A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE TWO LEADERS

In her long history, India rarely had three men of the calibre of Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Nehru and Sardar Patel, who lived in the same period and laboured together for the same cause. All the three were imbued with limitless zeal and unquestionable sincerity. They sacrificed everything for the sacred cause of the motherland.

V.B. Kulkarni has compared their roles to the great Hindu Trinity: Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Gandhi represented Brahma – the creator and the inspirer. Nehru reflected Vishnu’s soft, gentle looks, a nobility of character and humanism that transcended barriers of caste, class and creed. And Patel proved, like Shiva, the destroyer and unifier – the builder and consolidator of Modern Indian Nation. The Mahatma’s genius welded the ‘Troika’ into a potent force that jointly waged a non-violent struggle against the British Imperialism for over three decades.

Among these three nationalist leaders, Mahatma Gandhi was undoubtedly unique and outstanding. He tried to get independence for the country by non-violent method – a technique untried in the history of mankind. He combined in his person the traditional attributes of an ascetic and the shrewdness of a politician. He was basically a religious man
having absolute faith in the Almighty God. Due to his religious leanings he acquired certain political and social convictions which made him an extraordinary political leader of the country. Few men in their lifetime aroused stronger emotions or touched deeper chords of humanity than Gandhi did. "Generations to come, it may be", wrote Robert Einstein about the Mahatma, "will scarcely believe that such a one as this ever in flash and blood walked upon this earth". 1

Mahatma Gandhi lovingly called Bapu (father of the nation), so completely dominated the Indian political scene from 1919 to 1948 that this period is rightly called the Gandhian era in the history of India's freedom movement. An apostle of peace and non-violence, the Mahatma's message has a universal appeal and has profound influence on humanity. Rabindrabath Tagore had observed: "Great as Gandhi is as a politician, as an organiser, as a leader of men, as a moral reformer, he is greater than all these as a man, because none of these aspects and activities limits his humanity. They are rather inspired and sustained by it. Though an incorrigible idealist and given to referring all conduct to certain pet formulae of his own, he is essentially a lover of men and not of mere ideas". 2

During the best part of his life, Mahatma Gandhi


worked in India for the sake of the country's freedom. He was much more than the liberator of a nation. Although as a patriot he will be ranked with George Washington, William Mazzini and Sun Yat–Sen, his achievements are not confined to bringing independence to four hundred millions of people. By his insistence on the application of purity to politics, he has given shape to the aspirations of the noble humanity of all ages. It is immaterial whether he was in a minority of one or a majority of a million. He said: “I belong to the tribe of Columbus and Stevenson who hoped against hope in the face of heaviest odds”. His stand on truth and the persistent resolute attempt at the crystallization and concretization of the perfectionistic dreams of humanity in his own person and in society impart to him a unique place beyond the grasp of a parochial patriot or power politician.

An indomitable freedom fighter, a successful administrator, a devoted patriot, shrewd political organiser and a dedicated servant of the nation, Vallabhbhai Patel will be ever remembered in the annals of India for his great work of political and territorial consolidation of the country. He was a man of tremendous patience. He devoted his vast energies to give concrete shape to some of the Gandhian techniques for political fight.3

Sardar Patel was also one of the greatest leaders and statesmen the country had ever produced both in the pre and post independence era. Devotion to duty was the hallmark of

his character. He placed duty over his person and carried the fire of revolt. He was an unassuming man with simple and austere habits. A man of such a sterling character who gave all he had for the sheer love of the motherland, would rarely be found. He was a man of iron will and never flinched from the principles he cherished.

In Lord Mountbatten’s words Vallabhbhai Patel was a man of iron will, clear vision and ruthless determination who at heart was kind, gentle and sentimental. It is given to few men to serve their country so faithfully and so well as did Sardar Patel without ever sacrificing his loyalty to those whom he called friend. The Sardar devoted himself, body and soul, to various tasks till the end of his illustrious life and his achievements were so great as to have left indelible footprints on the sands of India’s history. Gandhi and Patel were great according to any definition of greatness. The ultimate goal of both of them was the attainment of India’s independence from British Colonialism and work for the development and reconstruction of the nation. As the title of the thesis is “Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Patel—a Comparative Study” it will be in the fitness of things to evaluate their similarities and differences in the concluding chapter.

SIMILARITIES

Their parents had little formal education; still they had wide knowledge and were well equipped with varied

experiences of practical life. Both Gandhi and Patel inherited most of their qualities, e.g. truthfulness, bravery, generosity, high moral character, industrious habits, honesty, straightforward dealings, patriotism etc. from their fathers.

From the religious minded nature of their mothers, they learnt the lessons of moral and spiritual purity, simplicity, restless spirit of service, gentlemanliness, orderliness and an irresistible desire to fight against injustice. The inherited qualities of their parents moulded their lives to a great extent.

During the period of their school education, both Gandhi and Patel were average students. Right from their young age they were strong critiques of religious orthodoxy and superstitions.

Great Britain attracted both these leaders because of the greatness of her people and democratic institutions. Both Gandhi and Patel, during the initial stages of life admired the British and wanted to imitate them. Sardar Patel was anxious to go to England to see the English people, who, living 7,000 miles away, were able to rule India for so long.

Both these leaders had their “Barrister at Law” degrees from England. They were quite eager to complete their higher studies in Great Britain within the shortest possible time, thereby saving time, energy and money. Both of them did not want to stay away from home even a day longer than was necessary. After enrolment in the Bar, they left for home the following day.

After coming to India, both these leaders used Gujarat not only as their base but also a form of laboratory to carry out
their experiments. Both of them started their political career as members of the Gujarat Sabha which was founded to petition people’s grievances to the government. Both Gandhi and Patel used to attend its deliberations regularly. In December 1916, both these leaders attended the Lucknow Session of the Congress as the representatives of the Gujarat Sabha.

