INTERACTION AFTER INDEPENDENCE

The Indian Freedom Struggle was unique because of the non-violent character of transfer of power. It provided impetus to the mankind's liberation struggle for the revolutionary transformation of the entire world without violence. Indian freedom was the beginning of a process of decolonization which has proved irresistible, at least so far as political independence is concerned.

August 15, 1947, was not merely a date but the celebration of an idea, triumph of a concept, a tryst with destiny and fulfilment of a dream. Sardar Patel's message to the nation on the eve of this auspicious day, sounded a note of optimism and cheer, despite the hurdles the new nation had to face. He told the people not to forget the stupendous responsibilities followed by the freedom of the country. The Independence of India was to be guarded zealously. He further asked the people to ensure that in free India all were to be

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considered equal.²

Similar views find echo in Nehru's speech at the midnight of 14th August 1947. He said: “.........Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge.......A moment comes when the soul of a nation, long suppressed finds utterance. It is fitting that at this solemn moment, we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India.......”³

But the chief architect of India's freedom was not present in the 'Independence Day' celebrations in India's capital. Mahatma Gandhi had gone to Calcutta a few days earlier on his way to Noakhali district of Bengal Province where large scale communal violence had taken place. Commenting on the Mahatma's absence from Delhi, Lord Mountbatten remarked that Gandhi's absence was intentional and said: “ .......He (Gandhi), had never given the 3rd June (1947), Plan his unqualified blessings and he realised that his position might be difficult.......”⁴

When an officer of the Information and Broadcasting Ministry, Government of India, went to Gandhi for a message, 

³ Mathai, M.O., REMINISCENCES OF NEHRU AGE (New Delhi : Vikas Publishing House), 1979, p.11.
the Mahatma, who was greatly disturbed, following the outbreak of communal violence throughout the country, replied that ‘he had run dry’. When a representative of the British Broadcasting Corporation approached him for a message, which would be broadcast all over the world, he (the Mahatma), observed: “I must not yield to temptation. You must forget that I know English”.

Later on, when the members of the Bengal Cabinet came to meet him, Gandhi blessed them giving vent to his inner ideas. He told them to be humble and forbearing and advised them to “Beware of power; power corrupts. Do not let yourselves be entrapped by its pomp and paeantry. Remember, you are in office to serve the poor in Indian villages. May God help you”.

Earlier, at Patna, the Mahatma had said that 15th August was a day of their trial. Swaraj that had come was not worth celebrating by illumination. It was a day when they should fast, spin and pray. Accordingly he celebrated that historic day by observing one day fast at Calcutta.

The havoc caused by partition that followed independence had made Gandhi desperate. It was generally feared that like Lahore, Karachi, Bombay, Amritsar and certain other parts of India, Calcutta would, too, suffer death and

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destruction of a devastating magnitude, but it was saved by Gandhi's presence over there. On August 11, 1947, the Provincial Premier, Shaheed Suhrawardy, called on the Mahatma and persuaded him not to proceed to Noakhali until peace was assured in Calcutta.

The former shared the latter's lodging among the untouchables and assisted the Mahatma in pacifying the people. When in the end of August, news of the atrocities in the north Calcutta brought about a threatening recrudescence of communal disharmony, the Mahatma immediately began a fast to end only when sanity returned. Within five days there was almost complete peace. After one of Gandhi's prayer meetings, in the 'Calcutta Maidan,' thousands of Hindus and Muslims mingled and embraced one another to present an example of communal unity. No word of government, it seemed could have given so much confidence to the people as was done by this frail figure alone. He had inspired tremendous confidence in the minority communities, as is clear by Lord Mountbatten's words: "The one man boundary force was able to maintain peace and security while a 50,000 strong police force was swamped by communal riots".7

The Mahatma was around 78 when he undertook this hazardous tour. Only a man of boundless energy, shrewdness and undying enthusiasm could have attempted to perform the feat. It was also during this period that relations between Gandhi and Patel deteriorated over communal question. The

7 Menon, V.P., TRANSFER OF POWER IN INDIA (Bombay: Orient Longman), 1968, p. 434.
Mahatma's ears were being constantly poisoned against Sardar Patel of being a communalist by some nationalist Muslims and he was also accused of violence, repression and aggressive speeches.

Infact, Sardar Patel believed in plain speaking and did not know how to mince words. In one of his speeches, he told the Muslims that mere loyalty to the Indian Union would not do at this critical juncture. They must give practical proof of their declarations. He further wanted them to denounce Pakistan for attacking Indian territory with the connivance of Frontier Tribesmen and condemn all acts of aggression and advised them: “Those who want to go to Pakistan can go there and live in peace. Let us live here in peace to work for ourselves”.

Similarly when Sardar Patel asked the Hindus to protect themselves with whatever weapons they could find, he was accused of inflammatory speeches and violence. The Mahatma asked the Sardar to clarify his position. The latter refuted the charges leveled against him. In reply to the accusation of adopting repressive measures and behaving as anti-Muslim, he told Gandhi that the Khaksars wanted Delhi, Agra and Ajmer to be included in the state of Pakistan.

The people of India paid too high a price for their emancipation from the British Colonialism. Some observers, however, felt that had Indian leaders exercised some restraint or patience, the bloodshed could have been avoided. B. Krishna, one of Patel's biographers, had observed that had there been a little patience, the refusal to be rushed and Gandhi's counsel been practised, the history of the Indian
sub-continent would have been very much different.

