The South Africa’s experience (1893–1914) contributed in a number of ways to the foundations of Gandhi’s ideology and methods, as well as to his later achievements in India. His entry into the politics of the country marked a change into the socio–eco and political life of India. In his anxiety to broaden the social base of the Congress he, alongwith his trusted lieutenants, carried his message to the villages and sought to involve the peasants and the down trodden in the nationalist struggle. The regional or local protest movements, which involved Gandhi and Patel, had an intense bearing on the freedom struggle of the country.

The genius of the Mahatma and the Sardar as his lieutenant, lay in inspiring and directing nascent popular movements so as to construct new forces. In the formative stages of their nationalist careers, both these leaders seems to have led from the bottom, in representing discontent and formulating aspirations rather than leading officially by issuing commands.

Numerous local satyagraha movements were led by Gandhi and Patel during the period ranging from 1917–28, directly as well as indirectly. This period saw both these
leaders applying the principles of satyagraha to meet situation that seemed to have little in common among them except that they were sought to be tackled through the weapon of satyagraha. These included indigo cultivators suffering in Champaran, mill-workers' demand of increase in dearness allowance in Ahmedabad, peasants' demand of suspension of land revenue in Kheda, to counter dacoits' menace in Borsad, to protect the honour of National Flag in Nagpur and to oppose the collection of enhanced revenue in Bardoli.

These were primarily local issues and both these leaders kept these movements as such and did not involve all India leaders. The local satyagraha movements laid the foundations of Gandhi's technique of satyagraha based on the twin principles of truth and non-violence, and helped him in launching All India Satyagraha Movements.

In this chapter, an attempt will be made to present a brief account of all these local satyagraha movements in the light of the role being played by both Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Patel.

**CHAMPARAN SATYAGRAHA**

In Champaran, an atrocious system of exploitation of peasants at the hands of the European planters was prevalent for more than a century. The European had captured indigo and sugarcane fields and would force the peasants to grow Indigo in their fields under what were known as "Tinkathia" contracts. To extract money from the peasants they used all sorts of brutalities such as beating, shutting them up in temporary prisons, impounding their cattle, looting their houses etc.
Gandhi first came to know of Champaran and the sufferings of the peasants at the Lucknow Session of the Congress in December 1916. On the request of Raj Kumar Shukla, a harrowed agriculturist, Gandhi decided to proceed to Champaran on April 10, 1917, to have first hand information. During his stay over there, Gandhi was assisted by Raj Kumar Shukla, Rajendra Prasad, Braj Kishore Babu, Maulana Mazhar–Ul–Haq, J.B. Kriplani and MR. Malkani.

He collected 20,000 statements of peasants. After a thorough study of the whole problem and after meeting the peasants and secretary of Planters' Association, Gandhi found the peasants' cause was just. So he decided to side with them. D.G. Tendulkar observed: "......In Champaran Gandhi realised the mission of his life and forged a weapon by which India could be made free.......".1

In this satyagraha Gandhi disobeyed the law by not leaving Champaran till an inquiry was instituted to remove the stain of Indigo. After a long drawn out struggle the government agreed to appoint an Inquiry Committee and made Gandhi one of its members. To keep the Champaran agitation at local level, Mahatma Gandhi did nothing in the name of Congress. Nor did he allow the struggle to take a political colour because he considered the issue non–political. The committee was supposed to give its report within three months. After an

---

analytical study of the entire episode, it gave its report in favour of the cultivators, abolishing forcible indigo cultivation.

On the successful completion of the movement, Gandhi in a statement to the press, announced: “The proceedings are withdrawn under instructions from the government. Official assistance during the conduct of my inquiry has been promised”. Gandhi had thus achieved his aim to promote peace between the planters and the raiyats so as to secure the raiyats the freedom and dignity that should belong to all humankind.²

The success Gandhi was able to achieve was largely due to his style of functioning. He remarked, the Champaran struggle was a proof of the fact that the disinterested service of the people in any sphere ultimately helped the country politically. The success of satyagraha movement in Champaran awakened interest in Gandhi’s method of non-violent resistance, but the real power and force of satyagraha had to be tested severely and demonstrated more convincingly before he could think of applying it to the national issues or problems. Two such successful experiments were conducted during the Ahmedabad mill-workers’ strike and the Kheda agitation, before applying the Gandhian technique of satyagraha on an all-India level, during the Non-Co-operation Movement of 1919–22.

The happenings of the Champaran agitation had an electrifying effect on the life of Sardar Patel, and helped in bringing him into close contact with Mahatma Gandhi. That is the only justification of presenting here a brief account of this movement.

AHMEDABAD MILL WORKERS’ STRIKE

In the month of July–August 1917, when there was a serious plague epidemic in and around Ahmedabad, 'Textile Industry' gave a bonus amounting to 75–80 percent of the basic salary of the workers as an inducement for them to stay on in the city. When the menace was brought under control, especially with the untiring efforts of Vallabhbhai Patel, who was the President of the Ahmedabad Municipality and a group of social workers, the bonus still continued as a compensation for the high cost of living over there.

