PARTICIPATION IN THE CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT (1930–1934)

Mahatma Gandhi took little interest in the political activities of the country from 1922 to 1928. This was the period of his incarceration after the Non-Co-operation Movement. Although he was released on medical ground only after two years of stay in jail yet he did not think it proper to engage himself in active politics until the time of his sentence was over. During this period he kept himself engaged in such innocuous activities of the constructive programme as promotion of swadeshi goods, Hindu–Muslim unity, eradication of untouchability etc.

The politics of the sub-continent was also going through a crucial stage at that time, with unseemly controversies among legislators, exploitative and repressive measures adopted by the Colonial government and communal disturbances. By the end of 1927, there were distinct signs of political upheaval; trade unions were becoming more and more militant and youth leagues were coming up rapidly; there was a resurgence of revolutionary violence throughout the country. Such was the political scene in the country when Gandhi re-entered active politics in March 1928.

The successful conclusion of the Bardoli Satyagraha
(discussed in the earlier chapter), under the direct leadership of Sardar Patel, though with Gandhi’s blessings, had further strengthened the image of the Congress. “The fact”, Dr. P.N. Chopra observed, “remains that the Bardoli Satyagraha laid down the foundations on which the later Gandhian movements were launched”. ¹

The Civil Disobedience Movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi in March 1930, was his first direct attempt to secure ‘Purna Swaraj’ i.e. Complete Independence in the sense of severing relations with Imperialist Britain, in pursuance of the ‘Complete Independence Resolution’ passed by the Congress in its Lahore Session held in December 1929.

Mahatma Gandhi resolved that if the ‘Dominion Status Constitution’ as recommended by the All Parties Conference (1928), was accepted by the British Parliament in its entirety before December 31, 1929, it would be all right. But in case it was not granted, the Congress would be then free to organise a campaign of Non-Violent Non-Co-operation, including non-payment of taxes and carry on Civil Disobedience as may be decided upon.

The All India Congress Committee delegated its final authority to Gandhi to launch the Civil Disobedience Movement and the country awaited his move with bated breath. He drafted a pledge which said: “The British Government.....has ruined India economically, politically,

culturally and spiritually...We hold it a crime against man and God to submit any longer to a rule that has caused this four fold disaster to our country...."2

Independence Day—January 26,1930—was observed with great enthusiasm in various parts of the country and to quote Jawahar Lal Nehru, “it revealed to us as in a flash the earnest and enthusiastic mood of the country.....This celebration gave necessary impetus to Gandhi and he felt with his sure touch on the pulse of the people that the time was ripe for action......”3

India demanded home rule or complete independence mainly for two reasons : first, because freedom is the birth right of every nation” ; and secondly, “because her most important interests are now made subservient to the interests of the British Empire without her consent and her resources are not utilised for her greatest needs."4

The proposals regarding the Civil Disobedience Movement were made public with the historic letter that Gandhi wrote to the Viceroy, on March 2, 1930, enumerating his eleven–point demands containing the substance of

3 Ibid.
independence. Through this communication, the former demanded from the government 50 percent cut in army expenses and civil service salaries, total prohibition, release of political prisoners, reform of the C.I.D., changes in the Arms Act allowing popular control of issue of firearm licenses, lowering of rupee–sterling exchange ratio to 4:1, textile protection, reservation of coastal shipping for Indians, 50 percent reduction in land revenue and abolition of the salt tax and government monopoly.5

Gandhi decided to launch the Civil Disobedience Movement by manufacturing salt at Dandi thereby breaking the law. The salt tax though relatively light in incidence, hit the poorest in the country. The choice of salt as the central issue for launching a struggle, appeared somewhat eccentric at first to a few leaders. Jawahar Lal Nehru, later recalled his initial sense of bewilderment at this.

Lord Irwin, the then Viceroy, complacently informed Secretary of State, Wedgewood–Ben : “......At present, the prospect of a salt campaign does not keep me awake at night.......”6 To Moti Lal Nehru and many other leaders in the Congress and outside it, salt had become like fasting and Charkha— another of Gandhi’s hobby horses. But the


developments which took place with the passage of time proved their observations wrong.

Gandhi proposed to launch the satyagraha campaign with the small Ashram community, his criteria being to select only those who had gone through the rigid discipline of the Sabarmati Ashram. He selected a band of 78 satyagrahis, who hailed from all parts of the country, two of them being Muslims, one Christian and rest Hindus, including two Harijans. Their ages varied from 16 to 61, he himself being the eldest among them. He decided to start the historic Dandi March on March 12, 1930.

Sardar Patel earned the appellation of "John the Baptist" during Gandhi's Salt Satyagraha of 1930. He was to the latter what saint John was to the Christ. The former was the forerunner and Baptist of Jesus. Patel seems to have played precisely the same role in this movement. He baptised the people on the route on which Gandhi was to go to Dandi on April 6, 1930 and brake the law prohibiting manufacture of salt from the sea water—a simple act thereafter turned into a symbol of national defiance and aroused world-wide attention for its revolutionary implications.

