

Confrontation, Compromise, or Strategy? Bose and the Gandhian Dilemma

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Introduction

The Indian freedom struggle was never a centralized struggle; it was a platform where multifaceted ideologies were expressed amidst the brimming ideologies. The visions and views of Gandhi and Bose stand in opposition. Gandhi staunchly adhered to the ideology of ahimsa (non-violence) and led civil disobedience movements such as the Non-Cooperation Movement and the Salt Satyagraha. Bose formed the INA with Indian POWs and sought help from Nazi Germany and Japan to overthrow the British military. Gandhi used nono-violent means which involved boycotts, strikes and defiance of British laws.

After his great escape from the country during the Second World War, Bose gave up Gandhian methods and secured assistance from the Axis powers. When the 'Clash of the Titans' in Europe during the Second World War was preeminent, Bose took meticulous steps to organize an army outside the nation. This was to overthrow British imperialism from Indian soil through an armed rebellion. In their pursuit of freedom, regarding their personal objectives, “each stuck to his ideas, refused to make any compromise to accommodate the views of the other because their

stances were almost always diametrically opposed.”¹ Besides, it has been mentioned that, “Bose was a soldier, Gandhi a statesman; Bose believed in the sword, Gandhi in non-violence; Bose believed in ends, Gandhi in the means.”² This paradoxical understanding of Gandhi and Bose's relationship suffers from the drawback of oversimplification and fails to establish an in-depth and extensive perception of their intricate

¹ B. K. Ahluwalia and Shashi Ahluwalia, *Netaji and Gandhi* (New Delhi: Indian Academic Publishers, 1982), preface, viii.

² Ahluwalia and Ahluwalia, *Netaji and Gandhi*, viii.

relationship. The fact is that, in spite of all their differences, they seemed to have a very fruitful and meaningful interaction during the course of their struggles.

Ideological Conflicts

Despite all the differences mentioned, why did Gandhi offer the Congress presidency to Subhas for the year 1938? This remains an intricate question, as Gandhi justified the offer in his letter to

Vallabhbhai Patel on 1 November 1937: “I have observed that Subash is not at all dependable.

However, there is nobody but he who can be (the next) president.”³ The conflict between Gandhi and Subhas surfaced after Subhas joined the Indian freedom struggle and politics. This clash took its toll at the Calcutta Congress in December 1928 on the issue of independence versus dominion status. The Declaration proposing a Round Table Conference and reiterating the British aim of ultimately granting dominion status to India was welcomed in a manifesto signed by many leaders, including Gandhi, Motilal, and Jawaharlal Nehru. Meanwhile, Subhas Chandra Bose refused to sign it and issued a separate manifesto with two other fellow members. At the Lahore Congress in December 1929, Bose demanded a militant programme to implement the independence resolution. The Gandhians had adopted this resolution to put up a show and not for a real cause, as the Madras Congress leader Satyamurthi said.⁴ Subhas criticized the Gandhi-Irwin Pact and opposed its endorsement by the Congress at the Karachi Congress in March 1931.

When Gandhi suspended the Civil Disobedience Movement in May 1933, Bose, then in exile in Europe, issued a joint statement with Vallabhbhai Patel sharply criticizing the Gandhian methods of struggle and his suspension of the movement as a “Confession of failure” and called for a radical reorganization of the Congress on a new principle and with a new method, for a “change of leadership,” and, if necessary, for a new party within the Congress composed of all radical elements. The participation of Congress ministries under the Government of India Act, 1935, was not favoured by Bose. In a letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas urged Nehru not to accept it by all possible means.⁵ In Bose's book *The Indian Struggle*, published in London, Bose predominantly criticized the Gandhian leadership, accusing it of compromising with

³ Mohandas K. Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (hereafter CWMG), 100 vols. (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1958–94). Vols. 1–90 constitute the chronological main series.

⁴ *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (hereafter SWJN), ed. S. Gopal, 1st ser., 15 vols. (New Delhi, 1972–82), 4:206, 208.

⁵ Subhas Chandra Bose, *Letters, Articles, Speeches and Statements, 1933–1937*, ed. Sisir Kumar Bose and Sugata Bose, Netaji Collected Works, vol. 8 (Calcutta: Netaji Research Bureau, 1994), 144.

British rule. It was later banned in India. Gandhi had even confided to Lord Irwin regarding Subhas as his “opponent.” So, why was Subhas chosen as the next president?

