

Forgotten Iron Man and his Legacy

Abstract

Sardar Patel was a visionary statesman. Commitment, Dedication and Sincerity were his hallmarks but Indian govt. has forgotten this Iron Man (Except during election times) and the young generations of present time only know him as a freedom fighter and an associate of Gandhi and Nehru. He had a dream of a vibrant and prosperous India with a powerful voice in the world affairs. He accomplished his near impossible task of unifying India at a time when Winston Churchill wanted to Balkanise the sub continent into Hindustan, Pakistan and various princely states. With Sardar Patel efforts the unification of 565 princely states in a short period of less than four years have no parallel in the entire Indian history perhaps such examples are not available even in world history. It is a bad luck that our nation has forgotten this Iron Man and he could not get the respect which he deserves. This paper examines the contribution of Sardar Patel and his legacy.

Keywords: Bismarck, Determination, Fearlessness, Razakar, UNO, Operation Polo.

Introduction

Born on 31st Oct, 1875 at Nadiad, Vallabhbhai Patel was the son of Zaverbhai Galabhai Patel, a leva Patidar. This class of cultivators is known for their industrious habits, simple character and straight forward dealings. After doing matriculation in 1910 he left for London and joined the Middle Temple where he took an examination in Roman Law and stood first. He was a staunch follower of Gandhiji and was blessed with rare qualities of integrity, iron determination and absolute fearlessness.

C. Rajagopalachari (eminent Congressman) once said, "Undoubtedly it would have been better if Nehru had been asked to be the Foreign Minister and Patel made the Prime Minister". In 1909, Patel's wife was hospitalised in Bombay (now Mumbai) to undergo a major surgical operation for cancer. Her health suddenly worsened and despite successful emergency surgery she died in the hospital. Patel was given a note informing him of his wife's demise as he was cross-examining a witness in Court. According to witnesses in the Court, Patel read the note, pocketed it and continued to intensely cross-examine the witness and won the case. He broke the news to others only after the proceedings had ended.¹

Objectives

The objective of this paper is to create awareness in the present generations about Iron Man Sardar Patel and this paper highlights the contribution of Sardar Patel and legacy he left for this nation. And this paper also examines how a single man can change the destiny of a nation. And the objective of this paper is also highlights (Patel's) contribution not in the field of unification of our country but also in other fields like constituent assembly. Civil services etc.

Sardar Patel in Congress

In 1946 there was election of Congress President (It was also decided that elected Congress President would become the first Prime Minister of Independent India). Sardar Patel won 13 out of 16 votes, Kriplani got 3 and Nehru got 0) But Gandhiji asked Patel to step down, thereby making Nehru the Party President and hence the first Prime Minister of Independent India.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (Ex-Congress President) in his autobiography which was published posthumously in 1959 wrote-

"It was a mistake on my part that I did not support Sardar Patel. We differed on many issues but I am convinced that if he had succeeded me as Congress President he would have seen that Cabinet Mission Plan was successfully implemented. He would have never committed the mistake of Jawahar Lal which gave Mr. Jinnah an opportunity of sabotaging the plan. I can never forgive myself when I think that if I had not committed these mistakes, perhaps the history of the last ten years would have been different.



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Sardar Patel had a great clarity on the minorities question. He said, "Now the separation of the country is complete and you say, let us introduce it again and another separation. I do not understand this and this method of affection if the process that was adopted which resulted in the separation of the country is to be repeated. Then I say those who want that kind of thing have a place in Pakistan, no 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 the disruption will have no place, no quarter here and I must say that plainly enough when I say we must forget the past, I say sincerely there will be no injustice done to you. There will be generosity towards but there must be reciprocity of is absent, then you take it from me that no soft words can conceal, what is behind your words. Therefore plainly one more, appealing to you strongly that let us forget let us be one nation".

Sardar Patel and Partition of India

During the partition period when reports of organised attacks on Muslims by Delhi and Punjab Policemen (as they were affected by the tragedies of Partition). Sardar Patel called out the Indian Army with South Indian regiments to maintain law and order and peace. Curfew was imposed strictly and shoot at sight orders were given Patel warned officials against partiality and neglect.

