

Indira

GANDHI



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An Eventful Life

The great leader from Nehru-Gandhi family, Indira Gandhi, the first and the only female Prime Minister of India, was born on 19th November 1917. She was the daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, and Kamala Nehru. As a child of a freedom fighter she was also involved in India's freedom struggle. She organised the Vanar Sena of boys and girls who used to help in the circulation of messages and banned publications of the members of the Congress Committee. She joined Shantiniketan and later went to Oxford. While in Europe she met Feroze Gandhi, a Parsee Congress activist. They got married in 1942. She had two sons: Rajiv Gandhi and Sanjay Gandhi. After the independence of India, Indira Gandhi continued her work for the cause of India. She organised various relief camps, provided medical care to refugees. She started taking part in Indian politics and became her father's confidante and secretary. She managed the election campaigns of Jawaharlal Nehru and her husband Feroze Gandhi, during the election of 1951. She was elected as the president of Indian National Congress in 1959 and 1960.

After the death of her father Jawaharlal Nehru, she contested the elections and joined the government of Lal Bahadur Shastri, as a Minister of Information and Broadcasting. After the death of Lal Bahadur Shastri, with the backing of the Syndicate she won in

a vote of the Congress Parliamentary Committee and became the fifth and the first female Prime Minister of India on 19th January 1966. Indira Gandhi imposed emergency in 1975. It was believed that the emergency provision of the Indian Constitution was used by her to grant herself extraordinary power. The period lasted for nineteen months. In the subsequent elections in 1977, Indira Gandhi lost her seat. The government formed by the Janata Party could not complete its term and in 1980 mid-term elections were held. In these the Congress came to power and Indira Gandhi again became the Prime Minister of India.

She was awarded the Lenin Peace Prize for 1983-84. In 1984, she ordered the launch of Operation Blue Star. Under this, the army was sent to the Golden Temple, the holiest Sikh shrine, as the government of India believed that the temple complex was being used as a sanctuary for criminals such as Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. As a result of the army's attack on Golden Temple many civilians were also killed. This infuriated many Sikhs and on 31st October 1984, Indira Gandhi was assassinated by two of her Sikh bodyguards.

Indira Priyadarshini Gandhi (19 November 1917 - October 31, 1984) was the Prime Minister of India for three consecutive terms from 1966 to 1977 and for a fourth term from 1980 until her assassination in 1984. She was India's first and to date only female Prime Minister. Born in the politically influential Nehru dynasty, she grew up in an intensely political atmosphere. Her grandfather, Motilal Nehru, was a prominent Indian nationalist leader. Her father, Jawaharlal Nehru was a pivotal figure in the Indian independence movement and the first Prime Minister of Independent India. Returning to India from Oxford in 1941, she became involved in the Indian Independence movement.

In the 1950s, she served her father unofficially as a personal assistant during his tenure as India's first Prime Minister. After her father's death in 1964, she was appointed as a member of the Rajya Sabha by the President of India and became a member of Lal Bahadur Shastri's Cabinet as Minister of Information and Broadcasting. The then Congress Party President K. Kamaraj was instrumental in making Indira Gandhi the Prime Minister after the sudden demise of Shastri. Gandhi soon showed an ability to

win elections and outmanoeuvre opponents through populism. She introduced more left-wing economic policies and promoted agricultural productivity. A crushing victory in the 1971 war with Pakistan was followed by a period of instability that led her to impose a state of emergency in 1975; she paid for the authoritarian excesses of the period with three years in opposition. Returned to office in 1980, she became increasingly involved in an escalating conflict with separatists in Punjab that eventually led to her assassination by her own bodyguards in 1984.

Birth and Infancy

Those were the initial years of the 20th century and the whole world was going through major changes. In such a volatile period, Indira Gandhi was born on 19 November 1917 in Anand Bhavan at Allahabad.

The Nehru family used to stay in Anand Bhavan.

The Nehru family has a unique history of struggle and achievement.

The year was 1857, which was a time of change not only for India but the entire world. In those days, on the banks of a stream in Delhi lived a family, which had come from the valley of Kashmir and had settled there. At that time, the head of the Nehru family was Gangadhar Nehru, who was the '*kotwal*' of Delhi, The Mughal Empire, which was on its last legs, controlled Delhi. Another event that took place in 1857 was the first movement for independence. Very quickly, this movement was suppressed and the oppressive activities of the white soldiers started. Gangadhar Nehru did not consider it appropriate to live in Delhi in such an atmosphere and he came and settled in Agra. They had not been long in Agra when one day, suddenly, Gangadhar Nehru died at the young age of 34, Gangadhar had two young sons on whom the burden of running the family befell. About three months after Gangadhar's death, a third son was born in the house whom his widowed mother, Indrani, gave the name, Motilal.

This was the same Motilal with whom the destiny of India was entwined inextricably. His son, Jawaharlal Nehru, and his granddaughter and the protagonist of our book, Indira Gandhi, became the Prime Ministers of India later.

Motilal Nehru was very intelligent from his childhood and very soon he achieved success in life. When he was 36 years old, he came to Allahabad and bought Anand Bhavan and lived there for the rest of his life.

When he came to Anand Bhavan, Jawaharlal Nehru was a tiny infant. Because he was the only child, he was the favourite of the entire household. There was no shortage of money or comforts in their house; the entire family used to live comfortably like landlords. At the age of 16 years, Jawaharlal Nehru took admission in the famous school of England called Harrow,

Jawaharlal Nehru completed his studies with great dedication and returned to India as a barrister. At the time, he had crossed the doors of adolescence and reached adulthood. Motilal Nehru immediately took the decision to get him married. Jawaharlal Nehru was 27 years of age when he got married to a woman named Kamala, who belonged to a cultured family of Delhi.

Exactly 23 months after the marriage, Kamala gave birth to a beautiful girl at Anand Bhavan. The whole house resounded with the sweet cries of the baby. Jawaharlal Nehru was beside himself with joy. On hearing this news, the Nightingale of India, Sarojini Naidu, said to him — “Jawahar! The spirit of a new India has born in your house.”

Mrs. Taylor was staying in Anand Bhavan in those days. On seeing the newly born baby, she said — “Aha! How beautiful, how delicate, how pure she is, just like a flower!”

Jawaharlal Nehru picked up the child in his arms and said to his wife — “Kamala, see, the child is so beautiful, like ‘Indu’. Do you know the meaning of ‘Indu’? ‘Indu’ means the Moon. Our daughter is beautiful like the moon: Indira Priyadarshini.”

At that time, nobody knew that the child would one day be known by the name of Indira Gandhi and would influence the whole world with her deeds and would give India stability and would create a new history for it.

Amidst the Burning Clothes

One morning in 1922, when Indira was five years old, she awoke to the smell of smoke. The little girl thought the house was

on fire, and she ran down the hall to the front porch. There, on the lawn in front of her house, was a huge bonfire. Indira smiled as she remembered what her mother had told her the night before. She had explained to Indira that, in protest against the British government, all Indians had agreed to follow a suggestion that Mahatma Gandhi put forth. He told the Indians that if they really wanted to demonstrate to the British how they felt about Indian independence, they had to stop buying foreign goods. He suggested that they burn all their foreign possessions, including their clothes, and start weaving their own cloth for their garments.

The Nehrus, who probably owned more British goods than most Indians, decided to display their intentions publicly. Servants and family members threw furniture, drapes, cloth, rugs, and clothing into the fire. They wore garments made of rough, homespun cotton cloth, called *khadi* which they had made themselves. This cloth was irritating to the skin and often caused rashes and bleeding. Yet the Indian people were determined that as long as the British ruled their country, they would never again buy anything from England.

The fire had been burning for two days when Indira was asked to contribute to the cause. She didn't mind giving up her pretty dresses and wearing the uncomfortable cloth, but she was particularly fond of a favourite English doll.

Looking back on those days, Indira wrote, "For days on end — or was it weeks? It doesn't matter it seemed an eternity — I was overwhelmed by the burden of decision — the struggle went on between love for my doll, pride of owning such a lovely thing, and what I thought to be my duty towards my country.... At last I made my decision and, quivering with tension, I took the doll up on the roof-terrace and set fire to it. Then the tears came as if they would never stop and for some days I was ill with a temperature. To this day I hate striking a match."

While Indira's father and grandfather whiled away their days in jail, reading, writing letters, and spinning khadi on a spinning wheel, she played her political fantasy games in the safety of her home. Instead of the usual childhood themes of marriage and family, Indira's games always got intensely political. Her dolls were — at the same time — British, with tiny pith helmets, and

Indian, wearing khadi and the small white cap that became known as the Gandhi cap. In Indira's scenarios, the dolls fought against each other or argued their issues aloud. Her dollhouse became a shop that refused to go along with Gandhi's request for simplicity and still sold foreign goods. Her dolls, dressed in white khadi, would picket the store, as Indira had seen her mother and aunts do so often. She devised weapons, guns and clubs, and put them in the hands of her dolls to represent the British militia and the police. As Indira grew older, however, she tired of her make-believe political ambitions. Indira wanted to do something real, to make something happen.

In 1924, Mahatma Gandhi organised a *sangha*, or group, that was dedicated to travelling throughout India, urging people to take the first step towards independence by making their own clothes. Indira often accompanied her mother and aunts on these sangha trips, and this experience deepened her commitment to a free India.

For the first eight years of Indira's life, her education consisted both of real life experiences and of stories from the Hindu culture. Two Hindu epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, were endlessly recounted by her great aunt Rajvati. Indira's mother took care of her spiritual education by encouraging her young daughter to join her in Hindu prayers and chants. Unlike her husband, Kamala was a deeply spiritual person, and she inspired Indira with her unshakable faith and courage.

The subject of proper schooling for Indira was a touchy one in the Nehru household. Jawaharlal first sent her to an Indian public school, the Modern School, near their home in Prayagraj. But Motilal disagreed and took advantage of the fact that his son was in jail and couldn't do more than protest. Believing Indira would get a better education at a private school, Motilal sent her to St. Cecilia's, a British school. Jawaharlal strongly disapproved, fearing that the English would unduly influence his daughter. Indira was then pulled out of school and given private tutors.

This change in her education didn't seem to bother her very much, since she had never felt comfortable with the other children in school anyway.

In 1926, when Indira was nine years old, Kamala was diagnosed with tuberculosis, a disease of the lungs and respiratory system. Although tuberculosis is curable with modern antibiotics, it was a common cause of death at the time. The doctors suggested that Jawaharlal take her to Switzerland, where she could receive specialised medical treatment. One of the first things Jawaharlal did after arriving in Switzerland was to enrol Indira in L'Ecole Internationale, a Swiss international school. That year was one of the happiest of Indira's life. The time in Geneva gave Indira increased independence. She had to go to the market and deal with foreign shopkeepers who had a different culture and tradition.

