

SARDAR VALLABHBHAI PATEL: A POLITICAL REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel regarded as the founder of modern India in the post-colonial era. Like Gandhi, he was also champion of national integrity and idea of pluralistic society based on the principles of truth, non-violence and Satyagrah. Thus, it is commonly believed in the Indian context that nationalism became redundant after achievement of Independence. But it is not always true. In this paper it is analysed through the political revision of Sardar Patel's thoughts and ideas.

Keywords: Nation Building, Integration, Gandhism, village swaraj

1. Introduction:

The post-colonial state in India reflected her specific relational affairs in making 'tryst with destiny' which actually arises from the structural changes brought about the pre-colonial and colonial experiences and alignments of different caste, class, religion and sects by the superstructures of political and administrative institutions which are established in that context and similarly, from radical re-alignments of 'new born' multi-dimensional forces which have been brought about in the post-colonial situation. There is no doubt that India was an inherited polity due to a peculiar historical legacy therefore, actually it was difficult to entirely dismantle the whole intuitional foundation of the colonial state in the aftermath of Independence. Therefore, borrowing both, the experience of divisions of territory and acceptances of new lights of hope India started her journey in a broken heart.

However, scholars like Bipan Chandra (Chandra, 1993) pointing out that it is a common tendency many of us to felt that nationalism became redundant after achievement of Independence. According to him this is because we constantly failed to redefine nationalism on the basis of what had been achieved. Nationalism had to be constantly redefined as the objectives of a particular stage of historical development were achieved and therefore were on the way to being superseded. In other words, 'new' nationalism had to take off from where 'old' nationalism had ended, even while maintaining continuity with it (Chandra, 1993; p. 93).

Historically, the British rule significantly brought about an enduring political consolidation in India. The effect of the British rule, plus innovative modern communicative system, in promoting a working sense of Indian unity was of vital importance. The maintenance of law and order, administrative unity, the introduction of a common body of socio-political concepts and values, the appearance of English as a lingua franca, fiscal and economic integration, all served to link together the disparate elements which made up the Indian society as did the common national struggle against British rule (Emerson, 1960; p. 12). And consequently this political struggle for the making of a new India to continue, but it had now to take a different form. Instead of massive anti-colonial movement and take the form of nation-building (Chandra, 1993; p. 98).

2. Post-colonial State in India and Its Nationalist Discourse :

The scholars basically highlights, two opposite school of thoughts which generally explain how this kind of 'nationalist' ideologies blending with the concepts of 'nation-building' and 'state-building' process that have produced since 1947. One school, belonging to one stream of Marxism, denies and decries the relevance of nationalism to the post-independence era. It in fact sees nationalism as a bourgeoisie ideology was to some extent relevant during the anti-colonial struggle. But once the anti – colonial struggle was over and this bourgeoisie captured state power, nationalism became irrelevant so far as the mass of the exploited and dominated were concerned (Chandra, 1993; p. 98). Therefore, in these sense, nationalism now became an instrumental weapon of the ruling elites and a chief ideological vehicle of domination. Similarly, the conceptual idea and its practical orientation of nation – building is to be denigrated because nation – building means according to this school of thoughts the capitalist renovation of socio – economic and political structure and maintain its order. As a result, the non-ruling classes always be the secondary positing in respect of the ruling classes is concern.

On the other hand, another school of thought of opinion sees 'all- India nationalism as oppressive and the effort to build a strong nation – state as authoritarian and therefore not to be supported. But it is willing to support nationalisms of what it regards as nationalities based on language, religion or tribe' (Chandra, 1993; p. 99). Not surprisingly, those who under – played nationalism before independence, seeing it as a form of antagonistic towards the dominant bourgeoisie nationalism. It is possibly not the place to refute these two schools of thought. Clearly, they are more or less guided by the critique of nationalism developed in West. But the origination and basic nature of Third World nationalism in Asia, Africa and Latin American countries are quite different in compare to developed West. Yet, as a part of ex-colonial world, India also replicate the potentialities of nationalist aspirations are not actually exhausted, but that in reality there is great need for it. Still it does provide a real solution to the real problem of uniting the masses in their struggle for socio-cultural and politico-economic development which lies at the core of the idea of 'nation-building'. In this respect, ideologically, nationalism continues to serve social and political functionalities of the people for economic and social development. And one of the most crucial parts of this project is 'integration'.

3. Integration as tool for 'making a Nation':

In large and multi-national state like India, the problem of integrating people inhabiting different regions with varied language, religion, culture and ethnic communities, the task is an arduous one. As Weiner, analyzing the crisis of political development in new nation-states, pointed out the greatest task facing the new nation will be to the process of bringing culturally and socially discrete groups together into a single territorial unit, and the establishment of a sense of loyalty to that unit (Weiner, 1968; p. 27). Similarly, Claude Ake explain the problem as, 'how to build a single coherent political society from a multiplicity of 'traditional societies', how to increase cultural homogeneity and value consensus; and how to elicit, from the individual, deference and devotion to the claims of the state' (Claude, 1967). Therefore, it is important to accommodate and build consensus over different sheds and currents of nationalist imagination.

