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Gyan Prakash. 2019. *Emergency Chronicles: Indira Gandhi and Democracy's Turning Point*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press. 456 pages.

- 1 The state of Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi on June 25, 1975, and lasting until its withdrawal on March 21, 1977, has inspired a wealth of literature. Ranging from “personal histories” of the period by eminent journalists (Nayar 1977; Kapoor 2015), insider accounts by policymakers (Dhar 2001), historical studies (Chandra 2003; Lockwood 2015; Jaffrelot and Anil 2021), sociological accounts of the resistant public spheres of the period (Plys 2020; Rajagopal 2011), anthropological studies of the Emergency state (Tarlo 2003), or even literary criticism on poetry and fiction representative of the period (Mathur 2004; Merivirta 2019), scholarship on the Emergency abounds. The upsurge of this scholarship in the past decade may be explained by the consolidation of Hindutva politics in contemporary India. The consecutive electoral wins of the Bharatiya Janata Party in the general elections of 2014 and 2019, and the state's subsequent repression of institutions and activists has brought to bear the ghost of the 1975 Emergency on the “New India” of today. Sustained attacks on universities like Jawaharlal Nehru University, Aligarh Muslim University, and Jamia Millia Islamia, the ransacking of independent media houses like NewsClick, and the indiscriminate arrests of students and human rights activists have led scholars to turn to India's first authoritarian crisis to reach an understanding of our present discontent. Among the monographs published on the Emergency, Gyan Prakash's *Emergency Chronicles: Indira Gandhi and Democracy's Turning Point* (2018) remains distinctive for its multidisciplinary analysis and gripping storytelling.

Reminiscent of the narrative quality of previous works like *Mumbai Fables* (2010), Prakash's book draws on archives such as the Ford Foundation Records, personal correspondences, interviews with witnesses and activists, and legal debates to furnish a history that contests the notion of the Emergency as an isolated national phenomenon, rather constructing the crisis as "part of the sweeping worldwide challenge from below to postwar and postcolonial establishments" (8). Prakash situates the Emergency within the global context of popular activism in the late 1960s and 1970s drawing parallels with the simultaneous crises in other postcolonial South Asian nation-states like Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh (13).

- 2 *Emergency Chronicles* challenges the popular memory of the national Emergency and dismantles two of the most persistent myths associated with the event. First, the book contests the perception of the constitutional crisis as an exceptional event—a sudden descent into authoritarianism (8), locating it instead within India's broader experience with popular democracy. Second, it delivers a resounding critique of the view that posits the Emergency as a distortion attributed to "Indira's evil political genius," attacking its portrayal as an isolated phenomenon cut off from the period before and the time after. Prakash lays out an expansive framework for an understanding of the crisis within the origins of the postcolonial Indian nation-state. Relying, among other authors, on Francine Frankel's work on India's political economy and Granville Austin's extensive research on the Indian constitution, *Emergency Chronicles* juxtaposes the Emergency's shadow on the everyday lives of India's citizens in the 1970s with the larger legal and political processes that shaped the event. As its title makes clear, Prakash posits the Emergency as a "turning point" in the history of Indian democracy, an account that is markedly different from Jaffrelot and Anil's (2021b) interpretation of the crisis as "merely an intensification of recognizable trends from the past" (p. 13–14). In their recent monograph *India's First Dictatorship: The Emergency, 1975–1977*, the authors write that, rather than being a "turning point" or exceptional event, the emergency helps us view Indian democracy through a different lens, that of India's subalterns and marginalized citizens who had long been the targets of techniques of governmentality like gentrification and sterilization programs that are often exclusively associated with the Emergency (Jaffrelot and Anil 2021a:14).
- 3 While studies like Emma Tarlo's *Unsettling Memories: Narratives of the Emergency in Delhi* (2003) focus on the voices of subaltern citizens like the inhabitants of Delhi's resettlement colonies, Prakash's historiography directs its attention primarily to the plight of students and political activists through detailed attention to characterization and successful evocation of the texture of places and moments. *Emergency Chronicles* begins at the School of Languages in Jawaharlal Nehru University on the morning of the first day of the Emergency. Following the mistaken arrest of JNU student activist and member of the Student Federation of India (SFI) Prabir Purkayastha during a protest, Prakash deftly weaves together the students' personal and political lives at the university with the prominent political figures who went on to become the face of the Emergency. However, the protagonist of the first chapter is the institution itself as a representation of the contradictions of Nehruvian India. The proposal for JNU, established in 1969, was spearheaded by such disparate figures as Dr. Douglas Ensminger of the Ford Foundation and the left-wing journalist Romesh Thapar. Prakash writes that while the left-wing student body of JNU in the 1970s was strictly anti-American and "India's image under Nehru and Indira was pro-Soviet Union," Nehru

himself was not averse to American modernization and maintained a close relationship with Ensminger (24). These contradictions at the institution's very foundation were central to the Nehruvian vision that JNU was built to embody, and which Prakash describes as "the ideal of a pedagogic state, teaching its citizens to be Indian in the fashion that Nehru envisaged. The irony was that this was being built precisely when this ideal was coming apart on the streets" (26). *Emergency Chronicles* situates these contradictions implicit in the Nehruvian vision at the very heart of the Emergency.

