

The State of Saurashtra

The peninsula of Saurashtra situated at the northern end of the country's western seaboard comprised the fourteen salute states of Junagadh, Nawanagar , Bhavnagar , Dhrangadhra , Porbandar , Morvi, Gondal, Jafrabad , Wankaner , Palitana, Dhrol , Limbdi, Rajkot and Wadhwan, besides seventeen non salute states , and another 191 small states, exercising varying degrees of jurisdiction. The area was a little over 22,000 square miles with a population of nearly four million .

However , this does not reflect the actual picture on the ground. This is best captured by this quote from The Tribune (July 1939) : *As many as forty-six states have an area of two or less than two miles . eight of them, namely Bodanones, Gandhol, Morchopra ,Panchabda ,Samadhiala ,Chabbadia, Sanala, Satanomess and Vangadhra are just over half a mile each . yet none of these is the smallest state in Kathiawar . That distinction goes to Vajanones which has an area of 0.29 square mile, a population of just above two hundred ,and an annual income of Rs 500 / a year.*

The administration was further complicated by the fact that many of them had 'enclaves' outside their individual boundaries , with states like Nawanagar ,Gondal and Junagadh

having nine, eighteen and twenty-four separate areas of territory. The Department of states calculated that the map of Kathiawar could be divided into 860 different jurisdictions , Not only was internal trade hampered , smugglers and anti-social elements could easily slip into other jurisdictions to circumvent the law. Four years before the transfer of Power, under the attachment scheme , the Political department had joined the very small states with the neighbouring states – but after the lapse of Paramountcy and the Indian Independence Act, in a fairly irresponsible step, the Political department retroceded the Crown jurisdiction , even over railway lands. The States Department moved in post haste , and appointed M N Buch as the Regional Commissioner for Kathiawar who began exercising all the powers which the Crown's representative had, in the past.

Reference must be made here about the strength of the Kathiawar Rajakeeya Parishad(KRP), which was not only active on the political and social fronts, but thanks to the close association with both Gandhi ji and Sardar Patel, were also organized and disciplined.

Following the transfer of power , there was a wave of agitation all over Kathiawar for responsible government , and the states really did not have the wherewithal to manage the law-and-order situation , which was aggravated by Partition related events , especially the influx of refugees from Sindh and Junagadh imbroglio. Moreover, unlike in the past, when

popular movements were put down with assistance of the British, now the KRP had support from across the country, especially the Congress workers in the neighbouring districts. However, the States department was clear that in the long run the only option was responsible government – though there were three distinct views on how this should pan out .

One option – in fact the easiest was to merge all the the states- both jurisdictional and non-jurisdictional with the neighbouring province of Bombay. Another option was to limit the attachment to the smaller (non -jurisdictional states) only, and encourage the four prominent ones – Bhavnagar , Nawanagar , Junagadh and Dhrangadhra to act as ‘magnet states’ , but this too would not have ensured the establishment of a modern administration with separate legislatures, executive and judiciary for each of the four units. Hence the option of organizing all the Kathiawar states into one unit gained currency – as for historical reasons as well, the entire region had been identified as Saurashtra,

The first step in this direction was taken on 15th January 1948, when the Sardar inaugurated the transition of power from the Ruler of Bhavnagar in the presence of UN Dhebar, Balwant Rai Mehta and V P Menon. Later the Sardar addressed all the Kathiawar rulers at Rajkot where he hinted that ‘while little pools of water tend to become stagnant and useless, but that if they were joined together to form a big lake , the atmosphere is cooled , and there is universal benefit.’ In a subsequent meeting with Menon, the States Ministry made its views quite clear. ‘It is not possible for the 222 states of Kathiawar to continue their separate existence under modern conditions for much longer . the extinction of separate existence of States may not be palatable , but unless something is done in good time to stabilise

the situation in Kathiawar, the march of events may bring about more unpalatable results. One may therefore say that even as the States Ministry was quite clear about what it wanted, it was trying to build a consensus on this issue, and the name of Mahatma was also liberally invoked.

Within the next two days, the Maharaja of Dhrangadhra came out in open support of the Kathiawar union, and the Jam Saheb of Nawanagar was quietly told to acquiesce and become the Raj Pramukh of the proposed Union, or face the consequences of merger with Bombay. Jam Saheb maharaja Digvijay Sinhji, the nephew of the famous cricketer Ranjitsinhji seized the opportunity, and addressed all the Kathiawar princes of the need to preserve the identity of Kathiawar. As the Ruler of Junagadh had already fled to Pakistan, the popular mood after the plebiscite was to join the Kathiawar Union.

The inauguration of the United States of Kathiawar was performed by the Sardar on 15th February, 1948, and in his speech, the Jam Saheb said '*it is not as if we were tired monarchs who were fanned to rest, or bullied into submission. we have by our own volition pooled our sovereignties and covenanted to create this new state. the United States of Kathiawar so that the unity of India is more fully achieved.*'

In January 1950, before the adoption of the Indian Constitution, it was decided that the Union would be called Saurashtra, and that the Constituent Assembly of Saurashtra, together with the Rajpramukh (Jam Saheb) should form the interim legislature of the state.