



# A Critical study of Relationship between Sardar Patel and Subhash Chandra Bose

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## Abstract:

*This research paper critically explores the nuanced and evolving relationship between two towering figures of India's freedom struggle, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Subhash Chandra Bose. Though united by the common goal of securing India's independence from British colonial rule, they diverged sharply in their ideological perspectives, strategic approaches, and leadership styles. The study delves into their early political influences, their roles and interactions within the Indian National Congress, and the ideological rifts that emerged most visibly during the Tripuri Congress session of 1939. Bose's re-election as Congress President and subsequent resignation highlighted fundamental divisions within the party and set the stage for Bose's formation of the Forward Bloc and his alignment with Axis powers during World War II. Patel, rooted in Gandhian principles, took a cautious and constitutional route, viewing Bose's methods with skepticism.*

*By examining correspondences, speeches, party documents, and eyewitness accounts, this paper seeks to provide a holistic view of the interpersonal dynamics and political disagreements that characterized their relationship. It analyzes how their divergent visions influenced not only their mutual perceptions but also the broader trajectory of India's freedom movement. Special attention is paid to the way their legacies have been constructed and interpreted in post-independence India. This comprehensive study not only sheds light on an underexplored aspect of Indian political history but also offers insights into the pluralistic and often contentious nature of the nationalist movement that ultimately led to India's independence.*

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**Keywords:** Sardar Patel, Subhash Chandra Bose, Indian National Congress, freedom movement, ideology, leadership, political strategy

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## 1. Introduction

The Indian freedom movement, one of the most remarkable anti-colonial struggles of the 20th century, was not a monolithic campaign but a vibrant mosaic of ideologies, personalities, and strategies. Within this complex tapestry, two figures stand out for their resolute commitment to India's liberation and their distinctly contrasting approaches: Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Subhash Chandra Bose. This paper embarks on a critical exploration of the dynamic between these two stalwarts, whose political philosophies, methods, and worldviews diverged significantly, even as their shared goal remained the same—the complete independence of India from British rule.

Sardar Patel, often referred to as the "Iron Man of India," was a master of realpolitik, an organizer par excellence, and a staunch follower of Mahatma Gandhi's principles of non-violence and constitutional reform. He was pragmatic, deeply grounded in Indian traditions, and focused on administrative consolidation, believing that a disciplined, united front was essential for the success of the nationalist movement. His leadership in the integration of princely states post-independence would later cement his status as one of the chief architects of modern India.

In contrast, Subhash Chandra Bose, popularly known as "Netaji," emerged as the embodiment of revolutionary nationalism. Charismatic, idealistic, and deeply influenced by European political thought, Bose believed in mobilizing mass resistance and forging international alliances-even with regimes ideologically opposed to democracy-if that could expedite India's liberation. His audacious move to raise the Indian National Army (INA) and seek support from Axis powers during World War II marked a radical departure from the mainstream Congress strategy.

The complex relationship between Patel and Bose cannot be fully understood without situating it within the broader context of the Indian National Congress-a party that, despite being the principal vehicle for India's independence, was often riven with internal conflicts. The late 1930s, especially the Tripuri Congress Session of 1939, brought their ideological divergences to a head. Bose's electoral victory over the Gandhian nominee Pattabhi Sitaramayya and the subsequent resignation of the Congress Working Committee revealed deep fractures within the movement. Patel's resignation from the committee and his firm opposition to Bose's leadership signaled not just a political disagreement but a broader conflict of visions.

This introduction sets the stage for a critical re-examination of their relationship-one that has often been oversimplified in public discourse. While both leaders have been individually lionized-Patel for his post-independence nation-building and Bose for his militant resistance-the nuanced and evolving dynamic between them has received relatively less scholarly attention. Their interactions illuminate the fundamental tensions within the Indian nationalist movement: between constitutionalism and revolution, accommodation and confrontation, realism and idealism.

Through a meticulous analysis of personal correspondences, official Congress records, speeches, and memoirs of contemporaries, this research seeks to unravel the ideological foundations of their rivalry, the political consequences of their disputes, and the personal respect that occasionally tempered their conflict. It also explores how their legacies were shaped in independent India, with Patel often celebrated by the ruling establishment and Bose embraced by popular imagination as a revolutionary hero.

