CHAPTER - III

THE BARDOLI MOVEMENT

All the Satyagraha campaigns in India, so far described, pale into insignificance before the epic struggle waged by the peasantry of Bardoli in 1928. It was the first real breakthrough for, specifically, the Gandhian method of rural organization and agitations. The momentous no-tax campaign launched by the people of Bardoli is a 'landmark in the history of Satyagraha'.

The peasants who participated in the Bardoli Satyagraha of 1928 did not form a homogeneous group. They belonged to different castes and different social and economic strata. The Taluka by and large was a rural area and agriculture provided livelihood to approximately 76% of its total population. The ryotwari land tenure had created a three-tier pyramidal class structure. Landless were at the apex of the

1. It was the same Bardoli which had been selected by Gandhi as the spearhead of the no-tax campaign which was to climax the Non-Cooperation Movement early in 1922.
hierarchy, tenants belonged to the second tier, and labourers who were at the bottom of the pyramid, either did not have enough land or any land at all. These three groups were not mutually exclusive. A noteworthy aspect of the economic structure was that big landholders were conspicuous by their absence. The majority of them were small landholder proprietors.5

Significantly enough, this economic division of the society roughly coincided with its social division. The landholders, or khatedars as they were called, whose economic position was better, also stood higher in social hierarchy. The landholders and tenants mostly belonged to higher castes such as Anavil Brahmins, Patidars, Rajputs, Banias and Kolis among Hindus and Muslims, Persis and Christians among non-Hindus. The non-Hindus were hardly 4% of the total population. The advanced or higher castes were known in local parlance as ujaliparaj, the fair race people. The agricultural labour was mostly provided by the tribals belonging to different castes such as Dublas, Chodhras, Gamits, Naikdas etc., who were known as kaliparaj the dark race people. They were entirely dependent on their masters who were Patidars, Anavils, Banias or Parsis.6

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The socio-economic structure of Bardoli can be systematically presented in the form of a diagram.

**Source:** This diagram is based on the figures in L.J. Sedgwick, Census of India, 1921: Bombay Presidency, Bombay, 1922, Vol.VIII, Part 1,2 (Imperial Tables), p.xxxvii.

In the socio-economic structure of Bardoli, thus the higher castes and groups constituted the bulk of landlords, peasant, proprietors and tenants. Some in these sections also worked as agricultural labourers, but it was the kaliparaj people, who swelled the ranks of the agricultural labourers. They weren't only the poorest in the Taluka but also educationally and culturally the most backward. Their economic position made them solely dependent on the higher castes. Under these conditions, inspite of the fact that the higher castes exploited the members of the lower castes, the latter
did not perceive any conflict between their own interests and those of the former. In short the higher castes had a complete hold on the social and economic life of the Taluka.

After his release from prison and return to Gujarat in 1923, Gandhi was dismayed completely by the state of agrarian relations between the rich Patidars and the labourers. The 'constructive programme' carried on since 1921 had brought very little or no change to the social conditions of the kaliparaj community. Complaints made by the untouchables against Patidars, who used to beat and force them to remove carcases, were heard frequently and Gandhi often condemned the Patidar oppression as 'Swadeshi Dyerism'. In the mid 1920s, therefore, Gandhi considered Bardoli unfit to launch any Civil Disobedience Movement, because he thought, the lower peasantry was still isolated socially. The 'constructive programme' needs implementation with a far greater degree of commitment and sincerity than, in Gandhi's views, the Congressmen had till then. It is important to point out here that although dissatisfied, Gandhi didn't attack the then prevailing serf-master relationship. He just expected the Patidars to be more liberal towards their labourers. This reflects the limits to which Gandhi was prepared to go in changing the agrarian social

structure by involving peasants in the political movement. He gave priority to covering up class contradictions rather than resolving them.

The Gandhian strategy to unite agrarian classes through 'constructive programme' during 1921-7 was quite successful. The programme was so implemented as not to disturb the traditional caste structure and the dominant position Patidars enjoyed in it. Rather on the contrary, it helped in reinforcing the solidarity of the castes. The time to test that solidarity came when after the revision of the land revenue assessment in the Bardoli Taluka in 1925, the Government decided to increase the land revenue. In all districts of British India, except those under permanent settlement, the assessment of land revenue had been revised periodically. At the intervals of about thirty years, each district, not permanently settled, under-went a sort of Doomsday, called the 'settlement' of the district. The Surat district was 'resettled' in 1926, after an interval of exactly thirty years and the settlement officer M.S.Jayakar recommended that the Bardoli assessment should be raised by 30%. He had concluded his findings without meeting and discussing the question with the people of the Taluka and without giving them opportunity to put forth their point of view. Apart

from recommending an increase in assessment, a number of villages were also raised from a lower to a higher group and thus incidence of the increase fell even more heavily on these regrouped villages.

The bases of his recommendations were the speculative statistics and theoretical details contained in the Government briefs and not on the spot study of the position.11

M.S.Jayakar gave a number of reasons for the proposed enhancement from Rs.5,14,765 to Rs.6,72,27312, which may be summarized as under:-

1. Communications have considerably improved, including the opening of the broad gauge line of the Tapti Valley Railway.

2. Population has increased by about 3800.

3. The increase in the number of milk cattle and carts.

4. Increase in wealth as judged by the new and well built pucca houses springing up all over.

5. Improved conditions of the kaliparaj and spread of education and prohibition among them.

6. Abnormal rise in the prices of food grains and of cotton.

7. Agricultural wages have doubled.


8. The prices of land have risen, and assessment, represents a steadily decreasing proportion of the rent.\textsuperscript{13}

Jayakar submitted his report to the higher official, the settlement commissioner F.G.H. Anderson for scrutiny and acceptance. The commissioner examined the report with the help of the available data but without undertaking any actual survey came to the conclusion that the ground on which Jayakar had based his recommendations were inaccurate and invalid and the grouping of the villages done by him faulty.\textsuperscript{14} He, however, accepted as accurate the sales and rentals and the acreage of land leased out by the non-agriculturist land holders to actual tillers, prepared by Jayakar and on their basis proposed an enhancement of 29\%.\textsuperscript{15} He also changed the classification of the villages done by Jayakar.\textsuperscript{16} The report was submitted on November 11, 1925.

On the other land, anticipating such an arbitrary enhancement in land revenue in Bardoli in 1925-26, the Patidar landowners had already started mobilizing opinion

\textsuperscript{13} Settlement Report of M.S. Jayakar, Assistant Settlement Officer, Bardoli Taluka, dated June 30, 1925, Home Department (Political), File No. 178, 1928.

\textsuperscript{14} Report of F.G.H. Anderson, Settlement Commissioner and Director of Land Records, Ibid.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
against it.\textsuperscript{17} In November 1917 at Gujarat, in a Political Conference held in Godhra, they had called upon the Government to consult an advisory body of the elected members before increasing land revenue rather than to depend solely upon the Government Officials. This demand was repeated from various forums. But the Government paid no heed.\textsuperscript{18}

The Congress leaders were quick to protest against the increase, once the report was submitted. A sub-committee comprising N.D.Parikh as Chairman and Khushalbhai as secretary was appointed by the Bardoli Taluka Committee\textsuperscript{19}, in order to get to know the actual conditions. The Committee studied the M.S.Jayakar Report thoroughly and undertook a wide and exhaustive tour of the Taluka. After such a painstaking survey, it reached the conclusion that the increase was unjustified and the report was based upon invalid reasons. The report was published in July 1926, but was dubbed by the authorities as a total fabrication.\textsuperscript{20}

However, N.D.Parikh and Professor Malkani (Gujarat Vidyapeeth) tore the report to pieces by a simultaneous series of articles in the \textit{Navajivan} and \textit{Young India}.\textsuperscript{21} The peoples'

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17} D.N.Dhanagare, 'Myth and Reality in Bardoli Satyagraha: a study in Gandhian Politics', \textit{Australian Journal of Politics and History}, Vol.XXVI, No.2, p.265.
\item \textsuperscript{18} \textit{Ibid.},p.268.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Mahadev Desai, \textit{The Story of Bardoli}, Ahmedabad,1929,p.15.
\item \textsuperscript{20} \textit{Ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{21} \textit{Ibid.}
\end{itemize}
case was brought into the light in the following terms, each of them being a blow to the corresponding clause in the settlement officer's report:

1. The report has been prepared by M.S. Jayakar after visiting only a few principal villages and there too only the views of the Government employees were endorsed. The commissioner Anderson has given long notes on the report while sitting in his office. Neither of the two officers took the trouble to undertake any actual survey or a field study.  

2. The increase in population is hardly of any note. An increase in population of 3,800 in 30 years is not at all an imposing data.

3. "While it is true that there was a small increase in the number of buffaloes, Jayakar himself admitted in his report that there had been a decrease in the number of bullocks and the plough cattle is more important than the milk ones which merely form a side occupation."  

