Chapter II

INDIRA GANDHI: ELECTIONS AND DOMESTIC POLICY

“My grandfather once told me that there are two kinds of people: those who do the work and those who take the credit. He told me to try to be in the first group; there was much less competition there.”

Indira Gandhi’s ascendance to power was a milestone in the history of leadership in India, as well as in the world. She was not only the first but the only woman Prime Minister of the country, she has also been acclaimed as one of the most powerful personalities in the international platform. She was the second woman to have assumed the post of political leadership since the post Second World War, following Mrs. Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka. As the third Prime Minister of India (not to mention Guljarilal Nanda’s acting Premiership after the sudden death of Lal Bahadur Shastri, the second in the row after Jawaharlal Nehru), her political record displays a unique attribute, for she was such a kind of political figure in the post independent Indian political scenario, who was criticised and venerated simultaneously for her conduct and performances. She used to attract masses at large, even more than her father, Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s first Prime Minister. Most international political figures of the contemporary period had personal relations with her, a practice she had inherited while serving as her father’s hostess and personal assistant in various foreign tours during his premiership. She succeeded to

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the helm of power at a crucial point when India was undergoing multifarious tribulations both at home and abroad.

The death of Nehru engendered a factional rivalry between and among national and state party bosses relating to the authority and superiority that also had a consequent fallout in India's domestic and foreign policies. India needed a strong hand to deal with these turbulent situations. Indira Gandhi's emergence as the national leader was in perfect time to face the challenge. Being termed as the goongi gudiya or a dumb doll by her party colleagues because of her apparent humble and reticent behavioural traits and without any substantive contribution to her party, she became the Congress Party's prime candidate after the death of Lal Bahadur Shastri in 1967. It has to be mentioned in this connection that like Golda Meir, Mrs. Gandhi was initially chosen by her party's veteran leaders to run the government during the interim period till the commencement of fresh elections. They could not apprehend, however, the extent of Mrs. Gandhi's ambitions which culminated in her becoming one of India's most powerful leaders.

An interesting feature of Mrs. Gandhi's political career was her holding of unimportant portfolios before ascending the supreme position of the country. Unlike Golda Meir, who used to be in-charge of some of the most significant government posts before assuming the Prime Ministership of Israel (holding of key governmental departments before becoming the prime leader of the country is a custom that most political leaders follow), both Mrs. Gandhi and Mrs. Thatcher held comparatively less influential portfolios. In Shastri's administration, Mrs. Gandhi opted for a relatively light portfolio- the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, instead of foreign affairs, to which, she was better suited.³ At the same time, unlike Mrs. Meir, she was not an able debater, and rarely participated in parliamentary discussions, and this left her largely dissatisfied with her performance in the government and aimed at

³ Ibid., p. 24.
moving to London with her two sons.\textsuperscript{4} The situation, however, began to change with the sudden death of Shastri.

At the same time, unlike Mrs. Meir, who had been continuously displaying her acumen as an indispensible leader of Israel since the Galuth (pre-state form of Israel) years, Mrs. Gandhi could not prove her capability as a leading figure in the initial days of her entry into politics. Nonetheless, she possessed the most desired quality—her family background since she hailed from India’s one of the most influential families together with her image as Nehru’s daughter, and her mass appeal that had attracted huge supporters to her side. At the same time, her broad international contacts at the personal level were considered to be an additional advantage during crisis periods. Besides, her age factor was also proved to be valuable for the nation as she was merely forty-eight years old at the time of her ascendance to power. Thus, being young and modern with strong family connections, as well as, her gender was perhaps easier for her to involve herself with public than any other male candidate, who had little political experience as her.

Indira Gandhi’s political career and her behavioural attitude towards various political situations were influenced by several factors since her childhood days, which, in effect, help in analysing her major characteristics. Since she belonged to one of India’s most respectable families of the contemporary period, she was fortunate to have become acquainted with stalwarts of India’s freedom movement. Likewise, her evolution from a ‘dumb doll’ to one of the most critical debaters during Parliamentary discussions surprised her colleagues and enemies.

It could also be pointed out that the indifferent attitudes of party bosses towards Nehru’s daughter may have induced her to become a formidable and powerful leader of Indian politics. These veteran figures were unable to estimate the latent potential of their apparently docile and innocuous woman,

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid., p. 25.
who would one day utilise these party bosses as her stepping stone for a higher purpose, to emerge as a most powerful leader.

The present chapter seeks to look into the domestic policies of Indira Gandhi along with her electoral victories. Since this dissertation is not a biographical analysis, her domestic policies will be dealt with in a selective manner, by incorporating the most significant issues of her time, which had wider impact on the country and its people.

The chapter has been divided into sections covering her elections, reasons for her victory and her policy programmes that she undertook in each term, for the purpose of analysis. Before discussing these segments, attempt has been made to comprehend her personality factor in the light of various sources and incidents that influenced her starting from her childhood days, which in a way, contributed in shaping her personality, perspectives and policy measures. The chapter also seeks to analyse her functioning style, leadership pattern, decision-making technique and personality based on her policy formulations.

1. EXPERIENCES AND EVENTS INFLUENCING GANDHI’S POLITICAL CAREER

1.1 Early Childhood

Indira Gandhi, the only daughter of Jawaharlal and Kamala Nehru, was born on November 19, 1917, in the luxurious palatial residence of her grandfather Motilal Nehru, that is, Anand Bhawan, in Allahabad. The house being one of the principal meeting places of the Indian National Congress, little Indira was often surrounded by world famous stalwarts, such as Mrs. Annie Besant, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, Lala Lajpat Rai and others. She attended her first Congress meeting at the age
of three⁵ and experienced her first encounter with the British at the age of four on the occasion of the fall-out of Congress resolutions on the non-payment of taxes and the boycott of foreign clothes.⁶ As a result, she had been groomed into the intricacies of Indian politics almost unobtrusively and imperceptibly, long before her maturity.

Indira Gandhi was brought up, unlike her other two counterparts, in a relatively luxurious and secured atmosphere, in which, she never had a chance to experience poverty and hardship. She did not have to crave for hunger or run continuously for the fear or threat of persecution, in the manner that Golda Meir had. She was sent to European schools and colleges, and pampered with expensive toys in her childhood.

In spite of that Mrs. Gandhi suffered a lot because of insecurity, borne out of the frequent imprisonment of her parents. Unlike Mrs. Meir or Mrs. Thatcher, who were fortunate to be under the shelter of their parents, she was left alone. The long prison terms of her parents separated their daughter from them. Although her house had many family members, they were disturbed by her parents’ active participation in Gandhiji’s non-cooperation movement, which led the police to frequently arrest and convict them. This in turn made Indira self-reliant. In her own words, “I did not have a happy and serene childhood. I was very thin, sickly, nervous little girl. After the police came, I’d be left alone for weeks, months, to get along as best I could. I learned very soon to get along myself.”⁷

Another noticeable dimension of Gandhi’s personality was her shyness that could be traced from her childhood days. Her parents’ involvement in political activities, which resulted in their frequent imprisonment and long term absence from home, absence of any other children and playmates of her

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⁷ Steinberg, n. 2, p. 17.
age, and above all, her mother’s terminal illness made her ‘lonely and insecure’, as she remained under the care of servants.\(^8\) Simultaneously, her profound fear of rejection by others often haunted her as she was shy, lonely, and socially unresponsive unlike her other family members. One of her biographers has commented, “On the one hand, despite her painful shyness, she strove to excel in whatever she had to do. On the other, she enveloped herself in impenetrable reserve. She was unable to confide her thought and emotions to anyone except a very few, and she guarded her privacy most zealously.”\(^9\)

It can be argued that Mrs. Gandhi’s reticent behaviour was displayed during the initial days in the Parliament under the Shastri government, but she was always willing to overcome this. At one point of time she was taken for granted by her party bosses, who she silently purged to become a dominant and authoritarian political figure. When she was her father’s hostess she largely remained her father’s caretaker, instead of being Nehru’s close confidante and political adviser. Her staunch feeling of being rejected was deeply rooted, to overcome. The general impression of being inherently weak, shy, with lack of communicative skill appeared to her to be a curse, and she had always tried to transform and prove herself.

1.2 Relationship with parents

As mentioned earlier, Indira Gandhi lacked the constant presence of her parents and their guidance during her childhood, because of the latter’s active involvement in India’s struggle for freedom against the British domination. When her parents were taken away by the police, she felt an urgent need for protecting them, as the rest of her family members were strongly against their

\(^8\) Mary C. Carras, *Indira Gandhi: In the Crucible of Leadership* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1979), p. 36.

participation in the freedom struggle. As a consequence, she became self-dependent from her early years and deeply felt the need to support her parents both from the police and family’s disfavour. She explained this later: “I felt that rather than relying on my parents, it was my business to protect them from all this as far as I could.”

At the same time she was emotionally closer to her mother Kamala than her father. Actually both Kamala and her daughter were neglected and cursed because of their shyness by her paternal grandmother and aunt. Moreover, her mother’s recurring illness due to tuberculosis created a psychological pressure upon her. She felt it necessary to protect and take ample care of her mother as a primary responsibility. To one of her analysts, “…she took a nurturing role, becoming the mother to her sickly “child”, thus inverting the usual parent-child relationship. Her father encouraged her to be independent, and she somehow felt that he, as well as her mother, were vulnerable and needed her protection”. Thus, when she was in dire need of the protective shield and companionship of her parents in the formative stage, she was left alone to mould herself to become as an independent individual, bereft of any well-wisher or friend but to serve her parents. She took her mother to various sanatoriums in both India and abroad by herself for recuperation and eventually it was in Bavaria where she died in 1936 at the age of thirty-six, when her daughter was merely eighteen years old.

Gandhi’s reversal of the parent-child role was not only limited to her home but got extended, encompassing a larger dimension when she regarded the Indian population as her children and herself as the mother or the

10 Gandhi, n. 6, p. 16.
11 Steinberg, n. 2, p. 55.
guardian to look after them. Here she associated herself with the traditional mother-child role and felt it as her primary responsibility to look after them.

1.3 Relationship with other family members
Apart from her parents, Gandhi was attached to her grandfather, Motilal Nehru, who used to keep a watchful eye on her in the absence of her parents. In fact, he was also her source of inspiration because of his participation in India’s freedom struggle along with her parents. It was only Motilal, Jawaharlal and Kamala, who had deeply involved themselves in Mahatma Gandhi’s call for freedom struggle, in spite of strong reservations of other family members. On the other hand, her association with her grandmother Swaruprani and aunt Vijaylaxmi was quite unusual because of the latter’s ill-treatment of her mother. In fact, Gandhi’s antipathy towards her aunt was so strong that she even ordered to her imprisonment, for being a vociferous critic during the declaration of national emergency in 1975.

1.4 Participation in India’s freedom movement
The participation of the Nehru family in Mahatma Gandhi’s freedom struggle against the British left a deep impression on Indira Gandhi’s life. Like Golda Meir, she was innately nationalistic and deeply associated with the freedom struggle and the making of India. She recalled later in her autobiography,

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13 Malhotra, n. 9, p. 104.
15 In Allahabad she used to treat the helpless lepers, who were considered to be social outcasts and untouchables at that time. She also established a children’s spinning group, called Bal Chakra Sangh on the advice of Gandhiji for the promotion of Khadi and hand spinning. During the Non-cooperation movement of 1930, she played the lead role in shaping her organisation, the Vanar Sena or the Monkey Brigade, named after the Hindu epic, Ramayana, as auxiliaries, to help the Congress workers in the freedom struggle.
“When my father wanted to join Gandhiji and to change the whole way of life, to change our luxurious living, to give up his practice, the whole family was against it. It was only my mother’s courageous and persistent support and encouragement which enabled him to take this big step”.\textsuperscript{16} In fact, her mother displayed remarkable strength and was a source of inspiration to her father. It was on her insistence that the Nehru family embarked on the burning of foreign clothes on the call of Gandhiji; even if, “the whole family was against it but it was my mother’s insistence that brought about a change”.\textsuperscript{17}

Since her childhood she had been watching her grandfather, father and mother going to prison and it became a matter of pride and honour for the Nehru family at that time that inspired her deeply. When she was imprisoned due to her active participation in the ‘Quit India Movement’ of 1942, she regarded this as the “most dramatic incident” in her life as “I made up my mind that I had to go to prison. Without that…something would have been incomplete.”\textsuperscript{18}

Inspired by her parents, Gandhi was compassionate about and sensitive to the trauma, social malpractices and political bickering of freedom movements. India’s freedom movement, had, therefore, cast a lasting impression on her mind, which influenced her in shaping India’s domestic and foreign policies during her premiership. Her nationalistic spirit that she had imbibed from her parents and the freedom struggle was reflected in the 1971 War against Pakistan, where she demonstrated an uncompromising attitude towards her foreign foes and refused to make a trade-off vis-a-vis India’s security.

\textsuperscript{16} Gandhi, n. 6, p. 12.


1.5 Educational influence

Indira Gandhi’s educational career was not a conventional one as she was admitted to different schools both in India and Europe at different times, which resulted in a marked discontinuity and interruption in her educational career. The absence of parents from home and her mother’s recurring illness, for which she had to escort her mother to different sanatoriums in Europe for recuperation, and above all, the nationalist zeal of the Nehrus in India’s freedom struggle made her educational journey rather incomplete. Mrs. Gandhi, however, confided in her autobiography later, “My education suffered not because of my parents being in prison, but because the type of schools to which I could go seemed so remote from the life we had at home that I was not in a mood to take anything from them.”

Unlike Mrs. Thatcher or Mrs. Meir, who showed their strong dedication and perseverance to education, Mrs. Gandhi displayed her reservation and antipathy towards a formal educational curriculum and refused to attend her classes instead. Above all, she did not perform well as in her academic life, which was considered to be “the conventional route to political leadership” for the nationalist elite sections.

Gandhi’s grandfather Motilal Nehru’s love for western education led her to join St. Cecilia convent school in 1924, where half of the pupils were British, and she was the only one to wear hand-spun clothes, unlike the rest of the best dressed girls. She, therefore, developed a strong resistance to attending her school because she felt depressed and lonely. As she was strongly a nonconformist, she refused to accept the rigorous English pattern of education in those exclusive high profile convent schools of India and Europe.

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19 Gandhi, n. 6, p. 17.
20 Everett, in Genovese (ed.), n. 18, p, 106.
Later she was admitted to a boarding school at Poona, run by a family friend and Congress worker, to complete her matriculation in 1934 and was sent to Shantiniketan thereafter, where she found her inner solace through the development of mental wellbeing under the tutelage of Rabindranath Tagore.

After her mother’s death, Gandhi went to study modern History at Somerville College, Oxford. With the outbreak of the Second World War, she came back to India on the account of poor health. The underlying reason, however, was her failure to pass the Latin exam for the second time, for which, she was asked to leave her College.22

It may be argued that Indira Gandhi was an imposing political figure of the contemporary period, whose support base extended from the Hindi speaking regions of the north down to the Dravidian regions of the south that included Hindus, Muslims and other minorities, peasants, workers and common people. This rare quality was emanated from her cosmopolitan outlook that was borne out of her upbringing in the Nehru family. At the same time, her engagement with the Indian freedom movement also taught her to be fearless.

