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FORGETTING AND REMEMBERING THE EMERGENCY

'Nothing that happens in the future can undo this past.' (*John Dayal and Ajoy Bose*)

The history of Independent India can, like all history, be read as a history of remembering and forgetting. Certain characters, moments and events are splashed large across the canvas of public memory; others are watered down, diminished, reduced, faded out of the picture altogether. One such faded moment is the Emergency of 1975–7. So much has it slipped out of public discourse that today it is remembered, if at all, for the extent to which it has been forgotten. Yet, such forgetting is not without significance. It has its own history. As Ashis Nandy recently commented: 'Enormous political effort has gone into wiping out the Emergency as a live memory.'[1]

The Emergency does not lie alone in India's pool of forgotten moments. Neither is it unique. Such moments share at least one common factor: they do not fit comfortably into the national picture of how things are meant to be. Hence, as Shahid Amin has demonstrated, the violence that occurred at Chauri Chaura in 1922 has been sidelined in the 'nationalist master narrative' of the freedom struggle which seeks to uphold an image of non-violence.[2] Similarly, the horror that accompanied Partition in 1947–8 has been underplayed or passed off as a brief 'moment of madness' because it does not fit the 'history of progress' as we want to see it.[3] The Emergency

[1]Ashis Nandy, 'Emergency Remembered', *Times of India*, 22 June 1995.

[2]Amin, 1995, *Event, Metaphor, Memory*.

[3]Gyanendra Pandey, 1995, 'Nation and Masculinity: Some Reflections on Gandhi and the Partition of India', paper presented at a conference on Gandhi held at SOAS,

is another violent moment. Like Chauri Chaura and Partition, it is difficult to digest. Not only does it threaten the precarious image of India as 'essentially non-violent'—an image increasingly difficult to sustain—but it also implicates the state as the key agent of violence. More threatening still, the Emergency challenges the discourse of democracy which claims an unbroken hold over India's past from the present day right back to the attainment of Independence in 1947. But the Emergency cannot be forgotten without leaving some casualties in the discourse of democracy, for to forget it is also to forget what was once described as 'democracy's finest hour': the vote which dramatically overthrew the Emergency government in March 1977. At the time this event was projected as a historic victory, a genuine 'people's struggle' on a par with the attainment of Independence. One British journalist even went so far as to state '22 March 1977 may be recorded by future historians as one of the most significant dates in the second half of the twentieth century'.[4] His words read oddly now, as if in the process of entering history, they somehow got deleted.

Recent trends in historiography teach us to take an interest in such deleted moments. We are no longer concerned only with what is written but also with how it is written and what has been excluded. This creates an awareness of the processes by which certain events become significant through the activation of memory whilst others become insignificant through the institution of forgetting. Forgetting, like remembering, can be public as well as private. Whilst public memory is triggered off by collective symbols that often take on physical form, public amnesia operates through producing absences or substitutes; absences which serve to discourage the construction and survival of memory, and substitutes which serve to redirect memory along alternative routes. Public forgetting is a subtle process, not least because we tend to forget what it is we have forgotten. And that is when forgetting is most successful—when we are no longer aware of what is absent.

The visitor who arrives in Delhi is offered a tour of the monuments

October 1995. It is only in very recent years that attempts are being made to recover Partition narratives and to recognise and analyse the levels of violence they contain. See also Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence* and Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries*.

[4]Michael Henderson, 1977, *Experiment with Untruth: India Under Emergency*, Delhi: Macmillan, preface.

of public memory. For the modern period these include Parliament House, Rashtrapati Bhavan, India Gate and the memorials and cremation sites of great national leaders, notably Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. It is a tour which traces history as it is meant to be remembered, replete with physical markers inscribed in the landscape of the city. What is proposed here is a guided tour of how a certain moment, the Emergency, has been forgotten, and how its forgetting is equally imprinted in the capital's landscape. It is a tour which takes us to places which might have become sites for remembering the Emergency but which, in the course of history, have become sites for forgetting it. We begin our tour by following a bus of Indian tourists to Teen Murti Bhavan, the residence of the Nehru family, just a short distance from Parliament in the heart of New Delhi.

Teen Murti Bhavan

Teen Murti Bhavan is a handsome cream coloured mansion built by Edwin Lutyens in the 1920s as part of the new imperial capital. It is situated in a luscious tree-filled garden, one of the few places in contemporary Delhi where peacocks literally strut. Jawaharlal Nehru lived here during his 16 years as India's first Prime Minister and much time was also spent here by his daughter Indira and her sons, Rajiv and Sanjay. Until 1948, however, it had been the official residence of a British Commander in Chief. History has since smoothed over these imperial edges by converting the building into a memorial museum 'dedicated to the nation'. Walking around this gracious home-cum-museum one can see Nehru's study and living rooms, frozen in time since his death. One can also begin again at his birth and follow his steps through a photo montage of the freedom struggle and the founding of the Indian Republic. It seems an ironic place for tracing memories of the Emergency, a period which most intellectuals consider a blot on the noble Gandhi-Nehru legacy. But history has kindly intervened on two occasions to save posthumous Nehru from exposure to his daughter Indira's politics: once in 1971 when close associates prevented her from fulfilling her plan to take up residence in the mansion; and again in 1974 when the library, which used to be inside the mansion, was transferred into a new modern building around the corner. All of this means that when Indira Gandhi declared the

Emergency, she was living not in Teen Murti Bhavan, but in the nearby residence of 1 Safdarjang Road, and when literature about the Emergency began to surface, it was shelved, not in Jawaharlal Nehru's home but in the modern new library next to it.

The library, moulded in sandy concrete, may lack the historic grace of the mansion, but it serves our purpose well as a repository of the past. Whilst the tourists continue to follow the arrows of public memory in Teen Murti House, we shall make a brief detour in search of things once remembered but since forgotten, for it is only through reviving memories that we can comprehend what their forgetting is about. Rummaging through the shelves marked 'Constitution', it is possible to trace the duration of the Emergency both as an experience and as a written memory. The books, though jumbled together, slip easily into two categories: those which welcome the Emergency, generally published between 1975–6, and those which deride it, generally published between 1977–8. The overlap is minimal since censorship had prevented people from openly criticising the Emergency at the time, whilst simultaneously pushing criticism underground from which it re-surfaced after the event. What we have, then, are two alternative narratives, each with its own vision; one which projects the Emergency as a step into a brighter future; the other which remembers it as a bleak and shameful past. Each narrative creates its own time-scale, re-arranging past and present to suit its future, yet neither dominates for more than 21 months. These are phantom futures and ghostly pasts. By 1979 they are already subsiding. By 1980 their demise is marked by the absence of new additions that year to the Emergency shelf.[5]

Stepping into the future: the official narrative of the Emergency

'I am sure you are all conscious of the deep and widespread conspiracy, which has been brewing ever since I began to introduce certain progressive measures of benefit to the common man and woman of India,' Indira Gandhi announced in her first Emergency broadcast

[5]Occasional books on the Emergency trickled into the library in the 1980s such as *Voices of Emergency*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, a collection of resistance poems edited by J.O. Perry which did not come out until 1983 owing to the difficulties that had been involved in collecting poems from across the country.

on 26 June 1975. 'Certain persons have gone to the length of inciting our armed forces to mutiny and our police to rebel...How can any Government worth its name stand by and allow the country's stability to be imperilled? The actions of the few are endangering the rights of the vast majority.'[6]

'We were not happy to declare Emergency,' she announced some six weeks later in her Republic Day speech, 'but we had to under the compulsion of circumstances...Stringent measures were taken just as bitter pills have to be administered to a patient in the interest of his health...No one can prevent India marching ahead.'[7] These were themes she was to repeat throughout the Emergency; that temporary hardships were necessary in order for India to speed up the march of progress. They were themes splashed across the newspaper headlines and posted onto billboards and stickers throughout the city:

> THE NATION IS ON THE MOVE!
> EMERGENCY USHERS IN ERA OF DISCIPLINE!
> MARCHING TO A BETTER TOMORROW!
> EMERGENCY FOR A STRONGER MORE PROSPEROUS FUTURE!

Integral to this vision of the future was the notion that democracy had been derailed and that the country was spiralling towards unprecedented disaster. Jayaprakash Narayan was identified as the chief conspirator intent on provoking full scale rebellion and encouraging 'anti-Congress parties' to obstruct not only economic development, but all normal functioning of the administration and economy. They were inciting people not to work, encouraging the non-payment of taxes, preventing farmers from selling their produce to the government, encouraging mass strikes and rousing children and students to violence. They had created 'the kind of climate' in which it was impossible for any nation to survive, let alone prosper.[8] The Emergency was therefore a constitutional necessity. It gave the Prime Minister the much needed right to deal harshly with disruptive elements and to set the nation back on the path to progress at an

[6]Broadcast on radio, 26 June 1975, included in Indira Gandhi, 1984, *Selected Speeches and Writings* (*SSWIG*), vol. III, 1972–1977, Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting; pp. 177–8.

[7]Speech from Red Fort, 15 August 1975, *SSWIG*, pp. 200–1.

[8]Interview, 3 July 1975, *SSWIG*, p. 180.

accelerated rate. 'Whatever we are doing is pro-India, it is pro-Indian people, it is pro-the direction of the future of India,' she told the Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament).[9]

By portraying the recent past as a descent into catastrophe, Indira Gandhi not only justified 'stringent measures' but also proclaimed them as a duty: 'It is incumbent on a democratic regime to remove obstacles and impediments...for social, political and economic progress.'[10] The arrest and detention of opposition leaders, social activists, journalists, students and academics 'were necessary' for the preservation of democracy. So too was the banning of certain organisations and groups 'wedded to terror and murder'. Similarly press censorship had become 'a necessity'. 'I am not happy that we had to impose regulations on newspapers,' she told M. Shamim in an interview, 'but some journals had shed all objectivity and independence and allied themselves totally with the opposition front and did anything to spread doom and defeatism.'[11] For some time they had 'deliberately distorted news', 'made provocative comments', 'hurled allegations' all of which had to be stopped in order 'to restore a climate of trust'.[12] As for foreign journalists, they had long enjoyed maligning India and spreading vicious rumours so their trumped up criticisms were not to be heeded.

