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## Patel Lands in Pappu's Lap: Gujrat Elections

Prof. Dr. Arun Sahay

The polling for the two-phase elections in Gujarat will take place on December 9 and 14. Votes will be counted on December 18. Gujarat Election turf is getting hotter and hotter. Mudslinging game is at its height. Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party has been ruling Gujarat for more than two decades. Thus, anti-incumbency, now, has become a genuine force. Rahul Gandhi, who is more popularly known as 'Pappu' and is likely to be elevated as the Congress president, has put his heart and soul in this election. The congress slogan 'Vikas Gando Thayo Che' (development gone crazy) campaign is showing up turning Modi's development plank into a liability. Primarily, the dual election game in Gujarat has been muddled with the entry of the third party, Patidar Anamat Andolan Samiti (PAAS) led by Hardik Patel.

Hardik Patel, at one time, had become a celebrity in Gujarat. He rose from Mansa where Patels had held a massive public rally on July 22, 2015, to seek quota under the OBC category. This was the second public gathering after the quota agitation began in Mehsana on July 6, 2015. People thought that his influence was expanding far beyond his community. In this regard Hardik had himself said, "I am so happy that not just Patidars, but Thakors, Kshatriyas and members of other communities have come here. This is a fight for our rights which have been taken away

for 25 years. Education, jobs, agriculture land, we have been provided nothing." Come elections and his mouth starts watering to taste power. From his agitation for quota for Patidars, he shifted his position, the sole aim being to defeat BJP. In the process, he found a new friend in Rahul Gandhi, vice president of congress. When Rahul was in Gujarat, Hardik met Rahul in the hotel but he blatantly denied about this meeting. The Congress, on the other hand, was hoping to piggyback Hardik Patel to persuade the Patidars forming around 12 per cent of the state's population to vote for congress. No doubt, congress, especially Pappu, has been wooing Hardik to support the party in ensuing Gujarat election. Though Patels have traditionally been BJP supporters, this time, they have been hobnobbing with the Congress who has been trying to harness the Patel anger against the BJP government in order to win the election.

Be that as it may, Hardik went on denying his meeting with Rahul Gandhi. Patel's fear had been for losing his face in Patidar community as congress was not committing anything about reservations for Patel community, should congress win with PAAS support. In this regard, Reshma Patel, former aide of Hardik and currently BJP leader, has not only questioned the Patidar leader's denial but provided some evidences of his being in the same hotel where Pappu stayed. Public, at large, believed that Patel met Pappu





and that something was brewing. She exposed his secret meeting with Congress leaders in a private hotel where Rahul Gandhi also stayed and conducted marathon meetings with other Patidar leaders as also Alpesh Thakor.

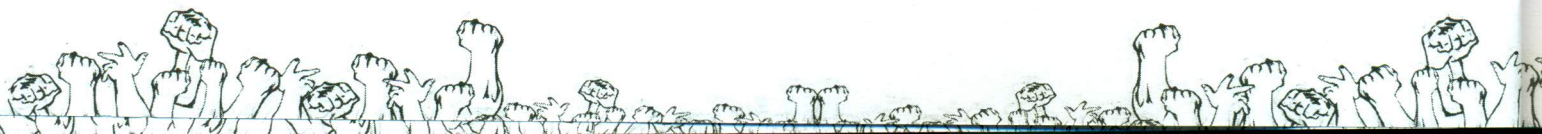
While speculation about Patel-Pappu meeting was going on, Patel has been trying to save his face from the media but congress was having consultations within the organization about the possibility of reservation quota for Patidars. Meanwhile, the Congress released the first list of its candidates for the elections with senior leaders from the state Shaktisinh Gohil and Arjun Modhwadia getting tickets. This battered Patel-Pappu equation for the time being. As per Kapil Sibal, some formula was worked out that would satisfy Patidars on the issue of reservation. In pursuance thereof, Patidar leader Hardik declared that the Congress party has agreed to the demands of the reservation sought by the Patidar community in the wake of the upcoming Gujarat Assembly elections. But the community is still doubtful about Congress party's ability to do it though the PAAS has been propagating about its possibility after survey on OBC quota.

Consequently, Hardik Patel pledged his support to the Congress in his attempt to oust BJP from Gujarat, which has held it for 22 years. In the initial few weeks, he made his support contingent on the congress agreeing to cover Patidars under the 27 per cent quota for other Backward Classes. To convince his community, he started communicating that when the survey takes place, everything will be crystal clear in front of people and that congress will have to put their reservation formula with details in their manifesto. He, further, said that Patel leaders have

not sought any ticket from the Congress, but all they want is reservation asserting that all that the Patidar community wants is the right to study and employment.

The electorate, including some members in Patidar community have taken these statements with a pinch of salt. Hardik, being of 24 years, is not eligible to get a ticket for election under the constitution of India whose Article 84 (b) provides that the minimum age for becoming a candidate for Lok Sabha election shall be 25 years. Similar provision exists for a candidate to the Legislative Assemblies vide Article 173 (b) of the Constitution read with Sec. 36 (2) of the R. P. Act, 1950. Intention of both Pappu and Patel is further doubted as Hon'ble Supreme Court has set aside the notification of Rajasthan Government to include Jats in the Central list of Other Backward Classes (OBC). The court categorically said that caste, though a prominent factor, can't be the sole factor to decide backwardness. In their decision, they said that backwardness has to be social backwardness and not educational or economic backwardness.

Chipping in the matter, Finance Minister, Arun Jaitley, mocked the understanding reached between Congress and Hardik Patelled PAAS on reservation for Patidars. He stated that it amounted to "deceiving each other" because quotas cannot exceed the constitutional ceiling of 50 per cent. The law of the land is very clear and that is interpreted by the Supreme Court. In Rajasthan case, it has already been reaffirmed that the 50 per cent cap cannot be breached. The claim by Patel that the proposed reservation law could be put in the 9th Schedule under Article 31 (C) of the Constitution is not tenable as even the





entry into 9th Schedule is subject to judicial review which is subject to challenge on the basic structure. Thus, congress and PAAS can only continue to mutually deceive each other and deceive the public by saying that they will devise a methodology by breaching the reservation cap. Legally and constitutionally, it is not possible to provide further reservation to Patidars within OBC quota as per the law of today.

As regards, Patel's stand towards BharatiyaJanata Party (BJP), he is doing a double speak. He had stated that he had no enmity with the ruling party, but hastened to add that they do not bother about the welfare of 6 crore people of Gujarat and that he will make all efforts to fight against the BJP because they have compromised the wellbeing of the people of Gujarat and have not only disrespected the Patidar community but were making attempts to break the Patidars. He, further, alleged horse trading attempts by the BJP stating that several

horse trading attempts have been made with our conveners in North Gujarat; Rs 50 lakh was offered. No doubt that he dismissed reports of him joining any political party but did not disclose the fact that he is ineligible to fight election as per the constitution. Obviously, therefore, his statement "I am not going to join any party for at least next two years," is perfunctory.

Now that Patel-Pappu alliance, like Akhilesh-Pappu alliance that was swept away in U.P election, is in place, it is for the people of Gujarat to judge its purpose and prospects. December 9 and 14 are not far when the mood of Gujarati's will be known. Which side the camel will sit will also be known on December 18. Let us hope that logic, and not the emotions, prevail.

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