Sardar Patel was gradually influenced by Mahatma Gandhi's activities in Gujarat. However, it was only the developments of the Champaran Satyagraha which made their impact on the former. Initially, he was more interested in a game of bridge than listening to the Mahatma’s speeches, who was to speak in the Gujarat Club in Ahmedabad. But when Patel came to know how Gandhi was able to secure the basic rights for the tenants exploited by indigo cultivators at Champaran, there was a sea change in the former's attitude towards the latter. It also inculcated a desire in Sardar Patel to devote himself to the service of the nation. Until then he only cherished the dream of becoming a barrister of utmost repute.

Their actual link began with Gandhi’s election as the President and Patel as the Secretary of the Gujarat Sabha. For both the Mahatma and the Sardar it may be called a love at first sight. Frankness, fearlessness and shrewdness of Patel, greatly appealed to Gandhi. The former was enchanted by the latter’s selfless devotion to the service of the downtrodden and his strong will to wrest the freedom of the country.

Both Gandhi and Patel played an important role in the successful resolution of Ahmedabad Mill–Workers’ Strike. This struggle provided them an opportunity to have an insight in the labour–capital problem and a hold on Ahmedabad workers.
The Kheda Satyagraha was further responsible for bringing Gandhi and Patel closer to each other. The latter had proved his skill and shrewdness in this agitation. Sardar Patel led a 'no tax' campaign and won a resounding victory when the government yielded to the demands of the peasants for the postponement of the collection of the land revenue as the yield from the fields had been severely affected by continuous and heavy rains. The non-violent movement concluded on the lines drawn by Gandhiji.

Praising Patel’s contribution Gandhi said, “It is certain that but for Vallabhbhai, the campaign would not have come to a successful conclusion”. Not before long the Mahatma realised that the Sardar was a prize catch. Kheda Satyagraha enable both Gandhi and Patel to closely study the tyranny of the British government and plight of Indian peasants, thus bringing them closer to each other.

The next two local struggles—Nagpur Flag Satyagraha and Borsad Satyagraha against the dacoits’ menace—were conducted by Patel alone as Gandhi was in incarceration in Yeravda Jail. The former had completely followed the techniques adopted by the latter of instituting a personal inquiry to find out whether the cause was just. Similarly Patel tried to maintain close links with satyagrahis and built up their morale when he found it wanting. While in the first case the demand of the satyagrahis was completely vindicated, regarding the hoisting of the National Flag, by the government, the second satyagraha was also concluded successfully since the punitive tax was withdrawn by the authorities. The Borsad Satyagraha earned Patel the title of ‘the King of Borsad’, from Gandhi.
Sardar Patel’s earlier experiences in conducting satyagraha movements both along with Gandhi as well as independent of him, proved helpful for him in the Bardoli Satyagraha Campaign. With the successful conclusion of this movement, Patel was given the distinction of an ‘Indian Lenin’. He also came to be known as the Sardar of whole of India. The title of the “Sardar” was first conferred on him by Gandhi.

Both Gandhi and Patel were enamoured of the British to begin with, but the enchantment did not continue for long. Passage of the Rowlatt Bills, Punjab wrongs and Khilafat issue made them turn into ‘Non-Co-operators’ from ‘Co-operators’. Both of them strongly criticised the Rowlatt Bills and the repressive measures used by the Imperial government, and worked for arousing strong public opinion against British Colonialism. They also condemned Jallianwala Bagh Massacre and criticised the findings of the Official Inquiry Committee. The duo felt that the Hunter Committee Report was an attempt to condone official lawlessness and the government, by accepting the report, had sought to protect the prestige of the Colonial Empire rather than securing justice to the people of India.

Both of them also criticised severely the British government’s breach of pledge given to the Indian Muslim community regarding the preservation of the solidarity of the Turkish Empire. By championing the cause of Khilafat, Gandhi also wanted to utilise the opportunity for securing Hindu-Muslim unity. The Sardar fully supported him in this endeavour.

In fact Patel was single minded in the pursuit of his
goal. During this period of time, he followed Mahatma Gandhi without doubt or demur. So long as the basic aim of winning national freedom remained unfulfilled, he did not consider it imperative to evaluate any aspect of Gandhian philosophy. It was enough for the Sardar that the Mahatma’s leadership had the potency to lead the country to the desired goal. The same approach continued during All India Satyagraha Movements conducted by Gandhiji.

When the Mahatma launched Non-Co-operation Movement in 1920, the Sardar fully supported the move. Not only this, he (Patel), persuaded the delegates at the Calcutta and Nagpur Sessions of the Congress to vote for Gandhi’s programme of Non-Violent Non-Co-operation. Both the Sessions (Special and Annual respectively), had approved Mahatma Gandhi’s programme of action. It was in the Nagpur Annual Session (December 27-30, 1920), that Congress, especially under the persuasion of these two leaders accepted a new objective for the National Movement: “The attainment of ‘Swaraj’ by the people of India by all possible means”.5

Immediately after launching the movement, the nationalist leaders including Gandhi and Patel asked the people to discard Imperial honours in protest against government’s repression. A call was given to the lawyers to give up their flourishing legal practice to join the National Movement. Boycott of Legislative Councils was also pursued by the nationalist leaders. The students were asked to leave

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government controlled educational institutions. It was also during this agitation that the Congress leadership favoured a complete boycott of the Prince of Wales’s visit to India to represent the real picture of British misrule in the country.

