

1. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel – Personality

On October 31st, the Prime Minister of India led the nation in commemorating Rashtriya Ekta Diwas (National Unity Day) at Ekta Nagar, Kevadia, Gujarat, marking the 150th birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel – The Iron Man of India

Early Life and Education

Birth and Background – Sardar Vallabhbhai Jhaverbhai Patel was born on 31st October 1875 in Nadiad, a town in the Kheda district of Gujarat. He belonged to the Leuva Patel Patidar community, known for their agricultural and entrepreneurial spirit.

Family and Values – Raised in a traditional agrarian family, Patel imbibed values of discipline, self-reliance, and courage from an early age. His humble beginnings shaped his practical outlook and deep empathy for rural India.

Education and Legal Career – Patel completed his schooling in Karamsad and Nadiad before pursuing law. He later went to England in 1910 to study at the Middle Temple Inn, London, where he qualified as a barrister in 1913.

Professional Success – Returning to India, he began an illustrious legal practice in Ahmedabad, earning recognition for his analytical skill and integrity. His success in law gave him financial independence, which later helped him dedicate his life to public service.

Entry into Public Life

Initial Civic Role – Patel's first formal involvement in public administration began as Sanitation Commissioner of Ahmedabad in 1917, where he efficiently tackled the plague epidemic and improved civic hygiene.

Chairman of Ahmedabad Municipality (1924–1928) – As Chairman, he focused on urban sanitation, primary education, and municipal finance reforms, setting a model for local governance rooted in accountability.

Meeting with Mahatma Gandhi (1917) – The Turning Point

Influence of Gandhiji – Patel's meeting with Mahatma Gandhi in 1917 was a transformational moment. Gandhi's ideals of truth, non-violence, and service to the poor inspired Patel to shift from personal success to national service.

Commitment to Nationalism – Patel joined the Indian National Congress (INC) and soon emerged as a formidable organizer, strategist, and orator in Gujarat and beyond.

Role in India's Freedom Struggle

Kheda Satyagraha (1918) – When famine and crop failure hit Kheda, British authorities insisted on full revenue collection. Patel, guided by Gandhiji, led the farmers' peaceful protest demanding remission of land revenue. The protest lasted three months and was marked by discipline, non-violence, and unity among peasants. The British government eventually relented, remitting taxes – a landmark victory that demonstrated the power of collective resistance.

Bardoli Satyagraha (1928) – The government increased land revenue in Bardoli by 22% to 60%, ignoring poor crop yields. Patel led the Bardoli peasants' movement with remarkable organization and moral discipline. Women affectionately called him "Sardar" (Leader), a title later popularized by Mahatma Gandhi. The British eventually withdrew the tax hike, marking a decisive victory for India's non-violent struggle and establishing Patel as one of the foremost nationalist leaders.

Civil Disobedience and Quit India Movements – Patel played a pivotal role in mobilizing the masses during these movements. He faced multiple imprisonments but continued to inspire unity and resilience against colonial oppression. During the Quit India Movement (1942), Patel's leadership in Gujarat and across India was crucial to sustaining nationwide resistance despite British crackdowns.

Sardar Patel – Architect of National Integration (Post-Independence)

Role as First Home Minister and Deputy Prime Minister (1947–1950) – After independence, India faced the monumental challenge of integrating over 560 princely states into one nation. Patel, assisted by V.P.

Menon, skillfully combined diplomacy, firmness, and persuasion to achieve peaceful accession of most states. Only a few, like Hyderabad, Junagadh, and Kashmir, required decisive intervention.

Integration Achievements –

Junagadh (1947) – Integrated after public referendum following its ruler's decision to accede to Pakistan.

Hyderabad (1948) – Integrated through 'Operation Polo', a swift police action that restored order.

Kashmir (1947) – Patel oversaw early administrative coordination after the Instrument of Accession was signed.

His efforts ensured that India remained territorially united despite immense political, religious, and logistical challenges.

Vision Beyond His Lifetime –

Patel's vision of unity resonated in later national milestones –

1. Merger of Goa (1961) into the Indian Union.
2. Accession of Sikkim (1975) as a full-fledged state.
3. Abrogation of Article 370 (2019), seen by many as the final fulfillment of his vision for complete integration.

Leadership Philosophy and Vision

Iron Man of India – Patel's unwavering resolve, pragmatism, and administrative acumen earned him the title of the 'Iron Man of India'. His strength lay in blending idealism with realism.

Unity in Diversity – He believed that India's strength came from diversity bound by a shared sense of belonging, not uniformity. His concept of unity was rooted in federal cooperation, where the Centre and States worked in harmony.

Administrative Reforms – Patel was instrumental in creating the All India Services (IAS, IPS) – calling them the "steel frame of India" – to ensure administrative continuity and national integration.

Legacy and National Recognition

Rashtriya Ekta Diwas (National Unity Day) – Instituted on 31st October 2014, Patel's birth anniversary, to honor his monumental contribution to the unity and integrity of India.

The Statue of Unity, unveiled in 2018 in Kevadia, Gujarat, stands as the world's tallest statue (182 meters) – symbolizing national unity and leadership.

Bharat Ratna (1991) – Awarded posthumously, recognizing his unmatched contribution to India's freedom and nation-building.

Enduring Message – Patel's life reminds every generation that unity is not inherited – it must be nurtured and defended. His words resonate even today – *"Every citizen of India must remember that he is an Indian, and he has every right in this country, but with certain duties."*

Patel's Relevance in Contemporary India

His legacy guides India's governance model emphasizing discipline, decentralization, and national integrity. In times of growing diversity and regional aspirations, his ideals remind the nation that solidarity is the true source of strength. Patel envisioned India as a federation of hearts and minds, not just territories – a message that remains deeply relevant for India's unity and federal balance today.

Conclusion

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was not only a freedom fighter and statesman but also the architect of modern India's unity. He transformed India from a patchwork of princely states into a single sovereign republic, demonstrating the power of vision, courage, and statesmanship.

His life remains an enduring symbol of national integration, administrative excellence, and pragmatic leadership – truly justifying his immortal title, the Iron Man of India.

Source – <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/sardar-patels-vision-and-the-meaning-of-national-unity-today/article70221709.ece>