ASOKA MEHTA

A DECADE OF INDIAN POLITICS

1966-77

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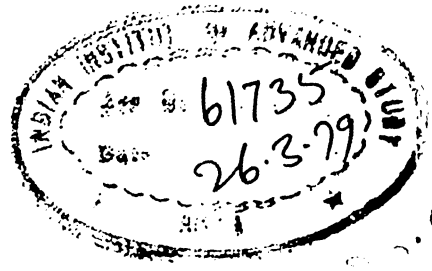

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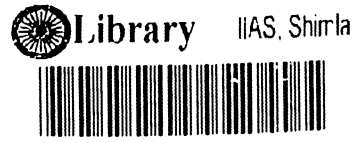

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Introduction

I had been privileged to preside over the first Acharya Narendra Dev Memorial Lectures delivered by Professor Menon. It was therefore with enthusiasm and alacrity that I responded to Guptaji's invitation to deliver current year's Lectures. For me any opportunity to pay homage to the memory of our leader is always welcome. The exalted norms that Acharya Narendra Dev observed in his public life can prove a source of inspiration in these depraved days. In company with the eminent nation-builders, he was atonce a politician and a teacher, a statesman and a scholar. The varied disciplines and devotions were meaningfully inter-twined in him : his politics was rooted in rectitude, anchored in principles. With him public work was a mode of *sadhana*, uncontaminated by narrow, crass considerations. Politics for him was service, not scheming, a mission, not manouevering. Both the style and substance of his politics were shaped by his attitude of sanctity towards it, to him politics and ethics were close co-ordinates. He had in him the gift of widening the horizon and deepening the humanity in all those who worked with him. While the nation saluted him for his intellectual eminence, he himself was conscious only of his humility. As a

guru, he delighted to see younger men forge ahead, no person for him could ever be a pawn of power. We enrich ourselves by seeking to light our little candles from the eternal flame that he has left behind.

Another irresistible attraction was the theme that was suggested for these Lectures : "A Decade of Indian Politics", obviously, the latest decade—one replete with dramatic developments, unexpected events and stern warnings. Strangely, the decade has witnessed decay in politics, degeneration in leadership, not in India alone but almost the world over. In 1968, of President Johnson it was said, "Secrecy, lies, half-truths, deception—this was the daily fare.... President Johnson is leaving office with perhaps the worst record for credibility of any President in our history."[1] But worse was yet to come : Spiro Agnew, Vice-President of the United States, and Tanaka, Prime Minister of Japan, were compelled to quit when exposed for corruption. President Nixon was forced to resign and barely managed to keep out of prison for his Watergate crimes. Rabin, the Israeli Prime Minister, had to step down when he was caught violating a law of his land. Both Mrs. Bandarnaike and Bhutto face serious charges against them in their countries. The saving grace lies in the fact that Nemesis in each case has struck quickly and in the exposure of the mal-

1. William J. Small : *Political Power and the Press*, p. 119.

odorous actions the Press and the Courts have played a notable part. There is a new vigilance among these organs of power, an overt insistence on rectitude. Nixon and Agnew had no occasion to face their voters, but Tanaka and Bandarnaike somehow managed to escape rejection by their constituencies. It was left to India to be truly sharp in vigilance : not only Mrs. Gandhi's government, but she herself were rejected at the polls. A fitting *denouement* to a dramatic decade.

Again, it is significant to watch the tumbling of women leaders, who had risen to power because of their close relationship to charismatic men : two of them—Madame Peron, President of Argentina, and Mrs. Bandarnaike, Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, were relicts of heroic husbands. Mrs. Gandhi's eminence was derived in no small measure from her proximity to her great father. These ladies could not sustain their elevation because basically they lacked leadership-timber. History, at the last moment, deprived Mrs. Mao from providing yet one more footnote of failure. One is driven to that sad conclusion because the only woman leader to leave a stamp of her personality as Prime Minister, was Mrs. Golda Meir of Israel, whose ascent to the high office was on her own merit—as it were a Sun-choice against the Moonchoices of reflected glory. Anyway these new experiences are a part of the ore that comes out of the rich seam of politics of the last decade.

Background : The Nehru Era

In developing the issues and theme of our subject it would not be possible to wholly isolate the decade from the earlier period. The decade is linked to its past through continuity as well as change. While it is true that one should respect the pastness of the past, that is, accept past upon its own terms, the filaments of continuity require us to relate it to the present also. Some of the ugly happenings of the last decade, the period of Mrs. Gandhi's stewardship of the country, were distortions of practices of the earlier period—the Nehru era. Some of these practices in their turn, were the holdover from the yet earlier and different period—that of the struggle for national freedom. It is not enough to evaluate personalities as legendary or loathsome, it is necessary to consider institutions behind them in order to uncover the causes of ultimate malfunctioning. A brief analysis on that account is called forth.

The political culture of India has been largely shaped by practices evolved by the Congress Party. The more important of them were adopted during

the time that the Congress confronted the British—that is in the thick of the liberation struggle. With the end of foreign rule they lost their relevance, but their anachronism has yet to be acknowledged. One such practice has been the centralisation of the process of selection of party candidates for Assemblies and Parliament. Another is the fairly firm rein maintained by the Central Parliamentary Board over the State governments. Yet another practice is the subordination of the Parliamentary wing to the organisation. These arrangements were justified because the Congress was engaged in struggle for freedom, and democracy under the British was only in name, largely a sham. Of the three practices enumerated above, the last was the first to crumble. After 1946 the top leaders were not only in the legislatures but manned the governments. Between 1947 and 1951, there was a lingering effort to maintain the old style relationship. After generating considerable bad blood it was jettisoned. The pendulum then swung the other way—position of primacy among the two wings was sharply reversed. The creative balance between the two wings, in a parliamentary democracy with pluralist politics and developing economy, has yet to be worked out. In the case of the other two practices old habits have held on, thereby raising a crop of difficulties for the nation.

Let us first consider the selection process of

candidates. It has been said by a political scientist that "the nominating process is obviously one of the points at which parties can be studied most advantageously for no other reason than that the nomination is one of the most innately characteristic pieces of business transacted by the party ... By observing the party process at this point one may hope to discover the focus of power within the party, for he who has the power to make the nomination owns the party."[2] In terms of Schattschneider's logic the Congress Party was "owned" by its High Command. While that position was legitimate and necessary in the days of struggle against the imperialist masters, it became an integument after Independence.

In other democratic countries the choice of candidates is largely left to constituency units of the party. The British Prime Minister has hardly any say in the selection of his party's candidates for Parliament. The President of the United States can exert little influence because the selection of candidates for all offices in that country is made by primaries. Directly or indirectly party members and activists of a constituency exercise decisive influence in determining the nomination. If a Presidential candidate succeeds in rousing considerable support for himself, his party candidates benefit by clinging to his "coat-tails". That Presi-

2. E.E. Schattschneider : *Party Government*, p. 100

dent on election may find the U.S. Congress intractable for a while. In the United Kingdom elections are largely a contest between the incumbent Prime Minister and his challenger, the Leader of Opposition. Their personalities, dramatising the duel, undoubtedly play an important part. The two leaders determine priorities and map electoral strategies but on the nomination process *per se* they have little influence.

In India, though the selection process varied somewhat at different times and different places, occasionally enabling district or state committees of the Congress to play a part, generally the central leadership exercised major influence. As procedural mechanism for conflict resolution was never properly internalized, the result was that each dispute tended to be channelled upward involving intervention of the High Command. The consequence was that many aspiring candidates devoted more effort to gaining a patron among the High Command than in winning confidence of colleagues in the constituency. In the circumstances incentive for nursing a constituency got blunted. It further caused heart-burning among the grass-root workers who lacked access to the big-wigs of the party. Consequently the process of nomination left the organisation anaemic at the base, and prone to manipulation from the top. It is necessary to dwell on this point both because this unfortunate pattern was later cynically exploited in the Congress

and because the successor parties to the Congress continue to roll along the old rails. If we want democracy to get deeply-rooted and political parties to be base-strong, a major change in the nomination process is imperative.

The Central Parliamentary Board was set up in the wake of the Government of India Act of 1935. R.J. Moore in his book, *The Crisis of Indian Unity, (1917-1940)* has well brought out the reason for that : "The nub of the 1935 scheme was the division of the monolithic Raj into the quasi-autonomous units ; co-ordinate provincial authority, similar to the internal sovereignty of the (princely) states, was to be substituted for subordination to the Central Government. This was essential to the Muslims, as also to the princes' acquiescence in the federation. However, the Congress chose to operate the provincial governments through a unitary party structure".[3] To combat the planned threat to Indian unity by forces of disruption blessed by the British, the Congress was duty-bound to impose centralised direction and discipline on its parliamentary offshoots in the provinces. There was, however, no warrant to continue the practice after Independence. Thereafter the state legislatures were entitled to be left free to organise the life in the State : the majority in the legislature choosing its leaders to manage the affairs of the

3. p. 306.

State. Frequent intervention by the Central Parliamentary Board, generally composed of senior Union Ministers, resulted in debilitating democracy in the federating units. The United States, Canada, Australia, Switzerland are among the federations that have been strong and economically dynamic without being encumbered with centralisation at party level that negates democratic devolution prescribed in the Constitution. Unfortunately the atavistic feature of the Congress has been accepted as the norm by the successor parties.

Because effective democratic functioning was denied at the level of nomination and in state level administration, periodically Congress was plagued with bossism. Dhebar resigned half way through his second term as Congress President, his frustration stemmed from his fear that a great deal of power once associated with the Centre was being encroached upon by State leaders. Dhebar saw threat of bossism in a Chief Minister seeking to establish firm grip on the party organisation directly by getting elected as President of the Pradesh Committee, in contravention of Congress policy, or indirectly by getting control of the P.C.C. and its Election Committee. The bias towards centralisation prevented institutionalisation of healthy Centre-State relations. The High Command saddled itself with the task of *Centre-State co-ordination*, *party-government co-ordination* and conflict resolution leaving the party unused to the exerci-

sing of its democratic muscles. Bossism can be countered not by more authority at the top but by reformist impulses of the rank and file—that, at least, is the experience of other democracies. To seek to cure bossism in the States by super-bossism at the Centre is surely a remedy worse than the disease. In a pluralist polity a political party tends to have considerable degree of looseness. Federal polity implies "soft" nor "hard" parties. Again Centre-State problems are best sorted out by "brokering and balancing", not by decisions laid down from above.

