Letter to Smt. Sonia Gandhi

New Delhi

It is with a deep sense of responsibility, and an overwhelming sense of concern that we write to you. The founders and the leaders of the Congress party like your eminent grandfather-in-law had always encouraged a tradition of free and uninhibited exchange of views amongst congressmen. They have built the foundation of Indian democracy on the four pillars of liberty of opinion, freedom of expression, responsibility of action and above all nation before self. We believe we are being true to these ideals in placing our views before you.

Madam President, we belong to a generation which had the good fortune to have, as role models, people like. Mahatma, - Gandhi, Pt. Nehru, Maulana Azad, Subhash Chandra Bose, Sardar Patel, Lal Bahadur Shastri and Indira Gandhi. It is under their tutelage that we learnt about the value of, sacrifice, and the intensity of national, pride. They taught us to be Indian first and Congressmen next. Your family has, more than once, made the supreme sacrifice to uphold these ideals.

After the demise of Rajivji, the party felt orphaned. Like most orphans, its condition deteriorated. With. the slow decline of the Congress Party, the forces of communalism, violence, and fundamentalism, which would divide and break the country, grew from strength to strength. As a result the country plunged from crises to crises. The last three years have seen more political, social economic turbulence in this country than the, previous 46., Right thinking people were leaving the Congress. The poor, the underprivileged, the minorities and the youth were disillusioned with the party.

It was at such a bleak time Madam, that some Of us came to you. We had all watched with respect and admiration, the great dignity with which you and your children bore the series of blows that life dealt you. We also sensed the "genuine affection and care that you had for Congressmen and the Congress Party. At this critical juncture in the party's life we came to you and requested you to take over the reins of the party. We felt that the real respect the Congress party had for your family would rejuvenate the Organisation. And we are not wrong. Your, presence in the party gave it new life. The disintegration stopped. Congressmen Started returning to the fold.

For the past months, we have observed the maturity and dignity you have brought to the high office of the Congress president. You have kept the fold together, consulted with senior colleagues and motivated the youth, Through all this ran a clear purpose that the party so cherished by your family did not perish. Such selflessness is not new to India, and this ability to put the party's interest above yourself gave us hope and strength.

With clarity of purpose you concentrated on the party without getting involved in the political battles fought on the ground and on the floor of Parliament. Despite tremendous pressure, you resisted the temptation to fight elections. Both at the AICC session in Delhi and at Panchmarhi, you very rightly reminded us that keeping the party strong and vibrant was as important as running a government. When the fractured outcomes of the general elections were out, you and the party accepted the verdict of the people of India that the Congress party had not fully lived up to their expectations. Other political parties were given a chance to take this great country forward. At all times you intuitively understood and respected the often unstated wishes of the Indian people.

However, of late we have noticed what we hope is only a temporary aberration. We believe that this is the work of a few self seeking individuals, we pray that you are able to disengage yourself from,such minds. Soniaji you have lived as a daughter-in-law to India for the past 30 years. You have, in your own way, absorbed much of this great country's spirit. You are in the line of many non Indians who have loved-and adopted this country and worked for its benefit. The Congress party which you now lead was the brainchild of a Scotsman, Sir A.0. Hurne. The seat you occupy has once adorned by Annie Besant. It is in this selfless tradition that we see your services to the party and the nation.

Madam President, India is a country with a history and tradition going back for 1000's of years. It is a confident culture and a proud nation. Above all it is a country which is self sufficient in every sense of the word. India has always lived in the spirit of the Mahatma's words "Let the winds from all over sweep into my room" but again he said "I will not be swept off my feet". We accept with interest and humility the best which we can gather from the North, South, East or West and we absorb them into our soil.

But our inspiration, our soul, our honour, our pride, our dignity, is rooted in our soil. It has to be of this earth. Soniaji you have became a part of us because you have all along respected this. We therefore find it strange that you should allow yourself to forget it at this crucial juncture. It is not possible that a country of 980 million, with a wealth of education, competence and ability, can have anyone other than an Indian, born of Indian soil, to head its government.

Some of us have tried to initiate and open broader discussions on this issue within the party. It is an issue which affects not just the security, the economic interest and the international image of India, but hits at the core pride of every Indian. Unfortunately this initiative has been thwarted at every stage.

At the risk of repetition we would like to emphasise that, as Congressmen, we look up to you as a leader who kept the party together and is a source of strength to all of us. We hope that you will continue in this role for many years. But, as a responsible political party, we also have to understand the genuine concern of the average Indian who may or may not be a Congressman. That Indian is concerned about the person who will guide the course of his destiny for at least five years.

India's Prime ministership is probably the single most difficult job in the world today. A country with the size of a subcontinent and with a population of 980 million, a vibrant, vocal democracy, a struggling economy, fissiparous forces tearing the social fabric, insurgency and terrorism which cuts at national unity. No government anywhere in the world faces the type of complex problems and multidimensional issues that need attention in India. A person who is to take the reins of this country needs a large measure of experience and understanding of public life. That is why the founders of the party insisted that people who aspired for higher positions should first spend time working their way up. This way the party worker got acquainted with the complexity of issues in the country.

The average Indian is not unreasonable in demanding that his Prime Minister have some track record in public life. The Congress Party needs to respect this very justifiable expectation. We need to understand that, during an election campaign, every congress worker has to be able to be aggressive about his party's line. Our workers cannot afford to be either defensive or apologetic. This will negatively affect the party's performance.

We believe, Madam President, that even now it is not too late. Let this great party once again move forward in the direction of Rajivji's dream. - A strong resurgent India leading the world into the 21't century. Rajivji's dream was shared by all of us. We look to you to lead the party to fulfil this dream.

We have discussed this matter today in the CWC at great length. We stand by the views we have expressed there. There can be no two opinions that this personalized campaign started by the BJP against you is reprehensible and needs to be opposed strongly. At the same time we would again state that the issue raised by us in today's meeting is real as far as this country is concerned and cannot be wished away.

We believe that it is our responsibility as congressmen and political leaders to formally place on record our view and request the CWC and you to consider the following suggestion which we feel would set at rest the controversy currently being debated across the country.

The Congress Manifesto should suggest an amendment to the Constitution of India, to the effect that the offices of the President, Vice President and Prime Minister can only be held by natural born Indian citizens.

We would also request that you, as Congress president, propose this amendment. This will be in line vath your own consistent stand that your sole concern in entering public life was to revive and rejuvenate the party for what Pandit ji, lndiraji and Rajivji gave their all, Such a stand will not only further enhance your status but also give strength to the Congress party as it goes to the polls.

We urge you to consider the issues we have raised in the same spirit and seriousness with which we have raised them. We believe that in the larger interests of the party and the country you would accept the suggestion we have made.

With regards,
Yours sincerely,

P.A. Sagma Tariq Anwar Sharad Pawar