

## Chapter-6

# From Colonial Federation to National Unity: Sardar Patel's Constitutional Vision and Administrative Wisdom

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### Abstract

This chapter is based on the proceedings of the Round Table Conferences (*Government of India, 1930-1932*), the Butler Committee Report (*Government of India, 1929*), and correspondence preserved in letters to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel (*Patel, 1971*), re-examining the problems of the 1930s-40s and proving why the 1935 Government of India Act failed. The 1935 Act was praised as a historic agreement of establishing a Federation between British India and princely states, but in reality, it was complicated and full of contradictions, with a little chance to succeed. The princely states were invited to join the Federation without losing their independence, and without any time-bound caveat. This chapter specifically examines the princely states of Gujarat, like Bhavnagar, Gondal, and Junagadh, as these were the states that showed hesitation, distrust and even resistance in joining the Federation. Archival records reflect that the rulers saw Federation not as shared governance, rather as a threat to their independence (*Government of India, 1930-1932*). Their worries grew stronger as the British government did not force them to join, and the Second World War began. Therefore, the plan of implementation of the proposed Federation never moved beyond the papers. The failure of the 1935 Federation wasn't just a legal or structural setback. In fact, it played an integral role in shaping Sardar Patel's plan for the integration of princely states after independence. As India's first Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of States, he worked on merging over 560 princely states into the union, keeping in mind the

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VOICE OF UNITY: Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and the Making of Modern India

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ISBN:978-81-991164-9-8

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.64328/978-81-991164-9-8-6>

Young India Publication, Gandhinagar, Gujarat

problems he observed during the 1930s. His approach combined the use of constitutional agreements, administrative sequencing, and a blend of persuasion and strength (Menon, 1956; Gandhi, R., 1991). This chapter looks at the historical journey from the failed 1935 Act to the successful integration of over 560 princely states into the union after independence. It also highlights Sardar Patel's role in how he combined practical governance and constitutional planning, which led to successful integration. His success wasn't sudden or accidental; rather, it came from the learning and experiences from the failure of the 1935 Act (Saggi, 1962; Gandhi, R., 1991).

**Keywords:** Sardar Patel, Federation, Government of India Act 1935, Integration of States, Instrument of Accession, Centre-State Relations

## Introduction

### Patel's Constitutional Vision and Administrative Foresight

In the 1930s, the political future of India was still undecided. The British government wanted a federal system through which they could retain their political power while suppressing the rising demands of self-governance (*Government of India, 1930-1932; Government of India, 1935*). While the Indian leaders were politically divided, the provinces and princely states were weighing the benefits and risks of joining the federation. Amidst all these ongoing circumstances came the biggest experiment of the British Government, i.e., the Government of India Act, 1935 (*Government of India Act, 1935*). On paper, it was flawless, promising to create a unified federal system combining both the British government and the princely states, however, inherently it was weak and impractical. It gave the choice of voluntary participation to the princely states and completely ignored some key issues like power-sharing, finance and autonomy. Because of these flaws, the 1935 Federation was bound to fail from the beginning.

By this time, Sardar Patel was already an experienced Congress leader. He had a strong influence, particularly in Gujarat's rural districts. His political instincts had been sharpened by years of organising campaigns like the Bardoli Satyagraha (*Gandhi, M. K., 1928; Gandhi, R., 1991*), where the theories related to the constitution mattered less than the practical results that came from the negotiations and resolution. Sardar Patel realized that the 1935 Act failed to be implemented not only because of its structure, but also because no one had the commitment and the clarity to implement it. He noticed that the princely states were reluctant to lose their autonomy, there were no fixed deadlines for joining the Federation, and most importantly, the British government did not want to unite India. All these summed up and made the Act hard to practice and implement (*Menon, 1956; Patel, 1971*).

