THE FORMATIVE PHASE OF THE LEFT AND THE
PEASANT MOVEMENTS 1926-34

The discontentment and disaffection of the peasantry in the form of vigorous peasant campaigns against the British Imperialist regime was the regular feature of the 20th century. The main contributors to their awakening were, first, the great depression from 1929-30 which brought agricultural prices crashing down to half or less of their normal levels dealing a severe blow to the already impoverished peasantry burdened with high tax, rents and increasing unemployment. Thus, it led to weakening Ryot's bargaining power while reducing somewhat the discontent of the employer. Secondly, the emergence of Left-wing-contributed to the radicalization of the national movement. The disenchanted group of Non-Co-operators, Khilafatists, Revolutionaries, Labour and peasant activists etc., were also searching new roads to political, social and economic emancipation. The stream of national struggle for independence and the stream of the struggle for social and economic emancipation of the suppressed and the exploited began to come together.1 Socialist ideas acquired roots in the Indian soil; and Socialism became the accepted creed of Indian youth. Another lesson drawn home from

the 1917 Russian Revolution was that if the common people-workers, the peasants and the intelligentsia - could unite and overthrow the mighty Czarist empire and establish a social order in which there was no exploitation of one human being by another, than the Indian people battling against the British Imperialism could also do the so. Socialist doctrine, the Marxism, the guiding theory of Bolshevik Party acquired a sudden attraction for the people of India. The main form of political work by the early communists was to organise Peasant’s and Worker’s Parties and work through them. These Worker’s and Peasants’ Parties set up by the Communist Party of India were largely a legal protective cover to disguise themselves against the Government which wanted to stem their activities. The task before these parties workers was to penetrate peasant organisations wherever they existed as genuine mass organisations, to correctly formulate in the agrarian question in the ranks of the working class, to explain to them the importance of the decisive role of the agrarian revolution, and to acquaint them with the method of agitation, propaganda and organizational work among the peasantry.

Thirdly, the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi was sharpening the anti imperialist instance vis-a-vis the British Imperialism.

4. Ibid.
Mahatma Gandhi made his road to the apex of national leadership by small scale experiments in the form of peasant movements for the redress of local grievances - The Champaran movement 1917, the Kheda Satyagraha 1918, etc. But the first real breakthrough for specially Gandhian methods of rural organisation and agitation come with the successful story of Bardoli in 1928. In this chapter an attempt is made to discover the nature of leadership and class character of this movement as well as the socio-economic structure of the Bardoli taluka.

Socio-economic Structure: The Bardoli was a taluka in Surat district, then a part of the Bombay province, consisted of 138 villages, comprising three administrative sub-divisions - Kadod in North, Sarbhon in South-west and Valod in South-east. The Bardoli taluka was predominantly agricultural with practically no major industry at all. Consequently, agriculture provided livelihood to approximately 76% of the population. Only 24% of the inhabitants depended on non-agriculture pursuits such as trading, salaried job or other professions. According to the Census report of 1921, the taluka had a population of 7909 belonging to Hindus 96%, Muslim 3.43%, Parsis 43%, Christians 10% and 04% others of the total population. This census report

5. Dhangare, D.N. Peasant Movements in India 1920-50 pp. 88-89.
classified the inhabitants of this taluk in higher and lower social groups properly known as ‘Ujaliyat’ (Caste Hindus) and ‘Kaliparaj’ (aboriginals, black people) respectively. The upper category consisted of Brahmins 5.96%, Baniyas 1.68% and Patidars 13.25% of the total population. Though numerically in a minority, these sections enjoyed the dominant position. In addition, they had higher social status in the area. They were also the landowners, moneylenders and, thus, controlled the rural economy.⁸

The area was under Ryotwari land tenure system. The ownership resided in the hands of the Government and it settled deeds with the individual landowner who were responsible for the payment of the annual revenue. The total cultivable area was 121366 acres, 19% of which was in the hands of non-cultivable landlords whose number was barely 1% of the total population, mostly belonged to Bania and Parsis, who had money landing or other business in other parts of the taluka. The remaining 81% of the total landholding was held by 16073 Khatedars or peasant proprietors or occupants.⁹ These landholders were at the apex of rural hierarchy. These Khatedars were broadly divided into two categories (i) those who cultivated their land themselves, (ii) those who farmed out their land on annual rent to

⁸ L.G. Sedgwick, Census of India 1921, Bombay Presidency (Bombay 1922), Vol. III, Part I.P. XXXVII.
others.10 The people who took land on annual rent from the latter group of Khatedars were known as Tenants or inferior landholders. They belonged to second tier of the socio-economic structure. Among them there were landless or agriculturalist who had no land at all were at the bottom of this hierarchy. According to the census report the Landholders used (25%), Tenants (47%) and Landless Labourer (51%). It is further reported that only 5% of the landholding group had more than 25 acres of land under their control, while 60% had 1 to 5 acres of land.11

Khatedars, who had small landholdings to meet their material needs would also cultivate the land on tenantry basis. Some of them worked as agricultural labour to supplement their income.12 The significant story was that the members of the advanced and intermediate caste were either peasant proprietor or tenants, and, thus wielded greater economic power than the agricultural labour, the Kaliparaj section. Actually, the economic power of an individual and his social standing as a consequence of his caste seemed to reinforce each other.13

13. Ibid.
The control of the power constituents of Banias and Patidars or Khatedars over the rest of community (mostly poor section) was almost absolute. The Banias, who had virtual monopoly of trade and money lending, lent in kind and cash to illiterate and ignorant adivasis, charging exhorbitant rates, compound interest and kept them under their clutches. The Patidars were comparatively less exploitative than Banias who employed Dublas as servants for domestic as well as agricultural purpose.\textsuperscript{14} Originally, the Patidars, who were a brotherhood of village landholders, formed a community known as Kanbis. Since the Mughal times, Patidars made themselves jointly responsible for paying the land revenue to the Mughal tax farmers. The land in the village was divided into 'patis' (strips) and each pati-holder (pati-dar) was held responsible for paying land revenue in proportion to the size of his holding.\textsuperscript{15} The Patidar's share in the village could be sold, but normally only by one Patidar to another. Patidars invariably possessed the best and richest land of their share and rented out to the poor section of peasant. Thus, they controlled the economy of the village. On paper, the Patidars were liable to pay for higher sums of revenue than the sub-ordinate peasantry.\textsuperscript{16} In practice,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14} Shah Shayam Ghan, \textit{Traditional Society and Political Mobilization, the experience of Bardoli- Satyagrapha 1290-28 - Contribution to Indian Sociology, Nov. 8, 1974.}
\item \textsuperscript{15} \textit{Revenue Survey Assessment in the Kana, Collectorate (Bombay), S.S. Patel. Patidorona, Unnharah Vir Vasandas (Pipler, 1946) pp. 12-21.}
\item \textsuperscript{16} \textit{Narva Report, p. 12}
\end{itemize}
they invented a new range of extra taxes which they imposed on lower castes. As a result, lower castes were normally impoverished, while Patidars were comfortably well off. The higher castes like Patidars due to their high status could also obtain credit at lower rate of interest.\textsuperscript{17} Again the Patidars had a strong community feelings. However, it didn’t mean that within community they were free from conflicts. In dealing with outsiders they tended to stick together. Rivalries were kept within the village. The political implication of this was that their social relation was so strong that the outsiders had to deal with the Patidars of a village as a whole. Thus, the politics of peasantry started from a basis of communal and caste solidarity. Further it had class overtones as well.\textsuperscript{18}

Apart from this section, the aboriginal tribes ‘Chodhras’, ‘Gamits’, ‘Dublas’ and ‘Dheds’, who accounted for almost one-half of the Bardoli’s population, had no land and lived in abject poverty and almost outside the effective social control of the area. Their contacts with the outside World was rare, as they lived in hilly areas and speaking different language of the rest of inhabitants of the taluka. But the Dublas and Dheds were exception to this, and were part of village culture, as they served as full time servants of the landowners (masters) and, in turn, got daily food and clothing. Their

\textsuperscript{17} Hardiman, David, Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat, pp. 38-39. 
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid
condition was same as that of serfs, known together as adivasis. These people were immersed in religious and magical beliefs. Another factor which subdued these agricultural labourers and kept them labourers under strong clutches of landlords was ‘hali system’ which was widespread in Surat district. The genesis of this system lies in money lending practice. When a Dubla borrowed money in emergency, he, in turn, agreed to work on his creditor’s form. They subsisted on wages just enough for existence. The wages were paid in cash and were so low as the amount borrowed could never be repaid. Consequently, for a Hali, the chain bondage continued from one generation to another.