The textile mill-owners’ attempt to end the plague bonus led to a confrontation between them and the mill-workers. Gandhi had hardly finished his work in Champaran when he got an urgent appeal from the side of mill-workers, since their dispute was taking a serious turn. He rushed to Ahmedabad to render whatever help he could to avert further conflict between the two parties.

Immediately after reaching over there, Gandhi met the Collector, mill-owners and mill-workers, and in consultation with them, succeeded on February 14, 1918, in getting a tribunal appointed to determine the extent of increase in the cost of living.

The proposed tribunal was to be composed of the
Collector of Ahmedabad, as President; Jagabhai Dalpatbhai, Ambalal Sarabhai and Chandulal, as representatives of the mill-owners; and Gandhi, Patel and Shankar Lal Banker, as the representatives of the mill-workers. The tribunal, after a detailed study of the entire case, concluded that there should be a 35 percent increase in the basic salary of the workers. This outcome could have become possible mainly due to the inclusion of two great champions of the workers and down-trodden, the Mahatma and the Sardar, in the said tribunal. Both of them were working hard since a long time for the betterment of general and industrial labour.

Due to some misunderstanding first the mill-owners, and later the mill-workers refused to abide by the recommendations of the Tribunal. Soon there after, the workers went on strike. This agitation offered to Gandhi an opportunity to test and prove his faith in non-violence. He was inspired by an active desire to harmonise the interests of both the parties, but when an open struggle became inevitable, he threw his weight on the side of the workers, and took over active leadership.  

The mill-owners declared a lockout which continued till March 12, 1918. The labourers’ strike commenced from that day. The mill-owners did try to break up the unity of the workers but they couldn’t succeed mainly due to the complete control of Gandhi and Patel over the activities of the workers. The former had also administered a solemn pledge to the

---

workers to remain firm in their resolve, since according to him their cause was just.

When the mill–workers were on the brink of starvation, a suggestion was made to raise a fund for them. Gandhi, however, was not in its favour as he believed that “the real significance of non-violent resistance is to be found in one’s ability to voluntarily face hardships and the more the hardships one is called upon to endure, the greater is the test”.4

Therefore, Gandhi advised the mill–workers not to accept financial assistance from anywhere and carry on the strike with a firm resolve and be prepared to face hardships. He said: “You earn money by the sweat of your brow. Do not accept money from anybody in charity; that will not add to your self-respect........”.5

On March 12, 1918, events took a new turn. On that day the lock-out was ended, and the textile mill opened for those workers who were prepared to work on an increase of 20 percent. Employers’ agents began to induce the workers to start work. Though the workers were participating in the struggle under strict instructions of Gandhi and Patel, but gradually their strength started declining. The former asked the workers to stand by the pledge they had taken, and he sent his co–workers, especially Sardar Patel and Indulal Yagnik, to


5 Ibid.
sustain the workers in their resolve.

Expressing their grumble, the workers of ‘Jugaldas Chawal’ told Chaganlal Gandhi that what was it to Ansuyabehan and Gandhiji? They come and go in their cars; they eat sumptuous food but the workers were suffering death agonies; attending meetings did not prevent starvation. Gandhi felt that the workers criticism was just, but he could not tolerate the idea of their breaking the pledge. On March 13, 1918, he spontaneously announced in a public meeting: “I cannot bear that any of you should break your promise. I will not take food or use a car until you have received the increase you have asked for........”.

With this announcement of Gandhi, everyone present in the meeting was moved. “Tears flowed from the eyes of everyone present”, says Mahadev Desai. One by one they stood up and assured the Mahatma that they shall never fail in their pledge, and requested him to give up that terrible resolve, but he solemnly turned down their request. Gandhi was, time and again, asking them to earn bread by hard labour. Now they began to work in the weaving school building under construction in the Ashram. Patel also provided them work in various projects in the Ahmedabad Municipality. The workers were infused with new strength and determination, and learnt the lesson of self-help.

Gandhi began his fast on March 15, 1918. This exercised an indirect pressure on the mill-owners and a direct

\[\text{\cite{Ibid}}\]
one on the mill-workers. An atmosphere of goodwill, with a preparedness to settle the dispute seemed in the offing. The fast continued until 18th, when an agreement was reached regarding the appointment of an arbitrator by the parties concerned. Not only this, both the parties at conflict also resolved to accept the recommendations of the arbitrator.

In this way the Ahmedabad mill-workers’ strike came to a successful close. This righteous agitation was conducted with the help of cleanest means of truth, non-violence and devotion to duty. It had ennobling results on both sides, ensured mutual goodwill and restored employer-employee relations on the foundations of mutual love and trust.

While commenting on its significance, Gandhi had observed that the Ahmedabad strike provided the richest lessons of life. The power of love was never so effectively demonstrated to him as it was during the lock-out. The existence of God was realised by the mass of men before him as soon as the fast was declared.

