

SARDAR PATEL FOR ADMINISTRATORS: YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW

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Introduction

Sardar Patel is hailed as the greatest visionary administrator of India. His contributions towards building up the civil services in post-independence India and his vision and ideas about administration can be considered as the ‘gold standard’ of public administration, governance and public policy. Though there are hundreds of great lessons we learn from Sardar Patel, seven of them are highlighted here – existence of IAS, minister-administrator relations, values and ethics, leadership lessons, the real meaning of freedom, vision on economy, and lessons for future administrators. When in need, a modern-day administrator should look upto Patel for a solution – apt, timely and effective.

When the 21st Century is throwing up newer and newer challenges of disease, disarray, disempowerment, disdain; and the common citizen is looking towards the administrators and policymakers to provide healing touch in different domains of governance, no one other than Sardar Patel comes to our mind for showing us the right path to handle these challenges. When we go through the mind and speeches of Sardar Patel both before and after the independence of India, we feel that the pearls of wisdom showered by him, and the governance instrumentalities highlighted and practiced by him, make Sardar Patel absolutely relevant for all administrators – of yesterday, today and tomorrow. There would hardly be any other towering personality of the era of our independence than Sardar Patel as he is considered the ‘light house’ showing the path to hundreds of civil servants and administrators in their journey towards socio-economic, cultural, political, technological and scientific development of our country. Any writing, literature, debate, or statement of Sardar Patel almost three-quarters of a century ago looks like a lecture delivered by a visionary world-class administrative personality today.

Sardar Patel was the most distinguished statesman–administrator of Independent India. He had the rare combination of the “vision of a statesman with the sagacity and practical outlook of an administrator” (Singh 1987: 3). His vision, thoughts, practical approach, personal and personality traits, leadership style, forward-thinking, foresight, planning, etc. are all traits and lessons which can be considered as the benchmarks of governance for public policymakers and administrators. His foresight about the future of India and the role of administrators and bureaucrats was immaculate. The dreams and aspirations not only of our great freedom fighters but also of the common man of India at the dawn of 15th August, 1947 when the First Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru made his famous ‘Tryst with Destiny’ speech – can only be realised if we treat Sardar Patel as the torchbearer and solution provider in our day-to-day governance.

Though there are numerous lessons for the modern-day administrators to be learnt from Sardar Patel, a few of them in the context of present-day governance challenges and their suggested solutions are presented here.

Existence of Indian Administrative Services

In the modern-day, an Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer may not realise fully his or her existence as an IAS officer, had it not been the persistent determination of Sardar Patel to continue with the administrative structure in the post-independence era. During the various Constituent Assembly, it was Sardar Patel who persistently emphasised the continuation of the civil services in India – though with a few changes in approach and orientation. He described civil services as the ‘steel frame’ of India. He can be considered the ‘Father of Modern All India Services’.

Sardar Patel had a deep understanding of the lessons of Indian history. He knew that regional and other narrow loyalties which lead to chronic divisiveness would harm India in the absence of a central authority. He emphasised that there was no alternative to the administrative system prevalent in India at the time of independence, though it required a shift in the objectives and functioning. He was not a person to discard everything from the previous regime without going into the pros and cons. Sardar Patel as Home Minister in the Interim Government convened a Conference of Provincial Premiers on 21-22 October, 1946 to convince them about the need and justification of setting up of All-India Administrative Services. Even during the Constituent Assembly debates on October 10, 1949, he was firm as a rock while categorically stating that “The Union will go, you will not have a united India, if you have not a good all-India service” (Sardar Patel 1949: 51). While giving a speech to the new recruits of civil services at Metcalfe House in Delhi in 1947, he said that the existing Indian Civil Service (ICS) was neither Indian, nor civil, nor imbued with any spirit of service. Though he justified the need for the continuation of

the Indian Civil Services, he re-designated them from ICS to IAS and from IP (Imperial Police) to IPS (Indian Police Service).

The change was not just in nomenclature, but in the vision and mission of the post-independence civil services. The new services were to be manned by ‘Indians’ - contrary to predominant Britishers in ICS (though the number of Indians in ICS grew gradually). It was ‘Administrative’ – to deal with the administration of India as a whole including the princely states. Ultimately, it was to be treated as a ‘Service’ - service to the nation, service to the people of India and service to fulfill the goals of independence. He observed that it was essential for independent India’s administrative machinery to have a strong frame, capable of withstanding stresses, and of maintaining discipline in administration and peace in society.

