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OPINION

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THE PUBLIC VOICE

“WHAT a waste of time and money” exclaimed the middle-aged, pleasant-faced, lady political scientist, looking up from her paper as she stood in the queue at the bus-terminus. “You are referring to?” asked the thin lady just behind her. “Why Indira’s recent jaunt to the Gulf States, of course. What did the woman think she was doing?” “Why, surely, with Pakistan flexing its muscles it was the proper policy to try and get near them”, said the thin lady. ‘To hope to get them on your side against Pakistan, could there be anything more futile? During the last conflict, Radio Kuwait was actually calling for contributions from all good breathern of the faith to help our gallant mujahedin, fighting and wounded in India! Why, they would all rejoice lightly and feel stronger themselves if Pakistan made the hydrogen bomb. I agree the unity of Islam is a thing difficult to understand for the ordinary citizen, but surely not for the Prime Minister and her Foreign office!”

‘I’ll tell you why she went or at least give you one of the most likely reasons. She was doing Russia’s work for her, putting forth the Russian plea about the building up of opposed forces in the Indian Ocean, in effect saying to the Americans and the West, go, go, go, leave the Russians nicely situated to take over from their vantage points in Afghanistan, South Yemen, the borders of Iran etc., whenever they wish, the whole area. The states signed joint communiques accordingly, saying the defence of the area must be left to the nations of the littoral, knowing well that if the crunch came, they would crumple up quite easily, and both they and Indira seemed happy. In reality, it was nothing beyond a massive, skilful propaganda exercise on behalf of the Russians, whose very recent seizure of Afghanistan is to Delhi a thing of the long past, an accepted fact of life,” said the thin-faced, bespectacled economic journalist.

“I agree with you about the need for countervailing forces in the area, but one’s always got to remember the Americans can be almost as uncomfortable neighbours as the Russians, so en garde against both, which I’m afraid we aren’t against the Russians at all. The whole of our government seems to be open to them at will. Not a healthy state of affairs, no, I fear not,” said a tall young man in a black cap and long black coat. “Enough of foreign affairs” said a smart young secretary with a very impressive brief-case, “let us turn to domestic matters. There, the mystery to me is, why does Indira let this soul-destroying halaise go on and on. In every sphere, things go from bad to worse, and she just sits and smiles and smiles, distributing largesse on occasion, making new

promises while the old remain unfulfilled, and actually doing nothing. Government by manipulation and inaction it might be called. Why, I ask, and how long can it go on?"

"Anyone considering Indira must begin by assuming that she is an inordinate liar, a most unscrupulous person, a strong believer in the theory that what she likes is the whole law and an excessive lover of power. Therefore she is not to be understood or judged by ordinary standards. She is in fact *sui generis*. Now why does such a person allow conditions to deteriorate so completely? One view has been that she wanted the common people to cry out to her in despair, do anything you like, take any powers you want, so long as you improve conditions, secure law and order, hold and reduce prices. We don't care whether we're free or not, only look into these essentials. The people as a whole are by now very near this stage, she feels. Why interfere? A few more turns of the screw, and they will be quite ready to prostate themselves at her feet. Then will come the time for vigorous and rightly-oriented action. Meanwhile busy giddy minds with thoughts of approaching foreign wars, and busy herself in cultivating the Russian chief, power similar to whose she aims at enjoying in this country. The common people have not yet cried out and they may not, but few can doubt they are very near the stage of acceptance of whatever new fetters are put upon them. So you may soon see some action, whether you like it, all or any part of it, is another matter," said a handsome middle-aged lady in a kaftan and embroidered slippers.

"All this is too esoteric for a person like me" said a young man in blue jeans and a yellow bush-coat. "Does it strike you that the woman is simply slowed-down by old age? I remember an aunt of mine, very vigorous and bossy she was, managing this, that and the other until you could hardly call your soul your own. And then she turned sixty. So different she became, even indifferent to her own most important affairs. Truly unaligned. Why cannot something of the same kind have happened to Indira at sixty-three or is it sixty-four? Give the dear old girl a chance. Don't just think hardly of her." "You were not in the country during the Emergency, I believe" said the young secretary, and as the young man nodded, "No, I thought not. Otherwise you would not be so free with your excuses and apologetic explanations. Though I'm not quite sure, take Chavan for instance, he had a box-seat throughout the Emergency, condemned Indira in the strongest terms after it, and is now willing to crawl back to her and lick her feet, and so, too, numberless others. Power and Pelf, Power and Pelf, the lure of these it seems impossible for most Indians to resist. To be out of office, even office at the party level, oh how terrible, terrible, it seems to them. So they forget and often she forgives, making a great show of magnanimity. Her programme would seem to be out by six months though. She had hoped to gather in all the recalcitrants by the end of nineteen eighty. However, the Gadarene swine now seeming to be coming to heel, and after all does six months or even a year's delay really matter. She looks around and sees she's

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unchallangeable. She smiles to herself, bah, the state of the country, bah, what care I how foul it be, if it be but fair to me."

"The other day, she certified her son Sanjay to have been a man of integrity. What is one to make of that? Surely she knows as well as any body, that integrity and he were as far apart as heaven and hell. The young man was essentially a goonda, a useful goonda to her no doubt, but none the less to the people, a grave danger. I know, I know the saying about speaking nothing but good about the dead, but when there is misrepresentation to this extent, it becomes one's duty to set the record right. If Al Capone had certified Lucky Luciano's high qualities of head and heart, one might just have smiled. But here Al Capone is the Prime Minister of India. Think also of the other Relevant maxim, to the living one owes consideration, to the dead nothing but judgment," said the political scientist. "Since it is clear that she is an inordinate liar and most unscrupulous, isn't serious consideration of what she says, somewhat beside the point," said the lady in the kaftan. "Clear to you and to us, yes; but clear to the people, I doubt, and that is the tragedy of our times in this country. Among the politicians, not one person universally regarded as truly concerned only with the public interest, who can be regarded as a touch-stone. Ah, well, here comes the bus. God give us all more wisdom, strengthen our characters and help us make ourselves better persons," said the economic journalist. And so they climbed into the bus, that had meanwhile come up and discharged its passengers.

VIEW

A. B. SHAH : I am happy to learn that you have decided to continue *Opinion* in view of the danger that democracy in India still faces. Your decision also fortifies me in my decision to continue *New Quest* beyond 31, December 1981, though only till a week ago I had firmly decided to give up its editorship and, if no suitable successor were available, to suspend its publication.

I hold you once that your mere presence among us was a source of strength in the midst of enveloping darkness. You did not believe me. Well, here is an example of what I meant.

Please publish this letter in *Opinion* : it may help others elsewhere in the country.

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