

## Chapter-24

# Integrating Diversity: Sardar Patel's Approach to Secular Nationalism

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### Abstract

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who is respected as "*Iron Men of India*", occupied an important place in the journey of the country's unity and solidarity. Although Patel is often remembered for his administrative skills and the role of decision -making in integrating more than 560 domestic states, his secular nationalism aspects remain equally important but unwanted levels of his inheritance. Patel's attitude towards secularism was deeply realistic, which is based on the immediate challenge of a new independent nation to fight against division, communal instability and wounds of regional division. Instead of viewing secularism as an abstract ideal, Patel accepted it as a tool of rule that ensured national integrity as well as ensured equitable behavior of different communities. His emphasis on the neutrality of the state in religion and his emphasis on law and order reflects that unity can be maintained only through justice and inclusion. In this chapter, Patel's political philosophy and the obligation of solidarity are tested with the strategy of maintaining India's plural character. In the widespread controversy of Indian nationalism, the secularism of Patel, as it has been analyzed, highlights how the model of his regime provides permanent education for conducting diversity in contemporary democratic society.

**Keywords:** Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Secular Nationalism, Religious Diversity, Unity and Cohesion, Nation-Building in India.

### **Introduction**

Known as "*Iron Men of India*", Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel played an important role in the first years of India's independence. His permanent influence is based on his distinctive view of secular nationalism-the integration of diversity is based on the independence of more than 500 indigenous nations in the Indian Union. Patel's view was based on a practical, citizen-centric secular model. He was the main figure of the independent constituency and the rejection of communal representation while serving as the president of the Minority and Fundamental Rights Advisory Committee at the Constitution Meeting. Instead of adhere to a specific detection department that stimulates the subcontinent during partition, he was in favor of an inclusive style of political involvement, where the citizenship community is defined by individuals.

### **Secular nationalism: citizenship on communalism:**

Known as "Iron Men of India", Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel played an important role in the first years of India's independence. His permanent legacy does not only depend on his independence of more than 500 indigenous states in the Indian Union, but also depending on his unique view of secular nationalism-consolidation of diversity without suppressing it.

### **Idealism:**

At the center of Patel's thinking was a realistic, citizenship-centric model of secularism. As the chairman of the Minority and Fundamental Rights Advisory Committee on the Constitution Meeting, he played an important role in rejecting

separate constituencies and communal representation. Instead, he supported an inclusive model of political participation where the individual, not the community, defining citizenship-to move away from a particular identity department that contributed to the subcontinent during the partition.

### **Strategy and institutional authority:**

Beyond the moral declaration, Patel believed to include unity through a strong institutional framework. Since the rule of independence was immediately prioritized, he chose a strong, centralized state system. Patel recognized the use of the colonial structure found in the inheritance and tried to give their nationalist validity. This "*steel structure*" of bureaucracy provides a united stage between cultural and regional divisions. He did not have a forced-viewed initiative at the time of the need for the exercise of state power, but the political realism was lined up in the urgent obligation to build a state.

### **Political Consolidation: inclusion without integration:**

Patel efficiently combined the necessary incentives, diplomacy and energy to integrate the domestic states. His discussions often were assured to the rulers like the preview purse and privileges, but when the persuasion failed-as he did not hesitate to take decided steps in the case of Hyderabad and Junagadh. These steps were not aggressive occupation, but the target was to protect regional integrity and to prevent division. These interventions, especially in Hyderabad, supported secular rule in different regions rather than imposing uniformity.

### **Reunion of cultural roots with national identity:**

Patel realized that the unity of India did not need to erase its cultural diversity. His message to the Muslims-"It is a big mistake to think that their interests are different from the

country where a community lives"-the appeal to build mutual faith and to define communal lines in the service of citizenship. Patel urges people to "forget the past" and accept a common Indian identity, which is not religious loyalty, but there is collective loyalty. Thus, his secularism was less about the isolation from religion and more about developing a uniform civic morality.

### **Criticism and restriction:**

Patel's view was not out of criticism. Some historians argue that sometimes unity is the price to address true diversity. In order to emphasize structural solidarity, the inherent cultural and social differences can be ignored-"unity" has risen to become very abstract, isolated from the living reality and subtle loyalty of various communities in India"Moreover, some have canted that if anti-colleonal nationalism is unacked, it may embrace divorce in a uniform national identity. Fostering Political Togetherness.

Sardar Patel's secular nationalism so came to be seen as a well-speaking, inclusive, and United kind of citizenship, yet based on realism and strength. He demonstrated How Communities, Robust Institutions, and Equitable Programs Could All Work to Preserve Unity Without Stifling Diversity. His Perspective Encourages Modern Democracy to be grounded in practical methods while maintaining moral principles. As a reminder that secularism is an infrastructure of inclusiveness, oversight, and careful regulation rather than just an abstract concept, Patel's legacy is still important today.

