



The Role of Vallabhbhai Patel as a President of Indian National Congress – A study

D.Sahadevudu

Lecturer in History, Government Degree College, Uravakonda,
Ananthapuramu District, Andhra Pradesh state, India.

Abstract:

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was associated with Indian National Congress from the early phase of Gandhian Era. He started his journey as primary member of Indian National Congress Party in 1917. He rose to Chairman of Reception Committee for Ahmadabad Indian National Congress session held in 1921. He successfully organized that session which was attended by veteran congress leaders. Patel was elected as Gujarat Pradesh Congress in 1921. From that onwards he continually elected for that post up to 1950. Sardar was the defacto Chairman of the Congress Parliamentary Board from its inception till he breathed his last on 15th December 1950. Sardar Patel enforced strict discipline within the Congress Party to make it compact unit. He had shown courage in checkmating stalwarts like Subhash Chandra Bose, Rajagopalachari and Dr. Khare. Patel's evolution from primary member of Indian National Congress to its President is a remarkable one and his impact on Congress Party is also a significant chapter in the history of Congress. Recently the Statue of Unity inaugurated by Honourable Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi at Narmada Valley Gujarat on Birth Anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel on 31st October 2018. The Tallest Statue in the world marked to the Iron man of India. How the Tallest position acquired by him in Congress Party is a research piece for present article.

Key words: Session, President, Organization, Party.

Introduction:

Sardar Patel was born on 31st October 1875 in a middle class farmer family. As a fourth child his education slowed, but reached climax when Patel completed Bar at Law in 1910. He got fame and name as a criminal lawyer. After association with Gandhiji he plunged into National Movement in 1918. He became deputy to Gandhiji at Ahmadabad Congress session in 1921. After a decade Patel stood by side with Gandhiji.

Methodology:

Historical approach and chronological method followed in this research paper. Though the literatures available primary references as well as secondary sources like "The History of Indian National Congress", "Jawaharlal Nehru: An Autobiography", "Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel", "Gandhi a Memoir, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel India's Ironman, India Since the Advent of British A Descriptive Chronology on this topic, there are some gaps in the field of significant marks of Patel's president ship at Karachi Congress session in 1931. For this a title effort made to fill the gaps of the

Iron man in the tallest position in the Congress Party and his imprints on party organization.

Indian National Congress:

Political parties are new dimension in the Modern Indian History which was impact of colonial rule in India. Many Political Associations and parties were established before Indian National Congress. But their contribution to freedom struggle is little scope in the era of National Movement. But Indian National Congress though it started with 72 delegates in 1885 gave path to mighty National leaders in coming years. Indian National Congress founded by A.O. Home a retired British Civil Servant and its first session held in 1885 at Bombay. W.C. Banerjee was its first President. Every year Indian National Congress sessions conducted mostly during the last week of December at different cities in India. The hosting region leaders will not preside over the session but they will organise that session. Historians classified Indian National Congress sessions in three Eras as Moderate Era 1885-1906, Extremist Era 1907-1919 and Gandhian Era 1919-1947. Truly as per categorization the second Extremist Era, the Extremist Leaders are ousted from party. Moderate leaders dominated this period also.

Vallabhbhai Patel -Indian National Congress:

In any party the primary members ambition to acquire high position in party. Likewise it is very difficult to get highest position in oldest party like Indian National Congress.

In the span of fifteen years Vallabhbhai rose from normal party delegate to tallest position in the Indian National Congress. In the journey of Association with Congress Party Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel firstly made a solid base in his home province. At initial phase he attended Congress sessions with a normal mode. In fact an opportunity knocks his political career in the year 1921, when Indian National Congress session held at Ahmadabad which was his home region. Here Patel made this session successfully as a Chairman of Reception Committee for Ahmadabad Indian National Congress session. From these onwards slowly he plunged into the Congress Party Organization Cadre. He was elected for Gujarat Pradesh Congress Committee Chairman. There he made his strong hold, then organised the party cadre in stern discipline. During the years of Non Cooperation Movement Patel successfully carried party programme into public. Even in the fraction period Pro changers, No changers within Congress Party circle Patel stood in the Gandhian line No changers to withstand not participating elections.

Patel attended Lucknow Congress as delegate on behalf of Gujarat Sabha in 1916. He was elected as the President of Gujarat Provincial Congress Committee in 1921. He successfully proved as the Chairman of the Reception Committee of Ahmadabad Congress Session in 1921. From 36th session of Congress to 46th session of Congress Patel associated with different activities in the Party. During the Bardoli No Tax Campaign which was successfully conducted under the leadership of Vallabhbhai Patel, his name was circulated Nationwide and got publicized with the title Sardar. After this Bardoli Movement, Party cadre wishes to elect the Sardar Patel as Congress President for Lahore session in 1929. But as the pleaded wishes of Motilal Nehru, Patel dropped and make a way to the president ship for Jawaharlal Nehru.

