

VALLABHBHAI PATEL :  
His role and style in Indian politics  
1928-1947

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## ABSTRACT

This study of Vallabhbhai Patel's role and style in Indian politics attempts to show how mobilisation of men and materials was achieved by exclusively political means for the attainment of conservative goals and for the prevention of any radical changes. This was done primarily at Patel's instance in the face of much opposition from many forces, particularly the socialists who sought a more comprehensive programme for a wider section of society. Patel's qualifications for this job lay in his background, his personality and his affinity with certain regions (Chapter I). Several experiments in controlled mobilisation culminating in the Bardoli Satyagraha showed the political effectiveness of Patel's version of Gandhi's nationalist scheme (Chapter II). The plan of nourishing the roots rather than spreading the branches greatly strengthened the Congress organisation and helped Patel in steering Congress party policy in the direction of conservative goals (Chapter III). Patel and Gandhi's mutual reliance on each other, and Gandhi's granting Patel a free hand in political tactics, gave much political strength to the Gandhites in Congress. The quest for political supremacy was accompanied by efforts to exclude other political groups, and particularly the left, from political limelight (Chapter IV). There were problems in running an intense political race. Threats posed by ambitious leaders, factional infighting and conflicting goals were put down with a heavy hand and political opposition was not tolerated (Chapter V). Negative steps in some areas were accompanied by positive steps in others, such as acceptance of office in the provinces and a gradual change of Congress's policy towards the States (Chapter VI). Factors beyond Patel's control such as British imperialist policy and the accompanying political readjustments in India brought some setbacks for Congress. But, Patel was quick to recover lost ground and rivals were soon outmanoeuvred (Chapter VII).

The thesis argues that Patel typifies the Indian politi-

cian par excellence, capable of taking control over all the diverse and unevenly developed aspects of Indian society by giving them a political direction, thus circumventing certain social and economic requirements which leaders with either a Marxian or a traditionally reformist vision would consider essential for development.

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## PREFACE

This is a political study and hence precludes any extensive discussion of socio-economic matters. Rather it analyses Vallabhbhai Patel's contribution to the political activity of the period. In choosing Patel as the subject of my work I have worked under many limitations, the most significant being that he wrote very little. Unlike Nehru and Gandhi there are no revealing articles, no autobiographies or 'Experiments with Truth' in the case of Patel. There are only letters written for particular purposes, newspaper accounts of political activity and interviews carried out with Patel's contemporaries which form a large part of the research on Patel.

I would like to extend my thanks to some of Patel's associates and contemporaries. First of all I am grateful to Manibehn Patel, Patel's daughter, with whom I spent time at different stages of my work and from whom I was able to pick up interesting details of her life with her father and her own personal impressions of his yearly years. She was kind enough to permit me to see the Patel Papers at Navajivan, Ahmedabad. G.M.Nandurkar, the editor of Patel's correspondence, also gave whatever assistance he could.

Many of Patel's contemporaries provided valuable insights into his personality and the prevailing conflicts of the period. I have formally interviewed and informally conversed with them over the entire period of my research and, therefore, have not always specified the dates of all my encounters with these people. In particular, Jai Prakash Narain, J.B.Kripalani, G.D.Birla, S.K.Patil, J.L.Kapur (all now dead) and Jagjivan Ram, Morarji Desai, Shankar Prasad, Bhagwan Sahay, D.P.Mandelia and P.G.Mavlankar have all given invaluable help in discussing Patel's contributions as a leader. In England, the late Lord Mountbatten and Sir Conrad Corfield also spared considerable time to talk about Patel and India.

No modern historical study of India can be complete without the help of two vital institutions - the India Office Library in London and the Nehru Memorial Library in New Delhi. I am very appreciative of the congenial working conditions and atmosphere of cooperation in both these establishments.

I also wish to thank Profs. Ravindra Kumar and S.R. Mehrotra for sparing the time to discuss particular aspects of Congress with me. My husband, Vijay, who has been actively grappling with the inter-action between the Congress Party and the Government in relation to some voluntary socio-economic schemes with which he is closely connected, has provided me with some information pertaining to current Congress functioning at various levels. To him I am indebted for this and for doing my 'running around', in England if I was in India, and vice versa.

I began my work under Dr.B.N.Pandey's supervision. However, I was deprived of his guidance midstream when he died in 1982. Dr.Peter Robb, who took over from him, has shown me excessive patience and forbearance and saved me from much of the despair that set in two and a half years ago. To him I am most grateful.

This thesis terminates in 1947 and not 1950, the year of Patel's death. Patel's administrative period for which he is particularly admired by Indians has only been briefly surveyed in this work. I have sought primarily to assess Patel's role as a nationalist and analyse his contribution to the independence movement. The omission of the last three years of his life does not affect the argument of the thesis in any way.

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## INTRODUCTION

Indian politics before 1947 have been variously interpreted by historians. Much thought has been devoted to the larger question of the direction from which control, initiative and change emanated in the colonial context. Within this thinking fall what Stokes called the simplified dichotomies of East and West, tradition and modernity, caste and class, status and contract, feudalism and capitalism, continuity and change, which formed the basis of nineteenth century thinking of the study and progress of the society. More recent interpreters of colonial rule in India - orthodox Marxists, neo-Marxists, anti-ideologists, Namierists, neo-Machiavellians, moffusilites, kulakites, and subalternists - explore the nature of society more thoroughly, while differing in the emphasis they place on the causes of conflict and the prime determining factor of change. Whatever the emphasis, whether the focus is on the structure of Indian society, or changes in modes of production or processes of modernisation, it becomes increasingly clear from most recent studies that the role of vested interests in determining the degree of conflict and the direction of change is vital. This is because it is the one factor that moulds and shapes the thoughts and activities of persons and groups of different economic backgrounds, social traits and political ideologies and it can be translated into an idiom and language understood equally by all people in all periods. It may broadly be defined as that interest which, either as individuals or as members of economic, social or political groups, people tend to safeguard above all other interests. In a diversified society like India vested interest takes different forms and assumes different nomenclatures. In the context of the Indian national movement some studies have focused on the class or caste factor, or the primordiality factor, or the modernisation factor to explain the nature or direction of nationalism or other movements engaging people. Historical

analysis being as complex as it is the single factor approach certainly has its limitations. So does a multi-factor approach which does not bring out the extent to which a particular factor actually governs interactions at particular periods, in particular areas and between particular participants. This study seeks to emphasise the role of the political factor during a particular phase of the national movement, specifically in the style of one particular leader of the period - Vallabhbhai Patel.

Some years ago a friend and historian, Rajat Ray, grouped the various interpretations of Indian nationalism into three broad categories - Marxists, neo-traditional and predominantly political. He asserted that an interpretation that rests exclusively on any one of these features was not likely to make wholesome history. It is my contention, however, that in interpreting Patel's role and style of leadership the 'predominantly political' plays the most important and at some points an exclusive part, and is contributory to an understanding of the politics of that period and of present day politics.

In the epilogue to Congress and the Raj, B.R. Tomlinson says, '.....the origins of the political system of independent India must be sought in the events of 1934-39, not those of 1945-47'. My thesis suggests that the origins of the modern Indian politician can be traced back to the political career of Vallabhbhai Patel. The relevance of Tomlinson's remark for my thesis is that the years 1934-39 provide that peak period of political activity which is crucial in illustrating some aspects of Patel's political role and style which typify the Indian politician.

Individually, Gandhi's contribution in resolving conflict and effecting some form of change within the imperialist context has received the maximum attention from historians writing about twentieth century British India. This work looks at the role of Vallabhbhai Patel in relation to conflict and change in the imperialist and nationalist

context. Conflict here is seen as the quest for supremacy by dominant groups or individuals over numerically or otherwise subordinate groups or individuals. Change is the process whereby individuals or institutions adapt to new or altered economic, social or political stimuli . In studies of prominent peasant groups or area studies of Gujarat, Patel has been portrayed as a conservative Patidar who methodically developed a following of his own. This was based initially on his ability to satisfy the needs of specific sub-groups of Gujarat's landed peasantry to regain economic and social dominance by galvanizing them in the political field under the banner of Gandhism. This thesis seeks to add a vital dimension to this portrayal. It seeks to show how, through a distinct political style, with the assistance of the bogie of imperialism and the ideology of nationalism, and more particularly Gandhism, Patel extended his control to the national scene to the exclusion of those who ideologically or otherwise, had a wider appeal than he did. Patel took great pains to curb the efforts of other political groups in gaining influence and spreading mass movements either of landless peasants or workers. In the spheres where he held control he tried to give a particular direction to the national movement. This thesis seeks to assess the nature of this direction and determine what was for Patel the most effective way of meeting the challenges posed by the conflicts of the period.

In the 1920s the political reforms offered by the British increased the field of political participation for Indians. Nationalists were divided between changers and no-changers, and among the latter there were two categories: the Gandhites, who were less opposed to seizing power and the socialists and other leftists, who were opposed to the reforms and had their own vision of an independent India and their own methods of fighting for it. Starting out as a no-changer Patel soon found himself combating the double challenge posed by imperialism and socialism. To that end he set about revising some of the Gandhian programmes and

the Congress Party's policies. In handling the British strategy of reforms which was directed in part towards reducing the growing strength of the Congress, Patel tightened the organisation and made it top heavy and consequently less democratic. To meet the British and socialists' threats simultaneously he extended the Congress arm to the village level thereby equipping the Congress party to combat its adversaries as well as fight elections. Apart from facing the problem of divisions among themselves, if the socialists were unable to control political activity generally and Congress policies in particular it was largely due to the doggedness of men like Patel who took charge of much of the execution of Congress's political strategy and tactics. Patel's reactions to the two threats posed by the imperialists and socialists supplemented each other. There were junctures at which it was difficult to determine which of the two threats was greater for Patel. Gandhism helped Patel find an answer to both.

The cumulative effect of Patel's experience as a mofusil lawyer, municipal councillor and Gandhian worker was the attainment of a political status whereby he was able to make a smooth transition from the provincial to the national scene. The provincial links were nevertheless continuously nurtured by him, for obvious reasons. They gave him the connections required to sustain a network on which he was to rely to advance himself politically, and also to combat the advancing influence of leftists or other radicals. The provincial links also made Patel narrow in outlook and lacking in vision. Yet **this** was not necessarily a shortcoming in the Indian context at the time. The politics of India were not, to an extent are still not, the politics of broad horizons. For the most part objectives were limited, confined to areas, communities and interest groups; and even when the goals seemed wide the means of mobilisation and achievement were narrow. Patel's parochialism was therefore in keeping with a prevalent Indian view of goals and the means of achieving them.

In order to ascertain Patel's distinct contribution to Indian politics along these lines this thesis will analyse his political activities from the time of the no-tax campaign in Bardoli in 1928 which made him a national leader, to the time that Congress formed the Interim Government and went on to bargain for India's independence. Chapter I describes Patel's social background and attempts to bring out the role of his family and social group in developing in him such traits as pragmatism. An interesting question is how, during this period, he reconciled the contradictory impulses of a municipal councillor and a khadi-clad village worker. The Bardoli no-tax campaign, the subject of Chapter II, was the fourth satyagraha which Patel directed and it brought him on the national scene. Labelled a Gandhiite he now had to work his way towards a position from which he could assist Gandhiites in their domination over Swarajists or other groups, like the leftists, within the Congress. The beginning of this quest for dominance is evident in Chapter III. Its intensification and Patel's role as the pivot of a move by Gandhiites to change tactics to meet more political threats, such as those from the left, is the subject of Chapter IV. From a national movement, the Indian National Congress transformed itself into a Party organisation, preparing itself for the role of an alternative government. An open umbrella-like association sheltering many groups of differing opinions gradually gave way to a more closed association run by like-minded leaders whose clash was not merely with British imperialists. By now Congress was also in direct conflict with those groups that wanted it to specify what kind of India it stood for before fighting to gain it. Although by forming ministries in seven out of eleven provinces Congress entrenched its position and put its adversaries at a considerable disadvantage, it is evident from the next two Chapters, V and VI, that Patel went to great lengths to keep Congress and Gandhiites at the helm of affairs. Accusations of high-handedness were levelled against him; but for him the end seemed more important than the means. With the coming of

the war and the resignation of the ministries, Congress seemed to be losing much of the advantage it had gained in relation to the other political groups. Chapter VII discusses how Patel sought to regain that advantage (a) by trying to secure the best terms possible for Congress in the negotiations with the British and (b) by strategic planning when two sets of elections had to be contested by Congress in 1945 and 1946, for the Central and Provincial Assemblies and for the Constituent Assembly. All these manoeuvres culminated in Congress forming the Interim Government in September 1946 thereby fulfilling most of its political objectives. The final scene was a consolidation of all that Patel had been striving towards during those years. Socialists, Muslims and princes were all handled firmly in keeping with his style of leadership.

In this thesis answers to different questions are sought at different stages. Given that Patel claimed adherence to the Gandhian method of social and political response, how far did he actually assist Gandhi in the achievement of essentially Gandhian goals? After all Gandhi did relate the national movement to a long-term scheme for India which Patel was not very concerned about at this stage and did not support in its entirety at any time. Gandhi and Nehru both had their separate visions of a national India which can be gathered from their respective political activity. What vision of India can be drawn from Patel's role and style? If there was no particular vision, then what was Patel's distinct contribution to Indian politics which earned him the title of 'Iron man of India'? Percival Spear puts Patel in the category of 'rational' leaders who are 'neither worshipped nor followed faithfully' but obeyed. He also puts limits on the scope of such leadership. The nature of some of these limits will be looked at in those political activities of Patel which form the subject of this work. However, it will also be demonstrated how, with an emphasis on the 'purely political', Patel made this type of leadership less confined and

more enduring than other types and became the archetype of the modern Indian politician.

## CHAPTER I

### THE PROVINCIAL EXPERIENCE

#### Early years to 1927

Gujarat has been called the 'Garden of India' because some areas like Charotar, the central part of Kaira district, are rich in soil and fertile. The farmers of such areas are, therefore, well rewarded for their hard work and enterprise. By far the most well-known and economically well-off community in rural Gujarat is the Patidar community. It is not easy to define in precise terms what a Patidar is. Fitting this community into one of the four varnas of Hindu society poses problems. In the last century, Patidars formed part of a large caste group called Kanbis, which in turn was divided into Levas and Kadvas, names which originate from those of the two sons of Rama, Lav and Kush. Patidars are those Kanbis who belong to the Leva group. They call themselves Kshatriya because of the frequent reference to their supposed descent from Rama. Others call them Vaisyas. Some Brahmins, who resent their key positions in many villages, call them Sudras out of personal animosity. In any event, most research on the community and its origins tends to emphasize and describe customary social traits of Patidars in order to define their Patidar-hood.<sup>1</sup> These traits vary and help to establish a hierarchy which differentiates Patidars from other Kanbi as well as categorize 'superior' and 'inferior' Patidars. The only constant attribute is the one that defines their economic origins and relates to their occupancy of government as opposed to alienated villages as shareholders who divide the payable revenue among themselves without any interference from outside. Apart from that, we have only accounts of their enterprise and industry in agriculture. There are also suggestions by some sociologists that even their social practices - Indian bride price, dowry debts and marriage networks - contained an 'investment component' and a process of capitalization:

In giving away his daughter with a large chunk of his wealth a Patidar father was, among other things, purchasing a share in an increasingly profitable corporate enterprise, one which may be thought of as an agrarian banking system. 2

Whether one actually accepts the above statement and the detailed reasoning that is used to substantiate it or not, it is well known that the Patidars' shrewdness on the agricultural scene was matched only by that of the Vania's in commerce and trade. Among the predominant caste groups in Central Gujarat - Brahmins, Patidars, Vantias, Baraiyas and Patanvadias - the Patidar community acquired status through their social network and economic skill; it gained a reputation as the most enterprising community in Gujarat.

Patidar villages are classified as 'superior' or 'inferior' depending on whether they are predominantly inhabited by superior or inferior Patidars. The criteria for establishing superiority or inferiority are inter-marriage and inter-dining. Superior Patidars are the pacesetters simply by virtue of belonging at the top in a hierarchy of families accepted by Patidars.

Vallabhbhai Patel was a Leva Patidar from Karamsad which was the ancestral village of Vallabhbhai's father Jhaverbhai Patel, who owned ten acres of land there. Jhaverbhai was born in 1829 and married Ladbai whose family came from Nadiad and was better off than his own. The influence of rural Patidar life on Vallabhbhai is not difficult to determine. Dwellings in most villages were laid out caste-wise. Jhaverbhai's home was a brick house with two storeys traditionally laid out with a verandah and court-yard and equipped and furnished with an eye for the useful rather than the ornate. Vallabhbhai often recalled his simple village life and felt it made for more rounded healthy personalities. He always regarded town life as inferior in comparison.<sup>3</sup> Central Gujarat villages were not as isolated as many villages in central and northern India. Lying on trade routes from the interior to the sea they were constantly exposed to outside influences in terms of commodities

that came to the local bazaars, and traders that came to buy and sell in these villages. Patidars had much contact with Vanias; Pocock suggests that the Patidar emulated the Vania and learnt many of his shrewd ways.<sup>4</sup> Many Patidars of Kaira district had become wealthy as a result of the introduction of cash crops and agricultural improvements. But, certain natural disasters like drought, floods and locusts at the close of the century caused considerable distress to farmers and resulted in an emigration of those ambitious Patidars from Kaira district who had either become traders or received education and gone into professional jobs. Ahmedabad became the haven for some people; others - and their number was quite large - emigrated as far as East Africa as traders. Those who emigrated to Ahmedabad either went into trade or law or formed part of the technical and administrative staff of textile mills. Baroda also provided new opportunities to Patidars from Central Gujarat. By the turn of the Century many Patidars with wealth had gone into trade or finance. These Patidars are described by the urban historian Gillion as 'the middle class of modern Ahmedabad....more politically conscious than the Vania elite of the old City'.<sup>5</sup> Jhaverbhai, however, had neither made much money from land nor explored other financial opportunities which had been availed of by fellow Patidars. A devout believer in the Swamynarayan cult founded by Swami Shahajanand in Gujarat in 1829, he spent a lot of his time in religious observances at the expense of worldly gain or advancement. He had six children, five sons and a daughter, the latter being the youngest in the family. The sons, beginning with the eldest, were Somabhai, Vithalbhai, Narsinhbhai, Vallabhbai and Kashibhai. Vallabhbai lived with his father till he was seventeen. Although he fasted with his father and observed some of the rituals which his father did, the long term effect of his father's religious fervour was that Vallabhbai shunned orthodox religious practice in his adult life. He seems to have imbibed from his mother a practical approach to people and problems. Much less is known about his

mother, but people recall her ability to participate in neighbourly activity and communal living.<sup>6</sup>

Vithalbhai and Vallabhbhai both went into law. The former took the district pleader's examination in 1895 and started practice, first in Godhra and then in Borsad, which was only a few miles from the family home in Karamsad. Five years later, Vallabhbhai also took this examination and practised first in Godhra and then Borsad, which was the centre of the taluka's criminal courts. The experiences as a lawyer in a moffusil town were invaluable. There was no room for pretention either in the profession or life style. Vallabhbhai tried to accumulate as much of knowledge as he could of procedure, the peculiarities of interpersonal relationships and the malpractices that existed in the legal field.<sup>7</sup> The two brothers made a name for themselves in the area and, spurred on by their success, decided to go to England to qualify as barristers. Vallabhbhai took the initiative, but Vithalbhai exercised the elder brother's prerogative and asked Vallabhbhai to transfer him the travel papers and admission to the legal courses which were in the name of V.J.Patel. After Vithalbhai returned, Vallabhbhai left for England. His stay there was not marked by any extraordinary experiences and most of his time was spent reading law. This was in marked contrast to Gandhi who took dancing lessons and explored many aspects of British social life by moving around with different kinds of people. Vallabhbhai kept to himself and was almost unadventurous on his first and last visit abroad. He performed as well in the Bar examinations as his elder brother had done and, on his return in the summer of 1913, settled in Ahmedabad. This was partly because he was familiar with many of the Patidar families who had moved there and partly because Ahmedabad had only six barristers at the time, so that Vallabhbhai's chances of professional success were quite bright there.<sup>8</sup> His initial impact following his return from abroad is described by G.V.Mavlankar, a resident of Ahmedabad and an early associate of Patel:

A smart young man - stern and reserved - not given to many words - and of a firm and pensive expression almost as if he looked down upon the world with a sort of superiority complex. 9

In particular, he went on:

His cross-examination of witnesses was brief but pointed and he had such a quick judgment of men that by a mere piercing glance at the witness he knew what type of person he was and led his cross-examination accordingly...he always exhibited a thorough mastery of facts....But the one great quality which struck everybody...was the fearlessness with which he dealt with the Court. 10

We are concerned here less with Vallabhbhai's professional success and more with his entry into public life. This stage of Patel's life is particularly significant. It explains his entry into both a government institution - the municipality, and anti-government political activity - the satyagraha. In his day-to-day work at the Bar he came across clients, fellow lawyers, magistrates, judges, government officers and political officers, whose relationships with each other revealed certain features that made an impression on him. He found clients, fellow magistrates, judges and officers arrogant in their dealings with Indian subordinates and he detected a certain brusqueness in the attitude of police officers, all of which bothered the superior Patidar who was not accustomed to servility. He felt that institutional authority was held in awe by people generally. Among his associates at that time were Patidar district pleaders and lawyers such as Govindrao Patel, Shivbhai Patel, Chimanlal Thakor, Maganbhai Chaturbhai Patel and others who either held or aspired for positions in local government. It might be mentioned here that by 1913 his brother Vithalbai had gone through the paces of entry into political life. He had been elected first to the Borsad Taluk Board in September 1911, then to the Kaira District Board in November 1911, and from there to Bombay Legislative Council in January 1913. The initial inspiration to enter politics came to Vallabhbhai from the success that his brother had achieved. He was also encouraged to think of a

public career by the activities of various members of the elite in Ahmedabad, members of Indian political associations like the Gujarat Sabha, with whom he spent much time playing bridge at the Gujarat Club. With Vithalbai he attended the 1915 session of the Bombay Presidency Political Conference organised by the Gujarat Sabha at which matters pertaining to municipal organisation were discussed. In 1915, Gandhi came to settle in Ahmedabad and set up an ashram in Kochrab village which was later moved to the banks of the Sabarmati. His experiences in South Africa and the doctrine of truth and non-violence became the subject of many discussions at the Gujarat Club, and although initially Vallabhbhai took all these talks lightly, the accumulated effect of this exposure, his meeting with men who were politically active, and his brother's success was his almost simultaneous entry into two fields - the Ahmedabad Municipality and the Gujarat Sabha.

We shall first discuss his activity in the Municipality from 1917 to 1927. The object is to highlight some aspects of his personality and his political style that were formed at this stage and were directly related to the local Ahmedabad scene in terms of rivalries among Indians and relations between the officers and elected Indians. The idea is not to recount Patel's activities in the Municipality; these have been adequately dealt with in various secondary works cited in the notes. The object is to observe Patel in a typical Gujarati city with which he had developed strong social links, and in which the British had never been fully assimilated, and to assess his role in a British institution - the Municipality - which became the first instrument of his political ambition and recognition. There was no scope for any revolutionary changes either in the organisation or the city for they were likely to be resisted, in the one case by the British authority and in the other by the local tax payers, the vested interests in Ahmedabad. Within these constraints Patel tried to make a mark in the municipal organisation and in the city.

In January 1917, Patel was elected to the Ahmedabad Municipality in a by-election. The Municipality had been superceded for incompetence in 1910 and replaced by a Committee of Management which brought about many improvements in those areas where the previous Municipality had failed - the strict enforcement of Municipal by-laws, control over staff, orderly water supply and drainage, collection of taxes and so on. The elected Municipality was restored in 1915, after an amendment of the District Municipal Act, whereby it was stipulated that the Chief Officer in the Municipality would be a Municipal Commissioner who would be an ICS officer having stronger powers than before. The Ahmedabad Municipality was to have twenty seven councillors elected as follows: four by those eligible through education, one by the Millowners Association and twenty two by the wards. The President was to be elected by a two-third majority of the councillors. Patel's first concern was to ensure the smooth working of the Municipality. To him a good starting-point was to ensure a harmonious working relationship between the elected councillors and the municipal officers. The elected members of the municipal board looked upon the amendment of the District Municipal Act, which provided that ICS officers would be chosen Municipal Commissioners, as a curtailment of their freedom and, therefore, they objected to the arrangements. Objections, formal and informal, had been registered about the prohibitive cost to the municipality of the burden of appointing highly paid ICS officers as Municipal Commissioners. The first officer who occupied such office in Ahmedabad only confirmed the fears that people had about the undue control an official could exercise over the representatives. John Shillidy was appointed Municipal Commissioner of Ahmedabad and took every opportunity to overawe the forty members of the Municipal Council and other subordinate officers. Patel, being temperamentally not the kind of man who would be overpowered too easily, decided to take some action in the Council. In the first instance, he set about mastering all the facts and figures pertaining to the Municipal Act and the powers, rules

and regulations contained therein. Next, he studied the vagaries of the local administration of the area and then embarked upon exploring the ways and means whereby he could better the existing relations between the elected and the appointed councillors inter se, as also those between the councillors and citizens. He then looked for the appropriate opportunity to embarrass the Municipal Commissioner.

An incident pertaining to a swampy lake near the railway station gave Patel the chance to launch a meticulously prepared attack on the Municipal Commissioner with the object of exposing misconduct. It had been established at law that the lake was the property of the Municipality and it was considered desirable that it should be covered because it had become a breeding ground for mosquitos. Shillidy managed to procure it on permanent lease for the setting up of a match factory by Fateh Mohamad Munshi in consideration for his generous contribution towards the war loan. Patel got a motion passed by the Board to get Shillidy removed on the ground that the latter had misrepresented to the Government of Bombay a Municipal Board decision pertaining to the lake. Shillidy had to leave his post.<sup>11</sup> This was only the beginning. Patel then carefully studied all the areas in which the previous Municipality (which had been superseded) had failed and those in which the appointed committee of 1910 had succeeded. He realised that success for him could lie in performing extraordinary feats in those areas. As Chairman of the Sanitary Committee he attended to all the mundane matters pertaining to the Municipality like the problems of water supply, collection of rates, good drainage, relief in time of flood and famine. What all these meant to a city like Ahmedabad can be adequately gauged from accounts of Ahmedabad's decline in urban schemes despite its rapid advancement in urban finance and industry.<sup>12</sup> Patel was anxious to achieve results, and principles or legal obstacles were often abandoned or surmounted by negotiating a way around the problem so that the resulting benefits would far outweigh the seeming irregularity that may at times have

been unavoidable. He later recalled to his colleagues that the lessons learnt at the municipality level were of much use in provincial and national politics when dissensions had to be tackled in the party or, in the event of a dispute, advantage secured over the government.<sup>13</sup>

Most improvements were well in keeping with the style of the Patidar, with an emphasis on the utilitarian rather than the decorative. The reservoir at Kankaria was the nearest Patel came to constructing a beauty spot. He recommended the maintenance of gardens around the reservoir. What his associates and other citizens recall as the outstanding features of Patel's term in the municipality were, firstly, his eagerness to delve directly into mundane city problems as opposed to paper and desk work, and, secondly, his activity in challenging the highhandedness or incompetence of officers. Within two years he gathered sufficient support on his side and could almost boast of leading a party within the Municipality. By 1920, when the Municipality got the right to choose its own municipal commissioners and an Indian headed the organisation, politics within the organisation increased. What was more, Gandhi's non-cooperation call soon reached the municipal area and members formed camps and alliances on the basis of their strength in the political field.

A crisis occurred in the Ahmedabad Municipality in 1921, when the Government appointed a Deputy Inspector of Schools to supersede the Schools Committee which was in charge of maintaining, managing and administering the schools. This was the result of the Municipality's decision to non-cooperate with the government in educational matters. The trouble arose when Pratt, the Commissioner, usurped the rights of the Schools Committee and persuaded the Ahmedabad agent of the Imperial Bank of India to transfer Rs.12,000 of the Municipality's money to the account of the Deputy Educational Inspector. In January 1922, there was a stir in the Municipality when a Member, Rao Sahib Harilalbhai Desai, argued that the Bank should restore the money failing which the President and the Managing Committee should file a suit

against the Imperial Bank, Ahmedabad, to recover the amount. Patel, aware of the odds which the members of the municipality faced against the all-powerful Government, suggested what he considered were effective pressurising tactics. He anticipated that the Government would find shelter behind some section of some statute or the other which members of the Municipality might not be able to match.<sup>14</sup> The Commissioner had already decreed that under Section 178(3) of the Bombay District Municipality Act, Government could take charge of it, if it could show that a Committee had defaulted in its duty in some way or other. Commending the teachers of the schools for refusing to take their salaries from the Deputy Education Inspector, Patel said that the entire issue would be publicised all over the country. In particular, the conduct of the Bank would be exposed to indicate to the people how the Bank had abused the confidence placed in it by making money deposited with it by one party available to another. Failure to return the money would prompt the Managing Committee of the Municipality to advise the public that it was unsafe to leave their money with Imperial Bank. Although the Bank denied that the public had reacted to the propaganda, there were reports that there had been a rush for withdrawal of money on the Imperial Bank.<sup>15</sup>

Moral and social pressure was brought into play for quicker results. Patel's inclination to by-pass slow and cumbersome institutional procedures showed itself again and again in his political career. The thorny question of actually obtaining money to function had to be tackled. The Government had clandestinely obtained information about the Municipal Board's activities on 7 January 1922. Vallabhbai conducted a thorough investigation into how the Commissioner's order of 7 January, invalidating the Municipality's resolution, was conveyed to the Municipality on the same day as the latter had passed the resolution. The investigation revealed that <sup>the</sup> Collector had sent a Chief Officer (N.D.Mehta) to the Municipality to procure the proceedings of the Board before they were concluded. The Board, on its part, learnt of the

Collector's intentions, and before the order could be formally communicated to the Board, two cheques totally a sum of Rs.14,000 were drawn from the Bank. When the amounts were being paid out, the Chief Officer appeared on the scene to stop payments; but, by then, Rs.10,000 had already been paid out and the Municipality was able to pay the teachers' salary from that amount. Patel, by putting a question to the President of the Municipality, exposed all the irregularities whereby the Board's proceedings were conveyed to the Collector late at night in order that the Collector might forestall any move of the Municipal Board. An act deploring all this was passed by the Managing Committee at Patel's instance and it was further stipulated that the School Committee's powers could not be taken away, because these did not come from the order suspended by the Collector.<sup>16</sup> Government employed its final weapon and the Municipality was superceded by the Government and run by a Committee of Management. The President of the Municipality, a moderate by the name of Ramanbhai Mahipal, and Nilkanth, who was not a non-cooperator, continued as Joint Chairmen.

Two years later, in 1924, under pressure from vested interests in the city, elections were held again and the Municipality restored. Vallabhbhai Patel became its President and exhibited considerable zeal in the progressive developments of the city. A programme which involved drainage schemes, water supply, facilities for schools, suburban schemes, road construction and the demolition of the city wall, showed Patel as an effective and thorough administrator and helped him to develop a network of alliances with prominent persons which henceforth were to become his modus operandi.

There was friction in the Municipality as a result of which Patel resigned in April 1928. A Chief Officer on Probation called I.R.Bhagat made serious allegations against the Municipal Engineer, Gore, and because the status of both officers was the same, Patel conducted the inquiry himself. He discovered that not only were Bhagat's allegations ill-

founded but, that he was guilty of many improprieties himself and, therefore, could not be confirmed in his post as Chief Officer. Bhagat, however, intrigued to stay on. Ambalal Sarabhai, the most prominent millowner of Ahmedabad, organised his own party to fill the Municipality, because Patel's partymen were closely allied with the Congress, which had been espousing the cause of workers in recent labour disputes in the city. Sarabhai, however, had sufficient strength to win over men from Patel's party. In the meantime, the post of Chief Officer fell vacant and four persons—Bhagat, H.L.Dewan, Paranjpye and Morarji Desai, who was in Government service, applied for the job. Patel supported Dewan and Sarabhai opposed him. The balance of forces was such that with members voting individually, Bhagat was chosen. Caste, community, relationships—all seemed to have played a part in the elections. In April 1928, Vallabhbai Patel resigned from the Municipality.<sup>17</sup>

Between 1917 and 1927, Patel was simultaneously involved in a British established institution, the Municipality, and in an anti-British institution, the Congress, that was engineering the boycott of British institutions. These were certainly contradictory impulses in fact, but not entirely so in terms of the preceptions of the people in this period. A Municipal Councillor turned khadi-clad Congress worker was not regarded as such a blatant incongruity. Initially, Municipal Councillors were elected on a much narrower franchise than members of provincial legislatures were after 1920. Yet, they were never accused of having sold out, because the nature of the work could be adequately explained as undiluted service to the city dwellers. As Patel later recalled and explained:

I served Ahmedabad Municipality to the best of my ability...to all of us to serve our own city must give unmitigated pleasure and satisfaction which I cannot get in any other sphere. Further, to clean the dirt of the city is quite different from cleansing the dirt of politics. From the former you get a good night's rest while the latter keeps you worried and lose your sleep. 18

Patel's involvement in the Municipality and in politics was simultaneous and directed towards one goal - that of public recognition for purposes of politics. In 1917, Gandhi had just made a tremendous impact at Champaran and Ahmedabad gave him much acclaim. Patel was more than likely to get drawn towards Gandhi, if for no other reason than simply as a vehicle for political take-off. He began his apprenticeship under Gandhian patronage in 1917. He became the Secretary of the Gujarat Sabha of which Gandhi was the President. That same year, the Gujarat Sabha became involved in the Kaira 'no-rent' movement. The agitation has been comprehensively analysed by Hardiman and features like the nature of support and system of alliances have been discussed at length. The events of the agitation are being recounted here for two reasons. The nature of the disaster that stuck Kaira farmers was likely to have affected farmers in many other areas as well. On Gandhi's own admission, most Kaira farmers were 'highly respectable land owners' whose plight resulting from the successive mishaps in the district could not have been worse than that of the really downtrodden people of the other areas, that is, the subsistence farmers or landless labourers. Yet, the plight of these farmers was emphasized to the exclusion of other farmers. Why this was so needs an answer. As we will see from the conduct of the campaign, the forging of links with rent payers seemed a vital feature of the agitation. Secondly, the nature of the conclusion of the agitation is discussed at some length because it gives an indication of the purpose of the agitation for politically-minded leaders like Patel.

The movement was initially sponsored by a local man - Mohanlal Pandya - a Vadadra Brahmin of Kathlal, from a rich peasant and money lending family - who later sought the support of Gandhi and the Gujarat Sabha. On the grounds that the farmers of Kaira were in distress, the movement demanded a remission of land revenue. The farmers of Kaira had been hit before. Famine in 1899, cholera epidemic and crop

failure in 1900-01, rain scarcity and rat epidemic in 1901-02, plague in 1902-03, locusts in 1903-04, failure of rain in 1904-05, excessive rain and flood in July 1905 followed by drought in August and September 1906-07 and crop failure in 1907-08. Between 1908 and 1914 there was a respite from the successive disasters, with a steadying of prices as a result of good harvests in 1912, 1913 and 1914. The year 1915 was again a bad year and the kharif crop had failed. The next year was better; but in 1917, there was seventy inches of rain and the crops, particularly in the rice tract, were badly damaged. At the end of the monsoon, when the bajri and kodra crops were cut and laid out to dry, there was rain again and the crops rotted. The winter crops were destroyed by rats. Quite clearly there was a strong case for land revenue remission or at least the sympathetic gesture of postponing collection of land revenue dues for that year. The entire atmosphere of demoralisation in Kaira helped Gandhi in his efforts to piece together fragmentary agitations into something big. The revenue officers, however, were not inclined to advise the government to make any large-scale remissions.

At the Gujarat Political Conference held at Godhra in November 1917, Gandhi invited leading men to come and talk to the peasants in Gujarati and help them articulate their demands. Land revenue, vath and other political problems were discussed and their solutions suggested. These solutions were related to problems of caste solidarity, the damage to dairy and family milk-business and the glaring need for 'our upright management of civil affairs'. In particular, the Conference deplored the fact that with regard to the revenue matters of a district the Collector was wholly dependent on the one-sided reports of the Mamlatdar and the police. It suggested the appointment of an advisory board of elected members for each district. Soon, political workers were travelling all over the area, determining the nature of the problem and advising the farmers. Young Patidars joined the movement. At Kathlal, in the north of the

district, in Kapadvanj taluka, Mohanlal Pandya and Shankarlal Parikh prepared petitions for the leading Patidars of their area and then for those of other areas. These were sent to the government and, while they awaited a reply, the farmers of Kathlal refused to pay revenue. However, all that they were told in reply was that the revenue officers had ample opportunity to decide the issue. On 27 November 1917, some representatives of the agriculturists went to the Collector to ask him to await the reply of the Bombay Government before beginning the collection of revenue. In the meantime, Gokuldas Parikh and Vithalbhai Patel, elected members of the Bombay Council, toured about twenty villages in Kapadvanj and Thasra talukas and gathered first hand information about the losses and hardships of the farmers. They made their recommendations to the Collector, V.K.Namjoshi, who decided that suspensions of revenue could be made to the effect of half in forty villages of Nadiad taluka, thirty-four villages in Kapadvanj, thirty in Mohammadabad and seven in Matar taluka. But, in fact these suspensions were not carried out and there was agitation. Pandya and Parikh then entreated the Gujarat Sabha to involve itself directly and in January 1918 visited Vallabhbai Patel's house (which was the Gujarat Sabha's headquarters) everyday. They had extensive discussions with Patel who had an ear for detail and who made a thorough study of their problems. The Sabha had already sent a letter to the Bombay Government on 1 January 1918 asking for a full enquiry into the matter. With the appeals from the agriculturists increasing, the Sabha at Gandhi's suggestion decided on 10 January to advise the farmers not to pay revenue until the government had replied to the Sabha's letter. Unfortunately, two factors complicated the issue. With the delayed rains it seemed the rabi crop would be good. Revenue was supposed to be collected first in December (after the kharif harvest) and then in April (after the rabi harvest). In some areas the dues were collected separately for the two crops, in December and April, and in other areas for both together in April. Kapadvanj was an area that had a December collec-

tion and hence the no-revenue campaign began there in December. By the time payment was due in the other areas the situation was not as bleak as it had been at the time of the kharif crop harvest. The rabi crop promised to be good and the failure of the kharif harvest was not likely to be apparent. To determine the effects of the kharif crop failure a thorough inquiry into the personal hardships of the farmers was needed. The officials did not lend much credence to the farmers' woes; they based their reports on the likelihood of a good rabi crop harvest. This irritated the Gujarat Sabha leaders. So did the rebuff that some of the Sabha leaders received at the hands of Frederick Pratt, the Commissioner of the Northern Division, when seven leaders went to see him on 11 January 1918 and four of them were turned away. This only made the Gujarat Sabha leaders stronger in their support for the no-revenue campaign. They bided their time for Gandhi's return from Champaran, and, in the meantime, tackled the press statement of 16 January 1918 which had been issued by the Government of Bombay following parleys with those Indian leaders who still felt inclined to try constitutional means. This statement supported the action of the Collector of Kaira District in demanding land revenue and the outstanding taqavi repayments. It also questioned the locus standi of the Gujarat Sabha of Ahmedabad among the farmers of Kaira and called their advice 'thoughtless and mischievous' and asserted that the government would not allow 'any intervention in the normal work of the collection of land revenue dues' in the 'rich and fertile district'.<sup>19</sup> Gandhi sent a telegram to the Gujarat Sabha and urged them to give a convincing reply to the Government's statement. He told them to ask for an independent investigation and also to give the Government sufficient proof that the visits of Gokuldas Parikh and Vithalbai Patel to Nadiad on 12 December 1917 and to twelve villages in Kapadvanj and Thasra were made at the request of the Sabha. He added:

That agriculturists who have to borrow or to sell their cattle in order to pay land revenue should do so is an

advice I would not hesitate to give. The government can do what it likes. 20

When Gandhi arrived on the scene on 4 February 1918, he was asked to join a deputation to the Governor of Bombay. The whole picture changed; for with the popularity after Champaran and his sympathetic attitude towards the recruitment campaign he could not be dismissed lightly by the Government. At a meeting with Gandhi on 5 February 1918, Willingdon conceded Gandhi's demands for an independent inquiry into the matter. In the meantime Gandhi sent a stiff letter on 7 February to Pratt, the Commissioner of the Northern Division, protesting about the threatening notices and circulars that had been issued by the Mamlatdar of Kapadvanj.<sup>21</sup> On 9 February the Governor's secretary wrote to Gandhi:

Neither from the discussions which took place between you and His Excellency on the 5th, nor from the accounts which have appeared in the papers is it clear to the Governor that the local officers have in any way been harsh. He is not satisfied that any advantage would be gained by appointing an Independent Commission. 22

The Kaira struggle was on. The Executive Committee of the Gujarat Sabha met at Vallabhbhai's house on 14 and 15 February to determine the course of action to be taken. Opinions differed. Indulal Yajnik, a Nagar Brahmin of Nadiad and an enthusiastic political worker in Gujarat, wanted extreme measures to be taken. Vithalbhai Patel and Gokuldas Parikh, who had come from Bombay especially for the meeting, were against unconstitutional measures. Gandhi decided that the Gujarat Sabha as an organisation could not act because it could not be assumed that everyone endorsed Gandhi's method of satyagraha. He undertook the campaign as an independent venture and those people who wished to follow him were asked to accompany him on 16 February to the Hindu Anath Ashram in Nadiad, which became the headquarters of the movement, and from there disperse to different villages to inquire into the peasants' grievances. Most of the Gujarat Sabha leaders, including Vallabhbhai Patel, followed Gandhi.

Vallabhbhai Patel threw himself heart and soul into the campaign and discarded his English dress and from February 1918 onwards wore a dhoti and kurta.<sup>23</sup> The team of people that came to Nadiad divided themselves into groups and each group was to inspect roughly fifty villages by 10 March and then report its findings. Based on some of these reports, Gandhi's letter of 26 January 1918 to the Collector<sup>had</sup> suggested that though he personally was fully satisfied that postponement of land revenue was justified, the Collector might appoint his own enquiry of independent men, representative of all sides, and satisfy himself.<sup>24</sup> In many areas the first instalment, and in some areas both instalments, had been collected, sometimes after the selling of cattle. The Collector questioned the basis of Gandhi's inquiry and pointed out the likelihood of a good rabi crop. There seemed less and less room for negotiation until, on 22 March 1918, Gandhi formally commenced the satyagraha at a large meeting of agriculturists at Nadiad.

For much of the campaign, Gandhi was away from Kaira and left Vallabhbhai Patel in charge. At a meeting presided over by Patel at Nadiad on 31 March, farmers took a vow pledging their support and expressing their willingness to face all consequences including attachment rather than betray the cause. Patel warned them of coming hardships and commended their courage. He visited many villages including Uttarsanda, Chakhasi, Bhainal and Golel at which meetings were well attended. Leaders of villages commented upon Vallabhbhai's sacrifice of his professional interests and his keen interest in peasant affairs. The presence of Patidar district pleaders who had come to their native villages from Ahmedabad to help in the campaign gave further importance to the cause. Patel's presence also created enthusiasm and in Borsad, where the Patel brothers were well-known, farmers took them in a procession and paid them tributes. A signature-collection campaign was started for making a petition to the Government and publicising the strength of the movement. By 4 April, about 1500 people had signed.<sup>25</sup> Com-

mending Patel's efforts, Gandhi said at Karamsad in April 1918:

This is Vallabhbhai's native place. Vallabhbhai is still in the fire and will have to endure a good deal of heat, but I think out of all this we shall have gold in the end. Let your good wishes go with him. 26

Patel was first exposed to the method of satyagraha in Kaira. Instilling the spirit of endurance among people, he toured extensively all over Kaira with Gandhi, when he was there, and with other workers. An eyewitness commented on Patel's style:

He spoke seldom. He watched closely Gandhi's method of work. He observed carefully the way in which he carried on his correspondence with officials and conducted his discussions with them; he observed the way in which he kept up the morale of the people and tested their mettle; and above all noted the way in which at the height of the campaign he watched for an opportunity to secure a settlement. 27

As they toured from village to village, Patel was able to notice that the response of each village depended on the nature of the response of the dominant caste or community of that village. He involved them accordingly and the movement came to be based mainly on the support of the dominant caste. The aims and methods of the satyagraha suited the Patidar who had status and economic benefit to gain and not much to lose by participating in it. Landowners in the area had an average of 20 bighas of land. Od, in Anand Taluka, was a village of big landowners and more than fifty landowners had signed the declaration when Patel visited them on 3 April. An Uttarsanda landowner with 250 bighas allowed an attachment to be brought against his goods.<sup>28</sup> The Patidars' only fear was the permanent loss of lands which might be confiscated. The vehemence with which Patel asserted that confiscation was after all only a fresh entry in the register of the Revenue Department and would make no sense if the owners could ensure that no one came forward to cultivate, reinforced the faith of the Patidars. Patel's own village, Karamsad, at first responded feebly compared

with Ras, Sunay and Nayagam. It was a prosperous village and the progressive and prosperous Patidars there had opened many avenues for themselves. Famines and mishaps had not altered their position much and economic rivalry between them reduced the likelihood of their making common cause. Patel noticed this during his visit to Karamsad in April 1918:

...I see you frightened of officials. This is clearly due to lack of unity amongst yourselves. If even on an occasion like this you are not able to get rid of disunity when will you be able to do so? 29

Evidently this factionalism, which existed in some of the villages, often tended to prevent participation in popular agitations because each faction feared that any land or property confiscated from it would be bought by a rival faction.

Gandhi rebuked the three factions of Patidars in Od, saying:

...Let me tell you what I heard about you in Nadiad. I was told that the people of Od are quite spirited but that they have till now, used their courage and strength not for their good, but in quarelling and wrangling among themselves....And so it happens that this soil of Kheda, fertile and lovely which your forefathers had transformed into a land of gold, had been ruined while you have been stubbornly fighting for your claims against one another. 30

Gandhi chided Patidars for their bad reputation in some matters. Their attachment to land made them weak and cringing before officials. This weakness was unmanly and manliness was a quality that was most vital in a satyagraha. They were the enterprising community of the region and so it was natural that they were covetous of land. But he reminded them that they were also kshatriyas and, therefore, they were bound to their pledge. They must not be intimidated by Government orders which, on mature consideration, they regarded as unjust or oppressive.<sup>31</sup> On 12 April, Pratt, the Commissioner of Northern Division, addressed the Kaira cultivators. Vallabhbhai Patel sat in the audience. In an

intimidating speech, the Commissioner warned those villagers who were servants of the State - Mukhis and Matadars - that if they did not collect revenue their posts and hereditary rights would go. All 'chothais', fines and forfeitures would fall on them and not on the political leaders. Their estates and houses would go, their wives and children would be left destitute and they would be reduced to the level of labourers. They would be foolish to fall for the Congress leaders' promises. Drawing their attention to the recent Ahmedabad labour dispute, the Commissioner said that workers had taken a pledge for a 35 per cent demand and the Congress leaders had not been able to fulfill their promises so that the workers had to break their pledges and return to work with a 27 per cent increase. He said it would be regrettable if respectable Patidars lost precious lands in a futile exercise of false claims. Patel challenged Pratt on the misrepresentation of facts of the Ahmedabad mill strike. The agriculturists who were present pleaded for mercy and said that grain was not selling well. Bajri was being sold for Rs.3-4 as. a maund and rice for Rs.4-6 as. a maund. Iron (for implements) was expensive and so was labour. Storing mohuva flowers was illegal and, therefore, any side-income from country liquor was impossible. Pratt was unwilling to go into these details. His stern threats were greatly resented by the public and the following remark became the subject of some controversy:

The lands of those who will not pay will be confiscated. Those who are contumacious will get no land in future. Government do not want their names on their Records of Rights. Those who go out shall never be admitted again. 32

Apart from giving moral reassurances, Patel met these threats with concrete gestures. By the end of April, financial support from magnates in Bombay had been procured for the Kaira campaign by Patel through his brother Vithalbai.<sup>33</sup>

About the same time, on 24 April, Pratt issued a circular that the pressure for payment on people should be reduced. The circular was reiterated on 24 May. It was

only when the circular had a visible effect on the mamlatdars who led the harassment of cultivators, that Gandhi called off the campaign. Willingdon, the Governor of Bombay ridiculed the claims made by Gandhi and Patel, that the satyagraha had been called off because concrete concessions had been elicited from the Government. The Governor declared that the campaign had ended because the April and May circulars generally released the pressure on villagers.

We gave no concessions and my Commissioner tells me that Gandhi's assertion that he knew nothing of our orders to the mamlatdars in April and May is a bare-faced lie. 34

It might be mentioned that although Gandhi laid emphasis on the undertaking given by the Mamlatdar of Nadiad - that if the well-to-do Patidars paid up, the poorer ones would be granted suspensions - he confessed quite openly:

It was clear that the people were exhausted...I was casting about for some graceful way of terminating the struggle which would be acceptable to a satyagrahi. 35

The Kaira satyagraha is of particular significance not merely because it marked the beginning of Patel's involvement in active politics but also because it gave him a political power base. As a result of his methods of functioning, he linked Gujarat to the Congress Party in a manner which he himself could use to his and the party's advantage. Coming from a peasant community Patel understood the peasant scene. It was not the cause of landless peasants and labourers that he espoused. The rural hierarchy was a reality which he accepted and endorsed. In the Kaira satyagraha Patel was tackling the wrongs being done to those higher up in the rural hierarchy - the landowners who paid rent or tax and had a stake in the social structure. He made no promises of a classless or egalitarian society and functioned with the stratified society. The peculiarities of particular areas were fully exploited to mobilise support. In Chikodra, the compact village of bold Arya Samajist Patidars, Patel ensured that appeals were based simultaneously on the Arya

Samajist and Patidar factor of the society.<sup>36</sup>

Vallabhbhai Patel worked in Kaira and other Gujarat areas with a view to making them future reservoirs of support for Congress. His Patidar background, the experience in rural Gujarat, his capacity and eagerness for political advancement made Patel an asset, a 'Deputy General' to Gandhi. Gandhi said in a speech after Kaira:

I wondered who the deputy general should be. My eye fell on Shri Vallabhbhai. I must admit that the first time I saw him I wondered who that stiff man could be. What could he do. But as I came in contact with him I knew that I must have him. 37

Gandhi was quick to point out that the association between the two satisfied Patel's ambitions as much as much as it fulfilled Gandhi's needs. He suggested that there was no dearth of people who would have followed Gandhi and done his bidding and if Vallabhbhai came forward it was because he had everything to gain and not much to lose from it. Addressing the agriculturists and workers on the 'lessons of the satyagraha', Gandhi said that Vallabhbhai had the wisdom to realise that to make any kind of mark in the politics of the time it was imperative that he 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.<sup>38</sup>

While at the local level, in Kaira district, a particular grievance of peasants provided Patel with the opportunity to learn the art of agitation, at the wider party level - the provincial Gujarat Congress - he was learning lessons of another kind. Negotiations, bargaining and decision-making for the purpose of determining Congress policy and gaining political advantage now occupied the attention of Congress leaders who were emerging in the front ranks in different areas. In Gujarat, the men in charge of the Provincial Congress Committee were prominent agitators of the Kaira satyagraha who had been rewarded with positions in the party. Patel became President of the Gujarat Provincial

Congress Committee in 1921 and remained so till 1942. G.V. Mavlankar and Indulal Yajnik were made General Secretaries and there were ten working committee members of the Gujarat PCC. In December 1920, at Nagpur, the Congress organisation had been altered so that each hierarchical level of the party corresponded with that of the administration. The Provincial Congress Committee became the key level in the organisation and provincial power bases became valuable. Patel busied himself in Gujarat learning steadily the rules of the game. He was in charge of Congress finance and that put him in a position of strength, particularly as Patel was also a very skilful fund-collector and could prevail upon almost anyone to contribute.<sup>39</sup> His control over the purse did, however, lead to personal conflicts and in one such conflict, in 1921, Indulal Yajnik and Vallabhbhai Patel fell out with each other. The Bhils in the Panch Mahals District were in a sad plight as a result of the failure of crops in the area. Indulal Yajnik was inclined to give generously to the downtrodden victims. Patel rationed contributions and wished to distribute them as he deemed fit and prudent. He did not consider Bhils a good investment in terms of political support for the Congress. Indulal appealed to Gandhi who expressed sympathy for the Bhils but was reluctant to interfere directly in the matter. Indulal submitted his resignation as Secretary of the GPCC in October 1921 and relations between him and Patel were never normal after that incident.<sup>40</sup>

Patel was Chairman of the Reception Committee at the Ahmedabad Congress in December 1921 and his arrangements were commended.<sup>41</sup> He took pains to give the session the new Gandhian look. Particular emphasis was placed on simplicity and swadeshi. The party organisation needed to appear attractive enough and sufficiently open to attract widespread support even while it was being tightened for controlled and regulated political activity. Citing Gujarat as the best example of the executors of Gandhi's programme, Patel said in his speech that a lakh and ten thousand charkha wheels were at work in the Province and 2 lakhs of pounds of

khaddar had been produced during the past two years. In temperance work (prohibition) and the abolition of untouchability too Gujarat had excelled. All these figures were designed to show that Gujarat should be regarded as the leading province in terms of Gandhi's national movement.<sup>42</sup> The Congress programme of non-cooperation had been endorsed at the Nagpur session of 1920. In Ahmedabad, the preparations for turning this non-cooperation movement into Civil Disobedience were discussed. Particular areas in Gujarat were to be chosen to lead the civil disobedience movement and Patel spoke proudly about Gujarat's preparedness for the struggle despite Government's premature arrests of workers and volunteers.

The final choice of the area where Gandhi would lead the civil disobedience movement was between Anand in Kaira district and Bardoli in Surat district. Vallabhbhai Patel, to whom Gandhi had left the choice, picked Bardoli. He did so primarily because the Bardoli Patidars, upon whom the success of the campaign depended, were less ridden with dissensions than the Patidars in Anand. This was because the largely tribal lands in Bardoli had only been settled in the last century by caste Hindus and there was a clear-cut division between them and the landless labourers, with few intermediaries. Of a population of 87,000 in Bardoli, Patidars numbered about 30,000 and Dublas (a backward class of landless agriculturist workers) about 54,000. The rest were Muslims, Anavil Brahmins, Vantias and untouchables. The leading Patidars had formed a Patidar Association and since 1908 had taken an active part in politics. Swadeshi, prohibition and national education had all gained a firm foothold in the area. At first Gandhi had intended starting civil disobedience in both Anand and Bardoli so as not to offend Kaira. But some symptoms indicating the somewhat violent mood of the Anand Patidars made Gandhi endorse Patel's choice of Bardoli. Moreover, Bardoli had many passive resisters of the South African Indian struggle, who had returned to positions of responsibility in the local Congress. Every

village had men that had been associated with Gandhi's South African passive resistance.<sup>43</sup>

Vithalbhai Patel, whose opinion Gandhi had also sought, agreed with the choice after a thorough survey of the region in January 1922. It is noteworthy that during his legendary campaign in Bardoli in 1928, Vallabhbhai used the knowledge of the area derived from the surveys and impressions gathered at the time of the proposed 1922 campaign.

The decision to launch the movement in Bardoli in February 1922 was abandoned by Gandhi because of the eruption of violence at Chauri Chaura in Gorakhpur District. The Working Committee of Congress ratified Gandhi's decision to stop non-cooperation on 11 and 12 February. Gandhi was arrested in March 1922 and jailed for two years.

Although Patel did not wholly agree with Gandhi's decision of stopping civil disobedience, he had not fortified his base sufficiently to make any independent moves. Patel had built his reputation as a prominent political leader on the provincial scene, but not yet on the national scene. For that he still relied on Gandhi. He tried to enthrone disillusioned Patidars of Kaira, but to no avail. The sixth Gujarat Political Conference was held at Anand on 25 and 26 May 1922 with Kasturba Gandhi presiding and was relatively poorly attended. At the conference, the vitality of the constructive programme and Gujarat's faith in non-cooperation were reiterated. Vallabhbhai was at pains to prepare Gujarat so that it had an edge over other provinces in the next round of political action. In June 1922, at Lucknow, he was anxious to demonstrate to a disillusioned AICC that Gujarat was still enthusiastic about non-cooperation and prepared for it. That Gujarat had become the province par excellence as far as political programmes were concerned was admitted by leaders from other provinces. P.C. Ray visited Ahmedabad on the occasion of the laying of the foundation stone of the Gujarat Vidyapith on 9 March 1923 and attended several functions at schools and colleges. He went

back to Bengal quite impressed that Gujarat was way ahead in the national movement, Remarking in his address that areas like Gujarat and Bombay were ideal for national institutions he said:

Here your boys are brought up in an atmosphere of business and independent initiative, not as in my province where service is looked upon as the sole means of livelihood...things are otherwise in Bengal and I have no hesitation in saying that Bengal must follow in the footsteps of Bombay if she is to prosper. 44

Not all of this was of Patel's making. He had made considerable headway in preparing Gujarat for political activity : whereas he moulded some of the politics in Gujarat, he was also greatly affected by it. This is demonstrated by the satyagraha campaigns as well as by his political activity later. The agitations were not entirely made by the leaders; the leaders were also made by the agitations.

The Nagpur satyagraha came immediately after a sharp division in Congress over the profitability of the politics of non-cooperation. There had existed, ever since the inauguration of the 1919 Act, a body of moderates in Congress who did not want the policy of boycott to extend to the Councils. With the disillusionment of 1921 and 1922, this body of opinion, led primarily by C.R.Das, grew; but, even when civil disobedience was abandoned, council entry was not adopted as a policy. At Gaya, in December 1922, Motilal Nehru proposed a resolution advocating Council Entry, which was lost; Rajagopalachari's resolution adhering to the view that civil disobedience was the best way to oppose imperialism was carried with Patel's backing. Patel, however, was quite inconsistent on the two subjects, of civil disobedience and council entry. On the one hand he asserted that Gujarat was one province that was fully prepared for any kind of agitation in 1922-23. On the other hand, he described other provinces as quite unprepared for agitation. In the Punjab, Congress institutions were lying dormant; in U.P., the stage was not set for agitation; and in Delhi, there was indifference to it. Most of north India he said

was rife with Hindu-Muslim disunity. In Gujarat, other leaders like Gidwani and Abbas Tyabji favoured a movement. Leaders who were casting around for support and political rivalries, came to the surface each time a decision was made or altered by the Provincial Congress. At the Gaya Congress, Patel was both advocating civil disobedience as the best policy and vetoing its embarkation. Yet, within five months he was agitating in Nagpur, a totally alien territory for him, seeking to assert that non-cooperators were ahead of council-wallahs in terms of manifest political success. The reason for this is that agitations could not be started by leaders so easily; the so-called 'followers' were their own masters to a degree hitherto underplayed by elitist historians. Subaltern studies remedy this balance somewhat.

The Nagpur Flag Satyagraha was a face-saver for Patel, who had resigned from the Congress Working Committee in May following a confrontation between the 'changers' and 'no-changers' and the passage of a resolution proposed by P.D. Tandon which suggested a compromise with those who advocated Council Entry.<sup>45</sup> Patel saw in the proposal of Council Entry an attempt by the moderates in Congress to take power and attention away from the Gandhian non-cooperators who had just about found their feet. This feeling of resentment towards any group that sought to wrest control away from the Gandhian group was increasingly evident in later years too (1934-39), when such attempts were made by leftist leaders towards the then moderates and conservatives (Patel and Gandhi). Vithalbai Patel admonished Vallabhbhai for being discourteous to Congress and resigning and not accepting the party's decision to compromise with the council-wallahs. Much could be achieved in the legislatures he said 'if only the President of the Gujarat Provincial Congress Committee would learn to respect the orders of the AICC'. Vallabhbhai, who did not take kindly to criticism, replied in a tone that was almost proprietorial towards Gujarat and Gandhi. Pointing out that it was not he but members of the Swaraj Party who were spoiling the image of Congress unity, he said:

Gujarat knows Gandhi far better than Patel (Vithalbhai). His party has merely made use of Gandhiji, whereas Gujarat is endeavouring to the best of its ability to follow in the footsteps of Gandhi.... It was not necessary for Patel to remind Gujarat that Gandhiji always respected the resolutions of the All India Congress Committee. Gujarat also knows that when Gandhi was free the whole country carried out his wishes unquestioningly. Today the very leaders who do not respect the basic resolutions of the Congress itself demand that others should respect those of its resolutions which favour their point of view. 46

Vallabhbhai also rebuffed Jawaharlal Nehru's overtures towards compromise and was determined to stick to his decision to abide by the Gaya resolution and not to accept the alteration made by the All India Congress Committee at Bombay; the AICC was, after all, only a Committee of full Congress. He made it a matter of personal prestige and would not suddenly and so obviously alter his own stand. Rebuking Nehru for his wavering attitude he wrote:

I assure you that it is painful to add to your troubles, but I have been scratching my brain to find out how of all people you would be a party to the arrangement which was expected to create such a complex situation.... At Bombay in your speech in the meeting you said you had to choose between two evils, you anticipated troubles, now why should you blame us. 47

On 10 July 1923, on the second day of the meeting of the AICC called by the Swarajist Party at Nagpur, Jawaharlal Nehru moved for disciplinary action against those Provincial Congress Committees that did not accept the Bombay decision of the AICC; in short, against Vallabhbhai Patel and Rajagopalachari. But the move was lost by two votes.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, Patel took a stand against the Swarajists with only a few leaders on his side at a time when elections under a Swarajist banner were likely and Swarajists were bound to accumulate considerable political support in key provinces. Reasons for this stubbornness are not hard to find. It would not be accurate to say that he had any ideological objection to council entry. He was still a member of the Ahmedabad Municipality and in fact became its President in

1924. Moreover, local leaders in Gujarat has been denouncing non-cooperation and it was inexpedient to ignore their attitudes. But, compromising with Swarajists like C.R.Das and Motilal Nehru would mean playing second fiddle to them for the foreseeable future. Patel was aspiring for the front line and would rather be at the head of a dissenting minority than a follower in a compromising majority.

Having taken a stand against the Swarajists, Patel was casting around for worthwhile political activity. The C.P. provided the opportunity when, not for the first time, trouble arose over the issue of the National Flag in March 1923. The Working Committee of the Nagpur District Congress fixed 1 May 1923 as the date for the beginning of an organised protest against the Government's interference with the right to carry the National Flag publicly in Nagpur. A press communique issued by the local Government had been published in the Hitavada which stated the Government's stand in the matter. The most influential Britons lived in the Civil Lines area and it was here that the Government forbade the carrying of the National Flag.<sup>49</sup> On 30 April, the Congress leaders published a route that they intended to take and on 1 May the Nagpur Flag Satyagraha began formally. Day after day, several volunteers carried the flag along the prescribed route in defiance of the District Magistrate's orders, submitted themselves for arrest and pleaded guilty before the Magistrate and received sentences of two or, sometimes, three months' rigorous imprisonment or one months' simple imprisonment under Sections 143 and 188 respectively of the Indian Penal Code. This became the city's daily tamasha and people went to witness it as they would see a show. Government servants in offices were warned that if they were found standing near a place where arrests were being made, action would be taken against them.<sup>50</sup> The Magistrates who convicted the non-cooperators, and the sub-inspectors who arrested them, were mostly Indians. The reservoir of volunteers was kept full by the appeals made by the prominent leaders of different areas to the people to join the satyagraha. For example,

on 23 May in Balghat, a plea made by Jammnalal Bajaj, who, being the most prominent local man in the Province, was the chief patron of the movement, produced a batch of 250 volunteers ready to leave Balghat for Nagpur straightaway.<sup>51</sup>

Jammnalal Bajaj had joined Vallabhbhai Patel in isolating himself from the rest of the National Congress leaders over council entry. It was at this time that all attempts at reconciliation between the two sections had failed and Patel and a few others had resigned from the Working Committee. It was, therefore, most gratifying to both of them that the national flag satyagraha provided an opportunity to demonstrate, firstly, that non-cooperation as opposed to council-entry was not a spent force and non-cooperators still had tremendous support behind them, and secondly, their personal organisational capacity. Three days after resigning from the Working Committee Patel was in Nagpur and he witnessed the arrests of Congress non-cooperators from a distance, alongwith Rajagopalachari, Prakasam, Hardayal Nag, Gangadhar-rao Deshpande, George Joseph, Rajendra Prasad and Devdas Gandhi, all of whom were opposed to council-entry. On 31 May 1923, Vallabhbhai Patel addressed a public meeting and vindicated the stand taken by those who had not endorsed the recent AICC decision. The AICC, he said, had no jurisdiction to deliberate on a motion passed by the general Congress session at Gaya and, therefore, the AICC decision was not binding on Congressmen. He asked voters not to vote for pro-councillors until the latter had courted arrest by carrying the national flag. He assured the Nagpur satyagrahis of concrete support by promising them a regular supply of volunteers.<sup>52</sup> During his speeches he continued to express bitterness over the Congress split and to rationalise the stand of the no-changers. At the height of the satyagraha campaign Vallabhbhai was denouncing C.R.Das and the latter's criticism of Gandhi's refusal to accept Reading's offer. He did not mince his words in expressing his strong disapproval of C.R. Das and his methods. He wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru when the latter gave a Press interview criticising Rajaji and Patel

for their attitude to the Bombay decision;

I wonder why you would not allow those who are in the right to have their own way and prefer to allow those who are in the wrong to do so....I trust you have been carefully following the adventures of Mr.Das in Madras. Do you think if the terrific onslaughts are allowed to be delivered day after day without protest.... How do you expect us to watch with equanimity the rapid demolition of the magnificent edifice that has been erected by the combined sacrifice of so many in this land. 53

In Patel's eyes, C.R.Das was guilty of cowardice because he had not 'charged' Gandhi for not accepting Reading's offer at the time when the offer was made. To choose an opportune moment for attacking Gandhi was, in Patel's opinion, not a very courageous act:

Had he ventured to charge Mahatmaji in this manner eight months ago would anyone have listened to him? But that would have not been Deshbandhu's way. 54

In addition to his utterances being a manifestation of the resentment that he felt towards the Swarajists, they were designed to win over a large section of Swarajist supporters in the Central Provinces. The general population of this area was closely allied to that of the Bombay Deccan. In the pre-war period Tilak had a large following in this area. More recently, C.R.Das had captured the support of the people with his talk about the advantages of fighting the British in the Councils. Thus, getting supporters in an area that had already been 'captured' by others was not an easy task for Vallabhbhai. To keep the movement going, the leaders had to depend on the import of volunteers largely from Gujarat and Bombay, and to a lesser extent from Bihar, Sind, Punjab, Bengal, Karnataka, U.P., and Hyderabad. After Jamnalal Bajaj was arrested, the Working Committee of Congress, which met in July, entrusted the task of coordinating the campaign to Patel. He arranged for every province to send a certain number of volunteers and also ensured that at least 50 volunteers were available for arrest every day.<sup>55</sup>

The momentum of the satyagraha abated somewhat after two months. This was not due only to diminishing enthusiasm. The

beginning of July saw the monsoon in full earnest and the transportation of volunteers became increasingly difficult. Many parties of volunteers came on foot and torrential rains often resulted in some groups having to abandon their tasks. There was also disunity among volunteers. They came from different areas to an area which was not so much a Congress as a Swarajist stronghold; this annoyed Patel sometimes. In a letter to Mahadev Desai, he complained:

This is indeed a stimulating struggle. If only the people are united, it would be possible to make the Government yield within a week. But here we have an orchestra in which every player plays whatever tune he likes....In the next issue or two of Young India you must appeal for money. This appeal should be well drafted. 56

By the end of July demoralisation had set in; not many people seemed interested in the satyagraha and the movement was on the verge of collapse. On his return to Nagpur on 22 July, Vallabhbhai sent bleak reports of the movement:

For the first two days nobody would come near me. Nagpur is absolutely cold. There is no response and I had to rely on outside help. My brother came here on the 25th and we found that unless things could be made more lively the movement would collapse and it would be a great disaster. 57

Vallabhbhai thereupon left his brother in Nagpur and went on a volunteer recruitment campaign. He went to Calcutta and asked Rajendra Prasad to meet him there. At Calcutta, he arranged for 'four big batches from Bengal and Bihar to reach Nagpur as soon as possible' with a promise to send twenty volunteers every day for a month. Maharashtra and Karnataka promised fifteen and the Tamil area twenty every week. 58

Vithalbhai Patel's involvement in the movement requires explanation. The Swarajists were due to contest elections in a few months and they calculated it to be better strategy to see the movement handled gracefully within the legislature than have it peter out disgracefully outside. The Government of C.P. was 'bent on finishing the whole show before the 2nd August' because the Executive Council was

scheduled to meet on that day to decide on the policy to be adopted in the Legislative Council which was due to meet on the 6th to discuss the subject. Vithalbhai Patel, therefore, joined in the struggle and decided to liaise with Vallabh-bhai who, as is evident, was becoming weak at this stage. Vithalbhai Patel planned to get a resolution moved in the forthcoming session of the C.P. Legislature suggesting the cancellation of the DM's order under Section 144.

The resolutions passed in the Legislative Council of C.P. demanded (i) the cancellation of the order of the Deputy Commissioner Nagpur, applying section 144 of the Criminal Procedure (ii) the unconditional release of volunteers and Congress workers imprisoned in connection with the national flag agitation (iii) the withdrawal of pending prosecutions of those already arrested and (iv) the granting of permission to railway authorities to issue tickets for Nagpur to all passengers that desired them. However, the Government was not prepared to give effect to these resolutions.