Slogans in the streets of Delhi reiterated these messages:

> GRAVE MISCHIEF HAS BEEN DONE BY IRRESPONSIBLE WRITING!
> SILENCE IS GOLDEN!

Conditions restored to 'normalcy', Indira Gandhi was then able to 'GET ON WITH THE JOB OF NATION BUILDING!' by introducing a new 20-point economic programme aimed at hoisting the country forward. 'The Emergency provides us with a new opportunity to go ahead with our economic tasks,' a government pamphlet announced. Plans were oriented towards improving the social and economic conditions of the poor. They included lowering the price of essential commodities, providing land-sites for the landless and weaker sections, banning barbarous customs like bonded labour, reviewing agricultural minimum wages, expanding irrigation, accelerating power schemes, developing

[9]Speech in Lok Sabha, 22 July 1975, *SSWIG*, p. 187.

[10]Interview with Indira Gandhi in *Souvenir on Emergency and Social Justice*, 1975, Delhi: Council of National Affairs.

[11]Interview, 3 July 1975, *SSWIG*, p. 181.

[12]Broadcast on radio, 27 June 1975, *SSWIG*, p. 179.

the handloom sector, implementing agricultural ceilings and liquidating rural indebtedness. They also included income tax relief for the middle classes, control of prices for books and stationery, and harsh measures intended to tackle tax evasion, smuggling and various types of 'economic crime'. The overriding message was that through hard work and mass co-ordination, India could enter a new and successful era of socialism.

> THE ONLY MAGIC TO REMOVE POVERTY IS HARD WORK!
> YOU TOO HAVE A ROLE IN THE EMERGENCY!
> WORK HARD! PRODUCE MORE! MAINTAIN DISCIPLINE!

While slogans, stickers and newspaper headlines codified the basic message into succinct and memorable phrases, government pamphlets with titles like *Timely Steps* and *Preserving our Democratic Structure* spread the word. Meanwhile books and seminar proceedings lent the weight of academic approval with titles like: *Freedom is not Free* (1975), *Era of Discipline* (1976), *Thank you, Mrs Gandhi* (1977) and *Emergency: Its Needs and Gains* (1976). Such books, along with newspaper and magazine reports of the time, should be read, not as witnesses of the past but as mouthpieces of the dominant narrative of the then present. Take for example the commemorative booklet *Souvenir on Emergency and Social Justice*, 'presented to the great leader of masses, Indira Gandhi' on her 58th birthday (19 November 1975). Here the Prime Minister's words are echoed in the praise of successive chief ministers and important dignitaries who proclaim the Emergency 'a necessary measure', a 'good opportunity for the poor', 'a wise and timely action'. Meanwhile Indira herself is admired for her dynamic leadership, her pursuit of truth and her dedication to the nation for which she will never be forgotten. 'The coming generation will feel extremely proud of the name of Indira Gandhi. They will worship her as [the] personification of Sita, Laxmi and Durga [Hindu goddesses]. Long live Indira Ji,' predicts an enthusiastic Virendra Khanna, General Secretary, Council of National Affairs.

By 1976 the 20-point national economic programme had been joined by an equally promising five-point programme, to be implemented by the Youth Congress under the 'dynamic leadership' of the Prime Minister's youngest son, Sanjay Gandhi. So apposite was this smaller programme that Indira Gandhi even suggested that the 20-point programme could do with borrowing some extra points from it! Some, in their enthusiasm, began to refer to 'the 25-point programme'.

Sanjay's points were short and pithy: Each One Teach One—to achieve complete literacy; Family Planning—for a prosperous future; Plant Trees—for ecological balance; Abolish Dowry—to end a social evil; Eradicate Casteism—to destroy social prejudice.

The speed with which Sanjay Gandhi was rising to prominence was heralded as 'a symbol of the new emerging youth power', made possible through the favourable conditions brought on by the Emergency. It was in the enthusiasm and actions of this newly roused Indian youth that the country's future lay. 'Significantly and happily', wrote the journalist of a reputable fortnightly magazine, 'Sanjay Gandhi today has leapt out of the wings...and raced to the centre of the Indian political theatre. He has won this prize race within a span of 12 months, or even less...He is ensconced today in a position of political leadership which comes naturally to him. He is in the key-slot of authority: both political and organisational.'[13] This magnificent leap to power at the age of only twenty-nine, and without any previous political experience, showed his extraordinary energy, his 'hard-as-nails approach' and his 'accurate perception' of India's urgent problems. Like his mother he seemed to magnetise the crowds through his projection of a better future: 'As a catalyst he is a vital and necessary political bromide to organise Indian youth. Appropriately large numbers of Indian young men and women have increasingly gravitated towards Sanjay Gandhi. They have all gravitated for a reason. And they will remain with him for a reason.'[14]

In Delhi Sanjay's praises were sung for two main 'reasons'. His close involvement with the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), and his personal dedication to beautification of the city, had resulted in the planting of thousands of trees and resettlement of thousands of squatters who had previously lived in miserable and wretched slum conditions. Such slums could no longer be tolerated with callous indifference. Demolition and resettlement were the prerequisites for development, and Sanjay Gandhi was visibly at their forefront. But most importantly of all, Sanjay Gandhi was praised for his deep commitment to family planning. At the 'Hum Do Hamare Do' (We are two, so let's have two) Family Planning seminar in August 1976, he was acknowledged as one of the driving forces behind the new priority

[13]'Sanjay Gandhi: A Driving Force', *India Today*, 1–15 Sept., 1976, p. 20.
[14]Ibid.

given to this urgent economic problem. The conference pamphlet contains Sanjay's photograph on the frontispiece, along with those of the President and the Prime Minister. The cover of the pamphlet, typical of government publications of the time, portrays a panorama of the vast, uncontrollable Indian 'masses'. Inside we are confronted by the horrifying urgency of the population explosion, as the chief ministers of various states compete with alarmist statistics. 'Every 19th second a child is born in West Bengal, every minute, 3 new born babies, every hour, 180 new born babies and by the time you leave the conference today—today we shall be spending two hours—we shall have 360 new born babies in West Bengal...Can you see how dangerous the problem is?' There was unanimity that vasectomy was the most efficient means of tackling the terrifying birth rate which would lead India to ever more grinding poverty if not forestalled. Vasectomy camps were already spreading throughout the country, and incentives in the form of cash, ghee and electrical equipment were offered as appropriate. Sterilisation was heralded as the means by which every Indian, rich or poor, could contribute to a better and more prosperous future.

The dominant narrative of the Emergency was bold and unmistakable. It flowed not only from the mouths of Indira Gandhi and her son, but also from the mouths of politicians, bureaucrats, officials and journalists. In Delhi, it was quite literally plastered in the streets in hoardings, stickers and bold slogans painted on the back of rickshaws and buses. By controlling population growth, increasing production, boosting agriculture, encouraging industry, abolishing socially backward customs, clearing slums and rooting out corruption, India could achieve new levels of greatness. Modernity was the goal and the Emergency was the means to attain it. It provided India with the discipline she so desperately needed. But, despite the clarity of this message, certain people deliberately chose to 'misunderstand' it. They went about spreading rumours of 'forcible sterilisations' and of people 'crushed to death under bulldozers'. They delighted in exaggerating the occasional mishap and spreading fear amongst the people who were basically in favour of the Emergency.

By the end of 1976, the dominant narrative had become increasingly defensive. It was losing its hold. Despite censorship and imprisonments, voices of dissent were beginning to surface which could no longer be glossed over as the discourse of the traitor. Previously reduced to

the hushed tones of underground literature, the muted criticisms of the few Indian newspapers with editors brave enough to risk their careers[15] and the blatant but distant rumblings of the foreign press,[16] these voices of dissent were getting both louder and closer. By early 1977, they seemed to be emanating not just from subversive activists, many of whom were in prison, but from the ordinary citizens, from the very crowds who had previously cheered so loudly, not least because they had often been paid to do so. Attempts were made to adjust the dominant narrative to suit the apparent change of atmosphere. A halt was called on family planning activities and prominent individuals began to alter their tone. Bansi Lal, the Defence Minister, made a public apology to the people of Haryana, promising, 'no more sterilisation'. Increasingly ministers began to speak of 'overenthusiastic officials' getting carried away. Indira Gandhi decided to calm fears of a permanent dictatorship by relaxing censorship and announcing a general election in January 1977, but the tide had already turned. At her first election rally on 1 March 1977, her speech was shaky. It began with references to 'reactionaries and vested interests' bent on attacking her, but continued with an admission that certain 'excesses' had been done, not only by officials, but also by politicians.[17] Her words were drowned out by a disgruntled crowd. During the election campaign that followed, counter arguments gathered strength in the merging of the opposition forces under the Janata Party. These forces were speaking a new discourse of vengeance.

The election results were announced on 22 March 1977. They

[15]During the Emergency the two national newspapers which most successfully withstood censorship restrictions were the *Indian Express* and the *Statesman* whose editors, V.K. Narasimhan and C.R. Irani respectively, retained their commitment to the idea of a free press.

[16]Foreign newspapers played an important role in publishing critical material about the Emergency, much of which fed back to India through underground channels. Foreign correspondents were at first expected to submit drafts of their articles for inspection by official censors. Later they were permitted to censor their own dispatches according to official guidelines. Peter Hazelhurst (*The Times*), Mark Tully (*BBC*), Lewis Simpson (*Washington Post*) and Lorens Jenkins (*Newsweek*) were amongst those foreign correspondents who were expelled from India for their controversial reporting.

[17]Since the main source of Indira Gandhi's speeches is a 'selected' rather than a 'collected' works (*SSWIG*), it contains very few of the speeches she made during the Emergency. This means that we are obliged to rely on the reports of journalists and writers for their content.

recorded a massive Janata victory. Indira Gandhi revoked the Emergency the following day. Her march into the future had been abruptly halted. It was time for a new narrative to assert its dominance.

