The period of 40s is conspicuous due to rapid change on national and international political scenes. The whole situation took an aggravated form due to the World War II. The British economy was in a very bad shape and the large colonies occupied by Great Britain gradually started attaining freedom. The freedom of India in 1947 was only a step forward in the completion of the process of such a significant change. The freedom which was going to be a matter of perennial happiness to the people, brought along with some social, political and administrative instability, undreamt of by the political observers in India. The division of the country resulted into a series of communal riots all over. The situation was further aggravated due to large scale exodus of people across the two borders. The settlement of the refugees was a big problem to the law and order in the country. The problem did not end here as there also arose the issues like division of army and civil services between India and Pakistan resulting into administrative instability. The hostile attitude of five hundred and odd princely states was a potent threat to the very concept of an integrated India.

It is in the perspective of such critical problems that the nation looked forward to an able and stern leader who could command control over the situation by his statesmanship and put back the country into the process of nation building.
There was no dearth of able leadership as the country had many towering personalities associated with the freedom movement. The problems that came up were not unexpected as the leaders knew that such a situation would arise. But what was unexpected was the magnitude and enormity of the calamities which came in the wake of partition. The violence had to be curbed, the refugees had to be sheltered, the minorities were in need of protection, the shaken confidence of the civil servants required to be restored and finally the unification of the princely states into Indian Union was to be effected. Sardar Patel who took up the reins of the administration proved to be the most suitable man for the task. His numerous efforts towards unification and consolidation of the country deserve an in depth study.

The present study is devoted to Sardar's skilful manner in which he was ultimately successful in giving the nation a strong base of administration. The role of Sardar during freedom struggle and thereafter is well documented. But, unfortunately, the previous work does not very much project him as a pioneer of nation building, and that is why the present study was taken up. The study should become all the more significant in the context of the present political atmosphere wherein any thoughtful citizen feels that the process of national integration is receiving continual setbacks. Further, many aspects of Sardar's contribution are still undiscovered and this study is certainly an attempt to bring out the finer points of the same.
The purpose of the present study is to understand, analyse, criticise and appreciate Sardar's contribution to the nation building in the context of the general social upliftment of the people, his political skill and administrative excellence so very manifest during the period under study. The scope of the present study has been purposefully confined to multiple-roles Sardar played during the 40s.

All efforts have been made to make the work as much documented and authenticated as possible. With this end in view, a variety of sources and means were consulted and utilised. The work is based on primary sources like interviews with those personalities who were significantly associated with Sardar, checking of Sardar's unpublished papers as well as some collection preserved by the Government of India and by his daughter. Sources of secondary importance like books, periodicals, articles, newspapers etc. have also been given a serious and careful attention, mainly for the purpose of corroborating the conclusions drawn from primary sources.

Some of Sardar's contemporaries, still alive, were contacted as a primary duty. The most significant of Sardar's contemporaries was the late Lord Mountbatten. He was approached although he was leading a retired life. True to his greatness, Lord Mountbatten was only too glad to respond encouragingly to a letter written by me. Although no new information, more than what has been published, could be added by him, his encouragement
has been a source of inspiration and is gratefully acknowledged. Similarly, I had also approached old stalwarts like Messrs Jagjivan Ram, Harekrishna Mahtab, V. Shankar, late H.V. Kamath, late Acharya Kripalani and others either through correspondence or personal interviews. All those great personalities have given me encouragement and help for which I am indeed grateful to them.

A considerable portion of my work owes a great deal of indebtedness to Miss Maniben Patel, (Sardar's daughter) for its successful completion. But for her help, I would not have been able to consult some of the unknown and unpublished correspondence. My grateful thanks are also due to Mr. G.M. Nandurkar, the editor and co-editor of some of Sardar's work, for his kind permission to allow me access to a number of personal documents preserved by him as a tribute to Sardar Patel. It is this help which has enhanced the quality of my work.

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