



## RAJIV GANDHI



Lok Sabha Secretariat  
New Delhi  
2019



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The name of Rajiv Gandhi shines in the annals of our history as a visionary leader who re-engineered the national mindset on a variety of issues and won the immense confidence of the people in a very short span of time. Endowed with remarkable courage, fortitude, wisdom, dedication and conviction, he left an indelible imprint of his personality in our national life. Rajiv Gandhi brought to Indian politics an open mind and a fresh outlook and with these noble attributes he combined the natural gift of a sharp political instinct. His deep understanding of India's socio-religious pluralism and its unique civilisational heritage was another asset that acted as a driving force behind his political will to rid the country of the several ills afflicting its people.

Rajiv Gandhi was born in Bombay\* on 20 August 1944 to Shri Feroze Gandhi and Shrimati Indira Gandhi. In 1950, when he was six years old, they shifted to Delhi and stayed with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Soon, Rajiv was enrolled in the Welhams School, Dehradun. Subsequently, he joined the prestigious Doon School in 1955. Thereafter, Rajiv Gandhi left for Cambridge in 1962 and joined the Trinity College. From there, he moved over to the Imperial College of Science and Technology in London. During his stay at Cambridge, Rajiv met Miss Sonia Maino, whom he married in 1968.

On returning to India, Rajiv Gandhi joined the Indian Airlines training course at Hyderabad in December 1967; later, he joined the Indian Airlines as an apprentice on 5 May 1968 and captained HS-748 type aircrafts before securing the Boeing Commander's Licence in 1980.

Though Rajiv Gandhi stayed at 1, Safdarjung Road, the official residence of the Prime Minister and his mother, Shrimati Indira Gandhi, he kept a distance from politics. However, the sudden death of his politically active brother, Sanjay Gandhi, in June 1980, changed the whole scenario. Eventually, Rajiv Gandhi relinquished a bright prospect in his chosen career and plunged into politics and contested for the Lok Sabha election from the Amethi constituency in June 1981, which he won by a thumping majority. Soon, he got active in the party work. He was appointed the General Secretary of the All India Congress Committee (Indira) [AICC(I)] on

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\*Now known as Mumbai.

3 February 1983. Simultaneously, he was given the charge of managing the affairs of the Congress Seva Dal, the Youth Congress (I), the National Students' Union of India (NSUI) and many other bodies relating to women, students, youth and minorities.

On 31 October 1984, following the assassination of Shrimati Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi was sworn in as the Prime Minister of India. The fortitude, dignity and composure he displayed in facing the personal tragedy and its aftermath impelled the entire nation to look to him for solace and reassurance.

Rajiv Gandhi was a truly modern leader with an open mind receptive to ideas and a broad vision. Soon after taking over the reins of administration, he stoically faced the challenges that confronted the nation and set out to rejuvenate the country. In the Eighth General Elections held in December 1984, he led the Congress Party to a landslide victory winning 401 seats a higher percentage of the popular vote than ever before.

Rajiv Gandhi was convinced that the future of India depended on technological modernization, higher productivity and rapid advancement towards social justice. With a massive mandate behind him, he heralded a new era in inclusive development of the Indian economy by giving priority to food production, employment generation and increase in productivity in the Seventh Five Year Plan so as to eradicate poverty and enhance the Gross National Product.

Rajiv Gandhi stressed the need for faster and holistic agricultural growth which required the extension of Green Revolution to other regions. Besides, he provided an acceleration to dry-land farming through the Technology Mission for oilseeds and the national project on pulses. He gave a major thrust to agriculture in the Seventh Five Year Plan. During his tenure as Prime Minister, the production of foodgrains touched an all time record. Rajiv Gandhi also gave a new orientation to the Industrial Policy so as to achieve a higher growth rate and a new impetus to the productive forces in industry to encourage quality and healthy competition.

Rajiv Gandhi's emphasis on technology can be gauged from the fact that he set up technology missions in the fields of telecommunications, oil seeds, immunization, drinking water and illiteracy. He set off earnestly to pull the country out of the morass of self-weakening traditional mindsets rooted in caste, creed and gender discrimination. His cherished dream was to take India into the 21st Century as a country free from poverty, exploitation and the burden of its colonial past. Therefore, he launched a frontal attack on corruption,

inefficiency and procedural complications in bureaucracy and worked whole-heartedly to provide an honest, humane, efficient and clean administration. Rajiv Gandhi brought in a new work culture which took into consideration not only the demands from the worker but also the working atmosphere as well as basic requirements of an employee. Amply realizing the fact that the key to economic and social transformation lies in administrative reforms, he brought the Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms under his direct control and made constant review of the administrative organization, policies and procedures.

