CHAPTER - V
SARDAR PATEL AND THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT -
FINAL PHASE AND TRANSFER OF POWER
It was Sardar Patel who played a crucial and decisive role in attaining the freedom of India and her partition. Being a realist, Patel knew that the British would not wind up their empire early unless India was partitioned. India would not have got independence so early, had the Sardar not agreed to the partition. In this chapter, an attempt is made to assess the decisive role played by the Sardar along with various events leading to the ultimate transfer of power. Important events like the partition of India, the birth of two nations, aftermath of independence are also discussed.

On October 13, 1946, the League found it expedient to join the Interim Government which had been formed on 24th August with Nehru as the Vice-President. It was no Coalition Government in the real sense of the term. It 'Consisted of a Congress bloc and a Muslim bloc, each functioning under separate leadership'. The League refused to accept Nehru's leadership and the principle
of collective responsibility. Constant wranglings in the Cabinet presented a sad spectacle of a house divided against itself. Liaquat Ali Khan, who held finance portfolio, utilized his power in such a way as to make it difficult for any Congress Government to function effectively. Mr. Jinnah had chosen his members for the purpose of securing 'a foothold to fight for our cherished goal of Pakistan' and to cooperate with the Congress for the promotion of common welfare. The League members of the Interim Government openly indulged in belligerent speeches. One of them went to the extent of saying that 'the events in East Bengal were but part of the all-India battle for Pakistan' outside the Government. The communal spirit had been mounting.

The Assembly met for the first time on 9th December, 1946 with the abstention of the Muslim League as it had not received any clear-cut assurance from the Viceroy that the proposal of the Mission Plan of 16th May, 1946 for the grouping of provinces would be respected by the Congress. Therefore, the Congress, in February 1947 demanded that the League should vacate the Interim Government. Sardar Patel stated in a press interview
that if the Viceroy did not demand the resignation of the League members from the Government, the Congress would have to withdraw from the Government. The consequences of such a step would have been disastrous and would have led to communal riots and civil war in the country.

C.R. Attlee's Announcement on the Transfer of Power:

When all the efforts made by the Cabinet Mission, the Viceroy and the British Prime Minister to bring harmony and cooperation between the Congress and the League had failed, and when the Congress-League confrontation on a number of vexed problems had been mounting and the maintenance of law and order question became acute throughout the country, Mr. Attlee, the Prime Minister intervened with the historic declaration to transfer power.

Mr. Attlee, in his historic declaration of 20th February 1947 declared "His Majesty's Government desire
to handover responsibility to authorities established by a Constitution approved by all parties in India, in accordance with the Cabinet Mission Plan. But unfortunately, there is at present no clear prospect that such a Constitution and such authorities will emerge. The present state of uncertainty is fraught with danger and cannot be indefinitely prolonged. His Majesty's Government wish to make it clear that it is their definite intention to take necessary steps to effect the transference of power to responsible Indian hands by a date not later than June 1948."

Lord "avell wished to persist with the Cabinet Mission Plan, for he held that it was the only possible solution of the Indian problem... He therefore advocated that the status quo should be maintained and every attempt should be made to compose the differences between the two major parties. It was his firm conviction that it would be dangerous and unworthy if the British withdrew without a previous understanding

between Congress and the League." Mr. Attlee, being responsible and shrewd did not accept Wavell's advise. Mr. Attlee was firm on fixing a date for the withdrawal of the British power and transfer of responsibility to Indian hands. He considered this as the only solution to Indian problem under the then existing circumstances. Therefore, Wavell tendered his resignation and Admiral Viscount Mountbatten was appointed as the Governor-General of India to effect the transfer.

Mr. Attlee's historic declaration was hailed with much exuberance by different quarters. The Congress was happy over the intention of the British Government. Nehru acclaimed it as a 'wise and courageous decision'. "The clear and definite declaration (regarding the transfer of power) removes all misconceptions and suspicions... (It) also brings reality and a certain dynamic quality to the present situation... It is a challenge to all of us." But Gandhi was the only

Congress leader who was not happy with the declaration. He could foresee the deeper implication of it. In a letter written to Nehru on 24th February 1947, he warned him that this would lead to Pakistan for those provinces or portions which may want it. No one will be forced one way or the other.

