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EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

Long Haul Ahead

As one watched the elaborate obsequies that were performed following Sanjay Gandhi's tragic death — right up to the countrywide display of urns and immersion of the cremation ashes, sometimes touching off unseemly scramble among the self-proclaimed mourners — one could not escape the impression of its being overdone by those who are anxious to feather their own political nests by what they thought would please the Prime Minister. An occasion for mourning loses its solemnity by such extravaganza, and it would be dishonest for any observer to overlook this aspect of the nearly week-long rituals at canonisation.

If Indira Gandhi has resumed her onerous public responsibilities overcoming all the anguish of personal sorrow, the sudden disappearance of Sanjay has left a good section of his cohorts in a state of helplessness, a feeling of being orphaned. The so-called youth power does not seem to have legs of steel; quite a few of these new luminaries are in a state of brooding uneasiness, frankly confessing that their conduits did not really extend up to the Prime Minister, but they banked on her son to get things done from her. Now that the son is gone, the precious link snapped,

can they establish direct rapport with the Prime Minister, and would she comply as readily with their designs and desires as her son would have done, as he used to do? It would however be incorrect to think that the entire youth brigade is orphaned; some, at least, can claim to have been in the business of politics long before Sanjay appeared on the scene, although they too have been able to climb higher only through his sponsorship.

To get out of this predicament, some of the youth leaders have raised the demand, as yet subdued, for Sanjay's widow Maneka taking over his mantle; while those in the Congress-I who are not interested in promoting this brand of youth power but concerned with it, seem to be placing their bets on the Prime Minister's other son, Rajiv.

But Indira Gandhi's problems will not be solved by inducting one or the other. In magnitude and intensity, these are formidable. This is neither the place nor the time to assess what role Sanjay has played and would have played in the management of her affairs as the Prime Minister. For on the morrow of mourning, one cannot expect to have an objective assessment of the one who has passed away, in a climate

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so heavily surcharged with subjectivism, spontaneous or contrived.

One can only point at this stage to the indisputable fact that Sanjay's was not the personality that could have welded the nation in any common endeavour cutting across political barriers. His ardent adulator Khushwant Singh, who at least can by no means be accused of distorting Sanjay, has candidly written about him: "I recall his saying that a leader who is feared is more respected than a leader who is loved. 'That's why when I tell them to do something, they damn well do it'." Whatever the worth of such a trait, it certainly does not betray love or respect for the masses, the common humanity, nor a perception of their invincible strength once aroused, as a Gandhi or a Nehru could perceive. One need not be harsh to his memory at this moment of Indira Gandhi's sorrow, but one cannot help feeling that this could not be the stuff on which she could have long relied without jeopardising her position or that of the nation. This is however no moment to judge one who has gone in such tragic circumstances, and once gone, need not warp our judgement about what is to be done today, tomorrow and the day after.

The loneliness that surrounds Indira Gandhi today is not only personal, it is political. Over the years, she has built up an edifice, a party named after herself, which has no Areopagus, but only a lighthouse, a single-pillar structure. Next to herself, she was building another that has now disappeared. There are no colleagues to fall back upon, no trusted team. If De Gaulle is her hero in history, she does not have even a Malraux to converse with: a Dhawan, a Kapoor or a Brahmachari cannot obviously fill the bill.

With the comfortable majority it commands in Parliament and in the majority of the State Assemblies, the Congress-I should have no difficulty in restoring smooth administrative functioning. But one look at the newly-formed State Ministries brings out the disconcerting spectacle of factions ranged against factions within the ruling party, intensification of caste tensions as between the Sanjay-backed Rajputs and the dispossessed Brahmins. The Rajasthan Ministry finds it difficult even today to take off. Faction fight is sharpening in Madhya Pradesh. In Uttar Pradesh

there is threat of deadlock even over such a simple issue as the choice of the Assembly Speaker. In Punjab, the new Ministry is worried about Akali infiltration. Chenna Reddy may be having temporary relief in Andhra Pradesh, but Antulay finds himself in deep waters in Maharashtra. There is majority no doubt for the Congress-I but hardly any stability.

No doubt the old and tired men of yesterday are of little use. The Opposition is in disarray presenting a mosaic of conflicting interests. Many of these seem only too willing to be called and are ready to serve her, but most of these are worn out and exhausted, seeking safe and comfortable berths. In such a situation, the temptation to take to some form of Peronism is understandable. But this leads to sure disaster in a country like ours with the type of problems and the magnitude of difficulties confronting it. Indira Gandhi has in her hands today jobs that can be tackled only through the mobilisation of the entire nation, not by the oracle of soothsayers or the antics of whiz-kids.

