

## Chapter-16

# Grassroots Mobilization: Women, Youth, and Rural Empowerment

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### Abstract

This Chapter touches on Grassroots Mobilisation: Women, Youth and Rural Empowerment where there is the transformational action of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, so that inclusiveness was the thing in the nation building in India. Being a leader who participated very much in the fortunes of the masses, Patel was in a position to know that the real freedom would be attained only at a point when the mass population is empowered, the young generation would be active, and the women can be leaders. In his grass root form of politics, he was able to merge mobilisation of politics and social-economic development where independence did not just present power, but a social upsurge.

This is because he was strongly interested in bringing different communities together around a common cause. This is one of the aspects that were witnessed in his leadership of movements like Bardoli Satyagraha. He never doubted in mutual action and power. Agricultural productivity is an aspect he kept an eye on because it is a significant way of de-pauperizing rural poor. He stimulated the local government by favouring the Panchayati raj system of villages. He not only pushed the aspect of including females as a token representation, but he was broad in his thinking when he incorporated women in the field of education, making decisions and, consequently, establishing gender inclusive governance.

Sardar Patel had a vision to become a disciplined citizen, service-harkening citizen who will espouse a value of unity to

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the youth, integrity and devotion to his country. His focus on moral character, education and civic duty drew a roadmap on the way the youth would be involved in post-independence India. Patel was able to establish a solid base of rural empowerment and participatory democracy through the policy campaigns, the grassroot campaigns as well as his indomitable spirit of seeing that unity is achieved. His vision is also re-read and turns an object of teachings, which could be implemented concerning the situation in modern India in the sphere of rural development, the problem of gender equality and youth empowerment, finding his old spirit of nation-first.

**Keywords:** Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Grassroots Mobilization, Rural Empowerment, Women Empowerment

### **Introduction**

Buffered in history, it is typical to have the formation of modern India, through constitutional argument, administrative reforms, and diplomatic machinations. It was not the exaltation of administrative streets in which our Saradar Vallabhbhai Patel was especially interested, but life in day-to-day India, in the strength of a peasant, in the vigour of a woman, in the idealistic excitement of youth and in silent suffering in the village. He was born in a small-town farmer family of Gujarat as a merchant. The study of the law not only intensified his analytical gifts, but also the knowledge of the actualities of the situation which led him to think that reunited India could never possibly achieve anything, unless the villages were greatened, and the people themselves should have a portion in shaping their own fate.

As the choice to independence ensued, he inherited an instant and a twin dilemma of about 500 states in politics and social economic restructuring of a population that was predominately rural and poor. The Communal division that had been devastated by the partition and colonial policies were even more instilled foundations on institutionalised poverty, lack of literacy, and feudal exploitation. Patel learned that no information and assurance of the own capabilities of the people was possible without the organisation so no democratic form of

government could be erected and economic development could be erected. He told an audience in Ahmedabad in 1948 that people should not tell them what the cities were like but rather what the country villages had self-respect and self-sufficiency. This was by no means an attitude in the company and Patel was an out of place person. Sardar Patel would have liked to have the best of both - village self-governance, the cooperative enterprises, and village leaders to which he would add national policies - quite the opposite to the visions of the national policies - rapid industrialization and state-planning as envisaged by Jawaharlal Nehru. His ideals literally fused the Gandhian ideals of decentralisation with the science of administration whereby the empowered accompanied accountability.

The Kheda and Bardoli Satyagraha's were the ideal ones of the grassroot works of Sardar Patel. It is because of these campaigns that he was able to demonstrate that the rural India could be unified, unarmed and negotiated in a way to achieve a win-win situation not only in politics but also in socio-economic activities. He promoted the roles of women in the government and the youth in the civil activities as well as the empowerment systems based on self-help.

Sardar Patel knew what he wanted and that was that India had to be consolidated and empowered at the grass-root level. The wholeness of the nation could only be healthy when the last hamlet and the richest citizen understood that he was a part of the national development- not as an object of the national development, but as a producer of his own piece of the cake in life.

### **Arranging the Rural Communities**

The political career of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was directly related with lives of the Indian rural people. His epoch relied on the misery of the agrarian and his policies on the internal perception of the village life, its beat and disposition to the colonial rule. He won better in the countryside whereby farmers were isolated and stretched by the taxes and debts. Patel not only gave rise to the mobilisation of the rural folk with political displays but also inculcation of self-confidence, solidarity through discipline and organisation to the rustic folk who

would bear an indelible mark on the Indian war of freedom and the rural policy of the post independent era.