The Ahmedabad Mill-Workers’ Strike played a crucial role in the future application of Gandhian technique of non-violent resistance. During this struggle, the Mahatma and the Sardar worked in close association. The former, for the first time, used the weapon of ‘hunger strike’, as an important instrument for the redressal of public grievances. It also reminded the workers of their shortcomings and taught them to honour their pledge and work unitedly for the fulfillment of their cherished objectives and to improve their way of life. During this agitation, the principle of non-violence had been observed in letter and spirit. Not only this, Gandhi and Patel’s
hold on Ahmedabad workers was further consolidated.

KHEDA SATYAGRAHA

Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, as far back as 1896, during the great famine, which rocked the entire Western India, had declared: “......The country’s emancipation can only be achieved by removing the clouds of lethargy and indifference which have been hanging over the peasant, who is the soul of India. We must remove these clouds and for that we must completely identify themselves with the peasants. We must feel that he is ours and we are his.........”.

Nearly twenty-one years later, Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Patel in 1918, took the same road to fight for the rights of the peasants of Kheda district in Gujarat.

The crops in Kheda and some other parts of Gujarat, were washed away by heavy rains, in the first quarter of 1918. Since the farmers could not pay the land revenue, they requested the government for the exemption of land revenue for the said period of time. Under the Land Revenue Rules, there was a provision that if the crop was four annas (25%) or under, the cultivators could claim full concession of the revenue assessment for the year.

According to the official estimate the crop was said to


be over 25 percent while the peasants claimed that it was far behind the government's figures. The government's decision of forceful collection of revenue and the various repressive measures that followed, forced the peasants to present their cause before Gandhi, who was still busy in giving the final touch to Ahmedabad mill-workers' case.

After getting the message, Gandhi left for Kheda to get the first hand information of the problem. Sardar Patel was already present over there. After detailed investigations, both these leaders concluded that the peasants' demand was genuine and based on truth. Consequently, they sent a number of petitions to the government for the termination of the collection of the land revenue. After getting negative response from the authorities, they solemnly decided to advise the peasants to resort to satyagraha.

Even before coming personally to Kheda, Mahatma Gandhi was taking keen interest in the developments there. In a letter to the press (26.2.1918), he said: "It seems self-evident to me that there is nothing unlawful if, to express one's sense of injustice, one refuses to pay a tax, in a perfectly civil manner, and let it be collected forcibly........".9

Before formally launching the satyagraha movement, the following pledge was signed by the peasants before the Mahatma and the Sardar: "We solemnly declare that we shall not, of our own accord, pay to the government, the full or the remaining revenue........we shall let the government take

9 THE COLLECTED WORKS OF MAHATMA GANDHI, ibid., p.217.
whatever legal step......and gladly suffer the consequences....".10

Gandhi launched the satyagraha movement on March 22, 1918, at a public meeting at Nadiad. Being preoccupied, he entrusted the work of Kheda Satyagraha to Patel. Initially, the former was not confident as to whether the latter would be able to do the needful. According to Parikh, close scrutiny convinced Gandhi more than ever before that he must secure his help. The Mahatma never had to regret his decision.11

As the commander of the Kheda Satyagraha, Sardar Patel displayed unmistakable evidence of great qualities of leadership, so complimentary to that of Gandhi’s. The former worked in the campaign not as an independent leader but as the latter’s assistant. He worked hard, day and night, for the success of this movement. This was the second time when Patel was working so close to Gandhi.

Unlike the Mahatma’s other associates, the Sardar enjoyed two distinct advantages: first, he belonged to Kheda, born and brought up on its soil and amidst its environment, and had practised as a lawyer for nearly a decade at Borsad. Second, being the son of a peasant, he knew and understood the peasants and workers much better than others.

In his public speeches, Sardar Patel like Gandhi, injected in the people’s hearts and minds, courage and

11 Parikh, N.D., ibid., p.89.
fearlessness. The former's advice to the peasants, seems to have been truly Gandhian when he said that the agitators must remain truthful, non-violent, polite, affectionate, peace-loving, united and determined throughout the entire struggle.

