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History of Post Independence India

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CHAPTER

4

JANTA GOVERNMENT

4.1 Introduction

Emergency is considered as one of darkest phases of the Indian democracy. The press freedom was gagged, Habeas Corpus was suspended along with the fundamental right to life and liberty, the law and order situation was made more dictatorial. The arrests under Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) were done to satisfy the political and personal interests of the, then prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The state and parliamentary elections were postponed. There was censorship of the press, cinema and other forms of art at the whims of the political executive.

There were several reports of police excesses on people being reported but, unfortunately, no action was taken during the time of Emergency. Forceful sterilizations were done and slums were cleared using police forces for urban development under the umbrella of Twenty Point Programme. The demolition of Delhi's Turkmaan Gate was one such incident where the police shot and killed people protesting against the demolition of their houses, ordered by Indira Gandhi's government in 1976.

This created a state of resentment amongst the people. There were large scale protests by the local people men and the students, usually, under the leadership of many parties like Jan Sangha, Janata Party and Bharatiya Lok Dal. There were widespread protests across India and many regional parties like the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), Janata Party, Akali Dal and Communist Party of India (Marxist) came together to protest against the Emergency imposed by the government.

After the proclamation of the Emergency, the world perception of India changed from a democracy to a dictatorship. The perception changed owing to the large scale and irrational enactment of laws. The power of judicial review was taken; parliament was given absolute power to change Constitution; and, the tenure of the state and central governments was increased to 6 years in the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act.

Apart from it, most of the decisions for the running of the administration were taken by the coterie of Sanjay Gandhi.



Morarji Desai

4.2 Rise of Regional Parties and Coalition Governments

The disaffection of the masses was growing with every passing day. The excesses of government and prevailing climate of fear led to situations of despair. While moving towards socialism, Indira Gandhi lacked a concrete economic policy. This resulted



in gradual abandoning of fiscal prudence, leading to macroeconomic imbalance. There was an increase in government expenditure like subsidies and grants, loan waivers, overstaffing and salary increases for the government employees. This led to failing economy, which added to the woes of common man. There was no avenue left for seeking the redressal of these problems, due to the concentration of power in the hands of the executive.

Amidst all this, surprisingly though Indira Gandhi announced revocation of emergency and holding of elections in 1977, due to the damning Indian global perception, growing discontent among the Indian citizens and internal surveys conducted by Indira Gandhi's team that assured her majority in the general elections in 1977.

The opposition political parties were bound to reap on to the prolonged disaffection of citizens due to hardships suffered under emergency. The political parties belonging to different ideologies and roots of origin, came together to oust Congress and capture power. They lacked any effective policy, planning or ideology and, hence, were merely conglomerating entities in pursuit of power.

After the Internal Emergency ended, the opposition parties believed that Indira Gandhi would lose the announced election in 1977.

Sensing the opportunity the main leaders of Congress, Jagjivan Ram, H.N. Bahuguna and Nandini Satpathy, defected the Congress party and formed a new party called as Congress for Democracy (CFD). The opposition leaders came together as Janata party, formed by the merger of Congress (O), the Jan Sangh, Bharatiya Lok Dal (BLD) and the Socialist Party. A common front was formed constituting

Janata Party, Congress for Democracy, DMK, Akali Dal and CPM to fight Congress and its allies (CPI and AIADMK).

- The 1977 elections were fought on the single agenda of excesses committed during the Emergency like press censorship, restriction of civil liberties, forced sterilizations, the excesses committed by the police etc. during the Emergency years.
- The results were on expected grounds. Congress lost whole of North India and was only able to retain 2 seats but, surprisingly, increased its tally in South India. The results acted like a referendum to Emergency and were inversely proportional to the impact of Emergency. The North India, which bore the maximum impact under Emergency, reflected dismal results for Congress, whereas, in South India, where impact of Emergency was less and Twenty-Point Programme had performed well, Congress achieved spectacular results increasing its seat tally from 70 in 1971 to 92. Janata Party and its allies emerged victorious winning 330 out of 542 seats.
- On the premise that Congress had lost the legitimacy to rule, citing the losses suffered during the national elections, the Janata government dismissed the nine Congress ruled state governments and ordered fresh elections, eventually, leading to the rise of regional parties who were the major alliance partners of Janata government. This was done by the Janata government to strengthen its grip and consolidate the regional powers in its favour.
- In the subsequent assembly elections, held in June 1977, Janata party came in power in these states except in Tamil Nadu where AIADMK won. In West Bengal, CPM (a Janata Party ally) won. The control over parliament and the state assemblies enabled the Janata party to achieve what it had set out to, the complete consolidation of power. This enabled it to elect, unopposed, its own candidate, N. Sanjeeva Reddy, as the President of the Union in July 1977.