Growing Political Confrontation

Suniti Kumar Ghosh argues that G. D. Birla had committed cooperation of the Congress with the British government on the drafting of constitution.⁶ The Act brought significant changes to the subcontinent. It foresaw India as a “sham federation.” It also separated Burma from India, thereby creating two new provinces—Sind and Orissa—and included Princely India, which comprised more than 560 states. Accordingly, the federation and a responsible government at the Centre would emerge, provided that the princes of the states, having at least half the total population of all the states, voluntarily agreed to accession.

Under this Act, the government at the Centre would not have any control over defence, foreign affairs, tribal affairs, and ecclesiastical affairs, which would be administered by the Governor-General. The responsible government at the Centre and the federal legislature would also have no say in regard to 80 per cent of government finance, which would be spent on defence and so on. The Governor-General, on the other hand, was given considerable powers through which he could issue ordinances, maintain peace and harmony, protect the rights of minorities, and also ensure the financial stability of the country. The central government and the legislature were supposed to continue according to the Government of India Act, 1919, until the proposed federation was implemented. The Act also granted provincial autonomy to the provinces of British India. Powers were divided into three lists—Central, Provincial, and Concurrent. The Act provided voting rights to about 11.5 per cent of the population, although the voters were divided into communal groups. The British Government appointed Governors to administer the provinces with the help of ministers responsible to the provincial legislature. Even if a federal legislature were established, the Governor-General could reject or reserve its laws under the instructions of the Secretary of State. If the legislation passed by the ‘Federal Legislature’ ever came into being, Reginald Coupland wrote, it “Would be subject to refusal of assent or to reservation by the Governor-General acting under the control of the secretary of state, and to disallowance by the crown on the secretary of State's advice...” and the British Parliament could

⁶ Suniti Kumar Ghosh, “Play Fair and We Will Play Fair: Pages from Congress History,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 27, nos. 20–21 (May 16–23, 1992): 1079–88.

“legislate for British India without regard, if so it chose, to Indian wishes.”⁷

The Government of India Act, 1935 and the Federal Plan

The Government of India Act, 1935, contained many provisions, such as reserved subjects, special responsibilities, and safeguards, that allowed the British to retain control over India. British industries, trade, banks, and other economic interests were protected from interference so that they could continue to benefit from India's resources. The Act was designed to create an alliance between the British rulers, the princes, large landlords, and wealthy Indian businessmen (compradors). These groups were expected to work together to prevent the Indian people from achieving their aspirations for freedom and self-government.⁸

An article in the Communist International argued that the proposed federal system was only a pseudo-federation. According to it, Britain wanted to strengthen its rule by making use of feudal elements and divisions based on religion, nationality, and other differences. The Constitution was intended not only to strengthen British control but also to unite all the exploiting classes against the Indian people and their struggle for independence.⁹ The constitutional expert A. B. Keith also criticized the scheme. He stated that the British supported federation because it would introduce a strong conservative element to counter democratic forces in British India. He believed that federation was mainly a way to avoid granting a truly responsible government at the Centre. Since defence and foreign affairs remained under British control, the supposed grant of responsibility was almost meaningless.

Despite these criticisms, Mahatma Gandhi, his close associates, and some prominent Indian industrialists, such as Ghanshyam Das Birla, remained optimistic about the constitutional reforms even while they were being debated in Britain. Gandhi carefully thought over the ‘bill’ and came to the conclusion that it could be beneficial if it was implemented in the right way.¹⁰

Indeed, the Act, which Gandhi later described as “the creation of the best British brains” and “behind which there were honourable motives,” was capable of rendering benefits to the classes Gandhi represented. The resolutions of the Congress and the various statements of its leaders showed strong dislike

⁷ Reginald Coupland, *The Indian Problem, 1833–1935* (London: Oxford University Press, 1943), 146.

⁸ Suniti Kumar Ghosh, *The Indian Big Bourgeoisie: Genesis, Growth and Character* (Calcutta, 1985).

⁹ Valia, “The Economic Crisis and the Policy of British Imperialism in India,” *Communist International*, May 15, 1932, 285.

