

## SARDAR PATEL'S ADMINISTRATIVE VISION: SOME REFLECTIONS

T.N. CHATURVEDI

*“We always speak of India’s culture, of India’s civilisation, but do we ever pause to think that the relief of the poor, mutual aid amongst neighbours, charity to the helpless and kindness to the downtrodden have been the shining virtues of that culture and civilisation? Let us ask ourselves if we are living in the spirit of those ancient virtues!”*

— Sardar Patel

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel is one of the foremost figures in the annals of the Indian national movement. Due to his versatile personality he made many-sided contributions, to the national cause during the struggle for freedom and subsequently after attainment of Independence for consolidation of our hard won freedom. While assessing his contribution to administration indeed governance, one has to take into consideration his personality, the forces that shaped the man, his philosophy of life and the organisational and public as well as experience that he gained while mobilising forces for political resistance to alien rule in different ways for different purposes, and at different times. It will be a narrow view of the subject to confine oneself only to the evaluation of his direct association with administration after the formation of the Interim Government in September 1946 till his death in December 1950. What he strived for and achieved during this span of about four years as part of the Government, was largely motivated and sustained by his observations and experiences during his earlier public and political life and the ideals that sustained the freedom struggle.

Sardar Patel was primarily a man of action and a supreme realist. His realism has been attributed to the principle that “the cause is always greater than the man”. It was not given to him the spin academic theories of administrative reform and change either by inclination or by circumstance. His was not a management consultant’s soft world of fabricating proposals on models for organisational improvement or betterment of administration. His administrative vision was conditioned by the prevalent situations and its

requirements as well as the way he wanted to build society and the country in the future. He had a grasp of the political, social and economic reality as well as the possibilities of the future and the path to proceed towards it. His was a grim and continuous struggle with the realities of practical life in a hostile environment under an alien dispensation, but he had the capacity to locate and seize an opportunity. He would not pause to think, but acted promptly. He had no fear of any kind once his mind was made up. He did not look back or shrink once he clearly saw his path and his goal. It was an understanding of the nature of this environment which provided him with an insight into the then existing administrative machinery as well as bureaucratic functioning and shaped his views as to what the administration ought to be. As a man of action, he watched the administration in operation in all its facets. As a political and social worker with a legal background, with his ears to the ground and his heart close to the people, it was not difficult for him with his sensitivity to understand the failing of the unresponsive legal and administrative system and the personnel manning it. The inspiration or the motive force of this insight and effort was the quest for deliverance from foreign domination. His width of outlook or vastness of mental horizon, charity of heart, realistic perception of the environment and sensitivity to public feeling were largely responsible for his remarkable achievements as a politician as well as an administrator. Straight, simple, yet shrewd, he acquired a comprehensive and realistic grasp of all matters relating to the administration of public affairs. As M. Chalapathi Rau wrote: "He represented strength. Whatever he said and did, he was the strongman of an Augustan age. It was this strength, which gave self-possession to a people who had Gandhi and Nehru but needed Patel".

Without going into the semantics of it, administration-which is broadly the organisation or management of any aspect of human affairs-can be viewed, firstly, as an academic study, or descriptive one and secondly, as the practice or profession. The two, of course, have points of congruence and convergence. Administration as an academic discipline aims to improve and refine the administration in practice. Obviously, Patel's concern was with the latter. The concern was not narrow or segmented but encompassed the totality of the good of society in all its aspects. His concern was with what is today being called as good governance. But it is from the observation of how the mastermind works in a situation that one is sometimes led to formulate some principles or at least tentative working rules of wider applications. Besides, it also becomes interesting to judge the personal traits and qualities of head and heart, which a person in authority displays while involved in the actual administrative processes and which go to condition his success or otherwise. All this goes to reinforce ultimately the discipline of administration as an academic study. There is growing consensus among scholars of public administration that the conventional dichotomy between administration and politics does not hold good. They constitute an interacting system. The political and constitutional context

of administration is exceedingly relevant for administrative effectiveness and its credibility with people. Any policy ultimately becomes political as it is concerned with allocation and utilisation of scarce resources in shaping of society. This becomes all the more pertinent when we aim to evaluate the contribution of one who was not merely an administrator, howsoever lofty or competent, nor even simply a mighty politician, but an outstanding statesman. The study of intellectual processes, as far as we can do so, of such a man may illumine even constitutional history and become an integral part of the administrative development of the country. This is evident from the role that the Sardar played in crucial matters in the Constituent Assembly. From whatever angle of vision we look, many splendoured contribution of Sardar Patel to governance strikes the eye as lofty peaks.