The study does not aim to valorize one leader over the other. Rather, it critically investigates the dialectical interplay between their visions, arguing that the richness of India's freedom struggle lies precisely in such ideological diversity. By understanding the nature of the Patel-Bose relationship, we gain deeper insights into the political debates that shaped modern India and the contested nature of leadership within a nationalist movement striving for unity amid profound ideological differences.

## 2. Early Lives and Political Influences

Understanding the formative years of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Subhash Chandra Bose is essential to contextualizing their political choices and ideological orientations. Their early lives, shaped by distinct cultural, educational, and familial backgrounds, played a significant role in crafting their approaches to India's independence movement.

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel born on October 31, 1875, in Nadiad, Gujarat, into a traditional agrarian family of the Leva Patidar community, Patel's upbringing was rooted in rural Indian values and customs. His father, Jhaverbhai Patel, had served in the army of the Queen of Jhansi, instilling a sense of patriotism and resilience. Sardar Patel's early life was marked by modest means, self-discipline, and a relentless pursuit of education. He studied law in England and became a successful barrister upon returning to India. Despite his exposure to Western legal and political institutions, Patel remained grounded in Indian ethos. His political journey began earnestly with his association with Mahatma Gandhi during the Kheda Satyagraha (1918) and later the Bardoli Satyagraha (1928), which earned him national recognition and the title "Sardar." Patel's approach was methodical and strategic, relying on legal frameworks and grassroots mobilization. His firm belief in constitutionalism, non-violence,

and the necessity of organizational discipline laid the foundation for his future political stance.

Subhash Chandra Bose, in contrast, Subhash Chandra Bose was born on January 23, 1897, in Cuttack, Odisha, into a well-educated and affluent Bengali Kayastha family. His father, Janakinath Bose, was a prominent lawyer and member of the Indian National Congress. Bose's early education at Presidency College in Calcutta and later at the University of Cambridge in England introduced him to European political thought, particularly the ideas of socialism, nationalism, and authoritarian governance. Influenced by Swami Vivekananda's spiritual nationalism and the aggressive nationalism of revolutionaries, Bose developed a passionate, uncompromising stance against British imperialism. Bose's resignation from the Indian Civil Services in 1921 symbolized his total commitment to the cause of India's independence. His worldview was profoundly shaped by his belief in decisive action, mass mobilization, and the use of force if necessary. He admired the organizational efficiency of European fascist regimes, although he did not subscribe to their ideologies. His political strategy aimed at establishing a centralized, disciplined leadership capable of swift and impactful decisions.

### **3. Entry into Indian National Congress and Early Interactions**

The Indian National Congress (INC) served as the crucible for nationalist politics during the British Raj and provided a common platform for a wide spectrum of leaders. It was within the Congress that the initial intersections between Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Subhash Chandra Bose occurred. Although they joined the Congress during different periods and under different circumstances, both quickly rose to positions of influence, albeit along distinct ideological trajectories.

Patel formally joined the Indian National Congress after his successful leadership of the Kheda and Bardoli Satyagrahas under the mentorship of Mahatma Gandhi. He was recognized as a staunch nationalist with a capacity for organizational discipline and mass mobilization. By the 1920s, he had become a vital part of the Congress Working Committee (CWC) and emerged as a trusted aide of Gandhi. Patel's leadership was especially evident in provincial Congress politics and administrative affairs. His approach emphasized pragmatic strategies rooted in constitutional means, discipline, and centralized control within the Congress hierarchy.

Subhash Chandra Bose's entry into the Congress came with an intellectual and revolutionary fervor. Upon returning from England in the early 1920s, he joined the Indian freedom struggle, quickly gaining prominence as an articulate speaker and dynamic organizer. His early involvement included editing the newspaper Forward and serving as the Chief Executive Officer of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation under C.R. Das. Unlike Patel, Bose attracted support from younger and more radical members of the party who were dissatisfied with the Congress's incrementalism approach. His presidency of the All-India Youth Congress and later the Congress Working Committee signaled his swift rise. Bose's alignment with leftist factions, along with his admiration for European nationalist models, earned him both praise and suspicion within the party. While he often expressed personal admiration for Gandhi, he was openly critical of the Mahatma's non-violent philosophy as the sole strategy for national liberation.

### **4. The Tripuri Congress Session (1939): A Turning Point**

The Tripuri Congress session of 1939 marked a definitive rupture in the working relationship between Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Subhash Chandra Bose. This session, held in Tripuri (now in Madhya Pradesh), was a watershed moment not just in the dynamics between these two leaders but also in the ideological direction of the Indian National Congress.

