

SARDAR PATEL: A VISIONARY ADMINISTRATOR

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Introduction

India @75 which we celebrate today and take it for granted, underwent perilous circumstances during the period 1946-50. Humanitarian horrors of the partition, religious riots, refugee settlement, scarcity of all kinds on the one hand; while on the other, the challenge of integrating princely states to a united India and drafting of a constitution for the Republic of India. And in midst of all, the founding fathers of India had to, with depleted number of civil servants to assist them, ensure the transition of India to a state of peace, order, liberty and stability while effecting demobilisation of politically active elements and guiding them to nation-building.

Sardar Patel played a pivotal role at this historically critical juncture. He laid down the institutional foundation of the modern India state with pragmatic statecraft and political deftness. “That there is today an India to think and talk about is very largely due to Sardar Patel’s statesmanship and firm administration. Yet, we are apt to ignore him.”¹ This paper intends to throw more light on Sardar Patel’s role in building the civil services in the nascent Democratic Republic of India. As such, the undelaying objective of the paper is to examine the role played by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel in translating his vision of civil services in practice in the newly independent India.

Role of Sardar Patel in building India

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, as the Deputy Prime Minister with Jawaharlal Nehru as the Prime Minister, managed Departments of Home, States, and Information and Broadcasting. He played a decisive role as the Chairman of the Committees for Fundamental Rights, Minorities and Provincial Constitution, and steered provisions on Right to Private Property, Privy Purses for Princes and constitutional guarantees for the Civil Services. The key to understand Sardar Patel’s immense contribution in building India is how he viewed the Indian State and the role of civil services.

Sardar Patel ‘considered the Indian State as a representative and embodiment of the Indian nation, the collective will of the citizens, irrespective of social diversities and structural divisions’ (Roy & Sinha, 2019:viii). As a first step, he oversaw the integration of princely states into the Indian Union, which took place ‘with a skillful combination of baits and threats of mass pressure’ (Sarkar, 1995:451). ‘The smoothness and good feeling with which this problem was resolved has no parallels in history.’ A comparison with Bismarck ‘betrays poor realisation of the magnitude of the problem of the Indian state when paramountcy lapsed after British left’ (Buch, p.41), which could have led to balkanisation of India. Patel’s ‘iron will the perfect foil for Nehru’s softer core’ (Gandhi, 2021:17); ‘the masterly handling of the rulers by Sardar, his unflinching politeness to the rulers, was the foremost factor in the success of the accession policy’ (Menon, 1957).

Sardar Patel as a supreme realist realised that after attaining independence from the British, India requires a mindset change in governance. As the home minister, Patel witnessed firsthand the flexibility and adaptability of the state personnel to the new structure of authority and command. He found them loyal to the law of the land rather than to the changing political leadership, and foresaw them—provided they were legally protected from political retribution—both as staff agency to assist and advise the legislature and political executive; and as the line agency to implement the law and policies made by the latter. As we would see, Sardar Patel translated this vision into practice to build the civil service in newly independent India.

Sardar Patel an ‘out-and-out doer’²

The primary reason why ‘Patel’s role in establishing a new governance paradigm is often underrated’³ is that the works on Patel are ‘mostly hagiography, which lack analysis.’⁴ If not much is known about Patel outside India and not much is written on or by Patel nor he is quoted often;⁵ it is because Patel was not a writer in the mould of Mahatma Gandhi, or Nehru but a man of action. He did not write ‘elaborately crafted world views and expansive and detailed memoirs’ like them. But what distinguished him is the fact that Sardar Patel had, unlike them, a long experience of working with the administration. His speeches, participation in the meetings, conversations with others and occasional letters bring out his views and ideas quite forcefully (Spodek, 1975). Despite his ailing health, Patel was handling the almost daily grind of constitution-making, sorting multiple problems of governance as well as the party organisation. Patel used to say: “Why not create history rather than waste time writing it?”⁶ As his daughter and sometime-secretary-and-housekeeper, Maniben recalled: “Sardar was a man of few words. He wrote very little; he hardly kept any record of his public and party work.” It is almost as if once his work was done, Patel wanted to erase every bit of his memory from the momentous history of India’s independence (Sengupta, 2018: xxiv).

Sardar Patel's early days and his personality

That Patel was 'a man of action and a supreme realist' needs to be understood with reference to his 'personality, the forces that shaped the man, his philosophy of life and the organisational experience' that he gained mobilising political resistance 'for different purposes, and at different times' (Chaturvedi, 2004:58).