Migration of population, relief and rehabilitation of those who were coming from the parts of newly established nation of Pakistan were the most daunting of challenges facing by Sardar Patel. Once the border lines were established about 14.5 million people crossed over to the nation of their choice.

Following Gandhi's denial but Congress at approval of the Plan. Patel represented India on the Partition Council where he oversaw the division of public assets and selected the council of minister with Nehru. However neither he nor any Indian leader had seen the violence and population transfer that would take place with partition. Patel would take the lead in organising relief and emergency supplies, establishing refugee camps and visiting the border areas with Pakistan leaders to encourage peace. Despite these efforts, the death toll is estimated at between 5,00,000 to 1 million people.²

The estimated number of refugees in both countries exceeds 1.5 million³.

In his (Sardar Patel's) words "No one would be permitted to try to damage the unity, security and integration of India. People and organisations indulging in separatist activities should control themselves and get into the main stream as soon as possible if they do not do so then there would be no hesitation in taking hard steps against them".

Patel in Constituent Assembly

Patel had played a dominant and decisive role in the Constituent Assembly from the beginning and he remained the moving spirit behind some of the landmark provisions of the Indian principles. He was the Chairman of the three important committees namely

1. The Fundamental Rights Committee
2. The State Constitution Committee
3. Committee for minorities.

Partition of undivided India into two nations created serious problem of law and order.

It was the Patel who had recommended Dr. B.R. Ambedkar to be appointed for the post and ensured that he completed his tenure despite Nehru's wish to drop him at one point (As said by Dr. Chopra). Patel never hesitated to take a strong stand against Nehru on issues like Fundamental Rights, electorate and status of Kashmir.

He was the man who had presented recommendations on political safeguards for minorities.

Patel, a man of action, spoke only when necessary in the Constituent Assembly. Yet his impact on the constitution was much wider than his intervention in the debates. He also played an important role in the selection of members of the drafting committee. He was assertive on the issue of Fundamental Rights. Dr. P.M. Chopra who was Chief Editor of the Work's of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel (Vol. XI) said "The Iron Man so dominated the Assembly that the constitution which emerged from it bore his stamp and could be ability called the Patel Constitution."

He was also instrumental for the entry of eminent Jurists like B.N. Ray, Gopala Swami Ayyangor, K.M. Munshi and Alladi Krishnaswami Aiyar.

Dr. Chopra further says,

"Not only did Patel see that Ambedkar was appointed law minister but ensured that he completed his tenure despite Nehru's wish to drop him at one point."

On his assertiveness Dr. Chopra says "Sardar's interventions in the Assembly during the debates were few but forceful".

He also outlined a concept of people's policy which replaced the rulers polity in states acceding to Indian Union and defended privy purses. Patel spoke twice on 26 Nov, 1949 to announce the acceptance of the constitution by the states and on January 24, 1950 to facilitate Dr. Rajendra Prasad on being elected as the first President of India.

Political Integration of India

If Nehru is regarded as the Chief Architect of Indian Foreign Policy then Sardar Patel can be regarded as the Chief Architect of United India.

He is remembered as the man who united India and for this he is compared to Otto Bismarck of Germany who did the same thing in 1860s.

Under the plan of 3 June, 1947, more than 562 princely states were given the option of joining either India or Pakistan or choosing independence. On this issue of princely states Gandhi ji said to Patel,

"The problem of the states is so difficult that you alone can solve it."⁴

The Iron Man of India, Sardar played a key role in political integration of India. In his role as the First Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister of India, he left a legacy which is very difficult to match.

Sardar devoted himself whole heartedly to ensure that the country which was already partitioned remained intact and united.

After partition Sardar Patel issued a statement to the princes wherein he appealed to their sense of patriotism and reiterated that the new states

department in no way desire to have supremacy over them. He said we can raise the country to new greatness, while lack of unity will expose us to unexpected calamities.

The situation was complex and it can be gauged by the fact that there were 26 small states in Orissa and 15 in Chattisgarh area of present Madhya Pradesh. Even in Saurashtra, where there were 14 big states 119 small states. At this stage skilful diplomacy was required.