Sardar was of the firm opinion that “an efficient, disciplined and contented service assured of its prospects as a result of diligent and honest work, is a *sine qua non* of sound administration” (Sardar Patel 1948). The Indian Administrative Services need to have an understanding of India’s past, present and future - in social, cultural, economic and political domains. All India Services were essential for the administration and smooth functioning of the Constitution of India in general, and law and order in particular. Singh (1987: 1) observes that never before in our history since the Mauryan bureaucracy, India had a uniform system of administration that included every part of the country. Patel felt that the men and women occupying positions in the All-India Services were capable and trained, and could very well earn their living elsewhere, but the country would be deprived of this robust, time-tested and committed organ of the government. Patel stood for the constitutional protection and safeguards for the civil services which are now enshrined in Article 311 of the Constitution.

Sardar Patel not only ensured the survival of the civil services in India, but he cautioned the powers in the government and Parliament that the civil services should be above the party. He stated that the government should have no or minimum role in the recruitment, discipline, or control of civil services. “You are the pioneers in the Indian Service, and the future of this Service will depend much upon the foundation and the traditions that will be laid down by you, by your character and abilities and by your spirit of service”, said Patel to the IAS probationers (Sardar Patel 1947).

He also built the ‘tenure’ system to ensure coherence in the posting of IAS officers in the field and also in the State secretariats. This was to have convergence on what we call Policy Formulation and Policy Implementation in modern-day parlance. This thought is all the more relevant in the present day scenario, when we observe that many civil servants in their initial years of service do not know how things move at the higher levels in policy formulation, and conversely many civil servants who do not have adequate

field experience as District Collector/Additional Collector may not really appreciate how things work at the ground level, and how public policy formulation should take care of the implementation issues right at the formulation stage (Hill and Hupe 2002).

Minister–Administrator Relations

Sardar Patel’s prescriptions of the delicate relationship between Ministers and Administrators or Politicians and Bureaucrats are as relevant even today as they were yesterday. He has lessons for both the players (Ministers and Administrators). He realised more than any other of his colleagues that a civil servant could act as a faithful agent in the solution of the country’s problems. He observed “do not quarrel with the instruments with which you want to work. Take work from them. Every man wants some sort of encouragement” (Sardar Patel 1949).

He was a great votary of providing full freedom to the civil servants to express their views without fear or restraint when he said “You will not have a united India, if you have not a good All-India Service which has the independence to speak out its mind. Today, my Secretary can write a note opposed to my views. If you do not give your honest opinion for fear that it will displease your Minister, please then you had better to go. I will never be displeased over a frank expression of opinion” (Sardar Patel 1947).

Many of the officers including V.P. Menon (Menon 1985), V. Shankar (Shankar 1974, 1976), H.S.R. Iyengar (Iyengar 1964a, 1964b) who worked with him observed that Sardar Patel expected the officers to think and act independently to the best of their knowledge and ability without shirking responsibility (Singh 2019: 71). Since Sardar was handling too many issues like the independence of India, the Kashmir issue, the integration of princely states, performance of official duties as Home Minister of India, being the chief troubleshooter of the government, he did not believe in reading the files in detail for understanding the administrative issues. Rather he would take oral briefings from senior officers who were expected to come fully prepared. After giving them a patient hearing, Sardar Patel would have a crystal clear knowledge of the policy problem and would provide immediate solutions, the steps to be taken by civil servants and others based on his deep understanding of people and problems. Once decided, he would be firm in his proposed policy actions and would expect his officers to implement what exactly had been envisaged for them.

The above relationship has huge implications in modern-day governance where the ties between the politician and the administrator may be seen to be thwarted in one or the other part of the country. Of course, the Constitution of India gives supreme power to the people of India which ultimately means the

government in power as distinct from the party in power. The political class constitutes legislature and the political executive, whereas the civil services constitute the permanent executive. The ultimate decision in a democracy is of the political class through the government in power, yet the civil services have a tremendous role to play. In a vast and diverse country like India, the civil services should provide free and fair opinion and assessment of various public policies based on their knowledge, empirical evidence and practical issues of implementation. The civil servants should think about a public policy issue from diverse perspectives and send them on file to the higher authorities. Ultimately, it is for the political powers to accept or reject the recommendations of the officers; and they have full right to overrule the officers. For this whole act, neither of the two (politician or civil servant) should be seen with a suspicious eye as both are performing their duties in their respective roles. We have seen many instances in the past, where we find the balance between in the minister-civil servant relationship to have been broken, causing catastrophic consequences for the country. This should be avoided while keeping Patel's prescriptions in mind.

