

The Wedding of Indira Nehru A Film Script

--by Norvin Hein

Photo: Gateway of Anand Bhavan, bronze plaque on pillar, right.

In the city of Allahabad in Northern India, this is the famous house called Anand Bhavan-- "Happiness House." It was the beloved personal home of Jawaharlal Nehru, free India's first prime minister, and of Indira Nehru his daughter and of Rajiv Gandhi his grandson--all, in their turn, prime ministers of India. Before India's liberation, Anand Bhavan was a major center for the planning of the struggle for India's freedom. It was India's Mount Vernon. The bronze memorial plaque at the right of the entrance describes in simple language the eminence of Anand Bhavan among Indian homes:

"This house is more than a structure of brick and mortar. It is intimately connected with our national struggle for freedom and within its walls great decisions were taken and great events happened."

One of the most distinguished gatherings that ever took place at this lovely mansion was the assembly that came here for the marriage of Indira Nehru to Feroze Gandhi, on March 26th, 1942. Jawaharlal Nehru was its host; many national leaders were its guests. It held the attention of all India. It was reported in the press of the world. It was a memorable wedding.

The planners of the wedding had a difficulty regarding photography. 1942 was already, for India, the third year of World War II. Many western consumer products were by that time already non-existent in India's markets. But this young American teacher in a nearby college, who had a small movie camera, still possessed (brought from America) just one fifty-foot roll of precious color film. The occasion had come to expend it, and the way was opened to me. I attended the wedding, and did the best I could with my short roll of film. Now, in extreme old age, with the help of a technically skilled son, I am at last able to pass on to you my experience of sixty seven years ago.

Some of the viewers of this film will appreciate it because they respond positively to weddings in general. Weddings are romantic events, awakening human and humane sympathy almost universally. The visual settings of weddings, their music, their warm emotions, even their fine foods are always pleasing.. Weddings are the greatest and the happiest of all rituals of family life. No one need be ashamed of finding weddings fascinating, simply as a sharing of joy.

Others will find the center of their fascination in this wedding in the fact that it is essentially a Hindu wedding -- a kind of wedding that most outsiders have few opportunities to see. It is a Hindu wedding that has been freely shaped by persons of very modern mind. They have abridged and modified the traditional Hindu liturgy in accordance with their principles. But they have preserved the Hindu ceremony's great symbolic acts, and kept them in their traditional order of occurrence.

I confess myself to be a sentimental reporter of both these types: I love weddings, and I am fascinated by their variations. But I did not undertake recording this wedding with a feeling that I must above all preserve the warm emotions of a romantic family event. My deepest interests in India had come to a focus on historical and social matters. I knew the life of the Nehrus primarily as dedicated strivers for Indian independence in a grim period in Indian history. This wedding was engulfed in such social and political storms that it could not have been, for its principal persons, a carefree celebration. Not in very many of its aspects was March 26, 1942 a perfect day in Allahabad. It was also a dreadful day. Deeply caught up in the struggles of a tumultuous time, the Nehrus could not cast all care aside amid the pleasures of an attractive family festival. They had critical choices to make and pressing duties to perform, in very grave matters, of even national and international importance. Some of the tensions of the day did not present mortal dangers, but some did. The troubles, small and great, were all tests of equanimity, and all were hard to bear.

We begin with perturbations that were not military nor even political but purely personal. For all that, they were not minor ordeals. Among the tensions that Jawaharlal was obliged to endure at the time of the wedding, there were some--very personal--having to do with his beloved daughter Indira, and the wedding decision itself. Those struggles did not threaten life. Compared with the international threats of the day, they might be called storms in a teacup. The first difficulty began with the press announcement of Indira's engagement and continued through the wedding day. It was a campaign of vituperation stirred up by the Nehrus' disregard of the marriage rules of orthodox Hinduism in their planning of Indira's wedding. The Hindu tradition had strong taboos regarding how decisions to marry should be made, and regarding who may be matched as bride and groom. In the early twentieth century Traditional-minded families in great numbers were still militantly defensive of the ancient prohibitions, and deeply angered with prominent families when they permitted liberties in the marriage of their children. We shall explain how Indira's engagement was actually agreed upon.

On December 3rd, 1941, Jawaharlal Nehru was still serving his eighth term of imprisonment for speaking against the rightfulness of British rule in India. On that day he was released. He hastened to return to his beloved Anand Bhavan. Making no seditious speeches on the way, he hoped for and rather expected to have, at home, a restful interlude of domestic peace. Instead, he found himself deeply involved at once in an unexpected tension. His daughter Indira waited for him lovingly but with a declaration—a declaration that it was time for her to be married, and that the marriage should be soon. She had the groom, also, firmly in mind: she was resolved to become the wife of a young man of their neighborhood. His name was Feroze Gandhi.

Jawaharlal was taken aback. He knew Feroze: a literate but not highly educated young man. He was not a relative of Mahatma Gandhi. Feroze was amiable and energetic, but not professionally ambitious. He was a young aide in the offices of Jawaharlal's own local Congress Party headquarters, located in Anand Bhavan.

The Nehrus had long argued that choices in marriage belonged to the young people involved. A shift in that preachment was not possible now. Indira pressed her father for his cooperation, and for an announcement of her engagement to the press.

In Jawaharlal's eyes Feroze was neither an impossible person nor a very distinguished person either. To tell the truth, Feroze was hardly the man that he, Jawaharlal, would have chosen had he been a traditional father and the family's prime mover in such matters. He suggested softly that Indira delay her final decision for a time, to make sure that her choice, when irrevocably made, would be a mature and sound one. Indira's retort was that her decision, now, was as mature as it would ever be, and that it was time for him to set a date for the marriage.