After Sardar Patel's request, princely states started acceding to the Indian Union. One after the other, Indore, Gwalior accepted the advice of Sardar Patel. Sikh states of Punjab also cooperated with the merger.

V.P. Menon was a Senior Civil Servant on whom Patel had worked over the partition of India and Patel asked to Menon to become his right hand as Chief Secretary of the State Ministry. On 6 May, 1947, Patel began lobbying the princes and used social meetings and unofficial surroundings to engage most monarchs, inviting them to lunch, tea at his home in Delhi. He stressed that princes would need to acceded to India in good faith by 15 August, 1947 and he did not rule out force, setting a deadline by 15 Aug, 1947 for rulers to sign the instrument of accession document. Almost all princely states merged into the Indian Union, only J&K, Junagadh and Hyderabad did not join Indian Union.

Junagadh was important for Sardar Patel. Since it was in his home state of Gujarat and also this area (Kathiawad) had the ultra rich Somnath Temple which had been plundered 17 times by Mahmud of Ghazni who broke the temple and its idols to rob it of its riches, diamonds and gold. Junagadh was quite far away from Pakistan and 80% of the population was Hindu and the Nawab was under pressure from Sir Shah Nawaz Bhutto acceded to Pakistan. He (Patel) send the Army to occupy the principalities of Junagadh to show his resolve, following wide-spread protests and the formation of a Civil Govt. or Arzi Hakumat. Both Bhutto and the Nawab fled to Karachi. Under Patel's order Police and Indian Army marched into the state. Later on plebiscite was organised and in this plebiscite 99.5% voters decided to merge with India.

Hyderabad was the largest of the princely states and included parts of present day Telengana, Maharashtra and Karnataka states. Nizam Osman Ali Khan was the ruler of Hyderabad state and 80% of the population was Hindu. Nizam of Hyderabad sought independence or accession with Pakistan. Muslim forces loyal to Nizam called Razakars, under Qasim Razvi pressed Nizam to hold out against India.

In Sept, 1948, during cabinet meeting Patel emphasised that India should talk no more and to take strict action against Nizam. After this Patel ordered the Indian Army and Police to integrate Hyderabad (In his capacity as Acting Prime Minister) when Nehru was touring Europe.⁵

Sardar Patel appointed General Choudhry as Army Incharge and K.M. Munshi as regent known for his strong Muslim bias who accomplished the task.

This action was termed "Operation Polo". In this operation thousands of Razakar forces had been killed and Hyderabad was easily secured into the

Indian Union and in just 108 hours Nizam of Hyderabad surrendered and merged with India.

'Operation Polo' or action the annexation of Hyderabad from the State of Nizam and Junagadh, both with Muslim rulers also go to his credit.

In Sept, 1947, Pakistan started invasion in Kashmir and Sardar Patel wanted to send troops into Kashmir but Mountbatten and Nehru were of the opinion that we should wait till Kashmiri Monarch Raja Hari Singh accedes to India. After the signing of Instrument of Accession, Patel oversaw India's military operation to secure Srinagar and the Baramulla Pass. Nehru referred this Kashmir problem to UNO. Earlier Patel had advised Nehru against going for arbitration to the United Nations and still even after 69 years of Indian independence still this problem is going on. During his tenure as a Home Minister, Patel alerted Nehru about the threat to India from China which was unfortunately ignored by Nehru and had to pay a heavy price for it during 1962 war (still China has occupied 38,000 sq. miles area of India).

Patel also opposed the release of 550 million rupees to Govt. of Pakistan and he convinced that the money would go to finance the war against Indian in Kashmir.

In 1949 crisis were again started when the number of Hindu refugees entering West Bengal, Assam and Tripura from Pakistan. Their number was more than 8,00,000. Patel strongly criticised this act of Pakistan. Gandhiji was assassinated on 30 January, 1948 and Patel was the last man to privately talk with Gandhiji who was assassinated minutes after Patel's departure. With two months of Gandhiji's death Patel suffered a major heart attack. Timely action of his daughter, his Secretary and Nurse saved Patel's life.

For the first time in Indian history stretched over ages, India became united and this achievement occurred without shedding a drop of blood, so that was the miracle of his personality.