The League found much encouragement in the following words of the Prime Minister's statement. "His Majesty's Government will have to consider to whom the power of the Central Government in British India should be handed over, whether as a whole to some form of Central Government for British India or in some areas to the existing Provincial Governments." It began to think that if it stayed out of the Constitution-making body and succeeded in setting up League ministries in the six provinces which it included in its demand for Pakistan, power would be handed over to it in those provinces. Its dream of an independent and sovereign Pakistan would thus be realised. The League started its desperate attempt to secure control over all of them. It was firmly entrenched

4. Ibid.
in Bengal and consolidated in N.W.F.P. was shaky and the League started direct action. Malik Khizr Hayat Khan was forced to resign as he was unable to enforce law against the Muslim League National Guards and the Hindu Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh. The League forced the ministry here. The League resorted to terrorise methods to pull down ministries in Bihar, Bengal, U.P. and Punjab. The result of the formation of League's ministry in place of the Unionist Government in the Punjab, was the breaking out of communal riots all over the province. The violence led to man-slaughter, arson, looting of property, etc. In Rawalpindi alone, 2,049 persons were killed in the course of a fortnight. Lord Mountbatten's Press Attachee who visited Rawalpindi reported that the destruction in the Hindu and Sikh quarters was as thorough as any produced by fire bomb raids in the war. The Muslims of the area were quite pleased with themselves. The worst feature of the ugly situation was that the police force remained inactive and took no step to prevent ghastly atrocities. Some British Army Officers tauntingly asked the panic-stricken Hindus who sought their help to go to Gandhi, Nehru and Patel.
The Congress Working Committee and the Congress Reaction:

When tension mounted and communal outbreaks were spreading like a conflagration and when practically many parts of the country were in a seething cauldron of atrocities, the Congress Working Committee met on March 8th, 1947 to discuss the dismal situation. It was the consensus of many members in the Congress to come to a compromise with the League. The Hindus and Sikhs in Eastern Punjab and Hindus in Western Bengal were afraid of losing their identity in the eventuality of partition and therefore they urged the Congress leaders for a partition of these two provinces. While announcing to Parliament on 20th February 1947, the appointment of Lord Mountbatten as Viceroy, Mr. Attlee said that he would be "entrusted with the task of transferring to Indian Hindus the responsibility for the government of British India in a manner that will best ensure the future happiness and prosperity of India." 5

Even many of the Congress leaders felt that without partition there would be chaos and confusion. Thus on 8th March, the Congress Working Committee made it clear that the Constitution framed by the Constituent Assembly will apply only to those areas which accept it... (further) it must also be understood that any province or part of a province which accepts the Constitution and desire to join the union cannot be prevented from doing so." In order to protect the interests of the minorities, the Congress recommended the partition of the Punjab. With the division of Punjab, the predominantly Muslim part would be separated from the predominantly non-Muslim part. This was the first sign of the Congress painfully awakening to the hard realisation that a divided India was preferable to a United India with a civil war on, whose end no one could predict.

It was in this crucial and frightful condition that Lord Mountbatten the new Viceroy arrived in India on 22nd March 1947. He was a man of charm, imagination,

titanic energy, dexterous, determined, drive, ambitious and full of initiative. He was reputed for his statesmanship and his genius in winning over people. Fundamentally, he was a pragmatist and a man of action and an individualist. The most remarkable and distinctive feature of Mountbatten's diplomacy was the speed with which he took crucial decisions. With the arrival of such a diplomat par excellence, things began to move fast. The Congress and the Muslim League began their final desperate struggle for power.