1.6 Impact on Gandhi as Nehru’s hostess
A momentous part of the life of Indira Gandhi came when she decided to serve her father’s hostess after he became India’s first Prime Minister in 1947. Nehru had many personal and official responsibilities and these were assiduously taken care of by Mrs. Gandhi. She felt it necessary to help her father in all his socio-political work, leaving her husband in Lucknow, and overlooking the fact that her duties would largely remain unrecognised,

22 Steinberg, n. 2, p. 19.
unnoticed and unacknowledged. In fact, she remained totally submissive under the overarching personality of her father.\(^{23}\)

Mrs. Gandhi’s childhood frustration and loneliness continued into her adult life and she remained largely unaltered even after she became the mother of two sons. Her role as her father’s hostess was, therefore, apolitical as Nehru apparently never discussed any political issues with her.\(^{24}\)

It may also be said that she became the Prime Minister and seceded from the diktat of the bosses of the century-old Congress Party, she was ignored and sidelined for not possessing adequate quality and strong disposition. She was included in the Shastri government merely as a token of Shastri’s gratitude towards Nehru, who had supported his candidacy as a Premier. In spite of being a Cabinet Minister, she was excluded from major decision-making under his leadership. At the same time she was also feared by many as a possible rival, because she was Nehru’s daughter, and indulged in deriding her potentials, evident from her nickname as ‘dumb doll’ by her fellow contemporary political leaders.

While comparison with Gandhi’s two other counterparts, Margaret Thatcher and Golda Meir, it may be seen that both these leaders were directly or indirectly involved in the politics of their respective countries since their early years. Dennis Thatcher wanted his daughter to be well versed in politics since her childhood, and discussed every single political issue with her, whether she was able to understand them or not, and encouraged her to attend Parliamentary proceedings. Likewise, the plight of Jews worldwide left an indelible mark on Golda Meir, which influenced her to intertwine herself with politics since a tender age. As a consequence, she herself made an effort to understand the situation by reading, and listening to speeches of Jewish leaders, without much support from her parents.

\(^{23}\) Carras, n. 8, p. 90.

\(^{24}\) Steinberg, n. 2, p. 50.
It is also to be noted that both the leaders were bereft of having any kind of hereditary support base from their respective families, unlike Indira Gandhi, who was blessed with a dynastic political culture that she inherited from her grandfather and father. The Nehru family was the principal bedrock of the Congress party, to which she belonged. Despite being the daughter of India’s first Prime Minister, she was virtually left alone to develop and groom herself into a politically sensitive person. She received no assistance from her father to be inducted into politics. As such, her initial reluctance to step into the world of politics was clearly visible from her refusal to join the Legislative Assembly of the state of Uttar Pradesh in the immediate aftermath of India’s independence on the request of G.V. Pant, and to contest India’s first general election of 1952 as requested by Congress workers on the plea that her two sons were too young. Instead, she campaigned on behalf of her father and husband, and both of them won.25

In spite of all this, perhaps the greatest education in politics that Mrs. Gandhi experienced at this juncture was from the numerous foreign trips that she undertook while accompanying Nehru in his capacity as India’s Prime Minister, and her first solo trip to the Soviet Union as the Prime Minister’s daughter in 1953.26 The outcome was that she had personal contacts and close relationships with most of the political stalwarts of international politics, which had immensely helped her during her Premiership.

2. ENTRY INTO POLITICS

Despite her initial reluctance, Mrs. Gandhi may have yearned to create her own individual footmark in politics, perhaps, to get rid of the tag of ‘Nehru’s daughter’. This may explain her membership of the Congress Working Committee (CWC), the highest policy-making body of the Congress Party, in

25 Gandhi, n. 6, p. 30.
26 Steinberg, n. 2, p. 21.
In February 1959, she was unanimously selected as the President of the Congress Party at the thereby becoming the third from the Nehru family in this post, after her grandfather, Motilal Nehru (1919 and 1938) and her father Jawaharlal Nehru (for a number of sessions) and the fourth woman after Annie Besant (1917), Sarojini Naidu (1925) and Nellie Sengupta (1933).

There are certain evidences that Indira Gandhi’s ascendance to this prestigious position stemmed not out of a decision of Nehru, but emanated from the wishes of other Congress co-workers, to whom, she may have appeared as a potential and promising figure to carry out party policies. Nehru’s statement at a Press Conference, which was held in the immediate aftermath of her inauguration as the Congress President may substantiate this: “Normally speaking, it is not good thing for my daughter to come in as Congress President when I am Prime Minister.”

On the other hand, critics have pointed out that the ingenious ‘Kamaraj Plan’ was dexterously designed by Nehru to remove all potential party aspirants from the path of his daughter for becoming the Premier.

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27 Malhotra, n. 9, p. 61.
29 Ibid., p. 5. To Nayar, the plan was a “cleansing operation” through which Nehru removed all possible successors and competitors and cleared the path for Mrs. Gandhi. The Kamaraj Plan was designed in August 1963 by Nehru and his close associate Kamaraj Nadar, the Chief Minister of Madras (the name was later changed to Tamil Nadu) that asked most of the Congress heavy-weights, Cabinet Ministers and Chief Ministers, who were vehement aspirants for the post of the Congress President, to resign from their governmental positions in order to look into the organisational matters of the party. Kamaraj himself resigned from his post to lead his party as the President. To Nayar, the plan was a “cleansing operation” through which Nehru removed all possible successors and competitors and cleared the path for Mrs. Gandhi.
On the other hand, Mrs. Gandhi’s acceptance of the post may be perhaps because she had a desire to move away from the shelter of her father and cast on independent pathway. This was evident from an interview to Anne Leslie of the London based journal, *Punch*: “I have never been in the shadow of anybody, not been my father. I have always been very determined and very independent....”\(^{31}\)

Nevertheless, it is perhaps impossible to deny that Nehru’s preference for dynastic leadership led him to indirectly help his daughter assume the supreme party post, irrespective of the fact that both father and daughter had denied such influences on each other. It is also a fact that Mrs. Gandhi never pushed her father to take her into politics. She rather confided to his peers that her father did not discuss anything with her that she wished for.\(^{32}\)

Mrs. Gandhi’s gateway to politics was further widened when she was given a Cabinet post under Lal Bahadur Shastri, who had succeeded to the Prime Ministerial position after the death of Nehru in 1964. Shastri offered the Foreign Ministry only to have a “Nehru in the Cabinet to maintain stability.”\(^{33}\) She however, refused to take the charge, and preferred the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting instead, which had much lesser significance compared to the Foreign Ministry.

3. GANDHI’S ROLE IN MAJOR POLITICAL EVENTS BEFORE BECOMING THE PREMIER

There were a number of political events that facilitated in moulding the character of Indira Gandhi from that of a frail, passive, dependent and retiring person to a personality with dominating, authoritarian, and ambitious. Her lust for power and its sometimes unscrupulous use, made her one of the

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\(^{31}\) Zakaria, in Ahluwalia (ed.), n. 1, p. 48.

\(^{32}\) Frank, n. 21, p. 237.

\(^{33}\) Gandhi, n. 6, p. 101.
strongest and unchallenged leaders of the twentieth century. This indomitable spirit, however, emerged gradually in the course of her interactions with the intricacies and craftiness of Indian politics in the aftermath of the demise of her father. It was around this time that she got acquainted with and grasped the art of politics that had eventually transformed her into a master politician. Quite skillfully, she had reversed the Aristotelian dictum of the domination of man over woman, and instead, became a symbol of female power, not only in the subcontinent, but the entire world (she was the second female head of government in the world after Mrs. Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka).

3.1 As the Congress President

During the premiership of Nehru, Mrs. Gandhi was elected as the Congress President in 1959, succeeding U.N. Dhebar, who was about to retire from the post before the completion of his second term. As expected, Mrs. Gandhi was initially reluctant and hesitant in taking up the responsibility. Her appointment, according to Nehru “indicated neither a leftist nor a rightist swing, but rather a desire on the part of the sections of the Congress to get out of a rut by introducing a new, young leadership instead of the same old faces.”

This marked a new beginning in the history of the Indian National Congress Party, for not only did Mrs. Gandhi become the youngest President of the organisation (she was only forty two years old) in the post Independence period, but she also embarked on policies so as to furnish the party with a fresh outlook and vision, which was evident from the series of

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34 To Aristotle, there were two different types of classes- one was fated to rule and the other was fated to obey in the manner of male over females and masters over slaves.

political events that transformed the cartography and political atmosphere of India.

During a short span of ten months in the office, Mrs. Gandhi undertook bold decisions much against the wishes of her father. She advised him to bifurcate Bombay Presidency into two separate states- Bombay and Gujarat along linguistic lines, which was strongly against Nehru’s idea. When she became the Prime Minister later, India witnessed the creation of new states on the basis of territorial adjustments so as to cater to the growing urge for linguistic, caste, communal and religious allegiances.

Another noticeable event that demonstrated the determined personality of Mrs. Gandhi was the imposition of Presidential rule in the Communist governed state of Kerala, once again, contrary to the desires of her father. It also became a commitment for Mrs. Gandhi as the newly appointed party President in her first Press Conference, to “make special efforts to win back Kerala for the Congress”, something she mentioned in her first Press conference. Despite being an ardent admirer of leftist ideology, she did not want the rule of the Communist Party in Kerala. As a consequence, President’s rule was imposed in 1959, followed by the declaration of fresh general elections in the following year, in which, the Congress made a spectacular come-back.

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36 Myron Weiner, Political Change in South Asia, (Calcutta, Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1963), p. 140. Unlike Mrs. Gandhi, on the other hand, found it just to rearrange them Nehru strongly disliked the concept of reorganisation of state boundaries along linguistic lines as it would aggravate provincial sentiments and loyalty and administrative dislocation.


38 Frank, n. 20, pp. 252-253. It may be pointed out that Mrs. Gandhi was not the sole decision-maker in this case. Nehru’s trusted adviser Krishna Menon also informed him about the deteriorating condition of Kerala, which confirmed about the imposition of President’s rule in the state.
3.2 As an active social worker

A commendable facet of Mrs. Gandhi’s personality was her dedication to the service of her countrymen. During the outbreak of the Sino-Indian War of 1962, she made an arduous trip to the North East Frontier Area (NEFA) and Tezpur of the state of Assam, the actual and borderline sites of contest, to provide the moral support for the soldiers, comfort the wounded, energise them and make them feel how indispensable they were for the security of the country. 39

Likewise, Mrs. Gandhi used to inspect violent and turbulence prone states personally so as to establish direct contact with victims and help them find effective solutions. In 1961, during a virulent Hindu-Muslim riot in Jabalpur, she organised relief operations and helped in pacifying the mob. 40 In 1965, when south India was suffering from language riots, she immediately flew to Madras to restore peace, once again, against the wishes of the party high command and the dictates of Premier Shastri. In her opinion, “I think my going made a definite difference in calming people”. 41 Given the intense political turmoil, she felt that it was her responsibility to look into the matter, not merely as the Minister of Information and Broadcasting, but as the “one of the leaders of the country”. 42

Mrs. Gandhi’s behavior in these contexts is an indicator of her thinking. It presents a portrait of herself as an indispensible leader not merely of her party, but of her country. She was gradually expanding the domain of her authority from a simple Congress cadre to the leader of the masses.

39 Gandhi, n. 6, p. 92.
41 Gandhi, n. 6, p. 106.
42 Malhotra, n. 9, p. 84
4. POLITICS OF SUCCESSION AND GANDHI’S ASCENDANCE TO POLITICAL POWER:

The politics of succession following Nehru’s death, was one of the most intriguing chapters of Indian politics, for it had shaped the destiny of political leaders and the political atmosphere of India in a manner that was never envisaged earlier. And this was specially the case for Mrs. Gandhi, whose emergence as a powerful leader was the most dominating event of Indian politics. In the post Nehru years, there were three consecutive successions of political leaders to the prime ministerial position: the ascendance of Lal Bahadur Shastri in 1964 after the death of Nehru, the selection of Mrs. Gandhi to fill the vacuum, which was created with the sudden demise of Shastri in 1966, and the democratic electoral mandate of Mrs. Gandhi in the second general election of 1967. Although it is inappropriate to consider the election of 1967 as a case of succession, since there was people’s mandate behind the ascendance of Mrs. Gandhi to the supreme position, the manner by which she was chosen by the Syndicate bosses as the only prime ministerial candidate amidst much bargaining and the meticulous calculations on the power-sharing pattern between Gandhi and her arch rival, Morarji Desai, depicted a clear picture of the succession of Mrs. Gandhi as the Head of the Government.

4.1 Gandhi’s succession to the Prime Ministerial position in 1966

A few months before his death, Nehru in an interview to R.K. Karanjia, the editor of Blitz, referred to three names as his legitimate successor, Kamaraj (“a leader of the masses who is dedicated to our ideology”), Lal Bahadur Shastri (“simple, modest, gentle”) and Guljarilal Nanda (“a good socialist and a man of great integrity”). Reputed journalist Welles Hangen regarded Indira Gandhi as the fourth option for the post of Premiership in the absence of

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Nehru.\textsuperscript{44} It was apparent, therefore, that neither Nehru, nor other political experts thought of Indira Gandhi as the future Premier. However, the situation took a volte-face after the sudden demise of India’s second Prime Minister Lai Bahadur Shastri in 1966 and Mrs. Gandhi was elected by the Congress party as the first woman Prime Ministerial candidate by a secret ballot, winning 355 votes against 169 votes of her rival Morarji Desai, and was thereby elected as the leader of Congress Parliamentary Group.\textsuperscript{45} She thus became the third Prime Minister in the row (not to mention Guljarilal Nanda, who took over as the acting Premier till the election of Mrs. Gandhi was complete). She was sworn in on January 1966, and accordingly become the youngest Prime Minister of the country.

Initially, Mrs. Gandhi was reluctant to stand for the highest office of the country. It was only on the repeated request of the then Congress President Kamaraj that she decided to contest the election. It was a decisive decision that went in her favour and soon proved to be the turning point in her political career. This decision, however, had an underlying motive. According to the Congress President Kamaraj, she was the only choice, because, “being a woman, Mrs. Gandhi could be expected to be more pliable and dependent on the president than the other contenders. And secondly, she was the candidate most likely to defeat Morarji Desai....”\textsuperscript{46}

It, therefore, appears from this fact that her gender became a matter of great significance to the Congress bosses, which could be dexterously used to attract sizeable sections of the Indian public and to win back the Congress support which was declined in the absence of Nehru and Shastri. Together

\textsuperscript{44} Hangen, n. 40, p. 166. His other chosen ones were M. Desai, V.K. Krishna Menon, L.B. Shastri, Y.B. Chavan, J. P. Narain, S.K. Patil and Lt. B.M. Kaul.

\textsuperscript{45} Masani, n. 5, p. 138.

\textsuperscript{46} Steinberg, n. 2, p. 25.
with that, her “progressive image and fresh outlook” it was felt, would influence younger generations to be a part of the organisation.\textsuperscript{47} Besides, her parental lineage and dynastic heritage would also be useful in bringing back non-Congressional states into the Congress fold.\textsuperscript{48}

A second reason behind the scene was to prevent the authoritarian influence of Morarji Desai, one of the strong contenders for the post and was vehemently opposed to Mrs. Gandhi’s candidature, but disliked by the majority of the Congress bosses as it would not be easy for them to control and dominate him, in the manner they had plans for Mrs. Gandhi.

