

# Assessing Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Role in India's Unification

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## Abstract

This paper attempts to analyse the role of one great person who took the enormous task of building the nation's edifice when a nation on the verge of independence was struggling to discover its geography of togetherness. Through his unwavering determination and perseverance, he was able to unite hundreds of strikingly distinct states to create the modern nation-state of India and this visionary's leader name was Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. From 1917 to 1950, Sardar Patel ruled the Indian political system. He devoted his life to the cause of liberation and reorganised the Indian National Congress. He oversaw delicate ministries including Home and the States after Independence. He merged the princely States after the Partition and reorganised the government. Patel was a key contributor to the creation of the Indian Constitution and helped lay the groundwork for democratic democracy. As a result, he became known as the Iron Man, a wise statesman, and a founding father of modern India. It is therefore widely held in the Indian context that nationalism was rendered obsolete with the victory of Independence. But this isn't always the case. The political reinterpretation of Sardar Patel's ideas, actions and thoughts are examined in this paper. Sardar Vallabhai Patel was a self-sufficient and driven individual. He almost never needed assistance from others to fulfil any of his professional tasks. Sardar Vallabhai Patel was one of those who helped the nation's citizens come together. He gave individuals the means to rebel against the British government. He participated in a number of demonstrations against Indian rulers.

**Keyword:** Independence, Democracy, Nationalism, Citizen

As a nation on the verge of freedom was striving to identify its geography of togetherness, one great person took on the enormous task of forming the structure of the country. By his unwavering determination and perseverance, he was able to unite hundreds of strikingly distinct states to create the modern nation-state of India. This visionary's name was Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.

On October 31, 1875, Vallabhbhai Patel was born in Nadiad, Gujarat. His life took a turn for the better when Mahatma Gandhi selected him as his deputy commander to head the Kheda Satyagraha in 1918. He was a prosperous lawyer by trade. Hence, Vallabhbhai Patel discovered that his life's course was changing into a career of public duty as the leader of a peasant's movement. Patel was chosen to lead the Ahmedabad Municipal Board in 1924. After taking over, he improved Ahmedabad's water distribution, sanitation, and drainage infrastructure. The inhabitants watched in wonder as the President of the Board picked up a broom and dustpan and cleaned the city's Harijan quarter of the district by himself. Ahmedabad discovered a new hero in him. Increasingly he was interested in the fight for independence. His participation in the 1928 Bardoli Satyagraha propelled him to a new level of national glory.

The peasant movement, which sparked intense debate across the country, served as a testament to the Sardar's organisational skills and drive for tenacious action. Here, he gained the honorific title of "Sardar," which has become a beloved nickname by which he is still cherished. Sardar Patel later rose to prominence as a key figure in the nation's fight for liberation.

He was chosen as the Indian Nation Congress's President in 1931 during its Karachi Session. He delivered a somber speech that captured the mood of the moment at a time when the nation was in upheaval due to the execution of Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, and Rajguru. The Indian Independence Act of 1947 brought the long-cherished ideal of freedom one step closer to reality. But a lot more challenges were ahead. British India and the Princely States made up all of India at the time of its independence. There were 17 British-Indian provinces, and there were more than 560 princely states, which made up nearly two fifths of the country's total land area. While the Indian Independence Act gave the Indian Government jurisdiction over British India, the princely states' leaders had the choice of joining either India or Pakistan or staying independent. In order to achieve the inclusion of the princely states into the Union of India, Sardar Patel intervened. Under Sardar Patel, the States Department was established on June 25th, 1947. Its secretary was named VP Menon. Together, these two people were a powerful team whose tact and diplomacy allowed them to get over obstacles that seemed insurmountable.

Sardar Patel took his oath of office as India's first Home Minister and Deputy Prime Minister on August 15, 1947. He assumed leadership of the Ministry of Communication and Broadcasting as well.

The story of accession developed with its own difficulties and important accomplishments. Following multiple discussions and negotiations, Jodhpur acceded to India in June 1947 after attempting to negotiate better terms with Pakistan. Travancore subsequently declared in July 1947 that it will exercise its right to continue to be independent. The Raja of Travancore eventually joined the coalition because to Patel's diplomacy and statesmanship. This choice significantly affected the leaders of other governments who had previously wavered on the subject of accession.