In order to have a more balanced view of his contribution to administration, we have also to take into account his social ideals, his thoughts on socio-economic issues and the like since they directly impinge on the approach that has to be given to policy as well as the programme by the apparatus of administration. Sardar Patel, as we have stated, was no administrator in the conventional sense. During the course of varying phases of the freedom struggle, he developed into a statesman-administrator. In a way, after attainment of freedom, he was the guardian not only of administrative requirements and proprieties but also of administrative effectiveness. As has been said, "the rebel in him had also the sound instinct of a builder." It is in the effort at nation-building that his administrative finesse and acumen found expression through his capacity for organisational efficiency, punctilious enforcement of discipline and a knack for popular mobilisation that had flowered first during the struggle for Independence.

It may be of interest to examine briefly some of the formative influences in the Sardar's life and episodes or experiences, which moulded his thinking, attitude and actions. Son of a pattidar, the Sardar was essentially a peasant in his outlook and experience. He was fully conversant with the trials and tribulations as well as the problems and possibilities of rural India. His father had participated in the 1857 War of Independence and one can only surmise that strong resentment of foreign rule was a part of his patrimony. In the second place, the Sardar was born and brought up in not very affluent circumstances and was from his childhood, familiar with personal adversity as well as with the grinding poverty and suffering of the masses. But this generated in him a sense of self-reliance, probably even an element of taciturnity-through a streak of optimism and self-confidence, that with will and effort, one could rise above the circumstances. Even in his school days, he exhibited a remarkable single-mindedness of purpose and power of organisational capacity for leadership. Again, the Sardar's family belonged to the Swami Narayan sect, which is known for its sense of social obligation or solidarity as well as personal loyalty

and ethical conduct. Though not deeply religious in either the ritualistic, philosophical or theological sense, he was God-fearing and spiritually inclined. During his Yervada prison days, Patel learnt Sanskrit from Mahadev Desai and studied the Bhagvad Gita in depth. His study of the Gita and, possibly, 'the doctrines of sthitpragya' as well as the 'gospel of disinterested action' made a lasting impact on his mind. This is reflected later in his conduct of the responsibilities of public life and business of the Government with single-minded determination and equanimity of mind. Sardar Patel did not wax eloquently about or make claims for any philosophy of life but he did evince, in day-to-day working, a philosophical detachment in terms of the Gita. He exemplified in his life that for him, efficiency in action was yoga.

It seems a bit strange that while Patel was in the UK to qualify as a barrister though there was revolutionary fervour among the Indian students there due to the activities of Shyamji Krishna Verma, Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, V.D. Savarkar, Madanlal Dhingra and others, he did not seem to have been particularly affected by it. Probably, this is explained by the steadfastness of purpose that characterised him throughout his entire life. It may seem amazing to us that immediately after having qualified for the Bar during record time, he returned forthwith to India direct without caring to visit any other country on the continent.

Sardar's study of law and jurisprudence and subsequent practice in the criminal courts seem to have had a definite influence on his way of thinking and action. Law inculcates precision of thought and respect for order and stability as well as for rights of the individual, including the right to property. His legal practice gave him a deep insight into the variegated facets human nature. It brought him in touch with the courts, the officialdom in the district, the working of police and judicial administration and gave him an understanding of the psychology of social and individual crime and possible reactions thereto. So, he fully knew not only the different aspects of administrative working and its pathology but also the strains and stresses existing at all levels between the citizen and the administration. With this background in mind, one can better comprehend his role and contribution in the framing of the Constitution and his handling of complex administrative problems in later years. His was a comprehensive perspective and approach to administration, which can be understood by the term governance in today's parlance.

The story of how the bridge-loving barrister, who was not initially impressed by Gandhi, became his intimate follower, has been graphically narrated by G.V. Mavalankar, later on the first speaker of Lok Sabha after Independence. Gandhi's instinctive perception of the pulse of the people, action-mindedness, strong will-power and uncanny sense of direction ultimately won over the diffident Sardar to his side. He was often dubbed as a blind follower of Gandhi. It speaks volumes of his intellectual integrity — an asset in governance and public life-

that he never submitted to Gandhi's will without mature reflection and self-scrutiny. Once convinced, he was an unflinching and disciplined follower. But this association with Gandhi was the single most lasting influence on his outlook and work in public life. As Dr. Rajendra Prasad said, "Like Mahatma Gandhi, he would look into the details of every problem that came up before him and he would not be satisfied unless he had probed the thing to its depth. He was not the man who took what might be called a bird's-eye view of a question, neglecting small details. He always applied eye view to the problems. He had also a fund of confidence in himself and in the people whom he led and he would not hesitate to take risks because he really felt that there was no risk involved as things would, according to his calculations, set themselves right". A man of few words he was meticulous in his approach to the implementation of his decisions. Such an administrative perception is a unique contribution to that art and practice of administration.