While closely observing the princely states of Gujarat, Sardar Patel came up with an unmasking perspective of how the princely states envisioned Federation. For example, Bhavnagar, Gondal, and Junagadh each responded differently to the prospect of Federation, which all in conclusion, reflected a spectrum of cautiousness, scepticism, and absolute resistance (*Government of India, 1930-1932; Trivedi & Patel, 2012*). This whole concept of Federation for princely states was not only a question of idealism, but it was the willingness to preserve authority, managing autonomous revenue streams/systems, and most importantly, safeguarding their internal governance rather than being powerless in their own state, where the princes had ruled earlier. This hesitation was clarified by introducing a policy of non-interference, which led the princes to defer commitment for an unspecified duration (*Government of India, 1930-1932*). In conclusion, the so-called Federation system imagined for India only existed on paper and never in practice.

After the independence in 1947, Sardar Patel, as the Minister of States, had the groundbreaking task of uniting the fragmented princely sovereignties and colonial legacies into a unified nation (*Menon, 1956*). The memory of the 1935 Federation's collapse was not an abstract lesson to him, but

rather was a lived experience that shaped his approach to integration. He discarded the voluntarism of the earlier scheme and instead pursued a strategy grounded in constitutional certainty, administrative sequencing, and a pragmatic mix of persuasion and firmness (*Gandhi, R., 1991*); *Saggi, 1962*). The Instruments of Accession and merger agreements he engineered bore the imprint of a leader who had learned, a decade earlier, what a nation could not survive without a decisive and enforceable centre (*Menon, 1956*). This chapter outlines the journey of how Sardar Patel unified the unrealised

promise of the 1935 Act with the successful consolidation of post-Independence India as a unified nation.

### **The Road to the Government of India Act 1935**

The early 1930s were marked as the critical constitutional bargaining period due to the fragile balance between the British cautions and the aspirations of Indians regarding Federation. The Simon Commission's report of 1930 had already stirred political tempers by recommending provincial autonomy but leaving the question of central governance unresolved (*Government of India, 1930*). As a result, the British Empire sought to seek a more comprehensive solution, which led to the assembling of the Round Table Conference in London in 1930 and 1932. The motive behind these meetings was to discuss the structure of a future Federation of India by bringing together representatives of British India and the princely states to a single table.

The Second Round Table Conference, which was held in the autumn of 1931, proved to be significant in Indian history. The leaders of the Indian National Congress actively demanded more powers for Indians to form a responsible government and to chart a clear path to complete independence from British Rule. While, in contrast, the representatives of the princely states were more cautious and hesitant (*Government of India, 1930-1932*). They did not strongly demand independence as they feared that joining the Federation would erode their authority, they would lose the power over revenue control and foremost importantly, they

would be subjected to political pressure from the provinces. This reflected the centuries-old political culture of the princely states in which sovereignty was a prized possession and alliances were entered into only when they served immediate interests. Simultaneously, the British appointed the Butler Committee in 1927 to examine the relationship between the Crown and the princes. Its report, delivered in 1929, confirmed that the states were legally independent entities bound to the British Crown by treaty, and that any constitutional change would require their voluntary consent. This principle, carried into the 1935 Act, became both the foundation and the fatal flaw of the proposed Federation (*Government of India, 1935*). It meant that no state could be compelled to join, and no deadline could be imposed for accession.

The political negotiations were very slow, cautious, and often inconclusive. Provincial leaders from Congress found themselves struggling with a constitutional draft that promised unity in theory but deferred its realisation indefinitely. For the British Empire, this ambiguity was perfect as it preserved their influence while postponing the risk of a fully sovereign state. For the princes, it offered a way to keep their options open and maintain their pride and prestige in their states. Nationalists like Sardar Patel realised that constitutional promises made by the British Empire were not reliable and promising (*Patel, 1971; Gandhi, R., 1991*). When the Government of India Act, 1935, was finally proposed, it created an elaborate federal framework with separate lists of powers for the centre and the states, provisions for provincial autonomy, and the promise of eventual inclusion of the princely states. But the voluntary nature of that inclusion complicated the framework. Significant economic and administrative disparities between the states made the scheme weak and unstable right from the beginning. All the while, Patel closely observed the negotiations and how the princely states reacted to them, and he realized that the Government of India Act appeared to have a perfect structure on paper, but it did not have the political will, trust, or enforceable commitment to keep provinces and

princely states together in a functioning Federation (Patel, 1971; Menon, 1956).

