PART II:
FERTILE VOICES
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‘Having space to narrate means having power’

(Morey, *Fictions of India*, 2)

In this section I deal with the ‘fertile voices’ that came up during and after the Emergency. These voices coming from diverse sections of Indian society, both within and outside, form the cultural and literary legacy of those sterilized times and are important for not just understanding the Emergency but the nation itself. As opposed to the sterility of spirit mentioned in the earlier section of this study, this literature tries to chart a new perspective and tries to break out of the sterility that had enveloped the nation. The novels as well as the poems, which are a part of this section, see the Emergency as a disastrous event which created a serious crack in the image of the nation as a stable entity and the state as a democratic structure. There are some key themes that dominate these works – those of the Emergency itself, its representation, its nature, as well as its excesses – which feature in more or less every work written on the Emergency. Apart from this, Indira and Sanjay Gandhi emerge as the key villains of the Emergency in these pieces and there is a strong criticism of the dynastic rule that was being promoted by the Congress at that point of time. Then there is the questioning of the discourse of nationalist history as well as the breakdown of the established discourses, which is seen in Vijayan’s allegories and Rushdie’s magic realism.

The Emergency might not have spawned too much by way of fiction but the few works that it has are highly influential and portray very vividly all that the Emergency typified. Most of these works show how literary imagination was affected by the Emergency. While the nonfictional and political literature deal with the event in a rather matter of fact manner, with an occasional deviation into gossipy tidbits, the novels written on the subject offer a rather stark and nightmarish vision of the Emergency. Whatever has been documented about the Emergency has been brought to life in the novels based on the event. Although these works might read as exaggerated depictions of the Emergency for a lay man not quite acquainted with the Emergency, yet they are very close to the truth and have a veracity that is quite chilling at times. Within fiction also I have created two categories, that of the literature dealing with the Emergency from within India and that from the Indian diaspora. A close reading of these two reveal a huge difference not just in the treatment of the event but also in the way it is perceived and consequently represented. Because of the fact that for the diaspora
the Emergency was an event viewed from the outside, through secondary sources and heard accounts, there is a desire to portray all that has gone into constructing their view of the Emergency. This is why both Mistry and Rushdie offer such packed accounts of the event. For them the experience or image of India does not exist as that of one ‘moment’, but is comprised of several such moments, which is why their India emerges as such a comprehensive entity, though marked by ruptures. Their spatial distance from India privileges them to a more objective view of the country as well as a broader and more critical insight into its history, which is why the discourse of history, its making or unmaking, figures so prominently in such narratives.

This is in comparison to the writer at home who enunciates his or her experience of India at the particular point of time as it affected him/her or the people around. It is the contemporaneity of the nation and history in the making that is reflected in these books. The writer is too involved in the creation of this history as s/he is himself or herself a part of this history, to be able to step aside and view the event in its entirety. This is probably the reason why we have a piecemeal representation of the Emergency in the literature based on the Emergency from within India. These are narratives which deal with the various sections of society which were affected in different ways by the Emergency, for instance the upper classes in Rich Like Us and the lower middle class in Katra Bi Arzoo, or the issue of custodial disappearances in An Iron Harvest. I personally prefer this wide outlook on the event which can be gleaned from multiple sources and resists the privileging of any one perspective on the Emergency which had far too many aspects to allow for essentialism.

While the Emergency and its representation is emphasized upon in all the works studied here, it is equally necessary to understand the manner in which the nation is also represented in this literature. Maya Dodd cites Priya Joshi’s use of the concept of ‘nationsroman’ with respect to the novels Midnight’s Children, TrotterNama, The Great Indian Novel and The Shadow Lines and shows how they are no longer marked by a ‘celebratory nationalism’ but ‘united by an elegiac mood’ which is even more pronounced post the Emergency (qtd in Dodd, 10). Most people will probably disagree when I state that India cannot be termed as a true ‘political nation’ from 1947 to 1977, since 15 August 1947 simply meant freedom from the British and the first step towards becoming a democratic nation in a country where most people did not know what democracy entailed or that they had rights too. The process of nation-building and the percolation of democracy to the very grass roots of Indian society was a slow but steady process which intensified over the years. It is a
The fact that Indira Gandhi could declare the Emergency only because she knew that the tradition of political democracy was not really that strong in India at that point to resist the government's offensive. Political enablement in its true form was expressed in the 1977 elections and has carried on ever since, but in the process, the nature and features on the state have changed along with the perception of the Indian nation.

In the literature marked by the impact of independence, we see the rise of the same 'traditions of political thought and literary language' through which the nation emerged as 'a powerful historical idea in the west' as instrumental in creating a discourse of Indian nationalism also (Bhabha, 1). These novels highlight the growth of this political thought which can be taken to be literary markers of the development of India as a nation, but the post Emergency novels, as Priya Joshi writes, question nationalism (cited in Dodd) and can thus be seen as breaking away from the image of the unified nation that was presented in the earlier novels dealing with the nation. Rumina Sethi states in Myths of the Nation that 'Historical fiction is useful when claiming the validity of many of the nation's myths without having to battle with the charge of essentialism which fiction manages to circumvent more easily than does history, simply because it is fiction' (2). While I do not quite agree with Sethi's contention that the fictional nature of a historical novel necessarily helps it escape the charge of essentialism, yet it is useful no doubt in validating or subverting the 'nation's myths'. Sethi's own study deals with the construction of 'nationalist ideology in the cultural sphere' (1) through the novel Kanthapura, but the texts that I have taken up in this section work in the other way and, instead of enforcing or formulating discourses of identity or national ideology, they gravitate towards locating the ruptures in such a discourse.

Continuities and discontinuities, fluxes and instabilities lead to a steady progression of a nation's identity which grows out of a 'large and liminal image of the nation' characterized by 'ambivalence' (Bhabha, 1). This liminal space is highly important in the growth of any nation and it can be said that these novels explore this very space which actually comes to define the nation. Memory – public and personal – is crucial for determining any nation's identity and history. However, when memory is consciously pushed aside, as in the case of aberrant but definitive events such as the emergency, how do we arrive at a new positioning of the nation and its identity? Is a valid repositioning possible if we select some events as being representative and the others as being non-existent, or peripheral? For Bhabha, the 'site of a strange forgetting of the history of the nation's past: the violence involved in establishing the nation's writ. It is this forgetting – a minus in the origin – that constitutes the beginning of
the nation’s narrative’. As Bhabha remarks, this forgetting, or being ‘obliged to forget’ is not ‘a question of historical memory’ but rather ‘the construction of a discourse on society that performs the problematic totalization of the national will (310). In the Indian context then this ‘national obligation to forget’ begins right at the moment of Independence itself which is marked by the violence of Partition and subsequently by events such as the Emergency, the 1984 riots, Ayodhya, Godhra etc, which have added or subtracted something or the other from the nation and its narrative. The ambivalence of the ‘liminal’ space allows for the post-colonial or new nation to assume an arbitrary position to re-define itself in relation to an earlier identity or define itself anew by choosing new parameters altogether in which to posit itself. Given the problems that one encounters in the articulation of the identities of nations such as India, it is difficult to use terms such as ‘post-colonial’ as being definitive since the careers of such nations show far more complex forces at work than merely those concerned with colonialism or decolonization. Their contemporary national histories past and present no longer fit within the space of the ‘post’ since they have moved beyond this. In Naipaul’s words, ‘the past has to be seen to be dead’, and it is necessary to understand India’s colonial past as well its stumbling onto the modern world as a nation. However, it is equally important to move beyond this past after a certain point of time if the present is to be understood.

The India that emerges post Emergency can be understood more in terms of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the ‘rhizome’, which insists on growing, and takes up its own life and identity and spreads beyond boundaries. India defines itself by resisting all definitions and categorisations, which is why it appears as such a ‘miracle’ and anomaly as a democracy. It was the ‘will to be a nation’ removed/divorced from the shadow of the ‘post-colonial’ tag rather than the inability of an erstwhile colony to govern itself, that marks aberrant events which are normally pushed to the margins but which actually change the nation. The 70s saw the rather vocal assertion of this ‘will to be a nation’ through popular people’s movements, as also in the 1977 elections. This ‘forgetting’ also leaves a gap, a ‘discursive space’, or the ‘moment of anteriority’ which becomes the site of instabilities and a further continuity of this will to nationhood. This forgetting becomes a site for creative discursivity as well because its inherent instability, which results from a deferred resolution or confrontation, gives space for a future discourse to arise. Forgetting and then the growth of a new space from this centre leads to the presence of multiplicities which characterise India. ‘Being obliged to forget becomes the basis for remembering the nation, peopling it anew, imagining the possibility of other contending and liberating forms of cultural identification’ (Bhabha, 311).
These are just a few of the issues that crop up while studying the fertile voices consisting of the various novels and poems based on the Emergency. Though not a part of 'protest literature', except for some of the poems which were written during the Emergency, this corpus of literature in highly political in its nature and makes an attempt at voicing dissent against the State and its executives. Since this is fiction, there is an emphasis on the themes and the literary devices employed by the writers for representing the Emergency. The novels and the poetry taken for study within this section do help to some extent in coming to terms with the emotional impact that the event had on the psyche of the people. However, since they explore only some aspects, a lot of pent up emotions still remain unexplored. It is interesting to note amongst the texts studied in this section that they see Indira Gandhi’s desire to hold on to power as the main reason for the declaration of the Emergency. It was not just a nightmare that lasted for a few months but a harsh reality that changed the lives of many people. The attitude of the people towards the Emergency – ranging from indifference, enthusiasm, anger, frustration, to confusion – are all portrayed in these books, which help in understanding the Emergency, as well as India and Indians during those nineteen months.
CHAPTER: 3
Stories and Allegories: Novels of/on the Emergency

As stated earlier this chapter seeks to study novels from within India which are based on the Emergency. The main texts are O.V. Vijayan’s *The Saga of Dharmapuri* (1985), Nayantara Sahgal’s *Rich Like Us* (1985), C.P. Surendran’s *An Iron Harvest* (2006) and Rahi Masoom Raza’s *Katra Bi Aarzoo* (1978). All the above mentioned books deal with some or the other aspect of the Emergency, but unlike the novels written by diasporic or migrant writers, they do not deal with the Emergency as a comprehensive whole. There are no doubt references to the major events of the Emergency, but the focus is mostly on particular aspects of the Emergency which affected the writers personally, or were a part of their socio-cultural position. Again as the division of my chapters indicates the idea is to draw a contrast through the event of the Emergency as to how contemporary history is viewed both from within and without, through Indians living in India who experienced the Emergency first-hand and the diasporic Indians who saw the nightmare from a distance without being a part of the trauma. This is not to say that the latter would not have been affected by it, but the actual experience which figures in the depiction of the Emergency is vastly different as is evident from the treatment that Vijayan or Sahgal or Raza mete out to this event.

I have undertaken a close reading of the four texts stated above and since each deals with the Emergency in a different manner it is difficult to draw too many common points of comparisons, though all of them offer a strong criticism of the Emergency. The most important theme that runs through these books is that of the Emergency as an experience, which revealed certain dark aspects of the state and society, thereby corroding the myth of a benign democracy. Then again the juxtaposition of the past and the present is a leitmotif that runs through the literature of the Emergency, because the event marked the end of an era in more ways than one. India has never been the same since this event, for better or worse, married as it is now to the legacy of the Emergency. While the Emergency as an event can be deconstructed at various levels, it is equally important to see how it has been constructed in public imagination, which is something that these novels offer. Although there are numerous other texts from within India that directly or indirectly deal with the Emergency, I have chosen these four because of the different aspects and ways through which they explore this event. Vijayan’s satirical allegory offers a very abstract, philosophical view of not just the Emergency but the world itself. Sahgal’s subtle and critical observation of high society
during the Emergency gives an insight into how those who were not affected directly by the excesses of the Emergency viewed it as necessary for ‘disciplining’ the nation. Surendran’s novel, while focusing on the story of one of the known victims of the Emergency, also seeks to portray one of the biggest problems of the Indian state, that of Naxalism. Rahi Masoom Raza’s novel depicts how the life of those belonging to the lower middle class was rudely thwarted by the Emergency and their small hopes brutally crushed. All these novels are set against the background of the Emergency and, as emphasized earlier, address specific problems and aspects of the Emergency which were closer to the writers’ own lives.

I

Whoring with History: The Saga of Dharmapuri and Vijayan’s Short Stories

O.V. Vijayan’s The Saga of Dharmapuri (1985), translated by the author himself from Malayalam stands as one of the most classic and disturbing texts in Indian English writing that explore the complex post-Independence years. The nightmares of the 20th century become ‘flaming orgasms of apocalypse’ in the novella which shows a world that seems almost beyond redemption. The novella portrays a sense of disillusionment which grows out of a dysfunctional state and depicts the frayed fabric of a hapless society through scatological and sexual imagery. The novella also raises the question as to whether the Empire had really ended in the psyche of the masses given its insidious presence in the social, economic and political spheres of the nation. Or did it continue to thrive in the form of a new imperialism wherein the so called democratic government now became the new exploiter of the masses? The Saga becomes a savage indictment of the Indian body politic. In Vijayan’s own words the ‘Saga is definitely a novel of protest – a predetermined offensive about the whole concept of the state, against war ... In some ways, it is anti-civilisation’. Written before the 1975-77 national Emergency imposed by the then Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi, but not published till much later since it was too controversial, the book is a chilling prognosis of the dystopia of authoritative rule that India witnessed during this period. India during the 1970s was a nation caught in the midst of severe political as well as socio-economic crises that threatened the very foundations of democracy. The real crisis came in the form of problems that were seemingly simple but confoundingly difficult to solve: poverty,

unemployment, corruption, rising prices, a burgeoning population and the lop-sided development of a nation. Independence had promised much, but reality turned out to be something else for the masses of India who were fighting a battle everyday for a dignified existence. In a system which failed to take cognizance of these problems and was a prey to the satiation of its own appetite for power, disillusionment, cynicism and frustration found many takers, as is evinced in Vijayan’s vision of India.

The novella is full of this sense of darkness that engulfed India during the 1970s and more specifically the Emergency. It is not just an uncanny dark prophesy of the excesses that came during the Emergency but also shaded and shadowed with its horrors since the author later incorporated the events of the Emergency in the unpublished novella. It is important to state here that Vijayan’s disillusionment is not just limited to India or the Emergency but extends to the political sham that the whole world was mired in during the era of the Cold War. Colonialism and Imperialism did end on certain dates, but only on the surface. Imperialism was too potent an enemy to be cast aside overnight and decolonization was a slow process that could argue against colonial practices but could not remove the ‘imperial mindset’. The emergence of a bipolar world and the rise of the Cold War led to a yet another power struggle in the world but this time pushing it beyond the edge of reason. Vijayan’s nihilistic ‘anti-civilisation’ diatribe stems from his cynicism with a world deaf to the cries of humanity and blindly rushing towards self-destruction with the piling up of nuclear arsenal. Since Vijayan’s satire does not spare anyone and cuts across the political spectrum in India, the book was vehemently criticized by the Left and panned by the, progressive critics for its ‘imperialist slant’ (Author’s note). His dystopic Dharmapuri is a world where imperialism and the forces of neo-colonialism reign with the complicity of the power-holders of post-colonial nations. A nexus builds up where the third world becomes the site for the machinations of the capitalists and communists. The charge of an ‘imperialist slant’ arises on account of the fact that Vijayan portrays post-colonial third-world nations as being equally manipulative, rather than passive sites, in the insidious power games of the world. This charge levelled by the ‘Left and the progressive critics’ is not really valid as the novella not only criticizes the Left, the Communists or the Socialists, but the Capitalists and neo-imperials alike, in short the whole established political order. It deviates from the norm by refusing to show the post-colonial nation as a victim of imperialism, depicting it instead as being equally active in furthering the designs of imperialism. While countries and societies espoused decolonization, colonialism as Vijayan depicts did not just entail a race or a nation,
but more insidiously a way of thinking, which not only affected the coloniser but the colonised as well. The inability of such societies to strike an independent position post Independence does not speak of a deficiency or a failure on their part but points to the crippling effects of colonialism. This reworks the prevalent political discourse on imperialism, necessitating a more honest appraisal of post-colonial nations as being responsible to a large extent for their problems of poverty, corruption and underdevelopment. It does not side with the imperial forces but simply debunks the myth of the native country as being only a victim of exploitative imperialism or neo-imperialism and such a perspective goes against the Left’s ideological stance; thus the criticism.

India during the 1970s was a land of disillusionment for the people, be it the common man, a sensitive writer like Vijayan or the students leading the anti-government protests. The Indian experiment with democracy till 1975 was one that was keenly observed and even hailed by the world, but the clamping of the Emergency was met with genuine disappointment and gave ample reasons to gloat about to those who had always been skeptical of the success of democracy in India. Independence transformed overnight a civilization that was centuries old and yet never really a well defined political nation, into the world’s largest democracy. But the gap between the utopian India that was envisioned during Independence and what it actually turned out to be was huge indeed. However, it is not something for which individuals alone can be held wholly accountable. India after Independence was a nation full of contraries that was still venerating satiś at one end and at the same time moving towards social progress and modernization. This post-colonial India with all its complexities understood freedom but could not comprehend ‘democracy’ in its totality. While popular opinion sees it as the darkest spot in Indian history, I personally view the Emergency as an inevitability in the Indian body politic. The Emergency is the culmination of all the gathering ruptures in the Indian system and marks the dismantling of the dominance of the Congress party in India. The collapse of a fragile, centralized system at a point when the country was going through economic, social as well as political turmoil was predicted by many though not in the form of the Emergency.

Given the marginalization of the discourse of Emergency in modern Indian history, the literature based on it gains all the more relevance. As the author himself states The Saga is a book ‘written in anger’, and was ‘a cleansing and cathartic experience’. It arises from

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2 ibid
not only the anti-Indira wave post the Emergency, but more so from the disenchantment with a dysfunctional system of which Indira was just a part. It is not the indictment of one person but the exposure of a system marked by corruption and decadence. Although highly criticized because of its excessive use of scatology and sexual imagery, the novella makes an important statement in emphasizing the depravity and utter fall in political and social ideals that marked India as well as the world during that period.

The Saga of Dharmapuri is the story of modern India and similar developing countries in the post-colonial world. The book’s name itself, invokes the tale of the land of Dharma that has sadly enough turned into the land of adharma. It is an allegory of the Indian state both as it was before and during the Emergency. Dharmapuri, ruled by a tyrannical President, becomes a cesspool of violence, rape and plunder. The President and his desire to instill a dynastic rule in Dharmapuri become a caricature of the dynastic rule of the Nehru-Gandhi family. Like India, a state of Emergency is declared in Dharmapuri also to safeguard the President and his brood from the inevitable change of rule that would someday sweep across the country. The Emergency in India which was declared by Indira Gandhi to avoid stepping down from her post was, among other things, an attempt to stall a similar change of rule at the centre. The President and his cohorts form the pinnacle of a system that has gone horribly off the path that had been envisioned by those who had fought for a democratic Dharmapuri, in much the same way as India fell prey to corruption and political dissolution after the glorious ideals of Independence. The State of Dharmapuri is symbolic of contemporary systems of governance which were carried out on the basis of a modern cult of feudalism legitimised by the tokenism of democracy.

Vijayan’s Dharmapuri is characterized by the utter perversion of basic human values. In Dharmapuri no relationship exists which is not corrupted at some level or the other. The President is a dictator pandering to neo-imperial forces whose defecation becomes an act of national importance revered by the people, his turds forming a formidable ‘wall against imperialism’ (183). His failure to carry out his timely defecations symbolizes a crisis in the state setting about national uproar and panic. The metaphor of defecation comes to symbolize the rule of tyranny wherein even the basest acts of the dictator are venerated by masses too weak to oppose him. This forms a vicious circle as the President, like all dictators, comes to believe himself to be invincible and above the rest of humanity. For such megalomaniacs, the nation then starts existing for them instead of vice-versa. An instance in point is the fact that during the Emergency, Indira too was deified and lauded by a sycophantic Congress party,
whose President D.K. Barooah went so far as to declare that ‘India is Indira and Indira India’. Given her iconic status in popular imagination, it is easy to believe that even she thought herself to be invincible during the Emergency but the illusion was rudely shattered after the people rejected her in the post Emergency 1977 elections.

Caught in the grip of a ruthless tyranny, the state of Dharmapuri starts rotting from within revealing its hollowness. The wearing of bark by the President and his sycophants since ‘Bark had become the fetish of patriotism’ (186) is a reference to the wearing of khadi popularized by Gandhi and unfortunately made synonymous with hypocrisy and corruption of the worst kind by the later generation of Indian politicians. The can of worms literally opens when the President’s untimely defecation reveals a worm, only to foreshadow the complete collapse of a system that is hollow and rotten from within. ‘The Palace had indeed been disturbed over the unusual hour of the defecation. And despite all denials, it was true that a premonition of catastrophe had come over the President …’ (185).

This ‘untimely defecation’ symbolizes the rumblings in the Indian system in the form of the JPM as well as the Allahabad verdict which held Indira guilty of electoral malpractices, portending a possible eviction from the Prime Minister’s position and power. What followed was the opening of the ‘can of worms’ as the JPM, the Emergency and the later Janata government also split open the failings of the Indian body politic laying bare a faulty system, not of democracy but governance, that had been set in motion without really understanding the necessities and complexities of a nation as diverse as India.

The Emergency or ‘State of Crisis’ is imposed in the state of Dharmapuri in the face of an unseen enemy who threatens not so much the country as the President, who fears that the polls might throw him out and that his progeny might also be left to starve and die. ‘My beloved people,’ the President said in a midnight broadcast, ‘give me your freedoms, henceforth let them be hidden inside me, because it is to rob you of these that the insidious enemy has penetrated us’ (193). The people of Dharmapuri are taken by surprise but soon fall into a resigned acceptance in much the same way as the people of India reacted to the Emergency. Its imposition was met with a certain degree of bafflement amongst the masses but on the whole their attitude was quite accepting of the suspension of all liberties so much so that the Prime Minister herself was surprised at the ease with which democracy could be snuffed out. The ‘sceptics’ whisper’ (193) does emerge every now and then in Dharmapuri but such feeble disturbances are quelled with ease as the masses remain safely cocooned in
their belief that the President, the Supreme Commander of the Congregation of Persuaders, would never harm his own populace. It was the same kind of blind faith that the people of India showed towards Indira Gandhi in their reaction to the imposition of the Emergency. It was impossible for them to believe or even think that the leader they had put so much faith in could actually quash their rights and put countless people behind bars on the flimsiest of reasons. When the bubble finally burst, it gave way to a slow and sullen anger that expressed itself in the 1977 elections.

The book also shows Vijayan’s criticism of the ‘Soviet-Indian left wing and its efforts to prop up both socialist-communist leaders and a political dynasty’\(^3\). The theme of dynastic rule overtaking the country prefigures dominantly in the novella as the State of Crisis is declared by the President first and foremost to safeguard the future of his progeny. His own place is secured by eliminating and thwarting all possible contenders for the position including his own kin, so that the ‘history of the dynasty can be re-written without hindrance’ (302). The satire is directed at the cult of propagating political dynasties in India, the prominent one being the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, which has dominated the Indian political scene since Independence. While Indira took over after Nehru, Sanjay Gandhi shot to fame and prominence during the Emergency but his subversion of the rules and powers of the Emergency for carrying out his whims made dynastic rule quite unpalatable for the masses. This is not to decry the legitimacy of political dynasties; yet the kind of adulation and sycophantic veneration that is bestowed upon such families destroys the very idea and base of political democracy. It does away with the system of checks and balances in democracy by consolidating power in the hands of a few. This reduces what is an exercise in political, and to some extent, social equality to nothing more than a race amongst politicians to be better sycophants than all others. This was the main failing of the Congress party as Indira Gandhi was able to centralize the party and state power under her personal command simply because the others in the party chose sycophancy over political accountability.

Dharmapuri becomes an epitome of all such countries of the twentieth century which succumbed to tyranny and oppression after failing to fulfill their commitment to democracy. In the Indian context specifically (since the satire was inspired by the Emergency), the collapse of democracy under the weight of its own burdens and as it appeared on the surface, under the whims of a near tyrannical woman led to disbelief, bitterness and anger. Unlike

\(^3\) ibid
most commentators of the Emergency, Vijayan’s anger is directed not so much at the
excesses that took place as at the corruption and decay of human spirit the world over. The
madness is complete as everyone demands to be satiated in their hunger for power, blood,
and money. The Proletariats of Dharmapuri demand their surplus in the form of the flesh of
the young, the Partisans admonish the poor for their rampant breeding and remind them of the
advice given to them by the agencies of international credit for controlling population
through birth control and if need be by inducing famines as well.

Vijayan’s ‘anti-civilisation’ diatribe targets all the established world orders, systems
and regimes as well as the grand monolith of history. History becomes a saga of prostitution,
of the pimping away of the self and the nation as symbolized through the rape of Laavannya,
the kitchen maid and the pimping of the Begum of Samarkhand. The monolith of history, its
creation—because it is often biased and subjective, is savagely criticized by Vijayan. He sees
the ‘history of man’ as one made out by the ‘relentless repetition of aggregation and
violence’, which only ‘the blind can look upon’ (230). This pattern of history remains the
same catalogue of death and destruction carried out by one generation after another, ‘in all
that relentless flux, pain and the killing always remain the residue’ (267). ‘The eunuch voice
of history’ which has always condemned the innocent with a deafening shrillness and
hysteria, is a voice that does not belong to ‘man nor animal, neither of the mate nor of the
offspring’ (278). The sexual decadence in the state of Dharmapuri reaches its culmination as
the rulers and their concubines ‘play with history’ (279), not realizing that their temporality,
confounded in a maze of orgies is actually a self-condemnation to the inexorable jaws of
history which suck them into a void of chaos. ‘Playthings of their own evil (they) became
Toys which they knew must come apart and eventually disintegrate into rubble. Yet they
played on, and warded off the terror with dalliance’ (279). However the flipside of
manipulating history is that someone can also manipulate it in the future. History is the
eternal whore in the Saga whom everyone can fuck but no one can rule because it can
through its pliable yet autonomous self, invariably deceive all those who thought they had
managed to write their stories upon its body.

The ‘worm’, the sexual organ of the President which refuses to harden and rise,
becomes a symbol of the impotency of the State and its rulers. Although tyrants like to
believe themselves to be invincible, their realization of the fact of their being human actually
increases their tyranny over the masses and, like the President, they try to conceal their
weaknesses from the masses for fear of reprisals. In the face of such insecurities the President
of Dharmapuri increases the ruthlessness of his tyranny and tries to block out any way that the truth might have of breaking out. To make sure that the people never come to know of the degradation of the royal member to that of a worm, censorship and physical force are enforced to ensure complete secrecy. State propaganda would make sure that the sycophants in the media write ‘hide-bound’ verses glorifying the President while ‘behind that historical rubble’ the worm along with countless other worms of the past would find ‘refuge’ (301).

Vijayan exposes the shallowness of not just the autocratic rulers of the past but also the contemporary self-styled, ‘elected rulers’ who still carry on as if the past had never gone away and the traditions never changed. Perhaps the knowledge of the transience of power is precisely what drives men and women to strive relentlessly for that pinnacle of supreme unchallenged tyranny. The author uses the metaphor of defecation to convey the idea that power and its desire are innate and natural in human beings. Power, absolute power corrupts the powerful and demeans the people subjugated under it. The lowest that people can sink to is the veneration of a dictator’s excreta and, in using such a disturbing metaphor, the author also tries to shake the reader’s complacency into an understanding of the filth that actually lies around our own seemingly comfortable and ordered lives.

