

## Quota for Patels?

### The neo-middle class syndrome and the (partial) return of caste politics in Gujarat<sup>1</sup>

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The political trajectory of the Patels (also known as Patidars<sup>2</sup>) in Gujarat, which shifted in the 1980s for the first time in post independence India, is changing its course again - and in relation to the same issue : reservations.

Representing 12.3% of the population of the state, this dominant caste of farmers which had rallied around the Congress behind Vallabhbhai Patel in the 1920s-1940s remained behind the ruling party after independence, while it benefited from the abolition of the zamindari system (especially in Saurashtra) in the 1950s and quickly seized the opportunity of growing and marketing commercial cash crops such as tobacco, cotton, sugar cane and groundnut, with some of them moving to the cities as business prospered. Ghanshyam Shah emphasises the fact that at the same time “The Patidars follow[ed] many of the cultural practices of the Vanyas and consequently elevated their position from the middle to high caste”<sup>3</sup>. – as evident from their partial rallying around the Swaminarayan movement.

However, they distanced themselves from Congress in the 1980s when the then Chief Minister, Madhavsinh Solanki capitalised on his caste federation, the Kshatriyas (made of Kolis – low caste – and Rajputs<sup>4</sup>) to form a large non-upper caste coalition also made of Harijans, Adivasis and Muslims, the KHAM. Solanki’s quota politics based on the promise of reservations to the OBCs allowed him to win the 1980 and 1985 elections but alienated the Patels who were at the forefront of violent anti-reservation demonstrations - which resulted in Solanki’s resignation in 1985, soon after the elections. Then, BJP became the party of the Patels. In the 1995 elections, the party projected Keshubhai Patel as its candidate for Chief Ministership and 67% Patels voted BJP (against 20% for Congress)<sup>5</sup>. Patidars now represented 30% of the 121 MLAs of the BJP (against 28% in 1990), while the OBCs had

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<sup>1</sup> I am most grateful to Mahesh Langa for his reading of an earlier draft of this article. The shortcomings that remain are naturally mine.

<sup>2</sup> On the anthropological trajectory of this caste group, that explains its different names, see David F. Pocock, *Kanbi and Patidar: A Study of the Patidar Community of Gujarat*, London: Oxford University Press, 1972.

<sup>3</sup> Ghanshyam Shah, “Polarised communities”, Seminar, no 470, Oct. 1998, p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> Rajni Kothari and Rushikesh Maru, “Federating of political interests: the Kshatriyas of Gujarat,” in Rajni Kothari (ed.), *Caste in Indian Politics*, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1986 [1970], p. 72 and Ghanshyam Shah, *Caste Association and Political Process in Gujarat: A Study of Gujarat Kshatriya Sabha*, Bombay, Popular Prakashan, 1975, p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> Ghanshyam Shah, “The BJP’s Riddle in Gujarat: Caste, Factionalism and Hindutva,” in T. Blom Hansen and C. Jaffrelot (eds), *The BJP and the Compulsions of Politics in India*, Delhi, OUP, 2002, p. 245.

declined by 5% (43 against 48).<sup>6</sup> The replacement of Keshubhbhai Patel by Narendra Modi did not dissuade the Patels to massively support the BJP. In 2002, 82% of them voted for the party, more than the upper castes (76%).<sup>7</sup>

In 2015, however, young Patels mobilised against the BJP government of Anandiben Patel – the successor of Narendra Modi – when it refused to include them in the list of OBCs and therefore to give them access to reservations - that they had constantly criticised till then. How can such political and societal evolutions be explained?

### **The Patels' demand for reservations: the class element**

#### *A success story for few Patels only?*

The first factor explaining the Patels' mobilisation has much to do with the role of class: large dominant castes like Patels – but also Marathas, Jats, Kammas etc. – are increasingly heterogenous in socio-economic terms. Certainly, the Patels are over represented in the elite groups which dominate the economy and the polity of Gujarat. After independence, these agrarian capitalists who were so good at commercial agriculture – including cotton crops - invested in industrial ventures. In the 1970s and 1980s, they were clearly the main beneficiaries of the state policy supporting the small-scale enterprises—and resisting the licence Raj. Few famous entrepreneurs illustrate this trend: the Odhavji Patel of Morbi – a city which has recently become the tile town of India thanks to other Patel entrepreneurs - developed the Ajanta brand of clocks. Karsan Patel set up Nirma, a Rs. 10,000 crores group which has interests in detergent, pharmaceuticals, cement and education - it runs the Nirma University. In the same sector, Dr. Dahyabhai Ukani founded Ban Lab and Pankaj Patel built the Zydus group, the 5<sup>th</sup> largest pharma company in India. Popat and Chhagan Patel started the oil engine industry in Rajkot. In the same city, in the 1990s, Tulsi Tanti launched Suzlon, a pioneering company making windmills. Prayasvin B. Patel has been a pioneer in the manufacturing of material handling equipment with the Elecon Engineering Company. Besides these industrialists, the Patel diamond barons – mostly based in Surat – deserved a special mention: Savji Dholakia runs Harekrishna Diamonds, Govind Dholakia, Shree Ramakrishna Exports, Vallabh Patel, Kiran Gems and Lalji Patel, Dharmanandan

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<sup>6</sup>. Kiran Desai and Ghanshyam Shah, “When Patels Resist the Kshatriyas,” in Christophe Jaffrelot and Sanjay Kumar (eds), *Rise of the Plebeians? The Changing Face of Indian Legislative Assemblies*, New Delhi: Routledge, 2009, p. 199.

<sup>7</sup>. S. Kumar, “Gujarat Assembly elections 2002. Analysing the verdict”, *EPW*, 25 Jan. 2003, p. 275.

Diamonds (he bought Narendra Modi's monogrammed suit for Rs 4.31 crore). In real estate too, several Patels – who had land to sale ! - have made a fortune: Dipak G. Patel has started the Ganesh Housing Corporation, Rushabh Patel the Parshwanath Group and Suresh Patel the Surya Group. Now real estate and construction sector play a significant role in the political economy of Gujarat. Many local politicians are connected with real estate because it's considered the safest avenue to park black money. In most of the cities in Gujarat, more than 30 % top builders and real estate players are Patels, and some of them are politicians, including BJP MLAs (Vallabh Patel and Babu Jamna Patel are cases in point). In Surat, Patel diamond barons have diversified into real estate and education. For instance, Gajeras of Laxmi Diamonds are top builders as well as education barons<sup>8</sup>.

Another sector in which Patels have invested successfully is media. The second largest Gujarati daily, *Sandesh*, is owned by a Patel, Falgun Patel, who is the owner and managing editor of the paper. Interestingly, *Sandesh* was the newspaper which gave prominence coverage to the Patel agitation at an early stage in 2015. Besides, several local district level papers and media outfits are owned by Patels, including *Nav Gujarat Samay*, a Gujarati paper launched by the Times of India group which has recently been bought over by a local Ahmedabad builder, Ghanshyam Patel of Shayona group<sup>9</sup>.

