CHAPTER-III

EMERGENCY AND ITS AFTERMATH
In this chapter, the stress is on the one and only unique political phenomenon that has left quite an indelible mark in Indira’s political career and in Indian politics i.e., the Emergency. Today, more than thirty five years later, the internal Emergency remains a dark interregnum in the history of independent India. Far from being relegated to the dustbin of history, its specter continues to haunt many political leaders, while defying the comprehension of large segments of academics, bureaucrats and the general public. Paradoxically, however, the Emergency marks a unique moment in the political history of Independent India - a time when the Left and the Right came together with the Socialists across opposing ideological spectrum. Perhaps, their cohabitation in jail helped consolidate the unlikely alliance between the Left and the Right and the Right and the Muslims. As recalled by RSS functionary Chandrasekhar Bhandari, "The Emergency was against democracy. We had to fight it. Though there were political differences with many sections, the Emergency provided a ground to come together. RSS workers stood as guarantee for Muslim prisoners who went on parole. We even provided maintenance for their families because they suffered as much as Hindu families did. We organized blood donation camps. Human relationships are different. We do not oppose a Muslim just because he or she is a Muslim. The fight was against the Government and for democracy. There was good will about the RSS then.  

The Background: From the early seventies, the intensity of struggle increased between forces supporting status quo and forces of change. Mrs. Gandhi represented the change that people desired to see in the Indian political system. Indian politics, therefore, witnessed the electoral expression of discontent and disapproval with greater intensity in 1977 (anti-emergency) and in 1980 (against the Janata Party’s rule), when respective governments failed to deliver the goods the people desired and aspired for. Initially, Mrs. Gandhi through systematic and strategic steps of projecting herself as the savior of the down trodden and the ideal of the unprivileged was able to establish herself amidst masses, industrial classes and urban population. But radical structural changes which were conceived by her were not effectively implemented because of the feeling of insecurity amongst the vested interests and that proved a great hindrance for the development of the country. The use of modern communication and mass media evoked a feeling of loyalty and gratitude among the general public towards Mrs. Gandhi but lack of performance of her government as visualized by her, gave way to pessimism and
cynicism among the masses which further led to wave of agitations, discontent and direct action that changed the entire political scenario. The result was that Mrs. Gandhi had to use authoritarian techniques to manage the crisis which found expression in Emergency. “There existed an all encompassing anti-congressism and its support base was shaken”.  

However, the phase too demonstrated the incapacity and inability of the opposition parties to act in unison and provide a viable alternative that could channelize the new awareness at lower levels of society, pose a challenge to the then political dispensation and provide an alternative paradigm of government.

**The Strain in the Seventies and the Setting up of the Stage for Emergency**

Before the evocation of emergency, the democratic Indian polity had to confront critical issues like the political opportunism, inflation, black marketing, foreign debt and gherao tactics and the country was engulfed and besieged by their accompanying problems. In a nationwide broadcast on December 27, 1970, Indira Gandhi announced that she had dissolved Parliament and ordered new election. She told the nation that she was calling the elections a year earlier than scheduled. Indira described the move as showing of her government’s concern with “not merely remaining in power” but with using that power to “ensure a better life to the vast majority of our people”. It was the first time since independence that Parliament had been dissolved before serving its full term. Indira’s Congress party won a landslide victory in the ensuing elections, gaining 350 of Parliament’s 521 seats, two more than a two-third majority. The grand Alliance’ of Congress (O), Jana Sangh and Socialist Party was totally routed. They could get only 49 seats. The remaining went to the CPI, CPI (M) and others who were sympathetic to Indira’s policies. The way was now clear for Indira Gandhi for implementing her socialistic programmes.

**The Strain in the Seventies**

Then what could be the reason that put strain on the system in the seventies despite the intention of national leadership to relate promises of economic reform to party’s capacity of implementation. One of the reasons was the war with Pakistan which was the result of President Yahya Khan’s, the Pakistani ruler’s inhuman deeds in neighboring Bangladesh, the other being the pressures exerted by short-run calculations of maintaining political power. All these worked in the opposite direction. Mrs. Gandhi was caught up in the complex set of compulsions. She had to maintain personal credibility as a committed socialist against the charges of political opportunism, and on the other hand neutralize potent rivals, the extreme left (naxalites), the CPI
(M) and contain other opponents. As promised, the radical and social changes were to be ushered in without revolutionary costs of large scale violence. Since promises exceeded the ability to work within democratic framework, the inflation of radical rhetoric resulted in increased expectations and demands. This dilemma gained ground since the Prime Minister was unable to solve the contradiction between long term risks and short term benefits. Thereby she adopted an ad hoc approach\(^5\) that consolidated her position and suited the aspirations of party, the support base and of course, the leaders. The utter failure of the government to cope with the country’s economic ills resulted in widespread unrest. Student riots broke out in Bihar, which has a history of backwardness. One student was shot dead. To protest the police action, a number of students burned railway stations, stormed police outposts and stoned policemen in various parts of Bihar state. Similarly, riots occurred in five other states-Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Orissa, Gujarat and Rajasthan. Characteristically, the then Congress President, Sankar Dayal Sharma, accused the CIA of fermenting trouble in India to make a cleavage between India and Bangladesh. Sensing the danger of a mass upsurge against her government, Indira Gandhi decided at a meeting of the Congress party on October 9-11, 1972 to impose greater government control on the economy to cope with increasing prices, growing unemployment and scarcity of essential commodities and ameliorate the suffering of the common man. The AICC approved two resolutions to deal with the problem. One called for the takeover of wholesale trade in the food grains and strict government control over the distribution of essential goods. The second resolution would give the government a dominant role in “core sector” industries, limiting the role of private entrepreneurs. Under the plan, the government would establish publicly-owned plants to produce more steel, chemicals, cement and oil. Plans were also formulated to provide employment to five million educated but unemployed and for the additional 20 million unemployed in rural areas. These plans, however, remained unimplemented. The unrest spread to more and more areas. On Gandhi Jayanthi day, Mrs. Gandhi blamed CIA for India’s civil disturbances. She did not specify what the CIA was doing in the country, but alerted party men against the Agency’s role.