Not many care to remember that "he was one of the earliest among the Congress leaders to interest himself in organising labour". From 1917, even before the non-cooperation movement, along with Gandhiji, he was engaged in resolving labour disputes in Ahmedabad. He was deeply involved in organising the Gandhi's Majdoor Mahajan Sangh in Ahmedabad. He was also, for some time in the twenties, the chairman of the BB&CI Railway Workers' Union. Thus the Sardar was well-acquainted with the problems of industrial labour, industrial peace and trade unionism. He was therefore not a novice in this sphere of public life when many problems emerged after freedom was achieved. He was also immensely interested in constructive work apart from agitational politics and had considerable accomplishments to his credit. He did not believe in drawing room socialism or even drawing room social service. He promoted and helped many voluntary organisations which were floated to serve many social needs. Even with his commitment to state welfarism, he recognised that the importance of voluntary effort could not be minimised or ignored. By no means a social obscurantist, he was always a pillar of strength to Thakkar Bapa in his work of the uplift of the Harijans, Girijans, Bhils and other unprivileged and disadvantaged sections of society. He perceived that the mobilisation of the people is voluntary efforts was the supreme countervailing force to the power of an alien bureaucracy. He was neither centraliser nor decentraliser on theoretical grounds, but as the promoter and propeller of people's initiative and enthusiasm he knew that there should not be any chasm between the democratic government and what we today term as civil society. Some other aspects of his public and political life gave him such a wide perspective for future responsibilities that these merit mention. The Kheda Satyagraha was the start of his political career. Gandhiji said about Vallabhbhai Patel: "If it were not for his assistance. I must admit that this campaign could not have been carried through so successfully". At Borsad in 1922-24, when dacoities and robberies were, rampant and people's life insecure because of the collusion of criminals

and the governmental functionaries or in today's language the nexus between criminal and the bureaucracy, he mustered courage to expose the ugly situation at a great personal risk and was successful in having the corrective measures taken by the authorities. The Satyagraha in Borsad against punitive tax was, again, his personal triumph. As Mavalankar said: "The fearlessness and the grit which he showed in plain-speaking to authorities in those days of bureaucratic domination by the steel-frame of the then ruling race, can hardly be appraised now in proper perspective. He always stood erect and showed a sense of self-respect, which was a guide and inspiration to youngsters like me. His spirit of service and devotion to duty were of such an exceptional character that as chairman of the municipal sanitary committee, he stuck to his residence in the city of Ahmedabad when plague (1917) was raging and refused to move for personal safety. He was a familiar figure moving in the streets of Ahmedabad, getting the sewers cleaned and the plague-stricken areas disinfected. When friends argued, he simply looked at them, and his silence was more eloquent than his words". As president of the municipality, he rendered signal service in the improvement of civic services and humbled the arrogance of the high and mighty bureaucracy with his administrative and political shrewdness and tact in matters of principle. One has only to have a broad familiarity with life and work as Chairman of Ahmedabad Municipality to understand the profundity of his achievement. Thus, he acquired a feel of the working of local self-government institutions and other grassroots organisations such as cooperatives and panchayats quite early in his public life.

Vallabhbhai Patel displayed the same spirit of fearless dedication when the plague struck Borsad in 1935. Patel's leadership of Bardoli Satyagraha, "for organisation and discipline, in planning and purpose, for unity of command and union of spirits" has been called by Dr. P. Sitaramaiyya as "a marvel unique in Indian history". He, through his speeches, tried to infuse a spirit of fearlessness, self-sacrifice, moral courage and discipline among the poor peasantry, which withstood the wrath of the foreign rulers. Mahadev Desai, paying tribute to the Sardar, said in *The Story of Bardoli*: "A leader had never a worthier following and the followers never a worthier leader". At the end of the Bardoli affair, Srinivas Shastri wrote to Gandhiji on September 7, 1920: "Vallabhbhai has risen to highest rank. I bow to him in reverence." As Jawaharlal Nehru writes in his autobiography, Bardoli "became a sign and a symbol of hope and strength and victory to the Indian peasant". Again, Sardar Patel's mobilisation of people, manoeuvring of strategy and efforts for settlement during the Nagpur Flag Satyagraha (1923) bear testimony to his great organising ability, administrative acumen and political sensitivity. Similarly, his organisation of relief at the time of the unprecedented floods in Gujarat in 1927 evoked administration even from the bureaucracy. It will be interesting to recall the reply that the Sardar sent to Gandhiji at this time when Gandhiji offered to come to help as it will give us an idea of the man, his thought process and his self-confidence. He wrote: "If

you wish to give us an opportunity to show you how well we have learnt what you have taught us and how we are putting into practice the training that you have been giving us for the past ten years, do not come". Such experience of crisis administration or coping with natural calamities in a spirited self-reliance equipped him adequately to gear up the administrative machinery for similar tasks in future in the aftermath of partition.

