

LEGACY OF SARDAR VALLABHBHAI PATEL

C. SHEELA REDDY

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was a statesman gifted with the rare quality of astuteness and pertinacity in his approach to problems. Despite his stern exterior, he possessed a generous heart in the pursuit of larger objectives. He never allowed emotions or sentiments to weaken his resolve. Patel's realism rested on the sound principle that the cause is greater than the individual. He was essentially a man of action and there was no place for vacillation, selfishness and cowardice in his scheme of things. He was a visionary and unifier of modern India.

The Indomitable 'Sardar'

In the words of Jawaharlal Nehru, "History will record it in many pages and call Sardar Patel the builder and consolidator of the new India and say many other things about him. By many of us he will perhaps be remembered as a great captain of our forces in the struggle for freedom and as one who gave us sound advice both in times of trouble and in moments of victory; a friend and colleague and comrade on whom one could invariably rely, as a tower of strength which revived wavering hearts when we were in trouble". The geographical, political and economic unification of India which remained a dream for centuries was consummated by the policy of integration, spearheaded by Patel, after independence. His negotiating skill, precision, firmness and administrative efficiency facilitated the integration of most of the Princely States into the Indian Union. This was remarkable as it was achieved without any bloodshed. Patel's insight, wisdom and diplomacy convinced the monarchs, who agreed on accession to the Indian republic. His negotiation skills hold key lessons for corporate leaders of the 21st century who explore all possible options to ensure a win-win situation.

Sardar Patel laid the foundations of an integrated India; wherein regional loyalties were overshadowed by the desire to build a strong and united nation. His tireless efforts fructified when most of the rulers agreed to the dissolution

of their respective States, surrendering control of thousands of villages, jagirs, palaces, institutes, cash balances amounting to crores and a railway system of about 12,000 miles to the Indian government. On October 12, 1949, Patel outlined the concept of people's polity to replace the rulers' polity in States acceding to the Indian Union. But for him, no one else could have achieved the unique distinction of bringing Nizam's domain into the Indian Union. He steered India through the immediate aftermath of Partition and left us with his dreams of an India that would take its due place in the comity of nations. He also inspired to traverse the path with determination and his assessment of the hurdles that the country may face was always grounded in realism. As Independent India's first Home Minister, Sardar Patel showed great wisdom in preserving peace in the country despite communal disturbances and fissiparous tendencies which were so rampant immediately after Independence and Partition. He set the stage for an administrative framework that continues to serve the nation.

Role in the Making of the Constitution

Article 1 of the Indian Constitution states that "India, that is, Bharat, shall be a Union of States. The credit for the creation of modern India goes to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. He was attracted by Gandhian policies of non-violence, spirituality, discipline, moral strength and became part of the all-India freedom struggle and participated in movements against the British exploitative policies. He reorganised the Congress Parliamentary Board as its Chairman and helped the party accept the Cabinet Mission Plan and ultimately form the interim government in 1946.

After Independence, as Deputy Prime Minister under Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel managed the Departments of Home, States, Information and Broadcasting. He played an active role as the Chairman of the Committees for Fundamental Rights, Minorities and Provincial Constitution. He was instrumental in incorporating provisions like the Right to Private Property, Privy purses for Princes and Constitutional guarantees for the Civil Services in the Constitution. As a member of the Partition committee, he helped the allocation of the liabilities and dividends between India and Pakistan.

Sardar Patel's pre-occupation with integrating the Princely States into the Union, rehabilitating and resettling the victims of Partition - the refugees from East and West Pakistan, closely supervising the organisational affairs of the Indian National Congress and the day-to-day administration of the Home and State Ministries did not deter him from actively participating in the deliberations of the Constituent Assembly. He was instrumental in piloting some of the most important parts of the Constitution, especially the incorporation of Fundamental Rights. Sardar Patel was the chairman of the Advisory Committee in the Constituent Assembly (1946) which had to prepare an interim report on Fundamental and Minority rights to be examined in the context of the situation in

the country. He moved in the Assembly a resolution to take into consideration the interim report on the subject of Fundamental Rights prepared by the Committee. In the annexure appended to the report, Fundamental Rights such as citizenship, equality and freedom for citizens, rights to religion, cultural and educational rights, miscellaneous rights and right as to constitutional remedies were set out. These were styled as justiciable. This division of rights into justiciable and non-justiciable led to a very exhaustive debate in the Constituent Assembly lasting over several days. He also moved a clause while dealing with the article on citizenship, that the state shall make no discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, or sex. This simultaneously pleaded for providing uninhibited access to all such places as wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads, places of public resort maintained wholly or partly out of public funds or dedicated to the use of the general public and places of public entertainment. Thus, Patel's role in shaping the Indian Constitution was pivotal.