The central leadership's attempt at sorting out tangles in the party in a State did not always keep distinct authority in the party and authority of the Union Government. The earliest example of misuse of governmental authority was provided by the Punjab in 1951. After the holo caust of partition, Punjab was undoubtedly a problem, even a parlous, province. There were three Congress ministries in succession, but none of them escaped instability. Part of the difficulty lay in divided counsel among the High Command. Baffled in finding a solution, the Prime Minister advised the President of the Republic to impose central rule on the State. That set a precedent for the use of a Constitutional provision for partisan ends. In later years that crisis provision in the Constitution, meant to avert administrative break-down, was flagrantly used for consolidating not just a party's

position but the personal position of a Prime Minister.

The relation between the two wings of the party had unitary thrust during the British days. After Independence the relations passed through three phases between 1947 and 1967. The first four years were marred by conflict and collision. The next twelve years were of centralisation and convergence facilitated by the undisputed primacy of Pandit Nehru. The last four years introduced considerable divergence and reactivated the question—who is subordinate to whom ?

Between 1947 and 1951 two Congress Presidents, Kripalani and Tandon, resigned because they felt either ignored or thwarted by the leaders of the parliamentary wing. Immediately after Independence, the old habit of wanting to subordinate the parliamentary wing to the organisation persisted among those who manned the organisation. It was not realised that the whole context had changed. When Gandhiji had reorganised the Congress in 1920, he had stated, "I do not consider Congress as a party organisation ; even as the British Parliament, though it contains all parties and has one party or other dominating it, from time to time, is not a party organisation." Hence, before Independence, the Congress acted as the watch-dog Parliament over its governments. Once sovereign Parliament came up, that power and responsibility devolved upon it. The party had

no option but to discover a new role. Gandhiji had sought to alert the Congress about that in his last days, but with little effect.

It has sometimes been argued that in a developing society a party has an important role to play—of activising economic development and social change. In an authoritarian country like Mao's China, mobilisation process of development is possible, though not indefinitely. In democracy, the quintessentially political process is primarily occupied with distribution, not production. It is more concerned with who gets how much of what is available than how to make more available.

Democratic process generally facilitates social change. Interestingly, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar had said, "It is wrong to say that the problem of untouchables is a social problem. For, it is quite unlike the problem of dowry, widow re-marriage, age of consent, etc., which are illustrations of what are called social problems. Essentially, untouchability is a problem of quite different nature . . . . . It is fundamentally a political problem." Democratic power has done more to soften the contours of untouchability than any other measure. Likewise the remarkable shift in political leadership from the advanced to the backward classes in our country could not have come about except through the swish and swirl of democratic process.

Political parties play two divergent roles, namely, integrative and disjunctive. Harry Eckstein in his book, *Pressure Group Politics*, has argued that integrative function of parties is important for the existence of stable government while the disjunctive function of pressure groups is equally important to prevent alienation of groups from systems that appear to distort their goals.[4] In fact, it has been said, "Elections are often won by the votes of a collection of minorities, each gathered round one issue." As Carl Friederich has argued consent often takes the form of common behaviour rather than agreement on principles.

Returning to our theme, Nehru had to establish the supremacy of the parliamentary wing because, *inter alia*, Parliament members are elected by the entire people and are answerable to them, while the party delegates are elected only by its members and are answerable to just that segment of the population. But he spoilt a good case by injecting into the controversy ideological flavour by dragging in traditionalism and modernism, right and left-terms of little relevance to the realities of politics in the country. Nehru thereby sanctified the use of ideological wrappings to cover up power conflicts.

In detailed designing of policies the government was much better placed, but in capturing

4. p. 162.

deeply-felt urges of the people the party had the distinct advantage. For instance, the party was far more sensitive to the urge for linguistic re-organisation of the States. The government spokesmen's attempt to play down the reform only added to the complications. The pressure for re-organisation was not felt in the Hindi-speaking regions ; their size, weight and traditions accustomed them to view the country as largely of undifferentiated culture, more unitary than federal in its political make-up. Such a divergence between sensibilities of the heartland and of the periphery is a matter of considerable concern in knitting together the national polity. To benefit from party's keener perception, sharper sensitivity to public moods, there has to be a free dialogue between the party units and party centre and between the government and the party, which is not so common in our country.

The first essential to that end is ensuring of functioning democracy within the party. This has been theoretically assumed, rarely realised in practice. As early as 1950, Kripalani had complained to Tandon, "In the last elections methods were used to influence the voters that were highly repugnant....The bribes of offices and other advantages were freely used by some of those in possession of the organisation and of the Government. Nay, in many cases administrative machinery was used to secure votes for the dominant group in the Centre and the States. The Working Commi-

ttee appointed an election-disputes sub-committee. Its records bear an eloquent, if damaging, evidence of what was done or attempted." The problem of ensuring fairness in *internal* election in a mass organisation, such as trade unions, has engaged increasing attention in many countries. Some sort of independent machinery akin to Election Commission and Election Tribunal has been thought of in the United States. In the United Kingdom other devices and reforms have been adopted. Without internal democracy, a party cannot remain a reliable reflector of public mood. In democracy it is necessary to reflect the public mind as well as to lead it ; the party is better suited to gauge the mind and the government to lead it.

Gandhiji had consciously maintained a number of positive tensions inside the Congress. There were at least three of them : between the parliamentary and the organisational wings, between the High Command and the Pradesh Committees and between the so-called traditionalists and modernists. Though Sardar Patel was the strong man of the Party he was particular about sustaining the initiative and importance of the P.C.Cs. How sincerely he strove for it, even in the midst of the crucial elections to Central and State legislatures in 1946, is writ large in his voluminous correspondence now available to the public.[5] These ten-

5. Vol. II : *passim*.

sions, particularly the first and the third, irked Nehru.

There was a streak of impatience in him. Patel, in a moment of irritation had called Nehru "a virtual dictator ; for he claims 'full freedom to act when and how he chooses'. This in my opinion is wholly opposed to democratic and cabinet form of Government." Normally, Nehru consciously tried to exercise restraint and thereby rein-in his impulsiveness. Yet, under him certain precedents got set up that were later to prove abrasive. One of them was the manner in which Tandon was edged out of Presidentship. Thereafter, Nehru went further and took over the Presidentship himself and retained it for the next four years. Not only the balancing tension between the two wings but that between the two posts—of the Prime Minister and of the party President—was muted. By merging the two offices in himself he reduced the relationship between them to those of substance and shadow.

Even after 1955, when Nehru stepped down from Party Presidentship, the position of the Congress President remained equivocal. Dhebar, though in a different spirit, followed his predecessors, Kripalani and Tandon, into premature retirement. It was thereafter not easy to coax others to accept that office ; the incumbent designate had, in fact, to be 'dragooned'. Partly that was so because effective decisions resided with the Prime

Minister but largely because of adventitious interferences : Sanjiva Reddy was reported to have complained, as recorded by Brecher in his book, *Nehru's Mantle*, that as Congress President he was treated as "Mrs. Gandhi's *chaprassi*"? [6]

On the other side of the ledger we must record Nehru's countervailing measures in the administration. He was anxious to build up the sanctity of the Constitution, based as it was, in Granville Austin's expressive terms, on "consensus and accommodation". While Nehru wanted the Constitution to be flexible, he had also hoped that the period of flexible adjustment would be a limited one and had looked forward to "accommodation with the Constitution which is as sound and basic as we can make it." He respected the structured channels of the administration and did not attempt to short-circuit them. He did not think it right to build up a separate secretariat of his own, he worked through the Cabinet Secretariat and other well-defined machinery of the government. In his personal office the highest-ranking officer was a mere Joint Secretary.

He welcomed strong Chief Ministers, each with his own power-base in his State. Again, where new faces were brought in, Nehru helped them to strike deep roots, as in Maharashtra and Tamil Nad. In fact, Stanley A. Kochanek in his

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6. p. 131.

book, *The Congress Party of India*, goes to the extent of stating, "In a sense, Nehru had encouraged the emergence of the Chief Ministers by strengthening their position *vis-a-vis* the party organisation through the Parliamentary Board, and, in 1952 following the first General Elections, he had supplanted most of the P.C.C. leaders on the Working Committee by the most important Chief Ministers."[7] He evidently believed that stable and purposeful government in the States required leadership that derived strength from its soil. There was to be a balance between the autonomous strength of the government in the State and guidance, shared perception, widening of horizon, emanating from the Centre. Thanks to that approach, the void left by his death was quickly filled up by the concert of Chief Ministers.

Nehru further helped to bolster the independence of the judiciary, freedom of the press and liberties of the people. Though he was not as dynamic as Mao nor institutionally as innovative as Tito, his dedication to democracy was deeper. His attempts at fostering community development and panchayati raj were further expressions of that devotion. That these programmes failed to realise their promise was not his fault.

During the freedom struggle the purposes were not only evocative but were simple and direct

7. p. 313.

enough to be understood by all. There was a shared perception of goals at the national as well as the local levels. The position began to change sharply after Independence. In the new context, in terms of interest articulation, interest aggregation, idiom and ethos the communication between local workers and national leaders became loose. It is to the credit of Nehru that he brought about wide spread interest and some understanding about economic development and social transformation, a thirst for knowledge tinged with the unfamiliar. He laid the foundation of India's industrial strength, of planned development. Much of that he achieved by expanding the frontiers of knowledge of the people.

Because of the enduring strength of the Congress party under Nehru, and weakness of the fragmented opposition, there was a constant flow of persons from the opposition into the Congress and the dissidents who broke away from the Congress were never able to achieve a national focus. The odd result was that reduction in inter-party conflicts was accompanied by intensification of intra-party conflicts in the Congress. While Nehru must bear his share of blame for this organisational inadequacy in the Congress, he also deserves credit for adapting the Congress to the changing nature of the social structure in the country and to the changing elites in society. Aspiring social groups were encouraged to work within the domi-

nant party as the road to power. Commanding power to pattern a major share of our destiny, Nehru was able to hand out roles necessary and proper to many groups.

At the other end, there were areas where Nehru's escutcheon was badly botched. One such instance was his support to Kairon's method of functioning in the Punjab. It is true that the Punjab was a difficult State, with its factious Congress, and the communal claims of the Akalis to contend against. There was a great deal of criticism, also some justification, of Kairon's style of functioning. For instance, a contemporary sympathetic assessment ran as follows :

> "Apart from the question of corruption, however, much of what happened in the Punjab in terms of the intervention of politics in administration at Kairon's instance, can be said to be justified by the nature of the turbulent politics of the State and factional divisions within the Congress Party. Where the opposition has constantly hurled challenges to the very existence of Government and has not hesitated to bring the State to the brink of disorder, the use of patronage and the stationing of loyal men in strategic places, plus certain sternness in administration are legitimate instruments for the Government. In other words, Kairon's

> methods, were in part, more or less dictated by the political compulsions of the situation in the Punjab, they were part of the requirements of effective rulership in the State. As for the civil service, though perhaps the pendulum swung a little too far, the Kairon era was a necessary corrective to the pre-independence tradition of monopoly of authority in the civil service, a tradition which reached its zenith in the Punjab,"[8]

It is possible that Nehru's own rationalisation for maintaining political stability in that strategic border State by doubtful methods ran along somewhat similar lines. It, however, may not be an accident that a decade later somewhat similar arguments were to be trotted out to justify the imposition of Emergency over the whole country. Administrative high-handedness, not to talk of adventures in authoritarianism, fortunately, sooner or later, fall foul with the judiciary. In the case of Kairon, remedial action began with the strictures passed by the Supreme Court against him. That led to the appointment of a Commission of Inquiry whose adverse report led to the exit and eclipse of Kairon. The familiar cycle of violation of democratic norms by a government, it being caught out in a Court, resulting in a Commission of Inquiry, ending in forced resignation, was set in. Nehru's

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8. Myron Weiner (ed) : *State Politics in India*, p. 491.

death, before the last act of the drama, leaves the question tantalizingly unanswered as to how he would have ultimately handled the problem and what corrective action he would have initiated for the future.