Mountbatten being sincere, plain and open-hearted played no hide and seek in discussing the Indian problem with the important leaders of both the Congress and the League. Sardar Patel appeared to him "as a strong, sturdy and capable organiser, possessed of great common sense and realism. He considered Patel worthy of cultivation." He soon found Nehru and Patel as the key persons of the Congress, apart from Gandhi. While Patel with his iron grip controlled the party organisation, Nehru had a mass appeal and Gandhi had a mystic influence. Lord Mountbatten did not appreciate Gandhi who told him, during the final phase of the
crucial negotiations that Jinnah was to be requested to form a Cabinet of his own choice and run the administration. Mountbatten told Gandhi, "He must first get the support of the Congress party, and this he naturally failed to get. But that was Gandhi." 7

It did not take much time for Mountbatten to realise that Mr. Jinnah held the key to the whole situation. So, he had talks with Mr. Jinnah and did not cut much ice with him. He found Mr. Jinnah cold, aloof, 'frigid, haughty and disdainful'. Jinnah refused to be convinced or converted by any viewpoint other than his own. He was rigid and stubborn about his only goal - Pakistan. His only end was to achieve a separate and independent national homeland for 90 million Muslims. About Jinnah, Mountbatten said that "he gives me the impression of a man who has not thought out a single piece of the mechanics of his own scheme, and he will get a shock of his life when he really has to come down to earth to try and make his vague idealistic proposals work on a concrete

basis." On another occasion, he told that "until I had met him, I would not have thought it possible that a man with such a complete lack of administrative knowledge or sense of responsibility could achieve or hold down such a powerful position." 9

After having prolonged discussions with Sardar Patel, Nehru, Jinnah and other important leaders, he arrived at a crucial decision that Muslim League held fast to their demand for a sovereign Pakistan, the Sikhs and the Hindus were reluctant to remain in a Muslim-majority. Punjab and the Hindus in Bengal refused to remain under the majority rule of Muslims. He read the minds of the leaders and studied the views of the parties thoroughly well and arrived at the inevitable conclusion that 'partition' was the only solution. In fact, Mountbatten within three weeks of his arrival in India realised that a United India, if not an impossibility, was to say the least 'a long and ticklish job, fraught with danger and uncertainty', 10

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9. Ibid., p.231.
Besides this "a fairly quick decision would be the only way to convert the Indian minds from the present emotionalism to stark realism and to counter the disastrous spread of strife." And it may be added that Mountbatten 'was in India not to risk failure but to achieve success, and achieve it quickly'. Mountbatten, being shrewd and skilful, realised that the resolution adopted by the Congress Working Committee on 8th March, 1947 foreshadowed partition which made his task easier.

Congress Accepts Partition:

Even before the arrival of Mountbatten, Sardar was convinced after working for about seven months with the League Ministers that partition was the only way out. It was unavoidable though unfortunate. Sardar was able to convince the other Congressmen and succeeded ultimately in getting the resolution passed on 8th March by the Congress Working Committee. The resolution was

believed to have been inspired chiefly by Sardar Patel. During the past seven months India has witnessed many horrors and tragedies which have been enacted in an attempt to gain political ends through brutal violence, murder and coercion. The tragic events have demonstrated that there can be no settlement of the problem in the Punjab through violence and coercion and that no arrangement based on coercion can last. Therefore, it was necessary to find an alternative. This would necessitate division of the Punjab into two provinces so that the predominantly Muslim part might be separated from the predominantly non-Muslim part.

What made Sardar Patel to accept the idea was not the charm and the able advocacy of the idea by Lord Mountbatten but his bitter experience of working with the League members in the Interim Government. He found it impossible to work with them because of their out and out Pakistan mentality. Maulana Azad writes "The situation within the Executive Council had so annoyed and irritated Sardar Patel that he now became a believer in partition."¹³ The Sardar was compelled by events to

¹³. op.cit., p.796.
admit that 'whether we liked it or not, there were two nations in India' that the 'Muslims and Hindus could not be united into one nation' and that there was 'no alternative' except to recognize this fact. Sardar said, "I agreed to partition as a last resort, when we should have lost all. Five Muslim League members had established themselves as Ministers of the Interim Government with the sole object of partitioning the country... We decided that partition should be agreed upon the terms that Punjab and Bengal should be partitioned... Mr.Jinnah did not want a truncated Pakistan but he had to swallow it. I made a further condition that in two months' time power should be transferred and an Act should be passed by Parliament during that time, guaranteeing the British would not interfere with the question of the Indian States. We will deal that question... let paramountcy be dead."