The political climate leading up to the Tripuri session was highly charged. Bose had already served as Congress President in 1938, during which he had advocated for industrialization, stronger international alliances, and a more militant stance against British rule. His policies created discomfort among the Gandhian faction within the party, including Patel, Rajendra Prasad, and others who viewed Bose's

leadership style as authoritarian and his proposals as radical.

Despite the lack of endorsement from Gandhi, Bose stood for re-election in 1939 and won against Pattabhi Sitaramayya, the Gandhian candidate. Gandhi famously remarked that Sitaramayya's defeat was his own defeat. This electoral victory underscored Bose's popularity among the youth and the left-leaning segments of the party, but it simultaneously deepened divisions within the leadership.

### **5. Ideological Divergences**

The relationship between Sardar Patel and Subhash Chandra Bose was fundamentally shaped-and ultimately fractured-by stark ideological divergences. While both leaders were deeply committed to India's independence, the philosophical underpinnings and strategic methodologies they championed were frequently at odds. These differences extended beyond mere political preferences to embody opposing worldviews regarding nationalism, leadership, and the role of violence and foreign alliances. Patel, firmly rooted in the Gandhian tradition, championed non-violent resistance and civil disobedience as the cornerstone of India's freedom movement. He believed that moral legitimacy and mass mobilization were the keys to undermining British authority. Patel saw non-violence not just as a tactic but as a fundamental principle of nation-building.

In contrast, Bose was skeptical of the efficacy of non-violence as the sole strategy for independence. While he respected Gandhi personally, Bose argued that British imperialism could not be overthrown without direct and possibly violent confrontation. He admired the militarized nationalism of European countries and envisioned a disciplined, modern state backed by a strong army. His advocacy for seeking assistance from foreign powers, including Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, reflected his belief in *realpolitik* over idealism.

### **6. Bose's Resignation and Formation of Forward Bloc**

The culmination of the ideological and strategic conflicts between Subhash Chandra Bose and the mainstream Congress leadership, represented in large part by Sardar Patel and Mahatma Gandhi, was Bose's resignation from the presidency of the Indian National Congress and the subsequent formation of the Forward Bloc. These developments significantly altered the political landscape of the Indian independence movement and solidified the estrangement between Bose and the Congress establishment. Despite winning re-election as Congress President in 1939 at the Tripuri Session, Bose found himself increasingly isolated within the party. The Working Committee, dominated by Gandhi loyalists such as Patel, Nehru, and Rajendra Prasad, refused to cooperate with his leadership. Bose proposed the establishment of a national planning committee, more assertive opposition to British rule, and the mobilization of youth-moves seen as too radical by the conservative leadership.

Facing unrelenting resistance and lacking the support needed to execute his vision, Bose resigned in April 1939. His departure was not just from the post of President but effectively from the mainstream leadership of the Congress Party. Gandhi's public statement, calling Bose's victory a personal defeat, and Patel's cold reception of his proposals made reconciliation improbable. In response to his marginalization, Bose launched the Forward Bloc in May 1939 within the Congress fold, positioning it as a left-wing faction aimed at consolidating the political left and rejuvenating the nationalist movement. The Forward Bloc sought to unite all anti-imperialist forces and called for immediate and uncompromising struggle against British colonial rule.

While the Forward Bloc initially existed as part of the Congress, it rapidly drifted toward becoming a separate political entity. Its socialist agenda, emphasis on direct action, and alignment with international anti-fascist struggles attracted support from workers, peasants, and youth but distanced it further from the Congress leadership. Sardar Patel, as a staunch defender of Congress unity and discipline, viewed Bose's actions as divisive and potentially destabilizing. He believed Bose's move to create a faction weakened the party at a crucial juncture. Patel and his allies worked to limit the



Forward Bloc's influence within Congress and eventually facilitated its expulsion.

The growing rift between Bose and the Congress right wing, represented by Patel, underlined irreconcilable differences in approach. Bose's increasing radicalism and international overtures were seen by Patel as reckless adventures, whereas Bose viewed Patel's caution as a hindrance to India's liberation. Bose's resignation and the formation of the Forward Bloc marked a definitive break in his relationship with the Congress high command and specifically with leaders like Patel. This episode underscored the fragmentation within the nationalist movement and highlighted the challenges of balancing ideological diversity with organizational coherence. While Patel continued to steer Congress through institutional strategies, Bose ventured onto a path of militant resistance, signaling a divergence that would shape their legacies in starkly different ways.