Holiday in Europe

In 1926 — before aeroplanes divorced distance from time — it was a long journey from Bombay to Venice: across the Arabian Sea, round the Gulf of Aden, through the Suez Canal into the Mediterranean, past Crete and the Ionian Islands and up to the very top of the Adriatic. 'A rough voyage', is how Nehru described it in a Letter to his father, both in terms of the weather at sea and the emotional climate on board ship. Only Indira relished the electrical storms and towering waves that left everyone else giddy and nauseated. But the tense relations between Kamala and Nan Pandit were eased when Kamala came down with an attack of bronchitis and was confined to her cabin. Kamala still had a high fever when they reached Italy.

As soon as they landed, the Pandits rushed off on their six-week European holiday, but Kamala was too ill to travel further so the Nehrus stopped for three days in Venice — a magical place for Indira — a city of islands, like a mirage suspended on water, where people moved about in gondolas rather than automobiles, carriages or bullock carts. When Kamala's temperature fell, they boarded a train that sped across northern Italy to Geneva — a bustling city with trams, honking cars, paved and cobblestone streets, with people in dark clothes wielding umbrellas. Though spring, Geneva was damp and cold; mist and fog hovered over the lake and for days there was no sign of the encircling mountains — or the sun.

For several months they lodged in cheap pensions until they found a two-bedroom flat at 46 Boulevard des Tranches. After the

army of servants at Anand Bhawan, a single Swiss maid was hired named Marguerite who spoke only French. Jawaharlal was determined to live as frugally as possible. This suited Kamala ascetic temperament, but back in Allahabad Motilal was incensed at what he called his son's 'false economy'. 'It seems, 'he wrote, that 'you have undertaken the trip merely to demonstrate how cheaply it is possible for a man, wife and child to live in a European town. It was hardly necessary to go so far afield for such a practical demonstration of domestic economy. He criticised Jawaharlal for not purchasing an overcoat and for 'giving to Kamala some very inferior stuff' to wear outdoors.

Part of the reason for Nehru's overzealous economising was the great expense of Kamala's treatment. He had brought enough money to last them the six or so months he expected they would stay in Europe, but he either did not calculate medical expenses or underestimated them from his vague memory of the cost of living in England fifteen years earlier, Kamala consulted medical specialists at the famous Geneva Research Institute of the Swiss bacteriologist Henri Spahlinger as soon as they arrived in the city. Laboratory tests revealed TB bacilli in her sputum — confirming the Lucknow doctors diagnosis. She then underwent a course of Spahlinger's vaccines which cost more than £100 — a large sum in 1926. This controversial vaccine was an anti-tuberculosis serum derived from the blood of horses, though its source and nature were kept secret. To Jawaharlal's chagrin, he had to wire Motilal for the money for this treatment. His drive to cut corners in every other direction was obviously a way of compensating for its hefty cost. But, as Motilal argued, if at the same time Kamala was being injected with the Spahlinger serum she was also inadequately clothed, meagrely fed, and shivering in chilly, draughty lodgings, it would defeat 'the very object of your visit',

Nehru did not, however, compromise on Indira's education in Geneva. The city was the headquarters of the League of Nations, formed in 1919 and in 1926, still 'the hope of international order [and]... at the height of its prestige.' L'Ecole Internationale, a multilingual (French, German and English) school, had been established for the children of those who were involved in the League — Jawaharlal and Kamala decided it would be perfect for

Indira and well worth the fees. Good schools in India were invariably British-run, with a British outlook and curriculum hostile to the Nehrus' nationalism. The League of Nations school was truly international with seventy-five pupils from most of the League countries. The syllabus was neither Eurocentric nor underpinned by any political or religious dogma.

But what did Indira make of L'Ecole Internationale? In later years, she merely said that she was happy there and that she liked her teacher Miss Hartoch. What she remembered was the distance of the school — housed in a Swiss chalet with magnificent mountain views — from their house. To get to school Indira had to take a long walk, followed by a tram ride and then a bus ride — all negotiated four times a day. She left each morning at eight o'clock, came home for lunch at noon, went back to school at two when the children were taken by bus to the country for games, arming and nature study, and then finally returned home again at six in the evening. At first Nehru accompanied her to and fro, but this took a large chunk out of his day. So eight-and-a-half-year-old Indira began making the daily trek on her own, her satchel of exercise notebooks and primers strapped on her back. 'Indu is a wonderful little girl,' Motilal wrote from Allahabad, 'to be able to make her way in the streets of a Swiss town in the way you describe ... it [is] a brave thing to do.'

Indira, in fact, came into her own in Geneva where there were no servants, no *ayab*, grandmother or great-aunt to look after her. She helped the maid Marguerite with the housework and went shopping with her. She read to Kamala, who was largely confined to bed, and made sure she took her medicines. Jawaharlal wrote to his father of Indira's increasing autonomy and initiative to which Motilal replied, 'Dear little Indu is a marvel ... her mental growth has been remarkable. .. Who could have imagined she would within a few months cultivate all the self-reliance she is showing?'

Indira's rapid adjustment to life in Geneva was helped by the speed and ease with which she became fluent in French, Instruction at L'Ecole Internationale was in both French and English and of course out on the streets of Geneva she spoke French. Nehru Wrote to his sister how 'her English is becoming infected with her

French and she talks of going *jusqu'a* the post office and it being *presque* ten o'clock. As for Hindustani, she tries to avoid talking in it." Kamala and Jawaharlal, however, feared she would forget Hindi altogether and insisted that she speak it with them.

Indira was metamorphosing in other ways too. Though Kamala wore saris the whole time she was abroad, Nehru reverted to the European dress he had worn during his years at Harrow and Cambridge and in India before the non-cooperation movement. And despite his economy drive, a new wardrobe was purchased for Indira. Instead of the scrawny little Allahabad Indu dressed in coarse *khadi*, Indira now wore starched Swiss dresses, knee socks and strapped patent leather shoes. A large hair bow was added on special occasions — when she and Nehru went, for example, to tea with the French novelist, biographer and critic Romain Rolland who lived at the eastern end of Lac Lemane at Villeneuve. They also called on the German-Jewish poet and political activist Ernst Toller, and they received invitations from the large number of radical Indians living in exile in Switzerland.

Among these was an old, ailing couple named Krishnavarma. Jawaharlal took Indira to call on Shyamaji Krishnavarma and his wife who lived on the top floor of a crumbling house in Geneva — quite alone and friendless. Books and papers littered the floor; everything was covered in a thick layer of dust. Shyamaji Krishnavarma's 'pockets bulged with ancient copies of his old paper, the *Indian Sociologist* and he would pull them out and point with some excitement to some article he had written a dozen years previously. His talk was of the old days, of India House in Hampstead, of the various persons that the British government had sent to spy on him, and how he had spotted them and outwined them. Shyamaji Krishnavarma had plenty of money, but would not waste it on servants and told his guests how he would walk long distances rather than spend a few centimes on the tram. 'Over the whole place; as Nehru described it, 'there hung an atmosphere of gloom, an air of decay.'

Meanwhile, far away in Delhi, thirteen-year-old Parmeshwar Narain Haksar listened one day in 1926 to a heated conversation between his mother, some other female relations and Kamala Nehru's mother Rajpati Kaul. Their discussion 'centred on her

daughter's delicate state of health and how she had suffered thanks to Jawaharlal's involvement in the national struggle and his pilgrimages ... to jails'. But Rajpati now was full of hope for Kamala because Jawaharlal had taken her to Europe, 'Why Jawaharlal should have gone to Europe was not clear' to young P. N. Haksar who sat silently in the midst of the women. Then Rajpati explained that 'the climate in Europe ... was better than India's. But more than the climate was the importance, in her eyes, of Kamala and Jawaharlal being alone together with their child Indu.

Because of the ever-present fear that Indira would develop tuberculosis, Nehru was alarmed when she came down with bronchitis. Additional funds were wired from Allahabad and he had Indira thoroughly overhauled by children's specialists and other doctors' in Switzerland, To his and Kamala's relief, examinations and tests revealed nothing 'organically wrong', yet, as Nehru said, 'obviously she was below normal.'

In November, to celebrate her ninth birthday, Indira travelled on her own from Chesieres to Montana to see her parents after an absence of nearly five months. She stayed with Nehru in a small pension close to the sanatorium and visited her mother twice a day. Since the first snowfall in the mountains, she had been skiing and sledging at Chesieres and now she and her father skied together. It was exhilarating, and the beauty of their surroundings — the tallest peaks in Switzerland, bathed in sunlight — sublime. Nehru wrote to Nan Pandit that he had decided that 'skiing is the finest sport going — excepting only the ever exciting game of life and revolution", 'Indu,' he added, 'is making steady progress in skiing, For Nehru, physical exercise in the clear, cold mountain air banished doubts and anxieties, both personal and political. He felt liberating, cut off from India. They saw very few Indians and indeed very few people at all apart from the little colony" in the mountain resort.

For Montana was a resort — a playground for the leisured rich as well as a refuge for the ill and dying: a strange atmosphere for Indira. On the one hand there was the sanatorium for tuberculosis patients — many of them 'advanced cases' — where her mother lay in a white-sheeted bed in a room with windows and doors opened wide to the cold mountain air. But on the other

hand, there were more than a dozen fashionable hotels, full of cosmopolitan guests from all over Europe and America, who skied and skated by day and went to galas, concerts and ice ballet performances at night. Indira picked up on the tension that existed between Montana's two classes of visitors. Invalids and holiday-makers resented each other's presence, and relations between doctors and hoteliers were even less cordial. Hotels like the Palace Bellevue, l'Eden, le Royal and le Continental posted large signs announcing '*On n'accepte pas les malades*'.

Indira came to Montana again at Christmas and it was during this longer stay that she finally confessed how unhappy she was at Chesieres. Nehru made enquiries about other schools in the region and arranged for her to move to L'Ecole Nouvelle at Bex, only a two-hour journey away which meant she could visit her parents and ski with her father nearly every weekend. Like the League of Nations school, this was an international institution and the students — all girls between the ages of nine and eighteen — came from South America, the United States, and India as well as Europe. L'Ecole Nouvelle was situated in a beautiful, extensive estate outside Bex called La Pelouse which had originally been built by a wealthy Russian emigre. Indira boarded in a brightly painted Swiss chalet surrounded by apple, pear and chestnut trees and vineyards. From her window she could see the snow-covered Dents du Midi across the valley. The headmistress, Mile Lydie Hemmerlin, was an intelligent, kind fifty-year-old Swiss woman, though, in Indira's words, 'a fiend for exercise and a strict disciplinarian'.

