

INTRODUCTION

## INTRODUCTION

The role of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel in Indian politics for over three decades was unique and multi-dimensional. He was at the centre of Indian politics from 1919 to 1950 emerging as a great national leader. This period may rightly be called the 'Patel era'. He was the guiding force, moving spirit, deciding factor, source of inspiration and the symbol of unity, strength and stability in the thick and turmoil during the final stage of our freedom struggle.

Sardar Patel who had an aversion to politics in his early years, under the mystic magnetic spell of the Mahatma found a metamorphosis in his life and became the most important lieutenant of Gandhiji. We cannot think of Patel without Gandhiji. Each and every principle of Gandhiji was woven into the fabric of his life. It was he who implemented Gandhiji's principles in action; yet he did not follow him blindly. To him goes the credit for most of the successful Satyagrahas in the country launched by Gandhiji. The war of independence became possible only because of the no-tax campaign of

of Bardoli, successfully carried out by the Sardar. He gave up lucrative legal practice and became almost a fakir devoting himself to the path of service shown by Gandhiji. He trained a band of workers for national service.

Patel's role in the freedom movement was most significant, heroic and unique. He inspired the masses of India for a heroic fight. He cast a magnetic influence on them with his great qualities. Being a peasant, he championed the cause of the poor peasantry of India and realised that their lot could only be improved by implementing the Gandhian ideology. He had no belief in any 'ism', yet, he claimed himself to be a true socialist. He was a democrat, yet he opposed democracy that had no discipline, unity and stability. He was pragmatic in his approach and not doctrinaire or dogmatic.

Sardar Patel rendered yeoman service to the nation at a critical period of its struggle for freedom and consolidated six hundred princely states into a nation. On the crucial issue of partition and winding up the

British empire in India, his role was most decisive. India would not have attained freedom so early, had the Sardar not agreed to the partition at a crucial stage. He built a strong and united India after partition. His role as a freedom-fighter, consolidator, unifier, statesman and administrator in the modern history of India is unique and memorable.

Purpose of Study :

The purpose of this study is to analyse and assess Sardar Vallabhbhai's role in Indian politics. Sardar Patel played a significant, crucial and decisive role, particularly in the Satyagraha campaigns, national movement, Indian National Congress, elections to the central and provincial Assemblies, transfer of power, partition of India, consolidation of freedom, civil services, constitution-making and a host of other events. He gave a definite shape, direction, discipline and momentum to the freedom struggle and changed the very shape of the political map of India after her independence.

He unified six hundred princely states under one flag, one government and one nation with a remarkable speed which could very well be described as a peaceful and bloodless revolution. This achievement of the Sardar is unsurpassable in the history of any country. As a statesman and administrator, he hammered out a nation and laid a sound foundation for a new civil service. His role in the constitution-making was also significant. A study of his role and achievements deserve special attention. Therefore, a sincere attempt is made in this thesis to examine his role in an objective manner.

The topic is so complex and vast in its scope that one has to grapple with the techniques, the methods of approach, achievements, contribution, ideology and ideas of this unique personality the nation has ever produced. His was a many faced life and his activities were multifarious. Therefore, any generalisation, conclusion and assessment has to be made with great care and caution.

Sardar Patel was undoubtedly a unique personality

in the sense that he possessed rare and excellent qualities of head and heart. Some of them were budded in his childhood and blossomed later. He loved action rather than words. Realism, patriotism, humanism, commonsense, courage, farsightedness, iron will, statesmanship and administrative skill were some of the hall-marks of his personality. Besides this, he was a great leader, organiser and disciplinarian. It was true that he was harder than the hardest diamond and softer than the softest flower.

Therefore, a study of these traits of his character also needs a special attention and an attempt is made in this thesis to examine these aspects of his life.

Sardar Patel was subject to some controversy and criticism. He was compared with many historic personalities. All such controversies, criticisms and comparisons are considered fully in this thesis in the light of his multifarious activities and achievements most systematically, and objectively and an attempt is made to evaluate his role.



### Justification for the Study :

The unique and the manifold role played by the Sardar so significantly in Indian politics, his great achievements as a statesman and administrator, his patriotism, sacrifice, ideas, ideals and the dedication need a special and objective study. The present thesis is an attempt in examining dispassionately the role of a great patriot, freedom-fighter, consolidator, statesman, administrator and an architect of united India in the liberation of his country, in consolidating and building a strong and united India.