Jawaharlal, a widower, had no wife to help him in this discussion. At 24, Indira was indeed mature in years. That she had not received strong parental counsel was not her fault: her mother was dead, her father often in prison or preoccupied with public affairs. Jawaharlal swallowed his reservations, gave in. March 26th was chosen for the wedding. The press was notified, seventy invitations to the wedding were sent out. All India knew.

The engagement had not been made in accord with the rules of traditional Hindu propriety. In the orthodox mind, the initiative in matchmaking belongs to the parents. For a daughter to make her own match, and insist on it in the face of parental reservations, is outrageous behavior, and any father who allows this to happen shows a despicable weakness and endangers his whole people..

Not many of the orthodox knew, perhaps, who, within the family, had had the dominant role in the making of this bad choice, but anybody and everybody could know, from the press report, who had been chosen. And many protested, correctly, that the choice of

Feroze Gandhi was not allowable by any traditional reasoning whatever. Indira Gandhi, a lofty Kashmir Brahman by birth, would have found a proper match, they said, only in a man who was a Kashmir Brahman, or at least in a Brahman of some kind. But Feroze was neither a Kashmir Brahman, nor any kind of Brahman at all. He was in fact not even a Hindu, but a Parsi, a Zoroastrian by religion, and therefore not a worshipper of any Hindu god. He came of a family of shopkeepers, but as a non-Hindu he was not entitled to a caste rank among shopkeepers or any other Hindu caste. Any match between Indira and such a person would be a match that the authorities of neither religion could recognize or approve. It could not be validated by any ceremony yet composed by any priest of either religion. If Indira persists, thinking that somehow she can marry this man, instead of becoming his wife she will find that she has become only his concubine, giving birth all her life to none but outcaste children.

Wrathful letters calling the Nehrus promoters of anarchy began to arrive. They continued to fall on the heads of Indira and Jawaharlal until the time of the wedding itself. Even on the day of the wedding, the two had some fear still that the defenders of tradition might embarrass them with a protest march in the street in front of Anand Bhavan. The Nehrus did not make any retort, nor give in; but the assault of the orthodox was disconcerting.

The months of Indira Nehru's engagement came to a climax in India in the wedding of March 26th. The course of Indira's wedding preparations was being paralleled all the while, by another drive of a very different nature that was being reported daily in the world press. It began in faraway Hawaii on almost the same calendar day as Jawaharlal's release. A line of violence, it came to a halt only at the boundaries of India. Its impact was being deeply felt at Anand Bhavan on the day of the wedding. Its field was war.

It was a very spectacular Japanese imperial expansion. The Japanese offensive began on December 7th, 1941, with a stealthy and

very destructive attack by Japanese bombers on the American naval fleet anchored at Pearl Harbor. The intention of the Japanese was to eliminate from the Pacific the only rival naval power that could possibly block a planned Japanese expansion into Southeast Asia. The capital ships of America's pacific fleet were all put out of action, and the Japanese leaders became free for six months to use their very modern military forces where they liked. A long sequence of Japanese military victories was now reported in the world press. The news was dramatic and intimidating.

The islands of the Dutch East Indies were attacked at once, and were taken over with all their oil. Bangkok was occupied on December 9th. The great battleships the Resolute and the Prince of Wales, on which the British depended for defense of Singapore, were easy victims of Japanese torpedo bombers on December 10th. On February 15th, the great city of Singapore itself surrendered. Together with the city, ninety thousand British troops of various sorts fell into captivity--and often peonage. The fall of Singapore shocked the world much like, once upon a time, the fall of Rome. Rangoon fell next, on March 8th. Moving up-country in Burma, overland, the Japanese were soon near India's land boundary in Assam. And they blocked the Burma Road to Chungking, which had been carrying all the aid that the outside world could deliver to free China. Chang Kai-shek's tenacious armies seemed doomed to be defeated now, at last. After wiping out Free China, the Japanese would be able to withdraw hundreds of thousands of Japanese soldiers from China to expand Japanese conquests elsewhere.

A great flight of thousands of Indians and Europeans out of Southeast Asia now began, using northern footpaths. Pouring into India, these desperate refugees filled the country with awareness of the nearness of the Japanese and of the magnitude of their capacity for violence. On March 23rd, three days before the wedding of Indira,

the Japanese seized India's Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal. The next day Japanese bombers inflicted severe damage on all ports of naval importance on the eastern coast of Ceylon. On the day of the wedding itself, Japanese fliers were surely loading their bombers for the air attacks that fell the next day on the seaports of the east coast of India itself.

Indians had no reason to suppose that the swift-moving Japanese would stop there. Steps of aggression against India had already begun. They had not paused in a hundred days of conquest; they could not be expected to break their stride now. Japanese action against India would surely start here as elsewhere with heavy bombing from aircraft carriers, followed promptly by a major land invasion. In Allahabad, town of the wedding, observers expected early attention from Japanese bombers because of the vital role of the city's great railroad bridges in any defense of India's eastern coast. With Allahabad's bridges blown, Western India's men, manufactures and imports could not reach the east coast in time to stop a Japanese landing.

Already on the morning of the wedding, at this photographer's nearby campus, the Government of India was improvising an air defense for the great Jamuna River Bridge, only a hundred yards away. The stoutest brick building of the college was being made into an anti-aircraft center. Masons were bricking in the archways of its verandahs, creating a double-walled fort against bomb-blast. Allahabad on the morning of the wedding was not at war, but outbreak of war was a possibility at any hour. Neither bride nor groom nor any guest could dismiss the thought of a sudden arrival of bombers..

Jawaharlal, in particular, had no right, like some of his guests, simply to brush the worries of the day aside, to accept its risks and to refuse to think about them. He had been chosen for leadership and had responsibilities in defense. The Indian National Congress had

had a deep concern for several months about the quality of all British planning for the defense of India. Mahatma Gandhi, a pacifist trusted by the masses in all matters, had been unwilling to make any plan to resist the Japanese with weapons. The Indian National Congress was unwilling to entrust India's safety totally to his pacifism. So it had turned to Jawaharlal, and made him chairman in all nationalist debates about the defense of India, and leader of all Nationalist discussions with the British government about the matter. He could not allow his mind to be turned off.