Both these leaders worked tirelessly, moving about in rural areas on foot, covering long distances, exhorting and encouraging the peasants. In a speech at Aklacha, on April 10, 1918, Gandhi said that the British authority was blind and unjust. A government that said that such authority must be respected, could not last for a long time. Addressing the satyagrahis on April 11, the Mahatma argued: "......No king can remain in power if he sets himself against the people. I have taken it as the chief mission of my life to prove this......".12

The satyagraha which was launched in March continued till June. Its uniqueness lay in the peasants standing firmly behind the integrated leadership of Gandhi and Patel, willingly accepting any punishment inflicted upon them. B. Krishna, one of Sardar Patel's biographers, observed: "......Gandhi stirred their spirits and made the bold declaration that if the government confiscated their lands, it would be an act of spoliation and theft that would shake the foundations of the British authority in India......".13

With the help of his experience through the Ahmedabad Municipality, Patel persuaded the mass strength of 27,000

12 THE COLLECTED WORKS OF MAHATMA GANDHI, ibid., pp.328-29.
peasants not to pay land revenue and said that 'this fight will act as a spark which will set the whole country afire'. He also found that non-violent non-cooperation with the authorities could, indeed, bring rich rewards in the years to come. It was also during this period that Patel sensed that the concept of satyagraha found favour with the great majority of Indian people. In a pamphlet, the Sardar said: “........A bitter war is on between the public and blind administration........It has auctioned many houses......It has auctioned standing crops. It has threatened imprisonment. But inspite of all this the public has stood firm........”\textsuperscript{14}

According to Dr. P.N. Chopra, Gandhi had discovered Patel, in his full swing, only on the battlefield of Kheda—not earlier, neither during the Ahmedabad Mill Workers' Strike, nor when the latter was the Secretary of the Gujarat Sabha with the former as its President. It may be observed that this satyagraha brought about a complete transformation in Patel's life. He gave up his flourishing and ever-growing legal practice in order to devote his entire time for the national cause.

It was also during this period that to the Sardar, the Mahatma seemed to be a multi-dimensional personality—a warrior, saint and a guide—all in one, whom he could trust and follow unflinchingly. On one occasion the former had observed that living with Gandhi convinced him that India’s salvation lay only in treading the path shown by Mahatma Gandhi. Yet, on an another occasion, Patel claimed: “When it comes to

\textsuperscript{14} Chopra, P.N., (ed.), THE COLLECTED WORKS OF SARDAR VALLABHBHAI PATEL (Delhi: Konark Publishers), 1990, Vol.1, pXVI.
obeying an order, there is no soldier like me."\(^{15}\)

Following a compromise formula initiated by the government, the satyagraha came to an end on June 6, 1918. Gandhi and Patel welcomed the settlement though it was not a complete victory as the government refused to allow general suspension of 7 percent revenue collection. On the same day, the duo jointly issued a pamphlet, stating that the satyagraha was over: ".........The fight has come to an end............If the public had been informed about the orders.....Many could have been spared the hardships they had to undergo........until today it was a matter of honour not to pay up the land revenue ; now it will be a matter of honour to pay it up. Whoever has the means to pay should do so......."\(^{16}\)

Following the conclusion of the struggle, Gandhi and Patel paid rich tributes to the people of Kheda. Thanking the people for their outstanding contribution, the latter observed: ".......By their courage the peasants of Kheda have drawn towards them the attention of the whole of India.......They have shown great loyalty to truth, fearlessness, unity, firmness and self–sacrifice....."\(^{17}\)

Praising Patel at a meeting on June 29, 1918, Gandhi said: ".....A leader’s skill is judged by his competence in


\(^{16}\) Parikh, N.D., ibid., pp.89–90.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., pp.90–91.
selecting his assistants. Many were prepared to follow me, but I could not make up my mind as to who would be my deputy commander. I must admit that when I first met Patel, I could not help wondering who this haughty person was, and whether he would be able to do what I wanted...If it were not for his assistance, this campaign could not have been carried through so successfully..........."^{18}

Patel expressed his deep gratitude to Gandhi for having given him the credit of success of Kheda Satyagraha. He added: ".......Mahatmaji has handed to me, the tribute offered to him. Let me say, on behalf of my colleagues that we would have accomplished nothing .....if Kheda’s people had not themselves shown courage and forbearance.............."^{19}

The Mahatma was quick to point out that the association between him and the Sardar, satisfied the latter’s ambition as much as it fulfilled his own needs. On the lessons of satyagraha, the former had once observed : ".....Vallabhbhai had the wisdom to realise that to make any kind of mark in the politics of the time, it was imperative that he should join the new movement. That was his best way of leaving a legacy to his heirs—a better legacy than his money which could be squandered away......."^{20}

The significance of Kheda struggle lies in that it was the

^{18} Gandhi, Rajmohan, ibid.,p.68.
^{19} Ibid.
^{20} THE COLLECTED WORKS OF MAHATMA GANDHI, ibid., p.461.
first occasion when Gandhi involved the common people in mass action and educated them on the lines of satyagraha. The agitation, according to D.V. Tahmankar, brought awakening in the peasantry in Gujarat; they shed their lethargy, learnt self-reliance, gained self-confidence and also realised that they had certain rights which they could enforce through mass action.

Moreover, this satyagraha movement was of great importance because it marked the beginning of Patel's more active participation in the politics of the country and gave him a political power base. Madhu Limaye remarked: "The lessons Patel learnt were so thoroughly digested and absorbed by him that thereafter he quietly took over the whole work in Gujarat, and freed Gandhiji for the bigger tasks ahead. His work in Kheda won for him Gandhi's complete confidence".21

From all-India angle, the Kheda agitation was of double significance. With the success of this satyagraha, Gandhi had ushered in a new era in the freedom struggle, and no less important was the fact that it brought the Mahatma and the Sardar much closer to each other.