Since the Ahmedabad Congress Session of 1921, Gandhi acted as the inspirer and Patel as the organiser of this political organisation. Both of them continued to play their respective roles right until India’s independence. While the former, as the leader invested the Congress with the character of a national political party, the latter proved the backbone of this effort throughout thereafter. The Indian National Congress under their leadership had shed its earlier bourgeoise image and assumed instead a mass character.

Patel lent his unflinching support to Gandhi in the conduct of Non-Violent Non-Co-operation Movement though he did not initially like the latter’s suspension of the movement on the eruption of violence in February 1922, yet he did not think it wise to oppose his decision publically. It may not be out of place to mention that many other important leaders, including Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose, C. Rajagopalachari, etc. had also criticised Mahatma Gandhi for suspending the agitation at a moment when it was gaining strength.

When the Left-Wing in the Congress emerged as a radicalist revolt against Gandhi, his philosophy and his technique of nationalist struggle and advocated an uncompromising, vigorous and activist policy for the attainment of independence from British Colonialism, these two leaders tried their best to persuade all those Congressmen to lead their struggle with the help of peaceful methods only.
Both of them severely criticised Swarajists' move to enter into Legislative Assemblies during the middle of 1922. While commenting on this move, the Sardar observed: “.....Once we enter the Legislature, the people will lose their enthusiasm......It will be ruinous to the Congress......If you conduct your campaign for a hundred years through Legislative Assemblies, you will not get independence.....”

Mahatma Gandhi had prepared a draft resolution to be presented before the Lahore Session of the Congress in December 1929, and declared “Complete Independence as the goal of the Congress policy”. He had also fixed 26th January 1930 for the celebration of ‘Independence Day’. Patel strongly supported his move. Both these leaders also felt during this period of time that the overall situation in the country was ripe for an All-India Satyagraha Movement.

Whenever the Mahatma and the Sardar were not busy in leading satyagraha movement directly, they used to be completely absorbed in such innocuous activities of constructive programme as promotion of hand-spinning, Hindu-Muslim unity and eradication of untouchability because according to Gandhi, constructive programme provided the necessary training for participation in active satyagraha.

Before the commencement of the Civil Disobedience Movement in March 1930, both Gandhi and Patel realised that

the British government had ruined India economically, politically, culturally and spiritually. Both of them felt the necessity of complete independence for India because freedom was the birth right of every nation. After launching the movement, the duo contributed a lot in preparing people for the forthcoming struggle. As an acting President of the Congress, during the first year of the agitation, the Sardar had advised the people of the nation thus: “Every house in the country should be the office of the Congress Committee and every individual to be the Congress in himself”.7

During the Civil Disobedience Movement, 1930–34, Sardar Patel acted as John the Baptist. The success of Mahatma Gandhi’s Dandi March was greatly due to the Sardar’s untiring efforts as he visited various villages enroute to Dandi to create awareness among the people regarding the aim of the satyagraha. The response of the masses was tremendous as exhibited during Gandhi’s visit to those villages where people lined in thousands throughout his 241 miles way from Sabarmati to Dandi. Sardar Patel’s early arrest prevented him from participating in the conduct of Salt Satyagraha.

The historic Gandhi–Irwin Pact which was signed on March 4, 1931, was regarded by both sides – the Congress leadership and the British Government–as a temporary truce rather than a lasting peace. Still, both Gandhi and Patel, hoped that it might prove to be the beginning of sustained co-operation between the Congress and the Colonialists.

Thereafter the duo started touring the country extensively to give the first hand information to the people regarding the provisions of the Pact.

Though Patel did not appreciate all the clauses of the Gandhi – Irwin Pact, especially the clause of not returning the confiscated lands of the peasants of Kheda and Bardoli, yet he accepted the Pact ungrudgingly. He even asked the All India Congress Committee delegates at Karachi to accept the Pact thereby showing his loyalty to Mahatma Gandhi. During the Annual Session of the Congress at Karachi, in December 1931, Patel acquired a new status next only to that of Gandhi in the hierarchy of Congress leadership.

Both the Mahatma and the Sardar became Presidents of the Congress for one Session each. While the former presided over the Belgam Annual Session of December 1924, the latter could do so in the Karachi Session held in March 1931. When both of them arrived at Karachi to attend the Congress Session, they were greeted with a ‘black flag demonstration’, organised by the younger leaders of the Congress, with the help of students in protest against their inability to protect the lives of Bhagat Singh and his two associates.

It may not be out of place to mention that Gandhi had tried his level best to persuade the Viceroy to save the lives of Bhagat Singh, Sukh Dev and Rajguru. Both Gandhi and Patel, while disapproved the methods adopted by those three revolutionary leaders, greatly admired their patriotism in the Congress Session. It was mainly due to the persuasion of these two leaders that a resolution mentioning the key fundamental
rights of the people was passed by the All India Congress Committee at its Karachi Session in 1931. Contrary to the pronouncements of the “radicals” like Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose, Patel lent his powerful support to Gandhi, who didn't believe in India's complete severence of the British connection after achieving independence.

When Gandhi was in London, Patel acted as his contact with India. The latter kept him informed of all the major developments in India. The former asked the latter's counsel for extending his stay abroad. The correspondence of this time (e.g. Letter of 26th October 1931), reveals Gandhi's absolute confidence in Patel. The latter had remained true, confident and close consultant of the former during that period of time.

Following the failure of the 2nd Round Table Conference, the Mahatma after consulting the Sardar and other Congress leaders, decided to resume the Civil Disobedience Movement. Taking a serious note of his decision, the British Government arrested both these leaders and lodged them in the Yeravda Jail for a period of more than 16 months (January 4, 1932 to May 8, 1933). During most of the period of their incarceration, they kept themselves engaged in non-political activities – reading, writing, spinning, book-keeping etc.