Patric-French, an eminent historian evoked that Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was the Real Father of Nation.

He played a vital role in reorganising administrative structure of India and he established two all India level services namely IAS (Indian Administrative Service) and the IPS (Indian Police Service).

On Oct 10, 1949, Patel deferred the inclusion of Art. 283-A (incorporated in the Constitution as Article 314) which gave Constitutional guarantee to the terms and privileges granted to ICS Officers opting for service in independent India. He is also known as the "Patron Saint" of India's services.

Sardar Patel was also actively involved in nation building by different ways. The idea of cooperative for milk industry was the brain child of Patel which led to White revolution (headed by Dr. Kurien of Amul). Patel motivated farmers to join the movement to break the monopoly of private players and place the power among the hands of the producers/farmers.

He also pledged the reconstruction of the ancient Somnath Temple but dilapidated Somnath Temple in Saurashtra (The work was completed after

Patel's death) and the inauguration of this temple was done by Dr. Rajendra Prasad (First President of India).

Last Days of Sardar Patel

During Summers of 1950, Sardar Patel's health had been started declining rapidly. He began coughing blood. His meetings and working hours were reduced by Maniben Patel. Patel frankly admitted to his colleague N.V. Gadgil that he was not going to live much longer. In Dec, 1950 he started to lose his consciousness. On the advice of Dr. Roy he was flown to Bombay (now Mumbai) on 12 Dec, 1950 Dr. Roy told him that his condition is very critical.

C. Rajagopalachari, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Nehru and Menon all came to see him off at the airport in Delhi. That time condition of Sardar Patel was extremely weak and had to be carried on to the aircraft in a chair. In Bombay, large crowds gathered at Santacruz airport to greet him to spare him from this stress. The aircraft landed at Juhu aerodrome, where Chief Minister B.G. Kher and Morarji Desai were present to receive him with a car belonging to the Governor of Bombay, that took Vallabhbhai Patel to Birla House⁶.

After suffering a massive heart attack (his second) he died on 15 Dec, 1950 at Birla House in Bombay. In an unprecedented and unrepeated gesture on the day after his death more than 1500 officers of India's civil and police service congregated mourn at Patel's residence in Delhi and pleaded "Complete Loyalty and unremitting zeal" in India's service.⁷

His cremation was attended by 1 million strong crowd including Indian Prime Minister Nehru, C. Rajagopalachari and President Dr. Rajendra Prasad.

Some critics say Patel was bias against muslims. But it is certainly wrong to say this-

In Sept, 1947, he was said to have had ten thousand muslims sheltered safely in the Red Fort and had free kitchens opened for them during the communal violence.⁸

Some critics are of the opinion that Nehru ignored the advice of Sardar Patel on China.

Some historians and admirers of Patel such as Dr. Rajendra Prasad and industrialist J.R.D. Tata have expressed opinions that Patel would have made a better Prime Minister⁹.

Sardar Patel called the Bismarck of India but his achievements were all the greater because he operated in a far complex environment. He unified hundreds of princely kingdoms with diverse

languages, customs and beliefs into a single nation which is today the home of 17.5% world's population.

Conclusion

Modern history is incomplete without Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. His vision, his work and his principles were highly remarkable in independent India and he was more than India's 'Bismarck'.

Modi govt. in annual budget set aside Rs. 200 Crore for the statue of this great man in Gujarat and this is a dream project of our Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This statue "The Statue of Unity" will be on the same lines as that of the "Statue of Liberty" that will make our country stand tall as one nation, one culture and one people which was the dream of Sardar Patel.

There are many reasons why Patel has become a silent icon. The reason is very clear that he was a man of action for whom work was primary. For him public appearances and photo shoots were secondary. He was truly an exceptional man and we should not forget his Iron Man and Indian govt. and states need to do more to honour this Architect of Modern India than it has done so far.

It was the greatness of Sardar Patel that on his demise even British leaders and the British Media paid tributes. The Guardian expressed which is as without Patel, Gandhi's ideas would have had lost practical influence and Nehru's idealism less scope.

He was truly the Icon of modern India.

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