The issue of free Indian participation in the direction of World War II had come up already in 1939. At the outbreak of that war, the Indian National Congress declared sympathy for the British cause, and expressed willingness to participate in the war effort, but only as a free India. That political demand had received no serious attention from the Viceroy of the time. India was carried into the war, then, simply as a part of the British Empire, and India gave thereafter only such uninspired war service as the British government of the time could exact.

With the unflagging fury of the Japanese attack in early 1941 and with the defensive efforts against Japan in Southeast Asia taking an ever more disastrous turn, the members of the British Parliament felt the danger of the situation, and took the initiative away from British officialdom in dealing with nationalist India. Their conviction was that the wholehearted participation of nationalist India was indispensable to any possibility of success against the Japanese. Exercising the supreme authority of Parliament now, they drew up a plan for the full participation of all Indians in the war; and for the complete liberation of India immediately after victory. The shaping of free India would then be entrusted to a constituent assembly in which none but Indians would have any place or any say. Faith was asked in this promise because it came from parliament, the ultimate authority in Britain, possessed of absolute power to make and keep promises.

Sir Stafford Cripps was sent to India as spokesman for Parliament, bringing the parliamentary plan, and accompanied by a delegation of friends of India to help with explanations and assurances. The emissaries had arrived in Delhi on March 23rd, and by the time of the wedding they had described Parliament's plan and its promises. Due next, sessions were scheduled, immediately after the wedding, for Indian questioning of the delegation.. Then, among Indian nationalists of all kinds, there was to be an internal discussion of the Cripps proposal, and, finally, a vote.

The Indian National Congress, that was heavily predominant among nationalists, had made such discussions as these precisely the responsibility of Jawaharlal Nehru . The other nationalists also, as a matter of fact, accepted Nehru's chairmanship. He was the key figure in all of India's response. No more important political proposal had been raised in India for generations nor had Britain ever made promises of anything dearer to Jawaharlal's heart. Would this be the dreamed-of day, then, the dawn of Indian independence? Only one day after the wedding, Jawaharlal would have to be at the meeting in Delhi, discussing the most important issue of his lifetime, and coping, as moderator, with many Indian minds. Could he cope with that problem—with the pressure, also, of a great family wedding?

Many national leaders who were scheduled to participate in that fateful political discussion were deeply awed by the importance of its question and by the promptness with which their answers would have to be given. They felt a compulsive need to consult with Nehru at once. Some hurried directly to Allahabad, and to Anand Bhavan—wedding or no wedding. They were resolved to get the attention of Jawaharlal for short discussions in intervals in the course of the wedding—intervals that did not exist, in view of the fact that he was a single parent and sole host at a great social affair. These national political leaders milled about among the wedding guests, adding to the false impression that this gathering was a national assembly of the great and the near-great in its original intention..

There may be experts among today's viewers of this film today who can identify more of the very distinguished persons who are mingled in this crowd.

There were some national leaders who did not need any consultation with anybody to arrive at a very negative reaction to the Cripps proposal... Mahatma Gandhi, for instance, was unwilling to give credence, any longer, to British promises of any kind. The Cripps pledge of independence was, in his eyes, to be looked on as another bad check on the British bank—written now, even, on a failed bank.

Not very different were the reactions of those who pointed to the provision about freedom "after victory." "After WHAT victory?" was their contemptuous question. "Could free India do worse? Turn the defense of India over to Indians NOW! Admittedly, victories had not been prominent in the press news of the recent British struggle with the Japanese in southeast Asia. "Colonel Blimp" was their figure for all British military commanders.

But the British estimate of the military talent available to the Indian National Congress was not high, either. In the ranks of the Congress, experienced military men were not many. And the British were worried by the vast social influence of Mahatma Gandhi and by his call to the Indian nation to join him, without weapons, in resistance to Japanese invasion by entirely spiritual means. Gandhi had refused to take part in any thinking about a military defense of India. Lack of confidence in Mahatma Gandhi's planning was one of the grounds for the British insistence, at the conference, on keeping military responsibility for the present in the hands of British generals. The negotiators of neither side would give in on this issue of who could be successful with the defense of India. There were other grave reasons for the Indian rejection of the Cripps plan, but this disagreement about fit military leadership was stubborn and lasting and very costly in the end for the leaders of the Indian National Congress

Such were the critical national issues that were demanding Jawaharlal's total attention, in a time when he was totally involved in a great family wedding.

And he had other ordeals to endure, that we have not yet mentioned—personal problems in the field of religion. We have already described the diatribes heaped upon him by the champions of the ancient Hindu laws of eligibility in marriage. Though the Nehrus were not a family having the least eagerness for religious leadership, they thought through their problems in religion with humanity and dealt with them with honesty and with energy. We have another unusual story to tell, of model religious leadership on their part.

The Nehrus were wise, first, in hearing the warning of the orthodox: that the pair were not going to find in existence, ready for use, any standard ritual that would validate such an outlandish marriage as the Nehrus had in mind. Nor would it be easy to find a priest who would be willing to perform such a shocking wedding of unsuitable people. Truly he and Indira did have a great problem to solve here, that lay in the awkward field of religion. It was a field in which they were not sophisticated. Neither he nor Indira had ever been fond of rituals, or spoken well of them. Some friends had wondered whether Jawaharlal could ever bring himself to participate in a ritual of his own. But Jawaharlal loved his daughter, and, faced with her marriage, he felt a need somehow to solemnize the union. But with a ritual? With what ritual? Merely to submit to the usual orthodox ceremony?--THAT was out of the question. And there was a special problem in the fact that the proposed marriage was an inter-faith marriage. The family of the groom were Zoroastrians. They should not have to participate in liturgies in which they could not believe. Only a ceremony universal in spirit would do. Innovation was necessary, but who could do it? and what was it, that had to be done?

