

One of the giants of our freedom struggle, Jayaprakash Narayan stood out as the "conscience of India" at a time when the atmosphere in the country was vitiated by intrigues and the scramble for power.

A tribute by one who knew him intimately.

Jayaprakash has passed away. JP is no more with us. We utter the words, but have we really understood their grim implications? These will gradually sink in as the days pass.

For a generation now, JP has been a compass to our national ship; he has been the conscience-keeper and unofficial Ombudsman of our nation. At every crisis, we have learnt to turn to him to give us guidance and a sense of direction. This was so in 1956 when Soviet tanks overran Hungary. It was again so when in 1960 Chinese Communist hordes invaded Tibet. In 1965, it was he who encompassed a cease-fire between the Indian Armed Forces and the Nagaland "army". It was he who stirred the conscience of the authorities and enabled



—Amiya Taraftar.

Homage To J.P. by Minoo Masani

the dacoits to make their peace with society. He has espoused many unpopular but worthwhile causes. Where shall we now find our lodestar?

This is not the time or occasion for cold-blooded analysis. The blow is still too fresh and emotion clouds the mind.

I first met JP, then a stunningly handsome young man, at the end of the year 1932. He was Acting Secretary of the All-India Congress Committee. We were both young romantics functioning underground in the Civil Disobedience Movement led by Gandhiji. Within a few weeks, I was with him in the Nasik Road Central Prison where we spent the whole of the year 1933 together and became close friends. There is no place like prison to test a man. JP was pure gold.

This year, I met JP on March 20 when I rushed from the train that brought me to Bombay straight to Jaslok Hospital where JP had already been admitted the previous day. He was having his midday meal when I went in to greet him and my heart was warmed by the almost childlike glee with which he greeted me. Optimistically, I promised to call on him at noon the following day. How little we know of what twenty-four hours can bring! The last time I met JP was before he left Bombay for Patna a few months ago, never to return.

Forty-seven years passed between those two meetings. Through all these years, JP gave freely and almost unwisely of himself—thinking nothing of sleep, food or personal comfort. It was his disciplined Gandhian wife, that great little lady, Prabha-

vati Devi, who looked after him and ensured some measure of attention to his health.

If I were asked what are the two qualities of JP that stand out in my recollection of the last half-century, I would say Courage and Gentleness. JP combined them beautifully. A truly brave man is always gentle.

Physical Courage

JP's physical courage was evident in his escape from Hazaribagh Prison in 1942 during the Quit India campaign, in the exchange of fire between his protectors and the police of Nepal, by the way in which he stood up against interrogation when in solitary confinement in the Agra Fort Prison where he was denied sleep night after night in order to make him confess that Gandhiji and he were pro-Japanese.

JP's moral courage was demonstrated on the many occasions when he chose to dissent and part company from Mahatma Gandhi and later Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

JP was a gentle person who would not hurt even a fly. The last time I paid him that compliment, however, I got into trouble with him! I had mentioned this in a speech in the Central Legislative Assembly, soon after my election in September 1945, while urging his release from prison. JP wrote to me from Agra Prison saying he liked my speech but he made a critical comment by asking me very dryly: "Do you think it right to concede that only those who are

too gentle to kill flies should be set at liberty?"

There are certain values to which Jayaprakash consistently adhered. I would list these as Individual Liberty, Love of the Country, Social Justice, Spiritual and Religious Values.

From these objectives, Jayaprakash never swerved for a moment. Man was always in the centre of his picture. JP was conservative and slow to change; but ultimately he was prepared to learn from experience. He moved slowly from one religious faith to another; from Hinduism to Marxism, from Marxism to Sarvodaya. From being a Commissar, he became in the end a Yogi. He resisted giving up his long-time adherence to Karl Marx, but at last, in 1953, during his 21-day fast in Poona, he made the change from Marx to Gandhi.

