

RECENSIONE

GYAN PRAKASH, *EMERGENCY CHRONICLES: INDIRA GANDHI AND DEMOCRACY'S TURNING POINT*. PRINCETON, NJ: PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2019. VIII+439 PAGES. ISBN 978-0-691-18672-6 (HARD COVER).

This is a very important book in modern Indian history. It revolves around the state of emergency declared by India's president upon the initiative of Indira Gandhi on the night of 25 June 1975, which she did using the emergency powers that the constitution provided (7); "the Council of Ministers [...] was kept in the dark until the next morning" (9). Before dawn broke, her political opponents were rounded up in raids carried out during that night. Quite prominent among those detained was the "seventy-two-year-old Gandhian socialist Jayaprakash Narayanan" (1), "[p]opularly known as JP" (1), who "had once been a close associate of Indira's father Jawaharlal Nehru" (1), and who in 1973 "had come out of political retirement" (1) to challenge her rule, addressed mass rallies, and was joined in his effort to unseat her by most opposition political parties. The state of emergency lasted 21 months, constitutional rights were suspended, and "her regime unleashed a brutal campaign of coercion and intimidation, arresting and torturing people by the tens of thousands, razing slums, and imposing compulsory sterilization on the poor" (from the blurb). Prakash claims that the Emergency was not "brought on solely by Gandhi's desire to cling to power, arguing that it was as much the product of Indian democracy's troubled relationship with popular politics" (*ibid.*).

The Prologue likens the upsurge led by JP to both the 2011 widespread support for another anti-corruption elderly Gandhian, Anna Hazare, then Narendra Modi coming to power in 2014, and similar populist upsurges seen globally since 2010, e.g. the Arab Spring, and Donald Trump's populism. The Prologue is followed with nine chapters, then endnotes, and (on pp. 425–439) a subject index.

In South Asia, "Srimavo Bandarnaike in Sri Lanka, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in Pakistan, and Mujibur Rahman in newly created Bangladesh turned to different forms of authoritarian government when faced with crises produced popular unrest. In this respect, neither the predicament confronting Indira nor her turn to authoritarianism was unique" (7) around that time. During Indira Gandhi's Emergency, victims persecuted had "little recourse to courts, whose powers were severely curtailed. Armed with shadowy extraconstitutional powers, a coterie headed by her son Sanjay Gandhi ran amok, it punished and intimidated recalcitrant officials, ordered slum

demolitions, and sent sterilization drives into high gear to control population growth. A gagged press ensured that the regime's actions received only favorable coverage" (8).

Chapter 1 "begin[s] with the arrest of a student in New Delhi" (13). Chapter 2 takes a step back, to the 1940s. Chapter 3, "Rage on the Streets", is about popular unrest, which had been building up since the mid-1960s in India and globally. Chapter 4, "Into the Abyss", considers popular dissatisfaction: "a widely present sense in the 1970s that India had failed to keep the promise to transform the feudal social order" (117). The expression of this in cinema is illustrated. This is followed with the sections "Indira Rising" (128) and "The Center Tries to Hold" (136). Indira Gandhi "served uninterrupted as prime minister from 1966 to 1977 and once again from 1980 to 1984, winning massive victories in elections during most of her reign" (9). Her father, Jawaharlal Nehru,¹ was prime minister until his death in 1964.

"There was a deeper significance to the entanglement of [Indira's] personal ambitions with her professed ideology" (137). "The 1967 elections brought out in the open the erosion of the Congress system. The state had lost control. Indira's solution to the crisis was to centralize power" (137). She "appealed to the people directly and over the heads of party leaders. This meant an attack on [her own] party" (137) in the late 1960s, e.g., by ousting Morarji Desai from her cabinet, nationalising private banks, and abolishing the ex-princes' privy purses. The temporal setting moves to 1973–1975 in the section "Things Fall Apart" (152).