If in the case of the Punjab one may have to hold back the verdict, there is no such option in the case of Jammu & Kashmir. There, after Shaikh Abdulla's ouster and arrest, Bakshi's methods of consolidating his power had all the hallmarks of populism and authoritarianism, of deception and corruption. It is unfortunate that hardly any protest against these methods was voiced in the rest of India. I was one of the few who braved the wrath of Bakshi, got stabbed by his so-called Peace Brigade, in fact a private army paid from State funds. What was permitted in Kashmir we should have realised could one day spread all over India. I had reminded Pandit Nehru of the Austinian concept, "What the King permits, he commands". In that sense by permitting Bakshi to violate vital democratic norms, the Prime Minister was "commanding" the violation. A similar charge could be levied against the ultimate sovereign—the people of India. The indelible lesson is that democracy is indivisible, it can never be good in parts.

In the last years of his life the Chinese attack showed how fragile were some of Nehru's achievements in foreign policy. The loss of three prestigious by-elections to the Lok Sabha made it obvious

that under his long stewardship the Congress Party had lost much of its original vigour. He recognised the pressing need for a marked shift towards organisational work in the party. Believing that he was imparting a salutary shock, he unfolded the Kamraj Plan, under which a number of senior leaders resigned from the government ostensibly to devote themselves to organisational work. Twice in the past Nehru had thought of resigning as Prime Minister, but on both the occasions he had allowed himself to be dissauded. Such a move would have overcome his "staleness" and refreshed both him and the party. Whatever the intentions behind the Kamraj plan, all sorts of other motives were attributed to it and subsequent events were to give credence to the misgivings of the sceptics. Anyway that exercise did little to tone up the Congress Party. A close student of the Party scathingly observed, "Ironically, the man who came to the Congress Party leadership in the name of the Party reconstruction failed most conspicuously to carry out his primary task. If anything, the organisation deteriorated during these years, and this deterioration was reflected in the results of the 1967 General Elections."[9]

L.B. Shastri : An Interlude

The presence of a senior leader of the stature of Kamraj at the helm of the party, however, facilita-

9. Stanley A. Kochaneck : *op. cit.* p. 423.

ted the succession after Nehru's death. To all those who had wondered sometimes with pessimistic airs, about "After Nehru, Who ?" a quick answer was given. It was obvious that the mantle would fall on Nehru's trusted trouble-shooter. It could not have been easy for anyone to step into Nehru's shoes. The innate simplicity and humility of Lal Bahadur Shastri stood him in good stead at the critical moment of the transition. I was in Moscow when the new Prime Minister visited the Soviet Union. It was astonishing to find how his soft personality quickly ended the hesitations of his hosts and won him instant confidence.

For Shastri it was not easy to initiate new policies : it was then as difficult to break away from Nehru's policies as today it would be to persist in 'Mrs. Gandhi's policies'. Shastri may not have commanded Nehru's vision, the storming of the sky, but he was more earthy : Nehru got fascinated with luminous ideas, Shastri's concern was over concrete products for the people. He had an uncanny appreciation of the thoughts and feelings of the myriad little people of the land and he knew how to reach out to them--witness his simple yet stirring slogan on the eve of the Indo-Pakistan war, "Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan".

Whatever the achievements of Nehru in foreign policy he had left behind him rasped relations with our neighbours. Shastri patiently set out to mend

the fences : he sorted out the tangled skein with Ceylon and won back the confidence of Nepal. Pakistan got a blistering lesson for under-estimating the strength of the humble man. Shastri's long experience of conflict resolution in the party stood him in good stead in his new responsibility. In other directions too, he set about structuring policies to suit the changing situation : in nuclear policy, for instance, responding to the Chinese advances in the field Shastri shifted India's position from step by step approach to arms control, from which Non-Proliferation Treaty had emerged, to insistence on "vertical" disarmament, that is beginning the dismantling of the weapons of nuclear powers, as a prelude to "horizontal", that is non-proliferation, ban. It was a subtle yet pregnant switch.

In economic policies too a shift was quietly brought about. He gave a new fillip to agriculture. The biological and chemical revolutions, use of new seeds and of fertilisers, achieved clear profiles under him. He upgraded the importance of consumer goods industry and wanted the public sector to show results in that field. Public corporations for paper and cement were set up during his time. On the other side he did not mind basic goods, like chemical fertilisers, being produced by the private sector also, if thereby abundance could be assured. He was thinking of relaxing restrictions on foreign capital for certain areas of economy. His Finance Minister, who had long been feuding

with the international financial organisations, was adroitly edged out ; Shastri's method was conciliation, not confrontation. After his visit to Moscow, he had planned to go to Washington to bring his soothing touch to bear upon the bruised relations between the two countries. He liked to get things into rhythm, not roughen them.

His basic style was conciliatory and consensual. He was always anxious to save other man's "face". He hated frills, flamboyance, fuss; the idiom he favoured was simple and direct. His effort was to make issues malleable, not abrasive. Desirous of overhauling the administration, to make it both efficient and humane, he set up a high power committee, under the most experienced administrator-statesman of the time, to map the process of restructuring.

Because he was suddenly faced by a severe drought and an unprovoked aggression from Pakistan, it became impossible for him to hold the price-line : whole-sale prices registered an increase of ten per cent. Yet the frugal man saw to it that the rate of savings in the economy did not decline, in fact it reached its peak under him.

Shastri did not believe in leaving vital issues simmering on the back burner : he, therefore, began to defuse the situation in the Punjab by persuading both the communities and both the regions, Punjabi and Hindi, to move towards an agreed solution. He

did not want a minority community, Sikhs in this case, to nurse a grievance.

It was characteristic of the man that he dismissed the suggestion for a snap poll to cash in on the popularity won in the wake of the Indo-Pakistan war. For him the war had been a national effort and he was not going to exploit it for partisan ends. The war strengthened his faith in the fundamental unity of his countrymen, He saw only divisiveness in ideological snipings. He, who had enjoyed alike the confidence of Nehru and Tandon, could not conceive of conflict between traditionalists and modernists : in fact, he felt that India's natural stance was modernising of tradition. Loaded words like Right and Left, Progressive and Reactionary were alien to his lexicon. Under Shastri ideological thaw set in.

Yet there were elements of enigma in him. One watching his style was apt to assume that he favoured a shift from the pyramidic to polycentric leadership. But on the resignation of Kairon, he appointed as Chief Minister of the Punjab a person patently unequal to the task. Was it an effort to run the State from the Centre ? Then again, his insistence on getting Kamraj re-elected as President of the Party, in contravention of the bar against it, appeared like a manouevre to keep Morarji Desai out of governmental as well as party position. Was that the way a conciliator would heal fissures in the party ?

May be innocently, but the establishment of a separate secretariat of the Prime Minister with a senior Secretary at the head of it was a move heavy with mischief. Did he fail to realise the gravitational pull inherent in that office ? His premature death cuts short all our speculation.

Within eighteen months the Congress leaders were called upon a second time to choose a Prime Minister. The personalities that had played a conspicuous part in the selection of Shastri were still dominant on the scene and were motivated by the same considerations in making the second choice. The core of the "king-makers" came from the South. They, with some colleagues from Calcutta and Bombay, came to be known as the Syndicate. Its *raison d'etre* was to keep Morarji Desai out of power and choose some one amenable, or at least less intractable, to their pressure. Cynically in 1969, at the time of the split in the Congress, Morarji Desai was denounced as the spokesman of that very Syndicate !

The Rose and the Thistle

In 1966, the shadows of the forthcoming General Elections were lengthening. Naturally the search was for a person who would prove an electoral draw : the mystique of Nehru was still great and that favoured the claims of Mrs. Gandhi. Even a sober daily like the *Statesman* hailed her choice as "The Return of the Rose". Under Nehru, the core of Congress coalition of support had come

from the minorities, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. It was felt that Mrs. Gandhi would help to hold that coalition together. To many Mrs. Gandhi was *the* daughter to whom Nehru had written his famous *Letters* and unveiled the *Glimpses of World History*—that is, groomed greatness. She was believed to be better acquainted with the world scene than other contenders and was expected to get on with world leaders. Incidentally, greater interest was taken by the Chief Ministers in the selection process on this occasion and Mrs. Gandhi, evidently, enjoyed their confidence.

Mrs. Gandhi's character was very different from that of her predecessor : while Shastri was always conciliatory, Mrs. Gandhi was exclusionary. Her exclusionary nature prevented her from confiding in any colleague. It slowly emerged that distrust was a dominating motif in her. Somehow she always felt threatened. The more power she had, greater was her sense of insecurity. She, therefore, liked to spring surprises. Initially, these were viewed by man's world as the ways of a woman ! Mrs. Gandhi had prided herself on her knowledge of the wide world : "I know America very well", she would say or about any other country that came up for discussion. She had felt slighted when Shastri had overlooked her claim to be the Foreign Minister. As Minister of Information she felt that she had been shoved in a small

slot. Sometimes in those days she would toy with the idea of emigrating abroad, so great was her frustration. But her tryst with destiny was not far.

On January 24, 1966, Mrs. Gandhi entered upon a long innings of power. Her eleven years as Prime Minister can be broadly divided into three segments, conveniently labelled as pragmatic, populist and authoritarian. In each succeeding phase her characteristic style became more pronounced. She was hoping to improve upon her father, because according to her he had been an indifferent politician, allowing himself to be burdened with too many scruples. She prided herself to be schooled as "the Prince". But these traits were to unfurl slowly, few had discerned them from the start.

