

Research Paper

Sardar Vallabhai Patel and Indian Polity**Dr. Chandrakant. Devappa**

Professor & Research Guide

Department of Political Science

Govt. First Grade College

Dharwad: 580 001, Karnataka (India)

ABSTRACT

Vallabh Bhai Patel (31 October 1875 – 15 December 1950) was an Indian barrister and statesman, one of the leaders of the Indian National Congress. He had known to be social leader of India who played a major role in the country's struggle for independence and guided its integration into a united, independent nation. He was known as the "Iron Man of India". In India and across the world, he was often addressed as Sardar.

Political Administration:

A strong administrator, a devoted patriot and a dedicated servant of the nation, Sardar Patel will be remembered in the annals of India for his great work of political and territorial consolidation of the country. He devoted his vast energies to give concrete shape to some of the Gandhian techniques for political fight¹.

Sardar Patel was primarily a man of action and a supreme realist. His realism has been attributed to the sound principle that "the cause is always greater than the man"². It was not given to him to spin academic theories of administrative reform, either by inclination or by circumstances. His was not a management consultant's soft world of fabricating proposals for organizational improvement or betterment of administration. Even his administrative vision was conditioned by the prevalent situation and its requirements. His was the grim and continuous struggle with the realities of practical life in a hostile environment. But he had the capacity to locate and size an opportunity; he would not pause to think or waver, he acted promptly. He had no fear. He did not look back or shrink once he clearly saw his path and his goal. It was an understanding of the nature of this environment which provided him with an insight into the then existing administration as it was and shaped his views as to what it ought to be. As a man of action, he watched the administration in operation. As a political and social worker, with his ears to the ground and his heart close to the people it was not difficult for him with his sensitivity to understand the failings of the administrative system and the personnel manning it. The inspiration or the motive force of this insight and effort was the quest for deliverance from foreign domination. His width of outlook or vastness of mental horizon, charity of heart, and sensitivity to public feeling were largely responsible for his remarkable achievements as a politician as well as an administrator. Straight, simple, yet shrewd, he acquired a comprehensive and realistic grasp of all matters relating to the administration of public affairs.

In order to get a more balanced view of his contribution to administration, we have to take into account his social ideas, his thoughts on socio-economic issues and the like since they directly impinge on the approach or the direction that has to be given to the policy as well as the programme by the apparatus of administration. Sardar Patel, as we have noted, was no administrator in the conventional sense. He was a statesman administrator. In a way, he was the guardian not only of administrative requirements and proprieties but also of administrative effectiveness. As has been said, "the rebel in him had also the sound instinct of a builder." It is in the effort at nation building that his administrative finesse found expression as is capacity for organizational efficiency, enforcement of discipline and popular mobilization had flowered during the struggle for independence.

As Dr. Rajendra Prasad said, "Like Mahatma Gandhi, he would look into the details of every problem that came up before him and he would not be satisfied unless he had might be called a bird's eye view of a question, neglecting small details. He had also a fund of confidence in himself and in the people whom he led and he would not hesitate to take risk because he really felt that there was no risk involved a things would, according to his calculations, set themselves right"³. Such an administrative perception is a unique contribution to the art and practice of administration.

It is also worthwhile to remember that "he was one of the earliest among the Congress leaders to interest himself in organizing labour." From 1917, even before the non-cooperation movement, along with Gandhiji, he was engaged in resolving labour disputes in Ahmedabad. He was deeply involved in organizing the Gandhi Majur Mahajan Sangh in Ahmedabad. He was also, for some time in the twenties, the chairman of the BB and CI Railway Worker's Union. Thus, the Sardar was well-acquainted with the problems of industrial labour, industrial peace, etc., so he was not a novice in this segment of public life when many

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administrative problems emerged after freedom was achieved. He was also immensely interested in constructive work apart from gestational politics and had considerable accomplishment to his credit. He promoted and helped many voluntary organizations. Even with the commitment to welfare state, it is recognized that the importance of voluntary effort can be minimized or ignored. Not by any means a social obscurantist, he was always a pillar of strength to Thakkar Bapa in his work of the uplift of the Harijans, Bhils and other unprivileged sections of society.

