

# **RAJIV GANDHI**

## HUMAN FACET

Interview based book

*Editors*

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**Ghulam Nabi Azad**

**Vigin in a Bunker**

In October, 1984, Mrs. Indira Gandhi had asked Ghulam Nabi Azad to take Rajiv Gandhi on a vacation to Ladakh. This was hardly 15 days before her assassination. Mrs. Sonia Gandhi could not go because of the ill effects of high altitude on her health. Without her Mrs. Azad did not want to go. So she cancelled her programme. Azad then the Deputy Ministry for Information and Broadcasting had to inaugurate a TV Transmitter in that area. This was a chance for them for a vacation before the forthcoming elections next year.

Throughout the journey Rajiv drove his Jonga for 10-12 hours a day, and still felt fresh. Azad, despite belonging to the hilly Jammu and Kashmir area, was very tired. After traveling for 8 hours at an altitude of 14,000 feet, they reached a temple, which had 200 odd steep steps. Halfway to the temple, Mr. Azad felt dizzy and fell unconscious. Rajiv, being much tougher than Azad, virtually dragged the latter to the Jonga and drove straight to Chishul, at a height of 14,000 feet on the border with China. Due to extreme cold there – almost minus 25 degree centigrade army jawans stayed in the bunkers, which are narrow and can accommodate only one person. Such bunkers were provided to Rajiv Gandhi and Azad also.

Sanjay then decided to take the risk and took off along with the newly married Mrs Azad, his sister-in-law and Ghulam Nabi Azad. He landed at Delhi airport on 29<sup>th</sup> evening. From the airport Sanjay rang up Mr Jain to inform him that he had parked his plane in the hanger. Mr Jain was pleased that the plane was available as he had chartered it to some foreigners the next morning for going to Jaipur.

Early next morning, Mr Jain and his pilot took off with two foreigners for Jaipur, but the plane crashed over Jaipur airport and all the four people died on the spot.

When Rajiv Gandhi lost power in 1989 after losing the General Election, and VP Singh was defeated on the floor of the house, Chandra Shekhar became the Prime Minister (leading only 54 members in the Lok Sabha) with Congress support. During that period communal riots took place in Meerut and Saharanpur. For bringing peace Rajiv undertook a “Sadbhavna Yatra” by road to Meerut. On the way he addressed roadside meetings.

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**Ghulam Nabi Azad****Concern for a Colleague**

Hearing the news, Rajiv Gandhi immediately rushed to Ghulam Nabi Azad and shifted him to a Nursing Home for immediate treatment. Somehow, his bleeding was stopped and he was shifted to the AIIMS for operation. Parliamentary Affairs Minister, HKL Bhagat visited him to enquire about his health, and Azad informed him that he would be operated upon the same day. After sometime, a nurse arrived in the room along with a barber to shave the hair from the part of the body which was to be operated. Mr Azad told the nurse that he would do the shaving himself.

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**Ghulam Nabi Azad****Destiny at the Temple**

As mentioned in a earlier narration, Rajiv Gandhi and Ghulam Nabi Azad had gone together on a vacation to Ladakh. They visited an old hut, which had been visited by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru a few decades before. Mrs. Indira Gandhi, after her marriage to Feroze Gandhi, had also gone there during their honeymoon.

Jawaharlal had put his signatures on the register at the hut and Mrs. Indira Gandhi had followed suit. Ghulam Nabi Azad asked Rajiv also to put his signatures on the register, which he did. Then Azad mentioned that Pandit Nehru became the Prime

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Minister, followed by Madan Indira Gandhi, and predicted: “After 15 years, you would also become the Prime Minister of India.”

Ghulam Nabi Azad never realized that his prediction would come true, not after 15 years but after 15 days! Exactly 15 days after their temple visit, Mrs. Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her own security guards. President Giani Zail Singh decided that only Rajiv could keep the Congress Party and the country together at that difficult hour. It was destiny, as Rajiv had never thought or aspired to become the Prime Minister, but tragic circumstances forced him to take up the responsibility.

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**Mrs. Ghulam Nabi Azad**

**Guardian Angel**

Ghulam Nabi Azad was married on 27 March, 1980 at Srinagar. Most top Congress leaders attended his wedding.

When Mrs. Azad was expecting her second child (she was in the 7<sup>th</sup> month of her pregnancy), Mr. Azad had to go on an official visit to U.S.A. But Nature has its own ways, and on one late evening Mrs. Azad developed labour pains and was rushed to the hospital. Doctors who examined her detected serious complications and decided on a ceasarian operation to save the child. For such major operations prior consent of the head of the family is obtained, and therefore she was asked to summon her husband or a guardian to give the written consent. She told the

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doctors that her husband was out of India and that she did not have any relations in Delhi.

Suddenly she remembered that before leaving for U.S.A., her husband had left the telephone number of V. George, Secretary to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, with her just in case she was in need of help. She gave that phone number to the doctor who informed Mr. George at about midnight about the serious condition of Mrs. Azad.

To everyone's surprise, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi arrived at the hospital at 2 a.m. He signed the consent papers and stayed in the hospital till the baby girl was delivered and Mrs. Azad regained consciousness. While narrating the incident Mrs. Azad became emotional and said that Rajiv Gandhi was a 'Farishta'. With Rajiv Gandhi's tragic death, a vacuum has been created for ever for her.

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**Mrs. Ghulam Nabi Azad**

**Little Miss Azad's Uncle**

When Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated, the girl was just five years old. She had noticed that her Rajiv Uncle was not visiting her any more. She enquired: "Why Rajiv Uncle had stopped visiting us?" Just to satisfy her curiosity, the parents told her that her Rajiv Uncle had gone to meet God, that is why he was

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not visiting them. After some time Mr. & Mrs. Ghulam Nabi Azad went on a pilgrimage to Holy Mecca and Medina alongwith their children. When they were doing. 'Umra', they showed the Holy Mosque to their children and told them that, that was the "House of God".

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**Joshi**

**In Father's Mould**

Once Priyanka, daughter of Rajiv Gandhi, was traveling by a car alongwith the security personnel. The car stopped at a Red light and a leper approached Priyanka for alms. She immediately asked the driver and the security man for money. The driver was carrying a currency note of Rs.50 and the other of Rs.20. Both felt tat to give so much money to a beggar was too much, but they did not want to say no to Priyanka. They therefore lied to Priyanka that they did not have any money. Priyanka, smart and intelligent young lady as she is, knew that both were lying. In a split of a second she removed one of her gold earrings and gave it to the poor leper, who could not believe his eyes when he saw gold in his hand. Both the security personnel and the driver were shell shocked and could not believe that Priyanka could go to that extent.

The Nehru-Gandhi family right from Pandit Nehru, to Rajiv Gandhi and his children Rahul and Priyankas has been pet lovers. They take care of their pets as one would of the members of one's family.

Ajitabh Bachchan, brother of Amitabh Bachchan presented three foreign pups to Rajiv Gandhi. From among them one male was adopted by Rahul and he named it Pluto. There was a bitch among the pups. She was adopted by Priyanka who named it Pipa. Rajiv Gandhi told his children that since they have adopted the dogs, it would be their responsibility to discipline them and teach them toilet habits, etc. Rahul and Priyanka became very attached to their pets. They ran with them in the mornings and evenings to give them exercise. They became part of their lives, and the puppies in their turn loved their masters. One morning Rajiv Gandhi found that Rahul's dog had defecated in the courtyard. He did not like it, and pulled up Rahul for not giving his dog proper toilet training. Rahul was about to call his servant to clean up, but Rajiv Gandhi insisted that Rahul cleaned it himself. He was responsible for

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training the dog and therefore he was responsible for any wrong done by him. In that way he would remember his duty. Rahul did as he was asked. From that day he devoted more time to Pluto's training.

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**Joshi**

**Blessing from a Peasant**

A very unique and touching incident was shared by Joshi with the author. As we all know Rajiv Gandhi nurtured his constituency Amethi and had practically known the people of Amethi, they also reciprocated his affection many fold.