She had inherited a difficult position caused by a calamitous fall in agricultural production. Two successive years of severe drought jolted the economy and caused a crisis of food management. Prices of foodgrains shot up by 40 per cent in two years, because the production which had been 89 million tonnes in 1964 had fallen to 72 and 74 million tonnes in 1965 and 1966 respectively. There emerged a great need for large-scale public distribution of foodgrains. In 1966-67 alone over 14 million tonnes were sold through public outlets. There was no way of mobilising such large supplies from the home production. The supplies could be got only through import of over 10 mil-

lion tonnes. India's foreign exchange reserves unfortunately were low—only $383 million, and a part of that amount had to be earmarked for repayment to the I.M.F. It was generous food-aid from the U.S.A., under PL 480, that saved the critical situation. Besides grains, for economic development also the new government received substantial assistance from abroad ; in the first four months aid packets worth $6,000 million were negotiated both from the West and the East. Mrs. Gandhi thus began her regime with considerable international goodwill, perhaps a tribute to her youth, sex and promise of modernity.

She picked up the threads where Shastri had dropped them and initially maintained his policies and priorities. Bifurcation of the Punjab was put through. She also continued the policy of opening up the economy which, over the years, had got shackled with myriad controls. Resulting distortions were inhibiting growth. A programme of selective decontrol was taken up.

Considerable anxiety was caused by India's stagnant exports : in 1966 they were less than in 1951 ! And that quantum of exports, mere $1,500 million, was sustained by many hidden and open subsidies. Mrs. Gandhi was yet not interested in gathering all power in her hands and was disdainful about getting pecuniary benefit from administration's involvement in economic affairs. Again, in the precarious situation then developing, it was

felt prudent to heed advice emanating from the I.M.F. One of the reforms suggested was a realistic adjustment in the exchange rate of the rupee. That would provide a disincentive for imports, a stimulus for exports and reduce administrative intervention in the economy.

Devaluation was not something unknown to India. In 1949, India had devalued Rupee in relation to the dollar, in conjunction with Sterling. That change in exchange value by 30 per cent was accepted by the country as a purely economic-technical measure. Mrs. Gandhi had not expected serious political backlash if India did that again to overcome domestic economic difficulties. The idea of floating exchange had not yet achieved acceptability, There had, therefore, to be a sharp, clear-cut change in the rate of exchange. That meant surprise action, highly confidential preliminaries and minimal consultations. In pushing through the change Mrs. Gandhi showed remarkable grit. In fact, she was prepared to demand instant resignation from any Cabinet colleague who was opposed to the operation. She was, however, taken aback by the volume and intensity of political indignation that followed the announcement. Till her Emergency Waterloo, she could perhaps have looked back at the devaluation as did Tage Erlander, who described the devaluation of Kroner in 1949 as the biggest mistake in his 22 years as Prime Minister of Sweden. It is ironic that in 1971,

when Mrs. Gandhi's government linked the rupee to the sinking sterling, that resulted in implicit devaluation of the rupee in relations to most currencies, not a whisper of protest was heard. Evidently, politically speaking, in matter of exchange rates surruptitious moves "sell" better than open measures !

Mrs. Gandhi till then was continuing the style set up by Shastri, embodied in the person of the Secretary to the Prime Minister, L.K. Jha, of solving problems on technical merit. No ideological overtones were injected in economic decisions. The rude reaction to devaluation made her seek ideological rearmament. She soon chose a secretary, Haksar, who was to help her change her style.

Persistence of draught kept pushing up the priceline and adversely affected industrial growth. Consequently exports failed to pick up. The old momentum in development, however, was kept up for a time : in fact, total net investment in the economy reached its peak at 15·3 per cent of the National Income in 1966-67. That was all to change later.

Acute economic distress took its toll politically—there the stresses and strains grew. The opposition parties became very active ; various agitations were launched, including one demanding ban on cow-slaughter that caused considerable disturbance in the Capital. The Capital had also

to face a strike by policemen blessed by the opposition parties. Efforts were afoot to show up the new government as weak and devoid of direction : something on the lines of the famous "prisoners of indecision" charge made by Mrs. Pandit against Shastri.

For much of her difficulties Mrs. Gandhi blamed her Congress colleagues, most of whom she privately dubbed as "the bosses". But she was in no position to move against them. The only result was an increase in disarray in the party and lack of rapport—near glacial relations, between the government and the organisation. The party failed to remain as resilient as before, attracting and accommodating conflicting groups and pulls.

Under Nehru a silent shift in the social content of the political structure had been taking place: in Tamil Nad and Maharashtra the non-Brahmins had come to the fore. There was a spectacular rise in the social status and political position of certain castes, for instance the Nadar in Madras so convincingly analysed by Rudolphs in their book.[10] In Andhra Pradesh too Brahmin leadership had been displaced by the agricultural castes. In fact, when Sanjiva Reddy had to give up Chief Ministership because of an adverse Court reference, his successor was chosen from a scheduled caste.

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10. Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph : *The Modernity of Tradition*, p.p. 36-49.

In the South, the beneficiary of the politicisation of new castes and classes was the Congress. In North India, however, the backward classes, and the agricultural castes, continued to feel blocked by the advanced castes. The first rupture in that connection occurred in the Rajasthan Congress. There the Jats decided to bury the hatchet and line up with the Rajputs to challenge the entrenched hegemony of Brahmins and Banias. The conflict led to the formation of a Janta Party in that State in 1966. Mrs. Gandhi began to explore the possibility of staking influence in both the camps, in the official group as well as among the break-away dissidents. This was a new strategy, so alien to Nehru's. He used to operate on the basis of pluralism within consensus, while Mrs. Gandhi was imperceptibly moving towards a strategy of management through conflict.

As the General Elections approached the opposition parties sensed a whiff of victory. The Congress appeared vulnerable for the first time. In the past factions inside the Congress had manipulated parties in opposition, now those parties sought to manipulate factions in the Congress. In the changed context ideological barriers that divided the ranks of the opposition came down : the Jan Sangh, Swatantra Party, the Socialists and Communists were drawn together. A similar phenomenon had occurred in 1957 in some States, e.g. Maharashtra. The combinations had then been

glued together by deeply-felt grievances on States-reorganisation. In 1967 the diverse elements came together purely on anti-Congressism. Lohia, who for years had preached equi-distance from the Congress as well as the Communists, put forward a new programme and a new strategy. The programme was basically one point : Congress *hatao* ! and the strategy was combined, as against fragmented, opposition at the polls. The Congress Party failed to assess the seriousness of the threat and made no attempts to divide the opposition. Perhaps it was a victim of its own over-confidence.

The results proved to be stunning. Though the decline in the Congress Party's vote was by just four per cent, from 45 to 41, the decline in seats won in the Lok Sabha was substantial, 19 per cent. Congress strength fell from 361 (in 1962) to 284. In the past, the Congress had got 24 to 30 per cent more seats than votes ; in 1967, thanks to adjustments among the opposition parties the vote-seat advantage came down to 13·5 per cent. The Congress set-back was marked in Orissa, West Bengal, and Uttar Pradesh, and there was a real debacle in Tamil Nad. In a number of States the Congress found itself in minority and out of power. The rejection proved decisive in Tamil Nad where a single party—the D.M.K.—had been responsible for the ouster. Elsewhere, shaky coalitions of opposition parties took over the

governments. In Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Haryana, the slim majority of the Congress melted with the desertion of some Congress legislators. Interestingly there were more than twenty-five coalition governments during the period.

Mrs. Gandhi faced the wind of change in various ways. Veterans like Kamraj who had lost the election were left to lick their wounds. Morarji Desai was brought back into the Government, as Deputy Prime Minister, to impart stability and strength. Towards the States different policies were adopted : for instance, in Rajasthan, where the Congress majority was in doubt, the balance was tilted in its favour by the imposition of President's Rule. It was soon to become a favourite device : "Since 1967", Hansen and Douglas were to observe in their book, *India's Democracy*, "these provisions have been used so extensively that any count now becomes rapidly out of date."[11] In Uttar Pradesh, defection of Congressmen did not come as a surprise to Mrs. Gandhi. The defectors may not have had her blessings but they had some, howsoever indirect, consultations with her. In Tamil Nad, she decided to befriend the D.M.K., without much thought on its effect on her routed party. She also favoured fhe Congress, where useful, entering into coalition governments.

Mrs. Gandhi must be given credit for bold moves during that unstable period. She declined

11. p. 36.

to accept the easy way out of renominating Radhakrishnan for Presidentship of the Republic, a course favoured by Kamraj. Instead she sponsored candidature of Vice-President Zakir Husain. Against the united support for the prestigious candidature of the ex-Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, she saw her candidate through : India, evidently, was in an innovative mood—it elected a woman as Prime Minister and selected a distinguished Muslim to be the Head of the State.

Mrs. Gandhi's bid at reorganising the Congress to meet the new challenges failed to take off. Kamraj, as Congress President, nullified her effort to dissolve the West Bengal P.C.C. with a view to re-organise it. There appeared to be a stalemate in the organisation, severe electoral set-back notwithstanding.

After a period of stunned silence, Kamraj came to the conclusion that what the party needed was not organisational overhauling but programmatic radicalisation. That would simultaneously undermine the base of the rightist opposition and take the wind out of the sails of the leftists. The success of a number of former rulers in the elections in Orissa, Gujrat and Rajasthan, mostly as Swatantra Party candidates, led him to favour termination of their privileges. Under Kamraj's prodding the Working Committee adopted the ten-point-programme, that included many-hued nationalisation : of banks, general insurance,

foreign trade, etc. Mrs. Gandhi was unenthusiastic about the programme and hardly participated in the discussions on it. Even in the Cabinet where the issue of nationalisation *versus* social control of banking was to be decided, Mrs. Gandhi kept her thoughts to herself. It was not a radical programme that she was after but a populist stance in politics.

Through her refurbished secretariat the needed strategy was being evolved. Initially greater attention was directed towards the Parliamentary Party, the organisation outside was left alone. Many of the opposition groups in Parliament were carefully cultivated. In the international field an open anti-American slant was favoured, and at the height of the Vietnam War few could quarrel with it. In the post-Tashkent period, the Soviet Union's endeavour had been to foster balanced relationships towards both India and Pakistan. Even at the cost of some displeasure of India, the Soviet Union extended arms aid to Pakistan. Mrs. Gandhi played cool; she progressively made clear to the Russians the advantage of a "tilt" towards India. Side by side her Secretary began orchestrating behind her the support of the C.P.I. and other Moscow-oriented elements, here and abroad.

The year 1967-68 saw a marked improvement in the production of foodgrains, from 74 to 95 million tonnes. But industrial production continued to decline, and price-rise persisted. Savings and

investments slided down and Plan holiday was declared. The steady drive towards a crescendo of effort at economic development sustained under Nehru was allowed to peter out. Mrs. Gandhi's *forte* was in political management, not in economic development.

