

Weekly Copy Ps. 5

Annual Subscription Rs. 2

OPINION

Vol. XXI

4th NOVEMBER 1980

No. 27

MRS. GANDHI & MORADABAD

A. G. NOORANI

Says the Urdu Poet:

Only when I was dead did she come—to my grave, Mir;
My saviour remembered me, but after my ruin.

The couplet just about sums up the thoughts and feelings of those who lost their near and dear ones, in the Provincial Armed Constabulary's (PAC) shooting spree at Moradabad on Id-ul-Fitr (August 13), when, at long last, the Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, condescended to visit them two months later, on October 16.

The conduct of the visit itself and her exoneration of the PAC and attribution of blame by the clearest implication to Muslims was hardly calculated to reassure the people. That four days later the Bakr Id (October 20) prayers were not said at the Idgah, where the shooting had taken place previous Id, testifies only to the futility of Mrs. Gandhi's empty gesture.

The Hindustan Times correspondent, Mr. Narendra Aggarwal, reported (October 17) from Moradabad that "except at the Eidgah and Gul Shaheed, Mrs. Gandhi did not get down from her car. Many people presented her with written memorandums (sic.) Her car was followed by a cavalcade of vehicles and some of them met with minor accidents. Many residents could be overheard grumbling what kind of a visit it was as they did not get a chance to explain their problems to her." She received delegations—at the Police Officers' Mess—but that is, surely, a different affair.

The correspondent reported that Mrs. Gandhi explained that "she had wanted to visit the town earlier but had been advised against it in view of the inflamed feelings of certain sections of the people". Such a consideration had never deterred her on similar occasions in the past. One would have thought that a Prime Minister's visit would soothe inflamed feelings. (On September 18 it was announced that her visit to Moradabad the next day had been postponed).

Mrs. Gandhi gave an altogether different explanation to a delegation of the Aligarh Muslim University Students' Union on September 10. The UNI reported, "When they requested her to visit Aligarh and Moradabad, she said the Opposition might take advantage of her visit."

The PM's contradictions about the causes of the tragedy in Moradabad

are as glaring as those about her visit and similarly reflect a cynical approach.

Contrast it all her stand on the Narainpur tragedy which she exploited in order to topple the Lok Dal Ministry: (1) She repeatedly criticised the Chief Minister, Mr. Banarsi Das, for not visiting Narainpur. (2) She criticised, also, the appointment of a District Judge to inquire into the Narainpur happenings. Yet, it is only a District Judge who will probe into the Moradabad outrage. (3) Her attitude to police morale was altogether different then. In her letter to the Chief Minister, published on February 3, she wrote "While it is important to keep up the morale of the police, it would be disastrous to our democracy as well as the well-being of our people if the police get the feeling that they can get away with atrocities". (4) She asserted then the legitimacy of making political capital out of others' failures. 'Why should we not take advantage of other parties' failure?' she said at Narainpur on February 7 adding that the UP Government had no right to exist because of its lapses (*The Times of India*, February 8).

Thus, Mrs. Gandhi's stand on Narainpur in February 1980 was the very opposite of her stand on Moradabad six month later. Both were great human tragedies. In both cases grave atrocities were perpetrated by the police. In both Mrs. Gandhi has shown a cynical indifference to all considerations except the narrow, partisan political consideration.

Small wonder, then, that Mrs. Gandhi should contradict herself endlessly, pathetically every time she speaks on Moradabad:

(1) On August 18 in the Lok Sabha she defended the PAC. There may be a few communal elements in it, she said, but distrust would demoralise the force. For the rest, she was studiously vague as to the causes.

(2) On August 28 at the Cong. (I) Working Committee meeting she came out with her version: (a) There was a foreign hand behind these incidents. "Foreign forces" were clearly involved. (b) The incidents had been "instigated and were politically motivated". Indeed, they were "a part of a conspiracy" which covered the incidents in Gujarat and Kashmir as well. She specifically cited these in this context. (c) The object of the conspiracy was "to undermine the stability of the Government" by creating discord between the communities. Mrs. Gandhi, however, did not identify the participants in the conspiracy.

The Working Committee immediately endorsed these bright ideas. "Apart from the fact that it was moved by her, the resolution bore the imprint of her draftsmanship". *The Hindu* reported (August 30). The resolution declaimed "It is significant to note that there seems to be a systematic pattern which could only be the outcome of a degree of preparedness to provoke confrontation with Governmental authority." So, according to her, the Muslims had come prepared to have a confrontation with the Government's arm, the PAC, and had, presumably, arranged the presence of the pig, the firearms and the rest. All on the occasion of their Id.

