



Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel – Architect of United India

Dr. Ms. S.M. Vimala

Assistant Professor in History

St. Mary's College (Autonomous), Thoothukudi

Introduction

Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel was a great organiser and administrator. He was the captain of the nationalist forces in India's struggle for freedom. He was prepared to sacrifice everything for the sake of his country.¹ He was the Chairman of most of the important Committees appointed by the Constituent Assembly, e.g., Committee on Fundamental Rights, Committee on Minorities, States Committee etc. He was responsible for many of the unanimous decisions of the Constituent Assembly. His contribution was particularly great with regard to the problem of the States and the minorities.² One of the positive gains from the transfer of power was the integration of the Indian States with British India and the consolidation of the Indian Territory in India after partition. Now we may deal with the career and work of *Sardar* Vallabh Bhai Patel who was primarily responsible for the achievement.³

Career of Sardar Patel

Vallabh Bhai Patel (1875-1950) was born on 31st October, 1875 at Nadiad, a small town near Surat in a Kshatriya family. His father was Jhaveri Bhai Patel and mother Ilat Bhai.⁴ His father fought against the British in the Mutiny of 1857 as a soldier in the army of Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi. As a child, Vallabh Bhai went to a village school, but he was primarily a self-taught man. He helped his father in the fields till he was seventeen. Thereafter he joined a school a Petlad away from home and studied English. At the age of twenty-two, he passed the Matriculation Examination and later qualified himself for the District Pleaders Examination. He got a law degree and by 1900 he started his practice as a lawyer at Godhra in Gujarat. He was more interested in criminal cases than in civil.⁵ He became a successful lawyer, earned good money and then went to England in 1910. He got the degree of Bar-at-law and returned to India in 1913. He started his practice at Ahmedabad and became a reputed lawyer.



Attraction towards Politics

When Mahatma Gandhi established the Sabarmathi *Ashram* and started his political activities there, Vallabh Bhai Patel was attracted towards Indian politics. Then after his success at Champaran, Gandhi was called for help by the peasants at Khera, Patel offered his services to organise the no-tax campaign by the peasants there. He succeeded in getting some relief for the peasants at Khera.⁶ In 1917, he came under the influence of Gandhi and plunged into active politics after renouncing his lucrative practice. In the same year he was elected as member of the Ahmedabad Municipality where he carried on a relentless fight against the British bureaucracy.⁷ In 1921, when the Indian National Congress held its annual session at Ahmedabad, Patel was elected as the Chairman of the Reception Committee. In the days of the emergence of the Swaraj party, Vallabh Bhai Patel was on the side of the No-changers while his brother Vithalbai was a prominent Swarajist.⁸ In 1923, he was put in charge of the Nagpur Flag Satyagraha.⁹ In 1924, he was elected as the President of the Ahmedabad Municipal Board and served the people well.¹⁰ As President he did a commendable job in improving civic amenities.

Protege of Gandhi

Sardar Patel was a true disciple of Gandhi. His best quality was that he was a good organiser. Whenever Gandhi plunged himself into any movement and organisational work of the Congress, he always entrusted its organisational responsibility to *Sardar* Patel. When the Congress decided to form the ministries in 1937 in the provinces, *Sardar* Patel was entrusted with the responsibility of looking after their functioning. In that capacity whenever he found lapses on the part of any Congress leader or minister, he did not hesitate to take disciplinary action against him. Patel, thus, was a bold and strict disciplinarian who feared none in taking just steps even against his party members. This quality of *Sardar* Patel paid him good dividends when he became the Home Minister in Independent India. His greatest achievement in that capacity was the accession of more than five hundred native states to the Indian Union. It was a great success of his diplomacy as well as of his strong will. That is why he is called the 'Iron Man' of India.¹¹

Bardoli Satyagraha

In 1928, Patel captured the attention of all India by organising the no-tax campaign of the peasants of Bardoli. He went from village to village exhorting the peasants



not to pay the enhanced tax. “Like Tantiya Tope, the ubiquitous general of the 1857 revolt, Vallabh Bhai was to be seen everywhere raising the morale of the peasants.”¹² In 1928, he led the Bardoli *Satyagraha* and brought it to a successful conclusion. The peasants at Bardoli were so much impressed by his organising skills; Gandhi conferred on him the title *Sardar* which was prefixed to his name for all times.¹³ The *Sardar* of Bardoli eventually blossomed into the *Sardar* of India.