Once in the midnight when it was pitch dark, Rajiv Gandhi was traveling from Rai Bareilly to Amethi as Prime Minister in 1987 alongwith 2 escorts cars. Due to terrorists threat his tour programme were not announced in advance as such nobody knew about his tour plans. The cars were going at a very high speed and there was no traffic on this road. Suddenly Rajiv Gandhi saw an old man carrying a Lantern and waving them to stop. Rajiv Gandhi ordered his Driver Joshi to stop the car near the old villager, probably he was in trouble and wanted help at this unearthly hour. Driver complied with the instructions and stoped the car near the old peasant. PSO got out of the car and asked the man what was his trouble that he was standing with lantern in his hand in the middle of the night on a lonely road. His reply surprised everyone including Rajiv Gandhi when he

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said that he had come to meet Rajiv Gandhi. PSO enquired from the old man that how did he know that Rajiv Gandhi would be coming this way-to-night. The old man replied that he had spoken to Rajiv Gandhi then informed him that he would be passing this area tonight and he should come and wait for him and that is how he is here. On hearing this Rajiv Gandhi got out of the car and told the oldman that he was Rajiv Gandhi and he would like to extend any help to the old man. The old man shocked them further by saying that he did not need any material help as he had sufficient land and his children were doing very well. All he wanted to meet his beloved young Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and bless him.

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**K.R. Narayanan (President)**

**Early Signs**

In Mr. Narayanan's own words: "I have very vivid and fond recollections of Rajiv Gandhi as a young leader before he became the Prime Ministers, as also as Prime Minister of whose Ministry I was a member.

Mr. Narayanan recalled that after Mrs. Gandhi had addressed the US Senate, Senator Charles Burcy approached Rajiv Gandhi and said: "We would like to know something about what the younger generation of India is thinking."

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Rajiv Gandhi came to the mike and said: “The younger generation of India is willing to learn; they are learning from the elders and are optimistic about the future of India.”

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### **K.R. Narayanan (President) Africa Fund – Rajiv’s Brainchild**

It is said that while Mahatma Gandhi started the struggle for freedom of South Africa in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, it was finally accomplished by Rajiv Gandhi.

After the tragic assassination of his mother, Mrs. Indira Gandhi in 1984, Rajiv Gandhi took up the cause of South Africa very seriously to get apartheid dismantled there for ever. But this task could not be accomplished by India alone and the international community had to be involved. The Bahamas Commonwealth Nations’ Conference was preoccupied with how to dismantle apartheid in South Africa. Rajiv for the first time that conference assumed a very clear-cut leadership role and proposed trade sanctions against South Africa. This move was opposed by the white regime of South Africa. Rajiv Gandhi clashed head-on with Britain’s Mrs. Thatcher. He created history of sorts by isolating her on this issue. He made every nation to welcome the

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proposed sanctions. Later, the U.N. Assembly also passed a resolution and officially applied trade sanctions against South Africa. In this way pressure could be brought on the racist regime there to put an end to apartheid.

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**K.R. Narayanan (President)**

**Amitabh's Friend**

On hearing the news about Amitabh's accident, Rajiv left her mother and rushed to Bombay by the first available flight to be near his childhood friend in hospital. Amitabh was the darling of every young Indian. His roles in Indian films as an "angry Youngman", who fought against social injustice had endeared him to the public. Even schools in India held special prayers for the recovery of Amitabh. God listened to their prayers and is now hale and hearty.

This was another example of Rajiv's affection, and concern for a friend.

There must be some cosmic connection in the universe through which some time one can communicate with his/her near and dear ones over distances. When peoples watch the TV or talk over the telephone, some wire connections are needed; but not for the cosmic connection.

Rajiv Gandhi was a perfect gentleman, who never lost his cool or shouted at any one. According to Ravi Nath, the PSO who had been assigned to guard Rajiv Gandhi since 1981, he had only once seen Rajiv Gandhi very upset over a trifle matter and lose his temper. Rajiv, as the AICC General Secretary, was invited by the Bengal Congress leaders and he was about to address a large roadside gathering of several thousand people at a remote place in West Bengal. Youth Congress workers were vying with one another to reach the dais and they even had a sort of fist-fight. At that very moment, perhaps, his mother's assassins were aiming their guns at her and she was trying to communicate with her son through the cosmic connection. Rajiv Gandhi was very upset and asked PSO Ravi Nath to control the crowd, but the latter expressed his inability to do so. Rajiv then lost his temper, left the dais and threw out some workers, saying that he would not address them and would go back.

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**Ravi Nath (P.S.O.)**

**Compassion in Family**

Rajiv and his family camped at the picnic site for lunch. Mrs. Sonia Gandhi started serving lunch as Mrs. Indira Gandhi was late in coming. But before the children started eating, Sonia gave lunch packets in a paper plate to Rahul to tell them not to feel shy and ask for another helping if they want. When Rahul was taking the lunch, he met his grandmother, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, on the way. She asked him where he was going and he replied that he was taking lunch for uncle Ravi and the Jawan. Indira Gandhi went with Rahul and offered them lunch.

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**Ravi Nath (P.S.O.)**

**His Larger Family**

At another time, he had gone to Dehradun on a holiday. While returning, he spotted a “bhuttawala”. He stopped his car and asked Ravi to fetch “bhuttas” on the roadside, they gathered round him and he too enjoyed their company.

A Sikh gentleman, an auto-parts dealer saw Rajiv Gandhi and came to him. The Sikh reminded Rajiv Gandhi that he had purchased a fan-belt from his shop a few years back, and then invited him and his family to his shop. Rajiv readily agreed and went to his shop along with Sonia Gandhi and had soft drinks.

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He spent nearly half an hour at the shop discussing family and international matters as if two old friends were having a get-together after a long time. People were really impressed by his unassuming nature, simplicity and humility.

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**Ravi Nath (P.S.O.)**

**One with the Poor**

Rajiv was once travelling in Andhra Pradesh by road. He was followed by officials and party workers in a convoy of cars. Suddenly he saw a tribal “jalebiwala” on the roadside. We all know that Rajiv had a sweet tooth, and could not resist the temptation of sweets. He stopped his car, walked towards the “jalebiwala”, purchased some “jalebis” and began eating them. No one could stop him as he had moved so fast. It was risky to eat food prepared on the road side. But it is almost suicidal to get it from a roadside vendor in remote region infested with Naxalites.

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**Jagdish Tytler**

**He ate at Dhabha like a Commoner**

Mr. Tytler shared his pleasant memories of the late Shri Rajiv Gandhi with me when I met him to familiarize him with the book I was doing. He recalled the days, when Rajiv Gandhi was not even a pilot. He used to move about on a ‘Rajdoot’ motor byke. He had no airs though he was a son of the Prime Minister of India. He behaved like a common man as if he was one of them.

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Rajiv Gandhi brought posters one night and asked Jagdish Tytler to pillion ride his motor byke with a bucket of glue. They went to Pahar Ganj area. Rajiv Gandhi himself climbed the ladder to stick posters on the walls. Jagdish Tytler remembered about the days before the election to the Municipal Corporation. They had been putting posters on the walls all night. Suddenly Rajiv Gandhi felt hungry as both of them have not had any dinner. Mr. Tytler suggested that they should go back to his house for food, to which Rajiv Gandhi retorted and said, “Why not we go to a ‘dhabha’? Finally they went to a roadside ordinary ‘dhabha’ opposite Sheila Cinema, in Pahar Ganj, which was frequented by rickshaw pullers and labour class. He had toasts with tea in a broken cup. He seemed to have relished his food sitting in the company of poor people. Though some of them recognized him as Rajiv Gandhi, son of the Prime Minister, he was least bothered about it. Mr. Tytler said it was remarkable on the part of Smt. Gandhi to have raised both her sons Rajiv and Sanjay like commoners without any snobbishness or false pride. That is why Rajiv could feel the pulse of the people and identify himself with them. He was a very simple and unassuming person. Mr. Tytler said he enjoyed working with him and sweet memories of those days are still fresh in his mind.

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**Suresh Pachauri**

**Glimpses at Bhopal**

Once Rajiv visited Mhow, the birthplace of national leader Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar. He was going in an open jeep along roads lined on both sides with people. Ladies were throwing garlands and flowers from their balconies. One particular lady tried to throw a garland on Rajiv but missed him Rajiv noticed it. He then asked Mr. Pachauri to go to the lady and ask her to make tea for him. When Mr. Pachauri met the lady with Rajiv's request, she was thrilled beyond description. She made tea for her beloved leader. Does not this remind us of the legendary story of Lord Ram eating the berries from the hands of a tribal woman after she had tasted them?

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**Sheikh Hasher Dubai**

**He Was a Democrat**

Sheikh Hasher Maktoum Bin Jumaal Maktoum is the Director of Information, the Chief of Dubai TV and Radio. He had ample opportunities to understand the young and dynamic Rajiv Gandhi and the impression he got, was that he latter was the harbinger of liberalization in India which was a hall mark In the contemporary history of India.