The Government of India’s annual economic survey submitted to Parliament on February 22, 1973, said the 1972-73 fiscal year was a “very difficult year” as a result of decline in food production, an increase in prices and an “unsatisfactory” growth of national income. The wholesale prices in 1972 had risen 7.8 per cent over the previous year’s level, with the boosts particularly high for sugar and food grains. Although national income had gone up to 4.6 per cent
in 1970-71, it showed only a 1.5 per cent to 2 per cent rise in 1971-72. The opposition parties barring CPI boycotted Parliament session to show their displeasure with the government’s handling of the problem of food shortage, price rises and unemployment. Added to the problem was the severe drought that gripped Central and Western India. Riots over shortage of food and yarn erupted on April 18, 1973 in Nagpur. Shops selling grain, clothing, wine and groceries were looted by stone–throwing demonstrators. Yet, the government informed the UN disaster relief office in Geneva that in spite of severe drought in Maharashtra there was no food crisis in the state and that it did not need outside help.

Indira Gandhi described the worsening economic situation as a “passing phase” and joined issue with her critics who sought to make the government deviate from the “path of socialism”. Soaring inflation had increased the price of food by 25 per cent and the country was further beset by food shortages and rising unemployment. Food riots broke out in Bombay and other parts of the country. In Tamil Nadu, more than 8,000 persons were arrested in an unsuccessful attempt to smash plans for a general strike. Troops were called out in Karnataka and Manipur states after widespread violence. A trade union strike protesting the government’s failure on the economic front paralysed the capital on November 6. The protesters, some of them turned violent, called attention to the sudden sharp price increases on such basic items as rice, kerosene and transportation. The protests were heightened by the government’s decision, the previous weekend, to boost drastically the cost of gasoline and kerosene as a result of the Arab oil cut off in connection with the West Asian crisis. The strike caused closing of shops, banks, restaurants, theatres and schools, transportation workers, doctors and civil servants stayed away from their jobs. The government, which had denied any condition of famine in the country, sought and got two million tons of grain from Russia as loan. Brezhnev described the loan as a gesture of friendly Soviet-Indian relations.

The opposition called upon Indira Gandhi to resign if she was not able to curb the rising prices. The government had increased the price of gasoline by more than 80 per cent. Saudi Arabia reduced the supply of crude oil to India by 10 per cent. The opposition questioned the wisdom of the government’s continued support to the Arab cause. Atal Bihari Vajpayee asserted that by rushing to hold Israel responsible for the present war (October 1973) Indian government had destroyed the little possibility there was for the play of constructive diplomacy. Indira, however, rejected the charge of hasty conclusion in foreign affairs.
committee ended a two-day conference in New Delhi on April 28, 1974 with a resolution that warned that a “grave economic situation” in the country was being transformed into a “grave political one”. It urged party workers to close their ranks and stand by Indira Gandhi. The statement was in reference to the violence and political turmoil in Bihar, where student demonstrators pledged to continue their struggle against state government. The CWC resolution blamed “Right reaction, fascist elements and vested interests” for creating the unrest to discredit the Congress party. The resolution named RSS and Anand Marga as the instigators of the violence. But, younger members led by Chandrasekhar criticized the leadership charging it with “trying to find scapegoats” for its own failure.

The railway workers launched a nationwide strike on May 8, 1974 to back up demands for doubling their wages, a bonus, shorter working hours, cheaper food rations and reinstatement of union employees dismissed for union activities. Rejecting the demand the government sought to crush the strike with brutal force. Socialist leader George Fernandez was arrested from the negotiation table. An estimated 50,000 were thrown into jails in what was described as “an onslaught against Indian working class”. The government refused to negotiate the wage demand until the strike was ended. The strikers had to surrender ultimately before the might of an oppressive government. The collapse of the strike was a major victory for Indira Gandhi. In fact, the successful explosion of a nuclear device by Indian scientists on May 18, 1974 had taken the wind out of the strikers sail. India’s coming of age as a nuclear power had been credited to the “dynamism” of Indira Gandhi. Even her critics had expressed pride at this marvelous scientific feat. No sooner the euphoria over the N-blast died down than the economic problems had caught the nation’s attention. Indira Gandhi announced a series of decrees on July 6, 1974 to combat India’s rising inflation. One edict limited the distribution of dividends to 12 per cent of the share value, or one third of the total profits. The announcement resulted in a sharp drop in stock prices and led to the closing of stock markets throughout the country. The government also impounded 50 per cent of the cost of living allowances to wage earners and curbed company profits. This was called the Compulsory Deposit Scheme. Labor and political leaders denounced the government measure. They charged that the government had favored big businessmen in return for contribution to the ruling party and had used “semi-fascist” methods in putting down strike and demonstrations. Top Congressmen soon sat in a conclave at Narora and accused Indira of
mishandling the economy. A resolution adopted by the meeting contained a 10-point programme to combat inflation, and rejuvenate the economy.

