

Nehru vs. Patel Debate

Why in news?

Prime minister had recently unveiled the Statue of Unity (Sardar Patel statue) in Gujarat.

Why “What if Patel had been PM” argument is still debated ?

- This narrative never seems to cease, especially in Gujarat, which considers this an injustice done to Patel.
- Patel is seen as more competent, more nationalist, more capitalist than Nehru.
- There are three assumptions regarding this narrative,
 1. First, that Vallabhbhai showed displeasure towards the arrangement of Nehru as Prime Minister.
 2. Second, that by insisting that Nehru be made the PM, Gandhi let down his fellow Gujarati.
 3. Third, that had Patel indeed led independent India in its initial phase, things would have been different.

Is this debate baseless?

- At a basic level, the Nehru vs. Patel debate is unprofitable.
- Patel died in December 1950, before India’s first general election.
- Even if he had been the PM he would have not been around long enough to influence the nation in any meaningful manner.
- He was at that time 75, and Nehru was the younger man by 15 years.
- Patel was part of the earlier generation, and, along with Jinnah and Gandhi, passed on shortly after Independence.
- In March 1948, seven months after Independence and two months after Gandhi’s murder, Patel had suffered a heart attack and his health had been in decline since that time.

Was Patel communal in nature?

- Some people are transposing on Patel the communal views they hold.
- The fact is that they are misreading Patel.
- In his book *Sardar Patel and Indian Muslims*, Rafiq Zakaria showed the

facets of Patel's secularism.

- His message to Hindus in the Constituent Assembly was: “It is for us who happen to be in a majority to think about what the minorities feel and imagine how we would feel if we were treated in the manner in which they are treated.”
- Patel was instrumental in giving Indian Muslims the right to proselytise and convert Hindus to Islam.
- Patel was instrumental also in giving minorities the right to run their own institutions.
- It is true, of course, that Patel looked on Muslim motives with suspicion after Partition.
- But he was able to put himself above his emotions.
- **Gandhi said this of Patel :** “I know the Sardar... His method and manner of approach to the Hindu-Muslim question, as also to several other questions, is different from mine and Pandit Nehru’s. **But it is a travesty of truth to describe it as anti-Muslim. The Sardar’s heart is expansive enough to accommodate all.**”

Source: Business Standard

