

Chapter-3

The Interplay of Pragmatism, Realism, and Nationalism in Patel's Political Thought in Gujarat

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Abstract

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel is today seen as a central figure in the Indian political history, particularly with regard to his role in the political development of Gujarat, in that he synthesized nationalism, realism, and pragmatism in a new manner. The paper will focus on the intricate relations between these three components of the political philosophy of Patel, and how his pragmatic view of the resolution of conflicts and governance was founded on a critical assessment of the social-political processes and the consistent advancement of the nationalist cause. The decisions made by Patel at the time of integrating princely states or at the time of negotiating the troubles of post-independence India make it clear that he was a pragmatic politician and that he exhibited the leadership style of flexible and at the same time moral leadership (*Gupta, 2021*). His realistic understanding of the political limits and the politics of power facilitated his pragmatic responses to the problems of Gujarat without causing harm to nationalistic ambitions (*Mehta, 2022*). Patel shared the idea that nationalism was not an ideology but a practical movement, which was premised on the spirit of progress and unity in Gujarat and the Indian nation as a whole (*Singh, 2023*). This essay identifies the relevance of the ideas expressed by Patel to contemporary politics within a government and a region by putting them in the context of nationalism and pragmatism in political theory. The paper contributes to the improved comprehension of how the political philosophy of Patel still affects the political identity of Gujarat by crossing the political theory with historical analysis. It also gives advice on the way of finding a compromise between idealism and realistic government.

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Introduction

It is believed that Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel is one of the most important figures in the formation of the modern Indian politics due to his unique political ideology comprising nationalism, realism, and pragmatism. His pragmatic approach to leadership in Gujarat and country in general was defined by a practical understanding of the sociopolitical reality and orientation to effective administration and conflict management. Such flexibility enabled by his core values is seen in the way Patel managed the merger of the envisioned princely states and how he has gone around the political problems that have arisen after independence (*Gupta, 2021*). The impractical limits and power structures in politics enabled him to come up with practical solutions that could solve the local concerns without compromising on nationalist interests (*Mehta, 2022*). Patel thought that nationalism was feasible and founded on the principle of Gujarat unification, development, and becoming a part of the Indian nation-state (*Singh, 2023*).

These three elements of the national philosophy were particularly interesting in the synthesis of Patel in Gujarat, where nationalism and the existence of a regional identity have traditionally been combined with national interests. The skill with which Patel balances between the national agenda and local interests can be considered an illustration of his advanced political philosophy, whose intention was to balance national integration and regional autonomy. To understand political dynamics in Gujarat, which even modern day government and political discourse still echo in the legacy of Patel, a knowledge of this interaction is needed (*Desai, 2022*). Moreover, the approach suggested by Patel illuminates the challenges of building a state within the framework of the pluralistic and diverse society by highlighting the importance of realistic leadership being based on the nationalist principles, but attentive to the local circumstances.

To contextualize the ideas of Patel in the broader context of the political theory, this paper will analyze how the three pragmatism, realism and nationalism interact in the political philosophy of Patel. The paper seeks to illuminate on how the concepts of Patel still impact on the political identity of Gujarat and provides a platform to address the issue of the current state of governance by integrating the historical perspective with current theoretical perspectives. The study contributes to the discussion of political leadership by demonstrating how idealism and pragmatic governance may be harmonized to achieve political stability and growth in the region in complex socio-political situations.

Historical Development:

The nationalist awakening and eventual emergence of independent India occurred during a time of colonial subjection, and the political philosophy of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was shaped. He created a combination of nationalism, realism, and pragmatism in response to the complex issues of Gujarat and India in the first half of the 20th Century. To understand this interaction, a historical analysis of the political career, ideological influences, as well as the sociopolitical environment of Gujarat is needed.

Participation in Politics at an early age and Grounded Foundations:

His early political career was shaped by the experiences that Patel had as a Gujarati lawyer and social reformer. Patel was born in Nadiad, Gujarat in 1875, which is why he went into politics with a very practical mindset. His work as a lawyer in colonial Gujarat led him to the development of a grounded attitude towards solving problems due to his exposure to the administrative and socioeconomic realities of the place (*Gupta, 2021*). Patel never believed in abstract solutions but rather pragmatic solutions, which were specific to particular situations, unlike ideologues who held theory more important than practice. This pragmatism became his political style. His political career was influenced by the fact that he had worked closely with Mahatma Gandhi in the Champaran Satyagraha in 1917. Patel demonstrated his capability of leading

pragmatically by uniting peasants and interacting with the British officials. His top priorities were negotiation, small wins, and effective mobilization, concentrating on the achievable goals instead of idealistic ideas (*Mehta, 2022*). This approach became closely related to his emergent nationalist sentiments since he felt that practical action was essential to the cause of India becoming free.