Last but not least, Patels are overrepresented in health. In any city in Gujarat, more than one third of the doctors are Patels, it seems. Among them feature prominent Hindu nationalists, including Pravin Togadia, the VHP leader who is a cancer surgeon, and the former Rajkot MP and ex-union minister, Dr Vallabh Kathiria. The Patels are probably more represented among professionals and industrialists than any other peasant caste in their respective state elsewhere in India.

Patels have also made a fortune overseas. They are probably in a majority in the Indian diaspora in the US. They are about 1.7 million, working primarily in hotels and motels (sometimes nicknamed as “potels”). Gujarati politicians have cultivated their relationship with these Non Resident Gujaratis who send money back home, making local Patels even richer.

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<sup>8</sup> Dhiru Gajera was BJP MLA and then he joined Congress and unsuccessfully contested assembly polls.

<sup>9</sup> Ghanshyam Patel runs this newspaper in joint venture with *The Times of India*.

Politically, the Patels are also dominant. Non only the CM, Anandiben Patel, but also 7 senior ministers in a government of 27, the BJP party chief in the state, 5 MPs and about one third of the MLAs come from this group<sup>10</sup>.

### *Some Patels are less equal than others*

There is a popular view “evident in the saying, ‘P for P’, that a Patel would always support a Patel, making the community a close-knit one”<sup>11</sup>. But there is a clear differentiation of the caste along class lines - in addition to sub-caste lines, even though they sometimes overlap: Leuva Patels and Kadva Patels, respectively in Saurashtra as well as central Gujarat and Northern Gujarat represent the dominant jatis (whereas the Satpanthis of Kutch and the Chaudhary Patel of North Gujarat are not as affluent, the latter are even part of the OBCs), but there are inequalities *within* the jatis.

### The rural/urban divide

While Patels still predominantly live in the countryside, the gap between villagers and urban dwellers has become more pronounced. This is true all over India, as evident from the National Sample Survey data, including the average Monthly Per Capita Expenditures (MPCE), one of the most reliable indicators to measure standards of living. The rural-urban differential has grown dramatically between 1993-4 and 2007-8: the urban MPCE was already 62.9 % higher in towns and cities than in the villages of India in 1993-94, and the gap has reached 90.7 % fourteen years later, before a decrease to 83.9% in 2011-12<sup>12</sup>. In contrast to this trajectory, the Gujarat differential climbed from 49.8 % in 1993-4 to 68 % in 2007-8 and remained the same in 2011-12. Gujarat is not, therefore, the state where this differential is the most marked, far from it: Haryana (because of satellite cities like Gurgaon), Karnataka (because of Bangalore) and even Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal have seen the gap between the urban and rural standards of living increase dramatically. But Gujarat has been

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<sup>10</sup> Mahesh Langa, « Patels’ quota demand poses challenge to Anandiben », *The Hindu*, 19 August 2015 (<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/patels-quota-demand-poses-challenge-to-anandiben/article7554563.ece>).

<sup>11</sup> Rita Kothari, « The Patel agitation and the ‘paradox’ of demanding OBC status », *Kafila*, 17 Sept. 2015 (<http://kafila.org/2015/09/17/the-patel-agitation-and-the-paradox-of-demanding-obc-status-rita-kothari/#more-26059>)

<sup>12</sup> “Key results on household consumer expenditure 1993-94, NSS 15th round”, National Sample Survey, Organisation Department of Statistics, Govt. of India, March 1996, “Household consumer expenditure in India, 2007-08”, National Sample Survey Organisation, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Govt. of India, March 2010 and National Sample Survey, Key Indicators of Household Consumer Expenditure in India, NSS 68th Round, July 2011-June 2012, New Delhi, Govt. of India, 2013, p. 9. (<http://www.indiaenvironmentportal.org.in/files/file/key%20indicators%20of%20household%20consumer%20expenditure%202011-12.pdf>).

unable to reverse this trend either, in contrast to Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu— not to say anything about Bihar, the only state where the rural population is catching up.

Not only has the rural population of Gujarat lost ground vis-à-vis the urban population of the state – even if the gap is no longer widening - but it has also started to lag behind the rural population of other states. In 1993-4 and 2007-8, rural Gujaratis occupied the fourth rank in terms of MPCE. In 2011-12, they occupied the ninth, behind Haryana, Karnataka, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Punjab and Kerala. Urban-dwellers are not doing better, but nor had they been highly ranked beforehand (seven and eight respectively in earlier surveys).

Rural and semi-urban Patels have been especially affected by the crisis of the cooperative sector in Gujarat, including district cooperative banks which are in a bad shape after financial irregularities almost sealed the fate of eight of them in the early 2000s: Madhavpura Mercantile Cooperative Bank, Charotar Cooperative Bank, Vishnagar Cooperative Bank, Laxmi Cooperative Bank, Diamond Jubilee Cooperative Bank, Suryapur Cooperative Bank, General Cooperative Bank and Baroda People's Cooperative Bank<sup>13</sup>. The failure of the Madhavpura Mercantile Cooperative Bank had the largest repercussions on the sector. Four of the eight banks mentioned above had to be liquidated.

### What jobs?

While the Patels who lived in villages resented the growing gap between rural and urban Gujarat, those who went to the city were often disappointed by the job market they found there.

According to an Assocham study the number of new employment creations dropped by 6.5% in Ahmedabad and by 19% in Vadodara 2013<sup>14</sup> - when Delhi, Bangalore, Chennai, Kolkata, Mumbai and Hyderabad continued to rise.

One of the reasons for this trend was the crisis the Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) were experiencing. A study by the Institute of Small Enterprise and Development, that the Gujarat Industrial Development Corporation had sponsored, showed that in 2013, the Non Performing Assets of the MSMEs of Gujarat had grown by 43.9%. That was mainly attributed to the poor financial support that the MSMEs got because of high

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<sup>13</sup> « Another co-operative bank in Gujarat in liquidity crisis », *Economic Times*, 4 Sept. 2002 ([http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2002-09-04/news/27357001\\_1\\_liquidity-crisis-suryapur-co-operative-bank-diamond-jubilee-cooperative-bank](http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2002-09-04/news/27357001_1_liquidity-crisis-suryapur-co-operative-bank-diamond-jubilee-cooperative-bank)).

