

Great Indian Leaders

**Priyadarshini & Rajiv**

Our Dynamic Leaders





# Priyadarshini & Rajiv Our Dynamic Leaders

Editor : **Dr G.V Hari**  
Illustration: **Suresh Kumar**  
Design: **Bhattathiri**



**Jawahar Bal Manch**  
New Delhi

English

**Priyadarshini & Rajiv**  
**Our Dynamic Leaders**  
(Children's literature)

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# Preface

I am happy to present before you the third book in the series being brought out to familiarise the children about our heritage and the hardships faced by our predecessors in their fight for freedom and efforts for nation building. The present volume is about two of our vivacious leaders and former Prime Ministers - Indira Gandhi who masterminded the growth of our nation and Rajiv Gandhi who was instrumental in bringing in the latest technology which helped our nation to leap forward in a fast manner.

We are now enjoying the freedom in this democratic country because of the legendary fight against the British by our forefathers/ancestors. But sadly, we are slowly forgetting those who got us this freedom. Of late, we are witnessing wilful efforts to malign the leaders and the martyrs of the freedom struggle. These activities are not only an insult to the history of our country but also an injustice to the future generations.

We sincerely hope that these books will help in imparting

affection towards our mother land and fair understanding of our history and heritage among the children. Materials for further understanding will follow soon. Balmanch is the largest children's organisation having wide reach throughout the length and breadth of our country. Publishing similar literature in all Indian languages is in the anvil.

Wish you a useful and enjoyable reading, .

**Dr.G.V.Hari**  
Chairman  
Jawahar Bal Manch



# Indira Priyadarshini

1917 November 19 – 1984 October 31





One of the most remarkable women leaders in world history... one of the most powerful leaders India has seen... the first woman prime minister of India – Thus, Indira Gandhi holds a heroic place in the history of India.

Indira Priyadarshini was born during a significant period of Indian independence struggle. She was born on 19 November 1917 to Jawaharlal Nehru, who was at the forefront of the struggle and Kamala Nehru.

Being from a family that was constantly involved in the freedom struggle, Indira did not experience much closeness from her Jawaharlal Nehru or her grandfather Motilal Nehru. It can be said that she grew up alone with her mother Kamala Nehru, who was suffering from many illnesses.

It was her grandfather Motilal Nehru's wish that his grand daughter should get the best education available in India. So, Indira was sent to a British-run school St. Cecilia for her primary education.

However, there was a rule that the children of the Congress members should not study in schools run by the British Raj due to which Indira was unable to continue her education.

In 1933, by the time she completed her education from Pupils' Own school in Pune, Indira had studied in several schools.

## **Vanarsena under Congress**

Indira's desire to work with the Congress had to be put on hold due to her young age. But she set out to help the freedom struggle as best as she could. As part of this, Indira gathered students from nearby schools to form Baal Charka Group and Vanarasena. Their aim was to provide help to the Congress in small ways. It was this sena which passed on secret messages to the freedom fighters without the knowledge of the British.

It is also said that Vanarasena was Congress' own idea, knowing well that acting through children was a good way to work as it would not raise doubts among the British. Members of the vanarasena also did other works such as sewing flags and nursing wounded freedom fighters.

In 1936, Indira joined the Oxford University for her graduation. During this time, Kamala Nehru's health condition worsened. Although so much was done to save her life, she passed away on February 28. The demise of Indira's mother during her graduation studies shook her life.

## **In Quit India Movement**

In 1942, just before the Quit India Movement, Indira married Firoz, who was also a member of the Youth Congress. They soon got jailed for participating in the Quit India movement.



Indira gave birth to Rajiv Gandhi and Sanjay Gandhi in 1944 and 1946, respectively.

From 1947 to 1964, Indira worked unofficially as one of the top advisors of Jawaharlal Nehru . During his rule, Indira's influence was notable.

## **Into politics**

During 1959-60, Indira Gandhi was elected as the President of the Indian National Congress. It was thought that this would give an opportunity for her to be a part of the cabinet of ministers. But Jawaharlal Nehru, who was against nepotism in party politics did not induct her into his ministry. Indira utilised this opportunity to be Nehru's closest aide, allowing her to master all aspects of politics.

After the death of Jawaharlal Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri took Indira into his cabinet as a Union Minister. In 1966, after Lal Bahadur Shastri, Indira Gandhi became the fifth Prime Minister and the first woman Prime Minister of India.

Indira Gandhi served as India's Prime Minister from 1966 January to 1977 March and 1980 January to 1984 October. The brave decisions that Indira took as the Prime Minister landed her the title 'Iron lady' .

## **Eventful Life**

Indira's political career was very eventful. She was one among the few Indian Prime Ministers to be equally



admired and hated. Nationalisation of banks, strong stance on protecting religious interests, environment friendly actions such as silent valley national park.... Even though she was appreciated plenty of times during her tenure, she received much criticism for declaring emergency. In the political sphere, Indira was a presence such that she was much lauded by her supporters and much questioned by her opposers.

## India's first woman prime minister

India got its first woman prime minister 55 years back. The second Prime Minister from the Nehru family. After Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira served as the prime minister for the longest period. From 1966-77 and later from 1980 till her death, Indira served as the prime minister for a total of 4 tenures.

Indira realized that in a country with high illiteracy, radio and television were the best means for news to reach common people. She gave shape to a scheme that enabled to establish radio stations at a low cost. She knew exactly what would draw attention of the media and common people.

In 1965, when the India-Pakistan war broke out, Indira was on a holiday in Srinagar. In spite of security warning by the Army, she stayed in Srinagar itself. Following this incident, there was a joke that all ministers in the cabinet, except Indira, were women. Such small instances gave the message that Indira truly was a deserving leader. As the India-Pakistan peace discussions were progressing, Lal Bahadur Shastri died while in the Soviet Union. The demand for Indira to be the Prime Minister became even stronger at this point.

India went to war with Pakistan, with Indira supporting the independence of East Pakistan. As India won the war, in a way, she also became a reason for the formation of





Bangladesh. During her rule, India evolved into a powerful nation in the South Asia. India had grown considerably in economic, political and defense spheres.

### **Nationalisation of Banks**

One of the greatest achievements from Indira's political career worth mentioning is the nationalization of banks. 14 banks were nationalized during this period. People welcomed this decision owing to the exploitation by private banks.

Several reforms were brought in the banking sector. Investments increased by 800%, banks opened new branches in rural areas, Banks became accessible to the larger public. More than increasing the purchasing power of people, the investments made in various sectors paid off. Even Jayaprakash Narayan, who was the leader of Opposition appreciated Indira's move of Nationalisation.