NAGPUR SATYAGRAHA

The period of two years, 1922–24, when the Ahmedabad Municipality, along with some other municipalities, was under suspension, proved to be a blessing in disguise for Sardar

Patel. Mahatma Gandhi being in jail, serving his first imprisonment in India, the Congress Working Committee asked Vallabhbhai Patel to lead the Nagpur Flag Satyagraha Movement in the year 1923.

The satyagraha had its origin in Jabalpur, which was associated with the issue of hoisting of National Flag over the Municipality Headquarters, in August 1922. What caused anguish among the authorities, was the rebellious spirit displayed by the municipality in rejecting a resolution suggesting that the National Flag and the Union Jack (National Flag of Great Britain), be flown together.22

In March 1923, when the Congress Working Committee assembled at Jabalpur, the municipality passed a resolution to hoist the National Flag over the Town Hall—the Municipality Headquarters—, but was strictly prohibited by the authorities. This provoked the launching of an agitation on March 18, 1923.

Owing to the grimness of the situation, the Nagpur District Congress Committee entered into the fray, thereby shifting the battlefield from Jabalpur to Nagpur. On March 18, 1923, a procession, under the leadership of Pundit Sunder Lal, was taken in Nagpur with the National Flag. The principle at issue was the right to carry the National Flag or indeed any religious or political flag peacefully in a public street, whether in a large or in a small organised procession. But the leader of the procession was arrested and sentenced to six months

22 Krishna, B., ibid.p.80.
imprisonment. Seth Jamnalal Bajaj, who assumed the leadership thereafter, also met the same fate. Many other leaders were also arrested by the authorities.

In reaction to the repressive measures of the government, the Congress decided to launch a massive agitation, which was started on May 1, 1923, under the leadership of Sardar Patel.

Patel arrived in Nagpur on July 22, 1923, to take charge of the Nagpur Flag Satyagraha. Soon he realised that most of the Congress leaders were already in jail, the movement was not properly planned, and a section of people, under the influence of Swarajists, were against the agitation.

Inspite of all these adverse circumstances, Patel was not to be deterred. He exhorted the people of Gujarat: “....Remember the flag that was hoisted on the 'Pandal' of the Congress session, held on the banks of Sabarmati (December 1921), in the presence of Mahatma Gandhi, is being dishonoured at Nagpur...... Today we are fighting for the retention of our flag. Get yourself recruited as satyagrahi soldiers, sign the pledge and march towards Nagpur when ordered.”

After getting acquainted with the prevailing circumstances, Sardar Patel asked all the Provincial Congress Committees to send satyagrahi volunteers for courting arrest and that at least 50 satyagrahis should be available at the

Nagpur Railway Station for arrest daily.

It was mainly due to Vallabhbhai Patel’s initiative that besides Gujarat, volunteers started pouring in quick succession from Bengal, United Provinces, Punjab, Sind, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Hyderabad etc.

He started giving them lessons in satyagraha in order to make them an army of non-violent soldiers. Inspite of mass arrests, the flow of flag satyagrahis continued. During this time Sardar Patel discovered that the way to true leadership lay through the affection and loyalty of the people which could only be earned by serving them.24

The Sardar was fighting this battle against the authorities almost single handed, as most of the leaders were either in prison or had not co-operated. Giving vent to his disappointment, he told Mahadev Desai that had the people been united, it would have been possible to make the government yield within a week.

The official orders issued by the District Magistrate of Nagpur on May 1, 1923, were to remain in force for two months. On 17th June, another order, prohibiting the carrying out of the flag, under section 144 of the Indian Penal Code, was issued, also to remain in force for two months.

The satyagrahis were also determined in their resolve to carry on the movement. Taking into consideration the seriousness of the situation, the Home Member in the

24 Tahmankar, D.V., ibid., p.66.
Governor’s Executive Council, arranged a meeting on August 13, between the Governor and Sardar Patel, but no settlement could be reached.

Vallabhbhai Patel, in a statement on August 16, reiterated that the struggle would continue unabated. He also asked the satyagrahis to remain firm in their resolve.

Thereafter, the Home Member once again approached Patel for a settlement and finally succeeded in his efforts. He suggested to the latter that if the procession of the 18th August was allowed to pass through the Civil Lines—earlier declared as a prohibited area—the struggle should be called off immediately. Sardar Patel agreed, but also asked for the immediate release of all satyagrahi prisoners. The government accepted his demand.

In accordance with the agreement with the Home Member, Patel informed the Superintendent of Police (Nagpur), of his decision to take out the flag procession on August 18, 1923, through Civil Lines. Nearly one hundred volunteers participated in the procession and it reached its destination peacefully.