Indira's later memories of Bex scarcely mention the syllabus or her studies. Rather than the books she read and what she learned, what Indira recalled about L'Ecole Nouvelle were things like getting up 'first thing in the morning' for 'a cold, or rather icy, shower — no matter what the weather ... Then we ran around the garden in shorts. On Thursdays and Sundays we had a two-hour fast walk and on other days a similar gymnastics or athletics period. Windows were ... kept open' round the dock, Precisely the sort of bracing atmosphere her father wanted for her. And in fact Indira thrived at L'Ecole Nouvelle. She even loved the farm work required of all the students in the autumn: picking apples and chestnuts and harvesting grapes in the vineyards.

The Congress of Oppressed Nationalities which led to the formation of the League Against Imperialism. Motilal Nehru was expected in the late spring by which time Kamala felt so much better — and was so weary of the sanatorium regime — that she announced she wanted to accompany the others on the ‘grand European tour’ Motilal had already planned for all of them, including Indira,

Indira’s summer holidays began in mid-April, but shortly after she reached Montana, a telegram arrived from India; Motilal was deferring his European trip for at least another three months. Back in Allahabad, he was embroiled in a long-standing legal case that had been subject to incessant stays and adjournments and which now further delayed him. In addition, he was in the process of building a new family home and this too was not going forward speedily. For years Jawaharlal had argued that Anand Bhawan, even on its present reduced scale, was far too large an establishment and that they should live in a smaller, simpler house. Shortly after he, Kamala and Indira left for Europe, Motilal began constructing a new home in the grounds of Anand Bhawan. And for a time at least it remained a fairly modest venture. But it was difficult for Motilal — even in straitened financial circumstances — to do anything by half-measures. Inevitably, the new Anand Bhawan — though smaller than the original — grew into an ornate, wedding-cake-like structure of two floors and numerous apartments with an encircling veranda and extensive gardens. As a result, in May 1927, when Motilal originally planned to sail for Europe, it was not even near completion.

If they waited for Motilal to arrive, it would be September or later, by which time Indira had to be back in school — Jawaharlal felt strongly that she should at least see Paris and London before they returned to India. Kamala was restless, unhappy and eager to leave Montana. Obviously they could make an abbreviated, not-so-grand tour now, but they were hampered by scant funds. Then another wire arrived from Allahabad: Motilal urged them to begin travelling without him and sent a draft for £500. Jawaharlal, Kamala, Betty and Indira set off from Montana on 1 May.

They arrived in Paris the next day and found a cheap hotel in Mozart Gardens. It was spring with the trees in full flower on

the boulevards. They went to Arc de Triomphe, Notre Dame, the Eiffel Tower and the Louvre, but what Indira later remembered most vividly were the number of amputees who had been wounded in the Great War whom she saw on the streets and also on the metro where special benches were reserved for the 'mutilés de la guerre'. In addition to the usual tourist sights, Jawaharlal took her to the Concierge prison, a forbidding place after Nairn' Jail in Allahabad. One night they went to a sensational and much publicised performance of *Dracula*. To create the appropriate atmosphere for the play, ambulances had been stationed outside the theatre and uniformed nurses positioned inside the hall to treat members of the audience who fainted with terror. During the performance doors and windows burst open and Dracula flew in on invisible wires.

The Childhood

Indira Priyadarshini, was born on November 19, 1917 to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and his young wife Kamala Nehru. She was their only child. The Nehru family can trace their ancestry to the Brahmins of Jammu and Kashmir and Delhi. Indira's grandfather Motilal Nehru was a wealthy barrister of Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh. Nehru was one of the most prominent members of the Indian National Congress in pre-Gandhi times and would go on to author the Nehru Report, the people's choice for a future Indian system of government as opposed to the British system. Her father Nehru was a well-educated lawyer and was a popular leader of the Indian Independence Movement. At the time of Indira's birth, Nehru entered the independence movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Growing up in the sole care of her mother, who was sick and alienated from the Nehru household, Indira developed strong protective instincts and a loner personality.

Her grandfather and father continually being enmeshed in national politics also made mixing with her peers difficult. She had conflicts with her father's sisters, including Vijayalakshmi Pandit, and these continued into the political world. Indira created the Vanara Sena movement for young girls and boys which played a small but notable role in the Indian Independence Movement, conducting protests and flag marches, as well as helping Congress

politicians circulate sensitive publications and banned materials. In an often-told story, she smuggled out from her father's police-watched house an important document in her schoolbag that outlined plans for a major revolutionary initiative in the early-1930s. In 1936, her mother, Kamala Nehru, finally succumbed to tuberculosis after a long struggle. Indira was 18 at the time and thus never experienced a stable family life during her childhood. She attended prominent Indian, European and British schools like Shantiniketan, Badminton School and Oxford, but she showed no great aptitude for academics, and was detained from obtaining a degree. While studying at Somerville College, University of Oxford, England, during the late-1930s, she became a member of the radical pro-independence London based India League.

In her years in continental Europe and the UK, she met a Parsi, Feroze Gandhi, a Congress activist, and eventually married him on 16 March 1942 at Anand Bhawan Allahabad in a private Adi Dharm Brahma Vedic ceremony still noted for its unconventionality. Just before the beginning of the Quit India Movement — the final, all-out national revolt launched by Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress Party. In September 1942 they were arrested by the British authorities and detained without charge. She was ultimately released on 13 May 1943 having spent over 243 days in jail. In 1944, she gave birth to Rajiv Gandhi with Feroze Gandhi, followed two years later by Sanjay Gandhi.

During the chaotic Partition of India in 1947, she helped organise refugee camps and provide medical care for the millions of refugees from Pakistan. This was her first exercise in major public service, and a valuable experience for the tumult of the coming years. The Gandhis later settled in Allahabad where Feroze worked with a Congress Party newspaper and an insurance company. Their marriage started out well, but deteriorated later as she moved to New Delhi to be at the side of her father, the Prime Minister at the time, who was living alone in a high-pressure environment at Teen Murti Bhavan. She became his confidante, secretary and nurse. Her sons lived with her, but she eventually became permanently separated from Feroze, though they remained married. When India's first general election approached in 1951, Gandhi managed the campaigns of both

Nehru and her husband, who was contesting the constituency of Rae Bareilly. Feroze had not consulted Nehru on his choice to run, and even though he was elected, he opted to live in a separate house in Delhi. Feroze quickly developed a reputation for being a fighter against corruption by exposing a major scandal in the nationalised insurance industry, resulting in the resignation of the Finance Minister, a Nehru aide. At the height of the tension, Gandhi and her husband separated. However, in 1958, shortly after re-election, Feroze suffered a heart attack, which dramatically healed their broken marriage. At his side to help him recuperate in Kashmir, their family grew closer. But Feroze died on September 8, 1960, while Gandhi was abroad with Nehru on a foreign visit.

At Shantiniketan

The duration of the course (curriculum) in Poona was four years, but Indira completed it in three years.

In the meantime, she was growing from adolescence to youth. These are the days of life when all the happiness of life is spread around us. In Indira's life too, youth tiptoed in quietly, and the glow of youth spread on her face, Indira's whole body shone with a sublime beauty. But, Indira was unaware of all this. When she passed out from Poona and reached Anand Bhavan and went to tell her father about this good news, she found out that the government had spoiled all her plans. Her beloved 'Papu' had been imprisoned and her mother was sick.

Indira's studies were still incomplete.

Indira was then sent to Shantiniketan.

To mould Indira according to his aspirations, Nehru Ji sent Indira to Shantiniketan, the school of the great poet, Rabindranath Tagore. Here, Indira would be able to obtain knowledge about Indian culture and traditions. The classes were held in the lap of nature and students would imbibe the lessons of life sitting under mango trees, according to Tagore's education methodology.

Her Father's Daughter

After her return to India she married Feroze Gandhi, in March 1941 much against the wishes of the conservative Hindu

community, as he was a Parsee. But Nehru was on her side. When Indira's father was in jail he used to write beautiful, long letters to her about his patriotic feelings and the current political situation. This led her to understand the intricacies of the nation, better than the most.

In 1942, she joined the 'Quit India' Movement along with her husband and was arrested and jailed. After India gained freedom, Pandit Nehru was elected Prime Minister. After his death in 1964, Lal Bahadur Shastri took over. And then in 1966, Indira Gandhi was elected leader of the Congress.

Unconcealed Anger

Mrs. Gandhi did not conceal her anger at these attacks. "This is one of the countries in the world where the economy, although under severe strain, is not collapsing," she said to a journalist in 1974. "Do you think it is easy to keep a country like India united? You say promises are not kept. I assert with all authority: Who in the world has kept more promises?"

However, vague her destinations may have seemed, Mrs. Gandhi was always clear about her conviction that she was meant to lead India. She rarely indulged in self-analysis and usually brushed aside questions about her failed marriage, her personal life, her possibly difficult role as the daughter of the nation's first Prime Minister.

"Every position has advantages and disadvantages," she once observed. "I had an advantage because of the education my father gave me and the opportunities of meeting some great people, not only politicians, but also writers, artists and so on. But in politics one has to work doubly hard to show one is not merely a daughter but is also a person in her own right."

She added, "Of course, being a woman you have to work twice as hard as a man."

Once, when a visiting journalist asked her to describe Indira Gandhi, the woman, the Prime Minister said: "In spite of always living in the public glare, she has remained a very private person. Her life has been hard. This has made her self-reliant but has not hardened her."

A Lonely Childhood

Indira Priyadarshini (the second name means “Dearly Beloved”) was born Nov. 19, 1917, the only child of Jawaharlal Nehru and his wife, Kamala, in Allahabad in northern India. Her grandfather, Motilal Nehru, who owned the house in which they lived, was a brilliant lawyer who discarded a lucrative practice to ally himself with Mohandas K. Gandhi and the Congress Party in the independence movement.

By all accounts, the child’s early years were painfully lonely. The house served as a headquarters for the freedom struggle; her parents were frequently taken off to jail; the police were constantly there.

“My public life started at the age of 3,” she said. “I have no recollection of games, children’s parties or playing with other children. My favourite occupation as a very small child was to deliver thunderous speeches to the servants, standing on a high table. All my games were political ones — I was, like Joan of Arc, perpetually being burned at the stake.

“I was very headstrong. The whole house was always in a state of tension that nobody had a normal life. There were police raids, arrests and so on, the physical and mental strain. And all the time it was in public.”