Further Sardar Patel realized that the British Government was indirectly encouraging League's demand for Pakistan. This was quite evident. The Sardar felt that it would be better to give up a few small pieces in the North-West and the North-East and then build up a strong and

consolidated India. Perhaps, Maulana Azad was the only Congress leader to have opposed the division of the country till the end. He was echoing the ideas of Lord Wavell - maintenance of status quo.

The next problem before Mountbatten was to evolve a scheme of partition and transfer of power. Jinnah demanded the whole of the Punjab and the Bengal. But the Congress wanted these provinces to be partitioned and the Hindu majority areas of these provinces should remain in India. This was not acceptable to Jinnah who called it a "truncated and motu-exten Pakistan", ultimately, Lord Mountbatten succeeded in evolving a scheme of partition acceptable to both the parties. In May 1947, he sent his Chief-of-Staff Lord Ismay to London to secure Cabinet approval for the partition scheme. But it was drastically changed by the British Cabinet. Meanwhile, the Viceroy had shown it to Nehru and V.P. Menon who rejected it as it was bound to split up the country into a large number of initially independent successor states without any Central Government. If implemented, it would have resulted in the balkanisation of India and the unity of the country would have been destroyed.
At this time, bad feelings between the two communities were at their pinnacle. Everywhere, there was chaos and confusion and lawlessness. Patel attributed this to the inaction and negligence on the part of the British Government.

At this stage, V.P. Menon, an I.C.S. Officer, the Reforms Commissioner and a distinguished Legal adviser to Linlithgow, Wavell and Mountbatten evolved a scheme which was acceptable to both the parties and Mountbatten. But for his unrivalled intelligence and help, it would not have been possible to solve the problem so early and easily. He was a great boon not only to British Government when it was ruling India but also to Indian Government after its freedom.

According to V.P. Menon division was inevitable and could no longer be avoided. The alternative was a ghastly and incessant civil war due to mounting communal tension and dangerous frictions. The circumstances were inevitably moving in the direction of partition. Gandhiji was dead against Pakistan. But he was taken by surprise when he heard about the resolution adopted by the working
Committee on 8th March in which partition of Punjab was adopted. Gandhiji was annoyed and demanded an explanation from both Patel and Nehru. Gandhiji wrote to Patel, "try and explain to me your Punjab resolution if you can." Promptly Patel replied: "It is difficult to explain to you the resolution about the Punjab. It was adopted after the deepest deliberation. Nothing has been done in a hurry or without full thought. That you have expressed your views against it we learn only from the papers. But you are, of course entitled to say what you feel right."  

Subsequently, Gandhiji had a long and deep discussion with Sardar Patel and Mountbatten in which he was thoroughly convinced about the partition. Maulana Azad received the greatest shock when he found that there was a great change in the attitude of Gandhi. Sardar Patel was the first person who convinced Gandhiji fully that nobody could change his mind after that. Azad said that what

16. Ibid.
w as most surprising and shocking for him was that Gandhi began to repeat the arguments which Sardar Patel had already used. "For over two hours I pleaded with him but could make no impression on him," thus writes Moulana Abul Kalam Azad.\textsuperscript{17}

The argument of Mountbatten about partition was also convincing. He argued that the Congress had agreed to a weak Centre only in order to meet the opposition of the League. Provinces were given the largest measure of autonomy. But in a country, so divided by language, community and culture as India was, a weak centre was bound to encourage fissiparous tendencies. If the Muslim League were not there, the Congress could plan for a strong Central Government and frame a Constitution with a view to national unity and solidarity, from the fact that the British Government did not try to suppress the communal riots though it had the power to do so. After the entry of the League into the Executive Council, it had ceased to function as a Cabinet. Patel realised that Anglo-Muslim

\textsuperscript{17} op.cit., p.187.
alliance was doing great mischief and that the Indian interests were being betrayed by the British bureaucrats in every department of the state. Referring to the way in which the Department was behaving, Sardar Patel said that it was then that he was made fully conscious of the extent to which our interests were being prejudiced in every way by the machinations of the Political Department, and came to the conclusion that the best course was to hasten the departure of these foreigners even at the cost of the partition of the country. He also felt that there was only one way to make the country safe and strong and that was the unification of the rest of India. Patel felt that if partition was not accepted, India would be split into many bits and would be completely ruined and there would be several Pakistanis instead of one. In every office there would be Pakistan cells.

