

Sardar Patel's Conceptualisations of National Security and Unity: Implications for the Modern Milieu

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Abstract

Today, national security and unity are the foundation of the stability and development of a country. In the contemporary scenario, challenges like border disputes, terrorism, cyber threats, and regional separatism make national unity even more important. Only a united and secure nation can play an effective role in economic growth, social congruence, and globalization. In this situation, the role of the historical contribution made by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel to the unity and national security of India becomes even more important. The integration of 562 princely states of dependent India into the Union of India was the result of his diplomacy and determination. His vision was based on robust unified governance, social synchronization, and the protection of national interests. His views are pertinent in today's India in the context of territorial integrity, international relations, anti-terrorism strategies, national security, and India's position on global forums.

His strategies on issues like national security and the union of Hyderabad (1948) and Junagadh (1947) into independent India deliver inspiration and an ideological basis for dealing with India's current border disputes and internal security challenges. His prominence on national unity is important for founding congruence in India's cultural and religious diversity. Therefore, this research paper has been divided into three parts. The first part designates the historical contributions of Sardar Patel. The second part remarks his views on national unity and security and the third part deliberates the current relevance of his

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views. In general, this research paper is an attempt to build a bridge between historical analysis and today's policy challenges, in which an attempt has been made to find out whether his views are still relevant for India's national security and unity.

Key Words: Sardar Patel, India, national security, unity, integration

Today, the unity and security of any country is an essential element for its inclusive development. The nation that failed on the issue of unity and security has only its history left today; geography has been devastated. Both of these elements were important in the case of India too, perhaps that is why our architect of unity and security, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, did a very good and successful work for the unity and security of India in the past. A prominent leader of India's freedom struggle, the first Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister of independent India (1947-1950), Sardar Patel's inflexibility and diplomacy ensured the merger of over 560 princely states into the Indian Union (1947-1949),¹ which established India as a nation.

His view on unification of India was not only associated with the unity of geography but also to social and emotional.² His policies provide guiding principles in strengthening the procedural frameworks for modern India, which accentuate an integrated approach and social harmony for national security and unity. His vision was constructed on social harmony, economic stability, and robust, unified governance. Contemporary challenges of India such as border disputes with Pakistan and China, terrorism, and separatism, underline the relevance of his ideas. India's growing role on global platforms, especially the initiative to demand permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) by forming G4 since 2005, is inspired by its vision of protecting national interests.

1

At the time of independence, India was a fragmented nation, with over 560 princely states. Many of these wanted to maintain their independence. Sardar Patel, as Home Minister (1947-1950), accepted the multifaceted task of integrating these princely states into the Indian Union. His strategy included dialogue, diplomacy and then the use of force, just as dialogue, diplomacy and then the use of force were used in the Mahabharata. For example, the princely state of Hyderabad, which was under the rule of the Nizam (1947), refused to join the Indian Union. So, Sardar Patel first conducted dialogue and continued diplomatic efforts. But when both of these failed, he launched Operation Polo

(1948), which resulted in the union of Hyderabad with India. Patel said in this context, "No price is too low for the national unity".³ Similarly, the Nawab of Junagadh declared to join Pakistan but Patel's diplomacy and firm determination unified it in the Indian Union.

His diplomacy of using the Instrument of Accession led to all the princely states ceding areas such as defence, foreign affairs, and communications to the central government. This strategy not only ensured geographical unity but also played a major role in providing India with a strong administrative structure. Coupled with this, he also started the Indian Administrative Services to make India's administrative structure sustainable in the long run. He believed that a stout and unified administrative service was essential to maintain national unity and integrity. He said in the Constituent Assembly, "If you do not have a good All-India Service, which may express its mind independently, you will not be able to have a united India".⁴ Along with this vision, he played a fundamental role in establishing the IAS as a service that is politically neutral and dedicated to national unity. Today, these services are playing a crucial role in establishing India's internal security and unity.

2

Sardar Patel's ideas for national security are mainly seen in the integration of the princely states of Hyderabad and Junagadh into India. To discern his viewpoint, it is essential to know about the above two events. Hyderabad was the largest princely state in the southern part of independent India, which had an area of about 82,000 square miles. Its ruler, Nizam Osman Ali Khan, was ruling there at that time.⁵ He refused to join the Indian Union and expressed his desire to remain independent. Furthermore, the Nizam also tried to find opportunities of coalition with Pakistan. Hyderabad's joining Pakistan was a big threat to India's national security and unity. Hyderabad was geographically surrounded by Indian territories, and its populace was a Hindu majority (about 85%). Besides this, Razakars and radical Muslim militia leader Qasim Razvi reinforced the Nizam's privilege for independence through violent activities in 1947-1948. The violence of the Razakars and the tenacious behaviour of Nizam intricicated the situation. Assessing both these circumstances, Patel adopted a multi-pronged strategy for the merger of Hyderabad. He primarily held talks with the Nizam there, resulting in an utterly improbable chance of unification. After the process of failed dialogue, he adopted a diplomatic approach, in which the Nizam was to be set to sign the Instrument of Accession. He said, "Hyderabad is an integral part of India, and it cannot be allowed to remain separate".⁶ After the failure of diplomacy, force was used.

