

Emergency and After

Raj Kumar Bhatia



JIGYASA

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Prof. Raj Kumar Bhatia



Sh. Bhatia spent 19 months in Tihar Jail, Delhi, as MISA detenu in the company of many eminent persons. Sh Hemant Vishnoi (standing 5th from left) managed to have his camera there. Some of eminents the Photograph are : In the Middle row (from left): Sh. Ram Nath Vij, Sh. Kanwarlal Gupta, Sh. K.R. Malkani, Prof. Suresh Upadhyay. Kanwarlal Gupta, Sh KR Malkani, Prof Suresh Upadhyay. Standing (2nd from left : Sh. Bhatia, (4th) Sh. Virendra Kapor, (6th) Sh. Arun Jaitley Sitting in the bottom row on extreme right : Sh. Vijay Pratap.

Introduction

Jigyasa is an intellectual forum created by (and for) intellectuals with the aim of intellectual stimulation of its members and public through group discussions, seminars, lectures and public functions in which eminent personalities from all walks of life are invited as speakers.

I feel privileged to write the introduction of the 3rd publication of Jigyasa, which was founded in May 2017, containing a very incisive and thought provoking article on ill fated Emergency imposed by Smt Indira Gandhi's govt in the country in 1975. The article has been written by our founder Chairman Shri Raj Kumar Bhatia, who as a national office bearer of Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad himself had been a victim of Emergency and remained behind the bars during entire period of Emergency. He had played a leading and prominent role in ABVP in pre and post emergency periods.

The article under publication was originally written by Bhatia ji for April-October issue of Indian Journal of Democratic Governance published by another esteemed intellectual forum Rambhau Mhalgi Prabodhini to commemorate the 50th anniversary of imposition of Emergency on 26th June, 1975. During the period of Emergency misery, grief, fear, oppression, decimation of Constitution, democratic institutions and oppression of Sangh Organisations and other opposition political parties was all pervasive in entire country. Having strongly felt that emergency was nothing short of dictatorship imposed on the country through misuse of constitutional provisions and it was a dark period of democracy and deeply anguished by all these developments and personal sufferings and experiences in jail and aftermath of Emergency Raj Kumar Bhatia ji was prompted to pen down this article so that people do not forget the excesses and devastating impact of dark Emergency.

The noteworthy feature of the article is that it also briefly narrates the story of undoing of the gains made by our polity after

the end of emergency.

I wish that Shri Bhatia fondly addressed as Rajji by the ABVP cadre and Jigyasa members shall continue to enlighten us with his highly thought provoking and educative writings and articles on issues of relevance to the society at large.

Satish Minocha
Secretary, Jigyasa

The imposition of emergency in India on 26 June 1975 will remain etched in Indian history forever as a big black spot on the healthy democracy which was adopted by the founding fathers of Indian constitution soon after independence. In one go the country had boldly adopted a democratic form of government with the features which perhaps, in comparison, left behind other democracies of the world. Only one comparison with USA, is warranted here. Whereas we adopted universal franchise for all citizens above the age of 21, ignoring whether they were men or women, rural or urban, rich or poor, literate or illiterate, of one or other caste or of one religion or the other etc, in US it happened in stages. Whereas in India a woman became the top executive head i.e. the Prime-Minister within two decades of independence in United States no woman has reached the post of President in over two centuries of its democracy.

The comparison underlines how a 'sacrosanct' system of governance in India was perverted and given a body blow in 1975 by the then PM of the country Indira Gandhi who had a strong streak of a dictator and a dynast in her psyche. Though the constitution did provide a provision for imposing an emergency but that was done not only disregarding the merits of the situation but by violating the nicety of the procedure. The constitution required the approval of the cabinet for imposition of emergency before the proclamation of same by the President. But the order was reversed. The President was made to sign the emergency order hours before the cabinet approval.