<sup>14</sup> Alok Kumar, « 'NCR tops in job creation, not Gujarat' », *The Stateman*, 19 January 2014.

interest rates and the indifferent policy of the local banks – including the cooperative banks mentioned above<sup>15</sup>. The share of the MSMEs credit in percentage of the gross bank credit has continuously declined from 12.98% in 1997-98 to 6.34% in 2006-07. It has started to rise again afterwards to reach 10% in 2009-10, while the cooperative banks were somewhat recovering, but for many of them it was too late<sup>16</sup>. This financial situation has precipitated the crisis of many MSMEs. According to the Ministry of MSMEs, the number of sick units has jumped from 4,321 in 2010-11 to 20,615 in 2012-13 and 49,382 in 2014-15 – a figure second only to Uttar Pradesh<sup>17</sup>. Between 2004 and 2014, 60,000 MSMEs shut down in Gujarat<sup>18</sup>. Clearly, the MSMEs were not in a position to hire as many people as before.

The big companies are not necessarily either for a different reason. Under Modi, Gujarat has attracted many multinationals (Indian as well as foreign) which turned out not create many jobs because they were very capitalistic. Between 2009-10 and 2012-13, Gujarat was the state where investment in industry was the highest (above Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu)<sup>19</sup>, but that was not necessarily positive for job creation because it reflected the acquisition of machine tools more than anything else. The comparison between Gujarat and Tamil Nadu is illuminating in that respect: the Gujarati industry represented 17.7% of the fixed capital of India and only 9.8% of the factory jobs, whereas the industry of Tamil Nadu represented 9.8% of the fixed capital but 16% of the factory jobs<sup>20</sup>. These figures reflect the contradiction of the Gujarat models in terms of job creations: investments are running high and they result in growth, but not in job. While Gujarat accounted for 9.8% of the industrial jobs of India in 2013, its share of the added value was three percentage points above (at 13.9%)<sup>21</sup>.

Besides the quantity of the jobs available, their quality was also a problem. One of the reasons why industrialists have invested in Gujarat is the low level of wages, as evident from the Labour Bureau data for 2011-12:

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<sup>15</sup> ISED Small Enterprise Observatory, *Gujarat Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises Report 2013*, Cochin, Institute of Small Enterprise and Development, 2013, p. 99.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>17</sup> Piyush Mishra, « Only UP has more sick MSMEs than Gujarat », *The Times of India (Ahmedabad edition)*, 4 Dec. 2015, p. 2. <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ahmedabad/Only-UP-has-more-sick-MSMEs-than-Gujarat/articleshow/50042647.cms> (accessed 21 August 2016).

<sup>18</sup> Pragya Singh, « How Much Growth Can Absorb All? », *Outlook*, 14 Sept. 2015 (<http://www.outlookindia.com/printarticle.aspx?295246>).

<sup>19</sup> Govindraj Ethiraj, « Quietly, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu outrace Gujarat », *IndiaSpend*, 16 January 2015, <http://www.indiaspend.com/cover-story/quietly-maharashtra-tamil-nadu-outraced-gujarat-25529>

<sup>20</sup> ISED Small Enterprise Observatory, *Gujarat Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises Report 2013*, p. 39.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

**Table 1 : Average Daily Earnings (in Rs.) in States by Category of Employees during the Year 2011-12**

States	Directly employed workers			Contract workers	All workers	All employees
	Men	Women	Total			
Uttar Pradesh	224.51	222.58	22.45	209.27	219.93	352.55
Madhya Pradesh	324.46	215.80	318.89	214.56	294.52	447.63
Gujarat	203.24	209.75	203.42	260.50	217.97	373.91
Karnataka	362.92	188.93	292.65	276.09	289.06	461.27
Kerala	411.75	133.56	245.73	205.98	240.18	323.38
Tamil Nadu	604.64	153.04	247.47	269.39	251.31	328.85
India	305	171.40	282.71	237.60	268.96	416.18
Public sector	876.93	359.89	821.63	326.53	679.41	944.99
Private sector	274.52	165.94	255.67	233.51	248.89	387.75

**Table 2: Percentage of Workers Employed in States by Sectors and Category of Workers during the Year 2011-12**

States	Public	Private	Directly employed	Contract workers
Uttar Pradesh	3.07	96.93	61.41	38.59
Madhya Pradesh	5.88	94.12	65.68	34.32
Gujarat	1.18	98.82	64.92	35.08
Karnataka	4.13	95.87	78.08	21.92
Kerala	15.78	84.22	85.45	14.55
Tamil Nadu	3.01	96.99	80.46	19.54
India	4.46	95.54	65.42	34.58

Sources of tables 1 and 2 : Government of India, Ministry of Labour & Employment, *Report on Absenteeism, Labour Turnover, Employment & Labour Cost Annual Survey of Industries (2011-2012)*, vol. II, Chandigarh/Shimla, Labour Bureau, p. 38, p. 68 and p. 80

Not only wages were rather low in the private (formal or informal) sector, but, as table 2 shows, the government jobs were in smaller numbers in Gujarat as in other states (we'll return to that point) and while the regular employment growth rate in the formal sector has remained the same since 1993-94 (2.7%), there has been an increase from 19% of the share of

contractual work (that is of the informal sector) from 1993-94 to 34% in 2007-08.<sup>22</sup> As table 2 shows, the percentage of contract workers is as high in Gujarat as in some BIMARU states and higher than in states of similar levels of development (like Karnataka or Tamil Nadu).

Low wages and precarious jobs have been “sustainable” in Gujarat because of the inflow of migrant workers from UP, Bihar, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Orissa<sup>23</sup>. But this situation has resulted in tensions anyway: in 2014, Gujarat was the state where the number of strikes was the highest at 26 (against 19 in Tamil Nadu)<sup>24</sup>. And the locals could only resent this state of things, be they employed or looking for jobs.

Pravinbhai Patel, a senior supervisor at the Industrial Training Institute of Palanpur claims that his Patel students do not get jobs in proportion of their population and that these jobs do not meet their expectations:

“It was good of Modi to bring in big companies like Tata Nano and Ford to set up manufacturing units here. But these companies are exploitative and haven’t generated the jobs they promised”. The Nano plant is a case in point: “When it came, they took in 800 apprentices every year, at Rs. 3,300 a month. But they remained trainees, never employees. Then the plant shut down for a long time and everyone lost their jobs, and now the unit is barely functional”<sup>25</sup>. Another interviewee told Arefa Johari: “Private jobs have no security and they make you work so much more!”<sup>26</sup>. A Patel diamond polisher confides similarly “The jobs we were promised never came. The Gujarat model was all *phekumbaazi* (tall tales)”<sup>27</sup>.

