

Chapter-13

Reimagining Sardar Patel's Vision for 21st Century India: Strengthening National Unity, Upholding Secularism, and Responding to Emerging Global Threats

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Abstract

The research investigates Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's legacy through 21st-century India while evaluating his national unity vision and secular principles and his approach to new international security threats. The successful political integration of 500 princely states after independence led by Patel created a lasting national unity framework which continues to address current Indian problems with regionalism and separatist movements and social divisions. The research investigates Patel's definition of secularism because he viewed it as more than religious state separation since he believed it served as a political framework which unites diverse peoples within a country. The section becomes vital because religious divisions in society have grown more intense while social divisions between religious groups continue to expand. The research analyzes Patel's vision through modern international relations to demonstrate how India needs a self-sufficient defense system to handle international security issues and maintain national freedom. The study proves that Patel's principles continue to shape current governance through its combination of historical research and political theory and security analysis. The research shows that administrative wisdom and decisive political leadership based on Patel's pragmatic and integrative approach will unite the nation while protecting secular values

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and national security. The last section of this paper presents policy recommendations which focus on enhancing both domestic unity and international strength of India. The paper supports bringing back Patel's ideas to build a fresh system for national development and administrative control. The paper supports Patel's vision as the base for creating modern nation-building and governance systems which need to adapt to global changes.

Keywords: Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, National Unity, Secularism, Federal Integration, India's Strategic Security.

Introduction

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel or the Iron Man of India was one of the most influential modern Indian architects. His economical vision of the country was far beyond the political plan it was the establishment of a united, inclusive, and powerful nation. The most successful thing about Patel was that he added over five hundred and sixty princely states to the Indian Union. This was not just a bureaucratic feat, but it was a masterpiece of diplomacy moves, foresight and a never-remitting devotion to national unity (*Shekhawat, 2025*). He pictured India as a strong, unitary democracy that was not closed to its diverse heritage and at the same time developed a sense of unity. Go back to the 21st century and India is in a tricky path. The issues are factual and immediate, beginning with the renaissance of regionalism and religious polarization and the geopolitical changes on the international scale. In this respect the ideals which Patel believed in are not merely a footnote in history, they are a guide. His belief in unity in diversity and secular rule is a powerful antidote to the divisive factors that we live in our current world. Patel warned that national unity must not merely be militantly defended, as in the case of external aggressors, but also in the face of national apathy

and ignorance (Shekhawat, 2025)¹. The fact that communication is particularly potent in an age in which fake news and identity politics can tear societies apart is particularly compelling.

Patel was a progressive individual, too, in his administration. He also referred to the civil services as the steel frame of India that brought about a disciplined and impartial bureaucracy (Dwivedi, 2025)². Such a system of government is now more than ever required in the modern world of hectic changes of policies and technological disturbances. It is the basis of a democratic stability and confidence. Patel is also concerned about the strategic autonomy, which is superficially applicable at the international level. The much-anticipated vision of the self-reliant yet cooperative India becomes more visible when India takes the leadership positions in such forums as the G20 and promotes such initiatives as the International Solar Alliance (Garge, 2025)³. Patel was aware of a balance between national interests and international responsibilities- an aspect that is essential in handling such issues like global warming, terrorism and economic interdependence. Thesis Statement: Sardar Patel vision that was founded on unity, secularism and strategic governance continues to shine on India. The country can be able to establish its democratic background through the values that he possesses, enhance the development of inclusivity, and emerge as an example within the rapidly changing world. Basically, Patel and his legacy is not just about statues in his honour or even yearly tributes. It is a dynamic design of the way India should move forward, smartly, boldly and collaboratively. Given that the Rastriya Ekta Diwas is being celebrated every year, the question arises; are we even becoming what Patel had to be? Because to honour him is to do more than to remember--to do.

