The Congress Party has, by and large, provided a strong base for the consolidation of India. Looking to the conditions prevailing at the time of independence, the importance of the role played by the Congress Party can be fully appreciated. The country had got battered by the partition, leading to the influx of million of refugees and their rehabilitation, by the problems created by Pakistani intruders in Kashmir, and integration of native States. But for the strong political base and integrative force of Congress party, the country would not have sustained the onslaught. The command of the Congress Party was in the hands of Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel in later years. While Nehru provided the ideological thrust to the party, Sardar provided the working mechanism. The levers of domestic power were under the control of Sardar and he retained his dominant position in the Congress organisation. ¹ Sardar, with his extraordinary qualities of organising power, put the party

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on such a strong footing that even today the party is bringing results and the fruits of his basework are being enjoyed by us. This is another important contribution of Sardar Patel to the process of nation building through his work of party building.

**Party as a Prerequisite of Democracy**

In any democratic government, political parties are prerequisites. The representatives of the party, elected by the citizens, take part in government. With the involvement of the people in governmental activities, democratic set up is established. Parties of different ideologies are formed and the common people group together under the guidance of leaders and they form the basic structure of political parties. Success of a leader in a political party depends on how much confidence of the people he can gain and consolidate the party through an overall control of the party machinery.

Political Parties in a country are formed as a result of politics. Politics may be understood as the relationship between man and government in terms of power. It is the science and art of governance of people.
The methods of exercising control over government and skill in guiding governmental activities are part of politics. The political power originates from the capacity to govern people, gain their confidence and offer them a decent life. The political power is based on the consent of the people who are governed. The excercising of the political power is done by the political parties who by virtue of their policies and objectives try to gain confidence of people. Now-a-days, democracy is prevailing in many countries of the world which means government of the people, by the people and for the people. The political parties in a country maintain and promote democracy and lead the country to growth, integrity and stability. The overall progress of a country depends on the success and efficiency of the ruling party of the country.

Leadership and Party Building

The success of a party in democracy depends on its leaders. An able leader will guide the party in such a way as to gain confidence of the people. He will work

ungrudgingly for the welfare of the citizens and by way of his ardent work he could attract the people as followers. He can motivate people to work for the growth of the country and building a strong nation. The political leaders have to undertake various functions while holding the top party office. Hans Nagpaul said:

"Members of a group, when performing the leadership functions, play many different roles. Various types of leadership roles have been suggested by social scientists. As a planner and policy-maker, the leader looks ahead and sees the long range effects of group action after taking stock of the existing problems; as an executive he carries out the group policies, as an educator he assists the group to see alternative solutions to different problems and thereby helps in arriving at an agreement. As the spokesman, the leader represents the group in its relations with other groups . . . as a mediator he calls for the identification of the areas of agreement in the group and brings cohesion through this agreement."

3. Nagpaul Hans "Leadership : A frame of reference"

Vidyarthi L.P. (Ed) - Leadership in India, Asia
Thus the complete dynamics of the smooth working and growth of a party depends on the type of leadership available in the top hierarchy. In the hand of an able leader, the party gets right lead and can penetrate into the masses, gain the confidence and expand its base. An able leader can act as a strong administrator and remove the bickerings and intra-party clashes; thus he can represent a united image of his party to the outsiders. Through the able guidance of the leader, party gets more and more support and with the support of the majority, it can work for the welfare of the country. Building up an able leadership in a party, is to build up the party itself and make use of the strong party in building a strong democratic nation. The party leader should have certain qualities so as to enable him to attain dominance over others. As per Hemphill:

"The leader exhibits behaviour indicative of his ability to advance the purpose of the group. He exhibits behaviour indicating competence in administrative functions. His behaviour is characterized by the ability to inspire the members of the group to greater activity." 

Congress Party and Nation Building

The Indian National Congress was the organisation for freedom movement and could awaken the people towards the fight for freedom. The spirit by which people from the different strata of society came together for a common goal of attaining freedom, was responsible for the success of the Congress and gradual development of political consciousness in the country. The leadership of the Congress was in the hands of such stalwarts as Tilak, Gokhale, Gandhi, Nehru and Patel who kindled the light of freedom and awakened the people to follow them. When Tilak said "Swaraj is my birthright", and Gandhi came out with the demand for complete independence, the Congress got full support of the people for a common goal of independence. The Congress party thus got a strong base through the support of the masses and formed the basic structure of democracy. The democratic movement was further strengthened and popularized by Nehru and Patel through their wholehearted efforts for the Congress Party, which had established democracy in the country. Gandhiji's movement through the Congress Party was purely democratic; he could gain support from
all the divisions of the society. The strong party foundations and subsequent democratic movement were given a gigantic shape by Nehru and Sardar Patel along with Gandhi. The leaders who formulated the party policy and strategy during the crucial period of freedom movement were thereafter came to be known as inner circle. It consisted of Pandit Nehru, Babu Rajendra Prasad, Sardar Patel and others. Among them, Nehru had idealistic approach, and Sardar Patel had a realistic approach towards problems. In case of any problem, Sardar with his farsightedness came out with a solution and implemented it through his own supervision. He was a tough administrator, who could convince his fellow members regarding any vital steps to be taken; he could foresee the coming events and accordingly could take remedial measures for the benefit of the country and his party. He could work untiringly and motivate the party cadres for more concerted activities. His leadership quality aimed at building up the Congress Party with a strong footing. There had been number of crises in the party which were successfully

In the latter part of the independence movement and even after the partition Congress polity was guided by persons like Nehru, Patel, Prasad and Azad who in effect formed the core of the leadership.
tackled by him. With his able leadership, Congress party came out to be the only party of the people during the period fascinating, yet so critical.6

The Congress party had really to undergo numerous disheartening experiences and take up high challenges from the ever obstructing Muslim League and perpetually biased British Government. This period was so dreadful for any sincere Indian Nationlist that only the leadership of no less a leader than Sardar, Nehru, Prasad was considered the most effective and fruit bearing. So it was only through their able leadership, that the party could sustain its identity and unite the people. Had the party not stood on a firm footing through the worthy leadership, the independence of the country would have been delayed. Sardar’s guidance to party colleagues enabled the party to consolidate its position and counter the British bureaucracy and Muslim fanaticism.