## **Industry**

In 1971, when Indira came to power for the second term, this wave of nationalization spread to the industrial sector as well. Industries, such as, Iron, coal, and all were nationalized. The remaining private industries were all subjected to strict monitoring.

## **Bangladesh Liberation War**

The 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War was another event that added to Indira's fame and achievement.

The Pakistan army started the war by sending back Hindus from East Pakistan into India. India questioned this move of Pakistan at various international platforms, and eventually entered the Bangladesh Liberation War.

India imprisoned close to one lakh of Pakistani soldiers and liberated Bangladesh from Pakistan. Indian victory in the Bangladesh Liberation War strengthened Indira's support among the public. The people believed that India

was safe in Indira's hands. Post this war victory, the then leader of Opposition Atal Bihari Vajpayee compared Indira to Goddess Durga.

## **Smiling Buddha**

As far as India's Nuclear Programme was concerned, Indira followed in Jawaharlal Nehru's footsteps. Soon after China's Nuclear Testing, Indira approved the development of India's Nuclear weapons. Indira wanted to establish India's stability and security by being one of the Nuclear superpowers in the world.

In 1974, Dr. Raja Ramanna informed Indira Gandhi that India was ready to test Nuclear weapons. Thus, India successfully tested Nuclear weapons from the Pokhran desert range in Rajasthan.

This operation, which was called 'Smiling Buddha' did not invite much responses internationally, but a vehement protest came from Pakistan. Indira wrote a letter to the Pakistan Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and also to the world stating that the nuclear test was undertaken for peaceful purposes.



# The Green Revolution and the White Revolution

**T**he research and advancements in the Agriculture sector that began in 1960 led India from severe food scarcity to a country with surplus production of food grains. India eventually began to export the surplus food produce. These measures, called the 'Green Revolution' also led to diversification in agriculture.

During 1978-79, India produced 131 million ton of food produce. The Green Revolution led to not just an increase in agricultural production, but also created employment opportunities in the sector manufacturing farm equipment and machinery. Agricultural productivity was the highest in the states of Punjab and Haryana.

Around this period, the White Revolution led to a multifold increase in the milk production. The white revolution helped reduce malnutrition among children to an extent in the country.

## Language Policy

India had constitutionally accepted Hindi as the official language of the Indian Union. However, non-Hindi speaking states, especially South Indian states were not ready to accept this law. They insisted that English should be the official language of India. This became a cause for much unrest. In 1967, through an amendment led by Indira, English and Hindi were both recognized as the official languages of the Indian union.

## State of Emergency

The Emergency was imposed from 1975 to 1977. This decision came under severe criticism from the opposition. During the state of Emergency, Indira formulated 20 point programme for the country's development.

After 19 months, in 1977, Indira ended the Emergency and called for election. Congress lost the election that year. Indira Gandhi lost in Rai Bareilly constituency to the Janata Party candidate Raj Narain. As a result, Morarji Desai of the Janata Party became India's Prime minister.

Following defeat in the election, Indira worked to muster the support of the people by calling out the policies of the Janata Party for being anti-people. The increasing public support for Indira and the large crowds that assembled for her rallies generated fear in the Janata Party.

Four different FIRs were filed against Indira by the CBI.



In 1980, the Congress Party, led by Indira rose to power with a huge majority.

## **Elections**

- 1980 – Won in Raebareli, Uttar Pradesh and Medak, Andhra Pradesh (now Telengana).

- 1978 – Became a Lok Sabha member by defeating Janata Party's Virendra Patil in Chikmagalur, Karnataka
- 1977 – Lost to Raj Narain of Janata Party from Raebareli
- 1971 – Elected to the Lok sabha

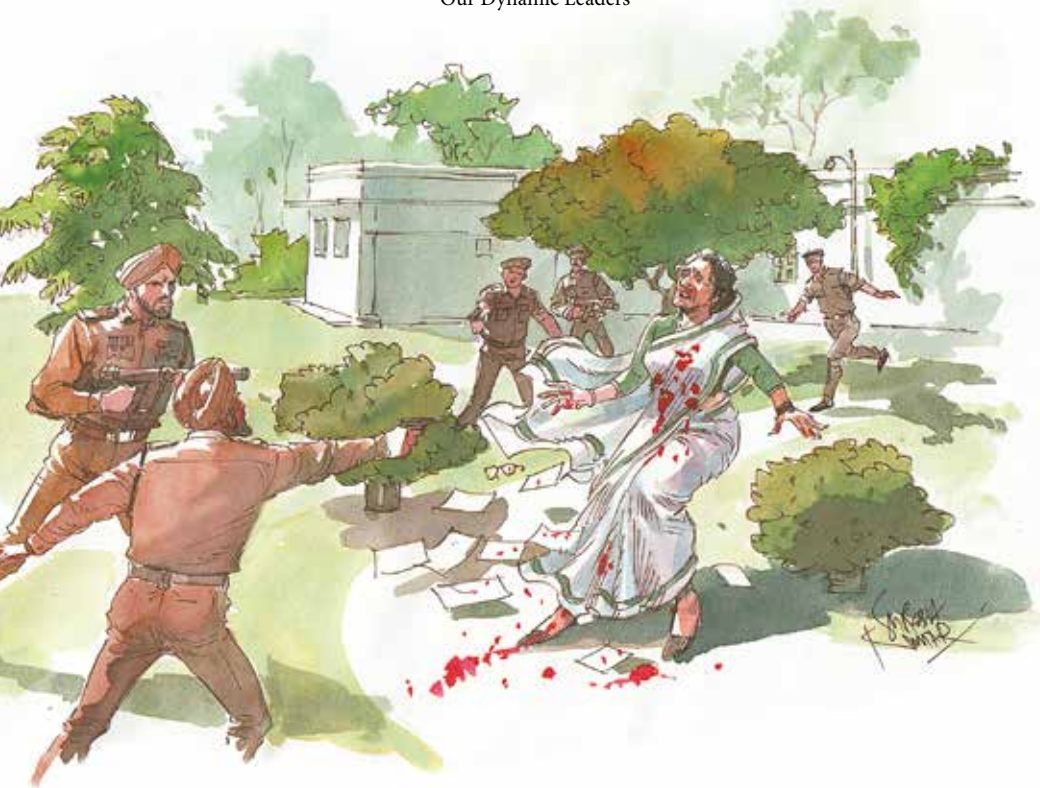
## Assassination

Indira had to lay down her life in return for her measures to suppress the Khalistan organization. The Army, directed by Indira, executed 'Operation Bluestar' to bring out militants who were said to be hiding in the premises of the Golden temple, the holy pilgrimage of the Sikhs. In this backdrop, Indira was advised to reorganize her security team. Indira declined with just the question "Are we secular?"

