

THE INDIAN JOURNAL OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Vol. XXIII

October-December 1977

No. 4

SARDAR PATEL'S CONTRIBUTION TO PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION*

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“What we have is not *swaraj* but only freedom from foreign rule. The people have still to win internal *swaraj*, abolish distinctions of caste and creed, banish untouchability, improve the lot of hungry masses, and live as one joint family—in short to create a new way of life and bring about a change of heart and a change of outlook.” —*Sardar Patel*

“We always speak of India's culture, of India's civilisation, but do we ever pause to think that the relief of the poor, mutual aid amongst neighbours, charity to the helpless and kindness to the downtrodden have been the shining virtues of that culture and civilisation? Let us ask ourselves if we are living in the spirit of those ancient virtues!” —*Sardar Patel*

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel is one of the foremost figures in the annals of the Indian national movement. Due to his versatile personality he made many-sided contributions, to the national cause during the struggle for freedom. While assessing his contribution to administration, one has to take into consideration his personality, the forces that shaped the man, his philosophy of life and the organisational and public experience that he gained while mobilising forces for political resistance to the alien rule in different ways and at different times. It will be a narrow

view of the subject to confine oneself only to the evaluation of his direct association with administration since the formation of the Interim Government in September 1946 till his death in December 1950. What he strived for and achieved during this span of about four years as part of the Government was largely motivated and sustained by his observation and experience in his earlier public and political life.

Sardar Patel was primarily a man of action and a supreme realist. His realism has been attributed to the sound principle that "the cause is always greater than the man". It was not given to him to spin academic theories of administrative reform, either by inclination or by circumstances. His was not a management consultant's soft world of fabricating proposals for organisational improvement or betterment of administration. Even his administrative vision was conditioned by the prevalent situation and its requirements. His was the grim and continuous struggle with the realities of practical life in a hostile environment. But he had the capacity to locate and seize an opportunity; he would not pause to think or waver, he acted promptly. He had no fear. He did not look back or shrink once he clearly saw his path and his goal. It was an understanding of the nature of this environment which provided him with an insight into the then existing administration as it was and shaped his views as to what it ought to be. As a man of action, he watched the administration in operation. As a political and social worker, with his ears to the ground and his heart close to the people, it was not difficult for him with his sensitivity to understand the failings of the administrative system and the personnel manning it. The inspiration or the motive force of this insight and effort was the quest for deliverance from foreign domination. His width of outlook or vastness of mental horizon, charity of heart, and sensitivity to public feeling were largely responsible for his remarkable achievements as a politician as well as an administrator. Straight, simple, yet shrewd, he acquired a comprehensive and realistic grasp of all matters relating to the administration of public affairs. As M. Chalapathi Rau wrote: "He represented strength. Whatever he said and did, he was the strongman of an Augustan age. It was this strength which gave self-possession to a people who had Gandhi and Nehru but needed Patel."

Without going into the semantics of it, administration—which

is broadly the organisation or management of any aspect of human affairs—can be viewed, firstly, as an academic study, and, secondly, as the practice. The two, of course, have points of congruence and convergence. Administration as an academic discipline aims to improve and refine the administration in practice. Obviously, his concern was with the latter. But it is from the observation of how the mastermind works of a situation, that one is sometimes led to formulate some principles or at least tentative working rules of wider application. Besides, it also becomes interesting to judge the personal traits and qualities of head and heart which an administrator displays while involved in the actual administrative processes and which go to condition his success or otherwise. All this goes to reinforce ultimately the discipline of administration as an academic study. There is almost a broad consensus among students of public administration that the conventional dichotomy between administration and politics does not hold good. They constitute an interacting system and the political context of administration is exceedingly relevant for administrative effectiveness. This becomes all the more pertinent when we aim to evaluate the contribution of one who was not merely an administrator, howsoever lofty or competent, not even simply a mighty politician but an outstanding statesman. The study of intellectual processes, as far as we can do so, of such a man adds to our understanding of the web of intricate relationships between politics and administration. Moreover, the tangible achievements of such a man may shape even the constitutional history and become an integral part of the administrative development of the country. From whatever angle of vision we look at, the many splendoured contribution of Sardar Patel to administration strikes the eye as lofty peaks.

