

Indira Priyadarshini

By

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Abstract

She tried to live up to the name. And succeeded to some extent. For there came a time when people even began to call her Ma Durga, an incarnation of the Mother Goddess.

Keywords

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Introduction & History

They draped her in pink brocade.

There was some makeup on her face too, so that now it had some colour and did not look too pale. And then gently, very gently, they lifted her and placed her on the flower bedecked gun carriage.

That was how she started on her last journey.

Indira Priyadarshini

That's what the great poet and Nobel Laureate, Rabindranath Tagore, called her. It's Sanskrit word, meaning 'looking upon everything with kindness and compassion'.

Her parents had chosen to name her Indira, after Goddess Lakshmi. Indira, another Sanskrit word, meaning beauty, or auspiciousness.

Let's start at the beginning.

India was completely caught up in the throes of the struggle for freedom from the British when she was born. Through those turbulent times people would somehow manage to exist, often facing tremendous hardships, and at great cost to themselves and their physical and mental health.

She was a lonely child.

Her father was away a lot. As a close associate of Mahatma Gandhi, he was at the forefront of the freedom struggle and was often jailed for long periods by the British. But he did try his best to keep in touch with me, his only child, through long letters that he wrote from prison.

Her mother was a gentlewoman, frail of body though very strong in spirit. She bore the long separations from her father stoically, and even took to playing an active role in the freedom struggle, organising groups of women in our hometown of Allahabad and picketing shops selling British goods.

Indeed, the fight for the independence of India was all that one ever thought about, day in and day out. And as a child, she too played a part in her own way, gathering neighbourhood children and forming the Vaanara Sena or Monkey Brigade, leading the resistance to British colonial rule.

At last, the day arrived when the British were forced to leave, and finally all could breathe in a free, independent India.

But there had been a heavy price to pay for this freedom.

Several thousands of lives had been lost in the struggle, innumerable families were torn apart and uprooted, and the country suffered the most terrible amputation with the partitioning of the land and its people into East and West Pakistan.

She lived through it all.

Her mother, who had been suffering from tuberculosis, had passed away some years earlier. She had been at her side, nursing her through her long illness, at Lausanne, in Switzerland.

Her mother's passing had brought her closer to Feroze Gandhi, whom she had known for a long time, and who, in the frequent absences of her father, had been so helpful when her mother was ill. She too, had been very fond of him, and grateful for all the assistance he rendered.

Feroze and she got married.

She was happy with her simple, domestic life. Feroze was a loving husband, and the next few years saw them become the parents of two boys, Rajiv and Sanjay.

India became independent, and her father was chosen to be her first Prime Minister.

Feroze and she had begun to live separate lives. For some time there had been friction between them, and now she chose to move into her father's official residence with Rajiv and Sanjay.

As the Prime Minister's official hostess she gained an immense education. Whether while hosting foreign dignitaries who were visiting her father, or accompanying him on trips abroad, she learnt the principles of diplomacy at first hand. And interacting with political, social, economic and other important leaders at home, she slowly learnt the craft of a professional politician. And her father was guiding her through it all.

Her father's passing left her quite bereft.

But he had been grooming her for just such an eventuality. Even when he was Prime Minister, she had been made the President of the Indian National Congress, the ruling political party and the main force that had spearheaded the independence struggle.

Her father's successor inducted her into the Union Cabinet of the Government of India, and she became a Minister. And, barely two years after her father's passing, she became the third Prime Minister of India.

Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister

She rather liked the sound of that. And now she could do even more, so much more, for her country and her people.

Some called her Durga. Yet others equated me with our motherland, claiming that India Is Indira, Indira is India!

It was a heady feeling, at first. But in time she soon realised that heavy is the head that wears the crown. And indeed, her crown had more thorns than roses.

Her two boys had by now grown to manhood's estate.

Rajiv fell in love with a pretty Italian girl, and she conducted their wedding ceremony in her house. Sonia was a simple, affectionate homebody, and a few short years later, she had become the grandmother of two absolutely delightful little ones - Rahul and Priyanka.

Sanjay too, had fallen in love meanwhile, and her Prime Ministerial residence soon welcomed yet another beautiful bride, the charming young Maneka. Little Varun, made her a grandmother for the third time, and she couldn't be happier.

As a mother, she felt fulfilled.

Her boys were no longer alone in life, they each had a family of their own, one that loved and cared for them. And she was free to continue with her role as mother to the people of India.

When life is smooth sailing, like a bed of roses, there are no opportunities to grow as a human being. Adversity, of which she had seen plenty in life, was no stranger to her.

It had given her strength and tenacity, and the determination to plough through in all her endeavours, focussing on the fulfilment of what she perceived to be her duties as Prime Minister.

But the tragedy that struck that summer morning was incredibly cruel. Sanjay, her darling golden boy, her right hand, indeed her helpmate, was no more.

Somehow she pulled herself out of the overwhelming paralysis of mind, and began picking up the pieces of her life. She had lost her son, but she was still the mother to the rest of India. She could not afford the luxury of grief, she had to carry on, no matter what.

Rajiv came to her aid.

He gave up his job as an airline pilot, and devoted himself to full time politics. She was grateful for his help and assistance, and began grooming him just as she had been grooming Sanjay before. And just as her father had groomed and prepared her, all those years ago.

An active politician's life is very, very lonely. There are no real friends, and often even advisors and counselors give misleading advice.

The crown on her head became even heavier, more thorny than ever. She had a premonition that her end was near.

"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.”

On a whirlwind election campaign, yes, those were the words that she uttered that day in Orissa.

Indeed, it was definitely the end. Operation Blue Star had been the final nail on her coffin.

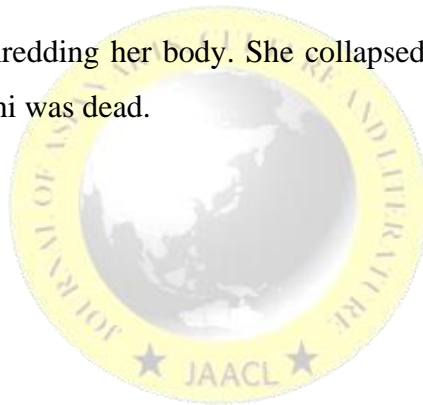
She had been warned.

They asked her to remove all the Sikh bodyguards in her security detail. She refused. What will be, will be, she decided.

Bullets rained into her, shredding her body. She collapsed on the ground, to rise no more. Indira Priyadarshini Gandhi was dead.

Reference

Wikipedia



About the Author

An experienced voice-over artiste who has written and spoken commentaries for short films and radio/tv advertisements, Kalyani has been an English News Reader with All India Radio for over three decades. Ms. Kalyani Menon is the Associate Editor of the Journal of Asian Art, Culture and Literature (JAACL).

