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## To become or not to become prime minister: An enigma called, Sonia Gandhi

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### Abstract

Even after 20 years, many questions are raised that why Sonia Gandhi rejected the crown and did not become the Prime Minister despite Congress won in 2004 Election on her face. The faction of people claims that she haven't become the Prime Minister because Sonia Gandhi is Italian born, while the other faction of the people claims that Sushma Swaraj threatened that she will shave her head and go bald if Sonia Gandhi will become the Prime Minister. While the actual reason is none of them. It is true that many time some people speaks many things, but what is the reality is still unknown to many of us. This research paper explores the decision of Sonia Gandhi, the prominent Indian politician and leader of the Indian National Congress, to decline the opportunity to become the Prime Minister of India in 2004. The paper delves into the factors and motivations behind Sonia Gandhi's controversial decision, analyzing the political landscape, personal considerations, and the impact it had on Indian politics. Through an examination of primary and secondary sources, including interviews, speeches, and historical accounts, this paper sheds light on the reasons for Sonia Gandhi's abandonment of the Prime Minister's position. The findings reveal a complex interplay of personal convictions, political alliances, and familial obligations that influenced her decision-making process. Additionally, the paper discusses the consequences of Sonia Gandhi's decision, exploring its effects on the Indian National Congress, the perception of leadership, and the broader political landscape in India. By examining this significant episode in Indian political history, this research paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamics and complexities of political leadership and decision-making.

**Keywords:** Abandonment, crown, faction, landscape, perception

### 1. Introduction

#### Background of the General Elections 2004

It the spring of 2004, the announcement of the 2004 Lok Sabha elections was imminent. Pramod Mahajan, a prominent leader of the BJP, endorsed Deputy Prime Minister Lal Kishan Advani as the Prime Ministerial candidate and launched the "Shining India" campaign. On the other side, the Congress-led Alliance UPA, headed by Sonia Gandhi, a foreign-born politician and the widow of former Minister Rajiv Gandhi, was in contention. Unlike previous Lok Sabha elections in the late 90s, this battle was primarily between the BJP and its allies versus Congress and its allies, with no viable third front alternative. However, regional differences played a significant role in the election dynamics.

The BJP contested the elections as part of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), but it also had seat-sharing agreements with strong regional parties outside the NDA, such as the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) in Andhra Pradesh and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) in Tamil Nadu. Before the elections, there were attempts to form a Congress-led national-level joint opposition front, but no agreement was reached. Nevertheless, Congress managed to form alliances with regional parties at the state level. This marked the first time Congress contested a parliamentary election with such alliances.

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**Fig 1:** UPA Chairperson Sonia Gandhi with Atal Bihari Bajpayee

The left parties, including the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Communist Party of India, contested independently in their strongholds of West Bengal, Tripura, and Kerala, challenging both Congress and NDA forces. In some other states like Punjab and Andhra Pradesh, they entered into seat-sharing agreements with Congress. In Tamil Nadu, they joined the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK)-led Democratic Progressive Alliance. Two parties, the Bahujan Samaj Party and the Samajwadi Party, refused to align with either Congress or BJP. Both parties were based in Uttar Pradesh, the largest state in terms of population and seats. Congress made several attempts to form alliances with them, but there was no success. Many believed that these parties could potentially spoil Congress' chances of winning. As a result, Uttar Pradesh witnessed a four-cornered contest that had little significant impact on Congress or BJP.



**Fig 2:** Samajwadi Chief Mulayam Singh Yadav with Bahujan Samajwadi Party Chief Mayawati

**2. Pre-Poll Surveys**

Most analysts and opinion polls predicted that the NDA would emerge victorious in the elections. The economy had been experiencing steady growth, and the government's disinvestment of state-owned production units, in line with India's liberalization policies, was progressing well. India's Foreign Exchange Reserves had also reached over US\$100 billion, making it the 7th largest in the world and a record high for India. The service sector had generated numerous job opportunities. The BJP campaigned on the so-called "feel good factor" and promoted the "India Shining" campaign, highlighting India's recent economic successes, such as increased mobile phone ownership and rising IT exports.



