

“A study on Contributions of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel in consolidating Historical Elements in New India after independence”

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Abstract

The dawn on India's freedom was full of political and socio-economic complexities. The leaders of the country found themselves in an atmosphere surcharged with multifarious and divergent criticalities. These had, if not solved quickly, would have led to further complications. Vexed with various problems of varied dimensions, the leaders had to find out ways and means to face the reality of the situation and arrive at a solution beneficial to the country. The problems of minorities, though at the first instance seemed of minor nature, came out to be crucial. And, Sardar Patel with his extraordinary caliber wisdom and capacity, could arrive at an acceptable solution to restore confidence in them; thereby leading them towards the common goal of national solidarity. Simultaneously, a more crucial problem arose due to the British policy towards more than five hundred and odd Princely States, their exact position after the departure of the British was not clearly defined. The immediate fallout of the freedom of the country was the creation of two distinct nations, namely, India and Pakistan. The native princes were allowed to join either of the two proposed countries according to their choice. A country, invested with such a large number of Free states, could not have dreamt of political consolidation in such an environment. It was quite likely that those princes could have formed a third force and contributed towards its disintegration rather than its further consolidation. Faced with such a critical and complex situation, the mantle of finding out a solution with a view to avoid the disintegration the Congress party had cultivated political awakening and 213 democratic thinking in the minds of individuals of all sections of the society of the country fell upon Sardar Patel. Sardar's Patel task was to create political consciousness in the minds of the people of those states and simultaneously to persuade their princes to merge with the union of India so as to form a strong united India after the departure of the British. By tactful method, by promising privy purses, through his friendly advice, and sometimes by stern and strong administrative measures, he could succeed in bringing all the rulers together merging their states into the Indian union without any bloodshed. The final task of nation building thus found its success in the competent and strong hands of Sardar Patel.

Key word: Republic of India, princely states, Indian Independence Act of 1947, Indian army, integration

Introduction

India is a land of diversities linguistic, ethnic, cultural, and religious as well as many others. This has led to the formation of a large number of small states. As observed by Gurmukh Nihal Singh: “Nature has made India a more or less self-sufficient unit, but historical accidents have divided her into a large number of separate political entities”. Even in the earlier stages of civilization there had never been an occasion when the whole country had completely been under a single government. The political integration of the country was never possible. Moreover, the concept of a nation also did not exist. India, instead of being a nation, was divided into a number of small states.

The problem of the Indian states assumed a more serious dimension particularly during the British rule. The states which existed during the earlier period, assumed a different status under the colonial government. The beginning of the British domination in India was, basically, through a series of treaties with the various rulers of the country from time to time. Even after deploying the armed forces, the British Government was not fully successful in extending its control to the entire country; it had to enter into treaties with powerful native kings. At the beginning of the British rule, the various native states could not come together for the purpose of political freedom. To start with, the East India Company, which was a trading company, entered into treaties with the native rulers from 1757 upto Lord Minto's Governor-Generalship in 1813. The company wanted a footing in India. At the time of Wellesley, it was decided that the British should take up permanently political power in India; also the princes should be allowed to retain their personal insignia of sovereignty by surrendering their political independence.

Till the breaking out of the First World War, nationalism in India did not grow to such an extent as to pose a threat to the British rule. There was no upsurge of mass consciousness for the establishment of a responsible Government in the country. The great war of 1914-1919 acted as a catalyst towards accelerating the temper of the Indian nationalism. The doctrine of paramountcy was a peculiar strategy evolved by the British for governing the relations with the states. As observed by Shankar. “Paramountcy meant that the States accepted Suzerainty of the British government and the government of India, to carry out directions given to them by the Government of India. It was convenient to the British government to refuse to define paramountcy”. Paramountcy was a special system concerning the relationship of the states with the British government. The states had to cooperate with the government on matters of all-India policies in respect of railways, post and telegraphs, and defense. The crown representatives sometimes used to station an army, construct railways on a part of the states, and used to take the administrative control of the area. The Cabinet Mission Plan of 16th May, 1946 gave a clear picture of the transfer of power and the position of the native states in the new set up of free India. The future of the country depended much on the decision of the Princes regarding their participation in the new constitution and the merging of their princely states with the Indian Union. This event formed the cornerstone of Patel's popularity in the post-independence era. Even today he is remembered as the man who united India. He is, in this regard, compared to Otto von Bismarck of Germany, who did the same thing in the 1860s. Under the plan of 3 June, more than 562 princely states were given the option of joining either India or Pakistan, or choosing independence.