4. "The revision settlement, instead of directly calculating not profits, taken rental as an index of profits. Here again rents paid do not represent net profits. Firstly, only 4% of land is leased, and

23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
this in several cases by emigrant holders, who have brought land at exhorbitant prices. To enhance assessment on cent percent land on the basis of rent paid by only 4% to absentee landlords, is not fair. Such leases are generally very short and the high rents paid for the literal exhaustion of the soil by the lessee. A true rent valuation must take an average of short and long leases together."\(^{25}\)

5. "The brick and mortar buildings were for the most part constructed by those who had made money in Africa."\(^{26}\)

6. "Was it proper to increase the land revenue by 30%, because the people themselves helped through their own activities in propagating the temperance movement and in increasing the education facilities for the backward class people? Infact, the burden of debt on these people was steadily increasing and they were losing their lands."\(^{27}\)

7. "Although the prices of agricultural commodities had risen after 1918 as a result of the war, they had started declining since 1925."\(^{28}\)

\(^{25}\) Young India, July 20, 1926.

\(^{26}\) N.D.Parikh, *op.cit.*, p.301.

\(^{27}\) Ibid., p.303.

\(^{28}\) Ibid., p.302

*Young India*, July 29, 1926.
"The cost of cultivation had enormously increased by approximately 400%, as compared with the conditions prevailing 30 years ago. A pair of bullocks cost Rs.400/- as against Rs.100/- about 30 years back, carts Rs.150/- each as compared to Rs.501 to 751 and above all agricultural labour now charges Rs.200/-, 300/- as compared to Rs.30/- a season, the prevailing rate at the time of the last assessment."29

The prices of land had gone up because there were now owners, who had earned money in foreign countries.30

"Jayakar had suggested that alteration of the classification of some of the villages on the ground that they had benefited from the Tapti Valley Railway and this was supported by Anderson. But both had forgotten that in 1896, the then settlement officer had taken into account the benefit to be derived from that railways."31

Hence the public leaders were voicing their grievances through the press, and educating the downtrodden and illiterate tillers about the wrongs being done to them. On the other hand the Bombay Legislative Council was also astir with the issue. These pressures finally led the Government in July 1927 to issue orders to increase the assessment by

30. Ibid., p.301.
31. Ibid.
22§ the reason for the reduction in the percentage of increase of the assessment being the probability that the prices of cotton might fall in near future. But the reduction was too meagre and came too late to satisfy anybody.

The leaders of the Taluka, especially Patidars, considered the enhancement as "too high and unreasonable" and demanded that an open enquiry should be held, before there was any enhancement in the revenue. Modern Review observed in this connection, "the contention of the ryots was that this has been arrived at in an arbitrary and unjust manner, that the settlement officer disregarded popular representation, that the economic condition of the taluka has been getting worse year after year, and that the assessment was an oppressive burden."

The peasants' cause was warmly espoused even by the elected members of the Bombay Legislative Council, particularly those representing Bardoli and its environs. In September 1927, K.M.Munshi, a leading lawyer and constitutionalist from Bombay moved the following resolution in the Legislative Council:


33. N.D.Parikh, op.cit.,p.300.
Mahadev Desai, op.cit.,p.16.


"This council recommends to Government that the revised land revenue assessment in the Chorasi and Bardoli talukas of Surat district, sanctioned by this Government, should not be given effect to."\textsuperscript{36} The debate in the council was surcharged with unreality and it was clear that the peasants of Bardoli could obtain no relief from the council.\textsuperscript{37} Having exhausted all the gentler methods of persuasion, the leaders of Bardoli approached Vallabhbhai Patel to take up their case.\textsuperscript{38} They also met Gandhi and after having assured him that peasants were fully aware of the implications of such a campaign, secured his approval.\textsuperscript{39}

It is important to note here, that initially the Bardoli peasants were rather liberally disposed to the Government's decision. In a largely attended conference in September 1927, at Bardoli, the Patidar landowners decided to withhold the payment of the enhancement only and expressed willingness to pay revenues at the old rates. But later, as they sought counsel from Gandhi and Vallabhbhai, their attitude radicalised. They now resolved to withhold revenue dues altogether until either the enhancement already ordered was

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{38} R.R.Diwakar, \textit{op.cit.}, p.133.
  \item \textsuperscript{39} B.R.Nanda, \textit{Mahatma Gandhi, A Biography}, Delhi,1958,p.270.
  \item \textsuperscript{39} Talk with the Representatives of Bardoli Taluka, \textit{Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi},Vol.XXXVI,February-June 1928, pp.22-23.
\end{itemize}
suspended or a fresh enquiry and revisions were conducted.

Before starting the movement, Vallabhbhai Patel wrote a letter to the Governor of Bombay Leslie Wilson on February 6, 1928, stating that there were irregularities in the Bardoli settlement, and unless an enquiry tribunal was set up to re-examine it, the peasants would refuse to pay their land revenue. However, the Government turned down Patel's appeal for the review of the assessment and declared that it would not be responsible for the losses which the peasants might suffer by listening to 'outsiders'. There was an unconscious irony in the British Officers describing Vallabhbhai, a leader of Gujarat, an outsider in Bardoli Taluka. Vallabhbhai was amazed to learn that he was an 'outsider' in any part of Gujarat. It was a strange perversity of the foreign Government to consider him an outsider in Bardoli. It only revealed the intention of the Government to divide and isolate the people.

On February 12, 1928, a meeting of the people was called, which passed a resolution calling for the launching of a peaceful Satyagraha against the Government and the

41. Ibid.
42. B.R.Nanda, op.cit.,p.270.
stoppage of payment of the land revenue until the Government was prepared to accept the amount of the old assessment and appointed an impartial tribunal to settle the whole question of revision by investigation and enquiry on the spot. This resolution was proposed by Bhikhabhai Khandubhai Desai, who was a leading Anavil landholder of the village Pani and seconded by the following twelve proprietors from different villages and drawn from various communities of the Taluka-Kanbis, Anavils, Banias, Parsis and Muslims:

Table: 3.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>Village</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Dayalji Prabhubhai Patel</td>
<td>Patidar</td>
<td>Akoti (North)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Morarbhai Nathubhai Patel</td>
<td>Patidar</td>
<td>Sarbhon (South West)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Naranbhai Madhavabhai Patel</td>
<td>Patidar</td>
<td>Malekpore (South West)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Kanabhai Hirabhai Patel</td>
<td>Patidar</td>
<td>Vankaner (Central)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Makanbhai Nathubhai Patel</td>
<td>Patidar</td>
<td>Bahipura (South West)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Ranchhodji Gopalji Nayak</td>
<td>Anavil</td>
<td>Sapa (South West)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Manibhai Ranchhodji Desai</td>
<td>Anavil</td>
<td>Mota (North)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Ranchhodji Gulabbhari Desai</td>
<td>Anavil</td>
<td>Buhari (South East)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Ibrahim Ahmedhbhai</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Bardoli (Central)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Sultan Kha Sulabat Khan</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Valod (South East)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Sunmukhlal Gordhandas</td>
<td>Bania</td>
<td>Valod (South East)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Firojsha Faramji</td>
<td>Parsi</td>
<td>Surali (Central)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: For details see The Bombay Chronicle, May 20, 1928.

43. The Bombay Chronicle, February 13, 1928; Young India, February 16, 1928.
44. The Bombay Chronicle, February 13, 1928;
Thus started the Bardoli Satyagraha of 1928, with the oaths taken by peasants on the name of Prabhu and Khuda that they wouldn't pay the land revenue. Vallabhbhai gave religious overtones to it by calling it a 'Dharma Yudha' and 'Maha Yajna' (great sacrifice).

Far from 'engineering' this agitation, as the British later maintained, Vallabhbhai Patel, until February 12, 1928, acted as no more than the cautious advocate of the demands of the Patidars of Bardoli. Even before the passing of the resolution, Vallabhbhai did not fail to point out to the people the dangers inherent in the conflict. He exhorted the peasants, "I still ask you to think twice before you take the plunge... fight if you feel that you must resist oppression and injustice. If you miserably fall, you will fall not to rise again for several years, but if you succeed you will have done much to lay the foundations of Swaraj.

45. The Bombay Chronicle, February 13, 1928. Young India, February 16, 1928.

46. Ibid.


The resolution about offering the Satyagraha, met with the approval of most of the newspapers. Papers of all shades of opinion adversely criticised the attitude of the Bombay Government as exhibited in the correspondence that passed between them and Vallabhbhai Patel. In this connection, the Navajivan observed "there is cleverness, evasiveness and discourtesy in Government's replies."  