However, the relationship between the Patidars and the adivasis was conducive to the maintenance of the traditional social order. Again, this bonding of caste and agricultural hierarchy was further strengthened by social control of caste and village council. Every caste had there own council, which managed social affairs and exercised the authority over its members side by side. The leaders of the leading castes formed village council that managed the village affairs. The effective functioning of these village councils contributed a well knit social organization at both caste

and village level. Thus, this equilibrium and sense of mutuality that felicitated political mobilization when the need arose.\(^22\)

The peasantry had very little contact with their ruler who were the Britishers. The administrators with whom the peasants came into most frequent contact were those at the taluqa level, ‘Mamlatdars’. They were the members of the Bombay Provincial Service and were mainly Gujarati of high cast. The main function of these was to assess the revenue demand each year and to make sure that it was paid promptly and in full.\(^23\) The revenue was supposed to be collected in two instalments, the first in January, the second in March or April. The representative of the Government in the village was the headman or mukhi. The other village official was ‘Talati’ or village consultant. Their duties were to look after the village records and help the Mamlatdars and Mukhi in collecting revenue. Usually, they were also from high caste.\(^24\)

The Bombay Provincial Government pursued the policy of extracting more and more land revenue. The landowners found it more profitable to lease their land to the tenants and thus to transfer the increased revenue to the latter. This process resulted in gradual growth of tenantry from 23% of the total cultivating group in 1907 to 47% in 1921. (That was 14%)

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\(^24\) Parikh Shankar Lal, Khedami, Ahmedabad, 1922, pp. 16-19.
increase).\(^{25}\) Rapid growth of population with extremely slow growth of the industrial development and constant growth of tenancy led to the fragmentation of holdings which resulted into deterioration in the conditions of the peasantry. According to the Report of Bombay Provincial Bank Enquiry Committee 1929-30, an economic unit of land in the taluka should have constituted of about 15 acres of land where as average size of landholding in Bardoli was limited to 7 acres.\(^{26}\)

The peasants protested against the State in two main ways, first, by petitions and secondly by revenue refusal. Mostly the petition did not work with the alien Government. The opposition was weak as a result, peasants had to voice their protest by refusing to pay their land revenue. When the peasants refused their revenue instalments, they had to be brought to heel with fines, confiscation of property and eviction.\(^{27}\)

One of the most remarkable feature which the collector of Kheda district noticed in this region was the obdurate behavior of well to do cultivators. They were more prone in refusing the land revenue. This shows


\(^{27}\) Under the Bombay Land Revenue Jurisdiction Act of 1876, The Sansay high court and civil courts had no prediction in matter relating to land revenue assessment G.D. Patel, The land revenue settlement and the British Rule in India.
that the revolutionary potential of the peasantry lay in the well-to-do (dominant) peasantry.\textsuperscript{28} However, the British Government view was different, they dismissed the earlier protests of well-to-do cultivators as merely the money-grabbing, tax dodging of selfish elements against the richer peasants. The reality was, however, different which was grasped by Mahatma Gandhi especially first in 1918 that revenue refusal was a legitimate form of political dissent and the leadership must be from the Patidars of dominant community of that region. That proved successful in 1928 Bardoli Struggle.

Nationalism - On rising tide in Gujarat

The Bardoli struggle was not the handiwork of these Patidars alone. This was supported by the middle class whenever the opportunity arose.\textsuperscript{29} This support first came from a group of Ahmedabad intellectuals who had founded the ‘Gujarat Sabha’ in 1884. Their leader was Sir Ramanbhai Nilkanth - a nagar Brahman who believed in social reform in society and was well known for his satirical and humorous writings.\textsuperscript{30} Most of the active members of the Gujarat Sabha were Ahmedabad lawyers and also individual nationalists

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\end{itemize}
like Ambalal Desai. Ambalal Desai is better known as the champion of the peasants against heavy revenue demands and he took up the issue with Bombay Government.\(^3\) After the suspension of the Non-Cooperation movement in 1922, on Gandhi's advice the congressmen had settled down to intense constructive programmes. Six Ashrams were started in the Bardoli taluka for the upliftment of the low-caste untouchables and tribal inhabitants.\(^2\) In order to discard the social barrier in the relationship of the Ujliparaj and Kaliparaj, leaders like Kuvarji Mehta and Keshavji Ganeshji exhorted the masses. They learnt the tribal dialect and developed a 'Kaliparaj literature', that aroused the Kaliparaj against the Hali System and exhorted them to abjure intoxicating drinks and high marriage expense which had led to financial ruin.\(^3\) In 1927 night schools were started to educate the Kaliparaj children. Annual Kaliparaj conferences were organised in 1922, and in 1927, Gandhi presided over the annual conference renamed Kaliparaj as Raniparaj. Narhari Parikh, and Jugatram Dave also assisted in those constructive activities and that way the Indian National Congress had built up a considerable base among the

\(^3\) Therefore, V.S. Speeches and Writings of the Late Dewan Bahadur Ambalal S. Desai, M.A. (Bombay, 1918) p. 21.


\(^3\) Bhatt, A. - Caste and Political Mobilization in Gujarat district p. 333.
Kaliparaj Community. Similarly, on Gandhi’s advice, the ‘Patidar Yuvak Mandal’ began constructive work with great enthusiasm by 1923. The mandal was succeeded in setting up organisations - The ‘Raniparaj Sabha’ to mobilise members of the backward castes and tribes and popularise among them the spinning wheel.

Apart from these efforts, the ideas of the extremist nationalist of Bengal, Maharashtra and the Punjab circulated freely during the first decade of the 20th century. Two movements which developed with their efforts were the terrorist and the Arya Samaj. They contributed in spreading the nationalist ideas in Gujarat. The leader of the terrorist movement were the Bangalee Aurobindo Ghose, K.G. Deshpande. Efforts were made to form select bands of Marathis and Gujaratis. One of the focal points of these activities was a nationalist school called the ‘Ganganath Bhartiya’ Sarva Vidyalaya founded by K.G. Deshpande in 1907. The strict discipline among the students most of whom belong to Marathis Brahmanas and Patidars castes. This shows that landlord background appear to have responded best to the nationalist ideas.


37. *The British described, The Act as a dangerous specimen of the Patidar Community which has rather an unenviable reputation for criminality and the supervision of justice and order.*
activities. The most important Gujarat terrorist group was formed by Mohanlal Pandya Punjabhai Bhatt and Narsimhabhai Patel. Under the guidance of Barinder Ghose, this group organized itself into a band of revolutionary terrorist in 1908. Popular legends held them responsible for attempted assassination of Lord and lady Minto on November 15, 1909. Their manual published under the misleading title of 'Vanas-patine Davao (Herbal Remedies) Written by Narismhabhai Patel spread vigorous propaganda against the British Raj.

The other factor which led to the rise of nationalism in the masses of Bardoli taluka in particular was the Arya Samaj. Its founder was Swami Dayanand Saraswati who belonged to Saurashtra. However, the movement spread in Gujarat only for a short span of time between 1905 and 1917. This movement which was revivalist in nature, exhorted the Hindu masses about their great past, tradition and culture and developed love and faith in it.

All new ideas which encouraged nationalism in the Bardoli taluka came through market contacts. Rich peasants who were increasingly marketing their produce themselves were coming into closer contact with the towns. The milk trade especially required daily contact with stations along the Ahmedabad - Bombay route for milk which was a highly perishable product.

39. Advocate of India, 7th February, 1912 (Clipping the held by Sumant Bhatt).
commodity. As a result, political events in Ahmedabad, Baroda, Bombay influenced the villages of the Bardoli region. Rich peasants also began to travel to cities throughout India to sell their goods, and so they came to understand how city-dwellers lived and thought. Another common path to nationalism in period before 1917 was through getting education outside the village.41

After the successful Russian Revolution, Socialist doctrines acquired a sudden attraction for the people of Asia.42 M.N. Roy and V.I. Lenin evolved the Communist International policy toward the colonies. Idea of worker's and peasant's Parties was mooted.43 The main form of political work done by the Left was to organise these Workers' and Peasants' Parties and work through them. The basic objective of these parties in different regions was to work within the Congress and to give it a more radical orientation making it 'the party of the people'. And independently organised workers and peasants in class organisations, to enabling, first, the achievement of complete independence and ultimately of socialism.44

42. Petrie, David, Communism in India, 1924-27 National Archives of India, p-32.
43. Ibid.
But the Communists strictly adhered to the Classical Marxist - Leninist canons of the proletariat leadership in the ongoing struggle for independence. The Russian legacy became their object of reverence and the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat an act of faith with Worker’s and Peasant’s Parties circles.45

Thus, if we see the Meerut Conspiracy case (March 1929) arrests and the first All India Workers and Peasants Party conference, held at Bhatpara (Calcutta) in March 1928, inference can be drawn that these contained majority of the working class leaders or unions. However, this didn’t mean that Workers’ and Peasants’ Parties represented by the communists lacked any inclination towards organisation of peasants. In its annual conferences radical programme of agrarian reforms including land to the peasant was promised. But action failed to keep pace with words and due to that reality Workers’ and Peasants’ Parties evoked little response from the peasantry. This lukewarm response was also partly due to the lack of man and material strength and partly due to both Kanpur and Merrut conspiracy cases.46

On the other hand, the Workers' and Peasants' parties leaders

45. The power of labour (N.d.) M.C.CE, II, P. 527 (3) pp. 28-29.
46. M.C.C.E. IV, Pamphlet (P) 23.
couldn’t maintain consistency of aim and tactics. Earlier they defined peasant as ‘One who does agricultural work with his own hands and whose land does not exceed two bighas. This group of peasants was largely their catchment area. Consequently, the landless agriculturists were sidelined. Though they felt the need to organise stratifying the peasantry and recognising the potentialities of each group to fight against their social and political enemies was one way. But heading the peasantry to the chosen path was quite another. The response of Workers' Peasants' Parties was hesitant interwarm. The Bombay unit of Workers’ and Peasants' Party even criticised that movement because of its anti-imperialist and mixed class character supported by the bourgeois. But clemens Dutt, another member of the Left and guide to Indian Left, gave a different view in this regard in a letter to R.P. Dutt.

