



**Nehru Memorial Museum & Library with Centre for Reforms, Development & Justice**

Is Organising a National Conference On:

**Making of a Gandhian Nationalist – A Study of the Life and Times of Sardar Patel**

On 31<sup>st</sup> October & 1<sup>st</sup> November 2017 At Library Building, Teen Murti House, New Delhi

**Papers are invited from scholars on the following sub-themes for the conference by 15 August 2017. Those desirous of presenting papers are requested to submit a short abstract in not more than 100 words by 30 June 2017. To register please go the link at the bottom.**

**Sub-Themes:**

- 1. Peasant Leadership:** At the urging of his friends, Patel won an election to become the sanitation commissioner of Ahmedabad in 1917. While often clashing with British officials on civic issues, he did not show any interest in politics. However, in October 1917 he met Mahatma Gandhi at the Gujarat Political Conference in Godhra. On Gandhi's encouragement, Patel became the secretary of the Gujarat Sabha, a public body that would become the Gujarati arm of the Indian National Congress. Patel now energetically fought against *veth* – the forced servitude of Indians to Europeans – and organised relief efforts in the wake of plague and famine in Kheda. The Kheda peasants' plea for exemption from taxation had been turned down by British authorities. Gandhi wanted to wage a struggle but could not lead it given his prior commitment in Champaran. Gandhi asked for a Gujarati activist to devote himself completely to the assignment, Patel volunteered, much to Gandhi's delight. Here began his journey as a peasant leader, leading participating in several Gandhian satyagrahs in the state including the Salt Satyagraha at Dandi. This technical session would invite papers to examine the rise and role of Sardar Patel as a Peasant leader till the end of his life.
- 2. Political Organiser:** Sardar Patel's position at the highest level in the Congress was consolidated from 1934 onwards when the Congress abandoned its boycott of elections. Based at an apartment in Mumbai, he became the Congress's main fundraiser and chairman of its Central Parliamentary Board, playing the leading role in selecting and financing candidates for the 1934 elections to the Central Legislative Assembly in New Delhi and for the provincial elections of 1936. In addition to collecting funds and selecting candidates, he also determined the Congress stance on issues and opponents. Not contesting a seat for himself, Patel nevertheless guided Congressmen elected in the provinces and at the national level. Patel guided the Congress ministries that had won power across India with the aim of preserving party discipline – Patel feared that the British would take advantage of opportunities to create conflict among elected Congressmen, and he did not want the party to be distracted from the goal of complete independence. Differences arose between Patel and Nehru, when he opposed declarations of the adoption of Socialism at the 1936 Congress session, which he believed was a diversion from the main goal of achieving independence. In 1938 Patel organised rank and file opposition to the attempts of then-Congress president Subhas Chandra Bose to move away from

Gandhi's principles of non-violent resistance. He transformed the party of agitationists to that of governance. This technical session would discuss papers to examine the rise Sardar Patel in Congress hierarchy and his role as Gandhi's most stout defender.

3. **Partition & Communal Question:** Vallabhbhai Patel was one of the first Congress leaders to accept the partition of India as a solution to the rising Muslim separatist movement led by Muhammad Ali Jinnah. He had been outraged by Jinnah's Direct Action campaign, which had provoked communal violence across India, and by the viceroy's vetoes of his home department's plans to stop the violence. Patel was aware that Jinnah did enjoy popular support amongst Muslims, and that an open conflict between Jinnah and the nationalists could degenerate into a Hindu-Muslim civil war of disastrous consequences. The continuation of a divided and weak central government would, in Patel's mind, result in the wider fragmentation of India by encouraging more than 600 princely states towards independence. In December 1946 and January 1947, Patel worked with civil servant V P Menon on the latter's suggestion for a separate dominion of Pakistan created out of Muslim-majority provinces. Communal violence in Bengal and Punjab in January and March 1947 further convinced Patel of the soundness of partition. Patel, a fierce critic of Jinnah's demand that the Hindu-majority areas of Punjab and Bengal be included in a Muslim state, obtained the partition of those provinces, thus blocking any possibility of their inclusion in Pakistan. Patel's decisiveness on the partition of Punjab and Bengal had won him many admirers, which was tired of the League's tactics, but he was criticised by Gandhi, Nehru, secular Muslims, and socialists for a perceived eagerness to do so. This session would try to clear the dust over the general perception that Patel followed policies with anti-minority sentiments.
4. **Leading Nascent Nation:** Integration of the princely states formed the cornerstone of Patel's popularity in the post-independence era, and even today he is remembered as the man who united India. However, to get that 'unity' he as nation's first Home Minister worked at several levels. Patel was a key force behind the appointment of Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar as the chairman of the drafting committee, and the inclusion of leaders from a diverse political spectrum in the process of writing the constitution. Patel was the chairman of the committees responsible for minorities, tribal and excluded areas, fundamental rights, and provincial constitutions. Patel piloted a model constitution for the provinces in the Assembly, which contained limited powers for the state governor, as he clarified that it was not the intention to impede the functioning of an elected government. He worked closely with Muslim leaders to end separate electorates and the more potent demand for reservation of seats for minorities. His intervention was key to the passage of two articles that protected civil servants from political involvement and guaranteed their terms and privileges. He was also instrumental in the founding the Indian Administrative Service and the Indian Police Service, and for his defence of Indian civil servants from political attack. He guided setting up of the Kaira District Co-operative Milk Producers' Union Limited, which preceded the Amul milk products brand. Patel then oversaw India's military operations to secure Srinagar and the Baramulla Pass, and the forces retrieved much territory from the invaders. Patel, along with Defence Minister Baldev Singh, administered the entire military effort, arranging for troops from different parts of India to be rushed to Kashmir and for a major military road connecting Srinagar to Pathankot to be built in six months. He admirably handled the near insurmountable refugee situation. In an unprecedented and unrepeated gesture, on the day after his death more than 1,500 officers of India's civil and police services congregated to mourn at Patel's residence in Delhi and pledged "complete loyalty and unremitting zeal" in India's service. The fourth session would reiterate his role as the nation builder.

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