Gujarat has not developed his services as much as other states, including Karnataka and Maharashtra, where this sector gave (some) jobs to the youth. In Gujarat, services represent only 46% of the GDP, against 59% at the national level. This specificity reflects, among other things, a comparatively poor command of English. Indeed, another feature of the “Gujarat model” pertains to its sub-nationalist dimension: the state has promoted its *asmita* (identity, glory) in such a manner that the regional language has received a particular attention at the expense of English. In fact government schools do not teach English till class V. In one

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<sup>22</sup> Deepal Trivedi, “How Vibrant is our Gujarat,” *Ahmedabad Mirror*, 9 Oct. 2012.

<sup>23</sup> *Social Inclusion of Internal Migrants in India*, Paris, UNESCO, 2013 <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002237/223702e.pdf>, p. 2. Surat was the Indian city with the largest proportion of migrants, 58% (ibid., p. 6).

<sup>24</sup> « Workers’ strike : Guj tops the list in India », *DNA*, 11 August 2015, p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Cited in Arefa Johari, « Casteism, brides and a failed Gujarat model: What the Patel demand for reservations is really about », *Scroll.in*, 14 Sept. 2015 (<http://scroll.in/article/753595/casteism-brides-and-a-failed-gujarat-model-what-the-patel-demand-for-reservations-is-really-about>).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Cited in Arefa Johari, « Casteism, brides and a failed Gujarat model: What the Patel demand for reservations is really about », *Scroll.in*, 14 Sept. 2015 (<http://scroll.in/article/753595/casteism-brides-and-a-failed-gujarat-model-what-the-patel-demand-for-reservations-is-really-about>).



of its reports, KPMG explained the relatively underdeveloped IT sector of Gujarat not only because of “a lack of engineering institutes”, but also because of a “lack of proficiency in English”<sup>28</sup>. In 2016, the Gujarat government’s annual exercise to evaluate and grade the quality of primary schools in the state showed that proficiency in English (as well as in Gujarati, incidentally) was declining<sup>29</sup>. Rural Patels suffer even more from the language problem because of their rustic traditions. As Rita Kothari points out, “there are ‘essences’ of the Patel identity expressed in idiomatic expressions, for instance, referring to the rough-hewn language ‘Patel nee jeebh’ (a Patel’s tongue)...”<sup>30</sup>.

The problems Patels faced on the job market were all the more painful as they had to pay a lot for their studies. Like others, Patels have realised that education was necessary for finding a job in the city – and leave the village. But they have been more and more attracted by private universities – whose quality was supposed to be better, but whose fees were sometimes very high and their diploma not necessarily well appreciated. Ironically, five universities of northern and central Gujarat, where the 2015 Patel agitation was the most intense, are run by rich Patels, including the Vallabh Vidyanagar complex near Anand, Nirma University in the suburb of Ahmedabad and Ganpat University in Mehsana district.

Certainly, the above-mentioned difficulties with which the Patels had to cope affected other groups too, but some of their problems are specific.

### *The Patels’ specificity – and agitation*

The Patels have probably resented their frustrations more strongly than others for at least two reasons. First, in the wake of the pro-KHAM policies of the Solanki government in the 1980s, OBCs have asserted themselves socio-economically. They have acquired a relative prosperity in the countryside and they have started to do new government jobs - that the Patels used to get before –, including those of teachers and police constables.

Second, Patels convey a deep sense of superiority that is related to their domination over village life since the 1950s-60s, over state politics and, increasingly, over the economy. The disconnect between this status, a sense of socio-economic downgrading and the success

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<sup>28</sup> Cited in Aakar Patel, « The Problem with the Gujarat Model », *Outlook*, 6 Sept. 2015, (<http://www.outlookindia.com/printarticle.aspx?295257>).

<sup>29</sup> Ritu Sharma, « Gujarat annual evaluation: Six lakh Class VI students can’t write in Gujarati, 5 lakh can’t read », *Indian Express*, 27 May 2016 (<http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/ahmedabad/six-lakh-class-vi-students-cant-write-in-gujarati-5-lakh-cant-read-2821226/>).

<sup>30</sup> Rita Kothari, « The Patel agitation and the ‘paradox’ of demanding OBC status », *Kafila*, 17 Sept. 2015 (<http://kafila.org/2015/09/17/the-patel-agitation-and-the-paradox-of-demanding-obc-status-rita-kothari/#more-26059>)

story of so many Patel enterprises (mentioned above) has contributed to the crystallisation of a deficit in self-esteem and sentiments of anger. As Satish Deshpande points out: “The Patidar campaign raises the subtle issue of the role of caste pride in the context of real or perceived downward mobility”<sup>31</sup>.

Thirdly, the Patels are suffering from severe imbalance on the matrimonial market. The sex ratio of this group is so asymmetrical that the parents of girls are in a good position for bargaining with those of the grooms. And the jobs these boys have (or don't have) become a problem in that respect. Gopal Kateshya points out that “Parents of girls prefer a groom with a government job or business in a city to one with agricultural land in rural areas (...). Cities like Rajkot have seen training centres such as ‘Patidar IAS Academy’ open with the aim of getting more Patels into All-India Services”<sup>32</sup>. One of the Patels interviewed by Aarefa Johari comes to the same conclusion for other reasons: “Private jobs have no security and they make you work so much more!”<sup>33</sup>.

Now, the number of government jobs is shrinking in Gujarat more than anywhere else, as evident from table 2, which shows that in 2011-2012 these jobs represented only 1.18% of the total number of jobs in the state, when the national average is almost 4.5%. On the top of it, half of these jobs are under quotas. These reservations have always been criticised by the Savarnas (upper and dominant castes) in the name of merit – hence the tirade repeated ad nauseam that “When a 45% student from a *halki* (low) caste becomes a doctor, he will end up leaving his surgical scissors in the patients’ stomach”<sup>34</sup>. Patels articulate a strong sense of injustice: they are refused access to the government jobs they deserve when incompetent low caste people are hired *en masse*.

For all these reasons, the Patels have mobilised for being included among the OBCs. The two leaders who have mobilised them in the framework of two new organisations are typical of the sociological profile of the disgruntled Patel youth. Hardik Patel, a college graduate from central Gujarat runs the Patidar Anamat Andolan Samiti (PAAS), whereas Lalji Patel, from North Gujarat has started the Sardar Patel Group, another youth body. However

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<sup>31</sup> Satish Deshpande, « The Patidar idea of reservation », *The Hindu*, 5 Sept. 2015 ([http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-patidar-idea-of-reservation/article7616378.ece?utm\\_source=vuukle&utm\\_medium=referral](http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-patidar-idea-of-reservation/article7616378.ece?utm_source=vuukle&utm_medium=referral)).

<sup>32</sup> Gopal Kateshiya, « Gujarat violence: Who are the Patidars, and why are they angry? », *The Indian Express*, 27 August 2015 (<http://indianexpress.com/article/explained/simply-put-who-are-gujarats-patidars-and-why-are-they-angry/>).