His career was out of was at Kheda Satyagraha (1918) which made the first Patel engagement. In the same year, there was crop failure in Kheda, the Gujarat state, due to excessive rainfall and plague. The crops had reduced to the level that most of the farmers were unable to afford the land revenue as required by the colonial government. The administration was however not in a position to give in or at least give a suspension of the taxes. An already disheartened peasantry turned up before Mahatma Gandhi, and he gave the matter of directing the movement to Patel.

Sardar Patel was much devoted in making ready the situation. He was also travelling village to village and preached ideas of satyagraha and nonviolent noncompliance. He visited farmers at their residences and held communal meetings to get them on the same.

This was founded on reasonableness and unity; everyone would stop paying their dues and the government could not afford to put everyone to go to gaol but in the case the binding power failed, the runaway would achieve no progress. He indicated that they not only protested to get money relief but honoured and justice. In one of his speeches, he had warned him against making threats and coercing with the concerted hands, and we shall have a chain of iron. His poems influenced people to unite and organise. They threatened the farmers but on behalf of Patel. This gave rise to an uprising which was non-violent, and peaceful as guaranteed by Sardar Patel.

The volunteers played a role of some form of interim between villages spreading the word around and motivating and assuring no family of feeling isolated in the battle. This British government at last yielded, and the revenue of the year was not augmented. The Kheda not merely in the short-term meaning which it was also an advancement, which has resulted in Patel becoming a person to reckon with as a philosopher who can also be practical and stern in his presentation of the Gandhian ideology and action. The farmers did not halt on threats and intimidation through confiscations and arrests. Patel ensured that the campaign does not involve violence and encourage violence and encounters. The village liaisons were also

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volunteers and she would be swapped by the settlements and would be passing information and morale and ensuring that no family was left behind in the war. The British government later given in and that year revenue collection was suspended. The success in Kheda did not only alleviate the position on the moment but the picture of Patel as the leader who could synthesise the principles of Gandhism and rigorous and practical action developed.

This would be the second hurdle that Sardar Patel would experience, a decade onwards in Bardoli satyagraha in 1928. In this case, there was the issue of the random upgrade of land rent by 22 percent irrespective of floodings and low harvests that had brought agony to the farmers. Farmers of Bardoli taluka knew that Patel had achieved success in Kheda, which desired his leadership. He accepted the responsibility with adequate preparations. He also conducted surveys whereby he had to establish economic capacity of each household and ensured that the foundation of the protest was founded on facts. The next stage was the formation of a scheme of village committees the work of which was backed by volunteer squads, which attended to the communication and the distribution and upholding of non-violent order. The place of each of the villagers was anticipated; every chance was anticipated. Patel equally educated the society on how to anticipate the backlash of the government whether in the shape of and property take over or arrests and know how to endure all the pain without being demoralised.

The government had attempted to put an end to satyagraha by confiscation in the form of seizing of land and livestock through auction. Patel responded in a manoeuvring fashion and all auctions were a protest to the world: the villagers would not be present at the auction and it would render the latter pointless. Even his enemies were astonished by his ability to wield his authority and at the same time exercise diplomacy. This culminated into a happy medium after which increased taxation was abolished and property taken back. The people made him Sardar that is to say, chief or leader, a name which he should never forget because they were thankful to him. Bardoli movement was a grass root movement of the text book. It was shown how those institutions that were most difficult to

distort by institutions of exploitation, could be shred to pieces by systematic organisation, by long-range strategic planning, by one moral cause. The collective farmer could not be brought down by any physical ministry even by the hand of Patel himself. We have to put into waking this unity, and to hold it in a waking.

The mobilisation of the rural people in the case of Patel did not simply come up during the protests. He perceived a necessity to put institutional bases that can inform empowerment between crisis. He also promoted intra farm movements where little peasants ought to combine their forces enabling them to be more fruitful and bargain. He urged the rural credit associations to relax the grip of the money-lenders on the farmers and the local independent institutions to run irrigation, the selling of seeds and markets. His reaction to his ideology that the political freedom could never be reduced to financial freedom was these programmes.

This vision had the principle of Panchayati Raj village-level self-governance as the main concept. Patel never only thought of these bodies as an administrative unit but as a school of democracy in which the villager would be taught to make his own decision and his own conflicts and be responsible to the people. His short stint as a chairman of the Ahmedad municipal board had given him an idea as to what much can be done with responsive government being close to people so as to smooth out the lives of people in the city. He also had intentions of applying that model in the rural India whereby he had a vision of the villages being dependent in a federal democracy.