The experience of the Sardar during Provincial Autonomy, as the chairman of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee in selecting candidates for election to the provincial assemblies and for exercising supervision over their working, programme implementation, maintenance of discipline, overall performance, etc., gave him not only an overview of factional politics, veiled points of bureaucratic resistance but also of administrative pulls and pressures, political stresses and strains, people's reactions and response, etc., to administration. The Sardar's diplomatic tact, skill in dealing with parliamentary issues, and understanding of constitutional niceties concerning the relationship between the Government and the Ministers came into full play at the time of differences between the Governors and the Chief Ministers of UP and Bihar and also when a serving civil servant was being made the Acting Governor of Orissa during the same period. It was this insightful experience that was to be his source of strength in dealing with powerful Chief Ministers, prickly politicians or recalcitrant princes after Independence.

One can even trace his handling of the problem of states on Independence to his observation of the conditions in the then Kathiawar States, his association with the Rajkot episode, and Gandhiji's fast and his general contacts with the workers of the States' People's Conference. It was Sardar Patel who could contain the mischief of Sir Conrad Corfield and his colleagues in the erstwhile political Department.

We may now turn to the unfolding of the events on the eve of and after the attainment of independence, which provided new challenges and new opportunities to Sardar Patel's political astuteness and administrative sagacity. It was a brief span but it was crowned with glory. It was a period of turmoil and tragedy, but it was also his finest hour as a statesman and as an administrator.

V.P. Menon, while referring to the Sardar's work in the interim Government, wrote: "When he took over the Home Ministry in 1946 he had no experience even as a provincial minister, yet he showed at once a clear grasp of the essentials of administration. He knew how to exercise power and how to deal with men. He would have each problem fully discussed, hearing all sides, and would then take his decision, and once taken, everybody knew it was final. He assigned a man responsibility and then left the job to him, and everybody did his best because he could count on his being upheld". This is a perceptive appraisal of the Sardar as an administrator. But as we have emphasised, it was the earlier

phase of his political career, which was, in a way, almost unconsciously, a preparation for his approach and success on his assumption of governmental responsibilities after the advent of freedom.

The story of the merger and integration of the states is a thrilling chapter in our history. It is neither necessary nor relevant to our purpose to go into the details of the maze of this psychologically and politically fascinating process, which was a turning point in history. As V.P. Menon wrote: "Handling of the rulers by the Sardar was the foremost factor in the success of the accession policy. The rulers soon came to recognise him as a stable force in the Indian political scene and as one who would give them a fair deal. Added to this, his unfailing politeness to the rulers, viewed against the reputation as the 'Iron Man of India', endeared him to them and created such confidence that all accepted his advice without demur". It was his statesmanship and administrative tact and foresight that helped to counteract the forces of disruption, disintegration and balkanisation. This unique achievement, including the negotiated settlements with princes, is to be judged in the background of the contemporary situation and compulsions and not the hindsight of history. Even the Junagarh imbroglio was solved by him to the lasting advantage of our country. Only Kashmir and Hyderabad remained. The police action in Hyderabad was principally his work. Gen. J.N. Chaudhary has testified that after initial cross-examination regarding the possible duration of the operation, "he never questioned the timing again and left all further details to the team. This naturally gave one a great sense of confidence and when the task was done, his quiet 'well done' sent by telegram was worth a thousand other wordy effusions". He feelingly concludes: "Loyalty is a two way street with the broader section running downwards". This is a time tested maxim of administrative effectiveness through delegation, and evolution and decentralisation while keeping a tab on the essentials. Many perceptive political commentators have observed that there would have been no Kashmir problem if the matter had been left to Sardar to deal with.

The Sardar was not merely satisfied with the unification and consolidation of States. He was aware of their feudal heritage and was keen on the democratisation and modernisation of their administration. In order to impart a sense of administrative comprehension and competence to the popular touch, represented by the ministries, he introduced the Institution of Advisers. His vigilant eye was always overseeing the administrative development in the states, especially the erstwhile princely states. His massive correspondence is extremely revealing in this regard. In a way, he provided training and guidance to the popular administrations in the states where they were yet to find their feet and pave the way for modernisation of administrative machinery to cope with the tasks of growing democratic compulsions.

