



The Sanjay Story

Vinod Mehta

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How did a nation of over 600 million people bow down to the whims and fancies of a Prime Minister's pampered son? In this carefully researched book, Vinod Mehta makes the first complete appraisal of the Sanjay Gandhi phenomenon and its impact on the national scene. It begins at Anand Bhavan, the Nehru mansion in Allahabad, and Feroze

Gandhi's relationship with the Nehrus – particularly Kamala and Indira. This gives the background to an understanding of Sanjay's volatile personality as it developed through his early years and his obsession with cars that led to the establishment of the Maruti factory. Writing in a style that is both compelling and honest, Vinod Mehta sifts the facts from the rumours and gets to the core of Sanjay's dramatic emergence after the declaration of the Emergency. His capturing of the Youth Congress and the excesses of the sterilization campaign (which he thought would ensure his place in history) are brought out in telling detail, as is the use of the media to build the cult of Sanjay.

With a new introduction, The Sanjay Story allows readers to look with the benefit of hindsight on the rise and fall of one of independent India's most controversial figures. What emerges from the text is not only an understanding of Sanjay and his times, but an understanding of India's current political scenario. Vinod Mehta confirms the truth of history writing – that to engage intelligently with the present, you must come to terms with the past, even a past as inglorious and bewildering as the Emergency.

The Sanjay Story Details

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Parambir says

1. I started this book with great expectations.....but it was an anticlimax. An ordinary story of a very ordinary individual who was allowed to create havoc during the Emergency. Why it happened still remains a mystery..... there are such divergent and biased views that one does'nt know whom or what to believe....even Vinod Mehta's conclusions are, at best, guesses/inconclusive. To his credit he has tried to remain neutral.
 2. Overall the book is described best by Vinod himself in his concluding para, " The Sanjay Story is really nothing but a rather squalid and commonplace tale of nepotism and opportunism".
 3. I am glad to have finished the book in the time that I did!!!
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Bigсна says

The Sanjay Story is not really his story in the true sense. It is more an amalgamation of snippets (some factual / some inferred / some derived) from here and there - that the author has had to gather in the absence of the opportunity to get information directly from the man this book is about.

When Vinod Mehta decided to write this book, he approached Sanjay Gandhi a few times to get him to agree to be involved in the project. He even tried to persuade Sanjay Gandhi by going through Maneka Gandhi, but to no avail.

Sanjay Gandhi was not willing to be a part of the book until he had full rights to veto everything that was written in the book. This was not agreeable to Vinod Mehta and he decided to go ahead and write the book anyway - Sanjay or no Sanjay.

So the book became a list of accounts that Vinod Mehta heard from various people and parties - pro-Sanjay and anti-Sanjay along with his own observations and experiences.

Written in 1976, at the height of the Emergency - the book picks up a few main incidents that shaped the public perception of the Sanjay Gandhi phenomenon. It starts before Sanjay's birth, in an attempt to analyze the reasons and lives that shaped Sanjay Gandhi's personality through his childhood and youth - and made him the kind of man that was known to invoke fear in many people.

While there is enough material to make one tip towards the anti-Sanjay line of thought or opinion, I was still confused and in want for more credible information to really make up my mind. The book goes a little haywire in terms of the timelines as well.

As has been customary in the past, I looked up information, interviews and any other details I could find online as well - to maybe gather a more complete picture of the man in question. However, what I came up with was either repetitive or nothing new. Even watched a 45 minute Simi Garewal Rendezvous with Maneka Gandhi - which was a totally different dimension and insight into Sanjay Gandhi - obviously but interestingly so.

To me, Sanjay Gandhi still remains the elusive, erratic and spoilt son of the Iron Lady - who surprisingly melted pretty easily when it came to her son's whims and fancies. It was as if she could never say no, to any tantrum her son threw and the country bore the brunt of it. She allowed him enough leeway to get out of hand and become powerful enough to play a pivotal role in some of India's most historically remarkable years. He managed to get away with a lot too and hardly bore any repercussions of the glaring misdoings of his time. His life story - as much as we know of it - and his sudden death are not quite what one terms as "normal". Which is why there is such prevailing interest in The Story of Sanjay.....

Even after reading this book, there remains an inherent need / desire for more information - to really understand the psyche of this "first family of India" as what they had were extra-ordinary lives - and it would

be quite interesting to get a 360 degree inside-out view of it.

