



THE CONGRESS PARTY: THIRTY YEARS OF POWER

by B. G. Verghese

At the midnight hour of August 14, 1947, Independence won, Prime Minister-elect Jawaharlal Nehru announced that "the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance." The Congress Party took over the colonial government left by Lord Louis Mountbatten, last of a long line of British Governors-General and Viceroys. Thereafter, for nearly 30 years, the party continuously controlled the Indian Parliament—and the Prime Minister's office.

The Congress held the country together in 1948 during the appalling trauma of Partition, when millions of people moved between Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan and uncounted hundreds of thousands were slaughtered on the basis of their religious faiths. The Congress shaped India's 1950 Constitution and established the democratic framework that its latter-day leader, Indira Gandhi, drastically abridged before she, and the party, were brought down by one of the remaining safeguards: free elections. For the first time in its history, the Congress Party had been rejected nationally by the Indian people.

Now in partial eclipse, the party is by no means defunct. The Congress (I) faction—the "I" is for Indira—leads the opposition in both houses of Parliament, and holds or shares office in three states. The party, split by Mrs. Gandhi in 1978, could again become the democratic alternative to the ruling Janata Party (a disparate coalition that includes many former Congress members) but only if given new leadership committed to democratic principles. Until then, the future is clouded.

Organized with official encouragement by Allan Octavian Hume, a retired Indian civil service officer, the Congress Party held its first meeting in Bombay in 1885. Its object was to become the "germ of a native Parliament," a sort of tentative loyal opposition. Indeed, its first meeting concluded with "three cheers for Her Majesty, the Queen Empress."

The early character of the party was typified by Gopal Krishna Gokhale, a gentle and liberal Brahmin from Poona, who

tried to persuade the British to improve the social conditions of the country. Other party members, however, wanted to go further. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, a fiery Brahmin nationalist who was inspired by the "Asian" victory in the 1904–05 Russo-Japanese War, called for *Swaraj*, or "self-rule." "*Swaraj* is my birthright," Tilak declared, "and I shall have it."

After Mohandas Gandhi returned to India in 1915, he propelled the nationalists into a mass struggle. Various men of note fell in behind Gandhi. Among them were Vallabhbhai Patel from Gujarat, who was to become the integrator of independent India; C. R. Rajagopalachari from Madras, who would be the first Indian Governor-General after Mountbatten; Rajendra Prasad from Bihar, who became the first President of the Republic; and Motilal Nehru, father of India's first Prime Minister. World War I temporarily interrupted the nationalists' forward movement, as more than 1.3 million Indians fought in France, the Middle East, and Africa against the Germans and Turks. But the end of the war brought fresh demands from the Congress—and fresh repression of Indians by the British.

In early 1919 in Amritsar, holy city of the Sikhs, violent protests erupted against the jailing of two Congress leaders. On April 13, as a crowd of 20,000 massed in an enclosed area, a nervous British general ordered his outnumbered troops to fire. When the smoke cleared, there were 390 dead and 1,200 wounded. Nationalist attitudes hardened overnight. The Jallianwalla Bagh massacre is still remembered and invoked in India.

The following year, Gandhi launched his first noncooperation movement, culminating in his imprisonment in 1922 after what he called a "Himalayan blunder"—his supporters had turned violent and burned a police station, with the policemen



A CLASH OF SYMBOLS

The three-decade-long dominance of the socialist Congress Party (symbol, left) over India's politics was broken only in 1977 with the victory of the Janata Party (symbol, right), a new coalition comprising nearly a dozen political parties—and many disgruntled Congress Party members.



inside. He did not revive the movement until the late 1920s. Turning instead to tasks of social and economic reconstruction, he encouraged village industries, school reform, and the production of hand-spun cloth called *khadi*, which became the proudly worn livery of freedom.

The Salt March

Disappointed with the pace of promised constitutional reforms, the Congress in 1929 pledged itself to *Purna Swaraj*, or total independence, a step beyond the dominion status it had hitherto sought. A few months later the second noncooperation movement was launched with Gandhi's famous Salt March to the obscure coastal village of Dandi in Gujarat. There he symbolically defied the British by taking crusted sea salt from the shore in violation of the government's salt monopoly. This simple act electrified the nation and brought him to the attention of the world. Once again Gandhi went to jail.

