Mahatma Gandhi—Early Life

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was the chief architect of India’s Independence. He was a great soul in a beggar’s garb and manifested India’s desire for national self-determination. He was the leader of a vast number of human beings for over a quarter of a century and triumphed as the embodiment of India’s will to complete freedom from the chains of British Imperialism. At the time of his arrival in India, ‘India was a nation in the making’. At the time of his death in 1948, the country had become an independent entity. Although he could not prevent the partition of the nation, yet he was successful in getting independence for the country with his unique method of non-violence.

The Mahatma’s ancestors were ‘Bania’ by caste and grocers by profession, who basically hailed from Kutiana in Junagadh, a Princely State of the Bombay Presidency of the yester years. Originally they devoted themselves to trade and agriculture. Bania is a synonym in India for a sharp and shrewd businessman. His family came into prominence when Uttamchand Gandhi, Mahatma Gandhi’s grand father was appointed as the Prime Minister or Diwan of Princely State of Porbander, during the last quarter of the 18th century.
Thereafter, Gandhi’s father, karamchand Gandhi also held the same position for a long period of time.

Gandhi’s father was a man of little formal education. According to various biographers of Mahatma Gandhi, he belonged to a cultural and well to do family. He was also familiar with the experiences of practical life. Karamchand Gandhi, in the words of his own son, was “a lover of his clan, incorruptible, truthful, brave and generous but short-tempered”.\(^1\) Gandhi’s mother Putlibai, almost practically unlettered, was a capable, peace-loving, hardworking and deeply religious minded lady.

Since death claimed earlier three wives in quick succession, Karamchand Gandhi was married to Putlibai under the aegis of 4\(^{th}\) marriage ceremony. She bore him three sons (Lakshmidas, Karsandas and Mohandas) and a daughter (Ralitabehn), Mahatma Gandhi being the youngest among them all.

In his autobiography, Gandhi observed that the outstanding influence his mother had left on his memory was that of saintliness. She was deeply religious. She would not think of taking her meals without her daily prayers. He inherited moral and spiritual purity from his mother. “Whatever purity you see in me,” recalled Gandhi at a later stage, “is derived from my

mother, not from my father."²

Of these parents Gandhi was born at Porbander, on October 2, 1869. Until seven, he attended an elementary school in his native town. When his father left Porbander for Rajkot, to become the member of the Rajasthanik Court, Gandhi was admitted to a Taluka school over there. Right from his childhood, he was quite punctual, truthful and obedient. His sister recalled that rather than be late Gandhi would eat the food of the previous day if breakfast was not ready.³

Gandhi himself said that he didn’t remember having ever told a lie, even during his school days, either to his parents or teachers or his school mates. He was very shy and generally avoided company of others. Books and other study material were his sole companions during those days. Although he remained an average student, there existed a strong desire for self-improvement. Whatever he read, was mainly for self-instruction. He liked the books and pamphlets containing lessons of truth, non-violence and respect for parents and teachers.

Marriage of a child was then considered as much a parental obligation as education is considered now. Gandhi got married when he was a high school pupil, aged thirteen, to

Kasturbai, daughter of a Porbander merchant, Gokuldas Makanji. It resulted in wasting a year of his schooling. Later on reflecting about child marriage, he wrote "I do not think it meant to me anything more than the prospect of good clothes to wear, drum beating, marriage processions, rich dinners and a strange girl to play with".4

During the early days of their married life, there used to be severe differences of opinions between the two. Gandhi used to put numerous restrictions on kasturbai to prove his superiority, but it was the latter who in her own quiet and determined way, resisted most of them. The former later on told to J.S. Hoyland that "I learnt the lesson of non-violence from my wife when I tried to bend her to my will. Her determined resistance to my will on the one hand and her quiet submission to the suffering my stupidity involved on the other, ultimately made me ashamed of myself and cured me of my stupidity in thinking that I was born to rule over her; and in the end she became my teacher in non-violence".5

Later on in his life Gandhi realised his mistake and believed that only a Hindu wife could tolerate these hardships. Thereafter, he regarded woman as an incarnation of tolerance. The canker of suspicion was rooted out only when he understood "Ahimsa"6 in all its bearings.

4 Gandhi, M.K., ibid., p.11.
6 "Ahimsa" means literally non-hurting, non-violence.
Gandhi joined Samaldass College at Bhavanagar in January 1888, for higher studies but couldn’t make it as he found the lectures difficult to understand, and left the college the same year. While he was struggling to decide about his future programme, Mavji Dave, a friend of Gandhi’s family, suggested to the latter’s mother that he should go to England to qualify for the Bar. Gandhi’s mother did not initially approved the suggestion due to her religious susceptibilities. However, Becharji Swami, a Jain Monk, came to Gandhi’s rescue by administering an oath for not touching wine, meat and woman. This solemn resolve finally persuaded Gandhi’s mother to give her consent for his visit abroad.

In this regard, Gandhi had to face the wrath of his community (Modh Bania), at Bombay. The headman of his caste told Gandhi that his proposal to go to England was not proper as one had to compromise with his religion and one was also obliged to eat and drink with Europeans. In reply, Gandhi told him that he didn’t think it was against their religion to go to England as he intended to go there for further studies. He added: “I have solemnly promised to my mother to abstain from three things you feared most. I am sure that the vow will keep me safe”. 7

Gandhi sailed from Bombay to London for higher studies on September 4, 1888. There were four Inns of Court: Lincoln’s Inn, Gray’s Inn, the Middle Temple Inn and the Inner Temple Inn. The last, where he was enrolled on November

7 Gandhi, M.K., ibid., p. 33.
Immediately after going to England Gandhi desired to look like an English gentleman and directed his attention to taking lessons in dancing, Piano, French and elocution. He also purchased some new clothes from the Army and Navy Stores. He also went in for a chimney pot hat. Not content with this, he spent £10, on an evening suit made in Bond Street. He also requested his brother to send him a double watch chain of gold. But after a short period of time he realised the futility of all these ventures and turned his attention to studies. He observed that if his character made a gentleman of his, so much the better. Otherwise he should forego the ambition.

