

PATEL ON NATION, NATIONALISM AND NATION- BUILDING

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The historical root of the concept of India as a modern nation acquired form, shape and identity through the process of anti-colonial movement. Before the emergence of Indian national movement, India as an identity was portrayed as a mere geographical entity with divisive social, cultural, linguistic, religious and political expressions by imperialist and neo-imperialist historians. In the process of research on the notion of nation it has emerged as a complex concept. Social scientists agree that it may not be easy to define a nation. There is always the danger of reification, emanating from singular aspect of nation and nationalism – be it cultural, religious, political or economic. It has also been seen how significant myth, history and reason become essential in defining concept of nation and nationalism.

In the study of Sardar Patel's notion of nation and nationalism we find predominance of reason. Ironically, historians have often been ideological, partisan and monocentric in their research on Sardar Patel. They focused mostly on political and contentious issues, ignoring the context. Hence, if most leaders of the National Movement were projected as secular, modern, scientific, rationalist, and democratic; Patel was caricatured as stern, puritanical, conservative, authoritarian, anti-left, soft-communalist. Therefore, researchers and historians largely highlighted those perspectives of Patel on issues like nation, partition and communalism, which could be explained by taking recourse to history and myth and not reason.

Patel's position on the question of nation and nationalism - their definition and significance emerged from the same moral and ethical value system from which Gokhale, Tilak, Gandhi and Nehru's arose. He accepted the position of early leaders of Indian National Congress on the notion of nationalism. He criticised narrow expositions on the concept of nation and nationalism and placed citizenship above religious, ethnic and caste identities. He strongly reacted to any views which encouraged particularistic variety of nationalism based on ideology, community or cultural groups. Notably Patel in defining nationalism

did not draw from Hindu scriptures and mythologies. He largely repeated the metaphors which Gandhiji used while propounding the ideology of nationalism, explaining the policies, programs and strategies of the Congress. The nationalism which he subscribed to was a product of composite phenomenon which evolved over a period of time by intermeshing of several traditions. Central to Patel's nationalism was the attainment of independence from colonial rule, followed by engineering a robust process of all-inclusive national reconstruction. He did not, unlike some other leaders, revive or initiate any religious festivals or fairs for the spread of nationalist consciousness in the country. He criticised the growth of communal tendencies and asked people to revive and remember themselves as citizens only. 'If you forget your citizenship and talk of religion it is a cloak. Therefore, when I hear some people talking about Hinduism in danger, I feel that they are going a wrong way' (See Neerja Singh, *Myth of the Indian Right*, 2015, pp. 17-18). Elaborating on his view on political nationalism, Patel stated that all communities in India would have equal rights as Indian citizens and they would have full protection of the law and government, to live in peace. Furthermore, he highlighted that 'As in the long run it would be in the interest of all to forget that there is anything like majority or minority in this country and that in India there is only one community – that is, one Nation'. (Ibid., p. 18). Patel strongly reaffirmed that, 'In free India there would be no distinction of caste, creed or religion or of classes resulting in the domination of one section over another. There may be rich and poor, happy and unhappy, but there would be no difference in status between one citizen and the other.' (Neerja Singh, 20015).

For Patel *swaraj* did not mean removal of white sahibs and placing black sahibs, but it meant establishment of *Raj* of farmers and *majur raj*, reviving spinning wheel and village home productions, to help the starving millions.

Democracy, according to him, should be decentralised and it should percolate down to the economic and social sphere, without jeopardising the nation's security and encourage production and cultural progress of the subjects and the nation as a whole. (Ibid.). He supported management of corporate life of villages by means of popularly elected panchayat and attaining economic self-sufficiency in the essentials of life.

Patel regarded civil liberty as the soul of democracy. He agreed with the principles of the Indian Civil Liberty Union, right of free association and combination, equality before law as long as the purpose was not opposed to law or morality.

Patel was categorical in his articulation on the nature of civil liberty. According to him 'The people will have full civil liberty on condition that class war and violence are not preached... The people of India do not want civil liberties with conditions attached to them. On the contrary the people of India, especially the workers must have the unconditional liberty of association, of

going on strike, of making speeches and of issuing newspapers. In the whole of civilised world this indeed is the meaning of civil liberties on which depends our freedom.' But 'if civil liberty means the liberty of association with a view to molest and even to assault ... then our country at least had better remain without the pale of the civilised sphere. Civil liberties for which the Congress pledged to truth and non-violence mean liberty conditioned by the use of truth and non-violence' (See Patel Papers, Ahemadabad).

