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Effective Use of Language in Communicating News through Political Emergency

R. Subramani, Ph.D

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Indira Gandhi

Introduction

Emergency is a governmental declaration that may put off ‘certain usual functions of government, alert citizens to alter their normal behaviors, or order government agencies to implement Emergency preparedness plans. It can also be used as a rationale for suspending civil liberties. Such declarations usually come during a time of natural disaster, during periods of civil disorder, or following a war’. But, unfortunately, some countries have declared Emergency because of the local political crisis or turmoil. At that circumstance civil liberties and governmental system are regulated by the constitution and powers may be invoked or rights may be suspended.

During the Emergency, civil liberties as well as the freedom of expression of the media are set aside. Simply they impose censorship on the media. The censor has two notions, ‘to count the citizens and to supervise their morals. The intention of censorship is to control the speech and other forms of human expression, often by government intervention’.

In the 18th century, European media outlets underwent strict censorship. Colonial governments, such like Russia, Britain, exercised firm control on political publications in their spheres; Russia as in the Baltic states, Britain as in Australia, Canada, India and the colonized Africa. Sometimes wartime censorship is also carried out with the intention of preventing the release of information

that might be advantageous to an enemy. This has been successfully employed in the Second World War

Emergency in India

In the post-independent era, the Indian press has enjoyed the large measures of freedom because Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru realized the need of the press. Even though in the year of 1961 Emergency was imposed on the press, the restrictions on the press were minimal. But the 1975 Emergency dictated rigorous restrictions on the people and media.

In connection with Indira Gandhi election case, the Uttar Pradesh High court delivered judgment on June 12th, 1975. The justice Jagmohan Lal Sinha declared *Mrs. Indira Gandhi's 1971 election was invalid and barred the prime minister from holding political office for 6 years*. That judgment sparked a fire in Indian politics. Indira Gandhi Government at the Centre declared Emergency on June 26th, 1975. The nineteen month Emergency suspended the fundamental rights of the people. Moreover all the laws related to fundamental rights have been set aside. That was one of the darkest periods in the post-independence history; people were not able to know what happened in the country, because press was not allowed to carry any anti-Emergency news.

The central censorship order addressed to all printers, publishers and editors prohibited the publication of news, comments, rumors or other reports relating to action taken by the government in relation to Emergency. The government guidelines and censorship orders had their effect throughout the country. Following the declaration of Emergency, more than thirty-four printing presses were seized and sealed; over seven thousand people were arrested in connection with the publication and circulation of underground literature. The government tried to suppress news on such arrest. In fact, the official orders did not reveal anything to the press.



Jayapraksh Narayan
Anti-Emergency Leader

Censorship against Press

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The censorship order demanded that anything related to publication should be submitted before the censor officer. All journalists were in a state of shock. They never imagined that there would be such curtailment of freedom. Journalists were not allowed to do their work. The Government also gave directions to the editors. *What to be published, what not to be published* type of instructions were communicated to the press.

The essence of the censorship guidelines emphasised the following aspects:

Censorship covers any news, report, comment, statement, visual representation, film, photograph, picture and cartoon.

Censorship applies to the publication of news, comments or reports relating to the proceedings in parliament, any legislative assembly or a court of law.

Apart from the above, general guidelines and the sub-clauses of the censor orders emphasise so many points. They are...

The statements made on behalf of the government may be published either in full or in a condensed form, but its contents should not infringe censorship.

Reproduction of any objectionable matter already published is not permissible.

No unauthorized news, advertisement, or illustration should be published in regard to vital means of communication.

There should be no indication in the published material that it has censored.

No references should be made to the places of detention, and the names of the political personalities detained.

These guidelines were strictly enforced by the loyal officers. All over India, the dissenting voice against the censorship was also raised.

‘This censorship is peculiar and extra-ordinary. Even in British days, the worst days when the British were fighting the Second World War and they were losing battle after battle, they never subjected a dependent India to this kind of censorship, which the rulers of independent India are now inflicting on us. But propaganda was instituted across the country’.