He also started budgeting his expenditure as it was necessary in keeping with the economic resources of his family. Finding some vacant time from Law course, he thought of improving his basic education. Therefore, he decided to prepare for the matriculation examination of the London University and passed the said examination in the second attempt.

The vow of vegetarianism was a constant source of embarrassment to Gandhi as only a few vegetarian dishes were available in London at that time and it was also difficult to procure them. Consequently, most of the time he had to

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8 Ibid., p.43.
remain hungry. His friends were worried at his failing health but he could not break the promise given to his mother.

To his surprise one day while roaming about in London, Gandhi came across a vegetarian restaurant in Feningdon Street. The sight of this filled him with an undescrivable joy and he had his first hearty meal. He also purchased Henary Salt’s book ’Plea for Vegetarianism’ and read it thoroughly. He was greatly impressed by the book. Later on he narrated in his autobiography: “From the date of reading this book I may claim to have become a vegetarian by choice”.¹⁰

This book whetted his appetite for dietetic studies. He read a number of books available on vegetarianism, which included Howard William’s “The Ethics of Diet”, and Anna Kingsford’s “The Prefect Way in Diet”. The conversion to vegetarianism brought a new self-assurance to Gandhi. During this period he came to another ascetic conclusion that the seat of taste is not in the tongue but in the mind.

Towards the end of his 2nd year Gandhi came into contact with two Theosophist brothers, Bertram Keightleys and Dr. Archibald Keightleys, who were instrumental in bringing him in touch with Theosophy. He also met two important leaders of the Theosophical Society, Madame Blavatsky and Mrs. Annie Besant. Gandhi also read “key to Theosophy”, written by Madame Blavatsky. It stimulated a desire in him to read books on Hinduism. During this time he also read Edwin Arnold’s “The Song Celestial”, Bhagwad Gita’s translation in

¹⁰ Gandhi, M.K., ibid., p.41.
English though he could not have imagined at that time that the ‘Gita’ would one day become his spiritual guide.

He also read Edwin Arnold’s ‘The Light of Asia’ and learnt about Budha’s message of non-violence. He read the Bible and was fascinated by the ‘Sermon on the Mount’, which gives the message of love, charity, forgiveness and non-violence.

While commenting on the essence of his religious studies during his stay in England, Gandhi observed: “My young mind tried to unify the teachings of the ‘Gita’, ‘The light of Asia’ and the ‘Sermon on the Mount’. That renunciation was the highest form of religion appealed to me greatly”.¹¹

Gandhi also cultivated the habit of reading newspapers in London which improved his English to a great extent. Yet he was troubled by the fear that limited knowledge and lack of acumen would not make him a successful lawyer. So, he first thought of seeking the advice of Dadabhai Naoroji, but on a second thought found him too big for a novice student. So, he sought the advice of Frederich Pinchutt, who was disappointed on his limited general reading. He advised Gandhi to read more books on Indian History, Psychology and Philosophy, and also told him that honesty and industry were enough for the success in the legal profession. Gandhi felt reassured as he thought he possessed these qualities in abundance.

Gandhi wanted to return home as soon as possible

¹¹ Ibid., p.58.
without wasting even a single day more than required to complete his studies. He completed the requirements of Bar—Law on June 10, 1891, and was placed 34th among the total 77 who were declared qualified in the final examination. He was enrolled in the High Court on June 11, and the next day, he sailed back. Although he spent nearly 3 years abroad, his excessive shyness was not, however, shaken off completely. He was still apprehensive of his talent for speech or arguing a case. Later on, recalling his experience in England, Gandhi said: ".....But not withstanding my study there was no end to my helplessness and fear. I didn't feel myself qualified to practice Law.......".  

Soon after Gandhi landed in Bombay, he received the information of his mother's demise, indeed a great shock to the young Barrister. It was a cruel blow for him as many of his cherished hopes were shattered. Yet he managed to control any wild expression of grief and effectively checked his tears. 

Thereafter, Gandhi decided to start legal practice in the Bombay High Court and established his Law Office there. His first performance as a lawyer, however, was disappointing. Consequently, he left Bombay and went to his home town, Rajkot, to resume his legal profession. He realised that he was good at drafting legal applications and memorials which brought him an average monthly income of Rs. 300–400, though internally he was not very happy. 

In the meantime a Meman firm (Dada Abdullah and

12 Ibid., p.68.
Company), from Porbander gave an offer to Gandhi for going to South Africa for helping in a legal suit amounting to £40,000, through his brother. Gandhi’s services were required to assist the European barristers with his knowledge of Gujarati language and he would further have the advantage of seeing a new part of the world and of making new acquaintances.

Commenting on the proposal Gandhi said: “.........This was hardly going there as a barrister. It was going there as a servant of the firm. But I wanted somehow to leave India. There was also the tempting opportunity of seeing a new country and having new experiences. Also I could send £105 to my brother to help in the expenses of the house. I closed with the offer without any haggling and got ready to go to South Africa.”