In order to get a more balanced view of his contribution to administration, we have also to take into account his social ideas, his thoughts on socio-economic issues and the like since they directly impinge on the approach or the direction that has to be given to the policy as well as the programme by the apparatus of administration. Sardar Patel, as we have stated, was no administrator in the conventional sense. He was a statesman-administrator. In a way, he was the guardian not only of administrative requirements and proprieties but also of administrative effectiveness. As has been said, "the rebel in him had also the sound instinct of a builder." It is in the effort at nation-building that his administrative

finesse found expression as his capacity for organisational efficiency, enforcement of discipline and popular mobilisation had flowered during the struggle for independence.

FORMATIVE INFLUENCES

It may be of interest to examine briefly some of the formative influences in the Sardar's life and episodes or experiences which moulded his thinking, attitude and actions. Son of a *pattidar*, the Sardar was essentially a peasant in his outlook. He was fully conversant with the trials and tribulations as well as the problems and possibilities of rural India. His father had participated in the 1857 War of Independence and one can only surmise that strong resentment of foreign rule was part of his patrimony. In the second place, the Sardar was born and brought up in not very affluent circumstances and he was, from his childhood, familiar with personal adversity as well as with grinding poverty and suffering of the masses. But this generated in him a sense of self-reliance—probably, even an element of taciturnity—through a streak of optimism and self-confidence, that with will and effort, one could rise above the circumstances. Even in his school days, he exhibited a remarkable power of organisational capacity for leadership. Again, the Sardar's family belonged to the *Narayan Swami* sect which is known for its sense of social obligation or solidarity as well as personal loyalty. Though not deeply religious in either ritualistic, philosophical or theological sense, he was God-fearing and spiritually inclined. During his Yervada prison days, Patel learnt Sanskrit from Mahadev Desai and studied the Gita. He would read the Gita and, possibly, 'the doctrine of dexterity in action' as well as 'the gospel of disinterested action' made a lasting impact on his mind. This is reflected later in his conduct of the responsibilities of public life and business of the Government.

It seems a bit strange that Patel was in the U.K. to qualify as a barrister and though there was revolutionary fervour among the Indian students there due to the activities of Shyamji Krishna Verma, V.D. Savarkar, Madanlal Dhingra and others, Patel did not seem to have been at all affected by it. Probably this is explained by the singleness of purpose that characterised him throughout his entire life.

Sardar's study of law and jurisprudence and subsequent

practice in the criminal courts seem to have had a definite influence on his way of thinking and action. Law inculcates respect for order and stability as well as for rights of the individual including the right to property. His legal practice gave him a deep insight into the variegated human nature. It brought him in touch with the courts, the officialdom in the district, the working of police administration and gave him an understanding of the psychology of social and individual crime. So he fully knew not only the different aspects of administrative working but also the strains and stresses existing at all levels between the citizen and the administration. With this background in mind, one can better comprehend his role and contribution in the framing of the constitution and his handling of the complex administrative problems in later years.

The story of how the bridge-loving barrister, who was not initially impressed by Gandhi, became his intimate follower, has been graphically narrated by G.V. Mavalankar. Gandhi's instinctive perception of the pulse of the people, action-mindedness, strong will-power and uncanny sense of direction ultimately won over the diffident Sardar to his side. He was very often dubbed as a blind follower of Gandhi. It speaks volumes of his intellectual integrity—an asset in administration—that he never submitted to Gandhi's will without mature reflection and self-scrutiny. But this association and Gandhi was the single most lasting influence on his outlook and work. As Dr. Rajendra Prasad said, "Like Mahatma Gandhi, he would look into the details of every problem that came up before him and he would not be satisfied unless he had probed the thing to its depth. He was not the man who took what might be called a bird's-eye view of a question, neglecting small details. He had also a fund of confidence in himself and in the people whom he led and he would not hesitate to take risks because he really felt that there was no risk involved a things would, according to his calculations, set themselves right." Such an administrative perception is a unique contribution to the art and practice of administration.

