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Foreword

India has had a galaxy of great men who were instrumental in winning independence from the British yoke. Standing tall amongst these luminaries was the 'Iron Man' of India, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. Sardar Patel bequeathed the idea of an integrated India after independence to the nation. His contribution in laying the foundation of the Union of India is unparalleled and chronicling his deeds for a historical profile is indeed a daunting challenge. I am glad that RNP Singh has taken up this gauntlet in this book on Sardar Patel. He has presented to the readers meticulously some original researched facts about the contribution of Sardar Patel, particularly towards building the free and integrated nation which India is today. Singh's work in presenting a true picture of Sardar Patel has been a commendable work.

Sardar Patel played a prominent role under Mahatma Gandhi in the national struggle, both during and after independence. He consolidated and unified the country and brought about stability in the Indian administration. Sardar Patel is thus aptly acclaimed as the 'Iron Man' and was a master strategist blessed with an uncanny foresight and a clear vision of where India's future lay. The greater part of his illustrious life was devoted to the struggle

for freedom of the country and once independence was won, he dedicated himself to the monumental task of integrating the five hundred odd princely States into the Union of India. The integration of these princely States was a momentous challenge, not only in the history of modern India, but one which has not been witnessed or equalled in the history of any other nation.

Sardar Patel's singular commitment to the territorial integrity of the country was further underlined in the widely acclaimed accession of Junagadh and Hyderabad to the Indian Union. Sardar Patel was a visionary who was deeply rooted in the realism of the events of the day. As is well known, he was very unhappy that the Kashmir issue was referred to the United Nations. His mature and farsighted advice to deal with Chinese diplomacy analytically, was ignored by Nehru. The subsequent events proved that Sardar Patel's assessment was correct.

RNP Singh has presented a vivid account of the contribution of Patel in integrating India, replete with many well researched facts, which had hitherto escaped the notice of many earlier writers. Sardar Patel's total focus towards the integration of India, and saving it from Balkanisation, has been eloquently narrated by the author. He has not coloured the narrative with his own opinions and has treated the subject objectively which will enable the readers to exercise their own independent judgment. Sardar Patel's mature and decisive approach to the many debilitating issues that faced India at independence prevented any further division of India, which could well have become a mix of an India of the people and an India of the Princes. These sterling qualities which were the hallmark of his life and work are so much more required today as the country is faced anew with stresses appearing in our national rubric in many fields.

It is, therefore, an appropriate time to reflect on the contribution of this great unifier of modern India. The author has factually and comprehensively presented Patel's spirit and

work with a view to guiding present and future generations of Indians, to meet the challenges of a growing India while retaining the spirit of its founding principles.

Finally, I will once again like to convey my compliments to RNP Singh, our Senior Fellow for having produced such a masterly work.

General NC Vij

VSM, UYSM, AVSM (Retd) Director VIF
Former Chief of the Army Staff &
Founder Vice Chairman, NDMA
New Delhi, April 2018

Preface

Writing a book on the life and achievements of an outstanding personality like Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel would always be a huge challenge for anyone, but for me personally, it was especially so for multiple reasons—the primary one being the fact that I had only recently gone through the enormous task of examining this near contemporary history while writing a book, *Nehru: A Troubled Legacy*, that involved over three-four years' intensive research. On most of the issues and developments the two stalwarts, Nehru and Patel, were physically together but politically and intellectually wide apart. It was a stern intellectual test to analyse the events from two or more different perspectives and try to arrive at balanced and unbiased conclusions.

Vallabhbhai has been variously perceived by historians and contemporary analysts as a 'superman', and a leader with 'superlative brains'. He was none of that. What he was, was a statesman gifted with the rare quality of astuteness and pertinacity in his approach to problems. Despite his stern exterior, he possessed a generous heart, but in the pursuit of larger objectives, he never allowed emotions or sentiment to weaken his resolve.

Contrary to the general perception, Patel was totally committed to Mahatma Gandhi, yet at no time did he compromise with his deeply-felt convictions. For instance, despite his abiding faith in the Mahatma's leadership, he accepted non-violence, not as an ineluctable way of life, but in the circumstances then obtaining in India, as the only available weapon to compel British withdrawal from the country. And when the country achieved its objective, Patel was quick to advocate the creation of a strong defence force to guard its newly-acquired sovereignty.

Vallabhbhai's realism rested on the sound principle that the cause is always greater than the man. His perceived ruthlessness in enforcing organisational discipline in the Congress Party was derived from the conviction that only as a strong party could the Congress qualify to play the role of a competent 'receiver' after the end of foreign rule. His leadership of the peasants' revolt in Gujarat and of the flag *satyagraha* at Nagpur were designed to drill and discipline his countrymen to a life of suffering and sacrifice as a means of winning national freedom. In his scheme of things, there was indeed no place for vacillation, selfishness and cowardice, which he fought against, not with kid-gloves, but with the mailed fist. And because he was essentially a man of action, he lived, not in words, but in deeds.

Vallabhbhai has won for himself a glittering page in history as an annexationist and unifier far more resourceful and much bolder than Bismarck. Only a man of his resolute and persuasive abilities could have accomplished the unique feat of merging the five hundred odd mutually exclusive and fiercely self-regarding principalities into India's wider unity. The sacrifices demanded from the Princes were of staggering proportions and yet a majority of them willingly surrendered their most cherished possessions. It is not a small tribute to Patel's vision and sagacity that even after he had stripped the rulers of their powers, his

relations with them, both individually and collectively, were most cordial. The bloodless revolution, representing the crowning achievement of his life, was accomplished at a time when the armed forces of the Government of India were dangerously inadequate.

To build up India of his dreams, Patel felt the need for an efficient and enthusiastic Civil Service. The ICS under the British Raj had earned renown for the ability and versatility of its members, but following the country's partition and independence in 1947, nearly 700 European and Muslim ICS officers out of a total of 1,150 had left. The burden of running the administration of a problem-ridden country fell upon a small number of officers.

Patel was indeed the only senior Congress leader who not only appreciated and admired their capabilities, but also won their confidence by fighting for their rights, privileges and immunities. He realised that the problems of the country, which were of such heart-breaking complexity, could be dealt with effectively only with their expert assistance.

After the exodus of a large number of the ICS and IP (Indian Police) men, Patel constituted the Indian Administrative Service and Indian Police Service in its place despite opposition from many State Chief Ministers to the creation of such an all-India cadre. Patel sternly discouraged divisive tendencies and impressed upon them the need for an interchange of officers in order to preserve the unity, integrity, independence, impartiality and the efficiency of the administration throughout the country. Never before in India's history since the Maurayan bureaucracy did India have a uniform system of administration, from which no part of the country was excluded. Nor was the country ever before unified as an unrestricted democracy.

Most of all, those who knew Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, acclaimed him as a great man. An outstanding quality of

his leadership was his capacity to dominate any situation, no matter how difficult it was. Alan Campbell-Johnson, who had rare opportunities of watching the Sardar in action, has referred to the Indian statesman in many places in his book, *Mission with Mountbatten*. Describing the Sardar as a man with Roman qualities, he recalls his conversation with Sir Archibald Nye whose knowledge of Indian affairs was also intimate and first-hand. Nye told him that, 'he was very impressed with Patel who was a real leader in the military sense'. 'Mountbatten', writes Campbell-Johnson, 'had been somewhat apprehensive about his first meeting with Patel, who had the reputation of being the strong man in the Congress High Command, but he very quickly detected a twinkle in the Sardar's eye. His approach to the whole problem was clear and decisive'.¹ In an extempore speech at the farewell banquet for him and Lady Mountbatten on 20 June 1948, Mountbatten referred to the Sardar thus: I was warned before I came to India that I should meet my match in a very 'tough guy', Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel; but when we met I came to the conclusion that he could not be quite as tough as the act that he put on. He is so very apparently hard and firm and unyielding, and I think he is like that because he does not want the world to know what a very warm heart beats behind the rugged exterior and I regard him as one of the greatest friends I have made here.²

'What was Vallabhbhai?', asked Rajagopalachari, and he himself answered: What inspiration, courage, confidence, and force incarnate Vallabhbhai was.... We will not see the likes of him again.³ Nehru called him, 'the Builder and Consolidator of New India... a great captain of our forces in the struggle for freedom... a tower of strength which revived wavering hearts'.⁴ Gandhi found in him a Colleague 'most trustworthy, staunch and brave'.⁵ Vinoba Bhave called him, 'the accurate Bowman of Gandhi's struggle, his disciple and his GOC. He knew no retreat'.⁶

Patel's international acclaim was equally eloquent. *The London Times* wrote of him on his demise, 'Little known outside his own country, "Sardarji" neither sought nor won the international reputation achieved by Gandhi or Mr Nehru. Yet, he made up with them the triumvirate that gave shape to the India of today'.⁷ The *Manchester Guardian's* tribute was more specific: Without Patel, Gandhi's ideas would have had less practical influence, and Nehru's idealism less scope. Patel was not only the organiser of the fight for freedom, but also the architect of the new state when the fight was over. The same man is seldom successful both as rebel and statesman. Patel was the exception.⁸

In spite of Patel being an unquestioned patriot, statesman, visionary and a unifier of modern India, dispassionate observers cannot help suspecting that there is almost a conspiracy of silence aimed at obliterating his memory. In certain circles he is painted as a reactionary, communalist and Hindu nationalist. His book of speeches, *Sardar Patel on Indian Problems*, has been out of print and no attempt has been made to reprint it. The original publisher was Government of India. A commemorative volume published on his 75th birthday, containing extracts from his speeches and life sketches by admirers, had a limited circulation.