When Gandhi decided to go to South Africa for an year’s assignment, he could hardly have imagined the new avenues of maturity and public service which the new continent’s adventure was to open to him. Besides his own inherent qualities, it was the long drawn hostility of the European administrators and politicians on the one hand and the helplessness of the Indian minority community, living over there on the other, paved the way for him to play the role of a shrewd middleman to sort out the grievances of the people.

Gandhi landed in Durban in May, 1893. A weeks stay over there had given him a sufficient knowledge of the colour prejudice prevalent in South Africa. In a Durban court where

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13 Ibid., p. 85.
he was taken by Adbullah, the European Magistrate ordered him to take off his turban. Gandhi refused and left the Court room and wrote a letter of protest in the local press. This first experience of racial discrimination was nothing as compared to his second experience during his journey from Durban to Pretoria. At Maritzberg he was asked by police personnel to move to the van inspite of having a first class railway ticket. On his refusal to comply with the order he was thrown out of the compartment at the railway station along with his luggage. 

It was a bolt from the blue for Gandhi and the incident set him brooding over what had happened. He had not been warned by his client about the humiliating conditions under which Indians lived in South Africa.

It was a bitter cold night. Sitting in an unlit waiting room, Gandhi started thinking of his duty: Should he terminate the contract and return to India or should he fight for his rights and should he go to Pretoria without minding the insult inflicted on him. Ultimately he took the momentous decision to fight the malice of colour prejudice and suffer hardships in the process. A new Gandhi was born on that night.

Soon after his arrival in Pretoria, Gandhi's feeling of

inferiority and lack of self-confidence, seemed to have vanished. He invited the Indian community to a meeting to present to them a clear picture of their conditions in Transvaal. The meeting which was a great success, boosted his morale. He told the people that South Africa seemed to have no place for a self-respected Indian. It must be changed through collective action.

In due course, Gandhi persuaded the two parties at dispute—Sheikh Abdullah and his opponent Tyeb Seth to come to a settlement through arbitration. This settlement was a great success for young Gandhi as it made him learn that the function of the lawyer is to shift the facts and to find out the truth. He said: "I had learnt the true practice of law. I had learnt to find out the better side of human nature (the spirit of mutual compromise), and to enter men's hearts. I realised that the true function of a lawyer was to unite parties riven asunder."\(^{15}\)

Soon after the settlement of the case when Gandhi was about to sail back to India, he happened to glance through a news item in the 'Natal Mercury', a daily newspaper under the headline, 'Indian Franchise'. It was a draft Bill to be introduced in the Natal Legislative Assembly to disenfranchise Indians (alongwith other Asiatics), settled over there. He told the Indian community that 'this was the first nail into their coffin'. The Indian community pleaded with Gandhi to cancel his departure and to stay on in Natal to organise a protest

\(^{15}\) Gandhi, M.K., ibid., p.168.
movement against the government’s move on their behalf. He agreed to their request.

To launch the movement in an organised manner, Gandhi formed Natal Indian Congress with the help of influential Indians living over there on August 23, 1894. Despite repeated protests by the Indian community, the Bill was passed by the Natal Legislative Assembly. Gandhi also took a deputation to London to plead Indians’ case before the Secretary of State in London. Later on, however, the Bill was rejected by the Colonial Office in London as it discriminated against inhabitants of another part of the Empire.

His struggle against racial discrimination continued over various issues including non-registration of land of Indian purchasers, restriction on Indian immigration, domicile condition, education test etc. In 1906, he launched ‘satyagraha’ against Asiatic Registration Bill passed by the Transvaal Government. The Bill required every Indian—man, woman and child above eight years—to get himself registered and to give finger and thumb impressions on the registration forms.

An Indian could be challenged to produce his registration certificate by police personnel. The professed objective behind this move was to check the infiltration of Indians into Transvaal. In reality the new measure aimed at humiliating the educated Indians living over there. On reading the clauses of the Bill, Gandhi was convinced that if passed into a law, this measure would spell absolute ruin for the Indians.

He called a meeting of the Indian community on September 11, 1906, at the Empire Theatre in Johannesburg
to prepare the strategy to oppose the government's move and decided that Indians living over there, should take a pledge to resist the unjust law. He remarked: "......... There is only one course open to those like me to die but not to submit to the law. It is quite unlikely but even if everyone else flinched leaving me alone........., I am confident that I would not violate my pledge......"16.

Despite strong opposition by the Indian community, the Legislative Assembly of Transvaal passed the Bill and enforced it from July 1, 1907, extending the date later to November 30, 1907. Gandhi formed a Passive Resistance Association to conduct the satyagraha campaign to oppose the said enactment. The boycott proved successful as only 511 Indians had got themselves registered by November 30, 1907. Gandhi was arrested in December 1907 along with his 26 prominent colleagues and was given simple imprisonment. Consequently, satyagrahis filled the jails in Johannesburg.

The government started negotiating with Gandhi and said that the act would be taken off the statute book if Indians got themselves voluntarily registered. General Smuts accepted some arguments made by Gandhi and the latter was released. Gandhi called a meeting of the Indian community to discuss the informal agreement he had reached with General Smuts that the Asiatic Registration Act would be taken off the Statute Book if Indians registered themselves on their own.

There was a good deal of criticism by some members of the Indian community over the issue why the repeal of the Registration Act did not precede rather than follow voluntary registration. A Pathan from North Western Frontier Province threatened Indians of dire consequences if they went in for registration. He also made a murderous assault on Gandhi on his way to registration.

