Dictatorship starts with the gagging of the opposition press," Indira once declared. Between the time she uttered those remarkable words and now, several memorable events have taken place. Two spectacular events in particular have focused world attention upon her: First, she won in the war against Pakistan and made Bangladesh possible; second, she declared a state of emergency, which includes, among other measures, press censorship.

Some people contend that whatever she is doing now is at great personal cost and that she is courageously undertaking the defense of her democratic country and her people against anarchy. Others bewail the passing of democracy and compose eloquent obituaries. Still others contend that "a democracy" may have died, but a promise of another, more indigenous in nature and more suitable for the service of its people, may be in the working. A grand tradition and an ancient society are going through a process of dislocation and upheaval, or of revolution, and this process inevitably brings suffering to many individuals. Ambassador T.N. Kaul has said that this revolution "is so immediate that its implications and possible success or failure are not clearly assessed."

The various interpretations of the present revolution are due no less to a Western insistence on uniform codes of conduct for democracy than on the complexity of the process in India itself. India is, has always been, a bundle of contradictions; this state consists of many nations and nationalities, a range of climatic conditions, vastly varied topographies, peoples of wide ethnic and racial characteristics, all the world's great religions, two of the world's five classical languages, seventeen major languages, 256 minor languages, and three thousand dialects. If these are inconveniences and obstacles to understanding India, they are also fundamental challenges to running a modern nation-state in a world set up to function in a Western-style democracy.

There are enormous difficulties in looking at India as a political entity, both from inside and from outside the country. The "idea" of India was present even before the Moguls and the British extended their imperialism to "India." India was never a "mechanical agglomeration," but rather a cultural and spiritual state, into which many ideologies and colors, many strands of wisdom, many faiths and beliefs were blended to form a solid and "conservative stability" that has lasted longer than any other living civilization. India organized itself in order to continually "educate the human mind and soul and its development through the natural and the spiritual existence," as Sri Aurobindo, a spiritualist of recent times, has put it. India averted a total conversion to Christianity or Islam despite continued efforts from both, a testimony to the individuality of the people. Separate individual rights and communal unity were never viewed to be at odds with each other in traditional literature on the subject. Nor were they to be treated merely as intellectually constructed superstructures, but rather as "a natural outward form of the inborn tendencies and character of the complex social mind and temperament."

The greatest institution that India has fostered is the individual. Nowhere else in the world has individual perfection been such a constant and recurring theme in art, literature, religion, and politics. What needs to be understood here are the differences in approach between Western and Indian ways of viewing life, whether they relate to the concept of freedom, liberty, democracy, the status of women, reverence for all forms of life (not just human), and ultimately the question of human destiny itself. In the final analysis, explanations and differences are to be sought in the differences in temperament between Indians and Westerners.

It is only against this background that we should look at the "terrible change" in the Indian subcontinent, if we are genuinely interested in the whys and wherefores of democracy and liberty. The immediate background leading to the present crisis is clear. The years 1973 and 1974 witnessed some of the worst havoc in the history of modern India. The economic difficulties were mounting. They flowed from the droughts of 1973 and 1974, described as the worst in
the century; from world inflationary pressures; from the
traumatic results of increased oil prices; and from in-
creased import bills for food, fuel, and fertilizers. Even
more threatening was the internal situation—massive
strikes fanned through political campaigns, riots and
robberies incited by antagonistic elements, and intense
eaming among the various political and geographic
factions, all of which accentuated the already highly
fissiparous tendencies present in the subcontinent. By
this time India had lived through the experience of
hosting ten million refugees from Bangladesh, and it was
at this time that Jayaprakash Narayan, a peace worker of
great distinction and a venerated opposition leader,
issued a call to the people to take the law into their own
hands. He asked the students to boycott schools and
colleges, the people to pay no taxes, and the army, the
police, and the civil service to disobey the government.

