

# Vision Of Social Equity And Social Justice Of Patel: A Social Work Perspective

Mrs. V. Kavitha<sup>1</sup>, Mr. Narendran. S<sup>2</sup>, Dr. Pandab Hansda<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Social Work Department, Hindustan College of Arts & Science, Padur, Chennai-600103, kavithu15@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Social Work Department, Hindustan College of Arts & Science, Padur, Chennai-600103, narenramakrishna1988@gmail.com

<sup>3</sup>Assistant Professor, Social Work Department, Hindustan College of Arts & Science, Padur, Chennai-600103, pandabhansda75@gmail.com

---

## Abstract

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel popularly celebrated not only as the architect of India's political integration but also as a visionary champion of social justice and equity. His vision strengthened not only political integration but also the upliftment of marginalized groups through inclusive development. His leadership in movements like the Bardoli Satyagrahas represent his commitment to uplifting marginalized communities, fighting against oppressive taxation and social discrimination. Patel's vision uplifted to economic empowerment, notably through the cooperative movement, and to gender equality, as he mobilized women and advocated for their participation in nation-building. As chair of the Constituent Assembly's Advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights, Patel headed in embedding non-discrimination, abolition of untouchability, and equal access to public resources in the Indian Constitution. The role of social work in furthering Patel's vision is crucial: social workers today can draw innovation from his inclusive approach to promote social equity, community development, and empowerment of marginalized groups. Social work education and practice, by integrating on skill development, advocacy, and social inclusion, perpetuate Patel's legacy and contribute to the realization of a just and equitable society. This conceptual paper explores the intersection of Patel's ideals with contemporary social work, highlighting strategies for addressing persistent inequalities and fostering social cohesion in line with Patel's vision. By revisiting Patel's contributions, the paper aims to provide a framework for social workers to actively engage in building an inclusive and just India, ensuring that the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity remain central to national development.

**Key Words:** Social Justice, Marginalized Communities, Cooperative Movement, Community Development, Social Inclusion

---

## INTRODUCTION

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel stands as one of the foremost architects of modern India, renowned not only for his leadership role in the political unification of the country but also for his unwavering commitment to social change. Born in 1875 in Nadiad, Gujarat, Patel's early life was marked by a keen sense of justice and a deep empathy for the struggles of the common people. His close association with Mahatma Gandhi and his active participation in the freedom movement shaped his journey from a practicing lawyer to a national leader. Patel's leadership style was characterized by pragmatism, courage, and an inclusive vision that recognized the importance of integrating diverse communities into the national fabric. He earned the title "Iron Man of India" for his resolute efforts in integrating over 560 princely states into the Indian Union after independence, ensuring the territorial integrity and unity of the nation at a critical juncture. However, Patel's vision extended well beyond political boundaries. He believed that true nation-building required addressing deep-rooted social inequalities and fostering a sense of collective belonging among all citizens. Guided by Gandhian values of truth, non-violence, and service, Patel championed causes such as the abolition of untouchability, the empowerment of women, and the upliftment of marginalized groups. He consistently emphasized that social justice and economic self-reliance were essential pillars for a strong and harmonious

society. Patel's legacy offers profound lessons for contemporary social work, especially in the realms of community development, social inclusion, and advocacy for the disadvantaged. His ability to mobilize people across caste, creed, and gender lines, and his focus on practical solutions to social problems, provide a blueprint for social workers committed to building a just, equitable, and inclusive India. His life and work continue to inspire efforts toward national integration and the realization of constitutional values in everyday life.

### **Sardar Patel's Commitment To Social Justice: Understanding Social Justice In Patel's Context**

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's vision of social justice was rooted in the belief that every individual, regardless of caste, creed, or gender, deserved equal rights, opportunities, and dignity. For Patel, social justice was not merely a theoretical concept oriented the true freedom and progress of the nation. He maintained that the empowerment of the marginalized sections of society was a prerequisite for real independence and national unity. Patel's approach addressed both the visible and invisible forms of oppression - economic, social, and political - that marginalized large segments of Indian society.

Patel's commitment to social justice was evident in his pivotal role during the framing of the Indian Constitution. He moved key resolutions in the Constituent Assembly to ensure that the state would not discriminate against any citizen based on religion, race, caste, or sex, and he advocated for unrestricted access to public resources and spaces for all citizens. He was a strong supporter of fundamental rights, believing that liberty and equality were the most important part for both individual and national development. Patel's advocacy extended to supporting the Hindu Code Bill, which advanced women's rights and empowerment, and to promoting cooperative movements that provided economic dignity and security to local communities, especially women.