<sup>33</sup> Cited in Aarefa Johari, « Casteism, brides and a failed Gujarat model: What the Patel demand for reservations is really about », *Scroll.in*, 14 Sept. 2015 (<http://scroll.in/article/753595/casteism-brides-and-a-failed-gujarat-model-what-the-patel-demand-for-reservations-is-really-about>).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

the former has taken the lead. Born in 1993 in Viramgam (Ahmedabad district), he is the son of a small businessman (whose work consists in fixing submersible pumps in wells) who used to be a BJP activist. He completed his B. Com with some difficulty (after two attempts) in 2013 from the Sahajanand College in Ahmedabad. Just before, he had joined the Sardar Patel Group and became the president of its Viramgam unit. It seems that three factors precipitated his entry on the public scene and his militancy: first, he realized that young Patidars could not find a job easily, second, that Patel farmers were losing out and third, his sister – who was doing a BA in English as an external – failed to qualify for a state government scholarship, whereas one of her friends did, through the OBC quota, even though she had scored lower marks. In 2015, Hardik Patel was expelled from the SPG after a conflict with Lalji Patel and started his own organisations.

Both then started to ask for reservations for their caste group. Demonstrations took place in Mehasana in July 2015, and then in Visnagar where the office of the BJP MLA, Rishikesh Patel, was targeted<sup>35</sup>. In August the demonstrations spread to Devbhoomi district, Gandhinagar, Jamnagar, Amreli and Junagadh, before the massive procession of Surat which, on August 17, mobilised between 1 and 5 lakhs of demonstrators. Then the government invited some Patel leaders to negotiate with the Committee of Ministers that the Chief Minister, Anandiben Patel had formed. The representatives of the SPG declared after the meeting:

“Our talks with the government have failed. We have proposed to scrap the entire reservation system prevailing in the state and form a separate commission allowing special quota under Economically Backward Class in place of Socially and Educationally Backward Class”<sup>36</sup>.

This statement showed that all the Patel agitators were not necessarily interested in the inclusion of their caste group in the list of the state OBCs, even though this demand remained the standard one, at least on Hardik Patel’s side.

The government replied to him that by the Supreme Court jurisprudence, reservations could not expand beyond the point they had already reached: 49.5% of the public offices (27% for OBCs, 7.5% for SCs and 15% for STs). And when they realised that their demand would not meet any response, the Patel leaders organised a huge protest movement which mobilised half a million people on the 25<sup>th</sup> of August 2015.

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<sup>35</sup> The movement possibly started in North Gujarat because of the dominant role of one section of the Patels of this region, the Anjamans, who benefited from reservations as OBCs, in contrast to two other sections, the Leuva Patels and the Kadavas.

<sup>36</sup> « 5 lakh Patidars rally in Surat, raise reservation pitch », *DNA*, 18 August 2015, p. 16.

During this demonstration, the police over reacted, the repression resulting in the death of 9 young Patels. Some of them died in police stations<sup>37</sup>. In cities like Ahmedabad, the Gujarat police attacked Patel colonies, destroying cars and using an abusing language with women. They also arrested Patel men randomly. Eventually, FIRs were filed against 1,482 Patels across the state in the three days after the August 25 rally. Six months later, more than 1,300 Patels were still facing criminal cases<sup>38</sup>. The brutality of the police, as well as their provocative attitude vis-à-vis Patel women, has been partly attributed by Patels to the large number of low caste people in their ranks. Indeed, the Patel mobilisation has re-launched caste war – of words if not more.

Subsequently, a larger number of Patels rallied around the movement and gave it a different form. Protesters shouted out BJP leaders for preventing them from speaking at public functions. Patel women did it by clanking steel plates with spoons<sup>39</sup>. Another strategy of the Patels consisted in withdrawing their money from the banks in order to destabilise the financial system of Gujarat – which shows that the protesters were rather well-off! One of them candidly declared: “I have withdrawn three lakh from my account in order to support the agitation. We are fighting for injustice in the present reservation system. Many from our community deserve quota benefits which are available to other communities in the OBC category”<sup>40</sup>.

Hardik Patel radicalised in a different manner. He threatened that he would agitate in Rajkot during the India-South Africa ODI cricket match. He was detained preventively and then released. He had already been accused in an FIR filed by the Rajkot police of “insulting” the national flag.

On 24 September the Chief Minister announced a Youth Self-Reliance Scheme which was intended to help the family which did not benefit from any positive discrimination. Scholarships have been introduced in favour of the students with minimum 90 % in the board examinations and whose parents earn less 4.5 lakh rupees a year. She also offered age relaxation of five years in government jobs. Hardik Patel refused this “package” and started to

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<sup>37</sup> Aarefa Johari, « Gujarat police wilfully attacked us and damaged our property, allege Patels across Ahmedabad », *Scroll.in*, 28 August 2015 (<http://scroll.in/article/print/751675>).

<sup>38</sup> Aarefa Johari, « Six months after Hardik Patel’s reservation rally, more than 1,300 Patidars face criminal cases », *Scroll.in*, 25 Feb. 2016 (<http://scroll.in/article/804105/six-months-after-hardik-patels-reservation-rally-more-than-1300-patidars-face-criminal-cases>).

<sup>39</sup> Mahesh Langa, « Led by women, Patel agitation phase II is already on », *The Hindu*, 12 September 2015. <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/patel-agitation-phase-ii-is-already-on-led-by-women/article7645269.ece>

<sup>40</sup> Cited in Mahesh Langa, « Patel intensify stir, withdraw funds from banks », *The Hindu*, 16 Sept. 2015 <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/patel-agitation-intensifies-patels-withdraw-funds-from-banks/article7659266.ece>

expose “the Gujarat model”, calling it a “myth”<sup>41</sup>. On October 18 he was arrested in Rajkot on the basis of phone calls he had allegedly had with other Patel leaders with whom he discussed plans to block highways on the evening before the ODI. On the following day, an FIR was lodged against him for sedition on the basis of a TV grab showing him advising a supporter who was prepared to commit suicide for the cause « to kill four-five policemen » instead<sup>42</sup>. He is still waiting for his trial in the Surat jail at the time of writing.

### **The return of caste politics or the growing impact of class?**

#### *The crystallisation of a neo middle-class vote in 2012*

The 2012 election in Gujarat have suggested that class was gaining momentum at the expense of caste at the time of voting. Indeed, the OBC supporters of Modi did not share the same social background as those who remained with Congress. Kolis were a case in point. While the Kolis living in villages still massively supported Congress, those who stayed in semi-urban and urban contexts moved towards the BJP. In the rural constituencies, 53.5% of Kolis voted for Congress. They were only 18.5% to do so in the semi-rural constituencies, where 65.2% of them support the BJP. This was a clear indication of the impact of urbanisation that affected more or less all the OBC caste groups. So much so that the only constituencies in which Congress prevailed upon the BJP were the rural ones. And the more urban the voters were, the weaker the Congress was as evident from its performances from 45.7% of the valid votes in the rural seats to 32.2 in the semi-urban ones and only 27.5 in towns and cities. The relation was equally linear on the BJP side, but in the reverse order of 43.3 to 50.8 and 57.7%.