Gujarat and Background of Nationalism:

As Patel points out, nationalism was a real experience, which was deeply embedded in the social-political fabric of Gujarat and not an abstract idea. Gujarat had certain special prospects and challenges to nationalist mobilization due to its agrarian base, flourishing merchant caste, and princely domains. Inclusive nationalism at Patel was meant to unite diverse groups of people in an effort to promote social reform and self-rule (*Singh, 2023*).

Through grassroots organization, Patel's leadership in the Gujarat Pradesh Congress Committee promoted nationalist ideas. In order to strengthen national unity through local empowerment, he supported causes like the removal of untouchability, rural development, and the advancement of indigenous businesses (*Desai, 2022*). His nationalism was therefore pragmatic, emphasizing concrete socioeconomic advancements as the cornerstones of political liberty.

In the face of political complexity, realism:

The political intricacies of colonial India and the difficulty of bringing a divided region together shaped Patel's realism. He was aware of the restrictions placed on Indian society by British colonial power as well as the conflicting interests of castes, princely states, and sectarian conflicts. His political approach, which prioritized power consolidation, alliance-building, and negotiation over revolutionary idealism, was influenced by this realism (*Mehta, 2022*).

Patel's political realism is demonstrated by the admission of more than 560 princely states into the Indian Union after independence. Patel, who served as India's first Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister, used a mix of strategic persuasion, diplomacy, and, when required, force to bring the

country together politically. His strategy, which reflected a realistic assessment of political power and regional dynamics, struck a compromise between the necessity of national integration and respect for local autonomy (*Gupta, 2021*).

The Interaction of Nationalism, Realism, and Pragmatism in Practice:

Perhaps Patel's treatment of the princely kingdoms of Gujarat best captures the interaction of pragmatism, realism, and nationalism in his political philosophy. There were many semi-autonomous states in the area, each with differing levels of loyalty to the British Crown. Without upsetting the local rulers or sparking civil unrest, Patel's job was to unite these states into a single Gujarat and, consequently, India.

Because of his practicality, Patel adopted adaptable tactics that were customized for the unique circumstances of every state. He used political pressure sparingly, signed treaties, and promised advantages. He carefully balanced force and conciliation since his realism recognized the power these rulers wielded and the possibility of conflict (*Desai, 2022*). His nationalist idea of a united India, where regional identities like Gujarat's would flourish within a unified nation-state, served as the foundation for this strategy.

The political identity of Gujarat was affected in the long run by this synthesis. Patel's legacy established a standard for political leadership that prioritizes pragmatism in addition to ideological commitment by fostering a sense of regional pride entwined with national allegiance. Consequently, his political ideology continues to influence the political culture and models of governance in Gujarat, which emphasizes the need to have flexible leadership that balances idealistic thought and practical constraints (*Singh, 2023*).

Influence of existing Political Legacy and Ideas:

All political ideologies such as Indian nationalism, British political realism and Gandhian ethics had influence on the political philosophy of Patel. Patel was not as focused on the power politics and political pragmatism as Gandhi was, however, Patel was as committed to the nationalism and non-violence as Gandhi. As opposed to the idealistic ways of the

leader, Gandhi often had more pragmatic realism which led to more assertive methods pointing at a different yet complementary line of the greater freedom movement (*Mehta, 2022*).

The philosophical development of Patel over the years shows that his response to the transition of India to a colonial and then a sovereign power changed. He was the author of the political unification of India due to his capacity to blend political realism, pragmatic politics and nationalistic zeal. Scholars argue that the leadership approach employed by Patel offers a valuable solution to the current political problems, especially when it comes to managing diversity, regionalism, and national unity (*Gupta, 2021; Desai, 2022*). The political environment in Gujarat is defined by the fact that pragmatism, realism, and nationalism interact dynamically, which is evidenced by the historical process of the development of the political ideas of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. The ideology of Patel was of the time and a driving force towards future political developments as it was founded on the ideals of practical governance, political realities, and nationalistic ideals. Besides leaving a complex model to understand the challenges of state-building and leadership in pluralistic societies, his legacy is still intact in the political identity of Gujarat.

