CHAPTER FOUR

THE POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF
SHRIMATI INDIRA GANDHI
EARLY LIFE

It was during this historic year, in 1917 that Kamala Nehru, the wife of Jawaharlal Nehru, gave birth to a small, perfectly formed female child at Anand Bhawan. The child, who was destined to make history like her father and grandfather, was given two names: 'Indira' which is another name for the Hindu goddess of wealth by her grandfather, and Priyadarshini, 'dear to the sight' or 'dear to behold', by her parents.

1 Anand Bhawan: according to Charles H. Andrews—an Italian who joined the Indian Freedom movement, and was a valued friend of Mahatma Gandhi and the Nehrus—was like "one of the stately country houses in England owned by the high aristocracy". Jawaharlal learnt to swim in its indoor swimming pool, which was the first of its kind in Allahabad. A foreign biographer of Indira Gandhi, who "loved the house of Nehru" for the "unlikely things, observed"... the trivial and the historic strangely mixed together and reflected in the kaleidoscope. "Such was the fabulous Anand Bhawan and its cosmopolitan owner, Motilal Nehru, donated the palatial residence to the nation and recristened it Swaraj Bhawan, which became the headquarters of the Indian National Congress." Motilal Nehru built a smaller house in the same ground and the family moved into this modest dwelling in 1925. It was also named Anand Bhavan. Swaraj Bhawan held the status until the Congress Party shifted its main office to Delhi in 1946. The Congress Working Committee decided in 1948 to turn Swaraj Bhawan into a home for children, and the Children's National Institute took it over in 1949. The new Anand Bhavan has also been gifted to the nation, in accordance with the will of Jawaharlal Nehru, Mrs. Indira Gandhi handed it over, on November 1, 1970, at a formal ceremony to the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Trust.
Despite the unusual naming, the child was to be better known as 'Indira'. Which was shortened to the pet diminutive 'Indu'. The story of her early life is inextricably linked with Anand Bhawan and the multifarious goings-on in that mansion.

Built by Motilal Nehru the father of Jawaharlal Nehru— with whom the Nehru legend starts, the Anand Bhawan abode of Happiness was a whitewashed villa, laid round an open, paved courtyard, its elegant terraced roofs and long, airy verandahs, running round the 37 rooms, which were enclosed by a series of colonnaded arches. Its rambling interior included over half a dozen bedrooms and large reception rooms. Motilal Nehru, who lived in English style, was the first Indian to import a car in 1904, and Anand Bhawan had the latest gadgets, besides the finest china and the most sparkling crystal, bought on successive trips to Europe.

But the happiness of Jawaharlal and Kamala Nehru was destined to be short-lived, as the wind of change, that was to engulf the Jawaharlal Nehrus in the maelstrom of the nation, was already beginning to blow. Jawaharlal Nehru was in the process of taking a momentous decision—of jo—
ming the freedom struggle which would inevitably entail continual separation from Kamala Nehru and daughter Indira. Sensitive and proud, Kamala Nehru was no idealist like her husband but her realism added a new dimension to his strength. He was preoccupied most of the time and she felt lonely in a big household which was full of new relatives. Her only consolation was her baby girl. But in due course, she was to lead the nationalist transformation of the Jawaharlal Nehrus.

Mrs. Indira Gandhi told a women’s seminar many years later. “Many people knew the part which was played by my grandfather and my father. But in my opinion, a more important part was played by my mother. When my father wanted to join Gandhiji, and to change the whole way of his life, to change our luxuriant 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 made such a difference not only to our family but to the history of modern India.”

2. Indira Gandhi, speech at a women’s seminar in Tanjore, June 1965.
THE LITTLE GIRL was lonely during the long summer afternoon. She could hear the snoring of the old ayah who looked after her in the absence of her parents, and who now lay asleep on the cool marble floor of the hall. The big house was quiet and empty. In her father’s room the books neatly arranged in the shelves were gathering dust which blew in even through closed doors and shuttered windows. On the green baize-covered table of the grand father’s office, fat green and red Law books lay still open where grandfather was consulting them when the Red Turbaned Policemen came to take him away. In the large drawing room which was always full of people and voices, the doors and windows were closed, and the sofas and chairs were all shrouded in white dust-covers and looked like so many cows seated in the shade of a big banyan tree.

The little girl, being the only child in the Big House, was used to running around the place, now demanding a new ribbon for her hair from her mother, now confronting her father with questions, disturbing her granny in her

pads and prayers, and climbing on to the lap of her grandfather as he discussed law cases with his clients. But at the moment there was no one in the house except the snoring nanny and the wide-awake little girl. The Grandfather and father were both in prison, and the ladies of the house had gone out to picket the foreign cloth shops and to organise processions and public meetings. The little girl had begged to be taken with them, she too wanted to march in a procession holding a big tricolour flag in her hands. But her mother had decided she was too young to get involved in the Satyagraha movement. That was why she was left alone in her room.

Indira's scholastic career started early at a kindergarten in Delhi where she spent a few months. This was followed by a brief spell at the Modern School, Allahabad. Before she was seven, she was withdrawn from the school, to be admitted to St. Cecilia's School, Allahabad, run by Roman Catholic nuns. Her father, however, did not appreciate the fact that Indira should start her formal education at a school run by European ladies.

