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To
Mrs. Indira Gandhi,
1, Safdarjung Road,
NEW DELHI 110 001

An Open Letter to Mrs. Indira Gandhi - No.4.

From:

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Madam,

This is my fourth and the last open letter in the series I have written to you since you clamped emergency and postponed elections last year. Now, at a short notice, you have announced your decision to hold the elections after all. The narrow margin which such a sudden decision leaves for your political opponents is most unfair. You say that emergency is being relaxed and press censorship lifted. But what about the 59 amendments you had enacted which have institutionalised these twin evils? Or, will you say that these will remain dead letters of the law and will not be enforced? Madam, your unpredictability is tantalising!

Today is the Republic Day. Many in this country will be reaffirming their pledges of loyalty to the Constitution. But it will not be to that amended Constitution of yours. It will be to the one your father had a hand in creating. This Constitution of 1950 had endorsed the civil rights and liberties which the United Nations had accepted in its Universal Declaration of Human Rights which the Indian people value. But in 1975 you had to curtail these for some reason and perhaps you are yourself, like many others, not clear why you found it necessary to do so. Ordinary citizens who pledged to honour, protect and defend the Constitution kept their word. But you who assumed office on the solemn oath to do so have on the other hand, been the first to be disloyal to it.

How come, Madam, that your conscience is so easy about all this? Could we link it with the mad quest for personal power that seems to have blinded you to all proprieties which should govern the head of a State which pledged itself to democratic traditions this day just a quarter of a century ago? For, step by step these last two years, you have suppressed all civil liberties and assumed a form authoritarian rule with all political power amassed round your person. Having ceased to have any legal claim to continue as Prime Minister, once you postponed the elections in March 1975, you persisted in using the Lok Sabha with its Congress majority to frame illegal laws. The 44th Amendment (now 42nd) was enacted illegally. It cannot be accepted as a lawful act in the Governance of this country. Your announcement to hold the elections now is only a ruse to do away with the Lok Sabha altogether, as perhaps you consider it to be an inconvenient impediment in your march towards total dictatorship. Those who believed that you were fighting to make the Lok Sabha supreme, now have had their eyes opened to the fact that this institution is only only a handmaid of your ambitions. But to give a constitutional image to your actions, you have had to make the pretence of fresh elections, which you have often said you will win hands down!

Madam, as if to thwart the judgement which ruled corrupt practices on your part on your election case appeal, you have been indulging in more such practices since then on a scale enough to dumbfound one. Under the new laws and emergency, behind which you have fortified yourself, you seem to think that none can question you. Your actions to take so-called relief to the poor and the downtrodden, are merely immoral forms of purchasing their votes by trading on their gullibility and exploiting their ignorance. It is not your party funds that you are spending but the tax-payers money, with which to boost your image and that of your son and party. What you are offering to these poor people are illusory incentives, promises that cannot be fulfilled and populist slogans. These only mock at the plight of the poor even as they struggle under the present stresses and strains of the hard time they are subjected to under your regime.

Madam, why do you have to do all this? Why the delay then and why now this sudden decision to hold elections? Has Bhutto's decision to hold elections in Pakistan shamed you into doing this, late than never? Is it because you find that your own followers have begun to question your motives and your methods and have begun to desert you? Is it because you find your ground being cut under you by your upstart son who does not approve of your

collusion with the CPI ? Is it because you find it difficult to exercise the same discipline over your son and party men which you are able to prescribe and enforce over the people at large ? Is it because you have begun to realise that your image has become tarnished beyond repair both at home and abroad ? Is it because the state of political expediency and ad-hocism which has been the basis of your Government for 10 years has got out of hand even for you ? Is it right that for all your blunders which make situations worse confounded and due to which your popularity is waning, that you make scapegoats of those who are politically opposed to you and dub all that they say and do as anti-people ? Do you alone hold the monopoly of all that is pro-people, patriotic and nationalistic.

Madam, if you will only take a little time off to ponder on all these things dispassionately, you will perhaps see yourself as the people see you. People see you today as someone who has betrayed a trust, one whom they have indulged too much and for too long and one who they think ought to get out and get out quickly to make place for someone better than you to steer his country's affairs along democratic lines while preserving their self respect and their civil liberties, which is dear to them under all circumstances !