44th Constitutional Amendment

The Janata government took immediate steps to restore liberal democracy and disassemble the despotic features of the Emergency. The Fundamental Rights and civil liberties to the press, political parties and individuals were restored. The 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act was passed during the Emergency. The Janata government introduced the 44th Constitutional Amendment that repealed majority changes brought by the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act. Some of the changes brought about by 44th constitutional amendment Act 1944 were:

- The terms of the House of the People and the state assemblies were restored to five years from six years.

- In the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act Parliament was given unrestrained power to amend any part of the Constitution and the power of Judicial Review was taken away. The Judicial Review power of the Supreme Court and High Courts was restored by the 44th Constitutional Amendment.
- In the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, an amendment in Article 368 prevented any constitutional amendment from being called in question in any court on any ground. It also revoked the courts' power to determine what constituted an office of profit. The 44th Constitutional Amendment restored the rights for judiciary and corrected the said anomalies.
- The Janata government appointed Shah Commission to enquire into the excesses committed during the Emergency of 1975-77.
- In the 44th Constitutional Amendment, the Right to Property was changed to being a legal right from being a fundamental right.
- It amended articles 19, 22, 30, 31A, 31C, 38, 71, 74, 77, 83, 103, 105, 123, 132, 133, 134, 139A, 150, 166, 172, 192, 194, 213, 217, 225, 226, 227, 239B, 329, 352, 356, 358, 359, 360 and 371F while it inserted articles 134A, and 361A and removed articles 31, 257A and 329A.
- It amended part 12 and schedule 9 of the Constitution.
- The 44th Constitutional Amendment omitted the Article 360 clause (5) of the Indian Constitution which made the satisfaction of the President, Governors and administrators final while issuing ordinances.
- The Fundamental Rights in Article 20 and Article 21 can not be suspended even during Emergency automatically, as it was amended.
- In the 44th Constitutional Amendment, Article 74 was amended to give the President the power to return the advice tendered by the Council of Ministers for review. However, this can be done only once.

Shah Commission Report

Shah Commission was appointed by the government to enquire into the excesses committed during the National Emergency of 1975-77, by the previous government. It was appointed under the former Chief Justice of India J C Shah, by Janata government.

Shah Commission was appointed to enquire into the atrocities committed by the police, arbitrary detentions, press censorship, restriction of civil liberties, forced sterilizations, etc. carried out during Emergency.

Commission operated as a courtroom and had its own investigating staff for the complaints that were registered with it. The complainants were allowed to have their own legal representation.

There were strict deadlines that were followed by the commission and it had to present findings within a year of its setting up.



Sketch showing Shah Commission's Proceeding

Indira Gandhi and other Congress leaders like Pranab Mukherjee disputed the legality of the commission and hence did not take the proceedings of the commission very seriously.

The commission's findings were given in three reports:

- (a) First report declared that emergency was not justified as it was declared on the wish and whim of Indira Gandhi only. It criticized the gagging of the press and the way it was censored.
- (b) Second report questioned the role of Sanjay Gandhi and police excesses during the violent evacuation drive of Turkmaan Gate slum.
- (c) Third and final report catered to the police being found guilty of committing excesses like restriction of civil liberties, forced sterilizations, torture of the people jailed during the emergency, etc. It condemned the role of the bureaucracy that turned a blind eye to the excesses during Emergency and even participated in it.

No action was taken on the findings of the commission as Janata government lost its majority in Parliament due to internal clashes.

Food for Work Programme

Food for Work Programme (FWP) was introduced by Janata government to reduce rural unemployment and help in rural development like rural roads and canals. Another feature of Food for Work Programme was to stabilize food grains prices. The FWP was for massive rural employment which would in turn create a new consumer class among in rural India and boost consumption. The payment was done in the form of food grains.