Anatomising the past: the post-Emergency counter narrative

'On 25 June 1975, Indian democracy was put to death'—so reads the cover of B.M. Sinha's *Operation Emergency*, a slim paperback completed only 10 weeks after the March elections. The book purports to be 'an uncensored sweeping narrative of the terror, oppression and resistance during those dark days'. The words are sprawled dramatically in black and yellow on a white background. In the right-hand corner a blood-red splash contains the words 'Topical Hard Hitting Political Best-seller'. On the back cover is a potted history of the Emergency experience, printed dramatically in heavy black ink:

- POLITICAL LEADERS AND WORKERS, INTELLECTUALS AND JOURNALISTS NABBED IN MIDNIGHT SWOOP, AND JAILED
- PRESS GAGGED, AND EMASCULATED
- PRISONERS SUBJECTED TO TORTURE AND UNHEARD OF BRUTALITY
- HOUSES AND BAZAARS BULLDOZED INTO RUBBLE
- MEN AND WOMEN DRIVEN LIKE CATTLE INTO FP [FAMILY PLANNING] CAMPS
- THE 'CAUCUS' STRIKING TERROR, UNHINDERED BY THE LAW
- SYCOPHANTS AND HANGERS-ON CALLING THE TUNE

We have entered a new body of literature, enthused with outrage and the desire to expose. As if to compensate for the burden of censorship during the Emergency, this new literature seems to have virtually flooded the market in the years 1977–8. Whether in the form of prison memoir, official judgement, resistance literature or political exposé, this new literature is concerned primarily with remembering the Emergency in such a way that it can not and will not be forgotten. 'Because we tend to forget,' writes Rajmohan Gandhi in his foreword to Michael Henderson's *Experiment with Untruth*, 'we must be reminded of what it was like to miss the air of liberty.'

This elevation of memory to the status of a national imperative had the effect of cancelling out Indira Gandhi's presentation of the Emergency as a transitory phase designed to usher in a new future—a tough means to a more glorious end. The new post-Emergency narrative spins the focus back in time. We are no longer concerned with the projected ends but with the actual means. In the new atmosphere

of political post-mortem, the 'bitter pills' which Indira Gandhi had administered as 'a cure' are now identified as a form of poison. The new prerogative is to track the progress of that poison as it seeped into the veins and arteries of the nation, thereby infecting the entire system.

Unlike the official Emergency narrative, the new master narrative cannot be traced back to a primary source. Rather, it is multi-vocal and has been cobbled together from a mixture of personal experiences, underground literature, prison memoirs, public hearings and newly uncovered government documents. Above all, it is part of a vast collective exercise in memory with a view to judgement. This is not to argue that the elements of such a narrative had not existed earlier. Voices of dissent had of course been present throughout the Emergency, but political conditions had rendered them fragmented and dispersed. Arrests, censorship and the climate of fear had not only prevented the circulation of alternative views, but had also cultivated a series of blanks which had worked against the formation of a single coherent narrative. It was only after the Emergency, when the fear of repercussions had been lifted and new information uncovered, that such a narrative could be established and elevated to a position of dominance.

> After the nightmarish experience of nineteen months of terrifying darkness, the nation awoke to the clear bright sunshine of a new day...The dawning of this new day brought to light the gory sequence of that night...And those who were the perpetrators of the horror, those whose hands shaped the pattern of events, will not be let off lightly—Justice will take its toll![18]

One strand of this new master narrative lay in recovering fragments of dissent originally expressed during the Emergency under what were then conditions of danger and adversity. *The Smugglers of Truth*, for example is a selection of articles and drawings taken from *Satyavani*, an underground paper that was published in London and New York during the Emergency. It contains the writings of foreign journalists and resistors whose controversial words and opinions had been 'smuggled' in a two-directional process both in and out of India. 'It is a selection of what people in India could not read at the time.' Although the articles it contains were originally written during the Emergency,

[18]N.D. Rawla and R.K. Mudgal, 1977, *All the Prime Minister's Men*, Delhi: Pankaj, preface.

the volume itself belongs to the post-Emergency era and is part of the collective exercise of asserting a dominant interpretation of the recent past. So too is *Voices of Emergency*, an anthology of resistance poems. Its retrospective quality is highlighted by the fact that some of its poems turn out not to have been written during the Emergency at all![19] A recurring theme throughout the volume is people's inability to speak out against the Emergency which imposed an eerie silence just as it imposed an all-engulfing darkness. Jimmy Avasia's short poem 'Emerging' expresses in a few words what others say in many:

> *One day we woke,*
> *Free to do as they wanted.*
> *Ideals collapsed in smoke.*
> *Nobody spoke.*
>
> *On the way to an answer*
> *they selected a truth*
> *but all suggestion of question*
> *died en route.*

A volume of the intellectual journal *Seminar* is quite literally the publication of critical voices that were silenced until the final phase of the Emergency.[20] But here the silence signifies resistance rather than compliance. The editor of the review, Romesh Thapar, had originally prepared the volume in 1976 but, refusing to submit to censorship restrictions, withdrew the manuscript from publication. His decision to publish it six months later, when Emergency restrictions had been lightened, makes it part of the retrospective exercise of remembering the past.

There are three principal overlapping genres of this post-Emergency discourse: the political exposé aimed at making visible what was previously hidden; the prison memoir providing the intimate account of personal experience,[21] and the public judgement aimed at

[19]The journalist, Dhiren Bhagat, later criticised the validity of some of these so called 'resistance poems'. Having found one of his own adolescent ramblings in the collection, he was well-placed for making such a criticism, especially since his own poem had been written long before the Emergency. (See Dhiren Bhagat, 1990, *The Contemporary Conservative: Selected Writings*, Delhi: Viking.)

[20]*Seminar*, 210, February 1977.

[21]This book is concerned less with the prison experiences of the literate than with the unwritten narratives of the urban poor. Those interested in prison memoirs

interrogation of the guilty. Barely two weeks after the Janata victory, the Home Minister, Chaudhuri Charan Singh had asserted that justice must be done 'by bringing to book all those guilty of excesses, malpractices and misdeeds during the Emergency from the highest down to the lowest functionary of the Government'. On the basis of this statement special commissions were established to bring the past under the microscope of the law. The most famous judgement was that of the Shah Commission, which opened its enquiry on 30 September 1977. It received as many as 48,000 allegations of abuses which it whittled down to 2,000 cases for investigation. The scale and scope of the commission was compared with that of the famous Nuremberg trials. But long before it had published its slow and ponderous conclusions, the framework of the new master narrative had already been established in books with dramatic titles like *An Eye to India: The Unmasking of Tyranny* (1977), *Black Wednesday* (1977), *Nineteen Fateful Months* (1978), *What Price Perjury?* (1978), *Democracy Redeemed* (1977) and *Experiment with Untruth* (1977). Such books may sit together with Emergency publications on the library shelves, but the story they tell is a very different one.

Like the official narrative, the new narrative takes us back to the period immediately before the Emergency. But this time Indira Gandhi is portrayed as a corrupt and tyrannical leader trying to assert her already fading power, whilst Jayaprakash Narayan (popularly known as JP) is described as the noble and ageing people's hero, encouraging the masses to assert their discontent through non-violent protest in the Gandhian style. Justice had seemed destined to prevail when on 12 June 1975 the Allahabad High Court had found Indira Gandhi guilty of corrupt election practices and debarred her from office for a period of six years. The crowds had been expectant as J.P. Narayan and opposition leaders had demanded the Prime Minister's resignation, but their hopes had been shattered by an unforeseen event. Obsessed by power, and egged on by her ruthless son, Indira Gandhi had chosen not resignation, but dictatorship.

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of the Emergency should consult the following: Jayaprakash Narayan, 1977, *Prison Diary*, New Delhi: Popular Prakashan; Lal K. Advani, 1978, *A Prisoner's Scrap-Book*, New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann; Kuldip Nayar, 1978, *In Jail*, New Delhi; Vikas; Primila Lewis, 1978, *Reason Wounded*, New Delhi: Vikas; and Mary Tyler, 1978, *My Years in an Indian Prison*, London: Penguin.

The declaration of Emergency features both as a moment of revelation—the time when Indira Gandhi's real intentions become apparent—and as a descent into utter darkness. 'We were caught unawares in this unexpected treachery undermining all our constitutional provisions, parliamentary practices and public institutions,' recalls P.G. Mavalankar, a member of the Lok Sabha. Others, like the journalist V.K. Narasimhan refer to the Emergency as 'the long dark night' when 'free people lost their basic liberties and were subjected to a regime of terror and suppression they had not known even under the British'. What is unanimous in all of these accounts is the view that Indira Gandhi declared the Emergency in order to stamp out opposition voices which she could no longer control by democratic means. The arrest and detention of thousands of men and women conveniently classified as 'conspirators' provides indication of her sinister intentions. So too does the sudden termination of the electricity supply to major newspapers for a period of three nights—thereby enabling her to prevent adverse publicity in the short term and install press censorship for the long term. The Emergency therefore features as a device through which Indira Gandhi obtains access to the basic tools of dictatorship: the ability to ban all meetings, processions and agitations that did not work in her favour; the ability to arrest and detain people without trial and the ability to gag the press and to use it as an agent of personal propaganda. It therefore represents a complete subversion of democracy.

The 20-point economic programme, which features prominently in the official Emergency narrative, becomes a minor detail in the post-Emergency exposé. The programme is dismissed as old plans dressed up in new populist discourse. Socialist talk about 'helping the weaker sections' and 'going to the masses' is interpreted as mere rhetoric whilst the fact that food prices dipped in 1976 is explained by the heavy rains which had resulted in a successful harvest. But none of this, we are told, could deceive the masses into thinking that the Emergency worked in their favour. 'People were, no doubt, terrorised but certainly their thoughts could not be checked,' Sinha suggests. 'They were aware [even before the Emergency] that the Government was slowly turning them into slaves by promising them the bread of plenty. The 20-point programme was another attempt to fool them into believing that long-awaited millennium had come. This resulted in hate for her and her coterie. How could they accept somebody as

their leader who had thrown to the winds all ideals of truth and justice, and on false ground claimed to be the most virtuous person in the world?'

As it unfolds, the new narrative becomes like a play, endlessly repeated with minor variants but with the basic roles well defined. Indira Gandhi is the new 'Hitler' otherwise known as the 'Durga of Delhi'.[22] Dominated by an oedipal passion for her own son, she is seen to support his rise to power despite his well-known history of failure and corruption. The fact that Sanjay dictates orders without holding any official position is an indication not only of his ruthlessness, but also of the insatiable greed of the politicians and officials who surround him. They feature in the play as an ever-flattering chorus of sycophants, singing the praises of the powerful with unholy gusto. Not much better are the journalists and editors who readily bow down to press censorship, crawling when only asked to kneel.[23] Last, but by no means least, petty officials and bureaucrats populate the stage like small but lethal spiders, building the bureaucratic web with which to ensnare the populace.