The Narora programme provided for drastic cuts in governmental spending, stricter enforcement of internal revenue measures, higher industrial and agriculture production and proper distribution of essential consumer goods at reasonable prices. Soon there was a crack down on smugglers, hoarders, black marketers and tax evaders. As the severity of the income tax raids had its echo in Delhi, the Congress party bosses for the first time felt that their coffers were running out of funds, for most of the contributions to the party had been accounted for donations from elements that have enough ill-gotten wealth. Indira put a stop to these raids and sacked Minister K.R. Ganesh who was in charge of the anti-tax-evaders operation. The 10-point programme soon vanished in the thick of power politics.

On the food front, the situation was getting precarious following a poor harvest during 1974 season. Domestic farmers could bring only 2.9 million tons of wheat to market after the Rabi season compared with 4.3 million for the same period in 1973. The shortfall had to be met with imports of another 1.8 million tons of food grains. Food Minister Subramaniam admitted in Parliament that the government was having difficulty distributing wheat to the cities. The system under which the government purchased food for distribution through fair price shops in cities was a total failure because of inflation shifting policies, hoarding, corruption, and the failure of state government to deal effectively with farmers. The situation was further aggravated by floods in seven states, particularly Bihar, where huge quantities of crops were destroyed. Tragically, a prolonged drought in some other parts and severe power shortages had intensified the food crisis, with the central government seeking to import additional quantities to end hoarding, to stave off the spread of starvation in the northern and central sections of the country. The crisis was aggravated by hunger and violence in UP, West Bengal and Rajasthan. Reports of deaths due to hunger and malnutrition had started pouring in. An estimate said about 15 million people in rural Bengal were either starving or living on one meal.

A general strike in Bihar on October 5, 1974 protesting rising prices and food shortages resulted in clashes between police and demonstrators leaving 12 dead. In New Delhi, on the same day, a crowd of 50,000 attempted to march on to the residence of the Prime Minister. The march was generally peaceful. But Bihar was boiling up. On November 4, Jayaprakash Narayan led thousands of student demonstrators in Patna to demand the dissolution of the state
government on the ground of corruption. Police used brutal force to disperse the marchers. JP himself was struck by a police man’s lathi. As anti-government demonstrations in sympathy with the Bihar movement spread to other parts of the country, Indira met JP to find a solution to the national crisis. The Indira –JP talks had ended in deadlock as JP rejected the Prime Minister’s request that he call off the movement and she would look into his demands.

The assassination of Railway Minister, Lalit Narayan Mishra on January 3, 1975, was used as a pretext by Indira to crack down on JP’s campaign. Mishra, 52, and 23 others persons were wounded by a bomb explosion at Samastipur in Bihar on January 2. He died in hospital the next day. The Prime Minister declared that “the forces of disruption which have spread hatred and indirectly encouraged violence” were responsible for Mishra’s death. The Congress party in a resolution had condemned the incident and described Mishra a martyr, “the first victim of the fascist forces” being unleashed by JP’s movement.

Indira said she, not Mishra, was the “real target” of the assassins. She discounted rumors that the government might have decided to kill Mishra because he had become an embarrassment to her regime as results of his involvement in the Pondicherry license scandal. It was alleged that Mishra, as Foreign Trade Minister in 1972, had arranged for a forged petition in the name of 21 Congress members of Parliament for issue of import licenses to certain previously blacklisted firms in return for a large fee. A subsequent Central Bureau of Investigation probe accused Congress MP Tul Mohan Ram and an accomplice of forging signatures of 20 others, leading the government to issue to the firms permit for the import of scarce luxury items. No formal charges were filed against Mishra who denied involvement in the case.

