As I write this essay, Indian people celebrate their fortieth anniversary of victory over British imperialism. There will be festivities all over the country, particularly in rural schools, where children of all ages parade through their town or village singing patriotic songs created during the freedom struggle. Coming from a family of nationalists, I used to be the lead singer in my school parade in a small village in southern India. As the modern media of communication - radio, newspapers, and television - were practically absent, rallies and parades dominated the political culture. Leaders seldom spoke about "national integration" at these rallies as they so commonly do today. They spoke of social justice in a free India and the struggle to preserve that freedom.

All of that has changed now with the domination of national political institutions by one political party, namely the Congress. Concurrently, a personality cult has grown up around the Prime Minister. This has meant that the Prime Minister stands above the party and is no more the first person among equals in the Parliament but one with extraordinary powers. That is a most important legacy of the Congress Party rule and particularly that of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the third Prime Minister of India, who ruled the country from 1967-1977 and from 1980 until her assassination in 1984. Her special interest to develop mass media as extensions of state power, embodied in the Prime Minister, led to some critical changes in the Indian media landscape during the last ten years, about which I have written elsewhere (Pendakur, 1988).

Theoretical Context

Indian political economy is characterized by a market economy functioning parallel to certain feudal social relations. The modern nation state embodies those dominant social relations and arbitrates the resulting tensions to preserve capitalism, in the long run. The state has monopolized the electronic media of radio and television leaving advertising, the printed press, and cinema to the capitalists. While the relations between the state and the capitalist media in India are too complex to cover in an article of this length, this paper attempts to explore those relations during a specific historic period when the state laid bare its class character. Employing political economy of communication as my theoretical paradigm (Smythe, 1981; Mattelart, 1979), I have attempted to analyze the class character of the communication process and the contradictory relationship between media institutions, the state and the public during the 1975 Emergency.
Emergency versus Martial Law

Martial law may be defined as the brutal assault by the State on its citizenry, where the power to govern is held by a military junta or a coterie of military and business interests. All democratic institutions are either crushed or deformed in the interest of the regime to quell oppositional voices. Such martial law regimes, in contemporary geopolitical context, have the support of (active or benign) one or the other Super Power. The US and USSR both supported Mrs. Gandhi (Lal, 1977: 35; Selbourne, 1979: 239-244). The "Emergency" in India, although fitting the above definition in general had its own twists and turns.

June 26, 1975 marked the beginning of the National Emergency in India, which lasted about 19 months. Signalling the end of democracy, it was the culmination of events of the nearly decade-long rule of Mrs. Gandhi. It suffices to note the key features of the Emergency to mark the similarities and differences between Martial law regimes and the Emergency regime. Mrs. Gandhi, fearing that the social upheavals might engulf the nation and set India on a new historical course, requested the President of India to sign an order declaring that a state of emergency existed in the country and suspended the rights of citizens under Articles 14, 21, and 22 of the Constitution. A reign of terror was unleashed which included mass arrests of the opposition, prominent leaders and rank and file members, trade union leaders and ordinary members, social reformers, and volunteer activists (Nayar, 1977: 49). The coercive apparatus spread wide to encompass the left and the right political opposition to Mrs. Gandhi's rule. Even senior army commanders and alternative inner party leaders were placed under house arrest. The Armed forces were not utilized by the Prime Minister. Instead, the large para military forces were deployed. Prior censorship and censorship were imposed immediately on all the news media with the dramatic shut down of all the newspaper presses in New Delhi by cutting off their electricity (Nayar, 1977: 41).

Four days following the Presidential edict, the Maintenance of Internal Security Act was amended "to make it unnecessary to communicate to a person detained under the act the grounds for his detention" (Selbourne, 1979: 131). Although the Parliament was not in session on June 26, when it reconvened the demand of the opposition to restore democracy was not heeded by the Prime Minister because her party was in majority and some of the effective opposition Members already languished in jails. There were widespread reports of torture in the jails and some prisoners died in custody. Although there were no reports of death squads as in El Salvador, for instance, or in pre-revolutionary Nicaragua under Samoza, there were killings of communist revolutionaries by the police in various states in what the government publicized as "encounters." Forced sterilization camps were organized and government employees were ordered to meet certain quotas set by the Regime (Selbourne, 1979: 271-272). Those who did not conform were punished. The attacks against the poor, the minorities, and the unionized work force intensified. The state organized "beautification"
campaigns in Delhi and bulldozed the homes of slum dwellers (Selbourne, 1979: 271). These various assaults on the citizenry under a constitutional coup d'etat were committed by a regime which gave the appearance of a Parliamentary democracy but was neither responsible to that institution nor to the people. To the community of nations around the world, the regime, like all other martial law governments, employed strategies of disinformation and denial of truth. People within India resisted in many ways, including fighting pitched battles during the assaults. Many people outside India did whatever they could to bring some pressure on the regime to restore the democratic rights of Indians.

