

A Retrospective on Integration of Princely States into Indian Union

Prof. Anuradha Jaiswal

Abstract

The Indian Independence act 1947, allowed all states to decide to join either India or Pakistan. Before the date most of the States had signed the Instrument of accession by which they agreed to accede to India. But there were some states who thought that in the changed situation they were entitled to declare their independence. A keen competition took place between Pakistani and Indian leaders in securing the accession of Princes to their respective dominions. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel (1875-1959) who took charge of the States Department in July 1947, tackled the situation with utmost ability, assisted by the experienced Secretary V.P. Menon.

Keywords- Paramountcy, Diplomacy, Accession, Territory, Accession.

In colonial India, nearly 40 percent of the territory was occupied by fifty-six small and large states ruled by the princes who enjoyed varying degrees of autonomy under the system of British paramountcy. British power protected them from their own people as also external aggression so long as they followed British diktats. In 1947 the future of the princely states once the British left became the matter of concern.¹ Many of the larger princely states began to dream of independence. They got an encouragement from M.A. Jinnah who publicly declared on 18 June 1947 that the 'States would be independent sovereign States on the termination of paramountcy, and where 'free to remain independent if they so desired'.

The nationalist leaders rejected the claim of any state to independence and repeatedly declared that independence for a princely state was not an option – the only option being whether the state would accede to India or Pakistan, on the basis of its territory and wishes of the people. By signing instruments of accession to join the Indian Union, the princes had only surrendered their power on three subjects, defence, foreign affairs and communications and had thereby retained some residual powers of governance.

It was the diplomacy and persuasion used by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, that hundreds of princely states integrated with Indian Union in two stages. Some princely states had shown wisdom and realism and patriotism and had joined the Constituent

Assembly in April 1947. However, Travancore, Bhopal and Hyderabad and few others had announced their desire to claim an independent status.²

Sardar Patel was given additional charge of newly created states and V.P.Menon was made the Secretary of the Department. These states were cajoled to surrender their residual powers, accept democratic change and finally embrace the new constitution of India as their own. Many of the princes were pensioned off with tax free “privy purses” and other benefits, some were given largely ceremonial positions in foreign missions. The princes responded to Patel’s appeal and all but three of them-Junagadh, Jammu and Kashmir and Hyderabad-acceded to India by 15 August 1947.³

Junagadh was a small state on the coast of Saurashtra, surrounded by Indian territory and without any contiguity with Pakistan. Still its Nawab announced accession of his state to Pakistan on 15 August 1947, even though the people of the state, mostly Hindus desired to join India. Nehru and Patel agreed, that the final verdict rests with the people as ascertained through a plebiscite. Pakistan accepted Junagadh’s accession. The people of the state on the other hand did not abide the ruler’s decision, organised popular movement, forced the Nawab to flee and established a provisional government. The Dewan of Junagadh, Shah Nawaz Bhutto, father of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, invited the Government of India to intervene. Indian troops marched into the state. A plebiscite was held in the state in February 1948, which went in favour of joining India. A year later, Junagadh was merged with the province of Saurashtra and allowed seven members in the Saurashtra legislative assembly. This rounded off the process of its integration into the India Union.⁴

The State of Kashmir bordered on both India and Pakistan. The Kashmir situation was more complex and directly related to the history of Partition. In 1947 its ruler Hari Singh was a Hindu, while nearly 75 percent of the population was Muslim. Hari Singh did not accede to either India or Pakistan. Popular forces led by National Conference and its leader Sheikh Abdullah however wanted to join India. The Indian political leaders wanted the people of Kashmir to decide, they were supported by Gandhiji, who declared in August 1947, that Kashmir was free to join either India or Pakistan in accordance with the will of the people. But Pakistan refused to accept the principle of plebiscite. In 1947, the Muslim majority princely state of Kashmir remained geographically contiguous with Pakistan with strong trade links with her. So Pakistan

