

description of *The Travels*. This foreign literature can no longer be confidently read without also listening to the subtle indigenous voice of Purwalelana.

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EMERGENCY CHRONICLES: INDIRA GANDHI AND DEMOCRACY'S TURNING POINT. By GYAN PRAKASH. pp. viii, 439. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2019.  
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On 25 June 1975, India's prime minister Indira Gandhi announced an auto-coup. Quite literally overnight, democracy gave way to dictatorship. Over the course of the next twenty-one months, a hundred thousand, three score parliamentarians included, were banged up in prison. Two dozen parties were banned. The government's blue pencillers set about establishing a regime of prior restraint. Unions were crippled, judges threatened into submission. A couple of thousand were even killed for resisting the Emergency in some form or other. All the same, and just as suddenly, Mrs Gandhi decided to revoke the dictatorship in January 1977. Elections were held and the incumbents went down in defeat. Democracy 'returned', as it were. What, then, is one to make of this very Indian coup, its harbingers and legacies, its premature revocation?

It turns out that in his well-written but ultimately superfluous account, Gyan Prakash does not quite know. *Emergency Chronicles* presents itself as a history of the Emergency, but one is hard-pressed to find much about it between its covers. Less than a hundred of the book's four hundred pages, in fact, concern the Emergency itself. Not unlike in Gertrude Stein's Oakland, in Prakash's account "there is no there there".

But before considering the book's contents, a few remarks on form. *Emergency Chronicles* is a pleasant read. Prakash's prose is brisk and crystal clear, reminiscent of the rest of his corpus. Few sentences are encumbered with subordinate clauses. Moreover, Prakash has an eye for detail, always appropriate for the period under study. He does a commendable job bringing the analogue world—transistor radios, telegrams, 'oversized sunglasses'—of the seventies to life. The treasure trove of photographs—some thirty of them, all tastefully chosen and very well produced—point to the same end. What is more, his book is a welcome work of *haute vulgarisation*. There is now a wide literature—legal, social, cultural—on the Emergency, much of it on very specific themes and in specialist journals. Prakash skilfully synthesises all this information in nine neat chapters, even if the volume in its entirety—on account of the tenuous thread tying the discrete chapters together—never manages to bespeak quite the same internal consistency. Admirably, too, there is no endless methodological navel-gazing (so common in recent histories of postcolonial India) here—only the occasional reference to the Nazi jurist Carl Schmitt so beloved of so many South Asianists for his observation that "sovereign is he who decides on the [state of] exception" (p. 9). (Its use here strikes one as out of place: for in making this claim, Schmitt was justifying absolute state sovereignty—his immediate concern was to defend Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution, which granted the executive greater emergency powers—while Prakash

here is evidently critical of it, which begs the question of what analytical utility he sees in this notion). Foucault is confined to footnotes. *Homo sacer* makes but one cameo.

Stylistically, perhaps, the only flaw is that Prakash is given to too much romanticism, probably induced by repeat viewings of *Hazaaroon Khwaishein Aisi*, a period romance about a revolutionary, political fixer, and their common love interest set against the backdrop of the Emergency. Two kindred radical romances—one between two JNU students and the other two politicians of the Socialist Party, the Dandavates—for some reason, are the subjects of lengthy excursions in *Emergency Chronicles*. Here, his taut prose becomes cloying. ‘Conversations on intellectual and ideological matters soon blossomed into a romantic liaison’, we are told about the JNU students (p. 21). With the Dandavates we enter more cringeworthy territory, if only because Pramila Dandavate was possessed of her own brand of purple prose (saccharine and vacuous in equal measure: “The earth looks like a freshly bathed young woman. The moment the sky clears up, all my favourite birds flap their wings clean and start chirping away”) (pp. 327–328), which, in the event, proves rather infectious. For even Prakash soon begins producing mawkish sentences in a mimetic vein: “They loved each other because they loved freedom. Their love also enriched and extended the meaning of freedom” (p. 333).