¹ Shekhawat, G. (2025, October 30). Sardar Patel's vision and the meaning of national unity today. The Hindu. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/sardar-patels-vision-and-the-meaning-of-national-unity-today/article70221709.ece>

² Dwivedi, V. (2025, October 31). Sardar Patel's vision of governance and its timeless relevance. Bureaucrats India. <https://bureaucratsindia.in/news/bi-exclusive/sardar-patels-vision-of-governance-and-its-timeless-relevance>

³ Garge, R. (2025, October 31). Sardar Patel's vision for India. The Pioneer. <https://www.dailypioneer.com/2025/columnists/sardar-patel-s-vision-for-india.html>

Sardar Patel's Vision: A Historical Perspective

The Indian state that has emerged as a result of the vision of a single, secular and administratively integrated India by Sardar Patel has become one of the foundations of the democratic identity of the Indian state.

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, an Iron Man of India has a decisive role which shaped the political geography of post-independent India. The first Deputy Prime Minister and the Home Minister was Patel, who had a monumental task of integrating over 560 princely states into the Indian Union. This union was not merely part of the political necessity but the nation-building. Patel applied diplomacy, persuasion, and firmness to ensure that the torn apart princely states were brought together to form a single national fabric (*Shankar, 2025; Times of India, 2025*).

Patel was pragmatic and urgent in the integration approach. It was not surprising that he knew that political division would threaten the existence of the young republic. His reaction to the rebellious states like Hyderabad, Junagadh was fast, which indicated that he was willing to make sure that the national unity is maintained by any means possible. According to *Shankar (2025)*,⁴ the leadership of Patel at this period was that of firmness as opposed to being aggressive and this made him gain the trust of those who were his allies and opponents.

Besides the unitedness of the territories, Patel was also committed to the establishment of the strong and centralized nation-state. He believed that the proper governance needed the harmonious administrative system. His thoughts on the establishment of a single civil services led to the establishment of an Indian Administrative Service (IAS), and it has been famously known as steel frame of India by him. It was a structure that was to achieve continuity, impartiality,

⁴ Shankar, V. (2025). Reminiscences of Sardar Patel. In *The Iron Man of India: Role of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel in Integrating India*. International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts. <https://ijert.org/papers/IJCRT1136088.pdf>

and efficiency in governance in the various regions (*Times of India, 2025*)⁵.

The less important fact was that Patel was an inclusive government and secularist. Despite being a staunch Hindu, Patel was a strong advocate of the fact that India had the power of pluralism. He not only defended the constitutional right to religious freedom, but he also defended the rights of the minority during the turbulent Partition period. His speeches were

more inclined on the necessity to consider all citizens as equals regardless of their religion or geographical background as a measure of fostering unity in the nation (*Government of India, 2025*)⁶.

The Patel vision can be used in the current context. His demand on unity, secularism and institutional purity makes his stand very timely considering that India is grappling with concerns like regionalism, communal conflicts and administrative inefficiencies. Not only in the statues and commemoration days is his name not impressed but in the very fabric and character of the Indian Republic.

Strengthening National Unity in 21st Century India:

The existing issues of the Indian modernity (regionalism, identity politics, and social segregation) can be solved with long-term perspectives with the vision of an integrative and inclusive and unified governance by Sardar Patel. The 21st century in India has taken its toll on the national unity because of the growing regionalism tendency and the political identity and the fragmented social discourse. These problems are intensified due to fake news online, financial disparity, and cultural segregation. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel had left a roadmap on how to struggle against these forces. His approach was diplomatic and pragmatic as he used constitutional power and through integration, the diversity

⁵ Times of India. (2025, October 31). Unification, civil services, and census: How Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel shaped India. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/unification-civil-services-and-census-how-sardar-vallabhbhai-patel-shaped-india/articleshow/124978848.cms>

⁶ Government of India. (2025, October 31). India pays homage to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel on his 150th Jayanti: PM. https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/india-pays-homage-to-sardar-vallabhbhai-patel-on-his-150th-jayanti-pm/

would not be disrupted, on the other hand, the regional identity would be created (*Shekhawat, 2025*)⁷. Patel turned India into the first Home Minister and he united over 560 of the native states into a single state that had a strong central government and simultaneously the regional identity would be established.