The role of intellectuals in this tragi-comedy is more ambiguous. Though some are perceived as being guilty of complicity, many feature as the emotional sufferers of the Emergency; the men and women burning with indignation but unable to speak out either because they are already in jail or else because they fear arrest. 'For India at that point was a country where mail was opened, phones tapped, movements watched, and dissenting views punished with imprisonment without trial.' Thus wrote Michael Henderson, a foreign journalist who had tried to publish a critique of what was happening during the Emergency itself, but had been unable to find a foreign publisher willing to accept the manuscript for fear of the damage it might do to their commercial links with India. When, after the Emergency, such critiques became hot commodities, Henderson's newly expanded manuscript joined the growing body of post-Emergency exposés.

The new narrative also features victims and resisters, the bulk of whom are poor and illiterate. Indeed speculation even arose as to

[22]Durga, the powerful and vengeful goddess renowned for having slain the buffalo-demon, Mahishasura.

[23]A phrase used by Lal Krishna Advani and much-quoted in the post-Emergency literature.

whether Sanjay Gandhi's resettlement and family planning measures were not part of a systematic plot to obliterate the poor. 'Was Sanjay trying to wipe out the harijans and the tribals and the poor through vasectomy?' asks Raj Thapar in an article in *Seminar*, concluding that he was. Writing in more sociological bent, Anirudha Gupta declares, 'It was the poor, the illiterate and the depressed who suffered the most. The rich—either because they had the money or the influence—mostly escaped.' [24] Just what the poor suffered is made explicit in the numerous accounts of how, in the effort to fill sterilisation targets, chief ministers and others anxious to please Sanjay Gandhi instilled terror by imposing forcible sterilisation. 'People were rounded up at random, from the streets, the tea shop, and the bazaars, and taken to the family planning camps to be sterilised. No distinction whatsoever was made between old men and young boys, between married and unmarried men—the forced sterilisation just went on and on!'[25] Many books feature an assortment of nightmarish incidents of death by sterilisation. In the northern states of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, located in the so called 'vasectomy belt', there were tales of entire populations of village men hiding in the fields to escape police raids in the night. There were also instances of police firings and innocent protesters killed. Most post-Emergency writers identify the fear and fury over sterilisation as being the primary cause of resistance to the Emergency. 'Please do not think I am exaggerating,' an old Congressman is reported to have told a journalist during the 1977 election campaign, 'but these damned vasectomies have become something like the greased cartridge of 1857.'[26]

In the Delhi version of the post-Emergency narrative, the poor suffer a form of double victimisation. Not only are they sterilised, but they also lose their homes in the massive slum clearance project directed by Sanjay Gandhi in the name of resettlement. David Selbourne's eye-witness account, published during the Emergency, and republished after it, sets the scene: 'In clouds of dust, and with children weeping beside their smashed and bulldozed hovels, as I saw myself, trucks

[24]Anirudha Gupta, 1977, *Revolution through Ballot*, Delhi: Ankur, p. 85.

[25]N.D. Rawla and R.K. Mudgal, 1977, *All the Prime Minister's Men*.

[26]Gupta, 1977, *Revolution through Ballot*, p. 83. This is a reference to the famous Indian Rebellion of 1857 which is said to have been sparked off by the rumour that cow's fat was used to grease the cartridges used by Indian sepoys.

now drive the displaced away and dump them without food, sanitation, water or building materials for "resettlement" in the name of a new politics of "discipline" and "development".' Writing in more controlled language, the Shah Commission concludes: 'The manner in which demolitions were carried out in Delhi during the Emergency is an unrelieved story of illegality, callousness and of sickening sycophancy by the senior officers to play to the whims of Sanjay Gandhi.' Within a mere 21 months an estimated 700,000 people were displaced from slums and commercial properties, including large areas of the Old City. And it is here, in one of the ancient Muslim strongholds known as Turkman Gate, that Delhi's counter-Emergency narrative reaches its climax as the dual forces of sterilisation and demolition unite. 'Turkman Gate is where it came to grief,' chronicles Henderson. 'People speak the words now in the way that they spoke of Jallianwala Bagh after General Dyer's massacre in 1919.'[27]

What exactly happened at Turkman Gate on 19 April 1976 remains open to speculation as each playwright revises the script. But the overall theme is clear: local resistance to family planning and demolitions precipitated a brutal massacre of innocent citizens. Some litter the stage with as many as 1,200 corpses; others are more restrained. The version we shall follow here is that of John Dayal and Ajoy Bose[28] who, after conducting 'two months of tough and continuous investigation' put the death toll at 12. Their tale winds its way between two nearby localities of the Old City: Turkman Gate on Asaf Ali Road and Dujana House near the Jama Masjid. It begins in mid-April with the inauguration of a family planning clinic in the Muslim-dominated area of Dujana House. The clinic is run by a glamorous socialite turned 'social worker' whose name is Ruksana Sultana to some, and *rundi* (whore) to others. She is Muslim herself and goes about trying to persuade Muslim women of the area to get their husbands sterilised. As the week progresses, the people of the area watch in horror as beggars are rounded up in the streets and bundled into a basement

[27]Henderson, 1977, *Experiment*, p. 59. In 1919 General Dyer ordered troops to fire on a crowd of protesters gathered at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar. This resulted in the death of 379 unarmed civilians and the wounding of over 1,000 others. This event became a major rallying-point around which many Indians united in the freedom struggle.

[28]J. Dayal and A. Bose, 1977, *For Reasons of State, Delhi Under Emergency*, Delhi: Ess Ess Publications, pp. 35–65.

clinic, from which some never emerge. The story advances to Turkman Gate, only a mile away, where demolition squads show no sign of leaving the area and residents begin to realise that their homes may be next on the list for devastation. Some try to enlist the help of Ruksana Sultana, knowing her influence with Sanjay Gandhi, but she is only willing to support their case if they set up a family planning clinic at Turkman Gate and supply her with 300 sterilisation cases within a week. As fears spread a delegation of local residents try to approach Jagmohan, then Vice-chairman of the DDA (Delhi Development Authority), asking amongst other things, if the Turkman Gate people might be resettled together in a single colony known as 'Welcome' or the nearby colony of New Seelampur in east Delhi. Jagmohan is angered by the idea of displaced Muslims building up their strength by huddling together in particular locations. He is said to have replied, 'Do you think we are mad to destroy one Pakistan to create another Pakistan?'

The tension is mounting. At Dujana House the knives are out; at Turkman Gate, the bulldozers are preparing to roll. Women of Dujana House begin to protest. A *burqa*-clad (veiled) woman lies on the road, blocking a van full of sterilisation victims who have been collected randomly off the streets. The police try to intervene and end up arresting one man. The crowd raises a protest and a general strike is called throughout the area including Turkman Gate. When Ruksana Sultana next arrives at Dujana House, she is besieged by furious local women but manages to escape. 'It was around this time,' report Dayal and Bose, that the message from Turkman Gate was flashed to Dujana House. 'They are massacring us here at Turkman Gate. Come and help us if you can.'

> The message took the family planning camp right out of the mind of the people of the Jama Masjid. Men, women and children ran through the lanes and by-lanes towards Turkman Gate. The people of Turkman Gate were their relatives and friends. If they were being attacked, that was where they would fight the police...The two parallel dramas of Turkman Gate and Dujana House had at last converged.

So the scene is set for the ensuing onslaught. At its centre are women and children squatting on the road in the hot April sun, trying to protect their homes from demolition. Facing them are demolition squads; men wielding pickaxes and backed by bulldozers. Close by

the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) is standing guard, arms in hand and ready for use. Violence finally erupts when some women and children get up to pray. Seeing the sudden movement, the chief of the Nehru brigade incites his men to prevent the crowd from throwing stones. This they do by throwing stones themselves only to be met with fierce retaliation. What follows is a stiff police crackdown, first with sticks and then with a teargas shell which lands in the midst of the women and children. 'An eerie scream went up amongst them. It was not a cry of fear. It was a battle cry.' Someone, nobody quite knows who, incites the police to fire and a bloody conflict follows. Some flee into the Faiz-e-Elahi Mosque only to find themselves gassed out and physically and verbally abused. 'In just half an hour the Masjid had become an abattoir. Blood lay in pools on the ground and the air was noxious with fumes of teargas and groans and moans of the injured congregation. Doors, windows and furniture had been smashed and the cash box of the Masjid, containing a few thousand rupees had been looted by the marauding policemen. It had been a wholesale affair.'

Outside in the street the desperate crowd is throwing stones and is aided by new arrivals who attack the police from behind, taking control of the police *chowki* (post). The Commissioner of Police orders reinforcements, which, armed with bayonets, aim to kill. 'The Western horizon was red. Four o'clock in the afternoon and blood flowed down Turkman Gate. Their short-lived jubilation had turned sour as bullets cut them down one by on. Nobody, not even the people of Turkman Gate, could take so much punishment.' At 5.30 in the afternoon a curfew is declared, leading to a systematic wave of rape and looting as foul-smelling constables break into the homes of defenceless women whose husbands have been arrested or have fled. It is a tale which ends in darkness—literally and metaphorically. The electricity has been cut off, leaving only the shadow of bulldozers grinding through the night. 'The rubble of Turkman Gate was scooped up into trucks and thrown behind the Ring Road where buzzards and jackals were seen rummaging through the rubble. Only the stink of stale meat which hung for days together over the thrown rubble remained to tell the story of the life and death struggle of the people of Turkman Gate.'

