CHAPTER: 2

The Exposes: Reading Nonfictional Emergency literature

The first category of literature that I have taken up for examining the Emergency is that of ‘Creative Nonfiction’ or ‘literary or narrative nonfiction’. This primarily comprises of the non-fiction that came out post the Emergency and consists of exposés, prison diaries, commentaries, journalistic accounts and essays on the event. While I have taken up the fiction written on the event to analyse how it was perceived subsequently through the lens of creative imagination, it is equally important to study how it was viewed in the immediate context as well. This creative nonfiction provides an insight into the nature of an event most aspects of which are still not acknowledged officially as well as the reaction and perception of the people towards the Emergency and the people in power. To begin with, the term ‘creative nonfiction’ refers to ‘a genre of writing that uses literary styles and techniques to create factually accurate narratives.’ The editor of the journal Creative Nonfiction, Lee Gutkind, states that ‘The word “creative” refers simply to the use of literary craft in presenting nonfiction – that is, factually accurate prose about real people and events – in a compelling, vivid manner. To put it another way, creative nonfiction writers do not make things up; they make ideas and information that already exist more interesting and, often, more accessible’. The genre can be said to utilise conventions of fiction such as characterization, plot, point of view and dialogue to tell a personal story in the case of a memoir or prison diaries, literary journalism or political commentaries etc. The main points of emphasis in this genre would dominantly be those of truth, memory, structure, point of view and narrative space. According to Gutkind, ‘The essential point to acknowledge here is that there are lines – real demarcation points between fiction, which is or can be mostly imagination; traditional nonfiction (journalism and scholarship), which is mostly information; and creative nonfiction, which presents or treats information using the tools of the fiction writer while maintaining allegiance to fact’. Elaborating further upon the feature of this genre, Barbara Lounsberry describes some characteristics of this genre in her book The Art of Fact. There should be ‘Documentable subject matter chosen from the real world as opposed to ‘invented’ from the writer’s mind’. Secondly, ‘exhaustive research’ which allows the writers to ‘establish the credibility of their narratives’. Apart from these the ‘scene’ as well as a ‘Fine writing: a

3 ibid
literary prose style'. The writer should be able to recreate or set up the scene of the event in a descriptive manner as opposed to the objectivity of journalistic reporting. 'Verifiable subject matter and exhaustive research guarantee the nonfiction side of literary nonfiction; the narrative form and structure disclose the writer’s artistry; and finally, its polished language reveals that the goal all along has been literature'.

Most of the texts taken up within this chapter reveal the said defining characteristics of the genre. They are based on the Emergency, include facts based on research, and are conveyed in a language that is more literary than journalistic, although they do tend to get too sensationalistic at times. They form an integral part of the study of the Emergency as they constitute the most immediate reaction to it and form the base for many of the fictional accounts that followed subsequently. In a way they form the first discourse on the Emergency, which was governed by a dominantly anti-Indira sentiment and the horrors of the excesses of the event. According to Emma Tarlo, who also includes various sources of ‘remembering and forgetting’ in her study of the Emergency, Unsettling Memories, ‘The post-Emergency exposés, letters, and judgments which surfaced immediately after the event offer a short-term memory of the Emergency’ and reveal a ‘lack of historical depth’ (3). Most of the books taken within this chapter come across as a ‘new body of literature, enthused with outrage and the desire to expose’ the excesses and with ‘remembering the Emergency in such a way that it can not and will not be forgotten’ (Tarlo, 31).

As a counter point to the nonfiction I have also included a government publication on the Emergency titled Timely Steps which depicts how the government tried to push the Emergency as a positive step. Such ‘Government files and official propaganda’ produced during the Emergency ‘lend insight into the present of the past. They offer an official memory still uncensored by subsequent developments and political trends’. It is however true that no one interpretation or perspective, whether it is that of the government, the nonfiction or the fiction, can offer the truth of the Emergency since it is complicated by more than one reason. However, they do lead to the creation of a ‘new multi-textured narrative of the Emergency’ (Tarlo, 4). The ‘post-Emergency master narrative’ emerges as ‘multi-vocal ... cobbled together from a mixture of personal experiences, underground literature, prison memoirs, public hearings and newly uncovered government documents. Above all, it is a part of a vast collective exercise in memory with a view to judgment’ (Tarlo, 32). However, one of the

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4 Barbara Lounsberry, quoted in ‘Creative Nonfiction’, op. cit., May 2010
failings also of this narrative that was constructed immediately after the Emergency is that it tends to be too judgmental and reads more as an indictment of Indira and Sanjay than an analysis of the event itself as both people are associated in these writings with the fall in political ethics and ideals that took place in the years that preceded the Emergency.

There is a huge corpus of such books that came out immediately after the Emergency in 1977 continuing well into the next year also, since, as stated earlier, anyone who felt that they knew or had ‘experienced’ the Emergency felt that s/he was equipped and qualified to write on it and that is one of the foremost characteristic of a truly free state. However from a literary standpoint they do not boast of a very high quality. They form a discourse of the Emergency as it was remembered, experienced and constructed through facts and rumours. The event has not been able to make itself a part of the popular Indian historical, political or even social discourse, even though it had important ramifications on all three accounts. The hesitation may be because for a certain generation of people having lived through it there is not much of a mystique left in it which is important for the formation of an ‘event’.

The style in most of these books is quite literary and descriptive conforming to that of creative nonfiction, but in some cases it is quite objective and journalistic too, and then there are those which have a highly sensationalistic flavour, devoid of original insight. Most of these books employ the omniscient point of view which tries to emphasise on the veracity and factual nature of these accounts. While some of these books offer a highly valuable insight into the nature and events of the Emergency, some also give an unbalanced mixture of political analysis and a consciously derived literary style that somehow does not cohere too well and obfuscates the real nature of the event.

As far as the present value of such books go with respect to the Emergency, one can say that they hold a lot of value because they give us a rather detailed picture of the Emergency as also the key players involved in it. They can be used to reconstruct the Emergency as an event in the manner that it happened because they are quite comprehensive and follow the entire chronological order of the Emergency. A lot of these books are undoubtedly one sided in castigating Indira Gandhi as the villain of the piece; however, there are some that offer a very judicious view of the same and provide an insight that can help us in unraveling the complexities of the Emergency.

The Emergency, though brief, was rather exacting and led to a host of conflicting emotions and feelings. The few months that it lasted were quite enough for the public
consciousness to be riled by the excesses that were committed and the most immediate repercussion of the lifting of the Emergency as also the censorship was that people let out their long pent up feelings of having been subjected to a near dictatorship in the nonfiction that came out. This was for the most part written by people who were in some way or the other affected by the Emergency, if not directly in the sense of having been imprisoned and harassed or by having relatives or acquaintances who were arrested or harassed. Instances of such books are In Jail by Kuldip Nayar, Reason Wounded by Primilla Lewis, A Prisoner's Scrapbook by L.K. Advani, My Years in an Indian Prison by Mary Tyler, The Midnight Knock by K.L. Malkani and so on. Then there are political commentators of the time such as Sachchidanand Sinha, Balraj Puri etc, who have sought to present an analysis of the Emergency. Apart from these there are compilations of newspaper editorials and reports from the western press as also the underground press that was operative outside the country such as Satyavani and The Press She Could Not Whip. Finally there is yet another interesting category of books which claims to present an inside view of the Emergency but fall into the dross of mere sensationalism like Janardan Thakur's All the Prime Minister's Men. Understandably, most of this literature rode on the mounting anti-Indira and anti-Emergency wave that followed the 1977 Janata Party win. However, the later Congress party win made most such books and idealistic claims look very shallow indeed. Tarlo likens the post Emergency narrative to that of a 'play', 'endlessly repeated with minor variants but with the basic roles well-defined. Indira Gandhi is portrayed as the new “Hitler” otherwise known as the “Durga of Delhi”. Dominated by the oedipal passion for her own son, she is seen to support his rise to power'. Then there are the corrupt politicians and officials who form an ‘ever-flattering chorus of sycophants, singing the praises of the powerful with unholy gusto’ and finally the ‘petty officials and bureaucrats populate the stage like small but lethal spiders, building the bureaucratic web with which to ensnare the populace’. The role of the intellectuals is a little more complicated as some are seen as ‘guilty of complicity’, while ‘many feature as the emotional sufferers of the Emergency, the men and women burning with indignation but unable to speak out either because they are already in jail or else they fear arrest’ (Tarlo, 36). Indira Gandhi understandably became the arch villain of the piece and while JP along with a few who had actually dared to go against the government were proclaimed as heroes. Many others in the political arena came to acquire a heroic halo merely by having been members of the opposition. They were those who had chosen to ride the wave that had been set in motion by others. Naturally, when the heroes came crashing down with the Janata Party debacle, all the bitterness that had been poured out after the Emergency was better left forgotten. The anti-
Indira diatribe died down remarkably swiftly and the deluge of anti-Emergency literature which had stormed the nation a few years back was relegated to the background. The disappointment that came with the fall of the ideal was another reason why the Emergency was preferred to be forgotten in the long run by India as a nation.

At a thematic level most of these books concern themselves with more or less the common issues of the time. Since they are nonfictional accounts they incline more towards the political than the literary and, as stated earlier, focus primarily on Indira Gandhi and her style of functioning during the Emergency as well as describing in detail Sanjay's role and that of the key political players in the Emergency. A brief look at the political history of India from the time Indira Gandhi became Prime Minister shows that major upheavals had taken place in the country under her governance. Her first term was accompanied by a sense of euphoria and the hope of a fresh beginning, but her second term in office soon started showing political opportunism and was mired in scandals and charges of corruption. Moreover, the magic of her slogan 'garibi hatao' had begun to wear off in the face of hopes belied. The Emergency was seen a desperate attempt to hold on to power after the Allahabad judgement and a naked display of her own authoritarian streak. I would not like to put the blame squarely on Mrs. Gandhi for the Emergency as most political commentators have, but would like to see it as the failure of the entire system that was built not on a solid foundation of political democracy but on personalities starting from Gandhi, Nehru, Indira and continuing even today with Sonia and Rahul Gandhi within the Congress. Such a system which derives its strength from the force of one person or family is bound to collapse sooner or later. Post the Emergency there was no one to really hold the system together, not because of the absence of a leader like Indira but because of the lack of any strong ideological base. When the fall did come, Indira Gandhi was seen as the villain of the piece because she was the public face of the Emergency. It was conveniently forgotten that while she controlled the switch, the machinery had carried forward the command, forgetting that it had a life of its own and was supposed to have self-control. Or may be this is how the system works, it always has a scapegoat that it can throw out to the people. The system remained the same which had led to the creation of such personalities, menacing and malleable, which could ensnare not just the common man but the larger than life leaders also. So the villains were also the victims, in a sense, of the same system. I am not making a case of defence for the Gandhis or trying to absolve them of what happened during the Emergency but merely pointing out that an event such as the Emergency, as also most dictatorships, while attributed
to one person for the most part, cannot be achieved without the complicity of a faulty system. The Emergency cannot be understood by simply positing Indira as the villain. That would be too simplistic an explanation for an event that is far more complex than what meets the eye.

Another important theme that runs through most of these books is that of the ‘enfant terrible’, Sanjay Gandhi, and his role in the Emergency. According to some sources, not only is the Emergency attributed to him but the excesses as well. He brought in what was known as the ‘Punjabi Mafia’ which is purported to have been the caucus that misdirected Indira Gandhi. That Sanjay was an extra constitutional source of immense power is undoubtedly a fact and what is also a fact is that he did not reach such a position by virtue of any merit of his but rather through the use of his surname and mother’s position as also the willing sycophancy of many political leaders and industrialists who saw him as the heir apparent and so did all they could to please him so that he in turn would oblige them upon assuming power. The power play was simple and the results that followed were also expected. It was in order to please Sanjay Gandhi that his pet projects, the sterilization and beautification drives were pursued with undue zeal, so much so that most excesses were committed on these fronts.

Apart from this, an important aspect of these books is the detailed descriptions and facts pertaining to the excesses of the Emergency whether it is the sterilization campaign, the demolition drives, or misuse of the Emergency provisions by the bureaucracy and the ministers. There is an emphasis on the MISA arrests as also the censorship and general highhandedness of the government. The legal excesses that took place, i.e. the amendments in the constitution, are however often of more concern in these books than the actual excesses that took place with reference to the sterilization and beautification programmes. While these accounts engage more with the legal and political implications of the Emergency, the fiction deals with the human aspect of it.

For purposes of convenience I have divided the books into the categories of memoirs, analytical accounts, and sensationalistic books. These are the dominant categories of most of the creative nonfiction that came out after the Emergency. While the bulk of this chapter focuses on the nonfiction that came out post the Emergency, I would like to start with a publication by the government titled *Timely Steps* (1975) which sought to publicise the Emergency as a highly beneficial and much appreciated event in India. I have done this so as to state the government’s own position on the Emergency and then move onto the other books as a counter point to the official discourse of the Emergency.
Newspeak

Timely Steps published in August 1975, by the Ministry of information and Broadcasting was brought out by the government to justify its actions and, as is obvious, it seeks to glorify the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, and the Emergency. The book can be read as one of the ‘paper truths’ of the Emergency and emerges as one of the ‘mouthpieces of the dominant narrative of the then present’ (Tarlo, 27). The willing complicity of the ministries to acquiesce with the PMO shows that there was an utter lack of autonomy as everyone wanted to simply please the Prime Minister. The Introduction itself states that, ‘These steps were taken to maintain the internal security of the country and to ensure economic betterment of the people’ and that these received ‘overwhelming support from national leaders and the Press’ (5). The book consists of extracts and snippets from the speeches of politicians and reports regarding the Twenty and Five Point programmes initiated by Indira and Sanjay Gandhi. It does not offer any comments but simply picks out the reports that came out in favour of Indira Gandhi. On the surface it appears from these that the Emergency was actually lauded by the people; the real picture however is that censorship forced the press to either publish reports favourable to Indira Gandhi and the Emergency or to hide the reality by not publishing anything at all.

The book starts with the President’s proclamation of the Emergency, ‘In exercise of the powers conferred by clause (1) of Article 362 of the Constitution, I Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, President of India, by this proclamation declare that a grave Emergency exists whereby the security of India is threatened by internal disturbance’ (7). The words ‘grave’, ‘security’ and ‘disturbance’ are highly deceptive and are used to mark the JPM as a ‘fascist threat’ which threatened to overpower the government itself. The next entry which is the Prime Minister’s address to the nation is even more interesting and shows the official line that the government had adopted for justifying the Emergency. The opening lines of her speech have become a legend in themselves: ‘The President has proclaimed Emergency. This is nothing to panic about’ (8). She projected the threat of a ‘deep and widespread conspiracy’ which was being planned against her since she had introduced ‘certain progressive measures of benefit to the common man and woman of India. In the name of democracy it has been sought to negate the very functioning of democracy’ (8). The use of words such as ‘conspiracy’ reveal not just the paranoia that had started haunting Indira but also blame the JPM for everything that was happening. She tried to strengthen her own position by stating

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5 Indira Gandhi’s speech on All India Radio, June 26, 1975
that all the unrest in the country was carried out to sabotage her economic plans for the
tbetterment of the country. 'Agitations have surcharged the atmosphere leading to violent
incidents' (8). Pointing to JP she stated that 'certain persons have gone to the length of
inciting our Armed Forces to mutiny and our police to rebel' (8). It was dominantly this point
that was taken up by the government to justify the Emergency and to brand the JPM as being
fascist and against national interests. Indira Gandhi's speech points to the way in which not
only paranoia was spread amongst the masses but also how popular sentiment was
manipulated by distorting or exaggerating details and through highly charged language in an
atmosphere that was already volatile. As Tarlo puts it, 'By portraying the recent past as a
descent into catastrophe, Indira Gandhi not only justified “stringent measures” but also
proclaimed them as a duty' (Tarlo, 26). She talked about 'forces of disintegration' trying to
stir 'communal passions' in the country thereby 'threatening our unity'. The use of 'our' is
deliberate and it tries to demonise the opposition as being violent and destructive by playing
upon communalism. Since the Partition was relatively recent, such a statement would have
had the required effect of inducing a sense of panic in the minds of the people. The rise of the
JPM was no doubt accompanied by the strengthening of the right wing as there was a
collaboration amongst the opposition parties to oust Indira, and it did lead to a sense of
anarchy which manifested itself in the form of gheraos and strikes in the country. However
for any movement to be successful the participation of the people is a must and it was so in
the case of the JPM also, not because of the speeches he made but because the people
themselves were frustrated with the stagnant state of affairs where the only thing that seemed
to be progressing was corruption. Indira's speech also reveals the kind of arrogance and self-
identification that she had with the nation to the extent that a personal attack on herself was
construed as an attack on the nation itself. She did not perceive herself to be a leader elected
by the people and therefore open to criticism, but considered herself to be the only leader who
could lead the country and felt it necessary to justify her actions as also accuse and indict the
opposition for carrying out a personal attack against her, 'All manner of false allegations have
been hurled at me. The Indian people have known me since my childhood. All my life has
been in the service of our people ... It is not important whether I remain Prime Minister or
not. However, the institution of the Prime Minister is important and the deliberate political
attempts to denigrate it is not in the interests of democracy or the nation' (8). Although she
claimed that this was no 'personal matter’, her speech shows how she had manipulated the
entire speech into one of personal power-play by making herself the victim rather than the
perpetrator of all that had happened. According to her, no government ‘worth the name’ could
have simply stood by and allowed the ‘country’s stability to be imperilled’ by the ‘actions of a few’ who were ‘endangering the rights of the vast majority’. Such a situation she warned could ‘encourage dangers from outside’ as well (9). She assured the people that the ‘new Emergency proclamation will in no way affect the rights of ‘law abiding citizens’ and appealed to the people for their ‘continued cooperation and trust in the days ahead’ (9). The speech is quite contradictory to all that happened subsequently in the form of the censorship that was imposed as also the MISA and the suspension of Fundamental Rights. In a speech made on June 27, 1975, she elaborated further on the ‘reason for proclaiming the Emergency’, which according to her was the ‘climate of violence and hatred’ that was prevalent in the country (10). Referring to the opposition as well as JP she stated how they had ‘chalked out a programme of countrywide bundhs, gheraos, agitations, disruption and incitement to industrial workers, police and defence forces in an attempt to wholly paralyse the Central Government. One of them went to the extent of saying that the Armed Forces should not carry out orders which they considered wrong’ (10). This entire ‘programme’ which was to start from June 29th was accordingly pre-empted by the government to avoid ‘damage’ to public order and the economy. While she stated in her speech that within two days of the imposition of the Emergency there was ‘normalcy all over the country’, there is no mention of the mass arrests that had taken place or the atmosphere of fear that had been clamped over the nation. Her authoritarian streak comes through when she says that ‘even in a democracy there are limits which cannot be crossed. Violent action and senseless satyagrahas will pull down the whole edifice which has been built over the years with such labour and hope’ (10). The so-called ‘senseless satyagrahas’ were used effectively against the British by Gandhi, but in a modern democratic state, the same tools of resistance became uncomfortable and were accordingly declared illegal during the Emergency. Regarding censorship she stated that although she ‘believed in the freedom of the press’ yet it was imposed because ‘like all freedoms it has to be exercised with responsibility and restraint’. She also added that ‘grave mischief has been done by irresponsible writing’ in ‘situations of internal disturbance’. ‘Responsibility and restraint’, already rather heavy, loaded words gained even more sonorous overtones when it was expected that the Press follow them to the utmost. According to her, ‘several newspapers have deliberately distorted news and made malicious and provocative comments. The purpose of censorship is to restore a climate of trust’ (11). Indira Gandhi believed that there was actually a conspiracy against her which involved the press as well. This kind of paranoia had its impact on the nation also since she ended up locking and muzzling anyone who criticized her. It is interesting to note that rather than addressing issues
that mattered at the national level, she focused more on complaining about how the opposition had spread a malicious campaign against her. ‘Rumour-mongers and anti-social elements have had a field day and have spread stories of all kinds’ (11). This was a reference to the reports regarding the arrests of the opposition as well as opinions on the Emergency. She even went so far as to state that the leaders under arrest were being given all ‘courtesy and consideration’ while not really explaining why the en masse arrests were so necessary (11). The ‘purpose’ of the government was now to ‘increase production’, ‘supply power’, ‘alleviate the hardships of the poorer sections’, which is nothing new given that the government was expected to do this much at the very least. Even the famous Twenty-point programme, uncannily similar to Hitler’s 25 point programme, did not offer anything new or path breaking. She ominously declared that ‘this is a time for unity and discipline’ (11). The people were expected to obey the government without as much as a murmur. With the opposition all locked up and the Congress leaders either kowtowing to the Gandhis or pushed to the margins, Sanjay Gandhi could insult and virtually bully most of the leaders into submission, which is why a ‘sense of discipline’ pervaded the country.