It is also worthwhile to remember that "he was one of the earliest among the Congress leaders to interest himself in organising labour." From 1917, even before the non-cooperation movement, along with Gandhiji, he was engaged in resolving labour disputes in Ahmedabad. He was deeply involved in organising the

Gandhi Majur Mahajan Sangh in Ahmedabad. He was also, for some time in the twenties, the chairman of the BB & CI Railway Workers' Union. Thus, the Sardar was well-acquainted with the problems of industrial labour, industrial peace, etc. So he was not a novice in this segment of public life when many administrative problems emerged after freedom was achieved. He was also immensely interested in constructive work apart from agitational politics and had considerable accomplishment to his credit. He promoted and helped many voluntary organisations. Even with the commitment to welfare state, it is recognised that the importance of voluntary effort can be minimised or ignored. Not by any means a social obscurantist, he was always a pillar of strength to Thakkar Bapa in his work of the uplift of the Harijans, Bhils and other unprivileged sections of society.

Some other aspects of his public and political life gave him such a wide perspective for his future responsibilities that they merit mention. The Kheda Satyagraha was the start of his political career. Gandhiji said about Vallabhbhai Patel : "If it were not for his assistance, I must admit that this campaign could not have been carried through so successfully". At Borsad in 1922-24, when dacoities and robberies were rampant and people's life insecure because of the collusion of criminals and the governmental functionaries, he mustered courage to expose the ugly situation at a great personal risk and was successful in having the corrective measures taken. The satyagraha in Borsad against punitive tax was again his personal triumph. As Mavalankar said : "The fearlessness and the gift which he showed in plain-speaking to authorities in those days of bureaucratic domination by the steel-frame of the then ruling race, can hardly be appraised now in proper perspective. He always stood erect and showed a sense of self-respect, which was a guide and inspiration to youngsters like me. His spirit of service and devotion to duty were of such an exceptional character that as chairman of the municipal sanitary committee, he stuck to his residence in the city of Ahmedabad when plague (1917) was raging and refused to move for personal safety. He was a familiar figure moving in the streets of Ahmedabad, getting the sewers cleaned and the plague-stricken areas disinfected. When friends argued, he simply looked at them, and his silence was more eloquent than his words." As president of the municipality, he rendered signal service in the improvement of civic services and

humbled the arrogance of the high and mighty bureaucracy with his tact in matters of principle. Thus he acquired a feel of the working of local self-government institutions quite early in his public life.

Vallabhbhai Patel displayed the same spirit of fearless dedication when the plague struck Borsad in 1935. Patel's leadership of Bardoli Satyagraha, "for organisation and discipline, in planning and purpose, for unity of command and union of spirits" has been called by Dr. P. Sitaramaiyya as "a marvel unique in Indian history." He through his speeches, tried to infuse a spirit of fearlessness, self-sacrifice and discipline among the poor peasantry which withstood the wrath of the foreign rulers. Mahadev Desai, paying a tribute to the Sardar, said in *The Story of Bardoli*: "A leader had never a worthier following and the followers never a worthier leader." At the end of the Bardoli affair, Srinivas Shastri wrote to Gandhiji on September 7, 1920: "Vallabhbhai has risen to highest rank. I bow to him in reverence." As Jawaharlal Nehru writes in his autobiography, Bardoli "become a sign and a symbol of hope and strength and victory to the Indian peasant". His mobilisation of people, manoeuvring of strategy and efforts for settlement during the Nagpur Flag Satyagraha (1923) bear testimony to his great organising ability, administrative acumen and political sensitivity. Similarly, his organisation of relief at the time of the unprecedented floods in Gujarat in 1927 evoked admiration even from the bureaucracy. It will be interesting to recall the reply that the Sardar sent to Gandhiji at this time as it will give us an idea of the man, his thought process and his self-confidence. He wrote: "If you wish to give us an opportunity to show you how well we have learnt what you have taught us and how we are putting into practice the training that you have been giving us for the past 10 years, do not come." Such experience of crisis administration or coping with natural calamities equipped him adequately to gear up the administrative machinery for similar tasks in future.