The secular nationalism of Sardar Patel came to be regarded as well-speaking, inclusive and United. some sort of citizenship, but upon strength and realism. He showed How Communities, Strong Institutions, and Fair Programs Could All Be used to maintain Unity Without Stifling Diversity. His Viewpoint teaches Modern Democracy to be based on the

practical. approaches and upholding ethics. Reminding us about the fact that secularism is an infrastructure. of inclusiveness, oversight, and careful regulation rather than just an abstract concept, Patel's legacy is not outdated.

### **Patel in the Nation's Historical Landscape:**

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel (1875-1950) is the so-called Iron Man of India and has held an office. An important place in the history of India after independence. In the Union of India, the consolidation of more than 560 local states, the work for which both diplomacy and decision measures are required, are occasionally linked with his political heritage. However, the view of the nation formation of Patel entails a realistic image of secular nationalism and secular. nationalism. Patel's view, which was once surpassed by the violence of the countryside, preserved India's rich cultural diversity and highlighted the subtle balance of national solidarity by guaranteeing national solidarity through civic involvement, legal structure and state institutions.

His secular nationalism was not abstract, but from the urgent challenge of political division, communal violence and institutional fragility. Patel's uniqueness of secularism is in its practical view: where Jawaharlal Nehru philosopher, developed the form of generous and idealistic secularism, Patel focuses on creating political confidence and institutional power as the basis of unity. In this sense, Patel's views were more closely attached to Gandhi's moral appeal for the sake of harmony, but at the same time, it was separated by dependence on the state machinery.

### **Secular Nationalism:**

citizenship on communalism, Patel's role as the chairman of the Advisory Committee on fundamental rights, minorities and tribes, and excluded regions in the Constitution Council highlighted his centrality in the formation of the secular

structure of independent India. A system that increased communal divide under colonial rule a separate constituency for minorities was something he categorically opposed. Instead, Patel imagined a citizenship model on the basis of personal rights instead of communal identity (Guh, 2007).

He declared that India could not maintain the stability of separate political departments, noting that the communal system had already reached the final stage of division. Patel emphasized that the minorities must be treated with fairness and respect, warning that "burden and danger for a minority national stability" (CSS-ISLA, 2020) proves that secularism should not be as indifferent to diversity but to ensure equality.

### **Balancing Idealism with Ground Realities:**

Unlike Nehru's philosophical view, Patel adopted a realistic model. Nehru supported secularism as a moral commitment to neutrality, while Patel emphasized on involvement, belief-making and law and order. To Patel, communal harmony could not be assumed; This requires a system of confidence, justice and sometimes strong intervention. Scholars argue that Patel's "practical secularism" recognizes the fragile situation of India's subsequent India, where there was sectarian suspicion (Ayer, 2019).

This distinction was made clear during the discussion of the Hindu Code Bill, the issues of public order, and the protection of religious minorities. Nehru gave priority to the long-term ideals of social reforms, while Patel called for a solution that prevents instability and reassures communities. Patel's secularism was no less ethical; Rather, it was based on the need for immediate administration.

### **Institutional Authority and Statecraft:**

Institutional authority was also central to Patel's idea of unity. Referred to as the "*steel frame*" of the country, he

strengthened and inherited the Indian Civil Service. In order to maintain continuity and stability, Patel attempted to indigenize colonial bureaucratic structures into a nationalist framework rather than eliminating them (*Mushirul Hasan, 2000*).

He realized that in the absence of an unbiased, centralized administrative structure, India's diversity could quickly devolve into chaos. His belief in a strong state, whose institutions of administration acted as bridges across cultural barriers, was therefore inextricably linked to his secular nationalism. According to Patel, national cohesiveness was ensured by unbiased governance rather than by majoritarian domination (*Governance Now, 2021*).

### **Inclusion without Assimilation in Political Integration:**

The incorporation of princely states into the Indian Union was Patel's greatest accomplishment. Patel made sure that the notion of India as a one political entity triumphed over divided sovereignties by using a combination of incentives, persuasion, and military action when required. Princely integration had secular connotations even though it is frequently interpreted as a consolidation act. Consistent with its Muslim rulers and Junagadh with its controversial loyalty, including Hyderabad, Patel laid the foundation of a multi-national but united government (*Copeland, 2014*)

To stop the Nizam from seceding, Patel approved Operation Polo in Hyderabad in 1948, highlighting the impossibility of a communal state inside India. Similar to this, Patel used plebiscite and administrative assertion to guarantee integration in Junagadh, when the Muslim monarch joined Pakistan against the preferences of his primarily Hindu citizens (*Drishti IAS, 2024*). These verdicts show Patel's promise to respect cultural diversity and to maintain political solidarity under secular constitutionalism.

**Balancing National Identity with Cultural Origins:**

Patel emphasized time and again that removing ethnic or religious diversity was not necessary for unity. His appeal to minorities, especially Muslims, stressed trust, equality, and being a citizen together. For a community to believe that its interests differ from those of the nation in which it resides is "a great mistake," he said (*WION, 2016*).