The Muslim League members of the Interim Government were driving out Hindu and Sikh officers from key positions in their Departments and putting in their places Muslims who could be depended upon to promote the cause of Pakistan. The representative of the 'Amrit Bazar Patrika'
sent a message to his paper during the second week of May 1946 that inside information available to him showed that Delhi might soon be made the centre of 'direct action'. In the light of such horrifying developments, Congress leaders could not come to any decision other than the one they arrived at, viz., the acceptance of Pakistan in order to drive out the British and save the country from further ruin.

Jawaharlal admitted that partition was an evil, but saw no alternative to it. It was with pain and sorrow that he commended the proposals of June 3. He accepted them because that was the only way to put an end to the struggle for power within the Interim Government. He also told them that as long as the Congress, including Patel, Nehru and other leaders clung to the goal of a United India, the Viceroy and the British Government would support the League. Finally, as it is mentioned earlier, in May 1947, Patel, Nehru and the Congress Working Committee gave approval for partition. Partition was accepted by both the leaders Patel and Nehru as they wanted to put an end to the nuisance of Jinnah. Alan Campbell Johnson writes, "Nehru and
Vallabhbhai Patel, the two Congressmen in the Interim Government accepted partition on the understanding that by conceding Pakistan to Jinnah they will hear no more of him and eliminate his nuisance value, or as Nehru put it privately that by cutting off the head we will get rid of the headache. 18

V.P. Menon's scheme was based on the Dominion Status formula. According to this, India was to be divided into two states enjoying Dominion States; one of which was to include all the Hindu majority province and the other to comprise Muslim majority areas. Those areas of the Punjab and Bengal which had a majority of non-Muslims were to be excluded from Pakistan. This envisaged a strong centre without evolving any compromise in the matter of sovereignty. Lord Mountbatten appreciated the plan in the following words: "I know no other country in the world to-day in the fortunate position of having a Constitution, but which can be amended by a stroke of pen day by day to be made to work more...


agreeably to themselves." Lord Mountbatten held the historic conference and discussed thoroughly with Patel and Nehru on behalf of the Congress and with Mr. Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan on behalf of the Sikhs. V. I. Lenin writes, "Nobody could have been better aware of the situation in the country than Vallabhbhai Patel... Like the great statesman that he was he assured me (V. I. Lenin) that if power could be transferred at once on the basis of Dominion status, he for one would use his influence to see that the Congress accepted it." Therefore, the credit of making the Congress and Gandhi who were deadly against partition to realise the hard realities and to accept the partition went to Sardar Patel.

With the Dominion Status formula, the League's 'preferred Status' with the British would be eliminated and the Congress would achieve objective of independence. The Congress had some other advantages; it would ensure transfer of power, gain British friendship and goodwill and also provide smooth running of administration. 'the princes with their past associations, with the

21. op. cit., p.364.
British Crown would be reassured and more willing to negotiate. Patel could see that if the transfer of power were effected on the basis of Dominion Status, Congress could have a strong Central Government and stop the centrifugal tendencies growing fast in the country.

Mountbatten had another conference with the leaders the next day. The Congress and the Sikhs had given their written assurance of acceptance of the new Plan. Mr. Jinnah had given only a verbal assurance. Then, 'the Viceroy turned to Jinnah, who nodded to signify his assent'. This came to be known as the 'historic nod'. It was a great triumph for Mountbatten's tact and charm that the final stages of acceptance were reached without much friction. It was only a shrewed man like Patel who could understand the significance of Jinnah's nod and immediately said to Nehru, 'I don't trust Jinnah or his Muslim League, they don't put their signature to any agreement...'. Patel's suspicion came true when the League Council passed a resolution on 10th June 1947 to the effect that it could not agree to the partition of Bengal and the Punjab or give its consent to such a partition. Nehru was alarmed by
this and immediately wrote to the Viceroy that the objection of the Council to partition violated the plan and was tantamount to its rejection. He insisted that the Viceroy should obtain a written consent from the League. Without entering into controversy with the League, Mountbatten bluntly told him that if the new scheme was not acceptable to the League it would lose Pakistan. When Patel learnt Mountbatten's warning to Jinnah, he said, 'Jinnah dare not ignore the Viceroy's warning'. Mr. Jinnah had no alternative except to accept the scheme of Dominion Status with partition. Patel was thus exhibiting his extraordinary capacity of predicting the events and reading the minds and judging persons.