The Opposition was told to behave itself—"function with a sense of responsibility. Narrow or partisan considerations weaken the basic fabric of democracy ..." Finally, the resolution said, the incidents in UP "have also to be viewed in the light of the developments in other parts of India and in the international sphere." Thus, all possible options were kept open for exploitation depending on the exigencies of the moment. The triumph of expediency over scruples or principles could not have been more resounding.

(3) On September 10 Mrs. Gandhi was quoted by the AMU Students' Union delegation, according to a report by the UNI, as having said that the CIA was "playing a major role in creating communal trouble". As a sop to the delegation, she also accused the "bad" elements who had infiltrated the PAC—during Janata rule. Her spokesman said he was "not aware" of her making a statement about the CIA (The denial was repeated on Sept. 23). The UNI, however, added "In a signed statement the AMU Students Union Secretary, Mr. A. A. Fatmi said the Prime Minister had made the remark when asked about foreign involvement in the incidents of communal violence in several towns."

(4) On September 27, at Calcutta, Mrs. Gandhi accused the RSS and the Jana Sangh of creating dissension "She indicated that these two organisations were behind the recent communal riots in North India" (*The Hindustan Times*, Sept. 28).

(5) In Moradabad, on October 16, Mrs. Gandhi said, according to the PTI, that, that the riots "were caused by the conspiracy of a handful of persons. She did not think that foreign elements were behind the disturbances." The "handful" were not identified but they must be very powerful and the Government incredibly incompetent for them to have been able to embark on a conspiracy which, according to her, extend to Kashmir and Gujarat. Mrs. Gandhi also said that "though a few policemen might have overreacted", it was unfair to blame the entire police force.

(6) At her press conference on October 21, Mrs. Gandhi changed her mind and said that there was, indeed, "foreign interference" in the recent disturbances but one could not put one's finger on it. It was part of the effort to "destabilise" the region. She repeated that there was a conspiracy behind the riots; that there was a "pattern" and efforts were made to turn the people against the Government and its arm the police.

The implications of Mrs. Gandhi's statements are obvious: (a) The PAC was not in the wrong (b) The Muslims were either conscious aggressors or tools in the hands of conspirators. In any case, they were in the wrong. On these two points Mrs. Gandhi has been consistent. She has contradicted herself on the presence of a foreign hand and on the existence, character and composition of the conspiracy. Her version on all the points conflicts entirely with almost the entire reportage in the leading English dailies and periodicals.

One can brush aside small fry like Mr. V. P. Sathe who saw foreign forces very early in the day (Aug. 16) and confidently asserted (Aug 17) that the first shot was fired at the police itself. Mr. Yogendra Makwana,

OPINION, November 4, 1980

Minister of State for Home, first blamed foreign sources (Aug. 17), later (Aug. 25) the RSS.

But, one would think that the country's Prime Minister would know the facts authentically and definitely. Mrs. Gandhi either does not or, if she does, cares not to reveal them. There can be no other explanation for her contradictions, her vagueness and her disclosures belatedly and in instalments which only added to the confusion by their contradictory character. Almost every one except Mrs. Gandhi and RSS chief Balasaheb Deoras and his followers acknowledges the fact that the police went berserk at Moradabad. Not only that but, as Mr. Krishna Gandhi points out (*Economic & Political Weekly*, Sept. 6), the PAC consciously gave the events a communal turn.

Mr. Prem Bhasin, former General Secretary of the PSP, pours scorn on the official version and pointedly asks who was gained by the conspiracy and hidden hand theories. "Who has gained? It may be just a windfall, but the fact remains that all the heat and the anger against the police and the administration that was building up into a tornado has been suddenly drained away. In many eyes, the policemen are now heroes who sacrifice their lives in fighting anti-national elements. Sympathy has replaced anger and suspicion. The Lok Dal satyagraha has had to be called off. Preventive Detention Ordinances have been issued not only in UP where 'communal' disturbances have taken place but also in Gujarat and Maharashtra where the anti-price-rise movement was gaining momentum. There are vieled-hints of MISA being used again. The general public is bewildered, confused and panicky. Pray, who has gained. Is it necessary to answer this question?" (*Janata*, August 31).

(to be continued)

54. Shri B. Venkatappiah,
B3/59, Safdayang Encowe,
New Delhi 110 016.

Posted at Central Pack. Sorting Office, Bombay on 4-11-1980
Regd. No. BYW 69
Licence No. 14. Licensed to post without pre-payment

Edited and published by A. D. Gorwala at 40C Ridge Road, Bombay 400 006 and
printed by him at the Mouj Printing Bureau, Khatau Wadi, Bombay 400 094
Proprietor : A. D. Gorwala