But the leaders at the helm of affairs in the Congress were thinking differently. Madhu Limaye opined: “Both Jawahar Lal Nehru and Vallabhbhai Patel before the end of their last detention (1942-45), had made up their minds— independent of each other—that the struggle should now be over and they must grab whatever power was offered to them, trusting the unfolding events to make it complete......”

Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, a distinguished Socialist, severely criticised the resolution on partition of the country and opposed it in the Congress Working Committee. He opined that the partition was not a rational response to the situation prevailing then. Rather it was due to criminal intent of Congress leadership which was bent on capturing power even at the cost of national unity and integrity.

An analytical study of the Indian freedom struggle reveals that numerous political developments preceding independence were mainly responsible for the partition of the country. The Muslim League’s ‘Direct Action Day’—August 16, 1946, the massacre of the Muslims in Bihar in November 1946 and Non-Muslims in the North Western districts of Punjab Province in the first half of March 1947, seems to have brought home the Indian leaders to the truth that the partition of the


9 Lohia, Ram Manohar, GUILTY MEN OF INDIA’S PARTITION (Allahabad : Kitabistan Publication), 1960, p. 5.
country was unavoidable. While commenting on the Bihar developments, Pyarelal, Gandhi’s Secretary observed: “......The Bihar disturbances of 1946 finally shattered the dream of an undivided India.......”\textsuperscript{10} On the same issue, the free press journal “Bombay”, had observed that Gandhi’s movement had started with the Khilafat and ended with the creation of Pakistan.

Even before the formation of the Interim Government, the Sardar seems to have realised that although many among the Britishers had doubts about the wisdom of partition, they were not prepared to fight the League in order to oblige the Congress. He also saw that the Muslim League had the Muslim population behind its beck and call, that its leaders were determined on the issue of partition and that they were willing to reduce the country to chaos and disaster in order to get it. Perhaps he was the first among the Congress leaders at that time to realise that the only way out was to amputate the diseased limb.

Sardar Patel’s idea behind the partition of the provinces of Punjab and Bengal into separate Hindu and Muslim majority provinces was to make the Muslim League face reality so that they might give up the idea of Independent State of Pakistan, and begin to feel safe and contended in an undivided India by having autonomous provinces of their own.

It is also possible that he was forced to accept partition

of the country because Liaquat Ali, being a member of the Finance portfolio in the Interim government, not only levied heavy taxes on the capitalists—majority of them being Hindus, looking on Patel to safeguard their interests—but also withheld the sanctions of Departmental grants so that Sardar Patel and other members of the Interim government could not appoint even a fourth class employee in their respective Departments, and certainly obstructed the smooth functioning of the Interim government.

Explaining the reasons why he had accepted partition of the country, Sardar Patel said that he was unwilling and was full of sorrow and it was against his innermost feelings, against all he had to live for and against all he had aspired for. He added that “We accepted partition willingly and after a full consideration of its consequences. We felt that if we couldn’t remain united, we must part........If we had not partitioned, the consequences would have been much worse than what actually took place as a result of partition........”\(^{11}\)

In addition to it, Sardar Patel said: “........We were quarrelling and fighting bitterly among ourselves. The third party was reaping full benefits out of the situation in which we had landed ourselves. We had to pay the price for our liberty. It was then that we decided that if the foreign government undertook to leave, as soon as possible, the price of partition

On 17th August 1947, two days after he became the first Prime Minister of Independent India, Nehru flew to Amritsar and toured almost the whole of Punjab and witnessed terrible outcome of partition. Millions were uprooted from their dear ones and robbed off all their possession. Nobody was sure of the morrow. Burnt houses, looted shops, broken skulls, blood smeared corpses and mutilated bodies scattered all over towns and villages spoke of the barbarous bloodbath.

Nehru became sceptical if the Indian independence had come just a little too fast. According to Michael Breacher, a few months or a year or some more time perhaps might have made all the difference and saved so many lives. But it was too late to repent over the spilt milk. He wondered that so ardent a nationalist as Nehru failed at the crucial hour. And felt that Nehru was lured by the tempting prize of power after the tribulations of a long struggle. It was a pity indeed.13

Gandhi and Patel’s dream of free India was similar. While commenting on it, the former had once observed that he would work for an India in which the poorest should feel that it was their country in whose making they had an effective voice, an India in which there would be no high class and low class, an India in which all communities would live in perfect harmony. There would be no room in such an India for the

12 Ibid.
curse of untouchability. Women would also enjoy the same rights as men. That was the India of his dreams.

When questioned by the students of Gujarat Vidyapith about the basis of India’s future economic policy, the Mahatma had expressed his views which were in close conformity to those of the Sardar. He said: “......Everybody should be able to get sufficient work to enable him to make the two ends meet. And this ideal can be universally realised only if the means of production of elementary necessities of life remain in the control of the masses.........”14

Again regarding the adoption of the model for the rapid economic development of the country, both Gandhi and Patel held similar views that one should not stick to either Capitalist or Socialist form of Government but adopt a mixed approach for the rapid and balanced economic development of India. Both of them believed in harmonious relations between capital and labour since they are complementary to each other. 15

Explaining his stand, Sardar Patel said that he was not “Socialist” enough to condemn the “haves”, or “Capitalist” enough to ignore the “have nots”. He observed: “......I have been blamed that I am a friend of Rajas, Capitalists and Zamidars, but I claim to be a friend of labour and the poor as


15 Saxena, S.C., POLITICAL SCIENCE—AN ANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVE (Delhi: Macmillan India), 1992, p. 43.
Mahatma Gandhi was of the opinion that Independent India will not have any official religion and people of different religious faiths should be considered as equal. When the Rev Mr. Kellas, Principal of the Scottish Church College, asked Gandhi whether India would remain a secular State. The latter replied that it should undoubtedly be secular and he added that everyone living in it should be entitled to profess his religion without let or hindrance, so long as the citizen obeyed the common law of the land.