"It is true that the movement is sponsored by many elements not at all sympathetic to the real interests of the workers and peasants but that is not a reason to declare against it any more than the fact of the participation in it of the rich cultivator. It is a movement which should have our active support and that the silence of Workers' and Peasants' Party about the movement does no good to the later. The peasants rich or poor, have a legitimate


grievances and the Workers' and Peasants' Party" would have come out as their champion. Even if only through manifests and public statements from the very outset.

At the same time the rich peasants and bourgeoisie support would lead to a sabotage if the movement developed on a large scale and met with resistance that seemed only an additional reason for the Workers' and Peasants' Party to throw its weight in and to all for an extension of the struggle and to make clear the importance of the role of the peasants who alone would really carry through the struggle in an active fight.\footnote{Letter C.P. Dutt to S.V. Ghate (28 June, 1928) M.C.C.E. VI, P. 1348 (34) pp-39-40.}

The confusion and the conflicting opinions in the Workers' and Peasants' Party was largely due to the over emphasis on mindless acceptance or interpretation of the Marxist line. The failure to grasp the concrete reality crippled their efforts and responses to the peasantry.

Thus, it showed the ambivalent attitude of Workers' and Peasants' Party towards the agrarian issue. The Communists seemed to have been unaware of the great potential in uniting the entire peasantry in an anti-imperialist front potential which the Indian National Congress recognised and fully utilised. Nor were the communists able to single out and utilise other immediate demands which could arouse broad sections of the peasantry

\footnote{Letter C.P. Dutt to S.V. Ghate (28 June, 1928) M.C.C.E. VI, P. 1348 (34) pp-39-40.}
into political activity. Thus, it was left to Gandhi and the Indian Nation Congress to organise peasants movements totally stealing the show from the communists who were left raising premature radical slogans such as ‘land to the tiller’, ‘abolition of landlordism without compensation’ etc.\textsuperscript{50}

\textbf{Ideology, Programme, I}

Gandhi recognised the existence of social conflicts in Indian society and felt alarmed at the threat to national unity as a result of those conflicts. He, thus, sought to harmonise those mutually conflicting interests in
necessity, or that there existed a basic and irreconcilable antagonism between the interests of the former and those of poor peasantry. He said, "What is needed is not the extinction of landlords but a transportation of the existing relationship between them and the poor peasantry into something healthier and pure."\(^5\) The central theme of his entire theory was that there had to be voluntary conversion of the exploiting classes to the cause of socio-economic justice. Gandhi object was, thus, to eliminate not class divisions but class conflict. Class divisions there will be, but, they will be horizontal not vertical.\(^5\)

In case the Zamindars refused to be converted to the new way of life, the peasants would compel his adherence through non-violent non-cooperation. If this failed, the peasants would quit the land if asked to do so, but they made it clear to the landlord that all land really belonged to the tiller. Since it would be impossible to till the land, thus the Zamindar would submit.\(^5\)

**LEADERSHIP MOBILISATION**

Now the first and foremost issue in front of the nationalist leaders

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54. Ibid, pp. 95.
55. Harijan, March 31, 1946.
was the identifying themselves with the people and to generate faith in them. When Kuvarji arrived at Bardoli in connection with the satyagraha, he preferred to stay at a temple rather than with his relatives. He, thus, sought to identify himself with castes other than to which he belonged. That particular temple (Apsara) belonged to Jain’s, who constituted an important position in the taluka from where religious discourses were preached everyday for communicating his plan about Gandhi’s movement to the local people. All this imparted religious fervour to his task. On the other hand Kuvarji Mehta mobilized like-minded parsons for this purpose. Jivaji became his first companion. He was a teacher by profession. But he resigned at Mahta’s instance. The mission was inaugurated at Sankli, Jivaji’s village. Various public meetings and marches were held, where foreign clothes were brunt. In order to create enthusiasm, the marchers came in uniform with the Congress flag at the head of the procession, ringing bells; singing songs and raising slogans against the British government.

Again in order to rallying the Adivasis, their religions sentiments were exploited. While singing national songs, the nationalist of Gujarat gave greater weightage to the names and images of the Adivasis gods - Siliya and

56. *Shah, Ghanshyam, Ibid., p. 95-96.*
57. *Id.*
Simaliya. In 1924, Kuvarji Mehta presided over the conference of Adivasis and introduced them as disciple of Mahatma Gandhi, their god.58

The Ashram group of Congress leaders contacted Vallabhai Patel and persuaded him to take on the leadership of the movement. A meeting of the representative of sixty villages at Bamni in Kodod, formally invited Vallabhai to lead the campaign. He reached the Bardoli on February 4, 1928 and wrote a letter to Bombay Provincial Government regarding withdrawal of enhanced land revenue. But after getting negative reply, he returned to Bardoli on February 12, 1928 and started the Bardoli Satyagraha.59

He divided the taluqa into 13 workers' camps or chhavanis. Each was under the charge of an experienced leader. A one hundred political workers were drawn from all over the province, assisted by 1500 volunteers. The movement had its own intelligence wing, whose job was to find out the indecisive peasants.60 Before launching the Satyagraha, Vallabhai Patel repeatedly reminded local leaders that it was their movement which he was undertaking on their behalf and it was their duty to participate in it without any reservation.61 He told the peasants on February 13 that being himself a

58. Ibid.
60. Ibid.
61. Id.
peasant, he understood their problems and therefore, shouldered the responsibility of bringing them out of their plight. On February 25 while addressing the adivasis, he said that he was much worried about them because of their poverty and illiteracy. Following the same pattern of appeals, he exhorted the peasants of Valod that they were the leaders of the taluka and without them no movement could succeed. On May 18, in his speech, Vallabhai in a view of imparting common identity sought to develop the concept of class. Anyone who was engaged in one form or another of agriculture was labelled as Khedut, utterly cultivator. Thus, having pulled together into a common class. Patel appealed to them that the no tax-movement concerned all of them, independent of religion, caste and community.

Earlier Kuvarji Mehta recruited volunteers from his kinsmen, former students and their relatives. Thus, gradually, he won over his caste fellows and through them, leaders of other castes and communities.

Thus, upto 1928, the recruitment of the volunteers pierced every depth of the Bardoli taluka. All leaders were accorded importance by giving due status and designation like ‘Commandant’ or ‘President’ in the organisation of the Satyagraha, raising their moral commitment and sense of

63. Ibid., February 12, 13.
64. Id., May 18, 1929.
participation.\textsuperscript{65}

The previously established caste and village councils gave an impetus to the organisations and mobilization of the village peasantry. These councils were made primary units of the political movement and the local leaders derived their authority from them. Prohibition, propagation of khadi and boycott of law courts, etc., programmes were also pursued by these councils.\textsuperscript{66} Similarly all major decisions and directives of the movement were taken by and conveyed to the people through those councils. Thus, these village councils acted like communication satellites. On February 12, Vallabhai convened a meeting of various castes leaders including representative of the Patidar Brahmins, Baniyas and Muslims at Bardoli and persuaded them to take a decision against the enhancement of land revenue. This conference resolved that the revision settlement in Bardoli was arbitrary, unjust and oppressive. He advised all the occupants to refuse payment of the revised assessment until the Government was prepared to accept the amount of old assessment in full satisfaction of their dues or until the Government appointed an impartial tribunal to settle the whole question of revision by investigation and enquiry on the spot.\textsuperscript{67} The said resolution travelled through

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\item \textsuperscript{65} Shah, Ghanshyam, \textit{Op. cit.}, pp. 97-98.
\item \textsuperscript{66} Gujarat Mitra, \textit{Gujarat Darpan, March 11, 1928}, - Surat daily.
\item \textsuperscript{67} \textit{The Satyagraha Patrika, February 12, 1929}.
\end{itemize}
the masses through satellite councils which were also made responsible to implement strict discipline. Due to effective social control of these satellite council over their caste and village, the programme proved successful. The leaders of these councils directed that who would pay revenue against the caste verdict would be excommunicated by brethren. Similarly, members of community who did not have caste councils in the area, were compelled by the village leaders to follow the directive of the majority community.68