4. Satish C. Aggarwala & Adish C. Aggarwala: Legacy of Indira Gandhi (Socialist Age Publications, New Delhi, 1985) p.18
From the beginning, Indira's was a case of self-
education, or education via a changing environment, which
Pestalozzi would have approved. She read what she wanted,
pulling her books in the well-stocked Anand Bhawan library.
While other girls would be day-dreaming over the usual
diet of fairy tales and nursery rhymes, Indira was reading
Bernard Shaw and Shakespeare. It was in this library that
she read about Joan of Arc, the tragic heroine, who,
leading her compatriots to rise against the invading
British, fostered a sense of nationhood among the French.
The analogy was ironically complete in so far as the
British sway over India continued in the twentieth century.

There were other, significant incidents in her
teenager days which pointed to the role of leadership for
which she was grooming herself. Seeing that the whole
family was in prison, Indira expressed her desire to join
the Congress volunteers. Disappointed with the reply that
she was not old enough to be one, Indira launched her own
'army' of volunteers with the children from her
neighbourhood. Drilled and disciplined by Indira, these
junior volunteers, comprising boys and girls, were
christened by her as 'Vanar Sena,' Monkey Army. They
could not be full-fledged volunteers, but Indira trained and used them to run errands for the Freedom movement to and for the police lines. Messages would be passed on by groups of children, playing hop-scotch and running around unsuspected, that the police is at so and so place, that so and so is to be arrested, or whatever would be the news of the moment.

Motilal Nehru, then in prison, was delighted to hear of the 'Monkey Army'. He wrote to Indira thence: What is your position in the Monkey Army? I suggest the wearing of a tail by every member, the length of which should be in proportion to the rank of the wearer. The badge with the print of 'Hanuman' (the Monkey God) is all right, but see that the gada (club), which is normally in Hanuman's right hand is not there. Remember that the gada means violence and we are a non-violent army. Have you got someone to teach you marching and drilling? It is essential. Above all, you have to keep yourself fit. Papu (her father) runs two miles every morning. You ought to be able to run at least one mile without stopping and increase the distance gradually.............

5 ibid p.19.
Returning to Anand Bhawan in December 1927, Indira joined St. Mary's Convent in Allahabad. This time Jawaharlal kept back his reservations to Indira being educated in an English Medium European school. To balance her curriculum, and keeping in view the nationalist sentiments, a Hindi tutor was engaged to teach her Hindi at home.

Meanwhile, Indira's formal schooling was a matter of concern to Jawaharlal Nehru. He was on the lookout for a suitable school where her parents or agents may be jailed in the vicinity. On the advice of Gandhi, Indira was sent in 1931 to the Pupils' Own School at Pune, run by Mr. and Mrs. Vakil, an idealistic couple, who ran the school partly on Tagore's experimental ideas. It was close to Yervada gaol where Gandhi was imprisoned at the time. Indira was for some time the only boarder at the school and she would sleep with Mrs. Vakil. This was no new experience for Indira; from childhood she had learnt the art of living with herself. Indira, however, was 'Indira Didi' to her classmates, and it gave her a privileged status.

Indira missed her parents though the company of her cousins, daughters of Mrs. Vijayalakshmi Pandit, who were
also at the school, helped in her adjustment to the new environment. She hiked in the Western Ghats and liked climbing hills and mountains. She evinced organisng ability, planning school excursions and entertainments, and was elected 'Prime Minister' of the student's Council. Diligent at work, she was preparing for the matriculation examination. She and her cousins went to see Gandhi while he was on an indefinite fast. Actually, Indira became a regular visitor at Yerwada jail. Other high points in her school life were the visits of her mother and grandmother who would come loaded with chocolates and other 'goodies'.

The tragedy overwhelmed Indira and her father. 'Kamala Nehru is no more' were the words reverberating in his fevered brain. To solace Indira, he took her away to London for a few weeks. They shared each other's sorrow, drawing closer to each other in the hour of grief. After Jawaharlal's return to India, Indira went back to Beg for a short term, to complete her London Matriculation, the preliminary to her joining Oxford. Then she went to England, matriculated from Badminton School and later entered Somerville College, Oxford, and studied modern history. She enjoyed the course and liked her professor's
At Oxford and in London, Indira got to know many Indian students, who already influenced by the Indian national movement, led by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, were sharing the 'wind of change' that was sweeping through Europe. The students of the London School of Economics (LSE) were banded in the new movement for a 'united front' against the common danger of fascism. Among these were Foroz Gandhi, by then a LSE scholar. Among the others were some of the future leaders of India: Bhupesh Gupta, Jyoti Basu, Minoo Masani, Mohan Desura mangalam and his sister, parvati, Nithil Chakravarty and Renuka Ray. All of them were involved in Krishna Menon's India League who persisted with the battle for Indian independence with the help of Labour Members of Parliament and sundry sympathisers. Jawaharlal Nehru had established a committee for aid to Spain and China and India did more than her bit for these organisations. On a fund-raising occasion, she gave a prized bracelet to an auction for the Spanish cause and it fetched 50 pounds.
MARRIAGE AND POLITICAL APPRENTICESHIP