### **Anatomy of an “improbable” Federation**

The Government of India Act 1935 proposed to create a single unified constitutional structure that would bring together British Indian provinces and over five hundred princely states under one umbrella (*Government of India, 1935*). After examining the details thoroughly, it became clear that the scheme was less a blueprint for integration than a carefully balanced arrangement designed largely to avoid upsetting any party too greatly. Ironically, the act that was intended to maintain stability ended up making it weak and unstable. The biggest and most obvious flaw in the Act was voluntarism. The princely states were not obliged to join the Federation, and there was also no fixed timeline for accession (*Government of India, 1935*). This resulted in the creation of a void in the core framework of the Act, i.e., while princely states were prepared to enter the Federation under the new constitutional arrangement, the princes could wait for an unspecified duration, enjoying the status quo without committing to any change. The absence of a binding accession clause meant that the Federation could remain incomplete for years, compromising its credibility from the beginning.

The inequalities in the finances added another layer of instability. Many princely states relied on customs duties, monopolies, or unique taxation systems that would have been difficult to reconcile with federal fiscal policy; for example, Bhavnagar's huge portion of the finance was contributed by the taxes collected from the ports (Trivedi & Patel, 2012; *Government of India, 1930-1932*). Smaller princely states in Gujarat, like Gondal and Bhavnagar, feared being merged into a federal financial system (Trivedi & Patel, 2012) because they believed that this integration could snatch their economic independence, i.e., reduce or take away their control over their own money and resources. The larger princely states, such as Junagadh, saw the federal finance system as a potential threat to their control over money and resources (Menon, 1956). The princely states were reluctant to join a

central system because they believed that the central government would limit their freedom to use resources as they wanted and as per their priorities, and the root cause was that every princely state operated the government in its own way, particularly based on the ruler's interest. India needed a strong political agreement and proper institutions to combine all the princely states into one smooth federal system, which was not addressed in the 1935 Act. Instead, the Act allowed the princely states to rule separately without considering how they would work together in the future.

At the core of all these problems was the political mistrust among the three main participants- princely states, the Congress party and the British Empire (*Patel, 1971; Gandhi, R., 1991*). The provinces governed by elected ministers under the system of provincial autonomy distrusted the princely states. They thought that the princes were unwilling to be accountable in a democratic system and were resistant to following the rules that democratic governments expected. The princes feared that joining a Federation would expose them to political unrest (*Government of India, 1930-1932; Menon, 1956*), governmental reviews, and, most importantly, erode their internal sovereignty. The British, as usual, unwilling to confront either side and maintaining a posture of cautious neutrality, offered assurances to both while pushing neither toward resolution and delaying the whole process to suppress the unrest against them. In reality, the federal structure of the 1935 Act was a complex but superficial appearance. It seemed like a real federal system, but in practice, it lacked real power, authority, or functionality (*Government of India, 1935; Gandhi, R., 1991*). It gave the appearance of unity while entrenching the very divisions it claimed to bridge. For Patel, who was closely observing the currents in Gujarat's princely states, this was more than a theoretical flaw. It was a practical warning that constitutional design without legal authority and administrative integration could not produce lasting political unity (*Patel, 1971; Menon, 1956*).

## Gujarat's Princely States in the Federation Debate

The 1935 Federation cannot be explained in theory alone; it is best understood by examining the stances of the individual princely states (*Government of India, 1930-1932; Trivedi & Patel, 2012*). Larger princely states of Gujarat like Bhavnagar, Gondal, and Junagadh responded to the Federation from their own perspective, shaped by their local politics, economic conditions and personal views of the rulers, while the smaller, non-jurisdictional states of Gujarat such as Dasada, Bhoika, Dhrafa, Babra, Songadh, etc. responded very differently to the proposed Act.

Bhavnagar was the most progressive state spending on public works, education and administrative reforms (*Trivedi & Patel, 2012; Menon, 1956*). The rulers were practical and realistic and understood the change in politics, so they were open to joining the federal system instead of completely rejecting it. But even Bhavnagar was cautious (*Government of India, 1930-1932*). It wanted clear guarantees from the central government that their revenue system would stay under their control.