Patel made hard hitting attack on the 'leftists' viewpoint of civil liberties. He favored duty bound civil liberty. According to him, 'It would be a poor return for those sacrifices and sufferings if we fail to preserve the liberties which we have won after so much struggle and to surrender them to the merciless and ruthless tactics of a comparatively small number of persons whose inspiration, methods and culture are all of a foreign stamp. When we think of civil liberties of the extremely small number of persons concerned, let the House also think of the liberties of the millions of people threatened by the activities of individuals whose civil liberties we have curtailed. I am using the words "civil liberties" in connection with these individuals with some reluctance because for them liberty is synonymous with license and there is hardly any difference between civil and criminal' (Ibid).

Patel not only regarded civil liberties as cornerstone of democracy but considered freedom of press as life and blood of civil liberty 'The freedom of Press is an ideal that we cherish as it is a concomitant of democracy. If we want a democratic rule, we must have freedom of press, freedom of speech, freedom of expression and the freedom of association.' (Ibid). However, he was against unconditional freedom which was the demand of the left. According to him, 'All kinds of freedom are good, but if in this big assembly one or two youngsters try to frighten people by hurling bombs or crackers at them what are we to do? Can we allow them freedom? Can we ask policemen not to handle them? Should we call it freedom? It is not freedom but lunacy and asylum are the only proper place for him' (Ibid).

In his instruction to the Ministries on civil liberties Patel stated, 'Civil Liberty must have the full scope in Congress regime. Please note the adjective civil before 'liberty'. The moment you drop the word 'civil', 'liberty' will then mean license. No responsible government can allow license or unlimited liberty to the people. If the criminal liberty of a few persons should be restrained for exercise of the civil liberty of lakhs of law-abiding citizens and if the Congress Ministries fail to impose restrictions on those few, then they will be failing in duty' (Ibid).

Patel advocated civil liberty tempered by a sense of duty and responsibility. In a letter to S. K. Patil dated 28 June 1937, he highlighted this aspect with deep clarity, 'A newspaper in the hands of an office bearer of an important Congress organisation is a dangerous weapon and can often be successfully

used to mislead public opinion by suppressing the truth and also by propagating untruth, unless the man holding that office has the courage to face unpopularity, risk his office and even incur the displeasure of his colleagues for the sake of standing by the truth and exposing fraud, hypocrisy and untruth. This is a difficult task. I frankly confess that you are not according to my judgement an equal to that task... My advice to you would be, resist the temptation of taking the responsibility of running a newspaper, until you are mentally, morally and financially equipped adequately for the task which to my mind is not so easy as is supposed to be... I hope you will not take this amiss. I understand your difficulties and your delicate position but we who have braved hardships and borne sufferings have not done so far, depriving our soul, and we are expected to have greater moral courage than the normal run of people to stand by truth in spite of difficulties and embarrassments' (Ibid).

The framework for democratisation of economy and society as visualised by Patel was based on Gandhi's constructive programme. In consonance with the Gandhian constructive programme of decentralisation of economy and society, Patel exhorted the peasants of Gujarat on 27-28 December 1934, while visiting various districts of Gujarat like Broach, Ras, Rampraja, Kareli, etc., to forsake drink, gambling and untouchability. They should use khaddar to help the peasantry and support home industries. He said swaraj could be achieved with the help of the village or home industries. Patel further elaborated that for India hand spinning and hand weaving were appropriate as it was impossible for a country like India to seek a solution to its question of village reconstruction or rehabilitation through industrial development.

According to Patel economic power would come to the villagers by strengthening village industries. Village industry would need village organisation. It would give rise to accumulation of money which till now was being sent to the cities. Thus, peasants would become independent of government as they would be able to generate resources at the village level.

In his speech to the women members of the Jyoti-Sangh, Ahmedabad on 2 October 1934 Patel explained what he meant by swadeshi and how it would strengthen the peasantry and give them economic power to make them self-reliant so that they could meet the difficulties imposed by the British government on them. He said, 'One definition given by you that Swadeshi is mill made cloth may be correct in one sense. But in a broader sense it is a great stigma. It is not necessary for us to popularise the mill cloth. Mill owners are monetarily in a very sound position. They would be able to dispatch their goods in every village without your help... when many varieties of khadi are available then why help the mills. I do not want you to hear the complaints of Bombay and Ahmedabad mill owners. When a number of persons had courted imprisonment at that time the mill owners of Bombay had entered into a contract with Lancashire and mortgaged the nation. How can we assist those who care for their own business

and have no feelings for the nation's welfare? The factory owners shall indulge in flattery to the Government. In that sense if we use only khadi, we would have the satisfaction of doing enough' (Ibid).