Conducted in month(s)	NDA	UPA	Other
August 2002	250	195	100
February 2003	315	115	115
August 2003	247	180	115
January 2004	335	110	100

**Fig 3:** India Today Cutout and Opinion Polls of 2004 Elections

**3. B.J.P and N.D.A Campaign**

In the past, the BJP had been seen as a hard-line Hindu party with close ties to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu organization. However, the party had distanced itself slightly from its Hindutva policies over the years. The election campaign focused more on economic achievements. The BJP realized that its voter base had reached a plateau and concentrated on pre-poll alliances rather than post-poll alliances. The foreign origin of Sonia Gandhi also became a part of the NDA's campaign. The "India Shining" campaign was launched in October 2003, aiming to create a positive national sentiment to counter any anti-incumbency sentiment. Although questions were raised regarding the use of public funds for a clearly political campaign, the government argued that it aimed to inform the public about the achievements of the NDA coalition as a whole. The campaign was temporarily suspended during the state elections in December but resumed afterward. However, the messaging of the campaign proved problematic, as it highlighted the BJP's disconnect from ground realities and allowed opposition parties to appeal to the poor by portraying the BJP as a party of the urban middle class. Congress' main slogan focused on questioning the benefits received by the common man, leading to a focus on service delivery and anti-incumbency sentiments towards non-performing MPs from all parties.

**4. Congress and UPA Campaign**

The Congress and UPA campaign focused on several key issues, including economic development, social welfare, and secularism. They highlighted their commitment to inclusive growth, poverty alleviation, and strengthening social welfare programs. The campaign also emphasized the need for a harmonious and diverse society, promoting the idea of India as a secular nation. The campaign was led by Sonia Gandhi, who was the President of the Indian National Congress at the time. Sonia Gandhi emerged as a charismatic and influential leader, rallying support and

presenting herself as a strong alternative to the incumbent government. Her leadership played a crucial role in shaping the campaign's messaging and strategy. The Congress and UPA campaign adopted a populist approach, focusing on the concerns and aspirations of the common people, often referred to as the "aam aadmi" (common man). The campaign aimed to connect with the masses by addressing their everyday challenges and presenting itself as a champion of their rights and interests. The UPA campaign showcased the strength and unity of the coalition. Various regional parties joined hands with the Congress, bringing together diverse political ideologies and regional interests under a common agenda. This broad-based coalition helped the UPA present itself as a credible alternative to the NDA government. The UPA campaign forged strategic alliances with regional parties, particularly in key states, to maximize its electoral prospects. These alliances were crucial in consolidating support and securing a broader voter base in different regions of the country. The campaign effectively utilized the media and communication channels to amplify its message. It leveraged traditional forms of media, such as television, radio, and newspapers, as well as emerging digital platforms to reach a wider audience. The campaign also emphasized the importance of effective messaging and public relations to shape public opinion.

#### 5. Congress's Advisor Attempts to form UPA Government

In the morning of May 8, the final day of the election campaign, Ahmed Patel, a close aide of Sonia Gandhi and her advisor, along with politician and journalist Santosh Bhartiya, met to discuss how to prevent the BJP from forming the government. Despite surveys indicating that the BJP and NDA still had a larger alliance than any other alternatives, Ahmed Patel decided to appoint Manzoor Alam and Santosh Bhartiya as mediators to engage with leaders from all political parties. He requested Santosh Bhartiya to deliver his message, representing Sonia Gandhi's views, to former Prime Minister and veteran leader VP Singh. VP Singh had previously become Prime Minister in 1989 with the support of the BJP and other political parties. Therefore, Pramod Mahajan and BJP believed that morally, in 2004, when the BJP needed VP Singh's support, he should have supported them. However, VP Singh withdrew his support, citing the BJP's "HINDUTVA" politics and the increasing communalism in the country. He expressed his belief that Sonia Gandhi should be made the Prime Minister instead. VP Singh also criticized the BJP for attacking Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin. VP Singh said "If BJP would have agreed of making Atal Bihari Vajpayee the Prime Minister, I would not think anything, but now the path on which BJP is going, it is the path of increasing communalism in the country, so only Sonia Gandhi should be made the Prime Minister."