A series of negotiations between the C.P. Government and the Patel brothers ensued. There were about a dozen meetings and Vallabhbai was present at some of them.<sup>59</sup> There was a gentleman's agreement between the parties that the negotiations, including the correspondence pertaining to it, would be kept confidential. The inconclusive nature of the talks and the proximity of the renewal date of the new order led Vallabhbai Patel to make a settlement on 16 August. He reminded the people that the old order of the Deputy Commissioner, passed two months ago, was due to expire the next day. On the 18th, a procession would go through the Civil Lines and it was hoped that it would not be obstructed. He was shrewd enough, however, to accompany the announcement with reassuring remarks, for the Government's benefit, about the spirit in which the entire movement was being conducted. He was speaking with the authority that had been vested in him by the Working Committee and pointed out that the Committee wished to make it clear that the organisers of the processions never intended to cause annoy-

ance to any section of the public. He also repudiated the suggestion that there was an attempt, implied within the movement, of insulting the Union Jack,<sup>60</sup> This statement had the desired effect and the Home Member met Vallabhbhai Patel the same day to work out a settlement. The Government was to allow the procession on the 18th if after that the struggle was formally called off by the Congress. This Patel agreed to do if all persons arrested during the course of the satyagraha were released and a promise given that after their release a procession would be allowed in accordance with a required undertaking. This last act of negotiation was between the Home Member and Patel. In fact, all the negotiations were between the Patel brothers and the C.P. Government. The police felt slighted, as did the Government of India. The District Superintendent of Police, seeing that the Government had decided not to renew the order under Section 144, issued a notice under the Police Act that his prior permission was necessary before any procession went through the Civil Lines area. Patel wrote to the D.S.P. informing him about the proposed procession and sent him the leaflet that had been issued to the participants. The procession of 100 went as scheduled through Civil Lines, observing silence as it passed a church and reached its destination, Sadar Bazar, unobstructed.<sup>61</sup>

The controversy did not end there. Vithalbai Patel, who had gone to Bombay on the 16th, made a premature announcement of victory that added to the indignation that was being felt in some quarters.<sup>62</sup> The Government of India reprimanded the Government of Central Provinces for yielding to the Congress and for agreeing to the release of prisoners, an undertaking which they had no right to give.<sup>63</sup> The Government of C.P. was clearly embarrassed by the reproach and felt let down by the Government at the Centre. They, on their part, had asked the Patel brothers not to insist on the prior release of prisoners but to 'trust in the judgment and good intentions of the Government'. The C.P. Government tried hard to rationalise their decisions and explained that

local officers supported the release of prisoners and that commitment could not be broken,<sup>64</sup> On 1 September 1923, Government of India sent a further rebuke:

....While sympathising in their desire to find a solution for situation Government of India regret that Government of C.P. considered it necessary... to enter into understanding involving release of prisoners....Government of India consider that they should have been previously consulted. 65

The Government of India also deplored the Government of C.P.'s promise to Congress permitting a second procession, after the release of prisoners.<sup>66</sup> The Viceroy was perturbed by the whole arrangement which the Government of C.P. had made with Patel:

....in regard to the release of prisoners it would appear that an implied understanding was arrived at by C.P. Government with Patel, and in this they were undoubtedly wrong... 67

However, at the end of it all, they accepted the view of the Provincial Government recognising that 'any withdrawal or variation at this juncture, of terms arranged would be considered as a breach of faith and will probably lead to a renewal of agitation on this highly unfavourable issue'.<sup>68</sup>

Trivial statements were issued. Patel was anxious to show that there had been no loss of face in the termination of the satyagraha and made what the government called 'bombastic statements...claiming to have achieved a great triumph'. Government's final verdict on the minor disputes relating to who had won and who had lost can be summed up in a Minute by M.Seton:

The controversy is really like a squabble between two lower school boys as to which has scored. 69

The important thing is whether Patel, who had fought in a Swarajist stronghold to show his strength to Swarajists, achieved his aim. The Flag Satyagraha was a novel idea in the continuing quest for dominance by Gandhi's supporters in areas where they had failed to make much impact. Gandhi's in-roads into C.P. politics had been initiated earlier by

Jannalal Bajaj who had been fairly successful in winning support for Gandhi in the area with the help of his influence and resources. That Patel chose Nagpur to show his strength to Swarajists was probably on Bajaj's suggestion; Bajaj had also resigned from the Working Committee after the Bombay decision to accommodate Swarajists. The success of the satyagraha must be gauged from the view point of the Swarajists and the Government. For the Swarajists, the success of the satyagraha was questionable because Patel took their help ultimately in executing his campaign and in its termination. Apart from involving his brother Vithalbai, he also invited B.S.Moonje, the Deshastha doctor and M.R. Cholkar, his Brahmin lieutenant, to attend and address the public meeting organised by the two brothers. Swarajists were willing because elections lay a few months ahead and the publicity could be used advantageously.

Local newspaper reports certainly did not credit Patel with having conducted a successful satyagraha or arranging a respectable settlement. Opinions in these papers supported the Swarajists and came down heavily against Patel's expedient use of the Flag Satyagraha to further his political ambitions.<sup>70</sup> The Udaya (from Amraoti) remarked:

The truth appears to be that the so-called non-cooperators think it below their dignity to seek unity with their own countrymen differing in political views, but are ever ready to try for compromise with the government with the help of their intermediaries.... 71

The Lokmat from Yeomal gave all the credit to the Swarajists and denounced no-changers for their criticism of councillors:

Although the non-cooperators have all along been branding pro-council people as traitors to the mother land, it is after all the present councillors of the Province who ran to the rescue of the flagwallahs and saved the situation from being more humiliating to them. 72

As far as victory over government was concerned, it might be worthwhile to quote the Government of India's attitude to the flag problem before Patel joined the struggle. While believing

that proscribing a flag could be done by certified legislation, the Government of India declared:

We are of course aware that the use of this flag may produce a disturbing effect on Parliament and public opinion in England; but...we attach far more importance to the consideration that we should be penalizing as illegal an act which should have great difficulty in proving to be either seditious in itself or involving danger to the State....'Swaraj' does not necessarily imply independence of the British Crown. As so frequently happens in India the demonstrators have for the most part taken action without a definite idea of its implications. 73

Government did not consider the satyagraha as a big threat and, given the local public reaction, certainly did not regard its conclusion as a defeat for itself. The object of the satyagraha for Patel personally was clear. It was conducted with a view to rationalise the stand against council-entry. At the height of the campaign, in addresses to the public, Rajaji and Patel made constant allusions to and comparisons between the Swarajists and no-changers.<sup>74</sup> Government also believed that the satyagraha had been used by non-cooperators to further their own ends.<sup>75</sup> The whole affair they thought was a triumph for Government and Swarajists and not for non-cooperators.<sup>76</sup>

Ultimately, the no-changers capitulated at the Delhi session of Congress, in September. Patel, Bajaj, Rajendra Prasad and others entered the Delhi meeting carrying the national flag at the head of a procession of Nagpur satyagraha prisoners and received acclaim and applause from the audience. The gesture was intended as a triumph for non-cooperators. A murmur of disapproval was heard from them when Maulana Azad in his address failed to mention the victory of the Nagpur satyagraha. Mohammad Ali made a plea at this meeting to accommodate council-entry and non-cooperators complied. Patel was asked later why he had not accepted the earlier Bombay compromise (referred to as Nehru's compromise) and accepted a far worse one at Delhi. Patel said that on the one hand the Delhi compromise gave non-cooperators a feeling of showing that they were making a sacrifice and on

the other hand turning down Mohammad Ali's plea would have alienated Muslim opinion. However, the fact remains that Swarajists had in fact gathered tremendous support and strengthened their organisation, and electoral victory had become more than a likelihood to them by September. As the results showed, Swarajists fared well in most provinces.<sup>77</sup> Jammalal Bajaj presented a grim picture of the lack of Gandhian control over Congress institutions in what he called the 'Maharashtrian Province'. That he could influence people to strengthen Congress Committees has been demonstrated. But a permanent hold over them seemed difficult.<sup>78</sup> The free hand that was required to be given to Swarajists in the Province certainly caused people like Patel and Bajaj much anxiety. Bajaj warned Patel that it might even have a detrimental effect on areas like Kaira where Congress had worked hard to establish control.<sup>79</sup>

Patel reverted to Kaira district to retain and strengthen the Gandhian Congress base in the area. Like the Nagpur satyagraha the next satyagraha in Borsad was undertaken to vindicate a stand on wider political issues. It has already been mentioned that the abandonment of Civil Disobedience in 1922 had not been welcomed in Gujarat. Patidars had become disillusioned and Patel's efforts to revive them by piece-meal measures like picketing and calls for minor no-rent campaigns had proved futile. Similarly, his propaganda among Congressmen against Swarajists who were due to go in for elections in October had also not had much success as before. Dadubhai Desai and Jesangbhai Patel, Legislative Council Members for Kaira who had undertaken to represent Kaira landlords' interests, seemed to have sympathetic audiences at their meetings.<sup>80</sup> All this caused differences in the thinking of Congressmen who put up their own candidates against the incumbents. Vallabhbhai reprimanded them for their interest in electioneering but some leaders continued and even achieved political success. All this considerably damaged the unity among Congressmen in Kaira. Vallabhbhai Patel turned his and their attention to Borsad taluka with

a view to mobilising and cementing them in a movement. It was important to show his power to mobilise just then while (a) Gandhi was in jail and (b) Swarajists were trying to overshadow the disunited no-changers. At meetings in Borsad Patel asked people to make a straight choice whether they wanted councillors or Congressmen to alleviate their burdens. A few educated people in Councils, he added, could not change the situation in the country.<sup>81</sup>

Borsad taluka was a southern taluka of Kaira district with a population of one and a half lakhs of which more than half were Patanvadias and Baraiyas. These castes were part of a non-Kanbi section of the population originally called 'kolis' and some villages were totally inhabited by these communities. Before the advent of British authority these communities were renowned for Kshatriya and Thakur traits, on which basis they claimed to be Kshatriyas. They formed the fighting forces of the neighbouring princely States. With the advent of British rule and the gradual replacement of local forces by British forces, these warring communities lost their jobs. They had already slackened in their second occupation - land - and were not enterprising enough to make agriculture profitable. Patidars had stepped in where kolis were unsuccessful. The latter mortgaged land with sowkars and Patidars and fell into further decline and gradually into bad ways to obtain money. Gradually, they were lumped with criminals and tribals for having committed petty offences and came under the Provincial Criminal and Tribals Act whereby they had to report regularly to the local police and were carefully watched as potential criminals.<sup>82</sup> Patel had an association with these so-called criminals between 1902 and 1913 when he was a district pleader in Godhra and Borsad. One such person was Gulab Raja of Singlav village. His offence had been committed in the neighbouring Baroda State but he had alienated the police and the Bania community in his village. He once entered into a dispute with a Bania and, given his unpopularity with the community and police, was arrested. He approached Patel to defend him,

but was convicted. Patel took his case, feeble though it was, and accused the judicial machinery of corruption. His client, however, became a more hardened criminal after he served the sentence. As a lawyer Patel's contacts in the area were widespread and his involvement in a movement was likely to bear some positive result in terms of extensive mobilisation of support. He could not, however, start a movement from the top.

In September 1923, a special punitive tax had been imposed (Rs.240,074) on the people of Borsad to pay for the expenditure that the Government was going to incur for the additional police that were required in the area as a result of an increase in the incidents of dacoity, murder and robbery. Anglo-Indian papers alleged that Gandhi's teachings had accelerated criminality among the people. In 1919, the Collector of Kaira had punished Banias of Sarajedi and Nadiad. Now it was the turn of the whole adult population of Borsad. Vallabhbhai Patel pointed out that dacoits like Gulab Raja flourished long before Gandhi came on the scene.<sup>83</sup> After the special Congress meeting at Delhi in September, where no-changers had yielded to the Swarajists, Patel went to Ahmedabad and met local leaders who appraised him of the Borsad problem. He called a meeting of the Gujarat Provincial Congress Committee and Mohanlal Pandya and Ravi Shankar Vyas (a Vadadra Brahmin and Arya Samajist) were assigned the task of conducting a village to village enquiry into the matter. The facts were reported to Patel who perused them thoroughly and questioned his two investigators so persistently that one of them, Ravi Shankar Vyas, resolved never again to work for such a strict and stiff person as Vallabhbhai Patel. However, when in his speeches, Patel commended the report, Ravi Shankar appreciated the rigorous cross-examination that he had been subjected to.<sup>84</sup> The Committee reported events and happenings leading up to the imposition of additional police for which the taluka was paying the price. For seven years Borsad and Anand taluka had been subjected to many acts of violence committed by an outlaw Babar Deva, a Patanvadia of Golel. He had collected

a big gang and it was said he had murdered about twenty-five people including his wife's mother who had tried to betray him to the police. Another outlaw, a Muslim called Ali from Borsad village, had also been pestering the people and had been arrested; but, in a deal with the police he was released to enable him to lead them to Babar Deva. The plan of sending a thief to catch a thief did not materialise. Ali had been supplied with weapons by the police and he had used them for more acts of crime. To absolve themselves of any blame in failing to catch the outlaws, the police were sending reports that suggested that people of the villages were in league with the criminals. The Government based its decision to impose more police on the villages on these reports and ordered the costs to be realised from the villagers, who, they stated, were guilty of complicity. This was done first in two villages, Khadana and Johan, in April 1921. As the problem persisted, the police and the tax were extended to the whole taluka. The police sought to aid the Government by blaming the people. The people blamed the police for being hand in glove with the criminals and sharing their booty. In the course of his investigations Patel came into possession of evidence that suggested that the police force had been instructed by its Superintendent in the case of Ali to turn a blind eye to his offences because he was assisting them to arrest Babar Deva.<sup>85</sup> He also procured an official letter from the Mamlatdar's office in which the Mamlatdar advised the Collector that the people of Borsad were too poor to pay the punitive tax. This letter had been obtained by Patel's youngest brother Kashibhai. On 1 December 1923, when the Congress Provincial Committee met at Borsad, Patel reported that his Enquiry Committee was satisfied that the proposed tax was unjustified, that the government had not provided people with the protection it should have and instead had falsely accused the people of being in league with the dacoits. The people were, therefore, justified in refusing to pay the tax and would bear whatever consequences might follow. In subsequent meetings he laid stress on the

fact that it was not for the sake of saying the Rs.2-7-0 per person that the no-tax campaign was being waged. The main point was that the Government had no right to insult the people by suggesting that they were the companions of thieves and dacoits.<sup>86</sup>

Police and tax officials went ahead with raids and collections.<sup>87</sup> The struggle lasted for five weeks and ended on 8 January 1924. Patel had taken pains to collect evidence to support his charges against the police. The charges against the government were published in all the newspapers.<sup>88</sup> The Governor of Bombay, Sir Leslie Wilson, who had taken over from Sir George Lloyd in December and was anxious not to begin with a tarnished image, had the matter investigated and sent the Home Member, Sir Maurice Hayward, to Borsad on 4 January 1924, to ascertain the exact nature of the happenings in the taluka. The villagers made a representation to support their case against the proposed levy and to prove that some police officers were guilty of corruption. Ultimately, on 7 January 1924, the Government of Bombay dropped the proposals to deploy an extra police force in the area and to levy extra charges.<sup>89</sup>

Organisation in this movement was interesting. The headquarters were at Ras from where the satyagraha was conducted in eighteen centres. The Commander was Mohanlal Pandya and the local leaders, through whom the day-to-day touring, pamphleteering and lectures were delivered, were Darbar Gopaldas, Ravjibhai Nathabhai Patel, Ravjibhai Manibhai Patel, Phulchand Bapuji Shah, Shivajibhai Ashahbhai Patel, Bhogilal Nathabhai Choksey, Chhotalal Vyas and Gokuldas Talati.<sup>90</sup> At the 21 November meeting when the taluka Congress was being planned it was decided that each village would send one representative per hundred persons and all village activities would be supervised through these delegates. The delegates were to be the 'worthy people of the village'. These leaders went from village to village telling people not to pay the new levy and to resist attachment of property by local police officers. The leaders, as it can be seen from the above list

of names, were either Patidars or Vanias or members of the other socially and economically well-placed communities and groups. They appealed to the Baraiyas and Patanvadias of the villages by recalling their antecedents as jagirdars and thakurs. Patidars who dominated some villages like Golel allowed attachment of their property purely as a response to the call from Patidar brethren. Vanias in the area supported Gandhian leaders as a group because Gandhi had propagated the setting up of cow-protection societies in the course of his constructive programme and was encouraging the tenets of their way of life. Patel appealed to all these groups and addressed them as the elevated sections of Gujarat on whom the prosperity of the Province depended. Meetings were often held community-wise. At combined meetings people sat in community groups. Patel's affinity with the higher socio-economic groups and lack of interest in landless, underdeveloped peasant communities was quite apparent to the discerning eye. Patanvadias and Baraiyas who had turned dacoits were more sympathetically treated by him than the downtrodden Ujliparaj and Kaliparaj in the area. To the former two he made appeals based on their high Kshatriya caste status and their hitherto prosperous jagirdari and thakur background, and expressed faith that the waywardness of some of them was a temporary aberration caused by economic necessity and imperialist callousness. In the case of Ujliparaj and Kaliparaj, he entertained no hope of their upliftment and emancipation. He accused them of being ignorant and devoid of community spirit and felt that any efforts towards reforming them would be futile.<sup>91</sup> There was also an element of intimidation on the part of Patidar leaders. In Virol they held a meeting and passed a resolution that whoever helped government servants in their work of attachment or bought or handled auctioned articles would be fined Rs.101 and excommunicated. Other communities like Dharalas (including watchmen, Ravania and Pagis) Dheds, Bhangis, Barbers, Khumbars were all required to pass resolutions to stay away from auctions.<sup>92</sup>

A few observations about Patel emerge from these satya-

graha campaigns. They help in assessing Patel's political role at this stage, albeit at the provincial level, and also indicate how political aspirants could make the link from the local to the provincial and then to the national scene. Kaira, Nagpur and Borsad were all designed towards harnessing local political problems to the national political activity which Gandhi had made possible for ambitious politicians. On his own Patel would have had difficulty in making the jump from the local to the national stage. These satyagraha movements helped him to play supervisor and organiser of local talents and thereby cause attention to be turned towards him. He formed links with the local men and after Kaira, which elevated him to the special position in Gandhi's camp, he dealt with local leaders with a feeling of superiority. The local links were based on his community ties and professional connections in these areas. To Patidars of Borsad were now added Patanvadias and Baraiyas, thus increasing the supporters of Congress and Patel in Kaira district. But, Patel had difficulty in procuring the support of castes or groups that were socially and economically lower than these. In this he was quite un-Gandhian.

Patel's alliances with other provincial leaders were also made at this stage. The Nagpur Flag Satyagraha brought Patel and Rajendra Prasad together in a political partnership based on a natural alliance. Both had relatively privileged, rural origins and both were associated with Gandhi without being disciples. Their position and style was conditioned by these two factors. Rajendra Prasad wrote of Patel later:

It was during this visit to Nagpur that I came closer to Sardar Patel....It was here that we had greater opportunities for closer contacts which led to the beginning of an intimacy which was to last till his death....His gravity, efficiency and qualities of leadership inspired in me deep regard which was to increase with greater association. 93

Rajagopalachari, who was with Patel in trying to diminish the influence of the Swarajists, also developed a rapport with Patel at this stage.

It would be erroneous while analysing Patel's role even at this point to think that Patel and Gandhi had the same political goals much less the same political styles. Judith Brown has underplayed Patel's role in her analysis of the Kaira Satyagraha.<sup>94</sup> In fact Patel was indispensable to the movement even though it was carried out under the aegis of Gandhian ideology. In 1917, Patel was better known in Kaira district than Gandhi. In 1923 too, at the time of the Borsad campaign, Patel could boast of his own links with the local community even while the platform from which he addressed his workers was that of the Gandhian Congress.

Features of Patel's style surface at various points in the progress of the agitations. Patel's hallmarks were, concentrating on ends rather than means, coordinating somewhat limited grass roots activity rather than participating in it himself and emphasizing political changes rather than social revolution. They won him the support of Patidars, Vantias and other privileged groups; but they also brought him the antagonism of socialist groups which had begun to organise themselves during the 1920s. Related to this was his idea of unity - which was one of the pragmatic coming together of like-minded persons or groups for achieving specific objectives. It did not mean a coming together of one and all for the achievement of all encompassing visionary socio-economic goals. His earlier views on unity are expressed at the family level and hold good in his approach to the resolution of political and social conflict. On the personal front he talked a lot about the advantage of unity, as a policy. Advising his daughter when she was evidently having problems with her sister-in-law, Patel said that it was natural to be dis-united but to expose disunity to the outside world was a blunder. The lessons of give and take, negotiation and compromise, that one could learn in a family set up could come in very useful in dealing with the world outside. Quite apart from increasing bitterness and reducing harmony, discord in the family (or in a party) could be exploited by outsiders.<sup>95</sup> In 1929, his daughter-in-law got meningitis. Patel requested

his daughter, Manibehn, to treat her sister-in-law well and thereby contribute to harmony in the family.<sup>96</sup> Patel had made expediency his watchword in private and public life. He advised his son Dahyabhai against making enemies and said it was likely to bring him long term disadvantages.<sup>97</sup> Vallabhbhai wanted Manibehn and Dahyabhai to have good relations between them and tried to put some pressure on them but he could not impose his will on either of them. Dahyabhai had difficulties with other relations too and Vallabhbhai suggested that he should stay away from them rather than clash with relatives repeatedly.<sup>98</sup> Vallabhbhai had his own problems with relatives and seems to have learnt to look at such matters with considerable objectivity. His relations with his brother Vithalbai were governed by such an outlook. He was always cautious about keeping the family image and contained disagreements within the group. He did this with the party organisation too and wanted discontentment and conflict to be kept under control. Disagreements did not leave him unruffled, but to worry unduly about them was in his view a dissipation of energy. Rebuking Dahyabhai for getting agitated about the unseemly behaviour of his cousin and aunt in family affairs, Vallabhbhai said that getting caught up in quarrels dissipated one's energy. 'Although it is difficult to rise above it, it is worthwhile to try to do so'. It remains to be seen whether he was able to do so himself and whether, on the political scene, conflicts were always treated with the same magnanimity he was advocating to his family in their personal lives. At what cost disagreements were contained within the group will be observed in the next few chapters.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER I

- 1 David Pocock, Kanbi and Patidar, A Study of the Patidar Community of Gujarat (Oxford 1972) ; David Hardiman, Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat. Kheda District 1917-1934 (Delhi 1981) ; Chandrasekhar Shastri, Rashtra Nirmata Sardar Patel (Guj.) (Bombay 1963) p.223 ; R.E. Enthoven, The Tribes and Castes of Bombay, Vol.II (Bombay 1922) p.134.
- 2 Alice W.Clark, "Marriage Investment, Credit Networking and the Demography of Central Gujarat 1825-1905". Paper presented at meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, Chicago, 1982.
- 3 P.D.Saggi (ed) , Life and Work of Vallabhbhai Patel, (Bombay).
- 4 Pocock, op.cit. p.52.
- 5 K.L.Gillion, Ahmedabad, A Study in Indian Urban History (California 1968) p.163.
- 6 Mukutbehari Varma, Loh Purush Sardar Patel (Delhi 1970); Chhaganlal Joshi, Sardarini Atmeeyata (Guj) (Gandhinagar 1976) ; Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Centenary Souvenir (Delhi 1975) ; Chandrashekar Shastri, op.cit.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Chandrashekar Shastri, op.cit.
- 9 Dadasahab Mavlankar, Article on the occasion of Vallabhbhai's seventieth birthday quoted in Narhari Parikh, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Vol.1, p.23.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 The Shillidy incident and other municipal matters have been thoroughly discussed in Devavrat N.Pathak and Pravin Seth, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel from Civil to National Leadership (Ahmedabad 1980). Also File 49, Patel Papers, Navajivan, Ahmedabad).
- 12 Gillion, op.cit.
- 13 Interview with V.Shankar, Patel's Secretary from 1946-1950, at Teen Murti Marg, New Delhi, September 1977.
- 14 The Commissioner of Gujarat had declared unlawful a resolution of the Ahmedabad Municipality to continue to maintain, manage and administer the primary schools and prohibited it from doing so as long as this order remained in force. Bombay Chronicle, 12 January 1922, p.10.
- 15 Ibid.

- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Pathak & Seth, op.cit. 326-331.
- 18 D.V.Tahmankar, Sardar Patel (London 1970) p.63.
- 19 Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. 14, (Publications Division, New Delhi, 1965) p.155.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ibid. p.185.
- 22 Ibid. p.184.
- 23 Indulal Yajnik gives a vivid description of Vallabhbhai Patel before the latter abandoned his European attire, and sums it up by saying 'He seemed to be 125 per cent European'. Indulal Yajnik, Atmakatha, Vol.2. (Guj) (Ahmedabad 1955) pp.21-2 ; Ravjibhai Patel who also participated in the movement, met Vallabhbhai Patel for first time in Nadiad at the residence of Gukuldas Talati. His European clothes left an imprint on Ravjibhai's mind too. He was taken aback when for touring the village, Vallabhbhai suddenly appeared in the traditional dhoti and kurta. Ravjibhai Patel, Hindna Sardar (Guj) (Ahmedabad 1963 ) pp. 7 and 8.
- 24 Gandhi to Collector, 26 January 1918, CW ,14 , p.215.
- 25 Bombay Chronicle, 2 and 5 April 1918.
- 26 CW, 14 , p.307.
- 27 Parikh, op.cit. pp.74-5.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Ibid. p.75.
- 30 CW, 14 , p.341. See also speech at Karamsad, p.308.
- 31 Ibid. p.347
- 32 Bombay Chronicle, 18 April 1918.
- 33 Ibid. 24 April 1918.
- 34 Willingdon to Chelmsford, 11/12 June 1918. Willingdon Papers, Mss.Eur. F.93/1, I.O.L.
- 35 M.K.Gandhi, An Autobiography, The Story of my Experiments With Truth, (Ahmedabad 1927) p.267.
- 36 Bombay Chronicle, 20 April 1918.

- 37 Speech at Nadiad, 29 June 1918, CW, 14, pp.460-61.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Gujarati businessmen and millowners recount how they could scarcely ever refuse Patel's requests for party funds. He knew their financial commitments, bank accounts and other details and they could give no excuses that he could not get around somehow.
- 40 Yajnik, Atmakatha, (Guj) Vol.2, pp.309-332.
- 41 Bombay Chronicle, 22 December 1921.
- 42 Ibid. 30 December 1921, p.11.
- 43 Ibid. 10 December 1921 and 9 February 1922, p.8.
- 44 Ibid. 12 March 1923, p.8.
- 45 Ibid. 28 May 1923, p.6.
- 46 Four days after Vithalbhai addressed a gathering for Council Entry, Vallabhbhai addressed one in the same place contradicting all that his brother had said. Times of India 21 May 1923, p.12.
- 47 Vallabhbhai Patel to Jawaharlal Nehru, 24 June 1923, Jawaharlal Nehru Papers, NMML.
- 48 Indian Annual Register, 1923, Vol.II, p.176.
- 49 Times of India, 3 May 1923, p.8.
- 50 Ibid. 24 May 1923, p.8.
- 51 Ibid. 8 May 1923, p.8.
- 52 Ibid, 2 June 1923, p.12.
- 53 Patel to Nehru, 24 June 1923, JN Papers.
- 54 Times of India, 20 June 1923. p.10.
- 55 Patel to Mahadev Desai, Nagpur File, Patel Papers.
- 56 Ibid.
- 57 Patel to Nehru, 1 August 1923, JN Papers.
- 58 Ibid.
- 59 When the satyagraha ended, a fresh controversy began and part of it pertained to the question of who began these negotiations. The Government of C.P. insisted that the Patel brothers instigated them and particularly asked for an inter-

view with the Governor, Sir Frank Sly. Vallabhbhai described this as the petty-mindedness of those that indulged in these trivialities, while making it clear that it was the Chief Secretary who both suggested and arranged an interview with the Governor. He added: 'To me how the interview was brought about is of little consequence....Personally I would not even wait for a formal invitation if I felt assured of a genuine desire for mutual understanding'. Ibid. Nagpur File, Patel Papers.

60 Vallabhbhai Patel's statement, 16 August 1923, Bombay Chronicle, 17 August 1923, p.10. Vallabhbhai Patel had also given his assurance and the Government was aware that 'this assurance is a move in the game'. Report of the D.M.Nagpur, 2 August 1923, Home (Pol) File No.280/1923, N.A.I.

61 Nagpur File, Patel Papers.

62 Vallabhbhai Patel was not pleased about Vithalbai's announcement of victory in Bombay for it had been expressly agreed at the negotiation stage that no statements were to be issued until the movement was formally declared over. 'Had Vithalbai not been indiscreet in Bombay, I might have left here on the 22nd alongwith the prisoners'. Parikh, op.cit. p.209.

63 Telegrams from Secretary, Government of India, Home Dept, to Secretary, Government of CP, 25 August 1923, L/P&J/6/1794.

64 Ibid. Telegram from Government of CP to Secretary to Government of India, Home Dept., 26 August 1923.

65 Ibid. Telegram, Secretary, Government of India, to Secretary, Government of CP, 1 September 1923.

66 The general feeling was 'that CP Government showed too great anxiety to compromise at any cost'. Note by G.H.W. Davis, Dy.Secy, Home Dept, Government of India, 12 October 1923, Home (Pol) File. 280/1923.

67 Ibid. Viceroy's comment, 18 October 1923.

68 Telegram, Secretary, Government of India, Home Dept, to Government of CP, 1 September 1923, L/P&J/6/1794.

69 Ibid. Minutes by M.Seton, 13 December 1923. Secy of States Council Minutes of Resolution of Government of CP.

70 Extracts from Central Province' newspapers, enclosed with CP Government's resolution of 1 October 1923 in Government of India (Home) letter No.5 of 1923 to Secy of States, 6 December 1923, L/P&J/6/1794.

71 Ibid.

- 72 Ibid.
- 73 Secret Despatch No.3 of 1923 from Govt. of India (Home) (Pol) to Secretary of State for India, 31 May 1923, ibid.
- 74 Bombay Chronicle 2 June 1923, p.7 ; 5 June 1923, pp 7 and 8.
- 75 Davis' Note of 12 October 1923, Home (Pol) File-280/1923.
- 76 Ibid. Note by W.M.Hailey, 16 October 1923.
- 77 Bombay Chronicle, 17 September 1923, p.7.
- 78 Jammalal Bajaj to Vallabhbbhai Patel 18 August 1924, File 8, Jammalal Bajaj Papers, NMML. The progress of Gandhians in the Maratha region of CP was limited. Congress reliance on Bajaj to counter Swarajists and particularly Tilakites' efforts through Marwaris and mercantile support was not enough to weaken the Swarajists' stronghold. The limited success Bajaj achieved ended when he moved to the national Congress scene. Moonje then reestablished his hold and after the 1923 elections maintained his strength over professional groups, Brahmins and others until M.Abhyankar, the barrister from Wardha, challenged it and also brought about, in Nagpur at any rate, a rapprochement between the Swarajists and Gandhian Congressmen under his own leadership. D.E.U.Baker, Changing Political Leadership in CP and Berar 1919-1939. (Delhi 1979) pp.73-83.
- 79 Bajaj to Patel, 18 August 1924. Bajaj Papers.
- 80 Satyagraha in Borsad, Mahadev Desai's article, Bombay Chronicle, 19 December 1923, p.6.
- 81 Patel's address to Borsad Taluka Conference, 2 December 1923, Young India, Vol.V., No.49, 6 December 1923, pp.409-411.
- 82 Manibehn Patel, Borsad Satyagraha (Guj) (Navajivan 1972) p.12. See Hardiman, op.cit. for analysis of rivalries between Baraiyas, Patanvadias and other peasant groups.
- 83 Satyagraha in Borsad, Mahadev Desai's article, Bombay Chronicle, 19 December 1923, p.6.
- 84 Ravjibhai Patel's account of meeting of taluka men and government officials on 4 January 1924, Manibehn Patel, op.cit. p.12.
- 85 Ibid. p.16.
- 86 Ibid, pp.22,37,39.
- 87 For details Manibehn Patel, Borsad Satyagraha and Shiwaram Kshirsagar, The Indomitable Sardar and the Triumph of Borsad (Vallabh Vidyanagar 1973).

- 88 Times of India, 22 December 1923, p.12.
- 89 Ibid, 8 January 1924, p.8. Gandhi believed that 'this satyagraha is in many ways superior to the Kheda satyagraha as well as to the Ahmedabad satyagraha. In Borsad satyagraha by itself has totally succeeded.' CW, 25, p.382, See also Gandhi's praises of Patel, Bombay Chronicle, 29 March 1924, p.10.
- 90 Kshirsagar, op.cit. p.46
- 91 Vallabhbhai Patel to Narhari Parikh, 15 February 1924, G.M.Nandurkar (ed.) Sardarshirina Patro. Sathiyō Sambandhiyō ane snehione (Guj) Vol.5 (Navajivan, Ahmedabad 1978).
- 92 Satyagraha Bulletin, 22 December 1923, Kshirsagar, op. cit. p.89.
- 93 Rajendra Prasad, Autobiography (Bombay 1957) p.200.
- 94 Judith Brown, Gandhi's Rise to Power (Cambridge 1972).
- 95 Vallabhbhai Patel to Manibehn Patel, 24 October 1923, Patel Papers.
- 96 Ibid, 15 October 1929.
- 97 Vallabhbhai Patel to Dahyabhai Patel, 6 December 1930, ibid.
- 98 Ibid. 11 October 1933.
- 99 Ibid. 4 July 1934.

## CHAPTER II

### CONSOLIDATING THE PROVINCIAL BASE 1928

Bardoli was the spring board from which Patel was able to enter the national scene. The Bardoli satyagraha of 1928 made Patel a national leader not because of any particular features in the satyagraha, but because of its timing. The general political scene during the period that immediately preceded it and Patel's position in that scene gave Bardoli its importance. This scene was related to the activities of non-Gandhian groups in Congress (like Swarajists), of non-Congress groups (like Socialists) and of the Government. The connection between the wider political scenario and Patel was provided by Gandhi. Soon after his release from jail in February 1924, Gandhi was called upon to give his views on the political situation and particularly on the question of council entry.<sup>1</sup> His commendations of Patel and of Gujarat were made in superlative terms.<sup>2</sup> Patel had been working towards just that. The satyagraha campaigns, which from the wider view point were mere side shows, did give Patel an edge over other provincial leaders by obtaining for him political recognition in Gandhi's eyes and a power base to rely upon and revert to whenever required. At this time Gandhi needed to strengthen his hold over Congress after an absence of two years, and Patel needed to strengthen his hold over Gandhi. To do this he had to assist Gandhi in establishing control over Congress. In May 1924, Patel took Gandhi to Ahmedabad to rest and also to appraise him of the whole political situation.

To honour Gandhi upon his release, Patel urged Gujarat Congressmen to present Gandhi with a purse of 19 lakhs of rupees for the constructive programme. The response to this appeal was remarkable. Donations came in at the office of the Gujarat Prantik Samiti everyday. Gujaratis living in areas as remote as South Africa and Japan contributed to the fund. Abbas Tyabji, Darbar Gopaldas Desai, Devchandbhai

Parekh (General Secretary of the Kathiawar Political Congress) and Fulchand Shah toured different parts of Kathiawar; and Vallabhbhai Patel and Manilal Kothari went to Mansa, Kadi, Patan and other important areas of Gujarat for collection work. Sums contributed varied from Rs.10 to over Rs. 10,000. In Bardoli and Borsad talukas collection work was particularly brisk. At the Gujarat Political Conference held at Borsad in May 1924, Kaira district and Vallabhbhai Patel were praised for their valiant spirit. Commending the people of Kaira for the supply of volunteers for the Nagpur Satyagraha and for the victory at Borsad, the Conference led by Vallabhbhai Patel, Tyabji, Mahadev Desai, Indulal Yajnik and Manilal Kothari put before the people definite lines for the execution of the constructive programme as laid down by Gandhi. Meanwhile, Gandhi was with Vallabhbhai Patel at his Bardoli Ashram until July 1924. In June 1924, at the AICC meeting at Ahmedabad, the Gandhi/Patel team put forward four resolutions calling upon Congress to express the extent of its faith in Gandhi's leadership. These resolutions sought the introduction of a spinning franchise, the disciplining of Congress workers who did not follow instructions, and the strengthening of the five boycotts. These were all recognised as Gandhian trademarks. The resolutions and the method of their passage in the Committee were seen as a triumph for Gandhi even while Swarajists stuck to their own programmes. Patel's firm support of Gandhi in Ahmedabad earned him the title of a 'blind follower of Gandhi'; for Patel it was part of a political course.

From Ahmedabad began the process of handing over to the Swarajists the political wing of the Congress while Gandhi took charge of the constructive wing. The Calcutta Pact (November 1924) followed by the Belgaum resolution (December 1924) ratifying the pact, followed by the Patna AICC (September 1925) decision, followed by Kanpur (December 1925) were all aimed at reducing the tensions within the Congress executive by granting enough authority to the Swarajists to carry on their council policy. Some no-changers resented

this; other more shrewd members of Gandhi's camp forged ahead in the alternative spheres of activities.

Between 1924 and 1928 Congress is described by Narhari Parikh as going through a 'depression' and by Tomlinson as leading a 'schizophrenic existence'.<sup>3</sup> Having given Swarajists a free hand in political matters Gandhi concentrated on the constructive programme. The All-India Spinners Association was started and although Gandhi kept reminding his followers and those Congressmen in particular areas that had been politically active, that the constructive programme was the real national work, he could not keep an organisation of nearly two lakh members in fighting trim simply by having them spin, weave and fight the evil of drink. Patel had reverted to the Municipality, and also taken to constructive work. But, followers who had thought that they could make a full time activity of political agitation could not be convinced. Recourse to spinning was no substitute for active politics; specially when council-wallahs were offering alternative political activity. Clearly, Patel faced heavy odds in this period. It was difficult to create activity when the supporters were disillusioned and a stimulating cause was missing.

The break in this low key activity of no-changers was provided, as was mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, by a number of factors related to the wider political scene. These factors are significant because they reinforced Patel's stand against opposition groups (including the government). First of all, the position of the Swarajists needs examination. Their election methods and results in Bombay Province alone provided enough evidence of (1) the disunity within the Party and (2) its increasing parochialism and communalism. A hunt for unity between the warring wings of Congress began by the end of 1926. At a public meeting in Bombay in December 1926, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu plauded the pleas for unity among Swarajists and Congressmen which were being made by members of the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee. In typically poetic language she pointed out that it was for

Congress leaders to recall the Swarajists into their fold. Moderate opinion in Congress, however, did not think that leaders like Patel would compromise their stand. Commenting on Sarojini Naidu's use of poetic language - 'Come back ye children who are exiled' - to get Swarajists and alienated leaders back into the Congress, the liberal newspaper Leader wrote:

But can the Congress say this so long as its policy is dictated by one or two individuals who have been frustrating all attempts at unity and have made their institution a purely party organisation which has been pursuing a policy of intolerance and exclusiveness. 4

The reference was to leaders like Patel.

At the provincial level, the differences between constitutionalists and agitators continued, with each side vying with the other to establish the superiority of its methods in resolving conflicts between the people and the ruling power. In rural Gujarat, the measures of their respective strength was the degree to which they could safeguard peasant interests.<sup>5</sup> Land revenue, its settlement, increases and reductions were all matters handled by the bureaucracy according to regulations. Constitutionalists in the Bombay Legislative Council had been demanding a review of these regulations and, pending such a review, had suggested that all settlements should cease. The Government of Bombay rejected such demands and paved the way for those who favoured agitation to display their strength in the one field in which leaders could make much political capital - land revenue.<sup>6</sup>

The other front on which leaders like Patel felt threatened was that of the socialists and communists. In the mid-1920s organised efforts were afoot to spread communism in India and infuse socialism into the Congress.<sup>7</sup> Both movements caused concern to Congress leaders who were struggling hard to keep the organisation in their grip. Although socialists' inroads were not of such magnitude as to cause general alarm, some areas were considered better targets than others.

Bombay Province was particularly vulnerable to leftist propaganda.<sup>8</sup> Happily for Congress the Bombay Government was equally concerned about 'the Communist problem' and was exploring ways of acquiring powers to deal with it.<sup>9</sup>

Within the Congress organisation some prominent leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru were actively propagating the adoption of a socialist creed for Congress. Their efforts led to resolutions being introduced at the Madras session of Congress in December 1927, in which several communists participated : S.A.Dange, Muzaffar Ahmed, S.V.Ghate, K.N.Joglekar, R.S.Nimbkar and Benjamin Spratt. Congress was criticised by leftists from now on for its 'middle class or babu politics' and urged to orient its policies solely towards the masses.<sup>10</sup>

Threats and drawbacks on one side and new opportunities on the other gave the no-changers a chance to show their organisational skill. A natural disaster helped in restoring some of the Congress's lost image and giving Patel a chance to show his acumen at speedy provincial mobilisation. In July 1927 Gujarat had very heavy rain resulting in floods. Ahmedabad, Baroda and other towns were affected. The worst hit area was Kaira district which experienced acute shortages of food and other supplies. Patel, who was still President of the Ahmedabad Municipality and of the Gujarat PCC, got to work immediately. The provincial workers that had helped in earlier satyagraha campaigns came forward and organised themselves in batches functioning from centres that had been set up by Patel to dispatch relief to the badly hit areas. With financial assistance from magnates in Ahmedabad and Bombay, Patel procured supplies and sent them to the trouble spots. After the floods resettlement of peasants was undertaken through existing Congress Committees. Employment, loans, medical facilities, shelter and seeds were all provided at subsidised rates. Gandhi offered to come and help. But Patel turned down his offer:

If you wish to give us an opportunity to show how well we have learnt what you have taught us and how we are

putting into practice the training that you have been giving to us for the past ten years, do not come. 11

Gandhi made appeals for funds through Navajivan; for the rest, Patel managed the entire operation. Once again Gandhi commended him for organisation and service:

Shri Patel is a seasoned soldier and has no other occupation than that of service. He has got an efficient agency of workers under him. Donors need therefore have no fear of wasteful expenses or misappropriation. 12

For Patel it was useful to be able to work in Gandhi's name but without Gandhi's active involvement. It gave him recognition and enabled him to strengthen associations with provincial workers who in turn looked upon their repeated association with Patel as a good political investment. Along with Patel they too received due credit from the general Congress organisation and from Provincial and Central Legislatures for the training and discipline they had learnt under Gandhi's tutelage and Patel's direction. It must be remembered that at a time when Provincial Congress workers and volunteers in Gujarat were demoralised, <sup>as</sup> a result of the suspension of non-cooperation, activity that shone some limelight upon them was likely to be welcomed.

The Bardoli agitation thus had a political background that was as important as the particular issues and incidents of the movement. It was also not an isolated incident of protest against revenue increase. Some talukas of Kaira district were settled in 1923-24 and increases of 27 percent in Borsad and 25 percent in Anand, and reductions of 7 percent in Thasra and 8 percent in Nadiad and Kapadvanj, had been recommended. Protests had come in from several Kaira villages. This had opened up the age-old controversy about what is the best ground for determining land revenue - rent or other considerations relating to profits and environmental changes and so on.<sup>13</sup> In the 1920s this debate was carried on by F.G.H. Anderson, the Revenue Settlement Commissioner of Bombay, who supported the theory of rental statistics, and H.L. Painter, the Commissioner of the Northern

Division, the supporter of the theory of 'other considerations', the latter also being supported by R.M. Maxwell, the Collector of Kaira. Anderson and Painter were the two typical personifications of the support and rejection of the theory of rental statistics. This dispute among the officials also came into play in the Bardoli land revenue dispute.

Bardoli taluka and Valod peta in the Surat district contained 137 villages over an area of 222 square miles. The flat country in this area, traversed by three big rivers - Tapti, Purna and Mindhole - had a population of about 87,000 most of whom were agriculturists. The expanse of flat land was interrupted only by the tributaries of the three rivers. In fact, the rivers divided the entire area into three main compartments, the north, the middle and the south, without causing any physical differences between these divisions. Soil differences existed between the eastern and western parts of the taluka and peta, the western half being endowed with rich black soil with an extraordinary capacity for moisture-retention. On the whole, the soil was fertile in the entire region which was also wooded with luxuriant mango groves. In the decades before the 1920s most of the cultivators had concentrated increasingly on cotton because it was a profitable crop involving low costs and minimal trouble. Bagayat cultivation, requiring intensive labour and more money, was abandoned even at the cost of good wells lying idle. The cotton crop was also encouraged by adequate road and rail communication : Bardoli-Supa Road and Tapti Valley Railway improved connections with the trading centres, Bardoli and Navsari. There were local facilities, moreover, for ginning and pressing, at Bardoli, Madhi, Valod, Kanalchod and Buhari : the cotton was then exported because there was no local cotton mill. The area of land under cotton cultivation increased from 25,000 acres in 1894 to 40,099 in 1923-24. In contrast, the land under jowar, 27,554 acres in 1894, went down to 18,642 acres in 1923-24.<sup>14</sup>

The most hardworking and enterprising cultivators in the taluka were the Leva Kanbis (Patidars) and the Matias. The land was cultivated by owners with the help of 'halis'. The women folk of the Matias also helped in the field. The contrast between the fields of Kanbis and those of Muslims and Kaliparaj was distinctly noticeable and was a result of the general unwillingness of the latter to work too hard. In Valod peta, Kaliparaj, Chodras, Brahmins and Muslims cultivated their fields.

The size of the holdings of agriculturists and calculations made on the basis of the family size and population and their standard of living gives some indication of the economic and social conditions in the taluka. Shirin Mehta gives a detailed account of all these features in her book on Bardoli.<sup>15</sup> In a forthcoming article I have shown that the section of the peasantry that was directly affected by the increase in assessment was neither as numerically large nor as economically destitute as the agitation made it out to be. I have analysed the socio-economic nature of the taluka and of Congress support to show exactly how far the Bardoli movement could be called a truly peasant movement.<sup>16</sup> Existing literature on the subject differs in the emphasis it places on the basis for analysing the peasantry. Exclusive categories based on 'class', modes of production or primordality do not make the task of studying Indian peasant societies easier. Certain features of the Bardoli agitation are of more importance here than quantitative details of the peasantry which have been analysed by other writers.<sup>17</sup>

The settlement that was due to be revised comprised 137 government villages (one village less than in the earlier settlement because Chandraya village of Valod peta had been included in the village limits of Sikar). The factual details of the ground on which the government enhanced the assessment and the arguments put forward by those who recommended the increase and the reasons given by the Committee appointed on behalf of the cultivators for rejecting the Government's recommendations are all recorded in the comprehensive accounts

of the Bardoli satyagraha that have been written in English and Gujarati.<sup>18</sup> The broad facts of the case need to be recorded here, greater stress being laid on the movement and its political implications.

Proposals were submitted by Jayakar, the Assistant Settlement Officer, for the second revision settlement of the area on 30 June 1925. The physical features of the taluka and peta and its general agricultural improvements were described. Some of the conclusions reached about economic conditions and change were similar to those already set out above. It was felt that the climate was healthy and the rain sufficient, wealth had increased, roads had improved and consequently the traders were more active than before. Prices of food grains had risen; cotton had become an increasingly better source of income for the agriculturists. Farmers owned more cattle and farm workers got better wages. Prices of land had risen and it was observed that the assessment represented a steadily decreasing proportion of the rent. Most important of all, the price of the total products of the taluka represented a clear increase of 15,08,077 rupees over the price of the products during the previous settlement. The Settlement Officer recommended an increase of 25 per cent over the existing rates of assessment; twentythree villages were elevated to a higher group so that the total increase came to 30.59 per cent. The old assessment was Rs.5,14,762 and the new Rs.6,72,273.<sup>19</sup>

The Commissioner of Settlement, F.G.R. Anderson, disagreed with much of what the Settlement Officer had said. He did not accept the groupings of the villages and made new ones based on the differences in sale and rental value between dry crop and rice lands. In the Revenue Department resolution it was stated that Anderson had rejected Jayakar's groupings because the latter 'had not taken sufficiently into account the statistics of sales and leases and rental values which he had collected'. In view of the great differences in the sale and rental values of dry crops and rice lands,

the Commissioner of Settlements had proposed entirely different groupings for these two categories.<sup>20</sup> Anderson recommended an increase of 29.03 per cent based on rental value (as against Jayakar's idea of the gross value of produce), which, Anderson asserted, 'is a fallacious starting point - for consideration of increased cost of production could nullify the whole argument . Therefore, settlement proposals based on rental and not gross produce and prices are the required thing'.<sup>21</sup> The government finally recommended their own figures, an increase of 21.97 per cent throughout the taluka, and passed orders on 19 July 1927 that the new rates should be introduced during the current revenue year 1926-27 and levied from the revenue year 1927-28, guaranteed for a period of thirty years. It was stated that all petitions to the contrary made by the people had been considered and the order had been carefully looked into.<sup>22</sup>

The Bardoli taluka Congress Committee appointed a sub-Committee to prepare a case for the peasants of Bardoli. It sought to answer the arguments for enhancement put forward by Jayakar and Anderson. It was stated that Bardoli had already paid enough in revenue for the rail and road benefits. The factor of increase in population applied only to four or five villages that were trade-oriented and semi-urban and not rural. The people had more milch cattle than before in order to supplement the waning income from farming; plough cattle, moreover, had decreased. Other manifestations of good living, such as 'pucca houses' and 'imported rice and refined sugar' were all obtained by incurring debts with the sowkar.

The sub-committee conceded that there had been a rise in the prices of food grains, but contended that the figures were for abnormal years 1914-23. The people contended that Jayakar had not actually inspected the people's representations or the actual facts contained therein. His report was based on statistics collected by talatis and, it was alleged, the economic conditions of the people had not formed part of

the inquiry. Anderson, for his part, had based his evaluation on statistics of rent, but, the people's committee stated, had used erroneous figures: a total of 42,923 acres subject to rent, though Jayakar had clearly asserted that in the taluka 23,995 out of 97,500 acres were in the hands of non-agriculturists and that more than two-thirds was in the hands of those who cultivated it. Government, moreover, had instructed Settlement Officers that statistics of rent were not to be used in deciding assessments unless they existed in considerable volume (Anderson maintained 42,923 acres was 'considerable'). Further, section 107 of the Land Revenue Code laid down that 'profits of agriculture' should be the basis for fixing assessments. Having determined from Jayakar's inquiries (for he had made no attempt to discover net profits) that the profits of agriculture had increased by more than 20 per cent in Bardoli, the Government decided that the assessment should correspondingly increase by 21.97 per cent.

The Taluka Congress Committee then appointed an enquiry committee to collect facts and figures from the farmers. It declared that they were not in a position to pay the existing rate of assessment let alone the enhanced rates, and that there had been no profit worth the name from the land. In September 1927, after the Government Resolution had finalised the revision settlement, a conference was held in Bardoli under the presidentship of Babubhai Desai, Member of the Bombay Legislative Council. It was decided that the people were not to pay the increase. Government, however, issued orders to the talatis to collect the new assessment from 5 February 1928.

Kalyanji and Kunverji Mehta, the two brothers who in 1921 had invited Gandhi to organise a civil disobedience movement in Bardoli and who had been working towards maintaining a functioning organisation in the taluka, went to Vallabhbhai Patel, alongwith the Taluka Secretary, Kushalbai, and asked him to lead the peasants in a no-tax campaign. Vallabhbhai was not inclined to interfere while Council

members were involved in helping the Bardoli agriculturists. He did not want any duplication in leadership and wanted people to come with a second request. When the peasant leaders repeated their request Vallabhbhai set to work straightaway and called a conference of the agriculturists on 4 February 1928, the day before the collection of the assessments was due. Representatives from seventy-nine villages attended; they included Patidars, Anavils, Kaliparaj, Parsis and Muslims. There was vacillation among some who feared the confiscation of their lands and thought it might be better to concede the old assessment and withhold the enhanced assessment. At the end of the meeting most dissidents had been convinced that the taluka would have to think as one if anything was to be achieved. They were given a week to give their final decision, while Patel communicated to the Government, in Gandhian style, a last warning before starting the action. He suggested to Government to appoint an impartial tribunal, failing which he would be compelled to advise the people to refuse to pay the assessment and suffer the consequences. In the first place, he pointed out, rent had been adopted as the basis of assessment - and this was erroneous. In the second place, the groupings of many villages had been altered so that these villages now came into a high assessment category; and this was arbitrary. Moreover, all this had been done without giving the agriculturists notice. In the last week of July 1927, thirty-one villages had been served a notice to submit their objections within two months to what in reality was a final order passed on 19 July 1927 to increase the assessment. The notice seems to have been a futile exercise of formality. The Government had already passed the final order on 19 July because in order to bring it into effect in the current revenue year, which is what the Government wanted, it had to be passed before 1 August. To serve a notice inviting the public to submit objections to an order that had already been irrevocably passed seemed to Patel both ridiculous and deceptive.<sup>23</sup>

On 12 February 1928, Vallabhbhai Patel met the agriculturists of Bardoli. He had not had a satisfactory reply to his letter to the Government and now openly advised the farmers to 'refuse payment of the entire assessment so long as the Government do not come to terms'.<sup>24</sup> There seemed little point in delaying the decision because the government had not made the conciliatory gesture of suspending the collection of tax pending a decision on Vallabhbhai's letter. Vallabhbhai in the meantime went into the legalities of the matter and satisfied himself that apart from being iniquitous the orders of the Government were against the letter of the law. The requirement, that according to Section 107 of the Land Revenue Code notice must be served on agriculturists in the event of regrouping of villages two months before any order was passed, was blatantly violated by the Government. Thus, the opportunity for representation had been deliberately denied to the people.

The following resolution was passed on 12 February 1928:

This conference of the people of Bardoli taluka resolves that the revision settlement in Bardoli...is arbitrary, unjust and oppressive, and advises all the occupants to refuse payment of the revised assessment in full until the Government is prepared to accept the amount of the old assessment in full satisfaction of their dues, or until the Government appoints an impartial tribunal to settle the whole question of revision by investigation and inquiry on the spot. 25

Vallabhbhai particularly impressed two things on the peoples' minds: (1) that the Government would attempt to divide their ranks, a move which they must resist to the best of their ability and (2) that the Government would first strike at the leaders and confiscate the best lands so that if the most influential men succumbed the rest would yield sooner or later. The people were advised to be wary of such a move.<sup>26</sup>

On no account was it a smooth sailing campaign. There were indications that the leaders were more keen to carry through the campaign than the people. There was lack of cohesion among the different communities and within each community.<sup>27</sup> Patidars as a community tended to act together,

often to distinguish themselves as a class of superior people. If a few superior Patidars acted one way then all others would do likewise to demonstrate their high status. This, incidentally, made for greater solidarity among them. 'Solidarity seeking' has been described as an inherent trait of Patidars - a trait that has been directed successfully into political channels.<sup>28</sup> Vantias, on the other hand, felt that they had much at stake financially in the land and in the crops trade; some also had social relations with Government officials and could be embarrassed by the consequences of non-payment. They were, therefore, prone to be weak in such a campaign, and likely to act independently rather than as a community. Dublas, who accounted for about half the population of the taluka and were the debtors and workers for the monied communities, had no direct reason to fight; some of them were likely to follow their creditors or masters in their attitude to the campaign. Anavil Brahmins, described as 'proud and defiant', had not joined at the initial stages and their calculating nature made them hesitate until the campaign was in full swing.<sup>29</sup> Parsis too had been cool and the Muslims had been lukewarm in their attitude at the beginning. Mohanlal Pandya, the man who had shown enterprise during the Kaira campaign, seemed much less hopeful at the time of the Bardoli campaign. In a letter to Vallabhbai written after reconnoitring the taluka, he said:

No one seems to me to be in fighting trim. They are going about their business as though nothing had happened....I do not despair, but let us not overrate our strength. 30

Patel made a mental note of all these weaknesses of the taluka and then set out to base the campaign on what he knew to be the strength of the taluka. He did not think that pious platitudes would make anyone change his mind. He tried to exert some social pressure on the villagers. Four centres had already been set up in the taluka with influential persons in charge - at Bardoli in the centre with Kalyanji Jugatram and Kushalbai, at Sarbhon in the south-west with

Dr. Tribuvandas, at Modhi in the north with Makhanji Desai, and at Vedchchi in the east with Chunilal Mehta and his wife. In areas where influential Vantias and Patidars counted for something among the population, Patel set up centres so that the influential people of each area could be prevailed upon to help the campaign and their exemplary action would persuade the rest of the people in the area to follow suit. Valod, the Mahal headquarters, and Bahari in the south-east were Vania strongholds. Vankaner in the heart of the taluka and Vared and Bamni in the north, were Patidar strongholds. The Raniparaj areas of Valod and Buhari were put in the care of Dr. Chandulal, and Abbas Tyabji and Imam Saheb Abdul Kadar Bavazir took charge of the Muslims.<sup>31</sup>

The key words in Patel's speeches were 'organisation' and 'discipline', and as stated above, he did little moral sermonising. The arrangements were modelled on the army. Urging villagers to organise he directed them to send daily bulletins to headquarters punctually and follow all instructions from headquarters accurately. Warning them to beware of those patels and talatis who would betray them to the Government, Patel asked them to close their ranks and not to let Government cause a breach.<sup>32</sup> The emphasis on organisation continued throughout Patel's political career. As he became more and more prominent in the party machine he instilled into his colleagues and subordinates the necessity of discipline in organisation.

The Government of Bombay was quite baffled by the Bardoli land revenue agitation. It blamed the Collector of Surat who in turn blamed the lower officials:

It is very evident that on the first warning given to the Collector that there is likely to be any possible trouble about the payment of the revised assessment, the Collector should take immediate action.... 33

The inadequacy of the existing law in dealing with a campaign like the one at Bardoli was felt again and again. Only the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1908, could be used to declare illegal any association that was planning such a campaign.

The Governor sent a plea to the Home Department at the Centre to devise ways and means of making the organisation illegal. The Viceroy, however, considered the law existing under the Criminal Law Amendment Act sufficient for the purpose.<sup>34</sup> The Secretary of State seems to have urged the use of firm and early action in a Bardoli -type situation and, on the basis of Leslie Wilson's ( Governor of Bombay ) dissatisfaction with the existing laws to deal with the satyagraha, suggested that the matter be studied 'comprehensively'.<sup>35</sup>

Government expected the satyagraha to fizzle out by the end of May 1928 when lands would be put up for sale and the threat of new buyers would bring the present owners to their senses. Government was refusing an inquiry because they feared that Vallabhbhai would follow up his success in Bardoli with agitations for other settlements.<sup>36</sup> In March, the Government issued a Press Note announcing the reduction of a considerable number of villages in Bardoli taluka and Valod Mahal to a lower group which would result in a reduction in their rates. The Land Records Staff had also been directed to investigate the question of reclassification of soil in several villages where deterioration had occurred due to erosion. Patel was requested to reconsider the position in the light of the above facts.<sup>37</sup> But Patel did not yield. The 12<sup>th</sup> of June was observed as 'Bardoli Day'. In Bombay all the markets were closed, Marwari Bazar, Moti Bazar, cloth markets, grain markets, jewellery shops, Marwadi Chamber of Commerce, cotton markets, commission agency firms and all other commercial concerns had closed for business.<sup>38</sup> In other provinces too Bardoli day was observed by speeches being given to congratulate Patel on his courageous stand and by the collection of funds.<sup>39</sup> Soon the repercussions of the agitation had widened and Bardoli was receiving support from outside.

By April, eight members of the Bombay Legislative Council from Gujarat had tendered their resignations to the Government.<sup>40</sup> In June, K.M. Munshi, who had been carrying on a correspondence with Government on the subject, resigned. Gradu-

ally, most prominent citizens of Bombay had pledged their support to the cause, Constitutionalists had also taken a stand in the matter. Other eminent men in other organisations began to express strong opinions from various stand points. Purshotamdas Thakurdas, H.N.Kunzru, Motilal Nehru, Tej Bahadur Sapru and others urged the holding of an enquiry into the matter. Purshotamdas Thakurdas tried to bring to Patel's notice that there was no indication that Government would 'descend from their Olympian heights' and he hoped that Patel would not push the people too far in their sufferings. Patel assured him that contrary to what Thakurdas had heard in Surat:

My own opinion of the people's temper is that they are out for suffering to the uttermost rather than surrender the principle for which they have upto now bravely stood up....We can wait as long as Government want to  
... 41

Support among prominent people outside Bardoli presented an attractive prospect for Patel of securing a position in wider areas, thus providing that vital link between the provincial and the national.

The pragmatist in Patel looked for an opportunity to avoid stalemate rather than take a stance and obtain nothing. Sumant Mehta, an active leftist Congressman from Gujarat, wrote of Patel's strategy in Bardoli at the beginning of June: 'He knows when to negotiate and on what terms'.<sup>42</sup> By the middle of June mediating parties had taken Patel's permission to make some attempts towards a compromise. Purshotamdas Thakurdas, Lalji Naranjee and H.P.Modi corresponded with and met the Governor to negotiate terms for a settlement. Patel made visits to Bombay in this connection and although he seemed anxious to arrive at an honourable settlement, he was equally anxious to conceal his desire for a settlement. Yet, a mellowing in his attitude was discernible. He wanted to settle the matter before the peasants showed signs of weakness. Their trial of strength had already weakened them considerably. It was better to call a halt before

they showed signs of further weakness. At a meeting in Bombay on 4 July, Patel said:

I guarantee that if there is a change of heart on the part of the Government and if they grant the humble request which peasants of Bardoli are making, the peasants will pay their assessment dues in 24 hours. 43

By mid-July 1928, developments brought Vallabhbhai Patel and the Governor face to face. While the Governor went to Simla on 13 July to see the Viceroy and discuss the situation with him, Vallabhbhai addressed a large District Congress at Ahmedabad. At the Congress he laid emphasis on the fact that the demand of the peasants was only for a re-enquiry. This was not a political movement. He was not a politician - he had cleared the gutters of Ahmedabad. It was clarified at this Congress by N.C.Kelkar that Vallabhbhai Patel was the only accredited representative of the peasantry of Bardoli and the Governor would be well advised to treat him as such. The Governor sent for Patel to meet him at Surat where he was due to arrive on 18 July. Talks were held between the Governor, his advisers and twelve satyagrahis. The Governor promised an enquiry into the alleged errors of official calculation provided the old assessment was paid up and the difference between the old and the enhanced assessment was deposited with the Government by a third party until the results of the inquiry were known. The immediate payment of the old assessment and the calling off of the movement were conditions that had to be fulfilled before the Government made any move on its part. Patel found the Governor's offer inadequate.<sup>44</sup> However, he did not want to lose the opportunity for a settlement. Aware of his own strength as well as the Governor's weaknesses, he clarified his point about the nature of the inquiry:

Let me, however, clear one point. I have never asked for nor do I ask for an unofficial inquiry in the sense that<sup>it</sup> should be unconnected with or uncontrolled by the Government. I would be satisfied with an official inquiry committee in the selection of whose personnel the people have adequate representation and which should be open, impartial and therefore of a judicial nature. 45

As Patel's attitude mellowed, the Government stiffened its

posture. In his address to the Legislative Council on 23 July, the Governor, while promising 'a full, open and independent inquiry' upon payment of the revenue and cessation of the movement, also gave an ultimatum addressed through the Surat members of the Council to their constituencies.<sup>46</sup>

The role of the Council members needs to be discussed at some length to determine both Patel's and the Government's motive in giving the members the attention they did. Government announcements of May and July on Bardoli were designed to create a favourable atmosphere for the passage of the two Bills that were due to be introduced in the Bombay Legislature in the next session. The idea was to placate those members in the Council who were interested in the settlement of Bardoli, and thereby ensure the smooth passage of the Small Holdings Bill and the Land Revenue Code Amendment Bill. Non-Brahmins as a group in the Legislature were opposed to the former bill. Non-Brahmins generally were also supporting the Bardoli movement. The idea was to appease them and get their support. Also, if Bardoli could be settled the Gujarat members, who had resigned, could be won over. Patel's attitude to the Council members concerned was a mixed one. For some time he had been opposed to Council members meddling in his affairs. Patel's resentment of Council members' interference in his personalised campaigns had been expressed more than once. Apart from criticism of Chunilal Mehta for suggesting institutional remedies without actually coming to Bardoli, Patel had also attacked Council members earlier for interference in his work at the time of the Gujarat floods. Chunilal Mehta defended himself thus:

One word more as to the remark you have made that I have not been to Bardoli...you are perhaps aware that this is not my department....Besides, I had enough experience of unpleasantness from both sides in connection with the Gujarat floods. You have probably not forgotten that when without your invitation, I went on my own accord to see you gentlemen at Anand, at the commencement the language of both Mr. Abbas Tyabji and your goodself, though I am sure it was not meant, came very near to insult. 47

There was a general feeling that Patel looked upon 'Bardoli' as his 'show'.

In June, Patel had tried to counteract Government's move and the Council members' role in the Bardoli movement. He had instructed Gangadharrao Deshpande, the Karnatak PCC President, to explore the possibilities of resignations of Karnatak Council members. Gangadharrao Deshpande's feedback from the area was not very favourable. Of the six councillors three were prepared to resign; two non-Brahmins who were title holders and one large landowner were not prepared to resign.<sup>48</sup> Vallabhbhai's rapport with the Council Members (except those of Gujarat) was, therefore, negligible.

The matter was further complicated by the fact that Chunilal Mehta (the Finance Member) was sponsoring the Small Holdings Bill. He was also sponsoring a resolution in the Council for the appointment of a committee to assist the Simon Commission which Congress had decided to boycott. His initiative in seeking a resolution of the Bardoli question was directly related to enhancing his reputation in the Council in the light of the two resolutions he had sponsored.<sup>49</sup>

By early August, Patel could not take too negative an attitude to the moves made by the Council Members towards a settlement of the Bardoli issue. Apart from the reports sent by Gangadharrao Deshpande, K.M.Munshi's inquiry among Council Members and his meeting with the Governor also revealed that progress towards a solution was only possible with the involvement of the Council Members in some negotiations with the Governor. The Governor had ruled out direct negotiations between himself and Vallabhbhai Patel or any of Patel's spokesmen.<sup>50</sup> Surat members were required to give an unconditional undertaking that the revised assessment would be paid (even if the difference was obtained from their own agencies). Then and then alone would Government look into cases of reinstatement of talatis and patels or the return of the confiscated lands and property and other matters. Council members seemed willing to compromise and were

prepared to pay the difference from private sources. While writing disparagingly of the Council Members' compromising attitude and flattering Patel by repeated remarks about the mobility of the movement, Munshi did betray a certain uncertainty about where he stood, in this remark:

I may be wrong but I somehow cannot reconcile the courage and the mobility with which you have conducted the movement and our Council Members' utterances and resignations with the efforts which some of us are now making to accommodate ourselves to the ultimatum delivered. I may however assure you that if no compromise is made, the consequence to you and to Gujarat will be terrible as the movement is likely to be dealt with as a rebellion. 51

Secretly, he too hoped for a quick compromise.

The Surat Members' letter to the Revenue Member, Rieu, was vague and unspecific but, Chunilal Mehta insisted that that was in fact the virtue of the letter, that there were no specific commitments on the part of the satyagrahis, and yet it still communicated a gesture of good-will to the Government. Patel felt disinclined to accept the terms of the commitment. He wanted Mehta to make the conditions of the satyagrahis more specifically known to the Government. Mehta indicated that all Government really wanted was to retain its prestige and, therefore, if a vague communique like the one being sent gave the feeling and did not betray the trust and self-respect of the satyagrahis, it should not worry Patel. The latter did, however, insist on the announcement of the inquiry being made immediately after the letter from the Surat members to the Revenue Member regarding the reinstatement of talatis, restoration of lands and release of prisoners.

The settlement was thus made with an emphasis on the spirit rather than the letter of the issue. It must be added, however, that throughout the campaign Patel gave priority to the institution of a full, open and independent inquiry in any settlement. This he did achieve in the end. Earlier attempts had not procured this:

The Surat Statement contemplates a very limited inquiry to be conducted by a Revenue Officer assisted

by a Judicial Officer to investigate 'errors of calculation and fact' and a totally different thing from a 'full, open and independent inquiry'. I hope therefore that undeterred by the threats contained in the Government's deliverance, public opinion will concentrate only on the one point that I have mentioned. 52

When the resolution of the Governor in Council instituted an inquiry into the revision settlement of Bardoli on 18 October 1928, it was clearly stated in Clause 3 of the resolution:

As the inquiry is to be full, open and independent, the persons interested should be allowed to lead as well as to present evidence before the officers with the help of their representatives including legal advisers. 53

The financial result of the inquiry led by R.S. Broomfield and R.M. Maxwell was a net total increase of Rs.30,806 or 6 per cent over the old assessment of Bardoli taluka and of Rs.17,842 or 5.24 per cent of Chorasi taluka, compared with the second revision settlements as sanctioned, for which the latest figures were a total of Rs.6,30,650 in Bardoli and Rs.4,07,965 in Chorasi respectively.<sup>54</sup> In the two talukas together, therefore, whereas the second revision settlement imposed an increase of Rs.1,87,492 or 22 per cent, the Broomfield Maxwell proposal resulted in an increase of 48,648 or 5.7 per cent only.

In arriving at their proposals Broomfield-Maxwell made it clear that Jayakar and Anderson in making their proposals regarding the second revision settlement did have regard for the 'profits of agriculture', a stipulation laid down in Section 107 of the Land Revenue Code:

In revising assessments of land revenue regard shall be had to the value of the land and in the case of land used for the purpose of agriculture to the profits of agriculture. 55

But their actual estimates of what the profits of agriculture were likely to be during the period provided for may have been wrong. In Broomfield and Maxwell's opinion they were 'unduly high'.

But to misread the evidence, or to be misled by faulty evidence is a very different thing from acting contrary to the law. 56

The settlement also represented a victory for one element in government circles which had always argued in favour of profits and 'other considerations' as opposed to rental value. It is interesting to note that conflicts within government often took a vital dimension in these controversies and gave the lie to any notions that nationalists had about a monolithic imperialist adversary. While thus safeguarding the prestige of the Revenue Officers responsible for the Second Revision Settlement figures, the report did, however, reduce the increase in assessment substantially and above all conducted the inquiry according to the demands of Vallabhbhai Patel. Bhulabhai Desai and Patel were also present during the proceedings. K.M.Munshi had been carrying on the inquiry instituted by the Indian constitutionalists.<sup>57</sup> That too had some effect on the spirit and thoroughness with which the officers conducted their inquiry. The Broomfield-Maxwell report was published on 13 May 1929 and Patel gracefully acknowledged the credit that was due to the Government, clarifying at the same time that he would wait to see if government had learnt something from the whole incident.<sup>58</sup>

Politically, the agitation was a victory for Patel, except that he had not managed without the help of constitutionalists. The conduct of the campaign gave Patel considerable prestige amongst the agriculturists. Gandhi had not established direct relationships with the farmers of Gujarat. Patel's relationship was primarily with particular sections of the peasantry (Patidars) or with local leaders, who in turn had links with particular sections of the peasant groups. It will be observed later that Patel had the edge over socialists in the 1930s in areas like Gujarat for just this reason. He had worked so intensively with leading peasants in Gujarat and with local leaders, that outside forces just could not penetrate his network.

