

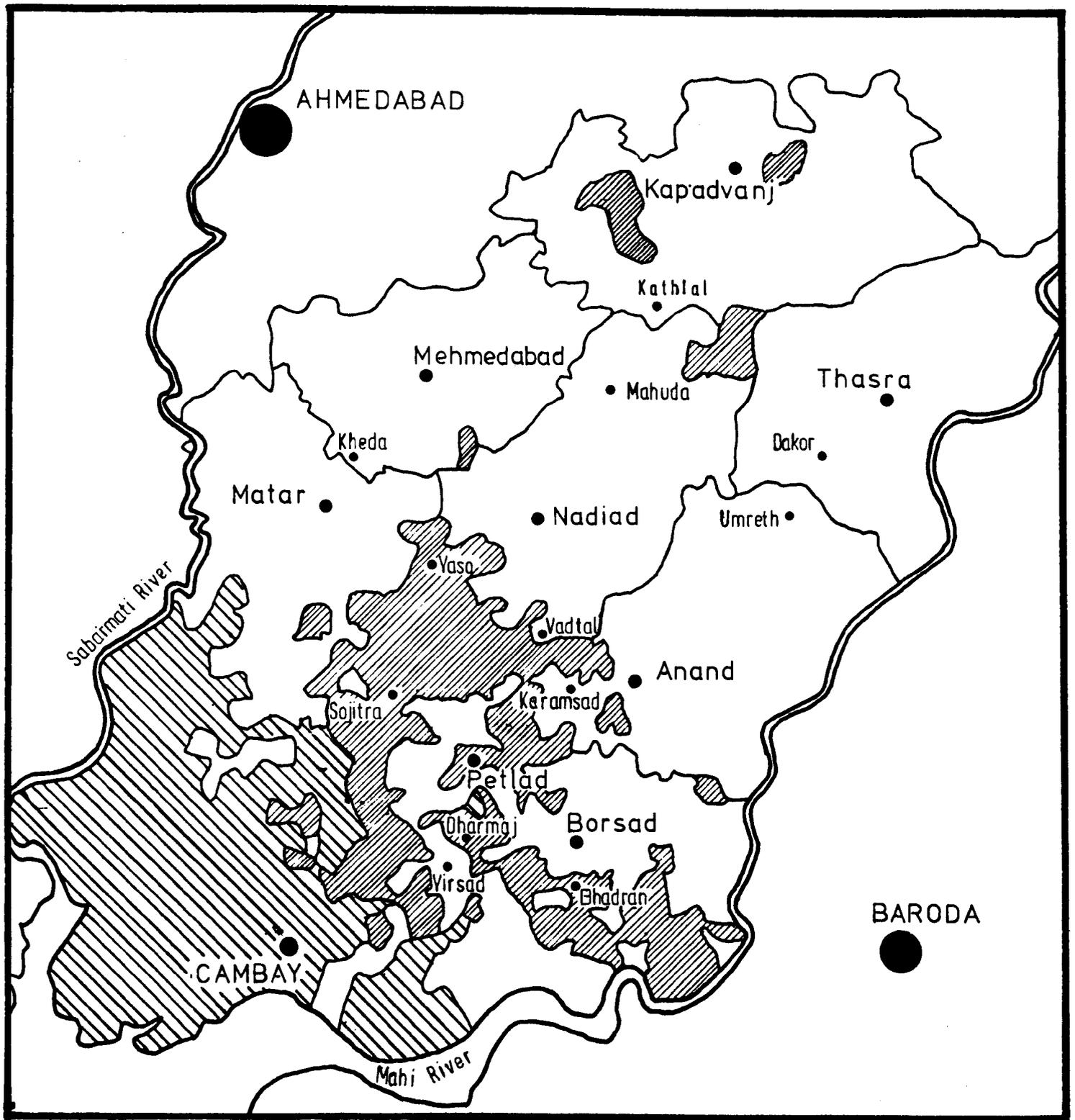


**Peasant Agitations
in Kheda District, Gujarat,
1917 - 1934.**

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Kheda District during the period of British Rule.

- Anand Taluka Headquarter Town
- Vaso Other Places of Importance
- ◌ Cambay State
- ◌ Parts of Baroda State

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Abbreviations used in footnotes

BA	Maharashtra State Archives, Bombay
Bombay FR1	Fortnightly report for the first half of the month for Bombay Presidency
Bombay FR2	Fortnightly report for the second half of the month for Bombay Presidency
BRO	Baroda Records Office
CWMG	Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi
H.D.	BA, Home Department
IOL	India Office Library
J.D.	BA, Judicial Department
NAI, H-Poll	National Archives of India, Home Political Department
NML, AICC	Nehru Memorial Library, All India Congress Committee papers
R.D.	BA, Revenue Department.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years a new orthodoxy has arisen in the study of Indian nationalism. Increasingly, historians have turned from the study of all-India politics to the minutia of local politics. The Indian nationalist movement has come to be seen as a messy alliance of disparate interest groups struggling for position in the new political systems which the British Raj gave birth to. Personal ambitions and factional conflicts, rather than ideology and class solidarity, appear to have been the motivating force behind the nationalist movement.¹ This new orthodoxy can only be challenged by detailed studies of areas in which the nationalist movement was strong. Kheda District in Gujarat was such an area. In this thesis, an attempt will be made to find out why nationalism became a popular ideology in the area, which social groups, or perhaps factions, supported the movement, and how such support was mobilised. The conclusions will, I hope, help to refute some of the assumptions of the new orthodoxy.

An explanation is needed as to why I chose this particular subject. Choice of topic is, of course, always somewhat arbitrary, a leaping from one related subject to another, until one's choice comes to rest on an appealing and significant subject. My initial fascination with India stemmed, I suppose, from an Indian heritage found often in middle class English families. The family fortune rested on Bengali jute, and I myself had been born in Rawalpindi during the holocaust of partition. My first return to India was on my grand tour to Kathmandu after leaving school, and although I had already decided to study English and European history at the London

1 See Anil Seal, 'Imperialism and Nationalism in India', in Gallagher, Johnson & Seal, Locality, Province and Nation, (Cambridge University Press 1973), pp. 1-27.

School of Economics, I chose Indian nationalism at S.O.A.S. as my special subject. As a postgraduate at Sussex University, I took up the full-time study of India for the first time. My primary interest remained in Indian nationalism, and I soon realised that without good local level histories of the nationalist movement, the subject could not hope to progress far beyond the clichés of nationalist historiography. Anthony Low suggested several provinces on which he felt work was needed. When he mentioned Gujarat, I felt instinctively that this had to be my field of study, for it was an area central to the nationalist movement as a whole, it was a self-contained linguistic region, and it had a strong indigenous culture.

I soon discovered that the production of a history of the nationalist movement in Gujarat would be no easy task. The best histories in English had been written by the nationalists, Mahadev Desai and Narhari Parikh, and although there was much interesting and suggestive detail in these studies, they failed to explain convincingly why so many Gujaratis should have given such fervent support to Congress in the years after 1917. K.L.Gillion's otherwise admirable work on Ahmedabad was not concerned with answering this question. However, a piece he had written on the Rowlatt Satyagraha incorporated the useful concept that during this period moral authority in Ahmedabad was transferred from the British to the Indian National Congress.² But what exactly did this mean? The only study to go beyond such generalisations was an article by Anil Bhatt on Bardoli Taluka which showed that the force behind the nationalist movement in Bardoli was a Patidar caste association, the Patidar Yuvak Mandal.³

2 K.L.Gillion, 'Gujarat in 1919', in R.Kumar, Essays on Gandhian Politics, (Oxford University Press 1971), p. 143.

3 Anil Bhatt, 'Caste and Political Mobilisation in a Gujarat District' in Rajni Kothari, Caste in Indian Politics, (Orient Longmans, Delhi 1970), pp. 299-339.

The article was concerned primarily with showing how a caste association could be used to mobilise political support. Although the question of motivation was left unanswered, it was possible to use the article to suggest a theory. My first tentative conclusion was that the nationalist movement in rural Gujarat was supported by a class which was 'rising', the Patidars, and that the movement provided a vehicle for their aspirations. But as Anthony Low pointed out, I had not yet demonstrated that the Patidars needed to use the movement to compete against any particular social group in Gujarat. My tentative suggestion was that they were not competing with any particular social group in Gujarat, but that this was perhaps typical behaviour of a class of capitalistic peasants. It was in this state of uncertainty that I left for India in October 1971.

I started my search for material at the National Archives of India in Delhi. The lack of solid information was somewhat disheartening. In Delhi, I met Ranajit Guha, who opened my eyes to many of the realities of modern India. He told me to go straight to Gujarat, and immerse myself in the culture and history of the region. The archival material could wait. This somewhat anthropological approach appealed to me, and within days I was on the train to Ahmedabad.

I settled in Ahmedabad at the Gujarat Vidyapith and began to learn Gujarati. I discovered that there were some very good secondary works in Gujarati on the nationalist movement in Gujarat, and these I went through with the help of a retired Brahman schoolteacher, Bhaskerthai Dave. I began to travel out to the towns and villages around Ahmedabad. I visited Surat, and discovered that serious scholars were already working on the history of the nationalist movement in Surat District. I saw that the two key areas for the nationalist movement in rural Gujarat were Kheda and Surat Districts, and I discovered that there were several important differences in the societies of the two areas. I felt that

I could not hope to understand the movement without going down to village level, and with about six hundred villages in Kheda District alone, it would be impossible to do the sort of study I felt was needed if my attention was divided between the two districts. After much thought, I decided to concentrate on Kheda District alone.

After six months' work in Gujarat, I went to Bombay to look at the records of the Bombay Government, and to read the Bombay Chronicle for the period. The annual Collector's reports provided superb background material for the years leading up to the agitations, but unfortunately they ceased to exist in 1919, so that much of the period of the agitations was not covered. The Bombay Chronicle turned out to be good for the actual agitations, but revealed little about developments in local politics in Kheda at other times.

I returned to England in October 1972, and continued work at the India Office Library, reading through all the revenue settlement reports for Kheda, which were copious. I then wrote up the social background material, much of which forms the first four chapters of this thesis. It was at this time that I began to realise the significance of divisions amongst the Patidars themselves. This was partly as a result of reading David Pocock's study of hypergamy amongst the Patidars of Kheda.⁴ I began to realise that the Patidars were not so much competing with other social groups, but competing amongst themselves. The nationalist movement had to be examined in the light of this conflict. The difficult problem was to define the divisions within the Patidar caste.

Through the generosity of the Australian National University, I was able to spend a further five months in India, collecting information in the light of insights I had gained. I visited many villages during

4 D.Pocock, Kanbi and Patidar, (Oxford University Press 1972).

this period, and was able to get some of my best material from interviews with men who were alive during the period of the agitations. As these are an essential part of my source material, I have listed them at the end of the bibliography. I also found some very interesting material in the Baroda Records Office. I ended my stay in India in the place I had first started, the National Archives in Delhi. I read through the fortnightly reports and found some good material on the 1930-31 civil disobedience movement. I left India at the end of 1973, and spent eighteen months at the Australian National University, where the thesis took its final shape under the supervision of Anthony Low.

During the first few months of my stay in Australia, I tried out two main lines of approach. In the first approach I used an economic argument to explain the rise of nationalism in Kheda. I put forward the hypothesis that one section of the Patidar caste had been radicalised by an economic crisis. The other approach was suggested by the work of Max Weber. The Gandhian ideology which was so popular in Kheda District was imbued with a strong puritan ethic. Perhaps, therefore, the Gandhian movement proved popular among the Patidars because it was so relevant to the new capitalist age in which hard work and sobriety were well rewarded virtues. I therefore had two possible explanations for motivation, one economic, one cultural. After much thought, I decided to reject Weber in favour of Marx. The cultural explanation has its uses, but in this thesis it is used essentially as an overlay. The underlying explanation for the agitations is an economic one. During this period, I also worked out a theory for the divisions within the Patidar caste.

The thesis which has resulted bears the impression of the approach I took. A considerable period was spent working on the social background. In the thesis, the first four chapters are concerned entirely with the social history of Kheda District in the century before the agitations

took place. It might be argued that the thesis lacks balance as a result. I would not agree with this, for there are no good social histories for the area in the nineteenth century, and without a thorough grounding in this history, it is impossible to understand the agitations fully. After chapter four, there is a break to examine the emergence of nationalist ideology and activities in Gujarat. This chapter is not concerned directly with the peasants of Kheda, but it is a vital part of the whole story. In chapter six, all these threads come together in the Kheda no-revenue campaign of 1918. In this chapter, Judith Brown's work on the Kheda movement is examined.⁵ This study appeared in 1972, a year after I had started my research. I apologise to her in advance, for I have had to be very critical. The next three chapters examine the movement in Kheda in the period 1919-1934. In the conclusion, the reasons for the decline of militancy in Kheda are discussed, and theories about peasant movements in India are examined in the light of what has been discovered about the Kheda agitations.

The thesis is the result of four years' study made possible by grants from the Social Science Research Council of Great Britain and the Australian National University. My foremost debts of gratitude are towards Anthony Low, who encouraged me constantly with generous help, guidance and unabated enthusiasm for the project, and Ranajit Guha, who has on many occasions dragged me out of intellectual quagmires and suggested new lines of approach. I would also like to thank Robin Jeffrey, who read through and criticised my early efforts, and Jim Masselos, who exposed some of the weaker points of my arguments. In Canberra, many a pleasant lunch-hour was spent with Ken Gillion discussing aspects of Gujarati history. I also owe thanks to

5 Judith Brown, Gandhi's Rise to Power, (Cambridge University Press 1972), pp. 83-111.

J.B.Harrison, who first encouraged me to take up Indian history. In India, I was given invaluable help by many people. Kanu Bhavsar gave me a home in Gujarat, to him and his parents I give special thanks. Girish Pandya accompanied me around the villages of Kheda and initiated me into Kheda society. Others to whom I owe thanks are Anil Bhatt, Natvarlal Dave, Arvind Desai, Miss D.G.Keswani, Rashbehari Lal, P.G.Mavalankar, Masali Masavi, Ratubhai Parikh, Kantibhai Patel, Mr. Satyapal, Ghanshyam Shah, and the staff of the Gujarat Vidyapith. Those who gave generously of their time for interviews are listed at the end of the thesis. The institutions from which I received help were the Gujarat Vidyapith, Vallabh Vidyana-
gar, Baroda University and Bombay University. All of them at one time or another gave me accommodation at very low rates, for which I am grateful. My thanks are also due to the Governments of India, Gujarat and Maharashtra for allowing me to use their archives. I would also like to thank Mrs. Anne Hardman for putting up with my vagaries over the typing of this thesis. Above all, there is my all-encompassing debt of gratitude to my parents, which hardly needs to be stated.

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CHAPTER ONE: THE GEOGRAPHY AND PEOPLE OF NINETEENTH CENTURY KHEDA¹

Kheda District lies in the heart of the province of Gujarat in Western India. Those who travel in Gujarat can hardly avoid passing through Kheda at some stage. In times of peace these rich alluvial plains have been crossed by huge caravans laden with exotic produce. In times of war the gentle garden countryside has become the frontier between battling powers intent on pillaging the prosperous peasantry. This region, which lies between the cities of Ahmedabad and Baroda, and which includes the fabled port of Cambay, has often provided a key to the understanding of the history of Gujarat.

In 1775 James Forbes passed through the area. On 16 May he travelled from Boriavi to Mogari, two villages lying in the heart of the rich Charotar tract of Kheda. He wrote in his diary:

"At sun rise we marched from Boravee, thro [sic] a country delightful as the eye could wish - resembling a nobleman's park and gardens richly cultivated - every hedge was set off with rows of lofty Mangos, and other fruit trees, which formed very beautiful vistas, tho unadorned with buildings to terminate the view, nor otherwise decked, with any work of art - every acre of this rich country in times of peace is cultivated, and enclosed with milk bush hedges...."²

Alexander Kinloch Forbes, writing eighty years later, echoed the earlier description:

"The fields are, in the richer part of the province, enclosed with strong and high permanent hedges, which, with the noble trees that everywhere abound, render the country so close, that the boundaries of a field circumscribe the view, and unless the hum of voices, the whirr of the spinning wheel, or the barking of dogs,

1 I prefer to use the Gujarati spelling Kheda, pronounced with a soft palatal d, in preference to the English corruption - 'Kaira'. In this chapter 'Kheda' refers to the whole area lying between the Mahi and Sabarmati rivers, rather than the nineteenth century administrative division. A superb description of the area in the mid-twentieth century also exists, which should be consulted. D.F.Pocock, Kanbi and Patidar, A Study of the Patidar Community of Gujarat, (Clarendon Press, Oxford 1972), pp. 1-51.

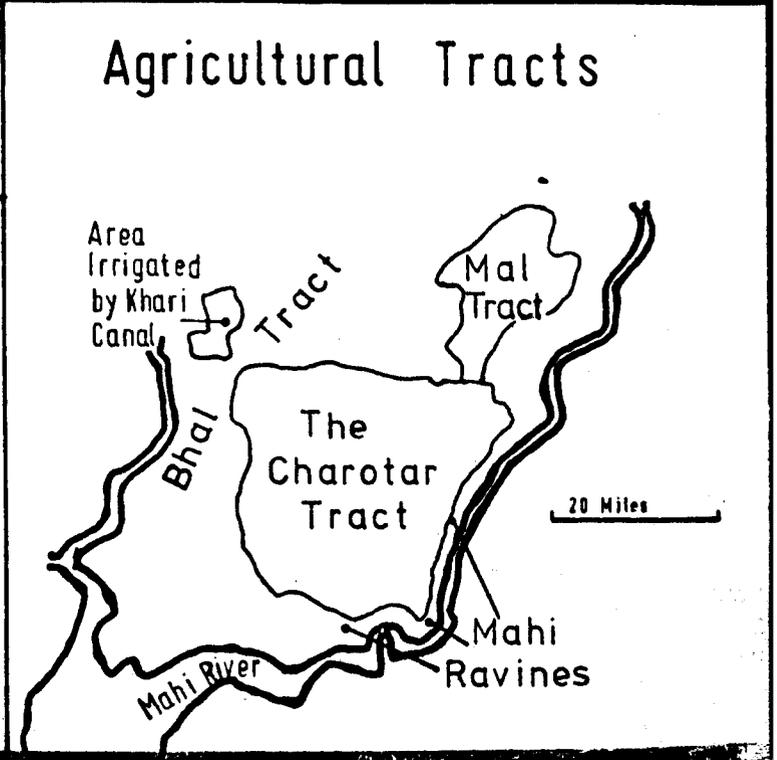
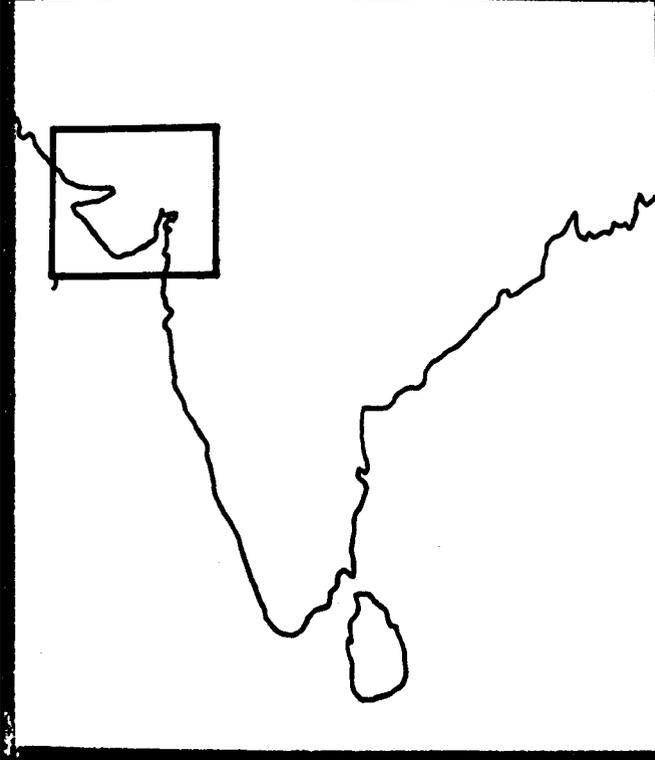
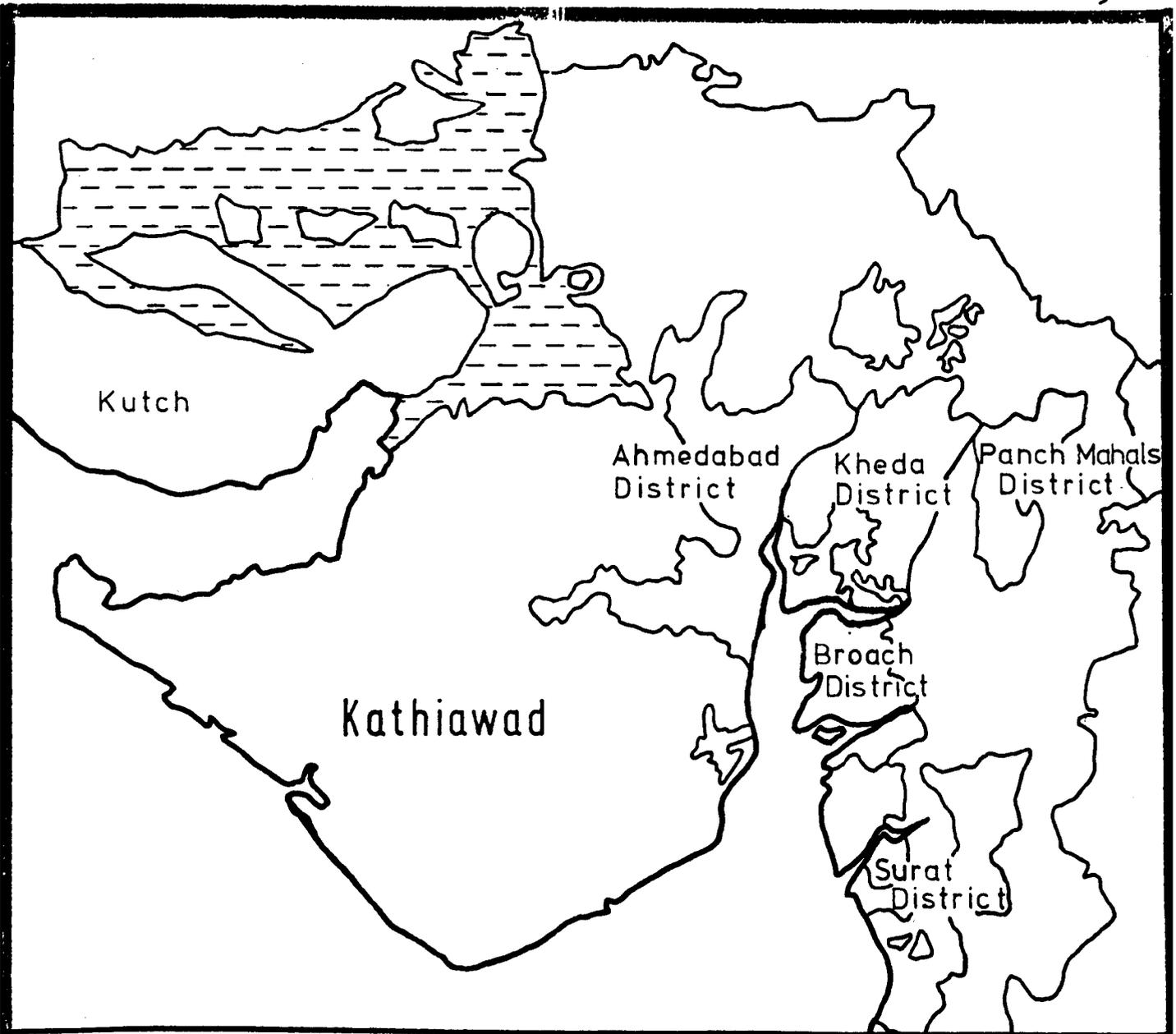
2 James Forbes, Memories of the Campaign on behalf of Ragonath Row 1775, IOL, M.S.S. Eur. B.3.

gives him notice of its vicinity, the traveller may enter a village almost unawares. Hedges and trees here swarm with birds of many varieties, from the peacock to the sparrow; game of all kinds is in great abundance, and monkeys rove about in troops, or rather in armies...."³

These descriptions evoke the fertile tract known as the Charotar, rather than the poorer lands of the north and west of Kheda District (see map one). The Charotar is known for its goradu soil, a light and shallow loam which has depended for its exceptional fertility on the constant manuring, watering and attention of the industrious Kanbi (or Patidar) farmer of the tract. The tract is renowned for its tobacco. To the north west, in the region of the Sabarmati river, lies the black soiled Bhal tract. Black, or kali, soil is the predominant soil of the Gujarati plains. The chief cash crops have been cotton and wheat. In the middle of the Bhal tract there has since the late nineteenth century been an area of rice cultivation, irrigated by the Khari Canal. The poorest land of all is found in the northeast of Kheda. This area, known as the Mal tract, is a black soil area which has a bed of limestone a few feet below the surface which is impervious to water. During the monsoon the area used to become marshy and almost impossible to cultivate. The whole Kheda area is built on the silt washed down by the Mahi and Sabarmati rivers into the Gulf of Cambay, and is without a single hill. The only variation is where the land is broken up into deep ravines along the banks of the Mahi river. In this three mile wide belt the land is of little agricultural use.

The rich plains of Gujarat were converted by conquerors for the large amounts of produce or revenue which could be squeezed from the peasants. In Sultanate times the sultan reserved the tract for himself, and in Mughal times either the Emperor or important nobles took the

³ A.K.Forbes, Ras Mala, or Hindoo Annals of the Province of Goozerat in Western India, (Richardson, London 1878), p. 541.