The work accomplished on paper was huge. According to official reports, employment of 150 crore man-days was generated, over 200,000 km of roads were built, 800,000 hectares of assured irrigation in achieved and 66,000 school buildings were constructed or repaired. However, in reality, the achievements were rather dismal. Given the

fact that large number of man-days were generated, an expectation of fall in unemployment, was imperative, but on the contrary unemployment rose. There was a shortfall in the payments to FWP enrollers as the production was far below than what was needed to suffice the increasing demands. There was a larceny committed by the grain distributors and the contractors under the scheme as most of the grains were black marketed and the many of the intended beneficiaries did not receive any compensation for the work.

The corruption was so huge that:

- (a) Many a times, gains were issued to contractors without even verifying if the work was completed or not.
- (b) No checks were made to see if the intended beneficiaries did receive any compensation for the work, from the contractors.
- (c) There were many loopholes in the schemes, like non durable kuccha roads were constructed, no cross drainage was provided, canals existed only on paper in many places, etc.

This scheme was a good scheme on paper but, on the implementation front, it failed completely. It was marred with rampant corruption of the bureaucracy, contractors and politician nexus. This resulted in depletion of the food grain reserves and subsequently government resorted to cash payments to the beneficiaries.

4.3 Analysis of Janata Government

The Janata party came as a crusader for the civil liberties against the authoritarian Indira's regime during the Emergency. This coalition gave India a hope for better governance along with economic development. The Indian people gave it an overwhelming majority and government started its work as soon as it came to power.

Achievements

- As soon as the Janata government came to power, it took upon the task of restoring democracy. It brought about the 44th Constitutional Amendment Act which made it difficult to form an authoritarian government in India.
- The judicial review of the courts was given new life by the 44th Constitutional Amendment.
- The freedom of press, civil liberties, Fundamental Rights, etc. were restored.
- The new Janata government stressed upon extending the postal and telecommunication services in rural and backward areas on an unprecedented scale.

- The Food for Work Programme was launched with the objective of reducing rural unemployment and helping in rural development.
- The new Janata government shifted its economic policy from large scale industries to labor intensive small scale industries.

Failures

However, soon the dream with which Janata party had captured the imagination of voters began to fade due to lack of internal cohesion, weak leadership, absence of clear cut planning, strategy and decision making, which eventually started to show in failure of governance and administration. What was believed to be a strong coalition by the people who voted Janata party in power, was just a conglomeration of disparate ideologies and every leader in Janata party having Prime Ministerial ambitions. From the very beginning, tremors in the coalition began to show up.

Morarji Desai, Charan Singh and Jagjivan Ram all three stalwarts wanted to be Prime Minister and a crisis loomed on the coalition from the first day itself. Jayaprakash Narayan and J.B. Kripalani were looked on to provide guidance that made Morarji Desai as the PM but it was visible that Charan Singh was not happy with the decision. There was forceful restoration of lands with to the erstwhile the landowners. These lands were taken from them during Emergency and given to poor people or Scheduled Castes under the Twenty Point Programme of Indira Gandhi. There was outbreak of large scale violence, in the rural hinterlands and in cities like Aligarh (Uttar Pradesh), during the Janata government rule. The government, however, remained a mute spectator to these social tensions and atrocities on the poor peasants and Scheduled Castes as it did not want to upset its voter base which mainly belonged to upper and intermediate castes, comprising of rich and middle class peasants, landlords, small businessmen and industrialists.

- There were many instances when the army and paramilitary forces were called upon to maintain law and order. The constant calling of the army to maintain law and order; disparity between the pay scales of the military, policemen and para military forces and limited promotional avenues in paramilitary forces; and, policemen led to a lot of strikes by them. Their demands were met immediately by giving the policemen and paramilitary forces immediate compensation however.
- There was problem of grave unemployment in the country. At that time primary employer in country was agriculture sector. The agriculture sector was plagued with policy paralysis, the 1975 Emergency, reducing productivities, constant floods and droughts. This had

caused discontent in a large section of population which depended on agriculture for employment. The government's prime challenge was to raise employment and reduce the discontent amongst Indian citizens. Hence, the government moved to labor-intensive small-scale industries from agriculture. This move was, however, not supplanted with proper policy backing. Hence, it failed to implement a concrete economic model in substituting the large scale industrialization model with labor-intensive small-scale industries. This move led to debasement of the already troubled industrial sector.