There are two contentions about Bardoli that need reexamination. One is the assertion that all castes and classes of agriculturists participated in the Bardoli agitation.<sup>59</sup> In fact this was not really so. Some facts about who supported it and who did not and why have already been mentioned on pp. 79-83 . The main basis on which it is called a successful peasant agitation is the participation of the Kaliparaj (called 'Raniparaj' by Gandhi, as untouchables were called Harijans to elevate their otherwise lowly status). The presence of the Raniparaj at meetings called in particular villages of Surat is no indication of their role in the movement itself. The conversion of tribals and other ostracized sections of people in Surat to Gandhism was brought about as a result of factors that had little to do with land revenue agitations or similar satyagraha. First of all, the Bhakti movement and social reformers like Arya Samajists had tried to end the isolation of the tribals and landless in the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. Later, during the first non-cooperation movement, Gandhi had tried to encourage his workers to tap Adivasi support. Kunverji Mehta tried to influence them in their own idiom but no full-scale Gandhian propaganda was carried out to begin with. After the suspension of the first proposed Bardoli movement in 1922, the Bardoli Ashram was set up and Gandhian influence was sought to be widened through khadi activity. Jiwanbhai Bababhai Chaudhri and Gomjibhai Lalbhai Chaudhri of Vedchchi village ( a predominantly tribal village of Valod) asked leaders of the Bardoli Ashram to set up spinning centres in their area. This task was assigned to Chunilal Mehta and Keshavbhai Patel.<sup>60</sup> Adivasis themselves also initiated reform movements in their own communities and in their own idiom.<sup>61</sup>

Jugatram Dave then took on the work among the Raniparaj. In 1924, the Second Raniparaj Conference held at Vedchchi brought out Adivasis in large numbers. Khadi work spread rapidly from 1925-27 and provided work for many idle hands. During the Bardoli satyagraha Raniparaj attended meetings held in and around their village because Gandhian workers called

them. Their active involvement in propaganda, resistance and arrests in the Bardoli satyagraha was negligible and certainly there was no political inclination among their leaders. Later, Jugatram Dave set up a Raniparaj Vidyalaya in Valod in 1929 and an Adivasi donated 12 acres of land for it.<sup>62</sup> A centre for basic education was also set up. But the socio-economic activity led to no political activism. In fact from a recent study of Valod's rural development one gathers that as a result of the lack of activity among such areas and peoples, patterns of land ownership have not changed even during the post-independence period, marginal farmers having lost land to middle or rich farmers and joined the ranks of landless labourers.<sup>63</sup> The Bardoli movement too was purely one which in numerical terms benefited and was supported mostly by the 6 to 25 acre group of landowners. One can tell something of the socio-economic background of some of Gandhi's supporters, in Surat and Bardoli in particular, from a list of the names of those who rendered Gandhi assistance (mainly financial). Many had gone to South Africa and East Africa. Some stayed there and sent financial assistance. Some who had returned also supported the satyagraha. On these, on Patel's trainees from Kaira and on those who had kept a Congress organisation active in Bardoli since 1921 (like the Mehta brothers) depended the success of the campaign through the support of the dominant groups like Patidars and later Vantias.<sup>64</sup>

Related to this point about the socio-economic nature of the support on which the campaign was based is a second point about Bardoli that needs reexamination - the attitudes of the participants in the satyagraha. A critical account of the nature of support clarifies only some of the confusion over the reasons that led to the agitation. The extensive controversy over the middle peasant thesis has been discussed elsewhere and briefly mentioned in my forthcoming article.<sup>65</sup> What is important in the present context is not simply who supported the campaign but why was it embarked upon. Explanations for the agitation have been ranged between

'short term and narrowly economic reasons' and 'long term and political reasons'.<sup>66</sup> While reiterating that the peasants of Gujarat were not a passive docile lot that could easily be led in a campaign, it must be added that details of the conduct of the campaign do give the impression that the peasants (rich, middle and poor), did not have very strong reasons to initiate the campaign. It has been demonstrated how the Bardoli agitation (in its full and comprehensive form) was politically inspired by leaders. The reasons for which it was supported by the differentiated peasantry were not economic (1) because each peasant category had different interests to safeguard and (2) the accruing benefits were more socio-political than economic. In a study of three satyagraha campaigns, A.W. Nakhre brings to light the attitudes of satyagrahis, both leaders and rank and file, with particular emphasis on the use of non-violence. Having located 45 original participants Nakhre shows that contrary to widely-held beliefs, the rank and file participator was more dedicated to the Gandhian method of satyagraha through non-violence than the sub-leaders, who looked upon the movement and participated in it as a 'purely pragmatic' exercise. The sub-leaders and many of the rank and file participants were young, elitist and of comfortable economic status and looked to the satyagraha as a medium through which some kind of power could be obtained.<sup>67</sup> It might be mentioned here that rank and file here does not mean those lower in the economic or social strata. It simply means ordinary supporters as opposed to those assigned leadership positions. Power is defined here both as a vehicle of control over others and as a moral phenomenon.

In the ultimate analysis it would be more accurate to say that the Bardoli agitation was not intended as a peasant movement per se. It was an agitation geared towards politicization and political mobilisation in separate ways, of particular sections of the peasantry for political purposes and designs. The linking of local grievances with national politics seemed the most expedient way of extending the Gan-

dhian hold over the different areas. Even if some Dharalas, Dublas and other backward groups supported Patidar landowners, the fact that no changes in the structure of social and economic relations between Patidar landowners and poor peasants was intended or achieved surely disqualifies the Bardoli satyagraha from being labelled a peasant movement. The backward classes were in fact encouraged to preserve the status quo. Curiously, the 'weapon' of non-violence, supposedly intended to strengthen the weaker sections of society, actually disarmed them and exposed them to greater exploitation by those who could manipulate them for their own ends. Patel had no commitment to non-violence; he adhered to it and discarded it at his convenience. In the 1920s and 30s when Congress was in the process of ascending, Patel considered non-violence useful in keeping control over wide-spread movements. In the 1940s when Congress was strong and entrenched, he was willing to use violence against rivals and opponents. In Patel's hand non-violence and other Gandhian methods were tools to be used for wider political goals. Peasants, either as one or many, would not derive enough economic benefit from the agitations to compensate the loss of lands or movable property that would result from supporting the agitation. Political influence or recognition might compensate the loss or threat to property that would accompany participation in a land revenue agitation.

Dhanagare sees 'tension management' as one of the significant features of Gandhian programmes intended for the upliftment of the masses.<sup>68</sup> Gandhian ventures also seem to have inculcated self-confidence in a people that had hitherto been suppressed socially and economically. In return for a life of simplicity, sacrifice and service they got recognition and acclaim. Patel benefited greatly from this situation of mutual advantage. He had at his disposal a 'reservoir' of supporters and volunteers that came in use from time to time when a show of strength had to be made. His responsibility was to see that these supporters were rewarded directly or indirectly. In making the 'confiscated lands' matter a big

issue or personally dealing with the selection of candidates at election time, Patel discharged those debts he incurred when he needed support. In the post-Bardoli period, Patel also intensified his political calculations and bargaining power to meet the new situation.

## FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER II

- 1 Collective Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol.23, p.415.
- 2 Ibid, pp.381-2.
- 3 Narhari Parikh, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Vol.1, p.275 ; Tomlinson, The Indian National Congress and the Raj, p.33.
- 4 Editorial, The Leader, 4 December 1926, p.3.
- 5 The general use of the terms 'peasants', 'agriculturists', 'cultivators' here might be considered inaccurate by writers of rural history. The existence of categories among peasants is not of primary importance here. In fact even the broad distinction of landlord and peasant is not heeded here; nor other finer distinctions between 'landlord', 'land controller' etc. Owner cultivators, rich tenants, are all classified as peasants or farmers - the main difference that concerns us here is that between the well-to-do farmers on the one side and subsistence farmers and landless peasants on the other.
- 6 See Hardiman, Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat, pp.183-4.
- 7 See B.R.Nanda (ed.) Socialism in India 1919-1939 (Delhi 1972) ; J.P.Haithcox, Communism and Nationalism in India : M.N.Roy and Comintern Policy 1920-39 (New Jersey 1971) ; Muza-ffar Ahmed, Communist Party of India: Years of Formation (Calcutta 1959) ; Muzaffar Ahmed, Myself and Communist Party of India (Calcutta 1970) ; G.D.Overstreet and M.Windmiller, Communism in India (Berkeley 1959) ; Acharya Narendra Dev, Socialism and the National Revolution (Bombay 1946).
- 8 Rani D.Shankardass, The First Congress Raj : Provincial Autonomy in Bombay (Delhi 1982) pp.164-6.
- 9 Ibid, and Correspondence between Irwin and Governor Sykes, Mss.Eur. F.150/1, Sykes Papers, I.O.L.
- 10 Jawaharlal Nehru, Presiding over a Republican Congress session, The Hindu, 29 December 1927, p.4.
- 11 Gandhi to Patel, 6 August 1927, CW, 34, op.cit. Patel to Gandhi on or after 6 August 1927, Parikh, p.302.
- 12 Parikh, p.303.
- 13 Eric Stokes, 'The Land Revenue Systems of North-Western Provinces and Bombay, Deccan, 1830-80, Ideology and the official mind', The Peasant and the Raj (Cambridge 1978) ; Eric Stokes, The English Utilitarians and India (Oxford 1959) ; Hardiman, Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat, pp.184-7.
- 14 Asstt. Settlement Officer's proposals and correspondence between Asstt.Settlement Officer Bardoli and Collector of Surat, 30 June 1925, Home (Pol) 1/8/1928. N.A.

- 15 Ibid. See Shirin Mehta, The Peasantry and Nationalism. The Story of the Bardoli Satyagraha (Delhi 1984).
- 16 Rani D.Shankardass, Forthcoming article, 'Spokesman for the Peasantry : The case of Vallabhbhai Patel and Bardoli'.
- 17 Neil Charlesworth, Ishwarlal Desai, Mahadev Desai, David Hardiman, Shirin Mehta, Narhari Parikh, Ghanshyam Shah.
- 18 See Mahadev Desai, The Story of Bardoli ; Narhari Parikh, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Vol.1 ; Ishwarlal I.Desai, Swatantrya Sangram Sahityamala, 1st series, Vol. 2 , B.S.Surat, 1970 ; Bardoli Satyagraha Patrika.
- 19 M.S.Jayakar, Asstt.Settlement Officer, Bardoli Taluka, to Collector of Surat, 30 June 1925, Home (Pol) 178/1928.
- 20 Resolution No.7259/24 of 19 July 1927, Home (Pol) 178/1928.
- 21 Note of the Settlement Commissioner and Director of land Records, 9 April and 15 May 1926, ibid.
- 22 Government of Bombay, Revenue Department, Resolution No. 1259/2H, 19 July 1927, ibid.
- 23 Vallabhbhai Patel to the Governor of Bombay, 6 February 1928, Bardoli File, Patel Papers.
- 24 Bombay Chronicle, 13 February 1928, p.8.
- 25 Resolution passed in Bardoli at Conference of Agricultu-  
rists on 12 February 1928, Patel Papers.
- 26 Vallabhbhai Patel, address at Sanathar village in Bardoli Taluka, Bombay Chronicle, 16 May 1928, p.7.
- 27 For a classification of communities, see Table in Rani D. Shankardass, 'Spokesman for the peasantry:The case of Vallabhbhai Patel and Bardoli'.
- 28 I.Catanach, Rural Credit in Western India, 1875-1930 (California 1970) p.168.
- 29 Mahadev Desai, Story of Bardoli, p.55.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Ibid. pp.38-9. Ishwarlal I.Desai, Swatantrya Sangram, Vol. 2 ,
- 32 Bombay Chronicle, 4 June 1928, p.4.
- 33 Leslie Wilson, Governor of Bombay, to Irwin, 16 August 1928, Home (Pol) File 197/1928.

- 34 Ibid. See opinion of L.Graham, I.C.S., Secy, Legislature Department on Criminal Law Amendment Act.
- 35 Secy of State to Viceroy, *ibid.*
- 36 Harilal Desibhai Desai to Vallabhbhai Patel, reporting meeting he had with Anderson, 8 April 1928, Bardoli File, Patel Papers.
- 37 W.W.Smart to Vallabhbhai Patel, 28 March 1928, *ibid.*
- 38 Bombay Chronicle, 13 June 1928, p.7.
- 39 *Ibid*, 14 June 1928, p.7.
- 40 Bombay Chronicle, 23 May 1928, p.9, and 29 May 1928, p.9.
- 41 Vallabhbhai Patel to Purshotamdas Thakurdas, 13 June 1928, *ibid.*
- 42 Sumant Mehta, 'Bardoli Satyagraha' in Bombay Chronicle. 8 June 1928, p.8.
- 43 Bombay Chronicle, 5 July 1928, p.7.
- 44 The Governor had promised 'a special enquiry into the alleged errors of the official appreciation and calculation of the facts and figures either by a Revenue Officer unconnected with the present case or by a Revenue Officer with a judicial official associated with him'.
- 45 Vallabhbhai's reply to P.S. to the Governor of Bombay, in Bombay Chronicle, 21 July 1928, p.9.
- 46 *Ibid*, 24 July 1928.
- 47 Chunilal Mehta to Patel, 11 July 1928, Patel Papers.
- 48 Gangadharrao Deshpande to Swamy Anand, 4 July 1928, *ibid.*
- 49 Gangadharrao Deshpande to Swamy Anand, June 1928, *ibid.*
- 50 K.M.Munshi to Vallabhbhai Patel, 29 July 1928, *ibid.*
- 51 *Ibid.*
- 52 Vallabhbhai Patel in a statement to the Press, Parikh, *op.cit.*
- 53 Resolution No.7259/24 of 18 Oct 1928, Home (Pol) 5/17/1931.
- 54 Report of the special inquiry into the Second Revision Settlement of the Bardoli and Chorasi talukas, R.S.Broomfield and Maxwell (Bombay 1929) p.77.

- 55 Ibid. p.5.
- 56 Ibid.
- 57 For the full report of K.M.Munshi, see Bombay Chronicle, 17 November 1928, 28 November, 5 December and 8 December 1928.
- 58 Bombay Chronicle, 9 May 1929, p.7 and 13 May 1929, p.1.
- 59 See Hardiman, Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat, pp.187-88 ; 'The Roots of Rural Agitation in India 1914-1947 : A rejoinder to Charlesworth'. The Journal of Peasant Studies, Vol.8, 1980-81 ; Ghanshyam Shah, 'Traditional Society and political mobilisation : the experience in Bardoli Satyagraha' (1920-1928), Contributions to Indian Sociology, new series 8 (1974).
- 60 Jugatram Dave, Khadi Bhakta Chunibhai (Guj) (Ahmedabad 1966).
- 61 See also David Hardiman, 'Adivasi Assertion in South Gujarat : the Devi Movement of 1922-23' in Ranajit Guha (ed) Subaltern Studies, III.
- 62 Jugatram Dave, Mari Jivankatha (Guj) (Ahmedabad 1975) ; Ishwarlal I.Desai, Raniparajma Jagriti (Guj) Swatantrya Itihas Samiti Zila Panchayat,(Surat 1972).
- 63 Ghanshyam Shah and H.R.Chaturvedi, Gandhian approach to rural development : The Valod experiment (Delhi 1983).
- 64 See Ishwarlal I.Desai, Swatantrya Sangram.
- 65 David Hardiman and Neil Charlesworth's discussion on the middle peasant theory of peasant agitations, with special application to the Bardoli agitation in Journal of Peasant Studies, Vols. 7, 8 and 9, 1979-80, 1980-81 and 1981-82.
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- 67 Amrut W.Nakhre, 'A Study of Satyagrahi attitudes, with special reference to Bardoli, Rajkot and Pardi satyagrahas', Ph.D thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1974.
- 68 D.N.Dhanagare, Agrarian Movements and Gandhian Politics (Agra 1975) p.63.

## CHAPTER III

### EMERGENCE ON THE NATIONAL SCENE 1928-1934

The laurels obtained during the Bardoli satyagraha secured for Patel considerable political power and a distinguished place among the national leaders of the time, a place which he retained till the end of his life. With the title of 'Sardar' conferred on him by the people of Gujarat, Patel moved on to a role that required fuller participation on the national scene.

The period after Bardoli was one of severe difficulty for the Congress and its leadership. The fairly united protest over the appointment of the Simon Commission was followed by differences over the goals of Congress, which were now being disputed by socialists and radicals who wanted to give the Government an immediate ultimatum. Dominion status, acceptable to some, was vehemently opposed by those who would not settle for anything less than independence. The quarrel between the changers and no-changers could not be resolved. Vallabhbhai Patel's background favoured a rural conservatism as opposed to Motilal Nehru's urban middle class conservatism. The latter formed a vital part of 'moderate opinion' which the British sought to 'detach' from the 'artificial anti-government unity' that had been forged among Indian politicians in the wake of Viscount Simon's visit.<sup>1</sup> Patel was a moderate of a very different brand. He was not in favour of winds of change turning into a storm that would blow through the countryside (in his case Gujarat), and disrupt the areas and groups and his own support. It was far better in his view to strengthen the powers of the countryside in a smooth unobtrusive way whereby interests of the different groups would be taken care of by their spokesmen who would nurture their own areas of interest and influence and also enhance the prestige of particular groups with which they had some socio-economic affinity, than to allow a clean sweep by egalitarians who would, in his opinion, make no substantial political advancement in the diversified social and

political set-up of the Provinces. He had already expressed his disapproval of the Independence Resolution at Lahore in December 1929 on the grounds that it went against the spirit of the Calcutta resolution, which had accepted Gandhi's compromise. Subhas Bose referred to all these differences as 'the fundamental cleavage between the elder school and the new school of thought'.<sup>2</sup>

By 1928-29 Gandhi had established himself as the undisputed 'guru' in Congress and any individual or group that wanted to forge ahead in the party at the national level clearly needed Gandhi's blessings to do so. As a result, up-and-coming provincial leaders vied with such other for first place in Gandhi's eyes. The competition was usually healthy but often caused rivalries that were exacerbated in times of political crises and burrowed deeper and deeper with every major political development. Patel's rivalry with Jawaharlal Nehru was one such example of a relationship that became worse because of their common and close links with Gandhi. Gandhi took Vallabhbhai for granted though he needed him even in his own province, Gujarat, having no rural roots there himself. The Nehrus too were necessary for they were Gandhi's best link with the liberal, middleclass and intellectual world. Gandhi was somewhat overawed by them and, when it came to making choices, on one or two occasions, Gandhi blatantly opted for the Nehrus, and Patel had every reason to feel slighted.

The elections of the President of the Indian National Congress in the years 1928 and 1929 were two occasions when Gandhi exercised his prerogative in favour of the Nehrus. Patel was the victim who dared not protest. In 1927 too Patel had been considered a good choice for Congress President but, second to Jawaharlal Nehru, who was regarded as the best by Motilal and Gandhi.<sup>3</sup> That year Dr. Ansari was offered the Presidency as part of the strategy to appease the Muslims. In 1928, Patel's name featured again, this time against Motilal Nehru, but the latter was unwilling to accept. The youth of the country wanted Jawaharlal Nehru. However, at

this juncture the leftists and young radicals were still gathering strength and could be disregarded in favour of the rightists whose influence and weight in provinces like Bengal was a deciding factor in determining the choice of President. Motilal Nehru was acceptable to this section of Congress. So was Patel. Gandhi, however, backed Motilal, and Patel surrendered to the Mahatma's will. In 1929, Patel was pitched against Jawaharlal Nehru. This time the Presidency was strategically important. The Congress ultimatum to Government was due to expire around the time of the session of the Congress and a negative reaction on the part of the Government portended a massive campaign on the part of the Congress. In the light of this struggle it was not easy to decide who might be more suitable as President. Jawaharlal Nehru had, by then, developed a massive following among the young intellectuals and his revolutionary ideas were shared increasingly by thousands inside and outside Congress who thus formed a new pressure group that defied party boundaries. Patel, on the other hand, had become the great organiser of the party machine at least in Gujarat and that was of immense value if a mass movement had to be conducted with a new intensity. If Gandhi had let it be a straight fight between Patel and Jawaharlal Nehru, the former would have emerged victorious. Gandhi too, was in demand in ten out of eighteen provinces. Of the other, five had recommended Patel and three Jawaharlal. When Gandhi opted out, he asked Patel to do likewise, thus ensuring that Jawaharlal was elected unopposed. If Gandhi had not put pressure on Patel to step down, most of the provinces that had backed Gandhi would probably have shifted their support to Vallabhbhai, for Congress was dominated by right-wing provincial leaders to whom Patel was more acceptable than Jawaharlal. There was a host of reasons why Gandhi considered Jawaharlal Nehru more suitable for the Presidency. Jawaharlal appealed to the young, to intellectuals and to the masses; and he was more acceptable than Patel to the Muslims. If Nehru ever got carried away, which he did, Gandhi and Patel, who worked

as a team, would put sufficient pressure to keep him in check. In the case of Patel, Gandhi was confident of his steadfastness and approved of his style, which by now was quite set; he also believed he could rely on Patel. That was no comfort for Patel and in later years he made his bitterness quite apparent.

By 1929, Vallabhbhai Patel's political style was well defined. That he was primarily interested in the political as opposed to the socio-economic was also clear. Patel had come to national politics via the province and his power lay in retaining that provincial link. He kept that link out of expediency and necessity. National political activity often changed according to prevailing British policy. The province was the only area with some degree of constancy. Building a provincial base could never go wrong, whether the Congress was agitating or participating or negotiating. Moreover, Patel's political stature at this juncture was not that of a giant. His social background, education and life style all catered for a modest and moderate style of politics. Plodding persistently and showing concrete results he intended to make himself indispensable to the Congress organisation in particular and to politics in general.

Thus, even though Bardoli gave him the status of a national leader, in the post-Bardoli period Vallabhbhai made fewer speeches on the national stage than on the local and provincial. He was less preoccupied with larger and general issues than with specific, limited ones. He was President of a society formed in Surat district and the neighbouring Indian States to combat the evil of intoxicating drinks. The Parsi community had a special stake in resisting Congress propaganda on the subject of prohibition and the system of free or cheap labour that Parsi landowners enforced. In encouraging the Raniparaj and Koli communities in the area Vallabhbhai said that they should resist harassment and ill-treatment by employers 'even if you have to attack your opponents'. However, he also assured the Parsi landowners and liquor merchants that he would be presiding over the seventh

Raniparaj Conference to be held on 25 April 1929 at Unai in Surat district, and that he would look into all instances of harassment of Parsis.<sup>4</sup> Patel's brand of political consolidation was always in keeping with his conservative spirit.

In matters pertaining to land he claimed special expertise. It has already been indicated that he asserted more than once that slogan-shouting did not make the young revolutionaries the spokesmen of the peasantry. The problems of those who lived by the land could best be grasped by those who had lived with them, and he considered himself better equipped than most over such questions like the assessment and remission of land revenue and the role of officials.<sup>5</sup> On 23 July 1929, a representative conference was held with Patel as President and a body called the Land League was inaugurated.<sup>6</sup> Patel's concerted efforts to maintain strong links with particular sections of agriculturists were the more necessary at this stage in order to counter the increasing interests of socialists in the countryside. Some western papers believed that he regarded himself as the 'Local Lenin'.<sup>7</sup> Such a title would have been anathema to him. He sneered at the self-styled leaders of the peasant revolution:

First show that you have ability and the strength to carry out a revolution before you shout victory to revolution. What is the good of asking others to shout victory for something which is not in existence?<sup>8</sup>

The 1930 civil disobedience movement was Congress's answer to the political stresses and strains both within and outside the party. The year 1929 had been difficult, with socialists, extremists and moderates pulling their own ways. Socialists and left-wing organisations were demanding a change in the economic and social structure of the country. Particular pressures from the left wing in the form of trade union demands or the clamour of leaders like Subhas Bose and his followers, all had to be accommodated in the next move of the Congress. The fact that civil disobedience was decided upon was no indication that extremists had won the day. Congress was, as always, a conservative body, even when its

declared aims sounded radical. Non-cooperation was designed to achieve moderate political goals and Congress had no intention of altering the basic social structure of the country. It is relevant in this context that Gandhi's master move, the spectacular march to Dandi to manufacture salt from the sea, is said to have been inspired (1) by a South African experience and (2) by Vallabhbhai Patel.<sup>9</sup> In November 1913, Gandhi had protested against the South African Government's discriminatory laws by leading a march of 2,221 Indians from Natal to the Transvaal. This provided the model for his 1930 March. The area and details of organisation came from Patel's Bardoli example. A campaign like Bardoli, limited in area and purpose and dependent for resources and support on a reliable and constant human reservoir, encouraged Gandhi to plan along similar lines. Patel planned the route of the march through Bardoli and also suggested to Gandhi that the band of men he should take with him should be trained Ashramites who could fetch the best publicity by their exemplary conduct.

However, while Gandhi was leading the Salt March to Dandi Vallabhbhai Patel, one of the first Congress leaders to be arrested during the campaign, was in jail. He had gone to Ras in Borsad taluka on 7 March 1930 to address the people there. The magistrate prevented him from making his speech before a large crowd that had assembled to hear him. Patel was taken to Borsad where a semblance of a trial took place before the District Magistrate, the magistrate who arrested him and the Superintendent of Police. He was in Sabarmati jail for three months while his friends outside disputed the legitimacy of his arrest. The political repercussions were felt acutely in Gujarat with the Congress and the Government. Within a week, six police patels, fifteen matadars and three ravanias (hereditary police patels) had resigned as a protest against Patel's arrest. Commercial groups also protested.<sup>10</sup>

This response and that in the rural areas further strengthened Gandhi's faith in Kaira and Surat and his reliance on Gujarat. Ras, where Vallabhbhai Patel was arrested, was one

of the first places in Kaira to resolve not to pay taxes. Three thousand rich Patidars in that area had refused to pay taxes and their lands had been confiscated; Government got Baraiyas, who had been employed earlier as working hands, to cultivate these lands under Government protection.<sup>11</sup> While encouraging further resignations of talatis and applauding the resignations of village officers, particularly in Kaira and Broach districts, Gandhi said that Gujarat on its own had the capacity to win complete independence for India. There were 90 lakhs of people in Gujarat but 40 lakhs would be adequate if all of them participated seriously and unitedly.<sup>12</sup>

Vallabhbhai Patel's intense efforts had given confidence to Gujarat. Gandhi referred to Patel again and again during the march and noticed that the invocation of his name had an electrifying effect on the people of the areas through which he passed. The civil disobedience movement forged ahead with success in most provinces. Gujarat was the main theatre, by design. As the Secretary of the GPCC, Manilal Kothari, said:

...with the excellent training and discipline which it had all these years received under the inspiring leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, it will on this momentous occasion, put into the field all its available men and resources and lead the quiet and firm struggle to a victorious end... 13

The Government also acknowledged that Gujarat had surpassed all other provinces in the conduct of the civil disobedience movement campaigns:

The movement had for various reasons such as the building up during last 10 years by Gandhi and Vallabhbhai Patel of the organisation in Gujarat and its success at Bardoli, reached a more advanced stage than anywhere in India. 14

By the time Vallabhbhai Patel was released on 26 June 1930, other Congress leaders from Gujarat and from other provinces were in jail. When Jawaharlal Nehru was arrested, Motilal Nehru had been appointed Congress President; and when he was arrested on 13 June 1930, he appointed Patel as Congress President. The Working Committee of Congress and its other organisations and offices had been declared illegal

by the Government. Responding to a rousing welcome in Bombay after his release, on 3 July 1930, Patel said in an interview:

I want every single man, woman, and child in each Province, district and town to feel that he or she should take up the burden of carrying on the national fight if the Congress organisations are declared unlawful and all recognised leaders are put in jail. Each Congressman then becomes a Congress Committee for the purpose of the fight. 15

He spoke out openly and unequivocally against those who were vacillating and hesitating to fight. Addressing a large gathering at Bai Kanubhai's Wadi in Bombay he admonished collegiates for not giving up their studies, while Nehru 'the prince of Indian youth' was in jail.<sup>16</sup> In another reprimand to college students he asked them if they knew that their idol Jawaharlal was in jail and that hundreds of women were the victims of police lathis and physical illtreatment in the fight for freedom, while they, the students, stood by idly or spent their time doing mathematics and history.<sup>17</sup> We may take it that the criticism was implicitly also of their leader who could not inspire a better response among his supporters.

That the fight required 'money and munitions' rather than big talk was the burden of many of his speeches. His message to Congress workers on the inauguration of Congress week in Bombay on 14 July 1930 indicated clearly that the week was being celebrated to gather men and money. A house-to-house campaign to enrol members and collect money was undertaken by each ward at his behest.<sup>18</sup> The focus on the efforts of Bombay and Gujarat was sustained by his concentration on these regions. It was an opportune moment for him to control the movement: he was out of jail for a short period of time and made political capital out of it. Criticising those who were entertaining ideas of peace talks, Patel said it would be a blunder for Congress to show weakness by yielding just then. Irwin's statement (of November 1929) had made it quite clear that India could be offered only what

the spokesmen of Britain agreed to give as a result of discussions at a Round Table Conference in London. Vallabhbhai Patel pointed out that those who participated in such a Conference would be quite disillusioned. Nor was the recent statement made by the Governor of Bombay (in the Legislative Council) conciliatory. Patel replied to the Governor's address at a public meeting at Azad Maidan on 20 July 1930 and characterised it as a gross libel on India and on Gujarat in particular. The Governor had said that the entire civil disobedience movement was charged with violence and Bombay Province was rife with disorder. Surat and Kaira in particular had been picked by him as examples of areas where Congress had encouraged the growth of violence and disorder. Patel contradicted all these charges and declared that in this spirit peace moves would never be entertained; in fact the struggle would be intensified after the monsoon.<sup>19</sup>

During 1930, Patel was in and out of jail three times. Early August saw him back in jail in connection with the Tilak Anniversary procession; he was sentenced for three months. On 5 November he was released but was taken in custody on 6 December from Ahmedabad to Bombay in connection with a speech delivered at Bombay a month earlier while opening Soorji Vallabhdas Khadi Bhandar in Mandvi. In between jail sentences, he made sure the grip on Congress supporters was strengthened by adequate reassurances to them about the return of the lands that landholders had been called upon to forfeit both during the Bardoli campaign and the current civil disobedience movement. In urban areas (Ahmedabad and Bombay) merchants, who were increasingly supporting Congress with a prudence that was typical of them, needed clarification on the issue of the boycott of foreign cloth and the position of millcloth. These two matters were crucial in Ahmedabad and Bombay which were the leading textile areas of the country. Purshotamdas Thakurdas wrote to Patel that manufacturers and salesmen of indigenous millcloth seemed to have got the impression that Congress wanted the cloth market in Bombay to be closed as part of the current political

movement for Swadeshi.<sup>20</sup> A clear statement was communicated through Purshotamdas Thakurdas to the Bombay merchants by Patel that the closing of the Bombay Cloth Market was neither intended nor desirable as part of the movement. 'What Congress wants is, as is well known, the stoppage of import or sale of foreign cloth. As far as I am aware even the Bombay PCC is not against the sale of mill made cloth...'<sup>21</sup>

There were merchants who had large stocks of foreign cloth. Their plight had to be met too. At the opening of Soorji Vallabhdas Khadi Bhandar, Patel said the idea of the sale of such cloth later should be dispelled by merchants. The only guarantee he would give them was that if they had not already taken such cloth to Delhi and burnt it, they should make an inventory of their stocks and seal them and he promised to pay them every penny when a national government was established in the country.<sup>22</sup> Further assurances were given on the question of general hartals which were to be treated purely as symbols of protest and not as an impediment to commerce or trade.<sup>23</sup> Patel took great pains to protect his allies.

Gujarat had posed an increasing threat to Government in its successful conduct of no-tax campaigns. Even more important, however, was the prominence that the Gujarat situation received in the peace talks that began between the Gandhians and the Government as a result of the parleys between the moderates and Gandhians in Yerawada jail in August 1930. Ramsay Macdonald announced on 19 January 1931 that the Round Table Conference was arriving at some agreement that the aim of the intended reforms should be a Federation, the nature of which would be determined after further discussions with the representatives of British India and the Princes. Irwin then announced on 25 January that in order to facilitate negotiations, the Government in consultation with local Governments had decided to free those members of the Congress Working Committee who were in prison. The Gandhi-Irwin agreement, also widely known as the Delhi Settlement, was not received with great enthusiasm by many Indians and more particularly

by many Congressmen. Much energy had to be devoted by the protagonists of the agreement to convince those who felt that the suspension of civil disobedience as demanded by the settlement was a betrayal ; and to argue that the agreement, far from obstructing Congress's interests, would help Congress in gaining lost ground. On his first visit to Ahmedabad at a large public meeting at Azad Maidan on 8 March 1931, Patel explained the truce by saying that the nation would lose nothing if it laid down its arms while the discussions at the Round Table Conference were going on. In inviting Congress to formulate its demands Government had in fact given recognition to Congress and realised its strength. The basis of the agreement was that India would be treated as indivisible, consisting of the Indian States, and what was called 'British India'; responsible Government would be a condition in the discussion of any future scheme and the safeguards and reservations that were to be negotiated would be in the interests of India.<sup>24</sup> But more important than the nuances of the constitutional problem was the issue of confiscated lands which was Patel's own condition for the acceptance of any proposals, which condition Gandhi was obliged to fulfil no matter how smoothly discussions on other matters might proceed. He faithfully promised:

I shall see that every inch of the confiscated land goes back to the rightful owner. There cannot be any alternative proposal in this regard. The land will and shall be restored to the man who owns it inspite of the Government whose contract is closed. 25

The issue took on serious proportions as negotiations between Gandhi and the Viceroy proceeded. Government accused cultivators of non-payment of dues, and cultivators accused Government of using intimidation and force to extract revenue. At this juncture Vallabhbhai Patel's prestige depended on the successful solution of the Gujarat lands and revenue problem so that he could carry on negotiations with the Government with the sanction of the people behind him. While Patel recommended Gandhi's settlement to the people, Gandhi undertook to lend his prestige to Patel's campaign to reassure

the cultivators of Gujarat that they would not be let down and all promises made to them would be fulfilled. On 12 March, a week after the Gandhi-Irwin agreement, Gandhi marched with Patel from Ahmedabad to Borsad, through the villages of Baroda territory to encourage and reassure the people.<sup>26</sup>

As President of the Karachi session of Congress, Patel urged Congress to endorse the settlement that the Working Committee as 'accredited representatives' had entered into with Government. He pointed out that it was not really open to the general Congress to repudiate the agreement unless they passed a vote of no-confidence in the Working Committee. Discussing the settlement at length Vallabhbhai asserted that the clause about 'safeguards and reservations' should not alarm anyone; British advice would be taken, not their dictation, whether it was in the field of defence, finance or civil administration. To pacify the protagonists of complete independence he said that there would be no receding from the Lahore resolution of complete independence. But a childish refusal to associate with the British or any other power would be unwise and he was decidedly not in favour of it, as he openly admitted:

I am aware that there is strong body of opinion in the country to the effect that before a partnership could possibly be conceived, there must be a period of complete dissociation. I do not belong to that school. 27

Congress's big political opportunity for participation had come and Vallabhbhai Patel was not going to allow extremists from any side to ruin Congress's chances. One can discern from this point onwards an all-out effort on Patel's part to procure for Congress the real benefits that would accrue from any reforms that were likely to be introduced as a result of the negotiations. To that end he also started shaping the Congress in his own image, with Gandhi's consent and full cooperation. At the first AICC session under Patel's presidency on 1 April 1931, Gandhi prepared a list of new members of the Working Committee in accordance with Patel's

plans for shaping a Congress that would do his bidding. Bose was dropped from the Working Committee, and certain provinces were not represented. Gandhi made a revealing statement about it:

If you want work from Sardar Patel you must not put in any man on the Working Committee who might strike a discordant note. 28

Much evidence of this attribute could be seen as the Congress moved forward, bargaining all the time, in the period of political development that accompanied the British reform scheme. How the entire Congress machine was geared towards procuring the desired political gains will be seen in the next chapter.

The Karachi session of Congress was described as a 'historic session' by many Congress leaders who attended it.<sup>29</sup> The atmosphere in the country was mirrored in the session proceedings. There was a difference of opinion on the resolution on Fundamental Rights and the National Economic Programme in the Subject Committee. Eventually, with appropriate changes, the resolution was accepted at the session and many of the Fundamental Rights drawn by Jawaharlal Nehru were incorporated later into free India's Constitution. Gandhi and Patel thus placated the restless revolutionaries; Patel also reproached them for their impatience. He assured them that eventually the Congress organisation would be in the hands of the younger men. If they really had strength behind them and did not approve the Constitution formulated by the moderates 'they could always throw it into the waste paper basket' when the time came. Until then discussion on the settlement would not be encouraged and the orders of 'Commander-Gandhi' would have to be obeyed.<sup>30</sup>

In his capacity as President of Congress did Patel reveal any distinctive features of style in dealing with political and non-political matters? There were a few things that were given priority in keeping with Patel's own interests. The dispute over lands confiscated during the no-tax campaign was one such issue. Vallabhbhai had much at stake in terms of political support and credibility in fulfilling the pro-

mises he had made to the Gujarat peasants. In the Gandhi-Irwin talks Gandhi indicated quite clearly that it was Patel who had to be satisfied in any arrangements that were agreed to in relation to confiscated lands. After the agreement Patel was perturbed that there was continuous harassment of peasants in Valod Mahal, that pending cases had not been withdrawn, confiscated lands had not been returned and police had been posted in several places to prevent farmers from entering their fields.<sup>31</sup> Several instances of pressure by police and officials occurred and Patel reported them to Gandhi, who was in Simla at the time. When police prosecution became intolerable and a blockade was imposed on some villages, Patel became desperate: 'For God's sake allow fighting if this cannot be stopped', he urged.<sup>32</sup> Government was irritated by the importance that Gujarat farmers had assumed in the negotiations with the Congress. Fully aware that Vallabhbhai would not yield on this subject they chided him for being more solicitous about his reputation among his Gujarat supporters than about the peace that a settlement might bring. Gandhi was anxious that Congress should participate in the negotiations but not at the cost of alienating the solid support of those leaders on whom he was beginning to rely more and more for taking the Congress forward with him. Gujarat, therefore, became a stumbling block in any move towards a solution ; as Sykes put it to Irwin: '...it was a question of how far Vallabhbhai will be prepared to sacrifice his own reputation in the interests of peace'.<sup>33</sup>

Patel also dealt with the Gujarat problem directly. He undertook to fight for some of the patels who had resigned and not been reinstated. In Ras, a Patidar-dominated village, several such incidents had occurred. In one particular case the new patel of a criminal tribe had a conviction and was, therefore, not qualified to fill the post ; yet he had been retained instead of the previous Patidar patel who had resigned at the instance of Vallabhbhai Patel. To regularise the position of the new appointee, the Government was contemplating removing the disqualification of the patel they had appointed:

...instead of removing them from service it is now seriously proposed to remove their legal disqualification. I must emphatically protest against this wanton breach of the settlement. 34

Patel was prepared to fight to the end to get the old Patel reinstated; that is how he made life-long supporters. His continued support for Patidars returned enormous dividends at every juncture. In addition, he ardently espoused the cause of the Patidars generally at this point. He had put forward their complaints to the Collector from time to time in the matter of confiscated lands and pressures put on them for non-payment. The Government had put special police in the area for the protection of Patidars' property. Then the police was removed and the Dharalas began harassing Patidars again. Patel vehemently fought out the Patidars' point of view and rejected any suggestion that Patidars should be expected to work jointly with Dharalas.<sup>35</sup>

Apart from the land issue and remission of land revenue and the general advancement of Gujarat, internal Congress matters needed careful handling by the President. Patel had to face many attacks from individuals and regions. In particular, Bengal became an increasing source of trouble for Congress as the years went on. Bengal was unhappy with Patel ; Subhas Bose at a Students' Conference made a general attack on the Working Committee and a specific one on Patel that Bengal had been completely neglected for about eighteen months. The Bengal Congress had not been approached in connection with the Hijli tragedy.<sup>36</sup> Sen Gupta was putting pressure over the affairs in Chittagong where violence and repression had occurred. He wanted an all-India demonstration to be organised. Patel consulted M.S.Aney in the matter. Aney's opinion was that Congress would be ill-advised to take up such a step as an all-India demonstration. But he did corroborate the general feeling that Congress had neglected the province of Bengal:

He is of opinion that nothing of that kind could be done although he feels that in Bengal a feeling had been worked up that the province had been neglected by the Congress. 37

The Bengal Congress was having its own internal trouble. Subhas Bose and Sen Gupta were at odds, and the former had asked the Working Committee to intervene. Complaints had been coming in for some time from Bengal about the difficulty that some District Congress Committees were having in obtaining membership forms from the Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. The rule in Bengal, as in some other provinces, was that the sanction of the PCC had to be obtained before membership forms could be obtained by the DCCs. Some DCCs had been refused the forms.<sup>38</sup> Subhas Bose and Sen Gupta had quarrelled partly because the latter had ordered the printing of membership forms, in anticipation of being denied printed forms, despite being told not to do so. He also wrote to Bose suggesting that as Secretary he should issue forms liberally and not give cause for complaints.<sup>39</sup> M.S. Aney was appointed to settle the dispute which threatened to get out of proportion. Aney's award did not help and the settlement between Bose and Sen Gupta was short-lived. Patel called Subhas Bose to Delhi to discuss matters but the latter refused and said that the meeting would have to be in Calcutta as he was not inclined to go to Delhi.

Subhas is angry with us because we refused to interfere in their quarrels as desired by him at the last meeting of the Working Committee...I wired to him inviting him to come to Delhi with the proposals about Bengal...he has wired back saying that we must meet in Calcutta and that he cannot come to Delhi. 40

Patel decided to assuage the Bengali Congressmen and requested Rajendra Prasad to go to Murshidabad to attend the Bengal Conference. Nariman also agreed to go. Having done that, he wrote to Nehru:

I do not think that any Bengal friend should now complain that Working Committee was in any way neglecting Bengal. The step of sending two members of the Working Committee specially to go and attend a Provincial Congress is not unusual one. 41

Patel too had his grievances against Bengal's attitude to other provinces. In Calcutta, a campaign of picketing against Ahmedabad and Bombay mill cloth had been carried on

for a month and a half. Patel was angry about it and upset over Tagore's role in it:

Tagore had been rubbing the Gujaratis and Marwaris the wrong way. They complain of his narrow provincial propaganda for Bengal...a leaflet in Bengali... had been issued by Tagore recommending boycott of non-Bengali mills and the purchase by Bengalis of Bengal cloths alone. 42

Nehru visited Bengal in November 1931 and came back as distraught as Patel was over Bengal's parochial and antagonistic attitude. 43

Apart from attending to the problems within his own province and those of and between other provinces, Patel had to meet demands from individual Congressmen for the solution of their problems. These he handled with tact and shrewdness. A man named P.A.Pereira living near Bombay complained to Patel that the Bengal Mercantile Life Insurance Company, with its headquarters in Calcutta, was not paying him a due sum although his policy had matured a year before. Patel's reply was:

I regret that you should have so much difficulty in getting your dues but I am afraid it was not within my jurisdiction as President to go into private affairs of the members of the Congress. I am afraid therefore that I can do nothing in your matter. 44

Nehru's reaction to the same complaint was quite different:

...the Congress cannot tolerate the exploitation of people in this way by Insurance or other companies. In particular we are concerned with the efficient and honest management of Swadeshi concerns...the present case appears to be a glaring instance of inefficiency as well as want of bona fide and I am therefore giving publicity to it so that the public may be put on their guard. 45

Similar complaints were made on behalf of rural organisations - that in conflicts with those interest groups in Bombay which were important for Congress, Patel tended to keep the interest groups happy. When the prices of cotton and grain fell and farmers were adversely affected, it was brought to Patel's notice that this was largely due to forward markets and associations in cities like Bombay. The 'commercial princes and their clients' bought grain cheaply and then depressed prices

by 'short selling' in forward markets. Patel suggested that only the association representing the various trades and commercial interests of Bombay could take action in this matter:

Much as I regret the effects of extensive gambling in regard to cotton and grain commodities, I am afraid there is very little that I can do in my capacity as President of the Congress to improve the situation. 46

However, on another occasion not long afterwards Patel seems to have gone far beyond his jurisdiction as President of Congress. Before the Puri AICC Congress session, he instructed the Secretary of the DCC of Puri to remove or efface 'the ruins and other obscene images on temples in our country'. Decent people he said found such figures revolting and, therefore, the sooner temples like Jagannath at Puri were rid of them the better. That the figures were of archaeological and historical value did not concern him. He had to keep up the Congress image of a body of 'pure minded persons'. No one else was consulted; instructions were given and the job had to be done:

I shall be glad to hear from you that the proposed effacement had been effected. I have no doubt you will move in the matter with promptness and see that the offensive features of the great gopura and elsewhere in the Puri temple are obliterated forthwith. I wish that the process should be completed in good time before the ensuing Congress at Puri. 47

Patel was emerging as authoritarian and conservative, with a genius for organisation. Skilful though he was as an organiser, Patel had his short-comings as a negotiator and reconciler. He seems to have recognised this himself. Conscious of the difference between his and Gandhi's approach to political and other problems Patel indicated once that he had less patience with and was more intolerant of dissenters and breakers of agreements than Gandhi was. 'Gandhi's ways' he said 'were the ways of peace and persuasion'. But, he (Patel) was not versed in skills like letter writing and long drawn out negotiations. This was by way of warning to the Government that if it committed breaches of the peace settlement in Gandhi's absence from India it would be doing so at

its own risk.<sup>48</sup> As agitators Gandhites could afford to appear tough. Yet, during negotiations later when Congress was likely to gain substantially by compromising somewhat, Patel was the first among the Gandhites to settle for a bird in hand rather than aspire for two in the bush (See Chapter VII).

Patel's involvement in the solution of the communal problem was negligible at this stage. Mobilisation of Muslims during satyagraha campaigns was left to Muslim leaders and he had no close relations either with Muslim leaders or with any Muslim groups inside or outside Gujarat. He was more interested in the 'truce' with Government to the extent that it pertained to Gujarat. The main stumbling block in the way of Gandhi's departure for London had become Government's unsatisfactory answer to his letter relating to breaches of the 'truce', which breaches related to the crisis in Bardoli caused by revenue extracted from peasants under duress. That Patel was unyielding on the subject was evident. His word carried sufficient weight in Congress by then for Gandhi to tour Bardoli and Borsad as well as go to Simla for talks with the Viceroy on the subject in order to satisfy and pacify Patel.<sup>49</sup> Patel's rigidity led to rumours that the Government was considering it necessary to arrest Patel and Jawaharlal Nehru at Simla at the beginning of July. While Gandhi was willing to give a longer rope to the Government on the question of the appointment of a tribunal to look into breaches of the peace in areas in Gujarat, Patel was clear that a tribunal of his design would have to be a precondition to Congress participation in the Round Table Conference. Gandhi agreed to an impartial official inquiry instead of an Arbitration Board and later even conceded that he would advise the Working Committee to accept a 'one-sided tribunal' if Government accepted the principle that between the Government and the people, the Congress would act as an intermediary.<sup>50</sup>

Congress discussions in the meantime were progressing on two fronts (1) between Congress members on the issue of communalism and (2) between Congress members and the Govern-

ment on the Delhi Settlement and the observance of its conditions. On the first question, at the Congress Working Committee meeting that was held on 7 July 1931 in Bombay, Dr. Ansari, the leader of the Nationalist Muslims, had talks with Shaukat Ali who was a spokesman for those who were adamant that separate electorates were necessary albeit for an initial period of about ten years. The question as to whether Muslims should accept joint electorates after the stipulated period would be decided by a 60 per cent majority of the Muslim members of the legislatures elected by separate electorates. The Nationalist Muslims (Dr. Ansari, Maulana Azad, Dr. Alam and Syed Mohammad) were not prepared to compromise to that extent. Even if they yielded on the issue of a five or ten year period for separate electorates, they were quite clear that they would not allow separate electorates to continue beyond this period. To ward off criticism from the general Muslim populace, they also contended that the communalist Muslims were not more concerned about the interests of the Muslims than they were, and were in fact compromising the Muslim position by accepting a 46 per cent minority in Bengal and a 40 per cent minority position in Punjab in exchange for separate electorates. In Bengal and Punjab the Nationalist Muslims were adamant that a Muslim majority should be preserved. The inability of the two Muslim groups to agree led Congress to appoint a sub-committee to draft a formula on the communal problem which would meet with the Nationalist Muslim view point and satisfy Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and all minority communities that held nationalist views.

Gandhi, Patel, Jawaharlal Nehru and Abdul Ghaffar Khan went to Simla on 25 August in a last bid to solve the problem. Caught between his anxiety to retain control of Congress policy as well as of the massive active support and organisation brought to bear on Congress by Vallabhbhai Patel, Gandhi made a statement that would placate all sides, such as:

There is not the slightest desire to humiliate or embarrass the government or anybody. The only desire

is to get justice somehow or other. Let it be after the Government's manner but it must be so just that it would be acknowledged as such by those who are striving for it.... 51

By the end of August, the contradictions between Gandhi's keenness to go and Patel's insistence that Gandhi could only participate if the Bardoli crisis had been given consideration, were well known. Bombay Chronicle reported clearly that 'Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel is no longer in the way as the inquiry into Bardoli affairs has been conceded'.<sup>52</sup> Patel had his way. In later years, at the time of constitutional negotiations when Government had to ascertain the Congress position on various matters, Government realised and admitted that rather than carry on discussions with the Congress President it was better to call Vallabhbhai Patel and get an idea of real Congress thinking.

This difference in approach between Gandhi and Patel appeared more and more clearly as the opportunities for political participation and involvement increased. It took concrete shape in the formulation of a new policy by Congress to meet the new political stimuli. Patel's greatest anxiety was the one he had for the freedom movement. He was anxious that the India that emerges should be a conservative India. Gandhi was no radical, but he did want many changes in the social structure. Patel's and Gandhi's style and role in achieving a conservative India were poles apart. The next chapter reveals this in ample measure.

### FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER III

- 1 R.J.Moore, The Crisis of Indian Unity, 1917-1940, (Oxford 1974) p.46.
- 2 Indian Annual Register, 1928, Vol.I, p.359.
- 3 Motilal Nehru to Jawaharlal Nehru, 11 August 1927, Nehru Papers.
- 4 Bombay Chronicle, 26 April 1929. p.7.
- 5 Presidential address, Maharashtra Provincial Conference, 4 May 1929, Indian Annual Register, 1929, Vol.I, p.389 ; also Bombay Chronicle, 6 and 7 May 1929, p.1.
- 6 Indian Annual Register, 1929, Vol.II.
- 7 General Manager, Keystone View Co. to Secy to Vallabhbhai Patel, 9 July 1928, Patel Papers.
- 8 Parikh, op.cit. Vol.1, p.393.
- 9 Dennis Dalton, 'The Dandi Drama', in Peter Robb and David Taylor (ed.) Rule, Protest, Identify, Aspects of Modern South Asia (London 1978). See also Gandhi to Vallabhbhai Patel, 18 May 1934, Letters to Sardar Patel.
- 10 The Bombay Cotton Brokers' Association, Shri Mahajan Association, The Bombay Bullion Exchange, the Bombay Stock Exchange, Hindustani Native Merchants' Association, the Grains and Seeds Merchants' Association, the Seeds Trader Association, the Marwari Chamber of Commerce and the Bombay Shroff Association.
- 11 Bombay Chronicle, 3 November 1930, p.1.
- 12 The Hindu, 22 March 1930, p.1.
- 13 Ibid, 8 March 1930, p.9.
- 14 Speech by Governor, Bombay, at Governor's Conference, Simla, 21-25 July 1930, Sykes Papers, Mss.Eur. F.150/2(b).
- 15 Bombay Chronicle, 3 July 1930, p.1.
- 16 Ibid, 4 July pp.1 and 3.
- 17 Ibid, 5 July 1930, p.1.
- 18 Ibid, 15 July 1930, p.1.
- 19 Ibid, 4 July 1930, pp.1 and 6 ; 15 July 1930, p.1 ; 21 July 1930, p.1.

- 20 Purshotamdas Thakurdas to Patel, 22 July 1930, Letter published in Bombay Chronicle, 26 July 1930, p.1.
- 21 Vallabhbhai to Purshotamdas Thakurdas, 23 July 1930, *ibid.*
- 22 Bombay Chronicle, 15 November 1930, p.1.
- 23 Vallabhbhai Patel to Purshotamdas Thakurdas, 23 July and 26 July 1930, *ibid.*, p.1.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 9 March 1931, p.1 and 5.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 13 March 1931, p.1.
- 26 *Ibid.*; Parikh, *op.cit.*, Vol. 2, p.47.
- 27 Presidential address at Karachi Congress, Bombay Chronicle, Special Congress Supplement, 30 March 1931, p.A.
- 28 Bombay Chronicle, 2 April 1931, p.1.
- 29 K.M.Munshi, Indian Constitutional Documents, Vol.1, p.28. P.Sitaramayya, The History of the Indian National Congress (1895-1935) pp.782-3.
- 30 Presidential address, Karachi session, Indian Annual Register, 1931, Vol.I, p.280.
- 31 Vallabhbhai Patel to Gandhi, Telegram, 18 May 1931, AICC File 32 of 1931.
- 32 Vallabhbhai Patel to Gandhi, Telegram 21 July 1931, Patel Papers.
- 33 Sykes to Irwin, 25 March 1931. Mss.Eur. F.150/3(a).
- 34 Vallabhbhai Patel to Emerson, 24 October 1931, AICC File 32 of 1931.
- 35 *Ibid.*
- 36 On 16 September 1931 detenues in Hijli Jail were fired upon by the Government. This created an uproar and even Rabindranath Tagore, the Bengali Poet who had stayed out of politics, made speeches condemning the action.
- 37 Vallabhbhai Patel to Jawaharlal Nehru, 7 October 1931, AICC G-60 of 1931.
- 38 AICC File 21 of 1931.
- 39 Patel to Sen Gupta and Patel to Bose, 10 October 1931, AICC File 63 of 1931.
- 40 Patel to Nehru, 19 October 1931, AICC File G-30 of 1931.

See also Nehru to Secretary, BPCC, 11 April 1931, File 22 of 1931.

41 Patel to Nehru, 28 November 1931, AICC File G-60 of 1931.

42 Patel to Nehru, 25 November 1931, *ibid.*

43 Nehru to Patel, 26 November 1931 and 28 November 1931, *ibid.*

44 Patel to P.A.Pereira, AICC File 17 of 1931.

45 Note by Nehru, 21 October 1931, AICC File 8 of 1931.

46 Patel to R.D. Palliwal, 19 June 1931, AICC File 17 of 1931.

47 Patel to Secretary DCC Puri, 14 November 1931, AICC File 9 of 1931.

48 Bombay Chronicle, 26 June 1931, p.1.

49 *Ibid*, 14 July 1931, p.1.

50 *Ibid*, 19 August 1931, p.1. ; 21 August 1931, p.1.

51 Gandhi's interview to the Press at Ahmedabad, 18 August 1931, *Ibid*, 19 August 1931, p.1.

52 *Ibid*, 28 August 1931, p.1.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONGRESS'S NEW POLICY AND THE ASCENDANCY

#### OF THE RIGHT WING 1934-1937

As a result of the Round Table Conference held in London, the Communal Award of August 1932, the White Paper of March 1933 and the proceedings of the Joint Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform, Congress leaders who were not attracted to civil disobedience and who favoured entering the legislature became active once again in attempting to frame a policy that would be an adequate and advantageous response to the political stimuli being offered. During the years that Gandhi, Patel and other prominent leaders were in jail, particularly the period between January 1932 and July 1934, there was a certain amount of dissatisfaction among Congress leaders with existing Congress policy. The British referred to it as a 'drift' and regarded it as very suitable for their purposes.<sup>1</sup> Apart from disagreements on the continuance of civil disobedience, the constitutional reforms, communal electorates and other specific issues, Congressmen had accentuated their ideological differences. Previously, owing primarily to Gandhi's genius, moderates and extremists, socialists and capitalists, revolutionaries and reactionaries, all had somehow managed to co-exist under the Congress umbrella. With Gandhi in jail along with his 'action man' Patel, things had gone roughly for Congress as an organisation. Dissensions had deepened and Gandhi seemed to have lost his grip over many moderates and extremists alike. The jail interlude was not favourable from the point of view of Gandhi's hold over his differing Congress colleagues. He shouldered a heavy responsibility in directing and continuing civil disobedience from within the jail while other leaders outside had different plans for Congress. Events that were happening outside dismayed Gandhi; Patel on the other hand seemed to anticipate them and rebuked Gandhi repeatedly for shutting his eyes to the reality and for undertaking fasts each time something went against his wishes.

Elections to the Central Legislature were due in November 1934 and Congress had to formulate a policy on the matter. Congressmen outside jail attempted to gauge opinions in the different Congress provinces on the future programme of Congress, and on civil disobedience in particular.<sup>2</sup> Congress leaders who were not in jail met on 12 July 1933. M.S. Aney, the acting President, strongly urged the withdrawal of civil disobedience and the capture of the councils. All the provinces were represented and most leaders pleaded for a change in the programme; even those who favoured the continuance of civil disobedience admitted that the movement was at an ebb. The conference passed a resolution authorising Gandhi to seek an interview with the Viceroy failing which civil disobedience was to continue unabated. The Viceroy's reply to Gandhi was unfavourable as the Viceroy had declined to negotiate with the representatives of an association which had not abandoned the movement against the Government. However, the pressure on Congress continued from those leaders who wanted a new programme for it. The idea was put forward that some leaders 'should meet and decide to restart the Swaraj Party and go over to the country with a concrete programme of work'.<sup>3</sup> It was recommended that individual civil disobedience might be allowed and also the propagation of the constructive programme as a scheme towards the preparedness for another fight.

On 31 March 1934, about forty Congress leaders met at Dr. Ansari's residence in Delhi. The outcome was the revival of the Swaraj Party to contest the elections with the object of rejecting the Government's White Paper and replacing it with national demands. Gandhi approved the decision and wrote to Vallabhbhai Patel that he hoped that the latter endorsed his approval. 'I feel it is better not to exercise any more check' and, therefore, those who wished to enter the legislature might do so in their own name, not in the name of the Congress.<sup>4</sup> Gandhi was well aware that many would rejoice at the new developments. He was eager to have Patel's opinion and was confident that of all the Congressmen close

to him Patel would 'appreciate the correctness of the decisions'. A meeting of the revised Swaraj Party was due in Ranchi and Gandhi was anxious that even while he disagreed with them he should still lead the men who had hitherto followed him unquestionably. He wanted to show them that he saw their point of view and did not want to lose their following. He confided this to Patel:

It is only fair that those who daily attend the councils in the spirit should be permitted to enter them in fact, then alone can they realise the advantages and disadvantages of such action. Is it not better that one who daily eats jalebis in his imagination should eat the real thing and know the wisdom or folly of doing so? 5

Patel's formal response to the new development could only be obtained after his release; in the meantime, Gandhi made it clear that Patel's views were vital if any irreversible decisions were to be taken:

I can only say that any conclusions that any conference many arrive at can only be inconclusive without the presence of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. 6

The suspension of general civil disobedience was ordered by Gandhi in a statement issued from Patna on 7 April 1934. This order and the recognition bestowed on the revived Swaraj Party started fresh ripples in the political stream. Once again political activity began all round. The Ranchi meeting of the Swarajists on 3 May sought to get the resolution of the Delhi Conference of March approved and to elaborate further the implications of the developments both in relation to Congress and the general political scene. All proposals were to be subject to the approval of the AICC.<sup>7</sup> The AICC and the Working Committee meetings held in Patna on 18, 19 and 20 May 1934 endorsed Gandhi's statements of 7 April regarding the suspension of general civil disobedience and the adoption of the programme of council-entry. The decision led to the formation of the Congress Parliamentary Board to which was entrusted the task of contesting the elections. The Working Committee decided that the existence of

a Swaraj Party as a separate party was unnecessary and the parent body, Congress, would undertake through its own Board, the work of implementing the new policy of the Congress. It was also decided that an open session of Congress would be held in Bombay in October to give finality to all these decisions. Alignments and manoeuvrings once again became the preoccupation of Congress and non-Congress leaders, not unlike what had happened after the Gaya Congress in December 1922.

Vallabhbhai Patel was released from jail on 14 July 1934. Much had happened outside during the two and a half years that he had spent in jail. The Communal Award had been announced in August 1932, leading to great protest by Indian leaders, Gandhi's fast and the Poona Pact. A White Paper with detailed constitutional proposals for the future of India's political development had been published on 15 March 1933. A Socialist Party had been formed and the Swaraj Party had been revived to enter the councils. Patel's views on each of these subjects were significant in terms of the direction that Congress was now going to take to meet the political situation. The Communal Award caused disagreements in the Congress Parliamentary Board soon after the Board was set up. The Nationalist Muslims endorsed the position taken at the Ranchi Conference on 4 May that the Award should neither be accepted nor rejected until an agreed settlement between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs was brought about. At the CPB meeting on 16 June, Gandhi firmly stated that Congress stood for Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and others and nothing should be done to make the Muslims feel that Congress had departed from that position. M.M.Malaviya and M.S.Aney, however, wanted the unequivocal rejection of the Award and threatened to resign their positions on the Board and the Working Committee respectively if Congress did not reject the Award.<sup>8</sup> At its meeting in Benaras at the end of July, the Working Committee issued the Election Manifesto approved by the Congress Parliamentary Board. The White Paper was deplored and a Constituent Assembly was recommended, elected on the basis of adult suffrage or its nearest equivalent, with power given,

if necessary, to the important minorities to have their representatives elected exclusively by electors belonging to such minorities. The White Paper lapsing, the Communal Award would lapse automatically. The Constituent Assembly would determine the method of representation of important minorities and make provisions for safeguarding their interests. On the Award, in particular, the Working Committee felt that as long as differences persisted the position still had to be that it could neither be rejected nor accepted:

By common consent it is intrinsically bad. It is anti-national. But Congress cannot refuse to take into account the attitude of Musalmans in general who seem to want the Award; nor can the Congress accept it, as Hindus and Sikhs reject it. 9

It was further stated that all members would be obliged to carry out the Congress programme and all office members who did not do so would be disciplined unless they had a conscientious objection to doing so. Malaviya and Aney resigned from the Parliamentary Board and the Working Committee respectively.

It was at this point that Patel was forced to make explicit his displeasure at the tendency towards increasing indiscipline in the Congress organisation from several quarters. Initially he believed that Malaviya's and Aney's revolt would not be able to damage Congress prestige. Replying to a request from Choitram Gidwani, the President of the Sind PCC, for a reconsideration of the Working Committee's resolution in the light of the increasing tendency to revolt as evidenced by the attitude of Malaviya and Aney and that of Roy, Gupta, Tandon and Kidwai on the Council-Entry programme, Patel said: 'God willing, we shall come through elections and successfully, leaving no marks of bitterness behind'.<sup>10</sup> But the revolt soon took on serious overtones and led to a strong reaction from Patel. Malaviya formed the Nationalist Party in Calcutta, stating on 19 August that it was not a revolt against the Congress. Nonetheless, Patel issued a statement a few days later to the effect that the new party would be undermining the strength of the Congress

and was, therefore, working against the Congress's interests. In view of the fact that Gandhi had given conscientious objectors to the Award the freedom to speak against it, it was not necessary for dissenters to form a new party. Bona-fide Congressmen would be put up as candidates even while they spoke against the Award. If, however, non-Congressmen were intended to be put up as candidates by the Nationalist Party, then clearly it was working towards weakening the Congress. Clarifying the relationship of the Nationalist Party with the Congress Party, Patel said that the former had no authority to contest the elections in the name of Congress. Refuting Malaviya's claim that the Congress Nationalist Party was a party within the Congress and that it stood for the essential principles of the long-established Congress to a greater extent than the Congress Parliamentary Board, Patel retorted:

....without the authority of the Congress being duly received it cannot with propriety be called 'Congress Nationalist Party' especially when it is formed deliberately to propagate a policy in direct contradiction to the official policy of the Congress. 11

Patel looked at the prevailing problem of internal conflict in the Congress from two angles. He felt strongly that discipline and solidarity were now of greater importance, given the forthcoming legislature entry. To that end it was necessary that the agency that the AICC had appointed be obeyed and no Congressmen could owe allegiance to any other organisation so far as the election and related programmes were concerned. Dissenters had to be dealt with firmly. Patel put forward the argument that Congressmen who were now fighting the elections had derived the authority to do so from the AICC resolution adopted at Patna in May 1934. The same resolution also enjoined all Congressmen to be guided in all matters pertaining to the elections by the Congress Parliamentary Board. Malaviya and other dissenters were disobeying the dictates of a resolution that they had been party to.<sup>12</sup> Patel also felt conflicts were becoming increasingly discernible and would undermine the

strength of the Congress at a crucial juncture when united action and a diminution of conflict was imperative. With a view to presenting a united front at the time of the elections, Patel suggested a fresh attempt towards arriving at a working arrangement between the Congress and the Nationalist Party. The Working Committee invited Malaviya and Aney to work out a compromise at their meeting at Wardha which began on 8 September 1934. No compromise emanated from twelve hours of joint and separate discussions between Malaviya and Aney on the one side and Gandhi, Patel, Dr. Roy, Bhulabhai Desai and Maulana Azad on the other. Congress offered Malaviya ten seats for his party but Malaviya wanted more.

The Congress Working Committee concluded its session with a general statement of its policy and a particular set of instructions directed at dissenters, that all Provincial and subordinate Congress organisations had to obey the Congress Parliamentary Board in all election activities and that no office-bearer or member of any Congress executive could support any candidate who did not fully endorse the policy of Congress.<sup>13</sup>

Thus began an era in Patel's relationship with Congress in which he made it quite clear that as long as he had anything to do with the running of the Congress organisation he would not tolerate any indiscipline or rebellion. This was also the beginning of a period in the development of the Congress organisation when particular emphasis was placed on strict discipline, the forging of unity even at the risk of curbing freedom, and to that end, the setting up of a machinery that permeated all levels of the provinces and executed a programme and policy that came down from the top of the structure. Within a few days of having laid down the Congress position in relation to Malaviya and the Nationalist Party, Patel asserted it heavily against the Berar Provincial Congress Committee and invalidated the proceedings of their meeting at Amraoti at which Vamanrao Joshi was re-elected President, Kaanada Sastri of Buldana and B.H. Jatkari of

Yeotmal were elected Vice-Presidents and Biyani and P.Y. Deshmukh (Congress Socialists) were elected Joint Secretaries.<sup>14</sup> He also threatened disciplinary action against the Town and District Committees of Allahabad for their resolutions against the Working Committee's statement on Council Entry.<sup>15</sup> It became increasingly clear that Patel would not tolerate independent opinions on any matter on which the Working Committee made a decision. Addressing Congressmen when laying the foundation stone of Ghaffar Khan Nagar, which was being erected for the forthcoming Bombay session, Patel said:

You might have your own views on the political situation in the country. But forget it as long as you are volunteers. You are supposed to know nothing but service. 16

Patel was even more intolerant of the new Congress Socialist Party that had been formed in his absence. In dealing with the problem of socialists Gandhi and Patel were at one. Neither could tolerate either the theory or practice of socialism; Patel, however, was more ruthless than Gandhi in his attacks on all socialists. His political support came from areas and groups whose vested interests had to be protected. Socialists all over the country were pledging themselves to the destruction of the vested interests. Their threats had become more sharp ever since the Congress Working Committee had yielded to pressure from the Council-Wallahs. Socialist leaders were trying to persuade the general Congress to plan Congress strategy according to the socialists' programme. They had decided to permeate the Congress body and the Congress strongholds like Bombay and Gujarat in order to undermine the strength of the right wing.<sup>17</sup> The Executive Committee of the Bombay Congress Socialist Party was particularly critical of the Working Committee's policy:

Congress socialists will not be deterred by the Working Committee's disapproval but will double their efforts to get the Congress to adopt the programme on which alone the broad masses of the country can be organised in the struggle for independence and to stop the disastrous drift to the Right. We appeal to the rank

and file of the Congress to rebel against the policy of fraternisation with Liberals, Pseudo-Liberals and Mahasabhaites. 18

From U.P., Acharya Narendra Dev, Jai Prakash Narain, Sri Prakash and Sampurnanand criticised the Working Committee for referring to the socialist programme of class war and confiscation of private property as 'loose talk'.

In his first interview after his release, Patel made it clear that if the new Congress Socialist Party lowered the prestige of the Congress in any way he would oppose it vehemently. Unity and discipline were of great importance at that juncture; moreover, Congress owed something to those who had made sacrifices in supporting the party.<sup>19</sup> As socialists stepped up their propaganda Patel increased the intensity of his opposition till it bordered on becoming an obsession. In almost every speech he criticised the socialists for their 'foolish talk' about straightening the Congress ideology. Peasants could not benefit by reading Lenin or by indulging in academic discussions; socialists should go to the rural areas and work among the peasants as he (Vallabhbhai) had done.<sup>20</sup> At the Working Committee meeting in Benaras at the end of July, Gandhi tried to accommodate the socialists in the hope of somehow winning them over. A resolution was passed to the effect that the Congress resolution in which the words 'loose talk' had been used was not intended to be critical of the Congress Socialist Party or its programme, but of individual socialists who engaged in loose talk. But, Patel then obliterated Gandhi's soft-peddalling at a meeting at Kashi Vidyapith a few days after the Working Committee meeting by dismissing all the socialists' efforts as 'tall talk' and 'mere moon-shine'. Vallabhbhai said that he spoke:

...as a man of the people who had all his life lived in closest touch with the conditions in village life, I know what reorganising of the peasants and workers means. Let our Socialist friends show me a single village or a single union of industrial workers which they have organised to their satisfaction according to their ideas. 21

Throwing yet another challenge to the socialists who wanted

to replace the charkha in the Congress flag with the tricolour, Vallabhbhai said in Matunga:

It is no use condemning Congress and Congress leaders for doing this and omitting that. Let them accompany me from Cape Comorin to Kashmir, work amongst the peasants, handle tractors, and examine the comparative value of all their theories imported from the west. 22

More than the socialists' general encroachment into the Congress organisation Patel resented their intrusions into his political domain of Gujarat. Presiding over a special meeting of the Gujarat PCC on 3 October 1934, Patel pointedly told socialists that he would not tolerate any interference from them in Gujarat where he had dedicated his life to win Swaraj. Even if Gandhi left the Congress, he said, he (Patel) would not leave the Gujarat PCC. He had commitments to Gujarat and had to rehabilitate all the farmers who had been ruined during the civil disobedience movement.<sup>23</sup> At a public meeting in Ahmedabad he gave a stern warning that, unlike Gandhi, who was kind even to his enemies, Patel would deal toughly with anyone who came in his way and tried to undo what Congress had done.<sup>24</sup> Replying to an accusation denouncing him as the enemy of farmers and a friend of capitalists Patel said that everyone knew of his affinity with the peasants. As for being a friend of capitalists, he believed that in the struggle for freedom the help of capitalists, land-lords and princes should also be enlisted.<sup>25</sup> This only gave socialists more ammunition to attack Patel. The Publicity Officer of the Congress Socialist Party retorted that Patel resented socialists simply because the latter believed in divesting the vested interests upon which Patel relied for help and support. Rejecting Patel's special claim over Gujarat, the socialists declared:

Whether Mr. Patel will tolerate the socialists or not, the socialists certainly are not going to be elbowed out by such heroics. They know what they are about and in spite of Mr. Patel the socialists will carry out their programme in Gujarat, as in other parts of the country. 26

It became clear as time went on that as Patel hardened his

attitude to the socialists, the socialists intensified their campaign against Patel. Moreover, his intolerance of socialists increased and influenced many of his political decisions, particularly those that pertained to the organisation and personnel of the Congress Party. The entire decade of the 1930s was for Patel a period of consolidating Congress gains in such a way that like-minded Congressmen would control the decision-making apparatus and keep the left-wing out of the machinery of Congress. Patel's attitude to the Congress's new programme of council entry was related to the idea of Gandhiites seizing control and initiative in Congress affairs. Gandhi could not do it. His ideological commitment and proclamations precluded power politics which now assumed importance. Patel was willing to take on the challenge of the new Congress programme inclusive of its party politics. Tomlinson's assertion that Gandhi's lack of faith in the parliamentary programme was backed to the hilt by associates like Patel does not seem justified.<sup>27</sup> Patel asserted several times that Congress was now desperate to capture the legislatures for it was a chance which if missed may become a severe setback for Congress:

If people all over the country do not vote for the Congress candidates, and the majority of Congressmen are not returned to the Assembly in the forthcoming elections, then it must be understood that the Congress will not be able to do any work in the country for a few years to come. 28

He admitted that although earlier he had been an opponent of council-entry he had decided now that Congress prestige and morale demanded taking up the challenge which Government had thrown to the Congress. Success at elections was imperative for Congress and once that was obtained he would steer Congress along the right way:

Exercise your votes to the fullest extent and see that as many Congressmen as possible are returned to the Legislature, then come to me and I will show you the way. 29

Patel saw party politics as a necessary evil and intended dealing with them rather than wishing them away. The socia-

lists or other dissidents posed a big threat to the Gandhites which needed immediate attention. Apart from carrying out propaganda and disciplinary action against the socialists Gandhites had to take positive measures to build Congress's own strength in a way that would make future attempts to undermine their strength difficult.<sup>30</sup> Patel had a comprehensive scheme directed towards that end. Even Gandhi became an instrument, albeit by design, in the big plan for domination.