A third factor was Mrs. Gandhi’s acquiescent nature for which she had earned the humiliating appellation, ‘dumb doll’ from her power-brokers and colleagues, to whom she would easily come under the grip of the Congress bosses, and would utilise her stature as a protective shield for the fulfillment of their desires. Given Mrs. Gandhi’s submissive nature, who had rarely raised her voice in any parliamentary debates and discussions, and looked up to her senior colleagues for their advices.\textsuperscript{49} It was also felt that it would be easier for the latter to manipulate her and bypass any probable independent power base that was likely to emerge if Desai had won the post. On the other


\textsuperscript{48} From the late 1960s there was the breakdown of the monolithic Congress domination and the rise of regional parties that had led to the formation of non-Congress governments, which became quite ubiquitous in the Fourth General Elections of 1967.

\textsuperscript{49} Mohammad Currim Chagla, \textit{Roses in December: An Autobiography}, (Bombay, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1974), p. 448. As the leader of the Lower House of the Indian Parliament under Mrs. Gandhi’s first term as the Prime Minister in 1966, Chagla mentioned in his memoir about the relative non-interventionist character of Mrs. Gandhi and her tendency to route questions and queries that were directed against her, to her deputy Ministers, and her repeated apprehension of whether she would be asked for any clarification from the House. Chagla was her Minister of External Affairs during the India-Pakistan War of 1971.
hand, since she was not among those, “who matter in a broad spectrum of Cabinet deliberation”, she would never pose a threat to her senior colleagues.

Nevertheless, the initial reluctance and malleability of Mrs. Gandhi was soon proved to be counter-productive and a much stronger and ruthless incarnation of Mrs. Gandhi emerged as a result of her succession to the helm of political power. Her candid opinion in this regard was expressed in her memoirs, “I am always reluctant when I enter into something but then I give it my best”, and she gave her best to provide India with powerful leadership till date. From then onwards she continued to win in all the subsequent national elections, except in 1977 when she was dethroned by the Janata party, and dominated the nation till she was assassinated in 1984.

4.2 The electoral mandate of 1967

The year 1967 was one of the most crucial years of Indian politics for it was the first general election to be held after the death of Nehru, and more significantly, the gradual erosion of the hegemonic presence of Congress in the states because of the rise of regional political organisations. Amidst political turmoil, Mrs. Gandhi and Morarji Desai had appeared to emerge as the principal contestants for the post of Prime Minister. Akin to Golda Meir, Mrs. Gandhi was initially chosen by her party bosses in 1966 to head the post for an interim session till the commencement of fresh elections that were scheduled to be held the following year.

In 1967, Mrs. Gandhi was also chosen by the Congress power-brokers to continue as the leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP) and


51 Abbas, n. 43, p. 12.
thereafter, the Prime Minister, in spite of the fact that her appraisal report for the first year as the Premier was not satisfactory, since she was not considered by the majority of the Parliamentarians as an able leader, specially in her dealings with the Opposition. The Syndicate was strongly against this decision, because they were deeply annoyed by her devaluation policy, except the Congress President Kamaraj Nadar, who was, perhaps, strongly supported of candidacy.

The probable reason behind this choice could be the lack of a political figure having an all-India appeal and a charismatic personality. Most of the members within the highest echelon of the Congress Party had regional background, and the haughtiness of Morarji Desai was also not quite acceptable to the party elite. At the same time, there was also an apprehension of the party bosses that the presence of various regional political organisations may weaken the influence of the Congress over the Indian electorate and undermine its status. Hence they needed a strong figure to expand the Congress bases in the states, and thus officially endorsed the candidacy of Mrs. Gandhi, who appeared to fit this role.

Another notable factor that went in the favour of Mrs. Gandhi’s premiership was the role of her supporters within the Congress and members

52 Michael Brecher, “Succession in India 1967: The Routinisation of Political Change”, Asian Survey, (California) Vol. VII, No. 7, July 1967 p. 426. Italics is mine, as she would soon excel in the art of politics and sweep aside all her rivals, including her party peers to make herself as the most dominating and unchallenged Prime Minister, and the oppositions would have to wait till 1977 to oust her from her chair. That ousting, however, would also be short-lived, as she would soon regain her lost position in the general elections of 1980.

53 The leading figures of the Congress since the post-Nehru period were devoid of an all-India affiliation. S. K. Patil (Bombay), Atulya Ghosh (West Bengal), Sanjiva Reddy (Andhra Pradesh), Kamaraj (Madras) were influential in their respective states, but not for the entire country.
of her ‘Inner Circle’\textsuperscript{54}, popularly known as “Young Turks”, who were institutional in backing her candidacy and insisted on no compromise or power-sharing with Morarji Desai, who was supposed to be given the position of Deputy Prime Minister and the Home Ministry according to the wishes of the Syndicate.\textsuperscript{55} With their active involvement, she initiated a vigorous pressure over the Old Guards to ensure her position as the leader of the government in the impending national election.\textsuperscript{56}

Mrs. Gandhi’s move was a portrayal of her calculative mindset, which was absent in her initial years. It seems that she was gradually grasping the nuances and intricacies of politics. With the announcement of Mrs. Gandhi as

\textsuperscript{54} Since the time of her ascendance to the prime ministerial position, Indira Gandhi was maintaining a close association with some of the party members, who were her prime advisers, strategists and loyal supporters, and also acted as a powerful pressure group and lobby to dilute the over-arching Syndicate presence. They were also considered as Mrs. Gandhi’s ‘Kitchen Cabinet’ or the ‘Young Turks’ against the senior and veteran Congress leaders. They were Dinesh Singh, Ashok Mehta, Y.B. Chavan, Swaran Singh, Fakruddin Ali Ahmad, Subramaniam, Jagjivan Ram, Brahmananda Reddy and the group of Members of Parliament from Maharashtra, Punjab and Kashmir, who had displayed their loyal support towards Mrs. Gandhi. With the help of this group that Mrs. Gandhi was institutional in seceding away from the Syndicate to form the ‘Indira Congress’ in 1969. All of them were paid back through their heading of chief Ministries as a prize for their loyalty towards her.

\textsuperscript{55} The Syndicate bosses wanted to make a compromise between their two indispensable prime ministerial candidates, Gandhi and Desai. They wanted to make a trade-off between them, by utilising the all-India figure of Mrs. Gandhi as the leader without hurting the wishes of Morarji Desai, who would be appointed as the Number Two leader as the Deputy Prime Minister (DPM), Home Minister and leader of the House, as proposed by veteran leader, S.K. Patil (known as ‘Patil Plan’). However, in nexus with her support groups, Mrs. Gandhi had persuaded Desai to accept the posts of DPM and Finance Ministry instead. It, thereby, demonstrated her rising as the leader of the country, by defying the dictates of her party bosses. For a detailed analysis, see Brecher, n. 52, pp. 423-443.

the leader of the nation, she formed her Cabinet without consulting the Congress President and her principal backer, Kamaraj and his associates, and her DPM, Desai. This was the beginning of her confrontation with the party veterans and the consolidation of her own power base and position. Her case also bears resemblance to that of Margaret Thatcher, who also resorted to a similar stance in nexus with her own coterie of supporters and associates to ensure her victory as the leader of the Conservative Party in 1975 and in the subsequent general election of 1979.

5. POLITICAL CAREER: ELECTIONS AND DOMESTIC POLICIES:

According to Mrs. Gandhi, “It is absolutely untrue to say that my father groomed for it [political leadership]; because if he had, at least he would have taken me into his confidence about decisions. He did not. We had discussions but only because I was interested in the subject...While I say that I didn't want political leadership I also think that it is not possible for me to be away from problems.”

It was impossible for her to remain indifferent towards politics, because she belonged to the Nehru family. Being the daughter of India’s first Prime Minister, it was expected that she would have a natural entry into politics.

The Syndicate bosses of the Congress were, in fact, apprehensive of Mrs. Gandhi’s influence and participation into politics, which might install “another Nehru” as the political leader. In fact, these senior party members wanted to assume power for themselves. When Shastri was about to succeed

57 Gandhi, n. 6, p. 102.
58 The Syndicate (Kamaraj of Madras, Atulya Ghosh of West Bengal, S.K. Patil of Bombay and Nijalingappa of Mysore) was the principle pressure group and an exclusive body of top Congress veterans that was formed in 1963 and comprised of all leading Congress members from allover India. It took its formation since the fag end of Nehru. They were the chief decision-makers of the party.
to the prime ministerial position, he openly confided, “I shall prefer a unanimous election...Were a contest to become inevitable, I would like to stand against Morarji, because I can defeat him, not Indiraji”. After inviting Mrs. Gandhi into his newly formed Cabinet, he chose Sardar Swaran Singh, instead of her, to take the charge of the Foreign Ministry, for it might make her “too important”. On the other hand, Mrs. Gandhi also chose an insignificant Ministry, probably to gather her strength, which she demonstrated after her succession to power in 1966.

It was, therefore, quite apparent that the entry of Mrs. Gandhi into the domain of politics would cause her rivals and potential candidates discomfort, because of former’s powerful background and parental lineage. Step by step, Mrs. Gandhi prepared herself, which had remained unnoticed by her Old Guards.

At the beginning, Mrs. Gandhi was quite protective of herself and the policies she initiated, as she was still thriving under the aegis of the Syndicate bosses, but she rapidly transformed herself as the guiding authority by finding new ways and techniques for her survival as an autonomous and independent leader, free from Congress bossism. She no longer remained the ‘dumb doll’, instead, she became the alpha and omega of the Indian political scenario. She also started courting block partnerships with religious and social minorities, such as Muslims, Sikhs, and the lower castes, who were previously neglected by the political leaders. Hence, she rose above her party and became the leader of the country and her people. Her father Nehru had charisma, which attracted the Indian mass at a larger scale, while his daughter, instead, discovered methods and strategies to bring all socio-

59 Nayar, n. 28, p. 10.
60 Ibid., p. 14.
economic classes within her fold. Here lies the novelty and contribution of Mrs. Gandhi to Indian politics.

Since Mrs. Gandhi remained in power from 1966-1977 at a stretch by winning one succession and two general elections, and again came back to power in 1980, and dealt with myriad issues, each having different repercussions, it would be useful to discuss her policies, which are selectively chosen here for analysing her role in accordance with her time-frames, as there was a broad spectrum of issues during her leadership.

5.1 1966-1967
I. Devaluation of Indian currency

After assuming the responsibility of Prime Ministership in 1966, Mrs. Gandhi was conscious of maintaining a distinct identity, away from the diktats of her senior colleagues. An interesting facet of her behaviour was her neutrality towards ideology, unlike her father, as well as her two other counterparts, Golda Meir and Margaret Thatcher, to whom, ideology was a defining characteristic in their respective political careers. As a true realist, however, the ends became more valuable to Mrs. Gandhi than their means. According to her, “I don’t really have a political philosophy. I can’t say I believe in any ‘ism’...I wouldn’t say I am interested in Socialism. To me it’s just a tool.”

As a consequence, the devaluation of the Indian currency to promote export and trade in the foreign market was initiated by Mrs. Gandhi in 1966 as a form of respite from economic hardships for the repaying of a $400 million loan for food imports amidst severe drought, shortage of adequate rainfall and agricultural stagnation between 1964 and 1966. Together with internal

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62 Hangen, n. 40, p. 181.

threats, the growing deterioration in the balance of foreign trade, and two successive exogenous shocks from the aggressions of China in 1962 and Pakistan in 1965 had further worsened the situation.\textsuperscript{64}

The idea was originally mooted by her immediate predecessor, Lal Bahadur Shastri on the request of the World Bank, as a solution to India’s economic problems, in 1964.\textsuperscript{65} His sudden death transferred the whole issue to Mrs. Gandhi’s tenure. After assuming leadership, she made no concealment of her efforts, which were guided by rationality and pragmatism. She understood at once the desperate necessities of American support and aid, which was withheld due to India’s involvement in armed aggression against China and Pakistan. As a consequence, in consultation with her close aides and advisers, such as Ashok Mehta, Minister of the Planning Commission, C. Subramaniyam, the Food Minister, Sachin Chaudhuri, the Minister of Finance, and technocrats, L.K. Jha, I.G. Patel, and P.C. Bhattacharya, as well as Chester Bowles, the US Ambassador to India, Mrs. Gandhi devalued the Indian currency by 36\%, much more than the World Bank suggestions of only 15-20\%,\textsuperscript{66} knowing fully well that such step would mark a radical departure from payment too. The situation was further deteriorated when India suffered from an acute shortage of adequate rainfall that caused severe drought in the country.

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., p. 380.

\textsuperscript{65} The World Bank Commission’s chief, Bernard Bell had advised Shastri to revise India’s practice of import-substitution and export pessimism through economic liberalisation and foreign investments as a precondition for an economic assistance in the form of an annual package of $1.5 billion from the US. By expelling T.T.Krishnamachari, his Finance Minister and strong critique of such policy, Shastri displayed his openness to such profitable Bell Mission. His demise, however, stalled the initiative. For more information, see Chester Bowles, Missions to India (Bombay, B.I. Publishers, 1974), specially chapters on Shastri, and Gandhi.

the main tenets of the post-Independence Indian economic policies and her father’s ideology.67

If an analysis is made on what impelled Mrs. Gandhi to reduce the exchange rate of Indian currency higher than the recommended level, it will be discerned that she was not the lone decision-maker. Political analysts have pointed out her lack of experiences in economic affairs in the initial years of her leadership.68 Mrs. Gandhi had also confessed about her lack of expertise in this particular field, and resorted to this measure when “All the economists agreed that devaluation was necessary. I listened to them.”69 Thus, it could be argued that such a decision was based on her advises and recommendations of her coterie of Ministers and bureaucrats.

Sensing an apparent disagreement with the Old Guards, the Premier, restricted the discussions on the matter to her close associates, and silently removed the Syndicate and the experienced T.T. Krishnamachari from the decision-making. This was her first daring attempt to follow an independent line, free from the interventions from the old bosses. This decision, as anticipated by her, encountered nationwide protests and rising criticisms against her leadership and even demanded her resignation, both from her party and her nation, and was charged with having “sold out” to the capitalist world.70 To C Rajagopalachari, the head of the recently formed Swatantra Party (established in 1966), and other opposition parties criticised the policy of

67 Since the post independence period, the Indian leaders were following the twin models of export pessimism and import substitution so as to generate a strong indigenous economy as the symbol of India’s sovereignty and deliberately rejected western aid for its internal development.


69 Ibid., p. 5.

devaluation as a “capital offence”. The outcome was a widening gap between Kamaraj and his associates and Mrs. Gandhi, as both sides lacked a viable working relationship with each other.

Things became further worsened, when India received only $900 millions out of the promised $1.5 billions of aid from the President Lyndon Johnson in the form of PL-480, and another drought had forced a steep rise in inflation. The outcome was a clash of egos between the Old Guards and new generation, led by Mrs. Gandhi. The question of gender in particular became important because the ‘dumb doll’ had started dictating to her male elders and speaking her own mind, not caring to consult with them.

The disparaging remarks from both inside and outside of her party held a lasting impression on Mrs. Gandhi’s style of leadership and functioning. Her deep sense of insecurity, which was ingrained into her mindset since her childhood resurfaced now and this instigated her to believe nobody. She became more cautious while choosing her associates regarding policy programmes that she wanted to initiate in her second phase of leadership. It was because of her vulnerable position both as a Congress worker and as the leader of her country, where her survival was at stake, she felt the urgent need for rising above the Syndicate before they purge her aside.