Side by side, the traditional heritage of each caste was revived and emphasized. Just as Rajput in the name of their warrior spirit expected to behave like the Kshatriya and should support the Satyagraha. Brahmans, due to their high caste status should be in the forefront of the movement. The Banias were exhorted that it was their dharma to support satyagraha for safeguarding the interests of their community. Simultaneously, the social status quo and unity among various groups based on traditional complementaries were strongly emphasized. Vallabhai Patel told untouchables, Dublas and artisans that it was their dharma to be loyal to their masters. He observed, “It is just like saying to a pativarta (Chaste and dutiful wife) that she should change her husband. How can you leave the sahukars who has helped you in difficult times”.69 Big gatherings were addressed by Congress

69. The Satyagraha Patrika, July 5, 1929.
leaders like Vallabhai Patel, Mahatma Gandhi, Kuvarji Mehta, Narhari Parikh etc. Religious idioms, popular speeches with which they built up the political tempo step by step. People were told that fighting the injustice was the Dharma of all. Their battle against the Government was dharma yudha - a righteous war.\footnote{Ibid., February 12, 1929.}

The leadership soon grasped that reality that speeches were not enough to sustain enthusiasm among the masses regarding Satyagraha. So a constant touch with the people war required.\footnote{Id., February 4, 1929.} ‘The Satyagraha Partika’ was edited by Jugatram Dave who was a noted writer from Bardoli taluka. Everyday its circulation came with 9 to 12 thousand copies.\footnote{Shah, Ghanshyam, Op. cit., pp. 102-103.} However, this patrika had its own limitations. It couldn’t reach upto the illiterate adivasis whose language was different. Kuvarji Mehta sorted out that limitation with another method known as ‘bhuva’. He found a group of highly emotional and religious adivasis who repeatedly and vigorously hammered upon them that it was God’s command that liquor was an evil. Consequently, a bhuva asked his followers to shun, liquor.\footnote{Shah, Ghanshyam, Ibid., pp. 102-103.} Another method used was ‘Bhajan Mandals’ - of devotional Choral group, singing hymns. This was a familiar association and people
used to participate in it regularly. In 1928, several such mandalis were formed which recited devotional -cum-political songs depicting Gandhi as a saint), Vallabhai Patel as priest and the Government as the devil. This inculcated a spirit of sacrifice, firmness and faith in the masses.74

The two brothers Kuvarji Mehta and Kalyanji Mehta were the real makers of Bardoli Satyagraha. Their pioneering and all pervading work set the task ready for the Vallabhai Patel. These leaders helped in percolation of the movement from upper to lower level and without them even Gandhi would not have been successful in translating his influence into an active programme. Both of them were Patidars by caste and belonged to landed class. Kuvarji Mehta was a local leader; a native of taluka.75 While another leader Vallabhai Patel was a state and national level leader. He was president of Congress and a close associate of Gandhi. The early socialization of all these leaders was same inspired by ideals of Hindu religious literature. The militant outlook of the Arya Samaj acclimatized by having practical experiences in the conduct of public life in village and caste groups.76 That's why they deliberately selected Bardoli for planned satyagraha.

74. Ibid., pp. 105-106.
Khvarji Mehta had harmonious relations with the people of that area. Having been a teacher in the taluka, he carried out some social reform activities there. Secondly, himself being Patidar, he was confident of his fellows' caste support. But, above all, the main consideration of Vallabhai Patel for launching the movement in Bardoli was the availability cadre and an institutional base built by Kuvarji Mehta. Therefore, all that he himself had to do was to accelerate the process of mobilization.\(^77\)

**Earlier Efforts**

The Settlement officials in charge of reassessment work adopted arbitrary methods and revised rates often without actually visiting and surveying field during 1920. Between 1925-26 the Bardoli Patidars landowners started mobilizing against that enhancement. The first such expression came in political conference held in Godhra in November, 1917. In a resolution the conference demanded that the Government should consult an advisory body of elected members in revenue matters instead of relying exclusively on the collector and his revenue administration.\(^78\) A similar demand was made in the evidence before the Joint Parliamentary

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Committee. It recommended legislative and constitutional control over the question land revenue assessment and revision, and critiused the monopoly of the revenue bureaucracy. Various legislative councils, particularly that in Bombay, had passed resolutions. But the government paid no heed. In the Bardoli taluka, the revenue demand confirmed that the local revenue authorities had indeed gone beyond legal provision for increasing revenue to 22%.

Lord Irwin, the Viceroy known for his sobriety, advised Wilson the Governor of Bombay to adopt a soft line on the Bardoli issue. On July 18, Wilson offered terms to Vallabhai Patel to pay full assessment or the difference between old and new revenue demands and to suspend satyagraha so that an inquiry regarding revenue settlement in Bardoli could be conducted. But Sardar Vallabhai Patel rejected those and pressurized them to release all the satyagarha prisoners and restoration of forfeited lands to original landowners and appoint an impartial inquiry. Despite Irwin’s conciliatory approach. On July 23, 1928, Wilson reiterated the terms as announced earlier and decided to tackle the satyagraha firmly. The Gujarat

79. Indian National Herald, 8 March, 1927; Indian Daily, 5 March 1927, in Bombay Native Newspaper Reports, 1927.
80. The Bombay Chronicle, 17 May, 1927.
members of the Bombay Legislative Council resigned as a mark of protest against the Government policy. This was followed by Vallabhai Patel’s threat to resign. He was president of the Bombay legislative council, and was reckoned to become speaker of the Imperial Legislative Assembly.\textsuperscript{83} Diwan Bahadur Harilal Desai, a government loyalist initiated a dialogue between Vallabhai Patel and the Bombay Government in May 1928. As it was expected, first he stressed, to pay the enhanced land revenue and only than inquiry could be initiated. Vallabhai Patel rejected that offer. In June 1928, K.M. Munshi, a leading lawyer and constitutionalist from Bombay, headed an unofficial committee consisting of Rao Bahadur Bhima Bhai Naik, Dr. Gilder, Hiralal Desai, Sivadasai Chandrachud, B.G. Kher. The committee held the Bombay Government responsible for its arbitrary decision of enhancement of revenue and later disposing of the confiscated lands for as little as one-thirtieth of their actual market value, and by imposing frightful sentences on defaulters and agitators after summary trials.\textsuperscript{84}

\textbf{The Government’s Response}

The Government of Bombay adopted a policy of repression. For


\textsuperscript{84} Desai, M. \textit{Op. cit.}, pp 240-44.
the recovery of relatively small amounts of revenue dues large landed and movable properties were attached, confiscated and even disposed of in auction for nominal and even throw away prices. The agitation began in mid February 1928. By July, all non-agricultural holdings about 15000 acres were declared forfeited and over a tenth of them were even sold. As regarding cultivating landowners, 50000 acres of land were forfeited though not sold. Again in order to exploit communal feelings, the Government deplored Pathan parties to assist attachment officers, belonging rather naively, that the mere presence of the Pathans would either frighten the satyagrahis or an account of their being Muslims would lead to a communal strife with the largely Hindu agitators. In the same process it appointed Mamlatdar to divide the ranks of the Muslim peasants who supported the satyagraha. But, despite all these measures the Government couldn’t collect more than a sixth of the total revenue due.

The deadlock ended when a new axis was formed between Rao Bahadur Dadubhai Desai, a well-wisher of the Bardoli peasants, and Sir Chunilal Mehta, a member of the Governor’s Executive Council, who together arranged an informal discussions between the Government’s representatives and Vallabhai Patel and council members from Gujarat.

85. Gopal, S. Vice Royalty of Lord Irwin, pp 32-33.
86. Munshi, K.M., I follow the Mahatma, 1940, pp. 22.
The negotiations were held in Poona. A face-saving formula was drawn that somebody would pay the revenue arrears (on behalf of the peasants) to the Government while the Bardoli satyagraha would be called off. Actually, the compromise proposal was initiated by Vithalbhai Patel. Vallabhai Patel, first rejected that formula.88 But the Poona negotiations were pre-planned by Vithalbhai Patel.