#### 6. BJP and Pramod Mahajan undertake the responsibility to form Government

The BJP and its leader Pramod Mahajan also engaged in talks with other political leaders and parties to explore the possibility of forming the government. BJP Leaders felt that that they may fall short of the required number of seats to form a government, the BJP began reaching out to potential allies from other political parties. The aim was to secure the support of enough Members of Parliament (MPs) to achieve

a majority in the Lok Sabha. The BJP held discussions and negotiations with various regional parties and independent MPs to forge a coalition and gain the necessary numbers to form a government. Key leaders and representatives from different parties were approached to explore the possibility of an alliance. The BJP focused on engaging with regional parties, particularly those with a significant number of seats in the Lok Sabha. These parties held the potential to provide crucial support to the BJP-led coalition in forming a stable government.



Fig 4: Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) general secretary Pramod Mahajan

During the negotiations, the BJP sought to find common ground with potential allies on policy issues and governance agendas. Discussions often revolved around shared ideologies, policy alignments, and the distribution of power and ministerial positions within the government. Pramod Mahajan and LK Advani made attempts to build a coalition and convince potential allies to join them in forming the government. These efforts involved backroom negotiations, discussions on power-sharing arrangements, and addressing the concerns and demands of the parties being approached. These included regional interests, ideological alignments, power dynamics, and the political aspirations of the parties being approached. Parties weighed their options based on their own priorities and the potential benefits of aligning with the BJP-led coalition. On the morning of May 9, 2004, former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu and DMK leader Karunanidhi received a call from Pramod Mahajan, who expressed his determination to make Atal Bihari Vajpayee the Prime Minister.

#### 7. Last day of Voting and Aftermath

10<sup>th</sup> May 2004 was the last day of voting and Former Prime Minister VP Singh had a dialysis session on same day and then he met Sonia Gandhi. They had a conversation that lasted about half an hour, during which VP Singh assured his full support to the Congress party and pledged to gather support from other parties too, including Former Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar and HD Deve Gowda. It can be argued that VP Singh played a significant role both in diminishing the Congress Party in and after 1987 when he leaved Congress Party after accusing Rajiv Gandhi of corruption and in forming and supporting the Congress party in 2004.

On the last day of voting, May 10, 2004, around 5:30 PM,

as the final phase of voting was about to end, news agencies started showing exit polls. The exit polls indicated that the NDA was the largest alliance but still short of a majority. BJP leaders remained confident that the actual results would differ from the exit polls, and they expected the NDA to secure a majority.

Seat Forecast	BJP allies	Congress allies	Others
NDTV-Indian Express	230-250	190-205	100-120
Aaj Tak-ORG Marg	248	190	105
Zee-Taleem	249	176	117
Star-C-Voter	263-275	174-186	86-98
Sahara-DRS	263-278	171-181	92-102
Outlook-MDRA	280-29	159-169	89-99

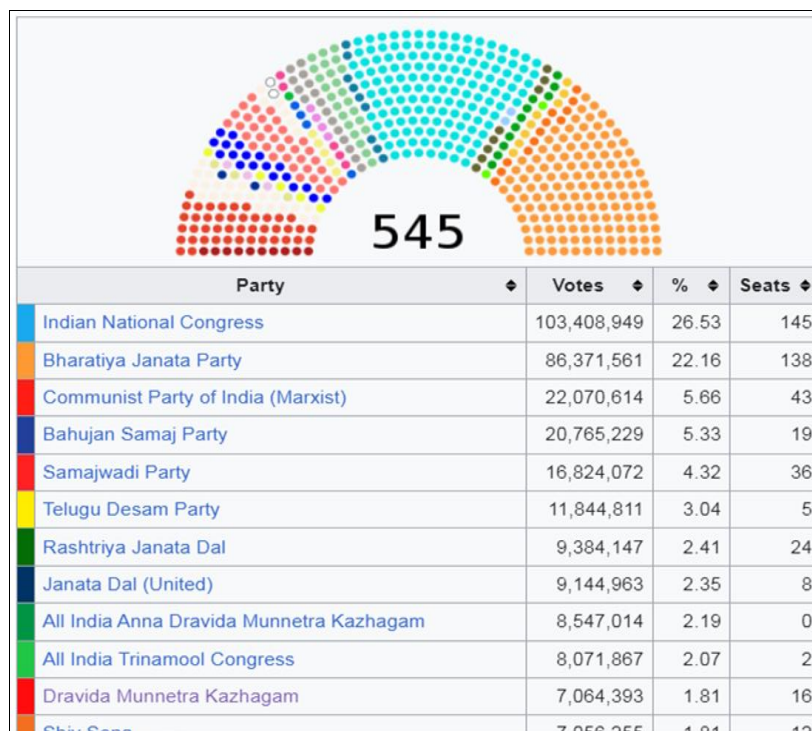
**Fig 5:** Exit Polls of 2004 General Elections

