

Article 3

Shenanigans of Gandhi

“Everyone sees what you appear to be, few experience what you really are.”

— Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*

Gandhi ran the Congress with an iron hand masked in a velvet glove. There was a clear policy in the Congress: follow the dictates of the Mahatma, or be kicked out. As Gandhi put it, “Anyone who does not believe in the fundamental policy of Congress [read Gandhi] should leave and work outside it.” And if the person did not leave willingly, he was “persuaded” to do so by underhanded scheming against him!

I shall give five illustrations of Gandhi’s shenanigans, his scheming, in the case of K. F. Nariman, Dr. N. B. Khare, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Dr. R. Lohia, and Bhulabhai Desai.

K. F. Nariman Case:

I quote from Dhananjay Keer’s *Mahatma Gandhi: Political Saint and Unarmed Prophet*, pages 633-34. The time is mid 1937:

“At this juncture Gandhi was involved in a long, bitter public controversy which raged for over six months in the Bombay presidency. At the instance of Sardar Patel the Congress members of the Legislative Assembly of the Bombay Province, deprived K. F. Nariman of his opportunity to be the leader of the Assembly Party. Nariman was a selfless, fearless, brilliant, patriotic leader and was looked upon as the natural leader of legislative Party. Nariman had riled the Gandhian Right wing leaders by his book *Whither Congress*.¹ Sardar Patel preferred a docile Maharashtrian solicitor B. G. Kher, to a strong leader, Nariman . . . Gandhi stood by Patel. . . .

For months Gandhi had been assuring Sardar Patel that Nariman would come to harm . . . and yet Gandhi wrote to Nariman his silence had been in the interests of Nariman! Gandhi agreed to be the sole arbitrator in the dispute. Nariman helplessly agreed.

Gandhi in his foregoing letter said that if on the examination by Bahadurji or Madgaonkar, his findings were against Nariman, he should have an opportunity of

¹ Link to the book, *Whither Congress*: <http://www.anurupacinar.com/pdf/Whither%20Congress.pdf>

tendering an apology and making a full and frank confession of his weakness and the wrong done to the public, the Sardar and other colleagues. But if he found Nariman unjustly dealt with by the Sardar, Gandhi observed, he would try to undo the mischief. . . .

Partial as he was to the Sardar, Gandhi evidently assumed that Sardar was innocent and Nariman guilty: for he mentioned no punishment to the Sardar if he was found guilty.

On September 26 he wrote to Patel that he should try to forget the Nariman affair. 'You have transferred.' he replied reassuringly, 'your worries to me and I have passed them to Bahadurji.' . . . Gandhi was confident of what his judgment would be.

In the second week of October, Bahadurji decided against Nariman on both the counts, his action in the election of 1934 and his action in the present dispute. Gandhi endorsed the decision and sent it to Bahadurji who read it in his office to Nariman in the presence of Mahadev Desai.

All kinds of pressures were brought on Nariman. To increase the tempo of it, a telegram had been sent to Nariman on the previous day conveying the news that Gandhi's health was affected and would not be completely restored till this episode had been satisfactorily ended.

Overpowered by the anxiety for the Mahatma's health, Nariman lost his grit and balance. He signed an apology which had probably been drafted by Gandhi and signed his political death warrant.

Soon after, Nariman recanted. But it was too late.

Gandhi, who had agreed that the enquiry would be private and even the Working Committee need not know about it, sent all the records to the Working Committee; and without giving Nariman a chance to reply, they all got together to guillotine Nariman politically.

He was declared unworthy of holding any position of trust and responsibility in the Congress organization.

The rest of his life Nariman spent reading *What Next* and saying, 'Had I served my Lord as faithfully as I served Congress, He would not have deserted me.'"

Here you have the Mahatma of the Indians, the man to whom "Truth is God" and who would "sacrifice freedom for truth," who publicly denounced the revolutionaries for their "secret" agendas, scheming without batting an eyelid!