JP had disclaimed the responsibility for Mishra’s death and warned the government against using it a cover to suppress the people’s movement. The victory of Sharad Yadav in Jabalpur Parliament by-election had a demoralizing effect on Congress party. Yadav was sponsored by the opposition parties which were backing the JP movement. Both JP and Indira had considered the election a prestige issue. Yadav’s victory silenced JP’s critics who used to say that his movement lacked popular support. On March 6, 1975; JP led a people’s march on Parliament. Over ten lakh persons joined the march which presented a charter of demands, described as the people’s Magna Carta to the Speaker of Lok Sabha. Addressing the huge gathering at New Delhi’s Boat Club lawns JP said “There are corruption all around and also mismanagement, poverty and illiteracy.” He pledged a nationwide month-long agitation to
press demand for the ouster of corrupt ministers, and overhaul in the education system and an austerity programme. The demands also included lifting of the external emergency proclaimed in 1971 in the wake of war with Pakistan, political and economic reforms and new election in Bihar. The government rejected all these demands. The people’s march however, had its reverberation in the ruling party. A group of Congressmen led by Chandra Sekhar counseled Indira against a confrontation with JP. Mohan Dharia, Works and Housing Minister in her cabinet, publicly urged her to open contacts with JP. Dharia said his suggestion was unavoidable because “I am saying what people want and that is a dialogue with opposition”. Indira replied to his suggestion by summarily dismissing him from the cabinet. In an address to Parliament, Dharia had said the country faced “chaos and anarchy” unless the Congress party took steps to cope with its “unprecedented economic, social and political crisis, the country was going to face problems of Himalayan proportions “.

Mrs. Indira Gandhi was not inclined to read the shift in mass perception. The economic crisis of 1974 resulted in gheraos and strikes. Birlas and Tatas spoke openly about anarchy and chaos enveloping the country. The wave of strikes however continued and on 7th May 1974, the railway strike began which provoked the central leadership to stop the enhancing and perennial problem of strikes. All the unions in railways were involved except those affiliated to the INTUC, George Fernandez, the railway workers leader was arrested. Conditions had been deteriorating rapidly. From early 1974, it was evident that the country was heading towards a major disaster. For weeks and months, schools and Universities remained closed. Strikes and Lock-outs crippled large sections of the industry. Smuggling and black-marketing became rampant.

The state elections and by-election indicated the volatility of the electorate. The Congress lost seats in several states including in strongholds such as Gujarat. Agitation against authority was organized by students in Gujarat. They succeeded in bringing the State Government to its knees. Jaya Prakash Narayan, the popular leader in Bihar pounced upon the idea and organized similar movements in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra. The ultimate in the defiance of law and order, was his exhortation to a “Total Revolution”, which sanctioned gheraos of democratically elected legislators to prevent them from attending to Legislative Assemblies and the Parliament. He admitted this was “unconstitutional but not undemocratic”. It was both. At one point he was so carried away by
his idealistic theory that he said that when the administration was bad, even the police and army should rebel. Some of the leaders of the Opposition Parties were delighted at the prospect of toppling the government in some States. The students were encouraged by these leaders to rebel against authority and indulge in violence. The leaders incited the army also to rebel against the Central Government because the Allahabad High Court had found fault with the election of Indira Gandhi. Mrs. Gandhi felt that if this tendency was left unchecked it would make the country ungovernable and ruin the country. Soon Jaiprakash Narain harnessed the mass opposition and gave it a new direction. He advocated a voluntary federation of village republics based on Sarvodaya. The total revolution favored price reduction, and decrease in levels of corruption. The peaceful nuclear experiment in 1974 was a success, thus the endeavor in the fields of technology and foreign policy added to some extent credit to Mrs. Gandhi’s leadership. The J.P.Movement had gained momentum. With the support of opposition, he demanded replacement of the Congress Government.  

The Allahabad High Court, during the same period (June 12, 1975), stunned the country by its judgment on Raj Narain’s petition against Mrs. Gandhi. She had defeated him by a margin of one lakh votes in the parliamentary elections. The High Court found her guilty of electoral malpractice. Justice Jag Mohan Lal Sinha not only set aside her election from Rae Bareli in 1971 but also debarred her from elective office for a period of 6 years. The offence was the use of government transport and personnel during election campaign. J.P. escalated his verbal onslaughts challenging Congress on every issue like poverty, corruption etc. However, the Cabinet Ministers, Congress C.M’s and M.P’s joined the chorus of their support and they were quite anxious to display their loyalty. The main concern was to preserve their own positions in the Indira built power structure the whole of which they feared might collapse, if she was out of office even temporarily.  

Mrs. Gandhi’s faith in her indispensability was never shaken. She told Morales, one of her biographers “no option but to stay in office because the country was in peril both because of internal and external enemies and there was no one else who could cope up with such a grave threat. To add to her strength, was the other person, an eminent constitutional lawyer of India, Nani Palkhiwala who was also a top executive in the country’s largest industrial conglomerate, the Tata’s. He fought Mrs. Indira Gandhi’s case in the Supreme Court. The verdict given by
V.R. Krishna Iyer, the Supreme Court’s Vacation Judge was that she could stay in office and speak in Parliament but until the appeal was decided, she could not vote. This was only a conditional stay of the Allahabad High Court verdict. Mrs. Gandhi was placed in quite an awkward position. Her legal claim to stay in office would have been strengthened if the Supreme Court would have given her an unconditional stay on Allahabad High Court’s Judgment, but the judgment was against her expectation.

**The Proclamation of Internal Emergency and the Repercussion**

The judgment of the Supreme Court made the opposition quite jubilant. But Mrs. Gandhi thought of handling the issues diligently with the help of her totally trusted advisers and aides. When Mrs. Gandhi and her advisers came to a conclusion that the situation was fast spinning out of control and the country was fast becoming ungovernable, she came to a conclusion that the panacea for all the then existing evils was the imposition of Emergency. She acted with great courage and advised the President of India at eleven in the night on 25th June 1975 and convinced the President of India to the resolution of imposing a State of Emergency.