On 11<sup>th</sup> May, 2004, VP Singh began gathering possible support from other parties. He first spoke to HD Deve Gowda, a former Prime Minister, who had gained prominence despite losing one of the two Lok Sabha seats he contested. VP Singh and Congress sought his assistance, not only in the Lok Sabha but also in the Vidhan Sabha elections, as a post-poll alliance partner. VP Singh then approached Harkishan Singh Surjeet, General Secretary of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). Surjeet agreed to support Sonia Gandhi as the Prime Minister, but HD Deve Gowda still had reservations about supporting Sonia Gandhi. Later in the evening, VP Singh contacted Karunanidhi again. VP Singh appointed Santosh Bhartiya as a mediator to initiate talks aiming with former Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar Singh, aiming to address the rift between

VP Singh and Chandrashekhar that had persisted since 1989-90, and to support Congress in forming the government. In the morning of May 12, 2004, as the election results were about to be declared the next day, Ahmed Patel arranged a meeting between Sonia Gandhi and HD Deve Gowda. Initially, Sonia Gandhi was hesitant to talk to Deve Gowda, but after much persuasion by Ahmed Patel, she agreed to discuss the situation in the country. Deve Gowda, who had been critical of the Congress, also agreed to speak with Sonia Gandhi. Later that night, Sonia Gandhi invited Chandra Shekhar to her house, and scheduled a visit between 7:30 and 8:00 PM. During the meeting, Chandra Shekhar expressed his support for the Congress, though he considered it only moral support. As the evening progressed, AB Vardhan, General Secretary of the Communist Party of India and D Raja arrived at 8:15 PM and informed VP Singh and Chandra Shekhar that they had decided to support the Congress. The meeting lasted for 25 minutes, and as Chandra Shekhar was leaving, he expressed his trust in Vishwanath's advice but cautioned that he knew the Congress well and believed Sonia Gandhi would use us just like a tissue paper. It is possible that Chandra Shekhar was still enraged due to his past experience of being betrayed by former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi's husband, in 1991.

**8. Result Day**

The Lok Sabha election results were scheduled to be announced in the morning of 13<sup>th</sup> May 2004. Initially, the trends showed a close contest between the BJP and Congress, with both party leading at different times. However, by around 5:30 PM, the results became clear. Congress had won 145 seats, while the incumbent BJP won 138 seats. Congress emerged as the single largest party with a lead of only 8 seats, getting privilege of the first invitation to form the government. On the evening of the result day, Manzoor Alam, Ahmed Patel, and Santosh Bhartiya met with Sonia Gandhi to discuss the possibilities.