The Nehrus had some literary skills, but the writing of religious rituals was not one of them. They needed help. They wrote to Mahatma Gandhi asking his advice: how can we create a marriage ritual that is universally acceptable? The Mahatma replied quickly, briefly, and clearly: get a written copy of the usual Hindu marriage

ritual, entire, and a red pencil. And go through the leaves of the old ceremony. and with the red pencil strike out, strike out, and strike out. Strike out every passage that offends against morality or or reason. All that is meaningless, strike out. Strike out all that insults anybody. When you have struck out all that you have had reason to strike out, you will have a precious remnant. It will be your universally acceptable marriage ceremony.

This blunt advice had an impact. Viewers will perceive its influence when they see the coming film. Such a radical selection and such a shortening has been basic in it. But the Nehrus had some strong preferences that were personal, and a few favorite materials of their own to contribute. They needed an editor who could discuss the materials that they approved and wwho could weave it together for them. They found the help they needed in a professor at St. Stephen's College, Delhi, named Lacchmidhar Shastri. By vocation he was a professor of Sanskrit, and by avocation a priest, accustomed to performing weddings, and also to serve modern-minded Hindu families as counselor in the shaping of their ceremonies. He was willing to adapt marriage ceremonies to their convictions. Also, he had at hand a large personal archive of edifying Sanskrit passages on social and political concerns, and he was more than ready to use them as replacement passages in the ceremonies that he edited for the modern-minded.

The Nehrus conferred with professor Shastri. They explained their dislikes, and made their suggestions. There is no minute of this meeting, but hearsay says that Jawaharlal asked the professor to take it easy with his noble political texts. He said that he was a politician and proud of it, and that politics is important in its place—but that its place was not large at weddings. Yet Jawaharlal did yield some place to politics in his ceremony, as we shall see.

. And strong-minded Indira plainly asked for a few insertions of her personal choice, and got them, at the meeting with Shastri. Professor Shastri returned to his office in Delhi, did his compiling of materials, and returned to Allahabad on March 26th with a little black book of the ritual in his hand. Its remarkable modernizations are worthy of discussion—after the viewing of the film— by persons who know the ancient ritual well.

Professor Shastri no doubt helped the Nehrus also in preparing, for distribution at the gate of Anand Bhavan on the wedding day, a small red booklet of four pages, *The Essential Parts of the Marriage Ceremony*. It names a dozen major elements in the ceremony, quoting in each case a few words from its liturgy in Sanskrit or in English translation. I shall cite it occasionally.

We are near the point where our film itself will take over the telling of the wedding story. It will be helpful to viewers to have a prior acquaintance with the persons of the film, so I shall provide, as playwrights do, a personae—with portraits:.

1. Indira Nehru, the bride.

23 years old.—a mature age, in India, for a woman to marry. An over-mature age, in her own view. The responsibility to find a mate was traditionally her fathers, but he was in jail. A forceful person, she took steps of her own. For what followed, stay with this film.

2. Feroze Gandhi, the groom.

29 years old. At my Ewing Christian College, Allahabad, he got an intermediate college education, and was awakened to the cause of India's freedom. He gave up advanced studies and took a job in the offices of the Indian National Congress. His office was located in rooms of the Nehru home at Anand Bhavan. There he became acquainted with the Nehru family personally as well as professionally and became helpful to them in family and individual matters also. Indira became a personal friend of his, then more. She and Feroze had pledged themselves to each other privately, long before this formal betrothal.

3. Jawaharlal Nehru, father of Indira.

52 years old. In his youth he studied effectively at Harrow and at Cambridge and returned to India a British-style aristocrat. But he became in time India's most stubborn and eloquent spokesman for British-style democracy in India. For that "sedition" he had by the time of this wedding suffered eight terms of imprisonment in British Indian jails. He was to suffer, alas, one more confinement.

4. Lacchmidhar Shastri, priest of the ceremony.

The spelling of his name is his own. He is pictured here in his professional garb in a faculty photo provided by St. Stephen's College, Delhi. We shall see him at the wedding, in different professional vestments, and older. The little that is said here on his life was drawn mainly from an article by P. D. Tandon on March 27th in Allahabad's newspaper, The Leader. A religious modernizer like the Nehrus he too carried on no religious wars, but simply modernized boldly, when he thought it right to do so. As presiding priest at this wedding he will be in the center of the stage always—as cantor of the Sanskrit lines and as director of his clients in their essential physical movements

5. Anand Bhavan itself, scene of the wedding.

Though not a person, it needs introduction also. Possessed of so little film, I could not risk its exhaustion by spending it on non-essentials. It was the rite itself that got full attention, rather than its ambience.. I make amends now with views of the wider setting of the ceremony, obtained from later sources

6. Anand Bhavan from the street.

Much-loved home, before India's independence, of Indira and Jawaharlal. In later years, when these two dwelt elsewhere in residences of state, Anand Bhavan remained a favorite place of family resort. Its broad lawns and many verandahs allowed it to accommodate large gatherings, as it did on March 26th, 1942. The ritual center on that day lay at the rear of the house, away from possible noise from the street. There a raised platform, a stage for the actions of the wedding, had been extended from a verandah of the house. and further outward, on the grass of a lawn, a block of seventy chairs for seventy persons had been arrayed, shielded from the were arrayed, for the formally-invited guests of the wedding. A canvas pavilion, a shāmiyāna, shielded them from the sun. All the rest of the lawn was thrown open as standing space for any of the general citizenry who wished to come. general citizenry. It was a surrounding sea of faces on this day.ss.