Francine Frankel, in this context brings forth the paradox of accommodative politics and radical social change that existed in India then. The imposition of emergency was justified by Mrs. Gandhi when she assertively argued that economic reforms were essential for growth and social justice, which were impossible to be carried out within the limitation of existing democratic process. This was quite contrary to the statements she usually made regarding democracy. One such example is democracy is valuable for us because far more than any other system, it facilitates involvement of all sections of people and gives inner strength.” 14 Frankel rightly remarks “traumatic experience of National Emergency raised once again, a fundamental paradox of political economy” 15

Mr. Farkuddin Ali Ahmed proclaimed a State of Emergency throughout the country on 26th June 1975. Under Article 352 of the constitution, “If the President is satisfied that a grave emergency exists whereby the security of India thereof is threatened whether by war or external aggression or internal disturbance, he may by proclamation make a declaration to that effect”. Clause 3 reads that such an emergency” may be made before actual occurrence of war or any such aggression or disturbance if the President is satisfied that there is imminent danger thereof. 16 On 26th June 1975, the President issued an ordinance. It forbade the courts from intervening in questions relating to the Emergency. Censorship on the press was also tightened. On the day the
proclamation of Emergency was made, Jaya Prakash Narayana along with all the leaders of the
Opposition and those who were likely to spread discontent among the masses were arrested and
put in prisons. Smugglers, dacoits, hoarders and all other exploiters were arrested under the
Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA).

As a result of strict vigilance of the government, prices came down. The exploiters of
society became nervous and tried to be honest. The business malpractices like hoarding, black
marketing, smuggling etc which jacked up the prices and which were every day happenings
suddenly became experiences of the past. Industries, offices and educational institutions worked
regularly. One could see office-going people running to catch the bus or to be at the place of
duty well in time. Trains were running on time. There was a sense of discipline everywhere.
There were no strikes, picketing, gheroing and other kinds of demonstrations. One wondered
how the entire nation behaved decently and in a disciplined way everywhere.

There were, of course, whispers of tyrannical use of power by the police and other
officials. They were reported to be using MISA for settling private scores. Some of the prison
officials behaved in a high-handed manner and beat up some of the prisoners. Under the orders
of the officers of the P.W.D., unauthorized huts and tenements were destroyed. In order to widen
roads, some of the houses close to the roads were pulled down. But these were excesses indulged
in by unscrupulous or overzealous officials. Probably, the accounts of excesses were exaggerated
by interested parties, that is, those who were against the Congress and the Prime Minister.
The decision to declare an internal state of emergency, taken by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi
seemed destined to alter the course of Indian political history. India has achieved a zero price rise
which was phenomenal in the context of the rest of the world, and there was a fever of
commitment about everything- including the twenty-point program, Mrs. Gandhi’s pet package
deal, to keep the people happy.

There was mass arrest of opposition leaders and with most of them behind the bars,
normalcy was being restored and the nation was put back on to rails. Much against Jai Prakash
Narain’s hope neither Jagjivan Ram nor Chavan revolted against Mrs. Gandhi. Soon J.P’s
movement vanished into thin air. A section of Indian intelligentsia did support her for the act, but
those who were vocal had come to the conclusion that ideology for Indira was nothing more than
the convenient camouflage and that she was throwing to winds all norms of democracy Indira
publicly decried these intellectuals as dupes of foreign elements and said that “since Indian democracy had gone off the rails she was trying to put it back on the track”.  

The leftist camp believed in state control of the commanding height of the economy in a welfare state and in narrowing of disparities. Hence no resentment was shown as such. The arrests made were precautionary and the names were not allowed to be published. Stringent censorship followed. Demonstrations and strikes were banned and wage freeze took place. So also a ban was imposed on the writings which were inimical to the interests of the country. The purpose of declaring emergency as rightly pointed out, was basically two fold –to safeguard the country and bringing to an end rural and urban unrest in many parts of the country.”  

The emergency enabled Mrs. Gandhi to move towards an institutionalized control of the press, and the opposition.” Personally, I am not for Censorship at all, but the Home and Information and Broadcasting ministers have their own difficulties”, Mrs. Gandhi said in an interview with a Bombay weekly.  

The proclamation of state of Emergency in June 1975 was described as a real coup de etat. In any case, it came as a surprise. In a message to the nation, Mrs. Indira Gandhi spoke of a deep and widespread conspiracy of the forces of disintegration in full play’. Of communal passions aroused that are threatening unity, of new programmes., challenging law and order throughout the country. Indira had declared a state of Emergency before and never before had Members of Parliament been arrested, never before had a total censorship been imposed upon the press. On the night of June 27 in a broadcast to the nation, she gave the reason for proclaiming the state of emergency and said that a climate of violence and hatred had been created which resulted in the assassination of a cabinet minister and an attempt on the life of the Chief Justice. She further said that the opposition parties had chalked out a program of country wide gheraos, agitation, disruption and incitement to industrial workers, police and defense forces in an attempt to paralyze totally the Central Government. She also said that one of them went to the extent of saying that armed forces should not carry out orders which they consider wrong and the programme was to begin from the 29th of this month.  

