

*Rajiv Gandhi
and Rama's Kingdom*
1994

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*The Democratic
Monarchy*

On the early afternoon of March 29, 1982, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi summoned to her office in the Prime Minister's house—her government residence—in New Delhi her daughter-in-law Maneka, who had been widowed less than two years earlier, at the age of twenty-three, when Mrs. Gandhi's younger son, Sanjay, died in the crash of a sports plane he was flying. Maneka had lived with Mrs. Gandhi for seven years, ever since she married Sanjay, but now Mrs. Gandhi peremptorily told her that she must quit the house immediately.

"What have I done?" Maneka asked. "I have already explained everything to you."

"You have attended the convention, and now you face the consequences!" Mrs. Gandhi shouted. The convention in question had been held the day before by a few of Sanjay's disgruntled followers. Mrs. Gandhi had made it known that she considered the convention subversive to her rule. Maneka had attended it, claiming that its purpose was only to honor Sanjay's memory and promote his work. (My account of the events of that day is based on what newspaper reporters overheard at the Prime Minister's house, on their interviews with eyewitnesses, and on published letters and statements from the participants.)

In the office with her, Mrs. Gandhi had two men who were