With the loss of Congress hegemony, the Centre-state relations revolved more round negotiations and less through intra-party decisions. With her posture of friendliness and charm, Mrs. Gandhi initially enjoyed some advantage. She also displayed genuine interest and sympathy towards the aspirations of the tribal people, particularly of north-eastern India. Thanks to her prodding the ambition of hill people of Assam to have a state of their own was fulfilled with the formation of Meghalaya. Later came Arunachal and friendlier relations with the Nagas.

Such pre-occupations were no answer to the stubborn problems in the party. Time had come to elect a new President of the Congress. Mrs. Gandhi did not favour another term for Kamraj. She would have liked to take over the party presidentship herself, but for that there was little support. The compromise choice fell on a veteran leader from the south, but in the new Working Committee, she could get only one of her nominees in, the rest were "consensus" candidates, that is largely beholden to the established leaders.

Mrs. Gandhi realised that the party was yet far from penetrable.

The euphoria that the opposition parties had experienced after the elections began to subside as the coalition governments failed to hold their heterogenous elements together. The Union Government could therewith exploit fissures that emerged. By 1968 most of the improvised opposition governments collapsed. In the ensuing mid-term polls, the Congress was able to recover much of the lost ground. The political landscape was changing to the advantage of the Congress, but not necessarily to the sole benefit of Mrs. Gandhi.

Both Mrs. Gandhi and the Working Committee had largely lost interest in the radical programme that had been adopted in 1967. Only the Young Turks, a ginger group in the Congress, took it seriously. Mrs. Gandhi adroitly made them feel that senior leaders, mainly Morarji Desai, were the principal obstacle in the path of its implementation. A denigration campaign against them was sedulously inspired.

As that was the time when Mrs. Gandhi was selecting and sharpening new tools and shaping a new strategy, the day-to-day functioning betrayed certain lackadaisicalness. I shall cite just two instances, one very minor, the other of some significance. As a Minister in her government, I got an invitation from the Neo-Dastur Party of

Tunisia to attend a Conference. I sought the Prime Minister's instructions. I was asked to cable acceptance. Then she was advised that the government could not defray expenses to attend a party gathering. I was therefore asked to cable my regrets. Our Mission in Tunisia thereupon pointed out that in a one-party State like that of Tunisia, distinction between party and government was irrelevant. So I was told to cable acceptance again !

The other incident was connected with the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August, 1968. Our government's reaction was mild and non-censorious. But two General Secretaries of the Congress Party in Parliament tabled an amendment charging the Soviet Union with violating the U.N. Charter. I pleaded with the Prime Minister to persuade the party colleagues to withdraw the motion because to defeat it would mean that in our view there was in fact no such violation. The Lok Sabha, however, was asked to vote the amendment down. I was among the few who supported it and naturally resigned from the government. The resignation caused some stir in the House. A prominent opposition M.P. thereupon brought a strongly worded resolution condemning the Soviet action. To my surprise the Congress M.Ps were asked to let the resolution through ! The Lok Sabha was the only august body in the world that

had within the same week both condoned and condemned the Soviet action.

The Populist Phase

By 1968-69, thanks to Morarji Desai's careful handling of the economy, food imports went down to five million tonnes, prices started falling, foreign trade gap began narrowing and foreign exchange reserves began climbing up. The initiative was returning to the Congress. Mrs. Gandhi while happy with the change was not satisfied with being just *primus inter pares*, she wanted to be supreme. While she was chaffing at the constraints, an unexpected development occurred.

In 1969, President Zakir Husain passed away suddenly. In choosing his successor Mrs. Gandhi saw her chance. She disapproved automatic elevation of the Vice-President, though in the past two Vice-Presidents had been so elected. She first approached the Speaker, Sanjiva Reddy, to be the Congress candidate. Later she favoured Jagjivan Ram. She was not interested in any particular person as candidate, her intention was to seek a confrontation with her colleagues on the issue.

The A.I.C.C. that met at Bangalore became historic again. In 1950 the clash between Nehru and Tandon had begun at a Bangalore A.I.C.C. Mrs. Gandhi desired history to repeat itself. Her contribution to the A.I.C.C. *per se* was only her

"stray thoughts", her main thrust was reserved for the Central Parliamentary Board. Twice in the past, in 1952 and 1957, the then Prime Minister had failed to have his way in the choice of the Presidential candidate : in 1952 Nehru had favoured Rajaji and in 1957 Radhakrishnan. On both the occasions majority support had gone to Rajendra Prasad and Nehru had acquiesced in the decision. In 1967 Kamraj had to agree to a candidate not of his choice. Mrs. Gandhi's reaction was different. Her new mood was seen in the public tongue lashing she gave to Chavan because he had not chimed in with all her swings. She thought of sacking him to exhibit her authority.

Her advisers, engaged in sharpening a populist strategy, had other plans for her. It would be better to cashier Morarji Desai and therewith give a right-left twist to the controversy. It was, however, necessary to dramatise the issue to capture popular attention, even enthusiasm, so fourteen banks were nationalised with great fanfare. Previously banks, insurance companies and many other concerns had been nationalised, but without stirring up a campaign. On this occasion, on the other hand, the Prime Minister's Secretariat instigated a number of rallies and mass demonstrations; a personality-cult round Mrs. Gandhi was launched. Progressive *versus* reactionary was the new convenient axis introduced into Indian

politics. Both State and party matters began revolving round the Prime Minister's Secretariat and plans were laid for politicising the whole set-up.

The next move was even more audacious, risky yet richly rewarding if successful. As per decision of the Central Parliamentary Board, Mrs. Gandhi proposed the candidature of Sanjiva Reddy but simultaneously began to pull the rug under him. She carefully worked out her strategy. She positioned herself for powersharing at the State level with regional parties like the D.M.K. and Akali Dal. She imparted ideological salience to the political controversy and thereby got the support of the Communists. Simultaneously Congress veterans were denounced as reactionaries. Their socialist, secular and nationalist credentials were subtly challenged. By persuading Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed and Jagjivan Ram to spear-head the attack a valuable electoral asset was built up. The hapless President of the Congress, S. Nijalingappa, was bombarded with mid-night missives, to put him in the wrong in the next morning's press. Congress legislators were exhorted to put their conscience over party discipline where conscience was programmed by Mrs. Gandhi !

Notwithstanding all her wile and guile, Mrs. Gandhi could only marginally shake the loyalty of Congressmen. Her main support rested in the Congress Party in Parliament—the strategy of

cultivating it paid some results. In the State legislatures only in a few States, like U.P., Bihar and Andhra could she carry some Congress MLAs with her. Because the 1967 elections had weakened the strength of the Congress in the legislatures, even that marginal desertion by Congressmen enabled Mrs. Gandhi to narrowly defeat Sanjiva Reddy.

Her crude power play, her deliberate flonting of party discipline, alienated large sections of Congress workers from her. But in politics, more than elsewhere, nothing succeeds like success. She was soon able to swing to her side Chavan and the Maharashtra P.C.C. and Sukhadia and the Rajasthan Government. The balance of forces in the Congress Party began to change in her favour. The organisational leadership in the Congress after considerable hesitation expelled Mrs. Gandhi from the party—too late as it turned out. With her in command of the Central Government and the euphoria she had roused, she was able to retain the support of 240 Lok Sabha members belonging to the Congress Party. The organisational leadership could carry only a minor fraction of the C.P.P. with it. The die was cast.

Mrs. Gandhi's advisers felt it opportune to inject new techniques in politics: one of them being manipulation of the media—the Radio and T.V.—to build up her personality cult. Nehru did not need such aids, he could tower without stilts. Mrs.

Gandhi was to discover much later that while such a cult might buttress her position, it would be at the cost of cohorts, who would acclaim her to protect themselves from all challenges to their position, stigmatising them as threats to the supreme leader herself. The then Minister of Information was adroit in his manipulation of the media—it was not allowed to forfeit its credibility.

The next target was the minority communities: witness the foray into the Islamic Conference at Rabat, an attempt to impress the Muslims—attempt that however, backfired. To impress radical opinion, a part of the ten-point programme was suddenly activised. Legislation was introduced to abrogate the privileges and privy purses of the princes. The difficulties that legislation as well as that on bank nationalisation encountered in the Courts provided grist for a campaign to clip the powers of the Courts; and for whittling down the sanctity of the Constitution. By 1971, perspicacious critics could write, "But possibly even more ominous is the growing tendency of the Government to treat the Constitution as something that can be manipulated for party political advantage, rather than as a set of rules that all must obey ... Perhaps more likely is the possibility of a transformation of political practice, within a formal framework of the constitution itself, so radical as to subvert the conventions and customs that have hitherto been accepted and operated. .This would

almost certainly require in the first instance the proclamation of an emergency. and a compliant Supreme Court"[12]. A new scenario was being prepared.

By the end of 1969, the Congress had split. During the early months of 1970, various means available to the Government were used to strengthen the Ruling Congress and demoralise the Organisation Congress. Other political elements that failed to fall in line with Mrs. Gandhi were also treated summarily, e.g. the dismissal of Charan Singh's Ministry in Uttar Pradesh was accomplished by getting the approval of the President while he was in the Soviet Union ! The ideological stance was emphasised to win support of the Socialists and Communists. The C.P.I. came to believe that Mrs. Gandhi's leadership offered access to them to avenues of power. In Kerala, the Congress soon formed a coalition government under a Communist Chief Minister. The will o' wisp of the "Kerala pattern" kept the C.P.I. in line. Once Mrs. Gandhi had helped to put together a coalition government in Kerala to keep the C.P.I. out of power, now she blessed a coalition with them. Her defence would be that it is the Communists who had changed.

The changes that Mrs. Gandhi's style of functioning brought about in the Congress Party were recently described by two political scientists

12. A.H. Hansen and Janet Douglas : *op. cit.* p. 49.

as follows : "The Congress split and emergence of Indira leadership rudely destroyed the balance of internal factional competition. There was growing intolerance towards factions and factional fights. Factions were considered as a challenge to the supreme leader rather than a part of the Congress system...The growing attenuation of internal competition led to a steady erosion of the 'openness' of the Congress system."[13]

Both 1969 and 1970 were good years in agriculture; production of foodgrains topped 100 million tonnes, raising per capita availability of foodgrains from 14 to 16 oz. a day. Industrial production rose from 151 in 1967 to 184 points in 1970. Prices that had risen by 14 and 12 per cent in the first two years of Mrs. Gandhi's regime, slowed down the pace to four per cent. Foreign trade had approached towards a balance. It was a good moment to go to the people. With her flair for springing surprise, Mrs. Gandhi dissolved the Lok Sabha and announced mid-term poll. Such a call to the hustings was the first of its kind; it meant snapping of the nexus that Nehru had consciously forged between elections to the Lok Sabha and to the State assemblies. Mrs. Gandhi wanted a straight vote on her leadership, her winning trump.

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13. Ram Joshi and K. Desai : *Towards More Competitive Party System* (mimeo), p. 14.