Intertwined with this lust for power is the theme of imperialism which goes beyond merely the neo-colonisers in the Saga. It is a potent poison that inhabits the spirits of the people turning them into marauding beings who would not hesitate to disrobe a woman in order to prove her innocence before their voyeuristic eyes. Imperialism in Dharmapuri connotes the rape, the shaming of the people by their own selves, lost as they are in the darkness and selfishness that surrounds and engulfs them. The cadavers of Dharmapuri are not just nameless dead bodies, but the living dead robbed of their voices by those in power. They cease to be human simply because of their vast numbers and are condemned to a fate worse than death. Vijayan posits the view that imperialism is not just confined to the parameters of a traditionally defined relation between the colonised and coloniser but a conflict that pervades even the post-colonial world. He implies that the imperial design never really ended despite Independence because it is too well entrenched in the psyche of the masses and therefore reaches across all social strata even in a democracy. Defecation and rape, the two controlling metaphors of the book, symbolize the filth and violence intrinsic to any system based on imperialism and it is the dystopia created by such forces that assail Dharmapuri. While the satire is directed dominantly at imperialism, it also criticizes the
willing complicity of the nations who gave themselves in to such a demeaning bondage even after heroically clamouring for freedom.

Freedom and democracy brought about hope and a new world order, but these alone were not sufficient to guarantee peace and development for a huge chunk of humanity. The world after colonialism did not turn out to be utopian or ideal. Dharmapuri is emblematic of all that is wrong with the modern world but it is no longer a passive site of exploitation unlike the past. It is actively engaged in power games that the White Confederates and the Communists, the two power blocks of the western world, indulged in. As stated earlier this is a satire on the two power blocks of the Cold War also where the White Confederacy or USA becomes ‘A trans-oceanic-capitalist-Imperialist power practicing the sorcery of consumerism and hardsell’. Although it is ‘one of the traditional enemies of Dharmapuri’, however the ambiguous nature of such diplomatic relations is revealed as we are told that ‘the Confederacy yet replenishes Dharmapuri’s armouries, and supplies the president with candy’ (324). On the other hand the Communists are represented by the Red Tartar Republic which is ‘Guided by the infallible dialectical-and-materialist sorcery, the Republic claims to be the natural ally of all decolonized peoples. The Communard Party ... holds paternal sway over Communards the world over and gives Dharmapuri solidarity and slogans’ (324). The survival of the super-powers also depends on skullduggery and intrigue, where petty nations such as Dharmapuri become the sites of their incomprehensible proxy wars. The Cold War grew more from a perceived threat of weapons and arsenal that the other side might have and this threat filtered down to smaller nations also which got involved with arms building. Vijayan satirises the cold war and the darkly comical nexus of arms trade carried out between the erstwhile colonisers and the neo-imperialists and countries such as Dharmapuri which are dumped with obsolete arms. These are further sold after a few years to even lesser nations creating a global atmosphere of terror and instability. Dharmapuri tries to maintain a precarious balance with both: the Communards for its defense needs and the White Confederates with their trading houses. The fictional Dharmapuri is shown to have a leaning towards the left; yet despite this, a single column in reference to the country in the ‘White Confederate Media occasioned great rejoicing in the Shantigram, and for some inexplicable reason, was prized more than a whole Prava supplement’(184). India, though a part of the NAM, followed a ‘tilted non-alignment’ with its decidedly pro-Soviet tilt from 1962-1991. Despite this pro-Soviet stance in its early years, mostly on account of security reasons, as far as world opinion was concerned it was necessary to have the approval of the democratic
West. While world opinion is of paramount importance for any emerging nation, the kind of paranoid concern that was depicted by the Indian government in the 1970s makes this a serious point in the partial failure of decolonization. Some commentators of the Emergency have pointed out that perhaps one of the main reasons for Indira Gandhi’s calling off of the Emergency was because she wanted to reclaim the good opinion of the western press.

Diplomacy in the era of decolonization is ‘dominated by bartenders and chefs’ since there is nothing left save opulent dinners as the terms of policies are already decided by the neo-imperials (192). Diplomacy in Vijayan’s satire is reduced to just this, a rather trivial formality wherein the Great White Fathers of the White Confederate patronise the rulers and Presidents (prospective victims, 192) of the newly independent countries by bowing in apparent deference to the greatness of the nations they had colonised and how they had much to learn from them. ‘It is true, Your Tiny Excellency, the New World has a good deal to learn from your ancient civilisation.’ (192).

The inclusion of the President’s brood in the numerous offices of the trading houses is seen as the ‘country’s hegemony over imperialism’ (191). The White Confederates, eager to get the maximum that they can, chart a familiar path of intrigue and manipulation by giving gifts and limousines to the new rulers of the independent country, making one wonder if anything had changed from the days of the East India Company. The television crews of the White Confederacy try to hardsell the Orient by capturing scenes of ‘waifs freezing on the sidewalks’, which in turn causes ‘great anger among the people, who turned such occasions into street tableaux against imperialism’ (187). Vijayan criticizes both the exoticising of this reality for western consumption as also the sham of moral righteousness and outrage indulged in by the Indian populace, where instead of confronting this reality, it is sought to be negated or pushed aside or imputed onto imperialism. A similar debate erupted recently with respect to the Oscar winning film The Slumdog Millionaire. However, it has to acknowledged that poverty in India is a fact and no matter how ugly or embarrassing it might be it is an undeniable part of India.

Since there is a criticism of the Left in the novella it would be pertinent to point out that Vijayan’s satire against the Left stems more from personal experience. Though once a ‘coffeehouse Marxist’ himself, Vijayan’s disillusionment with the Left led to his breaking away from it and this expresses itself in his vehement satire against the communists. During the Emergency, the role played by the Left parties with the exception of the CPI(ML), was
quite dubious and has often been a matter of controversy. The CPI, which took a pro-Emergency stand, is represented by the communards of Dharmapuri in the novella who seek to uphold the Tartar Republic’s ideals and partake of the Presidential sacrament. The CPI(M) was against the Emergency on principle, but only passively so, leaving only the CPI(ML) consisting of the extreme Left which was openly and radically against the Emergency. In Dharmapuri, communards greatly rejoice the imposition of the Emergency as also the suspension of the law of Habeas Corpus which was the last impediment in the march towards human progress in the eyes of the Communards of Dharmapuri (194). Its removal is greatly appreciated and even the mass arrests of the civilians in Dharmapuri are greatly rejoiced by the Communards as it reminds them of the Great Tartar Purges of the Tartar Republic (194). The communists are thus portrayed as historically opposed to human rights and in favour of dictators. The so called demagogues of the Left or the Communards are criticized who, while crying themselves hoarse about the virtues of communism, satiate their hunger with the culinary delights offered by their enemy the White Confederacy. They cry communism, but live on the fruits of capitalism. As the President says, ‘what the Tartars might offer us is inedible, fit only for delegates to the Peace-and-Youth jamborees. The Tartars themselves, when they come out of their country, hunger for the culinary art of the Confederacy’ (281). The author thus exposes communism as being a sham. He criticizes India’s pro-Soviet tilt also as a farce since people spoke the language of socialism, but did not leave the smallest opportunity to lap up the goodies offered by the capitalist West. It is also alleged by many commentators that Indira declared the Emergency with the help of the Soviet Union and that JP had the backing of the CIA, thus pointing to the Emergency as having been a possible site for behind the scenes global power play. However, since there is little official knowledge available on the Emergency, such theories can remain mere speculations.

The author also makes reference to the Indo-Pak tensions which were at a peak at that point of time through the Sorrow of Samarkhand which symbolises the sorrow of terrorism that both countries indulge in so as to keep the masses distracted from the failings and corruption of the government. But the people by now used to this are not distracted and therefore, the rulers turn to ‘nuclear sorrow’ on each other’s ‘outlying provinces’ (a parody of India and Pakistan since both had tested nuclear weapons and gone nuclear during the 1970s) (303). But this too has its problems as the new imperialism demands not money but food to satiate its gluttony and the nuclear radiation would cause contamination and a loss in the demand for Dharmapuri’s human meat. The world of diplomacy is exposed as being that of
haggling and fixing convenience for each other's rule at the cost of the masses. Therefore a
false nuclear war breaks out between both countries where the 'most lethal ingredient is
saltpetre'. For the masses this war was the real thing and with the fervor of patriotism at its
peak, the people of neither country could be made to consider any other truth save the
'decolonised truth of the black and brown continents', where people live in their own handed
down versions of truth. Written in the 1970s, which were in any case turbulent years the
world over, the author castigates not just his own people for their blindness but also the West,
the neo-imperials of the time, who took advantage of the younger and more vulnerable
nations. For Vijayan it is not just India or Dharmapuri which is flawed and hollow, but the
entire edifice of ideology and governance that the world rests upon is faulty.

One is led to question whether India or Dharmapuri only temporarily regressed into a
'primitive lawless state' (281) or was this madness, lawlessness and brutality always skulking
beneath the surface, a festering sore which the Emergency burst letting the ooze out. Perhaps
the filth had to come out as a cathartic experience for a nation that did not quite understand its
own limitations and strengths. The inability of a rigidly centralized system to understand or
adapt itself to changing circumstances is probably why the Indian system buckled under
during the Emergency. The reason why such a system collapsed can be traced back to
colonialism which post Independence, led to what can be termed as 'clonism'. Clonism can
be said to be the creation of a derived system based on the cloning of the hegemonic cultural
as well as political institutions of the coloniser such as the bureaucracy, education system, the
legal system and even the constitution to a large extent. There is a difference between
concepts such as copying and mimicry as opposed to clonism, since the idea is to create a
new entity with its distinct identity, and yet one that is a replica of the prototype. The
problem with such a cloned system is that while the original is a natural system which
evolved through centuries, adapting itself to circumstances and people, the clone, being a
consciously created replica, is often unable to understand or adapt itself to a changing
environment since it has the genetic make-up of another system and lacks the required
defense instincts to respond to such situations. Even in biological cloning one of the major
problems is the low survival rate of clones. The Indian system was also 'consciously created'
post-Independence by picking up pieces from the best that was available, but when the pieces
were put together and set in motion, the problems started surfacing soon enough since the
ground reality demanded a system which could change and accommodate itself to the
complexities of the situations. Such a system could not possibly address the needs of people
who came not just from diverse religions or ethnicities but also from varied economic backgrounds, the majority of whom were illiterate and too poor to understand how the new glorious order affected their lives. This is probably why the Indian system collapsed during the Emergency as it was a derived system, politically and economically which though conceived by the best, could not be sustained by those who came after the visionaries. Post the Emergency, the earlier system could not hold as it had already collapsed and from within it one can trace the emergence of a new system which grew as responses to the very Indian problems of communalism, casteism, and separatism, which we can see functioning today.

While there is a structural critique of the contemporary world as a whole, Vijayan criticizes India through specific references to the Indian bureaucracy’s penchant for obstructing work through red-tapism, or the ‘interminable parades’ carried out to showcase the nation’s strength. Since India had to buy mostly second-hand arms or make do with those left over by the British, therefore even these come in for severe criticism by Vijayan: ‘During the Great Decolonization, the departing Imperialisms had bequeathed costume kits and obsolete weapons to their freed colonies: there were interminable parades in all the new republics, which could devise no better use for their new-found sovereignties’ (189).

In Vijayan’s dystopia which is blinded by imperialism and headed towards nihilism, women and children symbolize the ‘victims’, whether it is the country, freedom or simply woman herself. They are used by men for power, lust and greed regardless of their age or position. Laavannya the kitchen maid is not only used by the Minister for Sorrowing, but she is also the one who saves Siddhartha, the saviour, from the violence of the people by allowing herself to be stripped and raped to prove the truth of her innocence. It is a perverted world where even the saviour is not recognized by the people and is in turn saved by the flesh of a woman who is forced to become the site of the various orgasms that history spits out. It is the rape of not just the maid Laavannya but that of the nations as well. The pimping away of the Begum of Samarkhand, a neighbouring kingdom of Dharmapuri, to the entire credit agency of the Confederates is also the pimping away of the autonomy and Independence of a third world nation into the throes of the neo-imperials. The satire is not just directed at imperialism but also at the willing complicity of the nations who gave themselves to such a demeaning bondage even after clamouring for freedom.

In a world that is full of the basest acts that man can perform on man, humanity is redeemed by the rise of the King Siddhartha ‘not the Buddha King but a parallel creation’
(author’s note) who leads the blind onto the path of salvation. A slow and cathartic process, it takes place with the regeneration of Mother Nature which becomes a trope for a return to the natural order from an unnatural and perverted world. In the eternal battle between good and evil, the victory of good is always somewhat ambiguous, because neither can survive without the other. The pipal tree will grow in the midst of mire because it is needed there the most. The reason why the world still carries on is because while madness and brutality have had the upper hand at some moments and places, yet the spirit of humanity which is still alive today was so then also, offering a way to carry on.

Dharmapuri has Siddhartha as its saviour; India unfortunately had no one to look up to after the Emergency, but the seeds of a new order were sown during the chaos of the Emergency, for it is only from the chaos of madness and anarchy that a power to counter it can rise. Post-Emergency, India cannot boast of having rid itself completely of the malaise and corruption that had plagued it before and during the Emergency. The Indian body politic has still not been able to rid itself of the can of worms that the Emergency let out. But its greatest redemption has been the awakening of its people to their rights and a refusal to be condemned as savage hordes by their own leaders simply because of their numbers.

The novella is at times too shrill in its voice against the wrongs being perpetrated in the world, at other places it is marked by dense imagery and clichés. It is harsh and unrelenting in its attack on the systems of havoc and insanity and does tend to get carried away at times. However, it does have enormous relevance with respect to the fact that it was written not consciously for the Emergency but prior to it and reworked later to incorporate some elements, and thus is a felt indictment and disillusionment with a system that had promised so much and fallen over so quickly in its own filth. While the criticism of the Communards and the imperialism of the White Confederacy might sound too outdated and clichéd today, however going by the time in which this was written it seems quite relevant. Again one is led to question the topicality of literature and its position in the process of understanding and formulating history. Nonetheless because of the fact that such events did take place in the not so distant past, and the fact that the post-Independence imperialism has also not been studied much permits us to accord the Saga the place it has as a primary text dealing not just with the psychosis initiated by the Emergency but also one that talks about neo-imperialism and the nexus between the decolonized countries and the imperialists. The novel is allegorical as well as a prognostication of what was to come.
The short stories by Vijayan called *Allegories of Power* deal more explicitly with the Emergency. As the author’s note states ‘they are concerned with power and terror, occasioned by India’s brief experience of the Emergency.’ They convey the experience of Emergency in different ways and manners and, while some of them are disturbing, the tone is not as harsh as the *Saga*. The first in the series is ‘The Wart’ which is simply about a wart which grows from a seemingly innocuous protuberance on the narrator’s face into a malevolent ‘thing’. Though it appears to have a life of its own yet it is not a natural being but a monstrous unnatural creature. The story starts with an introduction to the narrator’s seemingly ordinary existence and how a wart, tiny and insignificant as a seed started to grow on his lower lip. Nothing out of the ordinary or disturbing, however it soon starts growing rapidly and becomes large with a ‘glistening scab around its stem’. As the narrator moves through the everyday activities of his life, the wart continues to grow and finally he ministers the ancient herbal remedies of Dhanvantari to it. But all this to no avail as the wart feeds on everything that the protagonist ministers. It starts oozing yellow pus and becomes so repulsive that the author’s wife also starts rejecting his presence. Left to his own self he prays to his ancestors, ‘My fathers, these riversides and mountain slopes had borne witness to your freedom, and yet what has befallen me, your son? You bequeathed to me the precious palm leaf with its arcane of healing, and yet why have these leaves and roots failed to prevail over this invading spore?’ (466) As a last resort he tries to cut it off, and wakes up several months later from a swoon to find that his family has left him. The feeling of isolation is further compounded by the grotesque reality of the wart but the narrator finds love and relief in the arms of Naani, a maid. Just when the author feels that he is becoming whole again, an enormous phallus breaks out of the wart and rapes Naani. While he had till now hated the wart and considered it his bane, the climax that he feels when the enormous phallus takes Naani, makes him realize that the wart which had ‘fostered with the impurities of [his] body, and the folly of my piety, was flesh of my flesh’ (472). He cannot escape the fact that it has fed on his body and spirit like a parasite, and has now turned into a phallus, not a symbol of fertility, but that of destruction and evil. The wart takes him over completely and commands him to throw away the rusted knife of his ancestors with which he had tried to cut it off. The narrator tries to pray to his ancestors to help him from this monster which while just an excrescence, is a powerful one and abuses him in its ‘woodpecker cackle’ for his transgression of turning to memory, since ‘memory is a crime against history’ (474). History is thus seen as antithetical to memory as the truth of memory can defeat history. The wart gives the author knowledge of a ‘willing servitude’; the brotherhood that the wart teaches him
is not the brotherhood of love but that of bondage. The wart feeds on the dead body of Naani who had tried to soothe the narrator’s pain with her love; it is this love that it wants to destroy with its malevolence. As the body disappears, the wart grows even bigger in size till the author becomes its appendage. In a reversal of the earlier action, the wart now applies Dhanvantri’s medication and finally casts off the narrator. The wart changes into an elephant which is taken by the passing Brahmins to their temple. The final salvation for the narrator finally comes with the strains of the Gayatri Mantra and the benevolent sun which shines on him with its cleansing light. The story also ends on a spiritual note where the narrator turns to God who is the ‘prisoner’s door’ (477).

The story is allegorical as the wart can be seen as the Emergency which had come to stand for all the dross and monstrosities of India, a grotesque protuberance on the nation’s body. The beginning is always small and invariably ignored, and as in the Saga, where the worms were a part of the State, so too in ‘The Wart’, the protuberance, the germ is already present in the narrator. The resident evil of the nation bursts forth in the open after having lived off the nation’s strength at a time when it is vulnerable. The socio-political chaos that surfaced in the Emergency was like the growth of the wart on the nation’s face. It fed on the nation like a parasite, and sucked it deeper and deeper into its vortex. Like the narrator it could no longer bear the weight of these warts and succumbed to their bondage. Naani’s body, which is first taken forcibly by the wart and is then consumed by it, can be taken to be the consumption of democracy by the anarchy of Emergency. What is interesting is that the Emergency was sanctioned by the constitution, and was declared for safeguarding democracy, but its malevolence was such that it consumed a major part of the spirit of democracy thriving on it like a parasite. The nation stuck in the quagmire of evil tries to evoke the glorious past, and is punished for doing so by the state. The present cannot be ruled nor history created with the constant badgering of the past. The wart does not want any goodness to come through even in memory, because it wants to be the supreme power over the narrator’s body. During the Emergency also there was absolute censorship and repression, people could not criticize the government or compare the present to the past for this would have been a memory that could arouse the dormant, latent sense of justice in them. The wart takes over the past and becomes an elephant, which is then taken by the Brahmins to their temple unaware of the fact that it is an excrescence that they were venerating in the temple of god. The narrator cries and warns them of it but, blinded as people are to appearances, they revere it as being holy. With the Emergency also, people refused to see it for what it was and
gave in, and later when it was lifted it existed in a different form, that of the present maladies 
that assail India. The end might seem to suggest a victory of evil over goodness as the wart is 
taken into a temple, but the priests who take it there are blind to its reality. As the narrator 
survived the wart so did the nation which had been overtaken by the Emergency but survived 
it and cast it aside to emerge as a resurgent political entity. The narrator also experiences a 
rebirth of sorts when he awakens to the fact that while he had negated god and considered the 
wart as omnipotent, yet it is ultimately god who opens the door releasing him from his prison. 
The end is triumphant, albeit muted and restrained, just as for India also, notwithstanding the 
Janata debacle, democracy emerged as the ultimate victor, scarred yet victorious.

The next story in the series is 'The Foetus', yet another allegorical story about the 
Emergency: one that deals with the terror of sterilization that was rampant then. Sterilization 
was a pet project of Sanjay Gandhi; however as the author quite frankly states in an 
interview it was not meant to attack any one person. It is an allegory of the innate propensity 
towards evil that humans possess as also the fact that an event like the Emergency brought 
such an inclination out in the open. There are direct references to contemporary political 
personages, as the Sovereign is a widowed Lady and it is her unborn foetus that becomes the 
evil force in the story. The pregnant lady stays shut in her fortress and this unnatural 
pregnancy soon fills people with fear, as her pregnancy is accompanied by dark omens. This 
metaphor of pregnancy occurs in Midnight's Children also, and it symbolizes the coming of 
the Emergency as an evil, deformed creature, a negative force that was able to terrorise the 
minds of the people. The village has a 'foetal membrane spread over it like an astral canopy' 
(479) occluding the wisdom of the stars. The foetus, 'an enormous blob of jelly slithering up 
the trail, its malefic fluids glistening in the moon', comes out each night to feed on the bodies 
of the villagers, (479). Its slime trails soon mark the whole village just like India was affected 
and marked by the slime trails of an aberrant event, the Emergency.

The village Priest and the Astrologer who try to make some sense of these aberrant 
and bizarre occurrences soon realize that the foetus was a force fed and nurtured by the 
crimes of the past when the 'lords of the fortress had willed their power over us, and this 
manifests itself in this blob of slime' (481). The seed of this malignant force had been sown 
in the many tyrannical generations of the past. This tyranny and malevolence are not new or 
unnatural since they have always been a part of society and just like the wart which had

4 ibid
always been present in the narrator’s body; the foetus also grows from within the system because it has always been present in it. The excesses of the Emergency were also not restricted or particular only to that time: this political depravity had always been a part of the system; it only gained absolute freedom during the Emergency in the same way as the foetus does in the story. The sins of the lords, the leaders of the country, were the corruption and utter lack of accountability that the country now had to pay a price for. In order to save the village from the scourge of the foetus and his followers, the Astrologer relies on a litany but this is also disregarded by the ‘young scions of the gentry’ who ‘trusted their reason, and the exuberance of their bodies, the bodies that hunted and preened and made love’. While this could be taken to be Sanjay Gandhi and his caucus of the Youth Congress and various other friends of his, however since the author did not want the story to be interpreted in such a reductive manner, therefore one can take them to be the multiplication of the evil symbolized by the foetus as ‘It was with them that the Foetus communed in the mysterious emanations of the night. Soon, there were carnivals of youth to celebrate the advent of the Foetus’ (481). They also represent the willingness of the masses to follow evil and anarchy as they proclaim that ‘The Foetus is our new Sovereign, and we are his soldiers. The old order is crumbling’ (481). Soon the village council is taken over by decadent youth filled lust who drive away the old councilors and ‘two portraits adorned the council hall, one of the Lady, in the carnal fullness of middle age, pregnant, naked. The young men gazed on this in spasms of lust. The other portrait, before which fervent worship was offered, was of a blob of gelatin, turgid and luminescent, with hands and feet. The Foetus!’ (482). Unnatural times with unnatural desires and rulers, no wonder that the Emergency aroused such surreal images of a perverted order.

The attack by the foetus and the scions of the gentry on pregnant ladies can also be inferred as a reference to the sterilization drives and also at a more symbolic level the complete collapse of the natural order. ‘There are no private pregnancies any more declares the leader of the youth’ and while the pregnant women ‘swam around in distraught circles’, ‘their pursuers came upon them, blind to identity, incestuous’ (484). The sin of perversion, of what was just and right during the Emergency becomes an incest whereby the scions raped their very own country. The Insurrectionist, a probable reference to JP, ‘enfeebled by age, the forgotten hero of many sad and passionate uprisings’ now lost in his ‘cocoon of senility and heroism’ (484) tries to defy the foetus with the arguments of the past not understanding that this was a new threat, a new evil which did not simply oppress physically but took over the minds of the people, and vampirized historical memory (484). The Emergency did not simply
work at the level of brute strength, though it was strengthened by it, but more importantly it sought to create a psychosis in the collective psyche of the people through fear, which is portrayed brilliantly by Vijayan through the image of the Insurrectionist and his partisans held in the grip of the fetuses who massage their temples and foreheads, as though rubbing in a ‘lethalunction’ all the while saying ‘Submit’ (484). And soon as it happened with India and its masses, they submitted with a bare protest and ‘decades of legendary battle softened into inane compliance’. Once the leaders fell to the ‘mesmeric evil’ it spread through the nation like an ‘inexorable seepage’ (485).

The whole village becomes an ‘island in time’ (486), a time of sorcery and sin where the Foetus refuses to be born, threatening to go on forever as a Foetus, an aberration of nature. The Emergency too reduced India to such an island where no one really knew what was happening or why. It seems in retrospect, a frozen space of two years in history, which has been forgotten but, ironically enough, though it seems frozen, there was a lot that happened within that freeze in India. In the story, the whole system collapses as there is no police to save people from the terror being inflicted upon them, all lessons are replaced by slogans and propagandas, childbirth is outlawed and only fetuses allowed the right to live. The Foetus also comes to symbolize the spiritual and moral deformity and the abnormality of the new generation of India which is not completely human and lacks the basic values which once inspired generations of the past. And yet it is not their fault that they are perverted thus, the sin as the astrologer says lies in the past only, in the crimes of the rulers which have deformed man today. The perversity which was hitherto latent now overtakes humanity resulting into half formed beings who know only evil and not goodness. But as the Astrologer says, ‘Nothing is perennial’, not even servitude and the Foetus too is confronted and defeated but not through force but the balm of love. The chanting of the litany brings out the humanity of the foetus making it realize that it is a half-formed human after all. It goes back to its mother’s womb, and is born, but not alive. Neither mother nor child survives, and in a typically symbolic manner, the dark clouds also disperse from the village. As I stated earlier it would be easy to read this story with reference to Sanjay and Indira yet it goes further than mere personal attacks and moves on to a more philosophical level regarding the evil within.

It is interesting to know that while in both ‘The Wart’ and ‘The Foetus’, Vijayan depicts the seeds of evil as sown in the past, it is in the past alone that salvation also lies. Both the wart and the foetus are appendages that feed on the body and grow into monstrosities that have a life of their own, and yet cannot be considered living because they
seem to be controlled by a desire to destroy and control, whether it is sexual or physical. They are parasites which destroy the very system they grow out of. Whether it is the Saga, ‘The Wart’ or ‘The Foetus’, the symbolic battle is between the eternal binaries of good and evil, and the Emergency for the author is emblematic of the primordial evil that exists in man himself. The gluttonous lust of the wart and the foetus are intrinsic, not external forces. Thereby the author tries to say that the Emergency was not simply a detached, isolated aberrant event, as it is popularly seen, but an insidious force that was lurking within the nation’s history and body politic all the while. The Emergency was probably just the physical manifestation of all the evils that were assailing the Indian nation which had hitherto lain disguised under the contentment and acceptance of the masses. The flaws in the system such as those of political values, corruption, etc, which should have been taken into cognizance early on, simply kept on piling and added to this was the problem of the fostering of a dynastic rule over the nation by the leading party, the Congress. The last aspect comes in repeatedly in Vijayan’s works based on the Emergency.