- 4 The conflict between the momentum for a strong centralized state and the impetus for a decentralized democracy played a vital role in Indian constitutional debates and the history of the Emergency. During the second world war, the "mobilization of war and militarization brought the state directly into the lives of the people" (47), even as the war shattered old patterns of colonial authority spearheading the process of decolonization. This debate continued on into the decolonization period as well-known figures like Léopold Sédar Senghor in French West Africa and Aimé Césaire in the Caribbean pushed for the self-determination of colonies without state sovereignty. In India, the horrors of the partition, the worsening situation in Kashmir and Hyderabad, and the desire to carry out the incomplete project of modernity, a key concern in Nehru's *Discovery of India* (1946), served as the rationale for forming a centralized state. Prakash writes that Indian independence entailed no revolutionary overthrow of the old social order, economy, law, police, and bureaucracy, leading to disillusionment and widespread unrest (40). The postcolonial elites required a state that was capable of containing this discontent and drew heavily on the colonial legal apparatus. During the Emergency, police brutality, arrests of opposition leaders, widespread censorship, and the crackdown on journalism were also a reminder of how colonial laws of exception were instituted in the Indian constitution. Laws like the Indian Penal Code (1860) put into place after the rebellion of 1857, and the Defence of India Act (1915), an emergency criminal law drafted to prevent insurrectionary activities during the first world war, resurfaced in 1971 as the dreaded Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) and were widely used during the Emergency.
- 5 The lack of social transformation in postcolonial India spurred popular rage on the streets manifesting in several movements on the ground. The Bihar Movement (1974–1975), comprising primarily youth and students, demanded Sampoorna Kranti or Total Revolution under the leadership of Jayaprakash Narayan. While Bipan Chandra's monograph *In the Name of Democracy: JP Movement and the Emergency* (2003) contends that JP's movement that formed coalitions with fascist organizations like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Jana Sangh was one of the foremost rationales for the Emergency, Prakash insists that popular unrest in the country had been building since the 1960s, not unlike similar movements around the world. For example, in 1966, Maharashtrian cartoonist Bal Thackeray founded the ethnonationalist Shiv Sena party that demanded a Maharashtra for Maharashtrians. Prakash differentiates JP's "Total Revolution," which espoused a "People's Government" aimed at the extension and democratization of power (111) from the populist Shiv Sena, which pitted a homogenous "people" against its enemies. In addition, The Communist Party of India (Marxist), founded in 1964, saw the communists' ascendance in Bengal, with left-wing activists from squatter colonies acquiring union leadership positions and introducing protest tactics like the gherao (similar to picketing in which workers prevent employers from leaving until their demands are met) in the Indian public sphere. In the countryside, peasant unrest culminated in the Naxalbari movement in 1967,

spearheaded by local leaders and the communists of Bengal, leading to the formation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) in 1969. The youth of the country played a significant role in most of these movements. Prakash's book demonstrates the state's insistence on "disciplining" this chaos on the streets through the Emergency, which was posited as an instrument of social democracy, a "shock treatment to bring the undisciplined citizenry to order" (114).