In Rajiv Gandhi, he did not see a typical, petty politician. He was a democrat who came into, politics due to twists of fate and history. That is why his ideas differed from that of a conventional

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politician. Politics as such was part of his family, it ran into its blood from the time of his great grand father. But he was averse to it. He was dragged into it late in life.

His Highness Sheikh Hasher Maktoum had met Mrs. Indira Gandhi a number of times. He found her humble but full of strength. During his visit to Dubai in 1990, Rajiv Gandhi impressed the people of Dubai, who found him to be a very simple and uncomplicated person. Sheikh offered the government plane to Rajiv Gandhi to return to India as his regular flight developed some defect, though he was out of power. That speaks a lot about his reputation as a world leader. According to Sheikh Hasher, Indian people working in Dubai are very peaceful and hard working.

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**L.R. Lulla – Dubai**

**Dubai Visit**

Mr. L.R. Lulla had migrated to Dubai in 1954. His father had moved there earlier in 1950. Dubai had just then struck oil, and was not as developed as it is today. He started his career as an Executive Secretary in an Oil Company in 1954. He joined DNATA as the Traffic Officer at the Dubai Airport in 1969. Later he floated a Construction Company which had to be closed down because of recession. Lulla's two sons Raju & Prakash are in the hotel business in U.S.A., Dubai and India. Lulla is a great admirer of the Nehru-Gandhi family, and he had met Mrs. Indira Gandhi personally both in Delhi and Dubai.

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Coming to Rajiv Gandhi, he recalls that when Rajiv Gandhi visited USA, after he became the Prime Minister, he told the Congress in his address that “As Americans you are a young nation and in my case I am a young man”, this was well taken by the American people.

After the tragic death of his brother Sanjay and the assassination of his mother, Rajiv was compelled to join politics against his wishes. Mr. Lulla had met Rajiv Gandhi once in Delhi and second time when he visited Dubai for a short while.

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**Sunil Bhatia – Dubai**

**What Should I Say**

Sunil Bhatia met Rajiv Gandhi in Hotel Hyat in Dubai. He was there on his way back to New Delhi after visiting Moscow and Tehran where he had gone to diffuse Iraq-Kuwait conflict. He wanted to visit Baghdad to meet President Saddam Hussain but was prevented from going there due to war conditions. When Sunil Bhatia requested Rajiv Gandhi to address the select gathering assembled in the Hotel lobby, Rajiv Gandhi asked him, “What should I say?” This shows how simple and unassuming he was. Any other person who had been a P.M. of a country, however modest he might be, would not ask a stranger such question.

When Mrs. Sheila Kaul lost her husband, she was completely shattered. Rajiv went to her and consoled her, saying: "Aunty, do not worry, you are not alone. I would always be by your side." When Mrs. Kaul was narrating this, she broke down, saying, "He promised to me that he would be always by my side; he has gone before me." Mrs. Sheila Kaul now feels completely shattered.

This is a real story of a nationalist Muslim, who died a true soldier's death while on a mission to the snow-clad Himalayan border of Siachin Glacier on September 27, 1984. This incident was narrated by his young widow Ms. Nargis Naqvi. She is able to lead a meaningful life now because of the help rendered to her by Rajiv Gandhi.

Sq. Leader Intezam Hussain Naqvi was born in a farmer's family at Amroha. As a young man he had the burning desire to join the Indian Air Force as a pilot. He was married to a charming local girl from his own community at Amroha in 1970. Both were deeply attached to each other. Naqvi had postings at Allahabad, Hyderabad, Bagdogra, Bareilly, Agra and Guwahati, last posting was at Hindon. During their 13 years of blissful married life they

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were blessed with a daughter and a son. Naqvi was a loving husband and an affectionate father. By nature he was a kind and caring person and a dedicated soldier. During their honeymoon he had once told Nargis that he would like to die in uniform as a soldier of the country. If it so happened she would be a proud widow of a soldier. Nargis never forgot these words, but used to wonder how could he die and leave them alone in this cruel world.

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**Atul C. Marak (Meghalaya Minister)**

**Love For the Tribals**

Marak, therefore, appealed to his colleagues and Youth Congress president, Ghulam Nabi Azad and Rajivji, that as young leaders, they must organize seminars and conventions in the North-East to enable the people of the region to exchange views and get wider exposure. He further suggested that some of the youth leaders will be guiding the country after some time, therefore, Youth Congress conventions must be held in the North-East and the delegates put up in the houses of the local people, to enable them to learn their culture, food habits, and traditions. Similarly North-Eastern youth should be sent to other parts of India to get similar exposure.

After some time Rajiv Gandhi announced that the next Youth Congress convention would be held in Shillong, and it did take place.

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**Rajiv Shukla**

**Never Lost In a Desert**

Once as Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was touring Kutch followed by his special security, S.P.G., who are trained on the pattern of the US Secret Service and M-16 of England. His special Jonga was already there before he began his daily journey. He preferred to drive it himself. He drove fast, almost at a speed of 120-140 kmph. The Jonga was a four wheel drive, while S.P.G. people were traveling by their traditional Ambassador car, having a speed of 60-70 kmph. It was no match for Jonga. The S.P.G. Escort-I, therefore could not keep pace with Rajiv's Jonga. And to make the matters worse, it met with an accident with a "neelgai". Rajiv Gandhi meanwhile, had reached a remote village in Kutch along with some journalists. The S.P.G. personnel were in panic. They were frantically trying to locate the missing Prime Minister of India! Rajiv Gandhi was thus without any security cover for a considerable length of time.

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**Rajiv Shukla**

**At the Service of a P.S.O.**

When Rajiv Gandhi was out of power, after losing the 1989 general elections, he decided to utilize his time by undertaking "Sadbhavna Yatras" by IInd Class train journeys. He was accompanied by hundreds of Party workers and media persons.

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Once Rajiv went to Patna on such a “Sadbhavna Yatra”. His only security guard was PSO Gupta. Prime Minister V.P. Singh had withdrawn the S.P.G. cover for Rajiv Gandhi. At Patna there was an ocean of people to see and hear their beloved leader. The people wanted to hug Rajiv and shake hands with him. Gupta tried his best to keep the crowd at a distance but in the process got his feet treaded upon. He was limping as he had sprained his foot. Rajiv Shukla, a journalist, noticed his limp and brought the fact to the notice of Rajiv. He immediately opened his briefcase, took out a pain-killer spray and himself applied it on Pradip’s feet after removing his socks.

Gupta later told Rajiv Shukla that his “Sahib” was so kind that he would be glad to lay down his life for him and he did. He was blown off along with Rajiv Gandhi at Sriperumbudur.

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**Wajahat Habibullah &**

**Whale Of a Time**

Harihar Swarup of PTI

Rajiv Gandhi visited Lakshadweep, in the Indian Ocean in the winter of 1987-88, where his childhood friend Wajahat Habibullah, an IAS Officer, was the Commissioner. Rajiv and Sonia had gone there to spend their holidays. As both were keen divers, they wanted to do some scuba diving in the blue water.

When Ghulam Nabi Azad described Rajiv as “a friend of a friend”, Wajahat would not have understood the real meaning.

Wajahat was a Doon School friend of Rajiv. He was posted in Srinagar as the Divisional Commissioner in 1990-91. He had gone to the main mosque to oversee the arrangements for the Friday prayers just before the Id. There, he was attacked by militants by rockets. Habibullah survived, but his security guards including a DSP were killed on the spot. This tragic news was telecast as well as broadcast over the Radio.

The same evening Rajiv Gandhi rang him up to enquire about his well-being. That was not all. The next morning he was informed by the Indian Airlines to collect a package sent by Mr. Rajiv Gandhi. In that he had sent his own bullet-proof vest. When Wajahat rang him up to thank him he said: “I hope you are wearing it.”

Learning about some atrocities committed on Harijan community at Agra, Rajiv Gandhi decided to visit them. He left by Taj Express accompanied by Sonia Gandhi. At the Agra Railway Station, over a lakh of people had gathered to have a glimpse of

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their beloved leader. Not an inch of space was there for him to move towards the Jeep brought by the local Congress leaders. Telling PSO Sagar to get down and make some walking place for him, he asked S.S. Ahluwalia to take care of Sonia. Rajiv followed PSO Sagar. Sonia followed Rajiv clutching to his kurta, Ahluwalia was the last. So he had to take the brunt of the crowd's pressure. As Rajiv was the leader of the opposition the Government vehicles were available for his use, but he did not want to use them. He asked Ahluwalia to look for the Jeep brought by the local Congress leader. Ahluwalia climbed the top of one of the Ambassador cars and saw that a Jeep with the Congress flag was parked after a row of fifty cars. He signaled Rajiv to climb on the roof of the Ambassador and then hop from one car to another to reach the Jeep. There was no other way of moving through the surging crowd. Rajiv again reminded Ahluwalia to look after Sonia and then began hopping from one car to the other followed by PSO Sagar. People were both amazed and angry Amazed at the agility of their beloved leader and angry because they could not touch him. When the crowd moved away, Ahluwalia could escort Sonia to the flag bearing Jeep.