Lord Mountbatten flew to London with the new plan which was accepted by His Majesty's Government and published on June 3, 1947.\footnote{Ibid., Appendix-X, pp.522-27, for the text of the new plan known as the Statement of 3rd June 1947 (for the immediate transfer of power). It is also found in the Indian Policy Statement, cmd 7136, (1947).} The main features of the plan were its simplicity and clarity and it contained those points which were favourable to the parties. The Mountbatten Plan included particular guidelines to obtain the will of the people living in those areas claimed by Pakistan. In Bengal, Sind and Punjab, the
Provincial Legislatures would give their definite verdict. In the North-West Frontier Province, a referendum would be held to decide as to which of the two Dominions it wished to join. In Sylhet which was dominantly a Muslim district, a referendum would be held in the eventuality of Bengal favouring Pakistan. The Mountbatten Plan provided transfer of power before the final date of June 1948 and the right of the Dominions through their respective Constituent Assemblies to decide whether or not to join the Commonwealth.23 The Indian Independence Act which contains the provisions of Lord Mountbatten's new scheme which was accepted by the British Government and published on June 3, 1947. It is also known as the Statement of June 3 passed by the British Parliament with a speed unprecedented in its annals. It was passed by the House of Commons on July 15 and by the House of Lords on July 16 and received the Royal Assent on July 18. The Indian Independence Act of 1947 stands out as one of 'the noblest and greatest laws ever enacted by the British Parliament'. 24


The Secretary of State Lord Listowel addressing the Foreign and other journalists at the India House said: "This is a Bill unique in the history of legislation in this country. Never before has such a large portion of the world population achieved complete independence through legislation alone." 25

In a Press Conference Patel remarked that on 15th August 1947 India would be completely free. 'And that is the greatest achievement of India and one may say, it is one of the greatest acts done in history by any power.' 26

The leaders of the Congress including Patel and Nehru accepted the Mountbatten Plan formally by 153 to 29 votes with 36 abstentions in the A.I.C.C. meeting convened in Delhi on June 14 and 15, 1947. While moving the resolution in the meeting Govind Vallabh Pant said that the June 3rd Constitutional Plan was the only way to achieve independence and freedom of the

26. Ibid., p.399.
country. Further, he said that the choice before the members was 'between accepting the plan or committing suicide'. The resolution was seconded by Azad who was strongly opposed to the partition of India but he felt that the Cabinet Mission Plan was a better one. However, having regard 'to the state of indecision and drift in the country', an immediate settlement was needed and therefore, he supported the resolution recommending acceptance of the June 3rd plan. He strongly hoped that the division was only on the map of the country and not in the hearts of the people. He felt that it would be a short-lived partition'. Azad being only a great scholar had a poor capacity to forecast the events and judge the persons. He predicted that the partition was going to be a 'short-lived' one. But the partition remains even after thirty three years.

Sardar Patel, accepting the Plan said that he was not sorry that the Statement of 16th May had gone. If it was accepted, the whole of India would have gone the Pakistan way. Today, they had 75 to 80 percent of India, which could be developed by Indians as per their genius. The rest of the country could be developed by the League.
While accepting the Plan Nehru said that he disliked the division of India, but at the same time India could not be allowed to 'bleed continuously and indefinitely'. A swift surgical operation was preferable under such dire circumstances.

The last hurdle was the consent of Mahatma Gandhi. He was a law unto himself and he followed what his 'inner voice' told him. Fortunately enough, he also agreed to the resolution. The stage was now set for the final act of India's independence. The long-cherished ambition and the eagerly awaited day dawned on the Indian horizon and on August 15, 1947, enslaved India became free and independent. Britain fulfilled her promise of granting independence to India after the war. As Lord Samuel said in the House of Lords' debate on the Indian Independence Act, the British action was 'a treaty of peace without war'.