On the morning of 31 October 1984, Indira was walking from her house at H. No.1, Akbar Road, New Delhi to her office to be interviewed by the British filmmaker Peter Ustinov. Walking for about a minute, she reached the gate to her office. Sub Inspector Beant Singh was standing there. Indira smiled at Beant Singh, who had served nine years in her personal security team. However, Beant Singh's response to her smile was in the form of bullets. Beant Singh had shot her with his service revolver. As Indira fell to the ground, Constable Satwant Singh shot about 30 rounds using his sub-machine gun.

"Every drop of my blood will invigorate India and strengthen it..."





One day before her death, Indira Gandhi gave her speech at Odisha at the Secretariat parade grounds which some consider as a premonition of her imminent death.

“I am here today, I may not be here tomorrow. But the responsibility to look after national interest is on the shoulder of every citizen of India. I have often mentioned this earlier.

Nobody knows how many attempts have been made to shoot me, lathis have been used to beat me. In Bhubaneswar itself, a brickbat hit me. They have attacked me in every possible manner. I do not care whether I live or die. I have lived a long life and I am proud that I spend the whole of

my life in the service of my people. I am only proud of this and nothing else. I shall continue to serve until my last breath and when I die, I can say, that every drop of my blood will invigorate India and strengthen it...

Even if I died in the service of the nation, I would be proud of it. Every drop of my blood will contribute to the growth of this nation and to make it strong and dynamic”

## **Bharat Ratna**

In 1971, the President of India V.V. Giri awarded Indira with the Bharat Ratna, the highest civilian honour for leading India to victory against Pakistan in the Bangladesh Liberation War.

In 2011, the Bangladesh government posthumously conferred Indira Gandhi with Bangladesh’s highest civilian award ‘Bangladesh Freedom Honour’ for her outstanding contributions to the Bangladesh Liberation War.

Indira received several awards, such as the Mexican Academy Award for Liberation of Bangladesh in 1972, second annual Award of FAO in 1973, U.S.A Mothers’ Award in 1953, Isabelle De Este award from Italian government, Howland Memorial Prize by University of Yale.

In 1967 and 1968, Indira was voted as the most respected woman by the French Institute of Public Opinion. In 1971, Indira was voted the most respected person in the Gallop



Poll survey of U.S.A. In 1971, the Argentine Society awarded the Diploma of Honour to Indira Gandhi.

In 1999, Indira Gandhi was named 'Woman of the millennium' by BBC. Other prominent women on the list include Queen Elizabeth, Marie Curie and Mother Theresa.

# The Wind in the Mountains

Excerpt from the Novel by  
Dr George Onakkoor

Golden October was spending its last days. Suddenly one day Madam called.

“Ranjan, we are going to Kashmir.”

“Ma, now Kashmir!”

The trip was dangerous. The minds bitter over the dismissal of the government, had not yet found peace. Ranjan was trying to convince her that she should wait for some other time.

“What if we wait and the trip is never made? No, Ranjan we are going. I can't postpone it.” Madam was firm.

Now there were no doubts. The arrangements for the trip were made. Kamalendu clung on to him as he bade goodbye to his family. When Maya tried to take her away, she bawled aloud. He hurried to the airport while Maya and his mother tried to pacify the child.

Strong security measures were taken in Kashmir. Madam took her grandkids Rahul and Priyanka along with her. A cold wind blew. There was intermittent snowfall. Ranjan took the children around the Srinagar market.



Ranjan was trying to retrieve the experience of the pleasant lonesome trips of his childhood. The trips with mother to Kashmir. Her relatives used to get together. Those were good times indeed.

The gloomy skies brightened up as the sun came out. The chinar trees were decked with their flowers. In the valley of the mountain ranges, Madam sang a song:

“Here , Nature holds a bowl of blossoms. The winds sweep down from the mountains. There is the caress of snow in them. Let the snow flakes fall upon my heavy heart, this evening.”

The next day a hurried trip to Bhuvaneshwar. The elections were round the corner in Orissa. The horrid incident during the last elections rushed to the mind. Madam involuntarily felt her nose. The scare was still there. It was the first time that a stone had hit her face.

“what is the meaning of freedom when the people are poor and miserable?”

This question was repeated at several venues. Then she said as though directed by some inner compulsion:

“Now I am here. Tomorrow I may not be here. How many futile attempts were made on my life. It is not a problem for me whether I should live or not. I have been on this earth for quite a long time. All these years, I have been living for my country and its people. I have great pride in that. Till my last breath, till I die, I have no



hesitation in shedding each drop of my blood to strengthen my nation.”

She reached Delhi rather late in the night. As she walked into her home she directed Manoranjan to take rest. He need not come to office the next day.

“You must be tired with incessant travels. Convey my apologies ‘to Maya. Tell Manasi that I would like to meet her. Ask her to bring Kamalendu along.”

She said ‘Good Night’.

Sonia was awaiting her at Safdar Jung House. Rajiv was away campaigning. The children were in bed. When could Indu have gone to bed? There was light in her room till

dawn. Was she writing? Or was she slipping into memories of her childhood?

The next morning was also going to be a busy one. She had to give an interview to the BBC. It was to be given in her office on Akbar Road. As she finished her bath, Sonia had selected her clothes, she served her breakfast, too.

A delightful morning. The sky was clear. The new rays of the sun spread over the land. Flowers smiled on the plants. Butterflies fluttered about in the garden.

Indu walked on like a wind bearing fragrance. Her burden, seemed to have gone. Her mind seemed to be as light as a feather.

As she passed the gate from her residence to her office on Akbar Road, the sentry posted near the bougainvillea climbers a little away, bowed his head. She greeted him with folded hands. ;

Suddenly a revolver sounded.

“What, what are you doing?”

Gunfire swallowed her voice. She fell flat, her body riddled with bullets. Her vermilion sari soaked in blood.

Everything was over in seconds. .

Sonia who rushed out of the house screaming, tried to hold mother up. She was rushed in a car to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences.

By noon, the curtain came down on a mercurial life.

Rajiv was in a village in Bengal on the election trail.