On one occasion, Gandhi told a Calcutta audience that religion was a personal matter and if the people succeeded in continuing the personal plans, all would be well in our political life. He added: “....If officers of the government as well as members of the public undertook the responsibility and worked whole-heartedly for the creation of a Secular State then only could we built a new India that would be the glory of the world......”

The Sardar also believed with the Mahatma that India should be declared a secular State as only a Secular State can ensure full protection to the minorities. He was convinced that in Independent India there could be no serious talk of a Hindu


State. In a letter to M.B. Birla, the Sardar wrote: "I do not think it will be possible to consider India as a Hindu State with Hinduism as the State religion. We must not forget that there are other minorities whose protection is our primary responsibility. The State must exist for all people irrespective of their caste and creed". Like Gandhi, he opined that it is the responsibility of the majority community to inculcate confidence in the minorities.

Sardar Patel knew that Pakistan’s anti-secular policies would have an adverse reaction in India but he did not bear any ill-will against Pakistan on that account. For Patel, the creation of Pakistan was the hope of a final settlement of a brotherly dispute. He said, "We feel that satisfying the obstinate demand of a brother who had been a part of a joint family could bring peace to both of us and prosperity for all".

He asserted that if right policies were framed and implemented with utmost sincerity in India and Pakistan, communal friction and bitterness would come to an end at the earliest possible. The Sardar expected a change of outlook on the part of the Muslim community and desired that they should forget their past and involve themselves in the process of nation-building. Inspite of the fact that the Muslims

20 Patel V.J., ibid., p.49.

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considered him as their greatest enemy, Patel in all sincerity advised them that mere declarations of loyalty will not help them. And that they must give practical proof of their declarations.

Gandhi also emphasised that both the newly created nations should co-exist peacefully and sort out their differences through arbitration. In his prayer meeting on September 26, 1947, he said that though he was an opponent of all warfare, but if there was no other way of securing justice from Pakistan and if that country persistently refused to see its proved error, the Indian Government would have to go to war against it.\textsuperscript{21}

Both the Mahatma and the Sardar requested all the citizens to be loyal and honest to their respective countries. While commenting on the possibility of a fresh conflict between the two neighbouring countries, the former had observed: “If there was a war, Hindus in Pakistan could not be fifth columnists there. No one would tolerate that. If their loyalty lay not with Pakistan, they would leave it. Similarly, if the loyalty of the Muslims in India lay with Pakistan, they should not stay in the Indian Union.”\textsuperscript{22} Patel also said in his speeches at Lucknow, Bombay, Ahmedabad, Calcutta etc. that those Muslims who were disloyal to the Indian Union would have to go to Pakistan.

\textsuperscript{21} THE COLLECTED WORKS OF MAHATMA GANDHI, ibid., Vol. LXXXIX, p. 252.

\textsuperscript{22} Keer, Dhananjay, ibid., p. 773.
Sardar Patel further told those Muslims who had prefer
to stay back in India that it was their duty to sail in the same
boat with the Hindus and sink or swim together. He also
warned them not to ride on two horses and select one horse
whichever they like.

On October 22, 1947, Pakistan invaded Kashmir which
had acceded to the Indian Union on October 26. The
Government of India sent troops by air to Kashmir the next
day. While justifying the Indian Government's stand, the
Mahatma observed: ".....It was right for the Union Government
of India to rush troops, even a handful to Srinagar. They must
save the situation........The result was in the hands of God.
Men could but do or die. He would not shed a tear if the small
Union force was wiped out like spartans, bravely defending the
Kashmir....."23

Similarly, Sardar Patel also supported the action of the
Indian Army and greatly admired the efforts of the soldiers in
keeping intact the unity and integrity of the country. He also
warned the Government of Pakistan against her disruptive and
communal activities in India.

Further, both the Mahatma and the Sardar strongly
advocated the Indian Government's move to acquire the
membership of the "Commonwealth of Nations", an
international organisation, founded by the British Government.
Not only this, the duo also supported India's membership of all
other important international organisations, like the United

23 Ibid., p. 774.
Nations Organisation, whose ultimate aim was the promotion of peace, security and development of the entire world community.

Commenting on the problem of communalism and its British connection, Sardar Patel observed that if one looks at the history of India, he would find that there were no Hindu–Muslim riots in the pre–British period. Therefore, when the British paramountcy was over, Patel constantly appealed to the people to create an atmosphere in which no minority should feel insecure in the country for two main reasons. First, the economic development and prosperity of the nation depended on internal peace and communal harmony; and secondly, communal rioting would earn a bad name for the country abroad and provide the foreigners a chance to say that Indian’s were not capable of managing their internal affairs.

Gandhi and Patel’s personal understanding remained intact for some time after India’s independence, despite the slow polarisation which quickly changing political events were imposing upon them. For the latter knew that the former believed in politics based on morality while he was more concerned about organising practical programmes.24

The crisis deepened when Gandhi commenced fast on January 13, 1948, for establishing communal harmony and peace in Delhi and other riot affected areas. He wanted the Muslims to be reinstated in their homes in Delhi and its

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adjoining areas and wanted the leaders of the Congress to strengthen their resolve to protect the Muslim community. Sardar Patel, however, was not happy with Gandhi’s decision of fasting.