Some elements in the opposition discerned a dangerous drift in the country's politics. To avert disaster four parties, the Organisation Congress, Jan Sangh, Swatantra Party, and the Samyukta Socialist Party, came together on the eve of the elections. The Grand Alliance that they put together unfortunately was neither grand nor an alliance. They did not subscribe even to a common manifesto. No wonder that people's response remained lukewarm. Kamraj, notwithstanding his lack of enthusiasm for the alliance, happened to provide it with the election slogan: "Save India, save democracy". The sophisticated plea about peril to democracy got simplified as "*Indira hatao*", a variation-*cum*-continuation of 1967 cry, "*Congress hatao*". In the interval, Indira had become the Congress.

Mrs. Gandhi's populist partisans, thereupon, provided her with a brilliant counter-cry—"*Garibi hatao*!". Mrs. Gandhi's interest in the abolition of poverty was largely cosmetic. That she lacked deep and determined involvement was proved by her record of economic performance. National distribution could show respectable results only if national production was steadily geared up. Two economists surveying "Indian Economy under three Prime Ministers" recently concluded, "It would not be entirely unfair to say that the economic management of the Indian nation was not at the centre of interest in Mrs. Gandhi's

scheme of things... It may not be an unwarranted conclusion that a severe political crisis was in the making and largely inevitable around mid-seventies given sustained neglect of the economy."[14] That is not surprising because the pace of development under Mrs. Gandhi, was only half of that under Nehru. Further investment in the puplic sector, a crucial component of socialist strategy, showed downward direction in contrast to the trend established under Nehru, the direction was otherwise in private investments.[15]

In the elections Mrs. Gandhi's vote went up by 3·6 per cent over the Congress vote in 1967. That small swing in her favour, however, gave her marked boost in the M. P's elected—by as much as 13·5 per cent. Though her achievement—70 per cent of the seats—fell short of Nehru's "hat-trick" in 1952, 1957, and 1962, she succeeded in reversing the downward trend of Congress vote and in disproving the contention of many political scientists that India had a segmented political system. For instance, Myron Weiner had observed, "To a remarkable degree those political developments that occur in one segment do not affect the developments in another."[16] Mrs. Gandhi's "massive mandate" showed how untrue such a view was.

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14. Panandikar and Varde : *Prajnan,* Vi, 2, p. 148.
15. Srinivasan and Narayana : *The Economic and Political Weekly*.
16. *op. cit.* p. 53

The Grand Alliance fell apart on the morrow of its election defeat. It lacked the stamina for a long haul together. Mrs. Gandhi retained the support of her allies—the D.M.K. and C.P.I.—while her opponents got fragmented. These considerations were dwarfed by new developments. Hardly were the elections over when elemental unrest broke out in East Pakistan. It led to widening streams of refugees fleeing to India. Before that threat to nation's security, partisan controversies were hushed. No wonder, because in the next few months over ten million refugees crowded in West Bengal.

India faced a delicate situation. The Bengalis of East Pakistan had come to the end of their tether. They demanded secession from Pakistan. Their plight aroused widespread sympathy in India, more so in West Bengal. The Pakistan authorities, however, were not unhappy at the exodus of unwanted Muslims and a large number of Hindus. Pakistan banked upon the reluctance of most countries to countenance secession. India's plea for the Bengalis was not appreciated even by Yugoslavia, leave aside other members of the world community. The United States, for various reasons, was against any weakening of Pakistan. The odds against India were heavy.

The situation dramatically changed in July 1971 with Nixon's opening towards China. It

threatened the line up of United States-Pakistan-China. The danger to India was somewhat mitigated by the fact that such a line-up posed a threat to the Soviet Union also. It appeared as if a fundamental restructuring of world politics was on the anvil. Mrs. Gandhi's close relations with the Soviet Union enabled Indo-Soviet Treaty to be announced on August 9, 1971. It evoked wide support in the country, because it was assumed that in the event of an armed conflict with Pakistan, the Soviet umbrella would be there, which would deter China from intervening in the conflict and U.S.A. from arm-twisting.

Mrs. Gandhi carefully escalated political pressure on Pakistan backed by appropriate military preparations. In December a short, swift war, brilliantly planned and executed, liberated Bangladesh. Pakistan's defeat exposed the weaknesses of the country and the limitation of support from its patron-nations. It was the finest hour for Mrs. Gandhi. The *Economist* of London hailed her as the "Empress of India"—probably she began to believe that and with it dynastic ambition sprouted within her.

All the political parties had supported the tough response to Pakistan. The victory was of the nation as a whole, and it was assumed that it would not be used for partisan end. But early in 1972, elections to the State Assemblies were announced. The bedraggled opposition was no

match to Mrs. Gandhi decked with laurels of victory. Almost all the States came under Congress control—the monocolour picture was spoilt by D.M.K. rule in Tamil Nadu. The D.M.K. had cleverly used Mrs. Gandhi's difficulties in 1971 to get a fresh lease of power for itself without conceding much to Mrs. Gandhi in Parliament. It was made to pay heavily for that cleverness : Mrs. Gandhi, an expert in splitting parties, directed her expertise to the D.M.K. and later hounded it out of office while discrediting its leadership on charges of corruption.

Mrs. Gandhi began to treat the States as if they were her fiefs. Trusted persons from the Centre were sent down to be Chief Ministers, demonstratively ignoring local claims. In a book, *India Today*, then written, I had said, "Chief Ministers held positions as nominees of the Centre and not as accepted spokesmen of their States. The source of their power is made obvious : it is the confidence given to them by the Prime Minister. What is vouch safed can be withdrawn."[15] The States began to be increasingly run from the Centre.

The Prime Minister's Secretariat was subtly getting converted into a Presidential one as operated in Washington. The aides from the office began issuing directions to Cabinet sub-ordinates,

15. p. 25.

and later to Cabinet Ministers themselves. Of Nixon, it has been said that he appointed loyalists at the second or third spot in departments who did the White House bidding. Mrs. Gandhi began acting on similar lines. Soon the Gresham's Law began to operate among the entourage of the Prime Minister—bad men driving out good men. Atmosphere of subservience and insecurity was being built up. What originally may have emerged accidentally, was retained by design. In the ruling party, democracy was eroded, elections dispensed with, dissent silenced. Towards the opposition, tactics of confrontations rather than of eliciting consensus were applied, ideological salience was used to sharply polarise public life. A new dimension to Prime Minister's power was provided by bringing all the intelligence agencies in the Government under her control. To them was added a new organisation, Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), that was to impart a sharper edge to the P.M's establishment.

Mrs. Gandhi's new measure of herself reflected itself unevenly in her international dealings. The Simla Conference was an exclusive summit between the Prime Ministers of the two countries. It was very unlike the Tashkent Conference that was held under the auspices of he Soviet Prime Minister. Mrs. Gandhi successfully insisted on purely bilateral dealings with Pakistan. Towards Bangladesh, however, Mrs. Gandhi developed a

Big Power attitude. Shaikh Mujib-ur-Rehman, inadvertently or otherwise, began testing out styles of ruling, that Mrs. Gandhi was fancying. Ultimately, the poor Shaikh had to pay a terrible price for it, and the relations between Bangladesh and India got progressively estranged.

Whatever be Mrs. Gandhi's achievements and failures in sub-continental politics, her economic management betrayed gross ineptitude. During 1971 to 1973, money supply increased at the rate of 15 per cent a year when the growth in national product was 1 per cent. A great part of the money was wasted after populist programmes launched without any preparations. Output of foodgrains fluctuated between 105 to 97 million tonnes. Prices rose during the period by 70 per cent. In 1972, with heavy commitment to Bangladesh, import of foodgrains touched the lowest level—0·45 million tonnes—and per capita availability of cereals its highest—while the production fell to 97 million tonnes. As the food stocks melted away and hoarding and speculation squeezed supplies, the Government decided to take-over the wheat trade. The take-over proved a flop : the amount procured fell from 8·4 million tonnes in 1972 to 5·6 million tonnes in 1973. Industrial growth fell to less than one per cent in 1973 and 1974. Steel production declined at an average rate of one per cent a year and capacity

utilisation in steel fell by 14 per cent; in other industries by 8 per cent.

A new phase of radical politics was the enunciation of the philosophy of commitment and the effort to get the civil servants, judges, etc., committed. While formally the demand was for commitment to "progressive" policies, in actual practice the commitment was to be to Mrs. Gandhi. There was supercession of judges in the Supreme Court, and a new relationship between the executive and judiciary was sought to be designed that would temper with the various checks and balances in the Indian polity.

During the period the opposition continued to feel quashed. The CPI (M), that had got a severe drubbing in the West Bengal elections of 1972, was reluctant to bestir itself. Other opposition parties found it hard to break out of their own cacoons. Even the important elections to Uttar Pradesh Assembly could not overcome their fragmentation. The result was that Mrs. Gandhi was able to romp home with barely a third of the votes polled in her favour. The opportunity to correct the political *malaise* in the country through electoral process was missed, and manipulative politics was given a fresh lease.

The formation of the Bharatiya Lok Dal was the first tentative attempt to break the stalemate in

the opposition. The response it evoked was marginal, and it failed to generate a momentum.

Continued success of Mrs. Gandhi's politics led to debasement of standards in Mrs. Gandhi's camp. Power and money—and the two were viewed as interdependent—were presumed to accomplish any end. That resulted, *inter alia*, in increasing insensitivity to the hardships of the people. From 1972 onwards there was a steady price rise—the annual rate going up from 10 to 23 per cent in successive years. In 1974, the output of food-grains was no more than in 1969. The steep rise in crude oil prices and the rise in the cost of imports had an adverse effect on the economy. Industrial stagnation added to unemployment. The Labour Exchanges had nearly ten million applicants on their live registers, over a third of them from educated young unemployed.

Radical slogans had lost their relevance. The ruling party's politics appeared to become venal. Its massive majorities only added to ineffectiveness and in-fighting. But the opposition parties remained lack-lustre. The vacuum in political life was suddenly filled by youngmen—mostly students—on their own. Both in Gujarat and Bihar they came out to demand resignation of the discredited ministries; the agitations soon snow-balled into the demand for dissolution of the assemblies. The youth was in search of a new polity—*Nav Nirman*, as it was called in Gujarat. Fortunately for the

young people, Jayaprakash Narayan came forward to provide their inchoate urges with moral leadership. A new phase opened in Indian politics. The reactions of the youth were in sharp contrast to what had happened in West Bengal in 1970. Then the angry young men had launched the Naxalite Movement where over 2,000 persons, including 68 policemen, had got murdered. This time the youths' response was peaceful, and based on mass action. The teachings of Gandhiji were beginning to reassert themselves. The nexus between means and end was becoming relevant again.