Generally speaking, Patel gave primacy to agriculture as the fountainhead of Indian economy but he realised the essentiality of industrialisation for its forward movement. Patel became more emphatic on the need for industrialisation, 'this is the age of scientific and industrial research. If we want to achieve our proper place in the community of nations we should carry on our work of research with speed and efficiency' (Ibid).

Patel, accepted the role of agriculture and village industries in the development of the rural sector. But for national canvas the two guiding principles for him were stability and self-sufficiency and these, he held, could not be achieved without industrialisation and strong army. He said, 'many say that we should adopt Gandhiji's programme. But they hardly realise that the government which has to maintain the army must have industrial installations too. For that we must have industrialisation. Some say that we should not industrialise but build our country on rural life. I spent a lifetime with Gandhiji. I am not a fool to forget his teachings. I also want village self-sufficiency. But what is the position in which you find yourself? Villagers are forsaking the villages for cities. If we do not have industries what will happen? Will villages equip the Army? Will they supply all the transport, guns and ammunitions, petrol, steel, clothing and other things which a well-equipped Army must possess? Instead of looking at the problem one sided we have to do justice to both towns and villages' (Ibid).

A true Gandhian, and peasant by instinct, Patel, could not remain apathetic to agrarian problems despite his support for a strong industry. But by 1947 he gave primacy to industry over agriculture. Strong center and well-equipped army required strong industrial base; therefore, industrialisation of Indian economy came to occupy position of prominence in Patel's thinking during this period. This shift in the position of Patel from his earlier stance was dictated by the emerging new challenges of the statecraft. He insisted that industry meant more production and considering the economic situation of the country the sooner the agricultural economy transformed itself into a predominantly industrial one, the better it would be for the country. Patel reiterated his view that India could be a welfare state like other industrialised nations only when it had advanced substantially in industrialisation. He also emphasised that agricultural economy should have balance of cash and food crops and it should be organised in such a manner that it should help in geometrical progression of industrial development which would increase general prosperity and thereby secure a higher standard of living for the common man. Furthermore, Patel categorically stated that 'If the world succeeds in having disarmament all over it then the scheme of village sufficiency would be an idle thing to follow. But

it is a far dream. Therefore, we have to plan for our industry and agriculture in order to meet our primary and immediate needs. In certain directions at least the country has to be industrialised rapidly and with all the efficiency needed for it. Otherwise, we are doomed in the modern context of the world. The modern army is not the army of bows and arrows. It is an army which requires many things which only machine can produce. Apart from arms and ammunitions, apart from the uniform and other things that are needful, it needs a large quantity of stores, jeeps, motors, mechanical appliances, aeroplanes and petrol and so many other things. And for that purpose, you must have industries and they should be developed in our own country.’ (Ibid).

For Patel, a balance should be maintained between agriculture and industry with focus on village industry. However, whatever be the instrument of development, whether large industries or cottage and village industries or agriculture, the economy should be free and it should establish relationships of cooperation.

Though an ardent follower of Gandhiji, Patel was of the opinion that industrialisation was a necessary evil of the modern times, but it should support agriculture as it was the foundation of the Indian economy. According to him, the state should own and control key industries and services and there should be a symbiotic relationship between cottage and large-scale industries (Patel Speech at Ahmedabad while laying the foundation stone of Ahmedabad Textile Research Association, 30th October 1950, See Patel Papers).

Patel accepted the critique of colonialism as expounded by the moderate and extremist leadership of the Congress. He also agreed to the earlier Congress leaderships’ advocacy for modern economic development based on modern industrial science and technology. The very fact of India being colonised by a small nation like England was an intimidating realisation, making him appreciate the significance of modern industrial economy in a country’s growth and strength. Patel realised this fact, ‘If the Indian government is to be seen today on the basis of Gandhian philosophy without army, I am prepared to change the whole thing.....Tomorrow the whole of India will be run from one end to the other if you do not have strong army’ (See Patel’s speech 12 November 1949, Patel Papers).