Chapter 5, "Lawful Suspension of Law", begins with how the President was made to declare the Emergency around midnight. "With the declaration of the Emergency, Sanjay cast a large shadow over the nation. He held no official position, yet he wielded immense power" (205); so begins Ch. 6, "Sanjay's Chariot", about his wrong-headed project to manufacture a car, the Maruti, while in his twenties.²

Chapter 7, "Bodies and Bulldozers", relates about slums being razed, and the sterilisation campaign. I remember how at the time, the latter was praised in the Western press. Prakash traces the role of the Ford Foundation in pushing in that direction in the 1950s and 1960s. A 1970 Ford report had "concluded by speculating on the use of compulsory sterilizations, as well as the use of taxation and property regulations to achieve targets" (270). "Marika Vicziany³ has shown that the Emergency did not invent coercion" (271), and "she shows that the program was coercive" (271). The next section within Ch. 7 is about slum clearance in Delhi (273). The focus switches back to forced sterilisations in the section "Enter Sanjay" (279). For Sanjay Gandhi, "[t]here was no cultural, social, and political problem with respect to birth control that could not be handled with blunt force. This was also true of urban beautification"⁴ (281), by removing the poor. "Population

¹ Indira Gandhi was unrelated to the Mahatma Gandhi. She got her married name, *Gandhi*, from a Parsee man she divorced.

² Incidentally, consider for comparison Israel's ill-fated private project to manufacture a car, the Susita (this is the Aramaic name for a mare), 12 years after the establishment of the state. "Many today know of the Susita simply as a name, or have seen one of the handful of collectors' cars at a rare auto show in Israel. But there was an actual Israeli car industry which got going just 12 years after the establishment of the state and flourished briefly, although, as the documentary explains, this industry was never viable and was, metaphorically, built on sand". Hannah Brown, "The Little Israeli Car That Couldn't: The Story of the Susita", *Jerusalem Post*, 12 April 2021, <https://www.jpost.com/j-spot/the-little-israeli-car-that-couldnt-the-story-of-the-susita-664956>

³ Marika Vicziany, "Coercion in a Soft State: The Family Planning Program of India. Part I: The Myth of Voluntarism", *Pacific Affairs*, 55(3), 1982, pp. 373–402; Eadem, "Coercion in a Soft State: The Family Planning Program of India. Part 2: The Sorces of Coercion", *Pacific Affairs*, 55(4), 1982–1983, pp. 557–592.

⁴ There is another kind of situation linking urban "beautification" and tyranny, to be found in the pro-Austrian, anti-liberal, anti-Risorgimento Italian novel *L'ebreo di Verona* by Father Antonio Bresciani (1798–1862), published in instalments in the Jesuits' then recently founded magazine *La Civiltà Cattolica* (e.g., its Ch. 5 appeared there in the fourth issue of Year 1, Vol. 1, published on the third Saturday of May 1850, on pp. 410–411). See in Vincenzo Fasano, *L'Image du juif dans le roman feuilleton italien (1870–1915)*, Galatina (Lecce): Congedo Editore, 2008, Fasano's Sec. 3, "Antonio Bresciani, le chef de file des romans rétrogrades", of the introduction. When the issue was the Austrian army regaining control of the city of Vicenza, Bresciani referred to Austrian rule in Vicenza as the Austrian beautification of Vicenza.

control broke out of the confines of set institutional practices of governance and began to operate at the command of one man” (284): “Sanjay did not bother with institutional imprimatur” (284). “[D]ramatic increases in sterilization targets [...] ramped out coercion” (285). “The weight of population control fell not only on the poor but also on lower-middle-class government employees and schoolteachers” (285). “In a patriarchal society, the fear of the loss of masculinity sparked discontent and resistance, compelling the government to muster the police to enforce Sanjay’s program of birth control” (286). “A riot broke out in the Haryana village of Pipli, triggered by the death of a widower who had been forcibly sterilized”, and the police “laid siege on the village”, and “threatened to bomb the village if the residents did not step out of their homes. Left with no option, they did. Four to five hundred men were rounded up and sterilized” (287). In another village in the state of Haryana, Uttawar, whose population “was composed primarily of the Meo community of Muslims” (287), power supply was cut off, several villagers were falsely charged for firearm possession and arms smuggling, the village was raided and household property vandalised, and over one hundred men were trucked and forcibly sterilised.⁵ The police forced a doctor to perform surgery on a 25-year-old man with only one child, and “rode roughshod on the doctor when he refused to operate on a seventy-year-old man” (288).⁶ When urban slums were razed, “displaced

Consider for comparison the phrase “the reconstruction of Iraq” being the euphemism for the period of American and British occupation of Iraq in the 2000s, the phrase being patterned after “the Reconstruction of the South” referring to the period following the United States Civil War as long as former Confederate states were garrisoned by the Unionist army. It was the withdrawal of those garrisons, i.e., President Rutherford B. Hayes’ withdrawal of federal troops from Southern capitals (so that by 1879, there were only 1155 soldiers stationed in the former Confederacy), that enabled the disenfranchisement of Black people in those states, and their civil and political rights could no longer be guaranteed. (Actually, the Force Acts requiring such garrisoning remained in place, but the funds to enforce them dwindled.)