What made her childhood even more difficult was the contemptuous treatment given her mother, Kamala, by the far more Westernised and sophisticated women of the Nehru family. Mrs. Gandhi in later life indicated that her own fluency in Hindi, far better than her father’s, and her “Indianness,” or ability to think and feel as a Hindu Indian, were largely a legacy of her mother. When asked once about the impact of Kamala Nehru on her personality, Mrs. Gandhi replied, “I saw her being hurt and I was determined not to be hurt.”

Letters from Her Father

In her turbulent childhood — erratic schooling in India and Switzerland, followed by involvement in the independence struggle as a courier and demonstrator — she knew her father chiefly through the famous letters he wrote from a succession of prison cells. The letters, now collected, gave a capsule history of

the world from Buddha to Stanley Baldwin and forged a strong link between father and daughter.

"They were the only companionship I had with my father," she recalled. "That is why I valued them so much."

Although Nehru was in and out of prison and travelling constantly, his link with his daughter strengthened. "Nehru was constantly pointing out to the girl the fascinating world around them," wrote the journalist Krishan Bhatia, author of "Indira," a biography of Mrs. Gandhi.

Her formal schooling remained sporadic; she spent three unhappy years at a formal boarding school in Poona and in 1934 went to the university at Shantiniketan (Abode of Peace) in West Bengal, founded by Rabindranath Tagore, the Nobel Prize-winning poet and philosopher. It was a brief, almost idyllic experience for the young woman in the unconventional school, where she studied poetry and the Manipuri style of classical Indian dancing. "In a way," she recalled, "Tagore was the first person whom I consciously regarded as a great man." She said that the evenings spent sitting at his feet, talking or watching him paint, were "moments of serene joy, memories to cherish."

British Education

Kamala Nehru died the following year. In 1937, Indira enrolled at Somerville College, Oxford, where she studied public and social administration, history and anthropology. Although, she was in poor condition physically — she was ordered to spend several months in Switzerland to recover from pleurisy — Indira was active in the student wing of the British Labour Party and enrolled as a Red Cross volunteer when World War II began, even working briefly as an ambulance driver in the blitz.

In 1941, however, with the Indian independence movement nearing an apparent confrontation with the British, she sailed home with Feroze Gandhi, a newspaperman from Allahabad, who had worked in the Congress movement. He was a childhood friend of Indira, but her family was shocked when she announced, on arriving home, that she and Mr. Gandhi — who was not related to Mohandas Gandhi — planned to marry.

"Nobody wanted that marriage, nobody," she recalled many years later. Mr. Gandhi was of a different religion; she was a Hindu, he was a Parsee, which meant that "the whole of India was against us." But she and Feroze Gandhi were married in March 1942. By September of that year, they were both sent to prison by the British. In fact, the only real domestic period of their troubled marriage was between 1943 and 1946, when they lived in relative quiet in Allahabad. A son, Rajiv, was born in 1944, and another, Sanjay, in 1946.

That year Nehru became Prime Minister of a provisional Government as a prelude to full Indian independence, and Mrs. Gandhi became his official hostess. He enjoyed parties and travel; Mrs. Gandhi was dutiful, almost reluctant. Later, she recalled that she had disliked socialising and making small talk. "It took me a long time to get over this. But I had to learn to enjoy it, so I did." She also said later that she had "hated" serving as hostess and once confessed that the crowds, noise, conflict and lack of privacy that marked so much of her life evoked "considerable bitterness in me."

She was so constantly with her father that, in the recollection of one Indian journalist, few even noticed her. As she grew closer to her father, and his demands on her grew with his prominence, the Gandhi marriage crumbled and the couple began to live apart. Feroze Gandhi went on to become an outspoken member of Parliament; he died in 1960.

Pre-politics Life

Born on November 19, 1917 in Allahabad, Indira was the only daughter of Kamla and Jawaharlal Nehru. The latter was the first president of independent India and that was only the apogee of a life completely pervaded by the politics. Since the tender age, Indira was involved in the struggle for the independence of India to which each member of her family actively participated. Her grandparents, uncles (among which Vijay Lakshmi Pandit, first woman called to preside the UN) and parents, were cyclically halted for crimes against the British Empire, forcing her since that time to assume several responsibilities as housewife. It happened straight that in some occasions all the components of the family were arrested and she was the only one to be free. This already

happened at the age of 4 and in the decade that followed, it was a rather frequent eventuality. The hard treatment which her parents had received during the long periods of imprisonment, weakened notably the health of her mother that was forced to spend a long convalescence in Switzerland, accompanied by little Indira that she had just celebrated her eighth birthday. The distance from the native country and the studies in a Swiss college modified her vision of the world forever.

In fact, originating from a very rich family and culturally at the vanguard, she would have been able to abandon herself in the traditional reserve of the Indian women waiting for a good marriage that guaranteed her a prosperous future. Contrarily, spending the first years of the adolescence in a foreign nation allowed her to see the reality of her nation with the eyes of a detached observer, able to also see the defects and the problems, maintaining unchanged the homeland love transferred to her by her father. Re-entered in India, she became active in the guerrilla against English already at the age of 11.

She founded the Monkey Brigade, a formation constituted entirely by kids that was inspired to the Monkey army of the Monkey epic Indian poem Ramayana. Composed by more than 6,000 members, the movement had active role in the struggle for the independence furnishing an accurate and sure service of transmission of the communications among the delegates of the movements for freedom and attaching with impunity some English barracks. As she remembered, in this first part of her life it was of enormous importance the proximity of her father and the Mahatma Gandhi who didn't ever exclude her either from the political discussions either from the active participation in the actions of protest and struggle.

About this, she said: "... my choices had been influenced by them, from the spirit of equality that they infused in me; my obsession for justice comes from my father that had received it from the Mahatma Gandhi. However, it is not correct to say that my father influenced me more than the others..... they were all to do it, it was everything to do it...." The strong relationship with her father, already deeply clear from the letters that he wrote from the jail during the time of the Monkey Brigade, then collected in

two books become famous, it had been increased from the premature death of her mother (1934) due to a cancer. The sudden lack of the maternal figure upset for a long time Indira that until the beginning of World War 2 was disinterested in the political life, entirely devoting herself to the superior studies, graduating first to the Vishva-Bharati University, in the state of the Bengal, for then continuing abroad her own studies at the Sommersville College in Oxford, Great Britain.

An Inescapable Calling

Despite her shyness, and the fact that most politicians, diplomats and journalists viewed her only as Nehru's daughter, Mrs. Gandhi felt almost obligated to play a political role in India. "She knew that politics was something she could not escape," a friend said in 1966, when Mrs. Gandhi first became Prime Minister. "As a Nehru, she felt it was her destiny. She feels her background gives her a mission she must carry out."

As her father's confidante and companion, Mrs. Gandhi travelled at his side abroad and at home and became a familiar, if somewhat diffident, figure to millions of Indians. Her first step towards national stature was in 1955, when she was elected to the 21-member Congress Party working committee. It was a small step, and she remained withdrawn and self-conscious, but it marked her first move towards an independent political identity.

Four years later, she was named president of the party, obviously because she was the daughter of Nehru, then at the peak of his power. Yet she herself, then 42 years old, was beginning to emerge as a favourite of the impatient younger members of the party, which was dominated by aging men linked only by the bond of having fought together against the British during India's long struggle for independence.

Signs of Toughness

During her 11 months as president, she began to display toughness and political assertiveness. She was influential in the ouster of the Communist government in the southern state of Kerala. Six months later, in state elections, she shocked many moderate supporters when she successfully allied Congress with the Muslim League, a sectarian group abhorred by Congress's leaders.

Despite her success, she turned down the offer of another term, partly because of concern about her father's health and partly because she realised that she was not yet senior enough to run the party as she wanted. In May 1964 Nehru died of a stroke. Mrs. Gandhi went into a period of silent withdrawal for weeks, tending to burst into tears whenever a friend tried to offer condolences. Lal Bahadur Shastri, the new Prime Minister, offered Mrs. Gandhi a Cabinet post; she chose the relatively unprestigious job of Minister of Information and Broadcasting and did a lackluster job.

But in 1966, when Mr. Shastri died suddenly, the Congress Party's leaders chose Mrs. Gandhi as Prime Minister. There were two key reasons: First, they felt that she would be pliable, and second, they wished to avoid the obvious choice, Morarji R. Desai, whose career would be intertwined with that of Mrs. Gandhi years later.

A Politically Charged Childhood

Born on 19th November 1917, in Allahabad, she was greatly loved by her parents and her grandfather Motilal Nehru, who was a famous lawyer, and a public figure in his own right. Her father had joined the freedom struggle, so little Indira, or Priyadarshani as she was lovingly called, was exposed to politics from the age of 3 or 4 years. Her house was the centre of political activity, as all the important leaders stayed there on visiting Allahabad. Mahatma Gandhi was a frequent visitor to her father's residence and she was greatly affected by his thinking.

A visit to the Sabarmati Ashram left an indelible mark on her psyche and she was impressed by the simple, hard life and patriotic feelings that she witnessed there. She passed her Metric from Pune University and was then sent on to Shantiniketan, formed by Rabindranath Tagore. Here she was made to lead a strict highly disciplined life. From here she went on to study in Switzerland and then to Oxford University in London.

Sad Demise of Mother Kamala

On 20 April 1935, when Indira returned after spending 10 months in Shantiniketan, Rabindranath Tagore wrote a letter to Jawaharlal Nehru with a heavy heart:

"Dear Jawahar,

Our heart is very heavy today because Indira is leaving us and coming to you. Shantiniketan needed her very much. How much she was needed here, I cannot tell you. You have raised her with a lot of love and affection. I praise it wholeheartedly. She was very popular among the students here. I hope that when the situation is amenable, you will send her here again, so that she can complete her studies here."

But, Indira could not return to Shantiniketan. The circumstances were not amenable.

It was the month of May.

Her mother was seriously ill. Her body was reduced to a skeleton. She was suffering from tuberculosis. Indira took her mother to Europe in the month of May so that she could get better treatment there. The circumstances did not permit Jawaharlal Nehru to go with them.

At that time, the situation in the country was extremely volatile. Jawaharlal was in jail most of the time. He was not given the opportunity to look after his sick wife even.

The drama of the Round Table Conference had failed.

Mahatma Gandhi had been imprisoned as soon as he set foot on the Indian soil.

Jawaharlal Nehru was busy in writing his autobiography in the jail and there in Anand Bhavan his wife was on her deathbed. Now, the pomp and dazzle of Anand Bhavan did not exist any longer. When the people who had lived in Anand Bhavan did not remain there any longer, then how could Anand Bhavan remain the joyous place that it once was. When his wife's condition deteriorated, Jawaharlal asked his daughter to return to Allahabad.

Indira left her studies midway and came there.