**Fig 6:** Result of 2004 Indian General Elections

On 14<sup>th</sup> May 2004, Sonia Gandhi engaged in discussions with her colleagues, while VP Singh continued his conversation with the Left and Karunanidhi. On 16<sup>th</sup> May 2004, Karunanidhi, who had promised support to the NDA, met with VP Singh and informed him that he was going to meet Atal Bihari Vajpayee, as he had pledged his support. In response, VP Singh took a piece of paper, wrote a letter of support to the Congress addressed to Sonia Gandhi, and will have his (Karunanidhi) signature on it, stating that if anyone accused VP Singh of forging his signature, I am ready for that, even. Finally, the consensus was made on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2004 that Sonia Gandhi would lead the newly formed government as the Prime Minister of the country. The announcement was greeted with applause from the newly elected Congress lawmakers in the central hall of parliament. Sonia Gandhi expressed her gratitude to the people of India and emphasized the need to utilize the momentum generated by their revival as a catalyst for change. "I feel deeply humbled, I feel greatly privileged," she said, standing under life-sized portraits of former prime ministers, including her assassinated husband Rajiv, mother-in-law Indira and Indira's father Jawaharlal Nehru. "I thank the people of India from my heart. We have succeeded against all odds, we have prevailed despite all predictions of disaster. There is now a momentum generated by our revival, let us not squander it. We must utilise it as a catalyst for change." Congress' election of Gandhi as its parliamentary leader was expected and means that, having already secured the support of key allies, she will be prime minister, barring any last minute hitches with new political partners.

The Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) secured 218 seats, while the Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) won 181 seats out of the total 544. The UPA did not achieve a majority on its own and relied on external support, rather it relied on external support, similar to the formula adopted by the previous minority governments of the United Front, the NDA, the Congress government of P. V. Narasimha Rao, and earlier governments of V. P. Singh and Chandra Shekhar and similar to previous minority governments in India's history. The Left Front, with 59 MPs, the Samajwadi Party, with 39 MPs, and the Bahujan Samaj Party, with 19 MPs, were significant blocs that supported the UPA. The UPA government's policies were guided by a common minimum program, which was developed through consultations with Left Front leaders Jyoti Basu and Harkishan Singh Surjeet of the 59-member Left Front. An informal alliance had existed prior to the elections as several of the constituent parties had developed seat-sharing agreements in many states. After the election the results of negotiations between parties were announced. Hence, government policies were generally perceived as Centre-left, reflecting the centrist policies of the INC. At the dinner meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2004, Sonia was "unusually reclusive" and sat in a corner, and surprisingly talked mostly to VP Singh, who had "politically hurt her husband the most" but was approached earlier by her Political Secretary Ahmed Patel to drum up support for her prime minister ship.



**Fig 7:** Ahmed Patel with Sonia Gandhi

### 9. Stand of President Kalam

Certainly! The issue of Sonia Gandhi's citizenship became a subject of debate and speculation following the 2004 elections, where the Congress party had a strong performance and she emerged as a prominent figure within the party. It was widely believed that President ABJ Abdul Kalam did not actively participate or intervene in the debates and inquiries surrounding Sonia Gandhi's citizenship. Kalam's approach was seen as respecting the constitutional and legal frameworks governing the eligibility criteria for the prime ministerial position. He did not interfere or express any personal objections to Sonia Gandhi's candidature based on her citizenship status.



**Fig 8:** A P J Abdul Kalam filing his nomination papers for the Presidential Election in presence of the Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and the Leader of the opposition Sonia Gandhi along with other political leaders in New Delhi. (File Photo | PTI)

But on the other side even Four days after the general election, when no single party secured a majority, the President wondered about the course of action to be taken. On May 17<sup>th</sup> 2004, Kalam's secretary P. Madhavan Nair advised him to invite Sonia Gandhi to Rashtrapati Bhavan, where she was expected to present letters of support from different parties. Kalam was instructed to briefly glance through the letters and ring the bell, while his secretary would be in the adjacent room with the letter appointing Sonia Gandhi as the prime minister. According to Kalam, during that period, many political leaders visited him, urging him not to succumb to any pressure and appoint Sonia Gandhi as the Prime Minister. However, he acknowledged that such a request would not have been constitutionally valid. Kalam recalled that if Sonia Gandhi had staked a claim herself, he would have had no choice but

to appoint her, as it would have been the only "constitutionally tenable" option available to him. He was almost certain that Sonia Gandhi would lead the UPA government.