¹⁰ G. D. Birla, *In the Shadow of the Mahatma* (Bombay, 1968), 131.

and called for protests against the Act and its complete rejection. Significantly, when the Government of India Act came into being, Gandhi's Harijan did not make any reference to it.¹¹

Nehru's Presidency and Gandhi's Strategy

Gandhi sent a message to Nehru offering him the presidency of the coming Congress session, and Nehru was asked not to reveal anything in Europe through his statements or speeches. Nehru's term was extended for another year. Nehru, as S. Gopal said, “was the best shield of the

Congress against left groups and organizations.”¹² While Nehru denounced the Act as a “charter of slavery,” he cooperated fully with Gandhi to guide the Congress to work with the provincial part of it—to the complete satisfaction of the Gandhis, Birlas, and the British rulers.¹³

While cooperating with the Raj “as partners in this repression and in the exploitation of our people” (to quote Nehru's expression),¹⁴ the Congress leaders were eloquent in expressing their determination to combat the federal part of the Act of 1935, and the radical elements within and outside the Congress were assured of a confrontation with the British Raj on this issue. Despite all their rhetoric and brave resolutions for the consumption of militant political workers and people, Gandhi and his associates wanted to get the Congress to work with the federal part. Though Gandhi distrusted Subhas, he thought of taking his chances. He hoped to tame Subhas by making him Congress president and to use his leftist image as he had used Nehru's. With Subhas's help, he wanted to neutralize all opposition from the radicals within and outside the Congress and implement his policy of collaboration with the Raj.

Secret Negotiations, Nehru and Gandhi's Approach to Federation

The British Raj, in the meantime, was preparing to introduce the federal setup. Gandhi and his emissaries were carrying on behind-the-scenes negotiations. Nehru was well aware of what was going on behind the scenes and was willing to accept the federal scheme, provided that a few minor conditions were agreed to by the Raj. According to Gandhi's secretary, Madhabdev Desai, Birla was performing his task as a broker between Linlithgow and Gandhi. He writes:

Gandhi had personally rejected a proposal that Congress ministries should resign if federation was

¹¹ D. G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, vol. 4 (New Delhi), 47.

¹² Sarvepalli Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography*, vol. 1 (1981), 137.

¹³ Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru*, 231.

¹⁴ Ghosh, *India and the Raj*, 2:129–42.

implemented.... According to Birla, Gandhi's opposition was not directed at the federation itself because of his objection to the states' position (that is, to the nomination by princes of the states' representatives in the federal legislature).... Birla believed that federation should be introduced without delay because Gandhi, while alive, could have secured its acceptance....¹⁵

Gandhi actually was quite favourable towards the provision of the constitution that the responsible government would have no control over subjects such as defence and foreign affairs, which would be administered by the Governor-General. Gandhi was more worried about how the states would send their representatives to the federal legislature. While discussing this, Birla suggested that the best course might be to let the Muslims have their federation of the northwest.¹⁶ This probably shows that Birla proposed to Lord Linlithgow that India should be partitioned into a Hindu India and a Muslim India. This proposal had already been sent to Gandhi by Birla. In Sevagram, Lord Lothian stayed for two days, which proved fruitful, as Gandhi gave him a note in which he proposed that the states' people should be represented through elections and assured the Raj that if the Congress achieved its rightful status, then the rest would become easy. In the course of the discussion, a formula suggested by Gandhi was conveyed by Lothian to Linlithgow.¹⁷

Nehru and Gandhi's Efforts

Apart from Birla, Bhulabhai Desai, Gandhi, Agatha Harrison, and Carl Heath also played active roles in the discussions on federation. Nehru informed the Congress Working Committee from France, in a note dated 1 August 1938, that he “had learned that Bhulabhai Desai had given people in Europe the impression that the Congress might accept federation if some minor changes were made.”¹⁸ Desai later denied the allegation, and it seemed that he had expressed his personal views rather than the official Congress position.

In a letter written from Budapest on 1 September 1938, Nehru informed Kripalani that Gandhi had been sending short and unclear letters to Lord Lothian and Agatha Harrison regarding federation, which Lothian interpreted in his own way: “An effort is made to show that they can go ahead with federation.” Nehru

¹⁵ John Glendevon, *The Viceroy at Bay: Lord Linlithgow in India, 1936–1943* (London: Collins, 1971), 75–76; cited in *Words to Remember*, a book on G. D. Birla sponsored by the Birla family (Bombay, 1983), 82.

¹⁶ Glendevon, *The Viceroy at Bay*, 88–89; cited in *Words to Remember*, 83.

