

## **Project on National Emergency of 1975-1977 in India**

Our research project delves into the National Emergency of 1975-1977,' a transformative and contentious period in the history of India. This project aims to examine the Emergency in-depth, exploring the historical context that led to its declaration, the underlying motivations, and its profound impact on Indian society, politics, and governance. With a focus on archival research and oral history, our study seeks to shed new light on this critical juncture in India's democratic journey, offering fresh insights and a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics at play during this period.

During the 21 months of National Emergency, the country witnessed a suspension of civil liberties, media censorship, and the concentration of power within the government, with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi at the helm. Due to its enormous effects on democracy, human liberties, and administration, understanding India's 1975 National Emergency is of the utmost significance. This time period serves as a stark warning of how democratic regimes can become vulnerable when leaders wield unchecked power. The Emergency's suspension of civil liberties, media restrictions, and repression of political opposition serve as a stark reminder of the importance of protecting individual freedoms and human rights. It also raises important issues regarding political accountability and the necessity of transparent and accountable governance.

From a historian's perspective, studying the Emergency is challenging for several reasons. Firstly, the declaration of National Emergency on 25 June 1975 by the erstwhile president Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed gave the central government several extraordinary powers. The government, spearheaded by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, was able to use an extremely iron-fisted approach against any form of political criticism or dissent with impunity. This was observed in the form of complete censorship of the press, suppression of records, arrest of political rivals etc. As a result, there is a clear vacuum of historical sources in the form of newspapers, written records etc. from the period, particularly those criticising the regime.

Furthermore, due to the innately political nature of the events, the narratives of Emergency have been coloured by political ideologies prevalent in India. Such narratives tend to be highly polarised, due to political implications. This resulted in a rather 'black and white' approach to the incident, where in the narrative is either characterised by complete criticism of the regime, or severe underplaying the civil liberty violations during the period. An outcome of this is that the facts and accounts from the period often tend to lean heavily towards one side or the other. This poses a challenge to the historian trying to build a holistic narrative of the period.

In this project, we will be employing oral history as the primary approach for our exploration of the period. The findings of the project, based on oral accounts, will be supplemented by available written sources. Through the design of its methodology, our approach avoids both the historiographical challenges mentioned earlier. As an oral history project, it is unencumbered by the lack of written records during the period. Furthermore, as nearly half a century has passed since the Emergency, the narratives are likely to be less polarised. As a result, the accounts and facts surrounding the period are likely to be much more clearer and holistic.

The Emergency's enduring impact on Indian politics, combined with the scarcity of records from that time, makes it a vital and intriguing piece of political history. It highlights the preservation of democratic ideals because of its long-lasting influence on Indian politics, its function as a warning against authoritarianism, and its significance for the judiciary. This historical occurrence underscores the necessity of vigilant guardianship over democratic institutions and principles and provides insightful lessons for all nations.