A True Leader

Sardar Patel held that Fundamental Rights and Liberty are essential prerequisites for the development of the individual and a nation. His devotion to work for the farmers' rights gave Patel the title "Sardar". In 1918, Vallabhbhai took the responsibility of leading the farmers of Gujarat. He started the Kheda satyagraha that demanded the suspension of the revenue collection from farmers as there was a drought. He also led the 'No Tax Campaign' and urged the farmers not to pay heavy taxes imposed by the British after the floods in Kaira. In 1928, the farmers of Bardoli again faced massive tax hikes and the government seized their lands in retaliation when farmers were unable to pay the taxes. After negotiations by Patel, the lands were returned to farmers. The spirit of non-violent resistance which was the dream of Gandhiji was fulfilled by Sardar in the Bardoli Satyagraha. The uneducated and unsophisticated peasantry of Bardoli *Taluka* reacted to Sardar's lead in a manner and in a measure that was, indeed, surprising. The struggle ended in complete triumph for Sardar and the peasants of Bardoli. During the Bardoli Satyagraha, Sardar Patel consulted with a large number of women to prepare the strategy of the Satyagraha and brought them into the lexicon of politics. Sardar Patel's support to the Hindu Code Bill brought out his commitment to the rights of women and their empowerment. The roots of the iconic dairy cooperative Amul - Anand Milk Producers Union Ltd - can be traced back to his vision for empowering local communities, particularly women. He also popularised the idea of cooperative housing societies, thus ensuring dignity and shelter for many.

Sardar Patel always raised his voice on several issues against exploitation and criticised the high-handedness of authority, the exploitative revenue policy of the Government and maladministration in the Princely States. His vision of the State was firmly grounded in his political values. In his concept, the State

was founded and held together by a high sense of nationalism and patriotism. Individual liberty was to conform with the provisions of the Constitution. He strived for the emancipation of backward communities and women, Hindu-Muslim unity through the Gandhian constructive programme and skilfully utilised the higher castes for social integration and political mobilisation. He strengthened the plural basis of the nation-state, by bringing electoral participation as effective means of political mobilisation. He saw a nation as 'democratic in structure, nationalistic in foundation and welfarist in spirit and function'. He remarked that "Every Indian should forget that he is a Rajput, a Sikh or a Jat. He must remember that he is an Indian and he has every right in his country but with certain duties".

Patel – An advocate of Strong Civil Service

Sardar Patel, the 'Iron Man' and founder of modern India, restructured the Indian bureaucracy after the transfer of a large number of officials to Pakistan. He was conscious of the fact that independent India needed 'a steel frame' to run its civil, military, and administrative bureaucracy. He had deep faith in institutional mechanisms like having an organized command-based army and a systemized bureaucracy. In his speech at Shillong on January 2, 1948, he stressed the role to be performed by armed services as the guardians of our newly won freedom. "Ours is a big country. We have to make strenuous efforts to make it a compact unit. There are small States, there are Tribal Areas and there are Excluded Areas. All this makes our task complex and difficult. Nevertheless, we have to solve all these problems so that we may become a strong and united people capable of competing with any nation and any country in the world". He drew a dismal picture of administration without a permanent service.