Mrs. Gandhi said that such a programme would have resulted in a grave threat to public order and damage to the economy beyond repair and this has to be prevented. She opined that the kind of programme envisaged by some of the opposition group is not compatible with
democracy and it is anti national by any test and could not be allowed. She believed that since the proclamation of Emergency, the whole country has gone back to normalcy except for partial hartal, and minor incidents in Gujarat and this sense of normalcy must be maintained. She said that there should be realization that even in a democracy there are limits which cannot be crossed. Violent action and senseless Satyagraha, she said, will pull down the whole edifice which has been built over the years with such labors and hope and she further concluded that it will be possible to lift the Emergency soon. She said that she had always believed in freedom of the press and like all freedom it has to be exercised with responsibility and restraint. Mrs. Gandhi said that in situations of internal disturbances whether they be language or communal riots, grave mischief has been done by irresponsible writing and we have to prevent such situations, for sometimes, several newspapers have deliberately distorted news and made malicious and provocative comments. The entire purpose, according to her, was to bring about a situation of calmness and stability and the purpose of censorship is to restore a climate of trust. There has been delay in broadcasting of news from the All India Radio and newspapers. It took time to make all necessary legal and administrative arrangements.

In the meantime, rumor-mongers and anti-social elements had a field day and have spread stories of all kinds. I want to assure you that leaders under arrest are being extended all courtesy and consideration.

This is the time for unity and discipline. I am fully confident that with each day, the situation will improve and that in this task our people in towns and villages will give us their full support so that the country will be strengthened. After justifying the Emergency Mrs. Gandhi spoke of its achievements as follow: It was because we took rather severe measures that we were able to put the economy back on an even level. Our agricultural production, our industrial production, our exports, all these rose to an unprecedented level. We were able to stop smuggling, hoarding and many other activities which affected the country’s economy, more especially the poor people’s income. This is what enabled us to earn foreign exchange, for instance, the curb on smuggling. For the first time, our balance of payment was almost satisfactory.

It is not only the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund but also other international bodies and individual economists who came from different Universities, They all were amazed at what we were able to achieve in this very short time apart from the fact that we
had cleaned up the cities, removed beggars and introduced discipline. Some of the disciplines on traders were enforced vehemently providing relief to the common man. On students, nothing was done, but the air of discipline infected them also so that examinations were on time and Universities were run peacefully as, in fact centers of learning should be. Apart from the economic welfare, politically we have achieved a great deal because the unity of India was never so strong and meaningful in all these years, before or since independence. Especially in the Border States we have managed to bring the people into the mainstream of the national life. 22

At the same time with the intention of strengthening her position amongst the masses and to alleviate their suffering, Mrs. Gandhi introduced the 20 point Programme which was a familiar mixture of old Congress promises (radical agrarian reforms, social justice etc.). Her attempt was to make out that emergency was an opportunity to make good the promises of social and economic change which was not possible due to unwanted disturbances. Added to the rehash of early Ten Point Programme, the Twenty Point Programme comprised two new elements which were supposed to enthuse the country. They were the blanket cancellation of small debts owned by poorest of the poor to money leaders and plan to set free the bonded laborers because of their inability to pay ancestral debts.

**About turn and march towards Democracy**

Very soon Mrs. Gandhi’s party began to fragment. With the defection of an important leader Jagjivan Ram and his decision to form UFD, she decided on the election to decide the issue. Election was announced on 21st March 1977 and the emergency was relaxed Political leaders were released. This decision was sudden and unexpected. Inder Malhotra remarks evidently that she wanted to regain her credentials, as a democratic leader. She did not want to be known a leader who destroyed democracy so lovingly nurtured by her own father. Probably she hoped that, encouraged by her supporters, the intelligence agencies and advisers she could restore it and remain in power by winning the elections. But perhaps, she was aware that she may lose poll and power. She was defeated at the elections, the outcome reflected discontentment and deprivation that people felt during the emergency which was identified with the Congress rule. Mrs. Gandhi humbly bowed to the people’s verdict and tried to put up a brave face.

Thus, Inder Malhotra asserts that the assessment that Mrs. Gandhi was authoritarian by nature is not a fair one for she disproved the charge by one simple call for elections entirely on her own and apparently without being under any pressure. He quotes Mary Carras who attempted
a political psycho-analysis of Mrs. Gandhi “ she was democratic ‘ in temperament and her self-image’ had been that of a democrat, her self-respect was derived thereby from the self-image” carras has noted that her commitment to democratic way of life was combined with certain ambivalence regarding proper use of authority which was further strengthened by her conviction that her personal worth was tied up with her desire to do great things for her country and she identified herself with the nation completely.  

