It is somewhere reassuring to see a continuum in the national outburst against enactment of CAA (linked with NRC) demonstrated by peaceful protests on streets across Indian cities by young students (the largest since the Emergency), civil activists, lawyers and public intellectuals. Any form of violence must be condoned.

However, peaceful protests should be viewed for what they represent: a battle against coercive means of state-authoritarianism, that seeks to normalize police-brutality in shutting up dissent of any form or kind; and, a conscious rejection of any law that appears to be ‘disciplinary’ in its classification or treatment of another, instilling feelings of communal hate while producing an environment of organized chaos for ‘new order’ to emerge.

One must emphasize how critical it is for the rising public conscience to execute civil resistance in a peaceful, non-violent manner to keep the momentum going. At the same time, it is crystal clear that the BJP government now, under a Modi-Shah duopoly, has lost its track by adopting the dark, showing how it doesn’t care about the economy, or the rising crime against women, or the exacerbating state of rural poverty/unemployment, or farmer distress.
The regime rather seems more interested in creating a national registration of (exclusionary) citizenship than have a national registration of those unemployed (as Yogendra Yadav said) or those in extremal states of malnourishment, or those suffering from abject poverty.

It cares about ruthlessly introducing a majoritarian rule by law that, wearing a communal cloak, aims to change the very idea of citizenship (to ‘statizenship’), have a uniform civil code (to follow this), and continue doing so through the establishment of a police state that knows ‘getting things done’ through a danda-raj.

As India wages a war with its own-self, the movement triggered by students across universities, in its finality, remains a fight for the Republic’s very survival. Bystanders, or those on the side, may do well to seize this moment by recognizing its vitality and support (enable) the movement peacefully.

As Pratap Bhanu Mehta rightly said, “We are in an insolent tyranny, whose hallmark is that it will take the calls for ordinary justice, decency and liberty as signs of ‘anti-national insurrection’. Its cause is served by portraying everything as disorder…”

We are governed by a state that enjoys the power to repress, subjugate and detain whoever it feels a ‘threat’. In a Kashmirification of India, tactically, being out on the streets leading peaceful demonstrations in multitude of thousands remains perhaps the only way to make the oppressors realize their own wrongs and misdoings (whether in Kashmir or anywhere else). Hopefully, this can be achieved by overturning a discriminatory NRC (+ CAA) combine.

What we need is a cohesive structure of social movements to build around the current resistance that can unify a singular dissenting force by narrative against the state’s oppression. Regional voices, including those part of worker-movements must find a centralizing national opposition, that is articulated through powers of strong oration subsequently gravitating towards better political representation.

So far, the national political opposition seems clueless and largely missing in action, and those within the Indian National Congress (including the likes of Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi..) have done very little to be able to present a unifying narrative for state-level protests (seen in states like Delhi, Bengal, Maharashtra etc.) to resonate for action at the very top.
In the 1970s, during the Emergency, a unifying oppositional architecture was evident with Jayaprakash Narayan and other leaders leading the fight against an oppressive Indira Gandhi regime by being able to include those affected by poor economic, social conditions (workers, farmers etc.).

The difference now is there is a lack of such form of public leadership (especially in the opposition) and which is further combined with an absolute breakdown of institutional order, including the majesty of the law’s apex body, the Supreme Court. The Court stood up then upholding the constitution’s basic structure and in protecting basic civic and political rights. For now, the court appears, sadly, to be compromised or subjugated to a great extent.

As vital institutions fail with a dissolution of civic-institutional morality, one can only hope that we can find a new voice through the current movement, which, in its sustenance, can establish a new normal restoring the hope of future generations in India’s ability to acknowledge (and live with) its own differences and refuse a violent politics of brutish majoritarianism. However, any form of violence will only allow the state to reinforce colonial laws like Section 144 to bury dissent. A long, peaceful march to non-violent resistance awaits (and needs to sustain itself).

WRITTEN BY
Deepanshu Mohan
Associate Professor of Economics & Director, Centre for New Economics Studies, O.P. Jindal Global University...