Who threw the first stone and for what reason? Was it the Nehru brigade or the people of Turkman Gate? Were the latter resisting

sterilisation or demolition or a mixture of both? The unanswerable nature of such questions does nothing to diminish the symbolic value of the story. For, of all Emergency tales, the story of Turkman Gate contains the most dramatic elements for a tragedy. It begins as the state versus innocent women who fight for the basic right to retain their homes and reproduce. The fact that they are veiled highlights their sanctity and emphasises the state's violation of it, whilst the fact that they are accompanied by children reinforces the image of innocent lambs to the slaughter. It becomes the state versus the community as residents of the old city rush to support one another, willing to unite and die together in the face of such oppression. It is also the state versus the minority, with the suspicion that this is a deliberate attempt to remove Muslims from one of the few areas where they are dominant. The reference to 'a second Pakistan' creates an echo of the bloody massacre that accompanied Partition. In this cruel drama the people are poor and unarmed; but the state does not hesitate to use the technology of violence, crushing the people with guns, gas and machinery. Most accounts contain at least one incidence of a person who is crushed to death by the bulldozers. In many accounts it is a breast-feeding mother and her new born baby who are the victims. As far as symbolism is concerned nothing is lacking: the bureaucrats are callous and speak like villains; the police murder innocent citizens and rape women; homes, bodies and religious property are systematically and brutally violated, leading Sinha to conclude: 'Never was such a great human tragedy caused in any part of the world.'[29]

The post-Emergency retrospective ends with a people's victory as the victims of the Emergency rise up to overthrow the dictator. It is the victory of right over wrong. Many dedicate their books to the millions of victims and resistors who made this victory possible. *Nineteen Fateful Months* for example is dedicated 'to those valiant sons of the Indian soil who refused to submit to the forces of tyranny, high handedness and authoritarianism and preferred misery, humanitarianism or even death'. Similarly *The Emergency: Future Safeguards* is dedicated to 'the victims of the Emergency whose sufferings roused their countrymen to sweep out of power governments which had caused those sufferings.' With the victory India's new future is realigned with her noble past. Jayaprakash Narayan is the new Gandhi,

[29]Sinha, 1977, *Operation Emergency*, p. 153.

and just as Independence Day had heralded a new era of optimism for India, so the March elections promised a fresh reawakening after the lengthy darkness.

However, the discourse of judgement breeds its own controversies. The institution of the judge splits the people not only into the roles of witness and accused, but also of defendant and approver. Many of the ministers brought before the Shah Commission claimed that they had simply been following orders and had been unable to resist the terrible pressures placed upon them. Even prominent men like Kishan Chand, Lieutenant Governor of Delhi and B.R. Tamta, Commissioner of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi claimed a combination of ignorance and helplessness. Some even wept with humble apologies; others sought to alleviate their own guilt through implicating their colleagues. 'During the Emergency many people like me had to mortgage their conscience,' remembers Congressman Shankar Dayal Singh, 'but the truth is I have often been smitten by a feeling of repentance over all that happened during the period.' He presents his book, *Emergency, Fact and Fiction*, as an attempt to redeem his conscience by revealing the inside story of what really happened. His foreword is humble but inside the book he devotes much time to denigrating his colleagues whilst remaining relatively silent about his own position. He is also highly cautious in his critique of Indira Gandhi, recognising (and perhaps hoping) that she may still rise again.

More radical is the discourse of defence which surfaces in the works of those who refuse to don the mantle of guilt and shame. Jagmohan, for example, the 'villain' behind the DDA's demolitions, not only defended his actions before the Shah Commission, but also published a book aimed at proving his innocence. In *Island of Truth*,[30] he portrays himself as a lone honest man surrounded by hypocrites and buffeted by concocted accusations. He dismisses much of the dominant narrative as 'inaccurate', 'an injustice to history and public information', a product of 'hypocrisy and superficiality'. He claims that the Turkman Gate episode in which he, as Vice-chairman of the DDA, was directly implicated has been blown out of all proportion and embroidered with erroneous facts. The riot was caused, not by demolitions, but by the threat of family planning at Dujana House. He supports his

[30]Jagmohan, 1978, *Island of Truth*, Delhi: Vikas.

argument by pointing out that out of the six people killed, only one lived in the Turkman Gate area and he happened to be someone whose home was not scheduled for demolition. Jagmohan insists that the entire resettlement drive conducted during the Emergency was in line with DDA policy which was created back in the 1950s. His language is emotive: 'Mine is an island of truth—truth in its essence, truth in its basic framework. I intend to take you to this island...I hope to show you a few spots from which the reality may emerge, and you may be able to see true reflections even in a cracked mirror. You may realise that what was done in Delhi during the Emergency was development and not "demolition". It was a dawn, not a doom.'[31] Similarly in response to David Selbourne's dramatic accusation that 25,000 displaced people could only get new plots through compulsory sterilisation, he argues: 'Not in a single case, compulsory sterilisation was made a pre-condition for allotment of land or plot to those who were affected by the clearance-cum-resettlement operations.'[32]

But the most effective challenge to the post-Emergency narrative came from Indira Gandhi herself who refused to submit to the role of dictator that had been ascribed to her. Her arrest on 3 October 1977, and subsequent release the following day, acted as a buttress to support the idea that she was not guilty after all. Meanwhile, by claiming that the Shah Commission was politically motivated, she justified her refusal to comply with it. Eventually, when pressurised, she did attend the court but refused to come to the witness box and be sworn in for testimony. This resulted in Justice Shah ordering a case to be filed against her, thereby delaying the procedures of the commission. Meanwhile, Indira Gandhi continued to wield power within the Congress Party and was beginning to reassert her importance by promising to devote herself to the service of the nation. Some blamed the Janata Party for failing to make use of the atmosphere of revenge that had prevailed immediately after the Emergency. Dayal and Bose who wrote a second Emergency book, this time about the Shah Commission, conclude: 'The developing political scene made time a valuable commodity, the public memory a political force of considerable magnitude.

[31]Ibid., p. 1.
[32]Ibid., p. 82.

The public which had suffered was crying for justice. It had shed blood and it wanted blood...The appointment of the Commission in those blood-thirsty times was an anti-climax.'[33]

Even before the Commission opened its enquiry in September 1977, the post-Emergency narrative was already subsiding against a backdrop of rising prices and political chaos.

> The euphoria of March steadily gave way to bitterness and cynicism by August. The victims of the Emergency like the people of Turkman Gate or the resettlement colonies outside Delhi still continued in their misery and sorrow. To make things worse, prices of almost all essential goods had started rising alarmingly. There had begun to circulate already among some the dangerous logic that perhaps Mrs Gandhi was right in saying that the Emergency was a bitter pill needed by the country.[34]

Our excursion through the book shelves of the Nehru Memorial Library ends with a Janata Party publication entitled *Will we let her do it again?* Published in late 1979, the pamphlet bears witness to the decline of the post-Emergency narrative. It is a desperate attempt to convince the electorate not to allow Indira Gandhi back to power. It ends with a plea: 'Shrimati Indira Gandhi imposed Emergency on an unwary people; if the people vote for her in the coming elections, she would, true to style, argue that the people have endorsed a return to fascist, dynastic rule. Ponder over it.'

After 1980, the shelves marked 'Constitution' fill up mainly with books on other themes; communalism, regionalism, minorities. The Emergency has ceased to be either journalistic coup or scholarly preoccupation.

1 Safdarjang Road

It is time to leave the library and to converge with the coachload of tourists back on the heritage trail. Our brief detour through one of the more neglected shelves of the Nehru Memorial Library has reminded us of what it is we might be looking for as we track the forgetting of the Emergency in Delhi. Just a few hundred yards away

[33]J. Dayal and A. Bose, 1978, *The Shah Commission Begins*, Delhi: Orient Longman, p. 3.

[34]Ibid., p. 6.

from Jawaharlal's home is the residence where the adult Indira Gandhi lived and died. We are at 1 Safdarjang Road, a comparatively modest bungalow in another leafy bird-filled garden. In the early 1970s Indira Gandhi had considered it too modest; hence her plans to set up residence in her father's loftier abode. But her plans had been thwarted by the Nehru Trust and she remained at 1 Safdarjang Road which now serves as a museum and memorial both to herself and to her eldest son, Rajiv.

To those familiar with the Emergency literature, the address alone is poignant with memories. A scene from the post-Emergency epic immediately springs to mind:

> '1, Safdarjang Road. Late 1975. "They come quite early, by 7.45 a.m. Municipal Commissioner B.R. Tamta, Delhi Development Authority Vice-chairman Jagmohan, V.S. Ailawadi of the NDMC, Minister H.K.L. Bhagat, Lt Governor's Special Secretary Navin Chawla. Police DIG P.S. Bhinder is also occasionally here.
>
> They wait in the ante-rooms, sometimes with Dhawan (Prime Minister's Secretary) and talk about Delhi affairs. They eye each other with rabid suspicion. He (Sanjay) calls them in one by one. He listens to their situation reports, and tells figures. Sometimes he taunts them that the other fellow is far more active. The person promises to be better by tomorrow.
>
> Sometimes he calls all of them together. This is when the big schemes are chalked out. This is when the officers bid for more portion of the work to be done. It is like a grand auction."' (An eye witness)[35]

We are standing at the entrance to the place where Indian democracy went to the highest bidder. This was the infamous den of secret meetings, conspiracies and unconstitutional goings on; the home of the monstrous two-headed tyranny of Delhi. But when we join the crowds waiting at the entrance we find, not surprisingly, that we are queuing for an entirely different play.

We are greeted by a photograph of a smiling Indira Gandhi who, like us, stands at the doorway of the house. Below a plaque reads, 'Indira Gandhi lived in this house with her family as Minister for Information and Broadcasting from 1964 to 1966, and as Prime Minister from 1966 to 1977 and 1980 to 1984. Rajiv Gandhi, sworn in as Prime Minister 31 October 1984, lived here till March 1985.' Where Indira lived between 1977 and 1980 we are not told. Who

[35]Cited in Dayal and Bose, 1977, *For Reasons*, p. 33.

took up residence in the house during that period is also omitted. Such details have no place in this new drama. For this is the Life and Martyrdom of Indira Gandhi.