Elaborating on his view on political nationalism, Patel stated that all communities in India would have equal rights as Indian citizens and they would have full protection of the law and the government, to live in peace. Speaking further, Patel stated that ‘As in the long run it would be in the interest of all to forget that there is anything like majority or minority in this country and that in India there is only one community----that is one Nation.’

Patel placed citizenship, above religious, ethnic and caste identities. To him religion was a ‘matter between man and his maker and its mixing with

politics was seen as a dangerous business' (Ibid). Being a follower of cultural pluralism, Patel was of the view that 'It is the Hindus' duty to help protect Islam by rendering every possible assistance to the Muslims and expressing full faith in the goodness of that community' (Ibid). He did not support obscurantist cultural traditions and symbols for popularising nationalism. Unlike the extremist leaders of the Congress who opposed reforms like Age of Consent Bill, supported revival of Ganapati and Shivaji cultural- religious festivals and taking pledges before Kali and Durga, Sardar Patel insisted on propagating the concept of secular citizenship and nationhood under a democratic governance of liberal and egalitarian character.

Patel did not suffer from any kind of civilisational delusion of grandeur. He did not reject everything Western as materialistic and crude, and accepting everything Eastern as metaphysical and spiritual. He regarded social reforms to be an essential precondition for the success of the anti-imperialist struggle. He wanted Congress to take up social issues like untouchability, education, dowry, child-marriage, purdah, prohibition, rural indebtedness, conversion, and ritualism. For bringing about a humanistic, undogmatic and non-violent *swarajya*, Patel regarded abolition of untouchability as the most essential humane act. Expressing his feelings over the issue, Patel said 'I advise you to abolish untouchability which is a curse to the Hindu community of India. You cannot discard your own brother. According to the Hindu philosophy, it is a sin to discard any one who is living. Soul is God and even an untouchable has soul in him. You therefore cannot discard God-soul' (See Patel Papers).

Patel blamed the Brahmins for practicing falsehood and deceit in the name of protecting Hindu religion. Expressing his anger at the prevailing injustice sanctified and justified by Brahmanism, Patel said that Hindu religion is divided and it now exists only in outward show such as applying religious sectarian mark on the forehead, glimpses of deities and in undertaking religious tour of sacred places of pilgrimage. People commit sins for as long as twenty-five years and then go to Ganga for holy dip so that they are absolved of all their sins. But they forget that true Hinduism consists of control of the senses, abstaining from sensual pleasures, and in realisation of Supreme Being – God. Exposing the hollowness of the caste system, Patel wished every member of Shudra caste to feel that he was superior to Brahmin. He held caste Hindus responsible for the plight of untouchables and retorted that 'Many superstitions and hypocritical practices are rampant among the farmers and they are all there in the name of religion. We reject our Harijan brothers whose services are needed not only in agriculture but also in things nobody else is able to do and we hurt them, all in the name of religion. This is a sin. When a person we call an untouchable embraces another religion he immediately becomes touchable. I advise you to abolish untouchability which is a curse to the Hindu community of India. You cannot discard your own brother. According to the Hindu philosophy it is a

sin to discard anyone who is living. Soul is God and even an untouchable has soul in him. You, therefore, cannot discard God-Soul' (Singh, Neerja, 2015, 39-40). 'In free India there can be no distinction of caste, creed or religion or of classes, resulting in the domination of one section over another. There may be rich and poor, happy and unhappy, but there can be no difference in stature between one citizen and the other' (Patel's Speech at Jodhpur on 25 January 1949. See G.M. Nandurkar (ed.), *Sardar Patel- In Tune with the Millions- II*, Ahmedabad, 1976, p. 56).