Besides writing to Gandhi, Motilal Nehru had conveyed his innermost feelings to Subhas Chandra Bose: “..... Vallabhbhai Patel was the hero of the hour, and the first choice should go to him. Failing him however, the next best choice was Jawaharlal”.¹

Vallabhbhai Patel - President of Indian National Congress:

In 1930 various historic events rushed such as Dandi March by Gandhiji, inauguration of Salt Satyagraha finally Gandhi Irwin pact made peace environment in the Country. Indian National Congress session held at Karachi for to ratify this pact in March 1931. For this session the president ship crown headed to Sardar Patel. In fact it is not such jubilant atmosphere like Lahore Congress session in 1929.

The Karachi Congress session held in 1931 was a significant event Indian National Congress History. Before Karachi Indian National Congress session, six days earlier Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev were executed on 23rd March 1931. Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev murdered Mr. Saunders British Police Officer on 13th September 1931 at Lahore Railway Station. This was Lahore conspiracy case. This was an emotional upsurge following the execution of Bhagat Singh, whose “Name was as widely know all over India and was as popular as Gandhi’s”.² Even though Gandhiji had made every attempt to save their lives, there was anger among the people, especially the youth, as to why he had not refused to sign the pact on this question. All along Gandhiji’s route to Karachi he was greeted with black flag demonstrations. In this atmosphere Patel handed the Congress session with simple and pacified the environment into his hands. He covered the critics attack on his political guru Gandhiji with his master skills. Even Jawaharlal Nehru stated that “The President, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, was one of the most popular and forceful men in India with the prestige of victorious leadership in Gujarat.”³

The Congress met at Karachi on 29 March 1931 to endorse the Gandhi Irwin or Delhi Pact. The Congress passed a resolution drafted by Gandhiji by which it, “While dissociating itself from and disapproving of Political Violence in any shape or form, admired the bravery and Sacrifice of the three martyrs. The Congress endorsed the Delhi Pact and reiterated the goal of Purna Swaraj. During Karachi Congress session Gandhi Irwin pact ratified and decided to nominate Gandhiji for to attend Second Round Table Conference.

By a resolution passed at Karachi the Congress has assured to all Indians Certain Fundamental Rights and has drawn up an economic and social programme. It has made it clear that, in order to end the exploitation of the masses, political freedom must include real economic freedom of the starving millions and has laid down fundamental rights of citizenship such as freedom of speech and association, of person and property of religion and conscience.

The Congress Working Committee also elected Vallabhbhai the President of the Karachi Congress as the normal procedure for election of President was not possible under the abnormal conditions that had prevailed for about a year. The ship has reached the Shore” said Sardar recently at Karachi “and our freedom is near at hand. It is for us to take it and work it to our advantage or leave the opportunity”

Sardar Patel stated that, “The heartless and foreign nature of the Government was never more strikingly demonstrated when in their carrying out the executions in the

teeth of all but universal demand for the commutation of the death sentence. Let us not, however, be deterred from our purpose in a fit of resentment. This insolent exhibition of their armed power but adds to the heavy indictment against the soulless system and increases our capacity for vindicating our position if we would refuse to be deflected from the straight and narrow path we have chosen. May the souls of brave patriots rest in peace and may their families find comfort in the fact that the nation is a sharer of their mourning.

Patel said, “You have called a simple farmer to the highest office to which an Indian can aspire. I am conscious of that your choice of me first servant is not so much for what little I might have done, but it is the recognition of the amazing sacrifice made by Gujarat. Out of generality you have singled out Gujarat for the honour. But in truth every province did its utmost during the year of the greatest National awakening that we have known in modern times”.⁴

Sardar Patel told in the final summing up as Congress President “Gandhi is now almost 63 years old, I am 56. Should we, the old be not more anxious for Independence than you – the young? Because we are interested in seeing India Independent before we die, it is we who are far more anxious, and in a hurry, than you. You talk of workers and peasants. But I can claim that I have become old in the service of the peasants... Hardly any one of you could have made the peasants sacrifice their person and their property so much as I have... Why are you agitating yourselves unnecessarily? You are not going to be old soon... Don’t let your energies get wasted. Keep your weapons bright and shining. You have before you plenty of work-abstinence from alcoholic drinks, use of Khadi and Cultivation of Self-Purification. All these activities give the people incredible strength.”⁵

In Karachi session the historic resolutions passed which have blended old generation feelings with young generation thrusts. The resolutions on Fundamental rights and Economic planning were significant marks in the chapter annals of Karachi Congress session. Vallabhbhai Successfully weaned away Nehru, Prominent Votary of Socialist thinking into his fold by incorporating a set of Socio-Economic Principles in the Karachi Congress Resolution on Fundamental Rights.⁶

In 1931 Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel rose as President of 46th session of Karachi Congress in 1931. Patel hold the post of Party President from 1930 to 1934. He acted as the Chairman of the All India Congress Parliamentary Board from 1935–1940. This newly formed board supervised the 1937 elections for Central Legislative and Provincial Assemblies and also monitor functioning of the Congress Ministries in various States. Patel played a crucial role in 1937 election campaign at every stage. He played vital role in getting majority to form Government in eight provinces out of 11 provinces. He strictly observed the power activities of Congress Ministries during 22 months public rule. Finally he urged the Congress Ministries to resign from office due to British Government decision India’s participate in Second World War without consultation of public representatives.