The Judiciary was not abolished, but it was deprived of its jurisdiction over the Executive Branch of the government by constitutional amendments. Two critical amendments to the Constitution of India, passed in August 1975, accomplished that task. The 39th Amendment ensured that persons holding high political office including that of Prime Minister could not be punished by a court of law if they committed election fraud to secure that office. The 40th Amendment put the Prime Minister above the law of the land by giving personal immunity from criminal and civil prosecution, covering periods before assuming that office and after leaving it (Selbourne, 1979: 132). The ruling party without an effective opposition was extremely generous to its leader! The Supreme Court of India drove the final nail into the coffin of Indian democracy when it accepted the amendments which were enacted by a Parliament that had lost most of the opposition members to jails. Judges at various levels of the judicial system, who were unwilling to go along with the Regime, were either fired or transferred, thus bringing the entire judiciary into line.

The 1975 Emergency was a qualitatively different act of aggression by the State on the Indian citizenry, when compared to the earlier coercive acts against sections of the population rebelling against the status quo. There were two important aspects to the Emergency which made it so: (1) its class character, and (2) its attempt to establish total information control to preserve the insecure rulers. Leading analysts of India's political economy have characterized the ruling elites as an "intermediate class" or the class that stands in between the owners of the means of production and those who sell their labor power (Raj, 1973). Running the state apparatus, the members of this class have relied on big industrial capital and big agricultural capital for material support as well as mobilization of the rural peasantry. Being a heterogenous class, it often expresses contradictory interests and objectives such as "socialism," protected markets for national capital, nationalization of industries and banks, all of which effectively enhance its own class power by vastly expanded public sector outlays and opportunities for its members. This intermediate class erected a large institutional superstructure of licenses and quotas so the captains of industry and commerce become applicants for favors. It put the propertied classes on the defensive by legislating land reform laws and land ceiling acts, while members of the ruling group amass property for themselves. The promises of redistribution of wealth, however, remained an
illusion and the state failed to deliver the most basic necessities to the majority of the people.

The early seventies were marked by events that jolted the strangle-hold of the ruling party on the electorate. Sections of the "intermediate class" began to revolt against policies such as higher food prices, which were intended to benefit the big peasantry. Students rebelled against corruption and lack of jobs. Railway workers, one of the largest unions in the country, staged a national strike in 1974 which nearly paralyzed all movement of goods and people. Secessionist tendencies grew and in fact became the dominant issue for the nation's polity. The democratic institutions such as the Parliament and the press became obstacles to the preservation of that class power and the regime drifted into authoritarian rule. The insecure leader asserted her authority by a constitutional coup d'etat in 1975.

For the first time in 28 years, after decolonization, the middle class and the intelligentsia came to be subjected to the same coercive machinery of the state that was always used against communist revolutionaries, workers, Dalits (former untouchables), the tribal people, and peasants. The state already had in its arsenal the Defense of India Rules and the Maintenance of Internal Security Act, which were used in the previous years against various social forces. Under Mrs. Gandhi's leadership, the state's para military forces—the Border Security Forces, the Central Reserve Police Force, the Central Industrial Security Forces, and the state's intelligence gathering machinery—the Research and Analysis Wing, Central Bureau of Investigation—had been expanded. Radical organizations of various kind, particularly communists and peasant groups, union activists, etc., were subjected to harassment, torture in jails, and "encounter" deaths by the paramilitary forces. The Emergency intensified those attacks on the radicals but it also included a new target—the rural and urban middle class. Student leaders, political activists, volunteer workers, social reformers, leaders of the trade union movement, who may not have been touched in the earlier periods, were attacked during the Emergency.