Barring the occasional tonal lapse, the more serious problem, incontrovertibly, is the antinomy at the heart of *Emergency Chronicles*. For, at the outset, Prakash sets up two arguments, the one contradicting the other. On the one hand, he advances what could be called the ‘long Emergency’ thesis—that seen more broadly, with the periods on either side of it, the regime was only one chapter in the long and dark history of an illiberal democracy. Yet on the other, as signalled in the subtitle of his book, he seems to suggest that the Emergency marked “democracy’s turning point”—that, with it, India’s halcyon days came to a close. One is an argument about continuity, the other rupture. So which one are we to believe? The trouble arises from the salesman’s urge to flog both narratives.

The reasons for Prakash’s paradox are not hard to fathom. Two, in particular, stand out: the motivation for undertaking this research and the writer’s own parochial nationalism. First, the afflatus. As he explains early on in the book, *Emergency Chronicles* is driven by the attempt to make sense of our illiberal moment. To this end, with one eye to the present, Prakash sets out to recover the origins of Indian authoritarianism, naturally fixing on the Emergency—when the postcolonial regime’s arbitrariness was in full view—while also drawing attention to the periods that bookended it.

Quite rightly, Prakash suggests that “the powerful and enduring myth that the Emergency dropped from nowhere and vanished without a trace” (p. 375) needs challenging. Here, however, he is guilty of his own charge. Ready to acknowledge that authoritarian impulses never ‘vanished’ in the Emergency’s wake, he is nevertheless reluctant to admit that these did not ‘drop from nowhere’. For in this study, the Emergency comes to account for the innovation of a whole gamut of state practices. He is on solid ground when he suggests that after 1977, the criminalisation of politics grew apace and Hindu nationalism took off. But Prakash pushes the stick too far. Corruption, arbitrariness, and state violence, too, are thrown into this declinist mix. At times, the Emergency is the watershed; at others, the passing of India’s first premier is. “After Nehru’s death”, Prakash writes, “the political elite became consumed with scheming to maintain power” (p. 378). Only after? The long list of scandals and malversations in Nehruvian India—to name a few: Kairon’s smuggling racket; Patnaik’s corporate fortune; Mathai’s transactions with the CIA; the kickbacks to Krishnamachari; Nehru’s imperious dismissal of all five non-Congress chief ministers who threatened to last out a full term and liberal use of preventive detention and shoot-to-kill orders to stamp out protest—suggest otherwise.

Common to revisionist declamations such as Prakash’s is a firm belief in declinism and the attendant presentation of the Nehruvian period as some kind of golden age, both fashionable in the liberal academy. The venality of today’s trigger-happy elite, on this account, must be seen in contradistinction to

the benevolence of India's earliest postcolonial rulers. Here, Prakash's nationalism comes into view. In *Emergency Chronicles*, he makes light of the early postcolonial leadership's transgressions, noting *en passant* the suppression of communists, Muslims, and peripheral populations under Nehru only to conclude that India's first premier "had managed to maintain some semblance of a commitment, however feeble, to the discourse of the common good" (p. 116). We are never told how. We get reams of extracts from *The Discovery of India*, Nehru's book-length nationalist pamphlet of 1946, but little about his years as prime minister.

Being more attentive to the illiberalism of Nehruvian rule would have saved Prakash from some of the inaccuracies that litter his book. In his epilogue, for instance, he writes that Charan Singh's restoration of preventive detention in 1979 "indicates that the Emergency had succeeded in normalizing it" (p. 379). In fact, it was not Mrs Gandhi in 1975 but Nehru in 1950 who normalised it: after he pushed through the passage of the Preventive Detention Act, he saw to it that it never lapsed, renewing it *ad infinitum*, just as his successor and then his daughter did in turn until she lost her majority in Parliament in 1969. Perhaps, then, the golden age of Nehru was not too dissimilar to the dark age inaugurated by his daughter.