Map 1. British Districts of Gujarat and

revenue of the area. At this time the Charotar was defined as "Pargana Nadiad, Mahudha, in the vicinity of Petlad and some of the villages of Thamna."⁴ In this area there were 413 villages yielding a revenue of twenty-three and a half lakhs of rupees each year, an average of Rs. 5690 for each village.⁵ By comparison the village average in Viramgam Pargana, west of Ahmedabad, was Rs. 1147.⁶ Even the villages on the superior black soils of Broach Pargana paid only Rs. 2222.⁷ Under the British the high demands continued. In the three British Charotar talukas of Anand, Borsad and Nadiad the village average was Rs. 4399. In the talukas of the Bhal and Mal tracts the average was Rs. 2678.⁸ In the Petlad taluke of Baroda State, which covered much of the best land of the Charotar, the average was Rs. 8969.⁹ The British and Baroda talukas of the Charotar combined had 348 villages, which paid nineteen and three quarter lakhs each year. This was an average of Rs. 5673 for each village, a sum remarkably close to the Rs. 5690 demanded about 150 years earlier. Under British rule, Kheda became one of the most highly assessed areas in India. The revenue on the goradu lands of the Charotar was almost five times the amount paid on the best black soil lands of the Deccan. Even the poor

4 This was in the gazette of early eighteenth century Gujarat. Ali Muhammad Khan, The Mirat-i-Ahmadi Supplement, translated from the Persian by Syed Nawab Ali and C.N.Seddon, (Oriental Institute, Baroda 1928), p. 207.

5 The figures are given in 'Dams' (40 to a rupee); I have converted them and given the figure to the nearest half lakh. Ibid, pp. 162-170.

6 Ibid, p. 166

7 Ibid, p. 175.

8 Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, Volume III, Kaira and Panch Mahals, (Government Central Press, Bombay 1879), p. 1, (hereafter Kheda Gazetteer)

9 A Jamabandi Settlement Report of the Petlad Taluka and Sisva Mahal, (Government Printing Press, Baroda, 1902).

Mal tract lands paid half as much again as the Deccan black soil lands.¹⁰

The farmers of Kheda were almost totally dependent on the monsoon, which produced about thirty-five inches of rain in an average year. In Darsad Taluka in 1867 over eighty per cent of the land was without any form of irrigation.¹¹ The rivers, in their deep beds, were not easily used for irrigation canals. The British only built one small canal, the Khari, opened in 1881 in the west of the District. Elsewhere irrigation continued to depend on wells and tanks. The water table in Kheda was exceptionally deep, and expensive masonry-lined wells usually had to be dug. This perhaps contributed to the growth of a particularly responsible and industrious farming community in the area, for such a well was a very long term investment.

In the nineteenth century almost all the land in Kheda was planted with foodcrops. In 1890-91 cereals took up eighty-three per cent of the cropped area of the district, pulses twelve per cent.¹² Most farming was of a subsistence kind. Probably only about one-fifth of the land was used for cash crops. These cash crops were mainly grown to pay the land revenue demands, which had been collected in cash since Mughal times. The chief cereals grown for subsistence were the varieties of millet called bajri (32% of the cropped area) and juvar (8%) which were made into rotli, the flat unleavened bread which was the farmers' staple diet. Kodra (16%) and ragi (8%) were inferior cereals grown and eaten by poorer people. Pulses, cooked in the form of dal, provided the farmers' protein. Pulses and rice (15%) were consumed by the farmers, as well as being sold on the

10 Papers relating to the Revision Survey Settlement of the Kapadvanj Taluka of the Kaira collectorate, Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government. No.CCCXXVIII, New Series, (Government Central Press, Bombay 1895), p.5. (hereafter Bombay Selections).

11 Correspondence relating to the introduction of the Revenue Survey Assessment in the Kaira Collectorate. Bombay Selections CXIV, (Bombay 1869), p. 258.

12 All percentages in this and the next paragraph from: Kheda Gazetteer Vol. III-B, (Government Central Press, Bombay 1926), p.7.

market. Rice and wheat (2%) were considered luxury crops, eaten only by the rich, or when guests needed to be impressed.

The only non foodcrops of importance were tobacco (3%), cotton (2%), and mhowra. When tobacco had first appeared in India in the seventeenth century, the Charotar farmers had been among the first to grow this profitable crop. In 1865 an acre of irrigated tobacco land could yield an annual profit of Rs. 240.¹³ However, before the twentieth century cultivation was limited. It was a labour intensive crop requiring a large initial capital outlay. Cultivation was always confined to the Charotar. Cotton was grown entirely in the Bhal tract. The farmers also benefited from the demand for mhowra berries and ghi. The mhowra berry came from the trees which surrounded the Charotar fields, and was used for the distillation of the local spirit, daru. The Charotar was also famous for its dairy produce. In the days before refrigeration exports had to be in the form of ghi. The milk was almost entirely from buffaloes.

The peasants did not usually go to the towns to sell their produce. Smaller peasants sold their surplus grain and cash crop to a village dealer, who in turn sold to a town merchant. The village dealer could be the local trader, but was often a rich farmer. More prosperous peasants usually sold directly to the urban dealer. At harvest time these urban dealers toured the villages to inspect the crops and bargain for a price with the village dealers or farmers. After the produce had been taken by bullock cart to market, the villagers were paid in cash.¹⁴

13 Correspondence relating to the introduction of the Revenue Survey Assessment in the Kaira Collectorate. Bombay Selections CXIV (Government Central Press, Bombay 1869), p. 146.

14 Kheda Gazetteer, pp. 74-75. M.B.Desai, The Rural Economy of Gujarat, (Oxford University Press, Bombay 1948), pp. 249-250.

Kheda was well served with markets. Besides the many large and wealthy villages with their small bazaars, there were thirteen major market centres. The great urban market of Ahmedabad also lay a few miles to the north-west. The most valuable export crop was tobacco. The best tobacco was sold for hookah and snuff in Ahmedabad, Baroda, Broach, Surat and Bombay. Inferior tobacco was sold for bidi, chalam and chewing in Rajasthan, Central India and Bombay.¹⁵ The chief mhowra market was at Anand, and distillers came from all over Gujarat to buy. Ghi was mostly exported to South Gujarat. This trade alone was worth eight lakhs annually, a sum equivalent to two-fifths of the District land revenue demand.¹⁶ Cotton and rice from the Bhal tract mainly went to Ahmedabad.

The larger Charotar villages were noted for their many well built houses. The richer Kanbis usually lived in two-storied wood or brick houses with tiled roofs. In front of the house was a courtyard, in which cattle, farm implements and manure were kept. The houses themselves had wide verandas, in which there were beds, or sometimes a swing, on which the Kanbis could relax in the evenings smoking their hookah. In a few very prosperous villages the facades of the houses were richly covered in ornate woodcarvings. The interiors of the houses were dark, and sparsely furnished. Poorer Kanbis lived in single-storied thatched mud huts. These often had a division down the centre, one side being for living, the other keeping the bullocks and buffaloes at night. Lower castes lived in more decrepit mud huts in their own sections of the village. Landless labourers often lived in frame huts covered in leaves in the fields. These were only uncomfortably cold to live in for about two months during the winter.

15 Bombay Selections CXIV, (1869), pp. 144-145.

16 Kheda Gazetteer, p. 74.

The villages were usually very compact, for land was valuable in the Charotar. The streets were dusty and rutted in the dry weather, virtual streams in the monsoon. Little black pigs scavenged in the filth. Naked children played about in the dirt, for at that time children did not wear clothes until about the age of eight. The magnificent white Charotar bullocks, for which the area was famed, could be seen being led by the thin, meagrely clad landless labourers. Potters, blacksmiths, carpenters, tailors and shoemakers could all be seen at work in their open fronted houses. In the centre of the village was the open space called the chora. In the centre was a pipal tree surrounded by a cement platform about three feet high and three feet broad. The farmers would squat on this in the evening, gossiping. Announcements and speeches could be made from this platform. The government offices, where the revenue records were held, were usually at the chora. For most of the day the village had a lethargic appearance, but there were bursts of activity. At dawn the people went to the fields to relieve themselves. Halfway through the morning the buffaloes were released to flock to the village tank, where they wallowed for the rest of the day. The womenfolk went to the well to draw water, and the men to the fields to farm. In the evening the cattle trudged back, stirring up the dust in the sunset, and the farmers returned for their evening hookah. At night the villages were very dark and very silent.

In 1881 about fifteen per cent of the Kheda population lived in towns. By today's standards the towns had a very rural appearance. Even in the largest town of Nadiad, many of the inhabitants went out each day to farm the surrounding fields. People often kept cattle and other livestock in their houses. The most obvious feature of the towns were the streets of shops, each confined to one particular trade or product. There were the rows of moneylenders, goldsmiths, shoemakers, cloth merchants,

food sellers and the dealers in spices, perfumes, incense and brassware.

Towns existed for a variety of reasons. They were usually market centres for the agricultural produce of surrounding areas. Credit could be obtained from the urban moneylenders and bankers. They were manufacturing centres. They could be the seat of government, or perhaps a pilgrimage or education centre. A town had to fulfill some of these functions if it was to prosper. In the nineteenth century the most flourishing towns in Kheda were Nadiad, Kapadvanj and Umreth. None of these were major centres of government. Nadiad was the largest, with a population of 28,304 in 1881.¹⁷ Nadiad had been a Kanbi village which had risen with the dramatic success of the leading Kanbi family under Mughal rule. In 1864 the main railway line between Bombay and Ahmedabad was opened, passing through the town. In 1876 Kheda's first cotton mill was opened at Nadiad. The second largest town was Umreth (14,643), a prosperous trading centre with a large population of the industrious Khedaval Brahmans. Kapadvanj (14,442) was famous for its Bohra Muslim traders and bankers. In 1864 C.J.Prescott wrote about Kapadvanj:

"Kafilas take this road 'en route' to Ahmedabad from Central India, and during the entire fair season immense caravans halt here regularly. Large quantities of tobacco grown in Neriad, Pitlad, Borsad, come to the merchants here for transmission to "Malwa" and "Marwad", and it would appear that piece goods, hardware, country-manufactured cotton sarries, silk sarries, and turbans, soap, glass bangles, and many articles of domestic utility are very largely exported from this flourishing town to the Gaekwar's territories, the Myheecaunta, the Panch Mahals, the Balasinore Country, and Central India."¹⁸

In Mughal times these towns had manufactured products for a world market. In the nineteenth century the international demand for such hand made artifacts had declined, but there was still a local market. The towns had not yet become mere staying posts for industrially produced goods on their way to the villages.¹⁹

17 This and other town population figures from: Kheda Gazetteer III-B (Bombay 1904), p. 8.

18 Bombay Selections, CXIV, (1869), p. 690.

19 Other towns were, with 1881 population:

The headquarter town of the district was Kheda. In the past Petlad had been the local administrative centre, but in the nineteenth century it had come under the rule of the Gaikwad of Baroda. The town was in any case declining. The great trade route from Cambay to Ahmedabad, and thence to Central and North India, had passed through Petlad, Sojitra and Kheda towns. By the nineteenth century Bombay had become the entrepot for Western India, and goods now went to Ahmedabad on the railway via Nadiad. The main railway line missed Petlad by fifteen miles. Logically Nadiad should have been the British headquarters town. However, in 1803 Kheda town was chosen as a British military base for its supposedly salubrious climate, and in 1817 it was made the district headquarters. Kheda, like Petlad, had declined since the demise of the Cambay trade. Its isolated position in the western corner of the district made it hard for the British officials to gain a feel for local conditions. The climate subsequently turned out to be malarious. The only advantage appears to have been the excellent hunting in the area. The Bombay Government often considered moving the Collector's office to Nadiad, but never actually took the step.

During the nineteenth century the population of Kheda doubled to 872,000.²⁰ By the end of the century the Charotar had an extremely

19 (continued from previous page)

Petlad	14,418	Mahudha	9,440
Kheda	12,640	Anand	9,271
Borsad	12,228	Mehmedabad	8,173
Sojitra	10,253	Dakor	7,710
Balasinore	9,718	Matar	4,889

Petlad and Sojitra figures from Baroda Census Report 1881, Gam var jat, (Government Printing Press, Baroda 1881).

20 The population of Kheda under British rule was as follows (the earlier figures are very rough):

1826	450,000	1901	716,332
1846	566,513	1911	691,744
1872	782,733	1921	710,982
1881	805,005	1931	741,650
1891	871,794	1941	914,957

1826 - Bombay Selections X, p. 135. Bombay Selections XI, pp. 54, 63, 78, 85, 107, 114, 117, 118. 1846 and 1872 - Kheda Gazetteer, pp. 25-38, 143-165. 1891 and 1901 - Kheda Gazetteer, III-B, (1904), pp. 5, 9, 1911 and 1921 - Kheda Gazetteer, III-B, (1926), p. 1. 1931 - Census of India 1931, Vol. VIII, Bombay Presidency, Part II, Statistical Tables, (Government Central Press, Bombay 1932), p. 412. 1941 - Census of India 1941, Vol. III, Bombay Tables (Government of India Press, Simla 1941), p. 108.

high population density. In the Petlad Taluka in 1891 there were 784 people to the square mile.²¹ This can be compared to Kapadvanj Taluka in the north of Kheda, which in the same year had a density of 363 to the square mile, and to Bombay Presidency, in which the average density was 151 to the square mile.²²

The percentages of the population by caste for Kheda and the Charotar were as follows:²³

	<u>Kheda</u>	<u>Charotar</u>
Brahman	7	5
Rajput	3	7
Vania	4	3
Kanbi	20	32
Artisan castes	6	8
Koli	36	23
Muslim	9	8
Dhed	5	6
Bhangi	2	2
Other castes	<u>8</u>	<u>6</u>
	100	100

The high castes of Kheda were the Brahmans, Rajputs, Vanias and Kanbis. In towns these castes lived in distinct sections, and had little social contact. In the village they mixed freely, spending their evenings gossiping and smoking together.²⁴ Centuries of Muslim rule, egalitarian Jain doctrines and Bhakti movements, had meant that of all caste Hindus

21 Census of India 1891, Vol. XXIV Baroda, Part I, Report, (Education Society Press, Bombay 1894), p. 18.

22 Kheda Gazetteer III-B, (1904), p.5. Census of India 1891, Vol. VII, Bombay Presidency, Part I, Report, (Government Central Press, Bombay 1892), p. 5.

23 The figures for the whole of British Kheda District were for 1872 when there was a population of 782,733. Kheda was not a homogeneous area, and the figures are not very useful. The Kheda figures have often been used in descriptions of the Charotar, which has led to the Kanbi percentage of the population being grossly underestimated. It is interesting to note that in fact the Kanbi were easily the largest single caste in the area in which they were most dominant. The Charotar figures were for the 106 villages of Petlad Taluka and Sisva Mahal of Baroda State, which in 1881 had a population of 196,026. These villages lay in the heart of the Charotar. Unfortunately the only detailed figures available for Kheda were for 1872, and for Petlad and Sisva for 1881. Kheda Gazetteer, pp. 29-37. Baroda Census Report, 1881, Gam var jat.

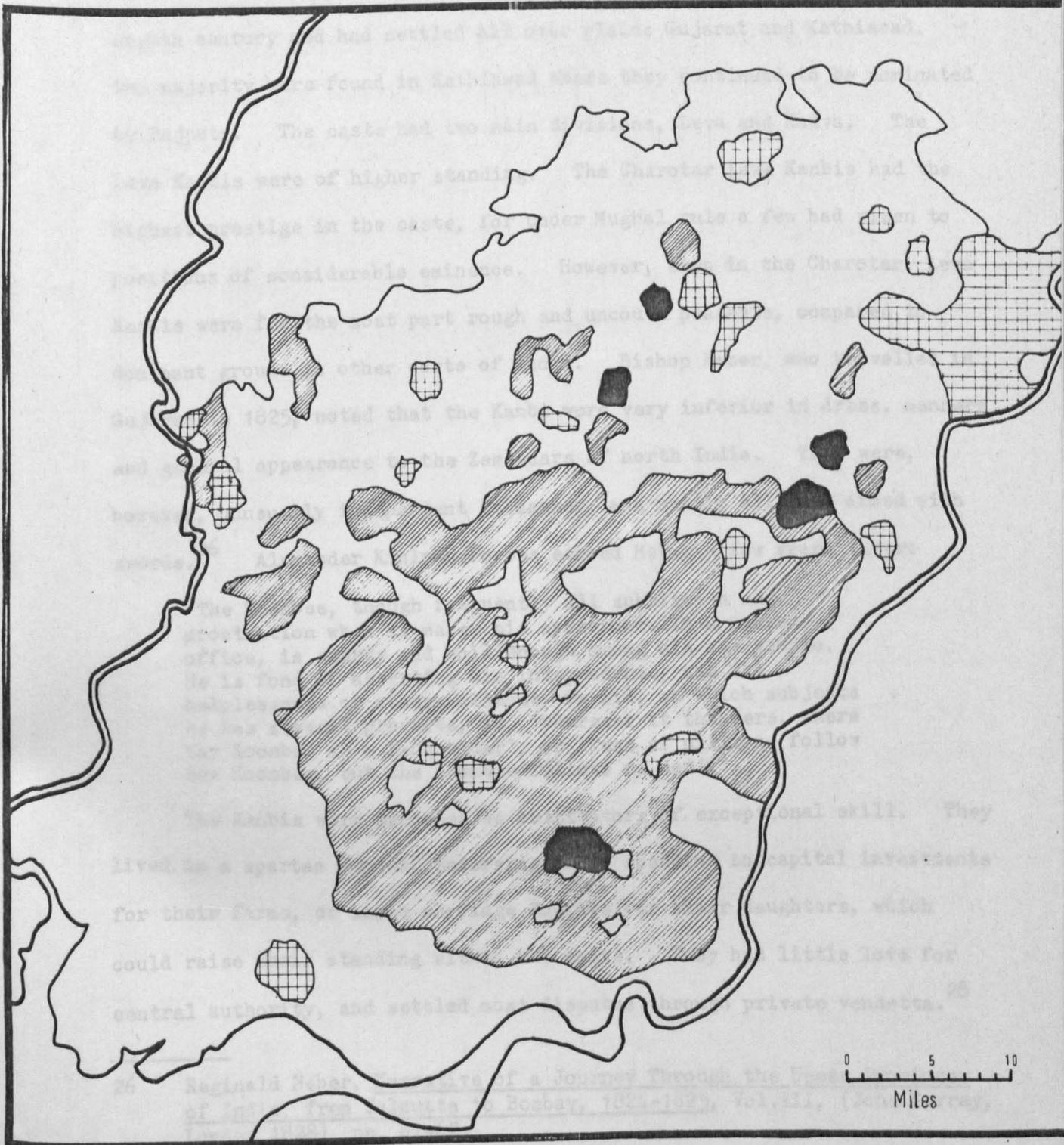
24 Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, Vol. IX. Gujarat Population Hindoos, (Government Central Press, Bombay 1901), p. xxii. (hereafter Gazetteer of Gujarat Hindus).

Gujaratis were probably least concerned about ritual pollution. Different villages were dominated by different castes. In the Charotar most villages were dominated by Kanbis, while in villages in other parts of Kheda Rajputs, Baraiyas and Muslims were usually the most powerful castes. The map gives an idea of the areas of dominance.

Before the fifteenth century the Rajputs had been dominant in the area. Gujarat came under nominal Muslim rule in 1297, but it was only after 1403, when the great dynasty of Ahmedabad Sultans broke away from Delhi, that the Rajputs came under serious attack. Many were chased into the hills. Others were put out of caste by the brutal but effective strategy of forcing their womenfolk to join the sultan's harem. When Rawal Satrasalsingh of Matar was ordered to give up his daughter, he chose to die rather than accept such a dishonour, she herself fled into life long exile.²⁵ The lands confiscated from Rajputs were either brought directly under the sultan, or given as grants to his soldiers. Rajputs continued to rule in the hilly country on the fringes of Gujarat, and in Saurashtra, or Kathiawad, where Rajput Kingdoms continued till 1948. The Rajput tradition of ruling thus continued as a constant reminder to the Rajputs and their low caste imitators as to their true dharma. In Kheda itself the Rajput lived dissipated lives, dreaming of their glorious past. They had become the lowest of all Indian Rajputs, and were looked down on by Kanbis and Vanias for their flesh-eating and opium-smoking habits. The population percentages for Rajputs (Kheda 3% and especially Charotar 7%) were probably somewhat high, as many Baraiyas liked to claim to be Rajputs.

After the decline of the Rajputs, the Leva Kanbis became the dominant caste of the Charotar. The nature of this dominance will be examined in the next chapter. The Kanbis had probably come from north India in the

25 S.C.Misra, The Rise of Muslim Power in Gujarat, (Asia Publishing House, London 1963), p. 207.



Map 2. AREAS of DOMINANCE.



Patidar- dominated areas .



Baraiya " "



Muslim " "



Brahman " "

eight century and had settled all over plains Gujarat and Kathiawad. The majority were found in Kathiawad where they continued to be dominated by Rajputs. The caste had two main divisions, Leva and Kadva. The Leva Kanbis were of higher standing. The Charotar Leva Kanbis had the highest prestige in the caste, for under Mughal rule a few had risen to positions of considerable eminence. However, even in the Charotar, Leva Kanbis were for the most part rough and uncouth peasants, compared to dominant groups in other parts of India. Bishop Heber, who travelled in Gujarat in 1825, noted that the Kanbi were very inferior in dress, manners and general appearance to the Zamindars of north India. They were, however, unusually independent in manner, and nearly all were armed with swords.²⁶ Alexander Kinloch Forbes echoed Heber a few years later:

"The Koonbee, though frequently all submission and prostration when he makes his appearance in a revenue office, is sturdy and bold enough among his own people. He is fond of asserting his independence, and the helplessness of others without his aid, on which subjects he has several proverbs, as, 'Wherever it thunders, there the Koonbee is a landholder', or 'Tens of millions follow the Koonbee, but the Koonbee follows no man'."²⁷

The Kanbis were renowned as cultivators of exceptional skill. They lived in a spartan manner, reserving their spending to capital investments for their farms, or large marriage dowries for their daughters, which could raise their standing within the caste. They had little love for central authority, and settled most disputes through private vendetta.²⁸

26 Reginald Heber, Narrative of a Journey Through the Upper Provinces of India, from Calcutta to Bombay, 1824-1825, Vol.III, (John Murray, London 1828), pp. 61-62.

27 A.K.Forbes, Ras Mala, p. 542.

28 The Collector of Kheda wrote in 1899: "On the other hand the Patidars of Borsad show no improvement in their propensity for plotting vile and cowardly murders. Unfortunately it is very rarely that conviction is obtained in such cases. Here then we have a well-to-do section of the community, better educated than the Dharalas or Dheds, showing an undiminished disposition for revenge but whose methods are abominable in the extreme. In comparison with these patidars even the Dharalas crimes almost sink into insignificance."
Collector's Report, Kheda 1898-99, BA, RD. 1900, Vol. 30, 137 Part II, p. 48.

The archetypal Kanbi was short and thickset with a large droopy moustache. In the nineteenth century they dressed in the traditional Gujarati costume of red turban, the white keliyu coat with its short pleated skirt, and white chorano, a jodhpur style trouser. Before 1900 the caste was almost always known as 'Kanbi'. In the twentieth century the name 'Patidar' became popular. In deference to historical convention the caste will therefore be referred to as 'Kanbi' when describing events before 1900, and 'Patidar' afterwards.

In Gujarat Brahmans were not greatly respected. Centuries of Jainism, then Muslim rule, had badly undermined their position. In Kheda District there were over forty different Brahman jati.²⁹ However, most came from ten main groups.³⁰ About a fifth were in the bureaucracy or business, the rest being fairly evenly divided between those living by cultivation, and those acting in a religious capacity.³¹ The cultivating Brahmans were usually considered respectable peasants, on a par with the Kanbis. They were dominant in a few villages, such as Borsad, where even the headman was a Brahman. The priestly Brahmans had to make a living from schoolmastering, cookery, begging and fees from religious ceremonies.

There were two exceptions to the rule. The Baj Khedaval Brahmans, who were chiefly found in the towns of Umreth and Mahudha, were prominent

29 The Gazetteer of Hindus for Bombay Presidency (1901) mentions 41 different Brahman jati in Kheda District. The list is not exhaustive, a census of Petlad town in 1841-42 had four other Brahman jati not in the Gazetteer list. Gazetteer Vol. IX, p.3. BRO, Revenue Department, General Daftar No.1400, Ferist II, Bundle 3, Mulki sambhandi pragane petlad vasti patraka badal.

30	Audich	23	Vadadras	6
	Khedaval	23	Gauds	5
	Mevadas	10	Nagars	3
	Modhs	8	Borsadas	2
	Tapodhans	7	Nandoras	2
			Other Kheda Brahmans	<u>11</u>
				100

Gazetteer of Gujarat Hindus, p. 3.

31 This statement is based on all-Gujarat figures. Ibid, p. 22.

as traders, moneylenders, absentee landowners and government servants. They owned most of the land in a wide area around Umreth. The Nagar Brahmans, who in Kheda mostly lived at Nadiad and Potlad, were known as an exceptionally pure caste, with very fair skin. They were great administrators. Mughal Viceroys in Gujarat, eighteenth-century adventurers, and nineteenth-century princes of Kathiawad had often depended on Nagar advisers. This small jati wielded immense power. Through nepotism they ensured that the best posts in princely Gujarat were filled by Nagar Brahmans. The political history of nineteenth century Kathiawad was largely that of the rise and fall of Nagar administrations.³² In the nineteenth century many Nagars had also become bankers and business men.

The Nagars of Nadiad were famous throughout Gujarat. Greatest of all was Mansukhram Tripathi (1840-1907) who became a millionaire by speculating on the Bombay stock market in the early 1860s. He became the Bombay agent for a number of Kathiawad states, which gave him immense powers of patronage. The Nagars of Nadiad were the foremost literary talents of the time in Gujarat. Most famous was Govardhanram Tripathi (1844-1907), whose monumental four volume Sarasvatichandra is still considered to be the finest Gujarati novel. The Nagars were a very conservative group, for their power depended on the continuation of traditional princely rule in India. In different circumstances they would have perhaps been pioneers of western ideas, or even the leaders of a vigorous Congress movement in Gujarat in the late nineteenth century.

The Vantias were probably the best known of all Gujarati castes. From time immemorial they had profited from the sea trade with the civilisations of the Middle East, China, the Mediterranean and Europe. Their ethic of sobriety, non-violence and ascetic thrift had strongly influenced the Brahmans and Kanbis of Gujarat. In the cities the majority of Vantias were Jain. In Kheda District most were Hindus

32 Census of India 1891, Vol. XXIV, Baroda, Part I, Report, p. 410.

of the Vallabhacharya Vaishnavite sect. Only a quarter were Jain.³³ Although there were seventeen separate Vania sub-divisions, nearly half belonged to a local group called the Khadayata Vanias.³⁴ The Vanias of Kheda had few contracts with the Vanias of Ahmedabad or Bombay. The Gujarati traders in Bombay, such as the Kapol Vanias, Bhatias and Lohanas were mostly of Kathiawari origin. The Kheda Vanias were often considered somewhat coarse, perhaps because they in turn had been influenced by the practical peasant outlook of the dominant Kanbis.