"Born to an impoverished peasant proprietor in Central Gujarat, this neglected middle son relied on himself (Gandhi, 2021:17). Being middle son gave him, Patel admitted, "the usual independence, initiative and resources of a middling. When the time came, I could exercise a will of my own."⁷ It also gave him respect for hierarchy and authority (deference to Gandhi), and enabled him to accept difference so long as it was contained. 'Familiar with personal adversity', Patel developed sturdiness and determination, 'sense of self-reliance, probably an element of taciturnity...and self-confidence that with will and effort, one could rise above the circumstances' (Chaturvedi, 2004:60). 'His childhood episodes foreshadowed Sardar's latter concern with firmness, organisation and willingness to fight for what he considered right' (Spodek, 1975:1925).

Later, his legal practice gave him a deep insight into the variegated facets of human nature and 'reinforced many attitudes of moderation' (Spodek, 1975:1926). His work during early phase of his political career: Satyagraha in Kheda and Borsad against punitive tax, relief work during plague in Ahmedabad (1917) and Borsad (1935), flood relief in Gujarat (1927), crisis management working with the administrative machinery, foreshadowed, in a way, 'his approach and success on assumption of governmental responsibilities' (Chaturvedi, 2004:65). He realised that while it was possible to gear up the administration; the mobilisation of people was the supreme countervailing force to the power of alien bureaucracy. And Sardar Patel was invariably cast in crucial roles in Indian politics from 1919 to his death in 1950.

Still later, as chairman of the committee for selecting candidates for elections to the provincial assemblies (1946) and mobilisation of resources and people gave him an insight into fractional politics, administrative pulls and pressures, honing his diplomatic skills and in dealing with parliamentary issues. 'Through training, family, and political positions, Vallabhbhai had access to a range of bargaining levers, and he pragmatically employed them all. So long as he was recognised as an overall leader, he could tolerate a great variety of opinions. This became a cornerstone of his policy' (Spodek, 1975:1927).

Sardar Patel had no experience even as a provincial minister when he took over the Home Ministry in 1946. Yet he had a clear grasp of the essentials of administration; he knew how to exercise power and how to deal with men. With 'naturally serious, even dour face' (Sengupta, 2018:xiii), and with 'the peasant's

innate distrust of abrupt changes' (Chaturvedi, 2004:70), it was characteristic 'of his peasant origin that', Patel, 'having set his hand to the plough he never looked back' (Tahmankar, p.71). Patel's past political career gave him the administrative tact and statesmanship which persuaded the Princes to accede to the union with India.

VP Menon, his Secretary in the States Department, notes that Sardar Patel would have each problem discussed, hearing all sides, and would then take his decision, and once taken, everyone knew it was final. 'He assigned a man responsibility and then left the job to him, and everybody did his best because he would count on his being upheld.' This is echoed by General JN Chaudhary who led the police action in Hyderabad: "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" (Menon, 1954).

Sardar Patel's vision of Civil Services

The decision of independent India's founding leaders to retain the basic structure or the 'steel frame'⁸ of the Indian Civil Service (ICS)⁹ wasn't just 'path dependency' (Vaishnav & Khosla, 2016:7) but occasioned by the need to keep the nascent nation-state united.

The leaders, particularly Sardar Patel, were impressed by the way the civil service had largely maintained order in the tumultuous decade prior to 1947. This is not to say that India's post-independence leaders did not harbour scepticism about the true nature of the ICS. Prior to independence, Nehru accused the ICS of having 'built up a caste which is rigid and exclusive. Even the Indian members of the service do not really belong to that caste' (Chakrabarty, 2006:83). Nehru went on to write: "Just as someone else once defined the Indian Civil Service, with which we are unfortunately still afflicted in this country, as neither Indian, nor civil, nor a service." Sardar Patel himself was highly critical of colonial civil service. As the President of the Indian National Congress in 1931, he insisted on 'a heavy reduction in the civil service expenditure and subsequent reduction in the enrolment of the civil services' (Maheshwari, 2004:252). At the time of partition, the number of ICS officers was depleted as the British had stopped further recruitment to the ICS in 1946; besides, 'a majority of British Civil Servants in India were pro-Muslim' (Krishna, 1975:6).