Nonetheless, the problem of integration has been "restricted to the determination of the nature and diffusion of nationalism in a particular transitional polity and the impact that nationalism had on the developmental process" (Alam, 1981; p. 2). On the eve of British withdrawal from India two forces operated, pan-Indian nationalism seeking an integrated independent India, and the separatists seeking its independent existence. At first, the Indian National Congress were not against giving the Right to Self-determination and even the Right to Secession to the aggrieved components and agreed to prepare a federal constitution with residuary power vested in the units. However, alarmed by the rising number of claims the

Congress did not agree to any proposal by any unit to secede from the Indian Union. Even though the Congress conjured that it cannot think in terms of compelling the people in any territorial unit to remain in the Indian Union against their will, the post-independent India wanted to inherit as much as the British India.

With the imminent lapse of paramountcy, a number of schemes were envisaged, demanding sovereign homelands, responsible governments, a state within the Indian union and threat to join Pakistan or other states. The task of the new government was therefore to prevent the disintegrative forces and integrate them with the mainland and protect the territory handed to them by the British. In this respect Vallabhbhai Patel's role in integrating different states with the Union of India and in facing up administratively to the trauma of the Partition and the partition riots was outstanding.

Nation is the product of a concrete historical process and therefore a long time in the making and thus that is the most important factors of the anti-colonialist agitation was to promote the process of 'nation-making' through the common platform against alien power through active ideological, political, cultural and economic efforts. Yet, in post – 1947 era it is in fact argued that the process of 'nation-building' was initiated and illuminated by a highly imaginative and dedicative activities of the leaders who had been engaged in the national liberation struggle and engaging themselves on different areas of 'nation-building' process like, task of integration, socio-economic developments and more or less it replicate as a 'safety-valve' to combat communalism through nationalist ideologies. Thus, as Bipan Chandra argued that 'there is the need to constantly redefine Indian nationalism so as to inspire the Indian people with realizable goals and objectives' (Chandra, 1993; p. 112). Nationalism therefore is still the most relevant ideology in the 'divided nation'. But at the same time, undoubtedly, it will be remembered that the task of redefinition of nationalism best to be judged of the heritage of freedom struggle and historical experiences and the values and principles developed in the past. We must remain true to the ideas and vision of our nationalist ancestors, and one of them is definitely is Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.

4. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel: A Gandhian Crusader:

Any study of Vallabhbhai Patel would show that he was a man of strong social commitment, a visionary with pragmatism and a leader capable of guiding the nation at a critical juncture of Indian polity. His life and activities have proved that a leader worth the name should have the capability of assimilating within himself all the essential qualities that the nation represents and that took a nation which gains independence after a long period of subjugation under foreign rule. Like many of the Indian leaders who took the task of making a modern India, Patel also had to consider each and every issue to understand the pulse of the people. It is not a very difficult task to understand that the post-colonial situation in India demanded a great number of promises from the newly independent Indian state. It is equally easy to appreciate that the infant state that India was immediately after the attainment of independence, was not capable of providing all kinds of services. The Indian society was totally fragmented, economy shattered and the polity segmented. In fact, independent state in India started its march amidst mainly hurdles.

To under Sardar Patel property, it will be relevant to begin the study with a reference to the 'link' between him and Gandhiji. It began with the election of Gandhiji as the President of the 'Gujrat Sabha'. Patel was elected as the Secretary. It was in the year 1917. Gujrat Sabha was converted into Gujrat Provincial Congress Committee in 1919. Thus, Sardar Patel's entry into politics "marked a revolutionary change in his life – a change that pushed him into public life and made him the popular leader that he was. This was the year in which the 'Guru' and the disciple met. The Guru was Mahatma Gandhi and the disciple was Vallabhbhai Patel. The relationship between the two great leaders was the greatest single factor for the success of our political struggle" (Murthi, 1976; p. 133).

Patel's commitment to secularism was deep-rooted and full of conviction. He believed that "there is good in all religions and if we follow the good, there is no danger. But if there is a mixed motive and if some people seek to explicit religion for political or other ends, then surely will that religion invite danger upon it" (Patel, 1976; P.104). He wanted "to build the Indian society in such a manner that everybody will be happy." (Patel, 1976). He appealed to everyone "to create an atmosphere of good will and harmony." He said: "*Learn to live in peace and learn to love your neighbour- whether he is a Christian or a Muslim or anybody else. Let us follow our own religion in the light of our own tenets and conscience. It is the solid substance that counts and there is plenty of it in all religions.*" (Patel, 1976; p. 105).