In Gujarat, the movement soon began to sag under intensified repression. There was the danger of the wave of popular anger breaking into violent spray. At such a crucial juncture Morarji Desai went on a fast unto death to save the cause of the young people. His intervention led to the dissolution of the discredited Assembly : the first occasion since 1969 when Mrs. Gandhi had to bow to public pressure.

The hardships of the people and their disenchantment with established ways sent ripples of the Gujarat-Bihar agitations to other States. The obvious course for the Prime Minister was to conciliate the public opinion and embark on necessary reforms. She was averse to both. Persons like Chandra Shekhar who sought to build a bridge between Mrs. Gandhi and Jayaprakash Narayan were anathemised. With unction Mrs. Gandhi

characterised her differences with J.P. as a struggle between "the vested interests determined to thwart further social justice and economic independence and the toiling masses determined to consolidate the social and economic gains that they have made and to move forward to the chosen course." While the "toiling masses" groaned under growing burdens, Mrs. Gandhi's cohorts cheered her on.

Mrs. Gandhi refused to conciliate, she refused even to look into the charges of corruption brought up and documented before Parliament. Outside, student unrest and industrial strife grew : the man-days lost through strikes and lock-outs exceeded 20 million. In 1974 came the general strike of railwaymen which the Government crushed with severe repression. The giltter had gone off of Mrs. Gandhi ; her charisma had got routinised. Her personality began to be dragged into controversy. That was largely because of undue favours shown to her son in an industrial project he had sponsored and also because of mysterious, unsavoury incidents like the Nagarwala case. 1974-75 was a sad contrast to the halcyon days of 1971-72.

Greater the unrest, greater became Mrs. Gandhi's obduracy. She blamed the opposition for the mounting ills. She also mounted tirade against America and other western powers. Some credibility was provided to the latter when the United States and even Canada reacted critically to India's peaceful explosion of nuclear device. But

the public mood was so recalcitrant that India's entry into the exclusive nuclear club failed to evoke any euphoria.

Instead of seeking a national consensus on vexed problems, she in fact spurned Jayaprakash's offer for evolving healthy codes of public action. She preferred to stock her armoury with new weapons. Ostensibly to curb smugglers and hoarders, she enacted a drastic legislation – MISA. The opposition, fully familiar with her technique of giving economic cover to her political manoeuvres, voiced its fears over possible misuse of the draconian law. The enactment of MISA with the continuation of external emergency long after the war was over roused considerable concern. The opposition was provided a rallying centre by the J.P. movement ; unity in action was slowly getting forged.

Though the Gujarat Assembly had been dissolved early in 1974, till 1975, there was no move to hold fresh elections. In fact the trend was to dispense with by-elections, and elections to local bodies, etc. Direct administrative control was favoured, elections were viewed as a luxury. To stem the rot Morarji Desai once again staked his life. He demanded firm announcement of election dates for Gujarat, an unequivocal assurance against misuse of MISA and revocation of the state of emergency. The fast rallied round him the support of the entire opposition. Mrs. Gandhi was com-

pelled to concede Desai's demands—elections were announced for June, 1975 and assurance over MISA was given. In the ensuing elections Desai succeeded in uniting the opposition parties and win for the Janata Front working majority in Gujarat Assembly. The results were a far cry from the debacle of the Grand Alliance in 1971.

By a fateful coincidence, on 12th June, together with the results of Gujarat elections, came the judgement in the election petition filed by Raj Narain against Mrs. Gandhi. She lost both—the elections and the petition.

As Mrs. Gandhi was convicted of electoral offences, she would lose her seat in the Lok Sabha and suffer disqualification, for a period of time, against contesting election. It was open to her to go into appeal before the Supreme Court, but, in the meanwhile, convention demanded that she should resign from her high office. That is what she herself had insisted upon her colleagues in the past. The first reaction from Mrs. Gandhi's camp was to organise popular demonstrations in her support. In 1969 such rallies may have had spontaneously evoked support, but in 1975, they had to be laboriously engineered—in fact, stage-managed by misusing the official machinery.

The opposition, vitalised by effective leadership provided by J.P. and Morarji Desai, and encouraged by unexpected victories, demanded Mrs. Gandhi to step down. The press also

emphasised the need to respect proprieties. In the Congress Parliamentary Party, Mrs. Gandhi felt the groundswell growing against her continuance. It was that threat that troubled her most. She had obtained a partial stay order from the Superme Court, but she could not be sure of her party's support, nor of the ultimate decision by the Supreme Court. The hand-picked Chief Ministers raised the chorus of her indispensibility to the country but orchestrated general support could not be mounted.

Authoritarian Phase

Ever since the Court judgement, Mrs. Gandhi was searching for some drastic action. She totally ignored the official channels of decision-making, including the Cabinet, senior officials, etc., and concocted her plans through a trusted coterie. Some of these trusted men had a talent for diabolique. It was decided to clamp down in absolute secrecy and surprise internal emergency on the country, censor all newspapers, subvert the mass media, arrest and detain in one swoop the opposition leaders. The arrests were made under MISA, that only two months back Mrs. Gandhi had solemnly promised never to use against political workers. All that and more could be rushed through because of the plaint President. Fakhruddin Ahmed obligingly suspended the fundamental rights ; scrutiny by Courts was blocked. To inject fear among her own partymen, leading dissidents

in the party were detained. The line was clear : those who are not with me are against me.

The *blitzkreig* operations were smoothly carried out in a single night. No laws were respected, no questioning was tolerated. Authoritarian rule was imposed upon the country. The Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, under a new Minister, was used to traduce the opposition, emasculate the press, and indulge in mendacious propaganda. Strict censorship was clamped down on the newspapers and public activities were proscribed. As I was behind the bars I have no first hand knowledge of that period. I was later told that New Delhi in those days wore the look of an occupied, conquered city.

Though respected leaders like Jayaprakash and Morarji were thrown into detention, the liberties of the people taken away, there was hardly any popular reaction. The fact was that the people were stunned. The news black-out added to the confusion. Everyone was caught by surprise. Like Lord Birkenhead, Mrs. Gandhi must have said, "Not a dog has barked". Her constitutional *coup d'etat* had succeeded. Endorsement of her action came from Communist governments in Europe and from some of the authoritarian regimes in Africa. Even some democrats were shaken : later an opposition leader who was then in detention because of his opposition to the martial law regime in the Philippines, was to declare that Mrs.

Gandhi's action convinced him that Asia was not yet ready for democracy. Where President Marcus had failed to convince, Mrs. Gandhi had succeeded ! The liberal newspapers from overseas were sought to be cowed down by expelling their correspondents from India.

The Congress President Barooah was still on the old track. He advised the Prime Minister to nationalise sugar and textile industries.[17] Mrs. Gandhi had no use for such radicalism now. In fact, she had long felt herself a prisoner of her slogans and she had become restive with the ransom that the Communists were exacting. The Emergency was an opportunity for her to move away from populism that had proved sterile and costly. Money supply between 1966-67 and 1974-75 had increased by Rs. 7,000 crores as against by Rs. 3,500 crores between 1950-51 and 1965-66. With the result that price rise was of the order of 137 per cent under Mrs. Gandhi, as against 48 per cent under Nehru. In breaking away from old policies she was encouraged by her son, Sanjay, who was now enlisted as her second in command.

Initially after the first shock was over there was a certain sense of relief among the people. The Emergency was expected to be of a short duration, and through it discipline seemed to have been restored in campuses, factories, etc. The

17. Kuldip Nayar : *The Judgement*, p. 60.

trains ran to time. Price rise was checked and much pandemonium ended.

A new economic programme was announced in July, 1975. Its 20 points were somewhat miscellaneous but were drafted to appeal to various sections of the people. A massive propaganda drive was geared up behind the programme. Fortunately for the country, year 1975-76 was blessed with good weather conditions. There was a record harvest, with food production rising by 21·2 per cent. Both in rice and wheat, new peaks of production were reached, industrial production also recovered, registering an increase of 5 per cent and paving way for over 10 per cent growth for 1976-77. Prices were held in line, in fact they declined by one per cent. Exports increased by 21 per cent with smaller rise in imports. With national income growth of 8 per cent, an expansion of 11 per cent in money supply was absorbed. The Emergency could have received no better economic underpining. Accidentally the stick and the carrot fell into balance.

The situation began to change with indulgence in excesses. The caucus that had gathered round the Prime Minister aggravated the atmosphere of suspicion and fear around her. The chief of the caucus was the Prime Minister's son who soon built up his *imperium* within the *imperio*. He had his own confidants and they exerted more power than the real incumbents in office. Such *boule-*

versement in authority occurred even in high places : the assistant to the Lt. Governor of Delhi reduced the Governor to a kind of *roi fineant* and the Minister of State in the Union Home Ministry ranked in reality over his senior—Cabinet Minister. Through large areas of administration, the effective mechanism was sparked by favouritism and fear ; law and procedures were considered to be a liability ; administration was progressively recouped out of structured functioning. Every thing was kept in whirl, the sole fixed focus was the Prime Minister.

The roads to redress were effectively barred : the Courts could no longer intervene ; press was no more free to ventilate grievance ; popular agitation was out of question. While on the one hand arbitrary actions grew, on the other hand, the possibility of seeking redress receded further. Everyone was made to feel weak and helpless—either prostrate or be punished !

Doses of demoralisation were also given to the ruling party. An atmosphere of sycophancy was deliberately cultivated. The Congress President equated Indira with India. The party and government were made to operate on 'the *Fuhrer —prinzep*, the mythology of one supreme leader. Those Congressmen who refused to kow-tow as demanded lost their positions, among them the Chief Ministers of Uttar Pradesh and Orissa. The next on the chopping-block was the Chief Minister

of West Bengal. Two lone opposition Ministries —in Gujarat and Tamil Nad—were got rid of. There was to be conformity and abject compliance: greatness of a person was measured by the grovelling he imposed on those around him. Public rallies of the Prime Minister and the Heir Presumptive became command performances : the mass media were debauched.

On the other side, every section of society was subjected to fear : some leading journalists were imprisoned, captains of industry threatened with arrest, traders freely mulcted, judges brought in line by punitive transfers. The atmosphere was so much surcharged with fear that people were afraid to talk. I was amazed to find how totally uninformed senior officials and prominent persons were of what was happening. They were like a distorted triad of monkeys : they saw no truth, heard no truth, and uttered no protest. As the Shah Commission has observed in its report, "During the Emergency, for many a public functionary the dividing line between right and wrong, moral and immoral ceased to exist".

As the Heir Presumptive had his own power base in the Government, so was he accorded an independent power base in the organisation. There was a mushroom growth of the Youth Congress, an organisation that rallied round it doubtful elements that did not scruple to extort money from traders, factory owners, and others.

Standard of public life sank so low as to produce only stink.