Whether to project a strategy or work out a tactical approach to such on-going crisis as the one in Assam, Tripura or Manipur, it demands heroic efforts to hammer out a national outlook out of the fragmented politics of today. The unconscionable drift in handling Assam has brought about a situation in which the national leadership of every party is left without any initiative to defuse the tension, not to speak of solving the issue of foreign nationals. In the entire North-East, the alienation of the tribal people widely spread over a strategic belt, has deteriorated into armed hostility which is but one step from secession. The chain-reaction of the North-East can be felt in every tribal pocket in the country — the perceptible awakening of subnational entities — and in this very tribal region lies the heartland of India's industrial revolution.

At the moment, we may be trying to pursue an active foreign policy, but no nation's foreign affairs or defence can be sustained on the precarious foundations of a near-bankrupt economy. The inability to curb inflation, the mounting oil bill, the lengthening shadow of unemployment and the widening income disparities — all these bring out the unreality of the Government's complacency in the Budget debate

Parliament. There could be no question of pursuing the goal of self-reliance with Government depending on foreign loans to meet the deficit. Even the demagogic promises about price stabilisation or halting the inroad of multinationals are no longer heard.

The reiteration of the Twenty-point Programme, however pious the exercise may be, cannot cover up the mismanagement of the economy itself. The mess in power generation, the persistent lack of coordination between coal, power and transport, the festering sore of corruption both at high places and low — witness the sugar scandal — and all this bringing about inevitable difficulty in working out an effective Plan strategy. In the last thirty years, the nation's economy has never had to face such a critical prospect.

The unrest in campuses is spreading all over the country, taking on a dimen-

sion that can hardly be tackled at the academic level. The deterioration in the law-and-order situation can be seen in the spate of criminal activities on the part of the police force — as evident from the shocking disclosures about the happenings at Baghpat. A situation is being fast reached when anarchy gets the upper hand and the authority of the executive can hardly cope with any political disorder or economic breakdown. Out of all this is emerging a picture of all-round collapse of institutions and values.

In such a season of dark and lowering clouds, with the power structure facing new and unprecedented assaults, can Indira Gandhi afford to go it alone? For her as also for her opponents, it is a long haul ahead. The age of miracles is dead and gone, and so are the miracle-makers.

July 2

N.C.

COMMENTARY

The Myth-makers

C.N. CHITTA RANJAN

IF Sanjay Gandhi's brief, controversial, Indira-sponsored sojourn in the limelight of Indian politics cannot be shrugged off as of no consequence at present and in the immediate future, current attempts by interested individuals and groups to lionize him and create a new myth about a potential saviour of the nation snatched away from our midst in the prime of youth, border on the grotesque. History is inexorable, and picturesque but meaningless phrase-making (like Sanjay-the- "doer" - and- Nehru-

the- "dreamer" story in a big newspaper which prides itself on its objectivity) will make no difference; there is no way to convert a spasm into a revolution through verbal jugglery, exaggeration and the like.

It becomes necessary to place this phase of our politics in perspective, particularly because of the bid to conjure up a "Sanjay cult" as a well-known journalist approvingly describes it or a "Sanjay legend" as some semi-literate politicians put it. To imagine that spending public money on monuments or naming schools and other institutions after the young man will make Sanjay Gandhi one of the greats of Indian history, is to live in a fool's paradise. It is amazing that those in power do not comprehend this simple truth. But then those in power have been responsible for creating the atmosphere in which such stupidities are seen by self-seekers devoid of even common sense, not to speak of historical sense, as the best way to please Indira Gandhi and retain or gain positions in the power structure.

Before coming to recent events, let us take a brief look at the background. Sanjay Gandhi came

to figure in public discussions only because of the controversy around his Maruti small car project — a project that could not take off despite official patronage to the point of irregularities and despite Sanjay Gandhi's well-publicised interest in, and knowledge of, matters mechanical. There is no evidence that he ever had much interest in politics — although, with the kind of friends who surrounded him and encouraged him, he let it be known that he did not quite approve of his grandfather's socio-economic ideas and ideals. Even if he had only a strictly limited horizon, he did not shy away from being projected at a later stage as the man who knew all the answers to the nation's problems. His supposed shyness would seem to have come in handy to hide a lot of ignorance combined with a lot of arrogance.

Those who have described him as a "doer" in contrast to the "dreamer", Jawaharlal Nehru, will no doubt tell us in due course what exactly Sanjay did. Denigration of Nehru is the favourite pastime of certain interests in this country. But by describing him as a "dreamer" they cannot wipe out the solid

contribution he made to establish parliamentary democracy on a stable footing in so vast and varied a country or the fruits of the planning process to ensure economic self-reliance he initiated with remarkable vision or the continuing validity and impact on the world at large of the independent foreign policy he forged, striking a new path and drawing more and more countries to it, in the interests of peace, freedom and shared progress. And the learned gentleman who, for reasons unknown, chose to compare Nehru riding on horseback to preside over the Lahore session of the National Congress with his grandson playing about with planes unmindful of rules and regulations which he could ignore because of his parentage, would seem to need to re-read the history of the freedom struggle. The Lahore session represented nothing less than Nehru's triumph in making Gandhiji agree to the forthright demand for complete independence as against the Dominion Status favoured by powerful conservatives within the Congress. What was important about Lahore was not the horse.