As the Congress party positioned Sonia Gandhi as their prime ministerial candidate, questions were raised about her eligibility to hold the highest office in India due to her foreign origins. APJ Abdul Kalam was ready to swear Sonia Gandhi in as the Prime Minister after the 2004 polls when he was the President despite pressure from various political leaders. In his memoirs titled 'Turning Points: A Journey through Challenges,' Kalam revealed that he received numerous letters and inquiries from individuals and

institutions regarding Sonia Gandhi's citizenship status. Moreover, President Kalam also received the letter from Subramanian Swamy, a prominent Indian politician and economist, expressing his concerns about Sonia Gandhi's eligibility to become the Prime Minister of India. In the letter, Swamy argued that Sonia Gandhi's Italian birth and upbringing could potentially compromise her commitment to India's national interests. He highlighted the importance of upholding the constitutional provisions regarding the eligibility criteria for the prime ministerial position. President stated that all these letters were totally useless and he forwarded these concerns to the appropriate authorities.

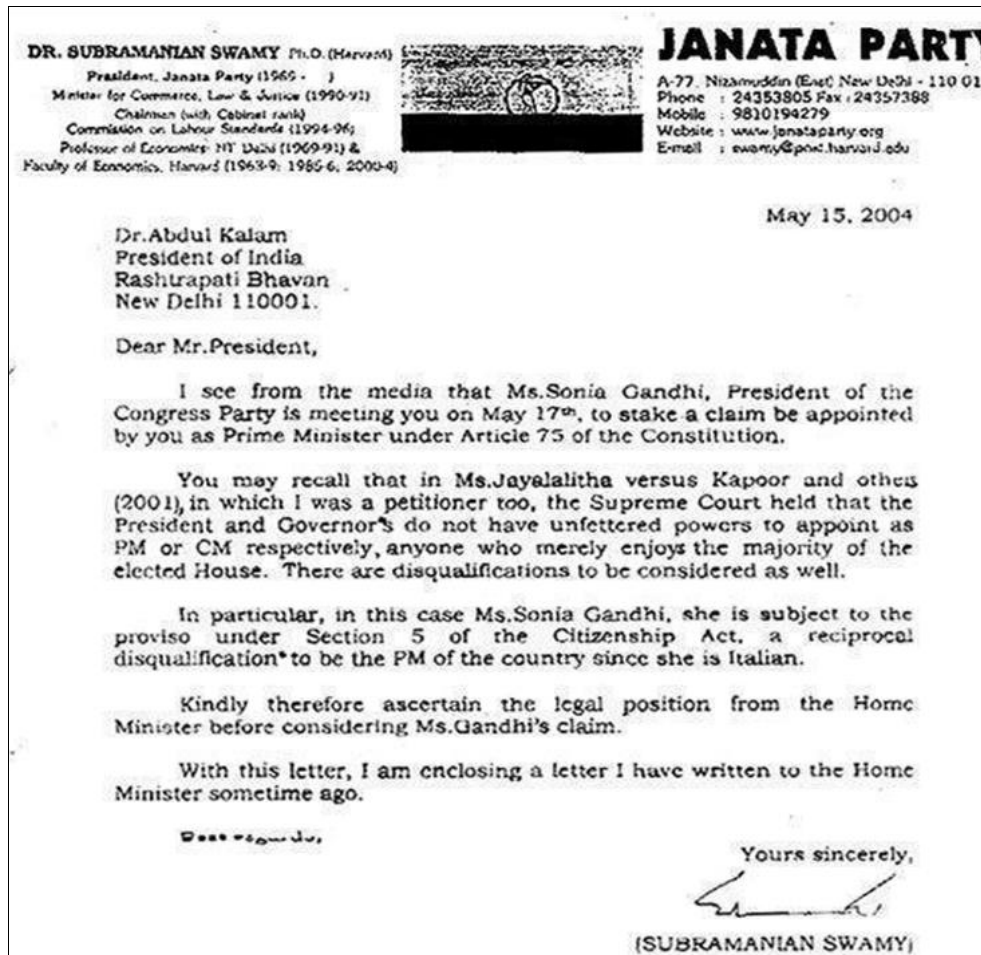


Fig 9: Janata Party President, Dr. Swamy Letter to President Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam on Sonia Gandhi dated May 15, 2004