7. Rear of Anand Bhavan, seen obliquely from the east..

Looking from this angle you will be able to see, recessed in the center of the back wall of the house, an inset verandah, and

extending outward into the lawn from that verandah a waist-high platform. That lightly-shaded platform --a chabūtra in Hindi terms—was the arena for the enactment of all the rituals of the wedding.

8. The floor of the chabūtra.

In the middle of this stone floor that has become a stage, notice a receptacle for a small fire. That fire-pit is the altar that is necessary for the performance of any ritual that is considered to be Vedic. The verandah set in the house wall at left serves as a kind of green room for the occasional retreat of any persons involved in the central ceremony, but it provides also privileged sitting space, on rugs or chairs, for spectators deemed to need protected seats. Thus, running outward from the house three special spaces lay in a direct line: running outward from the house: this sheltered inset “green room;” then the roofless stage, then the shaded seating for the special guests.

The opening event of a wedding, by folk custom should be the glorious pageant of the arrival of the groom and his entourage at the front gate of the bride. This practice would have involved, at nine o'clock in the morning, the blare of an approaching brass band and then sight of the groom approaching in knightly garments riding on a horse. His relatives and friends follow then in splendid column, dressed in their best. For ordinary families this aristocratic show comes at a kingly price in rentals and fees, the cost exceeded only by that of the sumptuousness hospitality that the bride's family next heaps upon this arriving throng.

No such grand arrival is mentioned in the Essential Parts of the Marriage Ceremony nor was any show of the kind available to the camera at the start of Indira's wedding. It did not happen. It is a strange journalism that reports on events that did not happen, but this non-event has importance and calls for notice. Early on, Jawaharlal in his writings expressed his disgust for the extravagances that marriage customs force upon poor people. Though he could, personally; afford to pay a brass band if he wished, on this occasion he refused to lend the dignity of Anand Bhavan to such a oppressive custom. With his approval the Gandhi's on the wedding day at nine, simply came over from their nearby house, I know not how. They

had walked to the rear of Anand Bhavan without show, and the wedding began. So did our film.

The topics dealt with in the film will be numbered. The numbers are artificial, given only for convenience in discussions. Any spectator who wishes to make a comment or ask a question should remember or jot down the number of the incident, and use it at the conclusion of the ceremony.

1. The first guest arrives: a very young relative. Eager but bashful, he clings to the hand of his father.

2. Our first glimpse of Jawaharlal, the principle host of the day. A few small matters are still to be settled about the use of space, and he is in rapid movement. But he pauses, to give even this cameraman an instant of greeting.

At an edge of the circle of pavement about the fire, a broad arc is to be kept clear, and there the principal persons of the ceremony are to be seated in two facing lines that form a rectangle. Four mats have been laid down, two to a row. In our understanding of who the occupants will be, one of the four has no obvious occupant. We learn that is a seat for the bride's mother, who is no longer living. Yet she will be a recognized presence, with a place of honor in the ritual of this day.

3. This is Vijaya Lakshmī Pandit, Jawaharlal's sister. As aunt of the bride she will take the deceased Kamala's place as Jawaharlal's helper in extending hospitality to guests.

Some day soon, Vijaya Lakshmi will be a diplomat for free India, and free India's ambassador in Washington.

4. Here is Indira, the happy bride. This day brings long dreams of hers to realization. In her celebration she does not wear the family gems, as local brides normally do. Flowers will be her only ornaments. Nor will silks or brocades be seen here. Only homespun cotton fabrics will be worn. The cloth of Indira's bridal dress is said to have been woven of thread spun by Jawaharlal in his cell during one of his imprisonments.

5. The jaunty groom, Feroze. A tease and a prankster, he will save today's proceedings from undue solemnity. He wears the national Gandhi cap, a sherwani (formal Indian coat) and jodhpur trousers.

6. The invited guests have all made their appearance by now, and have been shown their seats with deference. Jawāharlāl has taken his own central seat on the raised platform. Indira sits down at her father's side. Feroze takes the seat facing hers, on the opposite side of the rectangle. They settle in their places rather tentatively. Garments are straightened, hair is patted, they look for and get approving nods from the presiding priest.

7, Suddenly we notice that the priest is engaged in recitation now, and is gesturing rhythmically, in his right hand a bundle of stems of some kind. This baton of a sort is the bundle of darbha grass with which priests mark time when chanting vedic liturgies. We know, by these priestly activities, that the ceremony has begun. The incantations will continue for more than an hour. Often the ritual recitations will be, actually, speeches of the major persons of the ritual, uttered by the priest in Sanskrit in behalf of his clients.

Our camera at first had little to do. It could not record the sounds. And of actions, little that was visible went on for many minutes. Yet, as the pandit's words rolled on, it became possible to discern the arrival of dramatic moments of ritual action. They had famous names. Once learned, these names could in time be made to tell an enquirer their stories.

8. **The Grasping of Hands, the Pānigrahanam,**

is the first of these great landmarks of the ritual to emerge with clear dramatic meaning. The ceremony requires of its principle persons, first of all, evidence of clarity of purpose and a clear consent. Sitting opposite each other in their respective lines, they reach out across the intervening space now, and clasp each others' hands.

This act comes early in the ritual and is of fundamental importance. The grasping of hands declares the uniting pair's own sincere desire to wed.

9. The fact that the moment of the Pānigrahanam has come gives us assurance that another important exchange has already taken place--even if we have not noticed it, or heard its name. Jawaharlal—or the priest on Jawaharlal's behalf, in Sanskrit, has already asked a question of Feroze in words like these: "Feroze, is it your firm intention to take this daughter of mine as your wedded wife?" And Feroze has replied in words like these, "It is my firm intention indeed. And furthermore I vow never to neglect her; and ever to heed her wishes, and I promise to supply all her needs." And Indira has agreed to marry him, in the sign of clasping his hand.