On his release, the Mahatma issued a statement in which he said: “One of the greatest joys of my life was that I had an opportunity of staying in prison with the Sardar. I knew of his invincible courage and of his burning love for the country, but never before had I the good fortune of spending as much time with him as I was able to do during these sixteen months. His affection and love overwhelmed me and reminded
me of my dear mother. I would never have imagined that he possessed such qualities of maternal affection". Gandhi's judgment of Patel was based on personal experience he had during their prison life. Whenever he was "in the slightest degree indisposed", the Mahatma admitted, "he would be immediately by my side and would pay personal attention to the smallest of my needs".8

The period of 1930–34, presents a clear picture of much closer relationship between the two leaders. During 1936–37 when Provincial Assembly elections were to be held, both these leaders realised the internal discord in the party and subsequent necessity for unity in the Congress ranks. Both of them strongly recommended stern action against those found guilty of violating the directives of the Congress.

Both the Mahatma and the Sardar, alongwith other leaders of the Congress, were bitterly critical of Britain's unilateral policy of declaring India a belligerent country in World War II. They wondered that a country having 1/4th population of the world was made a partner without the consent of her people. Consequently, they started mobilising public opinion against the British Imperialism. They made it clear that if the government could not pay due attention to the genuine demands of the people, they will be forced to launch an all-India agitation.

When the Cripps Mission (headed by Sir Stafford

Cripps), visited India in March 1942 for a constitutional settlement, both the Mahatma and the Sardar participated in its deliberations. Following the failure of the Mission, they strongly criticised the British government for not being sincere towards the resolution of the Indian crisis. While commenting on this, Gandhi said to Sir Stafford Cripps: “Why did you come if this is what you have to offer? I would advise you to take the first plane home”.  

After the failure of the Cripps Mission, both Gandhi and Patel came to believe that the national unity could not be achieved so long as the third party was there. They also carried the conviction that the only solution of Indian tangle lay in the complete withdrawal of the British authority.

Soon after the advocacy of the slogan “Quit India”, Congress started mobilising its resources to prepare the people of the country for the forthcoming struggle. Both Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Patel felt that the British must transfer political authority to the responsible Indian hands and leave the country immediately. Contrary to the viewpoints of some Congress leaders like Nehru, Azad and C. Rajagopalachari the duo had concluded that the overall political scenario of the country was conducive for the launching of an all-India

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The Congress accepted the idea of a struggle at the Working Committee’s meeting at Wardha on July 14, 1942. The issue was first discussed in Congress Working Committee meeting in April. Mahadev Desai, Gandhi’s Secretary, had sent a draft to Patel asking him to get the resolution passed. Of all the members of the Working Committee, Vallabhbhai gave the most vehement support to the Mahatma and he was the first one to agree with the latter’s proposal of ‘Quit India’.

To create public opinion regarding the Quit India Movement, Gandhi and Patel, along with other members of the Congress, toured the country extensively and organised public meetings and rallies at different places. They also used the columns of the anglo-Indian and vernacular press to further strengthen their course of action.

While commenting on the nature and implications of the forthcoming struggle, both Gandhi and Patel expressed similar views that the impending revolution would be so great that every individual had to take part in it. The former had further opined that the freedom of India was necessary not only in the interest of India but also for the safety of the world.11

They asked the British government to quit India immediately, lest continuation of their rule might tempt other

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Imperialist Powers to occupy the country. While meeting the accusation that the Congress desired power for itself more than freedom for India, both the Mahatma and the Sardar expressed similar views when they said that let the British transfer power to Indian hands whether it was the Muslim League or any other party or organisation and the Congress would dissolve itself.

The All India Congress Committee met in Bombay from 6–8 August 1942 to approve the Quit India Resolution. Both the Mahatma and the Sardar attended that historic Session. The former in his long speech asked the delegates and the people to get ready to participate in the forthcoming struggle to be launched in the near future. The latter had strongly supported his move.

The government was afraid that if a Mass Civil Disobedience Movement was launched, it might paralyse civil administration and endanger the British war efforts. For strong preventive action, the government arrested all important Congress leaders, including Gandhi and Patel, in the early hours of August 9, 1942, under the ‘Defence of India Rules’.

When the Indian Viceroy, Lord Wavell, invited the Indian leaders for forming of a new Executive Council which would be more representative of organised political opinion, both Gandhi and Patel attended that Political Conference at Shimla during June–July 1945. The said Conference, however, resulted in failure since the Viceroy could not overrule the Muslim League. The duo had also realised that Lord Wavell surrendered before Jinnah's intransigence and obstinacy.
British Government's decision to hold elections to the Central and Provincial Legislative Assemblies in 1945–46, did not excite the Congress leaders, especially Gandhi and Patel—as they believed that the rank and file of the Congress were still in Jail and secondly, because the electoral rolls were not revised. Later on, however, after some discussions with the Viceroy, the Congress leaders agreed to participate in the proposed elections. Their main aim was to demonstrate before the world that the whole country was behind them and that the people of India were determined to win freedom.

In 1946 British government decided to send a high-powered Cabinet Mission to India for a constitutional settlement. Both the Mahatma and the Sardar welcomed the move and participated in the Mission's deliberations.

Both Gandhi and Patel had similar views regarding the issues facing Independent India. They observed that the biggest problem before the country was of peace and tranquility. On the issue of future economic policy, they observed that everybody should be able to get sufficient work to enable him to make the two ends meet. They further opined that mutual love and affection alone would make India geographically united and economically strong.

Both the Mahatma and the Sardar had expressed similar views when asked the question, whether India would remain a Secular State. They had opined that it should undoubtedly be Secular and 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.
Both had shared similar views regarding Pakistan and emphasised that these two nations should co-exist peacefully and sort out their contentious issues through arbitration. On September 26, 1947, Gandhi had said that he had been an opponent of all warfare. But if there was no other way of securing justice from Pakistan, the Indian government would have to go to war against it.