Indira landed at Bombay from the city of Paris in March 1942. She was accompanied by Feroze Gandhi. They had taken a vital decision about themselves that was to shake the serene complacency of Anand Bhawan. Otherwise, there was little warm welcome for Indira at the once crowded household. The last link with the older generation, Swarup Rani, her grandmother, had died. Jawaharlal Nehru was ill in the jail at Dehra Dun. The loneliness was felt by Indira much more than she ever had as a child. Brooding over her own future, Indira felt sure that the next step would be marriage. She had decided that she would marry Feroze Gandhi. Maybe, she felt that matrimony would produce a sense of security which she lacked. This had been no sudden infatuation. The acquaintance of Feroze Gandhi with the Nehru household went back many years. Feroze Gandhi had been devoted to Kamala Nehru and had served her during her illness in London and abroad. It was Kamala Nehru who was responsible for the continuance of Feroze's relationship with Indira; Feroze chose to study at L.S.F because thereby he could be near Indira and Kamala Nehru. In London, whenever Indira was there, he was her
constant companion. "I don't like Feroze Gandhi but I love him," Indira is reported to have said. They had worked together closely for Krishna Menon's India League. Like Indira, Feroze was affiliated with the radical wing of the Congress which stood for a rapid change of society that would be free from poverty and starvation and would do away with casteism, religious bigotry and social injustice. Ideals hardly match action in any society, as we all know too well so many years after Independence. Bigots rallied on either side of the fence to prevent the union of Indira with Feroze Gandhi. When she finally broached the subject with her father, during one of her visits to him in prison, he was taken by surprise almost shocked. He tried to dissuade her. Feroze's family background, education, etc., were different from hers. He mentioned the disparity of religion though it hardly mattered to him in the conventional sense. He even advised her to bide her time, meet some more eligible young men and then decide. The family, belonging to an exclusive community which had preserved its clannish links despite migration from Kashmir to different parts of India, took much the same view.

6. Ibid. p. 32
Prishna, who was close to Indira, could render no help. On the other side of the fence, the family of Feroze Gandhi though hardly illustrious like the big Jawaharlal Nehrus, were orthodox Parsees and no lovers of mixed marriages either.

Making a last bid, Jawaharlal Nehru sent Indira to the Sabarmati Ashram in the hope that Gandhi's intervention would help to resolve the family crisis. An indiscreet report in the Leader, Allahabad, announced the marriage of Indira Nehru with Mr. Feroze Gandhi brother of Miss. Tehmina K. Gandhi, personal assistant to the Chief Inspector of Schools, United Provinces. The story was angled to expose the inferior financial and social status of the family of Feroze Gandhi.

The wedding was a quiet affair, in deference to the wishes of Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. The bridal couple also did not want an ostentatious affair. Some Vedic rituals which were valid for mixed marriages were performed at the simple ceremony, just as had been done when Indira's cousin, B.M. Nehru, had married Magdalena Friedman, a Hungarian Jew. Jawaharlal escorted the couple to the
pandal where they walked around the sacrificial fire seven times. Besides Jawaharlal’s seat was an empty seat reserved for the bride’s mother, Kamala, who was no more. The bride was reminded that in life there was no happiness without sorrow. The resourceful Pandit, Shastri, recalled B.R. Nekru... had a sword put into the hands of the bride, and made her vow that she would safeguard the rights of the country.

The wedding, however, was far from small. People and presents streamed in from all parts of the country. Kashmir, whence her ancestors had come down to the plains two and a half centuries ago, had its fascination for Indira Gandhi. The newly-wedded couple went to the romantic, Happy Valley. ‘Wish we could send you some cool breeze from here,’ they wired to Jawaharlal Nehru from Gulmarag. His reply, couched in subtle humour, was prompt: ‘Thanks, but you have no mangoes’. Back from the brief honeymoon trip, the couple moved into a small house of their own near Anand Bhavan. Feroze had a job as the Manager of the National Herald, a national daily founded by Jawaharlal Nehru. M. Chalapathi Rau then editor of the paper, remembered Feroze Gandhi at that time as ‘Fresh from
London, with a beauliful of enthusiasm including enthusiasm for the Soviet Union.' He also looked after their small garden meticulously. They were as happy as any newly-weds could be, but quiet domesticity was not to be their lot. She gave birth to her first son, Rajiv on August 20, 1944, in Bombay.

AT TEEN MURTI HOUSE

Indira Gandhi was back at Anand Bhavan by October, 1944. She and Feroze Gandhi knew by now that Jawaharlal Nehru was lodged by the British authorities at Ahmednagar Fort along with other leaders of the Congress. Indira Gandhi was still saddened by the growing thought that the Government would not allow interviews, nor were the prisoners asking for any, because the conditions, under which they were likely to take place did not 'fit in with my conception of my dignity or the dignity of my dear ones', as Jawaharlal Nehru put it. It was an untypical, unpoltitical phase for Indira Gandhi but in describing it in retrospect she used the word 'peaceful', rather than 'unpolitical'. In her own characteristic manner, imbued as

she was with the quiet intensity of the introvert, she was preparing herself for the role of responsibility that she would take on in the years to come. The short, peaceful period was soon overtaken by one in which she 'got involved and once again in public life'.