10. "The Giving of the Girl," the Kanyadāna, next follows

The meaning of this act is not a mystery. Such a giving occurs in almost the same spirit in western wedding rituals also. The bride's father gives over his function as her named protector. The responsibility henceforth is her husband's. Indira at this point arose from her seat beside her father and crossed over to the seat reserved for her beside Feroze That will be her seat throughout the rest of the ceremony.

11. The binding of hands.

This is a priestly binding, done by the presiding pandit by tying the clasped hands of bride and groom together using a band of flowers strung on a cord. By that priestly binding, the personal resolve of the bride and groom to marry is powerfully reinforced. Their will to unite is strengthened now by the acceptance and blessing of Vedic priests, loftiest of men and authorities of the highest earthly order.

[The photographer at this point inadvertently, for a second or so, lost control of his trigger finger and "wasted" a few frames of film in a side view of a portion of the attending crowd. As dealing with an independent. topic of their own, those frames are useless.

But lack of views of the outer crowd at this event is one of the weaknesses of my coverage, and even one glimpse of the crowd would have value in broadening viewers' understanding of the setting. Editor, can these stray frames be saved and used somewhere? There are several other instances below also, where I have been guilty of such wastage and where, perhaps, a few "useless" frames might be shifted to make possible the presentation of an overlean but important topic, not presentable without supplementation. stands.]

12. The Gift of Clothing,—The Vastradāna.

In a directly symbolic act, Feroze now confirms his vow to supply Indira's material needs—with specific assurance regarding clothing. He presents to her a neat stack of garments. She dons the topmost of them, binding it about her waist. Her acceptance of the clothing confirms her acceptance of marriage to Feroze.

13. The Feeding of the Groom.

As Firoze assured Indra that her need of clothing would be met, she now assures him that he will be fed.. In front of her she has an array of foods. She takes a morsel, leans forward, and puts it in his mouth.

(Editor: This charming symbolic act came without warning and was almost completed before I became aware of it and used the trigger. As it the incident stands, it is over before it can be understood. By multiplying an early frame of this series into an extended still picture—or even by taking a terminal frame for that purpose—time would be created for a verbal and visual introduction that would allow viewers to understand what is going on.

14. A second cooperating priest takes up his station now as an adjunct, presiding at the altar of the sacred fire. With a silver ladle he pours into its burning-pit from time to time its special fuel of melted butter. Until the end of the wedding this fire will glow and this priest will tend it. The reverential sentiments of those present will be centered on this flame and its updraft; and eyes will rise to higher foci of worship, in loftier realms.

15. **The Offering for Victory – The Jayahoma**

The bride and groom arise, now, and stand before the fire. They bow; they feed the fire, then resume their standing pose. Indira is to perform now the Jayahoma, the next act in the traditional wedding. Called “The Offering for Victory,” the bride of old time made a libation in the fire, and then uttered a vow regarding the victories that she would thereafter seek- not hers but her husband’s victories-- and that it would be her aim to protect him against all hostile powers, known or unknown.

Just what vow Indira actually uttered, my silent camera of course could not record. But the reporter of Allahabad’s newspaper, The Leader, the next day published a translation of her vow. It was a indeed a soldierly promise that she made, but a different one, addressed not to her husband but to the nation:

“If there are any people in the four corners of the earth who venture to deprive us of our freedom, mark! Here I am, sword in hand, prepared to resist them to the last. I pray for the spreading of the light of freedom: May it envelop us on all sides.”

This is the vow that Indira actually took, and, I think, took to heart. In its shift from family to political virtue, the literary hand of Pandit Lachmidhar Shastri is rather clearly seen.

16. **The Agnipradakshanam. The right-hand circuit of the fire.**

By their circumambulations of the fire the bride and groom will maximize their contact now with the sacred fire. Ordinary people and priests on earth have had their say. The fire will make connection with higher realms, and ensure that this union, known and blessed on earth, is known and approved in eternal realms also.

17. A Glance at the Assembled Guests.

The circling is long, the chanting is long also, and for my camera there is little to do.. Time can be taken for a glimpse of the great standing crowd of which I am a part. They fill this large back lawn to its very borders in all direction, and fill even a neighboring lane. At the center, at the outer edge of the platform,

seated guests sit in the shade of a canvas pavilion, a shāmiyāna. Many eminent persons are seated there, leaders in the professions and particularly in national politics. Though this is a family observance, it is the observance of a very national family. At least four members of the Working Committee of the All-India National Congress are here. If you can, Identify other celebrated people!

18. **The Sapta Padī, The Seven Steps.**

As we approach the end of the wedding, the whole ritual process will come to a climax in a final set of circumambulations from which no return or reverse is possible. When its last step has been taken, Indira and Feroze will be known as mates on earth and heaven in highest truth, forever. There will be no possibility, then or ever, of any turning back.. So it is proper that, in finalizing so grave a step, there should be no hurry. There is time still for lectures sitting and lectures standing; and subordinate rituals may still be seen, of a minor nature. One of these late interludes is the observance called “Stepping on the Stone”—

19. **Ashmāharohana, The Stepping on a Stone.**

In the old-fashioned wedding, in one of the final circuits of the bride and groom, a flat stone was brought in and laid in the path of the bride in particular. When the pair, walking hand in hand, came to the point where that stone lay in their path, the bride put her right foot upon the stone and paused to take an oath: that she would be as firm as that stone in her faithfulness to all the vows and resolutions that she had made that day.

In the ceremony created for Indira and Feroze a modern adaptation was made. Feroze, too, is taking the vow of rock-like faithfulness—with some embarrassment--and fumbling a little with his foot To enquire into the integrity of his vow is not my role..