Vallabhbhai organized the Taluka with amazing thoroughness. For several years, there had been four or five workers' camps. The Bardoli Satyagraha: The location of 20 workers' camps, their support networks and camp leaders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Region</th>
<th>Camp</th>
<th>No. of Head Quarter villages covered</th>
<th>Name of the camp leader</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. North Region</td>
<td>1. Mota</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Balvantari Mehta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Varad</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Mohanlal Pandya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Bamni</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Darbar Gopaldas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Balda</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ambalal Patel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Central Region</td>
<td>1. Afue</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ratangi Bhagabhai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Sialda</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Fulchand Shah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Vankaner</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Dr. Champak Lal Chai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. South Eastern Region</td>
<td>1. Siker</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Kalyanji Patel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Bajipura</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Narmada Shankar Pandya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Valod</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Dr. Chandulal Desai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Buhari</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Naranbhai Patel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. South Western Region</td>
<td>1. Sarbhn</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Dr. Sumant Mehta</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


49. The Bombay Newspapers (Confidential), File No.54, 1928 (P.C. Joshi Collections).
50. Ibid.
five social service centres in different parts of the Taluka, which were carrying on constructive activities. On the framework of these, sixteen camps were now organized in convenient centres and 250 volunteers were put in charge of these camps. The top rank of the leaders consisted of about 150 trained persons, who belong to the Taluka, but Vallabhbhai Patel used local leaders and workers as "linkmen" between his other assistants and common peasants. These local leaders belonged to different caste and communities. At the bottom level, he recruited volunteers from the peasantry.

Hence it is clear that Vallabhbhai wanted the peasants to present a united front to the Government. All the communities and sections were appealed to join the movement. The Satyagraha was made to be an issue which involved the prestige of each of the caste in Bardoli. The support of each caste was sought on the basis that if it did not support the

52. The Bombay Chronicle, May 20, 1929.


Satyagraha, its prestige would be lowered. It was further resolved to out-caste those who paid the land revenue. In this way, at times some un-Gandhian methods were used to ensure solidarity, such as branding those who paid their land revenue as untouchables. Religious appeals were another way to bring the different communities into the streams of the movement. Religious leaders were called from outside to persuade their respective communities not to pay taxes. For example, Abbas Tayabji, persuaded the Muslims to join forces with the Hindus. The Imam Sahib of Bardoli blessed the struggle and asked all Muslims to rally under the leadership of Vallabhbhai to fight the Government. The tribal audience were told that their gods, Siliya and Simaliya had become old and had now deputed Gandhi to look after them and did not the Mahatma (Gandhi) wear a lion-cloth like


then, and drink goat's milk rather than the more expensive buffalo's milk? After the speech, the jai of Siliya and Simaliya Dev, and then of Gandhi, would be loudly proclaimed. Thus, through the social and religious symbols, the difficult task of involving the tribal people was made smooth.

Simultaneously, Vallabhbhai sought to develop the concept of 'class' providing common identity to all the culturally distinct groups. Anyone who was engaged in one or another form of agriculture (as landless labour, tenant or landlord) was labelled as Khedut, literally 'cultivator' but in actual usage a word of a more inclusive meaning. The term was applied to not only all cultivators but to virtually all inhabitants of Taluka as all of them depended on agriculture as a source of livelihood. Having thus pulled them together into a common 'class', Vallabhbhai Patel appealed to them that the no-tax movement concerned all of them, whether they were tax-payers or not. As a result of skilful use of caste associations, social boycott and religious appeals, Brahmans and untouchables, Patidars and Baniyas, Muslims, Parsis and Hindus all flocked to join Vallabhbhai's force, providing a strong united front against the Government.


61. Ibid.

Massive publicity campaign was another active and effective means of mass mobilization which was done through a daily newspaper, The Satyagraha Patrika with the circulation of 9,000 to 12,000 copies every day.\textsuperscript{63} The speeches and articles in this Patrika harped on the theme of peasant and rural labourers being the only "real producers of wealth ... the two main pillars of the state." This was combined with a repeated emphasis by Vallabhbhai Patel on rural class unity and traditional mutuality. "The shahukar (moneylender) is merged in the tenant like milk in the water\textsuperscript{64} and their relations are non-antagonistic.

The notion of a vertical solidarity of the peasants community suited his purpose best. His advice to the poor peasants was, "Government wants to divide you and shahukar (moneylender) but for you your shahukar is every thing. You should laugh at and consider him a fool if somebody says that you should change your shahukar. It is just like asking a pativrata (i.e. dutiful wife) to change her husband. How can you leave a shahukar who had helped you in your difficulties?"\textsuperscript{65}

Thus, Vallabhbhai Patel who was a staunch Gandhian, justified the economic dominance of the superior-caste money-lender over those at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

\textsuperscript{63} Mahadev Desai, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 168-69.

\textsuperscript{64} The \textit{Satyagraha Patrika}, February 12,13, 1928. Mahadev Desai, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 169.

The movement had also its own intelligence wing, whose job was to find out indecisive peasants and check them from paying their dues. The ground work done in the course of the constructive programme too paid rich dividends during the movement. The local leaders were very active and they interpreted the Gandhian ethic of 'non-violence' the way it suited them. At times, some of them even went to the extent of disregarding the creed of non-violence and coerced local patels and talatis, to resign their jobs and to paralyse the local administration. Soon the movement gained momentum. The non-payment of land revenue, portended a serious situation.

On the other hand, Government started its own propaganda against the satyagrahis. It began to declare openly that the leaders of the Congress were exploiting the poor, innocent and helpless peasants of the Bardoli Taluka. The Satyagraha, it opined, would not succeed, rather it would damage the interests of the peasantry. The Collector Hatshorne declared thus: "Government do not wish to injure the agriculturists of the taluka, but it will be their own fault if they suffer loss of their land. Many of the agriculturists are willing to pay the land and other taxes due from them, but these men are unfortunately being terrorized by threats of fire, violence and social boycott. If the agriculturists follow the foolish

advice given to them by the non-cooperators who are conducting the campaign and most of whom come from outside the Taluka and hold no land in Taluka and have therefore nothing to lose, it will be the unfortunate cultivators, who will suffer in the long run.68

On February 15, 1928, the Government fired its first shot on the weakest section of the enemy. Pre-emptory notices to pay the land tax were sent to fifty Baniya land holders.69 Traditionally, the men of this community were deeply attached to their property and were timid by nature. But Vallabhbhai had turned them into warriors who would fight for their honour regardless of the odds against them.70 Forty eight of them tore up the notices and only two of them were persuaded.

The correspondent of The Bombay Chronicle reported: "Evidently, the authorities wanted to select the weakest spot for dealing their first blow, but it seems they are sadly mistaken in selecting the Banias of Valod. Most of those served with notices are said to be simply amused by the threats and are looking forward with interest to measures the Government may take against them..."71

The Government resorted to the policy of maltreating the petty landlords in Raniparaj villages. For example, in a village named Bedkuva, which was chiefly populated by

68. The Bombay Chronicle, May 20, 1928.
69. Ibid., January 23, 1928.
70. K.L. Punjabi, op.cit., p. 56.
Raniparaj community, it was alleged, the petty Raniparaj landholders were even beaten in some cases and a small sum of revenue was collected from them. The threats of fines too had no effect on the people. At last, the Government started confiscation of the lands of the defaulters, as it knew, the peasant's attachment to his land and the fear of losing it would bring him to its knees. On this juncture, in order to maintain the morale of the people, Vallabhbhai told them:

"The sons of the peasants have nothing to fear. They must have confidence that the land of their forefathers will remain as theirs. No one can unjustly deprive the peasants of his land and get away with it. If Government forfeits the land in this manner, it will be clear that there is no Government in this country. It will then be robbers with whom we shall be dealing. I say let the robbers come. There will be greater fun in their rule than in the rule of these foreign Baniyas. Do not be afraid of anyone."

And people refused to be frightened. Although some of the scared Baniyas, paid revenue, the overwhelming majority of ryots withheld payment. Out of total number of 14,855 land revenue assessments only 1,830 paid their land revenue to the Government. As a result, the property on a large

73. N.D.Parikh, op.cit., p. 316.
74. Sunil Sen, Peasant Movement in India; Mid Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, Calcutta, 1982, p. 83.
scale was attached. The Dublas refused to help the officials in carrying this attached property. The caste organizations called upon the people not to purchase the attached lands. As a result, the attached property was sold for a song to outsiders as no local buyer came forward. By the middle of the May, 1928, the number of forfeiture notices exceeded 1500, the japti officers attached utensils, cattle and other belongings of the peasants. The issue of the forfeiture notices was severely commented upon in the press. The Kesari (Marathi) remarked: "It is a proof of efficiency of the Satyagraha movement that Government is compelled as a last resource to draw the weapon of confiscation of lands." 

Even the strong police reinforcement and the Pathan parties pressed into service by the Government for the repression of the movement could not break the resistance of the peasants. Commenting on the non-violent resistance of the people, the Modern Review observed: "... the spirit of the people has not been crushed by cruel persecution ... it is a struggle in which victory or defeat will be equally inglorious for the Bombay Government."

Those who opposed the movement had to face the prospect of being refused essential services from sweepers, barbers, washermen, agricultural labourers and of being socially boycotted.