Quite a few of Gandhi's letters tracing this sorry tale are available here:

<http://www.gandhiserve.org/cwmg/VOL072.PDF>

Dr. N. B. Khare Case:

In 1938, Dr. Khare was the Premier of the Congress Ministry in the Central Provinces of India. He was a strong leader and had definite goals and acted upon them. He did not blindly follow the dictates of the Mahatma. And for this he paid a price.

Dhananjay Keer tells us:²

“A crisis had been brewing since May 1938 in the CP [Central Province]. Three Congress Ministers, Mishra, Shukla and Mehta submitted their resignations to Dr. N. B. Khare, leader and Prime Minister, as he had brought charges of nepotism and bribery against them. But the charges were found to be only errors of judgment, and Gandhi said in *Harijan* of June 4 that they were made recklessly and spitefully. There was a compromise and the crisis was averted.

As Dr Khare found it impossible to pull on with those three Ministers, he went to Gandhi at Segaoon on June 29 and sought his advice in the matter as he had done on two previous occasions. But Sardar Patel had met Gandhi on June 21 and briefed him against Dr. Khare. So this time Gandhi reprimanded Dr. Khare for troubling him now and then and added that he was not even a four-anna member of the Congress. Dr. Khare, while taking leave of the Mahatma, said that he would act according to the message of his own inner voice.

This was indeed an affront to Gandhi.

[The only “inner voice” allowed to exist in the realm of Congress was that of the Mahatma.]

Dr. Khare then demanded resignations from his rebel colleagues as he wanted to submit resignations of all the Ministers to the Working Committee. But the three members at the instance of Dr. Rajendra Prasad had stubbornly refused to do so. Dr. Khare, therefore, in a desperate mood, instead of referring the matter to the Parliamentary Sub-Committee, resigned on July 20 with two of his colleagues. . . .

According to parliamentary conventions, as soon as the Premier resigns the other Ministers automatically cease to be Ministers. Naturally, under article 51 of the 1935 Act the Governor had to dismiss the three rebel Ministers who refused to resign. In doing so the Governor observed parliamentary conventions and used no special right. . . .

² *Mahatma Gandhi, Political Saint and unarmed Prophet*, Dhananjay Keer. Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1973 pages; 649-52.

[Dr. Khare had neatly out-manuevered the ministers and Gandhi! Upon the Governors invitation, on July 21 Dr. Khare formed a new ministry which included an “untouchable” Minister.³ No way was Gandhi going to put up with this “insubordination.”]

On July 22 Dr. Khare was called by the Congress bosses to Wardha [in Gandhi’s ashram] to explain his position. There he was treated as a criminal and a conspirator, and his colleagues were reprimanded. The Parliamentary Subcommittee asked him to submit his resignation and also the resignation of his colleagues. In the resignation he was made to admit: ‘I have come to realize, in submitting my resignation and forming a new cabinet I acted hastily and committed an error of judgment.’ He was marched to the phone in a building near-by and Subhas Bose made him read out the text of his resignation to the Secretary of the Governor. . . .”

[Then the Congress High Command wanted Dr. Khare to resign his leadership of the Assembly. He agreed provided his right to seek re-election was not contested. This did not go down well with the Congress High Command. There were many pressures applied to Dr. Khare to make him yield, but he did not buckle under.]

“As he did not yield, he was taken to Segaoon in a car to Gandhi who had left Wardha that evening before Khare reached that place.

Maulana Azad, Sardar Patel, Subhas Bose and Rajendra Prasad put pressure on Dr. Khare in the presence of Gandhi who reprimanded Dr. Khare for his betrayal of the Congress and the country by entering into a conspiracy with the Governor. He said that Dr. Khare was untrustworthy and unreliable and guilty of gross indiscipline.

Dr. Khare had evoked the Mahatma’s anger by issuing licenses for Rifle classes, an unforgivable sin from the viewpoint of the Mahatma. And Patel had previously a tussle with Khare over the selection candidate at the All-India Parliamentary Board in Faizpur. They whispered against him and dictated the content of his resignation.

