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CARTOONING THROUGH CRISIS: THE CASE OF ABU IN INDIA'S EMERGENCY YEARS 1975-77

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Artículo || Recibido 25/11/2022 | Aceptado: 23/05/2023 | Publicado: 07/2023

DOI 10.1344/452f.2023.29.13

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Abstract || This paper is an attempt to understand the communicative potential of political cartoons in the face of censorship. The Emergency Years in India (1975-77) saw the most stringent censorship of mass media in the public sphere in independent India, and thus has been chosen as the period of study. The cartoonist Abu Abraham, who continued to draw cartoons for the national daily *Indian Express* throughout the period and claims to have not been disturbed much by censorious authorities becomes the axis of this analysis. Taking cues from theorists Judith Butler and Louis Althusser, the paper focusses on the techniques and strategies employed by Abraham in his cartoons that allowed most of his cartoons to pass through the censorship filters, and still make an impact on the general public.

Keywords || Censorship | Satirical political cartoons | Emergency | Speech act theory | Abu Abraham | Offensive cartoons

Dibuixant a través de la crisi: el cas d'Abu en els anys d'Emergència 1975-77 a l'Índia

Resum || Aquest article és un intent de comprendre el potencial comunicatiu de les caricatures polítiques davant la censura. Els anys de l'Emergència a l'Índia (1975-77) van ser testimoni de la censura més estricta dels mitjans de comunicació a l'esfera pública a l'Índia independent; per això s'ha escollit com a període d'estudi. El caricaturista Abu Abraham, que va seguir dibuixant vinyetes pel diari nacional *Indian Express* durant tot el període i afirma no haver estat molt importunat per les autoritats censors es converteix en l'eix d'aquest anàlisi. Prenent com a referència els teòrics Judith Butler i Louis Althusser, l'article es centra en les tècniques i estratègies emprades per l'autor en les seves vinyetes, que van permetre que la majoria de les seves caricatures passessin pels filtres de la censura i siguessin causant impacte en el públic en general.

Paraules clau || Censura | Caricatures polítiques satíriques | Emergència | Teoria dels actes de parla | Abu Abraham | Caricatures ofensives

Dibujando a través de la crisis: El caso de Abu en los años de Emergencia 1975-77 en la India

Resumen || Este trabajo es un intento de comprender el potencial comunicativo de las caricaturas políticas frente a la censura. Los años de la Emergencia en la India (1975-77) fueron testigos de la censura más estricta de los medios de comunicación en la esfera pública en la India independiente; por ello se ha elegido como periodo de estudio. El caricaturista Abu Abraham, que siguió dibujando viñetas para el diario nacional *Indian Express* durante todo el periodo y afirma no haber sido molestado mucho por las autoridades censoras se convierte en el eje de este análisis. Tomando como referencia a los teóricos Judith Butler y Louis Althusser, el artículo se centra en las técnicas y estrategias empleadas por él en sus viñetas, que permitieron que la mayoría de sus caricaturas pasaran los filtros de la censura y siguieran causando impacto en el público en general.

Palabras clave || Censura | Caricaturas políticas satíricas | Emergencia | Teoría del acto de habla | Abu Abraham | Caricaturas ofensivas

0. Introduction

Several events of global and local significance in the last couple of decades have rendered the efficacy and offensive potential of political cartoons undeniable and hard to ignore. Even if the Danish cartoon controversy (2005) and the Charlie Hebdo attacks (2015) could be downplayed as acts of religious fanaticism, such is not the case with examples taken from India. In India, satirical political cartoons have been a continuous battleground for freedom of expression against censorious authorities. In the year 2012, cartoonist Aseem Trivedi was charged with no less than charges of sedition for his cartoons depicting the Indian Parliament. In the same year, cartoonist Satish Acharya was arrested for satirising a political leader and her actions in West Bengal, while a university professor was charged for merely sharing via email a cartoon satirising the same leader. These incidents implore us to analyse the nature and intensity of the effect that cartoons have on those they target, resulting in these volatile reactions of the censorious powers-that-be. This paper is thus an attempt at exploring the various facets of this complex life cycle of satirical political cartoons as it clashes with censorious powers in the Indian public sphere. The freedom of expression offered by the digital age in the globalized world has ironically functioned like a mousetrap for those who have found themselves dealing with legal charges from different corners of the public sphere, but most notably from political leaders. The simple question that serves as the starting point for this analysis—why and how do cartoons hurt?—leads us to a plethora of related questions. What threat does the subject observe on being drawn as a cartoon and being laughed at? Despite the absence of any possibility of physical injury, what leads to such a volatile retaliation as physical attacks? Why is laughter perceived to be so damningly dangerous and threateningly inescapable? As it seems crucial at this juncture to evaluate the course of this interaction between satirical political cartoons and threatened authorities who retaliate with censorship, this paper attempts to do it by going to the very beginnings, as it were, of this interaction in independent India: The Emergency Years (1975-77)¹. This period witnessed perhaps the first instance of censorship of mass media in independent India and arguably played a pivotal role in setting the tone for the interaction between a range of mass media and the state. The focus in this paper will be on the Kerala-born cartoonist with the pen name of Abu Abraham who drew for the *Indian Express*, one of India's leading national dailies, during this time and, despite evidence of several of his cartoons being banned by the Chief Censor, claims to have been allowed to carry on almost as usual during the turbulent times. His cartoons and this claim made by him prompt us to turn our attention to the changes that the subject positions of citizens of India were forced to undergo during these years as certain rights that they took for granted were taken away. Though this paper does not delve into theoretical details about satire, it locates the cause of hurt that