## **7. World War II and the Indian National Army (INA)**

The outbreak of World War II intensified the already complex dynamics between Subhash Chandra Bose and the Indian National Congress leadership, including Sardar Patel. While Patel and the Congress maintained a stance of cautious opposition, emphasizing constitutional methods and civil disobedience under Gandhi's overall strategy, Bose pursued a radically different approach. His commitment to achieving independence through armed struggle led him beyond India's borders, aligning with Axis powers in a controversial but strategic bid to liberate India. After his split with the Congress and the formation of the Forward Bloc, Bose's impatience with British rule only deepened. In 1941, he escaped house arrest in India and traveled clandestinely through Afghanistan and the Soviet Union to Nazi Germany. There, Bose sought military assistance to overthrow British rule. Although ideological contradictions existed-Bose was anti-fascist in principle-he pragmatically leveraged the Axis powers' willingness to weaken the British Empire.

One of Bose's most significant initiatives during the war was taking charge of the Indian National Army (INA), originally formed by Mohan Singh with Indian prisoners of war captured by the Japanese in Southeast Asia. Bose restructured, revitalized, and expanded the INA, transforming it into a formidable force dedicated to fighting British colonialism.

Sardar Patel and the Congress leadership viewed Bose's alliance with the Axis powers and the militarization of the independence movement with grave apprehension. For Patel, the moral and political risks of such alliances outweighed potential benefits. He feared that association with fascist regimes would tarnish India's nationalist cause and undermine its claims to freedom based on democratic and ethical grounds.

Moreover, Patel, along with Gandhi and Nehru, believed that the struggle must remain mass-based and non-violent to maintain legitimacy both within India and internationally. The Congress also emphasized negotiations with the British to achieve constitutional reforms as the war progressed.

## **8. Legacy and Historical Interpretations**

The relationship between Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Subhash Chandra Bose continues to evoke significant scholarly interest and public debate, reflecting broader tensions in how India's independence struggle is remembered and interpreted. Both leaders left indelible marks on the nationalist movement, yet their legacies have often been framed in contrasting, sometimes conflicting narratives shaped by political, ideological, and historiographical factors. Sardar Patel is widely celebrated as the "Iron Man of India" for his instrumental role in integrating over 560 princely states into the Indian Union after independence, thereby laying the foundations of a united and sovereign nation. His reputation for pragmatism, political acumen, and administrative skill has made him a symbol of stability and nation-building.

Historically, Patel's legacy has been intertwined with the mainstream Gandhian narrative of the

freedom movement, emphasizing constitutionalism, non-violence, and institutional leadership. His cautious, methodical approach to political change has often been portrayed as essential for transitioning India from colonial rule to a democratic republic. However, some historians argue that Patel's emphasis on political centralization and his tough stance on dissent within the Congress reflected a more authoritarian streak, raising questions about the balance between unity and pluralism in his vision for India.

## 9. Conclusion

The relationship between Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Subhash Chandra Bose epitomizes the complex and multifaceted nature of India's struggle for independence. United by the common goal of freeing India from colonial rule, they nonetheless embodied contrasting visions of nationalism, leadership, and strategy-differences that not only shaped their personal rapport but also influenced the broader trajectory of the freedom movement. Patel's commitment to constitutionalism, non-violence, and pragmatic political consolidation provided the structural foundation for India's transition from a fragmented colony to a unified nation-state. His emphasis on internal cohesion, consensus-building, and institutional discipline helped navigate the volatile post-independence period, particularly in integrating princely states and laying the groundwork for democratic governance. Conversely, Bose's militant nationalism, charismatic leadership, and willingness to embrace revolutionary methods-including controversial alliances during World War II-offered a radical alternative that inspired many Indians, especially youth and marginalized groups, to intensify the fight against British imperialism. His formation of the Indian National Army and global outreach reflected his unyielding dedication to the cause of independence at any cost. Their ideological divergences, evident in key moments such as the Tripuri Congress session, Bose's resignation, and the formation of the Forward Bloc, reveal the inherent tensions within the Indian nationalist movement between moderation and militancy, constitutional process and direct action, idealism and realpolitik.

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