In an article entitled "Incentives to Goodness", which appeared in the September 1952 issue of *Freedom First*, he wrote:

For many years, I have worshipped at the shrine of the goddess of dialectical materialism—which seemed to me intellectually more satisfying than any other philosophy. But while the main quest of philosophy remains unsatisfied, it has become patent to me that materialism of any sort robs man of the means to become truly human. In a material civilisation, man has no rational incentive to be good. It may be that, in the kingdom of dialectical materialism, fear makes men conform, and the Party takes the place of God. But

when that God himself turns vicious, to be vicious becomes a universal code. I feel convinced, therefore, that man must go beyond the material to find the incentives to goodness. As a corollary, I feel further that the task of social reconstruction cannot succeed under the inspiration of a materialist philosophy.

For this he was reviled and vilified as a traitor, revisionist, capitalist stooge and an agent of the CIA!

Gandhiji had said about Jayaprakash: "One day he will speak my language." It is sad that Gandhiji did not live to see that day which came in 1952.

Increasingly, as time passed, Jayaprakash got disillusioned with politicians and political parties. While interviewing him in 1972 in connection with his work for the dacoits, I mentioned a suggestion that Madho Singh, the leader of the dacoits, should stand for Parliament and asked Jayaprakash somewhat mischievously whether, in that event, Madho Singh would not be in good company. Jayaprakash demurred with a smile and said dryly: "He would probably not be in good company, because he, you see, would be a reformed dacoit."

In the evening of his life, JP engaged himself in the most strenuous and taxing campaign he had ever conducted. His election programmes in February 1977 were marked with the letter 'D' for dialysis every second or third day. Despite this, he rampaged round the country like a young man. On February 25, however, he had to be rushed to Jaslok Hospital and the doctors passed the verdict that his campaigning days were over.

India of JP's Dreams

In his final appeal to the voters on March 13, 1977, to defeat the Government and restore democracy, Jayaprakash shared his vision of the India of his dreams:

The India of my dreams is a community in which every individual, every resource, is dedicated to serving the weak—a community dedicated to *Antyodaya*, to the well-being of the least and the weakest.

It is a community in which individuals are valued for their humanity—a community in which the right of every individual to act according to his conscience is recognised and respected by all.

It is a community in which different views contend peacefully, in which disagreements are settled in a civilised manner. It is a community in which fellow men persuade each other, not bludgeon each other.

It is a community in which all have work—a decent living which fulfils them. It is a community in which each individual has enough to develop his creative potential to the maximum, in which everyone who toils with his hands has a share in owning and a say in managing the factory or firm in which he toils. It is a community in which the strong, the majorities, themselves recognise the handicaps of the weak, of the minorities, and go out of

their way to assure them preferential facilities so that their historical handicaps are removed.

It is a community in which every resource is bent to meeting the needs of the masses—to provide them enough to eat, to ensure clothing, housing, drinking water for them.

A Gandhian India

The India of my dreams is a community in which every citizen understands and participates in matters that transcend his immediate personal interests. It is a community in which citizens—especially the weak—are organised and awakened to implement reforms and to keep an eye over the rulers.

It is a community in which officials and elected representatives are the servants of the people, in which the latter have the right and the opportunity to bring them to book if they go astray, in which office is not looked upon as privilege, but as a trust given by the people. In short, my vision is of a free, progressive and Gandhian India.

JP was throughout a consistent anti-imperialist. He denounced Soviet imperialism in Hungary and Chinese Communist imperialism in Tibet, but he was not slow in taking up cudgels for the freedom of the people of Nagaland and Kashmir. In this, he was one of a handful of people whose anti-imperialism does not stop outside the frontiers of his own country.

In consequence, JP won many hearts and rallied people in various parts of the world in the pursuit of good causes. The tribute that President Carter paid him

during his visit to the United States for medical reasons bears testimony to the impact that he made abroad. In the course of a message that he sent to JP in May 1977, President Carter said: "Your devotion to freedom and democracy has inspired us all."