Both of them opined that minorities in both the countries—India and Pakistan—should be loyal towards their respective States. Sardar Patel, however, added that if they couldn't do so they must leave their respective countries to a place where lay their loyalty.

Patel Committee’s Report on Minorities was submitted to the Constituent Assembly in December 1947. It included the issue of joint electorate, representation of minorities in the Legislative Assemblies and abolition of untouchability which were also precious to Gandhi.

Both these leaders did not believe in sticking to either Capitalist or Socialist pattern of economic development but in the mixed economic approach for the well-being of their people. The duo had also observed that accepting of economic and developmental aid from the two leading blocks (led by the USA and the USSR), or from any other country of the world didn't mean alignment with any power block.

Both Gandhi and Patel were critical of Lord Mountbatten’s suggestion to the Indian Government to refer the Kashmir issue to the United Nations Organisation, especially in the wake of Pakistan’s attack over Kashmir.
This has been widely accepted that Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Patel were the 'Prime Movers' of India's Freedom Struggle, thereby their role was complementary to each other in the greater interests of the country as a whole. In their joint endeavour, their contribution was second to none. They turned down their backs upon personal comforts and professional ambitions and devoted their lives in the service of the Motherland.

DIFFERENCES

While Gandhi's ancestors were 'Bania' by caste and 'grocers' by profession, Patel's ancestors were 'Leva Patidar' by caste and 'agriculturists' by profession. The former's grandfather and father served as Diwans or Prime Ministers of the Princely State of Porbandar, the latter's ancestors were mere peasants.

During the period of school education, while textbooks remained the sole companion of Gandhi, the Sardar, along with his studies also used to devote some time to co-curricular activities. While the former was enrolled as a Law student in England in the 'Inner Temple Inn', the latter did the same in the 'Middle Temple Inn'. While, Gandhi did not have any earlier experience in the study or practice of law in India, Patel had an experience of District Pleader in India for more than ten years preceding his studies in London. Hence he topped in the Law examinations in London and got a scholarship. Referring to this, Sardar Patel wrote in a letter to his bother on June 7, 1912, in an unassuming manner: "I have completed my
examinations and have passed in the first class. It means I shall be coming six months earlier than usual." While the Mahatma became a barrister at the age of 22, the Sardar could do so only after crossing 37 years of age.

Soon after coming to India, Gandhi started his practice first at Bombay and later on in Rajkot but he didn’t succeed. On the other hand, Patel on his return to India was offered two positions by the Government of Bombay—one of a judge in the Bombay High Court and the other was of a professorship in the Government Law College, Bombay—but he declined both. The Sardar left for Ahmedabad and within a short span of time he had a flourishing practice of Law over there. Although the Mahatma had spent nearly three years abroad, his excessive shyness was not, however, shaken off completely. Contrary to this, Patel returned to India as a fearless and indomitable barrister. Due to the former’s inability to start a lucrative practice in India, he left for South Africa.

Though Gandhi went to South Africa initially for one year but the struggle against racial discrimination forced him to stay there for more than two decades. In the process of his struggle, he fought for the rights of the Indian community living in South Africa and thus became a leader of repute. He also had a flourishing practice as a barrister, first in Natal and later in Transvaal. However, in the field of public service, Gandhi was more experienced than Patel. Contrary to this the

latter continued his work in Ahmedabad and very soon established himself as a leading barrister of repute. He has also rendered some public service through Gujarat Sabha and Ahmedabad Municipality.

After coming back to India (from South Africa), Gandhi utilised every opportunity to address small gatherings of Western educated Indian elite in the Gujarat Club in Ahmedabad. He also used to meet important leaders of Indian National Congress, which was the main political party at that time in the country, and told them about the conditions of Indians living in South Africa and about his efforts to fight against the evil of racial discrimination. Patel, on the other hand, came to Gujarat Club for recreation. Initially the latter was very sceptical and critical about the former's ideas and plans.\(^{13}\) Gandhi's success in the Champaran Satyagraha, however, proved a turning point for Patel and he started admiring the former.

Though after his close association with Gandhi during the Kheda Satyagraha and Ahmedabad Mill Workers' Strike Patel was greatly impressed by him and decided to accept his leadership, he however, refused Gandhi's invitation to stay at the "Sabarmati Ashram", frankly telling him that he did not want to stay there as he did not like some of the conditions prescribed by the Mahatma for living in the Ashram.

\(^{13}\) Mavalankar, G.V., SARDAR PATEL [an Article in 'The Tribune', on Patel's 70th Birthday] (Lahore : The Tribune Press), November 3, 1945, p.4.
Both of them differed in their outlook and approach towards various social and political issues. Gandhi, for whom morality was the basis of politics, was a religious man at heart. He believed in fasting and vows. Fasting for him was not only a sacred creed but also a weapon for the redressal of public grievances; while Patel was critical of such techniques. When the Mahatma decided to go on fast against ‘Communal Award’ in 1932, the Sardar showed his displeasure by telling him that he should have given notice about his fast well in advance. On a later occasion, Patel told Gandhi that his undertaking a fast so frequently had no meaning. He would simply make his fast appear cheap. It would cease to carry weight.

Another issue of disagreement was Gandhi’s policy of appeasement towards Muslims and his claim to represent the Muslim community. Patel questioned his claim to represent the Muslims. He felt that Gandhi could prick, through fasting the conscience of Hindus only and Muslim community generally did not bother for him.