The Emergency was an event of immense magnitude which is still difficult to comprehend and fathom since it is too close to our historical consciousness. However Vijayan’s allegories, so close to the event, represent it as a malevolent and evil force like the wart or the foetus making it into a symbol of evil per se. While the event was an unfortunate one yet it is debatable whether the Emergency was such an evil aberration considering that whatever happened, the excesses or the fall in the political and social values, were already happening at some level or the other in the nation. The Emergency merely threw them in our face, but what is important is that we have become used to this kind of a mayhem post the Emergency. While no Indian government would probably ever dare to impose an Emergency again, it can also be observed that the Indian body politic as also the public has become quite numb to the political charlatanry that was exhibited during and after the Emergency.

While the above mentioned are allegorical stories that deal with the Emergency within a specific framework and characters, the next two stories deal with certain aspects of the Emergency. ‘Oil’ as the author himself says deals with power as an organic quality\(^5\). The story centres on a strange affliction that takes over a village where all the children are normal and healthy till pubescence when they are suddenly attacked by a strange paralysis. The Chettiyar and his wife the Chettichiyar provide oil to the entire village and as is revealed

\(^5\) ibid
through the story, they contaminate the oil with an inexpensive chemical waste brought by their minion, the hunchback, which causes the paralysis in the children. Soon the entire village including the young and old alike are taken over by a strange inertia and vacuity, breaking out of which seems impossible. The Chettiyar slowly takes over their lands and their will, leaving them with nothing but a morbid existence filled with torpor. The Chettiyar’s power over the villagers takes them over with the finality of the darkness of a moonless night. The story understands power as a hegemonic quantity which slowly but insidiously comes to take over the body and mind of the masses.

The Chettiyar shows himself to be generous and benign, his wife Chalachi Chettichiyar equally so, as she would administer strange herbal remedies to the women for their personal problems. The whole atmosphere of the village becomes slowly charged with a strange bondage to the Chettiyar, as the people refuse to even listen to the village officer that the oil might be adulterated. The villagers prefer to go on buying the oil from the Chettiyar and the people are forced to heed his words which are now laced with an undertone of threat. They know the truth, yet no one dares to raise their voice against him as it is more convenient to live under power than take the uncomfortable path of challenging it and changing their established, comfortable way of life. Velunni, the father of one such paralyzed boy, wakes from his torpor and decides to take the oil for examination. However, the hunchback’s thinly disguised threats force him once again into the same life of resignation. As the story explores the theme of tyranny through hegemonic oppression, it can be seen to have resonances of the Emergency also in it. The key line of the Emergency was that it was good for the people, even necessary. The injunction was accompanied by references to possible inconveniences if not complied with. Power demands complete submission and hegemonic power seeks to do this by a control over the mind. The Chettiyar controls the people by convincing them that what he does is for their own good and thereafter bends them as he pleases while the people allow themselves to be enveloped by the darkness that he casts over them. Power during the Emergency worked at various levels and in various forms. Along with brute force and legal arm twisting, a more insidious power was wielded by the government through its propaganda which conveyed to the people the real message that any opposition or dissent would be quashed. What is even more disconcerting was that a lot of people initially even gave into this kind of propaganda and gave their tacit approval to the Emergency and the authorities, in much the same way as the villagers.
The rich and the intelligentsia were seduced by the charms of the Emergency just like the villagers and the officers are by the ominous eroticism of the Chettchiyar and her pungent fragrance of evil, for even the erotic can be equally hegemonic in more ways than one. The middle classes and the poor like the villagers had their own ‘separate darkness, on the darkness’s sufferance, each under the oppression of his or her own personal hunchback’ (502) and could not, did not, oppose even if they wanted to in their hearts. A new generation grows up crippled because their parents refuse to stand up to oppression and allow themselves to be led by the hand of tyranny. In order to make sure that no one indulges in acts that could incite the people by arousing the dormant thoughts of life and freedom inside them, the Chettiyar imposes a strict regime of controlled diet and continence upon the people and violations are met with reproach. Indira and Sanjay also tried to impose a similar regimented life onto the people including forcible family planning, and India too seemed to have been paralysed during the Emergency save for a few who stood against this hegemony as long as they could, like Rajan, the crippled boy in the story. While the children, fed on a diet of propaganda, lay crippled in thought, their growth stunted since they had to learn at an age to bow down before authority, the parents, the older generations simply watched in mute compliance with ‘their reason blighted’ (503) as there seemed to be no reason nor desire for any other action. The old bull of the oil press, the symbol of the country plodding on inexorably through time and tyranny, is replaced by a machine, the ‘village’s new malefic god’, and is left to die and rot. While the story is dark and contains images of death and the stench of rot mingled with a crude eroticism, the end offers some hope strangely enough from the rotting carcass of the old bull. It sweeps and travels through the night and just as the Chettiyar and his wife are at the pinnacle of their obscene victory, the ‘avenging stench’ of the bull rises containing all the wrong done, the ‘spite and violence’, the ‘lament for the shriveled limbs’ and sweeps over the ‘sinners’ with ‘spectral hands’ (509). The carcass is that of India, of democracy, freedom ... life itself, which rises to defend and avenge itself from the tyranny of a mechanized and lifeless existence. It was when the elections came that the rotting cadaver of India rose once again to avenge itself and brought a new lease of life for the people. This ‘wrath’ breaks through only when there is nothing is left to lose anymore. Just as the Chettiyar considered the bull to be insignificant and expendable after all its life of toil, the authorities also took India, the ideal of democracy to be expendable. The masses might have been seduced and drugged by the power of hegemony and the hope of an entire generation crippled, yet the death of an ideal or even a construct was ultimately larger than the people or an unjust government. The elections of 1977 too were accompanied by the stench of the rot that lay
underneath the system and the Emergency. The Congress hegemony suffered a massive blow in its defeat and the old system which involved the zombie like compliance of the people was finally rejected. The price that India had to pay was heavy indeed: even if it was only two years, but then even two years of an enforced silence can be a very long time.

The last story in the *Allegories of Power* is ‘The Examination’ which explores the Emergency as a systemic evil which thrives on the logic and principle of punishment and force. It sees the state through the allegory of an examination which is conducted under duress and makes it appear as an organized madness where people have no option and no will other than to submit and become a part of the insanity. The story is darkly humorous but is in no way lacking in the same brutal satire that marks the other stories by Vijayan.

When a bubonic plague hits the town of Palghat, Ananthan Pillai comes with his ‘Hitlerian moustache’ and a cheroot on his ‘pendulous lip’ as a representative of the state and controls the disease with state intervention (511). The Hitlerian moustache is a rather obvious and clichéd reference to the arch dictator and seeks to make Pillai more of a caricature than a threatening dictator but he proves effective since even the rats and parasites are taken over by the state. The humour makes the madness and satire even more disturbing as the Emergency was more of a joke for many at the time since the antics of the state were so extreme that many people could not believe they were happening. The entire scenario of people running and trying to save themselves from sterilization appears funny to people today but the absurdity of the situation is what makes it so grotesque. Yet history makes us laugh even at the nightmare, which is why probably the Emergency has been so conveniently placed on the back-burner. The dictator, the ‘New Emperor of the Hooked Sceptre, the dispeller of rats’ (515) is driven by a single minded obsession towards ridding the town of its rats and no amount of money or flesh can deviate him from his task.

In keeping with his debunking of the popular discourse of history as being an accurate chronological and sequential catalogue of events, Vijayan induces breaks in the story and then deliberately introduces a rather surreal and dreamlike scenario involving a character called Venugopalan, and the plague police force set up by Pillai. While the dictator himself rested like an emperor, the plague militia grew on even after the plague had long since disappeared from Palghat. Once the ‘system’ gets established in the town of Palghat, it keeps on plodding relentlessly deteriorating into the madness and chaos of a machinery that has run amuck and one which claims victims at will. It is interesting to note that even the government
with its Hitlerian tinge went about chasing the ‘rats’ of society, the smugglers and criminals in the initial days of the Emergency; however like Pillai’s plague police it soon started plaguing the people in general as well.

Venugopalan goes out to buy gold studs for his grandson only to be accosted by the well known face of Raman poleeze, an active recruit of the mad system set in motion by Pillai. Venugopalan is forced to walk in the direction he has chosen, the state not offering any turning back to anyone any more, caught as it is in its system of demanding absolute obedience and compliance. What seems like a joke, a funny dream turns into a ghastly nightmare for Venugopalan who is forced to take an exam, the verdict of which turns out to be death by hanging. He meets people he has known all his life and yet no one helps him, as everyone seems to be caught in the same madness as Raman poleeze. State intervention claims everyone for itself, even Venugopalan’s little grandson is crushed under the unseeing, unfeeling feet of the marionettes of such a system. The story comments upon the systemic failure that took place during the Emergency which was characterized by ‘state intervention’ in all matters, including the personal, and one which involved arrests and arbitrary punishments by the system. The ideological warfare that it played out on the people was so potent that people also became complicit with the machinations of the Emergency. In the story, as in reality, the once familiar faces seem distorted by the merciless staccato of dictatorship. While the plague, the original cause for the setting up of the plague army is over, the system continues to run amuck, unabated and uncontrolled. The crumbling of institutions such as the media, police and bureaucracy into instruments of terror created an unfamiliar disorder in the system that was met with some confusion as in poor Venugopalan’s case, but for the most part with the tacit complicity that it demanded. The humour is dark as indeed it was during the Emergency when to even think against the government was a potential threat to the state. For people who were thrown into jails it was like Venugopalan’s examination, a test of the common man’s endurance and sanity in an insane system.

Apart from the Emergency which is the dominant theme in these works, yet another equally important and related issue that runs through them is that of the discourse of history. Vijayan, the iconoclast, corrodes with his Swiftian satire all sanctity that is accorded to the meta structures of power and history leaving them with nothing but a rag to cover themselves with. In all of this man becomes the ultimate object of his attack as the arbiter of such a society which has become rootless and anarchic. The constant use of scatology and sexual imagery in Vijayan’s works is important in emphasizing the depravity and the utter fall in
political and social ideals that were felt by the people prior to the Emergency. The reason why these allegories of power are able to catch the spirit of the Emergency as also the fall of the Indian socio-political system is because unlike the novels of Mistry or Rushdie, Vijayan and Sahgal write from the point of those who had witnessed the nightmare first hand rather than receiving a second hand, therefore diluted version of the event. This is not to take away anything from the other books, but simply to point out the difference in the treatment of the theme of Emergency, both at the levels of allegory and realism, which arises from the spatial and political locations of these authors.

II

Auctioning the Self: Nayantara Sahgal's Rich Like Us

Vijayan’s nihilism envelops not just the Emergency but makes an indictment of the perverse side of human nature as well leading to a rather bleak scenario of the world in general. Sahgal on the other hand gives a very controlled, finely nuanced portrayal of the Emergency, which is as disturbing as Vijayan’s allegorical satire, though not as graphic or nihilistic. Nayantara Sahgal's novel Rich Like Us (1985) is also a text that speaks of personal experience of the Emergency. Sahgal is not only one of the major writers in Indian writing in English but also a cousin of the late Mrs. Gandhi. A member of the Sahitya Akademi Advisory Board, Sahgal resigned during the Emergency in protest. Sahgal's novel is not allegorical, symbolic, or hysterical in its criticism of the Emergency. The tone is quiet, restrained, subtle and even evokes the nostalgia of a lost romance at places, and yet, despite all this, it is a provocative text as it highlights the hegemonic power that the Emergency exerted over the intelligentsia.

As the title suggests the book deals with the Emergency as seen through the lives of those belonging to the Indian upper class, the rich and the elite, who revealed their rather dark and ugly side during this period. The novel explores the sycophancy and corruption that took over the upper classes during the Emergency making them appear grotesque and blind to the reality of the situation. While the event is mostly studied in political terms, an important area that gets studied with respect to the impact of the Emergency is the change in the social value system that took place in these two years. While the Emergency is the canvas on which the book and its characters are painted, the hues are such that one is also compelled to understand it as a social text that portrays the shift in values from one generation to the other.
There are direct and explicit references to the dominant political personalities of the time such as the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Sanjay Gandhi. Even though they are never brought before the reader, they influence and control not just the actions but also the characters of the rest of the cast in the novel. The ugly underbelly of Indian society came to light with the Emergency since people grovelled to whatever depths they could in order to ingratiate themselves with the PM and her son. That it was the elite, educated enlightened upper crust of society that chose to debase itself in such a manner makes the novel all the more disturbing. It is this revolting sycophancy and corruption of values that Sahgal exposes in the book. Added to this is the fact that it is the depiction of an event actually experienced which makes the Emergency a felt rather than imagined experience.

The novel is narrated by a civil servant Sonali, the main protagonist who comes face to face with her own indifference towards the reality of India ensconced as she was in the cocoon of her secure existence as a top ranking bureaucrat, till it is rudely shaken by the Emergency. The novel also explores the life of an Englishwoman, Rose, an endearing character who is married to an Indian businessman Ram, and forms the last link to the old India. The novel makes a contrast between the past and present values and has a sense of nostalgia for the romance that once existed in India. As opposed to the past, where values and ethics, above all a sense of decency and honesty still prevailed, the present comes across as ruthless and opportunistic, willing to remove whatever comes in its way of achieving ends no matter how corrupt or bizarre they might be, even if it entailed the murder of an old woman for safeguarding a corrupt business deal, or the sterilization of a beggar without arms or legs. That all this and more is not done by criminals or thugs but by an educated intelligentsia consisting of socialites, businessmen and bureaucrats makes the subtle satire run like cold sweat down one’s back. The almost Nazi like hysteria that takes over Nishi, Rose’s daughter-in-law, regarding the sterilization campaign forces one to consider the almost fanatical pull that propaganda and power have over people. Ironically enough, the very people who would have been expected to understand the larger implications of what was happening and protest against it, were actually the ones who gave their whole hearted support to the draconian policies undertaken during the Emergency.

Sahgal exposes the corrupt nexus of industrialists, ministers and bureaucrats in the small dinner party hosted by one of Delhi’s elite businessmen, Rose’s stepson Dev, for the stereotype American investor Mr. Neuman and Ravi Kachru, the bureaucrat. For people like Dev and Neuman the Emergency had created conditions quite conducive for meaningful
business through the pro-industry policy reforms such as banning strikes that the government had initiated (2). Most people felt that the opposition was not required in a country such as India and it only created useless impediments. The government's locking up of all the 'troublemakers' in jail under the MISA is appreciated by people like Dev who could now carry out their business freely with the help of government employees such as Kachru. The oiling of the government machinery through dollars and the existence of systemic corruption which is taken as a given without raising as much as an eyebrow, is portrayed by the author in simple matter of fact language which takes up barely a few lines. But the impact is sharp enough in its deliberate casualness as the author barely disguises her references to the numerous scams that were taking place at the time such as Sanjay Gandhi's project of setting up Maruti, 'the people's car', which had raised a huge scandal on account of the fact that it had been allocated prime agricultural land in Haryana and despite heavy investments had not produced a single car. The Happyola drink factory that is referred to in the novel refers to the controversy involving a leading cola brand that came to India during the Emergency. As the author says it was a 'child of the Emergency, with a blanket import license that would store underground hiddenwares for car manufacture' (50).

A lot of industrialists and politicians had willingly put their money in the project because it was spearheaded by the PM's son which revealed that the nexus had spread even more widely than it otherwise would have. Since the highest authorities were also involved in it, the underlings had a valid excuse to account for their actions. Dev in the novel is a part of the new generation which espoused the same kind of debasement of values that Sanjay Gandhi came to be known for. He was the role model for many such Devs who had scant regard for what was right and wrong. The Maruti scandal is not just a passing reference in the novel, but an important part of the plot. Dev and Nishi along with others get involved with the production of the 'non-existent' car, as Nishi's father calls it, and Rose's knowledge of the wheeling-dealing that was going on and about the smuggling of the parts of the car leads to her death, as she becomes too dangerous for Dev and his cronies. The indifference and ruthlessness that had become a part of the new generation of India is depicted through Dev and his friends, who freely and casually talk over drinks about the possible ways that could be used by the government for eliminating JP in jail. They just as easily forge cheques or use bribery and kill people like Rose when they become a hindrance in their way. The Emergency marks a further perversion of values in an already unstable social environment.
While the earlier Nehruvian government too had its fair share of problems yet it was still marked by a certain sense of commitment and integrity which was seen to be grossly lacking in Indira’s government. This shift in the values of the past and present generation from Nehru to Sanjay is reflected across the social spectrum during the 1970s and is a prime focus of the novel. The protagonist Sonali also questions, ‘Where had the tradition we were trying to build gone wrong?’ (23). The nation and society had somewhere deviated from the path that it had set out on after Independence and the result was a directionless people trying to find their own personal paths towards success at the cost of the nation.

The novel also highlights the role of bureaucracy, often considered to be the backbone of the Indian government during the Emergency. Both Sonali and Ravi are top ranking bureaucrats who belong to the generation that studied in Oxford and came back starry eyed with the ideals of Marxism, to be a part of the nation’s movement towards progress. During the Emergency, Sonali is sent back to her home cadre as a punishment for interfering in the cola deal, while Ravi on the other hand becomes the ‘right hand and left leg of the prime minister and her household’. Kachru is described as an ‘ineffable blend of mediocrity and respectful response embroidered with manners that counted with the political bosses’ (23). He is just one of the many minions of a powerful bureaucracy that had allowed itself to be subjugated by politics which invariably affected the Indian system in more ways than one. ‘The distinction between politics and the service had become so badly blurred over the last few years it had all but disappeared’ (23). While there may have been earnest bureaucrats like Sonali who might have stood up against the Emergency or protested in whatever way they could, it is also a fact that the bureaucracy for the most part acted as a more than willing accomplice in the whole exercise since the few who protested were punished in similar ways like Sonali is. As Sonali blandly states, ‘We knew this was no Emergency. If it had been, the priorities would have been quite different. We were all taking part in a thinly disguised masquerade, preparing the stage for family rule’ (23). The subservience of a structure as important and massive as the Indian bureaucracy had important implications because it led to a weakening of the very foundations that it had been built upon. Not only were its independence and autonomy compromised upon, but the whole image of the civil services as being bound by a certain sense of ‘discipline’ was also corroded (22).

Sahgal lambasts the Indian way of thinking and feeling when she says that the indifference that the bureaucrats or people in general sported regarding events around them was because it was practical and convenient for them: ‘No one wanted trouble. So long as it
didn’t touch us, we played along pretending the Empress’ new clothes were beautiful’ (24). What did not affect them did not matter to them, caught as they were in a ‘conspiracy of silence’. Sonali is also caught up in the masquerade among the blind, not being affected for more than five minutes after the sight of a helpless man being kicked by the police, till she is personally impacted by the Emergency. Sonali admits the indifference on the part of people like her own self saying: ‘We knew we were up against a power we couldn’t handle, individually or collectively. Though I am sure the true explanation is that we are blind from birth, born of parents blind from birth. We do not see what we do not want to, and when we cannot avoid a nasty sight it still can’t do much to hurt us. I was superbly insulated by the centuries against that sight …’ (24). It is only when she is transferred to a posting that she knows is more of a demotion that she feels the cold slap of power on her face and starts understanding the Emergency. The insulation given to us against any wrong till it affects us personally is a part of the Indian social psyche and more particularly the intelligentsia and the upper classes. One is woken out of that stupor only when the bubble breaks.

While the Emergency is looked upon as a measure for controlling ‘chaos’ initially, with the disruption of civil rights an atmosphere of fear starts pervading the country. As the Emergency slowly starts invading the lives of the masses, the ‘sullenness’ of the people builds up slowly despite the censorship. Tenements are demolished by the government and ominous looking vans ‘like the ones used for collecting stray dogs’ now prowl the streets ‘picking citizens for vasectomy’ (22). It is a nightmare albeit a civilized one ordered by the government for propagating peace and progress. Sonali too becomes one of the many unsuspecting victims of the Emergency as she is suddenly demoted and feels the ‘midday knock’ of the Emergency on her life. She is able to comprehend that she alone is not being singled out for the punishment. Rather, as she says, ‘The logic of June 26th had simply caught up with me. The same soundless nudge that landed me in the ditch had carted thousands off to jail, swept hundreds more out of sight to distant “colonies” to live, herded as many like animals to sterilization centres’ (28).

These were things that simply happened because the events of the Emergency defied any other logic or reasoning. The fact that she is replaced by her now estranged friend and lover, Ravi Kachru, makes the punishment all the more harder for Sonali. The nudge makes her come back to her reality, that of living in India where women were still being burnt for not bringing enough dowry. Her carefully cultivated insulation towards the scene of a helpless boy looking for his spectacles while being beaten by the police torments her and
makes her question the Indian spirit that even today allows people to walk by a person dying on the road or being beaten up. The 'moderate, tolerant' attitude and the 'civilised ways' that she and her fellow countrymen had grown up with are exposed to reveal nothing more than a very casual attitude of acceptance towards 'cruelty and depravity'. India with all its glorious past is stripped to reveal nothing more than a 'collective will to cowardice' and a life based on 'monumental lies' that could either support the Emergency in the way that the majority did or cry out sullenly when it started entering their carefully cocooned spaces. It did not matter when the poor were being rounded up for sterilization or labour camps, or when the opposition and students were being locked up because it was all far removed from their lives, just as the Emergency does not hit Sonali till she is demoted. Sonali’s awakening to the fact of her own indifference to things around her results in a desire to disbelieve everything because ‘there was no fundamental truth’ left to believe in anymore (31). She experiences a sense of loss of the values of the past and disillusionment with the hollowness of today which leads to a state of vacancy and confusion. In some ways it can be said that this generation, depicted by Sonali and Ravi, had the hardest path to follow because once the euphoric haze of Independence settled down, it revealed the rot that had been fermenting underneath and it was left to this generation now to take charge and sort out a system which demanded either Ravi Kachru’s willing servility or a very staunch unyielding commitment to one’s principles regardless of the outcome. It is no wonder then that most chose Ravi Kachru’s path and in the process let the rot turn into a quagmire.

Moving onto the world of the ‘bold and beautiful’ of Indian high society we have Nishi, Dev’s wife from a modest background who is quickly caught up in the social intrigues of the rich. For the nouveau riche like Nishi the Emergency was a period of ‘magical calm’, which suddenly made a country that was difficult and ‘humiliating’ to explain to foreigners, ‘comforting’ and more presentable. ‘And then Emergency was so popular’ (87). Nishi looks up to the ‘Leader’, Indira, with an unflinching reverence that so many like her were ready to pour forth: ‘The idea of a Leader, someone to look up to, made her pulse beat faster, fulfilled a yearning for tidiness, and a woman in command put at least one woman beyond the furies all other face’ (87). The Leader’s being a woman tidying up the country’s mess inspires Nishi also to help this process at her own level. The Prime Minister or the ‘Leader’s’ office becomes a veritable pilgrimage for people like Nishi who gather there for paying obeisance and making sure their patriotism towards the Leader is seen as unwavering and steadfast. As schoolchildren, lawyers, teachers and elites like Nishi trundled to the waiting rooms they
smiled to each other as though followers towards a common purpose, enveloped in the ‘mystical glow of people doing the right thing’ (87). Sahgal also satirises the strange desire for social work that broke out amongst the elite of the country during the Emergency. This was pursued with a single minded dedication in the field of sterilization. Because of their sheer number and low standard of living, India’s poor were looked down upon as mere breeders who deserved to be sterilized. With chilling ruthlessness and utter indifference to the fact that these were people that they were dealing with, the elite ladies of Nishi’s circle meet over a dainty tea party at the Intercontinental and decide upon the course of their patriotic fervour. The meeting is inspired by the (in)famous Twenty-Point Programme and the whole idea is to ‘popularize’ the Emergency so as to prove that they cared about the nation and its problems. ‘There was so much one could do, take groups to congratulate the Prime Minister, plant trees, prevent their servants from having more children’ (93). The ‘dyed hair, imported skin fragrances’ contrast incongruously with easy matter of fact statements about getting the ayah’s ‘tubes tied’ or dismissing them if they had more children, as part their no-nonsense, businesslike agenda of implementing the sterilization programme. The serious discussion considers even the religion factor in sterilization, since only Hindus could not be sterilized in the face of the apparent opposition that would be put up by Muslims and Christians. Secularism is shown to be alive and kicking by Sahgal in the excellent satire that she makes at the expense of the upper classes. At some level this might be considered as a stereotype, a caricature, but then during the Emergency the stereotypes lived out their roles as in the case of certain socialites such as Rukhsana Sultana who were part of Sanjay Gandhi’s sterilization team. The ferocity with which the whole exercise of getting servants sterilized is conducted for proving allegiance to the high command makes people like Nishi blind to all logic and reason as she tries to force Kumar the old servant and the amputated beggar into the ‘Custard Cream Crunchies for Tea’ van for sterilization and is only stopped in her Nazi like fervour of having the servants sterilized by Rose.

The immediate contrast to all this sycophancy is offered by Nishi’s father Kishori Lal, a victim of Partition who now had to sell bathroom equipment for a living. The defiant red tilak that he wore was more of a political statement than an actual belief in the ideologies of right wing organizations such as the Jan Sangh. It was this affiliation with the Jan Sangh that not only worries Nishi during the Emergency but also leads to his arrests under the MISA. As it happened with most people, even Nishi does not realize the dark side of the Emergency till her father also becomes its victim. At one level she supports the Emergency since it helped
further her husband’s business and gave her the hope that her husband’s support and contacts would indirectly provide a blanket of security for her father. While Nishi is almost fanatic in her support for the Emergency, her father is equally vehement in denouncing it. The contrast between the past and present, between a generation that had gone through the trauma of Partition and the pain of rebuilding everything all over again and the present generation that grew up in free India with a distorted self-centered power hungry vision is even more stark here. Rose and Kishori Lal’s clarity of vision regarding the reality of the Emergency and empathy with humanity are in marked contrast to Nishi’s hysteria and Dev’s overvaulting greed and ambition. When Nishi tries to persuade her father to go and congratulate the Prime Minister, he refuses to go and be a part of the madness that seemed to have overtaken the elite like Nishi. Sahgal makes direct references to the arrests of JP and people from Delhi University through Kishori Lal’s condemnation of the government. He even suggests that JP might be killed in jail, ‘With this lot in power it’s happened once too often already even before your precious Emergency (91).’

The reference can be taken to be the infamous Nagarwala incident or even L.N. Mishra’s death, wherein all the key witnesses died under highly strange circumstances as a result of which the truth behind the incidents were never disclosed, since they implicated the Prime Minister. It also points to Indira Gandhi’s style of politics and the change in the political culture and values that has often been attributed to her. The Emergency was many things: mass arrests, censorship, power, corruption and the fall of a society. The ideal of India was born of a certain time long past which was too hard to follow now for a people who were mired in the manifold problems that nation-building involves. As mentioned earlier, the gap between what should be and what was, was still too huge after the Independence and it invariably affected the people and the Indian value system in more ways than one.