Following the 1935 Government of India Act, which introduced representative government in the provinces, elections put several Congress candidates in office. Their tenure was brief. In 1939, in the wake of the Viceroy's unilateral commitment of India to war against the Axis powers and Britain's failure to include Indian independence among her war aims, the Congress ordered its members in provincial governments to resign.

Not so the Muslim League, the prime political party for India's vast Muslim minority. Its leader, the brilliant lawyer and former Congress Party member Muhammad Ali Jinnah, pledged the league to the war effort. In return, he got from the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, a promise that his party would have a veto over any postwar change in the governance of India. In 1940 the Muslim League, meeting in Lahore, adopted the Pakistan Resolution, which formally set out the goal of separate Muslim-majority states in the northwest and northeast of India. Thus was the stage set for Partition.

By 1942, Gandhi was ready to raise the anti-British slogan

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"Quit India." It had immediate results. The Congress's final "No" to Britain's war effort meant imprisonment once more for Gandhi, Nehru, and virtually everyone else then active in Congress Party politics. The jail doors remained closed until after the surrender of Germany in 1945.

To some Indians, Britain's wartime difficulties seemed an opportunity to hasten Independence by direct action. One former Congress president, Subhas Chandra Bose, rejected Gandhi's nonviolence and organized 20,000 Indian prisoners of war to fight for Japan against the British in Burma. Most other Congress leaders stayed with their Gandhian principles. But one of them, Jawaharlal Nehru, who was beginning to move up to a position of power in the party, had already taken a different ideological path from Gandhi's.

Sophisticated and cosmopolitan, Nehru was impressed by the potential of the Soviet experiment as well as by the importance of planning and state-controlled development of heavy industry. When Independence came in 1947, Nehru was the mentor of India's "Congress Socialists." (The leadership of this faction was later taken by Jayaprakash Narayan, who, a generation later, was instrumental in bringing down Nehru's daughter, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.)

Government by Faction

Mahatma Gandhi's last advice to the Congress was that it should disband itself with the attainment of Independence. By the time of Gandhi's assassination in 1948, however, his influence had already waned. The Congress had become India's government and Nehru its leader.

The Congress Nehru led was a coalition sheltering many diverse factions that united when necessary to win elections, then worked to advance their own regional, religious, or economic interests. Gradually, what began to matter in the public eye was not ideology, or even program, so much as integrity, style, and, of course, results. The last frequently were not forthcoming, and the Congress never won a majority of the popular vote after Independence. But it always controlled a majority in the lower house of Parliament.

As time went on, the Congress became more a vote-getting machine than a cohesive political party. The "ministerial wing," the people who ran the central government, took precedence over the "organizational wing," the party officers. The All-India Congress Committee, the party's government-controlled "High Command," paid little heed to state and provincial officials,

HINDUISM: A VAST SPONGE



India, according to its Constitution, is a secular state. Yet among its people are members of most of the world's major religions. There are more Muslims in India than in all of the Middle East. Christianity, traditionally believed to have been brought to southern India by St. Thomas the Apostle, has perhaps 14 million adherents of various sects. There are additional millions of Buddhists, Sikhs, and Jains—religions of Indian origin. But dominating all are the Hindus, nearly 84 percent of the country's enormous population.

To the monotheistic world extending westward from India to the Pacific coast of the Americas, Hinduism has always been puzzling. Jews and Christians hew to Yaweh's dictum brought down from Mount Sinai by Moses: "You shall have no other gods before me." Muslims daily testify: "There is no god but God." But in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Krishna, just one of the thousands of gods in the Hindu pantheon, says: "Whatever god a man worships, it is I who answer the prayer."

Hinduism over the millennia has developed a limitless capacity for absorbing every kind of belief, however incongruous. Even the Indian-born Buddha has been given a perverse reincarnation as the ninth and latest avatar of Vishnu. British historian Sir Percival Spear has likened Hinduism to "a vast sponge that absorbs all that enters without ceasing to be itself." The simile is not quite exact, as Spear concedes, "because

who went their own, sometimes corrupt, ways.