In the solitude of the Yeravda Jail, Mahatma Gandhi for the first time, perhaps, revealed to Sardar Patel, how much sorrow and pain were caused to him by the Muslims’ attitude towards him in the case of the Kohat communal rioting and at the Round Table Conference. He said in a depressed tone, “Whom should I tell the insults I have borne on behalf of the Muslims? For their sake I have drunk bitter cups of sorrow”.

Sardar Patel severely criticised those leaders of the Congress, including Gandhi, who were repeatedly approaching Jinnah for settlement of the Indian communal problem following the British Government’s ‘Communal Award’. He
observed that the Congress leaders made several attempts for reconciliation with the League leaders but failed to persuade them. Gandhi, however, was still hopeful of some concrete results through continuous parleys. Not only this, the Sardar also criticised the British government's soft corner for the League leadership.

The differences between Gandhi and Patel’s outlook had started cropping up in the late 1930s. While the former was still in favour of boycotting Council Entry Programme, the latter strongly favoured the joining of reformed Legislative Assemblies during 1936–37. After the resounding victory of Congress in the provincial elections in 1937, the Mahatma favoured coalition governments in association with the Muslim League (based on the principle of proportional representation), even in those provinces in which the Congress had secured an absolute majority or was the single largest party, but the Sardar was strongly against any such move.

Differences between the two leaders were further noticed over the question of the selection of Congress President in 1938. Mahatma Gandhi was in favour of Subhash Chandra Bose for his popularity in the youth wing of the Congress and the country, but Sardar Patel did not seem to favour his candidature perhaps because of the fiery radicalism and Socialist inclinations of Bose.

World War II found Sardar Patel along with other leaders of the Congress differing with Mahatma Gandhi’s policy of non-violence. In the governance of the country, while for the latter non-violence was an article of faith, for the former and most of the Congress leaders, it was a matter of policy, which
could be changed according to the circumstances.

The Sardar, like many other important Congress leaders, was in favour of offering full civil and military support to the war efforts of the British authorities. He not only advocated the training of young men in the mechanisms of sophisticated warfare but also strongly supported complete Indianization of the Indian Defence Forces. This approach of Patel was quite contrary to that of Gandhi's.

Sardar Patel was of the opinion that they couldn't administer the country without using necessary violence. He was also appointed a member of the War Sub-Committee to aid and advice the Congress regarding its war policy during the pendency of the World War II.

Following the continuous victory of the Axis Powers, when Gandhi offered unconditional support to the British government in their war efforts, Patel openly criticised the move and observed that keeping in view the former's universal love, his offer of unconditional support was the right thing in principle but not in practice.

Patel was also unhappy with the Indian Viceroy and the British Conservative Party Legislators, for their unnecessary support to the Muslim fundamentalism during the pendency of war. He further observed that the British authorities were continuously practising the policy of 'Divide and Rule' to strengthen its hold in the Indian sub-continent.

Following the failure of the Individual Civil Disobedience Movement during the period of 1940–41, the Sardar was in favour of immediate launching of Mass Civil
Disobedience Movement, but the Mahatma felt that the political scene was not conducive for the same. The latter was apprehensive of violence breaking out. Once the mass movement was declared, he confessed, they could not stop it; if stopped, the people would be crushed badly.

In February 1946, encouraged by the Communists and some other radical elements, the Royal Indian Navy ratings staged an open revolt and threatened more disorder and bloodshed. It was due to the shrewdness of the Sardar, who happened to be in Bombay at that time that the Navy’s ratings were persuaded to surrender before the British authorities on February 23, 1946. Patel was the only top ranking Indian political leader who contributed a lot in the effective management of this crisis.

In the mid 1946, after the resignation of Maulana Azad from the Presidentship of the Congress, when Patel was the ultimate choice of the members of the Congress Working Committee, All India Congress Committee and Provincial Congress Committees, for that esteemed position, Gandhi once again brushed aside the majority’s opinion based on democratic ideals and made the Sardar withdraw his name in favour of Nehru, for the third time. In this way the Mahatma acted arbitrarily and partially which might have had negative effect on the relationship between these two leaders. During the period 1945–47, Sardar Patel no longer remained Gandhi’s yes man or blind follower as he used to be after the Kheda Satyagraha, as is revealed by the developments during parleys for transfer of power.

Analysing the question that why did Gandhi sacrifice
Patel, his trusted lieutenant three times from becoming the Congress President is a very pertinent question. Gandhi had his own justification for this. When the question of Congress Presidentship arose in 1929, the Mahatma had persuaded the Sardar to give way to Nehru as Nehru's father Moti Lai Nehru wished to see his son on that esteemed office during his own life time. When the same issue appeared in 1937, Gandhi again asked Patel to withdraw his candidature in favour of Nehru. He observed that if Nehru was not appointed President at that moment it would lead to disintegration of the Congress organisation. In 1946 the question of electing the Congress President assumed added significance as the President was to assume the office of Prime Minister in Independent India. Mahatma Gandhi once again persuaded Sardar Patel to accommodate Nehru and opined that he (Nehru) was comparatively young and better known at the international level. Although Patel was hurt, still like a soldier he accepted Gandhi's decision. In fact, the Mahatma considered Nehru as his political heir.

It was in the January 1942 All India Congress Committee Session that Gandhi had declared : “Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru and I have had differences from the moment we became co-workers, yet I have said for some years and say it now that not Rajaji, nor Sardar Vallabhbhai but Jawahar Lal will be my successor. When I am gone, he will speak my language”. He further added : “You cannot divide water by repeatedly striking it with a stick. It is just as difficult to divide us”.