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<sup>41</sup> « Hardik threatens to expose ‘well-propagated’ Gujarat model », *The Hindu*, 10 October 2015. <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/hardik-threatens-to-expose-wellpropagated-gujarat-model/article7747279.ece>

<sup>42</sup> Satish Jha, « Patidar leadership on a limb as Hardik Patel nears Day 200 in jail on sedition charges », *The Indian Express*, 28 April 2016 (<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/hardik-patel-jail-patidar-party-patidar-protests-2773582/>).

**Tableau 3: The impact of urbanisation on the voting pattern of castes and communities**

Castes and communities	Congress			BJP			GPP		
	rural*	semi urban°	urban#	rural	semi urban	urban	rural	semi urban	urban
Upper caste		16.1	22.5		64.5	60.5	16.1		
Patel	12.4	16.1	10.7	62.8	71	72.9	24.8	6.5	6.4
Kshatriya	45	41.1	36.2	51.2	51.8	53.2	0.7	-	2.1
Koli	53.2	18.5	-	44	65.2	0.8	-	3.3	-
Other OBC	40.7	26.6	17.9	50.9	51.6	65.5	3.1	3.5	5.5
Dalit	81.3	45	59.7	18.8	36.3	16.9	-	1.3	-
Adivasi	47.3	41.1	20	29.6	35.6	66.7	0.8	10	-
Muslim	70.2	81.4	68.5	20.7	7	29.6	0.8	2.3	1.9
Total	45.7	32.2	27.5	43.3	50.8	57.7	3.3	4.6	3.2

Source: CSDS Data unit.

\* Rural constituencies have 75% or more village-based voters

° Semi urban constituencies have between 25-75% urban voters

# Urban constituencies have 75% or more urban voters.

Why have OBCs rallied around the BJP in semi-urban and urban contexts? These urban OBCs are former peasants who have migrated to the city or who have been incorporated in the rapid process of urbanisation that Gujarat has been undergoing. In this

process, their caste identity—which had already been secularised<sup>43</sup> by quota politics and the phenomenon of caste federations—and which had always been comparatively weak, as evident from the elusive character of the Kshatriyas, has further eroded. Their joining the middle class category was related to their ceasing work in the field to work in a factory, a sweatshop of the informal sector (which is more likely), or why not, in the service sector as a *chaiwala* or as a driver—if not as a proper clerk. They might not earn much more than before since wages were very low in Gujarat, as mentioned earlier, but at least they had a job—and they thought they had some hope for a brighter future. This group of aspiring people has been identified by Narendra Modi during his 2012 election campaign as forming a new “neo middle class.”<sup>44</sup>

While the 2012 elections suggested that caste politics was receding because of class considerations, the 2015 local elections made the pictures even more complex because of the impact of the Patel agitation.

*The 2015 local elections: caste, class and the rural/urban divide*

At first sight, the class element has receded in the background and caste politics asserted itself again in the wake of the Patel movement. First, there’ve been instances of clashes between Patels and Dalits in Ahmedabad – where, in 2002, both groups had joined hands against the Muslims<sup>45</sup>. Patels and Thakores (OBCs) also clashed with lethal weapons in Ranosan, the village of North Gujarat from where the Patel agitation started in June-July<sup>46</sup>.

Secondly, new groups prepared themselves to seize the opportunity that the Patel movement was likely to create if the whole quota system was revisited: Kshatriya Rajputs, for instance, asked also for quota too. The General Secretary of the Vadodara district Kshatriya Rajputs’ association declared:

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<sup>43</sup>. D.L. Sheth, “Secularisation of caste and making of new middle class”, *EPW*, 21-28 Aug 1999, accessed on 5 Sept. 2006 through: <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~sj6/epwshethmclass1.htm>.

<sup>44</sup>. “Poll-bound Modi banks on ‘neo-middle class’”, *The Times of India* (Ahmedabad edn), 4 Dec. 2012.

<sup>45</sup> « Patidar quota row: Hardik Patel held, released on bail; mobile internet banned in Gujarat », *DNA*, 20 Sept. 2015 (<http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-patidar-quota-row-hardik-patel-held-released-on-bail-mobile-internet-banned-in-gujarat-2126770>).

<sup>46</sup> R.K. Mishra, « Painful Patel Punch: A National Social Re-engineering Experiment! », *Wordsmiths & Newsplumbers*, 25 August 2015 (<http://wordsmithsandnewsplumbers.blogspot.in/2015/08/painful-patel-punch-national-social-re.html>).

“We are the community that ruled the country in our regions. We are the royal community of warriors that gave away our kingdoms and princely states to have a united country, at the insistence of Vallabhbhai Patel. However, today, we have nothing in our hands. Our rights and privileges have been taken away to reduce us to a poor community. We must get special privileges in the form of reservations too. We are warriors and we know to fight for it”<sup>47</sup>.

Thirdly, OBCs closed ranks and their organisations were revived. Thakors are a case in point. The president of the Kshatriya-Thakor Sena, Alpesh Thakor, considering that the Patel mobilisation “may be part of a larger conspiracy to remove the reservation in the long run”, threatened to “uproot” Gujarat government if Patels were given a quota<sup>48</sup>. Alternatively, he suggested to give the Patels additional quotas:

“Albeit our demand is hypothetical, but we want to give a clear message to the government that Patels should be given reservation but not under OBC. We have consent from 147 OBC communities across the state and we will begin protests if Patels are included under OBC”<sup>49</sup> (which – given their level of education – would allow them to corner most of the post reserved for the OBCs).

Last but not least, Hardik Patel himself aspired to create a pan-Indian caste federation. For him, « Patel » is the gujarati name of a social category that is present all over India and that he calls the « Patidars »:

« We may be 1.8 crore in Gujarat, but nationally we are 27 crore. Chief Minister of Bihar Nitish Kumar is from our community and so is Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu. In all we have 117 Patidar members of parliament. This demonstrates our strength and reach»<sup>50</sup>.

But the first battle, for Hardik Patel and others, had naturally to be fought in Gujarat – on the occasion of the local elections<sup>51</sup>.

Local elections have played a major role in the rise to power of BJP in Gujarat : the

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<sup>47</sup> « Vadodara: After Patels, Kshatriya Rajputs take to streets for OBC reservation », *The Indian Express*, 10 Sept. 2015 (<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/after-patels-kshatriya-rajputs-take-to-streets-for-obc-reservation/> Page).