The particular circumstances that led the Prime
Minister to adopt her present course are by now well known.
The specific item of controversy was the construction of
rostrums by the state government of Uttar Pradesh for the
purposes of campaigning. The opposition parties
charged that in using these rostrums (which cost about
$400), Indira Gandhi had acted illegally. By a decision
of the Supreme Court, overruling an Allahabad
court decision, the opposition parties lost their bid to
unseat the Prime Minister—a stunning example of the
high degree of democratic evolution in a country with a
political history of only twenty-five years. Upset by the
court’s decision, the political parties demanded that the
Prime Minister resign, issued a call for massive civil
disobedience, and pleaded with the army to take over
control. Little did they realize that they were walking on
a thin strand of hair, that abysmal fire could break loose
at any moment. And it did.

Today the Indian Constitution is one of the longest and
the most complicated in the world, a challenge even to a
Sam Ervin. Everyone knew the constitution was there to
protect the people from the government. Now everyone
is finding out how versatile it is in its ability to protect
the government from the people. There is much that words
can say, and the Indian Constitution says a lot. Article
352 of the Indian Constitution, under which the
emergency is declared, has made it possible for Indira to
round up many hostile elements in the society. It has
been argued that 85 per cent of those listed as political
prisoners are thieves, smugglers, and antisocial ele-
ments. Why then are they called political prisoners?
Does India need to invoke Article 352 of the Constitution
merely to arrest thieves? Those charged with the duty to
explain say that since Article 352 is an article of the
Constitution of India, the constitutional rights of the
citizens of India are not being violated; that, in fact, the
constitution is being enforced and is in full force. Then
what has happened to Article 19, which grants freedom
of speech? Well, that is not enforced because there was a
"well-organized and calculated conspiracy of powerful
forces trying to remove the Prime Minister from the
political scene."
today than it has been in many years. The availability of food grains per capita was lower in 1974 than in 1971, but significantly better than in 1972 and 1973. This year's crop is expected to be even better than that of 1974. The northern plains have enjoyed a good share of the monsoons, and even Rajasthan, a "chronic drought-stricken state," has fared better than ever before. B.M. Bhatia of Delhi, writing in the July 12, 1975, issue of The Economist, ventured to say that "with all its shortcomings the Indian government has a much better record in the management of the country's economy in the last year than Britain's during the same period"—which may be faint praise considering the plight of the Britons.

The twenty-point economic program that followed the declaration of emergency is designed to deal with inflation through essential economic measures as well as by using the penal sanctions against price increases in essential commodities. The program dealt severely with corruption in trade, with hoarding, tax evasion, black marketeering, and smuggling. The immediate effect of the emergency measures became evident in the area of essential commodities and in the return to work by striking labor. National income is projected to increase from 2 per cent growth rate in 1974-75 to 6 per cent in 1975-76. The supply of power, coal, and steel is expected to increase.

India's gains in the past were entirely absorbed by the population increase, creating even more severe imbalances in the population-resource equation. The government of India has always supported planned parenthood and has long had a system of rewards and disincentives in operation. Now, of course, with the added power in its hands the government has moved ahead—in the words of Mrs. Gandhi—"to combine a little compulsion." The recent measure of compulsory sterilization is seen by the government as the most effective of various family planning methods.

Twenty-five years after development efforts began and twenty-eight years after independence India's economic situation has not improved to any appreciable extent. In fact, actual income has dropped to an all-time low. The ruling party blamed the opposition for the lack of social change and accused it of interfering with the intended reforms of the government. India's per capita gross national product of $110 is one of the lowest in the world, and its per capita consumption of food grains has been very low. With a birth rate of forty per thousand, infant mortality has been one of the highest in the world (only the Sahelian African statistics are higher).

While all of these are hard facts of Indian life, one thing was good and was working—the political system itself. India stood unaffected in the midst of political turmoil and military dictatorships in neighboring countries, held seven general elections (the most massive free elections in the world), and had a very active and stormy parliament. Recently, however, and for the first time, the question was raised: Would India go down politically or economically? Should the political organization first collapse—with the kind of leadership crisis that existed and with the immense factional and fissiparous tendencies at work—economic breakdown was sure to follow. Fear that anarchy, massive disarrangements, communal disturbance, black marketeering, and other related crises could be at hand drove the majority in the subcontinent to support the present emergency.