Gondal took the middle path. It neither agreed to join completely, nor did it openly oppose the Federation. Being a smaller state with limited resources, it mainly wanted to keep control over its administration (*Trivedi & Patel, 2012*). For them, there were no real benefits of joining a Federation where bigger and powerful states would dominate them. The rulers of Gondal were well aware that their vices would be reduced to a mere token presence under the centralised framework of Federation (*Menon, 1956; Trivedi & Patel, 2012*), also their local priorities would be subsumed under broader national policies. For them, remaining outside the Federation was not a rejection of unity in principle but a means of safeguarding relevance and authority.

Among the three princely states, Junagadh was the most resistant to the proposed Federation (*Menon, 1956; Government of India, 1930-1932*). Having significant resources and a ruler who was inclined more towards preserving absolute sovereignty, Junagadh viewed the Federation as a potential threat to its political freedom. Its rulers' reluctance

by a calculated reading of British policy (*Patel, 1971; Menon, 1956*), which at the time placed no real pressure on the princes to commit (as discussed above, the concept of voluntary participation). This led to treating Federation as an option to be weighed indefinitely, rather than a pressing national obligation, as there were no consequences in doing so.

The varying responses of rulers of the princely states revealed a larger truth: the princes' decisions were not driven by abstract constitutional ideals but by concrete calculations of power, finance, and survival. Patel, given his strong political and social connections across Gujarat, shaped his understanding of how the princes thought and acted in practice (*Gandhi, R., 1991; Saggi, 1962*). It was a formative lesson for him in politics. He recognised that any future attempt at integration would have to address these concerns directly, through clear legal instruments, equitable fiscal arrangements, and, where persuasion failed, decisive administrative action. In the 1930s, the princes could afford to hesitate. In the India of 1947, Patel would ensure that such hesitation was no longer an option (*Menon, 1956*).

### **Why the Federation Failed Before It Began**

By the late 1930s, it had become clear that the Federation promised by the Government of India Act 1935 (*Government of India, 1935*) would never actually come into effect and would remain only a theoretical clause written in the law. The voluntary nature of accession meant that no amount of constitutional drafting could compensate for the lack of political will (*Government of India, 1935; Menon, 1956*). In Bhavnagar, Gondal, Junagadh, and countless other states, accession was a question of strategic advantage rather than national responsibility (*Government of India, 1930-1932; Trivedi & Patel, 2012*). Without deadlines or enforcement mechanisms, the Act effectively gave the princes the luxury to delay the proposed Federation for an indefinite period.

Let's deep dive into the relationship between the British rule and the princely states, which is also one of the causes of the failure of the proposed Federation. The British had treaties

with the princely states, and in return, the princely states gave their loyalty to the British Empire (*Government of India, 1929; Menon, 1956*). For instance, Colonel Walker, in his capacity as an officer of the East India Company during the early nineteenth century, had drawn several treaties with the princely states of Gujarat, facilitating military protection and trade security. The princely states upheld these historical treaties as indissoluble and non-negotiable. Therefore, though the Federation was proposed, there were no efforts made by the Britishers to implement it (*Menon, 1956*).

The advent of the Second World War in 1939 destroyed all the chances or momentum that was left for the proposed Federation (*Menon, 1956*). The war acted as the decisive factor that ended it all at once. With global conflict diverting resources and attention, neither the British nor the Indian political leadership could advance a complicated federal negotiation. For the princes, the war was yet another reason to postpone accession. It was clear that until the voluntary participation of princely states existed, it was impossible to have a successful Federation (*Government of India, 1935; Menon, 1956*).