Indira took her mother with her and set off alone on her journey. Indira served her mother very well. But, her mother's condition continued to deteriorate. It was natural for Indira to get worried. On one hand, her father was in jail and, on the other

hand, her mother was on her deathbed. Indira who was all alone was not able to understand what to do. Her mother's condition did not improve. Her father could not cross the high wall that had been made in his path by the colonialists, to be with his wife and daughter.

Then, suddenly Jawaharlal Nehru was released from the jail. The government had come to know that his wife was on her deathbed. Only one month was left for his jail sentence to be over. But, the government released him one month before to give proof of then 'great generosity, so that he would not be denied the chance to meet his sick wife before her death.

In those days, Indira was staying with her mother in the Black Forest town of Germany. After being released from the Garhwal jail, Jawaharlal Nehru straightaway reached there.

Kamala, who was lying on the sick bed, welcomed her husband with a wan smile.

But, in spite of her Papu coming there, her mother's condition did not improve. When her mother's condition began to deteriorate further, her father took her to Switzerland. Here, her mother's condition improved a little bit. Indira took admission in a nearby school there and Papu bought a typewriter and got busy in his literary activities.

Lessons in Politics

Due to his political preoccupations, Jawaharlal Nehru was not able to pay enough attention to little Indira. But, still a definite plan had been chalked in his mind about Indira, He wanted to make Indira a scholar, a farsighted and an enthusiastic person and he made efforts to accomplish this dream of his. He used to love his daughter very much. All the time, the picture of his daughter used to remain in front of his eyes. But, there was discipline also in this love. Jawaharlal Nehru wanted to raise his daughter with a mixture of love and discipline.

He did not have any son, A son was born to him, but he died at birth. So, he used to consider Indira as his son and wanted to mould her according to his dreams. What Jawaharlal Nehru had dreamt of her, Indira accomplished that. She became a scholar, a farsighted and an enthusiastic person. With these three qualities

as her foundation stones, Indira carved out such great achievements that her name would be remembered for centuries to come.

Indira was still young when Jawaharlal Nehru was active in the political arena. Most of his time was spent in jails. Indira reacted very strongly to these jail journeys of her father.

Although Jawaharlal had dedicated his entire life to, the nation, still he had not forgotten his duty towards his daughter. Wherever possible, he would give Indira some teachings about life. Whenever he was in jail, he would try not to let Indira feel his absence. He used to write educative letters to Indira from the jail so that she would gain knowledge about the high principles of life. These letters written by Jawaharlal Nehru were not mere letters, but treasure trove of education, science, and history. These letters had a unique importance. Indira assimilated the lessons given in these letters into her life. The importance of these letters is still undiminished. These letters are collected in a book called '*Glimpses of World History*'. Besides this, they are also collected separately in a book titled '*Letters from a Father to a Daughter*'. Jawaharlal Nehru had a great love for books. He often used to give Indira books of high quality to read. On Indira's birthday, he used to give her only books as gifts. On the New Year's Eve in 1935, he was in jail in Almora, He sent Indira a book titled '*Science of Living*' with the hope that after reading this, Indira would learn the art of living life in a magnificent way.

That child, who has been given the gift in childhood of witnessing a mature political atmosphere and has been given lessons in her childhood about living a life of sightedness and determination, can never ever allow any biased feeling to come into her life.

Reading of these books had a very good effect on Indira. The letters that her father wrote to her had an even better effect on her. On reading these letters, the pictures of our ancient civilization and the progress of the human beings would come before her eyes. She would feel a sense of pride and respect for the ancient civilisation of her country.

Whenever Jawaharlal Nehru was at home, he would tell Indira the stories of brave and scholarly people. Sometimes, he would

tell her the story of Queen of Jhansi and sometimes he would tell her the story of Joan of Arc, The story of Joan of Arc influenced Indira deeply. The story of that brave woman stirred Indira's heart. How brave was that woman who gave up her life by being burnt to death but freed her country from captivity! On hearing the painful but inspiring story of Joan of Arc, little Indira decided then and there, "Papaji! I will become Joan of Arc." Jawaharlal Nehru was very happy on hearing Indira's words and kissed her on her forehead.

Like her father, her mother, Kamala, also paid a Lot of attention to the upbringing of her daughter. Kamala used to remain sick since the beginning, but she never shirked from her duties towards her daughter. Although Kamala was weak physically, she was very strong mentally. Indira was very deeply influenced by her mother's personality. Her mother was soft-spoken, cheerful and determined and these qualities of her mother had a lot of influence on Indira, Like her mother, she used to love truth and hate lies and deceit.

Besides her soft-spokenness, simplicity of living, kindness, and sweetness, she also inherited shyness and modesty from her mother.

Her father, Jawahar, was very worried about Indira's studies. But, he was not in favour of giving her an old-fashioned and orthodox education. He was fully aware that the present education system inspired people to remain slaves mentally. The whole education structure was made by the British officers and the British educationists, and it taught the Indian citizens to be loyal to the British government The influence of the Britishers could be seen clearly on the Indian educational institutions. Nehru did not want to send, his daughter to any such school where she would lag behind mentally.

Indira had gone on a tour of Sri Lanka with her 'Papu' (Indira used to call her father 'Papu' lovingly) and her mother When they returned from the tour, her parents began to worry again about Indira's studies. Here, the political life of Anand Bhavan had become more eventful. Motilal Nehru had died.

The foreign government had become more cruel. The struggle was showing the signs of becoming fiercer. Jawaharlal knew that

one day Indira would also have to jump into this struggle, so she should acquire all qualifications for this soon. The biggest requirement for her now was of a regular education. Jawaharlal used to teach his daughter as much as was possible for him, But, his own life was a path strewn with thorns, so it was not possible for him to teach Indira regularly.

After Motilal Nehru's death, every work in Anand Bhavan was carried out with Mahatma Gandhi's advice. Mahatma Gandhi advised Jawaharlal Nehru to send Indira to a school where she would be given nationalistic as well as humanistic education. On his suggestion, Nehru sent his daughter to a school in Poona, which was being run by a patriotic couple. This was a school for girls only.

Monkey Brigade

After a one-year stay, the Swiss doctors allowed Kamala's return to India, In 1927, when Indira was ten years old, she and her parents sailed home to India, Before going to Prayagraj, they went to Madras to attend a session of the Indian National Congress. Motilal was president of the Congress, and it was very important that the family show their support Besides, Jawaharlal had been out of the country for a year, and he missed being in the thick of political activity.

Upon arriving home, Indira was promptly enrolled in St. Mary's Convent School in Prayagraj. She was very unhappy there and felt that consequently she didn't learn very much. The English teachers frequently scolded the students and seemed to single out Indira for frequent criticism. While she attended school, Indira was also being tutored at home in Hindi, the language of India and Hinduism, the major religion of her country.

Indira's father was once again in prison, and this time the police had physically abused him. He had been leading a demonstration when a police officer on horseback, carrying a six-foot metal-tipped pole, began beating Jawaharlal and the other demonstrators.

Although Indira was only twelve, she wanted desperately to join the Congress Party with her parents. Members had to be

eighteen years old, however. Indira invented a solution to her problem with Vanar Sena or the "Monkey Brigade," Indira's choice of a name was derived from a story in the Indian epic poem *Ramayana*, a story most Indian children knew. In this story, an army of monkeys helped Rama, the hero, conquer Ravan, the demon-King of Lanka. Indira probably likened the demon-King to the British rulers and the army of monkeys to the Monkey Brigade.

More than one thousand children attended the first meeting of the Monkey Brigade. At first, Kamala and Jawaharlal were amused by Indira's attempt to take part in the country's political life. Before long, however, they realised that these children could serve an important function in the fight for in-dependence. The Monkey Brigade sewed and hung national flags, brought food and drink to people who marched or attended rallies, wrote letters for prisoners who didn't know how to write, and gave first aid to Congress volunteers injured by police brutality.

One of the young people who got involved with Indira and her political activities was a young man named Feroze Gandhi. (Feroze was not related to Mohandas Gandhi. Gandhi is a common name in India). Feroze and Indira became very close friends. He was as passionate about the freedom movement as Indira, and this was their major bond. Most members of the Nehru family liked Feroze, and he became a frequent and welcome visitor at Anand Bhavan. In 1929, Indira's father was elected president of the Indian Congress, One of Jawaharlal's first acts as president was to draft a resolution proclaiming that *purna swaraj*, or complete independence, was the goal of the Congress and the people of India.

In April 1930, Mohandas Gandhi led another peaceful demonstration. The British had enacted salt laws in India, forbidding citizens from extracting salt from sea water. If the Indian people wanted salt, they had to purchase it from government agencies. On March 12, Gandhi began a twenty-three-day march to the small seacoast village of Dandi. On April 6, Gandhi, along with thousands of followers, spent the night in prayer. In the morning, he led the multitude into the sea and, in total disregard for the law, began to collect salt-water in evaporation pans. Gandhi and thousands of others were arrested in a bloody confrontation with the police, Jawaharlal was arrested in April and Motilal in June for their part in the salt protest.

Indira had left St. Mary's by this time, and she spent her time educating herself by reading. She had always been a voracious reader and sometimes got so absorbed in her books that she would forget to eat. The library at Anand Bhavan boasted a collection of nearly six thousand books, and her father was constantly adding new ones. Before visiting him in prison, she would often write him a letter, asking him to have a new list of books ready for her.

When Indira wasn't reading or working in the Monkey Brigade, she was running. Jawaharlal taught her that exercise was the way to keep both body and mind healthy. This practice probably helped Indira remain strong and centered during difficult situations, such as having family members imprisoned,

Indira was somewhat used to her father and grandfather spending time in prison, but on New Year's Day in 1931, she was forced to deal with an exceptionally difficult situation, Indira's family was having dinner when the phone rang. Indira gave her account of the event: "I went to take it and it was a warning; they just said that Mrs. Nehru would be arrested the next morning. Before I could reply they put down the phone and we didn't find out who called. I went and told her. She said a lot had to be done before her arrest. She called a meeting of prominent Congress workers and in the meantime, she asked me to pack for her. Since she thought the house might also be searched, we had to get rid of certain papers... She was arrested at about 5 A.M."

Entry in Congress

She was imprisoned for 13 months in 1942 by the British. In that year she married Feroze Gandhi, a journalist; they had two sons, Rajiv and Sanjay. Indira, however, remained with her father, who became Prime Minister after independence, and acted as his hostess and close supporter from 1947 to 1964. Under Gandhi's instructions she worked in the riot-affected areas of Delhi in 1947. Associated with numerous organisations, she was Chairman of the Central Social Welfare Board (1953-7), member of the Working Committee and Central Election Committee from 1955 and the Central Parliamentary Board from 1956, and President of the All India Youth Congress from 1956 to 1960. On Nehru's death in

1964 she was elected to Parliament in his place. After acting as Minister of Information and Broadcasting (1964-6), Indira Gandhi became Prime Minister on the death of Lal Shastri in 1966, having toured India, drawing enormous crowds in her campaign,. In 1971 he called a general election to seek public support and won by an enormous margin.