¹⁷ Birla, Bapu, 3:145–46, 148.

¹⁸ SWJN, 9:103.

wished that the position could be cleared by Bapu.¹⁹ Nehru felt that Gandhi should clarify the situation, but Gandhi refused to do so. Later, Nehru wrote to the Working Committee from London, where he stated that Gandhi's letters could be interpreted as suggesting that he was prepared to accept federation under certain circumstances. On the other hand, Carl Heath, a moderate supporter of Indian Conciliation, wanted to remove the misunderstandings in Britain regarding Gandhi and other Congress leaders. The international scenario was intense at that particular time, and Nehru believed that the Congress's position should be clarified. At that stage, Gandhi believed that avoiding conflict and confrontation would be better. He thought it might strengthen the position if certain conditions were fulfilled. These, by themselves, were not satisfactory, but the alternative of conflict would not be worthwhile at this stage if things were done.²⁰ Nehru, too, agreed that conflict might not be desirable if certain conditions were secured.

Historian B. N. Pandey notes, “The respect and Cordiality with which he (Nehru) was received in Britain (in 1938) softened his bitterness and subdued his suspicious. He even found himself willing to accept, on a few conditions and as a temporary measure, the federal provisions of the Act of 1935.”²¹

Early in September, Carl Heath himself wrote to Gandhi, pointing out the impasse in the federal question. As usual, on an issue like this, Gandhi could not but be evasive. In reply to Carl Heath's earnest request for a joint statement, Gandhi wrote on 13 September that it was not easy for the Congress to make a statement offhand. He stated that whatever had to happen would happen as a result of negotiations between the parties. He also made it clear that there was no real difference between Jawaharlal and himself: their language often differed, but they arrived at the same conclusion. As noted before, defence, external affairs, and several other subjects, besides an overwhelmingly large part—about 80 per cent—of federal finance, would be under the control of the Governor-General under the Act of 1935. As Tomlinson writes, Gandhi seemed rather to accept a compromise on these matters under which the Viceroy would discuss them with his council but retain control over them himself.²²

¹⁹ SWJN, 9:128.

²⁰ SWJN, 9:13–15.

²¹ B. N. Pandey, *Nehru* (London, 1977), 216.

²² B. R. Tomlinson, *The Indian National Congress and the Raj, 1929–42* (London, 1976), 113. Tomlinson cites “Note an Interview with G. D. Birla,” Linlithgow to Zetland, December 3, 1937, Linlithgow MSS, vol. 4.

Bose's Challenge, Discussions and Efforts

Gandhi's main concern was over the nomination of the states' representatives to the federal legislature by the princes, as there was a fear that, in that case, the majority might not emerge at the Centre. They wanted the states to be represented partly by the princes and partly by the subjects of the states, as Gandhi told Guy Wint.²³ S. Satyamurti appealed to the Viceroy to hold consultations with Gandhi immediately and come to a settlement on 2 January 1939. He said that the changes that would satisfy them did not require an amendment to the Act but could be effected through Orders in Council. He was afraid that delay might strengthen the extremist elements in the Congress.²⁴

Later, sometime in April or May 1939, Lord Lothian wrote to Birla: "It looks as if the Mahatma is gradually swinging Congress round to the policy he outlined to me when I went to stay with him at Segaon."²⁵ The challenge to this policy of collaboration with British imperialism, which was being pursued under the façade of opposition to it, was spearheaded by Subhas. He refused to toe Gandhi's line and took an unequivocal and uncompromising stand against the federal scheme as envisaged in the Act of 1935. Before his return to India early in 1938, Subhas had talks with the Secretary of State, Zetland, the leader of the Conservative Party in the House of Lords, Halifax, and others in London. As Agatha Harrison informed Nehru, these talks "made deep impression." Subhas "had been very frank with them and they were under no delusion as to the situation or to the determined front against federation."²⁶

Campaigning Against Federation

True to his word, Subhas carried on an extensive campaign against the federal scheme. When reports appeared in the British press about behind-the-scenes negotiations between Congress leaders and the Raj over federation, Subhas issued a press statement on 9 July 1938. He said that he had already contradicted such a report that had appeared in the Manchester Guardian and that he could not believe "that any influential Congress leader has been negotiating with the British Government."