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**S.S. Ahluwalia**

**Last Trip to Assam & N.E.**

Mr. S.S. Ahluwalia used to be a bitter critic of Rajiv Gandhi, though he admired latter's pleasing personality. When Rajiv declared that he "would take India to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century." Ahluwalia argued with him that most Indians were in the 16<sup>th</sup>

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century. How would he carry 85 crores of people into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He further said that if Rajiv had in mind a few lacs of people, then they were already in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He suggested to Rajiv to play down the slogan. Rajiv Gandhi began appreciating his blunt advice and changed his tone in later years. Ahluwalia said that Rajiv was too trusting, and was betrayed by the people whom he trusted. He was used to taking quick decisions like a pilot. He did realize that a minor mistake by a pilot could cause untold destruction. The Chief Executive of the country had to be as careful as a pilot of an aircraft.

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**N.K. Seshan**

**Pilot by Choice**

As the Commander of the Avro-46 hopping flights of the Indian Airlines, Rajiv Gandhi had practically flown to every sector. He got his flying training at the Safdarjung Flying Club.

He had told his grandfather Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru that he would like to become a commercial pilot as he had no interest in politics, which bored him.

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**Jagdish Nehra**

**He Loved His Country**

Rajiv Gandhi's biggest contribution was in the field of Science and Technology. During the five years, when he was the Prime Minister, the country made great strides in scientific and

technological fields. The electronics and computer revolution in the country today is all due to Rajiv Gandhi's vision and sustained efforts.

Though Rajiv Gandhi wanted to build a modern India, yet he did not want it at the cost of our culture. In fact, Rajiv Gandhi took special interest in preserving the traditions and culture of our country by setting up regional cultural centres. He even propagated India's culture in the world by organizing Festivals of India abroad.

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**Sam Pitroda**

**A Phenomenon, A Visionary**

Today India can boast of being one of the few developing countries in the world where computer is a household word. Practically in all public schools, computer education is compulsory. Banks are extensively using computers in their customer services while defence establishments are using computers for their data analysis. Several middle-class families are even using PCs in their homes.

How did computer revolution take place in India in such a short time? The credit goes to no one else but Rajiv Gandhi.

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**Farooq Abdullah****Kashmiri Tea on The Floor**

During Rajiv Gandhi's tenure of Prime Ministership, there were floods in Kashmir in 1987-88. Dr. Farooq Abdullah invited him to pay an official visit to Srinagar. At that time there was no trouble in the state-no militancy-and peace and harmony prevailed in Kashmir. Hindus and Muslims lived like brothers, and as Pakistan propoganda had not reached Kashmir, Kashmiris were proud of being Indians.

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**Miss Nirmala Deshpande****Unassuming Self-Helper**

Miss Deshpande narrated that the Delhi's winter season was on and she had casually mentioned about no provision of hot water in her bathroom and that she carried hot water from Sanjay's bathroom. Next day she saw Rajiv fixing replied "It is cold, and therefore I had fixed a small Geyser", and proceeded to instruct her how to operate it. Rajiv was so unassuming and considerate.

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**Arun Kumpani ACP****Everyone's Rajiv**

After Rajiv Gandhi lost the 1989 General Elections and V.P. Singh became the Prime Minister, his Special Protection Guard was withdrawn and his security was handed over to Delhi Police.

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## HUMAN FACET

Young Arun Kampani was made responsible for the security of Rajiv Gandhi and his family. At that time Rajiv faced security threat from various terrorist outfits operating in the country, e.g. the Punjab terrorists, the JKLF and the LTTE. It was tough to guard Rajiv Gandhi, who did not like restrictions and wanted to mingle freely among his admirers and friends.

The security team headed by ACP Kampani was totally dedicated and enjoyed working with him. The team comprised three Inspectors-Aggarwal, B.R. Kashyap and Om Kumar – and three PSO, of the rank of Sub-Inspectors –Pradip Gupta, (who was killed with Rajivji at Sriperumbudur), Suresh Kaushik and O.P. Sagar.

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**Insp. Suresh Kaushik, PSO      Bleeding Wrist, Bleeding Heart**

After reaching the Circuit House, Rajiv Gandhi had a closed-door meeting with Bangarappa. Suddenly Rajiv Gandhi called out to Kaushik to connect him to his secretary V. George on the telephone. While giving instructions Rajiv noticed Kaushik's bleeding wrist and admonished him for ignoring the injury. He asked Bangarappa to arrange for a doctor attend to Kaushik's injury, but the latter seemed more interested in continuing their talks. Rajiv Gandhi was a bit angry with Bangarappa and said, "You are not bothered about the suffering of Kaushik but I am. You care only for your interests."

Most PSOs deputed to guard former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi became his admirers and adored him. Rajiv Gandhi was very kind and considerate towards his security staff. They were treated as members of his family.

When Rajiv Gandhi was nearing Roorkee, he saw a serious road accident between a Maruti and an Ambassador. The Maruti was totally crushed and all its six occupants were badly injured. They were bleeding profusely. Although many cars had stopped at the accident site, but the occupants of them stood there as mere spectators. Rajiv Gandhi stopped his car and instructed PSO Kaushik to take the injured persons to the hospital at Dehra Dun in his car and instructed PSO Kaushik to take the injured persons to the hospital at Dehra Dun in his car. Kaushik was in a dilemma whether to obey or disobey the order of Rajiv Gandhi. He mustered courage and told his boss that he could not leave him alone without an escort. The other escort cars were far behind. Rajiv Gandhi, for the first time lost his cool and shouted at Kaushik. "You are bothered about my safety. What about these six persons?. They need immediate medical attention." At this Kaushik whispered to his driver to reverse the car slowly; luckily in the meantime the other escort cars roared in. Rajiv Gandhi immediately summoned the sub-inspectors of the three cars. With their help he lifted some of the injured persons and put them in the escort Ambassador cars. When the bystanders saw Rajiv in

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## HUMAN FACET

the rescue act, they also helped. Being a trained pilot, Rajiv Gandhi knew how to react in an emergency.

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**Suresh Kaushik, PSO**

**The Last Journey**

Later, as well as know, Rajiv Gandhi was killed by the “human bomb” along with his PSO Gupta and 12 others. It shocked the entire nation and almost everyone cried. Author’s daughter, Ritu became hysterical and had a nervous breakdown. Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar ordered a special IAF plane for Mrs Sonia Gandhi to go to Madras and bring the body of Rajiv Gandhi to Delhi. Mrs. Sonia Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi flew to Madras alongwith R.K. Dhawan and PSO Kaushik. A message was sent to Madras to arrange the body of Rajiv Gandhi to be brought to the airport from the hospital. Mrs. Sonia Gandhi and Priyanka were sobbing all through the flight.

Many prominent Congress leaders had come to the Airport to offer their last respect to their beloved leader, and placed flowers and wreaths on the coffin of Rajiv Gandhi. Seats were removed in the plane to make room for the coffins of Rajiv Gandhi and PSO Gupta. After the bodies were put in the plane, Sonia Gandhi completely broke down, and Priyanka Gandhi consoled her.

After some time, Sonia Gandhi was composed, she noticed that Rajiv’s coffin was full of flowers but there was not a single

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flower on the coffin of Gupta. She got up from her seat along with Priyanka, removed some flowers from the coffin of her husband and placed them on the body of the slain PSO. She stood there for a few minutes with folded hands and closed eyes praying to God for giving peace to the soul of Gupta, who had given his life while trying to protect her husband, Rajiv.

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**Hari Dutt (Driver)**

**Driver to the Nehru-Gandhi Family**

Hari Dutt was attached to our first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru as a driver and served also the two subsequent Prime Ministers from the Nehru-Gandhi family. He was treated as a member of the family, Rajiv Gandhi always showed respect to Hari Dutt. His two children Priyanka and Rahul also considered him as one of the elders of the family. Though he has retired from the Government service, the Nehru-Gandhi family has persuaded him to continue with them.