The growing factionalism of the Congress during the late 1950s and the first years of the 1960s coincided with the inevitable twilight of Jawaharlal Nehru, who was as much the Congress as he was India. The failures of the nation and the party he saw as his own. Planning had not ended poverty, and the public-sector industries faltered without spurring a take-off in economic growth. In the 12 years from Independence until 1960, annual per-capita income increased only by about 15 percent—in real terms, to about \$70. The bright hope of nonalignment, meanwhile, was tarnished by the Sino-Indian border conflict in 1962, when China callously slapped India's face diplomatically and embarrassed it militarily before the world.

Nehru died a disappointed man—India's "tryst with des-

Hinduism has shown a remarkable power of assimilating as well as absorbing: The water becomes part of the sponge."

Has Hinduism been a force for good or ill? Educated Indians are divided on the question. N. C. Chaudhuri, best known in the West for *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951), regards Hinduism as one of the few cohesive forces on the subcontinent. Novelist V. S. Naipul agrees, but suggests in *India: A Wounded Civilization* (1977) that cohesion has been bought at the price of stultifying conformity:

"The key Hindu concept of *dharma*—the right way, the sanctioned way, which all men must follow, according to their natures—is an elastic concept. At its noblest it combines self-fulfillment and truth to the self with the ideas of action as duty, action as its own spiritual reward, man as a holy vessel But *dharma*, as this ideal of truth to oneself, or living out the truth in oneself, can also be used to reconcile men to servitude and make them find in paralyzing obedience the highest spiritual good *Dharma* is creative or crippling according to the state of the civilization, according to what is expected of men. It cannot be otherwise Indians have made some contribution to science in this century, but—with a few notable exceptions—their work has been done abroad The scientist returning to India sheds the individuality he acquired during his time abroad; he regains the security of his caste identity, and the world is simplified once more. There are minute rules, as comforting as bandages; individual perception and judgment, which once called forth his creativity, are relinquished as burdens, and the man is once more a unit in his herd, his science reduced to a skill. The blight of caste is not only untouchability and the consequent deification in India of filth; the blight, in an India that tries to grow, is also the overall obedience it imposes, its ready-made satisfactions, the diminishing of adventurousness, the pushing away from men of individuality and the possibility of excellence. . . ."

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tiny," which he had evoked in his eloquent speech on the night of Independence, still unconsummated. His successor, Lal Bahadur Shastri, a deft politician and Home Minister under Nehru, might have made some progress—if only in party reform. But after a year and a half in office he died in Tashkent, having settled, with Soviet mediation, the 1965 war with Pakistan. Indira Gandhi succeeded him.

Nehru's daughter's accession to office was hailed by many as the beginning of a generational change in Congress rule. But there was a degree of cynicism in her selection by the party's "High Command," which had put together enough support for her to shut out the ascetic Morarji Desai (now Prime Minister). The "Old Guard" believed they could control the then-insecure Mrs. Gandhi. But she had iron in her soul.

THE MAHATMA

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi is revered in India as "Father of the Nation."

In the 30 years since he was felled by an assassin's bullet, Indians may have diverged from the teachings of the scrawny little ascetic ("a half-naked fakir," Churchill once scornfully called him). But they cannot forget that without Gandhi and his extraordinary revolutionary methods, they would not have the nation they do.

Gandhi was born in 1869 in the tiny princely state of Porbandar, a remote coastal region of western India. His father was *diwan* (prime minister) and an orthodox Hindu of the Vaisya caste (merchants and moneylenders). Although Mohandas wanted to be a physician, his father sent him to London, a shy and frightened 18-year-old, to study law for two years.

As a fledgling barrister back in India, Gandhi was a failure—so timid he was unable to speak out for his clients. Nonetheless, in 1893 a group of merchants gave him a one-year assignment among the tens of thousands of Indians in South Africa. Faced with British colonial oppression of the Indian community, Gandhi discovered that he could speak out and sway people—indeed, that he had enormous reservoirs of courage and tenacity. It was here that he developed his ideas about peaceful, nonviolent opposition. He stayed in South Africa for 20 years—ultimately obtaining concessions on behalf of Indian indentured workers there—and was acclaimed a hero when he returned to India in 1915.

