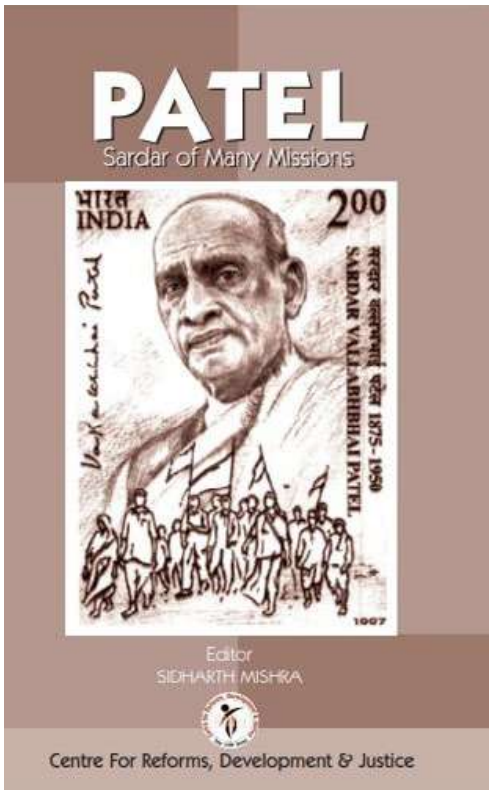
Book Review

Patel: Sardar of Many Missions

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Patel: Sardar of Many Missions

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India's *Statue of Unity,* a gargantuan structure, is unequivocally one of the major architectural wonders to have been constructed in the Indian subcontinent. Standing tall at one hundred and eighty-two meters, the statue is an ode to Indian statesman, independence activist Vallabhbhai Patel (1875-1950), who was the first deputy prime minister and home minister of the independent Indian state, and an adherent of Mahatma Gandhi during the nonviolent Indian independence movement. A juggernaut of politics, whose steely determination, intelligence and kindness earned him the sobriquet of Sardar, meaning Chief, Patel's legacy as a craftsman of modern India is insurmountable. If the *Statue of Unity* commemorates

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Patel's contribution to Indian society, culture and politics in architecture, books like *Patel: Sardar of Many Missions* memorialize and celebrate his bequest in nonfiction.

Edited by Professor Sidharth Mishra, noted journalist, author, media expert and current Chairperson of Vivekananda School of Journalism and Mass Communication, Vivekananda School of Professional Studies, GGS Indraprastha University, New Delhi, India, the book is a document that encounters the historical lacuna in the representation and problematization of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel as a major political figure in India.

A study of historical, creative and critical texts from pre-Independent period to post-Partition India suggests an emphasis on the three major political figures: Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi and Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Although it is undoubtedly true that the Nehru, Gandhi and Jinnah formed the major vertices of the political structure of the Indian subcontinent and contributed immensely in myriad ways to its present culture, Patel was the figure who indubitably steered Indian politics on major fronts. It is after all, thanks to his leadership that the British colonial provinces that formed the Dominion of India and major princely states were successfully integrated into the newly independent nation of India. Considering the heritage Patel has left behind, a sustained commemoration of his efforts is required to understand and appreciate modern India's history. The book *Patel: Sardar of Many Missions,* therefore, makes an important contribution by evaluating and documenting the extensive work of one of the most revered leaders of modern India.

The book consists of ten well-researched chapters that problematize Patel's role in Indian politics from myriad angles. The book is unique in that it not only highlights Patel's contributions to India, raising him from historical abnegation, but also recovers him as an actual individual with nuances, not just a binary to Nehruvian politics. The introductory chapter by Brigadier C.S. Thapa and Professor Mishra discusses in detail the political circumstances leading to military action in Kashmir, the Kashmir Conflict (1947-1949), and Patel's role as the Deputy Prime Minister in steering the issue with steely determination and securing the Indian state for us. We may remember that during the critical time of India's Partition, it was Patel who organized relief supplies and emergency camps, and he accompanied Pakistani leaders to the border areas in an effort to encourage peace between the two countries. Further, at the Nizamuddin Auliya Dargah area in Delhi, where thousands of Muslims feared attacks, he prayed at the shrine, visited the people, and reinforced police presence. Also, in order to prevent retaliatory violence, he suppressed reports of atrocities against Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan. Patel's contribution in this case was a decisive effort to mitigate Partition violence that killed millions of people and is looked upon as a contested refraction of the saga of

Indian independence, the mythical freedom gained at midnight. In this context, one may also remember Patel's work concerning the allocation of dwellings to refugees and aiding them as they became integrated in the newly independent India.

One thing that makes the book *Patel: Sardar of Many Missions* a unique read it how it manages to extract Patel from the stereotypical comparative position vindicated by such works as "Nehru and Sardar Patel: Comradeship and Contrast - 1947-48" published in *World Affairs: The Journal of International Issues* in 1991 and study him with all his gradations and nuances as an individual unto himself who should be considered more than a binary of Nehru. This the book does with strategic academic research by showing Patel as he really was: a sardar of many missions that benefitted his country.