In a broadcast made on July 1, 1975, over AIR, Indira Gandhi’s Emergency special economic programme emphasized on ‘hard work sustained by clear vision, iron will and the strictest discipline’ as being the only ‘magic’ which could ‘remove poverty’. She also wanted the people to not ‘expect magic remedies and dramatic results’. Her attitude of regarding the nation as her personal fiefdom is echoed in the words that ‘there must be greater respect for state property’ and that ‘its destruction will be visited by punitive fines’. And while the government was bound by its duty to curb conspicuous consumption, this ‘strict code of austerity’ applied to the citizens as well. There are references to measures for tackling foreign exchange, inflation, land allocation, rural credit, tax evasion etc, which were issues that should have been tackled in any case with or without the Emergency. Considering that for the past thirty years, the Congress had been in power and these problems still persisted, it is interesting to note how the Congress managed to blame the opposition and the so called ‘disruptive forces’ for its failures. ‘The worst feature of the crisis which was building over the last few years was that it spread cynicism and sapped national self-confidence. There is a chance now to regain the nation’s spirit of adventure. Let us get on with the job’ (41). The tone is rather admonitory and once again carries a mild hint of a warning to agree with the government’s stance. The people were exhorted to work hard, be disciplined, and not give in to ‘rumour-mongering’ (read criticism) against the government, and more specifically the
Prime Minister. The peremptory ‘let us get on with the job’ directive is also directed more at the people than the government. This rather schoolmarmish and brusque attitude did not go down too well with the masses and was seen as a pointer to her authoritarian streak. In an interview with the Times of India Indira Gandhi stated how there had been a concerted campaign of ‘hate and calumny’ against her and how the press ‘deliberately blacked out anything that went in favour of the Congress and gave undue prominence, to even exaggerated, anything that was against us’ (44). Although she expressed regret over the ‘regulations’ that were imposed over the press she also said that ‘some journals had shed all objectivity and independence and allied themselves totally with the opposition front and did everything to spread doom and defeatism’ (44). She went on to say that despite all these ‘restrictions’, ‘we are still one of the most relaxed nations in the world’. Such a statement during the Emergency is hard to believe even in retrospect.

She further declared that the Emergency was not imposed for the ‘convenience of individuals or groups’ but was the ‘direct consequence of various factors and the opposition front’s announced designs to paralyse the government’. She blamed the opposition for undermining democracy and accused it of trying to create a ‘wreckage’. Most of this was meant for foreign consumption and in the initial stages of the Emergency, such propaganda actually worked. The Finance Minister stated that India was a ‘soft society’ and needed a ‘shock’ and that the ‘Emergency provides that shock’. It also provided the government an ‘opportunity to strengthen democratic processes’ if used in a ‘proper manner’ (57).

The book also includes the responses of the state and Congress leaders to the Emergency and these consist of praises for the Prime Minister as well as the Emergency and the special economic programmes introduced during this period. The Emergency is perceived as a necessary step for ‘saving the nation from a catastrophe’ (14) or in the words of Dr. Karan Singh, then Minister for Health and Family Planning, ‘The promulgation of the Emergency is more than a legal measure an attempt to rehabilitate the spirit of dedication and discipline in the country’ (15). The Prime Minister’s actions were lauded as being ‘timely’ in the face of the ‘grave threat posed by the reactionary and fascist forces’. V.C. Shukla stated that ‘mischief makers ... had created conditions in the country which were ripe for the conspiracy by which rightist elements and fascist regimes normally take over democracies’ (16). While they are all quick to laud the Emergency and hail the PM as the saviour of the

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6 July 3, 1975, reproduced in Timely Steps, p 42
nation, no concrete reasons are cited as to why the Emergency was imposed. The extracts of speeches of the Chief Ministers, who were mostly from the Congress or its allies, also reek of hypocrisy and sycophancy. The Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister’s speech does not mention the nation or national security but states that the ‘irresponsible behaviour of the forces that were against the Prime Minister’ had led to imposition of the Emergency and that the Press had ‘misused’ its ‘freedom’ and spread ‘baseless allegations against the Government and the Prime Minister’ (17). The national interest was being identified not just with the office of the Prime Minister but more dangerously with the person of Indira Gandhi. It was not the nation that was being referred to but Indira Gandhi, since all the Chief Ministers wanted to be in her good books. Adding to the already present sense of paranoia about there being a conspiracy afoot is Bansi Lal’s statement that ‘this action has foiled the evil designs of the forces in and outside the country which are inimical to its progress, stability and democratic traditions’ (18). There was a lot of emphasis on the ‘foreign hand’ factor with respect to anything that happened in India during those days. S.S. Ray, the Chief Minister of West Bengal and one of the people instrumental for the Emergency, states that ‘under the circumstances this was the only just thing to do ... in the name of democracy these people were throttling democracy. Allegation after allegation was made against the Prime Minister and others which were absolutely false and absurd’ (22). The dominant refrain is that it was the Prime Minister who was being attacked and therefore no self-respecting government could have tolerated such an affront, which was why the imposition of the Emergency was justified. Sometimes in between one finds a stray reference to the ‘nation’ also!

In this context, it is highly interesting to note D.K. Barooah’s speech where he stated that, ‘Once again the Prime Minister, Shrimati Indira Gandhi, has shown her unflinching determination to save this country from external as well as internal dangers’ and that the declaration of the Emergency shows that ‘the nation’s interests are safe under her wise, courageous and determined leadership’. He also appeals to ‘all patriotic, democratic and progressive forces and organisations’ to stand by the Prime Minister and also that such ‘steps have been taken after the people’s patience was exhausted because of the reckless and irresponsible behavior of individuals and parties who were doing their worst to undermine the stability and unity of the country and its democratic Constitution’ (23). It is not surprising that Indira too started believing that she was indispensable to the nation and was the only one who could handle the nation’s problems. It was not just people like Barooah who made such statements but bodies like the Congress Working Committee as well which justified the
imposition of the Emergency on the lines that the ‘difficult and complex economic situation
necessitated such measures in view of national interests’. Moreover ‘internal factors’ starting
from the Bangladesh crisis, the Pakistan war, drought had all put a ‘great strain’ on the Indian
economy forcing the government to take ‘hard decisions’ (23). According to the Congress
Working Committee, the opposition instead of supporting the government in saving the
‘country’s economy from impending disaster, began a ‘systematic campaign of obstruction
and vilification …’. Therefore in the ‘face of this formidable challenge’, ‘the President had to
invoke the Emergency provisions of the constitution in order to forestall the subversive
attempts’ (24). The emphasis on the formal procedure of the ‘President’ invoking the
Emergency draws attention away from the fact that it was advised by the Prime Minister and
not even the cabinet as is normally the case. ‘Popular Acclaim’ also includes statements
supporting the Emergency from obscure and rather interestingly named organizations such as
the ‘National Alliance of Young Entrepreneurs’, ‘Indian Institute of International
Understanding’, subsidiaries of the Congress such as INTUC, NSUI, U.P. Rural Labour
Congress, and the CPI which had supported the Emergency. Most of these speeches seem to
have been made with the express aim of pleasing the Prime Minister and remaining in her
good books. There are also extracts from the foreign press mostly from Muslim countries or
countries that favoured authoritarianism, along with quotes from sundry papers from Canada,
Poland, Panama, Malaysia, etc. which approved of the Emergency, with an extract from New
Straits Times, Malaysia stating that ‘it was the only way to bring sanity to a situation that was
threatening to get entirely out of hand’ (32).

The Twenty-Point Economic Programme was hailed as ‘yet another landmark in the
history of our country’ which ‘heralded the ushering in of a new era of progress and
development’ (59). Considering that not much had been done on this front despite the
whooping majority that the Congress had received in the 1971 elections when Indira had
famously declared ‘Garibi Hatao’, it is strange that the issue was taken up again during the
Emergency and the opposition blamed for creating obstacles for the implementation of the
programme. The statements given by the Chief Ministers of various states supporting the
programme and vowing to implement it with ‘full vigour’ do not reflect the real picture either,
since most of the state governments belonged to the Congress and they were all too willing to
support Indira. She had replaced the state leaders with her own men who in any case would
not say anything critical about her or Sanjay or their policies during the Emergency. Although
most of the issues in the Twenty-Point programme were usual economic policies and did not
offer anything new, the industry welcomed these steps nonetheless hoping that the government actually meant to implement it. It is true that inflation was curbed and hoarding, smuggling etc were checked in its initial period, but beyond this there was nothing very radical that was undertaken by the government. Poverty and unemployment continued unabated as the government could not remove such structural problems overnight, much as it promised to. Again there are selective extracts from the Press which 'acclaim' and 'applaud' the economic programme. To quote The Times (U.K.),

The Emergency in India has brought an unprecedented measure of order in the country.

Trains are running on time, corrupt officials are being dismissed, Government servants are reporting on time for duty and prices of essential commodities have tumbled to the delight of the average housewife as police continue to round up hundreds of smugglers and hoarders (77).

The public face of the Emergency was just this that there was 'discipline' and 'order' in the country and that the government meant business with its no nonsense approach. Again this in no way reflects the true opinion of the people since the opposition was locked up and no criticism of the Emergency could be published in the press. This concealed the corruption and organized anarchy that was taking place underneath this façade of order and discipline. Soon all this broke out in the open and this abuse of power became rather visible even though there was a rigid censorship in force. Such publications help in understanding the kind of image that the government was trying to project about itself, as also the official discourse that it was trying to create about the Emergency. They also show the sycophancy and opportunism of the other Ministers as this volume was published in the initial days of the Emergency when nothing save the arrests of the opposition leaders and censorship, along with a strict work rule had been imposed. It was too early to judge whether the Emergency was beneficial or not in terms of economics, and the willingness with which the politicians and journalists stated that it was by far the best thing that the Prime Minister had done, was not only premature but hypocritical as well.
The Post-Mortems

An important category of nonfiction is that of the various analytical and critical commentaries on the Emergency that came out after the Emergency was revoked. While there was indeed a veritable deluge of such books, the most sensible ones are by far those written by professionals in the field of journalism, or those with a sound political insight. These conduct a post-mortem of the Emergency as they try to not only unravel the truth behind the censored event, but also the reasons for its imposition. While the issues and the reasons remain more or less the same, the style varies in each as is evident through an analysis of these books. I have chosen Emergency in Perspective by Sachchidanand Sinha, An Eye to India: The Unmasking of a Tyranny by David Selbourne, and Balraj Puri’s Revolution/Counter-Revolution for analysing the manner in which the official discourse of the Emergency was debunked and a ‘new counter narrative’ constituted through these texts. These texts are based on extensive research and offer facts which can be checked though not necessarily be corroborated by official sources, and help us reconstruct the Emergency through a balanced analysis of the event. They offer not just a critique of the Emergency but depict the feelings of the intelligentsia as well, as they criticize not just those in power but also the people for not having protested against the government.

It is important to start with the perception and reaction of the people towards the Emergency as also the possible reasons for its imposition. Sachchidanand Sinha in his book Emergency in Perspective gives a very balanced view of the event and makes a detailed study of the Indian polity and roots the Emergency and what all happened during it as part of a systemic flaw in the Indian political system. Rather than emphasizing on the ‘excesses of the Emergency’ or the ‘resistance’ against it, he tries to perform the ‘thankless job of bringing our people back from that euphoric height to sober reflection on all that happened’ (viii). He also considers the Emergency not as a result of the megalomania of a single person or party but rather the result of weaknesses in the Indian democracy and a faulty administrative system. Warning against a complacent attitude, he emphasizes on the need to build a ‘permanent bulwark against a recurrence of dictatorship’ as well as to find out why India’s ‘democratic system collapsed so suddenly without a fight’ (4). His words are almost prophetic since the Janata government could not last its full term and the nation soon witnessed the return of Indira Gandhi after having written her off in 1977. This wider perspective on the Emergency, its reasons as well as its future implications, are missing from most of the nonfiction Emergency literature, which for the most part is very reductive in its take on the event.
Sinha traces the problems of the present Indian system which he describes as ‘an alien
graft by the British on our own tradition’ to its colonial past, a point echoed by many others as
well (5). The most important throwback of this legacy was the rise of the elite class, and the
institutionalization of the bureaucracy which was quite far removed from the people. It was
this gap between the executive and the masses that led to the perpetration of excesses during
the Emergency. The problems of the present are traced in the past, starting from the Partition
and the Congress’s consolidation of its image as the ‘sole custodians of India’s nationhood
and sovereignty’ (18). Political problems and state-authorized police brutalities further led to
the estrangement of the people from the government making it a fearful monolith. According
to him poor socio-economic indices prevalent before the Emergency fuelled unrest and led to
an agitation of sorts which was met by force rather than concrete action which the
government was actually in a position to do. All this combined with corruption and basic
flaws in the system resulted in the Emergency (45). Sinha indicts not just Indira Gandhi and
her brand of coterie politics but also the system that allowed her to grow in such an
unchecked manner. She had to be a part of the system to be able to manipulate it to suit her
advantage (46). He draws attention to the fact that the state had always displayed its
repressive side in scattered incidents across the nation which involved arrests under DIR, use
of violence, police brutalities and press censorship through ‘misinformation and blackout’ of
sensitive news (27). Taking up the role played by the bureaucracy also during the Emergency,
he points out the flaws of the Indian administrative system tracing them back to the imperial
legacy that the British bestowed upon India, a legacy we unfortunately held onto rather than
letting go and establishing our own system (14). Sinha very rightly points that for the British,
stability was most important and this concern was imbibed by the Indian leaders also, so
much so that stability became the all important factor and led people to believe that stability
was ‘synonymous with a system where the command from the top is obeyed without demur
by all lower down’ (16). Stability in the Indian context thus emerges more as a way of holding
and consolidating power at the higher levels than extending it to the nation as a whole. Even
the Emergency was declared in the name of safeguarding democracy and bringing about
stability but it led to even greater instability subsequently. For the Congress to retain its hold
over the centre and for Indira to retain her position as the central figure in national politics, it
became very important for her to keep a firm grip over power as it was the ‘only stabilizing
factor for the Congress’ (38). Faced by a situation wherein public opinion had turned against
the Congress and Indira, she resorted to the most extreme option available to her, the
Emergency, for retaining its position as the country’s ruling party. She did this over other
democratic options which might possibly have averted the crisis as well. Sinha not only criticizes the Congress and Indira for their role during the Emergency but the opposition also as in his view the demands for Indira’s resignation had less to do with the ideals of fair play, justice or democracy, but rather more with political opportunism. Rather than mobilizing the masses and carrying forward a concerted mass movement which would cleanse the system and help stabilize it from within instead of only superficially through power, the opposition chose dharnas etc which targeted Indira rather than policies.

In the case of Indira Gandhi, she excited extreme passions, either those of ‘aspiration or anathema’ (41) and while the personality cult had entered Indian politics with Gandhi himself, it got perverted during Indira’s time where she herself deliberately sought to make herself larger than the nation. Indira herself was able to mobilize huge, allegedly paid, crowds for her rallies (48). Sinha also criticizes Sanjay Gandhi’s politics along with the kind of sycophancy that made him the so called ‘Son of India’. Indira’s use of state machinery such as the police and RAW for monitoring the activities of her opponents is cited not just by Sinha but also mentioned in Mistry’s novel Such a Long Journey which deals with the infamous Nagarwala incident which involved the embezzlement of Rs.60 lakhs from SBI in the Prime Minister’s name. Nagarwala died soon under mysterious circumstances as did some of the officials involved in the case. The novel clearly shows how agents of RAW were deputed by her to track her opponents. The prime intelligence services of the country were used more for Indira’s personal benefit rather than the nation’s security. Sinha pointedly states that whatever happened in the administration during the Emergency was not just an aberration but rather an inherent feature of the Indian civil system. The only difference was that during the Emergency all these spiraled out of control and grew to monstrous proportions (47). The use of force during the Emergency is not as much as an aberration or exception but only the intensification of what was already in practice, during a period when the people were totally deprived of any legal safeguards for protecting them against the state itself. The excesses were already a part of the Indian polity’s character; the Emergency merely gave them legal sanctions. Sinha points out the Indian attitude of apathy and callousness towards the poor and for placing materiality and power above human life (24). While a lot is made about the censorship that was imposed upon the newspapers during the Emergency by the Congress government, it was not just during the Emergency that such tactics were resorted to. Sinha cites the instance of Morarji Desai who in his position as the CM of Maharashtra had also arm-twisted the Times of India (28). The use or misuse of media for political gains is thus not
restricted to only the Congress but emerges as a feature of Indian politics prior to the Emergency. It is only after the Emergency and the sort of criticism that the government received for its role regarding censorship that governments now think twice about imposing it. Sinha also raises the point that very few editors were actually arrested much less tortured, which makes their giving into the whims of the government even more questionable (52).

The intelligentsia according to Sinha had two choices, the first being to capitulate, the second being to fight and lose its privileged position. The first emerged as an easier option for them as going against the government could entail the loss of the carefully built position as part of the controlling authority over the masses. He also states that the elite tried to rein in the ‘unruly’ masses who were looked down upon as the ones responsible for India’s burgeoning population (30), a point echoed by Sahgal also in her novel *Rich Like Us*. They willingly gave their support to the Prime Minister and paid visits to show their solidarity with her. At the level of the working classes, Sinha points out that in a country which has a population as huge as India does, the fear of losing a hard earned job would be intense enough to remove any other concern from one’s mind. The practical and realistic compulsions of sheer survival thus governed the working class’s acceptance of the Emergency (53). Only the self-employed i.e. the business class, according to Sinha, could have mustered the courage to face the Emergency but since this is a politically neutral class, it too allowed the Emergency to grow unchecked. So with the masses more concerned about their personal well being, the opposition tidily locked up, and even the bureaucracy getting a taste of power which made it complicit with the government, it was easy to maintain the Emergency. (56).