Another intellectual, the mighty editor of one of our biggest newspapers, who only a few days back published an editorial comparing Sanjay Gandhi's entry into politics to Mahatma Gandhi's entry in the early part of the century and had earlier still written about some new kind of cultural revolution that Sanjay represented, seems to have had second thoughts. He has now come out with the thesis that Sanjay owed his importance and power to his mother, her position and her charisma. Having made this discovery, he has not hesitated to pontificate about the "schizophrenia" and "ambivalence" of the Indian intelligentsia. Obviously it would not occur to such a pompous specimen that he is himself quite a glaring example of these attributes.

Sanjay had to defend himself in the face of the fierce criticism of the Maruti project and the irregularities associated with it. He defended himself as best he could, and who could defend himself better than a son of a

powerful Prime Minister? The Gupta Commission report is a matter of public record — it was placed before Parliament and so far as one knows has not been withdrawn — and Gupta was no clumsy J.C. Shah. Ultimately, when Indira Gandhi also came under attack, even if Jayaprakash Narayan's Total Revolution was a flop, a stage was reached when the Prime Minister would not trust her colleagues in Government or party, and began to depend on her second son — the elder son was not ambitious, not the "derring-do" type and not suited for the kind of job Indira Gandhi had in mind. Indira herself has made the strange statement that Sanjay was to her "like an elder brother who had given me support and help". Here is a complex psychological relationship which it is for experts in the field to analyse.

Whatever the implications of the closeness that had developed between mother and son, a few facts stand out. It is said — and there is no reason to disbelieve it — that Indira Gandhi imposed Emergency on his advice. But was it only his advice that made it possible? It was the cowardly acquiescence of many of her senior colleagues on the one hand, and acceptance of the move by others in high places who found they could do what they liked with the new unlimited powers on the other, that made the imposition of Emergency possible. It was in this situation that Sanjay Gandhi discovered his own importance as the Prime Minister's beloved son. Servile Chief Ministers and Ministers spreading the red carpet for him wherever he went, fawning on

him, and misusing the administrative machinery for the astic image-building exercise, all part of the record. When the masses showered affection on Jawaharlal Nehru, his reaction was characteristic: he feared this might go to his head, and warned himself and others against any personality cult by writing that memorable article under a pseudonym. But Sanjay Gandhi, not known for humility, and well known to his friends, some politicians and many officials as the embodiment of all the arrogance of a pampered child of a reigning queen, could not be expected to react similarly, even if the carefully organised "popular" enthusiasm had in fact been spontaneous. His reaction was to see the possibility of controlling the levers of power without even a semblance of responsibility. He is said to have advised his mother against holding elections in 1977. But her democratic instinct prevailed, no doubt because she was persuaded that she could not lose. It is sad that in retrospect she should believe that her son's undemocratic advice was right.

It is being proclaimed that Sanjay Gandhi was the "architect" of the Congress-I victory in the Lok Sabha elections early this year and the Assembly elections in many of the nine States that went to the polls recently. One would think that is a highly debatable proposition. The film star type halo that attracted many young people to Sanjay was no doubt one of several factors, but much more important were, first, the chaos that prevailed in the administration and in public life during the Janata-Lok Dal regimes, second,

FROM BOSWELL SINGH

One evening over my whisky I asked Sanjay about the alleged excesses of the Emergency. He never took anything stronger than plain tap water, not even tea, coffee or an aerated drink. He candidly admitted some mistakes he had made in his judgment, the manner in which the family planning programme had been executed, some of the men and women who had been arrested and detained. But censorship imposed on the Press did not worry him; he never thought very highly of journalists and regarded newspapers as an urban nuisance. I was surprised to find that he did like Hindi films and had a teenager's adoration for Zeenat Aman.

—Khushwant Singh in *Contour*, June 29, 1980

divided and confused Opposition that could not offer any kind of challenge to Indira Gandhi and the party which remains an extension of her personality (a united Opposition in 1977 swung less than nine per cent of votes to bring about her rout), and third, the sympathy evoked among large sections of the public by what was made to look like harassment of a hapless woman and her son.