Beyond legal and constitutional measures, Patel's vision for social justice was reflected in his grassroots activism. He criticized exploitative policies, fought against the high-handedness of authorities, and worked tirelessly to empower peasants, workers, and the rural poor. He inspired marginalized groups to organize, demand their rights, and participate actively in the democratic process. Patel's idea of democracy was based on equality, unity, and shared responsibility, and he believed that only by overcoming divisions of caste and creed could India achieve true nationhood.

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's vision of social justice was deeply rooted in the belief that true national integration could not be obtained without addressing the inequalities and injustices faced by marginalized groups, especially women, rural populations, and the economically disadvantaged.

### **Key Social Movement**

His advocacy was not limited to rhetoric; during the Bardoli Satyagraha, he consulted with women, encouraged their involvement in planning and execution, and recognized their leadership, which was a radical step at the time. He also supported legislative reforms such as the Hindu Code Bill, which promoted gender equality and women's rights. Patel's efforts were instrumental in bringing women into the mainstream of the independence movement and public affairs, demonstrating his belief in equality and respect for women's opinions.

### **Upliftment Of Marginalised Community**

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was deeply committed to the upliftment of marginalized communities, particularly Dalits and other socially disadvantaged groups. He actively worked to abolish the practice of untouchability, recognizing it as a major barrier to social unity and national progress. Patel believed that true independence and democracy could not be achieved unless every individual, regardless of caste, was treated with dignity and respect. He consistently advocated for the integration of Dalits into mainstream society, encouraging their participation in public life and ensuring their access to basic rights and opportunities. Patel also promoted inter-caste harmony, urging people to rise above narrow social divisions and work together for the greater good of the nation. He supported various initiatives aimed at providing educational and economic opportunities for backward classes, understanding that empowerment through education and livelihood was essential for breaking the cycle of poverty and discrimination. By championing these causes, Patel laid a strong

foundation for a more inclusive and equitable society, inspiring future generations to continue the fight against social injustice.

### **Economic Empowerment: The Cooperative Movement**

Patel's vision of social justice also extended to rural development and economic empowerment. He was a firm believer in the Gandhian concept of Grama Swarajya, or village self-rule, and worked to empower rural communities through value-based education and skill development. He saw the upliftment of villages as crucial for bridging the gap between the "haves and have-nots" and for fostering inclusive growth. Patel's support for the cooperative movement, especially among farmers, led to the establishment of successful models like Amul, which empowered local communities and promoted self-reliance.

Furthermore, Patel's approach to social justice emphasized the need for collective action and community participation. He believed in mobilizing people across caste, creed, and gender to fight against social evils such as untouchability and caste discrimination. His advocacy for non-discrimination, equal access to resources, and the abolition of untouchability was later enshrined in the Indian Constitution, reflecting his commitment to building a just and inclusive society.

To be precise, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's vision of social justice was comprehensive and forward-looking. It encompassed gender equality, rural empowerment, economic self-reliance, and the eradication of social discrimination. His legacy provides a powerful framework for contemporary social work, highlighting the importance of advocacy, education, and inclusive development in achieving lasting social transformation.

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's commitment to economic empowerment was a cornerstone of his vision for a just and inclusive India. He understood that political freedom would be incomplete without economic self-reliance, especially for the rural poor and marginalized farmers. Patel's approach to economic justice was both practical and transformative, focusing on collective action and the democratization of economic opportunities.

A defining example of Patel's strategy was his pivotal role in the genesis of the cooperative movement in India, particularly in the dairy sector. In the 1940s, farmers in Gujarat's Kheda district were at the mercy of private milk contractors who exploited them by fixing low prices and controlling the market. Recognizing their plight, Patel advised the farmers to organize themselves into cooperatives, allowing them to bypass exploitative middlemen and directly market their milk. He recommended that the farmers establish their own pasteurization plant and, if necessary, launch a "milk strike" to demand fair treatment. Patel's trusted associate, Morarji Desai, was instrumental in mobilizing the farmers and setting up village-level milk cooperatives. These societies then federated to form the Kaira District Co-operative Milk Producers' Union Limited - later known as Amul - which became a model for cooperative dairy development in India.

The Anand Pattern that emerged from this movement involved organizing primary dairy cooperatives at the village level, which would then federate into district unions and, ultimately, state-level marketing federations. This structure empowered farmers to collectively own and manage the entire value chain—from production and processing to marketing—ensuring fair prices, transparency, and profit-sharing. The success of Amul inspired similar cooperatives nationwide, and the government later institutionalized this model through initiatives like the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) and Operation Flood, transforming India into one of the world's largest milk producers.