Dictators thrive on little dictators and everything is at the cost of the people (58). This was borne out amply during the Emergency when every minister, bureaucrat, police official or any other minion started wielding power over the people in the name of the Emergency. The chief instrument of dictators is terror, which falls arbitrarily on the people, striking whoever it pleases. Dictatorships thrive on this unpredictability of terror, as the fear of becoming victims of the terror keep the people in check. A part of this terror was the excesses of the Emergency which as Sinha says were ‘essential’, since without these the Emergency could not have gained its fearful nightmarish character or the dictatorship asserted its ‘omnipotent’ character (58). This was at once the Congress’s main advantage during the Emergency and at the same time the reason for its downfall post the Emergency.
Sinha's views on the Emergency turn quite bitter at certain places as do those of many people who were quite disgusted with the whole thing even after it was lifted, as the Janata government also offered them little relief. Even those who tried to gain a brief measure of heroism post the Emergency are not spared by Sinha as he criticizes those who escaped abroad during the Emergency in order to 'fight' from there or even those who defected in order to join Indira's party. The RSS, well known for its part in standing against the government, also had the largest number of defectors (67). Sinha also points out that JP's arrest did not create much turmoil amongst the people which can lead us to question the strength and reach of the JPM also. It was a big movement initially, and yet if it was a really strong and deep-rooted movement, it would have put up a good enough fight against the government which it did not. There were 'sporadic acts of violence' but nothing that could pose a big enough challenge for the government. While some students, or a few politicians who were actually committed to democracy, genuinely stood against the government, most others were simply riding the anti-Indira wave. As far as protest or awareness regarding the repressive character of the Emergency is concerned, there was no strong organizational structure for the circulation of banned literature which was being published clandestinely. Bulk of this literature was meant for the party people, the politicians and the workers. It did not even reach the villages or the poor or the middle classes. Though I do not mean to sound disparaging, or excuse the Indian populace for not having resisted the Emergency, yet an important point to be considered here is that the common Indian man or woman is assailed by far too many practical everyday social and economic problems of mere survival which prevent him/her from taking too radical a step even for personal freedom let alone democracy. These problems are of such a particularly Indian nature that these would not be understandable for an outsider since they grow from within the Indian social and political system. Therefore while it is easy enough to deride the masses for buckling under with their 'chalta hai' attitude, yet at the same time a closer look might reveal the compulsions which could have possibly made many such people give in.

However, leaving the masses aside, the case of the Indian politicians is of a different nature altogether, as Sinha criticizes them for not having made any kind of analysis for ascertaining as to why the Emergency was accepted by the people so readily. As opposed to the West, there was nothing here except a desire to capitalise on the Emergency (68, 69). Ultimately it was the use of excessive force by the police and the government in sterilizations which woke people from their stupor. While the poor in the villages and the cities had long
been targets for the government, it was when the middle and rich class started getting
discomfited by the government’s pushiness and utter disregard for people that there was some
sort of reaction against the Emergency. The stirring of the people at a time when the
opposition was despairing also speaks of a divorce between the masses and the government
(Sinha, 70). According to Sinha there was a change of attitude that was brought about on
account of certain issues such as the family planning excesses, laxity of the promises made for
justifying the Emergency after the initial fervour, suppression of India’s tradition of dialogue
and debate, censorship, and finally public ridicule of Indira Gandhi marking a decline from
her once proudly held image of Mother India or Durga to that of a petty dictator (72-73). Sinha
also debunks the popular idea that the reason why Indira called for elections was her
deep love for democracy. Instead, he asserts the more plausible explanation that she did it
more because she was lulled by the belief that she still enjoyed the same level of unrivalled
popularity and could sweep the elections. At a certain point, a dictator is compelled to
legitimize his/her own rule and this was proved both by Indira then and Musharraf in the
recent past, both of whom lost the elections they were confident of winning and both did so
on account of the heavy censorship they had imposed which made it difficult for them to
gauge what the actual public mood was.

At another level it was quite easy for the opposition to launch a concerted attack
against Indira during the elections. They were mostly forged along the lines of ‘unity for
action’. Even the manifesto was primarily ‘Dictatorship v/s Democracy’ giving the opposition
a chance to occupy a high moral ground and become heroes temporarily (80). Sinha goes
beyond the Emergency to point out the hollowness of the entire system. The very people like
Morarji Desai who were arrested under MISA, had used the same laws for their own
convenience as well (85). Dictatorships rarely come with any new apparatus or system, they
simply subvert the existing system and use the people’s willingness to be dominated to their
advantage. Indira was no different from the others as she simply used the existing apparatus
for her own purposes and it was the same apparatus that was ‘serving the new incumbents in
office’ (87). Sinha points out that though it would be easy to make Indira Gandhi the villain of
the piece, yet it was not just her but the entire upper class which found in her a useful agent
for their subversive ends (88).

Sinha’s book is one of the few truly analytical ones on the Emergency which do not
seek to simply push everything onto Indira but go beyond it to understand the state of Indian
politics during that time and its future as well. Sinha realistically points out that ‘public
memory is short’ and that with time the ‘emotional impact of these dark days’ would fade away along with the generation which had lived through the experience of the Emergency(4). What would remain however are those ‘underlying forces which brought the dictatorship’ and which would be ‘long-lasting, unless consciously eradicated’. The present is ample proof that such a thing has indeed happened.

Another book which has come to be almost an authority on the Emergency, one which Meghnad Desai calls an ‘angry book about India’ is David Selbourne’s An Eye to India: The Unmasking of a Tyranny. Journalists like Selbourne were privy to a lot of what happened during the Emergency and were vocally against it. The book starts out on an angry note and denounces the event at the very outset. The anger speaks of a western sensibility outraged at the kind of breach of human rights that took place during those nineteen months. It is an outsider’s view of the Emergency and is quite clichéd at times in its presentation of the Emergency and India as well. However, notwithstanding this aspect, it offers a lot of important facts and details on the event. Like Sinha, Selbourne also ‘traces the roots of recent episodes into an ongoing pattern of paternalism, hypocrisy, and violence’ (Desai, 46). The book while seeking to expose the roles of the ‘architects and protagonists … and the illusions and cruelty, lies and violence to which India was subjected’ during the Emergency, tries to understand the ramifications of this event also (Selbourne, xi). Selbourne sees the Emergency as a ‘part of a continuum in the history of India since independence’. He decries the possibility of viewing Indian history as a ‘simple trilogy: that is, as a pre-Emergency democracy (“the world’s largest”), an Emergency dictatorship, and a post-Emergency democratic restoration’ (xi), which is something that I have refuted in my thesis stating that the Emergency does present a watershed in Indian history, one which separates the pre and post Emergency India. The continuum that Selbourne mentions does not simply extend from 1947-1977 or 1980 but is spread over a larger time frame spilling onto the future as well, and since within a continuum there can be occasional deviations and phases, the Emergency marked one such phase which effectively changed the course of that continuum. However it is important to note that unlike most other commentators who see the Emergency as an aberration, Selbourne’s inclusion of the same as part of India’s history makes it easier to justify its importance in this history since at the end of it the Emergency was ‘a brutal and ignominious period in the history of the nation’ (xi).

The book is voluminous not just in the number of pages it has but also in the facts and sources that it seeks to put before the reader. Explaining his methodology Selbourne states...
that it was necessary to acknowledge the sources and facts concerning all the information he has given lest there be any ‘cancellation by denial and evasion’ of the ‘record of the crimes committed against the Indian people’ (xi). Since the theme of the book is the ‘condition of the people’, therefore he has attempted to ‘bring together observed life with the empirical and quantitative measure of it’ since only a ‘combination of perceptual and rational knowledge can carry the reader to the heart of the matter’ (xii). This explains the subjectivity that the book tends to suffer from at times when it makes highly essentialistic observations on the ‘condition of the people’. Nonetheless Selbourne’s book is important as it presents a view from the outside which is also necessary for understanding the Emergency.

According to Selbourne the Indian polity at that point was one that was mired in structural problems and so there could not have been a ‘qualitatively or absolutely new crisis, or ‘Emergency’ for the Indian people as a whole’ (7). The economic problems as discussed earlier were not just the result of the JPM unrest but could be traced to the very beginning of the nation. Selbourne attributes this more to India’s Socialism which he calls ‘indigenous Indian capitalism’ which has furthered inequalities of ‘Himalayan proportions’ in the country (9). The economic analysis that he offers comprises a discussion of the well known factors of external dependence, stagnant land reforms and poverty – structural factors which in some way or the other did lead to the build up of the crisis that constituted the Emergency, if not directly then definitely a part of the larger picture.

Selbourne also gives a detailed account of India’s socio-economic and political background emphasizing on incidences of political uprisings and rebellion in India along with state repression and violence. He sees the history of post-independence India as one fraught with violence and cruelty far removed from its non-violent, ‘pietist and pacific’ image (12). This violent streak is referred to by Sinha also in his analysis of the event. Selbourne cites numerous instances of ‘political imprisonment’ as well police brutalities even prior to the Emergency, and goes onto include People’s movements such as the Telengana uprising or the Naxalite movement as part of protest and rebellion which was countered by a commensurate ‘cruelty of state response’ (17). Selbourne’s very vocal protest against the state is evinced through the following lines: ‘... large numbers of those assumed by the government to be “naxalites” and denoted as such, were young people and students, who were engulfed in the orgy of violence and counter-violence, variously arrested, beaten and killed in that panic-stricken crescendo of cruelty and counter-cruelty which marks the insurrection of the dispossessed’ (18).
State excesses can sound rather unbelievable when one is far removed from such atrocities, however; when shorn of its evocative language, Selbourne’s statements hold a lot of truth and this is borne out by the case of Rajan discussed in detail in Ch. 3 of this thesis. Selbourne’s description of the political scenario of India is corroborated by a lot of references through which he tries to present the ‘real’ picture of India. While he discusses almost all the major political parties of the time as well as their ideologies, yet the focus invariably comes to rest on the Congress which was till then ‘the’ ruling party of India. He gives extensive data regarding state controlled repression and brutalities which were a part of the Indian polity prior to the Emergency as well. What happened in India during the Emergency had already taken place through sporadic repression and MISA in various parts of the country and as he points out, political prisoners were always treated badly in India (17). The socio-economic problems that he emphasizes upon as well as the structural inequalities in India were no doubt important factors which were a part of the Emergency crisis, and since the Congress had been taking national decisions as well as deciding the economic direction in which the nation was to head, it is obvious that it received a lot of flak for its performance. This is a pointer to the fact that the situation had deteriorated dramatically in terms of stability and the political atmosphere. Selbourne’s analysis tends towards a criticism of the Congress and its adoption of the socialist models, as he tries to show how the Congress manipulated things to its advantage in the Emergency. Selbourne clearly exposes the fact that the Congress had historically been detrimental for the nation in a lot of ways (18-19) and holds it responsible for the social and political decay in the country as also for the rise of the subsequent rebellion by people spearheaded by JP.

The tone of the book from the very outset is highly vocal in its criticism of the Gandhi regime. The ‘politics of illusion’ which projected democracy ‘of the people, for the people’ is exposed as being ‘a democracy for the millions consisting of shared inequality, suffering and violence, presided over by landlordism and industrial power, and with continuous dynastic rule at its apex’ (104). According to Selbourne, it was this democracy which was sought to be protected by those in power through the Emergency and its diktats. Discussing the crucial amendments made to the constitution, in which the 40th amendment was by far the most important as it granted the Prime Minister ‘personal immunity from civil and criminal proceedings’, Selbourne states that this ‘grant of immunity was not attended merely both by rhetoric and violence, but denial of violence, and asseverations of honour’. Further it was ‘preceded and followed by the announcements of the economic “new deal” to “ameliorate the
condition of the people"; by the further elaboration of censorship regulations and "press guidelines", and the imprisonment of journalists and academics; by the arrest and (worse) of opposition trade unions and the closure of trade union offices and student unions; by the denial of trade union rights and the construction of a new politics at the point of production. It was lost in the opening and unfolding panoply of repression, deceit and coercion being extended over the face of India, cast into shadow" (133).

All this resulted in a further concentration of power with its centre being the Prime Minister's office and the near negation of the cabinet to such an extent that the Prime Minister's secretariat would take decisions on behalf of the cabinet and the cabinet would read the 'newspapers to discover what had been decided for them' (141).

The 'shabby progression of excess upon seedy excess' by the state was seen through censorship and while it might seem unimportant when compared to other excesses such as that of the 'knife of compulsory sterilization or the shanty tumbling to the bulldozer, ragged children crying in the gutter' (160), the casualty in the case of censorship was truth which unfortunately never has a voice of its own. The fact that censorship allowed for a 'new lie' to establish its 'dominion over unarmed opinion ... by a process of steady percolation into the fabric of institutions' (160) was dangerous because it contained a violence and propaganda of coercion directed at the minds of the people. However the government alone could not have achieved the kind of power that it wielded over the people without the help of people themselves. Like Sinha, Selbourne also criticizes the role of the civil service and analyses the empowering of the District Magistrate as a revival of the 'British kingpin of administration at the ground level'. Power was not just consolidated at the top and then sanctioned to the lower sections, but it also inevitably led to the rise of an obscene power structure where all the other sections-judiciary, parliament etc were stripped of their powers. Selbourne strongly indicts this perversion of power in India as also violence which is seen as an almost intrinsic feature of this polity. There were as he remarks 'varieties of violence against the people; imposed upon them the deceit and cynicism of their rulers; and capped by that casual and corrupted indifference which is the hallmark of political regression' (262).

The emergency impacted the education sector also to some extent as 'academic freedom was also placed on the anvil, and suffered in the wake of the Emergency a succession of hammer blows: mass detention of teachers and students, the abolition of teachers' and students' unions, assaults and inroads physical as well as intellectual' (164). Selbourne
criticizes the prevalent academic malaise and hypocrisy but the government was relatively successful in the stifling of free thought and protest as any kind of protest was met with either arrest or expulsion or termination of service. After all this, it would be pertinent to quote Indira’s statement to the San Francisco Examiner where she says that ‘we have not had to use the police at all throughout the Emergency’ (quoted in Selbourne, 190). The book is rich in many such statements which were issued by the authorities in order to justify the Emergency as a people friendly measure which had resulted in peace and prosperity. There were rampant sackings and watching over of officials by the government, something similar to the classic dystopia created by George Orwell in his book 1984. Selbourne emphasises on the plight of the common man for whom the Emergency did not have any use since their lot remained the same, thereby exposing the Emergency as a sham (264). Selbourne also sees the silence of the people as evocative of ‘forms of suffering, fear and labour, which can know of no new Emergency in its condition’. But he also points out that this was not a silence of ‘acquiescence and torpor’; rather it held the ‘power of the people, whether dormant or raised from fear to anger, to rural insurrection, or other forms of renewed and organized counter-violence’ (262). It is true that the condition of the people was already beyond any further Emergency, and they might have chosen to simply accept it which they did not ultimately. They remained silent during the Emergency simply because it was not clear at that point of time as to what the future would hold, maybe if the Emergency had carried on for a longer period, the people might have rebelled but that is just speculation. The elections, for whatever reasons they were called, gave the people a chance to bring about a bloodless revolution. It was the silence of the people that had led Indira to believe that she still enjoyed their support and it was this silence which resounded later as her castigation in the elections.

This was a response to the ‘politics of action, which, with its violence, arbitrary or random, selective or programmatic, connected at many points with the lives of the people. It was the familiar politics also of unleashed police riot and sadistic terror; it was the answering politics of despair, of self-defense, and ... the counter-violence of an affronted and outraged people’ (271). Selbourne gives a highly evocative and emotive account of the ‘sadistic terror’ that came with the forcible sterilization, the demolition drives and the eviction of the poor from the cities: ‘In the clamour of weeping and violence, of ruthless and instant demolition, often without warning, and without remedy or compensation, the ferocity of the urge to “root out” and “mop up” was convulsive’ (270).
There were other ‘voices’ apart from those of the authorities that spoke of the misery of the people which Selbourne quotes as his sources. These unofficial testimonies of the suffering of people carry more weight than the doctored official accounts:

They spoke of action ‘ill-conceived and cruelly inhuman’; of ‘children’s bitter wailing and the dejection of their parents’; of the rain’s teeming down upon the dumped belongings of the newly homeless hutment dwellers, ‘on their bed-rolls, utensils and sacking’. Lots of the city’s poor consisting of the ‘sweepers and scavengers’ were ‘forcibly removed by truck with their few chattels and utensils and dumped five miles from the city, and three miles by foot from the nearest work, or income; without food or means, in a dusty wasteland, without utilities or water’ (271).

It is an aspect of the genre of creative nonfiction that the suffering seems magnified through the use of such charged language and adds to the oppressive character of the event which is hidden under the blandness of plain facts and figures. The suffering of the people on account of forcible sterilization is even more harrowing and points to the nightmare that the Emergency was for those who were far removed from the protection of the state. These were not carried out on the rich or the middle classes as much on the poor and the lower middle classes simply because they were economically unprivileged and looked upon as the main offenders for India’s burgeoning population. The plight of a few villagers who had come to Barsi market and forcibly taken for sterilization is cited below:

What shall we say of the decision to pick up poor local villagers ‘because they could not offer much resistance’... ‘taken away, regardless of age, in prowling municipal garbage trucks for a quick sterilization’, and dragged by force to the operating table? Of the fact that they included the old and the young, the newly married and the long widowed, those with children and the childless ... and many sterilized already? (272)

The problem of over-population is no doubt one of the major hindrances in India’s growth, however the solution that was imposed during the Emergency was more of a ‘political and surgical short-cut, armed with a knife, and elsewhere with lathi or revolver, sledge-hammer or bulldozer. And between a fistful of rupees for incentives, and the severing of the fallopian tube (for fifty rupees, say), or the excision of the vas deferens (for twenty) of the poor peasant and worker, was the driven bargain of the cash nexus between “patient” and “doctor”, born of the compulsions of fear and need on the one hand, zeal and greed on the other’ (273).
Such events required suppression by the censors since they revealed the 'very basest levels of sadism and degeneration' which went against the popular image of the Emergency as bringing about peace and progress. As a popular slogan of the time goes, the 'nation was on the move' but it was headed towards 'debasement and reversion, not dignity and reason' (274). No matter how strong the politics of power and terror might be, it is always haunted by a 'fear of political failure' and it is the 'mass assertion of the people’s anger and its ultimately always greater power’ that emerges victorious no matter how long it might take (278).

In Sanjay’s context, Selbourne says that he represented a ‘new generation and degeneration together’. Sanjay’s ‘vision’ saw India as a nation free of poverty well on the path of progress, the execution of this vision saw more regression and degradation of the nation. He declared the ‘welfare of the poor’ as the only ‘touchstone of policy’ but ironically or perhaps deliberately the poor were the ones who were the victims of the Emergency (305). His brand of ‘radical national “socialism”’ thus travelled with him through ‘elaborately festooned and triumphal arches, erected in city after city to greet the epitome and embodiment of a degenerate new order, and passed the vacant-lots and mounds of rubble of the route’s stall-holders, and shanty dwellers, swept away from sight by mass demolition, and lost in an even deeper limbo’ (305). There is a trenchant criticism of not just Sanjay and his brand of politics, but also those who helped further his plans and hailed his ideas as the most brilliant and inspiring need of the times. These comprised not just the politicians but the media as well as the academia who stood ‘firm upon a secure base of intellectual corruption’ (311).

Within India either there was no opinion or it was suppressed by the censors. Outside however it was a different story, ‘there was condemnation, credulity, support, lack of interest, confusion or silence – a familiar range of response to another polity plunged deep into coercion, fear and violence’. However while there were the usual noises for ‘the release of the imprisoned, calls for an international boycott, for the restoration of civil liberties’ and so on, there was ‘international protest at torture’ (359). But since the government doggedly rejected claims of there being excesses, such protests did not help in lessening these tortures since they took place at levels where international censure hardly mattered. At the bottom of it all, the Indian Emergency according to Selbourne was a ‘specific political expression of economic dependency, “under-development” and hegemonic crisis’. Selbourne sees most of the evils assailing India, including its power perversion as stemming from its ‘national socialism of under-development’ which was ‘propelled’ in India to serve the interests of the ‘most developed bourgeoisie of an “under-developed” nation’ (361).
Selbourne’s ‘Eye to India’ scrutinizes not just the economic and political systems but aims at a more comprehensive perspective and tries to bring out the ugly social reality of Indian society comprising of poverty, filth and squalor. The India of the streets, of the slums is juxtaposed against the power hungry and corrupt political India. Both are equally distressing for the average Indian and yet it is this ugliness, which was further intensified and glaringly brought out in the open during the Emergency that became the definitive image of India to the outside world. The book is ‘a crowded text’ (Desai, 46) as it presents the Emergency in juxtaposition to India’s poverty and other structural problems. The author terms the Emergency as a ‘brutal and ignominious period in the history of India’ (Preface) and then waxes eloquent on India’s poverty while in the next instant gives us statistics about India’s development and the excesses of the Emergency. It is no doubt an important book and offers a lot of valuable facts and analysis which help in ascertaining the nature of the event but the constant shifting between what Desai calls the ‘ankho dekha haal’ of everyday Indian life and ‘straight political reporting’ deviates attention away from the event itself.