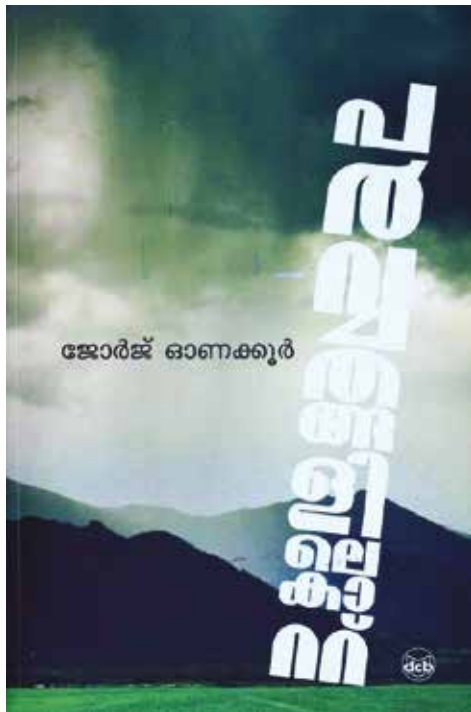


The wind gathered momentum. It raged all over India. Loud lamentations rose from all directions. Black flags decked the streets. Half-naked adivasis came down from the hills onto the roads. They beat their breasts in sorrow, and ran amok. Children wailed.

Nobody could bear this sudden passing away of so benign a presence.

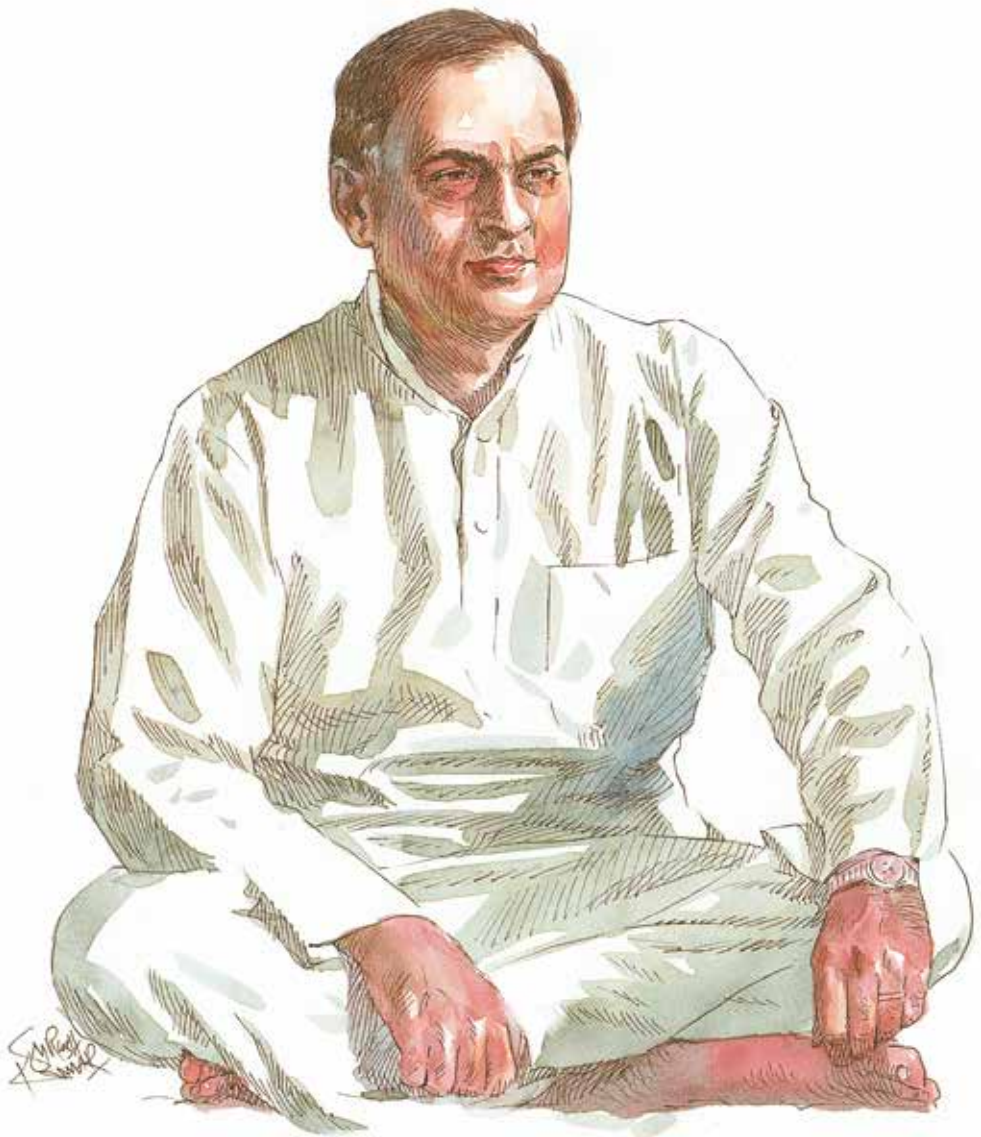
A mother they had never seen before. With an affection that strokes their foreheads, caresses their souls.

Even the Silent Valley sobbed. Its life was convulsing. The last of the Earth's verdure was being swallowed by the tongues of fire.









# Rajiv Gandhi: A Great Visionary

**T**he India we see today wasn't built overnight ..!  
Whether it is information technology or food availability, all the facilities we enjoy today were created on the conviction of many former Prime Ministers.

Shri Rajiv Gandhi was a visionary who made great contributions to the growth of India.

Born on August 20, 1944, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi was sworn in as the youngest Prime Minister of India, at the age of 40. The stalwart bid farewell to this world on May 21, 1991, in Tamil Nadu in the wake of a suicide bombing by the LTTE.

Rajiv Gandhi is a symbol of pride in the minds of every Indian. During the period 1984-1989, Rajiv Gandhi was able to bring about a great revolution in the field of information technology in the country by focusing on the IT and telecom sectors. Considering the achievements made in the field of information technology today, we can see that the far-sighted stance taken by Rajiv Gandhi back then was very beneficial. If India stands high in front of the world, it is because of Rajiv Gandhi, the Prime Minister. In a short period, Rajiv Gandhi was able to complete the revolution in all spheres and lead India to the forefront.