In absence of the availability of material, it has been difficult to satisfy the curiosity of the student of history about what the Sardar was, and what he achieved as a fighter for freedom, as a powerful organiser and a great statesman. Some writers have thrown much mud at the Sardar's memory. This needs to be cleared by presenting hard facts. Patel's personality will then stand out clear and radiant for future generations to make their own estimate of his contribution towards building the free nation which India is today. In the present political flux, thinking men more than ever mourn the absence of Patel's leadership, his clarity of thought, his robust sense of realism, his firmness in decision

and his iron will which none could bend; and they cannot help saying: Had Patel been alive for some more years, India would not have seen such dismal days.

Instead of a biographical narrative, I have in this book taken up only one aspect—that is his contribution to the integration of the Indian States in a factual and objective manner. I have tried to present the personality of Patel against the background of the political situation prevailing immediately after partition. My sole objective in writing this book is to present his personality to the reader in its proper colours—as one who left his mark not only on the map of India but also on the minds of the people.

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<https://priyamvadrai.files.wordpress.com/2016/07/integration-of-princely-states-3-638.jpg>

Integration of the Indian States

The masterly handling of the rulers (Princes) by Sardar was the foremost factor in the success of the accession policy. The rulers soon came to recognise him as a stable force in Indian politics and as one who would give them a fair deal. Added to this, his unfailing politeness to the rulers, viewed against his reputation as the 'Iron Man of India', endeared him to them and created such confidence that all accepted his advice without demur.

—VP Menon

AFTER SECURING the accession of States, Vallabhbhai Patel tightened his grip on the great movement which brought about their full integration with India. People were demanding the introduction of 'responsible government'. They were becoming restive due to violent outbreaks of discord. The safety of the

rulers as well as of the people was in danger. Maintenance of law and order was becoming a problem and the Government of India was constrained to intervene wherever internal condition deteriorated. The States had no resources, no manpower and no stability. The rulers had become targets of the revolutionary impulses of those they had ruled. Their security depended on the goodwill of the people and the protection of the Central government. But the government could not support States which continued in their pre-independence form. Patel advised the rulers to surrender their power and authority to the Government of India, and in return accept the grant of privy purses and guarantees of their personal properties and privileges. The rulers saw the inevitable and wanted to salvage what they could. They negotiated for their privy purses.

Patel decided that the best course would be to secure their merger into a Union. He, therefore, explained to the rulers that the States could no longer continue their separate existence. Like little pools of water they had become stagnant. The transfer of power to the people had become inevitable. It was in the interests of the ruler that this should be effected in a peaceful manner. Most of States could not satisfy the demands of the people for minimum amenities of life, for they did not have the resources of money and manpower. By forming a Union of the States, the administration could be kept under control. The transfer of power might not be palatable to the Princes, but unless this was done, they would have to face more unpalatable prospects.

And then, from the realistic angle, he convinced them that the popular ministries (provincial governments) were sure to vote for merger into a Union of States. He asked them, would it not be safer for the Princes to agree to merger and thus safeguard their privy purses and their personal properties? The Princes agreed, and the United States of Kathiawad was formed on 15 February 1948. The movement for merger spread to other provinces. The Deccan and Gujarat States, scattered all over the province of Bombay, merged with it in June 1948. Kolhapur followed suit

in March 1949. Vindhya Pradesh was established in January 1950. The Madhya Bharat Union was formed in May 1948.

The merger and integration of States gathered such momentum that the Punjab States formed the PEPSU in July 1948, the Rajasthan Union was formed in May 1949, by the merger of Matsya Union with Greater Rajasthan. Travancore and Cochin formed a Union in May 1949. Next month Mysore was integrated. In January 1949, Baroda had merged into the State of Bombay. On 7 November 1947, the Dewan of Junagadh found it impossible to carry on administration and requested the Government of India to take over the State.

Like a magician, Patel had picked up the fragments of States and from his basket produced compact and viable units. The map of India was changed completely. Out of 554 States, 216 had merged in the provinces, 310 had been consolidated into six Unions, five were put directly under the Centre as Chief Commissioner's Province, 21 Punjab Hill States formed the Himachal Pradesh and two States were made into separate Provinces. The 554 States were thus reduced to fourteen Unions and States.¹

The administrative consolidation of these States and Unions, which varied much in their structure, was undertaken by loaning experienced officers to the Unions. The State forces were integrated in the Indian army. This process was completed by the Constitution of India which came into force on 26th January 1950.

Patel's policy of integration recognised the rights of the rulers, acquired by heredity and history which the people must honour. He said, 'Their dignities and privileges and their means of subsistence on a reasonable standard must be assured'.² He hoped that rulers would discard their former mentality, bred by autocracy, and devote themselves to the service of the people. He described the rulers as co-architects in the work of building the nation. He claimed that 'he had never used any coercion on the Princes. It was the compulsion of circumstances and events

which forced the Princes to surrender. Some had intelligence to see the inevitable, others, who struggled against it, were ultimately forced in it'.³

Patel took all care to safeguard the genuine interests of the rulers. Some critics believed that Patel had been too generous to the Princes in respect of their privy purses and private properties. They ignored vital statistics. *The total amount of privy purses actually taken by rulers, before integration, was of the order of Rs 20 crore in values of the 1940s. In addition, customary taxes were collected from the people on such occasions as marriages and birth in the ruler's family, and even for purchase of a special car. On the other hand, the total cost of the privy purses after integration, as sanctioned by the Ministry of States, was Rs 5.8 crore.*

The amount in the case of each ruler was fixed in consultation with the Ministry or the leaders of the Union. They were granted for life and the successors' privy purses were to be fixed at the discretion of the government. Only eleven rulers got more than Rs 10 lakh. They were Gwalior (Rs 25 lakh), Indore (Rs 15 lakh), Patiala (Rs 17 lakh), Baroda (Rs 26.5 lakh), Jaipur (Rs 8 lakh), Jodhpur (Rs 17.5 lakh), Bikaner (Rs 17 lakh), Travancore (Rs 18 lakh), Bhopal (Rs 11 lakh), Mysore (Rs 26 lakh), and Hyderabad (Rs 50 lakh in Hyderabad currency). Ninety-one rulers were given privy purses of more than one lakh rupees. Fifty-six rulers had less than one lakh and the remaining 396 rulers were given privy purses less than Rs 50,000 per annum.⁴

As against this cost, the gain to India was considerable when the States were taken over. *The new State governments inherited cash balances and investments exceeding Rs 77 crore.* The rulers surrendered over 500 villages, thousands of acres of land and their palaces, museums and buildings. For instance, the Nizam surrendered his personal estate with a net revenue of Rs 1.24 crore in return for a compensation of Rs 25 lakh per annum during his life time. He invested over Rs 40 crore in government securities and shares and, in addition, gave an annual loan of

Rs 50 lakh for the Tungbhadra Project. *Besides, the government acquired about 12,000 miles of railways without payment of compensation.*

The country has reason to be grateful to Sardar Patel who laid the foundations of an integrated India, wherein regional loyalties were overshadowed by the desire to build a strong and united nation. *By partition, India had lost 3.6 lakh square miles of territory with a population of 81.5 million. By the integration of States, she acquired 5 lakh square miles of territory with a population of 86.5 million.* Artificial barriers between the States and the rest of India were demolished. Almost overnight, the superstructure of the modern system of government was introduced in these States.

The Sardar performed a miracle. In his own words: The great idea of geographical, political and economic unification of India, an ideal which for centuries remained a distant dream and which appeared as remote and as difficult of attainment even after the advent of Indian independence, was consummated by the policy of integration.

But he was too much of a realist to ignore that real integration had still to take place in the minds of the people. He said: We have to weave new fabrics into old materials; we have to make sure that simultaneously the old and the new are integrated into a harmonious whole—a design that would fit well into the pattern of all India.⁵

Historical background of the idea of integration

The Indian States, with their total subservience, formed the main arch of the British power in India. After the great National Revolt of 1857, when Victoria, the Queen of England, assumed the role of the Empress of India, the British government clearly drew its lessons from the rebellion and felt that the native governments had acted and could act as breakwaters for any nationalist storm, which would otherwise have swept away the Empire in one great move. For over ninety years, these States, petrified under British control, continued to play an important part in maintaining

foreign rule in India. With ever-changing doctrines and devices regarding their subservience and sovereignty, they provided the strongest bulwark against the rising tide of nationalism.

Successive British statesmen continued to prize the loyalty of the Princes who ruled over the backward populations under the 'control' of British Residents or Agents. During the twentieth century, when British India was astir with national aspirations, new constitutional doctrines were evolved by the British in India. All the States, with full powers of jurisdiction, were now equal in sovereignty; the treaties made by them with East India Company were sacrosanct. But, where the British interests were affected, the undefined word 'Paramountcy' overrode all obligations. This doctrine was avidly accepted by the rulers as their charter of independence.

The British Empire started annexing Indian States and provinces, as subsidiaries of the Empire, after 1858. 'The Indian Princes were seen as feudal subsidiaries of the British crown, especially after the Royal Titles Act of 1876.'⁶ The crucial thing at this time for the imperial state was the question of heir or successor of the kingdom. It was not only an idea of conquest but also an idea of hegemonic administrative control under the mark of governability and accountability that the colonial state emphasised, which it carried forward in everyday formal-legal bureaucratic-governmentalised spheres of life.