The experience of the Sardar during Provincial Autonomy, as the chairman of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee in selecting candidates for election to the provincial assemblies and for exercising supervision over their working, programme implementation, maintenance of discipline, etc., gave him not only an overview of factional politics, veiled points of bureaucratic resistance but also

of administrative pulls, pressures, strains, people's reactions and response, etc., to administration. The Sardar's diplomatic tact, skill in dealing with parliamentary issues, and understanding of constitutional niceties concerning the relationship between the Governor and the Ministers came into full play at the time of differences between the Governors and the Chief Ministers of U.P. and Bihar and also when a serving civil servant was being made the Acting Governor of Orissa.

One can even trace his handling of the problem of States on independence to his observation of the conditions in the Kathiawar States, his association with the Rajkot episode, and his general contacts with the workers of the State's People's Conference.

Though not concerned with the political aspects or the right and wrong of the issues involved, the conflict of viewpoints or even of the clash of personalities, it is pertinent to mention in passing his relationship with N.B. Khare, K.F. Nariman, R.A. Kidwai, Congress Socialists, Subhas Bose, A.K. Azad and even Nehru and the broad spectrum of interaction in various contexts with a view to appreciate his ideals and objectives, values and norms, strategy and tactics, attitude and approach, reaction and response to many vital questions of public affairs which had a vital bearing on matters of policy and programme of the state in the next few years. It has also to be appreciated that the so-called temperamental and ideological differences between Nehru and Patel have been needlessly magnified and the supplementary and complementary role, reciprocity of functional positions and mutuality of personal affection and regard, openly expressed by both, are apt to be ignored. Actually, it is the contribution of the one which promoted the success and achievement of the other during the epoch-making period when their lots were cast together.

PATEL'S FINEST HOUR

We may now turn to the unfolding of the events on the eve of and after the attainment of independence which provided new challenges and new opportunities to Sardar Patel's political and administrative sagacity. It was a brief span but it was crowned with glory. It was a period of turmoil and tragedy. But it was also his finest hour as a statesman and administrator.

V.P. Menon, while referring to the Sardar's work in the

Government, wrote : "When he took over the Home Ministry in 1946 he had no experience even as a provincial minister, yet he showed at once a clear grasp of the essentials of administration. He knew how to exercise power and how to deal with men. He would have each problem fully discussed, hearing all sides, and would then take his decision, and once taken, everybody knew it was final. He assigned a man his responsibility and then left the job to him, and everybody did his best because he could count on his being upheld." This is a perceptive appraisal of the Sardar as an administrator, but, as we have emphasised, it was the earlier phase of his political career which was, in a way, almost unconsciously, a preparation for his endeavour and success on his assumption of governmental responsibilities.

The story of the merger and integration of the States is a thrilling chapter in our history. It is neither necessary nor relevant to our purpose to go into the details or the maze of this psychologically fascinating process. As V.P. Menon wrote : "Handling of the rulers by the 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 the reputation as the 'Iron Man of India', endeared him to them and created such confidence that all accepted his advice without demur." It was his statesmanship and his administrative tact and foresight that helped to counteract the forces of disruption, disintegration and Balkanisation. This unique achievement, including the negotiated settlements, is to be judged in the background of the contemporary situation and compulsions and not the hindsight of history. Even the Junagarh imbroglio was solved by him. Only Kashmir and Hyderabad was principally his work. Gen. J.N. Chaudhary has testified that after initial cross-examination regarding the possible duration of the operation, "he never questioned the timing again and left all further details to the team. This naturally gave one a great sense of confidence and when the task was done, his quiet 'well done' sent by telegram was worth a thousand other wordy effusions." He feelingly concludes : "Loyalty is a two way street with the broader section running downwards." This is a time tested maxim of administrative effectiveness.

The Sardar was not only satisfied with the unification and

consolidation of States. He was aware of their feudal heritage and was keen on the democratisation and modernisation of their administration. In order to impart a sense of administrative comprehension and competence to the popular touch, represented by the ministries, he introduced the institution of Advisers. His vigilant eye was always overseeing the administrative developments in the States, especially the erstwhile princely States. His massive correspondence is extremely revealing in this regard. In a way, he provided training and guidance to the popular administrations in the States where they were yet to find their feet.