Highly influenced by the diversified roles the computers could perform in enhancing efficiency, in increasing productivity and in forecasting designs, Rajiv Gandhi effected a new computer policy that provided considerable fillip to the indigenous production of computers and their use in offices, schools, banks and in many other areas of human activities. He was also convinced that India could make a place for herself as a producer of software by rightly utilizing the available skilled labour.

Another ambitious and innovative programme of Rajiv Gandhi was to decentralize power by giving constitutional status to the Panchayati Raj system. He was fully aware of the fact that only a fraction of the amount earmarked for the welfare of the people was reaching the targeted segments, the rest getting lost on the way because of corruption and administrative ineffectiveness. He, therefore, wanted to devolve financial power to the people through the Panchayati Raj and Nagar Palika Bills. This was an ample proof of his vision that the participative and democratic system of Government would unleash enormous energy, bring governance closer to the ideals of self-governance and ensure revolutionary changes in the status of the downtrodden and the marginalized sections of society.

Rajiv Gandhi realised that the inordinate delay in the deliverance of justice to the people in India was in a way tantamount to the denial of justice. He also knew that the courts were over-burdened with too many cases. In order to relieve the pressure on courts, he gave a further thrust to the judicial system through the *Lok Adalats*, which led to speedy disposal of cases. Besides, Rajiv Gandhi raised the strength of the judges in the Supreme Court and High Courts and took steps to fill up the vacancies in these Courts within a reasonable time limit so that pending court cases could be disposed of quickly. He also provided a new channel of grievance ventilation to Government servants with the establishment of the Administrative Tribunals.



Rajiv Gandhi was highly critical of misgovernance and the failure of the delivery system. He began at the top by taking initiatives to end political degeneration. The Constitution (52nd Amendment) Act, 1985, popularly known as the Anti-Defection Law, was enacted to put an end to political defection. Another significant step taken by him was the Companies (Amendment) Act, 1985 which permitted donations by companies to political parties subject to certain conditions.

Rajiv Gandhi had tremendous confidence in the youth and expected much from them in the task of nation-building. To give the youth of India a feeling of active participation in the democratic process, the voting age was lowered from 21 to 18 years through an amendment to the Constitution. This amendment, which added in almost 50 million young voters to our electoral system, changed the electorates' profile overnight.

Rajiv Gandhi was proud of India's glorious cultural heritage and emphasized on every occasion the need to imbibe the age-old values and wisdom that India stood for. Though he was a vocal champion of modernization, he never wanted India to lose her identity based on the values of secularism, tolerance, non-violence and peaceful co-existence which made possible so many diverse cultural traditions to flourish in our country. His concern for protecting, promoting and highlighting Indian culture was manifested in his new Education Policy and the holding of Festivals of India in different parts of the world. His interest in art and culture prompted him to set up seven Zonal Cultural Centres which not only helped inter-State cultural interaction but also brought about an awareness in the minds of the general public of their rich cultural heritage.

Rajiv Gandhi was deeply concerned about the problem of environmental degradation and its catastrophic impact on human civilization. He showed his profound concern for environment by launching a programme to clean the River Ganga and by setting up the National Wasteland Development Board. Rajiv Gandhi also called for global efforts to ensure access to environment-friendly technologies and the funding of research and development into such technologies. With these ends, he proposed the establishment of a Planet Protection Fund (PPF), under the aegis of the United Nations to be used to protect the environment by developing or purchasing conservation-compatible technologies in critical areas which could then be brought into the public domain for the benefit of both the developing and developed countries.

As far as India's foreign policy is concerned, Rajiv Gandhi gave utmost importance to improving India's relations with the neighbouring countries while not making

any kind of compromise with the country's unity, integrity and the principles the nation stood for. With all good intentions, he signed the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord which provided for the safety of life and property of the Tamils and ensuring the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. His desire to promote good neighbourly relations prompted him to send emergency help to the beleaguered Maldives Government in 1988 and relief to the flood stricken people of Bangladesh the same year. Rajiv Gandhi also initiated substantive talks with Pakistan and was keenly interested in promoting people-to-people contacts so as to promote friendship and understanding between the two nations. Convinced that the consolidation of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) would go a long way in solving the plethora of problems faced by the countries of the region, he directed his efforts to promote sustained and continuous cooperation among the members of the Association.