- 6 One of the pleasures of reading *Emergency Chronicles* is that it draws its examples of postcolonial anxieties and rebellion from the archives of Indian cinema in the late 1960s and the 1970s. The cinematic output of directors like Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, Shyam Benegal, Mani Kaul, and Kumar Shahani provides an apt canvas for reading the turbulence in Indian cities and the countryside. In the chapter "Rage on The Streets," Prakash compares Satyajit Ray and Mrinal Sen's films for their portrayal of Calcutta as "a city torn asunder by political violence and state repression" (92). Similarly, Shyam Benegal's films set in the rural countryside reflect postcolonial India's failure to transform the feudal social order. In the context of the global aesthetics of liberation that emerged in such movements like Brazil's Cinema Novo and the French New Wave, Prakash reads Benegal's films like *Ankur* (The Seedling, 1973) and *Nishant* (The Night's End, 1975) as local iterations of disillusionment in the face of persistent caste, gender, and class inequality.
- 7 In consecutive chapters, *Emergency Chronicles* takes up two of the most cited authoritarian projects of the Emergency—the controversy around Sanjay Gandhi's Maruti Car and the slum demolition and sterilization programs spearheaded by Jagmohan, then chairman of the Delhi Development Authority. Prakash demonstrates the interconnectedness of the two projects arguing that "for population and development activists ... the mantra was modernization, and the small family was its embodiment and instrument" (262). In the chapter titled "Sanjay's Chariot," the corruption-ridden Maruti project spearheaded by Sanjay Gandhi is contrasted with the Ambassador car, where the former's positioning of itself as the "people's car" is counterposed to the "postcolonial idea of simplicity and a controlled economy epitomized by the largest selling passenger car, the stodgy Ambassador" (209). Prakash formulates this movement in design as an allegory of the Emergency, for it symbolizes an intervention in the Nehruvian planned economy where personal automobiles were not a priority (209).
- 8 The subsequent chapter, "Bodies and Bulldozers," builds on the Emergency's rhetoric of modernization by connecting it to the coercive sterilization projects that have come to be identified as embodiments of the Emergency regime's cruelty. Rather than seeing these projects as exceptional, Prakash situates them within the prehistory of family planning in India and the global politics of population control. Drawing on Mathew Connelly, Rebecca Jane Williams, and Sara Hodges' work, Prakash argues that not only did family planning policies in India go back decades before the Emergency, they also began as a global project (259). From Thomas Malthus's "Essay on the Principle of Population" (1798) to the racial hysteria over the "impending yellow peril" among American elites, the history of population control was inflected with fears that those deemed inferior viz-a-viz race and class would outnumber the fittest and most capable (259). In the 1970s, these Malthusian concerns juxtaposed with Cold War paranoia led to American intervention in the Global South through policy incentives regarding population control. The Ford Foundation under Ensminger was key to such incentives

in India. Prakash cites Nicole Sackley's work on the Ford Foundation to register how "the foundation's promotion of modernization was part of the anti-communist U.S. agenda against the Soviet Union, but Ensminger skillfully delinked Ford India from Cold War geopolitics and positioned it as India's partner in a broad strategy of development" (262).

- 9 The chapter "Freedom Behind Bars" interrupts these geopolitical considerations through a philosophical meditation on the nature of freedom reflected in the archives of the Emergency. Prakash reads the prison diaries of Jayaprakash Narayan and Lal Krishna Advani, the letters exchanged between the socialist couple Madhu and Pramila Dandavate, and interviews with Prabir Purkayastha, the wrongfully arrested JNU student, to recreate the dialectical struggle over the many iterations of freedom in postcolonial India. On the one hand, JP Narayan's reflections on freedom in his prison diary are grounded in the assumption of the continuity of anti-colonial dissent in postcolonial India. Similarly, socialists like George Fernandes, Madhu Limaye, and the Dandavates demonstrate their unbending opposition to Indira Gandhi in the missives they wrote to her from prison. On the other hand, the RSS chief Balasaheb Deora's two supplicatory letters to Indira Gandhi attempt to negotiate his jail release. The conceptualization of these different perspectives on freedom is juxtaposed with the texture of everyday life in incarceration evoked most distinctly in the Dandavates' letters which were interspersed with revolutionary poetry, notes on their readings, and even the weather. In bringing together these material archives of poetry and politics, *Emergency Chronicles* builds an affective discourse on freedom that juxtaposes the philosophical and the embodied.
- 10 While the Hindu right posits the Emergency as an interruption in India's democratic history, Prakash's conceptualization of the Emergency as a "turning point" emphasizes how the crisis changed the terms of political debate in India. The Emergency turned the contestation over the meaning of democratic values into a constitutional crisis where politics came to acquire a primarily electoral dimension. Through examples of literary texts like Rahi Masoom Raza's Urdu novel *Katra Be Aarzoo* (Street Without Desires, 1978), Prakash undercuts the euphoria that marked the end of the Emergency by pointing to the persistence of chaos, inequality, and impunity in Indian political and social life. Indira Gandhi continued to justify the imposition of the Emergency and refused to testify before the Shah Commission established in 1977 to investigate the excesses of the Emergency. Despite revoking several press freedoms and parliamentary restrictions, the opposition failed to repeal the forty-second amendment under Article 368 that granted immense powers to the parliament to amend laws at will. Moreover, escalating inflation and caste violence created a crisis of legitimacy for the Janata Party, leading to the resurgence of support for Gandhi, who would go on to rise again in the next election cycle in 1980.
- 11 The final chapter titled "The Aftermath" explores how the Emergency's aftermath helped solidify an exceptional narrative of the period. Acknowledging the historian's debt to the Shah Commission report, Prakash nevertheless notes how the Commission's centering of the "excesses" of the Emergency contributed to the focus on personalities instead of processes in understanding the crisis (354). Moreover, the aftermath of the Emergency brought together the coalition of Bharatiya Lok Dal, Jana Sangh, Swatantra Party, and the Socialist Party, blunting the edge of left politics solely for electoral maneuvering. Prakash mourns this movement from prison to party politics, signaling

