● BOOK NOTES · ONE PAGE · BELONGING: A JOURNEY OF LOVE · SONIA GANDHI · KNOPF 2026 · 636 PAGES

A girl from a small Italian town, a Cambridge café, *and sixty years of India.*

Sonia Gandhi's memoir is personal first and political second. It starts with a nineteen-year-old who hated English food and noticed a quiet young man at the next table. It ends in a Delhi garden, eight decades later, with two terriers at her feet and two children in Parliament. In between: three family deaths at the hands of violence or fate, a party she never planned to lead, and a top job she gave away.

WHAT INDIRA GANDHI TOLD HER AT THEIR FIRST MEETING

"Don't be afraid, Sonia. I'm human. I too was once young and in love. I understand you perfectly."

London, 1965. Said in French.

19 — her age when she met Rajiv in Cambridge, 1965

1968 — flew to Delhi in January, married 25 February

1984 — Indira Gandhi shot dead on 31 October

1991 — Rajiv killed at Sriperumbudur on 21 May

1998 — elected Congress president on 14 March

2004 — won the election, then declined to be PM

SONIA GANDHI · MEMOIR

Belonging

A Journey of Love

7 parts · Prologue to Epilogue · 1946 to 2024

THE BOOK IN SEVEN PARTS, BY SHARE OF PAGES

Love · 65–68	Finding my way	Triumph & defeat	Rajiv as PM	Aftermath	Leading Congress	20 yrs on

- **Love and Courtship** (1946 to 1968). Orbassano childhood, a strict father, Cambridge, Rajiv, a long wait.
- **Finding My Way** (1968 to 1970). Delhi, the Bachchans, a garden wedding, a lost first baby, Rahul.
- **Triumphs and Defeats** (1970 to 1984). Bangladesh, Priyanka, the Emergency, 1977 loss, Sanjay, Indira's murder.
- **Rajiv as Prime Minister** (1985 to 1989). 405 seats, drought, computers, Nassau, Bofors, opposition.
- **Dénouement and Aftermath** (1990 to 1998). Security pulled, Sriperumbudur, seven years of quiet.
- **Leading the Congress Party** (1998 to 2012). Amethi, the 272 mistake, 2004, the NAC laws.
- **Twenty Years On** (2004 to 2024). UPA record, the Modi years, cancer, her mother, Bharat Jodo.
- **Epilogue** (2024). The garden, Rajiv's desk drawers, no regrets about India, some about compromise.

01 · LOVE

She did not know who he was.

At the Varsity restaurant she guessed he might be Neapolitan or Spanish. Only later did she learn Rajiv was Nehru's grandson. They courted on his odd-job money in a battered VW Beetle.

→ **The book is a love story first. Politics is the backdrop she chose, in her words.**

02 · FAMILY

A father who said wait.

Stefano Maino, a builder and war veteran, banned her return to Cambridge. When Rajiv drove to Orbassano in 1966, he warmed to him but set a rule: wait until she turned 21 and see India first.

→ **He gave her a return ticket. She never used it.**

03 · ADAPTING

Belonging is learned slowly.

Spicy food, staring crowds, Hindi lessons, a sari spun from Nehru's jail cotton. In the early 1980s she gave up her Italian passport, around the time Amethi villagers accepted her in a way she had longed for.

→ **Small daily choices about food, clothes and silence, made for years, is how she says it happened.**

04 · LOSS

Three deaths reshape the family.

Sanjay's plane crash in June 1980. Indira shot by her own guards in October 1984. Rajiv killed by a suicide bomber in May 1991, after his special protection was withdrawn.

→ **She writes the hospital scene of 1984 in the present tense. It is the hardest chapter to read.**

05 · DUTY

She resisted politics for 7 years.

She fought Rajiv entering politics. After 1991 she stayed out, edited his books and ran the foundation. She stepped in only in 1998, as Congress split and the BJP grew.

→ **Her stated reason: fear for the India Rajiv believed in, not ambition.**

06 · HONESTY

She names her own mistakes.

In April 1999 she told the President she had 272 seats. The promised support never came. She calls it hasty. In the epilogue she says some political compromises still weigh on her.

→ **Not a score-settling book on her own side. Sharper on the Modi years.**

Three moments that turned the story

31 Oct 1984 — Indira is killed. That evening Rajiv is sworn in as PM. Sonia begs him not to. He answers that they will kill him anyway.

21 May 1991 — Rajiv asks her to join him on the campaign that afternoon. She is too tired. He dies that night at 46.

May 2004 — Congress wins. She takes a night with her children, then tells Central Hall her inner voice says decline. She names Manmohan Singh.

The rest of the book explains how a shy outsider ended up holding these choices, and why each one felt like duty rather than power.

If you only read one part

For the love story	Part One. Cambridge 1965 to the Delhi flight in 1968.
For history up close	Part Three. Bangladesh 1971, the Emergency, the 1977 fall, 1984.
For Rajiv the leader	Part Four. Nassau, China, the drought war rooms, Bofors.
For grief	Part Five. Sriperumbudur and the seven quiet years after.
For 2004	Part Six. The night before the inner-voice speech.

Want the whole book in 15 minutes?

Part-by-part summary with dates, key moments and takeaways. Free A4 PDF of this page, one click.

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