# Rajiv Gandhi the Youngest Prime Minister of India

**Prime Minister:  
October 31, 1984 - December 2, 1989**

**R**ajiv Gandhi, who was elected to power at the age of 40, is India's youngest Prime Minister and perhaps the youngest ruler of a republic in the world. He became Prime Minister eight years younger than the age at which his mother was when she was elected. His eminent grandfather, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, became the first Prime Minister of independent India at the age of 58, beginning his 17 years long governing. As a trailblazer, representing new young generation of India, Shri Gandhi received the greatest popular support in the history of the nation. He was ready to face the general election still in grief from his mother's demise. The Congress won a landslide victory in the election, winning 401 of the 508 seats up for grabs. Congress won an unprecedented majority than in the previous seven elections. Undoubtedly, his

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start as the undisputed leader of seven hundred million Indians was remarkable. It is noteworthy that at a young age, Shri Gandhi, who was disinterested in politics till then, was accepted immediately. Regardless of being the youngest of the great family that served the country for four generations, during and after the freedom struggle, he had no interest in politics.

Rajiv Gandhi was born on August 20, 1944, in Bombay. He was only three years old when India gained independence and his grandfather became the Prime Minister. Consequentially, his parents moved from Lucknow to Delhi.

Feroze Gandhi, the father of Shri Gandhi, became an MP and earned the reputation of being a fearless and hard-working parliamentarian. Rajiv Gandhi spent his childhood with his grandfather at Thinmurthy House. His mother, Indira Gandhi was the homemaker there. After studying at Welham Prep School in Dehradun for some time, he moved to Doon School in the Himalayan Valley, where he made some lifelong friends. Soon his younger brother Sanjay also joined him there.

After school, he attended Trinity College, Cambridge, but soon moved to Imperial College, London. He studied Mechanical Engineering and as he often said later, he did not want to study hard for the exam. It was clear that he did not want to choose politics for a profession. Mr.



Gandhi's friends point out that most of his bookshelves had science and engineering books, and those books on philosophy, politics, and history were scarce.

He was interested in music. He loved western music and Hindustani music. The other two interests were photography and amateur radio. He was passionate about air travel. Soon after returning from England, he passed the entrance examination of the Delhi Flying Club and decided to obtain a Commercial Pilot License. He soon joined Indian Airlines, a public sector domestic airline, as a pilot.

While studying in Cambridge, he met Sonia Maino, an Italian woman studying English there. They were married in 1968, in Delhi. She stayed with their children Rahul and Priyanka at the residence of Mrs. Indira Gandhi in New Delhi. Their lives were really private, except for the political turmoil going on around them.

Things changed when his brother Sanjay died in a plane crash in 1980. The pressure to get into politics and help his mother grew. The situation was further complicated by the challenges from outside and inside. He resisted initially but soon succumbed to the pressure. He was ready to contest the next elections in Amethi, which he represented when his younger brother Sanjay died. And was elected by a good majority.

Lack of enough stadiums and other infrastructure

facilities was a big concern then, particularly when Commonwealth Games was around. It was Shri Gandhi who was appointed to make sure that the construction work was completed on time and that the Games would be performed without any defects. He proved his ability and coordination skills in doing things by overcoming this challenge. At the same time, as the General Secretary of the Congress, his activism in energizing the party and in perfecting the organizational structure was remarkable. It was these skills that helped him in the later experimental stages.

His mother was assassinated on August 31, 1984, forcing him to serve as Prime Minister and Congress President at the same time. Only he had the misfortune of having to take on high responsibilities in the worst stage of his life. But he showed the courage and self-control to restrain his grief and to fulfill his responsibility to the nation.

During his month-long election campaign, Shri Gandhi traveled tirelessly from one end of the country to the other. Often traveled farther than the circumference of the earth. He addressed millions of people at 250 public meetings. With his modern thinking and timely decision-making, Shri Gandhi was knowledgeable and passionate about high technology. As he reiterates, Sri Gandhi aimed to preserve the integrity of India and to be the driving force behind the country's glorious future into the 21st century.

# India to save Mali: Operation CACTUS

Nothing beyond the sound of waves can be heard off the coast of Mali. Suddenly, two fishing boats approached the shore, breaking through the waves. About 100 people jumped out of two boats with rocket launchers, grenades, and AK-47 rifles.

On November 2, the people of Mali woke up to the shocking news.

A coup attempt is underway in Mali. All major government institutions have been taken over by mercenaries. They have detained several people, including Mali's Minister for Education. They have started violence at the President's residence. They had taken over the airport, news channels, and radio stations.

## **November 3, 12.30 pm**

Urgent discussions are being held at the RAW Office, Parliament House, and Agra Air Force Headquarters in New Delhi. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi announced on All India Radio: "India to save Mali".



The six-hour cabinet talks came to an end. Six hours ago, countries around the world including India and the United States had received phone calls from the Malian President seeking help. RAW's Delhi headquarters was still receiving information from RAW agents in Mali and Sri Lanka.



### **November 3 - 3.30pm**

An Ilyushin Il-76 aircraft with 50 brigade from the Indian Air Force base at Agra. By this time two Indian Navy warships had left for Mali (INS Batwa, INS Godavari).

Departing from Agra Air Force Headquarters, Ilyushin

flew more than 2,500 km and landed paratroopers from the skies near Mali Airport. Within hours of landing, Mali airport was recaptured from the mercenaries, and the Indian Air Force planes landed at the airport with other commandos. After moving President Qayyum to a safer place, the rest of the government institutions were liberated from the clutches of mercenaries. Two hostages were shot dead by mercenaries during the rescue of Mali's education minister and other captives.

At the same time, the Indian spy agency's investigation revealed that the People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Elam (LTTE), an affiliate of the Sri Lankan Tamil Tigers (SLTT), was behind the incident and that the mercenaries had come to the coast of Mali from a ship anchored in the Sri Lankan waters. The Indian Navy's warships Batwa and the Godavari captured the Sri Lankan ship and handed it over to the Malian government. Nineteen mercenaries were killed and the rest were captured by the Indian army. Except for a bullet in the leg of a soldier, the Indian Army suffered no casualties.

Abdullah Lufti, a Malian national and Sri Lankan businessman who was a supporter of former Maldivian President Ibrahim Nasir was behind the coup.

The strength of the willful Indian rulers and army thus became known to the world.

This is history ...

# Rajiv Gandhi

## History and events

- Born on August 20, 1944, in Bombay, in a prominent Indian political family.
- Grew up in his grandfather's house in Allahabad.
- Rajiv's father Feroz died of a heart attack when he was 16 years old.
- Enrolled in nearby Shivaniketan School for Nursery Classes. Later at Welham Boy School and Doon School in Dehradun.
- Joined in 1962 at Trinity College, Cambridge University, London to study Mechanical Engineering.
- Rajiv returned from London and joined the Delhi Flying Club. Rajeev wanted to be an aviator.
- While studying in Cambridge in London, fell in love with an Italian woman named Sonia Maino. They were married in 1969.
- On his return to India, Rajiv joined Indian Airlines as a pilot. Rajiv, who was a gentle soul, did not show much interest in politics.