It is undoubtedly true that Nehru had more charm than force whereas Vallabhbhai was endowed with a revolutionary
force. Questioning why did the Mahatma prefer charm to force? Twelve years earlier, Gandhi had been influenced by Nehru’s acceptability, Vallabhbhai was less popular than Nehru with the youth of the country’s Left-Wing and the Muslim community. Moreover, consideration of age was also there Nehru was younger to Patel by almost fifteen years. Not only this, the latter was also not keeping good health for the last one year. Gandhi also believed that Nehru was well verse in tackling international relations as compared to Patel.

According to Rajmohan Gandhi there were yet two other crucial considerations. Gandhi knew that Patel would provide a corrective for Nehru when necessary. Jawahar Lal would act as a colleague and not as the sole guide of political authority. The Mahatma had written to the Sardar as early as 1939 that he expected Patel to provide robust and analytical fellowship to Nehru and suggested that he expected men like C. Rajagopalachari, Rajendra Prasad, Maulana Azad and Jai Prakash Narayan to do likewise in the greater interests of the country.

Another important factor that was lurking in the Mahatma’s mind was that he felt that Jawahar Lal was more likely than Sardar Patel to resent a number two position. He was certain that Vallabhbhai’s commitment had nothing to do with rank. Gandhi’s assessment of Patel is revealed by his letter to Norman in 1937 : “.............The Sardar has no parliamentary ambition. He has no ambition for leadership either ............you won’t find him going to the press and
complaining if he loses hold on populace........"14

In spite of some reservations the Sardar had strongly pressed for acceptance of the Cabinet Mission Plan in the Congress Working Committee. It was largely because of his advocacy that the Committee had overruled Gandhi’s misgivings regarding the Plan. Patel himself told Sir Stafford Cripps that he had thrown his weight in favour of the Plan when the Mahatma was opposed to it.15

In September 1946, after the formation of the Interim government, Sardar Patel took charge of the Home Ministry. During this period of time, when Gandhi, Nehru and certain other Congress leaders, talked of the struggle against the British government, Patel appeared to be more realistic since he held that it was no use flogging a dying horse, and instead of fighting with the British authorities, the time had come to help them to roll up their bedding and depart.

Sardar Patel’s failure to defeat Jinnah and his followers in the game of violence (preceding and succeeding the Direct Action Day—August 16, 1946), was primarily due to the hostility he encountered from Gandhi and the Congress. The Mahatma being totally committed to non-violence, abhorred bloodshed, even if the other side adopted it as a weapon.

14 Gandhi, Rajmohan, ibid., p.302.
For sometimes past, the differences between Gandhi and Patel were coming to surface which is clear from the former's letter to the latter. The Mahatma's letter to the Sardar on July 1, 1946, bears ample evidence of their differences: "I did not like your conversation today. I have been at a loss to understand a number of things which you have done. You speak in the Committee with much heat. I do not like it. We are drifting in different directions". The Sardar's prompt reply was: "I must be at fault. Only I cannot yet see it and that makes me feel unhappy. I do not want to take a different path. But if I had not done what I did, the Congress would have been held to blame afterwards.

Gandhi's offer to Lord Mountbatten, the last Indian Viceroy, to hand over the political authority to Jinnah to run the Provisional Government in return for unity and integrity of the country, at that crucial stage, was severely criticised by Sardar Patel. It was due to the initiative of the latter that the former's proposal in this regard was rejected straightway by the Congress Working Committee by an overwhelming majority. It was after this incident that the Mahatma had asked Lord Mountbatten to omit him from discussions for the future talks regarding the transfer of power.

Pyarelal has also observed that during the final phase of the transfer of power, some differences cropped up between Gandhi and Patel and other important Congress leaders. The Mahatma's insistence to settle directly with the Muslim League without the intervention of the British even at the cost of civil war did not appeal to the members of the Congress Working Committee, including Patel and Nehru. Similarly, Gandhi's suggestion to Lord Pethick-Lawrance to invite Jinnah for
forming the Interim Government did not find favour with Sardar Patel and Nehru.

Inspite of the best efforts of the Congress leaders, the Interim Government did not function smoothly as the Muslim League members had joined the government to fight for Pakistan from within the government. The experiences of the Interim Government convinced Patel of the futility of hoping a reconciliation between leaders of the Congress and the League. He was exasperated by this attitude of the League.

Patel told the Muslims time and again to develop national spirit and not to rouse communal passion. His hard hitting speeches were picked out of context and conveyed to Gandhi that Patel was inducing the people to violence. When Bihar was rocked by communal violence, the Mahatma advised the Sardar to appoint a Commission for inquiry. The latter, however, was not convinced of the utility of such a Commission and told Gandhi that it was to be appointed by the Governor. The Mahatma, however, held the Sardar responsible for the lapse.

They were further drifting apart. In January 1947, Gandhi gave his mind to Patel: “.........Your speeches are inflammatory ..............You are teaching the people to meet sword by sword.....you insulted the League....” The latter felt hurt by the Mahatma’s letter. After a proper analysis and thorough heart-searching, the Sardar found that he had not

16 Ghaznefer Ali’s speech in the Interim government, Quoted in HINDUSTAN TIMES, October 20, 1946, p.2.
worked in any way against the Mahatma's ideas and tradition. The charges were baseless and the latter's ears were being poisoned against the former. But Patel was conscious of the difference in their style of functioning. His style differed from that of Gandhi's. He felt that he could not act in a manner repugnant to national interest.

In reply Patel wrote to Gandhi that his letter had pained him. Talking about the complaints he observed that those were false and some were quite baseless. He further explained his position regarding 'sticking to office' which was in reply to Nehru's frequent offers of resignation as he felt repetition of empty threats had lost the Viceroy's respect. Patel cleared his position that he had no lust for power and would like to resign immediately if need be.