Notwithstanding the state's residents' adamant opposition, the Nawab of Junagadh made the decision to join Pakistan. Sardar Patel worked tirelessly to finally reunite Junagadh with the rest of India. A historic plebiscite was held in Junagadh in February 1948, and the vast majority of voters chose to stay inside India.

Kashmir's Raja Hari Singh had been on the fence about joining. But, when Pakistan launched an invasion on Kashmir in October 1947, the Raja pleaded with Dr. Rajendra Prasad for immediate aid. Sardar Patel is sworn in during a press conference on state integration in India. The Raja accepted assistance and reciprocated by signing the Instrument of Accession. While the Constituent Assembly was preparing the Indian Constitution from October 1947 to November 1949, the conditions of Kashmir's accession were negotiated. Under Part XXI (Temporary, Transitional and Special Provisions) of the Constitution, Article 370 was added to protect the special conditions under which Kashmir had consented to join India.

In accordance with Article 370, the President might select which portions of the Indian Constitution should be applied to Jammu and Kashmir with or without modification by issuing the Constitution (Application to Jammu and Kashmir) Order 1954. As a result, Jammu and Kashmir kept its Special Status and adopted its own Constitution.

In order to maintain a temporary status quo, Nizam Mir Usman Ali Khan Bahadur of Hyderabad signed a Standstill Agreement with the Government of India. Yet, Patel was forced to act by racial tensions and violence in the State. Operation Polo saw the Indian Army enter Hyderabad. Hyderabad was included in the Indian union after a ceasefire was declared by the Nizam on September 17, 1948.

The life and career of Sardar Patel are an example of tenacity, sagacity, and decisive leadership. He gained the moniker "Iron Man" due to the way he restored and upheld domestic stability during his time as Home Minister following the country's division.

Few people are aware that he was also a key figure in the creation of the Indian Constitution, though. The Constitution's core clauses and significant portions were introduced by Sardar Patel.

### **Fundamental Rights:**

Patel headed the Advisory Committee set up by the Constituent Assembly on January 24, 1947. The Committee's responsibility was to prepare an interim report on the fundamental and minority rights outlined in the Indian Constitution are the most significant.

**Reasonable Restrictions (Article 19 (2-6)):** Sardar Patel presented the first draft of the reasonable restrictions on April 30, 1947. Among the several amendments, one of them was the inclusion of protection of minorities, groups and tribes within the provision. Striving for equality, Patel accepted the amendment partly and suggested that amendment should be made to the clause after 10 years, by which time tribals would have risen to the equal status of other citizens and once that is achieved the word "tribes" could be eliminated from the provision.

### **Citizenship:**

While drafting a law for dual citizenship, a question arose whether a person born in India, whose parents are foreign nationals, would receive Indian citizenship. On this point Patel's words were, "It is important to remember that the provision about citizenship will be scrutinised all over the world. They are watching what we are doing. This is a simple problem. We must always have a few foreigners coming here.... If by the accident of birth, someone comes and stays here, subject to the proviso which we have enacted, we can control double citizenship by our legislation.

This clause was adopted in the Constitution.

**Non-discrimination of citizens (Article 14):** The issues relating to caste, communal, religion, sex, colour and dynastic discrimination were infecting the state even then. Patel introduced the right to non-discrimination of citizens on the above laid grounds and the clause provided complete access to public facilities like wells, tanks, roads and bathing ghats. While drafting this fundamental right, a notion was discussed to provide politicians with an exclusive non-discrimination right by way of inserting the words "political creed". This meant that no citizen should discriminate against member of political parties for their political beliefs.

Opposing the inclusion, Patel said, "[I]t is an absurd idea to provide for non-discrimination as regards a political creed. Political creed may be of any kind. There may be some political creeds highly objectionable. Some may not be deserving of discrimination, but may actually be deserving of suppression."

