CHAPTER FIVE

INDIRA GANDHI RISE TO THE OFFICE OF
THE PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA
...the people of India do not vote directly to elect the candidates, or the members vote for their constituents, all over the country, and all this shows the evidence of popular concern, society, and country. But not only politicians and the leaders of society interested, but in colleges and universities in educational officers and Government officials have been closely concerned with education. In the day to day, and even in the village school, the principal or any other to listen to the song of the singer, the issue of succession was being discussed. Newsletters were being considerably spread that the name was between the Bui, and the various groups reported for the all-lumber special song was unannounced upon, approved, applauded or carried by the well-known writer and of the world's top singers.

On the arrived at the Central Hall at a quarter to 12. So the manuscript session, being Gandhi speech, the idea, some by keeping a trial with her memories. The idea, but still with stomach in the early morning midst when it quietly drawn to Rat Dhatu, the Samadhi of Mahatma Gandhi, 1936, p. 7.
Gandhi, the father of the nation, but to Indira Gandhi, the daughter of Mahatma Gandhi, her father, the father of the nation, was an intimate emotional寄托. As she stood there, wrapped in silence, in thought, her thoughts, she must have remembered the many letters that she had received from him, the father, the super-father. In those letters, Gandhi spoke of the child of Jawaharlal Nehru, India, and how he would look forward to seeing her happy and light in heart. In the letter that he wrote to Indira Gandhi, he mentioned how he would write to her, to keep her informed of his thoughts and feelings. Once, when she went to visit him in jail, he wrote to Indira Gandhi, to tell her that India was not a country, but a people. He looked happy and in possession of more flesh. Being very well and Jawaharlal Nehru had a hearty laugh when he showed her this telegram to his daughter. All this and much more must have passed in her mind as she stood there, breathing in the peace and strength from the silence of the samadhi.
From Raj Ghat she went to the near-by Shantivana, the Abode of peace, the last resting place of her father, and from there she drove to Teen Murti House where she lived for so many years as her father’s housekeeper and devoted companion. In front of a portrait, she stood in prayerful silence to pay a daughter’s homage to the memory of one who was, for many years, both father and mother to her. He was her teacher, too, for all that she knows and all that she is today, she owes not to a school or a college but to her father, and the most exhaustive and enlightening "correspondence course" in World History and Humanities that he gave her by writing that remarkable series of letters from prison which was later compiled into the monumental Glimpses of World History. And, in that moment of destiny, she must have recalled the words he wrote to her many, many years ago on her birth-day in prophetic anticipation of just such a moment.

INDIRA GANDHI was elected Leader of the Congress Party on January 19, 1966, and by virtue of that position she was sworn in as Prime Minister of India five days later. But if she had so desired, she could have occupied this position nineteen months earlier, immediately after the death of her
father. It is well known that she was offered the mantle of Jawaharlal Nehru by some of the most important and influential Congress Party leaders whose sponsorship could have ensured her unanimous election. But she politely turned down the proposal, presumably because she was too preoccupied with her grief but also because she was sensitive to the possible charge that Prime Ministership was being offered to her as a kind of Nehruian inheritance. To accept the highest office in the land with such an innuendo attached to it would have not only hurt her sensibility and self-respect, it would have also irretrievably handicapped her in the discharge of her duties as Prime Minister. And so she kept out of the race, preferring at a later date to accept the rather junior Ministry for Information and Broadcasting under Lal Bahadur Shastri whom she respected as one of her father's most trusted colleagues.

Dul, on the death of Lal Bahadur Shastri, when the same offer was repeated to her she accepted it because now there was no fear of the charge that, through her, the

[2 Ibid: p.11]
dynastic rule of the Jawaharlal Nehru's was being perpetuated. She accepted, but still not without some philosophical hesitation. As she told friend soon after her election by the Congress Parliamentary party, she was reminded of a poem by Robert Frost, one of her favourite poets whose 'And Miles To Go' poem was found scribbled on Jawaharlal Nehru's desk after his death. The poem which Indira Gandhi remembered is entitled 'How Hard It is to keep from being King When It's In You and in the Situation,' and begins thus: The King said to his son: "Enough of this. The Kingdom's yours to finish as you please. I'm going out tonight. Here, take the crown." But the Prince drew away his hand in time To avoid what he wasn't sure he wanted.

But this time Indira Gandhi did not draw away her hand in time, for now the capacity to meet the challenge was in her, and in the situation." With an act of will she overcame her resistance and her reluctance. She confided to an interviewer, "I am always reluctant when I enter into something but then I give it my best."

4. Ibid p.12
When Indira Gandhi learnt that the election would be contested, she did not flinch from the battle. Indira Gandhi was neither self-deprecating nor self-righteous in her attitude to her voters. Indira Gandhi neither canvassed for herself nor attacked her rival. She viewed both the possible alternatives of victory and defeat with complete equanimity, in contrast with the feverish and hectic campaigning by Morari Bapuji who issued a circular letter to all the M.P.'s asking for their support, and bitterly complaining that members of Parliament were being pressurised to vote against him.

The dignified self-assurance with which Indira Gandhi accepted the challenge of greatness spoke a maturity of political experience and outlook of which only her closest associates were fully aware. Jawaharlal Nehru was certainly one of them. While he took elaborate pains never to use his influence to push his daughter forward into a position of power, there is no doubt that he had proud father's confidence in Indira Gandhi's capacity to rise to the occasion if and when she would be called upon to do so in her own right.
And so it came to be that, for the first time, in the history of democratic institutions, a daughter came to occupy the high office of her father, not as a matter of dynastic succession, but by virtue of her own capacity for leadership which, undoubtedly, she had acquired during long years of apprenticeship in the Nehruian school of idealistic politics.

In many quarters of the world, the election of a woman as Prime Minister of India was looked upon with surprise and some concern. In no western country, capitalistic or Communist, had a woman ever risen to such a position. True, the world's first woman Prime Minister was Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike of Ceylon but she was chosen not for herself but as a symbolic re-affirmation of the people's love for, and loyalty to, her assassinated husband. Moreover, that was in a small country like Ceylon, and in any case her regime proved to be a passing phase. But a woman Prime Minister of India, the world's largest democracy, it was a phenomenon which puzzled some and fascinated others in many countries of the world.

Indian mythology and Indian history provide many
examples of remarkable women. The Principle of strength is symbolised by the goddess Shakti, Prosperity by Lakshmi and the Arts by Saraswati. The worship of Rama is incomplete without his divine consort Sita, even as Krishna must always be accompanied by Radha. There is no doubt that in ancient India the woman had an honoured place in Hindu society. Gautama, the Buddha, elevated her to a position of spiritual equality with man, and the emperor Ashoka chose his daughter Sanghamitra to cross the oceans and spread the gospel of the Buddha to the countries of South East Asia.

During the Medieval period both among Hindus and the Muslims, there were quite a few outstanding women, some of whom have left their impress upon history as able rulers and leaders of their people. Padmuni, the Rani of Chittora, was as brave as she was beautiful. Razia Sultana ruled over the empire of Delhi with remarkable tact and political acumen. Chand Bibi, as the reigning queen of a southern State, made a better success of her regime than many of her male contemporaries. Queen Noorjahan virtually ruled during the reign of her husband Jehangir, and Zubanlsa the
daughter of the emperor Aurangzeb, was a renowned poetess whose verses are even today regarded as lyrical masterpieces. The Rani of Jhansi, during the great anti-British uprising of 1857, died fighting for the integrity of her kingdom and the freedom of her country.