It was also at Patel's initiative that the Congress Working Committee passed a resolution on March 8, 1947, favouring the division of the Punjab Province. For Gandhi, the resolution was a 'bolt from the blue; it was as if the abyss had suddenly opened under his feet. He was not consulted or forewarned by the Congress Working Committee, especially by Nehru and Patel.

Sardar Patel was the first leader of the Congress to believe that there was no solution of the constitutional tangle except through the partition of the country. Gandhi felt much pained to learn about Patel's and Nehru's continuously veering round to the view of partition. He had, earlier, repeatedly averred that partition of India would be over his dead body. But finding Nehru and Patel favouring vivisection of the country, he came face to face with the realities of the situation.
With a heavy heart he endeavoured to compromise with the fact of partition. The Sardar's role was decisive in bringing the Mahatma round the view. Now the only choice left before Gandhi was to withdraw himself from any further discussions and he whole heartedly engaged himself in working for peace in riot torn areas or quenching the fire of communal hatred.

Sardar Patel and Nehru had played important role in the implementation of the June 3rd Plan. In the 'Partition Council', the Sardar's was the decisive opinion on behalf of India. He ensured a judicious division of assets and liabilities between the two newly carved Dominions. Contrary to this the Mahatma was not a member of the Partition Council.

On the eve of independence when Mahatma Gandhi was wandering in the riot affected areas of Bengal, trying to maintain peace and harmony between the two communities, the Sardar was in Delhi, preparing himself for the forthcoming Independence Day celebrations. The latter had time and again asked his countrymen to be ready in every respect to make India politically and militarily strong and economically prosperous.

The Sardar took charge of the Ministries of Home, States (a Cabinet rank Ministry constituted for the integration of Princely States), Information and Broadcasting besides being the first Deputy Prime Minister of India. The Mahatma, on the other hand, refused to share any political power or position and decided to initiate the constructive programme, especially the promotion of communal harmony.

There were frequent differences between Gandhi and Patel on finer details of administration, protection of Muslim
minority, India’s attitude towards Pakistan and the defence policy of the country after independence.

One such issue was payment of rupees 55 crores to Pakistan as the share for the cash assets of the undivided India. While Sardar Patel and other Cabinet Members decided to withhold the payment, due to the fact that the money would be utilised for purchasing arms and ammunitions, and would help Pakistan to carry on war in Kashmir more vigorously which Pakistan had started on October 23, 1947. Gandhi on being suggested by Lord Mountbatten, became convinced that money must be paid. The said amount was finally released by the Cabinet when the Mahatma started a fast unto death for Hindu–Muslim unity and maintaining peace in the capital.

Another issue of difference between the Mahatma and the Sardar concerned with the dissolution of the Congress. While the former wanted the Congress to cease to be a political party and devote itself to social reconstruction, the latter severely criticised this move and decided to further strengthen the Congress and make it an indomitable political organisation. Majority of the Congress leaders strongly supported Patel’s stand in this regard.

It may not be out of place to mention that one of the major problems which followed India’s independence was the integration of 574 and odd Princely States with the rest of India. Sardar Patel accomplished this most difficult job almost single handed, without much bloodshed and in a record period of 18 months. He also reorganised the Indian Administrative Services including Police Service. He also wanted India to be strong militarily in order to be able to defend her unity,
integrity and sovereignty. He also differed from Gandhi's viewpoint when he declared that the country should be rapidly industrialised to increase its defensive strength and economic prosperity.

The rapidly increasing differences between Pandit Nehru and Sardar Patel, further drifted Gandhi. The Mahatma wanted both these leaders work with a spirit of accommodation. He was sure that idealism of Jawahar Lal Nehru tempered with robust realism of Sardar Patel would lead the nation towards the path he had cherished. He discussed the issue with Patel and Nehru and told them that he would like them to function effectively by co-operating with one another by following a policy of accommodation. Irrespective of their differences, Patel followed his advice and worked on it throughout thereafter till the end of his life.

During the best part of his life the Sardar followed the Mahatma without doubt or demur so long as the basic aim of winning national freedom from British Colonialism remained unfulfilled. The former's devotion to duty, spirit of patriotism and nationalism prevented him from questioning Gandhi or evaluating any aspect of his philosophy. It was enough for him that Gandhi's leadership had the potency to lead the country to the desired goal.

Despite these numerous differences, Sardar Patel considered Mahatma Gandhi as his mentor and surrendered his judgement to him whenever and wherever possible. At no time did he consider himself equal to Gandhi. His sharp intellect, down to earth realism and pragmatism at times made the Sardar adopt a course which seemed different from the
Mahatma’s. At all stages of his political career, the former paid the greatest attention to the latter’s ideas.

Similarly, Gandhi did not wish to force his ideas on Patel. The former asked the latter to do whatever he thought proper. However, their differences did not diminish the regards the Sardar had for the Mahatma, nor did it anyway lessen the latter’s love for the former. In his short career after Gandhi’s death, Patel had full faith in the Mahatma’s ideas, and in deference to Gandhi’s wishes he worked in close co-operation with Nehru and accepted his leadership.

D.V. Tahmankar has beautifully summed up the role of Congress leadership: “Mahatma Gandhi gave the Congress inspiration and Jawahar Lal Nehru broadened its vision and imagination. But, it was Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who gave it efficiency and sense of thoroughness.”

In the end, it can be said that neither Mahatma Gandhi nor Sardar Patel were born great but they rose to greatness by their dedicated service to the people of India. They utilised all their tacts, talent and political wisdom for the promotion of peace, progress and prosperity of the country, and in this way carved out a destiny for themselves. In the real sense of the term, both Gandhi and Patel were the ‘Prime Movers’ of the Indian Nationalism. Their contribution will remain alive forever in the annals of Indian history.