The Sardar's contribution to the making of the constitution has been commended by such diverse personalities as B. Shiva Rao, B.R. Ambedkar and Frank Anthony. As chairman of the Advisory Committee on Minorities and Fundamental Rights, by inspiring confidence and skilful manoeuvring, he scotched the subtle move claiming separate representation for Muslims. His agreement to provide special safeguards to the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes, taking into consideration the realities of the situation, was an effort towards the removal of the historical disparities. Frank Anthony has acknowledged him as a friend of the minorities who showed a wealth of understanding for their viewpoint. As an uncompromising exponent of the integrity of the country, he was opposed to re-organisation of the country on a linguistic basis. He was also the chairman of the committee to determine the principles of the provincial constitution. Here he worked in intimate collaboration and understanding with Nehru who was the chairman of the Committee on the Principles of the Union Constitution. The Sardar's assurances to the services and the constitutional safeguards accorded to them, though rendered obsolete in the march of history, have, nevertheless, to be comprehended in the light of the then prevailing situation when the ship of the state had to be steered through troubled waters and this necessitated the confidence, support and the ungrudging co-operation of the administrative machinery and the services personnel with experience. It is not difficult to appreciate that all these constitutional issues had deep and far-reaching administrative implications. It is also well-known that by the tone of his intellectual arguments and force of personality, Patel succeeded in giving the judiciary an independent status, free from political or legislative interference—a heritage of his study and faith in the

rule of law. The passage of time may have necessitated changes, but that does not take away the Sardar's solid contribution to the making of the constitution.

The Sardar's political sagacity and clarity of thought, firm determination, capacity for realistic analysis of the situation and decisiveness in action attained new heights when the final bid for power came. His keen perception of the working of divisive forces in the Interim Government and the demoralisation of the administrative machinery led him to agree to the partition of the country, though with a heavy heart. His unwavering effort for the maintenance of law and order during a period of communal frenzy against tremendous odds was a great feat. But for the part that he played in the Partition Council and the Joint Defence Council and the decisions that he took with promptitude, affecting every branch and subject of administration and of property and assets that belonged to undivided India, the actual partition would have been well nigh impossible within the stipulated time. Again, India owes a great deal to his ruthless suppression of the separatist and communal forces as well as the anti-national and subversive elements in many parts of the country in the early years of freedom. V. Shankar in his *Reminiscences of Sardar Patel* has referred to a large number of incidents showing his capacity for prompt decision-making which saved the situation or resolved the issues. He was for national amity, communal harmony and a secular state. As Pyarelal has said : "He was too big to be merely anti-anybody as such."

Sardar Patel had been often criticised as a reactionary, or as a friend of the princes, industrialists and landlords. But as Pyarelal again says : "He had an innate distrust of slogans and 'isms'; above all, he hated hypocrisy and cant". Again, like his mentor Gandhi, "he made a broad distinction between the man and the system." He was critical of what he called the "parrot cry of socialism." This was during the days prior to independence. This can be explained in the light of the character of the national struggle which was in the nature of a single platform and he did not want the united energy for action to be divided or diffused when the goal of freedom had to be attained. Again, even after the attainment of independence, he would exhort all segments of the nation to produce more, create more wealth, before talking of 'levelling of wealth' as we have not gained freedom for the

distribution of poverty. We all know that this was a period of shortages—a virtual economy of society. To a direct query whether he was in favour of socialism he gave the reply: "In Gandhiji's *ashram* the first principle is non-possession of property. That is socialism—is it not? Practical socialism." Probably he was more for social conscience and trusteeship than for socialism. We also cannot ignore that the adoption of socialism as the goal of state policy in the country has been an evolutionary process—Avadi and after. Probably Sardar Patel might not have been fully cognizant of the institutional and structural forces of socio-economic change, but it would be unfair to accuse him of conscious bias or favouritism to the propertied and the privileged. His was a pragmatic, practical approach. He was opposed to theoretical propositions advanced as panacea, on *a priori* considerations. It is only a conjecture, but it should be said that had he been endowed with a longer span of life, with his sharp comprehension of the moods and aspirations of the people, and the needs of the polity, he would have also moved to a more practical approach towards socialism suited to our societal ethos and economic imperatives.