Indians are understandably proud of this noble line of distinguished women. And yet the fact remains that for hundreds of years, along with the other manifestations of a decaying and stagnant feudal society, the position of the Indian woman showed a steep and distressing decline. Social customs like sati and purdah imposed callous and even inhuman restrictions upon Indian women. The goddesses of mythology and the warrior queens of history were now reduced to the position of glorified and slave-girls.

If, within a hundred years, the Indian women have managed to assume a position in Indian society when one of them can be entrusted with the Prime Ministership of the country, it is due not so much to the traditional reverence accorded to women but, rather to the position of dignity and equality they have won for themselves through their active participation in the national struggle. The
history of the Indian freedom movement is full of women who distinguished themselves both as astute politicians and dedicated patriots. Irish born Annie Besant, "the adopted daughter of Mother India," was one of the "patriarchs" of the Indian National Congress. Among the earliest presidents of the Congress, she played a very important role in bringing about political awakening in India. Sarojini Naidu, peerless orator and par excellence in politics, for many decades, remained one of the pillars of the Congress organisation, and among the most important leaders of the freedom movement. As President of the Congress, her perorations oratory was notably effective in carrying the message of the Congress to the vast masses of the people.

As democratic institutions grew and developed, women all over the world have had to wage a prolonged and, often, bitter struggle to win their elementary civic rights. Even the right to vote was bestowed upon them grudgingly and after an agonising struggle led by the suffragettes. The women's organisations in India, no doubt, have carried on an educative campaign for social reform, but they never have had to engage in a struggle for their democratic rights and their political status of equality. All this
they have secured as a by-product of the national movement. Women who marched in processions shoulder to shoulder with men, who faced police batons and braved even bullets, who went to prison with new-born babies in their arms, naturally, inevitably, and almost imperceptibly, acquired a status of equality in the democratic society they were helping to evolve.

Indira Gandhi was the first Indian woman to be Prime Minister but she was not the first to hold an office of political responsibility. Her aunt, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, was Minister in the provincial government of Uttar Pradesh before she went to Moscow and Washington as Ambassador, then to London as High Commissioner, and finally presided over the United Nations General Assembly. The Minister for Health in the Union Cabinet has mostly been a woman. A woman, Mrs. Sucheta Kripalani, was the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, the most populous state in the Indian Union.

The election of Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister, thus, was not an isolated or exceptional phenomenon, but the culmination of a long historic process. It was the most
significant and dramatic manifestation of the responsible role played by the women of New India in the life of their country.

When Indira Gandhi won that fateful election, the women of India, naturally rejoiced at what they regarded as the final vindication of their claim for equality. Just as naturally humorists and cartoonists enjoyed the opportunity to laugh at the expense of the super-suffragettes, the domineering females, who might imagine that the time had come to overthrow the alleged tyranny of the mere male. But soon the jokes lost their edge, for the new Prime Minister, though a woman endowed with grace, was no more a feminist than her father was anti-feminist. Indira Gandhi was as unself-conscious about her being a woman as she was unimpressed by the argument first whispered, then hinted, and now beginning to be voiced by some reactionaries that she could succeed because she was a woman. 'Women,' she reminded an interviewer, 'are also people, a part of the population, and not a separate species.' And she could have added that all through the ages in every country, whenever the occasion has demanded,
a woman has responded to the challenge of the times no less
meritoriously than a man of destiny. Her name might be
Joan of Arc, or Rani Lakshmi Bai, or Halide Edib of Turkey,
Madame Lurie of France, La Passionaria of Spain, Madame Sun
Yat Sen of China, Madama Martini of Indonesia, or Sarojini
Naidu, or Indira Gandhi Indira Nehru of India.

"Some are born great," as the Bard has said, "some
achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon
them." In the case of Indira Gandhi, all the three
attributes of greatness seem to apply to her. She was born
in an atmosphere of intellectual distinction and political
eminence, she was reared and educated and trained by her
great father to measure up to the highest standards of
dedicated human endeavour, and at a crucial period of her
country's history she had the mantle of greatness
thrust upon her, more like a provocative challenge than as
a protection.

Some are born great! Or are they? Despite the strong
family ties that bind Indian society, the principle of
heredity has seldom been applied in Indian Public life.
Jawaharlal Nehru, son of Motilal Nehru was the exception
that proved the rule. No one ever thought of entrusting the leadership of the nation to any one of the three sons of Mahatma Gandhi. The genius of a Tagore, a Raman, a ghoosh, has not been transmitted by heredity.

Some achieve greatness, no doubt. But how? Through what alchemy of environment, example, education, inspiration or incentive? The story of Indira Gandhi was an essay in such an analysis of greatness.

There has never been a Prime Minister like Madame Gandhi or a Prime Minister who can wrinkle the eyes, toss the sari draped coiffure and smile away, momentarily at least, the unbelievable cares and woes of the past. "All who know her agree that power becomes Indira Gandhi. She was more generous, more articulate, more open and much more beautiful than she was years ago when she only honored on the fringes of importance," recalled an American Correspondent. "It's possible that action plusher, secret weapon-keeping woman--are just right for India now. And with a flint of her sari, Mrs. Indira Gandhi was off to give her country what it needed.

7. From an article by Hugh Noffet in "Life".
8. From an article by Natalie Gitelson in "Harper's Bazar".
9. From an article by Hugh Noffet in "Life".
The West could not comprehend how India—a country where women traditionally occupied inferior status—elected a woman Prime Minister. It was, as it were, an element of the exotic typical of the Orient complicating the drama of politics, when the second Asian woman had become a Prime Minister, after Sirimavo Bandaranaike of Ceylon. "It is nothing short of sensational that Asia, where women are still emerging from bondage, should have produced the modern world's first two women heads of government," observed the New York Herald Tribune. "Woman with the toughest jobs of them all," said the Washington Evening Star.

She had been aware from her childhood that the rural people of this country had deep inner resources and strength. She had seen their generosity, however poor they were and the wisdom of the people who tilled the soil, wove cloth or moulded artifact. A capacity to be themselves enabled them to converse with the most sophisticated minds with ease and intelligence. One of her major concerns as Prime Minister was to see that in advancing their material needs which was essential, they did not lose this down-to-
earth quality and with it the wisdom of being themselves. Perhaps she was happiest when she was amongst these people.

It was when she was with the women of rural India, that the centuries entered into her, a primordial knowing, which the women of this land hold and communicate. I have witnessed her on an occasion sitting hunched on the ground before an old stricken grandmother, both their sari's pulled low over their heads. The old lady was mourning, rocking to and fro, pouring out her sorrows. Indira Gandhi, her ear held to the mouth of the sorrowful woman, listened and mourned with her. Indira Gandhi was a good listener.

It was in her relationship with sophisticated people that she was ambiguous. Speaking of her relationship with people she said, 'The difficulty is I move. Other people remain static. And, therefore, relationships drop away. Circumstances and environment are the challenges I respond to. I am no longer the same person, but the persons with whom I studied expect me to take over at the same

point as my childhood responses, and when I cannot, they think I am proud.' She hesitated, then said, 'I have never tried to be different to what I am. I have been myself, while people are always trying to be something other than what they are.