Selbourne’s descriptions often read almost like Mistry’s novel as he makes the whole scenario look bizarre and grotesque and at the same time close to reality. What seems to be exaggeration in Mistry’s novel is compounded by factual evidence here. Selbourne’s book, though one of the most popular and well known ones regarding the Emergency, suffers from some integral flaws, prominent amongst which is the essentialization of India as a land of poor, illiterate masses, which is true to some extent but cannot be made the dominant view. Selbourne’s analysis is complicated by the pull of two contraries, the first being the objectivity of the plethora of facts and references that the text consists of and, on the other, the highly subjective gaze of the author which seeks to emphasise the ‘condition of the people’. The constant shuttling between poeticisation of India’s poverty and the journalistic analysis of the Emergency tends to mar the impact of the book. Sometimes the jump from one to the other makes it difficult for the reader to maintain a sense of continuity. For instance the chapter titled ‘On the Condition of the People’ uses highly emotive language to describe the ‘ugly Indian underbelly’ and is in stark contrast to the factual description of the Indian polity given earlier. Essentialistic statements such as ‘India and poverty are indissolubly one’ (37) form the thematic basis of the chapter which goes on to describe the lives of those living on the streets. India is all this and yet not only this, and these images of poverty, hunger and squalor become the representative picture of India, turning poverty into what defines India. For people who are not used to this aspect of humanity, there is an almost voyeuristic pleasure
that comes from glorifying such images. Admittedly it is a part of India that nobody is proud of, and one that needs more effort from the people and the government, but the situation is not so simple in reality. Poverty is not just a material state of being, but much more deeply entrenched in the psyche of a certain section which sees such an existence as almost liberating since it places them beyond the state and society. Some do break out of it but some persist in staying within the same rut. There are no excuses for the kind of graphic scenes one witnesses in India’s railway stations or even in posh markets such as Connaught Place, yet a lyrical description of such images in an otherwise factual book tends to obfuscate an objective view of both the event and the country, since India emerges as a repressive and unstable polity marked by poverty where people live the basest possible existence. Selbourne’s approach obtusely reflects the kind of construct that India was believed to be. Selbourne tries to mix poetry, politics and poverty, the Upanishads and the harsh reality of India in this book. However there are some very hard-hitting comments that Selbourne makes with reference to the socio-economic conditions of India when he says that in India there is a ‘calculation not for life but for existence’ (42). India defies categorizations and generalizations, and therefore problems arise when we try to see and define India in a rigid manner. As an Indian, I can see both the progress and stagnation that marks India, not just survival but a pulsating life force as well, which is probably absent for someone who does not belong to this nation of contraries.

While the first two books form individual opinions on the Emergency as a whole, Revolution Counter-Revolution (1978) edited by Balraj Puri consists of essays on various aspects of the Emergency intelligently told by those who ‘know their respective disciplines and minds’ namely J.B. Kriplani, Arun Shourie, Balraj Mehta, Mulk Raj Anand etc rather than the commentaries of the “insiders”, “approvers” or “after-thought heroes” of the Emergency as the editor himself says (7). Aware of the rampant publishing of books on the Emergency he states that ‘No apology need be offered for adding yet one more book to the rapidly growing “Indian Emergency Literature”’ (7). The book offers perspectives on the Emergency, its impact on the constitution, the intelligentsia, as well as the economic aspect and several other issues. Like the above mentioned books this too tries to add to the ‘catalogue of questions on the subject’ of the Emergency and the future of Indian democracy (10). These books, it would appear, are concerned with the larger aspect of understanding the implications of the event on Indian democracy as also trying to warn against the recurrence of such an event in the future. Rather than blaming people, they stress on the importance of understanding and assessing the faults of the system so as to safeguard democracy.
Moving on to the essays, J.B. Kriplani’s “The Nightmare and After” describes the horrors of the Emergency with the main emphasis lying on censorship, the MISA arrests, and Sanjay Gandhi’s extra constitutional powers. As regards Indira Gandhi’s decision to call for elections, one which still perplexes academicians, the possible reasons given by Kriplani range from economic factors to consultations with her astrologers. An interesting feature in most of these commentaries is not the Indira vitriol, but the glorification of the Janata alliance: ‘They [the Janata alliance] relied on the justice and the strength of their cause and their belief in the people, poor and ignorant as they were. The oppressed people did not fail them’ (14). In all of its years since Independence, India had never known any other party at the centre other than the Congress; therefore the views that emerge from these books about the first non-Congress government and the hopes that people had of progress and development from this government, offer an interesting peek into the psyche of a nation that believed in the hope of there being a new beginning, a new era of progress and prosperity. This is reflected in Kriplani’s rather strange use of words, ‘the nightmare was over and the people breathed the ozone of freedom’ as the ‘Janata government has taken away fear from the minds of the people’ (14). There were assurances by the new government that there would be ‘no shadowing of individuals, no tapping of telephones and no censorship of private correspondence’ and the ‘rule of law ... again ... guaranteed (15)’. He emphasizes that though the Janata government could have easily acted in the same way as the Congress, it chose not to arrest or detain ‘the evil-doers of the regime’ since it ‘proceeds by the rule of law’ (15). People expected the new Janata government to remove ‘the debris not only of the Emergency period but, as it were, of all the thirty years after independence ... One hopes that it will be equal to the task of pulling the country out of the morass in which the Congress government had left it. The Silent Revolution of 1977 continues’ (15).

Considering that the Janata government consisted of people who had come together only for their own interests and for removing Indira, such expectations were bound to lead to disillusionment and they did so soon enough. Kriplani is not the only one at the time who had such high hopes from the Janata; more or less everyone did so, since the 1977 elections did not just mean the end of the Emergency or the removal of Indira, it meant a breaking away from a past dominated by the Congress and its policies. It meant a new way of thinking, a new path of development and progress for a nation whose burgeoning population needed much more than what had been offered in the past thirty years. There is a certain naivety in such eulogizing of the Janata government and it is probably because of the disillusionment that the
masses had from the opportunistic and unprincipled Janata government soon after the Emergency that ushered in skepticism and cynicism in the Indian body politic.

Mulk Raj Anand’s essay “Writer and Emergency” is written not just from the point of view of a writer but also from that of the ordinary Indian. A very pertinent observation that he makes with respect to the Emergency is that ‘One can only write about the impact of the terrors of the Emergency in terms of one’s own experience of them’ (33). While the Emergency was imposed on the entire nation, the ‘experience’ itself was limited only to certain sections of society, which is probably why the Emergency has such divergent perceptions even amongst those who went through it. Anand states that he was himself unaware of what the Emergency meant for a full year, probably because it did not really affect people like him. Moreover, people living outside India knew more about the Emergency on account of the censorship that had been imposed in India.

While Sanjay Gandhi is openly derided for his role during the Emergency, especially in the sterilization campaign, the attitude regarding Indira Gandhi varies and is somewhat ambiguous as people tried to fathom her change from ‘the meek and mild daughter of a freedom loving intellectual’ to the paranoid near dictator that she emerged during the Emergency (40). What had seemed to be a ‘mere indulgence by the mother of a spoilt son, now became a deliberate, vulgar, undemocratic and somewhat ridiculous effort to impose a dynastic order of succession’ (38). Anand tries to capture the complex feelings that Indira still evokes in the minds of the people as most could not believe that she was privy to all that had taken place during the Emergency and allowed it to happen as well. She was much reviled for her role during the Emergency and was compared to Hitler and Nixon for her ruthlessness and cunningness; yet she is also admired greatly for her fortitude and decisiveness as a leader. Her ‘transition from the “little gentlewoman” to a “colossus with the charisma of Joan of Arc” remains an “enigma”, and most people held a “sentimental regard for her as Nehru’s daughter” and also because she was the country’s first and only woman Prime Minister (40). He states that Indira’s rise was more because she took advantage of ‘an emergent sense of India’s role as a “great nation” whereby she made herself the “leader of a new class of would-be chauvinists who wished to build a power state on the lines of western nation states’ (40).

While Indira herself stated that she was more of a politician than the statesman her father was, and it is mostly as a politician that she is discussed in the accounts of the Emergency, yet her position as India’s most powerful prime minister is made even more
complex by virtue of her being a woman. While her strengths and weaknesses should be seen objectively without drawing in the gender aspect, yet with regard to Indira and in the Indian context given the extraordinary times in which she took over, it is inevitable that we view her position as also her actions, as a woman Prime Minister. Anand uses an interesting turn of phrase ‘woman-non-woman’ for Indira since being a woman she was ‘isolated’ from the rest of the politicians but she used or negated her gender as and when necessary and even ‘idealized’ the status of her family, therefore becoming a ‘woman-non-woman’. She displayed a certain ‘rigidity against her feminine sensibility, pretending to be a man among men’ and yet she also appropriated the images of ‘Mother India’, daughter, and daughter in law of the masses as it suited her (41). In consonance with her public images, Indira Gandhi kept her ‘Aggressiveness ... behind a discreet purdah always, by drawing the pallu of her sari on the forehead in public’ (41). This was perhaps the most visible and symbolic aspect of her populist politics, one that clicked with the masses giving her the iconic status that she had. In Anand’s views her actions displayed a ‘dynamic self-image of a masculine doer’ without the ‘tentativeness or negativity of the woman’ which is why she must have related to M.F. Hussain’s portrayal of her as ‘Durga and Mahish Mardini’ (41). Her various ‘masks’ reveal the rise of her ‘pseudo-fascist order’ forged out of an alliance with the ‘new class of “nationalist-socialist(s)” under the guise of a ‘bourgeois democracy’ (42).

The role of the intelligentsia during this period is also one that has been under much scrutiny and more often than not it was criticized for its ‘subservience’ in accepting ‘the suffocating new order’ (42). Anand calls the Indian intellectual a ‘lonely person’ who ‘remains imprisoned within his own sensibility’, one who is isolated from the rest of his society and ‘rejected’ by the West. This is discussed in detail by Arun Shourie in his essay “Role of Intellectuals during and after Emergency”. India’s intellectuals were not just isolated from the ‘people’ but also from ‘each other’ and ‘the organizations that reached out to people’ (46). Explaining the role of the intellectual in a country such as India he says that given the ‘uneven’ development of the masses, ‘their ability to perceive the meaning, the import, of their experience often lags behind their experience itself. This retarded or lagging self-awareness is the brake that intellectuals can help loosen’ (49). While this might be the case at the theoretical level, in the Indian case, contradictory as it is, it is the illiterate, poor Indian masses who control the vote bank and their decisions are not formulated as much by the articulation of their experiences by the intelligentsia as by the sway of populism, their religious or casteist loyalties, or their approval or disapproval of the government’s policies
primarily on the economic front. Shourie states that the Indian intellectual should also play the role of unshackling the minds of the Indian masses from a hegemonic system that seeks to keep the people down (49). On the whole I feel that plainly put the Indian masses are much smarter than the Indian intellectual gives them credit for, as they understand the politicians and the politicians understand them better than the intellectuals. While we stand on the sidelines and glibly articulate the state of affairs in our post-colonial jargon, the pulse of the nation is understood infinitely better by both the masses and the politicians. It is only now that some sort of ideological underpinnings have also become a part of the election manifestos on account of the rise of a young voter base, but for the most part elections still remain an exercise in populism targeting the masses rather than the intellectual elite.

Rather than pointing out the flaws of others, Shourie, a current member of the BJP, includes his own self in the critique preferring the pronoun "we" rather than "they". According to Shourie the most important lesson that India's intellectuals learnt through the Emergency was that they "lacked even the most elementary courage" as they "collapsed without struggle in the face of the mildest possible dictatorship" (45). The categorization of the Emergency as a 'mild dictatorship' by an avid critic of Indira Gandhi would seem strange at the outset. However Shourie cites his reasons for terming it as such, namely that while there were excesses, 'tortures' and 'suffering' yet it was nothing when compared to 'what a Djilas or a Solzhenitsyn had to put up with' (45). It is true, that despite the excesses it was not a very harsh and severe dictatorship, probably because it was short and affected few sections of society and was called off before people actually started feeling its repressive side. Yet despite this, Shourie castigates that 'we subsided like froth' (46). For those who did have the courage to stand up against the dictatorship, it proved to be wholly 'ineffective' and their protest akin to being 'decorative switches on the wall with no wires at the back' (46). Apart from this the most 'galling' thing was the 'conceited cliquishness' and the 'voluble contempt for each other' that was displayed by India's intellectuals during the Emergency. 'Intellectuals just refused to acknowledge the courage and honesty of those few among them who were standing up' (47), and so they resorted to petty rationalization of the Emergency or the criticism of those who tried to stand up for their principles. The problem with the Indian intellectual as he sees it is that 'articulation ... has been a substitute for action' (55). In the aftermath of the Emergency and the dismal role played by the intellectuals, Shourie voices his concern that this lack of action may further be compounded by 'self-laceration' leading to a further rift in the system (55).
Post the Emergency one could also see the rise of what Abu Abraham, a famous cartoonist, calls 'a new breed of after-though heroes whose pre-dated adventures are being recounted daily. There are the I-told-you-so heroes. Those who always hated Mrs. Gandhi can now say that they were always right. Women-haters, Nehru-baiters, reactionaries, anti-Russians, even anti-birth control people can all claim to be heroes' (57). It is interesting to note as Abraham puts it that despite its 'evil manifestations', 'the Emergency was beginning to show some desirable effects and had considerable support from people in general' until it turned into an 'inevitable corruption of power' (58). Balraj Mehta, in discussing the economic aspects of the Emergency, also states that the Emergency proved to be quite profitable for the industrialists as they supported the Emergency and got their demands fulfilled from the government. He concedes that unlike the populism of Garibi Hatao, the twenty point programme could have actually brought some fruitful economic changes (68). When the Emergency was declared a lot of people felt that it would probably be good for the country after the chaos that had preceded the Emergency and that it would help restore some social and economic sense to a nation feeding more on discontent than food. Later as the excesses grew, as also the 'vulgarity' that soon became a 'pronounced feature of the Emergency' (59), the disillusionment with the government also started growing. Again Abraham also points out that the most prominent amongst these that irked the masses was the 'Sanjay Factor' which was 'assiduously built up ... by the Punjab-Haryana mafia and the money-bags' (59).

Even the role of the bureaucracy has been subjected to a lot of scrutiny as for the most part it gave in to the dictums of the government which is not too strange when one considers the history of Indian bureaucracy as having been designed primarily for the 'rulers' and not required to be an independent thinking body by itself. As the executive body it is subservient to the legislature and has been made to stay within that role. This is primarily one of the reasons that the Indian bureaucracy was equally a part of the excesses that took place during the Emergency. The 'anonymity' within which the bureaucracy functions 'tends to dehumanize their functioning' which results in its turning into 'a disoriented group of people looking desperately for self-assertion' (78). This condition of the bureaucracy according to the author (anonymous) explains 'why so many government servants tended to go berserk the moment they got an opportunity to wield real power unfettered by a myriad of constitutional and external constraints' (79). The 'sins of bureaucracy' lie therefore in its following of orders which lacked 'official sanction, but were nevertheless performed by it to satisfy the wishes of its ministers and political functionaries in their personal capacity' (81). The
bureaucracy is criticized mostly on moral grounds therefore as it cannot be legally held accountable for orders it followed during the Emergency. Post the Emergency, as the author points out, politicians excused the excesses of the bureaucracy on the pretext that these were 'occasioned by an atmosphere of insecurity engendered by the policies and personal traits of some of the erstwhile rulers'. It is pointed out that while the bureaucrats were responsible in part for creating the 'atmosphere of terror', they were also besieged by a sense of insecurity which had developed due to 'subterfuges' played out by politicians with respect to postings, appointments, promotions etc and the rise of a 'system of favours' which not only 'subverted' the 'functioning of bureaucracy' but also destroyed its 'hierarchical structure' (82).

As is inevitably the case, discussions on the Emergency come to centre on Indira Gandhi and her reliance on men of dubious character. Balraj Puri even quotes Feroze Gandhi as having called her a 'fascist' when she was the Congress President in 1959 (92). Puri raises a very valid point when he says that notwithstanding her authoritarian tendencies, an 'attempt to explain the entire phenomenon called the Emergency in terms of the role of a single person would also tantamount to a belief in a sort of "personality cult" – in reverse' (93). This is exactly what most commentators on the Emergency have tended to do and in the wake of the Janata debacle and her subsequent rise to power, all this was negated and she was again reinstated as a leader since she was raised above the event, even if negatively. In Puri's views, the 'psychological needs of the ruled' determine to a great extent the rise of an 'authoritarian regime' and it is in the absence of adequate democratic institutions that the people support the rise of a 'strong leader'. It is necessary to keep in mind that 'it was not an effective and efficient democracy that was demolished on June 26 1975; it was an ailing system that collapsed on that day' (94). Everyone had their own theories for the Emergency; some hold the bogey of a leftist takeover as being responsible, some claim that Indira had become a 'stooge' for the Russians, and even the rise of Sanjay is seen as a measure to curb the threat that the communists posed (114).

There is open admiration for Indira in the early years of her career as the Prime Minister, but the subsequent decay of political scruples during her tenure shook the faith of many of her admirers. She lost on 'quality' but gained in 'quantity' as she aspired for 'power and then absolute power'. Her strategy lay in making herself aggressively 'more nationalistic, more socialist, and more anti-imperialist than her opponents' (98). The author also accuses the opposition and JP at having been equally collusive with Indira Gandhi in 'her efforts to demolish the system' (100) which is contrary to the opinions of those who raised both JP and
the opposition sky high as the saviours of democracy. JP wanted the entire system to go 'lock, stock and barrel' and this is what led many to think that his ideas were more destructive than constructive since he did not offer any clear, concrete alternative to the existing system (102). Although he claimed to distance himself from most political parties, he also wanted to be the implicit head of the movement. Even after the victory of the Janata Party, he held a certain 'distrust in the effectiveness of political power' (119). The words 'Total Revolution' proved to be quite hollow in the aftermath and while JP argued for this revolution to take place at seven levels, namely 'social, economic, political, cultural, ideological or intellectual, educational and spiritual', there was hardly anyone in the Janata front who was ready to take these up in practice (120). The Emergency had an 'all pervasive' impact on the 'psycho and moral behavior of the people, politics, economy, culture, administration, academic and educational institutions and social life' which Puri likens to a 'revolution ... albeit in counter direction' (112). The subsequent victory of the Janata became the 'rebirth' of democracy and is termed as a 'democratic revolution ... as bloodless and peaceful as the earlier authoritarian "coup"' (116). According to the author the Emergency paved way for the 'deconditioning' of the Indian populace from its 'conformist' character (117).