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76. Mahadev Desai, op.cit., pp. 70-77.
77. Bombay Newspapers, (Confidential), File No.54, 1928.
by their Kinsmen and neighbourhood. Government officials were worst affected by this pressure as they were refused supplies, services, transport etc. and in these circumstances they found it impossible to carry out their official duties.79

On the other hand, many village officials, the patels and talaties resigned their posts in sympathy with the movement. According to a report of the Bombay Chronicle of June 8, 1928: "About 40 patels and 8 talatis from Bardoli Taluka, some of them with long records of service, extending from 10 to 25 years, tendered their resignation as a protest against the official policy of lawlessness in Bardoli.80

The situation became more complicated when the eight members of Legislative Council from Gujarat and three from Bombay also tendered their resignation81 as a protest against the Government's policy in regard to the Bardoli question. Prominent among them were Shivdasani, Rao Bahadur Bhimbhai Naik, Swaminarayan, Dr. Dixit, Rao Saheb Dadubhai Desai, Jivanbhai Patel followed by the resignations of Bhulabhai Desai, Bechar of Karachi and Nariman.82

The papers congratulated Messrs Nariman Bechar and Bhulabhai Desai on their having resigned. However, Jam-e-Jamshed alone observed: "We don't think that mere resignation will serve

80. _The Bombay Chronicle_, June 8, 1928.
81. _Home Department (Political)_., File No. 75, 1928.
any purpose and we trust no more would be forthcoming.\textsuperscript{83}

In a letter to Viceroy, Vithalbhai Patel, who was the President of the Central Legislative Assembly, also declared his intention to resign and participate in the movement actively if the Government refused to relent.\textsuperscript{84}

In another letter addressed to Gandhi, he announced a monthly donation of Rs. 100/- so long as the campaign lasted.\textsuperscript{85} The pressure on Government was further intensified when K.M. Munshi, took a hand in the matter in June, 1928,\textsuperscript{86} and began correspondence with the Governor of Bombay to explore the possibility of compromise.\textsuperscript{87} On June 27, 1928, he resigned\textsuperscript{88} from his seat in the legislature. Later on, with the purpose of enquiry into the grievance of the Bardoli peasants, Munshi, headed a non-official committee, consisting of prominent citizens of Bombay, such as Rao Bahadur Bhimbhai Naik (M.L.C.), Dr. Gilder, H. Lalji, Shivdasani, Chandra Chud (M.L.C.) and B.G. Kher (solicitor).\textsuperscript{89}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{83} Bombay Newspapers (confidential), Filc No.54, 1928.
\item \textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{86} K.M. Munshi, I follow the Mahatma, Bombay, 1940, pp. 44-57.
\item \textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{88} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{89} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
The report of the committee confirmed the fact that local revenue officials had legally erred by selling the confiscated land for 1/30th of the market value and by imposing heavy sentences on defaulters and agitators after summary trials.\(^90\)

**N.B.** Chandrachud, who was a member of the committee, gave his impression about the justness of the Bardoli cause during an interview to the *Times of India*, he said: "... the cause of the peasants is absolutely just and their demand is quite reasonable. Government officers have lost their heads and ... statesmanship has gone bankrupt in making indiscriminate attachments by breaking into the house of those who were not 'Khatedars'. If Government want to improve matters and create sympathy and confidence they must assent to the people's demand ... ."\(^91\)

In the meantime, Vallabhbhai Patel also continued to mount pressure on the Government. Throughout the months of May and June, 1928, several conferences were held in the various districts of Gujarat to pledge support for the cause of the Bardoli peasants. The most significant of these was the Surat District Conference held on May 26, 1928. Addressing the conference, he warned the Government that if it failed to give up its policy of repression "the only course open to the peasantry of Gujarat will be to fall in line with their fellows of Bardoli and fight against Government."\(^92\) Simultaneously, he sought support for the Bardoli cause from the various

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92. Mahadev Desai, *op.cit.*, p. 120.
organisations in the country - one of them was Servant of India Society. The Society appointed a Kanzru Committee under Presidentship of Hridyanath Kanzru to look into the matter. After an enquiry and on the basis of various findings, the committee upheld the demand for a fresh enquiry into the case of the Bardoli peasants. The publication of its report brought more public figures on the side of the peasants' demand for an open enquiry.

On this juncture, Moti Lal Nehru who belonged to the liberal wing of the Congress uttered: "Government has taken up an extraordinary position. If the assessment is prima facie wrong and unjust and merits reconsideration it is absurd and illogical to demand payment of dues under it." Another liberal T.B. Sapru went further: "It appears to me to be necessary that an independent inquiry should be made not only into the grievances of the people of Bardoli with regard to the enhanced assessment but also the allegations made regarding the method employed in enforcing payment and dealing with the situation."

Several newspapers, such as the Statesman and the Pioneer also lent support to the peasants' cause. The latter asserted that: "no impartial observer of the Bardoli dispute, possessed

93. Servants of India Society was a moderate and conservative body which commanded great respect for its impartiality.


95. Ibid.

96. The Bombay Chronicle, July 7, 1928.

97. Ibid., July 8, 1928.
of the plain facts of the case, can resist the conclusion that the peasants have got the right on their side and that their claim for an examination of the enhanced assessment by an impartial tribunal is just reasonable and fair."^98

Infact Bardoli struggle aroused a good deal of national consciousness all over the country. People from Maharastra, Sind and other provinces also started sending their messages to Gandhi, expressing their desire to participate in the movement. At meetings in Bombay and United Provinces, thousands of peasants resolved to follow the Bardoli example and prevent any rise in taxes.°° People from all over the country donated over Rs. 150000 to the Satyagraha fund to prosecute the campaign.°° On the appeal of Gandhi, June 12, 1928 was observed as Bardoli Day, throughout India.°° The slogan "Bardolise India" was becoming very popular with the peasant masses. The Sultan of Calcutta writing in its issue of June 21, 1928 against the pace with which taxes were being increased in Pabna, Chittagong and other districts asked the Bengal Government if they "intend to create many Bardolis there also."°°° The Asr-j-Jadid (Calcutta) of April 17, 1928 commented that "if the spirit which is working among the peasants of Bardoli spreads to other parts of India, who can say that the condition of India

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98. The Pioneer, July 11, 1928.
99. The Hindu, January 9, 1929.
100. Mahadev Desai, op.cit., pp. 92-93.
101. Ibid., pp. 93, 95, 223.
will remain the same as it is today."\textsuperscript{103}

The organ of Bengal Workers' and Peasants' Party Ganvani made a plea for preparing the workers for a general strike and the peasants for refusal to pay taxes and "to make use of this as a political weapon."\textsuperscript{104} "Bardoli", it wrote on July 5, 1928, "has created such an awakening in the country that she can no longer put up with oppressions like a dumb beast."\textsuperscript{105}

Pleas came in asking that the successful resistance be turned into a general no-tax campaign but Vallabhbhai ruled out each such suggestion sternly. Both he and Gandhi were at pains to prevent the Satyagraha from becoming a no-tax campaign. Gandhi said in Young India: "Vallabhbhai has slightly distinguished the proposed Satyagraha from the Swaraj Satyagraha. This campaign can not properly be deemed to be a no-tax campaign launched for the attainment of Swaraj as Bardoli would have done in 1922. This Satyagraha is limited in scope, has a specific local object."\textsuperscript{106}

Vallabhbhai also wanted to use the highly inflammable material of Indian peasantry for an experiment in his Bardoli laboratory in the ryotwari area only under his strict supervision and control.\textsuperscript{107} There were certain considerations which

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{103} Report on Indian Newspapers and Periodicals in Bengal, 1928, No. 26, p. 340.
\item \textsuperscript{104} Ibid., File No. 28, p. 382.
\item \textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{106} Young India, March 8, 1928. \textit{Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi}, Vol.XXXVI, p.90.
\item \textsuperscript{107} Shive Kumar, \textit{Peasantry and the Indian National Movement, 1919-1933}, Meerut, 1979-80, p. 149.
\end{itemize}
prevented him from importing help from outside quarters. First, Bardoli struggle was for a just and localised cause. Stepping in of national leaders from other provinces would have given it an all India stance making the situation complicated. In that case, the issue of Bardoli might have been thrown to the background. Besides, Gandhi had given his approval only to the struggle of Bardoli with limited objectives and constrained sphere and it could be better fought if it were not diffused and if it remained localised at Bardoli. Moreover, Vallabhbhai did not want to give even the semblance of an opportunity to the Government whereby it would be able to condemn the movement as a political one and pull it well into the jurisdiction of sedition, thereby finding an easy way to beat it with the handy stick of some last minute ordinance. As such he decided to go alone, a risky but calculated move. He was indeed a "supreme tactician." 108

The state of agitation during these months was belying the Government expectation that after the arrival of monsoon in June "the cultivators might endeavour to break away from the agitation as they did in 1918 at the time of Kheda Satyagraha." 109 The enthusiasm of the people remained unabated. After a visit to Bardoli, Commissioner Smart unreservedly confessed on June 30, 1928, "The main as well as subsidiary headquarters of the campaign were crowded and

busy. The pressure on the people not to pay their land revenue remained effective as heretofore.”