Patel's vision for cooperatives extended beyond dairying. He saw cooperatives as a means to organize economic activity in rural India, linking credit, production, and marketing societies to provide comprehensive support to farmers and artisans. The cooperative model promoted by Patel was rooted in Gandhian ideals of Gram Swaraj - self-sufficient, democratically managed villages. It emphasized collective ownership, decentralized decision-making, and the upliftment of the weakest members of society.

Today, Patel's legacy continues to shape India's rural economy. The recently launched Sardar Patel Cooperative Dairy Federation Limited (SPCDFL) is a multi-state initiative designed to unify and empower millions of small and marginal milk producers across the country, reflecting Patel's enduring influence on cooperative policy and rural development. This model has not only helped to improve incomes and

livelihoods for countless families but has also fostered social cohesion, gender inclusion, and community resilience in rural India.

### **Gender Equality And Women's Participation**

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was a steadfast advocate for gender equality and women's empowerment, recognizing early on that the progress of the nation was inconsistently linked to the status and advancement of its women. Patel's commitment to women's education and their participation in public life was evident in both his words and actions. He consistently emphasized that education for girls was not merely about literacy but about developing character, self-reliance, and the ability to contribute meaningfully to society. He supported educational institutions for girls, such as Vitthal Kanya Vidyalaya and Kanya Vidya Bhavan, and ensured that these schools were equipped not just for academic learning but also for nurturing discipline, hard work, and self-confidence among female students. Patel believed that educated women would become pillars of strength for their families and society, and he worked to dispel superstitions and social barriers that discouraged female education, stating that "the chariot of life runs on two wheels, but we have been crippled for the last two hundred years because we have let one of our constituent parts useless".

Patel's approach went beyond education—he mobilized women during mass movements, most notably the Bardoli Satyagraha, where he actively consulted with women, involved them in strategy, and encouraged their participation in public protests and organizational roles. This inclusive approach was groundbreaking at a time when women's roles were largely confined to the domestic sphere. The success of the Bardoli movement, where women's leadership and courage were publicly acknowledged, set a precedent for their active involvement in India's freedom struggle and civic life. Patel's support for the Hindu Code Bill further underscored his commitment to legal and social reforms that would ensure equal rights for women in matters of inheritance, marriage, and property, reflecting his belief that every citizen should be treated equally under the law.

He challenged traditional gender roles by advocating for equal opportunities for girls and boys, criticizing the prevalent discrimination that limited girls' access to education and public life. Patel insisted that both boys and girls must be educated and empowered, warning that neglecting one would lead to societal imbalance and discontent. He promoted the idea that women should be self-reliant, capable of self-defense, and imbued with strong moral values, preparing them to be leaders and change-makers in their communities.

Patel's vision for women's empowerment was holistic, encompassing education, legal rights, economic participation, and social respect. He believed that true Swaraj (self-rule) and national progress were impossible without the full and equal participation of women, famously stating that just as a house is incomplete without a housewife, so too is national freedom incomplete without the rightful place and respect for women. His legacy continues to inspire efforts toward gender equality, women's education, and empowerment in India today.

### **Constitutional Vision: Embedding Social Justice**

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's constitutional contributions were both foundational and far-reaching, leaving a lasting imprint on India's democracy and social fabric. As the chair of the Constituent Assembly's Advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights and Minorities, Patel played a decisive role in shaping the core values of the Indian Constitution. He was instrumental in ensuring that the Constitution enshrined guarantees of non-discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth, and he championed the abolition of untouchability, which became Article 17 - a historic and progressive provision for social justice. Patel also advocated for equal access to public places and resources, recognizing that true democracy required the removal of social barriers and the creation of inclusive public spaces.

Patel's leadership in the Assembly was notable by his pragmatic, action-oriented approach. While he spoke sparingly in debates, his influence was deeply felt in the selection of committee members, the framing of key provisions, and the management of complex negotiations among diverse interest groups. He was committed to fair representation, ensuring that not only major communities but also minorities, women, and marginalized groups had a voice in the constitution-making process. Patel's handling of minority rights was particularly nuanced: he opposed separate electorates, believing they would deepen communal divisions, but

he supported safeguards for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Anglo-Indians through reserved seats and nominations, thus balancing the need for protection with the goal of national unity.