It was Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's vision that the Civil Service should strengthen cohesion and national unity. He wanted a strong and vibrant federal administrative system in which the All-India Services would play an important role. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel encapsulated the vision of a Civil Service for independent India while addressing the First Batch of IAS officers on 21 April 1947. He said that... "Your predecessors were brought up in the traditions in which they felt out of touch and kept themselves aloof from the common run of the people. It will be your bounden duty to treat the common men in India as your own, or to put it correctly, to feel yourself to be one of them and amongst them... ".... You are the pioneers in the Indian Service, and the future of this service will depend much upon the foundation and traditions that will be laid down by you, by your character and abilities and by your spirit of service. You can look forward to your future with trust and confidence, and if in the true spirit of service, I am sure you will have your best reward." Police. He pointed out that an efficient, disciplined and contented service assured of its prospects as a result of diligent and honest work was a sine qua non of sound administration

under a democratic regime. N.M Buch, a civil servant who served under his direction and was in continuous contact with him observed, “He treated the Civil Servants in the context of human relationships, letting them have an insight into the man, behind the politician and the Minister and expecting and getting in return not merely a production return in terms of man-hours of work instead of payments made, but their loyalty, their enthusiasm and the very best that they were capable of giving. There was a challenge to their ingenuity and sense of patriotism and a regard for their experience and sense of self-respect”.

Every year, the central government celebrates April 21 as ‘Civil Services day’ an occasion for the civil servants to rededicate themselves to the cause of citizen and renew their commitments to public service and excellence in work. On this day, Prime Minister’s Awards for Excellence in Public Administration are presented to Districts/Implementing Units for implementation of priority programme and innovations in different categories. This enables civil servants to connect with each other and gives exposure to good practices in administration being implemented across the nation.

Self-reliance – Going *Atmanirbhar*

Self-reliance was among the chief tenets of Sardar Patel’s economic philosophy. He repeatedly cautioned against submitting our positions to the interests and judgment of others. This holds true as much now as it did then. He constantly advised against greed and encouraged creating wealth before claiming a just share. He advocated Mahatma Gandhi’s philosophy on labour-employer relationships. The Mahatma’s methods, he said, could bring labour its legitimate reward through constitutional means. He wanted to see India industrialise quickly to reduce dependence on external resources. Being primarily a farming country, the agricultural revival was of primary importance. His promise to the industry was for no “impediments, bottle-necks or red-tape” as he said in a radio broadcast on Pandit Nehru’s birthday on 14th November 1950. In the same broadcast, he championed investment-led growth and said, “Spend less, save more, and invest as much as possible should be the motto of every citizen.” He appealed to every segment of the society - lawyers, farmers, labours, traders, businessmen and government servants for saving every ‘*anna*’ that could be spared and to place their savings in the hands of the government for utilisation in nation-building. He said, “We must have capital, and that capital must come from our own country. We may be able to borrow from international markets here and there, but obviously, we cannot base our everyday economy on foreign borrowing.” This was a call for voluntary savings, and for savers to choose their preferred means of investment.

Sardar Patel’s ability to harness the energies of the masses to the important issues of the day was legendary. He clearly recognized the importance of rapidly building national capabilities by promoting greater entrepreneurship. India

has increased both its manufacturing and exports moving forward on the path of development. He wanted the Indian economy built on surer foundations of increased production, industrial and agricultural, and increased wealth. Decades after his death, Sardar Patel continues to inspire all those who are engaged in building a resurgent ‘New India’.

Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan or the Self-reliant India campaign is the vision of new India envisaged by the Hon’ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. The aim is to make the country and its citizens independent and self-reliant in all senses. The campaign outlines five pillars of *Aatma Nirbhar Bharat* - Economy, Infrastructure, System, Vibrant Demography and Demand. The key element here is the “need to create an eco-system” that will allow Indian companies to be globally competitive and thus making India self-reliant.

Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat

To mark the birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhai Patel, National Unity Day (*Rashtriya Ekta Diwas*) is celebrated in India on 31 October since 2014. The nation on this day reaffirms the inherent strength and resilience to withstand the potential threats to the unity, integrity and security of our country. Patel strongly believed that “Manpower without unity is not a strength unless it is harmonized and united properly”. The spirit behind *Rashtriya Ekta Divas* is to foster a sustained and structured cultural connection between people of different regions. The idea of *Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat* was mooted by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi during the *Rashtriya Ekta Divas* held on 31st October 2015, who propounded that cultural diversity is a joy that ought to be celebrated through mutual interaction and reciprocity between people of different States and Union Territories to foster a common spirit of understanding throughout the country. The knowledge of the culture, traditions and practices of different States and Union Territories (UTs) will lead to an enhanced understanding and bonding between the States, thereby strengthening the unity and integrity of India. Each year, every State/UT would be paired with another State/UT in India for reciprocal interaction between the people.