Balachander says

I guess this is the difference between reading a book in the era it was written in and reading it decades later. What would have been a fresh, insightful, racy read in 1980 is now just a collection of well known facts and gossip. Vinod Mehta doesn't present this as some rigorously researched, scholarly work (how could it have been when the principal characters refused to allow themselves to be interviewed ?) and instead presents it as a loosely bound set of conversations, gossip, some research, interviews and speculation. All this is good fun at times though it is mostly, in keeping with the personality of the man, rather boring. Vinod does attempt to be more balanced with his analysis of the man and the fact that this was written in 1980 lends it some extra credibility. There are surprisingly few really humorous incidents from the subject's life which I find hard to believe taking into account how the lives of people like this (people with dictatorial mindsets, surrounded by sycophants) usually are when seen from a distance. I suppose it is because he was neither the first nor the last politician to make use of terror, violence, family background, sentiment etc to make a mark for him/herself. Neither is he the first well meaning politician, public figure to not deliver either because of lack of ability or an unwillingness to listen to contradictory views (Rahul G and Kejriwal come to mind easily). The sections on Maruti do have some of the farcical quality I expected from the rest of the book though. (I was not aware that the first incarnation of the brand ended with the production of 20 handmade cars and never reached the roads) The sections on "nasbandi" (possibly the most well known of S.G's "achievements" are interesting, partly because while horrifying, they also don't convey the terror that other writers have managed to fill them with. (I am thinking of sections of "A fine balance"). Vinod M while disapproving of how it was carried out seems to agree that people would have got themselves voluntarily sterilized, if enough time, explanation was provided and they had not been coerced. In all, this is a very quick, not uninteresting read. Don't expect any major facts/insights though.

Ashok Sridharan says

Authored by Vinod Mehta in 1978, The Sanjay Story is- as the title suggests- a biography of Sanjay Gandhi the person. The subject matter of this book is not Sanjay Gandhi the politician, but the person. Mehta recounts Indira Gandhi's story (to give context to Sanjay Gandhi's upbringing), Sanjay's childhood, the influences that shaped his character and his journey from a mediocre student to perhaps the most powerful man in India for a brief period of 20 odd months.

The author has attempted to narrate Sanjay Gandhi's life story as it is, without demonising or idolising the man. The book also explores his role during the emergency (1975-77), when civil rights were suspended and India came frighteningly close to becoming a police state. Vinod Mehta has also attempted to explain why Indira Gandhi, the iron-willed prime minister was so helpless when it came to her son, which in turn explains how he came to be such a powerful figure without ever holding any constitutional office.

Sanjay Gandhi comes across as a man who failed in nearly everything he tried his hand at, a man who loved automobiles but had neither the aptitude nor the patience to understand the mechanics of the automobile, resulting in a failed attempt at making the common man's car. He also comes across as a man who intended

to change things for the better, but lacked the ability to take people along, much less understand the root causes for the problems he was looking to eradicate.

Vinod Mehta has managed to present the facts objectively, unambiguously disclosing wherever he has expressed his personal views- a remarkable fact, considering this book was written just months after the horrors of the emergency ended and Gandhi was easily the most unpopular figure in India.

On the flip side, the book was written in the late 70s, when Gandhi was still alive. Much has changed since then, not least the fact that Gandhi himself died less than a year after the book was written. As one would expect from a contemporary work, the book does not (and cannot possibly) explore the consequences of Sanjay Gandhi's machinations and its legacy.

Nonetheless, this book is an excellent contemporary account of the events and one of the main actors in the emergency- easily the darkest chapter in post-independence Indian history.

Andrew says

Probably the best book on this intriguing scion of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty.

Mehta does a great job of painting a picture of what it must have been like to be grandson of India's first Prime Minister, and favoured son of Indira, India's third (excluding Nanda's short caretaking periods). At no point is his upbringing allowed to become an excuse, but it is used to explain the how Sanjay became so powerful in the mid 70s in India when he became a figure of hate for some (and adoration for others) on account of his escapades building the Maruti brand, largely with illicit loans from the government. Mehta carefully catalogues some of the worst abuses of the 75-77 Emergency (which Sanjay is credited with being behind) and includes numerous interviews help to bring the boy (he was still only 33 when he was killed performing acrobatics in his private plane) to life.

Given that he was brother-in-law of Sonia, father of Varun, uncle of Rahul and Priyanka, this is essential reading for anyone wanting to get their head round the extraordinary story of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty and its influence over the Congress Party.

Parvin Sultana says

Written by Vinod Mehta, it is perhaps the only biographical book on Sanjay Gandhi. In the words of the author himself, it is one of the quickies that were published immediately after emergency. While most books written on emergency does look at Sanjay Gandhi's role in it, this book goes way back to Sanjay's childhood, his Doon school days and tries to give a more holistic picture of the person who is often connected with the infamous emergency and the excesses related to it. The book for a change stays away from unnecessary glorification as well as demonization.

It brings forth a man who was average at best in every way with the faults of an average person intact. His not so illustrious academic career, his disdain for formal education goes a long way to explain the failure of Maruti. He didn't seem to be the right person for the job. Mehta revisits the excesses of emergency that were executed under the aegis of Sanjay Gandhi. He talks about the rehabilitation of the slum dwellers of Turkman Gate and the forced sterilization programme. While Sanjay Gandhi believed that the slum dwellers would be given better places to live, they were dumped in incomplete living quarters far from their work places. He also rightly believed the need of family planning and realized that incentive and not coercion

should be at play. But this went terribly wrong.

What this book does is moves away from the compulsion of pinning the blame on one person for the debacle of post emergency elections. It reiterates the need to look at the role of those around Sanjay who worked as his henchmen and subordinates and how they at times manipulated his limitations. In many cases it seems Sanjay was ignorant about the implications of the policies that he was initiating. But had he none the implications, would he have decided otherwise? One cannot say. Lastly the lucid writing style of Vinod Mehta makes it a good read.