All the same, mesmerised by the republic's founding fathers, Prakash appears incapable of being clear-eyed about their role in setting the stage for the Emergency. To write about India's nationalist pantheon—the writers of the Constitution, rulers of the new-born nation—after all, is to tread hallowed ground. To be sure, he does attempt to trace the roots of Mrs Gandhi's dictatorship in what turns out to be a rather otiose chapter on the Constituent Assembly. For, at first, Prakash draws attention to the clauses and arguments that India's constitutional architects marshalled when they vested government with near-authoritarian powers—the very constitutional articles that provided Mrs Gandhi with legal cover to impose emergency rule. Somewhere along the way, however, the chapter turns into a love letter to the Indian Constitution. Indeed, there is a certain *naïveté* in his suggestion that the founding fathers burnished state power merely to bring about radical social change: Delhi's new rulers, apparently, were after "a strongly armed state entrusted with the social project of bringing about India's transformation from a backward past to a modern future. Underlying it was a faith in the political to transform the social" (p. 71). Reading the Constituent Assembly debates too closely and uncritically—as Prakash does—can have this effect. Stepping back, and not being too squeamish, produces an altogether different picture. It becomes clear, then, that the expansive set of repressive laws, the adoption of the simple plurality system, and curbs on liberties—due process was compromised, states of emergency legitimised—were all intended to preserve the Congress's hegemony. It is only by stripping away this simple reality, and by maintaining for the better part a silence on the intervening period between the assembly debates and the Emergency, that Prakash can assert: "It was all a fine balance, which came undone in 1975" (p. 74).

Likewise, it is only by overlooking the Nehruvian political economy that Prakash is able to conclude that the story of Maruti, the automobile company owned by Mrs Gandhi's son Sanjay, "shows how a crony capitalist project served as an instrument for breaking through the crisis in the postcolonial economy of planning and national self-reliance" (p. 210). 'Crony capitalist': is there a concept with less purchase? The adjectival manoeuvre, of course, serves to present the recent Indian experience in contrast to some benign, self-respecting capitalism, as if it were some kind of anomaly. Except that state-capital relations under Nehru were not very different. For in truth, Nehruvian rhetoric of statist "planning and national self-reliance" was one thing, Nehruvian praxis another. From foodgrain through investment to aid, foreign assistance made quick work of early postcolonial India's autarkic ambitions. Planning, at all events, was of little moment. FICCI, the capitalists' guild, had a veto over the selection of the finance minister in Nehruvian India. Public funds often benefited private empires. Anti-trust legislation and threats of nationalisation were almost never followed through. Even during his dying days—as

throughout his life—Nehru continued to use state planning to cosset private capital: in April 1964, a month before his passing, his planners agreed to disburse 44 per cent of their investment allocations to the private sector. Under Nehru's stewardship, the largest industrial houses built fortunes thanks to discriminatory licensing, cheap labour, and import-substituting industrialisation. Was this not 'crony capitalism' as well?

In the event, Sanjay's Maruti enterprise was most certainly not "the opening shot aimed at the administrative and economic norms that had governed postcolonial India" (p. 246), as Prakash would like to have it. *Pace* Prakash, Indian capital had declared open season on the "governing norms of transparency, accountability, and impartiality" (ibid.) long before the Emergency. The Birla *ménage*, for one, was given—to the outrage of the opposition—the entire power grid generated by the prohibitive Rihand Dam Project for a knockdown price in 1959. Nor was the cohabitation of corporate and political power entirely new. Orissa chief minister Biju Patnaik, for instance, added Rs. 100 million to his fortunes in Nehruvian India, his business and political careers following analogous trajectories. Evidently, there are limits to seeing the automobile industry as a stand-in for the entire economy.

A closer look at both the political economy and state practice, then, reveals that the Emergency was no 'turning point'. Prakash would have been better off presenting the regime—while, of course, also recognising the contingencies that led up to it—as the outcome of the deepening of a very Indian style of rule from 1947 on rather than a radical departure from it.

The antinomy aside, a second defect of the volume is to be found in the organisation of *Emergency Chronicles*. To put it charitably, a certain restlessness pervades the book. In Prakash's cantilevered narrative, every episode relating to the Emergency opens into a digression that, at best, has only a tangential bearing on the regime under study. A police kidnapping at the JNU? Here's a potted history of the university (pp. 14–37). Mrs Gandhi used the law to declare a state of emergency in 1975? Here's a *précis* of the Constituent Assembly debates of 1946–9 (pp. 38–74). Sanjay Gandhi built a car? Here's another of India's automobile industry (pp. 205–248). What we get, then, is less a history than a cabinet of curiosities.