Closely related to the three issues which have been discussed above which engaged Patel's attention as soon as he came out of jail was a fourth problem which required even greater shrewdness than the other three, namely the role of Gandhi in the Congress organisation in the immediate future, given the ramifications of the new political situation. It can be seen from the several meetings that Patel had with Gandhi between the Benaras meeting in July and the Bombay Congress session in October that Patel was closely associated with Gandhi's decision to retire from active leadership of Congress.<sup>31</sup> After one such meeting at the beginning of September, Patel said in an interview in Wardha that the next meeting of the Working Committee was very important for several reasons and that some vital matters would come up in Congress soon. Two days later a report was leaked out by the correspondent of The Hindu which stated that Gandhi intended to retire from the Congress. Although Gandhi rebuked the correspondent for publishing a report of a confidential conversation between him and Patel he admitted that there had been discussion on that subject, and also stated that the decision to retire was not directly related to Malaviya and Aney's current moves against the Congress policy.<sup>32</sup> A draft of Gandhi's statement regarding the proposed retirement was sent to Patel for approval before it was actually made public on 17 September 1934.<sup>33</sup> The statement said that the decision to retire was prompted by what Gandhi regarded as 'fundamental differences between the Congress intelligentsia and me'.<sup>34</sup> On the spinning wheel, khaddar, entry into the legislatures,

socialism, policy towards the States and even non-violence, Congressmen disagreed with Gandhi, and he in turn refused to accept any of their views:

I see that the educated and intelligent section of the Congressmen no longer have faith in my programme of work....Out of personal consideration for me or because they are afraid to oppose me openly, they are refraining from open opposition and support my programme although they are not genuinely convinced of its merits.<sup>35</sup>

Whatever may have been proclaimed as the reasons for retirement the real reasons were not hard to determine. They could be ascertained from the moves and statements made by Gandhi before and after the first announcement of the proposed retirement and from the changes Gandhi wished to introduce in the Congress organisation. That a Congress without Gandhi would be better able to combat the ascendancy of other groups than a Congress inhibited by Gandhi's immaculate image had become increasingly evident. Gandhi expressed resentment at the socialists' encroachment : 'If they gain ascendancy in the Congress as they well may, I cannot remain in the Congress'.<sup>36</sup> But he could not take the more drastic step of fighting the socialists tooth and nail as Patel intended if they crossed his or the Congress's path. Gandhi was burdened with the responsibility of maintaining his image ; Patel had no such problem.

It might be argued that Patel's taking control was the result of the fact that Gandhi had been outmanoeuvred in Congress and would now await the call for direct action which he expected to lead. But, it must be remembered that in internal Congress politics, Gandhi did not mean simply the singular Gandhi any more. Gandhi had already begun functioning (politically) in accordance with much of Patel's strategy. Lack of interest in spinning and disillusionment with civil disobedience were not sufficient indicators of Gandhi's being out-manoeuvred. Gandhi's followers were not all of one kind. There were the true Gandhians who lived and worked as he did and followed his precepts religiously, having made Gandhism their life. They were the people who did village-uplift work

and spent much of their time in Gandhian ashrams. Then there were the Gandhiites who found his political techniques of satyagraha and non-cooperation effective and joined him primarily for these and marginally for Gandhism. Patel belonged to this category. There was also a third category who associated with him because of the success of his political techniques; they believed neither in the techniques themselves nor in the general Gandhian ideology. These broad categories did not emerge suddenly. They had existed for several years. By 1934, however, the third who comprised the least constant of Gandhi's associates, had become restive and to deal with them it was not ideological Gandhians that were needed but pragmatic Gandhiites. Patel seemed the most appropriate choice. With Gandhi's blessings on the one hand and concrete support from provincial leaders on the other, he felt he would be able to see the Congress through the crisis.

Rajendra Prasad from Bihar and Rajagopalachari from Madras were expected to provide that concrete support. Between them, the three leaders would be able to command enough support and gather adequate strength to fight to the bitter end. Gandhi had expressed his faith in Rajendra Prasad:

...who unlike Jawaharlal shares most of my ideas and whose sacrifice for the nation judged whether in quality or quantity is not to be excelled. 37

Gandhi expressed his confidence in the three leaders to Rajagopalachari when the latter visited him at Wardha at the end of August to discuss Gandhi's retirement:

If after my withdrawal the Congress being free from my deadweight turns down all that we have prized dearly, naturally you and others, including Rajendra Babu, will retire. I expect no such catastrophe. On the contrary I believe that they will listen to you and will be eager to retain your co-operation. 38

Rajagopalachari seemed to require a little more convincing than Patel and Prasad. He felt that the move had come at the wrong time and was likely to be seen as a triumph of the Government over the Congress and the Viceroy over Gandhi, and that all political hope and enterprise was likely to be des-

troyed. However, Gandhi's retirement was being carried out with the limited object of strengthening the Congress organisation by leaving it in tougher hands and not with the wider object of encouraging political hope all over the country. To that end the timing had been chosen with the concurrence of Patel, as Gandhi admitted: 'Sardar Vallabhbhai had agreed with me that the time had arrived for me to retire from the Congress'.<sup>39</sup> Patel corroborated this at a public meeting in Nagpur in an interview given in Wardha at the end of September:

My views on Gandhi's statement are well known. I said to him a fortnight ago and I believe it even now that the time is ripe for him to retire from the Congress...<sup>40</sup>

Patel also conceded that the work of restoring 'purity and discipline' in the Congress would be much facilitated if Gandhi was absent from Congress deliberations in Bombay. This statement led to the widespread belief that Patel had asked Gandhi not to attend the Bombay Congress session so that the organisation might be effectively purged of all the elements which were prone to insubordination and lack of discipline.<sup>41</sup>

From this point onwards, Vallabhbhai Patel took on a crucial role in the Congress organisation. He had now become Gandhi's 'deputy general' in a very real way. He was going to follow Gandhi's general strategy but the tactics would be his own. He felt he knew what was to<sup>be</sup> done. Gandhi trusted his instinct and let his mantle fall on Patel. He had told Jammal Bajaj soon after Patel's release that much load could now be shed on Patel who being out of jail could take on a great deal of work and shoulder much of his (Bajaj's) responsibility.<sup>42</sup> Patel took on the organisation and arrangement of Congress programmes and Gandhi referred such matters as the schedule for Congress elections and scrutiny of the names to him.<sup>43</sup> While he assigned all this work to Patel he also feared that the worst thing that could happen at this juncture would be if Patel were to fall ill, for the new edifice would collapse:

However, I remember the case of William, the Prince of Orange. As long as God wanted him to live and serve, he remained unharmed even in the midst of a shower of bullets. 44

In speeches delivered shortly before the Bombay Congress, Patel was able to speak on Gandhi's behalf with a forthrightness that Gandhi himself often shied away from. Contradicting statements of people like B.G.Horniman, who said that after all the hue and cry Gandhi would not retire, Patel said that Gandhi was simply disgusted with the hypocrisy and cheating that were rampant in the Congress organisation:

A man gives a hundred rupees and gets 400 members enrolled. At the time of elections he buys some khadi and clothes these members in it to vote for him and gets a place in the Congress Committee. 45

Addressing a Gandhi Jayanti meeting at Kalbadevi in Bombay, Patel told the crowd that if they did not want to follow Gandhi's precepts they should not keep Gandhi in the Congress.<sup>46</sup> If they had no faith in khaddar they should say so openly.<sup>47</sup> Ironically, Patel himself was not with Gandhi for his 'precepts' or his khaddar and, of all the Gandhiites, was perhaps the only one who recognised that some of the 'hypocrisy' that he was condemning on Gandhi's behalf was essential if electoral victory and monied candidates were required. Personally, he was more concerned about lack of discipline than hypocrisy. Patel also asked people to endorse the plan that Gandhi and he had in mind to strengthen the Congress organisation. It might mean that individual freedom would have to be replaced by submission to the dictates of the leaders:

In the midst of a great struggle if every soldier wants to think and act for himself, the war cannot be carried on, much less won...we must accept some limits to democracy of thought and action. 48

Discipline, which he used interchangeably with unity in many speeches, meant simply the observance of his dictates and succumbing to his will. An illustration of this can be observed in the next chapter in the kinds of people he supported and opposed.

In addition to ensuring that Congress would be managed by those who would have a community of interest, Gandhi and Patel had also worked out a plan for adapting the machinery of the Congress to the new climate which was being created. On 15 October, Gandhi made a statement proposing amendments to the Congress constitution (the statement was prepared with the help of Vallabhbhai Patel who was in Wardha till 14 October). Before spelling out the detailed changes Gandhi said:

In order that the change contemplated may not come without due warning to the nation, with the consent of Sardar Vallabhbhai I have taken the liberty of placing the amendments before the public. There is no question of threat or ultimatum behind the amendments. It will be open to the Subjects Committee and then to the Congress to reject the amendment, but I would warn them against so doing without the most careful considerations. 49

The changes proposed were as follows: The number of delegates was to be reduced from 6000 to a maximum of 1000, elected not according to the population of each province but in accordance with the number of Congressmen in the Congress register, in the ratio of one delegate to every 1000 or more Congressmen. Voters would have to be registered for at least six months before exercising the vote, and delegates would represent constituencies from which they were elected and no other area. These delegates would become the AICC for the year, and delegates from each province would become the PCC members in their respective provinces. Calcutta would be a separate province like Bombay. The PCCs would be in charge of creating the organisation of district and taluka Congress Committees. To strengthen the Working Committee the President would have complete power of appointing his colleagues. The reason was elaborated by Gandhi:

The idea is to save time and some degree of vexation. Not to accept the recommendation of the President in such a matter would be a vote of no-confidence. No President can work if his colleagues are imposed on him. 50

At the Bombay session of Congress, Gandhi moved his amendments which were passed for the most part except that the

figure for delegates was agreed at 2000 and the AICC was reduced to 166. The 1934 amendments to the Congress Constitution were significant, given the political background that has been described earlier. The aim was to make the Congress organisation compact and manageable and to give the Working Committee the power to run it in its own way. The stress on delegates being directly connected with the constituencies from which they were elected made local leaders in provinces important, and if the Working Committee was composed of members who were extremely powerful in their provinces and had control over local leaders, then clearly the entire Congress organisation would be at their beck and call. While the centralisation of the Congress was intended to give power to those persons who would be entrusted to run the Congress organisation, the ruralisation of Congress at the lower levels was intended to combat the propaganda of socialists and others relating to the Congress's lack of real interest in the masses. Gandhi intended to manouevre things in such a way that the entire Congress organisation would be equipped to meet political stimuli both from the Government and the people, and to combat adversity in a strong, silent and legitimate manner.

Patel acceded to Gandhi's strategy relating to the Party but carried on his more forthright tactics as well. Socialists Deshpande and Purshotamdas Tricumdas suggested that Gandhi's amendments be circulated and then discussed at the next session. Patel snubbed their proposal and said that the amendments were the result of Gandhi's unparalleled maturity and experience which could not be matched by anyone else in the Congress. The proposal was defeated; Gandhi and Patel won the day. Gandhi had been at a moral advantage throughout the session having announced his retirement from active leadership of the Congress and Patel had the tactical advantage of having Gandhi's full backing. The day after the session ended, Patel was able to sneer at all those critics who had doubted the success of the Bombay session and had said that Congress had lost its influence. Those who had faith in the

people and its leadership knew the Congress would be a success and it was.<sup>51</sup>

Gandhian leadership in general and Patel in particular came in for much criticism after the victory at Bombay. The Congress Socialist Party continued its vitriolic attacks. Particular leaders condemned the move towards excessive centralisation of Congress; they saw Gandhi's retirement as a ploy to make Congress disagreeable for non-Gandhiites and regarded the constitutional changes as harmful to the Congress mass character.<sup>52</sup> T. Prakasam made a pointed attack on Patel, the no-changer, for not resigning from the Working Committee when the pro-changers' policy of council-entry had been adopted by the Congress:

It passes my comprehension how Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel who very recently declared in a public speech that if he had been outside the jail when the Parliamentary Board was brought into existence he would have prevented it, would continue as a member of the Working Committee to carry on the Council Programme. 53

Prakasam advocated a change in the personnel of the Working Committee and also announced that Gandhi had promised to recommend to Rajendra Prasad, the new President of the Congress, that a Congress socialist should be appointed to the Working Committee. But the socialists were sorely disappointed for they were unrepresented.

The new Working Committee was announced on 31 October 1934. Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr. Syed Muhmud and J.B. Kripalani were to be secretaries, Jamnalal Bajaj was to be the Treasurer and the members were as follows: Vallabhbhai Patel, Khan AbdulGhaffar Khan, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, Sardar Sardul Singh, M.A. Ansari, Maulana Azad, C.Rajagopalachari, Gangadharrao Deshpande, P.Sitaramayya and Jairamdas Daulatram. No Bengal leader replaced the late Sen Gupta and Bengal was represented by Maulana Azad. It was said that with all the bickerings that had gone on between rival groups in Bengal over the choice of candidates for the Provincial Congress, it was thought advisable not to choose any one. Gangadharrao Deshpande was the only new name. He was a strong suppor-

ter of Vallabhbhai Patel.<sup>54</sup> Thus, the new Working Committee was adequately strengthened to perform its new role.

While Patel was to keep the reins of the Congress organisation in his hands, Gandhi had devised his ingenious scheme to spread Gandhian influence as far out as possible, through the All-India Village Industries Association which he had set up...

....under the aegis of the Congress and as part of its activities, an autonomous organisation under the advice and guidance of Gandhiji...with power to frame its own constitution to raise and to perform such acts as may be considered necessary for the advancement of its objects. 55

The activities of the Association and the involvement of such powerful leaders as Patel in spreading its branches and promoting its work led to the feeling among both government officials and other political groups that the Village Industries Association was really a camouflage for political work. Government viewed the whole scheme of Gandhi's retirement and his propagation of intensive village uplift with suspicion:

It has therefore most dangerous potentialities...Mr Gandhi contemplates a three fold attack in future. Congress members of the legislature will do all they can to hamper 'repressive' action by government, the village organisations will be available for an intensive civil disobedience campaign, and the socialist left wing, which is gradually moving into closer touch with the communists will be the allies of the Congress in this campaign. 56

The Government circular from which the aforesaid extract had been taken was sent as a warning to provincial officers that Gandhi's new movement, with its emphasis on village industries, was really the move of an astute politician to rope in the rural masses for his next big revolutionary movement. It suggested certain precautionary measures to combat the movement if the need arose and sought the opinion of the provinces on the appraisal and on the suggested precautions. In the newly elected Legislative Assembly in January 1935, the circular was attacked vehemently by Congress members. Satyamurti said that Government's intentions of frus-

trating Congress designs to represent the masses seemed irreconcilable with their earlier declarations that Congress could only be taken seriously if it represented the people as a whole. The direction in which the Congress intended to go was further clarified in the Assembly:

We, speaking on behalf of the Congress here, undoubtedly claim to become the alternate government of this country as early as possible. Undoubtedly we are here to take over the government of this country. 57

Patel too intended to assert the claim of being the alternative government as soon as possible, except that while Satyammurthi had openly declared his aspirations a few years earlier and had entered the legislature, Patel was working out a master-plan whereby Congress would be the alternative government and he would be the leader of the Gandhiites politically (as opposed to morally and socially). References to Vallabhbhai Patel as a dictator became frequent from now on, but as long as Gandhi was on his side he had nothing to fear. The election campaign and programme were planned by Patel. Gandhi had pleaded ignorance of such matters when he had requested Patel to 'create the climate suitable for me to get out of the Congress'.<sup>58</sup> He knew he would have to depend on Patel and his allies to take the Congress to electoral victory. 'I haven't the slightest idea how elections are fought' he admitted to Patel in August 1934 when he was discussing the new strategy of Congress with him and Prasad.<sup>59</sup>

Throughout October 1934, Patel had been accepting or rejecting the names of persons who wished to file their nomination papers to stand as Congress candidates in the Assembly elections due in November. Each province was required to send the names of candidates to the Parliamentary Board which had the power to accept or reject them. In effect Patel's word was law. Over Bombay, Gujarat and Maharashtra, he had direct control and could even go so far as to recommend names himself. Even in other provinces Patel's sanction was necessary. In the conduct of the campaign Patel addressed himself to people on all the subjects that were troubling their minds.

Starting with Punjab, immediately after the Bombay Congress session, he then went to Bihar where Malaviya had done intensive propaganda on the Award and had put up Pandit Jagat Narain Lal against the Congress candidate Anugraha Narain Singh. Bihar became particularly important in the fight (it was called the 'Kurukshetra' of the elections) because Malaviya was exploiting the sentiments of the Bengali Hindus in Bihar and Bengal by pointing out that Congress was not doing anything to safeguard Hindus' interests and, what was more, that Rajendra Prasad had not bothered to include a Bengali in his Working Committee. Patel had to painstakingly trace the history of the Communal Award and the proceedings of the Round Table Conference and to point out that when no solution to the communal problem was forthcoming at the R.T.C., Malaviya signed the document requesting the British Prime Minister to give a solution to the problem. This he did in the form of the Communal Award. Addressing Bombay's cosmopolitan crowds he said:

I want specially to remind the minority communities that the interests of every minority community are safer in the hands of Congress than any other party in the country. The Congress had proved this over and over again...the Congress is even prepared to risk being misunderstood by a section of the majority community rather than give up what it considers to be a proper attitude. 60

The conduct of the campaign enabled Patel to gauge the strengths and weaknesses of many provincial leaders.<sup>61</sup> He was particularly perturbed by the failure of some leaders to provide the funds they had promised. In some provinces like U.P. and Bihar he made good the deficit that these breaches of promise caused. But he held those things against the leaders in question (in this case Dr.B.C.Roy who had promised to collect money for those candidates in these areas who could not produce money for themselves). In the election, Congress won 46 seats in an Assembly of 142 seats. At the time that the new Legislative Assembly began its session in Delhi in January 1935, the Congress members in the Assembly decided that they would abandon their parliamentary independence and be governed

by the rules and instructions issued for their guidance by the Congress Working Committee, the AICC and the Congress Parliamentary Board.<sup>62</sup> That implied that Bhulabhai Desai, the member from Gujarat, would only be the nominal leader of the party; he would get his orders from the leaders who formed the nucleus of the party. The implications of this were far-reaching and will become clear presently.

Having chalked out, with Gandhi, the method and manner of gaining supremacy for Gandhiites inside and outside Congress, Patel now set about implementing the scheme in stages. At the end of 1934 and throughout 1935, despite an attack of jaundice in the summer and of piles in the winter, he was active in equipping Congress as a party for the coming political events and developments. He did this both by positive steps geared towards strict discipline in the party and negative acts designed to keep out those individuals and groups that had doubts either about Congress policy and strategy or about Patel's methods. It was an opportune moment for Patel to reinforce his own political strength at the provincial level which had been the key to his success. Last but not least, the intrusion of socialists into Gujarat was a factor that spurred him on to establish greater control over the Gandhiites in the area. Anyone who came in the way was not likely to be treated gently.

In December 1934, Patel toured Gujarat. He relied heavily on Gujarat when he calculated his strength and, therefore, was anxious to reestablish his contacts in the area after an absence of two and a half years. The socialists had set up a branch of the Congress Socialist Party in Gujarat and were seeking a direct contact with the people, in accordance with their policy of mass mobilisation. Other newcomers had also made attempts to gain quick political influence in Gujarat and Patel looked disdainfully at such opportunists:

Whatever policy the Congress had adopted inside or outside the Legislature one thing is certain, that Congress will not allow self-seekers to get positions of influence and power as far as it can help. 63

Patel had received reports of some Gujarat leaders trying to develop and strengthen their own political links. A meeting had been held in Broach on 22 April 1934 at which prominent Congressmen from all parts of Gujarat were present. Among other things, every effort was made by these leaders to reassure the Gujarat peasants that Congress would ensure that they were adequately compensated for what they had lost in their fight for Congress. Chandulal Desai took charge of a committee to collect funds for farmers. An assessment of the farmers' losses was made in detail; losses as a result of attachment or confiscation of land during the civil disobedience movement were calculated. Chandulal Desai issued a public statement that nearly Rs.500,000 were required and of that sum Rs.100,000 were needed immediately.<sup>64</sup>

All these appeals appeared to be directed at restoring Congress prestige and glory as well as that of particular leaders in the provinces. As time went on and Patel himself returned to Gujarat, he did not look very favourably upon what he considered encroachments by men like Chandulal Desai. Chandulal's quest for mass support in Gujarat was resented even more because he had made expressions of public support for the socialists. In a speech in Bombay on 28 April 1935 at the monthly flag salutation ceremony at Congress House, on the Congress platform, Chandulal commended the spread of socialism in Gujarat and criticised Patel's rigid stand on the subject. His criticism of Congress's prevailing policy and programme was made in clear terms:

...the impression that I gathered at the Jabalpur meeting (of the AICC) was that there was a deliberate attempt at crushing the socialists. Whatever opinion one might have about the ultimate goal of the country, I for one assume that it is going to be a socialist state.<sup>65</sup>

He went on to say that the Council-Entry programme was a mistake and would achieve nothing.

The country is at present not looking to the Assembly or the councils for its solution. It is waiting for the release of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. I am sure that immediately after his release the whole political atmosphere is going to change. 66

Patel took this as a personal affront and admonished Chandulal Desai for his lack of understanding of the prevailing situation of capitalism and of those who believed in it.<sup>67</sup>

As the year went on, Patel's differences increased; not only with Chandulal Desai but also with other Gujarat leaders like Morarji Desai, Darbar Sahab and Dinkarrao Desai. Morarji Desai and Vallabhbhai Patel clashed over the use of the Gujarat Peasants' Relief Fund. Morarji and his supporters wanted farmers to receive some amounts no matter how meagre, to enable them to be satisfied enough to continue to support the Congress. Congress resources were limited and could only be distributed to a small section of farmers, thus leaving a large section of them dissatisfied. Patel felt it was better for Congress to withhold the distribution of funds altogether than incur hostility of those who would not receive any. The Government observed these differences between Gujarat leaders closely and attributed them to Patel's autocratic and high-handed manner and the power he had gained as a result of Gandhi's full confidence in him, which in turn was also related to Patel's strength in Gujarat. They analysed the situation as follows:

It is also reported that as Vallabhbhai had earned an all-India reputation, he had neglected his co-workers in Gujarat....It is a curious fact that though such dissensions are known to Gandhi, he had not come over to pour oil on troubled waters, on the contrary he had given Vallabhbhai a free hand in Gujarat. One may perhaps be permitted to speculate and wonder if the tail is now wagging the body. 68

This analysis was partly true. Patel had been given a free hand in dealing with dissenters; and that did encourage him into an attitude of intolerance towards rivals and opponents. Immediately after his release when he returned to Gujarat and observed the internal bickerings among some leaders, and described the scene to Gandhi, the latter replied: 'I fully understand your impatience regarding Gujarat. Do what you think fit'.<sup>69</sup> Patel had rewarded many of the Gujarat leaders by placing them in key positions in the local PCC. More than this he did not intend to do. They were expected to remain

followers, a role which not all of them accepted. Patel felt perfectly within his rights to tackle as he deemed fit any political persons or groups that obstructed his plans. As President of the Gujarat PCC he had the authority to deal with local leaders firmly, and it was this firmness that some leaders resented. In letters to Darbar Sahab on 9 and 11 January 1935 and to Morarji Desai and Chandulal Desai on 7 November and 17 December 1935, Patel expressed sorrow at his colleagues' suspicions and indicated that contrary to their belief he had no love of office. To Chandulal Desai he expressed regret that his colleagues were mistrusting him:

I am deeply distressed at the poison which has now spread into the political life of Gujarat...I have become disillusioned and I can see that it is now my duty to move out of Gujarat. Once that happens, everyone will have complete freedom of action and they will have an opportunity of getting rid of their unjustified suspicion and distrust of me. 70

He was prepared to resign and indicated that to Dinkarrao Desai on 31 December 1935:

By my continuing in office in the Provincial Committee ...there is a possibility...of an increase of hostility and misunderstanding....That is why I think that if I resign, things will become easier. 71

Meanwhile, the socialists continued to try to undermine Patel's political base. In a public meeting under the auspices of the Gujarat Congress Socialist Party, they had said that the struggle for real independence depended on the conscious organisation of the masses, and that Congress Village Industries work could not get swaraj; nor could their programme of council entry.<sup>72</sup> They repeated their allegation a year later at the Gujarat Congress Socialist Conference at Ahmedabad on 22 and 23 June 1935 when they passed resolutions that were designed to lower Congress's prestige. Apart from calling Congress's council entry programme an alliance between the imperialists and the native exploiters, the socialists demanded the abolition of Indian States, called for the cooperation of States' subjects in the struggle for independence and declared that the activities of the Village Industries Association were detrimental to the country's

interests because they would not solve the problem of the peasantry and were likely to mislead the revolutionary elements in the country.<sup>73</sup>

In a cordial letter to Patel, Narhari Parikh presented his analysis of the aftermath of the Socialist Conference in Gujarat. To him the attraction which the young felt for socialism was quite natural; it was strengthened, however, by the weakness of the Congress as it functioned at the time.<sup>74</sup> Patel was not convinced by this reasoning. He went ahead with his plan for Congress to permeate as many areas in as many ways as possible. In some areas, vertical mobilisation was attempted through existing elites such as dominant castes; in others, horizontal mobilisation based on shared interests and economic influence was sought. The cellular approach was also tried through ashrams that were specially set up in some places and people were encouraged to go to these ashrams to seek help and to learn Gandhian ways.

In the Surat district, Congressmen took up the work of arbitration in civil, criminal and social disputes. In Kaira district, the Village Industries Association scheme was introduced in the Matar and Thasra talukas. Institutions related to this scheme were also started in West Khandesh district. The Gujarat Prantik Samiti started the organisation of farmers' unions first in North and South Daskroi talukas of the Ahmedabad district. The idea was that if these proved to be of some value, unions would be formed in other talukas too. Congress leaders in Gujarat purchased 1000 bighas of land in Kathwada in the Baroda State adjoining Ahmedabad to rehabilitate the peasants of Ras who lost their lands in 1930-31. The Government did not look favourably on this move, for accompanying it was the intention to have Kathwada as the headquarters of the All India Village Industries Association for the Ahmedabad district, so that Congress work could be carried on from there without interference or fear of confiscation of property.<sup>75</sup> The Borsad plague epidemic also gave Patel and the Gujarat Congress a chance to raise their stock among the local community. Local Congressmen took the oppor-

tunity to decry the lack of effort on Government's part in alleviating the villagers' plight at the time of the epidemic and assured the people that Congress would not fail them as the Government had done.

This spurt in Congress activity, intended primarily to counteract the interests of the socialists in Gujarat, did have some effect on the people, but relative to the method that was adopted. Where Congress set up arbitration work the point was to present Congress as an alternative or substitute government and thus impress the people. In so doing, however, district Congressmen only limited the social character of the Congress by allying it to those elites who could enforce decisions through social sanctions or influence in each locality. It is this very character of Congress that socialists were critical of; hence this method did not really meet the socialists' criticism. The scheme to set up farmers' unions was limited to areas around Ahmedabad. Its limitation lay in its orientation towards redressing grievances of farmers against the Government - such as confiscation, remissions of revenue and so on. This plan focused on landed peasants and not the landless and was not directed against the ills of the social or economic structure of society which the socialists were trying to tackle. The work done through the Village Industries Association was probably the only one that came near to looking at the problem from the viewpoint of the under-privileged, on whose behalf the socialists claimed to be fighting. It was this Gandhian activity that gave Congress enough strength to overawe both government and socialists. It showed up government deficiencies and highlighted its shortcomings both by redressing local grievances and carrying on propaganda against government activities. Government admitted indirectly that its efforts were inadequate:

It had been represented that there is considerable scope for sympathetic attention and assistance on the part of government. If local grievances were attended to and local wants supplied not necessarily at great expense, there would be a reaction in favour of government. 76

Gandhi's and Patel's involvement was taken as a challenge and Government sent instructions all over the country that the Congress programme would have to be forestalled. Government also made its own investigation about the local conditions in villages to take over some of the activities that the Village Industries Association was carrying on for the benefit of the villagers.<sup>77</sup> Special mention was made of the case of the plague epidemic in Borsad taluka where all the work done by Congress and particularly Patel was effectively publicized and Government's measures passed unnoticed.<sup>78</sup> Congress had opened a special plague hospital and Patel went around the villages supervising the work that was being done. Government looked upon Congress activity in these areas as directed against them. It was nervous about the increasing strength of Congress and made some gestures to match Gandhi's Village Industries Association. A sum of one crore of rupees for the economic development of rural areas was sanctioned in the budget presented to the Legislative Assembly in March 1935.<sup>79</sup>

Gandhi had given Patel a special commendation for this work in Borsad:

There are many such holes like Borsad into which fresh air needs to be introduced and we suffer because we neglect them. What you are doing is the only solid work. 80

It was Patel's initiative that was partly responsible for restoring Congress's prestige. But, ironically, it was the kind of activity that the Village Industries Association did that Patel personally took least part in. In the administrative aspects-constituting its Board, selecting the President, choosing the location for the head office and establishing the centres - Patel assisted Gandhi.<sup>81</sup> But, in the actual work of village uplift and in improvement schemes for harijans, Patel had a minimal role. Gandhi entreated men like Mavlan-  
kar, Ranchhodlal and Shankarlal Banker to try and get money for these schemes.<sup>82</sup> Patel, Gandhi said, had too many burdens already and, therefore, he did not want to trouble him.

By June 1935, Patel had reinforced his hold over Gujarat and spread Congress influence in all those vital areas which had been considered important and where support had to be demonstrated. His stock in Gujarat was high. Gandhi was given a less demonstrative reception than Patel in the areas they visited at this time. Government officers pointed out that Patel was more in favour in districts like Kaira than Gandhi was, adding, however, that 'the venomous Patidar agitator is more to the taste of the intriguing and turbulent Patidar community'.<sup>83</sup> It must be added of course that Gandhi had left the field to Patel because much of what had to be done required Patel's skill; as he himself put it: 'I have given an undertaking to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel that I should not meddle with the affairs in Gujarat'.<sup>84</sup>

Factional disputes were prevalent in other provinces as well as Gujarat, and Patel's anxiety about Congress victory in elections led him to look quite intolerantly at the parties involved in these disputes. Patel's involvement also related to his role in the selection of candidates for the elections. Patel was the one Gandhiite who laid emphasis on an appearance of unity at this stage. But, as said before, unity for him meant the imposition of the will of Gandhiites on those who were showing signs of striking out on their own. At no point do we find that Patel sought unity by accommodating dissent; the quest for unity became an excuse for asserting his conservative views and maintaining the status quo in the Congress. The provinces which had shown signs of indiscipline over the past year - factional fighting having been prompted by the decision to contest provincial elections - were chiefly U.P., C.P., Bengal and Madras. In U.P., there had been commotion at the Lucknow Congress Committee meeting in September 1935 and further disputes in meetings of the PCC at Kanpur, Saharanpur and Allahabad, and finally at Lucknow, the last over the inclusion of particular names in the Reception Committee for the Lucknow session.<sup>85</sup> At Aligarh, the District Congress Committee had split and two rival meetings had been held. Patel had not concealed his

disgust over the behaviour of the Congressmen and wrote to the Congress President, Rajendra Prasad:

The U.P. crowd is behaving very badly and you must write to them strongly or take over control from them. They are disgracing us all. 86

M Nagpur had posed problems at the end of 1935 when rival Congress groups came to blows at meetings and police constables had to be brought in to terminate the fight.<sup>87</sup> Patel expressed his displeasure towards this behaviour too, to Rajendra Prasad.<sup>88</sup> Dissension in the Bengal PCC had been going on for many years. After the death of C.R.Das, J.N.Sen Gupta and Subhas Bose had formed groups and later B.C.Roy and J.C.Gupta had carried on a rivalry for the supremacy of their groups in the PCC.<sup>89</sup> But the politics of the Communal Award coupled with renewed interest in electoral politics had only exacerbated provincial trouble in Bengal. Finally in the middle of 1936, Madras posed a problem which led to C.Rajagopalachari tendering his resignation from the Working Committee. A dispute arose in August 1936, when the Chairman of the Trichinopoly Municipality had to be elected. Satyamurthi, President of the Tamilnadu PCC, had instructed local Congressmen that P.R.Devar would be the Congress nominee and no one else must be put up as a candidate. At the election, Dr.Rajan an M.L.A. and a Congressman, proposed the name of Poonniah Pillay (a Congress Councillor) and the latter defeated the official Congress nominee by three votes.<sup>90</sup> A delicate situation arose. The Congress Working Committee was meeting in Bombay within a few days of the event and the Election Manifesto of the Congress Party had to be finalised and then announced by the AICC immediately afterwards. Patel tried to persuade Rajagopalachari not to resign so that the progress of the Party and the election campaign would not be marred. He asked Satyamurthi to help:

We must persuade him to withdraw his resignation. Please put all your pressure on him and Dr.Rajan as also on other Congress friends there so that they may meet and find out some solution of these resuming difficulties. It weakens the already disturbed Congress organisation all throughout the country. 91

But Rajaji refused to withdraw his resignation. Direct disciplinary action against Dr. Rajan was also not considered advisable by Patel who felt that an amicable settlement would have to be found which would not tarnish the image of Congress in Tamilnadu and elsewhere. A meeting of the TNCC was held under the Presidentship of Satyamurthi, and Dr. Rajan and his supporters were asked to resign over the Trichinopoly affair.

At the Centre, Congress politics revealed the confrontation between Gandhites and socialists in full measure. We have already seen in the first half of the chapter how the Congress organisation was prepared for the pressure from the left. It now remains to be seen how in actual fact the socialists failed to make much headway as a result of the political methods and strategy of the Gandhites and more particularly Patel. The tenure of the CPB formed in May 1934 (for a year) expired in April 1935 and a new Parliamentary Board had to be elected. On 23 April, the AICC met at Jabalpur to elect the next Board. This meeting became yet another battleground for Gandhites and socialists on the issue of war, States' people and office, the socialists pressing Gandhites to take a clear stand. Patel was able to overcome the pressure then and also at the meeting of the Working Committee on 29 July 1935, and the AICC on 17 October 1935. The Lucknow session crystallized Congress attitude on all the subjects that had been in the forefront - the reforms, the Communal Award, the left, office acceptance and the States' question. The socialists did manage to be of sufficient nuisance value to the Gandhites to make the latter try more than one way of handling them - placating or cajoling but never ignoring them at any stage. The 'war' between Gandhites and socialists has been discussed by Tomlinson and Wilson in their works.<sup>92</sup> Socialists' strength in provinces like U.P., and Bihar, their interest and relations with the Kisan Sabhas and trade unions, and their consequent attempts to put pressure on right wing Congress leaders into taking stronger stands on some issues than they might otherwise have done, does suggest that for some/time the Congress right wing was more than pre-

occupied with socialists. For Patel, the existing problem of pressure from the left took a personal and somewhat irate dimension when Gandhi got Jawaharlal Nehru to be President of the Lucknow session of Congress in 1936, to placate the leftists. Patel let out much steam at the Lucknow session and made no secret of his displeasure at Gandhi's attempts to humour Jawaharlal Nehru to keep him in the fold, and felt that without such moves the right wing's tactics had already borne fruit.

He made it amply clear also that he was not happy with the exuberance with which Jawaharlal Nehru had propagated socialism in his Presidential address, and took issue with him on a number of specific counts. First, in particular, while reiterating the Congress stand on the Communal Award, he explained that, to oppose it, Congress had to be prepared to fight the government as well as the Muslims. That was neither desirable nor possible. Even the socialists with their tall-talk and constant criticism of the Working Committee's decision, he said, had taken a neutral stand on the Award and Patel wanted to know whether that was to 'help the cause or was it a vote catching device'. Secondly, he met Nehru's slanted references to the right-wing High Command by assuring him that the members of the Working Committee were not personally interested in Council-Entry or the acceptance of office. Referring to Rajendra Prasad and himself he said that they were as interested in revolution as any socialist, but not interested in destruction. Men like him, he said, also had sacrificed their careers and were inspired with the same fire of revolution. They intended to participate until they found that their bones had grown too weak; they would then retire into the jungles. Patel pointed out that Jawaharlal or his socialist friends were not alone in regretting the change in Congress tactics from non-cooperation to Council-Entry. But the entire situation had changed and Gandhi's decision for Council-Entry had been taken after taking into account all the new political developments and postures of the political groups in the country. Reiterating his faith

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in Rajendra Prasad, Patel said that the former had travelled all over the country during the preceding eighteen months and had carefully observed the conditions and attitudes everywhere. He had reached the conclusion that office acceptance had to be undertaken if it strengthened the country. Jawaharlal Nehru on the other hand had been in jail and abroad much of that period and was ill-equipped to give concrete remedies to the new problems. It would be immature and unwise to underestimate the strength of the enemy. The British had framed a constitution after thorough research into the prevailing political situation and had borne in mind and anticipated many of the moves that Congress might make. To fight that Constitution without thought and deliberation would be, in Patel's opinion, suicidal. That was the problem; instead of strengthening the organisation, fighting the elections and revitalizing the movement, members of Congress were busy quarrelling among themselves. That would only lose them seats at election time.<sup>93</sup>

Between the Lucknow session in April 1936 and the Faizpur session in December 1936, minor incidents kept occurring which increased suspicions among both right and left wingers in Congress. For example, Patel and his supporters resented Nehru's suggestions that various special committees should be appointed for causes related to peasants and workers, and that Congress should see to it that only such Congress members are included in these committees who had direct contact with labour.<sup>94</sup> Then, again, on 18 May 1936, Nehru made a speech in Bombay in which he tried to save himself from the attack that there were no women in his Working Committee by saying that his Working Committee was not of his choosing:

The responsibility of choosing the Working Committee members rests with the President and you all know what the situation was at Lucknow. You must know the price I had to pay for my views and I will have to continue to pay such price. Choosing the Working Committee members was not so easy...I, as President, encountered many odds...my wishes were not carried out. 95

Reactions to this blunder were strong. Gandhi, Patel, Prasad, Rajagopalachari - all protested. Patel's resentment in this matter was merely an extension of his disapproval of many of Nehru's ways. Moreover, Patel could have been President at the next (Faizpur) session but for the policy of keeping the left happy by electing Nehru. Above all, he was unhappy that Nehru had 'put us in the wrong before the public'.<sup>96</sup> Rajendra Prasad, Patel and Rajaji corroborated each others' disapproval of Nehru's style; Patel wrote:

I can't stand the attitude of injured innocence he had assumed regarding the nomination of members on the Working Committee...Rajaji feels equally strongly. 97

When Gandhi intervened and wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru asking him to clarify his position, the latter sent explanations which Patel refused to 'swallow'.

It is a humiliating position in which I for one would not agree to stay at any cost. He was expected to act honourably with his colleagues and if he cannot do so or if he feels that we are a drag on him we must clear the way for him. 98

On 29 June 1936, despite Gandhi's earnest efforts, seven members of the Working Committee resigned; but, two days later the letter of resignation was withdrawn. It had achieved its purpose of binding Nehru to the opinion of the majority. Patel rubbed in the latter point when he declared for the benefit of others that henceforward Nehru would put the party above all and would endorse a majority decision even if it was repugnant to him.

At the Working Committee meeting at the end of June 1936, Nehru's public utterances again came in for discussion. All through May and June he had been giving speeches insinuating that there were certain persons in Congress who did not believe in socialism; but stating that he was firm in his mind that that was the goal of Congress, and without it the political democracy that was being talked about was a sham.<sup>99</sup> But by this time Patel had realised that he would have to extricate himself from unnecessary controversies with the adversaries lest they undermine the strength of the organi-

sation in forthcoming elections. Inaugurating the election campaign on 7 July in Bombay, Patel indicated what the priorities for Congress were at that time:

Outside the Congress there are many who are interested in seeing Congressmen engage themselves in fruitless controversies or stand divided. But we, who have fought many battles of endurance, hardship and suffering, cannot be expected to be easily led astray. For the first time, except in the case of the last elections, the Congress in its history in the last fifty years had decided to capture the Legislatures and no Congressmen can afford to ignore the effect that failure or success of the Congress at the polls will have on its prestige and position. 100

Thus, although he was fighting socialism all the time that he ran the Congress organisation, for the brief period during which winning the elections was the goal, Patel advocated the avoidance of quarrels. For that reason he withdrew from the contest for Presidency of the Faizpur session of Congress that year:

For the present there should be no divided counsel but perfect co-operation amongst all forces that are found in the vast national organisation of ours for achieving independence....I therefore withdraw from the contest for Presidentship of the Faizpur session of the Congress. 101

He did, however, take pains to convey that his withdrawal did not mean that he endorsed Jawaharlal Nehru's views; in fact he wanted people to be fully aware that 'on some vital matters my views are in conflict with those held by Pandit Jawaharlal'. He said that he did not believe in the inevitability of the class war. Gandhian truth and non-violence could convert many exploiters who were mercilessly exploiting the masses. Speaking from firsthand knowledge of the peasantry he insisted that the peasants would awaken to a sense of their terrible condition and fight for their rights by the effective methods taught by the Gandhians:

Being a farmer myself and having identified myself with the peasantry for years I know where the show pinches, but I know that nothing can be done except by the power of the people. Fortunately we have learnt what non-violence non-cooperation can do. When people learnt

that art of withdrawing their co-operation from the forces of evil, it will perish from want of nourishment. 102

Moreover, Patel took great pains to point out that his gesture should not be interpreted as meaning that Jawaharlal Nehru had greater powers than were possessed by the President's office:

The Congress President has no dictatorial powers. He is the Chairman of the well built organisation...The Congress does not part with its ample power by electing any individual no matter who he is. 103

The real power in Congress had been placed in the hands of the Working Committee at Lucknow. It will be seen that the Working Committee further strengthened its hands by the rules of discipline agreed at Faizpur. Patel had a plan and his reasoning may be seen to have gone something like this: the socialists had admittedly captured support among workers, students and other sections of society; but they could be contained if Nehru were made President for a second time. Nehru could be more or less controlled by the Working Committee. And thus, if open controversy were avoided and the voters successfully wooed, there would be victory at the polls which would rebound to the credit of the Gandhian Congress. The strategy of 1934 depended on this victory, and other matters would be sorted out later, when it was supposed the Gandhians would be in a position of even greater strength. An advantage of this approach of course was that many on the left agreed that the elections had to be won. At the Faizpur session Nehru provoked the right-wing by disagreeing openly with Patel's statement that if Congress did not accept office someone else would; he nevertheless managed to exercise sufficient restraint to avoid an open quarrel.

As President of the Congress Parliamentary Sub-Committee with the task of approving the choice of Congress candidates and supervising the entire election campaign, Patel was in a strong position to ensure the hoped-for outcome. He therefore refused to be provoked:

I do not want to enter into a controversy about things which are expected to come about a long time hence. I am concerned about the immediate future. My business is to think about the next majority of the Congress in the legislatures, without the help of any party or individuals which happen to come into the legislatures.<sup>104</sup>

By thus closing their ranks for the avowed object of winning the elections the right-wing leaders had made sure the organisation would not be changed. The Faizpur session saw a further increase in their strength when on the one major issue that was still hanging in the balance - office acceptance - their resolution was adopted, that the question would be decided by the AICC as soon after the Provincial Assembly elections as practicable. In Patel's mind the question of office acceptance had been answered in the affirmative, though he thought it impolitic to be too open about it at that time. The subject was formally shelved in order that the actual conduct of the election campaign may not be tainted by accusations of power-hunger against Congressmen. But, the Congress Parliamentary Committee considered the applications of candidates with their suitability for office in mind and was quite clear about the type of candidates that would win in each area and do well in office.

Indeed it can almost be said that Patel's efforts to appear to maintain unity at all costs averted the danger of a socialist takeover of the Congress organisation, and reimposed the old guard. Faizpur saw the beginning of a period of decline of the socialists' strength in Congress and otherwise. Not only did they lose over office acceptance, but they saw the right-wing election manifesto endorsed. Then, the Working Committee passed disciplinary rules which were intended to keep in check all those who criticised Congress decisions and which applied to all Congressmen, not only those in the legislatures.<sup>105</sup> And it was not long before these new rules were enforced. For example, Guru Raghubir Dayal, President of the Kanpur DCC, had refused to withdraw his candidacy against the official Congress candidate, Jawaharlal Rohatgi. The President, therefore, decided to suspend

him from membership of all Congress Committees. Endorsing the action, Vallabhbhai Patel said:

The Working Committee has just framed rules of discipline which are intended to be rigorously enforced and it is hoped that the Congress will not be forced to use them against responsible members. 106

Similarly, Patel sent letters to the Presidents of Andhra, Tamilnadu and Kerala PCCs instructing them to ask N.G.Ranga, a member of the AICC, to explain why he had circulated pledge forms prepared by the Andhra Peasants' Association among Congress candidates of Andhra, Tamilnadu and Malabar and urged them to sign these forms in return for support at election time.<sup>107</sup> Congress candidates in those areas were told to pay no attention to such overtures and to confine their loyalty to the Congress manifesto alone.

For the conduct of the election campaign, Patel had been delegated special powers, particularly in relation to Bombay province. He exercised his authority fully and pragmatically. He explained to the electorate again and again that it was most vital that Congress capture the legislature, and urged Bombay to give a lead as it had always done, and back Congress solidly.<sup>108</sup> He was confident that in the end the weighty and influential elements of Bombay would carry the day, regardless of any flutter caused by the socialists, and despite the dissatisfaction expressed in some quarters over his choice of candidates. Thus, trade union circles decried the Congress Parliamentary Committee's rejection of the candidature of R.S.Nimbkar and its choice of Jinnabhai Joshi for E and F wards, but Patel paid little attention to the disenchantment and issued a statement that the Parliamentary Subcommittee was not obliged to give any reasons for the rejection of the candidates and that 'it is enough to say that nobody was in favour of Mr.Nimbkar's selection'.<sup>109</sup> Some critics felt that Maharashtrian candidates too had been ill-picked: the local leaders were rebuked for not having chosen a 'better lot'. Dissatisfied Congressmen were alleged to have said that candidates had been chosen in such a manner

that only the right-wing had found their way in the list, and that the whole plan was to find men who were rich, would work the constitution and accept office when the time came.

Vallabhbhai stated the ultimate objective thus:

There is no difference of opinion about the objectives. All of us want to destroy the imposed constitution. How to destroy it from within the legislatures is the question. It will depend upon the resources and the resourcefulness of those men and women who enter the legislature under the Congress banner....I can visualise an occasion when the acceptance of office may be desirable to achieve the common purpose....We might in the course of events be driven to such an acceptance. 110

But, it was evident that he was fighting socialism all the while that he ran the Congress organisation, for that was the idea behind Gandhi's retreat and Patel's advancement. Beneath the facade of unity, there still lay his obvious differences with Jawaharlal Nehru, his rejection of the class war and his acceptance of the capitalist system; as he said: 'I do believe that it is possible to purge capitalism of its hideousness'.<sup>111</sup> To a Poona audience he revealed what we have already seen to be the thinking behind his work for the elections:

...remember that those who are opposing us today will have to work with us tomorrow, for they are of us. Our greatest need is unity and our subjection is due to our weakness and our weakness is disunity. 112.

Thus, Patel travelled far and wide in Punjab, the North-West Frontier Province, Maharashtra, Madras and other areas : the energy with which he participated in the election campaign was matched by only one other leader, who may indeed have surpassed Patel in the zeal with which he canvassed. That leader was Jawaharlal. Patel's message of appeal for a united stand for Congress success at the polls was also a subtle denunciation of all those political groups or mushroom parties who claimed to be more representative of the peasants and workers than was the Congress.

Patel also wanted to demonstrate that his policy depended on his own control over the party machine.<sup>113</sup> At the time when all kinds of allegations were being made against

Congress over the choice of candidates, Patel assured the public that there was scarcely any need for misgivings in the matter because as the disciplinarian of the party he could say confidently that the Party's authority was sufficiently rigid to prevent the Congress from being injured by what he called miscreants and betrayers.<sup>114</sup>

The result of the elections was thus evidence of the triumph of the right-wing. It came as no surprise to Congress or its opponents or the Government. Congress won 74 per cent of the seats in Madras, 62.6 per cent in Bihar, 60 per cent in Orissa, 57 per cent in C.P., 59 per cent in U.P., 49 per cent in Bombay, 32 per cent in Assam, 38 per cent in N.W.F.P., 24 per cent in Bengal, 10 per cent in Punjab and 12 per cent in Sind.<sup>115</sup> Sections of the press had tried hard to belittle the Congress at the last lap of its campaign by saying that the Congress had gone all out to win and had stopped at nothing.<sup>116</sup> The criticism was of no consequence and nothing spoke as eloquently for Congress as its own success.

After the election, the Congress had to decide on office acceptance. The Working Committee decided at its Wardha meeting on 28 February that if Governors gave special assurances that they would not use their special powers of interference or set aside the advice of their ministers in regard to their constitutional activities, then Congress would form ministries in the six provinces where it had obtained a majority.<sup>117</sup> The Government was duly informed of this decision. This pretence of reluctance fooled no one. The likelihood of office acceptance had been considered almost a year before when Patel had openly declared more than once that it might be necessary in the interests of the common purpose. Reopening the question after Congress had got a majority was a tactical move. In the first place, Congress was in a strong bargaining position, and was hardly likely to forego the fruits of having gained a majority in so many provinces. Secondly, by drawing public attention to the Government's special powers, it could make Government somewhat cautious of their use. Thirdly, a

certain amount of drama had to be enacted for the benefit of those who had accused Congress of being power-hungry. One more point rendered this move necessary. Ever since the Bombay Congress of 1934, with the change in the Congress Constitution and the announcement of a parliamentary programme in the provinces, provincial leaders had been in a position to realise that more and more powers could now come within their grasp. Electioneering had also been very much a provincial exercise, and even national leaders like Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad and Jawaharlal Nehru were men who were deeply entrenched in their provinces and relied on provincial men to a certain extent. It was partly to re-assert central discipline, lest success at elections tempt the provincial leaders to assert themselves, that the Congress Executive wanted to show from the start that all vital decisions beginning with the vital one of office acceptance would be made by the Working Committee. Socialists accused the Working Committee of assuming the role of a fascist grand council to which Patel promptly replied:

If the Working Committee was assuming the role of a fascist Grand Council, it was doing so under the leadership of a first class Scientific Socialist (i.e. Nehru). 118

While the Government's response to the Working Committee demands of assurances was awaited, and the PCCs voted on office acceptance in the different provinces, the Working Committee continued to tighten its hold. That the Congress High Command regarded the matter of the election of the Congress leaders in the new legislatures as a matter of vital interest was made clear by informal instructions to provincial leaders that the final decisions in the choice of such leaders were not to be taken without reference to the Working Committee. The President of the Congress was reported to have expressed the view that the post of the President of the Party in the Legislature involved constant contact with Government, and would not be given to any individual purely as reward for distinguished service.<sup>119</sup> The interests of the party would

play a role in the choice. Patel met accusations against the Congress High Command's dictatorial role in an interview on 26 March. Impressing upon the public the need for complete unity in Congress he said:

All sorts of reports about control from the centre are speculative, imaginary and exaggerated....Provincial leaders would require no guidance to carry out the Working Committee's instructions on which there will be naturally, a uniform policy, nor is there any difference of opinion between leaders and members of the Congress. The Congress today is absolutely of one mind. 120

That this was not actually so became clear soon enough with the appearance of controversies directly involving Patel. But, Patel went ahead undaunted towards the goal which had been clear to him for some time.

Having striven hard to see Congress in office, however, it became important for him to ensure that they could take up the opportunity. He expressed his nervousness to Nehru over the stalemate caused by Government's refusal to give assurances to Congress.<sup>121</sup> He was anxious to obtain some conciliatory gesture from the Government and took pains to show that Congress intended to behave itself in office:

...if the assurances required in the AICC resolution are forthcoming there will be no hesitation on the part of the Congressmen to utilise the machinery of the Act in building up the strength of the nation by all legitimate means. 122

The stalemate on the provinces continued for three months during which time Minority Ministries were set up. The Congress in the meantime mellowed its stand at the instance of Gandhi and agreed that Congress Ministries in each province would accept a gentleman's agreement from the Governor that the special powers would not be used as long as the Ministers acted within the Constitution. Certain parts of Linlithgow's statement of 22 June were considered satisfactory for the purpose of serving as an assurance. Linlithgow regarded as baseless the apprehension on the part of the Ministers that the Governor would intervene at random in the administration of the Province. Such an intervention was neither desirable

nor advisable according to him:

Special responsibilities are, as I have said, restricted in scope to the narrowest limits possible. Even so, limited as they are, a Governor will at all times be concerned to carry his Ministers with him; while in other respects in the field of their ministerial responsibilities it is mandatory on a Governor to be guided by the advice of his Ministers even though for whatever reason he may not himself be wholly satisfied that advice is in the circumstances necessarily and decisively the right advice. 123

On 7 July 1937, the Congress Working Committee decided on office acceptance. The Parliamentary Sub-Committee, under Patel's chairmanship passed the following resolution:

Resolved that in cases of emergency members named below be authorised to deal with matters coming within the purview of this Sub-Committee in the provinces mentioned against their names respectively:

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel	: Bombay Presidency (comprising Congress Provinces of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Bombay City and Karnataka) ; Madras Presidency (comprising Congress Provinces of Andhra, Tamilnadu and Kerala) ; Central Provinces of Mahakoshal, Nagpur and Berar ; and Sind.
Maulana Abul Kalam Azad	: Bengal, U.P., Punjab and N.W.F.P.
Rajendra Prasad	: Bihar

Patel had secured the victory of the Gandhiites, albeit at some cost. He asserted that much of what the Gandhiites were doing was for unity and consensus. In fact this was not really so. Patel made no compromises or sacrifices of his underlying position at any point; whether dealing with groups or individuals, the treatment was the same - strict discipline and imposition of his point of view.

A significant feature of this period is the differences of style between leading Congressmen. There was a difference between Patel and Gandhi and between Patel and Nehru.

At present, our concern is with the differences in their methods for ensuring that Congress was the primary organisation in the fight against imperialism. Strangely enough there were more similarities between the methods of Nehru and Gandhi than were apparent. Both had identifiable, though different, goals for Congress and occupied themselves with these goals while undertaking political activity. Patel had made the pursuit of political activity itself his goal to a large extent, justifying it by saying that rhetoric and declarations of aims was no substitute for the effective handling of power politics. His pre-occupation with power politics increased with time, as the following chapters will show.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER IV

- 1 Willingdon to Samuel Hoare, 15 May 1934, Mss.Eur. E.240/6.
- 2 'The people want respite to recover from their economic weakness...the period of respite (should) be utilised in councils not for destruction or obstruction but with a definite intention of seizing power'. Dr.Ansari's letter to Mahadev Desai (for Gandhi) 5 July 1933, Gandhi Papers, Vol.59, Gandhi Smarak Sangrahalaya.
- 3 M.A.Ansari to K.M.Munshi, 23 February 1934, K.M.Munshi, Pilgrimage to Freedom, 1, p.361.
- 4 Gandhi to Vallabhbhai Patel, 6 April 1934, Letters to Sardar Patel (Ahmedabad 1957).
- 5 Gandhi to Patel, 19 April 1934, *ibid.*
- 6 Gandhi in the course of an interview, Bombay Chronicle, 20 April 1934, p.1.
- 7 A lengthy resolution was passed outlining the programme and policy of the party, *ibid.*, 4 May 1934, p.1.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 17 June 1934, p.1; 18 June 1934, pp.1 and 4; 19 June 1934, p.1.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 30 July 1934, p.1.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 11 August 1934, p.1.
- 11 Vallabhbhai Patel's reply to Malaviya's statement of 25 August, *ibid.*, 26 August 1934, p.1.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 5 September 1934, p.16 ; 9 September 1934, p.1.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 12 September 1934, p.1 and 16.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 14 September 1934, p.8 ; 15 September 1934, p.1.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 15 September 1934, p.1.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 17 September 1934, p.1.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 21 May 1934, p.1.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 21 June 1934, p.7.
- 19 Interview with the Bombay Chronicle Correspondent, *ibid.*, 15 July 1934, p.1. Also public statement of 25 July 1934, Times of India, 28 July 1934, p.2.
- 20 Public meeting at Congress House, Bombay, Bombay Chronicle, 15 July 1934, 16 July 1934, pp. 1 and 8.
- 21 Speech at Kashi Vidyapith, *ibid.*, 5 August 1934, p.1.

- 22 Ibid, 2 October 1934, p.12.
- 23 Ibid, 4 October 1934, p.1.
- 24 Times of India, 4 October 1934, p.10.
- 25 Bombay Chronicle, 4 October 1934, p.1.
- 26 Statement issued by the Publicity Officer, Congress Socialist Party, *ibid*, 5 October 1934, p.7.
- 27 Tomlinson, The Indian National Congress and the Raj, p.43.
- 28 Vallabhbhai Patel at the inauguration of the Congress election campaign, Bombay Chronicle, 8 October 1934, p.1.
- 29 Ibid, 16 July 1934, p.1.
- 30 James Wilson's thesis elaborates the nature of the threat posed by the socialists in the 1930s to the established Gandhian leadership and the response of the Gandhians to this threat by a strategy that culminated in victory, but also revealed fresh areas of dissidence. James C.Wilson, "Gandhiites and Socialists : The Struggle for control of the Indian National Congress", Ph.D thesis, S.O.A.S., London , 1978. This present thesis will carry Wilson's arguments further and pinpoint Patel as the architect of the strategy that brought Congress right on the top of all the warring elements in the Congress.
- 31 Bombay Chronicle, 3 September 1934, p.1.; Times of India 7 September 1934, p.11 ; 26 September 1934, p.10.
- 32 Bombay Chronicle, 5 September 1934, p.1. ; 6 September 1934, p.4.
- 33 Draft of Statement regarding resignation ,Gandhi to Vallabhbhai Patel, beginning of September 1934, Patel Papers.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Gandhi to Rajagopalachari (Copies to Patel and Prasad) 3 September 1934, *ibid*.
- 39 Draft of Statement regarding resignation, *ibid*.
- 40 Bombay Chronicle, 29 September 1934, p.1.
- 41 Ibid.

- 42 Gandhi to Jamnalal Bajaj, 17 July 1934, CW, 58.
- 43 Gandhi to Vallabhbhai Patel, 4 October 1934 and 7 October 1934, ibid, 59.
- 44 Gandhi to Vallabhbhai Patel, 8 October 1934, ibid.
- 45 Vallabhbhai Patel addressing a public meeting at Matunga, Bombay Chronicle, 2 October 1934, p.12.
- 46 Times of India, 6 October 1934, p.14.
- 47 Ibid, 1 October 1934, p.14.
- 48 Patel addressing meeting at Matunga, Bombay Chronicle 2 October 1934, p.12.
- 49 CW, 59, pp.174-84.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 K.F.Nariman, Chairman of the Reception Committee had said on the occasion of the laying of the foundation stone of Congress Nagpur, 'It is a well known fact that whatever had been begun by Sardar Patel had achieved success - I am sure that the Bombay Congress would in the same way be a very successful session as the Sardar was laying the foundation stone of the Nagar'. Bombay Chronicle, 17 September 1934, p.1.
- 52 Criticisms of Madan Mohan Malaviya, Swami Shahajanand, Acharya Narendra Dev and Satyamurthi in the Leader, 29 October 1934 ; Congress Socialist , 29 September 1934; Bombay Chronicle, 21 October 1934.
- 53 Bombay Chronicle , 30 October 1934, p.8.
- 54 Ibid, 31 October 1934, p.1.
- 55 Gandhi's statement to the press, CW, 59, p.183.
- 56 Secret Circular issued by the Government of India to its officers on 23 November 1934 quoted in Legislative Assembly Debates ,Vol.1, January 1935, p.11.
- 57 Satyamurthi's speech, ibid.
- 58 Gandhi to Patel, 21 September 1934, Letters to Sardar Patel.
- 59 Gandhi to Patel, 20 August 1934, CW, 58.
- 60 Bombay Chronicle, 14 November 1934, p.3.
- 61 Vallabhbhai Patel to Dr.Ansari, 11 November 1934, Patel Papers and Bombay Chronicle.

- 62 Bombay Chronicle, 21 January 1935, p.1 ; Times of India 21 January 1935, pp.9-10.
- 63 Speech at Surat, 27 December 1934, Bombay Chronicle, 28 December 1934, p.12.
- 64 Home Dept (Special) Government of Bombay to Home Dept, Govt. of India, 1/7 May 1934, 1/9 June 1934, Mss.Eur. F/97/14A.
- 65 Bombay Chronicle, 29 April 1934, p.14.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Vallabhbhai Patel to Chandulal Desai, 7 May 1935 (Guj) Sardar Shrina Patro, Gujaratna Sathiyone, Vol.2.
- 68 Home Dept (Spl) 1/7 January 1935, Mss.Eur.F.97/14A.
- 69 Gandhi to Patel, 21 August 1934, CW , 58.
- 70 Patel to Chandulal Desai, 19 December 1935, Patel Papers.
- 71 Patel to Dinkharrao Desai, 31 December 1935, Patel Papers.
- 72 Bombay Chronicle, 27 May 1934, p.1.
- 73 Proceedings of the Gujarat Congress Socialists Conference at Ahmedabad, ibid, 24 June 1935, p.1.
- 74 Narhari Parikh to Vallabhbhai Patel (Guj) Sardarshrina Patro, Vol.2.
- 75 That Patel was responsible for much of this scheme of rehabilitating Congress in Gujarat is evident from the fact that Government's fear and apprehension stemmed mainly from Patel's activities and the success he seemed to be achieving in Gujarat. See Home Dept (Pol) 1/7 January 1935 ; 1/4 March 1935 ; 16/19 March 1935 ; 16/20 April 1935 ; 16/21 May 1935 ; 16/21 June 1935, ;1/6 September 1935 ; Mss.Eur.F.97/14A.
- 76 G.A.Shillidy, Office of the DIG Police, CID, Bombay Province to H.F.Knight, Secy Home Dept (Pol) Govt of Bombay, 7 May 1935, Home (Pol) 3/8/85.
- 77 Bombay Chronicle, 6 January 1935, p.1.
- 78 Government tried to malign Congress efforts by stating that its efforts in the direction of co-operation with Congress in relief work were met by discourtesy from Congress workers. Patel made counter charges that Government and Local Boards failed to take prompt measures. In an unofficial inquiry Patel's charges were upheld and Government's refuted. Bombay Chronicle, 26 October 1935, p.20.

- 79 Bombay Chronicle, 1 March 1935, p.1.
- 80 Gandhi to Patel, 10 April 1935, Letters to Patel, p.99.
- 81 Gandhi to Patel, 21 November 1934, CW, 59.
- 82 Gandhi to G.V.Mavlankar, 20 November 1934, ibid.
- 83 Home Dept (Spl) 1/6 June 1935, Mss.Eur.F.97/a.
- 84 Bombay Chronicle, 23 May 1935, p.8.
- 85 The Leader, 21 September 1935, p.11 ; 11 October 1935, p.5 ; 25 October 1935, p.10 ; 27 October 1935, p.10.
- 86 Vallabhbhai Patel to Rajendra Prasad, 8 November 1935, Prasad Papers, File VI of 1935.
- 87 The Leader, 20 October 1935, p.10.
- 88 Patel to Prasad, 8 November 1935, and Prasad's reply, 17 November 1935, Prasad Papers, VI/35.
- 89 For details of the bickerings in the Bengal PCC over the availability of enrolment forms by the DCCs from the PCC President's office and the intervention by the Working Committee whereby Patel assigned M.S.Aney to look into the alleged irregularities see M.S.Aney's report on Bengal Congress disputes, File G-25/506 of 1934-35, AICC Papers. See also John Gallagher in Gallagher, Johnson and Seal (ed.) Locality, Province and Nation (Cambridge 1973).
- 90 Bombay Chronicle, 1 August 1936, p.1.
- 91 Patel to Satyamurthi, 21 January 1937, Satyamurthi Papers in Rajmohan Gandhi, The Rajaji Story : 1937-1972 (Bombay 1984).
- 92 Tomlinson, pp.52-58 ; Wilson, pp.53-68.
- 93 Indian Annual Register, January to June 1936, p.283.
- 94 Jawaharlal Nehru at Jinnah Hall, Bombay on 16 May 1936, Bombay Chronicle, 18 May 1936, p.13.
- 95 Speech at Bombay, 18 May 1936, ibid.
- 96 Patel to Prasad, 23 May 1936, Prasad Papers, File 1 of 1936.
- 97 Ibid., Patel to Prasad, 29 May 1936.
- 98 Ibid.
- 99 Nehru's speech at Jinnah Hall, 16 May 1936, Speech at a Women's meeting at Marwadi Vidyalaya Hall on 18 May 1936

- and speech at Congress Committee meeting at Bandra on 18 May 1936, Bombay Chronicle, 18 May 1936, 19 May 1936, p.1. and 14.
- 100 Patel at a public speech in Bombay on 7 July 1936, Ibid, 8 July 1936.
- 101 Ibid, 28 December 1936, p.24.
- 102 Ibid.
- 103 Ibid.
- 104 Patel in an interview at Madras, ibid, 17 December 1936, p.10.
- 105 Ibid, 11 December 1936, p.7.
- 106 Ibid, 6 January 1937, p.1.
- 107 Ibid, 21 January 1937, p.1.
- 108 Times of India, 9 November 1936, p.6.
- 109 Ibid, 11 November 1936, p.14.
- 110 Patel's statement regarding Presidential election for Faizpur session, Bombay Chronicle, 28 November 1936, p.24.
- 111 Ibid.
- 112 Patel in a speech in Maharashtra, 21 January 1937, ibid, 22 January 1937, p.7.
- 113 Patel apportioned the seats, planned the election strategy and assuaged disgruntled sections of communities like Harijans, province by province ; See Patel to Prasad, 21 July 1936, 8 August 1936 ; Patel to Sambamurthi, Working Secretary of Composite Parliamentary Committee, AICC, 13 September 1936 and 21 September 1936. Patel Papers.
- 114 Bombay Chronicle, 11 December 1936, p.8.
- 115 P.Sitaramayya, History of the Indian National Congress, 2, p.39.
- 116 Times of India, 17 February 1936, p.14.
- 117 Ibid, 19 March 1937, p.11 ; 20 March 1937, p.13.
- 118 Ibid, 6 March 1937, p.7.
- 119 Ibid, 10 March 1937, p.1.
- 120 Ibid, 27 March 1937, p.1.

121 Patel to Nehru, 29 March 1937, quoted in B.R.Nanda, Gokhale, Gandhi and the Nehrus (London 1974), p.139.

122 Times of India, 27 March 1937, p.1.

123 Viceroy's message, 22 June 1937, *ibid*, 22 June 1937, p.8.

## CHAPTER V

### MAINTENANCE OF CONGRESS DISCIPLINE 1936-1938

(i)

#### The Nariman Episode

Patel himself was caught up in a controversy soon after the elections in March 1937. The issue, which became known as the Nariman Episode thereafter, pertained to the election of the leader of the Congress Party in the Bombay Provincial Legislature.

K.F.Nariman was a prominent lawyer of Bombay who had participated successfully in local politics, finally becoming President of the Bombay Province Congress Committee. The incident relating to his being rejected in the choice of the leadership to the Congress Parliamentary Party is important for a number of reasons. It typified both Patel's and the Congress High Command's strict control over provincial affairs, an indication of which had been given earlier in the steps taken to put down indiscipline among Congress members. It also revealed such traits in Patel's style of political functioning as ruthlessness and toughness, for which he was chosen to serve as the most effective 'hatchet man' of the Congress Party.