Though not a doctrinaire votary of non-violence, he knew that during the struggle against foreign rule that was the only suitable weapon for an unarmed people. Even after the attainment of freedom, the unification of the States and the metamorphosis of the administration provide "convincing demonstration of non-violence in action." But during the exodus of the minority community from East Pakistan, as it was then called, due to the atrocities before the Nehru-Liaqat Ali Pact, and after the occupation of Tibet by the Chinese, he would not mince matters. He said: "In this Kaliyuga, we shall return Ahimsa, but if anybody resorts to force against us we shall meet it with force." He fully realised that non-violence in the troubled world could not be the state policy.

The effort of Sardar Patel to have the provision for all-India services in our constitution as an integrating factor in the federal system, despite the initial reservations and hesitancy of some Chief Ministers, is really commendable even if one concedes their weaknesses and inadequacies. The validity of the institution was subsequently stressed by the States Reorganisation Commission. Speaking in Bombay in October 1949, he appealed to the critics of

the civil services to shed their old prejudices and assess their worth in the background of their quality and contribution at the time. "Outsiders", he asserted "cannot appreciate their work. Many of their loyal workers and patriots are working with us day and night. All that we have been able to achieve, whether it be in the sphere of States or in Kashmir or in other theatres, has been possible because of their loyalty and whole-hearted support." But he was also conscious of the need for training of the new entrants to public service in the changed conditions and he was responsible for the setting up of the training institutions for the two all-India services as they then existed. In order to fill up the gaps in the services, due to resignation or migration of officers, he also devised the system of open recruitment to induct suitable persons with varied experience into administration in order to meet the emergent situation. He realised the basic role of civil service and categorically stated: "An efficient, disciplined and contented services assured of its prospects as a result of diligent and honest work, is a *sine qua non* of sound administration under a democratic regime, even more than under an authoritarian rule. The services must be above party and we should ensure that political considerations either in its recruitment or in its discipline and control, are reduced to the minimum if not eliminated altogether." We have no doubt that if the Sardar had been at the helm of affairs longer, he would have given the requisite priority to the training, development and orientation of services, be it from the viewpoint of functional adequacy, imaginative sympathy for the citizen, capacity to adapt to changing requirements or rapport with the community.

SERVICES' TRIBUTE

As a tribute from the services to Sardar Patel, it may be useful to quote an extract from the speech of Girija Shanker Bajpai who spoke in a meeting condoling Patel's death and where he echoed their sentiments which provide as assessment of his qualities admired by the services in him as their political master :

"It is as an administrator that most of us who have assembled today can speak of him with propriety and, perhaps, with some knowledge. History holds many examples of the fruits

of freedom squandered by lack of attention to stability and order, the twin foundation of society. Though a revolutionary in his fight against foreign rule, Sardar Patel was no believer in abrupt or violent change: progress by evolution was really his motto. And so, although in August 1947 power changed hands, and with it the spirit of the administration, the machinery of Government was preserved. As Home Minister and Minister for States, the Sardar had a double conservative in the true sense of the word, in what had been the provinces in the old India, creative in the Indian States. Neither was easy. To the ordinary stress of transition caused by the withdrawal of trained personnel which had wielded all power for a hundred years was added the strain of partition, and the immense human upheavals and suffering that followed it. The fate of our new state hung in the balance during those perilous months when millions moved across the new frontiers under conditions which are still vivid in our memories and, therefore, need not be described. That despite some oscillation, the scales stayed steady was due not only to the faith of the people in its leaders, but to the firm will and strong hand of the new Home Minister. It is no false pride but a sense of relevance that leads me to mention the part that all the services played in those difficult times. In this, they were, of course, true to a tradition on discipline and duty. But they were heartened and sustained in their endeavour, as much by the confidence and faith reposed in them their new chief as by the ardour of a patriotism kindled to flame by the breath of freedom.