**Abolition of untouchability (Article 17):** Sardar Patel strove to make the clause well formulated so that a call for amendment would not arise. Yet an amendment was sought for the insertion of "unapproachability" in the clause keeping in mind the conditions of places like Malabar. Patel opposed the amendment and said that the provision dealt with the removal of the idea of untouchability and to make it punishable by law. He further said that the provision dealt with untouchability in a comprehensive

manner and “if untouchability is provided for in the fundamental rights as an offence, all necessary adjustments will be made in the law that may be passed by the Legislature.”

**Abolition of titles (Article 18):** While drafting the provision, the matter relating to titles provided by imperialistic rulers arose and it was suggested that such titles should stand abolished. Patel said, “many titles have been surrendered during the last year or two and the titles have lost their value.”

He said the purpose of the provision was to prevent political parties from having “authority to give any inducements or to corrupt people in order to build up their party or to obtain or derive strength by unfair means.”

### **Minority Rights:**

On August 25, 1947 the Advisory Committee was debating on separate and joint electorates and reservations of seats in legislatures and services for the minorities.

Sardar Patel stood his ground firmly in favour of joint electorates. Patel in his report classified minorities into three categories of tribes, Indian Christians & Sikhs and Muslims and scheduled castes.

Patel said: “Those who want that kind of thing have a place in Pakistan, not here.... Here, we are building a nation and we are laying the foundations of One Nation, and those who choose to divide again and sow the seeds of disruption will have no place, no quarter, here, and I must say that plainly enough.”

After much debate, the idea of a joint electorate was accepted but the Committee did not stop pondering over it. By 1949 a common ground was established among the members of the committee, including Patel and it was felt that free India should not have reservations for minority communities apart from scheduled castes.

Patel resorted to bring equality to all and eradicate the concept of minorities. He believed that such classification was brought about by the imperial rulers to maintain balance between communities but the same had given birth to communal differences.

Sardar Patel, played an instrumental role in the creation of All India services which was also his other notable contributions. He had pictured these services as the "Steel frame of India," which would help to further protect the nation's integrity and togetherness. He expected the officers of the Services to uphold the greatest standards of integrity and honesty since he saw them as partners in administration. Sardar Patel was the man who visualized the crucial role of All India Services in post-independence India. The present day All India Services obviously owe their origin to Sardar Patel's sagacity and thus he is regarded as the father of modern All India Services.

The last breath of India's Iron Man was taken on December 15, 1950. In a relatively short period of time, he had successfully completed the work of uniting 565 Princely States into the Union of India—a feat unheard of in history.

In the years that followed, the process of national unity continued. The French government finally turned over Pondicherry and other French colonies to India in 1954 following protracted talks. Indian troops entered Goa, which had remained under Portuguese rule, in December 1961. Goa, Daman, and Diu were incorporated into the Indian union and turned into a centrally controlled Union Territory of India with Operation Vijay. Eventually, in May 1987, the Union Territory was divided, with Daman and Diu remaining a Union Territory and Goa becoming the twenty-fifth state of India.

Sikkim, which had previously served as a protectorate state, was integrated with India in May 1975. The monarchy was overthrown. The 36th Constitution Amendment Act of 1975 made Sikkim a state of the Indian Union, thereby preserving the country's territorial integrity.

Jammu and Kashmir was granted a temporary special status under Article 370 of the Constitution on August 5, 2019, however that provision has since been repealed in light of J&K's status as an integral part of India. As Sardar Patel had intended, this brought about the nation's true union and consolidation.

### **Conclusion:**

By putting together parts of an incredibly difficult jigsaw puzzle to form the India that we know today, Sardar Patel created a lasting legacy. He truly embodies a united country. Since 2014, October 31, which marks his birthday, has been honoured as National Unity Day to honour this exceptional person.

The "Statue of Unity," the highest statue in the world, was dedicated to the country on October 31, 2018, by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The 182-meter-tall statue of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel in Kevadia, Gujarat, stands as a tribute to one of the nation's most revered leaders against the stunning backdrop of the Satpura and Vindhya hills. Yet, it is true that Sardar Patel might have some restrictions on his thinking and behaviour. But it is also true that Sardar Patel was a strong leader who was always motivated by a sense of necessity. He lived out the values he held dear. Despite not being a brilliant philosopher, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was a wonderful man of great deeds. The magnificence of Sardar Patel is found there which is enough to describe his greatness.

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