6. Ghose Sudhir—Gandhi’s Emissary. R Rupa & Co., Calcutta, 1967, pp. 167-174. During the discussions with Cripps Mission for interim government a crisis arose when it was suggested by Azad that no Congress Muslim would be included in Interim Government. To come out of such a fix Sudhir Ghosh suggested Cripps that the problem could only be solved by taking advice from Sardar Patel, ultimately the problem was solved by Sardar.
Due to the entry of leaders like Patel and Nehru, the Congress Party was fully disciplined. The members united under the banner of the party and tried to sink their differences under the guidance of party leaders. The discipline of the party was operative at all levels. Such a discipline was necessary to maintain the party's image and to keep up the morale of the party cadres.

The freedom struggle demanded an unquestioned sense of discipline and the prominent and devoted leaders could cultivate it at every level of the party. It was continuance of the same sense of discipline and selfless service that helped at the most crucial period of Indian history - the aftermath of partition. The same noble qualities sustained the party and the idea of nation building could be materialized.

From time to time, Congress Party has extended guidance to the people and led them in a democratic way. During the time of the freedom struggle, the people united under Congress banner against the British Government. They sacrificed their life, family and property for the cause of the country. After the independence, the Congress established the democratic government and
smoothly administered the country. Congress took steps for economic and industrial growth, peace and harmony among the different communities in the country. Thus providing all the necessary parameters required for the nation building, the Congress was pivotal to the process of nation building.

Sardar Patel and the Congress Party: Early Period

Sardar was a Congress party cadre under Gandhiji. He gained success in various non-cooperation movements. His success in numerous civil-disobedience movements was indicative of his leadership qualities. People made him hero of the freedom struggle. The party cadres had full confidence in him. In case of any problem, the workers of the party used to seek his advice. Whenever a decision was to be taken, his opinion was always sought for, by the party high command. In later part of his life, he, as a member of the inner circle of the party, was one of the policy makers of the Congress party. Such a distinguished position, he enjoyed till his death. He was a strong party administrator in the building of the new India through his ruthless efficiency.
Sardar attained popularity and subsequent control of the party through his active part in various mass movements. His success at Kheda, Borsad, Bardoli in successive years gave him popularity and he could consolidate the party for difficult tasks ahead. His election as President of the Bombay Provincial Congress in 1921 proved his popularity and command on the Congress ranks. This was followed by Chairmanship of the Reception Committee of the 36th session of Indian National Congress. He was so active that with his initiative, he could collect one crore of rupees for the future struggle of the Congress. His administrative capability and political maneuver quickly made him the party boss par excellence. As observed by Mr. Saggi:

"The technique adopted by Sardar Patel at Bardoli set the moral for future campaigns and undermined the imperial citadel. When the Congress organisation was banned, he made every home a Congress office and every soul a Congress organisation. He turned every village into an

armed camp and made the people cast their fear. He taught them to be self-reliant, resourceful and patient. The art of managing man he knew very well."

In the special Congress Session of 1920, held in Calcutta under the Presidentship of Lala Lajpat Rai, the triumph of Congress by carrying out the objective resolution was due to hard work of Sardar Patel.

Sardar's grip over the Congress party can be seen by his success in the Madras Political Conference of 1929, when he obtained a resounding victory over extremist group led by Srinivas Iyengar. Congress accepted dominion status as per Nehru Report. The objective of the Congress was made clear and the party could consolidate its activity with majority support.

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9. Tahmankar D.V. Sardar Patel - George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London 1970. The author has observed: "But it is doubtful if it would have received such a support if Vallabhbhai had not been there to canvass vigourously and Vigilently", p. 83

10. As per G.O.I. File No. 18/XI - Political Nov. 1931 (NAI, New Delhi). In a letter to Pt. Nehru Mr. Patel has authorised the council of the Provincial Congress Committee to start 'defensive Satyagraha'.

Sardar's election as the President of Karachi Congress in 1931 made him a member of the inner circle of the Congress organisation. He had a very good hold on the party organisation and he could formulate and suggest ways and means for building a strong Congress organisation.

Sardar Patel had the opportunity to rise to the highest honour of the Congress party in the shortest possible time. He was the President of the Congress when the quarrel started in 1932. Unlike before, Sardar prepared the list of working committee members and his successor one by one, who would officiate in his absence. This proves his command over the party colleagues and foresight in organisational matters.

Sardar was a realist while Gandhiji was mostly an idealist. It was only natural that their views sometimes clashed. The matters came to a head when during the Congress session of Bombay, 1934, Sardar agreed with Gandhi's desire to leave the Congress. As Gandhi was the very soul of the freedom struggle and in turn the main spirit behind the Congress party, everybody at the session

of Bombay was shocked to see that the differences between the protege and the mentor could not be allayed and while one was leaving the other rather settled down to the decision. He was conscious that speaking only in terms of idealism would not bring about results. Any political problem should always be fought on the political platform only. Such a step in the mode of working of the Congress gave a remarkable swing to the party politics and helped in facing the problems that the party had to face in the coming years.