Beyond the Assembly, Patel's vision helped embed the principles of justice, equality, and fraternity into the very structure of Indian governance. He believed that the Constitution should provide not only rights but also effective mechanisms for good governance and social inclusion. His insistence on embedding legal and policy frameworks for social justice has had a lasting impact, providing the foundation for subsequent laws and affirmative action policies aimed at uplifting marginalized communities and promoting equality.

For contemporary social work, Patel's ideals remain highly relevant. His holistic approach – combining advocacy, community mobilization, and policy influence – offers a model for addressing both immediate needs and long-term empowerment. Social workers can draw from Patel's strategies by encouraging collective action, supporting skill development and economic initiatives like cooperatives, and promoting social inclusion across caste, religion, and gender. Patel's emphasis on participatory leadership and ethical advocacy is particularly instructive for social work education, which can integrate his case studies and methods to train future professionals in building a just and inclusive society.

In brief, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's constitutional legacy is a testament to his vision of a united, equitable, and democratic India. His work in the Constituent Assembly ensured that the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity were not just ideals but actionable commitments, guiding the nation's journey toward social justice and inclusive development.

### **Relevance To Contemporary Social Work**

To translate Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's legacy into effective strategies for social work practice, it is crucial to adopt a holistic, action-oriented approach rooted in community engagement, advocacy, and empowerment. Below is an elaboration of key strategies and their integration into social work education, drawing inspiration from Patel's life and methods:

#### **Community Mobilization**

Patel's leadership in the Bardoli and Kheda movements demonstrated the transformative power of collective action and grassroots leadership. Social workers should prioritize mobilizing communities to identify their own needs, organize around shared goals, and develop local leadership. This involves facilitating dialogue, building trust, and nurturing a sense of agency among community members. Like Patel, who traveled village to village during crises, social workers must be present on the ground, fostering solidarity and resilience, especially among the most vulnerable.

#### **Advocacy And Policy Engagement**

Patel's approach went beyond agitation; he engaged with authorities and influenced policy to address systemic injustices. Social workers must similarly work with government bodies, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders to advocate for policies that benefit marginalized groups. This includes lobbying for legal reforms, participating in policy dialogues, and ensuring that the voices of disadvantaged communities are represented in decision-making processes.

#### **Skill Development And Economic Initiatives**

Patel's support for cooperatives and vocational training was instrumental in empowering rural populations and promoting self-reliance. Social workers should promote the formation of cooperatives, self-help groups, and skill development programs tailored to local economic opportunities. This not only enhances livelihoods but also builds collective bargaining power and economic independence, especially for women and marginalized groups.

#### **Promoting Social Inclusion**

Challenging discrimination and fostering unity across caste, religion, and gender were central to Patel's philosophy. Social workers should design and implement programs that break down social barriers, encourage inter-group cooperation, and celebrate diversity. This can be achieved through inclusive community events, awareness campaigns, and interventions that promote equal access to resources and opportunities.

#### **Empowering Women**

Patel's advocacy for women's education and leadership set a precedent for gender-inclusive development. Social workers should create platforms for women's voices, encourage their participation in community decision-making, and support initiatives that address gender-based barriers. This includes leadership training, support groups, and targeted economic programs that enhance women's autonomy and status.

### **Integrating Patel's Legacy In Social Work Education**

To sustain these strategies, social work education must go beyond theory and immerse students in real-world challenges. This involves:

- Incorporating case studies of Patel's movements (such as Bardoli and Kheda) into the curriculum to analyze successful models of community mobilization and advocacy.
- Emphasizing participatory methods, ethical leadership, and the importance of social advocacy as core competencies.
- Encouraging students to undertake fieldwork in rural and marginalized communities, fostering firsthand understanding of grassroots realities and the skills needed to drive change.

By embedding these strategies into both practice and education, social workers can honor Patel's legacy and become effective agents of social transformation, working towards a society that truly embodies justice, equity, and inclusion.

To address persistent inequalities in society, a comprehensive and practical framework for action is essential—one that reflects Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's values of justice, inclusion, and community empowerment. Below is an elaboration of each step in such a framework, demonstrating how social workers, policymakers, and community leaders can create lasting impact:

### **Recognize And Map Local Inequalities**

The first step is to thoroughly understand the specific challenges faced by marginalized groups within a community. This requires systematic data collection, community mapping, and direct engagement with local residents to identify issues such as poverty, discrimination, lack of access to education, healthcare, or economic opportunities. Patel's own methods - touring villages, listening to grievances, and documenting hardships - serve as a model for this process. By recognizing the unique forms of disadvantage present in each locality, interventions can be tailored to address real needs rather than applying generic solutions.