The increase in GNP did not itself reflect any increase in the standard of living for the vast majority. There have been tremendous improvements in various wealth-producing sectors of the economy. But somehow the benefits were not felt at the lower level. One has to ponder Marx's statement that "there must be something rotten in the very core of a social system that increases its wealth without diminishing its misery." The estimates of unemployment in India, as in many countries, leave a lot to be answered for. If to the official reported unemployment figures we were to add the number of persons looking for jobs (but not included in the official count), and if we add the adjusted number reflecting the underemployed, the figures might reach an unbelievable 50 per cent among the employable.

While socialistic thought was introduced into Indian politics early in its nationhood, what has operated is a capitalist model of development. Despite the fact that India ranks ninth among the world's industrialized nations, only 4 per cent of the population is involved in
industrial activities, and goods produced by industry are being bought by only 10 per cent of the population. The Indian bureaucracy continues the tradition of representing largely the interests of capitalists (small in number) and talks mostly in urban terms. The socialistic vocabulary in India is one of the most enlightened, but the government, its policy, and its bureaucracy have been objectively allied to the ruling class in the rural areas. Nationalization of the less profitable sectors (except for banking) has not filled the public coffers. Instead, with few exceptions, the nationalized industries are following a policy of good-enough-for-government work and depleting the public resources. What is being created is a big-city middle class that merely apes the West in its acquisition habits, in its use of disposable materials, plastic art objects, sound systems, records, cosmetics, and beauty parlor aids. This increases the social distance from the poor.

Nearly 40 per cent of all agriculturists in India own no property of any kind. Yet—despite the various dire predictions and theories—India could be a food-exporting country if economic and social incentives were put to work and if agricultural inputs were reasonably stable. The land in India is sufficient to feed all its people. Where necessary, the bioptic potential of the land can be reconstituted to increase productivity. Perhaps Chairman Mao is speaking to India when he says: "take agriculture as the foundation and industry as the leading factor."

Nehru described laboratories of science and technology as the "shrines and temples of the future." The Indian mentality, aided by the longest cultivation of mind of which any civilization can boast, quickly stepped onto the science and technology bandwagon. India emerged, in the words of Daniel Moynihan, "as the third most technically advanced country in the world." As a World Bank official put it: "India is not a less developed country, it is just poor."

Even though most Indians realize that when there is no freedom to eat there is no liberty, freedom of sorts has always mattered in India—the freedom to speak as an individual, the freedom to follow any faith, including that of atheism, and the freedom to remain inert and oneself! So the present situation, if disturbing to foreign correspondents, is a devastating reality to Indians. Yet many have joined ranks to give Indira support. A thorough investigation of the present situation by this author, followed by interviews with a representative of one of India's most conservative and distinguished newspapers and with an advocate of the Supreme Court of India, an industrialist, a student, and an unemployed engineer, revealed that all agreed on one thing: the necessity for the proclamation of the emergency.

A responsible U.N. official put it this way: "Indira in the first place should not have given the political parties so much freedom. She allowed them to play all the games they wanted and allowed them to lose all the games one by one." A newspaper publisher (now under censorship) said that this emergency has not come soon enough.
According to him, such a step should have been taken even earlier.

Does this (so-called) loss of liberty mean anything to the poor in India? They are too weak to be concerned with the spectrum of events. They have heard all the politicians. But they do not complain. They also know that, of all the institutions and persons that have cheated them, lied to them, and insulted them, their government is the most outstanding. But they, in their own hungry, illiterate state, do understand that their freedom to starve derives from their being the backbone (without being the muscle) of the Indian Union. Beyond that they do not understand the articles, sections, subclauses, and amendments to the right to eat. A man will put liberty over any other right if he has the capacity for action and if, in fact, he has freedom to act. He will put liberty first if he has the strength to defend himself in a competitive society and in a society where there exists a relative abundance of resources.