**Patel's Leadership and Strategy Are Realistic:
The realism of political and social realities is called pragmatic realism:**

Realism in political leadership is a strong understanding of sociopolitical surroundings and being ready to deal with issues in realistic terms rather than idealistic ones. The Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel leadership style demonstrated this form of realism since he continuously analyzed the political and social environment and came up with realistic and successful solutions. This was a necessary strategy at a time when a colony was being governed, intercommunal conflict, and challenges of unifying the different peoples under one nation were being experienced (*Wolpert, 1984*).

Patel's Knowledge of Gujarat's Social Structure, Economic Situation, and Caste System:

Patel possessed an advanced knowledge of the intricate socioeconomic situation in Gujarat and particularly the centuries old caste system and intercommunal violence. He realized that these factors had a significant influence on social stability and political mobilization. In a bid to reduce the caste divisions, Patel advocated the inclusive policies and political cooperation among the cross-castes. He was also in favor of the measures that aimed to enhance the economy without affecting social order because he realized the effects of economic inequality on social cohesiveness (Guha, 2007). Since he was a realistic judge of the unstable social situation in Gujarat, he managed the communal situation by taking a direct action and preventing bloodshed and encouraging reconciliation.

His insistence that order, law, and discipline serve as the cornerstones of progress:

Patel's focus on discipline and law and order as necessary conditions for any significant advancement was a clear indication of his realism. Without social stability, he thought, political freedom may destabilize society and impede progress. During his time as India's first Home Minister, he made a concerted effort to set up strong administrative and law enforcement systems. Patel's concentration on these pillars demonstrated his belief that a stable internal environment was necessary for successful nation-building (Brown, 1994).

His interactions with other political leaders and within the Indian National Congress were realistic:

Patel's strategic discussions and coalition building inside the Indian National Congress revealed his realism. He frequently served as a mediator, striking a balance between opposing ideologies to keep the party cohesive. In his dealings with leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi, Patel demonstrated his practical approach by putting group objectives ahead of individual or ideological disagreements. In order to maintain the momentum of the freedom struggle and the transition to independence, he was politically realistic in

his handling of criticism and his encouragement of compromise (*Wolpert, 1984*).

Examples of How His Policies Strike a Balance Between Idealism and Realism:

Idealism-his dedication to India's independence and unity and realism his recognition of the country's political complexity and pragmatic limitations were carefully balanced under Patel's leadership. For instance, Patel's pragmatic strategy during the integration of princely states was negotiating terms acceptable to the princes, perhaps utilizing subtle intimidation but avoiding outright conflict. Patel's aim, however, was a united India. In a same vein, he advocated for communal harmony by tempering the ideal of secular nationalism with practical measures to alleviate complaints and stop violence (*Guha, 2007*).

Nationalism in Patel's Vision for Gujarat and India Exploration of Patel's Nationalist Ideology:

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's conception of nationalism was deeply rooted in the principles of unity, integration, and secularism. His nationalist ideology transcended mere political independence, emphasizing the importance of building a cohesive and inclusive nation-state. Patel viewed nationalism as a unifying force essential to overcoming the diverse social, religious, and regional identities within India, particularly in Gujarat, his home state (*Wolpert, 1984*).

Emphasis on National Integration and Unity:

Patel's unrelenting quest for national integration was a defining feature of his nationalism. He made a significant effort to incorporate princely states into the Indian Union because he thought that India's strength resided in its unity. He envisioned a politically and culturally cohesive India in which communal and regional distinctions were reconciled under a unified national identity. His understanding that a divided India would be exposed to both internal conflict and external dangers was reflected in his intellectual and practical commitment to integration (*Guha, 2007*).

Resistance to Sectarianism and Communalism:

Patel was an outspoken critic of sectarian strife and communalism, which he saw to be significant barriers to Indian nationalism. Patel actively sought to lessen religious strife in Gujarat, where there were significant communal tensions, by promoting political cooperation, discussion, and strict administrative procedures. He condemned any kind of sectarianism that endangered the unity of the country and placed a strong emphasis on secular nationalism, arguing for equal rights and respect for all communities (*Brown, 1994*).

Highlighting Gujarat's Contribution to the National Freedom Movement:

Patel was instrumental in galvanizing Gujarat's heterogeneous populace to back the Indian liberation cause. In addition to incorporating regional ambitions into the larger nationalist goal, he promoted pride in Gujarat's contribution. Patel's leadership strengthened the connection between Gujarat's identity and India's by bringing regional political movements into line with the national cause (*Wolpert, 1984*).