Keeping aside the day-to-day political troubles, the root cause of the proposed Federation was that it lacked a strong and shared sense of unity (*Gandhi, R., 1991; Saggi, 1962*). People did not feel connected or united together which made them bring the Federation into practice. Instead, it was just a temporary legal agreement that was meant to keep the princely states and provincial government calm and cooperative at least on the surface. It did not solve the deeper conflict of interest or resolve their long-term political and power struggles. The princes were promised autonomy, the provinces were promised unity, and the British promised both that neither would be forced into an uncomfortable compromise. The result was a plan that satisfied everyone in principle but no one in practice. Sardar Patel watched this process unfold with increasing clarity about what a future India could not afford. A Federation that relied on goodwill alone was, in his eyes, a fragile edifice. If India were to become one nation, it would require more than voluntary clauses and

polite diplomacy; it would need enforceable commitments, central authority, and a leadership willing to act decisively (Patel, 1971; Menon, 1956; Gandhi, R., 1991) when persuasion failed.

### **Patel's Post-Independence Administrative Strategy**

India's independence in August 1947 did not immediately mean the inheritance of a unified territory; rather, it meant the patchwork of the British Government, i.e., the princely states having their own autonomy and, most importantly, disputed borders at many fronts of the unified India (Menon, 1956). For instance, over five hundred princely states were not automatically under the control of the Indian government. Some were geographically small but strategically placed; others, like Hyderabad and Kashmir, were large, resource-rich, and politically complex (Menon, 1956; Gandhi, R., 1991). The British had left no blueprint for bringing them into the Union. For Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, now Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for States, the task of integration was the most urgent test of the nation's survival (Menon, 1956). Patel's approach bore the clear imprint of the lessons he had drawn from the 1935 Federation (Gandhi, R., 1991); Patel, 1971). The earlier scheme had faltered because it left accession to voluntary choice without clear legal instruments or administrative follow-through. This time, Sardar Patel came up with the Instrument of Accession, a simple but decisive document (Menon, 1956) which ensured the princely states lost control over defence, external affairs and the economic system. Seeing the failure of the 1935 acts, Patel did not threaten the rulers; rather, he opted for a soft approach, ensuring that sovereignty remained under the control of the Central Government. Once the princely states signed the Instrument of Accession, Sardar Patel moved swiftly to encourage a complete merger. He proposed the merger of smaller territories into one administrative unit (Menon, 1956), aiming to reduce the political fragmentation in princely states like Kathiawar and Saurashtra. His method not only includes negotiations but also strength. Trusted intermediaries like V. P. Menon were dispatched to hold direct talks with rulers,

offering them honourable terms and pensions (*Menon, 1956*), but leaving no doubt that refusal could invite political isolation or, in extreme cases, military action.

Patel, playing a crucial role in the integration of princely states, had a careful strategy for uniting all the autonomous princely states with India. He started with those princely states that were more willing to join (*Gandhi, R., 1991*); *Saggi, 1962*), as this would bring quick success, and also it would help to set an example for other autonomous princely states. This resulted in strengthening the central government's position with each successful accession, both legally and in public perception. The rapid integration of Gujarat's smaller princely states demonstrated that the union government of India was capable of bringing the princely states under its authority/control (*Menon, 1956*; *Trivedi & Patel, 2012*). This also helped to establish a notion of how easy it was for the central government to integrate princely states when it had both the political will and administrative precision.

Sardar Patel knew that integration was not getting the princely rulers to sign the Instrument of Accession, but real integration required establishing strong governance in the integrated areas. He worked on extending the reach of civil services, ensuring one legal system and law and order in the newly merged regions. Keenly observing the 1935 Act, he made sure not to repeat the mistakes and ensured a unified and standardized administration by merging laws and orders and governance into one central framework right from the beginning (*Menon, 1956*). By 1950's, India's political landscape had been completely changed. Under the British Rule, India was a collection of several hundred motley autonomous states, but due to the efforts of Sardar Patel, this fragmented system was brought under one umbrella (*Gandhi, R., 1991*), i.e., a unified India. He also ensured that India had one constitution and a common governance system across India. For him, a unified India was not just a political achievement, but it was bringing life to the dream that he had been seeing for years. He also believed that national unity was just a symbolic goal, but rather it was a very essential and practical necessity for the survival of the nation (*Patel, 1971*).