- When Sanjay Gandhi was killed in a plane crash, flying a private plane in 1980, Rajiv Gandhi had to enter politics despite his reluctance.
- In February 1981, Rajiv was elected to the Lok Sabha from Amethi in Uttar Pradesh. Amethi was the constituency of Sanjay Gandhi. Shortly afterward, he was elected President of the Youth Congress.
- When Indira Gandhi was shot dead by her bodyguards, the Congress leadership and activists forced Rajiv Gandhi to become the Prime Minister.
- After Indira's death and the Sikh massacre, the Rajiv Gandhi led government came to power with the largest majority in Congress history (405 seats in the 540 - member assembly).
- The BJP won only two seats in that election, which was marred by the shock of Indira's death and the Rajiv wave. The call for the Nehru family was so strong.
- Rajiv warmed up relations with America. Rajiv Gandhi visited the United States from June 11 to 15, 1985. India and the United States have signed an agreement to fight together against planned terrorism, as well as bilateral cooperation in science and technology. The agreement also provides for the development and production of a new vaccine against the growing epidemic in India. Rajiv succeeded in building good diplomatic relations





with the United States without compromising India's interests.

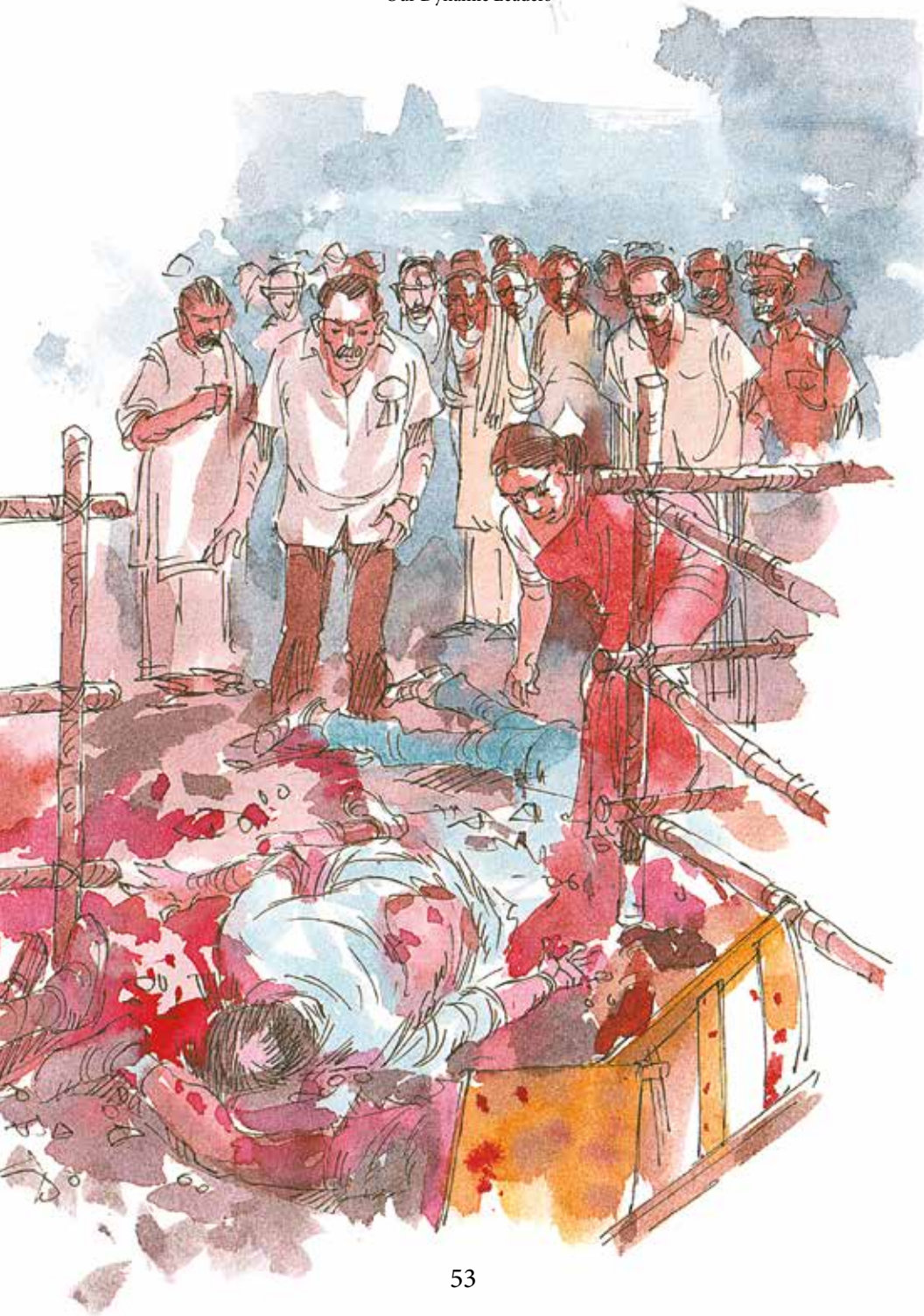
- Rajiv Gandhi, the first Indian Prime Minister to visit China after Nehru, allayed some doubts and mistrust in India-China relations. Rajiv sought to solve many of the country's long-standing problems. Rajiv Gandhi signed the Mizo Agreement, the Assam Agreement, and the Punjab Agreement. India's foreign policy was very friendly with its neighbors. That is why during the insurgency in Mali, President Abdul Gayoom came to India without relying on the United States for help. Similarly, to counter the Sinhalese attack in Sri Lanka, the Sri Lankan leadership did not hesitate to contact Rajiv.
- The Indian Army launched a military operation there called Operation Cactus to thwart a rebel attempt to oust the President of Mali. Within hours, the Indian Army regained control of Mali. With this military action, diplomatic relations between India and Mali were strengthened.
- Rajiv enthusiastically promoted the development of science and technology in India. Rajiv significantly reduced import tariffs on technology industries, including computers, aircraft, and defense and communications equipment. Rajeev wanted the new generation of India