The unity vision that Patel saw was not zonal, but ideological as well. His other vision was inclusive nationalism according to which every citizen regardless of his/her religion, language and region was concerned about the future of India. This concept is highly significant in the modern context, where the identity politics is sure to ruin the sense of solidarity. This is because Patel demanded the secular government and equality of citizenship which led to the pluralist democracy (*Goswami, 2025*)⁸.

The existing policies which were premised on the thoughts of Patel are reaffirming the federal system per the concept of cooperative administration. Establishment of state and Centre partnerships, in particular, education, health and infrastructure. The ideas of administration Patel subscribe to, as the embodiment of the Indian administrative service, is based on the need to have non-partisan institutions that stimulated solidarity without usurping autonomy of the locales (*Qadri, 2025*)⁹.

Besides, the cultural pluralism and dialogue is to be promoted. The Patelian tradition is that unity is unequal. Inclusion and civic education can be used to promote linguistic, religious and cultural cohesiveness.

⁷ Shekhawat, G. (2025, October 30). Sardar Patel's vision and the meaning of national unity today. The Hindu. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/sardar-patels-vision-and-the-meaning-of-national-unity-today/article70221709.ece>

⁸ Goswami, S. K. (2025, October 31). National Unity Day and the Vision of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. Sentinel Assam. <https://www.sentinelassam.com/more-news/editorial/national-unity-day-and-the-vision-of-sardar-vallabhbhai-patel>

⁹ Kadri, R. (2025, October 30). Sardar Patel Birth Centenary: A life in service of the nation. Hindustan Times. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/sardar-patel-birth-centenary-a-life-in-service-of-the-nation-101761838285836.html>

Upholding Secularism in a Diverse Society:

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was the visionary leader of a united India, which was founded on secularism, and a dire necessity in the face of the increasing communalism and polarization. The first Home Minister of India Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was the founder of secular nation and it was on this that the unity of the nation was to be established on a principle of religious tolerance. His attempts to unify more than 560 princely states to the Indian Union were political, yet based on the idea that the multiethnic society would prosper within the realms of the secular system (Srinivasan, 2023)¹⁰. Patel did not favour the notion of making India a Hindu state, and the rights of the minorities had to be protected, also the co-existence of the religions.

The development of communalistic and political polarization and identity mobilization are the new threats of secularism. Such trends pose a danger to the ideology of inclusion of the Indian Constitution and destroy social cohesion. Civil strife and hate-speaking and religious intolerance are increasing, and these are the conventional heritage of the partisan political discourse and social media streamlining.

To advance the secular values, certain tactics are needed:

Protection by the constitution and law Article 25-28 in the Indian constitution provides secularism where the freedom of religion is provided and also the religious discrimination is banned. There is the necessity to strengthen judicial regulation and the adoption of anti-discriminatory legislation.

Tolerance and diversity education:

The teaching curriculum must emphasize pluralism, critical thinking as well as ethical thinking. Mutual respect can be achieved during inter faith discussions and cultural exchange programs in schools and universities.

¹⁰ Srinivasan, R. (2023). Sardar Patel's vision of religious harmony in post-independent India. *Journal of Research Administration*, 5(2). Retrieved from <https://journlra.org/index.php/jra/article/view/511>

Political leadership/civil society position:

The leaders should be on the front line and should denounce hate speech in a decisive and explicit manner. The civil society organizations are very active in the process of instilling secular values which are achieved through the grassroots campaigns, lobbying through legal avenues and the establishment of awareness. What we learn in the history of Patel is that it is imperative not to sit back and watch the process unfolding but to make efforts beyond his means to see that justice and solidarity prevail within a multi-ethnic society.

Responding to Emerging Global Threats¹¹:

The example of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel can be used to explain an intriguing example of how to counter the current threats to the world interests such as geopolitical instability, terrorism, climate change, and cybersecurity. These political values that Patel stressed were; political unity in the country, strong military defence and diplomacy that was practical. The very fact that he was originally uniting princely states and reacting to foreign aggression like in the case of 1947 in Kashmir meant that he was also thinking in pre-emptive security and strategic planning (*TheAcademy.in, 2025*)¹². Patel was a powerful leader, who thought of powerful internal intelligence machine and dictatorial administrative machine to achieve stability in a freshly independent nation, India. The concepts created by Patel in the modern setting can be used in the resolution of the emerging threats:

Enhancing the national security and intelligence:

The State security needs hi-tech surveillance systems, computer defence systems and intelligence systems to curb terrorism and digital war.