Sahgal’s satire is directed on the other part of the elite society as well, which comprises of the intelligentsia – lawyers, bureaucrats, journalists and professors – who go a step further and offer very logically thought out arguments for justifying the Emergency and its excesses. Sonali is taken aback by the bizarreness of the rationality with which the well read guests argue in favour of the Emergency and the Prime Minister and her son in the cosy, comfortable environs of her sister’s place, far removed from the reality of the Emergency and the nation itself. For such people there were no forcible sterilizations or demolitions and so for them the Emergency with its emphasis on ‘discipline’ was the right thing for the nation. The present dictatorship is seen as one of ‘nature’s marvels’, a ‘brilliant archaeological find’.
Even the possible dynastic continuation of power is seen as nothing unnatural and neither is the mother’s moving ‘heaven and earth for her son’. Sanjay Gandhi is praised by the guests for his ‘organizational talent’ in ‘vasectomising the lower classes, blowing up tenements and scattering slum-dwellers to beautify Delhi, setting up youth camps with drop-outs in command, loafers and ruffians who would otherwise have been no more than loafers and ruffians’. Referring to the locking up of the opposition and the Maruti project, the admirers state, ‘With his ill-wishers out of the way now, a patriotic, hand-spun, hand-woven car, every nut and bolt of it made in India, would soon be out on the road. Look at the way he’d sprung full-blown, up and doing, into the power structure, while grandpa had had to spend years in jails and mummy had led doll processions before making it to the executive suite.’ (100). In one sentence Sahgal demolishes the mystique and aura around the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, while Nehru was a leader who built his image through genuine sacrifices for the nation, Indira and Sanjay simply rode on the crest of the popularity and goodwill of their lineage.

The policy was simple during those days, one could be critical of either the son or the mother but not both, and so the communist Delhi University Professor, though anti Sanjay, chose to agree that it was Sanjay’s prodding that had made Indira take on the dissenters. ‘Catching the President in his pyjamas ... and the Cabinet in its underpants ... would teach that bunch of stooges who was boss. Decision was the thing, not like grandpa with his view-sharing and soul-searching, his to-be-or-not-to-be and comrades-all in struggle.’ (101). The Professor’s views reveal the distance that India and Indians had travelled since the days of Nehru to the present. Decisions rapidly translated into action, with or without discussions was what people wanted and not Nehru’s deliberations or ‘view-sharing’ before coming onto a democratic decision based on consensus. Indira’s decisiveness was no doubt a quality much admired especially during the Bangladesh War, but later this decisiveness, through which she started taking decisions of national importance with her coterie without deliberations with leaders, revealed her authoritarian streak also.

Since the Cabinet was not taken into confidence regarding the Emergency and the President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed was simply asked to declare the Emergency, it shows not just the decisiveness of Indira Gandhi but also the way in which the authority of the constitution as also the position of the highest executive office of the country was completely undermined by the ruling power. While Sahgal denounces the rich for their misplaced zeal for social work, the ‘Third World’s upper crust’ is criticized for its cultured sycophancy and chameleon like adaptability. Over casseroles and puddings, Madam is praised for being the
saviour of the masses and is lent fervent support by the 'capital's professional elite' for setting right all the wrongs in the country. The editor of a daily is ready with panegyrics for Madam while striking the right note of mild disappointment about the regrettable but necessary suspension of rights. The lawyer opinionates on the inevitability of amending the constitution and making it more amenable for Madam to 'fight disruptive forces and crush the vested interests she had been battling against since infancy' (103).

Imperialism was a part of Indian history, so why should the present be any different? The fact that the Emergency got by with such ease was because it was much easier for the people to simply shift positions from the cushioned sofa of democracy to the steel backs of dictatorship with minimal discomfort since all it required was a change in posture and the right noises at the innocuous dinner party shows. For Sonali however the change is not that easy as she tries to make sense of the people around her who suddenly seem like puppets, scary because of their mechanical thoughts. Sahgal satirises the cultural elite for willfully giving into sycophancy and propaganda. Their attitude as depicted in the novel is one of superciliousness and a mistaken belief that because they were rich and privileged they knew what was best for the country and that they were the only ones who deserved rights. The poor, illiterate masses consisting of beggars, lower classes and domestic help are looked down upon as no less than cattle, beasts of labour, which need to be directed since they lack a mind of their own. And because these people breed rampantly, it becomes necessary to curb them even if by force, since such people do not have rights in any case. Sachchidanand Sinha discusses the gap between India's elite and its poor and traces this attitude of apathy to India's imperial past. The elite derived its sense of superiority from the imperial legacy of Pucca Sahibs who were economically and socially above the poor. Sinha's comment on the colonial Indian elite that 'The elite's ideals of democracy stood on stilts far above any contact with the dirt and soil of common life' is valid even today as seen in Sahgal's portrayal of the Indian elite (S. Sinha, 8). A quiet restrained anger carries itself on the back of a very subtle satire in this novel which explores the life and attitude of this privileged section of society.

Sonali tries to make sense of the world around her which had changed not just because of her demotion, but also because suddenly people she had always known were repeating words of those in power. She is unable to understand the apathy around her since she herself had been a part of this insulated existence till a short while back. Not only is she compelled to discern the flaws in the society around her, but also the political and ideological base of the country, which reveals itself to be faulty in the extreme. 'We were living in
confusing times. Marxists and Hindus were fraternizing in jail, Establishment Communists were cheering monarchy, and the millennium had arrived disguised as an Emergency headed by a Mother Tzar whose ignorant little peasants were quite happy with mother's blessing' (104). The image of Indira Gandhi as the most powerful individual of the country, in fact as the only individual in India who could solve its problems, is shown to be deeply entrenched in the psyche of the people. Ravi Kachru's speech to taxi drivers on the nationalization of banks in 1969 by the 'Supremo' Indira Gandhi, goes on to show how the masses were willing to submit to the Supremo's power because people like Kachru glorified her as a messiah of populism. If the bureaucracy and the educated approved of her, so would the taxi drivers and the masses of India. ‘After all, said Ravi, his voice throbbing with controlled emotion, what were the Government, the Cabinet, the Ministers, the State, the municipalities? They were there to do Her bidding. What was the country? It was She, who like the many-armed goddess would be ever victorious against those who were plotting to dethrone her’ (191).

An important audience to this speech extolling the Prime Minister while dismissing the so called 'democratic structure of India', is Sonali's father who is also an IAS officer. For people like him and his generation, India was democratic 'only because we believed it was, and felt morally responsible about keeping it one' (191). Seeing 'Two decades of parliamentary democracy ... go up like a Divali cracker' because people would rather believe in Leaders than a country and its institutions, makes Sonali's father keenly aware of the huge gap between the present represented by Kachru and the past which was his own self. For characters such as Rose, Kishori Lal and Sonali’s father, the present is too complex and muddled to make sense of. Rose finds it difficult to understand people such as Dev or Nishi and finds clarity only in her conversations with the legless, armless beggar. Similarly, for Kishori Lal, the nation and its administrators had stopped making sense after the partition and for Sonali’s father the present was a compromise, a failure in spite of all the battles fought in the past. In India, the civil service, a relic of colonialism, still has a dominant role to play in the administration of the country. This 'steel frame' of the country was supposed to provide for an apolitical, impartial administrative body for a large democratic country where most people were still illiterate and below the poverty line. That this elite educated body, the cream of the Indian intelligentsia willfully allowed itself to be politicized and fell to kow-towing before the 'Leaders' points to the 'slow erosion of values' (Mehrotra, 226) that was taking place in India. This personality cult was initiated by the Supremo herself by having mass rallies (which were rumoured to be paid for) to hail her, the rest of the populace came rushing
forward to ‘serve the Supremo with the same undying loyalty ... that they themselves had
given to the Supremo’s father, and in no time at all would be giving to her son’ (Sahgal, 191).
Judges and lawyers also send roses for congratulating the Supremo to show their loyalty
before ‘going off to their chambers to ensure that fundamental rights didn’t get in the way of
socio-economic justice’ (192). While some judges were able to perform exemplarily during
the Emergency, even the judiciary had not been able to escape getting besmirched a little with
the dross that had set in India.

During the Emergency, the popular perception of the Indian political system was that
the ‘top’ controlled by ‘one and a half person’ mattered the most and that everything could be
all right in the world if one was in the right with the ‘top’. Sonali is equally mystified with
this attitude amongst Delhi’s elite that “the top” is a rational, intelligent, humane place, and
all the cunning and callousness is conceived at lower levels, behind “the top’s” back’ (33).
The excesses were also blamed not on the leaders but on the lower levels of the government.
The novel reflects the Indian political obsession for glorifying the ‘Family’ which also
contributed to the fall in political ethics. Even when Sonali confronts Ravi about his highly
populist speech, he makes it clear that he was one of ‘us’ who believed in ‘Family’ or rather
one family in particular which as Sonali states was revered as the ‘Holy Trinity’ (196). While
Vijayan’s allegorical dystopias create nightmarish visions of the dangers of a dynastic
tyranny, Sahgal warns in a more realistic manner of the effects that such a deification of a
‘Family’ can have on the social and political structure of the nation. It would be unfair to
state that the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty is detrimental for India, because the fault does not lie
with the family per se, since there are lots of examples of politics carrying on from one
generation to the other the world over, but political dynasties should be acceptable only if
there is capability and merit in the successive generations. The problem lies with the attitude
of people like the Minister in the novel who sees the culmination of his spiritual journey
which started from the Mahatma, to ending as a ‘speck of dust at the feet of Madam’ (49) or
that of Kachru who proclaims her as a ‘many armed goddess’ from the top of a taxi. It is this
kind of hysterical adulation and sycophantic reverence that made a family into ‘The Family’.
If we have already removed some people from the equalizing power of democracy and placed
them above the system itself, then it is but natural that the system would start rotting and
become dysfunctional as it did during the Emergency. It becomes democracy on a leash as it
did under Indira Gandhi. While this was and still is a problem with the Indian system, it alone
cannot be held accountable for the Emergency. A lot of views blame structural causes for
having led to the Emergency as the system and the people as a whole, the nation and the
direction that it was headed for would have resulted in an Emergency or some other event
invariably with or without Indira Gandhi. So again, though there is excessive reference to
Indira and Sanjay Gandhi in the novel as the architects of the Emergency, I would prefer to
see them as parts of the flawed Indian political system than the villains of the Emergency.
The Emergency was much larger than individuals, as Sahgal’s novel also depicts through the
way it impacts the lives of various people. It was bigger than Indira and Sanjay as was proved
in the elections and in the novel, when Ravi finally stands up against the very system that he
had helped grow, as he says in the end ‘There are no rules and regulations anymore. I never
realized it would come to this.’ (294)

Another important theme that emerges in the novel is that of women and their
responses to not just the social but the political system as well, in relation to their own
personal lives. Written by a woman, the novel depicts the dominance of the Indian political
system and the enforcement of a near dictatorship by a woman who despite her flaws
changed India in more ways than one. This, along with the presence of a female protagonist
as well as women from diverse backgrounds and ages in the novel, lends it a distinctly
feminine subjectivity. It is the female characters’ responses to the Emergency that emerge as
crucial markers of a changing society. Sonali, Rose, Nishi, Mona, Bhabi-Jan are all dominant
figures in their own right whether it is resigning as protest in the face of a demotion, trying to
hold on to a lost past, aspiring towards power, or simply planning an only son’s life. They are
juxtaposed against the Emergency which is also seen as the manifestation of a female force
mostly, since it had been imposed by a woman who had become virtually omnipotent since
hardly anyone dared to challenge her.

For Sonali and Ravi, who are a part of the western-educated Indian generation that
had no real political ideology or grounding in the nation, it was difficult to decide which path
to choose. So although Ravi courts Marxism and Sonali in Oxford, he slips in quite easily
with the established pattern of bureaucratic sycophancy also, letting go of both his ideals and
love in the process. For Sonali however, who would rather turn to India and Gandhi, it is
difficult to understand ‘Why we had to keep cutting and pasting Western concepts together
and tying ourselves to them for ever as if Europe were the centre of the universe, and the
Bible and Marx were the last word on mankind’ (124). Makarand Paranjape in his essay ‘The
Crisis of Contemporary India and Nayantara Sahgal’s Fiction’ states that, ‘The conflict
between tradition and modernity in the political subplots thus privileges tradition over
modernity. Tradition represents the positive Gandhian and Nehruvian values of compassion, Satyagraha, nonviolence, and social justice, combined with the democratic values of socialism, civil liberties, rule of law, and so on. Modernity is associated with corruption, expedience, illegal activities, fascism, political violence, suppression of civil liberties, dictatorship, the politics of the personality cult, and the like. The deterioration in public life is best shown in Rich Like Us, set during the Emergency of 1975-77.' I do not agree with Paranjape's demarcation of tradition and modernity as the values he refers to such as those of corruption and political violence or even suppression of civil liberties can be traced to the past as well, which, it would then appear, are as much a part of our tradition as social justice. Moreover India has never really had a tradition of non-violence; therefore tradition cannot give all the answers or be the answer either. The Gandhian and Nehruvian models were highly idealistic and conformed to a personality cult, because part of why they were followed by the masses was because these men were themselves much larger than the ideals they espoused. This is also why it was so difficult to follow them even subsequently, even for Nehru's own daughter. The deterioration was there undoubtedly and is an indicator of the fact that India and its people had shifted markedly from the ideals of Independence. For a nation that was built on personalities and borrowed institutions rather than a concrete political and ideological base, confusion and instability were bound to follow because as Sonali laments all they had were western concepts and ideas and mere 'droplets' of our own culture. 'Wasn't it time after all these centuries to produce a thought of our own ...' (124).

The novel goes beyond the Emergency and becomes a personal event for every character in the novel. It brings out the worst in some people such as Dev and Nishi but becomes the reason for a new beginning for both Sonali and Ravi. Listening to JP's speech to a mammoth crowd before the night the Emergency was launched, Sonali is confronted with questions that she and probably most Indians were aware of but had never really thought of, 'Why were the poor still poor? Why were there so many more of them? Why had the fat got stuck high up instead of trickling down? Why? Why?' (197)

JP was branded public enemy number one by a paranoid government because he had managed to rouse people into questioning and protesting against the government and the system. The Satyagraha launched by him was crushed by the government for being 'undemocratic and anti-government'. Most Emergency literature tends to be sympathetic towards JP as his vision, though directionless, was idealistic and opposed to the tyranny of the dynasty. While controversies regarding JP's role in the Emergency also abound, it is an
undeniable fact that he was the only beacon of hope for the people at a point when they
desperately needed someone to believe in. His 'Socratic soliloquy' is the 'point of hemlock
itself' because, 'Teaching the virtuous life when virtue is in short supply is treason' (197).

Among the many 'victims the snapping jaws of the Emergency' claimed, the most
unlikely is Kishori Lal. Nishi's fear of her father getting arrested for his affiliations with the
Jan Sangh comes true as he gets arrested by the police for the simple crime of possessing a
Jan Sangh rally poster. Despite his attempts at explaining the Haryanvi police that he was not
a Jan Sanghi and even showing the Indira Gandhi 'She Stood Between Order and Chaos'
garlanded poster that hung in his shop, Kishori Lal is taken away quite unceremoniously to
the Daryaganj police station, where he is locked up and branded a 'saboteur', a 'part of a
conspiracy to overthrow the government' (216). The interrogation of an elderly man like
Kishori Lal, who sells bathroom equipment for a living, consists of whipping and beatings in
order to prove his involvement in the conspiracy to overthrow Madam. Initially he takes it to
be a misunderstanding on the part of the 'overzealous Haryanvi policemen who wanted to
impress Madam with their Chief Minister's loyalty' (234), but later standing before the police
in the jail, for whom torturing prisoners was simply a break between tea, he remembers how
differently the Germans treated the Russians during the second world war and realizes then
that, 'Madam was a German and he was a Russian. And now he started to believe it was
happening' (222). The absurdity and shock of the whole incident blurs the present with the
past for Kishori Lal whose thoughts run between JP, Gandhi, Madam and his own life and
choices. He is a product of the times he has lived through, the Partition splintered his life, and
making a new life in what was now his country did not prove to be easy for Kishori Lal or the
many others who had been uprooted like him without any say in the matter. His choices in
life whether it is selling bathroom equipment as an adherence to Gandhi's commandment of

cleaning one's own excreta or affiliating with the Jan Sangh, despite being an atheist, as a
protest against the country's partition were perfectly logical choices for him which had grown
from the struggles in his life. These very choices had now made him a 'saboteur'. Inside the
jail he sees his beatings as 'a sign of hope. Prisons hadn't yet become a planned routine,
scientifically organized to receive teachers, students and shopkeepers' in a country that was
'merely authoritarian, not totalitarian' where 'prison ways were still experimental' and were
innovated upon by jailers who sought to create 'better careers for themselves' (238). His
fellow prisoner is a young student from Nehru University who briefly romances with
Naxalism after a stint at a US university and is now a co-conspirator in much the same way as
Kishori Lal was. A lot of students did get arrested under the Emergency and as most of the accounts based on the Emergency narrate, they went through tortures and in some cases disappeared from police custody. The boy and Kishori Lal draw up a fictional laughter show where the Hitlerian Madam’s dialogues such as “I shall banish poverty” or “Watch me remove disparities”, become the cues of controlled laughter from the audience while she keeps getting enraged (239). India had become a similar farce during the Emergency and the student’s surreal play portrays the actual reality of a country where honour, self-respect, freedom and life itself had been auctioned to those in power and that too at the cheapest possible prices.

Amidst all this madness and confusion Sahgal sees hope only in Gandhian values. It is quite interesting that discourses from the outside as well as within, view the nationalist programme in India as one essentially based either on a certain cultural past or centering around the figure of Gandhi. The constant harking back to Gandhi by various characters such as Sonali and Kishori Lal, not only offers a contrast between the structure of governance and life that he had tried to introduce but also shows how far away India had travelled from that ideal. Is this repeated going back to Gandhi and his ideology, a genuine cry for a father figure or role model to look up to after the draconian dystopia of matriarchal rule? Does the Indian sensibility accept patriarchy as the norm, as we have not had a female Prime Minister since Indira? Furthermore considering that we have come a long way from Gandhi’s ideas and India today is far different from the one he envisioned, and frankly there does not seem to be a will to go back to those ideas, then why does he figure as the only answer in the texts?

As the dominant leitmotif of the novel is the contrast between the past and the present, the past eventually emerges as the stronger of the two and is able to offer hope and a new life to various characters such as Sonali, Kishori Lal and even Ravi. For Nishi it is a constant struggle to shrug off her humble past and fit in with the rich and elite present, which creates a pressure that borders on hysteria, while for people like Dev the past and the present are nothing but the self above everything else. The end also offers a hope that a beginning can be made somewhere and that not even the Emergency could last forever. The present grows out of a knowledge of the past.

While it could be said that the novel focuses a lot on Madam and her son, there is a valid justification for such an emphasis since the focus of the novel is to expose the rich and the elite, who were eager to side with the two power figures. It is their shallowness and
sycophancy that is depicted through references to Indira and Sanjay Gandhi. It was partly because of the kind of support that the upper class, the bureaucracy and the intelligentsia gave the Gandhis that they could get away with the Emergency for as long as they did. The attitude towards the Emergency and the masses of India from the lofty realms of the elite gives an idea of how great the gap is between the two sections of Indian society. There is the reality of the beggar whose wife is taken and raped and whose arms and legs are cut off to teach peasants the lesson of 'how never to stand up for one's rights' and then there is corruption in the Indian political and bureaucratic structure along with the fact that the only original Indian political thought or concept that we have been able to come up with in all these years is 'sab chalta hai'. It is not as if these issues were specific only to the Emergency, they existed before it, during it and after it as well. There are some things that have never changed in India which is probably why movies like The Slumdog Millionaire make us uncomfortable in our own skins that still sweat outside in the heat despite our expensive deodorants and ACs.

An important point in the novel is that the past is ironically brought before us again through the West. It is Marcella, Ram’s old flame, who gives Sonali a new vocation, that of assisting Marcella and her husband in setting up an exhibition of Indian art in London. The hope of a new beginning by once again going back to the past is, as Sonali says, a gift that Marcella makes to her. More importantly even the realization that the Emergency could also end is given to Sonali by Marcella: ‘A word can start the rumour of a rainbow. Until she [Marcella] said it I hadn’t realized the Emergency could ever be over …’ (299). Interpreting this from a typically post-colonial perspective would probably involve haranguing about colonial hangover and how we still depend upon the West for approval and directions. But going beyond this rather loaded perspective, one can also see it simply as people reaching out to people regardless of race, age and nationality. In the ‘othering’ of the coloniser we also tend to forget that there could be space for an even footing, of people interacting as people without a deliberately superimposed colonial or post-colonial baggage. The novel transcends these boundaries in the lives of the various characters it chooses to portray; Rose cannot be regarded as the ‘other’ any more than Ram can be taken to be the typical western educated Indian, even Sonali and Ravi, caught as they are in a maze of western thought, eventually try to find their way in a system that does not offer much help. Sahgal thus constructs a complex mosaic of people, emotions and events offset by the Emergency which acts as a catalyst not only for people, but at a larger level for the nation also to find its own way.
III

After the Rain:

C.P. Surendran’s *An Iron Harvest* and T.V. Eachara Varier’s *Memories of a Father*

‘The light went away. No it didn’t go away; it was beaten away’ (Varier, 68).

*An Iron Harvest*, published in 2006 is perhaps the most contemporary account of the Emergency and its excesses. While the dominant theme of the novel is based on the true story of a father’s search for his missing son, there are other equally pertinent issues that the novel depicts which are those of the Emergency and the Red Earth Naxalite movement in Kerala. The novel explores the volatile political situation in Kerala during the 1970s and not only denounces the dominant ruling party the Congress but also the Communist parties of Kerala that had failed the people. Pitted against both these are the naxals of the Red Earth movement which sought and fought to awaken the masses. As stated earlier, the novel is based on the true incident of the ‘custodial death of a young engineering student Rajan’ (Author’s note) from REC Calicut during the Emergency and his father Eachara Varier’s fight against the State of Kerala for justice. Rajan was picked up by the police from his hostel and taken to the Kakkayam police camp where he was allegedly tortured and never seen alive again. The exact reasons for his death as also the whereabouts of his body are unknown to this day. The novel contains characters who correspond to real life figures during the Emergency which the author puts down to ‘correspondence or coincidence’. The notorious DIG Raman of the Kakkayam Police camp in the novel is Jayaram Padikkal who went on to become the DIG of Kerala; Marar the Home Minister is former Chief Minister of Kerala K. Karunakaran who was the Home Minister during the Emergency. Sebastian is E. Varier and Abe, P. Rajan. The Che Guevara like young naxal is John who could possibly be Varghese, a naxal from Wyanad, who was also shot in a fake encounter just like John is in the novel.

Against a cast that is modelled on real life figures and a case that kept pending for years, Surendran’s novel brings us very close to the horrors of the Emergency faced by people such as Varier. It gave a carte blanche to officials such as DIG Raman and Nathan to devise sadistic tortures upon innocents such as Abe and Thevi. The novel also exposes the nexus between landlords, politicians and bureaucrats, which ruthlessly exploited the peasants in Kerala and made it difficult for the common man to attain justice. Sebastian’s painful journey of a father in search of justice for a son he knows is dead is the most powerful yet
restrained theme in the novel. The other story is that of John, Abe’s Naxalite friend, as well as the Red Earth Movement, who were fighting for something elusive, something that even they were not sure was worth it in the end. Apart from this is the Emergency which forms a backdrop to the above mentioned themes. The novel coalesces three different strands together and fuses them in one storyline: a father’s pain and trauma while searching for his son; the Emergency which reveals the callous and brutish nature of the bureaucracy and government machinery till the very top; and the saga of the naxals in Kerala. In the writer’s own words, ‘An Iron Harvest explores the mind of men who die for what’s nearly not there. It’s about human projects. The making and unmaking of history. The tears welling at the heart of stone. Pale carnage beneath bright mist. The folding of the flower.’

The novel is different from the other novels based on the Emergency as it is based on a real incident and this works to its advantage in some aspects especially in the delineation of people such as Raman, Nathan and Marar who are representatives of a callous system. The case itself was lost to the public and gained spotlight again during this decade when various parties ranging from the CPI(ML) to the BJP made the right noises for a probe into Rajan’s death. The Hindu also reported that the ‘administration had still not given him [E. Varier] a satisfactory answer regarding his son’s death’ and that the ‘nature of Rajan’s death was still unknown.’ E. Varier himself wrote an autobiographical account of his long and lonely struggle against the State in the book Memories of a Father (2004). The story of Varier has not just been fictionalized but also politicized and is a classic case of ‘justice delayed is justice denied’ as he himself died in 2006 and Padikkal in 1997.

The novel begins on a note of violence which becomes a recurrent leitmotif in the text. There is on the one hand the violence of the Red Earth aimed as a protest against the state and its agents of exploitation, and on the other the state authorized and precisely executed custodial violence of the police. Both are the same in essentials as John the protagonist himself acknowledges, ‘Their idea of truth lay close to violence. John’s too’ (2). The crucial difference between the two was torture, which is a ‘Violation of the body and spirit. Rape’ (2). This was something which the Indian police excelled at in not just Kerala but the entire country at that point, due to lack of accountability. Then there is mental

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6 C.P. Surendran, “Red Earth, pouring rain”, Tehelka. Feb 04, 2006
violence and torture, which is perhaps the most potent, that Sebastian and his family have to undergo at the hands of an inhuman and callous state machinery in their search for Abe. The Emergency was characterized by a violent streak which was one of the main reasons why many people did not speak out against it during its imposition. The MISA allowed for the police and the state to detain, without a warrant, any one they wanted to in the interest of national safety. What went on in most such cases of arrests is brought to light only in literature, fictional as well as non-fictional, such as this novel or the testimonies of prisoners who underwent torture in jail. The Emergency also enabled the police to carry out indiscriminate arrests and tortures in the name of countering the naxalite movement without any legal restrictions or impediments posed by human rights since all fundamental rights had been suspended. A celluloid depiction of Naxalism during the Emergency is the Bollywood film called *Hazaron Khwahishen Aisi* (2005) which shows not just the attraction that the radical movement posed for the young generation but also the crude manner in which both sides inflicted casualties on each other. However, while the problem of Naxalism, or rather the problems that led to the rise of Naxalism, were present prior to the Emergency, yet the Emergency, due to its repressive nature, led to a full combat between the state forces and the naxals. Naxalism is undoubtedly a grave situation in India which cannot be justified when one considers its innumerable victims; however what cannot be excused as well is the kind of rampant terror that the police spread at will during the Emergency. Terror camps such as Kakkayam where the police carried out tortures of the worst kind could exist only because this was violence sanctioned by the state itself. Custodial deaths and disappearances were a common feature even prior to the Emergency, the difference being that earlier they were hushed and done secretly, not as blatantly as during the Emergency. During those nineteen months, these incidents could take place openly and were carried out to intimidate people primarily because the state had legalized this kind of violence. It is important to point out here that these police brutalities affected a certain section of society and not the majority which is why these aspects have never received much attention.

The facts regarding Rajan's death as depicted in the novel and Varier's own account show that there was a nexus between the police and the state politicians. K. Karunakaran, the then Home Minister, denied that Rajan had been taken into custody as it suited the state to have police officers like Paddikal (Raman in the novel), who specialized in sadistic tortures, by their side. Even landlords like Kutty and Vaithi who are the chief targets of the Red Earth are an integral part of this power nexus as they fund politicians like Marar in the novel
regardless of their political affiliations to ensure their protection through the State and police from extremists like John. Varkichayan, the Red Earth ideologue, explains the nexus, 'the Marxists like the ruling Congress party, are with the landlords ... they get their funds from the Vaithis of the hills. Why should they displease their supporters? That's why Red Earth has to make its presence felt. The parliamentary parties have to fight elections and they need funds for that. Why will they choke their lifelines? But Red Earth will not stop with just protecting the rights of the poor.' (27)

The fight is between the triad of landlords, politicians and bureaucracy aligned on one side with legal authority behind them and the naxals on the other. Both sides are equally deliberate in their violence and while both suffer casualties, it is people like Sebastian and the poor peasants in the villages who get caught in the cross-fire. The Emergency allowed the triad to manipulate and corrupt the special rules implemented under the Emergency as they wanted. It is not to say that the issue of Naxalism, or peasant uprising, or even police excesses came up only with the Emergency, these were problems that had existed earlier also, but the Emergency aggravated these further because of the unconditional authority that the State could now wield over the people. This lead to a virtual face off between the naxals and the police as it was more or less an open war now. The excesses became all the more pronounced therefore in such a situation.