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73 PL-480 refers to the US Public Law 480 programme (Food for Peace Programme) that was initiated in 1954 as a method of transferring of agricultural surplus to other countries. It began in India in 1966 and was terminated during the onset of the Bangladesh War, when President Nixon had abruptly terminated this aid programme.
74 Steinberg, n. 2, pp. 27-28.
5.2 1967-1971: Mrs. Gandhi’s First Term/Second Phase as the Premier

The fourth general election of 1967 was an important signpost for Mrs. Gandhi’s political career, as she had to consolidate her position amidst the growing dissatisfaction among her party bosses, who were now her supporter-turned-staunch critics. As discussed earlier, she was, nevertheless, chosen as the prime ministerial candidate for this election, but she was now more conscious of proving herself as the indispensable leader of the nation, by rising above her senior colleagues.

The outcome of the mandate, however, was less different than expected by the Congress. Although it was able to form a majority by winning 283 seats out of a total of 520 in the Lok Sabha, the number had decreased as compared to the third general election of 1963, when the party captured 361 seats. It had lost important seats both at the Centre and in the state Legislative Assemblies, which was an indicator of the decay of Congress hegemony which was now challenged by the rise of regional political outfits. At the same time, personal defeats of the Syndicate bosses such as Atulya Ghosh, Kamaraj, S.K. Patil and others led to an intense struggle for dominance and supremacy within the party hierarchy.

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75 Since Mrs. Gandhi was running a caretaker government that lasted for a year (1966-1967), it may not be regarded as her first term in the office on the ground that she did not complete five full years as the Prime Minister, as required by the Constitution.


78 Most of the prominent Syndicate bosses suffered personal defeats in the Fourth General Election of 1967. Kamaraj lost his home constituency from Madras, Atulya Ghosh was
Together with these losses, the mounting criticism concerning the devaluation measure widened the gulf between Mrs. Gandhi and the party bosses. She was unable to become the Congress President, after the end of Kamaraj’s term, despite her desire to control the organisation, as the Syndicate installed Nijalingappa in the place. This led to a sharp compartmentalisation between the Congress national party and the Congress national leader, for the first time in Indian politics. Nevertheless, she played a leading role in introducing some of the significant measures during her four year term as the Prime Minister.

I. Gandhi’s role in the selection of the President of India and consequent relationship with the Congress bosses

With the decreased Congress support base, intra-party rivalry and uncertainty about her future and position as the Premier, Mrs. Gandhi had turned out to be more of a rationalist and pragmatist than before, which was evident from her selection of the presidential candidate, after the end of the term of President Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan. The Syndicate bosses wanted the Chief Justice of India, K. Subba Rao, the official Congress nominee, while Mrs. Gandhi broke the discipline by supporting the Vice President Dr. Zakir Hussain as her Presidential candidate to give credence to India’s secular image, and thereby she entered into a direct confrontation with the Old Guards.79 However, Dr. Hussain became the next President of India in 1967. This was a decisive victory of Mrs. Gandhi against her party bosses, and opened up fissures within the party hierarchy.80

79 Gandhi, n. 6, pp. 131.
80 Masani, n. 5, pp. 182-183.
With the death of Hussain in 1969, the same issue had reappeared. This time Mrs. Gandhi supported the then Vice President, Varahagiri Venkatagiri, while her party supported Neelam Sanjiva Reddy, the Congress President, on the assumption that a strong President would counter the growing supremacy of the Prime Minister. This was a superfluous issue, since the Indian Constitution does not provide for the independent functioning of the President given the \textit{de facto} superiority of the Prime Minister. This time too Mrs. Gandhi had won the battle and Giri became the next President of the country.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 182-187.}

Such incidents were indicators of the growing dominance of Indira Gandhi as the leader of the nation and her latent zeal to destroy the backbone of her party bosses, who were critical of her decisions and leadership. It also proved her preeminence as the Premier; it was once thought that this post too, would be guided and dictated by her party veterans. Likewise, her desire to assume the post of the Congress President after the termination of Kamaraj’s period in 1967, reflected her desire to control both the party and the leadership by combining the dual role as the party President and the Premier of the nation. However, she was forced to accept Nijalingappa’s candidature for the post, he was another Syndicate member from the anti-Indira camp. The outcome was a division of the Congress leadership between the two opposing and irreconcilable camps that of the Prime Minister and that of the party President, where each group was trying to assert its superiority by controlling, dominating and challenging the other’s leadership. At the same time, with the growing power of Mrs. Gandhi and her executive branch comprising of her carefully chosen Ministers over the Congress Parliamentary Party comprising
of the Syndicate and rest of the Congress workers, the rift between the two sides seemed to be irreconcilable and widened further.  

This growing dissension between the two opposing camps was eventually resolved when Mrs. Gandhi was expelled from the party at its Bombay Session in 1969, compelling her to rethink her position and look for alternative sources of support and reassert herself as the leader of the minority government, a major blow to the monolithic Congress organisational composition. The party was now bifurcated between the Congress Old (Congress O), led by the old guardians of the party and the Congress Radicals (Congress R) under the leadership of Mrs. Gandhi and her loyal supporters.  

Critics, however, have pointed out that some of the supporters of Mrs. Gandhi wanted to terminate the recurrent interventions of the Old Guards in her affairs. In the words of D.P. Mishra, her Principal Secretary, “I pressed for the split because I could see the Thakurs (non-Brahmins) going down and as a Brahmin I enjoyed the prospect.” It seemed that the truncation of the party had transformed into a matter of pride for the Indira supporters, as they watched their contenders crumble. The resultant effect was the branding of

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82 Austin, n. 56, p. 174.

83 This dissension was further intensified with Mrs. Gandhi’s success in making V.V. Giri as the President in 1969, against Sanjiva Reddy, the official candidate for the Congress Party. Eventually on November 12, 1969, removed Mrs. Gandhi from the Congress organisation. For more details, see ibid., pp.178-180.

84 The hostility between the two Congress factions were more pronounced with the issue on the identity of each group. Mrs. Gandhi criticised that the split was not based on the clash of personality, but between the upholder and supporter of socialism (Mrs. Gandhi’s faction) and those who were reactionaries and stood for the status quo. For a detailed analysis, see Ibid., p. 180.

the old rulers as ‘reactionaries, conservatives and rightists’ in contrast to the ‘progressive, open-minded and leftist’ orientations of Mrs. Gandhi’s camp.\textsuperscript{86}

Although the old stalwarts accused Mrs. Gandhi for the cause of this split and called for the election of a new Prime Minister,\textsuperscript{87} only 65 Congress Parliamentarians went in their favour, while 226 voted for her.\textsuperscript{88} Thus Mrs. Gandhi had asserted her independence from Syndicate’s stranglehold by seceding away from the eighty-four year old organisation and creating a wide polarisation of ideas.

II. Gandhi’s ideological shift: Abolition of Privy the Purse and the nationalisation of banks

As mentioned earlier, Indira Gandhi’s leadership and policy programmes were never conditioned by any kind of ideological overtones, unlike her other two counterparts, rather they were contingent upon the needs and exigencies of the situations she faced. In pursuit of her survival, strengthening of her position and people’s acceptance of herself as the national leader, Mrs. Gandhi considered the dire need for a political strategy that would be radical in nature and would have a wider appeal to the electorate. The outcome was a tilt, her tilt and growing sensitivity towards socialism as an indicator of her pragmatic and realist vision.

In the annual session of the All India Congress Committee (AICC), held in New Delhi, Mrs. Gandhi explained her viewpoint in support of socialist principles:

> In Indian condition, problems can only be solved if we follow the path of socialism. My father called it scientific socialism. It is only through socialism that we can solve the problems of

\textsuperscript{86} Austin, n. 56, p. 176.


\textsuperscript{88} Steinberg, n. 2, p. 75.
poverty and unemployment and build a strong India which all our workers and intellectuals want. In order not to be subservient to the multi-nationals or others, we have to follow socialism and non-alignment in international affairs.\textsuperscript{89}

This opinion was in sharp contrast to Mrs. Gandhi’s devaluation policy of 1967. However, as a pragmatic politician, she felt it just to renounce her erstwhile posture and standpoint and embrace and adopt a resolution that would attract the public. The resultant decision to abolish the Privy Purse came at this crucial juncture, which bolstered the nationalist spirit and heightened her prestige as the unanimous choice for the national leadership.

The Privy Purse and privileges were established in 1948 and received Constitutional support in 1950. It was primarily meant to provide a tax-free compensation to the 565 erstwhile rulers of princely states, whose provinces were eventually merged with the Indian Union after Independence, as a reward for giving up their Princedom. The decreasing support of the Congress in the 1967 general election, and the historic split of the organisation and her zeal to consolidate her power and position had impelled Mrs. Gandhi to embark on a radical approach towards these last bastions of princely power in the form of the termination of their privileged status.

Thus the Congress Working Committee (CWC) adopted a Ten-Point-Programme in its Bombay session, held in December 1966 for the attainment of socialist democracy, where social control of banking institutions and removal of privileges enjoyed by the ex-rulers because of its incongruousness with the concept of modern democracy became primary agenda for the ruling party.\textsuperscript{90}


\textsuperscript{90} \textit{Hindustan Standard} (Calcutta), June 25, 1967.
Accordingly, the Lower House had passed the Privy Purse Abolition Bill (Twenty Sixth Constitutional Amendment Bill), but this was defeated in the Upper House in 1970. The Premier then asked the President, V.V. Giri to issue Presidential Ordinances for the derecognition of Indian Princes from the Constitutional status, and their titles, perks and honoriums were revoked. When the Supreme Court had ordered her issue to be unconstitutional, she persuaded the President to dissolve the Lower House for a fresh election, to be held two months later, in February 1971, before the completion of the constitutional requirement of five year period of the Parliamentary system, with a view to receive people’s support. The underlying reason for this sudden commencement of the general elections may be understood from Mrs. Gandhi’s statement later:

I obtained a Presidential order, but the princes took the issue to the Supreme Court, which on November 27, 1970, declared the order illegal. Because I wanted to keep my pledges to the people and although our government could have continued

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91 Since Nehru’s premiership, Indian Princes were offered electoral seats in the Parliament by political parties, including the Congress, because of their capability of capturing votes from their subjects and provinces, and were bestowed with special constitutional status and privileges, in exchange. Mrs. Gandhi presented a Bill concerning their abolition as a form of Constitutional Amendments by deleting Articles 291 and 362 regarding the matter. Despite the strong opposition from the Congress O, Swatantra Party, and other rightist and reactionary groups, the Bill was cleared at the Lok Sabha, but failed to get the desired majority at the Rajya Sabha. Wary of the future status of the issue, Mrs. Gandhi then issued Ordinance to supersede the Parliamentary clearance, thus resorting to extra-constitutional means to fulfill her desires. As a consequence, few princes filed a suit challenging her order at the Supreme Court, which had declared the ordinance as invalid. Mrs. Gandhi then dissolved the Lok Sabha and announced fresh election in order to seek popular mandate in support of her case, and cleared the issue after her winning a landslide victory in the fifth general election of 1971. A detailed record in William Richter, “Princes in Indian Politics”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 6, No. 9, February 27, 1971, pp. 535-540.
in power for another fourteen months, I asked the president to dissolve the Parliament and call for new elections.92

With her landslide victory in the general elections of 1971, the central government under the leadership of Mrs. Gandhi introduced series of Constitutional Amendments. Out of these, the Twenty Sixth Constitutional Amendment Act of 1971 terminated the Privy Purse and associated privileges of the former princes of India.93

As endorsed by the CWC, the nationalisation of banking institutions also upheld Mrs. Gandhi’s propensity to implement socialist principles. It was another significant and calculative strategy to counter the growth of criticisms following her devaluation policy and her expulsion from the Congress. It was more of a defensive strategy to win back the Indian electorate and discredit her rivals and opposing camps, who were vociferous critique of her policy endorsements. Above all, she realised the pressing need for making her electorate understand that she was the representative of the ‘real’ Congress, whose ideology was innately based on socialist lines, unlike its dissident faction, the Congress O, whose alliance with rightist organisations, the Swatantra Party and the Jana Sangh, had led the Indira camp to denounce them as conservatives and reactionaries, as compared to the populist Congress R.94

After the victory in 1967 general elections, Mrs. Gandhi sought to nationalise the commercial banks of India to allow the distribution of credits to the rural areas as well. Accordingly, the ‘Banking Laws (Amendment) Act, 1968 sought to “ensure…an equitable and purposeful distribution of credit,

92 Gandhi, n. 6, p. 148.
93 Austin, n. 56, p. 243.
94 Steinberg, n. 2, p. 34.
within the resources available, keeping in view the relative priorities of development needs.”

In tune with her socialist leaning, Mrs. Gandhi’s primary intention was the removal of monetary control by the few; provision of adequate credit for agricultural and small industry; and rapid expansion of banking services to rural areas, which would be accomplished through the complete government ownership of banks.

The resultant effect was the nationalisation of fourteen major banks for the betterment and welfare of the society and extension of loan facilities to the impoverished sections in 1969. Such a move reflected her desire to adjust her understanding with the general public, who would ultimately pull her minority government for a majority victory in the impending national election. However, before unleashing the project, Mrs. Gandhi sought Morarji Desai’s resignation, because of his apparent negative attitude towards the policies, she herself assumed the Finance portfolio of Desai.

In this connection, it is necessary to mention that the decision behind the state control of commercial banks was once again not a sole decision of the Premier. Rather, it was an outcome of the joint preparation of Mrs. Gandhi’s concerned Ministers, technocrats and her personal advisers. It follows from

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96 Before nationalisation, all major banks of India were controlled by one business house or by joint operations. These banks were mainly functioning to extend credits to industrial houses. Thus farmers and artisans had to borrow money at exorbitant interest rates from large traders and money lenders. For more information, see S.K. Arora and V.K. Puri, Indian Economy: The Developmental Experience (New Delhi, Himalayan Publishing House, 2008), p. 596.
97 Baldev Raj Nayar, n. 66, p. 110.
98 Gandhi, n. 6, p. 134.
99 Hindustan Times (New Delhi), July 18, 1969.
the above the profound reliance of Mrs. Gandhi on her close associates and personal advisers in formulating policies.

5.3 1971-1977

I. Electoral victory

As explained above, the fifth general election of 1971 was summoned by the Premier far ahead of the required schedule, for the solicitation of a popular mandate in support of her twin socialist goals; on a larger scale, there is no denying her desire to create an egalitarian society, but at the same time, there is also no denying her urge to consolidate her power. Her struggle for existence, consolidation and reinforcement of power in the post-split scenario were accomplished by winning 350 seats out of 518, breaking all previous records of the Congress Party since Independence.\textsuperscript{100} It also marked the restoration of Mrs. Gandhi’s dominance at the centre. Her victory confirmed her stature as the undisputed national leader.

In congruence with her leftist image, the new Congress group stressed on the populist slogan of \textit{“Garibi Hatao”}, or “eradicate poverty” as the primary tenet of their electoral strategy, which gained momentum within a two month period.\textsuperscript{101} The \textit{“Indira Lahar”} or the Indira wave overthrew the newly formed Grand Alliance, comprising of the Congress O, the Jana Sangh, the Swatantra Party and the Samjukta Socialist Party (S.S.P.) along with their electoral slogan of \textit{“Indira Hatao”} or “remove Indira” as counter-strategy. After the electoral defeat, the President of the Old Congress, Nijalingappa said, “If she had stayed with us, we would have done wonders with the country’s

\textsuperscript{100} Congress R had won 43.05% of votes, Congress O got only 16 seats with 10% seats. More details in W.H. Morris-Jones, \textit{“India Elects for Change- and Stability”}, \textit{Asian Survey}, Vol. XI, No. 8, August 1971, pp. 719-741.