Dr. Khare admitted in the resignation that he had acted hastily, but Gandhi added to the draft nearly a page and a half containing humiliating and damaging admissions. As a result Dr. Khare refused to sign his death warrant. . . .

³ “Towards the end of August 1938 some Harijans did *dharna* at Gandhi’s Ashram at Segaoon to compel him to instruct the CP. Ministry to take up a Harijan Minister. Gandhi replied that it was not in his power. It was Dr. Khare’s charge that Gandhi disapproved of the appointment of a Harijan Minister, as in the Mahatma’s opinion it raised absurd ambitions in the minds of Harijans! Gandhi had also opposed the appointment of any Harijan on the Harijan Sevak Sangh.” *Ibid*, page 652.

He was brought back from Segaoon to Wardha and asked to inform the Congress leaders of his decision by 3 p.m. the next day. . . .

On July 26 Dr. Khare conveyed to the Congress leaders his firm refusal to sign the draft prepared by them. So the Congress Working Committee declared: 'By all these acts, Dr. Khare has proved himself unworthy of holding positions of responsibility in the Congress organization. He should be so considered till by his services as a Congressman he has shown himself well-balanced and capable of observing discipline and discharging the duties that may be undertaken by him.' . . .

In the statement Gandhi issued on July 30, 1938, he said that he simply made corrections and additions to the statement which Dr. Khare had prepared. The suggestion that Dr. Khare was made to sign a prepared draft, Gandhi added, was baseless! When Dr. Khare published the photo-block of the draft, the people were dumbfounded!

A bitter attack was made in the press on Patel and Gandhi, characterizing their actions as fascist. Gandhi replied that his critics 'forget that fascism is the naked sword. Under it Dr. Khare should 'lose his head.' . . .

Dr. Khare was bitter and sometimes unbalanced, but he was a man of truth and of an unimpeachable character."

And so ends another saga of Gandhi's scheming.

Subhas Bose who played his part in this sordid business was himself shortly maneuvered out of his Presidentship (and even the Congress) by Gandhi. Nor was Sardar Patel left untouched. In 1947, Gandhi usurped him from the seat of Prime Ministership and installed his favorite, Jawaharlal Nehru.

The Ousting of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose:

Gandhi's scheming had no limits. He was the virtual dictator of the Congress and brooked no opposition. This is an interesting and illuminating account of his machinations to prevail despite an apparent "defeat."

Subhas Chandra Bose, the President of Congress in 1938, had displeased the Mahatma on several counts by showing a tendency of strong leadership and taking decisive stands on several issues against the Mahatma's wishes. He had a large following in the Congress. There was a real potential danger of the power slipping from the hands of the Mahatma into the hands of the dynamic Bose.

Keer writes in *Mahatma Gandhi, Political Saint and Unarmed Prophet* (pages 658-661):

“The National Committee had been set up by Bose to draw up a comprehensive plan of industrialization and of national development. This meant a threat to Gandhi’s ideology and his ideas about village uplift. He discussed the question of the presidency with Sardar Patel . . . ‘I feel it would be better if we consider Pattabhi Sitaramayya.’ Gandhi and Patel always took the decision and the Gandhi group said ditto to it. . . .

Subhas Bose had already decided to contest the election a second time, and the Gandhi group knew it. Bose wanted to give an ultimatum to the British Government if he succeeded. . . . But on January 19, 1939, Gandhi wired from Bardoli requesting him to withdraw in favor of Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya. Bose refused The next day, seven Gandhi leaders . . . issued at the instance of Gandhi, a joint statement from Bardoli which declared that the Congress President’s position was analogous only to that of a chairman and the policies and programmes were determined by the Working Committee. . . .

