Chapter 6: The Crisis of Democratic Order

Exercises — Exercises

Q1 State whether the following statements regarding the Emergency are correct or incorrect. (a) It was declared in 1975 by Indira Gandhi. (b) It led to the suspension of all fundamental rights. (c) It was proclaimed due to the deteriorating economic conditions. (d) Many Opposition leaders were arrested during the emergency. (e) CPI supported the proclamation of the Emergency.

(a) Correct: the Emergency was proclaimed on 25 June 1975 on the Prime Minister's recommendation. (b) Incorrect: various Fundamental Rights, including the right to move court for their restoration, were suspended, but not literally all of them. (c) Incorrect: it was proclaimed under Article 352 citing a threat of internal disturbance, not economic conditions as such. (d) Correct: many opposition leaders and workers were arrested in the early hours of 26 June. (e) Correct: the CPI supported the proclamation of the Emergency.

Q2 Find the odd one out in the context of proclamation of Emergency: (a) The call for 'Total Revolution' (b) The Railway Strike of 1974 (c) The Naxalite Movement (d) The Allahabad High Court verdict (e) The findings of the Shah Commission Report

(e) The findings of the Shah Commission Report. The other four were developments before the proclamation that built up the crisis, while the Shah Commission was appointed in 1977, after the Emergency ended, to examine its excesses.

Q3 Match the following: (a) Total Revolution (b) Garibi hatao (c) Students' Protest (d) Railway Strike; with i. Indira Gandhi ii. Jayaprakash Narayan iii. Bihar Movement iv. George Fernandes

(a) Total Revolution - ii. Jayaprakash Narayan. (b) Garibi hatao - i. Indira Gandhi. (c) Students' Protest - iii. Bihar Movement. (d) Railway Strike - iv. George Fernandes.

Q4 What were the reasons which led to the mid-term elections in 1980?

The Janata Party, which won in 1977, was not cohesive. Morarji Desai, Charan Singh and Jagjivan Ram competed for leadership, and the party was criticised for lacking direction, leadership and a common programme. It split, and the Desai government lost its majority in under 28 months. Charan Singh then formed a government with a promise of Congress support, but Congress withdrew it and his government lasted only about four months. With no stable government possible, fresh Lok Sabha elections were held in January 1980. Congress under Indira Gandhi won 353 seats and returned to power, while the Janata Party was heavily defeated, especially in north India.

Q5 The Shah Commission was appointed in 1977 by the Janata Party Government. Why was it appointed and what were its findings?

The Janata government appointed the Shah Commission in 1977 to inquire into the excesses committed during the Emergency of 1975-77. The Commission found that the administration and the police were turned into political instruments of the ruling party and became vulnerable to political pressure. Emergency rule was carried out through these institutions, which could not function independently.

Q6 What reasons did the Government give for declaring a National Emergency in 1975?

The government said there was a threat of internal disturbances and invoked Article 352, which allows Emergency on grounds of external threat or internal disturbance. The context was the Allahabad High Court verdict of 12 June 1975 invalidating Indira Gandhi's election, the opposition demand for her resignation, and the Ramlila grounds rally of 25 June. Jayaprakash Narayan also announced a nationwide satyagraha and asked the army, police and government employees not to obey 'illegal and immoral orders'. The government argued this threatened to bring administration to a standstill, creating a grave crisis that justified Emergency.

Q7 The 1977 elections for the first time saw the Opposition coming into power at the Centre. What would you consider as the reasons for this development?

The Janata Party made the election a referendum on the Emergency, campaigning on 'save democracy' against arrests of thousands, press censorship and other excesses. Public opinion turned against Congress, especially in north India, where forced relocation and sterilisation were concentrated. Opposition parties merged into the Janata Party under Jayaprakash Narayan, so non-Congress votes were not divided. Some Congress leaders, such as Jagjivan Ram's Congress for Democracy, joined in. Long-term change also mattered, as middle and backward castes of north India were moving away from Congress. Congress won only 154 seats, while Janata and allies won 330 of 542.

Q8 Discuss the effects of Emergency on the following aspects of our polity: Effects on civil liberties for citizens; Impact on relationship between the Executive and Judiciary; Functioning of Mass Media; Working of the Police and Bureaucracy.

Civil liberties: Fundamental Rights were suspended, including the right to move court for their restoration. Strikes, protests and agitations were banned. Preventive detention was used on a large scale, and arrested persons could not challenge detention through habeas corpus. The April 1976 Supreme Court ruling allowed the government to take away the right to life and liberty. Executive and Judiciary: relations were already strained over Fundamental Rights, Kesavananda Bharati and the 1973 supersession of judges. During the Emergency, the Supreme Court overruled High Courts that had allowed habeas corpus petitions, and Parliament placed the election of the PM, President and Vice-President beyond court challenge. Mass media: press censorship required prior approval of all material. Newspapers such as the Indian Express and The Statesman left blank spaces in protest, and Seminar and Mainstream closed down rather than submit. Journalists were arrested, and underground newsletters appeared. Police and bureaucracy: Emergency was enforced through them. According to the Shah Commission, they became political instruments of the ruling party and vulnerable to political pressure.

Q9 In what way did the imposition of Emergency affect the party system in India? Elaborate your answer with examples.

The Emergency and its aftermath reshaped the party system. In 1977 the opposition parties (Bharatiya Jana Sangh, Congress (O), Bharatiya Lok Dal, Socialist Party and others) merged into the Janata Party, led by JP, and defeated Congress for the first time since Independence. Dissenting Congress leaders formed the Congress for Democracy under Jagjivan Ram, which later merged with Janata. The Janata Party then split, lost its majority within 28 months, and Charan Singh's short-lived government followed. Congress returned in 1980 with 353 seats. Congress had meanwhile ceased to be an umbrella party and identified with a particular ideology and the appeal of Indira Gandhi, so opposition parties relied on 'non-Congressism', avoiding division of non-Congress votes. The politics of backward castes also began to dominate, as seen in Bihar's reservation controversy and the appointment of the Mandal Commission by the Janata government.

Q10 Read the passage and answer the questions below: 'Indian democracy was never so close to a two-party system as it was during the 1977 elections. However, the next few years saw a complete change. Soon after its defeat, the Indian National Congress split into two groups... The Janata Party also went through major convulsions...' (a) What made the party system in India look like a two-party system in 1977? (b) Many more than two parties existed in 1977. Why then are the authors describing this period as close to a two-party system? (c) What caused splits in Congress and the Janata parties?

(a) The contest in 1977 was essentially between Congress and the Janata Party. Congress won 154 seats, while Janata and its allies won 330 of 542, with the Janata Party alone winning 295. (b) Many opposition parties had merged into the Janata Party, and leaders like Jagjivan Ram's Congress for Democracy joined it, so effectively two main formations faced each other. This also ensured non-Congress votes were not divided. (c) The Janata Party split because of a power struggle among Morarji Desai, Charan Singh and Jagjivan Ram, and because it lacked direction, leadership and a common programme. The chapter gives no detailed reason for the Congress split after the 1977 defeat, and notes only that it divided into two groups.