According to B. Krishna, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel had the foresight to see as early as 1923, that the increase in the salt tax by the government which affected the poor people could be an invaluable weapon for a future satyagraha of local

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or national magnitude. Gandhi, was to take up the same issue nearly seven years thereafter to launch a nation-wide struggle which shook the foundations of the British Empire.

The Sardar went ahead of the Mahatma to prepare the people for an all out struggle against the Colonial rulers. He toured extensively to arouse public opinion in Gandhi's favour; his efforts proved very useful. Wherever he visited, he exhorted people to face government tyranny with physical as well as mental strength. He devoted his time and energy to educate the people for the forthcoming Civil Disobedience Movement being launched by Mahatma Gandhi. He strongly appealed to all sections of the people not to be afraid of hardships, including jails and join the struggle in large numbers.

According to B. Krishna, 'Dandi' was Sardar Patel's choice, so were the participants of the March being lead by Gandhi. Most of them were his trusted lieutenants since his earlier satyagraha movements. Gandhi appreciated Patel's efforts in preparing the people for the forthcoming struggle. The former in a speech at Napa, acknowledged that "Vallabhbhai had come ahead of him to smoothen his own path". 8

Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, a Congress historian observed : ".....While yet Gandhi was making preparations.....Vallabhbhai went before him to prime up the villagers for the coming ordeals ......moving in advance as

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8 Ibid., p.138.
Gandhi’s forerunner, the government saw in him John the Baptist...”

Calling Gandhi the saint of Sabarmati, Patel in a statement said: “......The man at Sabarmati, with a handful of bones, has shaken the British Empire with his spinning wheel. That is (a) real wonder.....He has built hope in you......Aren’t you going to fulfil them ?.......Freedom’s first page is being written in Gujarat’s history.......”

On March 7, 1930, when Sardar Patel was going to preside over a meeting being organised by the people of ‘Ras’—a village in the periphery of Dandi—he was restrained by the District Magistrate to do so and was arrested even before he had uttered a single word. Consequently, he was sentenced to three months and three weeks imprisonment. Referring to Patel’s arrest Gandhi said, “that the British authorities had arrested Sardar Patel because it feared that if he was left free, he and not the government would rule over the district of Surat”. Commenting on Patel’s arrest, Sitaramayya observed that with his arrest and conviction, the whole of Gujarat rose as one man against the government. 75,000 people gathered

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10 Krishna, B., ibid., p. 142.


12 Krishna, B., ibid., p. 138.
on the sands of Sabarmati and resolved: "...We the citizens of Ahmedabad determine hereby that we shall go the same way where Patel has gone..."\(^{13}\)

People from different parts of the country strongly protested against the arrest of Sardar Patel and simultaneously participated in large numbers in the meetings being organised and presided over by Mahatma Gandhi, while on his way to Dandi.

Madan Mohan Malaviya moved a resolution in the Central Legislative Assembly, condemning the government’s move to arrest Vallabhbhai Patel without a proper trial. Nearly half of the members of the Assembly were of the opinion that it was improper on the part of the government to serve upon him an order which cuts at the roots of the right to freedom of speech and expression. Even Mohammed Ali Jinnah had observed: "...The Government of India is setting a precedent with very serious consequences..."\(^{14}\)

After his release Patel devoted his time and energy to infuse new spirit among the people for the movement. He endeavoured his best to arouse public opinion in Gandhi’s favour, which was evident from the manner the people observed his instructions to remain united and non-violent. Even the British officials realised the impact of Patel’s visits on the morale of the people. According to district Superintendent

\(^{13}\) Sitaramayya, Dr. P.B., ibid., p. 639.

of Police (Surat) “Mr. Gandhi appeared calm (following Sardar Patel’s arrest). He is gathering more strength as he proceeds. His lieutenants are also getting bolder and arouse feeling of the people of this taluka by using Patel’s arrest as their trump card.....”\textsuperscript{15}

This period may be said to have initiated the beginning of close relationship between the Mahatma and the Sardar. After the arrest of the latter, the former seems to have found himself incomplete and his arrest became the main burden of Gandhi’s speeches. He said at Wasna: “....I may die at any moment, but the future generations will see that my prophecy was correct. Vallabhbhai was not a fit person for arrest. He should have been rewarded by the government. What wrong did he do........He befriended the people which was the duty of the government...He managed the administration of Ahmedabad.....I could succeed in Kheda district on account of him (Patel) and it was on account of him that I am here today.....”\textsuperscript{16}

The Civil Disobedience Movement in India broadly underwent three distinct phases before being suspended by the Congress Working Committee w.e.f. May 20, 1934. The first phase commenced on March 12, 1930 with Gandhi’s historic March to Dandi from Sabarmati. \textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p.12.