Subhas Bose replied to the joint statement fearlessly and spiritedly but without counting the cost. . . . He then leveled charges against his Gandhian colleagues that ‘it is widely believed that there is a prospect of compromise on the federal scheme between the Right wing of the Congress and the British Government, during the coming year. Consequently the Right wing do not want a Leftist president who may be a thorn in the way of compromise.’ . . .

Subhas Bose would have done well to stop at this affront; but he added fuel to the flames. He added that it was also generally believed the prospective list of ministers for the Federal Cabinet had been already drawn up. This was a most damaging statement against the Gandhists . . .

The Gandhian wing through which Gandhi controlled the Congress organization began canvassing to secure votes for Dr. Pattabhi . . .”

Even so the Leftists and the progressive-minded voters enthusiastically voted for Bose. This was a shocking reversal for Gandhi and his power in the Congress.

“On January 29, he [Subhas Bose] triumphed over Pattabhi, inflicting a memorable defeat on Gandhi whose refrain was that many despaired of defeating him. The old guard, who were aided by Nehru, were shocked.”

Gandhi’s reaction to this defeat:

“He asked his followers to quit the Congress because he was defeated. This was how his mind, method and democracy worked! ‘Those, therefore, who feel

uncomfortable in being in the Congress, may come out, not in spirit of ill-will, but with the deliberate purpose of rendering more effective service.’ . . .

Gandhi not only asked his men to come out of the Congress but also took a drastic step to corner Bose so that there would be a major crisis. He wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru on February 3, 1939: ‘After the election and the manner in which it was fought, I feel I shall serve my country by absenting myself from the Congress at the forthcoming session. Moreover my health is none too good. . . .’”

[Gandhi’s health was as effective a blackmailing tool as were his fasts. We have seen how he used it in Nariman’s case already. Bose realized that he was now up against the wall. He had a very good idea of the Mahatma’s capacity for intrigue.]

“Bose realized in his heart of hearts that he had caught a tartar in his victory. . . .

Bose tried to patch up the differences with Gandhi at Wardha on February 15, but it worsened the situation. . . . Bose could not attend the meeting of the Working Committee on February 22 which was called to discuss the agenda for the Tripuri Congress. It was unfortunate that Bose was taken ill on his return journey to Calcutta from Wardha. He later wrote in an article in *Modern Review*, ‘My strange illness,’⁴ which added to the suspicion about the mystery of his illness.

He requested the members of the Working Committee to postpone the meeting, which they construed as lack of confidence in the Working Committee. So twelve of them, on the advice of Gandhi, resigned . . . Only Subhas Bose with his brother Sarat Chandra Bose remained as members of the Working Committee.

So the battle was joined to depose Bose.”

- The field was now set for the downfall of Subhas Bose.

Subhas Bose was put in a very precarious position now that the Working Committee had shown their true colors. The Tripuri Congress session was coming up. Though seriously ill, Bose would *have* to attend or be a pushover for the Gandhian Congress members so determined to oust him.

At this time, Gandhi began a two-pronged fast on March 3, 1939, just days before the Tripuri Congress session. One goal of the fast was to compel the Thakore of Rajkot to buckle under and redeem his pledge made to the people, and the other was to divert the attention from the Congress session and keep it riveted on his health.

He had used his “poor” health and fasts countless times before to get his way.

⁴ There was a strong and recurring whisper that Bose had been deliberately made ill in Wardha, to orchestrate the coup that followed.

Keer continues (page 661-663):

“The Tripuri Congress was held from March 10 to 12, 1939, under the presidency of Subhas Bose who was seriously ill. . . . On the eve of the session, Gandhi had sent a message asking Subhas not to defy the medical advice and desiring him to regulate the proceedings from Calcutta!

By his fast unto death, Gandhi had riveted the Congress workers’ attention on him, created consternation among his opponents and anguish in his sympathizers and followers.