- Drought conditions in states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh arose because of agriculture stagnation due to policy paralysis, floods and depletion of food reserves due to Food for Work Programme.

There were grave differences in ideologies of the coalition partners. The Jan Sangh had radical Hindutva ideology while the Congress (O) and Bharatiya Lok Dal had a secular ideology. Bharatiya Lok Dal was a rich-peasant party with no pan India developmental vision. The Socialists largely lacked ideology, except in Bihar. No party was willing to compromise on its ideology.

Every partner group wanted to wield as much political and administrative influence as they could. The Janata government fell when Charan Singh withdrew his support from the government and thus, paved the way for a stronger Indira Gandhi government.

4.4 Return of Indira Gandhi Government

After the Janata Government failure, India held general elections to the 7th Lok Sabha in January, 1980. The Janata government had promised a lot and delivered too little. It was a loose coalition that barely held on to a majority in the Lok Sabha and, hence, never quite had a firm grip on power. A string of policy failures, rising unemployment and increasing atrocities on poor and people from backward classes acted as final nails in the coffin of Janata government. There was no credible face to challenge Indira Gandhi.

As expected once again Indira Gandhi was chosen as the Prime Minister of India. Immediately the Congress government dissolved the nine state assemblies in the opposition-ruled states. In the assembly elections that followed, Congress swept the polls except in Tamil Nadu. Now, Congress led governments were there in fifteen of the twenty two states of India.

Indira Gandhi restored her glory and became the only Indian leader with a national appeal but, then, she did

not have that firm grasp over politics and administration, as she used to command during her previous years as Prime Minister. Despite enjoying unchallenged power, she dithered in taking up new policy initiatives or dealing effectively with a number of disturbing problems.

Her last stint as Prime Minister was marked with organizational weakness of Congress which affected the performance of the government and its popularity.

Although Indira Gandhi totally dominated the central leadership of the party but, again she faced the problem of continuous factionalism and infighting within the state party units. This was because party organizational elections were repeatedly postponed; lack of faith that Congress could provide stable state governments; organizational weakness of the Congress; and, growth of disaffected dissidents within the party.

An example of all this was the electoral defeat that Congress suffered in the 1983 state assembly elections of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. These states were Congress bastions since their very inceptions.

Indira Gandhi faced certain intractable problems arising out of communal, linguistic and caste conflicts, mainly in Kashmir, Assam and Punjab. Communalism grew stronger and was manifested into communal riots, which spanned from 1980 to 1984 throughout India. The atrocities on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes continued to grow as they asserted their Constitutional rights which were unacceptable to the people of other castes.

The only bright star of the Indira Gandhi's government in its later years was on foreign policy front. Indira Gandhi tried to improve India's relations with the US, China and Pakistan, despite Pakistan's support to the terrorists in Punjab. She did not hesitate to order the army in April 1984, to deploy a brigade at the Siachen glacier along the Line of Control in Kashmir.

4.5 Unrest in Punjab

In the 1980s Punjab was immersed in a separatist movement to create an independent country for Sikhs to be called as Khalistan. This movement transformed into a terror campaign and was turning into a dangerous crisis for the Indian nation. From its inception, Akali Dal (Sikh dominated political party) tried to create a separate Sikh province. The States Reorganization Commission that was constituted to assess the demand for separate states, by linguistic groups, had rejected Akalis demand. Hence, Akali Dal adopted certain communal themes which became the constitutive elements of Sikh communalism, in all its phases.

Having lost the elections in 1980 the Akalis began to intensify the communal content of their politics and continuously escalated their demands, with the hope of expanding their support base in Punjab. This policy of Akalis was bearing fruits and they were gaining support in Punjab at a massive pace.

To counter the Akali, threat the Punjab Congress led by Giani Zail Singh supported Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale was a strong campaigner of Sikh orthodoxy and initiator of terrorism in 1970s, in Punjab. The terrorist campaign by Bhindranwale and All India Sikh Students Federation, headed by Amrik Singh, began on 24th April 1980, with the assassination of the head of the Nirankari sect. This was followed by killing of many Nirankaris, Akalis and Congress workers. Bhindranwale was shielded by the, then Home Minister Giani Zail Singh. Bhindranwale demanded for the implementation of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution (ASR), adopted in 1973.