After an anti-federal scheme campaign he issued a press statement on 9 July 1938. He regarded any weakness shown by the Congress or any section thereof during this fateful hour in India's history as

²³ Tomlinson, *The Indian National Congress and the Raj, 1929–42*. "Notes of Conversation with Mr Guy Wint," April 1, 1939; Birla, *Bapu*, 3:267.

²⁴ *The Statesman*, January 4 and 5, 1939.

²⁵ Birla, *In the Shadow of the Mahatma*, 269.

²⁶ Bose, *Crossroads*, 2nd ed. (Calcutta, 1981), 29.

amounting to “treachery of the first magnitude to the cause of India's freedom.” He declared that if the federal scheme was foisted on the Congress, “it will break the Congress,” and that he would relieve himself of the trammels of office in order to put up “open, unmitigated and unrelenting opposition to the monstrous Federal scheme.”²⁷ Again, another statement was issued by Subhas, appealing to all to unite and set aside their differences to issue a warning to the British against the federation scheme, which might divide the nation and the Congress.²⁸

At the AICC meeting, amendments were made and resolutions were taken up on federation. Some urged a mass movement against the federation, which was not accepted. Besides, the resolution warned radical Congressmen against “acts of incitement to violence.” Gandhi denounced the walkout and affirmed that the Congress, since 1920, had had one will, one policy, one aim, and exact discipline. The opponents were given the opportunity to move out of the Congress. This is clearly known from the reply to the two letters written by Maniben (Patel's daughter). After Subhas had left, many candidates were proposed for the post of president, but all of them refused.

Bose's Historic Victory

Many members sent their nominations in favour of Subhas's re-election.²⁹ While refusing to withdraw in favour of Sitaramayya Subhas maintained his position of “genuine anti-federation”. Subhas won the Congress presidential election. It was indeed a defeat and a rejection of the principles and policies that Gandhi represented, and he also hinted at the possibility of a split within the Congress.³⁰ The Gandhian leaders, however, were determined to overcome their setbacks and regain control. Those who wanted the Congress to adopt a more active struggle against British rule supported Subhas. He had become the symbol of change, a symbol of anticolonial struggle. However, these supporters were politically and ideologically weak and organizationally lacked unity. By contrast, the Gandhian leadership was politically strong and united, and many ministries and political machineries worked under it.

As Shankardas observed, “Bose came very close to challenging the dominance of the Gandhian leaders and the latter had to resort to a change of rules to gain a victory over him.... ultimately victory over the Gandhinites was well-nigh impossible for in addition to a vast and controlled organization they had

²⁷ Bose, *Crossroads*, 47–48; Kripalani to Nehru, August 11, 1938, J. N. Papers, vol. 40, pt. 1.

²⁸ Bose, *Crossroads*, 48–50.

²⁹ CWMG, 68:198, 199, 227, 230; Bose, *Crossroads*, 96; see also Bose, *Crossroads*, 87.

³⁰ Bose, *Crossroads*, 105–6.

enormous control over vested interest which had been further strengthened by the patronage and power that accompanied their role as incumbents.”³¹

Gandhi's Response to Bose's Victory and Accusations against Bose

The conflict soon started, and the opponents of Subhas launched their attack, presenting themselves as innocent. Nehru and others also accused Subhas of casting “aspersions” on members of the Working Committee. Subhas had not actually accused all his colleagues, but only some leading members of the Congress. Leaders such as Nehru, Kripalani, and Patel were aware of the roles that Gandhi and Bhulabhai Desai had been playing in the sordid drama. About a year later, Gandhi himself indirectly confirmed that Bose's accusations had some basis. On 20 January 1940, he said: “whatever may be true of the members of the working committee; I wholly endorse Mr Subhas Chandra Bose's Charge that I am eager to have a compromise with

Britain if it can be had with honour.”³² In the meantime, Gandhi decided not to attend the Tripuri Congress if Subhas won the election.³³ Instead, he went to Rajkot, where he intervened in the ongoing people's struggle against the local ruler.³⁴

Praise for Gandhi's Leadership

The Tripuri Congress chairman affirmed that: “Our Congress organization can be compared and is similar to the Fascist Party of Italy, the Nazi Party of Germany.... Mahatma Gandhi occupies the same position among Congressmen as that held by Mussolini among Fascists, Hitler among Nazis....”³⁵

Govind Ballabh Pant moved the resolution drafted by Patel and propagated as having been approved by Gandhi. Gandhi's absence was regarded as a tactical move that was carefully calculated, and it proved advantageous to him and his supporters. The resolution declared: “The Congress declares its firm adherence to the fundamental policies of the Congress which have governed its programme in the past twenty years under the guidance of Gandhi.” This resolution was actually ultra vires of the Congress

³¹ Shankardas, *Vallabhbhai Patel*, 188.

