction to protests. The aim is to remain steadfast in the fight against injustice.

[President Alvi promulgates Elections Reforms Bill 2021 into law](https://nation.com.pk/02-Dec-2021/president-alvi-promulgates-elections-reforms-bill-2021-into-law)

The idea is simple. Whether it is the student march that happened last week, or the Aurat March that takes place every year on International Women’s Day, these protests are being held in the hope that the voices of the marginalised are heard. They should not be discouraged or shot down because they lack numbers or organisation. Instead, they should be understood. By looking at these causes with an open mind, we may be able to see the passion behind them. For the power of such protests lies in the passion that fuels them.

As the great Munnu Bhai has said,

‘ho ni janda, karna painda ae

haq di khatir larna painda ae’

(It doesn’t just happen, it has to be done,

One has to fight for rights)