⁵ Incidentally, in March 2009, Sanjay Gandhi’s son, Varun, turned a nationalist politician, was to face criminal charges because of a fiery, threatening speech he made at an election rally, against India’s Muslim population.

⁶ I recall that in the Israeli press in the 1970s it was pointed out that Arab countries closed an eye over the targeting of Muslims for forcible sterilisation in Indira Gandhi’s India, in exchange for her siding with the anti-Israel line (which was a characteristic of all three prime ministers of the Nehru dynasty).

There was at least one moment I recall, in connection to this despicable situation, when Indira Gandhi’s compensated in terms of international politics, and saved herself the trouble of opprobrium even from Islamic countries, at the reports about some Muslims being forcibly sterilised in the Indian countryside. An image from somewhat later, shortly before of the Lebanon war of 1982, is indelible in my memory: Indira Gandhi embracing Yasser Arafat, along with my recollection that on the same trip of his to India, also Mother (now Saint) Theresa of Calcutta embraced him – presumably for ideological reasons similar to those of Spain’s Adolfo Suarez, rather than prevalently out of expediency as in Indira’s case. Neither India, nor the Vatican had normalised their relations with Israel as yet, and by now things have changed beyond recognition. In mid-September 1979, Spain’s prime minister, Adolfo Suarez, received a visit from Yasser Arafat, and promised to him (thus, continuing a Francoist policy) that Spain would never recognise the State of Israel. Arafat then visited a synod of bishops in Spain. (Neither they, nor Suarez apparently felt how symbolic this was coming nearly one month after a belfry came crumbling down, revealing the bones of nearly one thousand persons who had been walled inside when the Spanish Inquisition could see to it that such executions would take place.) It eventually was Spain’s Socialist premier Felipe González who normalised relations with Israel in the 1980s.

Although juxtaposed temporally and geographically, Mother Theresa’s hug and Indira Gandhi’s hug differ: the latter for sure did not consider Arafat an instrument of the *vindicta Salvatoris*, which is instead why at school I and my non-Jewish classmates were taught that Titus was “the delight of the human race”: a bit of propaganda of Rome’s Flavian dynasty that only persisted because he was also the destroyer of the Jews. There have been curious twists to that. Sansone Seppilli of Ancona in the Papal States, a Jew and Italian poet who translated from Hebrew into Italian verse *Hell and Paradise*, a short imitation of the *Divine Comedy* by Dante’s contemporary, Immanuel Romano, contributed to an anthology (collected by Benedetto Monti) of celebratory poems for the accession of the new pope Pius IX (*Componimenti raccolti in occasione delle feste fatte in Ancona ad onore dell’immortale PIO IX Pontefice Massimo*, Ancona: Per Gustavo Sartorj Cherubini, 1846), a poem in which Seppilli expressed hope for justice and brotherhood (“We all are brethren now”), and saluted him as “Tito novello” (“a new Titus”), by accommodation to a conventional personification of benevolence, but then pointed out a difference: Seppilli notes that Titus was “mite” (“benign”, as such was the received non-Jewish opinion), but “he painted his arm in blood”, which is not expected of the new Pope,

residents were offered plots in resettlement colonies often on the condition of producing sterilization certificates” (288).⁷

Prison is the theme of Ch. 8, “Freedom behind Bars”, and Ch. 9 is “The Aftermath”, at the end of the Emergency. At the suddenly announced general elections of 1977, “Indira’s Congress Party was routed and the Janata Party had won decisively” (343). Prakash suggests she held those elections because she craved legitimacy. “The Janata Party was a ragtag coalition of parties and individuals within conflicting ideologies and rival ambitions. The only objective that they shared was to unseat Indira”⁸ (344). She was arrested, she turned this into a media event, and was released

so the latter is going to be greater than Titus. In fact, after 1870 Pius IX referred to the newly enfranchised Jews as “dogs”. (It is unsurprising then that Jews may imagine India and China as blissfully untainted by the legacy of lands whose cultures were shaped by Judaism’s daughter religions suppressing the Jews.)

