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In evening of his life, Kamalapati Tripathi finds

himself ignored, even ridiculed



*"Pray, do not mock me: I am a very foolish fond old man, Four score and upward, not an hour more or less..."*
**(King Lear. IV. VII)**

The crowds thinned long ago. The minions and jesters took leave of his court even before his abdication. Pygmies who cannot even measure up to his knees have heaped abuses on him like the crown of straws. The forlorn figure has no vision of a conquest either.

For he is steadily lapsing into the realm of oblivion. Still, a few faithful hang around, like that obdurate Fool himself. And, as if to draw the parallel with grim perfection, 85-year-old Pandit Kamalapati Tripathi too has filial ingratitude tormenting his body and soul.

"I am killing time until time kills me," says Tripathi with a wry smile. Indeed, time now stands still at 9, Janpath, in Delhi's VIP quarters. Once the daily crowd of visitors would spill out onto the sprawling lawns. VIP Ambassadors would jostle each other for parking space.

Ministers, dissidents, loyalists and party workers - all used to turn up for Panditji's darshan and, of course, for his wise worldly advice. Supported by servants on both sides, he would emerge to hold court - his elegant walking stick serving perhaps as a sceptre. Every evening, a dozen-odd press correspondents would troop into his house - it was a regular beat for them.

But the glory has departed. The large front room which, served as the daily durbar hall, has not been full since November 12,1986 - the day he was forced to submit his resignation as Congress(I) working president. Panditji sits in the centre, with rows of empty stools to his left and right - the odd courtier comes and goes, but the emptiness remains.

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