Economic and psychological emancipation have been employed by Patel. His intention on the economy front was to cut the two ties of debts and middle men who were giving the farmers the tag of feeling vulnerable always. At the psychological level, he was attempting to bring about agency and responsibility in lieu of natural fatalism of the rural communities. Granted to thee not a liberty, Children, the atmosphere thou breathe, Hath said to thee when he stood on his feet Speech in Gujarat said he to men. These two phrases characterised his leadership approach as they made them find the courage in comprehending their power and being in their finest welfare as a team.

Patel would still act politically next few years on the basis of the Kheda and the Bardoli experience. Whether it was Quit India Movement or had been in the early years of the independence he could never have wavered in his faith on organised rural communities. He was quite aware that power of India lay in its villages and it was necessary that the countryside in India be awakened under both political and political responsibilities not only to attain freedom but also to have a fair and powerful country in the future.

That is besides heritage of successful campaigns Patel left behind in the process of organising rural communities. His legacy of leadership had pillars such as empathy, mastery of strategy, and brute strength of single-minded adherence of the people cause, which until today, helps people in the rural regions of India know how to go about empowering themselves.

### **Women's Empowerment**

Much as the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel is rightly remembered as the Iron Man of India, a politico of steel of his spine and grit of his will in polity bringing India into existence, the statecraft was not everything the world of his imagination of India. Behind his steel shell, however, there was a basic belief that the national development would never be actualised without the active and equal participation of the women. Empowerment was not a slogan to Patel but a necessity not only on moral, but on practical grounds as well. He was aware that he could never serve his dream of an independent India of self-reliance, unless he could liberate half of the Indians powers and intelligences and hardiness.

Patel was a women empowerment activist and this was portrayed when the Bardoli Satyagraha was held in 1928 where women were not thought as the follower but rather as the main action towards the achievement of the victory of the movement. Bardoli was agrarian protest against unjust taxation and that it had to be subject to general disciplining, sacrifice and unity. Farm wives were determined: they formed community kitchens, were capable of sending a message to each other even after they had been kidnapped, were able to watch the house when the men went to gaol and to retain their spirits when the time of doubt was excessively extended. As he did not hold back

in appreciating this contribution, Patel told him that without their audacity they would have collapsed under the burden of colonialism. In his opinions, their ability to conserve the spirit of people was as pertinent as negotiations and strategies that were taking place in the political setting.

It is worth mentioning that Patel did not view the role of women as representative and tokenistic. He failed to put into consideration the prevailing idea that they were there to spread moral support on civic initiatives. Their service at Bardoli was by no means the sign of the possibility to possess at the forefront of other larger spheres of government and development. He has kept reminding his generation of the reality that the single survival tool in the existence of change was to shatter the cultural and structural frontiers surrounding women into the domestic space.

This is what he thinks and dwells on his speech and writings. This was later seen in 1947 when Patel gave one of his speeches in a women conference that he said: No society can be above women. They should be heard in our panchayats; in our cooperatives; they should have a voice--they should have equal voice. It was a very radical position of the revolution in the early post-independent India. The country hinterland continued to be encumbered by the thick patriarchal society whereby making decisions about political activities was predominantly the prerogative of the male counterparts. However, Patel ruled that charity or reform would not empower women, but as the major source of rebuilding the nation.

His activism was concrete. In the initial independence years, Patel was among the supporters of the policies which would see women attain more positions in the local governments especially the panchayats which formed the sound rational in the rural government. According to his description, these grass root institutions could not be representative as it was not inclusive as it did not consider women when making the decisions and determinations. Besides that, Patel was a woman who believed in women education as a means of revolution. Literacy did not bring to his mind the ability to read and write but the foundation of economic independence, civic literacy and political involvement. A rural development vision had schools in rural areas, vocational training centres and

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membership of cooperatives.

The other source of empowerment as discovered by Patel is the economical one. He even encouraged the membership of women agricultural cooperatives since the relevant is the economic power of the rural economy in the cooperative sector not as dependent on the male farmers but as the independent interests. This meant giving them a say in the policy making, on resource allocation and in issues that affected running of the joint agricultural projects. Such an engagement was a gesture of rebellion against status quo in which the status of practically men landowners was relishing the monopoly of gains and leverages.

Trying to equip women with an active role, both in the administrative and economic life of the country, Patel was confusing social justice with nation-building. He was a man on the go: strong women would create strong families, strong families would create stable community and a stable community would create the nation. It was not idealism at all, but long-range policy. He realised that it would require social re-engineering that would take women off the periphery and into the centre to transform the rural India, more than the infrastructure itself.