Maharashtrian Congressmen met in Poona on 9 March 1937 and expressed the opinion that, as they were numerically the largest section in the legislature, they should exercise a major role in the choice of the leader of the Bombay Congress Legislative Party. On 12 March 1937, Patel convened a meeting at Bombay of the Congress members of the legislature at which the leader of the party was elected. The proceedings that took place were subtly regulated and controlled by Patel. The show was stage managed; Vallabhbhai Patel made the gesture of withdrawing from the meeting to indicate non-partisanship 'but the meeting pressed him to stay'.<sup>1</sup> Mangaldas Pakvasa, member of the Legislative Council, was proposed to the chair. The press was asked to leave and the proceed-

ings for the election of the leader began. Gujarat had handed over its authority to Patel who indicated that the Province was not interested in the leadership. Gangadharrao Deshpande spoke for Karnatak as well as for Maharashtra because Shankarrao Deo, who was Maharashtra's representative, was not at the meeting. K.M.Munshi handed over the authority for Bombay City to Patel. He later stated in his deposition on the Nariman episode:

...I was one of those who appealed to the House to make the election unanimous and in accordance with the resolution of the Bombay members of the 10th I requested Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Gangadharrao Deshpande to ascertain the wishes of the members and find out the person who had the largest support of the House. 2

Patel and Gangadharrao Deshpande had constituted themselves into a sub-committee which during a two hour period of adjournment of the meeting ascertained the views of the individuals present. B.G.Kher and K.F.Nariman were the two candidates in the running. Kher's name 'was regarded as agreeable' and Nariman's chances were clearly indicated as being nil. When the meeting reassembled the sub-committee recommended Kher's name which was carried by 'acclamation'.<sup>3</sup>

Immediately after the meeting, disenchantment with Patel's choice began. Crowds gathered outside shouting 'Vir Nariman ki jai'. Newspapers began a tirade against Patel. Public protests were recorded against the manner in which Nariman was rejected. A meeting convened specially to record its disapproval of the method adopted in the election of the leader called upon Nehru as Congress President to intervene and reinstate Nariman as leader. It was asserted that democratic principles had been violated and that the preservation of unity was not a good enough reason for Kher to have been elected. 'Certain persons' in the party, it was said, were damaging the prestige of the Congress. Patel was severely criticised much to the discomfort of the Gujaratis in the audience.<sup>4</sup>

On 15 March 1937 Nariman issued a statement to end the speculation about his own attitude to the controversy. He

submitted to the will of the High Command although he admitted that he would not pretend 'that events like last Friday's election do not affect one's personal feelings'.<sup>5</sup>

When the Working Committee met in Delhi from 15-22 March 1937 it was requested to consider a representation signed by the members of the Congress Party in the Bombay Legislature drawing attention to the agitation over the procedure of the election of the leader of the Party in the Bombay Legislature and asking the President to issue a statement deprecating the agitation. The Committee called Nariman and heard him at length. Nariman complained that Patel had taken the help of Gangadharrao Deshpande and Shankarrao Deo in influencing the Karnatak and Maharashtra voters. The Maharashtra members had expressed their intention to elect Nariman as leader and when Patel read about this in the Marathi paper Navakal and in other newspapers he was anxious and angry. On 9 March he sent telegrams to Gangadharrao Deshpande and Shankarrao Deo asking them to meet him in Bombay on the 11th, a day before the meeting of Congress members of the Bombay Legislature. These telegrams which became the focus of high drama in the next few weeks were alleged to reveal clearly that a conspiracy was being carried on to keep Nariman out and get Kher in. To Shankarrao Deo Patel had wired: 'Poona reports cause anxiety. Achyut you must meet me Bombay Thursday . Vallabhbai'. To Gangadharrao Deshpande he had sent the following message: 'Please meet me Bombay Thursday Vallabhbai'.<sup>6</sup>

Nariman's allegations were regarded as unconvincing and the Working Committee stated that the agitation against the decision to elect Kher was groundless and should be abandoned. The insinuation that Patel had used undue pressure in the election was considered unfounded and the Working Committee deplored the propaganda being carried on against him.<sup>7</sup> The Working Committee also passed a resolution by which the Parliamentary Sub-Committee consisting <sup>of</sup> Patel, Rajendra Prasad and Abul Kalam Azad was appointed 'to be in close and constant touch with the work of the Congress Party in all the

legislatures in the Provinces and to advise in all their activities and to take necessary action in any case of emergency'.<sup>8</sup>

When Nariman returned to Bombay on 23 March he clarified his position once again and appealed for an end to the controversy, pledging his support and loyalty to the leader and accepting as final the 'verdict of our Highest National Tribunal'.<sup>9</sup> Patel had already been 'cleared' by the Working Committee. On 26 March his colleagues Gangadharrao Deshpande and Shankarrao Deo and Achyut Patwardhan gave him further backing and support in their indictment of those who were indulging in 'malicious propaganda' against Patel and the members of the Bombay Legislature. They proclaimed that they and not Patel had made an effort to ascertain beforehand the views of the Congress members of the Bombay Legislature on the most acceptable candidate:

We desire to make it clear that Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel had taken no initiative in the matter and never influenced a single vote in this connection. 10

The matter rested for a while but was stirred up again in May 1937. Nariman wrote to Nehru that he wished to bring to the latter's notice some additional facts and information about the controversy. The letter was answered by Nehru on 17 June because he was in Singapore when Nariman's letter of 12 May reached him. In his reply Nehru sought to clarify that Patel's two telegrams, which by then had been widely reproduced in the newspapers, had already been put before the Working Committee at Delhi. Explaining Patel's reasons for sending the two telegrams Nehru pointed out that the eagerness that individuals had been showing to become Ministers even before the office acceptance issue had been sorted out had become a source of great distress to all the Congress leaders. The Maharashtrian MLAs' meeting was considered a bad sign. He had issued a press note denouncing the MLAs attitude and Patel, who had expressed his consternation to Jawaharlal Nehru, despatched the two telegrams to Shankarrao Deo and Gangadharrao Deshpande. 'The action that he took'

claimed Nehru, 'was entirely in accordance with our talks in the Working Committee'.<sup>11</sup>

Nariman, however, persisted in his complaints to Nehru about irregularities in the method of handling the controversy. On the one hand, he did not want the affair prolonged and on the other, he came up with fresh charges each time. In essence, he wanted what Nehru called 'protection from this persecution'.<sup>12</sup> Nehru assured him that the Working Committee would look into the matter, as he himself was at a loss to understand what actually Nariman wanted to be done at that time. Nariman was asked to come to Wardha on 7 July. He persisted in his allegations that Patel's telegrams to Gangadharrao Deshpande and Shankarrao Deo had sinister motives:

The object of summoning Gangadharrao was merely to secure his help and influence to bring over the Karnatak members against me. And when the two telegrams are read together the motive and object of the first is also quite apparent. 13

He, therefore, demanded that an independent, impartial and dispassionate enquiry by a tribunal outside the Working Committee should look into the matter and give its verdict.

The Working Committee met from 5 to 8 July and the issue was again considered, after which Patel issued a statement from Wardha on 9 July. It may be noted that he had maintained a judicious silence on the issue since the issue began and now decided, with Gandhi on his side, to answer Nariman's allegations. Patel revealed that on 4 March, a week before the meeting at which he was supposed to have brought undue pressure to bear on the election of the Bombay Party leader, Nariman had come to see him and took him for a drive at Worli to talk to him about the ensuing election. He sought Patel's help which Patel said he could not give; but he did promise not to jeopardise Nariman's chances if they came up.<sup>14</sup> Nariman's rejoinder to Patel's statement of 9 July extended the controversy further and Gandhi castigated him for it. Nariman categorically denied that he had ever asked Patel for

help in the election: 'I was all along protesting against the onesided and sedulous campaign that was being carried on against me behind my back by certain people and had a right to demand an explanation'.<sup>15</sup> Gandhi supported Patel's version of the story and thus gave the lie to Nariman's denial:

Indeed you left me the impression that when you took the Sardar for a drive you did seek his help. And if I am rightly informed you sought the help of the others also. What was wrong in it if you did? In your first statement in reply to the Sardar's you have almost made the admission. Nevertheless, if you accuse the Sardar of lying, naturally it is up to you to prove your case. 16

Nariman's grievances were described as imaginary. His legal acumen was put to doubt and his craving for office criticized. His complaint that his 'claims were defeated' was ridiculed by Gandhi who said that public men had no 'claims'. The golden way, Gandhi insisted, was through selfless sacrifice and not through 'a baseless hysterical agitation'. Defending Patel to the hilt, Gandhi said:

The target of this agitation remains unharmed. The Sardar had no parliamentary ambitions. He had no ambition for leadership either. Nature had endowed him with certain qualities and he uses them. You won't find him going to the press and complaining if he loses hold on the populace. 17

Nariman's vacillation on the question of the inquiry agreed upon with the Working Committee, and Gandhi's growing impatience with his increasingly excited statements, eventually resulted in an enquiry conducted by Gandhi and D.N. Bahadurji, a Parsi non-Congressman. Each Congressman or non-Congressman even remotely connected with the affair gave evidence. The issue became larger and was subdivided into two; first, an inquiry into Nariman's role in the 1934 elections when he was chosen as one of the candidates from Bombay to the Central Legislative Assembly and when he was alleged to have betrayed Congress by not pursuing his candidature after it was invalidated for some technical reasons by the Government; and secondly, an inquiry into the 1937 elections for the leadership of the Congress Party in

the Bombay Legislature, in which Kher was chosen and Nariman and his supporters began a campaign against Patel and his supporters. Patel submitted a statement of 25 pages on the first issue and 17 pages on the second issue in addition to some letters to Gandhi and supplementary statements answering Nariman's submission. Nariman's statement likewise elaborated on the two issues and met Patel's arguments on them. In regard to the first, the fact was that Nariman and Dr. G.V.Deshmukh had been nominated by the All India Congress Parliamentary Board. Electoral rolls for these elections were published on 14 July 1934 and closed on 24 September 1934. From 1 to 11 October nominations were permitted to be filed. On 6 October Dr.Deshmukh informed Nariman that the latter's name was not on the electoral rolls and that there was a discrepancy in the rolls about Nariman's address which had been put down as 45 Esplanade Road, whereas the address on his nomination papers was different. Nariman a few days later, informed Deshmukh that everything was in order and Deshmukh thereupon filed Nariman's nomination papers. On 11 October Nariman realised that the address in the rolls was that of his brother's office, his brother's name also being K.F.Nariman. Despite Patel's request that he should not withdraw his nomination papers, Nariman withdrew them on the ground that to have allowed the nomination papers to stay on the record would be an act of deception or impersonation. Nariman was accused of withdrawing to make place for another Parsi, Cowasji Jehangir, who was standing as an independent and, of not wanting to let down his community. Nariman, however, insisted that he had been reluctant to stand right from the beginning for financial reasons:

I made it clear that in the then financial difficulties I would not be able to bear the great financial burden which the election would impose, but I was given to understand that some arrangement would be made with regard to that and on that understanding I agreed to stand. 18

Another allegation against him was that on polling day he brought about Munshi's defeat. The Congress vote was supposed

to be divided equally between the two candidates, Munshi and Deshmukh, to ensure the election of both. In the afternoon, Nariman claimed to have noticed that Munshi's elections seemed certain but Deshmukh was lagging behind. At the request of 'some friends' he went around the city to ascertain the position and at Dadar, Muzaffarbad Hall and other places reminded the voters of the Congress agreement of equal distribution of votes between Munshi and Deshmukh. Nariman was accused of disturbing the arrangements. In his defence he asserted that votes were wasted because Jamnadas Mehta, the Democratic Party candidate, had split the vote. Nariman thought it ridiculous that he was being accused of having tried to get Cowasji Jehangir elected; he had in fact once conducted an inquiry into the arrangement of bogus votes for Sir Cowasji Jehangir, who wrote to Gandhi that the rumour that Nariman and he were in collusion was baseless. They were on opposite sides of the fence and the only relation that they had was that Nariman was his tenant 'and a good one too'.<sup>19</sup>

The inquiry committee was not convinced by Nariman's defence in this matter. His arguments for withdrawing the nomination papers were found to be weak as also his reasons for not checking on the information given by Deshmukh regarding the discrepancy between the address on the rolls and that in the nomination paper. A verdict of 'negligence' was passed against Nariman in the case of the 1934 elections. The Parsi community did not react well to this verdict. Dinshaw Mehta wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru as President of the Congress:

...the whole Parsi community has been upset as much so as to lose confidence in the Congress which was brought into existence by the ceaseless efforts of the Parsis. 20

Dinshaw Mehta was reminded that 'the verdict in both affairs had been delivered by D.N.Bahadurji who cannot be accused of any communal bias, and if he had any it will be in favour of Shri Nariman, who is a Parsi rather than in favour of Shri

Vallabhbhai'.<sup>21</sup>

On the second issue of the 1937 elections, statements were handed in from many prominent people including Kher, Deshmukh, A.B.Latthe, Shankarrao Deo, Hansa Mehta, L.M.Patel, Achyut Patwardhan, K.M.Munshi, S.K.Patil, Cowasji Jehangir and Patel's nephew, Ishwarbhai Patel.<sup>22</sup> The solidarity that was revealed in the support given to Patel was remarkable. But, apart from the result in which Patel emerged victorious, a few interesting facts do need comment for they lead us to question some of the conclusions that were arrived at in the indictment of Nariman and the victory of Vallabhbhai Patel.

Patel asserted in his statement on the 1937 elections that when he went to recuperate after the elections in Wardha at the end of February, Shankarrao Deo, Gangagharrao Deshpande and Achyut Patwardhan came to plead with Gandhi and Rajaji to persuade Patel to lead the organisation in Bombay. When Patel said that that was quite out of the question, they said that Nariman had to be kept out at all costs and that Kher should, therefore, be persuaded to accept. On Vallabhbhai's own admission, he did tell them that he considered Kher the best choice. The three leaders said that in the normal course a contest between Nariman and Munshi was expected and that Kher's entry was likely to embarrass Patel in view of the latter's leanings towards Munshi'. They were assured that Kher would be the best choice and that, in the event of his accepting, 'all others might withdraw and there would not be any contest and I would be relieved of an unpleasant situation'.<sup>23</sup> In view of the initial brief that Shankarrao Deo, Gangadharrao Deshpande and Achyut Patwardhan had received from Patel on the matter, there was little likelihood of any other candidate getting the High Command's approval and, therefore, by implication pressure had already been put on the choice of leadership. It was known that Patel could be quite firm with people who disagreed with him and had his own subtle ways of making them feel sorry. It was not difficult, therefore, to

get MLAs to fall in line with the choice which was made known by Gangadharrao Deshpande, Shankarrao Deo and Achyut Patwardhan. Gangadharrao gave his account of the events to Jannalal Bajaj who was ascertaining the facts for Gandhi when the matter was brought before the Working Committee. That Patel did not want Nariman to be leader had been clearly indicated to the three leaders, Deo, Deshpande and Patwardhan. But doubt had been expressed about Kher's accepting the position and the three leaders had been instructed to get Kher's approval.

Nariman would have done well to lie low for some time and then raise his head at an opportune moment. Instead he decided to fight with a man who had far too many strong forces behind him and on whose strength Gandhi had staged his retirement. Moreover, Patel normally did not take the first step in a dispute, but once attacked, spared no pains to counter-attack. Nariman's personality and reputation were severely damaged by the time Patel was through with him. It was said that Nariman had taken pains to obtain copies of the two telegrams in a 'highly suspicious' manner, although copies of the telegrams were deposited by Patel in the Parliamentary Board's office and then went to the Bombay Pradesh Congress Committee office where Nariman 'had a free access' to them. On 6 June 1937, when photocopies of the two telegrams appeared in the Kaiser-i-Hind with the purpose of 'exposing Vallabhbai Patel's bona fides', Patel made a thorough investigation from the Telegraph Check Office in Calcutta and the Post Master of Bombay and Ahmedabad about the leakage of the telegrams.<sup>24</sup> He concluded that Nariman was responsible for obtaining them and making them available for publicity purposes. In addition to establishing that the telegrams were quite straightforward Patel maintained that the methods used by Nariman to obtain the originals of the two telegrams condemned him straightaway 'as a man unfit to hold any responsible post or to associate with as a comrade'.<sup>25</sup> 'With devilish ingenuity, third class police court method was adopted and mean and fraudulent procedure was resorted

to,<sup>26</sup> by Nariman.

Nariman's campaign was directed against Patel but was represented as an insult to the Working Committee. It necessitated the use of drastic measures to end it.<sup>27</sup> The authority of the Working Committee was thus channeled towards the entrenchment of Patel's own position. He was left more powerful than before. Nariman was put aside after long and untinting contributions to the Bombay Congress and largely as a result of Patel's bitter counter-offensive, and despite Patel's claim to have acted with moderation. He pointed out that any other man in Nariman's place would have been expelled from the Congress for similar behaviour:

...but he belongs to a small and sensitive minority community and I understand the amount of patience and forbearance with which such a matter has got to be dealt. 28

Gandhi and D.N.Bahadurji gave independent judgments on the Patel-Nariman controversy which held Nariman guilty on all accounts. He was, however, saved the humiliation of seeing the judgment published in all the papers upon making a public confession that he was in the wrong. Nariman issued the following statement:

I am convinced that in the matter of election of 1934, I neglected my duty as a responsible office bearer of the Congress and gave some of my friends cause to feel that my neglect amounted to a grave breach of trust. In the matter of election of the leader of the Bombay Parliamentary Party in 1937 I am sorry to confess I misjudged the general position. 29

But that was not all. At its meeting in Calcutta in November 1937, the Working Committee passed disciplinary measures against Nariman. Nariman, by then quite disgruntled, issued a statement proclaiming that the Working Committee measures were ultra vires and illegal, that the original resolution of the Working Committee dated 11 December 1936 which laid down the disciplinary rules required that the accused had to be given a chance to explain what was considered 'indiscipline' on his part:

I am constrained to challenge the verdict of the Working Committee on constitutional, equitable and moral grounds and will take all steps that are open to me within the constitution of the Congress. 30

He resigned as President of the Bombay PCC in November 1937. Patel had made a permanent enemy of Nariman. The latter attributed yet another malicious motive to Patel for the decision to oust him from the leadership of the Congress Party in the Bombay Legislature. He tried to discredit Patel by making a statement to the effect that had it not been for Patel's interference the matter of forfeited lands in Gujarat, in which he was involved, would have been amicably settled in 1931 and the original owners would have been satisfied several years ago. Nariman claimed that in April or May 1931, Gandhi's secretary had sent for him and sought his help in restoring the lands to their original owners with the help of some influential Parsis in Bombay. Nariman arranged a meeting between Cowasji Jehangir, J.J.Vimadalal and a Mr.Garda, who had bought at least half if not more of the forfeited lands in Gujarat. The meeting took place at Bardoli Ashram where Gandhi was staying at the time. Gardha agreed to sell the lands for about Rs.14,000 which was well below the market value. But Gardha had already antagonised Patel in the first instance by his speedy purchase of the land when the Government had seized it; Patel had organised a boycott of Gardha, and did not forgive Gardha for his eagerness. Nariman narrated that:

The strained relations between Mr.Gardha and Vallabh-bhai were known to all. When he saw us with Mr.Gardha returning from the Ashram, he naturally suspected our mission. 31

Intimidated by Patel, Gardha broke off the agreement with the Parsis and the fate of the lands remained unsettled. When the Congress won the elections in Bombay in February 1937, one of the first things that Congress and more particularly Patel intended to do when Congress came into office was to restore the lands to the peasants. Nariman's contention was that he had openly stated to Congress colleagues that

in fact Patel had ruined Congress's chances of speedily settling the matter. He had stated:

...that but for Vallabhbhai Patel, by this time the peasants would have long settled down on their lands. I blamed the Sardar for the breakdown of those almost completed negotiations brought about after great difficulty some years ago; and those unpleasant remarks were obviously conveyed to him and they naturally caused him irritation and provoked his wrath. 32

Nariman's belated tirade against Patel was contradicted by the Secretary of the Gujarat PCC, B.D.Lala who ridiculed each one of Nariman's charges. Quoting extracts from the newspapers of April and May 1931 Lala stated that the entire issue had been reported then, including a letter from Garda on 13 May 1931 and nowhere was there any mention of Patel's role in the breach of the settlement. Garda broke the agreement at the instigation of Government officers who did not want the lands restored and also wanted to see breaches of the Gandhi-Irwin truce. Lala also expressed amazement at the fact that Nariman had not mentioned this incident for seven years, not even on the occasion of the formal inquiry instituted against him in 1937, he went on:

I am in a position to state that in none of the voluminous statements and counter-statements published by him in the Press or submitted in the Gandhi-Bahadurji Enquiry, did he ever put forward this story. It only springs up now to furnish a fresh ground to explain his pet theory that he was ousted by the Sardar from what he considered his well deserved right to the Premiership of Bombay. 33

Nariman's estrangement from Congress was more unpleasant each time he tried to rationalise his stand on the issues over which he had crossed swords with Patel.

The idea that the way Nariman was dealt with would act as a deterrent to future dissidents did not bear fruit. Other provincial leaders did not take the intended lesson. As we shall see in the next section N.B.Khare, the Premier of the Central Provinces, came in for disciplining in the summer of 1938, and was ousted from Congress by Patel and other members of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee. Patel lost as much

as he gained in these exercises. There was a further disadvantage for Patel. The importance of the Nariman episode does not lie simply in the personal rivalries within the Bombay Congress which were brought to the surface; or in the dictatorial manner in which Patel engineered both Nariman's dismissal and his 'political death'. Among the factors which had affected the leadership choice in Bombay were the numerical strength of the Congress party in the legislatures, the fact that the Maharashtra members formed the largest group in the party, and the pressures that were being put by the Maharashtrian MLAs and also by those from the Karnatak for a proportionate share in the Ministry. These factors could not be taken into account with Gangadhar-rao Deshpande (Patel's man) speaking for Karnatak and Maharashtra, and with Patel (and a Sub-Committee) eliminating Nariman and declaring Kher the only eligible candidate for the leadership. Maharashtrian members in the Legislature were interested in Nariman's candidature. For them the ascendancy of Patel and his Gujarati stronghold created an imbalance in the PCC which they intended to redress in the legislature. Patel destroyed all these plans and lost much sympathy from Maharashtrian legislators as a result.

(ii)

#### C.P. Crisis

Among the political problems posed by the provincial ministries, the most crucial turned out to be that of the Central Provinces Ministry headed by Dr.N.B.Khare.

In the Central Provinces, unlike Uttar Pradesh and Bihar where the confrontation was primarily with the Government over the release of political prisoners, the dispute was between Congressmen themselves, although the Governor was involved. The administrative unity that was the Central Provinces and Berar was a conglomeration of several Congress Provinces. Linguistically, it was composed of a smaller

Marathi-speaking and a larger Hindi-speaking area. The politics of the Central Provinces were faction-ridden. In the Marathi region the Gandhian movement had not caught on at first. The Hindu Sabhaites and Responsivists held sway. Leaders like Moonje and Waman Rao Joshi were the idols. Gradually, Congressmen (Swarajists) like M.V. Abhyankar became the respected leaders of the region. D.E.U. Baker has dealt adequately with the process whereby the influence of the Gandhian Congress spread in Nagpur.<sup>34</sup> Two prominent recruits were Narayan Bhaskar Khare, a Maratha Brahmin Doctor and Nilkanthan Deshmukh, a Maratha landowner. The induction of these men, and the accomplishments of men like M.V. Abhyankar dislodged the hold of the 'Old Brahmin Tilakites' over the Congress in Nagpur. Khare himself established a firm and widespread hold in Nagpur and in 1935 after Abhyankar's death became the leader of the Congress in Nagpur. Being a Brahmin, he could make sure the old support would not be lost, and having non-Brahmin associates to help (like T.J. Kedar and G.R. Pradhan), he got new support for Congress as well. It might be mentioned that his compromises with Responsivists and Mahasabhaites on the issue of the Communal Award did not go down well with the High Command in 1936. He did, however, get Congress the support of agriculturists, both Brahmins and non-Brahmins - at the time of the 1937 elections. Landless labourers, workers and harijans, however, were not won over. An important fact of Khare's mobilisation during this period was that he gathered considerable personal support and made a name for himself while spreading Congress influence. This partly explains his later success in getting himself chosen as leader.

Mahakoshal, the Hindi-speaking area, was more faction-ridden than the other areas even without the complication of the Mahasabha and Responsivist angle. Ravi Shankar Shukla on one side and Govind Das and D.P. Mishra on the other headed two rival groups of active politicians. R.S. Shukla stood against the Congress candidate Shiv Das Daga, in the 1926 elections and lost. He then participated in the Civil

Disobedience movement to redeem his image in the eyes of the national Congress leaders. In 1934, he became President of Mahakoshal Provincial Congress Committee and was aided in this by D.P.Mishra. At a meeting of the PCC at Bilaspur, R.S.Shukla consented to step down from the Presidency and proposed, not Govind Das, but Daga. Another name, that of Awadesh Singh, was also proposed by a delegate. Angered by the puerile attitude of some leaders, Govind Das withdrew with wounded pride. Daga did likewise. But Singh stayed in the running and was, therefore, declared elected.

Before the provincial election in 1937, the Mahakoshal Provincial Election Committee, with Chaturvedi, a noted Hindi poet, as its President, was able to reach unanimity in nominating most of the Congress candidates. In about a dozen disputed constituencies two sets of names were sent to the Central Parliamentary Board - in effect to Vallabhbhai Patel. In all these disputed cases when the final choices were made only Shukla's nominees were on the list. D.P.Mishra was quite put out and resigned the secretaryship of the PCC and the Election Committee. Govind Das also resigned.

Khare too had grievances against Patel over the selection of candidates. In his list, Bhikulal Chandak's name was substituted for that of P.D.Markare and Patel gave no reason for the change. Khare called this a 'highly irregular, improper and unconstitutional' act and voiced his resentment at the Faizpur session in December 1936:

...I told Sardar Patel in an open meeting of the All India Congress Parliamentary Board that this action of his was worse than the action of a British Bureaucrat whom we all condemned, because, the British Bureaucrat if he wanted to punish a person at least gave him an opportunity to defend himself. Sardar Patel in this case did not follow this proper and necessary procedure. Of course, Sardar Patel could not tolerate this open attack upon him and from that time onwards he nursed a feeling of secret hostility against me. 35

In the Central Provincial Elections of 1937, Congress won 72 out of the 122 seats. Of these Mahakoshal members won 42. They aligned themselves as a distinct group to exert

pressure in general and for the election of a cabinet. N.B. Khare became the Premier. Patel was accused of sending a message to Ravi Shankar Shukla to see that Khare was not elected the leader of the Party in the Central Provinces. David Baker and B.R.Tomlinson both assert that Khare was elected with the help of R.S.Shukla's rivals who wanted to reduce Shukla's power and control in the Mahakoshal areas where he had emerged as the most important leader. According to these writers, Shukla's Hindi opponents combined with Marathi Congressmen to elect Khare who was mutually acceptable.<sup>36</sup> D.P.Mishra gives a different explanation; claiming that 'the Congressmen of Mahakoshal were Congressmen first and Congressmen last',<sup>37</sup> he contends that Mahakoshal had neither a regional nor a caste bias and in electing Khare the Mahakoshal members were 'following the established tradition of electing a man from Nagpur'.<sup>38</sup> Shukla was rejected according to D.P.Mishra because of his past 'so well known to every member of the party'.<sup>39</sup> Khare believed he was elected because he had 'the backing of the whole Legislative Party'; but clearly the reason lay in the rivalries that existed among the other groups, and also the fact mentioned earlier that Khare had managed to gather some personal following while spreading Congress influence. In forming the Ministry he was told that his choices should be approved by Vallabhbhai.<sup>40</sup> As a result (with Patel's approval) P.V.Gole and R.R.Deshmukh were chosen from Berar, R.S.Shukla, D.P.Mishra and D.K.Mehta from the Mahakoshal and Yusuf Sha-reef from the Muslim community. The team was tension-ridden almost from the start. The cause seems to have lain as much with Khare as D.P.Mishra. Khare was elected with the help of the Mahakoshal leaders; but once appointed Premier, he began placing his own men in key places. He lost even the facade of support that men like Mishra and others had managed to put up for him. Mishra claimed to be victimised by Khare and was once again involved in a social scandal in addition to charges of corruption. The case of Mishra's missing files and his visit to the Chandni Chowk prostitute became the local gossip for some time.<sup>41</sup> There were allegations

inspired by Khare and his group that Mishra's appointments in the capacity of Minister for Local Government were partisan. An inquiry was set up to look into them. These and other cases seemed to indicate that Khare had begun a small campaign against some of the colleagues with the help of some of his supporters like T.N.Kedar and that this culminated eventually in his own defeat.

At the time of the election of delegates for the Haripura Congress in February 1938, Khare gave speeches in which he tried to meet the charges that the Ministry was weak by saying that the friction between the Governor and the Ministry was responsible for the weaknesses in the Central Provinces Ministry. The British Government consoled itself that these charges were made to clear his name in the eyes of his Congress colleagues. But Khare's position did not improve.

Of twenty-six places for delegates to the Haripura Congress, eighteen went to the Marwari group led by Jamnalal Bajaj and Poonamchand Ranka, and eight to Khare's group. Premiers in other provinces won their elections with a clear majority; Khare had to struggle: he was not on top of his provincial list, but third after Poonamchand Ranka and Awari. The Marwari group had weight in the Assembly and being composed essentially of capitalists and money-lenders, it had influence with the High Command. Jamnalal Bajaj had given financial help to men like Rajendra Prasad and also been a banker for Nehru. His personal influence was, therefore, considerable. There was simmering resentment against the group's importance, though an open breach had been avoided so far. The High Command sent messages to the different groups that disputes and differences should be sorted out rather than allowed to develop further. Government believed Mishra was waiting in the wings to oust Khare somehow; Shukla had agreed to back him and, even though he was persona-non-grata with the High Command, he expected to force their hand by getting a majority in the Party.<sup>42</sup>

After the Haripura Congress, grievances against Khare increased and by 8 May 1938, after a meeting of the Ministers

during which Khare's administration came in for much criticism, Gole, Shukla, Mishra and Mehta sent in their resignations, enumerating several cases of maladministration. They characterised the Home Department as weak and resented the fact that Khare did not take the advice of colleagues in vital matters. They decried Khare's lack of firmness in dealing with the police over the issue of the Jabalpur riots, his subservience to the secretariat, and his suspicions of a colleague, Gole, in a matter of the sale of a licence for mining manganese ore. They thoroughly disapproved of the report sent by Khare to Patel dealing with the controversial action of Yusuf Shareef as Minister for Law and Order, a report supposedly based on facts provided by the Deputy Commissioner of Wardha which the Deputy Commissioner denied subsequently.<sup>43</sup> The Shareef affair had indeed brought much discredit to Congress. Yusuf Shareef had reduced the sentence of Zafar Hussain, convicted of raping a minor Harijan girl. Hindus had pounced upon the incident to condemn the act of a Muslim. In response to Patel's demand for an explanation Khare sent a report supporting Shareef and condoning his action.<sup>44</sup> Patel was worried about the incident on more than one count. While Congress was made a target by caste Hindus for condoning a heinous crime committed by a Muslim, Government made full use of the Shareef propaganda and tried to point out to the Minister that he had come in for all this criticism because he was a Muslim and that Congress was after all a Hindu organisation. The general feeling was that Khare was too busy trying to please the Governor and the bureaucracy. On receiving the letters of resignation, Khare tried several tactics with his colleagues ranging from cajoling to bullying. On 9 May, a truce called the Pachmarhi compromise was arrived at between Vallabhbhai Patel for the Working Committee and Khare, whereby Khare was stripped of his portfolios and required to work in conjunction with his colleagues. The arrangement was supposed to be endorsed at a Working Committee meeting in Bombay on 15 May. Khare wanted to opt out but in Bombay he had a bigger adversary in Vallabhbhai Patel. Patel

had become disenchanted with Khare and with D.P. Mishra. He admonished Khare for holding an enquiry into the conduct of his colleagues and indicated that disciplining fellow workers was not Khare's job. Khare tried to go over Patel's head and met Gandhi on 12 June 1938. If Gandhi gave a patient hearing to Khare's accusations against his colleagues on this occasion, two weeks later he had been sufficiently influenced by Patel almost to turn Khare out and reprimand him for troubling him over these matters.<sup>45</sup> Khare should have learnt a lesson from Nariman and been cautious not to cross Patel's path. Now he had to face the consequences. The move and counter-moves in this drama culminated in the ousting of Khare and the installation of R.S.Shukla as Premier.

According to the Pachmarhi compromise the following statement had been handed in by the Ministers of Central Provinces to Patel:

In response to the wishes of the Party, as expressed at its meeting on May 24, we met together and discussed all the questions of differences amongst ourselves, some of them being temperamental, some due to differences of outlook and others involving questions of procedure regarding the internal working of the Ministry. We are happy to report that we have been able to amicably settle all our differences and have agreed to work in a spirit of comradeship and we feel confident that we shall have your full co-operation and support. 46

But Khare's problems with the Ministers continued. He was suspicious of them and all his actions indicated that somehow, by fair means or foul, he intended ousting his Mahakoshal colleagues. Earlier in Bombay, he had tried to convince Patel of the wisdom of getting rid of those Ministers who were not co-operating with him, but his efforts had failed. Differences with Ministers continued and the Pachmarhi compromise, which was discussed at several cabinet meetings, was not implemented. By mid-July, Khare devised another scheme to get rid of the unwanted colleagues. He decided to submit resignations on his and his colleagues' behalf with the intention that when he was called by the Governor to form a new cabinet then he would drop the Mahakoshal group and appoint

his own team in their place. Gole and Deshmukh submitted their resignations on July 13; Khare then wrote to Shukla, Mishra and Mehta and asked them to resign. They refused to do so and in turn requested Khare at the instance of Patel not to precipitate matters and to wait for the Working Committee meeting of 23 July to resolve the matter to everyone's satisfaction. Khare feared the worst at the Working Committee meeting and on 20 July sent in his resignations to the Governor. The three ministers who refused to resign were dismissed by the Governor on 21 July and some new members of the Cabinet were sworn in. The Governor's secretary issued a communique explaining the termination of the tenure of the three ministers. It said that the ordinary practice was that the resignation of the Prime Minister involved the resignation of the whole council of Ministers and, therefore, because the three ministers had refused to conform to this practice, the Governor had to take the unavoidable step of dismissing them.<sup>47</sup>

When the Parliamentary Sub-Committee met on 22 July Khare and his new Cabinet colleagues were clearly advised to retreat while there was still time, for advancing any further in their plans would lead them nowhere and cause them harm. Khare consulted his new colleagues and conceded that there was no way out for him and for the cabinet but to submit their resignations to the Governor. The Working Committee that met on 23 July accepted Khare's resignations and also issued instructions to him to convene a meeting of the Congress Parliamentary Party on 27 July to discuss the issue and elect a new leader. Khare was also told not to stand for the leadership. This came as a shock to Khare. He had thought that he would make a fresh bid for leadership and to that end had asked the Governor not to take action on the resignations submitted by him and his colleagues until the 27th when the election for the leader was due to be held. When the Working Committee decided to prevent him from contesting the leadership, Khare retorted:

I readily obeyed the Congress Parliamentary Sub-Committee as they told me that tendering the resignation to

the Governor on July 20 was hasty and injudicious. But if they want to drive me out of public life as had been done in the case of Mr.K.F.Nariman, then certainly I will try my best to oppose that move. 48

On 25 July, the Working Committee expressly forbade Khare's entry in the leadership contest; but Khare was adamant and even Gandhi's advice could not stop him. The Working Committee thereupon formally charged Khare with indiscipline.

The election of the new leader of Congress in the Central Provinces and Berar Assembly took place in Wardha on 27 July. The members of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee were also present at the event and it was later contended that their presence was an objectionable feature of the programme which influenced the voting much the same way as Patel's presence had affected Kher's election in Bombay. There may have been some justification in the objection. A member proposed Khare's name and on being reminded of the Working Committee resolution condemning Khare's behaviour, withdrew it. Ultimately, the contest was between Ravi Shankar Shukla and Deshmukh, and Shukla was elected by 47 votes to 12 ( 13 members remained neutral). In his quest for eliminating opposition and establishing his supremacy in the province, N.B. Khare had committed political suicide. He was now referred to as 'victim number two of Congress Fascism'.<sup>49</sup>

The post mortem on this crisis carried on for some time. The Parliamentary Sub-Committee issued a charge sheet against Khare. Khare issued his defence which was answered by Patel. Of the members of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee, Khare singled out Patel as his bitterest opponent. He accused Patel of highhandedness and bias. Some of his objections were directed at the Congress Party's methods of functioning and had no effect on Congressmen who had accepted these methods as the basis on which Congress had fought elections and accepted office. Khare wrote to the Congress President on 26 July:

I am opposed to the further view that the Working Committee or Parliamentary Sub-Committee should dictate to the Congress Parliamentary Party the choice

of its leader. I hold the opinion that the Parliamentary Party must be free to choose its own leader, and this choice should be free and unhampered. It must also be open to the leader to exercise his independent judgment in selecting his colleagues. 50

Khare also questioned the negation of the principle of joint responsibility, and the substitution of individual responsibility to the High Command for joint responsibility to the Prime Minister. As Patel pointed out in a statement made earlier in August, Khare's criticisms of Congress methods seemed to have been made only when things were going wrong for him. From March 1937 onwards, Khare had accepted the advice and instructions of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee which had been appointed quite clearly 'to be in close and constant touch with the work of the Congress parties in the Legislatures in the provinces, to advise them in all their activities and take necessary action in case of an emergency'.<sup>51</sup> In the choice of his colleagues and in their dismissal (in Shareef's case) Patel pointed out that Khare had submitted to the will of the High Command and made no criticism at that time. Dismissing Khare's 'new found love for joint responsibility' as a hollow sham, Patel pointed out that there were at least two occasions when Khare should have resigned if he believed in joint responsibility -(1) when Shareef resigned at the Working Committee's behest and (2) when the Mahakoshal colleagues resigned on the ground of his inefficiency in May 1938. But he continued as Prime Minister and resigned on 20 July 1938 after formulating an elaborate scheme to ensure that he would be called upon to form a new Ministry.<sup>52</sup> That scheme was foiled by Patel and Rajendra Prasad and Khare's wrath was, therefore, directed at these two men and primarily at Patel for ruining his political career.

The Khare episode is significant for several reasons: for the Province the Khare crisis marked the decline of the Marathi politicians and the ascendancy of the Hindi-wallahs. The Hindi Congress had taken over in a Province where Maharashtra leaders had built a strong base earlier. This

state of things became a permanent feature of the political fabric of the area. The crisis also revealed the degree to which the Central Province was faction-ridden and the High Command dictatorial. Moreover, it was an illustration of the relative strengths of the relationship of the Ministers with (1) the Party and (2) the Government. By design the party link was meant to predominate. The policy and organisational changes described <sup>in</sup> earlier chapters, undertaken by Gandhi and Patel from 1934 onwards, were intended to meet such situations as the Central Provinces crisis. There seemed little doubt that the purpose was that the High Command's ruling would prevail in the event of a dispute.

The arrangement between the Congress Ministries and the Parliamentary Sub-Committee was that the former had to do the bidding of the latter in everything. It was curious that Khare resented the lack of freedom in this respect in the later stages of the dispute. Earlier, he consulted Vallabhbhai Patel at each stage.<sup>53</sup> The Parliamentary Sub-Committee had the power to choose the Cabinet in each Congress Province. The entire Congress show was to be run by the Party leaders who were assigned the task. That Ministers should then complain of lack of initiative and freedom seemed strange. Shukla and Mishra reminded Khare of precisely this convention of the Congress whereby an oath of allegiance to the Congress required unquestioning obedience to the Congress Working Committee. 'The brief time of a year should not be enough to obliterate from your memory the Congress organisation which vests the Congress Working Committee with the highest authority over Congressmen'.<sup>54</sup>

The implication of the new right-wing strategy in the Provinces was that the Ministers were meant to have limited control over political developments. Political giants of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee controlled the entire operation inside and outside the provincial legislature, and with such disciplinarians in charge, it was intended that uniformity would prevail. In fact, in assessing the performance of the

Ministries, this one factor relating to the link between the Congress Ministries and the Central Congress Party is vital. The particular incident brought some theoretical questions to the fore which do not strictly fall within the parameters of the present subject ; (1) whether the Ministers had to do the bidding of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee (2) whether the three Mahakoshal Ministers could withhold their resignations when the Prime Minister had submitted his resignation to the Governor and (3) if they did withhold them could the Governor dismiss them on the basis of joint responsibility or the special powers of appointment and dismissal vested in him under Section 105.

After his defeat, Khare began an indictment of the Congress Working Committee. But the grip of the High Command was complete; above all it flourished as a result of a tacit agreement between all provincial Congress leaders. The leaders that subscribed to this agreement were all right-wing and the interests they represented were those of a socio-economic elite of a relatively local nature. The agreement needed sorting out only in case of conflict. The conflicts became more conspicuous because of the increased patronage that now went with power, and purely economic and social differences were thus magnified and took on a new and more complicated dimension. Bringing about coordination and compromise became vital. Vallabhbhai Patel was a master negotiator. He did not decry self-interest as a motivating force; it seemed natural to him. But that it should take ugly shapes and sizes was not acceptable to him. It was then that he stepped in and asserted the power vested in him - that of a master disciplinarian. The criterion of discipline was non-conformity with Patel's own plans for the Congress.

(iii)

Patel - Bose Conflict

The episode of Congress in office under the direction and control of the High Command, accentuated the grievances that some individuals and groups within Congress had against the dominant Gandhian group. Between the Haripura and Tripuri Congresses, dissensions in Congress widened further. The differences, however, were not purely ideological. The particular conflict between Vallabhbhai Patel on one side and Subhas Bose on the other, was a pertinent confrontation between differing men with differing modes of operation. The dispute was neither a simple one between the left and right, nor solely a fight between rivals for power and dominance. It was all this and much more. The recurring victory of the moderates in Congress had been causing anxiety to men like Bose for some time. His hostility to those who were keeping the flag flying in the name of Gandhi was based on several factors. To him leaders like Patel were provincial men with strong provincial bases. They had taken charge of the Congress executive and ran the affairs of the entire Congress, even in provinces they were not familiar with. Their links with these provinces were often through men who did not speak for the entire province, or even a large part of it, but represented only sectional or limited interests which were promoted by the central Congress and which in turn supported Congress economically and otherwise. Subhas Bose never understood why and how the Gandhians could speak or decide for a province like Bengal. He was the spokesman for Bengal and believed he had a right to assert his voice on behalf of Bengal when matters concerning provinces were being discussed by the executive of the Congress. He also believed that unlike the Gandhites at the Congress centre he had visions for Congress as a whole; it was a vision which those who ran the Congress regarded as unacceptable and totalitarian.

Bose spoke the language of the radicals and within Congress supported the socialists although he was not a member

of the Congress Socialist Party. He was chosen President of the Haripura session of Congress with the specific object of appeasing socialists, radicals, youth, Bengalis and other groups who were discontented with the direction in which Congress was being taken. Preventing the prevailing rift in Congress from widening had become imperative. Nehru, speaking on behalf of the left wing in Congress in an AICC report, advised leaders against carrying on a crusade against leftists:

Inevitably there is a right wing of the Congress and a left wing and various middle groups, though this simple classification sometimes misleads. An attempt to drive out the left if successful, would be fatal, for it represents a vital part of the movement without which it would lose much of its flair and become increasingly wedded to petty reformist activities. 55

It must be remembered that the strategy of the Congress right-wing from 1934 onwards had been precisely one of keeping the political initiative in its own hands and eliminating rivals. The threat from the left had been averted by imposing stringent controls on party memberships, by making non-conformers uncomfortable, and by a general expansion of political involvement in terms of areas and fields of activity. All this was achieved from the time of the Bombay Congress in 1934. Patel's own activity in his own province and in other provinces through local leaders was directed towards this. Having taken care of the actual threat from the left, constant criticism from that direction also had to be met. By offering the Presidentship to a spirited radical Bengali, the Congress Working Committee believed that many opposing groups could be appeased. Congress was already fighting on many fronts and if some quarrels could be put aside for the time being, Congress could devote its time to more vital matters.<sup>56</sup>

Bose made the issue of federation the main target for his Presidential term. The federal aspects of the 1935 Act were condemned by Congress primarily due to pressure from the left. Some practical politicians and some constitutional experts believed Congress's reasons for rejecting the federal scheme were 'divorced from facts and realities' and believed

that the scheme became 'a tragic casualty' in the 'clash of politics, the struggle for power, the wrangle for ascendancy and the scramble for gains'. Just before the Haripura Congress session of March 1938, when the Working Committee met at Wardha to draft the resolutions that were to be put before the session, Bose issued a statement:

My term of office as the Congress President will be devoted to resist this unwanted federal scheme with all its undemocratic and anti-national features, with all the peaceful and legitimate powers, including non-violent, non-cooperation if necessary, and to strengthen the country's determination to resist this scheme. 57

The Congress's attitude to the scheme was designed to present unity - but the left was far from satisfied. The Working Committee resolution on the federal scheme for Haripura did not come up to the expectations of the socialists. The resolution condemned the federal scheme as presented in the Government of India Act but added that the Congress was not opposed to the idea of federation but to the present scheme in which the concept of representation by election was non-existent.<sup>58</sup> This resolution coupled with the revised attitude towards the struggle of the States' people for civil liberties and responsible government made the critics of Congress policy sceptical about the intentions of right wing government leaders on the subject of federation. On the States' question, the draft resolution stated that owing to the new problem and conflicts in the States, the Congress felt obliged to revise its attitude of complete non-interference although the restrictions and bans imposed by rulers or British authority prevented Congress as an organisation from direct participation. Individual Congressmen were now free to render direct assistance in their personal capacity to help the struggle to develop without committing the Congress party in anyway. At the Congress Socialists Conference in Lahore on 13 April 1938 a resolution was passed that in the event of any attempt being made to impose federation on the country, preparations would be made for a nation-wide struggle including a no-tax, no-rent campaign and a general

strike on a national scale.

Bose carried on an intensive campaign against federation and although he believed that the formal Congress attitude was mellowing somewhat he waited to see what would happen when Congress was called upon next to state its formal position. Meanwhile, he gave speeches wherever he went that sought to convince people that Congress was hostile to federation and would never yield on the subject.<sup>59</sup>

With the Congress veering round to constitutionalism, Bose and his followers began to feel that Congressmen would soon be interested in the wielding of power at the centre and, consequently, be prepared to accommodate the adversary on the subject of federation. In view of the Congress participation in satyagraha campaigns within several States the change of attitude on federation was liable to be interpreted as a move by Congress to consolidate its position in the States in the event of its possible participation in a federal centre. Critics of Congress, like the Hindu Mahasabha, had been asserting for some time that Congress opposition to federation was based not on moral grounds but on expediency, and that once it was able to negotiate for itself the power at the centre it would change its stand. These details on federation are being discussed here because a tussle for supremacy between the right and the left seemed imminent, and federation became an issue on which differences crystallised. Whether Congress had a long-term plan in relation to the States and envisaged a federation in which it was the majority party or not is arguable. B.R. Tomlinson refutes the view that the Congress involvement in the States was part of <sup>a</sup> strategy to get power at the Centre.<sup>60</sup> Much of the evidence, however, suggests that despite formal resolutions prohibiting Congress from direct activity in the States, Congress had every intention of controlling a popular movement in the States under right-wing leadership. The manifest symptoms of this intention and Patel's role in the moves made by Congress towards a gradual control in the States are

discussed in the States' section of the next chapter. With Congress in power in the provinces it seemed unrealistic not to strengthen the foothold in the States. Bose looked upon appeals to the States' people to fight for their own right as a desire for the enhancement of power of those who had the reins of the Congress in their hands. He felt somewhat deceived on what he regarded as a softening of the Congress attitude. The meeting of the AICC on 24 September 1938 saw a flare-up on the subject of federation. The AICC rejected the new constitution and explained that it had permitted the formation of ministries in the provinces with a view to strengthening the nation in its struggle for independence. Leftist amendments were defeated and suspicions were voiced by leftists that Congress would work the federal scheme if certain amendments were offered by the British. A resolution on civil liberties was passed in which radical Congressmen were condemned for advocating 'murder, arson, looting and class war by the violent means':

...Congress warns the public that civil liberty does not cover acts of or incitement to violence or promulgation of palpable falsehoods. In spite therefore of the Congress policy on civil liberties remaining unchanged the Congress will consistently with its tradition support measures that may be undertaken by the Congress governments for the defence of life and property. 61

In the meantime, some Indian leaders who had been in England in June and July were reported to have had parleys with British leaders on the subject of federation. Insinuations were made in the British Press that Indian leaders were negotiating with the British Government over federation which caused an uproar among Congress leaders in India. Jawaharlal Nehru and Bhulabhai Desai who had gone abroad for separate missions had been meeting British leaders and had discussed federation with them. Rumours of their talks had an adverse effect on the Indian scene. Bose, who had observed the mellowing of the Congress attitude in silence thus far, issued a statement to meet the rumours coming in from London:

So far as I am concerned, should any unthinkable contingency arise of the Federal Scheme being adopted by the majority within the Congress it would probably be my duty to relieve myself of the trammels of office so that I would be free to work for what I consider to be in the best interests of the country, namely, open, unmitigated and unrelenting opposition to the monstrous federation scheme. 62.

About thirty members - socialists, leftists, Kisan Sabhaites, Royists and others - walked out from the AICC in protest against the encroachment on civil liberty. Congress was also severely criticised by leftists for negotiation with the All India Muslim League. A resolution was moved disapproving Congress moves which undermined the influence of the nationalist Muslims and obliterated Muslim mass-contact propaganda. It can be seen that differences with Congress's right-wing increased in proportion to the power wielded by Congress. Addressing the AICC members on the subject of Congress's negotiations with the Muslim League, Vallabhbhai Patel suggested that resolutions that criticised all that the Congress leaders sought to do, would aggravate rather than diminish already existing differences in Congress.

The political situation at this point was that whereas Gandhiites had taken the attitude that it was practically more sound to take control of as much of the decision-making machinery as came their way, with a view to mould things according to their ideas, the socialists were consistently fighting the reforms on ideological grounds. As a result, any move on the part of the Gandhiites to tackle aspects of the reforms in a piecemeal manner was interpreted by the socialists and radicals as a compromise and, therefore, heavily criticised. The Gandhiites on their part were growing increasingly weary of the negative attitude of the socialists which marred Congress prospects for the future. The socialists could only be contained by maintaining the right wing hold on the Congress machinery, by keeping radicals out and not allowing indiscipline to go unpunished. This was the Congress policy since 1934.

When Bose declared his intention to run for the Presidency for the party for a second term, Gandhites were quite clear that he should either be prevented from doing so or be defeated in the elections. Maulana Azad's name was suggested. When he declined, that of Pattabhi Sittaramayya was put up. Bose did not withdraw and a direct conflict ensued. Bose issued a statement on 21 January 1939 explaining his point of view and giving reasons for not withdrawing.<sup>63</sup> He asserted that he had been nominated as a candidate from several provinces and socialists and non-socialists alike were urging him not to withdraw from the contest. It was incumbent upon him, therefore, not to let down his supporters at a stage when a momentous issue like federation demanded a tough fight. Patel prepared a counter-statement on behalf of several members of the Working Committee and informed Sarat Bose that such a statement was being issued with the object of clarifying certain points raised by Bose in his statement. Sarat Bose strongly advised Patel not to take sides in the issue and warned him that the dissensions between the right and the left wings of Congress would be accentuated if members like Patel took a partisan stand. 'Please do not divide Congress' he said at the end of his telegram.<sup>64</sup> Patel issued the statement which was signed by him, Rajendra Prasad, Jairamdas Doulatram, J.B.Kripalani, Jamnalal Bajaj, Shankarrao Deo and Bhulabhai Desai. In it he pointed out that re-election of a Congress President was advised only under exceptional circumstances and no such circumstances existed to compell the re-election of Subhas Bose. Striking a note of warning that the President's powers could not be used by any incumbent to further his political ends, Patel and his colleagues stated:

The Congress policy and programmes are not determined by its successive Presidents. If it were so, the constitution would not limit the office to one year. The policy and programme of the Congress, when they are not determined by the Congress itself, are determined by the Working Committee. The position of the President is that of a Chairman. 65

In reply to this Bose accused these members of morally coercing the other Congressmen into taking a stand against him:

In an election contest between two members of the Working Committee, one would not expect the other members to take sides in an organised manner, because that would obviously not be fair. Sardar Patel and other leaders have issued the statement as members of the All India Congress Committee and not as individual Congressmen. I ask if this is fair either, when the Working Committee never discussed this question. If the President is to be elected by the delegates and not be nominated by influential members of the Working Committee will Sardar Patel and other leaders withdraw their whip and leave it to the delegates to vote as they like? 66

Bose voiced his lurking suspicion that the right-wing of the Congress was preparing for a compromise with the British Government on the issue of a Federal Scheme. That eventuality was feared by the leftists who resolved to fight it. Right-wing leaders in their turn were anxious to avoid having a left-winger as President. Bose, however, made it clear that he would not yield willingly to the right:

Even at this late hour, I am prepared to withdraw from the contest if a genuine anti-federalist like Acharya Narendra Deo for instance, be accepted as the President for the coming year....If the right wing really want national unity and solidarity they would be well advised to accept a leftist as President. 67

Subhas Bose's brother, Sarat Bose, sent a letter to Gandhi and the Working Committee that the stand against Subhas Bose was likely to create serious rifts among the Congress leaders and that the Working Committee's sympathy with Patel's statement and analysis was unbecoming and revealed their partisan attitude. Patel came in for a good deal of criticism. Socialists from different areas expressed and mobilised support for Bose. Commenting on the ensuing presidential election and on the statement issued by Patel and his supporters, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai said that the votes in the election would be cast for or against federation:

I don't want to go into the merits of the two candidates but I would appeal to the delegates not to be prejudiced by statements issued by members of the Working Committee.

68

Working Committee members were accused of influencing delegates; it was asserted that Patel had clearly instructed the Gujarat delegates to vote for Sitaramayya. Acharya Narendra Dev refuted Patel's contention that the election of the President had to be unanimous. He pointed out that in 1929, Patel had been a candidate and Gandhi had a difficult time persuading Patel to withdraw in favour of Jawaharlal Nehru. In support of Bose he said:

It is necessary to have at the helm a person who will inspire confidence in youth. Mr. Bose seems clearly marked out for the Presidential 'gadi'. 69

The powers of the two sides in Congress were tested and at the end of it Subhas Bose was elected by 199 votes.<sup>70</sup> However, he seemed to have lost more than he had gained. Thirteen members of the fifteen submitted their resignations from the Working Committee on 9 February 1939. They felt that with a President with whom they were not in accord they would not be able to function smoothly and it was better for him to have his own men in the Working Committee. Bose made a few desperate attempts to patch up the differences but Gandhi was sufficiently disenchanted not to allow a softening of attitude on the part of the Gandhiites. Leaked reports of the Gandhi-Bose talks suggested that Gandhi had castigated Bose and told him plainly that it was futile his attempting to procure the co-operation of the right-wing colleagues after he had taken such pains to alienate them.<sup>71</sup> Matters got worse and by the time of the Tripuri Congress the breach was wide and irreconcilable. Subhas Bose was too ill to be present. His resolution that Congress should give an ultimatum to the Government that it would begin civil disobedience soon was unacceptable to the Subjects Committee dominated by the group whose power was not easy to crush.<sup>72</sup>

A resolution which this group drew up and which was introduced on its behalf by G.B. Pant was passed and carried. This resolution stated that despite the recent bickerings within Congress over the Presidential election, the policy of the Congress was still one that Gandhi had laid down and which

the Congress had been following in the past year. The AICC had full faith in the Working Committee that had functioned during the previous year and as a body regretted that some of the Working Committee members had been subjected to unnecessary criticisms by the dissenting groups. The situation in the country was uneasy and it was necessary for the Congress to conduct itself in an orderly, dignified and at the same time powerful manner. It was, therefore, necessary that the Working Committee should be appointed by the President with Gandhi's advice and the direction of Congress policy should be that which Gandhi and his picked men considered appropriate.<sup>73</sup> Needless to say, Bose did not appoint a new Working Committee. He considered Pant's resolution ultra vires and quite improper. Letters were exchanged between Gandhi and Bose on the subject, but clearly there was no satisfactory way out of the impasse. Gandhi finally told him that the differences between them were too fundamental and that, therefore, he should go ahead with a Working Committee of his own and not a 'composite' Working Committee. He did, however, sound a note of warning at the end of his letter that just as Subhas Bose was entitled to full expression and to voice his resentment against suppression so also must he be prepared for those whom he wrongly called 'Gandhiites' to be able to assert themselves when they differed from him. He said:

There should be no difficulty whatsoever if they are in a minority. They may not suppress themselves if they are clearly in a majority. 74

The matter remained unresolved. Although Bose's dispute was with the Gandhiites, he and his supporters singled out Vallabhbhai Patel as the main culprit who was running the Congress show in his own image and style, and whose views on the role of Congress in the Indian political scene were by then becoming clear particularly to his opponents. Referring to Patel's statement of 25 January 1939, before the Presidential election, Bose had said that reference to the Bardoli meeting, at which Sitaramayya's name was suggested and which Patel mentioned in his statement, was an admission that some members of the Working Committee took decisions on such vital

matters as the choice of candidates for the Presidency, without consulting the President or other members:

It is clear that he (Patel) wants a President who will be a mere figurehead and a tool in the hands of other members of the Working Committee. The above confession (about the Bardoli meeting) also confirms the general impression that the Working Committee is really controlled by a group within it and that the other members are there on sufferance. 75

After the election, Bose was called upon to resign. Pressure to resign continued to be resisted by Bose for some time; Bose warned that he was being pressed to resign but was avoiding it because it would have fatal consequences:

My resignation would mean the beginning of a new phase in Congress policies which I want to avoid till the last. If we come to the parting of ways, a bitter civil war will commence and whatever be the upshot of it - the Congress will be weakened for some time to come and the benefits will be reaped by the British Government. 76

He tried to appeal to Gandhi as an individual rather than Gandhi as a part of Gandhian team of which Vallabhbhai Patel was a prominent member. Patel, he regarded as partisan and unfair:

People who are bitterly opposed for various reasons to Sardar Patel and his group still have confidence in you and believe that you can take a dispassionate and non-partisan view of things. 77

He tried to make a direct appeal to Gandhi to mediate and thus clear the ground so that Congress might embark on a forthright course of action without dissensions and bickerings. Gandhi whose strength now lay as much with the Gandhiites - like Patel - as theirs had lain with him earlier, rebuffed Bose's appeal:

The views you express seem to be so diametrically opposed to those of the others and my own that I do not see any possibility of bridging them...what is wrong is not the differences between us but loss of mutual respect and trust. 78

Gandhi advised Bose to form a Committee of his own liking and choosing and then put forward a programme before the AICC. If

the programme was accepted then Bose would face no problems and could disregard those with whom he was having differences. If it was not accepted, he would have to resign and let the Committee choose its President. Bose felt that Gandhi was anxious to see the 'Old Guard' at the helm of affairs and advised Gandhi to lead the old guard so that the increasing opposition against them would diminish.

...there is a world of difference between yourself and your lieutenants, even your chosen lieutenants. There are people who will do anything for you - but not for them. 79

It soon became clear that the conflict between the two political giants, Vallabhbhai Patel and Subhas Bose, was not an ordinary one. It could not be patched; nor could it be ignored. It would be terminated only when one party succumbed to the pressures of the other. Such was the power of the Vallabhbhai/Gandhi team that Subhas did not stand a chance. At the end of April 1939, Subhas Bose called a meeting of the AICC in Calcutta. Patel did not go to Calcutta for the meeting. Gandhi went to Calcutta but did not attend. Untoward incidents occurred there and the lack of harmony persisted -culminating eventually in Bose sending in his resignation on the second day of the meeting. Bose was faced with a dilemma because Gandhi's help was not forthcoming in forming a new Working Committee. Pant's resolution (passed at the Tripuri Congress) had stated that everything was to be done under Gandhi's direction; to form a Working Committee without Gandhi's advice, therefore, went against Pant's resolution. Jawaharlal Nehru in his typically conciliatory pose proposed that Bose withdraw his resignation and nominate afresh the old Working Committee which functioned in 1938. That would be a way out of the problem raised by Pant's resolution. As for Bose's desire to infuse fresh blood into the Committee Nehru explained that Jairamdas Doulatram and Jamnalal Bajaj had resigned on grounds of health and that would give Bose a chance to nominate two members of his choice. Jai Prakash Narain and Rafi Ahmed Kidwai seconded his proposition. But Bose dillyed and dallied and wanted the

right-wing leaders to make some moves; ultimately his resignation was accepted.

The old guard made provisions for the organisation to come under a tighter control. Rajendra Prasad at the AICC meeting in Bombay in June 1939 alleged that leftists were causing 'domestic faction and internal conflict', and said that these forces had to be combated effectively because they were disabling the country:

The first and most urgent problem for the Congress is therefore to purify the organisation and make it a disciplined and effective instrument of the people's will.<sup>80</sup>

At the same meeting, the AICC passed two resolutions that led to still more trouble between Bose and the Congress. One stipulated that no Congressman might offer individual satyagraha in the provinces without the sanction of the PCCs, and the second stated that because of recent problems relating to the jurisdiction of PCCs in relation to the Congress Provincial Ministries, the executives of PCCs would not interfere in administrative matters but would reprimand a Minister 'privately' in the case of some 'abuse or difficulty'. On policy matters in case of difference between the PCC and a Ministry, the Parliamentary Sub-Committee would deal with the matter. No public discussion was to take place on Congress policy or the functioning of Congress Ministries.<sup>81</sup>

Quite clearly the central executive of Congress wanted to keep the reins in its hands as much as possible. Bose's further resentment was to be expected. On 30 June he issued a statement condemning two resolutions of the AICC and urged the Working Committee not to resist or smother the expression of discontent among the masses. To voice a protest against these resolutions Bose urged the public to observe 9 July as All India Day. In the meantime, Bose had meetings with Jinnah and B.R. Ambedkar and also encouraged leftists in different areas to organise so that the right-wingers of Congress might be forced into taking a more forward stand.<sup>82</sup> The new President of the Congress, Rajendra Prasad, sent a formal warning to Bose that defiance of the AICC resolution would

mean breach of discipline and, therefore, it would be wise to cancel the meeting of 9 July. Undaunted by these threats, Bose addressed a meeting of 3000 at Bombay on 9 July and insisted that an ultimatum should be presented to the British Government to concede demands in six months, otherwise a mass movement would be started. He also urged the public to demand a cancellation of the AICC resolutions. Bose supplemented his defiance of the Congress warning by travelling extensively in Patel's domain - Gujarat - and seeking support and sympathy from workers and students. In an interview with the Sentinel correspondent, he proclaimed that the foundation of his new party, the Forward Bloc, had been securely laid down in Gujarat.<sup>83</sup>

Bose also made a statement in Bombay in which he criticised the Bombay Government's prohibition scheme as being unrealistic. Patel came down heavily on Bose's attacks and on his general political behaviour and revolt against the Congress; he particularly resented the encroachment in Gujarat and Bombay:

An unseemly aspect of Subhas Bose's conduct is that the President of a Provincial Congress Committee should have taken the trouble to travel one thousand miles to launch an attack on a Congress Ministry in another province. 84

Bose retorted sharply:

I am told by an eminent leader that I have revolted against the Congress. This is news to me. I have only protested against the highhandedness of the small group that now dominate the Congress and the Congress Ministries with the help of a packed majority....The Chairman of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee has hit me below the belt by alleging that I have joined the enemies of the Congress. 85

Bose asserted that the tirade against him was part of the plan to divert attention away from the idea of a mass struggle and side-track the main political issue facing the country, namely, how to prepare for the final struggle for India's freedom.<sup>86</sup> Patel answered Bose's charges against him when he was in Ahmedabad. He deplored Bose's personal attacks against him and other Congressmen and asserted that mere

talking could not prepare people for a struggle. In Nadiad he undertook a similar mission - that of undoing Bose's anti-Gandhian propaganda.<sup>87</sup> Attacks and counter-attacks between Bose and Patel continued. The Working Committee met at Wardha and took disciplinary action against Bose on 11 August 1939. Bose was disqualified from the Presidentship of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee and from being elected to any Congress Committee for three years.<sup>88</sup> Gandhi came to Patel's side to add moral support as he did in the Nariman episode. The confrontation, however, was not between Gandhi and Bose. The last few statements of Patel and Bose referred to above do indicate clearly that Bose's grievances were against Patel's highhandedness and his increasing strength and domination of the Congress centre. Gandhi's statements condemning Bose's antagonistic posture towards Gandhites do not show up a quarrel between Bose and Gandhi, as Tomlinson believes.<sup>89</sup> It was not a question of criticising the lieutenant (Patel) to attack the Captain (Gandhi).<sup>90</sup> As far as the elections, choices of candidates and formation of Congress teams was concerned, Patel was very much the captain. Patel actively participated in the kind of politics that Nehru, for instance, shied away from. It was this politics that was at the centre of conflicts like those between Patel on the one hand and Nariman, Khare and Bose in turn, on the other.

What was the significance of this episode in terms of Patel's status and role in the Congress organisation at this time? Clearly incidents and events centring around individual rivalries or ambitions and factional in-fighting all came within the jurisdiction of Patel and his associates. As long as any event had anything to do with the party and its smooth and effective functioning, Patel was directly involved and was, therefore, the main target of those who resented Congress policy during this period. Even though at some points the conflict also involved Gandhi, the main adversaries were Bose and Patel and as neither believed in compromising (as Nehru and Gandhi did) the conflict took on a wider

significance and caused a greater upheaval than it might otherwise have done. The issue of Vithalbhai Patel's will, referred to as the 'other bone of contention' by Tomlinson, also rancoured in Vallabhbai's mind and certainly increased his animosity to Bose.<sup>91</sup>

The dispute between Patel and Bose, however, must be seen in the light of the broader Patelian strategy which we have been tracing from the beginning of the thesis. Bose came closest to destroying the hegemony of the Gandhiites and the latter had to resort to a change of rules to gain a victory over him. Bose's rebellion made Patel tougher with opponents and more particularly with any kind of leftist opposition. Jai Prakash Narain described the Patel-Bose dispute as part of Patel's intensive campaign to dissociate extremists from the decision-making areas of Congress.<sup>92</sup>

Nariman, Khare and finally Bose represent a kind of escalation in the High Command's control over provincial leaders in these terms: Nariman was more or less on his own, a leader with some following based purely on political performances and activity; Khare represented a faction within the local Congress, and Bose represented a party which locally threatened the Congress and centrally opposed the old guard. Nariman's and Khare's own strength was limited and that is why their political demise was more complete than that of Bose whose reliance on the Gandhiites was limited. In Bose's case the conflict was highlighted by the fact that he had organised supporters behind him who laid as much claim to national interest as Gandhiites did. Ultimately, victory over the Gandhiites was well nigh impossible, for, in addition to a vast and controlled organisation, they had enormous control over vested interests which had been further strengthened by the power and patronage that accompanied their role as incumbents.<sup>93</sup> It was this factor that made Patel a realistic negotiator when prospects of gaining control and real power brightened after the war.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER V

- 1 K.M.Munshi's statement, Nariman File, Patel Papers.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Times of India, 8 July 1937, p.9.
- 4 Ibid, 19 March 1937, p.16.
- 5 Nariman's statement, 15 March 1937, Patel Papers.
- 6 Nariman File, Patel Papers.
- 7 Copy of the resolution passed by Working Committee at Harijan Colony from 15-22 March 1937, Patel Papers.
- 8 Times of India, 22 March 1937, p.12.
- 9 Nariman's statement, 23 March 1937, Patel Papers.
- 10 Gangadharrao Deshpande, Shankarrao Deo and Achyut Patwardhan's statements, 26 March 1937, ibid.
- 11 Nehru to Nariman, 17 June 1937, AICC E-7(1).
- 12 Nehru to Nariman, 8 July 1937, ibid.
- 13 Nariman to Nehru, 23 June 1937, Patel Papers.
- 14 Patel's statement to the Press, 9 July 1937, Patel Papers.
- 15 Nariman's statement to the Press, 12 July 1937, AICC E-7(1).
- 16 Gandhi to Nariman, 14 July 1937, ibid.
- 17 Gandhi to Nariman, 17 July 1937, ibid.
- 18 Nariman's statement regarding Legislative Assembly elections, 17 August 1937, Patel Papers, File of 37.
- 19 Cowasji Jehangir to Gandhi, 27 August 1937, ibid.
- 20 Dinshaw Mehta to Jawaharlal Nehru, 8 November 1937, AICC E-7(1).
- 21 JB Kripalani to Dinshaw Mehta, 23 November 1937, ibid.
- 22 Statements from these and other MLAs, MLCs are in File of 37/8 of Patel Papers,
- 23 Shankarrao Deo to Jamnalal Bajaj, File 4, Jamnalal Bajaj Papers, NMML.

- 24 Patel to Officer-in-charge, Telegraph Check Office, Calcutta, 7 June 1937, and reply from Accounts Officer, TCO, 14 June 1937, Patel Papers, File of 34.
- 25 Patel's statement, 29 August 1937, in reply to Nariman's statement, Patel Papers.
- 26 Patel's Original Statement to Working Committee, *ibid.*
- 27 Patel to Gandhi, 29 August 1937, *ibid.*
- 28 *Ibid.*
- 29 The Leader, 18 October 1937, p.15.
- 30 *Ibid*, 10 November 1937, p.10.
- 31 Bombay Chronicle, 7 June 1938, p.12.
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 *Ibid.*
- 34 See D.E.U.Baker, Changing Political Leadership in an Indian Province. The Central Provinces and Berar. 1919-1939 (Oxford University Press 1979) ; Baker, 'The Changing Leadership of the Congress in the Central Provinces and Berar', in D.A.Low (ed.) Congress and the Raj (London 1977) ; Tomlinson, The Indian National Congress and the Raj.
- 35 N.B.Khare, Political Memoirs or Autobiography (Nagpur 1959) p.7.
- 36 Tomlinson, *op.cit.*
- 37 D.P.Mishra, Living an Era, 1, (Delhi 1975) p.271.
- 38 *Ibid.*
- 39 *Ibid*, p.272.
- 40 Patel's displeasure at Khare's disinclination to abide by Congress instructions was expressed in a letter to Jamnalal Bajaj. Khare was accused of failing to keep his word, blaming others for his political shortcomings and being generally unreliable. Vallabhbhai Patel to Jamnalal Bajaj, 20 May 1937, Jamnalal Bajaj Papers, File P-8.
- 41 Mishra seemed to have had a reputation for colourful living. In May 1937, he had been involved in a scandal in the course of which many facets of his personality were discussed openly. Making allowance for some of them not being true and for the fact that legally he was absolved of the charges, Patel was still not convinced of Mishra's absolute sincerity. See Patel to Khare, 10 July 1937, in C.P.Ministerial Crisis, (Allahabad, Kitabistan for the AICC 1938) p.21.