While thousands of people were being arrested by the paramilitary forces and hauled into jails, an executive decree suspended Article 19 of the Constitution (Selbourne, 1979: 133). That amendment guaranteed the fundamental rights of free speech and expression, peaceful assembly, associations and unions, freedom of movement, freedom to hold and dispose of property in any part of the country, and freedom to practice any profession, occupation or trade. All of this was done in the name of preserving democracy. The nation's media were treated to a well organized campaign of censorship, disinformation, and ultimately government silence on vital economic and political issues confronting the Indian public in 1975.
Reigning in the Mass Media

Newspapers, magazines, films, radio, television, and phonograph records in India were primarily an urban phenomenon in 1975. Yet they were powerful because their "readership" was the intelligentsia, the middle class, the youth, the unionized work force, and the military-technocratic-bureaucratic elite. In certain parts of India, where literacy rates were as high as 80 percent (Kerala), the popular media reached out to an even wider audience. The English language dailies—The Times of India, The Statesman, The Hindustan Times, The Indian Express—were also read by the international diplomatic community so representation of the ruling party in an unfavorable light could be misread (or accurately read) to reveal the machinations of power in Delhi.

By the mid-seventies, India was considered to be the world's second largest publisher of daily newspapers and in terms of circulation (9.338 million in 1976), it held the third place behind the U.S.S.R. and Japan. The largest number of dailies were published in Hindi (252), Marathi and Urdu (94 each), Malayalam (91), English (89), Tamil (58), Kannada (53), Gujarati (37), Bengali (22), and Telugu (17). In terms of circulation, English language dailies commanded the largest readership with 2.259 million (6.6 percent of the total circulation of dailies) followed by Hindi, Malayalam, Telugu, and Urdu. Of the single edition dailies, The Anand Bazaar Patrika, a Bengali newspaper with 291,129 copies had the largest circulation. Among the multi-edition dailies, The Indian Express, in English, led with 403,927 copies; The Times of India, also in English was the second largest with a circulation of 346,733 copies; and Malayala Manorama, a Malayali daily the third largest with 327,444 copies (Rau, 1982: 1-3). These figures should not obscure the fact that printed communication was still the domain of the elites, given the low literacy and the abysmally low purchasing power of the Indian peasantry and workers. An estimated 2 percent of the newspapers reached the nearly half million villages of India and the rest remained in towns and cities (Sarkar, 1969: 15).

There appears to have been a good deal of plurality in terms of ownership, suggesting plurality of ideas and views also: 60.9 percent of the newspapers in the country were owned by individuals, although English newspapers with large circulation were controlled by big corporations with ties to industrial capital. For instance, the Birla family group controlled The Hindustan Times, and the Goenka family controlled the Indian Express publications. In the vernacular press, many a newspaper was owned by families with interests in land and industry. On the other hand, a sizeable party-affiliated press also thrived with 18 political parties owning a total of 92 newspapers in 1976. Of them, 26 newspapers were owned by the Communist Party of India, 25 by the Congress Party, and 15 by the Communist Party -Marxist (Rau, 1982: 3). It was this plurality and this diversity which came under attack during the Emergency. Although the state was the biggest producer of various media and held monopoly control over radio, television and documentary films in the country, the English language
and vernacular press was read by the articulate elites. It was a significant factor for national and regional politics as it was clearly the domain of the capitalists, some of whom were independent of the state. This meant that although the State-controlled media could be directed easily to tow the Emergency Regime's line, similar attempts would necessarily be made on the capitalist sector also.

By 1975, the State-controlled media sector consisted of a vast radio network which covered some 80 percent of the country. Due to the low purchasing power of the population, however, there were only 17.5 million licensed radio receivers in 1976 with an estimated 80 percent of them in urban areas (Government of India, Report of the Working Group on Autonomy for Akashvani & Doordarshan, 1978, Vol. I: 13). Television was still in its embryonic stage with only 8 transmitters sending out a black and white signal to an estimated audience of 5.1 million (Government of India, Television in India 1985). The transmitters were in urban centers and the great majority of people living in rural India were untouched by television. As though to change all that, the Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) was inaugurated by Mrs. Gandhi in July 1975. This was a long awaited technical collaboration project between the NASA of the U.S. and the Indian Space Research Organization. Hailed as the first experiment of its kind in the world, SITE delivered messages devised by program producers with the help of social scientists to 2400 experimental villages in six economically backward states. Programming on this network typified, in many ways, the intended use of media for the purposes of the State.