In his presidential address, Bose desired the Congress to give an ultimatum to the British Government. Although seriously ill, Bose tried in vain to control the Congress, but at the eleventh hour the socialists, Royist and other leftists did not support him. A large number of All-India Congress Committee members said that if they openly voted against the wishes of Ministers [most of whom were Gandhist] they would get into trouble. So they wanted a secret ballot. The suggestion was turned down. The result was that the Congress expressed its confidence in the members of the Working Committee who had resigned.

[All the Congress members knew very well the fate of one who opposed the will of the Mahatma. And so no one wanted to reveal their identity while voting.]

It [Congress] stifled Subhas Bose and resolved, overruling its constitution, that Subhas Bose, the President, must form his Working Committee in accordance with the wishes of the Mahatma. . . . Subhas Bose returned to Calcutta with body and hopes shattered.

Bose thereafter wrote to Gandhi and tried to win his support in forming the Working Committee [as required by the Congress resolution], but Gandhi did not respond to his appeals. Nehru tried half-heartedly to bring about a compromise between Gandhi and Bose. He wrote to Gandhi: ‘You should accept Subhas as President. To try pushing him out seems to me to be an exceedingly wrong step.’

Yet the Mahatma was ruthless. It was Gandhi’s dictum that however you repair it, a rift is a rift. Another of his dictums was that to forgive is not to forget . . .

Bose had to resign. He was the first Congress President to do so.”

And the Mahatma reigned supreme!

Next we shall see how Gandhi overturned the decisions of the Working Committee of the Congress that did not suit him.

Dr. Rammanohar Lohia Case:

In 1939 Gandhi was not a member of the Congress. As we shall see in the passage from Keer's biography given below, that did not prevent him from drawing resolutions for the A.I.C.C. and throwing tantrums if they were not passed as is!

“Dr. Rammanohar Lohia had a tussle with the Mahatma on the South Africa resolution at the All-India Congress Committee in Bombay in June 1939. Dr. Lohia suggested two amendments to Gandhi's draft resolution. One described Indians in South Africa not as “British Indians” but as “Indians” and the other recommended that Indians had better make a common front with the oppressed communities like the Negroes, the Zulus, and the Arabs and even the poor whites.

This enraged Gandhi and he said he would have the All-India Congress Committee pass his resolution without amendments or not at all. Nehru who had supported Dr. Lohia's amendments faltered at this stage. He persuaded Dr. Lohia to respect the opinion of Gandhi and withdraw his amendments which had been duly passed! . . .

Gandhi vetoed a resolution of the Congress which it had passed four hours earlier! When it suited his views Gandhi upheld democratic ideals and when the democratic vote of the Congress went against him he flew into a fury!”⁵

Gandhi's issues in South Africa were all about getting the Indians there recognized as citizens of the British Empire. Apparently, so many years later in 1939, that remained unchanged.

Bhulabhai Desai Case:

This story not only exposes the back-stabbing that Gandhi apparently routinely indulged in to keep his power, but it also exposes the stab in the heart he gave to Mother India. The saga is recounted in Dhananjay Keer's *Mahatma Gandhi, Political Saint and Unarmed Prophet*, (pages 731-33.)

“Gandhi's observance of a prolonged silence was partly due to his physical weakness and partly to his secret involvement in a serious plan. . . .

Gandhi made him [Dr. Syed Mahmud in October 1944] write a letter to Bhulabhai Desai requesting him to see Liaquat Ali, the leader of the Muslim League in the Central Assembly, and discuss with him the formation of a composite Government consisting of the Congress and the Muslim League. After waiting for

⁵ *Mahatma Gandhi, Political Saint and Unarmed Prophet*, Dhananjay Keer. Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1973; page 667.

a fortnight or so, Gandhi himself wrote a letter in Gujarati to Bhulabhai urging him to expedite the matter.