So he had no choice but to accept it. Vithalbhai Patel grasped the reality of the atmosphere (weakness of Patidar landowner). So he persuaded his brother, Vallabhai Patel, to accept the proposal without any reservation. Vallabhai Patel advised a rich Gujarati landlord and businessman from Bombay to deposit the sum equivalent 22% enhanced revenue. The Government welcomed the move. Even Mahadav Desai private secretary to Gandhi and also a Satyagrahi supported that proposal.89

Now the most crucial task before the Satyagraha leadership was that of restoration of land to its original holder. In this regard both Government officials and peasant representative cooperated. Rao Bahadur Bhima Bhai Naik became a legal purchaser, of all the sold and resold land which were restored to its original holder.90

89. Ibid.
In August 1928, the Bombay Government set up a committee known as the Maxwell-Broomfield Committee to review the Bardoli Settlement. The Committee inspected several villages in the Bardoli taluka between November 1928 and January 1929. The report of this committee came out in May 1929, which concluded that the method of using rental statistics was unsound for Surat district and the data which formed the basis of the revenue revisions carelessly was contrived by the Settlement officer. Thus the Committee accepted the agitator's plea in substance and reduced the new rate of fiscal increase from 22% to 6.25% (187492 to 48648).91

The New Statesman of London summed up the whole affair on May 5, 1929. It said, "the report of the committee constitutes the worst rebuff which any local Government in India has received for many years and many years and may have far reaching results. It will be difficult to find an incident, quite comparable with this in the long and controversial annals of Indian Land Revenue".92

If we look at the immediate grievances (enhancement of land revenue to 22%) of the rich and poor peasantry of the Bardoli taluka and if we consider this our parameter (enhanced revenue remission) of success or

91. Ibid.
failure than we may say that to some extent the efforts of the Indian National Congress brought success. However, the issue of restoration of land forfeited during the Bardoli Satyagarha, was kept in ambience for the next three years. Throughout this period, this question figured largely. Lord Irwin made verbal promises to Mahtama Gandhi in that regard and directed the Bombay Government to deal with the situation, sympathetically. Finally, the issue was decided in 1931 when the Gandhi Irwin pact was signed. Both parties claimed victory. The peasants were forced to make significant concessions.

The ideology working behind this movement was class harmony as advocated by Mahatma Gandhi and Indian National Congress. Gandhi didn’t want to disturb the social and economic framework of the agrarian hierarchy - though the condition of the poor peasantry was deteriorating continuously. According to census report of 1921, the growth of tenantry gradually increased from 23% in 1907 to 47% in 1921. According to report of the Bombay Enquiry Committee 1929-30, an economic unit of land should have 15 acres of land whereas average size of land holding in Bardoli was limited to 7 acres. As far as social conditions were concerned, this was worst than serfdom. Even Gandhi described the Patidars’s oppression as ‘Swadeshi Dyerism’ and Narhari Parikh went on fast for seven days against those inhuman atrocities.
of the Patidars on poor peasantry. Efforts carried out by the Satyagarha brought very little or no change to the social conditions of the Kaliparaj community. Again, the presence of Kaliparaj community children in the National Schools opened by Indian National Congress and Patidar Yuvak Mandal was negligible. By 1929, the volunteers of Indian National Congress distributed 1200 spinning wheels but all those were operational only in the Patidar community.\textsuperscript{93}

The Workers' and Peasants Party showed a lukewarm attitude towards that movement. The Bombay unit of Workers and Peasants Party criticized the Bardoli Satyagraha on the grounds that it was not a typical peasant movement directed against landlord exploitation but only an anti-imperialist agitation of mixed class character, sponsored by many elements who were not at all sympathetic to the real interests of peasants. Moreover, in this movement mass was mobilised through traditional organisations, social obligations, social control (Village Samities or Satellite Organisations), religious beliefs and symbols, rituals, coercion, etc. The steel framed traditional social structure (in which the landlords were exploiting the poor peasantry both economically and socially) and its ethos became convenient and poor instruments and that too without breaking or eroding old clusters of social, economic and psychological commitments.\textsuperscript{94}


\textsuperscript{94} C.P. Dutt to S.V. Ghate (28th June, 1929) M.C.C.E., V-I, p. 1348 (34) pp. 39-40.
The Communist Party of India and its protective cover, the Workers and Peasants parties, had some ideological objections. First, they believed in the theory of class struggle, which was going on, that would make the Indian national movement more broad base. But, the ideology programme and tactics behind the Bardoli Satyagraha were favouring class harmony against the imperialist regime. Here inference can be drawn that the Bardoli Satyagrahais were more interested in maintaining status quo in the social and economic relations of the society and without disturbing them, wanted to get the concessions from the imperialist regime. The economic and social dominance of the upper caste over that of the bottom of the agrarian heierarchy was justified and they used this relationship in fulfilling the needs of the dominant landowner Patiders. Secondly, they supported the theory of Scientific Marxism which is a science of social change and there is no room for dogmatism. Jaiparkash Narayan in his book 'My picture of Socialism' asserted that our’s aim is an economic, social and political democracy. In this system man neither will be slave or subdued to capitalism, nor to a party or the state. Man will be free. The bourgeois revolution was the mother of bourgeois democracy and social revolution is the mother of socialist democracy. The political and economic organizations of the state shall be based on principles of social justice and economic freedom.95

95. Shankar, Girija Socialist Trends in Indian Politics, pp. 53-63.
Thus, all the Left leadership criticised Gandhi teachings as retrogressive and equated him with those who stood for status quo in the society with a view to obstructing the pace of social transformation.

The Workers and Peasants Party of Bombay suggested to the Bardoli movement’s leadership for extension of that movement. The Asr-i-Jadid (Calcutta) on April 17, 1928, commented that "If the spirit which is working among the peasantry in Bardoli spreads to other parts of the province, who can say that the condition of India will remain the same as it is today". But the supreme leader of Bardoli campaign, Sardar Vallabhai Patel, was not in favour of spreading it to the other parts of the country. The communists were annoyed with that decision of Gujarat Congress leadership.96

Institutions such as Patidar Yuvak Mandal, Patidar Ashram, Anavil Ashram, Gujarat Sabha etc and their various caste journals as ‘Patidar Hitechhu’, ‘The Anavil Pokar’, ‘The Satyagraha Patrika’, also exhorted the masses for greater cohesion among the members of these respective castes. It was also the fact that the success of the movement was due to the configuration of the economic conditions of the dominant caste groups in the taluka and the prevailing social milieu and structure.97

The anti-imperialist struggle in India was multi-class struggle. The peasantry and the working class, though organisationally weak, ignorant and politically not sufficiently conscious of their role, were professed as potentially the most revolutionary. Therefore, the Workers' and Peasants Party of Bombay believed that could be done by mobilising the poor peasantry and handing over the leadership to them. The party, however, soon realised the ground reality, "Our task is to see that it assumes its historic role in the national movement".

No efforts were made by the Bardoli Satyagraha leadership to make the poor peasantry conscious about their inherent strength and their just rights. However, the Left leadership believed in that programme of class consciousness and solidarity which would lead the proletariat to defeat the exploitative forces. But age old traditional social and economic structure, contemporary leadership which believed in theory of status quo in social and economic life of the country, the initial weak start of the left movement which was also divided or preoccupied with the workers movements could not bring the desired results.

The Bardoli Satyagraha was essentially a rich and middle class movement against the imperialist British regime. In this movement the collusion between the rich, middle and poor peasantry was made successful
by the constructive programme, initiated or guided by Mahatma Gandhi. The structural dependence of the lower castes on the superior castes was complete. Further it was reinforced by the Gandhian political ethic that aimed at establishing a geinschaft solidarity among various castes and classes to fight against British regime. The basic questions of land control, actual use of land, land distribution, consciousness and solidarity could not be achieved. Gandhian methods of passive resistance and non-violence suited the class interests of the rich and middle peasantry. The dominant Patidars made full use of their hagemony by exploiting the ignorance or backwardness of the poor peasantry. In real sense patidars had blocked their way by not imparting moral and material benefit to them. This movement no doubt remained successful politically but could not alter substantially the feudalistic regime.

The Worker’s and Peasant’s Party record with the peasantry was dismal. The Communists in India were themselves not unaware of that shortcoming, and even the Comintern strongly criticised “the fact that hardly any practical work has been done yet among the peasants." This neglect is astonishing, as V.I. Lenin since 1920, had been emphasising the crucial role of the peasantry in bourgeois democratic revolutions and how in

98. *Adhikari, Documents, Vol. III B, p. 42*


100. *INPRECORR, Vol. 9, No. 40, August 1929, p. 486.*
the colonies work among the peasants was to play an important part in the activities of the communists who were to adjust their role to the level of the peasantry.\textsuperscript{101} On the other hand, due to their criticism of the Indian National Congress, they failed to cooperate with the Congress on that front and gained a foothold among the peasantry.\textsuperscript{102} The Worker's Peasant's Party often tended to approach the peasant question in a sectarian fashion. While emphasising the unity with the peasantry to the immediate task of national revolution, they were unable to formulate a strategy which would involve wide sections of the peasantry in the national revolution. The party argued in favour. They failed to grasp the reality that the mobilization of all sections of peasantry could herald a new stage. The incorporation of all sections of peasantry of organizing the poor peasants and agricultural laborers on the basis of economic and political demands.\textsuperscript{103}

The Communist seemed to have been unaware of the great potential of such demands. In an anti-imperialist front, a potential which the Congress recognised and fully utilised.\textsuperscript{104}

\textsuperscript{101} Chandra, Bipan, "Lenin and National Liberation Movements" p. 312.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid, pp 313-20.
\textsuperscript{103} WPP principles and policy, December 1929, Pamphlet, A.C.H.
Thus, Left led by their front rank organisation Workers and Peasants Parties tended to approach the peasant question in a sectarian fashion. While taking of unity with the peasantry for the immediate task of national revolution, they were unable to formulate a strategy which would involve wide sections of the peasantry, the concern remaining that of organizing the “poor peasants and agricultural labourers” on the basis of economic and political demands.