Most Vanias lived in the market towns where they made up about one tenth of the population.³⁵ In many of these towns they were the leading figures in the mahajan, or trade guild. Mahajans were extremely strong in the nineteenth century, and only began to decline in the twentieth century. The town Vanias owned shops, acted as bankers and moneylenders, and also travelled in the surrounding countryside buying farm produce for retail. They often acquired the land of peasants in debt to them, but preferred to rack rent it from the comfortable distance of the city, rather than attempt to cultivate it personally. In Kanbi villages the Vanias had little power. A few ran general stores, but even in this field Kanbis predominated.³⁶ Most of the lending in these villages was between Kanbis, and large loans were obtained direct from urban Vanias. Relations between Vanias and Kanbis were generally harmonious. In the Baraiya villages Vanias had greater economic power as moneylenders and dealers in local produce.

33 Kheda Gazetteer, p. 30.

34 Gazetteer of Gujarat Hindus, p. 69.

35 This figure is based on the Vania population in the towns of Petlad and Sojitra. Vadodra. Ganvar vastino dehjhado tatha jat. Book 1 (Baroda Government Press, Baroda 1902), pp. 809-840.

36 In 1883 it was reported that the Kanbis of Petlad Taluka were fast becoming the leading petty traders in the area. Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, Vol. VII, Baroda (Government Central Press, Bombay 1883), p. 126.

The most important of the low caste groups were those known as Koli, Dharala or Baraiya. Little is known of their early history, but they were probably the original inhabitants of the Gujarat plains before the Rajputs and Kanbis appeared. In the eighteenth century they had a reputation for ferocity:

"The Kolis hastened to plunder,
Like beastly wolves towards flocks of sheep."³⁷

However, it seems unlikely that all Kolis were like this. 'Koli' was not the name of an actual caste, but a vague term used to describe the low castes of central Gujarat. The largest Koli jati in Kheda was that of the Talpadas, or Baraiyas. In Kheda they made up about four-fifths of the Koli population. The second largest group were the Patanvadias, who were considered to be of lower status.³⁸ In this study the names 'Baraiya' or 'Patanvadia' will henceforth be preferred to the vague 'Koli' or 'Dharala'.

The majority of Baraiyas in Kheda were of a peaceful disposition, and worked as labourers for the Kanbis, or were landowning farmers in the areas of the District in which they were dominant. In the Charotar itself they were usually the farm servants of the Kanbis. The Kanbis worked their land intensively, using Baraiya labour freely, because the Charotar land was valuable, and had to be exploited to the maximum. Baraiyas were usually hired on an annual basis, and by 1900 were being paid partly in cash, partly in kind. They were too dependent on their patron's good will to be rebellious. Some possessed small plots of the poorer land in Kanbi villages, but because they were exploited by the Kanbis and Vantias they had little incentive to farm well. In several

37 Ali Muhammad Khan, Mirat-i-ahmadi, translated by M.F.Lokhandwala, (Oriental Institute, Baroda 1965), p. 797.

38 Census of India, 1891, Bombay, Part II, Tables, (Government Central Press, Bombay 1892), pp. 202-207.

Charotar villages the Baraiyas were dominant, but these tended to be service villages for nearby Kanbi farms, and during the nineteenth century the Baraiyas increasingly lost their lands in these villages to Kanbi and Vania moneylenders.

Elsewhere in the district the Baraiyas were dominant in the majority of villages. In 1864 the revenue official C.J.Prescott described the Baraiyas of north Kheda:

"Not being possessed of capital or a large amount of credit like their more fortunate Patidar brethren, they conduct their agricultural operations in the most slovenly and unremunerative manner possible, being quite content if their fields yield sufficient grains for them to subsist on for a few months and enable them to contract a fresh loan occasionally with the village moneylenders... As a natural consequence of this feeling there is a good deal of indebtedness among the Koli agricultural population... Hardly a man seems to be aware of the extent of his liabilities with the money-lender; and with regard to the prospect of paying off his debts he evinces the most lofty and supreme contempt... Some of the Kolis, however, spoke in, as it seemed to me, half regretful terms of the 'good old times' when to a great extent 'might was right', and when, according to their account, it was by no means an unusual occurrence for a 'Dharala' gentleman of embarrassed circumstances to get rid of his own liabilities and his creditors' existence at one and the same moment." 39

The groups which had the strongest claim to wolflike ferocity were the Patanvadias and the Baraiyas of the Mahi ravines. These two groups made strong claims to the Kshatriya Varna, and to prove it often took part in dacoities. In the eighteenth century they had given support to military adventures in their quest for status. The Baraiyas of the Mahi ravines had risen to prominence at this time by looting travellers and merchants as they forded the river. The British had recognised many of these robber chief as talukdars. In the nineteenth century they ruled their villages in the autocratic Rajput fashion. They often

tortured agriculturists of their villages to get more revenue out of them.⁴⁰ Their chief diversions were opium, family intrigues and raids by night on the Kanbis and Vantias in their rich Charotar villages.

There was thus a certain amount of tension in the District between the puritan Kanbis and the Baraiyas with their Kshatriya fantasies. The Kanbis looked down on the Baraiyas, who they believed to be disreputable, thriftless, and worst of all, sexually loose, for they often changed wives. But in some respects the Baraiyas were better off. In 1891 Colonel Mackintosh wrote:

"Some of the Koli women are very pretty. When compared with the stout, robust and often coarse Kanbi women, a very considerable difference is perceptible."⁴¹

The Muslims of Kheda were of two main types, the cultivating Muslims and the Bohras. The largest cultivating group was of Muslims claiming to be descended from the original invaders of India, the Ashraf.⁴² They were probably descended from Muslim soldiers who had been given grants of land for their services. The Sipai were local converts, and besides being cultivators, filled most of the lower grades of the District police force. The Molesalams were descended from Rajputs who had been forcibly converted to Islam, and the Maleks were local converts who had become landlords in several villages in northern Thasra Taluka. The majority of Muslims in Kheda lived by cultivation, usually as landowners, but sometimes as landless labourers. In 1899 the Assistant Collector,

40 Vikas 30 May 1929, Bombay Native Newspaper Reports 1929, p. 680.

41 Census of India 1891, Vol. XXIV, Baroda, Part 1 Report, p. 402.

42 Muslim groups by percentage of the Muslim population of 70,741 in Kheda in 1872:

Ashraf	34	Maleks	10
Sipai	22	Sunni Bohra	4
Shia Bohra	11	Others	9
Molesalam	10		
			100

Kheda Gazetteer, p. 36.

G.A.Beyts, wrote about them:

"The Mussalman is a bad cultivator and appears to esteem successful cultivation as derogatory to his respect. Talking to a Mahomedan Mukhi who complained of the poverty of his soil (which appeared to be excellent) and remonstrating with him for his want of care and for not manuring his ground I was confronted with an argument which was in his opinion convincing. 'But I am not a Patidar; why should I do all this?' " 43

It has often been stated that Hindus and Muslims co-existed happily in the villages in the days before British divide-and-rule policies and the Muslim League. This was not so in Kheda. During the nineteenth century villages and towns were by no means free of minor Hindu-Muslim riots at the time of Moharram. The Muslims had a reputation among Kanbis for creeping into their fields at night and stealing their crops, and also for letting loose their cattle to graze on Kanbi fields. The Muslims could never forget that they had once ruled these Kanbi peasants, and even though the Kanbis now had economic power, they still thought of them with contempt. The Kanbis, on the other hand, felt that the Muslims did not know their place. The problem was made worse by the fact that the British favoured Muslims when appointing policemen. These Muslims used their position in the police to enrich themselves through bribes. They did little to keep down crime and were hated throughout the district.

The Bohra Muslims were an exception to this rule. The Shia Bohras (Daudi and Sulemani) were probably descended from Arab traders who had come to the shore of Gujarat centuries before the period of Muslim rule. They had become like Vantias in all but religion, and there has never been a history of tension between Bohoras and Gujarat Hindus. They were an enterprising and wealthy class. Their centre in Kheda was Kapadvanj.

43 . Assistant Collectors Report 1898-1899, BA, R.D. 1900, Vol. 30, pp. 194-195.

Along with Nagar Brahmans, the Kapadvanj Bohras were the only group in Kheda to have strong links with Bombay City. Many Kapadvanj Bohras made their fortunes in Bombay. The Sunni Bohras were usually known as Ghanchi Bohras, and were found in most villages in Kheda working as oil pressers. In dress and costume they could hardly be distinguished from Hindus.

The only other group of any size in Kheda were the artisan classes and the untouchables. Artisans were more numerous in towns than in villages.⁴⁴ In the villages artisans entered into an annual arrangement with the farmers. Thus, in Arera village in 1824, the blacksmiths used to receive an annual one and a quarter maunds of grain for each plough belonging to each farmer. In return for this he had to keep all the farmer's agricultural implements in working order.⁴⁵ The system appears to have changed little during the century, but in the twentieth century cash payments became more popular. The vast majority of untouchables were either Dheds or Bhangis. The Dheds were considered the least impure, and by tradition were weavers. Although most were forced to turn to other occupations in the nineteenth century, especially agricultural labour, a number continued to earn a living weaving the coarse but comfortable Khadi cloth, which farmers liked to wear while working in the fields. The Bhangis were the lowest of the low, and were by tradition sweepers. In fact sweepers were not needed in villages, for most people relieved themselves in the fields. It is probable that the main task of the Bhangis was to remove and skin dead animals.⁴⁶

44 In Petlad Taluka in 1901 artisans made up 7% of the village population, 12% of the town population.
See footnote 35.

45 Bombay Selections, XI, (Bombay 1853), p. 76.

46 D.F.Pocock, Kanbi and Patidar, pp. 41-42.

CHAPTER TWO: THE STRUCTURE OF LOCAL DOMINANCE

1. The traditional village structure

In the last chapter the Kanbis were described as being dominant in Charotar society. In this chapter we shall examine exactly what this meant, and how the structure of dominance changed under British rule. The concept of dominance has been defined by Louis Dumont as having five characteristics. These were: (1) relatively eminent right over the land; (2) power to build up a clientele from other castes; (3) power of local justice; (4) monopoly of local authority, so that dominant castes were likely to be appointed as local officials by the state; (5) in many cases, kingly practices such as meat diet and polygyny.¹ The last characteristic did not apply to Kanbis, who only had a few customs based on Rajput practices, such as hypergamy. The customs of the Kanbis were a polyglot mixture of Rajput, Vania, Muslim and Maratha influences. Dumont would be on stronger ground if he defined his last characteristic as 'imitation of rulers or important castes in an area'. But the Kanbis conformed to the other four characteristics. In this section we shall examine how such dominance was organized at village level.

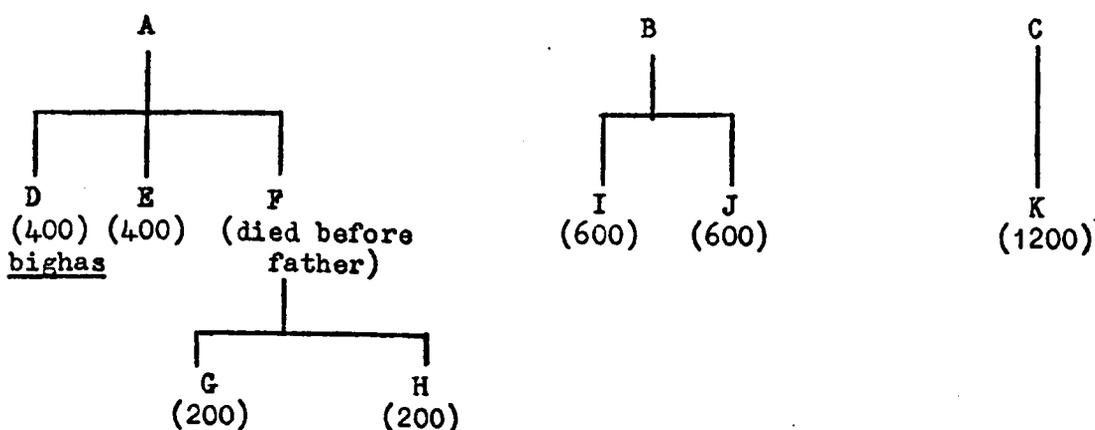
It is possible to trace the pre-British system of village dominance from an admirable settlement report written in 1862 by the British official, W.G. Pedder.² Through this report we can understand the underlying logic of the traditional system. In the Charotar it was called the narva system. Pedder over-simplified the system. In reality each village had its own eccentricities, and the system as a whole was of

1 Louis Dumont, Homo Hierarchicus, (Paladin, London 1970), p. 207.

2. 'Correspondence relating to the introduction of the Revenue Survey Assessment in the Kaira Collectorate', Bombay Selections, CXIV, (1869).

baffling complexity.³ In the following description we shall follow Pedder in ignoring the complexities in favour of the underlying structure.

The system was based on the holding of shares in a village. The original shares were those held by the founder of the village. Nadiad, for instance, was founded with four families sharing the land.⁴ These original shares were called moti bhag (large share). Over the years they were divided by inheritance. A simplified example is set out below. The area of the original village land was 5000 bighas. 1400 bighas were set aside as common land (majmun). The rest were divided as follows:⁵



In this example D, E, G, H, I, J, K, were all alive and holding the amount of land indicated in the brackets. They were called patidars, or holders of a pati, which meant the same as bhag, or share.

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- 3 This point was brought home to me when I read a Baroda report on the narva system, written thirty years later. I thought that I understood the narva system, but was soon baffled by the new terms and concepts introduced by a settlement officer who reported what he observed, rather than attempted to grasp the hidden logic of the system. A Jamabandi Settlement Report of the Petlad Taluka and Sisva Mahal, 1902, (Government Printing Press, Baroda 1902).
- 4 Bombay Selections, CXIV. The 'founders' of the village were not usually the historical founders, but those whom it was most convenient to believe had founded the village. Kanbi villages were not always founded by Kanbis. D.F.Pocock mentions that village tradition attributes the founding of the Kanbi village he studied to a Vanjara (an inferior nomadic trader), but none of the present dominant Kanbis admit to being descended from him. Pocock, Kanbi and Patidar, p.130
- 5 Example from Bombay Selections, CXIV, p. 5.

The patidars did not own their land in the western sense. The holding of a share in the village entitled a patidar to a proportion of the produce of the land. Patidars were usually allocated a plot consisting of a mixture of good and bad land. Technically, therefore, peasants bought and sold patidar status, rather than land.⁶ In the example there were three lineages, A, B and C. These were called khadki. The leading patidars in each khadki acted as matadars. There were usually about eight to ten matadars in each village, so that often one khadki had more than one matadar. The matadars were the village elders. As the village panchayat they arbitrated in village disputes and represented the village in dealings with outside authority. The matadars made up a village oligarchy and it was usual for the village headman, called the patel or mukhi, to be chosen from them in rotation.

Local dominance depended on controlling the flow of wealth from the masses to the rulers. This wealth was extracted in the form of land revenue, and as a result local dominance was closely tied to the land revenue system. The matadars were responsible for collecting the revenue from the patidars of their khadki. In the above example we shall say that the revenue demand on the village was fixed for the year at Rs. 9000. The matadars collected the rent from the majmun land, which was rented out to members of the village, and any other village taxes which came to, let us say, Rs. 1800. The remaining Rs. 7200 was divided as follows:

G and H each paid	Rs. 400
D and E each paid	Rs. 800
I and J each paid	Rs. 1200
K paid	Rs. 2400

⁶ A report of 1826 said that a share in a village was considered to be property which could be bought and sold. Report on Nadiad Pargana, 1826, Bombay Selections, XI, (1853), p. 75. The distinction between holding a share and holding land was somewhat artificial, of course, for in practice it amounted to much the same thing. It should be noted that throughout this thesis the term 'patidar' denotes a holder of a share in a village, whereas 'Patidar' denotes a member of the Leva Kanbi, or Patidar caste.

In practice the system was invariably more complex, for over the years the number of patidars grew. In Nadiad in 1862 there were eighty-seven patidars.⁷

Patidars invariably farmed the best and richest lands of their share with the help of hired labour, and rented out the poorer parts to lower castes, or ordinary Kanbis. Ordinary Kanbis made up about one-fifth of the Kanbi population of an average Charotar village.⁸ They had to rent the land they farmed from a patidar. In the village a poor patidar had greater standing than even a rich ordinary Kanbi. The two groups did not inter-marry and sometimes did not even eat together.⁹ However, ordinary Kanbis often held hereditary tenures, unlike the lower castes, who were usually mere tenants at will. Baraiyas, Muslims and other low castes also worked as labourers on the fields of the patidars. The patidars farmed their land intensively, using labourers freely, because the Charotar land was valuable, and had to be exploited to the maximum. In the Charotar the agricultural labourers were not serfs bound to a master for life, as was the case among the halis of South Gujarat.¹⁰ Labourers were usually hired on an annual basis, and were paid in kind, with a few minor cash payments.

The matadars and patidars controlled the economy of the village. In normal times they could ensure that they were always richer than those lower in the village hierarchy. On paper the patidars were liable

7 Bombay Selections, CXIV, p. 156.

8 In 25 villages of the Charotar in which patidars and Kanbis were listed separately in the Baroda State census of 1841-1843, 79% were patidars, 21% Kanbi. Mulki sambhandi pragana petlad vasti patraka badal.

9 Bombay Selections, CXIV, pp. 7-8.

10 For a description of the hali system see: Jan Breman, Patronage and Exploitation, Changing Agrarian Relations in South Gujarat, India, (University of California 1974).

to pay far higher sums of revenue than the lower castes, for they farmed the richest lands.¹¹ In practice they invented a whole range of extra taxes which they imposed on the lower castes. As a result, the low castes were always impoverished, while the patidars were usually comfortable off. Patidars could also obtain credit at lower rates of interest, for they could borrow on the strength of their reputation in the village. In Gujarati 'reputation' and 'credit' are in fact expressed by the same word, abru. They could therefore build wells, or undertake the cultivation of labour intensive crops like tobacco, which was expensive to cultivate, but eventually extremely profitable. Kanbis were usually moneylenders in the Charotar villages. They had the advantage over the Vania of being able to offer lower interest rates, because their position of dominance in the village ensured that they could enforce repayment of a debt.

The system was not a rigid one and considerable social mobility was possible within it. Normally a share could only be sold by one patidar to another. This ensured that shareholds remained in the village. But it was possible for an outsider to buy a share and settle in the village, or for an ordinary Kanbi to buy a share, if the village panchayat agreed. In Nadiad in the eighteenth century the four original moti bhags were expanded to six when two Kanbi families of high standing within their own village were forced by Maratha oppression to desert their villages and settle in Nadiad which had a wall around it. They were admitted to Nadiad as two new khadki. They were allocated suitable lands in the Nadiad area, and given a share in the government of the village.¹² During this period there was a considerable flux, for many patidars were ruined by constant plunder and had to allow the nouveaux riches among Kanbis to buy shares in their villages. There could also be a change

11 Bombay Selections, CXIV, p. 12.

12 Ibid., pp. 24-25.

when the sharehold agreement was renewed. Over the years the old agreements became out of date, either through the sale of shares, or due to families dying out or leaving the village. At this time ordinary Kanbis who had rented a plot of land for many years could, if socially acceptable, be recognized as patidars in the new agreement.

The villages were usually run by an oligarchy of village elders. It was rare for the matadars of any one khadki to be powerful enough to dominate the village on their own. When this was the case the head of the powerful khadki often became a hereditary headman, and the village fell under monocratic control. Normally the headmanship rotated between matadars every three to ten years. The choice of a matadar from the patidars of a khadki, and the headman from among the matadars, depended to some extent on age and family, but ability also counted. Evans-Prichard found that among the Nuer a combination of several characteristics was required before a man could become a leader. It was preferable that he was of good family, that he held a high position within the family, that he was an elder, was individually wealthy and had a strong personality.¹³ Much the same qualifications were required for leadership in a Kanbi village of the Charotar.

The system served to dampen class conflict within the village. Political conflicts within the villages were usually between khadki. Such struggles were not a threat to the social system as such. In these faction fights the low castes had to back their patidar patrons on whom they were totally dependent. The lower castes did not see themselves as a distinct economic class, and tended to see their interests as being bound up with their master's interests, for among low castes it was considered prestigious to serve a powerful master. This fitted in well with the hierarchical values of Hindu society which permeated

13 Georges Balandier, Political Anthropology, (Penguin 1972), pp. 58-59.

the whole system. Each caste had a place according to its dharma. The Kanbi dharma was to be an excellent farmer and rule the village. The duty of the lower castes was to serve a patidar master. Therefore, besides being forced by economic necessity to act as the menial of a patidar, the low castes were also indoctrinated to believe that they were acting according to divine dictate.

2. The Rise of some leading Kanbis within the traditional bureaucratic system

The village structure described in the previous section linked up to the provincial bureaucracy. Since the time of the Gujarat Sultans, Gujarat had been under what Max Weber would have called a patrimonial system of government.¹⁴ The system centred around a monarch, who in Gujarat was the Sultan from 1403 to 1573, the Mughal Viceroy from 1573 to 1760, and in large areas of Gujarat, the Gaikwad of Baroda from 1760 to 1817. The monarch was the highest legitimate authority. Office holders personally owned their positions, and ran their offices with the help of their own followers, relatives and friends. They had almost total power in their spheres of responsibility. They were checked by hallowed tradition, rather than by a codified system of law.

In this system office conferred on a man the right to exploit an area rather than rule it. The chief task of the office holder was to collect land revenue. Under the Mughals an area was usually granted to a noble, called a jagirdar. Until the end of the seventeenth century jagirdars only held their areas for three or four years. This prevented them from becoming local powers. To realise the revenue the jagirdars had to make arrangements with local dominant groups. The leaders of

14. The term 'patrimonial' is used here in a very broad sense to denote a type of bureaucracy found in feudal societies. The term is used to aid understanding, and it is not suggested that the bureaucratic system found in Gujarat conformed to Weber's ideal type in all particulars. For Weber on patrimonialism see: Max Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organisation, ed. Talcott Parsons, (The Free Press of Glencoe, New York 1964), pp. 346-358.

these groups were usually given the office of desai. This could become a hereditary post. The desais made agreements with the matadars of the villages, who promised to collect the revenue of their villages in return for a share in the money. The desais were usually helped by intermediaries called amins. Desais had immense local power, for besides collecting the revenue and being able to invent new taxes at will, they acted as the local police and judiciary. They were allowed to take 2½% of the revenue they collected, but as the jagirdars made little effort to supervise their activities, they invariably took more. In the eighteenth century the Mughal system broke down at the higher levels. Tax farmers replaced the jagirdars. The tax farmers exercised even less control over the desais, so that this intermediary class became very powerful. They often lived in small fortresses with their own private armies. If the village leaders refused to hand over the sums demanded, they were tortured till they paid up. Each layer in the system gained its own rake off, and as long as the status quo was maintained there was stability within the state.¹⁵

By the end of the seventeenth century some Kanbis had become considerable local powers within the bureaucracy. There is little evidence to suggest who were the desais in central Gujarat under the early Mughals. A Kanbi was desai of Savli which is on the other side of the Mahi river from the Charotar. He held this position at the time of Akbar.¹⁶ Although the leading Kanbi of Vaso was a friend of Akbar,

15 In Bengal the equivalent position to desai was chaudhuri, in Maharashtra deshmukh. Irfan Habib, The Agrarian System of Mughal India, 1556-1707, (Asia Publishing House, Bombay 1963), p. 291. The Mughal system is described by Habib, and also A.M. Shah, 'Political Systems in Eighteenth Century Gujarat', Enquiry, Vol.1, No.1, (New Series) (Delhi 1964), pp. 88-89. The Baroda State system is described in Gazetteer of the Baroda State, Vol. II, (Times Press, Bombay 1923), pp. 403-432. (hereafter Baroda Gazetteer).

16 C.V. Joshi, 'The Amins of Vaso', Proceedings of the Indian Historical Records Commission, Vol. XXV, Part II, (Government of India Press, New Delhi 1949), p. 177.

he does not appear to have been a dasai.¹⁷ The rise of the Kanbis within the bureaucracy appears to date from the late seventeenth century.¹⁸ This was a period free from war, and whereas the revenue demands in Gujarat during the seventeenth century remained stable, the price of agricultural produce tripled,¹⁹ which obviously benefited the Kanbis. The leading Kanbi of Nadiad, who was the first Kanbi to be granted the position of hereditary desai, received his title at this time.

In the eighteenth century Mughal rule in Gujarat was replaced by the rule of the Gaikwads of Baroda. The Gaikwads were descended from the most successful of the Maratha adventurers active in Gujarat in the eighteenth century. After Pilaji Gaikwad had helped to defeat the Mughal Viceroy of Gujarat in a war in 1724-25, his able son, Damaji Gaikwad, consolidated the families' power over the next forty years. However, the Gaikwads never managed to become the unchallenged rulers of Gujarat. The Peshwa claimed half of the Gujarat revenues, and through force of arms prevented the Gaikwads from becoming too powerful. In 1768 Damaji died, and a succession struggle followed between his sons. In 1772 one of these sons, Fatehsingh, allied with the British agent against his brother Govind, who was supported by the Peshwa. Fatehsingh promised to grant the British revenue rights if they supported his cause. This started a process by which, over the next fifty years, the Gaikwads gradually gave away more and more to the British to keep themselves in power. In 1817, after the final defeat of the Peshwa, the Gujarati lands claimed by the Marathas were divided between the British and the Gaikwads.