During his service, Hari Dutt had experienced the humane side of Rajiv Gandhi and his family. Says he that there is no show-off or pretences in the family. All of them are disciplined and normally do most of their work themselves, not bothering their domestic helps.

Hari dutt noticed an old villager approach the car with some papers in his hand. He dutifully brought the car to a halt. Rajiv Gandhi came out and asked the man about his problem. The old man began sobbing and said that his only son was suffering from T.B. He had no money for his treatment. An anguished Rajiv accompanied the old man on foot to his mud hut, and met his ailing son. He then instructed Capt. Satish Sharma, who was traveling with him, to have the boy sent to a hospital in Delhi for treatment, which the latter promptly did. The boy soon recovered, and came to Rajiv Gandhi's residence with his father to express their gratitude. Rajiv got the boy a job so that he could support the family.

People of Amethi looked upon Rajiv Gandhi as their godfather. Rajiv personally knew most of the people of the area and so does Sonia. Rajiv used to make notes in his diary and monitor the progress of the schemes started to help the poor people. This was to ensure that the funds earmarked for the scheme are not misappropriated and the benefits reach the people.

Rajiv sat in front alongwith the driver, while the Lt. Governor of Andaman-Nicobar was in the back seat of the car! Hari Dutt saw a person standing on the road with some papers in his hand. That was Rajiv's first visit of the Islands. Most people there had over the papers to him. But he declined, saying that he would only hand over the papers to Rajiv Gandhi and not to any other person. Rajiv told him that he was Rajiv Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India.

Hari Dutt remembers his last trip with Rajiv Gandhi, about a week before he was killed by the "human bomb" at Sriperumbudur.

Rajiv was on an election campaign of the hilly regions of Uttar Pradesh. He was continuously travelling in the Dehra Dun area, addressing road-side meetings arranged by local Congress leaders.

Rajiv Gandhi was completely exhausted by continuous traveling. Added to it was the fatigue of addressing meetings. His voice had become hoarse. However, he was considerate enough to think about his driver, Hari Dutt. Rajiv Gandhi thought that Hari

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Dutt would have been also tired for he was driving the car for 8 to 10 hours at a stretch and that too on a hilly terrain. According to Hari Dutt, Rajiv said “Hari Dutt you must be tired to go to the back seat and rest for some time.” Notwithstanding Hari Dutt’s protests, he took away steering from the former, drove the car for 3-4 hours. When he felt that the driver had rested, he allowed him to take over again.

While passing through Haridwar, Rajiv remembered a Muslim shrine nereby, and asked Hari Dutt to take him there. The Nehru-Gandhi family had been a traditionally secular family- rather secularism was in their blood. On his visit to the Muslim Shrine, Rajiv Gandhi was accompanied by the former U.P. Congress leader, Mr. Mahavir Prasad, who is now Governor of Haryana. The Rajiv Gandhi laid chaddar on the mazar of the sufi saint. The tradition of giving respect to all the religions is inherent in Nehru-Gandhi family. That is why they are loved equally by the members and minority and majority communities.

Chapter-39

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**Lekh Raj Sharma**

**The Humble Caretaker**

Transcript of the Author’s letter addressed to Rajiv Gandhi:  
NOIDA NEWS  
48, Shardhanand Marg,  
Delhi-110006

Sh. Rajiv Gandhi  
Hon’ble Prime Minister  
New Delhi

**RAJIV GANDHI**  
HUMAN FACET

Respected Rajivji,

Subject: Sh. Lekh Raj Sharma, Caretaker, Teenmurti Bhawan,  
seriously sick, admitted to Ganga Ram Hospital

I have been asked by Shri Lekh Raj Sharma to convey to you that his condition is serious and the doctors have advised him [to undergo] immediate surgery. He is being treated by Dr. G.D. Goyal at Ganga Ram Hospital.

You may kindly recall that Lekh Rajji has served with Pt. Nehru and later on with Smt. Indira Gandhi since 1948. On your persuasion he has stayed back at Teenmurti Bhawan as a Caretaker in (an) honorary capacity. You have been always kind to him and have always treated him as one of the family members. I shall request you to kindly depute some responsible person alongwith medical specialists to take care of him. His condition appears to be serious. He is lying on Bed No.22, Ward No.10.

With kindest regards,

Yours sincerely,

Sd/-

Harish Chander

(Editor)

**RAJIV GANDHI**

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P.S. I am enclosing herewith the Application from Sh. Lekh Raj Sharma

Copy of letter No.82(3/2638)/87-PMF dated 22-2-88 from Prime Minister's Office addressed to Lekh Raj Sharma.

Prime Minister's Office  
No.82(3/2638)/87-PMF

New Delhi-110001  
22.2.88

Dear Sir,

On the request of Shri Harish Chander, Editor, *Noida News*, the Prime Minister has sanctioned a grant of Rs.5,000/- from the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund for your eye treatment. A cheque No. 78047 dated 22-2-1988 drawn on Central Bank of India, Janpath, New Delhi, for the sanctioned amount is enclosed.

Kindly acknowledge receipt of the cheque by sending the enclosed acknowledgement letter duly signed.

Yours faithfully,  
Sd/-  
Rakesh Arora  
(Under Secretary)

Veteran journalist Khushwant Singh rang up the residence of Rajiv Gandhi and invited him on the 50<sup>th</sup> birthday of his son Rahul Singh. Mr. Mani Shanker Iyer told Khushwant Singh that even though Rajiv Gandhi was no more the Prime Minister, he was till a very busy person and had no time to attend birthday parties. Khushwant Singh gave up all hopes of seeing Rajiv at his son's birthday.

After some time V. George, Rajiv's Private Secretary, rang up Khushwant Singh and asked whether any other politician was also attending the party. He told George that no other politician had been invited, but he (Khushwant) was himself a part-time politician but would not be there as he went to sleep quite early. George then informed him that Rajiv would be joining his son's birthday party. However he would be there only for a short time. Though Khushwant Singh had retired for the night when Rajiv arrived, his son woke him up to meet Rajiv just for two minutes.

Khushwant Singh learnt in the morning that Rajiv had spent nearly one and half hours with the young crowd, who were dancing and enjoying the birthday party of Rahul Singh.

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**Shaheen Akhtar Sultanpur**

**Muslim Sister's Brother**

This is most personal and touching incident in the life of an adopted Muslim sister of Rajiv Gandhi. She narrated this most pleasant experiences with her beloved brother, Rajiv.

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**Ahamad Zamin**

**Party Worker's Godfather**

From a young age Ahmad Zamin had started working for the Youth Congress without giving a thought to his career and future prospects. He was an untiring Youth Congress worker, totally devoted to his party and his beloved leader Rajiv Gandhi. There is something very unique about the Nehru-Gandhi family, the minorities always felt attracted to them because of their strong secular credentials. As Zamin reached marriageable age, his parents became impatient and started putting pressure on him to get settled in life. In fact, they even selected a girl for him.

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**Khurshid Alam Khan**

**Honesty and Secular Ethos**

However, Mr. Khurshid Alam was suddenly dropped from the Union Ministry in 1987, without assigning any reason. Though Khurshid Alam Khan was confused and upset, he kept quite as it was a prerogative of the Prime Minister to keep or drop

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any minister. However, he had a feeling that Rajiv Gandhi was more relaxed in the company of his group.

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**Mrs. Shahwar Khan**

**Rajiv Gandhi's Combrade-in-Arms**

Once Shahwar had gone to 12, Willingdon Crescent to meet Sanjay. There she saw a handsome person in shorts. She thought he was some foreigner and asked a passerby who he was. She was surprised when she was told that he was Rajiv, the elder brother of Sanjay.

When Rajiv Gandhi was out of power, communal riots broke out in Ghaziabad, Meerut and Shahrampur. Rajiv planned to go to Meerut himself, and deputed Shahwar to visit Ghaziabad with her friends and make an on-the-spot survey of the damage to life and property of the riot victims. He was very keen to help those unfortunate people. Shahwar visited Ghaziabad and gave a detailed report to Rajiv. He then instructed his aides to rush help to the riot victims. Shahwar was touched by the secular ethos of Rajiv Gandhi, which he had inherited from his mother, grandfather and great grandfather.