Watching the programs beamed from New Delhi in a village almost 1500 miles away, I could not discern the machinations of the regime to consolidate its power by employing brute force. The nightly arrests, illegal detention, torture and deaths in jails, voices of dissent silenced by transfers, firing, and other means could not be seen on that television set. The viewer got a daily diet of lessons in family planning, health and hygiene, new agricultural techniques, and programs glorifying the nation. The national news programs consisted of the Prime Minister and her cabinet putting into action the regime's 20-Point Program for India's development. The voice of the opposition in the Parliament was not heard on television, let alone the opposition to the status quo in the villages of India. On the other hand, the news emphasized the activities of the Youth Congress, a wing of the ruling party, especially its leader Sanjay Gandhi, the Prime Minister's son. Big banners depicted Mrs. Gandhi as "Durga," a goddess and "Mother India," a mythical figure for the nation. There were posters proclaiming "Indira is India; India is Indira," equating the leader with the nation and suggesting any opposition to her as treason (Pendakur, 1975).

News directors at All India Radio were instructed to abandon even the pretense of journalistic fairness and balance in reporting events in the country, thereby reducing them to propaganda institutions of the state. Consider the following statement made just after proclamation of the Emergency by Mrs. Gandhi to the Conference of All India Radio station directors on September 9, 1975 responding to criticism of her
policies toward radio and television broadcasting (The Dass Committee Report, 1977: 13):

I have said in public forums it is a Government organ, it is going to remain a Government organ... It is there to project Government policies and Government views....They happen to be the views and policies which have been reaffirmed and voted upon by the Parliament of India.

This argument was echoed by V.C. Shukla, Minister of Information and Broadcasting at the same conference in equally blunt terms (The Dass Committee Report, 1977, Appendix 7: 15):

All India Radio is an organ of the Government and in democracy all of you are aware, parties run Government. Any party which gets the majority runs the Government and therefore, the policies of the party which runs the Government are bound to be reflected in the media that are controlled by the Government and nobody should quarrel with this fact and everybody's mind should be quite clear on this basic question.

What Mrs. Gandhi and her Minister conveniently left out of their arguments was the fact that a good many of the leaders of opposition were either in jail or underground. An extraordinary situation existed in the country because of the Emergency which had dramatically curbed the democratic rights of its citizenry. What is represented here as legitimate authority of the state over media institutions was not sanctioned by regular parliamentary processes but simply by the political party which dominated the Parliament. It simply meant that radio and television were reduced to the dubious status of publicity departments of the regime in power.

In documentary film, the state has always had complete monopoly through the Films Division, which regularly produced newsreels and documentaries extolling the virtues of state-sponsored development programs. It released one news reel a week to almost 10,000 motion picture theatres which were required by law to exhibit them and also pay a set fee. The Division, set up with the advice of the renowned British documentary filmmaker - John Grierson - had never been granted the autonomy from the clutches of government. During the Emergency, the Films Division turned out news reels and documentaries praising the accomplishments of the Regime and its 20-Point Program. The Ministry instructed the Films Division, from time to time, to buy certain films from outside producers circumventing all the previously established oversight procedures to ensure that the films had balance and fairness. A good example of such policy was the purchase in November 1975 of a film produced privately for the Central Campaign Committee of the All India Congress Committee entitled, A New Era Begins. The film compared the opposition leaders to Hitler and Mussolini by parallel cuts between the images of those dictators and Indian opposition leaders such as Jaya Prakash Narayan. The narration referred to them as "political adventurists" and "strange bed-fellows" and also spoke of the "nefarious plan of the opponents of democracy in India" (The Dass Committee Report, 1977: 92). The Films Division
recommended deletion of several sequences, which were not agreeable to the producer. He convinced the Ministry to intervene and, finally, after deleting only five shots of the opposition leaders, leaving much of the objectionable material intact, the documentary film was shown widely in January 1976. State controlled media clearly were put at the service of the ruling family and their political party to perpetuate a dynastic rule over the Indian people.

"Free" Press Under Attack

While it was relatively easy to coerce the state-run media institutions, as pointed above, the government had to resort to much sterner measures to reign in the press. Mrs. Gandhi's own contradictory views on the social role of the press in an electoral democracy could already be found in a 1968 speech made to the Press Trust of India (Government of India, The Years of Challenge, 1971: 286).