Madam, you chose to take pride in telling the people and the world at large that you take decisions on all important matters unmindful of the reactions of the people about them. Does not this expose you as a self-confessed dictator, considering the way that everyone of your decisions has been to amass more and more power to yourself ? Therefore, your professions of democracy sound hollow and your motives have become suspect. A person believing in the democratic process would feel impelled to respect and respond to the reactions of the people and of those of your political opponents as well. This is how people's leaders function in open societies. You profess to adopt the liberal modicum of dialogue and parleys with the whole world but you are averse to adopt the same method within the country, with your political opponents and people. Only a guilty conscience could prevent you from doing this !

Madam, such a guilty conscience originates from the initial blunder you committed on the 25th June 1975 when you chose to defy the Allahabad Court's verdict when you were prevented from contesting the elections for six years. It was too hard for you to bear the verdict. Instead of gracefully submitting to the verdict, you made it a Democles' sword hanging on your head. You became vindictive instead. You made a hash of the democratic processes imprisoned without trial people opposed to your policies, defiled and defrauded the constitution and chose to tread the lone and dangerous path of dictatorship. You thought you were above the advice offered you from seasoned leaders among your political opponents. You began to feel that there was no further need to rule by people's consent. So you had no qualms of conscience when you postponed elections twice over for no rhyme or reason.

Madam, after all that has happened, now at least after announcing the elections, may we hope that you will not commit the crowning blunder of your life ? Could one dare to advise you (and your upstart son) to please stay out of the contest of the Lok Sabha Elections and resist the temptation of wanting to win, you to become the Prime Minister again and your son a Cabinet Minister ? It is not for nothing that you sound warnings of revolts and anarchy as being ... round the corner. Having suppressed an innocent people beyond endurance for so long, you have become just a little nervous as to how they will react to a restoration of normalcy in political life ! It was open to you to let the law take its own course against political offenders. But you chose to suppress, penalise and hold to ransom the whole generality of people for no fault of theirs, by clamping blanket emergency. What for ? You have yet to explain it to the people who want to get their minds clear on this issue. And, in the forthcoming elections people are bound to make this one of the issues.

Madam, rest assured, the people's leaders, whether you approve of them or not, are going to talk and talk. They are going to have their say on all the matters that have affected their lives these last two years. You cannot curb them from expressing themselves now. They are going to say things that are going to hurt you, and hurt you badly. They are not going to succumb to adulation of you, your family and your son any more. They will talk the bitter truth that they have been experiencing and much of these will shock you too. You cannot, like King Canute order people to behave themselves. Your words will be heard but not acted upon. Since you symbolise the evil that is dictatorship, you will be the focus of attack by the demos in the elections. Do not call all criticism as character assassination. People can be gentlemanly if their rulers had shown the same qualities. So, Madam, all you can do is not to muzzle the people any longer.

Instead, it is better that you and your son beat a hasty retreat, while retreating is still good. As a votary of discipline, you might realise that disciplining the ego is also good for the soul. Perhaps such discipline could well apply to you also. Not/ Saffron series or rudraksha malas or momentary tears of remorse before the Shankaracharya of Kanchi or say any other would help you now to escape the nemesis that awaits every dictator.

Madam, there is the ancient story of King Parikshit. He fortified himself from a curse that he would meet his nemesis through the bite of a serpent, whose clan he had tried to exterminate. So he strengthened all his defences and fortified himself on a small island free from snakes. But all his calculations were foiled when a serpent assumed the form of a worm and hid inside a lemon which the King held in his hand to smell. The worm turned, became a serpent and King Parikshit met his nemesis this way.

Madam, whatever inferences you may draw from this story, there is one irrefutable truth you have lately uttered which your son in filial duty has thought fit to echo on platforms. It is this. All those who opposed to your policies and dictatorial ways have indeed adopted the one point programme, namely, to oust you from power. Yes, you are both right. People do want a change and they do want you to vacate your chair. What is so wrong about it, especially if the means they adopt are clean fair and non-violent? Their sanctions are derived from the lessons they have learnt from Mahatma Gandhi and his ideas and his philosophy. If the people and your political opponents put through this one point programme sincerely and honestly, the political processes will be well along the democratic traditions left by Mahatma Gandhi. Therefore it is Madam, that one is inclined to believe in J.P. when he declares that the present election's central issue boils down to a choice between dictatorship and democracy. The nation is alert and awake. People wait and watch for the triumph of democracy. Will you opt to join the people's camp or will you continue to be anti-people? The time for making a decision entirely on your own has come. Make it here and now is the advice of your friend and well-wisher.

Krishnabai Nimbkar.