Against this background of lax Maratha rule, several Kanbi leaders became extremely powerful at a local level. In 1722 many leading Kanbis

17 Loc. cit.

18 Shah, Political Systems in Eighteenth Century Gujarat, pp. 93-94.

19 Habib, The Agrarian System of Mughal India, pp. 327-328.

of the Charotar deserted the Mughals and joined Pilaji Gaikwad. The alliance between the leading Kanbis and the Gaikwads was to last almost without interruption for over two hundred years, Till 1707 Mughal rule had been popular in the Charotar, but in this year of Aurangzeb's death, the tract was ravaged by the Marathas. It was the first such attack since 1583.²⁰ In the following decade Mughal authority in Gujarat collapsed. The leading Muslim nobles in the province began to fight for power, and to pay for their troops they began to plunder the peasantry of central Gujarat. In 1722 some leading Kanbis of the Charotar went to Pilaji Gaikwad and offered to support him against the Muslims.²¹ It was largely through a series of such alliances that Pilaji proved so successful in his wars with the Muslims in Gujarat. These alliances greatly benefited the leading Kanbis. The most successful Kanbi between 1725 and 1759 was Venishah of Vaso. His father had made the original alliance with Pilaji Gaikwad in 1722. By 1735 Venishah had his own army and was a powerful warrior lord. He attempted to raise the ritual status of the Kanbis by fixing rules for marriage, funerals and caste dinners, many of which are still observed. He held frequent caste gatherings.²² In 1758 he deserted the Gaikwad and joined the Nawab of Cambay. This was a fatal mistake, for the nawab's followers did not believe in the sincerity of his allegiance to their cause, and in 1759 they murdered him.²³ The family never recovered from this cruel blow. Such violent changes in fortune were common in the eighteenth century, especially in the Charotar, which was the battleground between the Gaikwads at Baroda, and the

20 There had been a minor attack in 1706; 1707 was the first major one. M.S.Commissariat, A History of Gujarat, Vol. II, (Orient Longman, Bombay 1957), pp. 214-216.

21 C.V.Joshi, The Amins of Vaso, p. 178.

22 Loc. cit.

23 Ali Muhammad Khan, Mirat-i-Ahmadi, translated from the Persian by M.F.Lokhandwala, (Oriental Institute, Baroda 1965), pp. 829-830.

remnants of Muslim power in Cambay and Ahmedabad. Thus, although some Kanbi became extremely powerful locally, none became rulers of large areas.

The most successful Kanbis were the two desai families of Nadiad and Vaso. They were the only hereditary desais in the Charotar. The Nadiad desais were foremost because they had received their office from the Mughals. During the eighteenth century they purchased extensive tax-farming privileges from the Marathas. They soon made great fortunes. In 1775 James Forbes was astonished by the prosperity of Nadiad at a time when most cities were the "residence of crows and owls".²⁴ The desais of Vaso rose to prominence in the late eighteenth century. The household manager of the ill-fated Venishah had taken over the latter's affairs in 1759, and had soon become extremely powerful. In 1805 his son, Kashibhai, was made a hereditary desai by the Gaikwad.²⁵ The desais of Vaso remained under the Gaikwad in the nineteenth century. They often acted as tax-farmers, and became extremely wealthy. Kashibhai built a palace for himself at Vaso which in splendour and beauty was rivalled by few secular buildings in Gujarat. The desais of Nadiad and Vaso became an aristocracy within the Kanbi caste.

Lesser Kanbis did not fare so well in the eighteenth century. There appears to have been little solidarity between the leading Kanbis and their lesser caste fellows. The by no means minor Kanbi village of Tranja provides an example. Tranja was subject to the ravages of Kanbi tax-farmers and low caste bandits from Kathiawad. In the mid-eighteenth century the

24 James Forbes, Memoirs of the Campaign on behalf of Ragonath Row 1775, 10L, M.S.S. Eur. B3. p.151. The quoted words are by Ali Muhammad Khan, describing his beloved Ahmedabad: "God is Holy! the place which was the alighting place of noble princes and residence of eminent amins, is a seat of a dog. It is a place of the sausage seller. It has become a residence of crows and owls." Mirat-i-Ahmadi, p.825.

25 Interview with Virendra Desai, Nadiad, 4 October 1973.

village was burnt and plundered several times, until in 1767-68 the Kanbis deserted their village. They returned in 1775-76, but found that they had to pay protection money to keep some Kathiawari Bandits at bay. Between 1789 and 1799 the village came under the tax-farming area of the desai of Nadiad. On one occasion he tortured the patidars by putting heavy beams on their backs until they agreed to pay Rs. 2000. They could only find Rs. 800 and had to sell some village shareholds. Soon afterwards the village sharehold system broke down, to be revived only in 1826-27.²⁶ Whereas the leading Kanbis benefited from the anarchy of the eighteenth century, the majority of Kanbis suffered badly. The stability of British rule was to be a welcome relief.

Under the traditional bureaucratic system power at a local level depended on the holding of office. The rise of the leading Kanbis in the eighteenth century meant that there was a complete hierarchy within the caste based on hereditary offices held in the revenue system. At the top were the desais of Nadiad and Vaso. Below them were the amins. The village of Virsad and Vaso were noted for the number of Kanbis who served as amins. The village was an extension of the bureaucracy, for the positions of matadar and patidar were recognised as hereditary offices by the Baroda, and later the British regimes. Hierarchy within the Kanbi caste was therefore expressed in terms of desai, amin, matadar, patidar, down to ordinary Kanbi.

3. The impact of British rule on the traditional structure

The British imposed a modern bureaucratic system of government on India. Local notables and hereditary office holders lost their power to salaried officials who were appointed by examination. What had been considered a praiseworthy solidarity with kith and kin by office-holders came to be regarded as nepotism and corruption. Strict limits were set on the powers which could be exercised by an official. He had to conform

26 Bombay Selections, CXIV, pp. 515-517.

to a code of law. This change from patrimonial to the modern bureaucratic system of government was one of the central themes of nineteenth century Indian history, and at times it caused considerable social dislocation and discontent. However, as we shall see, the British were extremely cautious in the implementation of their radical programme at a local level.

In 1803 the East India Company, vexed by the chaos in the valuable cotton-growing areas of Gujarat, and attracted by the rich revenue of the area, decided to take over large tracts of the province.²⁷ Within two years the Gujarati land revenues enabled the budgets of the formerly impoverished Bombay Government to balance.²⁸ In 1817, after the final defeat of the Peshwa, there was a further division of Gujarat. The boundaries drawn up in Central Gujarat in 1817 remained till 1948. The Gaikwad was granted 106 villages of the Charotar. These were divided into two subdivisions called Petlad Taluka and Sisva Mahal and placed under the Baroda District administration. Although these Charotar villages only took up three per cent of the area of Baroda State, they paid 7.7% of the states' land revenue.²⁹ The British took about 200 Charotar villages and 350 non-Charotar villages, which together made up Kheda District. About 70 villages in the south-west of the area formed Cambay State under the nawab of Cambay.

The British first attacked the traditional system at district level. In the period 1814-1820 they broke the power of the desais. Initially the British had continued to use the desais to collect revenue from the villages. In 1814 the Bombay Government decided to introduce a ryotwari system. This entailed the abolition of the old bureaucratic positions and the collection of land revenue from individual peasants by

27 P.Nightingale: Trade and Empire in Western India 1784-1806, (Cambridge 1970), pp. 135-138.

28 Ibid., p. 215.

29 This figure was for the late nineteenth century. Baroda Gazetteer, Vol. II, pp. 61-63, 446.

salaried officials. They started by sending talatis or village accountants to the villages, so that the desai and matadars would be forced to keep regular accounts of their collections. Previously the matadars had employed their own accountants. Never before had Government tinkered with internal village management. It implied a lack of trust and was considered a grave insult by the desais and matadars. So incensed were the desais of Nadiad that they ordered all the matadars under their control to refuse their revenue to the British. The British broke the movement by jailing the desais and fining them ten thousand rupees.³⁰

The matadars and patidars fared better than the desais. In practice the talatis were invariably too mediocre as personalities to act as a significant check on the village leaders. In 1821 the Governor of Bombay, Mountstuart Elphinstone, visited the Charotar. He shrewdly realised that a ryotwari policy could undermine the stability of rural society, and ordered the talatis not to encroach on the power of the village leaders.³¹ Over the next decade the monolithic ryotwari policy was modified to include the narva or sharehold system. Of the 199 villages of British Charotar, 80 were recognised as narva, 82 became ryotwari and 37 became talukdari or inami estates belonging to a landlord or brotherhood of landlords.³² Even in the 82 ryotwari villages, Government policy until the 1860s was to give a lease to the leading Kanbis who were then responsible for the revenue. If they abused their powers and exploited the peasantry a panchayat could be established to investigate and break the lease if necessary.

The task of stopping the appropriation of vast sums of revenue by middlemen who were also the bonds of society, was a delicate one.

30 Kheda Gazetteer, p. 95.

31 Ibid., p. 97.

32 Bombay Selections, CXIV, pp. 140 and 225.

In many other parts of India the authority of the headmen was often badly undermined by the ryotwari settlement. The cohesion of village society was shattered.³³ In the Charotar the desais lost their power, but the matadars and patidars retained their position. The settlement was not the only reason for the maintenance of strong village cohesion in Kanbi villages, for in other parts of Gujarat, where ryotwari settlements were implemented, the Kanbis continued to dominate. But the fact that the superior position of the matadars and patidars was recognized by the British greatly enhanced the popularity of British rule among these classes. In 1830 Elphinstone's successor, Sir John Malcolm, inspected Kheda District and declared that the settlement was one of the most successful in Bombay Presidency.³⁴

Until the 1860s the British continued to collect most revenue from urban bankers who in turn made agreements with local moneylenders, matadars and patidars to collect the revenue from the peasants.³⁵ In the 1860s the British made a detailed survey of Kheda District with a view to implementing a system of closer supervision of revenue collection. They also wanted to abolish the hundreds of local village taxes in favour of standardised taxes. W.G.Pedder was asked to investigate the narva system. He found that the system was still flourishing, especially in rich Kanbi villages like Od, where the Government talatis were powerless against the three private talatis employed by the patidars.³⁶ In poor narva villages the patidars grimly held onto their positions, and told Pedder that they would lose prestige and would never be able to give their sons and daughters a respectable marriage if the system was abolished.³⁷

33 In Maharashtra the revenue settlements were deliberately designed to foster a climate of individualism and competition in rural society, which ended by only benefiting rich peasants and Gujarati and Marwari usurers. Ravinder Kumar, 'The Rise of the Rich Peasants in Western India', in D.A.Low, Soundings in Modern South Asian History, (Wiedenfeld and Nicholson, London 1968), p. 32.

34 Kheda Gazetteer, pp. 102-103.

35 Ibid., p. 60.

36 Bombay Selections, CXIV, p. 34.

37 Ibid., p. 17.

In such villages the patidars had lost much of the former independence, and there was increasingly less real distinction between patidar and ordinary Kanbi. Pedder recommended that the narva system be retained. It was not egalitarian, but represented realities, and the Government profited from it, for narva lands paid more than other lands.³⁸ Pedder's recommendations were accepted and the narva tenure, under which Government collected revenue from the matadars and not individual ryots, was given legal status.³⁹

Although the positions of matadar and patidar were retained, they soon lost all value. The positions had been important because they had provided a means of controlling the flow of wealth from the peasants to the rulers. The tight control exercised over revenue collection after 1860 made the posts far less lucrative. In future, local dominance was to depend not on sharehold titles but on the ownership of land. In the 1860s all the fields were mapped out and land title deeds were drawn up. Patidars were converted from being shareholders into owners of the land in the western sense. In this way the whole principle of the narva system was undermined, to be replaced by the principle of individualistic landownership. By the end of the century the title of patidar had so little value that only feeble attempts were made to stop ordinary Kanbis from calling themselves 'Patidars'.

The loss in value of matadar and patidar status was revealed when the first attempts were made to introduce a standard system of revenue collection in the Baroda State areas of the Charotar in the years 1892-1907. In Baroda State patidars had been granted ownership of their shares in the 1870s. When the Baroda Government tried to impose a narva

38 Ibid., pp. 17-20.

39 The narva Act is set out in: Patel Dhanabhai Narshibhai, The Bhagdari or Narvadari Tenures being Bombay Act V of 1862 (Amended by Act II of 1910) (Diamond Jubilee Printing Press, Ahmedabad 1910), pp. 29-34.

style settlement on the Charotar Kanbis in 1901 they discovered that such a system was no longer wanted. Many matadars even demanded that a ryotwari system be introduced to save them the bother of collecting the revenue.⁴⁰ In the end, fifty-one of the ninety-three villages settled in the Baroda Charotar agreed to be narvadari. A further settlement in the 1920s led to the number being reduced to twenty-seven.⁴¹

By 1900 there had been profound changes in the structure of local dominance. In an age of land ownership and close central bureaucratic control over revenue collection, matadar and patidar status had little value. Local dominance depended on wealth, and under the new structure the Kanbis had to make their money from the commercial exploitation of the lands they owned, rather than from the direct exploitation of the low castes in the village. The Kanbis were thus forced to become large-scale commercial farmers. They managed to adapt to the new system and during the period of agricultural prosperity in the late nineteenth century were a contented class. This was in contrast to the Deccan, where the dominant castes had fallen into the clutches of usurers and where there was much social discontent in the late nineteenth century. Because the Kanbis were still dominant, Charotar society had a superficially sleepy appearance. The Kanbi panchayats ran their villages in the old ways, and the low castes continued to act subserviently. But the changes in the structure of dominance had profound political implications. Under the new system the Kanbis had become commercial farmers and agricultural depression had become a far greater threat to the maintenance of their dominance than was previously the case. When such a depression occurred after 1900, the effects were to be explosive.

40 A Jamabandi Settlement Report of the Petlad Taluka and Sisva Mahal, (Government Printing Press, Baroda 1905), p. 2.

41 Baroda Gazetteer, Vol. II, p. 30.

4. Standing within the caste

Kanbi villages were ranked on a scale which reflected their wealth and standing within the caste. Thus Nadiad, the home of the most powerful desai in the area, had become an extremely rich village, and occupied the supreme position in the hierarchy.⁴² Below Nadiad there were six other villages, the Kanbis of which were considered to be of superior standing within the caste. There were about 150 lesser Kanbi villages, which were themselves ranked in varying degrees of standing.

Superiority was expressed through marriage.⁴³ It was the ambition of every lesser Kanbi to forge an alliance with a superior Kanbi by marrying his daughter for an often immense dowry into the family of a superior village. He could gain much prestige within his village through such a marriage. These investments in standing within the caste enriched the superior villages, and impoverished the lesser. In 1857 the Collector of Kheda reported:

"There is a constant struggle on the part of the Akulia (or plebians) to obtain admission to the ranks of the aristocracy. This is the great object of their ambition in life, and to obtain it they do not hesitate to squander the hard-earned savings of a life, and to incur debts which involve them in irretrievable ruin. Many instances might be quoted of persons of large property who have reduced themselves to absolute beggary to defray the expenses of one marriage ceremony."⁴⁴

The lesser Kanbis were often cynically manipulated. It was not uncommon for a Kanbi to spend his dowry money, then return his wife to her father so that he could remarry for a new dowry.⁴⁵ There were even worse cases where so-called 'respectable Kanbis' murdered their wives to secure new

42 Although Nadiad was the largest town in the District it was originally a Kanbi village, and was still regarded as such by Kanbis. The Gujarati word gam does not sound so misplaced as does the English word 'village', when applied to an urban centre like Nadiad.

43 The marriage system is examined by D.F.Pocock, Kanbi and Patidar, pp. 126-52.

44 Report by Collector Ashburner, June 1857, Bombay Selections, CXLVII, p. 34.

45 Ibid., p. 34.

ones for more money.⁴⁶

In 1849 the Collector of Kheda, Mr. Webb, arranged for many lesser Kanbi villages to agree not to marry their daughters into superior villages. He persuaded the Baroda Government to make similar agreements in their parts of the Charotar. Villages of roughly equal standing were organised into groups called ekhadas or gols. Kanbis agreed not to marry outside their gols. An example was at Borsad where the lesser Kanbis formed a gol in 1854. They declared in their agreement that they wanted to increase their race, which was stunted by the loss of girls to superior villages. They believed that this would "please Government who are helping us".⁴⁷ But Government help was not enough to combat the influence of the superior villages which profited so greatly from these marriage customs. The gols were only a partial success. The agreements were made at a time of agricultural depression. In the prosperity which followed, men could once more afford to chase rank. Progressive souls continued to organise gols in the late nineteenth century, but they were fighting the very culture itself.

The gols represented the only organisations for Kanbis above the level of the village panchayat. Gols were not panchayats. Several castes, such as the Brahmans, Vantias and some imitative artisan castes, had panchayats. These organisations maintained the status of the caste, usually through the regulation of marriage and eating customs. Dissidents were fined or outcastes. Gols, on the other hand, were free associations of Kanbis of a scattered group of villages of roughly equal economic and social standing. They sought to make a group within the caste endogamous or exclusive. A village could always opt out of a gol. Kanbis who broke agreements were usually fined, for it was difficult for an individual

46 Census of India 1891, Vol. XXIV, Baroda. Part 1, Report, p. 400.

47 Bombay Selections, CXLVII, pp. 38-39.

gol to outcaste a member from the Kanbi caste as a whole. Real control over a Kanbi was not exercised by his gol, but by his village panchayat. The most important implication of the gol system for our purposes was that because the gols were stronger in times of agricultural depression, the Kanbis were better organised at the very time that their dominance was being threatened by poverty. In the period after 1900 the gols were to be used for political mobilisation against British rule.

Throughout this thesis a distinction will be made between 'superior' and 'lesser' Kanbis of the Charotar. The purpose is to compare and contrast the fortunes of the Kanbis of the top seven villages with that of other Charotar Kanbis. The rule will be to use the term 'superior Kanbi' to refer to Kanbis from the top seven villages of Nadiad, Vaso, Virsad, Sojitra, Dharmaj, Bhadran and Karamsad, and the term 'lesser Kanbi' to all other Charotar Kanbis. In practice the superior-lesser distinctions were different for each Kanbi village, for the villages above it were considered superior, while those below it were considered inferior. The Kanbis of the Charotar as a whole were considered to be superior to other Gujarat Kanbis, so that a Bardoli Kanbi, for instance, could gain prestige by marrying his daughter into even the lowest Charotar Kanbi village.

The distinction between superior and lesser Patidars was not a class distinction. Within each superior and lesser Patidar village it was possible to find rich, middle and even poor Patidar peasants. In many villages there were Patidar landlords.⁴⁸ The superior-lesser

48 For theories of class amongst peasants see: V.I. Lenin, 'To the Rural Poor', in Alliance of the Working Class and Peasantry, (Progress Publishers, Moscow 1965), p. 36. Also: Mao Tse-tung, 'How to Differentiate the Classes in the Rural Areas', in Selected Works, Vol. I, (Foreign Languages Press, Peking 1967), pp. 137-39. For theories concerning India see: Dattatraya N. Dhanagare, Peasant Movements in India, c. 1920-1950, unpublished D. Phil thesis, University of Sussex 1973, pp. 15-24. The topic will be examined more fully in the conclusion.

distinction has been preferred to class distinctions in the interests of precision, for detailed statistics on landholding amongst the peasants of Kheda are not available for this period. The records tend to concentrate on cultural divisions, such as castes and hierarchies within castes. In this thesis precise cultural distinctions will therefore be preferred to imprecise class distinctions. The extent to which these cultural divisions corresponded to class divisions is a question which will be examined in the conclusion.

CHAPTER THREE: A 'GOLDEN AGE' FOR THE KANBIS

The late nineteenth century was a 'golden age' for the Kanbis. In 1865 a British official reported on the people of Kheda District:¹

Well fed, well clothed, comfortably housed, with all the necessaries of life about them, and an abundance of sweet water, a fertile soil, daily accumulating material wealth, high prices and Railway communication, the whole community is in a condition of healthy prosperity and comfort, very pleasant to contemplate.

In this chapter the differing fortunes of the aristocratic, superior and lesser Kanbis will be examined. We shall then go on to look at the tradition of bhakti sects in Kheda. This tradition was to be important in the Gandhian agitations in Kheda between 1917 and 1934. Finally, an attempt will be made to examine peasant impressions of their British rulers.

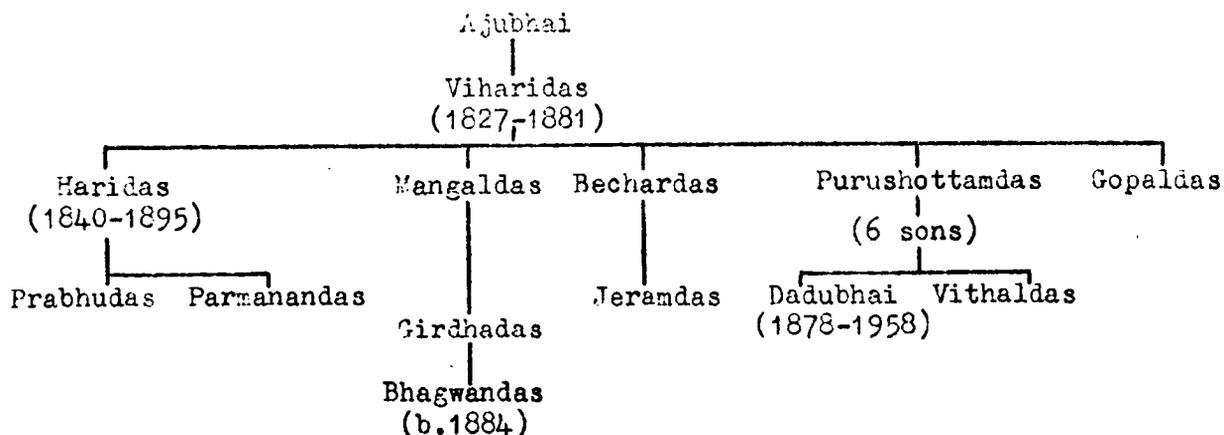
1. The Aristocratic Kanbis

The Nadiad and Vaso Desais² were the only aristocratic Kanbi families in the Charotar. The Vaso Desais remained under the rule of the Gaikwads of Baroda, whereas the Nadiad Desais came under British rule in 1803. As several of the Nadiad Desais will appear

1 Bombay Selections, CXIV, pp. 147-148

2 In this thesis the practice will be to use the term 'desai' to describe the official post of that name, whereas 'Desai' will be used as a surname. The same rule applies for 'amin' and 'Amin'.

frequently in this history, a family tree will be of assistance.³



In the nineteenth century the Nadiad Desais managed to adapt to British rule, and regained much of the local power which they had lost after their revolt in 1814. Under Maratha rule the desais of Nadiad had been local warlords with Kshatriya aspirations. In 1814 Ajubhai led a futile revolt against British rule, which resulted in his being locked up in a house in Kheda town for four years. He lost much of his property, including the village of Bilodra, which he held on inam tenure. After his release in 1818 some of his land was returned, and he was granted a tract of poor soil in Thasra Taluka, on which he founded Ajapura village. Although the Nadiad Desais continued to hate the British for a time, they proved far more adaptable to the demands of the new rulers than real Kshatriyas.

Viharidas Desai was brought up to dislike the British, and there is a story that in his youth he sent a letter to the Csar of Russia offering to ally with him against the British. During the Mutiny he remained neutral. In 1858 the rebel Tantia Tope came to Nadiad during his flight from the British, and asked Viharidas for help. Although Viharidas allowed Tantia Tope to stay with him, he realised that his cause was hopeless, and told the rebel that he did not want to ruin

³ This is based on the family tree kept at the Desai haveli at Nadiad. Only a few dates are available. There are descendants from all the separate lines, many of whom still live in Nadiad. Most of the information on the Nadiad Desais which follows was told to me by the family chronicler, Virendra Desai, at Nadiad, 4 October 1973.

the Desai family, who had already had much of their property confiscated by the British. Viharidas Desai was a highly intelligent man, who realised where the best interests of his family lay. He became a scientific landlord, in the tradition of the eighteenth century English squire. In 1862 the Governor of Bombay, Sir Bartle Frere, sent some tobacco seeds to Viharidas to help him in his experiments to grow tobacco suitable for the European market. Over the next twenty-five years the Bombay Government and the Nadiad Desais worked on this project in close co-operation, but in the end it failed, due to the lack of demand for the new type of tobacco.⁴ Viharidas gave all of his sons a western education, and all of them became firm supporters of British rule. The Nadiad Desais thus showed a chameleon like ability to adapt to the values of their rulers.

The attractions of such adaptability were particularly great, for after the traumatic events of 1857-58 the British set up a machinery of local government and central representation designed to give the landlord classes greater local power and a voice in the provincial capitals. The British wanted to make the landlords their chief allies in India. In Kheda District the Nadiad Desais were the chief beneficiaries. Under the new reforms their political power, which had been informal since they lost their position as desais, was made legitimate. At a local level they became nominated Presidents of the District Board and Nadiad Municipality. They had a virtual monopoly of power on the Nadiad Municipality from its foundation in 1866 till 1918. As nominated presidents they acted as patrons of modern development in Kheda District. They were also made Honorary Magistrates, and thus regained some of their lost judicial powers. At the provincial level landlords were summoned in neo-darbari fashion to nominated Councils. In 1888 Haridas Desai

⁴ Bombay Selections, CCXCV, p. 34.

became the first man from Gujarat to serve in the small Bombay Legislative Council. After it was enlarged in 1892 Purushottandas Desai usually served as a member of Kheda District Local Board. Nadiad Desais sat on Government Commissions, such as the Royal Opium Commission and the Agricultural Commission. They also had much influence in Kathiawad. Haridas served as Dewan in a number of states, rising to be Dewan of Junagadh in 1883, where he served for over a decade. Bechardas, Mangaldas and Girdhardas all served in important posts in Kathiawad states. They were rewarded for their services with such titles as 'Rao Bahadur' and 'Sardar'.

The Nadiad Desais were able to act as effective leaders of the Kanbi community because of the influence they had with the British. The Bombay Secretariat was prepared to listen to them. One example was in 1871, when legislation was initiated to check the practice of female infanticide among Kanbis. The hypergamous marriage system of the Kanbis inevitably led to female infanticide, but Vihardas Desai claimed that the legislation was an insult to the community and that the charge had never been proved.⁵ The Bombay Government appointed H.R.Cooke to investigate. He failed to prove a single case of infanticide. This did not prove that it had never existed, for the Kanbis had almost certainly managed to control the flow of information to Cooke. But the legislation was withdrawn. Until the Morley-Minto reforms the Bombay Secretariat did its best to satisfy the demands of the Nadiad Desais in such ways.

The desais of Vaso retained their tax farming powers till 1875. The Gaikwad of Baroda, Sayajirao II, who ruled from 1819 to 1847, attempted to undermine the powers of the desais, who had become overmighty subjects. Ironically he was thwarted by the British, who in

5 Bombay Selections, CXLVII, pp. 18-19.

the first decade of the century had guaranteed the positions of many Baroda desais, in an attempt to ensure the solvency of the Gaikwadi regime. In 1829 the Gaikwad took away the powers of the powerful desai of Navsari, but in the following decade the British forced him to reinstate this desai.⁶ By the 1850s the desais were demanding that they should hold their powers without having to give any services in return. In 1868-69 the Gaikwad abolished the hereditary privileges of the desais, but such was the clamour raised throughout the state that the measure had to be revoked.⁷ Thus when Sayajirao III came to the throne in 1875 the position was much the same as it had been at the beginning of the century.