Even a casual visitor to India notices the freedom and vitality of our Press. We should always defend this freedom because a free Press is a basic guarantee of democracy and a vigilant guardian of every right that free men prize. At the same time, it is for the Press to realize that freedom cannot exist without responsibility....By 'responsible', I do not suggest opinions convenient to authority. Let the Press do its duty as it sees it. I do not ask it to be impartial, for that would itself be a limitation to freedom of opinion, but let it not be too obsessed with the ephemeral and trivial but take a longer and larger view of events. The Press has a right as well as a duty to point out faults and to attack pettiness and hypocrisy. But let it not undermine the confidence and spirit of the people by speaking only of the failures and not of the victories of the people as a whole.

The "freedom and vitality" of the Press was rather limited if one considers the fact that the Rules of the Defense of India Act hung over it like a dark cloud, giving sufficient powers to the State to "bulldoze the press out of existence if it wanted" (Sarkar, 1969: 11). The Press had already been forced to function under that Act between the Indo-China war in 1962 and 1968. Mrs. Gandhi's own travails in the Allahabad High Court which convicted her of electoral fraud, the popular revolt against the Congress party gaining momentum in the north central provinces, and the general failure of her economic and social programs had been widely reported by the press in the early seventies. Such press freedom was already on fragile grounds as Mrs. Gandhi's 1975 Emergency proved. The reaction against the press from the Prime Minister's office was intense and swift to contain any negative information flowing through the printed media. The individual journalists, the owners of these media, and the institution of the press all came under this policy of containment.

Censorship, the tool of class power to establish ideological hegemony, was imposed on the Indian press by an order under Rule 48 of the Defense and Internal Security of India Rules on June 26, 1975 a day after the proclamation of the Emergency. Prior censorship and censorship rules and guidelines were issued to the Press while
 forbidding the newspapers from publishing those rules. They established broad authority for the censor, gave it an institutional structure, and included a list of "don'ts." Editors were particularly instructed not to leave blank spaces or identify the published material as censored - a common practice of protest during the British colonial period. Minister Shukla told the editors of newspapers such symbolic acts of protest would be considered "defiance" of the censor rules and invite arrest and detention (Nayar, 1977: 52).

Some journalists such as Kushwant Singh, editor of The Illustrated Weekly of India, and R.K. Karanjia, editor of Blitz, supported the insecure government assuming extra-ordinary powers to save itself. However, most of the leading journalists in the country did not support the regime. Consequently, censorship prevailed until about the middle of 1977. Some journalists went underground to avoid arrest and detention. Others defied The Emergency by quoting national heroes. The official paranoia reached such ridiculous heights during the Emergency that even quotations from Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru (first Prime Minister and Mrs. Gandhi's father), and Rabindranath Tagore, a nobel laureate were banned from publications. Calling them "motivated quotations", the authorities decided to censor Tagore’s poetry from All India Radio, passages from Nehru’s Autobiography, or passages from the Mahatma’s editorial pieces once published in Harijan or Young India (Mitra, 1979: 139-140). Banning Tagore and the Mahatma from the mass media with the claim of protecting the heritage of India and the nation’s unity simply exposed the bankruptcy of the Emergency rule.

Accreditations were withdrawn from a total of 51 "offending foreign and national journalists" (The Dass Committee Report, 1977, Appendix 14: 61-62). Foreign journalists were punished by another means—expelling them from the country or denying entry visas. Seven foreign journalists were expelled and 29 foreign correspondents were denied entry visas by the Government of India (The Dass Committee Report, 1977, Appendix 15 & 16: 63-64).

The global news agencies operating in India had already been reorganized as national co-operatives with ownership in the hands of Indian newspaper publishers. Reuters had become Press Trust of India and the United News of India had links with the Associated Press. Additionally, Hindustan Samachar and Samchar Bharati provided service in Hindi and other Indian languages (Government of India, Report of the Committee on News Agencies, 1977: 21-25). All those news agencies were restructured by the Emergency Regime into a public sector corporation called, Samachar, which formally began its operations on February 1, 1976. Its board and chair were handpicked by Minister Shukla and they were given wide powers to ensure the agency functioned to protect the interests of the Gandhi regime. The agency was instructed to screen its employees with the help of the police and eliminate "anti-social and anti-national elements." This was clearly an attempt to "clean out" the national/regional language news agencies of persons considered unfriendly to Mrs. Gandhi’s
dictatorship (Government of India, Report of the Committee on News Agencies, 1977: 49). All news material going out of Samachar to Indian and other publishers as well as material that was being received by Samachar from outside of India was subjected to censorship.

