

## Getting off the ropes:

The Congress has been decimated but there is still hope for revival (Editorial page, “No easy solutions for the Congress”, May 25). The base of the grand old party has been chipped away by the BJP and regional parties over a period of time and the party has made absolutely no effort to rebuild the organisational base. The situation has become so dismal that even when it formulated an attractive welfare scheme, the party failed to communicate its significance to voters. Going forward, it needs to rebuild the party from the village level. State and district level leaders who are in touch with the people should be encouraged rather than parachuting ‘Made in Delhi’ leaders. The party president should tour the country extensively in the next five years and understand the problems of the common people. Further, the party should eschew its soft Hindutva strategy to counter the BJP and re-embrace secularism, which has been its primary strength right from its origin. It may be a bit too much to expect the Congress to relinquish its dynastic leadership (Page 1, “CWC rejects Rahul’s offer to quit, asks him to overhaul party”, May 26). The leadership should get rid of its coterie-guided functioning and develop a regional-local leadership.

Kosaraju Chandramouli,

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The time has come for the Congress party to regain its political legacy. The party lacks leadership. In the current political scenario, there is no leader in the Congress who can match Mr. Modi in terms of oration and presence. Moreover, the Congress’s secularism has taken a beating. Unless there are new ideas and ideals, the Congress, or for that matter any other Opposition party in India, cannot even dream of dislodging the BJP.

C. Sambasivam

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It is evident from some of the letters that have been published ever since the BJP’s jaw-dropping victory that there is still a lot of latent support for the Congress, at least among many of us old-time readers of this daily (I am 88) who grew up with the Congress. I wonder whether Rahul Gandhi is even aware of his party’s great legacy. The Congress does not belong to the Nehru-Gandhi family alone. It belongs to the rest of India too as it represents values that are still dear to us in this great country.

If the Congress is to rebuild itself, it needs to stay away from ‘power-point presentations’. There must be mass contact programmes in parliamentary constituencies. This is the strategy that the BJP has fine-tuned to its advantage. It also needs to have a strategy for the short, medium and long term. Finally, I feel Amethi was lost after Mr. Gandhi announced his decision to contest from Wayanad. Whatever the spin being given to the decision, the perception was that he was “running away”. Priyanka Gandhi Vadra should have also contested against the Prime Minister. Even if she had lost, it would have still sent a powerful message to the party rank and file that she is willing to pick up any gauntlet. Life is about fighting the odds, which the BJP’s Smriti Irani has proven. The Congress must remember that in 2024, 10 crore new voters will be added. Can it connect with them in terms of its great legacy?

C.H. Subramanian,

Pune

<u>Words</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Chip		break, crack, crumble
Dismal		Unhappy, gloomy, morose, melancholy, dejected
Eschew		abstain from, give up, abandon, reject
Embrace		hug, hold, cuddle, clasp, clutch
Relinquish		renounce, give up, hand over, abjure
Over haul		repair, renovate, do up
Get rid of		separate, alienate
Coterie		crowd, band, community
Perception		Recognition, awareness, consciousness
Rank and file		Ordinary, employees, insider
Gauntlet		challenge, odds
Odds		challenges, gauntlets
Relevant		pertinent, applicable, apposite, suitable
Probability		likelihood, percept, expectation
Macabre		gruesome, hateful, grim, gory, hideous
Profound		heartfelt, in tense, keen, extreme

## Facing the debacle:

### **Congress stocktaking must be deeper than an off-the-cuff take on Rahul Gandhi:**

In light of the Congress's dismal defeat in the 17th general election, Congress president Rahul Gandhi's offer to resign from his party post at the Congress Working Committee on Saturday was on expected lines. What came as a surprise is the indication that he was seemingly unmoved by the CWC resolution that urged him to continue as president and restructure the party. Either way, whether Mr. Gandhi finally insists on quitting or allows himself to be persuaded otherwise, the party cannot look away from a dilemma that has shadowed it for long: the double-edged sword of the dynasty. Devoid of a coherent ideology or organisational structure, especially over the past two decades, the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty has remained the party's cementing glue. The family is projected as the party's emotional currency with the public and the Gandhi surname is invoked to hark back to the formative years of modern India. However, now in 2019, facing its toughest crisis, the Congress must address the question unflinchingly, and in depth, if it is to refresh itself as a political force. The decline of the Congress is symptomatic of the fading appeal of the old ways of conducting politics and of the disenchantment with opaque and unaccountable power-wielding by political dynasties. Also, as with the Left and Mandal parties, the Congress has collectively failed to upgrade its message, modes of outreach and organizational structures. But the Congress's success in nimbly facing up to the rout is vital if India is to have a coherent political opposition that keeps the government of the day democratically accountable.