Having mentioned the consistently unfriendly attitude to Israel (while allowing the presence of an Israeli consulate) of all three prime ministers of the Nehru dynasty, note however that India’s Jews (like other non-Hindus) have traditionally supported the Party of Congress. Most of that community emigrated to Israel, and in the 21st century many of those immigrants’ descendants take part in festive celebrations at India’s embassy in Tel Aviv, even though (like other ethnic Indians worldwide) they no longer have Indian citizenship, because Indian law excludes dual nationality. See a good discussion in Maina Chawla Singh, *Being Indian, Being Israeli: Migration, Ethnicity and Gender in the Jewish Homeland*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2009, repr. 2014.

One needs to bear in mind that from the early 1950s, Israel sought close relations to other decolonised countries of Asia and Africa, and was, e.g., close to Burma, the only other socialist but not non-Communist country of Asia. In theory at least, Israel’s ruling Labour Party and India’s Party of Congress had much in common (and, e.g., Israelis of Indian origin, who used to side with the Party of Congress, in Israel used to be close to Labour, unlike the typical pattern among the Afro-Asiatic half of Israel’s Jewish population who, except in co-opted circles, resented and still resent that party). In practice, India was cautious after the partition not to further antagonise Islamic countries, and, newly independent, voted at the U.N. against the motion that established Israel. The Third World Bloc also meant sacrificing closeness to Israel, which for a while was actually pining to side with them.

⁷ In an interview the Shah of Persia gave Oriana Fallaci, towards whom he made a point of displaying gallantry (even though his police had other views concerning her), he argued against women holding political power, by stating that female rulers are cruel. Had he Indira Gandhi in mind? Perhaps also Srimavo Bandarnaike? Or even Golda Meir, also highly visible as a female prime minister? Still, he entertained diplomatic relations with their respective countries. It is perhaps needless to say that it is immaterial whether he could think of concrete instances of cruelty on the part of those women.

⁸ One can think of just such a coalition managing to unseat Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel in 2021. In that coalition’s first one hundred days in office, it has performed rather well, perhaps surprisingly. Quite possibly, it has been external threats that kept the 2021 Israeli coalition from indulging centrifugal urges (even though internal differences quite significantly limit its margin of manoeuvre). The same was not true of the Janata Party in the late 1970s. In both cases, the premier ousted was extremely determined to come back, and on record, spectacularly resourceful. Other similarities between Indira and “Bibi” include: both of them have been populists, willing to probe limits and play fast and loose (though to different degrees, thankfully more contained in the Israeli case); both of them saw to it that their respective party would not produce or retain other politicians with a good potential; and both of them being the intellectually rather jejune, or at any rate nondescript, child of an erudite father (Benjamin Netanyahu’s father was a historian specialised in the pre-1492 Jews of Spain).

Four complicating worrying external factors intervened, within the initial 100 days in power of the summer 2021 Israeli coalition, in the following order: (a) Russia (apparently perceiving that post-Netanyahu Israel is no longer is an independent regional player willing to stand up to the U.S., reverting instead to the status of an obedient client) revoked her policy of coordinating with Israel when the latter undertakes air raids in Syria (which is in order to interfere with weapons consignments, or with such Iranian units specifically tasked with targeting Israel from close to the latter’s borders); (b) the imminence, within a few months, of Iran’s achieving military nuclear capability (in face of the unrelenting overt declaration of intent to obliterate Israel, which is not infrequently accompanied by the use of Axis-related propaganda), the threat being quite concrete (in contrast to speculation in U.S. news media about the Taliban in Afghanistan having appointing a new chief of Afghanistan’s fledging peaceful nuclear agency, and the Taliban refusal to rule out that they could seek to militarise nuclear energy); (c) the fall of Kabul owing to the U.S. pulling out the