The novel focuses a lot on John and the likes of him who had turned to the radical extreme path of Naxalism in order to change the system. Marar, the Home Minister of Kerala in the novel, sees the naxals as 'ideologically driven rebels' who felt that the 'existing political institutions and parties have betrayed the cause of the people. What that cause is I am no longer sure of, considering the pace with which the world is changing.' (82). However while there is a certain romanticisation of the naxals, especially John, there are also questions as to whether the movement was really worth it since the very people, the peasants that they were fighting for, hardly understood the ideology behind it. In the article 'Red Earth, pouring rain', Surendran writes about the passion of naxalites during those days: 'The Naxalites – young, thin, unshaven, loose-shirted, dirty-trousered, lit-eyed – were romantics who thought the social world could be made beautiful by random acts of revolt. A foolhardy lot: they set their heart on sacrifice, and in return they wanted a New World. [/] In the event, the heart, bleeding, lost, and the world went on to renew itself in a way it’s now famous for.' Though

Surendran, op. cit.
not a part of the movement himself, as he admits to not having that 'mystery of courage' that
the naxals possessed, Surendran had many friends associated with it to be able to write
convincingly enough about their 'spendthrift courage; their profligate preparedness to shed
their own blood; their willingness, determination even, to suffer for a cumulus cause which
even now has more spring than a pair of Nike sneakers kids might today kill or die for'.

The novel is as much about Kerala as about the Emergency and the characters
involved. Caught as it is between the naxals, a corrupt state machinery and political
charlatanry, Kerala also emerges as an important character in the novel. Like Vijayan,
Surendran’s criticism does not spare the Left either. Both writers come from Kerala and voice
a sense of disillusionment with a party many had great hopes from. This disillusionment is
depicted in the novel through the absent character of Cherian George, John’s father who was
a part of the Communist party, till the year 1964 when the party split into the Communist
Party (Marxist) and the Communist Party of India (19). Like many others, Cherian is
‘disgusted and disillusioned’ with the Left’s ‘ideological hair-splitting and unbridled hunger
for power’ (20) and interestingly turns to Gandhism which was the only way to be ‘spiritually
clean’ in an atmosphere of corruption and rot. Although he renounces the Left yet Cherian
manages to retain the support of the Railway Employees Union and wrenches it away from
the Communists. Cherian is ultimately killed by the Communists, who were unable to gain
control over the union so long as Cherian continued to be their leader. “The Communists,
John realized with a kind of burnished sadness, were more interested in union power than in
revolting against an exploitative establishment” (20). Unable to find the same faith that his
father had shown in the passivity of Gandhism, and disillusioned by the power hungry
Communists, ‘John rootless, half in rage, half in tears, began gravitating towards the
ideologically driven Red Earth’ (21). The desire to help create a ‘peasant and people's army,
in a swelling ripple-like movement’ (27) overcomes every other consideration in his life
whether it is his career or his love, Janaky. His father's death propels him towards the Red
Earth which at that point seemed to be the only answer to the chaos around him. John, like
many others, willingly agrees to give up his life for the movement, nothing else save Janaky
being worthwhile anymore. If ‘Bolivia was Che’s. Wyanad was his’ (4).

The novel begins with John starting out for a Red Earth mission involving the murder
of Kutty, a repressive landlord, who is shown to be the chief target of the movement. Kutty is
depicted as a true tyrant, one who not only exploited the peasants for money, but also violated
their personal lives and marriages with impunity. Kutty’s death becomes necessary to
convince the peasants of their movement: 'Red Earth couldn't organize peasants in North Kerala without convincing them that the movement could put to sword one of their laughing tormentors. There had to be at least one incident of exemplary punishment in the area, if Red Earth were to make a dent in the armour of peasant resignation' (9). Chami, a member of the Red Earth, is one such victim of Kutty's repression and the task of killing Kutty is thus given to him. The vanquishing of an evil such as that which Kutty symbolized does not prove to be easy. His prolonged struggle against death, despite numerous stabbings by Chami, is a realization of the fact that battles could not be won with the murder of a single man. Nor could an enemy as potent and old as the one they were fighting, be defeated so easily. He is finally beheaded with a sickle, the symbol of the peasant revolution. 'That [the sickle] they left next to Kutty's body, an unanswerable question forged in blood and metal, a crescent iron moon carving up a little bit of earth. An iron harvest'. (16) Kutty's death unleashes a nightmare which affects the lives of all concerned as this is the first blow on the nexus of the triad. His murder causes a stir not just in Kerala but Delhi as well, making it necessary for Marar and Raman to explain themselves to the government regarding the Red Earth. The nexus of power is revealed through Marar's words: 'The rich landlords are running scared. The Congress party, actually all mainstream parties, are beginning to feel the heat. The parties depend on these people for funds, and they are asking up, where is our protection?' (83). The police are pressed by the authorities to provide protection to the landlords who fund the parties and are the direct targets of the naxals. Although, as Marar remarks, the Prime Minister viewed Naxalism more as a 'Chinese conspiracy to destabilize the nation' (82), he knew that they were expected to 'show results soon' (83).

The Red Earth movement saw the landlords and the 'State's law and other repressive machineries' as the main enemies of the people. In order to convince the peasants of their commitment to the movement, they decide to attack police stations or rather camps, which were at that point potent symbols of state controlled terror. Varkichayan, describes the camps as being 'Offices of terror' where the 'suspected supporters of Red Earth are brought in and tortured. It is absolutely necessary that we attack police stations to counter the spread of State terror. At the same time we must annihilate individual feudal lords' (26). Though I would not like to justify the naxals or comment upon their ideology, I am interested in highlighting the violence that is intrinsic to both the police as well as the naxals. After the 'annihilation of Kutty', there is a debate between John and Varkichayan wherein the Red Earth movement, its value and the violence accompanying it, are questioned by John who sees the movement as
comprising of only a few motivated radicals and lacking in organization and vision. As he says, ‘Emergency or not, people don’t care for acts of terror. In all likelihood we are alienating them, we are perhaps more terrorists than revolutionaries.’ (199) Violence of the sort that Kutty’s murder comprises of, affects not just the workers and sympathizers of the Red Earth but even the very peasants for whom the whole war was being fought. This alienates the peasants who would rather face the injustice of the landlord than the combined ire of the landlord and the police. Varkichayan however sees murders such as those of Kutty as a ‘rallying point’ which made the people ‘identify with the justice of the action undertaken by us before they come forward in great numbers’ forming a ‘people’s army’ (198). The fire that they seek to ignite amongst the masses is difficult to come by merely through violence as John realises. The ‘fundamental limitation’ of their movement is that the ‘mainstream Communist parties have corrupted the worker’s ideology to the point that he thinks things will change through the ballot box. He is not entirely in the wrong either ... We have come into the picture either too early or too late’ (199). He too is assailed by doubts as to whether they were trying to reform society in the right way and given the recent spate of Naxalite violence, it is proven without doubt that Naxalism is certainly not the right way.

Vaithi’s humiliation at the hands of the Red Earth leads to a crackdown by the police and the entire state paraphernalia on the naxals, which terrorises the peasants as well. The nexus between the landlords, politicians and the bureaucracy runs too deep and is so deeply intertwined that any attempts at breaking it results in a severe backlash. Vaithi screams at the Home Minister Marar that he paid them ‘money in bundles’ so that his life was protected and threatens that either he ‘bust the Reds, or I’ll see to it that I get a new home minister.’ For Marar, unlike the radicals and their ‘isms’, ‘it was a question of his political survival’ (270) and so he passes the order for squashing the Reds down to his DIG, Raman, who in turn depends on Marar for covering up his excesses in the prison camp.

Surendran tends to romanticize the Red Earth movement at times, especially the figure of John, whom he often likens to Che Guevara. He is also reminiscent of Amitabh’s angry young man persona and even questions God at one point for choosing to remain silent at the ‘vandalisation of the Constitution’ and the killing of Abe and Sunny in much the same way as Amitabh Bachhan often did in his early films. ‘Those who fought on the side of the Good were not in God’s good books. So the good lost, and God couldn’t care less. God’s busy, John thought sadly, playing for the winning side’ (277). Surendran’s ire is directed mostly at communist parties led by people such as EMS, AKG, Achutha Menon and MN
Govindan Nair who ‘were too much a part of the corrupt system to actually go against it’ (277). The subversion of the constitution, the suspension of rights, and the willing complicity of the Communists and God in all of this, stirs the anger of people like John who had lost too much in this fight where, despite all that they had done, there was still little progress. He remains steadfast to his movement even while realizing that the revolution was still a long way off and would not come with violence. The attack on Kakkayam police camp for obtaining weapons and killing the DIG and Nathan results in a tragedy for many of the Red Earth members including John who, though successful in killing Nathan, is injured and ultimately caught by Raman. The exchange of dialogues between the two is more of a forced climax in the vein of Bollywood films, where Raman questions the reason for John’s devotion to the ‘cause. For John, it is all for a dream of truth, beauty, one for which he would give up everything all over again. Raman, ever the realist with a penchant for the truth, snubs John’s dreams: ‘Nobody wants to know the magnitude and scope of your dream, your truth. No one has the time. You think you are history. You are not even a footnote. Sad’ (309). It is not for what the revolutionaries did that it becomes imperative for the state machinery to wipe them out, but for their political beliefs, what they stand for, that make it necessary to snuff out the movement (309). For a man as tough and inhuman as Raman, John’s ideas about revolution and dreams open a maze of confusion, ‘Was John right? He didn’t know. He found talking to John confusing. It’s the bloody conviction, he thought, not the reasoning.’ (310).

John himself guessed that his end was going to be through a fake encounter, a method quite popular for dealing with naxals and other undesirables in the Indian system. John, Heston and Nair are all shot in the fake encounter and relegated to dusty details in obscure files. One cannot deny the excesses committed by the naxals any more than those perpetrated by the state. Such movements had started out from a sense of desperation which the state could not resolve leading to a further alienation from the system, as in the case of John. Although he knew that ultimately the revolution would have to come through parliamentary means, yet even with this realization, he fights with the movement because the other alternative was still a long way off for people to keep waiting interminably for justice. Naxalism as a movement continues to grow even today and is one of the most potent threats to the country’s stability and internal safety. However, it cannot bring about the sort of justice that it is killing for, since ultimately, despite its flaws, parliamentary democracy is the only sustainable solution. At the very least, it is the one that is most acceptable to the masses.
While the (mis)use of the state law and infrastructure by the police and the bureaucracy was a marked feature of the Emergency, it is also important to note here that it was not just the Emergency that corrupted these essential parts of the state organism. The decay was always present in a system that had not been changed since Independence and took a lot from the repressiveness of the British Raj. The problems of Naxalism, whether in West Bengal or Kerala, were rooted in social and economic issues, although it is ironical to note that the movement started in states which boasted of a dominant presence of the Left. Movements such as Naxalism are parallel to the Left and though they have a base in communism, yet they differ radically in their approach. The state paraphernalia was not flexible or accommodating enough to deal with these problems in their infant stages, and chose brute force to crush the movements rather than focusing on long-term solutions involving development and social justice in these areas. The oftentimes indiscriminate killings and excesses indulged in by the state forces earned the ire of the masses, thereby creating a sympathy wave for the naxals who were looked upon as saviours. Objectively speaking, the ideologies and tactics of the naxals do not evoke sympathy, nor do they help in justifying a lot of their actions which were equally violent and bloody thereby forcing the state to retaliate. Prior to the Emergency the police was still restrained in the degree of excesses it could commit, but with the Emergency it had a virtual carte blanche to use whatever methods it wanted to with minimum accountability.

In the very first chapter, the reader is swept away with the action of the Red Earth movement and the darkness that surrounds Abe’s disappearance at the hands of the police during the Emergency. Both are interrelated as Abe, a young engineering student who was John’s roommate, is picked up by the police in order to trace John and gather information on the Red Earth. Abe, while aware of John’s links with the Red Earth, is ‘cultural’ unlike John who considers himself ‘political’ (30). The arrival of Heston, the Red Earth postman, at the campus and the striking similarity between John and Abe makes John concerned about Abe’s safety, fears that distressingly enough come true when Abe is picked up by the police for questioning ‘Just like that’. John tries to figure out why the police would have targeted Abe: ‘It was not clear why they settled on him or what pointed a finger at him. John guessed that the police were just trying their luck blindly. Abe did put up a lot of politically loaded plays at college cultural nights. That probably filled the bill as incriminating evidence in the current scheme of things. There had been similar unsuspecting arrests from other campuses’ (32).
Kakkayam, the infamous police camp where Raman/Abe was imprisoned is introduced in the very first paragraph of the novel as a place where the police excelled at breaking a man’s body and spirit. ‘No one in the movement knew what happened to Abe after his capture. The police must have broken him down, or maybe he was tortured to death. At Kakkayam that was what happened to you. Then they threw the body down into the Kuttyadi rapids. The river and the jungle soaked your screams into silence’ (1). Reality was no less gruesome as the Mankekars describe Jayaram Padikkal’s camp as ‘one of the most notorious torture chambers in the country’ where ‘blow-ups of brutal murders, bodies with limbs severed, heads cut from the torso dripping blood, the vacant look in open eyes of the dead decorate the walls’. Padikkal ruled over this ‘hell’ and ‘No one who entered this horror home came out unscathed; often maimed and his nerves shattered, his life ruined forever’. A ‘special’ form of torture devised by Padikkal and his men consisted of the ‘ruler treatment’ which involved stripping the victim and tying him to a bench with his head suspended on the other end. Thereafter a heavy wooden ruler would be placed on his legs and it would then be rolled up and down his legs with two policemen either sitting or standing on the two ends. According to the authors this not only tore the ligaments and cracked the bones but also reduced the body waist down to a ‘pulp’. Since the victim’s underclothes would be stuffed in his mouth he would not be able to cry out in pain either’ (63). Abe’s torture in the novel as also Raman’s torture in real life comprised of the same ‘special treatment’ as cited above.

John soon comes to hear of the gruesome details of Abe’s death, from his fellow member Mani:

We now have the full details ... They dragged Abe out of the hostel, took him to a nearby lodge, and beat the hell out of him. They asked him for the names of our people to whom he had given shelter and Abe said he didn’t know they were Naxalites. They beat him up some more and took him to Kakkayam, where they started working on him in detail. One of their favourite exercises was to strap him to a bench and give him the roller treatment. A few days into the ordeal, Abe told Nathan, DIG Raman’s right hand, that he would part with the names if they stopped rolling the damn rod over him. He was brought before the DIG and Abe said he had no information and that he had lied for a moment’s relief. Nathan flew into a fury and kicked him in the groin. And Abe collapsed. When the cops realized Abe was gone, they took the body into the forest and set it on fire. They threw the bones into the river. So that’s what they did to our boy. (56)
John is overtaken by remorse and guilt, as he somewhere holds himself also responsible for the death of a friend who died for no fault of his. Despite this he knew that the path he had chosen had nothing but death to offer, 'Death was the name of the game. There was no getting away from that. Violence and death. But it's for a dream, John said to himself.' (56)

The presence of Abe despite his absence and the father's efforts at trying to find something of his son in the physical spaces around him, make the Emergency appear as a monster which could simply swallow people in its vortex of negative energy. Mani's matter of fact details impress upon the reader the cold anger of the Red Earth members as also the brutality of the police. This calculated sadistic brutality of the police is personified by the notorious DIG of the Crime Branch, Raja Raman and his sidekick, Nathan. Raman sees himself and Nathan as 'kindred spirits' who were 'both destined to be together in the violent enterprise of bringing truth to light. Truth, Raman had realized long ago, was ambiguous in the nature of its production. You could discover truth. Then again you could invent it. Its invention almost involved violence, something Raman knew he was good at using in a detached way' (46). While Nathan got a certain vicarious pleasure from the agony of his victims, Raman on the other hand derived 'a sense of power that truth was within his own means and the certitude of the fact that his high tolerance for other people's pain was a reliable index of his professionalism' (46). For Raman truth, invented or discovered, came from the sufferings of victims and his immunity to the suffering of others was a part of his professionalism as well as his sadistic nature. This was not just one man's sadistic desire but a view point that several such officers seem to have held during the Emergency. Truth is more often than not 'produced' in Indian prisons, and the testimonies of those who were imprisoned during the Emergency show the rather crude manner in which this happened. Sadistic and coldly inhuman as it appears, in the ultimate analysis it is Raman's method of finding or inventing truth that actually exists in reality. Power invents or distorts truth, and Raman had this power sanctioned by the state as well as those in power. Since it was a nexus, Raman's safety was ensured by those at the top namely Marar, the home minister: 'Headlines did not bother him [Raman]. He was accountable only to the home minister [Marar] and the home minister had been very good to him' (50). The truth about Abe's death is forever lost to Sebastian just as E. Varier could not ascertain the truth of his son's death till the very end of his life. Even a lifetime of struggle and pain could not bring to life a truth that had been tortured and lost forever in the dark recesses of the bestiality of human nature. Even Sebastian's meeting with Raman proves to be an exercise of power, of knowledge, of truth.
The truth being that Abe was dead and the police knew it, thereby it was in a favourable position to manipulate or distort this truth in any which way it wanted to, and prolong a father's suffering by never divulging the truth of his son's death. The knowledge of this truth was hidden from Sebastian since this particular truth regarding the death of an innocent student could be highly incriminating not only for Raman but those higher up as well.

By himself also, Raman provides for an interesting character study. He is a man with a face 'that looked as though it expected answers at all times ... it was a fearful face to behold. It was a face that could outstare a foundering man's basest humiliation and still expect a telling signal from the wreckage.' (60). His sadistic tendencies are shown through his penchant for smelling lead pencils and then driving the same lead pencils through the bodies of prisoners in his quest for the truth. This is a character trait that the infamous Jayaram Padikkal, on whose character Raman is based, was also known for. Surendran tries his best to bring out the man's psychotic tendencies and sadism in a convincing manner. Although he enjoys torture, yet unlike Nathan who seeks an 'acknowledgement of his existence' (46) in the physicality of the torture, Raman is shown to have a 'phobia' for touching people (47). While Nathan the ASI falls in the realm of the purely sadistic who enjoy the sheer physical pleasure of torturing another human being, Raman the DIG falls into the more dangerous category of the intelligent and yet coldly calculative and psychotic killer, who enjoyed the sense of power they wielded over the victim and those near him. His desire to order the masses and enforce discipline along with his quirky toilet fetishes and solo masturbatory orgies of the mind, make him appear like a character out of a Quentin Tarantino film. For Raman, 'order' was the ultimate ideal, the goal he aspired to since it would somewhere be an assertion of his own authority, his power.

Under his instructions, tortures are carried out on various prisoners including members of the Red Earth movement which are described in detail by the author and these were the set tortures that were followed pretty much all over Indian jails at that point of time. In the Kakkayam prison camp, Nathan, Antony and Joseph carry out these tortures with the same voyeuristic pleasure as indulging in an act of pornography. As an iron bar is mercilessly rolled over Sunny's (a member of the Red Earth) naked, bruised body, Nathari considers the scene and is 'reassured of his worth' (73). The scene of 'two policemen working on the naked flesh of the man strapped to the bench in the dark room with its bare accessories held for him the stark intimacy of a pornographic act. And pornography, Nathan believed, was a natural condition of life as he knew it.' (73). For a man like Antony who sees life through a haze of
alcohol and poetry, finding truth becomes as important as it is for his superiors: ‘The typist [Sunny] was in a desperate situation. Truth was his passport out of it. And it had fallen on Antony, a total stranger, to help him to tell the truth. Irony, irony, Antony thought.’ (73). Tortures such as rolling the iron bar on naked bodies or the aeroplane, or even applying spices to the private parts of the prisoners were all designed with a view to discovering the truth. The state would not settle for anything else and people such as Raman, Nathan or Antony made sure that they delivered it. Raman is not just a type that proliferated during the Emergency; instead, he is the horrific child of a system that rests on the foundations of intrinsic violence. Confronted by his superior IG Nambiar over some glasses of drinks in a club, he coldly sidesteps all the accusations the superior tries to level at him. Though for the most part a caricature, who chooses to devote his time and energy in perfecting his enactment of Ramayana for the police ball, the IG comes close to the truth about Abraham’s death and Raman’s role when he compares the present with Hitler’s regime. In his near drunkenness the IG speaks the only few words of reality when he says to Raman,

‘Finally it’s about killing people isn’t it?’

Though under the protection of the Home Minister, Raman does feel a little disconcerted as he realises that the IG’s interference and meeting with Sebastian might pose a problem for him. He still replies coolly to him saying

‘No. finally it’s about order and anarchy, finally it’s about the State and removing the rot within’. (159)

Although Nambiar knows that his subordinate had killed an innocent man and was hiding it under a bland statement of ‘truth being conditional on violence’ (160), he also knows himself to be powerless before Raman. He knew that even if he wished to help Sebastian he could not because the rot of which he himself was a part ran much deeper than Raman and the Home minister. His humiliation before the DIG is complete when he falls-face down on the ground unable to walk himself to his car in his drunken state. For Nambiar the qualm upon his conscience is momentary as he accepts the intractability of the brutal system and chooses to immerse himself in his passion for art and in finding the perfect Sita for his play.

Surendran exposes the systems of power to be such that even hierarchies can be manipulated and twisted and power networks created which transcend these hierarchies in ways that it becomes difficult to break them. Raman’s direct link with Marar overrides Nambiar’s authority leaving him powerless to intervene in the entire affair. Further, Marar’s links in Delhi ensure their safety as well as that of the landlords who exert power through the
money that they invest in politicians for their own safety. Sebastian's or John's fight therefore becomes all the more loaded against the odds as it requires the breaking up and challenging of an entire system and not just individuals like Raman or Marar.

If there is anyone whose life is shaken up totally by the Emergency, it is Sebastian, Abe's father. He poses a 'complication' for Raman as his son was dead while he was not (48) which meant a follow-up of the case which could prove to be damaging for the DIG since the case of 'Abraham would take some telling even if the Emergency gave him cover' (50). Surendran relies a lot on the book *Memories of a Father* by Varier to depict the pain of a father in search of a son he knows he will never see again (59). E. Varier's lonely fight against the system in reality shows just how inscrutable and intractable the State can be when it comes to the protection of its own carefully and finely tuned power hierarchy. The power nexus runs in much the same way even today, the only difference being that back then the safety net of the draconian laws of the Emergency allowed those in power to openly flaunt it and now it happens a little more surreptitiously.

For Sebastian the realization that his son was no more is something beyond comprehension. Life had, for no rhyme or reason turned into a nightmare, a life snuffed out just like that, 'Abe had been made insubstantial ... the boy he had bounced in the air had been snatched by fate before he could come back to earth ... the earth continued to rotate on its axis ... the morning sky continued to scroll its cumulous messages. A life had been blown out and no one had so much as paused in his stride. Nothing ceased in the observance of a single life's passing. My god, my child is gone from me forever, Sebastian thought.' (59) As he numbly walks behind Nathan in the camp that held his son before his death, he is heartbroken by the thought of his son's painful death: 'So this was the place where they had brought Abe ... the grass here kissed his ankles last. It was here that the sun had set for the last time on his broken body. Here's where my boy came to an end, Sebastian thought. This was the edge of the galaxy for Abe.' (59) The deceptive serenity of the Kakkayam camp set as it was amidst lush greenery, reeked of the death and pain of the many Abes who were brought there and tortured as part of Raman's exercise of finding the 'truth'. As he walks through the camp behind Nathan, Sebastian suddenly does not want to have Abe's death confirmed. For him, 'ambiguity was escape, in fantasy lay flight. Each step took him closer to a knowledge he would have given his life not to gain.' Ironically though he wants to push away the knowledge of the finality of his son's death away from yet his life's journey is marked by the quest for exactly this knowledge which somehow always eludes him.
‘Death was not an abstract thing. Death was people.’ (60) And for Sebastian this death was personified by Raman and the viciously inhuman Nathan. As he fumbles with his questions regarding his son’s fate, Raman coolly tells him that his son is not there and that he is free to have a look around the camp if he so pleases. Sebastian knows the offer to be meaningless as his son had been killed by the very men he sat talking to, and yet he is powerless to defy them or question them with full conviction. The lunch bag given to Sebastian by his wife for Abe, cuts into his flesh and spirit as he realises that he had lost his son to men like Raman and Nathan who felt no remorse or regret in having killed an innocent boy. The journey inside the prison camp, through the dark rooms where Sebastian could sense Abe’s erstwhile presence, where everything had death and decay written over it, turns out to be one of inconsolable loss; loss of a son and of life as he had known it. Amidst the darkness of Abe’s cell, Sebastian finds strength and courage to fight for justice for his son, ‘he was going to fight the case and take the government to court, whatever it took. He would do it, Emergency or not.’ (66). Sebastian determined as he is to seek justice first approaches IG Nambiar who is so busy acting in his version of Ramayana, that reality and the sorrows of a helpless old man become blurred with mythology. Not being able to find any help from Nambiar, Sebastian goes to Delhi to approach the higher offices of the government.

It is ironic that Sebastian tries to claim justice from the very government, the very forces, he was fighting against. In such a scenario, as the case of E. Varier proved, the common man could hardly be the winner since people like Raman were secure in the knowledge that they represented the government and their actions were virtually above the law during the Emergency. When Nathan apprises him of Sebastian’s threat of taking them to court, Raman caught in the middle of an unsuccessful attempt at masturbation, answers him with a casualness that is disturbing in its confidence of being able to get away with murder: ““What court? This is the Emergency, Nathan,” Raman said. “There is no court. You think any judge in India will go against the State and Mrs. Gandhi? And we are working for Mrs. Gandhi and the State.”” (68). The authority, the power, came from above and no one could challenge it, not even the judiciary which was browbeaten by the government during the Emergency. As was borne out, very few judges stood up against the government or more specifically Indira Gandhi during the Emergency. Sebastian is bullied by the police as it is feared that he might move the court for Habeas Corpus, which is exactly what E. Varier had done after the Emergency was lifted. In fact, his was the first writ that was filed in the High Court in Feb 1977: Professor Eachara Varier v. the Government of Kerala (Varier, 40).
The Emergency and its over shadowing presence subsumes even John and the Red Earth. In the book it becomes emblematic of the excesses that the country had been unable to overcome. Surendran fills the reader in on the background of the imposition of the Emergency by giving a brief background involving the Allahabad verdict and Indira’s desire to hold onto power:

Mrs. Gandhi knew she couldn’t continue too long in power, unless she resorted to the Emergency provision in the Constitution. Only those who had been in power long enough could understand the terror of losing it. It was bizarre, John thought, that the most powerful person in India considered herself a victim (3).