20. **The Seventh Step.**

The last step has been taken—without great stir or special fanfare. Indira and Feroze are now firmly and forever

married.

For the rest of the day, festive observances will continue to go on. But their function is no longer to effect the marriage. The marriage has been performed and now exists. The observances that follow, now, rather, celebrate that marriage.

21. The Couple's First Meal Together, The Samashanam

The two sit down, side by side, and eat a token meal. It consists of a few bites of food.

[Here again, and for the last time, I was not forewarned, and got no more than a single still shot of this major sentimental event. Editor, can you again multiply a split-second frame into a ten-second still shot, and create room for a verbal announcement? Alternative: a merely audile certification that the hallowed feeding has occurred.**]**

22. Posh Pūjā, Benedictions on the domestic pair.

Over the two heads of the seated couple, someone drapes a single uniting cloth. The cloth is a roof! The two are no longer a mere couple. They are a household.

On this “roof”, those who are nearby shower flower-petals now, blessing this new family. The petals become a storm. Friend after friend comes forward and casts flowery good wishes on that “house” until it is almost buried.

23. With palette and small brush in her hand, a married woman now approaches the seated Indira, and paints on Indira's forehead the red dot that identifies a Hindu married woman. Visibly now, she is Mrs. Feroze Gandhi. This round dot has the function that the plain gold finger ring has, in other climes.

24. In song, now, Mr. And Mrs. Gandhi are offered blessings and congratulations. In common practice, paid priests or choruses offer professional benedictions at this point. At this simple Nehru wedding, volunteers of the family make these musical offerings: Here, the first cousins of the bride, Nayantāra and Rita Pandit, rise and make the song-offering.

25. The Final Offering, The Pūrṇa Āhuti

In the last observance, Feroze and Indira stood before the assembly and recited as a valediction the last lines of the last hymn of the Rigveda. The text is easily available. I offer it in translation:

May these people have common speech, a common assembly,
A common mind and common plan.
Uttering for you a common prayer
I make for you a common oblation.
Let there be a common purpose, common hearts,
A common mind, that ours may be a happy common life.

This may have been the first instance in history of the use of Rigveda 10.191.3f. in the liturgy of a wedding. Thus, Pandit Lachmidhar ended his rite with a significant suggestion of a coronation. His intuition was prophetic.

26. Dismissed thus, the people of the assembly arose. Some hugged the bride and groom and in their own personal style wished them well. All mingled and chatted and did what they liked. So did this photographer.

27. This charming lady is Mrs. Gopi K. Handoo.. For many years her husband was Jawaharlal's personal guard in public places.

28. And next, handsome Feroze, as debonaire at the end of the long ritual as at the beginning.

29. Indira, at her happiest moment and most beautiful.

30. Feroze's aged mother, Rattimai Gāndhī. She was camera-shy. But she had been captured, and she submitted graciously.

31. Ranjīt Pandit, a Sanskrit scholar, and husband of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit.

32. Very many telegrams of congratulation are arriving from far places in the world. Indira and Jawaharlal take time now to open and enjoy them.

33. Rajendra Prasad, longtime striver for independence, often the president of the Indian National Congress. Through the first dozen years of the nationhood of India, he will be India's president.

[Rajendra Prasad was present at the wedding but this time my camera missed him. I ask for transfer, to this document, of my frames of him taken at a previous event. In my "Allahabad" spool,. taken at the site of the new Kamala Nehru hospital. Important! Same situation, and tactic, re Naidu, next below.]

34. Sarojini Naidu, member of the powerful Working Committee of the Indian National Congress, author of two books of poetry, talented political speaker, old personal friend of Nehru.

[Same situation as with Rajendra Prasad, same source, same importance.]

35. Nayantara and Rita Pandit, again. They enjoyed the wedding, and enriched it. Nayantara was soon to be a freshman at Wellesley College, and, later, a writer of books about these times and this famous Nehru family.

36. Wedding gifts.

They were many, and splendid, and safe in an adjoining room. But they had not been put on display here, though it was the established custom to do so. Families ordinarily showed off their wedding gifts with pride, glorying in their costliness. Jawaharlal despised the boastfulness and the materialist spirit of such displays and would allow no show of that kind at his house.

37. The wedding dinner follows now, for the formally invited guests. Such dinners are the occasion, traditionally, for serving sumptuous dishes, in many courses. Jawaharlal, by his own personal practice, took steps to de-emphasize that lavish custom. He has laid out, here, a wedding dinner that is totally Indian, and plain and simple.. Atop a clean white ground-sheet, on plates of leaves, vegetarian foods are being served. Water is provided in

common soft earthen throw-away cups. There is no western silverware in this spread, nor any crystal goblets. Though Jawaharlal himself grew up amidst western luxuries, he will not be an exemplar now of practices that India as a whole cannot afford.

38. Here, a courtly old gesture toward guests is being preserved: a service for the early washing of hands. Where eating is with fingers, this prior cleansing of hands is of course necessary. But Jawaharlal does not send his guests to washrooms or spigots, nor does he wish the water to be poured from slim-spouted ewers of ornate Mughal style. Servants stand in attendance holding jugs and pitchers from the kitchen, and pour water over the outstretched hands of those who are about to dine.

39. A teen-age belle—the daughter of the Mrs. Handoo whom we have already met, above.

40. Here are adult relatives of Indira and Feroze, enjoying the dinner, and practicing deftly the art of capturing food with the chapati. Their names? It was not a proper time to ask. Now, it is. Can you help?

41. Leisurely departure of guests from Anand Bhavan. They stroll to the gate, full of good food, and with memories of a thoughtfully planned occasion. We too have memories that are precious. We came to see a wedding, but we have seen hearts and minds, as well. Even those who have known much about the Nehrus will at this point will now, I think, know them better than before.