\textsuperscript{16} Krishna, B., ibid., p.140.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
Motilal Nehru remarked that like the historic march of Ramchandra to Lanka, the 'March' of Gandhi will be memorable. Daily, the Mahatma and the salt satyagrahis walked ten miles or more, the idea being to cover the 241 miles long track in about 24 days and reaching Dandi before April 6, 1930. Throughout the March, Ashram rules were strictly observed in respect of food, morning and evening prayers, and other things like spinning and writings of daily diary by all the satyagrahis.

The popular response to the March was beyond all expectations. On the very first day the route from the Ashram through the outskirts of the city (Ahmedabad) and beyond, was lined by the vast crowds and Gandhi felt that God’s blessing have descended on him. The most remarkable aspect of this national awakening was the eagerness of women to join the struggle alongwith men.

With the Salt March gaining more and more strength, the British authorities began thinking of ways to prevent Gandhi from his predetermined destination. One such technique was to arrest him and put him behind the bars. Speculating on this move, Jawahar Lal Nehru communicated to all Congress Committees that “Gandhi’s arrest should be followed immediately by an all–India strike to demonstrate our deep respect for and confidence in our great leader and our determination to follow him”.18 He further hoped that all institutions will close their doors that day and the whole

country will demonstrate again that it stands for complete independence.

On the appointed day, the 6th April 1930, Gandhi took bath in the sea and offered prayers. Thereafter, he bent down and pick up a lump of natural salt. Thousands of people witnessed the solemn ceremony. Soon after, he called upon the people to openly and fearlessly break the salt law and have the penalty on them smilingly. Others who could not break the salt law were asked to propagate the boycott of foreign cloth, prohibition of liquor and promotion of swadeshi goods and services. Cutting down the toddy trees was also included in the programme. The nation rose as one man in response to Gandhi’s call of satyagraha.

The government displayed admirable forbearance during the Dandi March for which Gandhi publically complimented it. But from the very first day of the commencement of the Civil Disobedience Movement, the police resorted to force to suppress the spirit of the satyagrahis. On the midnight of May 5, 1930, the Mahatma was arrested and moved to the Yeravda jail. Consequently, the All India Congress Committee extended the scope of the Civil Disobedience Movement to include the breach of forest laws, the non-payment of taxes in ryotwari areas and the boycott of foreign goods.

Gandhi’s arrest resulted in stimulating rather than slackening the Civil Disobedience Movement. The government retaliated with an iron hand issuing new ordinances to strangulate the Congress, freeze its funds and choke its publicity channels. More than 65,000 civil resisters were jailed
under various preventive Acts. Confidential Government Records of the time and correspondence of the Viceroy and members of his Executive Council provide ample testimony to the tremendous national upsurge.

Sardar Patel was released from prison on June 26, 1930. On his return he found a changed India. Gandhi was put behind the bars. Congress President, Jawahar Lal Nehru, too was incarcerated. Before he was taken to prison, he named his father Moti Lal Nehru as acting President of the Congress. But when he was also arrested, he handed over the Congress Presidentship to Sardar Patel.

As an acting President of the Congress, the Sardar advised his countrymen: “....Every house in the country should be the office of the Congress Committee and every individual to be the Congress in himself.....”

The entire Civil Disobedience Movement until the end of July 1930 was by and large peaceful. Despite occasional outbursts of mob violence and some terrorist crimes in Bengal, Bihar, Punjab and United Provinces, the principle of non-violence was generally observed. Gandhi had told his followers that the day they pledged themselves to non-violence they considered themselves responsible for the life of every

Sardar Patel was again arrested on August 1, 1930, for participating in the procession to mark Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak’s death anniversary. He was released in November of the same year and served with a prohibitory order against making public speeches. Inspite of delivering a harmless speech on the occasion of opening a ‘Khadi Bhandar’ at Bombay, he was arrested for the third time and was sentenced to nine months imprisonment. But before he could complete his term in jail, he was released in March 1931, alongwith other members of the Congress Working Committee for being available for consultation with Gandhi, who was holding talks with the Indian Viceroy.

The Gandhi–Irwin parleys had begun on February 17, and lasted until March 4, 1931, the day on which an agreement was signed between the two known as ‘Gandhi–Irwin Pact’. It provided for discontinuation of the Civil Disobedience Movement and participation in the 2nd Round Table Conference, on the part of the Congress, and the revocation of ordinances and the release of all prisoners of the Civil Disobedience Movement on the part of the government.