She said: "While peace is our aim, I am keenly aware of the responsibility of the government to preserve the freedom and territorial integrity of the country. We must therefore be alert and keep constant vigil, strengthening our defences as necessary. The valour, determination, courage and sacrifice of our fighting forces have set a shining example."

She sought the cooperation of all sections of Indians to build a dynamic and progressive society and a just social order. That could be done only through hard work, cooperation, and unity of purpose. The government would continue to encourage and help private enterprise. She approached the vast problems facing the country with

12. Ibid p.16
13. Trevor Driesberg: Indira Gandhi A Profile in Courage (Vikas publications, Delhi, 1972) P.60
humility. The tradition of Mahatma Gandhi and her father "and my unbounded faith in the people of India give me strength and confidence." India had often given proof of an indomitable spirit, and in recent years, as in the past, it has shown Unmistakable courage and capacity for meeting new challenges. There is a firm base of Indianeness which will withstand any trial."

She said she believed in socialism 'but not in a dogmatic way.' She believed that all forms of exploitation must end. This undoubtedly had to be achieved through socialism, 'for a large number of people are economically weak, and the economically stronger elements ride roughshod over them.' She added: "I believe in the people's right to a better life not only materially but also mentally and spiritually. I have been lucky to have had a rich life of mind, and it hurts me to see people steeped in such poverty that they are rendered incapable of appreciating culture and the arts. I would like conditions to be created where all the people would be able to enjoy and appreciate these finer values of life."

14. Ibid p.71
15. Ibid p.71
She believed that young people had a special role to play in building the new India of her dream. She told her interviewer: "Young people today have a lot of dynamic energy and vision, a desire to do things, and these must be tapped in the national interest. In every sphere of activity, youth must be inspired with a sense of involvement with national development. Young people must be trained to take up positions of responsibility in all departments of national life.

Ironically, Indira Gandhi was responsible in the first six years of her Prime Ministership for creating half a dozen new states, most of them out of what were former territories directly under the central government. But the effect was the opposite of banks Nationalisation. By satisfying the aspirations of the inhabitants of these territories for a bigger say in the management of their own affairs, these moves have strengthened national unity.

In an interview on the role of the public sector, Mrs. Indira Gandhi outlined her industrial development policy. She said a mixed economy, part public and part
private sector, was viable and could be the main path leading to a socialistic society. At the moment the public sector had a prominent position in the national economy in name, but not in fact. It would be given that position in fact immediately. Since the available capital resources of the nation were limited, public-sector investment would be most suitable in areas where social returns were highest. She did not propose to limit the private sector if it functioned as it should function, realising its own limitations, realise the public compulsions.

She said: "In the circumstances here in India it would be difficult to change entirely and suddenly what we have been committed to. We have been committed to the concept of a mixed economy. Within that, there is considerable room for movement." She and her party believed in remaining centrists but left of centre. She drew a sharp line demarcating the objectives of the two sectors. The private sector worked for profit in terms of money. The objective of the public sector was profit in social terms.

17, Ibid: 132
The most outstanding feature of Mrs. Indira Gandhi's political career was courage. "My grandfather once told me," she recalled in an interview with the New York Times, "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."

Mrs. Indira Gandhi has always been a doer, and she has done what she felt should be done courageously. Her biggest political test is now coming—meaningful land reforms speedily implemented to provide a sound base for the other economic and social tasks she wants to carry out. This will need greater courage than she has ever been called to show before. Once this hump is crossed, even greater things lie ahead. Mrs. Indira Gandhi was the unchallenged leader of India. As the head of an economically strong, politically stable modern and democratic nation, she was a successful Prime Minister of India.

Though the prestigious Economist of London called her India's untested leader, the weekly went on to make telling points. "None of this means that Mrs. Indira Gandhi will be the front woman for a collective of queen-makers.
Whatever she may owe to them, the Prime Minister of India, once in office, is a dispenser of power and patronage like other Prime Ministers, if not so untrammeled as some. This one is also a woman of strong will and in her opinion of herself, more akin to her father than to the humble Mr. Lal Bahadur Shastri..."  

Selig Harrison, a close observer of the Indian scene, writing in the Washington Post, characterising Indira Gandhi as "an Asian nationalist in a hurry," observed: "Indira Gandhi with her regal good looks and cosmopolitan tastes, her searching eyes and almost flirtatious banter does not fit the conventional image. But behind the cool sophisticated facade there is a restless impatience to see India arrive." Pravda saw her as "daughter and comrade-in-arms of Jawaharlal Nehru" complementing Premier Kosygin's message that she would "follow along the road of Jawaharlal Nehru and realise his ideals." What John Grigg said in the British daily, Guardian was perspicacious and prophetic at the same time: "She has a sharp mind, a strong

will and a dedicated spirit. If she makes a success of the
job she will deal what may be a knock-out blow to lingering
notions of male superiority."

Indira Gandhi was subjected to strong pressures in her
task of Cabinet-making, her maiden attempt at the strategic
placements at which she was to become an adept. Kamaraj
Nadar wanted few changes and therefore the major
portfolios—Home, Defence, Finance, Food and External
Affairs remained unchanged. She managed to co-opt Asoke
Mehta, D.S. Pathak and Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed in the cabinet
and Dinesh Singh as a Junior minister in the external
Affairs Ministry. Indian observers accepted the Cabinet as
'workmanlike.'

Indira Gandhi took urgent steps to have drought-
affected areas in Bihar and Kerala attended to, food
supplies rushed from other sources, and milk powder
and vitamins from foreign countries dispatched. With UN
assistance, an efficient feeder organisation was created—a
big factor in warding off famine. Then, as a corollary to
her US visit, redeeming her promise to President Johnson,

and the postulate set by the World Bank that devaluation of the Indian rupee was an essential precondition for further economic aid, Indira Gandhi took the unpopular decision. Neither the Congress nor her Cabinet was unanimous on this tricky point but Indira Gandhi stuck to the decision and had it implemented. Her debut in Parliament (March 1, 1966), replying to the debate on the opening address by the President, had been in low key.

No one, not even Kamalat Nadar, seemed to appreciate the weight of the enormous burden on the shoulders of Indira Gandhi. He was overoccupied with the anti-Congress, anti-Hindi Party Dravida Munnetra Kazaghami DMK for short, that had reared its head in Madras, his home-state, and he was finding out that Indira Gandhi's Independent nature was such that she would be nobody's pawn or puppet. She suppressed the Jan Sangh-fomented cow protection agitation in the Capital. With a firm hand, and sacked Nanda from the Home portfolio to replace him with V. B. Chavan. The general situation in the country in 1966-67 however, was far from satisfactory with industry suffering, growing unemployment and scarcity of consumer goods. To keep up the morale of the people, Indira Gandhi travelled vast distances and
addressed mammoth meetings. In these sojourns, she addressed a huge meeting at Srinagar and assured Kashmiris, "India would never buy peace with dishonour". "We have to build this new India" was the common denominator of her speeches, when she was in the South or in West Bengal. She was keen that the Congress became "the party of the builders of tomorrow". For her call for youth, intellect and broad horizons, she came to be called "the Indian Kennedy". Her monthly press conferences and her "person to person" monthly Broadcasts constituted her special way to communicate with the people-the multilayered level on contact-incidentally considerably offsetting her weakness in her Party organisation. Thus she was preparing the ground for the 1967 general election. She knew that she had been selected as the head of the government to win the election. But she was not going to "Keep the seat warm" for the Congress Party nominee. She had decided that she would retain her position if she would win the election.