Soon after the proclamation of the Emergency, censorship guidelines were circulated to all news organizations. Those confidential guidelines demanded that the press cooperate voluntarily with the government. The preamble of the guidelines reads as follows:

‘The purpose of censorship is to guide and advise the press to guard against publication of unauthorized, irresponsible or demoralizing news items, reports, conjectures or rumors. To this end, these guidelines are intended to enlist the voluntary cooperation of all sections of the press in maintaining an atmosphere conducive to the maintenance of public order, stability and economic growth in the country’.

The government guidelines and censorship orders had then taken effect throughout the country following the declaration of the Emergency. All the neutral journals and magazines were facing a lot of struggle to publish the real news.

South Indian states were aggressively opposed to the Emergency. In Tamil Nadu, ‘*Dinamani*’, ‘*Murasoli*’, ‘*Alaiosai*’, and ‘*Theekadir*’ dailies and ‘*Thuglaq*’ Tamil weekly have made remarkable contributions to the journalism. They resisted the implementation of the orders.



M. Karunanidhi, Anti-Emergency Supporter

Everyday all the printed materials should be submitted before the censor officers. Censor officers went through the matters line by line. Then they gave *PASSED FOR PUBLICATION* order. If they demanded any correction, the editor should carry out these, in place of the deleted material.

Constitutional guarantees, which were assured by the framers of the Constitution, were not protected by the Emergency managers. Prevention of Objectionable news Act which was brought into force during English rule was given life again. It was ordered that owner’s printing press where magazines are printed, publishers, and editors had to execute a promissory bond. Due to

this, press owners suffered a lot. Most of the press owners feared to function against the government.

Since the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Indian Constitution were cancelled, those who got arrested were unable to approach the court. The rights of journalism were controlled by way of pre-censorship. Many journals were prohibited from publication, alleging that they had published objectionable news and news disturbing the nation's welfare.

During the period of Emergency although it was difficult to publish materials with independent views, nearly 300 journals were still published by undisclosed organizations defying the restrictions. The journals of undisclosed organizations publishing in different names from different cities posed a real challenge to the police department. They were published in handwritten as well as in printed form.

Artful Usage of Language in the Presentation of News

During the Emergency era, the Indian journalists set a new theory and definition for news. For this, they used various tactics. Figurative presentation, presentation by tactful layout, presentation by thoughtful content, presentation by caricature, satire presentation, literary presentation, mythological and fabulous presentation, sarcastic presentation, and subtle way of presentation were some of the arts of the journalists.

Literary tactics was one which was followed by many Tamil Journals. '*Murasoli*' daily newspaper artfully used such tactics. '*Murasoli*' opposed Emergency by focusing on literary references in the context where freedom of thoughts and expression were prohibited by autocratic rulings. The Daily also published news items to unite people opposing such draconian laws. One such article titled Bravery shown in a Sangam literary work, written at least 1800 years ago, *kalithohagai*, invited the youth for a war against Emergency.

A man attempts to domineer
A young bullock but
Fear its deadly horns
Unfit to
Make love with a pastoral lady Herdsman's daughter
Even in his rebirth

Such literary quotations were used by '*Murasoli*' matching the Emergency context. Moreover, detailed interpretations for them were also provided. 'In those days, who possessed strong muscled shoulders took dignity in domineering young bullocks catching hold of their strong and sharp horns'.

News items igniting bravery in the minds of youth were published in '*Murasoli*'. Similarly the oppression of Emergency was indirectly explained through the poet Bharati's lines as:

Destiny, O destiny!
What have you thought of doing to me?