## **Lessons from the 1935 Federation in Patel's Nation-Building**

From a common person's perspective, the 1935 Federation was a complete failure, but for Sardar Patel, it was different (*Gandhi, R., 1991*); *Saggi, 1962*). Patel treated it like a rehearsal that gave him many valuable lessons about the approach he would adopt later on the real task of unifying India after independence. Every weakness of the earlier scheme had a corresponding corrective in his integration strategy after independence.

The most obvious lesson concerned the dangers of voluntary accession without enforceable commitments (*Government of India, 1935*). The princely rulers could keep postponing their decision about joining the Federation for an unspecified duration of time, leading the 1935 Federation plan to never actually function. Sardar Patel ensured that the decision to postpone the merger by the princely rulers was not accepted. Instead, he introduced formal legal agreements (Instrument of Accession) (*Menon, 1956*) that required the princely rulers to give up certain power immediately after signing it. Once a ruler signed the Instrument of Accession, the transfer of authority to the central government was final and legally irreversible. A second lesson lay in the fiscal and administrative fragmentation that the 1935 Act had left untouched (*Government of India, 1935*). The earlier scheme had allowed each princely state to retain its own taxation systems, trade duties, and bureaucratic norms, which would have made federal governance cumbersome even if accession had occurred. Patel moved in the opposite direction, pushing for administrative harmonisation from the outset (*Menon, 1956*). Newly merged states were brought into a uniform tax and revenue framework, and their bureaucracies were absorbed into the structures of the Indian civil service. The 1935 Federation had also suffered from political mistrust between provinces and princely states (*Gandhi, R., 1991*); *Patel, 1971*), a gap that British neutrality had allowed to persist. Sardar Patel knew that the unification of India would not come into reality just because the princely states felt

friendly or cooperative. Uniting all the fragmented regions into one would require consistent effort, planning, and sometimes using strength (*Menon, 1956*) to make everyone merge. His negotiations with the princely rulers were not just limited to being respectful and making them sign the accession, but also showing the strength that left no room for the rulers to reject the central authority.

Based on the past experiences of the 1935 Act, Patel knew that the process of integration could not be done gradually or in fragmented steps (*Gandhi, R., 1991*); *Saggi, 1962*); rather, the whole process of integration should be done swiftly or else that would leave room for resistance, communal violence, disunity and collapse again like the 1935 Act. These threats led Sardar Patel to execute the integration with remarkable swiftness during 1947 and 1950, ensuring that the political map of India became unified and stable (*Menon, 1956*). This was done to prevent any secessionist movement from gathering support and challenging the whole process of integration.

### **Centre-State Relations and the “Unity Clause”**

Sardar Patel's vision of a unified India was not just getting the princely rulers to sign the accession and merge their territory, but it was just the first step towards a larger goal (*Menon, 1956*). His main aim was to establish a strong and cooperative relationship between the central government and states after the merger of princely states into the union. His interventions in the debates of the Constituent Assembly reflected that he wanted a strong Union Government (*Government of India, 1946-1950*). He reasoned that if the centre was weak, India might break into parts again, just like he had seen earlier with the failed colonial Federation plan of 1935 (*Patel, 1971*; *Gandhi, R., 1991*), where too much freedom in the hands of princely rulers resulted in disunity.

In the 1935 Act, the balance between the centre and the princely states had been tilted heavily toward the latter (*Government of India, 1935*), giving them wide latitude to manage their affairs and the option to remain outside the Federation altogether. During British rule, princely states had

political convenience, which in Sardar Patel's eyes was a dangerous risk to India's unity. Therefore, when the Indian Constitution was being made, he worked on reversing the imbalance (*Government of India, 1946-1950*). He made sure that the central government had control over defence, external affairs, and communications. He also ensured that the power to intervene in any state's internal affairs that threatened the unity and stability of India lies in the hands of the central government. Patel wanted India to stay united, so he embedded this idea into the Indian Constitution. This is why the idea of President's rule and reorganisation of state boundaries (*Government of India, 1946-1950; Gandhi, R., 1991*) was included. These measures gave the central government power to intervene whenever there was a crisis threatening the unity and stability of the nation. The critics of this worried that this would lead to too much interference of the central government in states' independence. But Patel believed that these powers were not to limit the independence of states; rather, it was to ensure the safeguard (*Government of India, 1946-1950*) and keep India united and stable. When some princely states wanted to retain their autonomy or wanted to align with other countries, convinced him that without these safeguards, India could face the same problems that had weakened the 1935 Federation.