In 1875 Malharrao Gaikwad was deposed, and during the period of minority of Sayajirao III, the new Dewan, Sir T. Madhava Rao, abolished tax-farming. The desai of Vaso at this time was Ambaidas Desai. He was an extremely rich man who owned two petty states in Kathiawad, two hundred acres at Vaso, a whole village near Baroda City, as well as various estates scattered around the Charotar.⁸ He had often acted as the tax farmer for Petlad Taluka before 1875. After this date he lost his extensive judicial and police powers, but continued to be employed as a collector of revenue. However, he was no longer independent, for he was placed under the authority of the local revenue officer called the vahivatdar, who was in charge of the Taluka. The reforms only deprived Ambaidas of a part of his power, for he continued to rule his two Kathiawad states. He also continued to make large sums from his estates. It was in his interest to accept the loss of some of

6 Baroda Gazetteer, Vol. I, pp. 552-554.

7 Baroda Gazetteer, Vol. II, pp. 4-5.

8 BRO, Huzur Political Office, Section 38, File 64, No. 1366 of 1922-23, and No. 1/1 of 1922-23.

his power with as good a grace as possible. The example of the Nadiad Desais, who had adapted so successfully to the new system, must have also helped Ambaidas to reconcile himself to the reforms.

2. The Superior Kanbis

The superior Kanbis born between 1870 and 1900 were a remarkably successful generation. As a strong middle group in the Kanbi caste they prevented a wide gap growing between the aristocratic Kanbis and their peasant caste mates, a process which happened among some dominant castes in other parts of India.⁹ To a large extent their success was due to reforms which took place in Baroda State in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. These reforms gave many superior Kanbis a chance to escape their villages and obtain well paid jobs in the cities. Therefore, before we look at the superior Kanbis themselves, it will be best to glance at what was going on in Baroda State during this period.

Before 1875, Baroda State had been under an inefficient patrimonial system of government. In 1875 Malharrao Gaikwad was deposed by the British for "his notorious misconduct, his gross misgovernment ... and his evident incapacity to carry into effect the necessary reforms."¹⁰ The British were not prepared to allow antiquated systems of government to continue in the larger and more important states, and on several occasions in the nineteenth century used the period of minority of a new ruler to bring about reform. In the case of Baroda they created a minority by deposing Malharrao, and replacing him with the twelve year old Sayajirao III, who came from an obscure Gaikwad lineage in Maharashtra.

9 For Madras see: David Washbrook, 'Country Politics: Madras 1880 to 1930', in J.Gallagher, G.Johnson, A.Seal, Locality, Province and Nation, (Cambridge University Press 1973), pp. 166-68. For Maharashtra see: R.Kumar, 'The Rise of the Rich Peasants in Western India', (see chapter two, footnote 33).

10 E.C.Moulton, Lord Northbrook's Indian Administration 1872-1876, (Asia Publishing House, London 1968), p. 163.

The extremely able ex-Dewan of Travancore State, Sir T. Madhava Rao, was placed in charge of Baroda. The boy Maharaja was placed under the care of an English tutor, who brought him up to be an enlightened and responsible prince. Sayajirao was the first Gaikwad to receive a western education.

Madhava Rao's chief task was, in his own words:¹¹

To generally strengthen the executive establishments, so that Government may pervade and be co-extensive with the country and population, and may make itself felt throughout these dominions.

The extension of the central bureaucracy into the smallest corner of the state was not a scheme to be undertaken half-heartedly. Madhava Rao's plans were of an all-embracing nature, designed to strip the dominant groups of their old powers and replace them with new powers. At the heart of the reforms lay the plan for a modern education system in Baroda State, which would permit young people from the classes which had lost their powers to take entrance exams into the new bureaucracy. The scheme had already proved a success in Travancore State.¹² Although Madhava Rao proceeded cautiously with his controversial programme, he became extremely unpopular in the state, and in 1882 Sayajirao took the popular step of dismissing him and taking over the government himself. For the next thirty years Sayajirao took on his own shoulders the administration of Baroda State. With great energy and determination he carried through the reforms initiated by Madhava Rao.

The class which benefited most from these changes were the superior Kanbis, especially those from the four villages of Vaso, Sojitra, Dharmaj and Bhadran, which lay in the Baroda part of the Charotar. In 1881 there

11 Sir T. Madhava Rao, 'Report on the Administration of the Baroda State for 1875-76', in Selections from the Records of the Government of India, Foreign Department, No. CXXXII, p. 21.

12 Robin Jeffrey, The Decline of Nayar Dominance, unpublished D.Phil thesis, University of Sussex 1973.

were about twelve thousand Kanbis in these four villages.¹³ Although the superior Kanbis lost from the abolition of tax farming, this did not affect them unduly, for much of their wealth came from marriage dowries from lesser Kanbi villages. The late nineteenth century was a period of great prosperity in the Charotar, and the lesser Kanbis were prepared to spend large sums to gain the prestige of a marriage into a top village. With the money from dowries, the Kanbis of the superior villages acquired large areas of land in surrounding villages, and under the legal reforms they were recognised as owners by law. Sayajirao had a particularly high regard for the superior Kanbis.¹⁴ From 1890 to 1895 he even had a Kanbi Dewan, Manibhai Jashabhai Patel of Nadiad. The Kanbis were not tainted with the old Brahmanic traditions of administration, and were an ideal group for Sayajirao's new bureaucracy. He bestowed lavish favours on the four superior Kanbi villages of Baroda State. A special narrow gauge railway was built, linking Petlad with the four villages. An agricultural credit bank was opened at Bhadran, which by 1916-17 had nearly Rs. 140,000 out on loan.¹⁵ Bhadran was the first Charotar village to receive electric lighting, and its inhabitants still boast that it used to be known as 'the Paris of Baroda State'. Superior Kanbis throughout the Charotar became strong supporters of the regime, and even today sigh for the time when the Gaikwad ruled.

The ambitions and prospects for the generation of superior Kanbis born after 1870 were radically altered by the sudden expansion of English education in Baroda State. Such education was the passport to tertiary education in Baroda, Poona or Bombay, which qualified a young man for

13 Baroda Census Report, 1881, Gam var jat.

14 Bhailalbai Patel, Gujaratna Patidaro, (Patel Prakashan, Vallabh Vidyanagar 1971), p. 52.

15 Baroda Gazetteer, Vol. I, p. 278.

prestigious professional or bureaucratic careers, The careers favoured by the Kanbis were either in the Baroda bureaucracy, or in a technical field, particularly engineering and medicine. In this the Kanbis showed their practical peasant outlook, in marked contrast to young western educated Bengalis, whose greatest ambition was a liberal humanist career.

The first government schools in the Charotar were opened by the British. Government vernacular schools dated back to 1826, and Anglo-Vernacular schools to 1856. Anglo-Vernacular schools had several grades in which English was the medium of instruction. They ranked below High Schools which provided education in English up to the University matriculation examination. By 1877-78 British Kheda District had 190 government schools. Of these one was a High School (Nadiad) and two were Anglo-Vernacular.¹⁶ Facilities for English education in Kheda District were therefore somewhat meagre. Before 1871 Baroda State did not have a single government school. It was only at the personal insistence of the Governor of Bombay that Malharrao Gaikwad was forced to start some government schools.¹⁷ The first High School was opened at Baroda in 1871, the second at Petlad in 1873. In 1875 Madhava Rao created the Vernacular Education Department, in 1877 he opened the Baroda State Library, and in 1882 Baroda College, which was affiliated to Bombay University, took its first 33 students.¹⁸ This was perhaps the most important development, for it gave the Charotar Kanbis a chance to gain a degree without spending the large sums needed for living in

16 Kheda Gazetteer, p. 136.

17 Selections from the Educational Records of the Government of India, Vol. 1, (National Archives of India, Delhi 1960), p. 572.

18 Baroda Gazetteer, Vol. II, p. 316.

distant Bombay or Poona.¹⁹ In 1878 an Anglo-Vernacular school was opened at Sojitra, and in 1887 Vaso primary school was raised to Anglo-Vernacular status.

The student career of Motibhai Amin can be taken as an example for this generation of superior Kanbis.²⁰ Motibhai Amin was a Kanbi of the superior village of Vaso. He was born in 1873. At the age of eight he was sent to the new government primary school, which had been opened in 1875. Only the top families in Vaso were using the institution at the time. It had started with about 15 children, and had expanded to about 35 by Motibhai's time. The school was a successor to the traditional school, and was not a great improvement. The classes were chaotic and irregular. They were timed by an hour glass with running sand. A few text books made up the entire school library. The parents themselves showed little interest in the quality of the education their children were receiving. They were, however, aware of the advantages of higher education, and sent a petition to Sayajirao asking for an Anglo-Vernacular school. In 1887 Sayajirao took the opportunity of a visit to Vaso to announce that the primary school would be converted into an Anglo-Vernacular school with three teachers and a regular timetable.

The new school was a great improvement on the old. The new headmaster, Maganbhai Amin, was an able teacher with modern ideas about social reform and swadeshi. He insisted on regular attendance and

19 Ahmedabad possessed the only other college in Gujarat, but it was an extremely moribund institution. In 1885 it was granted the power to give B.A. degrees, but in 1887 the Government withdrew all financial assistance, and the standards of the College sank to a very low level, as it proved impossible to employ good or even adequate staff. It revived after 1912, when Government again started to assist it. Baroda College was, on the contrary, lavishly endowed and flourishing throughout this period, with professors of the calibre of Aurobindo Ghose. Details on Ahmedabad College from Bombay Chronicle, 24 October 1916, p. 7.

20 The next two paragraphs are based on P.C.Shah, Motibhai Amin, Jivan ane Karya, (Motibhai N.Amin Smarak Samiti, Anand 1942), pp. 5-57.

strict discipline. For the first time Motibhai Amin found school interesting, and at the age of 16 asked if he could follow some friends of his to Baroda High School, where he could study for matriculation. Motibhai's uncle, who had acted as guardian after his father's death, was at first unwilling to allow this, for he wanted Motibhai to farm the family land. He only gave permission after the intervention of a relative who understood the value of English education. The reluctance of Motibhai's uncle was understandable, for the concept of an individualistic education leading to a whole range of possible careers was not easily grasped in a peasant community, in which son automatically followed father for generation after generation. The wonder is that so many Kanbis grasped the concept so rapidly. In Baroda City Motibhai lived with 35 other Kanbi students in rooms at a temple. Among these boys there was a great enthusiasm for the new doctrines of swadeshi and social reform. At the temple they abolished separate cooking facilities for boys of different villages, and wore only Indian-made cloth. Motibhai used to send books on social reform back to Vaso to encourage other young Kanbis to take his path. Motibhai was a slow learner, and only graduated from Baroda College in 1899. He was accepted into the Baroda Civil Service. His family at Vaso were now delighted, for never before had a family member risen so high. The family reputation in the village soared.

Education in Baroda did not breed discontent with the government as it did in British areas towards the end of the nineteenth century. In the years 1890-1912 it was fashionable to admire the Gaikwadi regime as an example of the superiority of Indian self-rule over British rule. Many nationalists believed that India could be rejuvenated under the rule of enlightened Indian princes such as the Gaikwad of Baroda. Some even believed that the Gaikwad should be made King of Gujarat.²¹

21 Punjabhai Bhatt, The Solution of the Political Problem in India, (Prajā Bandhu Printing Works, Ahmedabad 1903), pp. 1-9.

This chorus of praise for Sayajirao came mainly from the elite classes of Baroda. Groups such as the superior Kanbis very much favoured strong rule by a great Hindu prince who was prepared to grant them important favours, such as education, and loans for the development of agricultural and industrial projects. The elitist nature of the support for Sayajirao was largely concealed until 1917, when the lesser Patidars began to give their support to Gandhi. The majority of superior Kanbis of the generation born between 1870 and 1900 found Gandhi's mass movement distasteful and irrelevant to their needs. They were not prepared to sacrifice their staid careers in civil disobedience movements. Even Motibhai Amin, who became an enlightened educationalist and social reformer, opposed Gandhi strongly, for he believed that if the Kanbis fell out with the government, be it British or Gaikwadi, they would be ruined.²² Motibhai Amin failed to appreciate that the alliance between Kanbis and the Government was in reality an alliance between an elite of Kanbis and the Baroda Government, and it did not bring such benefits to the lesser Kanbis.

3. The Lesser Kanbis

The lesser Kanbis' 'golden age' lasted from 1855 to 1899. The fundamental reasons for this period of prosperity were that a run of good monsoons coincided with a period of generally high prices and an absence of war. A secondary reason was that the British greatly favoured the lesser Kanbis in the revenue settlements of the 1860s. The opening of large urban markets through the development of communications and the increase in cash crop cultivation consolidated the prosperity of the period.

Between 1825 and 1899 there were no serious monsoon failures in Kheda. However, the period between 1830 and 1855 was one of low prices

22 For Motibhai Amin's opposition to non co-operation, see: P.C.Shah, Motibhai Amin, pp. 201-253.

for farm produce. The regular imposition of high revenue demands forced many farmers to sell their shareholds. The economic crisis of these years applied throughout Western India.²³ Between 1855 and 1865 there was a boom. World prices of agricultural produce soared, coinciding with a series of good harvests. Revenue was no longer a burden. Although prices fell in 1865, the prosperity continued for a further 34 years.

The revenue settlement made in Kheda between 1862 and 1867 benefited the lesser Kanbis in three main ways. Firstly they put an end to revenue farming above village level, which had been mainly to the advantage of the aristocratic and superior Kanbis and urban bankers. The British instead collected the revenue of the whole village from the matadars of the sharehold villages, which ensured that the settlements did not badly undermine the power of the village leaders. Secondly the settlements imposed a system of landownership in Kheda, and the Kanbis proved to be adept at using the law courts to buy up the land of lower castes, or even other Kanbis, who were in debt to them. Litigation became extremely popular in Kheda. Thirdly, the settlements blatantly favoured the Kanbis against the low castes of Kheda, through the principle of equal tax for all.

In the first half of the nineteenth century the dominant peasants in Western India had suffered from the imposition of British rule, partly because they lost many of their traditional powers, but also because of the unprecedented regularity of revenue demands and because of the destruction of village cohesion through the ryotwari system. After 1858 the British attempted to give dominant peasants a better deal. They needed more revenue, and impoverished farmers could not provide this, and it was also believed that the alienation of dominant castes had been an

23 Frank Perlin, 'Society in Crisis, Early Nineteenth Century Western India in Demographic and Institutional Perspectives,' Papers Presented to the Fourth European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies, University of Sussex, July 1974, p. 181.

important reason for the Mutiny. The Charotar Kanbis had not suffered so badly as the dominant castes of the Deccan. During the Mutiny they were quiet.²⁴ They received the full benefits of the new policy.

The settlements of the 1860s equalised the revenue rates for all castes. Traditionally the revenue rates had depended on caste. Baraiya and allied castes had been turbulent, and it had proved almost impossible to extract full revenue from them. It was also considered that as the Kanbis were better farmers by nature, they should pay more than the Baraiyas. The British decided to base revenue rates purely on the quality of the soil and position of the fields. This was essentially a regressive form of taxation for the Kanbis had all the resources of local domination at their command, and could always make a greater profit from each plot of land than could the Baraiyas. In the sharehold villages, which were mostly Kanbi dominated, the revenue was decreased by 5 per cent. In Baraiya dominated villages the revenue was increased by 11 per cent.²⁵ Token concessions were made for the more wretched Baraiya villages, but generally they were hard hit. They had to borrow more and more to pay their revenue, and were soon losing their lands through litigation to Kanbis and Vantias. After 1870 gruesome murders of usurers became commonplace in Kheda District.²⁶

24 Only one case exists of a Charotar Kanbi headman who rebelled in 1857-58. The Baraiya were more turbulent during this period, but there were no serious risings. R.K.Dharaiya, Gujarat in 1857, (Gujarat University, Ahmedabad 1970), pp. 30-34.

25 These figures were arrived at by somewhat involved calculations. The revenue rates before and after the 1860s settlements were added up for all the 77 narva villages of Nadiad, Anand and Borsad Talukas. These represented all the narva villages in British Kheda District, except for five in Matar Taluka, one in Mehmedabad Taluka, and one in Thasra Taluka. The 48 Baraiya villages were all ryotwari. The 48 Baraiya villages were selected because they had been described as Baraiya dominated villages in settlement reports or Collector's reports, and were situated in Nadiad, Anand and Borsad Talukas. They only represent a selection of Baraiya villages. They were mostly situated in the areas of poor soil on the borders of the Charotar. It was unfortunately impossible to compile figures to show how revenue liability was distributed within these villages. Sources: Bombay Selections, CCXCV, pp.58065, 130-137; Bombay Selections, CXIV, pp.238-243, 292-301; Bombay Selections, CCXCVI, Revised appendix 2, pp.2-7; Bombay Selections, CCCXXVII, Revised appendix Q, pp.2-7.

26 Kheda Gazetteer, p. 121.

The Kanbis also benefited from the rise in the Baraiya population which allowed them to use Baraiya labour more freely. Although the Baraiyas' economic position deteriorated during the late nineteenth century, credit continued to flow from moneylenders and the lack of famines assured that nobody starved. As is often the case this wretched class multiplied most rapidly of all. In the Charotar the Baraiya population increased from 18 per cent of the population in 1841-42, to 25 per cent of the population in 1881.²⁷ This represented a large increase in the number of landless labourers seeking employment. Figures show that wages rose during the period.²⁸ This is misleading. In the mid-nineteenth century labourers were mostly paid in kind, and the Kanbis had used their village domination to force them to remain in employment. With the growth in population and the advent of a cash economy in the village, the Baraiyas were given that dubious freedom found in capitalist societies, the freedom to sell their labour to whom they chose. Increasingly they received the bulk of their wages in cash, the only payment in kind being a meal of rotli and dal each day.

The new railways opened up large urban markets, especially in the rapidly expanding industrial cities of Bombay and Ahmedabad.²⁹ Before the 1860s there was not even a hard surfaced road in Kheda. In 1864 the Bombay to Ahmedabad railway was opened. It came from Baroda, crossed the Mahi river at Vasad, and then ran via Anand to Nadiad, and on to Ahmedabad. It was entirely in British territory, and resulted in the

27 1841-42: BRO, Mulki sambhandi pragane Petlad vesti patraka badal, 1881: Baroda Census Report, 1881, Gan var jat.

28 1862-63: 1½ annas per day. 1892-94: 2½ annas per day. Bombay Selections, CCXCVI, p. 6.

29 Bombay population: 1872 644,405. 1921 1,175,914.
Ahmedabad population: 1872 137,041. 1921 274,007

Census of India, 1921, Vol. IX, Cities of the Bombay Presidency, Pt. II, (Government Central Press, Bombay 1922), p. ii.

development of Nadiad and Anand as the premier markets for the District, at the expense of the previously important centres such as Umreth, and Kapadvanj. Over the next century the unexceptional lesser Kanbi village of Anand was to grow to be second only to Nadiad as an urban centre. Nadiad was now thirteen hours from Bombay (275 miles) and one and a half hours from Ahmedabad (25 miles).³⁰ Hard surfaced feeder roads began to be built to the main railway stations. In 1874 the railway from Anand to Godhra in the Panch Mahals was opened. In 1891 the railway from Anand to Cambay via Petlad was opened.

The lesser Kanbis grasped the implications of farming for a cash economy remarkably quickly. There was an expansion of acreage under cash crops during this period.³¹ They were prepared to alter their farming methods to suit the urban market. In 1890 a Swedish cream separator was exhibited at a local agricultural exhibition. Farmers from Nadiad, Uttarsanda and Chakalashi immediately bought similar machines so that they could produce western style butter for the large Bombay market.³² The lesser Kanbis kept themselves informed of developments in agricultural techniques. In 1904-05 the leading Kanbi of Palaj, a lesser Kanbi village in Borsad Taluka, visited Bombay for an agricultural exhibition. On his return he held a meeting of the leading farmers in the area to report on what he had observed in Bombay.³³

This greater awareness of the outside world was brought about in

30 Bombay Selections, CXIV, p. 142.

31 Acreage in Kheda District under tobacco, for instance, rose from 10627 acres in 1859-60, to 15577 acres in 1903-04. Harold Mann, M.L.Patel, and V.M.Majmudar, 'The Improvement of Tobacco in Northern Gujarat', Bulletin No. 132 of the Department of Agriculture, Bombay, (Poona 1926), pp. 1-2.

32 Bombay Selections, CCXCV, p. 8.

33 Assistant Collector's Report, Kheda, 1904-05, BA, R.D. 1906, Vol. 10, comp. 511, part II, p. 172.

part by the increased literacy among lesser Kanbis. Although they did not go outside their villages for education on a large scale till the 1930s, they were increasingly learning to read and write in Gujarati in village schools. Primary education expanded rapidly during this period. In 1885 there were only seven government primary schools in Kheda District, by 1893 there were 283.³⁴ There was a similar increase in the Baroda Charotar after 1875. In 1891 an order was passed by the Baroda Government that each village had to maintain a schoolmaster as a village servant, and schools were opened in all villages where 16 children were willing to attend.³⁵ The lesser Kanbis did not learn to read and write to widen their outlook or improve their minds, but purely because it had become a necessary technical skill. Increasingly both the British and Baroda Government demanded that the village leaders be literate, or else the talatis would be asked to take over some of their functions. The Kanbis could not afford to expose themselves to possible trickery by petty bureaucrats. In an age of a cash economy they needed to be able to keep accounts. Literacy was also useful in cases of land litigation and in petitioning the government. Kheda District became notorious for its anonymous and often slanderous petitions to the government.³⁶ Four attempts made by the Baroda Government to impose a revenue settlement on the Charotar territories between 1892 and 1905 had to be abandoned due to the floods of conflicting petitions which met each proposal.³⁷

34 Kheda Gazetteer, pp. 136-37. Vol. III-B, (1904), p. 27.

35 Baroda Gazetteer, Vol. II, p. 309.

36 Figures for all petitions received are not available, but Kheda led British Gujarat in petitions accepted. Very few petitions were accepted, as all anonymous and wrongly submitted petitions were rejected. In the years 1901-1911 the number of petitions accepted were on average:

Kheda District	6.3	Surat District	5
Ahmedabad District	4.4	Broach District	3.4
Panch Mahals District			1

BA, J.D. compiled from indexes 1901-1911.

37 The settlement was only finally reached in 1907. On the fourth attempt the settlement officer commented: "But hundreds of petitions were received, and it began to be seen that the settlement was intensely unpopular, and that it would be difficult and perhaps impossible to enforce it". A Jamabandi Settlement Report of the Petlad Taluka and Sisva Mahal, (Government Printing Press, Baroda 1905), p. 2.

The continuing agricultural prosperity led to a growth in population in the Charotar which can only be described as perilous. In 1827 the density in Borsad Taluka had been 389 people per square mile. By 1891 it had risen to 751.³⁸ This was the highest rural density in Bombay Presidency. Land was at a premium and was saturated with crops. Estates dwindled in size as they were divided equally among sons. Many Kanbis only made ends meet through exceptional frugality. Yet they refused to leave their villages. A government report of 1895 noted:³⁹

Patidars will not leave their native villages whatever the struggle for existence there, or the inducements offered from outside. Their pride of family and loss of social standing in migration paralyzes all colonizing activity.

This attitude was a luxury. The Charotar was a purely agricultural tract, and could only maintain such a dense population in a period of exceptional agricultural prosperity. By 1899 disaster was imminent. A series of bad harvests were inevitably going to cause extreme hardship and grave discontent.

4. From Kanbi to Patidar

Before the mid nineteenth century there was a clear cultural divide between the lesser Kanbis, who had a reputation for a rough independence and expert husbandry, and the superior Kanbis who had kingly or Kshatriya aspirations. In the eighteenth century they had fortified their dwellings and surrounded themselves with armed retinues. They tried to escape the vulgar farming connotation of their caste name by calling themselves 'Desai' or 'Amin'. There was little pride to be gained from being a Kanbi. The term stood for 'farmer'. It stemmed from the same root as 'kunbi', the farmer caste of Maharashtra, and 'kurmi', the farmer caste of northern India. Before the industrial revolution, peasant farmers

1827:
38 Bombay Selections, XI, pp. 107, 114.

39 Bombay Selections, CCCXXXVII, p. 9

throughout the world had been considered a coarse and superstitious class. For the early Christians the rustic (paganus) was merely a heathen.⁴⁰ Peasants only came to be seen as God-fearing honest toilers as a result of the romantic movement which originated in Europe in the eighteenth century. The philosophy had been imported into India in the early nineteenth century by a generation of romantic administrators, and had begun to penetrate the Indian consciousness by the end of the century. By this time the superior Kanbis had largely abandoned their Kshatriya aspirations. They no longer minded being connected with their lesser brethren under the new caste name of 'Patidar'.

Castes have standards of purity to which members aspire. These are often the standards of the castes above them. Kanbis tended to aspire to an idealised 'superior Kanbi' model. What were the standards of purity of this 'superior Kanbi'? It could be said that in the nineteenth century the standards had been de-sanskritised, for the peasant traditions of hard work and technical skill had emerged as one of the most obvious ideals of the Kanbis. The Kanbis in fact make nonsense of the concept of sanskritisation, for the conscience of purity in the Kanbi household was a complex jumble piled up over the centuries. As a dominant caste their dharma was power. In the pursuit of this dharma they were ruthless and clever. More than anything this explains their chameleon-like ability to adapt to new philosophies and cultures. Rajput, Vania, Muslim, Brahman, Jain, Maratha and British values all found a place in their caste ideal. Strongest, perhaps, were their traditions as a dominant caste mixed with the dogmas of Swaminarayan and the shopkeeping attitudes of the Vanias, but the hypergamous marriage customs of the Rajputs, the rituals of the Brahmans, and the doctrines of ahimsa of the Jains, had all left their mark.