The division of colonial India into British and Princely India was structured along various hierarchies and divisions overlapping social, cultural, economic, political and ideological differences between these two parts of the population. Princely States formed about two-fifths of the territory and a quarter of the population of colonial India. In order to better manage and control the Princely States, the colonial state deputed residents, political agents and Crown representative in those States. The Montague-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 were the first in this regard to initiate the process of sharing powers between the empire and its constituents. The most important

recommendation of the Montague-Chelmsford report related to the codification of political practice. The next twenty-five years saw the genesis and emergence of the constitutional history of India, providing measures addressing issues of political representation, autonomy and division of power between the Centre and States. The Government of India Act 1935, the Cripps Proposal of 1942 and the Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946, among others, were significant exercises in this regard.

Under the Government of India Act 1935, States were to accede to the Indian federation. It provided for a constitutional relationship between the Indian States and British India on a federal basis. A special feature of the scheme was that, whereas in the case of the provinces, accession to the federation was to be automatic, in the case of the States it was voluntary. A State was considered to have acceded when its ruler executed an 'Instrument of Accession' and after it was accepted by His Majesty. This instrument would empower the federal government, the federal legislature, the federal court and any other federal authority to exercise in relation to the State such functions as might be vested in them by or under the Act, but the authority to perform such functions was to be exercised only in respect of those matters accepted by the ruler as 'federal' in his Instrument of Accession and subject to such limitations as might be specified in it. An instrument of accession would become operative only when His Majesty had signed his acceptance of it.

The relationship of the Indian Princes with the paramount power was safeguarded by creating a Crown Representative in addition to the Governor-General. In the conduct of their affairs as members of the federation, the States were to deal with the Governor-General as head of the federal government, whereas in their relation with the paramount power, they were to deal with the Crown Representative.

The Government of India Act of 1935, other than the part relating to federation, came into force on 1 April 1937. From that

date, the functions of the Crown in its relations with the States were entrusted to the Crown Representative; those functions included negotiations with the rulers for their accession to the federation. The Viceroy who succeeded Lord Willington in 1936 was the Marquess of Linlithgow who came to India with the ambition to inaugurate the federation during his tenure of office. He thought that a direct personal approach to the rulers would persuade many of them to accept it. He, therefore, planned to send his own personal emissaries to various States to clear the rulers' doubts so that they could make a final decision without delay. The emissaries were provided with draft copies of the Instrument of Accession, which had already been sent to the rulers, as well as with the written instructions from the Viceroy.

The three emissaries chosen were Sir Courtenay Latimer, Sir Francis Wylie and Sir Arthur Lothian, all of whom belonged to the Political Service. The three emissaries toured the various States in the Winter of 1936-37 and met the rulers and their advisors. The rulers made it clear that they did not urge unity. The question which agitated them was not whether the federation would benefit India as a whole, but whether their own position would be better and safer inside the federation than outside it.

They conveyed their concern with these words: We are being given the opportunity of entering a federation from which, when once we are in, there is no escape. Nor, since the ultimate interpreter of the federal constitution is the Federal Court, can the Government of India or anyone else predict the course of future events or anticipate the use which federation will make of its powers. We owe it, therefore, to ourselves and to our successors to safeguard to the utmost our own position inside the federation. That is the light in which you must regard the limitations which we have proposed, and if they seem unduly numerous and too widely drawn, remember that we have good reasons for making them so.⁷ Limitations proposed by the rulers were mainly their desire to safeguard—their sovereignty and their financial position.

The emissaries submitted their reports to the Viceroy in early 1937. The reports indicated that the rulers were in bargaining mood and suggested many far-reaching concessions to induce them to join the federation. The Princes also sent their replies to the Viceroy, stating the terms on which alone they were prepared to come in.

Meanwhile, several rounds of talks between the Indian government and the rulers were held, with no result. No assurances they wanted was forthcoming. The federation was still as distant as ever. Such was the position towards the beginning of August 1939. In the meantime, the provincial part of the Government of India Act of 1935 had been put into operation and elections to the provincial legislatures had been held in 1937. The Congress had swept the polls in six provinces and in July of that year, it had formed ministries. A little later, with the support of a few independent members, Congress ministries were also formed in two other provinces, viz. Assam and North-West Frontier Province.

The overwhelming success of the Congress encouraged the States' subjects to agitate for civil liberties and responsible government. There were unrests in Mysore, Travancore, Kashmir, Hyderabad, Jaipur, Rajkot and the Orissa States. The Congress reiterated its objective of standing for the same political, social and economic freedom in the States as in the case of the rest of India, and of considering the States as integral part of India.

Lord Linlithgow realised that unless some radical reforms were brought about in the States, it would only be a question of time before they succumbed to the Congress agitation. The bigger States were capable of looking after themselves, it was the future of the middle-sized and small States about which he was anxious. He felt that, with regard to the latter, the policy of abstention from interference, which the British government had for some years pursued, could no longer be defended and should be abandoned; that active pressure should be brought to bear on these States to effect administrative reforms. Lord Linlithgow

wanted to bring stronger pressure to bear on the rulers than had hitherto been the case in the matter of sponsoring representative institutions and establishing some form of constitutional government within the States. But these proposals were not to the taste of the Political Department back home.

The Secretary of State was in agreement with Lord Linlithgow's proposal on administrative reforms. But, as regards the constitutional advance, he considered that, on both political and practical grounds, the initiative and onus of responsibility must continue to rest with the rulers themselves. He felt that constitutional development in the States, once begun, could not be regulated and limited in the same way as administrative advance and that no policy conceived by the British government could by itself maintain the rulers or ensure against their eventual capitulation to the Congress agitation. In the meantime, the Second World War broke out. The position then was that owing to the unyielding attitude of the rulers, as well as of the major political parties in British India, the federal scheme was in its last gasp.

Due to breaking out of the Second World War, the Empire needed the help of the Princes in men, money and material. It was not the time to rub them the wrong way. On 11 September 1939, Lord Linlithgow announced in his address to both Houses of the Central Legislative that, 'while the federation remained, as before, the objective of His Majesty's Government, the compulsion of the present international situation and the fact that, given the necessity for concentrating on the emergency that confront us, we have no choice but to hold in suspense the work in connection with preparation for federation'.⁸ This marked the close of a crucial chapter in modern India's political history.

Cabinet Mission and Constituent Assembly

When the war entered its acute phase with the fall of France, Neville Chamberlain resigned and Winston Churchill formed a National Coalition Government in which LS Amery became

the Secretary of State for India. On 8 August 1940, Linlithgow put forward some new proposals on behalf of His Majesty's Government. He offered a certain number of seats in the Governor-General's Executive Council to Indian representatives. He also proposed a War Advisory Council with members from the representatives of the States and of British India. Lastly, he promised that after the conclusion of the war, a body of representatives of the principal elements in India's national life would be called upon to devise the framework of a new Constitution. The Congress rejected the offer, the Muslim League followed suit.

The British government made no further overtures to the political parties. But, towards the close of 1941, the war situation had changed for the worse. On March 1942, Churchill declared in the House of Commons that 'the crisis in the affairs of India arising out of the Japanese advance has made Britain wish to rally all the forces of Indian life to guard their land from the menace of this invader'.⁹ He announced that the War Cabinet was sending out Sir Stafford Cripps to India, with a set of proposals approved by the Cabinet, in order to remove the doubts and apprehensions in the minds of the Indian parties and to convince their leaders how those proposals constituted a far-reaching advance towards satisfying Indian aspirations.

Sir Stafford Cripps, who arrived in India on 22 March 1942, revealed his two offers at a press conference on 29 March. His offer consisted of a proposal that a constitution-making body would be set up to frame the Constitution of a new Indian Union which would have the full status of a 'Dominion' with the power to secede, if it chose, from the British Commonwealth. This body would be elected by an electoral college consisting of the members of lower houses of the provincial legislatures, for which fresh elections would be held. The British government undertook to accept and implement forthwith the Constitution framed by this body on two conditions. Firstly, any province or provinces which were not prepared to accept the new constitution would

be entitled to frame, by a similar process, a *constitution of their own* giving them the same full status as the Indian Union. The second condition was that a treaty should be negotiated between the British government and the constitution-making body to cover all matters arising out of the transfer of responsibility, particularly the protection of racial and religious minorities.

The Princes were not associated with Cripps in any discussions. The rulers felt that the scheme for making a new constitution after the war applied to all-India and hence they were deeply concerned. They met Sir Stafford Cripps and raised several questions of their interest. While replying to their questions, Cripps said that in any case, it was definite that the British government did not contemplate transferring the Paramountcy of the Crown to any other party; Paramountcy would continue to be in force in the case of States which join the union; intention was to revise the treaties only so far as might be required in the new situation; and the British government could not be expected to coerce any party into such arrangements, although their good offices would be available to resolve differences. The Cripps offer was rejected by both the Congress Working Committee and the Muslim League. Cripps left for London, his mission a failure.

By the end of 1944, events had overtaken Britain's colonial plans. The defence of Stalingrad had halted Hitler, and his armies were thrown on the defensive. Japan had been effectively checked, leading to the victory of the Allies. The Labour Party withdrew from the coalition government in Britain after the victory, thus, forcing an early general election, in which the Conservatives were defeated. On 26 July 1945, the Labour Party was invited to form a new government. Atlee became Prime Minister and Lord Pethic-Lawrence assumed the duties of Secretary of State for India.

In September of the same year, Lord Wavell went to England and on his return announced his second plan. The announcement reaffirmed the King's government's determination to do their

utmost, in conjunction with the leaders of Indian opinion, to promote the early realisation of 'full self-government' for India and expressed the hope that India's political leaders would assume ministerial responsibilities in all the provinces after the elections, which had already been announced.