Some other aspects of his public and political life gave him such a wide perspective for his future responsibilities that they merit mention. The Kheda Satyagraha was the start of his political career. Gandhiji said about Vallabhbhai Patel: "If it were not for his assistance, I must admit that this campaign could not have been carried through so successfully". At Borsad in 1922-24, when dacoities and robberies were rampant and people's life insecure because of the collusion of criminals and the governmental functionaries, he mustered courage to expose the ugly situation at a great personal risk and was successful in having the corrective measures taken. The satyagraha in Borsad against punitive tax was again his personal triumph. As Mavalankar said: "The fearlessness and the gift which he showed in plain – speaking to authorities in those days of bureaucratic domination by the steel-frame of the then ruling race, can hardly be appraised now in proper perspective. He always stood erect and showed a sense of self-respect, which was a guide and inspiration to youngsters like me. His spirit of service and devotion to duty were of such an exceptional character that as chairman of the municipal sanitary committee, he stuck to his residence in the city of Ahmedabad when plague (1917) was raging and refused to move for personal safety. He was a familiar figure moving in the streets of Ahmedabad, getting the sewers cleaned and the plague – stricken areas disinfected. When friends argued, he simply looked at them, and his silence was more eloquent than his words"⁴. As president of the municipality, he rendered signal service in the improvement of civic services and humbled the arrogance of the high and mighty bureaucracy with his tact in matters of principle. Thus he acquired a feel of the working of local self – government institutions quite early in the public life.

Vallabhbhai Patel displayed the same spirit of fearless dedication when the plague struck Borsad in 1935. Patel's leadership of Bardoli Satyagraha, "for organization and discipline, in planning and purpose, for unity of command and union of spirits" has been called by Dr. P. Sitaramaiyya as "a marvel unique in Indian history". He through his speeches, tried to infuse a spirit of fearlessness, self-sacrifice and discipline among the poor peasantry which withstood the wrath of the foreign rulers. Mahadev Desai, paying a tribute to the Sardar, said in *The Story of Bardoli*: "A leader had never a worthier following and the followers never a worthier leader". At the end of the Bardoli affair, Srinivas Shastri wrote to Gandhiji on September 7, 1920: "Vallabhbhai has risen to highest rank, I bow to him in reverence". As Jawaharlal Nehru writes in his autobiography, Bardoli "became a sign and a symbol of hope and strength and victory to the Indian peasant". His mobilization of people, manoeuvring of strategy and efforts for settlement during the Nagpur Flag Satyagraha (1923) bear testimony to his great organizing ability, administrative acumen and political sensitivity. Similarly, his organization of relief at the time of the unprecedented floods in Gujarat in

1927 evoked admiration even from the bureaucracy. It will be interesting to recall the reply that the Sardar sent to Gandhiji at this time as it will give us a idea of the man, his thought process and his self-confidence. He wrote: "if you wish to give us an opportunity to show you how well we have learnt what you have taught us and how we are putting into practice the training that you have been giving us for the past 10 years, do not come"⁵. Such experience of crisis administration or coping with natural calamities equipped him adequately to gear up the administrative machinery for similar tasks in future.

The experience of the Sardar during Provincial Autonomy, as the chairman of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee in selecting candidates for election to the provincial assemblies and for exercising supervision over their working, programme implementation, maintenance of discipline, etc., give him not only an overview of factional politics, veiled points of bureaucratic resistance but also of administrative pulls, pressures, strains, people's reactions and response, etc., to administration. The Sardar diplomatic tact, skill in dealing with parliamentary issues, and understanding of constitutional niceties concerning the relationship between the Governor and the Ministers came into full play at the time of differences between the Governors and the Chief Ministers of U.P. and Bihar and also when a serving civil servant was being made the Acting Governor of Orissa.

One can even trace his handling of the problem of States on independence to his observation of the conditions in the Kathiawar States, his association with the Rajkot episode, and his general contacts with the workers of the State's People's Conference.