In the same tune in a highly emotional speech which he delivered on August 14, 1948, he held: "*In our domestic sphere, we must conform faithfully to the secular ideals which we have before us and conduct ourselves in a spirit of toleration, amity and good will.*" (Patel, 1976; p. 21). He further declared: "*there is no room in India for divided loyalties or conflicting allegiance.*" (Patel, 1976). He gave the assurance in this language: "*We must create an atmosphere in which everyone can live in confidence and security.*" (Patel, 1976).

Yet, it is held that Sardar's secularism was diluted secularism but Nehru's secularism was absolute secularism. It was been observed: "*There is no doubt that Sardar's diluted secularism was more popular and had more adherents than Pandit Nehru's absolute secularism.*" (Shankar, 1974; p.91) To him, religious belief is the sole criterion for judging a person or community by the criterion is always supreme loyalty to the country, which is another name of patriotism. He categorically declared that "in dealing with various issues, emphasis should be on a national rather than on a sectional or regional approach." (Patel, 1976; p.243).

Therefore, it is clear that in the entire thought making process of Patel, only one issue dominated, that is to say, patriotism first and patriotism last. That is why he could rise above any religious consideration. His prime objective in life and action was one – national cohesion. What he demanded from the people was nothing but a feeling of patriotism based on a solid sense of nationalism. The following observation by Patel bears testimony to this idea: "*In this country, where we have a secular state, where different communities with different religions and different sects, have been residing for centuries and who we wish should reside in future, we have a responsibility to see that the gulf between the communities is not widened and nothing which is preventable or which can be prevented without violating the principles of justice and fair play in done.*" (Patel, 1976).

It can be held that Patel had a vision of creating a society based on equality, justice and nationalism. He appeared to be very open minded and was ready to consider any 'ism' provided that brings peace and harmony in the society. Essentially what Patel had been striving for can be summed up under these views, namely, integrity, tolerance, equality and a sense of attachment with the nation or nationalism.

5. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel: Views on State and Society:

From this brief sketch on Patel's ideas, it will be convenient to touch upon his other views about the state and society. He followed Gandhiji when he supposed that efforts will be made to create a society where there will be no distinction of caste or creed as this country belongs to everyone residing within it. That is why Patel laid great importance increasing a democratic state. It may be mentioned here that democracy, to Patel, had wider meaning – a democratic system where democratic governance would prevail and a democratic value system where the high spirit of democratic ideals would dominate. He believed that it is only through democratic practices that people can find greater space in the decision-making process and with the people, restructuring and modernization of the society would be possible. For this reason, he

wanted to accord high priority to an alert and enlightened public opinion. He held, among other issues, that public opinion should act as the mechanism of eternal vigilance which could ensure liberty of the people. That is why; he was all in favour of the freedom of the press. He also held that the freedom of the press must be in terms with national aspirations and above all, with the high ideals of nationalism.

Similarly, Sardar insisted on having the spirit of cordiality and tolerance among all sections in the community. His famous saying has been: *“we should not spread the poison of hatred.”* From this conviction, he declared that stability and progress are two sides of the same coin. He was of the opinion that the history of democratic governance all over the world would suggest that a democracy can survive and achieve its goal if it is backed by stability which would provide the solid foundation for sustained development and progress. The primary aim, therefore, was to achieve that stability which was the surest foundation of progress. In this process, he also emphasized the role of a strong opposition and the achievement of progress would be possible when there would be unity of purpose, unity of aims and unity of endeavour. To him, negotiation, persuasion and accommodation are the three basic components of a stable democratic order. He stood for an integrated India and the way, he brought the erstwhile princely states shows his firm commitment to this idea.

The following observation of Patel sums up his entire thought process about the integration of the country: *“We are at a momentous stage of India. By common endeavour we can raise the country to greatness, while lack of unity will expose us to fresh calamities. I hope the Indian states will bear in mind that alternative to cooperation in the general interest is anarchy and chaos which will overwhelm great and small in common ruin if we are unable to act together in the minimum common task....let it be our proud privilege to leave a legacy of mutually beneficial relationship which would raise this sacred land to its proper place amongst the nations of the world and turn into an abode of peace and prosperity.”* (Patel, 1976; pp. 341-342).

Nonetheless, this observation by Sardar is sufficient to indicate the basic foundations of his ideas. Although Patel was a strong personality within the Congress Party and was very closer to Gandhiji, he always stood for dialogue and negotiation among different stake-holders, the primary goal, being a strong and integrated India. That is why; he could rise above party-politics and narrow interests and offered a far ranging set of solutions to end conflictual situations that the country was passing through immediately after independence.

6. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel: Economic Ideas

Closely following this comes Patel's economic ideas as he believed that only integration at the political level would be meaningless unless backed by a sound economic policy. Patel was in favour of strong idea of nation through political integration and this integration was key to development of marginal sections of the society. According to him villages were strong basics as unit of nation. In late stages of constitutional debates he propagated the idea of 'village swaraj' which is also the important element in Gandhi's Ram Rajaya. Truly he was not a utopian thinker; he discovered and shaped his idea of nation based on core democratic and legitimate values with pragmatic outlook. He believed that India suffered on economic front for two reasons: long subjugation under the British rule and lack of coordinated efforts. He held that one should not forget that India's economy was essentially agrarian in nature. It was therefore essential to develop village agricultural sector.

He in fact appealed to the farmers to produce more which would go to enhance the national income and ultimately would improve the economic condition of the country. In these words: *“My appeal to the agriculturalists is to work and work hard with a will to get the best of their exertions and deliver to*

government the maximum they can spare on the basis of their minimum requirements. They should help the government to implement many programmes of increasing food production so that we can restore the balance between food supply and demands of grains as quickly as possible. Whatever area can be brought under cultivation must be utilized to produce food grains.” (Murthi, 1976; p. 88).

To him, self-sufficiency in food and other basic requirements had been on the top of his economic agenda. Thus, as a true follower of Gandhiji, Patel believed in the non-violent way of reforming the society on all fronts – social, economic, political and others. That is why, like Gandhiji, he also favoured small-scale and cottage industries which could create for space for engaging local skills in the process of production. In one of his speeches delivered in Shillong before a huge gathering on 2nd January, 1948, Patel said: *“They say I am a friend of rulers and capitalists. But instead, I am a friend of Harijans and the poor and the tribal people. I am also a friend of socialists. But unlike many who indulge in the parrot cry of socialism, I have no property of my own. Before you talk of socialism, you must ask yourself how much wealth you have created by your own labour.”* (Patel, 1976; p. 14).

7. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel: Pragmatic Vision :

Sardar was a true believer of the conception of pluralism. He wanted to maintain the integrity of country without any kinds of caste, class, religion and regional considerations. In fact, Sardar Patel wanted to create a democratic pluralistic society with the base of ‘unity and integrity’. Sardar Patel was convinced that the future of India lay in consolidation, not in disintegration in the name of language or religion. He thought the nation to be a cohesive unit, changed the complexion of India by merging the small independent states into administratively viable units and brought about a new wave of nationalism. He did not want this spirit to be lots of fostering new divisionary forces. That is why he deeply concentrated crucial issues when our constitution developed.

As a Chairman of the Advisory Committee, Sardar Patel presented the Interim Report on the subject on Fundamental Rights to the Constituent Assembly on 29th April, 1947. He recommended that Fundamental Rights should be divided into two parts – one part consisting of justiciable rights and the other part, consisting of non-justiciable rights. The Interim Report dealt with justiciable fundamental rights and the committee prepared a list of such justiciable rights. The main recommendations of the Committee were accepted by the Constituent Ammebly. (CAD, Vol. I; p. 14).

The ethos of the Constituent Assembly on this issue has been correctly captured in this following observation: *“the history of our country, the composition of its population, ideological differences among the different sections of the population, our social traditions and requirements of true democracy, all necessitated it.”* (Banerjee, 1968; p. 36). In this respect, Patel declared: *“Our mission is to satisfy everyone at least let us prove we can rule ourselves and we have an ambition to rule others.”* (Austin, 1972; p. 59)

Similarly, he identified both government and fellow citizen as important two of the pillars for maintenance of this integrity. In actual fact, Patel was not in the favour of imposing any kind of censorship to constitutional and civic rights of people but he urged institutions and citizen both to become responsible towards freedom and their rights. In this respect he supported the constructive criticism for governance. As he stated *“While making constructive criticism of the government and pointing out the errors of it . . . You should remember that you have got a higher responsibility towards maintenance of future of society and of the integrity of the country and its freedom”* (Khan, 1951; p.18).

Indeed, Sardar Patel thus a dream to build a strong and consolidated India was complete with the formation of Indian federation. In the words of V.V. Giri, the former President of India: “Sardar is rightly being called the architect of India’s unity. His political sagacity, robust patriotism, practical wisdom and great administrative skill have made him one of the greatest statesmen of the world Sardar used all his great talents in welding India into one entity and administrative unity.” (The Times of India, November 2, 1973).

8. Concluding observation:

It is however true that Sardar Patel might have some limitations in his thought and action. At the same time it is equally true to hold that Sardar Patel was a leader who was always guided by his sense of practical necessity. He practiced what he believed. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel may not be a great philosopher but a great man of great action. Therein lays Sardar Patel’s greatness.

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