Of course, Congress leaders argue that the party would disintegrate if Mr. Gandhi were to quit. Mr. Gandhi, who had once likened power to poison, must take full responsibility for his party's debacle. However, figuring out the form that this account-taking must assume is what makes it a difficult

moment for him and the Congress. Whether Mr. Gandhi sticks to his resolve to quit or not, the party will have to go through a process of revitalization that deals with the hollowing out of its intra-party democracy. Any organizational reform that does not decentralize decision-making and fix accountability at all levels is bound to fail. It must involve a frank assessment of the Congress's risk of failing to cohere if Mr. Gandhi were to abruptly leave his post as party president. True, the Congress may well be able to sustain itself without a dynasty. But unless the new leadership emerges through a truly democratic exercise, and is truly independent of the dynasty, any half-hearted restructuring will only lead to the enfeeblement of the party. A dynasty-free Congress will surely invigorate the Indian polity, but a Congress-free polity could well prove dangerous for Indian democracy.

<u>Words</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Off the cuff		Speak off, impromptu, extempore, ad-lib, speak
Seemingly		apparently, clearly, outwardly
Insist on		Stand firm, be determined
Resolution		Intention, determination, tenacity
Urge		encourage, exhort, prod, appeal (to)
Persuade		Prevail on, induce, coax, convince, tempt
Devoid		deprived, destitute, bankrupt, denuded
Coherent		clear, explicit, unequivocal, lucid, transport
Glue		gum, adhesive, fixative
Invoke		cite, refer to, allude, touch upon, point to
Hark		listen, pay attention, attend to
Unflinching		determined, dogged, tenacious, bent on/upon
Symptomatic		characteristic, indicative, typical
Disenchantment		disappointment, disillusionment, dissatisfaction
Opaque		unclear, equivocal, ambiguous, enigmatic, cryptic, murky, muddy
Nimble		active, agile, sprightly, lively
Accountable		Responsible, liable, answerable
Dis-integrate		Break up, break apart, fall apart
Liken		compare, equate, bracket together
Assume		presume, suppose, take per granted
Revitalize		re-invigorate, boost, revivify, re-energise
Hollow out		dig, cut. Ex carate
Abruptly		Suddenly, summarily, unexpectedly
Enfeeblement		weaken, debilitate, indispose, lay low

## **Disclosing dissent:**

### **People are entitled to know whether or not the poll panel's key decisions are unanimous**

The rejection of the demand of one of the Election Commissioners that dissenting opinions be recorded in the orders passed by the three-member Election Commission on complaints of violations of the Model Code of Conduct may be technically and legally right. However, there was indeed a strong case for acceding to the demand of Ashok Lavasa at least in regard to complaints against high functionaries such as Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The EC has been rightly widely criticised for giving a series of 'clean chits' to the PM, despite some questionable remarks that appeared to solicit votes in the name of

the armed forces. Added to the widespread unease was the unexplained delay of several weeks in disposing of complaints against Mr. Modi. It is in this context that Mr. Lavasa's dissenting opinion may have been relevant enough to merit inclusion in the EC's orders. After all, the public is aware of the allegedly offending actions and remarks, and is entitled to be informed if the decision was not unanimous. In this hotly contested election, one in which the level of discourse was abysmally low, the onus on the poll panel to maintain a level-playing field and enforce the election code was quite high. Making public a dissent in the final order would have deepened the popular understanding of the issues in play.

The law requires the multi-member EC to transact business unanimously as far as possible — and where there is a difference of opinion, by majority. Therefore, there is nothing wrong if decisions are made by a 2:1 ratio. The apparent justification for excluding any dissent from the final order, but merely recording it in the file, is that the practice of including dissent is limited to quasi-judicial matters such as allotment of symbols. Should recording of a dissenting opinion be based on such a distinction? A more appropriate distinction would be between decisions that require reasoning — absolving the Prime Minister of an election code violation surely ought to be one — and administrative matters that need to be resolved with dispatch. If members have specific reasons for deciding for or against a particular course of action, there would surely be no harm in spelling out their respective positions. It would be unfortunate indeed if Mr. Lavasa stays away from meetings concerning violations of the Model Code of Conduct. However, as he has taken up the issue through as many as three letters, it is reasonable to infer that there is some basis for his grievance. At a time when the institution's reputation is being undermined by sustained criticism, the EC should not shy away from making public any difference of opinion within. It would be unfortunate if the majority in the EC were to be afraid of any public reaction that may result from disclosure of a split opinion.

<b><u>Words</u></b>	<b><u>Kind</u></b>	<b><u>Meaning</u></b>
Dissent		Differ, disagree, demur, beat odds
Accede to		Agree to, consent to, assent to, acquiescing, comply with
Criticize		censure, denounce, condemn, lambaste, pillory.
Solicit		ask for, requires, seek, apply for, put infer.
Allegedly		Reportedly, supposedly, purportedly, ostensibly.
Unanimous		United, in agreement, concordant, in harmony.
Discourse		Discussion, conversation, parley, powwow
Abysmal		Very bad, dreadful, awful, terrible, atrocious
Apparent		Evident, clear, manifest, discernible, perceptible.
Absolve		Exonerate, discharge, acquit, vindicate
Distinction		Difference, contrast, dissimilarity, variance.
Dispatch		send (off), post mail, forward, transmit
Resolve		Settle, sort out, solve
Spell out		explain, make clear, elucidate
Infer		deduce, conclude, conjecture.
Grievance		Injustice, wrong, in fairness/complaint, criticism
Shy away		demur, be reluctant, dissent.