There are some friends of mine who think that JP's life was one of failure. They concede it was a magnificent failure. I wonder: What is the yardstick of success by which one is to judge? If occupying seats of authority and becoming the President or the Prime Minister of a country is the test—despite the large number of pygmies who occupy such offices in most countries—then perhaps these friends are right. It must be remembered that the choice was his and that, if he had wanted, he could have been the President or the Prime Minister of India. But JP preferred to spend the last quarter-century roaming India, exposing corruption, initiating self-help projects, breaking down religious and caste barriers, espousing countless causes that would not win votes. Is that a sign of failure? His impact on men and women of all classes and ages was profound—students and youths rallied round him when he launched on total revolution in 1974. The best of businessmen responded to his call to do *Sampattidan* and accept the social obligations of business. Even dacoits laid down their arms and entrusted themselves to his care: Was that a failure?

Epitaph For JP

And, after all, does failure or success really matter, or is it the pursuit of one's beliefs in what is true and worth while? It is not failure but low aim that is a crime. JP was never guilty of aiming low.

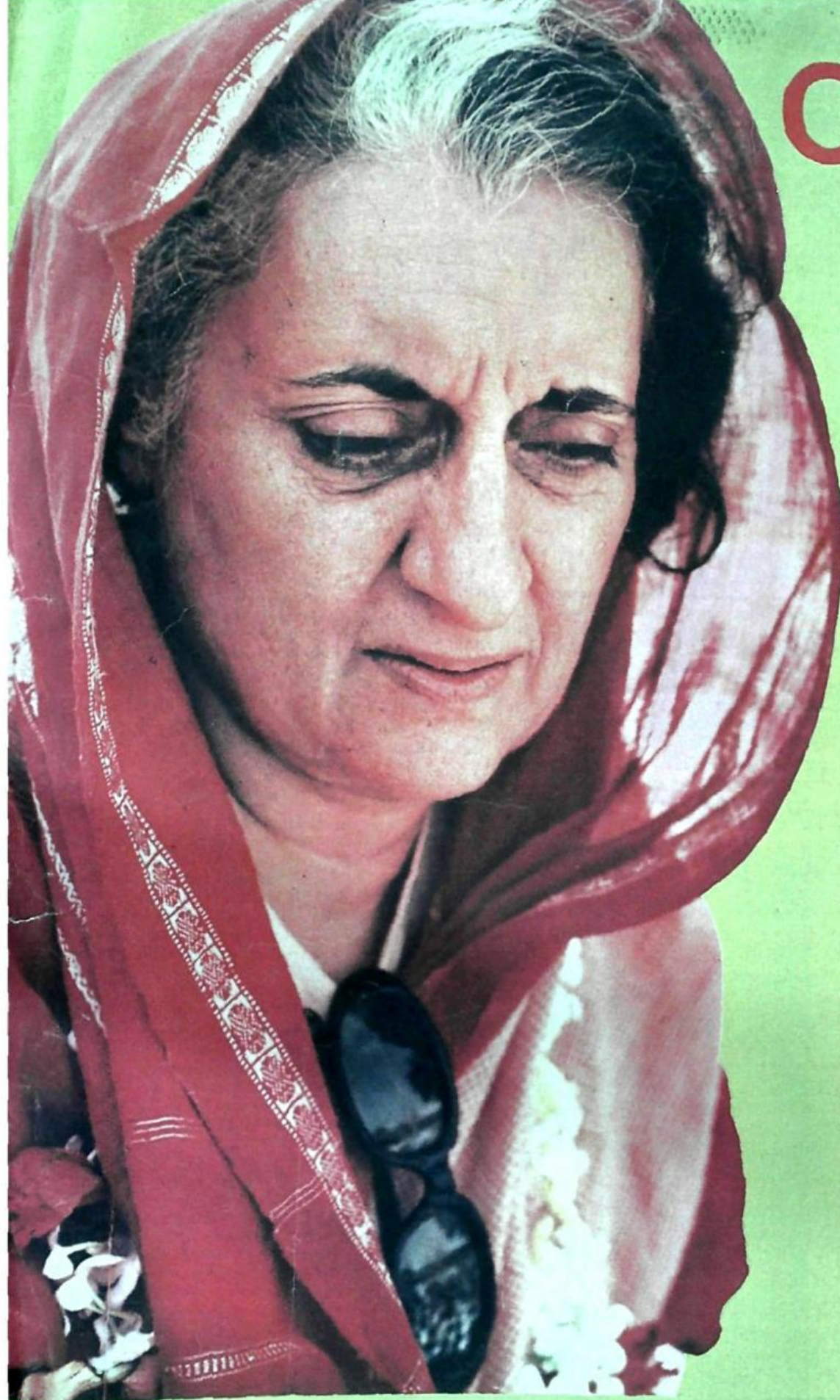
It is not given to liberators, as it was not given to Mahatma Gandhi, to reach the end of the road. Until man becomes perfect, no such achievement is feasible. It is true that JP passed away before he could recognise in the realities of his day the kind of society of which he had dreamt. He gave India its second liberation, but lived long enough for his hopes to be blighted yet once again, as they had been after the earlier liberation.