Whatever, he desired women to be enabled like a mark he can make on his inclusive nationalism like Patel. As he could have united the territories of the princes into a single political environment, he attempted to incorporate women in the political, economic, and cultural life of the nation, which was democratic. To him empowerment also did not imply the same non-oppression meaning but also representation and leadership as well as involvement. It is a vision that is up-to-date because even as early as in the period of independence, it was the time that it was kept as a reminder of the fact that. the decency, agency, or possibility given to the women is its actual wellbeing on the basis of its GDP rate or political soundness.

### **Youth Engagement**

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel trusted much in young generation because they were the heirs to the longstanding Indian independence and the further way of its evolution. His dream

of the involvement of youth never lingered on idealistic ideologies of romance but it was within his self-rule system that encompassed civic duty and patriotism and the application of the skill in nation-building. He was aware that political freedom in India would mean nothing until young generation was willing to take the challenge and uphold and sustain it.

Patel would go regularly to the student organisations of the freedom struggle, the latter being a predetermined case that the young minds were a plentiful soil, and one could just plant there a seed of positive change. He spoke to them reassuringly and repellingly alike. It was in one of his best-known speeches on the students at Bombay in the year 1948 that he informed them that there was no chain but a load and a curse to be as free. You just cannot help but yourself bear it on your shoulders. Words that indicated that he felt that independence was not the conclusion of struggle but rather, a new beginning, a more painful beginning which had to do with being together, discipline and sacrifice.

The kind of youth empowerment practised by Patel was tied on education reform. He was well convinced that education could not be reduced to learning by rote and to mere intellectual scholarship but education had to be broad, and included intellectual training, ethical training, physical health and professional training. To him a good education was the bread and butter of self-managing and socially accountable society. One of the examples that were ideal to him was the Gujarat Vidyapith which was the institution that was founded by Mahatma Gandhi. Not only were such schools' great academic establishments, but they were intermingled with the spirit of self-help, civic service and value of culture as Patel viewed it to be the foundation of responsible citizens.

He could have conditioned the character and mind within the youth organisations. This reading out of the object was to school the generation yet to come not in solitude to secure their livelihood, but to the work of the welfare of the world--to be the upright officials of the world, energetic agrarians, hardy craftsmen, and upright statesmen. Back home he would motivate the young men and women to work in the agricultural co-operatives, in local politics and community development. He believed that this would rescue the absence of contact between

the urban intellectualism and whatever the ground in the country as well as the process of the progress be inclusive and sustainable.

Patel was fond of the political awareness of young people; he was extremely watchful to the partisan degradation and imminence of excessive politicisation. He did not go astray and allowed the temptation of becoming a demagogue, a partisan, blindly following foreign ideologies without considering social and cultural peculiarities of India. The patriotism to him was not a sudden emotional rapture, but rather a long-term love of the national identity and health which was to be trained.

Patel was an idealistic, but a realist in his vision of youth-involvement. He wanted to use this vitality of the new generation, and to make it run through the knowledge and training and perception of responsibility. When he urged them to make a blend of idealism and positive action, he provided them with a pathfinder leading them into the arena of youth that would not only be the activism but also a lasting and a meaningful input to the social, economic and political life of India. The message is not dated and it is so because they were relevant at onset of era of independence a retrospect that the future of a nation is in the shoulder of the young ones.

### **Adorning Giving Political Strategy and Social Mobilisation Integration**

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was a political genius that could deserve the competency of assuming a national policy initiative and blend it with His activity in Kheda and Bardoli presents us with an example, on how the local movements could be misused under the interests of local society and the overall political process of Indian liberation. The riots did not merely constitute an expedition to acquire relief against unjustified taxation or even the authoritative measures but was the preparation laboratories of organising the rural India in such a way as to gain confidence in self and demonstrate how peaceful protesting could work. An additional effort that Patel had invested was the organisational network of the Indian National Congress that was present all over Gujarat through facilitating farmers and the village people to exercise their rights through an organised movement which created an organisational

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fortress based on which the political struggle was to be wrestled.

By 1947, when the nation got independence, Patel had over thirty years' experience with regards to the synthesis of the domestic interests and the national interests and was an invaluable servant in the Herculean task of assimilating the princely states into the Indian Union. The thing that the episode is mainly remembered by is that he is diplomatic and tough in politics but Patel managed to attain the presence of a grassroot legitimacy. Past campaigns, which were under his leadership, had influenced most of the local leaders to enable him to make this process of integrating possible. This network provided him with the much-needed information of the moods of the land and this enabled him to execute at a very fast rate and inclusiveness in unifying the new country.