In fact Patel was a secularist no less than Nehru and Gandhi. His secularism was traditional in its acceptance of religion as humanising force for promotion of non-violence, tolerance, love and compassion. It had its origin in Hindu culture and outlook. He differed from Gandhi and Nehru in so far as their secularism entailed unqualified compromise and appeasement—a give-in-to-win policy—which set no limits to win over the Muslim community. Though the aim of the Mahatma and the Sardar was the same, yet their approach differed. The latter was not in favour of diluting his nationalism by surrendering to the Muslim minority the right to be at par with the majority and give a veto in their hands.

His was a pragmatist approach which believed that a satisfactory solution of the communal crisis could be reached only through striking the right balance between conflicting interests: It cannot be a one sided game as followed by Gandhi who believed Muslim League would see reason in the end and the country would remain undivided. Patel was undoubtedly secular both in speeches and action, though he never hesitated to tell or pursue the truth irrespective of its being unpalatable.

To understand the later divergence of opinion between the Mahatma and the Sardar, it is necessary to take into account certain doctrinal differences which became more apparent after the dawn of independence. Some of the
important Gandhian concepts like non-violence versus State power, decentralization of political authority, promotion of cottage and small-scale industries, setting up of democratic village panchayats and some other points of Gandhian ideology could be put into practice by the Independent Indian Government more effectively. Consequently these issues became debatable and divisive.

In fact Patel, Nehru and many other Congress leaders did not have full faith in the above mentioned Gandhian ideology. So in the Independent India, majority of them moved rapidly away from any attachment or sympathy to these ideas and treated them as politically non-serious issues. Sardar Patel, too, attached more importance to the political problems facing the country than paying attention to the implementation of Gandhian ideas.

Non-violence, for example, which was a creed for the Mahatma, was only a matter of policy for all important Congress leaders, including the Sardar. Patel also favoured concentration of political power in the hands of the Central Government which was contrary to the Gandhian ideas. He also favoured the promotion of large-scale industries to meet the growing demands of the people. Not only that, Patel further opined that Indian Union should strengthen its armed forces to protect the people and the country from internal disturbances or external aggression.

In the first Central Government of Independent India, Sardar Patel took charge of three Ministries—Home, State, and Information and Broadcasting —beside being the first Deputy Prime Minister of the country. In contrast, Mahatma Gandhi
retired from political involvements altogether and left most of the administrative decisions to Nehru and Patel's judgment.

While commenting on the issue of political power and his decision to abstain from it, the Mahatma had observed: "......But I do not want to take power into my hands. By abjuring power and devoting ourselves to pure, selfless service of the voters we can guide and influence their behaviour. It would give us far more real power than we shall have by going into the government. A stage may come when the people themselves may feel and say that they want us and no one else to wield power. The question then be considered..........")²⁵

There was divergence of opinions between the Mahatma and the Sardar regarding the dissolution of the Congress Party, one of the major political parties to have launched a struggle against British Imperialism. The former had wished to dissolve it as a political organisation as he felt that its members showed signs of lust for authority, status and prestige of office. But his perception was not shared by most of the Congress leaders including Patel and Nehru, who considered it as unrealistic, unacceptable and a naive reversionary fantasy.²⁶ Sardar Patel rather endeavoured to make the Congress Party as the most powerful, formidable and disciplined national political organisation.

Inspite of his close association with Sardar Patel for a

²⁶ Lyon, Michael H., ibid., p. 50.
long time the Mahatma wanted Nehru not Patel to be the first Prime Minister of Independent India. In fact as far back as 1942, he had decided that Nehru will be his political heir. Again, in 1947, Gandhi had said publicly that “Jawahar Lal Nehru can not be replaced today while charge is being taken from Englishmen. He (Nehru), a Horrow boy, a Cambridge graduate and a barrister, is wanted to carry on negotiations with the British”.

Needless to mention that Sardar Patel too was a barrister and had distinguished himself at the Bar examinations and had a flourishing practice as a lawyer at Ahmedabad, but he did not have the charm and sophisticated grace of Nehru. Moreover, it seems that Gandhi had a definite feeling that Nehru was better known abroad and could make India play a crucial role in international politics. In addition to it, Gandhi was sure that Nehru’s selection as the Prime Minister, would not deprive India of Patel’s services, and the two would work as partners. They would be like two oxen yoked to the governmental cart. One will need the other and both will pull together for the well being of the nation.

Moreover Gandhi had a feeling that Nehru would not agree to take a second place, in the hierarchy of leadership, while Patel would. More than once (1929, 1937 and 1946), though supported by the overwhelming majority of the Provincial Congress Committees for the Presidentship of the Congress, the Sardar had to make room for Nehru. According to Rajmohan Gandhi, the Mahatma believed that “Patel would quietly accept the denial, and that nothing would effect his
discipline or prompt him to create trouble".27

In fact Mahatma Gandhi's attachment to Jawahar Lal Nehru can be traced back to 1924, when he not only referred to Nehru as his son but also said that the world would worship Nehru and shower flowers on him.28

Commenting on Gandhi's preference for Nehru, Rajendra Prasad said that Gandhi had once again sacrificed his trusted lieutenant—the great Sardar—for the sake of glamorous Nehru".29

Nevertheless Sardar Patel was conscious of his advanced age and probably realised that he may not be alive for long to take another opportunity to lead Independent India's Government. For this reason, if not for any other, the Mahatma's preference must have hurt him. Michael Brecher observed that "the denial of Congress Presidentship rankled in Patel's spirit".30

Sardar Patel did not protest nor did he defy the authority of the Mahatma. Some Congress leaders, especially Gopalaswami Ayyangar, R.K. Shanmukham Chetty, Jairamdas

28 Limaye, Madhu, ibid., p. 166.
30 Brecher, Michael, ibid., p. 315.
Doulatram and N.V. Gadgil, had also opined that the selection of Nehru for the Premiership did not affect Patel's sincere involvement in Congress and governmental affairs.