Poonam says

Accidental though, I stumbled upon this awesome piece of work by Vinod Mehta. Incidences in the book were so baffling, took me time to believe, this was the India of 70's which was also existed. You can actually draw a parallel to the Nazi ideologies with that of the political era of India of 70's.

The facts and figures were so simplistically put, while keeping the sense of the book alive. This book would actually stir your soul and make you question the democratic independence of country like India and how it is misused by the bureaucrats of India. How the voice of common man is smashed and destroyed for the benefit of the leaders we proudly elect.

Anukriti says

This book is the most absolute, clear, authentic and most intriguing account of Sanjay Gandhi, one would ever find. Growing up one heard so many things about this controversial figure, his politics, his frenzied measures in "reform" and his erratic personality. This book is one thing that will grant you so many answers about this man and his truths. a well researched and beautifully written book. A must read for all those who ever wondered about Sanjay Gandhi and the Gandhi family on the whole. The accounts of his life are brief, personalized, supported by hard facts and extremely rare incidents.

Right from his adolescence to the time of his rise- a complete picture of his psyche and the reasons behind each and everything he did are offered to the reader. In many cases one gets to read things one always thought must be true but never really believed- Feroze Gandhi and Kamala Nehru; Sanjay and his obsession with women and Maruti; Feroze and Indira Gandhi's separation and the real reasons for it. So many explanations offered.

You dont like it when you finish this book. You want it to go on.....

Varun Nayak says

Controversy's favorite child, Sanjay Gandhi's meteoric rise, the ruckus he created during the Emergency and its aftermath and his sudden death has been a mystery to many. Written just after the Emergency was lifted, the Sanjay Story by Vinod Mehta traces the journey of Indira's favorite son, from his birth and early days in the Doon School to his fateful death in a plane crash in 1980.

Sanjay was an ace journalist of his times and the book is well researched; though he could not interview his primary subject, Mehta has made a conscious effort to meet people close to the younger Gandhi, giving us a good picture of what went into Sanjay's mind when he took some of his most controversial decisions like the setting up the Maruti Factory & the excesses during the Emergency, primarily Nasbandi (Family Planning).

There are times when you will feel that you are reading from Page 3 of Times Of India; however, the book is definitely a must read for all lovers of Indian politics, especially those with a keen interest in the Emergency Years.

Aditya Surti says

The Sanjay Story is not his Entire Story. This very well researched book documents Sanjay's rise and fall until his defeat in the 1977 UP Elections and is certainly a valuable insight into his role during the Emergency. I understand that this book was first published in 1978, when Sanjay was still alive; however the author could certainly have used his valuable research to write a more comprehensive version wherein he could have encompassed episodes of his victory in the 1980 UP elections and his subsequent and untimely death.

VENKATRAMAN C K says

I like Vinod Mehta's writing style. You can't put down the book. The authors point is that the entire episode of the sanjay cult reveals that in India we are capable of sychopancy on a large scale and that is the real danger and not the emergency. it is also scary that such a large democracy can be brought so easily into a autocratic rule so easily. We have so many institutions that the right hand does not know the left.

Maharsh says

The Sanjay Story is a good read for anybody wanting to familiarise themselves with him. It serves as a great introduction and encompasses his entire, albeit short life with fairly well researched information and most importantly the book comes across as fairly neutral. It is not an anti or pro stance to the man, but mostly simply documenting of his life with backgrounds that involve the family line right up to Motilal Nehru. It does get somewhat technical in parts and seems to stray away from the man, it is not a humane or a journey that contains personal details at all (could be on account of Sanjay Gandhi being extremely shy) and strives to tell the impact his life public had on the Indian junta.

Amit Tiwary says

The Sanjay Story is probably the only book on Sanjay Gandhi. Late Mr. Mehta has put in lots of effort in compiling this book. This book was written when Sanjay Gandhi was alive. Must have been difficult.

The book tries to analyze the mind/acts/persona of Sanjay and succeeds mostly. The book tries to throw light on why Sanjay Gandhi became a Sanjay Gandhi. Covers complete background, his relationships with parents/siblings/friends, almost all parts of his growing years.

Some part of it though smells like highly fictionalized but then that was going to happen anyways with Mr. Mehta.

Amit Tyagi says

Read this book not so much for the history of our country but to make better sense of our present, to know about the rise of some of the players on the political scene of today; and most importantly to realise how much of the criticism levelled against the uncle holds true in case of the nephew.

Ajay Muralidhar says

Mr. Mehta's style of writing is extremely effective. An unbiased take on the life of Sanjay Gandhi and his contribution to Indian Politics leading up to The Emergency period in Mid'70s.

Interesting to read the part about The Maruti Car factory and how its genesis was through a complex quagmire of fraud and mismanagement. One has to read "The Maruti Story" By R C Bhargava to know how the project was revived and made to be a Grand success story it is.

Mr. Mehta should write more than waste time on National News Channel debating with self centered & egotistical News Anchors.