³² N. Mitra, ed., *The Indian Annual Register, 1945*, vol. 2, 54–55.

³³ CWMG, 68:368; Birla, Bapu, 3:220.

³⁴ See Ghosh, *India and the Raj*, 2:141–42, 148.

³⁵ N. Mitra, ed., *The Indian Annual Register, 1939*, vol. 1, 324, emphasis added.

constitution and was repugnant to all democratic principles. During the Tripuri session, significant cries such as “Victory to Mahatmaji” and

“Victory to the Hitler of Hindustan!” were raised. Nehru was not bothered by the fascist atmosphere revolving around him, despite being a socialist and anti-fascist. This rising ideology shocked Rabindranath, who wrote in an open letter to Amiya Chakravarty: “Now, at last, even from the platform of the Congress, brazen shouts of victory acclaiming Hitlerite policies have been raised. The Contagion has spread. The fascist serpent has bared its fangs from the very altar that was dedicated to the cause of freedom.”³⁶

Pant Resolution and Rejection of Bose's Proposal

The members of the Congress Socialist Party abandoned Subhas Bose when they faced opposition from Nehru and Gandhi. They chose to remain neutral during the delegates' session. Subhas also suffered defeat on another important issue. Since the signing of the Munich Pact in 1938, Subhas had been carrying on open preparations and asking people to join an anti-colonial struggle that would coincide with the upcoming war in Europe. He was in favour of demanding independence through the Congress, and the masses were to be ready for a nationwide movement if the demand was rejected. Subhas wanted the British to leave the nation and India to be given independence within six months. If the demand was rejected after this specified period, action was to be launched to paralyse British power. This was proposed during the Tripuri Congress. The pressure on Subhas intensified. The Pant Resolution asked him to form the Working Committee according to Gandhi's wishes, but Gandhi refused to communicate even after several requests from Subhas. According to Gandhi, the Working Committee should be homogeneous, and he challenged Subhas to form one that represented his policy.

Thus, Subhas found himself trapped in a difficult situation that compelled him to resign prematurely from the presidency. Many critics regarded Gandhi's tactics as unconstitutional and devious, but nevertheless, they proved very effective. Viceroy Linlithgow “admired the way Gandhi had succeeded, soon after the Rajkot affair, in removing Subhas Chandra Bose from a second term as Congress President and getting Dr. Rajendra Prasad elected in Bose's place.”³⁷ **Tagore's Admiration and Bose's Dismissal**

³⁶ Prabasi (Calcutta), Baisakh 1346 B.S., cited in Nepal Majumder, *Rabindranath O Subhas Chandra Bose* (Calcutta, 1394 B.S.), 132.

³⁷ Glendevon, *The Viceroy at Bay*, 94; quoted in *Words to Remember*, 84.

A telegram was sent by Rabindranath Tagore to *Subhas* stating: “The dignity and forbearance which you have shown in the midst of the most aggravating situation has won my admiration and confidence in your leadership.”³⁸ The various sessions and debates at the Tripuri Congress decided the course of Indian history that was to come. The question that arises here is whether the Congress should confront the Raj or cooperate with it. The forces that favoured confrontation with the Raj were defeated, and thus the struggle ended. Therefore, the policy of cooperation with the British continued.

Conclusion

The association between Gandhi and Subhas Chandra Bose was quite enigmatic. They had different political strategies and approaches to the freedom struggle. These were highlighted during the debate revolving around federalism in the Government of India Act of 1935. This article has argued that Gandhi and the dominant Congress leadership were prepared to explore constitutional compromise under certain conditions. Bose consistently rejected this approach as he felt that it was not suitable for the call for Purna Swaraj. Their rivalry in the Congress presidential election of 1939 was vital for the future of Indian nationalist struggle. Despite Bose's victory and support for a more militant programme, the organizational strength of the Gandhian leadership ultimately prevailed. The differences between Gandhi and Bose reflected competing political strategies. The ensuing debate shaped the future of Congress and the nationalist movement.

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³⁸ Bose, *Crossroads*, 192.

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