

THE MILLS OF HISTORY

by
M.R.MASANI

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*As per
Epistles
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By not resigning as Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi has missed a golden opportunity to do the decent thing and win some measure of public sympathy and esteem. If the press report is correct that immediately after the verdict of the Allahabad High Court was known she was in two minds on the subject and was later persuaded not to resign as Prime Minister, those who advised her, be they clever clever lawyers or political sycophants, have done ^{not} only the country but Indira Gandhi a signal disservice.

Former Chief Justice M.C.Chagla, Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan, Mr. Mohan Dharja and others who urged her to resign undoubtedly took the right view. In the U.K. or any Western democracy, a prime minister who was not only held guilty of corrupt practice but whose sworn testimony in the witness box was rejected by the Court would not remain, or be allowed to remain, in office for a day.

Since the readers of most Indian newspapers have not seen the text of the Allahabad High Court judgement- the Statesman was an exception - it becomes necessary to stress that it not only flatly rejects the evidence of Mr. P.N. Haksar and Mr. Yashpal Kapur, but Mrs. Indira Gandhi's testimony has also been disbelieved by the Court on several material points. At one stage the Judgement says:

"The statement made by Respondent Number One (Mrs. Indira Gandhi) fails to satisfactorily explain the inconsistencies."

At another point, the Judgement observes:

"I have given very careful and dispassionate consideration to the aforesaid reply given by Respondent Number One during her cross-examination and I regret my inability to accept it."

Yet again:

"I regret my inability to accept Mrs. Gandhi's assertion from the witness box which I have ^{considered} very carefully and dispassionately."

Another plea of Mrs. Gandhi's was dismissed as an "afterthought."

In disbelieving Mrs. Gandhi's statements made on oath, the Court

observes:

"The status and respectability of the witness alone cannot induce the Court to accept his/her testimony, more so when he or she is a party to the proceedings or interested in the result of the case. In such cases, evidence of the person has to be assessed without in any manner being obsessed by the high office that he or she may hold."

It is this "economy in the use of truth," as Prof. Harold Laski once politely described it, that constitutes a much bigger moral disqualification than even a corrupt practice for occupying the position of Prime Minister. There is nothing "technical" about it. For much less, Mr. Willy Brandt had to give up his Chancellorship and Mr. Profumo had to retire from public life.

The Allahabad High Court Judgement is of course subject to appeal. As I write in the middle of June, the appeal has not been filed but this may be done in the next few days. It is possible that the Supreme Court may reverse or modify the verdict of the Allahabad High Court in which case it must be accepted with as much respect as is due to the Judgement passed by the Allahabad High Court. We are not here concerned with the legal position nor with the supporting or questioning the judgement of the Allahabad High Court; what we are concerned with is political and moral propriety, and the validity of what is urged would be unaffected even if the Supreme Court were to reverse that judgement.

If Indira Gandhi had resigned as Prime Minister and then appealed to the Supreme Court as an ordinary Member of Parliament fighting to keep her seat, she could perhaps have become the Prime Minister again with some credibility and dignity if the Supreme Court had decided in her favour. As it is, she has forfeited both. As Mr. Chagla put it: "She will be in the same position as Nixon before he tendered his resignation."

The judicial condemnation of the Prime Minister has, as it happens, been accompanied by her political rejection in Gujerat. Since Mrs. Gandhi made the election campaign in Gujerat a one-man show, the credit, if she had won, would have gone to her. The ~~stafat~~ defeat of the Congress in Gujerat is her personal defeat. Mr. S.K. Patil was perhaps not wrong when he said: "At long last she has met her Watergate." It may also well be her Waterloo.

Mrs. Gandhi as Prime Minister has been a miserable failure. Her Marxist policies have ~~ruined~~ ruined the economy and aggravated the poverty of the masses, debauched the currency and increased unemployment. She has reduced India to the position of a Soviet satellite. Worse still, she has destroyed India's credibility in the eyes of the world.

It is encouraging that the most cogent reproof against the manner in which "political hysteria has been pitted against judicial pronouncement" by the Prime Minister and her supporters has come from a member of the Congress Working Committee, Mr. K. Chandra Shekhar, who, in a signed editorial in the Young Indian, writes:

"While no one can deny that the people alone shape the course of history, the institutions that a social and political system gives itself have also a part and relevance... It would be dangerous to use them as mere tools, to be cast away at convenience, for short-term, narrow interests."

"With the gradual erosion and disappearance of these institutions which provide the support, the system crumbles and disintegrates under its very weight."

"The turmoils and convulsions which follow have a tendency to engulf the very elements which initiate the process."

"Maybe, in the ^u ~~p~~ersuit of small-time gains, some people may lose sight of the reality. But history has its own course."

All this was foreseeable as far back as July 1969. "He who says 'A'," said Lenin, "says 'B'." 'A' was pronounced in 1969. 'B' is now being pronounced in 1975. On January 26, 1974, the London Economist had described Mrs. Gandhi as "The Empress In Decline". Since then the rot has proceeded further.

History moves on its course inexorably. Neither the cult of personality nor demagoguery can stop it. Like the mills of God the poet Longfellow wrote about, the mills of history

"grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small."

The only redeeming feature in this messy affair is that the verdict of the Allahabad High Court vindicates the integrity and the independence of the judiciary in India. If the United States could produce a Sirica, India too can produce a Sinha.