

Social Impact Of The Emergency And Lived Experiences

Abhishek Kumar Singh

School of Liberal Studies, Ambedkar University Delhi

abhishek.15aks@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper aims to study the social implications of emergency-based displacement through the case study of a resettled colonies in East Delhi. The idea of ‘social’ in this paper is not just limited to the activities, interactions, and reproduction, but it looks into the formation of unequal social relations over four decades. Using historical and social science methods, it tries to understand the social implication of emergency, as imagined in policies; how it was actually exercised, and what structures it made for communities and people.

Introduction

Emergency could be said as the dark period in the history of Independent India. It was a strange experience for the people, because for the first time they witnessed an authoritarian ruler post-independence, and that too came from the party, which played a significant role in fighting against the authoritarian rule.

The political narrative and the draconian nature of the leaders have been a topic of deep interest in academic and political circles, but what remained ignored for a brief time period was the long-term impact of Emergency on people and communities, the *longue duree*. The people who got displaced and resettled in different parts of India, and how this process of resettlement socially impacted those people is still untouched by scholars.

Literature Review

When it comes to experiences of forced migration and violence, the Emergency could be said as the second most draconian period in modern Indian History, the first being partition. Bipan Chandra lists three reasons for not lifting up the Emergency on 15 August 1975. In the second reason he states is that it was “Sanjay’s desire to prolong Emergency to consolidate his growing power.”¹ Sanjay Gandhi increased power during the emergency, and his direct involvement in political decisions and policies during the emergency played a significant role in shaping endeavours for emergency planning. There is a stark difference in the social impacts of Indira Gandhi’s twenty-point programme during the Emergency and Sanjay Gandhi’s five-point programme.

Bipan Chandra compares the emergency with the events in France in May 1968 when General de Gaulle was met with a similar radical upsurge of students and workers. General de

1. Bipan Chandra, *In The Name Of Democracy: JP Movement and the Emergency*, (Penguin, 2017), 184.

Gaulle tried to suppress the student movement via the police force, but rather, it ignited it as it got support from workers later on. On the contrary to Indira Gandhi, de Gaulle was able to handle the situation much better; he addressed the people on the radio and called for elections, whereas Indira Gandhi chose to declare an emergency rather than calling for elections. However, the poor judgment from Judge Justice Sinha also precipitated this crisis by barring Indira Gandhi from holding office for the next six years.

The declaration of state of emergency is a provision seen in the constitution of many countries. This provision is fairly used several times during epidemics, famines or wartime but the implication of this provision to crush the internal political dissent isn't common but is a outcome of personal endeavours of leaders to sustain their power. H.V Kamnath pointed out during the constitutional assembly debates that emergency as a term is too broad and it would allow the union government to intervene in affairs of the state during the slightest pretext of internal disturbances.²

In the Weimar Constitution, there were provisions where the president could declare a state of emergency to restore public order with the endorsement of the chancellor.³ The Reichstag fire decree was passed, arresting all the oppositional leaders who were termed dangerous,⁴ all the civil liberties were curbed, and all the anti-Nazi activities were censored. The declaration of emergency eventually led to the rise of a one-party state in Nazi Germany.

While studying the experiences of state-led exploitation, working class and marginalized sections are the most impacted ones; the privileged always find ways out. As Udit Sen (2018) in her account of refugees from East Pakistan, describes how the upper-caste *bhadraloks* (i.e., Brahmins, Kayastha, Baidya) who had ownership of land in districts of Eastern Bengal acquired refuge under the illegal squatter colonies of Calcutta, whereby the refugees who were Dalits by caste were sent to be rehabilitated in the Andaman region.⁵ In the case of emergency, the people who were affected the most were largely the working class. Bipan Chandra shows that mostly Urban middle-class students, businessmen, and neo-rich farmers were largely involved in the anti-congress agitation that began before the emergency.⁶ The working class, which mostly supported Indira Gandhi and was least involved in anti-congress agitation, was most adversely impacted by Sanjay's programmes.

The forced displacement might have involved extreme violence at times. Many people were forcibly displaced, and their houses were demolished, like at Turkman Gate, where people were shot, women were raped, and houses were bulldozed. Patrick Clibbens (2014) points

2. Francine R Frankel, Zoya Hasan, Rajeev Bhargava and Balveer Arora, *Transforming India: Social and Political Dynamics of Democracy*, (OUP India, 2002), 62.

3. M.R Lepsius, *From Fragmented Party Democracy to Government by Emergency Decree and National Socialist Takeover: Germany*, 111-151, (Max Weber and Institutional Theory, 2016), 123.

4. A. J. P. Taylor, Introduction to, *The Reichstag Fire*, by Fritz Tobias, 1-4, Translated by Arnold J. Pomerans, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1964), 2.

5. Udit Sen, *Citizen Refugee: Forging the Indian Nation after Partition*, (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 134.

