



### **Rajiv Gandhi...a life well lived**

Rajiv Gandhi became Prime Minister of India on 31 October 1984, after the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, his mother. He was 40 years old. In that hour of personal and national grief, he took up the challenge of leadership and gave himself completely to the task of healing a wounded nation, of rekindling a sense of hope. Two months later, the people of India gave him the largest electoral mandate since Independence.

Rajiv Gandhi combined the energy of youth with the vision of a reformer. He was a moderniser who sought to blend the scientific and technological advances of his time with India's age-old culture and history. He recognized that without democracy and secularism, India's society would be imperilled, that without education and economic growth, poverty would persist and that without political unity and integrity, the Indian nation would not be strong.

Rajiv Gandhi's years as Prime Minister were a period of progress and change. He brought peace and conciliation to many parts of the country where confrontation and violence had prevailed. To break the back of poverty, he initiated new programmes that would create employment and harness science and technology for the service of the poor. To give people power over their own destinies, he launched political reform and conceived of the new institutions of Panchayati Raj and local government. To fight backwardness, he charted new approaches in literacy, education and culture. He believed that all Indians, whatever their religion, caste or language, were equal and entitled to shape their lives and to realize their full potential, free from hunger, deprivation and fear.

Rajiv Gandhi regarded the world as one human family. As at home, he worked tirelessly for equality and fairness in the international community. He was a forceful advocate of nonalignment, non-violence and disarmament, a crusader against racial discrimination an environmental campaigner and a strong voice for the rights of the developing countries.

Rajiv Gandhi's political life was spent in the shadow of assassination, but he was a man of true courage and nothing could shake him from his sense of duty and his convictions. On 21 May 1991, not yet 47 years old, he was killed by a terrorist bomb at Sriperumbudur in Tamil Nadu. He died as he lived, with a smile on his lips and compassion in his heart.