Regrettably, the upshot of these meanderings is that less than a quarter of the book concerns the Emergency itself. The costs of this imbalance are clear. We wade through a thicket of film stills and synopses and get a crash course in automobile argot: 'suspension system'... 'front grille'... 'two-stroke engine'... 'four-stroke engine'... 'NSU Motorenwerke-manufactured engine' (pp. 237–238). But Prakash loses us in this quagmire of minutiae. By contrast, there is no room here for industrial relations, the brutal put-down of strikes, the emasculation of trade unions, or Mrs Gandhi's war on the lumpenproletariat—a surprise from the historian who cut his teeth with the excellent *Bonded Histories*—during the Emergency. All these warrant only cursory mention, if at all. Moreover, they are only registered in the many summaries of contemporary books and films interspersed in the book, or in the context of Communist-ruled Bengal in the sixties. It is almost as if the beginning of the Emergency marked the end of history.

Glossing over Mrs Gandhi's class war during the Emergency allows Prakash to claim quite incorrectly that it was only in her final term in office in 1980–4 that Mrs Gandhi began "inching toward pro-business policies" (p. 369). Paying closer attention to the period under study would have shown him otherwise: two of the Twenty Points of Mrs Gandhi's Emergency programme had their provenance in a memorandum authored by the industrialist J. R. D. Tata; the 1976 budget was India's first to prominently feature detailed pre-budget discussions between government and capital—before then, this kind of liaising tended to happen behind closed doors. While Tata, Birla, and Oberoi waxed lyrical about the regime, Mrs Gandhi set about crushing labour in the name of productivity. But we find no mention of the colossal mining disaster at the Chasnala colliery, the laying off of 500,000 workers in the first six months of the Emergency, or the imprisonment of unionists in *Emergency Chronicles*.

On the handful of occasions he grapples with these subjects, Prakash leaves a trail of misinterpretations in his wake. Symptomatic of this is his astonishing—and unsubstantiated—claim that Mrs Gandhi's licensing policy of 1970 came to 'be later deprecated as "license raj"' (p. 139). In fact, the protectionism of that particular edict was only a momentary blip bookended by systematic de-licensing, deregulation, and the recantation of import-substituting industrialisation. If anything, Mrs Gandhi's first two terms have gone down in history as the ones when government began dismantling the 'license raj'—a term of fifties vintage (C. Rajagopalachari popularised it in 1957) and more suited to characterise that decade's industrial policy—rather than overseeing its establishment.

Likewise, absent are other less glamorous but more momentous matters, such as land reform. It is an especially noteworthy elision. A few mentions in passing do little justice to the scale of the agrarian problem that Indian rulers faced in the early and mid-seventies. Indeed, the countryside had grown increasingly restive in the lead-up to the Emergency. In his extremely brief consideration of the matter, Prakash chooses to soft-pedal the monumental failure of Delhi's rulers in dealing with the agrarian question. "Of the sixty million acres estimated as surplus, released by the ceilings imposed by law on the size of landholdings, only a tiny portion was redistributed to the tenants a quarter of a century after Independence", he writes (p. 123). This makes it appear that it was a question of the state not doing enough. Again, Prakash adds that "the government did little to reduce the concentration of land-ownership" (*ibid.*).

In fact, it would be more accurate to suggest that India's postcolonial rulers did much to actively increase inequality and the concentration of landownership. For the little that was redistributed was more than compensated for by lands annexed by the smaller gentry abetted by state policy—which naturally favoured this class because it had a stranglehold on the Congress party. In the decade to 1971, for instance, the number of landless peasants nearly doubled and surplus landholdings grew from 24 to 31 per cent of total agricultural land in the country. It was not a question of progressive efforts foundering on the rocks of inadequate praxis, but regressive policies being followed through to the letter. (As an aside, his 1 per cent figure, taken from a journalist's memoir, for the amount of India's arable land that Nehru redistributed in his first term is most certainly inaccurate; the correct figure, as countless political economists and historians have shown, some 14 million acres, is closer to 3.5 per cent.) Equally bizarre is Prakash's claim that "instead of enacting and implementing radical land reforms and promoting the overall health and education of subordinate groups by empowering them with resources, the postcolonial elite chose state-directed modernization" (p. 272); which makes one wonder what Prakash thinks 'radical land reforms' are in the first place. In the Indian setting, inevitably such plans involved land consolidation, mechanisation, and cooperativisation—all state-led, of course.

