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# ROLE OF POLITICAL CARTOONS IN DARKEST PERIOD OF INDEPENDENT INDIA'S HISTORY

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**Abstract:** Forty three have passed since the imposition of Internal Emergency in India by the late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The emergency period from 25th June, 1975 to 21st March, 1977 is referred to as the “darkest period” of independent India as all civil rights were suspended and the freedom of speech and expression suppressed.

Media enjoy and exercise its freedom within a given legal framework as long as that given legal framework works. But, if such given legal framework either fails or is made to fail by any democratically elected authority by taking advantage of the law then that legal framework cannot ensure and protect that freedom of the media in that democratic political system. This period became a great time for the upsurge of ‘Cartoons’ rather ‘Political Cartoons’. The political cartoon can be defined as a satirical comment (using humor and caricature) about a political person, institution or event reflecting the cartoonist’s own values and opinions on that issue. India has had a strong tradition of political cartooning.

Thus, this study aims to understand the role of political cartoons during the time of emergency in 1975. For the purpose of the study the study, the amplitude of editorial cartoons taken as a medium to political communication was analyzed. As a part of the study, various cartoons published in different media during and post Emergency of 1975 were selected and analyzed.

**Keywords:** Emergency of 1975, India, Media, Political Cartoons.

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**Introduction:** Forty three years have passed since the imposition of Internal Emergency in India by the late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The emergency period from 25th June, 1975 to 21st March, 1977 is referred to as the “darkest period” of independent India as all civil rights were suspended and the freedom of speech and expression suppressed. Media enjoy and exercise its freedom within a given legal framework as long as that given legal framework works. But, if such given legal framework either fails or is made to fail by any democratically elected authority by taking advantage of the law then that legal framework cannot ensure and protect that freedom of the media in that democratic political system. During the emergency, censorship over the media was on top priority and many newspapers and magazines were banned during that period.

Political cartoons are symbolic artistic illustrations making a witty or humorous point containing comments on social issues, events or personalities, typically (but not always) combining satire and hyperbole to question authority and social mores. A good definition is given by Edwards & Winkler

(1987): a “graphic presentation typically designed in a one-panel, non-continuing format to make an independent statement or observation on political events or social policy”. In other words, the political cartoon can be defined as a satirical comment (using humor and caricature) about a political person, institution or event reflecting the cartoonist’s own values and opinions on that issue. It is, hence, a subjective observation on a political matter. Cartoonists use humor, satire, irony, exaggeration, labeling and analogy to express their/public opinion. In political caricatures/cartoons, the purpose is to ridicule, debunk or expose persons, groups or organizations engaged in political or social scenario. Political cartoons may be an incredible source to access the political climate and instigate public opinion. Political cartoons have always been indices of public opinion, they also have served as weapons of political activism. The column for the political cartoon was an integral part of the newspaper architecture. India has had a strong tradition of political cartooning. Nehru, the Prime Minister with a good sense of humor, enjoyed Shankar's cartoons. It was not only during the emergency period, however that the political cartoons played a vital role. During the formative years of the nation and even in post-emergency India cartoonists played a major part, poking fun at the national leaders and their policies, corporate magnates, godmen, the underworld and even the common man – nobody escaped the stinging strokes of their wit.

**Methodology:** Aim of the study: To analyze the use of cartoons and the role played by them during and post emergency.

To address the objectives of the study, the source of data has been obtained from the Indian media that specifically published political cartoons during and post Emergency of 1975. The study uses qualitative paradigm to analyze the political cartoons. The analysis is based on aspects like visual symbols, metaphors, visual distortion, irony and humour in images and text, language, stereotypes and caricatures.

### **Results and Discussions:**

#### **Analysis of Selected Political Cartoons:**



**Figure 1**

**Cartoon 1:** This cartoon showcased a very new fresh start to “Emergency” in the contemporary times which is very much unknown to the public. This cartoon is in reference with PM Narendra Modi, accusing the Indian National Congress for turning down India from every end. During emergency there was deprivation of fundamental rights to the citizens. One can easily point out the similarities in the two governments for example the public is still fighting for issues like unemployment, communal disturbances, etc which are killing the soul of democracy. The cartoon has numerous humor element to make the audience laugh, for example showcasing Modi pin pointing Indira Gandhi on one hand and on the other doing the same with the people highlights the hypocrisy of the present government. Also “people” who are known as the soul of democracy are shown as snake charmer and their self chosen government is killing them with the venom of unemployment, inflation, petrol prices etc. The language of cartoon is very normal and is easy to perceive by every individual. This cartoon can hit the minds of receiver because of the animated characters used in the cartoon.

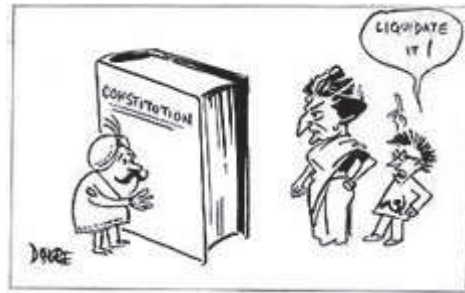


Figure 2

**Cartoon 2:** This cartoon is made by cartoonist Ashok Dongre . This cartoon hinted at Indira Gandhi's craving for power to the extent that the constitution had also come under threat. In the cartoon it is simply shown that how the then government pressurised the legislation to cut back the fundamental rights of people.. So this cartoon very sensibly tells the aura that was created during that time. The language of cartoon is very linear and easy to understand for example the cartoonist has intelligently conveyed the idea by using three words only.