The three books discussed above offer opinions on and analyses of the Emergency which, no doubt biased at times, are nonetheless devoid of the sensationalism of the books discussed in the next section. Even Indira is criticized more as a politician here rather than a woman or a mother which is a dominant feature of the sensationalistic books that follow, which have tended to limit the Emergency literature to just this feature. Nonetheless it is pertinent to study such racy literature as well since these books were readily consumed by the people after the Emergency and probably taken as the truth since they offered spicy details about the lives of the key players of the Emergency along with details about the event itself.

**Of Racy Times**

... And then Destiny took a hand, Mrs. Gandhi – hitherto a shrewd, consummate, calculating politician, noted for her fine sense of timing – lost her grip on the train of events she herself had set in motion (Mankekar et al, 183).

*Decline and Fall of Indira Gandhi* (1977) by D.R. and Kamla Mankekar, as the very title suggests, deals with Indira Gandhi as the prime figure in the Emergency vis-à-vis its cause
and repercussions. While I do not subscribe to the view that the Emergency can be blamed on Indira alone, yet my reasons for taking up this book have more to do with the style of narration that the Manekars have adopted for their creative nonfiction written on the Emergency. It is a very typical 'expose' book which tries to present the reader with the 'inside story', the 'hidden truth' of the event, along with references to the people involved. This is not to decry the veracity or authenticity of the book, as it does contain some very important facts pertaining to the event, which were not officially disclosed, but to highlight the style and presentation of the event in the book. It is fast-paced with suggestive chapter titles such as 'The Curtain Goes Up', 'The Lady's Style', 'Idi Amin Outdone', 'The Sanjay Phenomenon', 'Destiny Takes a Hand', 'The Curtain Goes Down', and shows the pervasive perspective that people had on the event which was to blame Indira and Sanjay for the Emergency and its excesses. This is undoubtedly a very limited view but it was one that prevailed amongst the masses and was furthered by books as the one in question. While most such narratives have employed the past tense, the authors in this case deliberately make use of the present tense at certain places in order to give the reader the effect of narrating events as they unfold. The narrative therefore adopts the omniscient narrative point of view and instead of simply giving a commentary on the events and the people, chooses to rebuild the entire chain of events along with the cast of characters. This effectively leads to the book being more of a pot-boiler than non-fiction. Most of the literature that came out post the Emergency is criticized for this very aspect as it led to a lot of generalization and event construction rather than a sustained and objective enquiry into the causes and effects of the event. As this book is an example of the representative 'Emergency literature' that came out in the wake of the lifting of the Emergency and the victory of the Janata government, it also highlights the very extreme positions that people took vis-à-vis the key political figures and the event itself. While one cannot take such literature as being the definitive word on the Emergency, it does help us understand why the Emergency is viewed as it is and also what the popular sentiment was at the time. Since the Emergency is more or less forgotten as an event it is necessary to rediscover the feelings of a nation that had just been released from a 'mild dictatorship'.

The very first lines of the book describe the whole event as a 'Greek tragedy – a fast-moving high drama, cascading to its destined end. Vinasha kale vipareeta buddhi', with Indira as the main protagonist who is moving towards her own destruction (1). The Emergency is seen as a battle between good and evil, namely JP and Indira respectively, and the Janata victory as a new 'dawn' after the 'unrelieved gloom of nineteen traumatic months' (1). It is a
triumph’ of good over evil as ‘Indian democracy, asserts itself and overthrows and banishes authoritarianism’ which seemed almost permanent in India (1). The ‘curtain goes up, on June 12, 1975, on a court-room in Allahabad’ the day when the decisive verdict against Indira Gandhi was declared and which subsequently set in motion a chain of events which led to the Emergency. The entire buildup from the court verdict to the Emergency, as described, consists of references to hurried meetings, frantic calls to close friends and advisors, quickly organized rallies which convey a certain desperation to hold on to power. ‘Fighting with her back to the wall’, Indira Gandhi ‘excels her own earlier performance, and fights back with reckless courage and a furious will to survive that leaves her political adversaries aghast’ (7). On the fateful June 25, while Indira ‘hatches’ the nefarious Emergency plot, JP is described as addressing the ‘historic mass meeting’ at the Ramlila grounds through which the writers deliberately seek to contrast his reaching out to the people with the government’s repression. We are given a glimpse of JP in his role as the people’s leader: although he is shown to be very enthused by the response of the people and is convinced that the people need a change, he is also dismayed by the unwillingness of the opposition parties to consolidate their forces to counter the government (39). His arrest is made even more dramatic as the authors describe the whole sequence of events down to the smallest detail as also the reaction of the people present with JP at that point which range from shock to nervousness. It would be pertinent to quote the description of the Emergency as given by the authors here: ‘Emergency, with its allies, terror and censorship, steals into the land like a thief in the night ... top leaders of the opposition have been rounded up ... Police armed with lathis, rattan shields and helmets are in the streets ... Power has been cut in Bahadurshah Zafar Marg, Delhi’s Fleet Street, to ensure that no newspapers come out that morning ... The people wake up that morning in a state of mystification, unaware for hours ... until the grapevine brings the grim news in whispered words’ (42). ‘The long night’ of June 25, 1975 is described as one which witnessed the ‘midnight knocks’ and indiscriminate arrests under MISA. There are various accounts of the escapades of some members of the underground from being arrested. Glorifying the underground movement, the authors state that it was these people who kept ‘the banner of the struggle against the Emergency flying’ (44). The activities of the underground during the Emergency for the most part consisted of hiding wanted leaders, cyclostyling pamphlets, distributing them and relaying messages of those in jail outside and vice versa. Those abroad tried to contribute their bit by publishing news from India and helping people know what was happening behind the veil of censorship. The content of such pamphlets consisted of ‘JP’s messages, lists of martyrs who died in jail and other vital
information about the activities of the movement calculated to keep up the morale of the workers in jail as well as outside' (45). An instance of this is *Satyavani: Defenders of the Truth* which claimed to publish only the truth of the Emergency. A lot of commentators have drawn comparisons between the struggle for Independence and the struggle against the Emergency, JP himself is often criticized for projecting himself as another Gandhi seeking to free the people from a different sort of bondage now. As the authors of this book also state, 'the leonine repression unloosed by the Government against the underground workers and the brutalities inflicted on them when captured, raised the struggle to the level of a second war of independence and threw up its own great martyrs and heroes. Most of them blushed unseen unsung’ (46). The authors describe the reactions of the cabinet ministers as being ‘shocked’ unable to even ‘whimper’ any protest with Sanjay Gandhi outside ‘keeping a watchful eye on the Ministers’ behaviour at the Cabinet meeting’ (14). What makes these accounts interesting are the small gossipy tid-bits of information that they provide, which are otherwise glossed over in more serious literature and commentaries. For instance we are told how Delhi Transport Corporation buses were used for gathering crowds for Indira’s rallies which were more like ‘organised, mass-scale picnic’, where people were hired for ‘Rs.5 to Rs.10 per head for two hours’ and the day’s entertainment included ‘bread as well as circuses’ (16). Such information later becomes the base for the fiction based on the Emergency such as Mistry’s *A Fine Balance* which describes a similar rally where the protagonists are also bundled into buses but are unlucky enough to not get the promised remuneration and the free ‘samosas’.

Again as is widely felt, the authors point out that Indira could have stepped down temporarily while the courts acquitted her but then they also raise an important issue as to whether the courts would have acquitted her at all in the absence of the ‘populist mass demonstrations’ and the Emergency, thereby pointing to the pressures induced on the judiciary by the government (32). The ineffectuality of the opposition in countering Indira is also attributed to the surprise element of the Emergency which caught them unawares and made it difficult to formulate any concrete stand against the government. Indira’s subsequent actions for justifying her decision of imposing Emergency are described in detail, as are JP’s comments and his letters to Indira which intensify the divide between the two as that of evil and good. It is interesting to note that according to the authors, Indira was ‘too proud a person to yield to official pressures from Washington or anywhere else’ whereas ‘indirect pressure’ might have worked. Moreover Sanjay was also seen to be making ‘overtures’ to the West making him ‘the West’s favourite – the rising star on the Indian horizon’ (37). This had a lot
of impact on the Indian political and economic scene as Sanjay made no bones about his 'anti-communism' thereby pushing aside the communist allies of Congress. His capitalist leanings also attracted Indian industrialists to come running with their 'moneybags' and soon, as the authors point out, 'there was an unmistakable rightward trend in Government's economic and industrial policies' (37). It is true that Indira did object to Sanjay's public denouncement of the left parties, but the government started veering rightwards, to please Sanjay to a large extent. The government carried out certain exercises in law enforcement and price control along with concern for civic cleanliness, which went in favour of the Emergency and so for 'the first six months everything went off swimmingly. Then the cracks began to appear' (33).

While the excesses of 'censorship' and 'mass incarceration deprived the Opposition of the right of reply ... all the engines of propaganda, radio, TV and news agency and the Press, as a whole, were turned on at Government's command, to damn the Opposition' (18). The authors also point out that the government could have, but did not take recourse to 'dialogue' instead of 'confrontation' since ideologically both JP and Indira were talking about the same things but in different words (33). Since her 'arrogance and authoritarian turn of mind' did not let her 'unbend', this resulted in 'the trauma of the nineteen months of Emergency' which as the authors say was further followed by the 'humiliating overthrow of Mrs. Gandhi's regime-and a dramatic reassertion by the Indian people of their right to democracy and liberty' (33). Ironically while at that point of time, with the Emergency fresh in the minds of the people, the Janata victory was heralded as the dawn of a new era in Indian politics, in less than two years, with the fall of this very government, it was Indira who was once again looked at as 'the' leader of India. This brief sense of euphoria, that people did have alternative leaders and that India could venture in a new direction was rudely shaken as the old order was brought back, on the surface at least. I say on the surface since major power shifts had taken place or at least the process for these shifts had been set in motion and these would gain momentum in the near future. Even Indira herself could no longer rely on her earlier strategies and had to resort to aggressively playing the communal card in the rise of sectarian parties post-Emergency.

Indira forms a dominant part of these books as they come to rest on her person mainly for explaining the Emergency. While the poems written on the Emergency depict her in not very complimentary terms, the nonfictional accounts tend to see her more as a ruthless politician, and as an over indulgent mother. Indira Gandhi is a complex figure by any standards, and while she is responsible to a great extent for ushering in the kind of politics that she did as well as for destroying the decentralized structure of the Congress, yet she is
also probably one of the strongest leaders that India has had, thereby making generalizations difficult. Indira's 'imperial' style consisted of 'politicking through emissaries' which, as described by the authors, saved her from undue 'embarrassment' (23). She is described as being 'cold and distant', a person who liked to keep her cards to herself, and even though took the advice of those close to her, did exactly what she wanted to. 'Her arrogance and lust for power alienated many around her. Shrewd and calculating, she lacked generosity and was often vindictive' and 'she rarely forgets or forgives anyone who dares cross her path' (24, 25). Such 'insights' into the character of one of India's most powerful and most private public figures make for strong generalizations making it all the more easier to ascribe the Emergency and its excesses onto Indira and deviating attention from a deeper study of the event. For most people, because she was arrogant, power hungry, vindictive etc, she was the person responsible for the Emergency and it could not have any other reasons for its implementation save a desire for saving her own position. The authors even offer a psychological insight into her personality attributing it to 'an inborn sense of insecurity' due to a lonely life as a child (26). While this is something that is often written about in her biographies or articulated in her own words, one cannot help but feel that this is a deliberate attempt at garnering sympathy and manipulating one's flaws by deflecting the blame unto external factors. Indira is described as a 'naturally dignified woman', one who could 'exude great charm' when she chose to. Her 'spell' was so strong that according to the authors, even though she was responsible for the 1977 'ignominy' that the Congress went through, she was vied as the only leader by the Congress party people (27). Her actions are described as those of one who felt 'possessive' about her country, to the extent that prior to the Emergency she was 'yearning for the haven and shortcut of authoritarian solutions for the baffling and sticky problems confronting her country, which demanded quick and effective answers from her'. The judgement merely pushed her 'over the brink' close as she was to the edge (28). 'By means of a deliberate regime of terror, through indiscriminate arrests and detentions and display of naked power, a fear psychosis was generated in the country which cowed down the people'. (29). The words used in the preceding line give a glimpse into how public perception viewed Indira and the Emergency, thereby making it easier to understand the nightmarish aspect accorded to the Emergency and the witch like tyrant that Indira was seen as.

It is interesting to note that it is very rare that the personal life of Indian leaders comes under scrutiny, or at least is made open to the public. In researching the Emergency, however, I found that not only was this so in the case of the Gandhi family, but especially so in the case
of Indira in her position not just as the Prime Minister but as a daughter, wife and mother. The incidents that found their way in books post the Emergency refer to her marriage and her interaction and relation with Sanjay. While the lives of other politicians would prove to be equally colourful no doubt, yet in Indira’s context while she was the most powerful woman in India, she was also the most vulnerable since her personal life and her relations with the men in her family as well as M.O. Mathai and Dhirendra Brahamachari have been intensely speculated upon. Rather than getting into a debate as to why Indira’s life should receive so much attention, I would simply say that it is the same principle of deriving vicarious pleasure at work here which makes women centered Hindi soaps so popular with the people.

It is interesting to note that while Indira is the public face of the Emergency and by virtue of her position as the Prime Minister the one responsible, yet many commentaries on the Emergency including this one view the behind the scenes ‘Sanjay caucus’ as the one that ‘ruled the country and gave shape to the Emergency regime, for good or ill’ (24). Referred to as the ‘Enfant terrible’ in the book, we are given a picture of the second most powerful person in India during the Emergency, Sanjay Gandhi. Described as ‘irrepressible, self-willed, wayward ... tall and handsome’, a character portrait is built of Sanjay right from his schooldays where we are told he had an ‘aversion’ to books. Most of the sensationalism of books such as this derive from ‘Sanjay narratives’ as they offer a lot of masala with which to hold the interest of the reader. For instance we are told that ‘Sanjay was a constant source of embarrassment and worry to his mother ... As an offspring of an affluent family, in his early youth Sanjay sowed more than his share of wild oats. They had a gang of their own, which was noted for horseplay’ (123). Most of such information is derived from ‘close family friends’ etc which naturally makes the book seem more like tabloid gossip in places than a serious commentary on the Emergency. He is portrayed as the ‘typical product of a broken home – vengeful, overbearing, petulant, with little respect for law or discipline’ (124). As the authors also say, ‘No single factor has contributed more to the downfall of Indira Gandhi and disintegration of the Congress Party that Sanjay’. Her ‘blind love’ for Sanjay is seen to be her undoing as she chose to ignore his high-handed ways and actions (133). It is a fact though that when her well wishers who could understand the situation, sought to warn her or caution her against Sanjay’s actions, she rejected such warnings stating that, ‘Those who attack Sanjay attack me’ (135). Sanjay’s portrait as the spoilt and powerful young man is made even more sinister when the authors state that ‘anyone who crossed his path or incurred his displeasure was destroyed remorselessly. He proved vengeful relentless and devoid of any sense of
justice' (135) and introduced a new breed in Indian politics comprising valueless, power and money hungry, opportunists. While Indira's office was dominated by the 'Kashmiri mafia' Sanjay's consisted of the 'Punjabi mafia' which believed more in arm-twisting tactics than democratic methods. Some of the similes used for Sanjay are quite interesting, for instance at one place he is described as 'a tiger turned man-eater', at another 'a sprinter in a relay-race' in his pursuit of power (140). However while Sanjay is held responsible for Indira's fall, his own rise is attributed to the 'sycophants and opportunists' who 'corrupted' his mind since they stood to benefit a lot from his actions (140). For every one person who stood against Sanjay there were ten who were willing to bend over for him, calling him a virtual 'messiah', or 'the next Prime Minister' or in D.K. Barooah's words the next 'Vivekananda, Shankaracharya, Akbar' (144), therefore making him believe he could get away with anything and that he was above the law. The biggest scam associated with Sanjay was the Maruti project involving the indigenous manufacturing of a 'people's car' for which he set up the company 'Maruti Ltd' in 1971. What made it so easy for him to undertake such a huge project at such an early age, with no previous background in manufacturing or even any kind of financial credibility was simply the fact that he was the Prime Minister's son and therefore India's industrialists and politicians were all too willing to pour in money and resources for his project to please him. For instance, Bansilal the then Chief Minister of Haryana gave him around 445 acres of prime agricultural land in Gurgaon at Rs. 10,000 per acre whereas the going rate of the area was around Rs. 35,000 per acre (126). These accounts of the past lead to the tumbling out of many skeletons which might be an embarrassment today. For instance Maruti India is one of the government's major concerns these days but according to these accounts its 'life started with lies and illegal actions' (126). It is a scandal indeed that Sanjay Gandhi with a declared income of just Rs.748 in 1969-70, became the Managing Director of the company with an investment of a mere Rs.100 by virtue of the ten shares he had bought at the rate of Rs.10 per share (126). Not only was the Maruti building faulty and in violation of many construction and town and country planning rules but also the excess of the steel and cement sanctioned for the building by the government was sold off at a profit by Maruti instead of being returned. The enterprise promised to put out 10,000 cars on the road by 1973 and while dealers were told to put a security of Rs.3 lakhs each, on which they would get an interest of 10.5% till the time the car came out, they got nothing, 'neither the car, nor the interest, not even the principal' while the company sat on the Rs.2.4 crores which it had collected by way of the dealers (127). Sanjay also set up his Maruti Heavy Vehicles (P) Ltd company in 1974 which, as the authors expose, purchased 'Perkins and Ford engines as scrap from US for Rs. 2000
each' and after fitting them with 'Indian-made gauges and locally made wheels' and giving them a 'fresh coat of paint' the road rollers would be sold off at a rate of Rs.1,40,000 each'. What is even more shocking is that the 'purchasers were generally Government undertakings and organizations such as the Border Roads Organization and the Haryana, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh Governments' (129). There are numerous other incidents that are cited relating to Maruti which reek of corruption and also speak of the willingness of the government to toe the line for Sanjay and prove its collusion in the Maruti scandal. His position of power was not derived from his Maruti project but from his active role in the politics of the time. According to the authors, Indira Gandhi used to refer Chief Ministers, bureaucrats etc to Sanjay Gandhi for resolving issues they had and so it was no wonder that they gave in to his whims and 'sought his blessings for their actions and policies' (142). It is even reported that Sanjay 'freely sacked Chief Ministers and toppled State Governments' when they refused to follow him (142). What is even more degrading is that 'fantastic amounts of public funds' were spent in greeting Sanjay when he visited the states, crowds would be hired and in some cases not only did the entire state cabinets go to the airport to receive him but some 'Chief ministers and other Congressmen in their sixties touched Sanjay's feet and literally carried his chappals for him and put them on his feet' (143). That a person who did not enjoy any position in the government could be deified simply because of his lineage shows that India was not as caught up in the colonial mentality as it was in an old slavish mentality.

His pet projects of sterilization and slum demolition also witnessed a lot of excesses as have been reported in more or less every book. The Congress had always enjoyed Muslim votes but as the Mankekars point out, Sanjay's 'crowning folly was his instant alienation of the entire Muslim community and the poorer sections ... by the brutal and tactless manner in which he sought to "beautify" the capital and force family planning on them' (146). His 'Operation Clean-Up' is considered no less 'whimsical' than Tughlaq's shifting of capital and he even used the royal 'we' when conveying his decisions, even though he had no locus standi in the matter. (147) The Mankekars also give a detailed description of the Turkman gate incident in the chapter 'The Crowning Folly' but since I have already discussed the incident in the preceding chapter, I will deal only with the authors' treatment of this incident. It was probably the most openly violent incident that took place during the Emergency and is treated with the same language and style as the narratives of Partition. The authors aim at conveying the same sense of horror and violence that took place during the Partition, the only difference being that it was the state that was the villain in this instance. The whole event is
told in a very detailed manner describing the demonstrations and protests staged by the residents with the names of several people cited in order to make it sound more authentic. We are told of the clashes between the police and the demonstrators, the firing, the forcible destruction of houses and the ‘haunted’ ‘dazed look’ in the eyes of the people (150).