The traditionalist in Patel revolted against use of conversion as a means to reject untouchability, but the reformer in him opposed Brahmanism and its perpetuation of untouchability. He believed that 'If the non- Brahmins had any sense, the Brahmins would soon become powerless. Even the non- Brahmins find it difficult to get rid of untouchability' (Chopra ed., 1994, vol. v, p. 279). He was also concerned with the fact that untouchability made the position of national leaders like him morally weak in the eyes of the British who exploited the situation to argue that the Indians were incapable of ruling themselves. He did not want conversion to be used by the British to show to the outside world how retrogressive, backward and inhuman the Indian society was. He rebuked the high caste that 'if a Dhod becomes a Christian or a Muslim he can go wherever he likes. The Santana religion has come to such a low degree that a man of other religion came to defend it'. Elucidating on the issue further, he said, 'The British Empire feels that we have been defeated or are reeling under fear of the authority which has been puffed up with violence. We have to continue and strengthen the struggle to self-purification. We are not strong enough to protect our own religion. So, if our traditional religion may have reached a stage where a foreigner has to search, we should perform the Shradha ceremony so as to attain emancipation. ----- You may perhaps be aware what the leaders of the Santana traditional religion were doing at that moment? Where had they gone? Does the traditional religion belong to the present age? It is current since the time of the Vedas. How many have been converted to Christianity? How many have become Muslims? Who are these traditionalists? They are converting only Hindus into their religious fold. Who are these missionaries? If you had not treated the untouchables inferior even to dogs, would there have been so many Christians?' (See Patel Papers).

Sardar Patel believed that the neglect of social issues would not only retard the growth of Indian society and make it decrepit but it would also weaken the freedom struggle. His approach to social questioning was progressive. He was combative in his criticism of the servile status of women, their confinement to hearth and kitchen, practice of child marriage, depraved condition of Hindu widows and its justification by shastras and prevalent illiteracy amongst them. However, Patel was presented as a traditionalist with a penchant for conserving and preserving the status quo in the name of custom and tradition. Thus, his

approach was seen as contextual and responsive to the existing receptivity of the people. According to Patel the backwardness of the nation was a result of women being kept in darkness of illiteracy enforced on them by men. They deprived women of equal rights and responsibilities. Sardar believed that the constructive energy of women should be employed for the success of Swarajya. According to him 'The root cause of India's backwardness is its invalidity. The country is treading in darkness on one foot and that too of a male. They (women) are being constantly hammered that they have to shoulder the burden of the house as far as possible. He has been not taught to accept that. In social and national spheres, women have some rights and responsibilities. That is why we are lagging behind. That is why it is always beneficial that women become aware of their rights and responsibilities slowly and gradually. Women in one way are extremely courageous. Men do not endure the miseries to the extent women do. In India misery is destined in women's fate, and she smilingly endures them...She is not aware of her rights. The society fears that if she is educated, she would have knowledge of her rights and will shake off the privations. But that fear is uncalled for. What is good for men is equally good for women also. The society adopts a partisan attitude between a male and a female. It pardons a male but a woman is permanently censured and disgraced, if he commits a blunder.... The result of education is always sublime. The blunders committed by men due to ignorance and illiteracy, though horrible, the society does not feel its thunder...' (Speech of Patel at Jyoti Sangh, Ahmedabad, 3October 1934, Patel Papers).

Addressing the students of Jyotisangh, Patel said 'I have to take it for granted whatever work has been carried out by very young and adolescent girls. The name of Jyotisangh itself signifies removal of darkness. To what extent this has been achieved remains to be seen. Your aim is excessively large and heavy. If we are able to achieve the goal, we would have certainly performed a heavy task.....Your aims are very high. I am really pleased to find that you have incorporated ideals of courage, self-help, physical and mental exercise together with national spirit in your preamble..... But if we continue to be afraid of such risks, we would not make any progress.....We are still entertaining the belief that women have to look after their home and hearth only. Such ignorance can be removed by these types of institutions' (Ibid).

The social vision of Sardar Patel was rooted in a realistic understanding of the Indian society. It was not influenced by any fashionable doctrine of impracticable kind. Since his concern was to activate the cementing processes of divisiveness in the society for nation building, he appeared to be reformist and pacifist to the Left. Since Patel subscribed to class collaboration as against class conflict, non-violence against Bolshevik kind of radicalism, the left branded him as status-quoist reactionary and conservative leader. However, he realised that in a geographical territory, struggling with colonialism, trying to achieve

independence and become a nation-state, social change to be lasting and harmonious, it had to be gradual and evolutionary. Patel sagaciously articulated that social issues should be taken up in such a manner that it would lead to social consolidation rather than weakening the process of nation building.