The announcement made it clear that His Majesty's Government intended to convene, as soon as possible, a constitution-making body to draft a future Constitution of India but, as a preliminary step, the Viceroy had been authorised to consult representatives of the provincial assemblies as to whether the concrete proposals in the Cripps declaration required any modification. It was against this background that the annual session of the Chamber of Princes was held on 17 January 1946. (The Chamber of Princes was brought into being by a Royal Proclamation on 8 February 1921.) In his address, the Viceroy assured them that no changes in their relationship with the Crown or the rights guaranteed to them by treaties and engagements would be initiated without their consent. At the same time, he expressed his confidence that the States would take their full part in the constitutional discussions which were to be held later in the year, as well as, in the proposed constitution-making body.

On 19 February 1946, Atlee announced the decision of the British Cabinet to send three cabinet ministers to India to settle with the Indian leaders, in association with the Viceroy, the procedure of framing a new Constitution for the country.

It was decided that the Mission should interview (1) Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes (2) the rulers of Patiala, Bikaner and Nawanganar jointly as representing the middle States (3) rulers of Dungarpur and Bilaspur jointly representing the smaller States (4) the Anwar of Chhatari (Hyderabad), Sir CP Ramaswami Aiyar (Travancore) and Sir Mirza Ismail (Jaipur) individually. A suggestion that the Mission should interview the representatives of the States' subjects was not acceptable either to the Political Department or to the Chancellor.

As per this decision, the Cabinet Mission met the representatives of the Princes. Broadly, the position taken up by the State representatives was that the Paramountcy should not be transferred to a successor government, but that it should lapse; that the States should not be forced to join any Union or Unions; that there should be *prima facie* no objection to the formation of a Confederation of States, if the rulers so desired; and that there should be no interference in their internal affairs by British India.

Imperial Strategy of Pakistan-Hindustan-Princistan

On 16 May 1946, the Cabinet Mission and the Viceroy, in consultation with His Majesty's Government, issued a statement embodying their own suggestions and recommendations towards a solution of the Indian problem. This was subsequently known as the 'Cabinet Mission Plan'.

Referring to the States, 'the Mission said that it was quite clear that with the attainment of independence by British India, whether within or without the British Commonwealth, the relationship which had hitherto existed between the States and the British Crown would no longer be possible. Paramountcy could neither be retained by the British nor transferred to the new government'. The statement went on to say that: the rulers had assured the Mission that they were ready and willing to cooperate in the new development of India. But the precise form which that cooperation would take must be a matter for negotiation during the building up of the new constitutional structure and it by no means followed that it would be identical for all the States.¹⁰

Under the proposed plan, the States were to retain all subjects and powers other than those ceded to the Union, namely foreign affairs, defence and communication. In the preliminary stage, they were to be represented in the Constituent Assembly by a Negotiating Committee. In the final Constituent Assembly, they were to have appropriate representation not exceeding 93 seats.

The method of selection was to be determined by consultation between the parties concerned.

The Cabinet Mission Plan of 16 May 1946, though expressed in the form of a recommendation, was really in the nature of an award, as the Mission had been unable to bring about a general agreement between the Congress and the Muslim League. The Congress agreed to participate in the Constituent Assembly to be convened under the plan for framing a new constitution. The Muslim League at first accepted the full plan while reiterating that attainment of a sovereign Pakistan still remained its unalterable objective; but after a somewhat acrimonious controversy between the Congress and the League over interpretation of the plan, the Council of Muslim League revoked its acceptance.

On invitation from the Viceroy, Jawaharlal Nehru formed an Interim Government. The League representative also joined the government. In the meantime, elections to the Constituent Assembly were held in accordance with the procedure laid down in the plan. The Muslim Leaguers who were elected to that body refused to join it. The Constituent Assembly, for the first time, met on 9 December 1946. It elected Rajendra Prasad as the President and appointed various committees to draft the different sections of the Constitution.

Patel, as Home Member in the Interim Government, realised that with the promise of separate constitutions for the princely States, His Majesty's Political Department harboured designs to Balkanise the Indian subcontinent. The Princes were under the exclusive charge of the Viceroy as Crown Representative, but were directly responsible to the Secretary of the Political Department. He, in turn, could directly report to the Secretary of State in London. The British were to terminate Paramountcy simultaneously with the transfer of power to India, so that they could make the Princes independent, and thus, enable them to negotiate, individually or jointly, with the new government in British India on equal terms. This was an attempt to implement

Churchill's 'Imperial Strategy' of which Wavell records in his Journal on 29 March 1949: He seems to favour partition into Pakistan, Hindustan, Princistan etc.¹¹ This was the tip of the iceberg. What was being maneuvered underneath hardly anyone could see or know. Patel was no exception.

Such maneuvering followed the two pronouncements of the Cabinet Mission: the Memorandum of 12th, and the Plan of May 16th. The former stated: When a new fully self-government or independent government or governments came into being in British India... HMG will cease to exercise the powers of Paramountcy... the rights of the States which flow from their relationship to the Crown will no longer exist and that all the rights surrendered by the States to the Paramount Power will return to States. Political arrangements between the States, on the one side, and the British Crown and British India, on the other, will, thus, be brought to an end. The void will have to be filled either by the States entering into a federal relationship with the successor government or governments in British India, or, failing this, entering into particular political arrangements with it or them.¹²

Though Patel was then a helpless witness, he commented later: Nobody could have been so innocent or ignorant as to presume that overnight small rulers could be converted into 'Their Majesties'. That position would have been full of dangerous possibilities and potentialities.¹³ In its 16 May 1946 statement, the Mission virtually put a seal on the Princely States' sovereign status by declaring, 'Paramountcy can neither be retained by the British Crown nor transferred to the new government'.¹⁴

The Cabinet Mission made another dangerous move in the suggestion that, for the seats allotted to the Princes in the Constituent Assembly, the Chamber of Princes should nominate a 'Negotiating Committee' for parleys with its counterpart from British India. Two dangers lurked in that. Since, practically every matter which concerned the State had been committed to

the care of the States' Negotiating Committee, Patel wondered whether their Negotiating Committee had to settle the question of determining the method of election of the States' representatives to the Constituent Assembly, or whether the Negotiating Committee had even a wider field of discussing other subjects concerning the States. Further, Patel wrote to KM Munshi: Another important question for us to decide is whether the Constituent Assembly will have any say in the matter of grouping of States, which the Chamber of Princes might decide on, or which any group of States independently might agree upon. He also told Munshi in his letter of 7 December 1946: You know efforts are being made to form groups of States, either independently or under the inspiration of the Chamber of Princes.¹⁵

Not much later, such fears came out in the open when Bhopal and Conrad Corfield, Secretary of the Political Department, began organising the Princes into blocs.

An accident of history changed the course of events and determined the fate of the country. An official file, casually falling into Patel's hands after taking charge of Home in the Interim Government, in September 1946, opened his eyes to the dangers India faced. Bastar, whose 'Raja was a minor and a weakling and the Prime Minister a foreigner' and a land which had rich mineral and other resources, was being 'mortgaged to Hyderabad State by means of long lease' and was to be 'exploited to the prejudice of India'.

His Majesty's Political Department evaded Home Member Patel's enquiries on the matter. He was told that those in charge of the Department were 'guardians of the minor' and that they 'could enter into the contract in the interests of the minor'. Patel told them that 'they (the British) were now going away and they should not bother about their wards. Their guardianship would now devolve on us (free India), and they should do nothing without our agreement, or which was contrary to the interests of the people' of India.

Not satisfied with the Political Department's response, Patel also called for the Prince. 'When I saw the ruler', he records, 'how young and inexperienced he was, I felt that it was a sin to make him sign such an agreement. It was then that I 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 sooner we were rid of these people, the better. Their main aim was to further their own interests and to cause as much damage to India as possible. I came to the conclusion that the best course was to drive out foreigners even at the cost of partition of the country. It was also then that I felt that there was only one way to make the country safe and strong—and that was the unification of the rest of India'.¹⁶

Meanwhile, on 20 February 1947, Prime Minister Atlee made a declaration in the House of Commons in course of which he set a date not later than June 1948 by which time Britain would transfer power to responsible Indian hands. It was also announced that Mountbatten would replace Lord Wavell as Viceroy. With regard to the States, the declaration stated: As was explicitly stated by the Cabinet Mission, His Majesty's Government do not intend to hand over their powers and obligations under Paramountcy to any government of British India. It is not intended to bring Paramountcy, as a system, to a conclusion earlier than the date of the final transfer of power, but it is contemplated that for the intervening period the relations of the Crown with the individual States may be adjusted by agreements.¹⁷ This announcement had a considerable influence on the two Negotiating Committees at their joint meeting on 1 March 1947. Nehru contended that the British government's declaration had introduced an additional element of urgency and it would be greatly to the advantage of the States.

The imminence of Partition and the British government's clear indication, that the treaties and Paramountcy relationships between them and the princely States would cease and that all

arrangements, usage etc. that bound them in fiscal and other matters would terminate immediately lent great importance and urgency to the problem of future relationship between the future Indian Dominion and the States.

Patel, who always had before him the picture of a united India embracing both British India and the States, was deeply concerned over this issue. He had no illusions about the future of India without this unity and integration. In fact, he was one of the few in the Congress party who had a clear idea of what this implied both in theory and practice and how much depended on the solution of this problem, not only from the point of view of peace and prosperity of the Indian Dominion but also from the point of view of the future relationship between India and Pakistan-to-be and its economic progress.