Feroze Gandhi was in charge of a small publicity office in Hotel Imperial, New Delhi. His chores included dealing with foreign correspondents. Thus started his rapport with the press which was to be his forte in his political career. But realizing his inadequacy in the press field, Feroze Gandhi left for Madras to receive training with the prestigious Newspaper, The Hindu. Indira, along with Vijayalakshmi, was staying with Jawaharlal Nehru, who was the de facto Prime Minister of the interim Government, at his official residence at 17, York Road, New Delhi. Since Feroze Gandhi was in Madras, and she was expecting her second child, she stayed on. On December 14, her second son was born prematurely. Feroze Gandhi had come up from Madras. The baby was named Sanjay, after the Philosopher in the Mahabharata.

— Satish C. Aggarwala & Adish C. Aggarwala: op. cit: p. 40
Indira Gandhi was up to her task as stewardess of her father's household, a role she was to play graciously later at Teen Murti House. Formerly the official residence of the Commander-in-Chief of the British-Indian armed forces, Teen Murti House was a palatial mansion, built in solid red sandstone, typical of Lutyen's New Delhi, and containing large reception rooms, long corridors and spacious lawns, reminiscent of Amrit Bhawan. This was to be the residence of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, and Indira Gandhi and her children, altogether for 17 long years as official hostess from 1947 to 1959, and then, while continuing that capacity as party colleague to Jawaharlal Nehru, from 1959 to 1964. To start with, her health having received a setback by her delivery of the second child, Indira Gandhi was in poor shape but she stuck it out when political developments were taking place at a fast pace.

Indira Gandhi also accompanied Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru on his official visits abroad to Europe, Asia and Africa. These tours, and many others that were to follow during her own long tenure as Prime Minister, made her one of the most widely travelled leaders of the world. Though she was unobtrusive by nature, Indira Gandhi,
however, had the matchless opportunity to observe—and assess—the finer points of summit diplomacy, an inestimable background for her at the time when she became the Chairperson of the Non-Aligned Movement. In 1949, she was witness to Jawaharlal’s diplomacy at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Conference in London, when he, aided by Krishna Menon, worked a compromise with British Prime Minister Clement Attlee that India should become a sovereign Republic within the Commonwealth. This was given effect on January 26, 1950. In April, 1950, Indira Gandhi, accompanied Jawaharlal Nehru for talks with Liaquat Ali Khan, Prime Minister of Pakistan, at Karachi. Little did she know then that she herself would be treacherously assassinated like Liaquat was, at the height of his power. The next time she accompanied her father to London was equally memorable; in 1953, as a guest at the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, to watch the many-splendoured traditional ceremony at Westminster Abbey.

CONGRESS PRESIDENT:

Free India’s first general elections in 1952 comprised a momentous event for India. The biggest Democracy in the
world was fielding 17,000 candidates from 59 political parties to contest for 5,600 seats but the voting population of 175 million was largely uneducated. Indira Gandhi was naturally interested in Jawaharlal Nehru's election campaign for the Phulpur constituency in U.P., even though Mridula Sarabhai and Lal Bahadur Shastri were incharge of the campaign. That Jawaharlal Nehru would be elected was a bygone conclusion but Indira Gandhi offered to make appearances on Jawaharlal's behalf wherever he couldn't go. Her first visit to Chamba proved to be a success. After the electioneering stint, Indira took it on herself to reactivate the women's department of the All India Congress Committee (AICC).

Seeing her make the grade as a congress leader in her own right, Jawaharlal Nehru had her elected to the Congress Working Committee through U.N. Dhebar, the soft-spoken, amenable Congress President in 1955. It was a deserved honour for Indira Gandhi to be elected to the highest executive authority in the party, and paved the way for her presidency. Soon after she was nominated to the Central Parliamentary Board, which has the important task...
for choosing candidates to run for the Lok Sabha, the lower house of the Parliament. After her apprenticeship in the national struggle and her exemplary performance as the official hostess of the Prime Minister, these bodies afforded Indira Gandhi a unique opportunity to study the subtle workings of the Indian Parliamentary system. Both at Teen Murti House, where she acted as unofficial adviser to the Prime Minister, emerging by the middle fifties as an important factor in the political power structure, and working assiduously with the top echelons of the Congress Party, Indira Gandhi showed in abundant measure that she was nobody’s puppet. Nobody regarded her any more as Jawaharlal’s potential shadow and her standpoint was her own. “It was a practical and unemotional approach which would be characteristic of her future political relationships and which contrasted strongly with her father’s more sentimental and easy-going nature”.

It was at a simple ceremony at the AICC headquarters in New Delhi that Indira Gandhi took over from U.N. Dhebar as the Congress President on February 8, 1959. Dhebar spoke of her unanimous election as “the right and proper

10. Zareer Masani; Indira Gandhi; A Biography, (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1975) p.93
decision at this momentous juncture in the annals of the national organisation. There had been a rival contender, N. Jayalalitha, the Mysore Chief Minister, but the fact that Indira Gandhi had built a considerable political base for herself counted in influencing the decision of the Congress Working Committee. Jawaharlal Nehru said, "I am proud of her good nature, proud of her energy to work and proud of her integrity and truthfulness."