Malhotra states that she had confided to P.Shiv Shankar” that her unfamiliarity with law was responsible for her inability to realize the pitfalls in Ray’s advice.” A bigger blunder according to him was Indira’s decision to by-pass her cabinet and she was held accountable by Janata government. Perhaps, he reflects, in her main anxiety to prevent leakage of her plans, she relied more on the small coterie headed by Sanjay. As Inder Malhotra rightly puts, Indira’s proclamation of ‘State Emergency’ was a cardinal sin a political blunder which decided the fate of Mrs. Gandhi wherein compromise, and consensus had foregone. It was like a political hurricane that swept Mrs.Gandhi out power. However, the Congress defeat was not total since the Southern states did accept it. The fear that the right wing cartel might impose Hindi and the less corrupt Congress-C.P.I coalition in Kerala paid some electoral dividends.

The Janata Rule

Overall, the Janata Party captured 270 seats out of 493 and gained 43.17% of the popular vote, but personal pride and prejudice inhibited the Janata Party to rule the country by being a strategist and organized party in Indian politics. On December 18, 1977 Mrs. Gandhi resigned from the Congress Working Committee on the plea that remaining an ordinary member of the Congress party “will enable me to serve our organization and fight for the cause which is dear to us and the ideals which we cherish”, On December 25, the followers of Indira announced that they would hold a national convention of Congress members on January 1st and 2nd, 1978 under the president ship of Mrs. Gandhi. The convention unanimously passed a resolution electing Indira as president and authorized her to take appropriate steps to organize Congress at all levels in consultation with Kamalapathi Tripathi, Mir Qasim, Narashima Rao, and others. Thus, Mrs. Gandhi was able to assume the position so that she could control the party and purge the self seekers, who feathered their own nest. The show of confidence in her further motivated her to tour the country.
The incessant noise of squabbling politicians that emanated from Janata government’s first year in office paved the way for renewed triumph for Indira. The Janata party comprised of prominent leaders who tried to gain the maximum in power game. The leaders were Atal Bihari Vajpayee, leader of Jana Sangh who motivated small traders and businessman, George Fernandes, former leader of Railway Union, Charan Singh the leader of rich farmers, Jagjivan Ram leader of the Harijanas, Morarji Desai the P.M- in-waiting who at last was redeemed by Jaiprakash Narain, a mystagogue and Raj Narayan. Once Mrs.Gandhi knew that she could win back the popular base, she decided to fight. The attempt to personalize everything into an attack on her and the sight of the whole government pursuing a lone woman did not appeal to the Indian masses for long. This further added to Mrs. Gandhi’s prowess as the leader of a competent dominant party which could win back the lost power. But many leaders of her party, who had obeyed her, distanced themselves for they were not at all hopeful of Mrs Gandhi returning to power again. Even Dev Kanta Barooah who had coined the slogan Indira is India and India is Indira, was amongst this group. The government which had overthrown her destroyed itself with astonishing rapidity and hastened Indira’s return to power. “The Janata ministry was on the mat and erstwhile demoralized Congress-I leaders went on the offensive posing as the new knights in the shining armor fighting corruption and bribery in public life”. Reported by B.I Rahadive, the CPI(M) leader in a political resolution in the X Congress of the party held in Jallundhur stated that there is “flood of scandals, the overwhelming of the nation by cause of adventurers (during emergency) and individuals mark the invasion of crisis in all spheres of life. No bourgeois party can be immune to it and Janata Party is no exception.”

This reflects the mood and the expectations at that time. Rehadive in his article further reports that the ruling party leadership is not only ignoring electoral promises but is blind to the political situation in the country. The situation calls for continuous fight against the forces of authoritarianism not by just merely passing a constitutional reforms Act, but by continuous mass propaganda and education to isolate these forces which are strongly introduced among the people and in parliament”. The Janata Party had no use for people once their votes were secured. Meanwhile the Congress leaders had once again resorted to the old mobilizing technique and professed their love for Harijans and other weaker sections so much so that the court proceeding against Sanjay and Mrs. Gandhi were occasions for mobilizing the ranks. By this time, the Indira
band of loyalists and the Congress (I) (which had split in 1977) became hopeful and in November, 1978, Mrs. Gandhi contested the election from Karnataka. She won by the active support of Devaraj Urs, an important and vociferous Congress leader who commanded the most stable component of the Congress which was thought to be ramshackle outfit. The threat of her return to power kept the Janata collection together. Re-entering the parliament and overhauling her party by once again resorting to concern for masses reflected her endeavor for entrenchment. She hoped in a given public statement to Charan Singh that the Janata Party leaders shall take care of more serious and mounting problem concerning industrial labor, weaker sections, farmers, middle classes, the inflation and lawlessness. The game of musical chairs however continued unabated and what was inevitable occurred in July 1979. The government which had overthrown Mrs. Gandhi destroyed itself with astonishing rapidity and hastened her return to power.

The smear campaign against Mrs. Gandhi by setting commissions and enquiries (eg. Shah Commission) changed the people’s attitude, for they knew that the Janata Government’s only achievement was this and that all the pressing problems were ignored and left unattended by them. Mrs. Gandhi picked up these lapses and formulated her strategy accordingly. Once again she became a formidable leader and indicated her plan of action; People again started flocking at her new residence and at her public meetings. The trickle had become a torrent. Indira Amma was welcomed by the people, especially by women. The opponents reacted to the rising popularity, she was deprived of her seat, even imprisoned her on the pretext of shielding her son Sanjay and his Maruti Car Project. By then the mass sympathy had been regained, when arrested, she was mobbed by her party supporters and the congress women started crying.