Objective

Present paper aims to examine the central role played by sardar Patel in

- a. Keeping India united aftermath of partition
- b. Integrating India with treaty of accession

Patel's political sagacity

The rulers of the princely states were not uniformly enthusiastic about integrating their domains into independent India. Some, such as the rulers of Bikaner and Jawhar, were motivated to join India out of ideological and patriotic considerations, but others insisted that they had the right to join either India or Pakistan, to remain independent, or form a union of their own. Bhopal, Travancore and Hyderabad announced that they did not intend to join either dominion. Hyderabad went as far as to appoint trade representatives in European countries and commencing negotiations with the Portuguese to lease or buy Goa to give it access to the sea, and Travancore pointed to the strategic importance to western countries of its thorium reserves while asking for recognition. Some states proposed a subcontinent-wide confederation of princely states, as a third entity in addition to India and Pakistan. Bhopal attempted to build an alliance between the princely states and the Muslim League to counter the pressure being put on rulers by the Congress.

Indian nationalists and large segments of the public feared that if these states did not accede, most of the people and territory would be fragmented. The Congress as well as senior British officials considered Patel the best man for the task of achieving unification of the princely states with the Indian dominion. Gandhi had said to Patel, "[T]he problem of the States is so difficult that you alone can solve it".[57] Patel considered a statesman of integrity with the practical acumen and resolve to accomplish a monumental task. He asked V. P. Menon, a senior civil servant with whom he had worked on the partition of India, to become his right-hand man as chief secretary of the States Ministry. On 6 May 1947, Patel began lobbying the princes, attempting to make them receptive towards dialogue with the future government and forestall potential conflicts. Patel used social meetings and unofficial surroundings to engage most of the monarchs, inviting them to lunch and tea at his home in Delhi. At these meetings, Patel explained that there was no inherent conflict between the Congress and the princely order. Patel invoked the patriotism of India's monarchs, asking them to join in the independence of their nation and act as responsible rulers who cared about the future of their people. He persuaded the princes of 565 states of the impossibility of independence from the Indian republic, especially in the presence of growing opposition from their subjects.

Many princes were also pressured by popular sentiment favouring integration with India, which meant their plans for independence had little support from their subjects. The Maharaja of Travancore, for example, definitively abandoned his plans for independence after the attempted assassination of his dewan, Sir C. P. Ramaswami Iyer. In a few states, the chief ministers or dewans played a significant role in convincing the princes to accede to India. The key factors that led the states to accept integration into India were, however, the efforts of Lord Mountbatten,

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and V. P. Menon. The latter two were respectively the political and administrative heads of the States Department, which was in charge of relations with the princely states.

Patel proposed favourable terms for the merger, including the creation of privy purses for the rulers' descendants. While encouraging the rulers to act out of patriotism, Patel did not rule out force. Stressing that the princes would need to accede to India in good faith, he set a deadline of 15 August 1947 for them to sign the instrument of accession document. All but three of the states willingly merged into the Indian union; only Jammu and Kashmir, Junagadh, and Hyderabad did not fall into his basket

By far the most significant factor that led to the princes' decision to accede to India was the policy of the Congress and, in particular, of Patel and Menon. The Congress' stated position was that the princely states were not sovereign entities, and as such could not opt to be independent notwithstanding the end of paramountcy. The princely states must therefore accede to either India or Pakistan. In July 1946, Nehru pointedly observed that no princely state could prevail militarily against the army of independent India. In January 1947, he said that independent India would not accept the divine right of kings, and in May 1947, he declared that any princely state which refused to join the Constituent Assembly would be treated as an enemy state. Other Congress leaders, such as C. Rajagopalachari, argued that as paramountcy "came into being as a fact and not by agreement", it would necessarily pass to the government of independent India, as the successor of the British.

Tenacity and diplomatic ingenuity

Patel and Menon, who were charged with the actual job of negotiating with the princes, took a more conciliatory approach than Nehru. The official policy statement of the Government of India made by Patel on 5 July 1947 made no threats. Instead, it emphasised the unity of India and the common interests of the princes and independent India, reassured them about the Congress' intentions, and invited them to join independent India "to make laws sitting together as friends than to make treaties as aliens". He reiterated that the States Department would not attempt to establish a relationship of domination over the princely states. Unlike the Political Department of the British Government, it would not be an instrument of paramountcy, but a medium whereby business could be conducted between the states and India as equals.