He had also complete information as to the designs and intentions of the League leaders, who were straining their ingenuity to see that the Princes remain a perpetual problem for the future Indian Dominion and that as many of them as possible out of those who might associate themselves with the future Indian Dominion keep themselves aloof from such an association. To top it all there was the Political Department led by Sir Conrad Corfield. It comprised a coterie of officials, practically all of them British, who had dominated the Princes, so far. It was chary of giving up that domination, was hostile to Indian aspirations and was believed to be inspiring moves among the Princes to form unions of their own even at the cost of the unity and integrity of the future India.¹⁸

Sardar Patel's views were further explained in his letter of 2 February 1947 wherein he said, 'Sovereignty in England vests in the people of England and not in his Majesty the King.... No man in his senses in the world believes that sovereignty vests in any single individual, whether he be a prince or a monarch, a czar or a Hitler'.¹⁹ On 26 February 1947, after Atlee's policy statement of 20th February, Patel wrote to a friend: From June 1948, there will be no Sovereign in India, and Paramountcy will

evaporate in the air.²⁰ By such utterances, he was forewarning the British and checkmating their designs in India. No other Indian leader had Patel's boldness and courage. Later, after the transfer of power, he grew still bolder and declared: Paramountcy can never be annihilated. It must ever reside in the central authority; for, it belongs to the people. Whoever will challenge it will perish.²¹ That was the warning to the Princes playing into the hands of Bhopal and Corfield.

The fear of Churchill's strategy of 'Princestan' always haunted Patel. His fears were later confirmed by some of the Dewans of the States. No less a person than Corfield himself admitted at Mountbatten's Staff meeting on 26 March 1947 that he was supporting Bhopal's conspiracy with some Princes against their joining the Indian Union, and that he was making efforts to set up the 'Princes as a potential third force',²² which was another name for Churchill's Princestan. At a conference of Residents and Political Officers, held in the second week of April 1948, Corfield asked them 'to enable the States to stand on their feet, to encourage them to hold together and, at the same time, to cooperate fully with British India'.²³ There was also a sinister motive in the Political Department's proposal to hand over to the States the Crown Representative's police force. Ingeniously, Patel killed the proposal by immediately changing the name to the Central Reserve Police. In the hands of the States, the force could have been a source of potential mischief.

All through, while dealing with the rulers and British negotiators, Patel maintained his characteristic coolness; an attitude of conciliation and compromise rather than confrontation, and yet he was firm in his resolve, and when an occasion demanded, he was blunt in expressing his views. In an effort to woo the Princes, he told them that the policy of the Congress was to befriend the Princes.

In contrast, Nehru's occasional outbursts scared the Princes. On 18 April 1947, addressing the annual session of the All-India States' People's Conference, Nehru declared 'that any State which

did not come into the Constituent Assembly would be treated by the country as a hostile State'. Such a State, he added, 'would have to bear the consequences of being treated'.²⁴

This speech provoked a prompt rejoinder from Liaquat Ali Khan, the leader of the Muslim League in the Central Legislature and the Cabinet, who in a press statement declared that the Congress had no right to coerce the States; and that, according to the Cabinet Mission Plan and the clarifications issued by His Majesty's Government from time to time, the States were perfectly within their rights in refusing to have anything to do with the Constituent Assembly. Liaquat Ali Khan appealed to the States to disregard the idle threat.²⁵

Meanwhile, Lord Mountbatten, the new Viceroy, arrived in India on 22 March 1947, and took charge two days later. In the course of his first speech he said that his was not a normal vicerealty. The British government was resolved to transfer power by June 1948, and solutions had to be found in a few months' time. His earnest determination to carry out the decision of His Majesty's Government to transfer power to Indian hands smoothly and speedily created a deep impression.

Mountbatten did not like Nehru's inflexible attitude. He privately rebuked Nehru for two reasons: first, it would scare the Princes from joining the Indian Union, and second, 'for his demagoguery', especially as a Member of the Interim Government, who ought not to speak in such terms without Cabinet approval. Pandit Nehru took this castigation meekly, explaining that he was speaking in a personal capacity as President of the States' People's Conference.²⁶

The Standing Committee of the Chamber of Princes held many meetings and even sought the Political Department's advice on several issues. At their Bombay conference, on 29 January 1947, the Princes resolved that the Constitution of each State, its territorial integrity and the succession of its reigning dynasty shall not be interfered with by the Indian Union, nor should the existing boundaries of a State be altered

except by its free consent. Far more alarming was their decision that the Constituent Assembly was not to deal with questions affecting the internal administration or Constitutions of States. The resolution 'provoked a good deal of controversy'; in particular, 'Public opinion was considerably agitated over the statement made by some rulers that, if the fundamental propositions were not accepted by the Congress, they would boycott the Constituent Assembly'.²⁷

This was all because of Bhopal who was playing into Jinnah's hands. Cochin and Baroda were the only States who were not a party to the Bombay resolution. The Maharaja of Cochin had announced earlier, on 30 July 1947, his decision to participate in the proceedings of the proposed Constituent Assembly through popular representatives, elected by the State's Legislative Assembly. After that, Baroda, guided by its Dewan, BL Mitter, announced its decision to join the Constituent Assembly. However, the majority of Princes were still with the Chamber of Princes under Bhopal's influence. Bhopal seemed to have received a shot in the arm with Travancore and Hyderabad joining his battle.

CP Ramaswami Aiyar, the Dewan of Travancore, said on 17 March 1947 that his State 'will be an independent State and will revert to the 1750 status'.²⁸ Earlier, on behalf of the Nizam, Syed Abdul Latif had declared on 27 February 1947 that Hyderabad would automatically become a kingdom on transfer of power and that the Nizam would proclaim himself, 'His Majesty the King of Hyderabad'.²⁹ This was just after Atlee's statement of 20th February.

Beginning of the End of Chamber of Princes

While addressing the joint meeting of two Negotiating Committees on 8 February 1947, Patel and Nehru suggested to the Princes to decide to enter and participate in the work of the Constituent Assembly, in the larger interest of the country. The suggestion did not find favours with the rulers. Bhopal, as the

Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes, had laid down certain fundamental prepositions on which they wanted satisfactory assurances before they could enter the Constituent Assembly. When things were heading towards a deadlock, the Maharaja of Patiala intervened and checkmated Bhopal's move for a deadlock through postponement by seeking a clarification of the position as it had emerged from the previous days' meeting. Because of Nehru's persuasive approach and conciliatory statement, the atmosphere became friendly.

The meeting was adjourned till 1 March. The two committees asked the Secretaries of the Constituent Assembly and the Chamber of Princes to jointly work out a scheme for distribution of the seats allotted to the States. At such a time when the two committees should have been sorting out the problem, Atlee's original statement of 20th February 1947 was watered down and another adopted instead.

By this resolution, 'the conference reiterated the willingness of the States to render fullest possible cooperation in framing an agreed Constitution and towards facilitating the transfer of power on an agreed basis. It redefined the general understanding reached between the two Negotiating Committees and demanded that ratification of that understanding by the Constituent Assembly should precede the participation in the work of the Constituent Assembly of the representatives of such States as might desire to do so at the appropriate stage'.

The resolution noted that Atlee's statement of 20th February 1947 further confirmed that the 'States would be in position as independent units to negotiate freely in regard to their future relationship with others concerned'.³⁰ Atlee's statement of February 20th threw overboard whatever limited progress the talk seemed to have made. The statement served as an encouragement to Bhopal and his group of princes to sit on the fence by declaring Britain's intentions not to hand over their powers and obligations under Paramountcy to any government

of British India, as also not to bring Paramountcy, as a system to a conclusion earlier than the date of the final transfer of power.

Sensing trouble ahead, Patel, at the meeting of 1st March 1947, spoke to the Princes in a mixed tone of frankness and deliberate pessimism. He is reported to have said, 'freedom is coming. But I am afraid it may not last long. Before that happens, nothing may be left of the Princes as well'.³¹ It was a stern warning, which turned the tide in his favour. Such pessimism on the part of India's 'iron man' surprised many Princes, especially Bikaner and Patiala, on whom, because of the closeness of their States to Pakistan and because of the happenings in Punjab, a new realisation dawned: how vulnerable their States could be to new dangers. They, therefore, refused to follow Bhopal's policy in their negotiations with the Congress. Impressed by the realism of Patel, the Bikaner-Patiala group assured him of its cooperation in achieving a united, strong India. Prime Minister of Bikaner, KM Panikkar, informed Patel on 10 March 1947, of Bikaner's decision to participate in the Constituent Assembly. Patel replied, 'I am glad that so many Princes are getting out of the cordon (Bhopal). Let us hope that they will come in now... you have seen what is happening in Punjab. I hope there will be no sympathy from any quarter for the Muslim League any more, not even amongst any of the Princes'.³²

The differences between Bikaner and Bhopal were now in the open. Their interviews revealed the full scale of split among the Princes. According to Campbell-Johnson, 'There is great grief to Bhopal, who feels that Bikaner and the other "dissidents", by allowing themselves to take part in the Constituent Assembly, are becoming tools of the Congress and undermining the whole bargaining position of the States... Bhopal thought the time-limit was quite impossible, and, if enforced, must involve bloodshed and chaos'. That sounded Jinnah-like to some of the Princes. Bikaner, on the other hand, held Bhopal responsible for the split, 'who, by his attitude to the Interim Government, had caused the communal issue to be raised against them (the

Princes)'. The real danger, however, lurked in the support Bhopal had of Corfield, who at his meeting with Mountbatten, on 26 March 1947, 'argued with some bitterness that Bikaner, by taking his place in the Constituent Assembly, had seriously weakened the bargaining power of the Princes'.³³

Bhopal, however, was contained in his efforts to influence the Princes. Bikaner now openly questioned the advisability and wisdom of such a policy. Bikaner countered Bhopal's move by arguing that it was in the interest of the Princes to have a strong Central government. The only safe policy for the States was to work fully with the stabilising elements in British India to create a Centre which would safeguard both the States and British India in the vacuum that would be created by the withdrawal of the British government. The interests of the people of the States obviously lay in joining hands with British India in establishing a strong Centre. Bikaner was followed by Patiala who, in a public statement, deprecated the policy of sitting on the fence.