The links that Indira Gandhi had forged with the people were to stand her in good stead as she geared herself in advance for the 1967 election. She started an

22. Satish C. Aggarwala & Adish C. Aggarwala: Legacy of Indira Gandhi (Socialist Age Publications, New Delhi, 1985) p. 73
electioneering tour a few months before the election. Always taking situations, however difficult, in her stride, Indira Gandhi coolly observed the pre-election scene. The political pattern in the country had become complicated with the emergence of the Swatantra Party, composed of princes, merchant princes, landlords, and other "have" under the leadership of C. Rajagopalachari, a Gandhian veteran of the freedom struggle, who had become Independent India's Governor General. In Madras, the DMK had been formed to resist the domination of the Hindi-speaking people from the north. The communist Party split into two separate parties, one CPI, which was Moscow-oriented, and the other CPI(M) which was Peking oriented. The Socialist Party had likewise been divided, adding to the confused political spectrum facing the harassed electorate. The Jana Sangh and Hindu Mahasabha represented their particular brand of tough chauvinism. Ideological moorings or goals apart, most of the parties were driven by the one passion of ousting the Congress.

In Telengana, Indira Gandhi again faced the cow issue, but as anticipated by the congress bosses, drew large crowds. Whether in Hyderabad or Madras according to
Kamaraj, she got "a queen's welcome" in Madras, she never mentioned the Opposition parties by name but expatiated on their 'negativism'. Facing hostile demonstrators, she continued speaking at Bhubaneswar in a hail of stones. A stone struck her face, cutting her upper lip and fracturing the bone of her nose. Applying her blood-stained handkerchief to her broken nose, she went on speaking. "This is an insult not to me but to the country because as Prime Minister of India, I represent the country." Flown back to New Delhi for an operation, she resumed her election battle, with undiminished vigour. In Jaipur and other places, where the Congress had become unpopular, she similarly braved hostile crowds, stilled by her flashes of the famous Jawaharlal Nehru temper. Referring to the Bhubaneswar incident, Hindustan Times wrote: "Mrs. Indira Gandhi has shown an example of personal courage that will win her admiration throughout the country."

23. Ibid: p. 74
24. Hindustan Times (New Delhi) February 9, 1967
25. Hindustan Times (New Delhi) February 9, 1967
The General Election was held in February 1967. Indira Gandhi was returned to Parliament by a vast majority from her own constituency. Many of her rivals in the Congress Party were defeated, except for Morarji Desai, who won with a good majority. The Congress party lost its majority in eight of the sixteen states it had ruled for two decades. Some of the tallest Congress poppies had been beheaded, including Kamalaji, Madanlal, Abulya Ghosh and S.V. Patil. Kamalaji's discomfiture was the worst, having lost to an unknown student leader, put up by the DMK in his own stronghold in Tamil Nadu.

Though it was a national rout of the Congress, the party was returned to the Central Government with a reduced majority of 55 per cent where it had been 75 per cent. The Congress survived as the largest single party in the country; the far-flung electorate, despite the rampant illiteracy, had decided for itself, chastening rather than destroying the party. The one-party dominance of the country by the Congress was a thing of the past—a factor that Indira Gandhi had to contend with. Her supporters were 26. Two (Kerala and West Bengal) were dominated by the communist parties coalitions ruled the others, except for Madras, which was won by the DMK.
asserting vociferously that the people's mandate had unequivocally demonstrated her popularity with the masses—and that she could not be held accountable for the defeat of the Old Guard colleagues whom she wanted to drop anyway. In the ensuing leadership contest, Morarji Desai, making the bid for the Prime Ministership for the third time, his followers were avowing that the Congress debacle had taken place because of the unpopular policies of Indira Gandhi's government, and it needs must be replaced by a strong leadership which could be provided only by Morarji Desai. It did not occur to these sanctimonious critics that but for Indira Gandhi there would have been a total rout for the Congress at the polls.

The Congress Parliamentary party was collectively conscious of the fact that the choice of the leader had to be unanimous, in the circumstances. In spite of his diminished stature, Congress President Kamraj Narain was able to play the mediatory role, assisted by D.P. Michra, and C.B. Gupta, Chief Minisers of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, respectively: the former an Indira Gandhi supporter and the latter committed to Morarji Desai. This time, however, the party bosses has to go with Indira
Gandhi, not lead her. After much wrangling, arguing and horse-trading, Indira Gandhi had to accept Morarji Desai as Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister for the sake of unanimity, but she made it clear that Morarji Desai’s ranking would be no more than No. 2 "with the right"—she explained—"to preside over Cabinet meetings in the absence of the Prime Minister." In effect, Morarji Desai’s third bid for the Prime Ministership had petered out, but he accepted the compromise, presumably hoping to make the grade as the seniormost member of the Cabinet.

Indira Gandhi was unanimously elected leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party on March 12, 1967, and drove to Rashtrapati Bhavan, where she was asked to form a government as India’s Prime Minister. Compared to January 1966, Indira Gandhi knew better how to play her cards in regard to the formation of the Cabinet. Keeping her own counsel, not consulting the organisational leadership of the congress, including Kamaraj Nadar, she showed him the list of her Cabinet an hour or so before it was to be submitted to the President. When Kamaraj Nadar had some queries about the changes she had made in the Cabinet

27 Uma Vasudev: *Indira Gandhi: Revolution in Restraint* (Vikas, Delhi, 1974) p.115
Indira Gandhi told him bluntly that these were made to "avoid complications". She had only taken Y.B. Chavan into confidence, while drawing the list.

The composition reflecting the increased independence of the Prime Minister, the new Cabinet had her close confidants—Anika Mehta, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed and Dinesh Singh—in charge of key economic portfolios. Jagjivan Ram, Karan Singh and K.K. Shail were also there, rewarded for their loyalty. Sanjiva Reddy, a member of the Syndicate, was dropped, Kamraj's intervention on his behalf notwithstanding. The junior ministership level was utilized by Indira Gandhi to suitably reward younger leaders who had evinced promise. She knew for sure that the Old Guard had to go and only then, with the active help of the younger party cadres, the Congress could square its practice with the Congress professions. The voters had struck an unequivocal blow for democracy. The writing was on the wall. The Congress, as the party of the common man, must rid itself of anti-democratic elements which had done little to banish the terrible poverty that still haunted millions of lives. Indira Gandhi had another five years in which to accomplish all she could for the people of India.
Though theirs was a vote of protest, they had returned her to power and, to all appearances, she was determined that they would not be disappointed.