Another magazine '*Thenmozhi*' whose contents were literatures of the Tamils and their administration of state, beautifully registered the oppression of Emergency through the famous *Thalaviar Thalaivi* (Lover and Lady Love) discourse. One such song published in its cover page reads thus;

We ran and hide ourselves
Drowning in your dazzle
O beautiful moon...
We sang, told stories
and danced with companions
You are not as you
Were once
But now
You are showering
Flames of fire
All this lengthy night

Clad in short colorful cloths
Jumping at the
Courtyard, we would build
Small homes in sand for play
Near you and dine
O beautiful moon
You are not as you
Were, once
Tell us whether you
Became a burning volcano?

We slept pleasantly
In the spreading cool light of the night
O my cool moon...
This place is not
Like that
You are torturing me
Being a fury of fire
Now
Is it right?

What error did I commit?

As the little ones in their
Sweet voice sing
For my lady love
Who came dancing?
Clapping her hands
You stood as feast once
But tonight
Why do you
Roistering as a sea fire?

O cool moon
A child learning to
Walk on the
Pearl strewn vast carpet
Now
You intricate not your
Milky light
But boil in the wind
Waves of sea fire

Here it has been registered that Emergency did not leave even the young lovers in tranquility and comfort. This song stands as evidence of opposition to Emergency and as a literary registration.

Readers realized the media tactics clearly through double-meaning headlines published in 'Thuglaq'. 'Thuglaq' was publishing the write-ups in a similar style. It restructured the famous Tamil literature *Aathichudi* in the present context.

Obey
Supporting is profit
One and half hours bad omen
Learn to grin lengthily
Accept the kicking's
Follow social norms
Yama's time always available
Cracking is natural
O what a pity
Unity is weakness
Run, run and keep running
Cure is illusion

Though such expressions are funny, the underlying concepts expressed the agony freedom-loving people felt during the Emergency.

Subtle and sarcastic approach

The newspapers expressed their anti-Emergency views also through the age-old tales and through religious stories. The magazine 'Vidyal,' which propagated progressive left ideologies, continuously published certain passages from the New Testament. One of them reads thus;

There did survive certain section of people who protect themselves by calling the rulers as great gods. History exhibits them to us.

The magazine 'Vidyal' also published a note for the biblical passage and explained clearly the purpose of the note. It reads thus;

At the end of the passage which prays for the good of such people, implies the passage, that such compulsions against the wish of such people will be destroyed by Time.

Readers naturally recognized that the idea in the passage was indeed criticizing the Emergency.

Journalists expressed just through their news their inability in publishing unbiased news items regarding the Emergency to their readers. The Daily 'Dinamani' pointed out the day-to-day political events through its editorial itself as soon as the Emergency had been declared. It enlightened the readers also by providing introductions to such articles. One of such introductions reads thus:

Readers may ask what is the context of today's editorial. There is nothing to write about the existing news. There are also days to say that there is no news to be written.

Such types of news items, announcements and introductions were published in 'Dinamani' successively. As done by 'Dinamani' the magazine 'vidiyal' also registered its anti-Emergency views following the tactics of 'Dinamani'. One such column appears thus:

Question: In the article regarding house-flies, there was no mention about the fact that all bees were completely killed in China?

Answer: It's true that all bees were killed in China. But in today's context is it possible to speak the truth?

Rule-bound Mocking

It is known that many newspapers expressed their views against Emergency within the rules and regulations of the Emergency but with great journalistic tactics. It is also known in 'Dinamani'

there were anti-Emergency ideas page after page before the censor rules were implemented vigorously. The ways news was written and the words used to communicate them transferred the sense of opposition to the hearts of the readers without any reduction in the heat.

White Space and Tactful Layout

The censor authorities of newspapers prescribed and executed respective pro-Emergency and anti-Emergency journals. The anti-Emergency journals were forced to ignore much more important news stories and to add further news stories to support the opinion of the censor board. That too, all such changes had to be done about 2 A.M. Therefore, morning newspapers like 'Dinamani', 'Murasoli' and 'Viduthalai' had to suffer a lot. But these dailies left certain pages blank to symbolize the news stories that must have been there in the original layout. The white spaces signified more than the printed pages in the newspapers.