The exhibition begins with a photograph of her addressing a vast crowd of people in Orissa. With it is an extract from her patriotic final speech:

> I am here today, I may be gone tomorrow. But the responsibility to look after national interest is on the shoulders of every Indian citizen. Nobody knows how many attempts have been made to shoot me, lathis [sticks] have been used to beat me. In Bhubaneshwar itself, a brickbat hit me. They have attacked me in every possible manner. I do not care if I live or die. I have lived a long life and am proud that I spent the whole of my life in service of my people. I am only proud of this and nothing else. I shall continue to serve until my last breath and when I die, I can say that every drop of my blood will invigorate India and strengthen it. I hope that youth, women and others, will all think together. They should shoulder the responsibility and it cannot be done by accepting others as leaders. (30 October 1984)

Next, we are confronted by screaming newspaper headlines in various languages:

> MRS GANDHI SHOT DEAD
> End comes soon after outrage at house.
> Assassination by 2 guards: One killed
>
> NATION MOURNS INDIRA
> Dastardly Killing by Security Men.
> Funeral and 12 day Mourning
>
> INDIRA GANDHI ASSASINATA DAI SIKH. IL FIGLIO
> RAJIV NUOVO PRIMO MINISTRO

This is a room dedicated to her brutal death in the garden of 1 Safdarjang Road where she was shot by two of her own security guards. The shelves contain posthumous awards from foreign dignitaries. A photograph of her distraught son, Rajiv Gandhi, at the funeral pyre links the grief of the individual to that of the nation. We, too, should mourn the death of the mother. A display of stones and crystals emphasises the durability of her soul.

Room 2 whisks us through her political career in startling black and white. A three-tier display bombards us from every direction.

Lining the top of the walls up to ceiling level are panorama shots most of which show Indira with the masses; receiving garlands, shaking hands, visiting villages and handing out flowers. Beneath are portraits demonstrating her various moods and attributes. In younger portraits she is shy and demure; later she is strong and authoritative, sometimes pensive, always dignified. At eye level is a montage of newspaper headings and selected articles. Since this is only the second room of the exhibition, it is quickly choked with people and the museum staff have little patience with those who loiter to read the headlines.

'Move on! Form a line! Quickly! Go through!' an authoritative male voice bellows out in Hindi. 'There's nothing to see in here. Move on!' Soon the jostling crowd of adults is replaced by a train of uniformed children who trot past, hand to shoulder, with the occasional teacher to direct the stream.

I have been granted special permission to go at my own pace which enables me to read the headlines: UNANIMOUS ELECTION OF INDIRA GANDHI. YOUNGEST WOMAN TO BE CONGRESS CHIEF (*Indian Express*, 8 February 1959); INDIRA GANDHI ELECTED AS PARTY LEADER INDIA'S FIRST EVER WOMAN PRIME MINISTER (*National Herald*, 20 January 1966); PRESIDENT ASKS MRS GANDHI TO FORM GOVERNMENT (*The Tribune*, 13 March 1967); NATION GIVES PRIME MINISTER MASSIVE MANDATE FOR CHANGE (*Patriot*, 12 March 1971); MRS GANDHI LOSES. SANJAY, BANSI LAL AND GOKHALE DEFEATED (*Statesman*, 21 March 1977); MRS GANDHI WINS BY 77,333 VOTES [at Chikmagalur] (*Hindu*, 9 November 1978); 'MASSIVE MANDATE FOR INDIRA. SANJAY, SHUKLA, CHAVAN WIN. PAI, DHARIA, GOREY LOSE' (*Amrita Bazaar Patrika*, 8 January 1980).

We arrive at a plaque which informs us of various important decisions that were made at 1 Safdarjang Road. From now on the display is thematically arranged under headings: Self-sufficiency in Food Grains; Devaluation of the Rupee; Bank Nationalisation; Abolition of Privy Purses Privileges, Congress Split, Indo-Soviet Treaty, Liberation of Bangladesh; Emergency; Election Defeat; Election: Come back; Punjab.

We stop at the heading 'Emergency' and read: NO BAR ON INDIRA CONTINUING AS PRIME MINISTER (*Times of India*, 25 June 1975); PRESIDENT PROCLAIMS NATIONAL EMERGENCY; SECURITY OF INDIA THREATENED BY INTERNAL DISTURBANCES; PREVENTATIVE ARRESTS: PRESS CENSORSHIP IMPOSED (*Hindu*, 27 June 1975); INDIRA GANDHI DEFEATED (21 March 1977). A photograph shows her sitting cross-legged on the ground,

haggard and humiliated after her election defeat in 1977. Another of the same year shows her being taken under arrest. Next she emerges victorious and traditional, this time in a coloured photograph. She is dressed in the orange of renunciation with the end of her sari pulled modestly over her hair. On her forehead is a red *tilak* (mark). We have passed on to the next section where new headings confront us: MASSIVE VICTORY...

In case we should be overwhelmed by the political face of Indira Gandhi, we are reminded of her simplicity by a low level display of objects which 'formed an intimate part of Indira Gandhi's daily life'. These are ordinary things: family snapshots, a scrabble set, knitting needles, a Beatrice Potter plate, an artificial cockroach and some butterflies, binoculars and books on wildlife. They seem to inform us that despite her greatness, she was an ordinary human being like you or me. As we leave the room we are confronted by a large black and white photograph of the urns containing her ashes, and then we arrive at the central exhibit which stands apart. Later we shall see it again from other directions. It is the sari she was wearing at her death. Reminiscent of other exhibits in the capital, such as Mahatma Gandhi's blood-stained dhoti, the pale yellow sari contains the bullet holes of the assassin. It is accompanied by a colourful embroidered bag and a pair of rather worn black sandals which highlight the sense of missing body. The perforations in the sari are discreetly encircled in what looks like pencil. There is no blood. The man beside me is pointing out the bullet holes to his son. Two women are discussing the sari, commenting on how the dirt has turned the yellow to grey. A braising quotation from Rajiv Gandhi leads us to the next room: 'Indira Gandhi died as she lived; unafraid with courage abiding'. (*Young Patriot*, 7 November 1984)

Having begun with her death, we now swing back to her life. First we are confronted with Indira Gandhi in context. We see her noble ancestors and their family homes, one of which we have already visited. We see her in genealogical perspective, with her parents and grandparents on the one hand and her children and grandchildren on the other. We are reminded that, not only she but her father before her and her son after her were Prime Ministers of India. Having set the frame we now go back to Indira Gandhi's childhood. We see her as a wide-eyed baby, a serious school girl; a budding nationalist; a coy adolescent and self-conscious student. Later we also see her as a

courting youth; a married woman and mother. Her wedding sari, woven from yarn spun by her father and the vessels used for the nuptials form one of the major attractions to women tourists, leading the museum staff to chivvy people on again. This time I am whisked along with the crowd but the word 'population crisis' has caught my eye and I stop in front of the relevant cabinet. This causes a pile up as a group of young men crowd around hoping to see something of particular interest. I am looking at a brass plaque presented to Indira Gandhi by the Population Council 'in recognition of her fostering support to solve the world population crisis through a demonstrated commitment to share ideas, knowledge, and experience towards the ultimate objective of reducing population growth and creating a better life for all the world's people.' (New York, 2 August 1982) With it is 'The United Nations Population Award—an affirmation by the international community of the importance of population in development, is presented to Her Excellency Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India for her outstanding contribution to the awareness of population questions and their solutions.' (New York, 30 September 1983)

Past more certificates, this time indicating honorary degrees, and past gaudy gifts from foreign dignitaries, we enter the room 'Indira Gandhi and the World' in which we see photographs of her on world tours or entertaining foreign politicians and diplomats. Soon we are with the diplomats and politicians at her funeral, reading the lines of Fidel Castro, the President of Cuba: 'We saw her disappear amidst flames, while her people, her descendants, and statesmen from all over the world surrounded the funeral pyre in respectful silence. And we recalled the august calmness with which, years earlier, she had indicated that one day she also would, with resignation, give up her life in a holocaust for the unity of her nation.'

The last image shows her as a frail but determined figure walking into the distance. It is reminiscent of a famous pose of Mahatma Gandhi who, like Indira, sacrificed his life for the nation.

We step outside and then re-enter the house and file past her study which contains unexceptional office furniture and a few easy chairs. 'Indira Gandhi's study was her sanctum. It was filled with well loved books and pictures and she often worked here at her desk late into the night.' A quotation from Indira reads, 'A tree must have roots. Though the roots go deep into the ground, the tree itself grows up

into the sky towards the sun. So must we turn our faces and our steps towards the future though our roots remain in the past.'

We step outside again and this time re-enter the house in the section where Rajiv Gandhi used to live with his wife and children. The exhibition is primarily photographic, accompanied by extracts from Rajiv's own writings, speeches and interviews. Again, we begin with death. First we see Rajiv carrying the ashes of his father, Feroz Gandhi. Next we see him with the ashes of his grandfather Jawaharlal. Next he is performing the last rites at his brother Sanjay's funeral, and finally he is at the funeral pyre of his mother. Above each photograph is a smaller image of Rajiv with the person portrayed in happier times. By seeing these deaths in quick succession we are invited to participate in his grief and to understand how he was compelled to enter politics. The context established, we swing back to his birth in 1944 and his childhood. He is a sensitive and pensive boy, sometimes seen with his mother; sometimes seen playing with his younger brother in the gardens of Teen Murti House. Later we see him as a schoolboy, a healthy adolescent in sports gear, a student at Cambridge and a young pilot with Indian Airlines. His marriage to Sonia is noticeably more prominent than his mother's marriage to Feroz Gandhi. What we get is a sense of Rajiv's carefree existence as a happy family man; an existence which ended abruptly with the death of his brother in a plane accident in 1980.

'I wanted to be left to myself. That was very much the case when I was flying. Then my brother Sanjay was killed in the prime of his life. My mother called to me in her loneliness. I went to her side. She urged me to respond to the insistent demand from the constituency and the party to take my brother's place as Member of Parliament for Amethi.'

A sequence is established. First we see the adult Sanjay beside his mother. The photo has been taken *contra jour* making Sanjay little more than a silhouette in the darkness. Next we see Rajiv comforting his mother after Sanjay's death. Then we see Rajiv's letter of resignation to Indian Airlines and finally we see him addressing the crowds. White *khadi* (hand-spun hand-woven cloth),[36] which he previously wore mainly

[36] *Khadi* was popularised by Mahatma Gandhi who elevated it to the status of national dress in the 1920s. The cloth still plays an important role in politics, though today it is associated as much with hypocrisy as with morality. For a history of *khadi* and its relevance, see Emma Tarlo, 1996, *Clothing Matters*, London: Hurst, chs 3 and 4.

on ceremonial occasions, now becomes his everyday garb. His adoption of it marks his acceptance of the burden of political office and his entry into the service of the nation.