This was not a part of the national unity as it was political realism of Patel. He liked the plurality and the conventions of the Indian villages but opposing was the idea that, the local autonomy would become the political decentralisation. His proclamation of 1949 of a hundred little Indias was reiterated a hundred thousand times--one-hundred little Indias will not make India a forceful nation. We must bind them with the fibres of common cause--this is his conception of an India united, having a common fate.

In his state of isolation and insecurity of independent nation, Patel believed that not even local self-governance was a way out. What he had planned was to have the balance between the local self-rule to the need of having the central power in such a way that the new modeled democratic form of India would be in a position to hold the centrifugal forces. Here, and hereafter is this paradox of regionalism and nationalism a canonical paradox of Indian democracy and, therefore, the instance of how the social mobilisation can be brought to conform to the political policy as demonstrated by Patel as applicable as it was representative of a model.

### **Letters and Modern Relationship**

Through the vision of his grass-root mobilisation, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel has remained making his contributions to the discussion of the development and Indian policies long after

his death in 1950. His self-help ideology, shared action and empowering poor classes can be identified in most of the rural development initiatives in the country. This Patel philosophy may directly allude to self-help groups (SHGs), women cooperatives and empowered Panchayati raj institutions, which thought that a village after a village alone could go forward and could never be imposed upon by the bureaucrats.

The impact he has created has been the enduring one and the states like Gujarat, Maharashtra and Kerala can attest to it. The cooperative model which was exemplified in the cooperative movement in Gujarat as Amul dairy cooperative implied the values of cooperative which Patel never relinquished and this gave the economy unity strength. His grassroot model of the economy can be proved to work because agricultural marketing boards and farmer producer organisations exist in other states. These institutions have helped the communities to agree at a higher price, gain access to markets and livelihood that they might not have to go through the state subsidies or other external players a move that Patel would have approved with ease.

The social life of women is also very modern as the female gender plays an active role which was demanded by Patel. He went against the centuries old gender norms when he was able to move women to attend the Bardoli Satyagraha and other local movements. His campaign has also been coincident with the national and international gender equality campaigns within the modern world that are geared towards the financial inclusiveness and education and political representation of women. Others such as allocations of seat to the women in the Panchayati raj institutions and even encouraging businesses that are owned by women which further appeals to Patel with the notion that without the women the society can never be fully transformed.

His curiosity about the position of youth was no less liberal. The convector of democratic and developmental ideals of India to Younger generation was Patel and he hoped that young should inculcate the spirit of discipline, responsibility and service to the nation. His vision has become as factual as it is today and even greater within the context of the modern world where training of young citizens and their civic education, as

well as entrepreneurship, become the nation priorities. Patel ideas are also incorporated in the federalism and decentralisation discourses. It is a touch unreserved of how to correct the mismatch that was existing between local administration and the structure of the country which is integrated because he scales the local governance and simultaneously makes sure that there is a single structure. The nearest worldwide equivalent of Patel model is community farming networks in Africa, experiments with participatory budgeting in Latin America and use of cooperatives in rural revitalization in East Asia.

This translates that the philosophy of grassroot by Patel is not the creation of the freedom struggle in India but it is live. Its euphoria, which gives strength to communities which are in line with a national purpose, is an indicator of the 21st century generation of a strong, equal and united India.

### **Conclusion**

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel biography is usually discussed on the grounds of the most significant practise that is integration of the 562 princely states to single India. Not merely was it the question of trading political goods and the reestablished boundaries, but the shaping of the majority of the citizens into the chronicle conductors of the Indian history and its manifestation of the wish to become one. The dream that he had in having a strong and free nation was not only seen in the village he enlightened but also in the lives of those he empowered in the decision-making process and the youth who he raised and moulded to become their own masters in their own rights.

Patel never organised the grass root in parallel: there is the root of the political unity and stability. He achieved this by inciting self-belief to the rural people so as to ensure that freedom will not only be a fig of imagination but reality that will be feasible in their day-to-day existence. The idea of the equal role of women in the state that he declared and the idea of the civic responsibility and service that he harshly instilled in the new generation the kernel of gender justice and the teaching of the civic responsibility and service respectively.

We have created the shrine of freedom. There is no light you

want in it now--you know there must not be an ugly spot. Patel has left the lamps that he lit on the grassroot burning and they light up the road that India is following towards unity, dignity and empowerment. Even we are reminded of his example that it is the strong communities that make a strong nation.

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