Although before the operation, Patel had warned the Indian government, "If the Hyderabad issue remained unresolved, it would become a threat to the unity of India".⁷ It bears mentioning that the then Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was against the use of force there. On the day when army was ready to deploy in Hyderabad for Operation Polo, Prime Minister Nehru called a meeting of the Cabinet Committee of Defence and the three army chiefs were excluded from it. The purpose of this meeting was to stop the said operation but Sardar Patel quietly left that meeting and remained firm on his decision to use force. As a result, He decided to launch Operation Polo (13 to 17 September 1948). The operation, commanded by Major General J.N. Chaudhuri, took control of Hyderabad in just five days. The Nizam surrendered on 17 September 1948 and signed the Instrument of Accession.⁸ The operation, which involved a balanced use of diplomacy and military power by Patel, led to the unification of Hyderabad into the Indian Union. He also coordinated Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and Indian Police Service (IPS) officers and ensured that Hyderabad maintained administrative stability after the merger.

After Hyderabad, he unified Junagadh into India. Junagadh was a small princely state of about 3,337 square miles situated in Gujarat. At that time, its ruler was Nawab Muhammad Mahabat Khan III. Junagadh also had a Hindu majority population, but the Nawab announced his accession to Pakistan on 15 August 1947.⁹ Junagadh was also enclosed by independent India. Hence, this decision was unacceptable to the geographical and social unity of India. Patel adopted a quick and diplomatic approach for the merger of Junagadh. He tried to persuade the Nawab to sign the merger document by first communicating with him, but this was not possible due to the Nawab's tenacious attitude. In this regards Sardar Patel said, "The decision of Junagadh cannot be against the wishes of the people".¹⁰ So, he started a local mass movement in collaboration with the people of Junagadh and local leaders such as Samaldas Gandhi. The local inhabitants diverged the Nawab's decision and a provisional government was established in September 1947. On the orders of the Sardar Patel, the Indian Army was deployed on the borders of Junagadh, which increased pressure on the Nawab. Finally, the Nawab fled to Pakistan on 25 October 1947. After that, his Dewan Shahnawaz Bhutto, started dialogue with the Indian government. Junagadh formally joined the Indian Union on 9 November 1947 and a referendum was held on 20 February 1948, in which more than

99% of the voters voted in favour of joining India.¹¹ It was due to Sardar Patel's diplomatic skill that military action was not required in this process. He used a balanced combination of diplomacy, public support, and military pressure in the merger of Junagadh.

His strategy ensured that the merger was peaceful and in accordance with the will of the people. Besides this, he appointed IAS and IPS officers to stabilize the local administration, which maintained social harmony and administrative unity in Junagadh. Both the above issues were very important from the point of view of national security and unity of India. Apart from this, we all know that if Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had not stubbornly kept the issue of Jammu and Kashmir with himself, then perhaps today it would have also been a part of India in an integral form. Sardar Patel believed that, "National security is not just a matter of protecting the borders, but also of internal unity and stability".¹² So, he considered the Indian Administrative Service as an important initiative considering national unity. For this, he said that India's cultural and religious diversity is its strength, but social harmony is necessary to maintain it. As reflected in his statement: "Our unity is our strength, and we must strive at all costs to preserve it".¹³ He further said, keeping in mind the diversity of India, "Our diversity is our strength, but to unite it we must promote mutual respect and co-existence".¹⁴ During the communal riots (1947-1948) and the calamity of partition after independence, Sardar Patel took hard steps to maintain peace and unity in India. He strengthened the police and administration and held talks with the leaders of various communities to reduce social tensions.

After independence, India needed an administrative structure that could ensure the geographical, social and political unity of the newly formed nation. Taking this demand in to account, Patel introduced the process of transforming the British-era Indian Civil Service (ICS) into the Indian Administrative Service (IAS). It may be noted that ICS was established in 1858 during the British colonial rule.¹⁵ It was an administrative service run by British officers. Its sole purpose was to maintain colonial rule in India and protect British interests. Earlier independence, the number of Indian officers in the ICS was inadequate, and the service did not fully reflect India's diverse populace and national interests. At that juncture, the ICS had only 1000 officers, about half of whom were Indians.¹⁶ It would be fair to say that this administrative structure was inadequate to deal with the complex administrative needs of independent India, especially challenges such as unification of princely states and communal riots.