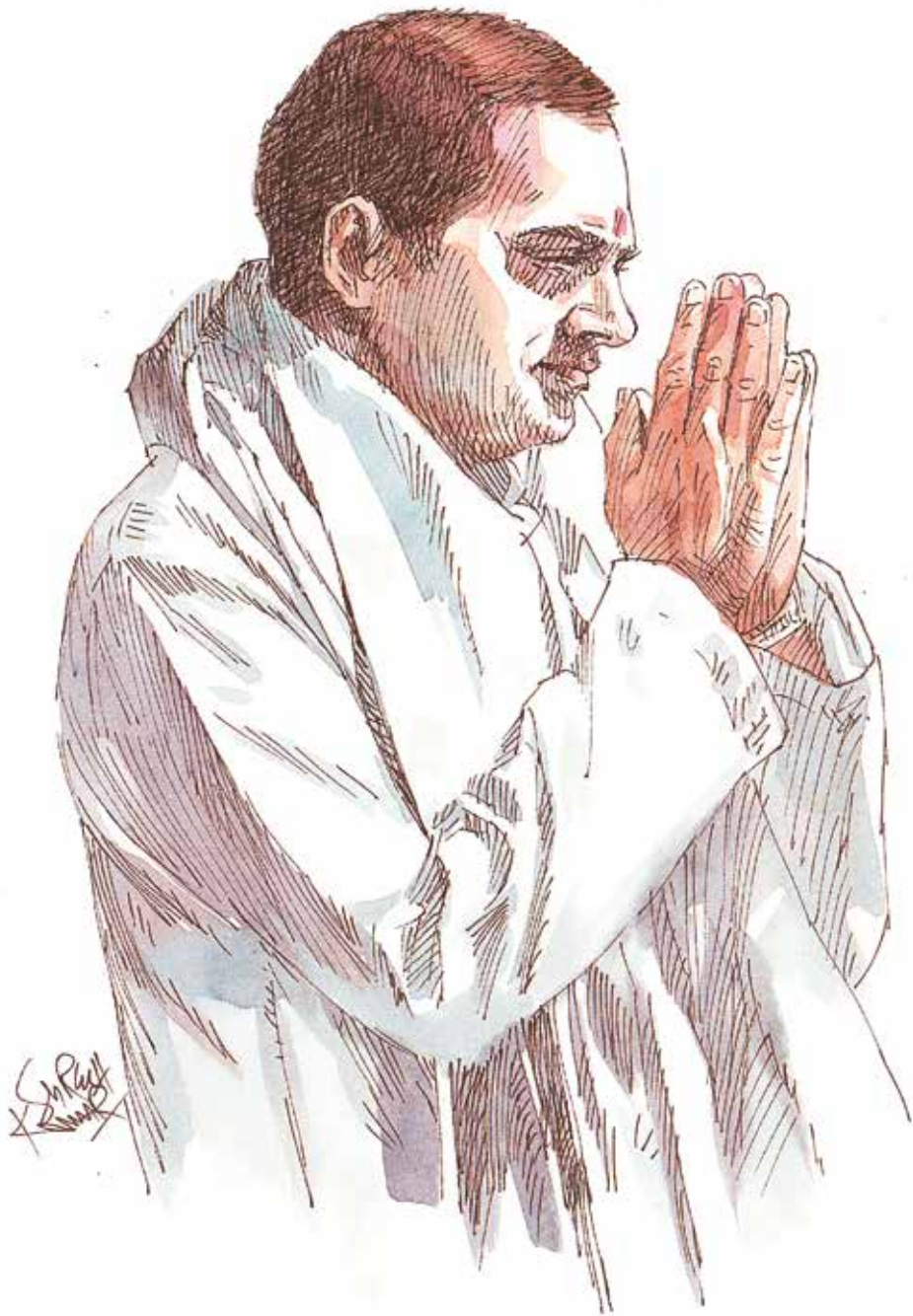
to move away from conservative learning and knowledge acquisition and use world-class technology for this. As a part of this, Rajiv started trying to bring communication technology to the common people.

- C-Dot was freed from government control. Rajeev's goal was to make C-DOT a research and development institution capable of defining and achieving its own goals.
- Rajiv desired to bring technology to the masses that implemented public call offices, a new concept in the field of communication in India.
- Nation's License Raj - Rajiv Gandhi took steps to roll back India's License Raj and to significantly reduce the red tapism, for starting new businesses. In 1986, Rajiv Gandhi announced a new National Education Policy to promote higher education in science and technology throughout India.
- Economic growth increased to 5.6 percent in the Seventh Five Year Plan. Industrial growth was 8 percent. The poverty rate has dropped from 38 percent to 28 percent. The economy was resurgent.
- Navodaya Vidyalayas were started in India in 1986 by Rajiv Gandhi. The first Navodaya was formed in 1985. Navodaya is P.V.Narasimha Rao's brainchild. Navodaya schools were started when Rajiv Gandhi was the Prime

Minister. It is a government scheme to provide better educational opportunities to the socially and economically backward students in the villages. Later, on the 100th birth anniversary of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, it was renamed Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya.

- The Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord was signed between Rajiv Gandhi and the President of Sri Lanka JR Jayewardene on July 30, 1987, in Colombo. The next day, Rajiv Gandhi, who was receiving the 'Guard of Honor' of the Sri Lankan Navy, was shot in the head by a Sri Lankan sailor named Vijitha Rohana. Rajiv barely escaped the assassination attempt with minor injuries.
- India agreed to send peacekeeping troops to Sri Lanka at the request of Sri Lankan President Jayewardene, according to the India-Sri Lanka peace agreement. The LTTE peacefully surrendered its weapons in front of the Indian peacekeepers sent by Rajiv. And this paved the way for open war between them.
- Many areas were recaptured from LTTE by the Indian Peace Keeping Force and LTTE-held territory was reduced to very small parts of Jaffna.
- Rajiv's last public meeting was at Thiruthani in Tamil Nadu. Rajiv Gandhi was killed in a bomb blast on May 21, 1991, during an election campaign rally in Sriperumbudur.





# A Person of Rarity

The life of Rajiv Gandhi is unparalleled in Indian political history. A rare personality who entered politics in unexpected and tragic circumstances and disappeared into history in a very short period (just seven years) with many good and bad contributions.

His reign was not long enough to be compared with the lives of political figures (some have likened him to Kennedy), not just in India, but in world history itself, but it was a time of comprehensive change in India's political, social, and economic spheres. Contrary to what is said by the BJP, it was this same man who started the new India we see today.