When She Finally Joined Indian National Congress

Something she always longed to do. Soon afterwards in 1942, she married journalist Feroze Gandhi to whom she eventually bore two sons. Soon after the couple was married, they were sent to prison on charges of subversion by the British. Her first and only imprisonment lasted from September 11, 1942 until May 13, 1943 at the Naini Central Jail in Allahabad. Fortunately, India won its independence from Britain in 1947. In that same year, Indira's father Jawaharlal Nehru became Prime Minister. Since her mother had died in 1936, Later in 1959, Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri appointed Indira Gandhi as minister of information and broadcasting. This position was the fourth highest ranking position in the Cabinet As minister, she most importantly encouraged the making of inexpensive radios and started a family planning programme.

A Young Woman in a Turbulent World

Jawaharlal was finally released from prison in September 1933. He immediately travelled to Poona to see Gandhi and Indira. The children at the school liked Nehru and were impressed that they were sitting with one of the most prominent Indian leaders of their country. Jawaharlal told stories to the children and helped devise small toys for them. When he left after a week, Indira was sad to see him go.

Later that year, when Indira was sixteen years old, she graduated from the Poona school and continued her education at Shantiniketan, an informal university located in Bengal. The school was founded by Rabindranath Tagore, a philosopher, poet, and mystic who had won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913. Before Indira left for her first semester at Shantiniketan, however, she travelled to Kashmir in north western India for the summer. Her mother, partially re-covered from her illness, and Mr. and Mrs.

Ranjit Pandit, Indira's aunt and uncle, travelled together. Mr. Pandit was a scholar, and he was in Kashmir conducting research for a book he was writing.

Indira accompanied her uncle to many ancient historic sites in Kashmir. She thought that Kashmir was the most beautiful place she had ever seen. After visiting Kashmir, Indira and Kamala went to Kolkata in eastern India to visit Jawaharlal in prison. They then went to the Ramakrishna Mission at Belur, near Kolkata. This was a Hindu ashram, and Indira and her mother spent many days peacefully sitting by the river and focusing on their own thoughts.

Indira made an important decision at the mission. Her friend, Feroze, had asked her to marry him. She had told him that she would give him her answer before she left for school. Staying at the ashram gave Indira the opportunity to put her thoughts and feelings in order, and she made a decision. She would tell Feroze no.

The school at Shantiniketan was somewhat familiar to Indira because the school in Poona had been modelled on Tagore's school. The administrators of the school were surprised that Indira, who came from a wealthy family, could so easily adapt to the somewhat simple life of the school. But her stay at Poona had prepared her for Shantiniketan.

The students arose at four o'clock in the morning; washed their clothes and cleaned their rooms. Tagore took an intense interest in how his school was run, and he was always there, watching the children and guiding their lives.

Indira found companionship at Shantiniketan with students her own age. This was a new experience for her, and she revealed in the emotional and intellectual communication she shared with her peers. She continued to read extensively, but she found that she suddenly took equal delight in other activities, such as Indian classical dancing and painting. However, one of the most important aspects of Shantiniketan, at least for Indira, was the peacefulness and tranquillity that the school encouraged.

The students started and ended each day with silent meditation. Silence was kept whenever possible, broken only by the sweet, melodious singing of Tagore's poems in Bengali, one of the loveliest Indian languages, or the delightful sounds of forest

birds in the garden. This tranquil atmosphere was such a healthy change for Indira that she remarked, "I seemed suddenly to have landed in another world."

A few months after Indira began her studies at Shantiniketan, her mother again became very ill and was sent to the Bhowali Sanatorium in the Himalaya Mountains. In 1935, Kamala's health had deteriorated so severely that Indira was asked to accompany her mother to Europe for a cure. Kamala travelled to Lausanne, Switzerland, where she died on February 28, 1936. A sorrowful Jawaharlal, who had been re-released from prison, was at Kamala's side.

The death of her mother was a severe blow for Indira. It had been only five years since her grandfather had died. Indira felt alone in the world. Her mother and grandfather were dead, and she never knew when her father would be re-turned to prison. The question of her future and her continuing education was one that both she and her father discussed at length, but in the end, Indira made the final decision. She would go to England. Both her grandfather and father had received an excellent education in England, and Indira knew that Feroze was studying at the London School of Economics.

In 1937 Indira passed the entrance exam for Somerville College at Oxford. There she took courses in history, public and social administration, and anthropology. As was her habit, Indira also read widely about other subjects such as art, archaeology, architecture, and comparative religions. She joined the student wing of the British Labour Party, which encouraged students to become active in politics.

A Rebel for the Cause

An March 1941, when twenty-four-year-old Indira arrived in Mumbai on the west coast of India, no family members were there to greet her, no well-wishers happy for her safe return. Her father was once again in prison, along with many other Indians.

World War II was raging throughout Europe and Asia, but the Indians seemed almost oblivious to what was happening outside their own country. Their only focus was independence, and the problems of the rest of the world didn't concern them.

One highlight brightened Indira's return, however. Gandhi had wired her in Mumbai requesting that Indira go to see him. Indira travelled to Sevagram in Prayagraj. Gandhi's ashram. After the somewhat mild temperatures in Europe, Indira felt suffocated by the intense heat. Moreover, when she arrived at the ashram, Indira was astonished and annoyed by the chaos and upheaval surrounding a man who the country beheld as a peacemaker. The turbulence, however, was not caused by Gandhi, but by his followers.

They were all fighting over who would carry his food to him, who would serve him, who would clean for him and do his washing, who would sit where when he was talking, and so on. Indira finally got tired of the petty quarrels and travelled to Dehradun to see her father in prison. He told her that he was going to be released in a few days, and she told him that she had to discuss something of great importance when he finally returned home. She was going to announce her intention to get married.

When she finally told Jawaharlal about her plans, Indira was disappointed that her news was not met with the usual excitement that most announcements of this kind would elicit. Jawaharlal was not unhappy that Indira wanted to marry, but that she wanted to marry Feroze.

Although the Nehru family had known and liked Feroze for many years, they felt that he was not a fit candidate for Indira. The Nehrus were Brahmans, the highest of the Indian castes, and they were Hindus. (Feroze's family were Parsis, a small religious sect that originally came to India from Persia — and therefore are not considered "true" Indians). Feroze was proud of his lower-middle-class background, but the Nehrus were aristocrats. Jawaharlal's objections to his daughter's marriage were based more on class considerations than on religious grounds.

Politically Active

Shortly after her wedding Gandhi was jailed for nine months, an event she described as being crucial in her life. Following her release she became increasingly involved in politics. During this time she also gave birth to two sons, Rajiv and Sanjay. When India achieved independence in 1947, Gandhi's father became the nation's first Prime Minister. Because Nehru was a widower he

needed Gandhi to act as hostess at official government functions. Gradually she and her husband drifted apart and although they were never divorced they lived separately until his death in 1960. Gandhi lived in Nehru's shadow for years, but she eventually began to speak out during her own campaigns and at functions her father could not attend. By 1959 she was president of the India National Congress. Influenced by Nehru's socialist leanings, she brought a fresh perspective to the party and sought to increase women's participation in politics.

Rise to Power

During 1959 and 1960, Gandhi ran for and was elected the President of the Indian National Congress. Her term of office was uneventful. She also acted as her father's chief of staff. Nehru was known as a vocal opponent of nepotism, and she did not contest a seat in the 1962 elections.

Nehru died on May 24, 1964, and Gandhi, at the urgings of the new Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri, contested elections and joined the Government, being immediately appointed Minister for Information and Broadcasting. She went to Madras when the riots over Hindi becoming the national language broke out in non-Hindi speaking states of the south. There she spoke to government officials, soothed the anger of community leaders and supervised reconstruction efforts for the affected areas. Shastri and senior Ministers were embarrassed, owing to their lack of such initiative. Minister Gandhi's actions were probably not directly aimed at Shastri or her own political elevation. She reportedly lacked interest in the day-to-day functioning of her Ministry, but was media-savvy and adept at the art of politics and image-making.

When the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965 broke out, Gandhi was vacationing in the border region of Srinagar. Although warned by the Army that Pakistani insurgents had penetrated very close to the city, she refused to relocate to Jammu or Delhi. She rallied local government and welcomed media attention, in effect reassuring the nation. Shastri died in Tashkent, hours after signing the peace agreement with Pakistan's Ayyub Khan, mediated by the Soviets.

Shastri had been a candidate of consensus, bridging the left-right gap and staving off the popular conservative Morarji Desai. Gandhi was the candidate of the 'Syndicate', regional power brokers of immense influence, who thought that she would be easily led. Searching for explanations for this disastrous miscalculation many years later, the then Congress President K. Kamaraj made the strange claim that he had made a personal vow to Nehru to make Gandhi Prime Minister 'at any cost'.

With the backing of the Syndicate, in a vote of the Congress Parliamentary Party, Gandhi beat Morarji Desai by 355 votes to 169 to become the fifth Prime Minister of India and the first woman to hold that position.

Independence of the Nation

On August 15, 1947, Great Britain released their control over India and the Indian Empire was quickly divided into two countries, today known as India and Pakistan. No longer under British control, India erupted into violence. Thousands of members of rival religious groups, the Hindus and the Muslims, were killed during riots. During this time Indira served as her father's hostess and housekeeper. Since her father had never remarried after his wife's death in 1936, Indira took charge of her father's large mansion and began helping him in political matters. Together they worked towards peace, arranging a meeting of Hindu and Muslim religious leaders in New Dehli, India.

Throughout the period of Indira Gandhi's political association with her father, she focused on social welfare work, particularly children's welfare. The Indian National Congress had led the country to freedom and had then become its major political party. She had joined the Congress in 1938, and later served as a member of its Youth Advisory Board and chairman of its Woman's Department. Prior to assuming the presidency of the organisation in 1959, Gandhi was named to its twenty-one-member executive Working Committee.

She was elected with more votes than any other candidate to the powerful eleven-member Central Election Board, which named candidates and planned electoral strategy.