As for Indira Gandhi, she said simply, "I am a humble servant of the Congress and you, my comrades, always regard me as such." But, enunciating her goals, she was clear-cut and business-like, calling for a sense of urgency in the organisation, and to make individuals, responsible for specific jobs. Indira Gandhi, one of the youngest Presidents in the history of the Congress—both Nehru and Bose had been younger at the time of their respective assumption of office—and the fourth woman, reaffirmed her faith in the socialist ideals of the Congress. She set about the task with her characteristic...
firmness. At her first press conference as the Party Chief, Indira Gandhi said, "The nation is in a hurry and we can’t afford to lose time. My complaint against the Congress is that it is not going as fast as the people are advancing." She travelled extensively during the first three months, attracting women and the youth to her speeches, in which she took a radical line. Here was the consistent drive to increase the participation of women in the national programme and to infuse younger blood into the party leadership. One of her first tasks as Congress President, later on, was to persuade younger folks to join Congress ranks. Also, Indira Gandhi took pains to develop the women’s wing of the Congress. She prepared a list of older members who were too old to serve on various committees. The list of course, included Jawaharlal Nehru but as Prime Minister he remained the leader of the ruling party.

As Congress President, Indira Gandhi was chiefly responsible for conceding the linguistic demand of Bombay to partition the province though Nehru had dallied with the idea that it might be possible to preserve Bombay as a
composite bilingual province. After Parliament had passed the necessary legislation, Sanjiva Reddy, Mrs. Indira Gandhi's successor as Congress President, confirmed that she had been "mainly responsible for bringing about a happy understanding between the different elements so that the new states of Gujerat and maharashtra could be ushered in an atmosphere of harmony."

Indira Gandhi was the fourth Woman to be elected President of the Indian National Congress—her predecessors being Annie Besant (1917), Sarojini Naidu (1929) and Nellie Sen Gupta (1933). Also she was the third in the Nehru family Pandit Motilal (1919 and 1938) and jawaharlal Nehru who was elected and re-elected President for more terms than he could remember. The other three women became Congress Presidents when they had reached an age of venerable maturiry. But Indira Gandhi was only Forty two would she be able to control and hold together an organisation that was threatening to split at the seams? There was neither unity of purpose nor unity of action Congress prestige had hit a new low. Every state and Local Committee was plagued by factionalism. Congressmen were

14. Zareer Mawani: op.cit.p.131
taking opposing positions in linguistic disputes. At the last election Congress had lost one State, (Kerala) to the communists and at the next election it might lose a few more States. Her election was more than a challenge, it was a punishment. (The Congress President would wear this honour not like a garland of roses but like a Crown of thorns.)

According to an official of the All India Congress Committee Secretariat, she made an efficient and conscientious Congress President. Unlike some of her predecessors she gave time to study and understand the organisational problems, went through the files and dictated replies to her correspondence. Already she had two busy secretaries at home, now she had a couple more at the Congress Headquarter. She toured the country, spoke to large crowds at Congress rallies, finally mastered her stage-fright and acquired an easy, conversational style which was somewhat like her father's but less rambling, and in its content, more matter-of-fact and less profound. Presiding over Committees meeting she insisted on brief and to-the-point speeches, gently controlling the many long-winded orators among the leaders as well as in the rank and file.
Both Feroze Gandhi and Indira Gandhi has been busy in their respective spheres of action—he was a vigorously outspoken member of parliament and she was President of the Congress who had not ceased to be the daughter, chaperon and confidante of her father—when Feroze Gandhi got his first heart attack. He looked so healthy and was so dynamic and full of life that no one could suspect that he was suffering from coronary insufficiency that would develop into serious heart trouble. Indira Gandhi rushed to him the moment she got the news, and passed days and nights of the deepest anxiety as he slowly recovered from the attack. When the doctors allowed it, she took him and their two children for a holiday in Kashmir. Where the bracing climate and his own will power, reinforced by the family reunion helped him to recover and recuperate fairly quickly. It was a second honeymoon after many years of the dust and din of politics.

Indira Gandhi was naturally anxious about her father but she wanted her to be more concerned with the problem of mobilising the people for national defence. [She went to the front, organised welfare services and comforts for the Jawans, and as Chairman of the Citizens Council for Defence]
she worked ceaselessly to sustain the morale of the people. The fight for a ceasefire, the main tide of aggression receded, but Jawaharlal’s wounds of the spirit did not heal. At the Bhubaneswar session of the Congress, in January 1964 he suffered a stroke. Indira Gandhi passed four months, nursing her father, gently chiding him to obey his doctors, keeping him informed of the developments. By May he seemed to have got over the worst, even started looking through his files, and official papers. On the night of May 26, he cleared all the arrears of work, said, ‘I think we have finished everything,’ then went to sleep. In the morning he collapsed after a stroke and never recovered consciousness. He died with his devoted daughter by his bed-side.