A new group formed by the Maharaja of Bikaner, though in minority, had a salutary influence on the Princes. As a result, the original draft was watered down, and another was adopted instead, which reiterated the willingness of the States to render fullest possible cooperation in framing an agreed Constitution and towards facilitating the transfer of power on an agreed basis. Seeing the situation going out of hand, Bhopal played a trump card suggesting to Patiala, who was pro-chancellor, 'that rulers who held offices in the Chamber should adhere to its recommendations on such vital matters notwithstanding any personal differences of opinion'.

The Maharaja of Patiala promptly replied that the fact that 'he happened to hold the office of pro-chancellor imposed no special obligations on his government, nor did it detract from his decision to adopt such policy about vital matters as he considered necessary in the interests of his State'. He told Bhopal that 'he was sending his representatives to the Constituent Assembly, because he felt that the stage for the States' participation in

the constitution-making process had definitely come, and that any delay in doing so would be prejudicial not only to his own interests but also to the wider interests of the country'. VP Menon characterised the wind of change as 'the beginning of the end of the united front put up by the Chancellor of Princes (Bhopal)'.³⁴

Mountbatten's 3rd June Plan

Meanwhile, Lord Mountbatten announced the plan of 3rd June 1947, according to which, His Majesty's Government would be prepared to relinquish power to two governments, India and Pakistan, on the basis of Dominion status, and this relinquishment of power would take place much earlier than June 1948. In regard to the States, the plan laid down that the policy of His Majesty's Government towards the Indian States, contained in the Cabinet Mission memorandum of 12 May 1946, remained unchanged. This announcement introduced a maximum degree of urgency into the situation.

Lord Mountbatten elucidated the plan next day at a press conference. No Fresh ground was covered so far as the States were concerned. But to a question whether it was the intention of His Majesty's Government to confer dominion status on any State which declared itself independent, he replied emphatically in the negative. It was at this conference that he gave the first public indication that the date of transfer of power would be on 15 August 1947.

The general tendency among the Princes was to make the most of the bargaining position in which the lapse of Paramountcy placed them. The fact that during Second World War many of the major States had strengthened their armed forces could not be ignored. The decision therefore, that with the withdrawal of the British, Indian States, comprising two-fifths of the land, must return to a state of complete political isolation was fraught with the gravest danger to the integrity of the country.

Patel saw this danger in the big chunk of supporters for the Chamber of Princes Bhopal had built as a bastion to give the Congress a strong fight. His statesmanship lay in turning the disunity among the Princes to his advantage. Now he rode among them like a rancher, gently shepherding his scattered flock back home. The operations had to be completed before the return of Paramountcy to the Princes on 15 August. Patel told the Princes on 15 April, 'In a short time India will be free.... I congratulate those Princes who have wisely sided with the Congress. Only those Princes will be able to rule who carry their people with them; those who fail to do so will find their thrones disappear.... Many of the Princes are yet sitting on the fence, waiting to see what shape coming events will take.... I appeal to such Princes to join us now. It would not behove them to do so in the hour of their defeat'.

Patel further told them, 'Many Princes seem to believe that they should collect arms to establish their authority. But India is not the same today as she was when the British came here.... In the end, every State will have to come in. But those who come in the last will deny themselves the honour they will enjoy now. It will be said of those who come in now that they helped bring about unity and establish peace in India. The rest will be classed as mere spectators'. He, however, assured the Princes, 'we want to uphold the Princes' prestige, their honour.... Those amongst them who have ability, intelligence and bravery can take up leadership of the Army. They can also enjoy the glory of serving India abroad as our Ambassadors. What for are you rotting in your small pits? Come out into the open ocean of national life'.³⁵

Due to the salutary effect of Patel's speech many important Princes including Baroda, Bikaner, Cochin, Jaipur, Patiala and Rewa took their seats in the Constituent Assembly. This set the ball rolling and as a result, other States began coming in one after another. Some of the States still kept aloof. An official document says: Bhopal... was acting as an agent of Pakistan..., he was circulating to other rulers false statement to the effect that, as

a result of his group of rulers, the Instrument of Accession was being revised, and that, if all of them stood firm, they would be able to obtain or extract more favourable terms.³⁶ Bhopal tried to convince the Princes by telling them that lapse of Paramountcy would take place prior to the actual transfer of power, so that they could be in a better position to bargain with the successor government. Bhopal succeeded in misleading many States, especially those strategically placed which included Jodhpur, Jamnagar and Travancore.

‘After announcement of the participation, the rulers on our side of the border realised that they should strengthen the Indian Union and so were gradually coming into the Constituent Assembly. They were, however, very jealous about their Sovereignty and I felt strongly that they should not be rubbed the wrong way. At the same time, the attitude of some of the rulers of big States was disconcerting and Pakistan was playing with the idea of getting some of the border States to cast in their lot with her. Sardar told me (VP Menon) that the situation held dangerous potentialities and if we did not handle it promptly and effectively, our hard-earned freedom might disappear through the States’ door.’³⁷

The concept of the lapse of Paramountcy was, according to Menon, ‘the greatest disservice the British had done us as well as the rulers’.³⁸ Patel held the same opinion. *The disservice lay in the 3rd June Plan, which was to sow seeds of disruption by making Paramountcy lapse simultaneously with the transfer of power: on August 15th; whereas under the Cabinet Mission Plan, Paramountcy would have lapsed only after the Constitution had been set up and power transferred to the successor governments.*

Even as late as 3rd June, when the Pakistan demand had been conceded, Corfield and Jinnah endeavoured to aggravate the situation for India by trying to establish the States’ sovereign status under the Plan. Jinnah stated on 18 June 1947 that every Indian State was a sovereign State and that the States were ‘fully entitled to say they would join neither Constituent

Assembly nor....' Liaquat Ali was more explicit in stating, 'The Indian States will be free to negotiate agreements with Pakistan or Hindustan as considerations of contiguity or their own self-interest may dictate....'³⁹ This was fishing in Indian waters, not without purpose. If he could force acceptance of his interpretation, Jinnah expected accession to Pakistan not only of Kashmir, Hyderabad and Bhopal, but also Indore, Jodhpur, Junagadha, Jamnagar and even Baroda.

The situation was taking dangerous shape. Patel was very much alive to the situation. Patel outmaneuvered Jinnah and Corfield and thwarted their design. Bhopal faced the futility of his efforts in Patel's success in Jodhpur, Kathiawar and even Travancore. Patel's assumption of charge of the newly-created States Department (not a ministry yet) on 5 July 1947 was significant in the prevailing confused, complex and dangerous situation. The new department was to replace His Majesty's Political Department without the latter's functions, powers and records. With Patel these things mattered little. He was capable of creating his own functions and powers that suited the nascent nation's interests. And he did create them.

Princes were drawn towards Patel because of his powerful personality, which gave them firm assurance of a hopeful future in an atmosphere of trust, and the benign friendship of one who exuded humanity, humility and broad-mindedness. Ample evidence of this was seen in Patel's policy statement on taking charge as Minister of States. 'The statement was acclaimed as a masterpiece of diplomatic finesse, reflecting Patel's transparent sincerity. He stirred up the nobler sentiments of the Princes by recalling the Princes' proud, glorious past when ancestors of some had played highly patriotic roles in the defence of their family honour and the freedom of their land.'⁴⁰

Patel proudly told the Princes that among them, 'I am happy to count many as my personal friends'. He reminded them, 'It is the lesson of history that it was owing to her politically fragmented condition and our inability to make a united stand

that India succumbed to successive waves of invaders. Our mutual conflicts and internecine quarrels and jealousies have, in the past, been the cause of our downfall and our falling victims to foreign domination a number of times. We cannot afford to fall into those errors or traps again'. He told them, 'we are on the threshold of independence.... The safety and preservation of the States, as well as of India, demand unity and mutual cooperation between its different parts'.

Patel urged the Princes to consider that in the exercise of Paramountcy, 'there has undoubtedly been more of subordination than cooperation', and that 'now that British rule is ending, the demand has been made that the States should regain their independence. In so far as Paramountcy embodied the submission of States to foreign will, I have every sympathy with this demand, but I do not think it can be their desire to utilise this freedom from domination in a manner which is injurious to the common interests of India, or which militates against the ultimate Paramountcy of popular interests and welfare, or which might result in the abandonment of that mutually useful relationship that has developed between British India and Indian States the last century'.

He told them, 'we are all knit together by bonds of blood and feeling, no less than of self-interest. None can segregate us into segments; no impossible barriers can be set up between us.... I invite my friends, the Rulers of States and their people, to the councils of the Constituent Assembly in this spirit of friendliness and cooperation in a joint endeavour, inspired by common allegiance to our motherland, for the common good of us all'. Patel gave them assurance that, 'it is not the desire of the Congress to interfere in any manner whatsoever with the domestic affairs of the States'. He further assured them, 'They (the Congress) are no enemies of the Princely Order, on the other hand, they wish them and the people under their aegis all prosperity, contentment and happiness. Nor would it be my policy to conduct the relations of the new department with the

States in any manner which savours of the domination of one over the other; if there would be any domination, it would be that of our mutual interests and welfare’.