President of AICC and Chairman of Parliamentary Sub-Committee INC

In 1931, he was elected the President of the All-India Congress Committee at Karachi session and he held the position this post till 1934. He was convicted for participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement and spent 15 months from January 1932 to May 1933 in the Yervada jail.¹⁴ He was the Chairman of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee of the Indian National Congress from 1935 to 1940. His actual role in that position has been described in these words: “He was the Fuehrer of the Congress Parliamentary regime, both de jure and de facto. He wielded immense power and directed solo, the knotty administration of his immense jurisdiction. The ministers danced to his tune and quaked at his name.” *Sardar* Patel was not prepared to tolerate indiscipline from any quarter.¹⁵

Apprehend of Patel

In 1941, he was arrested for participation in the Individual Satyagraha Movement, but released soon on grounds of health. In August 1942, on the eve of the Quit India Movement, Patel was arrested along with other prominent leaders and lodged in the Ahmadnagar Fort till 1946. On his release he played a leading part in the negotiations leading to the formation of the Interim Government and transfer of power.

Deputy Prime Minister

Patel became the member in charge of the Home Portfolio in the Interim Government (1946-47) and later Deputy Prime Minister when the first Government of Free India assumed office in August 1947. *Sardar* continued to be in charge of the Home Portfolio. This was the arduous task of quelling the communal disturbances which followed the partition. But his greatest work was done in regard to the integration of the princely states in the new Indian Union. He abolished the old Political Department and set up a States Department under his direct charge and by a policy of tact persuasion and threats negotiated even before 12th August, 1947 the merger of the majority of States with the exception of three



(Hyderabad, Junagadh and Kashmir) into the Indian Union.¹⁶ He played an important part in the negotiations between the British Government and the Indian leaders in 1946 and 1947. After 3rd June Plan of 1947, a very serious situation was created. *Sardar* Patel was in charge of law and order and the Muslim League was determined not to maintain it. It was a Herculean task on the part of *Sardar* Patel to maintain law and order in the country.

Even before the independence of India on 15th August, 1947, *Sardar* Patel created the States ministry and with the help of V.P. Menon and Lord Mountbatten, *Sardar* Patel was able to secure the accession of a very large number of Indian States into the Indian dominion. Hence, Patel has been described as the architect of India's unity.¹⁷ He is also remembered as the "patron saint of India's Civil Servants" for having established the modern all-India services system. He, more than anyone else in post-Independence India, realised the crucial role that civil services play in administering a country, in not merely maintaining law and order, but running the institutions that provide the binding cement to a society. The present day all-India Administrative Services owe their origin to the man's sagacity and thus he is regarded as "Father of Modern All India Services."¹⁸

Accession of Indian States to Indian Union

In July 1947, States Ministry was set up in Delhi under the stewardship of *Sardar* Vallabh Bhai Patel. V. P. Menon acted as Secretary of this important department. As a result of the combined efforts of Patel and Menon coupled with an appeal made by Lord Mountbatten to Indian rulers on 15th August, 1947, all other States excepting Kashmir, Junagadh and Hyderabad agreed to join the Union. The States transferred the three vital subjects of external affairs, defence and transportation and communication to the Union.¹⁹

Accession of Junagadh

Junagadh was the premier State in the group of Kathiawar States. It lay in the south-west of Kathiawar.²⁰ This Hindu majority State was under a Muslim Nawab. With a lapse of paramountcy, the Nawab of Junagadh declared the accession of the State to Pakistan. The people of the State launched satyagraha. The Indian forces also marched into the State. The Nawab fled to Pakistan in October 1947. A plebiscite held in 1948 gave the verdict of the people in favour of Indian Union. The formalities of accession were completed and it became a part of Indian Union.