There are studies already exploring his life, works and achievements, but they are limited and suffer from one lacuna or the other. There is therefore, a need for a comprehensive, scientific and systematic study. The present venture aims at this. Some doctoral theses have already been produced on some freedom fighters like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Gopala Krishna Gokhale, Bala Gangadhar Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, B.R. Ambedkar, Aurobindo Ghosh, and others. There seems to be no such scientific study on Patel, though some

biographies are produced which form an important source for the present study.

It is the contention of the author that Patel played a vital, and decisive role in Indian politics for over three decades. Contemporary writers on Patel have either taken for granted or appear to have missed the significance of his role and contribution. It appears that this fact has not been systematically and scientifically discussed and this has resulted in the tendency to ignore, overlook or underestimate the monumental role he played in Indian politics. The present thesis will, therefore, attempt to fill this gap and place Sardar Patel's role in the epoch-making and critical period of India's modern history in its proper context and perspective.

The available literature on Sardar in English, Kannada, Gujarati and Hindi and other languages provides a focus on his biography, different roles he played, different traits of his qualities, different facets of his personality, multifarious events, activities and

achievements, highlighting heavily on different curious questions and comparisons and discussing whether he was the 'Iron Man of India'? or the 'Bismarck of India'? ; whether he was anti-Muslim and pro-Hindu? whether he was opposed to socialism and nationalisation? whether he was an anti-democrat? whether he was pro-capitalist and a friend of the princes? whether he could be compared with Chandragupta Maurya, Ashoka, Akbar, Napoleon the Bonaparte and Julius Caesar?. But a systematic study of these claims and charges, a scientific exploration of the events, a thorough examination of his significant role, ideals and ideas are long overdue. ( The present venture is aimed at this. It is also the purpose of this study to analyse, examine and assess Sardar Patel's role in Indian politics.

In this venture, the author is sincerely directed, guided and inspired by Dr.A.M.Rajasekhariah, Babasaheb Ambedkar Professor of Political Science who had already produced many doctoral theses - particularly on freedom-fighters like Jawaharlal Nehru, Hardekar Manjappa and others, besides his own work on Dr.B.R.Ambedkar.

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Scheme of the Thesis :

The thesis is arranged in eight chapters. Each chapter has its main-title and sub-titles.

Chapter-I discusses Sardar Patel's early years - childhood and education. His activities as a naughty and intelligent school-boy, education in England, completion of Bar-at-Law, returning home, legal career, influence of his family and parents in moulding his character, development of fearless leadership and other qualities, etc., are also discussed.

In chapter-II, the factors influencing Patel's entry into public life, his works and achievements in the Ahmedabad Municipality in various capacities, his first contact with Gandhiji and becoming his devotee, giving up of his legal practice, his organisation of the Kaira no-rent campaign, Nagpur Flag Satyagraha, campaign against Borsad police, Bardoli peasants' Satyagraha and other events are discussed. His significant role as a great General of Gandhiji in the Satyagrahas and campaigns is assessed.

In chapter-III, an attempt is made to assess Sardar Patel's role as a heroic freedom fighter after his entry into the National Movement. It covers his participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement, his vital role in the Congress Sessions, his participation in the famous Dandi-march (Salt Satyagraha), his decisive role in organising elections to Provincial Legislatures (1937). In brief, it deals with Patel's participation in the freedom struggle from the time of the Civil Disobedience Movement to Quit India Movement (1919 - 1942) which forms the early phase of Patel's freedom-fight.

In chapter-IV, an attempt is made to assess the significant and decisive role played by the Sardar in the second phase of the freedom struggle with reference to the events like the Wavell Plan (1945), elections to Central and Provincial Legislatures (1945), the revolt of the Royal Navy, the Cabinet Mission, the Interim Government, the formation of the Constituent Assembly, the conflict between the Congress and the Muslim League, Communal riots, etc., are discussed.

Chapter-V covers the various events leading to the final transfer of power. The decisive role played by the Sardar in agreeing to the partition of India and the aftermath of independence are discussed.

In chapter-VI, the significant role played by Patel in the consolidation of the princely states and in building a strong and united India, the Junagadh problem, etc., are discussed.

In Chapter-VII, the crucial role played by the Sardar in solving the Hyderabad problem which led to its accession to the Indian Union through police action and the various problems encountered and solved by the Sardar are discussed.