Stories of displacement, of the ‘atrocities and zulum’ (155) that people faced on account of ‘Operation Clean-Up’ resonate in more or less every piece of fiction on the Emergency. While the idea itself may not have been wrong, the manner of its implementation certainly was. The elite class at that point lauded Sanjay’s actions and supported him because they wanted their cities to be clean as they tried to emulate the glamorous life of the West and these slums and shanties were like ugly warts on their dreams which they wanted to be removed. Indian cities are still full of slums and beggars and they pose the ugly face of ‘India shining’ and there is no doubt that the government should take steps to counter these problems, however in a typical Indian fashion, the one time that it did, it did it in a manner that created more problems than solving them. According to the authors these displacements numbering ‘seven lakhs’ formed ‘one of the biggest migration drives Delhi had ever witnessed’ (155). Sterilization was carried not as much by the health authorities as by the bureaucracy and public personnel who were to fulfill their mandatory quotas of sterilization cases and the pressure was so much that there are reports of teachers offering to ‘buy’ cases for Rs.300. It is almost bizarre when one reads the extent to which the administration went in order to jack up their quotas. Villages were also hard hit by the Emergency and in Bansi Lal’s Haryana the excesses were particularly harsh. When the initial bewilderment gave way to anger, ‘rebellion was stirred up among the people’ such as in Muzaffarnagar and Sultanpur with slogans such as ‘Nusbandi ke teen dalal; Indira, Sanjay, Bansilal’ denouncing the government (158). According to the authors the kind of excesses that took place in the name of city beautification and family planning could not have been ‘improved upon in Idi Amin’s land’ (34). Indira on the other hand denied that the government carried out excesses in its family planning drive or that it had harassed people. Even after the Emergency when the facts were made public, it was the bureaucracy that was blamed for excesses that took place (159).

While such accounts might be termed sensationalistic or exaggerated, they also help ascertain the truth about the Emergency to some extent. For instance we are told how everyone from a petty official to a sales tax inspector made use of the ‘new lawless laws’ for their personal gains. The government used the tax departments for conducting arbitrary raids on those ‘officials and businessmen who had crossed the path of the high-ups’ (34). It is not
as though this misuse of government machinery or the abuse of their positions by the officials had not taken place before or does not take place even now, but the Emergency allowed them to do so openly and without fear of any reprisals. For the most part as was explained, they were simply obeying government orders, even post the Emergency the same bureaucratic machinery was used by the Janata against the Congress albeit in a 'democratic' manner, read quietly and under covers. The authors also write about the kind of excesses that were perpetrated on student activists during the Emergency. The sudden arrests outside colleges, the tortures and the harassment of parents kept in the dark about the whereabouts of their children find their echoes in Surendran's *An Iron Harvest*. 'The idea was to strike terror in the people, and in the process, individual police officers gave full rein to their sadism and perversions' (34). As the writers say 'indeed, it was difficult to believe that our officials were capable of such cruelty and callousness; and now every time this writer passes a policeman in the street, an involuntary sense of revulsion overtakes him' (34). Another instance of the excesses of the Emergency that find mention in the non-fiction is the kind of force that was employed against those who revolted, especially in the villages. These accounts report that those revolting were 'beaten down and shot' and adult males in villages often had to spend days and nights hiding in fields to escape being caught by the police for forced sterilization (34). Most of the nonfiction on the Emergency is based on research as well as accounts that percolated through the blanket of censorship. Therefore to use this as the base for the truth of the excesses of the Emergency would be as tenuous as accepting the government's official position of there not being any excesses or very few at the most. Censorship not only turned 'the Capital ... into a vast rumour factory, often fact proving stranger than fiction' (34) but has also made the Emergency rather hazy, making it difficult to take an objective stance based on facts. As the writers themselves state, stories of brutalities that would often be 'considered incredible and a product of a sick imagination' would later turn out to be 'true' (35).

Indira's fall came with the belief, instilled by the 'ubiquitous tribe of the intelligence men swarming all over like worms', that she was still popular among the masses and that the Emergency and its excesses had not affected her vote base and, with western opinion again veering towards her, she felt 'she could get away with anything, even elections' (184). In her own words, as she publicly announced elections on January 18, 1977, 'Every election, is an act of faith. It is an opportunity to cleanse public life of confusion. So let us go to the polls with a resolve to reaffirm the power of the people and uphold the fair name of India' (quoted in Mankekar et al, 185). According to the authors there was a fear amongst the members of
the opposition that Indira might try to create an 'atmosphere of fear and suspicion, and even violence' since she was publicly making statements such as 'These groups have come together to encircle me and stab me' and that in insulting the Prime Minister, the opposition and Jagjivan Ram were insulting the country (194). Not only were people more 'sympathetic' towards the detenus but were no longer willing to take the Government propaganda at its 'face-value' (195). With her defeat 'the curtain rang down on this Greek tragedy, the country and the world found Indira Gandhi still in the centre of the stage. Unrepentant, unbowed, unbent, blaming the press, blaming the opposition’s tactics, blaming the bureaucracy, blaming everyone and everything around her for the dramatic denouement'. In the corner stood 'Sanjay Gandhi, the enfant terrible, still scowling, largely responsible for all that catastrophic devastation'. While Indira’s fall was huge indeed, the ‘debris and ruins of a citadel – the Indian National Congress, considered impregnable, immortal, eternal’ was colossal indeed (201). JP on the other hand was the hero of the tragedy; ‘a frail man, with a gentle voice but an iron will, arose to lead the Indian people. He led them with a firm, unflatering hand, out of the enveloping darkness of authoritarianism to democracy and freedom’ (202). According to the authors the debt that people owed to JP was as great as that owed to Gandhi since this was no less than a ‘second liberation’. There is no doubt that whatever his political or ideological failings, JP was a man with a strong sense of integrity and a firm belief in the people and his country despite being criticized for harbouring alleged fascist tendencies. What makes him actually heroic above the rest is that he carried his struggle against the Congress and the Emergency at a point when he was physically very ill and the imprisonment worsened his condition to such an extent that the government felt compelled to release him lest he should die in jail! The naivety of the masses as also the faith that Indian politics would be different post Emergency are apparent as the authors call JP a ‘shepherd’ guiding the Janata leaders post the Janata victory and in the belief that with the new government, ‘words and phrases as integrity, austerity and sense of public duty have ceased to be hypocritical euphemisms and become the yardstick of Ministers’ and politicians’ public performance – we hope, for good’ (203). There was faith that the ‘khichri’ Janata government would survive the test since coalitions had been successful in so many countries, and the party had enough ‘patriotism’ and a desire to serve the masses to ‘conquer its difficulties and carry on with the government for the full term’ (206). So much so that even communal parties such as the RSS, Jana Sangh, Muslim League, the Akalis which had gotten together to face the common enemy, Indira and the Congress, were now seen as more understanding of each other, to the extent that people actually believed that ‘terms like communalism had lost their sting’ (203). The Janata
government however collapsed in 1979 without completing its full term and proved embarrassing for people who saw that these politicians were no different than the others and that integrity and public duty were terms that reeked of hypocrisy. Ultimately it is not Indira or Sanjay who make the Emergency a tragedy; rather it is all Indian politicians, Congress as well as the opposition on the one side and the people on the other which make it so and the victims are of course the masses who felt that their leaders were worth believing both when the Emergency was declared and when the Janata Party came to power, but were disillusioned on both accounts. The one positive outcome of this event, according to the authors, is the ‘political awakening’ that the Emergency brought to what was hitherto called ‘a nation of sheep’ (204). The authors make the event a little too dramatic but then it is precisely this aspect which I sought to emphasize with respect to this book which describes the Emergency more in terms of the various acts of a tragedy and in its cast of characters. There is a tendency for the theatrical and the occasional exaggeration along with a desire to impact the reader with sensationalism mixed with facts. But the event itself was more of play acting for a brief while, and most people came out confused as to what had really happened to write good reviews!

And talking of reviews, an advertisement in the 1977 The Book Review for Janardan Thakur’s book *All the Prime Minister’s Men* describes it as:

Another bestseller from VIKAS after the sensational success of THE JUDGEMENT and TWO FACES OF INDIRA GANDHI. Kuldip Nayar described HOW it happened, Uma Vasudev analysed WHY it happened, while Janardan Thakur discusses WHO did it. Brilliant … Daring expose
A devastating work of investigative reporting …
Unique in the annals of Indian journalism …
Lays bare the startling aspects of their lives …

(*The Book Review, 1977*)

Thakur’s book is by all accounts the archetypal ‘Emergency literature’: sensationalistic, racy, judgmental, and as the blurb states a book that proposes to expose the real faces of those at the top who made the Emergency what it was. It tries to lay bare the characters of the men and women at the top and their henchmen at the lower levels who were responsible for creating the power pyramid that existed during the Emergency. Although the writer acknowledges that ‘none of the characters who occupy these pages has done anything great and virtuous to deserve the flood of books written on them’ yet it is important to write about these ‘small people’ since they were allowed by the people of India to get away with what they did. While
we must admit to our own ‘guilt’ we must also know the ‘faces that committed the ugly assault on the human spirit’ (vii). The book offers some rather revealing and unsavoury personal details of the men in power, most of which the writer says he had to keep aside since they were too ‘lurid or vulgar or difficult to substantiate’. Again he remarks that if the ‘tone is harsh or blunt’ then the ‘reader must remember that the writer is only echoing the tone of the people, more often in milder terms’ (ix). The author occasionally tends to slip into hyperbole which makes the exaggerated quality of the work even more pronounced.

N.S. Jagannathan in his review on the Emergency books calls it ‘by far the least pretentious and most readable of the Emergency crop’. It is readable no doubt but more for the sensationalism that it provides in the details of the people who are ‘diverting figures’ of a ‘terminated tyranny’, rather than the event itself (6). The author has just hearsay and ‘anonymous’ functionaries and ‘friends of the family’ as his sources, which do not really add to the credibility of the narrative. Rumour and gossip rely less on exactitudes and more on speculation which is primarily what the book sets out to do. The author uses very strong words of indictment against the key players of the Emergency and the constant references to their personal lives, detracts attention away from the Emergency which is probably how people saw it in the aftermath when a broader perspective on the event beyond that of a handful of power mongers was not available so easily.

The book starts with Nehru’s death and while no incident or names are given, yet it is implied that Nehru’s death, while resulting from a burst aorta, was also possibly due to the pain and distress that one of Sanjay’s infamous escapades gave him after he was apprised of it on his last dinner. As is common with most such narratives, there is a thorough assessment of Sanjay’s character and the author’s own reasoning as regards his character:

a famous doting grandfather, parents whose marriage was almost a total wreck, a whole retinue of fawning servants and craven courtiers, a pack of rumbustious friends, an environment of western permissiveness, with all this a boy could hardly be expected to grow up into anything but a Sanjay Gandhi-arrogant, brash, and cruel (5).

Sanjay is portrayed as a ‘pampered high society boy’ for whom such a lifestyle and temperament were a natural outcome of the kind of lineage and positions he enjoyed. The author goes onto cite incidents which aim at showing his ‘character development’ as also a litany of unsavoury characters who posed a negative influence on the young boy. According to Thakur, the fault lay not as much in Sanjay’s character as in the kind of people who fed him on dreams of power and money. This not only speaks of Sanjay but also of the entire
Nehru/Gandhi family and its seamy side which involves associations with rather shady characters such as the businessman ‘Dharam Teja’. Even Indira, according to Thakur, spent the ‘prime of her life’ in Teen Murti which was essentially a ‘bachelors’ den’. It provided her ‘invaluable training’ as the author states but it also took its ‘toll’ as the ‘springs of her womanhood had run askew’ (11). Indira’s like is ripped apart in a manner that no other politician is, not even Sanjay. While her being a woman Prime Minister subverts the male patriarchal order, it also renders her vulnerable on fronts like these where the speculation over a widow’s personal life makes for more racy accounts even if it is mere speculation and has little veracity. Analysing her Thakur says that, ‘Indira was a person with conflicts’ and some commentators attribute this ‘anxiety-ridden, unavoidable complex’ to a ‘constant fear of not measuring up to not being worth of Nehru’ (12). Thakur characterizes Indira as possessing a very ‘imperious mind, full of illusions of grandeur’ with a ‘low intellectual calibre’. She is described as a ‘shrewd intriguer’ with an ‘immense capacity for manipulating men and events’ and at ‘using people and then kicking them out the moment they became inconvenient’. Her ‘deep sense of insecurity’ it is explained had ‘warped her mind’ and induced a sense of paranoia. It is also stated that she could not trust people for long and though always surrounded by some caucus or the other, finally found the kind she wanted in a ‘set of fawning wheeler-dealers’ (19). Her marriage with Feroze Gandhi is also dissected and ripped apart. The two never ‘broke away in the formal sense. Which in a way, worsened their situation’ as they ‘went their own different ways, carrying with them their mounting guilt complexes’ (13). While questions are often raised as to how Nehru’s daughter could do what she did, it is stated that Nehru himself was not averse to dynastic rule and that he had wanted Indira to succeed him (18). When asked about the same in an interview, he is reported to have said, ‘I am certainly not grooming her for anything of the sort. That does not mean she should not be called to occupy any position of responsibility after me.’ (quoted in Thakur, 18).

Similar things were later said by Indira with respect to Sanjay and by Sonia with respect to Rahul, or in other words with respect to every future Gandhi inheritor of the Congress party.

Anonymous references to the use of sex and power in Indian politics and business, meant to shock the masses with the ‘reality’ of those in high-society, simply seek to sensationalise the whole event with random gossip about the high and powerful in India. It would have also served to promote sales since the book had a sixth imprint after publication. The author also makes the reader privy to the inside workings of the Teen Murti household and numerous characters who played a key role during Indira Gandhi’s tenure and the
Emergency. There is a detailed description of the role of P.N. Haksar, her personal assistant, who was also called the ‘virtual Prime Minister of India’ during Indira’s ‘years of glory’ which saw her ‘virtual deification as goddess Durga’. Though she took radical steps, Haksar made sure that they were not crude or corrupt and always ensured that she retained the moral high ground in public, and it was in this position that he advised Indira against the growing powers of Sanjay and incurred her displeasure. After her falling out with Haksar, her ‘operations became so crude and brazen that they tarred her face black’ (21). The genesis of the strong position of the PMO can be traced to the Haksar years and it is something that has carried on through the years and has also undermined the position of the cabinet, as it did so during the promulgation of the Emergency. This ‘concentration of power’ was later used with ‘devilish abandon by groveling sycophants’ who are also described as ‘worms’ who were fast ‘corroding the very ground she stood on’ (22).

Thakur’s language is not very sophisticated and he occasionally slips into rather crude attacks on Indira’s personal life. The author cites two incidents, cited by ‘staff’ and ‘family friends’, which relate to Sanjay’s wild ways. In one, Sanjay returned home late and started ‘banging the door’ and when Indira pulled him up, he threatened to hold a press conference and ‘expose’ her ‘before the world’. In the other, which was reported by Lewis. M. Simons a correspondent for the Washington Post, ‘a family friend’ who attended dinner with Sanjay and Indira ‘saw the son slap his mother “six times” across the face. “She didn’t do a thing,” the friend said. “She just stood there and took it. She’s scared to death of him”’ (25). Lots of commentators have emphasized upon the mother-son relationship and tried to analyse it in various ways. Thakur also attempts the same and suggests that there must be some ‘deep guilt’ that made her so ‘scared’ of him. ‘Did he have something to blackmail her with? Or was it simply that she was one of those women who feel the psychic umbilical cord with such great intensity that they simply cannot think of their child leaving them? ... Whatever the cause, there was no denying the fact that the boy had an abnormal hold on his famous mother’ (26). Such comments have led to all sorts of speculations ranging from Sanjay being the problem child of a failed marriage; an incestuous mother-son relation, Indira having Sanjay murdered later, and so on. Even the Emergency is popularly seen more as Sanjay’s brainchild and his doing since he controlled his mother.

According to the authors, post the Bangladesh war, she was exposed to a ‘superheated rhetoric’ by both the media and the Congress and was projected as the very ‘personification of India’. Even before the Emergency there was a concerted programme for
projecting Indira as ‘the leader’ and this was evident through the kind of hoardings the author describes that were put up in Connaught Place, which stated, ‘Think Big, Do Big for the Leader is Right and the Future is Bright’ (27). According to the author, Indira Gandhi was the ‘nexus between the Nehru culture and the Sanjay boorishness’. She was ‘no democrat, but was all the time trying to project herself as one’ (160). According to the author she thought that the ‘vast teeming millions of the country ... were all her worshippers’ (161). People of her caucus had created such a wall around her that she could not understand or see that the people were no longer with her. Despite the ‘populist rhetoric’ and the ‘redeemer cult’ Indira Gandhi’s tenure was accompanied by a ‘steady debasement of political values’ and a ‘staggering increase in all-round corruption’ (161). According to the author the Emergency was inevitable given the rising scandals and the need to rise above them. He also cites the stagnation of the Maruti project due to lack of finances and the huge scandal it was giving birth to as one of the reasons for the Emergency. Sanjay’s dream projects required a ‘constant flow of money’ and this in turn ‘necessitated that he and his mother had untrammeled power. Dictatorship was the logical extension of both his mother’s policies and his own ambitions’ (30). The Emergency proved to be the final forum through which they could exert their power. The scene that the author describes which took place after the Allahabad judgement and was told to him by an ‘eyewitness’ is no less than one from a political thriller as Sanjay rushed into the room and snatched her resignation letter telling her, ‘Mummy, you will never get power back this way’. Tearing the letter he is said to have told her, ‘Now let me take care of the situation’ (31). Facts and other less sensationalistic accounts show that the Emergency was suggested by close political associates of Indira such as S.S. Ray, and was pushed through by Sanjay although Indira denied that Sanjay had anything to do with the Emergency and stated that it was the decision of the cabinet.

The subsequent chapters of this book deal with specific people who were prime figures during the Emergency. ‘The Jat Bully: Bansi Lal’, whose name became a ‘byword for crudeness and barbaric depravity’ was an erstwhile Chief Minister of Haryana who was appointed the Defence Minister of India during the Emergency since he was very close to Sanjay and instrumental for a lot of Emergency excesses (32). While the author does tend to get his metaphors mixed a little in calling Bansi Lal’s appointment as ‘creating a Frankenstein’ yet the import is clear. Everyone mentioned in the book seems to have been a born villain and in Bansi Lal’s case it would seem that the ‘seeds of crudeness, intrigue, and trickery were sown quite early into his life’ (34). He is referred to as a ‘first-rate political tout’
who 'touted his way up the ladder and finally became the "tout-in-chief" of Indira Gandhi and Sanjay' (36). During the Emergency he is said to have boasted at a press conference that ‘we have brought newspapermen down to the level where they ought to be — "the drain level"’ (45). Bansi Lal’s reign of terror extended to not just hounding his critics especially newspapers but also in jailing and harassing his political opponents. Thakur makes the whole ‘Bansi Phenomenon’ even more intriguing when he tries to reason out the possible motives for Indira’s benign attitude towards him even while knowing the ‘black deeds of her favourite satrap’(47). According to him, ‘she protected him because she had no choice. In the ultimate analysis it was easier for Bansi Lal to ditch Indira Gandhi: he had no reputation to lose’ (47).