But after independence, Sardar Patel revised his views and began to regard the civil services as an invaluable institution and its members worthy of trust as advisors and administrators. Impressed, and as one scholar puts it, 'even Indian nationalists and their newspapers considered [the ICS] impartial, high-minded, conscientious, and incorruptible.' (Gilmour, 2006:315). Many nationalist leaders believed that the service would continue to be loyal in the wake of independence,

carrying out the wishes of their superiors while subordinating their personal views on policy but this time grounded in a democratic context and beholden to India's indigenous popular leadership (Burra, 2010:427).

As we have seen in the mental make-up of Sardar Patel, he was 'neither a hidebound person, nor an ideologue', but a stern realist. He 'felt more than any other leader that only a single, all-India administrative service could help him preserve what the British had built and through which they ruled over India' (Krishna, 1975:475). He had the flexibility to adopt a strategy that suited a particular situation, without compromising his basic principles. He could sense that they needed him because the British had left the ICS orphaned; while Prime Minister Nehru and pro-left Congressmen openly aired their hostility towards them as a class (Krishna, 1975:477-478). He, in turn, needed them as partners in the task of administration and in holding together India's highly divided federal polity.

He invited about thirty or forty senior civil servants, early in 1947, to his residence. Being utterly informal, but brief, realistic, transparently sincere and patriotic, Patel invited them 'to dedicate themselves equally to the service of the country' (Krishna, 1975:478-479). He was guided by three underlying beliefs about the All India Service: that such officers would have a national, rather than parochial outlook; that an elite bureaucratic corps would attract the best nationwide talent; and that such a group would possess an ingrained sense of independence and impartiality (Radin, 2007:1527).

'This essentially a Weberian¹⁰ analysis and appreciation can be traced to Patel's strong grounding in the Ahmedabad Municipality, and in handling of breakdown of civil order in the immediate pre-and post-partition period, and in the successful handling of the accession of the princely states' (Sinha & Roy, 2019:xxxii). Speaking at the Provincial Premiers' Conference in 1946 to decide the future of the All India Services, Patel would state that ICS officers were 'useful instruments' that would 'also serve as a liaison between the Provinces and the Government of India and introduce [a] certain amount of brashness and vigour in the administration both of the Centre and the Provinces' (Maheshwari, 1984:211).

Conference of Provincial Premiers, 1946

Moving ahead, Patel convened a Conference of Provincial Premiers on 20th and 21st October of 1946, which was attended by stalwarts: Pandit Govind Vallabh Pant from United Province; T. Prakasam from Madras; B.H. Kher from Bombay; Sri Krishna Sinha from Bihar; Hare Krishna Mahtab from Orissa; Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla from Central Province, Gopinath Bardoloi from Assam, and Dr. Khan Sahib from North West Frontier Province. Some states were represented by their senior officers.

Sardar Patel, in his introductory remarks, raised the question of whether a central or provincial service should replace the Indian Civil Service and the Indian Police (IP), recruitment to which had been stopped by the Secretary of State of India in view of the impending constitutional changes. He expressed the central government's support for the setting up of an 'All India Administrative Service,' and the advantages of such a service both to the centre and the provinces. Such an All India Service, he stated, would facilitate liaison between the centre and the provinces, ensure a certain uniformity and standards of administration, and keep the central administration in touch with the ground-level realities in the provinces. He went on to emphasise that the provincial administration would, on its part, acquire civil servants of a wider outlook and obtain the best material for the higher posts. 'The Home Minister emphasised that there was need for ensuring contentment and security in the services and for ensuring that the civil service was free from communal or party bias' (Maheshwari, 2004:254).

Premiers belonging to the Congress party, BG Kher, Ravi Shankar Shukla and Hare Krishna Mahtab supported the All India Administrative Service without any reservations; Gopinath Bordoloi wanted 'adequate' control of provinces over the service; and Govind Vallabh Pant, while favouring the proposal, wanted the Government of India to be responsible only for recruitment and training, and wanted the discipline and control to be fully vested in the provinces (Maheshwari, 2004:254-255).

The non-Congress provinces of Bengal, Punjab and Sind were firmly unwilling to the All India Service. Nawab Sir Muzaffar Ali Qazilbash, Revenue Minister of Punjab, who represented the province, wanted full control of the provinces over the service while agreeing that provinces should place the services of their officers for deputation with the Government of India. The chief secretary of Sind, representing the province, wanted provinces to form its own service even though participating in the scheme of central training of the officers. Bengal's additional secretary conveyed the decision of his government against the All India Administrative Service, while willing to agree to central prescription of standards for selection and to join a central scheme for training. However, all were unanimous that the Secretary of State for India's control of ICS and IP to go at the earliest even though they were not unanimous on the successor service 'Sardar Patel, the 'Iron Man of India', would not give in and stood by his original proposal most tenaciously' (Maheshwari, 2004: 255).