This strategy was followed by dailies like 'Murasoli', 'Viduthalai', 'Dinamani' and 'Alaiosai' for certain number of weeks. So, such presentations by tactful layouts communicated the meaning of the strange message to all readers effortlessly; the readers also understood that the reason for publishing such blank pages was all due to the limitless imposition of the censor officers. These white pages inspired the readers more effectively than the news stories that were to have been there.

At the same time pressmen also used a tactful layout by printing two contradictory news items to imply the central idea of the newspaper. But perhaps the censor authorities whose consent was mandatory before publishing never came across such a riddle, which could easily be located by the readers.

The following news items read so:

Women

You may use your temporary rights to solve the socio-economic problems to your ability and lead the country towards prosperity. Women cannot claim more rights during this Emergency period.

- *Bahrudhin Ali, President of India.*

The place where Federal lords, capitalists and merchants are, there, women have no possibilities to be equal to men and even before law.

- *Lenin*

Readers who read these two news items were able to understand the background of Emergency. Such tactful presentation of news writers befooled the censor authorities and ignited the minds of the readers.

As the anti-Emergency news items could not be published in the news paper, it could publish only the news related to thoughtful content. Such news possessed a content which could greatly interest the readers and help them figure out the central idea of the news.

Symbolic Quotations and Their Relevance

During Emergency all activities of the rulers were more cruel than those of a dictator, in addition to the crushing down of human rights. The journal '*Thuglaq*' reflected the emotions of the people through morals of history. The journal pointed out the political activities of Mrs. Gandhi many times as similar to those of the dictator Hitler, through news item titled "The Pride of Hitler"

The speeches of Hitler on people, false propaganda and press freedom were published in the news item. An instruction was also written to that. It was ...

The dictator Hitler led his own country to destruction claiming him to be a socialist but freezing up media rights, through his strong media and threatening. In their pages Hitler's pride is recalled through his own words but still unrevealed are the words of certain leaders.

This introduction was tailor-made to Mrs. Gandhi who declared Emergency in India. The Journal '*Thuglaq*,' in the style of explaining the political situation of India, also published his quotations.

We can make our people believe the hell a paradise through a clear and continuous propaganda. Also we can make them think even this miserable life as paradise. However much one propagandizes cleverly, the success of such propaganda must reiterate the same thing again and again endlessly. This is the primary principle for the victory through propaganda. From *Mein Kamp*.

'*Vidyal*' magazine also published popular quotes in a similar manner. Two quotes read like the following:

"The articles which were censored by the censor authorities were published in it. Penalties were imposed on the magazines. They were even dismissed by the Censors. However, these dispossessed magazines did go to the hands of the working class."

"Since this magazine is published statutorily it cannot kick start the struggle directly. Hence symbolic words and hints are in use".

As said above, many such quotations were published in 'Vidiyal'. But the news items in 'Vidiyal' seemed to censor authorities as mainly a reproduction of news items from the issues of 'Pravda' run by the Soviet Communist Party. The readers took them to mean the current situation of Emergency in India.

Conclusion

Censorship is normally considered as a defensive phenomenon, in the sense that censorship is a mechanism that deliberately prevents information from reaching the public. John Keane, in his book *The Media and Democracy* (1991) regards state censorship as a phenomenon which continues in modern democracies: "Governments use a number of mechanisms to regulate and distort the exchange of information and opinion between their citizens. These can include legal tools, such as secret services declaring emerging situation or initiating pre or post censorship of publications for state security reason or simply lying to the public about governmental actions or positions"

But the journalists have their own space in the dictatorship regimes too. Art and skill play a vital role in journalism. Journalists of liberal democracies too face problems just as those in dictatorial countries. They face threats from gangsters, religious fundamentalists, government machineries and politicians. But many journalists have their knack to leave their footprints. Journalistic footprints of Tamil Journalists have remarkable value in the History of Indian journalism.

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