The Sardar's contribution to the making of our Constitution has been commended by such diverse personalities as B. Shive Rao, B.R. Ambedkar



and Frank Anthony. As Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Minorities and Fundamental Rights, by inspiring confidence and skilful handling he scotched the subtle move of claiming separate representation for Muslims. His agreement to provide special safeguards to the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes, taking into consideration the realities of the situation, was an effort towards the removal of the historical disparities with a view to promote social cohesion. Frank Anthony has acknowledged him as a friend of the minorities who showed a wealth of understanding for their viewpoint. As an uncompromising exponent of the integrity of the country, he was opposed to re-organisation of the country on a linguistic basis in the wake of independence due to many incipient fissiparous-tendencies. He was also the chairman of the committee to determine the principles of the provincial constitution. Here he worked in intimate collaboration and understanding with Nehru, who was the chairman of the Committee on the Principles of the Union Constitution. The Sardar's assurances to the services and the constitutional safeguards accorded to them, though rendered obsolete by the march of history, have nevertheless, to be comprehended in the light of the then prevailing situation when the ship of state had to be steered through troubled waters and this necessitated the complete confidence, support and ungrudging cooperation of the existing administrative machinery, the services and the personnel with experience and expertise. It is not difficult to appreciate that all these constitutional issues had deep and far-reaching administrative implications. It is also well-known that by the incisiveness of his intellectual arguments, coolness of temper in discussion and force of personality, Patel succeeded in giving the judiciary independent status, free from political or legislative interference, a heritage of his legal study and faith in the rule of law. The passage of time may have necessitated changes, but that does not take away the Sardar's solid contribution to the making of the Constitution.

The Sardar's political sagacity and clarity of thought, preciseness in articulation, firm determination, capacity for realistic analysis of the situation and decisiveness in action attained new heights when the final bid for power came. His keen perception of the working of divisive forces in the Interim Government and the demoralisation of the administrative machinery led him to agree as a realist, to the partition of the country, though with a heavy heart. His unwavering effort for the maintenance of law and order during a period of communal frenzy against tremendous odds was a great feat. But for the part that he played in the Partition Council and the Joint Defence Council and the decisions that he took with promptitude, affecting every branch and subject of administration and of property and assessments that belonged to undivided India, the actual partition would have been well nigh impossible within the stipulated time. Again, India owes a great deal to his ruthless suppression of the separatist and communal forces as well as the anti-national and subversive elements in many parts of the country in the early years of freedom. V. Shankar,

in his Reminiscences of Sardar Patel, has referred to a large number of incidents showing his capacity for prompt decision-making, which saved the situation or resolved intractable issues. He was for national amity, communal harmony and a secular state. As Pyarelal has said: “He was too big to be merely anti-anybody as such”. Dr. Rafiq Sakaria in his lectures *Sardar Patel and Indian Muslims*, has logically and effectively exposed the myth sedulously promoted in some quarters that the Sardar was anti-Muslim. It is now well-known that Nehru had to request him to convince the people of West Bengal the rationale of the Nehru-Liaquat AH pact and visit Calcutta for this purpose. While addressing the public meeting at Calcutta in January, 1948 he said, “if the Government could not act as a trustees for the entire population irrespective of caste, religion or creed, it does not deserve to continue for a single day”.

Sardar Patel had been often unfairly criticised as reactionary, or as a friend of the princes, industrialists and landlords. As Pyarelal says: “He had an innate distrust of slogans and ‘isms’; above all, he hated hypocrisy and cant”. Again, like his mentor Gandhi, “he made a broad distinction between the man and the system”. He was critical of what he called the “parrot cry of socialism”. This was during the days prior to independence. This can be explained in the light of the character of the national struggle, which was in the nature of a single platform, and he did not want the united energy for action to be divided or diffused when the goal of freedom had to be attained. Again, even after the attainment of independence, he would exhort all segments of the nation to produce more, create more wealth, before talking of ‘levelling of wealth’ as we have not gained freedom for the distribution of poverty. We all know that this was a period of shortages—a virtual economy of scarcity. To a direct query as to whether he was in favour of socialism he gave the reply: “In Gandhiji’s ashram the first principle is non-possession of property. That is socialism—is it not? Practical socialism”. Probably, he was more for social conscience and trusteeship than for dogmatic socialism. We also cannot ignore that the adoption of socialism as the goal of State policy in the country had been an evolutionary process, from Avadi and after. Probably, Sardar Patel might not have been fully cognisant of the semantics of the institutional and structural forces of socio-economic change, but it would be grossly unfair to accuse him of any conscious bias or favouritism to the propertied and the privileged. His was a pragmatic, practical approach. He was opposed to theoretical propositions advanced as panacea, on appropriate and sound practical considerations. What is the so-called liberalisation now so much talked of, all about? What for is the call for good governance? And why the clamour for redefining the role of the Government?