President of the Indian National Congress

During 1959 and 1960, Gandhi ran for and was elected the President of the Indian National Congress. Her term of office was uneventful. She also acted as her father's chief of staff. Nehru was known as a vocal opponent of nepotism, and she did not contest a seat in the 1962 elections. Nehru died on May 27, 1964, and Gandhi, at the urgings of the new Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri, contested elections and joined the Government, being immediately appointed Minister for Information and Broadcasting. She went to Madras when the riots over Hindi becoming the national language broke out in non-Hindi speaking states of the south. There she spoke to government officials, soothed the anger of community leaders and supervised reconstruction efforts for the affected areas. Shastri and senior Ministers were embarrassed, owing to their lack of such initiative.

Minister Gandhi's actions were probably not directly aimed at Shastri or her own political elevation. She reportedly lacked interest in the day-to-day functioning of her Ministry, but was media-savvy and adept at the art of politics and image-making. During the succession struggles after 1965 between Mrs. Gandhi and her rivals, the central Congress [party] leadership in several states moved to displace upper caste leaders from state Congress [party] organisations and replace them with backward caste persons and to mobilise the votes of the latter castes to defeat its rivals in the state Congress [party] and in the opposition.

The consequences of these interventions, some of which may justly be perceived as socially progressive, have nevertheless often had the consequences of intensifying inter-ethnic regional conflicts...When the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965 broke out, Gandhi was vacationing in the border region of Srinagar. Although warned by the Army that Pakistani insurgents had penetrated very close to the city, she refused to relocate to Jammu or Delhi. She rallied local government and welcomed media attention, in effect reassuring the nation.

Shastri died in Tashkent, hours after signing the peace agreement with Pakistan's Ayyub Khan, mediated by the Soviets. The then Congress Party President K. Kamaraj was instrumental

and supportive in making Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister, despite the opposition from Morarji Desai who was later defeated by the members of the Congress Parliamentary Party, where Indira Gandhi beat Morarji Desai by 355 votes to 169 to become the fourth Prime Minister of India and the first woman to hold that position.

A Government Divided

Gandhi immediately set about reorganising the party to make it a more effective instrument of administration and national development. Her goal was to achieve a wider measure of social and economic justice for all Indians. As her left-of-centre policies (slightly liberal, or supporting civil liberties and social progress) became clear, the Congress Party split, with the younger, more liberal elements rallying around Gandhi and the older, more conservative party leaders opposing her.

This division came to a head in July 1969 when she nationalised (brought under the control of government) the country's fourteen leading banks in a highly popular move meant to make credit more available to agriculture and to small industry.

The split was formalised when Gandhi's candidate for the presidency of India, V. V. Giri, won over the party's official nominee. Although Gandhi took 228 members of Parliament with her into the New Congress, this was not a majority in the 521-member house, and she held power only with support from more liberal parties.

In December 1970, when Gandhi failed to get the necessary support to abolish, or end, the privileges of the former Indian Princes, she called on the president to dissolve Parliament. Midterm elections were set for March 1971, one full year ahead of schedule.

A coalition, or alliance, of three parties of the right and an anti-Congress socialist party opposed Gandhi, who made alliances with liberal parties as well as some regional parties. Her platform was essentially one of achieving social and economic change more rapidly in an effort to improve the quality of life of India's people. Her party won a massive victory with over a two-thirds majority in Parliament.

Political Career

During 1959 and 1960, Gandhi ran for and was elected the President of the Indian National Congress. Her term of office was eventful. She also acted as her father's chief of staff. Nehru was known as a vocal opponent of nepotism, and she did not contest a seat in the 1962 elections.

After the death of Jawaharlal Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri became Prime Minister and at the urgings of the new Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri, Indira Gandhi contested election and joined the Government, being immediately appointed Minister for Information and Broadcasting. She went to Madras when the riots over Hindi becoming the national language broke out in non-Hindi speaking states of the south. There she spoke to government officials, soothed the anger of community leaders and supervised reconstruction efforts for the affected areas. Shastri and senior Ministers were embarrassed, owing to their lack of such initiative. Minister Gandhi's actions were probably not directly aimed at Shastri or her own political elevation. She reportedly lacked interest in the day-to-day functioning of her Ministry, but was media-savvy and adept at the art of politics and image-making.

While the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965 was ongoing, Mrs. Gandhi was vacationing in the border region of Srinagar. Although warned by the army that Pakistani insurgents had penetrated very close to the city, she refused to relocate to Jammu or Delhi and instead rallied local government and welcomed the media attention. Shastri died in Tashkent, hours after signing the peace agreement with Pakistan's Ayub Khan, mediated by the Soviets.

After Lal Bahadur Shastri's untimely death in 1966, she was selected as prime minister by party bosses within the Congress Party as a compromise candidate. Her candidature was opposed by Morarji Desai, a veteran nationalist and prime ministerial aspirant himself. The Congress bosses were apparently looking for a leading figure acceptable to the masses, who could not only command general support during the next general election but who would also acquiesce to their guidance.

The Congress Party President K. Kamaraj was then instrumental in making Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister, despite

the opposition from Morarji Desai who was later defeated by the members of the Congress Parliamentary Party, where Indira Gandhi beat Morarji Desai by 355 votes to 169 to become the fourth Prime Minister of India and the first woman to hold that position.

In her initial days as Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi encountered numerous problems such as Mizo tribal uprisings in the northeast; famine, labour unrest, and misery among the poor in the wake of rupee devaluation; and agitation in Punjab for linguistic and religious separatism.

In the fourth general elections held in 1967, Congress suffered a major setback. Congress majority was greatly reduced in Parliament and non-Congress ministries were established in Bihar, Kerala, Orissa, Madras, Punjab, and West Bengal. This forced Mrs. Indira Gandhi to become assertive and opt for a series of choices that pitted her directly against the Congress Party high command, which had previously been built up by her father. Seeking to eradicate poverty, Mrs. Gandhi pursued a vigorous policy in 1969 of land reform and placed a ceiling on personal income, private property, and corporate profits. She also nationalised the major banks, a bold step amidst a growing rift between herself and the party elders. The Congress expelled her for “indiscipline” on November 12, 1969, an action that split the party into two factions: the Congress (O)-for Organisation led by Nijalingappa and the Congress (I)—for Indira-led by Indira Gandhi.

Indira Gandhi campaigned fiercely on the slogan of “Garibi Hatao” (eliminate poverty) during the fifth general elections in March 1971 and won an unprecedented two-third majority. Her leadership qualities came to the fore during India-Pakistan war in 1971 that resulted in liberation of Bangladesh. India achieved decisive victory over Pakistan in the face of diplomatic opposition from both China and the United States and a lack of international support from almost every other nation except the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc countries. Indian victory over Pakistan led to a great surge in Indira Gandhi’s popularity and she was compared to Goddess Durga by common people.

Expectations raised by the Garibi Hatao campaign and India’s victory over Pakistan in 1971 led to great disappointment and

political difficulties in the mid-1970s. Enormous economic cost of 1971 war, increase in world oil prices and, drop in industrial output added to the economic hardships. During this time Jaya Prakash Narayan initiated a civil disobedience movement against Indira Gandhi. In June 1975, amidst all this crises Allahabad High Court invalidated her 1971 election on the grounds of alleged electoral malpractices. Instead of resigning, Indira Gandhi declared an Emergency in the country and jailed all her political opponents. The Emergency lasted till March 1977 and in the general election held afterwards she was defeated by a coalition of parties called Janta Party.

Factionalism among coalition partners led to the collapse of Janta government and Indira Gandhi came back to the power once again in 1980. But her second innings was beset with difficulties and personal tragedies. Her younger son Sanjay Gandhi died in an air crash. Her government was confronted with serious challenges to its ability to maintain law and order as conflicts between religious and ethnic groups broke out in different parts of the country. After the army had invaded the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the chief shrine of the Sikhs, which had been held as an armed camp by a group of militant Sikhs, she became the target for Sikh anger and on 31 October 1984 she was assassinated by her own Sikh bodyguards.

Major Triumphs

First Term

Domestic Policy and the 1971 War: When Mrs. Gandhi became Prime Minister in 1966 the Congress was split in two factions, the socialists led by Mrs. Gandhi, and the conservatives led by Morarji Desai. Morarji Desai called her "Gungi Gudiya" which means 'Dumb Doll'. The internal problems showed in the 1967 election where the Congress lost nearly 60 seats winning 297 seats in the 545 seat Lok Sabha. She had to accommodate Desai as Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister. In 1969 after many disagreements with Desai, the Indian National Congress split. She ruled with support from Socialist and Communist Parties for the next two years. In the same year, in July 1969 she nationalised banks. In

1971, to solve the Bangladeshi refugee problem, she declared war, on Pakistan, on the side of the East Pakistanis, who were fighting for their independence. During the 1971 War, the US under President Richard Nixon sent its Seventh Fleet to the Bay of Bengal as a warning to India keep away from East Pakistan as a pretext to launch a wider attack against West Pakistan, especially over the territory of Kashmir. This move had further alienated India from the First World, and Prime Minister Gandhi now accelerated a previously cautious new direction in national security and foreign policy. India and the USSR had earlier signed the Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Cooperation, resulting in political and military support contributing substantially to India's victory in the 1971 war.

Foreign Policy: She invited the new Pakistani President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to Shimla for a week-long summit. After the near-failure of the talks, the two heads of government eventually signed the Shimla Agreement, which bound the two countries to resolve the Kashmir dispute by negotiations and peaceful means. Due to her antipathy for Nixon, relations with the United States grew distant, while relations with the Soviet Union grew closer.

Indira Gandhi was criticised by some for not making the Line of Control a permanent border while a few critics even believed that Pakistan-administered Kashmir should have been extracted from Pakistan, whose 93,000 prisoners of war were under Indian control. But the agreement did remove immediate United Nations and third party interference, and greatly reduced the likelihood of Pakistan launching a major attack in the near future. By not demanding total capitulation on a sensitive issue from Bhutto, she had allowed Pakistan to stabilise and normalise. Trade relations were also normalised, though much contact remained frozen for years.

Devaluation of the Rupee: During the late-1960s, Indira's administration decreed a 40 per cent devaluation in the value of the Indian Rupee from 4 to 7 to the US Dollar to boost trade.

Nuclear Weapons Programme: A national nuclear programme, was started by Mrs. Gandhi, in 1967, which evolved from the nuclear threat from the People's Republic of China and the intrusive interest of the two major superpowers not conducive to India's

stability and security. In 1974, India successfully conducted an underground nuclear test, unofficially code named as smiling Buddha, near the desert village of Pokhran in Rajasthan. Describing the test as for peaceful purposes, India became the world's youngest nuclear power.