Sardar Patel was immensely happy over the consummation of his Life's work, but he was conscious of the heavy responsibility the people of India would have to
bear from then onwards. The future of India lay in their hands and they were the architects of it. In a statement, Patel said, 'Let us not forget in this hour of joy, the stupendous responsibilities and obligations which freedom brings in its wake, our primary duty is to guard zealously our freedom against danger from within and without. We have to ensure that the humblest amongst us has the same stature as the tallest in the land, that labour gets its legitimate share of its product, that the millions in villages obtain a just return for the sweat of their brow and the state discharges adequately its elementary duty of feeding, clothing, housing and educating every son and daughter of the motherland. It has now been given to us by providence to fashion our country's destiny according to our cherished ideals and aspirations. If we fail... the blame will not lie at other's door. Indeed there are enormous difficulties and almost insuperable obstacles in our way; but it is for us to overcome them.'

Nehru, addressing the Constituent Assembly on the midnight of 14th - 15th August 1947 made an unique and heart-touching address to the nation. "Long years ago, we made a tryst with destiny and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure but substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom... It is fitting that at this solemn moment, we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people and to the still larger cause of the humanity... we end today a period of ill-fortune and India discovers herself, again." 28

Sardar Patel was one of the Chief architects of the new-born free India. For him the independence of India was symbolic of the rebirth of a suffering nation which had undergone a severe struggle for self-determination. It was a splendid and unforgettable event and achievement in the annals of Sardar's life.

Rarely, a moment of such magnitude comes as the fruition of one's life. With the emergence of free India, he became conscious, more than ever, of the formidable tasks which lay before him and the Indian people. India's freedom struggle took six decades to bear fruits and Patel had the supreme satisfaction of having played a significant, vigorous and predominant role in it for over three decades. He knew full well that partition had not solved the real problems of India's poverty, hunger, and ignorance, but it was only a means to save the country from disaster, destruction and atrocities.

Sardar Patel's happiness over the partition was marred soon as it brought in its train senseless communal violence and frenzy, sorrow and suffering and degradation. Galloping flames of civil conflict started. In communal strife between the Sikhs and Hindus on one side and Muslims on the other, lakhs of people were slayed, millions of persons uprooted from their homes, young girls were kidnapped and property worth crores was destroyed. Within an area of 30,000 square miles nearly 10,000,000 people were crossing
the line between India and Pakistan. The atrocities that occurred in both West and East Punjab were inhuman. Half a million people lost their lives while millions more were forced to migrate from their ancestral homes. Therefore, the happiness of independence was marred by the tragedy of India's partition.

The year 1947 was a crucial year in the life of Sardar and in the tumultuous history of India. It was a year of mixed fortunes for both. It marked culmination of an epoch and the beginning of a journey into the unknown. However, it may be said that there is hardly any parallel in the history of the world to the manner which was regarded as the brightest jewel in the British Crown. The June 3 Plan was considered to be the most courageous effort made by the British to resolve the deadlock. The progressive opinion of the whole world praised the courage of the Labour Government for having handed over power to Indian people. Walter Lippman, the famous American Political Commentator writes, "Perhaps Britain's finest hour is not the past. Certainly this performance is not the work of political genious requiring the ripest wisdom and the freshest vigour,
and it is done with an elegance and a style that will compell and will receive an instinctive respect throughout the civilized world. Attlee and Mountbatten have done a service to all mankind by showing what statesmen can do, not with force and money, but with lucidity, resolution and sincerity. 29

The non-violent way in which the Indian National Congress conducted the struggle for national freedom under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi is also unparalleled in the world history and is likely to remain unique in the annals of mankind. The predominant role played by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel who was a veritable Lieutenant of Gandhiji and a staunch follower of non-violence in India's freedom struggle remains evergreen in the History of India. Sardar's name shines and shines like a northern star amidst the great and mighty freedom-fighters of India.

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