When Patel came out in July 1934, the Congress was facing a crisis. The abrupt end of Civil Disobedience had brought demoralization and disintegration... There was the constitutionalist faction inside the Congress, not belonging to Malviya Group, but very much enthusiastic about work inside the legislatures without having a ghost of the idea how it was to be carried out, while the grinning John Bull straddled on the fence and merrily watched the next move of the Congress. There was the Congress Socialist faction who wanted to introduce Marxist doctrines and Marxist methods inside the Congress. An extreme Nationalist wing was being formed by Subhas Bose, who wanted to organize both those who were dissatisfied with Gandhian methods and those who were opposed to communal award without resorting to the tactics of Pandit Malviya and finally there was the group who believed in "our Gandhi right or wrong". Such was the condition of India in 1934... In India unifying role was played by Patel, who organized the Congress Parliamentary machine in 1934. He may be called the Parliamentary Dictator for he never did away with Parliamentary institutions. Subhas Bose was nearer to Nazi ideology than Patel is, had never the power Patel had and had no time to put his ideas to the acid test of reality. Patel did. From 1934 to 1939 he played a dominating role in the Indian politics, organized Parliamentary activities of Congress and later on (1937-39) influenced and controlled democracy in India⁶.

Though not concerned with the political aspects or the right and wrong of the issues involved, the conflict of viewpoints or even of the clash of personalities, it is pertinent to mention in passing his relationship with N.B. Khare, K.F. Nariman, R.A. Kidwai, Congress Socialists, Subhas Bose, A.K. Azad and even Nehru and the broad spectrum of interaction in various contexts with a view to appreciate his

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ideals and objectives, values and norms, strategy and tactics, attitude and approach, reaction and response to many vital questions of public affairs which had a vital bearing on matters of policy and programme of the state in the next few years. It has also to be appreciated that the so-called temperamental and ideological differences between Nehru and Patel have been needlessly magnified and the supplementary and complementary role, reciprocity of functional positions and mutuality of personal affection and regard, openly expressed by both, are apt to be ignored. Actually, it is the contribution of the one which promoted the success and achievement of the other during the epoch-making period when their lots were cast together.

The effort of Sardar Patel to have the provision for all-India services in our constitution as an integrating factor in the federal system, despite the initial reservations and hesitancy of some Chief Ministers, is really commendable even if one concedes their weaknesses and inadequacies. The validity of the institution was subsequently stressed by the States Reorganization Commission. Speaking in Bombay in October 1949, he appealed to the critics of the civil services to shed their old prejudices and assess their worth in the background of their quality and contribution at the time. "Outsides", he asserted "cannot appreciate their work. Many of their loyal workers and patriots are working with us day and night. All that we have been able to achieve, whether it be in the sphere of States or in Kashmir or in other theatres, has been possible because of their loyalty and whole-hearted support." But he was also conscious of the need for training of the new entrants to public service in the changed conditions and he was responsible for the setting up of the training institutions for the two all-India services as they then existed. In order to fill up the gaps in the services, due to resignation or migration of officers, he also divided the system of open recruitment to induct suitable persons with varied experience into administration in order to meet the emergent situation. He realised the basic role of civil service and categorically stated : "An efficient, discipline and contented services assured of its prospects as a result of diligent and honest work, is a sine qua non of sound administration under a democratic regime, even more than under an authoritarian rule. The services must be above party and we should ensure that political considerations either in its recruitment or in its discipline and control, are reduced to the minimum if not eliminated altogether." We have no doubt that if the sardar had been at the helm of affairs longer, he would have given the requisite priority to the training, development and orientation of services, be it from the viewpoint of functional adequacy, imaginative sympathy for the citizen, capacity to adapt to changing requirements or rapport with the community.

Conclusion:

It is summarized from the above stated administrative techniques of Sardar Patel worked for a democratic administration. It was partly an instinctive and unconscious process, partly it was deliberate and by design. What could broadly be considered the criteria which a democratic administration should satisfy? In the first place, it must be open in the sense of having a wide contact with the people. It must not operate in the interest of any privileged group or class. Its personnel must be recruited without discrimination from broad socio-economic strata of the population. In the second place, it must not get isolated from the people and should be sensitive and responsive to the feelings and reactions of the different segments of the public. It should keep abreast of the state of mind of the

governed and avoid the arrogance of disposition and attitude. In the third place, administration must not be regulated or controlled only by official hierarchy but also by public opinion and should not exist independently of political control. The constitutional framework that the Sardar tried to provide along with Nehru and the way he dealt with the emerging problems, the conventions that he helped to lay down in the functioning of parliamentary, and the environmental milieu that he wanted to introduce for the services, go to suggest that his ideal was the setting up of a democratic state and a democratic administration.

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