### **Design Inclusive Programs**

Once inequalities are mapped, interventions must be designed to ensure that the most vulnerable are not left behind. This involves creating programs that are accessible, culturally sensitive, and responsive to the lived experiences of marginalized groups. For example, Patel's support for cooperative movements and community-based initiatives like Amul demonstrated how inclusive economic models can uplift entire communities, particularly women and the rural poor. Social workers should ensure that their programs are participatory, involving beneficiaries in planning and implementation, and flexible enough to adapt to changing community dynamics.

### **Foster Partnerships**

No single entity can address deep-rooted inequalities alone; collaboration is key. Building partnerships with government agencies, NGOs, local self-help groups, and community organizations amplifies resources and expertise. Patel's own leadership style emphasized unity and collective action, bringing together diverse groups for common causes such as the Bardoli and Kheda Satyagrahas. Today, fostering multi-sectoral partnerships can help leverage government schemes, mobilize additional funding, and ensure a holistic approach to social development.

### **Monitor And Evaluate**

Continuous assessment is vital to ensure that interventions remain effective and relevant. This involves setting clear goals, tracking progress through measurable indicators, and gathering feedback from the community. Regular monitoring allows for early identification of challenges and timely course corrections. Patel's pragmatic leadership - where he constantly evaluated the impact of his actions and adapted strategies to achieve desired outcomes - serves as a guiding example. Evaluation should not only focus on quantitative outcomes but also on qualitative improvements in dignity, empowerment, and social cohesion.

By following this framework, social workers and community leaders can systematically address persistent inequalities, foster inclusion, and empower marginalized groups. This approach—rooted in the principles championed by Sardar Patel—ensures that social justice is not just an ideal, but a lived reality for all members of society.

## CONCLUSION

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's vision continues to serve as a guiding beacon for those striving to build a just, equitable, and inclusive India. His life and work exemplify how principled leadership, rooted in integrity and empathy, can bring about transformative social change. Patel's unwavering commitment to social justice was not confined to rhetoric; it was reflected in his actions—whether it was integrating the nation, championing the rights of marginalized communities, or advocating for gender equality and economic empowerment. Through his leadership in mass movements like the Bardoli and Kheda Satyagrahas, Patel demonstrated the immense power of community mobilization and collective action in confronting injustice and achieving lasting progress.

Patel's contributions to the Indian Constitution ensured that the foundational values of liberty, equality, and fraternity were not merely aspirational ideals but actionable commitments, enshrined in the very fabric of the nation's governance. His insistence on non-discrimination, the abolition of untouchability, and equal access to resources laid the groundwork for a society where every individual, regardless of background, could aspire to dignity and opportunity.

For contemporary social workers, Patel's legacy offers both inspiration and a practical framework. By embracing his values—such as inclusivity, grassroots empowerment, and ethical advocacy - social workers can play a pivotal role in realizing the constitutional promise of justice for all. This involves mobilizing communities, advocating for policy reforms, promoting economic self-reliance, and ensuring that the voices of the most vulnerable are heard and respected. In doing so, social workers not only honor Patel's memory but also contribute to the ongoing journey toward a more just and harmonious India.

In essence, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's life is a testament to the enduring impact of visionary leadership and compassionate action. His ideals remain as relevant today as they were during the formative years of the nation, reminding us that the pursuit of social justice and inclusion is a continuous process—one that requires dedication, courage, and the collective will of society. By drawing upon Patel's example, social workers and all citizens can help shape an India where the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity are truly realized for every individual.

## REFERENCE

1. Chandra, B. (2008). *India since independence*. Penguin Books.
2. Guha, R. (2014). *Gandhi before India*. Vintage Books.
3. Menon, V. P. (1956). *The story of the integration of the Indian states*. Orient Longman.
4. Ministry of Cooperation. (2022). *Cooperative movement in India: Past, present and future*. Government of India. <https://cooperation.gov.in/>
5. Patel, V. (2005). Women's empowerment in India: A critique. *Social Change*, 35(4), 47–64. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004908570503500404>
6. Shah, G. (2001). *Dalit identity and politics*. SAGE Publications.
7. Thapar, R. (2012). *The past as present: Forging contemporary identities through history*. Aleph Book Company.
8. UN Women. (2020). *Progress of the world's women: Families in a changing world*. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020>
9. Zakaria, R. (2000). *Sardar Patel and Indian Muslims*. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.
10. Gandhi, M. K. (1996). *Letters to Sardar Patel*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House.
11. Gandhi, R. (1990). *Patel A Life*. Ahmedabad : Navajivan Publishing House.
12. Parikh, N. (1971). *Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House.