Rajiv Gandhi visualized a world free of tensions and conflicts, where the atmosphere of suspicion would be replaced by mutual trust and cooperation, and where balance of terror would be replaced by promotion of legitimate interests of all. He believed the cause of disarmament to be a logical extension of the Gandhian view of non-violence and followed this policy in international relations. Thus, soon after assuming office, he continued the Six-Nation Peace Initiative to bring about nuclear disarmament. Having been convinced of the futility of arms-race, Rajiv Gandhi, in the Delhi Declaration, which he signed with Mikhail Gorbachev, affirmed the commitment to a world free of weapons of mass destruction and a world without war. This, in turn, provided a tremendous fillip to the global endeavours towards the processes of disarmament and arms control. Rajiv Gandhi also presented an Action Plan before the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on Disarmament in 1988 which was yet another landmark initiative he took for bringing about a peaceful, nuclear-free world based on equality, justice and non-violence.

Rajiv Gandhi faithfully worked for reviving the stalled North-South dialogue while bringing vitality to South-South cooperation. To him, the two were inter-related. While emphasizing the need for bringing a change in the present unjust and unequal international economic order through a revival of the North-South dialogue, he also called upon the developing nations to become more self-reliant, individually and collectively.

Rajiv Gandhi strongly believed in the worth of multilateralism in international affairs and continuously strived for the successful conclusion of the multilateral trade negotiations aimed at the growth of all countries. He strongly

felt the need for a sound multilateral trading system to ensure global economic stability and accelerate development. As the Chairman of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Rajiv Gandhi endeavoured to consolidate NAM as a force in the world affairs. He contributed significantly to the strengthening of the NAM by giving a new direction to it in the fast changing environment of the 1980s.

Rajiv Gandhi was the symbol of the fight against oppression and exploitation taking place in any part of the world, whether it was in South Africa, Namibia or Palestine. He launched a sustained attack on the dehumanizing policy of *apartheid*, which he believed would eventually be dismantled. To him, the struggle against the evil of *apartheid* in South Africa was an extension of India's freedom struggle and neither Indians nor the people of the world could really be free until this inhuman system was uprooted and justice delivered. He played a prominent role at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting at Nassau in bringing about a consensus on the measures to be taken against the racist regime in South Africa. He was instrumental in establishing the AFRICA Fund for assisting the Frontline States to resist invasion, colonialism and *apartheid*. The restoration of human rights and human dignity to the people of South Africa was thus one of his major objectives.

Rajiv Gandhi had an abiding faith in the efficacy of parliamentary democracy and he firmly believed that India's form and style of democracy based on the twin principles of secularism and socialism was the best model for development. He always made elaborate preparations before coming to the Parliament and took the nation into confidence through the Parliament on all important national and international issues. Even though his party emerged as the largest single party in Lok Sabha in the 1989 General Elections, he preferred to sit as a responsible Opposition. Rajiv Gandhi performed his role as the Leader of the Opposition in the most dignified and democratic way.

Rajiv Gandhi's eventful public life came to an abrupt end on 21 May 1991 when he was assassinated at Sriperumbudur, a small town west of Chennai, where he had gone to address a political meeting while campaigning for his party in the General Elections to the Tenth Lok Sabha. The entire nation, the Parliament, the State Legislatures, leaders from all walks of life, millions of his followers and admirers and dignitaries from around the world mourned the sad and untimely demise of this visionary leader who guided the nation in its march towards the Twenty-first Century.



President R. Venkataraman in his condolence message described Rajiv Gandhi as "a brave and dedicated son of India".

Condoling the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, the Lok Sabha passed the following Resolution:

"This House expresses its profound sense of grief at the treacherous and brutal assassination of our former Prime Minister, Shri Rajiv Gandhi. The cult of violence and the atmosphere of hatred deliberately promoted by senseless elements who have no faith in the democratic process and who are ceaselessly working against the unity and integrity of the nation, have claimed yet another crusader of peace and non-violence who, like his revered mother seven years ago, preferred to risk his life rather than to distance himself from the common masses of the country who loved him so intensely. The passing away of Shri Rajiv Gandhi at such a crucial juncture has deprived the country of the services of a young and charismatic leader on whom the downtrodden masses had pinned their hope and faith for a better and brighter future."

The Rajya Sabha also mourned the sad demise of Rajiv Gandhi and passed the following Resolution:

"This House deeply mourns the passing away of Shri Rajiv Gandhi, an outstanding world leader, who, with prescient vision, indomitable courage and tremendous determination, dedicated himself to the sacred task of building a new India, representing the dreams of generations of patriots our glorious struggle for freedom, an India—strong, united, peaceful and progressive, an India evolving in the genius of her time-honoured ethos of oneness and synthesis, towards modernity, an India making her contribution to the building of a better, more humane, world environment.

This House expresses the sense of profound shock and remorse felt by our nation, and the people around the world, that Shri Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated and our nation so deprived."