Perhaps, if he had lived longer, he would have received a little more justice in the eyes of history. The remnant of his rule was a wonderful start and a slightly disappointing end. In the small period it lasted, the interesting history had its own ups and downs and hopes and despairs. A kind of a tragedy in Indian politics. In the wave of sympathy caused by the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984, Rajiv

Gandhi, who came to power with the largest majority in India (50 percent of the vote and more than 80 percent of the seats), was the only hope of the disoriented Indian people at that time. The world called him 'Mr. Clean' and the new age phenomenon leading India to the 21st century.

Rajiv Gandhi was remembered by the people of his time, especially the middle class and youth, who understood the need to integrate India with technology and the economy. At that time, policies were introduced to dismantle the 'license raj' system and deregulate it to increase domestic production and achieve higher economic, industrial growth. Although it was very popular among the middle class, it was a time when the Indian economy as a whole was experiencing strong growth. For example, the construction sector grew by 8.9 percent. Market capitalization has multiplied. Rajiv Gandhi was a Prime Minister who was shocked by the imaginative changes in the political and social spheres when he came to power. He restored peace in Punjab, Assam, and Mizoram, which had long been a headache, and were milestones in Indian democracy. Rajiv traveled all over the country to learn about India and talked to people about his expectations. It was a time when everyone had faith in the future of India.

The time of Rajiv Gandhi was eventful. Five years of the rise of many progressive policies and activities, the first steps of modern India, the political leadership that



gave India confidence, the handsome personality who spoke the language of hope.

**G. Pramod**

Former UNDP Asia-Pacific  
Consultant and Columnist

(Courtesy: Mathrubhumi)

# Rajiv Gandhi: A Perfect Professional

**M**y view is that if modernization needs a real path, if a real India is to be built, the country must go back to the era and vision of Rajiv Gandhi.

Rajiv Gandhi was a perfect professional with a clear vision about the future. He grew up in a political family. He was a defender of the idea of India rooted in Gandhian values.

The expectation of young people like me at the time was that he would understand science and technology. The reason for that belief was that Rajiv was a trained pilot. We thought he could bring a scientific attitude to solve the problems of the country. That is the reason behind people like me deciding at that time to return to their home country from other countries and work. I was not alone. There were many like me.

According to me, the best opportunity that India got was when Rajiv Gandhi became the Prime Minister. Rajiv was a great opportunity for India to accelerate modernization.

A symbol of youth. He was not a part of any fundraising system. He was not a corrupt man, as some alleged. All those allegations were false. All the allegations against Bofors were completely fabricated.

When Rajiv Gandhi came to power, the people felt that they had gained power. However, some were concerned that this new approach would undermine the existing structure built on vested interests. For example, the import lobby entered the telecom arena with opposition. The old leaders in politics were confused. With the advent of computers, bureaucracy was exposed. They protested. Thus crises arose in many ways. Unknown fears arose. However, we have tackled all these issues. When some vested interests questioned our actions, we ignored them.

Some have questioned why Rajiv Gandhi brought these people from outside the country. Why bring people like Sam Pitroda. What do they know about India? The question was, What do they know about Indian villages? But they did not know that I was from an Indian village. They did not realize that my father had only a fourth-grade education. After all, you don't have to be poor to include poor Indians. You just have to be more discriminating with the help you render toward other people. They do not realize that you need to be selfless. The romance that built the country, the romance of building a country was in the eyes and the minds of everyone around him. The first two or three

years of rule were very good. Then came the Shah Bano case. It affected the administration. There is no doubt that he was wrong in his handling of the matter. But if a mistake is made, it can be corrected. However, it did not take long and some people jumped on the bandwagon and created a commotion and confusion. With that, things turned against him. The election failed. With that, India's growth derailed, affecting development, vested interests being the only things that prevailed.

Until then, India was on China's path of growth. In the telecom sector, I can say for sure. When we started the Center for Development of Telematics or C-DOT in India, Huawei did not exist in China. In the telecom sector, we were far ahead of China. If that speed had continued we would have grown like China. Not on the basis of big construction, but of bringing people out of poverty.

Rajiv was able to create the so-called telecom revolution of the day. Rajiv Gandhi believed me. It allowed me to do what I wanted to do. He did not try to take credit for what I did. Extensive and powerful technology missions were formed during the reign of Rajiv Gandhi. Several plans were formulated for development. The best efforts were made in the fields of defense, industry, pharmaceuticals, automobile industry, and so on. Everyone who was with Rajiv did his best whether it was Rahul Bajaj, Mukesh Ambani, Sam Pitroda, V Krishnamurthy, or Ashok Ganguly.



We all followed the same path to build India. But we soon lost that momentum.

## **The Man Behind the Vaccines**

I wonder what Rajiv Gandhi would have done if he had been in power during this period of the COVID Pandemic. Rajiv Gandhi started the Immunization Mission for Vaccination in the country.

I do not know how many people remember that polio was eradicated from the country through this immunization mission; 35 years ago. The field of biotechnology was developed at that time. India has grown into the largest vaccine manufacturer today, thanks to the immunization mission of Rajiv Gandhi, which provided the infrastructure for vaccine production. At that time power was completely decentralized. It was not ordered from a single-center, the Prime Minister's Office.

In a pandemic situation, The country needs a democratic system similar to the one that existed during Rajiv's rule. We need to build the team. It was learned that a scientist had resigned from the high committee for COVID management the previous day. He resigned after realizing that the scientific attitude did not matter.

Things that are happening today, including forging data, never happened during the rule of Rajiv Gandhi. He would have been anxious and angry about many things. But he

would listen to scientists. There was a Scientific Advisory Council then, of which I was also a member. Rajiv used to see us constantly. He would spend hours with us. Those meetings were all about learning, listening, and talking, and listening to the country's voluntary organizations. The whole of civil society would be heard. But in today's India, Civil society is being killed. Income tax raids are carried out on NGOs for receiving funds. No scientific institute today is independent. The scientific mindset is not encouraged. Some people drink cow urine for healing. Some politicians say that if you bathe in dung, the disease will go away.

## **Democratic values must return**

Today we wish to have a leader like Rajiv Gandhi. He would've brought people together. Real people and their talents would have been found and stopped from leaving the country. He would trust them and strengthen them. My view is that if modernization requires a real path, if a real India is to be built, then the country must go back to the era of Rajiv Gandhi, to his visions.

(Satyanarayana Gangaram Pitroda alias Sam Pitroda, a leading architect of India's IT and telecom leaps, was a friend and advisor to Rajiv Gandhi. Courtesy: <https://www.mathrubhumi.com/features/politics/sam-pitroda-remembers-6>)