Already in August 1977, when I called on him in his temporary abode at Nariman Point in Bombay, JP had begun to realise how the glory of the liberation of March 1977 was being tarnished. In an effort at consoling him, I read to JP the last chapter of my little book, *JP: Mission Partly Accomplished*, which was just then being printed. The chapter ended with a few words of Robert Louis Stevenson in his essay, "El Dorado". I suggested that these might be an appropriate epitaph for JP's own life and work. JP was deeply touched and, when I stopped reading, there were tears in his eyes. He nodded assent. This is what Stevenson wrote:

Oh toiling hands of mortals:
Oh wearied feet, travelling ye know
not whither. Soon, soon, it seems to
you, you must come forth to some con-
spicuous hilltop and a little way fur-
ther, against the setting sun, descry the
spires of El Dorado. Little do ye know
your own blessedness for to travel hope-
fully is a better thing than to arrive
and the true success is to labour.



—Mona Chowdhury.



Choose

What Are The Issues In The Mid-Term Poll?

by **Fatma R. Zakaria**

The forthcoming elections have acquired the character of a Presidential poll in the United States or France. For, in effect, we are being asked to select an individual rather than a party to lead the country. This is the first time in our history as a democracy that, on the eve of elections, every major political party has taken the decision on who it will choose or support as Prime Minister if it comes to power.

Not only has the choice of the leader been made by every party (as is done in Britain), but greater emphasis is being laid on him or her as the case may be than on the party. Indeed, the individual so chosen has assumed the importance of a "major plank" of the electoral campaign in the case of every one of these parties.

Unique Situation

Such a situation has not obtained before. During the Nehru era, it was indeed taken for granted that the Congress would choose none other than Jawaharlal Nehru to head the government, but the entire complexion of elections was different then as was the entire political character of the country. Nehru overshadowed all other personalities on the national scene and it was inconceivable that anyone else could occupy the office. For that matter, such was also the halo around the Indian National Congress that its victory in any election was taken as a foregone conclusion. Besides, none of the other parties projected any single leader as their Prime Ministerial candidate.

In the 1967 General Election, the first to be held after Nehru's death, Mrs Gandhi (who, on the death of Lal Bahadur Shastri in 1966, had been chosen by her party leaders to head the government) was the outgoing Prime Minister, but the Congress Party's Old Guard had by no means made up their minds before the polls as to who was to be their next choice for the office of Prime Minister. In fact, the High Command was divided on the issue even after the poll and a contest seemed imminent between Morarji Desai and Mrs Gandhi. Mr Desai, however, was later persuaded to withdraw his candidature on the assurance that he would be made Deputy Prime Minister in Mrs Gandhi's Cabinet.

—Chandu Mhatre

Mrs Gandhi will advocate a strong leadership and a cohesive party which can bring in stability, orderly progress, keep the country as one and protect the minorities. She will cite her record of 11 years.