As a tribute from the services to Sardar Patel, it may be useful to quote an extract from the speech of Sir Girija Shankar Bajpai who spoke in a meeting condoling Patel’s death, which provides an assessment of his qualities admired by the services in their political master:

It is as an administrator that most of us who have assembled today can speak of him with propriety and, perhaps, with some knowledge. History holds many examples of the fruits of freedom squandered by lack of attention to stability and order, the twin foundation of society. Though a revolutionary in his fight against foreign rule, Sardar Patel was no believer in abrupt or violent change; progress by evolution was really his motto, and so, although in August 1947 power changed hands, and with it the spirit of the administration, the machinery of Government was preserved. As Home Minister and Minister for States, the Sardar had a double task, conservative in the true sense of the word, in what had been the provinces in the whole India, creative in the Indian States. Neither was easy. To the ordinary stress of transition caused by the withdrawal of trained personnel which had wielded all power for a hundred years, was added the strain of partition, and the immense human upheavals and suffering that followed it. The fate of our new state hung in the balance during those perilous months when million moved across the new frontiers under conditions which are still vivid in our memories and, therefore, need not be described. That despite some oscillation, the scales stayed steady was due not only to the faith of the people in its leaders, but to the firm will and strong hand of the new Home Minister. It is no false pride but a sense of relevance that leads me to mention the part that all the services played in those difficult times. In this, there were, of course, true to a tradition of discipline and duty. But they were heartened and sustained in their endeavour, as much by the confidence and faith reposed in them by their new chief as by the ardour of a patriotism kindled to flame by the breath of freedom.

“Time only strengthened these ties of trust between the Sardar and the Services. This was due not only to his sense of the value to the administration of public servants of loyalty and integrity but to the keenness and warmth of his personal interest in their welfare. A smaller man might have allowed old-time prejudices to raise a curtain of suspicion between him and those who had served an alien regime. It was another mark of the Sardar’s greatness that he doubted the patriotism of no Indian unless the lack of it was proved. Trust, it has been said, begets trust, and distrust is its own cause. This is as true of government as of human relations in other fields”.

The Minister-Secretary relationship and even the general question of political control of administration is a subject of psychological and political complexity. H.V.R. Iyengar, who worked as his Home Secretary and also as Nehru’s Secretary has written at some length about the Sardar’s adept appreciation of the delicacy involved so as to get the best out of him under clear cut political direction and support. We bemoan the inadequacies of Minister-Secretary relationship. One wonders how many of us will like to remind ourselves of his stirring words in the Constituent Assembly. “Today my

Secretary can write a note opposed to my views. I have given that freedom. If you do not give your honest opinion for fear that it will displease your Minister, please, then you had better go. I will bring another Secretary”.

In view of his reputation for sternness and inflexible will, it is difficult for people to realise that Sardar Patel’s was a synthesising genius. His was an approach of feasibility and reconciliation. With a view to consolidate national freedom and to cope with the complex administrative problems in the wake of the end of foreign rule, he, more than Nehru played a role in casting his net wide outside the ruling party for talent, be it for constitution making, diplomacy or even in government. C.D. Deshmukh, in his recollections of the Sardar, mentions many instances of his amenability to persuasion and compromise for larger good and in deference to the views of others—a trait of high statesmanship as well as effective administrative leadership. Though endowed with humane quality, a sense of humour and even sarcasm, his indifference to popularity and passion for discipline, unfortunately helped to project only a distorted picture of his basic personality. Dorothy Norman wrote: “The moment one spoke with him one know that one was dealing with an honest man, that whether or not one agreed with him, one know he would say only precisely what he believed”.

It may be pertinent to refer to the assessment of Lord Mountbatten the last Viceroy of India with whom Sardar Patel had many a time notable difference: “I had not known Sardar Patel before I went to India in March 1947 and I was warned that I would find him a man of inflexible and iron will with whom negotiations would not be easy. I soon discovered that behind his stern and masterful exterior there beat a very warm and sympathetic heart. Since one had penetrated his armour plating one was dealing with an essentially, friendly, human and lovable man”. Sardar Patel was a man who could be trusted and who would inspire trust. He knew that not only politics but life itself also was the art of the possible. But a man of principles and of great personal integrity, he would not brook any compromise where the principle was concerned or the national interest was involved.