1967 General election had made it patently clear that the Congress was very sick, organically and organisationally. Subject to pressures of divisive forces emanating from religion, language, region and caste—it was not a unified party with a clear-cut philosophy or programme. Those pressure groups, eroding the national character of the party, had to end under the stern auspices of the one leader who could resuscitate the unwieldy, monolithic organisation. The leader was Indira Gandhi. She knew that she had the backing of the majority of Congress M.P.s., especially the younger ones the 'young turks' as the younger leaders of the Congress Left were called after the youthful stalwarts of the Ataturk era of modern Turkey, as well as the old Nehruites. These gave her the sustenance for the battles which she knew lay ahead. It was imperative that she lead the country in her own right, rather than by the grace of the party bosses.

But Kamaraj Nadar was in favour of giving another term
to Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. Equally vehemently, Indira Gandhi was firm that Zahir Husain should be Congress candidate, and she stoutly refused to succumb to pressures from Kamal and other Congress leaders. She wanted a president whom she could trust to act according to her advice.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was thick with Kamal and had criticised her previous governmental views on several issues. Besides, the occupation by a Muslim of the country’s highest office would emphasise India’s commitment to secularism at home and abroad. The Congress Parliamentary Board approved Husain by five votes to four. But Kamal had V. V. Giri, a South Indian trade unionist, adopted as the Congress candidate for the office of the Vice-President.

On the question of bank nationalisation, Indira Gandhi convinced a pragmatic approach at the Jabalpur session of the NCC in October 1967. Along with the expansion of state trading in imports, exports and foodgrains, land reforms and abolition of princely privileges, this reform measure had been accepted by the Congress Working Committee in May 1967. Since Morarji Desai made it clear that banks would not be nationalised so long as he was Finance Minister,
Indira Gandhi did not provoke a trial of strength with Narsimha Desai on the issue.

Indira Gandhi went on with her work, undisturbed by these developments, and the plans for a socialist India which she had initiated. She knew full well that the developing schism within the Congress Party was no new phenomenon. It had begun in the days when Jawaharlal Nehru had dominated Indian politics and inspired his followers with his dream of building a socialist India. The life insurance industry had been nationalised during Jawaharlal Nehru's Prime Ministership. Taking the next logical step, in the summer for 1968, Indira Gandhi had announced the nationalisation of large Indian-owned banks—i.e., 14 out of the 24 scheduled banks. She explained what nationalisation was, speaking over All India Radio. The objectives of nationalising the bigger banks were, firstly, the removal of control of big finance by a few, and the provision of adequate credit for agriculture, small industry and exports. A bill was accordingly introduced into Parliament in July 1969, follow up to a previous bill (Dec. 23, 1967) to bring banking institutions in the country under effective social control.
Indira Gandhi had to work out an organisational strategy that would give the new Congress the necessary advantage through reaching down to the grass roots. She was determined to establish its continuity with the old undivided Congress in whose fortunes her family had played a notable part. She said as much at the New Delhi session of the Congress (R) A.I.C.C., and reiterated the commitment to socio-economic change. This was the answer to detractors who were shouting from rooftops that she was leading the country to totalitarian communism. The Bombay Congress 73rd plenary session of the Congress confirmed the evidence of the earlier meet in New Delhi that the bulk of the congress party was behind her. About 500 members of the old AICC attended, and endorsed Indira Gandhi’s 10-point socio-economic programme which they had approved in 1966. The reconstituted AICC marked the grand finale of the Congress split. Indira Gandhi’s potential as a leader in her own right was writ large on the political scene. The New York Times commented: "... She has proved herself a courageous, tough-minded politician as well as an exceedingly skilful tactician—a Prime Minister in her own right and not a transitional figure, trading on her legacy
as the Daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru". There was a widespread public belief in Indira Gandhi's sincerity of purpose. She had won the unflinching support, not only of Congress radicals, but of the almost entire Indian Left. As a correspondent remarked at the time, "It has been the return of the rose, but more and more people are discovering that the rose is of a new variety, perhaps harder than its parent and containing new properties."

Try as it might, the Congress (n) failed to dislodge Indira Gandhi or even discomfit her. It backed out of the proposed united opposition and a motion of no-confidence against her government failed miserably. That she had emerged as the undisputed leader was clear from the way she reshuffled her Cabinet in June 1970. In a major reshuffle, she shifted Chavan from Finance to Home. From the Home Portfolio, she kept the important departments, the Criminal Investigation Department and the Central Bureau of Intelligence, under her own charge. On September 1, 1970 Indira Gandhi introduced the constitutional amendment bill

in Parliament by which the government could discontinue the priy purses, abolish of relinquish privileges. This was one more measure to identify her party with the 'Garibi Hata' slogan. The bill, passed by a record-breaking attendance in Lok Sabha, was however, blocked by the Rajya Sabha for a time, until Indira Gandhi had the proposal recognised by a Presidential Order.

Problems were, as before, proliferating on the home front. Indira Gandhi's opponents had been daring her to face the popular verdict ever since the Congress split. Unknown to them, she was readying herself to face the challenges but was looking for a dramatic issue to provide the prop. It offered itself in the form of the Supreme Court striking down the presidential order on the abolition of priy purses as ultra vires of the Fundamental Rights. It constituted a direct challenge from the judiciary to the executive and legislative arms of the government. Indira Gandhi advised President V.V. Giri on December 27, 1977 to dissolve Parliament and order a general election.

In a broadcast to the nation on the night of the dissolution, Indira Gandhi explained her decision to seek a
fresh mandate, and declared: "... we are concerned, not merely with remaining in power, but with using that power to ensure a better life to the vast majority of our people and to satisfy their aspirations for a just social order. Power in a democracy resides with the people. That is why we have decided to go to our people and to seek a fresh mandate from them.

TRIUMPHS AND TRIALS

It was the first time since Independence that Parliament had been dissolved before the conclusion of the five-year term, in the year 1971. Radicalism and pragmatism, well balanced, were reflected in the Congress (R) election manifesto. Ambitious promises were avoided. The central issue on which the election was being fought was Indira Gandhi's right to govern the country. She made it clear that her party aimed at an absolute majority and at giving the country a strong and stable government. But pundits, pollsters and astrologers were working overtime to make forecasts, which were generally gloomy for the ruling...
Congress—but the prophecies and calculations of election analysts were to go haywire.

Indira Gandhi toured the whole country, continuously on the move—addressing over 400 meetings (drawing huge crowds everywhere) amounting to a total attendance of 20 million people, a feat of energy and endurance, surpassing that of any campaign of Jawaharlal Nehru. She was everywhere with her "Garibi Hatao" slogan bringing hope to the poor and making the rich feel self-conscious. There were no brickbats, no hostile demonstrations this time as in 1967.

India went to the polls on March 1, 1971. By March 13, the national dailies carried the banner headlines "The Congress (I) sweeps the polls". By March 14, the unexpected had happened—the "Indira Gandhi wave" had eclipsed the anti-Congress trend of 1967. The Congress (I) won the required two-thirds majority in the Lok Sabha—short of 70 seats more than the undivided Congress had secured in 1967. Most of the leaders of the so called Grand Alliance were routed. The only one Congress party who improved their position were the CPI and the RSP, which had allied with Congress. (I) as well as the CPI (M), which had opposed her.
It was the hour of triumph for Indira Gandhi. The victory at the polls was a personal one for her. The discipline of the monolithic party had provided the sanguine hope to the voter that Indira Gandhi would be able to carry out the radical reforms to which she was committed since 1969, when at the Bangalore AICC the Red Guard had turned down her note on urgent economic reforms. Even the illiterate voter could discern that Indira Gandhi had reversed the process of political polarisation that had set it, and had drawn the main springs of national politics into a safe, middle-of-the-road force, dynamic as well as forward-looking.