As the President of the Congress Party, Mrs. Indira Gandhi observed that the party had lost contact with the professional and intellectual classes. The nation is in a hurry, she said, and we can’t afford to lose time. My complaint against Congress is that it is not going as fast
as the people are advancing. And that can be fatal for a political organisation." Even in her short tenure she was able to turn the activities of the Congress organisation into radical channels. She brought drastic changes in the organisation and persuaded younger element to take an active part in the crusade launched by her for strengthening the organisation. There had already occurred a split in the party and the Congress had lost its majority to the communists in the province of Kerala. Mr. Mankar has brilliantly depicted their cause of downfall in Kerala: "Rani's indiscipline and a lack of code or conduct in public life have done incalculable damage to the image of the Congress in the eyes of the electorate. The latter do not fail to notice, in contrast, the sense of dedication and discipline displayed by the Communists." There was an increasing tendency among the congressmen for joining the opposition and this desertion of many a great gem was to lead the party but to nowhere. Mrs. Indira Gandhi lighted a new life in the party and raised the lowered status of the

party President to its former dignity by her unremittent efforts.

The first act she did after assuming the 'Crown of thorns' was to exclude Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru from the 21 member Congress Working Committee. Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru had been on rolls of this committee for more than thirty-seven years. Probably she never wanted the intervention of her father in her firm decisions. Indira's experience as Congress President had its painful periods; on the whole, it toughened her personality. The Congress was passing through a crisis and the Kerala menace was bound to shake the party of its very roots. During the 1957 elections the Kerala Communist Party was able to secure 35% of votes and as a natural consequence it was voted to power in the Kerala Legislative Assembly under the leadership of Mr. E. M. S. Nambudripad, a skilled diplomat and strategy-deviser, in a strict constitutional process. Although they were not in an apparent majority yet they were able to overpower the congress by making an alliance with the

independent members of the Legislative Assembly. As their Ministry enjoyed a constitutional justification, the Central Government found it a hard nut to crack and they were hesitant to take any firm action against that communist regime. This was considered to be a great slur on the fair name of the Congressmen and the Congress Organisation that they had lost control over a state of the Union only in ten years of Indian Independence. And from the very first day of their assuming power the Congressmen in Kerala were preparing the planning the ouster of the Communists.

CABINET MINISTERS

The year 1962 marked the active reinforcing of Indira Gandhi's political career, already launched by her assumption of the office of the Congress President in 1959—and there was no looking back to these involvements, which found her in her element. But early in the same year, there was communal trouble in Jabalpur, a city in the western region of Madhya Pradesh, where the extreme right-wing Jana Sangh was pitted against the Congress. Indira

20. Naresh Chander: op.cit p.42
Gandhi went there on her own, walking on foot through every affected street, to restore peace and confidence-between Hindus and Muslims. She saw to it that the fears of the minority community were allayed.

Whatever the maneuver one way or the other, Indira Gandhi remained discreetly in the background. She was still nursing her grief in her loneliness and was preoccupied with a befitting memorial to Jawaharlal Nehru. Some painful chores still remained to be done. Along with sons Rajiv and Sanjay, she did the long dusty journey to Allahabad, carrying the urn which had her father’s ashes. Alongside was another urn, containing her mother’s ashes, which Nehru had kept by his bed for long years, and willed that these should be immersed along with his own at the confluence of the Ganga and Jumna at Allahabad.

It was a touching for Indira Gandhi. She broke down— for the first time since her father’s demise— and requested Lal Bahadur Shastri to spare her. The Prime Minister sympathised with her at the time but returned later to press her to accept a portfolio of her liking in his team, for the presence of the daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru would
being preshine to it. He was accompanied by Kamraj Nadar, who, it was said, had told Shastri, "Don't forget what you owe to the Nehrus." Responding to Shastri's reiterated request, Indira Gandhi said she would rather have "a lighter charge" and opted for Information and Broadcasting. Accordingly, the President, Dr. Radhakrishnan, swore Indira Gandhi as the Minister of Information and Broadcasting on July 2, 1964. Lal Bahadur Shastri ranked her number four in his cabinet, after himself, Nanda (Home), and Irshandachari (Finance). An optimistic comment on "Indira's New Role" appeared in the socialist congressman: The Nation is grateful to Jawaharlal Nehru not only for the great services he rendered to India, but also because he has left behind Indira Gandhi as his symbol. She inspires respect and is the nation's hope. Her acceptance of a post in the cabinet ensures that the new team will always be on Nehru's lines. Together with Shastriji and Nandidji she will ensure that Nehru's policies are carried forward and that India will uninterruptedly march to the socialist goal... in the public mind it is taken for granted that her present portfolio, important as it is,
Lal Bahadur Shastri was right in that Indira Gandhi's moving the Government contributed continuity to it. The gesture was appreciated by the common people. The ordinary folks appreciated the fact that she continued her father's 'open house' early morning sessions at 1, Safdarjung Road, where to she had shifted from Teen Murti House. At these meetings, which had an impromptu look, the people could freely place their problems confidentially before her, and if she could, she would place them before the right people. At 46, Indira Gandhi naturally became the Beacon for India's young intellectuals. They hailed her choice of the Information and Broadcasting portfolio as the right one—the 'wise' one, revealing her political acumen. Obviously their assessment was better than those who-oblivious to the growing importance of communications in shaping the political thinking of the people and related attitudes in the modern fast-changing world-thought Information and Broadcasting as one of the minor

22. Socialist Congress man. (New Delhi) 15-6-64
23. Satish C. Aggarwala & Adish C. Aggarwala: op. cit. p. 63
ministries. Control of press and other media of communication is as important, if not more, than Home, Finance and Industries. The All India Radio should not be the mouthpiece for the Government alone; it should have 'original thinking' behind it and include 'more controversy and discussion.' She said: "There is no harm in honest mistakes made in trying out new ideas and new experiments. One should not avoid doing things because risk is involved... Now people tend to work separately. In films and radio, for instance, we should work more closely with the Education Ministry with regard to school programmes. In India we expect miracles all the time. That is why we always get disappointed. But the Government of India runs in particular ways or ruts. There are rules and regulations. It is impossible to change everything overnight. All one can hope is to take certain steps, leading to other steps, which will bring about other changes gradually."

