

Emergency Chronicles: Indira Gandhi and Democracy's Turning Point

Gyan Prakash

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Gyan Prakash's *Emergency Chronicles* fills the gaps and dispels the myths concerning a two-year period in the mid-1970s when Indira Gandhi declared emergency powers and unleashed state terror on India.

During India's "Emergency," Gandhi, claiming a threat to national security and aided by her son Sanjay, jailed over one hundred thousand dissenters and instituted strict and coercive population, sterilization, and urban clearance measures. While assuming the rhetoric of a progressive, Gandhi had become increasingly ambitious and overprotective of her authority. Her policies, Prakash asserts, were inadequate "short-cuts" to address poverty and overcrowding.

Prakash draws on extensive research, expertly moving the focus from local events and personalities to India's postcolonial development and global political movements. Ample context supports the assertion that the Emergency was not "dropped from nowhere" and did not "vanish without a trace" as is commonly believed. Instead, it was an effect of the country's attempt to achieve democracy through political change but with only a "skin-deep" commitment to economic and social equality.

Prakash adds a heartbeat to history with his character profiles and illustrations. His portrait of the highly principled Jayaprakash Narayan, the "ambivalent revolutionary" and a friend of Gandhi's father, shows the extent to which Gandhi betrayed her father's ideals. "The face of opposition" to Gandhi, Narayan was imprisoned without cause and held for the duration of the Emergency. Analysis of the fledgling auto industry in India adds depth to Gandhi's son, Sanjay, including the story of his haphazard attempt to produce a "people's car" at a reasonable price.

Context and color shape this story and make it accessible to global citizens and students of history. Prakash is invested in democracy, and his book is the study of a young democracy derailed by authoritarian leadership. For those witnessing the authoritarian movements of today, *Emergency Chronicles* delivers a cautionary tale with instructive parallels.

JOE TAYLOR (January/February 2019)

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