Indira Gandhi was elected leader of the Congress Parliamentary party on March 17, 1971—for the third time in succession. Aware that massive central mandate entailed a heavy responsibility, Indira Gandhi’s mood was sober and pensive—even humble. Little did she know at this point that her attention to domestic issues would be diverted to an external crisis, appearing suddenly from out of the blue, the successful handling of which would carry the ‘Indira Gandhi Wave’ to new, unprecedented heights. But the heavy casualty would be the “Gurilbi Halac” programme—and
all the concomitant plans to banish poverty, illiteracy, corruption, casteism etc.

1972 was the usual crowded year for Indira Gandhi. By the end of the year, she had spent 120 days away from the Capital, involved in strenuous tours for one-third of the year. The widespread drought in 1972-73 caused acute distress in many areas. But 1973-74 were even more difficult years for Indira Gandhi, politically and economically. Towards the end of the Fourth Plan, 10 per cent of the goals were not reached because of inflation. In 1974, India was faced with a series of economic crises, worsening towards the end of the year. The surge of rising expectations, when the people were solidly behind Indira Gandhi during the crisis over Bangladesh and the War with Pakistan, had ebbed. The smug official assurance that self-reliance had been achieved in food proved a mirage. Rising prices threatened the millions living below the poverty line with starvation, who knew too well that the 1971 electoral war cry of "Garibi Hatao" had not been implemented. Despite problems at home, Indira Gandhi's interest in international affairs continued unabated. In February 1973, she told the delegates to the One Asia
Assembly in New Delhi that India needed peace, particularly in South and South-east Asia, so that it could carry out its programme of peaceful development within its own frontiers. She visited Kathmandu in February 1973 and Sri Lanka in April—furthering efforts at a meaningful foreign policy in relation to its neighbours. And, in the country itself, Indira Gandhi dealt with the simmering political bushfires in the border state of Sikkim, as well as the breakaway group in Andhra Pradesh.

An extra-parliamentary agitation—call for "Total revolution"—led by Jaya Prakash Narayan, a Gandhian veteran of the freedom struggle, who was popularly known as 'J.P.', posed a threat to the Congress leadership, and even the security of the country, as he had appealed to the armed forces to disobey unjust orders. J.P.'s desperate following was described by Mohammed Yunus, a close observer of the national scene: "As a matter of fact, disgruntled political lightweight, men and women of all hues and shades, joined his bandwagon. The most disillusioning aspect of Jaya Prakash Narayan's leadership at that time was that he made common cause with parties as diverse as the Marxists on the one hand and the Jan Sangh and the
Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh on the other. It made nonsense of any
premise towards political idealism. All they showed in
common was their hatred of Mrs. Indira Gandhi."

In a historic appearance before the Allahabad High
Court on March 19, 1975, Indira Gandhi defended her
election to the Lok Sabha from Rae Bareilly in 1971, and
denied having used any Government servant to further her
poll prospects or having pandered to the religious
sentiments of voters.

She remained in the witness box for five hours with a
45-minute break in the court of Mr. Justice JMC Sinha to
give her testimony in the election petition filed by her
arch-rival Raj Narain of the then Sanyukt Socialist Party.
She was the first Prime Minister of India to appear in
person before a court of law.

On June 17, 1975, Mr. Justice Sinha delivered the
historic judgement exonerating Mrs. Indira Gandhi of all but
two technical charges contained in the petition. He held
her guilty of ‘corrupt’ election practices on two counts.
Mr. Justice Sinha set aside Indira Gandhi’s election to the

31. Mohammed Yunus: Passions, Passions and Politics (Vikas,
New Delhi, 1980) p.191
Lok Sabha, and barred her from holding any elective office for six years. On the two counts on which Indira Gandhi was held guilty, one was that she used the services of Yashpal Kapoor, Officer on Special Duty in her Secretariat. The judge also pronounced her guilty of obtaining assistance of the State government officials for constructing a rostrum and making other arrangements during her election campaign. Mr. Justice Sinha, however, granted a 20-day stay of the operation of the judgement.

After consulting her senior colleagues and legal experts, Indira Gandhi decided not to resign in view of the stay order granted by Mr. Justice Sinha. This stand was also endorsed by the Congress Party and eight Chief Ministers. However, on June 16, a delegation of about 15 opposition leaders called on President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed requesting him to direct Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to relinquish the office of the Prime Minister forthwith."

Subsequently, on June 24, 1975, the Supreme Court granted a conditional stay of the operation of the Allahabad High Court judgment, declaring that her powers and
functions would remain unchanged. In the meantime, the opposition had found a rallying point in the person of Jaya Prakash Narayan who, continuing the agitation already launched under his auspices, gave a call for "Total Revolution". In Gujarat, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, the movement succeeded in enlisting the support of a large number of youth and students. Then came the internal emergency, declared by Indira Gandhi on June 25, 1975. This was followed by countrywide arrests of non-CPI opposition leaders and some congressmen. The Government also imposed pre-censorship of news under the Emergency proclamation. The draconian measures announced by the Prime Minister, included the 20-point Programme to boost up the economy, and there was increase in production. Mohammad Yunus, who was appointed special Envoy during the period, thus recounted the gains.

Strict action against the smugglers and antisocial elements had a salutary effect. The lacuna in governmental regulations was removed, and there was a marked improvement in the conduct and functioning of the officers. The tightening of the administrative machinery resulted in the speedy implementation of the new tasks undertaken. The
prices were controlled. Inflation was arrested. The rupee was made much stronger and foreign exchange reserves recorded an all-time high. A higher growth rate was made possible. A food surplus of 20 million tons increased our sense of self-reliance. The public sector organisations showed much better results. Those working in the fields and factories produced more, and this output was there for anyone to see. There were many laudatory references to these gains by the officials of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Even JRD Tata, who had been otherwise critical of official policies, came out with a statement in defence of the Emergency."

Addressing members of the Indian National Young Lawyers’ Congress, who called at her residence, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi said on July 4, 1975 that democracy was being misused by the Opposition and an atmosphere of confusion and chaos was being created which could neither strengthen democracy nor the country. More serious than this was "the cause of indiscipline which had been growing due to the talk of sabotage and satyagraha". The Country's
self-confidence had weakened in the last few months due to this kind of lull", she added.

Indira Gandhi however, said she was proud of democracy in the country. "I do not want to do anything against it. "Democracy was "very important" but "not more important than the survival of a nation".

