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GANDHI'S FUNERAL

Ashes are all that remain of a man who symbolised India's finest aspiration. As the last religious rites are performed a nation gives itself up to grief. For many, the vigile of prayer commences 48 hours before when the body of Gandhi was placed on the roof of Birla House in full view of the thousands who had travelled all night to pay their last tributes. Layed on a converted army truck the body was drawn into the vast crowd lined roads to the cremation ground. Planes strew the saffron shower of petals over the route while at the funeral pyre the relatives and friends build mounds of flowers and perfumed spices high on the sandalwood logs. Nearby with his family sit the Governor General with officials of the Government. The flower decked cortege moves slowly through the dense throng. Tens of thousands wept openly as the body passed by them. Premier Nehru travelling on the funeral coach with Gandhi's youngest son appeared bewildered in his depths of grief. Closing behind, pressing forward, cam a million mourners around the pyre the throng became packed as the body reached its resting place. Of all the faces in that vast multitude the most serene was that of the wife of Gandhi. To those around him Gandhi had seemingly been transformed from a beloved saint into a divinity. Randas Gandhi youngest son of the Mahatma places the torch to the pile of sandalwood and as the first fumes of scented smoke lift above the pyre the great cortege of mourners swept across the barriers towards it. Against this tremendous human tide the police were almost powerless, mourners were forced close to the fiercely burning Gandhi but as in Gandhi's lifetime peace won where force had failed. The mass hysteria was broken by the chanting of a hymn. Mahatma Gandhi had become immortal in the rising flames the spirit of a great man passed to his god.