Minister Shukla began to spar with various press barons in the country. Virtually all seem to have acquiesced to the Emergency except Ram Nath Goenka, proprietor of one of the country’s biggest newspaper/magazine chains, whose own political sympathies were known to be with the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh, a banned Hindu-nationalist political organization. Goenka compares well with the Pulitzers and the Hearsts of the American newspaper industry. He controlled the biggest newspaper chain, which consisted of 35 newspapers/magazines including the 10-edition Indian Express, published simultaneously from the major metropolitan centers (India Today, 1979: 28-35.). He was singled out for scrutiny by the Regime. In the first high level meeting presided by the Prime Minister after the declaration of the Emergency, when strategy was developed to coerce the media, Goenka’s name came up for discussion. The minutes were recorded as follows:

The question of enquiring into the Express Group of newspapers and Ramnath Goenka’s industrial empire was to be given immediate attention by the Department of Company Affairs and Ministry of Law and necessary action taken in regard to the irregularities and illegal transfers of funds to non-journalistic ventures from the profits of the newspapers. (The Dass Committee Report, 1977, Appendix 1: 3).

Pre-censorship was imposed on all editions of Indian Express on August 16, 1976. Goenka filed a petition against it in the Bombay High Court and the Government withdrew its order on September 30, 1976. The Government then issued orders to all its departments and public sector corporations not to advertise in any of the Indian Express group of newspapers. Goenka convinced the Bombay High Court in March 1977 to revoke that ban. Having failed in these tactics, the State charged Goenka for violations of various income tax and other laws, all intended to wreak havoc on the operation of the chain. The Regime then offered to buy up Goenka’s publishing operations but he wanted a fair price and all of it in "white money" (Nayar, 1977: 110-111). That apparently thought too costly and the final solution was to restructure the Board of Directors of his company in order to favor the Regime. K.K. Birla, an industrialist and owner of The Hindustan Times and an advisor to Sanjay Gandhi was appointed chair of this Board. It began a "clean up" operation of all senior correspondents who were seen as "unfriendly" to the government. The Board replaced the editor of Indian Express, S. Mulgaokar, by V.K. Narasimhan who was acceptable to Mrs. Gandhi. Goenka, in a recent interview recounting that episode characterized his company’s survival during the Emergency as a miracle (India Today, 1979: 37).

As the tone of stories did not change, Goenka’s publications were denied all advertising funds from various Central government institutions and agencies. The media
owners in the country were subjected to various other forms of harassment which included withholding of news print, electricity, etc. Those who fell in line became eligible, as usual, for all such essentials. When all else failed to squelch dissent, the ultimate weapon of banning the newspaper/magazine was used. A total of 18 newspapers/periodicals were banned (The Dass Committee Report, 1977, Appendix 20: 72). This strategy of punishing those publications "unfriendly" to the Regime and rewarding the others was systematically carried out by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (The Dass Committee Report, 1977, Appendix 18 & 19: 68-70).

By 1977, when Parliamentary elections were announced by Mrs. Gandhi, the news agency, the radio and television networks -- all controlled by the Central government -- were, according to Ashok Mitra, "openly, unabashedly, defiantly used in support of one particular party" (1979: 180).