The ground for the Gandhi–Irwin parleys seems to have been prepared by the mediatory efforts of the two liberal Indian leaders, V.S. Srinivasa Sastri and Tej Bahadur Sapru. It was a landmark in India’s freedom struggle as it was, probably for

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The first time that the British authorities dealt with a representative of the country, who had defied its authority, on a footing of equality. 21

The agreement reached in the Gandhi–Irwin Pact, was regarded by both sides as a temporary truce rather than a device for a long lasting peace. Gandhi and a couple of Congress leaders hoped that the truce might prove to be the beginning of sustained co-operation between the Congress and the British Government. However, this hope was not shared by Jawahar Lal Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose and most of the younger leaders of the Congress.

The Viceroy, Lord Irwin, too was under no illusion as to the difficulties that still had to be surmounted. Sir Penderal Moon, paid a well deserved tribute to the Indian Viceroy’s statesmanship: “.....today, free from distorting emotion and prejudice, we can see that Irwin’s policy was overwhelmingly right and that he did more than most other men of his time to keep alive the faith of the two peoples in each other ..........” 22

Soon after signing the historic Pact, Gandhi and Patel toured the country extensively for giving first hand information to the people regarding the agreement. Patel, however, was not fully satisfied with the Pact since no provision was made in it to return the confiscated property, especially land, to those people who legitimately owned it before the commencement of

22 Moon, Penderal, ibid., p. 1053.
the Civil Disobedience Movement. Gandhi too felt that the unsold property must be returned to their erstwhile owners.

Sardar Patel was appointed President of the Congress in Karachi Session in March 1931. Both he and the Mahatma were greeted by a 'Black Flag' demonstration because of the failure of the Congress leaders to save the lives of the national revolutionaries viz Bhagat Singh, Sukh Dev and Rajguru, from the gallows. Not only this, the demonstrators also criticised Gandhi's compromise formula and his decision to participate in the 2nd Round Table Conference as the sole Congress nominee, even against the advice of Patel and Nehru.

The records however, clearly indicate that the Mahatma had made sincere efforts to save the life of these revolutionary leaders and had requested the Viceroy repeatedly for the same. But with his creed of non-violence, Gandhi couldn't press his idea for Bhagat Singh and his associates beyond a point.23

While paying a glowing tribute to the bravery and spirit of sacrifice of these revolutionaries, Gandhi had observed: "...But I want a greater bravery..... of the meek, the gentle and the non-violent, the bravery that will mount the gallows without injuring or harbouring any thought of injury to a single soul...."24

In his Presidential address in the Karachi Session, while disapproving of the methods adopted by these

23 Parikh, N.D., ibid., p. 50.
24 THE COLLECTED WORKS OF MAHATMA GANDHI, ibid., p. 344.
revolutionary leaders, Sardar Patel praised their spirit of dedication to the sacred cause of emancipation of the country. He observed: “I bow my head before the patriotism, bravery and the spirit of sacrifice which animated Bhagat Singh and his comrades.”

Sardar Patel also appreciated the role of women in the Civil Disobedience Movement. A resolution mentioning the key fundamental rights of the people was passed. It was also during this Session that the 'National Flag' was adopted after deep considerations. Despite some of his own reservations regarding the Gandhi–Irwin Pact, Patel appealed to the delegates and the general public to accept the same in letter and spirit. His reasoning seems to have been that of a loyalist.

Emphasising the significance of the method of non-violence and its implications, the Sardar made an oblique reference to the Non-Co-operation Movement, Bardoli Agitation and the Salt Satyagraha, and said that India had shown to the world that the use of non-violence on a mass scale was no longer a dream of the visionaries, nor was that a false concept, but was a proven reality. While refuting the charges of some people regarding the incapacity of the peasants to participate in such a struggle, he (Patel), said: “Many had even feared that there would be outbreaks of large-scale violence. But we have falsified such doubts and fears by

25 Chopra, P.N., ibid., p.40.
people's bravery and unheard spirit of self-sacrifice. By calling upon women and children to participate, Gandhi gave evidence of the uniqueness of his battle.”

In the Karachi Session of the Congress, Sardar Patel acquired a new status, next only to Gandhi’s in the hierarchy of national leadership. William Shirer, an American journalist, who covered the proceedings of the Session said that there was one figure in Karachi Congress Session, little known in the West, but a power in India, who deserved mention. Next to Gandhi it was Vallabhbhai Patel, who built up the Congress into a formidable national political party, the only one there was in India. He was the boss of the Congress Party machine.

This Session was in a way comparable to the Ahmedabad Session of December 1921. That Session had given birth to a new Congress under Gandhi with Patel as his deputy. At Karachi, the latter was again by the former’s side. While commenting on the success of the Karachi Session, Jawahar Lal Nehru also admitted that this Session was an even greater success for Gandhi than any other previous Congress Session had been. He further observed that the Congress President, Sardar Patel, was one of the most popular men in India with the prestige of victorious leadership in Gujarat.

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27 Ibid.