The Conference discussed other related matters, which appear, in retrospect, so familiar to us at *India@75*. It preferred adoption of rules and regulations prevalent in the case of ICS; combined competitive examination for the proposed IAS and the IFS; fixation of cadre strength with provinces; 25% quota for promotion of provincial civil services in the proposed service with a certificate of fitness by the Federal Public Service Commission (FPS);

allotment of officers to be made in consultation with provinces, as far as possible, to their provinces of origin; benefits of leave, pension and other conditions of service on the basis of rules applicable to provincial services; a five-year pay scale of Rs. 300-350-400-450-500, leaving the final decision to the (First) Central Pay Commission. While these were easy to agree to, reconciling security of civil services with provincial demand for full control over them was as difficult then as it is today.

It was resolved that on removal or dismissal from service, in case of disagreement between a province and the FPSC, the Government of India would decide the case on merit after considering the recommendations of the provincial government and FPSC. The government under which an officer was serving for the time being, would have full authority to award other punishments subject to a reference to FPSC. While B.G. Kher, Hare Krishna Mahtab and Ravi Shankar Shukla accepted this proposal; Sri Krishna Sinha expressed his agreement with some misgivings. Gopinath Bordoloi suggested that even for removal or dismissal, the provincial government should be the final authority with a right of appeal to the Government of India. Govind Vallabh Pant and T. Prakasam, while agreeing to give due weight to FPSC, wanted the final authority to be with the provincial government. Punjab government proposed as a safeguard a civil service committee to whom all such cases would be referred and whose recommendation would be accepted by the government as binding by convention.

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel concluded the discussion by emphasising the provincial premiers' general support to the proposal for the creation of the All-India Administrative Service and the Indian Police Service (Maheshwari, 2004:258). He expressed the hope that 'after the general scheme was framed, those who were at present not in favour, would be convinced that adequate allowance had been made for provincial susceptibilities regarding control and would agree to join in' (Government of India, Home Department, File no. 45/3/46-Ests ®, Para 9, 13, 19 and 20).

A week later, Sardar Patel replied to the Starred Question 71 (Legislative Assembly Debates, 30 October 1946, p. 213) referring to the Conference of Provincial Premiers on 21st October 1946 that, "The consensus of the opinion at the Conference was in favour of the formation of new All India Services for this purpose. Details are being worked out in consultation with the provinces and when arrangements are finalised a public announcement will be made." Still later, Patel would succeed in incorporating Article 312 in the Constitution that "The Parliament may by law provide for the creation of one or more All India Services common to the Union and the State, and subject to the other provisions of this chapter, regulate the recruitment, and the conditions of service of persons appointed, to any such service." Thus, IAS and IPS are 'deemed to be services created by Parliament' under Article 312 (ii) of the Indian Constitution.

Debate in the Constituent Assembly on 10th October 1949

The debate in the Constituent Assembly on giving constitutional status to All India Services, while mirroring the deep differences among the members, highlights Sardar Patel's vision of civil services in the making of new India and his resolve to translate that into practice.

With Dr. Rajendra Prasad in the chair, on 10th October 1949, K.M. Munshi, a member of the Drafting Committee, introduced draft Article 283-A, on protecting the conditions of service as remuneration, leave and pension, and the same rights as respect to disciplinary matters to the existing officers of certain services. He also explained that the Article provided for members of the civil service of the Crown who held positions in the British Indian government to continue working under the Government of Independent India under conditions (pay, leave, benefits, and protections) of service that they enjoyed in the previous colonial Indian government. Munshi explained that it has been restricted to the members of the Civil Service of the Crown and that these guarantees are in Section 10 of the Independence Act that set out the terms on which the British transferred power to Indians.

The majority of Assembly members who took part in the debate around Draft Article 238-A opposed the provision on the following grounds: first, the Draft Article would put constraints on future parliaments in regulating the civil service. Second, the Draft Article should be an Act of parliament rather than a constitutional provision, thereby giving parliament some flexibility. Third, the weak financial position of India may require civil servants to take a pay cut – thereby violating the provision. And fourth, the Draft Article was discriminatory as it treated civil servants who were part of British administration differently from those who would be recruited after independence.