Thereafter, Sardar Patel declared: ".....The honour of the National Flag stands vindicated. Our right to take out processions on public roads in a peaceful and orderly manner has been restored. I regard this as a triumph of truth, non-violence and suffering......I am now in a position to announce that the Nagpur satyagraha campaign successfully closes in a manner entirely in consonance with the spirit of the teachings
On September 3, 1923, all satyagrahi prisoners were released. As a finale to the movement, they took out victory march through the civil lines with the National Flag. Sardar Patel, who also participated in the march, thanked the government for its efforts to bring this struggle to an honourable conclusion. He also complimented the measures of the Nagpur Congress Committee. The Sardar seemed to have become a true Gandhian as is reflected by his speech at Ahmedabad (September 5, 1923), after the conclusion of the agitation.

This satyagraha was a partial success as it ended in a compromise. But it had revived Gandhian Congress prestige, which had been somewhat lowered by the abrupt retreat of February 1922. The entire struggle was led according to the principles of satyagraha. During this agitation, Patel had requested Kasturba Gandhi to join the struggle, but later on stopped her following a settlement with the government.

The greatest gain of the struggle was that volunteers were full of zeal and new spirit irrespective of the hardships of jail, which had not diminished their enthusiasm. They further learnt the lessons of collective action, self-suffering and self-sacrifice. The experiences of this agitation, Sardar Patel

25 Krishna, B., ibid., p.84.
26 Parikh, N.D., ibid., p.217.
observed, were destined to play crucial role in his later struggles against the mighty British. This movement further exhibited that Patel, although a stubborn fighter, was, similar to Gandhi, when a principle was involved, was also ready to accept any honourable compromise.

BORSAAD SATYAGRAHA

Soon after his return from Nagpur, Borsad claimed Sardar Patel's immediate attention. It was his own taluka and it appealed him for help. The issue of contention was that the residents of Borsad and its adjoining villages were terrified by two dreaded terrorists and robbers, named Babbar Deva and Ali Mian.

The duo committed robberies and murders even in broad day lights. The government was unable to trace their whereabouts or arrest them, and blamed the people for refusing to co-operate in giving required information about these anti-social elements.

Therefore, the government imposed a punitive tax amounting to rupees 2.40 lakhs on the people to meet the additional expenditure being spent on the police security. The people termed this action as totally unjustified and arbitrary.

Prior to giving his consent to lead a satyagraha campaign, Sardar Patel, like Mahatma Gandhi in Kheda, decided to hold a detailed personal inquiry into the whole episode. Consequently, he directed Mohanlal Pandya and Ravishankar Maharaj—two of his close associates—to proceed to Borsad immediately. The Sardar asked them to study the situation in greater detail and submit a factual report at the
earliest possible.

After visiting many villages Mohanlal Pandya along with his colleague, submitted the report according to which the public was generally innocent and it further founded that the outlaws committed robberies at night; the police during the day, and on top of it all the people were being dubbed collaborators of dacoits. The report also mentioned in clear words that people opined that the police was dishonest and gave arms and ammunition to the dacoits and was co-sharer in the looted property. 28

After going through the report, Vallabhbhai Patel was convinced that the people were absolutely innocent. Besides, he also received a confidential circular issued by the Superintendent of Police to his subordinates, to turn blind eye to dacoits and offences committed by Ali Mian, as he had undertaken to assist in the arrest of Babbar Deva. Consequently, Patel was in a better position to challenge the government.

The Gujarat Provincial Congress Committee met at Borsad on December 1, 1923, and resolved that the government had proved itself unable to protect the public. It had also observed that it was the duty of the government to make adequate police arrangements. The Gujarat Provincial Congress Committee further advised the people to fight against the injustice and to refuse to pay the tax and for the sake of their self-respect, to bear patiently whatever hardships they

28 Ibid., p.224.
would have as a consequence.\textsuperscript{29}

When the government started the collection of the punitive tax with the help of repressive measures, Sardar Patel, on December 5, 1923, started his second satyagraha in Gandhi's absence. While explaining that it was wrong to pay the punitive tax the former opined that the question was not of giving 2–3 rupees but because the government considered them associates of dacoits.

After the conditions of waging the struggle and the attendant dangers had been explained to the people in detail by Sardar Patel, the people firmly resolved not to pay the punitive tax. In a leaflet he said that only by carrying out your pledges you can retain your self-respect. The government will threaten imprisonment, confiscate your property and take away your cattle. All that you should bear patiently. Under no circumstances should pay a pie, or react violently. Truth is on your side. If you adhere to the principle of non-violence, you are bound to succeed. Anyone, who is honest and who practices non-violence can never lose.