The election of 1936/37 was a turning point in Indian politics, when the Congress Party as per government of India Act, 1935, had to take part in the administration of the country by sending their representatives in provincial governments. The party had to play a different role than merely a freedom fighting machinery. It was necessary that Congress should capture as many seats as possible to prove that it had wide acceptance among the masses and it was the only party in the country. Sardar realised that the morale of the party had to be kept up and success of the party would lead the country one step forward toward democratisation and to nation building.
Sardar established control in formulating the party policy and his authority in the inner core of the party. Sardar was one of those few who could realise that Congress would have to take a different role as a party of power instead of a party of protest. The situation at that time was critical due to formation of groups like Hindu Mahasabha, Harijan's led by Dr. Ambedkar, the landlord non-Brahmins in Madras and Maharashtra and above all the Muslim League of Jinnah. At that juncture it was important that the Congress should develop cohesion among various internal groups and stand united against the other parties to establish its superiority. Strong administration and guidance was a very important factor in party building at that time.

During the elections, Sardar was responsible for the election of right candidate at the right place. To select candidates for various constituencies was a great job, as there were claims from rival candidates. The task to choose candidates out of a dozen of aspirants was difficult. But Sardar could achieve this impossible task with great success. In case the selection of candidates were not proper, there were chances of defeat.
for the Congress party which would have meant death of
the organisation, fighting for independence. Sardar with
his confidence and determination, performed his work
successfully. He was an organising genius and mobilised
his forces effectively. Sardar's ingenuity paid handsome
dividend. In the elections, out of the eleven provinces,
Congress got absolute majority in five provinces, whereas
in other four provinces Congress was the largest single
party. Only in Muslim majority Punjab and Sind, Congress
was a minority. While campaigning for the Congress
candidate he told the people, "A Vote for Congress is a
vote for Gandhi".

Sardar and Party Discipline

After the election, it was the task of forming the
Ministries in the Congress majority provinces. Though
Nehru was reluctant about the Congress participation
in Ministry, Sardar believed that participation of Congress
in provincial Legislature would strengthen the party for
the forthcoming freedom struggle. Sardar was the key figure

12. Indian Annual Register - Jan, to June, 1937. (Calcutta)
13. The author of "Red Star of the East" - The Iron
Dictator, A biographical study, M.D. Gunasena &
company, Lahore, 1943, p. 65.
in the formation of various Ministries in the provinces and his wishes were whole heartedly carried out. Ministries were formed by Congress in seven provinces and Sardar advised them to enlarge the scope of the constitution and use the administrative machinery for the betterment of the masses as best as they could.¹⁴.

His achievements in the election were so outstanding that he was successful in bringing the diverse elements together and the idea of a United India could be achieved. Only through his mastery over election machinery, the party could counter the ill designs of the British Government. The Congress transformed its construction programme through legislation under his able guidance.¹⁵.

Sardar attained considerable experience in controlling manpower, while working for the party. He foresaw the coming events and understood the psychology of the people. Such foresight helped him to fix up his own strategy and as a result, he could attain success and achieve party's goal.

Sardar's capability in handling the entire party conflict can be well established from the way he tackled the controversy between Nariman and B.G. Kher, who were the contestants for the premiership of Bombay. Though Nariman was a loyal Congress worker for long, he was not given the premiership of Bombay and in his place Kher was selected as premier. In the teeth of the allegation of partiality Sardar stood firm in his decision. Even Nariman's complaint to Gandhiji did not shake Sardar from his reasoning. Sardar indicated that he would abide by the decision of any independent tribunal. The tribunal formed for the purpose, found Nariman guilty of malpractices in 1934 elections. As a last resort, Nariman approached Congress president but Sardar's decision prevailed. In this matter Sardar wanted to maintain strict party discipline and did not follow communal path as alleged by Azad.

The allegations made by Azad were not correct as Sardar himself, at the first instance, did not get himself involved into the question of leadership; he was initially

16. The Bombay chronicle, dt. 11-6-37.

neutral and supported neither Nariman nor Kher. Moreover, all the three leaders Deo, Despande and Patabardhan were unanimous in rejecting Nariman's candidature due to his bad work at Wardha and Bombay Congress. Even Nariman himself admitted that Sardar was impartial and did not like him due to his unsatisfactory performance in 1937 elections. This is a clear example that Sardar was not an authoritarian but a disciplinarian.

There were similar instances which when looked superficially show that Sardar was misunderstood for his disciplinary actions; but with all fairness, it should be appreciated that whatever Sardar did was for the benefit of the country.

It is interesting that afterwards Nariman realised his fault and apologised to Sardar. As late as 1948 Nariman became the leader of the Congress Party in Bombay Corporation and renewed his friendship with Sardar.

A similar administrative problem came up in Central Province, when the minister of Mahakoshal group including D.P. Misra, R.S. Sukla and D.K. Mehta wanted to oust

the Premier, Dr. Khare. The premier wanted to control
the ministry but he acted unconstitutionally by
removing his faction groups. Sardar Patel viewed
Khare's action seriously and pointed out that Khare
had played in the hands of the British Government and
subsequently arranged his removal through the High
Command. In spite of strong protests from various
corners, Sardar was firm in his decision that Khare
was unworthy of holding such a high position and he
had to resign. Sardar ultimately left Congress and
joined Hindu Mahasabha. Sardar was justified in his
decision in handling such a crisis in Central province
as it was an eye opener for other States also. As
Ahluwalia has observed:

"The working committee at the instance of Patel,
resolved that Dr. Khare was unworthy to hold
any position in the Congress. It may be
mentioned that though Sardar Patel's action was
high handed, it was justified by the spirit of
time. He acted ruthlessly against individuals
but in the interest of the party."