His collection of intimate objects is noticeably more postmodern than his mother's. It contains a personal computer along with his travel bag and *khadi* outfit. We see him addressing the people in various locations and read extracts from his speeches until finally we arrive at the clothes he wore at his death. Unlike Indira Gandhi's discreetly ruptured sari, Rajiv Gandhi's *kurta pyjama* (tunic and trouser) seems to scream the violence of his death. It has been exploded into fragments, hideously stained. Only his trainers remain intact—stalwart and unscathed—their durability horribly reminiscent of those advertisements for products strong enough to endure anything.

The exhibition which began with Rajiv performing the last rites for his father, grandfather, brother and mother ends with Rajiv's son, Rahul, performing the last rites of his father. Rahul's face is seen through the flames, magnified but faint; almost ghostly. A tragic continuity is established. An anticipation of the future perhaps? One last fleeting glimpse of Rajiv's smile, then we are back outside, following the arrows to the drawing room and dining room of 1 Safdarjang Road. Both are tasteful and unostentatious, with fairly simple furniture and a few choice works of Indian art on the walls. As we leave the house yet again, we catch another glimpse of the sari in which Indira Gandhi was assassinated. Outside we arrive at the path on which she was actually shot. 'Every morning Indira Gandhi walked this path to her daily *darshan*[37] at which she met people from all corners of India and the world.' It is now covered over in gleaming crystal glass, donated by the Czechoslovakian government. Flower heads are placed at both ends and at the spot where she was shot. The sun makes patterns on the crystal as we walk to the far end where two uniformed guards stand alert. And here we read an excerpt from her undated handwritten notes.

If I die a violent death as some fear and others are plotting, I know the violence will be in the thought and the action of the assassin, not in my

[37] *Darshan*: sacred sight. In the Hindu religion gods and important mortals make themselves visible to people who imbibe their holy sight. Indira Gandhi used to make herself visible by greeting members of the public in her garden everyday and answering their queries.

dying—for no hate is dark enough to overshadow the extent of my love for my people and my country; no force is strong enough to divert me from my purpose and my endeavour to take this country forward.

And the final statement: 'Here Indira Gandhi fell martyr to the bullets of 2 assassins on 31 October 1984.'

This is the spot where those with cameras take photographs before passing on to the book shop where Indira Gandhi key rings and post cards are available along with works about her and other Indian leaders. But I have taken a detour and cut back through the exhibition in order to meet the director who is sitting behind a desk in a pristine office near the entrance to the bungalow. He is young, welcoming and somehow more helpful than I expect.

'This is the smallest Prime Minister's house in the world,' he informs me. 'She liked things to be simple. When people tried to persuade her to move to Teen Murti Bhavan or some other grander place, she said she preferred this small bungalow.' I remark on the crowds and ask if it is always as crowded on a weekday morning. He replies that the museum gets between 5,000 and 10,000 visitors a day; sometimes as many as 20,000.

'Thousands come out of love for Indira Gandhi. The fact that she died here also counts for a lot. They think of her as a *devi* [goddess] and want to see the place where she was killed. They just want to bow down and pay their respects, especially the old women. I used to sometimes interview the people queuing up outside and I found that they really consider her a goddess. Its the blind faith of the people—well I don't know if its blind or not—but their faith is really incredible.'

Pushing through the gates I leave the compound, noting the swelling queue accumulating in the street outside, as organised groups arrive by the coach-load from all over north India and possibly beyond. The figures may be exaggerated but I have never before seen such a huge queue outside a museum in India.

It is not difficult to trace the historical events through which this new master narrative took over and ultimately effaced both of the narratives that preceded it. Indira Gandhi's return to power in January 1980 is the first significant marker, followed shortly by Sanjay's death. With his plane accident in July 1980 one of the most controversial stars of both Emergency dramas ceased to exist. Meanwhile Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984 transformed any lingering shadow of

dictatorship into a halo of self-sacrifice whilst at the same time establishing Rajiv's legitimate right to rule. His assassination at a time when his image was badly tarnished led to a purification process which enabled him to join Mahatma Gandhi and Indira as the martyrs of the nation. The 'dynastic dictatorship' of the post-Emergency narrative has slipped smoothly into 'dynastic democracy': benign, authoritative and protective. India's new fortunetellers now speculate as to which of Rajiv's children will don the mantle of power which some see almost as a birthright.[38]

Convenient deaths and brutal assassinations may have helped to push the Emergency narratives out of focus, but politics has also played a part. If it had been in the interest of the Janata Party to build the memory of the Emergency in the months that succeeded it, it was also in the interests of the Congress Party to establish its forgetting. The exhibition at 1 Safdarjang Road not only provides us with alternative memories but also encourages us to forget the Emergency, which features as little more than an empty hollow. It appears first in the form of a declaration and next in the form of an election defeat. Nothing is told of what went on between this beginning and this end. Instead we simply jump from beginning to end to new beginning with Indira Gandhi's return to power. Viewed within the broader perspective of her lengthy political career, the Emergency is a mere hiccup, one of those brief but insignificant disruptions that every politician has to face. There seems no need to mention that the Janata leader, Morarji Desai, also lived at 1 Safdarjang Road, from which he too governed the country, albeit for a short while. Neither, of course, is there any mention of the Shah Commission, nor of the fact that the Congress Party is suspected of having bought up most copies of the Commission's final report in order to prevent its circulation.

And what of the glorious future that Indira Gandhi had promised during the Emergency? What of the revolutionary 20-point programme? The 5-point programme? Sanjay Gandhi's fantastic leap to fame? All of these have been effaced for they cannot afford to be remembered without running the risk of invoking the post-Emergency

[38]When Rajiv Gandhi's widow, Sonia, entered the general election campaign in 1998, she was thought by many to be paving the way for her children and in particular, her daughter, Priyanka. Sonia Gandhi's recent acceptance of leadership of the Congress Party has further exacerbated speculations about the resurgence of the Gandhi/Nehru dynasty.

narrative which encourages us to remember them in a certain way. This no doubt explains why at 1 Safdarjang Road Sanjay Gandhi's political career is entirely absent. His role is restricted to that of Rajiv's little brother and of Indira's son. The only adult photograph which portrays him in a political context has been taken in such a way that his face is reduced to a faint blur beside that of his mother. Death soon transforms him from beloved son to figure of tragedy and reason for Rajiv to enter politics. After his death Sanjay reappears briefly as an icon on a poster accompanying Rajiv on a political rally. Nothing is said of Sanjay's own participation in politics except that he once held the Amethi seat which Rajiv is now obliged to fill. With a curious irony the misdemeanours of the past have helped legitimate the presentation of the past in the present. The fact that Sanjay's power was largely unconstitutional during the Emergency becomes a valid reason for excluding him from an exhibition which aims to establish a legitimate master narrative. Similarly, press censorship and government propaganda of the past operate retrospectively. The occasional newspaper cutting from 1976 works in Indira Gandhi's favour since public criticism had been unpublishable at that time.

Safdarjang Road gives us the new master narrative in concentrated form, but it should not be supposed that this is its only physical refuge. Wherever Indira Gandhi's memory is publicly evoked within the city, it is done so within the framework of this narrative. The international airport and the indoor stadium, both of which bear her name are gigantesque monuments in her honour, symbolising her own hugeness. With the recent renaming of Connaught Place the narrative has been officially inscribed at the very heart of the city. Connaught Place has become Rajiv Chowk and Connaught Circus, Indira Chowk, thereby placing the mother's embrace of her son at the very centre of the capital city and nation. Needless to say, it is the son whose power was legitimate who features in the renaming of the streets. Monuments to Sanjay are conspicuous by their absence; the Sanjay Gandhi Memorial Hospital being an exception.

In search of memories

Like the tourists, we shall pass through 'Rajiv Chowk' and 'Indira Chowk,' but, like Delhites, we shall continue for the time being at least to refer to them by their original names. We are passing out of New Delhi and heading for the Jama Masjid at the very heart of the old city, otherwise known as Shahjahanabad. As we proceed, the roads become narrower and more crowded; Marutis, Ambassadors and auto rickshaws begin to mingle with cycle rickshaws and ponies and traps. The Jama Masjid towers majestically above us, its black and white minarets lending a fresh look to its ancient form. But we are not here to visit the Masjid. It is time once more to wander off the tourist path, this time in search of one of the central localities of the post-Emergency narrative, Dujana House. My map, though useful in New Delhi seems instantly inadequate in Old Delhi and I find the way by asking. The directions are clear. Opposite a small police booth, in the midst of the food and vessel sellers I must take a left turn. As I arrive at the police booth, I see a sign, Dujana House and walk under an unimpressive gateway, checking as I go past to see if there is any reference to the Emergency experience. Inside is a courtyard with shabby concrete apartments on one side and a beautifully maintained garden on the other. Cycle rickshaws are lined up in the entrance but the space remains open, populated only by the occasional passer by and a few men polishing enormous *biriyani* vessels used for wedding banquets. The people, mainly men, follow my movements with their eyes, indicating that this is not a space for foreigners; not a place for unaccompanied unveiled women either. I too am casting my eyes about, looking for visible reminders of the Emergency; a statue to the sterilised perhaps? A simple memorial plaque?

By now a middle-aged man in a *kurta pyjama* is looking at me as if he wants an explanation, so I begin to explain and soon find myself standing in a group. My knowledge of Hindi—though by no means perfect—is adequate for converting me from mere object of curiosity to curious subject with an enquiry. I ask the men if I can see the spot where the family planning clinic used to stand during the Emergency. They lead me to the end of the courtyard and into a neglected alley where they point to a derelict building, locked behind a metal grill. 'It was there, in the basement,' a man points. 'That was where they used to cut them up. Do you want to see inside?'

A young bearded man is sent off to find the key, but when we enter the building we find there is no electricity, making it difficult to see. A black cavern with white tiles on the walls of the staircase. Nothing

spectacular. A third man is pointing to an empty space nearby: 'This is where they set up the camp. The main officer used to sit round about here.'

What do you mean by 'camp'?

'It was a wooden shed. It was here they gave out the certificates and money. They were also offering a pot of ghee and a clock for *nasbandi* [sterilisation] at the time. They would grab the people by force, take them into the tent, make them sign papers, then take them into the basement. At first there was no toilet, but then they built this.' (He points to a shabby concrete building opposite the clinic.)