Besides maintaining the spirit of satyagrahis in the face of government’s repression, Sardar Patel also tried to persuade the dacoits to leave their anti-social activities as their life was not worth living. He further advised then to go to the police station to confess their crimes and then die on gallows as

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., p.231.
Taking into consideration the severe pressure from the satyagrahis, the government eventually withdrew the punitive tax within 39 days of the campaign when it felt convinced of the righteousness of the struggle. Patel immediately issued a statement on 12th January 1924, declaring that the satyagraha came to an end. He observed: "...Once again there has been a triumph of truth, non-violence and penance. This victory has been as quick as our struggle was just. It is unique in that both the parties have won. The government has admitted their mistake openly and with courage."³¹ Patel also congratulated the Governor of Bombay for this moral courage.

When the people were celebrating their victory, Gandhi was operated upon for appendicitis in the Sasson Hospital at Pune. On Patel’s second consecutive victory, the former greeted him with the words “Welcome the King of Borsad”.³² Soon after his recovery, the Mahatma wrote in the ‘Young India’ of April 6, 1924: ".........These achievements (Nagpur and Borsad Satyagrahas), are a great tribute to Vallabhbhai’s magnificent organising and administrative skill. And he has collected around him in the process, a band of devoted workers of like mind and ability...."³³

---

³⁰ Chópra, P.N. (ed.), ibid., p.315.
³¹ Parikh, N.D., ibid., p.250.
³² Krishna, B., ibid., p.99.
³³ Ibid.
One of the most significant contributions of the Borsad Satyagraha was that women participated in as large numbers and as eagerly as men. It was also during this struggle that the government had realised its mistake publically and the demand of the satyagrahis had been completely vindicated. The people's morale to take part in the future struggles, was further strengthened.

The Borsad Satyagraha served as a training ground for women of the Bombay Presidency and as a source of inspiration for women all over the country. Sardar Patel's prestige rose high. He was placed in the hierarchy of nationalist leaders. During this agitation the Sardar also asked the satyagrahis to make a quick study of their shortcomings and further suggested numerous measures so that they might be ready for the final conflict with the government.

**BARDOLI SATYAGRAHA**

In July–August 1927, there were excessive rains in many parts of Gujarat and Kathiawad, causing heavy losses to the life, property and standing crops of the people. The outbreak of this natural calamity disturbed Sardar Patel a lot who was the President of the Ahmedabad Municipality as well as President of the Gujarat Provincial Congress Committee.

After having obtained the first hand information from different sources, Vallabhbhai Patel issued an emotional appeal to the people of Gujarat through 'Navajivan' for donation generously for relief and rescue of their kith and
Following the appeal thousands of volunteers reached Gujarat to render their services in the relief and rescue operations, which were already in progress under the integrated leadership of Sardar Patel. He posted volunteers all over Gujarat in order to send relief judiciously wherever required and saw to it that social workers performed their duties with a sense of responsibility. Though Gandhi was not there, yet he sent his suggestions continuously regarding the successful conduct of relief and rescue operations.

Within a short period of time Patel took almost all activities relating to relief and rescue measures under his direct control. During these crucial moments, Gandhi even offered to visit the affected areas but the former declined the offer saying: "..If you give an opportunity to show how well we have learnt what you have taught us, and how we are putting in practice the training you have been giving to us for the past ten years, do not come........."35

The sufferings of the people further increased with the government's decision to increase land revenue by 22 percent from January 1928. The people considered this increase unjust and irrational due to the devastating floods of the preceding year which destroyed almost all crops. Therefore, they decided to revolt against the decision and requested

---

34 Parikh, N.D., ibid., pp.290-91.
Sardar Patel to take a lead in this matter. However, the government stuck to its decision and decided to collect the enhanced revenue from February 5, 1938.

Vallabhbhai Patel arrived in Bardoli a day earlier, i.e. on 4th February. He told the peasants that he was ready to help those who are prepared to revolt against the government’s decision and to face hardships. He also told them that the matter did not concern only a taluka but whole of Gujarat.

He gave 7 days time to the people to think over the matter and make up their mind for launching an agitation. According to B.Krishna, Patel had a double purpose in the postponement of the satyagraha movement by a week: “.First to administer shock therapy to the people with a view to steeling their resolve; and secondly, to explore possibilities of a compromise through the Gandhian principle of negotiation.”

Soon thereafter, he wrote a detailed letter on February 6, 1928, to the Governor of Bombay, in which he requested him to postpone the recovery of the revised land revenue until the whole matter was analysed. On February 12, he again asked the peasants of Bardoli to resist oppression and injustice if they were convinced of the cause and not to take the plunge lightly. The Sardar further told them that “if they succeeded in their attempt to resist the government, this will

36 Krishna, B., ibid., p.114.
lay the foundation of Swaraj."37

The ground for Bardoli Satyagraha was prepared, first by the government's refusal to postpone the collection of the revenue or reconsider the revised rates, and secondly, by the people's decision to oppose the government's move. Consequently, on the expiry of the stipulated period of time, the government started the collection of revenue forcibly. The people of Bardoli launched satyagraha under the leadership of Patel, on February 15, 1928. It took the form of non-payment of land revenue. When the government saw in the movement a challenge, it went all out to crush the spirit of the satyagrahis.