In order to create a collective political identity that transcends sectarian ties, communities were encouraged to "forget the past," but not in the sense of letting go of their identity. Thus, civic belonging—an Indian identity based on the constitution and common destiny rather than religion was central to Patel's secularism. Unlike other nationalisms that want to make everyone the same, Patel's idea tried to make everyone feel welcome without making them all the same.

**Beyond Communal Identity, Citizenship:**

Patel's secularism was based on a strong devotion to civic nationalism rather than on impersonal ideals. He thought that ideas like religiously based representation and distinct electorates would fortify community ties above patriotism, which is why he disapproved of them. Instead, He promoted a society with a strong, centralized democracy and equal rights for all people, irrespective of caste, religion, or geography.

In a profoundly poignant speech, Patel urged Muslims to remain in India as equal citizens and not as slaves to communal politics after the Partition. Additionally, he warned that communal retaliation would shatter the republic's core underpinnings and encouraged Hindus to defend minorities.

**Secularism through institutional inclusion:** As the chairman of the main committee of the Constituent Assembly, Patel played a subtle but important role in ensuring the rights of minorities in the Constitution of India: freedom of religion,

cultural autonomy, and linguistic rights. He did not support satisfaction, but he strongly opposed discrimination.

This institutional attitude towards the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and the Indian Police Service (IPS) to ensure that this institutional attitude state structure is inclusive and fair is evident by emphasizing religious or regional prejudice as a neutral, all-important institution.

### **R. S. S. and involvement with Hindu Wright:**

Patel's secular nationalism was also realistic. After the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, Patel first banned the State Volunteer Association (RSS) to build a hateful environment. However, he lifted the RSS to accept a constitution and to keep himself out of violence. Patel believed that communal forces would be integrated at the constitutional level if communal forces followed the democratic rules. This flexibility expressed his belief in inclusion through discussion and reform, not through exclusion. "For those who want to spread communal hatred, there is no place in our country." - Patel in RSS in 1949.

### **Theoretical structure: ethical distance and institutional secularism:**

Patel's view is consistent with the concept of "policy distance", a model of secularism where the state is involved in religion based on context-supports reforms in need, but otherwise neutral. In contrast to Western secularism (which demands strict separation), Indian secularism allowed limited state involvement to ensure embodiment and harmony by the Patel.

This model also contradicts Nehru's more idealistic and abstract secularism. Patel had the basis of constitutional, administrative skills, and political realism.

**Criticism and restriction despite his success:**

Patel's model has been criticized. Some scholars argue that he might have suppressed cultural and regional autonomy by giving priority to this. His centralized view, however, is effective in the formation of the nation, and can be seen as homogeneous in the long run. Others claim that he was inclined to Hindu cultural allusions, but in an involuntarily stimulated way to. The majority of sentiment.

**Significance and value today:** Sardar Patel continues to be a national unity in the present day. India. His legacy was summoned during the era of secular democracy to Hindu nationalism. political spectrum. This complex is represented by the Statue of Unity, the tallest statue in the world. tribute.

The model of secular nationalism introduced by Patel-institutionalized but open to everyone- does not overlook the fact that the secular mainstream has defined its particular religion(s) historically as its own. diversity-gives helpful lessons in this era of increasing segregation. His power and national identity, minority rights and constant balance preservation attempts.

**Conclusion:**

Sardar Patel's Secular Nationalism Focused More on Political Action Than Lofty Rhetoric provided an ideologically and geographically corroborated view of a fractured subcontinent that enabled the creation of the diversity under a single country banner. His methods, were never left to constitutional and practical inclusion, however powerful. The View of Patel is highly relevant considering that India continues to toy with its pluralist identity. Legacy by Patel indicates that the western notion of separation of state and church is not sufficient in explaining secularism in India. Instead, his idea

concerned the Creation of a powerful Yet just state able to control the same citizenship and shared emotions.

In this regard, the secularism presented by Patel was not anti-secular, but the communal was-instead not to erase the identity of the group, but to cross it. Patel is alienated by his foolish realism; He recognized the political and emotional implications of religion in India but denied the definition of the requirements of the national unity. Beginning with the reign of Nizam. S. He seeks to discuss with different factions such as S. on how to remove secularism rather than strategic engagement.

Due to his realism, he had the chance to produce a secular nationalism that was practical as opposed to idealism. Patel in a world where the politics of identity, ethnic nationalism and majority popularity are the key factors offers a medium bedrock: a strong state that promotes pluralism by disregarding social upheaval or cultural equilibrium. His perspective serves as a reminder that diversity when formally accepted can be the foundation of a residential republic and similarity is not necessarily the cornerstone of a nation.

When modern India is being considered at a time when religious freedom, minority rights and constitutional secularism are hot issues in modern India, the opinion of Patel is not only a historical point of view, but also a strategic sapphire. His solidarity with dignity model is still a relevant model that guides the conservation of unity within the diversity of India.

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