Gandhi had risked his life to fulfill his part of agreement but General Smuts went away from his words and refused to see the former who now called a meeting of the Indians for bonfire of registration certificates which numbered nearly 8,000 from a population of 18,000.

The satyagraha was also directed against another measure passed by the Transvaal Legislative Assembly prohibiting new immigration from India. Gandhi asked Natal Indians to enter Transvaal for defying the Registration Act. He also called upon the Indians to work in Transvaal without license, and refuse to produce them on demand and court imprisonment. Indian merchants and labourers marched into prisons following Gandhi's advice.

This time imprisonment was with hard labour. Gandhi himself had a taste of this severe treatment in Transvaal when he landed there in October 1908, and was lodged in jail with Kafir criminals. Prosecution, deportation and economic pressure did not crush the satyagraha movement which was continuing for the last 3-4 years. Gandhi housed satyagrahis' families in Tolstoy Farm, situated 21 miles from Johannesburg. Ultimately the movement came to an end on May 27, 1911, with a provisional settlement with the government.
Another breach of faith gave a new lease of life to the satyagraha movement. In May–June 1913, Gandhi led another satyagraha campaign against the nullification of marriages which were not solemnized according to the Christian traditions. It was during this agitation that Kasturbai was imprisoned for the first time in South Africa. One of the most important features of this struggle was that women also participated in large numbers. Consequently, it resulted in legalising all marriages, being solemnized according to different religious traditions.

Commenting on Gandhi’s capabilities to handle critical situations, Professor Gilberg Murray observed: “........Be careful in dealing with a man who cares nothing for sensual pleasures, nothing for comforts or praise or promotion but is simply determined to do what he believes right. He is a dangerous and uncomfortable enemy because his body which you can always conquer gives you so little purchase over his soul......”.17

The imposition of ‘Poll Tax’ on every Indian worker, which was an effort on the part of the government to harm the self-respect of Indian community, forced Gandhi to start once again satyargaha movement in protest against government’s move. He did so by leading a ‘Great March’ of Indian miners from New Castles to Charles Town. The marchers included 2037 men, 127 women and 57 children. It was also due to Gandhi’s initiative that the poll-tax was withdrawn completely.

17 Fischer, Louis, ibid., p. 153.
It resulted in the suspension of the satyagraha movement. The ‘Indian Relief Act’ was enacted following an agreement between Gandhi and General Smuts.

Soon after the conclusion of the ‘poll tax’ agitation, Gandhi realised that his mission in South Africa was over. On July 18, 1914, he left that country for ever, sailing from Capetown for London with Kasturbai, arriving just at the beginning of the World War I. During his short stay in England he once again organised Indian Ambulance Corps to help the war victims, but couldn’t render his services any longer since he was obliged to sail for India because of pleurisy.

Although Mahatma Gandhi and General Smuts were the representatives of two different and rival factions, still they didn’t have any ill-will against each other. Many years later the latter recalled his dealings with the former and observed: “......In gaol Gandhi had prepared for me a very useful pair of sandals which he presented to me when he was set free! I have worn these sandals for many a summer since then, even though I may feel that I am not worthy to stand in the shoes of so great a man! Any how, it was in that spirit that we fought out our quarrels in South Africa........”.18

During his more than two decades long stay in South Africa Gandhi fought the battle continuously for the redressal of the grievances of the Indian community living over there.

Describing the influence of his struggle in the African continent, his biographer, Doke, writes: ".............No one, however, could doubt that the personality of their great leader has been the supreme force in it all. His frequent imprisonments were sufficient to arouse all their powers of self-sacrifice and they embarrased the police officers in their efforts to be arrested too...Even when he was absent for weeks, his influence moved them with marvelous power...".19

His two decades long stay in South Africa brought numerous changes in his personality. Different seen as well as unforeseen events, conflicts and contradictions which followed his long stay over there, resulted in his full maturity and also helped him forge a new technique of socio-political agitation, which was destined to play a very crucial role in Indian politics in the following years.

**Sardar Patel—Early Life**

Vallabhbhai Jhaverbhai Patel, popularly known as "Sardar Patel", was born on October 31, 1875,20 in a peasant family at Nadiad. His birth took place at his maternal uncle's home. His parents actually hailed from the village Karamsad, nearly three miles away from Anand in the Kheda district of Gujarat.

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Like Gandhi, Patel’s parents were also practically unlettered. The latter had also inherited many qualities of his parents like the former. Vallabhbhai’s father Jhaverbhai Galabhai Patel, was a Leva Patidar, a class of agriculturist, well known for their hard work, simple character, quiet nature, industrious habits, honesty and straightforward dealings. He was a great patriot and adventurous person, and believed to have taken part in the First War of Indian Independence, in 1857, under the leadership of Rani Laxmibai, the revolutionary Queen of Jhansi.

Patel inherited from his father the qualities of honesty, truthfulness, fearlessness, discipline, bold temperament, devotion to duty, firmness, capacity to bear hardships, the power of endurance, resoluteness, skill and shrewdness to plan and organise a campaign, and to become a fire-brand freedom fighter.

Patel’s mother, Ladbai, was a simple, gentle, friendly and religious minded lady. She was illiterate and to some extent superstitious. She narrated to her sons (Vithalbhai, Somabhai, Narsibhai, Vallabhbhai and Kashibhai), the stories of the Hindu epics of the Ramayana, the Bhagavadgita and the Mahabharata. Patel inherited from his mother the qualities of simplicity, cleanliness, orderliness, restless spirit, motherly touch and irresistible desire to fight against inequality and injustice.

