



Mains Practice Question

Q. "Integration of princely states under Sardar Patel offers lessons for modern India's federal challenges." Analyze this statement in context of recent issues arising out of demand for regional autonomy. (250 words)

28 Oct, 2024 GS Paper 1 History

Approach

- Introduce the answer by highlighting how Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel effectively integrated princely states into India, managing tensions.
- Give arguments to how Patel's approach offers lessons for resolving current regional autonomy issues or how it is being resolved.
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction:

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's integration of nearly **560 princely states post-independence** laid a foundation for unified India amid challenges of **diversity, partition, and security threats**.

- With regional autonomy demands and federal tensions today, Patel's approach offers insights into **balancing unity with diversity**.

Body

- **Unity in Diversity:** Patel encouraged integration by respecting cultural uniqueness, fostering a sense of national identity alongside local diversity.
 - For instance, he promised the Maharaja of Jodhpur **for famine relief and rail connectivity to meet local needs**, building trust in India's unity without undermining regional interests.
 - Today, recognizing regional languages (through **recognition as classical languages as done recently for Marathi, Pali, Prakrit, Assamese and Bengali**) and cultures echoes Patel's method of uniting through respect for diversity.
- **Flexible Federalism:** Patel combined diplomacy with strategic force when necessary. In Hyderabad's case, after all negotiations failed, he authorized "**Operation Polo**" to secure integration.
 - Elsewhere, he peacefully used concessions like **privy purses**.
 - This flexibility allowed smooth integration while respecting regional governance, a principle mirrored today in **tackling insurgency cases** like in **Manipur**.
- **Balancing Security and Autonomy:** Patel was alert to security risks in border states. For Kashmir, he secured communications and mobilized defense when threats arose. His swift military response to the **1947 invasion reinforced India's stance**.
 - This approach reflects today's balance in regions like Jammu and Kashmir, where revocation of **Article 370** involved a combination of legal and administrative strategies.
- **Economic Inclusivity:** Patel worked to absorb princely states economically, mitigating disparities. His assurance of **privy purses eased transitions**, while in **Junagadh**, he used local sentiment for peaceful accession.
 - Today, demands for **economic inclusivity**, such as **Bihar and Andhra Pradesh's**

special status request, underscore the need to address regional disparities, as Patel did to foster unity.

- **Constitutional Integrity:** Patel ensured all accessions respected India's Constitution, prioritizing national unity within federalism.
 - When rulers hesitated, such as **Jodhpur's Maharaja**, Patel balanced guarantees with constitutional compliance.
 - The current case of Naga peace talks underscores the importance of a constitutional framework in accommodating autonomy while ensuring the **sovereignty of the Indian state**.
- **Diplomacy over Force:** Patel relied primarily on diplomacy, reserving force for exceptional cases like Hyderabad.
 - Today's autonomy demands in northeastern states highlight the need for proactive diplomacy rather than coercive measures.
 - Today's regional autonomy demands, such as those in **Maharashtra (related to Maratha reservation)** or **Bodoland** (Assam), underscore a need to balance **regional identities with national priorities**.

Conclusion

Sardar Patel's approach to integrating princely states laid the groundwork for a **cohesive federal structure** that accommodates diversity without compromising unity. His pragmatic use of **flexible federalism, economic inclusivity, and limited force** offers valuable lessons for managing contemporary regional autonomy demands in India.

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