"Time only strengthened these ties of trust between the Sardar and the service. This was due not only to his sense of the value to the administration of public servants of loyalty and integrity but to the keenness and warmth of his personal interest in their welfare. A smaller man might have allowed old-time prejudices to raise a curtain of suspicion between him and those who had served an alien regime. It was another mark of the Sardar's greatness that he doubted the patriotism of no Indian unless the lack of it was proved. Trust, it has been said, begets trust, and distrust is its own cause. This is as true of Government as of human relations in other fields."

The Minister-Secretary relationship and even the general

question of political control of administration is a subject of psychological and political complexity. H.V.R. Iyengar, who worked as his Home Secretary has written frequently about the Sardar's adept appreciation of the delicacy involved so as to get the best out of him under clear-cut political direction.

In view of his reputation for sternness and inflexible will, it is difficult for people to realise that Sardar Patel's was a synthesizing genius. His was an approach of feasibility and reconciliation. With a view to consolidate national freedom and to cope with the complex administrative problems in the wake of the end of foreign rule, he was with Nehru in casting his net wide outside the ruling party for talent, be it for constitution-making, diplomacy or even in government. C.D. Deshmukh, in his recollections of the Sardar, mentions many instances of his amenability to persuasion and compromise for larger good in deference to the views of others—a trait of high statesmanship as well as effective administrative leadership. Though endowed with humane quality, a sense of humour and even sarcasm, his indifference to popularity and passion for discipline unfortunately helped to project only a distorted picture of his basic personality. Dorothy Norman wrote : "The moment one spoke with him one knew that one was dealing with an honest man, that whether or not one agreed with him, one knew he would say only precisely what he believed."

Sardar Patel probably had the peasant's innate distrust of change. Probably, with his mentor, Gandhiji, he believed that 'one step is enough for me.' But he was not opposed to innovation or experimentation as such. He was cognizant of the expectations in a newly-liberated people and the changing demands of changing times. All that he wanted was the need to husband resources and to have some modicum of evidence and assurance that the change presaged a better shape of things. Presumably, his legal training and the prevailing philosophy of gradualism had its impact on him. But it would not be correct to categorise him as an apologist of the *status quo* or vested interests. He had a remarkable quality of administrative resilience and awareness of the spirit of the times. It is known that he had no property of his own and his sympathies were with the labour and the peasants and other dispossessed sections in society. There is a ring of sincerity in each and every word of Sardar Patel when he said in the course of a speech : "If anyone is fit to walk with his head erect on this earth, it is the peasant. He is the

producer, the others are parasites. But what a sorry plight he has been reduced to. The whole world depends on you two, the agriculturist and the labourer, and yet you are the worst abused people on earth. I am grieved at the woeful state to which you have been reduced. . . . I feel deeply ashamed and humiliated at your plight. I shall feel myself blessed and all my labours fulfilled when I see you come into your own and walk erect like men." He was only averse to creating dissonance and disharmony when the country's freedom and unity had yet to be consolidated. He believed that with the power of the State at its disposal and with the confidence and support of the people at its back, a dedicated leadership could work out the socio-economic transformation according to our needs and traditions. An assessment of Sardar Patel by one of the sympathetic biographers indicates a new line of thought : "It is interesting to note that Patel accepted Gandhi as his guru but followed the practical philosophy of Lokmanya Tilak just as Gandhi himself followed the militant Tilak although he acknowledged the mild and moderate Gokhale as his guru. It was characteristic of his peasant origin that having set his hand to the plough he never looked back." (D.V. Tahmankar)

Sardar Patel was not opposed to the planning process *per se*. But it is difficult to say about his conception of the nature, character, extent and limits of the planned economy. He was again pragmatic regarding the question of nationalisation. In his 75th birthday speech in Bombay, for instance, he said : Nationalisation is worthwhile only if the Government can manage the industries efficiently. But this is difficult. We have neither the men nor the resources even to run our administration. We have had to make our civil servants available to the States, and still they are not being run as efficiently as they should be. Let those who have the knowledge and experience manage the industries and increase the country's wealth." This related to a point of time. With this, in no way can it be construed that he was deliberately acting as a brake to any policy of social change. Sardar Patel was not insensitive to the inevitable passage of time and its compulsions.