The crucial issue of the integration of Hyderabad, which as K.M. Munshi puts it, could have become "an intensely hostile State separating the North from South" (Munsi 175) had it not been integrated in India, is deliberated upon in detail in the second chapter written by Dr. Tiwari, DU, New Delhi. The chapter talks in details about the territorial importance of the region, the regal legacy and obfuscating British policies that made the made the Hyderabad question not only critical but controversial for the political leaders of the time. The paper shows how Patel solved the crisis by his decisive action and prevented Hyderabad's secession from India and ultimately enabled its accession as an Indian territory. In that critical instant, Sardar's actions had been nothing short of heroic especially since the "situation needed a man of iron who would not balk at coercive politics, and in Sardar, India had at that vital moment just that man," (Graham 1951).

From the integration of Hyderabad to the life and philosophy of Patel to a study of Patel's world view and his ideas on the emerging geopolitical environment, the book comprehensively studies and analyses each issue with academic expertise. The result is a vivisection of the Indian political scenario, the pathological study of the concerns affecting its anatomy and the role of Patel in resolving complicated territorial/anatomical issues like the case of accession of hundreds of princely states like Junagarh, Travancore, Hyderabad, Kashmir and others into independent India.

One of the major points of study when it comes to Patel and his legacy is his relationship with Mahatma Gandhi. The chapter titled "Sardar's Bapu: A Critical Study of the Relationship between Gandhi and Patel" by Dr. Shachi Chawla deftly problematizes the important relationship between the two stalwarts of Indian politics and directs our attention to the intricacies of the relationship that affected Patel's ideology. Often called the "political evangelist of Gandhi's ideas and ideals," (Tarmankar 18) Sardar Patel deeply admired Gandhi

"for his commitment and ability to work to work towards his goal of bringing freedom for India," as Dr. Chawla says in her paper. Under the aegis of Gandhian philosophy, Patel organized the Congress party into a "powerful machine" (Chawla 73) and deftly acted upon various plans of Gandhi be it the famous Salt Satyagraha of 1930, the campaign against caste-based discrimination and untouchability, or economic upliftment of Indian villages. The chapter discusses all these important issues and many more pertaining to the Gandhi and Patel relationship including their differences of opinion and the major political act of Patel withdrawing his nomination for the post of Independent India's first Prime Minister at the behest of Gandhi.

Another important chapter in the book titled "Sardar Patel and the Tibet Question" directs our attention to Patel's remarkable vison and understanding of India's foreign and security question in the context of India's Tibet policy vis-à-vis China. A visionary and a nationalist, Patel's staunch secular ideology for India is discussed by Sudiptaa Bharaat, while Patel's concern for minorities is deftly analyzed by Kanchan Sharma in a brilliant study of Patel's political legacy on the issue of minority rights which assumed especial importance right after India's Partition. The welfare of the minorities in a democratic India was a cause that Patel took upon himself with sensitivity and confidence. He ensured that minorities could pursue their religion without fear in a democratic India by including the clause of the right to propagate one's faith as a Fundamental Right despite harsh criticism from his peers. As such, The Right to Freedom of Religion is provided in Articles 25-28 which ensures that all citizens enjoy religious freedom in India, while Article 25 grants all individuals the right to free expression and the ability to practice and propagate any religion they choose. Further, Patel also safeguarded the minority right to protect their linguistic and cultural heritage and ensured that religious and linguistic minorities were given the right to establish and function educational institutions within the territory of democratic India. A true secular leader to the core, Patel assured the Muslim community "security, freedom prerogatives and rights as par with Hindus without any discrimination," as Sharma puts it in the paper. Further, as a protector of Fundamental Rights for Minorities, Patel also supported the demand for educational security and service reservation to Anglo-Indians who deeply appreciated his efforts.

Considering that Patel and Gandhi together have struggled together to make India an ideal scientific space for the experimentation and application of the ideals of truth, Satyagraha and nonviolence, the legacy of Patel in popular culture is an area of serious study. Arunakar Pandey's excellent study deals with the many aspects of Patel's image management that deserve critical consideration.

In conclusion, the book *Patel: Sardar of Many Missions* is an excellent publication that questions the dichotomies of India's politics and presents the insurmountable role of Sardar Patel as the master of many missions that made the India "a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic, republic" (Preamble, Indian Constitution). In the present decade as India faces several taxing socio-political, cultural issues pertaining to minority rights, largescale economic disparity among Indian citizens, environmental issues and many more, we need to have a role model whose ideology, philosophy and political acumen could steer us toward an improved future. In Patel we unequivocally have that protagonist and it's time we appreciate him and his legacy and learn from him. As such, his work needs more wide representation and commemoration not only architecturally, but also academically and culturally. The book *Patel: Sardar of Many Missions* ably evaluates Patel's role as situates him in the forefront as a subject of critical historical study.

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