Vallabhbhai Patel took his primary education at his native village, Karamsad. Right from his childhood, he was hardworking and conscientious, and wanted to help his father in the field related activities alongwith his studies. He was
always proud of his peasant origin. After completing his primary education, he moved to Petlad to join another school which was upto 8th standard.

Patel was an average student during the initial stages of his studies. Although he was not a great lover of books at that time, still, he was firm in his view that his goal of rising to affluence would materialise only through higher studies. It was his determined will to rise above the limitations of his surroundings which saved him from falling into evil hands.

Even as a young boy, Patel disliked indiscipline, inefficiency and laziness. During his school days, he was considered as a rebel leader of student community, and his exceptional organisational and leadership qualities were recognised by both his teachers as well as his fellow students. He always showed high regards to those teachers who were honest, just, truthful and hardworking, but he would not spare an indifferent teacher and was also prone to do mischief as a young student.21

As per the then prevailing traditions of early marriage, Patel was married to Jhaverba, at the age of nearly 18 years. She hailed from the village of Gana, approximately four miles away from Karamsad. She had two children. The eldest was a daughter, Manibehn, who remained unmarried and devoted herself wholeheartedly to the service of her father. The

younger was a boy, Dahayabhai, who later on represented his native state in the Parliament of Independent India. Patel had never tried to foist his children on the nation. In this regard, he was in the tradition of Lokmanya Tilak, Gokhale and Gandhi.

Vallabhbhai Patel passed his matriculation examination from the Nadiad High School, at the age of 22. It seemed too late and too expensive for him to opt for college education which was of six years duration. He did not even go in for an Law course (LLB), as it was also too expensive and time consuming for him. His family members and relatives were making different plans for his future course of action. Reminiscencing later in the Yeravda Jail in 1932, Patel narrated to Gandhi and Mahadev Desai that his maternal uncle, who was an overseer in the municipality, thought of getting a Mukadam's (Supervisor), Job for Patel in the municipality so that he could start earning immediately.22

Vallabhbhai Patel, however, rejected his uncle’s proposal straightway as he cherished a secret plan for joining the rank of barristers and wanted to become a lawyer of utmost repute. Since he came form a poor family, he didn’t have the required economic resources to proceed to England to qualify for the Bar. He, therefore, decided to take the examination of ‘District Pleader’.

Patel was told that 7–10 thousand rupees were required

for doing Bar—at—Law in England. Since he could not manage the said amount, he decided to study earnestly for the law examination and resolved firmly to save sufficient money for a visit to England.\textsuperscript{23}

The financial position of Patel’s family was much weaker as compared to that of Gandhi’s. To fulfill his cherished dream, the former borrowed Law books from his friends and relatives, invested nearly three years in the preparations and finally succeeded in qualifying the said examination. He obtained District Pleader’s certificate in December 1900, and began his career as a lawyer at Godhra. After some time he shifted to Borsad. Right from the beginning, he was respected as much for his self-confidence and fearless advocacy as far as his shrewdness.

Borsad being the most criminal prone area provided an opportunity to Patel to become the most successful criminal lawyer within a short period of time. What perhaps equally contributed to his success, was his extraordinary thoroughness in the preparation and presentation of the criminal cases. During his eight years stay at Borsad, his deep understanding of human nature and behaviour seems to have paved the way to win almost all cases he had accepted.

Within a short period of time, through his lucrative legal practice, he found himself able to save enough money to meet the expected expenditure in England for the study of

Law. When he was almost ready to proceed over there, his elder brother Vithalbhai Patel, who also later on became a great leader in the Indian Freedom Struggle, persuaded Vallabhbhai Patel to suspend his own programme for the time being, and give the chance to him to go first. Vallabhbhai Patel not only generously complied but also cheerfully handed over the money he had saved to finance his own study tour. Similar to that of Gandhi, Patel had an extraordinary quality of suffering physical and mental adversities stoically. He never allowed anybody to know about it except at an appropriate moment.

Vallabhbhai Patel always believed in simple, direct, truthful and forceful speech. He cared little for any type of artificiality in the mode of his advocacy. He did not allow personal considerations to interfere with his obligations. He received the tragic news of his wife’s death when he was arguing a criminal case in the Law court at Anand on January 11, 1909. A man of determined will power, he read the telegram, put it in his pocket and continued cross-examining the witness and did not disclose anything about the message to anyone till the court adjourned for the day.

At the time of his wife’s death, Patel was hardly 33 years old. He was left with a six year old daughter and a four year old boy to look after. Although this incident shattered his home life, yet the same couldn’t disrupt his life’s ultimate mission. Taking aside all the stresses and strains regarding his remarriage, he decided to go to England to study law as per the predetermined programme. One of his biographers observed: “...........Even at that young age, there was an iron-like quality in Patel’s character. He never wavered in the
decision he once took and pursued them with an astonishing strong determination.....".24

Vallabhbhai Patel’s objective in going abroad was mainly of two-fold. His nearly ten years experience as a District Pleader had convinced him that only by becoming a barrister he could not only improve his legal status, but also gain access to a larger field, where he could make a fuller display of his talents. Secondly, Great Britain attracted him because of the greatness of her people and her institutions. Similar to Gandhi, during the initial stages of his life, Patel admired the Britishers and had faith in their invincibility.