Figure 3

**Cartoon 3:** This is a cartoon by Mika. This cartoon was posted on twitter recently after the grand issue of Mumbai rains which was on the top priority list of news. This cartoon clearly explains that, Emergency still prevails in Mumbai . The cartoon commented on the way Mumbai was struggling in non-stop rain that has stalled trains and slowed traffic to a crawl in places that have been flooded drastically. The cartoon simply compares the current situation to emergency period as the government was not taking any strict action to tackle the problem. This cartoon lacks humour and is very emotional in nature as it describes very serious time of Mumbai where people were drowning in front of their own houses because of floods. The language of this cartoon is very serious yet emotional because it wants to speak about the condition of the people.



Figure 4

**Cartoon 4:** This cartoon intelligently showcases how the whole country was running behind Indira Gandhi as she was not able to fulfill the needs of the people. In the cartoon it is shown that how the politicians were running away from their responsibilities after putting the country into crisis. This cartoon is humorous in way like people are shown running after Indira Gandhi which seems funny and Indira Gandhi too is shown jumping and running with a wide smile on her face . The language of this cartoon is very simple as the message shown is very clear and crisp with a use of just one sentence and several words which describes the emotions of both the sides very well.



**Figure 5**

**Cartoon 5:** This is a Cartoon by Abu Abraham. The image shown in this cartoon is of former President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed. It is trying to showcase that emergency which is a very big issue was taken lightly at that time that the then President imposed it without giving it a single thought. This cartoon is full of humour as it clearly tells how casually from his bathtub he is shown signing the permission letter. The language of the cartoon is funny and has the tendency to hit the mind of audience in every possible way.



Figure 6

**Cartoon 6:** Indira Gandhi was highly criticised for imposing media censorship during emergency. In the cartoon, Indira and Sanjiv Gandhi are looking at the newspaper praising Modi despite of his government having loads of flaws. The cartoon satirically comment on the rising stardom of Modi using the words like, 'The Global Leader', 'The Democrat', etc. Also, there is a sense of regret the then leaders are having calling themselves amateurish in comparison to today's government who got an escape from criticism. Indira Gandhi's cartoons has always been a content providing humor to the audience. Also, words like 56 inch to define the stardom of Modi is a very intelligent way to make the cartoon vocal and self explanatory. All the words used above are very much self explanatory and complementing the sketch very well.



Figure 7

**Cartoon 7:** The cartoon highlights Indira Gandhi's confidence in the 7<sup>th</sup> general election which was a comeback of her. Also, it comments on the threat Indira posed to Constitution of India by cutting back the fundamental rights of the citizens. Even after illegal political arrests, censorship and emergency she won at last in the 7<sup>th</sup> general elections. The reason of her victory was the lack of options in front of voters after a drastic failure of Janata party's government. The cartoon lacks the humor part but have a very strong point of view which describes the whole scenario with the legendary way of portraying Indira's pointed nose and the devilish smile which is enough to make the observer smile at the clever use of all the elements to convey a rather complex idea with a light mood. Use of words in the cartoon highlights the intelligence of cartoonist. The less use of words and moreover using the words

appropriately is very good. It has a good use of self explanatory words such as emergency, arrests, excesses, wins etc.



Figure 8

**Cartoon 8:** The cartoon sarcastically comments on the cartoon's and cartoonist's objectivity by making Indira Gandhi a spectator who is questioning cartoonist's objectivity and showing a corrected cartoon of herself. In the cartoon she is being portrayed as both an angel and the devil too. Also Indira Gandhi is shown as the cartoonist too who is very proud to be an objective cartoonist. Also she is ignoring the cartoonist very well and the cartoonist has shown himself as a dog who is barking and still gets ignored very well. It won't be wrong to rename the cartoon as 'cartoon in the cartoon'. The cartoon is full of humorous elements where cartoonist has very well sketched the double personality and two faces on Indira Gandhi where she is correcting the cartoon by telling him the correct use of objectivity which is a satire itself. Linguistically, the cartoon is very well presented, where cartoonist has used only one sentence comprised of 9 words to explain the whole cartoon with the brilliant use of question mark and exclamation mark. Also by writing a single word on the caricature of dog very finely defines the way media was ignored at that time.



Figure 9

**Cartoon 9:** This cartoon was made after the remembrance of 26 June 2018 by the Modi government as Black Day. On 26th of June in 1975 Indira Gandhi's government declared emergency. In this cartoon Modi is portrayed as Indira Gandhi with a brilliant use of hairstyle as a symbol of Indira Gandhi, which indicates the similarity in the wrong doings of both the politicians in their respective eras. The beautiful, logical and moreover intelligent way to communicate the comparison between Indira Gandhi and Narendra Modi is full of humorous elements. With the least number of words cartoon is able to communicate the idea very well. It has only three words which are self explanatory and are going very well with the cartoon to explain it and is able to speak for itself.

**Conclusion:** The study has shown that the cartoon genre constitutes a formidable medium of communication through which the media set socio-political agenda by attaching relevance to importance of issues and events through recurrent coverage aimed at shaping the people's understanding of the issues to bring positive change in society. Political cartoons during and post emergency were a source of information and public opinion and conveyed very powerful messages.

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