H.V. Kamath, formerly of ICS himself; M. Ananthasayanam Ayyangar, the deputy Speaker; and Mahavir Tyagi, a very articulate member, were strongly opposed to the proposal to give constitutional protection to the service conditions of the civil servants, which as 'a perpetual liability to the coming parliaments,' would bind later governments and parliaments. They argued for enacting legislation so that future parliament could review the matter to consider whether any legal protection was at all necessary.

Some members came out in support of the Draft Article. Brajeshwar Prasad emphasised the duty of the Indian government to honour the agreement made with the British. Not doing so, he argued, would bode badly for Indian politics. He also rejected arguments that called for the Draft Article to be a law enacted by parliament instead of a constitutional provision. He did not have faith in the adult franchise and the kind of people that would end up being elected. He argued that as a constitutional provision, Draft Article 283-A would be harder to amend and will protect the civil service from extremists and radical ideologues who may get elected to parliament.

Rohini Kumar Chaudhuri welcomed the new article because it enables ‘us to maintain the standard of conduct which any civilised government ought to maintain with regard to the Civil Services’ which co-work under them. He widened the terms of debate by deliberating on the very nature of Indian independence. He stated that the transfer of power has not been a revolution justifying the upsetting of everything that had existed before but a peaceful one requiring respect for the previous government’s obligations. However, he appealed to civil servants to voluntarily reduce their remuneration while arguing against a difference of status between the Ministers and Secretaries.

The most passionate defence of the provision and the civil service as a whole was mounted by Sardar Patel. ‘Patel actually lost his temper’ (Sinha & Roy, 2019: xxxvi). ‘Putting his personal reputation and integrity at stake in pursuance of his position was evident of his moral uprightness than his sense of contingent practicality’ (Sinha & Roy, 2019: 198). He questioned the members who opposed the Draft Article about their lack of protest on the issue when the terms of transfer of power were being drawn up stating that the provisions of the Indian Independence Act, 1947 were not discussed in secret.

“I would refer to you to the Indian Independence Act which gave birth to this Parliament and you find that the guarantees have been included there. As I told you, this agreement and these guarantees were circulated to the provinces and to individual members of the Service. Their agreement has been taken and signed by the provinces. They have agreed-both of them. Can you go behind these things? Have morals no place in the new Parliament?”

“Learn to stand upon your pledged word, and, also; as a man of experience I tell you, do not quarrel with the instruments with which you want to work. It is a bad workman who quarrels with his instruments. Take work from them. So, once and for all decide whether you want this service or not. If you have done with it and decide not to have this service at all, even in spite of my pledged word, I will take the Services with me and go. The nation has changed its mind. The Services will earn their living. They are capable people. They were trained in a different setting.”

He was livid with members of the Assembly who questioned the loyalty of the civil service and reminded them that it was because of the loyalty and patriotism of the civil service that the union of India did not collapse during 1946-49. He further reminded the Constituent Assembly that the political functioning of the government was impossible without the assistance of the civil service.

“We had a small nucleus of a broken Service. With that bit of Service, we have carried on a very difficult task. You ask the Premiers of all provinces. Is there any Premier in any province who is prepared to work without the Services? He will immediately resign. I wish to place it on record in this

House that if, during the last two or three years, most of the members of the services had not behaved patriotically and with loyalty, the Union would have collapsed.”

“The Police which was broken has been brought to its proper level and is functioning fairly efficiently. The Heads of the Departments of the Police in every province are covered under this guarantee. Are you going to change that? Are you going to put your Congress volunteers as captains? What is it that you propose to do?”

‘Patel was blunt that India needed them’ (Sinha & Roy, 2019: 195-96). He reminded the members that salaries of the ICS had been reduced by 40% post-independence, and even though civil services’ strength was halved, they kept the system going and India needed them. Patel appealed to the members to see the hard work put in by the members of service in ‘carrying out a very difficult administration for the last two or three years’, and, for that reason, they do not deserve to be treated as ‘enemies of our country’. That on point of patriotism, loyalty, sincerity and ability, Patel stated, “They are as good as ourselves”. Further, since it is not possible to ‘run the administration in vacuum’, without trained and experienced administrative personnel and given the fact that the Congress workers cannot be a substitute for them as their services were indispensable.

“Then you make up your mind to prepare for a substitute. We have already a substitute. We have started a training school here in India: We have fixed the cadre, proposals for which have been approved by Provinces you know all that. We have appointed a Special Commission to recruit about three hundred to four hundred men. They have just been selected. They are not selected from the I.C.S. cadre. They have no experience. But yet we want instruments. They will learn from these people.”

