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Union cabinet has adopted a new policy for the celebration of the anniversaries of the great people. Now only Gandhi ji’s birth and death anniversary will be observed by the government. In the mean time Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel’s birth anniversary as National Unity Day remained in the main agenda of the government. It appears now that country will now celebrate the Greats on the party lines.

The next few days will complete the 125th birth anniversary of Pt. Nehru who seems to have been given a cold treatment by the Union government. Government has segregated the Greats according to needs and ideological affiliations thus belittling their contribution in the nation building. Today Nehru is considered a part of Congress, true he headed a Congress ministry but his role in the freedom struggle is shortened by the present government. Congress during its ruling days did same to many including Patel, Bose and others. The nationalistic socialization is being governed by the political parties in accordance to their particular interests.

When freedom struggle was going on many great souls had come together for a great nationalist cause of making India free. In the contemporary time, Nehru and Patel are often compared and a sort of haze is created. A Kerala RSS affiliated newspaper publishes an article that Godse should have killed Nehru than Gandhi. Un authentication has become a Gobbelian truth of such writings but the greatest harm is to real national unity, the party ideology thus kills the true relevance of National Unity Day.

Patel and Nehru were coworkers in the freedom movement. Patel was man of resolution and action but a little serious. Nehru was a thinker and intellectual par excellence but a little utopian. They albeit had difference at the ideological level.“Nehru was the radical and Patel, the conservative. Nehru was a humanist, a product of a composite Hindu, Muslim and western
liberal environment and a firm believer in equal rights for all religious communities in India. Patel was a staunch Hindu by upbringing and conviction.”

The major diversion between Nehru and Patel was on the issue of minorities. Patel had his reservations about Muslims. He was concerned about the next phase of the nation building where he desired everyone to submit to the country putting aside the allegiance to a particular caste or religion. He differed from Nehru on the issue of minorities. Nehru was of the belief that it was duty of the state to protect them. Patel thought that minorities should demonstrate that they were loyal to new Indian state. “Nehru felt that it was the responsibility of the Congress and the government to make the Muslims in India feel secure. Patel, on the other hand, was inclined to place the responsibility on the minorities themselves.”

The selection of Nehru as the first Prime Minister was decided by Gandhi. In fact there was no role of Congress party in it. Why did Gandhi prefer Nehru over others, is not far to seek. Nehru had an aura of International leader, was a thinker with creative originality, had deduced certain philosophical concepts like socialism, democratic centralism from nationalistic perspective, had aired his thoughts through his everlasting books. None other in the Congress ever neared to him. He was “a person whose outlook on the Hindu-Muslim question, economic matters and international affairs was better than that of Patel.”

He had a plan for the future of India. Bose too had such thinking but was out of the party due to his differences with Gandhi. He had charted his own path. The real intellectual threat to Nehru never existed. Patel lacked this aura but the main causative factor which influenced Gandhi to select Nehru as Prime Minister was ideological affinity. They both willed for a multi religious plural society. “Indeed, immediately before and after independence the approaches of Gandhi and Nehru to the question of the treatment of minorities and on secularism were identical, but the approaches of both these men were significantly different from that of Patel.”

Gandhi knew well that both were important for the country but he gave edge to Nehru due to his credentials to secularism. Gandhi aimed to build a secular state and Nehru appeared to him a better choice. Though Gandhi wanted to keep both together, and “referring to Nehru and Patel(he stated) the two make an inseparable pair. Neither can do without the other. While often speaking of Nehru and Patel in the same breath; and working to preserve their partnership, Gandhi strove
to protect Nehru’s superior position in it, above all because Nehru was identified with secularism in a way that Patel was not.”