When we view the Sardar's contribution to administration, we find that he worked for a democratic administration. It was partly an instinctive and unconscious process, partly it was

deliberate and by design. What could broadly be considered the criteria which a democratic administration should satisfy? In the first place, it must be open in the sense of having a wide contact with the people. It must not operate in the interest of any privileged group or class. Its personnel must be recruited without discrimination from a broad socio-economic strata of the population. In the second place, it must not get isolated from the people and should be sensitive and responsive to the feelings and reactions of the different segments of the public. It should keep abreast of the state of mind of the governed and avoid the arrogance of disposition and attitude. In the third place, administration must not be regulated or controlled only by official hierarchy but also by public opinion and should not exist independently of political control. The constitutional framework that the Sardar tried to provide alongwith Nehru and the way he dealt with the emerging problems, the conventions that he helped to lay down in the functioning of parliamentary, and the environmental milieu that he wanted to introduce for the services, go to suggest that his ideal was the setting up of a democratic state and a democratic administration.

CONCLUSION

The appellation 'Sardar' was conferred on him after the success of the Bardoli satyagraha and that is how he came to be known throughout his life. It signifies the capacity for leadership. In administration and organisational theory, we have many approaches to the question of leadership. From an analysis of his thoughts and ideas and judging from his dealings with multifarious situations and also from the assessment of his personality by people belonging to different political complexion, a number of striking qualities emerge which helped him to provide administrative leadership in times of crisis and which set an example for others. One might venture to summarise them briefly. First, it is the clarity of objectives and understanding of the instrumentalities and the strategy to achieve the objectives set. Second, it is the power of rapid analysis, capacity to grasp all the facts and essentials of a situation and their mutual relationship. Third, it is the sense of timing, i.e., when the crucial step or decision is to be taken. Fourth, it is the capacity to think ahead and anticipate

moves or problems. Again, it might involve a fine sense of discrimination as to when and how far to give a point away without compromising a principle. Fifth, it is the capacity to judge people, willingness to take responsibility, desire to delegate responsibility to inspire confidence, to impart watchful guidance, to give credit of recognition and protection or support as needed. Sixth, "it is the capacity not only to understand people but to lead them—to be the conductor of the orchestra." The leader is not only the follower. He multiplies his capacity through teamwork and sets trends and even gives judgment against fleeting passions or opinions—a fairly exacting and at times a thankless task. Last, there are personal qualities of imagination, perseverance, equanimity of temperament, sense of dedication to causes higher than self, etc. We really find all of them in varying measures reflected in Sardar Patel. As Vaikunth L. Mehta said: "What made him great as a political administrator, while he remained a leader of men and a statesman, was his study of details, his knowledge of facts, combined with a deep insights, width of outlook and long-range vision. It is rarely that one comes across an individual of all these qualities that make for greatness—courage, knowledge of what is right, honour in action."

By way of summing up, we may say that Sardar Patel was not a system builder. He was a man of action. "His teachers were the facts of life; not books or doctrines." According to circumstances, his approach to administration could be manipulative, preventive, anticipatory or creative. He not only saved India from "the danger of fragmentation" but "gave her a united entity and a homogenous administration." We have tried to identify some of the formative influences of Sardar Patel's life and thought. Alongwith the background of his experience in different areas of public life during the struggle for freedom, his views on important socio-economic problems, which have their operational significance for administration, have also been referred to. It is in the light of this background that some of the highlights of his achievement as a member of the Government for a few but momentous years have been delineated. Besides, an effort has also been made to sum up some of his qualities of administrative leadership. It is only in this wider perspective that the Sardar's contribution to administration can be recounted and assessed. Probably we are

too near the events and the final judgment of history is reserved for the future. But even for a tentative interpretation, it must be granted in fairness that his contribution ought to be judged and evaluated by the norms of the times and the total context of the contemporary society and political compulsions.