The deep sense of duty and regard for the maintenance
of principles coupled with the ideals of untainted life

19. Murthi R.K. Sardar Patel - The man and his
contemporaries, Sterling Publishers Pvt Ltd, Delhi

of a Patriot" - op. cit., p. 42.
led Sardar to dismiss Khare and expose Nariman. But the consequences were far reaching. The steps fixed Sardar's seal on the provincial governments and established his unquestioned superiority in statesmanship. At the juncture of deeply disturbed political conditions of the country Sardar did help the party by his merciless yet exact and timely decisions. No doubt, the image of the party was made stronger and the path was cleared up for the future.

As a party builder Sardar had to take stern disciplinary actions when called for. As early as 1939, he was well known for his leadership in the Congress party; even he was named as Hitler from the point of implementation of discipline. His actions for the interest of the Congress party was not liked by a few of his colleagues. In course of his handling the party problems, he had to face opposition from his colleagues. But Sardar was not moved by propaganda made by his opponents against him, as he had full confidence over the actions he intended to take, keeping in view the benefit of the party and country as a whole. When he delivered his lecture in Baroda in May 1939 as 'The President of Peoples' Conference,
he was termed as the enemy of Maharastra. But Sardar was above all such criticism. In his own words:

"Poisonous propaganda has been willfully carried against me. But I never did deliberately anything either dirty or dishonourable" 21.

The next phase in the Congress Party affairs related to Sardar's opposition to Subhash Bose. In Tripuri Congress of 1939, in spite of strong opposition by the Congress High Command, Bose was elected Congress President. There was a direct and open clash between Sardar and Bose. Subhash Bose described Sardar as 'Shining light of the ruling clique' 22. Bose attacked the Congress ministers in the States. Sardar together with the members of the working committee warned him against his attitude and ultimately disqualified him from holding any elected post in the Congress for three years 23. It was a very crude method adopted by Sardar; but the same can be analysed in the context of Subhas's rousing popularity. This popularity might have proved very dangerous for the soul of the Congress party - The Mahatma.

The Mahatma would certainly have lost his hold on these prodigee and these might have resulted in total confusion in the Congress party as a whole. Bose, coming out of control of Gandhiji, would have become a dictator. Sardar acted as a ruthless administrator; but his action left a deep footprint on the Congress organisation in the later years. The exit of Subhas Bose from the Congress party removed the possibility of disintegration of the party, as the formation of new parties like Hindu Mahasabha, Forward Block, SSP did not pose any problem for the integrity of the Congress party; rather it firmly helped in consolidation of the party. K.L. Punjabi said:

"Bose resigned from the Congress and formed a new party, the Forward Block. Vallabhbhai heaved a sigh of relief at the exit of a would be dictator from the fold of the Congress - wherein he had functioned as a breaker rather than as a maker. Sardar had skillfully undone the mischief of the election of Bose"24.

Much to the chagrin of both the Mahatma and Sardar, Bose was becoming with dangerous speed too much of a giant. They feared that if they lost their hold on the party, which they did foresee in the victory of Bose, he would

become a dictator in the party and many lights of the party would pale into insignificance. These lights did include the front liners of the party. It is not sure whether the party was to be saved or the future of many stalwarts of the party was to be protected. The phobia made Sardar desperate and Subhash Bose was forced to stage his exit from the Congress party. The contention that the disintegration of the party was the main consideration, can be accepted only with a feeling of uneasiness. I wonder if K.L. Punjabi is truthful in his observation that the exit of Bose finally helped in its consolidation.

Sardar's approach to the dissident group of the Congress was different from others. In his opinion, in case of dissatisfaction, the faction group should be evicted, thus removing squabbles and internal bickerings. That was the way how he handled the party affairs and built up his own stronghold on the party machinery. His method of conducting the party affairs was not through a process of reconciliation but by way of elimination of rival groups. It was the late Yusuf Meharaly, a distinguished
socialist leader with intimate contacts with Patel, who said:

"Either one agrees with the Sardar and is then incorporated in his machine, or one disagrees with him and is sent to the wall. He eliminates opponents out of his path tactfully and, if necessary, ruthlessly."

When with the outbreak of second world war, the Congress Ministries at various provinces resigned on the directive of party High Command comprising of Sardar, Nehru and others, the party discipline among the members was well demonstrated. The discipline which was implanted in the party, helped the leaders to focus its protest against the British Government. Sardar as a party boss was destined to impose strict discipline at all levels.

Party Building: The Crucial Years (1945-48)

The most important activity of Sardar in party building started, when the Congress leaders were invited by the British Government to arrive at a solution and establishment of Constituent Assembly and formation of

interim government, under the cabinet mission plan of 1946. Elections in the central legislative assembly and provinces were to be held and Sardar played a vital role in selecting the candidates and supporting them so as to obtain majority for the Congress party. Sardar was the Chairman of the Central Election Board and he realised the great importance of the election and its impact in the coming years during transfer of power.

Sardar was the key figure as Chairman of the parliamentary subcommittee. Durga Das has observed:

"Congressmen had been in the wilderness during the war years and their party machine was in disarray. It became Patel's prime responsibility to reassemble the machine and get it to run smoothly."26

During the Central Legislative assembly election in 1945, Sardar coordinated with other leaders and the provincial Congress Committees as can be seen from his numerous correspondence. He played a vital role in the Congress High Command as a policy maker. At some stage he desired to relinquish his post but he had to continue as a policy maker during the period when Azad was the President27.