Accession of Hyderabad State

The Nizam of Hyderabad, encouraged by Pakistani agents, also refused to accede to India. The people of the State started agitation and became victim of Nizam's atrocities. The Nizam instigated a few communal organisations like Razakars to harass the Hindus. He began to dream of becoming a sovereign. He counted on the British support through the good offices of Pakistan. He appealed to American President and UNO to guarantee the security of his State. The Razakar organisation under Qasim Rizvi established a reign of terror in the State. The Razakars even raided the neighbouring Indian territories. Union Government could not tolerate such lawlessness. It launched Police Action on 13th September, 1948, against Hyderabad. Five days later the Indian forces entered the State triumphantly.²¹ The Nizam surrendered to the Commander of the Indian forces on 18th September, 1948. Rizvi was arrested and Razakars were disbanded and rounded up. The administration was cleared up and able administrators from India were put in charge of administration. The Nizam withdrew his case from the UNO and²² submitted tamely to the language of force and the State agreed to join the Indian Union.

Accession of Kashmir

Another problem that confronted the newly born Indian Union was that of Kashmir. Its borders touch both India and Pakistan. Both looked greedily at this Himalayan State. Jinnah was sorely annoyed at the British strategy which had deprived Pakistan of Kashmir. Maharaja of Kashmir committed another blunder by not signifying immediate accession to Indian Union. He had to pay by the nose for his mistake. Jinnah planned to grab Kashmir by force. On 22nd October, 1947, he deployed Pakistani army for an attack on the green valley of Srinagar. Pakistani forces were accompanied by Afridi raiders. The ruthless raiders did not encounter much resistance from the State forces. They captured the Power House at Mahura which supplied electricity to Srinagar. Their next target was Srinagar itself.

The Maharaja of Kashmir foresaw the gravity of the danger and implored the Government of India for immediate military help. He also signed the Instrument of Accession promptly. The Indian Government accepted to defend the valley on the condition that the future of Kashmir shall be decided by plebiscite. It is worth nothing that Lord Mountbatten was reluctant to airlift Indian troops to Srinagar, but Gandhiji and Nehru were strongly in favour of defending Srinagar against the raiders. The Indian forces went into action and



recovered a considerable part of territory from the illegal occupation of Pakistan forces. Jinnah was so much enraged with the retreat of the raiders that he ordered the Commander-in-Chief of Pakistan to move regular troops into Kashmir. But by the timely mediation of Auchinlek, then in charge of the combined forces of India and Pakistan, Jinnah's order was cancelled. Jinnah, however, did not become inactive. He continued slandering India on various counts.

The Indian Government, on the advice of Mountbatten, submitted the Kashmir issue for arbitration to the Security Council of UNO. Ceasefire was enforced on 1st January, 1949. The UNO sent Graham and Dixon to mediate but both failed to evolve a compromise formula. The UNO then directed Pakistan to withdraw its forces from the occupied Kashmir as a prelude to hold plebiscite. But because of non-compliance by Pakistan the issue remained hanging fire. Many times since the raid, the State of Kashmir has gone to polls and a responsible Government has been functioning in the State for all these years. The Constituent Assembly of Kashmir has also ratified the accession of Kashmir to Indian Union and the State of Jammu and Kashmir has now become an integral part of the Union, although it enjoys a status distinct from other States of the Union.

Merger and Integration of States

The States had agreed to transfer external affairs, defence and transportation and communication to the Union Government, but this was not sufficient. It was felt necessary that the States should recognise the Indian Constitution. Moreover, there was the need to make certain territorial adjustments. Thanks to the ingenuity of *Sardar* Patel who induced the States to accept the Indian Constitution and agree to the formation of bigger administrative units either by the merger of the States with the adjoining Provinces or by forming unions of several neighbouring States. Thus the Union of the States like Saurashtra, Patiala and East Punjab States Union came into existence. Big States like Mysore, Hyderabad and Kashmir were left intact to become members of the Union separately. The States like Bhopal, Manipur and Tripura, which did not accept the proposal of merging themselves with the neighbouring Provinces were taken under direct control of the Union Government.

Thus, four types of States came into existence after Independence. (The new Constitution of India discontinued the use of the word Province and called the constituent units of the Union as States.) Part A States included former British Indian



Provinces of Assam, Bihar, Bombay, Madhya Pradesh, Madras, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Punjab. Later on Andhra was also added to the list of Part A States. Part B States included Hyderabad, Jammu and Kashmir, Madhya Bharat, Mysore, Patiala and East Punjab States Union, Rajasthan, Saurashtra and Travancore-Cochin. Jammu and Kashmir, although included in Part B States was placed on a special footing. Part C States included Ajmer, Bhopal, Coorg, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Kutch, Vindhya Pradesh, Manipur and Tripura. Andaman and Nicobar Islands were placed in Part D States.