Bhulabhai met Liaquat Ali in Delhi and prepared a draft which was later known as the Bhulabhai-Liaquat Ali Pact. Liaquat Ali was to get Jinnah's approval and Bhulabhai Gandhi's. Bhulabhai met Gandhi with the draft and Gandhi made some changes in it, approved the draft secretly and asked Bhulabhai to meet Lord Wavell, the Viceroy. Bhulabhai met Wavell and handed over the draft to him for consideration and action.⁶

This secret Pact surpassed the Rajaji formula in the harm it did to the national majority. It agreed to a percentage of fifty-fifty in all representations for the Hindus and the Muslims.”

[It was not just an agreement of fifty-fifty Hindu-Muslim representation (which in itself was a colossal betrayal of the Hindu majority, going as it was—in leaps and bounds—ahead of weighted electorates.)

- It was an agreement of fifty-fifty representation by the Congress and the League.
- There would be no general elections either at the Centre or in the provinces.
- Democracy was given the go-by.

That wiped out the chance of either the Hindu Mahasabha (for Hindu seats) or any other Muslim party (for Muslim seats) representing the Indians and forming a Government in free India.]

“The demand for parity in the alliance of the Congress with the Muslim League in the Central Assembly had ripened to a reality. . . .

Meanwhile, news of the secret Pact leaked out and the members of the Working Committee, who were interned at Ahmednagar, were indignant at it. They expressed their anger and displeasure in a resolution about the pact.

Dr. P. C. Ghosh, one of the members of the Working Committee, met Gandhi at Sevagram after his release from Ahmednagar and gave him a copy of the resolution of the Working Committee. Gandhi took the cue and sent a female messenger to Delhi to contact Bhulabhai Desai. She told him that Gandhi would not bless a Government formed by Bhulabhai and Liaquat because he did not like the agreement. In a fit of anger Bhulabhai shouted: ‘Let Bapu go to hell. I will stand by what I have done!’ . . .

⁶ “There can hardly be any doubt that Desai had in fact reached an understanding with Liaquat Ali Khan on the formation of a national government at the centre . . . Gandhiji himself admitted later that the Desai-Liaquat pact had received his blessing.” *Transfer of Power*, V. P. Menon, page 178.

Azad, Patel and Nehru [after their release from jail on June 15] called Bhulabhai Desai and censured him for having mooted the Bhulabhai Desai-Liaquat Ali Pact. According to them it amounted to treachery.”

[It was not the parity they objected to, per se, for they agreed to parity only a short time later in the Simla Conference proposals. It was the fact that Bhulabhai had approached the Viceroy going over the heads, while they were in jail, and intended to be in charge of the Indian government that incensed them.]

“Bhulabhai told them that they were blaming him unnecessarily as he had done the bidding of the Mahatma. Upon this they furiously pounced upon him and said they would decide later what to do about the Mahatma, but he should not expect any important assignment in future from the Congress!

Humiliated, Bhulabhai met Gandhi and pleaded for removing the injustice done to him. Instead of protecting him from threats and attacks, Gandhi told Bhulabhai that he had wealth, reputation and position; he should not covet a post in the Viceroy’s Executive Council.

Not only that, Gandhi asked him as he had done in the case of Dr. Khare, to give him a statement in writing to this effect: ‘I, Bhulabhai Desai, consider myself incompetent to be a member of the Viceroy’s Executive Council and also declare that I will never accept such a job even now or at any time in the future.’

Bhulabhai was stunned! He said to Gandhi angrily, ‘You use a person as an instrument for your purpose and as soon as that purpose is served, you bury that individual. No one should expect justice at your hands.’”

Bhulabhai should certainly have known better than to have played Gandhi’s games! Schemes and power-plays were the order of the day in the Congress Camp—quite commonplace!—and certainly the Mahatma was a master at that game.

There are many more tales to tell of Gandhi and Congress machinations, the most relevant being the ruthless way—discarding all principle of nonviolence and truth—the Congress annihilated any chance the Hindu Mahasabha had of winning the 1945 elections. But that saga is given in detail in my novel *Burning for Freedom* and I will not repeat it here.

In the next two articles I will trace the Congress complicity in the partitioning of India.

Anurupa Cinar
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