The decision of Gandhi was not sudden. It was taken quite early. Even before the time when Quit India movement was not in full sight and second world war was in start phase, with no inkling that freedom was too near, “but in December 1941 at Bardoli Gandhi named Nehru as his successor:(Gandhi stated that)we had differences from the moment we became co-workers, and yet I have said for some years and say now that not Rajaji but Jawaharlal will be my successor. He says he does not understand my language…(but) when I am gone he will speak my language.” Gandhi reemphasized “even those who have fabulous wealth, vast armies and the atom bomb respect the moral worth of Jawaharlal’s leadership. We in India ought to have due appreciation for it.”

Once issue was settled in favour of Nehru. Patel never played any political trick to unseat Nehru. This was his political ethics and acumen. He knew he was fourteen years older than Nehru and not much time was left with him for nation building. He wanted to preserve Congress “for Patel knew that the destruction of their party might very well mean the destruction of India. He thus told Congress members who visited him to ‘do what Jawaharlal says’, (and) on 2 October; while inaugurating a women’s centre in Indore, he used the occasion of Gandhi’s birth anniversary to affirm his loyalty to the Prime Minister. He described himself in his speech as merely one of the many non-violent soldiers in Gandhi’s army. Now that the Mahatma was gone, ‘Jawaharlal Nehru is our leader’.”

The partition was result of cause and effect. Cause may be searched in the Muslim communalism and British policy of divide and rule. As Hegel says that ‘History is the pilgrimage of the spirit in search of itself. World History is the world judgment. History leads the wise men and drags the fools.’ The history unfolded and Hegel proved correct when Nehru and Patel both accepted the partition. To put the blames on Nehru and Gandhi are historical mistakes which many may commit. After the long debates on this issue “Nehru, Patel and Prasad next acknowledged and endorsed Jinnah’s two-nation theory in March 1947, by advocating in a resolution adopted by the Congress Working Committee the division of the Punjab into Muslim-majority and Hindu-majority areas. This was done by the three without consulting Gandhi, who reacted sharply and considered this to be an hour of great humiliation.”
Perhaps partition was inevitable. This force they failed to press back. Patel and Nehru both had their own logic. “As Mountbatten himself stated in his Nehru Memorial lecture;….Nehru realized that this would mean a much earlier transfer of power even though it were to two Governments and left a good chance for the essential unity of India to be maintained.

Patel was the first to accept the partition plan at the formal conference of national leaders convened by Mountbatten on 2nd June. Indeed, he gave it his whole hearted support. As Home Minister, Patel had realized that the drift towards partition had gone beyond the point of no return and chaos could be prevented only by conceding Pakistan.”

They both had their achievements and failings. If Nehru achieved the glory by establishing and nursing the democratic ethos in the country. Patel immortalized himself by integrating the Indian states. They failed too. If Nehru committed mistake in case of China, albeit Patel had warned him on Chinese intentions in his letter written to him on 7th November 1950. Patel on the other hand failed to visualize the future face of ICS due to its non indianisation. Patel could do nothing to change its colonial mindset which still persists. Patel just changed the name not the inner spirit. “Nehru did not want the Indian Civil Service (ICS) to continue as it was a relic of the past, of British imperialism. He had been hurt by the behavior of the ICS during the freedom struggle. He felt they lacked patriotism. Patel changed the nomenclature, ICS, into Indian Administrative Service (IAS) but did not agree to disband it. He considered the service a steel frame, essential for governance.”

Patel and Nehru had many differences on national issues but they dissolved everything for the country. In fact Patel, “never held himself back in offering Nehru his honest, pragmatic advice whenever sought, and rushed to his side, whenever Nehru was in trouble. It mattered little to him if his advice was not implemented; he merely discharged his duty to his country.”

After the death of Gandhi Nehru wrote a letter to Patel that the time was now to face the crisis together. Patel recollected the days of togetherness during the freedom struggle and both aimed to uplift the country. Political differences had no might to displace them from their goal. The contemporary leadership must understand this truth. Segregation of Greats at the political level will lead to weakening of the country. The political socialisation for the political gain by any party is not good for the country. Nehru and Patel must have stood against it.
References


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