Indira Gandhi's pragmatic philosophy defined in the last sentence, she was throwing open the opportunity for

"Address to Press Information Bureau Officers, Akashvani Bhawan; Quoted in the Statesman, (New Delhi) July 3, 1965."
All India Radio’s bureaucratic-intellectuals to streamline and modernise their ponderous, creaking governmental propaganda machinery, while the Films Division and the infant television organisation could jump into the fray under her favourable, forward-looking auspices. The staff found her receptive to new ideas though she had her own ideas about long-term planning and as to how things should be done and bureaucratic red tape reduced to the minimum. She encouraged the staff to make the necessary changes, assuring them of her protection against political or other pressures. Co-opting new and unorthodox persons with the National Board of Film Censors, she practically rid the censoring processes of set puritan formulae that used to be their guidelines. Attending the office punctually, she never left files gather dust on her tables; the necessary decisions were taken with exemplary promptitude.

Averse to these goings-on, Indira Gandhi involved herself deeply in the development of broadcasting for the people, while her interest in social welfare activities continued unabated. She had the Chand Committee set up to suggest structural changes in the functioning in radio and television—the Government-owned mass media. Even before the
report came out (April 1966), defining the role of the ministry in terms of Government responsibility and functioning in mass-communications, Indira Gandhi went ahead with institutionalising a dynamic and creative approach to radio, television and films, plus planning an effective expansion. She was able to double broadcasting time during her 15 month tenure as Minister for Information and Broadcasting (2.7.1964 to 19.1.1966).

Realising that the problem of the personnel was quite important, Indira Gandhi took steps to rehabilitate staff articles, who were given various allowances, hitherto given only to the permanent staff. She ensured that Hindi spoken over the A.I.R. was simple and that adequate emphasis was paid to Urdu. She encouraged the manufacture of cheap transistor radio sets which could be tuned into at least three Indian stations. She favoured A.I.R.'s light programme 'Vividh Bharati'. She appointed as Director General an incumbent from within All India Radio, in the most suitable person of Dr. Narayana Menon, who was a musician, broadcaster and literary figure. It was Indira Gandhi—the far-seeing Information and Broadcasting

25.Satish C. Aggarwala & Adish C. Aggarwala: op.cit.,p.65
Minister who was responsible for sponsoring an Urdu Service—which was to become a lodestone to Pakistani listeners—and the General Overseas Service. Television programmes were started on daily basis, replacing the previous twice-a-week service. Altogether a most creditable performance, despite her lack of administrative experience, compared to her predecessor, Dr. B.V. Keskar. Not even her worst critic could civil at Indira Gandhi's ministerial appointment as a handout, vouchsafed because she was Nehru's daughter.

Mrs. Indira Gandhi as Minister for Information and Broadcasting brought certain innovations in her ministry and a number of things initiated by her are still in process. She doubled radio broadcasting time to 18 hours and ordered the use of new transmitters of greater power and capacity which she imported from Russia. She suggested the opening of new radio stations at various places in India so that the neglected broader population may see the most of it. The role which the All-India Radio has played during the Indo-Pak war in formulating public opinion in the country in projecting the true image of India abroad.
For winning the sympathies of other countries is well known. A drastic step of tremendous democratic nature taken by Mrs. Indira Gandhi is that of altering a major provision of the regulation of All India Radio, a state monopoly. She has allowed opposition party members and independent commentators to express their views through the medium of All India Radio. This step has made her more popular among the masses.

Mrs. Indira Gandhi, during this term of eighteen months, successfully kept herself immune from political prejudices. In face of a question of principle she never differentiated between a party man and a non-party man. She sent a Circulation Team to study the exact circulation of different newspapers and the quotas which they receive. On recommendations made by this team, the newprint quotas of many newspapers, owned by big political bosses were curtailed. Those owners had to eat a humble pie when the shrews tactics employed by them could not break the ice. Again, when Mrs. Indira Gandhi initiated the opening of television stations in India, she placed orders for the

27.Naresh Chander Sahni: op. cit.p.60
equipment both with East Germany and West Germany, whereas India has granted recognition only one country.

The possibilities of using Television as a medium of people's entertainment and general education greatly fascinated her and she gave top priority to the task of inaugurating regular TV programmes in India. It was with her sanction that the New Delhi TV Station televised for village women a daringly frank educational feature on the contraceptive techniques to be used for family planning.