Patel spent almost the whole year (1931), in a bid to redeem his promise to Gujarat's peasants regarding restoration of confiscated properties.\textsuperscript{29} Both the Sardar and the Mahatma worked earnestly for this object. The former camping in Bardoli and the latter in Borsad. Patel was less successful in Bardoli than Gandhi in Borsad. It might be because, in the former case, the Viceroy's advice that the officials should assist the efforts for the restoration of confiscated properties was ignored by the authorities at Bardoli. \textsuperscript{30}

The time for the commencement of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Round Table Conference (November 1931), was fast approaching. Gandhi was reluctant to go to England because of growing tension between Congress members and British authorities. Moreover, each party was blaming the other for violation of Gandhi–Irwin Pact. But he was finally persuaded by the Congress Working Committee members to go to London to attend the Conference.

Sardar Patel felt very lonely after Gandhi's departure to England and invited C. Rajagopalachari to stay with him as it would be a great relief to him. He informed Rajaji that he had earlier talked to Bapu (Gandhi) about it.\textsuperscript{31}

At the discussions of the Round Table Conference, Mahatma Gandhi's stand was governed by the Congress

\textsuperscript{29} Parikh, N.D., ibid., p.48.


\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., p.226.
Party's mandate which reiterated the national demand for complete independence. During his stay in England, he tried his best to arouse the British public opinion in favour of Indian freedom. Though his mission proved to be a total failure as far as the deliberations in the Round Table Conference were concerned, he utilised the visit to influence the people of England about the prevailing conditions in India. Even in Lancashire, hurt by the Indian boycott, there were cheers for him. Gandhi informed Patel about his activities inside and outside the Round Table Conference and wrote that most of his work there was done outside the Conference. Although its value for the present was not much. He was inclined to think that it would turn out to be very useful later on.32

The Mahatma maintained close contact with the Sardar when staying abroad and kept him informed about his day-to-day activities. Not only this, the former used to seek the latter's advice and suggestions on important issues whenever he thought it appropriate. Gandhi asked for Patel's opinion about his visiting the European countries which was likely to take one month more as his work of the Conference was going to be over by mid November 1931.33 It was also through this letter (28.10.1931), that Gandhi delegated his full authority to Patel to take any step according to the need of the circumstances, to

fight the British Colonialism. After completing his foreign tour, Gandhi returned to India on December 28, 1931. Soon thereafter, he found that the spirit of the Gandhi–Irwin Pact was almost dead and the government was determined to destroy the influence of the Congress. The British authorities at that time refused to enter into negotiation with him except on humiliating terms. Consequently, the Mahatma directed his countrymen to resume the Civil Disobedience Movement. Taking a serious note of his decision, the government arrested him and Patel on January 4, 1932, and lodged them in the Yeravda Jail.

The second phase of the Civil Disobedience Movement started with the arrest of Gandhi, along with certain other Congress leaders on January 4, 1932. This phase witnessed the tardy pace of the movement that literally dragged on for more than sixteen months where after it remained suspended for about three months with effect from May 8, 1933.

The sudden imprisonment was for Gandhi both a surprise as well as a relief as after his return from England he intended to co-operate with the government to find out an honourable solution about the future course of action. He was not psychologically prepared for a renewal of the struggle.

The Mahatma and the Sardar were lodged in the Yeravda jail for more than sixteen months from January 4,

34 Ibid.
1932 to May 8, 1933. During their long incarceration, the former had discovered that behind the hard and stern exterior of the latter was a warm heart with devotion and sincerity towards Gandhi. He also found hidden in the Sardar, motherly qualities of service and sacrifice. The Mahatma's discovery was the outcome of their living together in an atmosphere free from the din and dust of political arena.

It was during this period that while Patel tried to accept some basic principles of Gandhi's life. He also started expressing his viewpoints openly on certain issues. His day would begin with Gandhi's at quarter to four in the morning with prayers. Thereafter, the latter would make the former recite Sanskrit 'slokas' (religious incantation). It was a very difficult job as Patel's knowledge in this field was nil. But he had strong determination. At the age of nearly 57, he started learning that language, of which Gandhi wrote to Pyarelal:

"...Vallabhbhai is running with the speed of an Arab horse (learning Sanskrit language very rapidly). Sanskrit book seldom leaves his hands........."36

During most of the period of incarceration, they were engaged in non-political activities—spinning, book-keeping, reading, writing and preparing future plans for the Indian freedom struggle. Patel's skill in manual jobs drew no less praise from Gandhi. The latter once observed: ".....In envelope making none can equal him in speed. He makes them without any kind of measurement. With naked eyes he makes his

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estimates and his envelopes come out absolutely equal in size. And yet he does not spend much time over it."\(^{37}\)

The Mahatma was further impressed by the method of the Sardar's functioning and his doing things immediately. The former was full of praise for the latter's adhering to his schedule in spinning and opined that hardly ever did he forget anything with which he was entrusted.