On August 16, 1910, Patel left Bombay for England. Right from the day he boarded a ship till the last moment of his stay over there, he had a clear cut objective in his mind: a definite purpose—to return home as a barrister. Like Gandhi, he also did not desire to stay away from home even a day longer than required. Unlike to Gandhi, during his stay abroad, Patel didn’t believe in any prohibition in the matters of food and drink. But similar to the former, the latter was also totally against the wasteful expenditure.

While Gandhi was enrolled in the Inner Temple Inn, for the study of law, Patel was enrolled in the Middle Temple Inn. Taking into consideration all his limitations, the latter plunged into studies by solely ignoring everything else. He devoted most of his wakeful hours to fulfill his cherished dream. Unlike the Mahatma, the Sardar remained an outstanding student.

24 Krishna, B., ibid., p.21.
throughout his entire stay in England. He stood first in the preliminary examination and got a monthly scholarship which continued throughout the duration of the course.

The story of Sardar Patel’s career in the Inns of Court was remarkable. His practical knowledge of legal terminology, unlike Mahatma Gandhi, gave him an easy victory over his fellow students. While Patel completed his studies in ten terms, Gandhi could do so in twelve terms. Unlike the latter, the former passed his final examinations in the first class and was awarded a cash prize of £ 50. Referring to this, he wrote in a letter to his elder brother, on June 7, 1912, in an unassuming manner: “.........I have completed my examinations and have passed in the first class. It means that I shall be coming six months earlier than usual.” 25

Since Vallabhbhai Patel did not consider that his attendance for another six months would in any way improve his legal knowledge, he like Gandhi, left for home, the next day following the convocation ceremony and landed at Bombay on February 13, 1913.

Soon after his arrival in India Patel, like Gandhi, wanted to practice Law as a barrister. The Government of Bombay in recognition for the former’s outstanding performance in the law examinations, offered two positions to him. One was 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 these offers as he wanted to

25 Chopra, Dr. P.N. (ed.), Ibid., p.XIV.
make Ahmedabad a centre of his future activities. He left Bombay for Ahmedabad and started practicing law over there.26

While Gandhi as a barrister in India was a complete failure, Patel had a tremendous success. The latter was able to have a flourishing practice as a barrister, within a short period of time. Very soon he conquered the barrister dominated Bar in Ahmedabad.

Both the Mahatma and the Sardar believed that no advocate should agree to defend a person if he was known to be guilty. In conducting his cases, the latter exhibited a through mastery of facts and carefully planned defence and attack. He would never allow a judge to overstep even in the least the limits of courtesy, nor would he allow or tolerate any unfairness, injustice or improper leaning on the part of the court in favour of the police or the prosecution. In this way Vallabhbhai safeguarded the self-respect of both, the Bar and the general public. He was a real, a truthful and a fearless barrister.

A sort of understanding was reached between the two brothers—Vithalbhai and Vallabhbhai, during the first half of 1913, that while the former will serve the country as a public servant, the latter the family. Although Sardar Patel himself wanted to join the public service, but he did not want to hurt the sentiments of his elder brother, and suspended his

Vallabhbhai Patel, later on observed: "......... My elder brother gave up his flourishing practice and started on a career of public service, while I bore the burden of maintaining the household ...............I had thus, to commit all the sins, and he performed all the good deeds; but I reconciled myself with the thought that I could claim at least a share in his good work...........".27

When Sardar Patel was still practicing law lucratively and leading a comfortable life in Ahmedabad, a crisis occurred in the Ahmedabad Municipality regarding the appointment of an Indian Civil Services (now known as Indian Administrative Services) Officer, as the head of the municipality. This ultimately forced Patel to join municipal politics. His friends persuaded him to get elected to this self-governing institution. Thereafter, he was actively engaged in fighting with the British bureaucracy for the redressal of the grievances of the people, especially in the areas of education, sanitation and allied services.

It was only when Vallabhbhai Patel entered the political arena that he discovered that the British in India were entirely different from what they were in their own homeland. Gandhi had also reached the same conclusion while practicing law at Rajkot.

While Mahatma Gandhi had left India for South Africa in

27 Ibid.
1893, following his failure in establishing himself as a successful barrister, Sardar Patel remained in his country and was engaged in two activities simultaneously—practicing law lucratively as well as participating in Ahmedabad municipal politics.

**GANDHI AND PATEL—INITIAL CONTACTS**

In January 1915 Gandhi came back from South Africa with a burning desire to serve his countrymen. Most of the Indian leaders greatly appreciated his efforts for the redressal of the grievances of the Indian community living in that alien land. At the reception given to him on his arrival in Bombay, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, an important Moderate leader of the Congress, advised Gandhi to “Plunge into no hurried programme of action, but should observe the Indian political scene and study Indian conditions for a year before he expressed himself on any political issue.”

After coming to India, Gandhi established his Ashram at Ahmedabad and attended the Annual Congress Sessions regularly and took keen interest in the politics of the country. He started visiting Gujarat Club frequently to address small gatherings over there. According to Tahmankar the theme of his lectures was to resist British bureaucracy wherever it acted against the interests of the Indian people.

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Surprisingly, for more than a year, since Gandhi’s arrival, Patel remained almost unconcerned by the former’s presence in Ahmedabad. One day, when Gandhi was addressing a group of elders in the Gujarat club, Patel was enjoying his game of bridge with his companions. G.V. Mavalanker, a barrister, who was watching the game summarised the incident: “...............When I got up to go............Vallabhbhai passed very sarcastic remarks discouraging me from going........... was very sceptical and critical about Gandhi’s ideas and plans.......brutally blunt in expressing his view......”.