Indira Gandhi announced general elections on March 16, 1977, after having lifted the Emergency on March 12. Indira Gandhi plunged into the election campaign with her usual verve and vitality. Campaigning for "a nearly paralysed Congress", she "continued to take a stand against what she had always said were the subversive forces of right reaction and leftist opportunism." She wanted the people’s sanction for her style of functioning and a political legitimacy for her son, but this time for once her instinct was not right. She had released J.P. as far back as November 1975, then Charan Singh and others, and had even dallied with negotiations with the Opposition. She

34 National Herald, (New Delhi) July 5, 1975, the news item entitled "Nation First-Indira Gandhi".
35 Satish C. Agarwala & Adish C. Agarwala: op.cit: p.89
36 Uma Vasudevi: Two faces of Indira Gandhi (Vikas publishers, Delhi: 1977) p.193
was not aware of the betrayals that were to follow- and her faith in the masses was misplaced at this critical juncture. Jagjivan Ram had formed the Congress for Democracy along with Sahugana and Manindra Satpathy, and this astute move by Jagjivan Ram was to seal the fate of her Congress. The newspapers with censorship lifted ran riot, revealing, what they thought was, the dark side of the Emergency.

The poll in 1977 spelt disaster for Indira Gandhi’s party. The Janata Congress for Democracy combine secured 299 seats in the Lok Sabha against the Congress Party’s 155. The Janata Government was installed in New Delhi on March 24, 1977, and theirs, as we shall see, was an inglorious period of non-governance. On March 20, 1977, it was clear already that Indira Gandhi’s Congress had been routed. She had been defeated in Rae Bareilly and resigned as Prime Minister on March 22, 1977, to interim President B.D.Jatti.

The Janata leaders gloated over the defeat of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Their ageing mentor, Jayaprakash Narayan, who had forged a semblance of unity amongst the desperate parties, declared with glee, "Mrs. Indira Gandhi’s political career is over. She has done enough harm and it
as better if she disappears from the political scene.
If one there was a false prophet, 'J.P.' was the one! Such lofty, malicious statements did not deter Indira Gandhi from her from commitment to serve the people. Whenever there was a national calamity, she was the first to arrive on the scene, as in the cases of Balochi village, where Hindus had been burnt alive, or the flood-affected areas of Delhi and Bihar, and cyclone-affected parts of Andhra Pradesh. The people responded to her solicitude for them.
"When it healed, the crowds came to her, and the chelas pahal, the regalia, remained," wrote Mohammad Yunus.
Thus, the Indira Gandhi charisma persisted, even during this bleat period, which was put a temporary patch.

LAST PHASE (1980-84)

When Indira Gandhi assumed office at the beginning of 1980, the country was in a very bad state of affairs, beset by the Janata Government. The economy was literally in shambles. Stagnation had shrouded the industrial field. Inflation was uncontrolled, unemployment

37. Ibid p.90
38. Mohammad Yunus, op. cit. p.105
was widespread and these twin factors had their deleterious effects on national discipline as well as the law and order situation. As for the international comity and the forum, India’s prestige was at its lowest ebb.

To counter this frightening situation, Indira Gandhi set to work undauntedly, and, in a matter of two years her Government had not only successfully reversed the backsliding trend on a number of national fronts, but also retrieved the national economy, bringing to the path of progress. Considering the size of the country, and the complexity of the problems, this was no mean achievement by any standards. It was due primarily to Indira Gandhi’s efforts that India occupied, by 1982, a respected position in the comity of nations.

Taking stock of the first three years of Indira Gandhi’s Government in office, the gross national product increased by 5.2 per cent in 1981-82, on top of eight per cent in 1980-81. The Prime Minister had announced the revised 20-point programme in January 1981.

designed to raise the socio-economic level of the rural masses, in a time-bound schedule. In the important power sector, the generation of power improved 7.2 per cent in 1980-81. In 1980-81, exports registered a rise of about four percent over the previous year; a better trend was witnessed in 1981-82, followed by similar improvement in 1982-83. In the field of Defence, the Armed Forces built a powerful production base during these years. The Defence Research and Development Organisation produced and introduced new armaments. India held its biggest ever exhibition in London in November, 1982, in a bid to attract West European markets for a wide range of its goods.

The 20-Point Programme, which had originally been started by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1975, was revised and announced by her in January 1981. Whereas the

Organised through the joint efforts of the Indian and British Governments, the Festival of India (22 March 1982 and of November) was pegged on the theme 'Continuity and Change'. India’s richness in art and culture—and achievements in science and technology—was project in a series of exhibitions held in Britain. There were seven major events of the performing arts and five seminars. The Prime Ministers of India and Britain, Mrs. Indira Gandhi and Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, the two co-Patrons of the Festival, were present at the inaugural function, which was marked by music concerts by top-ranking Indian artists like M.S. Subbulakshmi and Pandit Ravi Shankar.
thrust of the programme continued to be on providing better living for the less privileged sections of the society, it also aimed at all-round improvement in productivity.

The 1980-84, last phase of Indira Gandhi was a period of increased productivity on all fronts. The rapid advancement in the nuclear and space programme, with development of non-renewable sources of energy, the modernisation of the communication systems, accelerated expansion of oil exploration and attainment of self-sufficiency in foodgrains, were shining salients of her foresight and vision. To give one example, India’s domestic oil production during 1982-83 doubled from 10.5 million tonnes to 21 million tonnes, meeting 50 per cent of the country’s needs and 1990 set as the self-reliance target.

When Indira Gandhi’s government completed fourteen years she recalled the pledge to build a strong self-confident self-reliant independent India “and, taking stock of what had been done, observed: “Under the revised 20-point Programme, the Integrated Rural Development Programme had helped 10 million families and generated employment of
1,240 million man-days." She added: "The level of our investment in the Sixth Plan in the last four years is 65 percent or two-thirds higher than in the Fifth." Mentions that the Seventh plan was being formulated she said: "Each stage of development must carry the growth process further. Indeed, I should like the process of growth itself to be basically altered and so structured as to progressively reduce social and economic inequality." Elucidating how the promises made had been kept, the Prime Minister added: "Our policies of import substitution and of building indigenous capabilities in key areas have paid rich dividends. The policies and programmes followed since 1980 have generated capabilities to adequately meet our external obligations."

The theme of 'Garibi Hatao': the slogan Indira Gandhi gave to the nation was reiterated by her on and off. Addressing the 23rd session of the INTUC at Dhanbad on May 1, 1984, she said: "The prime need of the hour are unity and discipline, so that we could face internal and external threats. For us, people from all religions, castes are

41. S. C. Aggarwala & Adish C. Aggarwala: op cit. p. 94
42. Ibid: p. 95
equally they are all Indian, children of mother India. No
disrespect should be shown to anyone. No one should feel
deprived of rights nor discriminated against. We want to
bridge the gap between rich and poor as soon as possible.
This cannot be done at once stroke but the gap can be
reduced gradually if we stick to the path of socialism and
work simultaneously for improving the lot of weaker
sections."

Earlier, in 1962, during the Monsoon session of the
Parliament when the Opposition had staged a no-confidence
motion against her government, Indira Gandhi tackled the
seemingly 18 carat issue that the Government had done
nothing to mitigate poverty. She said that she would never
claim that the Government had succeeded in conquering
poverty.

However, the country has undergone tremendous socio-
economic change in the last two decades and the standard of
living of the people has been raised to substantial
level. Very pertinently she pointed out that the Opposition
could not dispute the fact that many millions had been

43. Ibid: p. 75
44. The Prime Minister was inaugurating an integrated rural
development conference of Khadi and Village Industries at
Rae Bareilly (U.P.)
brought above what was called the poverty line. On another occasion (September 1982), Indira Gandhi said that by the end of the Sixth plan, a total of 12.5 crore people would rise above the poverty line.