The analysis and stocktaking of emergency requires understanding of interplay of four main factors in pre and during emergency periods:

- (i) 'Student power' as an 'Agent of Change'.
- (ii) Indira Gandhi - the 'dictator' and dynast.
- (iii) RSS - a powerful national social organization.
- (iv) Healthy democratic setup in India in 1975

We may analyse the factors thus:

'Student power' as an 'agent of change' has been a global phenomenon. At different times in different parts of the world collective efforts of students brought about changes in their respective countries or societies. Only very recently we experienced it in Nepal. The same phenomenon was at work in India in late 1973 and early 1974 in Gujarat and Bihar respectively.

It was end of 1973, mess bill was raised in an engineering college hostel of Gujarat in view of inflation, the students reacted strongly, mess bills were raised in some other hostels too, the reaction of students became widespread. The students held the state government guilty for inflation which according to them was the result of corruption. In no time the whole state of Gujarat was in grip of mass movement of students demanding the resignation of chief-minister and dissolution of assembly and they succeeded in achieving their goal. The assembly was dissolved, new election took place, and a new government took over.

In early 1974 the students of Bihar planned an agitation related to their demands under the auspices of Patna University Students' Union. Very soon the impact of Gujarat movement reached Bihar. There also inflation and corruption became big issues and a strong student's upsurge started emerging. There also the state chief-minister was held guilty for the malaise. The movement was blessed by Shri Jayprakash Narain, a highly respected saintly and elderly freedom fighter. The movement gained momentum. It got further fillip as some non congress political parties also lent their support to it.

The movement did not remain confined to Bihar. The pinch of inflation, corruption, unemployment etc was being felt all over the country. The 'Bihar movement' or 'JP movement' acquired national dimensions and the PM Indira Gandhi was held responsible for the problems. It took nearly one year for the movement to become a strong national movement which was being led by Jayprakash Narain though students formed the vanguard. Bearing the heat of movement became difficult for the Prime-Minister. She chose the path of emergency.

Indira Gandhi became Prime-Minister in 1966 essentially because she was daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first PM of the country who had groomed her as a Congress leader. This was an exigency development in view of the untimely death of Lal Bahadur Shastri. She became PM again after election in 1967 with thin majority in Lok Sabha. In 1967 assembly elections were also simultaneously held with Lok Sabha. Opposition parties made major gains in Lok Sabha and in many assemblies. Indira Gandhi became weak within her party. There was a split in the party in 1969 in which she emerged as a ruthless party leader. In 1971 India won war with Pakistan under her leadership on the issue of Bangladesh's independence. She became a hero in the country and forced a mid-term Lok Sabha election in which she got thumping majority.

But by 1974 she started losing grip on political affairs of the country. Unsettled by JP movement and driven by her desire to remain the supreme leader of the country she chose the path of dictatorship. A fortnight before clamping the emergency she got three shocks in one day on June 12, 1975 which contributed

to her unsettling in a big way. Her election to Lok Sabha in 1971 was declared unlawful by Allahabad High Court as a result of election petition filed against her by socialist leader Raj Narain, her party lost in Gujarat assembly election and her political aide DP Dhar died.

For nearly 19 months of emergency the country had to bear the brunt of her dictatorship. Large number of people, including many top political leaders were detained in jails, media was gagged, Parliament was taken for a ride, Lok Sabha election was deferred by one year, Preamble of the constitution was amended, judiciary was put under pressure, despite her disqualification as Lok Sabha member she continued as the PM, her son Sanjay Gandhi became a highhanded extra constitutional authority.

