

## Chapter-5

# Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's Views on the Two-Nation Theory

Dr. Gopal B. Bharvad

Assistant Professor, MB Patel College of Education,  
Sardar Patel University, Vallabh Vidyanagar, Anand, Gujarat, India.

### Abstract

The Two-Nation Theory, championed by Muhammad Ali Jinnah and the Muslim League, posited that Hindus and Muslims represented two distinct nations and could not coexist peacefully within a single Indian polity. This ideology culminated in the partition of India in 1947, one of the most traumatic events in the subcontinent's history. In stark contrast, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel a leading figure in India's freedom movement and its first Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister rejected this theory on ideological, cultural, and pragmatic grounds. Patel envisioned a unified, secular India rooted in pluralism and national integration, where the rights of minorities were constitutionally protected and socially respected. This paper explores Patel's response to the Two-Nation Theory, his pragmatic acceptance of partition to prevent civil war, and his commitment to secular governance and minority rights post-independence. Through an examination of Patel's speeches, actions, and political beliefs, the paper positions him as a formidable opponent of communal politics and a staunch advocate for a unified Indian identity.

**Keywords:** Sardar Patel, Two-Nation Theory, Partition, Indian Constitution, Secularism, Integration, Communalism

### Introduction

The partition of British India in 1947, which led to the creation of India and Pakistan, was both a monumental political event and a profound human tragedy. It caused the displacement of over 14 million people and resulted in nearly a million deaths due to communal violence (*Talbot & Singh, 2009*). At the ideological core of this partition was the Two-

---

VOICE OF UNITY: Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and the Making of Modern India  
Dr. Ashish Paatiwala & Ms. Shital Koisa

ISBN: 978-81-991164-9-8

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.64328/978-81-991164-9-8-5>

Young India Publication, Gandhinagar, Gujarat

Nation Theory, which claimed that Muslims and Hindus constituted two separate nations with incompatible cultural and religious identities (*Jalal, 1985*). Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the chief proponent of this theory and the leader of the All-India Muslim League, argued that Muslims needed a separate homeland Pakistan to freely practice their religion and protect their political interests.

In contrast to Jinnah's separatism, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, one of the foremost leaders of the Indian National Congress and a key architect of independent India, vehemently opposed the Two-Nation Theory. He believed in the concept of a united India based on a shared cultural and civilizational heritage that transcended religious divisions. Although Patel reluctantly accepted the partition, he did so out of political pragmatism, aiming to avert a civil war and to stabilize the newly independent nation. Throughout his career, and especially after independence, Patel worked tirelessly to protect the rights of minorities, uphold secularism, and integrate the princely states into a unified Indian Union.

This paper seeks to explore Sardar Patel's ideological opposition to the Two-Nation Theory, his reluctant acceptance of partition, and his policies regarding minorities and national integration in post-independence India. It draws from historical accounts, speeches, and scholarly analyses to highlight Patel's role in shaping a secular and unified India.

#### Ideological Opposition to the Two-Nation Theory

Sardar Patel's resistance to the Two-Nation Theory was rooted in his understanding of Indian history and civilization. He believed that India was not a federation of religious communities but a civilizational entity forged through centuries of cultural synthesis and mutual coexistence. Unlike the Muslim League, which emphasized religious identity as the basis of nationhood, Patel argued for an inclusive nationalism that recognized diversity as a strength rather than a liability (*Chopra, 1999*).

According to Patel, the conception of separate nations based on religion was alien to Indian ethos and was propagated by British colonialists to divide and rule. He asserted, "The conception of a religious nation was a British creation to divide and rule India" (*Chopra, 1999, p. 82*). The British had

long pursued policies that emphasized communal divisions—for example, separate electorates for Muslims introduced through the Morley-Minto Reforms (1909) and later institutionalized through the Government of India Act (1935). These measures weakened Indian unity and contributed to the growth of communal politics.

Patel believed that the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan was a political manoeuvre to gain leverage rather than a genuine assertion of cultural incompatibility. He saw the League's insistence on partition as a tool to marginalize nationalist Muslims and to extract concessions from the Congress (*Gandhi, 2006*). His critique of the League was not limited to ideology but extended to its divisive politics that intensified communal tensions and weakened the freedom movement.