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**Ramji Bhai-Sartorial-keeper**

Ramji Bhai recalls that when Rajiv visited his shop for the first time after the death of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, he took him for an American boy. That was because of his very fair complexion

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and looks. When Rajiv next visited his shop and ordered more clothes to be stitched, Ramji Bhai asked him to give him his address (he did not know that he was the grandson of Jawaharlal Nehru). Rajiv gave the address of his friend Mohan Thadani, 16=B, Nizamuddin West! Only later did Mohan reveal the real identity of his friend to Ramji Bhai.

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#### **Vijay Singh Yadav      Busted Car Chasis and Narrow Escape (Driver)**

Vijay Singh Yadav was attached to Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad as his personal driver, when the latter was the General Secretary of the Congress Party. After the death of Sanjay Gandhi Rajiv Gandhi joined the Congress Party and was appointed its General Secretary. On his visit to Jammu & Kashmir for election campaign, he drove his own Ambassador car. He was received by Mr. Azad at Batol Circuit House.

It then started raining heavily. There is often a land or rock slide in the hills during the rains. Suddenly Vijay Singh saw a huge rock coming down at a high speed towards their car. A prayer emerged from his lips, not for his own life but for the life of Rajiv Gandhi and his boss Ghulam Nabi Azad. His prayers were answered and the hurtling rock suddenly changed its course and fell in a river, just grazing past the mudguard of their car. Except for a minor damage to the front mudguard, the car was safe, so were its precious occupants.

Tek Ram was resting on a sofa when Rajiv Gandhi came out of his room. Seeing Tek Ram asked him why was he not sleeping. The PSO evaded a direct answer and said that he (Rajiv Gandhi) need not worry about him and that he would eventually sleep. Rajiv then asked him which of the rooms was he in, to which Tek Ram merely replied that he was quite comfortable on the sofa.

By now Rajiv had realized that Tek Ram had no room to sleep. He then took Tek Ram by his arm and dragged him to his room and said; “See, I have a double bed; you can sleep with me here!”

In Jabalpur, Rajiv was riding a jeep in a procession, accepting greeting from the people who had lined up on both sides of the road. A young boy held Rajiv’s hand and refused to let it go until he gifted him his sunglasses. Rajiv immediately parted with his sunglasses. The boy though he was very keen to have the sunglasses never expected that he could get them. He jumped with joy. To get such a precious memento and that too from Rajiv Gandhi was a dream come true. Seeing the boy so happy. Rajiv gave an indulgent smile. Such rare qualities in him

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had endeared him to masses and had made him such a popular leader.

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**Miss Anita Saluja**

**'Unlucky' P.S.O.**

A special train was arranged to carry the ashes of Rajiv Gandhi from Delhi to Allahabad for immersion. Several hundred Congress workers and journalists were accompanying Sonia Gandhi on the train. The tragic journey was to Sangam, which is the holy meeting place of three rivers-the Ganga, the Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati-and where the ashes of every member of the Nehru family had been immersed.

Journalists noticed that PSO Kaushik was crying as the train neared Allahabad. They told him that he should feel lucky to be alive today. Had he gone to Sriperumbudur instead of Pradip Gupta, he would surely have been killed in the blast. To everyone's surprise Kaushik said that he was very unlucky to be alive as he wanted to die with his darling boss Rajiv Gandhi. He felt that Gupta was very fortunate to get the honour of dying with Rajiv Gandhi.

Rajiv Gandhi loved his people, especially those who were near him and served him too. And the spirit was reciprocal-all those who came in contact with Rajiv during his life time, were immediately charmed by him and were ready to do all his bidding, without question.

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It was a birthday of PSO Kaushik, when Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated by human bomb on 21<sup>st</sup> May, 1991. Kaushik was completely shattered by this tragedy and took a vow never to celebrate his birthday. To him 21<sup>st</sup> May, his birthday has become day of mourning.

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**A.C. Chaudhary**

**Friend of Refugees**

Due to heavy fighting in Kabul and other places in Afghanistan Indian settlers, both Hindus and Sikhs who had been there since centuries, suddenly found themselves uprooted and they moved over to India. They were Afghan citizens and carried Afghan Passports, and as such had been given short-stay visas by the Indian Embassy in Kabul.

Conditions in Afghanistan did not improve as super powers got involved in the war. The Soviet Union was fighting directly by sending its troops and equipment, whereas U.S.A. provided arms and ammunition and used Pakistan for a “Proxy War”. Hundreds of thousands of innocent people died, and even the local Afghans had to flee and take shelter in India.

Since the people of Indian origin had over-stayed in India, police began harassing them to leave and go back to Kabul even though the conditions there had worsened. Most of them lived with their relatives in and around Faridabad in Haryana. One

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young Congress leader, A.C. Choudhary, who originally belonged to the North-West Frontier, met Rajiv Gandhi and conveyed to him the plight of these hapless people, who would surely die if they were pushed back into Afghanistan. Rajiv Gandhi, a man of compassion, was moved and issued immediate instructions for providing all relief to these refugees and not to disturb them till the situation improved in Afghanistan.

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**Baldev, Photographer**

**Photographer's Delight**

Rajiv Gandhi was a photographer's delight, although he himself was a very competent photographer.

Baldev, a veteran photo-journalist who represented a foreign magazine, was asked by his principals to send them several photographs of Prime Minister Mrs Indira Gandhi's son Rajiv Gandhi with his wife, Sonia. Baldev approached Rajiv for a photography session and the latter readily agreed. Baldev took the couple in his old fiat car all over Delhi and took photographs at several places. When he brought them to India Gate, Rajiv and Sonia were treated with ice-cream. Several of these photographs of Mrs & Mr Rajiv Gandhi were later published in the magazine.

Once Rajiv Gandhi as the Prime Minister, was on an election tour by helicopter. He called Baldev to meet him at Morena to cover his tour. When Rajiv was leaving for his next hop for Dholpur, he invited Baldev to join him in his helicopter, and unloaded a State Congress leader, who followed him by car.

During one of his “Sadhbavna Yatra” to Uttar Pradesh, when Rajiv’s train halted at Kanpur, a local Press photographer climbed the roof of a compartment to take some exclusive photographs of Rajiv Gandhi with the people. He did not realize that there was a high tension wire overhead, and he accidentally came in contact with it and was thrown down.

Rajiv heard the thud of someone falling, and inquired what was it. He was told that a Press photographer had been electrocuted. Rajiv immediately arranged to shift him to a Delhi hospital. After every hour he enquired about his condition. Later, the photographer died. Rajiv Gandhi was very sad when the tragic news was conveyed to him.

Rajiv Gandhi as an Indian Airlines Pilot, was very particular about the safety norms.

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During the Janata regime at the Centre, Rajiv was once piloting a Delhi-Gwalior-Bhopal-Indore-Bombay flight. At Bhopal airport, a Madhya Pradesh Minister of the Janata Party entered the plane alongwith his supporters without going through the security check. Rajiv refused to take off till these people had gone through thee security search. The Minister threatened Rajiv Gandhi that he could get his services terminated for “misbehaving with a Minister”.

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### **Mr. Mehta of the C.P.W.D.      Compassion for the Distraught**

Like his grandfather, Pandit Nehru, Rajiv also met members of the public every morning and personally heard their grievances to try to get them some relief. Once a young lady came with her brother to meet Rajiv Gandhi at his official residence at Race Course, but they were not allowed to go in as they were late. The lady started crying. Mr. Mehta, a CPWD Engineer, who had been looking after the maintenance of the P.M’s House from Mrs Gandhi’s days, saw her crying and inquired about the problem.

The lady’s brother told Mr Mehta that through a newspaper advertisement he had arranged the marriage of his sister with a Youngman, who had come from a Gulf Country. After the wedding, he had gone back to the Gulf, promising to send her an air ticket and visa. Now more than one-and-half-years had

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passed, but there was no news from him. They now wanted to appeal to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to help the woman out.

Mr Mehta went inside the P.M's House and told Rajiv Gandhi about the lady's problem. Rajiv immediately gave instructions to let the sister and the brother in and she narrated her story. He immediately contacted the Indian Ambassador in that Gulf country and gave him the details of the errant husband, with instructions to sort out the matter without delay. Rajiv then consoled the lady and told her that if she did not hear from her husband in a week's time, she could come back and see him again.

The young lady did not come back-obviously her problem had been solved by the intervention of a compassionate Prime Minister.

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**Kum. Selja**

**Younger Sister from Sirsa**

Miss Selja, who had just turned 25, was selected by Rajiv Gandhi to represent the Congress from the Sirsa constituency, which was earlier represented by her late father Ch. Dalbir Singh. Even her father was one of the youngest politicians, who was brought into politics by Jawaharlal Nehru.