Despite his compatriots' admiration for his accomplishments abroad, he found on his return home that the Congress Party leadership, moderates and extremists alike, had no place in their plans for civil disobedience or nonviolence. Gandhi, a supremely patient man, set up his first *ashram* (religious center) and bided his time.

The Congress of that day was largely composed of wealthy businessmen, lawyers, and professionals, and had little contact with the people. Toward the end of World War I, Gandhi began appealing to

In her bid for supremacy, Mrs. Gandhi expediently donned a deeper shade of Fabian socialist pink. She nationalized the country's banks and secured the resignations of five conservative Cabinet members. Radical rhetoric filled the air.

A 1969 split in the Congress Party reduced Mrs. Gandhi's partisans to a minority in the Lok Sabha, but she continued in office with the support of the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, a Tamil-language party in the south. The Moscow-oriented CPI believed that the Congress Party split signaled an opening to the left, a conviction



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Collection: The New Jersey State Museum.

the masses. He helped textile workers win a bitter strike in Ahmadabad. He bested the tyrannical British indigo planters in Bihar. Soon the Congress leadership began coming to Gandhi. By the mid-1920s, he was the untitled leader of the party.

Gandhi's appeal to the Indian masses was traditional. The Mahatma (or "great soul," a title bestowed on him by Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore) was a rigidly celibate *brahmachari* seeking God, a holy man, a saint. "Men say I am a saint losing myself in politics," he drily observed. "The fact is I am a politician trying to become a saint." And it was as a master politician that he broke the age-old passivity of India's hundreds of millions, leading them to freedom from British rule.

Independence brought no joy to Gandhi. Depressed and saddened by the religious slaughter that followed Partition, he did what he could to bring it under control and displayed great concern for the Muslim minority remaining in the new India. On January 30, 1948, he came to his regular evening prayer meeting at the home of industrialist G. D. Birla in New Delhi. A young man greeted him with folded hands, touched his feet, rose, and fired three shots. Gandhi was dead in a few minutes, the victim of a fanatical Hindu.

fortified when Mrs. Gandhi dissolved the Lok Sabha in 1971.

That year the "Ruling" Congress faction—as opposed to the beaten "Organization" Congress, which went into opposition—entered into a formal electoral alliance with the CPI in a number of states, and in March it won a landslide victory. It followed up a year later by sweeping the polls in a number of key state elections in the wake of India's victory in the Bangladesh war.

Mrs. Gandhi's prestige was never higher. She could at that time have pushed for major reforms that were long overdue: in education, in agriculture, in planning, and elsewhere. In fact,

THE MAN WHO WOULDN'T BE KING

Jawaharlal Nehru, the gentleman revolutionary who spent nine years as a prisoner of the British before becoming India's first Prime Minister, grew up as a "brown Englishman." According to one prison-mate, he spoke English even in his sleep.

Young Nehru lived among the British until the age of 22. His wealthy lawyer father's home was the first built by an Indian in Allahabad's "Civil Lines," the residential area for high-level British officials. At home, British tutors prepared him for Harrow. From there he went to Cambridge, then on to study law in London's Inner Temple.

One biographer describes the young Nehru as "very handsome, debonair in his Bond Street clothes In the summer he did Europe." He himself recalled the period years afterward: "I am afraid that I was a bit of a prig with little to commend me."

After his return to India in 1912, he practiced law in a desultory fashion. Although his father was a very active member of the Congress Party, the son took only an armchair interest in politics. Even the chaos and slaughter of World War I failed to move him deeply.

Not so the 1919 Jallianwalla Bagh massacre. A year later, Nehru "discovered" the abjectly poor Indian peasant. Sensitized at last, he was ready to be enlisted by Gandhi. The dilettante was gone forever.

Although Gandhi and Nehru shared a deep mutual affection, they frequently disagreed. Gandhi represented Old India; Nehru, 20 years his junior, New India. The generation gap between them was too wide to bridge. But Nehru knew that freedom could not be won without the truly charismatic appeal of Gandhi. Despite their disagreements, Nehru clove to the Mahatma.

Gandhi's assassination was followed by the death in 1950 of Nehru's only serious political rival, Vallabhbhai Patel. After that,

however, she abandoned the initiative the moment she had it.