Within a few months of her taking up the Information Ministry, Indira Gandhi was launched on a major international assignment. She was the first Indian Minister to be invited to Moscow soon after the substitution of Khrushchov by Kosygin and Brezhnev when there were many misgivings in New Delhi that the new Soviet Government, in veering towards Peking, might become less friendly to India. On her return to New Delhi she was able to report to the Prime Minister—and to the press—that any apprehensions about a possible cooling of Soviet-Indian friendship were unjustified. After her talks with the Soviet leaders and also with British, French and Yugoslav
statement, she was convinced the "Soviet policies, whether in the internal sphere or in the field of international relations, and the Soviet attitude towards India and China, will not be changed."

The significant success of her mission to Moscow lay in the fact that she received categorical assurances from the Soviet government about continuation of Soviet economic and military aid to India. "By inviting her and according her warm reception in Moscow Soviet leaders wanted to reaffirm their friendship for India." Her first independent foreign tour after her father's death proved her skill as a diplomat and Lalk summmed up its significance: "Mrs. Indira Gandhi's foreign tour has confirmed the impression that her presence in the Government lends it international prestige and is taken as a guarantee of continuation of the national policies associated with the name of Jawaharlal Nehru."

A few weeks later she was on the other side of the world, visiting New York to inaugurate the Jawaharlal Nehru

30. Ishaq Ahmed Abbas: op.cit p.133
Memorial Exhibition. Like her father before her, she was perfectly at home in both the worlds. For her there never was an iron curtain.

When the Government of India held the International Film Festival of India in January 1963, Indira Gandhi, as Minister for Information and Broadcasting, took more than casual or official interest in the proceedings. She felt fully responsible for every aspect of the festival—the artistic quality of the films received and exhibited, the standards of judgement for the award of prizes, the entertainment of the members of the jury and other delegates and participants who had come from many countries of the world. All foreign guests who met here were deeply impressed by her unexpected interest in artistic cinema. As one member of the jury, a distinguished film critic of international standing, said to me, "I met many ministers at the film festivals held in Cannes, Venice, Karlovy Vary, Moscow and Berlin. But Mrs. Indira Gandhi is the first Minister I have ever met who really knows something about the international cinema. She actually discussed with me the relative merits of Rossellini and Ingmar Bergman." 31

31 Ibid p.134
Indira Gandhi was lionised abroad too. In November, 1965, she was the proud recipient, at Rome, of Italy's Isabella d'Este Prize for 'outstanding work in the field of diplomacy'. She returned to the Capital to a warm congratulatory function organised by the Congress Parliamentary party. Time was to evince that this early international recognition of Indira Gandhi was to be the precursor to many in this and other fields.

The bitter war came to an end on September 23, but Pakistan, launching air attacks on several towns in Punjab, wilfully did not respect the ceasefire. On September 27—for the third time in three weeks—she was again in Jammu and Kashmir State, this time consoling refugees at Kathua. Thanks to Moscow playing a peace-making role, the India-Pakistan issue was finally settled at Tashkent. On January 10, 1966, after five days of wrangling, and Premier Kosygin's "friendly persuasion", Ayub and Shastri signed a nine-point agreement.

The Strain of a week of continuous high pressure negotiations proved too much for Shastri, already a heart patient; he died in bed after a sudden heart attack, in the

32. Satish C. Aggarwala and Adish C. Aggarwala, op. cit., p.69
small hours of January 11. Home Minister, Gulzarilal Nanda, the first to receive the sad news, informed Indira Gandhi. She joined him at Rashtrapati Bhawan. The Prime Ministerial stakes were up again. Both Nanda, who became Acting Prime Minister for the second time in two years, and Morari Desai, expressed their candidature with undue haste. Indira Gandhi was in no hurry and left the decision to the Congress leaders. She was conscious of the fact that as Shastri gained stature with power, she had confirmed her.

The Congress Parliamentary Party was faced with a dilemma. If Morari Desai was the bête noir of Kamaraj Nadar, the Congress President and the Syndicate, the latter was not favourably disposed to Indira Gandhi either. Though her mind reportedly was 'in a fluid condition', she struck a deal with Y.B.Chavan, the Defence Minister, that each would support the other, in case either received majority support. Well aware that by dint of her background and training she was fitted for the role of the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi was not hustling anybody, nor announcing her candidature as others had done. She would do whatever the Congress President required of her, she told reporters. 'He
had asked me to stay at home until he calls me; she added, smilingly. Lambran quietly managed to have Chief Minister's support for Indira Gandhi. Others who supported her were the Congress workers, the Pradesh Congress Committee, the press, and those associated with the Jawaharlal Nehru family. The Syndicate wanted someone malleable whom they could manage; they were scared of Desai's authoritarianism and puritanism.

Finally, the ballots was cast, in secret, on January 14, 1966, by 526 Congress M.Ps in Parliament House, to choose between Indira Gandhi and Morarji Desai. The result announced to the restless crowds outside the Parliament was Indira Gandhi: 355; Morarji Desai: 169; invalid: 2.

Lambran and Nanda congratulated Indira Gandhi, who had won by a convincing majority. They were followed by Desai who offered his full cooperation "consistent with my self-respect and the interests of the country". Her own speech was short, stressing the need for party and national unity. The jubilant crowds outside the Parliament meanwhile were chanting: 'Jawaharlal Nehru Zindabad'. Their charismatic leader, who had an exalted status, above every other leader, had been reborn in the person of Indira Gandhi."

33. Ibid: p.69