Reacting to the views of Sir Chiman Lal Setalvad dated May 9, 1946, Patel in his reply wrote that Congress would never be a party to the creation of a weak or loose Centre or to any such arrangement of dividing India into religious groups nor could Congress afford to dilute nationalism to the extent of endangering the future safety and well being of the country. He further emphasised that neither could the country become a theocratic nation like Pakistan nor nationalism could be rooted in a particular communal ideology (See Singh, Neerja, Patel, Prasad and Rajaji: *Myth of the Indian Right*, New Delhi, 2015). Patel in his reply further stated that the adjustment of boundaries and of other regions and handling over the provinces of Bengal, Punjab and much less Assam could not be on communal lines but on national or linguistic lines to readjust the provincial boundaries. Pakistan, however diluted, was a communal solution of the problem and there could be no communal division of the country without complete redistribution of administrative areas on the same principle. A really national solution was acceptable to all with the fullest safeguard for every interest and regional minority (See Singh, Neerja *Ibid*); also see Nandurkar (ed.) *Sardar's Letters Mostly Unknown –I*, 1977, p.191).

Patel further elaborated that India was a land of varieties of religion, culture traditions, habits and languages. Yet throughout history it had evolved a synthesis, harmony and oneness which had been the admiration of the world and the secret of its preservation (See Nandurkar, G.M., *Sardar Patel: In Time with the Millions-I*, 1975, p. 241)

Sardar Patel like the early Congress leaders – Gokhale, Tilak and Gandhi gave civilisational explanation of the notion of nation and nationalism. He referred to rootedness of notion of nation in the subterranean cultural commonness. He regarded emergence of Indians nationalism as a product of composite phenomenon which emerged over a period of time by intermeshing of several traditions. Speaking at Lucknow on 6 January 1948, Patel castigated the communal interpretation of the notion of nation and nationalism. – “Today my mind turns back to those days when, in this city of Lucknow, the foundation of the “two-nation theory” was laid. It was said that the Muslim culture and traditions were not akin to those of Hindus. They were a separate nation. Muslims of this city played an important role in fanning this theory. A few nationalist Muslims protested against it. They made common cause with the Hindus because both of them were perturbed at the advocacy of such a theory and raised their voice against it. But my Muslim League friends made a strong plea for separation. They said that they were not satisfied with separate electorate and with the safeguard of the minority rights. They only wanted

separation and establishment of a separate State ... They accepted it as the whole truth (See Nandurkar, G.M. Sardar Patel – In Tune with the Millions-I, 1975, p.192). He challenged those who harped on threat to stability due to partition and communalism and reminded them as not to forget that partition was a political recourse only. Patel reiterated in his speeches that despite partition majority of Muslims still lived in India with shared history, memories and culture. According to him how could one obliterate the fact that since ages their ancestors had been buried in this land. And one might partition land but one could not partition river, forest, memories and history.

Insisting on the propagation of concept of state, citizenship and nationalism under a democratic, liberal and egalitarian governance system, Patel said in the Constituent Assembly that – “No community should think that its interests were different from that of the country in which it lived – ours is a secular state. We cannot fashion our policies or shape our conduct in the way Pakistan does it. We must see that our secular ideals are actually realised in practice ... Here every Muslim should feel that he is an Indian. If we cannot make him feel like this, we shall not be worthy of our heritage and of our country... In this country where we have 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” (Ibid).

Sardar Patel’s vision of India as an independent nation during 1930s was enshrined in the Gandhian vision of parliamentary swarajya based on the Panchayat system. According to Patel, it would be a nation representing the sovereignty of the people based on pure moral authority, non-violence and satyagraha. The tools with which such a system would be perpetuated were – the concept of Panchayati Raj, of trustee ship, charkha, village industries, basic education, removal of untouchability, communal harmony, prohibition and organisation of labour as Majur Mahajan. His speeches were replete with references as how swarajya would succeed in establishing a civil libertarian welfare nation based on social, political and economic equality. For him there was no conflict between the Gandhian view and the liberal view of the West over the notion of nation. According to him, independent India could be a true manifestation of the values enshrined in its struggle for independence. For him, swarajya could not be real for the masses unless democracy could extend from political to the social and economic spheres and in which there would be no opportunity for the privileged classes to exploit the bulk of the people, nor for gross inequalities as it existed (See Singh, Neerja, 2015). Speaking on 2 January 1949 in Delhi, Patel said, ‘In free India there would be no distinction of caste, creed or religion of classes resulting in the domination of one section over another..... there would be no difference in stature between one citizen and the other (See Nandurkar, G.M., Sardar Patel – In Tune with the Millions-II 1976, p.56).