The one exception to the above story of degeneration was the understanding reached by Mrs. Gandhi with Shaikh Abdullah. That generous approach helped to defuse crisis in Kashmir.

Behind the facade of the new economic programme, Mrs. Gandhi was busy buttressing her position. The Parliament was emasculated, its proceedings were censured before publication. It was used to rubber stamp many curious measures that Mrs. Gandhi sponsored at the time, mainly out of fright at the judgement pronounced against her by the Allahabad High Court. The Constitution was mangled in many ways, the Courts rendered powerless, the Parliament ineffective and the President officially reduced to a sinecure.

Sanjay Gandhi added five points of his own to the twenty-points of the new economic programme. The most important of those points was family planning. In 1966, Mrs. Gandhi had shown considerable interest in the programme. Its success then had been achieved through persuasion. Forgetting that lesson, on this occasion, the important programme was brought into disrepute by excessive zeal, even inhumanity, in implementation. Within a year it was claimed that over seven million vasectomy operations had been performed, but with little thought about after-care or concern over the possibility of psychological damage.

Nothing spread greater fear among the people than forcible sterilisations.

The dull, monotonous press seemed to have reduced itself to the status of Mrs. Gandhi's personal Gazette. The widening discrepancy between what the people knew was happening and what the radio announced destroyed credibility of the mass media. The crisis of confidence kept deepening. Interestingly, the worst victim of press censorship was Mrs. Gandhi herself. Her antennas no longer remained sensitive. She, like Catherine the Great before her, became a victim of "Potemkin-effect", her own propaganda. She got totally estranged from any knowledge of the decisive shift in public reactions that had occurred. While the roots of her power were rotting, she felt puissantly secure.

Dissent had been silenced by imprisonment. The least activity meant instant detention. The leaders of the opposition who had failed to come together before, were now pressed together in a common concentration camp. Ineluctably they began to move closer, shedding their separate skins, though the progress at real unity was painfully slow. That added to Mrs. Gandhi's sense of security. So confident had Mrs. Gandhi become, that contrary to her strategy of winning the support of the backward classes, by 1976, she had installed Brahmin Chief Ministers in Uttar Pradesh,

Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan ; thereby providing a hostage to the opposition.

The Emergency was used to loosen the strait-jacket of controls on the industrial economy. Various steps at liberalisation were taken. The result was beneficial. Industrial production increased by over 10% in 1976-77, the highest in a decade. Money supply increased by 17%, but that was largely the result of certain welcome developments ; because of the checks on smuggling and strengthening of the rupee, substantial remittances from abroad began to flow in through the official channels. Foreign exchange reserves rose by Rs. 881 crores in 1975-76 and Rs. 1371 crores in 1976-77. Bumper harvest in 1975-76 enabled large stocks—18 million tonnes of foodgrains to be accumulated. That led to food credit climbing into Rs. 2190 crores in March, 1977. Both foreign remittances and food credit added substantially to the stock of money supply while imparting resilience to the economy. These, however, were adventitious results. The Emergency administration failed to galvanise the economy. Mrs. Gandhi's "hard state" failed to show economic effectiveness. The average annual rate of increase in foodgrains between 1951-52 and 1964-65 was one per cent (after accommodating the rise in population), it fell to 0·2 per cent between 1964-65 and 1976-77. Per capita availability of cloth went down from 14·4 metres in

1955-56 to 11·4 metres in 1976-77. Likewise, in power the rate of growth tumbled down from 13·1% in 1955-56 to 1965-66 to 8·4 between 1965-66 and 1976-77. The consumer goods growth rate declined to 2·9% a year in the six years 1970 to 1976. In the capital goods industry that triggers industrial development the annual growth rate between 1955-65 was about 15% ; it came down to around 5% between 1966-76.

The Nemesis

The general elections that were due in 1976 had been postponed by a year through the extension of the term of the Lok Sabha from five years to six. Then in October, 1976 the Parliament was persuaded to put off elections by one more year—that is till early 1978. Having thus successfully thrown people on the wrong scent, Mrs. Gandhi suddenly called, on January 18, 1977, for elections. The elections were to be held in early March. The opposition hardly had any time to get into stride. The Emergency was relaxed, but not lifted. Mrs. Gandhi, thereby expected the people, to be circumspect—the Damocles' Sword was kept hanging over them. The elections were called to give her authoritarian regime legitimacy. Mrs. Gandhi expected them to register the triumph of populist authoritarianism.

The opposition leaders were let out of prison with the announcement of the elections. The commanding influence of J.P. and the leadership

of Morarji Desai helped rapidly to coalesce the divergent elements into a single party—the Janata Party. Its formation had an electric effect on the minds and mood of the people.

The people came forward and took over the campaign of the Janata Party. The handicaps of a party hurriedly formed by persons who were just out of prison were overcome by the remarkable outpouring of popular support. In 1967, Mrs Gandhi had been the beneficiary of youth-power; in 1977, she was the target of its wrath. The traumatic experience the people had gone through focussed their interest on a single issue : oust Indira Government. In six years, Mrs. Gandhi herself imparted urgency to the 1971 one-point programme of the opposition—"*Indira hatao* !". This time the old Grand Alliance had come through fire of common suffering, had not only accepted a common programme and discipline, but a single identity. With that the results of the elections became a foregone conclusion.

The defeat of the Congress was devastating in the North : in five States—from the Punjab to Bihar—the Congress drew a total blank. In Uttar Pradesh, where in 1971, Mrs. Gandhi had won 80 out of 85 seats, in 1977, she lost all the 85, including her own. In Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, the Congress managed to get a single seat each. Congress performance was poor in West Bengal and Orissa, and only slightly better in

Western India. Only in the South did the Congress maintain its commanding position.

How to account for this sharp divergence between the North and the South ? In 1967, the major reverses to the Congress had been in the Hindi region. In 1977, the rejection, well-nigh universal, was again in the same region. Such a repudiation may be partly because the State Governments could be run from the Centre more easily in the North than in the South. The excesses of emergency, its lawless rule, affected the people of the North far more than of the South. The strategy of sharing power with the backward castes had been more systematically worked out in the South. Perhaps the hastily put-together Janata Party had too much of Northern look. The hard fact is that the Congress rout was a reaction to the excesses of the Emergency rather to its imposition. Mrs. Gandhi's populist-authoritarian regime would probably have been legitimised but for the excesses indulged in. In that sense, Indira Gandhi was defeated by Sanjay Gandhi : significantly the Congress vote was the lowest—bare 18 per cent—in Haryana, where Bansilal had made a mockery of all decency.

In the midst of the Congress rout, it is important to note that the party still polled 34·5 per cent of the total votes cast. If in the country as a whole, the Congress vote was one in three, in Uttar Pradesh, it was one in four. Mrs. Gandhi

obviously had earned some lasting gain from her posture of "Garibi Hatao !" She was adept at sleight-of-hand politics. Take the condition of the Scheduled people. As against their conditions under Nehru, there was a marked deterioration : Those engaged in primary production increased in number from 75% to 82% in the case of the Scheduled Castes and from 91% to 94% in the case of the Scheduled Tribes, with corresponding decline in secondary and tertiary occupations. Again, in the primary sectors there has been deterioration in status : The number of landless among 1000 farming families went up from 345 to 518 among the Scheduled Castes and from 197 to 330 among the Tribes. Still the myth of Mrs Gandhi's solicitude for these people continues to elicit response. In June, 1977, when elections were held to the State Assemblies, the Congress vote bounced back. The difference in poll percentages of the Janata Party and the Congress narrowed from 43 to 16 per cent in Uttar Pradesh, 42 to 19 in Bihar, 52 to 30 in Haryana, and 25 to 11 in Madhya Pradesh. Only in Orissa and Himachal Pradesh did the margin widen in favour of the Janata Party. Mrs. Gandhi had damaged the Congress, but it was far from destroyed.

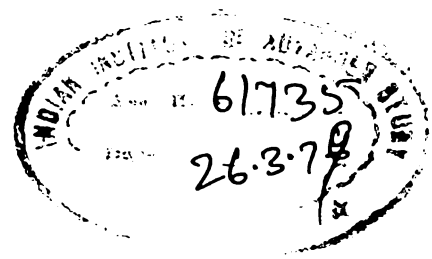
At the time of the Lok Sabha elections in March, 1977, it appeared as if India had finally moved towards a two-party competitive system. The two principal parties, with their associates,

were arrayed in clear juxtaposition. Within three months, during the June elections to State Assemblies, the picture got confused again ; regional parties returned to the fore. In Jammu and Kashmir, Tamil Nad, Goa and later in Nagaland, regional parties were swept to power. Because C.P.I. (M)'s hold over the years had been confined to West Bengal and Kerala, its success in West Bengal has both ideological and regional implications. The Janata Party's ability to absorb other parties seemed to have reached its limit. In fact the political structures of the national parties appear to have grown fragile.

Politics in India flowed smoothly, functioned with even tenor, during the fifties and part of the sixties. They entered a turbulent period after 1967. While the populist-authoritarian trends have been arrested, the turbulent has yet to be overcome, settled pattern is yet to emerge. Morris-Jones, in his study, *The Government and Politics of India*, published in 1964 had highlighted the establishment of "ordering framework" and of a "mediating framework" in the Indian polity. During Mrs. Gandhi's tenure of power, both these frameworks were undermined. It may not be difficult to restore the "ordering framework" by re-establishing constitutional checks and regulated functioning of the administration. But stability can return to politics only when the "mediating framework" is put right. It involves, in the words of

Morris-Jones, "keeping and holding in relation with each other the two active 'poles' of government and political forces. It requires them to maintain a dialogue and it further imposes the rules and style of their debate."[18]

The last decade may have been politically exciting, but in terms of economic amelioration it has proved disappointing. It helped to rouse widespread expectations ; the people have learnt to flex their political muscle. Consequently the decade we are embarking upon will demand performance-ability to cash the cheques issued in the past. Politics will have to concern itself not with ideological gestures or flamboyant policy-pronouncements, but with providing sensitive and efficient administration capable of solving the mundane, the local, the traditional tasks to the satisfaction of the people and swing the country in the orbit of development. Can we recover and improve upon the dynamic thrust of the Nehru era ?



18. P. 191.

Postscript

The above script was written over a year back. For varied reasons the Lectures could not be delivered in 1977. Since then many changes have occurred. Mrs. Gandhi has split the Congress once again and once again she has shown her strength against those whom she made to part with her: In Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh the official Congress forces were pulverized during the elections to the State Assemblies. While the Janata Governments have restored the freedoms of the people their over-all performances have failed to elicit public satisfaction. Mrs. Gandhi with her usual adroitness has exploited that fact fully. But to explore these vistas would mean altering the span of the decade and that would mean diffusing the focus of the Lectures. Later events cannot alter the validity of the analysis we have offered for the period considered.

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