Roughly at the same time, The Times of India, which had much influence with the Government, presented an alarming picture from its special correspondent, who had visited Bardoli. It observed, "the leaders of the no-tax campaign had succeeded in producing such a complete paralysis of the machinery of Government in the Taluka." In another article, the same correspondent wrote, "... Iron disciple prevails at Bardoli. Mr. Patel has instituted there Bolshevik regime in which he plays the role of Lenin. His hold on the population is absolute.”

The existing circumstances put the then Viceroy Irwin in a quandry. There was much pressure on him from political, social and commercial organizations; there was opposition from the prominent leaders of the country; there was support and sympathy for this issue among the members of the House of Commons, and even the Secretary of State for India felt much concerned for it. Irwin himself was keen that this issue shouldn't be allowed to jeopardise imperial policies which aimed at ensuring the smooth working of the Mantford reforms.
and initiating further constitutional changes after Simon Commission's visit to the country.  

Before taking up any step in this direction, Irwin called the Governor Leslie Wilson to Shimla for discussion and advised him to visit Surat on July 18, 1928 and to announce that the Government agreed to institute an official enquiry provided that the agitators called off their agitation, withdrew their demand for an unofficial enquiry and agreed to pay the raised assessment themselves or a third party paid the difference between the amounts based on the old and new rates. The Governor was also advised to make it clear that the enquiry would not go into the principles of settlement; it would concern itself with the errors of calculations which might be pointed out or detected during the enquiry. He also asked Wilson to see that steps were taken to replace the talatis and patels who had tendered their resignations at the call of Vallabhbhai Patel and joined the movement. Irwin's earnestness about the situation appears from his letter to George V, "Leslie Wilson had come to see me for a day on Sunday and has gone to Bardoli district today. I hope his visit there may bring peace. If not, I am afraid we are in for a difficult time which may bring quite serious trouble ... I have no doubt in my own mind that the cultivators have a certain case ... ."

115. Home Department (Political), File No.75, 1928.
116. Ibid.
117. Irwin to King George V, July 18, 1928, Halifax Collection.
However, the commencement of the meeting on July 18, 1928, between Leslie Wilson and Vallabhbhai Patel was in 'bad taste' as the latter and his associate were not agreed to the condition regarding the payment of the revenue based on the revised assessment either by the peasants or by a third party. They insisted that even if the enquiry was to be conducted by the officials of the Government, it should have judicial character and must cover the entire revision rather than specific cases. Moreover, Vallabhbhai asked for the release of prisoners, restoration of land, payment of compensation to those whose cattle had been sold, reinstatement of Government servants, punishment for the participants in the Satyagraha to be remitted and appointment of a committee to conduct an open independent enquiry. But, as the Governor was not ready to accept all the terms, the Surat Conference met with a failure. Leslie Wilson personally found in Vallabhbhai, a hard liner who would never budge from his basic demands. He called Vallabhbhai as "very difficult" and "swelled headed" who was an obstacle in the settlement of any kind.

The press endorsed with great satisfaction with Vallabhbhai Patel's 'manly' and 'self respecting' reply given

119. Ibid.
120. Ibid.
121. Wilson to Irwin, July 19, 1928, Halifax Collection.
122. Wilson to Birkenhead, July 19, 1928, Ibid.
123. Barring the Times of India, the attitude of which stands exposed.
to the Governor's offer at Surat. However, disappointment was expressed at the failure of the negotiations for the settlement of Bardoli dispute and the Government was blamed for "insisting upon humiliating conditions to be fulfilled by the peasants". The whole country was one with Vallabhbhai on the issue. Pt. Madan Mohan Malviya felt that the Governor's insistence upon the deposit of the enhanced amount of assessment was "unreasonable or could not be acceptable to the people of Bardoli". He stated that only obstacle to the settlement of the issue was a misconceived notion of prestige" On the part of the Government. Gandhi also declared that he was fully "sympathetic to the steps" so far taken by Sardar Patel and that he was in "full agreement" with the actions decided upon by him.

The Pioneer supported the demand for a fresh enquiry into the assessment and declared that the Government's action and attitude towards the ryots of Bardoli were "unjust".

124. Bombay Newspapers (Confidential), File No.54, 1928.
126. Ibid.
127. Ibid.
128. Ibid.
129. Ibid., July 25, 1928.
It considered the Governor's attitude regarding the deposit thus, "The difference between the old and new assessments which they demand, before the enquiry was granted, was a case of putting a cart before the horse".\textsuperscript{130}

Public opinion in the country was getting more and more restive and anti-Government. Peasants in many parts of Bombay presidency were threatening to start agitation for the revision of revenue assessment in their areas. The workers in Bombay textile mills were on strike and there was a threat that Vallabhbhai Patel and the Bombay communists would combine in bringing about a railway strike that would make the movement of troops and supplies to Bardoli impossible.\textsuperscript{131} The Bombay Youth League and other organizations had mobilized the public of Bombay for huge public meetings and demonstrations. Punjab was offering to send jathas on foot to Bardoli.\textsuperscript{132}

At the very same time, the sentiments on the failure of Surat Conference were echoed in England also. The Viceroy, on his part, felt much puzzled on account of the numerous queries from the Home Government. Neither he wanted that the Government should bow down to the extent that it might look ridiculous so far as the administration of the sub-continent was concerned, nor did he wish any kind of stigma on the name of Leslie Wilson. The pro-India members of the parliament in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{130} The Bombay Chronicle, July 25, 1928.
\item \textsuperscript{131} Sumit Sarkar, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 278.
\item \textsuperscript{132} Bipan Chandra, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 208.
\end{itemize}
England were also pressing hard for this delayed economic issue which they opined, had greatly crushed the socio-economic structure of the Bardoli Taluka. To give them a proper reply, Earl Winterton was constantly in touch with Irwin and his bewilderment also increased when the Viceroy was not putting forward a scheme leading to the solution of the problem. He wrote a note of encouragement to Wilson on July 19, 1928, "The economic element in struggle is of quite secondary importance and any weakening of your attitude would, therefore, be unintelligible either in India or here in the sense that Government no longer intends to govern". 133

Hence, Wilson was in a dilemma and felt himself jammed administratively between the Secretary of State for India favouring tough line of action and Viceroy favouring a kind of compromise and moderate policy. All these views had nightmarish effect on him as the solution did not appear to be visible. In a state of desperation, he decided to take severe action against the satyagrahis. On July 23, 1928, the Governor issued an ultimatum, that if a settlement were not reached within fourteen days from today, dire consequences would follow. He was, however, prepared to order an enquiry after the increased tax had been paid and the present agitation discontinued. 134

This statement aroused both hope and fear. Some people hoped

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133. Birkenhead to Wilson, July 19, 1928, Halifax Collection.
that the satyagrahis would now have an opportunity of showing their capacity to suffer for the country, whereas the others felt that a clash should be avoided.

Vithalbhai and several members\textsuperscript{135} of Bombay Legislative Council, seized with the problem and pounced upon the offer as a saving grace and met the Governor and the members of the Government.\textsuperscript{136} K.M. Munshi, who had been consulting the finance member, Chunilal Mehta, rightly thought the better thing was to ascertain the minimum from Gandhi and Vallabhbhai.\textsuperscript{137} He, therefore, met them and they (Gandhi and Vallabhbhai Patel) gave him the following terms:

(A) Pending the enquiry, the old assessment to be accepted.

(B) Satyagrahis to pay the old assessment and to call off the campaign on the enquiry being announced.

(C) Enquiry to be an open judicial one, by a judicial officer alone or assisted by a revenue officer with terms of reference as given below, and under which the people will have a right to lead and test evidence with the help of council if necessary.\textsuperscript{138}

\textbf{Terms of Reference}

First: To enquire into the report upon the complaints of the people of Bardoli and Valod:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{135} G.I. Patel, \textit{Vithalbhai Patel-Life and Times}, Book II, Bombay, 1951, p. 1002.
\item \textsuperscript{136} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{137} J.H. Dave (ed.), \textit{op.cit.}, p. 63.
\item \textsuperscript{138} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
(a) That the enhancement of revenue recently made is not warranted in terms of the land revenue code.

(b) That the report and the notifications accessible to the public do not contain sufficient data warranting the enhancement and that some of the data given are wrong.

(c) To find out if the people's complaint is held to be justified, what enhancement or reduction, if any, there should be upon the old assessment.\(^{139}\)

Secondly: To report upon the allegations made by or on behalf of the people about the coercive measures adopted by the Government in order to collect the enhanced revenue.

(d) All lands to be restored.