carpet from under the feet of the pro-U.S. Afghan government (both Presidents Trump and Biden bear the responsibility for this) underscores that reliance upon the U.S. could be ultimately lethal for Israel, whereas regional enemies promptly declared the expectation that Israel would fall like Kabul (e.g., Hamas declared: “The world will accept the expulsion of Israel”, and see below; this came after during the same summer, Hamas had declared, concerning the militias’ summer camps for children, that it is educating the children to be the generation that will accomplish the extermination; the expectation of annihilation of every Jew in the world is part and parcel of the Hamas Charter which is the constitution of the Gaza Strip; and in late September 2021, a Hamas-sponsored conference held in Gaza discussed what to do practically after Israel’s destruction); and (d) the slippery slope (reminding of how Britain’s Labour party accommodated Jeremy Corbyn’s extreme hostility, eventually leading to his leadership) of U.S. Congress Democrats to accommodate (and even take action seconding) extreme anti-Israel hostility of Congresswomen such as Rashida Tlaib, even when it comes to routine replenishment of a vital defensive-only capability (the Iron Dome antimissile system that prevents thousands of civilian casualties in Israel owing to the concentrated launch of thousands of Iranian-manufactured or Iranian-technology rockets from the Gaza Strip. Thus without the Iron Dome, Israel would be forced into total war on Hamas, because of the *primum vivere* principle).

Add to this, dysfunctionalities increasingly perceived by Western allies as disabling, in both the White House under successive presidents, and the U.S. Congress: budget-related in the latter case, with threats to stop salaries to millions of civil servants, but also relating to the budgetary underpinnings of international relations. In a sense, like with ancient Roman emperors, the sheer power of the U.S. entails that nearly every U.S. president would be inadequate to the global task (as leader of the West), with negative effects on at least some other countries; there is no obvious solution to this.

That the U.S. and U.K. declared disengagement from Afghanistan is in order to pursue a more aggressive containment policy towards China (unrelated to genocidal actions in Xinjiang, massive internment and tortures, as well as the forced sterilisation of ethnic Uighur women, about which Western leaders are unfazed), and that weeks after the fall of Kabul this found expression in an all-Anglo-Saxon alliance of the U.S., U.K., and Australia cancelling a military supply of the latter with France, underscores the crisis of the very concept of a Western alliance. Israel was perceived (including by Nehru) as a U.S. ally already when in the early 1950s Israel paid lip service to the Western camp in Korea, and that at a time when the U.S. disliked Israel, perceived as weak, Jewish, and socialist. Nehru’s (a prelude to Indira’s) total lack of sympathy for Jewish national aspirations were opportunistic as well as ideological, but overshadowed by the Mahatma Gandhi’s call for the Jews to gracefully submit to annihilation as eventually the perpetrators would repent (e.g. my mother’s perception of him was as a hypocrite), even though he was on friendly terms with some Jewish intellectuals; only recently a critique of this attitude of Gandhi (perhaps paralleling the emergent critique of his anti-Black prejudice) on the periphery of India’s intellectual circles.

See Navras Jaat Aafreedi (ed.), *India’s Response to the Holocaust and its Perception of Hitler*, a thematic issue of the New York alternative magazine *Café Dissensus*, 31 (20 January 2017), http://www.academia.edu/36554468/Indias_Response_to_the_Holocaust_and_its_Perception_of_Hitler

Bear in mind that already during the Taliban’s first period in power in Afghanistan, such measures had been taken (including the imposition of a badge for recognition) that the presence of a Hindu minority was erased. In 2021, the last local Jew fled Afghanistan. A parallel between the fall of Kabul and the hoped-for fall of Israel was drawn e.g. by the British-Palestinian BBC Arabic, Sky, and CNN TV pundit Abdel Bari Atwan, in an interview to the Lebanese channel Mayadeen TV on 19 August 2021, gloated that Israel’s fall would be more extreme than Kabul’s, as the inhabitants will not be able to use the airport (images of Afghans falling off the fuselage, the outside of which they had groped, of airplanes in Kabul were fresh in the minds of a global audience) and that their only possibility to escape would be by swimming to Cyprus: ‘they will have no other option but to flee through the sea. By Allah, they should listen to the advice of Hassan Nasrallah and start learning how to swim because their only option will be Cyprus, their only option will be the Mediterranean Sea’. During the interview, the television host smiles as Atwan makes a reference to Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and jokes about Israelis swimming to Cyprus. Atwan also references a 1995 meeting he had with then Palestine Liberation Organisation leader Yasser Arafat in Tunisia, well after the signing of the Oslo agreements (after signing, Arafat had publicly declared in Arabic that agreements with Jews do not have to be kept). “In July 1995, I met with President Yasser Arafat in Tunisia. [...] Arafat offered me to take a walk outside. It was at night, around 1 AM. So, we went out to take a walk and he told me: ‘By Allah, you will see the Israelis fleeing Palestine, like rats fleeing a sinking ship’. He told me: ‘You will get to see this in your time. I will not live to see that day, but you are much younger than me, and you will get to see this’. ‘Today I believe that prophecy will come true’, he adds”. The Simon Wiesenthal Centre tweeted: “That didn’t take long. Genocide-seeking haters of Jewish state inspired