Thousands of people were arrested and imprisoned, property seized and livestock auctioned; still the peasants remained defiant and peaceful. During this period, Gandhi guided the satyagraha from a distance. He wrote many letters to Patel regarding the conduct of the agitation. He also cultivated public opinion in favour of the peasants' cause, for this movement was also an additional step towards Swaraj as it provided training in disciplined and peaceful resistance.38

The struggle continued unabated for some time. When Sardar Patel found some peasants loosing their determination, he asked them to be firm in their resolve. To the wavering satyagrahis, he advised not to worry about their lands and be


38 THE COLLECTED WORKS OF MAHATMA GANDHI, ibid, Vol. XXXVI, p.90.
determined to face hardships. He continuously inspired the satyagrahis by telling them that the objective of the satyagraha campaign would be described as worthy, only when that left the satyagrahis stronger and more spirited than they were in the beginning.

When the rumour spread of Patel’s impending arrest, Gandhi wrote to him “...Write or wire if I am wanted ....the arrest if it comes off, will be a rest cure. If it does not, rest is for us forbidden fruit.” The Sardar who was unperturbed about his arrest, remarked in a lighter vein: “.. Why should I be arrested? There is hardly any chance. The poor buffalo at least fetches a few rupees, I would fetch nothing if attached and sold....”

Gandhi now decided to go to Bardoli to take Patel’s place if he was arrested. The former, therefore, reached there on August 2, 1928. In his welcome ceremony he told peasants that Vallabhbhai has made them famous throughout India. Accepting Patel as the sole leader of the satyagraha, Gandhi said that he could not speak there without the order of the former.

The Bardoli Satyagraha, provided an opportunity to test and demonstrate people’s determination. Although Gandhi

39 Gandhi, Rajmohan, ibid., p.154.
40 Desai, Mahadev, ibid., p.125.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid., p.170.
greatly appreciated the manner in which this struggle was continued, still he resisted pressure to extend the scope of this campaign and to convert it into an all-India satyagraha movement.\textsuperscript{43}

This satyagraha was the longest local satyagraha that Patel had ever led in any part of the country. It came to a close following a settlement between the government and the representatives of the satyagrahis. It held that an increase of only 7 percent and not 22 percent could be warranted. Thereafter, both Gandhi and Patel, in a joint statement on August 6, 1928, declared that the satyagraha was concluded.

According to Gandhi, the satyagraha had a lesson both for the government as well as for the people. For the government if they will recognise the power of the people when they have truth on their side and when they can form non-violent combination to vindicate it. For the people, the lesson was that they will not become a non-violent organisation unless they undergo a process of what may be called continuous corporate cleansing.\textsuperscript{44}

Bardoli Satyagraha rocked Sardar Patel to great fame. After the successful conclusion, heart-felt congratulations poured in from different parts of the country. Gandhi was the first to pay the most deserving tribute to him, when he said:

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{43} THE COLLECTED WORKS OF MAHATMA GANDHI, ibid., Vol.XXXVII, p.113.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., pp.179–80.}
“Vallabhbhai found his Vallabh (God) in Bardoli”.\textsuperscript{45} He further observed: “......Without Patel’s firmness as well as greatness this settlement would have been impossible..”\textsuperscript{46} Motilal Nehru, the then Congress President, in a letter to Gandhi, described Sardar Patel as “the hero of the hour,” and advised that “the least we can do to appreciate his public services is to offer him the crown.”\textsuperscript{47}

This satyagraha was also significant in the sense that it helped Sardar Patel to climb new heights of political eminence. Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, rightly forejudged Bardoli Satyagraha as the “precursor of the larger fight that Mahatma Gandhi was to wage in 1930.”\textsuperscript{48}

The successful conclusion of the Bardoli agitation further strengthened the relations between Gandhi and Patel. After this movement the suffix “Sardar” was permanently attached with the name of the latter and thereafter, he popularly named as Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel—the Sardar of the whole of India. This conflict also infused complete confidence in the Sardar to launch a nation-wide non-violent struggle for independence.

\textsuperscript{45} Desai, Mahadev, ibid., p.127.

\textsuperscript{46} Krishna, B., ibid., p.133.

\textsuperscript{47} Nehru, Jawahar Lal, A BUNCH OF OLD LETTERS (Bombay : Asia Publishing House), 1959, p.58.

These local satyagraha movements were very significant for Gandhi and Patel’s personal rise to eminence as well as in the freedom struggle of the country. Viability of the former's political style was tested through these local satyagraha agitations which paved the way for the Mahatma to embark on All-India Satyagrahas.

These struggles also provided an opportunity to Patel to come into closer contact with Gandhi and participate in India's struggle for independence. The duo came to have a definite understanding of the strength and weaknesses of the masses. They were also able to gather a group of young political workers who were fascinated by the Mahatma's identification with the problems of masses and ordinary Indians.