In the last chapter an attempt is made to assess Patel's role in Indian politics as a realist, patriot, nationalist, disciplinarian, organiser, consolidator, builder, unifier, statesman, administrator, prophet and a man of action, highlighting the various issues in which he had a crucial role to play. The Sardar had

to play the role of a supreme arbiter of hundreds of "Their Highnesses" in India which is also discussed. The sobriquets given to him along with some important allegations made against him and comparisons with some important personalities are examined and his place in modern Indian History is determined.

Sources :

Unlike Gandhiji, Nehru and others, Patel has not left any autobiography or any writings of his own. except a few articles, written speeches and his correspondence. Patel was no literary person. He was essentially a man of action. His philosophy of life was to make history rather than wasting time in writing it. He hardly kept any record of his public work. He used to destroy letters addressed to him after reading them and replied by hand, not even keeping their copies. Only when he became the Chairman of the Congress Parliamentary Board in 1934, records of his correspondence, speeches, etc., were maintained.

Luckily, Patel's daughter, Miss Manibehn who always accompanied him due to his ill-health, preserved many of his letters, even though some of them were in torn condition. Luckily, she handed over all letters, correspondence and other records of her father to the 'Navajivan Trust', Ahmedabad which has published the entire material in ten volumes - 'Sardar Patel's Correspondence : 1945-50', edited by Durga Das, published by the Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad (1971-1974) - which throw a flood of light on the achievements, activities, qualities and a host of other aspects of the Sardar, and constitute a rich source of material to a student of Indian politics of the time.

There are five volumes on Sardar Patel published by 'Sardar Vallabhbhai' Patel's Smarak Bhavan, Ahmedabad', 1974-1978. The titles of the volumes are as follows:

- 1) This was Sardar - The Commemorative Volume - Vol.I, 1974.
- 2) Sardar Patel - In Tune with the Millions -I, Vol.II, 1975.

- 3) Sardar Patel - In Tune with the Millions - II,  
Vol.III, 1976.
- 4) Sardar's Letters - Mostly Unknown - I  
(Years : 1945-'46), Vol.IV, 1977.
- 5) Sardar's Letters - Mostly Unknown - II,  
(Years : 1947-'48, Part One), Vol.V, 1978.

These volumes have brought to light not only some important letters and correspondence of Patel but also his important public speeches and articles on different facets of Patel by distinguished persons.

There are Select Correspondence, 1945-1950, Vol.I and II, edited by V.Shankar, published by Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1977.

There are also two volumes of Sardar Patel's speeches - (1) On Indian Problems, (1919) and (2) For a United India (1967), published by the Publications Division, Government of India, Delhi.

A Nation's Homage : Life and Work of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, edited by P.D.Saggi and published by the Overseas Publishing House, Bombay (1953?) -s

another source which includes some important public speeches and sayings of Sardar Patel with biographical profiles on him by distinguished persons.

Sardar Patel's speeches, debates and discussions on the floor of the Constituent Assembly from 9th Dec., 1946 to 24th Jan., 1950 are available in Constituent Assembly Debates, Volume, I to XI, published by the Manager of Publications, Government of India, Delhi.

These form the primary source material for the study which provide authentic information and the author has heavily relied upon these sources.

Besides these primary sources, there are secondary sources like books, biographies, souvenirs, periodicals, and articles published in journals, newspapers, etc., throwing much light on his life, works, events, achievements etc.,

The author personally visited the following libraries and collected a lot of material relevant to the study :  
Karnatak University Library, Dharwad; Mysore University,



Mysore; Bangalore University, Bangalore; University Library, Bombay, Gokhale Institute of Public Affairs, Bangalore; personal Library of the former Maharaja of Ramdurg.

The author collected information from the following Indian and foreign Libraries and Institutions through correspondence: Navajivan Trust, Ahmedabad; Bhakakra Library - Sardar Patel University, Vallabh Vidyanagar, District Kaira (Gujarat); Gujarat University Library, Ahmedabad; Gujarat Vidyapeeth Library, Gandhi Bhavan, Ahmedabad; Government of India National Library, Belvedere, Calcutta; Connemara Public Library, Madras; Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay; Lok Sabha Secretariat, Parliament Library, New Delhi; The British Museum, Bibliographical Information Service, The Reading Room, London; The Royal Commonwealth Society, London; The High Commission of India Library, London; India Office Library - India Office Records, Commonwealth Office, London; British Library of Political and Economic Science, London; and School of Economics and Political Science, Aldwych, London.

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