6. Chandra, *In The Name Of Democracy*, 48.

out that the main aspect of violence that abrupted at Old Delhi (Turkman Gate) was because of the attempts by Jagmohan (then DDA vice-chairman) for Urban Planning and cultural regeneration in the area for a new stream of poetry and a new stream of literature.⁷

The family Planning programme initiated during the Emergency was a big program, between 1972 and 1980 the World Bank gave the Indian government a fund of 66 million US dollars for sterilization.⁸ During the early phase of sterilization incentives were given in the form of land, and cash but later on sterilization became a compulsion and a forced deal. In 1976 there were around 7 million sterilizations happened across the country.⁹ The government created a structure where targets were assigned to individuals like public officials, health officials, teachers and policemen they had their fixed quotas of people and their salaries depended upon the number of people they convinced to get sterilized.¹⁰

Censorship during Emergency

Art forms that lived through that period and represent the fear that was prevalent among people during the Emergency especially in men. Most of the art forms were although banned, and largely they have distinguished, but some still managed to exist even after large attempts of censorship and suppression of them.

For example a song from the film “Nasbandi” which exemplifies the havoc of emergency, has its lyrics like

*“Kya mil gaya sarkar tumhe x2
Emergency lagake, Emergency lagake
Nasbandi karake Hamari bansi bajake
Nasbandi karake Hamari chuti karake
Ram bolo bhai ram Ram nam satya hai x2*

*Ghar wale bade khush the ke mai dulha banunga x2
Ghodi pe chadunga to Mai phulo se sajunga
Sehre ke phul rakh diye Sehre ke phul rakh diye
Arthi pe sajake Nasbandi karake Hamari bansi bajake
Nasbandi karake Hamari chuti karake
Ram bolo bhai ram, Ram nam satya hai x2*

*Arman tha hamko Bhi kahega koi abba x2
Kahne se pahle baj Gaya takdir ka dabba*

7. Patrick Clibbens, *‘The destiny of this city is to be the spiritual workshop of the nation’: clearing cities and making citizens during the Indian Emergency, 1975–1977*, (Contemporary South Asia, 2014), 61.

8. Prajakta R. Gupte, *India: “The Emergency” and the Politics of Mass Sterilization*, (Demographics, Social Policy, and Asia (Part I), Volume 22, Number 3, 2017), 40.

9. Carolyn Henning Brown, *The Forced Sterilization Program Under the Indian Emergency: Results in One Settlement*, (Human Organization 43, no. 1, 1984), 50.

10. Gupte, *India: “The Emergency” and the Politics of Mass Sterilization*, 43.

*Kya mil gaya gatar mein x2, Meri naav gira ke
Nasbandi karake Hamari bansi bajake
Nasbandi karake Hamari chuti karake
Ram bolo bhai ram Ram nam satya hai x2*

*Kuch note dikha ke Meri sagai chin li x2
Teen ghee ka Dikhake meri lugai chin li
Aisa bajaya band Aisa bajaya band Connestar dikhake
Nasbandi karake Hamari bansi bajake x2
Ram bolo bhai ram Ram nam satya hai”¹¹*

The song very well depicts the relation of fertility as one of the major elements of a man's existence in Indian society. It gives him respect in society, family and marriage as an institution majorly ran over this question of men providing capital and fertility to the family. When this fertility was taken away through sterilization it meant an equivalency to death which is depicted in the line “*Ram bolo bhai ram Ram nam satya hai*” it is usually used when taking one's corpse for cremation. The baits that were offered for sterilization are also mentioned in the song for example “*Teen ghee ka Dikhake meri lugai chin li, Aisa bajaya band Aisa bajaya band Connestar dikhake.*” It shows how ghee which is one of the key elements in the diet of Indians was being offered in exchange for getting sterilized. It also shows how uninformed people would have been about the future prospects for sterilization. For them in the moment it was an exchange for cash, goods, lands and other baits, but it was only in the later stage they would have realized that they have lost their fertility power.

Case Study

The rehabilitation into areas like Welcome, where people of different religions were homogenized as according to Jagmohan (then DDA chief) to prevent creation of a second Pakistan, these areas where the attempt to homogenize was enacted have in the present became points of hostility, and incidences of religious violence have been fairly common in those areas. Although it couldn't be said that these violence are a result of this rehabilitation and family programme but it couldn't be denied that it indeed could be said that attempts of homogenisation were initiated whose results aren't as one could say successful.

The housing rights were also granted on the basis of sterilization, although it was cruel but it was also an opportunity as Emma Tarlo in her work notes that for many people it was an easy route to get land in an area like Delhi where finding livelihood was very tough. But for others it was tough as many people were removed from offices if they didn't undergo sterilization in many households where men didn't undergo sterilization in order to keep their jobs women of those households had to get sterilized.¹² Medical harassment was also seen in government

¹¹. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fg1INIUwNy8>

¹². Gemma Scott, *'My wife had to get sterilised': exploring women's experiences of sterilisation under the emergency in India, 1975–1977*, (Contemporary South Asia, 2017).

hospitals during this period where pregnant women got their deliveries delayed three to four days until their husbands got sterilized.¹³

In the area of Hastinapur Meerut District where Bangladeshi refugees were rehabilitated, shows that almost forty percent of men were sterilized in the region during their resettlement in 1971-1972, and the remaining fifty-seven percent were sterilized during the Emergency in 1976.¹⁴ The amount offered for sterilization varied in that region as from an average of 50 rupees in 1971 it got to an average of 150 rupees in 1976, many also got some land in lieu of getting sterilized.¹⁵ On the other hand from Emma Tarlo's work we can derive that some labourers who were forced to get sterilized in order to keep their jobs later lost their jobs after sterilization as they got unfit to lift heavy loads.¹⁶ For people living in poor conditions, land or an amount of money was enough to get permanent loss from their fertility, as for them their present condition would have mattered the most.