Who used to take them by force?

'The police. Who else? If the police get you, you can't do much.'

Were many people from Dujana House sterilised?

'No. Not us. They brought the men from outside. They say some went in and never came back.'

So what happened to the camp after the Emergency?

'When the Janata came to power they came here and pulled the whole lot down.'

Conversation flows along familiar lines as the men begin to reiterate episodes from the post-Emergency narrative. Their eyes are enthusiastic as if recalling an old wife's tale they have not heard for a long while. Their memory is more collective than personal, but it is not public. No official attempt has been made to publicly inscribe the memory of the Emergency at Dujana House. It is a place empty of connotations to those who do not know.

Our final destination is Turkman Gate, the centre stage of the post-Emergency narrative; the ultimate symbol of oppression and resistance. If the Emergency is to be remembered anywhere it is surely here. We arrive in a stream of traffic going down Asaf Ali Road on a Thursday afternoon. Opposite is the tourist camp, one of the cheapest places for visitors to stay in Delhi. It brings back personal memories of when, as a student, I had spent a full two weeks in the camp, driving past Turkman Gate everyday, oblivious then of what had occurred there some ten years earlier. Was it that I had ignored the signs or was it that there were no signs to ignore?

Today there is something written on the gate. It reads: 'Regional

Defence'. Behind it is an enclosure for the police. Yet again the police headquarters acts as an indicator that we have come to the right place. Another Muslim area in the Old city. Guarded. Under surveillance. Later enquiries inform me that the police were located there even before the Emergency and that this was the police *chowki* that had been captured by the people during the struggle.

As we take the road that leads behind Turkman Gate, we again enter a region of cycle rickshaws, *burqa*-clad women and *topi*-wearing (cap-wearing) men. The architecture is unspectacular, consisting of four storey concrete blocks painted in a pale violet blue. These apartments correspond neither to the noble ancient homes described in the post-Emergency rhetoric nor the filthy stinking slum of the Emergency rhetoric. This is hardly surprising since these are the buildings that were erected after the controversial demolition, leaving the two narratives to dispute over the area's past appearance.

I talk to an old bearded man, dressed in a blue checked *lungi* (waistcloth), white *kurta* (long-sleeved, knee-length tunic) and *topi* (cap). He makes a wide gesture with his arm to indicate the extent of the area demolished during the Emergency. He sends a small boy to search for the person who will tell me 'the entire story'. A stalwart man appears and introduces himself as the local *chaudhuri* (leader) and Head of the Turkman Gate Committee. He tells me that he spent several months in prison following the demolition and protests at Turkman Gate on 19 April 1976. Our conversation on a street corner inevitably attracts a crowd, leading the original man to offer his scrap metal shop as a quiet place for discussion. Four of us go in: the *chaudhuri*, the iron merchant, a *burqa*-clad woman who turns out to be a local social worker and I. A conversation ensues:

CHAUDHURI
'Turkman Gate became a famous name during the Emergency. People came from all over Delhi to see what had happened. Even foreigners used to come and visit our houses. But look at the mess we are in now.'

SOCIAL WORKER
'The government makes promises but they don't do anything.'

CHAUDHURI
'This is a Muslim area so nobody bothers.'

The conversation swings back and forth between the Emergency drama and present-day neglect. New details embellish the post-Emergency narrative which has become even more spectacular over time.

CHAUDHURI
'400 people were killed, at least.'

SOCIAL WORKER
'The bulldozers crushed the people to death, grinding them into the ground. There was one man, he had just got married the night before, and the next day he was gone.'

What about Sanjay Gandhi? Did he ever visit this place?

CHAUDHURI
'Yes. He came. He took one look at our homes, which were bigger and more beautiful than anything you see here today, and he said, "These are all *jhuggis* [slum shacks]. They must be demolished". He wanted to build Sanjay Minar in the place of our houses but we did not let him. He never came back.'

What do you mean, Sanjay Minar?

CHAUDHURI
'One of those restaurants that spins round and round. A revolving hotel—that's what they call it.'

I ask if I can see the remains of the Faiz-e-Elahi Mosque which they tell me has been largely destroyed. We cross over the busy road, pass by the street vendors selling cloth for *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca) and enter a large empty space of dusty barren ground. 'All the buildings here were demolished.' We stare about at the vacant space, a space fertile for forgetting. The *chaudhuri* is walking with his head down, pointing out stone traces of old foundations—traces of demolition to those who know; mere stones in the sand to those who don't. In one corner stand some mature trees 'which got saved' and a section of the mosque. 'They would have destroyed the whole lot,' the social worker adds, 'but one of the bulldozers got stuck in the ground and the person driving it was killed so they got scared and called it off.'

Next we re-cross the road and they take me around the residential area, pointing out the dodgy electric wiring which twists and turns from one building to another.

Are there any signs to indicate what happened during the Emergency to passers-by like me who might not know?

CHAUDHURI
'No. Nothing like that.'

SOCIAL WORKER
'We couldn't do that. If we did they would make us take it down. They would say it was a provocation.'

They?

SOCIAL WORKER
'The government'.

They take me to the nearest equivalent; a brick arch standing in a derelict park which has turned to dust. We all squint at its faded plaque, unable to detect what is written there—something about Morarji Desai dedicating the garden to the people. A goat strolls by.

'But we do have a film,' the *chaudhuri* adds, 'a film which tells the truth about Turkman Gate and Dujana House.' He invites me to return for a screening on the evening of 19 April, the day of the famous battle at Turkman Gate some 20 years earlier.

Fragments of the past for the future

19 April 1996. Turkman Gate. Chairs fill the main lane, transforming it into an open theatre. Above the stage, a black and white banner bears an inscription in Urdu, 'Day of the Martyrs.' At 10.30 p.m., the head of the Turkman Gate Committee makes his way to the microphone and begins an impassioned speech which stretches on until midnight. It soon becomes clear that this is not an occasion for showing films but a political rally aimed at levering votes for the Janata Dal in the forthcoming local election. As the *chaudhuri* raises his voice, he swings his arms furiously like a prophet of old. His cries, hideously amplified by badly rigged loudspeakers, reverberate into the night, bouncing off the tenement buildings that line the street. His words are met by cheers and applause from a responsive audience composed almost entirely of Muslim men and boys.

'When our houses were being demolished, Jagmohan and Sanjay Gandhi came here. They threatened to cut me up into tiny pieces...No one can

come here and wipe out our houses, sweep us off the streets just because this is a Muslim area...For almost four hours we faced the bullets...'

We have stumbled across an act of remembering, live and vibrating. This is memory with a purpose. Like the demolition of the Babri Masjid by right wing Hindu extremists in 1992, the demolition of Turkman Gate in 1976 is invoked as proof of the betrayal of Muslims by the Congress Party and of the need for all Muslims to unite under the Janata Dal:

'All three stripes of the Congress flag have been stripped away leaving only the stick which they will use to beat us with. The Janata must win. The Congress try to buy us with favours but I am offering you my blood. I am prepared to die for you...'

The *chaudhuri*'s impassioned speech is followed by vehement words from the local MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) and two other Muslim notables. Like the *chaudhuri*, they invoke memories of 1976 and 1992 as evidence of an anti-Muslim plot and the need for solidarity. The speeches go on for several hours. All are in Urdu.[39] They speak a discourse of vulnerability channelled for collective action:

'All of you have come together tonight. If we scatter, we may have to face bulldozers and bullets again. Stand together on the same platform. Today is the day of the martyrs. The real tribute to the martyrs will be when we honour them with our deeds.'

20 April 1996, just one day later. I come across an election leaflet written in Hindi. Jagmohan, ex-Vice-chairman of the DDA, villain of the post-Emergency narrative, is standing in the local elections as a candidate for the right wing pro-Hindu BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party). The leaflet lists his many achievements, heralding him as 'the man who laid the foundations for making Delhi a modern city and for setting a world standard in development'. A newspaper article published the same week in an important national daily bears the heading 'BJP plays Turkman Gate card to woo voters.' Underneath, it claims, 'Jagmohan, *the* demolition man of the Emergency days, has turned Messiah for the uprooted residents of Turkman Gate.' The

[39] I am grateful to Rajinder, my research assistant, for accompanying me to hear these speeches and for translating extracts from them.

article goes on to claim that those people from Turkman Gate whose homes were demolished and who were taken to resettlement colonies in outer Delhi during the Emergency are now grateful to the ex-Vice-chairman of the DDA for having made them landowners. Jagmohan 'the Saviour' is now appealing to such people to remember his good deeds by supporting the BJP in the forthcoming election.[40]

Two fragments of memory of the same event. Both elaborated to suit present day political agendas, both used as resources for engineering futures, neither of which took shape. The Janata Dal failed to muster adequate support from the Muslims of Old Delhi in the 1996 elections just as Jagmohan failed to get elected for the BJP that time round, although he has since been elevated to the position of Union Urban Development Minister . The Turkman Gate Massacre, once so central to the post-Emergency narrative, has today shrunk to the status of a localised grievance which may raise passions amongst those individuals who were directly affected in 1976, but failed to capture the imagination of the electorate two decades later.

Our guided tour of the forgetting of the Emergency is over. What we have encountered in the city of Delhi is a series of absences in time and space—phantom futures that never happened; ghostly pasts whose relevance to the present has either been effaced or distorted and reworked to different ends; physical blanks or substitutions where houses were once demolished; where the conception of unborn children was prevented; and where political decisions were taken by a man who has since been edited out of history altogether.

Travelling around the city of Delhi we will pass many more spaces where demolitions once perforated the urban fabric, clearing the way for new homes, shopping centres, roads and parks, many of which already seem old. Demolition or development? I hear the echo of past narratives, fragments of which are discretely guarded and embellished in different corners of the city. But is there an alternative perspective from which we might begin to view the Emergency? One which speaks a language less tainted by the master narratives of times gone by? One in which the central characters are not the stars of Safdarjang Road, Turkman Gate and Dujana House, but the hundreds of thousands of ordinary Delhi citizens and bureaucrats whose lives were or were not disrupted by the Emergency?

[40] *Pioneer*, 17 April 1996.