Sardar Patel believed that it was compulsory to have a strong and efficient government administration because this was the foundation that would support the central government (*Gandhi, R., 1991; Saggi, 1962*). The creation of the All-India Services, particularly the Indian Administrative Service and the Indian Police Service, was the central idea of building a strong and united India (*Government of India, 1946-1950*). He wanted these services to be the backbone of India, making sure that the government runs smoothly, no matter who or which party is in power, treating every individual fairly and maintaining uniformity in laws and policies across India. Through his speeches, Sardar Patel also raised concern that to fulfil the dream of a United India, it is necessary to have a unified civil service (*Patel, 1971; Government of India, 1946-1950*) or else, it might lead to the falling apart of India into

separate regions, each governing on its own standards, completely ignoring the needs of the whole country. For Patel, the idea of unity was not merely about drafting the rules and laws on paper; rather, he emphasized practical ways of running the country (Patel, 1971; Gandhi, R., 1991). His vision ensured that India worked as one united and well-governed nation, instead of isolated states with divided power. This approach admitted the fact that India would always have many regions, cultures, and identities, but the needs of a united nation would always be foremost.

### **Conclusion: Reassessing Patel's Constitutional Role and Administrative Wisdom**

The journey from the introduction of the Government of India Act 1935 to the post-independence integration of princely states provides us with a unique perspective on how India's constitutional and administrative framework took shape (Government of India, 1935; Menon, 1956). For Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, this matter was more about a structured process of evaluation, introspection, and purposeful action, not a mere sequential political milestone (Gandhi, R., 1991; Saggi, 1962). Sardar Patel perceived the failure of the 1935 Federation not as a single mistake by the British Empire but as an important lesson (Patel, 1971; Gandhi, R., 1991) that helped him understand what needed to be done to turn the princely states into one nation.

In Gujarat's princely states, Patel personally observed that relying on the rulers of princely states to join voluntarily did not always execute successfully, also commitments based only on cooperation ended terribly, and mistrust between the independent rulers and the democratic government acted as the final nail in the Act (Government of India, 1930-1932; Trivedi & Patel, 2012). The failure in the Act's ability to implement unity made Patel realise that for a successful Federation, it is very important to have strong, enforceable agreements, a unified administrative system and a central authority (Gandhi, R., 1991; Menon, 1956), making it capable of taking firm decisions. When independence brought with it the unprecedented challenge of integrating more than five

hundred princely states, Patel was prepared in a way that few others were (Menon, 1956). The Instruments of Accession, the merger agreements, and the rapid administrative harmonisation of new territories were all responses shaped by the earlier constitutional experiment's shortcomings (Menon, 1956). Where the 1935 scheme had been delayed, Patel acted swiftly; where it had tolerated fragmentation, he insisted on unity (Gandhi, R., 1991); Patel, 1971); where it had avoided enforcement, he created mechanisms to make unity irreversible.

Patel's constitutional role was thus inseparable from his administrative wisdom. His work in the Constituent Assembly, his advocacy for a strong central government, and his creation of integrated civil services were all extensions of the same lesson (Government of India, 1946-1950): a diverse country can only remain united if its constitution and its administrative machinery are designed with clarity, authority, and resilience. Today, the political map of India bears the footprints of that vision. The unification of India's territories wasn't mere luck or force; rather, it was only possible because of the well-planned strategy (Menon, 1956; Gandhi, R., 1991) that turned the mistakes made earlier into a permanent solution for uniting India. Reevaluating Patel in this light is to see him not only as the "Iron Man of India" but as a strategic thinker who understood that for a country, its legal system and administrative machinery must stay intact (Gandhi, R., 1991); Saggi, 1962).

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