(e) All satyagrahis prisoners to be released.

(f) All talatis and patels to be reinstated.

(g) Valod liquor shop-keepers to be compensated.\(^{140}\)

Gandhi even told K.M. Munshi that the satyagrahis would willingly waive the demand for an enquiry into the coercive measures, if, it is regarded by the Government, as a hitch in the settlement.\(^{141}\) With these terms K.M. Munshi asked for an interview with the Governor. However, the Governor did not care for the terms and gave him the cold shoulders.\(^{142}\)

At this juncture, in anticipation of the developments and

\(^{139}\) J.H. Dave (ed.), \textit{op.cit.}, p. 63.

\(^{140}\) Ibid.

\(^{141}\) Ibid.

\(^{142}\) Ibid.
Vallabhbhai's arrest that might take place,143 Gandhi shifted to Bardoli on August 2, 1928,144 in order to take over the reins of the movement, as he had already given the assurance to lead in Vallabhbhai's absence.145 Gandhi observed on the eve of starting for Bardoli, "I am going to Bardoli in response to the command of the Sardar; of course Vallabhbhai often consult me, but does not a commander consult even a private serving under him? I am going to Bardoli not to take Vallabhbhai's place but to serve under him".146

On reaching Bardoli, Gandhi was amazed to see that all the people had complete confidence in God and were prepared to carry out their leader's order unquestioningly.147 Knowing that the talks of compromise were in the air, one of the peasants on behalf of the others told Gandhi: "We have surrendered our head to the Sardar, not our honour". "Then you may be sure that your honour is safe", said Gandhi. "But a greater test is still to come", he added. "When you have stood the final heat, victory is your. But tell me one thing, supposing Vallabhbhai is taken away and others also with him, won't you be cowed down?" asked Gandhi. "No fear", reply came with firmness. "Vallabhbhai has done enough to turn our iron into steel, and we know that the only thing we have to do is to be true to our word, even if the

144. Ibid.
145. Ibid.
146. Young India, August 9, 1928.
147. Ibid.
heavens fall". Such an unshaken faith had developed in the minds of the peasants of Bardoli for their leader.

On the other hand, after the initial deadlock, a compromise was reached at Poona on August 3, 4, 1928. To reach an acceptable compromise, leaders like Chunilal Mehta (a member of the Government's Executive Council), Harilal Desai and Rai Bahadur Dadubhai Desai - well-wisher of Bardoli peasants showed keenness to help the Government to solve the long-drawn problem. They arranged informal discussions between the Government's representatives and Vallabhbhai Patel and council members from Gujarat. Vallabhbhai was persuaded to accept a formula whereby somebody would pay the arrears (on behalf of the peasants) to the Government. Infact this compromise proposal was initiated by Vithalbhai Patel, who was the President of Indian Legislative Assembly. He advised his rich Gujarati friend Ram Chandra Bhatt to deposit in Government treasury a sum equivalent to the proposed 22%, revenue enhancement on behalf of the Bardoli peasants. Initially this scheme was rejected by Vallabhbhai. But Vithalbhai knew the weakness of Patidar landowners and wanted his young brother not to make it a prestige issue.

Although the compromise meant submission to the might of the Government, Vallabhbhai had no other option but to accept it.

148. Young India, August 9, 1928.
150. Ibid.
151. G.I. Patel, op. cit., p. 1001. Mahadev Desai (op. cit., p. 167) would have us believed that Ramchandra's name was inspired by the Government agency without stating reasons.
Even Mahadev Desai, Gandhi's private secretary at the time, and an active Satyagraha leader, insisted on compromising with the Government as there was no way out. The terms of agreement were honourable to both the parties.\textsuperscript{152}

**The Government's terms were:**

(a) Payment of assessment by landholders of Bardoli according to pre-revision settlement.\textsuperscript{153}

(b) Difference between the old and new settlement to be deposited by Ram Chandra Bhatt, according to the offer made through the Dewan Harilal Desai.\textsuperscript{154}

(c) Cessation of all agitations in Bardoli Taluka.\textsuperscript{155}

**Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's terms were:**

(a) Release of Satyagraha prisoners.\textsuperscript{156}

(b) Restoration of forfeited lands in Government possession.\textsuperscript{157}

(c) Compensation in case of grave hardship and gross injustice.\textsuperscript{158}

(d) Reinstatement of talatis.\textsuperscript{159}

\textsuperscript{152} Mahadev Desai, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 258-62.

\textsuperscript{153} The Indian Review, 1928, p. 577.

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{155} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{159} Ibid.
(e) Setting up of an enquiry committee, comprising a judicial officer associated with a revenue officer, the decision of the former being final.\textsuperscript{160}

The settlement was welcomed by all concerned and came as a great relief.\textsuperscript{161} As a result of this settlement, the Satyagraha was called off.\textsuperscript{162} Gandhi, who was at Bardoli at the moment, tendered his congratulations through the columns of Young India\textsuperscript{163} both to the Government of Bombay as well as to the people of Bardoli. About Vallabhbhai, he wrote that without his "firmness as well as gentleness the settlement would have been impossible"\textsuperscript{164} and added, that the satyagrahis have achieved practically all that they had asked for.\textsuperscript{165} Lala Lajpat Rai wrote in the 'People' that the settlement was a notable 'triumph of popular cause'.\textsuperscript{166} K.M. Munshi described the Bardoli event as one of the most brilliant triumph in the history of the Indian public life.\textsuperscript{167}

On August 6, 1928, a communique was issued by the Government, in which it was announced that an enquiry would be conducted by a judicial officer and a revenue officer, but in case of a difference of opinion between the two, the decision of the former

\textsuperscript{160} The Indian Review, 1928, p. 577.


\textsuperscript{162} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{163} Young India, August 2, 1928.

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{165} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{166} Satyagraha Khabarpatra, No. 16, August 8, 1928.

\textsuperscript{167} Mahadev Desai, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 178.
would prevail. Regarding the terms of reference, the communique said that the committee would enquire into the report upon the complaint of the people of Bardoli and Valod\textsuperscript{168} that the enhancement of revenue recently made is not warranted in terms of the land revenue code; that the reports accessible to the public do not contain sufficient data warranting the enhancement and that some of the data given are wrong; and to find that if the people's complaint is held to be justified, what enhancement or reduction should be upon the old assessment; and as the enquiry is to be full, open and independent, the people will be free to lead as well as test evidence before it with the help of their representatives including legal advisers.\textsuperscript{169}

These terms were word for word the same as submitted by Vallabhbhai Patel at the last conference, held at Poona. In this way, he gained almost all the points and the Government was also contented with keeping up its prestige, although in fact only a shadow of it.\textsuperscript{170}

The observance of these terms of agreement enabled the Bombay Government first to release those who had been convicted or arrested during the course of the agitation and secondly to restore those lands which had been forfeited but not sold, and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{168} The Times of India, August 8, 1928.
\item \textsuperscript{169} The Indian Annual Register, 1929, Vol. I, pp. 93-94.
\item \textsuperscript{170} K.L. Punjabi, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 63.
\end{itemize}
so also the cattle and other property. However, the problem was faced in obtaining the restoration of lands, which had been sold to the third parties. In this respect the Government officials and peasants' representatives cooperated. All the purchasers of the auctioned property were urged by the collector of Surat to give up the lands at the price for which they had purchased them, and Rao Bahadur Bhimbhai Naik became the legal purchaser of all the sold and resold lands, which were then restored to original land owners.

Satisfied with the development, Vallabhbhai Patel issued a message to the people of Bardoli on August 11, 1928 stating: "All Satyagraha prisoners have been released. Talatis are being reinstated as well. Hence it is proper that the peasants should unfailingly commence payment of the old assessment as soon as practicable".

Thereafter, the peasants started paying land revenue according to the old rates and Leslie Wilson informed Irwin on August 15, 1928 that all the taxes due to the Government, both on the revised and the old rates had been deposited into the treasury.

   Home Department (Political), File No.1, 1928.
   J. Coatman, India in 1926-29, Years of Destiny, London 1932, p. 11.

172. K.M. Munshi, I follow the Mahatma, pp. 61-62.

173. The Bombay Chronicle, August 2, 1928.

174. Irwin to Wilson, August 15, 1928, Halifax Collection.
On October 18, 1928 the Enquiry Committee comprised of R.S. Broomfield, I.C.S. (Judicial Officer) and R.M. Maxwell, I.C.S. (Revenue Officer)\textsuperscript{175} was appointed. And it was instructed to submit the report within five months from November 1, 1928.\textsuperscript{176} The line of action on which the committee decided to work was to visit several villages and talk to hundreds of peasants and their representatives. They collected several kinds of information about the quantum of land possessed by the peasants, their irrigation and other facilities of land, previous revenue, their families etc; which offered them a clear picture of the socio-economic status.