Sardar knew that success in election for Congress would determine the future of the party and the nation as well. So, he worked untiringly to make his effort a success. In his letter to Rajendra Prasad Sardar expressed that Congress should contest all the seats of the provincial assemblies to win a maximum of seats. Sardar's intention was to obtain maximum number of Congress candidates and not to allow other parties to gain strength. He asserted that the policy of the Congress leaders should be for the interest of Congress unity. He advised Rajendra Prasad that Congress should not make any adjustment of seats with Hindu Mahasabha as he was confident that Congress would easily secure all the Central Assembly seats. His intention was to keep up the prestige of the Congress party and accordingly he assigned the task to the party frontliners to endeavour for acquiring maximum success in the election. He tried to bring down the morale of his opponents when he wrote to Shyamaprasad Mukherjee that he should dissolve Hindu Mahasabha and join Congress.

29. Durga Das (Ed), op. cit., No. 24 - Sardar's letter to Nehru, date 12.10.45.
The Congress High Command gave Sardar full authority for approving the candidature of Congress candidates. By the resolution of the Election Board of 25th September, 1945 Sardar was empowered to approve a candidate where the nomination for a single candidate was received. Thus Sardar had absolute command over the party and his powers were more than the Congress president. This shows the party's confidence in him.

In order to strengthen the party, Sardar realised that new elements had to be inducted into the party machinery. In order to inject new blood in the Congress party he carefully looked into the nominations of various candidates. He indicated to Azad that in several provinces the Congress workers and committee members were not in touch with the political atmosphere of the country and did not enjoy confidence of the people. Accordingly, he suggested that selection of candidates should not be left to the provinces in order to avoid trouble and indiscipline. He desired that the party should keep in touch with the mood of the time and people as well.

When the complaints started coming about the nomination of candidates for central and provincial seats by the provinces, Sardar acted tactfully keeping in mind the prestige of the Congress and the prospect, in the election. In spite of representations by individuals and group of people for a particular candidate, Sardar strictly followed the principle of party's interest and no other personal considerations.

When Sardar found the danger in Bengal by the steps taken by the provincial committee in backing independent candidates, he immediately contacted Azad and intimated that supporting independent candidates would not be for the benefit of the Congress party and that the seats must be contested on Congress tickets only. He was very much concerned about the unity of the party. Bengal problem was a serious concern for him. He wrote to P.C. Ghosh:

"Bengal have suffered tremendously in the past five years and it is for us to mark or mar the future of Bengal. The Congress must present a united front and sink all personal differences".

33. Sardar's letter to P.B. Ugargol, dt. 5.10.45 - Courtesy Maniben Patel.
Sardar's appeal had a far reaching effect in Bengal and improved the prospects of Congress candidates. In order to remove differences between P.C. Ghosh and Sarat Bose, Sardar advised P.C. Ghosh to inform him of the details so that a solution could be reached. This shows his eagerness to bring the Congressmen together.

In order to gain strength of the party Sardar tried to resolve the conflicts among the party members and represent a united image, as this would strengthen the party.

When Azad was backing up Asaf Ali for the leadership of Central Assembly in place of Sarat Bose, Sardar realised that the same was detrimental to party's interest and immediately took up the matter with Nehru and Prasad. He expressed that no outside pressure should be brought in such matters. In his letter to Prasad, Sardar expressed grave concern and commented that ignoring Sarat Babu would lead to dissatisfaction in the party as Sarat was a popular leader.

Selection of candidates was problematic in Punjab also and complaints started pouring in. Sardar, though not directly connected in Punjab affairs, intervened for the sake of the party. Though majority of members wanted Thakurdas Bhargava, Azad was in favour of Shyamlal, the sitting candidate. Sardar expressed that Azad should not reverse the decision of the provincial Congress Committee, as the same would seriously affect the party's discipline and interest. About the factionalism in Punjab, Sardar was very much concerned and pointed out to Azad that those who had encouraged such quarrels had forgotten to look deep into it and realise the demoralising effect of such factionalism on the general situation.

As regards the provincial election in Punjab, on the suggestion of Dr. Gopichand Bhargava for adjustment of seats with Akali Sikhs, Sardar welcomed the suggestion for the gain of the party but only as a disciplined party worker, he reserved his decision and wanted to consult Election Board and Azad. The position of Congress

41. Ibid, pp. 139-140, Sardar's letter to Gopichand Bhargava, dt. 8.11.45.
candidates in provincial election in Punjab was becoming worse due to factionalism and Sardar strongly wrote to Bhimsen Sachar that party leaders should unite for defeating the Muslim League. He wrote:

"I wish that Congress ranks will realise how delicate the situation is and will resist the temptation of running the offices and entering into competition for getting due share of posts."42.

These were Sardar's efforts only which could bring down the differences and rivalry among the Congressmen and prevented the party from dis-integration. Sardar wrote to Sachar:

"Let us forget the past, adjust differences, remove mutual distrust and learn to work together as one team"43.

The problem that arose in the selection of central candidates in Orissa and Andhra was also tackled by Sardar firmly. Though Azad pleaded for B. Das as a candidate, Sardar did not approve it as he had valid reasons to believe that if B. Das were selected, party

interests would be hampered. He was in favour of candidature of Narayanswamy and wanted to put an end to minor bickerings. His intention was very much clear when in his press statement he warned that the Congress party and the country were passing through a period of crisis and at such a critical juncture Congressmen should not waste time on minor issues.

