THE LEADERSHIP OF INDIRA GANDHI

By SANDY CLARKE
editor@leaderonomics.com

This article is written as a tribute to the late Indira Gandhi on the 32nd anniversary of her death by assassination.

“I am alive today. I may not be there tomorrow... I shall continue to serve until my last breath and, when I die, I can say that every drop of my blood will invigorate India and strengthen it.”

HRSE words were spoken by India’s third Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, on the eve of her assassination, which took place on Oct 31, 1984.

In the exploration of leadership, there are fewer more complex leaders than Gandhi – a woman who is often mistaken as being related to Mahatma Gandhi, but who is, like her namesake, an iconic figure in India’s colourful history.

Indira Gandhi served as Prime Minister of India from Jan 24, 1966 until March 24, 1977, and then again from Jan 14, 1980 until Oct 31, 1984.

Her assassination came at the hands of her two Sikh bodyguards, in retaliation for her Operation Blue Star, where she ordered Indian Army troops to attack the Golden Temple – the Sikhs’ holiest place of worship – in an effort to assert her control.

A CONTROVERSIAL YET IMPACTFUL LEADER

In a New York Times obituary from 1984, Gandhi’s personal character received a less-than-glowing appraisal. From the article, “As a private person, Mrs Gandhi seemed aloof, chilly, complex, giving no clue in her withdrawn, quiet personality as to why her public figure should appeal as it did to many millions of Indians. She could be rude, sometimes opening letters and signing papers when foreigners visited her in the red sandstone Indian Parliament or the nearby South Block of the secretariat.”

7 INSPIRATIONAL QUOTES FROM INDIRA GANDHI

“My grandfather once told me that there were two kinds of people, those who do the work and those who take the credit. He told me to try to be in the first group; there was much less competition.”

“You can’t shake hands with a clenched fist.”

“The power to question is the basis of all human progress.”

“Education is a liberating force, and in our age it is also a democratising force, cutting across the barriers of caste and class, smoothing out inequalities imposed by birth and other circumstances.”

“You must learn to be still in the midst of activity and to be vibrantly alive in repose.”

“Whenever you take a step forward, you are bound to disturb something.”

“Forgiveness is a virtue of the brave.”

Her political leadership divides the opinion of commentators as much as her personality. While some saw Gandhi as aloof and insular, others admired her strength of character and iron will to put India on the map. On the domestic front, she managed to steer India to a 20% reduction in poverty, increase literacy levels by 30%, and raise food production to 25%.

While she was well-known for her charisma and communication skills, many saw her leadership as the reason behind the damage to India’s economy during her years of public service. She is also viewed to have done little to alleviate problems of hunger, sanitation, religious conflict, and caste that blighted the country.

As a leader, she was immeasurably strong-willed, and used questionable force, cutting across the barriers of caste and class, smoothing out inequalities imposed by birth and other circumstances.

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