The change in the name of the caste from Kanbi to Patidar represented

40 Julien Freund, The Sociology of Max Weber, (Penguin 1972), p. 200.

a move towards greater equality within the caste. The superior Kanbis could accept the lesser Kanbis as 'Patidar', because during the late nineteenth century their position had improved. They were no longer the vulgar peasants of the early nineteenth century who had worked the fields with their own hands. As their economic position improved they began to hire labourers for the dirty work, and improved their social status by becoming vegetarian and forbidding widow remarriage. They joined respectable religious movements, such as that of Swaminarayan, and learnt to read and write. The lesser Kanbis were rapidly becoming a respectable group in Gujarat society, now known as Patidars.

5. The Tradition of the Bhakti Sect

The most important religious tradition in Kheda was that of the bhakti sect. Without an understanding of this tradition it is difficult to understand the later appeal of the Gandhian movement in Kheda. First we need to examine the nature of the Hindu sect. Louis Dumont has put forward a definition:⁴¹

The Indian sect is a religious grouping constituted primarily by renouncers, initiates of the same discipline of salvation, and secondarily by their lay sympathizers any of whom may have one of the renouncers as a spiritual master or guru.

Dumont notes that sect tends to cut across caste, and that the sects follow monotheistic beliefs, whereas Hindu society is rigidly exclusive about caste, but allows a whole pantheon of Gods. Caste and sect thus balance each other.⁴² The rigidity of a caste society is made tolerable to the individual by freedom to choose a sect. I would add that the sect, or sampradaya as it is known in Gujarat, represents a set of moral values to which a Hindu chooses to conform. Thus to say that a man

41 Louis Dumont, Homo Hierarchicus, p. 233.

42 Louis Dumont, Religion/Politics and History in India, Mouton, The Hague 1970), p. 58.

follows Swaminarayan sampradaya means that he follows the code of spiritual conduct laid down by Swaminarayan, as well as the subsequent preachings of the monastic order founded by the saint. Choice of sampradaya is left to a person's own conscience, and is often the freest form of self expression available to a Hindu. The strictness with which the code is followed depends on the individual as well as the enthusiasm of the monks.

In Kheda District most Hindus were followers of Vaishnavite bhakti sects. The census of sects of 1872 recorded that only seven per cent of the Hindu population of the District were Shaivites. These were mostly Brahmans and Rajputs. Twenty-three per cent could not be classified. The remaining seventy per cent were members of bhakti sects.⁴³ The doctrine of bhakti is essentially a belief in the all saving power of devotion to God.⁴⁴ The bhakti sects were notable for their anti-Brahmatic egalitarian tradition, and workship in which theoretically all could join regardless of caste. There were two main bhakti traditions. In the doctrine followed most notably by the Vallabhacharya Vaishnavites, salvation was believed to come from ecstatic devotion to Lord Krishna. This led to various sexual practices associated with worship which brought the sect into low repute in the nineteenth century. The sect was less popular in Kheda than in other parts of Gujarat. In 1872 only twenty-two per cent of Vaishnavites followed this sampradaya.⁴⁵ The alternative

43 Kheda Gazetteer, p. 28.

44 Pocock, Mind, Body and Wealth, (Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1973), p. 101.

45 Vaishnavite (i.e. bhakti) sects as a percentage of total number of Vaishnavites in Kheda in 1872 was as follows:

Ramanuja	42
Bijmargi	27
Vallabhacharya	22
Swaminarayan	6
Kabir Panth	2
Madhavgar Panth	<u>1</u>
	100

These figures can only be used as a rough indicator. The Ramanandi sect was not even mentioned, although it was popular. In villages people often described themselves as Vaishnava without specifying a sect. This may have inflated the Vallabhacharya Vaishnavite figures. Kheda Gazetteer, p. 28.

bhakti doctrine stressed salvation through work. This doctrine was almost certainly influenced by early Christian missionaries in India,⁴⁶ and bore a striking resemblance to puritan Christian doctrines. It stressed the need for a simple life, prayer to God, a minimum of sensual gratification, and hard work.⁴⁷ The most important of the bhakti sects in this tradition was that of Ramanuja, which in 1872 held the allegiance of forty-two per cent of Vaishnavites in the District.

Bhakti sects were usually formed by a personality of holiness and charisma. He started by attracting a large following of devotees who promised to change their old corrupt life. This often caused a conflict with authority, especially if the doctrine was preached in a militant fashion. Gradually the holy man took on the aura of a prophet of God, or even came to be seen as a reincarnation of God. To a westerner the latter idea is bizarre, but, as D.F.Pocock has pointed out, the lack of theological distinction in India between the soul of the individual and the ultimate spirit which moves the universe, has often led to saintly men being deified as an incarnation of the ultimate spirit.⁴⁸ A monastic order was often created, which kept the doctrines alive after the saint's death. Over the years the original enthusiasm waned unless, or until, a new reformer arose.

In the early nineteenth century a new such sect emerged in Gujarat. The leader was Sahajanand Swami, a Brahman born near Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh in 1781. He came to Gujarat as a travelling ascetic around 1800, and first began to preach in Kathiawad. He attacked the sexual practices and debauchery of the sadhus and priests of the day,

46 Pocock, Mind, Body and Wealth, p. 140.

47 This was a description given to me of the way of Ramanandi, in a village in which the Ramanandi sect was popular. Interview with C.B.Patel, Mogari, 8 September 1973.

48 Pocock, Mind, Body and Wealth, p. 99.

especially the Vallabhacharya Vaishnavites. He founded an order of dedicated wandering sadhus who swore not even to look at a picture of a woman or utter a female name. In attacking the Vallabhacharya Vaishnavites, Sahajanand Swami was attacking the status quo of the day, for the rich Vanias of Gujarat were usually of that persuasion or were Jains. In 1816-17 the sadhus who followed Sahajanand Swami were chased from the great Vania city of Ahmedabad, which was then ruled by the Peshwa. They were physically assaulted and their idols snatched from them. The representatives of the Peshwa refused to protect them. A year later Ahmedabad came under British rule. The British decided to support the sect, for Sahajanand Swami's teachings had been having a pacifying effect on the turbulent Kathis and Kolis of Gujarat and Kathiawad.⁴⁹ Sahajanand was permitted to travel with a huge retinue of armed horsemen who could protect him from orthodox Vaishnavites. He became extremely popular in Gujarat, for after a generation of lawlessness he seemed to usher in a new age of morality. This partly accounted for the lack of anti-British unrest in Gujarat in the early nineteenth century.

Sahajanand's theology was in the tradition of Ramanuja, and stressed salvation through work. He laid down a set of practical and puritan rules for his followers which stressed that salvation lay through work carried out carefully and methodically each day. These were contained in a book of precepts called Shikshak Patra. Two hundred and six commandments were laid down. Prohibitions included the taking of animal life, eating flesh, drinking alcohol, gambling, swearing, bribery and adultery. Twenty-six commandments were aimed against the Vallabhacharya Vaishnavites and dealt with relations with women. They were extremely puritanical. Each follower had to give one-twentieth of his income to the head of the local Swaminarayan temple, or if very devout, one-tenth.⁵⁰ The caste system was accepted.

49 Ishvar Petlikar, Vidyanagara Vishvakarma, (R.R.Sheth, Ahmedabad 1964), pp. 43-44.

50 Census of India 1911, Vol. VII, Bombay, Part I, Report, (Government Central Press, Bombay 1912), p. 79.

Sahajanand once said that he did not attack caste as it would offend people unnecessarily. People could eat separately in this world, but in heaven all would be equal.⁵¹ In fact, as Dumont shows, if the sect attacks caste, it will itself become a new caste of limited membership.

The sect made great headway after 1820. Sahajanand began to preach openly that he was the latest incarnation of Vishnu, and should be known as Swaminarayan. Miraculous stories accumulated around him. In one the fearsome dacoit of Vadtal, Joban Pagi, had been turned from his desperate profession by visions of Swaminarayan.⁵² The temple founded at Ahmedabad became the base for Kathiawad, and the temple founded in 1824 at Vadtal near Nadiad became the base for Kheda and South Gujarat. Vadtal soon became the wealthiest Swaminarayan temple in Gujarat. After Sahajanand's death in 1830 the sect continued to grow. Some of the greatest Gujarati poets of the day were inspired by Swaminarayan's message to compose sublime lyrics to spread his new morality.⁵³ The sadhus constantly toured the villages, where they were revered for the strict code by which they lived. Vallabhacharya Vaishnavites were defeated in a debate by a Swaminarayan acharya before the Gaikwad of Baroda.⁵⁴

Another sect which appeared at this time was less important, but worth looking at. It was established by a Nadiad Kanbi called Madhavgar. He became a recluse and lived in Kathiawad, where he preached against the observance of caste and idol worship. He denied the existence of caste pollution. He attacked the Vallabhacharya Vaishnavite for their licentiousness, but condemned excessive austerities as well. In 1824 he founded a monastic order.⁵⁵ Thus, half a century before the much

51 Reginald Heber, Narrative, Vol. III, p. 41.

52 H.T.Dave, Life and Philosophy of Shree Swaminarayan, (Akshar Bhavan, Bombay 1967), p. 67.

53 K.M.Munshi, Gujarata and Its Literature, (Longmans Green and Co., Bombay 1935), p. 217.

54 Ishvar Petlika, Vidyanagarna Vishva Karma, p. 34.

55 Gazetteer of Gujarat Hindus, p. 546.

published Maharaja libel case in Bombay, when the social reformer Karsondas Mulji attacked the Vallabhacharya Vaishnavites, there had already been strong movements against the sect in Gujarat.

The old bhakti tradition of salvation through work had been rejuvenated by these sects to suit a very different era from the one in which it had been first propounded. These new doctrines were for the age of Pax Britannica, when application to work and sobriety would be well rewarded virtues. Swaminarayan's doctrines were particularly suited to the new capitalist age. One of his commandments even demanded that followers of the sect should audit their accounts each day so that financial problems would not interfere with spiritual development.

The Kanbis became some of the most fervent followers of Swaminarayan. In its messianic period the sect had attracted many low caste followers, but as it became institutionalised it increasingly became the preserve of the Kanbis and artisan castes. Although the sect remained small in terms of actual followers, it was often the more progressive villagers who joined, and the doctrines had a profound effect on Kanbi society as a whole. Through the new sect the Kanbis were able to gain a feeling of moral superiority and self respect which went hand in hand with their economic advance.

6. Peasant Impressions of the British

In the late nineteenth century the Nadiad Desais had allied with the British and the superior Kanbis had allied with the Gaikwad of Baroda. These two groups were firm supporters of these two ruling powers. The lesser Kanbis had no such alliance. Although the British had provided railways and schools, there were no obvious large-scale public works undertaken in Gujarat such as the canal and irrigation projects of northern India, which would have stressed the positive side to British rule. The story of Ranchhod Vira which follows has interest as a period piece, but

the main reason for telling it is to throw light on certain opinions held by the peasants of Kheda about their masters, the British.⁵⁶ Ranchhod Vira was a Baraiya with a long beard and ferocious appearance. He lived in a large Patidar dominated village near Nadiad called Chakalashi. It had a population of about 8,000, most of whom were Baraiya by caste.

In late 1897 Ranchhod Vira proclaimed himself to be a holy man of superior caste, and prophesied that in December of that year the great Ranchhodji Mandir⁵⁷ at Dakor along with its holy lake would appear in the fields of Chakalashi. Dakor was the greatest Vaishnavite temple in Kheda, and in Gujarat was second only to Dwarka. Ranchhod Vira prophesied that after the temple had come to Chakalashi, the golden age of Ranchhodji would commence. In this age liars and wrongdoers would be decapitated by the wheel of Rama. God would erect a sugarcane press and the man who could pass through without being crushed would be proclaimed ruler. The people were ordered not to pay their land revenue, and the village headman, Kashibhai Patel, was told in a letter: "if you want to inform your Government you may do so". Kashibhai made no such move, for Ranchhod Vira had become extremely popular in the area.

Ranchhod Vira's claims were given credence by measures which the British had taken to prevent a plague epidemic in South Gujarat from spreading north of the Mahi River into Kheda. Troops had been posted along the Mahi to prevent movement northwards, and the Dakor temple had been closed by the government during the autumn punam festival, to ensure that the plague was not spread by the lakhs of pilgrims who normally flocked to the temple at this time. These measures were reported in the

56 The account is based on: BA, J.D. 1898, Vol. 103, comp. 328, p. 209
Kheda Collector's Report 1897-98, BA, R.D. 1899, Vol. 24, comp. 1128,
pp. 32-34, 52.

57 Ranchhodji is another name for Vishnu.

local newspaper, and soon a rumour had spread that the British were persecuting Vaishnavites. It was also believed that they had lost control of all their territory to the south of the Mahi, which they were now defending with troops. The rumour gave plausibility to Ranchhod Vira's extravagant claims, and on the date for which he had prophesied the miraculous temple removal, Baraiyas, Kanbis, Brahmans and Vanias flocked to Chakalashi to witness the event. When nothing happened the high castes became angry, and Ranchhod Vira had to take refuge in a house.

Soon afterwards he established a camp in the fields of Chakalashi, where he continued to attract many Baraiya followers. He told them that British rule had come to an end, that the era of truth had begun and that an army of warriors was coming from the north. In January 1898 he paraded around Chakalashi with an armed retinue, who fired their guns in the air, and terrorized the Kanbis. He sent notes to Kashibhai Patel and the Kanbis of the neighbouring village of Samarkha, demanding that in future they pay their land revenue to him. The headman of Samarkha reported the affair to the Government. The mamlatdar of Nadiad Taluka soon came with 20 policemen to arrest Ranchhod Vira. At Chakalashi they were attacked by a huge mob of Baraiyas, and had to flee firing their guns. Two policemen were hacked to death. That night Ranchhod Vira attempted to heal some of his followers wounded in the battle, but when he failed he was denounced as a fraud. Next day the District Superintendent of Police rode into the village with 31 armed mounted police, but no resistance was offered. Ranchhod Vira was seized and taken to Nadiad, where he was whipped in public. He received a 14-year jail sentence. Kashibhai Patel was dismissed from his post for gross negligence in failing to report the affair at an early stage.

The incident showed that Kheda society was still extremely parochial. Chakalashi was not an isolated village. It stood two miles from the main

Bombay to Ahmedabad railway line, and five miles from Nadiad. The Kanbis appear to have been more aware of the realities of the outside world than the Baraiya, for the headman of Samarkha immediately reported the affair to his superiors. The adage that a little literacy is most dangerous was borne out, for it was the report in a local newspaper which for a time persuaded the high castes of Chakalashi that Ranchchod Vira was a true prophet.

The incident above all revealed the extreme lack of contact between villagers and rulers. British rule was characterised by force (the troops on the Mahi and the police), and revenue collection (Ranchchod Vira expressed his revolt by ordering the peasants to pay revenue to him in future). Normally the British presence was only felt in the village at the time of revenue collection. These collections were a cruel imposition on the peasants. A popular Charotar proverb ran: "It is better to receive a call from the God of death than a call from the Government".⁵⁸ Under the revenue system the peasants had no rights. Till 1876 they could challenge a revenue enhancement in the law courts, but when this was actually done in 1873, legislation was passed revoking the right.⁵⁹ In 1879 the Bombay Land Revenue Code was enacted, which provided no channels of protest for the peasantry. Only in 1907 was a regular system for remission and suspension of revenue laid down.⁶⁰ The system was largely run at the whim of the Collector and his subordinates. The Collectors believed they had the interests of the peasants at heart, but were usually ignorant of the true manner in which large sums of money were forced out of impoverished peasants. At village level revenue collection was a battle of wits, the village leaders trying to persuade the mamlatdar

58 Yamna nedu avje pan sarkana nedu na avje. I am indebted to Anil Bhatt for telling me this proverb.

59 G.D.Patel, The Land Revenue Settlement and the British Rule in India, (Gujarat University, Ahmedabad 1969), pp. 394-5.

60 Ibid., p. 397.

that the crops had failed, and the mamlatdar in turn cajoling the farmers till they paid up. Maamlatdars often crossed the bounds of legality, for rewards and promotion came to those officers who brought in the largest sums of revenue. Talatis who reported crop failure were ordered to alter their statistics on pain of dismissal.⁶¹ Peasants who refused their revenue were stripped naked and publicly whipped until they paid.⁶² As District Magistrate the Collector was also responsible for law and order. Under him was the District Superintendent of Police, who was usually British. Kheda was considered a 'problem District' because of the large number of Baraiya, Muslim and Patanvadia dacoits. The problem had been aggravated by British land revenue policies which had forced many low caste farmers to sell their lands to Kanbis in the late nineteenth century. Many could only live by robbing their former masters. Kanbis often connived at such crimes, for they were prepared to buy the stolen property of their kinsmen. As a result a large force of about 1,000 policemen had to be maintained in Kheda.⁶³ Many of the police were Muslims, and they were hated throughout the District.

The Chakalashi incident also demonstrated how religious movements in India inevitably took on political aspects. Religion and politics were not separate spheres in the Hindu mind. Ranchhod Vira's prophecy of a golden age with a great ruler meant that he considered it righteous to oppose the existing power. In Swaminarayan's day the evil forces had been the Muslims and the bandits ravaging the countryside. The British had appeared to usher in an era of peace and morality. By the late nineteenth century British rule was no longer regarded in such a light in the villages of Kheda. In the popular mind they had become enemies of religion and grasping tax gatherers.

61 The 1918 no-revenue campaign brought such irregularities to light. S.Parikh, Khedani Ladat, (Rashtriya Sahitya Karyalay, Ahmedabad 1922), pp. 16-19.

62 A Government inquiry in 1900 revealed such malpractices. G.D.Patel, The Land Revenue Settlement and the British Rule in India, p. 236. S.Parikh, Khedani Ladat, pp. 15, 18.

63 In 1920 there were 938 policemen in Kheda, 367 of whom were armed. BA, H.D. 1930, 3828 VII, p. 7.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE YEARS OF DISASTER

1. The Famine

The monsoon came in the second week of June 1899 as normal, and the fields were sown. After about six inches had fallen the skies cleared. July, then August were cloudless. First the sprouting seedlings withered, then the grass. The farmers stripped the leaves from the trees to feed their beloved bullocks and buffaloes. When the trees were bare they sold their hoarded gold, then their wives' jewellery, to purchase fodder. But by September the parched countryside was strewn with the carcasses of prize Charotari cattle. Human food now became the problem. Those without stocks of grain flocked to the towns to beg for food. They were turned away from the marble temples which their donations had helped to build. The Swaminarayan monks said that they would only feed members of the sect.¹ The Baroda Government made the feeble gesture of opening a few inadequate kitchens, which dispensed miserable rations to a lucky few. Some even sold their daughters as prostitutes to buy food.² The British Government rose to the situation more generously. By October large quantities of Burmese rice were being imported and distributed in the towns. Work camps were opened. The Christian missions threw open their doors to all. Few people actually died of starvation in 1899 as a result. The high mortality was caused by disease. The people, weakened and emaciated to mere skeletons by starvation, succumbed easily to the fever and violent diarrhoea of cholera,

1 Ishvar Petlikar, Vidyanagarnu Vishvakarma, p. 14.

2 Ibid., p. 10.

dysentery and plague. Seventeen per cent of the population died.³

There had been no comparable famine in Kheda since 1812, and the people were caught unprepared. Each caste reacted to the crisis in its own way. Vantias, afraid that they would be robbed by the starving, fled to the safety of the large towns. Rich Patidars survived by using up all their savings, the poorer ones went hungry and lost their cattle, but refused to be seen in the degrading work camps. The Baraiyas and poorer Muslims were also reluctant to enter the work camps. Many frankly stated that they preferred to die in their villages. There were never more than 60,000 out of the 300,000 Baraiyas of the District in the work camps at any one time.⁴ They had no savings and succumbed easily to disease. Their bodies were thrown into wells, which soon let out hideous smells. The untouchables were more resourceful. Many became Christians, and after entrusting their children to the missions, went to the government work camps. At one stage nearly three-quarters of the Dheds of Kheda were in the camps. They worked hard and earned good wages for raising earth embankments and digging village tanks.⁵

The period from 1899 to 1907 was one of continual disaster. In 1900-01 there was a cholera epidemic, and although the rains were better, the crop failed. In 1901-02 there was very little rain and the crops were eaten by swarms of rats which suddenly appeared in Thasra Taluke and the Charotar. A Mr. Hughes recalled how one evening while sitting on his veranda he killed twenty-two rats with a stick without getting up.⁶

3 In 1891 the population of Kheda District and the Baroda Charotar together had been 1,083,297. In 1901 it was down to 894,351. Census of India 1901, Vol. IX, Bombay, pt.1, Report (Government Central Press, Bombay 1902), p. 27. Census of India 1901, Vol. XVIII, Baroda, pt.1, Report (Times of India Press, Bombay 1902), p.54.

4 Collector's Report, Kheda, 1899-1900, BA, R.D. 1901, Vol. 51, comp. 137, part II, p. 31.

5 Loc. cit.

6 Report on the Famine in the Bombay Presidency, 1899-1902, Vol. II, (Government Central Press, Bombay 1903), p. 36.

The peasants' religious beliefs prevented them killing the rats, and soon the crops were stripped to the stalk. In 1902-03 the rain was adequate, but plague claimed 18,500 lives.⁷ 1903-04 was another bad year. In October locusts appeared, and in December there was a frost. The plague continued; at Anand eight per cent of the town's population died.⁸ In 1904-05 the rains failed. In Matar Taluka a full scale famine was declared and work camps opened. In July 1905 the rains were so heavy initially that there was bad flooding, but a drought followed in August and September. There was frost during the winter.⁹ The 1906-07 season was the best since 2898, but it was followed by a season of crop failure in 1907-08. This was the last of the really bad years.

These nine years had a disastrous effect on the ecology of the District. The goradu soil of the Charotar was not naturally fertile, but depended on constant manuring by cattle dung. After the decimation of the cattle population during the famine, the soil went unfertilised for years. In some places well water had sunk to a brackish sub-stratum and in using this for irrigation many farmers ruined their fields for several years. Trees had died, and the valuable fruit crop had been lost. Many village tanks were ruined by the famine relief works. Over the centuries a hard clay-like bottom had been built up, which had been destroyed when the relief workers had been made to dig the tanks deeper. The monsoon rains quickly drained away through the porous new bottoms. Many wells ceased to yield water.¹⁰

7 Collector's Report, Kheda, 1902-03, BA, R.D. 1904, Vol. 27, comp. 177, part II, p. 149. The plague first appeared in Kheda in 1898, reached its peak in 1902-03, continued at a high level to 1907, then declined considerably.

8 Collector's Report, Kheda, 1903-04, BA, R.D. 1905, Vol. 21, comp. 177, part II, pp. 151-3, 245.

9 Collector's Report, Kheda 1903-04, BA, R.D. 1905, Vol. 12, comp. 511, part II, pp. 5-7.

10 These complaints and others are listed in a series of petitions to the Gaikwadi Government from Charotar farmers. A Jamabandi Settlement Report of the Petlad Taluka and Sisva Mahal, 1905, p. 15.

Credit had also dried up as a result of the famine. The farmers desperately needed capital to dig new wells, restock their cattle and restore the vitality to the soil. But they had lost their savings, and found that few were prepared to lend them money. Patidar moneylenders now needed any money they still might have for their own farms, and urban moneylenders were unwilling to lend in villages, for land no longer provided good security. Fields which had fetched Rs. 400 an acre in 1899, fetched only Rs. 50 an acre in 1909.¹¹ In the non-Charotar areas of Kheda, land could not even find a purchaser.

At a time when much of the profit had gone from farming, the farmers were confronted with demands for higher wages from their labourers. The high mortality among Baraiyas had caused a severe labour shortage. About 60,000 of the 350,000 Baraiyas of the area died as a result of the plague and famine.¹² When the Baraiyas began to demand higher wages the Patidars had to give in, especially as the rapidly expanding industries of Ahmedabad were offering better wages. Between 1895 and 1908 the wages for an agricultural labourer rose from four rupees a month to six rupees a month.¹³ By today's standards this seems a paltry sum, but at that time one rupee could purchase fifty pounds of the staple food-grain, bajri.¹⁴ Wages had risen by fifty per cent at a time when the farmers could least afford it.

The British Government made no attempt to soften the plight of the

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- 11 Collector's Report, Kheda, 1908-09, BA, R.D. 1910, Vol. II, comp. 511, part VII, p. 43.
- 12 There were about 300,000 Baraiyas in Kheda District and 50,000 Baraiyas in the Baroda Charotar before the famine. Kheda Gazetteer, III-B (1904), p. 9. Baroda Census Report, 1881, Gan var jat. Baroda Census Report, 1901, Ganvar vastino dehjhado tatha jat, part 1.
- 13 Kheda Gazetteer, III-B (1914), p. 13.
- 14 The average price of bajri per maund (82 pounds) between 1905-06 and 1909-10 was Rs. 1 annas 10. Jamabandi Revision Settlement Report of the Petlad Taluka of the Baroda Division 1921, (Baroda Printing Works, Baroda 1922), p. 7.

Charotar farmers by reducing the land revenue on a permanent basis.

The revenue rates continued at the same level, even though the famine and plague had made nonsense of an elaborate revision of the revenue which had been carried out in 1894 and 1895. Although this survey had discovered that the Charotar was one of the most highly assessed areas in India, the government had sanctioned an increase of nineteen per cent in the revenue.¹⁵ In the Baroda Charotar the revenue was lowered by seventeen per cent in 1907 as a result of the agricultural depression, but as the Baroda rates had been higher in the first place, this did not mean that the burden of revenue became less than in the British areas of the Charotar.¹⁶ Therefore in spite of their hardship, the farmers of the Charotar continued to have to pay extremely high rates of land revenue.

This was essentially a crisis for the lesser Patidars. Although the superior Patidars also suffered badly from the famine, they had more savings to see them through the worst of the period. Many even profited through buying up the lands of poorer farmers cheaply. Above all, they had a source of credit which was independent of farming. By this time many superior Patidar families had members working in the cities. Money continued to be sent back to the villages. Young superior Patidars were also able to stay with their relatives in the cities to continue their education, even though their fathers may have been ruined by the famine. Lesser Patidars did not have such resources to fall back on. They still relied entirely on farming, a pursuit which now yielded little profit.

In the years after 1899 many lesser Patidars turned to new enterprises to keep themselves solvent. They were extremely reluctant to leave their villages, for there they had an identity and social position

15 See Chapter Three, footnote 25.

16 Baroda Gazetteer, Vol. II, p. 43. The figure of 17% has been calculated from the figures in the text. The percentages given in the text appear to be incorrect.

which would be lost in the towns. The only alternative was to develop businesses connected with agriculture. One such business was the manufacture of bidis from the tobacco they grew. Until the late nineteenth century Indians had always smoked their tobacco in a hookah just as Europeans had always smoked pipes. The popularisation of the cigarette was matched in India by the emergence of the bidi. Some Patidars opened workshops in the villages, where low caste labourers rolled these little cones of tobacco by hand.