A tireless crusader for the uplift of the underprivileged, Indira Gandhi initiated a number of concrete and lasting programmes for the economic and social betterment of the Scheduled castes, the backward classes and other weaker sections. She saw to it that these programmes became integral part of the national anti-poverty crusade.

Indira Gandhi was always particular that the benefits of technology should reach the villages. In July 1987, she made an impromptu plea for development of technology in the rural areas, particularly to reduce the drudgery of rural women. Addressing a conference of directors of national laboratories in the capital, Indira Gandhi said the biogas programme needed to be expanded over larger areas. She hoped that the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research laboratories could do much more in identifying various technologies to help the rural population, directly and indirectly.
A fourteen day peace mission in October 1983 that was to leave its mark on the annals of modern diplomatic history, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's foreign tour took her to Cyprus, Greece, France and finally to the United Nations. It was the last part of the tour, the "summit" called by Indira Gandhi in her capacity as the Chairperson of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), that was to try her mettle as the world leader who was taking time by the forelock to dispel dark clouds of cold war that had latterly enveloped the world. Addressing a summit of 27 world leaders, drawn from developed and Third World nations, at the UN Head quarters, Indira Gandhi, the Chairperson of the Non-Aligned Movement, warned that "the very fabric of international peace is under serious strain". She urged non-aligned leaders to renew their efforts in resolving global problems.

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi expressed her grave concern over the deteriorating global economic situation and said a "programme of immediate measures should be adopted to reactivate the world economy". In June 1983, she was delivering the second Raul Prediosch lecture on "peace and Development" at the sixth session of the UN Conference
on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), held at Belgrade. She said no sustained revival of the north (developed countries) is possible without the development of the South (developing countries).

The eleven-day European tour took Indira Gandhi, besides Yugoslavia, to Finland, Denmark, Norway and Austria. The visit, historic in its own way, went a long way towards evolving a decidedly positive approach to summit level consultations on major global issues in New York before the General Assembly of the United Nations was to meet in September 1983. The tour was a success on all counts, above all, a timely exercise for NAM, under the dynamic auspices of Chairperson Indira Gandhi, to gain a wider international audience and acceptability.

Inaugurating the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), held in India (November 23-29, 1983), Indira Gandhi observed for the first time that the arms race was very nearly out of hand and in Vienna, in Geneva and elsewhere negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union had been deadlocked for years. At the 'Crucial juncture', Indira Gandhi wanted the Commonwealth to urge

the two powers to exert themselves with greater determination to break stalemate."

The Prime Minister told the 44-nation historic meet that the "militarisation of the Indian Ocean proceeds apace in the pursuit of the global interest of the powerful". The Indian Ocean occupies a special place in India's efforts to ensure peace and stability in Asia. India's concern to turn the Indian Ocean into a zone of peace was reflected in the CHOSA communiqué which called on all governments concerned to reach agreement for the convening of the proposed UN Conference in 1984. A close study of the Doha Declaration revealed the Common wealth leaders' concern with the future of humanity.

Among the impressive infrastructure created for the Asian Games, including five stadia and the ASIAD village, was the main athletic stadium, constructed to Olympic standards like the others, and fittingly named after Jawaharlal Nehru. The flame of the Asian Games was lit by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium: the impressive venue for the opening and closing ceremonies. To her the "spread of sports consciousness in
Asia" testified to "the growing friendship among Asian Countries". In a "world born by conflict", she said, "sports builds bridges and promotes camaraderie." 46 With the success attained in the Ninth Asian Games, India was well set to play host to the 1992 Olympics.

Meeting under the chairmanship of Indira Gandhi, the Congress (I) Working Committee on July 1983 decided to work on a cash basis to create employment opportunities in rural and urban areas. The Committee also expressed serious concern over the 'large-scale violence, enormous loss of life and destruction of property of people of Indian origin in Sri Lanka.'

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's visit to Assam in February 1984 did not lead to any significant reopening of initiatives to resolve the foreigners' issue in Assam. Committed to the path of confrontation, the AASU continued and carried on a mild and symbolic agitation against the tribunals legislation on the ground that it seeks to bestow legitimacy on all the pre-1971 illegal immigrants. At the same time, the AASU was completely
silent on the proposal made by the Election Commission that
the revision of the electoral rolls in Assam should have as
its basis the electoral rolls of 1971. The controversy
continued over the composition of the electoral rolls.

Left with no other alternative, Madame Gandhi's
government called the Army in aid of civil authority on
June 2, 1984. Described 'Operation Blue Star' the army was
given the task of checking and controlling extremists,
terrorist and communal violence. The Akal Takht had been
fortified by Bhindranwale's men as well as any dug-out
position of any modern army. Rather than lay down their
arms, in response to appeals by the Army on June 5, 1984,
the terrorists unleashed deadly machine-gun fire from the
Akal Takht and from Harmandir Sahib. The movement of
troops towards the Golden Temple precincts cost them heavy
casualties. On the afternoon of June 6, 200 terrorists
surrendered, including 22 from Harmandir Sahib. Major
recovery of arms and ammunition was made from religious
places at Chowki Mehta, Pilibi and Rupar. The last of these
operations was completed by 17.00 hours on June 6.

Speaking in the Rajya Sabha on July 25, 1984, Prime
Minister Indira Gandhi said: "I want to make it clear that action we took was certainly not against the Sikh community, it was not against the Golden Temple or the Sikh religion in any way; and it was not even against the Akali Dal. It was against only those people who had gained control of the situation." As to why the Army operation was delayed, the Prime Minister explained in Lok Sabha on July 24: "Some honourable members have asked why we delayed the action. It seems one cannot be right, no matter that one does. We delayed it precisely because we did not want to take it, because we wanted some way out, some kind of understanding which would include the throwing out of terrorists, the dismantling of the arsenal and the ending of a situation which threatened our country's unity and integrity. It was because we were trying until the very last moment, that we did not take the action earlier.

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi wanted normalcy to be restored in Punjab as soon as possible. Just as in September, 1984. She had lost no time to replace Governor Ram Lal of Andhra Pradesh by Shanker Dayal Sharma, when the former bungled the state affairs by making the pretender, N. Hasmukha Rao, the Chief Minister, in the absence of
N.T. Rama Rao, she started the application of the 'healing touch' in earnest in the Punjab. The damaged Akal Takht was restored to its original shape through ‘Kur seva’ by Baba Santal Singh, carried a hectic pace—every trace of the unfortunate bullo removed. The Prime Minister announced that 'the token presence of the army in the Golden Temple can be withdrawn.' President Zail Singh’s visit to the Golden Temple two days after Operation Blue Star was followed by another in September 1984. During the latter visit the President claimed that 'most of the hurdles between the priests and the government had been removed', and hoped that other problems would be sorted out. Political analysts saw 'a glimmer of hope' in this and related developments. But the hopes proved to be dupes when the country was stunned by the tragic happening at the Prime Minister’s residence when Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her own Sikh bodyguards on 31st October 1984.

The light was snuffed out once again and the nation benumbed by shock bordering on disbelief. The country had been plunged into darkness, just as similarly, on January 30, 1948, Mahatma Gandhi had been struck down by an assassin’s bullets.