In fact, Sardar Patel remained aloof from Mahatma Gandhi during 1915–16. He could not have imagined that in the near future he was destined to be the most trusted companion of the latter.

He came in direct contact with Gandhi for the first time in the Lucknow Session of the Indian National Congress (December 26–8, 1916), as a representative of the Gujarat Sabha. The latter’s forceful speech in which he gave various suggestions to strengthen the organisation of the Congress to enable it to counter British Colonialism, appealed to the former to a great extent.

When a public meeting of the Gujarat Sabha was held on February 14, 1917 at Borsad, both Gandhi and Patel

attended it. The latter's participation in the meeting seems to have been the beginning of a great change in his person. It was for the first time that they discussed various issues of regional and national importance.

Soon thereafter, Gandhi was drawn towards the issue of indigo cultivators in Champaran to end the British Planters' stronghold on its economy. He looked upon it more as a humanitarian mission than political. All the same, he was also prepared for active satyagraha movement if it was forced upon him.

Mahatma Gandhi had expected that the indigo cultivators' case would require his presence in Champaran for a few days only, but surprisingly it took him almost a year to get the stain of 'Indigo' removed.31

The developments in Champaran seems to have made their impact on Vallabhbhai Patel. The name and fame that he wished to achieve in life by his superb performance in the legal circles began to lose its shine. Quest for the national service became his sole motto.

Thereafter, Patel realised that he could not keep himself aloof from the national political current. It gained further significance when Gandhi achieved three victories in May–June 1917, in quick succession: one, the Viceroy's compliance with his request to abolish indentured labour by a fixed date; two, the removal by a Viceregal decree of the much hated

31 Fischer, Louis, ibid., p. 196.
customs barriers at Viramgam in Kathiawar; and three, Gandhi’s victory in Champaran in Bihar. The last achievement, was no doubt unique, since the same rocketed Gandhi to an all India fame.

In November 1917, the Gujarat Provincial Political Conference was organised by the Gujarat Sabha in Godhra. Both Gandhi and Patel attended it. It was in this Conference that the former emphasised the need of collective action against British Colonialism right from the grass-root level. He observed: “........If we were unable to run our village administration skillfully, honestly and justly, how can we justify our demand for the independence of our country..........”.32

A permanent ‘Standing Committee’ was appointed to look into greater detail the policies and programmes of the organisation (Gujarat Sabha). While Gandhi was elected President, Patel and Indulal Yagnik were elected Secretaries of the Committee. This Conference, according to B. Krishna, proved a turning point in Sardar Patel’s life. For both Gandhi and Patel, this association was a case of love at first sight. It was the spirit of frankness, truthfulness and devotion to duty which won the hearts of each other.

At a meeting of the Sabha’s Working Committee, Gandhi said that the time had come when they needed whole time workers—not those who would be like seasonal birds. He began asking one by one from those present in the meeting if

32 Parikh, N.D., ibid., p.36.
they would accept his proposition.

The first to be approached was a barrister from Ahmedabad, who declined by saying that he was not a sanyasi (Saint). He had a family and children. The next, who was a businessman, also gave a negative response.

Thereafter, came Vallabhbhai's turn, also a barrister of utmost repute, having two young motherless children to look after, besides other family responsibilities. He did not take a second to give his consent. By a firm and unhesitating resolve, he placed his life at the disposal of Gandhi's proposition. While commenting on these developments, R.K. Murthy Patel's biographer observed: ".............After his encounter with Gandhiji, Patel was a new man. He had been transformed by the magic wand of the Mahatma from an ambitious lawyer into a dedicated nationalist leader.........".33

Vallabhbhai Patel was further inspired by Gandhi's address to the 'Princes Conference' in Benares on December 23-4, 1917. It was wherein Gandhi requested the rulers of different Princely States to dedicate themselves whole heartedly for the well being of their respective people. This Conference according to B.Krishna, one of Patel's biographers, also contributed positively and enabled Patel to follow in Gandhi's footsteps.

Though Sardar Patel was greatly impressed by Mahatma Gandhi and accepted his leadership, he refused

straightway the latter's invitation to stay at the Ashram, frankly telling Gandhi that he could not accede to his wishes as he was not in agreement with some of the conditions prescribed by the Mahatma for living over there.

After coming into close contact with Gandhi, Patel mastered the essence of nationalism, learnt the basic strategy of satyagraha and peaceful resistance which the former had successfully tried in South Africa during his decades long stay and wanted to try the same against the alien rulers in his homeland to win independence for the country.

The entire period of their initial contacts paved the way for a better understanding between Gandhi and Patel. Their association became more and more strong with the passage of time leading to the latter becoming a staunch supporter and an active lieutenant of the former in his struggle for the independence of the country. Once Sardar Patel decided to enter the freedom struggle, there was no looking back for him. Soon thereafter, he realised that the ground rules of battle in politics were totally different than the one in the battlefield of the law courts.

**INDIAN POLITICAL SCENE AT THE TIME OF GANDHI AND PATEL'S APPEARANCE**

History is full of examples of foreign rule having wielded together people of different castes, classes, races, regions and religions into one nation. A common subjection to British Imperialism produced nearly the same result in India. The Britishers came to our country from thousands of miles away and they almost always remained mere sojourners over here. There are few instances in history of such a complete and deep gulf separating the conquerors from the conquered as
existed between the Britishers and the natives of India.\textsuperscript{34}

Right from the beginning, the freedom movement in India was a part of a larger spectrum of national resurgence which covered almost all aspects of national life, socio–eco–pol–cultural and religious. While the progress in the different spheres differed in degree and kind from region to region, there was one common desire of gaining independence.

When Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Patel came on the Indian political scene, the nationalist movement in the country was fairly in an advanced stage. Indian National Congress had been established in 1885, and during the course of thirty years had worked for gaining political concessions from the Colonial rulers. During its early phase of twenty years, the Congress was dominated by Moderates including Dadabhai Naoroji, Mahadev Gobind Ranade, Gopal Krishna Gokhale etc.

The early nationalists believed that a direct struggle for the political freedom of the country was not immediately possible. Their main objective was to arouse nationalist feeling and to bring a large number of Indian people into the vortex of nationalist politics. The leaders continuously worked for the development and consolidation of the feelings of national unity irrespective of caste, class, race, region or religion. They aimed at evolving a common economic and political programme.

The most important part of their political work was their economic critique of Imperialism through trade, industry

\textsuperscript{34} Mehrotra, S.R., THE EMERGENCE OF INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS (Bombay : Vikas Publications), 1971, p.115.
and finance. They also popularised the idea of Swadeshi, and worked for economic reforms in the country. They pointed out that a large part of India's capital and wealth was being drained out to Britain. The Moderates also agitated for administrative reforms as the entire system was ridden with corruption, inefficiency and oppression. They also severely criticised the oppressive behaviour of the police and the government. Not only this, they also made a forceful demand for civil rights. Though they believed that India should eventually move towards self-government, but initially they suggested for a step-by-step approach towards freedom. They propagated the principles of 'prayer, petition and protest' while presenting their viewpoints before the government.

By the turn of the century, the Moderate leaders started losing their popularity, as there was a general feeling of discontentment and frustration among the rural people, peasantry, workers and the unemployed youth. It resulted in the emergence of new leaders who were more radical in their demands and believed in a more militant form of nationalism. They came to be called Militant Nationalists or Extremists.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, Lala Lajpat Rai and Aurobindo Ghosh were the chief exponents of Militant School of Nationalism. They wanted Indians to work for and obtain freedom by whatever means. They didn't consider any sacrifice to be too great. They pleaded for courage, sacrifice and self-confidence. They repudiated the idea that India needed the benevolent guidance of the British and they had an abiding faith in the strength of the masses and wanted to win independence for India through collective action.

In India the years of 1st World War (1914–18) marked
the maturing of mass nationalism. The Congress which was still dominated by the Moderates, decided to support the British war efforts, both as a matter of duty and with a spirit that a grateful Britain would enable the country to take a long step towards the road to self-government. The Extremists however, did not support that move.

While Great Britain was still experiencing the holocaust of war, Indian leaders like Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Annie Besant, put new life in the Indian Freedom Movement by establishing two Home Rule Leagues during 1915–16. The sole objective of these two political organisations was to attain home rule or self-government within the British Empire by all constitutional means and to organise and educate public opinion.

These two Home Rule Leagues worked in close cooperation and made rapid progress. Cry of home rule seems to have resounded throughout the country. The stir created by these Leagues angered the government. Not only the existing statutes were tightened, but numerous new laws and ordinances were also promulgated to crush the spirit of Indian Nationalism.

The nationalist leaders soon realised that disunity among themselves, especially Moderates and Extremists, was proving harmful to their cause, and that they must put up a united front before the alien rulers.35

The growing nationalist feelings yielded two historic

developments at the Lucknow Session of the Congress in 1916. Firstly, it reunited two rival factions of the Congress—Moderates and Extremists— and second, the Indian National Congress and the All India Muslim League, signed the 'Lucknow Pact' showing their solidarity. This agreement marked an important step forward in Hindu–Muslim unity.

Great Britain responded to Indian Home Rule Leagues' demand for self-government by Edwin Montagu’s statement of August 20, 1917. He said: “.........The policy of His Majesty's Government with which the Government of India are in complete accord, is that of the increasing association of Indians in every branch of administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire.........”.

The government's reform scheme published in July 1918 further divided the nationalists rank. Annie Besant was vacillating in her attitude to reforms. Lokmanya Tilak also could not do much and later he had to go to England. Home Rule Movement, however, created a generation of ardent nationalists who were aroused to political awareness and were impatient with the pace of change. Leaders of the Muslim League, however, were unable to show the way forward. Conditions were thus created for the entry of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Vallabhbhai Jhaverbhai Patel and a host of young leaders into the arena of Indian politics.

The Indian National Movement had come under a sharp focus at the international level, and evoked favourable response from Indians living abroad as well as foreigners, who expressed their sympathies for the just Indian cause.

Thus, from the 'Old Guard' of the Congress, the mantle of leadership passed to Mahatma Gandhi, the prophet of new ideology of 'Non–Violence'. The Mahatma had one great asset to his credit, when he came back to India and waited in the wings to enter the Indian political stage—it was his intimate and rich experience of working with the masses for realising a common goal. This was his strong point vis–a–vis the English educated elitist leaders of India. In the real sense of the term, the masses began to play a role in the country's politics after Gandhi appeared on the Indian political scene.\textsuperscript{37}

After assuming the leadership of the country, Gandhi remained its undisputed leader till the dawn of independence. In his gigantic task of freedom struggle, he was assisted by a number of political leaders including Sardar Patel, Pandit Nehru, C. Rajagopalachari, Maulana Azad, Rajendra Prasad etc. Before embarking an All–India Satyagraha Movements, Gandhi tried to redress the local grievances of the people through Local Satyagraha Movements.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p.516.