More important was the development of the dairy industry. Before the railway era milk could only be exported in the form of ghi, for which the Charotar was famous. In the late nineteenth century a demand emerged from Bombay for fresh milk and butter. In the years before the famine, ventures had been started such as a condensed milk works at Chakalashi, and a milk bottling factory at Uttarsanda.¹⁷ The industry collapsed during the famine due to the heavy cattle mortality. However, the Patidars soon realised that they could ease the crisis by using what capital they could command to re-stock their farms. They also invested in milk separating machines to produce cream for the butter trade. The whirr of milk separators was soon a familiar sound in Charotar villages. By 1907-08, 84 such machines were in use.¹⁸ By 1913 small factories were being opened to convert the by-product of butter milk into casein.¹⁹ During the 1914-18 War there was a large military demand for butter, and soon cream separators and casein works were found in even small villages.

17 Collector's Report, Kheda, 1898-99, BA, R.D. 1900, Vol. 30, comp. 137, Part II, pp. 37-8.

18 Assistant Collector's Report, Kheda, 1907-08, BA, R.D. 1909, Vol. 12, comp. 511, part II, p. 148.

19 . Collector's Report, Kheda, 1913-14, BA, R.D. 1915, comp. 511, part III, p. 12.

In 1915-17 there were in the eighty-five villages of Anand Taluka, fifty separators and thirty-eight casein factories.²⁰ By 1917-18 the dairy industry was worth a sum equivalent to the whole land revenue of the District.²¹

Although the dairy and other industries mitigated some of the harsher effects of the agricultural depression, the farmers depended for their real profits on cash crops. During the period 1900 to 1940 there was a decline in the acreage under irrigated crops. Rice, for instance, fell from fifteen per cent of the acreage under crops in Kheda in 1890-91, to nine per cent in 1921-22.²² The farmers switched to dry crops which needed less labour, capital and supervision.²³ In North Kheda cotton and groundnuts became extremely popular. In the Charotar the greatest expansions in cash crops were in tobacco, orchard and garden produce.²⁴ The expansion in tobacco was most pronounced in Borsad, and especially Anand Talukas.²⁵ The most dramatic expansion occurred between 1916 and

20 Collector's Report, Kheda, 1916-17, BA, R.D. 1918, comp. 511, part II, p. 61.

21 Collector's Report, Kheda, 1917-18, BA, R.D. 2929, comp. 511, part I, p. 12.

22 Kheda Gazetteer, III-B (1926), p. 7.

23 M.B.Desai, The Rural Economy of Gujarat, p. 71.

24 Orchard and garden produce included such items as fruit and vegetables, and spices such as ginger, garlic, chillis, etc. for the urban market. The acreage in Kheda under orchard and garden produce as a percentage of the total cropped acreage rose from one per cent in 1890-91 to eleven per cent in 1921-22. Kheda Gazetteer III-B (1926), p. 7.

25 Percentage of cropped area of Talukas under tobacco were as follows:

<u>Anand</u>	1894	1.75%
	1924-25	17.16%
<u>Borsad</u>	1894	7.41%
	1924-25	16.62%
<u>Nadiad</u>	1891-92	6.70%
	1924-25	6.88%
<u>Petlad</u>	1905	21.31%
(Baroda State)	1921	18.10%

Sources:

Bombay Selections, CCXCVI, p. 5.

Bombay Selections, CCCXXXVII, p. 3.

Bombay Selections, CCXCV, p. 4.

Bulletin No.132, Department of Agriculture, Bombay, p. 2.

Jamabandi Revision Settlement Report of the Petlad Taluka of the Petlad Taluka of the Baroda Division, 1921, p. 6.

1924, coinciding with a sharp rise in tobacco prices. However, less profit was to be gained from dry cultivation, and when the harvests failed, as they did frequently in these years, there was no profit to be gained at all.

Not all of the Patidars' enterprises were above board. It was a time when men lived by their wits, and in the years after the famine there was an upsurge in crime. The most dramatic crimes were committed by Baraiya, Muslim and Patanvadia dacoits. Besides raiding villages in gangs and robbing houses furtively at night, they also looted the trains on the Bombay to Ahmedabad lines; and stole cattle which they ransomed back to their owners. They robbed Vantias, Patidars and Christians, never members of their own castes. The Patidars did not suffer unduly. They usually acted as receivers of the stolen goods. They often hired Baraiyas or Patanvadias to carry out robberies. Although the British tried hard to stop such crimes, conviction of a Patidar proved almost impossible, due to the bribery of police and witnesses and the inevitable conspiracy of silence by the villagers. Borsad Taluka had the highest crime rate, and the pleaders of Borsad court were renowned for their use of bribed witnesses. The Assistant Collector of Kheda once estimated that in fifty per cent of contested cases, wilful and gross perjury was committed, usually on behalf of the defence.²⁶ The miserable pay received by lower officials made them highly susceptible to bribery; even Magistrates would be offered sums equivalent to half a year's salary.²⁷

2. The Growth of Discontent

In the years after the famine the feeling grew among lesser Patidars that a golden age had been lost. Their way of life was being threatened, and their local dominance being undermined. During the nineteenth century

26 Assistant Collector's Report, Kheda, 1906-07, BA, R.D. 1908, Vol. 17, comp. 511, part III, p. 87.

27 Collector's Report, Kheda, 1908-09, p. 93.

the basis of local dominance had changed from ownership of posts in the revenue bureaucracy to the commercial exploitation of land. After the famine the land ceased to yield the profits needed for the Patidars to maintain their status in local society and their standing within the Patidar caste. The crisis also appeared to threaten their religion. The feeling grew that somehow the British were responsible for this. Initially the discontent was inarticulate, but by the second decade of the century the Patidars were beginning to see the nationalist movement as a panacea for their woes.

As we have seen, the Baraiyas were placed in a favourable position by the famine. They began to demand higher wages. Many Patidars found that they could no longer hire labourers and make a profit from their land. During the long period of prosperity preceding the famine, labour had been cheap and obtained with ease. The old caste sanctions which had kept landless labourers under check had been relaxed. After 1899 the Patidars tried to reimpose these old sanctions, but now it was too easy for a Baraiya to flee his village and find employment in the rapidly expanding industries of the cities. The Patidars began to recall with nostalgia the days when the low castes had known their place. The Baraiyas even began to try to upgrade their status in society. In 1907 a Baraiya of Kheda called Daduram Bhagat started a crusade to lift the ritual status of the caste. He condemned the consumption of liquor and meat and told his caste mates to obey the law and lead an orderly life. Baraiya conferences were held to pass such resolutions. They resolved that in future Baraiyas should refuse to serve in the degrading jobs of village watchmen or house servants to the Patidars.²⁸ The movement fell to pieces when Daduram Bhagat died in 1909. But enough militancy had been stirred up to alarm the Patidars. Baraiyas began to demand higher

28 District Deputy Collector's Report, Kheda, 1907-08, p. 231.

wages. Although the Patidars resisted for a time, they had to give in eventually. The Patidars had to spend more time in their fields directing a smaller labour force so that labour would not be wasted, and in some cases they even had to take the compromising step of grasping a hoe themselves.²⁹

Grasping a hoe was only one way in which the Patidars' purity was threatened. More serious was their inability after the famine to be able to afford marriages into superior Patidar families. They were faced with the alternative of either accepting their inferior standing by arranging cheap marriages with Patidars of villages of similar standing, or renouncing the whole system of hypergamy. The system was deeply ingrained, and could only be replaced by an extremely strong alternative standard of purity. Some began to condemn hypergamy as an antiquated custom, others began to search for new religions. They hoped that through ascetism they could morally transcend the superior Patidars.

The search for new religions was given added strength by what appeared to be a Christian attack on the Hindu religion. During the famine many Dheds renounced their grovelling untouchability and became Christian. Before 1899 there had been about 500 Christians in Kheda District. By 1901 there were 25,000, which represented four per cent of the population. 19,000 of these were from the Charotar areas of Kheda. The Christian population remained at this level after 1901.³⁰

29 Collector's Report, Kheda, 1909-10, BA, R.D. 1911, Vol. 10, comp. 511, part VII, p. 31.
The village artisans were also demanding higher wages. They organised themselves into caste panchayats to voice their demands. The barbers (hajam) were most militant. In 1908-09 the barbers of Matar struck work and demanded higher wages. Collector's Report, Kheda, 1908-09, p. 37.

30 Similar figures are found for the Christian population in 1921. Kheda District had the highest rural Christian population in Bombay Presidency after 1900. It was surpassed only by the area in and around Bombay City.
Kheda Gazetteer, III-B (1904), p. 9.
Kheda Gazetteer, III-B (1926), p. 6.

The high caste Hindus resented these conversions deeply. A popular proverb of the time ran:³¹

The gods have gone to the hills, the saints to Mecca:
Under English rule the Dheds knock us and slap us.

The Dheds used to live in settlements outside the villages. After the famine many of these became Christian hamlets. Prodded on by European and American missionaries, the Dheds began to demand entry to the village schools. This caused extreme friction in many villages. When fourteen Dhed children appeared at the Government Primary School at Alindra village, the Patidars, Brahmins and Vantias immediately removed their children and sent them to schools in neighbouring villages. They only sent their children back after the Christian boys had left the school.³² The intensity of anti-Christian feeling persuaded the missionaries to concentrate on developing separate Christian schools in the Christian hamlets. The Dhed converts withdrew into themselves, becoming renowned for their non-conformity to village life and their pro-British sentiments. They continued to be resented and abused, for their presence provided a galling criticism of the Hindu social system.

The 'Christian threat' led to an upsurge of Hindu revivalist movements in Kheda District. The younger generation of high caste Hindus were not happy with the performance of the old bhakti sects during the famine. Many had closed their doors to the starving, in marked contrast to the Christian missions, where all had been welcome. The Swaminarayan sect had lost its moral drive. The temples had become exceedingly rich, the coffers at the Swaminarayan headquarters at Vadtal held several million rupees.³³ During the first decade of the century the sect was split by a conflict over the management of the Vadtal temple. Young men with a

31 'Der gaya dungre, pir gaya makki, angrajna rajman dheda mare dhakke', Census of India 1931, Vol. XIX, Baroda, Part 1, Report (Times of India Press, Bombay 1932), p. 412.

32 Assistant Collector's Report, Kheda, 1904-05, p. 170.
Assistant Collector's Report, Kheda, 1905-06, p. 74.

33 Collector's Report, Kheda, 1913-14, p. 40.

little education began to find the extravagant idol worship distasteful and the factionalism over material issues sordid. They also found the sect out of touch with the times, for followers were expected to hold such quaint beliefs as that the sun revolved around the earth. They began to seek for more modern and rational religions to give themselves a newer and more potent standard of purity.

The Arya Samaj proved to be most popular at first. The most fanatical convert was the Rajput Talukdar of Mogar, near Anand, who devoted his life to the shuddhi, or reconversion, movement. The most successful village branch was at Chikhodra, a lesser Patidar village near Anand. A few Chikhodra Patidars had received high school education. One of them founded a branch of the Arya Samaj in 1904-05 after reading a life of Dayanand Sarasvati.³⁴ In 1911 an Arya Samaj conference was held at Ranoli, near Petlad. Most of the Arya Samajists were Patidars or Brahmans, and they continued to respect their caste restrictions, even though the sect condemned such customs.³⁵ Although actual membership of the sect was small, the ideas were being circulated freely and listened to with sympathy in the villages.

The most radical Arya Samaj branch was at Nadiad, where three Vania Arya Samajists formed an orphanage, called the Hindu Anath Ashram, to save Hindu orphans from the clutches of the missionaries. They published a book in 1911, later banned, called Anath Bhajanavali. This contained a collection of songs which the children used to be sent round the town singing. One went as follows:³⁶

If, O father! you do not save us we shall lose our religion;
for want of a handful of grain, the children will become
Christian cow-killers;
the limited children of India, who are protectors of the cow,
will turn into cow-killers;
Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras will thus become
issueless.
Today the very name and vestige of Aryan Hindus will come
to an end.

34 Interview with Satyavan Margabhai Patel, Chikhodra, 2 October 1973.

35 Census of India 1911, Vol. XVI, Baroda, part 1, Report (Times Press, Bombay 1911), p. 61.

36 The original was in Gujarati. BA, J.D. 1913, compilation 234, p.113.

The basic theme to emerge from this book was that Christians and Muslims were plotting to overthrow Hindu dharna. The missionaries were being sponsored by the rich people of Europe and America. Hindu dharna was at their mercy because the people had been impoverished by famine, caste rules were no longer being maintained and moral fibre had deteriorated. The book exhorted Hindus to despise Christians and Muslims. It asked them to live simply so that they could donate generously to charity. The cow and the Brahman had to be revered and protected as in days of old. Only by such action could national unity, absolute Swaraj, and the regeneration of India come about.³⁷ Thus the search for a new, more relevant model of purity, had become political. The agricultural depression was no longer seen as being responsible for the social turmoil of the day. The fault lay with the British who were undermining Hindu dharna. Before there could be a new golden age, the foreigners would have to be chased from India.

The lesser Patidars only began to link their discontent to nationalism in the second decade of the twentieth century. Before this time their protest had been inarticulate and mostly seen in the refusal to pay land revenue. No-revenue movements became common in the years 1899-1907. The first was in 1899, the year of the great famine. During this year the local authorities wanted to give generous suspensions of revenue totalling Rs. 35 lakhs throughout Gujarat. The Bombay Government callously ordered that this should be cut to Rs. 16½ lakhs, and that the farmers should pay from their savings. Some Patidars combined together to refuse their revenue. At Bodal in Borsad Raluka the village headman was the only man who paid, and he was outcaste.³⁸

37 Ibid., pp. 39, 40, 51, 112, 113. The belief in nationalism and absolute Swaraj was expressed by these Arya Samajists of Nadiad in: F.B.Shah and C.N.Desai, The Indian National Songs (Gujarat Patra Press, Nadiad 1909), Preface (unpaginated).

38 Assistant Collector's Report, Kheda, 1899-1900, p. 19.

In Mehmabad the opposition was so stubborn that the mamlatdar had a nervous breakdown and had to be retired prematurely. The hard-pressed Collector, Henry Quin, eventually served notices on thousands of defaulters that if the revenue was not paid, their land would be sold by auction. One by one the Patidars reluctantly paid. Eventually nine of the usual twenty-one lakhs were collected.³⁹

These events created a scandal in Bombay, leading to a Government inquiry, which found that in some cases collection methods had been over-harsh.⁴⁰ The Report of the Indian Famine Commission of 1901 was critical about the burden of revenue demanded from Gujarat. It also condemned the Bombay Government's actions in 1899-1900.⁴¹ The Bombay Revenue Department had gained notoriety throughout India for its reluctance to suspend revenue in bad seasons. In 1902 it bent to the criticisms by sanctioning a few temporary reductions which were confined to Matar, Mehmedabad and Thasra Talukas, and a few villages of Anand and Nadiad Talukas. Kapadvanj Taluka and the Charotar continued with the rates of the 1890s settlements. The Gaikwadi Government was more sensitive, largely because the Patidars were a more powerful interest group in Baroda than they were in Bombay. In 1907 the revenue was decreased by seventeen per cent in the Baroda Charotar.⁴² The result was that many farmers in the British Charotar began to refuse to pay their revenue regularly. The Government often sanctioned revenue suspensions at the end of a bad year. Those too timid or weak to refuse their revenue thus lost their money, while stubborn Patidars, who had

39 Kheda Gazetteer, Vol. III-B (1904), p. 20.

40 G.D.Patel, The Land Revenue Settlement and the British Rule in India, p. 236.

41 Report of the Indian Famine Commission 1901, (Government of India, Calcutta 1901), pp. 82-91.

42 Baroda Gazetteer, Vol. II, p. 43.

held out, escaped. Eventually the Government retaliated by jailing prominent Patidars till they paid up.⁴³

In these years the British Collector used to report annually that the Patidars remained 'loyal'. This was not so. The British officers had failed to realise that revenue evasions, criminality, the refusal to co-operate with the British police, and Hindu revivalist movements were all ways in which an inarticulate peasantry expressed their disloyalty. The Patidars needed a champion who could make their evasions into a moral issue. These early no-revenue movements bore the same relation to the later Gandhian campaigns as did Luddism to trade unionism.

As the lesser Patidars became more aware of the outside world they began to link their hatred of the bureaucracy to nationalist sentiments. The famine played a major role in opening the villages to the political philosophies of the outside world. The milk and butter trade, which so many Patidars were forced to turn to at this time, required daily contacts with the cities, for milk was a highly perishable commodity. Political events in Bombay became common knowledge in Charotar villages within a day. The attempts made by many Patidars to set up small scale industries brought them into competition with the world market. They were not always successful. For instance, a stocking factory started by some Patidars in 1907 failed because Japanese stockings proved cheaper.⁴⁴ It did not take long for these struggling entrepreneurs to blame their failure on the British. Swadeshi and protectionist sentiments began to be voiced freely in the Charotar.⁴⁵

Young lesser Patidars born after about 1880 were most receptive to the nationalist appeal. Aurobindo Ghose and Tilak became the heroes of

43 Collector's Report, Kheda, 1905-06, p. 21.

44 Collector's Report, Kheda, 1908-09, p. 35.

45 After 1907 Swadeshi shops were established in the larger towns of the District. They were a success. Collector's Report, Kheda, 1906-07, p. 13.

this generation before Gandhi appeared. This generation was a particularly idealistic one, partly because the famine had made it harder to achieve material success in life. Few could afford the education needed to escape the narrow world of the village, and it was rare for those who did to progress beyond a high school education. They never achieved the success of the superior Patidars of the same generation. They considered themselves fortunate if they could gain employment as petty bureaucrats, or could set up a modest business. Often they failed to gain the necessary western style qualifications and had to return to their villages to scrape a living from farming or petty trade. Others qualified to become schoolmasters and returned to their villages to pursue this ill-paid profession. These men were to become an important element in the Gandhian movement, for they gladly embraced doctrines which stressed the superiority of village life over the modern capitalist world in which they had failed. They were to become the backbone of the Congress movement in the villages. In this way the agricultural depression prepared the way for the peasant romanticism of Gandhi.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NATIONALIST LEADERSHIP FOR KHEDA

So far we have been concerned almost entirely with the social history of the peasants, and particularly the Patidars of Kheda. It is now time to shift our attention to the cities of Gujarat and towns of Kheda. During the period 1900-1911 small groups of nationalists emerged in several of the towns and cities of Gujarat. In the years after 1917 these groups provided the nationalist leadership for the Patidar peasants of Kheda. In this chapter we shall see how a nationalist ideology developed in Gujarat in the first decade of the twentieth century, and then look at the reasons for the popularity of this ideology in two towns of Kheda. The chapter will end with a description of the emergence of nationalist movements with formal organisations in the towns of Kheda in 1917.

1. The emergence of a nationalist ideology

Before 1917 Gujarat had a reputation in nationalist circles for being a torpid backwater of ideological conservatism.¹ There was much truth in this. In Gujarat the most important western-educated group was that of the Nagar Brahmins. This group did not lack understanding of nationalist ideology; one only has to read the diaries of the Nadiad Nagar Brahmin, Govardanram Tripathi, to appreciate this.² However, very few Nagar Brahmins became nationalists, largely because their material interests made them supporters of the status quo. Many Nagar Brahmins had important political positions in the states of Kathiawar, and many were involved in commercial ventures which brought them great profit. One example was Mansukhram Tripathi (1840-1907), a Nagar Brahmin of Nadiad,

1 For instance, see P.H. Shastri to D. Naoroji, 21 December 1906, quoted in: Judith Brown, Gandhi's Rise to Power, (Cambridge University Press 1972), p. 90.

2 Govardhanram Madhavram Tripathi, Scrap Book 1888-1894, ed. K.C. Pandya, R.P. Bakshi, S.J. Pandya, Manuscript Volumes I, II, III, IV - Part (i), (N.M. Tripathi, Bombay 1959), pp. 43-44.

who made his fortune on the Bombay stock market. He acted as Bombay agent for the states of Junagadh, Kutch and Idar and had immense powers of patronage as a result. Although he opposed the nationalist movement, he financed moderates such as Pherozeshah Mehta and Dadabhai Naoroji in the 1890s to counter Tilak's extreme doctrines. Tilak was unable to get donations for his cause from many Kathiawari princes because of Mansukhram's influence in the peninsula.³ In short, although the Nagar Brahmans understood the philosophy of nationalism they had few serious grievances, and few were prepared to support the nationalist movement.

There were some exceptions to this rule. One was a group of Ahmedabad intellectuals who founded the Gujarat Sabha in 1884. Their leader was Sir Ramanbhai Nilkanth (1868-1928), a Nagar Brahman who believed in social reform and who was well known for his satirical and humorous writing. The active members of the Gujarat Sabha were mostly Ahmedabad lawyers.⁴ They had few important grievances and merely provided a weak form of leadership for a few elite Ahmedabadis. There were also individual nationalists, such as Ambalal Desai, a Brahma Kshatriya from Kheda District who devoted himself to politics after retiring from the Chief Justiceship of Baroda State. He attempted to act as the champion of the Patidar peasantry at the time of the famine, when there was considerable discontent over heavy revenue demands. Ambalal Desai took up the Patidars' grievance with the Bombay Government, but his protest was polite, a request for justice rather than a demand. In his speech at the 1902 Congress session Ambalal Desai could only

3 Indulal Yajnik, Atmakatha, Vol. I, (Ravani Prakashan, Ahmedabad 1967), pp. 12-15.

4 For instance, in 1916 five of the six main leaders of the Gujarat Sabha were lawyers, one a doctor. Of the 35 Ahmedabadis who travelled to the Lucknow Congress session of that year, 18 were lawyers, 14 were businessmen, 2 were doctors, and one was Gandhi. Report on the 31st Indian National Congress 1916, (Leader Press, Allahabad 1917), pp. 207-234.

make the weak remark that decades of criticism had had no effect on the Bombay Revenue Department.⁵

There was, however, one important area of nationalist activity in Gujarat during this period. This was in Baroda City, where an extremist nationalist movement flourished during the first decade of the twentieth century. This movement was largely organised by Brahman nationalists from Maharashtra, who found Baroda a congenial centre for their activities. The leaders were the Bengali, Aurobindo Ghose, who was a professor at Baroda College from 1892 to 1906, and K.G.Deshpande, a Marathi intellectual who served as a suba, or head of district, in the Baroda Revenue Department. Sayajirao III needed officials of I.C.S. calibre, and to get such men he could not afford scruples about their political leanings. Sayajirao himself was never a serious nationalist, he dabbled with it during this period, but abandoned the doctrine as soon as it became a threat to his power. He was prepared to give these intellectuals a free rein, especially as their movement never represented a threat to the state. Sayajirao hoped that the benefit to the state would outweigh the displeasure he would incur from the ruling race. This was a miscalculation which nearly lost him his throne.

The Baroda extremists believed in the doctrine of Hindu patriotism. This doctrine was, in Aurobindo's words:⁶

... an attempt to relegate the dominant bourgeois to his old obscurity, to transform the bourgeois into the Samurai, and through him to extend the working of the Samurai spirit to the whole nation.

In other words, Aurobindo believed that Japan had met the challenge of the western world by fostering the feudal ethics of the Samurai. He believed that Hindus likewise had to reassert the ethics of their feudal

5 Vaikunthlal S.Thakore, Speeches and Writings of the Late Dewan Bahadur Ambalal S.Desai M.A., LL.B., (V.S.Thakore, Bombay 1918), p.21.

6 Aurobindo Ghose, 'Unpublished essay for 'Bande Materam' 1908', Early Political Writings, (Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, Pondicherry 1972), p. 905.

past in order to develop the strength to throw off the British yoke. In such doctrines Baroda State served as an example of the superiority of Indian self-rule over British rule. Many nationalists believed that India could be rejuvenated under the rule of enlightened Indian princes, such as the Gaikwad of Baroda. Some even believed that the Gaikwad should be made King of Gujarat.⁷ The Gaikwad could only be flattered by such doctrines. This above all explains why he tolerated the presence of the extremists for so long.

Attempts were made to form select bands of Marathis and Gujaratis who could act as terrorists and revolutionaries within Gujarat.⁸ One of the focal points for such activity was a nationalist school called the Ganganath Bharatiya Sarva Vidyalaya, founded by K.G. Deshpande in 1907. Strict discipline was maintained at this boarding school. There were about sixty students, who were mostly in their mid-teens. By caste they were mostly Marathi Brahmans and Patidars.⁹ Madho Prasad has written about this institution:¹⁰

The Vidyalaya taught dharma, pranayam, yoga asanas, and mantra japas. The pupils learnt selections from the four Vedas by

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- 7 An obscure pamphlet by a Brahman lawyer of Kheda town was typical of this school of thought. The writer suggested that all Gujarati speaking areas come under the Gaikwad of Baroda, Rajasthan under the Maharaja of Udaipur, and the Punjab under a Sikh prince. Under such rule India could develop industrially and militarily. Punjabhai Bhatt, The Solution of the Political Problem in India, (Praja Bandhu Printing Works, Ahmedabad 1903), pp. 1-9.
- 8 Georges Balandier has noted that the first stage in the nationalist period of opposition to colonial rule has often been the formation of secret revolutionary bands motivated by a modernised form of traditional religion, which have made the nation an object of devotion. He calls such groups 'politico-religious sects'. Georges Balandier, Political Anthropology, pp. 163-4.
- 9 Source Material for a History of the Freedom Movement in India, Collected from Bombay Government Records, Vol. II, (Government Central Press, Bombay 1958), p. 862. (hereafter Bombay Source Material).
- 10 Madho Prasad, A Gandhian Patriarch, a Political and Spiritual Biography of Kaka Kalelkar, (Popular Prakashan, Bombay 1965), pp. 86-87.

heart. Indian history was learnt through books by Indian authors presenting the Indian angle. There was also provision for the teaching of the usual subjects Sanskrit, mathematics, drawing, hygiene, first aid, etc. In carpentry, weaving, tailoring, office organisation and management, practical instruction was imparted. The medium of instruction was the mother-tongue. Once a week, pupils went round the city, begging for alms in the ancient way. The dignity of manual labour was taught by example and precept, more by example than precept. There was provision for physical instruction. "Training in arms", according to the Editor of the Source Material, "was a part of the curriculum in which General Nana Saheb Shinde, the C-in-C of the Baroda State, and other military officers used to take interest and participate.