Due to these ideological predilections the Workers’ and Peasants Party leaders were of the view that the demand for land revenue reduction should not be supported first, because it effected the peasants only “marginally” and secondly because, it only marginally helped peasant, as it benefitted the landlords much more.

**PEASANT MOVEMENT IN OUDH**

The Oudh region was also the part of the ongoing peasant consciousness. It consisted of twelve districts in northern central India. In pre-British regimes the Taluqdars formed the dominant class of rent-collecting intermediaries, organising and managing local population.105 This age-long structure was first time disturbed by the Britishers because of the

Taluqdar’s active participation in 1857 Revolt against them. But with the passage of time, the political urgency necessitated pacification and protection of that class by delating on them the right of full proprietorship in land and power of evictions of Tenants. In lieu of that the Taluqdars extended their loyalty to the British regime.\textsuperscript{106}

The Depression brought agricultural prices scaling down of their normal levels. The value fell by 50\% between January and December 1930, and the impoverished peasantry was burdened with high taxes and rents. At harvest times, the cultivators had to sell their produce in appreciably less prices. This unparalleled slump completely shattered the Tenantry. Apart from this havoc, the conditions of the peasantry was not healthy due to the successive failures of crops which had nearly crippled the cultivators.\textsuperscript{107}

Again through the various enactments between 1880 and 1900, the economic dominance of the Taluqdars over the peasants remained unchallenged. These steps couldn’t stop evictions, enhancement of rents, demanding nazranas, extortion of illegal taxes and beggar. Later the Britishers passed in the U.P. Legislative Council the Tenancy Act of 1901 enabling a tenant to acquire occupancy right if he held the same land, continuously for a period of twelve years. But this Act of 1901 was not applied to districts of Oudh.

\textsuperscript{107} Neale, W.C., Economic Changes in Rural India, 1800-1855, pp 42-108.
Consequently continued to feel as insecure as before.\textsuperscript{108}

**Agrarian hierarchy in Oudh**

The agricultural population of Oudh can be classified into three main categories: first is of rent-receives, second is of rent-payers and third is of agricultural labourers. (This inference is drawn from the data from the census of 1921). However, there was no water tight division in those three categories. There was considerable overlapping among those categories. Each category was further sub-divided by reference to subsidiary occupations. This shows the extent of sub infeudation and fragmented nature of land rights in Oudh region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount paid (in Rupees) per annum</th>
<th>% of land holders</th>
<th>% of tenants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>200 - above</td>
<td>8.25</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150 - 199</td>
<td>10.92</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 - 149</td>
<td>14.14</td>
<td>2.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 - 99</td>
<td>8.69</td>
<td>11.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-49</td>
<td>12.32</td>
<td>22.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-24</td>
<td>45.68</td>
<td>61.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Evidence taken before the reforms committee, Calcutta: Government Press, 1920, I, pp 86-91, Table VI, VIII; also proceedings of the reforms office Time IPD., Appendix I, pp 67-68).

From the above table, the Oudh peasantry broadly can be divided into five categories: first, landlords who paid revenue of Rs. 200 p.a. or more, second, the rich peasantry, a section of landowners who paid revenue between Rs. 100-199 and tenants paying rent of more than Rs. 150, thirdly, middle peasantry, revenue payers between Rs. 25 and Rs. 99 and rent payers of between Rs. 50 and Rs. 149; fourth, poor peasantry, land-holders who paid less than Rs. 25 as revenue and Tenants who paid rent less than Rs. 50; fifth, the landless labourers whose number was 183908.\textsuperscript{109}

There are two noticeable things in the Oudh hierarchy of peasants. First, the secured and occupancy Tenants who formed a very small minority just 2.02% of the Tenantry in Oudh. The great majority of Tenants didn't have rights of inheritance and were subjected to rack-renting, evictions and illegal evictions by the landholders. Second, the evictions in U.P. increased by 100% during the first two decades of twentieth century.\textsuperscript{110}

Prices, Rental and Revenue Demands and Wages in the U.P. 1900-34.

\textsuperscript{109} Census of India, 1921, pp 382-9.

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
During the period of 1906 and 1921, the gradual rise in prices brought large profit to the cultivating owners and secured Tenants with sizeable holdings. But in case of small landholders and unprotected tenants, this gradual increase in prices brought miseries because those sections of the peasantry were left with no alternative than to buying from the market at least a portion of their family's food and other needs. Again, due to large population of unprotected tenants in Oudh brought more distress in that area in comparison with other regions.¹¹¹

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Leadership and Mobilization, Participants, Ideology

The Oudh agrarian movement in real terms was the part of Civil Disobedience Movement launched by Indian National Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi against the British regime. A no-revenue, no-rent campaign was launched. The no-revenue part was a call to the Zamindars to refuse to pay revenue to the Government, the no-rent a call to the tenants not to pay rent to the Zamindars. Since the Zamindars were more loyal to the Government, thus, the movement became a no-rent struggle.¹¹²

Leadership of no-rent campaign confined to the hands of the urban, middle class professional politicians who had links with the peasantry because some of them were themselves petty Zamindars or lawyers having interest in Tenants problems.¹¹³ The main leaders were Jawahar Lal Nehru, Kalka Prasad, Sri Krishan Paliwal, Anjali Kumar. The prominent among these was J.L. Nehru who developed an interest in agrarian questions in 1921 when he came in touch with peasant movement in eastern U.P. in 1927, he attended the International Congress against Colonial oppression and Imperialism which was held at Brussels where he and came into contact with communists and anti-colonial fighters from all over the world. By then he had begun to accept Marxism in its broad contours. The same year he visited the Soviet Union

¹¹³. Home Department File No. 1/28 (Political), January 1928, fortnightly reports on political situation in the UP.
and was deeply impressed by the new Socialist ideology. At the Lahore session of the Indian National Congress in 1929 he proclaimed, "I am a socialist and republican". In 1925, J.L Nehru joined hand with Subhash Bose to organise the Independence for India League to fight for complete independence and a socialist orientation of the economic structure of Indian society. His commitment to socialism was clear. He stood for social and economic equality, to the ending of all exploitation of nation by nation and class by class within a framework that recognised the primacy of the political, anti-imperialist struggle. He told the socialists to follow 'nationalism and political freedom as represented by the Indian National Congress and social freedom as represented by socialism. Thus, he didn't favour of an organisation independent of the Indian National Congress. The task was to influence and transform the Congress as a whole in a socialist direction.

Actually, the Left movement was divided into various ideological currents such as the Marxian, the Fabian and the current influenced by Gandhi. This wouldn't have been a major weakness in fact it might have been a source of strength for a broad socialist goals within the Indian National Congress.

The Left ideology succeeded in making a remarkable impact on

115. Ibid, Vol, 6, p. 16.
Indian society and politics. Organizationally, the Left was able to command influence over nearly one-third of the votes in the All-India Congress Committee on important issues. The prominent socialists like Acharya Narendra Dev, Jayaprakash Narayan and Achyut Patwardhan were members of the Congress working committee.\textsuperscript{116}

The impact of worldwide economic depression was different for different agrarian classes in Oudh. At first, the Tenants who were unable to pay their rents and sub-tenants who could pay only half of previous rent demand, felt the miseries of the slump. From the data table II inference can be drawn that there was tremendous rise in the wages of the labour (from 120 to 1926 to 180 in 1929). It seemed that the poor peasants were set to benefit from the slump because they could supplement their income from the new condition of market and wages.\textsuperscript{117} There is clear indication from the table second that among the all peasants' strata, the rich and middle peasants were hit hardest from the slump. Because this group of pesantry was associated with the market more clearly. Hence they were more sensitive to the price fluctuations. One more fact that can depict their picture of suffering is payment of loans to the creditors. Only 25\% of short term and 7\% of the long term loan had been repaid, and thus lands got transferred quickly to the hands

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid, VoL 7, pp 180-1.