<sup>48</sup> « OBCs threaten to ‘uproot’ Gujarat government if Patels given reservation », *The Indian Express*, 23 August 2015 (<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/gujarat/obcs-threaten-to-uproot-gujarat-government-if-patels-given-reservation/>).

<sup>49</sup> « OBC community to oppose Patel reservation movement », *DNA*, 12 August 2015, p. 16.

<sup>50</sup> Darshan Desai, « Caste stir threatens to spread in Gujarat as leader of Patel agitation is briefly detained », *Scroll.in*, 26 August 2015 (<http://scroll.in/article/751086/caste-war-threatens-to-engulf-gujarat-as-leader-of-patel-agitation-is-briefly-detained>).

<sup>51</sup> In fact, signs of Patels’ distastefulness vis-à-vis the BJP were seen before the Gujarat local elections, when Patel-dominated localities celebrated the victory of Nitish Kumar in the Bihar election by bursting firecrackers.



party's first successes took place in the municipal elections of Rajkot (1983) and Ahmedabad (1987), two achievements which reflected the ground work of Narendra Modi as well as his strategy of polarisation (as evident from the 1985 riots). In 2009, Modi was so confident that the BJP was unbeatable in the Gujarat villages, towns and cities that, as Chief Minister, he introduced a Gujarat Local Authorities Laws (Amendment) Bill that was intended to make voting compulsory in the local polls. He argued that citizens tended to vote less during these elections – an assessment that was especially true of the middle class voters. The Congress governor, Kamla Beniwal turned this amendment down because, she said, it violated the Article 19(1) of the Constitution which guarantees freedom of expression, including the right not to vote. But on August 21, 2015, her successor, the BJP leader O.P. Kohli, sanctioned the bill after Modi, the Prime Minister, appointed him in replacement of Beniwal. The High Court stayed its implementation, but the Patel movement had changed the political equation of the state anyway and the BJP government did not want the Gujaratis to vote any more after the Patel mass mobilisation of August 25! On 4th of October, the government issued an ordinance meant to delay civic body polls. Three weeks later, the High Court quashed it. The judges pulled up the State Election Commission – which had just announced that elections were postponed by three months – « for not abiding by the Constitution despite being a constitutional body »<sup>52</sup>.

The BJP feared the electoral mobilisation of the Patels – and rightly so. The SPG and the PAAS had different strategies though : the former called the Patels to « vote for the strongest candidate against the BJP candidate... »<sup>53</sup>, while the former rallied around the Congress. In Ahmedabad, out of the 192 municipal corporation seats, the Congress nominated 47 Patels, out of which 12 had been actively involved in the activities of PAAS<sup>54</sup>. These PAAS activists campaigned particularly vehemently against the BJP. In Morbi, Varun Patel, the chief spokesman of PAAS declared that the BJP leaders « have made bathrooms larger than (the) homes they used to have 10 years ago. They are driving in cars with red-beacons. They are enjoying all this thanks to our votes. But they did not listen to us in hour of need. Instead, they have booked 28,000 Patidars and murdered our ten brethren. Now it is time to seek revenge »<sup>55</sup>. In several places, the BJP preferred not to canvass – not even to contest – to avoid

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<sup>52</sup> « Gujarat local body elections: HC quashes 2 ordinances to delay polls, calls them 'unconstitutional' », *Indian Express*, 22 Oct. 2015 (<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/gujarat-local-body-elections-hc-quashes-2-ordinances-to-delay-polls-calls-them-unconstitutional/#sthash.bfuFV8OT.dpuf>).

<sup>53</sup> « Patidar pledge to ensure BJP rout », *The Indian Express (Ahmedabad edition)*, 9 Nov. 2016, p. 3.

<sup>54</sup> « Patidar groups to support Cong », *The Indian Express (Ahmedabad edition)*, 8 Nov. 2015, p. 3.

<sup>55</sup> « 'Patidars never vote for anyone other than the BJP. But where is BJP ?' », *The Indian Express (Ahmedabad edition)*, 28 Nov. 2015, p. 7.

the Patels' wrath. In addition to the Patel candidates nominated by the Congress, several stood as independents, using the flourboard as an election symbol<sup>56</sup>.

The results showed that the Patel mobilisation had affected the BJP's prospects to a certain extent. In geographical terms, the electoral map indicated that the Congress was back in a big way in Saurashtra, where the party won 9 of the 11 districts panchayats and won 34 seats at the Rajkot municipal corporation (against 11 in 2010 – however, the BJP got 38). But the real divide was between the rural and the urban constituencies, as evident from table 4 :

**Table 4 : The Gujarat 2010 and 2015 local election results for BJP and Congress<sup>57</sup>.**

Local bodies	BJP		Congress	
	2015	2010	2015	2010
Taluka panchayat	67 won 1,718 seats	150 won 2,460 seats	134 won 2,102 seats	NA 1,428 seats
District panchayat	8 won 292 seats	22 won 547 seats	23 won 472 seats	2 won 244 seats
Municipalities	41 won 984 seats	51 won 1,194 seats	12 won 587 s	9 won 392 s
Municipal corporations *	6 won 271 seats	6 won 443 seats	0 won 124 seats	0 won 100 seats

\* Seats-Wards-Results in 2015 :

- Ahmedabad – 48 Wards – 192 Seats: BJP-142, Congress-49, Others-01
- Surat – 29 Wards – 116 Seats: BJP-80, Congress-36
- Vadodara – 19 Wards – 76 Seats: BJP-50, Congress-14
- Rajkot – 18 Wards – 72 Seats: BJP-38, Congress-34
- Jamnagar – 16 Wards – 64 Seats: BJP-38, Congress-24
- Bhavnagar – 13 Wards – 52 Seats: BJP-34, Congress-18

Certainly, the BJP is eroding in the urban constituencies. While it had won 1,194 seats out of 1,905 across all municipalities in 2010 (and the Congress 392 only), it retained only 984 in 2015, but it controlled 41 municipalities (while the Congress got only 12) in addition to the 6 municipal corporations. In contrast, the Congress conquered 134 Taluka Panchayats and 23 District panchayats – repeating roughly the 2010 performance of the BJP. The latter had never been so low in these bodies since 2000, when Keshubhai Patel had been replaced by Modi as

<sup>56</sup> K. Saiyed, A. Raja and G. Kateshiya, « Out of 1,856 candidates in the fray, 374 independents, many Patidars », *The Sunday Express (Ahmedabad edition)*, 22 Nov. 2016 , p. 3. <http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/ahmedabad/out-of-1856-candidates-in-the-fray-374-independents-many-patidars/> (accessed 21 August 2016)

<sup>57</sup> Comparing the electoral performances of BJP and Congress in the 2010 and 2015 local elections is not easy because the number of bodies for which elections were held has changed, but the general trend is obvious.