“If the Princes could be persuaded to give up their kingdoms, how could it be otherwise with the services who are our own people, whose children will be also serving with us, and who have laboured all day and night for the country? They are men who prefer honour, dignity, prestige and deserve the affection of the people. Very few people would like to serve only to be considered as enemies of the country. So, do not speak in those terms and I appeal to you to consider my word and give your judgment.”

It appears that Patel’s speech convinced Assembly members who then voted to include Draft Article 283-A into the Constitution which later, in its final form, became Article 314 of the adopted Constitution of India, 1950.

Sardar Patel in action as Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister

Based on his sense of value of a public servant, and ‘not a sweet-tongued hypocrite’ but forthright in his thinking and talking’ (Parikh, 1955:8), Sardar

Patel always led by example. We can evaluate this at three levels: at the top, his working relationship as Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister with Prime Minister Nehru; his relationship with civil servants working with him; and defence of civil services from provincial leaders.

Nehru and Patel: Parliamentary Democracy at Work

From August 1947 to December 1950, Sardar Patel as the Deputy Prime Minister and Jawaharlal Nehru as the Prime Minister jointly ran free India's first government. It was difficult for Nehru and Patel, 'one with a massive hold on popular affection and the other with a sure grip on the Party, to work together in the unaccustomed field of administration' (Gopal, 1979:37). However, Patel and Nehru 'placed the interests of the country above personal differences' to work as a cohesive unit. Patel exercised control on Pandit Nehru when he crossed the limits of constitutional propriety; which 'was a formidable form of horizontal accountability on the prime minister' (Guha, 2008:116).

Not adhering to administrative discipline and correct official procedure led to a clash with Nehru on loaning motor vehicles of East Punjab government to Kashmir; sending Nehru's Principal Private Secretary Iyengar to Ajmer, escalating the matter to Gandhi the role of Prime Minister to uphold democratic principles and rules of ministerial and Cabinet responsibility (Krishna, 1975:489). But both Nehru and Patel always maintained cabinet decorum and decency.

The fascinating correspondence between Patel and Nehru over their powers between late 1947 and early 1948 illustrates the wider difficulties in comprehending the conventions and powers between the Prime Minister and the Cabinet. While Nehru believed that as Prime Minister he had seniority over his deputy and had to be respected as such (Nehru letter to Patel on 23d December 1947); Patel was critical of prime ministerial interference into matters which fall within his ministerial responsibility (Kumarasingham (2010: 723). "The Prime Minister should influence by way of consultation, not by edict"; Patel believed that his version was 'in accord with the UK practice' of the cabinet system of government. But, Patel always reached out to Nehru to ensure that their differences did not come in way of the government's ability to tackle the external aggression and internal strife.

Sardar Patel's relations with the civil service

The founders of the Indian nation-state respected the autonomy and integrity of the civil services. Sardar Patel believed that the ties of trust between the leaders and the services, led by his example of the Minister-Secretary relationship would work out the socio-economic transformation in a democratic dispensation¹¹. With the new All India Services, the strengthening of the police

forces in the States as enjoined by the Sardar and the reorganisation of the Central Secretariat services carried under his directions, the administration worked well enough during the difficulties.

To quote from Sardar Patel's own formulation in 1948: An All India Service, efficient, disciplined and contented, assured of its prospects as a result of diligent and honest work is a *sine qua none* of the sound administration under a democratic regime even more than under an authoritarian rule. The service must be above party and we should ensure that political considerations either in its discipline or in its control are reduced to the minimum, if not eliminated altogether (Singh, 1987:7)

'Patel looked upon the IAS as partners with him in the task of administration' (Krishna, 1975:479). The IAS, he said, "marks the inauguration of an all-India Service officered entirely by Indians and subject completely to Indian control." While addressing the probationers of the first batch of Indian Administrative Officers at Metcalfe House, Delhi on 21st April, 1947, he said: "You are the pioneers in the Indian Service, and the future of this service will depend much upon the foundations and traditions that will be laid down by you, by your character and abilities and by your spirit of service." He further enjoined them that it should be their 'bounden duty to treat the common man of India as our own.' The Indian officers 'must be guided by a real spirit of service in their day-to-day administration, for in no other manner can they fit in the scheme of things' (Chopra, p.62). "You will have to adapt yourselves to democratic ways of administration. Above all, I would advise you to maintain to the utmost the impartiality and incorruptibility of administration. A Civil Servant cannot afford to and must not, take part in politics. Nor must he involve himself in communal wrangles. To depart from the path of rectitude in either of these respects is to debase public service and to lower its dignity. Similarly, no service worth the name can claim to exist if it does not have in view the achievement of the highest standard of integrity."