The committee first subjected the data relied upon by the settlement officer and then relied upon by the settlement commissioner, to a close examination and came to the conclusion that the peoples' complaint was substantially justified.\textsuperscript{177} The special officer discussed in detail the data, especially regarding the railways, roads, marketing facilities for crops grown in the Taluka, condition of the Kaliparaj etc., and came to the general conclusion which he had drawn regarding the effect of these considerations on his proposals.\textsuperscript{178}

About railways, the enquiry remarked that "it is difficult to see, how the opening of Tapti Valley Railway can benefit the

\begin{itemize}
  \item[175.] Mahadev Desai, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 160.
  \item[176.] Ibid.
  \item[177.] Young India, May 16, 1929.
  \item[178.] The Indian Annual Register, 1929, Vol.I, pp.93-94.
\end{itemize}
people of Bardoli to any appreciable extent ... Another and a
still more important point ... is that, though this railway
had not been actually opened at the time of first revision,
it was practically completed and was taken into consideration
in the proposals then sanctioned ... . Taking the taluka and
mahal as a whole, it would be unreasonable ... to regard the
Tapti Valley Railway as a new factor in the situation which
has made a vital difference from the point of view of agricul-
tural economy".179

As regards the roads the officer said, "not one of the
old main roads, not even the roads through Sarbhan to Navsari,
can properly be described as good. There are fair stretches on
them. There are also numerous patches, where, if the roads
were any worse than they are, they would not deserve the name
of roads at all".180

As regards the introduction of motor traffic, the officers
noted that far from being an index of agricultural prosperity,
"it may even be a source of loss to the ryots".181

The officers' enquiry into the marketing facilities were
even more thorough. They went into the question of every village

179. R.S. Broomfield and R.M. Maxwell, Report of the
    Special Enquiry into the Second Revision Settlement
    of the Bardoli and Chorasi Talukas, Bombay, 1929,
    Part II, Para 35 (hereafter Broomfield Maxwell Committee
    Report).
    Young India, May 6, 1929.

180. Ibid.

181. Ibid.
to find out whether by any stretch of argument those facilities could be regarded as a ground for promotion of a village to a higher group. The officers pointed out, "Mr. M.S. Jayakar in his report speaks of Bardoli, Madhi, Valod, Kamalchhod and Buhari as the centres of the ginning and pressing industry as though they were more or less of equal importance .... The gin at Kamalchhod closed down about five years ago and must have moribund at the time Mr. Jayakar's report was written. That at Buhari, at the present time at any rate has a very little importance". The officers further observed, "Turning now to exports other than cotton, it appears that in great majority of villages, rice is not grown for export at all. Mr. M.S. Jayakar says, that large quantities of grass are grown ... and brought to the Surat bazar for sale, where good prices are as a rule realised". Curiously enough out of nearly 50 villages in Bardoli Taluka in which the officers made enquiries, it was only in one that they got any evidence of this trade.

Furthermore, when the settlement officer M.S. Jayakar had formulated his new revenue assessment proposals for Bardoli, agricultural prices, and particularly those of the leading local commercial crop - cotton were at their peak. In 1925 the cotton prices crashed and by 1928, as the increased revenue charges fell due, the price in Taluka was just half the level of four

183. Ibid.
years previously, Rs. 16 per maund compared with Rs. 32 in 1924. The collapse in cotton prices was, therefore, a disaster for many groups and individuals, "heavy losses, debts and sometimes insolvency followed, the natural results of speculation which fails to come off". In this way far from benefitting the agriculturists, the cotton prices ruined them. The officers observed in this connection, "that cotton boom was by no means an unmixed blessing from the ryots point of view, indeed, on a consideration of all the circumstances, it may be regarded as less a blessing than a curse".

The increase of population was also one of the factor which M.S. Jayakar had regarded as indicating the capacity to bear an increased land revenue assessment. However, disposing of this point, the enquiry officer said: "The increase of population in Bardoli, according to available statistics, is so small as to be negligible. In Chorasi there is practically no increase, and the births and deaths balance one another almost exactly. Population therefore, is not a factor which enters materially into this settlement at all".

M.S. Jayakar had described in his settlement report the increase in carts and cattle, especially milk cattle. But the

185. Ibid., Para 24.
186. Ibid.
187. Ibid. Young India, May 16, 1929.
enquiry officers did not agree with him. After a very careful examination, they compared not only the figures for 1904-5 with those of 1924-25 as M.S. Jayakar had done but also those for 1894-95 (the first settlement) with those for 1924-25\(^{189}\) and, thus, pointed out that there had been no increase in the number of plough cattle and cows,\(^ {190}\) the Taluka having merely made up the losses in the great famine; while the increase in the number of buffaloes and carts were also considerably reduced.\(^ {191}\) They justified their argument with the figures shown below:

\[
\begin{array}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
& 1894-95 & 1904-5 & 1924-25 \\
\hline
\text{Plough Cattle} & 18348 & 11234 & 18127 \\
\text{Cows} & 8835 & 6370 & 8283 \\
\text{She-Buffaloes} & 8977 & 7439 & 10854 \\
\text{Agricultural Carts} & 5732 & 4352 & 6055 \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

Source: Broomfield Maxwell Committee Report, Part II, Para 22.

The increase in the whole period was: She-buffaloes 20.9%, agricultural carts 5.6%.\(^ {192}\)

\(^{189}\) Broomfield Maxwell Committee Report, Part II, Para 22.

\(^{190}\) Ibid.

\(^{191}\) Ibid.

\(^{192}\) Ibid.
The officers felt that the increase was "hardly remarkable enough to lay much stress upon, except in the case of milk buffaloes".193

Regarding the new and well built pucca houses, the officer pointed out: "A great many of the imposing edifices belong to the South Africans, and those, of course, have not been built out of the profits of agriculture, at any rate in this country".194

Improved condition of the kaliparaj was also stated to be one of the factors by M.S. Jayakar for the enhancement of land revenue.195 The officers inquired into the conditions of these people and reached the conclusion that, "the Kaliparaj still remain a backward and ignorant class, lamentably shaukar ridden. The social uplift of the community may be said to have been well begun, but in the nature of things it is bound to be a slow process".196 The enquiry officers ascribed the cause of it to the constructive programme of the ashrams and the dedicated zeal of the social reformers. The Government could not claim any credit for this.197

The rental statistic relied on by the settlement commissioner were also examined and the point was emphasized that the close scrutiny of the kind required could only properly be carried out in villages in the presence of the parties or people acquainted with the facts.198 M.S. Jayakar had not made a proper

194. Ibid.
197. Ibid.
198. Ibid., Para 19.
survey of the villages; he based his settlement report on the official records. The tenancy register was probably the least reliable of the village records and in course of their enquiry, the special officers discovered a number of errors. Moreover, the register did not contain all the material facts. M.S. Jayakar had less than three months to survey 137 villages of Bardoli and 76 villages of Chorasi Taluka and a proper survey in such a short period was practically impossible. The special officer declared that any attempt to use the figure as though they were capable of yielding a direct calculation of the full standard of assessment, should be regarded as wholly untrustworthy.

In introducing the fresh proposals of their own, the enquiry officers made public inspection of 49 villages of Bardoli Taluka. Usually one day was devoted to each village. Their enquiry covered practically the whole of the revenue, agricultural and economic facts, so far as relevant for settlement purposes. As a result they drew the conclusions that the rental data was the only possible evidence accessible to the settlement officer in revising the assessment, and they based their settlement proposals on rental data. Their proposals are summarised in the following table, where they are compared with the results of the first and second revision settlements:

200. Ibid.
201. Ibid.
203. Ibid., Para 88.
204. Ibid., Para 92.
205. Ibid., Part IV, Para 128.
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<th>Group</th>
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**Abstract of Groups**

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The results of their proposal of Rs. 30,806 or 6% over the old rate in Bardoli.206 The resulting total increase in comparison with the record rate (for which their latest figures show a decrease of about Rs. 12,134) under their proposals was the result of Rs. 34,853 for dry crop, and Rs. 213 for garden, the latter figures being the result from the sanctioned revision settlement fixed by the Government for 1929.

The financial result of the proposal, as reported by the Government, was Rs. 48,600, or 22%, was reduced to Rs. 48,600.

The report of the enquiry, as tabled in Parliament on May 1, 1929. Even before this, Patel had expressed his approval of the report as a great success by Patel and the enhancement of assessment in original percentage and so also for the setting up of a judicial committee.

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206. Broomfield Maxwell Committee.
207. Ibid.
208. Ibid.
209. Ibid., Para 149.
210. The report of the enquiry, 12, 1929. At this point and had been replaced by
He was convinced that Bardoli settlement had been "technically a bad one". The report vindicated the position not only of the peasants but also of Irwin. He granted the victory to the agitators and wrote to the Secretary of State for India: "I am afraid the Bardoli Report confires a suspicion that I have had all along, namely that the ground on which Leslie Wilson thought he stood so firmly this time last year was by no means as secure as he wished us to believe."