The Congress Party’s wishes were fulfilled and the first person to forfeit his chair was Morarji Desai which took toll of Janata Party and it drifted apart steering clear the way for Mrs. Gandhi. George Fernandes had already resigned. Desai resigned in disgust due to continuous attacks on him by Charan Singh who in turn was busy courting M.P.’s to become the next P.M. Charan Singh asked Mrs. Gandhi for support. She in turn demanded withdrawal of Special Courts Act (new law to harass Sanjay and Indira). As an astute strategist, she further kept him guessing for few days and suddenly withdrew. Both Charan Singh and another contender
Jagjivan Ram could not withstand the political crisis. In 1979, the ultimate step was taken and the parliament was dissolved. The manoeuvres, scandals, in-fights and intolerance led to the Janata Party’s downfall.

**Mrs. Indira Wave**

As the 1980 election ensued and the campaign progressed, it became quite clear that the only leader who had national approach and national standing was Indira Gandhi. She made prices of potatoes and onions a major election issue. Her main battle cry was that she would give the country a government that works though rather pallid compared to the magic slogan of Garibi Hatao. But probably it was what people were looking forward to “It is Indira all the way” reported the Times of India.

Arun Shourie, an eminent commentator on Indian affairs, is of the view that no politician in India brought out the truth about others as Mrs. Gandhi did. She dispelled illusions not just about herself but about others too “She alone has the skill to shut the trap the moment rat walks in “ In many ways this gift of showing every one up for what he is worth is the great advantage of having Mrs. Gandhi around. The choice was between stability and continuous chaos and the nation chose the former. Indira Gandhi won the Raj Bareli seat by polling record votes of 2,23,903. A feat never achieved before. People expressed immense faith in her leadership. The victory of other 350 seats by congress candidates in Lok Sabha was largely because of her leadership. The results showed that Congress (I) won 66.85% of Lok Sabha seats. No party that returned to power since independence did ever have such a massive mandate.

**An Evaluation**

The emergency stands testimony to the fact that it was a unique event in the history of the country. The early seventies witnessed intense struggle between the forces of status quo and forces of change. Mrs Gandhi represented the change the people were aspiring for. But the changes that she had contemplated were not consummately and effectively implemented because of the insecurity that was infecting the vested interests and that proved detrimental to the interests of the country.

Meanwhile the country was plagued by problems of umpteen number like political opportunism in the ruling class, inflation, black marketing, foreign debt etc., which were making the lives of common man miserable and pathetic as the government of the day let by Mrs.Gandhi
could not rise up to the occasion to take up the gauntlet thrown by the adverse circumstances, despite the fact that she won a landslide victory in the then concluded recent election. Wide spread unrest represented by violence and riots, incited by forces inimical to the government, mostly let by Jayaprakash Naraian who advocated removal of the government because it has become personification of inefficiency and corruption. His advocacy of armed forces and police personnel to revolt against the government took the situation to a flash point. Unable to tolerate further threats to the cohesion and integrity of the country Mrs. Gandhi imposed Emergency as she felt that the country was fast spinning out of control and was becoming ungovernable.

Undoubtedly, the Emergency had its flip side like curbing of fundamental rights, high-handed behavior and excesses of the police etc., some of them real and some of them exaggerated. However the positive side was that a semblance of the discipline was infused into the politics. The prices of essential commodities were brought down and inflation to great extent was reined. Hoarding, smuggling, black marketing- the phenomena which were fleecing the common man became things of the fast. Industries, offices and educational institutions worked effectively and punctually. The entire nation behaved decently in a disciplined way ever where. Mrs. Gandhi made efforts to prove that Emergency was a God- sent opportunity to make good the promises of social and economic changes which were not possible early due to unwanted disturbances and she introduced the 20-Point Programme to ameliorate the suffering of the common man and better his living conditions.

The ardent democrat that she is, Mrs. Gandhi did away with Emergency and went to election in 1977. Though the results of election belied her expectations, she bowed to people were verdict in all humility. The Janata government that ensued proved to be a cruel joke foisted the people. As a result, it collapsed like moth-eaten Pagoda and Mrs. Gandhi regained power with in no time because the people of India reposed faith in her to be Manna from heaven who has come to deliver them from problems. She proved to be a colossus on the Indian political scene without any serious challenger.

Arun Shourie has aptly remarked, “Her reputed strength and her durability tempt others to attempt deals with her”. This very quality made her come back with resounding victory in a political environment wherein reservations against her had considerably lessened. Congress once again reemerged as the only viable democratic alternative in the 80’s. A personality oriented and centrally mobilized mass party operated through co-optative adhoc committees, nominated by
the Prime Minister herself. A more hegemonic model came into existence, projecting rising expectations and of course along with it frustrations because of the usual struggle for loaves and fishes.

The Indian political system has once again proved that it has a remarkable resilience because it not only withstood the internal emergency imposed by Mrs. Gandhi but also the instability due to Janata rule and soon resulted in a new dynamic democratic equilibrium.
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