<1> In Indian history, the Emergency or the Emergency years refers to a period from June 1975 to March 1977 for which duration, misusing the provisions in the Indian Constitution, the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi suspended fundamental rights of the people of India. The years 1973-75 saw rising discontent against the Gandhi government that was perceived to be corrupt and inefficient. Meanwhile, the opposition's candidate who faced Gandhi in the 1971 General Elections filed a case of electoral malpractices against Gandhi. This case has been recounted in detail by Prashant Bhushan in his book *The Case That Shook India*. As the court ordered that Gandhi step down as PM, she is known to have fallen to the advice of her son Sanjay Gandhi and his coterie to impose an Emergency which would give her time to make such amendments to the Constitution that the court's order may not hold. Indira Gandhi responded by taking away the fundamental rights of the citizens on the pretext of internal disturbances in the country, gagging the Press, making significant amendments in the Constitution through a truncated Parliament (as many opposition leaders had been arrested) et al.

Abu's cartoons caused in this forceful change of subject positions in the wake of censorship, thus aiming to shed light on the questions raised above through this lens. In this analysis, Abu's claim of being undisturbed and the humour in his cartoons are both conjectured to be deceptive attempts to steer clear of the stringent censorship. Two sources of primary material gave access to all the cartoons Abu drew during this time: one, Abu's own collection *Games of Emergency* in which he has compiled perhaps his most profound and hard-hitting cartoons from the period including some of those that were stamped "NOT TO BE PUBLISHED" or "NOT PASSED BY CENSOR"; and two, microfilm archives of the daily *Indian Express* June 1975 to March 1977 being maintained at the Nehru Memorial and Museum Library (NMML) in New Delhi (India). The cartoons analysed in this paper are representative of Abu's oeuvre of this period.

1. Citizenship and Subject-Positions in the Indian Context

The Emergency that was declared on June 26, 1975, by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, was debatably the first big jolt to liberty faced by the public in independent India. The professed aim of the Emergency was to protect the nation from anti-national elements and to bring efficiency and focus back to the country. All of the government's propaganda, however, could not suppress the widespread belief that the ulterior motive was the protection of Indira Gandhi's post as Prime Minister which was threatened by the 1975 Allahabad High Court judgement holding her culpable of electoral malpractices in the 1971 General Elections. Whatever the central reason might have been, the effects of the Emergency were real for the common folk and akin to a severe punishment for those employed in the Press. The biggest casualty was freedom of expression and freedom of the press. Electricity to all newspaper houses in the country was temporarily cut off to prevent reporting and opinion formation about the imposition of the Emergency. Among several other prohibitions, the most heavily enforced ones included commenting on the government, on the state of affairs in the country, on the Emergency directly or indirectly, and even upon the country's international relations with neighbouring countries. The last nail in the coffin was the Pre-Censorship Order that required publishing houses to submit all parts of their intended publication for prior approval of the Censor Board appointed for this role. For daily newspapers it meant an everyday race against time to create content, seek approvals, and print. For the cartoonists of the nation, this meant a plethora of actions to satirise but a lack of publishing houses willing to take the risk of offending the authorities by publishing those cartoons. Despite all these attempts of the government to control public opinion, it is evident that a formation of public opinion took place through 1975-77 which was expressed in the 1977 General Elections after the Emergency which resulted in

the defeat of the ruling government. It is in this context that this paper looks at the role of a cartoonist like Abu Abraham who famously remarked in the Foreword to his *Games of Emergency*:

After my first few Emergency cartoons, beginning with the two “speak-no-evil” monkeys, that appeared on June 28, two days after the Emergency was declared, pre-censorship was ordered. It was lifted after some weeks. It was again imposed a year later for another shorter period. For the rest of the time I had no official interference. I have not bothered to investigate why I was allowed to carry on freely. And I am not interested in finding out (Abraham, 1977: Foreword).

To investigate if and why Abu was allowed to carry on more freely than some others, or if even this claim was made with a view to making himself look non-critical and harmless, feels to be beyond the scope of this paper. The attempt will be to understand the communicative potential of his cartoons in order to point at the role he and others like him may have played in shaping public opinion through the 19 months of the Emergency. As part of the attempt, some insights will emerge also around the nature of interaction between censorship and subjects in a self-avowedly “free” country.

Given that freedoms and rights including the freedom of speech are available varyingly to citizens of different countries, and because censorship is essentially a curbing of this and other fundamental rights, it feels suitable to begin this analysis from an understanding of citizenship itself. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines a citizen as, “A native or naturalised person who owes allegiance to the government and is entitled to protection from it”. *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* flags a significant distinction between citizenship which it calls a “distinctively democratic ideal” and subject-hood which is the state of inhabitants in countries governed by monarchs or military dictators. It adds that “normative ideal” of citizenship in a democracy would entail that, “the governed should be full and equal participants in the political process”. Translated into crude terms, this would entail being recognized or seen by the State through a granting of rights and to recognize the State in return by performing duties. This reminds us of the moment that Louis Althusser uses to describe the initiation of a person into subjecthood in his essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”. He describes a policeman hailing a generic cry in the street: “Hey, you there!” (Althusser, 1970: 74)—in response to which an individual turns to see if s/he is the one being referred to. It is by being called or recognized and by responding to or recognizing that call that a person becomes, according to Althusser, a subject. Similarly, an individual may legally be a citizen of a country by birth/descent/naturalisation et al, but that citizenship is expressed and re-iterated by the individual through an exercise of their rights and performance of their duties as enshrined in the Constitution. While in the conventional sense citizenship is considered to be an inherently democratic concept and subjecthood the concept of an autocracy, Althusser uses the word “subject” to refer to all individuals who knowingly or unknowingly inhabit ideologies and