Chief Minister, partly because of these bad results<sup>58</sup>.

Table 4 suggests that the pattern that had emerged in 2012, when the correlation between BJP vote and urbanisation crystallised, still operates. But this time, the BJP lost rural Gujarat in a big way, from 2,102 seats in Taluka panchayats to 1,718 (384 less than Congress) and from 547 seats in District panchayats to 292 (180 less than Congress). If one admits that urbanisation is a relatively reliable proxy for class, these results do not only reflect the continuous pro-BJP orientation of the « neo-middle class » living in urban and semi-urban, but also the social differentiation of the Patels. Certainly, rich and less affluent Patels have joined hands during and after the August 2015 movement, suggesting that caste politics was back. But this solidarity has not translated itself in a systematic rejection of the BJP at the time of election. While rural and lower middle class Patels have probably shifted from BJP to Congress in large numbers, urban middle class Patels have remained loyal to the ruling party.

This complex arrangement combining caste and class (analysed here on the basis of the urban/rural divide) also came from the tactical moves of the parties. First, some state BJP leaders supported the Patels' agitation in their personal capacity. At the very beginning of the Patels' movement the BJP MLA of Vijapur, Prahlad Patel had written a letter to the Chief Minister in support of the Patidars' agitation. For him: "At a time when education has become costly after the BJP came to power, the Patel youths are finding it difficult to get jobs, even after getting education. Many of them are selling off ornaments belonging to their parents"<sup>59</sup>. Even the president of the state BJP, R.C. Faldu took side, tacitly against the position of the Chief Minister:

"We understand that reservation for Patel community under OBC category is next to impossible but the government should think of quota for economically backward families. Caste-based reservations will create distance between communities and that is why quotas for economically weaker sections should be considered"<sup>60</sup>.

Second, the Congress has its own problems. It had decided to explicitly support Hardik Patel, but it tried not to alienate the OBCs, its traditional vote bank. In fact, the Congress wanted to also exploit the resurgent mobilisation of those benefitting from reservations, to such an

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<sup>58</sup> This may be the reason why, for the first time, the state Election Commission did not make public the percentage of votes received by the parties (<https://sec.gujarat.gov.in/result-of-election-15.htm>).

<sup>59</sup> Cited in Nandini Oza, « Racing backwards », *The Week*, 16 August 2015, p. 49F. <http://www.theweek.in/theweek/statescan/Patels-demand-for-OBC-reservation-in-Gujarat.html> (accessed 21 August 2016).

<sup>60</sup> Cited in « Patel stir gets tacit support of state BJP chief and MLA », *DNA*, 17 August 2015, p. 16.

extent that a new version of the KHAM may take shape under the new acronym of OBCHA (OBC + Harijans + Adivasis)<sup>61</sup>.

In this context, the Congress chose to contest on a very simple plank: reservations should be extended to the Patels, which would make the quotas reach 65-70%. The State Congress president, Bharatsinh Solanki (who is the son of Madhavsinh Solanki) declared:

“When the quota agitation took place, we had demanded that apart from 49 per cent reservations for OBCs, STs and SCs, another 15 to 20 per cent reservations should be given to EBCs of all upper castes. The government could have done it by bringing ordinance or calling a special session of assembly. But, instead it chose to crush the invitation”<sup>62</sup>.

### Conclusion

The Patels’ movement draws from some of the social issues inherent in the Gujarati political economy. While the “Gujarat model” relied on high growth rates resulting from highly capitalistic investments by big companies, contract workers and low wages<sup>63</sup>, it did not benefit the rural part of the state as much as the cities and it created too few good jobs. The Patels were not alone facing these problems, but (a) they were more badly affected by the growing gap between rural and urban Gujarat (especially in Saurashtra), (b) they suffered comparatively more from the crisis of the cooperatives and the MSMEs (sectors where they had traditionally prospered), (c) they had to cope with the rise of OBC rivals, (d) their uneven command of English did not allow them to compete easily with upper caste middle class people in the services and (e) their sex ratio made the job problem even more acute. On the top of it, a “dominant caste” they were not prepared to experience downward social mobility and to take up on jobs which went mostly to migrants – who maintained wages very low.

All Patels were not uniformly penalised by the “Gujarat model”. Many of them profited by the opportunities it created to big companies and became part of the urban middle class – where they joined upper castes. Besides, the Patels have experienced a class-based differentiation that was already obvious among the OBCs. In both milieus, young, aspiring individuals have become part of a (semi-)urban “neo-middle class” after migrating from villages to towns. These people have been frustrated when they could not get good jobs, in spite of expensive studies. Hardik Patel’s trajectory illustrates this category, which has joined

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<sup>61</sup> Sheela Bhatt, « In Gujarat, a million mutinies now », *The Indian Express*, 25 Sept. 2015 (<http://indianexpress.com/article/explained/in-fact-in-gujarat-a-million-mutinies-now/99/print/> Page).

<sup>62</sup> « Congress voices support for Hardik Patel, quota agitation », *The Times of India*, 24 Oct. 2015.

<sup>63</sup> See C. Jaffrelot, « What Gujarat Model ? – Growth without development and with socio-political polarisation », *South Asia : Journal of South Asian studies*, 38 (4), 2015, pp. 820-838.

hands with Patels of the older generation – especially in the villages of Gujarat - who were experiencing some downward social mobility.

Eventually, Patels fell back on the old issue: reservations. Not necessarily to get their share of it – even if they try, they know it will be hard –, but to destabilise the system and dilute it. In that sense, their movement is not terribly different from the “andolans” of the 1980s. This agenda is paradoxically well in tune with the views of the Sangh parivar. A senior RSS leader, M.G. Vaidya, reiterated the traditional stand of his organisation recently: instead of caste-based reservations, quotas should be based on economic criteria. He pointed out that Hardik Patel was “right in this regard. People are backward these days not because of caste but because of economic conditions. If the criteria of reservations is changed from caste to economic status, then there won’t be permanent reservation. Caste-based reservation is making people remember their caste. How can you eradicate it if you make them remember it since their birth?”<sup>64</sup>.

For the Hindu nationalists, if reservations have to happen, it should be on a socio-economic basis. Gujarat, the first state which fought caste-based reservations may also be the first one to reinvent the system if it follows this line of reasoning successfully. In April 2016, the government has announced 10 % quota for economically backward classes (EBC) among upper castes. Families that earn less than Rs 6 lakh per year will qualify for these reservations. However, this ordinance has immediately been challenged in the High Court.

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<sup>64</sup> Pavan Dahat, « Abolish caste-based quota, says RSS ideologue », *The Hindu*, 31 August 2015 (<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/abolish-castebased-quota-says-rss-ideologue/article7597642.ece?css=print>).