Instruments of accession

Patel and Menon backed up their diplomatic efforts by producing treaties that were designed to be attractive to rulers of princely states. Two key documents were produced. The first was the Standstill Agreement, which confirmed the continuance of the pre-existing agreements and administrative practices. The second was the Instrument of Accession, by which the ruler of the princely state in question agreed to the accession of his kingdom to independent India, granting the latter control over specified subject matters. The nature of the subject matters varied depending on the acceding state. The states which had internal autonomy under the British signed

an Instrument of Accession which only ceded three subjects to the government of India—defence, external affairs, and communications, each defined in accordance with List 1 to Schedule VII of the Government of India Act 1935. Rulers of states which were in effect estates or talukas, where substantial administrative powers were exercised by the Crown, signed a different Instrument of Accession, which vested all residuary powers and jurisdiction in the Government of India. Rulers of states which had an intermediate status signed a third type of Instrument, which preserved the degree of power they had under the British.

The Instruments of Accession implemented a number of other safeguards. Clause 7 provided that the princes would not be bound to the Indian constitution as and when it was drafted. Clause 8 guaranteed their autonomy in all areas that were not ceded to the Government of India. This was supplemented by a number of promises. Rulers who agreed to accede would receive guarantees that their extra-territorial rights, such as immunity from prosecution in Indian courts and exemption from customs duty, would be protected, that they would be allowed to democratise slowly, that none of the eighteen major states would be forced to merge, and that they would remain eligible for British honours and decorations. In discussions, Lord Mountbatten reinforced the statements of Patel and Menon by emphasising that the documents gave the princes all the "practical independence" they needed. Mountbatten, Patel and Menon also sought to give princes the impression that if they did not accept the terms put to them then, they might subsequently need to accede on substantially less favourable terms. The Standstill Agreement was also used as a negotiating tool, as the States Department categorically ruled out signing a Standstill Agreement with princely states that did not sign an Instrument of Accession.

Accession process

The limited scope of the Instruments of Accession and the promise of a wide-ranging autonomy and the other guarantees they offered, gave sufficient comfort to many rulers, who saw this as the best deal they could strike given the lack of support from the British, and popular internal pressures. Between May 1947 and the transfer of power on 15 August 1947, the vast majority of states signed Instruments of Accession. A few, however, held out. Some simply delayed signing the Instrument of Accession. Piploda, a small state in central India, did not accede until March 1948. The biggest problems, however, arose with a few border states, such as Jodhpur, which tried to negotiate better deals with Pakistan, with Junagadh, which actually did accede to Pakistan, and with Hyderabad and Kashmir, which declared that they intended to remain independent.

Border states

The ruler of Jodhpur, Hanwant Singh, was antipathetic to the Congress, and did not see much future in India for him or the lifestyle he wished to lead. Along with the ruler of Jaisalmer, he entered into negotiations with Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who was the designated head of state for Pakistan. Jinnah was keen to attract some of the larger border states, hoping thereby to attract other Rajput states to Pakistan and compensate for the loss of half of Bengal and Punjab. He offered to permit Jodhpur and Jaisalmer to accede to Pakistan on any terms they chose, giving their rulers blank sheets of paper and asking them to write down their terms, which he would sign. Jaisalmer refused, arguing that it would be difficult for him to side with Muslims against Hindus in the event of communal problems. Hanwant Singh came close to signing. However, the atmosphere in Jodhpur was in general hostile to accession to Pakistan. Mountbatten also pointed out that the accession of a predominantly Hindu state to Pakistan would violate the principle of the two-nation theory on which Partition was based, and was likely to cause communal violence in the State. Hanwant Singh was persuaded by these arguments, and somewhat reluctantly agreed to accede to India.

Junagadh

Although the states were in theory free to choose whether they wished to accede to India or Pakistan, Mountbatten had pointed out that "geographic compulsions" meant that most of them must choose India. In effect, he took the position that only the states that shared a border with Pakistan could choose to accede to it.

The Nawab of Junagadh, a princely state located on the south-western end of Gujarat and having no common border with Pakistan, chose to accede to Pakistan ignoring Mountbatten's views, arguing that it could be reached from Pakistan by sea. The rulers of two states that were subject to the suzerainty of Junagadh—Mangrol and Babariawad—reacted to this by declaring their independence from Junagadh and acceding to India. In response, the Nawab of Junagadh militarily occupied the states. The rulers of neighbouring states reacted angrily, sending their troops to the Junagadh frontier and appealed to the Government of India for assistance. A group of Junagadhi people, led by Samaldas Gandhi, formed a government-in-exile, the Aarzi Hukumat ("temporary government").