Oppositional Culture

The hand of the censor and bureaucratic information machinery distorted the news and information flow to trumpet the ruling party's (family's) virtues as the savior of democracy but the alternative and oppositional voices were equally clever in disseminating their news to demolish that myth. Rumor spread the news of arrests, torture, sterilization camps, and other vital information like wild fire. An active underground printed press flourished (Basu, 1978). Letters, posters, cartoons, songs, and other prohibited material was used to disseminate information among the agitators and others. Various political parties whose leaders were in jail circulated information about the government's repressive measures by printing newsletters and leaflets (Lal, 1977: 78). Citizens committees, operating under different names each time to mislead the police, distributed pamphlets. When the press was barred from covering speeches made in the Parliament by opposition leaders, these same speeches became hot news items for the underground press. Protests about the Emergency by international organizations like the Amnesty International, the Socialist International, International Transport Workers Federation, International Commission of Jurists were suppressed by the censors but reached the public via the underground press (Basu, 1978: 6, 42, 66). International press coverage of the Emergency regime's excessive use of force against civilians, although subjected to censorship in Indian media, made it into the underground literature. Typical of such stories was, "Mrs. Gandhi Confirms Some Died in Protests Over Sterilization Drive," in The New York Times (Basu, 1978: 95). An exciting literary movement known as "Bandaya Sahitya" (revolutionary literature) developed in several languages (Pendakur, May 1988). This kind of oppositional culture, a viable alternative to the government media and censored press, kept the spirit of the people alive all over the country and connected those who were fighting against the repressive regime through communication. It may have also helped demolish the myth that constitutional democracy
was in the way of India's progress and ultimately contributed to the collapse of the Regime in 1977.

Motion Pictures under the looking glass

Cinema is in the private sector, although the state has dabbled in financing many of the so-called "art" films. India has been the largest producer of feature films since about 1975, with annual production reaching 800 films in 1985 (Dharap, 1985). Films are immensely popular with Indian people. An estimated 80 million tickets are sold every week at some 10,000 theatres in the country. The high appeal of cinema is seen by policy-makers as having an undue influence on the masses, thereby resulting in censorship.

Censorship of films dates back to the British colonial times. The Cinematograph Act of 1917 set up censor boards in the major cities and attempted to eliminate any suggestion in films of national independence and, thereby, disruption of the status quo. Any films that might lower the image of the imperialist (and his woman) in the eyes of the "native" were also not allowed (Government of India, Film India. Looking Back 1896-1960: 32). With the passing of the Cinematograph Act in 1952 by the Indian Parliament, film censorship was centralized in the hands of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting of the central government and rules governing censorship were copied from the British Board of Censors (Sarkar, 1982: 108). Although the emphasis on eliminating "seditious" material remained, the Censor Board's attention shifted more to exploitation of sexuality and violence in movies. The paternalistic state took it upon itself to ensure a certain moral code prevailed in the movies in order to protect the "uninitiated".

While the film producers devised various ways to circumvent the censor rules, political film making as a genre never developed well as film makers feared censorship of their ideas or even outright ban. Das Gupta (1981: 42) has noted how censorship robbed Indian filmmakers the opportunities to contribute to the nation's political culture:

The cinema cannot be used as a means of national debate; it must conform to the ideas of the Establishment. The Prime Minister can be criticized in the press but not in the cinema...no member of any political party, any profession, can be shown as corrupt, except for the village money lender who cannot put up a defence.

Fearing potential counter propaganda from feature films, the Emergency Regime tightened censorship. Kobita Sarkar, who was a member of the Censor Board during the Emergency disclosed the following directive from the Ministry to get tough:

...to ensure that scenes/songs/situations, etc. showing violence and vulgarity among other things should not be allowed in films that come up for
certification. Failure in this respect will be regarded as dereliction of duty (Sarkar, 1982: 86).

The Minister of Information and Broadcasting, V.C. Shukla, often interfered with the decisions of the Board in order to eliminate any political criticism in the movies. One dramatic instance will illuminate how centralized authority was abused by the Regime. A Hindi film, *Kissa Kursi Ka*, gained a great deal of notoriety because the film's subject matter was power-hungry politicians and it made oblique references to several scandals in Mrs. Gandhi's regime. What made this film worth remembering was not its art of depiction of political corruption in the country but what happened to it in the Emergency. It came before the Censor Board in April 1975, prior to the Emergency, when the Board had recommended a "U" certificate after several scenes were eliminated. But the Board's chairman referred the film to the Ministry for final approval. Amrit Nahata, the producer of the film filed a petition with the Supreme Court requesting it to direct the Government to clear his film as per the Censor Board's recommendation. Minister Shukla rejected the Board's recommendation and ordered the confiscation of all the prints of the film. He issued further orders declaring the forfeiture of the film under the Censorship Law and the Defense and Internal Security Act. Nahata filed two more petitions in the Supreme Court seeking a stay order of the forfeiture of the film and to obtain Government records on his film in the interest of justice. The High Court heard his request for a stay order on July 18, 1975. Although it rejected that request, it ordered the Government to preserve the film's negative and prints in proper condition until the disposal of the petition. Nahata convinced the Court to see the film as the content of the film was central to his case. The Court, however, never saw the film as the Ministry could not trace the film (The Dass Committee Report, 1977: 86-87).

