

## INTEGRATION OF PRINCELY STATES IN INDEPENDENT INDIA AND ROLE OF SARDAR PATEL

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Present-day India owes an immeasurable debt of gratitude to the vision, tact, diplomacy and pragmatic approach of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the indomitable man who integrated more than five hundred princely states with the Union of India and prevented the balkanisation of the newly-independent country. The midnight of August 15, 1947 is perhaps noted as the most significant in the pages of Indian history. But if freedom is the hard earned dream come true for the leaders and common men of India, then stitching together the hundreds of territorial pieces into a distinct whole was an aspiration much harder to realise. The departure of the British from Indian territory was accompanied by the question of how to bring together the 500-odd rulers and states they had left behind. The princely states, both spoiled and exploited by the British, maintained a position of semi-autonomy under the colonial era were the toughest challenge facing free India.

Once the withdrawal of the British was announced, the issue of the princely states had to be settled for the new government that would be in power. By the late 1930s itself, the Congress had made clear their intention of integrating the states into the Indian union. In the 1938 Haripura session of the Congress, the objective was made clear in the following words:

*"The Congress stands for the same political, social and economic freedom in the States as in the rest of India and considers the States as integral parts of India which cannot be separated. The Purna*

*Swaraj or complete independence, which is the objective of the Congress, is for the whole of India, inclusive of the States, for the integrity and unity of India must be maintained in freedom as it has been maintained in subjection."*

To aid in the process of integration a new states department was set up with Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel as its head and V. P. Menon as the secretary. Together they were given the responsibility to coax, cajole and convince the princes to accede to the Indian union. Most of the states agreed to join Indian union. However there are the cases of five states that opposed the idea of joining India- namely – **Travancore**, Jodhpur, Bhopal, Hyderabad and **Junagadh**.

The southern Indian maritime state - Travancore was one of the first princely states to refuse accession to the Indian union and question the leadership of the nation. The state was strategically placed for maritime trade and was rich in both human and mineral resources. The Dewan of Travancore declared his intention of forming an independent state that would be open to the idea of signing a treaty with the Indian union. There are several stories about Dewans' this intention. Some historians said that Travancore's bid to independence was in fact propelled by promoters of the idea of Pakistan. Some others says that there was secret ties with the UK government who were in support of an independent Travancore in the hope that they would get exclusive access to a mineral called monazite that the area was rich in, and would

give an edge to Britain in the nuclear arms race. But things turned in India's side when the Dewan changed his mind soon after he survived an assassination attempt by a member of a organization belongs to Kerala. Finally in year 1947, Travancore joined India.

The princely state of Jodhpur was a surprising case of moving to the opposite direction from India. Than the prince of Jodhpur somehow got the idea that it might be more beneficial for his state not to join India. Further, he was impacted by the promoters of Pakistan who offered him full facilities at ports in Pakistan along with military and agricultural support. However, when Vallabhbhai Patel was made aware of the possibility of Jodhpur not joining India, he immediately contacted the prince and offered him sufficient benefits and explained him the problems of joining the other state. The Indian side breathed peace when finally the Prince of Jodhpur signed the document of Integration with India.

Another state that expressed its desire to declare independence was Bhopal. The prince of Bhopal, who had a close relationship with the promoters of Pakistan, disapproved to join India. He had made clear his decision to attain independence to British authorities. But things didn't turned as he wished. He was informed by British authorities that "no ruler could run away from the dominion closest to him". By July 1947, the prince became aware of the large number of princes who had agreed to join India and decided to go along with them.

The case of Hyderabad was by far the most significant and complicated challenge among the princely states. When the British decided to leave, the Nizam was very clear on his demand for an independent state and consequently becoming a member of the British commonwealth of nations. For Patel, an independent Hyderabad was one of the most dangerous thing for newly Independent India. As soon as Britishers finally quitted India, the government decided to make a more decisive turn. In the month of September, Indian troops were sent to Hyderabad in what came to be known

as 'Operation Polo'. In an armed encounter that lasted for more than three days, the Indian army gained full control of the state.

Junagadh was a state on the coast of Saurashtra surrounded by Indian territory, and therefore without any geographical contiguity with Pakistan. Bounded on three sides by states which had acceded to India, and on the fourth by the Arabian Sea, it was the largest state in Kathiawar. It had enclaves in the bordering states of Gondal, Baroda and Bhavnagar, all of which had acceded to India, while other states, which had also acceded to India, had enclaves in Junagadh. The disturbed situation in Junagadh led to a complete breakdown of the economy and consequently the ruler quitted the state. Vallabhbhai sent troops to control the situation. In the face of acute shortage of funds and forces, the Dewan was forced to accede to the Indian government. Eventually a plebiscite was held in the state wherein 91 percent of the voters chose to join India.

It was considered one of the toughest situation for newly independent India and there was no doubt that there was the key role of Sardar Patel who made integration of these five princely states, with the Union of India, a reality. Sardar Patel handled effectively the integration of the princely states with his diplomatic skills and foresightedness. The problem of amalgamating more than five hundred independent states with a democratic self-governing India was difficult and delicate. Sardar Patel ensured, by his calculated methods, the absorption of a multitude of princely states into the Indian Union. Without any massive struggle, he secured the solidarity of the nation.

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