Values and Ethics

Sardar Patel gave a lot of emphasis on values and ethics in administrators. He knew that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Hence, he called for effective use of power and not an abuse of state power. According to Patel, the power which the administrators wield can bring the nation great dividends if rightly used, but can bring harm and disrepute if abused. He emphasised the need for compassion in these words, "we always speak of India's culture, of Indian civilisation, but do we ever pause to think that the relief of the poor, mutual aid among neighbours, charity to the helpless and kindness to the down-trodden have been the shining virtues of that culture and civilisation?" He observed that trust in his word is a far greater asset of an administrator (Singh 1987: 24). Compassion is not a weakness, but the strength of a man of iron. At a university function, he described himself as a graduate of the university of life. Even C. Rajagopalachari (1955) observed "character is as important for administrators at every level, from the Chief Secretary down to the last grade servant, as sunlight is to every form of life". The 'gathering storms' of today can be handled through the sagacity of Patel's wisdom (Thakkar and Sanghvi 2007).

The above principles hold true in modern times when we observe based on various research studies that it is not the Intelligent Quotient (IQ) and technical skills, but the Emotional Quotient (EQ) and Emotional Intelligence (EI) which contribute ninety per cent of the success of senior managers (Goleman 1998, Cooper and Sawaf 1998). Today's administrator is nothing if he or she is devoid of values and ethics. Citizens carry a lot of expectations

and trust upon the various administrative functionaries. For instance, a poor widow coming to meet the District Collector hopes that she would be given a patient hearing and would be sanctioned the widow pension. Ethical values are not anachronistic to modernity but a sign of virtue of an administrator, working to bring improvements in the life of people. Even modern concepts of Welfare Economics and Behavioural Economics point towards these values for development in a country.

Patel and Leadership Lessons

Patel gives a lot of leadership lessons that can give modern-day leadership *gurus* a run for their money. State Secretary V.P. Menon who worked closely with Patel describes the latter's leadership style as that of full trust in his men. Sardar never assumed or showed that he knew everything, and he would always formulate a policy or opinion after free and frank consultations. "Whenever we entered into any discussion, we do so as personal friends rather than as Minister and Secretary". Patel was a great listener. His decision-making was quick and sturdy. Patel was a very good judge of people, and he generally managed to select very competent people to work with him. He was a gifted team builder. His personality showed empathy and tenacity which are great virtues of a leader (Singh and Raval 2014). He was a man of action whose teachers were not books or doctrines but facts of life (Chaturvedi 1977).

The modern literature on leadership has empirically proven the utility of all the above traits for a successful leader. We all know administrators have to deal with numerous situations every day where leadership skills and instant decision-making is required. However, this requires knowledge, skills and attitude (Jain 2011). Unless the modern administrator equips himself with requisite knowledge coupled with commensurate skills and right attitude, no decision-making is feasible for solving ever-increasing and unanticipated challenges of administration. This can be done through the Art of Listening – listening to others, juniors, seniors and common people. Many times, the civil servants assume that once they have qualified the UPSC examination and completed the mandatory training in the academies, they know everything and there is no need for knowledge enhancement. Nothing can be far from reality. Knowledge and skill upgradation is a life-long process and every administrator should attempt to acquire higher knowledge and skills, because even if they are able to implement ten per cent of newly acquired knowledge and skills into their domains of administration, it would greatly enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of public service delivery.

Patel and the Real Meaning of 'Freedom'

Though India attained political independence in 1947, Sardar Patel described freedom as 'happiness for all'. "What we have is not *swaraj* but only

freedom from foreign rule. There may be rich and poor, happy and unhappy but there can be no difference in stature between one citizen and the other. True freedom will only come when we can rid ourselves of these weaknesses and realise our real responsibility and discharge it” (Sardar Patel 1975).

We see a lot of similarity in the perspectives on freedom as observed by Patel and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen. Sen also considers freedom as the end purpose of development in his ‘Development As Freedom’ (Sen 1999) where freedom is to remove various kinds of deprivations and disempowerments. The State should strive to bring this kind of freedom to the citizens where everyone should feel himself as an active participant in the process and outcomes of development, and not just a mute spectator of progress happening in the lives of others. The poor man should ‘feel’ rather than ‘see’ prosperity. The development process should be inclusive (Jain 2017) to enhance economic, political and cultural freedom for the maximum number of people in the society. Only then can we call ourselves true apostles of freedom.

Patel as a Foresighted Economist

Patel had not only notable political and administrative ideas, but robust economic ideas as well. He can be considered a foresighted economist. He treated growth as essential for the country, and emphasised higher production of goods for domestic supply. He viewed private investors as partners in this process who should not be suspected; rather they should be encouraged. He was also a votary of less restrictions on production, trade and commerce. He viewed import substitution necessary for self-reliance (Dholakia 2018).