Even films dealing with the nationalist freedom struggle were given the same treatment by the Ministry during the Emergency. A Hindi feature film, *Andolan*, was granted a "U" certificate by the Censor Board in May 1975 on the ground that its historic content of the 1942 freedom struggle led by Mahatma Gandhi was educational. The Ministry recalled the film before it could be released and imposed several drastic cuts, all of which dealt with revolutionary activity. Apparently the authorities believed that it would incite the public to commit offenses against the State, thereby leading to "disturbance of public order" (The Dass Committee Report, 1977: 85).

Foreign films with political themes were also subjected to the Ministry's gatekeeping. For instance, the Ministry blocked the release of the American film, *All the President's Men*, which dealt with the Watergate scandal in the Nixon Administration. It may have feared that the audience might have seen parallels with the cabal that was running the Emergency Regime. The Censorship law was used by the Ministry to coerce movie stars as well to behave in ways that were seen to benefit the Emergency Regime (The Dass Committee Report, 1977: 88). The net effect of such abuses of
political power was to impose greater prior censorship on the creative community in the film industry.

Conclusion

This article attempted to show how the Constitutionally guaranteed rights and freedoms are fragile and are easily subverted by the "intermediate class" which runs the state apparatus. It analyzed how the communication process, subjected to abuse by that class—although opposed by various groups—was an attempt to control the flow and content of information in order to entrench itself in power. This, however, cannot be simply dismissed as an aberration of history. The trend set during the Emergency to use and abuse mass media by those in power continues as an important area for further study. Several states have recently passed censorship laws to curb the power of the press. As Indians face ever more turbulent times in their political and cultural landscape, diverse and democratic media institutions should become the cornerstone of their national polity. Subversion of diversity only guarantees authoritarian class rule.

END NOTES

1. These articles, aimed at limiting the coercive power of the state, guaranteed equality to all citizens before the law, protection of life and liberty, and protection against arrest and detention in certain cases (Government of India, The Constitution of India As Modified Up to 1st May, 1977: 8 & 12).

2. Leaders of the Indian armed forces such as General Kariappa and General Thimmaiah have apparently taken the position that they would readily participate in conflicts involving external threats to national sovereignty but not in internal disturbances. My speculation is that the armed forces avoided the problem of being labelled "political" and, thereby, further legitimated their expansion and relative financial security. Thus, they may have avoided problems of disloyalty in the various divisions as demonstrated in 1983-84 by Sikh soldiers deserting to save their holy shrine in Amritsar which was attacked by the Indian army under Mrs. Gandhi’s orders. See Stephen P. Cohen, "The Military," in Hart (1976: 207-239) for a further discussion of this issue.

3. Others have called it a partnership between dominant classes including the relatively high-wage, organized workers in the capitalist and public sectors of the economy. These groups, consisting of an estimated 150 million people (or 20 percent of the population), are the backbone of the Congress Party which has dominated the State apparatus for the last forty years. Given the internal antagonisms within the "partnership" classes, the state has assumed the position of arbitrator of class interests and propagated the message that it's the guardian of national interest (Bhagavan, 1987: 57).
4. The BSF alone was 250,000 strong in 1975. The Home Ministry's budget request in April 1976 was in the amount of 1.6 billion rupees because the Minister argued, "of the 'coming-up' of several organizations like the CRP, the BSF, and the Central Industrial Security Forces. We push in a lot of money to the states to assist them to modernize their police forces." These para military forces were employed to break strikes and to put down student and other agitations as they were unpopular with the regular armed forces. They were in effect the private army of the regime in power (Selbourne, 1979: 329).

5. These coercive measures apparently came to India as courtesy of the American Embassy in New Delhi. The rules and the machinery to implement them may have been tried in the Philippines by Ferdinand Marcos, the U.S. appointed dictator. A Delhi entrepreneur, Kuldip Narang, close to Sanjay Gandhi, was believed to have obtained them from the U.S. Embassy and passed them on to Sanjay (Nayar, 1977: 25).

6. Lal (1977: 54) has noted that 50,000 news items were used by the state to build up the image of Mrs. Gandhi and her son, Sanjay.

REFERENCES


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