There was a manifest loss of direction, indeed, even of will. The Congress Party atrophied. Authority was centralized, then personalized as Mrs. Gandhi took over the party as well as the government. Through centralized fund-raising, she harnessed big business to her own brand of big-money politics. The party, holding for 90 years the middle ground in Indian politics, began to alienate its own rank and file. Political corruption grew.*

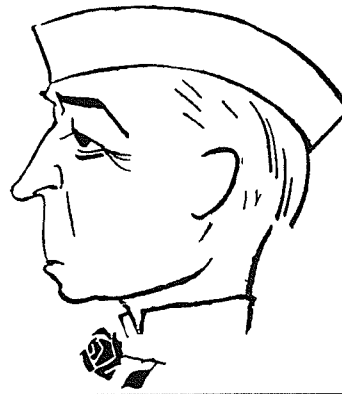
*In 1973, the Minister of State for Finance complained that his ministry was being denied the administrative powers to deal with smugglers. The Congress chief minister of Gujarat, Chimanbhai Patel, the state's top elected official, was accused by two of his own Cabinet colleagues of having entered into a deal with local oilseed merchants to siphon 2 million rupees into the Congress campaign chest for the 1974 election in Uttar Pradesh in return for allowing prices of vegetable oil (a staple in cooking) to rise.

Nehru *was* India. He traveled throughout the country, cajoling, prodding, ordering his people to do better. During Nehru's lifetime, India did not begin to achieve the goals he set for his country. But he held the country together when it might have fallen apart; and while he could have become a dictator at any time, he did not.

Nehru reveled in meeting and talking to people, and wasted his time extravagantly with foreign visitors. Perhaps this self-indulgence satisfied a need not filled by friends. He had very few. Among the closest were Viscount Mountbatten, the last Viceroy, and his countess. Their friendship began during the prelude to Independence in 1947. For years afterward, Countess Mountbatten regularly visited New Delhi in the lovely month of January. When she died of a heart attack in 1960, Nehru went into seclusion for three days.

One of Jawaharlal Nehru's habits was to jot down things he read that struck him. On his death in 1964 at age 74—he had been Prime Minister for nearly 17 years—a notepad was found beside his bed. On it he had copied the closing lines of Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening":

*The woods are lonely, dark, and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.*



Drawing by Shankar, from *The Big 4 of India*.
Krishnalal Shridharani (Delhi: Malhotra Brothers, 1951).

The economy plummeted, pushed into worse decline by drought in 1972 and 1973, by the financial drain of the Bangladesh war, and by the oil crisis and global inflation. The regime's contempt for established norms, plainly displayed in the ouster of independent-minded judges, stoked mounting protest, irresponsibility, and anger on all sides. As protests spilled over into the streets, the states of Gujarat and Bihar became centers of defiance under the leadership of Jayaprakash Narayan, who seemed to embody the mood of the people. Then, on June 12, 1975, the Allahabad high court ruled that Mrs. Gandhi was guilty of corrupt election practices. She was ordered to vacate her seat in Parliament—and, consequently, the prime ministership.

THE LADY

Her father was an agnostic. His will specified that he wished to be cremated, but without a religious ceremony. Yet immediately after Jawaharlal Nehru's death in 1964, his daughter, Indira Gandhi, took it upon herself to arrange for a traditional Hindu funeral. The body was carried through countless mourners to a pyre on the banks of the Jumna River outside Delhi.

Was she responding to a deathbed change of heart that only she knew had occurred? Overruling Nehru's last wishes for his own spiritual good? Or were her motives political in large or small degree?

All these conjectures were voiced at the time. Mrs. Gandhi said nothing and retreated for months into her grief. She was then what she would be throughout her 11 years in the prime ministership—as she put it, “a very private person.” Very private, very tough. To Henry Kissinger, she was always “the Lady.”