Green Revolution: Special agricultural innovation programmes and extra government support launched in the 1960s finally transformed India's chronic food shortages into surplus production of wheat, rice, cotton and milk. Rather than relying on food aid from the United States - headed by a President whom Mrs. Gandhi disliked considerably, the country became a food exporter. That achievement, along with the diversification of its commercial crop production, has become known as the Green Revolution. At the same time, the White Revolution was an expansion in milk production which helped to combat malnutrition, especially amidst young children. 'Food security', as the programme was called, was another source of support for Mrs. Gandhi in the years leading up to 1975. Established in the early-1960s, the Green Revolution was the unofficial name given to the Intense Agricultural District Programme (IADP) which sought to insure abundant, inexpensive grain for urban dwellers upon whose support Mrs. Gandhi — as indeed all politicians — heavily depended. The programme was based on four premises: 1) New varieties of seed(s), 2) Acceptance of the necessity of the chemicalisation of Indian agriculture, i.e. fertilizers, pesticides, weed killers, etc., 3) A commitment to national and international cooperative research to develop new and improved existing seed varieties, 4) The concept of developing a scientific, agricultural institutions in the form of land grant colleges. Lasting about ten years, the programme was ultimately to bring about a tripling of wheat production, a lower but still impressive increase of rice; while there was little to no increase (depending on area, and adjusted for population growth) of such cereals as millet, gram and coarse grain, though these did, in fact, retain a relatively stable yield.

Second Term (1971-1975)

1971 Poll Victory: Mrs. Gandhi's government faced major problems after her tremendous mandate of 1971. The internal structure of the Congress Party had withered following its

numerous splits, leaving it entirely dependent on her leadership for its election fortunes. Garibi Hatao (Stop Poverty) was the theme for Gandhi's 1971 bid. The slogan and the proposed anti-poverty programmes that came with it were designed to give Gandhi an independent national support, based on rural and urban poor. This would allow her to bypass the dominant rural castes both in and of state and local government; likewise the urban commercial class. And, for their part, the previously voiceless poor would at last gain both political worth and political weight.

The programmes created through Garibi Hatao, though carried out locally, were funded, developed, supervised, and staffed by New Delhi and the Indian National Congress party. "These programmes also provided the central political leadership with new and vast patronage resources to be disbursed... throughout the country." In the end, Garibi Hatao did little to help the poor: Only about 4 per cent of all funds allocated for economic development went to the three main anti-poverty programmes, and almost none of it ever reached the 'poorest of the poor'. So although the programme failed to stop poverty it achieved its goal of getting Gandhi elected.

Leaning towards Totalitarianism?: Gandhi had already been accused of authoritarianism. By using her strong parliamentary majority, her ruling Congress Party had amended the Constitution and altered the balance of power between the Centre and the States in favour of the Central Government. She had twice imposed President's Rule under Article 356 of the Constitution by declaring states ruled by opposition parties as "lawless and chaotic", and thus seizing control. In addition, elected officials and the administrative services resented the growing influence of Sanjay Gandhi, who had become Gandhi's close political adviser at the expense of men like P. N. Haksar, Gandhi's previous adviser during her rise to power. In response to her new tendency for stern use of power, public figures and former freedom-fighters like Jaya Prakash Narayan, Satyendra Narayan Sinha and Acharya Jivatram Kripalani toured India, speaking actively against her and her government.

Charges: On June 12, 1975 the High Court of Allahabad declared Indira Gandhi's election to the Lok Sabha void on grounds

of alleged malpractices in an election petition filed by Raj Narain (who had repeatedly contested her Parliamentary constituency of Rae Bareilly without success). The court thus ordered her to be removed from her seat in Parliament and banned from running in elections for six years. The Prime Minister must be a member of either the Lok Sabha (lower house in the Parliament of India) or the Rajya Sabha (the upper house of the Parliament). Thus, this decision could effectively remove her from office. When Mrs. Gandhi appealed the decision; the opposition parties and their supporters, eager to gain political capital from the situation, rallied *en masse* calling for her resignation. The sheer number of strikes by unions and protesters paralysed life in many states. To strengthen this movement, Jaya Prakash called upon the police to disobey orders if asked to fire on unarmed crowds. Public disenchantment with her government combined with hard economic times and huge crowds of protestors surrounded the Parliament building and her residence in Delhi, demanding her resignation.

State of Emergency (1975-1977): Mrs. Gandhi moved to restore order by ordering the arrest of most of the opposition leaders participating in the unrest. Her Cabinet and government then recommended that President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed declare a state of emergency, because of the disorder and lawlessness following the Allahabad High Court decision. Accordingly, Ahmed declared a State of Emergency caused by internal disorder, based on the provisions of Article 352 of the Constitution, on June 26, 1975.

Rule by Decree: Within a few months, President's Rule was imposed on the two opposition ruled states of Gujarat and Tamil Nadu thereby bringing the entire country under direct central rule. Police were granted powers to impose curfews and indefinitely detain citizens and all publications were subjected to substantial censorship by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Inder Kumar Gujral, a future prime minister himself, resigned as Minister for Information and Broadcasting to protest interference in his work. Finally, impending legislative assembly elections were indefinitely postponed, with all opposition-controlled state governments being removed by virtue of the constitutional provision allowing for a dismissal of a state

government on recommendation of the state's governor. Mrs. Gandhi used the emergency provisions to grant herself extraordinary powers. It was alleged that she further moved President Ahmed to issue ordinances that did not need to be debated in Parliament, allowing her to rule by decree. Simultaneously, Gandhi's government undertook a campaign to stamp out dissent including the arrest and detention of thousands of political activists; Sanjay was instrumental in initiating the clearing of slums around Delhi's Jama Masjid under the supervision of Jag Mohan, later Lt. Governor of Delhi, which allegedly left thousands of people homeless and hundreds killed, and led to communal embitterment in those parts of the capital; and the family planning programme which forcibly imposed vasectomy on thousands of fathers and was often poorly administered.

Third Term

In 1977, Mrs. Gandhi called elections. One factor was the economic gains, though there may have been political considerations at play. Mrs. Gandhi may have grossly misjudged her popularity by reading what the heavily censored press wrote about her, or may have feared a military coup had she attempted to rule by decree any longer (There were reports that the Armed Forces would forcibly remove her from power and hold elections). In any case, she was soundly defeated by the Janata Party, led by her long-time rival, Desai and with Jaya Prakash Narayan as its spiritual guide, who claimed the elections were the last chance for India to choose between "democracy and dictatorship." Indira and Sanjay Gandhi both lost their seats, and Congress was cut down to 153 seats (compared with 350 in the previous Lok Sabha), 92 of which were in the south.

Removal, Arrest, and Return: Desai became Prime Minister and Neelam Sanjiva Reddy became the President. Mrs. Gandhi found herself without work, or residence until winning a by-election in 1978. The Congress Party lost during the election campaign of 1977 the veteran Mrs. Gandhi supporters like Jagjivan Ram abandoning her for CFD. The Congress-I Party was now a much smaller group in Parliament, although the official opposition. Unable to govern owing to fractious coalition warfare, the Janata

government's Home Minister, Choudhary Charan Singh, ordered the arrest of Indira and Sanjay Gandhi on several charges, none of which would be easy to prove in an Indian court. The arrest meant that Indira was automatically expelled from Parliament. However, this strategy backfired disastrously. Her arrest and long-running trial, however, gained her great sympathy from many people who had feared her as a dictator just two years earlier.

The Janata coalition was only united by its hatred of Mrs. Gandhi. With so little in common, the government was bogged down by infighting and Mrs. Gandhi was able to use the situation to her advantage. She began giving speeches again, tacitly apologising for "mistakes" made during the Emergency.

Desai resigned in June 1979, and Charan Singh was appointed Prime Minister by Reddy after Mrs. Gandhi promised that Congress would support his government from outside. After a short interval, she withdrew her initial support and President Reddy dissolved Parliament in the winter of 1979.

In elections held the following January, Congress was returned to power with a landslide majority. Indira Gandhi was awarded the Lenin Peace Prize (for 1983-84).

Currency Crisis: During the early-1980s, Indira's administration failed to arrest the 40 per cent fall in the value of the Indian Rupee from 7 to 12 to the US Dollar.

Operation Blue Star: Mrs. Gandhi's later years were bedevilled with problems in Punjab. In September 1981, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale's separatist Sikh militant group took up positions within the precincts of the Golden Temple, Sikhism's holiest shrine. Despite the presence of thousands of civilians in the Golden Temple complex at the time Mrs. Gandhi ordered the army into the shrine in an attempt to clear it of the militants. Accounts differ in the number of military and civilian casualties. Government estimates include four officers, seventy-nine soldiers, and 492 militants; other accounts are much higher, perhaps 500 or more troops and 3,000 others, including many pilgrims caught in the crossfire. While the exact figures related to civilian casualties are disputed, the timing and method of the attack remain controversial.

Major Problems of Her Career

Gandhi faced major problems in the areas of food production, population control, land reform, regulation of prices, unemployment, and industrial production. The problems were increased by the arrival in India of almost ten million refugees, who were uprooted as a result of the civil unrest in East Pakistan.

In November 1971 Indian troops crossed into East Pakistan to fight Pakistani forces. A month later Gandhi announced recognition of the Bangladesh government set up by East Pakistani rebel leaders. On December 16 Pakistan's commander in East Pakistan surrendered to India.

In the state elections held in India in March 1972, Gandhi's New Congress Party scored the most overwhelming victory in the history of independent India. However, her opponent accused her of violating election laws, and a high court supported the charge in 1975.

Because of this development, as well as domestic unrest, Gandhi declared a state of emergency and postponed elections. In the 1977 elections Gandhi and her party suffered major defeats and Gandhi eventually lost her seat and the post of Prime Minister.

The following year Gandhi headed the Congress Party as she returned to Parliament. In 1979, she again became Prime Minister. In efforts to prove India's non-alliance in the global community, she visited both the United States and the USSR, the former Soviet Union, which consisted of Russia and several smaller states. Internally, riots broke out among Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh religious sects, or groups.

Sikhs, looking to separate themselves from India, secured weapons within their sacred Golden Temple in Amritsar, and assumed religious protection. Gandhi ordered government troops to storm the temple, leading to many Sikh deaths.

This led to her assassination at her residence on October 31, 1984, by her own Sikh security guards. In death, Gandhi remains a symbol of courage and democracy in one of the world's most populated countries.

Assassination

On October 31, 1984, Indira Gandhi was shot down while, walking from her house to her office. The fatal shooting was carried out by two men who were members of her personal bodyguard. The shooting marked an abrupt and tragic end to the lengthy political career of the lady, who was not only India's first female prime minister, but also the daughter of the very first prime minister of India. Her assassination was a great tragedy. The death of Prime Minister Mrs. Gandhi was followed by widespread rioting and other violence. Her son, Rajiv Gandhi, who took over after the death of his mother, performed the task of bringing calm to the rocked country.