The ‘internal conspiracy to overthrow her government’ which was allegedly plotted by leaders like JP could be countered only through the Emergency, or so Indira Gandhi tried to make the masses believe. The newspapers ‘bleeding black with the lies of the Emergency’ (8) praise its gains which were namely that the ‘trains were running on time, thanks to the Emergency’ (2). Important achievement indeed considering that the future of the nation depended on the precision with which trains ran in India! And then, ‘Numbers were becoming important in Emergency India. The largest good for the largest number surely must be measurable in grams?’ (5)

The AIR was also reduced to being a mouthpiece for the government, albeit a forced one as the exaggerations of the Emergency prove too much for the AIR news reader, Arjun, to read without any uncomfortable pauses. In a classic case of sycophancy, the AIR reports news of Indira Gandhi as the only leader capable of delivering the nation from the throes of poverty: ‘Mrs. Gandhi was happy that the nation was surging ahead, thanks to her 20-point programme. Each point was going to be a nail in the coffin of poverty. Jai Hind, Arjun said clearing his throat for the third and last time’ (52). Only good news were passed by the censors and so the radio blares out as to how ‘happily’ people were working and how they were working ‘all the time’. The ‘other good news’ consist of the ‘rising figures in the number of people willing to undergo vasectomies’, thanks to the Emergency. While Mrs. Gandhi as the Prime Minister did command a certain importance yet the reverence shown by the media and politicians towards Sanjay Gandhi her younger son, was an instance of the debilitating effects of power. His two pet projects of city beautification and population control through mass sterilization also find ample media space. As the AIR report goes,
There was an urgent need to beautify and develop Old Delhi areas like Jama Masjid/Turkman Gate, and Sanjay Gandhi had instructed the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) to execute the plan on the double. The DDA, said Arjun, clearing his throat, was holding a swearing ceremony to profess to the nation their keen resolve to turn Sanjay Gandhi’s dream into reality (52).

Another such news item reports Sanjay Gandhi as saying that, ‘people with more than two children would not be given job promotions in the government sector.’ (22). That a person with no political background or official position in the government or the party could announce such measures simply because he happened to be a Gandhi and the PM’s son points to the lawlessness rampant during not just the Emergency but within the leading party in general as well. The Emergency was an advantage to people like Marar and Raman since they had the protection of the state in return for cleaning up the naxals. In Marar’s words, Mrs. Gandhi was riding a tiger and it was going to be tough getting off its back. It was clear to people like him and Raman that they were riding pillion and that their survival depended on the survival of the regime as they were all part of it now and with much complicity (169).

On his way to Delhi to explain the situation regarding the naxals, Raman sees the city covered with hoardings of the ‘grim and unsmiling’ faces of Mrs. Gandhi and her son Sanjay (98). While the classic slogan ‘Garibi Hatao’ towers over Mrs. Gandhi’s forehead, Sanjay points north towards progress, a man with a mission of transforming India into a developed country. The main obstacle in his mission however were the ‘750 million people’ of India. ‘It was not clear what they had against progress. But they seemed genetically programmed against it ... Sanjay’s waking hours now went in conjuring up solutions that focused themselves below the belt of the multitude. A blow there seemed appropriate punishment for the crime that the Indian millions committed night after night in their passion ... nearly one billion people were forever running around with their pants down and their members erect.’ (99). Raman sympathises with Sanjay Gandhi in his quest for progress since he too viewed people more as obstacles in his desire for establishing a reign of order and discipline. ‘Fuckery unlimited! Invisibly, dark brown Indians, millions of them, huge of belly, and thin of limb were being conjured as if by black magic, and delivered with relentless success into the hot Indian sunlight’ (100). The only solution was to ‘tie up their overactive balls in a knot’ (100). Democracy was another problem since people such as these were not worthy of being allowed the unbridled freedom they had to procreate: ‘Democracy and sex. The two added up to just one thing: Collective suicide. In a democracy you couldn’t order people to
mate to rule, or to wear a condom when night fell’ (101). There were many people like Sanjay and Raman who felt that India’s breeding millions deserved to be punished and that sterilization was the only solution in a country where other population control measures such as condoms were ineffective either because of supply shortage or because people were too shy to purchase them and preferred children to the mortification of asking for condoms. The Indian government was aided in following this ‘special mission’ by willing politicians and officials who directed the ‘field operations in family planning’. The orders were to ‘sterilize people on a war footing’ as their quotas breathed down heavily on them. (106)

As they go to carry out their ‘mission’ of getting the hordes sterilized in the Turkman Gate area of old Delhi, Shashank and Raman are accompanied by a Mrs. Nafisa Ahmed, a character based on Rukhsana Sultana, one of Delhi’s socialites who worked fervently towards helping Sanjay Gandhi achieve his desired results. The pretty Mrs. Ahmed, dressed in a chiffon saree and dark shades, remarks, ‘people are like dogs ... they mate and have no idea it’s a consequential act ... the sterilization drive is to help people mate without endangering the nation’s future’ (109). The whole operation is conducted in a thoroughly professional manner where in a ‘predetermined area’ as many men as possible are rounded up and ‘driven to family welfare camps’ where vasectomies were performed by volunteer trainee doctors from AIIMS. The patients were rewarded Rs. 75 for their service to the nation. The order of the day as Raman notes is devotion and dedication towards Sanjay Gandhi and his mission. Concurring with Mrs. Ahmed’s admiration for Sanjay’s passion for order and beauty, Shashank says,

‘Mrs. Gandhi’s son is a great leader.’
‘And a great romantic,’ Mrs. Nafisa Ahmed said. ‘Only a romantic can save India. Realists will only get overwhelmed.’ (110)

Mrs. Ahmed’s great mission at Turkman fails as she steps on a pile of excrement and has a stone hurled at on her way to the podium to deliver her speech. Her service to the nation is sabotaged all of which conspire to ruffle her ardour for social service. Nonetheless, commands are issued to gather men for sterilization and very soon men who pose a potent threat to the nation’s progress are brought in for sterilization: ‘Three of them looked like they were in their early seventies, but it was rumored in Turkman gate that the three were prodigiously procreative. Apparently, the nation’s future quaked at their very sight. A length of rope bound the victims’ hands together and was passed between their legs, close to the
scrotum, the part of their anatomy most wanted by the state. They were marched to the van in a line’ (114). Many ‘national threats’ were similarly apprehended and sterilized during the Emergency. The upper echelons of society appreciated the government’s efforts at controlling population and also felt that the poor who bred so rampantly had no right to democracy.

While we witness the first onslaught of the government on the residents of Turkman Gate from the perspective of those in power, that is Raman, the second and more vicious attack involving the demolition of the entire area takes place before the eyes of Sebastian. The destruction of the Turkman Gate area was a major event during the Emergency, one that even the censors could not blot out and which figures in more or less every book written on the Emergency. In Emma Tarlo’s words it has become the ‘centre stage of the post-Emergency narrative; the ultimate symbol of oppression and resistance. If the Emergency is to be remembered anywhere it is surely here’ (56). It was carried out with complete complicity by then DDA Minster Jagmohan and this complicity is portrayed through the DDA officials in the novel as well. The pusillanimity with which the whole exercise of city beautification and sterilization was carried out by bureaucrats bespeaks of the systemic corruption that ‘romantics’ such as John were trying to fight against.

Sebastian is a spectator to the demolition of not just the three hundred odd settlements that were home for so many people, but also the destruction of their ‘personal history’. It would all be razed to ground in six hours and they would be rehabilitated somewhere else. And, ‘if Sanjay Gandhi had his way, it would be as if they never had a past. Or a place to locate their past. They had been living in and around Turkman Gate for years and this morning they found they would have to carry their roofs over their heads to an arid patch of land whose well-marked cinema houses and school complexes and water reservoirs were so much ink on paper. Some of them had visited their prospective rehabilitation centres and come away with the rudeness of the lie.’ (224)

While the disappointment with the rehabilitation centres was distressing enough what was worse was the grim and unrelenting reality of the bulldozers that stood outside their houses in the early morning: ‘Hordes of distraught people, some of them just out of their beds with their blankets around them, blinking their eyes off what seem like an extended nightmare, were massing around the bulldozers.’ (224) As the morning progresses, the area gets filled with the enthusiastic cries of ‘Raze to Build’ and ‘Sanjay Gandhi Zindabad’ which are voiced by the Delhi Development Authority. The DDA sticks to its brief and continues to
demolish the settlements. When the people protest the police opens fire onto the people: 'It was as if an entire orchestra had gone insane with the music they were trying to create.' With the mad cacophony of the gunshots, stampede and the desperate cries of people losing all they ever had 'came a set of new frightening notes: the sound of buildings crashing, and bulldozers flattening all their vertical opposition' (229)

The irony of it all as Bhaskaran, a journalist and Sebastian's friend, notes is that none of this would be reported in the newspapers the next day. Censorship made sure that none of the violence that was a part of the demolition got through. What made this even more bizarre was that even eye witness journalists had to get their reports passed through pre-censorship where most of the details were struck off. Although the tired father's resilience gives him courage to fight for justice, the shock of seeing the government turn its guns on its own people makes him realize that the death of his son was also 'just another episode in a badly made movie'. He is apprised by his friend Bhaskaran that he is just one of the hundreds who had missing family members and had been requesting the President and Prime Minister to do something: 'He was part of an intricate scheme of terror and sadness. One of the thousands harnessed to plough the killing fields for the iron harvest' (220). Bhaskaran's caustic comment that the government no longer belonged to the people and that perhaps the naxalites had a point in going against it after all makes Sebastian realize the futility of approaching the very same government for help. With the constitution in shambles there is little that Sebastian can clutch to as evidence in his case except for his son's innocence. But as Bhaskaran explains to him, 'The Emergency doesn't operate in term of evidence. It operates in terms of suspicion. Which is why the rule of the law goes out the window.' (218)

As he re-reads his letter addressed to the President after witnessing the nightmare in Turkman Gate, he becomes aware of the fact that the President knew exactly what was happening, and that he had chosen not to do anything about it. If houses were being razed, fathers and brothers being shot at or tortured, it seemed highly unlikely to Sebastian that the President would 'change tack and take a personal interest in Abe's case. Not for all the gold in the world, Sebastian thought, nor for the good in civil society, would the President lose his job' (232). The President was simply a rubber stamp who would not go against the PM even if it meant turning a blind eye to the people's suffering. Sebastian's meeting with Shashank, the home secretary, gives him an insight into the madness that bureaucrats like Shashank were engaged in. The Emergency for the bureaucrats meant numbers pertaining to everything conceivable, from the 300 sterilizations and electrocution of stray dogs, to the number of rats
killed and trees whitewashed. Everything falls in the same list and the scramble for numbers is unrelenting. Bhaskaran sees people like Shashank as ‘a spineless lot. Before the Emergency, they were engrossed in sucking up to the ministers and feathering their own nests. Now they sucked up only to Sanjay Gandhi and his mother and continued feathering their own nests.’ An important difference now was that they were all a part of some ‘motivational committee’ or the other such as ‘Prosperity Through Sterilisation’, ‘Safety Through Street Dog Extermination’ and so on. Shashank’s reaction and response to Sebastian’s request for help is typical case of government apathy even while knowing the truth: ‘...there are hundreds like him. I can’t be looking into all their complaints at face value. So many people, so many problems. Why there are men who have lost their balls and don’t know what to do about it!’(238)

Bureaucrats like Shashank followed the dictums of the Emergency because they were a part of the government and not only knew how to adjust to the vagaries of power but more importantly they were willing to do so, which is why they immediately switched sides with the coming of the Janata Party. The Indian bureaucrat has, even after 61 years of Independence, managed to retain his stolid presence in the country through its flexible backbone which made it easy to be in compliance with those in power.

With corrupt politicians, a brutish police force and an indifferent bureaucracy Sebastian goes back to Kerala, to the tears of his wife Ani Amma who, like Rajan’s mother in reality, is unable to withstand the shock of losing her only son. Her pain and breakdown becomes another burden that Sebastian has to carry in his lonely struggle for justice. Hearing her cry he feels like the helpless children of Turkman Gate ‘wandering about without hope amidst the ruins. Tears and ruins, Sebastian thought, as he sank to the floor...’ (246). What is all the more painful, whether it is for Sebastian in the novel or for Varier in reality, is the fact that he knew that his son was dead and yet is unable to have it affirmed ‘officially’ and know the cause of his death.

The end of the Emergency signifies some hope in Sebastian’s life, not that of getting his son back but at least that of ascertaining the truth of his son’s death. The writ he files results in a case which drags on for years and finally results in the verdict that Abe was indeed taken in police custody and that since his body could not be produced by the police he was ‘killed in the process of interrogation’. Marar and Raman are found guilty of ‘misrepresenting fact as well as conspiring to mislead the court’ (321). By the time they are
finally sentenced, Marar had become the Chief Minister and Raman promoted to the post of Inspector General, Crime Branch. It marked the triumph of an old man over the State against odds (321). The leitmotif of rain occurs throughout the novel at various points in the lives of the characters. The novel starts with a repressive rain that seems to inundate the lives of those who get engulfed in it with sorrow. It ends also with rain but this time it is a rain that washes away the pain of a father who had lost not only his son but everything that he could call life:

Rain falling, fading, gathering. Resurgent rain pouring over tiles, and eaves and leaves, brimming over tubs, bathing stones, banishing the world to a rumour ... With infinite care Sebastian opened his fists and let the rain wash them clean. (326)

The Emergency might have come and gone for the vast populace of India but it did not for Varier, who, even after 34 years of the Emergency and 62 years of Independence, was still not told the truth about his dead son’s body. Till as late as 2006 when he died, Varier was still not given any concrete answers as regards how his son had died or what had happened to his son’s body. K. Karunakaran, a leader of the Democratic Indira Congress, Kerala, the then Home Minister of Kerala, and on whom the character of Marar is based, was ‘visibly disturbed’\textsuperscript{11} when asked to comment upon Varier’s death. According to The Hindu he ‘termed the incident during the Emergency “unfortunate.” “But what is Eachara Warrier’s importance? What is his contribution to the country? Is he the representative of any political party or movement? Is he a litterateur? Why haven’t you bothered to find out the pain of a woman whose son was killed in the police station?” Mr. Karunakaran asked\textsuperscript{12}.

The Emergency is no longer in imposition, nor is censorship; such behaviour then leads one to question whether the repressive and dark side of the state which manifested itself during the Emergency ever really ended? This repressive violent streak of the government continues to manifest itself in the many violations of human rights that keep taking place in the country even today although there is a lot more awareness and activism on the part of human rights organizations now. It should also be acknowledged however that the law and order machinery of the state cannot be held entirely culpable for the breaches that take place now or even in the past, as it is more of a systemic evil which privileges tyranny and authoritarianism over democratic and law. The excesses of the Emergency have never been acknowledged by the government, much less looked into, for how can something that is

\textsuperscript{11} “Eachara Warrier dead”, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
denied be inquired into. This has led the state to benignly allow for excesses to take place within the precincts of the police stations and prisons, simply because the pre-Emergency and Emergency rules allowed for a complete and legalized state ordered repression.

The Emergency was different for different people – it was a political drama, a dark period that blotted out democracy, a time of excess, a time of progress and discipline and so on – but for those like E. Varier, it was a period that ripped their lives apart and left them a legacy of tears and ruins. Maybe the event can be dismissed and shrugged off as not being pertinent enough in today’s context: after all the past is past, why drag it into the future? However, if we do consider ourselves a democracy, then the pain and injustice done to any citizen should hold value and be redressed. We have the name of Rajan, and E. Varier’s memoirs as testimonies of the pain they went through but what of the many nameless victims of the Emergency whose names are not and will never be known but only spoken and mentioned as the anonymous ‘many’ who faced the excesses of the Emergency? The fact that we as Indians do not lay too much premium on coming to terms with the uncomfortable parts of our history is probably the root cause of many of our social tensions today. Partition ripped apart the nation, giving birth to the ugly monster of communalism, which we allowed to fester till it broke out in bloody incidents like the 1984 riots, Ayodhya, Godhra etc, simply because we refused to acknowledge and resolve the issue then and there. The wound never healed and is still there. The Emergency allowed for a state to show its authoritarian and violently repressive streak openly, yet we refused to go beyond a few individuals and address the real problems – those of a flawed system of governance and political corruption. The result being that not only have we chosen to wipe out the memory of the event but in the process allowed the government to disguise its violent streak under the garb of a ‘committed people’s democracy’. It did not necessarily need an Emergency for those excesses to take place, the will was always there, the Emergency simply made it easier to carry them out. Similarly even today it does not need an Emergency for various state authorized brutalities such as the Godhra carnage to take place because they were never controlled and continue to be a part of the system even after the Emergency.

I have also chosen to include within the context of this novel Professor T.V. Eachara Varier’s *Memories of a Father*, which is an account of his ordeal. It is one of those few texts that have come out from amongst the victims of the Emergency and makes us understand what those nineteen months meant for those who were affected by the event. The Foreword calls it a ‘story of today’s India, today’s Asia’ where thousands of people still become victims
of state controlled tortures and custodial deaths. While the voices of many such victims remain obscure and hidden from public view, this man's saga becomes the story of those countless others united as they are by their common bond of suffering. (Varier, viii).

As mentioned earlier, Professor Varier was the father of P. Rajan, an engineering student who was suspected of having links with the naxal outfit Red Earth and was picked up by the police for interrogation during the Emergency. He was never seen afterwards, nor his body ever recovered. Varier's saga is even more hard hitting not only because it is based on reality and is a first person narrative but more so because it lacks any kind of pretentiousness, or hysteria regarding the Emergency or his son's disappearance. It is a simply written narrative which speaks volumes of the pain Varier and his family suffered. The agony he went through is all too palpable when he describes how he stood outside the sinister Kakkayam camp and was denied access to his son while being told that his son was in the camp. As he stood helplessly outside, caught in the throes of anger and pain, he felt as if he heard his son call across to him 'Oh, father...' (5). The bowl of rice and plantain leaf that is kept ready every day by the parents for the son's return is one of the most poignant images of the memoir, 'He may step in any time. He may be hungry. There should be rice ready at home for him. Yes, he will come back. Sure he will...' (Varier, 6) While Varier had to bear the burden of the truth about his son, his wife who was 'mentally ill' (7) was never told about Rajan's death and spent her life waiting for him. Even on her death-bed she made Varier promise to bring Rajan with him the next time he came. The father's personal grief at having lost his son for virtually no reason overwhelms the reader as does the mother's lifelong wait for her son. It is not as a literary text that one reads these memoirs but rather as a moving social document that records the lone fight of a father against a system. The story evokes sympathy and forces us to take cognizance of our dehumanized system as well. There are many such Variers even today but we as a society seem to be emotionally immune to such incidents possibly because they make news once and are then lost in the maze of sensationalism and media hard sell.

Varier's fight involved many high-ups in the political world whom he refers to in his memoir. Though a lot of them were known to him personally, yet despite this he received little or no help from them. For instance though he approached the much revered Chief Minister of Kerala, Achutha Menon, for help, he had little hope for any help after the Chief Minister's office informed him that Rajan was in hiding, thereby indirectly calling him guilty:
I became convinced that the search would never end, sure that a father’s journey in search of a son is more tiring that the journey of a son in search of his father. Many friends stood wholeheartedly by me, but I was getting lonelier day after day. I walked up the empty inner rooms of my memory, calling for Rajan. I entered into an eternal search, suffocating though it was. (14)

The power games that go on in any administration are evident from the attitude of the Chief Minister in refusing to ask Jayaram Padikkal the ‘monarch’ of the Kakkayam camp (5) about Rajan at the behest of Varier, or Karunakaran, the then Home Minister, who knew about the goings on in the police camp. Varier himself states that while he did not expect any kind of sympathy or humane response from people like Karunakaran, yet the apathy of someone like Menon, a people’s hero, dejected him, quashing the little hope he had for finding his son (19). The insidious games of power entangle even the boldest and most humane of people.

Varier also reveals the brutalities of the infamous Kakkayam camp which was set up after the attack on the Kayanna police station on February 28, 1976 (20). According to the memoir, the police started rounding up youngsters from surrounding places after which they were ‘taken to the camp and brutally tortured’ where the ‘mode of enquiry ... never involved any modern or scientific methods for detecting crimes. Torture was the only method the police knew, and they used it freely.’ (20) Rajan too was arrested in one such round up for ‘suspects’ from his engineering college. On the night of the attack on the Kayanna camp, he was, by his father’s account, in the Farooke College youth festival all night long, a fact that could have been cross-checked by the police with several of his classmates and teachers. But the motive of the police was not as much to ascertain the true identity of those who had attacked the station, as to wipe out the Maoist-Naxals under the cover of the Emergency. Like many others who have written about the Emergency, Varier also draws comparisons of the Emergency with Hitler’s regime. The Kakkayam prison camp was a place where like Hitler’s concentration camp, tortures were conducted which were more like ‘an experiment, undemocratic and heartless, to find out whether the intellectual honesty and sense of justice of a generation could be destroyed by the power of an iron fist. How much Mr. Jayaram Padikkal succeeded in this experiment is something for history to evaluate’ (22).

Varier gives a stark description of the kind of tortures that were inflicted on the prisoners in Kakkayam camp. While I quoted a description of the Kakkayam camp earlier I now quote below an extensive passage from Varier’s book with reference to the tortures:
Mr. Jayaram Padikkal would sit on a chair and pass orders, while police jeeps rushed in and out and youngsters were dragged forth. They were beaten, and then tied to a wooden bench with their hands and legs down. A heavy wooden roller would be rolled over their thighs; many could not stand the pain, and fell unconscious. To prevent them from crying out, the police pushed cloth into their mouths. Afterwards, they would be bought before Mr. Jayaram Padikkal. While questioning them, he would roll a sharpened pencil in his hands; suddenly he would stab the pencil into the muscles worked loose from the bones on the things of the tortured. Koru said that at that moment you thought it would be better to die. The cries from being stabbed with that pencil could be heard outside the camp. (67)

Rajan was also tortured in a similar manner which was a part of the enquiry regarding the attack on Kayanna police camp and the missing rifle. Varier writes that when he could no longer withstand the torture of the rolling press, he told the police he would reveal the location of the rifle. Later he admitted to having lied in order to escape further torture. He was brutally kicked in the stomach by Mr. Pulikkodan Narayanan (on whom the character of Nathan is based), lost consciousness and died in the face of such extreme torture. Varier was told by those who survived the camp that the police had panicked at the death of Rajan and in order to hush up the matter, they ‘packed Rajan’s body into a sack and took it away in a jeep. They burned it in the midst of some forest with sugar, to ensure that not even the bones would be left behind, so it was said’ (68).

Varier states that many times these tortures were committed in front of the other inmates (70). It was not just the body that the police sought to target but the mind also. The idea it would seem was to demoralize the very spirit that sought to protest against the State. The villains in such exercises were mostly rewarded as in the case of Karunakaran and Padikkal who went on to take up high offices in the State even while the case went on. This leaves one a little circumspect about the judgment powers of history.

Varier admits that his memoir might be overly subjective and biased since he lost his son to the camp. While there is bound to be some sort of partiality in his account yet the fact of the matter is that a lot of accounts from the Emergency do corroborate the fact that these kinds of inhuman tortures did take place in police custody. The aeroplane torture, the thrusting of spices up one’s private parts, the scorching of skin with cigarette butts are just a few examples of these kinds of tortures. The reason why most of these are not brought into
account is because it was mostly students and young political activists who were subjected to these kinds of tortures. The political detenus were simply kept in bad jails and harassed, but were spared physical torture. Post the Emergency also not very many parties speak out vocally against police brutalities and excesses because some or the other sort of incidents have taken place in the reign of every government and more often than not with the government fully aware of the happenings. Moreover since the victims of the Emergency were not public figures but ordinary people, their travails remain forgotten and obscure.

There is something inherently wrong in a system that legalizes this kind of violence, where everyday human violations come to the fore, and yet things continue as usual. There is at times a feeble outcry, some vocal resentment of such high-handedness but for the most part, there is a certain cautiousness of not courting trouble by going too much against the government, possibly because the state apparatus in India still lacks transparency, and is above the individual who exists for the state rather than vice-versa. Moreover we are still fed with a discourse of glorious nationalism of which the state is the most overt symbol. The Indian system, with all its merits and demerits, has been able to keep going despite the occasional hiccup, but it is also necessary to take stock of the way in which this system has survived. It has its strengths and no doubt force has been the only solution in certain extreme issues which threatened the state and people; however one does not understand why this becomes necessary in more or less every law and order situation.

There was never even an attempt to find out if he (Rajan) was a real culprit or not. They just took him, tortured and killed him. That was all that happened.

Although trained to use scientific methods in finding real culprits, none of the police employed them. They found it easier to torture the accused ... This is why I believe that the police are only instruments of torture for the state. (24)

Prof. Varier’s strong words in this context do force a person to confront the dark side of the state machinery. In one instance, as Varier writes, he was told by a police officer that he could get Rajan freed but that he should continue to be a part of the extremists. An emotional response would have been ‘yes’, but Varier understood that the police meant him to confirm indirectly that his son was involved with the naxals. Varier refused to agree to such a condition that would indict his son even in death. This shows how the modern state uses its position and the helplessness of the people for creating ‘truths’ in order to keep its façade of a just and benign democracy.
Varier raised his case at various forums including the Lok Sabha; however little headway was made during the Emergency. It was only after the Emergency was lifted that the 'cool breeze of freedom started sweeping through the land again' and the Rajan case was brought to the notice of the masses. The Habeas Corpus writ filed by Prof. Varier and the subsequent case that followed went on to become 'a focal point for those struggling after the Emergency' (42). After having filed eight cases in various courts regarding the disappearance of his son, the High Court finally gave its verdict on April 13, wherein it concluded that Rajan was 'arrested by the police and tortured at Kakkayam camp' (46). The police was ordered to produce Rajan in the court by April 22. An appeal was filed against the verdict in the Supreme Court wherein the High Court's decision was upheld. With the Supreme Court verdict, one of the respondents, the Chief Minister Karunakaran, was 'forced to resign, sending ripples through national politics.' (46) Even the enquiry ordered by the Government of Kerala found that Rajan had indeed been 'arrested and tortured at Kakkayam camp' (46). Consequently, prosecution cases as well as cases for providing false affidavits were lodged against the accused police.

Remembering the Emergency, Varier names those nineteen months as 'black days'. They certainly were for his family but he also points out how 'many in the country were unaware of what the Emergency meant, and how it affected the lives of common people'. (60) He sees the Emergency as Mrs. Gandhi’s desperate attempt at holding on to power, which it indeed was at one level. The fact that ‘Most of the country was in deep sleep when the Emergency was declared’ led to an easy imposition of what was to turn out to be a draconian period of authoritarianism. It was only later when the excesses started affecting the people, when cases similar to those of Rajan repeated themselves in other places, that ‘India awoke in darkness’ (61). Despite this, for some people the darkness of the Emergency continued well beyond those nineteen months.

