Devout till Death

Wrishi Thakur Raphael

THE earthly remains of two of India's most fascinating politicians can be seen in Indira Gandhi Memorial Museum. They are the vestiges belonging to Indira Gandhi and her son Rajiv Gandhi, both of whom had illuminated India's highest seat of power for a considerable period of time. Their devotion, charisma and foresight have helped bring India to its present state, whereby it can proudly declare itself as an Asian powerhouse.

The first of the two: Indira Gandhi was the Prime Minister of India for the longest period of time (between 1966 - 77 and a fourth term from 1980 till her assassination in 1984). For someone born to the most powerful political family of the time, she had a whole nation's expectation to live up to. She started her pursuit of national politics as her father's assistant, Jawaharlal Nehru, who was the first Prime Minister of India. She had a most sensational political career, one remembered for its achievements in areas like agricultural development and family planning but also marred by feuds authoritarianism. During her last tenure at the Indian House of Parliament she was greatly involved in factions with Punjabi separatists. She ordered a military siege of the Golden Temple -Sikhism's holiest shrine - in an effort to wipe out Sikh Militants; a carnage which lead to heavy civilian casualties. Many lives were lost. Indira Gandhi was intensely criticized after this fiasco.

On 31st October 1984 while she was on her way to office she was gunned down by her body guards Satwant Singh and Beant Singh (Sikhs by religion) at close range. As many as 29 entry exit wounds were later discovered on her body. Beant was shot dead while Satwant was shot and arrested then and there by other guards. Her personal belongings which were used on that day are now exhibits in the Indira Gandhi Memorial Museum. The holes in her saree bear testimony of the atrocity, the horror of the kill, the bloodthirstiness of the enemy.

Rajiv Gandhi on the other hand had a comparatively less controversial period in office. For someone who was previously a pilot of the Indian Airways, running for the house of Parliament was never an agenda Rajiv Gandhi considered until his mother's assassination in 1984. But he went on to secure the greatest victory in the history of the Congress Party. He is greatly remembered for his pragmatism, his ability to deal with national problems with a more practical intent and his resolve to make things better for a country which was in dire need for honest leadership. He modernized the telecommunications industry, education sector, scientific ventures and diplomatic relations.

But the minister was criticized for his efforts to implement the Indo Sri Lanka Peace Accord. The peace plan was one which involved the insertion of Indian Troops into Sri Lanka in an effort to wipe out the LTTE Tamil Separatists. This eventually marred his success as a politician and maybe was directly linked to his untimely demise on 21st May 1991.

Rajiv Gandhi was campaigning for a second term in Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu. An LTTE guerilla by the name Thenmuli Rajaratnam approached him in a public meeting and bowed before him. She was packed with an explosive known as RDX. The impact of the explosion instantly killed many people including the former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

The Nehru family continues to influence India's political scenario enormously. The citadels of India's prosperity will forever be indebted to this family and its legacy of national leadership simply because the members of the Nehru family were devout to India till death. Their lives continue to inspire a nation of more than 1 billion, their deaths are still mourned and their stories will always be told with due solemnity and reverence.

Exam Bloopers