In this situation socialist like J.L. Nehru exhorted the peasantry parties in collaboration with communists. The peasantry in this area had already mobilised due to their previous movement in 1928 on class basis. Again J.L. Nehru built up a left-wing lobby within Indian National Congress. In real terms the 'no-rent' campaign of the peasantry on Oudh was started earlier than the nationwide civil disobedience movement launched by Indian National Congress under Gandhi leadership. The campaign initially started in Rae Bareli district by Qaji Ahmad Kidwai succeeded in mobilising peasantry to withhold rents. J.L. Nehru speaking at Taung district Rae Bareli on February 5, 1930, affirmed that the British Government was being run by the peasants money, legalised at tax and revenue. But the Government’s attitude towards the peasantry was complete apathetic. Thus, he advised the peasantry not to pay the enhanced rent to their landlord. He asserted that the value of Kharif crop had been reduced to about one half. Money value of the produce having diminished by more than 60% in the course of few months. The Government ought to have stopped at

119. J.L. Nehru, Resolution No. 11 in Merrut Conspiracy Case Exhibits.
once when the kharif crop was garnered, with satisfactory solutions in the matter of rent and revenue demands. But the Provincial Government showed complete indifferent attitude towards these demands.122 The united provincial congress committee too, endorsed J.L Nehru’s radical suggestion for anti-zamindar no - rent campaigns. The Zamindars extending their loyalty to the British regime didn’t follow J.L Nehru’s appeal and paid their revenue dues to Government but the Tenancy didn’t pay rents. Thus, in practice the no-tax campaign in oudh boiled down to a no-rent campaign.123

The Civil Disobedience Movement was started by Mahatma Gandhi on April 1930. It was restricted to breaches of salt law. Due to ambivalent attitude of the Indian National Congress and lukewarm attitude of peasantry the No-rent campaign receded into the background. J.L. Nehru was arrested and the first phase of the movement failed to make any impact on the peasantry any.124

It was only in October 1930 that the atmosphere again became radical, when, J.L. Nehru released from jail, he got the united Province Congress Committee to sanction the no-rent campaign. Evictions increased as landlords found it difficult to collect rents, (in Rae Bareli these were 711

cases of evictions as compared with 537 in 1929-30 in Manipuri ejectments while in 364 in 1929-30. Substantial Tenants producing cash crops for the market suffered and their income receded. The political atmosphere was also radicalised due to release of large number of detainees. Two months of preparation and intensive propaganda led to the launching of the campaign in December, 1930. A large variety of forms of mobilization such as prabhat pheries in which bands of men, women and children went around, Patrikas or illegal news-sheets, some times written by hand and sometimes cyclostyled were part of the strategy to defy the Government. By January, 1931 severe repression had forced many peasants to flee the villages.

Consequently, a hiatus was created in ongoing Civil Disobedience Movement in the form of Gandhi Irwin Pact of March 5, 1931. No rent campaign was also discontinued. The economic distress among the peasantry continued to be aggravating. In the beginning, the Tenants were advised to pay what was possible which was 50% by occupancy Tenants and 40% by statutory Tenants, provided the landlords gave receipt of the whole amount. But the Governments hopes of persuading landlords to offer rent

125. Revenue Department File No. 465, Extract D.O. No. 74/4, April 1821.
126. The Bombay Chronicle, 29th June, 1831.
semissions in return for revenue remissions were remained unfulfilled.\textsuperscript{129} Indian National Congress Committee on agrarian distress observed only nominal relief. Gandhi issued a manifesto to UP Kisans on May 24, suggesting a compromise by which non-occupancy Tenants should pay a minimum of 8 annas in the rupees and occupancy Tenants 12 annas. But officials noticed that peasantry in Oudh was taking Gandhi’s minimum rates or the maximum and often stopping all payments.\textsuperscript{130} While local leaders and activists were emerging, all using Congress name, but preaching a far more radical message like Kalka Prasad in Rai Bareli and Anjali Kumar in the same district picketed the house of the Raja of Sheogarh as a protest against eviction of defaulting Tenants.\textsuperscript{131} In the countryside, pressure for no-rent and what a fortnightly report of early September described as ‘the growing tendency towards violence and the defiance of authority mounted as prices declined sharply from the autumn of 1930 onwards. After a tour of 21 districts in U.P. Inspector General of Police reported on September 3, that Kanpur was one of the major urban, centre giving cause for anxiety.\textsuperscript{132} Gandhi met Hailey, the United Province Governor at Nanital, in May 1931. He issued a

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{129} AIC, File No. 4/1931, Part I, pp 61-68, NHML.
\item \textsuperscript{130} Sagkar, Sumit- Modern India, 1885-1947, pp. 311-15.
\item \textsuperscript{131} Home Political File 33/24/1931.
\item \textsuperscript{132} Fortnightly Report, 3 September, 1931.
\end{enumerate}
manifesto urging Tenants to pay rents, to suffer but not to retaliate. J.L. Nehru himself showed ambivalent attitude, he spoke against the landlords but refrained from advising Tenants to act in a way which would lead to confrontation. In fact Gandhi presence in this region inhibited J.L. Nehru and his Left-wing group in carrying forward the no-rent agitation.\(^{133}\) Kalka Prasad was driven out of the district Congress and things quietened down considerably in Rae Bareli, Unnao after J.L. Nehru’s tour these places in June, 30.\(^ {134}\) But soon these inhibitions were removed in September 1931 Willingdon replaced Irwin as Viceroy. On December 5, 1931 the United Province Congress Committee resolved to start no-rent campaigns again in Oudh region. This time the renewed Civil Disobedience Movement lasted for 1931. Masses both from town and countryside participated actively,\(^ {135}\) between December 1931 and July 1932 over 10000 Congress volunteers were arrested out of 2004 political convicts belonged to United Province, 1367 or 69% of them were petty Tenants and landless laborers. But these were often hired by the Congress and can be considered apart from the groups of rich and middle peasants who were in fact the bulwark of the 1930-32 no-rent campaigns.\(^ {136}\)

\(^{133}\) Agrarian Distress, Appendix XIV, United Province, Provincial Congrest Committee.


\(^{135}\) The Leader (Allahabad), 1st Nov., 1931, p. I.

\(^{136}\) G.O.I. Home 18/2/32 March, 1932.
The entire movement was under the complete control of the Indian National Congress. It was essentially a part of Civil disobedience Movement launched by Gandhi. It was fact that in some Zamindar areas low level violence was frequent as the Taluqdars mobilised their force to coerce Tenants. There were also instances when Tenants attacked Taluqdars. But from these instance we can’t argue that movement was not non-violent. But one thing was clear that Tenants lacked both organizational and leadership potential. There was neither concrete programming nor solidarity among the Tenancy. Perhaps the main reason for this lukewarm attitude of Tenants was the impact of depression which hit hardly the middle and rich peasantry but not the poor peasantry. Again, the poor peasantry had benefitted from the slump because, they could supplemented their income from labour because wage rose considerably during the period. On the other hand, the middle and rich peasantry couldn’t continue the struggle because their vested interest in the property.

The Government knew that the no-tax campaign was both anti-Government and anti-Zamindars, who were loyalist to Government. Thus, they pursued a pragmatic approach, “If tenants are made to realise that by withdrawing the payments of rents they will also lose their holding. They

will be less likely to follow the advice and dictate of those who advocated the no-rent campaign." If tenants refused to pay, they must be ejected. The Government considered it unfair to withdraw from the Taluqdars or Zamindars unless the no-rent campaign actually called off.\textsuperscript{139}

In Indian freedom struggle, the overriding feature was the supremacy of the question of 'National Independence which was the prime concern of the all political parties. However, the Left-wing emphasized the social and economic problem of the Indian peasantry and sought to bring them to the forefront of the national movement. The Congress definitely showed keen interest in mobilizing the rousing tenantry against the Government. The Zamindars at the same time tried to mobilise the middle and rich peasantry. Thus the poor presantry was left deprived from the mainstream of the national movement. Oudh was a zamindari area where feudalistic character of the agrarian system had to be deployed before a politician could expect any following among the Tenantry. But in case of J.L. Nehru and his Left radicalism was confined to mere ideological level because he couldn't afford to lose Gandhi whose prime concern was national independence and not political consciousness on class lines. Thus, the tenantry cause suffered to a certain extent.

\textsuperscript{139} Singh, Kumar Ashok - Presant Revolt and Agrarian Reforms pp-130-31.
Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Patel were arrested in May 1930. Spontaneously, a non-tax campaign started in some areas of Gujarat provinces such as Barsad, Ahmedabad, Kaira, Broach and Surat. Here, the peasantry was emboldened with the success of the Bardoli Satyagarha. Thus, this region was first to respond to the call of Gandhi's Civil Disobedience Movement.

