

Sardar Patel

The Architect of India's Political Unity

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, born on 31 October 1875 in a farmer's family in Nadiad, Gujarat, was a key figure in India's independence and the architect of its integration. His father, Jhaverbhai, a patriotic farmer believed to have participated in the 1857 uprising, and his mother Ladbai, a deeply religious and hard-working woman, instilled in Vallabhbhai values of self-reliance, discipline, and resilience.

Educated in his village until 17, he later passed his matriculation in 1897 from Nadiad High School. Driven to pursue law but unable to afford university education initially, he began as a district pleader. In 1910, he moved to England to study at Middle Temple, excelling in Roman Law and graduating with distinction in 1912. Upon his return to India in 1913, he established a successful law practice in Ahmedabad but gradually transitioned to public service.

Sardar Patel's political journey began with his association with Mahatma Gandhi during the Kheda Satyagraha (1918). He led the peasants in refusing to pay taxes due to famine-induced hardships, marking his first major victory against colonial authorities. This experience solidified his commitment to Gandhian principles of non-violence and civil disobedience. His leadership during the Bardoli Satyagraha (1928) against unjust tax hikes earned him the title "Sardar," a recognition of his role as a leader of the masses.

Patel played a pivotal role in the freedom movement, participating in the Non-Cooperation Movement and leading protests against repressive British policies. Arrested several times, he endured imprisonment during the Civil Disobedience Movement and the Quit India Movement (1942). As a trusted lieutenant of Gandhi, he presided over the Karachi Session of Congress (1931) and led organizational efforts for India's independence.

Post-independence, as India's first Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister, Patel achieved his most enduring legacy: the peaceful integration of over 560 princely states into the Indian Union. Despite immense challenges, he united the nation through diplomacy and firmness, earning the title of "The Iron Man of India." His work ensured a stable foundation for a democratic and sovereign India. Patel also played a key role in framing the Constitution and establishing administrative frameworks.

Sardar Patel passed away on 15 December 1950, leaving behind an indelible legacy as the "Consolidator of India." Tributes poured in globally, with Prime Minister Nehru describing him as a "tower of strength" and a "builder of modern India." His contributions remain a cornerstone of India's unity and democratic ethos.

Excerpts of Speeches Made by Sardar Patel in the Constituent Assembly

On the Integration of States

“The Central Government should perform the same functions and exercise the same powers in States as in Provinces”

“By integrating 500 and odd States into sizeable units and by the complete elimination of centuries-old autocracies, the Indian democracy has won a great victory of which the Princes and the people of India alike should be proud. This is an achievement which should rebound to the credit of any nation or people at any phase of history.”

“The amendments which are now being proposed concerning the provisions of the Constitution applicable to the States, embody the results of the bloodless revolution which within a remarkably short period, has transformed the internal and external set up of the States.”

“Whether the article provides for consultation or consent of the legislature of the affected State, the wishes of the people cannot be ignored either by the Central Government or legislature.”

“As a result of the policy of integration and democratization of States pursued by the Government of India since December 1947 the process of what might be described as 'unionisation' of States has been greatly accelerated.”

On the Importance of a Unified Constitution

“We discussed this matter with the Premiers of the various Unions and decided, with their concurrence, that the Constitution of the States should also form an integral part of the Constitution of India.”

“The legislative and executive authority of the Union in respect of the States will, therefore, be co-extensive with its similar authority in and over the Provinces.”

“Our new Constitution is not an alliance between democracies and dynasties, but a real union of the Indian people built on the basic concept of the sovereignty of the people.”

On the Benefits of Integration to States

“The States have benefited very considerably from the process of integration in the form of cash balances inherited by them from the Rulers.”

“The privy purse settlements are therefore in the nature of consideration for the surrender by the Rulers of all their ruling powers and also for the dissolution of the States, as separate units.”

“Autocracy in the States has gone and has gone for good.”

Democratic Freedom and Purna Swarajya

“The Purna Swaraj or complete Independence, which is the objective of the Congress, is for the whole of India, inclusive of the States, for the integrity and unity of India must be maintained in freedom as it has been maintained in subjection.”

“The only kind of federation that can be to the Congress is one in which the States participate as free units, enjoying the same measure of democratic freedom as the rest of India.”

“Need we cavil then at the small-purposely use the, word small-price we have paid for the bloodless revolution which has affected the destinies of millions of our people.”

On Unification of India

“The fiscal unification of India will patch up the disruptive rents in the economy of India which rendered effective implementation of economic policies in the Provinces impossible.”

“The Government of India have guaranteed to the Rulers of merged and integrated States payment of privy purses as fixed under the terms of the various Covenants and Agreements of Merger.”

“Our new Constitution is not an alliance between democracies and dynasties, but a real union of the Indian people built on the basic concept of the sovereignty of the people.”

“It removes all barriers between the people of the States and the people of Provinces and, achieves for the first time the objective of a strong democratic India built on the true foundation of a co-operative enterprise on the part of the people of the Provinces and States alike.”

“All the citizens of India, whether residing in States or Provinces, will enjoy the same fundamental rights and the same legal remedies to enforce them.”

After all, we are a democracy; the main sanction behind us is the will of the people and we cannot act in disregard of public opinion.