A dispute arose about the selection of candidates in Central Province. Azad cleared the nomination of Pandey without the consent of board members; this created discontent among the Mahakoshal leaders like R.S. Shukla and others. Sardar wrote to Azad about such irregularities and expressed that the act was sheer dis-honour to the Central Board. He pointed out that there was no provision in the board that the Chairman could reverse the decision of the Board. He was so much disturbed that he wanted to resign from the Central Board and Working Committee and wanted to be relieved without delay.

Sardar thus meant strict discipline in the party matters and wanted to strengthen the foothold of the Congress party.


The election in the centre and provinces created serious problems in Madras. Sardar tried his best to solve the same. However, he could not get the approval for Rajaji from Tamil Nadu Congress, but he selected Rajaji as the Congress candidate. Through his correspondence with Congress leader like Kamraj and others, he tried to impress on the possible gain, the party could get in case Rajaji was taken. However, finally he could make the leaders agree to certain amicable settlements with Rajaji. When Kamaraj wanted that decision of his committee was to be bound on the central committee Sardar sharply reacted and wrote:

"There is no question of imposing any decision from above, but you and your colleagues must realise that the working committee has also a responsibility and it can not abdicate its functions, if it has been approached by as many as about one third of the members of your provincial Congress committee."

Sardar thus tried to warn the provincial leaders that the party discipline would rest on Central leaders in case of incapability of the provincial leaders. There was also some problem regarding the nomination of

Mancharsha Awari from Nagpur Constituency. Though recommended by local Congress, his nomination was disapproved by the Central Board and Awari started fast in protest. Sardar was firm to maintain party discipline. He had a clear vision about his line of action and he never shifted from his standpoint. In reply to Ravishankar Shukla's request to interfere into the situation, Sardar intimated that when someone had chosen his line of action without his advice, he would not like to interfere. He, however, warned that he would never submit to any short of blackmailing. In the same letter Sardar held that he did not agree with Azad regarding change of decision of Central Board in favour of Pandey. His letter to Azad was quite indicative about discipline. He wrote:

"There can be no appeals against the decision of the Board including you as Chairman and if such authority were rested in you, there should have been a specific provision in the working committee resolution. Your action has lowered our prestige in the eye of the people of province".


Sardar strictly followed the decision once taken. He was a man of his words. Awari ultimately bowed down and broke his fast, on receipt of Sardar's telegram dt. 10.3.46 to him. Thus Sardar helped to build up party discipline.

Another contestant from Nagpur was the secretary of Provincial Congress Committee. But Sardar disposed him off nicely and advised him not to run after power only. He wrote:

"This is not the way in which your province can either build or maintain its reputation in the Congress organisation or outside. You must accept the decisions loyally and try to create atmosphere in which there will be no contest."

Sardar acted as a boosting force to raise confidence in the minds of the Congressmen, regarding victory of the Congress candidates in the election. He, in his letter to Gopinath Bardoloi of Assam, stressed that each and every seat should be contested to gain maximum advantage. He was concerned about Assam since the position of Muslim League was very sound. His moral support could give better results in election.

During the period of his working either in interim government or as Home Minister, Sardar always acted as an adviser to various ministries in the provinces. He worked into the problem in U.P. between the premier and Inspector General of Police. He stopped the Governor of Assam from invoking special power. Sardar was out and out a Congressman and strictly followed party discipline. In turn, he also maintained strict discipline among the Congressmen. When Congressmen raised funds for the party and the same was used for personal purpose by Kala Venkat Rao, Sardar warned him against such gross irregularities and bluntly told him that such an act was a gross indiscipline and would tarnish the image of the party.

After the election of 1946, the question of making the ministries in various provinces was the major role of the Congress Central Committee where Sardar played a vital role. In Madras, the prospective candidates for party leadership were Rajaji, V.V. Giri, T. Prakasam. Sardar and Gandhiji desired to have Rajaji as the party leader.


leader but Sardar, inspite of difficulties did not oppose Prakasham considering overall interest of the party. But at a later date when Prakasham played in the hands of Governor, Sardar warned him about the consequence 55.

When there was a conflict between the premier of Bihar Srikrishna Sinha and Governor Jairamdas Daulatram, Sardar intervened and tried to set right the things. He, for setting right the things, took up the matter with the premier and explained the role of Governor in the changed circumstances after independence. He also advised the Governor about his role with regard to provincial ministry 56.

Dissatisfaction arose in Assam Ministry, regarding Inter-Dominion-Conference between East Pakistan, Assam, West Bengal and Tripura, when Assam's case was not properly represented. Gopinath Bardoloi, premier of Assam referred the matter to Sardar, who looked into the problem and assured Bardoloi that at the appropriate time when the matter would come under review, he would definitely look into it 57.

57. Shankar V, Select Correspondence Vol-2, Ibid., p. 44. Sardar's letter, dt. 22.4.48, to Gopinath Bardoloi.
Provincial ministries faced problems from time to time in course of their functioning. Sardar was keeping a check on their smooth working and advised them as and when required. A crisis arose in Central Province Ministry when Dr. S.M. Hasan resigned and various reports about his resignation and his controversy with the premier appeared in the press. Sardar was terribly disturbed and took a stock of the situation from Ravi Shankar Shukla and others and finally got convinced that Dr. Hasan had not acted properly. He, in clear words, indicated to Dr. Hasan that he had lost confidence of his premier and it was for him to take corrective steps. Thus with Sardar's intervention the controversy ended keeping the image of the party.