The States and UTs are to embark on a mission to enhance their cultural, academic and economic ties by entering into a wide range of mutual engagements with the paired States/UTs covering the spheres of music, drama, cuisine, language, history, tourism and other forms of exchange between the people. An indicative list of activities has been drawn up and circulated to the State Governments / UT Administrations and the key Central Ministries. The States/ UTs may choose, evolve and develop their interaction pattern based on the suggested list as per operational suitability in the course of their interactions.

The Government of India under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi is engaging with the legacy of Sardar Patel with all due considerations, respect and diligence. The Prime Minister says that unity is “power, strength, progress and

empowerment” and has faith and firmness to strengthen the unity and integrity of the country. The government is dedicated to the political, economic, and social integration of all Indians. From the ideas of *Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana* (PMJDY), *Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana* (PMUY) to the clarion call for an *Atmanirbhar Bharat*, the political leadership is committed to making the “*Ek Bharat*” given to us by Sardar Patel into a “*Shreshtha Bharat*”. Sardar had given every Indian the responsibility to defeat any attempt to divide the country in the name of caste and religion and stay united.

Sardar Patel said that “We must also realize that if we have to take our due place in the comity of nations it will not come to us for the asking, but we shall have to strain every nerve for it. If you read the history of democratic countries, you will find that where there is stability, the task of administration goes on steadily, but where a country is foundationally unsteady, it becomes prey to all sorts of influences, feelings, sentiments and ideas. Our primary aim should, therefore, be to achieve that stability that is the surest foundation of progress. That stability can come only when there is unity in our ranks. It is true that for the foundation of a democratic government we must have a government and an opposition, but today while we have yet to stand on our legs, we have got to strengthen ourselves and that strength cannot come by dissensions in our ranks but by unity of purpose, unity of aim and unity of endeavor”. The spirit of ‘*Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas and Sabka Prayas*’ (together, for everyone’s growth, with everyone’s trust’ and with everyone’s efforts) resonates with the vision of Sardar Patel. The best way to honor the memory of Sardar Patel is by working with the same singleness of purpose as he did for a strong, united India. India remembers him with gratitude and respect. His legacy inspires and sustains us.

References

1. Singh, N. (Ed.). (2010). *Nehru-Patel agreement within differences: Select documents and correspondences 1933-1950*. National Book Trust.
2. Singh, RNP. (2018). *Sardar Patel: Unifier of Modern India*. Vitasta Publishing Pvt. Ltd.
3. Goradia, P. (2020). *Had Patel been Prime Minister*. Vitasta Publishing Pvt. Ltd.
4. Balasubramaniam, T. & Venkatraman, V. (2020). Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel an –analysis. *Indian Journal of Natural Sciences*, 10(62), 27982-27989.
5. Balasubramaniam, T. & Balu, A. (2021). Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel achievements and political studies, *Dogo Rangsang Research Journal*, 11(1), 167-175.
6. Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat- taking the legacy of Sardar Patel forward. (27 Oct, 2020), *Eastern Mirror*.
7. Making India ‘Shreshtha Bharat’ true tribute to Sardar Patel (31 Oct. 2019). *Business Standard*.

8. Anantha Krishnan. S, Revisiting the political values of Sardar Patel, [https://www.thehindu.com/books/books-reviews/revisiting-the-political-values-of- Sardar-patel/article6002134.ece](https://www.thehindu.com/books/books-reviews/revisiting-the-political-values-of-Sardar-patel/article6002134.ece), Accessed on 12th Oct 2021
9. Puja Mehra, Sardar Patel's Economic Ideas, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1506989>, Accessed on 12th Oct 2021.
10. Saggi, P. D. *A Nation's Homage Life And Work of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel* https://ksschool.org.in/Life-and_work_of_Sardar_VallabhBhai_patel.pdf, Accessed on 17th Oct 2021.
11. Desai D. A. Framing of India's Constitution: Contribution of Sardar Patel, *Journal of the Indian Law Institute*, January-March 1988, Vol. 30, No. 1 (January-March 1988), pp. 1-18.