The author makes the association even more sinister when he says that, ‘What if Bansi Lal chose to throw up the tapes of his tete-a-tete on phone with the famous mother and the son? What if the man, who had so little to lose, chose to make public the tell-tale pictures of the prince at the famous Pinjore gardens which he had kept so well-equipped at all times for the honoured guest? No, the man had to be shielded and protected’ (48). It is also reported that he once boasted that ‘I have taken possession of the Calf and the naturally the Cow is always at my beck and call …’, the reference being to Sanjay and Indira of course (48). Bansi had given prime agricultural land to Sanjay and was helping him with his dealings involving the defence industry as well and so he naturally had Sanjay’s support and whoever Sanjay approved of was approved of by Indira as well! The description of his working as the Defence Minister even if based on gossip is enough to create a sense of disgust as to the way in which one of the most important departments of the government operated during the Emergency. Thakur dramatically points out that ‘it would be futile to single him out for condemnation and forget the putrid soil that gave birth to such a man’ since he was not a ‘political freak’ but a ‘well marked example of a type that could be met throughout society’ (53). Not only is he to blame but the fact that such a man could get to the place that he was in also speaks of the ‘responsibility’ of the people for putting him in such a place.

V.C. Shukla is described as the ‘Playboy Goebbels’ even though the author himself states that to compare the two would be an ‘insult’ to the ‘great Nazi manipulator of minds’ (54). ‘Goebbels had brains’ whereas Shukla had ‘no mind’ but ‘police batons to beat minds out of existence and succeeded in totally destroying the credibility of the government and his masters’ (54). Shukla was Gujral’s replacement who was then the Information and Broadcasting Minister but had incurred Sanjay’s displeasure by not giving into Sanjay’s demands completely. Sanjay insisted that the AIR news bulletins be okayed by him before
they went on air and while Gujral resisted such unreasonable demands often times he had to comply and the scripts did not come back from No.1 Safdarjung Road as the ‘Big Censor sat over them’ (56). Gujral was later removed from the post on the pretext that the BBC had carried some ‘blasphemous news’ which it had not. The real reason of course was to put in place someone lacking any spine and willing to bend over to whatever Sanjay or Indira commanded him to. Shukla fitted the bill perfectly and like Bansi Lal he brought with him favourites from the bureaucracy to carry out whatever unreasonable and absurd restrictions were laid onto the press. Details such as these reveal the way the government functioned and also the kind of power pyramid that was built up during the Emergency. Indira and Sanjay relied on men such as Bansi Lal, Shukla etc to carry out their ‘policies’. This was then passed on by the ministers to their special aides in the bureaucracy who had a carte blanche to carry them out without any consideration of rules or laws. These were further executed by the lower orders of bureaucracy and since most of these orders were extra-constitutional and had ministerial sanctions which could not be challenged at that point of time, more or less everyone abused the power that came with such orders. Corruption and bullying became a common feature of the police and bureaucracy because there was no one to check them and they were simply ‘following orders’. Ethics and principles seem to have been at an all time low at this point. Shukla’s penchant for Bollywood and its starlets was well known and the author gives incidents culled from cine magazines to add some masala to Shukla’s character. Such sleazy information about a cabinet minister does not help in understanding the Emergency but it does throw some light on the personal life of public figures, as such leaders are to be found even today on the national political scene. An instance of the kind of instructions he issued to the press warning them against stating anything favourable about JP or the opposition: ‘Remember his utterances are a thing of the past, not a word anymore. Remember, Mrs. Gandhi is our leader. More than 600 million people of India adore her. Even a whisper against her is treason. Any unfavourable reference to people connected with her is unpatriotic. The image of our leader should not only be protected but brightened day in and day out ...’ (58). Such propaganda backfired as even the authorities also believed only in what they themselves dictated to the press. They never allowed the real picture to come through the thick maze of censorship that they themselves had imposed. Moreover in their efforts to please Indira they not only created a false image of a huge support base of not just Indira and Sanjay but the Emergency as well, which led to their over-confidence that they would sweep away the polls. Thakur goes on to give a preview into the working of the censor board at the lower levels as well. In one particularly absurd and funny case, the report of a
foreign correspondent was censored and sentences dealing with ‘fundamental rights’ were struck out with the explanation that this applied only to those who had been detained and that this did not mean that the Fundamental Rights were suspended. In the second instance, lines ‘suggesting that the demonstrations against Mrs. Gandhi have fizzled out’ were also struck out and the censor’s explanation for doing so was that ‘nobody would want to plan a demonstration against the Prime Minister in the first place. And by the way, you cannot pass this message informing your Editor that this report has been censored’ (62). The scene in its monumental absurdity seems almost as if taken from one of Ionesco’s plays.

Another character who appears as though taken from the theatre of the absurd is D.K. Barooah, the then Congress president who is described as the ‘Sly Jester’ and whom Sanjay deridingly referred to as a ‘clown’. The author however states that Barooah was no clown and that it was a ‘mask’ that he wore which concealed a ‘sly and scheming politician who had escalated to power through sycophancy and manipulation’ (74). Apart from character sketches, the author also narrates incidents related to the dirty behind the scenes world of politics. This involved the underlings of the high ups engaging in horse trading in order to bring down state governments which was a rather common scenario during that period. Barooah too is reported to have sanctioned president’s rule in Bihar to finalise the fall of Karpoori Thakur’s government which had been orchestrated by Yashpal Kapoor, Indira’s right hand man (78). The incident reveals not just the power that a PA like Kapoor wielded or the sycophancy of Barooah, but also the intrigues, manipulation and money that had become a part of national politics. The author goes on to detail Barooah’s personal life which apparently consisted of partying with his own coterie and patronizing ‘nautch girls’ (79). Sex and politics seem to be heavily intertwined in Indian politics as Thakur depicts it.

The picture Thakur paints of Rukhsana Sultana is quite similar to the one which found its way in novels on the Emergency including Midnight’s Children and An Iron Harvest. A ‘glamorous socialite’ she had come to align herself with Sanjay’s family planning programme. Unlike the others, Rukhsana did not malign Sanjay after the Emergency, and still considered him a ‘dynamic leader’. Her delusions about her own popularity are quite interesting as she stated to the author that ‘Wherever I went in the walled city, there were stampedes. People fought with one another to stand next to me. One day a young man came up and said he had not washed his hand for days after he shook hands with me. My meetings were like Cleopatra’s Durbar. People worshipped me!’ (114). The walled city was Old Delhi where she was directed by Sanjay to implement the Family Planning Programme and she
proceeded to do so with great gusto. During the Emergency she was described as the ‘Queen of the Walled City’ and after the event as the ‘Nasbandi Fiend’. According to the author her very name drew ‘murderous fury’ in Old Delhi and she was directly linked with ‘all the inhuman stories of bulldozing and forced sterilization’ (115). During the Emergency she was given her own retinue of policemen and officers who would accompany her to the walled city in her efforts to popularize family planning. Calling it a ‘mass butchery’ the author states that under her directions somewhere around ‘13000’ sterilizations were carried out in less than a year in Dujana House in Old Delhi (122). The ‘light of the walled city’ as she was called went out with the Emergency and symbolizes how even an ordinary citizen could acquire unlimited power during the Emergency simply through his/her proximity to the powers that be.

Dhirendra Brahmachari who is described as ‘Indira’s Rasputin’ was a ‘jet setting yogi’ who was a permanent fixture in the Nehru household since Nehru’s time. ‘He was the ‘Open Sesame’ to Indira’s court … the surest passport to No.1 Safdarjung Road for saints and mendicants down to crooks and smugglers … he was the Indian Tsarina’s Rasputin, the ruling mafia’s guru’ (105). A quote from India Today (16-30 June, 1977), which the author uses, describes the Brahmachari’s position in the following words: ‘whether it was license or libido, contracts or cabinet changes everything seemed to be solved by a single ‘blessing’ from the yogi’ (112). Like many other accounts there are suggestions that the Brahmachari acted as a liaison between the Gandhis and their ‘other’ dealings. He was a ‘well greased pipeline between the underworld and the powers-that-be; the swami was suspected to have played a key-role in the dispersal of ‘big booty’ (113). The author also provides detailed information on the role played by ‘khidmatgars’ such as Yashpal Kapoor or R.K. Dhowan. Kapoor, a petty clerk who rose up to become Indira’s right hand man, is credited with not just being instrumental for the toppling over of several state governments but also for masterminding Indira’s electoral campaigns. However despite giving her winning slogans such as ‘UP ki beti, Rae Bareli ki bahu’ (96), his involvement as a government employee in the 1971 elections was one of the reasons why Indira was indicted by the Allahabad court.

Thakur states in a rather acerbic tone that ‘Scurvy hoodlums, vile gutter-snipes, pimps and procurers, perverts and drug addicts were all the same to the mother and the son if they served their purposes’ (139). It is interesting to note here that while the ‘rot’ had set in the Congress party, people believed or at least hoped that with Indira at the top, there was still some hope. According to the author, ‘even hard boiled commentators and people supposed to have keen insight into men and matters were taken in by her show of sincerity and good
sense' (154). He states that post the Emergency also, people blamed Sanjay as the 'evil force' and believed in her 'essential goodness' (154). According to the author 'it was the will of Indira Gandhi and later of the mother and the son which operated through the crude bunch of men' (154). These 'men' did not even constitute 'mediocre politicians' but were 'small men', 'back-room boys' who were used by Indira and Sanjay for their unbridled pursuit of power; 'devoid of all values these were the men who rose to the country's top positions and debased them all' (155). Since tempers and emotions ran high post Emergency this kind of statements seem quite understandable. No one thought that the Janata government would collapse the way it did or that Indira would come back to power despite the Emergency.

While one can get a little bored with the sensationalism of the book, the accounts of these men do draw disgust at the sort of mafia that ruled the country during the Emergency. That there was a personality cult that surrounded Indira and made her almost invincible is a fact and while the same strategy was applied with respect to Sanjay, it failed because it was assumed that the people would accept him in a slavish manner. Thakur's narrative ends dramatically with Sanjay 'stunned into silence' on hearing about the 1977 election results.

Fact or fiction? Truth or rumour? Sensationalism or 'objective' journalism? The Emergency spawned a lot of confusion regarding the truth of the event and people if nothing else. True every political era has some dirty secrets and some villains, however in the case of an Emergency, which is compounded by censorship, the task of ascertaining the truth or even some measure of it becomes very difficult. While books such as those discussed do constitute the literature based on the Emergency, yet, they are not representative of the Emergency and cannot be read as the final word on the subject. It is difficult to state if these accounts actually construct the Emergency in its totality, since rumours were rife at that time and they often exaggerated people and incidents. They were based on some research and referred extensively to newspaper reports and speeches of the prime figures, but since facts were obfuscated and the papers censored, the analysis is not completely infallible and it would be no surprise then if such rumours found their way into books such as these. It would be a grave fallacy to consume all that such books state as the truth, since one requires a certain degree of skepticism and objectivity when dealing with such texts. The derision that Emergency literature faced was probably more due to sensationalistic accounts such as these. Since this sort of literature is more topical in its nature and frankly lacks any serious literary or journalistic quality, save a few books, it lost its relevance as soon as Indira and the 'villains of the Emergency' came back to power.
The Prison Diaries

Jail diaries and memoirs form an important part of Emergency literature as they are voices of dissent and protest against an authoritarian regime. These prison diaries do not speak of the tortures or horrors that people underwent under other authoritarian regimes. The political detenus were for the most part subjected to harassment rather than tortures since they would have caused a huge embarrassment for the government which wanted to maintain its image in the world. The students, naxalites and other suspects who were arrested under MISA were the ones who underwent tortures in jails and prisons and these have been reported amongst the excesses of the Emergency. Within this section I have taken up L.K. Advani's *A Prisoner's Scrapbook*, Kuldip Nayar's *In Jail* and Primila Lewis's *Reason Wounded*. Apart from these these are the memoirs of JP himself, of K.R Malkani, Shanta Kumar and Mary Tyler who were also detained and kept in prison during the Emergency but which have not been included within this study. This corpus of literature not only speaks of what happened through stories or poems, but more importantly why did it happen and how it affected those who were directly in the line of fire.

*A Prisoner's Scrapbook* by L.K. Advani contains not just his daily entries but also some of the underground literature that was being circulated under the name of 'a detenu'. While it was first published in 1978, it was republished again in 2002. Explaining the importance of republishing this book, the Publisher's Note states that the 'Emergency may be a distant memory now, never to be revisited. But every new generation needs to revisit, in books and in works of art and culture, both the dark and bright chapters of its nation's history – for illumination and for inspiration' and that such a book would 'help the new generation, as well as the generation that experienced the Emergency rule, to know both the “prisoner” and the undemocratic mindset and establishment that had turned India, for nineteen fateful months, into a “prison”' (4). While Advani was one of the 'heroes' of the 'darkest episode' in India post 1947, it would be pertinent to point out that he was also the Home Minister of India in 2002 when the book was republished!

That apart the book is important as it voices the opinions of a political detenu who happened to be amongst the more prominent members of the opposition and later on emerged as one of the hard liners of Hindutva. The Emergency that emerges here is one that is a political nightmare as Advani brings it out in his comparison between the Indian Emergency and Hitler's regime. Advani does compare Indira with Hitler but he also sees the complicity
of the Congress party in all of it. He gives an insider's view, one which is sharply analytical and political. The book is interesting both for its content as also because it is the voice of the opposition, the right wing opposition. It gives a political and balanced study of the Emergency while being a victim of the event. Advani's diary consists of chronological entries written fairly regularly. The diary starts with June 26, 1975 with news of the mass arrests that were taking place. He goes on to talk about the living conditions and the day to day routine in the prison. The book contains not just his daily entries but also some of the 'underground literature' that was circulated during the Emergency under the title 'a detenu'.

While most of the commentators discussed above have emphasized on the excesses of the Emergency, Advani focuses on the impact and excesses that took place on the political and legal front. As a member of the opposition he criticizes the working of the Parliament during the Emergency stating that the 1975 monsoon session of the Parliament would be the 'strangest in our Parliament's history' as the session was marked first and foremost by a lack of opposition members, moreover it entailed the suspension of 'all normal rules of procedure', no question hour, 'the proceedings could not be reported freely and faithfully; only ministerial speeches could be published' (28). He also goes onto criticize the functionaries of the Parliament such as the Presiding Officer and the Speaker who complied with the farce that was being enacted in the Parliament. According to him, Indira Gandhi was angry with the Parliament because it tried to act as a check over the government, or as he puts it, because it tried to 'discharge' its duties (29).

Advani's diary shows the working of a political mind at work concerned with understanding the strategies of the government as also devising counter measures against it. The diary narrates incidents concerned more with events happening within the jail involving the transfer orders of inmates, the writs filed by the members, or speculations over what steps would the government take next and attempts to reason them out the best that it could on the basis of stray reports and rumours bound as they were within the precincts of the jail. He does not dwell too much on his personal problems unlike some other writers who emphasized more on their personal hardships, the loss of one’s family, the apathy of the jail authorities which invariably resulted in Indira bashing and reducing the Emergency to just its excesses. The opposition while in prison concentrated more on filing writs and challenging the legality of the government’s actions. Prison life consisted more of transfers and discussions with fellow inmates about the state of affairs outside especially the constitutional amendments which were being made without any discussion or debate in the absence of the opposition. Considering
that they were political prisoners and members of the opposition, Advani and others with him were still kept under strict surveillance and even their transfers were made with strict security as Advani sarcastically points out that 'we were dangerous persons posing a threat to national security' (45). Commenting upon the ordinance which empowered the Government to re-arrest detenus after their release by court, he says that 'justice became a farce ... Illegality was legalized by the invention of the principle of “hidden right” [of the State]’ (68).

Advani quotes an extract from Nehru’s presidential address to the Lucknow Congress in 1936\(^7\) which if read on its own could be easily mistaken as a view on the Emergency:

A Government that has to rely on the Criminal Law Amendment act and similar laws, that suppresses the Press and Literature, that bans hundreds of organisations, that keeps people in prison without trial and that does so many things that are happening in India today, is a Government that has ceased to have even a shadow of justification for its existence (67).

That this situation bears an uncanny resemblance to the Emergency and was voiced by Nehru the father of the prime instigator of the Emergency makes it all the more ironical. For a long time people did not believe in Indira as being responsible for the Emergency or its excesses simply because they could not believe that Nehru’s daughter could allow, much less be a party to, such a flagrant breach of democracy. Indira Gandhi’s paranoia had reached such levels that even Gandhi Jayanti was declared to be ‘taboo’ in the country and many ‘people were arrested for celebrating Gandhi Jayanti’ and even Acharya Kripalani along with Rajmohan Gandhi were ‘physically restrained’ when he tried to hold a prayer meeting at Rajghat (49). Advani quite realistically points out that ‘the sins of the past few months are not Indira Gandhi’s alone. In retrospect, it would be deemed the collective guilt of all Congressmen – those who supported her policy actively, and those who acquiesced in it by remaining silent’ (67). Unlike most other commentators, Advani does not view Sanjay Gandhi as important as he was made out to be and considers Indira to be the key player in the Emergency because as a politician himself, he could probably understand the politics that were taking place better than the layman. Commenting upon Sanjay’s views on the economy, nationalization and so on he says that ‘in the suffocating climate of conformism obtaining in the country the latest version of *Sanjaya Uvach* is like a whiff of fresh air merely because it is nonconformist’ but also adds that ‘the merits of the opinions expressed do not matter’ (39).

\(^7\) Nehru, quoted from ‘The Lotus Eater of Kashmir’ by D.F. Karaka.
To think that imprisonment would not have affected the author simply because he chooses not to dwell on this aspect would be a fallacy indeed. Quoting Solzhenitsyn he says that the political prisoner always looks forward to freedom, ‘amnesty’, every call is seen as a call of freedom, but it always ends with disillusionment. No doubt the repeated transfer orders or summons also meant the same hope of freedom for the prisoners who were deprived of it at a time when there seemed no end to the tyranny of the government. And while in retrospect it might seem a brief period of nineteen months, for the prisoners there was no surety as to when the Emergency would be lifted and they would be released. For many people, especially political prisoners, it seemed as though the Emergency was to be a permanent feature and would be ratified through the government’s amendment of the constitution.

Advani shows his disappointment with people like Vinoba Bhave, considered to be Gandhi’s spiritual heir, for their support to the Emergency and exhorting people to be more disciplined. On the successful achievement of the ban on cow slaughter, Bhave stated that the credit for this went ‘first to God; second, his mother; third, Mahatma Gandhi and fourth, Indira Gandhi’. All this as Advani states was an ‘incredible let down’ that the detenus felt on seeing the Acharya more concerned about the fate of cows rather than men (142). The last entry made on Tuesday, January 18 happens after the announcement of possible elections and marks the release of Advani from prison. Pointing to the verdict of the people in the elections Advani says that ‘they stole the freedom of 600 millions, but they just could not destroy their hope!’ (163). The Emergency might not have been able to destroy the hope of the millions but the Janata debacle sure enough betrayed it subsequently.