Daniel Moynihan may quote an Indian-born economist to prove that lazy people are contributing to the crisis of poverty in India. But in fact, as both of them well know, social behavior and determinants are based on experience lived and learned. The right to eat is not a privilege but a fundamental right. Everything else regarding human rights is a matter of ideology and points of view. Thus we need not be surprised if the poor in India do not show concern about all of the above controversies. It may be true, to quote Mr. Moynihan, that those who “have put liberty first have done better by equality” than those who were obsessed with equality alone. Such an argument overlooks cultural conditioning, the temperament of a people, and the goals of the various societies themselves.

The judicial system in India is independent of both the political and the executive systems in operation. If anything, the Indian Supreme Court retains a distance from the government. The declaration of emergency, even the Supreme Court would admit, is within the constitutional power of the government. These facts aside, the Manchester Guardian reported in its July 12, 1975, issue that “Mrs. Gandhi genuinely feels herself as the only leader for India.” It quoted a hostile journalist as saying that “Mrs. Gandhi has a Joan of Arc mentality. When she was trapped by the Allahabad court decision and the opposition’s use of it, she was furious. She despises the opposition as second raters and fools.” The fact is that she retains a deep identity with the masses in India and is above corruption. She has declared that the legal system “designed to protect the political or economic power” of a small number of persons against the rights of the vast majority must yield for the sake of equality, and that “law itself should be an ally and instrument of change.” Her future actions will determine if democracy has become obsolete in India and obsolete for the liberal world. One thing is certain: Indira, despite the protection the emergency has afforded her, is in the open. She understands that she can no longer blame democracy for the lack of social and economic changes, nor is democracy “an excuse for failure” anymore.

The uses of emergency may be a matter of individual and political judgment. Indira would be well advised to use the present limitless freedom she has derived to deliver social goods, not just to the majority, but to all the people of India. Using her present mandate, perhaps the mechanism of social justice can now be put to work in earnest. After all, is there any other way to bring social justice to 600 million people? The mandate she has now is almost the best she has ever had. There has been a dramatic switching of loyalties since the Allahabad courtroom circus. Widely distinct groups, such as the chambers of commerce and labor unions, have come together to support her. The reason, as one observer puts it, is fear—fear of pandemonium breaking loose. Following the rally of the opposition parties and following the call of Jayaprakash Narayan to the people to launch a massive civil disobedience and to the army and police to take over the government, there was widespread panic. Walter Laquer of the London Institute for Strategic Studies once predicted that if and when tragedy unfolded in the Indian subcontinent, it would make Indochina seem like child’s play. This danger seems, at least for now, to have been circumvented.

Indira, like India itself, is many things to many people. The concept of creator, sustainer, and destroyer of life all in one is an ancient Indian motif perceived anew in the person of the present Prime Minister. She is prowess, power, word, fruit, and blossom, mother and child, a hard taskmaster and a good student, a mature and determined woman and at times a little girl soaking her cheeks in tears of bitter helplessness, a tough negotiator and a gentle message. The Indian mentality makes it possible to accept all aspects in their entirety, with all the contradictions. In a country where ends never justify means there is also an awareness that, as in algebra, the equation is the only truth and the terms may stand for anything. Social justice is the goal, and the burden of achieving it is now entirely on the shoulders of the Prime Minister. The present state of affairs is not seen as a contradiction to the stated principles of liberty and freedom, but rather as an act of the continuing drama of India’s nationhood. Nor is the chivalrous and frank worship of woman as intellect, power, energy, and body—so uniquely Indian—in jeopardy.

In the array of dictators fallen and real everywhere, and intimidated by “that woman” who is holding her head high, the Western press and politicians have lost their ability to see which is which. Like George Orwell’s creatures, they are looking from outside through the dining room window, “from pig to man, and from man to pig and from pig to man again,” unable to tell which is which. Ultimately, using their biases and overcome by their inability to understand the gigantic puzzle that is India, and with a clear but wrong picture in their minds, they have decided that Indira and the dictator are one and the same. Indira has maintained that she has done everything for her people, nothing for herself. If they are right or she is right, time will tell. The results are clear, but the meaning is still obscure.