\textsuperscript{101} Mrs. Gandhi had called for the fresh election within a short notice of two months, and within this limited time frame, she had emerged supreme.
development.” To some others, Mrs. Gandhi had successfully displayed her dexterity by challenging the preconceived notion that the voters would remain loyal to their traditional support base, since they would be apprehensive of any new player in the Indian electoral scene.

It was also the victory for Mrs. Gandhi alone, for her faction lacked a proper organisational base and had not be made adequate electoral preparations and had little control in most state governments, because of the rise of various regional political organisations as an alternative to the monolithic Congress after 1967.

It could be argued, therefore, that the election of 1971 confirmed the triumph of Mrs. Gandhi independent of her party affiliation, a clear mark of deviation from the previous practice when the Congress used to be the winner as an organisation, irrespective of who was the candidate. This tendency became possible because of the split in the leadership structure of the organisation. At the same time, it was also discernible that Mrs. Gandhi had successfully utilised the intra-Congress rivalry to her advantage. She had dexterously driven the public sympathy towards her by portraying the opposition faction as ‘rightist’, while juxtaposing herself as the real champion of the people’s cause and her implementation of socialist programmes were sufficient to woo the electorate to her side. Professor Weiner, who has written extensively on Mrs. Gandhi, has further added his opinion regarding the indirect contribution of the opposition to Mrs. Gandhi’s victory in the manner that, “By singling out Mrs. Gandhi as their prime target and (without offering

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102 Nayar, n. 85, p. 273.
104 Ibid., p. 1124.
any national leader as an alternative) they supported the efforts of Mrs. Gandhi’s supporters to make her a national leader.”

At the same time, by de-linking the state legislative assembly elections from that of the Lok Sabha, Mrs. Gandhi had made her electorate concentrate only on the national election for the first time and thus, freed the Congress from shouldering the burden fighting elections at the state level, which was a novel way of attracting people by her side.

Another remarkable electoral strategy resorted to by Mrs. Gandhi was the representation of minorities within Congress R. Indira Gandhi’s momentous call to “eradicate poverty” had a direct appeal for the impoverished masses and backward sections of the Indian rigorous caste hierarchy, who were largely underrepresented amidst the dominant Brahmins and other upper caste elites. During the Nehru period, the minorities had voted en bloc, in favour of the dominant Congress party, in spite of the fact that Congress had been associated with the leading castes of respective states.

Since the predominant supporters of the Congress were the Brahmins and other ruling elites, the 1969 split witnessed the continuation of the partnership of upper classes and dominant castes with the Congress O. Mrs. Gandhi's faction, on the other hand, coopted the Khatriyas, Harijans (Scheduled Castes), Adivasis (Scheduled Tribes) and Muslims to form the KHAM alliance as in Gujarat, and other states, to defeat the Swatantra-

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106 Morris-Jones, n. 100, p. 719.

107 The pre-split Congress was associated itself with leading and dominant upper castes of various states, such as the Lingayats of Karnataka, Rajputs and Banias of Rajasthan, Brahmins of Tamil Nadu, Brahmins and Jats of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, and Brahmins and Kayasthas of Bihar.
Congress O coalition. It allied with Dravida Munnetra Kazagham (DMK), the first non-Brahmin party to defeat the pro-Kamaraj Congress O. In so doing she was able to break down the traditional clientelist politics, not only in the urban areas, but also in rural constituencies through a bridging of socio-economic cleavages. In fact, she was the first to identify the value of minority votes as a successful tool of electoral strategy.

Another factor that helped Mrs. Gandhi was the participation of many regional political parties as alliance partners with the Congress R. It was, in fact, because of the emergence of regional parties that the Congress had lost a significant number of seats in various constituencies. Given their predominance in 1971, it was not easy for Mrs. Gandhi to achieve landslide result, yet she had demonstrated her courage and strength by implanting her party in some states by forming coalition governments with local parties, or by supplanting the regional political elements, and thus preventing the growing regionalist tendencies that started rising since 1967. Hence she was thus quite appropriate by calling the 1971 election as “a watershed event in

108 Frankel, n. 47, p. 211.
110 An interesting feature of the growth of most of the regional parties in India was their formation by seceding away from the Congress and likewise, and their leaders were all former Congress workers. The Swatantra Party of C. Rajagopalachari, Ram Manohar Lohia’s Samyukta Vidhayak Dal, Acharya Kripalani’s Krishak Mazdur Praja Party, Ajoy Mukherjee, and V. K. Krishna Menon’s Bharatiya Kranti Dal etc were all formed by dissatisfied Congressmen, and all participated in subsequent elections of 1967 and 1971 for their respective establishments.
111 In Maharashtra the local Shiv Sena and Peasants’ and Workers’ Party; the Bangla Congress of West Bengal; the Bharatiya Kranti Dal of Uttar Pradesh, the Akali Dal of Punjab, the Telengana Praja Samiti of Andhra Pradesh, etc. were defeated by Mrs. Gandhi. Where the ‘Grand Alliance’ was formed with the Congress O, Swatantra and Jana Sangh, she had successfully uprooted them. More information in Rudolph, n. 103, pp. 1119-1132.
Indian political development”, where, “the national leadership did succeed…in eroding the strategic position of local factional leaders.”

5.4 Centralisation of Power

The people’s mandate in the 1971 national election and India’s decisive victory against Pakistan in the Bangladesh War as well as solving the refugee problem in India had increased Mrs. Gandhi’s status, prestige and power to the extent that there was another major success in the state Legislative Assembly elections held in March 1972. Once more, her opposition was shattered due to the preeminence of the Congress (R). This victory, according to her critics, confirmed a new system of one-party dominance and a marked shift in political power from the federal units (states) to the Centre with an inordinate concentration of power in the hands of the Prime Minister.

Mrs. Gandhi had assumed so much power in her hands that the federal nature of the Indian polity appeared to be temporarily transformed into a unitary one with strong centralisation of power. From the selection of candidates for the election, to the nomination of Congress Presidents, all matters were decided primarily by the Premier in a manner that the candidates were loyal supporters of her faction and owed unconditional allegiance to the authority of the Premier. Being aware of the propensity towards the rise of state bossism, she became highly selective in putting only

112 Frankel, n. 46, pp. 213-214.
113 Congress (R) had won 70.76%, Congress (O) managed to get 3.23%, Jana Sangh got 3.86%, Swatantra 0.59%, Socialists 2.09% of votes polled in the 1972 State Legislative Assembly Elections.
115 Ibid., pp. 536-537.
those figures in state leadership, who had little chance of endangering her supremacy,\footnote{Iqbal Narain and Mohan Lal Sharma, “The Fifth State Assembly Elections in India”, \textit{Asian Survey}, Vol. XIII, No. 3, March 1973, p. 321.} under the Premier’s directives: “Ministers with a doubtful public image, or against whom corruption charges have been levied at any time, or with suspected ‘Rightist’ leanings were to be barred.”\footnote{S. Viswam, “Selection of Congress Candidates”, \textit{The Statesman}, February 4, 1972.}

This inclination towards the centralisation of power had already become manifest in the general elections of 1967 when the Congress lost seats to the regional parties that started taking active roles around this time. In her zeal to win back these ‘lost territories’, Mrs. Gandhi introduced a novel method of controlling anti-Congress groups through her policy of their ‘suspension’ by imposing Presidential rule.\footnote{B. D. Dua, \textit{Presidential Rule in India: 1950-1974, A Study in Crisis Politics}, (New Delhi, S. Chand, 1979), p. 43.} As an outcome, Article 356\footnote{According to the Indian Constitution, a Presidential Rule is imposed on states, when its administrative machinery is threatened due to internal disturbances. With the consent of the Governor of the concerned state, the Central government imposes Article 356 initially for six months, subjected to extension for another half year, whereby the regional party is dissolved, and a fresh election is called after the Rule is lifted.} was imposed on the non-Congress majority states of Bihar, West Bengal, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.

In 1972, in her quest for a highly centralised party structure and the establishment her own support base, Mrs. Gandhi was personally involved in selecting Congress candidates, in which, many sitting MLAs (Members of State Legislative Assemblies), Ministers and prominent leaders were denied the right to contest that engendered dissatisfaction among Congress workers and filed their own individual nomination papers against the officially nominated candidates, and were consequently, expelled from the party, or
forced to resign, as a mark of penalty for challenging the Premier’s authority.120

It could be argued, therefore, that under the premiership of Mrs. Gandhi the very essence of federalism was destroyed, as state leaders could only thrive at the mercy of central High Command. The consequence was the creation of a shaky unstable state government, bereft of any loyalty towards the local electorate, whose primary goal was to please the central leadership for their own sustenance, because any attempt to exceed the imposed parameters would be a self-endangering one. Hence a pyramidal and an extremely rigid hierarchical structure was created since as she consolidation of power, where she remained at the top of the pyramid, with limited or no decentralisation of power at the regional or local level.121 By the same token, the filling up of significant government posts by her trusted followers and close associates further weakened the democratic structure of India in the manner that the decision-making became highly centralised with deterioration of the institutional foundation of democracy giving birth to an overtly personalised regime.122

These actions also revealed the manipulative style of the Premier towards her party colleagues. By placing incompetent men in significant Union and state government posts, she made it possible to control and dominate her colleagues and secure her supreme position.123

However, one looks at Mrs. Gandhi’s ideas on democracy and parliamentary sovereignty, it will be discerned that she saw herself as the

120 The Times of India, February 14, 1972.


122 Ibid., p. 105.

123 Steinberg, n. 2, p. 92.
vanguard of freedom, and as a democratic leader. She emphasised strongly, “...we did take democracy seriously. To us, it conveyed the equality of all people to participate at every level in the development of their country and functioning of the government.”

Mrs. Gandhi further explained:

Three distinct streams of thought have combined to produce what might, vaguely be called the Indian approach to democracy. There is a stream of liberalism and parliamentary democracy...which emerged out of the British system- parliamentary institution, political parties, free election, fundamental rights and freedom, rule of law- formed the core of our democratic system. Parliament is the commanding centre of our political system, and government's responsibility to the legislature at the centre and in the states is beyond dispute....The second major stream is that of socialist thought with emphasis on social democracy and economic planning and development....The third stream has emanated from Mahatma Gandhi and his philosophy of nonviolence....It has supported and enriched India.

While she thus championed democracy, her actions belied her words that became more pronounced during her declaration of national Emergency in 1975.

The proclamation of national emergency on June 26, 1975 was a watershed in not only the political career of Indira Gandhi, but also India’s image as a Republic and a pioneer of constitutional democracy. It was a kind of a political

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coup that eroded India’s constitutional sovereignty and parliamentary democracy. This was also a landmark event in the political history of India on account of internal disturbances and threats to India’s internal security, in contrast to the national Emergency that was imposed due to India’s external threats in 1962 (Sino-Indian War) and 1971 (India-Pakistan War).

6.1 Backdrop
The declaration of national Emergency came in the backdrop of a verdict delivered by Justice Jag Mohan Lal Sinha of the Allahabad High Court on June 12, 1975, that Mrs. Gandhi’s electoral victory in 1971 from Rae Bareilly, her own constituency of Uttar Pradesh, was convoluted and controversial, and found guilty on the charge of corruption under Section 123(7) of the Representation of the People’s Act, on a petition filed by Raj Narain, whom she defeated in Rae Bareilly. The verdict thereby dispossessed Mrs. Gandhi from her premiership for six years and asked the Congress Party to elect their national leader within twenty days.

Instead of resigning from her post, Mrs. Gandhi appealed to the Supreme Court against the decision of the Allahabad High Court and continued with her job. On June 24, 1975, Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer of the Supreme Court allowed her to continue as Prime Minister without having any right to vote and participate in the parliamentary deliberations, and hence, overruled the High Court verdict.

This landmark judgement, thus, provided her with a carte blanche to sustain and secure her position through a declaration of Emergency on the

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126 Maxwell, n. 61, p. 357.
129 Steinberg, n. 2, p. 38.
very next day as a suitable option to end the nationwide anti-government protest movements directed against the Central government and the leadership.\textsuperscript{130} Mrs. Gandhi hence asked the President of India, Fakruddin Ali Ahmad, to dissolve the Parliament and declare a national emergency, in concurrence with Article 352 of the Constitution of India on the next day, June 25, 1975 on the ground that there was an outbreak of ‘internal armed rebellion’\textsuperscript{131} which would jeopardise the internal security of India. The order was passed by the Rajya Sabha with 136 to 33 votes and the Lok Sabha with 336 to 59 votes within forty-eight hours.\textsuperscript{132}

\section*{6.2 The Rationale}

The rationale behind this decision, however, must be seen in the context of India’s persistent problems related to corruption, nepotism, faulty electoral mechanism, industrial strikes and socio-economic hardships, which were borne out by the high rate of inflation and acute shortage of food supply.\textsuperscript{133} Moreover, the highly centralised system of governance had also corrupted the political system of India, which became widespread and a break down of law and order triggered nationwide public protests against Mrs. Gandhi’s administration. It started with massive students’ unrest in Gujarat\textsuperscript{134} and

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{130} Ibid., p. 39.
  \item \textsuperscript{131} This controversial term has been changed to ‘internal disturbances’ in the 44\textsuperscript{th} Constitutional Amendment Act of 1978 under the Janata Government. However, the Constitution has also remained silent on what constitutes ‘internal armed aggression’ or internal disturbances’.
  \item \textsuperscript{132} Henry C. Hart, “Introduction”, in Hart (ed.), n. 12, p. 14.
  \item \textsuperscript{133} Ram Joshi, “India 1974: Growing Political Crisis”, \textit{Asian Survey}, Vol. 15, No. 2, February 1975, p. 85.
  \item \textsuperscript{134} In Gujarat, students’ movement was started in early 1975, due the rise of food bills of Engineering colleges of Ahmedabad that was soon transformed into statewide protests against bureaucratic incompetence, ministerial corruption, and received support from the
\end{itemize}
people’s protests under the leadership of Jaya Prakash Narayan (popularly known as JP), a former Gandhian and believer of *Sarvodaya*, in Bihar. This was followed by a twenty-day railway strike, which had adverse effect on India’s economy and industrial growth. Besides, Mrs. Gandhi’s momentous call for the ‘eradication of poverty’ had become a farce as the impoverished sections were the worst sufferers due to the rise of prices of daily needs.

The situation was further worsened by JP’s call for a nationwide civil disobedience movement to force the resignation of the Premier. The Centre responded by the imposition of Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) of 1971 and the Defence of India Act of 1973 against all dissidents including JP, Morarji Desai and all those Congress leaders from her Cabinet, like Y. B. Chavan, Jag Jivan Ram who had urged for her resignation and left the government and joined opposition camps, and other so called ‘conspirators’ from every political organisation, including bureaucrats, central and state government employees and journalists (Kuldip Nayar, the editor of *Indian opposition groups led by Congress (O), Swatantra and Jana Sangh, who found it as a rare opportunity to organise a concerted action in dislodging the Central government of their arch rival, Mrs. Gandhi. The situation went against Mrs. Gandhi’s favour when she refused to cooperate and resorted to repressive measures through the Border Security Force and Special Reserve Police Force, instead of relying on state Police. The outcome was the defeat of the Congress (R) against the newly formed People’s Front, a coalition of dissidents led by Morarji Desai of 185 seats to 75 of Mrs. Gandhi. More details in Joshi (Ibid), pp. 85-87; Park, n. 128, p. 1003.