Nationalism as a Force for Unification Overcoming Religious and Regional Barriers:

In an effort to forge a common national consciousness and rise beyond local allegiances, Patel's nationalism was inclusive. In order to bring divergent factions together, he highlighted shared objectives like independence, social fairness, and economic progress. His work in Gujarat and throughout India showed how nationalism could be a unifying factor that valued variety and promoted a sense of shared identity and purpose (*Guha, 2007*).

In Indian nationalism, Patel worked to create a cohesive identity in Gujarat:

Patel sought to create a unified Gujarati identity that was strongly in line with Indian nationalism through political organization, social reforms, and cultural fusion. He pushed for the elimination of socioeconomic injustices that threatened national cohesion and promoted collaboration across various castes, communities, and geographical areas.

According to Patel's vision for Gujarat, local identities strengthened rather than weakened the fabric of the country (*Brown, 1994*).

The Interaction of Nationalism, Realism, and Pragmatism in Patel's Political Theory

Conflict and Complementarity between Nationalism, Realism, and Pragmatism:

Nationalism, realism, and pragmatism all interacted to develop Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's political philosophy. These components frequently worked in concert to provide a well-rounded leadership style that was both morally and practically sound. But there were occasionally conflicts for example, between his nationalist beliefs and the practical concessions that political realities demanded. Despite these sporadic disagreements, Patel's political efficacy was largely dependent on his capacity to manage and combine these factors (*Wolpert, 1984*).

Synthesis Facilitating Successful Leadership:

Patel became a successful and well-liked leader by combining nationalism, realism, and pragmatism. His pragmatic adaptability made sure that political advancement was not impeded by ideological purity. His accurate assessment of the situation kept people from becoming disillusioned and making snap decisions. His dedication to nationalism, meanwhile, kept him focused on the end goal of an independent and united India. Because of this combination, Patel was able to gain the respect of people from all walks of life and political parties, which made it easier to reach an agreement and take swift action (*Brown, 1994*).

Effect on Political Stability in Gujarat:

The interaction of these three factors greatly aided in maintaining political stability in Gujarat. While his realism influenced measures that addressed economic and social inequalities, Patel's pragmatic governance reduced caste-based disputes and sectarian bloodshed. Nationalism promoted a shared identity that went beyond regional

differences. During a time of severe social and political unrest, this combination assisted in keeping Gujarat stable (*Wolpert, 1984*).

Impact on the Indian Independence Movement in General:

Patel's integrated strategy played a crucial role in preserving the Indian National Congress's unity and the larger liberation movement at the federal level. Nationalism spurred group action, realism kept expectations in check, and pragmatism helped control the movement's divergent ideological currents. This synergy was demonstrated by Patel's leadership in uniting princely states, which he accomplished by striking a balance between the nationalist demand of unity and diplomatic negotiation (*Guha, 2007*).

Contribution to Nation-Building Policies After Independence:

Following independence, Patel's views were still influenced by the interaction of nationalism, realism, and pragmatism. Law and order, administrative simplification, and the unification of disparate areas into a single nation-state were his top priorities. His nationalist vision and practical, realistic approach to government established the groundwork for India's political stability and growth throughout its early years (*Brown, 1994*).

Conclusion:

The complex relationships between nationalism, realism, and pragmatism in Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's political philosophy are highlighted by this study. A pragmatic approach that placed a high value on workable answers to difficult political problems, a realistic recognition of India's varied sociopolitical realities, and a strong nationalist dedication to the country's unity and integrity were all demonstrated by Patel's leadership. Patel was able to successfully negotiate the intricacies of the Indian freedom struggle, the integration of princely states, and the early years of independent India because these factors did not operate in a vacuum but rather supplemented and occasionally challenged one another (*Wolpert, 1984; Guha, 2007*).

Patel left behind a significant impact in Gujarat and India. His leadership promoted broad political involvement and social cohesiveness in Gujarat, a region characterized by caste and communal strife. On a national level, his attempts to bring together princely kingdoms and institute administrative order set the stage for India's political unification and democratic growth. Political leadership that prioritizes cohesion, practicality, and grounded realism in tackling complex governance issues is still motivated by Patel's vision and deeds (*Brown, 1994*).

Patel's philosophy has important ramifications for modern political leadership and nation-building. Patel's model emphasizes the need to strike a balance between ideological commitments, practical tactics, and realistic evaluations of societal situations in a period characterized by growing political polarization and socioeconomic complexity. For leaders working to advance inclusive development, social stability, and national unity in pluralistic countries, his capacity to balance disparate interests in the service of a shared national good provides a useful framework (*Guha, 2007*).

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