Conclusion

In conclusion we can say that Emergency had an adverse affect on the lives and livelihood of people living in East Delhi. The attempts to homogenization were a stark failure as the necessities and requirements of people wasn't fulfilled, the area designated in East Delhi wasn't monitored enough, one can say that the violences that erupted in East Delhi were less significant before this homogenization programme was intended.

During the emergency several people were arrested for miscellaneous charges under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA), while many of those were leaders of opposition others were people who worked daily to sustain their families. Through oral accounts of some families it could be notes that in some families husband, brother, son all the bread earners were arrested and the family was left to rot with no aid to it. The women and men of that family narrate the havoc experiences they faced. Where the women used to be scared at times anyone used to knock on the door, the times when they spend says without food, these memories still haunt them at times.

The sterilization programme initiated during emergency could also be said as incompetent, it didn't had a vision of long term population control as India still stands as the first country with largest population in the world. Therefore, forced sterilization programme was an intent harassment of people, guided with the spirit to target the working-class population by giving them baits in exchange.

13. Emma Tarlo, *Unsettling Memories: Narratives of India's 'Emergency'*, (Permanent Black, 2003), 159.

14. Brown, *The Forced Sterilization Program Under the Indian Emergency*, 51.

15. Brown, *The Forced Sterilization Program Under the Indian Emergency*, 52.

16. Tarlo, *Unsettling Memories*, (Permanent Black, 2003), 154.

References

- ANDERSON, EDWARD, and PATRICK CLIBBENS. “‘Smugglers of Truth’: The Indian Diaspora, Hindu Nationalism, and the Emergency (1975–77).” *Modern Asian Studies* 52, no. 5: 1729–73. 2018.
- Basu, Sejal. *Underground literature during Indian emergency*. Calcutta: Minerva Associates. 1978.
- Bose, Ajay and John Dayal. *For Reasons of State: Delhi Under Emerge: Delhi Under Emergency*. Penguin Viking, 2018.
- Brown, Carolyn Henning. “The Forced Sterilization Program Under the Indian Emergency: Results in One Settlement.” *Human Organization* 43, no. 1: 49–54, 1984.
- Chandra, Bipan. *In The Name Of Democracy: JP Movement and the Emergency*. Penguin, 2017.
- Clibbens, Patrick. “‘The destiny of this city is to be the spiritual workshop of the nation’: clearing cities and making citizens during the Indian Emergency, 1975–1977”. *Contemporary South Asia*, 2014.
- Frankel, Francine R. Hasan, Zoya. Bhargava, Rajeev and Arora, Balveer. *Transforming India: Social and Political Dynamics of Democracy*. OUP India. 2002.
- Goyal, J. P. *Saving India from Indira: the untold story of emergency: memoirs of J.P. Goyal*. New Delhi : Rupa Publications. 2019.
- Guha, Ramchandra. *India After Gandhi: History of World’s Largest Democracy*. Picador India, 2017.
- Gupte, Prajakta R. “India: ‘The Emergency’ and the Politics of Mass Sterilization.” *Demographics, Social Policy, and Asia* (Part I). Volume 22. Number 3, 2017.
- Jaffrelot, Christophe and Pratinav Anil. *India’s First Dictatorship: The Emergency, 1975 - 1977*. C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd, 2020.
- Jagmohan. *Island of truth*. New Delhi : Vikas Publishing House. 1978
- Kothari, Rajni. *State Against Democracy: In Search of Humane Governance*. New Horizons Press. 1989.
- Lepsius, M.R. *From Fragmented Party Democracy to Government by Emergency Decree and National Socialist Takeover: Germany*. 111-151. Max Weber and Institutional Theory. 2016.
- Morris Jones, W. H. “Whose Emergency — India’s or Indira’s?”. *The World Today* 31, no. 11: 451–61, 1975.
- Scott, Gemma. “‘My wife had to get sterilised’: exploring women’s experiences of sterilisation under the emergency in India, 1975–1977”. *Contemporary South Asia*, 2017.

Selbourne, David. *An Eye to India: The Unmasking of a Tyranny*. Penguin. 1977.

Sen, Udit. *Citizen Refugee: Forging the Indian Nation after Partition*. Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Shah Commission Reports. *Interim Report I*. March 11, 1978.

Shah Commission Reports. *Interim Report II*. August 6, 1978.

Shah Commission Reports. *Interim Report III*. April 26, 1978.

Tarlo, Emma. *Unsettling Memories: Narratives of India's 'Emergency'*. Permanent Black, 2003.

Tobias, Fritz. *The Reichstag Fire*. Translated by Arnold J. Pomerans. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1964.