by Afghanistan debacle”. Both the transcript and footage (with captions in English) of Atwan’s interview appear at the website of a Washington-based media watch. See “British-Palestinian Journalist Abdel Bari Atwan: Kabul Airport Events Will Repeat At Israel’s Ben Gurion Airport; Israelis Should Learn To Swim; Arafat Told Me In 1995 That I Would Live To See The Israelis Fleeing Palestine Like ‘Rats Fleeing A Sinking Ship’, MEMRI, 19 August 2021, <https://www.memri.org/tv/british-palestinian-journalist-abdel-bari-atwan-israel-kabul-repeat-ben-gurion-yasser-arafat-fleeing-rat>

One of the reasons levels of hatred were allowed to attain such levels is that in its relations with the Middle East such as during the conquest of Iraq bringing about a change of regime, the Allies have not been interested in the least in seeing to it that the local authorities would cease to dehumanise Israel or the Jews (cf. the massacre of the Jews in Baghdad being let to run its course on 1 and 2 June 1941, even though the British army was present). Thus, after the fall of Saddam an Iraqi member of parliament flew indirectly to Israel, and spoke to an audience of Iraqi Jews who had come as refugees in the early 1950s. The hall acclaimed him. Immediately, his children in Iraq were killed, and the Iraqi parliament decided to punish him. On 24 September 2021, a conference in Erbil, the capital of the autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan, attended by 300 Sunni and Shi’a Iraqi notables urged to make peace with Israel and to rebuild ties with the dispossessed, exiled Iraqi Jews. This triggered a witch-hunt, as the Iraqi authorities, in a chorus led by the country’s president and prime minister, responded with arrest warrants (invoking a law that makes it a crime to advocate what the conference advocated), and Iranian-backed Shi’a militias vowed to inflict death upon the delegates. (In both Lebanon and Iraq, some people would not be averse to peace with Israel, but this is thwarted by a legacy of hatred and by the fact that both countries have become satellites of the Republic of Iran, whose will is more fully imposed through militias. In the autumn of 2021, Iran’s foreign minister declared that the war against Israel has already begun, and Iran falsely accused Azerbaijan, which has good relations with Israel, of harbouring Israeli troops. Iran’s jaundiced view of independent Azerbaijan is fuelled by suspicion, owing to there being an Iranian Azerbaijan that the northern neighbour may covet.) The Jewish News Syndicate columnist Ben Cohen in New York wrote: “One might have hoped that the United States – which continues to participate in military efforts to counter the Islamists of Da’esh, wields some influence in Baghdad and is explicitly committed to expanding the Abraham Accords – would have welcomed the Erbil conference and spoken out in defense of those participants now being hunted down. But an official statement from the U.S.-led coalition would only state they ‘had no prior knowledge of the event, nor do we have any affiliation with its participants’. As Robert Satloff of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy think-tank pointed out in a tweeted response, the question was not whether American officials had advance knowledge of the conference, but ‘whether, on a policy level, the U.S. government supports the right of brave Iraqis to gather in support of the U.S. goal of broadening the Abraham Accords and peace with Israel’. Given the current bleak political mood in the United States, there is little reason to pursue those goals, especially if doing so antagonizes the Iraqi government. The Biden administration’s silence suggests that they will only talk up the Abraham Accords when an Arab government announces its intention to make peace. Those Arab citizens who want to make peace with Israel in spite of their rulers are effectively being told that they are on their own” (<https://www.jns.org/opinion/iraq-persecutes-its-heretics/> dated 1 October 2021). Arguably then, there is nothing special in Nehru’s or Indira Gandhi’s attitudes to the Israel/Arab conflict, *vis-à-vis* Western attitudes, except in that Western leaders have sometimes adorned with a veneer of decency a Realpolitik that sometimes does not balk at letting the conflict fester for perceived self-interest.