According to Selja, she met Rajiv Gandhi after the death of her father in 1987 alongwith her bio-data, and just out of the

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blue, he said “Why don’t you contest the bye-elections?” Then he paused and asked: “Will you be old enough by the time elections take place?” She replied in the affirmative. Then he asked: “Are you ready to contest?” And she replied “It is up to you”. She stated that Rajiv Gandhi always treated her like his younger sister.

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**Virender Mohan**

**Lover of Good Music**

Famous photographer Mr Kundan Lal’s son, Virender Mohan, was celebrating the wedding of his daughter Kunika. Virender Mohan was, then working with the UNI and had invited Rajiv Gandhi to attend the wedding. To his great surprise, Rajiv arrived in time to receive the bridegroom’s party, in his self-driven white Maruti at 8.30 p.m. wearing the turban.

He gave Virendra Mohan a warm smile apart from conveying his greetings on the occasions. He shoved the security away and stayed back for an hour. He sought out friends and relations of the bride and bridegroom and greeted each one of them. As he was moving around, hee liked a particular number being played by the army brass band. “Who’s playing that?” he inquired. He was told that it was an army band. Lo and behold, he went-out of his way to congratulate every member of the band. What’s more, he even posed for a group photograph with the band. That was Rajiv Gandhi-warm, spontaneous and humane.

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**Ashish Madan**

**Ever Grateful**

Rajiv never forgot the people who had looked after him when he was a child. Mr. Madan was a Reception Officer with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru at Teenmurti Bhawan. He was married in the early 50's, and the ceremony was attended by Pandit Nehru as well. Mr. & Mrs. Madan looked after Rajiv and Sanjay whenever Mrs. Indira Gandhi had to go out with her father on official functions. As such, Rajiv became attached to the Madans. They were in touch with him even when Rajiv became the Prime Minister.

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**Dr. Najma Heptullah**

**Lend a Helping Hand**

It was generally known that Rajiv Gandhi, as an Indian Airlines pilot, was very considerate towards old and invalid passengers.

Once he saw an old lady walking towards the aircraft at Bhopal airport with a heavy handbag.

A stretch of the airport was dug up by the authorities for repairs. The lady was finding it difficult even to walk as she was old, her luggage was heavy and the road was uneven. In those days Captain Rajiv Gandhi was flying AVRO aircraft on the Bhopal-Bombay route. There were so many people on the airport

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besides the passengers but none went to help her. On that flight Capt. Rajiv Gandhi was on duty. He arrived on the airport and was walking towards his aircraft. On his way he saw the old woman struggling her way. Without wasting any time he walked to her and gave a very warm smile. Then he took hold of her luggage. The old woman protested out of courtesy. She had recognized him. How could she allow a grandson of Jawaharlal Nehru to carry her luggage. For a person brought up on old value system, it was a sort of treason to allow a member of the Nehru family to carry her luggage. In spite of her protests Rajiv Gandhi took her handbag and carried it to the aircraft.

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**Vishwajit Singh**

**He Lived for His People**

Vishwajit narrated an incident to highlight Rajiv's sense of humour. As soon as he had joined politics, Hari Singh Nalwa, (Member of Parliament from Haryana) invited Rajiv Gandhi to his blood camp. Nalwa also mentioned that they would take blood from the donors according to their weight. Now Rajiv wanted to play a prank on him and said that he did not have to take blood of so many persons, only one person would be enough! Nalwa could not get him at first, and asked him the name of the person, who would alone be able to donate blood equivalent to that of 8-10 persons?

Air Traffic Controller R.M. Sharma narrated a very interesting incident, which happened when Rajiv Gandhi was a Co-pilot of 'AVRO' aircraft.

Once Captain Rajiv Gandhi landed his 'AVRO' aircraft at Udaipur enroute to Jaipur-Delhi. The flight had 30 minutes halt at Udaipur. After the passengers boarded the flight ATC Sharma gave clearance to Captain Rajiv Gandhi to take off. The aircraft picked up speed on the runway and would have taken off after covering a distance of a few metres. But to his horror, Sharma saw through his binoculars a stray cow running towards the aircraft on the runway. He could not understand from where the holy cow emerged. He thought the aircraft would collide with the cow anytime. The thought of what would be the fate of the aircraft and the passengers made him nervous. Luckily Sharma's reflexes instantly worked and he shouted command over radio "Abandon take off". Sharma was perspiring and his heart beats shot up. Suddenly the aircraft came to a complete halt. Sharma thanked his lucky stars and gave fresh instructions to Captain Rajiv to line up the aircraft for take off. Aircraft backtracked and lined up for the take off as instructed by ATCO. Everyone at the airport took a sigh of relief.

**R.L. Bhatia**

**He was Kind and Considerate**

Mr. R.L. Bhatia, General Secretary of Punjab State Congress was shot three times in his house at Amritsar. He was rushed to the local hospital in a critical condition. The moment Rajiv Gandhi learnt about the assault on Mr R.L. Bhatia, he personally rang up the latter's brother to enquire about his condition. Rajiv Gandhi asked him whether he would like to shift his brother to All India Institute of Medical Sciences at Delhi. He also deputed Mr. Arun Singh, Minister of State for Defence, to ensure that Mr R.L. Bhatia was well looked after and the necessary medical facilities were provided to him. Arun Singh accompanied by Mr. Arjun Singh, Governor of Punjab called on Mr. Bhatia in Amritsar Hospital. They conveyed a message to the hospital authorities that Rajiv Gandhi wanted Mr Bhatia to be taken to Delhi by a special plane for treatment Dr. J.L. Bhatia, younger brother of Mr R.L. Bhatia thanked Prime Minister for his offer and told Mr Arun Singh to convey to the P.M. that his brother was very well looked after in Amritsar by most competent surgeons. Mr Arun Singh offered financial assistance for treatment, which the family politely declined. Every day Rajiv Gandhi rang up Mr. Bhatia's family to enquire about his health. He further told Mr. Bhatia to visit Delhi as soon as he had recovered.

Yashpal Khajuria was an active worker of the J & K Youth Congress under Ghulam Nabi Azad. He came in contact with Rajiv Gandhi in 1980, when the latter visited Udhampur Petrol Pump (near Jammu) on his way to Dharendra Brahmachari's Ashram at Mantalai. Khajuria had asked Rajiv Gandhi "Why don't you take interest in politics?" He replied "It is not my cup of tea. Politics is for Sanjay and not for me."

Rajiv arrived from 7, Race Course to the Teenmurti Lane, where the wedding was to take place, surrounded by the SPG commandos. As Rajiv was passing through the crowd, Janki Devi saw him and called him out by name. Rajiv was surprised to hear a motherly voice and looked up in the direction of the lady. But his commandos did not allow him to go near the gathering. Then Umesh Varma, son of Mrs. Janki Devi, mustered enough courage and told Rajiv that his mother was crazy about him and wanted to hug him as she considered him as Lord Rama.

Immediately an emotional bond was established between the two. Rajiv broke the security cordon and embraced the motherly figure. Janki Devi had tears rolling down her cheeks. She was in the seventh heaven. People around were astonished to

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see Rajiv and an old lady hug each other. Mrs. Janki told Rajiv that her life's desire had been achieved.

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**Inspector Om Kumar**

**Dog-Scared Boy and the Sufi Saint**

Once a woman labourer's son began troubling the pet dog of Gandhi family at 10 Janpath. The dog had never bitten anyone before, but the teasing by the boy annoyed him. He pounced on the boy scaring the little one out of his wits. So scared was the boy that he just would not stop weeping! When Rajiv Gandhi came to know about the incident, he immediately brought sweets and toys for the boy and bestowed full attention on him. The attention he paid on the boy almost bordered on pampering him. Rajiv had a special love for children and often played with them. He also spent a lot of time with his own children.

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**Girdhar Gomango**

**Gomango Dust**

On the fateful May 21, 1991, Rajiv Gandhi had left by a small plane piloted by Captain Chandoke for Bhubaneswar to cover the election tour of Orissa, and South India.

Girdhar Gomango, a Congress politician of short height and a tribal from Orissa, took Rajiv Gandhi to his constituency to address a mammoth crowd of tribals who had come from far-flung areas to hear him. The mike at the dais was fixed at a

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height of six feet for Rajiv Gandhi to address. But Rajiv wanted that Gomango should address the public first. Gomango, being a short man of only five feet, could not reach the mike. Rajiv noticed his embarrassment, and instead of lowering the mike picked up Gomango and brought him at the level of the mike! The crowd applauded in sheer amusement and there was clapping all around. Gomango had won that election.