135 The Gujarat unrest had a domino effect in Bihar, where youth wings of the Congress (O), Jana Sangh, and Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP) started protesting against the ruling Congress (R). They were soon joined by dissident Congress (R) members, who were dissatisfied with Mrs. Gandhi’s leadership pattern. The movement was eventually taken up by Jaya Prakash Narayan, who challenged Mrs. Gandhi’s style of functioning. These movements gathered momentum with the verdict of Allahabad High Court, and demanded her resignation. More details in Joshi, in ibid., pp. 88-91.

136 Park, n. 116, p. 1000.
Express, for instance, who urged her to lift the press censorship). According to the estimation of the Amnesty International, 1, 40,000 people were arrested and detained without trial during the Emergency.\textsuperscript{137}

6.3 Effects of Mrs. Gandhi’s actions

A common question that arises here is why did Mrs. Gandhi resort to drastic actions when she already possessed legal and constitutional support by virtue of her premiership. She justified her decision by saying that,

Democracy implies an implicit acceptance of certain objectives: the government can be opposed but not the national interest. The opposition front displayed an utter lack of understanding of this distinction. Their anger against me and the Congress include license to undermine democracy itself. Even in a democracy there are limits, which cannot be crossed. Instant Satyagrahis certainly cannot be a part of democratic life. When they win, they are for the system. When they lose, they decry and attack it.\textsuperscript{138}

Since the defence and security related Acts of Maintenance of Internal Security Act and Defence of India Rules were invoked, the Central government issued Article 359(1) of the Constitution that forbade the detainees from moving into the court for justice. Further, the personal protective shields of Article 14 (equality before law), Article 21 (protection of life and personal property) and Article 22 (protection against arrest and detention) of the Fundamental Rights were made non-available to these political prisoners.\textsuperscript{139}

Perhaps, to justify her action and impact of Emergency, Mrs. Gandhi introduced certain socio-economic programmes with a vision to reconstruct India:

\textsuperscript{137} Moraes, n. 14, p. 248.

\textsuperscript{138} Gandhi, n. 6, p. 170.

I began to introduce certain progressive measures of benefit to common man and woman of India. In the name of democracy it has been sought to negate the very functioning of democracy. Duly elected Governments have not been allowed to function and in some cases force has been used to compel members to resign in order to dissolve lawfully elected assemblies...The forces of disintegration are in full play and communal passions are being aroused, threatening our unity...We have watched these developments with an utmost patience for long...Any situation which weakens the capacity of the national Government to act decisively inside the country is bound to encourage dangers from outside. It is our paramount duty to safeguard unity and stability. The nation's integrity demands firm action.”

The consequence was the issuing of a Twenty Point programme on July 1st, 1975, that focused on issues related to land, irrigation and property, poverty alleviation, price control, distribution of wealth, energy sector, employment and training and other necessities of common people.  

While analysing the nature of Emergency that have been practiced in western democracies it may be discerned that the western countries are cautious in imposing national emergency, and it is imposed purely for the restoration of peace, preservation of citizens’ rights and the prevention of armed aggression and insurrection. Article 1(1) of the Emergency Powers Act of 1964 of Britain authorises the Crown to declare Emergency throughout the country if any action has deprived the community from procuring basic necessities of life or that hinders distribution of food, water, fuel, light, etc.  

The American Congress has the authority to withhold or cancel all powers of the President or any official from the Executives if latter’s actions  

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are found to be detrimental to the interest of the community according to Article 1(8).\textsuperscript{142}

The Indian scenario, however, reveals different picture altogether. It was for the first time that an Emergency was proclaimed on the basis of ‘internal disturbances’ for such a long period (June 1975-January 1977) and it was summoned in a year that was supposed to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Indian republic, an ironic reality for the citizens of India. Simultaneously, the situation demonstrated the extent and depth of Mrs. Gandhi’s personal power in declaring an emergency in order to rescue herself from the unpleasant circumstance of resigning from her post. At the same time, the manner in which the Emergency was ordered the supreme position enjoyed by Mrs. Gandhi alone at that time. She remained unchallenged, unless and until she herself called for the general election two years later that provided all her dissidents their desired opportunity to dethrone her in 1977. Morarji Desai confessed during his arrest to a correspondent of an Italian daily, \textit{L’Europeo}, “To get rid of a woman who is in power is more difficult than to get rid of a man being in power”.\textsuperscript{143} This reveals the gendered reality of the time, when the fact that a woman wielding power rather than a man appear difficult to accept for men.

Mrs. Gandhi, however, had reiterated time and again that all her actions were constitutional and legal and instead put the onus entirely on the oppositions, who demanded her resignation. She clarified her position:

The state of emergency was declared when on June 25 an open call was given by the Opposition Front for countrywide defiance of laws and civil disobedience. The Front did this in spite of the fact that the High Court in its ruling of June 24, clearly declared that I

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\textsuperscript{143} Uma Vasudev, \textit{Two Faces of Indira Gandhi}, (New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House, 1977), p. 151
\end{flushright
could lawfully continue to function as Prime Minister. The Front had made long preparations for this confrontation. The Court case was a coincidental factor...They wanted to force the issue through extra-constitutional direct action. The question is simple: Can a vociferous minority, which has the support of the big money and the big press- and some elements abroad- force its view on a nation and attempt to displace lawfully elected Government?  

She further stated:

In June last year some opposition groups launched a joint plan, ostensibly to save democracy. It is interesting to identify these great defenders of democracy- the Jan Sangh with its militant wing the RSS, Anand Marg, Naxalites, CPI (M), DMK, Socialist Party and their minor partners, the Congress (O) and BLC). What is the record of each of these? The first four are parties-believing in violence....The DMK's interest in strengthening the nation is suspect. The Socialist Party's -faith in democratic methods and in nonviolence is less than total...The Congress (O) and BLD did and perhaps genuinely believe in the constitutional approach. But Congress (O) leaders did not hesitate to adopt the most unconstitutional and undemocratic tactics in Gujarat and Bihar: Gheraos, intimidation of and forcing elected persons to resign, fasts to get assemblies dissolved- such conduct is far from being democratic. Their readiness to join with dubious and dangerous elements does not sustain their democratic credentials.”  

While juxtaposing the anti-Government actions of the oppositions, Mrs. Gandhi also attempted to legitimise all her activities as constitutional one. She noted:

An extra-constitutional challenge by the Opposition", she exemplified, "was constitutionally met. In every country, the state is invested with powers to deal with external aggression, internal subversion or disorder. Our Constitution makes express provision for the declaration of a state of emergency, where there is external aggression or internal disturbance...The use of what the

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144 Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi On Emergency, New Delhi, 1975, p. 3.
Constitution provides cannot be termed as unconstitutional. It has been done to defend the country's integrity. It is wholly wrong to say that I resorted to the Emergency to keep myself in the office. With the Supreme Court's ruling, with reiteration of my party's confidence in me and with the Congress continuing to command clear majority in Parliament, my prime ministership was not in question. What was in question was the preservation of bonds, which held the country together. The Opposition was not ready to abide by constitutional and legal considerations.\textsuperscript{146}

While such statements reiterates Mrs. Gandhi's denial of any role behind the orchestration of Emergency for preserving her position, the series of political events that took place in the name of Emergency, reveals that she received whole-hearted support from her colleagues and Cabinet, whom she informed at the final hour of the declaration and its implementation.\textsuperscript{147} As an outcome the Cabinet, which was relegated to the status of a “consulting body” under the might of Mrs. Gandhi was further reduced to a status of an “observing body”, where all decisions pertaining to the Emergency were taken outside of its jurisdiction.

Simultaneously, there was a series of draconian steps in the name of Constitutional Amendments were accomplished during this period that were quite contrary to the Indian democracy.

For instance, the Thirty-eight Constitutional Amendment of 1975 withheld the power of Judicial Review over the declaration of Emergency made by the President and Ordinances of the state Governors in support of the Emergency.

Mrs. Gandhi also persuaded the Parliament to pass the Thirty-ninth Constitutional Amendment Act of 1975, where questions relating to the

\textsuperscript{146} Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on Emergency, (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi, 1975), p. 10.

elections of the President, Vice-President, Prime Minister and the Speaker of the Lok Sabha were taken out of the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court.148

Similarly, the Forty-second Amendment of the Constitution, (1976) engendered the precedence of Directive Principles of State Policies over Fundamental Rights, in case of any conflict with each other. The Amendment introduced certain Fundamental Duties for the first time, and their non-observance was made punishable by law, and no court could question the validity of such actions. A new Article 257A was incorporated to empower the Union Government to send armed forces in case of any disturbance in the law and order situation and the affected state was barred from having jurisdiction over such forces.149 It seemed that India had transformed itself into a totalitarian state where the Central government became the repository of all power over the state and its citizens.

On the other hand, the national Emergency had certain positive outcomes despite a breakdown of the political apparatus of the Indian State. The economic sector was perhaps, the principal arena that fared well in this period. After two consecutive failures in adequate crop productions in 1973 and 1974, the economic condition of 1975 improved quite considerably due to adequate monsoon. This proved beneficial in reducing the inflation from 31% in 1974 to 10% in 1976.150 Together with this, Mrs. Gandhi’s Twenty-Point Programmes initiated several measures against smugglers, black marketers and money lenders through the implementation of Conservation of Foreign Exchange and Prevention of smuggling Activities Act of 1974 (COFEPOSA).

148 Austin, n. 58, Chapter 10.
150 Palmer, n. 147, pp. 174-175.
A notable part of the Emergency period was the apparent non-interference of western democracies in India’s internal matters. All foreign governments, including the USA, chose to remain silent, as it was India’s internal matter, except for the Soviet Union. The Indian Government was also categorical in explaining that her internal manoeuvres would not have any impact on her foreign relations. Britain was suspicious about India’s apparent eclipse of democracy, since its Constitution was modeled on the Westminster type. Her neighbours, Pakistan and China rejoiced at India’s political turmoil.\(^{151}\)

On the other hand, the assassination of the Bangladeshi President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family members in August 1975 created an air of apprehension in Mrs. Gandhi’s mind. At the plenary session of the Congress in December 1975, she confessed, “If the Jan Sangh comes to power, it will not need emergency. It will chop off heads. Heads were chopped off in Bangladesh and Chile. Persons there were not just detained. They were murdered.”\(^{152}\)

A question that often arises at this juncture was would any other Prime Minister of India (given the fact that they were all men), would have resorted to such repressive measures and called for an Emergency to silence oppositions. The possible answer appears to be a negative one because none of Mrs. Gandhi’s successors had consolidated so much power unlike her that would preserve and uphold their personal interests.

Another question is, whether India’s national Emergency was successful only because the Premier was a female. Once again the male-female distinction related to their individual role in politics comes up. The liberal feminist theorist, such as Wollstonecraft ruled out any difference in the

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\(^{151}\) Palmer, n. 147, pp. 127, 106-107.

\(^{152}\) Frankel, n. 47, p. 654.
functioning styles of individual genders, and approves of the consolidation of more power by female leaders than their male counterparts for the fulfillment of her personal desires. This is evident from the three female heads of the government, chosen for this dissertation.

Despite Mrs. Gandhi’s repeated assurance that the Emergency "will in no way affect the rights of law abiding citizens” and it would be lifted as soon as “the internal conditions will speedily improve to enable us to dispense with this proclamation as soon as possible”, it continued till January 1977, when she called for fresh general elections.

7. THE ELECTION OF 1977
The sixth general election of 1977 was another historical event in Indian politics. For the first time, the thirty-year continuous and uninterrupted Congress rule was overthrown to establish a non-Congress government at the Centre. It was a personal battle between Mrs. Gandhi and the rest. The authoritarian leadership style of Indira Gandhi was severely challenged and she was thrown out of office by the Janata Party, a new combination was forced to restore people's liberty with popular support.

The outcome was an enormous victory for the Janata party, a coalition of Mrs. Gandhi’s arch rivals, namely, the Congress Old, the rightist Swatantra party, and some Socialist organisations, who won 354 seats out of 542 in the Parliament stripping Mrs. Gandhi's Congress to only 153 seats. Morarji Desai fulfilled his long cherished dream of leading his country from the front as Prime Minister. The year also marked the eventual end of Mrs. Gandhi’s Emergency period.

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154 The Times of India, March 24, 1977,
The election was a watershed in the electoral politics of India, in the sense that, an amalgamation of some regional parties eliminated Mrs. Gandhi’s rule. Since 1967 these regional organisations were rapidly growing in stature as a viable Opposition, and got their breakthrough ten years later, by forming the first non-Congress government at the Centre. These political parties, which had vowed to overthrow Mrs. Gandhi, ever since she had stepped into politics as Congress President, were finally successful in fulfilling their long-cherished desire. The coalition, however, lacked any distinct ideological base. Since its primary aim was to capture power by ousting the existing Indira Gandhi regime, a loose alliance was formed with the Congress (O), the rightist Swatantra, the Hindu communal Jana Sangh, the dissident faction of the ruling Congress, the Congress For Democracy (CFD), led by Mrs. Gandhi’s Cabinet member, Jag Jivan Ram as well as some socialist outfits. The “conclave politics” among these leaders chalked out counter strategies to defeat the Congress (R).

7.1 Reasons behind the national election
Mrs. Gandhi had several reasons for terminating the self-imposed Emergency and calling for a fresh election. She realised that another year of extension of this crisis situation would alienate her valuable support bases. Hence she clarified her intention and announced:

Some eighteen months ago, our beloved country was on the brink of disaster. Violence was openly preached...Government had to act and did act. Without purposive Government a nation, specially a developing one, cannot survive...Restrictions could have been lifted earlier, had violence and sabotage been given up,

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155 The term was coined by Bhagwan Dua to indicate closed door meeting of all opposition leaders, in his article, “Indian Congress: Dominance Revisited” in Paul Brass and Francis Robinson (ed.), Indian National Congress and Indian Society, 1885-1985: Ideology, Social Structure and Political Dominance (New Delhi, Chanakya Publications, 1987), footnote no. 47 of p. 371.
had there been no attempt to stir up communal and other unrest. This discipline and feeling of hope enabled us to initiate and pursue many policies to help those, sections of the population who had greatly benefited from developmental plans....Because of this unshakable faith in the power of the people, I have advised the President to dissolve the present Lok Sabha and order fresh election. This he has accepted. We expect polling to take place in March. The rules of the emergency are being further relaxed to permit all legitimate activities necessary for recognised parties to put forth their points of view before the people...So let us go to the polls with the resolve to reaffirm the power of people and to uphold the fair name of India as a land committed to the path of reconciliation, peace and progress...For the people of India, may 1977 prove to be a year of added stability, strength and continuing achievement.156

Mrs. Gandhi's calculation was to release the imprisoned leaders quickly before the national election on the plea that they would have little or no time to mobilise the masses and organise their strength against her, or some may even boycott the election, which would be a boon for her.157 Moreover, her successive victory since 1967, however, had made her so much overconfident that she had completely overlooked the grievances and emotional upsurge of the general public directed against her abuse of state power during the Emergency, which was exploited by her opponents to oust her when she was at the pinnacle of power.

It could also be considered that due to press censorship, she was unable to comprehend the basic grievances of the people, and could not feel their pulse. Further, she was pacified by her sycophants, that this time too, she would have another landslide victory.158 She could not believe that as soon as

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158 Ibid., p. 107.
their release, the imprisoned leaders would cooperate with each other and organize a coalition front against her.