India believed that if Junagadh was permitted to go to Pakistan, the communal tension already simmering in Gujarat would worsen, and refused to accept the accession. The government pointed out that the state was 80% Hindu, and called for a plebiscite to decide the question of accession. Simultaneously, they cut off supplies of fuel and coal to Junagadh, severed air and postal links, sent troops to the frontier, and reoccupied the principalities of Mangrol and Babariawad that had acceded to India. Pakistan agreed to discuss a plebiscite, subject to the withdrawal of Indian troops, a condition India rejected. On 26 October, the Nawab and his family fled to Pakistan following clashes with Indian troops. On 7 November, Junagadh's court, facing collapse, invited the Government of India to take over the State's administration. The Government of India agreed. A plebiscite was conducted in February 1948, which went almost unanimously in favour of accession to India.

Hyderabad

Hyderabad was a landlocked state that stretched over 82,000 square miles (over 212,000 square kilometres) in southeastern India. While 87% of its 17 million people were Hindu, its ruler Nizam Osman Ali Khan was a Muslim, and its politics were dominated by a Muslim elite. The Muslim nobility and the Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen, a powerful pro-Nizam Muslim party, insisted Hyderabad remain independent and stand on an equal footing to India and Pakistan. Accordingly, the Nizam in June 1947 issued a firman announcing that on the transfer of power, his state would be resuming independence. The Government of India rejected the firman, terming it a "legalistic claim of doubtful validity". It argued that the strategic location of Hyderabad, which lay astride the main lines of communication between northern and southern India, meant it could easily be used by "foreign interests" to threaten India, and that in consequence, the issue involved national-security concerns. It also pointed out that the state's people, history and location made it unquestionably Indian, and that its own "common interests" therefore mandated its integration into India.

On 13 September 1948, the Indian Army was sent into Hyderabad under Operation Polo on the grounds that the law and order situation there threatened the peace of South India. The troops met little resistance by the Razakars and between 13 and 18 September took complete control of the state. The operation led to massive communal violence with estimates of deaths ranging from the official one of 27,000–40,000 to scholarly ones of 200,000 or more. The Nizam was retained as the head of state in the same manner as the other princes who acceded to India. He thereupon disavowed the complaints that had been made to the UN and, despite vehement protests from Pakistan and strong criticism from other countries, the Security Council did not deal further with the question, and Hyderabad was absorbed into India.

Conclusion

Sardar Patel was instrumental in bringing more than 600 princely states to accept the treaty of accession. Though at the time of merging the states into the dominion of India, certain complexities like misunderstanding and enmity developed between the ruling Congress party and the rulers of the States, the same did not persist for a long time but ended in a happy note of mutual adjustment. As Sardar could generate confidence in the minds of the people of the various states, his task in bringing back normalcy and healthy administrative set up in the integrated states became easier. The mechanics of integration of the states turned out to be so simple that the total number of five hundred and odd states could be integrated in a short span of time without even a single drop of blood being shed. Sardar's overall management of the integration system has proved to be far superior to any other integration process in the world surpassing the ingenuity of Bismark, the great unifier of Germany. His multipronged attack with definite objective of homogenization of the country, his stage play in the integration drama with the help of his Lieutenant like V.P. Menon, U.N. Dhebar, K.M. Munshi, J.N. Chaudhari, V. Shankar and others has proved to be a great success as we can see from the results which have followed in the successive years. The efforts of

Sardar have led the country towards democratization and prosperity through the 256 economic steps which were taken in the post-integration period.

The absence of a third force has resulted in the solidarity of the country and we are now poised for great promises in the coming years as one of the recognized nations of the world. Sardar's role in the dynamics of nationbuilding through the process of integration has paved the way for a glittering future of the country. "If this integration of princely states" writes Geoffrey Tyson in 'Nehru' "had not been carried out with a skilled and sure hand by the late Sardar Patel the sub continent might easily have suffered division into a third major segment in which the smaller princely states would have grouped themselves round the more powerful rulers in independent blocks, with resultant balkanization of a large part of the land".⁹³ The integration of the princely states thus acted as a synchronizing phenomenon and established a State of balance between chaos and segmentation and solidarity of the newly born Indian Union.

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