- 42 Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, 22 January 1938, Mss.Eur.F.125/58.
- 43 Bose's statement, C.P.Ministerial Crisis, p.3.
- 44 N.B.Khare to Vallabhbhai Patel, 25 March 1938, File 108, N.B.Khare Papers, N.A.I.
- 45 Khare, Autobiography, pp.11-13.
- 46 C.P.Ministerial Crisis, p.6.
- 47 Bombay Chronicle, 22 July 1938, p.8.
- 48 Statement issued after Working Committee of 23 July 1938, *ibid*, 25 July 1938, p.7.
- 49 Bombay Chronicle, 5 August 1938, p.5.
- 50 *Ibid*, 27 July 1938, p.1.
- 51 Patel's statement, 5 August 1938, *ibid*, 6 August 1938, p.1.
- 52 *Ibid*.
- 53 C.P.Ministerial Crisis, pp.20-23-
- 54 *Ibid*, pp.10-17.
- 55 Bombay Chronicle, 17 February 1938, p.7.
- 56 *Ibid*, 5 February 1938, p.1.
- 57 *Ibid*.
- 58 *Ibid*.
- 59 Bose at meeting of Progressive Groups, 19 May 1938. Bombay Chronicle, 20 May 1938, p.7., and at a meeting of Congress Socialists Party, Poona, 21 May 1938, *ibid*, 23 May 1938, p.12. Bose's statement of 25 January 1939 which said 'It is widely believed that there is a prospect of compromise on the federal scheme between the right wing of the Congress and the British Government during the coming year'. No public utterance of any Congressman could however be cited by him to corroborate his assertion, Subhas Bose, Crossroads (London 1962), p.91.
- 60 Tomlinson, *op.cit.* p.122.
- 61 Bombay Chronicle, 26 September 1938, p.1.
- 62 *Ibid*.
- 63 *Ibid*, 25 January 1939, p.16 ; Bose, Crossroads, p:87.
- 64 Sarat Bose to Patel, 24 January 1938, *ibid*, p.88.

- 65 Statement of Patel and six other members of the Working Committee, 24 January 1939, Bombay Chronicle, 25 January 1939, p.16.
- 66 Statement of Subhas Bose, 25 January 1939, *ibid*, p.1.
- 67 *Ibid*.
- 68 Bombay Chronicle, 27 January 1939, p.16.
- 69 *Ibid*, 28 January 1939, p.1.
- 70 The Province that voted solidly against Bose was Gujarat - of 105 delegates who participated 100 votes for Sitaramayya and 5 for Bose. Bombay Chronicle, 30 January 1939, p.1.
- 71 Times of India, 22 February 1939, p.9.
- 72 *Ibid*, 10 February 1939, p.11.
- 73 Indian Annual Register, Jan to June 1939.
- 74 Gandhi to Bose, 31 March 1939, Crossroads, p.133.
- 75 Bose's statement of 27 January 1939, Crossroads, p.101.
- 76 Bose to Gandhi, 31 March 1939, *ibid*, p.135.
- 77 *Ibid*.
- 78 Gandhi to Bose, 2 April 1939, *ibid*.
- 79 Bose to Gandhi, 6 April 1939, *ibid*.
- 80 Prasad's statement on behalf of the Working Committee, Indian Annual Register, Jan to June 1939, p.345.
- 81 *Ibid*, p.357.
- 82 Bombay Chronicle, 4 July 1939, p.1 ; 6 July 1939, p.14.
- 83 Bombay Sentinel, 18 July 1939, p.7.
- 84 Patel's statement in reply to Bose's statement of 10 July 1939, Bombay Chronicle, 17 July 1939, p.1.
- 85 Bose at Ahmedabad, 17 July 1939, *ibid*, 19 July 1939, p.3.
- 86 *Ibid*, 22 July 1939, p.1.
- 87 *Ibid*, 25 July 1939, p.14.
- 88 *Ibid*, 12 August 1939, p.1.
- 89 Tomlinson suggests that the conflict was really between

Bose and Gandhi and Bose lost because unlike Gandhi he did not have a team of supporters to rely on.

90 Tomlinson, op.cit. p.125.

91 Interview with Manibehn Patel, September 1977 and May and October 1980.

92 Interview with Jai Prakash Narain, Kadam Kuan, Patna, February 1978.

93 In an exhibition at Patel's Smarak Sangrahalaya, Ahmedabad, it was interesting to see photocopies of cheques and letters specifying donations given to Patel for the Congress Fund by leading industrialists and millowners, October 1980.

## CHAPTER VI

### ENTRENCHMENT OF CONGRESS POWER 1937-1939

(i)

#### Congress Ministries

Once the Congress Ministries were formed and functioning, each province had to execute the policies laid down by the Working Committee within the framework of its own social and political alignments of men and materials. The basic directions had been clearly laid down and there was to be no compromise over them. However, in several cases, Patel was called in to give special remedies. U.P., Bihar and Bombay were faced with troubles from workers and peasants and in each case Patel's curbs and controls reveal the wider scheme of maintaining a conservative economic and political structure that would foster 'measured and orderly progress' and bring about an eclipse of popular protests and mass uprisings.<sup>1</sup>

An AICC circular, sent soon after the permission to accept office was granted in July 1937, reminded the Congress Provinces of the nature of the programmes they were expected to pursue. Release of political prisoners, internees and detenues, and the return of securities taken from newspapers and press were seen as relatively easy tasks to be followed by a repeal of all repressive laws. The broad areas of reform were agrarian, industrial, educational and social, the last category encompassing the controversial policy on prohibition which was something Congress leaders were never wholly agreed upon. In particular, the land question and problems of rural debt were to be given adequate attention on the lines indicated by previous Congress resolutions, particularly the agrarian resolution of the Faizpur Congress. The execution of this programme was likely to take some time and it was, therefore, believed that while the legislation was being enacted some relief should be given to the peasantry immediately. That would assure the masses of the new Government's good inten-

tions.<sup>2</sup> Each province had its own land tenure system and its own agrarian problems and the Central Congress expected that land reforms would have to be made according to the requirements of each area. The socio-economic structure within Provinces was mirrored in the political alignments, so that land reform or industrial reform were both also political questions in each province.

Uttar Pradesh and Bihar had considerable agricultural discontent. Discussions on the Uttar Pradesh Tenancy Bill went on for months and were lively and animated. Socialist leaders thought the reforms did not go far enough. Zamindars and taluqdars were upset over the inadequacy of the reforms and were the most vehement in their opposition. Zamindars like Maheshwar Dayal Seth were ready for an all-out confrontation with the tenants. Through the mediation of Nawab Sir Ahmed Said of Chhatari, who was the President of the Zamindars' Association, Patel was asked to intervene to iron out some points of difference. For Patel, the negotiations had political rather than socio-economic importance for although he was not the spokesman of the rent-paying, debt-ridden peasantry he had not managed to befriend the landlords in the area either; the latter were anxious to get political leverage and power for themselves which Patel resented. However, he thought it might be a good opportunity to gain for Congress the support of an influential section of the vested landed interests in an area where the Congress leftists had alienated these interests from the Party. On 21 September 1938, the Congress Parliamentary Sub-Committee met a deputation of Uttar Pradesh Zamindars in Delhi to hear their case. G.B.Pant, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai and Bhulabhai Desai were also present at the meeting. The Zamindars presented their case and the Parliamentary Sub-Committee consented to arbitrate between the Uttar Pradesh Government and the Zamindars 'provided the Zamindars agreed to accept the decision of the Committee as final after the Committee had heard both sides'.<sup>3</sup> The Zamindars of Agra accepted the offer and their decision was conveyed to Patel, the Chairman of the Parliamentary

Sub-Committee, by the Nawab of Chhatari. At the latter's request Patel agreed to postpone the Uttar Pradesh Assembly session specially called to consider this Bill so that the Zamindars could have a meeting with the Parliamentary Sub-Committee. Though the Zamindars of Agra Province were willing to accept Patel's arbitration, some Oudh Zamindars had begun an agitation against the Parliamentary Sub-Committee's role and alleged that 'the Parliamentary Sub-Committee had been brought in to play the game of the Uttar Pradesh Ministry, namely to pull the chestnuts from the fire for the Government'.<sup>4</sup> In particular Raja Maheshwar Dayal Seth had been attacking Patel ceaselessly and although Patel said he was 'too thick skinned and thoroughly seasoned to take any notice of such unpleasant attacks' on him, he was not willing to allow the Congress image to be tarnished by accusations of doubtful motives.<sup>5</sup> The Oudh zamindars rejected the Parliamentary Sub-Committee's offer to arbitrate and asked for a negotiated settlement. Some of them were not prepared even for negotiations. On Patel's advice the Parliamentary Sub-Committee withdrew its offer. As Patel stated later:

The Committee made its offer to arbitrate and whatever decision it gave had to be accepted as final. Otherwise it would be unfair to the Congress organisation in the United Provinces and the Congress Government, inasmuch as it would necessarily be binding on them. 6

The Nawab of Chhatari seemed quite apologetic towards Patel that the attitude of some of the landlords had been so difficult. He wrote to Patel:

...but I do hope that you will still be able to find out some means of settling this knotty problem by an agreed settlement instead of carrying it through the two chambers. 7

But Patel refused to help and indicated that it was a pity that some zamindars had thus slighted him and the Parliamentary Sub-Committee:

It is a pity that a section of the Uttar Pradesh zamindars failed to appreciate the disinterested motive which actuated the Congress Parliamentary Sub-Committee to agree to undertake this none too envious responsibility.<sup>8</sup>

The motives that lay behind these parleys can be traced back a few years. In the early 1930s, at the instance of the left, Congress activity among the rural sections of U.P. had been given emphasis. The role of the C.S.P. in carrying on a tirade against the Congress Parliamentary Board and in highlighting their lack of concern for the exploited sections of the society caused the Congress Parliamentary Board much concern, given the fact that the Government had already sought to 'frighten the zamindars particularly by the argument that the Congress will confiscate their property'.<sup>9</sup> Congress had two problems - winning the peasants and the zamindars. Gandhi tried to win the peasants with his Sangh activities; that had a limited impact. Patel had to tackle the other end - he had to resist socialist propaganda and prevent it from alienating the zamindars from Congress. In the end, Congress leaders pleased neither side. The U.P. Tenancy Act 1939 was a compromise that made no substantial gains for Congress in terms of support.

A look at some of the other measures and the conflicts that accompanied them shows the conservative nature of the enactments and proposals. While discussing what Congress did it must be pointed out that many of these measures owed as much to administrative continuity as to Congress initiative. Some of the Governments were inexperienced and not all were manned by very able people. Caste balance, factional appeasement and ideological representation played their part in the selection of ministers - at the expense of ability in some cases. The experienced Governments often tended to follow previous government practice and British officials' advice to a greater extent than they or anyone else expected. The Uttar Pradesh Borstal Bill, the Maternity Benefit Bill, taxation measures such as the Court Fees (Amendment) Bill and the Stamp (Amendment) Bill were some such measures enacted in Uttar Pradesh. In the field of industry and labour, Congress faced problems in U.P. that were almost as demanding as those in Bombay Province. Kanpur, like Bombay, had a large labour force and in 1937, the labour strike caused much anxiety.

The Congress Government took recourse to repressive measures to deal with the strikers. Socialists and labour leaders were arrested and Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code was promulgated. The Congress Government was accused of deviating from the Election Manifesto and pressure was put by leftist leaders for it to withdraw restrictive orders and also compel millowners to accept the legitimate demands of the workers. Patel, who had gone to Lucknow especially to discuss the Kanpur labour situation with the Executive Committee of the Congress Party in the U.P. Legislature and had endorsed the restrictions put on workers, came in for much criticism for his tough attitude towards labour. At the Bengal Socialist Party Conference, for example, Jai Prakash Narain indicted Patel for his insensitivity towards the working classes and for a particular statement which he had made against the Ahmedabad workers who had been on strike. Jai Prakash Narain reminded Patel that Congress was pledged to support all legitimate struggles of the working classes.<sup>10</sup> But, Patel proceeded in his own vein and in Punjab and Bombay he recommended the same stringent measures to control the workers.<sup>11</sup>

In Bihar, landlord-tenant problems also required careful handling. On the one hand, the landlords were pressing for a better deal in the tenancy legislation; on the other hand, the Kisan Sabha had incited the kisans to stage several demonstrations to press for greater relief. Patel was quite clear that neither side was to be placated at the expense of the other. On the one hand he suggested that if the landlords were ultimately going to be cajoled into accepting it then there was no need to worry about improving the Bill to meet their wishes. On the other hand he also made it clear that he was not the tenants' spokesman:

We shall have to resist the excessive demands of the tenants who have been worked up and expected too much from Congress Ministries. 12

When a compromise between the landlords and the tenants was arrived at, he urged Rajendra Prasad to get the tenancy legis-

lation through. Deploring the opposition of the Kisan Sabha to the compromise, he condemned the leniency that Congress had hitherto shown to those Sabhas in the name of the masses. The alliance with the Sabhas was being misused in that each time something went wrong Congress was blamed and when something good was achieved the Kisan Sabha took the credit. The Champaran, Saran and Monghyr DCCs had passed resolutions banning Kisan Sabha activities in their districts and the Bihar PCC approved of the resolutions, declaring that the kind of propaganda that was being carried out by the Kisan Sabhas in the province was responsible for producing an atmosphere of hostility to the Congress Ministry and, generally, damaging the Congress work.<sup>13</sup> Strong action taken by the President of the Bihar PCC against the leader of the Kisan Sabha was endorsed by Patel:

Personally I feel that such action should have been taken long ago, but better late than never is also a good thing. 14

The trouble that Congress in Bihar and, more particularly, in Gaya and Patna had with Kisan Sabhas caused many ripples in the Congress. The anger and resentment among Kisan Sabha workers made its way into the Congress centre and a resolution was passed at Haripura, elaborating the position towards the Kisan Sabha.<sup>15</sup> Kisan demonstrations were being organised mainly in Maharashtra (by Indulal Yajnik), in Bihar (by Swami Shahajanand) and in Andhra (by N.G.Ranga). Patel poured out his anger towards all these leaders and accused them of making deliberate attempts to discredit the Congress Ministries 'by taking crowds of kisans to the Assemblies and encouraging them to make impossible and extravagant demands'.<sup>16</sup>

In Bombay Province, kisans organised mammoth rallies and marches to place their demands before the Assembly for the abolition of intermediary systems like khot and inamdari. For the relief of agricultural debt and moneylenders, the Bombay Government introduced a moratorium and a Moneylenders' Registration Bill which would take away the ills without actually removing the institution of money lending. It also proposed

a reduction of land revenue though socialists tried to belittle its efforts by stating that Congress should have reduced land revenue by 50 per cent. B.G.Kher denied that Congress had ever made such a promise and said that 12 per cent reduction<sup>will</sup>/be given to smaller peasantry and 25 per cent would be considered in heavily assessed areas.<sup>17</sup>

There had never been any love lost between the Kisan Sabhas and Patel. He had always been strongly against their formation and had no patience with the group that he believed had become the spokesman of the masses but had failed to see that there was a wider national aim before which even the cause of the masses became relatively narrow and limited. An interesting feature of nationalist leaders like Patel was their ability to take a stand against the overturning of the existing order by emphasising the importance of national aims. Sometimes this was so effectively done that programmes that in fact had a wider appeal were made to seem limited in comparison with the nationalist movement. Denouncing all efforts towards mass mobilisation as contributions towards mass hysteria, Patel wrote to Prasad:

Such rival organisations are bound to destroy Congress prestige. Congressmen are forced to join these Kisan organisations by the atmosphere created by the organisers. They are waiting for a time when they could displace us, that is why I have given them no quarters and they have always been attacking me mercilessly. 18

He had the same intolerant attitude towards the mill-workers in Bombay and other industrial areas. In Bombay Province, he tried to tilt back the scales that he thought had inclined too far towards the workers and their demands as a result of the concentration of the leftist groups on the work force. That in areas where mills and the work force were concentrated were socialist strongholds cannot be denied. The conduct of the strikes among Bombay's mill force is an example of the progress of the socialists. Patel's role in the resolution of the industrial and labour conflict in Bombay Province was yet another example of his efforts to curtail the influence of the leftists. In this particular area he

was at a considerable disadvantage. Migration trends, residential clusterings based on districts of origin, the internal structure and hierarchy within each mill, all contributed towards greater success for leftist leaders than for Congress workers. Before 1928, most of the interest taken in the work force in the mills revealed the Marathi character of both the mobilisers and the issues that were taken up.<sup>19</sup> Congress's overtures towards the work force were marked by a lack of trust in the workers' representatives and a lack of understanding of the inner workings of the mill industry. These have been shown to have been based on caste-clusterings which in turn were inevitable given the role of the jobber as the key figure inside and outside the mill.<sup>20</sup> But the 1928 strike had brought about new patterns of relationships between workers, jobbers and trade unions, a factor which Congress was not able to grapple with.<sup>21</sup> The handling of the 1928 strike by the British Government and the 1938 strike by the Congress Government of Bombay has been compared elsewhere.<sup>22</sup> The cause of the 1938 strike was the Bombay Government's Industrial Disputes Bill and the clause which labour leaders found particularly odious was that which allowed compulsory arbitration in disputes. The Bombay Congress Socialist Party had sent a memorandum to the Bombay Government in March 1938:

...We recognise that some sort of machinery compelling recourse to conciliation before direct action in the shape of a lockout or strike can be resorted to, is necessary....It is quite another matter, however, where arbitration is made compulsory. That means a denial of the right to strike, the destruction of that weapon of direct action which is the last resort, the only weapon in the hands of the workers in their unequal struggle with their exploiters under the capitalist regime. 23

The one-day strike on 7 November 1938 brought discredit to Congress and Patel. The Congress Government dealt with the strike as ruthlessly as the British Government before it. Policemen had been called for special duty and had been instructed to take action if workers were prevented by strikers from going to work. When strikers resorted to stone throwing and police officers were hit, police opened fire and workers

were seriously hurt and one was killed. Patel gave elaborate explanations to justify the Government's role. He said that labour leaders had no reason to complain because they had openly declared that their success depended on their ability to provoke Congress to resort to firing. Congress could not be blamed, he said, because the atmosphere that existed was not conducive to non-violence:

...until it is able to generate that atmosphere of non-violence in which such firing would become unnecessary, it has no alternative but to use minimum force, including firing, for the protection of life and property of those who are innocent. 24

These views were constantly reiterated by him and firmness in dealing with labour was considered the only way to maintain public discipline.<sup>25</sup> Trade union leaders referred to this as a 'perverted fascist mentality' and criticised Congressmen for their total disregard of consensus and discussion on vital matters.<sup>26</sup> Patel was unconcerned; he had communicated to G.B. Pant a year earlier, when the latter reported labour trouble in U.P., that labour and leftist leaders would have to be curbed effectively:

Similar elements are also likely to give trouble in Bombay. Unless we are able to control communist elements in the labour areas, such as Bombay, Sholapur, Kanpur and Calcutta, we will sooner or later be faced with a very unpleasant situation. 27

Patel's remarks were reminiscent of British comments made in the 1920s during their handling of strikes and demonstrations.<sup>28</sup> The Congress Government's obsession with workers' movements and the advance of the leftists can be seen in Munshi's handling of the 'red menace'.<sup>29</sup> Congress right-wing leaders failed to meet the problem. This failure and some other features of the Congress in power at the time have led historians to believe that the two and a half year period of Congress in office can be regarded as a momentous period in which, if Congress had made the appropriate adjustments to economic and social forces, power groups and rivals, then some of the later conflicts in the process of change from imperialism to self-government might have been avoided.<sup>30</sup> This contention

is not totally without substance. It has some weight in the case of the Muslims, workers and peasants. In the case of the States to which we shall now turn, it had limited application. The maladjustments in that area emanated from within the States rather than outside. Conflicts within Congress, however, did not help their handling of the issues involved.

(ii)

### Policy Towards Indian States

While power politics were being conducted in the British Provinces, Congress became involved in agitation in several States and in some the campaigns were directed and controlled by Patel. There have been several studies dealing with the emergence, shaping and reshaping of these States, the patterns of relationships within them and the policies and attitudes of the imperial power and Indian political groups towards these States.<sup>31</sup> For the present purpose it is not necessary to look too minutely at how the individual States were ruled, what were the modes of traditional relationships existing in the States and the extent of disenchantment among the people in the States.<sup>32</sup> The important thing is the nature of Congress involvement and control of political agitation in some of the States. More specifically, it is the movements after the introduction of Provincial Autonomy that concern us here because Patel's direct involvement began about that time. The Act of 1935 brought a new dimension to the Indian political scene in its idea of an all-India Federation in which the British Provinces and the Indian States would participate together and yet separately.<sup>33</sup> The conditions that had to be satisfied before a proclamation could declare a federation of India were that the rulers of the States in accordance with certain provisions would be entitled to choose not less than fifty-two members of the Council of States, and that the aggregate population of the States that came into the Federation would be at least half of the total population of the States. In principle, Congress rejected the federal provisions

of the Act which gave more importance to the Princes than to the people of the States. But in practice, it did not start agitating on the federal part of the Act until it had sorted out what it intended to do about Provincial Autonomy. Having negotiated its position on office acceptance and established itself in the Provinces through its disciplined and organised party machinery, the Congress leadership turned its attention to the other parts of the Act - the Federal Scheme. This interest in State affairs appeared like a change of policy on the part of the Congress and the opponents of the Gandhian wing accused the Gandhians of a change of policy and a compromise. But what had really happened was that the Congress did not have to pay much attention to the States' problem until the issue of federation assumed importance on the political scene. At the Calcutta Congress in 1928, it had declared its policy towards the States. In a resolution moved by Manilal Kothari the Congress assured the people of the States of its 'sympathy with and support in their legitimate and peaceful struggle for the attainment of full responsible government in the States'.<sup>34</sup> Patel had elaborated his own views on the States, their rulers and the source of the rulers' strength - the Paramount Power.<sup>35</sup> But there seemed no urgency for Congress to take a more active role in States' affairs.

With the Government of India Bill being hotly debated in the British Parliament, the States' question began to occupy the attention of political groups and princes. The princes began to voice their apprehension and put forward objections which the Government was quick to attend to and answer. At a meeting of princes and their ministers in Bombay at the end of February 1935, the princes voiced an objection that the Bill as framed required their acceptance of the whole Statute which they had not agreed upon. The unlimited control over all State matters allowed to the executive authority of the Federal Government was unacceptable to the rulers; so were the inroads into the domain of sovereignty and the internal autonomy of the States. Encroachments upon substantial sources

of revenue of some of the States (particularly income tax and customs) and matters like the administration of railways of States which the Federal Railway Authority intended to control were all matters that rulers found objectionable.<sup>36</sup> Rulers' objections could not be dismissed easily, for the Government depended so much on princely support. The Secretary of State issued a statement straightaway in the House of Commons that the Princes' interests would be properly safeguarded.

The States' peoples' contact with outside political forces began in the 1920s. Within the States, local organisations came up.<sup>37</sup> Congress's formal interest in the States' people can be traced back to 1920. However, it is in the years after the 1935 Act that the uprisings in the States gained political significance. At the Jabalpur AICC meeting in April 1935, the socialists demanded a change in States' policy on the part of the Congress. N.V.Gadgil moved a resolution that the interests of States' subjects were as much the concern of the Congress party as those of British Indian subjects and that States' people should get the full co-operation of Congress in the struggle for freedom. Kamladevi Chattopadhyaya maintained that the Calcutta Congress resolution of 1928 did not mean non-interference in the affairs of the States' people. Patel in opposing the resolution asserted emphatically that it was not Congress policy to interfere in the affairs of Indian States. States' subjects were welcome to join the Congress but Congress could not promise direct assistance to them in return. Giving some reasons for this attitude he said:

We were not prepared to go into an Indian State and interfere in its affairs in case it banned the Congress. A necessary consequence of Mr.Gadgil's resolution would be the abolition of Indian States. We were not prepared to subscribe to this policy. 38

G.B.Pant supported Patel's point of view and added that if Congress interfered in States' affairs the rulers would tighten their hold on the subjects. The shrewdness behind the policy was undeniable. Open hostility to the princes and manifest support to the States' people would fetch no gains

for Congress; in fact it would lead to political losses in terms of Congress losing a potential area of support. Socialist utterances like 'princes would have no place in a Socialist India' were not helping the cause of the people's freedom in the current framework.<sup>39</sup>

It was obvious that there were vast differences between Patel's and Gadgil's ideas of freedom for the people. Congress Socialists continued their propaganda against the Congress's States policy. At the Kerala CSP Conference in May and at the Gujarat CSP Conference in June 1935, resolutions were passed that the subjects of States should be encouraged to organise and join the struggle for independence in British India.<sup>40</sup> The Congress President deplored the constant criticism by the Congress Socialists of Congress policy and said that it confused people unnecessarily. But as in other matters in this too the socialists were worried about how Congress would manage and control such a vital section of opinion as that of the States' people through its uncompromising right-wing leadership. During the Congress President's visit to Bombay in June 1935, there was a demand to tidy up relations between the Congress Socialists and the Gandhites. Jai Prakash Narain, the CSP General Secretary, replied to Prasad's criticism of the Socialists' opposition to Congress policy by denying that the CSP was working in opposition, although he conceded that they had a right to oppose whatever they did not agree with in Congress:

...we must exercise our right as a minority to propagate our views within the Congress, to work along our own lines to criticise and even oppose such policies of the Congress as appear to us to be not in the interests of the masses. 41

The pressure from the socialists elicited a resolution from the Working Committee that met at the end of July 1935. This stated that the Congress recognised that the people of the States had the inherent right to swaraj and that it also believed in the establishment of representative and responsible government in States. It also asserted that Princes had been advised that it was in their own interest to establish res-

possible institutions and guarantee freedom to the people. It was not considered politically wise, however, for Congress to take on the people's struggle for freedom directly; the States' people themselves should fight:

The Congress can exercise moral and friendly influence upon States; and this it is bound to do, wherever possible. The Congress had no other power under the existing circumstances although the people of India, whether under the British, the Princes or any other power are geographically and historically one and indivisible. In the heat of controversy, the limitation of the Congress is often forgotten. Indeed any other policy will defeat the common purpose. 42

At the AICC meeting in Madras in October 1935, Patel moved a resolution to adopt the above resolution of the Working Committee. The socialists suggested two amendments to the motion - that Congress assure the States' people that in the proposed Constituent Assembly the States' people would be represented on the same basis as the people of British India, and that until the Constituent Assembly was formed it would not accept any Federal constitution which did not embody the elementary rights of citizenship for the States' people and the protection of these rights by a Federal Court, or did not give the States' people the right of representation in a Federal Legislature. Charging the socialists with ignorance of the States' problem Patel said that the Working Committee resolution should and would go no further than its declared intention. Resenting the pressure which the AICC members were exerting on the Working Committee, he asked them not to try and force their views on the Committee which had made its final decision and knew what it was doing:

...we tell you, for god's sake, don't throw the responsibility on us, and if you want to go further, go to the Lucknow Congress where there will be a fuller house who will decide. 43

The resolution was voted in, and in Congress circles it was considered a personal triumph for Patel and Prasad.<sup>44</sup>

At the Lucknow session in April 1936, the 1928 Calcutta resolution and the October 1935 Madras statements were both reaffirmed; at the same time, a further assurance was given to

the States' people later:

...that in its opinion the people of the States should have the same right of self determination as those of the rest of India, and thus the Congress stands for the same political, civil and democratic liberties for every part of India. The Congress however desires to point out that the struggle for liberty within the States is in the very nature of things to be carried on by the people of the States themselves. 45

Amritlal Seth moved an amendment that Congress should abandon its neutral attitude, to which Patel gave a caustic reply. Denouncing Seth as a member of the 'opposition camp' in the matter of the States, Patel said that Congress could only take as much responsibility in the States' matter as it could bear. It was a complicated and delicate matter and had to be handled carefully. He urged people, the socialists in particular, not to forget that it was through Congress influence that people in some States had become vocal - although in other States peoples' voices were heard in anti-Congress slogans. The situation, he said, was much the same as kisan and labour organisations which had sprung up as a result of Congress work among the workers and peasants but which were now rivalling the claim of Congress to stand for the people.<sup>46</sup> The States' Peoples' Conference in the meantime continued to put pressure on Congress to participate directly in the affairs of the States. At a meeting in Karachi attended by Nehru, the Conference expressed approval of a genuine all-India Federation as opposed to the one proposed by the Government of India Act and resolved to obtain recognition of the right of States' people to equal representation with the people of British India in the Constituent Assembly when it would be formed. The Conference appealed to Congress to abandon the policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of States.<sup>47</sup>

For the first half of 1937, Congress was busy with Provincial elections and the issue of office acceptance which was resolved by July. In September 1937, Congress was called upon to express itself again on the States' people's problems as a result of the Mysore Government's excessively prohibitive orders against the Congress organisation. Kamladevi Chatto-

padhyaya, the Congress Socialist member, who was visiting Mysore at the time decided to address a public meeting in Mysore despite the prohibitory order, which infuriated the Mysore Government further.<sup>48</sup> More stringent bans were imposed on Congress and Congressmen. At a gathering in New Delhi, Nehru, the Congress President, expressed dissatisfaction at the attitude of the States and indicated that Congress would be compelled to take retaliatory measures against those Indian States that were imposing bans on the Congress.<sup>49</sup> In October 1937, the 'Mysore Resolution' was moved by Kamladevi Chattopadhyaya and passed by the AICC at Calcutta. This became the subject of some controversy within Congress and between Congress leaders and the Mysore State representatives. The resolution condemned the Mysore State Government's inauguration of a new policy of repression and suppression of rights and liberties. The resolution said:

This meeting sends its fraternal greetings to the people of Mysore and wishes them all success in their legitimate non-violent struggle and appeals to the people of Indian States and British India to give all support and encouragement to the people of Mysore in their struggle against the former's right of self-determination. 50

This resolution led to much discussion.<sup>51</sup> Gandhi took a strong stand against it. In an article in the Harijan on 13 November 1937, he condemned the resolution as ultra vires and criticised the AICC for unconstitutional behaviour. Nehru disagreed with Gandhi and was distressed that Gandhi should have passed an opinion on a resolution without ascertaining the full facts.<sup>52</sup> Gandhi's part in this whole question of just how involved the Congress should get in the States question appears ambiguous. James Manor discusses the lack of coordination between Gandhi's views and official Congress policy and points to a 'muddle' on the issue. Actually there was no muddle. Gandhi's hand was being played by Patel at this point and it soon became clear why.<sup>53</sup> From this point onwards there was more active participation in the States by the national Congress. Gandhi and Patel had probably thought they would accelerate the pace of Congress involvement in the States in their own time. But,

events in Mysore developed faster than they had anticipated. The situation got worse and Congress was pulled in as a result. The details of the manner in which the 'Mysore resolution' was brought before the AICC at Calcutta and was introduced and passed reveal that Patel felt that Congress Socialists were taking the initiative in the States' people's problems and it was becoming imperative that Congress should keep the control in its own hands. R.S.Hukerikar, the Secretary of the KPCC, and Chengalraya Reddi, the President of the Mysore Congress Board, went to Calcutta to explain to the National Congress that repression had increased in Mysore and it was time for Congress to take a more active role in States' affairs. For two days they waited to be given a hearing and on the third day were summoned before the Working Committee only to be questioned about the political activities of Kamladevi Chattopadhyaya and K.F.Nariman. Meanwhile, some members had drafted a sympathetic resolution relating to Mysore and, after circulating it, had obtained 84 signatures in its favour. This resolution was moved by Kamladevi. Patel was infuriated at the way the Province and State Congress representatives, spearheaded by socialist leaders, were trying to take the initiative in getting the AICC to formulate the Congress policy towards the States. Patel felt that it was the Working Committee's prerogative to effect changes in Congress policy. He threatened to oppose the resolution tooth and nail at the AICC meeting. Shankarrao Deo accused Gangadharrao Deshpande and R.S.Hukerikar of having betrayed the Working Committee by pushing at an AICC meeting a resolution that suggested such a fundamental change in the Congress attitude. Chengalraya Reddi offered to modify the resolution into one that was a mere condemnation of the repressive policy in Mysore. Patel, however, was not prepared to entertain any proposal on the question. His attitude was adamant enough to frighten Chengalraya Reddi who, thereupon, suggested to some of the Karnatak members that the whole matter be put before the Working Committee which seemed to resent the encroachment on what it considered its prerogative.<sup>54</sup> The Working Committee members sat silently while the resolution was passed and had made up their minds

to attack the resolution later, with Gandhi's moral weight behind them.

The resolution was condemned, but reconsideration of Congress policy on the States' question was inevitable because that was the only way Congress would get back its control over the matter. There is no doubt that the Congress Working Committee wanted to control the States' question and the method of the struggle fully and completely. The change came soon enough when the resolutions for the next session of Congress had to be prepared. The Working Committee expressed solidarity with States' people and indicated that owing to 'new problems' and 'new conflicts' Congress was formulating a fresh policy with regard to Indian States. Full responsible government and the guarantee of civil liberty were recognised as legitimate goals for the States' people. It was clearly stated:

The Congress considers it its right and privilege to work for the attainment of this objective in the States but under the existing circumstances the Congress is not in a position to work more effectively to this end within the States. 55

Restrictions imposed by rulers and by the British rendered it necessary that the States' people would for some time have to carry on the task of struggling for their rights on their own. Congress would render support and goodwill from outside:

Individual Congressmen however will be free to render further assistance in their personal capacities. 56

Furthermore, although the setting up of Congress Committees within the States was forbidden, independent organisations could be set up by individuals. People of the States could also become primary or elective members of the Congress but the Committee of which they became members had to be situated outside the States.

Mysore State saw the enactment of this decision to participate more visibly in States' affairs. The Congress decision to hoist the 'national' flag in various places and to celebrate 26 January as Independence Day in the State was met with consi-

derable resistance by the State authorities. On 26 April, at Viduraswatham, a village 50 miles from Bangalore, 32 persons were reported killed and 60 injured as a result of police firing over the raising of the Congress flag. That gave Congress the pretext to step in directly in a State problem. Another 'Flag Satyagraha' was on, this time in an Indian State.

Patel's role in the States' question was, by design, unobtrusive in the initial stages. But for anyone who cared to look deeper into Congress reasoning, the purpose of his intervention was clear. The opportune moment for Congress to take hold of the States' people had come. Socialists had increased their interest in the States as a result of which there was increased pressure on Congress to play a more direct and sympathetic role in the States' peoples' problems.<sup>57</sup> It will be seen in the case of Rajkot, for instance, that Gujarat Socialists also took an active part in the agitation which Patel was controlling. Without appearing to interfere Congress had to intervene.<sup>58</sup> While it made public utterances that the States' people must carry on their own fight, it was sometimes necessary to spur them on. Patel did just that. He intervened in the Mysore problem and took over the role of supervising negotiations. He asked the Mysore Congress representatives to see Gandhi and take instructions on how to conduct the movement. Gandhi had already expressed unreserved support for the movement and had advised the agitators as follows:

Do everything possible to keep the movement absolutely non-violent....If necessary, I am prepared personally to lead this movement in Mysore whenever I happen to be in India. 59

Patel handled the Mysore situation himself as it developed further. He tried to conduct the negotiations in such a way that people felt that something could be achieved by agitating. On 6 May, Patel and Kripalani arrived in Bangalore and the former had two long interviews with Mirza Ismail, the Dewan of Mysore, during which the main points of difference between the Government and the Congress were discussed. Patel also met the Working Committee of the Mysore Congress two days later and determined and discussed their demands, which were

(1) recognition of the Mysore Congress (2) adequate representation in the Reforms Committee (3) recommendation of responsible government under the aegis of the Maharaja and (4) permission to the Mysore Congress to have its own flag.<sup>60</sup>

On 8 May, the dispute was concluded as a result of Patel's talks with the Dewan. It was agreed that (1) the Mysore State Flag would be hoisted alongwith the Congress flag in all ceremonial occasions involving Congress and (2) the Reforms Committee should consist of six Congress nominees.<sup>61</sup> On 9 May, Patel addressed a gathering of 30,000 people for 75 minutes and was able to communicate to them that an amicable settlement had been arrived at with the Government and that it would be given effect to in Government orders which would be issued in due course of time. Government had also promised an inquiry into the unfortunate incident at Viduraswatham on 26 April. He made some significant remarks that clearly indicated that Congress would not lose the States from its political grip. On the one hand, it would instil fervour into the people in their demand for responsible government and on the other, it would cultivate the States' officials too, because eliminating them was likely to harm Congress at that stage. Addressing Congressmen Patel encouraged them to work<sup>on</sup> their programme but warned them not to insist that the Congress flag be flown over Assembly Chambers or on Government Secretariat buildings. Even in British India, Congress had not made this a live issue. Advising Mysore Congressmen to be moderate in their demands so that the very existence of their organisation was not jeopardised, Patel also recommended a policy of congeniality in their relations with States' officials so that they would make some headway in achieving their aims:

I do not think it is unpatriotic to have friendly relations with States' officials. You must remember that they are Indian States and not foreign States. The struggle for freedom under the aegis of the Indian National Congress is freedom for 350 million people including Indian States' people and Indian Princes. Once the Princes are free, we shall settle our accounts with them without third party intervention. 62

The significance of this remark deserves to be noted. It is a curious amalgam turning at first on the meaning of 'freedom' and then implying either the domination of the States under a future Congress 'Raj', or perhaps their incorporation within a democratic system. The evidence so far suggests that Patel did not have, as Nehru did, any very clear political philosophy in relation to a future constitutional and representative democracy. Here the strategy was rather like the earlier (pre-1916) strategy of Congress vis-à-vis the British Government - to avoid internecine quarrels for a time and get the limited objectives first, and then seek further gains. Patel felt that on no account was it worthwhile for Congress to take on the government of the States at a time when the organisation was still building up its strength in the States:

I advised you to avoid competition among yourselves for places in the reformed government. If you can get responsible government...without a struggle and bitterness why not get it by co-operating with the government. 63

Instances like these show the extent to which Patel actually readjusted intermediary goals to achieve the ultimate goal - that of capturing as much political power for the Gandhites in Congress as was possible under the circumstances. Patel believed he was not compromising but simply changing tactics. Socialists, however, looked upon Patel's terms of agreement with the Mysore State as a compromise and were critical of his suggestion that the State flag should be hoisted along with the Congress flag. The criticism faded out when Gandhi gave full support to the settlement and deplored the socialists' criticism as unworthy of attention because socialists were prepared to use violence in States which Gandhi dismissed as immoral and unwise.<sup>64</sup>

In Rajkot State Patel supervised an agitation which assumed large proportions as Congress participation in it increased. Rajkot was particularly suitable for a comprehensive struggle between the various forces involved in the States' problems. Its urban nature, large immigrant population, its status as the centre from which the British Resident of the

Western India States Agency operated and, last but not least, its association with Gandhi and his wife added to the reasons why it was ideal as the State where Congress would try out its strength against possibly two adversaries at once.

Rajkot was not a prosperous State. Its ruler Dharmendra Sinhji who succeeded the relatively benign Lakhajirah as ruler in 1931 was aptly described as 'the despair of the political service'.<sup>65</sup> While the ruler squandered away his riches, the State as a unit was not economically sound. It had an annual income of about twelve lakhs. Its people were not the recipients of any benefits of welfare schemes and were consequently dissatisfied. In 1936, there had been a strike in the State cotton mill and a labour union had been formed under the guidance of Jethelal Joshi. In March 1937, Joshi and U.N. Dhebar convened a meeting of the Kathiawar Rajkiya Parishad. Dhebar was a Rajkot lawyer, conservative like Patel and imbued with a desire for reform rather than revolution. At the conference, various proposals were put forward which would bring social and economic benefits to the people but scant attention was paid to them by the rulers. Virawala, the Dewan of the extravagant ruler, was more deliberate in his disregard of the people than the negligent prince. He persisted with the State policy of selling ijaras (monopolies) on various consumer items and thus enriching the princely coffers. In August 1938, when the monopoly on gambling at the Gokulashtmi fair was given to a group called 'Carnival', agitators organised a protest at the fair. Lathi charges and arrests and an escalation of the agitation ensued. On 19 August, the Working Committee of Congress sent its formal support to the Rajkot State Subjects. Balwantrai Mehta and Rasiklal Parikh came to Rajkot with a message from Patel that the agitators would get formal Congress co-operation in their fight against the autocratic methods of administration.<sup>66</sup> The support elicited by the agitation made the Rajkot State authorities nervous. The Secretary of the Gujarat Congress Socialist Party issued a statement that the fight in Rajkot was a peoples' fight and that the struggle against gambling had turned into a struggle

for the 'immediate abolition of autocracy and immediate achievement of responsible government'.<sup>67</sup>

At the suggestion of Vallabhbhai Patel, the workers of Rajkot decided to hold a Rajkot Peoples' Conference on 3 and 4 September. Patel attended this conference and in his speech elaborated on the maladministration of the State and the misdemeanours of its rulers. A resolution was passed asking for responsible government with limited powers resting with the ruler. Later that day, Patel and Virawala had discussions in which Patel recommended that responsible government should be aimed at by the appointment of a reforms committee which would work towards it, that the ruler should be prevented from drawing excess amounts from the State coffers, that land grants should be reduced by 15 per cent and that all monopoly grants should be cancelled.<sup>68</sup>

The Dewan, however, had already put into action a plan whereby Patel's scheme would be severely dealt with. He advised the Thakur to release him from the duties of Dewan on grounds of illness and suggested the appointment of a new Dewan, Sir Patrick Cadell, a Britisher who had been Dewan in Junagadh many years before.

Patel was quick to appreciate the strategy, that an Englishman had been put in the front line to put into effect disagreeable policies that would bring discredit to him and not to the ruler or the ex-Dewan, who would in fact be functioning from behind the scenes. He accused the ruler and his advisers of being party to a 'highly objectional and unjustifiable arrangement' from which the conniving Dewan had removed himself to give the agitators a taste of repression at the hands of an Englishman.<sup>69</sup> Patel realised that a European administrator would face the struggle and carry out a policy of ruthless repression with greater self-confidence and more support from the Political Department than an Indian officer would. These hopes and fears were belied somewhat. A few weeks later the Thakur was complaining that the situation and the people's movement had become worse since Cadell arrived

because the latter failed to cope with it by not taking proper steps at the proper time. He wanted Cadell to leave but the latter would not do so and seemed to have the Resident's support in asserting that he had been appointed for six months in the first instance and would stay till then.<sup>70</sup> Cadell had nothing but contempt for the ruler and if he carried out any measure it was with the idea of assisting the British Agent rather than the ruler of Rajkot.<sup>71</sup> The Thakur was sharply criticised by Cadell for his behaviour both private and public and Cadell told him that the agitation was a direct result of the mismanagement of the State. He wrote to the Thakur:

The condition of affairs in the State is very serious. Many of the complaints against the State are based on your behaviour. It is believed that you spend too large a share of your State's revenue, that more of your expenditure is on unworthy objects and that you take no part in the administration of the State. I do not wish to make any reference at present either to the amount of money you spend or the way you spend it. But it is certainly true that you take no part in the administration and show no interest in the welfare of your people. 72

Cadell made several suggestions and demanded a promise from the Thakur that he would follow them, failing which he would leave and also make sure that 'this may have unfortunate consequences both for your State and for yourself'.<sup>73</sup>

The peoples' movement in the meantime progressed rapidly under Patel's supervision and Dhebar's direct control. The people's grievances had been ignored and a formal satyagraha had been started at the end of September 1938. Patel had advised Dhebar to auction a box of matches, which was one of the items over which Virawala had secured monopoly rights. Dhebar was sentenced to 15 days' imprisonment; others followed and the agitation gained in strength and the State had to make some move if it wanted to avoid disaster. Reluctantly, on Cadell's advice, the Thakur conceded some points, one among them being the release of Dhebar. Dhebar had Patel's full support and the Thakur was well acquainted with Patel's strength. He admitted as much in a letter to the Resident, Mr. Gibson, on 16 October 1938:

...I was not in favour of releasing Dhebar as he would create more trouble and would also run up to Vallabh-bhai Patel for instructions for agitation on a scale much larger and more serious....Dhebar was released on the night of 11th and a very large meeting of some ten thousand people was held to welcome him. It seemed that the State had lost all control over its subjects. Dhebar free, proved more harmful. 74

The struggle continued because no concrete concessions were made and also because of untoward incidents like the murder of a farmer and the harassment of villagers. At a public meeting on 21 November 1938, Patel declared that until the authorities in Rajkot negotiated with him they were not likely to achieve anything. No Dewan could make any headway unless he sought Patel's assistance:

I am neither a politician nor a statesman, but a simple peasant and I have one simple method. I keep saying no until I get what I want. 75

A meeting between Cadell and Patel was arranged and took place on 29 November 1938 at which many points were discussed - that of general amnesty for all civil disobedience prisoners, the appointment of a committee of ten to draw up reforms and the redefinition of the powers of the ruler. Cadell had objections to Patel's statement and the meeting came to nought. The Thakur invited Patel to Rajkot and Patel reached Rajkot on 25 December 1938. He reiterated to the Thakur that interested parties were consciously creating misunderstanding and it would be in the interests of both the Thakur and Patel to discuss the problems face-to-face. A settlement emerged after eight hours of discussion which emphasised the vital need for the redress of the people's grievances. On his part, Patel promised that all unconstitutional agitations would cease and the Thakur agreed to grant amnesty to all political prisoners. He also conceded a reforms committee of ten which would give the 'widest possible powers consistent with our obligation to the Paramount Power'. 76

Within two days of the publication of this agreement the Resident met the Thakur and his Council. He first reprimanded the latter for conducting negotiations with Patel. He said:

You know that Government of India was opposed to outside interference. By settling with him (Patel) you have lost the sympathies of your brother princes and the Government....Even amongst the Congress workers, Mr.Patel is regarded as most untrustworthy. 77

He also objected to the phrase 'widest possible powers' which he insisted would be misused by Patel. The Thakur, however, was relying on the fact that Virawala, whom he intended reinstating as Dewan and President of the proposed Committee, would check any Congress excesses. However, under pressure from the Resident and vicariously from the Paramount Power and with support from Virawala, the Thakur rejected three of the seven names that Patel sent to him on 4 January 1939.<sup>78</sup> The grounds given for rejections were (a) that the list of names appeared in the Press before it reached the Thakur (b) that the names suggested by Patel were unrepresentative of such communities as Bhayats, Muslims and depressed classes whose interests could not be ignored and (c) that names like Dhebar were objectional as it could be disputed whether they could be called State subjects. Patel reacted strongly to these objections but added that if any further pretexts were found for not implementing the agreement he would give orders for the struggle to be resumed. He added by way of characteristic intimidation:

I must also add that I have in my possession copies of correspondence that had taken place with H.H.the Thakur Saheb and Sir Patrick Cadell, and of the summary of an interview with the Resident. If the settlement breaks down I am afraid it will be my duty to publish in public interest these and other documents in my possession. But I hope I may have to do nothing of that kind and the Committee will be appointed and begin work immediately. 79

Patel's recommendations were not accepted. The Thakur appointed his own Committee and on 25 January Patel told the people of Rajkot to resume their struggle. The State authorities on their part increased the repression and suppression of the agitators. Kasturba Gandhi and Manibehn Patel decided to plunge into the struggle and were arrested and imprisoned on arrival in Rajkot on 3 February. Vivid accounts of ill-treatment of satyagrahis were received by Patel and Gandhi in letters from Manibehn and other volunteers.<sup>80</sup>

At this point Gandhi intervened. His requests for explanations about reports of maltreatment of prisoners from the Rajkot State officers were disregarded and he decided to go to Rajkot to ascertain the true position. After reviewing the situation and having unsatisfactory talks with the Thakur and Virawala, Gandhi wrote to the Thakur on 2 March that if the suggestions he was making were not accepted by the following day he would begin a fast which would go on till he was satisfied that his demands had been met.<sup>81</sup> His suggestions were rejected and he began his fast. He made it clear that the main reason for it was that there had been a breach of faith whereby an agreement made between the Thakur and Patel had not been honoured by the Thakur. The fast had the desired effect. The likely consequences of a fast undertaken by Gandhi in his seventieth year were well known. The Viceroy cancelled his tour and returned to Delhi on 6 March 1939. In reply to Gandhi's communication on his fast the Viceroy sent a note on 7 March:

...the best way in which these doubts can be resolved is to refer their interpretation to the highest judicial authority in the land, that is to say the Chief Justice of India. 82

Assuring Gandhi that he would exert his own influence on the Thakur to see that he would carry out the promises contained in the agreement, the Viceroy appealed to him to abandon his fast. Gandhi broke his fast on 7 March and left for Delhi on the 13th to attend the arbitration conducted by Sir Maurice Gwyer, the Chief Justice of the Federal Court. Sir Maurice's verdict was that the Thakur was in breach of the agreement of 26 December and was bound to accept the names recommended by Patel, for Patel's right to recommend the names in this case clearly meant 'choose' the names of seven members of the Committee. Unfortunately, that was not the end of the matter. Patel and Gandhi returned to Rajkot on 9 April only to be faced with further disputes over the names of the Committee's members. Minority groups had been incited against Gandhi and made to believe that he was rejecting their names. Communal disturbances followed. Further negotiations

achieved nothing. In fact, in May 1939, Gandhi admitted defeat, renounced the advantages accruing from Sir Maurice's award and denounced his Rajkot fast as impure and tainted with 'himsa'. He left it to the Thakur and his adviser to appease the people as they saw fit. Reforms were announced in Rajkot by November 1939 but they were worthless and Gandhi advised the people of Rajkot not to cooperate with them.

The real significance of the Rajkot satyagraha and Patel's role in it lay (1) in the effect it had on some neighbouring rulers and on the States' peoples' movement in general, (2) in the opportunity it provided for Congress to try and gain some of the ground it had lost to radicals like Bose at Haripura and (3) in providing Patel yet another instance of showing the political strength he was wielding with Gandhi's backing and which was becoming increasingly effective with each usage. It must be remembered that Rajkot was one of 283 States of Kathiawar which was about half the total number (584) of Princely States. To wield influence in the area was vital and had to be done cautiously. Although in Mysore we find Patel advising Congress workers not to challenge State officers, in Rajkot he seems to have got impatient of what he later called the 'grossest form of medieval autocracy' and decided that pressure had to be used against the ruler and his advisers. Patel's pressurising tactics did result in some neighbouring States announcing reforms. The liberal ruler of Aundh State had already announced reforms; a new State Constitution was prepared embodying the principles of Panchayat Raj, a truly representative Assembly, the utilisation of the State revenues for welfare purposes and the 83 like. The new constitution was inaugurated on 21 January 1939. The ruler of Rajpipla State whom Patel met on 29 December also announced a number of concessions.<sup>84</sup> Some Kathiawar States were directly affected by Rajkot. The State of Lathi announced several measures to the agriculturists; the Darbar of Wankaner followed suit.<sup>85</sup>

Some rulers in Kathiawar, however, were unaffected by happenings in Rajkot, and Patel tried other tactics to

bring them into line. In the principality of Limbdi, the ruler was old and retired and his two sons controlled the affairs of the State. Repression was rampant and in February 1939, raids were carried out in villages, homes were looted and people were beaten up. Patel abhorred the indifference shown by the Agent of the Crown Representative to the atrocities committed by the ruler and officials. He wrote in an interesting change of tune:

The responsibility for these happenings is therefore not only of the Thakur Sahab but in the ultimate analysis rests with the Parliament of Britain, which, while claiming to speak in the name of democracy, permits the grossest form of medieval autocracy to flourish in India and places the life and liberty of hapless individuals at the mercy of little despots. 86

Patel devised a new way to pressurize the rulers and officials of Limbdi. He organised a boycott of Limbdi cotton, a commodity upon which the merchants of Limbdi, and through them the State, thrived.<sup>87</sup> The Limbdi State Prajamandal's efforts in the boycott were strengthened by the support which the big business magnates of Bombay extended to them. A Committee was set up by them at the instance of Patel to keep close watch and ensure that not one bale of Limbdi State cotton was sold in India or outside the country. The boycott was so effective that it could not be lifted even when the Congress Ministries resigned in November 1939. Cotton dealers in Limbdi heaved a sigh of relief when the Ministries resigned but soon realised that business was still slack because cotton brokers in Bombay were reluctant to alienate the Congress which was likely to come in at the helm of affairs again. A cotton broker candidly remarked:

Because the Congress Ministry in Bombay has ceased to function it does not mean that the Congress High Command also ceased to give orders and express opinions. Unless and until the States come to an agreement with the Congress Party in India, we regret that we shall be unable to handle your Limbdi cotton much as we should like to do so. 88

Patel's control over interest groups was an important factor in Congress's ability to intimidate economic and political

opposition; and for Patel, intimidation was a useful political weapon. The conduct of the States' struggles at this stage was of importance to Congress in more ways than one. The show of Congress power and strength in their handling of the peoples' struggle gave the States' people confidence. It also made rulers cautious in tackling the issue in the future. Unfortunately, despite the changing attitudes of some of the rulers mentioned above there was no definite pattern of a shift in political alignments discernible in the role of the Princes in the power structure. Barbara Ramusack rightly points out that in the 1920s and 1930s whereas the numbers of 'politically aware Indians' that either rejected or severely criticised British policies in India swelled enormously, 'the princes however were one of the few groups within the empire who continued to identify their goals with those of the British'.<sup>89</sup> Urmila Phadnis also suggests that had the rulers not antagonised the politically conscious sections of their population to the extent that they did, Congress's hold over the States' peoples' struggle would not have increased the way it did.<sup>90</sup>

As it happened, Congress's involvement initially undertaken to keep socialist and extremist activity at bay had considerable impact on the States' people. Socialists were overtaken by Congress although that did not prevent them from carrying on their activities. In addition, Congress entry into States' affairs made the Muslim League aware of its lack of support in the area and prompted it to make a belated attempt to recover lost ground. They were helped by the fact that many of the rulers were Muslims. Thus, the States' question soon became an area of multi-dimensional conflicts. That gave Patel added incentive to intensify Congress involvement in the States. He did this in two ways: (1) by making the politically ambitious but relatively inexperienced local agitators dependent on Congress for organisational techniques and political leverage and (2) by showing up the local politics within the States and instructing those who had the resources to utilize them for political ends.

Patel's calculated and slow but sure entry into State politics had a lasting psychological effect on the rulers and

the subjects and enabled Patel to make bold decisions at the time of transfer of power. The manner in which most rulers did Patel's bidding around the time of independence and the recalcitrant States - Junagadh, Jammu and Kashmir and Hyderabad-were firmly dealt with, was linked to Patel's earlier political stick-and-carrot strategy. The fate of the Princely States was tied up with earlier Congress decisions of the 1930s in which bold plans for right-wing ascendancy were made.

(iii)

#### The Exit of the Ministries

During the summer of 1939, no direct confrontation took place between the Congress and the British. Congress had been busy with provincial work and with its internal problems. In September 1939, Britain declared war on Germany. On their side, initially Britain did not think that anything untoward was likely to happen in the nature of India's response which required a change of policy. The King Emperor's broadcast of 3 September and the Viceroy's proclamation thereafter expressed the hope that India would play a mature part in the confrontation between the forces of democracy and dictatorship and throw her weight behind those that stood for human freedom and dignity. Upon observing the negative reactions of the Congress and the League to the question of their co-operation in the war effort, the Governments of Britain and India felt the need for a revision of their opinion. Congress demanded a specific declaration of war aims. The Working Committee of Congress issued its reply on 14 September and accused Britain of having failed in keeping its promises after the First War and accused the States of hypocrisy in offering men, material and moral support for the safeguarding of democracy abroad while their own States could boast of nothing that vaguely resembled democracy. It also asked the British Government 'to declare in unequivocal terms what their war aims are in regard to democracy and imperialism and the new order that is envi-

saged'. The British Government resented the moral pressure. Gandhi, who earlier expressed some regret at the Congress's condition for supporting the war effort, now chided the British for presenting a facade of injured innocence after having spoken the 'old language of imperialists' - threats, cajolment and pressure - for so long.

The prestige of the Congress had been somewhat damaged in March 1939 by the conflict between Subhas Bose and the 'old guard'. Although the incident had ended in a victory for the Working Committee, the storm of opposition against the right wing continued unabated. Apart from Bose's continued indictment of Congress, other left-wing groups joined in pointing out that the manner in which the Gandhites in Congress had been consolidating their strength was responsible for the leftists' strong reaction. On behalf of the Communists of India, a few leaders issued a statement condemning Congress's treatment of Bose and its continued efforts to push the left wing out of Congress. The statement particularly condemned the Congress strategy of the past three years. This strategy, it said, was designed to divide the parliamentary work of Congress from the work pertaining to the masses:

The ministries were to perform the alchemistic experiment of transforming the dross of the British Constitution into the gold of Indian freedom and the masses of Congressmen were to restrict themselves to the constructive programme and create a non-violent atmosphere suitable to the success of the experiment. It was a line of curbing the fighting power of the working classes and the peasant masses - of refusing to unify these forces with those of the Congress, of refusing to weld the Congress into a weapon of united front struggle. 91

Thus, keeping the masses in control was seen as a devious right-wing strategy which left-wing groups regarded as a repetition of the true goal of Congress - the unity of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary work. Communists also accused Congress of attempting to keep the left at bay by refusing formally to launch a country-wide offensive in both British India and the States and yet working all the while on its own on a planned programme in both regions to secure a right-

wing Congress foot-hold well controlled by the Gandhiites.<sup>92</sup> The Bombay Left Consolidation Committee also made the same charge, adding that the constitutional changes made in Congress in recent years were intended to toughen the organisation against the growing influence of the left. The pressure from the left was mounting. If a confrontation with the British was likely, a head-on collision with leftists was not considered prudent. The Working Committee deferred its final decision on the Congress's formal attitude to the war in order to have time for a full discussion of the issues involved and a Sub-Committee consisting of Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Azad and Vallabhbhai Patel was appointed to deal with the situation.<sup>93</sup> By the beginning of October, Congress was feeling restive over Britain's silence with regard to Congress's demands for a declaration of war aims. Gandhi made haste to add that he had differed with the Working Committee on the 14 September statement and had been alone in asserting that unconditional support should be given to Britain.<sup>94</sup> In a House of Lords debate on Indian affairs, Congress's demands had been criticised. No formal answer, however, had been given to the demand. Pressure on Congress from other quarters had increased. Apart from the leftists, the Muslims had been more aggressive and Jinnah in particular had openly expressed his antagonism towards Congress and Gandhi. He clarified his position: Congress was required to recognise the Muslim League as the sole representative of the Muslims, and Congress must give up completely its claim to represent Muslims.<sup>95</sup> Given these pressures, and the likelihood of a direct clash with the British, Congress had to first strengthen its position. At the AICC meeting on 10 October 1939, the official resolution was passed despite 22 amendments (mostly from the leftists). It asserted that Congress was opposed to all Imperialist wars and condemned Nazism, but it also believed that democracy had to be extended to all colonized countries if real peace was aimed at. Britain had declared India a belligerent country without the consent of the Indian people and no declaration of war aims had been made by the British Government.

Although Patel took pains to point out that Congress was not bargaining, in effect, the Congress was doing just that. While seconding the resolution Patel demanded proof of British sincerity and stated that Britain would have to treat India as a free country if it wanted India to further the cause of democracy and freedom.<sup>96</sup> That he considered this a good chance to twist Britain's arm was evident. At a flag hoisting ceremony at Wardha he warned Congressmen that India would never get such an opportunity again when it could apply pressure on Britain and dictate terms from a position of advantage. Patel was quite clear that Congress should bargain. He <sup>was</sup> also clear that unity was imperative. A united decision and total compliance with 'the Commander's' wishes was necessary if Congress was to make any move. The Working Committee had been given more powers at the AICC meeting to counteract the problem of 'too many commanders and very few soldiers'.<sup>97</sup> Patel half expected the British to turn down Congress's request for a clarification of British war aims in relation to India. The idea was to present the British with an either/or solution in which Gandhites would be the gainers each way. The Viceroy's statement of 17 October was Britain's answer to Congress's demands.

The Working Committee met on 22 October 1939 and expressed dissatisfaction at the Viceroy's statement. The Congress Ministries were asked to tender their resignations. Patel expressed regret at a public meeting that Britain had turned down Congress's conciliatory gesture:

We decided to ask the Viceroy for the objectives of the war. We did not receive any direct reply but now are being asked if we are fit for independence. We are told to go and settle with the Muslims, i.e. with the Muslim League. If we do not succeed in coming to an agreement with them, we shall probably be told 'to go and settle with the Indian Princes'. When that happens no doubt they will say 'what about the Europeans who have so many interests in the country and who have invested so much money?'.<sup>98</sup>

The British, he said, were like the proverbial monkey that pretended to sort out the dispute between the two cats and

all the while filled his own stomach. Patel was critical of different groups and communities for meekly succumbing to British overtures and increasing the suspicion and hostility among themselves. Muslims and Indian princes alike were the objects of his contempt for their betrayal in what should have been a national cause:

In fact the institution of the princes may be said to have come to an end. India is not the home of the world's lost causes.<sup>99</sup>

It would not be far wrong to assert that Patel's attitude towards the Muslims and the Princes had hardened by the time the war situation brought out their responses of conditional and unconditional co-operation. If and when the Congress came to power at the centre and Patel had to decide the fate of these groups, it was evident that he would not go out of his way to help them. While Congress contemplated civil disobedience of one variety or another, Patel's mind was now working in the direction of how best to get Congress to be at the helm of affairs once the British were made to leave and how to establish Congress supremacy even out of office.

Patel's views on the subject of resignations are significant because he was one Gandhiite who had been constantly building up the party to avail of the power that office would bring. His anxiety at this time was that if Congress resigned it would lose the head start it had gained over other political groups.<sup>100</sup> On the other hand staying in office meant inviting criticism for the many unpleasant decisions that a war situation would demand. His fears were justified; when Congress resigned, other political groups got an opportunity to build their strength.

The entrenchment of Congress power in the Provinces and States had been for Patel a prelude towards further political gains at the centre. Before going on to discuss the ways in which Patel fortified Congress strength at the centre, a word about Patel's idea of unity would not be out of place. For all his talk of a lack of unity and common purpose between different political groups, Patel himself did not encourage

his group within Congress to unite with other groups. He wanted unity on his own terms. Since most decisions had to be politically sound and fruitful and procure dominance for Congress and the Gandhiites, links lasted as long as their political advantage. Ties based on religion, caste, community, ideology and even class, therefore, had limited strength in Patel's eyes. The best allies were those who were partners in a common quest for dominance and had no ambition for overtaking. In the supervision of the Congress Ministries in Provinces and the conduct of agitations in the States, Patel's actions were devoid of long term visionary goals. Unity with groups that had particular commitments was, therefore, unnecessary. for it would bind and delimit and require compromises that Patel was neither inclined nor required to make given the absence of all-encompassing programmes. This attitude persisted in the penultimate and ultimate phases of the struggle for power and independence. Several quick results were obtained on the political front. Several losses were also incurred on the socio-economic front.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER VI

- 1 Gyanendra Pandey, The Congress in Uttar Pradesh, 1926-1934 (Delhi 1978) p.218.
- 2 AICC Circular No.31 , July 1937, and AICC P-1 of 1938.
- 3 Patel's statement on breakdown of negotiations between U.P. zamindars and the Parliamentary Sub-Committee, Bombay Chronicle, 14 November 1938.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Vallabhbhai Patel to Nawab of Chhatari, 23 October 1938, Nawab of Chhatari Papers, NMML.
- 6 Patel's statement, Bombay Chronicle, 14 November 1938, p.9.
- 7 Nawab of Chhatari to Patel, 28 November 1938, Chhatari Papers.
- 8 Patel's statement, Bombay Chronicle, 14 November 1938, p.9.
- 9 'A further word with the Zamindars' (Translation of a Hindi leaflet 'Zamindaron se aur do-do baten') quoted in Gyanendra Pandey, p.224.
- 10 Narain regretted that Patel was not able to establish any rapport with the working classes; nor did he regard this as an inadequacy in any way. Interview with Jai Prakash Narain, February 1978.
- 11 The Leader, 10 December 1937, p.18.
- 12 Patel to Prasad, 4 December 1937, Prasad Papers, File II of 1937.
- 13 The Leader, 18 December 1937, p.8.
- 14 Patel to Prasad, 16 December 1937, Prasad Papers, File II of 1937.
- 15 See Indian Annual Register, January to June 1938.
- 16 Patel to Prasad, 23 September 1937, Prasad Papers, File II of 1937.
- 17 Bombay Chronicle, 18 January 1938, p.7 ; 12 February 1938, p.8.
- 18 Patel to Prasad, 2 October 1937, Prasad Papers, File II of 1937.
- 19 R.K.Newman, 'Labour Organisation in the Bombay Cotton Mills 1918-1929 (Ph.D Thesis, University of Sussex 1970).

- 20 Morris D Morris, The Emergence of an Industrial Labour Force in India : A Study of the Bombay Cotton Mills, 1854-1947 (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1965) ; Newman, op.cit; David Kooiman, 'Jobbers and the Emergence of trade unions in Bombay city', International Review of Social History, XXII (1977) pt.3.
- 21 Newman, op.cit; Muzaffar Ahmed, Communist Party of India Years of Formation (Calcutta 1959).
- 22 Rani D.Shankardass, The First Congress Raj : Provincial Autonomy in Bombay (Delhi 1982)
- 23 Bombay Chronicle, 11 March 1938, p.14.
- 24 Times of India, 11 November 1938, p.10.
- 25 Vallabhbhai Patel, On Indian Problems (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Delhi 1949) p.77.
- 26 The Mahratta, 11 November 1938, p.12.
- 27 Patel to Prasad, 22 September 1937, Prasad Papers, File II of 1937.
- 28 See letters of Governor Leslie Wilson to Viceroy, Mss. Eur.C 152/9 and 22 ; and Governor Sykes to Viceroy, Sykes Papers, Mss.Eur. F.150/1.
- 29 Munshi Papers, File 13 and 17 , Cupboard 8, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan; See also Shankardass, First Congress Raj, pp.183-5.
- 30 See I.H.Qureshi, The Struggle for Pakistan (Karachi 1969), Ch.5 ; Abdul Wahid Khan, India Wins Freedom, The Other side (Karachi 1961) ; S.K.Majumdar, Jinnah and Gandhi (Calcutta 1966).
- 31 Barbara Ramusack, The Princes of India in the Twilight of Empire, Dissolution of a Patron-Client System, 1914-1939 (Ohio 1978) ; S.R.Ashton, British Policy Towards Indian States (London 1982) ; Urmila Phadnis, Towards the Integration of Indian States, 1919-1947 (London 1968) ; V.P.Menon, The Story of the Integration of the Indian States (Bombay 1961) ; R.L. Handa, History of the Freedom Struggle in Princely States, (New Delhi 1968).
- 32 Apart from general studies on the subject, such as Robin Jeffrey (ed.), People, Princes and Paramount Power : Society and Policies in the Indian Princely States (New Delhi 1978), there are several memoirs and biographies about particular Indian States and their rulers in the bibliography in Ramusack, op.cit.
- 33 For origins of and the stalemate on federation see S.R. Ashton, 'Federal Negotiations with the Indian Princes, 1935-1939', Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, January 1981; Phadnis, op.cit. Chapters 3 and 4.

- 34 Indian Annual Register, 1928, June to December, p.371.
- 35 Patel at Kathiawar Political Conference, March 1929.
- 36 Proceedings of the meeting of Princes held in Bombay, 25 February 1935 : Views of Indian States - Correspondence relating to a meeting of States' Rulers held at Bombay to discuss the Government of India Bill and a provisional draft Instrument of Accession (Delhi 1935).
- 37 Phadnis, op.cit. p.84.
- 38 Bombay Chronicle, 28 February 1935, pp.1 and 8.
- 39 Yusuf Meherali addressed a public meeting in Agra on 8 May 1935 at which he made this statement, Bombay Chronicle, 9 May 1935, p.12.
- 40 Ibid, 28 May 1935, p.1 ; 24 June 1935, p.1.
- 41 Ibid, 3 June 1935, p.10.
- 42 Ibid, 2 August 1935, p.1. Working Committee Resolution, 1 August 1935.
- 43 Ibid, 19 October 1935, p.1.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Ibid, 13 October 1936, p.14.
- 46 Ibid, 16 April 1936, p.12.
- 47 Ibid, 20 July 1936, p.1.
- 48 Ibid, 29 September 1937, p.16.
- 49 Ibid, 11 October 1937, p.1.
- 50 Indian Annual Register 1937, July to December, p.216.
- 51 James Manor analyses the way in which 'the needs and actions of Congressman in Mysore were constantly out of place with those of the Indian National Congress in this period' and how all this affected the politics of the Mysore Resolution. James C.Manor, Political Change in Mysore 1917-1955, (New Delhi 1977) Chapter 5.
- 52 Jawaharlal Nehru to R.S.Hukerikar (Secy, KPCC) 19 November 1937, AICC -G-88 of 1937.
- 53 Manor, op.cit. p.85.
- 54 R.S.Hukerikar to Nehru, 14 November 1937, AICC -G-88 of 1937.
- 55 Working Committee's draft Resolution, Bombay Chronicle, 7 February 1938, p.1.

56 Ibid.

57 Manor, op.cit, p.107 , Manor gives a similar analysis except that what he attributes to Gandhi I attribute solely to Patel: 'Gandhi and the Congress rightly succeeded in pushing through a resolution which threatened leftists with discipline if their Kisan Sabhas activity went beyond what the 'right' considered acceptable'.

58 John Wood also points to a prevalent feeling that if Congress did not intervene other political organisations, possibly extremist ones, would do so. John R.Wood, 'Rajkot. Indian Nationalism in the Princely Context: The Rajkot Satyagraha of 1938-9'. in Jeffrey (ed) People, Princes and Paramount Power p.255.

59 Bombay Chronicle, 30 April 1938, p.1.

60 Ibid, 7 May 1938, p.1.

61 Ibid, 9 May 1938, p.1.

62 Times of India, 10 May 1938, p.9.

63 Ibid,

64 Bombay Chronicle, 21 May 1938, p.16.

65 John Wood in Jeffrey (ed.) People, Princes and Paramount Power, p.249.

66 Bombay Chronicle, 20 August 1938, p.1.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid, 6 September 1938, p.7 ; 8 September 1938, p.1.