Sonia Gandhi arrived at the scheduled time on 18<sup>th</sup> May at 12:15 PM, accompanied by Dr. Manmohan Singh. Instead of presenting the letters of support, she engaged in a discussion with Kalam, stating that she had the necessary numbers but would bring the letters the next day. Does Sonia Gandhi needed more time to gather the possible support or there was something else going on in her mind? Actually reason was she needed more time to discuss with her close aids that whether she should become the Prime Minister or not. This concern of becoming or not becoming the Prime Minister did not arise suddenly in her mind, there was an important context behind it. Context was meeting which took place a day earlier on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2004 at Sonia Gandhi's residence. Kalam suggested proceeding with the appointment that afternoon, but Gandhi postponed it. Later, President received a message that Sonia Gandhi would meet

him the next day i.e. 19<sup>th</sup> May in the evening at 8:15 pm.



Fig 10: Sonia Gandhi with President Kalam

### 10. How Sonia Gandhi changes her stand

Possibly on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2004, a meeting took place at 10 Janpath, Sonia Gandhi's residence, involving several close aides of the Congress Party. Attendees included son Rahul Gandhi, Daughter Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Manmohan Singh, Makhn Lal Fotedar, Natwar Singh, Suman Dubey, and Sonia Gandhi herself and many others waiting outside. The presence of Manmohan Singh was significant, as he was the only person present besides the immediate family and a family friend, Suman Dubey.

During the meeting, Sonia Gandhi wanted everyone to be aware of her decision and hear directly from Rahul about his feelings. It was revealed that Rahul and Priyanka opposed their mother becoming the Prime Minister due to concerns about her safety. They feared that she might face a similar fate as their grandmother, Indira Gandhi, and father, Rajiv Gandhi, both of whom were assassinated and were Prime Ministers. "I will not let you becoming the Prime Minister. My father and grandmother were assassinated, and within six months, the same fate will happen to you, if you become Prime Minister" were the words of Rahul Gandhi. So Sonia Gandhi rejected the Prime Ministership just because of fear, certainly yes but also the the Incumbent Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee Advised her to do so. Atal Bihari Vajpayee had advised Sonia not to accept the prime ministership, and he had a conversation soon after she was elected as the leader of the CPP. In their discussion, Sonia sought Vajpayee's blessings and support. While she was being considered as the next prime minister of India, Vajpayee congratulated her but cautioned against accepting the position. He expressed concerns about the potential division of the country and the strain it could put on the loyalty of the civil services. Despite being political opponents, Vajpayee and Sonia maintained a cordial relationship throughout.

Sonia had made up her mind to appoint Manmohan Singh as the Prime Minister, as indicated by his presence at the meeting.

### 11. Rahul stopped Sonia from being PM

Rahul expressed his strong opposition to his mother becoming Prime Minister, citing the threats faced by their family. He gave Sonia a 24-hour ultimatum to decide. This had a profound impact on Sonia, who was visibly agitated and in tears. Priyanka also voiced her support for Rahul's stance, acknowledging his determination and capability to prevent their mother from assuming the Prime Minister ship. Natwar Singh noted in his book *One Life Is Not Enough* that it was Rahul's threat to take drastic measures that ultimately led Sonia to change her mind. As a mother, she could not ignore her son's concerns. Consequently, it became clear that Sonia Gandhi would not become the Prime Minister. Now it was decided that Sonia Gandhi who made the UPA Victorious in 2004 General Election will not become the Prime Minister due to her son's fear of getting being killed. The same message was delivered to the allies' partner shortly. As events unfolded, Rahul's fear for his mother's safety led to Sonia relinquishing the opportunity to become the prime minister, despite being very close to attaining it. This decision garnered acceptance for her within the party and the country, unlike anything else could have achieved. Despite her foreign origins, Sonia went on to become the longest-serving party chief, leading the Congress Party for 22 years until she stepped down in 2022.

On that particular day, she had scheduled a meeting with senior party leaders at her residence. Accompanied by Manmohan Singh and Natwar Singh, Sonia informed Pranab Mukherjee, Shivraj Patil, Ghulam Nabi Azad, ML Fotedar, Ahmed Patel, and others. "that she had requested Dr. Manmohan Singh to take over as the prime minister. There was a stunned silence, followed by Manmohan Singh expressing gratitude but stating that he could not accept without a mandate. Natwar Singh intervened, asserting that Manmohan Singh had no right to decline since Sonia, as the one with the mandate, was transferring it to him. Sonia explained to Ahmed Patel that she did not want the new government to face intense opposition due to her foreign origins. Despite Patel's attempts to dissuade her, she remained firm in her decision. She also informed Janardan Dwivedi, her Hindi speechwriter, about her decision.

