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David Loshak believes it is only a matter of time before India calls Mrs. Gandhi and her henchmen to account.

### THE MESSIAH WITH FEET OF CLAY

The recent visitor to India finds a changed scene on arrival, after the year of "emergency" rule ordained by Mrs. Gandhi.

Once, there was a hubbub of assorted porters, rickshaw wallahs, beggar children, dealers in black market money, "guides", swindlers and fixers of every moral hue. Order has now been wrested from that chaos. The weary traveller is not now harassed - unless, perhaps, as a journalist, he arouses the especial suspicions of the passport men.

What assails the eye today is not a colourful melee of humanity but a rash of huge posters enjoining the populace to worthy deeds- the Thoughts, as it were, of Chairman Indira. "The only cure for poverty is hard work"; "Discipline is the watchword of the hour", and such like. India has changed.

Or has it? There may be no beggar children at the airport or the border, no beggars, mirabile dictu, in the streets at all. But are there no beggars in India? Has a year's "hard work" disposed of, or even measurably lessened poverty? No black marketeers sidle up with dubious wares: has, then corruption of this, and other, kinds been finished off? Merely to pose such questions is to expose the "emergency" for the essential fraud it is.

Certainly, the year since Mrs. Gandhi shut down Indian democracy has not been without achievement. "The trains run on time". Students study instead of demonstrate. Some aspects of the administration and the economy work more efficiently: all this, as "1966 and All That" would have it, is "a good thing".

But there are other facets of the emergency's "achievements". Freedom of speech has been abolished, unknowable numbers of Mrs. Gandhi's political opponents (or others who have crossed her family's path) incarcerated, the judiciary suborned, corruption transmuted from the back rooms of petty bureaucracy into a mainspring of central government, as personified in the emergence to near-supreme power of the sinister Sanjay Gandhi, son of the Prime Minister, Crown Prince, Lord High Executioner and heir apparent of the Nehru dynasty.

It is he who is credited, by Delhi rumour (the prime source of "information" in the absence of any reliable news), with having spurred his mother into seizing dictatorial power a year ago. This is, almost certainly, a naive simplification. For it is now plain that Mrs. Gandhi- never, really, a democrat either by persuasion or practice (any more than her father was)- had carefully laid the ground for her coup over several years. A series of astute manoeuvres won her control of all the main levers of power: every branch of the intelligence services, for example, including even tax investigation had carefully been transferred from sundry Ministries to her own office. At the same time, picked men were quietly placed in all the key administrative positions, outflanking any potential resistance among the politicians.

In this sense, the emergency has not been any great leap into a new phase for India, despite the cosmetic improvements, despite even the change from covert to overt tyranny. It is a logical development of what has gone before. India, therefore, has not been fundamentally changed.

This indeed, is the claim of Mrs. Gandhi, of her not even superficially reputable entourage, and of the sycophants who serve as India's spokesmen these days. It is their argument that only a tiny minority, middle class and intellectual, of India's 610 millions, is "inconvenienced" by the harsh "disciplines" of the emergency. Fair point: for the 300 million who border on starvation, the tens of millions more who lack shelter health care, education and everything else except despair, it is true that the abolition of habeas corpus for 200,000 political prisoners (a comparative handful), the imposition of Press censorship, the stifling of parliamentary democracy, the legalised perversion of justice, are and can be nothing other than as academic and irrelevant as the half-hearted prettifying of the approach to Calcutta from Dum Dum airport (the only evident benefit of the emergency in that hell-hole of a city).

#### Spurious Claim.

The emergency is indeed irrelevant to India's needs: its proponents give the lie to their own cause.

Nonetheless, to a great mass of Indian humankind, Mrs. Gandhi, daughter of the father of the nation and blessed, by a quirk, with the name of its greatest teacher, is as a messiah. She rightly claims (as Hitler claimed) to have "the people" on her side.

It is, in this light, a pity that Mrs. Gandhi failed to complete her PPE course at Oxford; just possibly it might have kept her from the self-delusions of such a spurious claim. It is easy, of course, to be critical of India, and Mrs. Gandhi is understandably "fed up" with Western criticisms that mistake the unique pattern of her nation and which are too often based (as South African whites are also wont to complain) on double standards. But it is not pious to point to the lessons of history, or even to what has happened in each of India's neighbours, to show in graphic form how dire the perils of dictatorship can be.

Even the infallibility of Popes is a synthesis of deeply-pondered Vatican opinion. But Mrs. Gandhi has set herself above the law, above restraint and correction, beyond disinterested guidance from officials who are better than yes-men, away from the checks and balances of (doubtlessly irritating) political opposition and (occasionally irresponsible) newspaper criticism. Pakistan was rent asunder and Bangladesh brought close to anarchy and collapse by dictators who thought they knew all the answers. There is no reason to think that India, similar in vital ways, would not, similarly led, end in similar disaster.

Mrs. Gandhi looks, on the face of it, strong. But this, again, is to misunderstand: her position is essentially fragile. It is, no doubt, because she, and her henchmen, sense this that they have resorted to cruelty and vindictiveness as political instruments: tactics of the fundamentally weak. In that weakness can lie no solutions to any of India's main problems. It can only exacerbate them in the longer run.

Five years ago I wrote that Mrs. Gandhi has yet to instil a sense of discipline into a people whose supreme indiscipline, while perhaps their greatest charm, was also their greatest failing. Sadly, that remains true: "discipline" imposed by force is not the instilled self-discipline needed then and needed now.

But today, as never before, Mrs. Gandhi is in sole charge, with no one left to blame when things go wrong. One fears it can only be a matter of time before Mrs. Gandhi, or the gang led by her son who now seek total control of India from her heavily guarded Delhi bungalow, are called to account. The price in blood could be heavy.