A word about the deliberate, officially-backed attempt to intensify the image-building effort even after Sanjay's tragic death. The choice of Shantivana, housing a simple monument to the first great nation-builder of free India, was not only improper but smacked of monarchical conduct. The argument advanced by some that the expected crowds could not be accommodated anywhere else in the Capital is patently a lame excuse rather than rational explanation. The impropriety of some State Governments declaring mourning, with the national flag flying at half-mast, is obvious. The Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces saluting the body has been officially justified on the grounds that they were only in their duty uniform and not in ceremonial uniform, and that it is perfectly legitimate for the topmost armed forces officers in the country to salute any dead body. Why then did these officers not go to Nigambodh Ghat where the other man who died in the air crash along with Sanjay Gandhi was cremated? Presumably what is meant is that any corpse that the Government in its wisdom decides to have cremated in the Shantivana-Vijay Ghat-Raj Ghat complex will get the salute.

The President of India cut short his stay in Tirupati and flew in to pay homage; evidently he was so overcome by emotion that he could not fly to Madras to pay homage to a former President and a great national leader, V.V. Giri. Sanjiva Reddy is not easily swayed by emotions; he knows what is worthwhile for himself and what is not. This writer for once finds himself in agreement with that political freak, Raj Narain, whose ques-

tions need to be answered honestly. And the list includes the mysterious withdrawal of the order to set up a court of inquiry into the air crash and the mystery surrounding the particular aircraft itself.

Next, the kind of things that politicians and others have been saying presumably to please Indira Gandhi. For example, C.M. Stephen's comparison of Sanjay to many great figures from Jesus Christ to Mahatma Gandhi. He could just as well have included God without much mental strain. Zail Singh, famous for his limitless IQ, said Sanjay had led the struggle against poverty. To Charanjit Chana he was an "avatar" and a "revolutionary". Obviously there are occasions when one can say anything and get away with it. Not to be outdone, a famous cartoonist offered the national flag at half-mast with a quotation from Julius Caesar, while another's offering consisted of a pair of chappals and a burning torch. It is a long and sickening record. Let us leave it at that.

What remains? The "youth power" which Sanjay Gandhi is supposed to have brought into politics. What is youth power? It is not something created by issuing fiat, Sanjay style. It is the product of awakening among the mass of youth, of dedicated determination to struggle against and end injustice of all kinds including social and economic inequality, a restless impatience to do away with all inequities. Youth power is not to be calculated in terms of the age groups in which elected members of Parliament or

State Legislatures fall. And in any case they were elected because they had the blessings of Indira Gandhi on the one hand and the opposition was disunited and had nothing to offer, on the other. Youth power has to emerge from mass movements. It has to be democratic in character and direction. You find it in Assam today, however much you may disagree with its objective: you could see it among the Naxalites however much you may disapprove of their methods. Gandhi led such youth power to Dandi — and not a Rajput brigade to the Assemblies and Parliament. Genuine youth power could not be mobilised even by JP despite his offering them a mass programme of sorts. How could it be mobilised by a rash young man who believed he was born to issue orders and the rest were there to carry out those orders? Khushwant Singh, close friend of Sanjay, has quoted the latter to show that he believed only in giving orders.

Youth has at crucial junctures played a great role in Indian politics before and after Independence. It will do so again. But certainly not because of those who have gained positions by the grace of Mother and Son and want to stick to those positions at all costs. Youth of India have some day to get a *leadership* — it cannot be a case of "one leader" — but that cannot be done by absurd moves like the "draft Rajiv" and "draft Maneka" campaigns. Even if some want it, no dynasty can be established in this country. It would be well to remember that. □

DOM'S MARKET VALUE

The most sympathetic communication I had with him (Sanjay Gandhi) was when his wife and he once came to lunch. At the time, my wife and I were in search of a new flat. While Maneka and Leela discussed prices and localities (there were only the four of us present) Sanjay did not speak. However, he appeared to be deep in thought, and presently said, "Vasant Vihar would be the best place for you. The vegetables there are good and cheap."

The remark seemed to me at the time somewhat risible, but on reflection it touched me. It seemed to me that Sanjay had devoted some thought and time to a problem that wasn't his, and that eventually he had based his suggestion upon what he himself thought to be most desirable in an area. It also showed an awareness of market values which I did not expect from him.

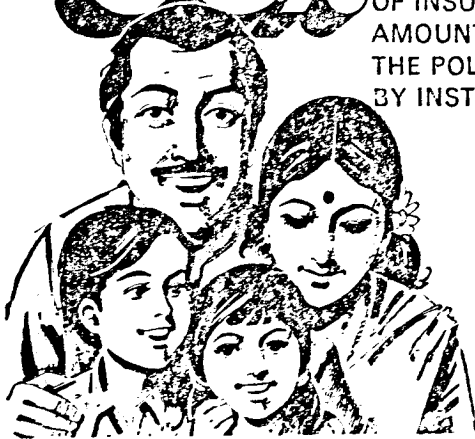
—Dom Moraes in *Sunday Standard*, June 29, 1980

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