

Rajiv's vision for India

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AS the nation enters the new millennium with excitement of new challenges and fresh hopes, the memory of Rajiv Gandhi comes alive as the only national leader who strived to prepare India for it as far back as 20 years ago. If today India is in a position to face this new millennium with new found confidence, it is due to the sagacity and vision of his dynamic leadership.

Rajiv Gandhi's vision for a better 21st Century for India lingers on. In fact, no one else did so much in the recent years to set our minds for a more prosperous and equitable India as Rajiv Gandhi did.

To write about the distinct dimensions of Rajiv Gandhi's unique personality in this context which inspired millions of our countrymen, young and old, and the contribution he made is a saga of the rise of a new generation — as is evident today in the many bright faces in Parliament and legislatures.

Rajiv truly gave us a perspective and laid the foundation in many ways to ensure a more secure and confident India among the comity of nations.

Much before he formally entered politics, the Kisan Rally of February 1981 at Boat Club in New Delhi had become one of the mammoth mobilisation of kisans in recent times. Although Rajiv was not on the dias at that rally, it was his organising skills that came to fore and marked the entry of a new star on the Indian political scene. This writer's acquaintance with him was on this eve.

My first encounter with Rajiv was a social one at late Srikanth Varma's North Avenue house. The second one was on that tragic day of Sanjay Gandhi's death when I was one of the mourners by the side of Sanjay's body when Rajiv walked in straight from airport. I recall that

he remained a composed person all through.

The third one was a discussion meet at 2, Akbar Road. It was his first formal meeting after resigning from the Indian Airlines with a select few to acquaint him with the charter of AICC. I was specially invited for that meeting (along with H.K.L. Bhagat and Shivraj Patil among others) perhaps because just then I did an organisational study on AICC set-up in New Delhi which he appreciated. The idea of computerising the set-up and introducing feedback on party functionaries were also part of that exercise.

Contrary to what one would expect after my much critical assessment on the state of affairs at that meet, Rajiv looked upon me during the next one year or so wherever any planning, analy-

dates, campaigning etc. Complex issues whether to do with some controversy in the party or on mobilising rural resources he used to refer them for my perusal or initial processing.

Once he became Prime Minister I never tried to be seen around. Only once during his prime ministership I met him. It was in the midst of the Bofors crisis. That was my last and memorable meet with Rajiv. In between he was always prompt in acknowledging my critical letters.

Rajiv Gandhi was very earnest in his endeavour to achieve growth with equity and create mass awareness about citizens' role and responsibilities and bring better discipline and efficiency in our public life and the government in particular. He was an impatient

course of the earlier era. Such an approach, in fact, was what we needed on home front also in resolving our own long pending political issues.

He tried his best to rejuvenate the party and its many wings at all levels for he wanted to build a cadre with passion as well as discipline and endeavoured to bring fundamental reforms in the party's functioning as well as in the government. One cannot forget his famous address at the 1985 AICC session in Bombay calling for getting rid of "power brokers".

The number of policy initiatives that he spearheaded during his governance was again unprecedented and these policies encompassed one end of the spectrum to another in the nation's development. He laid the firm foundation for an emerging and resurgent New India.

Rajiv enriched our public life in many different ways. He electrified people of the country across the socio-economic strata and brought to the fore many more dynamic leaders into mainstream politics as his mother Mrs Indira Gandhi had done during her long political life at national and state levels.

In a true democratic tradition, he was flexible — whether it was the case of press legislation, Shah Bano or Punjab. I remember how concerned he was to bring to an end the conflicts that engulfed the nation as in the case of Punjab, J&K, Assam, Mizoram etc. Rajiv's mission and vision was of a peaceful, united, prosperous and secular country, a self-reliant India that could face the growing challenges in a rapidly changing world. For he firmly believed that in our strength lies our honour and our progress. — CNF.

(Dr. N. Bhaskara Rao is a pioneer in public opinion and feedback research)

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sis and feedback from the grassroots was involved.

Rajiv's first formal visit was to Orissa and then to Andhra Pradesh. For both these visits the mapping, planning and themeing was done by me, which he meticulously followed. His desire that for every state such an exercise should be there could never be accomplished. I remember how carefully he corrected and updated my notes on return from those visit. Even Mrs Indira Gandhi's visits until then were not preceded by such analysis of the field situation.

Yet another innovation of Rajiv with which I was associated was at the time of elections to the assemblies of Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and West Bengal, when he wanted a systematic analysis to facilitate selection of candi-

disciplinarian. Little wonder then that whatever massive tasks he undertook in the party and the government — whether it was kisan rally or Asiad or Panchayat Raj — he made us proud and laid standards for everyone to aspire for.

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As a statesman Rajiv Gandhi was acclaimed in his own right, for his own ideas and his contribution in bringing the world closer. He was the happiest person to see agreements reached between the leaders of countries in conflict. He was the foremost to advocate such a collaborative outlook to replace the collusion