are thus subject to limits defined by that ideology. Believing in the law of the land indicates that the individual has internalised what is professed by the State as legitimate and thus the individual is likely to have a guilty conscience if or when s/he acts outside the limits of legitimacy defined by the State. Thus, to an extent, citizens too are “*always already* subjects” (Althusser, 1970: 75), as they are born into and re-iterate the ideologies that they inhabit. Viewed in this sense then, what does it mean for citizens of a democratic country when an Emergency is declared by the administrative head of the State? It would mean a sudden change in the limits of legitimacy as defined by the State they belong to. Should they fail to refashion themselves to suit the changed circumstances, this transactive bubble of rights and protection that the citizens inhabit would burst rendering them highly vulnerable to the Repressive State Apparatus.

Independent India adopted its Constitution on January 26, 1949, declaring itself to be a “sovereign, democratic republic”² and guaranteed its citizens such fundamental rights as the right to equality, the right to freedom (of speech and expression, education et al), the right against exploitation, the right to freedom of religion, the right to conservation of culture and the right to Constitutional remedies³. Article 19 of the Constitution specifically guarantees the right to freedom of speech and expression (among other freedoms) but also details the conditions under which this right may be suspended, as the concept of the absoluteness of any one right is not a feature of the Indian Constitution. It has been decided through judicial decisions that Article 19 includes the freedom of the press and also the right to dissent, even though it does not specifically mention these⁴. As journalist Kuldip Nayar (who was himself arrested during the Emergency) recounts in his book *Emergency Retold*: “Even though all fundamental rights remained suspended during the Emergency, the government issued orders specifically to suspend seven rights guaranteed by Article 19 of the Constitution” (Nayar, 2013: 155), and these included freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and the like. This was done through the Central Censorship Order, followed by the Prevention of Publication of Objectionable Matter Act (1976) and finally the Pre-Censorship Order which was applied and removed alternately. The gagging of the press was reinforced and heightened by various other big and small orders, often given orally and without record⁵. This expectation of a sudden change in subject-position seems to be the reason for the “panic” that Indira Gandhi expected would ensue amongst citizens when they heard her broadcast on the fated day: “The President has proclaimed the Emergency. This is nothing to panic about... I should like to assure you that the new emergency proclamation will in no way affect the rights of law-abiding citizens” (Rao Jr., 2017: 26). This panic can be seen well-articulated through Abu Abraham’s wordless cartoon published on June 28, 1975 (Figure 1)⁶, in the first issue of the *Indian Express* published since the declaration of the Emergency:

<2> Page no. 32 of the Constitution. A copy of the Constitution can be accessed at <https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/>

<3> Page no. 4-5 of the Constitution.

<4> As reported by Soli Sorabjee, the then Additional Solicitor General of India writes in his publication that came immediately after the Emergency was lifted.

<5> A record of these appears as Annexure II in Kuldip Nayar’s *Emergency Retold* (2013) and besides the Central Censorship Order, also includes recollections of phone calls from the government to journalists and press owners about which specific events would not be reported or how they would be reported. Another such record is present as an Annexure in Soli Sorabjee’s *The Emergency, Censorship and the Press in India* which was published immediately after the Emergency was lifted.

<6> Images of *Indian Express* pages are taken from the NMML archives.



Figure 1

The stock figures of Abu's cartoons, the two Congressmen seem to be shocked and scared as they say nothing and just cover their mouths with their hands instead, effecting a silent mutation of sorts. If there was a tagline, one can imagine that it would be something to the effect of: "I do not know what I can say anymore", or "Whatever I say will be the death of me". Abu referred to these figures in the Foreword to *Games of Emergency* as the "speak-no-evil monkeys" (Abu, 1977: Foreword).

These figures, however, seem to represent not only the party workers of the Congress but perhaps more aptly the commonfolk of the country who were taken by shock and did not know how to express themselves. Yet, these groups of people were not the only ones who faced such a jolt to their subject positions. It appears that even the head of the country, the President, underwent a re-calibration of his duties and authorities under the reign of the Prime Minister. From Gandhi's address to the nation that begins with the line "The President has proclaimed the Emergency", it appears that the President is either unwilling or deemed unfit to make the declaration himself. In other words, he has become more like a puppet in the hands of the Prime Minister who has officially advised and unofficially directed him to pass the orders. This is a sentiment aptly expressed in one of Abraham's cartoons (Figure 2) that made its way into the *Indian Express* published on December 10, 1975:

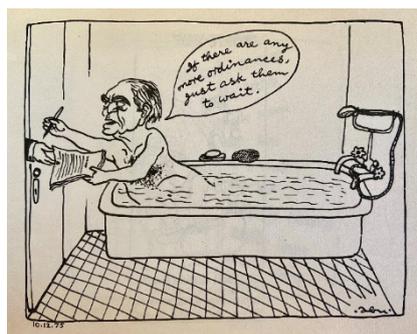


Figure 2

In this cartoon we see then President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed being prompted apparently by a peon or secretary to sign ordinances urgently while he bathes in a bathtub. The cartoon is reminiscent of the way in which the President was convinced or directed to pass the Emergency order in the middle of the night on June 25, 1975. But this cartoon is dated and published on December 10, 1975, which signals that this is possibly a comment on the various orders and ordinances that were passed during the Emergency routinely to prohibit specific actions and reports. There is no indication that the President is spending any time reading or debating these ordinances but just asks the peon/secretary to wait till he is out of the bathtub: "If there are any more ordinances, just ask them to wait". What becomes evident in this cartoon is the obvious change in the subject position of Mr. Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed from the top-most authority figure of the country to a pawn of the then government and Prime Minister who could get him to sign anything anytime. This altered subject position of the President is also consistent with historical records that hardly show his presence, except as a signatory on ordinances and orders. He seems to have had effectively refashioned his subjecthood to sail through the times.

It is from this perspective that this paper proposes to look at censorship: not something that simply prohibits the speaking of some words or the performing of certain actions, but as a means of altering the legitimate and desirable ways of being for the subjects of the country. What is regulated then is not just speech but the subject position itself that defines the limits of legitimacy for the individual. It is not speech, but subjects who are effectively censored by recalibrating the limits of what is acceptable as ways of being and expression. It is notable here that the Central Censorship Order 1975 passed as a part of the Emergency proclamation defined "objectionable matter" as, "any words, signs or visible representations (a) which are likely to (i) bring into hatred or contempt, or excite disaffection towards, the government established by law in India or in any State thereof and thereby cause or tend to cause public disorder" (Sorabjee, 1977: 44). Even as the broad definition threatens to stifle any dissenting voices, Explanation II included in the order further states that: "In considering whether any matter is 'objectionable' under this Act, the effect of the words, signs or visible representations, and not the intention of the keeper of the press or the publisher or editor of the newspaper or news-sheet as the case may be, shall be taken into account" (Ibid.). Both these excerpts quoted above tell us something significant for our analysis: one, censorship was not limited to written or verbal content but practically any representations in any forms; and two, we must focus our attention upon analysing the effects and not the intentions of utterances if we are to truly gauge how political cartoons dealt with censorship.

2. Cartoons as Speech Acts in Times of Censorship

For this understanding of the effects of utterances on the one hand, and the workings of censorship on the other, we turn to contemporary theorist Judith Butler whose reformulations of J.L. Austin's Speech Act Theory and of Louis Althusser's ideas on subject-formation are significant in this context. Taking off from Althusser's ideas on the formation of a subject and his/her *a priori* initiation into ideology, in her work *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* Butler proposes language as the medium through which the formation of the subject takes place. This is prompted by her observation that vocabulary from physical hurt is routinely borrowed to explain offence caused through language. Words like "wound" and "injure" often used in the context of offensive speech suggest, on the one hand, the lack of vocabulary specific to linguistic hurt and on the other hand a possible close link between the linguistic being and the physical being. Butler focuses on the latter and suggests that it is by being "spoken" to or addressed in one or many ways that a person becomes a subject. However, she claims to depart from Althusser's assertion of the individual's response to hailing (verbal or otherwise) as the moment of initiation into subjecthood. She urges that this version of initiation into subjecthood seems to assume a sovereign, transcendental and/or pre-existing voice that initiates the subject into being while she hints that that voice must also simultaneously be analysed as a product of ideology. She claims to also differ from Austin in his view of subjecthood who, according to Butler's understanding of Speech Act Theory, suggests a sovereign entity who speaks and thus can be seen as the originator of the words and ideas s/he presents. She proposes that it is by being addressed by an "other" that one becomes a subject who is in turn capable of addressing others as subjects. While it is true that this initiation into subjecthood is based on an address, this address may not always be verbal and does not have an identifiable beginning and end. The fact that the addresser had at hand the verbal and socio-cultural vocabulary that enabled him to speak to the addressee and that the addressee found himself in a position to reply through the same channel shows that they have both already been initiated through other addresses into a social system that makes this interaction possible. Butler writes: "In such a case, the subject is neither a sovereign agent with a purely instrumental relation to language, nor a mere effect whose agency is mere complicity with prior operations of power" (Butler, 1997: 26). This is what establishes language (roughly understood as a mode of address) at the very heart of subjecthood, thus creating a fundamental dependency on the Other for one's subject position. This is what Butler terms our "linguistic vulnerability" (Ibid.): a subject is simultaneously a product of language and an agent with the power to use language to address others.

It is at several levels that Butler explains the offence caused through language. First, since our subject positions depend upon the Other's address, a derogatory address such as in an abuse threatens to push the subject into a subordinate position. It is this threat to our subject position that offends and threatens. Second, since subject position in a society determines not only our ideological well-being but also ultimately our physical well-being, this threat through language is perceived as a threat to the body itself. Butler writes: "Language sustains the body not by bringing it into being or feeding it in a literal way; rather it is by being interpellated into the terms of language that a certain social existence of the body first becomes possible" (Butler, 1997: 5). This "social existence of the body" is what is challenged, Butler asserts, when targeted with words that offend. This is what explains the routine use of vocabulary of physical hurt to explain the injury caused through words. The threat in this sense begins the performance of that which is threatened. Third, Butler prompts us to wonder also about the violence that language does by merely constituting a subject, making some things sayable and within the reach of that position and others outside. In our present analysis, the fact that the "self" and "other" here represent the subject and the representatives of State power respectively only makes our analysis more fruitful, as we may also be able to comment on the diffused nature of State power. To be recognised in a society as a subject of various ideological state apparatuses is essential to, and even synonymous with, finding a legitimate niche for oneself. Yet, that finding oneself goes hand in hand with losing oneself to and being limited to those ideological apparatuses that govern us. The apparatuses that define us also set the limits of our subjecthoods. This losing of oneself in ideology is what is profoundly evident in this cartoon (Figure 3) by Abu published two months before the Emergency was lifted in anticipation of what life would be like post Emergency.