After the installation of Congress Ministries in various provinces and in the centre, Sardar did not close his eyes and become content with the achievement. On the contrary, he knew that it was absolutely necessary to observe discipline and strict administration in the ministries to avoid any pitfall. He kept him informed.

about the activities of various ministries and their functioning. The working of the ministries was viewed by the Parliamentary sub-committee in which Sardar was an active member. The purpose of the sub-committee was to be in close and constant touch with the work of the Congress party in all the legislatures in different provinces, guide them in their function and to take appropriate action in case of an emergency\textsuperscript{59}.

Keeping in touch with Ministers, advising them from time to time either during crisis period or for smooth running of the administration and party machinery, Sardar carefully maintained integrity and solidarity of Congress party. Even Harold Macmillan graded Sardar much higher in party leadership qualities than Bevin\textsuperscript{60}. As the party boss, as the Chairman of Parliamentary Subcommittee and by keeping him updated with the party affairs, he controlled the party machinery with ruthless efficiency\textsuperscript{61}. His excellency in controlling the party affairs was so much remarkable that it had attracted

\begin{itemize}
  \item 59. Coupland R - \textit{Indian Politics}, Oxford University Press, 1968, p. 90.
  \item 61. Moraes Frank - \textit{Jawaharlal Nehru}, New York, 1956, p. 402.
\end{itemize}
special attention to critics. In the words of John Guenther:

"He is the party boss par excellence. He is the Jim Frarely, the ruthless party fixer and organiser." 62.

At the time of any crisis in the party, he showed finest quality of maneuvering in political machinery and thus he could keep up with the political atmosphere of the country. T.N. Chaturvedi has noted:

"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, etc., gave him not only an overview of factional politics, veiled points of bureaucratic resistance but also of administrative pulls..." 63.


After Independence

Sardar's handling of party affairs even after the partition of the country is also remarkable. There are instances which prove that even after organising the party machinery for the purpose of attaining freedom, he had not let loose the party administration in the post-independence period. He knew that to keep a strong hold on the party machinery and guide the various Congress committees during the formative period of the country, were equally important. Consequently, he kept track on all the important affairs of the party.

In 1948, when the Congress socialists were trying to gain importance and crystallise to give an onslaught on the Congress party, Sardar Patel tactfully thwarted their attempt by instigating an amendment in the constitution of Congress, denying membership to individuals holding membership of other political parties. In spite of strong protests made by some Congressmen for

64. Allan and Wendy Scarfe - J.P. - his biography, Orient Longmans Ltd. New Delhi, 1975, p. 215.
such an amendment in the constitution and urging Nehru to dismiss Sardar, the opposition members did not get support from Nehru and other members and Sardar remained as Deputy Prime Minister. This proves the tactfulness of Sardar in holding party affairs.

Sardar was active throughout his career in keeping party in his control. In 1949, when an enquiry commission was set to enquire about the affairs in Nalagarh and Kishangarh in Pepsu, without his knowledge, Sardar immediately took up the matter with the then Congress President, Pattabhi Sitaramayan and strongly protested against such an irregularity in the party organisation. He commented on the partiality in handling the situation and was afraid that such steps will be detrimental to party.65

There were certain irregularity in the appointments of Chief Parliamentary Secretary in Punjab in 1949, and the same did not escape Sardar's attention. He immediately took up the matter with Kala Venkatrao, the then Secretary of


AICC and suggested that the Premier, Bhimsen Sachar should give proper explanation for such as irregularity and disciplinary action should be taken on the defaulter.66

There was a problem in Rajasthan in forming the Congress Ministry. The contenders were Jai Narayan Vyas, Manakya Lal Verma, Gokul Bhai Bhatt and Haraldal Shastri. Sardar, in spite of strong opposition managed to have Shastri elected as the leader of Congress party. There was still dissatisfaction in the party as can be seen that after the death of Sardar in 1950, Shastri had to step down from the ministership. This shows what a grip Sardar had on the party.67

To consolidate the party Sardar applied disciplinary measures. Jayprakash Narayan was not following the party discipline and by January, 1948, Sardar decided that Jayprakash should be made to toe the party line and he issued a press call to Congressmen to close their ranks, Sardar declared:

"If anyone finds himself as misfit, his place is outside the Congress; but as long as he is to regard himself as its member, it is his bounden duty to place the institution above the individual."68

In June 1950, there was some problem in the Congress Cabinet when Dr. Mathai resigned and made a public statement. When Azad wanted to tackle the situation, Sardar took serious objection and informed him that the ministerial matters should better be looked after by the Prime Minister as the political head of the ministry and Azad should not interfere.

**SUMMING UP**

Sardar knew that in order to keep discipline in the party and the ministry, code of practice had to be properly followed and unnecessary latitude should not be given to avoid dissatisfaction among the party members, as this may lead to disintegration. The success which Sardar made in party building, was due to his conviction of the party matter. In fact, he started his work for party building as a primary step towards nation building. Sardar set forth a model of party building

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during the process of his continuous association with the Congress party. His party building activity was aimed at attaining maximum stronghold of the Congress party through his active efforts in (a) arousing the masses with self consciousness and gathering them under the banner of Congress party (b) selection of proper candidates for Central and provincial elections when Congress decided to participate in the government (c) increasing the discipline in the party by removing intraparty conflicts among the members (d) applying strong administrative control over the party machinery to make the same more appealing to the public and more disciplined (e) eliminating the faction group which was the trouble maker and halted the progress of the party.