For Varier the public amnesia of the excesses of the Emergency is as dangerous as the event itself. ‘The dark powers of the Emergency are still there’ and these can rise to the surface again. All his work, as he says, is aimed at making people aware of the latent dangers that still prevail in civil society. Varier even toured the state extensively along with people who were victims of the Emergency to make people conscious of the excesses that had taken place. For Varier, who had lost his son, this was important to ensure that there were no more Rajans in the country again. Sadly enough public as well as state apathy far exceeds a victim’s pain. ‘History doesn’t pardon a lack of reaction and laziness often. I fought a lonely
battle for my lost son. Though tired, I am still carrying on.’ (63) Varier fought till the end of his life for justice. His story is not just about the excesses of the Emergency but also about personal grit and a strength borne out of pain, to carry on despite the odds. As in the case of the novel *An Iron Harvest*, the rain that once fell over Kerala, a rain of joy and compassion, turns to that of oppression and pain. Once the rain held music, now it spoke of ‘unheard stories’, pain and sorrow. The last image that Varier leaves the reader with is that of his son standing outside in the rain waiting to be let in: ‘I don’t close the door. Let the rain lash inside and drench me. Let my invisible son know that his father never shut the door.’ (74)

IV

The Death of a Dream: Rahi Masoom Raza’s *Katra Bi Arzoo*

A question that has surfaced repeatedly during and after the Emergency is the response of the common man to the Emergency and the attitude of the masses towards Indira Gandhi. Indira Gandhi figures in more or less every novel of the Emergency, directly or indirectly and in various forms; however very few have come even close to discussing the actual impact that she had on the people and how it changed after the Emergency. The complexities of the Emergency can also be understood to a large extent by understanding Indira’s position amongst the people also. Apart from this, most of the novels on the event generally start with the Emergency already in the background, which does not give any kind of a glimpse into life before the Emergency or their changing perceptions towards the people and politics of the time. This leaves us with a certain gap because how do we situate or comment upon the issue without a point of comparison? How would the Emergency have impacted those people who formed the base of the Congress, those who thought that Indira was India and that she personally was the one who took care of the people and worked for them? How do we understand the pains of those whose dreams and desires were crushed like rubble under the tyres of the demolition trucks because it was the Emergency? Not everyone suffered true enough, but those who did, could never go back to the life before the Emergency. Rahi Masoom Raza’s *Katra Bi Arzoo* is a novel that tries to answer these questions or at least makes a very good attempt at doing so. It is warm, humorous, dark, satirical, cynical, harrowing, horrifying, optimistic, brutal and humane. Raza’s India is depicted through the microcosm of Katra Mir Bulaki later called Katra Bi Arzoo and still later Katra Indira Gandhi. It is a world of Hindus and Muslims, politicians and opportunists, poverty and
humanity, dreams and dejection. The novel focuses on the lives of the lower middle class, people we see every day, but never register as having the same dreams, desires and aspirations like we do. People whose lives and existence are taken for granted since they are expected to adjust and accommodate to any situation, since they do not really matter in the larger frame of things. Unlike the other novels discussed in this thesis, *Katra Bi Arzoo* introduces us to the Emergency after it introduces us to the main characters and their lives, dreams and desires, thereby making the tragedy even more hard-hitting. The imposition of the Emergency and the knowledge that the lives of these characters, who have endeared themselves to the reader, will be rent apart slowly, makes the Emergency a terrifying unknown force that methodically destroys every dream and desire that the people of this small colony have. Apart from the Emergency, Raza also rips apart the politics of India at that point of time and emphasises how the politicians could and did take advantage of the gullibility of the people who revered their leaders like their gods.

The Emergency was not just a political event but had social implications as well. Raza narrates how he told a journalist that, ‘I was embarrassed that India’s intellectuals had not raised their voices against the Emergency. The Communist intellectuals were openly supporting the Emergency and they would never be forgiven in the history of Indian literature’ (122; all translations mine). He writes that the idea for writing this novel came during the Emergency and he was confident that Mrs. Gandhi would revoke the Emergency before the elections, therefore he would be able to have it published before she imposed another Emergency after winning the elections. Everyone believed that she would sweep the elections and impose the Emergency again and therefore legitimise the changes made during the Emergency. ‘However, the election results were even more shocking than Justice Sinha’s decision. Before this novel could be completed, the Emergency and with it the Congress Party was finished too. But I don’t think that this has diminished the importance of this novel as it a testimony of my illegitimate relation with the Emergency. And its name is still “Katra Bi Arzoo” because the season of aspirations has not ended but may be after a few days even aspiring might become a difficult task too’ (123). Aspirations which prove too heavy for the people of Katra Mir Bulaki to carry on any further and the novel ends on a tragic note. However dreams and aspirations are addictive and the more ephemeral and fragile they are the more they multiply, so even if one Katra saw the death of a dream, it would rise again in some other place and try to give its ephemeral self a tangible form.
Since it was originally written in Hindi, and there is no English translation of the text that is available, I have translated the given quotes on my own. To summarise the novel, since it may not be one that people are familiar with, the romantic name Katra Bi Arzoo etched by Master Badrul under the name Katra Mir Bulaki on the night of his betrothal to Shehnaaz, starts a chain of incidents which somehow lead to the idea in the government that a conspiracy was being hatched in the Katra by the Communist Asharam and that it was codenamed Katra Bi Arzoo. This speculation goes all the way to New Delhi and a detailed investigation is undertaken by the intelligence services to unravel the nefarious plot against the country’s leader. With the imposition of the Emergency, Deshraj, Asharam’s friend, is picked up by the police and tortured in order to reveal Asha’s location as also the details of the ‘conspiracy’. The simple name which once resonated with the unfulfilled dreams and aspirations of the people of Katra soon becomes the unwitting enemy of those very dreams as the government is convinced that since there was no Katra Bi Arzoo in reality, this could only be a conspiracy. Such paranoia was rampant at that point and as Raza satirises, such ideas were taken as the gospel by the intelligence and the government without considering the logic behind such a wild surmise. The lives of the people become expendable in the pursuit of the ‘truth’ and service to the masters. While Raza satirizes the bungling officious government servants and the opportunistic politicians, he also creates a small world, of small desires and aspirations which are also crushed by the forces unleashed during the Emergency. There are a host of characters whose shattered lives form the base of the novel – the two orphans Billo and Deshraj who grow up together, in the colony which witnesses not just their childhood, but their youth, their love, their marriage, the achievement of their dreams and, just as unblinkingly, witnesses the death of those dreams as also their own brutal deaths; the ideological communist Asharam and his grandfather the die-hard Congress veteran Baburam; the beautiful AIR announcer Prema Narayan; Master Badrul and Shehnaaz; Shamsu Miyan and his helplessness in the face of poverty and inflation; Pehalwan Bholenath and Itwari Baba. The lives of all the main characters change in some way or the other, through arrests and tortures in the case of Desh, through punishment for defiance against the state as suffered by Prema through the assaults on her body and spirit, demolitions, easy money and a taste of heady power in the case of the once burqa clad widow Mehnaaz, or a break from the rigidity of old political ideologies and loyalties as in the case of Baburam and his grandson Asharam. And then it is about Indira Gandhi, and those who were employed by the government but who thought that the government was Indira and that they were working for her and not the people. Although Rohinton Mistry also deals with the same section of Indian society, yet
Mistry’s narrative has something of a forced quality to it which is absent from Raza’s account because he is able to capture those subtle nuances of life which make the story so much more realistic. He shows how the people were unknowingly ensnared by the Emergency’s repressive and violent streak, how they were victimised by the very system that they were ready to swear genuine allegiance to.

The novel starts with the background to the top secret KBA or Katra Bi Arzoo file which implicates the people of the colony as part of a deadly conspiracy against the government. The official name of the colony was Katra Mir Bulaki which was scratched and renamed as Katra Bi Arzoo by Master Badrul Hasan ‘Nayab’ Machli Shehri the day that his marriage was fixed with Shehnaaz. According to Master Badrul the name fitted perfectly because as he noted the ‘people of this Katra had nothing else except a lot of desires’ (11). The journalist Asharam liked the name and wrote a story on it which was much appreciated and he was asked to write a serial on it. Since there was no such Katra in reality, the authorities were mystified by its presence and were convinced that there was a ‘conspiracy’ to overthrow the government which was being masterminded by Asharam in the colony and that it was codenamed ‘Katra Bi Arzoo’. As he started spending more time in the colony, he became involved with the people of that colony as well ‘collecting their desires’ for his work, unaware that the CID was after him (12). Very soon the government opens a file called the KBA file which effectively surveyed the people of the Katra in order to unravel the ‘conspiracy’. Since no one wanted to take the responsibility for investigating the conspiracy the file is soon sent from Allahabad to 1, Safdarjung Road which was the Prime Minister’s residence. An official Khursheed Alam Khan is sent to take charge of the matter and ‘Delhi waited with bated breath for the report to come back’ (12). Asharam was not able to write his serial but the author who makes frequent forays into the story, explains that he was going to complete the story so that it would be of use subsequently. The direct presence of the authorial voice, rather than using a mouthpiece, is quite interesting as Raza not only tries to fictionalise the story but also tries to give it a semblance of reality at the same time. The author satirises the paranoia of the government which saw anything out of the ordinary or anything that it was not aware of as a potential threat to the government. This is not just an exaggeration; both the Congress government and Indira were facing a lot of criticism for their inability to deliver their election promises and powerlessness to curb the mounting inflation and corruption. As the Congress had held a position of centrality till now, it was difficult for it to accept that it could be dislodged from its privileged position and as a consequence it
started perceiving conspiracies in everything possible. As stated earlier, Indira frequently made references to the opposition planning a conspiracy to overthrow her and blamed the media also for furthering a climate of hate and mistrust. The paranoia which grew from a sense of insecurity affected even the people who thought that they were too far removed from the world of those in power to be able to get affected by their lives. It is this misconception that is rudely shattered in the novel as it is the common man who suffers as a result of the paranoia of those in power far removed from him.

All this happens prior to the Emergency and very soon the KBA file starts taking a form as Asharam as well as residents of Katra Mir Bulaki are tailed and observed by Head Constable Jagdamba Prasad and the report maintained diligently by Sub-Inspector Ashfaqulah Khan. Both see themselves as valiant officials hot on the trail of Asharam, the 'mastermind' behind the conspiracy in a typical Bollywood ‘chase-scene’ (98). Asharam had become a pain in the neck for the police since he was constantly stirring a demonstration somewhere or the other and landing up in jail. Even the police wanted some sort of a 'permanent solution' to the problem but as Ashfaqulah Khan muses, 'The biggest weakness of democracy was that it was not easy to carry out any permanent solutions regarding anyone. Embroil someone in a case. And instantly the firecracker of a “writ” is set in motion and what is one to say of these bahinchod High Court judges who instantly give a verdict against the government’. The police still managed to get away with what it did with the help of some minister or the other who were here today, gone tomorrow. But the nexus remained nonetheless as each needed the other, the police for a cover-up and the ministers for getting their dirty work done (101). This nexus is a part of the Indian system even today and functions brazenly most times defying law and order. It is interesting to note that for the police 'permanent solutions' were the preferred solutions, democracy was a hindrance and a lot of people who shared this opinion were pleased that finally with the Emergency such expedient solutions could be carried out without any interference of democracy.

The novel moves from the conspiracy theory around the KBA to the simple uncomplicated lives of the people in the Katra who had nothing much except their dreams and desires which were forever at the mercy of the more realistic aspects of life. Deshraj the hero works in the National Garage and Billo his childhood friend and now fiancé ran the 'Janata Laundry'. Their dream was to save enough money so that they could buy a house of their own in the Katra and get married and for this precious house they had been saving in the post office house fund savings account ever since childhood. Billo who is also the
Pehalwan’s niece is introduced as a warm-hearted but tight-fisted girl well-known for her sharp tongue. Deshraj, the Pehalwan’s best friend’s son, now an orphan, was popular throughout the colony for his generosity with the limited money he had. The entire colony was waiting for their marriage which they knew hung on the house without which Billo was adamant she would not marry. It was a simple desire, to own a small house built from their own life savings over the years. Their own small world with its ups and downs was made so much more bearable because of the warmth and love of people like the Pehalwan, the rich beggar Itwari Baba, Shamsu Miyan and his two daughters, the widow Mehnaaz and the younger educated Shehnaaz, and Master Badrul the resident poet. All of them were striving towards a better life, trying hard to fulfil their small aspirations and helping each other on the way since it was not an easy journey. Life is an eternal struggle for the common man who is always concerned with the more practical and far more draining concerns of putting food on the table. As the writer questions,

Why must every dream have the noose of what shall we eat around its neck? This noose was there during the time of the British. It was there in Nehru’s time. It was there in Shastri’s time. It is there in Indira Gandhi’s time also. — Maybe there is some flaw in freedom itself. There is some adulteration. It is an imitation. Rice four rupees a kilo. Sugar seven and a half rupees kilo. Pulses four and a half rupees a kilo. Kerosene oil, available sometimes, sometimes not. Onions two rupees a kilo. Dream — a dream just isn’t available in the open market. Go to the black market and purchase the dream of your choice (81).

And even there the author notes wryly, one had to compromise on the dream and take the best that was available, even if it was chipped or jaded from places. Everyone in the katra was also doing the best they could to somehow make their dreams survive through the struggle that life was. Even when dreams were realised there was no guarantee how long they would last, since dreams are ephemeral by nature and deceptive too. Raza depicts the life and interpersonal relations of these people, emphasising on the small things that make the novel and the characters very endearing and identifiable.

While the Emergency comes much later in the lives of the people, Raza describes the perception and attitude of the people towards the Indian political scenario and the leaders especially Indira Gandhi, Morarji Desai, Jay Prakash Narayan prior to the Emergency so as to highlight how the people responded and changed their political attitudes after the Emergency.
He also emphasises how a certain section of society which consisted of people like Desh and Billo, who could not understand ideologies save those of earning their living or even comprehend political intrigues and manipulations or imagine that the very government and leaders they were ready to swear allegiance to, were betrayed by that very system and its leaders. The political theme of the novel is more pronounced in the case of the educated and politically active Asharam who is a journalist and a Communist. He is a part of the intelligentsia and also representative of the new generation that was veering towards radical politics as a result of disillusionment with the existing system, especially the Congress. As Asharam gravitates towards Marxism, there is a clash between him and his grandfather Baburam ‘Azad’, a diehard Congressman and a veteran of the Independence struggle. Asharam did not believe in the Congress and according to him ‘whether it was Nehru’s government, Lal Bhadur’s, or Mrs. Gandhi’s – the Congress was the agent of the capitalists and the enemy of the people. No matter who made the budget, Morarji or Subramaniam – the Congress government’s budget robbed the people and benefitted the big industrial houses’ (16). Not only was the rift growing between the grandfather and grandson but even Baburam had to at times acknowledge that the Congress he held such respect for was not the same party now and was being corroded by the opportunism that had crept into the party through people such as Babu Gaurishankar Lal Pandey, who is described as the ‘offspring of party tickets’ (16). Such people existed in Indian politics only for election tickets and not for the sake of any concrete ideology or social welfare. Political defection was rampant at that point and with the political instability mounting in the country, opportunists like Gaurishankar Pandey made the most of it by changing parties by the day. Despite all this Baburam was unwaveringly loyal to the Congress as people like him could not ‘think anything or understand anything beyond the Congress. The Congress was the warp and woof of not just his beliefs and his soul, but his life as well’ (16). He represents the old guard of the Congress which believed that so long as Nehru’s daughter was at the helm of the Congress leadership, the party could not go wrong, and that despite all the shortcomings, it was the only party which could solve India’s problems. He was deeply attached to Indira Gandhi whom he saw as his own daughter and when she broke off to form her own party and squashed people like Morarji, Baburam was genuinely pleased and was convinced that now ‘Gandhiji and Nehruji’s dreams would be able to come to realisation without any sort of hindrances’ (19). But still when he heard his grandson denounce the party and its ideology, he was often forced to think if there was something lacking in his own ideology. ‘Somewhere they were going wrong; dreams were breaking somewhere; ideals were getting cracked’ (19). Baburam had to
face the reality that the Congress, despite his personal loyalty towards the party, had somewhere failed to live up to the expectations of the people. While he had hoped that his grandson Asharam’s joining the party would mean a fourth generation of Congressmen in the family, Asharam’s disillusionment with the party’s performance and the still present socio-economic problems, pushes him towards the radicals and Baburam’s home starts witnessing clashes between two generations on the basis of ideology, faith, beliefs and values. For Asharam, Indira or Morarji were all the same and even though he was against Indira, he was convinced that even Morarji would form an opportunistic alliance later on with the help of sectarian parties such as the Jamaat-e-Islami. His own party the CPI had fallen prey to political factionalism as it had split into two where ‘One had become Mrs. Gandhi’s sidekick and the other was aspiring to achieve the goals of Marxism by aligning itself with anti-people parties such as the Jan Sangh and B.K.D. and the Akalis and Jamaat’ (19). So even though Asharam despised the Congress and had no sympathy for the dreams of his grandfather, yet he had nowhere to turn to except his own self with his share of disillusionment. Though he gravitates towards the Left, and is genuinely against the Congress and its policies and later on against the Emergency also, till his personal self is threatened, he is less committed to people and more to his own survival as the story subsequently depicts. The author highlights the contradictions between generations and also within a generation which has opportunists like Mehmaaz and Asharam, but people like Prema and Desh also, who were committed to their values and not just ideologies.

Politics also creeps in insidiously in the lives of the people of the Katra through sometimes overt and sometimes more subtle ways. Asharam tries to ‘awaken’ the people to their rights by galvanising them to form unions whether it is the workers union of the garage or Billo’s laundry workers union. However, while he was an ideological Marxist, for veterans like Gaurishankar Pandey, the local Congress leader, this meant trouble and acting according to the party’s directives, he calls Shamsu Miyan and Deshraj for dinner to talk over the matter and make sure that they stayed within the Congress fold and did not switch over to the radical CPI(M). He even offers a workers union and promises to give the members allowance from his own pocket. While Shamsu Miyan agrees to the union, Desh refuses on the grounds that they could not possibly demand their rights from the same person that they were getting an extra allowance from, apart from their wages. He refuses to sell himself off and this stalls Gaurishankar Pandey’s dream of becoming a great trade union leader from Uttar Pradesh. This also creates a rift between Desh and Shamsu Miyan who were like father and son as
Shamsu Miyan gives in to the temptation of a few extra pennies and agrees to form the union. Politics spoils relations to such an extent that Shamsu Miyan does not even invite Desh to his daughter’s wedding. However though he feels bad, yet as Desh explains his reasons for not joining the union to Asharam later, ‘I didn’t feel like selling myself off. Look Asha Babu I’m not a Congressman, nor a communist, nor a socialist. I’m Desh, plain and simple. And I’m not up for sale. The story ends here’ (93). Desh was not political; he did not want to be. ‘For Desh his politics was his experience, not his ideology … it was not his profession like that of Babu Sahib and Mrs. Gandhi and Morarji Bhai and Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Jay Prakash Narayan. This was Desh’s advantage and disadvantage’ (94). Politics and the essence of the time catches up with the people of the Katra also such as Jokhan, Mehnaaz’s much older husband, who becomes the leader of the local Youth Congress and is opposed to Asharam and since Desh was Asha’s friend, Jokhan was opposed to him as well. Political differences estrange Asharam and his girlfriend Prema Narayan also who was a staunch Congress supporter. Ever since their university days, Prema and Asha had been ideologically opposed to each other. Prema was a staunch believer of ‘Indiraism’ and could not see politics or India beyond Indira. Indira and ideological differences drive the two apart as Prema’s reverence for Indira blinded her to everything else just as Asharam’s disgust towards the Congress and Indira made him bitter and critical of Prema also. These political differences take even greater undertones after the Emergency as one could either support the Emergency and the Congress at that point or be in jail. Ironically many of the most loyal characters end up in jail during the Emergency in the novel!

The Indian public might be passive, but a conspicuous feature of this public is that it is very deeply involved in discussing politics to the extent that everyone is an expert on Indian politics. While socio-economic issues of inflation, poverty and smuggling etc were widely discussed by one and all, another very important area of discussion was Indira Gandhi, who had introduced a new hope for changing the state of affairs with her coming to power. It is important to understand the kind of fervour that people had for her, it was a loyalty and belief which grew out of the hope that this was a person who would think beyond herself and take the nation onto the same path of utopian progress envisioned by leaders such as her own father. Indira is frequently referred to as bityarani or darling daughter since she was not only Nehru’s daughter but also hailed from Allahabad where the novel is set. She was also considered the state’s daughter, an identity she frequently used for her political campaigns. In a discussion in the Katra, when the topic veers around the Raj Narain case,
Desh says that the verdict was known to all because ‘no judge had the guts to give a verdict against a woman who had chucked out veterans like Morarji also from the government like a fly in milk’ (41). But even though Indira Gandhi had endeared herself to vast sections of the society by promising to turn her slogan ‘Garibi Hatao’ into reality, yet as Ramavatar, a mechanic at the National Garage and the sole breadwinner of his large and hapless family, remarks, ‘Shrimati Gandhi gave the slogan remove poverty. Poverty however doesn’t seem to be getting removed. The poor are getting eliminated. In a few days time if the poor die out, poverty itself will be eradicated’ (45). The rising prices, the high rate of unemployment, corruption, a massive population compounded by the abysmal poverty, aged the spirit of young people like Ramavatar by hundreds of years (44). A similar view is voiced by Itwari Baba who had accumulated a neat amount through begging in a bank and always tried to convince people of the benefits of begging. As a beggar whose status had not been improved by the government’s promise, he is not convinced by the Congress populism and sarcastically tells the Pehalwan, an Indira supporter, that he would contest against Indira from Rae Bareilly in order to ‘tell her that bitiyarani since you can’t see poverty in order to remove it, then here we are before you. Remove us now’ (76). In a nation where a huge population was either below the poverty line or teetering on the edge of the line, the slogan ‘Garibi Hatao’ was just too much hope and such promises, if not kept, can collapse under the sheer weight of the expectations tagged with them. Itwari Baba’s disillusionment and disgust against the government and bitiyarani stem mainly from this sense of betrayal as poverty was larger than ever, and the poor just as helpless.

Billo and the Pehalwan on the other hand swore by Indira Gandhi and would not listen to anything against her and stated that they would vote for her no matter what. Desh points out that this was the ‘mistake’ that people like them made every time. ‘People are like fish. The leaders cast their baits laden with promises in the pool of life and suckers like us take the bait with the hook. Five years later we are revived and thrown back into the fishpond ...’ (76). Desh’s outburst speaks of the disillusionment that existed amongst the people who knew that the leaders were simply duping them with their grand sounding promises and though the people were still ready to believe them yet it would amount to the same disappointment later. The early Desh with his cautious approach towards politics and leaders is far removed from the later Desh who also gives in to Congress populism and the Indira cult after he is given a loan for his garage on the basis of a letter written by Indira herself, thus lending his words a touch of irony as he himself takes the bait. While Indira did genuinely
care for the people to some extent, yet this personal touch furthered her image as not just another leader, but as the caretaker of the people, a motherly figure who had taken on the burden of the people. Since she was so deeply entrenched in the politics and the psyche of the people, her persona looms large over the life of the people in the novel. She is the absent yet ever present character whose presence is felt through the discussions of the people, cut-outs of her pictures among the gods in homes, the references to her policies and, most prominently through the Emergency. I would like to comment here that Raza does not attack Indira personally or etch her in the same symbolic images as many other writers have; rather he portrays the truth of her persona, the living legend that she was for the masses, and this is extremely important in understanding not just the Emergency but Indira Gandhi also. The novel depicts extensively the impact that Indira had on the Indian populace at that point. Not only was she seen as a daughter or bitiyarani, but she was also seen as the messiah of the poor. Even Asharam’s mother Ramdei saw her future daughter-in-law cast in Indira Gandhi’s mould: ‘She spoke firmly like Shrimati Indira Gandhi and looked far better than Indira Gandhi’ (96). In Billo’s house, her picture was placed with the calendar gods and Billo and Desh’s photograph. ‘In her opinion even she was worthy of praying’ because after Baburam had written to Mrs. Gandhi about Desh’s dismissal by Gaurishankar Pandey from the garage, she had immediately written back to Baburam that Desh should take a loan from the bank and start his own workshop. For the people in the Katra, especially Billo and Desh, it was as if Indira had personally sanctioned their loan and she was their saviour, their leader. Desh had even named his garage ‘Indira Motor Workshop’. This not only made Desh gravitate towards the Congress due to loyalty towards Indira but created a little distance between Desh and Asha as he felt he was losing Desh to the Congress. Even though Desh had always distanced himself from politics, he was forced to think after his loan letter whether Baburam was not right after all about the Congress. ‘Whatever the AIR used to broadcast daily about the landless farmers being distributed land, or about lakhs of meter of cloth being exported which saved a lot of foreign exchange, couldn’t possibly be lies. He must have seen some hundred or two hundred documentaries which described how India had progressed during Indiraji’s reign. There was such a lot of prosperity which had been ushered in the country. Desh himself wore a terylene shirt now. He had started smoking Wills cigarettes. Some change had happened surely, which was why he had started agreeing with Baburamji’s views and Asharam had started feeling disappointed’ (106). The Congress populism and Indira’s personality cult helped retain the Congress hegemony and bring people like Desh also in its fold. This confused Asharam because although one person’s defection did not really affect
him but this was Desh, his friend, who had once refused to sell himself off to Pandey but could not see now, according to Asha, that he had sold himself off to the Congress (107).

Indira news blared across the AIR and was carried to the people of the Katra through the voice of Prema Narayan. Raza depicts how the state machinery was used to promote Indira’s image as the only leader who could solve India’s problems through news items such as Indira’s declaring education as the birthright of all citizens at a Delhi University Teachers Union meeting, or Jagjivan Ram’s stating at the All India Poetry Meet that the ‘future of India and Indian literature was safe in the hands of Shrimati Gandhi’. In yet another city, another minister unveiled a statue of Indira Gandhi. When the final news item concerned itself with the hijacking of a plane, and had no mention of Indira Gandhi, Desh switches to another channel and Itwari Baba caustically remarks, ‘Aei bhai, when Indira Gandhi wasn’t on board that plane, then how did it find mention on the AIR?’ Desh who is by now a die-hard Indira supporter snaps at him for constantly berating Indira and argues in her defence questioning, ‘Has the Allahabad bank given me a loan on Jayprakash Babu’s request?’ He is supported by Badrul Hasan who says that ‘Had she not been there, this country would have been ruined by now’. For the masses like Billo and Desh, since this was the government’s agency it could not possibly be false or exaggerated. Moreover Indira was their leader and they could not bite the hand that fed them, she had helped them and they would not be disloyal to her. In Badrul Hasan Nayab’s words, ‘No one save her can remove poverty. And she will remove it’ (112). He even recites his poem dedicated to her titled, ‘The New Sun’:

All this joy, this freshness is because of Indira.
This radiance in the country is because of Indira.
Hindustan’s destiny is like a lover enslaved to her (113)

She was the hope of many people who genuinely believed in her and to be fair to Indira Gandhi it was not without any solid reasons either. She had come in with a lot of promise and her radical politics in her first term, coupled with her being Nehru’s daughter, made the people trust her. The Indira mystique stems as much from the way she was projected as well as her actual performance, and for most people even during and after the Emergency she was not responsible for all that happened. What is all the more poignant is the naive and unyielding faith of the people in their leaders whom they venerated like gods. The leaders are built on the collective strength of these people who are ironically the very ones who get crushed under the power of these leaders.
The novel slowly moves towards the Emergency but does so through the lives of the characters. We are brought face to face with the repressive aspect of the Emergency through the random and life changing effects of the Emergency on some of these characters. Unlike most other novels on the Emergency, save Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, Raza introduces the Emergency in the middle of the novel by introducing the characters and their lives first. This is done quite deliberately with the intention of emphasising life before and after the Emergency, and also to depict the bitterness, the disillusionment and the pain of seeing dreams and beliefs crumble to pieces. It also helps in understanding the change in the political ideologies and perceptions of people post the Emergency, some went to the Congress while some Congress loyalists stood against it after the Emergency. Raza deliberately points out the date 11 June 1975, as life before this date and after was very different for the people of this Katra. On 12 June 1975, Justice Sinha was to pronounce his judgement which was going to shake the whole nation with the disbelief that even the gods could be held guilty. Most people were sure of what the judgement would be since how could anyone hold Indira guilty? The thought was preposterous in itself, still the night of June 11, was a sleepless one for many people as the author describes:

Justice Sinha was awake in his bungalow as this was not his night to sleep. Mrs. Gandhi was awake in No.1 Safdarjung because this was not her night to sleep. Mahatma Gandhi’s memorial, Maulana Azad’s grave, the Sadaqat Ashram cottage, the broad, straight road leading to the Vidhan Sabha, the walls of the Rashtrapati Bhawan – all of them were wide awake as it was not their night to sleep. Slogans were awake on the streets of Patna and the tension in the hearts of the students was wide awake. But the common man was sleeping. Labourers, farmers, small and big shopkeepers, the white collared gentry. Homeopathy and allopathy doctors, hakims and vaids were all sleeping – because everyone knew what the verdict would be. But when morning came, everyone realised that nobody knew anything at all (116).