### **A Pragmatic Acceptance: The Necessity of Partition**

Despite his ideological opposition, Patel eventually accepted partition in 1947. Unlike Mahatma Gandhi, who maintained an uncompromising stand against partition, Patel recognized the deteriorating communal situation and feared that prolonged conflict could lead to a full-scale civil war. By the mid-1940s, India was witnessing large-scale communal riots in places like Calcutta, Noakhali, Bihar, and later in Punjab and Delhi. In Patel's assessment, maintaining unity in such an atmosphere would only increase bloodshed and destabilize the nation.

V. P. Menon, Patel's close aide and collaborator in the Ministry of States, recalled Patel saying, "We accepted partition in order to avoid greater bloodshed and destruction, not because we believed in it" (*Menon, 1957, p. 189*). Patel viewed partition as a bitter but necessary pill to ensure a peaceful transfer of power. His decision was guided by realism rather than resignation. He understood that continued resistance to partition would only embolden the Muslim League and deepen the communal divide.

Moreover, Patel was deeply concerned about the administrative paralysis caused by the League's participation in the interim government. The experience of working with League members, who often obstructed governance,

convinced him that cooperation with the League in a united India was unfeasible. Thus, partition became a pragmatic solution to a political deadlock that threatened to consume the entire nation.

### **The Aftermath of Partition: Patel's Commitment to Minority Rights**

Even after the creation of Pakistan, Patel did not abandon his commitment to pluralism and minority protection. As the Home Minister, he was confronted with the enormous challenge of communal violence, refugee rehabilitation, and the integration of princely states. Despite the turmoil, Patel emphasized that minorities in India must be protected and treated with dignity.

In a speech delivered in January 1948, Patel declared, "It is the primary responsibility of the majority community to see that minorities feel safe. Without this, we cannot claim to be a civilized country" (*Gandhi, 2006, p. 346*). This statement underscored his belief that India's moral and democratic fabric depended on its treatment of minorities. His words carried particular significance in the immediate context of the partition, when retaliatory violence against Muslims in India and Hindus in Pakistan had become rampant.

Patel took concrete measures to curb communal violence and restore law and order. He deployed security forces in riot-hit areas, ensured the prosecution of those responsible for violence, and facilitated the return and rehabilitation of refugees. His approach was firm but fair. While he condemned the violence committed by Muslim mobs during partition, he equally condemned retaliatory actions by Hindus and Sikhs. He often reminded the majority community of their ethical responsibility to uphold India's secular promise.

**The Integration of Princely States: A Testament to Secular Vision** Perhaps Sardar Patel's most enduring legacy is his role in integrating over 560 princely states into the Indian Union. Many of these states were ruled by monarchs of various religions Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and others. Patel handled the integration process with a secular and statesmanlike approach, focusing on national unity rather than religious identity (*Menon, 1957*).

A particularly notable case was that of Hyderabad, a Muslim-ruled state with a Hindu majority population. The Nizam of Hyderabad initially refused to accede to India, hoping for either independence or integration with Pakistan. Patel responded decisively through a police action in September 1948 (Operation Polo), but his post-operation policies were conciliatory. He ensured that the Muslim population was protected and that the Nizam was treated with respect despite his opposition.

In another case, the princely state of Junagadh, ruled by a Muslim Nawab, declared accession to Pakistan despite having a majority Hindu population. Patel responded by organizing a plebiscite, which overwhelmingly favored joining India. These examples illustrate how Patel managed to balance political firmness with a commitment to secularism and democratic principles.

### **Patel's Influence on the Indian Constitution and Minority Safeguards**

While Dr. B.R. Ambedkar is rightly celebrated as the chief architect of the Indian Constitution, Sardar Patel played an equally crucial role in shaping India's federal structure and internal security architecture. As the chairman of the Advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights, Minorities, and Tribal and Excluded Areas, Patel was instrumental in shaping the provisions related to minority rights and secular governance (*Austin, 1999*).

Patel believed that minority rights should be protected not through separate electorates or community-based privileges but through universal rights applicable to all citizens. He opposed the continuation of separate electorates, which he believed had divided communities and fostered communalism under British rule. Instead, he supported equal rights, religious freedom, and cultural autonomy for all citizens, regardless of faith.