All these ideas make complete sense in the 21st-century Indian economy. We all know that growth is essential for providing resources to undertake welfare activities by the state (though growth is a necessary but not sufficient condition for inclusive development (Sen and Dreze 2013)). At the time of India’s independence, since private sector was underdeveloped, domestic supply of goods and services was a constraint; and hence both public and private sectors had to pitch in to reduce import dependence. Private sector participation is a much-welcomed thing now with top institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, and Nobel prize economists like Joseph Stiglitz (Stiglitz 2019) emphasising the role of markets and private sector. Indian economy in the pre-1991 era suffered because of the state-led, public-sector driven model which is paving way for the market-led and private-sector driven model now. Similarly, the licence-permit *raj* in the pre-1991 era constrained the growth of the Indian industry (Ahluwalia and Little 2012). Raghuram Rajan (2019) also emphasises the role of communities along with markets and state for development. All the economic ideas of Sardar Patel are worth noting as India aims to become one of the top economies in the world having already achieved the status of a fastest developing economy.

Patel and Future Administrators

Patel gives plenty of ideas and ideals which should be adopted by present and future administrators. In a democracy, people expect that the administration should facilitate the realisation of their legitimate claims and entitlements. This enhances the importance of integrity, responsiveness, accountability, efficiency and impartiality in administration (Chaturvedi 2017: viii). As emphasised by Sardar Patel, the administrators should have discipline, *esprit de corps*, integrity, incorruptibility, impartiality, etc. The administrators should make a common person feel that he is one of them. “The lowliest of the people should have access to you, and they should be able to open their hearts before you”.

He considered that civil servants represent the central authority, and the reputation and goodwill of the Government of India will depend upon them as to how they perform. This is very true in every sense of the term. As observed by Jain (2010), for a common man, a *Patwari* is more important than a Collector, a Constable is more important than a Superintendent of Police, a Lineman is more important than an Executive Engineer, etc. since they come directly in contact with the *Patwaris*, Constables and Linemen on a day-to-day basis. The civil servants carry the reputation, prestige and goodwill of the government. They are the eyes, ears and mouth of the government. Common people see the implementation of the schemes at the village level and make up their minds on the effectiveness of the government policies and programmes. Often, many things are achieved by the moral authority of the government without any need for action. However, this moral authority takes time to build, and if power is abused, it is lost completely (Singh 1987: 15). The administration should have a common face (Chaturvedi 2017). Sardar Patel demanded disciplined and efficient service from administrators, but also treated them with courtesy and consideration. This way he got the best out of them.

Patel emphasised the importance of implementation. He asked for the defense of honest people from the shadow of black sheep. He called upon the youth to concentrate on the paramount need of the hour namely constructive approach to the country’s problems (Sardar Patel 1982).

All that is given above hardly needs any explanation, or over-emphasis. We need humane, efficient, sensitive, result-oriented, hardworking, and proficient persons in administration. Many times, we observe that policies are made by the Secretaries without paying adequate attention to the implementation issues. Similarly, despite best of policies, lack of application and commitment in implementation makes them ineffective at the ground level (Weimer and Vining 2011). The modern concepts of ‘good governance’ and ‘governance for development’ enunciated by the World Bank (1992, 2017) highlight the importance of transparency, accessibility, accountability, responsiveness,

fairness and equity as essential constituents of good governance and inclusive development (Jain 2017).

Concluding Remarks

Sardar Patel is for all generations of administrators – yesterday, today and tomorrow. Every word he spoke, every thought he carried and every action he implemented are lessons in public policy formulation, implementation, governance and public administration. In this paper, a few aspects and ideas of Sardar Patel have been highlighted how they are completely and precisely relevant and implementable in modern-day administration. The philosophy and ideas of Sardar Patel ought to be emulated by modern-day administrators. Whenever in need, the administrators should read some of Sardar Patel’s literature, statements, or speeches; and they would get a solution for their administrative problem at hand.

The challenge of the twenty-first century in administration and governance can be handled if we adopt Sardar Patel’s ideas. He was a visionary in the true sense of the term. As an administrative thinker (Goel 2013) and practitioner, Sardar Patel can be equated with visionaries including Kautilya, who wrote *Arthashastra* more than two thousand years ago, or even great rulers like Ashoka and Akbar. Truly, he is the greatest statesman-administrator of independent India. But for him, Indian administration and governance would have been paradigmatically different.

Considering that Sardar Patel had less than five years to accomplish his mission (he breathed his last in 1950) all his achievements look even more awesome and stupendous. We wish he had lived longer to plan and implement various governance solutions in India with success and poise as he did in the unification of the princely states. His prescriptions and ideas should be on the table of every administrator and civil servant, and more so in their hearts.

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