Accuracy, precision, promptness and unwavering determination seemed to have been the hallmarks of Sardar Patel's character. He always used to discharge his responsibilities in the most exceptional manner. One day Gandhi entrusted him with the task of binding a book. He was surprised to see the job done to his entire satisfaction. He asked Patel thereafter, 'Vallabhbhai do you have the inclination for doing odd jobs since childhood, or have you acquired it in prison? Were you a craftsman already or have become one now?' The Sardar said, 'There is nothing like that. I have had no previous experience. When I see anyone doing something, I try to pick it up'. How independent, practical and determined Sardar Patel was is revealed by the frank talks these two leaders had over various issues facing the country. However, he did not share Gandhi's faith in the British politicians.

Irrespective of their party affiliations Patel opined that they were all tarred with the same brush. On the same issue, yet on another occasion, he bluntly told Gandhi that all those

\(^{37}\) Ibid., p. 162.
leaders had no sense of shame and that he (the Mahatma) would also come round his views sooner or later.

Commenting on the disadvantages of the British Raj in the country, both of them, however, believed that the Colonialists were interested in maintaining India as an integral part of their Empire at any cost. The Mahatma further added that the people of England had always been united on the question of India. If they gave up their claim on India, they would turn into beggars. It was in their self-interest to cling to India.

Sardar Patel, however, was at times critical of Gandhi in regard to some of his fundamental principles: non-violence, fasting, saintliness, attitude towards Indian Muslims etc. On one occasion, when the latter started covering the steaming hot tumbler of his morning drink with a piece of cloth, in order to save tiny insects from falling into it, the former could not help poking fun at him that he could not practice his non-violence to that extent.

Vallabhbhai Patel didn’t go the whole hog with Gandhi in regard to fasting. When the latter suddenly announced his decision to go on a fast in protest against British Prime Minister Ramsay Mac Donald’s “Communal Award,” the former felt angry and told Gandhi that he should have given the notice about his fast many days in advance as four days notice was not sufficient. He further expressed his anguish by saying that one fast has just ended and another is about to begin! “How can the government understand your non-co-operation? You
behave as if others are your subordinates".38

Yet, on another occasion, considering the inferences of such fasts, the Sardar told the Mahatma thus: "......your undertaking a fast so frequently has no meaning. You will simply make your fast appear cheap. They will cease to carry weight with the people as well as with the government......"39

Another important issue of divergence was Gandhi’s policy of appeasement towards the Indian Muslims and his claim to represent the Muslim community. Patel opined that by fasting, the Mahatma had pricked the conscience of the Hindus only. He asked the latter one day that were there any Muslims who would listen to him? Yet, on another occasion, the Sardar ruefully remarked that the Muslims were keeping mum on various national issues facing the country and were offering no opinion. But they were co-operating with the government and would continue to do so in the days that followed.

Besides, there were also some other minor points of disagreement between these two leaders. But keeping all these things at abeyance, they lived together during their long term of incarceration. In a letter to Nehru on February 15,1933, Gandhi described Patel as a “factory for inexhaustible supply

38 Ibid., p.165.
39 Ibid.
of mirth”.40

When Srinivasa Shastri, as a privileged jester in the establishment, exposed his lapses from correct English, Gandhi not only published these for his readers’ delight, but announced that “Sardar Patel’ was another specially privileged jester in whose presence gloom hides her fendish face........He will not spare even my ‘saintliness’. It may deceive simple people but never the Sardar or the Sanatanists......”41

Soon after the arrival of Mahadev Desai in the Yeravda Jail, following his arrest and sentence, the Commissioner of Police of the Poona Division, called at Yeravda and said that the government had kept the three best brains–Gandhi, Patel and Desai–together, which showed the British authorities’ great confidence in them.

The Mahatma had stated just after signing the historic Gandhi–Irwin Pact, that the position of Prime Ministership of Independent India would be reserved for younger minds and stouter hearts. At Yeravda, he once asked Patel what portfolio should be reserved for him, and he referred to the “beggar’s bowl”. In the Karachi Session of the Congress in March 1931, Sardar Patel had spoken of himself and Gandhi, as “We the old” and as “men in a hurry”, for independence. It seems legitimate to consider these remarks together. These discussions show that firstly, the Mahatma anticipated a role

41 Ibid.
for the Sardar in the free India's first Cabinet; secondly, that Patel thought that his work will be finished with the attainment of Swaraj; thirdly, these discussions also reflected that if the ordering of the affairs on the advent of independence was going to be in Gandhi’s hands, a portfolio rather than the Premiership of the country, was in store for Sardar Patel.

Prior to his release on May 8, 1933, Gandhi told Mahadev Desai that he was in the company of Sardar Patel with God's grace. After his release from the jail, the Mahatma found the whole political situation of the country changed radically. People from different sections of the society had started doubting the correctness of his policies and programmes. Some people even went to the extent of asking him to retire from the Congress. Gandhi was not completely averse to the suggestion and said in reply: “......I would gladly retire from the Congress and devote myself to the development of Civil Disobedience Movement outside the Congress and to Harijan work.....”