In his address to the Constituent Assembly on 25 October 1949, Patel stated, "We must not forget that the minorities have to trust the good sense and conscience of the majority and not look up to the majority for concessions" (*Austin, 1999*,

p. 144). His vision was that of a secular India where citizenship, not religion, determined one's rights and duties.

### **Patel vs. Jinnah: Diverging National Visions**

The contrasting political trajectories of Sardar Patel and Muhammad Ali Jinnah offer a valuable lens into the competing ideologies of Indian nationalism. Both were trained lawyers, western-educated, and initially associated with the Indian National Congress. However, their views on the future of India diverged radically during the 1930s and 1940s.

Jinnah gradually moved towards a politics of exclusivism, where religion became the primary marker of political identity. His insistence on the Two-Nation Theory stemmed from his disillusionment with the Congress's ability to protect Muslim interests. While Jinnah claimed to represent all Indian Muslims, his support base was limited, and many Muslims, particularly in Bengal and the United Provinces, did not share his vision (*Jalal, 1985*).

Patel, on the other hand, remained committed to a composite nationalism that accommodated multiple identities within a single nation-state. He viewed communalism—whether Hindu or Muslim as a threat to national integration. His practical experience in managing Congress-led ministries and later, independent India's internal affairs, made him acutely aware of the perils of identity-based politics.

### **Legacy and Relevance Today**

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's legacy remains deeply relevant in contemporary India. His vision of national integration, his commitment to secularism, and his emphasis on civic unity over religious identity offer enduring lessons in pluralistic governance. In an era when communal tensions continue to challenge Indian democracy, Patel's warnings against the dangers of religious nationalism deserve renewed attention.

Patel's legacy has also been the subject of political appropriation. Various political parties have invoked his name to claim his ideological inheritance. However, any honest engagement with Patel's thought must recognize his unwavering commitment to secularism, constitutionalism, and minority protection—values that are indispensable to India's democratic framework.

## **Conclusion**

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel stood as a pillar of strength during one of the most volatile periods in Indian history. His ideological rejection of the Two-Nation Theory, his pragmatic decision to accept partition to prevent greater catastrophe, and his unwavering commitment to secularism and minority rights mark him as a statesman of exceptional vision and integrity. Patel's life and legacy exemplify the idea of India as a diverse yet unified nation where religion is a matter of personal faith, not political identity.

His contributions to national integration, constitutional governance, and minority protection remain vital to the sustenance of India's democratic and secular character. As India continues to grapple with the challenges of diversity, Patel's ideals offer a compass to navigate the complex terrain of nation-building with justice, equity, and unity.

## **References**

- Ahmad, I. (2009). *The Legacy of Jinnah and the Two-Nation Theory*. Economic and Political Weekly, 44(32), 38–45.
- Anderson, B. (2006). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (Rev. ed.). Verso.
- Austin, G. (1999). *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation*. Oxford University Press.
- Bhargava, R. (2008). *Political secularism: Why it is needed and what can be learnt from its Indian version*. In G. B. Levey & T. Modood (Eds.), *Secularism, religion and multicultural citizenship* (pp. 82–109). Cambridge University Press.
- Brass, P. R. (2003). *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*. University of Washington Press.
- Chandra, B. (2008). *India Since Independence*. Penguin Books.
- Chopra, P. N. (1999). *Sardar Patel: Builders of Modern India*. Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.
- Gandhi, R. (2006). *Patel: A Life*. Navajivan Publishing House.
- Guha, R. (2007). *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy*. Pan Macmillan.

- Hasan, M. (1997). *Legacy of a Divided Nation: India's Muslims Since Independence*. Oxford University Press.
- Jaffrelot, C. (2007). *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader*. Princeton University Press.
- Jalal, A. (1985). *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*. Cambridge University Press.
- Khilnani, S. (1999). *The Idea of India*. Penguin Books.
- Menon, V. P. (1957). *The Story of the Integration of the Indian States*. Orient Longman.
- Noorani, A. G. (2000). *The Muslims of India: A Documentary Record*. Oxford University Press.
- Pandey, G. (2001). *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India*. Cambridge University Press.
- Raghavan, V. (2016). *Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and the Making of United India*. Penguin Books India.
- Smith, D. E. (1963). *India as a Secular State*. Princeton University Press.
- Talbot, I., & Singh, G. (2009). *The Partition of India*. Cambridge University Press.
- Varshney, A. (2002). *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India*. Yale University Press