¹¹ Journal of Political Science. (2025). Metamorphosis of modern India: Sardar Patel's genius of conflict resolution. *Journal of Political Science*, 7(7), 409. Retrieved from <https://www.journalofpoliticalscience.com/uploads/archives/7-7-29-409.pdf>

¹² TheAcademic.in. (2025). Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's contributions to national security and diplomacy. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 11(6). Retrieved from <https://theacademic.in/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/116.pdf>

The opening of the international relations and the diplomatic activity:

Patel suggests the realist approach of the diplomacy and India developed the strategy agreements, the peace-making missions across the world, and found its own niche in the international bodies.

Environmental management and sustainable growth:

Climate change is under an existential threat. The investment in sustainability urban planning, renewable energy and disaster resilience is associated with the long-term vision of Patel. The culture of cohesion and stability suggested by Patel and the current policy instruments can aid India to build a secure, cooperative, and sustainable future.

Integrating Patel's Vision with Contemporary Policy:

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel still has an impact on the modern policy-making strategy in India especially when it comes to integrating the country, secular politics and strategic defence. His attempt to bring together the 560 plus princely states and form the Indian Union formed the basis of the single federal system. Secularism and governmental discipline that Patel sought has been deeply entrenched in the constitutional ethos of India especially through Articles 25-28 that guaranteed the right to religion and disallowed discrimination.

Patel has bundled the existing policies like the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir as the realisation of the dream of a united India (*Indian Express*, 2025)¹³. Likewise, these programs encourage the integration of cultures and inter-state collaboration, including Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat, and conveys the idea of the national unity, voiced by Patel. The modernization of the defence programs such as the local production with the feature of the Make in India can be seen as the strategic vision of Patel in developing an independent security system.

The future policy directions should target: to keep on fulfilling Patel vision, the following should be taken into account in the future policy directions:

¹³ Indian Express. (2025, October 31). PM Modi fulfilled Sardar Patel's dream of truly unified India by abrogating Article 370. <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/pm-modi-fulfilled-sardar-patels-dream-of-truly-unified-india-by-abrogating-article-370-amit-shah-10338033/>

Raising cooperative federalism that implies sharing of resources and developing them in an inclusive manner.

Reform of education, interfaith dialogue and anti-discrimination. Improvement of strategic diplomacy through augmentation of membership in the multilateral organizations and regional associations.

Patel would be in possession of leadership and governance principles that comprise pragmatism, integrity and public service. Civic education, democratic participation and community-building should be an activity involving the people so that the unity and strength that Patel supported can be maintained.

This image of Patel is a timeless inspiration of the way to build a strong, inclusive, strategically placed India of the 21st century.¹⁴

Conclusion:

The metamorphosis of the vision of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel concerning the 21st century India needs a new commitment to the most fundamental elements of the national unity, secularism and strategic stability. The legacy left by Patel of the man behind the integration of India and his unswerving belief in inclusive governance has endless teachings of how to navigate through the current day problems. His principles of being practical in leadership, institutional power, and civic duty may never be more relevant than nowadays when polarization is rising, the world is becoming more unstable, and the environmental crisis is pressing.

To achieve the vision of Patel, India must reinforce the provisions of the constitution to protect the diversity, invest in good defence and intelligence infrastructure, and practice sustainable development by cooperating with other international nations. There must be integrity and vision in the political leadership and the citizens must be fully engaged in the democratic activities and community building. Having the policy in line with the principles of Patel, the modern India

¹⁴ The Hindu. (2025, October 30). Sardar Patel's vision and the meaning of national unity today. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/sardar-patels-vision-and-the-meaning-of-national-unity-today/article70221709.ece>

will establish a powerful, inclusive, and progressive society, which is not just capable of resisting the new challenges but also flourishes because of its unity and direction.

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