the sidelining of the radical project of social transformation that was once the core of democratic politics in the decolonizing period. Significantly, the return of Indira Gandhi as prime minister in 1980 marked a “Hindu turn in her public attitude” (371). The social-democratic rhetoric of the earlier years was replaced by a distinctly religious overtone in Gandhi’s public discourse, which was backed by an alliance of state and private capital, tax concessions for wealthy farmers, and her refusal to act on the Mandal commission. This turn was instrumental in strengthening the RSS, which had acquired legitimacy during the Emergency, and was beginning to mobilize Hindus to build a temple on the site of the Babri Masjid, foreshadowing the tragedy of the Gujarat riots a decade later.

- 12 In marking these continuities between the Emergency and the ongoing rise of Hindu nationalism in India, Prakash’s book may as well be read as a unique history of the present. Unlike Chandra, who claims that the Emergency and the JP Movement have little resonance today, *Emergency Chronicles* historicizes the rhetoric of the “undeclared Emergency” in contemporary India by revealing a clear path from the crisis of the 1970s to the vexed state of Indian democracy today. However, while the book explores the individual disagreements between the Dandavates over the coalition between the socialists and the Sangh under the banner of the Janata party, a more thorough examination of the Hindu Right’s trajectory in the days leading up to the Emergency and in its aftermath would have strengthened the monograph’s contribution to the contemporary moment. Also, the book does not delve into the knotty alliance between the Congress and the Communists explored in monographs like David Lockwood’s *The Communist Party of India and the Indian Emergency* (2016). In light of communist support, at least in the first year of the Emergency, the RSS was widely represented by US media as a force of resistance against the authoritarianism of the Emergency. This coverage, inflected by Cold War propaganda, shaped transnational support for the organization, encouraging its growth. On the home front, media studies scholar Arvind Rajagopal discusses how the Emergency and its propaganda mechanisms were instrumental in the rise of the new Indian middle class, which has emerged today as the strongest base for the Bharatiya Janata Party. In addition, Prakash’s “Chronicles,” like many other monographs on the Emergency, is primarily focused on Delhi at the expense of the political developments in the Indian borderlands, especially Kashmir and Sikkim. While the study deftly pushes back against the exceptional narrative of the Emergency by grounding the crises within developmental debates in postcolonial India, there is little analysis of the techniques of governance deployed during the Emergency and their continuities with the Indian borderlands. A figure like Jagmohan, who led the Shahjahanabad demolitions in the mid-1970s, went on to serve as the governor of Jammu and Kashmir from 1984 to 1989, and then again in 1990 at the height of militancy there. The integration of Sikkim in India, just months before the Emergency on May 16, 1975, the brutal suppression of the Mizoram National Front in 1966 with the bombing of Aizawl, and the Indira-Sheikh Accord signed in 1975, which saw popular Kashmiri politician Sheikh Abdullah capitulate to Kashmir’s merger with India under Article 370, find little space in Prakash’s narrative. With the revoking of Article 370 in Kashmir on August 5, 2019, the events of the mid-1970s have come full circle.
- 13 Despite these limitations, Prakash’s book is timely for readers within and outside academia who are confronted with the rhetoric of a “second undeclared Emergency” in contemporary India. On February 12, 2021, the Indian Enforcement Directorate (ED) raided the offices of the digital news portal NewsClick whose editor-in-chief Prabir

Purkayastha is the JNU student who features prominently in *Emergency Chronicles*. Not only does the online news magazine provide a space for radical journalists, but its coverage of the ongoing farmers' protests in the months leading up to the raid had earned it a wide readership. One among many instances of the state's crackdown on independent media and journalists, the attack on NewsClick invited widespread critique and comparisons with the Emergency. Historian S. Irfan Habib tweeted his response to the incident, "Sad but not surprised that a platform like #NewsClick is under attack... Its founder Prabir Purkayastha fought Emergency as well, so he knows the ways to fight." These and many other stories of dissent, reflections on freedom, and a clear outline of past mistakes make *Emergency Chronicles* an indispensable read for both scholars of history and culture, and dissenting citizens.

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