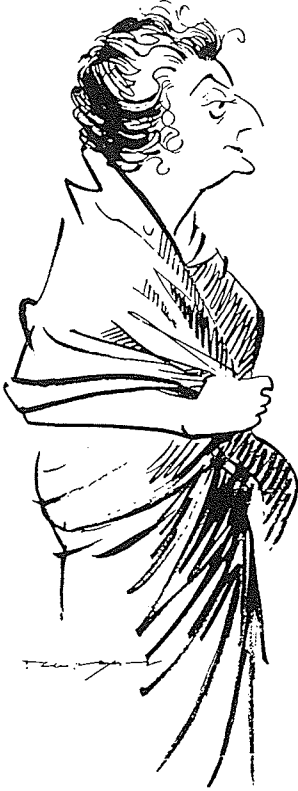
When Indira Gandhi was seven, an aunt came upon her one day standing on the verandah, hand upraised and muttering to herself. Questioned about what she was doing, the lonely, only child explained, “I am practicing to be Joan of Arc.”

At 24 she married for love and against tradition. Her choice, to her father's initial dismay, was a Parsee journalist-politician, Feroze Gandhi—no relation to the Mahatma. Shortly after the wedding in 1942, both were imprisoned for nationalist activity. The marriage later deteriorated when Indira became her father's hostess and moved into the Prime Minister's residence with her two sons.

Even before her husband's death in 1960, Mrs. Gandhi had moved slowly but inevitably into high political position. Her years at her father's side were an extraordinary apprenticeship for power, though she seemed not to seek it and vacillated about using it. By 1957, she had become president of the Congress Party. It was not

All might still have gone well had she bowed out gracefully pending an appeal to the Supreme Court. Instead, *goondas*, or “toughs,” from the Congress and elsewhere took the field under command of her son Sanjay, producing “rent-a-crowd,” pro-Indira rallies. “Indira is India, and India is Indira,” the Congress leadership proclaimed.

On June 26, 1975, less than two weeks after the Allahabad court decision, Mrs. Gandhi, without consulting the Cabinet or any other government officials, proclaimed an “Internal Emergency.” It was a signal for mass arrests (more than 150,000 people were jailed), rigid press censorship, a virtual ban on political activity, abrogation of fundamental constitutional



*Drawing by Laxman, from All in All,
M. Chalapathi Rau
(Vyasa Publications: Delhi, 1972).*

surprising that on the sudden death of her father's successor, Lal Bahadur Shastri, the Congress Party's "Old Guard" in January 1966 made her Prime Minister. Nor was it surprising that they thought they could run her as it suited them.

Instead, she purged the "Old Guard" and replaced them with people of her own choosing. After the Bangladesh war of 1971, she was at the pinnacle of her power. The Indian masses adored her. But India still faced old problems of poverty, corruption, and inefficiency that seemed invincible. Gradually, Mrs. Gandhi retired into distrustful isolation.

Another side of her became apparent: the doting mother. Both of her sons—Sanjay, a somewhat swinging bachelor, and Rajiv, an unobtrusive senior pilot for Indian Airlines—lived with her. When she proclaimed the Emergency in 1975, Sanjay, though he held no official position, became his mother's principal agent.

Mrs. Gandhi, who will be 61 in November, is not finished politically. But guessing at her future is as difficult as probing her psyche.

Questioned about the Emergency during the state elections of January 1978, she blandly replied, "All that is past history." Then, as the little girl in Allahabad might have said, she added: "And besides, we have said we were sorry for any excesses."

rights including habeas corpus, intimidation of judges and lawyers, and suppression of dissent. India, it seemed, was going the way of most other Third World countries.

A Gambit Fails

By swift degrees Emergency rule became increasingly untenable. Compulsory sterilization programs and the mass razing—140,000 dwellings in Delhi alone—of so-called squatter settlements turned into campaigns of terror. Sanjay Gandhi, the mainspring of these programs, began to exercise other powers, making key appointments and laying down policies. Constitu-

A MAN WITHOUT AMBITION

In one of his short stories, Rudyard Kipling recounts the tale of Purun Bhagat, prime minister of a large princely state, friend of Viceroys and governors, knight commander of the Order of the Indian Empire, who one day decides to let everything go "as a man drops a cloak he no longer needs." He makes his mendicant way far into the lower Himalayas, where he stays for years in silent contemplation. Then a landslide threatens the village below. He breaks his trance and becomes an activist again, reaching the village in time to warn its inhabitants. When all are safe, death overtakes him.

Jayaprakash Narayan, to whom much credit must go for ending Indira Gandhi's Emergency, is something of a 20th-century Purun Bhagat.