legitimately believed that it had a natural claim on the state. For Jinnah and the Muslim League, Pakistan without Kashmir would be incomplete while for Nehru and the Congress, integration of Kashmir would empower India's secular credentials. On 22 October several Pathan tribesman led unofficially by Pakistan army officers, invaded Kashmir and rapidly pushed towards Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir. In panic, Hari Singh on 24th October appealed to India for military assistance. Nehru even at this stage, did not favour accession without ascertaining the will of the people. But Mountbatten the Governor General pointed out that under international law India could send its troops to Kashmir only after the state's administration. Even though both the National Conference and the Maharaja wanted firm and permanent accession, India in conformity with its democratic commitment, and Mountbatten's advice announced that it will hold a referendum once peace and law order is restored in the Valley. After accession, the Cabinet took the decision to immediately fly the troops to Srinagar. Srinagar was first held and then the raiders were gradually driven out of the Valley, though they retained control over parts of the state and the armed conflict continued for months. While the Indian army established, control over much of the Kashmir Valley, Ladakh and Jammu, the Pakistan army occupied about one third of the territory of the state, which is called "Azad Kashmir" Thus by December 1947, Kashmir was virtually bifurcated, and India on the advice of Mountbatten's referred the Kashmir problem to Security Council of the United Nations, asking for vacation of aggression by Pakistan. Nehru regretted this decision as guided by Britain and the United States, Security Council tended to side by Pakistan and terming it as India-Pakistan dispute rather Kashmir question. In 1951, the UN passed a resolution providing for a referendum under UN supervision after Pakistan had withdrawn its troops from the part of Kashmir under its control. The resolution has remained ineffective as Pakistan refused to withdraw its forces from what is known as Azad Kashmir. Since then Kashmir has been the main obstacle in the path of friendly relations between India and Pakistan. India has regarded Kashmir's accession as final and irrevocable and Kashmir as its integral part, Pakistan continues to deny this claim. There have been subsequent wars still Kashmir remains bone of contention between the two countries.⁵

The Nizam of Hyderabad was the third Indian ruler who did not accede to India before 15 August, instead he claimed independent status. The state was geographically landlocked, economically dependent on India and surrounded by Indian

territory In November 1947, the Government of India signed a standstill agreement with the Nizam, hoping that while the negotiation, proceeded, the latter would introduce representative government in the state, making the task of merger easier. The Nizam on the other hand hoped to prolong negotiations in order to build his military strength and force India to accept sovereignty. In the meantime there was a rapid growth of militant Muslim communal organization, Ittihad ul Muslim and its para military wing the Razakars. Also the Hyderabad State Congress launched a powerful satyagraha movement to force democratization on the Nizam. Nearly 20,000 satyagrahis were jailed. Also a communist led peasant struggle had developed in the Telangana region of the state from the latter half of the 1946. By June 1948 Sardar Patel was getting impatient as the negotiations with the Nizam dragged on. Finally on 13 September 1948, the Indian army moved into Hyderabad. The Nizam surrendered and after three days acceded to the Indian Union. The Government of India however retained the Nizam as the formal ruler of the state. It marked another triumph of Indian secularism.

The second stage and the most difficult stage of the full integration of the princely states into the, Indian nation began in December 1947. Patel again completed the process very rapidly within a year. A large number were consolidated into five new unions, forming Madhya Bharat, Rajasthan, Patiala and East Punjab States Union (PEPSU), Saurashtra and Travancore-Cochin, Mysore, Hyderabad and Jammu and Kashmir retained their original form as separate states of the Union. In return of their surrender of all power and authority, the rulers of major states were given privy purses in perpetuity, free of all taxes. The privy purses amounted to Rs 4.66 crores in 1949 and were later guaranteed by the constitution. The rulers were allowed succession to the gaddi and retained certain privileges such as keeping their titles, flying their personal flags and gun salutes on ceremonial occasions, though there were criticisms for it. Further the French authorities handed over Pondicherry and other French possessions to India in 1954. The people of Goa took matters into their hands and started a movement seeking freedom from Portuguese, but it was brutally suppressed. In the end after waiting patiently for international opinion to put pressure on Portugal, Nehru ordered Indian troops to march into Goa on the night of 17th December 1961. The Governor General immediately surrendered without a fight and the territorial and political integration of India was completed, even though it took fourteen years to do so.⁶

Thus Sardar Vallabhai Patel who took charge of the Department in July 1947 tackled the situation with consummate ability assisted by the adroit and experienced Secretary of the Ministry, V.P.Menon . A keen competition had taken place between Pakistan and Indian leaders in securing the accession of Princes to the respective dominions. But Sardar Patel was able to secure their accession to the Indian union with his endurance and continued tactful persuasion.

References

1. Sumit Sarkar, *Modern Times*, pp, 64-67, Permanent Black, 2014.Ranikhet.
2. Francis Watson, *A Concise History India*, Pearson, pp,159-173, Thames and Hudson Ltd, S Pearson, pp,159-173, Thames and Hudson Ltd, Singapore, 2002.
- 3.Sekhar Bandyopadyay, *From Plassey to Partition and After(A History of Modern India)*, pp-473-482, Orient Blacksmn, 2015.
4. Bipin Chandra, Mridula Mukherje, Aditya Mukherjee, *India after Independence, 1947-2000*,68-79, Penguin, Delhi, 1999.
5. Shailendra Nath Sen, *An Advanced History of Modern India*, pp-460-464, Primus, Books, Delhi. 2017.
6. Sajal Nag, *Making of the Indian Union. Pp-20-45*, Akansha Publishing, Delhi, 2009.