Chapter I

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

The State of Saurashtra in the Indian Union came into existence with the integration of the many small States of Kathiawar in the Western India States Agency. It is the standing example of the nobleness of the Prince on the one hand and the sagacity and wisdom of the late Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel who employed the twin principles of integration and democratization to solve the very thorny problem of the Indian States. When the integration took place in 1946 there were 222 States of which 13 were salute States. There were as many as 329 non-jurisdictional administrations. Now Saurashtra is one of the part B States of the Indian Union. It is divided into five districts of Gohilwad, Kilar, Madhya Saurashtra, Sorath and Zalawad and the administration is carried on the lines of the district administration of the Bombay State.

As there were many states and estates in Kathiawar, it remained backward from all points of view till almost the dawn of freedom in 1947. The political destiny of Kathiawar came into the hands of the British after the defeat of the Peshwas in the second decade of the 19th century. Saurashtra before the intervention of the British was a hot bed famous for murders, arson and the
baharwatiyas (robbers). "The social and political system of the area was described as a system of sanguinary boundary disputes, murders, robberies, abductions arson and outlawry."

It was really a land of the princes and in all the bulky volumes called the Administration Reports of the various states one is at pains to find the information about the condition of the people. It is quite noteworthy that throughout the period—from the advent of the British to 1947—the efforts at consolidation were guided by the theory that the Indian States and British India were two separate political divisions of India.

Sovereignty of the Indian States was supposed to have been centred in their rulers. The people were dumb cattle who had no voice in politics. As servants are sometimes more exacting than the masters the Native Princes were comparatively harder towards their subjects than the British masters. Towards the British the Princes showed an abject submission but towards their own people they were intolerably despotic and irresponsible.

1. Memorandum of the Saurashtra Government to the Part B States (Special Assistance Enquiry) Committee (June 1953), page 3.
The British Government also did not consider it proper to force the pace of progress in the Indian States for, whatever advance was made in British India was made due to forces which were outside the control of the British. The various political, social and religious movements which started in British India during the last two decades of the 19th century and the first three decades of the 20th century were all due to the effect of the study of the English language, western sciences and political movements in western countries apart from the efforts of the Indian patriots like Gokhale, Ranade, Tilak and Pherozshah Mehta and others. It seems that the states were able to keep their people without practically any political autonomy for a very long time while great progress was made in British India in various fields. It is paradoxical, yet it is true that Indians proved more deadly against Indians than even the British.

Very little is known of the conditions prevailing in Saurashtra before the arrival of the British in the peninsula. The estimated area was 22,000 square miles and population was put at 15 lakhs i.e. 74 persons per square mile. The price of food grains especially Bajra was less than one rupee per maund by the end of the 19th century. As stated previously, because of the numerous political divisions presided over by despotic rulers there was no possibility of developing the moral and
material resources of the people. The deterioration and degeneration was almost complete. Even after the railways and the steamships, the area could not develop on healthy lines due to the personal factor of the rulers. Ports could not be developed because of the lack of resources of their rulers and certain areas were followed to remain without a railway link.

The burden of the theme is that people in Saurashtra could not develop to their full height. Now Saurashtra is witnessing a revolution which is political and economic. The common man is simply stunned by the suddenness and rapidity of changes which have affected his political, economic, social and even religious life. For the first time he has come into the open from his small state where he was a nobody to a position where he is somebody and where he is asked to express his ideas and opinions on many matters which he does not understand. Administration Reports were written for almost all States, but they were mostly for the use of the British Resident or Government of India's Political Department. These Reports were not published and only very few people had access to them. The method of the Reports was mechanical. They give very little idea of the correct position of the people of the State. But the impression one gains after reading these Reports - now they can be seen with special permission from the Records' Section of the Regional
Commissioner is that very little which can be called substantial was done for ameliorating the condition of the people. The Princes bothered about themselves rather than their people.

Saurashtra now has an area of 21451 square miles and according to the census of 1951 has a population of 4.1 millions. The census of 1881 showed a population of 2.4 millions.

As has already been pointed out it was a land of the Princes and for the Princes it would not be out of place to describe the form of the princely order obtaining in Kathiawar during the good old days.

There were as many as 222 states, big and small, which were under the charge of the Political Agent at Rajkot. These States greatly varied in area and revenue and therefore in importance. On the one hand there were big States like Jammagar and Junagadh while on the other chieftains could be found whose authority extended over a few villages. For administrative purposes these States were grouped into three classes. In the first class the management of the State, under ordinary circumstances, was in the hands of the chiefs, in the second class the management was shared between the chiefs and the Political Agent and his assistants, in the third
class the burden of administration rested almost entirely on the Political Agent. For purposes of general supervision and control, the province was divided into four districts or Prants, viz. Jhalwad, Nalar, Sorath and Gohilwad. Each of the Prants was partly controlled and partly managed by a political assistant.

All the States in Kathiawar were tributaries of the Peshwa at Poona (Gaikwar being the man on the spot to look after this interest of the Peshwas) when the British appeared on the scene. The British inherited Peshwa's interests, and in 1820 intervened between the Gaikwar and his tributaries.

All the States in Kathiawar, whether big or small were under the paramountcy of the crown. Paramountcy was wisely left undefined. The subordination of the Indian States was understood but not explained. The Paramount Power intervened on grounds of general policy, where the interests of the Indian people or the safety of the British Power were at stake. There were no limits to the exercise of paramountcy. According to the Indian States Committee (1928-29) Paramountcy was based upon treaties, engagements and sanads supplemented by usage and sufferance and by decisions of the Government of India and the Secretary of State embodied in political practice.
The basis of Paramountcy was essentially political rather than legal or constitutional. The Princes who were pressing for a definition of Paramountcy were authoritatively answered by the Secretary of State for India in the House of Commons in 1955. "In the ultimate analysis, however, the Crown's relationship with the States is not merely one of contract and so there must remain in the hands of the Viceroy an element of discretion in his dealings with the States. No successful attempt could be made to define exactly the right of the Crown's Representative to intervene." 2

The external affairs of the Indian States, the inter-state relations and the defence of India were matters for which the Paramount Power was responsible. The Paramount Power also intervened for the benefit of the Prince, for the benefit of the State and for the benefit of India as a whole. It may arise out of gross misrule, disloyalty, serious crime or the existence of barbarous practices. The upshot of the whole thing is that sovereignty of the British Crown exercised through the Secretary of State and the Viceroy was supreme in Indian India as also British India. No ruler could claim to negotiate with the British Government on an equal footing.

As the material prosperity of the people depends to a very great extent on the type of political institutions under which they are living, it is essentially necessary to understand and keep in our mind these implications of Paramountcy. In practice it was the Political Agent who was to realize the implications of Paramountcy. His office was extremely important both for the Princes as also for the people. Their entire happiness and prosperity depended upon the Political Agent as most of the States were medieval autocracies. It was certain that when India achieved her independence the States also would be affected. They were profoundly affected as Sardar Patel successfully applied the twin principles of democratisation and integration.

The life of the people in Kathiawar under the Princes together with the economic and political effects on the population will be narrated later. It is the purposes of this chapter just to introduce the political background in Saurashtra during practically the entire period under investigation.