Unlike many other ministers, Sardar Patel 'was a patient listener, who possessed an open mind and a willingness to benefit from others' experience.' He had the administrator's tact and ability to carry others along with him, even when the final judgment remained his. He conducted his work mostly from his residence—not by reading files till midnight, but by giving decisions on the briefing by his secretaries. 'Though verbal, he always stood by them. He had a photographic memory' (Krishna, 1975:478-479).

To quote some examples: Iyengar, Home Secretary discussed a letter by a political leader and on the verbal briefing, Sardar Patel gave his decision. Iyengar asked Sardar Patel whether he would like to read the letter himself. Patel asked him if he had told him all that it contained, then there was no need for him to look at it (Krishna, 1975:480).

He imposed his decisions democratically—not through blatant imposition, but willing acceptance. Sardar Patel asked Iyengar his opinion about a senior Congressman so that he could get a balanced picture. Sardar Patel asked Law Secretary Shavax A. Lal to give his opinion on an issue raised by Mountbatten when he was still the Viceroy and Governor-General. Lal asked him if he wanted his honest opinion. Sardar Patel flared up: “Does government pay you Rs. 4,000 a month for your dishonest opinions? It is your duty to give an honest opinion, and it is for me to accept it or not.” (Krishna, 1975:481)

Sardar Patel asked Iyengar, Home Secretary, who was opposed to the implementation of the Congress Working Committee resolution directing Government to take immediate steps towards the formation of a linguistic Andhra State. He was in a quandary and asked Patel, “What do you expect me to do about it?” Without a moment’s hesitation, Iyengar recalls, Patel asked me: “Are you, or are you not, the Home Secretary?” Iyengar was a little taken aback. “Of course, I am”, he replied. “Then”, Patel said, “do your duty as Home Secretary. Prepare a note to the Cabinet stating what exactly in your judgment are the implications of the proposal and how they should be further examined... You must clearly and frankly analyse the whole problem” (Krishna, 1975:481-82). Sardar Patel’s trust in the civil services is typified by the confidence he reposed on VP Menon his States Secretary.

Sardar Patel was the first Minister of Information and Broadcasting. While he ensured expansion of All India Radio (AIR) with 1 kw sets, community sets to villages, and handled with great restraint language problem of AIR; he also exhibited catholicity. Sardar Patel could be stern, too. He approved Josh Malihabadi as editor of an Urdu Magazine, ‘Ajkal’ despite opposition by N.C. Mehta, Secretary. When the order was not issued even after some months, Sardar lost his temper and had the order issued. Later, Mehta was sent as Chief Commissioner of Himachal (Shankar, p. 193)

Sardar Patel always selected the best man for the task to be discharged. When he appointed C.P. Ramaswami Iyer, who tried his best to establish Travancore as an independent sovereign state, as one of the most important commissioners, he was asked why he did so. “Was there any reason why the country should deprive itself of the services of one of the most able and distinguished sons? Do you think I am not competent enough to disregard any of his recommendations which I find not to be in the best interest of the country?” (Chavan, 2017:13)

As one civil servant stated, ‘public servants felt ‘the glow of a new dawn’ and rose to the occasion during those ‘momentous period of our history’ to prove worthy of the responsibilities that had been placed on them. All this was because Sardar Patel recognised them as patriotic and made them feel wanted, as he said in the Constituent Assembly, “every man wants some sort of encouragement” (Singh, 1987:9).

Taking on leaders to protect the civil services

Sardar Patel always stood for civil services. In his speech on 7th April 1947, he said: “Formerly we were abusing police, we used to hate them. In those times they were officers, now they are servants. But you will say that policemen are the same. Then I would say you get recruited in police and change them. Nobody will prevent you. There is no hindrance.” In his speech on the floor of the House on 10th October 1949, he said: “If you want an efficient All India Service, I advise you to allow the Service to open their mouth freely. You will not have united India if you do not have a good All India Service which has independence to speak out its mind.”