At the time of the Emergency, it must be remembered, four out of five Indians lived in the *mofussil*; illiterates accounted for over 70 per cent of the national population. Readers of *Emergency Chronicles* might be forgiven for thinking otherwise. For the concerns here are impeccably bourgeois: car manufacturing, universities, the world of letters and cinema. Prakash's judgment of the *parvenu* politicians—variously described as 'upstarts' and 'social climbers'; an auto mechanic-turned-politician is denigrated as 'this rough-and-ready man' (pp. 295, 304, 377)—who ensconced themselves in the corridors of power is of a piece with this vision. At times, it is almost comical how much Prakash sounds like Jagmohan, Delhi's gentrifier-in-chief during the Emergency. In introducing working-class Old Delhi, Prakash describes it as a "glut of workshops...a jumble of warehouses and automobile parts shops" that "stood as signs of modernity's brash intrusion in the elegant Mughal neighbourhood" before reminding himself not to "let a Dickensian eye overwhelm our picture of the Walled City" (p. 250). All the same, he then proceeds to register that many Muslim residents continued to live there in 'genteel poverty' (p. 251), thus rehearsing for a second time the classist claptrap of *ashraf* (Muslim upper-class) finesse, having just compared the workplaces of the working poor unfavourably to it.

If its questionable emphases and elisions account for the second defect of the book, hyperbole and misleading overstatements constitute the third. Emblematic of this is his sweeping claim about “the mass rejection of the Congress in the 1977 parliamentary” election (p. 361). A fall in vote share from 44 to 35 per cent can be described in more sober terms. On another occasion, we are told that Mrs Gandhi’s “decision to call elections in 1977 ensured a peaceful transfer of power”—a testament to “the roots struck by constitutional democracy in India” (p. 365). But what Prakash does not tell us—but Steven Wilkinson does—is that Sanjay and the prime minister were aiming for a coup in the wake of their electoral drubbing. But Raina, chief of army staff, simply refused to entertain the prospect. In the event, it was not the success of Indian democratic values but its civil–military relations that came to the rescue, leaving the nationalist historian with far less reason for self-congratulation. Readers will be surprised to learn that in 1975, Mrs Gandhi ‘impose[d] a totalitarian system’ (p. 310). Prakash may think it clever to regard the Emergency as belonging to the same genus as the Third Reich and Fascist Italy, but for the purposes of clarity and explication, it would have been more apposite to trade not in hyperbole but in facts. Mrs Gandhi’s was, in fact, a very weak authoritarian regime, utterly incapable of—and uninterested in—mass mobilisation and violence, eliminating the private realm, enforcing ideological conformity, and challenging the state’s monopoly on violence—all in all, a far cry from a ‘totalitarian system’.

His rather quaint takeaway from the Nagarwala scandal, where the eponymous figure impersonated the prime minister and withdrew Rs. 6,000,000 from her SBI account, is sure to raise eyebrows. To Prakash, “the incredible Nagarwala case conveys the immense authority that Indira Gandhi enjoyed...her very name could magically unlock bank vaults” (p. 143), when anyone who has perused the newspapers of the period knows that what was so newsworthy about the scandal was, in fact, the questions it raised about how Mrs Gandhi came to possess the seven-digit figure in the first place. Striking, too, is his assertion that Mrs Gandhi’s elevation as premier in 1966 “was a matter of accident, not dynastic succession” (p. 128). In fact, as the fourth-ranking minister in Shastri’s cabinet, she was jobbed into power precisely because she was seen as a Nehru redivivus. Elsewhere, we are given many clunky—and not to mention banal—platitudes about Jayaprakash Narayan’s ‘Total Revolution’, in part uncritical regurgitations of Narayan’s own rhetoric, but never told quite what it meant in practice: “his Total Revolution was a quest to lift Indian politics to a higher plateau of integrity and ethics... Its aim was to extend democracy by redistributing and decentralizing power” (pp. 93, 101). A closer inspection of it would have revealed it for it was: a power grab, plain and simple. Narayan wanted unelected ‘*sangharsh samitis*’ (some kind of ‘watchdogs’) to oversee parliamentary activity, veto the decisions of parliamentarians, and even, should the need arise, eject them from office. Moreover, Narayan’s critique of Mrs Gandhi’s regime always came from the Right: land reform ‘repressed’ the gentry; she was incapable of foisting Hindi on the South; her administration was doing the bidding of Soviet agents. ‘Total Revolution’, in short, bespoke neither integrity nor decentralisation. One could go on.