As a college student, he was involved in the early days of the Gandhian movement. He left India in 1921 to go to the United States. For a while he attended the University of California, working at various odd jobs to support himself. After leaving Berkeley, he worked his way across the country, moving from job to job, ending up on an automobile assembly line in Detroit. He returned to India in 1929, a committed classical socialist.

Narayan's political and social beliefs drew him to Nehru, then something of a parlor socialist. Soon Narayan was leader of the Congress Party's socialist wing and at the same time one of the most active and effective workers in the freedom struggle. After Independence, Narayan refused to accept any position in the government. And in 1948, opposing many of its practices, he quit the Congress, organized the Praja Socialist Party, and became the head of the three largest labor unions in the country. Many people at the time considered him the logical successor to Jawaharlal Nehru as Prime Minister.

Then, in 1954, he unexpectedly took the vow of *jeevandan* (literally, "gift of life") and, like Purun Bhagat, "went into the forest."

tional government was in fact being replaced by a palace caucus. But when Sanjay and other counselors advocated an indefinite postponement of elections—already put off a year by the Emergency decree—Mrs. Gandhi sought instead to legitimize herself by gambling on an easy victory over a disorganized, fearful, and divided opposition.

The gambit failed. The Janata Party, nurtured by Jayaprakash Narayan and forged, pre-Independence fashion, in jail, rode to victory on an upsurge of popular support. Even the most senior Cabinet minister, Jagjivan Ram, crossed over to the opposition, bitterly denouncing Mrs. Gandhi. The new Janata



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A vigorous 52, he joined the ascetic Vinoba Bhave in the *Bhoodan* (land gift) movement, an idealistic and largely unsuccessful effort to get landlords to give part or all of their holdings to landless peasants. For the next 21 years he walked with Bhave throughout the country, separated from all of his old activities. He scrupulously stayed away from India's turbulent electoral politics until Mrs. Gandhi was found guilty of election malpractices.

Then, on June 23, 1975, Narayan presided over a meeting of non-communist opposition leaders who demanded her resignation. On June 26, the Emergency was declared, and Narayan, though critically ill, was jailed without trial.

This action produced an outcry even the repressive Emergency could not silence. Jayaprakash Narayan in jail became the symbol of the betrayal of India's fight for freedom and of the erratic injustices of Indira Gandhi's regime. Rather than have his death on its hands, the government released him on November 12.

Now 76 and ailing, Narayan remains outside the turmoil of Indian politics. But while he lives, Indians expect he will raise his voice when it is needed.

government—like the Congress an amalgam of many points of view—took office under Morarji Desai on March 22, 1977.

In October 1977 the government arrested the former Prime Minister on corruption charges that were still under investigation. Emboldened by the wave of sympathy generated by this high-handed action, Mrs. Gandhi sought to stage a comeback following her release. She once again split the party, as she had in 1969, getting factional delegates to elect her as party chief. She was promptly expelled by the Congress. In her turn, she "expelled" the legitimate Congress president. Each faction claimed control over the party, its funds, and the election sym-

bol of "yoked oxen," which, along with the party name, still stirs a large measure of popular good will. In January 1978 Mrs. Gandhi held an enormous rally in New Delhi out of which emerged the Congress (I), which a month later made a good showing in three states, winning clear legislative control in two of them.

Whatever the future may hold for the fractured Congress, India today is going through a period of transition and political realignment that may take years to complete. Faint stirrings on the left suggest the possibility of a new constellation forming around the moderately Maoist Marxist Communist Party (CPI-M), which controls West Bengal and the small eastern state of Tripura. The ruling Janata Party has yet to establish a common identity and outlook, although India under Prime Minister Morarji Desai, the epitome of Gandhi-ism, is rediscovering the Mahatma, and the Janata Party is claiming his inheritance.

But the critical problems are psychological ones. Can the Desai government instill a new dynamism in India affecting everything from the process of policymaking to mass political participation? Will the government, blessed with uncommonly large reserves of food and foreign exchange, take a cautious approach to economic growth? Or will it seek to capitalize on these assets to establish a self-sustaining, satisfactory rate of growth? In my own view the latter course is the most promising. But in the India of the 1970s, it is hard enough to predict who will be in power, much less what they will do with it.