In fact, the Mahatma knew that both the leaders were required for the country's development. So, somehow or the other, he wanted to retain both Patel and Nehru in the Congress. According to S.K. Patil when Sardar Patel made a complaint against Nehru, Gandhi told him that Nehru was young and the nation wanted him. When Nehru complained to the Mahatma, he told Nehru that Sardar Patel was practical and experienced, and the nation wanted the Sardar. “Jawahar Lal Nehru is a thinker, Vallabhbhai Patel a doer”. In these words Gandhi summed up the contrast between his two lieutenants. In fact, Mahatma Gandhi wanted to utilise the services of both Patel and Nehru in the greater interests of the country and he was successful in his efforts in this regard.

With the passage of time, the differences between the Mahatma and the Sardar increased and the most contentious issues which contributed a lot in this regard related to the ever growing communal strife and cash compensation to Pakistan. Their relations further deteriorated. The crisis took a new turn by the former’s fast which he had started at the Birla House in New Delhi on January 13, 1948, for the reinstatement of the Muslims and for the restoration of desecrated mosques for their former and legitimate users. Patel did not like Gandhi’s move.

The gulf between the two further widened over the dispatch of Pakistan’s share of arms and ammunition from India. Pakistan had slowed down in sending India’s share and
diverted to Kashmir whatever she received from India. The General in charge (Lieutenant General S. Tharat), felt much concerned about the situation as the Commander-in-Chief, General Bucher, insisted that India should continue sending Pakistan's share. General Tharat had a talk with Patel and in connivance with the latter, there was a decline in the quantities of arms and ammunition sent to Pakistan.

The second major issue was the payment of rupees 55 crores to Pakistan consequential to financial adjustments. Since Pakistan was engaged in its communal and disruptive activities against India with the help of Frontier Tribesmen, most of the Congress leaders, especially Patel and Nehru, thought that if money was paid to Pakistan at that crucial juncture, it would help her to carry on the confrontation, either directly or indirectly in Jammu and Kashmir and elsewhere. It is speculated that Gandhi's fast besides other things also aimed at exhorting the government of India to give Pakistan its share of cash. Although on January 1, 1948, the Indian government expressed its reluctance to pay the said amount but after the announcement of Gandhi's fast, rupees 55 crores were paid to Pakistan.

Inevitably, like all leaders of pre-eminence, Sardar Patel had also his critics as well as admirers. He was charged of being not only an orthodox but also a reactionary Hindu leader, especially by a certain section of Muslim community. But such accusations are irrational. It was during Patel's stewardship as the Home Minister of India that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh was banned.

Similarly Mahatma Gandhi was not spared by his
critics. Certain radical elements in the Indian society, especially Hindu Sabahtes, severely criticised Gandhi's policy of appeasing the Muslim community, which he was pursuing since long. The tragedy of refugees in Delhi, Calcutta and certain other parts of the country further escalated their hatred towards the Mahatma. Gandhi's last fast which was commenced by him in New Delhi, for the redressal of the grievances of the Muslim community further added fuel to the fire. Consequently they decided to eliminate Gandhi from the centre stage of the Indian politics.

The tension once created did not ease and reached at the point of no return. And in the midst of this atmosphere of extreme gloom and disaster, Nathuram Vinayak Godse shot Gandhi when the latter was going to the prayer meeting in the compound of the Birla House on January 30, 1948, at 5.35 P.M. Five minutes earlier, the Mahatma had a detailed talk with the Sardar regarding the settlement of differences of opinions between the latter and Nehru on various issues concerning the administration of the country.

Millions of people throughout the world condemned Gandhi's barbarous killing and paid him heart-felt tributes. Great men die but greatness never dies. Nehru sorrowfully said: "The light has gone out of our life and there is darkness everywhere". Sardar Patel observed that the Mahatma's contribution will be remembered in the country for centuries to come.

Mahatma Gandhi, the apostle on non-violence was honoured in his death by a military salute of 79 guns. On the evening of January 31st the funeral procession attended by
more than 12 lakhs of people and official representatives of
different nations, saw the cremation of his last remains at Raj
Ghat, Delhi, on the banks of Jamuna. Ramdas, his son, lit the
pyre. Most of the Indian leaders, including Nehru, Patel,
Prasad, Azad and Kriplani were present on that occasion.

President Henary Truman of the United States of
America observed: "As a teacher and leader, his influence
made itself felt not only in India but everywhere in the world
and his death brings great sorrow to all peace–loving people of
the world community".

George Marshall, U.S. Secretary of State, described
Gandhi as "Spokesman for the conscience of all mankind".
Winston Churchill, the former Prime Minister of England,
stated: "I am shocked at the wicked crime". General Smuts of
South Africa said: "A prince among men has passed away".
George Bernard Shaw had observed: "It shows how dangerous
it is to be too good".

Jinnah, the first Governor General of the newly created
State of Pakistan, who was a bitter critique of the Mahatma,
said: "I was shocked to learn the most dastardly attack on the
life of Mr. Gandhi, resulting in his death. Whatever our
political differences, he was one of the greatest men produced
by Hindu community and a leader who commanded their
universal confidence and respect". Liaquat Ali Khan, the first
Prime Minister of Pakistan, called for a universal
condemnation of Mahatma Gandhi's barbarous murder.