Sardar Patel had the peasant’s innate distrust of abrupt change. Probably, with his mentor, Gandhiji, he believed that ‘one step is enough for me’. But he was not opposed to innovation or experimentation as such. He was cognizant of the upsurge of expectations in a newly-liberated people and the changing demands of changing times. All that he wanted was the need to husband resources and to have some modicum of evidence and assurance that the change presaged a better shape of things. Presumably, his legal training, the then prevailing philosophy of gradualism and the doctrine at the rule of law had its impact on him. But it would not be correct to categorise him as an apologist of the status quo or vested interests. He had a remarkable quality of administrative resilience and awareness of the spirit of the times. It is known that he had no property of his own and his sympathies were with the labour and the peasants

and other dispossessed sections in society. There is a ring of sincerity in each and every word of Sardar Patel when he said in the course of a speech: "If anyone is fit to walk with his head erect on this earth, it is the peasant. He is the producer, the others are parasites. But what a sorry plight he has been reduced to. The whole world depends on you two, the agriculturist and the labourer, and yet you are the worst abused people on earth. I am grieved at the woeful state to which you have been reduced... I feel deeply ashamed and humiliated at your plight. I shall feel myself blessed and all my labourers fulfilled when I see you come into your own and walk erect like men". He was only averse to creating needless dissonance and disharmony when the country's freedom and unity had yet to be consolidated. He believed that with the power of the state at its disposal and with the confidence and support of the people at its back, a dedicated leadership in a democratic dispensation could work out the socio-economic transformation according to our needs and traditions. An assessment of Sardar Patel by one of the earliest biographers. D.V. Tahmankar indicates a new line of thought: "It is interesting to note that Patel accepted Gandhi as his guru but followed the practical philosophy of Lokmanya Tilak just as Gandhi himself followed the militant Tilak although he acknowledged the mild and moderate Gokhale as his guru. It was characteristic of his peasant origin that having set his hand to the plough he never looked back".

Sardar Patel was not opposed to the planning process per se. But it is difficult to say about his conception of the nature, character, extent and limits of the planned economy. He was again pragmatic regarding the question of nationalisation. In his 75th birthday speech in Bombay, for instance, he said: "Nationalisation is worthwhile only if the Government can manage the Industries efficiently. But this is difficult. We have neither the men nor the resources even to run our administration. We have had to make our civil servants available to the States, and still they are not being run as efficiently as they should be. Let those who have the knowledge and experience manage the industries and increase the country's wealth". This, in no way can be construed to mean that we were deliberately acting as a brake to any policy of social change. He was not for a populist democracy but democracy for and of the people. Sardar Patel was not insensitive to the inevitable passage of time and its compulsions. He was always for a less unequal and more harmonious society. But the policy of reforms now underway only confirms the correctness of his vision.

When we view the Sardar's contribution to administration, we find that he worked for a democratic administration. It was partly an instinctive and unconscious process, partly it was deliberate and by design. What could broadly be considered the criteria, which a democratic administration should satisfy? In the first place, it must be open in the sense of having a wide contact with the people. It must not operate in the interest of any privileged group of class and must deal with every citizen with fairness, with justice and without

discrimination. Its personnel must be recruited without discrimination from a broad socio-economic strata of the population. In the second place, it must not get isolated from the people and should be courteous, sensitive and responsive to the feelings and reactions of the different segments of the public. It should keep abreast of the state of mind of the government and avoid the arrogance of disposition and attitude. In the third place, administration must not be controlled only by official hierarchy but be regulated also by public opinion and should not exist independently of political control. The constitutional framework that the Sardar tried to provide and the way he dealt with the emerging problems, the conventions that he helped to lay down in the functioning of parliamentary democracy, and the environmental milieu that he wanted to introduce for the services, go to suggest that his ideal was that setting up of a democratic state and a democratic administration, where there was no distinction of 'we' and 'they'.

The appellation "Sardar" was conferred on him after the success of the Bardoli satyagraha and that is how he came to be known throughout his life. It signifies his capacity for leadership. In administration and organisational theory, we have many theories of and approaches to, the question of leadership. From an analysis of his thoughts and ideas and judging from his dealings with multifarious situations and also from the assessment of his personality by people belonging to different political complexion, a number of striking qualities emerge which helped Patel to provide administrative leadership in times of crisis and which set an example for others. One might venture to summarise them briefly. First, it is the power of rapid analysis, capacity to grasp all the facts and essentials of the situation and their mutual relationship. Second, it is the sense of timing, i.e., when the crucial step or decision is to be taken. Third, it is the capacity to think ahead and anticipate moves or problems. Again, it might involve a fine sense of discrimination as to when and how far to give a point away without compromising a principle. Fourth, it is the capacity to judge people, willingness to take responsibility, desire to delegate responsibility to inspire confidence, to impart watchful guidance, to give credit or recognition and protection or support as needed. Fifth, "It is the capacity not only to understand people but to lead them-to be the conductor of the orchestra". The leader is not only the follower. He multiplies his capacity through team-work and sets trend and even gives judgment against fleeting passions or opinions at times - a fairly exacting and a thankless task. Lastly, there are personal qualities of imagination, perseverance, equanimity of temperament, sense of dedication to causes higher than self, etc. We find all of them in varying measures, reflected in Sardar Patel. As Vaikunth L. Mehta said: "What made him great as a political administrator, while he remained a leader of men and a statesman, was his study of details, his knowledge of facts, combined with a deep insight, width of outlook and long-range vision. It is rarely that one comes across an individual possessed of all these qualities that make for greatness-courage, knowledge of what is right, honour in action".