There is more to it. Indian troops were involved in the Second World War Allied effort, including during the conquest of Iraq after one month of pro-Axis government, but the British army deliberately allowing the massacre and pillaging of the Jews to proceed undisturbed until rioters began to also target high-street shops owned by non-Jews set a pattern that is arguably useful for understanding even 21st-century politics. The 9/11 attacks of al-Qaeda in the U.S. took place right after the World Conference against Racism held in Durban, South Africa, in September 2001, and that conference was anything but intended to combat racism: it has been the blueprint for 21st-century antisemitism globally. Irwin Cotler, a Canadian Jewish academic and former Minister of Justice and Attorney-General of Canada, attended that conference. “On September 10th, I flew back from South Africa to Canada. On September 11th, we witnessed 9/11. As one of my colleagues put it at the time, ‘If 9/11 was the Kristallnacht of terror, then Durban was the Mein Kampf’. Those of us who personally witnessed the Durban festival of hate have forever been transformed, by the pamphlets and posters of hate and antisemitism; the cartoons and leaflets depicting Israelis as Nazis and Jews with fangs and hooked noses; who were solicited with the notorious antisemitic tract ‘The Protocols of The Elders of Zion’. We witnessed demonstrators with signs that ‘Hitler should have finished the job’, and we witnessed Jewish students physically threatened with mobs screaming, ‘You don’t belong to the human race’. ¶ For us, Durban is part of our everyday

unconditionally the next day (352). She refused to testify in front of a commission, “on the grounds that it would violate her ministerial oath of secrecy” (352). “The commission wound up its hearings in March 1978 without having questioned her” (353). “The Janata government lasted for only twenty-eight months” (356). Indira Gandhi’s arch-opponent, Jayaprakash Narayanan, had died on 8 October 1979, and disagreements within the Janata much worsened afterwards. This opened the door to Indira’s comeback, which is the subject of the section “Indira’s Return and End” (366). She “was sworn in as prime minister for the fourth time on January 14, 1980”, but Sanjay, aged 33, died in an air crash on 23 June 1980. Her other son, the more distant Rajiv, who had stayed away from politics and worked as an airline pilot, was to succeed his mother upon her assassination on 31 October 1984. The Epilogue sums up Prakash’s arguments. This is a book that is informative, readable, and well argued.

Ephraim Nissan

lexicon as a byword for hate and antisemitism, just as 9/11 is a byword for terrorist mass murder. Simply put, Durban emerged as a ‘tipping point’ for a new wave of antisemitism masquerading as anti-racism” (<https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/the-durban-legacy-of-hate-20-years-later/> dated 24 September 2021. Cf. <https://forward.com/news/475320/20-years-ago-the-un-durban-conference-aimed-to-combat-racism-it-devolved/> which gives voice to the recollections of panellists, is also concerned, with important details, with that “carnival of antisemitic expression that drove Jewish participants to tears each night and had them fearing for their physical safety”; “I saw grown men crying, weeping”. “At that press conference, before we started, a phalanx of Iranian women in black rush the press conference and try to push over the” podium. “The Arab Lawyers Union also distributed pamphlets filled with caricatures of hook-nosed Jews depicted as Nazis spearing Palestinian children, dripping blood from their fangs, with missiles bulging from their eyes or with pots of money nearby”. The trade unions brought by train 20,000 persons to Durban to take part in the mayhem, and “the famous picture of the banner ‘Hitler was right’ was hoisted”; the chief of the police warned a rabbi not to dare walk a short distance). From the next few years, I recall how a BBC Radio 4 lady newsreader would repeat a mantra, claiming that terror against the West is illegitimate, terror against Israel is legitimate. Even as a global war on terror was waged by the West (sometimes with stolid moves), it was a basic implicit tenet that whatever would happen to the Jews is the Jews’ problem only. And this even when links were obvious. Partly owing to the November 2008 Bombay terror attacks (which in part were against a local Jewish religious and welfare centre: the Jews were killed right away, not taken hostage), India saw this more clearly than Europe and North America bothered to do. This is why I do not trust the West to see to it that another Holocaust would never happen again.