Chronology of Indian National Congress Session in 1931:⁷

Mar-29-1931 - The 45th Session of Indian National Congress assembled at Karachi on this day in an open air stadium. There were not less than 40,000 visitors. Punctually at 6 PM Vallabhbhai Patel, the President arrived followed by a procession

of Volunteers. In the procession were Mahatma Gandhi, Subhash Chandra Bose, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, The President and Gandhiji were greeted with a tremendous ovation Vallabhbhai Patel delivered his presidential address, after the welcome address by the Chairman of the Reception Committee.

Mar-30, 1931 – “I give no promise and no undertaking that the Congress delegation will bring complete independence but I pledge my word that they will not bring back greater bondage”, with these words Gandhiji supported the resolution moved by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru endorsing the Gandhi-Irwin Pact in the open session of the Congress on this day.

Mar-31, 1931 – Karachi Congress met in open air Gandhi was greeted with black flags by young revolutionaries and presented him black flowers in token of sorrow of Bhagat Singh’s execution. It is to be noticed that Gandhi did not support violent action of India’s one of the best known martyrs.

Conclusion:

Though Karachi session is short business like it makes significant impact on several dimensions. This session mostly conducted in the Hindi and it becomes official language for Congress proceedings. This session stressed on Non Violence Gandhian Satyagraha lines. Patel became defacto boss for Congress. His popularity rose from local to State and National Level from this session. Power politics entered from this era. Patel took challenges within the party and outside the party and ménage with successful strategies. It stood balance between old and new.

The Karachi Congress thus sowed the seeds of Patel’s becoming by 1934 the defacto party boss an on defined post as powerful as the General Secretary of the Communist Party in Soviet Russia.⁸

It was he who built the Party machine through imposition of strict discipline and by giving it a mass base and the Congress drew its strength from a combination of Gandhi’s soul force and Patel’s muscle power. As Party boss, Patel supervised and directed the functioning of the Congress Ministries Post – 1937 Provincial elections.⁹

Vallabhbhai Patel guided the youth in proper way towards National Movement. Even Western Press also praised the leadership of Patel. There was one figure in Karachi, little known in the West but a power in India, who deserves mention. Next to Gandhi, it was Vallabhbhai Patel, India’s nearest thing to an old Tammany Hall boss, who ran convention. Under Gandhi’s Guidance, it had been Patel, a bald-headed, moustached, tough-minded, Pragmatic Peasant Lawyer, who built up the Congress to a Formidable National Political Party, the only one there was in India. He was the boss of the machine”.¹⁰

Sardar Patel clearly carried the party from Individual interests to broad Institutional benefits. For this even president is below to the party high command. That nature even still prevailed in many political parties. Patel bluntly stated “The Congress President has no dictatorial Powers. He is the Chairman of a well-knit organisation. He regulates the proceedings and carries out decisions of the Congress as they may be arrived at from time to time. The Congress does not part with its ample powers by electing any Individual, no matter who he is”

The Karachi session became memorable for its resolution on Fundamental Rights and the National Economic Programme. Even though the Congress had from its inception

fought for the economic interests, civil liberties and political rights of the people. This was the first time that the Congress defined what Swaraj.

Several stalwarts acted as presidents of Indian National Congress from its inception. But their role and impact was time bound for some years. However Sardar Patel president ship for Indian National Congress is indeed remarkable one and a significant once. Both Patel and Indian National Congress got impact after Karachi Congress session. It made party on strong lines even to bend mighty leaders before the party high command.

Patel's was an attempt in establishing the authority of the Congress Executive as a body above the Congress President and even himself. His main concern seemed to be to usher in a healthy democratic process in evolution to become subservient to an individual's dictatorial or magisterial behaviour.

References:

- 1.Nehru, Jawaharlal : "A Bunch of Old Letters" P. 61
- 2.Sitaramayya, B. Pattabai : "The History of Indian National Congress" (1885-1935) P. 767.
- 3.Nehru, Jawaharlal : "Jawaharlal Nehru : An Autobiography" P.265.
4. Prof. Abdul Majid Khan ,Life and Speeches of Sardar Patel ,Indian Printing Works ,New Delhi,1951,p.94
- 5.Parikh Narhari D : "Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel" Vol-II, P. 55
6. Krishna. B, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel India's Ironman Harper Collins Publishers India – New Delhi – 1997, P. 181
- 7.Jagadish Saran Sharma – India Since the Advent of British A Descriptive Chronology – S.Chand & Co., Delhi – 1920,p.337
8. B. Krishna ,op.cit. p. 157
9. B. Krishna ,op.cit. p. ii
- 10.Shirer, Willium : "Gandhi a Memoir, Simon &Schutler Newyork 1979, P. 126