India's colonial past, demands and pressures of modern nation-state and Gandhian utopian vision of Panchayati raj based on ahimsa and satyagraha created dilemma for Patel. He was clear that swarajya and emergence of India as a modern nation would not mean removal of white sahibs replaced by black sahibs but it would mean establishment of majur raj and raj of the farmers, reviving spinning wheel and village industries and preparation of Khadi 'in every village home' to help the starving millions. (Patel's speech at Ginning Factory at Viramgam, 4 January 1935. See Home Political (Special), MSA, 4 January 1935, NAI, New Delhi). But by 1940s, once independence became certain and issue of partition started looming on the Indian political horizon a shift in Patel's notion of India as nation took shape. Now for Patel independent India signified – 'A strong Centre, a well-equipped modern army, economic contentment and responsible citizenship and a firm administrative fabric are the essential requisites as well as expression of that unity and strength.' (Speech of Patel on 2 November 1948, in Nandurkar, G.M., *Sardar Patel: In Tune with the Millions-I*, 1975, p. 241).

Speaking on the choice before the Congress leaders between Gandhian vision of independent India and Western notion of State, Patel elucidated – 'If we want to carry on government, there are only two ways of doing it. One is the path laid out by Mahatma Gandhi. That is the establishment of Ram Raj in which there is complete peace, freedom from crime and coercion of any kind. All of us should try to achieve that consummation; but undoubtedly, we cannot reach to that goal overnight. The alternative to it is a firm government backed by a strong Army, strong Navy, strong Air Force and a strong Police; but ultimately governed by the will of people' (*Ibid.*, p.18).

In Sardar Patel's notion, nation was not a given fixity. For him nation was a process, an evolving entity in which fixity of features like separate electorates for minorities or community interest vis-à-vis the interest of the country provided a kind of fixity to the nature of state and made it regressive. 'There is no place here for those who claim separate representation ... For a community to think that its interests are different from that of the country in which it lives, is a great mistake, ... It is wrong idea. That conception in your mind which has worked for many years must be washed off altogether. Here, we are a free country; here we are a sovereign state; here we are a sovereign Assembly; here we are molding our future according to our own free will' (Nandurkar, G.M., *Sardar Patel - In Tune with the Millions - II*, 1976, pp.155-156).

While commenting on the values on which armed forces should be based, Sardar Patel defined the trajectory of the emerging newly independent nation. He said, 'Yours is a truly national institution, in which must grow that healthy secular outlook, which is the foundation of true democracy and that unshakable loyalty to the principles on which that democracy must rest' (*Ibid.*, p. 300).

Sardar Patel located issues of nationalism within the boundaries of civil liberty. According to him civil liberty was life and blood of a true democratic nation, and nationalism which pulsated with civil liberty would create a nation with a soul. To him, ‘The freedom of Press is an ideal that we cherish as it is concomitant of democracy. If we want a democratic rule, we must have freedom of press, freedom of speech, freedom of expression and the freedom of association’ (Ibid., pp.145-148).

Thus, the ideal of the Congress, according to Sardar Patel, was establishment of a free democratic state, involving an egalitarian society in which equal opportunities were to be provided for every member for self-fulfillment, and self-expression, so that he could achieve an adequate ‘minimum of a civilised standard of life’. Also, democracy should be democratised and it should percolate down to the social and economic sphere, without jeopardizing the nation’s security. It should encourage production and cultural progress of the subjects and the nation as a whole. Patel realised that for the construction and projection of the idea of a strong nation, it was essential for a relatively less developed nation such as India to muster its resources effectively. Drawing from history Patel emphasised that in India in the past productive forces were not garnered properly and the distribution of resources were not done effectively, leading to serious dislocations in the society. For Patel the notion of nation was strongly linked with the augmentation of productive forces and effective distribution. Therefore, he supported management of corporate life of villages by means of a popularly elected panchayat and attaining economic self-sufficiency in the essentials of life. He not only stood for raj of farmers, village industries and agriculture but supported a symbiotic relationship between industry and agriculture (See Singh, Neerja, 2015).

Patel’s concept of nation was, thus, built on reason, democracy, secularism, civil liberty, equality and social justice. He rejected the use and abuse of culture, religion and community identity in the construction of nationhood. He placed secular citizenship over primordiality such as caste, religion and ethnicity and opposed separate electorates and communal representation.

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