Importance of Integration

Thus a miracle was performed in India by welding of big and small, democratic and autocratic units into a compact Union. The integration of the States is the greatest historical event of the country. This foiled the designs of the outgoing British rulers to leave the country in a state of mess. *Sardar* Vallabh Bhai Patel, the master-builder, commented with justifiable pride: “The great ideal of geographical, political and economic unification of India, an ideal which for centuries remained a distant dream, after the advent of Indian Independence, had been consummated by the policy of integration.” Writing about the integration of States, Michael Brecher observes, “*The magnitude of the operation is brought into bold relief by the vital statistics, within a year an area of almost half a million square miles, with a population of almost ninety million, was incorporated into the Indian Union. It was a bloodless revolution without parallel in this century, comparable with the unification of Germany and Italy by Bismarck and Cavour respectively.*”²³

Statue of Unity

The then Hon’ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 31st October, 2018 on Wednesday²⁴ inaugurated a 182 metre statue of *Sardar* Vallabh Bhai Patel overlooking the Narmada river in Gujarat as a tribute to the country’s ‘Iron Man’.²⁵ Foundation stone was laid in October 2013 by then Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi, now the then Hon’ble Prime Minister.²⁶ Dedicating the ‘Statue of Unity’ to the nation on *Sardar* Patel’s 143rd birth anniversary, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said: “It is a historic and inspiring occasion for all Indians. I am fortunate to dedicate this statue of *Sardar* Saheb to the nation.”²⁷ Gujarat Governor O. P. Kohli, Chief Minister Vijay Rupani and BJP chief Amit Shah were present at the unveiling of the ‘Statue of Unity’. He described the Statue of Unity as a symbol of the country’s engineering and technical capabilities.²⁸



The Prime Minister recalled the Congress leader's contribution in unifying the country after independence as he brought more than five hundred princely states on a common platform to join the Union of India.²⁹ "Without *Sardar*, we would not have imagined a railway line from Kashmir to Kanyakumari," Prime Minister Modi said, recalling the strategic efforts made by the first Home Minister of India in bringing Junagadh in Gujarat and Hyderabad in South India both of which were then controlled by Muslim rulers into the Union of India. The statue, described as the world's tallest given that it exceeds the height of China's Spring Temple Buddha by 29 metres, was built by Indian construction Major Larsen and Toubro (L&T) in 33 months.³⁰

The Statue of Unity, designed by Padma Bhushan winning sculptor Ram V. Suthar, depicts *Sardar* Vallabh Bhai Patel, India's first Home Minister and architect of united India, wearing a traditional dhoti and shawl, facing Sardar Sarovar Dam in Gujarat's Narmada district. A viewing gallery has been created at a height of 135 metres inside the statue to enable tourists to have a view of the dam and nearby mountain ranges.³¹ There is also large audio-visual exhibition gallery, spread across 4647 sq.mt area with an automated ramp. A museum and a memorial are constructed at the base showcasing artefacts and documents from the life of *Sardar* Vallabh Bhai Patel.³²

Conclusion

Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel, the Home and States Minister as well as the Deputy Prime Minister of India passed away at Bombay on 15th December, 1950. He was called the 'Iron Man of India' because of his strong will-power and by his sagacity had united all the Indian States with the Indian Union.³³ Lord Mountbatten who has described Patel as a man of "clear vision" with "a strong character and determination" has paid him the following tribute in this regard. "There is no doubt that the high-minded statesmanship which Vallabh Bhai Patel displayed throughout these negotiations made it possible to find a solution". In the words of Nehru, "History will record his work in many pages and will call him the consolidator of New India".