However, it needs to be pointed out here that Mrs. Gandhi’s essential democratic nature is reflected in the fact that she called for election in 1977, and accepted her defeat gracefully. No other authoritarian leader, all of whom were incidentally men, relinquished power, once they had achieved it through whatever means. Mrs. Gandhi may not have been aware of her unpopularity but the fact remains that she called the elections and accepted the verdict. This too goes to demonstrate her spirit and mental strength.

7.2 Loss and gain of electoral support base

One of the features of the national election of 1977 was the symbolisation of the election as an open confrontation between democracy and dictatorship and between the people's choice and totalitarianism. The consequence was the volte-face in Indira Gandhi’s electoral support base in the Hindi speaking north India. The critical years of Emergency had forced Muslims, Dalits and other minorities of the Indian caste hierarchy, whom she had largely enfolded under her umbrella in 1971, to leave her bandwagon and select the group which had the courage to restore and reinforce democracy.159

On the other hand, while suffering defeat in the Hindi belt, Mrs. Gandhi maintained the hold on non-Hindi speaking southern states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala. A probable reason was the unequal impact of Emergency between the north and the south.160

Likewise, the Janata Front was also relatively weak in garnering support from the southern states. Actually their strength lay more in the Hindi

speaking states of upper India. Unlike Mrs. Gandhi’s all-India command, the
Front leaders lacked popularity in the south. Most of their notable leaders
were from the north, and their respective parties were based in the north
(although the Swatantra party had been formed by the former Tamil Nadu
Chief Minister C. Rajagopalachari, in the late 1950s, its base was now
dissipated among the rightist leaders of north India). All these proved
conducive for Mrs. Gandhi to reinstate her prestige in the southern states.

Moreover, the Tamil Nadu chief and Mrs. Gandhi’ ally, M.G.
Ramachandran had a chauvinist message, “Indira is a woman. She is a
mother. Some men are trying to destroy her. We must save her”.161 This was
apparently strong enough to bring the electorate within the All India Anna
Dravida Munnetra Kazhagham (AIADMK)-Congress (R)’s alliance. This
statement, however, demonstrates the traditionally unequal relationship
between man and woman, where a woman is better portrayed as weak, frail,
and dependent, and her motherhood is specially highlighted to depict her
nurturing role. [In this regard, a question that arises is how many male leaders
would be content when his fatherhood or grandfatherhood (Israeli Premier
Golda Meir was often envisaged as the grandmother) is highlighted at crucial
political junctures].

7.3 Acceptance of defeat
For the first time in her long political career, Mrs. Gandhi had, however,
miscalculated and misjudged the sentiments of the electorate. She could not
fathom the triumph of an anti-Congress coalition in no time. The
establishment of the impregnable Congress fortress, which she had erected
step by step, was shattered at once. It was also her personal defeat, instead of

161 Narain, n. 143, pp. 110-111.
the defeat of the Congress (R) as a whole, since the party and personality of the Premier were amalgamated on a single plank.

On the other hand, as pointed out earlier, she accepted people’s verdict, a rare quality possessed by other authoritarian political leaders of the world. After absorbing the post-election trauma, she uttered:

Democracy implies an implicit acceptance of certain higher objectives: the government can be opposed but not the national interest. The opposition front displayed an utter lack of understanding of this distinction. Their anger against me and the Congress obscured consideration of the nation's welfare. Instant Satyagrahas certainly cannot be part of democratic life. When they win, they are for the system. When they lose, they decry and attack it. We, on our part, have accepted our setbacks at the polls. The opposition parties have to see that the Government, once elected, is allowed to function for its full term. But we weren't. Right from 1971 they started making trouble. The Bangladesh crisis came as somewhat of a chance to ward off troubles for a while. But they resumed immediately afterwards.\textsuperscript{162}

After assuming leadership, the Morarji Desai-led-Janata administration appointed a number of enquiry Committees to investigate Mrs. Gandhi’s misuse of power. The Privilege Committee of the Lower House found her guilty of the “breach of privilege and contempt of the House, for obstruction, intimidation and harassment of officials, preparing material for Parliamentary questions and” the Lok Sabha declared her guilty on December, 19 1978 by a vote of 279 to 139 and sent her to jail followed by her expulsion from the Parliament.\textsuperscript{163}

However, intra-party friction and clash of irreconcilable interests among the leaders of the Janata front that was soon cropped up in the

\textsuperscript{162} Gandhi, n. 6, p. 170.

\textsuperscript{163} R.S. Arora, \textit{Fundamental Issues for the Seventh Lok Sabha}, (New Delhi, The Institute for the Study of International Relations, 1980), p. 27.
immediate aftermath of its inauguration led to its downfall within two years.\textsuperscript{164}

8. THE ELECTION OF 1980 AND INDIRA GANDHI'S LAST TERM

Mrs. Gandhi’s return to power out of the ashes of the Janata reestablished the fact that India lacked a suitable leader having stature similar to that of Mrs. Gandhi. Her indomitable spirit and determination swept away all dissident voices and reconquered her lost position. Likewise, she also restored the fading popularity of the Congress and proved once again that the Congress was the only viable national party; it expanded her control over fifteen of twenty-two states.\textsuperscript{165}

Similar to 1971, Mrs. Gandhi won another landslide victory of 351 seats in 1980 from all the cross-cutting sections of the society, ranging from “the very rich and the very poor, from Brahmins to ex-untouchables/from well-to-do businessmen and government bureaucrats to tribal agricultural labourers and Muslim weavers...The strength of the Congress party among the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians- who constitute 38% of India's population- remains a major determinant of the electoral victories of the Congress party.”\textsuperscript{166} Hence it was the same electorate which had estranged her three years back, now had returned her into political power.

At the same time, almost all the major political parties split into several fragmented parts. This offered a number of choices to the electorate, however,

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid., p. 29.
\textsuperscript{166} Myron Weiner, “Congress Restored: Continuities and Discontinuities in Indian Politics”, \textit{Asian Survey}, Vol. XXII, No. 4, April 1982, p. 340.
the fragmentation of other parties became a boon for Mrs. Gandhi as she was able to resurrect her organisation, which was renamed as Congress Indira or Congress (I). There were now three Congresses, the Congress (O), Congress (I) and Congress Urs, named after the Congress President Devraj Urs; two Janatas (Janata Secular of Raj Narain, and Janata Communal of Morarji Desai), and countless other parties.167

8.1 Highly centralised administration
The return of Indira Gandhi into the centre stage of politics once again reaffirmed her propensity towards a highly centralised administrative system. Besides, her younger son, Sanjay Gandhi’s promotion to the post of the Chief Secretary of the party had further strengthened her inclination towards paralysing the formation of any independent support base for any of her party members.168 This effort also shows that Mrs. Gandhi wanted another dynastic succession of power, in the manner she had succeeded Nehru At the same time, Sanjay Gandhi’s confidants were placed as Chief Ministers and Legislative Assembly members in Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Bihar, Orissa and Karnataka.169 Most of these supporters had little or no regional background. Moreover as a counter-checking measure, she also appointed their rival opponents in the central Cabinet so as to keep the regional government perennially fragile.170 These tactics, however, led to the loss of Andhra Pradesh, for the first time in Congress history, followed by Tamil Nadu, in the state Legislative elections on 1983, despite the ruling parties’ clear majority in both the Houses. In the former case, the Telegu Desam of N.T.Rama Rao succeeded the Congress for the first time, while the AIADMK overthrew the

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167 Ibid., p. 342.
168 Frankel, n. 47, p. 659.
169 Hardgrave Jr., n. 166, p. 198.
ruling Indira backed DMK regime in Tamil Nadu. (They will be dealt separately in Chapter V, in the comparative analysis of the domestic policies of the three Premiers).

8.2 Communal Card
Mrs. Gandhi’s last term in the Prime Ministerial position coincided with nationwide religious, linguistic, caste and ethnic confrontations. She respond to these crisis situations with repression. In 1984, more than forty million Indian were under military rule. Another characteristic of Mrs. Gandhi's new outlook was her zeal to explore communal and religious ties that had great appeal to her northern base, which was quite contrary to her secular image. In order to woo her electorate, she resorted to exploiting communally sensitive policies to regain her foothold in the region. Like her father, she took her oath as the Prime Minister in 1966, by affirming her allegiance to the Constitution’ as a secular minded person, instead of swearing in the name of God. However, the growing internal disturbances in the states of Assam and Punjab with communal violence and ethnic strife resulted in an interplay of religion and politics, in which, Mrs. Gandhi took an active role. The issues will be dealt extensively in chapter five.

9. FUNCTIONING AND LEADERSHIP STYLE
Indira Gandhi has remained India’s most dominant Prime Minister since the post Nehru years. Her functioning style and leadership pattern demonstrates her overwhelming power and authority, by which, “India becomes Indira and Indira becomes India”, as envisioned by Debkanta Barooah, former President

171 Everett, in Genovese (ed.), n. 18, p. 125.
172 Masani, n. 5, p. 147.
of the Congress Party. Her leadership and functioning styles encompass a wide array of traits that hardly match those of contemporaries. Along with her leadership pattern and modes of functioning, lies her personality that has its roots embedded in her childhood. Having grown up with loneliness and insecurity, her relationship with colleagues and party peers were coloured by her intrinsic mistrust and lack of faith on them.

**9.1 Growing up in an intellectual setup**

Mrs. Gandhi was born in an atmosphere of intellectual distinction that was permeated with the intellectual outlooks of her grandfather Motilal and father Jawaharlal. Since her house in Allahabad was the citadel of India’s freedom movement, she grew up amidst the ideas of eminent personalities, who were regular visitors to her house. Such contacts led her to have personal equations with most of the Congress leaders, who were her father’s colleagues in the post Independence period. At the same time, her education in Europe fetched her personal relationship with Romain Rolland, Einstein, Bernard Shaw and others. Together with this, she had personal acquaintances with leaders of international politics, while touring abroad as the daughter of India’s first Prime Minister. These close associations helped her shape her outlook which was reflected in her policy programmes. At the same time her secular image had a wider appeal to the Indian masses, a trait that had sidelined all her opponents and competitors.

**9.2 Congress Party as a family organisation**

Mrs. Gandhi’s father and grandfather had served the Congress party as Presidents and were among the principal contributors of the organisation with regard to decision making. It therefore, appears that Mrs. Gandhi’s entry into

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174 Abbas, n. 43, p. 20.
Congress and subsequently into politics would be her natural inclination. Although she was reluctant to assume responsibility, the ‘Kamaraj Plan’ was a decisive step initiated by Nehru and she succeeded to the position of the Congress President (as the third from the Nehru family) and the Prime Minister thereafter. This could be considered as Nehru’s preference for a dynastic inheritance of power. This practice was also taken over by Mrs. Gandhi when she made her son Sanjay the President of the organisation. Similarly, the manner she had centralised power in her own hands, seems that she was one of those handful of elected heads of the state, who personified her party and power at the same time.

9.3 Relationship with party colleagues

Mrs. Gandhi’s relationship with the Congress colleagues in the initial days of her first Prime Ministership in 1966 was a subordinate – superior role, where she was largely underestimated and ignored by the Old Guards on the assumption that she could easily be dictated and directed at their will. Hence her capacity to act and think independently was largely discouraged due to the overarching dominance of the veteran members. In spite of nonacceptance from her colleagues, she managed to maintain her authority on the issue of the devaluation of Indian currency in 1966, without consulting the Congress President Kamaraj, as well as the bank nationalisation programme. Her Finance Minister and rival Morarji Desai was categorical: “As long as I am finance minister, this cannot be implemented. If the prime minister wants to do it, she will have to change her finance minister.” Mrs. Gandhi did exactly that relieved Desai from his portfolio and she herself assumed the post and implemented her goal.

175 Steinberg, n. 2, p. 84.
Likewise, the Congress split of 1969 was absolutely necessary for the consolidation and establishment of Mrs. Gandhi’s independent power base, which was difficult to materialise as she was under the control of the Syndicate. This tendency reflects Mrs. Gandhi’s competitive relationship with her veteran party leaders. The post-split period was, however, a period of consolidation of all key governmental posts by distributing other portfolios to her reliable supporters. She relied heavily on young, intellectual junior officers and bureaucrats for consultation in formulating national policies, rather than consulting for the old, veteran party bosses and the party President for their approval.

9.4 Purging and shuffling of portfolios of close associates

Gaining control of her party in the post-split period, Mrs. Gandhi became extremely conscious of forestalling anybody from becoming overpowerful. Hence she followed an innovative strategy of rotation and frequent reshuffling of portfolios of both party and office bearers. She wished to fill official posts only with trusted and loyal supporters so as to prevent any further disruption and upsurge of superior leadership than her. The consequence was the appointment of five party Presidents in quick succession: Mr. C. Subramaniyam (December 1969-March 1971), Mr. D. Sanjivaya (March 1971-1972), Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma (May 1972-October 1974) and Mr. D.K. Barooah (October 1974-1976).

Mrs. Gandhi’s mistrust was so profound and deep-rooted that it became impossible for any of her associates to emerge as a potential challenger. In this connection she also supported her action of purging her Ministers by drawing a parallel with herself and her father's modus operandi:

176 Ibid., p. 96.
“He (her father) did allow everybody to grow even those whom we considered as weeds. He did allow them to grow even though they were constantly threatening him...My father was a saint who strayed into politics, but I am not of the same stuff.”

She was intolerant of dissent and views opposing hers. According to her critics, “She was allergic to the impression that she could be fed with ideas or guidelines by someone else. Where a man is big and important and tries to create this impression, she throws him out. But where it's a small man and loyal, she protects him.” The outcome was that everybody was judged by one single criterion, that of loyalty. This behavioural trait was also discernible in the functioning styles of both Margaret Thatcher and Golda Meir.

Thus, the Finance Minister Sachin Chaudhury lost his position in the Cabinet after he took the full responsibility for the implementation of the devaluation programme; this followed by the loss of post of the Commerce Minister, Manubhai Shah. Likewise, her ‘Big Four’ Ministers, C. Subramaniyam, Fakruddin Ali Ahmad, Ashoka Mehta and Dinesh Singh, whom she coopted into her Cabinet after stripping the former Princes from their Privy Purse, were retired and new faces soon filled up the vacant posts. All this reflects Mrs. Gandhi’s deep sense of insecurity towards her own men, and cost her a heavy toll when her dissatisfied men left her to join the opposition camp and oust her from office, in the way that Jagjivan Ram, Dinesh Singh had joined the Janata Front in 1977.