69 Ibid, 12 September 1938, p.1.

70 Thakur to Crown Representative, 24 October 1938, Patel Papers, File 46/5.

71 Cadell to Thakur Saheb, 1 October 1938, ibid.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid.

74 Thakur to Gibson, 16 October 1938, ibid.

75 Patel at a public meeting in Ahmedabad, 21 November 1938, Bombay Chronicle, 22 November 1938, p.1 and 7.

76 Patel Papers, File 46/5.

77 Discussion report in Harijan, 4 February 1939, p.464.

- 78 Ibid.
- 79 Vallabhbhai Patel, *ibid*, pp.465-6.
- 80 Patel Papers, File 46/5.
- 81 Gandhi to Thakur Saheb, 2 March 1939, in Harijan, 11 March 1939.
- 82 Ibid.
- 83 Bombay Chronicle, 21 January 1939, p.20.
- 84 Ibid, 14 January 1939, p.1.
- 85 Ibid, 3 November 1939, p.10.
- 86 Foreword to 'Lawless Limbdi' by Vallabhbhai Patel, Patel Papers, File 47/1.
- 87 Bombay Chronicle, 10 August 1939, p.11.
- 88 Tharnley of P. Chrystal & Co., Cotton Brokers to Dayaram Ganeshji of the Ganeshji Type Foundry (Limbdi), 6 November 1939, Patel Papers, File 47/2.
- 89 Barbara Ramusack, *op.cit.* p.182.
- 90 Phadnis, *op.cit.* p.128.
- 91 Statement of P.L.Joshi, G.Adhikari and A.K.Ghosh on behalf of Communists of India, Bombay Chronicle, 14 August 1939, p.14.
- 92 Ibid.
- 93 Ibid, 15 September 1939, p.1.
- 94 Ibid, 16 September 1939, p.1.
- 95 Ibid, 2 October 1939, p.7 ; 6 October 1939, p.1.
- 96 Ibid, 10 October 1939, p.7.
- 97 Ibid, 11 October 1939, p.1. ; 12 October 1939, p.9.
- 98 Parikh, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, 2 , p.425.
- 99 Ibid.
- 100 Interviews with Manibehn Patel, May 1980 , Morarji Desai, April 1980, and Prof. P.V.Mavlankar, May 1980.

## CHAPTER VII

### NEGOTIATOR 1939-1947

As the curtain fell on the last scene of the Congress Ministries' performance under Provincial Autonomy, and the attention of the British shifted to the more dramatic event which had opened in Europe - the War - the inevitable reshuffling and readjustments began on the Indian political scene. With Congress out of office, other political organisations felt that everyone was now on an equal footing and faced with like alternatives, whether to offer resistance or to compromise with the British Government's plans relating to the long and short term future of India and its people. In either case, the choice had to be worked out by each organisation with an eye on what others were doing. Suggestions of ways out of the impasse were made by leaders of all organisations. The lack of unity was lamented by many and the lack of reason decried.<sup>1</sup>

The existing bargaining positions of the Indian political groups and the attitude of the British to them was the starting point of this new chapter in British India. Congress attention which had been taken up for two and a half years by its internal problems and organisation was focused once again on the ramifications of the British position in India. The nature of this position and the details of the British attitude have been analysed in several well-documented works.<sup>2</sup>

Patel's role in this phase of Indian politics can be analysed under three different heads: (i) as negotiator, (ii) as election manager and (iii) as administrator. In each of these his preoccupation with political aspects is evident in differing degrees. It is interesting to see which field reveals his maximum political strength.

(i)

Before looking at Vallabhbhai's own role and activity at this critical juncture of Congress politics, it might be worthwhile to analyse the Congress dilemma. Congress had abandoned office and, therefore, lost a position of advantage; Britain had taken the initiative into its own hands and although from its own stand-point (of the war and 'home politics') it could scarcely lay down the law, the scope to manoeuvre between communities put it at an advantage. A dissension-ridden Congress had a limited capacity to intimidate and its ultimate threat - civil disobedience - was likely to achieve little in terms of support or acclaim. How to negotiate with the least loss of face and with Gandhites in control was the question.

Anxious to conceal Congress's quest for a respectable settlement, Patel emphatically ruled out any likelihood of Congress looking favourably either towards office or towards the Muslim League till the Congress demand was conceded. Contradicting all reports of Congress's weak position, Patel insisted that Congress was in a position both to resume office and to launch a movement.<sup>3</sup> While negotiations with the Muslim League were categorically ruled out in view of the untractable position it had taken, Patel maintained a discreet silence on the question of negotiations with the British.<sup>4</sup> Warning the public that the Independence Day celebrations on 26 January should not be mistaken for a declaration of civil disobedience, Gandhi seemed to take pains to assure the Government that civil disobedience was not going to be embarked on.<sup>5</sup> Patel had also stated that Gandhi would not take any step without taking full stock of the situation and ascertaining the strength of the Congress.<sup>6</sup>

The British were conscious that at that point they had the upper hand despite their involvement in the war. Clearly then it was Congress that had to find ways of keeping a dialogue going all around. An apt cartoon in the papers called it 'chain talking' and elaborated it thus:

Sardar Patel had talks with Mr. Subhas Bose who had talks with Mr. Jinnah who is having a talk today with the Viceroy who will have a talk with the Mahatma who is bound to talk to Sardar Patel. 7

Yet Congress was not being taken seriously; its non-violence seemed to be a stumbling block. Patel felt that a change in tactics was necessary for Congress because the existing impasse was putting a strain on provincial leaders. Patel candidly admitted, 'at least I feel that I would not be able to take my province with me'.<sup>8</sup> Gandhi asked Patel to take the 'grave decision' and move towards a workable solution.<sup>9</sup> At its Delhi meeting from 3 to 7 July, the Working Committee took yet another step. A resolution demanded the unequivocal declaration by the British that complete independence was the goal for India. It also promised support in the defence of the country if as an immediate step a Provisional national government were set up at the centre. Patel and Rajaji, who were steering the Congress Working Committee through the paces of the so-called negotiations, had a lurking fear that some excuse or other would be forthcoming from the British Government to justify their rejection of Congress's proposals.<sup>10</sup>

Britain turned down the proposal for a National Government. The Viceroy made an offer on 8 August 1940 (the August Offer) which in broad terms suggested the enlargement of the Viceroy's Executive Council by the inclusion of Indian representatives of major political parties and the setting up of a War Council which included representatives of Indian States.<sup>11</sup> Congress's denunciation of the Offer was followed by its decision to launch civil disobedience.<sup>12</sup> Maulana Azad, Nehru and Patel chalked out the details about how the movement would be carried out.<sup>13</sup> Vinoba Bhave was chosen to begin the movement from 17 October 1940.<sup>14</sup> He was arrested on 20 October and was followed by Jawaharlal Nehru on 7 November, Patel on 17 November and other members of the Working Committee, AICC and PCCs soon thereafter. Patel was in jail till August 1941 when he was released on medical grounds.

As individual civil disobedience petered out, the British Government was encouraged into taking a more rigid and uncompromising stand in relation to the Congress. The situation was worse by mid-1941 when the Axis powers seemed to be gaining ground in Yugoslavia, Greece and the Aegean Sea and marching into Russia. North Africa had become vulnerable and Britain was nervous. But yielding to any pressure from the Congress was not about to make matters any better (a) because giving any advantage to Congress would alienate the Muslims, particularly of the League and generally perhaps even the non-committed Muslims and (b) because Congress cooperation in the war itself would not be forthcoming. The armed forces were manned substantially by Muslims - that was only one of many reasons why Muslims as a community had to be appeased more than the Congress.

By February 1941, a Muslim League Sub-Committee presented the idea of geographically contiguous units composed of areas where Muslims predominated being formed into independent Muslim States. In July 1941, an official communique suggested the enlargement of the Executive Council regardless of the refusal of Congress and Muslim League to participate. The Council was to have twelve members instead of seven, and eight Indians instead of three. A National Defence Council, consisting of thirty members mainly from the Indian States and other elements, was to be set up in order to give some avenue for the ventilation of Indian opinion even if that opinion was really quite unrepresentative.

During this period Congress deliberations were the result of several factors. Civil disobedience was not achieving very much; far from satisfying the restive elements of the left it had begun to irritate even patient men. The background of the Congress's next meeting at Bardoli on 23 December 1941 was formed by the new developments described above and ministerial manouevrings in Bengal and Orissa, coupled with the inclination among some leading Congressmen to opt for office in the firm belief that that would put Congress on a surer footing as well as put in its proper place the Muslim League's

idea of a separate nation. To emphasise the differences of opinion expressed at this meeting or to point to Gandhi's subsequent withdrawal from the Congress as symptoms of Congress disunity at this juncture would be an oversimplification. As Patel had said in July 1940:

We have been following Mahatma Gandhi as faithful soldiers for the past twenty years. We are prepared to do so even now but Mahatma Gandhi did not want us to follow him blindly. 15

Congress was faced with the problem of keeping its position as the premier organisation on the Indian political scene without appearing to compromise in any way. At a time when any political advance was possible only with some compromise, this posed a dilemma. The best way out <sup>was</sup> to have some members negotiating a respectable compromise while others adhered strictly to the Congress doctrine and thus kept Congress on a pedestal. Gandhi stepped aside again so that leaders like Patel, Prasad and Rajaji could make the tough decisions and save the 'Mahatma' from tarnishing the Gandhian image.

Linlithgow's reluctance to make another offer, the divergence of opinion in the British Cabinet, the emergence of several proposals and finally the Cripps' offer are well known historical events. 'Churchillian negativism' and 'Crippsian constructiveness' too have been adequately dealt with by Moore in his comprehensive analysis of British policy during this period.<sup>16</sup> Cripps' offer was crushed, says Moore, by the Congress and the basis for rejection was precisely that clarification on the role and powers of the Viceroy and the new Executive Council which the Congress had sought and which Cripps had been instructed to withhold.<sup>17</sup>

Congress had much to lose in staying out of the Government, but accepting an offer that clearly undermined their position and strength vis-à-vis their own organisation and other parties was considered suicidal, for the offer did not take the country a step further either politically or economically. While Azad and Nehru carried out talks with Cripps, there were those who were suspicious about the very purpose

of the mission. Rajendra Prasad along with J.B.Kripalani, Vallabhbhai Patel, Prafulla Ghosh and Shankarrao Deo had taken the position that moves like the Cripps offer and the negotiations that accompanied it were related to India's participation in the war effort and were, therefore, not free from ulterior motives. As such this went against Congress's fundamental policy.

What was Patel's attitude to negotiations? That he stood with Gandhi was well known, but his attitude was guided by more practical considerations. His preoccupation was less with concepts like non-violence and more with just how much would come into Congress hands if they accepted the offer. Negotiations had to be conducted on four planes. Congress and the British, Congress and the League, Congress and the Left and Congress and the Princes. Congressmen like Patel had resolved in their minds that promises about the distinct future, though important, must not overshadow the immediate delivery of a worthwhile offer. Hodson divided Congress thinking on Cripps' offer into three schools of thought; one was the 'pacifists', the strict followers of Gandhi who wanted independence, freedom and power, not to participate in the war but to evolve its own methods of combating the crisis; who exactly were included in this category was not clear - Rajendra Prasad seemed the only 'close disciple' whose opinion counted and who could fit this description. A second category was the 'moderates' such as Rajagopalachari and Maulana Azad, who wished to negotiate for real power, upon the procurement of which they would give full help in the war effort. The third category, of which Vallabhbhai was given as the sole example, was 'a group of hardened politicians'...who were not opposed in principle to Congress participation in the war but were not willing to compromise on any of the policy demands that Congress had been consistently making for years - long term or short term.<sup>18</sup> Nehru, whose role in the negotiations was prominent and significant, did not figure in any category.

Patel's attitude towards the British was always more tough than either Gandhi's or Nehru's; the more reluctant the

British seemed to give India what it wanted, the more rigid his attitude became. Disinclined to bargain when negotiations made no headway, Patel was prone to be quick in supporting Gandhi's alternative course of a popular movement. In April 1940, Patel had felt that unless some sort of action was taken demoralisation would set in.<sup>19</sup> He was also not very squeamish about violence. In 1940, when British reaction to Congress's national government offer was being awaited he had said:

In the circumstances which obtain today it would not be practical politics for the Congress to attempt the experiment of complete non-violence....I cannot see that we will be able to avoid using violence in dealing with those who inflict hardships upon our people. This is not the time for discussing principles; we have only to answer the straight question whether the people of this country think that they would or would not have recourse to force in dealing with internal disorder and external attack. 20

Between Britain's principle of 'no freedom without unity' and Patel's insistence that there would be no unity without a guarantee for freedom and adequate steps in that direction, the goals of freedom and unity were considerably altered.<sup>21</sup> Gandhi had stayed away from direct negotiations soon after the first meeting with Cripps. After Cripp's departure and before the scheduled AICC meeting at Allahabad, Gandhi had instructed Patel to attend the meeting and to reinject the Gandhian spirit into the organisation. Congress was not going to be pushed into taking a stand on the war simply by the ogre of a Japanese invasion. It would formulate its own policy. Gandhi contemplated a mass movement as it became more and more clear that the British were going ahead with the war effort and Indians had no say in the matter, while Patel had begun to feel that in missing opportunities of participation in Government, Congress was damaging itself both in relation to the League and to the British Government.

In the absence of a worthwhile offer, Patel asserted Gandhian dominance. Gandhi's draft was voted in at the AICC. The campaign was to be initiated in the provinces where Gandhiites had always commanded the maximum support namely,

Bombay and Bihar. Again, therefore, it was to be based on the strength and influence of the two leaders, Vallabhbhai Patel and Rajendra Prasad, without whose hard work Gandhi's campaigns were unlikely to gather momentum. On this occasion, the provincial leaders such as Patel, Prafulla Chandra Ghosh and Shankarrao Deo were to initiate the preaching of the gospel of a mass awakening in their respective provinces.<sup>21</sup> At first, British opinion underestimated the support such a movement was likely to get:

I should doubt myself whether the Working Committee would let him (Gandhi) go as far as this, for I think such an attitude would shock a great many people. 22

Such an analysis overlooked the strength of those on whom Gandhi relied at such times. Patel closed the doors to negotiations on the question of India's independence and geared himself to preparing for a movement on a mass scale.<sup>23</sup> He began touring his home province to explain the coming mass movement. Britain had kept up the facade of negotiations and compromise but the intentions were always at variance with the declared aims. The time for negotiations was over and a unique type of struggle was to be started. Addressing crowded meetings at various places in Gujarat and in Bombay, Patel predicted that this was Gandhi's last struggle and it would be 'short and swift'.<sup>24</sup> Patel made an incredible statement at a public meeting in Ahmedabad that even if Britain handed over power to the Muslim League or any other Indian party, Congressmen like him would be quite content.<sup>25</sup> The Secretary of State came under fire from Labourites for his unwillingness to accommodate Congress when Congressmen were being so reasonable. In the House of Commons, Sorenson called Amery's attention to Patel's statement that Congress was not seeking power solely for itself:

If this statement is accurate, does it not indicate that the alleged hostility to the Muslim League is not so averse as is sometimes assumed? 26

Amery did not answer this supplementary question, but in reply to the main question he declared that the statements of individual representatives were not authoritative and should

receive scant attention from Government. The statement was part of a political stunt.

Patel's ways of whipping up support in a mass movement were most feared by the British; so was his capacity to force a decision for action on the Working Committee.<sup>27</sup> A large volume of support in Gujarat and considerable support in Bombay City was expected. Patel's organisational work in Gujarat was likely to be fruitful enough to have the desired effect on cloth merchants and students. His 'influence' on mill-owners also caused concern to the government; when he went to meet Kasturbhai Lalbhai in Ahmedabad, the Government began to worry that he was going to put millowners in a dilemma by pointing out that their war contracts were anti-national and almost immoral. It was his old policy of intimidation again, and it was suggested that he had hinted to Congressmen that they need not be too squeamish about violence during the movement. A relatively dejected Gujarat was transformed into a confident one as a result of Patel's efforts at whipping up enthusiasm.<sup>28</sup> The changed atmosphere in Western India was attributed mainly to Patel and partly to Shankarrao Deo and Yusuf Meherali.<sup>29</sup>

Government had planned a counter-attack as thoroughly as Congress had planned its attack. The Intelligence Bureau of the Home Department intercepted documents to gauge the details of the nature of the movement. At dawn on 9 August, Gandhi and the Working Committee members were all arrested in Bombay and taken by special train to Ahmedabad. In every province, Government clamped down on activities of a political or semi-political nature. Serious disturbances accompanied by considerable disorder followed in most provinces, but more particularly in Gujarat and Bihar. In terms of success the movement did not achieve anything very positive for the Congress. The Quit India movement has been much discussed by historians, political analysts and journalists. Congress gains have been weighed against its losses to conclude that all in all it was a tactical error. Congress lost prestige and popularity and others made political capital out of the outlawing of

Congress. Britain tightened its control and the idea was mooted to hold India by force, if necessary. Other groups were also encouraged into taking more hostile stands. For the Muslim League, the Quit India Movement brought considerable gains in terms of support and credibility. It benefited from Congress losses and could now strike a hard bargain with confidence.<sup>30</sup> The role of the Communists in 1942 is a vital and separate aspect of the freedom struggle. It concerns us here only to the extent that the Gandhites and Patel in particular came down heavily on the Communists in 1944 and later, for their anti-national role earlier.<sup>31</sup>

The Quit India movement played a vital role in the direction of Congress strategy and gave leaders like Patel a better sense of purpose for the political aims they now formulated for Congress. For some time, Patel and other Congress leaders were non-functional and to that extent Congress lost that edge it had over the League. After the leaders came out of jail, two sets of negotiations followed. In the summer of 1945, the First Simla Conference came to an abrupt end. Jinnah turned down Wavell's suggestions that the latter would let four Muslim members be appointed by the League and the fifth Muslim could be a non-League member from the Punjab. In August, the Viceroy announced elections for the Central and Provincial assemblies, which announcement was the likely outcome of the coming into office of a Labour Government and of the Japanese surrender on 15 August. The next set of negotiations between the Congress, the League and the British were in the summer of 1946. In between, a Parliamentary Delegation visited India in January 1946 to ascertain the political position and demands of the different Indian parties and groups. It is necessary to look at Patel's attitude to all these events to determine what he felt about negotiating with the British and the League. Patel had already expressed his displeasure at Wavell's announcement of the First Simla Conference. In his broadcast Wavell had said that the Executive Council would include an 'equal proportion of caste Hindus and Muslims'. Patel had recoiled at the phrase 'caste Hindus' and speaking

for himself had said:

If these conditions persist Congressmen can have no place at the Conference. Congress is not a sectional organisation....I express these sentiments not only on my own behalf but all those Congressmen who are with Gandhiji at the moment. 32

There was much speculation and indignation over the failure of the Conference. Congress leaders had gone with some hope and returned full of bitterness.<sup>33</sup> Regarding the offer for elections, Patel was unmoved. Yet he realised that sitting around and sulking would only jeopardise Congress's long term plans. A neat balance had to be evolved between protesting and availing of the offers made by the British with ample provisions for the League's predictable and unpredictable demands. Congress, therefore, decided to contest the elections. Patel's next involvement in negotiations came at the time of the final discussions following the elections. In the final discussions in 1946, we see Patel bringing to bear all the facets of his political personality that so far had been seen in piecemeal measures at various points - the apparently simple but very practical Gujarati, the ambitious Patidar, the hair-splitting mofussil lawyer and municipal councillor, the narrow provincial leader, the right-wing nationalist, the uncompromising anti-Leaguer and, above all, the power politician.

Patel made it clear that this would be the last and most concrete opportunity for Britain to settle the Indian question amicably. He argued that an immediate transfer of real power would eliminate the bitterness that had spread among Congress as a result of Britain's attitude of indulgence towards the League which in turn had encouraged the League to become more obstructive than before. Patel expected trouble during the transfer of power ; the extent of the trouble he believed would depend on the sincerity of the transfer:

One must always expect trouble of some kind. After all the transfer of power in a vast country like India is a stupendous proposition and in the process a few disturbances here and there cannot be regarded as anything serious and are not likely to retard the progress of a vast country fully conscious of its national aspirations

To the Parliamentary Delegation visiting India in January 1946, Patel clarified that the fear of disturbances, however, would not restrain Congress from its goal:

Pakistan is not in the hands of the British Government. If Pakistan is to be achieved the Hindus and Muslims will have to fight. There will be a civil war. 35

The League leaders made much of Patel's references to violent means for achieving goals; Chowdhry Khaliq-uz-zaman asked what became of Congress's creed of non-violence and called the civil war threat a device to mislead the Parliamentary Delegation into believing that the League's Pakistan scheme would throw the country into total chaos and must, therefore, not be encouraged or pursued.<sup>36</sup>

At the Working Committee meeting from 12-15 March 1946, Congress had appointed an ad-hoc committee consisting of Azad, Patel and Nehru to negotiate with the Cabinet Delegation. Patel announced Congress demands at a press interview: Congress wanted immediate transfer of power for India. Although it would provide safeguards for the protection of the legitimate rights of minorities it would not give in to Jinnah's demand for dividing India as he wanted. This was Britain's biggest and last opportunity to enable India to be independent and conduct its international and foreign affairs in a spirit of friendship towards all nations. Encouraged by the British Prime Minister's statement, Patel expressed relief that the undue importance Britain had been giving to the Muslim League over the past six years would at last stop. Congress had gone to great lengths to accommodate the League; this demand for the vivi-section of India was unfair to Hindu and Sikh minorities in the Punjab and Bengal and would endanger the safety of both the constituent parts.<sup>37</sup> In Patel's view Congress was negotiating with the Cabinet Mission with the object of (a) stepping into the shoes of the British when they finally left India and (b) keeping the Muslim League from gaining too much without Congress actually losing ground itself at any stage. Hints were given to the effect that Congress was keen to get on with the working of an interim

government immediately. The British treated Patel's statement as the 'attitude of Congress' and felt that it would certainly develop into a formal 'demand to hand over responsibility'.<sup>38</sup> Patel suggested this soon enough: that the British should go ahead with the formation of a new government. The Mission should do that without consulting either the Congress or the Muslim League.

He was anxious to get across to the Mission that the longer they took the uglier the communal aspect of the problems was likely to become. 'The Congress trusts the Delegation to give a fair deal to India'.<sup>39</sup> Patel sounded almost desperate. The Congress had to get ahead of the League at all costs. Within Congress, he was struggling to keep ahead of the others in order that the party stayed in his image. These two factors which now governed much of his political activity also got him much disrepute. Gandhi rebuked him on these two fronts because more and more complaints had begun to come in about Patel's (a) anti-Muslim behaviour and (b) his highhandedness and overpowering role in the Working Committee.

Patel took a strong stand on the grouping scheme that was suggested at the Second Simla Conference and voiced his suspicions that Jinnah wanted groups with the intention of seceding and eventually carving out his sovereign Pakistan. When Jinnah was asked at the fourth meeting of the Conference to give his views on the right of secession, he said that the Union should not be for more than a period of five years. Patel pointed out that that was a clear indication of the reality behind Jinnah's emphasis on the group proposal.<sup>40</sup>

The Conference closed on 12 May 1946. The proposals which the Government announced on 16 May were the focus of high drama between Government, the Congress and the League.<sup>41</sup> The League accepted the scheme of a compulsory grouping of Provinces and inclusion of the six Muslim Provinces into sections B and C, 'in the hope that it would ultimately result in the establishment of a complete sovereign Pakistan'. Patel's early fears about Muslim intentions were more than

justified.

From the start, despite all the protestation about the long term, Congress's anxiety had really been about the short term. It sought many clarifications on and modifications of the 16 May proposals and also asserted that it could not give a reply until Government's scheme for the immediate future was known. Congress resumed its discussions with the Viceroy on the question of the composition of the Provisional National Government. The question of parity between Congress and the Muslim League posed a problem. The original British suggestion of 5:5:2 had Jinnah's full support; Congress refused to accept that ratio. Wavell believed it was Patel who was most vehemently opposed to the parity formula, a view conceded by Birla and suggested by Turnbull:

I suspect that it is Patel who is running this parity question and that he is using Birla to inject alarm into civil disobedience. 42

Patel did not accept Wavell's argument that parity would not become a precedent and would not be adopted in the Constituent Assembly or the Union Legislature, and that it was only an expedient to get over the difficulty of getting the League to participate in the Interim Government. Rejecting that explanation he contended that parity had become the pattern at the local level as well <sup>as</sup> in villages and in Municipal Committees. He made no secret of his bitterness and 'hostility' towards Jinnah's designs to break up India and go down in history as the maker of Pakistan. Patel made his position clear and then recommended that Jinnah and Nehru might meet and confer further on the problem,<sup>43</sup> knowing fully well that the Viceroy realised that it was Patel's opposition that had resulted in the Delegation's scheme 'hanging in the balance'.<sup>44</sup> Wavell tried to persuade Patel but reported 'Patel was not at all convinced'.<sup>45</sup> Eventually, all attempts to negotiate an agreement between the two parties on the composition of the Interim Government failed. Between parity (5:5:2), the basis of 13 portfolios (6:5:2, the Congress quota including a scheduled caste) and 15 portfolios recommended by Patel,

nothing could be worked out that was acceptable to all. Patel thus made it a point to impede in as many ways as possible the smooth realisation of objectives for Jinnah and the Muslim League.

The Viceroy issued his statement on 16 June in which an Interim Government was announced on the basis that the constitution would proceed in accordance with the statement of 16 May. It was also stipulated that if the two major parties or either of them was not able to join on the lines laid down, the Viceroy would proceed with the formation of an Interim Government 'which will be as representative as possible of those willing to accept the Statement of May 16th'.<sup>46</sup> The Congress Working Committee met the same evening that the Statement of 16 June was issued and Patel criticised the basis of the statement. Gandhi pointed out particular shortcomings.

The Viceroy accepted the suggestions that Sarat Bose's name be included but was not willing to accommodate the Congress on Sardar Nishtar's exclusion and Zakir Hussain's inclusion.<sup>47</sup> To Jinnah, the inclusion of the Nationalist Muslim was quite unacceptable; Patel too had first refused a Muslim in the Congress quota until Gandhi pointed out the expediency of insisting on this point to keep the support of the Nationalist Muslims. The Cabinet Delegation and the Viceroy met Azad, Nehru, Patel and Prasad on 23 June and urged them not to press the inclusion of a Nationalist Muslim among the Congress representatives in the Interim Government. The Delegation assured Congressmen that it had been made clear to Jinnah that the League did not represent all Muslim political opinion nor was a precedent or principle being set about Muslim appointees being the privilege of the League. It was, as stated several times before, a way out of a particular difficulty. Patel pointed out that this clearly meant that in the case of Nationalist Muslims to be a Muslim was a handicap, and the Muslims would leave Congress if they felt that their religion precluded them from political positions if they were in the Congress camp but not if they were in the League. Moreover, by giving so much deference to Jinnah on this one

point, the British were already allowing him the exercise of a veto which they had earlier so vehemently denied.<sup>48</sup> It was Patel's idea that Congress should accept the statement of 16 May and reject that of 16 June, which suggested the formation of Interim Government, along the lines stated earlier.<sup>49</sup> At a meeting with Gandhi and Patel the Secretary of State pointed out that if Congress accepted the statement of 16 May they were then on an equal footing with the League as far as the Interim Government was concerned. The Viceroy and the First Lord stated quite clearly that this move of accepting one statement and rejecting the other was simply a tactic to outmanoeuvre the League by giving a paper acceptance to the Statement of 16 May. The Delegation had been somewhat deliberately outsmarted and, as they felt, almost tricked. The Viceroy declared:

We have in fact been outmanoeuvred by the Congress, and this ability of Congress to twist words and phrases and to take advantage of any slip in wordings is what Mr. Jinnah has all along feared, and had been the reason for his difficult attitude. 50

That was not quite accurate of course. Mr. Jinnah had his own reasons for being 'difficult'. But what the Congress had, in their view, achieved was an abandoning of the 16th June proposals which 'fell to the ground'. A fresh start had to be made which the Viceroy was inclined to do after a short interval rather than immediately. It is said that Patel thus let slip the real last chance to avoid partition. Although the question of partition was more fundamental and deep to be in the hands of one man, Patel's posture certainly infuriated the League leaders further and made them difficult as coalition partners.

The Government was now even more convinced that Patel and not Nehru had to be satisfied in any negotiations for a settlement. After the Constituent Assembly elections in the various provinces, the Viceroy had expressed the urgency for forging a Provisional Government. On 22 July he had sent formal letters to Jinnah and Nehru putting forward certain proposals for an Interim Government. Nehru argued that the

primary issue was 'the independence in action' allowed to the Government, all other points of disagreement being 'minor issues' which would offer no difficulty.<sup>51</sup> Nehru's demands and objections were often regarded as nebulous and wordy (the phrase 'independence of action' was cited as one example of his tendency to be non-specific).<sup>52</sup> Patel's views were anxiously awaited. The Viceroy had already expressed fears that Patel was the one representative of a section of Congress who was out to 'improve' the Cabinet Delegation's scheme in such a way that the Muslim League stayed away both from the Interim Government and Constituent Assembly:

This section had no interest in the framing of a final constitution; all it wants is power, complete power, and power at once. The leader of this section in the Congress Working Committee is of course Patel. 53

Gandhi, it was felt, wavered between support for Patel one day and for Nehru the next but was intrinsically more in tune with Patel's thinking. He had left a host of decisions to him and was generally content with the version of discussions that Patel gave him.<sup>54</sup> As a result, Government found it necessary to talk to Patel. V.P. Menon suggested that Sir John Colville might go to Poona and see Gandhi, who would send for Patel to discuss the offer.<sup>55</sup>

In the meantime, the League decided to resort to direct action on 18 August. Jinnah's fury continued unabated. Communal disturbances followed in many areas, the worst of which was Calcutta, where there was loss of life and property on an unprecedented scale. Patel took a grim view of this provocation by the League; he made a note of all the trouble caused by the League and decided that 'they must be made to pay for this senseless butchery'.<sup>56</sup> The British also noted that Jinnah's and the League's prevailing attitude was likely to cause a lot of violence in the country and that it had certainly made Congress less prone to accommodating the League on anything but its own terms. Patel, in particular, was described as being in a very truculent mood on this issue of the Muslim League.<sup>57</sup>

Congress was anxious to form the Government as soon as

possible, with or without the League. Patel shrewdly observed to a Karachi lawyer, an independent supporter of Congress, that he was quite clear in his mind that according to the legal interpretation of the statement of 16 May the provinces were 'free to join, even in the first instance, and after the group constitution is framed they have a further right to opt out of the group'. But, he did not want these points to be opened up at this stage:

If we find the proposals otherwise satisfactory and the interim arrangement is made to our satisfaction it would be wise to accept the proposals. 58

Ideally, the British Government wanted a coalition; but given the League's reservations, it wanted to get on with the job of the Interim Government. Wavell, who had reopened the grouping question with Congress leaders and threatened that if they did not come round to the British point of view he would not convene the Constituent Assembly, received a snub from the India Office for giving such an ultimatum and was warned:

...we must ask you not to take any steps which are likely to result in a breach with the Congress without prior consultation with us. 59

Wavell's analysis that Congress always meant to use their position in the Interim Government to break up the Muslim League and in the Constituent Assembly to destroy the grouping scheme was similarly rejected by the India Office, and the retention of the caretaker government beyond the agreed time was firmly opposed.

On 2 September 1946, the Interim Government was sworn in and the distribution of the portfolios recommended by Congress and accepted by the Viceroy<sup>was</sup> as follows: Jawaharlal Nehru - External Affairs and Commonwealth relations, Baldev Singh - Defence, Vallabhbhai Patel - Home, including Information and Broadcasting, John Mathai - Finance, M. Asaf Ali - Communications (War, Transport and Railway), Rajendra Prasad - Agriculture and Food, Jagjivan Ram - Labour, Shafat Ahmed Khan - Health, Education and Arts, Syed Ali Zaheer - Legislative,

Posts and Air, C.Rajagopalachari - Industries and Supplies, Sarat Chandra Bose - Works and Mines and Power, and C.H. Bhaba - Commerce.

Negotiations did not end with the formation of the Interim Government. A disgruntled Muslim League still remained outside; and Jinnah was getting increasingly bitter towards both the Congress and the British Government. It took another seven weeks to persuade the League to join the Interim Government. On 25 October, five portfolios were made available to the League and their members were sworn in as follows: Liaquat Ali Khan - Finance ; I.I.Chundrigar - Commerce, A.R. Nishtar - Posts and Air , Ghaznafar Ali Khan - Health and Joginder Nath Mandal - Legislature.

The last lap of negotiations followed Attlee's announcement on 20 February 1947 that power would be transferred to Indian hands by June 1948. Mountbatten replaced Wavell as Viceroy in March 1947 to execute the new British Scheme. Questions of policy relating to the partition scheme and the reactions to, and alteration of the Mountbatten Plan, have been widely written about in scholarly works and journalistic best-sellers.<sup>60</sup> Patel's contribution at this stage was twofold: (1) the introduction of the Dominion Status idea and (2) the scheme of the partition of particular areas where Muslims were in a majority. The burden of convincing Gandhi on the latter part of the plan fell on Patel, who had been convinced for some time of the impossibility of working side by side with Muslim League. Gandhi's excessive concern for the Muslims cost him his life. Patel, who had no ideological commitment to any group, had sufficient support in the Working Committee to carry his suggestions through. The feverish activity that accompanied the announcement of the 3 June Plan by Mountbatten is described in V.P.Menon and Campbell Johnson's books. 15 August 1947 was set as the date for the transfer of power and a Partition Council was set up (of which Patel was a member) to work out details. Patel's secretary writes:

the main burden at the top level fell on Patel and Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan. 61

The practical issues that engaged Patel's attention show his administrative acumen as much as his negotiating skills. As some of them relate to his performance as Home Member and Minister for States Affairs, they have been dealt with in the section dealing with Patel as administrator.

(ii)

Patel's greatest anxiety in 1946 was Congress's performance in the Central and Provincial Assembly elections and later in the elections for the Constituent Assembly. Although Government's proposals were considered 'vague, inadequate and unsatisfactory', and were regarded as a variation of the Cripps' offer with no mention of the independence of India, Congress was still going to contest the elections.<sup>62</sup> Patel was on stage again playing the familiar role of choosing and picking, and hiring and firing, the partymen who would deliver the goods at election time. Even Gandhi took the back seat when Patel was in control on such occasions. As election manager, Patel exhibited his political skills most effectively. Contesting elections without reopening the registry roll to new voters and with so many Congressmen still in prison seemed a mockery and Patel indicated that such grudging gestures only made Congress wonder whether Government really wanted Congress strength to show up in the elections or not.<sup>63</sup> Closeted with Gandhi and Maulana Azad for several hours, Patel as Chairman of the Parliamentary Board of the Congress discussed the election issue from every angle and was able to promise a more than respectable performance on the part of the Congress. This electoral scene differed in many ways from that of 1936-37. These elections were for the Central and Provincial Assemblies and for the Constituent Assembly and each election had its own importance. Congress was numerically the largest party, but with the Muslim League fighting for a separate nation, the victory of the League in the Muslim seats took a significance

which was out of proportion to its numbers. In the previous election Congress had to prove something to the British; in this one it had to prove something to itself, the British and the Muslim League, to say nothing of the other minorities like the Sikhs and the scheduled castes. The rivalries between the Congress leaders within the Provinces and differences between the Provincial leaders and the Congress Working Committee members in charge also assumed proportions that were ominous of things to come. Perhaps they set a pattern for the future. That may be better analysed after a closer examination of the events of the elections and Vallabhbhai's role in them.

For the Central Assembly elections, Patel set up the special office of the Central Election Board on the top floor of Congress House in Bombay with Shantilal Shah as his secretary. Nominations were required by the end of October and two circular letters were issued to each province; one asking for nominations from the various provinces and the other for a 'draft pledge' that each candidate was required to sign. Nehru was asked to prepare an election manifesto based on the main issue of independence or Quit India.<sup>64</sup> The manifesto recounted Congress's past record of constructive and national work and deplored the adverse effects of a hundred and fifty years of foreign rule. The most vital and urgent need of India was the removal of poverty and the raising of living standards of its people and a comprehensive move towards economic and political planning by Indians themselves was, therefore, necessary. This was intended to pacify the left wing. The battle cry of the elections was 'Quit India' and Congress wanted people to help it to fulfil the Indian dream of independence by which all other freedoms would come to the people.<sup>65</sup> After this, Patel made most of the decisions according to his own style. In uncontested constituencies where there was only one candidate, Patel approved the application straightaway. In other cases, he was required to circulate the applications with his recommendations among the seven members of the Election Board whose approval was required for a nomination. Who would actually make the final decisions became evident after one or two disagreements bet-

ween the top leaders in which Patel had the final word.

Patel worked meticulously. After procuring the latest edition of the Legislative Assembly Electoral Rules and Regulations for electoral information about all the provinces, he began collecting information about the voters and the provinces. In the case of special constituencies in particular provinces, such as the constituency of Deccan Sardars and Inamdars in Gujarat, he procured the entire list of voters to determine the character of the electorate. In this particular case, the voters were conservative Maharashtrians and word was sent to the Maharashtra Congress Committee to choose a suitable Congress candidate from the area.<sup>66</sup>

By the middle of October, proposals began coming in from the various provinces. Patel showed scant regard for others' opinions and after the receipt of names from the first province, Kerala, he expressed a desire to take decisions on his own, rather than circulate the names to all the members of the Election Board:

I am afraid the procedure of circulation is cumbrous and lengthy. In many cases there will be more candidates than one for a constituency and there will be disputes....I will have no alternative but to give a decision according to my own light in case the replies are not received in time from the members of the Committee. 67

There were disputes in most provinces and differences over most of the candidates. With Maulana Azad, there was a fundamental conflict on the question of the procedure and method of decision-making. By arrangement, Maulana Azad was supposed to handle Bengal, Assam and the eastern areas, Patel, Bombay, Gujarat, Maharashtra and the west, and Rajagopalachari the south. Within this broad demarcation were provincial managers such as Rafi Ahmed Kidwai for U.P., Rajendra Prasad for Bihar, Maulana Baksh for Sind, Gopala Reddy for Andhra and Kamaraj for Tamilnad.<sup>68</sup> In several areas Patel and Azad had differences which were not easily ironed out. Deshmukh (Bombay), Biswanath Das (Cuttack, Orissa), Thakurdas Bhargava (Punjab), Pandey (Mahakoshal), the Ahrars, these were some of the subjects of vehement disagreements. The Maulana pointed

out that Deshmukh failed the test required for suitability by Congress candidates. He was guilty of indiscipline against the party and malicious statements against Gandhi.<sup>69</sup> Rajendra Prasad and Asaf Ali also made similar observations about him.<sup>70</sup> Patel believed that Deshmukh would appeal to the Deccan voters in his constituency. He recommended him in the face of much opposition:

In spite of his faults he is a good fighter and is a sport also. This time he will behave alright and so you need not be anxious about him on this score. <sup>71</sup>

Biswanath Das's name was rejected and Maulana Azad made an appeal for reconsideration which was rejected by Vallabhbhai.<sup>72</sup> A more serious difference was that over the seat from Ambala Division which the Punjab Board allotted to Thakurdas Bhargava instead of the sitting member Shamlal. Azad objected to Thakurdas and saw no reason why being Gopichand Bhargava's brother should give him more right to a seat than the sitting member who was a 'trusted man of the Congress... constantly been going to jail, and had never stayed back in any movement'.<sup>73</sup> But Azad's was a voice in the wilderness; Patel reminded him that four members out of seven of the Central Board had voted for Thakurdas and two had acquiesced in the decision; he, therefore, had no reason to upset the decision.<sup>74</sup> Although Azad did not retaliate just then, the incident rancoured in his mind. At the time of the provincial elections three months later, he decided to assert himself. The Board decided on a particular Mahakoshal candidate; Pandey appealed to Azad against the decision and the latter reversed the decision without consulting the Mahakoshal in-charge, R.S. Shukla. Patel disapproved sharply:

I had issued a public statement that the decisions of Mahakoshal are final and are not appealable and hence there will be no change.... If you had taken all the powers alone and disposed of all the nominations, nobody would have been more glad than myself. The procedure adopted in this case is such that I cannot understand it at all. <sup>75</sup>

A telephone conversation about the above incident and about a proposed visit of Patel's to Lahore and Sind of which Azad

disapproved led to a strong reaction from Patel:

...The least that I could do in the circumstances is that in view of your attitude, I propose to immediately tender my resignation from the Central Board as well as the Working Committee. I should be grateful if you will relieve me without any delay as my continuance in the present state is likely to give me constant mental trouble and anxiety. 76

Maulana Azad's explanatory reply was vague and inadequate. He had not expected Patel to react so violently and apologised without hesitation.<sup>77</sup> But Patel reminded him that the incident over Thakurdas Bhargava had been handled ungracefully by him; that in fact he had encouraged the impression 'all over that the President can hear appeals over the decisions of the Board'. The Mahakoshal decision was 'arbitrary and ex parte' and had placed Patel in a 'ridiculous position':<sup>78</sup>

Perhaps it may be that your approach to those questions is different from mine and therefore it is difficult for me to understand or appreciate it. It would therefore be better to relieve me from this embarrassing position altogether, as early as possible. 79

At this juncture, Patel had made himself indispensable. Moreover, as in the case of candidates from Punjab, Bengal and Sind, the selection of candidates was a complex and 'bad business' and the skirmish for going to the councils was bringing out the worst in everybody. As soon as a name was proposed various complaints would begin to pour in. Most of the complaints, according to Patel, were 'absolutely false' and above all 'no selection is possible which would satisfy all'.<sup>80</sup> Patel concluded that it was best that he himself should be satisfied by the choice.

The controversy between Rajagopalachari and Kamaraj required Vallabhbhai's attention and had to be handled very tactfully. Rajaji had kept away from the Congress ever since the difference of opinion in 1942. This difference stemmed from Rajaji's view that Congress should woo the Muslim League and concede Pakistan, if necessary, a suggestion that Patel thought ridiculous. Rajagopalachari had a resolution passed in the Madras Legislature recommending to the AICC, which was

due to meet in Allahabad from 29 April 1942, that the Congress should recognise the League's claim to separation and negotiate with it. Rajaji's subsequent resignation from the Working Committee enabled him to propagate his controversial ideas about conceding Pakistan to the League and working out a scheme for participation in a National Government. Gandhi granted him the freedom to sell that idea in principle but not without clarifying that in practice he was likely to suffer the consequences of annoying Patel. 'You should obey Vallabh-bhai's ruling', he wrote to Rajaji in May 1942.<sup>81</sup> Patel was most impatient with Rajaji:

We have made many attempts and courted many insults. The Congress today is reeling under two blows. One Cripps and the other Rajaji's resolution have done us enormous harm. 82

Thereafter, a certain shyness or reserve could be observed in Rajaji's relations with the top Congressmen and more particularly with men like Patel who had chosen to stick with Gandhi when the Quit India decision was taken. For his indiscipline in 1942, the Tamilnad Congress Committee castigated him more than the CWC. Kamaraj, the President of the TCC, insisted on the withdrawal of Rajaji's 4 anna membership of the Congress. After the release of Congressmen in the summer of 1945 and the refunctioning of PCCs, Rajaji began attempts towards re-entry on the Tamilnad Congress scene and more specifically, leadership of the South. Kamaraj was still a bitter opponent. He abhorred Rajaji's opportunism of 1942 and the callousness he had shown to Satyamurthi who had died in 1943 and left the road clear for Rajaji in the south. Detecting a softening of attitude on the part of the Working Committee, Kamaraj forewarned Maulana Azad that Tamilnad would not accept the re-entry of Rajaji 'into the Congress fold'.<sup>83</sup> An election engineered by Rajaji's group in Tamilnad was considered 'wholly irregular and void not merely on technical grounds but on substantive grounds' by Muthuranga Mudaliar and other members of the Kamaraj group.<sup>84</sup> Rajaji sent messages to Maulana Azad as well as Gandhi to get the Working Committee's support in making a re-entry. He realised, how-

ever, that in the end it was Patel who was in-charge of the elections. In November 1945, Dr. P. Subbarayan carried messages to Patel about Rajaji's plight and other grievances related to the Madras Congress. Patel had asked Kamaraj to suggest to Rajagopalachari that he might stand for the Madras seat of the Central Legislature. That was Patel's way of obliging Rajaji without upsetting the existing Tamilnad group. The 'offer' was watered down by Kamaraj into a 'casual mention' which Rajaji did not take seriously, much to Patel's surprise. It was later brought to his notice, however, that Patel had taken offence at Rajaji's refusal to stand for the election. Having gathered that at the provincial level he was having a difficult time, Patel thought the Central Assembly was a good point of come-back.<sup>85</sup>

I do not know why you declined to accept that offer. If I thought that your way in the province was easy, I would not have suggested that you should go to the centre. As I sensed many difficulties in your way for the provincial leadership, I made this suggestion which could have cleared your way for the future....<sup>86</sup>

Rajaji regretted the missed opportunity but his heart was still in provincial leadership. Patel was in a position at this juncture to effect a working arrangement between the two warring sides of the province and thereby procure their indebtedness and unconditional support. Rajaji appealed for Patel's help in preventing the 'whispering propaganda campaign that you are behind the move to destroy me'.<sup>87</sup> His proposal was that the existing TNCC members should be prevented from managing the selection of candidates for the elections. They might manage the Andhra districts but they were likely to make a mess in the Tamil districts:

If you select and set up a solid parliamentary board for this province the atmosphere will be clarified. If you desire my assistance in this, I can advise you. <sup>88</sup>

Patel took the matter in his hands and dealt first with those who threatened 'unfortunate repercussions' if any decision was imposed on them. Those who had refused to cooperate with Asaf Ali, who had been sent there to clear the 'political water', were reminded that the selection of candi-

dates ultimately rested with the Central Parliamentary Board which would see that the local selection Board was representative of 'all important claims and interests'.<sup>89</sup> At the same time, Patel realised that reliance on popular provincial leaders was necessary. He suggested a Board of eight to Kamaraj out of which three names would be Rajaji's choice, and stipulated that Rajaji's advice would be taken in exactly the same way as that of a member of the Board even though formally he would not be member of the Board. Patel explained that with adversaries like the British on the one side and the Muslim League on the other 'it was unbecoming to quarrel internally'. Moreover, antagonising an international figure like Rajaji would not be prudent for the party and the country. With Patel's characteristic ability to manoeuvre men and situations the crisis was averted. Kamaraj still asserted his opinion in the case of some names. He tried to revoke the Election Board's endorsement of Rajaji's choice (Velayudapani) and permitted an opponent P.V.Ponnuswamy to file his nomination. Patel regretted Kamaraj's treatment of Rajaji as an 'untouchable' and indicated quite clearly without mincing his words that if he did not carry out the terms of the agreement he would take strong measures to make sure that his instructions were followed.<sup>90</sup> This coupled with Gandhi's attempts towards Rajaji's revival in the south, led to Kamaraj tendering his resignation from the membership of the Provincial Parliamentary Board. It had become evident to him that the Centre was anxious that Rajaji should be reinstated as the provincial leader. In his article 'Curious' in the Harijan of 5 February 1946, Gandhi answered allegations that his trip to the south was undertaken for the purpose of reinstating Rajaji as leader and Premier of Madras. Gandhi proclaimed that his visit was in relation to the Dakshin Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha and the Madura and Palani temples; he added however:

I had no hesitation in saying that Rajaji was by far the best man for the purpose in the Southern Presidency and if I had the disposal in my hands I would call Rajaji to office if I did not give it to him myself. 91

Kamaraj protested and subsequently resigned over Gandhi's statement, which made Patel indignant. But Patel felt more let down when ten days later Rajaji wished to resign; he felt unable to accept the manner in which some Congress leaders stuck an independent note when it suited them, leaving him to bring harmony out of the chaos created by them. His efforts to get Rajaji into the provincial organisation at the top was also a move designed to benefit the organisation in terms of its wider national role. Rajaji's past record in the legislature had been commendable and with Congress heading towards participation in government activities, he had much to contribute. But Rajaji thought otherwise and felt he had lost his foothold in the province. He had supporters - but he also had a wide opposition and he, above all, knew the problems it could create for him. Patel called him 'unfair' and 'unjust' to others and rebuked him for letting him down:

How can anyone support you if you were to act like this? You do not even consult us, but that had always been your way of life. I cannot understand you. 92

Rajaji had spoilt many chances for himself. This time he was not easily forgiven. But the problem was not easy for him. His control over the province had diminished. His opponents had become so sure of themselves that after the provincial elections in April 1946, when the three southern PCC Presidents, Prakasam, Kamaraj and Madhava Menon, were summoned by Patel to choose Rajaji as the leader of the Madras Assembly Party, they refused outright and said publicly that they were at liberty to choose whomsoever they liked and that the High Command's advice was not mandatory. Prakasam was elected leader of the Madras Congress Assembly Party.<sup>93</sup>

The Rajaji incident has been narrated at some length to bring out the pivotal role Patel was meant to have in the Congress organisation and the relatively negligible impact of his political personality in areas in which he had hardly any control over vested interests. The South was clearly out of his grip. Gujarat, Maharashtra, Central Provinces and Karnatak, directly, and Bihar and U.P., indirectly, were still

controlled by Patel. The repercussions of falling out with him had been felt earlier in most of these provinces. Decisions about Congress adjustments with other groups also had to be made by Patel. At the time of the Central Assembly election, the Hindu Mahasabha leader, Dr. Shyam Prasad Mookerji, proposed to Rajendra Prasad that a settlement might be made between the Mahasabha and the Congress. Patel recoiled at the idea and refused permission straightaway. Congress was to contest every seat except that for which Dr. Mookerji was standing.<sup>94</sup> The Muslim League posed the biggest problem for Congress in view of the rapidly changing strength of the former. Congress strategy in this matter differed from area to area. In the Punjab, Ahrars and Unionists were likely to procure some seats and Congress had decided to support them with financial and other help primarily at Maulana Azad's behest. Patel's dissatisfaction at this proposal proved justified. In some areas in the Punjab where the Muslim League's nominations were declared invalid, the Ahrar candidates whose nominations were valid and who were being supported by Congress switched sides and joined the Muslim League.<sup>95</sup>

In the Central Assembly election, the Congress fared badly in the Muslim seats where Nationalist Muslims were completely eliminated and the League had got all the seats. With success on their side, the League made Congress's work more difficult. Members from other parties (like the Krishak Praja Party) were joining the League.<sup>96</sup> The Punjab and the Bengal posed a big problem in this respect. Vallabhbhai nevertheless felt that the candidates for the Muslim seats should stand as Congress candidates rather than as independents. Others increased the infighting. Each province had peculiar problems and it was Patel's task to see that factions and groups did not hinder the ultimate goal of Congress success. Patel looked at each case pragmatically. In Karnatak, for instance, Latthe aspired for a candidacy to the Bombay Assembly. He had been Finance Minister in the Kher Ministry and resigned his seat in the Assembly in 1940-41 because he could not accept the principle of non-violence absolutely in

meeting the war-crisis in 1942 and he differed on the question of the Quit India movement. For him to stand on the Congress ticket was, therefore, considered precarious because many voters were likely to refrain from supporting him for his vacillation in alternately accepting and rejecting Congress policy towards government proposals. Patel permitted him to stand as an independent with the understanding that he would sign the Congress pledge and join the party after the election. His opponent, Sambrani, who was a loyal Congressman was treated with as much concern and it was considered quite vital 'to satisfy him by providing for him somewhere else, whether in the municipality or in the local board'.<sup>97</sup> Eventually, however, the support of the Mahar community in that area was solicited and their candidate was allowed to stand as an independent backed by Congress while Latthe was persuaded to be the Congress candidate from the Northern Division of Belgaum district.

Disunity persisted in Punjab and Bengal at the time of provincial elections. In Punjab, the Akalis were creating a problem in reaching a settlement with Congress. Patel had given Maulana Azad a mandate in the Punjab PCC to settle with the Akalis on the basis that in 16 or 17 Punjab seats they would not put up their candidates. Gopichand Bhargava and Daud met the Sikh representative Sardar Baldev Singh in Lahore and after some discussion they agreed that the Akalis would leave ten seats to Congress, the Congress would give ten seats to the Akalis. Both would contest five of the seats and in seven, Congress would step aside for want of suitable candidates. But that did not work out either and the lack of a suitable settlement with the Sikhs proved harmful for Congress; it encouraged a pro-League drift which Patel was struggling hard to avert. Each non-Muslim general constituency was vital because Punjab was 'a key province of Pakistan'.<sup>98</sup> Deeply distressed by the inability of the three top leaders of Punjab to act in union, Patel asked them to stop quarrelling and to make demands, whether financial or otherwise, in consultation with each other.<sup>99</sup> A frustrated Daud

Ghaznavi complained to Patel that the Unionists and Akalis were using Congress to enhance their own strength and not to help Congress defeat the Muslim League and that steps were essential in order to prevent Congress being 'made a pawn in the game of power politics'.<sup>100</sup> Daud suggested a tour by Jawaharlal Nehru to whip up public support.<sup>101</sup> But the problem was not one of public support. Patel questioned the value, in terms of actual results, of diverting attention and resources to a general campaign for gathering the support of the masses. His election strategy was rather more pointed and specific and rested on particular individuals in particular areas whose prestige, power and position over groups was sufficient to control their political behaviour. Whereas Daud Ghaznavi believed that if Nehru conducted a two week tour in the Punjab the situation could be retrieved, Patel believed that for purposes of election simply creating 'a lot of enthusiasm' and gathering huge crowds was not sufficient:

...these demonstrations have no value for the purpose of election, as they influence no voters in the Muslim constituencies. The Hindu voters need no encouragement. 102

He had expressed the same idea to Jawaharlal Nehru before the Central Assembly elections. The latter wished to stay clear of local squabbles and preferred to look away when such squabbles were brought to his notice. He admitted he had no time for quarrels among groups and would rather spend his time encouraging enthusiastic young people and the masses generally to work for the party and its goals. Patel considered the concept of 'mobilising the masses' nebulous and sought to give it more concrete shape by identifying particular sections and groups among these masses who would control the larger sections of the people. While regarding disdainfully the petty quarrels among factions, Patel looked them squarely in the face and set into motion his patent remedies for eradicating these maladies - pressure, control and sometimes even force. 'Demonstrative enthusiasm' was superficial to Patel's mind. Directing people's interests along channels in which the mobilisers and mobilised had a mutual advantage

was far more fruitful.<sup>103</sup> The doubt over Congress being able to procure enough Muslim seats and the disunity and mistrust among Congress workers was a source of irritation for Patel to whom the elections, and more particularly, the Provincial elections, meant a great deal to the extent that they advanced Congress's political plans.

He was constantly on the look out for provincial leaders who would come down on dissidents rather than simply play safe and steer clear of factional infighting. To Bhim Sen Sachar, Patel wrote:

I notice that you have <sup>been</sup> trying to steer clear of parties, but that is not enough...unless there is someone who can assert and enforce his will without caring for the displeasure of those who are in the wrong, no progress can be made. 104

Patel had provincial strength to which he came back again and again and on which he relied even when he was fully involved with national questions of a wider nature. Patel showed in ample measure that although he had a distaste of infighting, he recognised its inevitability and dealt with it firmly. The Constituent Assembly elections provide further evidence of this.

The Constituent Assembly elections in the provinces had to be supervised with care in order to prove to the British and the opponents of Congress that the Old Guard still held sway over the machinery of the party. In most provinces, the elections went off smoothly and Patel was in touch with the leaders to suggest or approve names.<sup>105</sup> Among Congressmen there seemed to be a scramble for Constituent Assembly seats which grieved Gandhi more than it did Patel. Chiding the power-seeking Congressmen for publicising their jail records in order to get elected, Patel compared them to dogs who walked under fully loaded carts and deluded themselves into believing that they were in fact carrying the entire load on their shoulders. While Gandhi grieved at the loss of morality all around and wrote exhaustively in the Harijan about it, Patel was making a mental note of all the opportunists;

it was well-known that he did not forgive easily. Two provinces that he was particularly disheartened with were Madras and Punjab. Madras had defied him at the earlier elections and Punjab had made a muddle of the Sikh representation to the Constituent Assembly. Unhappy with the Cabinet Mission's treatment of the Sikhs' problems, Master Tara Singh had rejected their plan and the Akalis refused to elect their representatives to the Constituent Assembly. Patel intervened through Baldev Singh and sent messages to the Congress Sikhs in Punjab that they must nominate their representatives. The intention was that then the Akalis would follow suit and send their men as well. Pratap Singh Kairon was appointed to the Congress Working Committee to ease the problem with the Sikhs somewhat. As a result of Congress nominations, eight Sikhs did get nominated for Constituent Assembly elections. A few days later, on 14 July 1946, the Panthic Board met and Pratap Singh came in for criticism from all envious quarters. Conflicts arose as a result of Nehru's intervention which had been sought by Bhim Sen Sachar; the Sikhs were told that they might do as they pleased. All Sikh nominations were withdrawn and the previous boycott decision was reverted to. Fresh moves were made by Congress to get Sikhs to send representatives and the possibility of having bye-elections was explored. The Panthic Board agreed to accept the Statement of 16 May and to send representatives to the Constituent Assembly. There being no provision for bye-elections, these elections had to wait. Bhim Sen Sachar incurred Patel's displeasure and expressed a desire to resign which infuriated Patel further. Daud Ghaznavi who had been made Congress President of the Punjab PCC also left the Congress fold and went over to the League. Sachar was told plainly that he had failed to understand the situation and the repercussions were serious for Congress as a whole; he must, therefore, take counsel of Gopichand Bhargava who Patel regarded as more mature and reliable than Sachar.<sup>106</sup>

Before assessing what these three elections secured for Congress and for Patel, it might be appropriate to make a brief survey of the kinds of candidates Patel chose. First of all.

a candidate had to be a winner. Success at elections was so vital that no compromise could be made for any one on personal or compassionate grounds. Patel constantly referred to the need for 'strong candidates'.<sup>107</sup> That was the requirement even when compromises with other groups and parties were sought or considered. Prasad had suggested a settlement with Shyam Prasad Mookerji with the object of luring the orthodox Hindu votes. Patel ruled out such gestures and stated:

...that the Congress cannot afford to enter into any settlement with the Hindu Mahasabha, which had no chance of winning any seat anywhere in the whole country. It would compromise our position without any compensating advantage. 108

Loyalty to the party and adherence to the party discipline was another quality that Patel looked for in a candidate.<sup>109</sup> But, when Azad objected to G.V.Deshmukh's candidature on the basis that he fell short of the test of having 'proved his worth at the time of test', Patel asserted that other considerations sometimes took precedence over expressions of loyalty. Bombay City had a large Deccani population and the choice of a Konkani candidate was intended to woo the Konkani voters. A conservative personality seemed another quality that Patel sought in candidates. Apart from the conservatism in political thinking, simplicity in personal life was desirable. Nehru's recommendation of Dharam Yash Dev was rejected on this basis:

...from his conversation with me I gathered that he has a family and a style of living which is expensive...his wife is a society girl of expensive habits. 110

While ensuring representation to prominent communities in different areas, and encouraging the choice of candidates who had links which were advantageous, Patel declared that the choice could not be left entirely to Provincial Committees. The existing Committees were too old and consequently 'out of touch with the present day atmosphere'.<sup>111</sup> It was, therefore, necessary for him to take charge of picking and choosing candidates for the elections.

Gandhi's confidence in Patel made the latter indispen-

sable at election time. Every decision of Patel's was made unilaterally and Gandhi kept out of the elections completely. Patel declared confidently:

Gandhiji takes no interest in these matters. It is unnecessary to enter into the reasons as to why he has kept out of these elections....He is therefore not inclined to give advice to anybody and his permission should not be necessary. 112

With Gandhi's prestigious backing Patel had worked his way to a position of tremendous strength at the Congress centre. He, therefore, felt particularly slighted when on some occasions Gandhi expressed a preference for Nehru. Details of particular Congress Presidential elections are being mentioned here to show that Nehru was perhaps the only national leader by whom Patel felt threatened and vice versa. In 1945, Congress underwent a formal change. Jawaharlal Nehru took over as the new President and appointed a new Working Committee, which had some new names, some of which were not acceptable to the Old Guard. Patel was also running for the Congress Presidency, but at that juncture Nehru was recommended to appease certain sections within and without Congress, and Patel's name was withheld so as not to antagonise certain sections excessively. Patel cautioned those who were disgruntled as a result of 'the revolutionary change of personnel' in the Working Committee against allowing their emotions to get the better of them. When the fruits of labour of those that had struggled consistently were so near at hand he thought it foolish to throw them away by expressions of anger. Patel admitted that he too had swallowed a bitter pill and under normal circumstances would have resigned from the Committee. But he had other plans and his own ways of ensuring that the Committee did what he had chalked out for it. To D.P.Mishra, who ridiculed Nehru's constant cry for new blood, Patel wrote:

You may, however, rest assured that so long as one of us is inside the group that governs the policy of the Congress the straight and steady march of the ship will not be interrupted. 113

The Presidency of the Congress had somehow eluded Patel each time and he had grown accustomed to working off-stage. He

was quite clear, however, that he would ensure the 'right candidate' as President. After Nehru stepped aside on becoming Vice President of the Executive Council, a new President of Congress had to be elected. Kripalani, the High Command's candidate was opposed by Azad who sought the Congress Presidency as a compensation for his exclusion from the Interim Government. Patel's mistrust of Azad was well-known and the latter finally withdrew realising that Patel's partisan role could ruin him. Patel's secretary wrote:

This was the first major organisational conflict which I had the opportunity of witnessing at close quarters and I could see what powerful strings Sardar could pull from his house in Delhi, in distant corners of the country, to forestall and checkmate the Maulana's attempts.<sup>114</sup>

The same show of forces occurred at the time of the election for the President of the Jaipur Congress in December 1948, which Sitaramayya and P.D.Tandon were contesting. Patel was in favour of Tandon and Nehru was vehemently opposed to him. Tandon was a Hindu fanatic and was alleged to have a decidedly communal approach to many problems. Sitaramayya was elected with Nehru's vicarious support. Patel declared that he had maintained a neutral stand and Nehru should have done likewise. In 1950, Patel got Tandon proposed against Kripalani - Nehru's candidate. This time Patel spared no pains in getting his nominee elected. His secretary wrote, 'So far as Sardar was concerned he had been hurt too deeply to persuade himself to forget the past'.<sup>115</sup> Provincial leaders who gave unflinching support to Patel formed a 'formidable list'. Thus, even these elections showed Patel's managerial skills.

What did the different sets of elections achieve for Congress and for Patel? More important than the figures were the other features of the election which were pointers for the parties concerned. The strength of the League was now an established fact upon which Jinnah could make further demands, not the least of which was the demand for Pakistan. Control over the Muslim seats at the Centre, where Congress did not get a single Muslim seat, enhanced its prestige among the non-committed Muslims, and increased Jinnah's bargaining power

tremendously. He could now make some headway; for if he failed to procure anything for the League, he could at least obstruct proceedings and prevent the realisation of Congress aims. This further hardened Patel's attitude towards the League. On the Congress side, the elections revitalised the Congress machinery and showed it to be the best organised and most widespread party. It offered little by way of programmes or visionary goals. Nehru objected to this limitation of Congress, 'Congress has done very little in the way of big propaganda. They simply cannot function in a big way'.<sup>116</sup> Patel believed the achievement of intermediary goals and limited objectives was bringing Congress nearer the desired end.

As a financially sound and efficiently run organisation, Congress had evolved a pattern of functioning through a chain of intermediaries who had their pockets of influence and were solely dependent for their political livelihood upon their immediate superiors. Patel was at the apex of the set-up and exercised absolute control. Organisational strength was Patel's greatest contribution to the party and to its political advancement at the time, an advancement without which it was likely to lose all the ground it had gained upto the earlier period of its term in office under Provincial Autonomy. Directing, controlling and co-ordinating the party functionaries in each province, picking and choosing candidates, and carrying the entire responsibility of these decisions meant that Patel would be popular with some and unpopular with others. Neither reaction perturbed him; the work was often dull but the power it carried with it was both extensive and intensive. In every province, the local leaders were anxious not to displease Patel if they had intentions of building a political future. Acutely conscious that in this matter neither Gandhi nor Nehru counted for much, they carried favour with Patel; they brought complaints against their rivals to him and somehow made sure that they retained the goodwill of those confidants of Patel in the Provinces, such as Shankarrao Deo, S.K. Patil and others, alienating whom could bring them political losses.

'The ship has reached the shore', Patel said to a large gathering in Karachi, when he went to Sind to impress upon the public there that the province must return to a state of order and discipline if it wished to avail of the opportunity that had come its way in the form of the elections and the formation of new Assemblies.<sup>117</sup> As in 1937, so in 1945-46, victory at elections was most crucial for Patel. The section 'Patel as negotiator' demonstrated his preoccupation with securing tangible gains for Congress. This had been his aim since the 1920s and more so since the time of the Bardoli Satyagraha. 'How to rule India we will show when we acquire Swaraj', Patel had declared at a meeting in Bardoli in 1928.<sup>118</sup> Congress's victory in the elections and Congress gains in the Interim Government were two achievements that brought Patel on an equal national footing with Gandhi and Nehru during the transfer of power period. This further increased the areas of tension between the leaders, particularly between Nehru and Patel. Their styles and goals were different and the friction manifest itself further in their administrative roles.

(iii)

Patel's role as administrator could well be the subject of a separate thesis. It does not strictly speaking fall within the scope of this thesis. A brief discussion of it is necessary because it reveals that even with the colonial bogey almost gone, some features of Patel's political style which could only find some justification in a colonial setting, still persisted. After examining his role in some of the important fields under his charge it will be easy to see why the absence of a foreign enemy made little difference to his political style.

One of the first matters Patel had to deal with as Home Member was the change in the civil service. Question of compensation to British Civil Servants who wished to, or were required to, go on leave was dealt side by side with the issue of Indian civil servants who were given no option but to

continue in service. Acutely aware of the reliance of the administration on these services, Patel was very particular to assure them of their dues. It is worth noting that whereas as an agitator Patel had little respect for the civil service doing certain jobs in their line of duty, as an administrator and Home Member he took great care to ensure that their rights and privileges were duly respected. 'The key to efficient administration is the sense of security in the service at the top and non-interference by Congressmen or other people connected either with the Congress or with the Ministers in the administration. The Ministers should not give direct orders to any subordinate officers and they must deal with them through their superiors'.<sup>119</sup> Civil servants who worked with him, all recall this trait in Patel. That was not Congress's attitude in 1937.<sup>120</sup>

Patel's handling of the question of Princely States is regarded as his greatest contribution towards the making of a united integrated India. We are concerned here not with the achievement of a united India but with the style and method that accompanied this achievement. From the mid-1930s, Patel concentrated on acquiring power in order to get this section of the Indian politic under the Gandhiites' control. He felt that the effective use of that power could achieve for Congress what discussion and negotiation could not. Patel had given warnings to the Princes in the 1930s, when they had resisted Congress influence in their territories. In 1947, he was in a stronger position and cautioned them against adopting dilatory tactics and warned them of dire consequences if they did not pay due regard to the wishes of the Congress rulers.<sup>121</sup> There was 'double slavery' in the States according to Patel.<sup>122</sup> While assuring rulers not to be afraid of Congress, he made every effort to instil fear in Princes. If they created disunity, Patel warned them that there would be a central power that would wield enough authority to quell internal troubles.<sup>123</sup> That was how the warring States fell in line, one by one, and decided to co-operate with Patel. Princes decided to form unions among themselves and gradually,

through persuasion, threat and advice, they responded favourably to Patel's appeal to accede to the Indian Union. Those who responded unfavourably, like the rulers of Hyderabad and Kashmir, were treated accordingly.

To the press, Patel showed no indulgence. In November 1946, he warned the press that it had to co-operate with the Government and show restraint and discretion in publishing news and offering comments; if it did not, government would unwillingly be driven into taking actions unpalatable for the press, public and government alike.<sup>124</sup> That action was taken; in February 1947, an ordinance was passed restricting the freedom of the press. A committee was appointed on 15 March 1947 to review Indian Press Laws.<sup>125</sup>

In handling labour problems Patel revealed a similar recourse to repressive power. Labour problems had never been Patel's strong point. His lack of sympathy for strikers was well-known. In 1938, when Congress was faced with a strike in Bombay, Patel handled it with a firmness not unlike that shown by Governor Sykes in 1928. Patel justified Congress's firmness by blaming the existing atmosphere of violence created by the workers.<sup>126</sup> His attitude to the BEST strike in Bombay in 1947 was equally tough and he referred to the strikers as 'robbers'.<sup>127</sup> Patel's links with millowners and industrialists were well-known. Labour leaders, therefore, had no rapport with him. Yet, Patel needed some link with the work force because its leaders could bring much discredit to Congress by highlighting Congress's relative neglect of labour. Leftist leaders had always underlined this failing of Congress and in particular of leaders like Patel who claimed to come from humble stock and yet had difficulty in establishing sympathetic links with workers. To meet this criticism, a labour organisation - Indian National Trade Union Congress - was set up in May 1947, as an alternative to the already existing AITUC.<sup>128</sup> Socialist leaders opposed this inroad of Gandhites into a field they were incapable of understanding, given their class interests. Jai Prakash Narain voiced his opposition to 'government sponsored trade unionism' and asserted that

Muslim workers would not come near it.<sup>129</sup> Patel on the other hand felt that the AITUC with its posture of constant readiness to attack Congress had to be trimmed to size and believed the setting up of a rival organisation would solve some of the problems. He was disappointed when none of those whom he called 'our people', attended the existing AITUC Conference to stage their promised walk-out.<sup>130</sup> He was anxious to strengthen the new organisation and to counteract the hold of the Communist Party over the existing Trade Union Congress.<sup>131</sup> Side by side with implementing details of the partition scheme relating to boundaries,<sup>132</sup> the partition of assets and liabilities,<sup>133</sup> the relief of refugees,<sup>134</sup> and the maintenance of emergency services for the protection of minorities,<sup>135</sup> Patel was seen playing the familiar role of settling disputes between Congressmen in the Provincial Ministries. In Bengal, Bihar, Central Provinces, Madras and Orissa, differences between Ministers were resulting in loss of prestige for Congress, a fact that Patel was very mindful of.<sup>136</sup> Patel admonished Provincial Premiers for 'weak spots in your administration', adding 'I trust that you will lose no time in settling right the defects as quickly as possible'.<sup>137</sup>

Now more than ever, Patel expected Congressmen to show discipline. Independence had come. Congress could boast of having thrown out imperialism. Patel personally could boast of having ensured that throughout the struggle for freedom (and power) Gandhites could keep the levers of control in their hands and through a disciplined organisation and authoritarian leadership take full charge during and after the transfer of power.