‘Though accommodating and generous, Patel could be unsparing in upbraiding erring colleagues and irresponsible politicians’ (Krishna, 1975:485). Sardar Patel strongly condemned the influence of the bureaucracy by elected representatives. He advised Dr. Khare to take disciplinary action against R.S. Dubey, an MLA, who was interfering with the course of investigations against an officer who had committed an offence (Maheshwari, 2004:20). He pulled up Dr. B.C. Roy, Chief Minister (CM) of West Bengal, for showing discourtesy to the Prime Minister. He upbraided Govind Vallabh Pant, CM of Uttar Pradesh for opening an exhibition showing police atrocities during the Quit India movement because it could demoralise the police (Krishna, 1975: 486). John Mathai, Railway Minister was upbraided for not arranging quick transport of refugees from West Punjab and NWFP (Krishna, 1975: 487).

Conclusion

In retrospect, the modern Indian state owes its existence to Sardar Patel for welding India as a nation by getting hundreds of princely states to accede. As a man of action, not a formal writer, Sardar Patel’s contributions need to be evaluated based on what he could achieve in a brief span of four-five years. Besides giving sound advice both in times of trouble and in moments of victory to Nehru, Sardar Patel was the one on whom the party and the government could invariably rely whenever there was any trouble. Patel’s exposure to public work in his early years, as well as childhood experiences, played a major role in shaping his genius and statesmanship so that at a historically critical juncture when India was a fragile newborn nation, he could lay down the institutional foundation of a modern Indian state. This consisted of not only steering the making of the constitution as chairman of the crucial sub-committees but also to conceive of all India services, loyal to law and constitution to hold the India and nation together.

While Nehru provided ideology, Sardar Patel furnished realism, thus avoiding the two extremes, India could retain the middle course in politics. In so far the civil services are concerned, Sardar Patel was clear as to where the

politics begins and the administration ends and vice-versa; that democracy is an interplay between the citizen and the government that keeps the extremism of all kinds at bay. Patel was devoted to a united, strong and aspirational India, combining faith with work. With undiminished faith in Mahatma Gandhi and incessant work for the country, he bequeathed us an India where democracy is not an everyday plebiscite but a continuous process when as a nation we work for a brighter future.

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ENDNOTES

1. Dr Rajendra Prasad (Gandhi, 1991:9).
2. (Guha, *Makers of Modern India'*, 2008:56). Guha leaves out Patel (along with Subhas Chandra Bose) reasoning that 'his writings were either insubstantial or humdrum', and also because both 'were out-and-out doers.'
3. (Sinha & Roy, 2019). Singh writes that 'there is almost a conspiracy of silence aimed at obliterating his memory' (Singh, 2018).
4. (Conlon, 1972:296). Conlon says that there is a need 'to stimulate scholarly interest in a more through and objective analysis of the life and career of Sardar Patel.'
5. N M Buch, *A Civil Servant's Tribute in A Nation's Homage: Life and Work of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel*, in PD Saggi, ed. Life and Work of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Overseas Publishing House, Bombay, pp 39-41).
6. Das, Sardar Patel's correspondence, Vol. 1, p.55.
7. Patel ('Recollections') in PD Saggi, ed. Life and Work of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Overseas Publishing House, Bombay
8. The origins of the oft-quoted "steel frame" reference can be found in a speech then British prime minister David Lloyd George delivered to the British Parliament in 1922 on the subject of the Indian Civil Service: "If you take that steel frame out, the fabric will collapse. . . . There is one institution we will not cripple, there is one institution we will not deprive of its functions or of its privileges, and that is that institution which built up the British Raj—the British Civil Service in India." *House of Commons Debates*, vol. 157, columns 1495–1525, August 2, 1922, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1922/aug/02/civil-service-india>.
9. The ICS came into existence through the Government of India Act of 1858 as an all-India service, which numbered at its peak, 1,032 in 1931 and which was paid 'most handsomely'.

10. Max Weber's idea of legal-rational authority, underlying the modern state and its legitimisation process which embodies idea of compliance premised on rationality of law and bureaucracy as neutral rule-minded instrument of governance, based on consent rather than coercion.
11. Several reports by international development organisations on successful innovations in service delivery have recognised the pivotal role IAS officers have played in implementing the Indian government's key development and economic priorities over the past seven decades. See World Bank, *Reforming Public Services in India: Drawing Lessons From Success* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2006); also see NITI Aayog and the United Nations Development Program, *Social Sector Service Delivery: Good Practices Resource Book* (New Delhi: Government of India, 2015).