Sardar Patel was by nature retiring and averse to needless publicity, whether in political life or later on in ministerial authority, though he was also in charge of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. He was not interested in projecting himself but the work that he was required to do, and wanted to be done for the nation. This self-effacement may not be a virtue in politics but is certainly an essential requisite in public services in a multi-party parliamentary democracy. This is given the name anonymity which does not, however, mean an escape from responsibility or shirking one's tasks. In any case the importance of this needs to be realised by high profile civil servants if politicisation of public services is to be avoided as otherwise, it will only give rise to mistrust and distrust, which will be deleterious to good governance and dangerous for the democratic future of the country. Sardar Patel was fully conscious of it and adhered to it in his official dealings. Sardar Patel himself went into a good deal of administrative detail to ensure that the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting was adequately equipped to deal with the requirements of Independent India. He attended to the problem of language policy of AIR, restarted the section on Information Films, reorganised the Publications Division and approved the setting up of a new Reference and Research Division under the Ministry. This paved the way for many developments later on.

There is a general lament in the country today about decline or fall in values and norms in political life and in administration. Corruption is eating at the vitals of our society undermining people's faith in our democratic working. Many steps and measures are being suggested to counteract and contain this evil. The need for ethics in public life has assumed overriding, significance in the public mind. Transparency, probity, integrity, responsibility, openness, responsiveness, accountability, the role of civil society and many such concepts have become commonplace in political discourse. It is rightly said that no good governance is possible without a requisite ethical approach. Sardar exemplified them in his life, work, behaviour and dealings. Thrice in his life he showed amazing self-abnegation and self-effacement by yielding the Congress Presidentship to Nehru. Nobody could buy favours from him, be it in politics or government. He did not suffer from what may be called the Dhritrashtra syndrome. As a minister he warned his colleagues not to show any favour to his son Dayabhai in his business. The country knows the saga of sacrifice of his daughter Manibehen Patel. Personal rectitude and austerity became a part of his very being. It was because of Sardar Patel that a minister of the then Vindhya Pradesh was not only prosecuted for corruption but also sentenced to imprisonment. The public today at times feels disenchanted with the misdemeanours of people in authority with disgusting brazenness. Most of us are aware of Sardar's warning to Nehru and his two letters on the subject of the looming danger to security of the country from China, but which unfortunately was ignored. But we are not so much aware of the danger of the possibility of creeping venality in public life about which he warned, when R.A. Kidwai entered into a deal with Ranans from Nepal

for their getting a contract for night mail service since they were prepared to purchase the shares of the National Herald, even then a losing proposition. He also criticised such mixing of politics with the business of government. Madhu Limaye has dealt with this episode at some length in his portrait of Patel.

By way of summing up, we may say that Sardar Patel was not a systems builder but that he was a man of action. “His teachers were the facts of life; not books or doctrines”. According to circumstances, his approach to administration of public affairs could be manipulative, preventive, regulatory, anticipatory or creative. But it was invariably suffused with the popular touch. He not only saved India from “the danger of fragmentation” but “gave her a united entity and a homogenous administration”. We have tried to identify here some of the formative influences of Sardar Patel’s life and thought. Along with the background of his experience in different areas of public life, organisational and political, during the struggle for freedom, his views on important socio-economic problems, which have their operational significance for administration, have also been referred to. It is in the light of this background that some of the highlights of his achievement as a member of the government for a few but momentous years have been delineated. Besides, an effort has also been made to identify some of his qualities of leadership and his administrative vision. It is only in this wider perspective that the Sardar’s contribution to administration and governance can be recounted and assessed.

We have an objective assessment of Sardar Patel, rather a glimpse of it, in what the Manchester Guardian wrote on his passing away. “Without Patel, Gandhiji’s idea would have had less practical influence and Nehru’s idealism less scope. Patel was not only the organiser of the fight for freedom but also the architect of the new State when the fight was over. The same man is seldom successful as rebel and statesman. Sardar Patel was the exception”. Probably, we are yet too near the events and the final judgment of history is reserved for the future. But even for a tentative interpretation, it must be granted in fairness that Patel’s contribution ought to be judged and evaluated by the requirements of his times and the total context for the contemporary society and political compulsions. As his letters and documents are increasingly becoming available it is our—duty to evaluate Sardar Patel’s immense and multifaceted contribution and services to India - a theme that has unfortunately been largely neglected so far.