A fourth defect is to be found in Prakash’s tendency to erase native agency and stress the foreign origins of unsavoury state practices. Here, it appears, he is a repeat offender. There is an element of irony here; for Prakash is an alumnus of the collective that gave us Subaltern Studies, whose business pretty much ran on foregrounding agency. Even so, many of its contributors, Prakash foremost among them—as Rosalind O’Hanlon and David Washbrook have persuasively shown—in fact ended up eschewing it. While interesting, one cannot help but remark upon the incommensurateness—and unreasonableness even—of some of the genealogical reconstructions in *Emergency Chronicles*. His account of the Congress’ coercive sterilisation programme is a case in point. While he acknowledges that government efforts to manage population growth dovetailed with those of foreign agencies, the balance in his account unmistakably tilts to the latter. Prakash expends considerable energy on the Ford Foundation—at some point it becomes a fixation on a par with the Soros obsession of the Central

European Right—whose India chief apparently “played a key role” (p. 275) in the country’s family planning programme. But in overdetermining the role of the Ford Foundation, Prakash misses the forest for the trees: foreign agencies may have thrown pennies and reports at India’s rulers (the foundation’s contribution in the late fifties was a mere 3 per cent of state spending on family planning, and some 9 per cent in the early sixties), but it was the full weight of Indian state power—deployed by the republic’s political elite and policymakers who envisaged schemes, put money into them, and saw to their implementation—that made the sterilisation programme possible. When the dust settles, “the Ford and Rockefeller foundations, IPPF, and transnational experts” (p. 272) were marginal actors, their money negligible and advice dispensable.

An eye to the international can, after a fashion, turn somewhat parochial. “International population control zealots” (p. 268) command a lot of attention, but never Indian zealots and their equally native critics. Ford Foundation internal memoranda are given greater weight than ministry papers and deliberations: a good nationalist seldom points the finger at his homeland. Moreover, and quite surprisingly, Prakash ends his treatment of family planning in 1975, only to summarily register that sterilisations were made a priority by Sanjay Gandhi and violently implemented by functionaries and their political masters during the Emergency. In fact, as the Shah Commission reports and the Shah Commission of Inquiry Files at the National Archives in Delhi reveal, there is a rich history of changing attitudes and resistance to the programme during the Emergency. We now know that there was considerable flux: leading political figures and senior mandarins variously opposed, rethought, or gradually embraced the sterilisation programme. But Prakash has little use for government documents. Instead he makes much of an interim Ford report of 1970 that “concluded by speculating on the use of compulsory sterilisations” (p. 270)—on his account, the Indian state spiritedly rose to the task soon after—but entirely ignores the sterilisation camp at Ernakulum that was set up the same year, the success of which convinced policymakers that it was the blueprint for the future. Indeed, in the years that followed, it was this model—where the precariat traded in their fertility for some cash—that became policy. Contrary to what Prakash argues, monetary incentives (*à la* Ernakulum) trumped punitive deterrents (*à la* Ford) in the sterilisation drives of the early seventies. Prakash probably omits mention of the camp because it sits uncomfortably with the rest of his narrative. For not unlike Indira Gandhi, he would much prefer for there to be a ‘foreign hand’—a lexical favourite of hers—somewhere. For why else would he feel the need to concede, as he does on one occasion, that “we do not know if this advice [documented in ‘a Ford interoffice memorandum’, unrelated to the Ford report mentioned above] was ever given to the Indian government, which, in any case, was acting even without an explicit recommendation” (p. 286). Why, indeed, would we expect the Indian government to act on the “explicit recommendations” of the Ford Foundation in the first place?