Advani’s scrapbook consists not just of his prison diary but the articles written by him which were circulated as Lok Sangharsh Samiti literature under the title of ‘A Detenu’. The first such piece is titled ‘A Tale of Two Emergencies’ which shows the disturbing similarity between the methodology of Adolf Hitler to make himself an absolute dictator and the steps being taken by Indira Gandhi here to decimate and destroy Indian democracy’ (169). Both asserted time and again that there was nothing unconstitutional about the Emergency and did not have much ‘use for the opposition’ either. Indira’s popularity was waning even before the Emergency and the opposition had ‘formed themselves into a solid phalanx of alternative political power’ under JP. Advani attributes this ‘situation’ to the ‘genesis’ of the Emergency. Whether or not this was the genesis of the Emergency, it is an accepted fact that the Emergency was declared to a large measure by Indira to safeguard her position as the Prime Minister not just from the opposition but from possible contenders within her party as well.
Both amended the constitution by ‘managing some parties and taming others’ (172) and launched a concerted programme to spread their propaganda. The press was censored during both emergencies on account of having published material, namely criticism, that according to the authorities ‘tended to weaken the strength of the state, or the common will of the people’ (173). During the Emergency J.P. Morarji, Charan Singh and Vajpayee were declared ‘non-persons’ and simply ‘ceased to be’ as no news concerning them could be published. Hitler was a megalomaniac and a dictator; whether Indira was fundamentally one or not remains debatable, but it is definite that the sycophants surrounding her such as D.K. Barooah ensured that she became one with their nauseating flattery. Advani even questions if people were ‘going to permit this nation’s constitutional commitment to social, economic and political justice, to liberty of thought and expression and equality of status and opportunity, to be thrown overboard all because a single individual suffers from the hallucination that he or she is indispensable?’ (182). He describes the Emergency as an ‘Evil Trident’ through which Indira sought to suppress the press, judiciary and the opposition essential to any democracy (179). It was not democracy or discipline but an atmosphere of ‘servile sycophancy and cowardly conformism’ that seemed to pervade the country according to Advani. Indira commanded ‘awe, not respect’ and it was ‘fear’ that ruled, not ‘duty or honesty’ (179). Advani does not attack her personal life, but he does not spare her as a colleague and rival at the political level and attacks her on moral as well as political grounds. Unlike the other writings on the Emergency this offers a lot by way of political analysis as well as intelligently wrought out observations on the Prime Minister, fascism and the implications of the constitutional amendments. Advani calls the 44th amendment ‘an undisguised bid to destroy all checks and balances built into the Constitution’. The intent as Advani states was to give unprecedented powers to the Executive and this amendment sought to give a ‘new constitution’ altogether to the country (246). While the ‘democratic super-structure’ was kept intact, its ‘contents’ were turned ‘fascist’ in much the same way as Hitler’s overhauling of the Weimar Constitution without altering its ‘democratic complexion’ (215).

In Advani’s views the ‘crimes’ committed by the government were too ‘heinous for history to forgive’. ‘Democracy has been decimated, Parliament has been paralysed; the Press has been pulverised’ (192). The truth however is that history never remembers, it simply keeps writing one event over the other. If Hitler was not forgiven then how does one account for the numerous other genocides that have taken the world over in even so called democracies. The Emergency in comparison is a relatively small and insignificant event if
viewed in the larger context and for a nation that does not like to look back into a squeamish past, it was best to forget it. Despite all this and the fact that the author was in jail he was hopeful that even though the ‘struggle may be long and protracted’ but ‘democracy will ultimately triumph’ (193). With this in mind he even makes ‘an appeal to the conscience’ of the Congressmen to fight for ‘democracy, civil liberties, free press’ rather than following their leader (196). At a time when democracies were tumbling like nine-pins in post-colonial nations, there was a very real threat that the same might have happened in India too. The sub-continent, as it is, was and still is a highly volatile region and India the only stable democracy. Had India also succumbed to dictatorship, the world, or at least the sub-continent might have been a very different place altogether.

In the article titled ‘Anatomy of Fascism’ which can be taken as a response to Indira Gandhi’s repeated branding of the opposition as being fascist, Advani explains who fascists really are, and how the government instead was proving itself to be fascist under the Emergency. For a fascist, ‘a “responsible” opposition means opposition comprised of “Yes-men”’ (217). Her own insecurity as also her excessive self-identification with the country is made evident from a statement that she made in an interview and which Advani quotes here, ‘They opposed me because I became the symbol of certain things, of certain programmes. Along with the programmes, I was also somebody who was holding the country together. My party is the only all-India party, and it is the only party that can keep the unity and stability of the country. Now when you threaten that party and you have nothing to put in its place, then you are threatening the unity and perhaps the very survival of India as it is’ (217). It would not be wrong to infer from this statement that Indira was actually convinced that only she could rule the country. Another speech of Indira’s quoted by Advani here claims that the Emergency was necessary to avoid anarchy and possible bloodshed and she even questions the people, as to whether, ‘this country be considered more democratic had large members of people been killed after the 29th of June? Myself, my family and all those Chief Ministers and others who support me, had they been annihilated, would this country be considered more democratic? (223)8. In accusing the opposition of possible attempts at assassination at a point when she was herself held guilty by the courts points to how she used the ‘big lie’ in order to manipulate the masses to her advantage (222). While Advani’s views on fascism in the Indian context are interesting and offer a strong argument for viewing the government as fascist yet I would not agree with Advani’s claim that the RSS had nothing to do with politics and was not

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8 Quoted from ‘Democracy and Discipline: Speeches of Indira Gandhi’ GOI publication, p.111
fascist, as the hardline Hindutva ideology it espouses is fascist to the extreme. That apart Advani’s book offers a very political and well argued perspective on the Emergency. Even his criticism of Indira is based on the content of her speeches and her policies rather than speculations on her personal life and her relation with Sanjay. While he criticizes her as a Prime Minister and goes on to call her a fascist justifying his saying so with examples, there is none of the sensationalism that marks many other accounts of the Emergency.

Advani’s diary is quite contrary to that of K.L. Malkani’s record or memoir of his prison days, titled _The Midnight Knock_. It is not a jail diary, as he clarifies, but more of a ‘quintessential autobiography of all detenus’, or ‘a sidelight on the Emergency’ (Preface). He states clearly that the book is not an ‘account’ of the Emergency since he being in prison had no idea as to what was happening outside or what the government was doing (Preface).

Malkani was the first person to be arrested under the MISA and released after the Emergency was lifted. Not only was the Emergency like a long midnight for India but the arrests that were made were also swoops made overnight and without any warning, let alone a warrant.

Malkani was the editor of the journal _Motherland_ and was also a member of the RSS, which could have been the reason why he was arrested, as the RSS was banned during the Emergency. Since these are personal accounts they tend to delve into the personal feelings and emotions of the narrator. There are also understandable references to the families of these detenus since this was a highly volatile situation and people feared the very worst since this was an unprecedented event and one did not know how far the situation would deteriorate yet.

Malkani states that ‘so far I had only read about midnight knocks in Russia. Now I had experienced it – in India!’ (3).

Most of this book is a sequential narration of events as they happened. Before sunrise on June 26th ten people along with Malkani were already in jail and it is interesting that he was served the MISA warrant after his arrest. According to him, no one amongst those arrested had anticipated such a step from Indira Gandhi since they ‘assumed that the government would play the democratic game according to the democratic rules; and there had been no violence anywhere even to justify the imposition of Section 144’ (4). Those detained under the DIR were mostly lawyers and teachers who, absurd as it appears, were charged with ‘conspiracy to derail trains and loot wheat stocks!’ (5). Malkani admits that it was ‘disappointing’ for most of the detenus that the people had not protested against the Emergency but also reasons out the situation by surmising that the ‘people were paralysed under a reign of terror’ and that ‘they could not be expected to stop work, leave home and
court arrest, just like that' (3). Heroism after all does not really work in the face of everyday responsibilities and cares. Malkani’s journal, *Motherland* was one of the active voices of dissent against the government and Indira. In a democracy, dissent is integral as it leads to debate and discussion; however this criticism was seen by Indira as a direct attack on her personally. In an editorial written after the imposition of the Emergency it is stated that, ‘The declaration of the Emergency and other legal artifacts are merely a cover for what is, to all purposes, a takeover of the state by a ruthless political junta . . .’ (23). Prejudiced, scathing or not, such editorials represent the few voices of protest during the period. That this was a right-wing paper, lends it some political colour also.

While the political prisoners were not subjected to physical tortures during the Emergency, they were harassed on account of repeated transfers. Malkani was initially put in Rohtak jail and told that he would be sent to Delhi jail. However he was in fact taken to the Baropal Canal Rest House, which was infamous for the kind of interrogation that was carried out there. Malkani was also put through this interrogation and told that if he did not ‘cooperate’, ‘other methods’ would be used by the interrogators (25). Funnily enough, though probably not so for Malkani, the interrogators were most interested in an astrology based report published in Jan 1975 which consisted of an interview with a certain Pandit Varahmihira who had predicted that Indira would go out of power sometime in early 1976 and that she would try holding on to power by ‘declaring an artificial Emergency with Communist support when there will be large scale arrests of political workers and total suppression of peoples liberties or she might try to rule with military support’ (27). Indians have an obsession with astrologers and Indira was no different. Therefore such a report predicting not only her political decline but also her death under ‘mysterious’ conditions would most certainly have rankled her enough to have it interrogated (27). This is just one instance of the kind of obscurantist uses that the national intelligence service was put to during the Emergency and before it as well. It was not a plot to overthrow the government that the intelligence service was instructed to unravel but rather to find out ‘plots’ against Indira Gandhi specifically.

Life in jail however was not without its hardships as it ‘amounts to a partial death of the man inside’. ‘Loneliness’ as he says ‘can be very trying’ (41). Slogan shouting etc became a way of marking protest and ironically the jail seemed to provide more freedom to do so since there was no longer the fear of being arrested as the worst had already taken place. The term in jail was more than just a waiting period. According to Malkani one had to be careful
about not talking too much with the jail authorities or even the inmates. While the jail is a
different space for a convicted criminal, it takes on a different meaning altogether for a
political prisoner. In the author's words 'inside jail the jail alone is real; the world outside
appears unreal'. While in jail, the outside world appears as 'maya' and when outside, the jail
'stands out as a nightmare' (60).

Malkani goes on to state in a rather chauvinistic manner that perhaps women are
unsuitable as rulers, a statement which perhaps would find approval even today with people
with similarly narrow views (51). Since the book was written in the aftermath of the
Emergency, the author quite confidently and opprobriously says that the 'lady's' actions
could be forgiven only by 'God' since men could not forget her actions (86). It is interesting
that for many people the 1977 elections meant the 'inglorious end' of a 'promising career'
(88). For the author there were 'tears of sadness over the fate of this lady' as well as for the
fact that a 'black page had been added to our history'. Along with this was added a 'golden
Janata page' as well, since people genuinely believed that it would last and prove itself as
deserving of the votes that they had received. 'The rest was silence - a silence more eloquent
than words' as India had redeemed itself by affirming democracy after its brief interlude with
tyranny and 'survived in excellent condition' (88).

Kuldip Nayar's In Jail and Primila Lewis's Reason Wounded: An Experience of
India's Emergency, while personal accounts of imprisonment during the emergency under the
MISA, are not exactly accounts of the emergency unlike those of Advani or Malkani. Both
were non-political people who had been arrested either because of their openly critical and
vocal stance against Indira Gandhi, in the case of Nayar, or in the case of Lewis because she
had organized a Mazdoor Union which demanded minimum wages and basic rights in one of
the prime areas of Delhi. Both were arrested and put behind bars simply because the
government wanted to convey the message that it meant business and that no criticism would
be tolerated from anyone.

Kuldip Nayar was detained for a period of two months under the MISA and he was
kept in Tihar jail. His book is dedicated to his father-in-law who at the age of eighty-two had
posed a sufficient enough threat according to the government to also merit arrest under the
MISA! He states at the very outset that his was a subjective account of his experience in jail,
which it is undoubtedly and, unlike that of Advani which is more political, Nayar's memoir
tends to be more introspective and personal. In fact he felt that he was 'being made to suffer
for a noble cause' and was ‘atonning for the crime of many of my [his] fellow journalists who
had chosen to grovel at the feet of dictatorial authority, or to keep silent about the
enslavement of a nation’ (2). He was quite critical of the emergency, but, in this book the
emergency is more of an external force which impinges upon his immediate self and family,
through the draconian MISA. The account emphasizes upon physical discomforts faced by
political prisoners such as bad food, lack of proper sleeping arrangements, as well as upon the
interactions between the political prisoners most of whom were members of the RSS. In fact
there is hardly any jail account which does not refer to interchanges with the RSS, most of
which centre on debates concerning their ideology and Muslims. Apart from this, the constant
movement to and fro of the emergency prisoners from one jail to the other, the news of the
arrest of underground leaders, the speculation on the fate of the nation dominate most such
Emergency jail accounts.

Life in jail, even if brief, was excruciating mentally and emotionally as evinced
through Nayar’s account: the constant wait and hope of meeting one’s family, and finally
when the meeting would come, the disappointment at being scrutinized by the jail staff who
would even check the sweets brought by one’s family! Political prisoners, as most accounts
show, had rights which saved them from the debasement that other prisoners had to
experience in Indian jails. While routine corruption is jails is hardly anything new, Nayar’s
description of how young boys were picked up as undertrials during the Emergency for
helping in the jail chores made it no less than a ‘slave system’ where the ‘aim was to keep
them in as long as possible, for without them, the people employed to do the menial duties
would have no time to relax’ (33). On ‘paper’ the boys who were guilty of crimes were in
corrective institutions, but the reality, as Nayar saw, was something else altogether. Nayar’s
experience was brief as compared to many others, but it was no less a transgression of
personal freedom than that of others. As he says,

I would watch the few blades of grass besides my barred door turning green. As the
days passed there remained but a faint, persistent hope that I – and the others with me
– would one day be free. The shackles would break and there would again be freedom.

And my release, when it came, was an enormous personal experience. I had
learnt to value liberty as never before. It was a foretaste of what the entire nation was
to feel later, when the election results came in, for all India had been a prison
(Preface).
India had truly become a prison and everyone in the establishment a power hungry warder. Primila Lewis's account of jail life is far more disturbing as it shows the kind of power play and brutalities that went on in the female wards of Indian jails. In the very first instance, her arrest was a classic case of the government viewing anyone who was trying to bring in changes as a possible threat to be pre-empted. She was arrested upon her arrival in India from England in July 1975 and kept away from her son and husband. She spent most of her time in the Ambala jail, after which she was transferred to the Hissar jail and finally released on parole in 1977. Although her struggle for workers rights, which was the main reason why she was arrested, is discussed in great detail, I have chosen to focus on her depiction of jail life especially that in Ambala. There were other such political detenus arrested along with her, but they were kept with convicted prisoners and made to share the same facilities. They were not directly subjected to ill-treatment but were undoubtedly harassed indirectly by certain unsympathetic jail authorities such as Phool Kumari Singh, the officer in charge of the female wing, who was also the sister-in-law of the Bansi Lal 'the Jat bully'. She is a classic example of how power is perverted in India simply because of high connections which are taken to be a personal shield against any accountability. In the Indian context, it is also used to justify the exploitation of underlings especially those who are weak and vulnerable. After witnessing the pathetic state of the women prisoners and their horrific pasts, which had witnessed rapes, beatings and exploitation through forcible labour work, Lewis tried to help them move forward through small ways like educating some women or trying to instill a sense of unity amongst them. However, since the power of people like Phool Kumari thrived on the basis of insecurity and rivalry amongst the prisoners, she tried as hard as she could to retain her authority over the prisoners and these measures were 'absurd at first, but developed into a long nightmare of tension, fear, cruelty, struggle and revolt' (114). This manifested itself in the form of senseless beatings of the women, putting them against each other, and forcing them to labour and personal work. Such petty tyrants were to be found at more or less every level and department of the government but the Emergency and personal connections made them more reckless in their misuse of power. Most of the women prisoners described in the book were quite young and victims of rapes and beatings, and were in need of empathy, medical care and a support system to reclaim their lives as individuals. The prison was simply 'a microcosm of life outside' (161). Not only does Primila Lewis's account disturb us with its graphic details of the tyranny in jail, but more importantly it forces us to question the institutions of correction that seem more like institutions of destruction.
Lewis herself feels the acute difference in the lives of the convicts as compared to political prisoners like herself. As she says, ‘We were treated with respect and we could exercise our right to be treated as human beings’, the prisoners however had ‘nothing’. Not only were they ‘subject to the mercy of the jail gods’, they did not even have any ‘right’ to their rights. The only common thing between the two was a lack of privacy. The prison is a place where there is ‘no escape from others … Torn from your family and loved ones, you are thrown into a hostile and exposed situation where you must even grieve in public’ (161). While the convicts at least knew what they were in for and for what time, the political detenus were given no such reasons and what was worse was the uncertainty as to how long they would remain in jail, since it all depended upon the will of the regime. This interminable sense of wait, in the face of which they were helpless, was the biggest enemy that they had to combat in the jail. Not only did this impact the prisoners but their families as well, since apart from the constant concern regarding the well-being of those detained, the families also had to undergo harassment in getting visiting rights, and even their letters were censored before they got to the detenu. Life in those days was anything but normal and the whole of India was actually a prison, as Nayar remarks.

Studying jail diaries written during the Emergency by those who went through the experience calls for a different viewpoint altogether since this is a unique period in modern India’s history not likely to be repeated again. I have taken up just a few of the books that form the Emergency nonfiction for showing the perception and reaction of the people towards the Emergency. While these are relegated to the margins now that the Emergency itself has been forgotten, it is interesting to note that there was a very ambiguous attitude towards these books which sought to expose the Emergency as also the people involved when they came out. This is evident through the reviews of these books which came out in The Book Review of the time, which on the one hand raise the books sky high and on the other denounce them for adding to the ‘spate of publications on Indira Gandhi and the Emergency’ (Vanaik, 9). N.S. Jagannathan in his review of some of this nonfiction, which appeared in The Book Review, says that the ‘worst of them are badly written ephemera and very much a scissors and paste job’ while ‘The better ones are barely acceptable as necessary preliminary documentation of a dark period in our national life’ (2). According to the writer these books ‘trivialized’ the Emergency which was ‘an oppressive experience, tension-ridden and claustrophobic, with a sense of unnamed menace and sinister forebodings on the one hand and of a corrosive guilt at one’s acquiescence in it, however sullen, on the other’ and failed to express ‘the damage to
the spirit wrought by the regime's assault on the collective psyche and individual ones' (2). What would have been more desirable than the literature that came out were books that gave a 'coherent authentic account of what actually happened', 'details of the private decision-making that preceded the horror of public events ... an appraisal of the character, motivation and inter-relations of not only the protagonists but also the bit actors that played the attendant lords and swelled the progress', as also 'a rigorous analysis of the political sociology of these events and developments' (3). Which is quite strange since the Emergency literature for the most part consists of exactly these kind of books and analyses. He rightly points that the books offer numerous versions of the event from which one can pick and choose at will (6). His statement 'History, particularly instant history, is no doubt distilled gossip' is also true to some extent particularly in the case of the Emergency which was constructed to a large extent on the basis of gossip and rumours which found their way in these books subsequently. Perhaps the deluge of books that followed emphasizing the same incidents, the same horrors, indicting the very leaders people had looked up to was like rubbing salt over the wounds of the people, more specifically the intelligentsia. This literature forms a part of the 'technologies of witness' of the modern democratic state as Maya Dodd puts it and they remain witnesses to the Emergency which was itself a sterile period marked by an enforced muteness on the people. This literature does not offer any creative outburst which would have captured the 'terror and indignity of it all and the obscenity of a whole people being pushed around by a small group' (Jagannathan, 2) and helped people achieve a catharsis of the event like the partition. Even subsequently there were very few books in fiction which could fill this gap, the result being that while we have a huge corpus dealing with the how, why and who of the event, there is very little to explain the subjective, emotional aspect of the event. The people needed that sort of identification in order to purge the guilt as well as the anger, and the nonfiction, by persistently driving in the feeling of injustice, simply made the people turn away from an event which they could not come to terms with: anger after all can be very draining. The Janata debacle later simply closed the chapter once and for all, destroying also the importance of Emergency nonfiction, along with its own failure.