Everyone had expected that Indira would emerge untarnished from the case as she had been raised way above the common man and other leaders. People like Desh were so sure that Indira would be acquitted that he had told Billo to wear a special sari for going out for dinner to Civil Lines in his car in order to celebrate Mrs. Gandhi’s victory. This belief was shared by many others like him, some on the basis that the courts were ‘the call of justice’ and that justice would acquit her, or others who felt that the courts were institutions that perpetrated injustice. After all, ‘courts always sided with the government or the powers that be’. This was
proved by the long march of history also which showed more injustice than justice, but still things carried on just like they always had. ‘And who has ever questioned history?’(119) So people knew that Indira Gandhi would be acquitted either way, justly or unjustly. But history always has some surprise up its sleeve as was proved by the judgement on 12 June 1975.

Here the authorial voice intervenes directly refusing to speak through a character in the novel. He describes the day of the judgement which though referred to often in non-fiction, has not received much attention in fiction as writers have mostly tended to focus on the Emergency and its dark repressive side consisting of the excesses, than the judgement which prompted Indira to declare the Emergency as a desperate measure for self preservation. Raza describes the atmosphere outside the court as one crackling with tension, and Justice Sinha equally tense as he knew he was about to deliver a verdict that would prove nothing short of a political earthquake which it actually did: ‘He knew while he was writing the verdict that he was not writing the decision of an election petition but a chapter of Indian history ...’ (120). However this was a chapter that Indian history chose to push aside since it clashed with the other more balanced narratives of Indian history. Citing his own opinion on the verdict as well as nature of law, Raza says, ‘I don’t believe that the law actually works in the courts and that decisions are made on the basis of the law. The law might work in cases under the IPC, as one can prove truth or false in such cases. But in cases which involve politics or ideologies or a matter of principle, the law is not deaf or blind. It sprouts eyes. A nose forms. Ears develop. No judge in the world can divorce himself from his personal ideologies, his principles and his politics in such a case. The verdict that Justice Sinha gave was not a legal verdict but a political judgement’ (121).

On the day of the Emergency, the Allahabad Court is described as being packed with people waiting to hear the judgement. But while the common man simply came to see his/her beloved leader heroically acquitted, the others formed a different crowd as ‘This gathering was political. Not the politics of principles. Politics of opportunism. It was not the dreams of these people that were at stake in this kind of politics, but money. Lakhs and lakhs of rupees. Thousands of licenses’ (123). He exposes the lack of ethics in Indian politics, the base of which had been rotten away by corruption. Money was what mattered and not ethics, values and far less the dreams of the people. In that court in Room number 25, when the people got up, ‘Their many licenses, numerous bribes, several conspiracies, the wealth of corruption – all rose with them but no one noticed the lone dream which stood all by itself in one corner of Room number 25, looking at Justice Sinha’ (123). When the verdict was announced,
everyone was stunned by disbelief, but that ‘lone dream started clapping and that single clap sounded as if sixty or sixty-five crore people were clapping’ (124). This was a victory of democracy, of the judiciary as it asserted that even in India the law was above everyone else. But was it really? Would that lone dream have survived the Emergency? Would it have overcome the disillusionment of the next government? Dreams are very precious in India but the sad part is that no one bothers when they break, since they are not of any material value in a system which runs on money and corruption.

As he tries to recreate some sense of that historic day, Raza describes the various reactions of the Congress leaders and officials, from Subhadra Joshi to P.N. Haksar which were either pro resignation or anti resignation. Finally it was Sanjay Gandhi’s firm no to her giving in her resignation which decided the matter. There was an immediate show of solidarity by the Congress party and its other bodies when they heard that she would not resign. After all ‘What was Justice Sinha selling? Who was he to unseat Priyadarshini from her throne? And in a thick blob like mind, the worm of a slogan started to wriggle that Indira is India and India is Indira’ (124). This idea soon became an epidemic and the party people flocked to show their support to Indira or gave speeches like Gaurishankar to show that they backed the government. Raza satirises the hypocrisy and opportunism within the political system, especially the Congress which was by now completely under the family’s command. Such behaviour was expected of politicians but the people were genuinely shaken that Mrs. Gandhi could be held guilty of something too. Raza catches the pulse of the people in his descriptions of their reactions and their feelings. Prema Narayan, the newsreader, breaks down on air when she hears of the verdict. ‘She could not even imagine that Mrs. Gandhi could lose any battle. How could someone who had chucked Morarji like a fly in milk, be defeated by Justice Jagmohan Sinha’. For Prema everything seemed hollow and a lie that day. ‘And now that it had turned out that the Mount Everest was made of cardboard, what was left to believe in ... The Indira Gandhi for whom she had left Asharam had burst like a soap bubble and now Prema Narayan did not know how she would live and with what justification? And what meaning was left in living now?’ (125) For the educated like Prema, Indira was not just a female leader, but an ideal to be followed and revered, and now that she had been proved a mere mortal, a citizen and not a goddess, Prema did not understand how they were to go on in life since the ideal had been broken. There was no one to look up to, no one to follow, how could one live now? For Baburam who lived and breathed the Congress, the verdict was disappointing but he still believed that Nehru’s daughter Priyadarshini would
do the right thing and resign. Asharam mocks him but he remains unfazed in his belief that Indira would resign on principle, Nehru’s daughter would not act in any other way. When she does not, he starts having doubts and sends her a telegram advising her to resign. For him she was still the little girl who had played in his lap and called him ‘Azad Chacha’. Asharam caustically tells him, ‘... our Prime Minister is not Priyadarshini, but Indira Gandhi and she does not recognise anyone save her own self’ (131). But Baburam, though a little taken aback by Indira’s determination to stick to her seat, does not give up his faith in her or the Congress. This faith that Nehru’s daughter would do the right thing had many takers and in the initial period of the Emergency, it was widely believed that Indira did not resign because of the nation rather than her own self. While drinking tea from the Pehalwan’s tea stall which tasted just as good despite the judgement, Asha thought that ‘someone’s winning or losing did not affect the joy of life’ (131). Thoughts that were to prove horribly wrong and ironic as Indira’s loss did affect the happiness of many people directly and indirectly, with Asha as one of them. The judgement was explosive but what followed afterwards was beyond the comprehension of even Indira loyalists like Billo and Desh

‘The Emergency was like a horrible dark night. Mrs. Indira Gandhi was like an eclipse that had darkened the moon of our constitution. But there was no dawn after that night ended. It seems to me as if one night had ended and another begun’ (122). For people like Raza who were not swayed by the populism of Indira Gandhi or the rhetoric of the opposition, things were no different regardless of who was in power. Those who could see through the opportunism of the Janata Party, which was backed by the right wing, there were not going to be any radical changes. If things were dark before the Emergency, they certainly were not going to improve because those who had replaced Indira were equally lacking in scruples and values. Although Raza opposed Indira during the Emergency, yet he did not support Jay Prakash Narayan’s movement either, as in his own words ‘Jayprakash Narayan’s politics was not able to convince me’ (121). Raza was also against the opportunists who had aligned themselves with JP, especially the right wing, which was able to form the government in Delhi. ‘Mrs. Gandhi and her Congress government’s defeat is good news indeed. But the people who have won are no good either. Morarji Bhai became a Minister with Independence itself. Were there no corrupt people during his tenure? When and how many times has he raised a voice against the corrupt?’ (121). What makes Raza’s views on the Emergency so refreshing is that he does not harangue against Indira nor does he glorify the opposition, he denounces the spirit of the judgement, opposes the Emergency and the opportunists who
formed the opposition, but far more important than all these is his sympathy with the people of Katra Mir Bulaki who form his story and who were the ones affected by what all happened at the top levels of the government. They did not know what the legalities of the case were, but they were well aware of their socio-economic condition and believed that Indira alone could solve their problems, and so how could she be indicted?

The residents of Katra Mir Bulaki decide to rename it as ‘Katra Indira Gandhi’ in order to show their solidarity with her. The name is passed accordingly by the corporation and for people like Billo this one act, reaffirming her popularity and the love people had for Indira, nullified any judgement. For people like Desh or Billo, it was difficult to reason out why Indira should give her resignation. The stay meant that she should stay on and they did not want anyone else to become the Prime Minister. Asharam’s repeated attempts at trying to make them understand this is met by a blind wall of loyalty and faith. As he says in exasperation and disgust, 'This woman considers India to be her father’s fiefdom’ (140). This was not too far removed from the truth and moreover people were conditioned to believe that Nehru’s child and his family were above the rest and could take care of India the best. However it was not just Indira but the Congress also which exerted a huge control over the people. For Baburam also, though he loved his grandson, he was ‘not above his Congress under whose flags the struggle against the British had been waged’ (141). For people of his generation, the Congress was synonymous with all the sacrifices and the blood, the principles and values, the hope and the ideal that they had fought for. He could not stand anyone including his own grandson, criticise the Congress which was a part of his life and experience. The Emergency not just destroyed the democratic fabric of the state but, more than that, it caused a heart-breaking disillusionment with the Congress for people like Baburam, who were supporters of the party. The fall of the Congress was like the fall of a goliath and in the pettiest possible manner.

For opportunists like Gaurishankar Pandey, the Emergency was a good opportunity to show support for Indira and come into the notice of the central command. He did so by giving lengthy speeches against JP and Justice Sinha, declaring them to be enemies of the state. He goes to the extent of telling people that Justice Sinha must have been bribed and that it was clear to all that America was involved in all of this. The CIA had masterminded the whole event and that external powers were in collusion with fascist powers at home. The reports of such numerous sycophantic speeches were sent to Indira who saw these and the crowds outside her house and believed that the people were with her. Going by the depiction of the
sentiments and feelings of various people in the novel, one can even state that probably at that point Indira did have the support of the people since she was seen as the victim and had she declared fresh elections, she would have even won. But she declared the Emergency and turned herself from victim into oppressor.

The media had an important role to play in all of this as the people were under the belief that they were reading the truth since they thought that the news bodies were impartial as they belonged to the government and why would the government state anything other than the truth? The people are told that things had improved and they believed it to be so, but when there begin to arise discrepancies between reality and the news, people start doubting the truth that had been created for them. This leads to an even greater terror as till now the people were under the belief that the Emergency was temporary and fair, but with this realisation, other fears start arising which are portrayed through Raza’a poem in the novel

Emergency.
Where is the light?
None in the heart
None in the hearth
None on this way
None
Where is the light?
Where is the light?

My own self appears blurred to me
Where is the light?
I am becoming my own shadow
Where is the light?
The past is not visible
And there is no sign of the future
From here to there
It is all a matter of darkness
Darkness
Which is totally different from the darkness of before
The poem voices a certain helplessness, a need for some sort of hope, for a rescue from this sense of despair which seems all enveloping and heavy. It is brief, maybe just a moment but it is intense enough to weigh like the burden of a century. ‘Nothing seemed clear. Vidhan Sabha, High Court, Supreme Court. Gandhiji’s memorial, Maulana Azad’s grave, Tilak and Gokhale’s statue, University, Press ... everything that could protest was covered by a thick layer of darkness ... but this darkness was also strange. Many intellectuals could not see either in this darkness’. Time hangs heavy in this darkness where it is difficult to see one’s own self, as everything is distorted, it changes shape in this strange darkness. Initially people mistook this darkness to be the precursor of light. They felt that because they could no longer see anything, the problems had disappeared. They were taken in by the deceptive nature of this darkness which was not benign but malignant and repressive. This darkness could make even those who had not bowed before the British, now bend before Mrs. Gandhi and those who refused to toe the line had to pass through difficult times. ‘Our country about which Jehangir had said that paradise was this, was a ruin now, covered by chopped off heads and tongues like garbage and on this arose a creature called Sanjay Gandhi’ (153).

The conspiracy to overthrow the government which was supposedly hatching in Katra Bi Arzoo becomes a possible launch pad for the career of many officers and ministers in UP and the centre. Everybody wanted to please Indira Gandhi and Sanjay Gandhi and so tried to expose the conspiracy single handedly. The Emergency was a good time to prove loyalties and get rewarded for doing so. So while the police force swings into action and each officer tries to outdo the other, ministers try to show their loyalties by not just supervising the expose of the conspiracy but also by stepping up sterilization in the state.

The Emergency also saw the rise of local leaders such as Mehnaaz who started commanding sudden power through their association with the Youth Congress. ‘Mehnaaz had become a “social worker” and worked actively for the Youth Congress. Not only had she learnt all the arguments in favour of sterilisation but she had also started visiting women’s quarters to persuade them to go in for tubectomy. She had even started carrying a pack of condoms with her and was putting up posters for sterilization all over the neighbourhood, which embarrassed not just the women but the men also in Katra Mir Bulaki. There had been a huge scandal when she had lifted the veil from her face and donned a sari, but when it came to be known that she was going to receive Rs.250 a month as her salary, everyone agreed that the veil was not really necessary after all’ (117). Money was important and more so when one did not have it, so it did not take too much thinking to push aside tradition or religion where
money was concerned sometimes. Her efforts at sterilization are personally lauded by Sanjay and Mehnaaz becomes an overnight star and a force to reckon with in the area. She not only symbolises how power can distort a person but also the misuse of power by people who have never had it and do not know how to handle it. She uses her influence to get her way and for personal benefit, but also abuses her position against people who did not follow her orders. Her position is further abused by her husband who tried to make sexual advances at women including Prema by using his wife’s authority as a threat as Mehnaaz wielded enough power to have anyone arrested under MISA. The rise of people like Mehnaaz who had no official position in the government and their abuse of official powers was probably the worst feature of the Emergency. This is not just an exaggeration but an actual fact which has been reported by many accounts. The power wielded by such people is probably even more dangerous as they are highly unpredictable and exercise such enormous power on the whims of their ego without any sense of responsibility. The state also invited the ‘common man’ such as Desh, Billo, Shamsu Miyan and the Pehalwan to voice their support on AIR so as to show people that there was no falsehood about the Emergency and that it was actually for the benefit of the people. The four go there and it is there that Desh talks about his friend Asharam who was against the Emergency. Khursheed Alam who was already on the look out for tips regarding Asharam, who had left the city by now fearing that his life was in danger, picks this up. While Prem, his ex girlfriend and the AIR announcer is questioned, Desh is picked up by the police from the radio station itself without his knowing why, despite his statements on air that he was very pleased with the Emergency and that it had benefited millions of poor people ‘like him. Billo remains unaware that her husband had been picked up by the police for enquiring about Asharam and his ‘conspiracy’ against Mrs. Gandhi. She innocently and naively tells Prema on air that the Emergency was a wonderful thing. ‘Ever since Indiraji has imposed the Emergency, the nation has progressed a lot. The policemen have started paying for their laundry. There is a fall in the price of gold and sugar. I just pray to god that he gives Mrs. Gandhi a long life so that she may keep the Emergency in force’ (180).

Life changes drastically after this one day for all the characters concerned. Desh is tortured by the police in the most inhuman way imaginable in order to draw Asharam’s whereabouts from him. Desh tries hard to convince them that he was supportive of the Emergency and had tried to make Asharam also see his point of view. His fateful meeting with Asha in Tandon Park which had been noted by Jagdamba Prasad becomes the main point on which the police latch on and make him a co-conspirator of the ‘conspiracy’. Desh
refuses to divulge the information since he could not live with the knowledge that he had betrayed a friend. Khursheed and his sidekick, Jagdamba Prasad, beat him till the point where they become bored. Finally when Desh is nearly dead and thirsty to the point of delirium he tries to make his way to a glass of water in the room. Since his body is broken he tries to walk on all fours and as he does so his life starts going through his mind in a sequence, when he nears the glass, the policemen pick it up and make him come after the glass like a game, only the game was a man’s thirst, a man who had been reduced to the point where only the water existed for him and nothing else, not even his once proud self. When Jagdamba Prasad gets bored with the game he picks up a few peacock feathers from a bundle of such feathers lying in a corner and thrusts a few such feathers up Desh’s arse. ‘All three policemen started laughing loudly to the laughter and the feathers stuck in his arse and the pain in his body kept walking on all fours in that room of pain and humiliation for that glass of water’ (192). When he finally got to the glass of water, he could not drink it still as a firm hand kept it from him, ‘Where is Asharam?’, came the question again and as Desh’s mind went into a blurr, ‘Asharam? Asharam who? Desh started asking his own self and instantly something snapped in his mind and with it his thirst also finished. He looked at Khursheed Alam Khan, Jagdamba Prasad and the two nameless constables and shouted, “Say three cheers for Shrimati Indira Gandhi, three cheers for Indira Gandhi ...”’. There was no sound that came from his parched lips but he smiled at the police and started walking in all fours repeating ‘three cheers for Indira Gandhi ...’. This scares the police who decide that he was of no more use and after some medical aid, Desh is dumped like a bundle in the colony. The once proud, confident young hero of the novel is rendered a cripple, mentally as well as physically by the ruthless power of the state which is shown to be stupid and blind to all reason and logic save for its own personal benefit. Even his basic dignity as a man, as a human being, is stripped and discarded by the police in that room leaving him with nothing at all with which to go back to his life except for a parrot like chant of ‘Long Live Indira Gandhi’ and a ‘strange smile’. This smile was ‘a smile like an empty whisky bottle. The smile of a meaningless poem. The smile of promises made for the government. A smile like paper-flowers. A smile which had no colour, no shape and no meaning’ (210). It was a terrifying smile which symbolised the terror of the state and the Emergency, and a smile which spoke of the death of a man and his dreams and desires.

While Desh, simple and naive, tragically sacrifices his own life for his friend, Asharam, on the other hand escapes to Calcutta for fear of getting arrested and going through
torture. His political ideals were not strong enough to help him combat the pain of torture and even in Calcutta he spends every moment in the dread of being arrested any minute. Finally when he is no longer able to bear it he gets himself arrested under an alias and spends his time in jail without any worries. This continues till he finds out that a man’s fake identity in jail had been exposed and he is once again taken over by the panic of torture. He finally goes and confesses everything to the jailor and since this was a huge case by now, he willingly becomes an approver of the Emergency. The once radical and vehement critic of the Emergency and the Congress, the future of the Left, unable to bear bodily pain, becomes a supporter of the Emergency and is even given a ticket from the Congress for the forthcoming elections. Prema, the once Indira fan, is thoroughly disillusioned since she is able to observe up close how the government was using the media for its self-glorification and propaganda by obscuring the truth. When Baburam tells her that probably no one was telling Priyadarshini about what was happening she says, ‘who will tell her Dadaji? The tongues of the newspapers and magazines have been cut off. The All India Radio is Number One Safdarjung Radio. It’s now Sanjay Gandhi radio ...’ (204). She is saddened by Asharam’s approval of the Emergency and wonders whether it was the fear of torture or torture itself which had brought about this change. Talking to Baburam about this sudden change in Asha she explains how even though she was a Congress follower and had separated from Asha because of this, it was difficult for her to accept this change, ‘He says the Emergency is good. Sanjay Gandhi is an avatar. There is still a wall between us. But now I have gone on the other side of the wall and he has come on this side. The wall is still in its place’ (205).

However while Desh’s useless sacrifice and Asharam’s volte-face create a sense of shock in the reader, Master Badrul’s forced sterilization and Prema’s rape by Jokhan, Mehnaaz’s husband and his driver, furthers the darkness which had by now taken over the simple life of the people in Katra Indira Gandhi. As a member of a wedding party on its way to Panipat, Master Badrul is sterilized along with all the other people of the party including the groom. The poem ‘Sterilization of Islam’ which he had been humming to himself for reciting in a poetry meeting, dies on his lips as he comes face to face with the violation of his most private space and freedom for which he is given Rs.30 as reward by the state. It was a small matter for the state which was concerned with numbers but had far-reaching impact on the life of people like Badrul who in this ignominy even tries to cancel his wedding with Shehnaaz. She however stands by him and marries him. And as a way of getting back, gives those very currency notes back to the Congress as party fund.
The government had banned the collective presence of five dreams - employment, peace, courage, leisure and freedom. The dreams that people like Billo and Desh had were rudely destroyed by the government and they did not even know why. They were with the state and had even voiced their support for Mrs. Gandhi and the Emergency. Then how could they suffer? The tragedy of the Emergency was that it was people like these who suffered and had to pay a heavy price for their disillusionment. Billo unknowingly states the absurdity of the whole situation regarding the conspiracy when she says that ‘He [Asharam] was against the government for sure but does the government have some sort of seat and is it kept just anywhere that anyone who wishes to can unseat it? Where is Delhi and where is Katra Mir Bulaki. How can anyone overturn the seat in Delhi while sitting here? Is the government’s seat here in Allahabad?’ (219) This absurdity of the whole situation was not visible to the police and the intelligence who simply wanted to catch hold of the conspirators and get rewarded by the government and in the process ruin the life of some people if they had to.

Prema Narayan too falls into the clutches of the police when she witnesses Desh’s condition and blurts the truth on AIR. She is not just dismissed for doing so, but is also raped by Jokhan who was riding on the power that the Emergency had given people like him, this was not power based on any source of authority, rather this was power which grew by propagating fear and terror amongst the people regarding the unknown horror of what would happen if they offended those in power or people like Jokhan. She is also taken under MISA, as her outburst becomes a crime against the state and she is tortured and raped repeatedly by Jagdamba Prasad. When she becomes a hollow shell, she is thrown into a jail where we are shown another hell. She is packed into a ward bursting with women and is raped again by a lesbian convict who forces Prema to become her lover. The tragedy of the people keeps on multiplying. After her release Prema works against Asharam and tells people about Desh, Billo and her own story. While people like Prema had turned against the government regardless of the consequences, people like Asharam had preferred to save their own skin at the expense of principles simply because it was the easier option. Even Baburam, thoroughly disillusioned by the Emergency and the Congress, turns against his grandson who had ironically fulfilled his wishes and become a fourth generation Congressman. Baburam casts his vote against his grandson and after casting this vote, he ‘felt a weariness, which he had not felt even during the freedom-struggle. He came out of the polling booth. And he felt as if he had come out of jail’. (243). This was Baburam’s liberation from the Congress stranglehold which had kept him there blinding him to the reality outside.
During this time the victims are also made to face the demolition drive, as Gaurishankar Pandey, the Congress leader from Katra Mir, finally gets his way and sets about widening the road leading to his house. Gaurishankar Pandey had been successful in getting the lane next to his house named after his corrupt father Pandit Shivshankar Pandey, and wanted to have the lane broadened so as to be able to invite top leaders to his house during the coming elections. However this involved the demolition of shanty dwellings on both sides of the lane, as his plan was to have a fancy market in their stead along with lovely bungalows with small gardens (41). He is unable to materialise this plan earlier since people would have objected and since elections were around the corner, he did not want any sort of trouble there either. The Emergency provides him with a valid reason for calling for the demolition of the houses as he wanted to invite Sanjay Gandhi to his house and the demolition drives were rampant during the Emergency. This marks Billo’s tragedy as everything in her life had till now revolved around her home and husband, both of which were taken away from her one after the other. Billo who had given up her laundry and Desh’s workshop now has to let go of her house also as it was also one of the houses which needed to be demolished for widening the road. While we witness Desh’s physical and mental degradation into a pathetic wreck, Billo’s defeat is even more painful as we see the feisty, razor-tongued, no nonsense, firebrand turn into a helpless, powerless woman caught up in too many problems and burdened with an infant and an insane husband. Even during this dark phase of her life she does not give up her faith in Indira Gandhi and would often try to exhort Desh to remember what happened and write to Indira. When she goes to check her new allotted house in Sanjaynagar, her despair and darkness grows even further as she sees the desolation that had been allotted to her as her house. The house which she and Desh had dreamt of since childhood and scrimped and saved every penny for, was a house which was built on the foundations of their dreams and desires. But now everything had changed in her house and her life save the fixed smile on Indira Gandhi’s face on the calendar which had been hung among the gods. Losing that space, that life, for a nightmare breaks Billo and she sends Desh away with her uncle, the Pehalwan for some days. On the day of the demolition, she stands her ground and refuses to leave her house, and is crushed under the bulldozer with her baby in her arms. The irony of the situation is that at the very minute that she is crushed, the AIR plays her long ago recorded praise of the Emergency. Nobody cared about the tragedy as she was simply one more life amongst the many others. The news of her death is played down as were most such news which confounded matters even more as those on site had seen her die, but the official sources denied any such death, and the news could not be wrong. So what was the truth?
Finally, the elections are announced, but even though the opposition gears up against Indira, people were confident that Indira would win, no matter what the opposition might do. It is only when Jagjivan Ram defects that people start having doubts about Indira’s invincibility. In the Katra, the opportunist Gaurishankar Pandey joins the Janata Party and Asha fights for the Congress against him from that constituency. The Janata Party wins and brings a new hope for people. ‘The wall of silence of those nineteen months was finally crumbling. The necks bowed for nineteen months were finally straightening up.’ Somewhere in this new order a lone individual who had been rendered a cipher by the state too rejoices, unaware of what was really happening. Desh dances along with the crowd celebrating the victory but as he tries to clap, he lets go of his balancing crutches and before anyone could realise it, was crushed under the tyres of the truck carrying the procession celebrating the new government. The fate of the common man as symbolised by Desh is to be crushed under the wheels of those in power, regardless of whether it is the Congress or the Janata Party.

Raza’s novel is tragic and sarcastic. It is dark no doubt and leaves the reader with a sense of closure as there are no happily-ever-afters in the lives of his characters. The Emergency is pervasive and final for characters such as Desh, Billo and Prema. But even more than the Emergency and the hundreds of evils that bred of it, he highlights the changes in political attitude that took place prior to and after the Emergency, especially so with respect to Indira Gandhi and the Congress party both of whom were looked upon as monoliths which formed the base of India. The disillusionment and betrayal that people felt after the Emergency from both is probably one of the most important but least discussed aspects of the event. Raza’s novel is especially important as it captures this sense of betrayal and despair along with the pulse of the people, their lives and their dreams. Moreover his balanced perspective of the Emergency, which denounces the system as a whole in a very restrained manner, offers us a much better insight into the event than novels which take up a very aggressive and shrill stand against the Emergency and the dominant faces of the time.