Figure 3

We see an Editor of a daily newspaper talking on the phone and complaining: "It's unfair to lift censorship suddenly—we should be given time to prepare our minds". One could look at the proclamation and lifting of the Emergency as two points of sudden changes in the subject positions of all citizens. When the Emergency was

imposed, a lot that was sayable and legitimate suddenly became not just illegitimate, but punishable by law. Every citizen had to get used to a different kind of citizenship—one in which they could not speak their minds—, had to undergo forced vasectomies, had increased working hours, and had no access to opinions other than those of the government⁷. Once citizens (including newspaper editors) had found a niche for themselves in the changed ideological framework, another earthquake hit them: the Emergency was going to be lifted. Citizens who had adapted to such suppressed subject positions found themselves at a loss on how to conduct themselves when the restrictions governing their everyday actions were to be lifted. This was especially true of the press for whom freedom of expression was synonymous with survival and the Emergency had taken it away.

It is also significant to notice here that the altered subject positions under the new ideological framework of the Emergency were those that mastered self-censorship in order to avoid offending the powers-that-be. The editor in the above cartoon (Figure 3) seems to have survived through the censorship period, indicating that he did not fail to walk and talk on the lines dotted by the State. Hence his bafflement on the prospect of having to return to a pre-censorship state of affairs that required editors to be more daring in their search for versions of the “truth” at all times. This would signal the victory of ideology in an Althusserian analysis according to which once an individual internalises an ideology, that ideology becomes invisible to him/her as the individual starts to see it as the “natural” way of being. This leads to the individual regulating himself/herself according to the codes of conduct legitimised by the ideological apparatuses without the need of an external force to conduct himself/herself in that way. What the editor requires now is to unlearn the refashioning he had carried out on himself just a few months ago. Abu makes a sarcastic comment on the management of subjects by the government in a short write-up titled “Barefoot Humour” included in his book *Games of Emergency*:

The Minister of Fun and Humour, Mr. Hasyaram⁸, has declared that the Government is considering an amendment to the Constitution to make laughter a fundamental right... He revealed that the Government was considering a scheme whereby qualified jokers would be given the facilities to go to the slums and backward areas and spread laughter. It was the Government's policy to bring low-priced jokes to the masses and wipe the tears from the eyes of the less fortunate... (Abraham, 1977).

<7> As fundamental rights of the people of India remained suspended, and Indira Gandhi's 20 point programme (which included goals such as controlling inflation, reducing poverty et al) was already in place, Indira Gandhi's son Sanjay Gandhi who headed the Youth wing of the Congress Party came up with his own and additional 5 point programme. This included family planning as one of its goals but was the one goal most seriously pursued by Sanjay Gandhi's coterie. As weekly targets were given to various states to “motivate” men to get vasectomies, they forced men to get them to achieve those numbers. Different readings have blamed different parties involved: the boisterous Sanjay Gandhi, the indulgent mother Indira Gandhi, and even foreign pressure to reduce India's population from the US and the UN.

<8> This fictitious name is not without significance. “Hasya” in the Hindi language means laughter/humour and “ram” is a very common suffix used in many names in India and often suggests someone who does an excess of something. For example, Hasyaram would denote someone who indulges in laughter a lot.

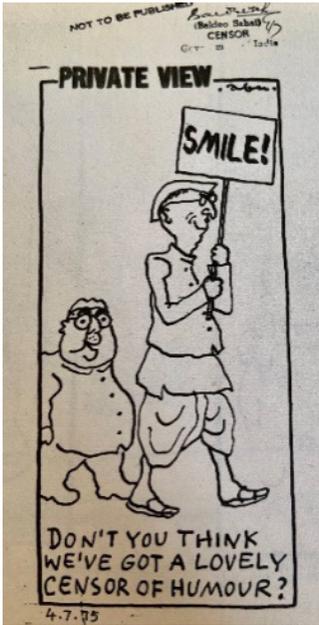


Figure 4

There are multiple comments on the state of affairs that we can read between the lines here. First, through the construction of the fictional post of the Minister of Fun and Humour Abu comments on the all-consuming controlling streak of the government: it will control everything in the citizens' lives from education to their fertility (through vasectomies) and even their indulgence in humour. This forced and controlled laughter imposed on the public is satirised in this cartoon (Figure 4) that was stamped "NOT TO BE PUBLISHED" by the Chief Censor on July 4, 1975.