On the following day of his release, Gandhi in a letter to Patel, acquainted him regarding his own health; and while appreciating the Sardar's exceptional care for him during the long term of incarceration, said: “...You gave me a mother’s

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42 Parikh, N.D., ibid., p.136.

Gandhi could not forget the happy moments passed in Patel's company. Thereafter, wherever the former went and whatever he did, he had always a feeling that the latter was with him. He felt that Sardar's spirit was following and protecting him in all his activities.\textsuperscript{45}

After his release, the Mahatma decided to resume Civil Disobedience Movement to further highlight the grievances of the people of India before the world. He started touring the country extensively for arousing public opinion against the British Government. Gandhi was again arrested on June 2, 1933, and brought back to Yeravda Jail. On his return, the first inquiry he made was about Sardar Patel. But the latter had already been shifted to the Nasik jail. The Mahatma felt sad and disappointed, and observed: "The nest is there, but the bird has flown......"\textsuperscript{46} He longed for the companionship he had enjoyed for more than a period of sixteen months and he often repeated a line from the Sanskrit play, 'Bhartruhari', "Oh God this is a wound which will not heal even by practising yoga".\textsuperscript{47}

The third phase pertains to the resumption of the Civil Disobedience Movement on August 1, 1933, with the

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\textsuperscript{44} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., Vol. LVI, p. 297. \\
\textsuperscript{46} Parikh, N.D., ibid., p. 136. \\
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid. \\
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launching of a new programme of Individual Satyagraha Campaign that kept the movement going nominally and symbolically.

When Sardar Patel was still in the Nasik jail, he was shocked to hear the news of the sad demise of his elder brother, Vithalbhai Patel, who had died in Switzerland on October 22, 1933, following a prolonged illness. Patel, however, refused to the authorities to be released on conditional parole to participate in his brother's funeral ceremony. Gandhi had predicted the same for Patel's release. In the Sardar's absence the last rites were performed by his (Patel's) son Dahyabhai Patel.

In fact the period of 1930–34, present a clear picture of the closer relationship between the two, which is clearly depicted in their correspondence. If two or three days passed without any message from the Sardar, the Mahatma felt uncomfortable and wrote to the former not to keep anything secret.48

After spending more than two years in jail, the Sardar was released on January 14, 1934, unconditionally on account of a nose ailment. On January 15, 1934, an earthquake of devastating intensity struck the province of Bihar. Thousands of people were dead and millions rendered homeless.

On hearing the shocking news, Gandhi, alongwith a

group of his followers rushed to the spot to help in relief and rescue operations. During this period he was obsessed by the idea of offering civil resistance all alone for the freedom struggle and also told the Congressmen that those who had faith in the Council Entry Scheme should be free to pursue that programme.49

From now onwards, Gandhi spent most of his time in non-political activities like fight against untouchability, temple entry, communal harmony and contribution in relief and rescue operations in the earthquake hit areas; Patel dedicated himself to the political activities. He assumed a new role as the Chairman of the Congress Parliamentary Board which had been constituted to fight the provincial elections during 1936–37. The said elections were scheduled to be held under the Government of India Act, 1935, which purported to grant more autonomy to the Indian provinces. The Congress under the Gandhities had since the Karachi Session of the Congress (March 1931), moved away from the early policy of boycott and confrontation to that of parliamentary or electoral politics.

Sardar Patel supported by Rajendra Prasad and C. Rajagopalachari, spearheaded the change. He had confessed to Gandhi earlier in the Yeravda Jail: “......government officials are harassing the peasants so much that we can give them protection only by entering into the government......”50

49 Ibid., p. 450.
50 Krishna, B., ibid., p. 170.
Gandhi shared his proposition provided his cooperation with the government took them towards independence. As Chairman of the Congress Parliamentary Board, Patel became the virtual boss of the Congress organisation. He vacated the chair of the Congress President for Rajendra Prasad when the All India Congress Committee met in 1934 in Bombay. The latter’s name was proposed by a few Provincial Congress Committees and Gandhi had asked him to accept the honour, but he was also the choice of Sardar Patel. Ever since their first meeting, the views of the two (Patel and Prasad), had tended to coincide.

Gandhi lent support to the ‘Old Guards’, frank dialogue with Nehru and other Socialist leaders. On their behalf, Dr. Rajendra Prasad wrote to Nehru on December 19, 1935:

“.......I know that there is a certain difference between your outlook and that of men like Vallabhbhai, Jamnalal Bajaj and myself, and it is even of a fundamental character. But I suppose, that has been there all these years and yet we have worked together. Now, that Bapu has in a sense withdrawn himself, those differences may become more marked. But I believe, unless a radical change is made in the programme and methods of our work, it will still be possible for all of us to continue to work together.......51

In December 1935 when Gandhi was seriously ill, Patel brought him from Wardha, got him examined in Bombay and took him to the Gujarat Vidyapith in Ahmedabad for a month’s

51 Ibid.
complete rest with the Sardar serving as the Mahatma's watchman and not allowing the visitors to see him.

During this period the relations between Jawahar Lal Nehru and Sardar Patel started deteriorating. The former's election for the Presidency of the Congress (1936), Socialists' and Communists' methods based on violence, Socialists' criticism of the 'Old Guards' and views on the future form of Government of Independent India, were some of the major points of difference between these two leaders.