179 Vasudev, n. 143, p. 49.
9.5 Control of the Cabinet

Mrs. Gandhi also demonstrated her supremacy by controlling and suppression of the Cabinet. Since the time of her ascendance to Prime Ministerial position in 1966, she had demonstrated an inclination towards relying on her close associates and personal advisers, popularly known as the ‘Kitchen Cabinet’, rather than on her Cabinet, that is the constitutionally created body for discussion and decision-making. During the Indo-Pak War of 1971, she tilted towards her Principal Secretary, P. N. Haksar who in assistance with the Army Chief Sam Manekshaw, prepared the details of the war strategy and tactics, and coordinated with the Bangladeshi representatives in West Bengal, and her another advisor, D.P. Dhar negotiated with the Soviet Union for the conclusion of the Friendship Treaty, while keeping her Foreign Minister, Swaran Singh out of the purview.¹⁸¹

Likewise, India’s detonation of its first peaceful nuclear device, was also done in secret in 1974, until she revealed the accomplishment four hours after the mission was completed.¹⁸² Further evidence of the diminutive stature of the Cabinet was discernible during Mrs. Gandhi’s declaration of the national Emergency, when the Ministers were informed only at the time that the Emergency was about to be declared. The Cabinet ratified the document in less than half hour.¹⁸³

Hence the primacy of the Premier remained predominant at the cost of reducing the stature of the Cabinet. This style of functioning depicts Mrs. Gandhi’s disposition and firm determination to accomplish her desires and tasks without interference from other. With the growing power and authority of Mrs. Gandhi, the importance of her Ministers, the Cabinet and its associated offices were also reduced subsequently, so as to provide special power and

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¹⁸² Steinberg, n. 2, p. 85.
¹⁸³ Malhotra, n. 9, p. 379.
prestige to the Premier and her coterie of advisers, bureaucrats and handful of Ministers. Critics have noted that in Nehru’s time, the Cabinet was an institution of collective governance, now it had been transformed into an agency designed to maintain Mrs. Gandhi’s support.\footnote{Richard Sisson, “Prime Ministerial Power and the Selection of Ministers in India: Three Decades of Change”, \textit{International Political Science Review}, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1981, p. 137.}

Mrs. Gandhi later confided to one of her biographers on the issue of her bypassing of the Cabinet for the announcement of Emergency, “It is a fact. I did not consult the Cabinet but it was ratified thereafter. But it is not the only instance when this was done. The Cabinet is never consulted on the budget. The same is true regarding the devaluation of the rupee in 1969. The PM is not bound to put everything before the Cabinet.”\footnote{Carras, n. 8, p. 233.} It can be deduced from this statement that Mrs. Gandhi was proud to have relegated the Cabinet to the backburner.

9.6 Relationship with the oppositions

Mrs. Gandhi’s relationship with the opposition groups was contingent upon her needs and the accomplishment of certain objectives. When she became the Congress President in 1959, she imposed President’s rule on the Communist government of Kerala in order to restore Congress dominance. On the other hand, she allowed the same Communist party to form the government in the Kerala Legislative Assembly election of 1970, when she found it profitable to fulfill her socialist missions.\footnote{Ouseph Varkey, “The CPI-Congress Alliance in India”, \textit{Asian Survey}, Vol. 19, No. 9, September 1979, pp. 882-883.} For that she also courted partnership with various leftist and socialist political organisations to galvanise support for the bank nationalisation programme. However, it was same Communist Party of India (CPI) whom she had turned down because of the former’s criticism...
against Sanjay Gandhi’s anti-socialist activities. The reason she provided, “...if they [CPI] had wanted genuine cool, we could have sat down and talked things over. They did come to meet me...but they came in a belligerent mood and shouted at me rather than sitting and trying to discuss how we could solve the problem.” She ordered their arrest.

Other leftist political organisations, such as, the Praja Socialist Party (PSP) and the Samyukta Socialist Party (SPP), with whom Indira Gandhi had courted partnership after the Congress split of 1969, were branded as rebels since they were organising protest movements and demonstrations against her leadership during the outbreak of Emergency and their leaders were even put behind the bar without trial.

Likewise, Mrs. Gandhi’s attitude towards the Congress (O), whose members was her former colleagues and from the highest echelon of the party hierarchy, was also negative because of the latter’s ignorance and negligence towards the Prime Ministerial power possessed by their junior colleague, Indira Gandhi. It gave rise to mutual enmity and hostility between the two faction and each side was unwilling to compromise with each other. Her call for the imposition of Emergency was to forestall the nationwide disturbances created by her opponents.

9.7 Loss of the federal autonomy

Another intriguing aspect of Mrs. Gandhi’s leadership style was the destruction of the federal structure of Indian polity. In pursuit of unchallenged domination, she resorted to an interventionist strategy of personally selecting state Chief Ministers and members of the state Congress, with the sole intension of forestalling any possible power-holder with the

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187 Ibid., p. 884.
188 Gandhi, n. 6, p. 165.
capacity to challenge her authority. Chief Ministers of the Congress ruled states were carefully chosen so as to eliminate the menace of regional bossism. Moreover, she was surrounded by sycophants from her Cabinet and state legislatures, but, instead of being carried away by their information and advice, she checked and counter-checked their words before believing them.\textsuperscript{190}

However, the states were direct fronts for the inter-party rivalries between the ruling Congress and the opponents. As explained earlier, states with non-Congress governments were soon placed under presidential rule for the restoration of Congress’ dominance as soon as Mrs. Gandhi had assumed leadership. Moreover, there was an imminent clash between the centrally-backed stooges and their contending groups, which posed a severe threat to the central leadership. Thus “local discontent was soon translated into a threat to the national government itself.”\textsuperscript{191}

\textbf{9.8 Abolition of parliamentary sovereignty}

Mrs. Gandhi’s Premiership was synonymous with the erosion of Parliamentary supremacy and Constitutional primacy. Through a series of Amendment Acts, she had wiped away the powers of the Parliament and championed her own leadership. Her dissolution of the Lower Chamber or the Lok Sabha and summoning of general election before the completion of five year term in 1971, the approval of the Emergency declaration by the Parliament were instances to show how the highest law-making body of India was subjugated.

Together with these, there were several Constitutional Amendments between 1971 and 1976, at least nineteen times, that had further altered the fundamental structure of the Constitution, and reduced the government’s

\textsuperscript{190} Masani, n. 5, p. 288.

\textsuperscript{191} Kochanek, in Hart, n. 12, p. 114.
accountability to the Legislature and the Judiciary. Similarly, when the Parliament and the Supreme Court had invalidated some of the governmental legislations, the central authority then dissolved the Lok Sabha in order to secure popular mandate through general election.

9.9 Attitude towards women
Despite being the first and only woman Prime Minister of India till date, Mrs. Gandhi did not considered herself as a representative of womenfolk. Time and again she noted that she was not biased towards women. She noted, “I do not regard myself as woman but as a person with a job to do.” Neither were her policies woman-friendly, nor did she encourage other women to take politics as a career, nor she had any woman Minister, either in her Ministry, or in her Cabinet. Instead she was regarded as the Warrior Queen and ‘Honorary Men’ along with Golda Meir and Margaret Thatcher, by political analyst, Antonia Fraser. Above all her style of functioning was not woman-centric. She did not have any feminine touch, instead, it had surpassed any male leader in terms of her ruthlessness, authority and her clamour for unchallenged and unrestricted power, once again testified that politics is genderless, and once a person assumes power, his or her gender becomes immaterial as all would function from the Machiavellian understanding of the Prince or Kautilya’s identification of Vijigishu (King), whose central role would be aggrandisement and full utilisation of power. It could also be considered that Mrs. Gandhi was not reared by her parents as their only girl child, instead, she was their only child and was trained to be independent and fearless since her childhood.

194 Ibid., p. 209.
Some of the critics mention Mrs. Gandhi’s character as a “fickle pilgrim who travels one year to the Ganges and the next to the Yamuna, acting like a capitalist in Washington and a socialist in Moscow.” They regarded fickleness as a feminine trait. However, her career and functioning style reflect that Mrs. Gandhi was not a fickle-minded lady, instead, she possessed a firm determination and knew what she wanted. She had a perfect goal-oriented vision and accomplished her missions.

It can be argued that the decision-making pattern of Premier Gandhi was contingent upon the advice and information furnished by her close associates, rather than a collective way of thinking based on the analysis of her Cabinet members. For instance, since her victory in 1967 election, a major part of her coterie of young members, or the Young Turks, wanted the split from the Congress bosses; likewise, her decision to continue in her office, even after the High Court verdict in 1975, and imposition of Emergency was induced and influenced by the advices of her younger son, Sanjay Gandhi.

Although in the initial years of her assuming of Prime Ministerial role in 1966, she was heavily constrained in making ministerial appointments as she had to accommodate the veteran Syndicate members, who were the supporters of her candidacy. Once she had freed herself from their interventions and influence through the historic split of 1969, she distributed portfolios to her trusted and loyal members, who would uphold her decisions. Moreover, her ‘Kitchen Cabinet’ was a mini-decision-making hub, which was the nerve behind all her decisions.

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10. PERSONALITY OF MRS. GANDHI

If one looks into the personality factor of Indira Gandhi, it will be interesting to note that her profile displayed a curious synthesis of reticence and assertiveness; ambitious and diffidence; tenderness and selfishness, where the accomplishment of her objectives became a prime concern. The way she grew up as one of the active participants in India’s struggle for freedom, her treatment of the ailing people, her social work\(^{197}\) were reflections of her kindness and open-hearted nature. On the other hand, the Emergency period bears testimony of her ruthlessness, when she ordered imprisonment of her rivals and challengers, and she was apparently, personally responsible for preparing the list of the people to be arrested.\(^{198}\)

On December 28, 2010, the ruling Congress government led by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh released a book entitled, *The Congress and the Making of the Indian Nation* to commemorate 125 years of the Congress Party. Here, it admitted that the Emergency was the darkest chapter in the party’s history, and considered, “Unlimited state and party power was concentrated in the hands of the Prime Minister.” It also accepted the excesses committed by Mrs. Gandhi’s son, Sanjay Gandhi and admitted that “He also promoted slum clearance, anti-dowry measures and promotion of literacy but in an arbitrary manner and much to the annoyance of the public opinion….\(^{199}\) The book is a compilation of essays contributed by eminent historians, political analysts and academicians.

Another significant characteristic of the personality of Mrs. Gandhi was her tendency of prioritising herself as the only leader of the country, with all desired capacities to lead from the front. It has been explained above how much she regarded herself as the indispensable leader under Shastri’s

\(^{197}\) Gandhi, n. 6, p. 24.

\(^{198}\) Moraes, n. 14, p. 222.

\(^{199}\) *The Telegraph*, December 29, 2010.
Premiership and rushed to turbulent areas to forestall crisis situations. Likewise, during the period of succession, she wrote a letter to his younger son, Rajiv by quoting few lines from Robert Frost, “To be king is within the situation/ and within me”. These lines reflect her ambitious quality of wielding power and assuming leadership.

Another incident would further exemplify her intention to continue as the Prime Minister, much against the Court verdict. When asked by one of her biographers, Dom Moraes, about the reason for her continuation in power, she uttered, “I wanted to resign, but people would not let me go, because there was a financial crisis and I was the only one who could handle it...What would have happened if there had been nobody to lead? It was my duty to the country to stay, though I did not want to”. Claiming herself to be the indispensable leader of the country, Mrs. Gandhi, felt that she alone was the suitable figure to save the nation from the ‘extra-constitutional forces’. Such a quality is an indicator of Mrs. Gandhi’s enormous self-confidence.

Mrs. Gandhi had tremendous physical strength and stamina. She used to travel several thousand miles in short span of time for election her election campaigns. Once she was hurled by a stone during an election campaign that broke her nose, but that could not dissuade her from accomplishing her task with her broken nose (she joked for being looking like white masked bandaged version of Batman). Since her childhood she suffered from poor health and recuperated from tuberculosis while studying in England, which she had proudly succumbed to be emerged as India’s most dominant

200 Steinberg, n. 2, p. 53.
201 Moraes, n. 13, p. 220. Emphasis is mine.
203 Frank, n. 20, p. 159.
politician. Such a power of physical endurance would also be observed in the cases of Margaret Thatcher and Golda Meir.

One of the dominant characteristics of Mrs. Gandhi was her ruthlessness towards her opponents, and intolerance towards criticisms mounted against her. Time and again, she had demonstrated her aggressiveness and ruthlessness towards her dissidents, whether against Pakistan during the Bangladesh problem in 1971, or her action against the Communists of Kerala in 1959 when she was the President of her Party, or her retaliatory measures against her opposition forces during the time of Emergency. Her non-accommodative stance towards criticisms also led her to crush her dissidents and rivals. Critics have pointed out that she was more comfortable working with people with less than equal quality and stature, than those who are superior to her.204 To the proponents of realism, leaders prefer bilateral relations and with those having lesser importance, by which the latter could easily be dominated by the former. The same thing could be applicable to the case of Mrs. Gandhi.

So far as her relationship with the general public is concerned, Mrs. Gandhi used to keep an open house for one hour every morning to allow the citizens to meet her,205 and had a great capacity to listen to their grievances, a rare policy pursued by politicians and national heads. She was fearless and afraid of none. She still kept her Sikh bodyguards, even after the Khalistan issue (it will be discussed in Chapter 5), for which she had to pay her price when they assassinated her in October 1984.

On the other side of the spectrum, Mrs. Gandhi had no time to listen to analysis of policies from her Ministers and civil servants. She explained, “I am always direct...I never spend my time in preliminaries...Not that I don’t

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205 Ibid., p. 37.
believe in them, but I think that first I should get the job done, then sit and talk.”  

She wanted to go straight into issues, rather than spend time in their flowery analysis, in order to address the problem faster.

Mrs. Gandhi’s tenure was also marked by the formation of several new states of Punjab, Haryana and Chandigarh by readjusting the Punjab province in 1966, the creation of Meghalaya, Manipur and Tripura and two Union Territories of Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh through the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act of 1971. Moreover, she was also responsible for the demarcation of the 1600 km border area between India and Burma in August 1974 and thus settled the territorial dispute between the two countries and solidified India’s national security. At the same time the merger of Sikkim with the Indian Union in 1975 added another feather in her performance cap.

Mrs. Gandhi was not the carrier of her father’s policy programmes, instead she had maintained her individual style of functioning time and again. Her promotion of Hindi as the national language through the Official Languages (Amendment) Bill of 1967 was a direct retreat from her father’s footsteps, who always wanted English along with Hindi as official languages.

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206 Frank, n. 21, p. 261.
CONCLUSION

At a conference of lawyers held in New Delhi Mrs. Gandhi made a sudden plea for reviewing the existing political system of government and inquired whether it would be possible to switch to a Presidential system of government.\(^{207}\) Such a debate reflects the extent of power and authority of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. This statement matches with Mrs. Gandhi’s personality, who was greeted by the *Economist* as the “Empress of India”, after her victory in the 1971 general election.\(^{208}\) No other Premier of India has received with such honour. She was also declared as the “most admired person in the world” in the same year by the special Gallup Poll not only in America, but also in France for two consecutive years of 1967 and 1968.\(^{209}\)

The Premiership of Indira Gandhi is still regarded as the period when India became a regional dominant, and a period when the citizens witnessed a wide continuum of extreme politico-socio-economic policy programmes, ranging from people friendly socialist initiatives, to the arbitrary and coercive use of state power in the name of Emergency. Her personality included a wide range of identities and images, from the ‘dumb doll’, to the ‘Empress of India’. After India’s success on the issue of Bangladesh she was revered by the Indian populace as the goddess ‘Durga’, the Hindu deity and the symbol of strength and female power. It was same mass who wanted her resignation after her initiation of coercive and repressive methods to curb anti-government activities.

The political career of Mrs. Gandhi, therefore, encompasses a wide range of actions and activities, for which she was portrayed sometimes as populist, sometimes as dictator. No other Indian Premier has been characterised in such a manner. It is often argued that whether any of her male

\(^{207}\) Roy and Venkatsubbiah, n. 182, p. 81.

\(^{208}\) Mitra, n. 171.

\(^{209}\) B. K. Ahluwalia, “The Soul of India”, in Ahluwalia (ed.), n. 1, p. 35
counterpart (Prime Ministers of India till date are all men) would have initiated the kind of policies taken up by Mrs. Gandhi, or have resorted to authoritarian measures in the name of Emergency. The fact is to follow her footsteps one requires tremendous determination, courage, power and disposition and has to be the authoritative and the alpha and omega of all governmental decisions. Very few people, men or women possess such qualities.