The country did not accept the imposition of emergency lying down. Soon after its proclamation the opposition to emergency also began. Activists found ways and means to oppose the emergency. Underground movement took roots. Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh(RSS) and its allied organisations played crucial role in organising the opposition both in underground and overground forms. Many RSS stalwarts succeeded in evading arrests. A huge Satyagraha was launched by Sangh Parivar and around 80-90 thousand people courted arrest. In all months of emergency all types of anti emergency activities were implemented effectively. The credit to RSS was not confined to emergency period alone. The student movements of Gujarat and Bihar were creation of the student organisation of Sangh Parivar Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad(ABVP). But for ABVP's backing Gujarat movement would not have become massive. Bihar movement was creation of ABVP in three ways. Two office bearers of Patna University Students' Union Sushil Modi and Ravi Shankar belonging to ABVP played key role through the Union. Bihar state organising secretary of ABVP Rambahadur Rai was the mastermind of the movement. He was ably assisted by the Patna Vibhag RSS pracharak KN Govindacharya. It were the efforts of Rambahadur Rai and Govindacharya which fructified in ensuring the blessing and leadership of Jayprakash Narain to the movement. ABVP played its leading role at the national level under JP's leadership. The political party Bhartiya Jan Sangh of Sangh Parivar too played leading role in the movement.

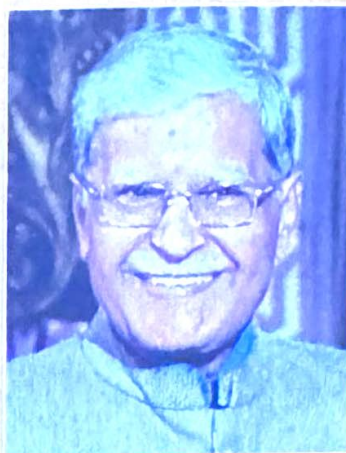
Though Indira Gandhi imposed 'dictatorship' in the country it was not possible for her to exercise 'absolute' power. Strong anti emergency movement emerged, particularly in the form of massive Satyagraha. Defence forces never dabbled in politics. Though under pressure, bureaucracy, police and judiciary kept functioning. Depending on individual morality and scope provided by the situation all bureaucrats, police personnel and judges did not become tools of the dictator. Of the two types of arrested people- MISA(maintenance of internal

security act) detenus and persons arrested under DIR (Defence of India Rules) and other provisions, the latter category could get relief from courts. Media too, whenever possible exercised its freedom of expression. Pressure came on Indira Gandhi from abroad too especially from democratic countries like United States, United Kingdom etc. The turning point came on January 18th 1977 when Indira Gandhi started reversing the emergency. In March 1977 Lok Sabha election was held. Ironically Indira Gandhi and her son Sanjay Gandhi both lost in their Lok Sabha constituencies. The newly formed Janta Party came to power at the centre. The emergency was gone.

The story of developments after emergency was saddening. The parties which came to power in 1977 as constituents of Janta party fell apart in less than three years. The phenomenon of politics, which is very common these days- self centered, ambitious leaders with a sizeable vote bank in their pockets unashamedly trying to outsmart their rivals, was in full play in the form of Charan Singh who was dying to become the Prime-Minister. He and his henchmen became tools of Congress manipulators. Raj Narain, the socialist leader who had won the election petition in 1975 against Indira Gandhi joined hands with her son Sanjay Gandhi in the game of installation of Charan Singh as PM. The bogey of dual membership of Bhartiya Jan Sangh (BJS) leaders as members of RSS too was raised by socialist ideologue Madhu Limaye to marginalise the biggest component of Janta Party *i.e* Bhartiya Jan Sangh.

The Janta Party government fell. Lok Sabha elections were held in 1980. Indira Gandhi returned to power again. Most of the political gains made by non Congress parties went down the drain. Indira Gandhi continued as a ruthless Congress leader, Prime-Minister and dynast. Her younger son who had emerged as an extra-constitutional authority during emergency died in 1980. She brought her elder son Rajiv into politics. The country paid heavily for her two political and divisive misadventures in border states of Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir where separatism and terrorism became a strong phenomenon. She herself became victim of the fallout of Punjab politics. But her dynasty remained intact. Rajiv Gandhi was installed as the Prime-minister after her death. Like his mother Rajiv Gandhi also became victim of his politics and was killed in 1991. But the dynasty continued in Congress uninterrupted over more than three decades and is still strong. In fact dynastic politics has become a strong phenomenon of Indian politics. So far as emergency is concerned the past experience may work as a deterrent for any future attempt in that direction. Only time will tell.





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