C. Rajagopalachari after his recovery from a prolonged illness raised with the Mahatma the issue of differences between these two Congress leaders—Patel, the Chairman of the Congress Parliamentary Board and Nehru, the President of the Congress. He asked Gandhi to see to it “that Vallabhbhai's decisions as regards parliamentary policy are not challenged but given full co-operation from the Congress Working Committee and by the Congress President.52

Though severe differences of opinions cropped up between Patel and Nehru during the years 1936–37, yet they fell in with a larger design in which their greater roles became complementary rather than conflicting. It enabled Gandhi to say in the Faizpur Congress Session in December 1936: “....I have cast all my cares on the broad shoulders of Jawahar Lal

Nehru and Sardar Patel...."53

Several Congress leaders wanted Patel to be the next President of the Congress (December 1937), more so as Nehru had said that those considering him for another term should bear in mind that he was a Socialist. The majority of the Provincial Congress Committees had nominated Sardar Patel’s name for that position. But he was not inclined to divide the Congress on that issue merely three months before the commencement of the proposed provincial elections. What happened thereafter was enumerated by J.B. Kriplani. He said that Jawahar Lal Nehru approached Gandhi and told him that he felt that one term of eight months was not sufficient for him to revitalise the Congress. He would like a second term of office. Gandhi remained thoughtful for some time. Then he said that he would see what could be done. In pursuance of Nehru’s talks with Gandhi, regarding a second term, the latter asked the Sardar to withdraw, which he did. 54

Sardar Patel undertook almost single handedly the difficult and most arduous task of finally approving the selection of candidates and of running the Parliamentary Board. He also participated in election campaign alongwith other nationalist leaders. Not only this, he was further required by the All India Congress Committee, Congress Working Committee and Congress Parliamentary Board to

54 Gandhi, Rajmohan, Patel–A Life, ibid., p. 257.
keep a close watch on the funds of the Congress.

Though quite busy, following his hectic schedule, he remained constantly concerned with Gandhi's health and the activities of his constructive programme. The Sardar reminded him in one of his letters, dated June 12, 1937, that he should not overwork, quoting the maxim, "Slow train runs for a very long time."\textsuperscript{55}

In the provincial elections, the Congress had an overwhelming victory and secured absolute majority in five provinces and was the single largest party in other four provinces. It was only in the Punjab and Sind that the party couldn't achieve comparable success.

Soon after the elections, there emerged another important question. The Congress leaders were not unanimous on the issue of office acceptance by the Congress Ministries. But it was soon settled after the effective intervention of the Mahatma and the Sardar. Ministries were formed without the help of All India Muslim League, an exclusion which was favoured by Patel and Nehru. But the same development was seen by more than one political observer as being decisive in turning India's Muslims towards separation.

Pyarelal, Gandhi's secretary and biographer, calls it "...a tactical error of the first magnitude and a decision of the Congress High Command taken against Gandhi's best

judgement..."56 K.M. Munshi, on the other hand, was not alone in considering it as the correct decision of the Congress leaders. In the Congress-League coalition the League would try to obstruct, defy or sabotage and by using veto, blackmail the Congress into submission..."57

During this period Gandhi and Patel differed over the selection of Congress President for the Haripura Session in 1938. While the former had thought of Subhash Chandra Bose, popularly known as Netaji, who was released from prison in 1937 and whose popularity in the youth wing of the Congress was in no way less than that of Nehru, the latter had doubts about his candidature because of Bose's radicalism and Socialist ideology.

When Sardar Patel said "I have seen that Subhash is unsteady", Gandhi’s reply was that "but no one except him can be the President". The conflict was resolved with the selection of Netaji Bose as the Congress President. To dispel his differences with Patel, in a conciliatory mood Gandhi said: "...Sardar and I are close to each other, we are as one, we work alike and we think alike ......."58

Sardar Patel's organisational power was complementary


57 Gandhi, Rajmohan, PATEL – A LIFE, ibid., p. 262.

58 THE COLLECTED WORKS OF MAHATMA GANDHI, ibid., Vol. LXVI, p. 373.
to Mahatma Gandhi’s soul force. Had the former not used his organisational capabilities judiciously and promptly to protect Gandhi and Gandhities, the Indian National Congress, rippled by internal discord and disunity during these years, might have gone on a different path.