A fifth and final defect—for our purposes here—owes to Prakash’s preference for the anecdotal over the analytical. The limits of such an approach are plain to see. In *Emergency Chronicles*, we find no sustained historical analysis of the causes of the Emergency, the reasons for its suspension; no survey of the classes and sectional interests on whose support the regime depended, the actors that opposed to it. Prakash’s concerns are party-political and individual, decidedly not social or economic. So it is that we learn that a few academics opposed the regime; but what of the university sector, seen as a whole? The *trahison des clers* eludes Prakash. And what of the support lent to the regime by the bureaucracy, bourgeoisie, and big business? We are told very briefly that there were protests in the run-up to the Emergency, but what about the precise grievances of the classes and sectional interests that were at its vanguard: the smaller gentry, students, peasants, and the proletariat? Everywhere, we draw a blank. Instead, we get brief sketches of a dozen or so influential figures. Structural forces, on the few occasions when they warrant mention, are typically reduced to a clash of personalities. The upshot is the kind of Great Man History that Subaltern Studies rightly rejected.

By resolutely eschewing class analyses and avoiding the big questions, Prakash misses the opportunity to reflect any more deeply on the Emergency and its place in postcolonial Indian history than most of his predecessors have in their journalistic accounts, memoirs, and histories. Here, as in many of those works, the set-pieces do not quite add up. Clearly, Prakash fashions himself more as a storyteller than an historian. Indeed, he does not rise to the historian's task of interpreting, rather than merely chronicling, events. It is no accident, then, that *Emergency Chronicles* reads like a film treatment—not unlike his *Mumbai Fables*, which fittingly made it to the silver screen as *Bombay Velvet*. Prakash would have been served better had he taken his wares directly to Bollywood instead of labouring on yet another, tired retelling of the Emergency. *Emergency Chronicles* would make for a nice film, though.

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As crises of public health, racial injustice, and economic recession spread worldwide, millions are experiencing distress, conflict, and vulnerability. Boreth Ly's first monograph *Traces of Trauma* establishes that this mélange of unnerving emotions is hardly new for Cambodians. Between 1975–1979, when the Khmer Rouge ruled Cambodia, about a quarter of the country's population died of infectious diseases, weapon wounds, and malnutrition. Ly's thesis is that studying the visual culture of contemporary Cambodia and its diaspora allows us to encounter the still-fresh scars of the genocide and of related upheavals and to critically appreciate strategies evolved to nurture resilience.

In the 1950s charismatic, if also polarising, leaders and their followers quickly emerged in the countries carved out of former French Indo-China. For example, Norodom Sihanouk became independent Cambodia's first constitutional monarch, left-leaning revolutionaries came to prominence in newly independent North Vietnam and pro-West politicians gained support in South Vietnam. Before long the United States was fighting communists in the region. As the conflict spread from the Vietnams into Cambodia the country was secretly bombed by US armed forces: they dropped 2.7 million tons of explosives over 113,000 sites in the country. Sihanouk's government fell and a civil war erupted. The war ended in 1975. Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge comrades seized power. They claimed that they wished to create a classless agrarian society that valued obedience and uniformity. Yet, in just four years their policies led to the death of about 1.7 million Cambodians, crushed the expression of individual identity, and shattered agricultural systems and urban fabrics alike. In 1979, the Khmer Rouge's aggression towards neighbouring countries led Vietnamese forces to depose it and establish a decade long rule over Cambodia. By the early 1990s, UN-sponsored efforts had led to the drafting of a new constitution, reinstatement of Sihanouk, and transfer of power to an elected government headed by Hun Sen. He remains Cambodia's Prime Minister to date.

Ly's opening argument is that although a fuller reconstruction of Cambodia's political history is needed, such a task can never help us grasp the trauma that its citizens have experienced and whose