While concluding his masterly speech, Patel declared, ‘we are all at a momentous stage in the history of India. By common endeavour, we can raise the country to a new greatness, while lack of unity will expose us to fresh calamities. I hope the Indian States will bear in mind that the alternative to cooperation in the general interest is anarchy and chaos, which will overwhelm great and small in a common ruin if we are unable to act together in the minimum of common tasks. Let not the future generations curse us for having had the opportunity but failed to turn it to our mutual advantage. Instead, let it be our proud privilege to leave a legacy of a mutually beneficial relationship which would raise this sacred land to its proper place amongst the nations of the World and turn it into an abode of peace and prosperity’.⁴¹

Patel’s speech moved many a prince, big and small. In a rich compliment, Bikaner said, ‘May I take this opportunity of sending you my best wishes in the onerous duties which have fallen upon you.... The fact that one of the most respected and mature statesmen and leader of your experience and judgment has been chosen is, I feel, a happy augury. It is most gratifying to recall that you have always shown a realistic and cordial attitude towards the States. The friendly hand that you have so spontaneously extended to the Princes and States, as evidenced by your statement is, I need hardly assure you, greatly appreciated by us. We are confident that we may look forward to an association of full cooperation with you and a sympathetic understanding at your hands of the very important problems vitally affecting the States at the present transitional stage, thus enabling the States to take their due and honoured place in the future Union of India, in the making of which we are all proud to give our wholehearted support. I know that the interests of the Princes and States are safe in your hands’.⁴²

In view of Patel's statesmanship quality and mature leadership even Mountbatten preferred Patel to Nehru. He wrote, 'I am glad to say that Nehru has not been put in charge of the new State Department, which would have wrecked everything. Patel, who is essentially a realist and very sensible, is going to take it over'.⁴³ He told the Princes at his last conference with them, on 25 July 1947, 'In India the States Department is under the admirable guidance of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel... you can imagine how relieved I was, and I am sure you will yourselves have been equally relieved, when Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, on taking over the States department, made, if I may say so, a most statesman-like statement of what he considered were the essentials towards agreement between the States and the Dominion of India'.⁴⁴ Mountbatten thought that Patel, being the 'strongest pillar of the Cabinet', alone could help him fulfil his assurance to the King on two matters, India's membership of the Commonwealth, and fair treatment for the Princes.

Patel and Mountbatten worked together in dealing with the Princes. Mountbatten was happy to get Patel's strong support for the Commonwealth membership. On the other hand, Patel was satisfied with Britain's decision that the Indian States could not enter the Commonwealth as independent Dominions. Patel secured another point. While giving his consent to India's membership of the Commonwealth, he stipulated a condition: 'Let Paramountcy be dead, you do not directly or indirectly try to revive it in any manner.... The Princes are ours, and we shall deal with them'.⁴⁵

As recorded by HV Hodson about a meaningful dialogue between Patel and Mountbatten, prior to the former's acceptance of the charge of the States Ministry, Patel said, 'I am prepared to accept your offer provided you give me a full basket of apples'. 'What do you mean?' asked Mountbatten. 'I will buy a basket with 565 apples, but if there are even two or three missing, the deal is off', Patel said. 'This', said the Viceroy, 'I cannot completely accept, but I will do my best. If I give you a basket

with, say 560 apples, will you buy it?' 'Well, I might' replied Patel.⁴⁶

Patel on his part showed tact and diplomacy in his handling of the Princes. They feared his firmness, even his wrath; but they could enjoy his genuine friendship if they did not override the country's interest. Presiding over a press conference addressed by Menon, on 5 July 1947, Patel gave a blunt warning. 'Whoever denounces such agreements takes the responsibility for the consequences.'⁴⁷

The States entitled to separate representation on the Constituent Assembly were now reassured that there was no threat to their separate existence. This development aroused among them consciousness of a community of interests; and joint consultations by this group, with the exception of States like Hyderabad and Bhopal. The smaller States, on the other hand, became apprehensive regarding the attitude of the major States. On 11 June 1947, Sir CP Ramaswami Ayer, Dewan of Travancore, announced that Travancore had decided to set itself up as an independent sovereign state. A similar announcement was made the next day on behalf of the Nizam of Hyderabad. The same Dewan of Travancore had earlier gone to the extent of announcing his intention to appoint a Trade Agent in Pakistan. These events had earlier given rise to apprehension that if other States adopted a similar attitude, then India will be split into fragments.

On 5 July 1947, Patel, through a statement, appealed to the Princes to accede on three subjects. It pointed out, 'The States have already accepted the basic principle that for defence, foreign affairs and communications they would come into the Indian Union. We ask no more of them than accession on these three subjects in which the common interests of the country are involved'. The statement went on: 'This country with its institutions is the proud heritage of the people who inhabit it. It is an accident that some live in the States and some in British India, but all alike partake in its culture and character.

We all are knit together by bonds of blood and feeling no less than of self-interest. None can segregate us into segments; no impossible barriers can be set up between us. I suggest that it is therefore, better for us to make laws sitting together as friends than to make treaties as aliens. I invite my friends, the rulers of States and their people, to the councils of the Constituent Assembly in this spirit of friendliness and cooperation in a joint endeavour, inspired by common allegiance to our motherland for the common good of us all'.⁴⁸

A number of Princes and States' ministers met at Patel's residence. Patel urged that the States, which had joined the Constituent Assembly, should forthwith accede to India on three subjects, and pointed out that such a course would enable them to have a direct voice in shaping the policies of free India's Central government. The States' delegation appreciated the logic of the suggestion, but emphasised that the matter required careful considerations and a cautious approach. It was decided to hold a series of informal discussions with the Princes and their advisors. It was this conference which at last broke the ice, clearing away a mass of vague suspicions which the Princes had entertained about the new States Department.

Patel continued to canvass individually with many of the Indian Princes who mattered. Much feverish activity to persuade the rulers to accept accession on three subjects and enter into Standstill Arrangements, by the time the British regime ended, were going on behind the scenes. The problem of dealing with the Princes collectively, however, appeared to be a formidable one, the delicacy of the task being heightened by the presence of disruptive elements among the Princes who were inspired either by the League leaders themselves or some of their own brother Princes who were out and out League sympathisers. Jinnah went to the extent of making a public announcement that he would guarantee the independence of the States in Pakistan.

At the meeting of the Princes which Patel had convened it was agreed that a conference of the rulers would be held

on 25 July 1947, at which matters of accession, Standstill Agreement and other issues concerning the functioning of the State Department would be discussed. But the question as to how this should be done in the face of doubts and uncertainties harboured by the Princes and the manoeuvres and machinations of those who were out to sabotage this development caused deep mental anguish to Patel. Finally, he decided that if he himself took a leading part in the meeting, it might lead to open agreements, notwithstanding the contrary or hostile acts by the League leaders. He also felt reassured that Mountbatten would be able to lend his help effectively in bringing about the aspired to results. Patel, therefore, secured Cabinet approval for Lord Mountbatten to deal with this question in his capacity as the Crown Representative. In the meantime, a draft Instrument of Accession and revised draft of the Standstill Agreement had been prepared by the Political Department of the British Government in India.

On 25 July, amid scenes of pomp and pageantry, the conference of Princes and representatives of States was held in the Chamber of Princes and Lord Mountbatten in a very persuasive and appealing speech advised the Rulers to accede to their appropriate dominion on the subjects of Defence, External Affairs and Communications. He made it plain that under compulsion of geography, a vast majority of the States were linked with the Dominion of India and if they were prepared to come, it was much better their coming in before 15 August than afterwards. He announced the personnel of the Negotiating Committee, who would consider the items on the agenda in detail, and then clarified a number of points raised by the Princes and their ministers.

The atmosphere was a combination of majesty and splendour, informality and cordiality. To this was added a compelling sense of urgency. In the midst of the divided counsels that prevailed, it seemed quite clear that most of the princes would play for safety and consequently follow the path of least resistance.

After the conference was over, the matter was remitted to the closed door discussions of the Negotiating Committee which, during the following week, sorted out the different problems the various States had and succeeded in enlisting the support of most of the Princes. Behind the scene, there was no doubt that Lord Mountbatten was exercising his influence in a remarkable manner in favour of accession for he was convinced that the Princes had no choice in their own interests but to accede.

Knots Untied for Unification of India

By 31 July 1947, all the hurdles had been crossed and all the knots unraveled and the Instrument of Accession and the Standstill Agreement were approved by the full Negotiating Committee. During the subsequent week, most of the Princes signified their willingness to sign the two precious documents but some stood out, the prominent among them being Hyderabad, Jammu and Kashmir, Travancore, Bhopal, Indore, Dholpur, Nabha, Junagadh and Jodhpur. All of them had mixed motives for their aloofness. Hyderabad held on to a dream of independence and separate existence. 'In view of the special position and peculiar problems of Hyderabad both Nehru and Patel felt that Lord Mountbatten should continue to negotiate with Nizam even after 15 August. Accordingly, on 12 August, Lord Mountbatten informed the Nizam that offer of accession would remain open in the case of Hyderabad for a further period of two months.'⁴⁹

Jammu and Kashmir had its difficulties, 'which Sardar fully appreciated and for which he was prepared to wait'.⁵⁰ Travancore asserted its independence on transfer of power. Bhopal believed in the evolution of a third force and was more in line with the ideas of Sir Conrad Corefield on this subject. Jodhpur got himself involved in unfortunate intrigues with Jinnah 'who gave him a blank cheque if acceded to Pakistan'.⁵¹ Indore, Dholpur, and Nabha were prepared to follow the lead of Bhopal.