The message seems to be clear: despite everything, "SMILE" and say that we have a "lovely censor of humour" even as a sense of humour is strongly discouraged. Second,

by making the less fortunate laugh, the cartoon alleges, the government perhaps hopes to draw their attention away from their misfortunes and the nation's condition such that laughter could function as a distraction for the masses. This view is supported by the passage quoted above in which the government's policy of sending low-priced jokes to the masses is directed at making their sorrows go away and making them "laugh it out", as it were. Thus, what Abu seems to hint through this cartoon and the write-up excerpted above is that the government would not leave even the sphere of humour unregulated. It would try to control potential satirists in such a way that they would only manage to provide low stakes jokes to the masses. If we take M.H. Abrams's definition of satire from his *A Glossary of Literary*

Terms, satire is "the literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking towards it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn, or indignation" (Abrams, 1999: 275). In this sense then, Abu hints that the government would try to take the satirical edge off from the content that would reach the masses so that they were left with hollow humour which could be self-effacing, scatological and the like. This cartoon also suggests that the masses would be made into passive observers such that they would even appreciate the censors who are censoring the humour that reaches them. Thus, humour, instead of causing the masses to cast a critical look at the subject, would be made to function as a distraction or anaesthesia. Thus, finally, there is also a simulta-



Figure 5

neous laughable attempt by the government to curb satiric laughter by co-opting the domain of laughter on the one hand and expecting “self-regulation” from those who make others laugh on the other. This kind of self-regulation is what becomes the subject of one of Abu’s cartoons published within a month after the Emergency was imposed (Figure 5).

Exasperated and disappointed with editors who do not even attempt to challenge censorship and to subvert it through articles and cartoons, one party worker asks another in Figure 5: “What do you think of editors who are more loyal than the Censor?”. It is submissive editors like the ones mentioned who represent the “victory” of ideology over individuals. In their attempts to tame humour and everything else as directed, they have ended up with obligated loyalty which can only be seen as reprehensible in the field of journalism.

When censorship is diffused around the subjects in this way and affects them from all quarters including from within themselves, it becomes far more complicated to be able to pin-point what a subject is actually responding to: an external but diffused form of censorship or an internalised one that the subject has actualised within. This observation complicates the lines between the oppressor and the oppressed, the subject and the object, between the State that censors and its citizens who are censored, thereby also complicating the question of agency as will shortly become apparent. Butler helps understand this paradox by challenging the wholeness or completeness of all speakers. She points out that the one who speaks is never simply an individual or a sovereign independent subject but a “subject-effect” which could be understood as a composite of intersecting processes and ideologies that create that unique subject-position. With this in mind, Butler challenges the idea of the completeness of speech acts by pointing out what she sees as a “constitutive difficulty” (Butler, 1997: 3) in J.L. Austin’s formulation. Austin distinguishes between three kind of speech acts: locutionary speech-acts that refer to simply utterances that are understandable by others, illocutionary speech acts that make an action happen the moment the words are uttered (for example in the statement “I pronounce you man and wife”); and perlocutionary speech-acts that refer to utterances that persuade the addressee to perform an action or change their opinions (for example in the statement, “I urge you to pass me the salt”). Austin however insists that these three may not always be easily identifiable and distinguishable and hence an analysis of the “total speech situation” (Ibid.) is required to clearly understand the effect of a speech act. It might be useful to mention here that much like the Central Censorship Order which defined “objectionable matter” quite broadly to include words, signs, and visual representations, we may extend the concept of speech-acts to include not just words but also signs and even visual representations like cartoons. While all speech acts are dependent on contexts in some manner and degree, Butler focusses on the performative element in speech acts and asserts that since

they depend on linguistic conventions and connotational meanings set by tradition for those situations, understanding them adequately requires us to analyse various factors even beyond the immediate context of the utterance. Speech acts are endowed with a historicity constituted of their past usages which have gradually become a part of the connotational meaning of the word or phrase itself but cannot be traced back to its origins with any certainty. This suggests the meaning of the words does not just lie within the context of the moment of utterance, instead it seems to derive from elsewhere that is outside of the grasp of this moment and thus forever outside the reach of analysis. It is this “constitutive difficulty” that Butler recognises and observes that a speech act always already exceeds itself: it can never just be contained within the moment of its utterance.

This challenge to the completeness of an utterance is quite applicable and relevant to an analysis of satirical political cartoons as well for various reasons. First, satirical cartoons are by nature a response to something, be it a person or a situation. The targets of the satire are mimicked in cartoons, or they are indirectly present through a depiction of the effects their actions have had on others around them. Thus, the meaning of a cartoon never simply lies within the cartoon itself: we must first understand the situation that a cartoon is responding to and/or the personality traits of the people featured in that cartoon. Second, there is observably an attempt on the part of cartoonists to have an impact on the targets of their satire such that they may correct themselves or mellow down as a result of the laughter that the public hurls at them. This is what several theorists including Henri Bergson have identified as the social function of laughter. The society uses laughter as a corrective force for eccentric individuals and as what Bergson terms the “momentary anaesthesia of the heart” (Bergson, 1964: 5) for the people laughing so as to avoid sympathy for the target ruining the enjoyment of laughter. If we look at satirical political cartoons as attempts to act as mirrors held up to eccentric individuals in the expectation that they may change course, we would be looking at cartoons as partly illocutionary (performing by saying it) and partly perlocutionary (commands or requests) speech acts. Consider the following cartoons by Abu (Figures 6 and 7):



Figure 6



Figure 7

Commenting on the blatant amendments to the Constitution, Abu's stock characters in Figure 6 are seen discussing ironically that they would be forgiving towards any amendments in the Constitution as long as some loopholes in them ensure that the citizens' rights are protected. What this cartoon effectively does is signal to those responsible for these unnecessary amendments that the citizens can see through their act. In Figure 7 we are presented with a more obvious way of revealing what Bergson calls the "inelasticity" (Bergson, 1964: 7) of those in power. Here the stock figures have given up talking about the citizens entirely and just mockingly say that they would be accepting of any changes in the Constitution "so long as the Constitution changers remain supreme". This comment mocks those who have made a mockery of the Constitution by changing it erratically and selfishly while constantly holding themselves above the dictates of law. These cartoons thus function as a way of signalling to the powers-that-be that their ulterior motives are evident to the citizens and that they should change their course. The following two cartoons (Figures 8 and 9) contribute further to this analysis:



Figure 8



Figure 9

These two are best read together as they are both responses to the 20 point programme launched by the government during the Emergency. The programme was comprised of twenty points which were meant to increase overall discipline amongst the masses, increase productivity, increase working hours, prevent the spread of rumours and so on. Figure 9 enacts what could be seen as an illocutionary moment of the assertion of the 20 point programme that made people "Work More, Talk Less"⁹. Yet, by attributing that commandment to a parrot who is well-known for simply mimicking what it hears, Abu has managed to turn the cartoon into a perlocutionary moment through which he is calling out the powers-that-be on how they have practically caged the masses, and thereby urging them to undo the situation. This is also a comment on those citizens who advocated the Emergency and now recount the "gains of Emergency", hinting that they are no better than a caged parrot who aimlessly mimics what it hears. Figure 8 is a wordless way of perhaps saying: the 20 point programme hurts like a bed of 20 nails and the determination of a yogi is required to survive it. Thus, both cartoons, by being bitingly critical of the situation, are meant to nudge the government to lose their inelasticity—much like in Bergson's

<9> Inefficiency in people, especially in government offices had been highlighted by the Indira Gandhi government as one of the areas where India needed to improve to be able to work more efficiently and develop faster. Since development of the country through its protection of the country from internal disturbances was the stated reason for the Emergency, there was immense emphasis at this time on doing your work well, being punctual and following orders especially in government offices. Another cartoonist RK Laxman has commented on this trend extensively in his cartoons of this period.

schematic in which the society laughs at eccentric individuals in order to streamline them. Figures 6, 7, 8 and 9 therefore cause what Butler categorises as “linguistic injury” in the context of insults or name-calling. These hurt by changing the context in which the targets view themselves and are viewed by others.

3. The Effectiveness of Censorship and the Possibility of Dissent

We now move on to considering the effectiveness and the nuances of censorship of such speech-acts. The question of agency and accountability is the foremost concern here. Given the fact that the speech act always exceeds itself because of its prior usages, its reliance on linguistic and cultural convention, and other factors, it follows that it is not possible to fix the originator of the complete message. If the words used carried connotations that prior usages gave them, then perhaps the speaker cannot be fully and solely held accountable for the effect they have on the listener. Further, if the body of the speaker which is an instrument of the utterance inevitably conveys more than the words spoken by the speaker, then s/he cannot be fully held accountable for what s/he perhaps felt but never really intended to convey. Agency, therefore, “is not a property of the subject”, says Butler (1997: 139). In other words, the “sovereign subject”, much like Levi-Strauss’s bricoleur, is a myth. In the cartoon featuring the parrot discussed above, for example, the words “Work More, Talk Less” actually came from the policymakers of the government themselves and the only addition that the cartoonist made was to attribute them to a parrot which in turn entirely changed the effect of the words. Similarly, one could question: who is the speaker in all these cartoons—the cartoonist or a narrative persona perhaps? On the one hand, this persona represents those citizens who are seeking their lost liberties, and on the other hand, the persona also represents those masses who have voted such a government to power. The masses are thus both victims and perpetrators. This presents a profound difficulty for any kind of explicit censorship: if the subject cannot be seen as the originator of the hurtful speech s/he has uttered then how do we fix accountability? And who do we punish?

Butler gleans over two major views of censorship: one, that “uncensoring a text is necessarily incomplete” given how decisions of an individual are already based on accepted conventions and expectations (what she terms “foreclosure”); and second, that “censoring a text is necessarily incomplete” as the text or act always already exceeds itself. She finds both views limiting as neither explains why certain acts of censorship are more effective than others. She is prompted to thus move away from the negative aspect of censorship and consider its productive aspect. Borrowing from the Foucauldian model of power, Butler asserts that “censorship is a productive form of power”, and what it produces are subjects through explicit and implicit forms of censorship. While explicit would include stand-alone

acts like banning things, implicit ways refer to the subtle production of malleable subjects through various discourses that go unnoticed. Butler asserts that “the production of the subject has everything to do with the regulation of speech” (1997: 133). Through the production of the subject, the delimitation of the sayable itself takes place. Since the formation of the rules and the norms itself take place through power, Butler asserts that the “task is not to speak against the law as if law were external to speak, and speech the privileged venue for freedom” (1997: 140). The only way to counter censorship in this view is to re-draw the rules and lines differently. This is what requires the persistence to push at the boundaries in order to constantly expand and exploit them. This is also where the agency of the individual lies. By being a body that consistently speaks and seeks to redefine the boundaries, the individual presents her/himself as the instrument through which the presuppositions of speech may be exploited as the body continues to exceed what is intended. Thus, for Butler, “The space between redundancy and repetition is the space of agency” (1997: 128).