The peasantry in Gujarat province was divided into three broad categories: the middle, poor and landless labourers which were also broadly coincided with caste division, such as Ujaliparaj, Raniparaj and Dublas.140

In the first category of Ujaliparaj, Patidars dominated. Their control over the rest of agrarian hierarchy was absolute. The Patidars farmed the best and richest land and rented out the remaining to other peasants. Thus they controlled the economy of the village. These sections of well to do peasantry formed the backbone of the struggle both in the Bardoli Satyagraha and in the no-tax campaign. Their numerical strength was approximately 13.25% of the total population. Thus, it was a minority community.141

Dublas with the Raniparaj formed the majority. Nearly 80% of the total landholding was held by 16073 peasant proprietors, 19% of the total was held by 1% of the total population or non-cultivating landlords: All these sections had to face oppression of landlords and the British Government. A campaign of the non-payment of land revenue was organised in the district of Ahmedabad, Kaira, Broach and Surat. In Ahmedabad district the arrears in July, 1930, ranged from 35% to 52% of the demand. The Bombay Government too, recognised this difficulty on the part of the cultivators, due to bad crop in this year particularly in the Kaira district and Ahmedabad. On grasping the reality the Bombay Government suspended their collection of land revenue. The urgency was noticed in Kaira district in the taluqs of Borsad and Nadiad in nearly 20 villages. The total amount of arrears were about one lakh rupees. The revenue in this region was generally paid in January and March and by the time no-tax campaign gathered force. Most of the dues had already been paid. In Broach district, the sphere of problem was Jambusar taluqa where 47% of the land revenue remained uncollected upto June 1930. In Surat, the Bardoli taluqa was worst

142. Ibid.
144. N.A.I. Home Political, 1930, No. 214/30, p 1-3.
145. Ibid.
The Government took stern action, sent strong contingents which unleashed terror. The Tenants were dealt mercilessly, their property was seized and attached forcibly. Under these rapacious conditions, the Indian National Congress organised hizrat or immigration to the neighboring territories of the Baroda State. At least 50000 of the peasantry who were involved in the no-tax campaign migrated.146

In this province the cultivators were radical on account of low prices of wheat. The Governor too, anticipated difficulty in paying kharif demands in central parts of the Punjab. The political parties which were at the forefront, mobilised the peasantry. These peasants largely belonged to communists and socialist groups such as Kirti Kisan Party, Bharat Naujawan Sabha, etc.147 Apart from these, there were also prominent organisations such as Indian National Congress and the Zamindara League. According to Government reports the most influential was the Zamindara League. The propaganda and the mobilization of this League was led by Sir Chhotu Ram and some other Muslim leaders. This league convened a meeting in Rohtak in October 1930 and called on Government to remit the whole land revenue and water charges.148

147. The Bombay Chronicle, 4 and 5 November, 1930.
In the Kirti Kisan Party - the communists like Sohan Singh, Josh dominated. They had connections with the Ghadar school of revolutionaries abroad. Their object was the establishment of a Workers' and Peasants' republic through a revolutionary struggle.

During this period, the activities of the Punjab Kirti Kisan Party were mainly propagandist in nature. The members of the party like Sohan Singh ‘Josh’ and M.A. Majid participated in various conferences, convened by the Naujawan Bharat Sabha and the Punjab branch of All India Workers and Peasants Party. In fact, these organisations collaborated with each other as they had common aims and aspirations. The Kirt Kisan Party convened its conferences in Lyallpur on September 29, 1928 and at Rohtak on March 10, 1929 for the purpose of familiarising the people with their ideas and encouraging the workers and the peasants.\(^\text{149}\)

In 1929, a Kisan’s meeting took place in Hissar and resolved not to pay abiana tax to their landlords till their legitimate grievances were redressed. The Kirti Kisan Party and the Congress were backing the agitation among other demands. They argued that around 58% of the agriculturists of the Punjab owned less than 5 acres of land and to tax these uneconomic holding was against equality, justice and all fair canons of taxation and they

\(^{149}\) MCC\#Sc. NI 205, Exhibit No. 1883(T).
demanded that at least 50% general remission in the land revenue and abiana and in special case, more remission should be given to the affected peasantry. In 1930, the peasants demonstrated for digging a canal in the Doaba due to security of water. About 50 thousand peasants demonstrated which gave the Government a lot to headache.\textsuperscript{150}

Apart from this attitude, the Punjab Workers and Peasants Party or the Kirti Kisan Party took an independent position suitable to the existing conditions. They saw the negative effects of frontally attacking the Congress and presenting ultra revolutionary programme to the peasantry. While maintaining the Communistic theme, to be somewhat more accommodating to other interests and in particular to claim that there is no fundamental difference between themselves and the Congress, but only a divergent of views as to present policy. In fact Kirti Kisan utilized the Congress organisation to spread Kirti-Kisan propaganda. This attitude of Kirti Kisan Party enabled it to acquire an initial foothold among the peasantry.

Following the remissions granted in the U.P. in May, 1931, the Punjab Government too remitted, a part of water charges and land revenue in June 1931. Thus, politically the struggle could not be radicalised.\textsuperscript{151}

\textsuperscript{150} Gajarani, S., Peasant Movement in Punjab, pp 28-31.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid.
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In the province the moderate group of Indian National Congress was leading the no-tax campaign under the leadership Rajendera Prasad, Sri Krishna Sinha and Sahajanand Saraswati. Inspite of the unfavorable economic conditions, there has been no wide-spread attempt to inaugurate a no-rent campaign. The above mentioned leaders mobilized the peasants over the demands for reduction of canal tax rates and grant of proper receipts for rents. The forum through which they were working was the Kisan Sabha founded by Swami Sahajanand in 1928.

The Units of Kisan Sabha effectively worked in Gaya, Patna and Sahahabad districts. In August 1929 the Bihar Congress appointed an Agrarian Enquiry Committee under Dr. Rajendra Prasad. The Committee recorded statements of Tenants in Gaya. But the outcome of this inquiry committee was unsignificant the reconciliation of Landlord - Tenant difference despite massive evidence of oppression by the Zamindars. Dr. Rajendra Prasad was not against peasants souring their demands but against the formation of the Kisan Sabha against the Zamindars. Thus the Congress leaders support to the

152. N.A.I. Home Political, 1933, No. 22/VII/21, 1-17.
154. Id.
155. Id.
demand of rent and revenue remissions was halting and lukewarm.\textsuperscript{156}

Similar protests were also registered in other provinces of Tamil, Bengal, N.W.F.P., etc. The peasant movement in almost all over India rose to a higher level and became anti-feudal. This time the leadership of the no-tax campaign was largely led by Indian National Congress. The Civil Disobedience Movement certainly gave impetus to the peasant consciousness. Some Leftist elements also had played a significant role in Punjab, Bombay and Bengal. Under their leadership peasants were exhorted for abolition of the Zamindari system. But the leadership as a whole couldn't go beyond the control of Indian National Congress which favoured concessions without disturbing the existing pattern of agricultural hierarchy.

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid.
CONCLUSION

If we once again review the peasant mobilization of the period between 1926-34, we can come to the conclusion that the fate of the Indian peasantry was largely determined by the state of agriculture which was hampered, not only by colonialism but also by feudalism, as represented by landlords and rich peasants etc. The agriculture contradiction was the direct result of both colonialism and vested interests in land. The peasants had become conscious of the fact that both colonialism and feudalism had to be eliminated. The preconditions for such a revolution of peasant type were gradually maturing. In India a mammoth and potent working class was there and there was clear possibility for the peasant to receive leadership from this working class. The peasant rebellion on the territory of Eastern Bengal 1907 and Bombay workers action of the same period as also V.I. Lenin’s observation on the Bombay workers action was trumpeted out of contest. V.I. Lenin had written that “In India too, the proletariat has already developed a conscious political mass struggle” and this meant that the collapse of British Colonialism was inevitable, that “The British regime in India doomed”. The Indian communist too, believed that the radical revolution among the pesentary was inevitable. Unfortunately too, much was read in Lenin’s observation.
Agriculture in India suffered from the survival of feudalism, the monopoly of large scale land ownership, huge rentals and communal traditions. Among agriculture communities, rent bondage and caste and communal strife were the chief obstacles to the development of peasant consciousness.

Apparently Indian peasent appeared on the threshold of class contradictions. India was on the boil. The class contradictions became extremely acute. However, at the same time the Indian liberation movement and the leadership of Gandhi turned the scale and the major contradictions as mentioned above were sidelined and thus couldn’t be resolved.

The Indian National Congress was oriented on gradual reformes and rejected the peasant’s social demand. While defending the landowners and the rich peasant under the name of united front, the peasant demands were put in the carpet. Consequently, the victory didn’t come for a long time. The leaders sought compromises, both with the landed classes and the British imperialism.

This objective reality came into prominence during the Bardoli movement. The radical revolution through this movement was blunted and the Patidars hegemony and the lower classes were brought to fight for the interest of the Patidars and their allies. The leadership of Patel and Gandhi mesmerised the Indian peasantry and for a time it appeared that the existence
of a large landless agriculturists with no security of tenures as tenants or as farm labourers on land of others was not a big problem. The most conspicuous was that all classes of the peasants were fighting for their interests as well as for the cause of Indian liberation movement under the leadership of Gandhi. Gandhi was praised for diffusing the class differentiation in agriculture. Similar was the picture of the peasantry during the Bardoli movement. The no-rent campaign in other provinces prominent among them Awadh, Bihar, Punjab, Madras, etc. were also on the pattern of Bardoli movement in which the landed classes supported by the Indian National Congress participated against the British imperialism. In short, it can be said that left was in hibernation, making/unmaking models for peasant radicalism while Gandhi and Indian National Congress provided them leadership without sharpening the class contradiction. Gandhi also succeeded in delinking large section of landlords and rich peasant from the British imperialism. Thus the national liberation movement expanded and popular masses rose to struggle against the British imperialism.