Patel's achievement has been compared to that of Bismarck who in 1871 unified Germany and established a powerful German nation. In the words of Tahmankar, one of the biographers of Patel, "The parallel between Bismarck's work in Germany and Patel's in India is striking, but the task in India was infinitely more difficult and complex. Whereas



Bismarck had to cajole and coerce some dozen princes, Patel had to deal with more than five hundred, many of whom were rich and powerful and the majority reluctant to give up their ancestral estates, great privileges and ruling powers.”³⁴

Yet, it has been concluded about *Sardar* Patel that he was an honest, tactful and successful political leader as well as an administrator and because of his qualities of head and heart he rightly deserved the title of *Sardar* as well as that of the “Iron Man of India”.³⁵ He knows his own mind, and most correctly senses the working of the Indian mind. He can therefore isolate any Indian problem, however knotty or complicated, and provide a solution. This was demonstrated in his achievement of the unification of Indian States.³⁶ Rajendra Prasad paid the following tribute to Patel on 23rd April, 1958: “His life-long work shall ever remain a shining example of the services one would undertake in the service of the country.”³⁷ For his undaunted support during the freedom struggle and for a United India, he was awarded the ‘Bharat Ratna’ in the year 1991.³⁸

End Notes

¹ Vidya Dhar Mahajan, *Constitutional History of India and the Nationalist Movement*, S. Chand & Company Ltd., New Delhi, 1982, p.340.

² *Ibid.*, p.8.

³ Sreedhara Menon, A., *Modern India Since 1707 And History Of The Freedom Movement*, S. Viswanathan (Printers & Publishers), Pvt., Ltd., Madras, 1989, p.524.

⁴ Vidyasri, *Great Indians-Who Made History*, Aruna Publications, Chennai, 2010, p.37.

⁵ Sreedhara Menon, A., *op.cit.*, p.524.

⁶ Sharma, L.P., *Indian National Movement*, Lakshmi Narain Agarwal, Educational Publishers, Agra, 1996, pp.228-229.

⁷ Sreedhara Menon, A., *op.cit.*, p.524.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.525.

⁹ Vidya Dhar Mahajan, *op.cit.*, p.339.

¹⁰ Sharma, L.P., *op.cit.*, p.228.

¹¹ Sharma, L.P., *op.cit.*, pp.228-229.

¹² Sreedhara Menon, A., *op.cit.*, p.525.

¹³ Sharma, L.P., *op.cit.*, p.228.

¹⁴ Sreedhara Menon, A., *op.cit.*, p.525.

¹⁵ Vidya Dhar Mahajan, *op.cit.*, p.339.

¹⁶ Sreedhara Menon, A., *op.cit.*, pp.525-526.

¹⁷ Vidya Dhar Mahajan, *op.cit.*, p.340.

¹⁸ *Varamalar Supplement Issue of Dinamalar*, Tirunelveli, 18.11.2018, p.28.

¹⁹ Agarwal, R.C., *Constitutional Development Of India And National Movement (History of Freedom Movement) (Including the Comparative Study of the Modern Indian Constitution and Administration)*, S. Chand & Company Ltd., New Delhi, 1981, p.219.

²⁰ Menon, V.P., *Integration of the Indian States*, Orient Longman Ltd., Madras, 1956, p.124.

²¹ Agarwal, R.C., *op.cit.*, pp.219-220.

²² Gomathinayagam, *Studies in Modern Constitutions*, Pavai Publications, Madras, p.430.

²³ Agarwal, R.C., *op.cit.*, pp.220-221.



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²⁵ *The Hindu*, Delhi, 01.11.2018.
²⁶ *The Hindu, Business Line*, 31.10.2018.
²⁷ *The Hindu, op.cit.*, 01.11.2018.
²⁸ *The Hindu, Business Line, op.cit.*, 31.10.2018.
²⁹ Siruvarmalar Supplement Issue of Dinamalar, Tirunelveli, 02.11.2018, p.6.
³⁰ *The Hindu, op.cit.*, 01.11.2018.
³¹ Siruvarmani Supplement to Dinamani, Chennai, 17.11.2018, p.7.
³² *The Hindu, Business Line, op.cit.*, 31.10.2018.
³³ *Ibid.*, p.171.
³⁴ *Sreedhara Menon, A., op.cit.*, p.526.
³⁵ *Sharma, L.P., op.cit.*, p.229.
³⁶ Iyengar, A.S., Introduction by Krishna Ahojja Patel, *Role of Press and Indian Freedom Struggle (All through the Gandhian Era)*, A.P.H. Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, 2001, p.291.
³⁷ *Vidya Dhar Mahajan, op.cit.*, p.340.
³⁸ *Vidyasri, op.cit.*, p.39.