Sardar through his administrative skill could build up a strong base for Congress party. Interacting with the party cadres, sinking difference between the party leaders, solving problems of various ministries, removing dissatisfaction and injustice in selecting the Congress members, boosting the morale of party workers and initiating mass cooperation in party
activities; he could set a model for the Congress party to establish it on a strong footing. As and when required, he, with the consultation of other senior party colleagues, had initiated reformation and modernisation of the party activities so as to keep it up with the change of political atmosphere. Such a dynamism, culminated in those days have paid fruits now-a-days, when the Congress Party has shouldered the responsibility of running a stable administration and improving the lot of the people by adopting modernisation in economic and industrial field. On the other hand, the Muslim League, which came out as the only party in Pakistan, after independence, has suffered fragmentation and the country is passing through a long spell of military rule. The democratic approach for the governance of the country, which was established by Muslim League is withering away as the party could not build up its base with mass awakening as the Congress Party did in the partition period. Lack of democratic government run by party machinery has hampered the growth of the country and difference between Indian and Pakistan can easily be realised with respect to administration, citizens' prosperity and
Overall image in international political field. Congress party had sustained a number of crises, but due to the strong base prepared by Sardar, it is still the strongest party in free India.

In present day politics, ultimate goal of nation building can be achieved by the party machinery, if the party can dominate powerful and well organised pressure groups in the society. As we can see today, the Janta Party leaders failed to establish supremacy of the political system over pressure groups, Mrs. Indira Gandhi as a leader from Congress Party, revealed her capacity to deal with the pressure groups, by her various reforms like bank nationalisation and abolition of privy purses. The base work for such a modality of party politics was done by the early leaders like Nehru and Patel 71.

Sardar Patel's steps to nurture the Congress party were wise in the context of the results achieved in the subsequent years. In the environment of freedom movement in preindependence period and critical situation in the post independence days, the steps taken by

71. Bhambri C.P. - "Indian Political System" The Times of India June 2, 1980 p. 8.(Ahmedabad)
Congress leaders including Sardar to stabilise the country's freedom through one party dominance are worth noting. Sardar knew that for creating an atmosphere of stability and peace through an orderly stable elected government, presence of a political party was essential. He also felt that steps were to be taken to redirect public attention from the activities of the party to the activities of the government for social and economic growth.

From time to time, Sardar was criticised as an autocrat as he acted in a ruthless manner in enforcing discipline. His attempts aimed at developing a strong base for Congress Party were not fully appreciated. But in the present day context, when the Congress Party is still remaining as the strongest party in the country catering for the growth and prosperity of the citizens, we should look into the steps taken by the devoted leader to prepare the party for the future. Sardar's efforts in the building up of Congress Party definitely deserve appreciation.

The role of the Congress Party after independence was well conceived by Sardar and Nehru. Gandhi wanted to dissolve the party or to convert it into a Social Organisation, whereas Sardar and Nehru prepared the party for the administration and nation building in the country. With such a change in the role, the party came out with success due to the leadership of Sardar and Nehru.

The infrastructure of the Congress Party, developed during the freedom struggle, had to be recast to make it suitable for the administration after independence. The party had to assume the role of government aimed at internal solidarity, economic and social stability and international image. Unless the basic structure of the party was built with strict discipline, interaction with the ministries and other government officials and fulfilling the need of the people, the country could not think of a leap forward.

Congress Party composed of diversity of people having its base all over the population, irrespective of caste, creed or religion and to enforce discipline.

Sardar had to act sometimes in a ruthless manner. Though many a time, he was criticised as an autocrat, his actions were aimed at cohesion of the party machinery in a critical juncture. Looking into the objective and intention of Sardar, to such drastic steps taken at times of necessity cannot be criticised without realising the farfetched results for which steps were taken. Sardar's actions at different times to systematise the party activities were not based on any personal ego or partiality. His actions were aimed at tuning up of the party for the future needs.

Sardar had, perhaps, more than any one of his colleagues, clearer vision of the party's role in the future administration of the free India. He could perceive that the Congress Party had to play the part of nation building and for that purpose it was absolutely essential that the divergent elements in the party had to be kept together by enforcing strict discipline. Unless a strict code of conduct and loyalty prevailed among the rank and file of the party, Congress could not think of building of the destiny of independent India. Sardar, in his various speeches, had clearly called the Congress Party cadres to get united and warned them that any indiscipline would not be tolerated but would be dealt with strongly and seriously. Sardar had worked for consolidation of the party keeping in view the growth and stability
of the country without looking into any personal interest. He was devoted to the building of a strong party in India as a prerequisite of nation building. In this respect he had played a unique role in nation building through the process of party building.

An important aspect of the working of intra-party democracy in a political party has been the formal supremacy of the mass organisation, by the exercise of real power and influence by leadership. The highest executive authority rested with the working committee of Congress which was the real centre of power. When Congress assumed responsibility for government in some of the provinces, the High Command decided to institute a committee of its important leaders known as Parliamentary Subcommittee constituted of Sardar Patel, Azad and Rajendra Prasad. The body exercised supervision over policies of ministries and guarded them against attacks of political opponents. Thus Sardar's supremacy over the Congress Party was well established. The growth and stability of the party leading to the solidarity of the country was the contribution of Sardar Patel. There were conflicts between organisational and ministerial wings of the Congress after independence. So long as Patel was alive, one man exercised control over the party organisation while holding
a high position in the Central Government. With his death, tension developed between members of the Cabinet and the Congress party president and functions of both the wings were clearly identified. Sardar, the consolidator of the party has still held in high regards among the rank and file of the Congress both in ministerial and organisational wing for his disciplinary steps aimed at consolidation of both the wings of the party.