This suggests a possible rationale for what he said, "National security is ensured not only by military power, but by a strong and integrated administrative structure".¹⁷ Therefore, Sardar Patel established a committee under the Home Ministry in October 1947. It was regulated by senior officials of the Home Ministry. Its objective was to prepare a framework for restructuring the ICS and establishing a new service, the IAS. The committee proposed that the IAS would train Indian officers and entrust them with important responsibilities in the central and provincial governments. As a result, the IAS was officially established with the coming into force of the Constitution. He insisted on a rigorous selection process and extensive training for civil servants. He believed that "the strength of administration is the strength of the nation"¹⁸, and so he saw the IAS as an institution that could bring uniformity to India's diversity. Patel gave these officers both diplomatic and administrative responsibilities, which helped to implement his strategy. This administrative service continues to play a role in maintaining India's unity and security even today.

3

Now let us talk about the relevance of Sardar Patel's ideas in the current scenario. In today's India, territorial integrity, border disputes and cross-border terrorism are major challenges to national security and building relations with neighbours is a multifaceted task. The Galwan Valley conflict on the India-China border and tensions on the Line of Control (LoC) from independence till now with Pakistan and cross-border terrorism show its gravity. Sardar Patel's strategies for the integration of princely states provide inspiration to deal with these challenges. His policies show that a balanced use of diplomacy and military power will always be necessary for the integrity of India. Today India is moving forward keeping in mind the policies of Sardar Patel. He had said, "We have to adopt both robustness and flexibility to protect national interests".¹⁹ In the Galwan conflict (2020), India used military deployment as well as diplomatic talks, which matches Patel's strategies. His policies teach today's India that firmness and synchronized tactics are necessary to protect national interests in regional disputes. He emphasised the development of infrastructure in border states, which India is striving to accomplish at a rapid pace today. This can be seen in the expansion of road and rail networks in Northeast India and Jammu and Kashmir.

Terrorism and regional separatism are the foremost challenges to India's internal security. Terrorist activities in Jammu and Kashmir and separatist movements in the Northeast are a menace to national unity. Patel considered internal unrest to be the biggest threat to national security. He said, "External

security is not possible without internal unity".²⁰ His policies included strict legal action and community participation. Today's national security policies, such as the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA-1967)²¹ and the National Investigation Agency (NIA, 2008)²² are stimulated by Sardar Patel's ideas. His strategies impart that a balance of military and civilian measures is necessary to deal with terrorism. Now, India is following this policy. A direct example of this is Operation Sindoor, launched by India after the Pahalgam terror attack in which India destroyed 9 terrorist training camps located in Pakistan.²³

Sardar Patel's vision of defending strong national interests further strengthens India's demand to reinforce its position on global forums. He said, "To protect national interests, we have to strengthen our voice on the global platform".²⁴ His diplomatic strategies are pertinent to strengthening India's position in today's global diplomacy. India's global position is exclusively relevant in the context of its demand for permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). India, along with the G4 group (Brazil, Germany, Japan, and India), is demanding reforms in the UNSC.²⁵ Its recent global initiatives, such as the Quad and the Indo-Pacific strategy, are also inspired by his ideas. His policies teach that internal unity and strong diplomacy are necessary to be effective on the global stage.

The relevance of Sardar Patel's policies becomes clear when analysed and compared with the national security and integration policies of modern India. His strategy of integration of princely states (1947-1949) can be seen with the abrogation of Article-370 in Jammu and Kashmir (2019)²⁶. The abrogation of Article-370 fully integrated Jammu and Kashmir into the Indian Union, which resonates with Patel's concept of integrated governance. He said, "Every part of India is an integral part, and cannot be separated".²⁷ His military and diplomatic strategies can be seen in the context of today's integrated command structure, the Andaman Nicobar Command and the National Security Council. Some of India's recent major defence reforms, such as the appointment of the Chief of Defence Staff, also represent his ideas of centralised and coordinated governance.

Now, it can be said that Sardar Patel's ideas provide guiding principles for present and future policies of national security and integration. Unity in his ideas was not just geographical but also social and emotional. Patel linked social unity with economic development, believing economic stability to be the

key to national unity. His ideas for national security and unity are as relevant today as they were at the time of independence (1947-1950). His strategies for the integration of princely states (1947-1949), emphasis on social harmony, and vision of strong centralized governance provide inspiration for the policies of modern India. He said, "A united India is a strong India".²⁸ His policies teach that for national security and unity, India needs to have a holistic approach, which includes diplomacy, military strength, and social unity. Patel's vision of "Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat" remains the guiding principle for India's policies and global position even today.

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