A HISTORICAL POSTSCRIPT

After a wedding, newlyweds commonly go on honeymoons. Going to jail is not much favored. But going to jail was the major journey of the Nehrus and the Gandhis four months after the Nehru-Gandhi wedding,

and to jail went a high percentage of their wedding-guests as well, in what has been perhaps the greatest lock-up that India has ever known. This grim old fortress at Ahmadnagar was to be the jail of Jawaharlal for almost three years. (NH photo) In any account of the Nehru wedding as a time of ordeals, this tale of the Great Imprisonments is a proper ending.

(note to editor: viewer tolerance for this verbal postscript seems difficult to ask, without something to engage the eye. Please look at my two photographs of the walls of the fort at Ahmednagar. This entire conclusion is about jail. Are these snaps appropriate for visual contemplation throughout the conclusion below?)

We saw Nehru last, striving at the wedding to prepare himself for chairmanship, the next day, of the most important political consultation of his life. This meeting between India's nationalists and the Cripps mission did not go well. The Cripps plan allowed the Muslims a separate independence--Pakistan. It also insisted on the continuing British command, for the present, of the forces in India that were resisting Japan. The majority of Indians present could not accept either proposition. On April 9th they formally rejected the entire British proposal. The members of Parliament and the members of the Congress went home unreconciled.

The Indian National Congress returned to its decades-old protests and pressures. Mahatma Gandhi composed a two-word catch-phrase against the British: "Quit India!" On the face of it, it said "Stop worrying about the defense of India. Leave it with us! Just go!" Nobody had made the Indian demand so curt and so drastic before. Nehru felt that the phrase was too blunt to be wise, but out of deference for the Mahatma he placed it as a motion before a great plenary session of the All-India National Congress in Bombay on August 8th, 1942. The resolution that was passed now by the meeting involved a double message:: 1. Leave India, now!. 2. If you ignore this demand, we shall launch a civil disobedience campaign of a severity that you have never seen before.

The British response was also drastic, and almost instant. To understand it, we must recognize that the British knew the Congress civil disobedience campaigns well, and did not doubt that this one would reduce India and its eastern front to chaos. But they did not believe that a government of the Indian National Congress could run a war. And there was a third factor, seldom mentioned. The British are a sea people, noticers of naval events. In the Pacific, six months after Pearl Harbor, the situation no longer prevailed in which Parliament had concluded that India could not be defended without nationalist participation. Japan was not enjoying the year of unchallenged domination of the Pacific that it had expected to gain by its victory at Pearl Harbor and at Singapore. After six months Japan was locked in a fierce, bloody and all-demanding sea struggle with a very angry and aggressive U.S.A. And since June 4th, the day of the battle of Midway Island, she was having to go to battle on the sea with only a shadow of the carrier force that had made her irresistible in South Asian waters.

In January 1942 Japan had had seven aircraft carriers. In May, two went with an invasion fleet bent on conquest of Australia. An American force met them on May 7th in the Coral Sea. Both sides lost two carriers, but the U.S. could replace the pair lost, Japan could not. And in June, when Japan sent a great fleet with four of its remaining carriers to seize Midway Island, all four of those remaining carriers were sunk. Desperate defense was the utmost that Japan could do at sea thereafter.

Another blow to the Japanese was its failure to stop the flow of assistance in arms to free China. Japan had cut and closed the Burma Road, but an alternate route was created with great speed and great determination-- through India and "over the hump" by air. Japanese occupation forces could not, then, end the Chinese resistance, nor ever withdraw their troops from China for the proposed conquest of India.

British leaders noticed now that the Japanese no longer had either the men or the ships for their planned assault against India over the Bay of Bengal. Their armada never would be launched. Who then could defend India? They could. With the help of the able Indian Army, they could defend India's land border as well, in Assam.

So at five o'clock in the morning of August 9th, detachments of the Indian police came to the lodgings in Bombay of the members of the working committee of the Indian National Congress and took them off to prison--in the grim old Muslim fortress at Ahmadnagar in inland Maharashtra. It was to be the ninth and longest imprisonment of Jawaharlal's life. Throughout August, hundreds of lesser Congress leaders were arrested also. They filled many jails, throughout the country. Indira, a little later, was taken to the Naini prison at Allahabad. That was the jail chosen for Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit also. Feroze went to prison at Faizabad. The Indian National Congress, as a thinking and speaking body, had by that time disappeared; it had been sent to jail. Jawaharlal's disappearance from the public scene was particularly tragic because it imposed passivity and silence on a person of such high capacity for making reconciliations that were deeply needed in those years. He was not released until June 14th, 1945, by which time Japan had ceased to pose any danger to India.

This film can deepen the world's understanding of the stature of Jawaharlal Nehru. The world knew him first in the literature on his captivity, written by himself and others. He was known as a political martyr, a man of noble thought and unflinching endurance, who returned time after time to imposed solitude, to brood there on the ideals of his nation..

The nine months in which the wedding is set—a time between imprisonments—is a period of its own in India's life, and in Nehru's. The acute threat of Japanese invasion defines it.. It was a fiery time.

In that fiery world of 1942 there s no tranquility was available in India for the quiet musings of Jawaharlal the sage..Three nations were in

collision with each other there: Britain, and Japan, and nascent India herself. Nehru was utterly exposed to the world now. Leadership was asked of him far beyond the formulating of theory. He was wanted in the pit. To his death he would be deep in the extraordinary tumults of politics and of war.

What the world could see in Nehru now in this age of his maturity was a leader of extraordinary humane dimensions in times of fierce conflict. He was competent under great burdens, composed when others were confused, fair when others were merely furious, firm when others were distraught. Of the virtue of constant equanimity—the *nityam ca samachittatva* of the Bhagavadgita-- he was an exemplar that his nation was fortunate to find, in its original reserve of leaders. Happy was the country that could have such a man as its first head of state.

Nehruwed
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