While paying a rich tribute to the Mahatma, 'The New
York Times' said: "A light has gone out. The rest remained for
history's inexorable hand to write down". The Asia News
Express' commented: "With the shots fired by Godse, disappeared one of the greatest political figures from the stage of world politics."

Indeed, Mahatma Gandhi was one of the greatest leaders the world has ever produced. He was the man of the millennium. Though apparently a politician, organiser, moral teacher and the leader of the masses, he had the soul of an ascetic.

After achieving independence from the British Colonialism, the country faced several grave challenges. One of the most important problems was the integration of 574 and odd Princely States with the rest of India. A separate Ministry—the States Ministry—had been set up under the headship of Sardar Patel for the accomplishment of that purpose.

In fact, integration and democratisation of the Indian administration which had long been the key note of the Congress policy towards the Princely States seems to have become a pressing problem after independence. The Indian princes themselves had, in many cases, begun to realise the spirit of the time and were gradually introducing measures in accord with that spirit. In some Princely States the progress was slow while in certain others it has been a little fast.

Mahatma Gandhi had given a timely warning to the Princely States that if they failed to take time by the forelock they would cease to be. "Their declaration of freedom," he asserted, "Would be tantamount to war". He further added: "An Indian was a citizen enjoying equal rights in every part of
India, but he must submerge himself where he resided”.31

The swift, skillful and non-violent manner in which the thorny and complex problem of accession and integration of 574 Princely States, many with their own national flags, currency, police, railways, posts and telegraphs, and other insignia of Nation-States, was accomplished, is unparalleled in the annals of world history. What is more, the former rulers seems to have looked upon the Sardar as an affectionate guide, well-wisher and elder brother. In a message on the formation of Vindhya Pradesh, Sardar Patel said: “......Unification and democratisation would be purposeless if they did not bring about improvement in the lot of the people who deserved utmost attention of the administration....”32

Sardar Patel’s achievements in this regard are conversely comparable to those of Julius Caesar and Napoleon. Caesar’s and Napoleon’s “Conquests”, were through war and violence, while the Sardar’s “Conquests”, were through persuasion, shrewdness, statesmanship and the kindling of the nobler instincts in the princely rulers. Except in two extraordinary cases of Junagadh and Hyderabad, his peaceful efforts were a complete success. Regarding his maneuver, it can be said that the Sardar did not cut the knots, he disarmed. He did not coerce, he induced. He did not pressurise, he appealed. But at the same time, in difficult and complicated cases, he did not threaten, he forewarned.

31 Keer, Dhananjay, ibid., p. 766.
32 Grover, V., (ed.), ibid., p. XXIX.
The much more difficult process of 'integration' of Princely States with neighbouring provinces or into new units like Kathiawar Union, Vindhya Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan or Himachal Pradesh along with internal constitutional changes in states which for some years retained their old boundaries (Junagadh, Hyderabad, Mysore, Travencore–Cochin), was also accomplished within the remarkably short period of little more than a year. Here the principal bait offered was that of very generous privy purses, while some princes were also made into Governors or Rajpramukhs. The rapid unification of India is certainly Sardar Patel's greatest achievement, but we must not forget the considerable role played here, too, by the existence or at least the potential presence of mass pressures.

Junagadh in Kathiawad whose Muslim ruler tried to join Pakistan was brought to heel by a combination of popular agitation with Indian police action. When the Nizam (ruler) of Hyderabad did not comply with the persuasive policies being followed by the Sardar and openly declared his intentions in favour of Pakistan, Patel reacted strongly and swiftly. He informed the Parliament that the Nizam's threat should be curbed immediately. After having the approval of the Cabinet for strict action against Hyderabad for breach of the standstill agreement, Sardar Patel rushed troops to Hyderabad, which through a '5 day police action' made possible the accession of the state in the Indian Union.

Sardar Patel expressed his gratefulness to the rulers of the Princely States who showed commendable appreciation of the realities of the then prevailing circumstances and a benevolent regard for public good and who were prepared to
sacrifice their powers and fortune in the greater interests of the people of the country. He also supported the grant of 'Privy Purses' to 'Princes', in return for their accession to the Indian Union.

It was also during the process of integration of Princely States that the Sardar had once observed: ".....I have reached an age (73 +), when it is my right to take rest, but the heart is yearning to utilise the time that is still left to me in the service of my country in these critical days. It is my earnest wish to dedicate the rest of my life to this sacred task......."33

Sardar Patel called it (the process of integration), a bloodless revolution, which within a remarkably short period of time, had transformed the internal and external setup of the States. He further added: "By integrating around 600 and odd Princely States into sizable units and the complete elimination of centuries old autocracies, the Indian democracy has won a great victory, of which the princes and the people of India alike should be proud. This is an achievement which should be considered to the credit of any nation or people at any phase of history".34

While paying a glowing tribute to the contributions made by the great Sardar in the integration of the Princely States, Nikita Khurushchev, former General Secretary of the Communist Party of the erstwhile Soviet Union, remarked:

33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., p. 402.
"You Indians are a remarkable people. How did you manage to liquidate the Princely States without liquidating the Princes".35

Sardar Patel can rightly be acclaimed as the architect of India's unity and integrity. The administrative unity that he brought about is a glorious chapter in the contemporary history of our country, for which he will always be remembered as the builder and consolidator of modern Indian Nation-State. His political sagacity, robust patriotism and consummate skill made him one of the world's greatest statesmen.

Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, while congratulating the Sardar, said that Patel occupied a unique position in the Congress Party and the government. He had attained that height not only by a single surprising miracle but a ceaseless endeavour and unflinching loyalty to the goal of national independence and its restructuring through his political shrewdness.

Sardar Patel also played an outstanding role in the making of Indian constitution which was mostly in the Select Committees and often behind the scene. He was the Chairman of the Co–ordination Committee and ensured the proper working of every Committee which were engaged in constitution–making. Besides Patel was also the Chairman of the Minorities and Fundamental Rights Committee. In this capacity he worked for ensuring the rights of minorities and fundamental rights of the people.

35 Heredia, Susana, A PORTRAIT FOR ME–A BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF SARDAR PATEL (Bombay : Orient Longman), 1972, p. 11.
Yet another important part of the constitution which bore the stamp of Sardar Patel’s statesmanship, related to the provisions regarding the Indian Civil Services. Despite bitter criticism from leaders like Nehru and Gobind Ballabh Pant, on retaining the All-India Services, the Sardar foresaw its necessity as there was no alternative to that administrative system. He observed that those Services were essential to keep the country intact. In the Constituent Assembly, he remarked: “....Remove them (Indian Civil Services), and I see nothing but a picture of chaos and disaster all round the country......”

Sardar Patel was a man of strong conviction. He vehemently supported grant of full compensation for private property taken over by the State in the public interest. He also declared that abolition of Zamidari system without adequate compensation would be nothing short of robbery.

A few leaders have criticised Patel for lacking international insight. The famous Oria leader and historian, Hare Krishna Mehtab, thought that Vallabhbhai Patel did not have a scholarly bent of mind on international politics. Similarly, Nehru wrote in his prison diary that. “It is difficult for Sardar Patel to think internationally”.

This observation is, however, contradicted by Congress historian Pattabhi Sitaramayya, who opined that Sardar Patel

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though seemingly wholly ignorant of the currents of thought in
the world and yet was fully conversant with their intimate
details, having embedded deep in his heart and brain
numerous details which explained each and every
international issue.

Sardar Patel had the gift of foresight based on his
intimate knowledge of men and their ways. He had gauged the
Chinese policy as early as 1950. He warned the country
against the threat to its northern frontier. He also advised
Nehru to strengthen the military set up of the country. The
Sardar strongly condemned the Chinese intervention in Tibet
and use of force against its traditionally peace loving people.
He seemed to have believed that Communism was no shield
against Imperialism, and Communists were as good or as bad
as Imperialists or as any other.

Patel, time and again, asked the rulers of Pakistan to
behave rationally. He warned them to stop all types of
disruptive activities, especially in the state of Jammu and
Kashmir. He described Jinnah's demand for a land corridor
linking West Pakistan with the East Pakistan (new
Bangladesh) wing as a 'fantastic nonsense'. While giving a
stern warning to Pakistan if it wanted further division of India,
Sardar Patel said let that nation do so in the open battlefield.
Declaring Kashmir an integral part of Indian Union, he stated
that let there be no mistake that Kashmir belonged to India.

The Sardar also indicted the United Nations
Organisation for mishandling the Kashmir issue. He observed :
"We accepted the U.N. Commission's cease-fire proposals, but
the other party—Pakistan—did not. We could proceed with the
Kashmir operation without danger if only we could free ourselves from our commitments”. Patel further emphasised that this international organisation must be strengthened for the peaceful resolution of various global conflicts.

Although Sardar Patel was neither a saint nor a reformer like Mahatma Gandhi but still he had some religious leanings. He was a firm believer in God. He was a nationalist leader with a dedication to Hinduism. It was probably for this reason that he was instrumental in the reconstruction of the famous Somnath Temple in Gujarat which was destroyed 17 times by Mahmood Ghazni of Afghanistan.

When the Sardar visited the temple on November 13, 1947, he found it in a sorry state and quickly decided to generate funds for its reconstruction. He strongly appealed to the Indian people, both living in the country and abroad, for contribution and collected 1.5 crores of rupees for the said purpose, a huge amount indeed in those days. Even today this temple has the distinction of one of the most important pilgrimage sights of not only Gujarat but whole of India.

During the closing days of his life Patel expressed his firm faith in the power of Almighty God. In this context his views were similar to those of Gandhi’s. It was Mahatma Gandhi’s belief that not a blade of grass moved without God’s will. “In a strictly scientific sense”, he once observed, “God is at the bottom of good and evil. He directed the assassin’s dagger no less than surgeon’s knife”. He once wrote to Sardar Patel, “When God feels that our work here is done, he will take us
away in a moment”.38

Sardar Patel had also observed: “........In the past, attempts have been made by fanatic Muslims and other interested persons on my life. But I have escaped by the grace of Providence. To take the life of any person is not in the hands of any individual........It rests with God only. If my work is finished in this world and I am wanted elsewhere, my life will end. But it will be only in the manner in which it is destined and in no other way........”39

It may not be out of place to mention that though Patel and Nehru respected each other and worked in close collaboration for more than three decades, first for the achievement of independence under the leadership of Gandhi and thereafter for its reconstruction and consolidation. Yet certain differences had also cropped up during the period of their long association.

Patel and Nehru had differences of opinion regarding communalism, economic development of the country, the problem of Jammu and Kashmir and Indian Administrative Services. They also had divergent views regarding India’s relations with the United Nations Organisation, China and Pakistan. On a number of occasions, Nehru threatened to resign from the government and in response to it, Patel also never hesitated to repeat that he would prefer to retire from


39 Ibid.

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the government.