Even as details of independence and partition were being worked out and Congress was in the saddle for all practical purposes, Patel revealed his continuing preoccupation with questions of power and dominance that had engaged his attention throughout his political career. For him the biggest threat to power was posed by the socialists, who he realised had a wider and more comprehensive scheme for the country than Patel's group did.<sup>138</sup> On the one hand, he made desparate

appeals to them not to ruin Congress's chances of fulfilling its dream. On the other hand, he instructed provincial governments and the party machinery to meet the threat as severely as necessary. While socialists complained that Congress Ministries were persecuting them 'on the flimsiest grounds',<sup>139</sup> Patel pointed out to the Bihar Ministry that all its problems stemmed from its ineffectiveness in dealing with socialists. He had expected the Ministry to control the activities of the Socialist Party 'either by vigorous measures taken by the Government or by disciplinary control through the Congress organisation', and suggested that a strong police force should be in readiness so that if socialists caused a crisis the police force could be used against them.<sup>140</sup> Strength, power and domination more than progress, development and reform had occupied Patel's mind from the beginning of his public life. That still held good at the time of independence as can be gauged from a letter he wrote in June 1947:

We are now free to develop about 80 per cent of our country in our own way. If we can consolidate our forces, have a strong Central Government and a strong army, we can, during the course of five years, make considerable progress. 141

Therein lies the reason behind Patel's ability to maintain, politically, a consistent predominance for twenty years, and his inability to be bracketed on par with Gandhi and Nehru in the category of 'first class' leaders. His equation of progress with factors like strength, force, dominance and authority was both an asset and a liability.

## FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER VII

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C.H. Philips and M.D. Wainright (ed.) The Partition of India : Policies and Perspectives, 1935-1947 (London 1970) ; V.P. Menon, Transfer of Power (Calcutta 1957).
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- 8 Patel seconding Delhi Resolution at AICC meeting, Poona, 28 July 1940, *ibid*, 29 July 1940, p.1.
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- 25 *Ibid*, 3 August 1942, p.5.
- 26 *Ibid*, 7 August 1942, p.1.
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41. For details of the two sets of proposals see B.N.Pandey (ed.) The Indian Nationalist Movement 1885-1947 . Select Documents (London 1979) ; Transfer of Power, VII.
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45. *Ibid*.
46. Statement issued by the Viceroy, 16 June 1946, *ibid*, No.550.
47. *Ibid*. 17 June 1946, No.553.
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51. Nehru to Wavell, 23 July 1946, Transfer of Power, VII, No.71.
52. Wavell to Pethick Lawrence, 24 July 1946, *ibid*, No.73.
53. Wavell to Henderson, 21 May 1946, *ibid*, VII, No.352.
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- 73 Azad to Patel, 23 October 1945, Telegram , 26 October 1945, 28 October 1945, *ibid*, Nos. 29, 32 and 33.
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- 97 Patel to Gangadharrao Deshpande, 9 January 1946, *ibid.*, No. 317.
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- 103 Patel to Nehru, 4 November 1945, *ibid*, No.74.
- 104 Patel to Bhim Sen Sachar, 25 December 1945, *ibid*.
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- 119 Patel to Sri Krishna Sinha, 8 May 1947, Sardar Patel's Correspondence, 5 No.109.

- 120 See Shankardass, op.cit.
- 121 Bombay Chronicle, 17 April 1947, p.1.
- 122 Hindustan Times, 9 June 1946, p.1.
- 123 Bombay Chronicle, 16 April 1947, p.1.
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- 127 Bombay Chronicle, 17 April 1947, p.1.
- 128 Ibid, 6 May 1947, p.4.
- 129 Ibid, 13 May 1947, p.4.
- 130 Patel to Gulzarilal Nanda, 27 February 1947, Sardar Patel's Correspondence, 4, No.96.
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- 136 Ibid, 5.
- 137 Patel to Sri Krishna Sinha, Premier, Bihar, 8 May 1947, Ibid, 5, No.109.
- 138 Interview with Jai Prakash Narain, Kadam Kuan, Patna, February 1978.
- 139 Jai Prakash Narain's criticism of Congress Ministries, Bombay Chronicle, 20 May 1947, p.6.
- 140 Patel to Sri Krishna Sinha, 8 May 1947, Sardar Patel's Correspondence, 5, No.109.
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## CONCLUSION

There is no dearth of work on leaders and leadership qualities. Types of leadership, bases of authority, modes of control and nature of following are some of the important facets of leadership that have been thoroughly analysed by historians and sociologists. What has this work on Patel contributed to leadership analysis or to the study of Indian politics?

This thesis comes in the wake of a widespread move towards subaltern studies in history, politics and sociology. Perhaps it stands condemned at the start for being out of tune with current trends in historiography. While I do not wish to apologise for having chosen a national leader as the subject of my inquiry, I would like to assert that this study can hardly be categorised as elitist history. What makes most writings on prominent leaders particularly odious is the tendency and temptation of writers to make heroes out of leaders and to highlight their outstanding qualities and circumstances to portray them as objects worthy of deification. This study of Patel has no such aim. It places Patel's leadership in a particular context to ascertain how far a leader's particular style is an act of volition and to what extent the choice of style has an effect on the wider socio-political scene. A study of this process by which individuals (they may or may not be elites to begin with) become leaders, brings out a multiplicity of factors that affect the relationship between a leader and his environment. Some of these factors are used by leaders rather like Robert Stern's 'resources', their use depending on a particular leader's aims and objectives. This study seeks to place this correlation on the continuity/change and conflict/consensus continuum to determine Patel's attitude to these social phenomena.

Leaders become successful when they are able to translate the needs of society, or parts of it, into intelligible terms and then to satisfy some of these needs over a period of time. They fail when they miscalculate the nature of these needs, the

strength of the counter forces and their own capacity to meet these forces. Related to this is a feature of leadership which forms an important backdrop for any study - the motives, aims and purposes of particular leaders. The motives and objectives of leaders are not always calculable or discernible prior to 'take-off'. Observation of the spheres in which a leader chooses to work and those that he avoids give some idea of his goals and objectives.

Focusing on Patel's role and style in a period in which the clash between the imperial and nationalist forces was at its most intense has posed a problem. Anti-imperialism became a war-cry for many would-be heroes and tended to camouflage some of the rationale behind their plans. It is, therefore, necessary to look at many of the leaders of that period sans imperialism. That is what has been attempted in the case of Patel. In examining his social background, his conduct of satyagraha campaigns, his relationships with provincial and national leaders and other modalities of his role, the objective has been to identify the central theme of his career and activities.

The first feature of Patel's role and style that is conspicuous is a preoccupation with questions of power, authority and discipline which form the essence of what may be called predominantly political pursuits. Starting with his public career in the municipality there are innumerable instances of checking misuse of power, penalising corrupt persons, chalking out moves to check-mate opponents or organising supporters for a show of strength. Patel eventually resigned from the municipality due to a lack of support; the municipal years, however, gave Patel incomparable experience in political manipulation.

The quest for political power and dominance was related both to the faculties he possessed and the goals he desired. In his recent book, The Anatomy of Power, John Galbraith asserts that for the effective exercise of power three attributes are vital - personality, property and organisation. In Patel's case the traits of personality, moulded to a substantial degree by his social background, and property, related

to his economic status, were present from an early stage as was indicated in Chapter I. Organisation, for which he leaned heavily on Gujarat, Gandhi and Congress, came later and added to his capacity to dominate political situations. Patel exercised influence through (1) the existing Patidar organisation and other Gujarati links, (2) the network of the Gandhian movement and (3) the Congress structure which he spruced up as and when he considered necessary. The degree of effectiveness of each link varied according to Patel's perceptions of that link at different times. For instance, Patel attached himself to Gandhi with no ideological commitment. His preoccupation with political results did not necessitate a full and all-encompassing contact with the many manifestations of Gandhian activity.

The lack of social content in Patel's activities was noteworthy. Speeches delivered in villages and small towns were all directly or indirectly aimed at driving out the imperialists and taking their place. Identification with socio-economic grievances of the worse off sections of the population was likely to put demands that were not easy to meet. It meant tampering with social institutions and established mores that were likely to disturb the status quo. Patel did not concentrate on poverty, ignorance or backward or decaying institutions. He did not concern himself with the bottom layers of Indian society. Any reference to this section was only as part of the general Gandhian movement. Patel also brought the influence of his own organisational links to bear on the Gandhian movement; the benefits were, therefore, mutual. Judith Brown in her article 'Gandhi's leadership' asserts that for the 'efficacy of a movement' it was not Gandhi's 'extraordinary public image' that was necessary; political movement concerned with power gave 'bite and strength' to agitation and non-cooperation. This political sustenance was provided consistently by Patel. It was in marked contrast to Nehru, for instance, who was, according to Wavell, inclined to range 'at large over economics and history'. Patel considered it more worthwhile to try and achieve the possible than spend

time defining the impossible. Thus, as an enemy Patel had an appeal to some of the British. Wavell thought him unattractive in personality and uncompromising but 'more of a man' than most Indian politicians.

Related to this is the question why Patel succeeded in the political field to a greater extent than other leaders of the time. The activities of some of Patel's contemporaries reveal differing commitments to socio-economic concepts - classlessness, total or partial traditionalism, religious or cultural revivalism, uncompromising nationalism, through violent or non-violent means. Most of the national leaders, including the two with whom Patel had the maximum affinity - Rajendra Prasad and Rajagopalachari - could fit into one or more of these commitment categories. Commitment to principle could be an asset and a liability. It limited the sphere of functioning of a leader and allowed for concentration of energy and resources on specific issues and subjects; on the other hand it also made for demands of an intense nature on these leaders and heightened the degree of non-performance if the demands were not satisfied. Patel's political role defied categorisation. Staying clear of issues and areas that demanded changes, Patel preferred to stay on the surface, at the political level. This level was in a sense the highest common factor, the central theme that was applicable to British India and the States. In fact it was this political level that gave him general appeal despite his insular and parochial outlook on many matters.

This leads us to the next point which this thesis has tried to meet. How did Patel deal with opposition? In a field of activity that was predominantly political Patel's enemies were likely to be numerous and varied, given the widespread nature of the links that were forged according to the need of the hour and Patel's own potential. Opposition included (1) political rivals, (2) ideological opponents, (3) social adversaries <sup>and</sup> (4) economic obstructers. Within each category there were leaders from Gujarat and other provinces and national leaders. Any dispute with, or threat posed by, political

riyals and opponents within Gujarat or other provinces was relatively easy to suppress because in the eyes of provincial leaders Patel had Gandhi's full backing and any leader with political ambitions was ill-advised to alienate Patel. But some provincial leaders who were ideologically opposed to Patel were less shy of open disputes and risked their political careers rather than allow Patel to ride rough shod over them in their commitment. We have seen examples of this with Indulal Yajnik in Gujarat, Nariman in Bombay, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai in U.P., Jai Prakash Narain in Bihar and Subhas Bose in Bengal. At the national level, leaders who differed ideologically, such as Nehru, were often more discreet partly because of their political stature and partly out of deference to Gandhi who both supported Patel and placated his opponents. Bose who opposed Patel at the national level did so to his own detriment. Social adversaries were those who could form pressure groups on the basis of caste, religion or status and pose a threat to Patel by either presenting problems as pressure groups or threatening his leadership by undue and unreasonable demands. Mahasabhaites, Muslims and Princes came within this category. The economic obstructers were those that could slacken the pace of Patel's programme by asserting the leverage that goes with economic strength and privilege - such as Purshotamdas Thakurdas, the Nawab of Chhatari. Internal Congress conflicts of 1934-39 bring out the different kinds of opposition to Patel's dominance and give a clear insight into the different views of political development held by groups despite the presence of a common imperialist adversary.

A third and related factor of Patel's political leadership relates to the resolution of conflict. The general tendency seems to have been to resolve conflict by overpowering rather than compromising. That was the case in both power conflicts and ideological differences. In the former case overpowering was blatant. In ideological differences it was through institutional changes like altering the Congress constitution, giving extra powers to the Working Committee, working towards the removal of an undesired President and getting a desired

one elected. In either case, conflict was never resolved by compromise. Patel's intention was that the opponent had to be defeated not accommodated and if the ideological opponents were appeased by Gandhi, Patel made sure their programmes were fully combated by him.

This brings us back to Patel's view of society and social change. As stated before Patel was a conservative who was interested in the status quo and concentrated on the political rather than the socio-economic aspects of society. He spent a lot of time and energy fighting those forces in society that sought any fundamental changes. To that extent he differed from true Gandhians. Patel did not share with Gandhi even an emotional passion for reform, such as the upliftment of untouchables or women, or the raising of living standards of the landless or jobless. He had no ideological scheme for rural or urban improvement (although in the municipality he executed urban improvement schemes with indefatigable energy). The four satyagraha campaigns which Patel organised or participated in before he became a national leader provide hardly any evidence of reformist zeal or fervour. The objects of the campaign, the support base, the appeals, all seem to suggest that the activity was designed to build a power-base and then reinforce that base by fulfilling the requirements of the areas or groups in question. Sometimes political activity was undertaken to make a show of political strength - as in Bardoli - or sometimes to vindicate a political stand or retrieve a lost position, as with the Nagpur Flag Satyagraha.

In over-emphasising the political factor and attributing purely political motives to Patel in his quest for leadership it is not intended to under-emphasise the economic factor. This is not a thesis against economic determinism. Rather, in revealing the up-hill nature of Patel's political struggle against the propounders of the economic faith, a degree of importance is conceded by implication to the latter. The significant thing, however, is that Patel gave the political dimensions of leadership an existence of their own. This thesis has sought to explain how this was so.

The back<sup>a</sup>wardness of the lower peasants, their total dependence on benefactors, lords and masters, and the structural relationships which bound the rural hierarchy were not the objects of attack even when Patel acted 'peasant leader'. Writers on peasant struggles maintain that the poor peasant is not inherently servile and lacking in a spirit of revolt. The apparent back<sup>a</sup>wardness and demoralisation of these peasants is rooted in other objective factors. This work has tried to demonstrate how the objective impediments to rural change are often perpetuated by skilful, successful and conservative politicians like Patel. Even middle peasants who could assist in generating a momentum towards change in rural areas were distracted by political gains and losses.

The same preoccupation with features like dominance and power can be observed in Patel's contribution in the final negotiations preceding the transfer of power. These negotiations had their roots in at least two decades of political perception and activity which in turn reinforced tentative conclusions about the goals for the Party, and within the Party the aims of a certain set of political leaders. If the interaction between rival groups in the decade or more before partition is closely analysed, much of what immediately preceded or followed partition fits into a pattern. Patel's attitude to socialists, Princes and Muslims was directly related to the political designs of each group and its interaction with Patel's political goals and methods. This had been made sufficiently evident in the 1930s and what happened in the transfer of power years was only a culmination of earlier processes involving political manoeuvrings among rivals and rival groups and changes in policy and attitudes on the British side. Nothing very radical happened socially or economically, or even politically. If there was a quest for radical changes Patel made sure it was obstructed. In these crucial years, under the garb of concepts like anti-imperialism, nationalism and liberal democracy, there was a tendency towards an increasing use of public institutions for private (which includes party) gain which Patel endorsed

and in some instances even initiated. In an imperialist context such a tendency, while fostering discipline and obedience could pose as altruism. Without that context, it perpetuated acquisitiveness, anti-social behaviour, the rejection of the idea of potential human equality and a tendency among holders of power to treat the state as a private 'jagir'. In so far as that feature is to be found in Congress as a party and a government even today, it may be seen in part as a legacy of the career of Vallabhbhai Patel.

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## 5. Interviews

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 Conrad Corfield  
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 Shanti S. Dhavan  
 Indira Gandhi  
 G.N.Handu  
 P.V.Mavlankar  
 J.L.Kapur  
 Amin-ud-din Khan, Nawab of Loharu  
 J.B. Kripalani  
 D.P.Mandelia  
 Mountbatten of Burma  
 I.M.Nanavati  
 Jai Prakash Narain  
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SUPPORTING MATERIAL.

**SPOKESMAN FOR THE PEASANTRY :**  
**THE CASE OF VALLABHBHAI PATEL AND BARDOLI**

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# I

Historians, sociologists, political scientists and anthropologists have recently made rural India their main concern and, within rural India, their preoccupation is increasingly with the peasant.<sup>1</sup> More recently, subalternists have suggested that the historian's focus on the elite has given a distorted analysis of history and society and that it is their aim now to put matters right by looking solely at the 'inferior' sections of society.<sup>2</sup> Peasants have now been made the elites of historiography. Peasant movements of all kinds have become the focus of study and historians have begun to explore the causes, failures and successes of peasant movements with a view to understanding the functioning of peasant societies and their interaction with society as a whole. On the positive side, this trend has contributed much by enabling us to understand specific properties of particular societies hitherto neglected. On the other hand, in underplaying the role of dominating elites (the nature of the domination varies according to the patterns of each area), it takes attention away from the 'enemy' and far from strengthening the weaker sections, such an approach often glorifies them and their weaknesses. The result is the perpetuation of the status quo. Cognizance must be taken of as many social, economic and political factors that accompany conflicts and changes within society.

The myth of the Indian peasantry as a passive mass of people, silently putting up with their lot till a fiery leader shows them how to break the shackles that bind them, has long been exploded. Quite apart from the peasant not always being passive nor the leader always fiery, there are some factors that are well recognised:

- (1) the peasantry is not one social or economic category but many;
- (2) the peasantry is ridden with conflicts and contradictions in which reconciliation is not always aimed at;
- (3) as a result of (1) and (2), peasant uprisings, whether they are started from above or below, do not always meet general peasant interests.

Ghanshyam Shah, who has done much work on 'grass roots mobilisation', recently presented a paper on post independence grass-roots mobilisation at a seminar 'India 2000' in Princeton.<sup>3</sup> He divided the mobilisation of the rural poor into two categories (1) ethnic mobilisation and (2) peasant mobilisation. The former takes into account features such as primordality and the latter emphasises the economic aspects of rural mobilisation. Shah stressed that both types of mobilisation were intertwined. That is inevitable, given the features of peasant society mentioned above. The subject of peasant mobilisation can be looked at from another plane - the objects and aims of mobilisation. At this level, the 'why' of mobilisation is more important than the 'how'. This aspect is of particular significance in an era when mass mobilisation is sought for agitational and electoral purposes that are often devoid of socio-economic content. In order that each exercise in mobilisation is seen in the right perspective the real purposes of mobilisation need to be clearly differentiated from their distortions.

Peasants mobilise or are mobilised to fight against an injustice or loss, or to achieve a goal or gain. The nature of the goal, both immediate and ultimate, affects the method and style of mobilisation. So also with real and apparent goals. Sometimes the immediate and apparent goals conceal the ultimate and real goals of mobilisation. To assess the nature of a particular exercise in mobilisation the apparent, real, immediate and ultimate goals must be differentiated and measured from the view point of the mobilisers and the mobilised. The ultimate goal of the peasantry in a particular exer-

cise in mobilisation must be determined by the analyst before an effort is made to study the different kinds of mobilisations and the side issues raised by them. For instance, in Ghanshyam Shah's recent paper the ultimate goal is that of building a 'participatory, egalitarian and just social order' and it forms a backdrop for analysing the mobilisation of the backward strata of rural India.<sup>4</sup> This backdrop provides the steering factor for his thesis on grass roots mobilisation - whether of backward castes, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, agricultural labourers or poor peasant farmers.

Without quibbling over the term 'peasant' I would like to state at the outset that as used in this essay the term is suggestive of some degree of economic backwardness and oppression.<sup>5</sup> Bearing this in mind, an analysis of the Bardoli satyagraha and Patel will be made. The Bardoli satyagraha was not an uprising of the most down-trodden section of the peasantry;<sup>6</sup> nor was Vallabhbhai Patel the most typical or representative peasant leader. There is much literature on the Gandhites betraying the cause of the peasants and workers in the national movement. Patel's and indeed Gandhi's commitment to the peasantry was limited. Yet, Bardoli has the reputation of being an exemplary exercise in peasant mobilisation. Some communists felt that the Workers' and Peoples' Party should have supported the agitation which was, after all, a peasants agitation.<sup>7</sup> What was it in the Bardoli satyagraha that brought both the taluka and Patel in the national limelight? Bardoli secured for Patel the title of 'Sardar' and the issue became important enough to affect wider negotiations between the British and the Indian leaders.

The Bardoli satyagraha was directed against the proposed enhancement of land revenue as a result of the new assessment. What was the nature of the problem caused by the proposed revision of assessment of land revenue? Details of the evolution of the land revenue system of the British, particularly in Surat District, has been adequately dealt with in Shirin Mehta's very plausible account of the Bardoli issue.<sup>8</sup>

There was the age-old controversy about the basis for determining land revenue. In the 1920s, this debate was personified in F.G.H. Anderson, the Settlement Commissioner and H.L. Painter, Commissioner for the Northern Division. Anderson was the chief exponent of the theory of rental value which he explained in Facts and Fallacies about the Bombay Land Revenue System. Painter believed in the empirical theory whereby profits of agriculture, environmental changes and the like were considered vital factors in any discussion of land revenue. The Assistant Settlement Officer, M.S. Jayakar's, proposals for fresh rates were first based on gross value of produce. After Anderson's criticism of his proposals, Jayakar stuck to the emphasis placed by Anderson on the requirement in the Land Revenue Code that 'settlements shall have regard to the value of land'.<sup>9</sup> Jayakar's report gave an all round picture of general improvement in agricultural conditions and prices in Bardoli taluka and he recommended an increase of 30.59% in the land revenue.<sup>10</sup> The increase was 25% over the existing rates of assessment. With the elevation of 23 villages to a higher group the increase came to 30.59%. It must be mentioned here that talukas in Kaira district were settled in 1923-24 and increases of 27 per cent in Borsad and 25 per cent in Anand and reductions of 7 per cent in Thasra and 8 per cent in Nadiad and Kapadvanj had been recommended. There were protests from several Kaira villages but none so organised and intense as that which occurred in Bardoli in 1928. The increase recommended for Bardoli was not unprecedented nor was protest from the peasants a novelty. What made the Bardoli protest movement so intense and what gave it the impact it had on the national scene?

## II

Bardoli Taluka, along with Valod Peta, forms one of the eastern-most talukas of the Surat district. It consists of flat country traversed by three big rivers, the Tapti, the Purna and the Mindhola and some small tributaries that cut

up the otherwise flat landscape. The three rivers make clear compartments of the area, without making one area particularly superior to another. The best lands are, however, situated in the western part of the taluka between the Purna and the Mindhola. They consist of level flat land with rich, deep (4' to 6'), black soil with a good moisture-retention capacity. The soil expands on wetting and cracks deeply and widely on drying which is of advantage as it leads to surface soil being mixed with sub-soil. Water can also be tapped at easy levels which is a great facility for garden cultivation. In the 1920s, however, this facility was not being utilised adequately. The rainfall during the monsoon is good in most of Surat district. At the highest rainfall station, it is 69.72 and at the lowest 34.36 inches annually.

The taluka and peta were well connected by the Tapti Valley Railway and the Bardoli-Supa Road, with trading centres like Bardoli 'town' and Navsari. The density of population per sq.mile of total area in Surat was 420 and of cultivable area 530. All the talukas in Surat district were and are still predominantly rural in nature. All cultivable lands come under one of 2 main categories, jirayat (dry crop land) and kyari (irrigated lands). Dry crops are further divided into kharif (early monsoon) and rabi (late monsoon). Kharif crops grow with the help of the south-west monsoon from middle June to middle October. They are reaped in the last week of September. Rabi crops depend on dew, irrigation and occasional fair weather showers falling between October and May. Bardoli's chief crops were jowar, rice and cotton. Cotton was becoming more and more popular because its cultivation involved less trouble and expenditure and its increased demand and rising prices brought greater profits to the cultivators. It is sown in June and reaped in March.

According to the 1921 census, of a total population of 87,909, agriculturists formed 67,160; the rest were artisans, teachers, traders and money-lenders. The population in most villages ranged from 501 to 3,000. Bardoli 'town' had a

population of 5,000 and Haripura 4,519. Most of the villages had between 10 to 25 houses. Others had more.<sup>11</sup> The total cultivated area was 1,21,366 acres. Of this, 97,371 acres was owner cultivated; the rest (23,995) was owned by non-cultivators who leased it to tenants because they had other means of earning or because they acquired it in lieu of debts from owner cultivators.

The size of land holdings in Bardoli taluka ranged from 1 acre to 500 acres.<sup>12</sup> The average size of holdings was 7 acres.

Number of holdings

<u>Acres</u>	<u>Bardoli Taluka</u>			<u>Taluka &amp; Peta</u>
	<u>1915</u>	<u>1920</u>	<u>1924</u>	<u>1921</u>
1 - 5	7,102	7,260	7,463	10,379
6 - 25	3,947	4,077	3,958	5,934
26 -100	503	492	507	829
101-500	17	13	14	40
500 & above	-	-	-	

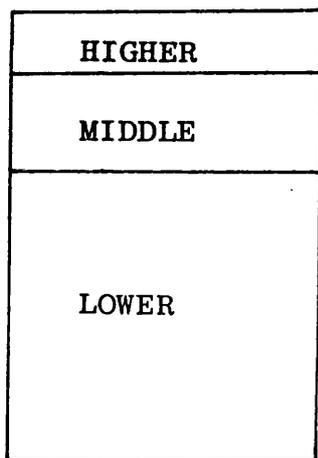
The size of the holdings is not an accurate indication of the average size of the unit of cultivation. The holdings are often divided among members of the family, and in some cases, scattered over the village and taluka and even different talukas, and in rare cases even over adjoining districts.

As the tables above reveal, Bardoli did not have many big landholders. More than 2/3 of the land was in the hands of those who cultivated it and 5,934 holdings (3,958 and 1,976 in the taluka and peta respectively) were from 6 to 25 acres and represented the holdings of the majority of cultivators. In Bardoli alone the number of land holdings which were between 101-500 acres was only 14. The average size of land holdings in the taluka - approximately 7.1 acres - was uneconomic by all standards. As families increased this figure became even more uneconomic and led to a greater

tendency towards tenancy. Tenants paid either cash rent or 'Adh Bagh' in which the assessment is paid by the owner and other costs by the tenant, after the produce is shared equally between them.

It is necessary to look at the caste and community break up of Bardoli's population. Sixty-three per cent of the population was Kaliparaj or backward castes. About 13% were Ujliparaj or higher castes and 24% were the intermediate groups:

CASTE CLASSIFICATION

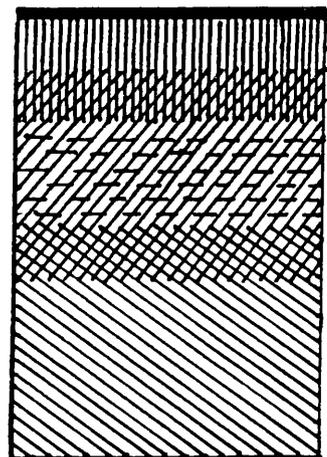


HIGHER - Anavil Brahmin  
13% Vantias  
Muslims  
Parsis

MIDDLE - Patidars  
24% Kolis

LOWER - Dheds  
63% Dublas  
Chodras

OCCUPATIONAL CLASSIFICATION



Non-cultivating landholders 1.2%

Landholders or Khatedar 25%

Tenants 45%

Agricultural labourers 51%

Artisans, teachers etc. 20%  
(These groups were not mutually exclusive)

Adapted from Census of India, 1921 ; Gazetter of the Bombay Presidency : Gujarat, Surat and Broach (Bombay, 1926) ; and M.S. Jayakar, Second Revision Settlement of the Bardoli Taluka and Valod Peta of the Surat District (Bombay, 1927).

According to the analysis put forward by Shirin Mehta, the higher castes were also the better educated and the economically better off. The burden of the revised assessment was more likely to hit them than the worse off agricultural labourers that formed the majority of the peasant population. Yet, the agitation is described as a widespread, all - encompassing, intense campaign that shook the taluka, district and province and achieved national status for the provincial leaders within a short period of time. Just how widespread and intense was this campaign and what did it achieve?

Kanbis were the dominant agriculturists in Bardoli taluka; in Valod, Brahmins, Muslims and Kaliparaj also cultivated land. Of the four divisions of kanbis - Anjana, Leva, Kadva and Matia, the last were the most numerous in the taluka. Leva kanbis, who always referred to themselves as Patidars, were the next numerous. They sought to differentiate themselves from non-Patidar kanbis and organised themselves socially as a distinct group to establish their superiority. Leva Patidars and Matias were the most hard working cultivators. They employed 'Halis' or labourers. Anavil Brahmins, who were also socially a dominant group of peasant proprietors, had the added advantage of being the most educated group in the taluka. They had gone into government service, teaching, law and trade. Kolis, who claimed Rajput origin and were competent agriculturists, were regarded as Kaliparaj. Kolis have been put into the 'Middle' caste classification because like some castes (Yadavas of Bihar) they tried, successfully in some areas, to upgrade themselves by 'sanskritization'. Economically, their status varied. Some kolis worked as Halis. Other Kaliparaj consisted of Dublas, Chodras, Dhondias and Dheds. Most Kaliparaj were Halis; some had small pieces of land, They were greatly in debt and the moneylenders exploited them excessively.

The population of Bardoli was, therefore, divided clearly along caste and class lines. Although there is a broad corre-

lation between the class and caste hierarchy from the view point of land ownership, some features of the hierarchy are meaningless. Ownership of land had less economic significance; the size of the holding and the total income accruing was more important even if the agriculturist was a tenant. Some factors make an assessment of the standard of living difficult:

- (1) despite a money economy, exchange transactions in rural areas are in terms of agricultural commodities;
- (2) all classes claim a share in the produce - owners, tenant-cultivators and servants;
- (3) most farmers supplement their agricultural income with related occupations;
- (4) help from family members working in the cities is common.

From surveys of villages in Bardoli (carried out later) it becomes apparent that the case of landless labourers is quite clear; they were in debt, had acute financial problems and even those who owned land (between 2 to 4 acres) could only eke out enough income for subsistence. The big farmers (those who had over 60 acres, more than a pair of bullocks, and about 9 other animals) were clearly well off and did not have financial problems. Of the other cultivators, there was not much difference in the income of the medium owner-cultivators, which formed the agricultural middle class, and the class of tenant cultivators, just above the lower rung of the agricultural ladder. The annual income of the former was Rs.1,500 to 2,000 and that of the latter approximately Rs. 1,250. The former, however, were in debt for marriages and other occasions demanded by their so-called higher social customs, and borrowed money from relations, friends and moneylenders. In addition, traders formed a category of people whose income was about Rs.2,000 and who belonged to three or four different communities.<sup>13</sup> They had a higher standard of living and higher expenses. Their participation in the agitation was sought by methods that were non-economic.

In this picture one can see that an increase in the land revenue assessment was going to affect about 17,000 agriculturists. Among these were well-to-do Patidars, Kanbis, Parsis, Anavil Brahmins and Sunni-Vohras who had other businesses outside the taluka and had leased out their lands. Not all of them found increase in land revenue assessment an issue of such great magnitude as the organisers would have liked to believe. Of course, as the figures have shown, 60 per cent of these 17,182 occupants held land between 1 - 5 acres (i.e. about 10,379 occupants). They were the Khatedars who were likely to be affected by the land revenue assessment. The average land holding in the taluka was 7.1 acres. With an increase in population the number of tenants had increased to 31,604. This section of the population (nearly twice the figure affected by the land revenue assessment) needed a movement on tenancy laws rather than an agitation against land revenue increase. Yet, land revenue was chosen as the subject for an agitation in Bardoli.

The conduct of the agitation will show that it was clearly a vehicle for a political journey. Its base, method, tactics and conclusion all reveal facets that have wider connotations than that of a peasant movement, pure and simple. All this brings us back from the subaltern to the elite and the power system whereby they dominated society.

### III

There was a political background to the Bardoli satyagraha which I have discussed at length in an unpublished work on Patel.<sup>14</sup> Broadly, it had three facets: (1) Patel's political ambitions (2) Patel's politicization of Gandhian methods and (3) the need at that particular time for particular Gandhites to prove political potency to a group within the Congress that had begun to be weary of some aspects of Gandhian techniques.

Patel's political ambitions were the result of his family

and social environment. The pragmatism came from his early family life and his Patidar background. The choice of a political career was influenced by the desire to emulate his brother Vithalbhai. The municipality took him up to a point in political recognition. In the meantime, a method with more vitality and quicker recognition appeared on the scene - the Gandhian way. It also catered to Patel's independent temperament. The hesitation in following the Gandhian path was that Patel was only partially committed to Gandhi's all-encompassing social, political and economic goals. Patel was anxious to make a political impact and breakthrough. Satyagraha campaigns in Kaira, Borsad and Nagpur, all contributed to Patel's enhanced political status. Bardoli's particular significance lay in its timing. It gave the Congress a break from its 'schizophrenic existence'.<sup>15</sup> Those who had opted for agitation as a form of political participation resented the free hand that had been given to the Swarajists by Gandhi, while the latter busied himself with spinning and 'constructive' work. They had to be reassured that their contribution in the national movement was as vital as that of the council-wallahs. Each side had been trying for some time to show that its methods in resolving the conflict between the people and the ruling power were superior. In 1926, the Swarajists had suffered reverses in the elections.<sup>16</sup> The announcement of an all-white Simon Commission to inquire into and recommend constitutional reform in India further strengthened the position of those who favoured agitation. Patel was already having problems in the Ahmedabad Municipality and in a show of strength between him and Ambalal Sarabhai in the election of the district officer Patel had to admit defeat when his man lost to Sarabhai's candidate. Reverting to agitation was the only answer.

Another factor that had begun to irk Patel was the activity of socialists and communists who were trying to infiltrate the Congress party and to influence people, in particular areas and occupations, with their propaganda. They did have some effect on Congressmen and accelerated the pace of

the Congress's interests in peasants and workers, The Congress's commitment to peasants, however, was neither constant nor uniform and certainly political leaders like Patel had much to do with the direction that it took. This political background of the Bardoli agitation was as important as the particular issues and incidents of the movement.

#### IV

It must at the outset be mentioned that Bardoli had had a dress rehearsal for non-violent non-cooperation in 1922, when it was chosen as the 'battleground' or the 'kurukshetra' for Gandhian satyagraha to protest against the atrocities of British rule (in particular the Jalianwala Bagh massacre and the Rowlatt Bills). Gandhi was first inclined to choose Kaira for this big agitation, but for various reasons agreed to Bardoli. An important reason was that he knew many families from Bardoli taluka who had been associated with him directly or indirectly in South Africa and had worked closely with him. Most of them were well-to-do Patidars who could command a substantial following by virtue of being among the elite families of the taluka. Some Patidar families of Surat district had already been working towards building up a political consciousness in their community and area. Kunverji and Kalyanji Mehta had founded the Patidar Yuvak Mandal which later got a permanent location - the Patidar Ashram in Surat city. Similarly, Dayalji Desai, an Anavil Brahmin, had set up the Anavil Vidhyarthi Ashram and had been closely in touch with Gandhi's work in South Africa. These local men had no problems as far as recognition and respect was concerned. They were high in the caste hierarchy and were looked up to by most of the people. But their limited sphere of operation and clearly semi-political intentions could not get a movement going without a widespread cause and sufficient support for the cause. Their social work in Bardoli and Surat was parochial and limited, and the biggest service Gandhi did for

them in 1920 was to give a nationalist dimension to their organisation, with his speeches on boycott of government schools, propagation of Swadeshi and prohibition. Even so, when preparations for the 1922 movement were afoot, it was soon apparent that people from lower castes and classes would not be easily absorbed. For Gandhi, this was a bad sign and an organisational weakness.

In the 1928 campaign, a remedy was sought to this weakness. Kalyanji and Kunverji Mehta requested Vallabhbhai Patel (at Gandhi's behest) to direct a no-tax campaign in Bardoli. As already indicated, Vallabhbhai had his own reasons for mobilising agitation at this time. He had resigned from the Ahmedabad Municipality; his brother Vithalbai was part of the moderate group in the Bombay legislature which was taking an interest in the Gujarat peasants to redress their grievances by constitutional means; the moderates had already got some kind of campaign going in 1927 through petitions and deputations and had procured a nominal reduction in the increased assessment. Patel took on the task of organising the campaign, but he seems to have had some reservations on the subject of leadership. The peasants had hitherto been following the MLCs' orders and suggestions and Vallabhbhai seemed anxious to clarify that once he was in charge of the campaign it would be directed by him according to Gandhian methods of satyagraha. The MLCs spoke at the 4 February meeting called by Vallabhbhai and assured him that he was free to take charge and carry on the peasants' campaign. In a letter to Sir Leslie Wilson, Governor of Bombay, Vallabhbhai asked for an independent inquiry committee that would look into the inaccuracies of the settlement report. failing which he would advise the peasants to withhold the land revenue and suffer the consequences.<sup>17</sup> He also suggested that he would willingly discuss the whole matter and avoid a confrontation if the Governor agreed. The Governor refused to give any importance to a self-styled leader of the peasantry and Patel decided to plan out the campaign with local leaders.

With the negative experiences of 1922 to warn him, Patel now chalked out details whereby the pitfalls and failures of the last campaign could be avoided. First of all, he brought some of his own men with him to guide, help and inspire the local leaders. Swami Anand, Darbar Gopaldas, Mahadev Desai and a few colleagues of Gandhi's from Sabarmati Ashram including Imam Bewazir would meet people from different communities and encourage them to fight. The idea was that the pace should be set by leaders from the higher communities and others would follow their example. A resolution/<sup>was passed</sup>describing the revision settlement as arbitrary, unjust and oppressive. It advised the occupants to refuse to pay the revised assessment 'until the Government is prepared to accept the amount of the old assessment in full satisfaction of their dues, or until the government appoints an impartial tribunal to settle the whole question of revision by investigation and inquiry on the spot'. This resolution was proposed and seconded by leading Patidars and Anavils. Two Muslims and one Vania and a Parsi also supported the resolution.<sup>18</sup>

Relying primarily on the leadership angle, Patel sent out the team to influence people in the villages. Aware that the campaign was not a mass movement unanimously supported by people, Vallabhbai impressed two things on the minds of the people and the local leaders: (1) that the government would attempt to divide their ranks, a move which they must resist to the best of their ability and (2) that the government would first strike at the leaders and confiscate the best lands so that if the most influential men succumbed the rest would yield sooner or later. The people were advised to be wary of such a move.<sup>19</sup>

It was not a smooth-sailing campaign. There was lack of cohesion among the different communities and within each community among the different economic strata. Patidars often acted together to establish their superiority and demonstrate their higher status. This, in turn, made for greater solidarity among them. 'Solidarity seeking' has been described as an inherent trait of Patidars - a trait that had been directed

successfully along political channels. Village Patels in more than half of the villages in the taluka were Patidars and had much control in their areas. Vantias as a community, however, posed a problem. Their financial stake and commitment in the land, loans, the crop trade and other commercial aspects of the taluka was too great for them to get carried away by a satyagraha conducted to benefit either a part of the taluka's population or the nation at large. Vantias were a weak link in the chain of support and one that the government tried to break. Anavil Brahmins, described as 'proud and defiant' by a co-Brahmin Mahadev Desai, were also reluctant at first. Although Anavil leaders had been organising themselves for socio-political supremacy and dominance in the area generally, Anavil occupants were prone to calculate their losses before joining the campaign. It was not until the campaign picked up considerable momentum that they joined the fray. Parsis were mostly liquor merchants, money-lenders or traders and lived in villages inhabited by the kaliparaj who were the biggest liquor consumers. There were very few landholders and they were well-off as they supplemented their agricultural income with earnings from trade. Their response to the agitation was minimal.

Muslim cultivators in the taluka belonged to the Sunni Vohras, numbering 874 and the Sheikhs, numbering 1,033. The former were owner-cultivators economically comfortable and, therefore, reluctant to join a campaign with which they had otherwise little affinity. Sheikhs were artisans and were relatively poor. Their participation in the agitation seemed of no direct benefit to them. Given these attitudes of the upper castes and classes, Congress workers had an up-hill task in mobilizing numerical support. Sixty per cent of the population had no direct interest in the agitation anyway. Dublas were likely to follow their creditors or masters in giving moral support. But they counted for little. The organisers did not envisage a campaign like the one at Kaira. Mohanlal Pandya, who had seen the enthusiasm at the time of the Kaira agitation, wrote to Vallabhbhai Patel after survey-

ing the taluka:

No one seems to me to be in fighting trim. They are going about their business as though nothing had happened...I do not despair, but let us not overrate our strength. 20

Having weighed the strength and weaknesses of the taluka, Patel chalked out his plan based on the strengths of the taluka. It was not his style to indulge in pious platitudes. A realistic assessment of the different attitudes of the people based on their different socio-economic positions enabled him to negotiate with individuals and groups to mutual advantage. To begin with, he addressed himself to the landholders and urged them to be man enough to fight their own battles and not simply reap the benefits of workers and volunteers who had come forward to make sacrifices.

The taluka was divided into four regions, which in turn had camps within them. The regions had an overall in-charge and the camps had different leaders in-charge. Regional headquarters were set up at Bardoli for the central region with Kalyanji, Jugatram and Kushalbai in-charge, at Sarbhon in the south-west region with Dr. Tribuvandas in-charge, at Modhi in the north with Mankanji Desai and at Vedchchi in the east with Chunilal Mehta and his wife in charge. The regions were further subdivided into chhavani (4 each in the northern, central and south-eastern regions and one in the south-western region). Each chhavani was headed by Patel's own man and not a local man from the taluka. These men analysed the geographical and social factors of each village and organised them accordingly. Valod, the Mahal headquarters, and Buhari in the south-east were Vania strongholds; Vankaner in the centre<sup>and</sup>, Varad and Bamni in the north were Patidar strongholds. Seasoned leaders like Mohanlal Pandya, Darbar Gopaldas, Chandulal Desai and Sumant Mehta persuaded people in these areas to follow the Congress lead and look to their long-term future. Abbas Tyabji and Imam Bewazir were told to mobilise Muslim support. Thus the appeals were given a communal or interest-based slant.<sup>21</sup>

The Government also exploited communal attitudes and acted accordingly, Chauthai notices demanding four times the original assessment were sent to Vanias, Muslims and Parsis. To facilitate japti officers, magistrates and mamlatdars were appointed from the Vania, Muslim and Parsi communities. This strategy worked and some Vanias, Muslims and Parsis paid up the first instalment on the specified date. Vallabhbhai suggested caste pressure and social boycott against defaulters. Supplies of essential commodities were cut off for some households and they were compelled to comply with the satyagraha rules : Government officers were likewise threatened and pressurized. Satyagrahis compelled and persuaded the menial servants and other staff of government officers to stop working for them.<sup>22</sup> The campaigners had contacts to elicit information from government sources and to trail potential payers.<sup>23</sup>

The element of coercion and social pressure was considerable. The Bardoli Satyagraha Patrika was the chief organ of propaganda and it often publicized the lack of courage of individuals, communities or villages. Kadod village with its predominantly Vania population had not joined the satyagraha. Its surrounding villages ensured that labourers would not work for the Vanias of that village. Patels and talatis were also humiliated into submission; they resigned and thus obstructed part of the collection machinery of the government.

The campaign took the shape of a grim battle between the forces of the government and those of the non-cooperators. The Congress workers arrayed themselves as an organisation parallel to the government and able to match the government's ability to redress peoples' grievances and look to their needs. The government began to attach land, cattle and chattel including pots, pans, tools and ornaments. The peasants bore the hardships bravely, partly because Patel and his men worked hard to assure them that they would not be the losers in the end <sup>and</sup> partly because they were made examples of in the leaders' speeches and the satyagraha pamphlets. Patel tried to focus as much limelight on Bardoli as he could. He got a resolution passed at the Congress Working Committee meeting

in Bombay on 18 May 1928 in which the conduct of the campaign, the role of the leaders and particularly his own role, and the courage of the peasants were all commended in superlative terms. An inquiry was recommended and the Government's role was criticized. Obtaining recognition at the national level served two purposes - it encouraged the local leaders and helped Patel to make the transition from the provincial to the national stage. Other national leaders were called to Bardoli for the same reasons. The agitation thus had the required impact for various reasons that were not directly related to the peasants' participation. Not the least among them was the role of the council-wallahs and other mediators.

The resignation of eight MLCs from Gujarat by April followed by the efforts at mediation and finally the resignation by Munshi and the material support and sympathy elicited by Patel from the commercial and trading associations of Bombay city all helped the cause.<sup>24</sup> Purshottamdas Thakurdas, H.N. Kunzru, Motilal Nehru, T.B. Saprú all expressed their views on the matter. This was just what Patel needed and wanted. It made Bardoli a wide enough issue and Patel the focal point of a crisis which had national implications. Inadvertently, the constitutionalists helped the agitators.

Another factor that helped the satyagrahis somewhat was the pressure that was building up on the Bombay Government from within and from 'home'. Bombay was paralysed by a widespread and effective strike in the textile mills. The strike was significant not just economically but also politically. Apart from paralysing the cotton industry the strike had become a rallying point for leftist leaders who got an opportunity to spread propaganda against capitalism and exploitation in general and to use the strike platform for the spread of communist or socialist ideas. Geographically, the lay out of the Bombay mill area further aided the concentration of the work force in particular areas where they were easily accessible.<sup>25</sup> This communist menace caused the right wing Congress leaders as much anxiety as it did the British Government of Bombay.<sup>26</sup> Sir Leslie Wilson was, therefore, facing fire on

two fronts. However, back home the questions on Bardoli were causing the Government much anxiety. In Bombay, the strike was posing a continuing threat. While the Governor clamoured for more powers to deal with the strike, the government at the centre worried about Bardoli. An unspoken pact emerged. The centre prevailed in breaking the deadlock on Bardoli by persuading Leslie Wilson to go to Surat; it yielded by granting the Bombay Government greater powers to deal with the strike situation. The outcome was negotiations and a settlement.

How did it come about and what did it achieve? After conferring with the Viceroy, the Governor of Bombay visited Surat on 18 July and, in accordance with the plan, announced that if the agitation was called off an official inquiry might be set up, provided also that the peasants paid the new assessment or a third party paid the difference in amount between the old and the new assessment. Leslie Wilson agreed to discuss the matter with the peasants' representatives foremost among them being Vallabhbhai Patel. The latter did not agree to the condition regarding the payment. He also emphasised that all those lands that had been forfeited by the peasants and sold by the government to recover the dues would have to be restored to their original owners, and village officials who had resigned would have to be reinstated. The discussions achieved nothing. Neither Patel nor Wilson was willing to yield any more. Economic reasons had faded in the background. Patel had made promises to the peasantry that they would not be the losers in the struggle. The restoration of forfeited lands became a major issue. The Governor too was under pressure and was the subject of discussion in the British Cabinet where 'the authority and prestige of government' was of greater importance than the peasants' grievances. The Secretary of State stated clearly : ' The economic element in struggle is of quite secondary importance'. This was not the first time a provincial governor had differing instructions from the Secretary of State and the Viceroy<sup>27</sup>. Added to that, the Governor faced pressure in his council and

in the Legislature.

The MLCs had their own reasons for wanting a speedy settlement in Bardoli. There were Bills pending in the legislature which required the support of particular groups - like non-Brahmins - who in turn were anxious for a speedy settlement in Bardoli. Patel's antagonism to MLCs like Chunilal Mehta was well-known.<sup>28</sup> He had tried to keep the MLCs out of the active part of the campaign; their role, however, could not be ignored. The Government was taking them more seriously than the agitators and they in turn, for their own political reasons, had a more compromising attitude to the problem than the NCOs. For different reasons, the Viceroy and the Governor wished to avoid a breakdown. MLCs like Chunilal Mehta desired a speedy settlement and Vallabhbhai wanted to reduce the stress of the campaign for fear of losing what support had been gained among the peasants. Chunilal Mehta persuaded Vallabhbhai to agree to give a letter to the Governor giving a vague assurance which the government desired in return for a concession on the subject of the forfeited lands. This letter and Chunilal Mehta's personal undertakings provided face savers for it.

For Patel, the return of confiscated lands and the institution of an inquiry were the two main issues on the basis of which he could claim the settlement as a victory for himself. The MLCs undertook to get the forfeited lands returned to their original owners. That solved a big problem for Patel. It is interesting to note that during the 1930 civil disobedience movement the subject of forfeited lands provided a stumbling block in negotiations between Gandhi and Irwin and almost led to a breakdown in the absence of mediating parties who could prevail upon both the government and the new owners. This is being mentioned here for two reasons. First, peasants' willingness to sacrifice for Congress is often highlighted to such a degree that it blurs some of the underlying reasons leading to the success of a campaign. Land owners did not recklessly agree to allow confiscation and Patel worked hard to ensure that lands would not be lost. Second, non-cooperation leaders like Patel on their own were

impotent to settle the matter of confiscated lands without help from financiers brought in by Bombay bigwigs and constitutionalists. The role of the MLCs, therefore, must not be underrated.

The conclusion of the agitation highlights its political nature. Patel had his hand on the peasants' as well as the government's pulse. The onset of monsoon rains, the impending sowing season, a reduction in the peasants' power of endurance and the accompanying toughening of the government's attitude (including the possibility of the deployment of troops if necessary) all had an effect on the pace and intensity of the agitation. Government threats of repressive action were met by counterthreats from Vallabhbhai which were aimed at the Government and the peasants. From talk of burning the standing crops to prevent government from confiscating it, to inciting the peasants and other groups to rebel, Patel made efforts to ensure the continuance of the agitation. When he noticed weariness and a diminishing enthusiasm, he began casting around for an end to the agitation. The services of the MLCs came in useful when the stalemate could not be broken.

It was agreed that an enquiry headed by a judicial officer and aided by a revenue officer would be instituted to look into the people's complaints and then determine the increase or decrease in the old assessment. The terms of reference further stated:

....as the enquiry is to be full, open and independent the people will be free to lead as well as test evidence before it with the help of their representatives including legal advisers. 29

Patel told the peasants that as the Government had accepted their terms they were bound to pay the old assessment, which the people did. The Broomfield and Maxwell report was published in May 1929. The increase recommended in the revised assessment was 5.7%. Many of the peasants' objections were conceded; Anderson's principle of 'rental-value', if properly determined, was, however, still considered sound and capable

of reflecting adequately all the other factors that were bracketed as 'profits of agriculture',<sup>30</sup>

Three features of the peasantry were emphasised at the beginning of this article. 'Differentiation' poses a problem when the success of a movement is to be measured. Success for whom? Simplistic sub-divisions such as rich, middle and poor peasants do not provide satisfactory answers. Much work has been done on this issue. Wolf and Alavi's middle peasants are said to form the substance of agitation and radicalism in the rural set up because they are the subsistence landowning peasantry threatened by the progress of commercialisation.<sup>31</sup> Was Bardoli an agitation by the middle peasantry? Hamza Alavi emphasises economic independence as the main distinguishing feature of the middle peasantry, pointing out at the same time that the middle peasant may be characterised by more than one mode of production. The determining feature in such a case would be 'the principal relation of production from which a person draws his livelihood'.<sup>32</sup> David Hardiman's middle peasant thesis, later revised into the caste-cum-class (Patidar) thesis, was rejected by Neil Charlesworth who stated that peasant agitations between the two wars brought many agrarian classes together. Neil Charlesworth sought to demonstrate how the middle peasantry, as shaped by commercialisation, was actually the 'most dependent' and most involved in varied market relationships of all peasant groups. Pressure from commercialisation is thus not accepted as the reason for middle peasantry militancy.<sup>33</sup> Then of course there is the question whether the Bardoli peasants were the 'Wolfian middle peasants'?

According to our table of class and caste groups - (the intermediate sections) - Patidars, Kolis, Kumhars and Ganchis - the last mentioned were not dependent solely on cultivation. Among higher caste groups, some Anavil Brahmins and Vantias (of the upper castes and, according to Shirin Mehta, also upper class) come under the economic definition of middle peasants. Did these groups - Patidars, Kolis, Anavils and Vantias - constitute the mainstay of the agitation? The

reluctance of Anavils and Vantias has already been discussed. In Valod, Chodras (lower caste) Brahmins (upper caste), and Muslims (upper caste) also cultivated their land for a living. They were the middle peasants. All these groups did not, as we have seen, constitute the agitation's supporters. Those rich and middle peasants who did support the campaign relied on the assurances given by Patel, that confiscated lands would be returned. Charlesworth's own answer to the reasons that lay behind the unity and strength of the Bardoli campaign is that 'the breadth of involvement in commercial production and the tenurial conditions under which it had recently evolved were such that even the leasing-in tenants recognised a serious threat from the reassessment'.<sup>34</sup> In the early 1920s, cash crop production had brought returns through which even a labourer could cope with some rent rise. With the threat of land revenue increase, land lords were planning to pass on some of the burden of that increase to the tenant in the form of higher rent.

This argument has limited application in an agitation in which so much threat and persuasion, as has been described, was used. The tenants were not likely to go beyond a certain point on the risk/return continuum. The risks that were involved were far greater than the benefits that were likely. The benefits of such a campaign would vary from one section of the peasantry to other. Price collapse might affect a wide range of the peasantry, but a peasant agitation with high risks of property-loss would have to bring other compensations to enrol the support of those not directly affected by its declared objectives.

Let us look at Patel's and other leaders' attitudes towards some socio-economic groups in the taluka to ascertain what attraction the campaign or Patel could have for them. The institution of money-lending, for instance, needed reform. Money-lenders were at once a blessing and a curse for the indebted peasantry. In Bardoli, Vantias, Parsis and Marwaris were the main money-lenders; Brahmins and Kanbis

also became money-lenders later. The peasants' primary source of credit was private money-lenders. Inevitably, money-lenders were in a position to harass the peasantry. The system of Halis, or hereditary labourers, originated in the money-lending business when heavily indebted peasants offered their services as part payment for the loan; they could never pay off the loan because the high interest rates made the loan more or less permanent. Given the status and influence of money-lenders in the taluka, Patel would not even consider any radical changes in the system. Instead, he recommended an assimilation of interests between the money-lenders and the peasants. The money-lenders, he said, were merged in the tenant like water in milk.<sup>35</sup> Any attempt to alienate the one from the other would be to the detriment of both.<sup>36</sup> Hardiman does not accept the primacy of short term economic grievances in causing the Bardoli agitation. His reasons are that earlier, when cotton prices were stable in 1921-22, Bardoli was ready for a campaign; and also that backward communities in eastern Bardoli supported the campaign and they were not affected with the fluctuations of prices of cotton or other cash crops.<sup>37</sup>

Adivasis' (Dublas and Chodras) conversion to Gandhian ways had little to do with the mobilisation of their support towards a peasant agitation. I will refer to the entire backward classes as Kaliparaj and seek to demonstrate what was the nature of their interest and link with Gandhians at this phase of the national movement.

Much has been written about the involvement of the Kaliparaj in campaigns for redress of grievances. Figures of Kaliparaj attendance at meetings are cited to show the extent of Kaliparaj involvement. The fact is that land revenue agitations like Bardoli had little to do with Kaliparaj participation in co-operative activity. The Kaliparaj had been a neglected section of society for a long time. The Bhakti and Arya Samaj movements played a significant part in their awakening at the beginning of the century. By focusing on

the problems of the tribals and landless these movements gave confidence to these sections of society and also gathered support for themselves. Also, during the first non-cooperation movement Gandhi realised that support from the backward sections in Gujarat was lacking. He urged volunteers to go out and tap adivasi support. When the constructive programme was launched a concerted effort was made to spread the message of khadi and prohibition. The khadi programme had an appeal for tribals and backward classes because it provided work for many idle families. From within the Kaliparaj, leaders came forward to request the Bardoli Ashram to expand its programme to remote backward areas. Jiwanbhai Bababhai Chaudhri and Gomjibhai Lalbhai Chaudhri of Vedchhi village were particularly active in seeking <sup>the</sup> help of Gandhian institutions in their areas. Chunilal Mehta and Kesavbhai Patel were asked to assist in this programme.

The greatest contribution towards the upliftment of Kaliparaj was by Jugatram Dave, a social worker with no political designs. He took an interest in their education, social welfare and general progress. But no intensive campaign geared to a change in the pattern of land ownership or economic relationships was either envisaged or executed. Recent studies on rural development in areas around Bardoli show that economic relationships pertaining to land have not changed till today; the basic problems remain the same. Marginal farmers who lost land to middle or rich farmers have become landless labourers.<sup>38</sup>

The Bardoli agitation made little contribution towards making Congress the spokesman of the peasantry. By focusing on increases in land revenue assessment, or additional tax levies, Congress was really evading the real problems - the burden of debt, exploitation by money-lenders, the lack of mobility in the village social structures, the insecurity of tenure, wage struggles and so on.

A new sphere - a kind of predominantly political employment bureau - was opening up with vast opportunities for various

classes and castes; and what gave agitations like Bardoli so much recognition was the manner in which leaders like Patel were able to give socio-economic flavour to a predominantly political mission. What was then the driving force behind the Bardoli agitation that gave it 'leverage' value for Congress even with limited numerical support and minimal significance in terms of socio-economic change? The force was not simply caste, class or factions (whether this is described as patron-client networks, guru-disciple relationships or 'brokerage' structures). Nor was it the dominant or middle peasant theory. The force was the changing concept of power brought about by non-cooperation, satyagraha and other methods of agitation whereby leaders like Patel gave concrete shape to the new predominantly political yard stick through which an individual's or group's influence, control and effectiveness could be measured or ascertained. An alternative mode of domination that could match the government's conventionally legitimate authority was set-up; something apart from force and legality. Agitational techniques became part of the Congress strategy of a parallel power-structure that would meet people's needs and requirements and establish the authority of those who devised the scheme. To use a phrase somewhat acontextually - a bourgeois 'dual power' system was sought.

The focus on political dominance marred much of the agitation's leaders' performance and played an important part in both the nature of leadership and support in the campaign. Amrut Nakhre's study of satyagrahi attitudes demonstrates that sub-leaders had a purely pragmatic (as opposed to ideological) attitude to satyagraha. The social composition of the participants was that they were the young elite, mostly in their 20s, relatively more educated and of higher economic status than the majority. The leaders were educated and had participated in previous satyagraha campaigns. Occupation and education distinguished them as a group rather than simply caste. Their reasons for participation can be gauged from their responses to some of the questions put to them

on the subject:

The immediate goal of the satyagraha was to get land revenue reduced. Personally, however, I was not interested in this aspect at all...to me the Bardoli satyagraha was only a part of the on going struggle for swaraj. <sup>39</sup>

To those who otherwise had a negligible control over general affairs in the taluka, it provided an opportunity to affect, vicariously, some dominant groups like the police, officials and the government machinery. One satyagrahi said '...for most of the satyagrahis, including the leaders, it was nothing more than a tactic'.<sup>40</sup>

One attitude appears to be common to all the leaders, particularly those who considered 'ahimsa' as a tactic; they all viewed conflict as a contest for power. In a traditional society in which pockets of influence and power were numerous and varied, a contest for power with an emphasis on the political factor was likely to serve as a unifying factor for those embroiled in other power conflicts. In this contest, non-violence plays an interesting part - subordinate groups that are otherwise unlikely to unseat, match or win over dominant groups take recourse to non-violence as a device that will restrain those already entrenched in power. It is the only 'string' that binds everyone equally. The rank and file, therefore, often show greater adherence to non-violence and the leaders and sub-leaders make a virtue out of necessity.

In this agitation, therefore, the commitment of the leaders to the peasantry was limited by several factors, which come in the way of this agitation being labelled a typical peasants' agitation. First, the composition of the taluka in terms of caste and class groupings, landholdings, crop distribution, all point to a taluka where different combinations of factors made the issue of land revenue assessment less imperative to the bulk of the population than other peasant problems. Second, the nature of support of the campaign also showed no correlation between the most vocal supporters and the most hard-pressed sections of the taluka.

Supplementing this was the fact that the majority either did not actively need to join the agitation or did so for reasons other than redress of real grievances, such as threats from and support to acknowledged leaders and political recognition, which often served as a compensation from the deprivations in other areas. Third, the nature of leadership and Patel's particular role in the agitation detract from its truly peasant nature. The leaders and sub-leaders were trained satyagrahis that organised the campaign meticulously. But they were not always able to formulate programmes that contributed towards any substantial socio-economic change in the taluka. Patel himself was primarily motivated by political stimuli and needed this satyagraha campaign to make the transition to the national stage. Fourth, and connected to the previous point, were the political antecedents and methods of the campaign. The ascendancy of other political groups like the Swarajists and socialists spurred on leaders like Patel to take steps that would quicken the pace of the agitation and bring about the advancement of the Gandhiites. The fifth factor was the contradiction between the subsistence peasants' real goals and the Gandhian goals, and the techniques of satyagraha. The technique of satyagraha is ostensibly designed to enable the weakest sections of society to assert themselves against the most powerful adversary by conducting non-cooperation through ahimsa. Non-violence in fact perpetuates the weaknesses of the feeble sections of society because it puts constraints on them and circumscribes their area of active protest against those whose power, positions and interests are well-entrenched. Through non-violence the weak are tamed into following leaders who are already strong, and the leaders in turn are able to reinforce their positions by recommending paths of non-violence and giving ideological reasons that restrain the weak. The discrepancy between the goals of the different sections of the peasantry - rich, middle and poor - can thus be glossed over and a campaign which serves different purposes for different groups of leaders is embarked upon. Ghanshyam Shah has compared the

responses of backward groups in Maharashtra and Gujarat. He suggests that whereas the backward groups of Maharashtra were militant and pressed their demands to the point of being prepared to break from the caste structure, backward groups like the untouchables of Gujarat were prompted primarily by Gandhian workers to exercise self-restraint rather than revolt.<sup>41</sup> Their endeavours met with limited success for two reasons: (1) working within the caste framework meant support from caste Hindus; this was not readily forthcoming and (2) the Gandhian programme among these groups was confined and did not help or seek to bring them in full contact with society at large.

It can be seen that while Congress work among the peasants began with Gandhi through his ingenious methods, Congress's commitment to the peasantry was neither constant nor consistent. Jannuzi has divided this varied commitment into three types: (1) those who were most committed and had a programme geared entirely to the peasant socio-economic system, like Jai Prakash Narain, Rammanohar Lohia, Minoo Masani; (2) those who believed in the goals of (1) but compromised on several fronts, like Jawaharlal Nehru and (3) those who stood substantially apart, like Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad and even Gandhi.<sup>42</sup> The 'why' of mobilisation mentioned at the beginning of the article assumes importance here. Patel's interest in the peasantry was political and, therefore, to the extent that it was deficient in socio-economic content, it went against the peasant interests. Bardoli has been called a 'balancing trick' aimed at a compromise between landed interests and industrial interests. Primarily, it was a trick to keep revolution at bay.

On no account does that imply that the Bardoli campaign served no useful purpose at all for the peasants of the taluka and was, therefore, inconsequential. Apart from fulfilling, albeit partially, the political aims and designs of the leaders, the agitation achieved different things for different people. For Patel, it was a well-timed well-planned campaign

that gave him a foothold on the national scene with a powerful provincial backing. For Gandhians in general, it was an exercise in satyagraha that reinforced their beliefs in Gandhian methods and further strengthened the Gandhian movement. To the rank and file, it gave a confidence that their socio-economic status could not provide. It thus released a section of the peasantry from a relatively passive role to one of limited activity. The state of helplessness of the subordinate groups was reduced by the opportunity to participate in a movement in which acts of service and self-denial could make heroes out of people otherwise considered impotent by the elite. Relief from economic burdens was not forthcoming and the existing hierarchy that perpetuated the roles of exploiters and exploited was left intact; the campaign did nevertheless instil a general self-confidence in the people of the area. The Gandhites managed to focus the attention of leaders of social and economic groups towards political conflicts and got them involved in the national movement.

I would like to end with a point made at the beginning of the article. Peasants have increasingly come to occupy the centre of the historical stage and an effort is being made to show the peasant's awareness of his plight and his will to fight it. This is a reaction from the image of a peasantry led by altruistic leadership. The change in approach is both welcome and needed. But it has not been achieved effectively. Perhaps that is because the power of the elite cannot be wished away simply by excessive preoccupation with the subaltern. Underlying much of the reaction against elitist studies is the assumption that implied in the study of elites in society is an admission of their superiority. This is not so. Nor are the social ideals and expectations of propertied people considered the key to an understanding of society as a whole. Even when the central questions in an inquiry relate to the non-privileged, there are many reasons put forward by social historians for paying considerable attention towards elites. First, insights provided by looking at elitist activity give an interesting idea

of one class's perceptions of another class. Second, the historical evidence at hand is often that which has been preserved by the 'dominant classes' or groups, so that knowledge of the 'commitments, biases and ideological dispositions' of these groups is inevitably central to any inquiry about the non-privileged, non-propertied people.<sup>43</sup> So, even when questions relating to the world as actually experienced by ordinary people are asked, the answers cannot ignore the world as it is ideologically perceived by elites. What makes elitist historiography particularly odious is the fact that hitherto elites have been put on pedestals and studied with admiration and adulation. It is this aspect of elitism which is deserving of the historians' contempt rather than all elitist perceptions. What is needed is probably a closer and more critical analysis of the whole genre of elites, their composition background and their modus operandi, so that the patterns of exploitation which form not a small part of subaltern studies can be appropriately dealt with. Without this, subaltern studies may themselves be 'one-sided and blinkered'.<sup>44</sup>

## FOOTNOTES

- 1 Writings of Hamza Alavi, Shahid Amin, David Arnold, Jan Breman, Andre Beteille, A.H.Bingley, Neil Charlesworth, B.S Cohn and R.E. Frykenberg, W.H.Crawley, A.R.Desai, D.N.Dhanagare, A.N.Das, Christophyon Furer-Haimendorf, Ranajit Guha, Kathleen Gough, David Hardiman, Walter Hauser, R.H.Hitchcock, F.Tommason Jannuzi, Kapil Kumar, Shirin Mehta, M.P.Nanavati, Gyanendra Pandey, Rajat and Ratna Ray, Peter Robb, D.Rothermund, D.F.Pocock, M.C.Pradhan, Ghanshyam Shah, Eric Stokes, James C.Scott, Majid Siddiqui, Teodar Shamin, M.N.Srinivas, Eric Wolf and others.
- 2 Ranajit Guha (ed) Sublatern Studies, I, II, and III (Delhi, 1982-84).
- 3 Ghanshyam Shah, 'Grass Roots Mobilisation in Indian Politics' . Paper presented at a seminar 'India 2000' at Princeton University, U.S.A., April 1985.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 See Joel Migdal, Peasant Politics and Revolutions : Pressure towards political and social change in the Third World (Princeton, 1974) ; and D.N. Dhanagare, 'The Politics of Survival : Peasant Organisations and the left wing in India, 1925-1946', Sociological Bulletin, 24, I , March 1975.
- 6 R.S.Nimbkar, a Bombay Communist asserted that the Bardoli agitation 'was not a typical peasant movement directed against landlord exploitation but was only an anti-imperialist agitation of a mixed class character, sponsored by many elements who were not at all sympathetic to the real interests of workers and peasants'. Bombay Chronicle, 4 June 1928, p.4. For this and other references to the Bardoli leaders' failure to represent typical peasantry see Dhanagare, 'Politics of Survival' and Dhanagare, 'Peasant Movement in India, 1920-30', Ph.D. Thesis, University of Sussex, 1973.
- 7 Dhanagare, 'The Politics of Survival'.
- 8 Shirin Mehta, The Peasantry and Nationalism. A Study of the Bardoli Satyagraha, (New Delhi, 1984).
- 9 Note by F.G.H.Anderson, Settlement Commissioner, 9 April/ 15 May 1926, to Commissioner Northern Division, Home (pol) File 178/1928. National Archives of India, New Delhi.

- 10 M.S.Jayakar, Asstt, Settlement Officer's proposals, re. Second Revision Settlement of the Bardoli Taluka to Collector of Surat, 30 June 1925, Home(Pol) File 178/1928.
- 11 Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency (Bombay, 1926); Census of India, 1921, Bombay Presidency, Vol.8 (Bombay, 1922) and Gazetteer of India, Gujarat State (Ahmedabad, 1962) p.319.
- 12 Jayakar, op.cit.
- 13 Gazetter of India, p.701
- 14 Author's unpublished work on Patel: 'Vallabhbhai Patel: His role and Style in Indian Politics, 1928-1947'.
- 15 B.R.Tomlinson, The Indian National Congress and the Raj, 1929-1942, (London, 1976) p.33.
- 16 For an analysis of these elections see Rani D.Shankardass, The First Congress Raj : Provincial Autonomy in Bombay, (New Delhi, 1982) pp.19-23.
- 17 Patel to Governor of Bombay, 6 February 1928, Bardoli File, Patel Papers, Ahmedabad.
- 18 Bardoli Satyagraha Patrika (Bardoli).
- 19 Patel addressing a meeting at Sanathar village in Bardoli taluka, Bombay Chronicle, 16 May 1928.
- 20 Mahadev Desai, Story of Bardoli (Ahmedabad, 1957) p.55.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Government of Bombay, Home Dept (Spl.Branch) 1928. Proposals to prosecute Vallabhbhai Patel and the policy of the Government regarding prosecution of Patel and leaders, in Shirin Mehta, op.cit. p.120.
- 23 See Shirin Mehta's account of interview with Kushalbhai, Morarji Patel, in Shirin Mehta, p.121.
- 24 Bombay Chronicle, 14 June 1928.
- 25 Shankardass, op.cit.

- 26 Notes on Communists, Vol,II, Munshi Papers, Cupboard 8 , File No.13, Bharatiya Vidya Bhayan, Bombay.
- 27 In the case of the Nagpur Flag Satyagraha in 1923, Governor Sly of the Central Provinces had been in a similar quandry.
- 28 Chunilal Mehta to Patel, 11 July 1928, Patel Papers.
- 29 Resolution 7259/24 of 18 October 1928, Home(Pol) , 5/17/1931.
- 30 R.S.Broomfield and R.M.Maxwell, Report of the Special Enquiry into the Second Revision Settlement of the Bardoli and Chorasi talukas (Bombay, 1929) p.77.
- 31 Eric R.Wolf, 'On Peasant Rebellions' ; in Teodor Shanin (ed.) Peasants and Peasant societies. Selected Readings (London, 1971) ; Hamza Alavi, 'Peasants and Revolution'; in A.R.Desai (ed.) Peasant struggles in India, Bombay, 1979. According to Wolf's definition middle peasantry 'has secure access to land of its own and cultivates it with family labour'. There is an element of autonomy suggested in the definition. Alavi's middle peasants are the 'independent peasant small holders' whose livelihood 'does not depend primarily on the exploitation of the labour of others'.
- 32 Hamza Alavi, op.cit. p.675.
- 33 Neil Charlesworth, 'The Middle Peasant Thesis and the roots of rural agitation in India, 1914-1947'. The Journal of Peasant Studies, Vol.7, 1979-80, pp.259-70.
- 34 Charlesworth, op.cit.
- 35 Quoted in D.N.Dhanagare, Agrarian movements and Gandhian Politics,(Agra,1975) p.55.
- 36 Ibid. p.62. See also Ghanshyam Shah,'Traditional Society and Political Mobilization : the experience of the Bardoli Satyagraha' (1920-28) , Contributions to Indian Sociology, New Series 8 (1974)
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