The report was a blow to the prestige of the former Governor Leslie Wilson. The New Statesman (London) commented: "The report of the committee constitutes the worst rebuff which any local government in India has received for many years and may have far reaching results ... the total increase of assessment which proved that resistance was one for 22%. The Commissioner drastically cut it to 6.03%. It would be difficult to find an incident quite comparable with this in the long and controversial annals of Indian Land Revenue."

Undoubtedly several peasants were not happy on recognition of 'rental value' theory as the basis of assessment by the committee. But they had the satisfaction that most of their demands had been accorded to by the committee. On the other hand, although the Government had lost on all major counts and was proved to have been in the wrong, it too was happy in the sense that a long and


213. Irwin to Viscount Peel, Secretary of State for India, May 1, 1929, Ibid., No.24, p. 127.

hard fight had come to an end.

Infact, the Bardoli struggle was not merely a local grievance. The whole question of an arbitrary system of land assessment was raised by it and hence the interest in it was nationwide. By questioning the local land revenue rates, the Patidars of Bardoli challenged one of the chief bases of British power in rural India. As F.G. Pratt, the British Commissioner for Gujarat, said in 1918, "In India, to defy the law of the land revenue is to take a step which would destroy all administration. To break this law, therefore, is different from breaking all other laws".

In June 1928 Leslie Wilson wrote to Birkenhed: "None of those who are instigating and supporting this campaign of civil disobedience in Bardoli now attempt to disguise the fact that they are not objecting to the actual revision of the assessment, but to whole system of land taxation and provisions of the land revenue code. The extreme politicians here have always in back of their minds the idea that if they do away with land revenue, they will do away with the British control".

Therefore, it would not be wrong to describe this Patidar agitation, the fundamental national issue. To dismiss these as being purely 'local' or perhaps merely 'economic' issues which were cleverly exploited by the elite leaders of the Congress is to ignore the popular dimension of Indian nationalism which gave

216. Quoted in Ibid.
the Congress party such strength in rural India. Indeed, it is safe to assume that the Congress leadership took up the cause of Bardoli peasants primarily because it saw clear political advantage in doing so. Several leaders including Gandhi openly asserted that the agitations like the one, the Bardoli peasants were waging would strengthen the struggle for freedom. Gandhi for instance, had written several weeks before the movement came to a close: "Whatever the Bardoli struggle may be, it clearly is not a struggle for the direct attainment of Swaraj. That every such awakening, every such effort as that of Bardoli will bring Swaraj nearer and may bring it nearer even than any direct effort, is undoubtedly true".218

Even Vallabhbhai himself had asserted during the course of the movement that the peasants' struggle in Bardoli was linked up with the wider fight for freedom. The Indian press was equally clear of the significance of the agitation for the freedom struggle. The Bombay Chronicle observed: "The agriculturist of Bardoli taluka had taken up a question which effected the whole country. They had suffered the hardships but at the same time the glory of Bardoli had been immortalised in the History of the fight for Swaraj. We are sure that this experiment will prove exceedingly useful as a kind of national service. In their success lies the key to independence of India".219

Although Gandhi was not directly involved in the campaign, yet he was the moving spirit, acting from behind the scene providing

219. Ibid., August 12, 1928.
moral strength to the peasant proprietors throughout the movement. In this connection, the special correspondent of *The Times of India* observed: "Though Mr. Patel is the chief figure at Bardoli, the brain behind the agitation is Mr. Gandhi, who from his Ashram at Sabarmati is in careful touch with the situation, while Patel himself constantly seeks his leader's advice." 220

During the movement, Gandhi kept on writing articles in *Young India* and *Navajivan* his chief organs of publicity in support of the Bardoli Satyagraha to build the image of the Bardoli leaders and to boost the morale of the agitators. He was constantly available for advice whenever the Bardoli peasants or their leaders needed it. Gandhi himself stated in one of the articles in *Navajivan*: "...I have associated myself with the Bardoli Satyagraha from its very beginning. Its leader is Shri Vallabhbhai and he can take me to Bardoli whenever he needs me". 221

Gandhi's press articles on Bardoli indicate why he was prepared to accept the burden of leadership on this particular issue. For him, it was not just a local Satyagraha for the redress of specific grievance, such as he had conducted in Champaran in 1917. Rather in his opinion, it was a crucial demonstration of the road to Swaraj. Right from the inception of the struggle, he had asserted that although the object of the Satyagraha was specific and local, not the attainment of Swaraj yet it had "an

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indirect bearing of Swaraj, whatever awakens people to a sense of their wrongs and whatever gives them strength for disciplined and peaceful resistance and habituates them for corporate suffering, brings us nearer Swaraj".222

The repercussions of Bardoli on Gandhi's career were far reaching. The failure of the 1921 movement had demoralized a large number of people and even the efficacy of the Gandhian techniques of political agitation had come to be questioned. However, the Satyagraha's success in gaining an enquiry helped to offset the memory of non-cooperation's 'sputtering end'.223 It revived people's faith in Gandhi's leadership. Even the leftist leaders were impressed. It is not without significance that S.C. Bose went to meet Gandhi at his Sabarmati Ashram in May 1928, when the Bardoli Satyagraha was at its height and requested him to come out of his retirement and lead the country.22

More important still, Bardoli lifted Gandhi out of the depression into which he had sunk because of the continuing communal tension and the slow progress of Khadi. Once more he began to see a role for himself as the leader of a movement which was non-violent, yet rooted in popular support, even if it had failed to convert the majority to non-violence as a

   Young India, March 8, 1928.


creed. While the outcome was still in doubt, he said, "the Bardoli struggle has revived our dropping spirits, it has brought us new hope, it has shown the immense possibility of mass non-violence practised not from conviction, but like most virtues with most of us as a policy".\textsuperscript{225} Shortly after he wrote to C.F. Andrews that the "Bardoli victory was indeed a victory for truth and non-violence. It has almost restored the shattered faith in non-violence in the political field".\textsuperscript{226}

In 1929, repeatedly returning to the implications of Bardoli, Gandhi observed: "... It (Government) was only compelled to yield under the pressure of organised resistance of Bardoli peasantry and it is bound to do so again whenever such resistance is well organised".\textsuperscript{227} In another place, he asserted, "It is only gradually that we shall come to know the importance of victory gained at Bardoli ... Bardoli has shown the way and cleared it. Swaraj lies on that route alone and that alone is the cure ... ".\textsuperscript{228} All these statements indicate Gandhi's faith in the efficacy of non-violent means.

He believed that the success of Bardoli has restored public faith too, in the non-violent action and showed how Indians could generate a sanction to back their demands, in

\textsuperscript{225} Young India, July 12, 1928.
\textsuperscript{227} Ibid., Vol. XLI, p. 164.
\textsuperscript{228} Ibid., pp 208-9.
contrast to their more usual style of wordy but flimsy outburst which he so deprecated, as at the 1927 Madras Congress. When he returned to Congress as an acknowledged civil-disobedience leader, Bardoli strengthened his commitment to that technique. As one American visitor reported to Irwin, Bardoli seemed to have convinced Gandhi that officialdom could be brought off its pedestal to discuss and negotiate if Indians mastered their facts and forcibly put them before the public.229

The efficacy of the technique in one region helped to convince him that the people could be bound by the thread of Ahimsa and that he could and should lead his country in a crisis in its relationship with the British Government. And on the eve of the Salt March in February 1930, the example of Bardoli's success remained foremost in Gandhi's mind.

Hence the struggle of the peasantry of Bardoli produced a chain reaction endorsing the phase of the resolution of complete independence of 1930, Dandi March, and ultimately merging into the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1932. While launching the latter, Gandhi observed: "In Bardoli the forces of violence were hushed in the presence of non-violent action. It remains to be seen how the all India struggle for independence will shape. The law that governed the Bardoli struggle which centered around a local grievance will govern the greater struggle for independence. The partakers will have to be strictly non-violent; they

will have to visualize the grievances of slavery as the Bardoli peasants visualized the grievances of an unjust settlement; they will have to submit to the strictest discipline even as the Bardoli peasants did". 230

Despite all these facts, it cannot be denied that the essence of Gandhian peasant movements remained unchanged in Bardoli. Like the Champaran and Kheda struggles, it was again an enlargement of a relatively minor agrarian issue - namely the method of revenue assessment and revision, which only voiced the grievances of the rich and the middle landowners - Patidars who were badly affected by the revised revenue rates. The basic questions such as relation between the landowner and actual cultivators of the land, land redistribution and so on were not touched upon. However, unlike Champaran and Kheda, Patidars made an alliance with those very poor sections whom they exploited. And this collusion was made possible by the 'constructive programme' which, for Gandhi, was the only meaningful and relevant politics at that time. 'The function of politics', as he viewed it, "was to strike a relationship among people from the lower to the higher strata". 231 So he allowed politics within the limits of 'constructive' activities.

231. Ibid., Vol. XXXII, pp. 421-3.