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**ACP B.R. Kashyap**

**Rakhis Galore and Owl's Omen**

Kashyap recollects a very interesting incident which reveals the very humane nature of Rajiv Gandhi. In 1990 on the 'Raksha Bandhan' day a number of poor women who worked along with their husbands on his farm came to tie rakhis on Rajiv's wrist. All of them had brought sweets too. Rajiv in all his innocence and sincerity extended his wrist to them and opened his mouth for the sweets. The women gleefully fed him one sweet after another. His mouth was full of sweets thrust by the well-meaning but thoughtless women. Without chewing he had to gulp down the sweets stuffed in his mouth, while 'rakhis' almost climbed up to the biceps of both the arms! But Rajiv could not tell them to stop feeding sweets to him and tying rakhis on his arm. Later, when he drank water, he developed a sore throat and his personal physician Dr. Sahary had to be called. The doctor advised him rest for a week and forbade him from speaking for two days. Kashyap says whenever the poor people showered their affection,

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Rajiv reciprocated their love many folds. “Rajiv was humanity incarnate”, says Kashyap.

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**O.P. Sagar, PSO**

**Did bad Omens Warn his PSO**

Suddenly, Capt. Chandhoke came out of the plane and told Rajiv Gandhi that the electrical system of the plane had failed. Rajiv himself entered the cockpit along with engineer Verma to see for himself what was wrong. Engineers from the airport were also summoned to rectify the defect. But their efforts failed. For Sagar that was the third bad omen, and felt like abandoning the onward programme. He mustered enough courage and suggested to Rajiv to cancel the Madras trip. And to his great surprise, Rajiv agreed, and decided to proceed to the Guest House for the night's stay.

When Sager reached the Guest House, another stock awaited him. The manager of the Guest House informed him that Rajiv had received a wireless message midway that the electrical system of the King Air had been rectified; and therefore he had taken a U-turn and rushed back to the airport! Sagar missed a heart-beat and asked DM to rush him to the airport as he desperately wanted Rajiv to cancel the trip-his sixth sense had warned him of the danger ahead. The King Air had already taken off when he reached the airport. Later he was told by the airport officials that permission was not given to take off, but on Rajiv's personal request they had relented. There is a belief that a person

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has to reach a particular place at a particular time to meet his fate. This exactly happened in Rajiv's case Sagar now regrets why the plane's power system was rectified. Capt. Chandhoke too laments why he sent the wireless message to Rajiv Gandhi.

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**Capt. Chandhoke**

**Last Call**

I had known the late Shri Rajiv Gandhi right from the day he joined the Indian Airlines. I as his junior colleague can say, that he was a totally dedicated pilot, very meticulous and a lovely human being. I came in his contact when he joined politics. I was personally flying him. I have had some lovely unforgettable experiences when I was working for him. I would like to narrate some of them.

One day, we had taken off, early in the morning at about 2 or 3 a.m. from Indore. Shri Rajiv Gandhi had addressed a couple of meetings throughout the day and he was very tired, his voice was absolutely hoarse and he could hardly speak. When we were in the mid-air, he asked me, "What is there on board the aircraft to eat?" He said, "All that I want is a dry roti and a hot cup of tea." I asked him, "If you want only dry roti to eat, where is the need to work so hard?" He simply laughed as his voice was absolutely hoarse.

Another incident took place, during the election campaign. We had landed in a place called Giridih in Bihar. There was a

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huge crowd waiting for him. The aircraft was parked on the runway and Shri Rajiv Gandhi was addressing a meeting. The public in order to be close to him went near the aircraft. To disperse the crowd the police resorted to a lathi charge. The crowd became furious and started pelting stones, which broke one of the windows of the aircraft. Since it was a pressurized aircraft, it couldn't be flown directly to Delhi. I ferried it to Patna for repairs. Shri Rajiv Gandhi reached there by road in the late evening. I had booked his seat on the Indian Airlines flight to enable him to reach Delhi. He asked me, "What are you doing about the aircraft"? I told him, "I had got the window taped up and will fly it to Delhi at a slow speed and at a lower level since we cannot get it pressurized here. He said, "If you are going to fly the aircraft, then why did you book me on the Indian Airlines flight?" He then refused to go on the regular scheduled flight and opted to fly with me. We landed in Delhi after midnight.

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**Captain Trehan**

**Are You on Drugs**

Before I narrate what happened on the last day, I would like to tell you about the happening on May 20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup>. On the 20<sup>th</sup> I had gone with Rajiv Gandhi to Amroha, Muradabad, Barreilly, etc., in U.P. We returned to Delhi around 4 pm. We were scheduled to take King Air and proceed to Bhubaneswar immediately. Rajiv Gandhi said, "I would like to go home. I think Sonia would have returned from Amethi." Saying that he got into his car. The car would have hardly moved 100 yards away, he

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stopped it. Calling me he said, “I am leaving two cars behind, you also go home and meet your families and be back in an hour’s time.” I said, “Sir, for us to come back in an hour’s time is not possible, we will wait for you here.” As it was very hot on that day, he got the VIP lounge opened for us so that we could relax. He returned with Suman Dubey, a team of Bulgarian journalists and P.S.Os, Kaushik and Sagar. We went to Bhubaneshwarr by King Air. I left my helicopter in Delhi. Another helicopter was positioned at Bhubaneshwar. Security Officer Kampani was there to receive him. The meetings in Bhubaneshwar went on till very late. The next day that is 21<sup>st</sup>, we took off from Bhubaneshwar at about 7.50 am for a place called Bharak in Orissa. Because of weight limitation only two persons besides Rajiv Gandhi could be accommodated in the helicopter. Kampani insisted that those two should be security personnel. Rajiv Gandhi ruled it out and took two politicians. So, Security Officer Kampani gave me his revolver and said, “Keep this, it might be required.” I was hesitant but Rajivji indicated that I should take it. So, I put the bullets in my pocket and the revolver under my shirt and the trouser. Rajivji in his speech in the meeting on that day said and I still remember those words, “I will not let my country disintegrate even if I have to give my life and my blood.” I remarked in the presence of some Congress workers, politicians and my co-pilot that why the members of Gandhi family spoke of Pradesh that he had come closer to the people. He was not sought after out of curiosity. Because of his security, the people were not allowed to go near him but he always told the police, “Let them come closer.” He was very close to the people indeed. Wherever he went the place

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resounded with slogans “Rajiv Gandhi Ko Wapas Lao”, “Rajiv Gandhi Zindabad”. I treasure a few memories of my travels with him which are undoubtedly very precious to me. However I would like to share those with the readers.

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### **H. Hanumanthappa**

### **Last Breakfast Request**

After Rajiv Gandhi had addressed three way-side meetings, one of the PCC General-Secretary told Hanumanthappa that Rajiv Gandhi wanted him to arrange breakfast for the next morning. It was already 10 p.m. and he did not know how to manage the breakfast at six the next morning. It was then decided that after Rajiv Gandhi began addressing the gathering at Sriperumbudur, he alongwith some other Congressmen would leave for Madras to order the next morning's breakfast. Rajiv Gandhi's car was followed by a convoy of about 35-40 cars. After reaching Sriperumbudur, Rajiv started moving towards the dais. Suddenly, there was a loud bang of a bomb blast. People started running here and there. Total panic and chaos reigned in the area. Hanumanthappa and his friends were shaken up in the car as they were only about 100 feet from Rajiv Gandhi at that time. The “human bomb” killed their beloved leader Rajiv Gandhi along with his PSO Pradip Gupta and many other persons. Hanumanthappa still feels that it was Rajiv Gandhi who had saved his life by asking him to arrange for the next day's breakfast, which was never to be.

Just a short distance from Sriperumbudur meeting site, Rajiv Gandhi stopped his car and got down to garland a statue of his mother Indira Gandhi. Surprisingly it took 10-15 minutes. Rajiv then got back into his car and proceeded towards the dais. Mrs. Jayanti Natarajan got out of the car and ran towards Rajiv Gandhi, thinking that he would require the assistance of an interpreter to communicate with the local people. PSO Pradip Gupta moved back to make room for her. When Rajiv Gandhi noticed that Jayanti was following him, he shouted at her to go back. Jayanti did not understand what he said or what he meant, so she stood like a statue. Again Rajiv turned to her and said: "I am telling you to go." So she walked away from the spot, totally confused. Exactly after one minute, there was a loud explosion and she was knocked over by the impact.