After the September of 1983 Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale started killing Hindus, looted local banks, jewellery shops and home guard armories. This situation went out of hand after the police in Punjab was unable to curb this terrorism and maintain law and order. Now Congress had to battle with the problem which they had created in the form of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale.

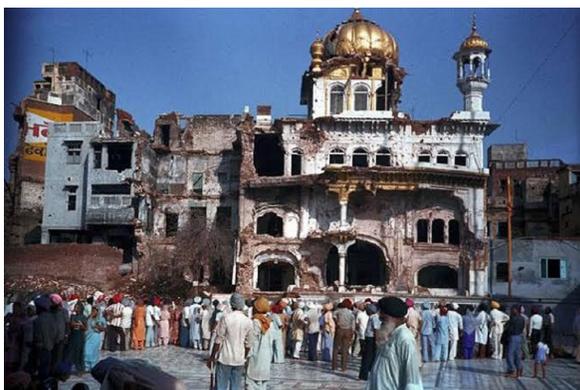
4.6 Operation Bluestar

Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale was the leader of the Sikh organization Damdami Taksal, who wanted to implement the Anandpur Sahib resolution, and to create Khalistan (as a separate for Sikhs). He along with his militant armed followers established control over Golden Temple complex or the Harmandir Sahib Complex in Amritsar, Punjab, in 1984. Under the order of the then, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, the Indian military performed an operation to regain control over Harmandir Sahib from Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale.

It was an intense military action that lasted for 8 days and the control was regained over Harmandir Sahib Complex. According to the official reports there were 500 casualties on Sikh militants side and, 830 casualties on military side, along with 2360 who were wounded.

The aftermaths of this operation were:

- Many Sikh soldiers mutinied in the army in protest and, subsequently, were brought under control only through military actions.
- Assassination of the then, Chief of Army Staff General Arun Shridhar Vaidya and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi later.
- Sikh militancy increased and this made Punjab a disturbed area, resulting in next decade of terror by Khalistan terrorists.



Akal Takht after Operation Bluestar

4.7 Indira Gandhi's Assassination

The military action under Operation Bluestar had not only destroyed the Golden Temple complex but, also the manuscript of Guru Granth Saheb the holy book of Sikhs kept at Harmandir Saheb. There was a huge resentment in the Sikh community against the, then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

On 31 October 1984, Indira Gandhi was assassinated by two of her Sikh bodyguards Satwant Singh and Beant Singh, at her residence on Safdarjung road, in New Delhi.

This assassination led to retaliatory violence in which thousands of Sikhs were killed in the 1984 Anti Sikh riots.

4.8 Critical Appraisal of Indira Gandhi Era

Achievements

She was a skillful and master politician who handled many crises under her regime. The Morarji Desai rebellion was the first crisis that she faced at the start of her tenure as Prime Minister which she skillfully negotiated and emerged

as the winner, sidelining him. She always had her way and hence was always in confrontation with the old stalwarts in congress like K Kamraj. After the split of Congress into Congress (O) and congress(R), her political management and policies made her faction of Congress a clear winner in the 1971 elections. After the Emergency, every big leader left the Congress in 1977, leading to the most shocking defeat in general elections, but she rose as a phoenix again, in 1980 with a bigger mandate than she had in 1971. However, in the later years of Indira Gandhi rule, there was a constant infighting in the state party units. In her last stint as the Prime Minister, she found it hard to keep the party together.

Under the Indira Gandhi regime, India transformed itself from a food deficit to a food surplus country. India was an importer of food grains in 1967, and even had to sign the humiliating PL480 programme of the U.S., which was presented in lieu of the food grain imports from U.S. to meet the shortage. To solve this agricultural crisis, Indira Gandhi carried forward the Green Revolution started by Lal Bahadur Shastri and took India to food sufficiency. She gave land to landless laborers and sharecroppers.

Indira Gandhi's major political asset was pro-poor image. She was seen as a savior of the underprivileged and the minorities. There is also no doubt that Indira Gandhi played an important role in politicizing the people, especially in making the poor, the Harijans and the tribals, the minorities and the women aware of their social conditions and in arousing consciousness of their interests and their constitutional rights.

