

FROM THE EDITOR

There was a time in Indian history when politics was a kind of Dharma—the Rajadharmā. In the recent past it became synonymous with patriotism.

Subsequently politics became a profession. There is no use lamenting the situation, for this was inevitable. Besides, there is nothing wrong in the concept of profession being applied to politics as long as it runs along sound professional ethics. What is lamentable is, many politicians consciously separated politics from ethics.

The face of politics, consequently, was tarnished. On one hand the aura surrounding the politician had faded; on the other hand democracy and socialism bred political ambition in an unmanageably large number of people. Not a single political party deemed it necessary to instill in the citizens the sense of political values, the responsibilities and duties that went with democracy and socialism. Rivalry was for power alone; the means of impressing the people extended from making ever louder noise and ever bigger bonfires of public property to erecting gigantic figures of leaders, tickling the primitive in man that was still awe-struck by size, sound and fury.

A weird culture grew rapidly: worship the politician or tear him to pieces at the earliest opportunity. This was enough to scare many sensible and capable people—capable but lacking in endurance—from the arena of politics. In the hands of lesser men politics that was once an ideal, became a commerce and worse.

Luckily, we had always had some great minds at the helm of affairs. The latest was Shrimati Indira Gandhi. She presided over the country at a time that was marked by turbulent occurrences, some of them the legacy of the past and some being churned out by her contemporaries inside and outside the country. The kind of vilifications she suffered could have thoroughly demoralised even a stern stuff by any normal standard; the misinterpretations her actions received were grotesque. Some of the best brains in the country devoted themselves not to eradication of India's ills, but to building up hostility against Indira. Despite this she took momentous decisions that required statesmanship of the highest order.

Shrimati Gandhi had many advantages. But the disadvantages she had were formidable too. First she was a woman. Second, she was the late Prime Minister's daughter. People saw in her occupation of that lofty seat (though it was not a direct ascension) a tendency for dynastic rule. It is a pleasant irony that the argument has grown limp when applied to Shri Rajiv Gandhi who succeeded her mother directly as the Prime Minister. Time has in store unforeseen surprises. It is good that our people are matured enough to realise that in the prevailing situation there was no alternative to Shri Rajiv Gandhi leading the Government.

Shri Rajiv Gandhi has started brave and bright. With a past marked by training in discipline, he has a vision transcending the immediate. His concern for ecological problems and his determination to try solve them is a sign of that vision. We congratulate him and remind our people that his performance cannot but depend on the value we the people give to politics. It is a chance for all to redeem politics from opportunism, corruption and frivolity and give it a status when it can again become synonymous with patriotism as well as global humanism.

ON THE TIDES OF TIME

NOT MERE NEMESIS

This editor once wrote in his personal column, "The Banyan Tree" in The Hindustan Times, "The latest manifestation of the subtle and circuitous way in which Nemesis works is to be noticed in the invasion of the domain of power by the film actor."

"For years the politicians behaved as the actor. He wore the mask of patriotism while, behind the mask, his face was being contorted— probably in most cases without his realising it—into almost a vampire's. He delivered harangues and hyperboles while his sole enjoyment lay in the lullaby of power."

"Nemesis saw and waited and then struck. Out of his hero's paradise the real actor stepped into the political stage, to outshine and outshout the false actor."

But there is another side to the picture. Even granted that filmstars successfully bartering their popularity earned at a different market for votes in the political market speaks of a certain immaturity of our voters, is it not a good thing to happen to politics? Most of the 'decent' people who criticise politicians and shun politics are those who have, directly or indirectly, contributed to turn politics into what it is. Filmstars are at least those who value politics more than their vocation which is valued so much by so many.

A CALL FROM THE PRINCE

Way back in 1955 Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh who was the honoured guest at the annual dinner of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, was presented with a small silver chalice by the representative of the surgeons. "May it please your Highness to accept this— Bleeding—Cup!" said the surgeon in keeping with the medical nuance.

"I can only say—it is—bloody—kind of you!" replied the prince.

The distinguished surgeons, we are told, burst their spleens but learnt that the prince had a terribly alert wit. In the three decades since we have learnt much more about his qualities. We were not surprised when enquiries were made from the Buckingham Palace, through the proper agency, about THE HERITAGE and its publishers. We knew that our invitation to the prince to contribute an article was receiving attention.

And then the article arrived promptly; we knew that the prince had the adaptability and wisdom that equalled his presence of mind. Lessons from the Deities is written with passion, far sight and— what is more—a great reverence for the Indian tradition. The prince, whose active leadership in a worldwide movement for conservation is well-known, has effectively presented the issue in an Indian frame.