Later that afternoon, Fotedar and Natwar Singh who were present in the meeting arrived at Vishwanath Pratap Singh's residence. Natwar showed VP Singh a slip of paper, which he read and pondered for a moment. VP Singh expressed his sorrow, acknowledging that Sonia had made her decision. Fotedar and Natwar departed after a brief wait. Shortly thereafter, VP Singh told other ally's partner that Sonia Gandhi had chosen Manmohan Singh as the Prime Minister. VP Singh and Somnath Chatterjee stated that Sonia's decision was influenced by her children's concerns. When Sonia conveyed her decision to her allies, they were upset, with RJD's Lalu Prasad expressing disappointment at not being informed earlier. Marxist veteran Harkishan Singh Surjeet attempted to dissuade her.

Sonia Gandhi was later scheduled to meet President Kalam on 19<sup>th</sup> May. The allies partner of the UPA were upset with Sonia Gandhi's decision, and they suggested that she postpone her meeting with President and look into her decision until the following day. However, Sonia Gandhi remained resolute, as her maternal instincts prevailed over her political ambitions.

Next day, on May 19 at the pre-allotted time, 8.15pm, Sonia Gandhi came to Rashtrapati Bhavan along with Singh. Sonia Gandhi will not become the Prime Minister was known to only the allies partner and still unknown to President Kalam. During their meeting, Sonia Gandhi showed Kalam the letters of support from various parties. He welcomed this development and expressed readiness to hold the swearing-in ceremony at her preferred time. However, to his surprise, Sonia Gandhi informed him that she would like to nominate Dr. Manmohan Singh as the Prime Minister.



**Fig 11:** A file photo of the former President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, handing over the letter of appointment to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh as Congresspresident Sonia Gandhi looks on

This was definitely a surprise to me, said President Kalam and the Rashtrapati Bhavan secretariat had to revise the appointment letter accordingly, inviting Dr. Manmohan Singh to form the government at the earliest. Manmohan Singh had a reputation as the architect of economic reforms and his trusted position within the Congress party.

## 12. Conclusion

Incumbent Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee was touched by Sonia Gandhi's gesture – and saw it as a sign that “India's democracy was safe”. When Janardan Dwivedi, who wrote Sonia Gandhi's speech was told by Sonia Gandhi that “I will not become the Prime Minister”, at the same time she also told that Janardan Dwivedi countrymen should not know that I have rejected this post because of fear of my children. And finally Janardan Dwivedi wrote that speech in which Sonia Gandhi said that “I am hearing the voice of my inner soul, I was always certain that if ever I found myself in the position that I am in today, I would follow my own inner voice. Today, that voice tells me I must humbly decline this post”

Furthermore, the threat given by Sushma Swaraj or Subramanian Swamy letter did not play a role in Sonia Gandhi accepting or declining the post of Prime Minister. After the UPA coalition received the mandate to form the government, Sonia Gandhi staked her claim for the Prime Minister's position to President APJ Abdul Kalam. Many times in his books, autobiography, Kalam mentioned he received many letters questioning Sonia Gandhi's citizenship and her suitability for the Prime Minister's role. However, he clarified that there was no constitutional restriction preventing her appointment. In a dramatic turn of events, Manmohan Singh's name was proposed during the UPA Parliamentary Party meeting to become the Prime Minister. Now one thing which seems important, that hypothetically if it is believed that Congress party had emerged victorious in the 2014 or 2019 elections, Rahul Gandhi would not have become the Prime Minister. This assumption is based on Rahul Gandhi's consistent response when asked about his willingness to assume the role of Prime Minister if the Congress came into power. On multiple occasions, when questioned in public forums about his potential candidacy for the Prime Minister's position, Rahul Gandhi has consistently answered with a resounding “NO.”

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