The economy had its ups and downs during the Indira Gandhi regime. Indira Gandhi got a troubled economy with looming agricultural crises, low economic growth and high inflation. These problems were coupled with the 1971 India Pakistan war and the 1973 global oil crises. Indira Gandhi took some very bold decisions towards boosting the economy. Indira Gandhi achieved increased food production through the Green Revolution; thereby, reducing the economic burden. She ended the privy purses which were a huge burden on government treasury. She nationalized the banks and instilled confidence amongst people to put their money in the banks; thereby, increasing the lending capacity of the banks which in turn, boosted the economic growth.

On the world politics front, Indira Gandhi set the stage where India was taken seriously by other world powers. Under her leadership the Soviet Friendship Treaty was signed, which helped India free East Pakistan. Under her regime, India performed the first successful nuclear test and the world recognized India's might. She kept India free of both the Cold War blocs and maintained relations with both the superpowers, U.S. and USSR.

India gained significant strides in science and technology during the Indira Gandhi rule. The Smiling Buddha was the assigned secret name of India's first successful nuclear bomb test done at Pokhran, in 1974. This was the first instance when a nation outside of the five permanent members of United Nations Security Council had achieved such a feat. This nuclear technology would be used for peaceful and economic purposes like development of mines, construction of dams, canals, harbors and search for minerals. This nuclear test was applauded by USSR, France and Britain who gave their full support to the Indian contention of using nuclear energy for civil purposes.



'Smiling Buddha' Nuclear Test

India made significant steps towards the space sector under Indira Gandhi's leadership. Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) was established under her regime, with the objective to harness space technology for national development, while pursuing space science research and planetary exploration. India's first man in space, Rakesh Sharma, explored space under her regime only.

Failures

Indira Gandhi failed to evolve a strategic framework to deal with communalism and separatism, resulting in her failure to deal effectively with the Punjab, Assam and Kashmir problems.

She did not make any efforts to check the institutional decay but even acted as a catalyst in some cases. The elevation of AN Roy as Chief Justice of India, superseding three judges created a space for political sycophancy in judiciary, which was unfortunate.

Indira Gandhi wanted to move towards a more socialistic policy— a leaf borrowed out of the Nehruvian policy book. In the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, the word 'socialist' was added to the Preamble of the Constitution. Indira Gandhi had no concrete policies to achieve this objective. This led to glaring failures on implementation

side and she failed to meet the demands of a mixed and growing economy.

During the Emergency, with the complete control lying in the hands of the executive, there was seen an increase in the already rampant corruption. Apart from this, there was a stringent control on businesses and it required considerable permissions for setting up private ventures. This was due to the socialistic policy outlook of Indira Gandhi. This resulted ultimately, in the slowing down of the economic growth and increased inflation rate in India.

Indira Gandhi was secular and she consistently opposed the communal forces like the RSS. She even gave India its first Muslim President, Dr. Zakir Husain. However, this secularism was trumped by the political motives when she turned a blind eye to the acts of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale in Punjab. This later turned out to be herculean mistake from which she could never recover.

The nuclear test conducted under her leadership attracted adverse reactions from the US, Canada, Pakistan and Japan. The US reacted with disgust and anger as it saw this as an attempt by India to build its own independent centre of power in South Asia. The Canadian government sharply reacted and suspended its nuclear aid to India on May 22, 1974 on the grounds that India's nuclear test was in contravention to the agreement signed between the two countries. The United States prohibited military aid and sales of military equipment to India except for military training purposes and US military and economic grant. The United States stopped the promised supply of enriched uranium fuel to the Tarapur Atomic power plant, leading to its stalling. This further moved India away from West. This whole nuclear test saga had much of negative fallout and India had to suspend its nuclear programme.

Indira Gandhi was blamed for centralization of power. From controlling Congress in the early years to the proclamation of Emergency, Indira Gandhi always tried to keep a strong grip on things. Even during the times of Emergency, she had put all her opposition behind the bars.

Conclusion

Though Indira Gandhi had her own weaknesses and strengths but nothing can take away the fact that she was on the Indian political stage for a long time and helped in strengthening India's image at global level.