However, when the patch-up came on Gandhi’s assassination, the Sardar replied to a highly sentimental letter from Nehru: ".....I am deeply touched......We both have been life-long comrades in a common cause. The paramount interests of our country and our mutual love and regard transcending such differences of outlook and temperament as existed, have held us together.......Recent events had made me very unhappy and I had written to Bapu (Gandhi), when I was going to Bombay, appealing him to relieve me, but his death changed everything, and the crisis that has overtaken us must awaken in us a fresh realisation of how much we have achieved together and the need for further joint efforts in our grief-stricken country’s interest....."40

Patel’s hectic schedule proved strenuous for his ailing body. In the second week of November 1950, he had his old intestinal trouble. On December 7th there was a recurrence of the heart problem. He was shifted from Delhi to Bombay on 11th. His condition further deteriorated and he breathed his last on December 15, 1950 at 9.37 in the morning, in the Birla House, at Bombay. In his death the motherland lost one of the greatest sons she has ever produced.

Millions of people attended the funeral procession which started from the Birla House to the Sonapur cremation ground in Bombay and paid floral tributes to the departed


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Soul. Nehru gave the news of Patel's death to the Parliament: “...Early this morning, the story of his (the Sardar's), great life ended. It is a great story as all of us know......and history will record him as the builder and consolidator of the New India.....But perhaps to many of us here he will be remembered as a great captain of our forces in the struggle for freedom and as one who gave us sound advice in times of troubles as well as in moments of victory, as a friend and colleague on whom one could invariably rely......”\textsuperscript{41}

Sardar Patel's funeral was largely attended. Not only the prominent leaders of India but numerous official representatives from different countries of the world took part in it. The Sardar's son Dahyabhai Patel lit the funeral pyre.

Paying his tribute, India's first President Dr. Rajendra Prasad said: “Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's body is being consumed by the fire, but no fire on the earth can consume his fame. We grieve for ourselves not for him”,\textsuperscript{42} C. Rajagopalachari observed: “What inspiration, courage, confidence and force incarnate Vallabhbhai was! We will not see the like of him again”.\textsuperscript{43} Maulana Azad stated: “Patel's valour was as high as the mountain and his determination as strong as steel”. Lord Mountbatten remarked: “Sardar Patel's

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., pp. 38, 115.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., pp. 448–49.
spirit will live for ever in India”. S.K. Patil wrote: “Carlyle’s definition of a hero was exemplified in Sardar Patel to an amazing degree. He was, indeed, a hero at all points. Whether it was serving the cause of agriculturists, organising relief measures in disasters, fighting the wrongs of British Imperialism running the institutions of local self-government, or carrying on the responsibilities of the country’s administration, he evidenced the same earnestness and masterly grasp of details”.44

N.V. Gadgil recalled that “without the active cooperation of Sardar Patel, Mahatma Gandhi’s experiments of non-violent satyagraha, for which he is remembered all over the world would not have been feasible”.45 Morarji Desai said that Sardar Patel’s first and foremost thought was always the nation; and actually he had no other interest in life except to serve the motherland.

‘National Herald’ commented that “Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was one of the greatest nation builders”. The New York Times’ described Patel as “a realist without whom the vision and the dreams of Nehru could not have made any headway. He was the consolidator of freedom. His role as the non-violent Bismarck is very well known”.

‘The London Times’ observed that “Patel was equal to


ten Bismarcks of Germany in as much as the German
Bismarck evolved a united Germany, the Indian Bismarck
evolved a united India which is about ten times the size of
Germany”.

Manibehn Patel’s daughter, who co-ordinated the
material for the volumes published by Patel Smarak Bhavan,
says: “....Like millions of my countrymen I feel......that if the
realism and the ideo–practical approach of the Sardar would
have prevailed on all things concerning the vital interests of
India, the picture of the country would have been greatly
different from what it is today......”

Sardar Patel’s memory, instead of fading with the
passage of time became even more securely entrenched in the
hearts of his countrymen. At the time of his birth centenary
celebrations on October 31, 1975, the Chairman of the
Celebration Committee, Rajni Patel, remarked that the
Sardar’s achievements as a statesman, administrator and
politician are incomparable in the world, considering the brief
span of three years and the odds he was pitted against.

One is really pained to learn that the rulers of India
took nearly 41 years after Sardar Patel’s death to confer
‘Bharat Ratna’ (the highest civilian award of the country) upon
him posthumously. According to Bipin Dapabhai, grandson of
the Sardar, his family had decided to refuse the honour
because of its being conferred so late. However, on July 12,
1991, Sardar Patel was conferred posthumously Bharat Ratna

46 Nandurkar, G.M., (ed.), ibid., p. 139.
and his grandson received the award.

While analysing role of various Indian leaders in the freedom movement of the country, a discerning analyst has aptly recorded: "Gandhi gave Congress inspiration, Nehru broadened its vision and imagination, Rajagopalachari sharpened its intellect and analytical faculty, Rajendra Prasad gave it purity, Sarojini Naidu gave it grace. But it was Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who gave it efficiency and a sense of thoroughness and power".47

It can be rightly said that while Mahatma Gandhi was the architect of India's freedom, Sardar Patel was the architect of India's unity and integrity. Had the duo lived for some more time, the history of the Indian sub-continent would have been quite different than what it is today. To sum up it can be said without exaggeration that the history created by these two illustrious leaders of India, will remain alive forever.