Lord Mountbatten actively engaged himself in trying to persuade CP Ramaswami Aiyer, the Dewan of Travancore, to

accede to India. He finally persuaded him to agree to accession. In fact, CP Ramaswami Aiyer was the first to declare a revolt against his State joining the Indian Union, accused the British of duplicity and of 'inconsistent and dissimilar approaches to the Princes and the Congress'.⁵² Travancore's accession was followed by Patel's instructions to the Travancore Congress Committee to suspend their campaign of direct action.

The Maharaja of Jodhpur had literally to be enticed away during the course of one of his visits to Jinnah and tackled by Patel, who was a friend of his father and towards whom the Maharaja displayed an attitude of veneration and respect. Thereafter, the Maharaja was taken to Lord Mountbatten and after he had successfully persuaded him into doing so, he signed the Instrument of Accession.

The Nawab of Bhopal, who was a personal friend of Lord Mountbatten, had not attended the meeting on 25 July, but later was persuaded to sign the Instrument of Accession. Characteristically, the Nawab made it a condition that his signature should not be announced for some days after the transfer of power. This was because he was deeply committed to the Maharaja of Indore, Dholpur and Nabha to oppose accession and felt that a premature disclosure would compromise his position. Finally, however, all of them, Dholpur, Bharatpur, Bilaspur and Nabha, signed the Instrument of Accession before 15 August 1947, since they realised that if they did not do so, they might be treated in a different category altogether after Independence.

Hyderabad, Junagadh remained. Patel had met the Prime Minister of Kashmir, Ram Chandra Kak, late in June 1947, when question of accession of Kashmir had been discussed, but he did not force the issue and was content to leave Kashmir, in view of the complications involved, out of the accession list. Through some of the emissaries of the Maharaja, who had sought Patel's advice, Patel had counselled caution and patience and was against any hurried commitment.

After expressing his intention to accede to India, the Nawab of Junagadh became the victim of Pakistani intrigue in which the leading participants were Sir Shah Nawaz Bhutto, who was Dewan, and Sir Mohammad Zafrullah Khan, Nawab's advisor on constitutional matters. Under these influences, the Nawab changed his mind and signed an accession to Pakistan contrary to every compelling factor that was relevant to the issue. This upset Patel considerably and he felt that the problem of Junagadh should be tackled with determination and speed.

Junagadh, situated as it was in the midst of Kathiawar State, and with a sea-front of its own posed a substantial security risk to India, if Pakistan secured a foothold there. Apart from this, Junagadh constituted the solitary defeat of Patel's policy regarding the States, on which he had set his heart and for which he had laboured hard and skillfully. Henceforth, Junagadh became an issue of patriotism and prestige for him and he began to organise in his own quiet and efficient way, resistance to accession to Pakistan from within the State itself. In this task, he roped in the services of the Kathiawar Princes, led by the Jam Saheb of Nawanagar and the leading subjects of Junagadh outside the State led by Samaldas Gandhi, a nephew of Gandhiji.

So determined was Patel to bring about a change in the shortest possible time that these matters became the continuous preoccupation of VP Menon and the States Department. The accession of States like Mangrol, Manavadar and other small principalities which were taken to be the feudatories of the State of Junagadh was secured. The organisation of the Provisional Government or *Arzi Hakumat* led by Samaldas Gandhi was finally accepted in order to secure quick results. 'In the process, it is interesting to recall that Patel turned down Lord Mountbatten's idea that the question of Junagadh might be referred to the United Nations Organisation.'⁵³

Energetic action was taken on the military front to preserve the peace and security of Saurashtra that was threatened by this development and one by one, the feudatory States of

Junagadh were taken over by the Government of India whilst *Arzi Hakumat* secured control over the Junagadh Islands in Saurashtra. A battle of words, in the meantime, was going on between India and Pakistan. 'It resulted in an angry exchange of telegraphic correspondence and also heated discussions at the joint meetings of leaders of India and Pakistan. Sardar displayed firmness and determination in dealing with the issue and resisted any attempt on the part of Lord Mountbatten to find a via media and even to soften the measures in the hope of avoiding an open conflict.'⁵⁴

As regards Hyderabad, on 21 June 1948, three days after the breakdown of negotiations with Hyderabad, Lord Mountbatten left India and was succeeded as Governor-General by C Rajagopalachari. Lord Mountbatten was extremely disappointed at the breakdown of the negotiations.

Hyderabad, politically under the control of Razakars,^{xvii} neither agreed to accession nor to responsible government. The minority community which was holding a virtual monopoly of all offices under the State government, could not view with equanimity the grant of responsible government for that would spell the end of their privileged position. The Nizam and his advisors were possessed by the notion that India would be unable to take any action against Hyderabad because her hands were full with Kashmir and other problems. The anti-Indian attitude of a section of the British press, and the plea for Hyderabad's independence voiced by some British political leaders, bolstered the Nizam's uncompromising attitude.

After the failure of the negotiation in June 1948, it was only a question of time when a major operation would be initiated. The entire staff for the purpose had been alerted

xvii The Razakars were a private militia organised by Qasim Razvi to support the rule of Nizam Osman Ali Khan and resist the integration of Hyderabad State into the Dominion of India in 1947-48. Its parent organisation was Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen.

and the timing depended on how long it would take for Patel to overcome a foreseen resistance to this course by Governor-General Rajagopalachari and by Pandit Nehru, who found in Rajagopalachari an intellectual support for his non-violent policy towards Hyderabad. Patel had already made up his mind. For instance, speaking at a meeting with Indian and foreign journalists in Delhi on 29 January 1948, after unification of Kathiawar States, he said: One State remains which is still causing us some anxiety. It is the State of Hyderabad.... Accession in the case of Hyderabad is inevitable and will.... The people there must get their due and I would only appeal to H E H the Nizam to appreciate this situation and to do the right thing in time.⁵⁵

Even earlier, at Junagadh, on 13 November 1947, before negotiations for a Standstill Agreement had been finalised, Patel had said, 'If Hyderabad is to be saved, it must effect a radical change in its methods and policy. In the world of today, only those who have guts can make their voice felt. If Hyderabad wishes to be heard, it must follow bravely and courageously the popular will. Otherwise, Hyderabad's fate will sooner or later be the same as those of other rulers and dynasties who had attempted to thwart the popular will only at the cost of their existence'.⁵⁶

He was even more forthright in his speech at Patiala, at the time of the inauguration of PEPSU (Punjab and East Punjab States Union), on 15 July 1948, when he said: 'Many have asked me the question, what is going to happen to Hyderabad? They forget that when I spoke at Junagadh, I said openly that if Hyderabad did not behave properly, it would have to go the way Jungadh did. The words still stand and I stand by these words... up to the last Lord Mountbatten was hopeful of a settlement, that hope never materialised owing to the intransigence of the Nizam and fanaticism of the forces at his back. But I should like to make one thing clear. The terms and the talks which Lord Mountbatten had, have gone with him. Now the settlement with the Nizam will have to be on the lines of other settlements

with the States.³⁵⁷ Thus, Patel's views, which were already quite strong in 1947, had begun to stiffen in January 1948; but after the failure of Lord Mountbatten's mission, they had crystallised into a need for action. In fact, by that time, the word had gone out to the Armed Forces and the provinces to be ready for a confrontation and take-over of the Hyderabad administration, if need be.

On 9 September 1948, after a careful evaluation of all considerations and only when it was clear that no other alternative remained open, the Government of India took the decision to send Indian troops into Hyderabad to restore peace and tranquility inside the State and a sense of security in the adjoining Indian territory. This decision was communicated to the Southern Command, who ordered that the Indian forces should march into Hyderabad in the early hours of 13 September 1948. The Indian forces were commanded by Major-General JN Chandhuri under the direction of Lt General Maharaj Shri Rajendrasingji, who was then the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Southern Command. This operation was given the name 'Operation Polo' by the Army Headquarters.

On the evening of 17 September 1948, the Hyderabad army surrendered. On the 18th, the Indian troops, under Major-General Choudhury, entered Hyderabad city. The operation had lasted barely 108 hours. Major-General Choudhury took charge as Military Governor on 18 September 1948. Immediately after the installation of the Military Governor's administration, the Nizam issued a proclamation which brought the Hyderabad State into line with the other States on accession and other matters.

'The masterly handling of the rulers by Patel was the foremost factor in the success of the accession policy. The rulers soon came to recognise him as a stable force in Indian politics and as one who could give them a fair deal. Added to this, his unflinching politeness to the rulers, viewed against his reputation as the 'Iron Man of India', endeared him to them and created

such confidence that all accepted his advice without demur.⁵⁸ Patel had come to a decision about which Reginald Coupland had speculated in 1945: 'An India deprived of the States would have lost all coherence. They stand between all four quarters of the country... India could live if its Muslim in the north-west and north-east were amputated, but could it live without its midriff?'⁵⁹ And that is what Patel instinctively meant when he stated, 'Hyderabad is, as it were, situated in India's belly. How can belly breathe, if it is cut off from the main body?'⁶⁰ The States formed India's heart and Patel's genius lay in preserving, integrating and strengthening that heart at all costs and thereby saving India from the frightening prospects of Balkanisation. Patel prevented a situation which was fraught with the gravest danger to the integrity of the country.

Jinnah could not forgive India, in particular, Patel, for forcing him to accept in the end a Pakistan that was 'truncated and moth-eaten' when the British left India. It was the end of the dream, which the British from Churchill to Atlee had, purposefully, built to serve Britain's own interests. They had nearly succeeded in handing Jinnah his dream empire but for the 'Man of Iron' in Patel, who blocked their way like a rock. Jinnah had made all efforts to secure accession or association of Jodhpur, Junagadh, Kathiawar, and even Hyderabad, not forgetting the invasion of Kashmir through frontier tribesmen.

* all emphasis in the chapter are the author's.

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