To maintain this resilience, Abu has techniques other than the one discussed above that involved making ironical and mocking comments on the state of affairs. One of them was the use of what can be called linguistic quips. These too could be further categorised into two: quips using ordinary words (like in Figure 10), and quips using old and familiar sayings and proverbs (like in Figures 11, 12). In Figure 10, we see the party workers carrying a placard that was to have read “Save Democracy”, but a simple change has been made using a caret such that it actually reads: “Saved Democracy”. The implication is clear: democracy which was to be saved for the masses has been saved away from the masses themselves. Further, the title of Abu’s book itself, “Games of Emergency”, is a tweaking of the oft-used phrase at the time, that is, “gains of Emergency” which the government claimed to have achieved during the period. The change of the word “gain” to “Game” in the title hints at the government’s shenanigans/games just to stay in power and rule autocratically.

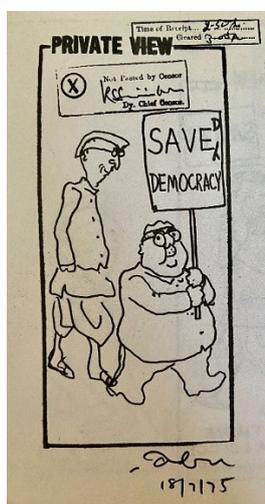


Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12

Figures 11 and 12 show the tweaking of pre-existing proverbs and sayings to carve out new meanings. The familiar saying “Ring out the old, ring in the new” has been edited in Figure 11 to read: “Ring out the old, ring in the old”. The contextual meaning becomes apparent as we read the relevant newspaper headline below that: “Congress Wants Lok Sabha’s Life Extended”. This, in effect, meant that Congress would stay in power by deferring General Elections to a later date. Hence the Congressmen are pretending to celebrate ringing out the old and ringing in the old. Figure 12 shows DK Barooah looking content, sitting comfortably in what appears to be a Press Conference while the text next to him reads: “Silence is golden, Dissent is silver”. The text is a tweaking of the familiar proverb “Silence is golden, speech is silver” which was meant to highlight the importance of silence over speech. Here, however it is dissent which is silver. As the Emergency intensified, Barooah gained prominence as the President of the Congress party. Thus, he is shown to be in a very contented space as he weighs his options to stay silent as Lok Sabha gets extended which will ensure continued power for him as Congress President, or to dissent against Gandhi by perhaps establishing his own political party and hoping to win the next elections. Hence, silence is golden but even dissent is silver. This was proven right in 1979 when Barooah truly separated from the Congress and set up Indian Congress (Urs).

<10> Source of Figure 13: <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/once-upon-an-emergency/>



Figure 13

Another technique that Abu used especially during the beginning of the Emergency was to have blank or wordless cartoons (like Figure 1) signalling that everything that he wanted to say would be considered “objectionable” by the Censor. This was in line with the policy adopted by the *Indian Express* to not toe the line and to keep attempting to push the boundaries of what could be expressed. On the same day, that is June 28, 1975, when the wordless Abu cartoon was published, the *Indian Express* also published a

blank editorial space (Figure 13).

Amongst other segments of the editorial page like letters to the editor and so on, should have also been the editorial article expressing the editorial board’s opinion of the happenings around but that is strategically left blank (in Figure 13) as if to say that all that the editors want to say would be deemed “objectionable matter” by the Censor. These blank spaces make the violence of censorship visible like nothing else can. The violence lies not only in the censorship of the

text or utterance, but also of the subject who wants to express but has had to accept prohibition. Abu turns our attention to this violence in the following cartoons (Figures 14, 15 and 16):



Figure 14



Figure 15



Figure 16

Figure 14 shows the beginnings of the censorship of subject positions through prohibitions on what they can express, and hence the party workers notice a change in public expression in the newspapers. Figure 15, very reminiscent of Orwell's 1984, makes apparent the thought control that the powers-that-be try to exercise over the masses: not only is expressing "objectionable matter" prohibited but so is the thinking of it. Finally, Figure 16 is an exasperated comment on the ultimate violence as the short and stodgy party worker talks about death: "If it is one's karma to die of prohibition it will be so". This one is particularly interesting because, when read together with the other two, it plays out the stages of the effects of censorship on the subject: prohibitions upon what is sayable and acceptable to express leads to curbing of "objectionable" thoughts over time which in turn leads to the "death" of the subject. To die here may not mean the end of the biological being but rather the end of the rational intellectual being of the subject who fails to cope with the environment of autocracy all around. In Butler's terms, this indicates the production of a new subject who has internalised the censorship around in such a way that s/he does not see dissent as an option.

4. Conclusion

However, it is efforts like Abu's and those of the Indian Express that still kept the spirit of dissent alive. The constant critical commentary through Abu's cartoons and the linguistic quips that make one laugh and think at the same time contribute to keeping scepticism alive in subjects. In fact, by prohibiting the publication of these cartoons, the Censor Board in a way acknowledged that these cartoons had the potential to hurt them, and, in the process, the hurt had already been caused to some extent, evident in their deteriorating image in the eyes of the masses. The blank spaces too have a similar effect

on the reader: not only do they catch the readers' attention, but also nudge them to "fill in the blanks" as it were, using their understanding of the situation and thus incentivise them to think critically. Thus, despite various attempts on the part of the powers-that-be to curb expression, thought and intellectual existence, it appears that many of the masses could see through their "games" and voted them out of power in 1977. This leads us to conclude, in a Butlerian way and beyond, how censoring a text is, all in all, ineffective, much like un-censoring is ineffective due to the "excess" that is inevitably said through any utterance and the "excess" in a thinking and analysing subject who, despite being under several regulatory forces, manages to observe and remain sceptical.

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