Besides Marathi Brahmans, Gujarati Brahmans and to a lesser extent young superior Patidars appear to have responded best to these nationalist activities. The most important Gujarati terrorist group was formed by Mohanlal Pandya, Punjabhai Bhatt and Narsinhbhai Patel. The first two were Vadadra Brahmans from the small town of Kathlal in Kapadvanj Taluka of Kheda District. The Vadadras were respectable farmers on a par with the Patidars of Kathlal. In the late nineteenth century they had taken to western education. Mohanlal Pandya, who was born in 1872, had studied at Bombay University and in 1904 had joined the Baroda State Department of Agriculture. Punjabhai Bhatt, who was born in 1871, had studied at Gujarat College, Ahmedabad, and then became a pleader at Kheda town. Narsinhbhai Patel was from the superior Patidar village of Sojitra. He was employed as an official by the Baroda State, and in the period after 1905 worked in the Baroda territories in North Gujarat at Mehsana town. He learnt Bengali so that he could translate nationalist literature into Gujarati and by 1911 had published six books, mostly translations. These were printed at the Shikshak Press at Mehsana, which was owned by Narsinhbhai's brother.

This group organised themselves into a band of revolutionary terrorists in 1908. They were initiated into the techniques of terrorism by Aurobindo Ghose's brother, Barindra, who had been a leading figure in the revolutionary samitis in East Bengal after 1902.¹¹ Popular legend holds them responsible for the attempted assassination of Lord and

11 A.B.Purani, The Life of Sri Aurobindo (1872-1926) (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 1960) p.112. J.H.Dave, Kunshi: His Art and Work, Vol. I, p. 37.

Lady Minto with two coconut bombs at Ahmedabad on 15 November 1909.¹² In March 1911 the British discovered the existence of the group after a manual on bomb making fell into their hands. This manual, published under the misleading title of vanaspatini davao (herbal remedies) and printed at the Shikshak Press at Mehsana, had been written by Narsinhbhai Patel. It called the British "aliens and black serpents" who had come to rob India in the guise of spreading civilisation. Those who helped the British were traitors. Indians had to learn to manufacture arms, or buy them from Europe, and then persuade the native troops to join the revolutionaries. The British were few in numbers and could be overwhelmed with ease.¹³ The books were sent anonymously to those believed sympathetic to the cause. After a batch of these books had been seized in south Gujarat, the British police traced the source back to the three extremists. Punjabhai Bhatt was a British subject and was tried in Bombay. He could not be convicted due to perjury committed by Narsinhbhai Patel.¹⁴ Narsinhbhai himself was tried in Baroda, but was skilfully defended by his friend, the future politician Vithalbhai Patel, and was acquitted.¹⁵

Although there were no convictions, evidence which came to light during the trials showed that the Baroda Civil Service had many extremist nationalists in it. The Gaikwad was placed in an extremely embarrassing

12 The British never found the culprits. NAI, H-Poll, January 1910, 143-153. The families of both Mohanlal Pandya and Punjabhai Bhatt still reside at Kathlal, and insist that the group was behind the attempted assassination. Interview with Sumant Bhatt (grandson of Punjabhai Bhatt) Kathlal, 20 August 1972.

13 Advocate of India, 7 February 1912, p. 6.

14 Bombay Source Material, Vol. II, p. 601.

15 Gordhanbhai Patel, Vithalbhai Patel, Life and Times, Vol. I, (R.A. Moramkar, Bombay 1951), p. 32.

position, and demands were heard in British circles for his abdication. In late 1911 he pulled back from the brink by forcing K.G.Deshpande and Mohanlal Pandya to resign from state service and by confiscating the Shikshak press and forbidding Narsinhbhai Patel entry into Baroda State for five years.¹⁶ Narsinhbhai fled to East Africa to escape prosecution for perjury in the British courts. He returned to India in the 1920s and became a Gandhian leader in Gujarat after 1917. Punjabhai Bhatt continued as a pleader till 1927, after which he became a sadhu. He never accepted Gandhi's teachings.

During the period 1890-1912 Baroda City, rather than Ahmedabad or Bombay, was the intellectual centre for central Gujarat. As a result, the brand of nationalism which became popular among the western educated students of central Gujarat was not that of the moderate liberals of Bombay, but that of the Hindu patriots of Calcutta and Poona.¹⁷ In schools throughout Kheda District, Tilak and Aurobindo became the popular heroes of the day. A good illustration of this process can be found in Motibhai Amin's Boarding House at Petlad in the Charotar.

In 1905 Motibhai Amin, the Vaso Patidar whom we have met in Chapter Three, and who had served as a Baroda State school-teacher since 1900, was appointed headmaster of Petlad High School in the Baroda Charotar. He was headmaster for only six years, but in this time he made Petlad into

16 Bombay Source Material, Vol. II, p. 601. In this source Narsinhbhai was described as: "... a dangerous specimen of the Patidar community which has rather an unenviable reputation for criminality and the subversion of justice and order".

17 An example of this concerned the future politician K.M.Munshi, who was a student at Baroda College at this time. One day he went to Aurobindo Ghose and asked him how he could become patriotic. He expected to be told to read about Mazzini, and was disappointed when Aurobindo recommended Vivekananda, saying: "Concentrate on Bharat as a living mother, worship her with the nine-fold Bhakti." Munshi persevered with Vivekananda, and said that for the first time he understood the harmful effects of western materialism. J.H.Dave and others, Munshi His Art and Work, Vol. I, (Shri Munshi Seventieth Birthday Citizens' Celebration Committee, Bombay 1956), p. 38.

one of the most prestigious high schools in Gujarat. In 1906 he started a boarding house after he noticed that many of the boys had to make long exhausting journeys on foot each day to reach the school. The existing High School teachers were of low calibre, and so he employed four new teachers to give extra tuition to the boarding house boys. Their teaching was of a high quality, and there was an enthusiastic atmosphere at the boarding house. When he was free, Motibhai Amin toured the villages of the Charotar collecting funds for the boarding house, and finding promising young Patidars to whom he could give scholarships. Motibhai hoped to create an educated elite of Patidars who could return to their villages to initiate social reform programmes. As a result there was a strong emphasis in the teaching at the boarding house on the duty of the educated to serve society.¹⁸

Motibhai Amin was not a supporter of the nationalist movement. He believed that involvement in politics would lead to the boarding house being closed down, and he attempted to stop the circulation of nationalist ideas. The effect of this ban was to make nationalist ideas all the more popular. The boys were further encouraged by one of the teachers, Karunashankar Master, who was a supporter of Gokhale, and also by the extremist Narsinhbhai Patel, who was a friend of Motibhai Amin and used to visit the school. Karunashankar Master used to give the boys Gujarati translations of books on such subjects as the Arya Samaj, Theosophy, Rabindranath Tagore, Booker T. Washington, Abraham Lincoln and Garibaldi. At school the boys used to read histories of England, such as Macaulay's, from which they received the idea of liberty. They were particularly impressed by the beheading of Charles I.¹⁹ Some of the boys were Arya Samajists.²⁰ The boys supported Tilak, Aurobindo and Lala Lajpat Rai,

18 . P.C. Shah, Motibhai Amin, pp. 71-77, 107.

19 Interview with Fulsinhji Dabhi (ex-student of Petlad boarding house) Nadiad, 29 September 1973.

20 Interview with Shivabhai Ranchodbhai Patel (ex-student of Petlad boarding house) Nadiad, 4 October 1973.

and swaraj was a constant topic of discussion.²¹

The majority of boys at the Patlad boarding house appear to have been Patidars. Many were from superior villages, but a significant number were intelligent young lesser Patidars who were given scholarships by Motibhai Amin. The majority went on to successful careers in which they were sympathetic to nationalism, but were not active nationalists. However, an unusually large number of talented young Patidars from the boarding house decided to devote their lives to serving society. Many became school-teachers or social workers. After 1917 they became supporters of Gandhi, and combined their social reform activities with leadership of their local Congress organisations. Without meaning to, Motibhai Amin had taken the cream of the Patidar youth of the day, and made many into future leaders of the nationalist movement in Kheda.

2. The Nationalist Challenge to the Nadiad Desais

So far in this chapter the emergence of nationalism in Kheda has been seen in terms of the spread of an ideology from Baroda City. It is easy to explain the conversion of idealistic students to nationalism in such terms, but not the conversion of hard-headed politicians. Politicians often take up popular ideologies to further their careers. Nationalism was an extremely potent and potentially popular ideology, and it was hardly surprising that certain local politicians in Kheda should use the ideology as a means of challenging the predominant local political power in the district, the Desais of Nadiad. This attack on the Nadiad Desais came at a time when they were losing the support which they had enjoyed formerly from the British.

The first challenge to the Nadiad Desais came from some superior Patidar lawyers of Borsad Court, led by Vithalbhai Patel. Vithalbhai and his younger brother, Vallabhbhai, were from the superior Patidar

21 Ravjibhai Manibhai Patel, Jivanna Jharna, Vol. I, (Navajivan, Ahmedabad 1959), pp. 24-31.

village of Karansad. Vithalbhai was born in 1873, Vallabhbhai in 1875. They were the third and fourth sons in a family of five sons. Their father was not a rich man, but as their mother was from Nadiad they were able to stay in the house of her relatives while they studied at Nadiad High School. The family could not afford a University education for these two talented young men, so they studied law books at home and eventually passed the District Pleader Examination, which qualified them to practise in the District Courts. Both started practice at Godhra in the Panch Mahals District, but in 1898 Vithalbhai shifted to Borsad, and in 1902 Vallabhbhai followed him.²² In these years the practice of Criminal Law at Borsad was particularly lucrative, for the Taluka had the highest crime rate in Bombay Presidency.²³ The two brothers soon built up a reputation for being able to ensure the acquittal of almost any accused criminal. Whether or not they used bribed witnesses is unknown. The other lawyers at Borsad did.²⁴ They soon became the local heroes, the champions of the Patidars in their perpetual war with the British police and bureaucracy. During these years Vallabhbhai Patel gained through his work an intricate knowledge of the politics and intrigues of Kheda District. The knowledge was to serve him in good stead when he became a Congress leader after 1917.

By 1905 Vithalbhai had earned enough money to be able to go to England for study. In 1908 he returned to India as a Barrister, and started practise in Bombay. Between 1910 and 1913 Vallabhbhai emulated his brother, and after returning from England set up practice in Ahmedabad. By this time Vithalbhai had become a nationalist politician. Although Vithalbhai's practice was in Bombay he accepted important cases in

22 G.I.Patel, Vithalbhai Patel, Vol. I, pp. 12-19. Narhari D.Parikh, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Vol. I (Navajivan, Ahmedabad 1953), pp.8-11.

23 Narhari Parikh, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Vol. I, p. 13.

24 Assistant Collector's Report, Kheda, 1906-07, p. 87.

Kheda District, such as the much publicised Nadiad Hindu Anath Ashram case, which involved a dispute between the town Arya Samajists and a local Missionary, Mr. Park. In 1911 he successfully defended his friend the revolutionary Narsinhbhai Patel against the charges brought by the Baroda Government. These cases enhanced Vithalbhai's reputation as a popular local hero and champion of the people.

In 1911 Vithalbhai decided to challenge the Nadiad Desais for a seat on the new Bombay Legislative Council, formed as a result of the 1909 Morley-Minto reforms. There were no seats for Kheda as such, only seats for the Bombay Presidency Northern Division Local Boards, or Northern Division Municipalities. Vithalbhai had to start by seeking election to the Borsad Taluka Local Board, which he achieved in 1911. He was then elected to the Kheda District Local Board. For the election to the Bombay Council Vithalbhai stood against the Nadiad Desai, Girdhadas. Girdhadas had controlled the Nadiad Municipality for many years as a nominated President and favourite of the British. The prominent Bombay lawyer Gokaldas Parekh, who was a Vania from Umreth town, stood against the Nadiad Desai, Gopaldas, for the Municipalities seat. The Nadiad Desais proved no match for the two lawyers at electioneering. Gopaldas Desai even implied in his manifesto that Gokaldas Parekh was probably the better candidate.²⁵ Both the Nadiad Desais were defeated in the elections Vithalbhai won by forty votes to twenty-five.²⁶ I have no details on how Vithalbhai achieved this result, but it was probably a combination of his personal popularity in the District coupled with a desire by the District Board members to cut the Nadiad Desais down to size.

At this time the Nadiad Desais were also under attack from the

25 Desai family papers in possession of Virendra Desai, Nadiad.

26 G.I.Patel, Vithalbhai Patel, Vol. I, p. 37.

British administration in Kheda District. This situation had arisen from a campaign against crime launched by an energetic, but impetuous and high handed Head of the District between 1909 and 1913, the Bengali Christian, Alfred William Goodeve Chuckerbutty. In his first report to Bombay he thundered against the "Primitive people" of Anand and Borsad Talukas:²⁷

Their well being is so great that they have, even now after a famine, ample leisure to indulge in their most primitive passions of love and desire and revenge. On this is based from old times their scheme of violent crime and medieval vendetta ... The Borsad bar enjoys an unenviable reputation for intrigue and bullying and free thinking almost amounting to sedition.

Chuckerbutty organised a conference for all his chief officers, at which he harangued them on the consequences of corruption. He demoted or transferred officials whom he suspected of wrong practices. He rewarded village headmen who gave information. Any murder was followed up relentlessly, such as the case at Rasnol, where the village headman was thrown into jail for failing to explain why a body had been found in a nearby field.²⁸ Murderers were hanged in public at the scene of the crime.²⁹ These activities caused intense annoyance throughout the District. However, Chuckerbutty had his eye on what he called Patidars of "baronial power".³⁰ In 1911 he managed to prove that the Nadiad Desais were swindling the Government of tens of thousands of rupees each year.

The swindle concerned Government auctions of grass plots in Thasra Taluka. After the famine much of the land in the poor Mal tract of Thasra Taluka had gone out of cultivation. The grass which grew there

27 Collector's Report, Kheda, 1909-10, p. 43.

28 Collector's Report, Kheda, 1911-12, BA, R.D.1913, comp.511, part II, p. 41.

29 BA, J.D. 1912, comp. 1551, pp. 1-26.

30 Collector's Report, Kheda, 1911-12, p. 52.

had value as fodder, and the Government decided to auction plots on an annual basis. The Nadiad Desais had managed to use their influence with Indian officials ranging from District Deputy Collector to village headman to ensure that much of the grassland went to them at a nominal sum. Other Patidars had bought up the remaining plots cheaply by organising an auction ring. Anyone who bid against the ring found the grass plot he had purchased going up in flames. It was later calculated that Government lost between Rs. 50,000 and Rs. 100,000 a year from these frauds. Although these activities had been going on since 1904, it was only under Chuckerbutty's regime that they were suspected. After investigation the auction ring was broken, and to lighten their punishment some of the Patidars involved agreed to give information about the Nadiad Desais. On the strength of this evidence, Chuckerbutty arrested Vithaldas Desai in September 1911.³¹

Chuckerbutty had gone too far in his cleansing of the "Augean stable", as he put it.³² In his attempt to be more British than the British he had failed to understand that the survival of the Indian empire depended on not alienating influential and loyal families such as the Nadiad Desais. A few days later the Sessions Judge of Ahmedabad, B.C.Kennedy, ordered that Vithaldas be released on bail. Chuckerbutty immediately wrote to Kennedy condemning the move, saying that Vithaldas was now eradicating compromising evidence. Chuckerbutty continued:³³

You were I am sure wrong in thus weakening the authority of the District Magistrate, particularly in a District where the High Court have specially enjoined upon Government to take very special measures to suppress crime, and therefore it seems very necessary that if you have any doubt at all as to whether it was your duty to so interfere, the Honourable the Chief Justice and Judges of His Majesty's High Court of Judicature should issue a

31 Full details of the case are given in Collector's Report, Kheda, 1911-12, pp. 53-57.

32 Ibid., p. 52.

33 BA, J.D. 1911, Vol. 120, comp. 2331, pp. 287-89.

disciplinary order to you not to so interfere in future, and am accordingly asking them to do so, believing the matter to be one of grave importance ...

Kennedy reported the matter immediately to Bombay. Chuckerbutty was censured for criticising his judicial superior, and told that his act of ordering Vithaldas into custody had been illegal. Chuckerbutty was forced to apologise to Kennedy.³⁴ Although Vithaldas was subsequently found guilty, and other revelations came out which showed how the Nadiad Desais had used their good relations with succeeding Collectors to trick them into granting land revenue concessions, Vithaldas was let off with only a warning. The ostensible reason was that as the frauds had been going on for eight years and involved officials of all grades, it would be unfair to convict Vithaldas and not the officials.³⁵ However, the real reason would appear to have been a wish not to alienate the chief allies of the British in Kheda any further. As it was, the case badly undermined the prestige of the Desais in the District. They could no longer claim to be on good terms with the British.

The Nadiad Desais were also challenged by a group of Vania lawyers' and Arya Samajists of Nadiad Town. The Vanias of Nadiad had acquired considerable amounts of land in the Baraiya dominated villages in the vicinity of Nadiad in the late nineteenth century, and were a prosperous and flourishing class. Nadiad was traditionally controlled by a mahajan, of which the Nadiad Desais were the most important members. In the late nineteenth century the power of the mahajan had been undermined by the establishment of the Nadiad Municipality and the growth in importance of the courts. The British gave the Nadiad Desais power in these bodies as nominated Presidents of the Municipality and Honorary

34 Ibid., pp. 301-303.

35 Collector's Report, Kheda, 1911-12, p. 55.

Magistrates. Some Vantias had reacted by taking up extreme anti-British nationalist ideologies. They tried to prove that they were the real guardians of Hindu dharna in Nadiad by becoming fervent Arya Samajists and founding the Hindu Anath Ashram. The two centres for these Vania dissidents were the Hindu Anath Ashram and the Nadiad bar, which came to be dominated by Vania lawyers. The two leaders of the Nadiad Vantias were Gokaldas Talati (b.1868), who was a graduate of Bombay University, and Phulchand Bapuji Shah (b.1882), who was from a rich Vania family of the town. Their ideas have already been examined in Chapter Four.

When Gandhi returned to India in 1915 these two extremists immediately sought his backing for their cause. They were first in contact with Gandhi in January 1915, and in 1916 Gandhi paid a couple of visits to the Hindu Anath Ashram. At the Lucknow Congress of 1916 there were seven delegates from Kheda District. All were from Nadiad, and all except one were Vania lawyers.³⁶ The Nadiad Vantias had now become fervent Congressmen in their struggle against the Nadiad Desais. The further nationalist exploits of these Vantias will be examined later. Here it is sufficient to say that they became extremely popular throughout the District as a result of the no-revenue campaign in the first half of 1918. In this year the Presidentship of the Municipality became elective for the first time, which was a delayed result of the 1909 reforms. Girdhardas Desai, who was the nominated President and life and soul of the Municipality, stood for election. The nationalist party put up Gokaldas Talati. After some astute canvassing behind the scenes, the nationalists managed to persuade some leading Patidars on the Municipality that it would be in their interests to undermine the power of the

³⁶ Report on the 31st Indian National Congress 1916, pp. 207-234.

Desais by voting against them. In the election Gokaldas Talati won by a single vote. Girdhardas deeply resented this defeat at the hands of a small town ranter, whose tactics he felt had been undignified. After 1918 he used to take long detours to avoid the bitter taste of having to walk past the buildings of the Municipality which he had served so diligently for a quarter of a century, and which had rejected him so shabbily.³⁷

3. The Small Town "Awakening" of 1917

Before 1917 nationalist ideology was a little used resource in the political life of Gujarat. In the period between June and November 1917 nationalist organisations sprang up throughout the small towns of Gujarat. Gandhi, in a series of skilful manoeuvres, took charge of the nationalist movement in Gujarat, so that he could use the potent force of nationalist ideology to popularise his own philosophies. After 1917 nationalist leadership in Gujarat came not from Bombay, Baroda, or from Annie Besant in Madras, but from Gandhi in Ahmedabad.

Gandhi returned from South Africa in 1915, and settled in Ahmedabad, where he founded the Sabarmati Ashram. Gandhi was considered a somewhat disreputable figure in Ahmedabad society initially, because of his unorthodox experiments with untouchables at the Ashram. Vallabhbhai Patel, who was becoming a prominent figure in the life of the city, considered Gandhi to be a misguided religious crank, fit only for sarcastic jibes.³⁸ At this time Gandhi was not taking an active part in the politics of the city. The Gujarat Sabha was dominated by moderate lawyers, and the branch of the Besant Home Rule League which was

37 Interview with Virendra Desai (Great Grandson of Girdhardas), Nadiad, 4 October 1973.

38 Abdul Majid Khan, Life and Speeches of Sardar Patel, (The Indian Printing Works, New Delhi 1951), p. 43.

founded by the theosophist, Maganbhai Chatturbhai Patel in October 1916 had hardly managed to attract any members, probably because theosophy was not popular in Gujarat. The attitude of the Gujarat Sabha leaders towards Gandhi changed completely in April 1917, when he refused to obey the order to leave Champaran District in Bihar. The news came to Ahmedabad on a hot sleepy afternoon. The legal fraternity at the Gujarat Club leapt to their feet, and Harilal Desai shouted to G.V.Mavalankar: "Mavalankar, here is a brave man and we must have him as our (Gujarat Sabha) President."³⁹ Vallabhbhai Patel showed some interest in Gandhi for the first time. Even the British had to admit that the news had fully restored Gandhi's prestige in Ahmedabad.⁴⁰ Gandhi accepted the offer and became President of the Gujarat Sabha.

Gandhi had moved into a central position in the political life of Ahmedabad at a time when town dwellers throughout India were becoming increasingly exasperated by the soaring prices of essential commodities brought about by the First World War. There was little sympathy with the war effort, and recruitment and collection of war loans by British officials were resented bitterly.⁴¹ When Annie Besant was detained on 16 June 1917, people in towns throughout India expressed their resentment against the British by flocking out to attend protest meetings and demonstrations. Maganbhai Chatturbhai Patel's Home Rule League gatherings swelled into monster meetings. When the young Bombay activist, Indulal Yajnik, arrived in Ahmedabad in August 1917 he was astonished at the new atmosphere in the city. He attended a huge rally held by

39 Ibid., p. 44.

40 Bombay Source Material, Vol. III, Part I, pp. 45-46.

41 K.L.Gillion, Ahmedabad, (University of California 1968), p. 165.

the Gujarat Sabha at the covered vegetable market, and although the monsoon rains were pouring down, people were packed on the surrounding terraces, roofs and even trees to hear Gandhi demand Besant's release. Ten thousand people were there, including the textile magnates, Ambalal Sarabhai and Kasturbhai Lallbhai.⁴²

Gandhi had not intended to begin nationalist agitation until after the war had ended, but Annie Besant's sudden popularity had forced his hand. Gandhi disliked Besant's brand of nationalism and considered the Theosophical Society headquarters near Madras to be a hotbed of fraud.⁴³ He felt that Besant had been wrong to start her Home Rule League during the war. The idea that her brand of nationalism might become popular in Gujarat forced Gandhi onto the political stage. On July 7 Gandhi wrote to the Private Secretary to the Viceroy criticising the Government for making Besant so popular by detaining her.⁴⁴ He held meetings in Ahmedabad to demand her release, but labelled them 'Gujarat Sabha' rather than 'Home Rule League' meetings.

Besant's Home Rule League made little headway in Gujarat before her release on 17 September 1917. This was because the period coincided with the monsoon months when travel was often impossible, at best unpleasant. During this period Home Rule League leaders only travelled to the larger towns of Gujarat and only thirteen branches were founded. Nine of these were started by Bombay leaders who travelled to Gujarat at weekends, the other four through local initiative. Of the nine founded by the Bombay Home Rulers, one was the Broach Town branch, two were in the leading towns of the Panch Mahals District, and all the rest were in

42 Indulal Yajnik, Atmakatha, Vol. II (Gujar Grantharatan Karyalay, Ahmedabad 1970), p. 6.

43 For Gandhi's differences with Besant see: Judith Brown, Gandhi's Rise to Power, p. 49. Judith Brown fails to show how Gandhi's antipathy to Besant forced him into action in 1917. See p. 92.

44 CWNG 13, pp. 464-65.

villages in Surat District. In other words, most of the new branches founded by the Bombay leaders were in that part of Gujarat nearest to Bombay.⁴⁵

The Ahmedabad Home Rule League leader Maganbhai Chatturbhai Patel only founded one new branch during the monsoon period, at his home town of Nadiad on July 1. The leaders of this branch were Gokaldas Talati and Phulchand Bapuji Shah. In late August they were joined by Indulal Yajnik. Indulal Yajnik was a Nagar Brahman from Nadiad who had pioneered the Bombay Home Rule League in 1915 and 1916 with Jamnadas D warkadas and Shankarlal Banker. The political 'awakening' in Gujarat so impressed him that in August 1917 he decided to devote his time to political work in Gujarat. During the monsoon period the Nadiad group founded only two new branches. On August 19 they started a branch at Umreth with twenty-six members, and next day one at Anand with six members.⁴⁶ Both towns were on the railway line.

In central Gujarat the real extension of nationalist agitation took place after Besant's release on 17 September 1917, when Gandhi suggested that signatures should be collected in local vernacular languages for a petition to Montagu demanding the Congress-League Constitutional Scheme. Letters were sent by the Gujarat Sabha to Congress Committees throughout India suggesting the plan. The Bombay, Poona and Madras Home Rule Leagues agreed to prepare petitions in their local vernaculars.⁴⁷ This was an extremely shrewd move by Gandhi. He was bypassing the local Home Rule League branches and making the Gujarat Sabha into the nationalist

45 Bombay leaders also made eleven speech making tours during this period to the five District headquarter towns of Gujarat after Home Rule League branches had already been formed there. Bombay Chronicle 1917, 30 June, p. 10, 4 July p. 5, 19 July p. 6, 23 July p. 8, 24 July p. 6, 25 July p. 9, 7 August p. 6, 8 August p.8, 20 August p. 8, 27 August p. 8, 31 August p. 8, 7 September p. 5, 12 September p. 5, 15 September p. 10, 17 September p. 8.

46 Bombay Chronicle, 27 August, p. 8.

47 Bombay Chronicle, 1 October 1917, p. 7.

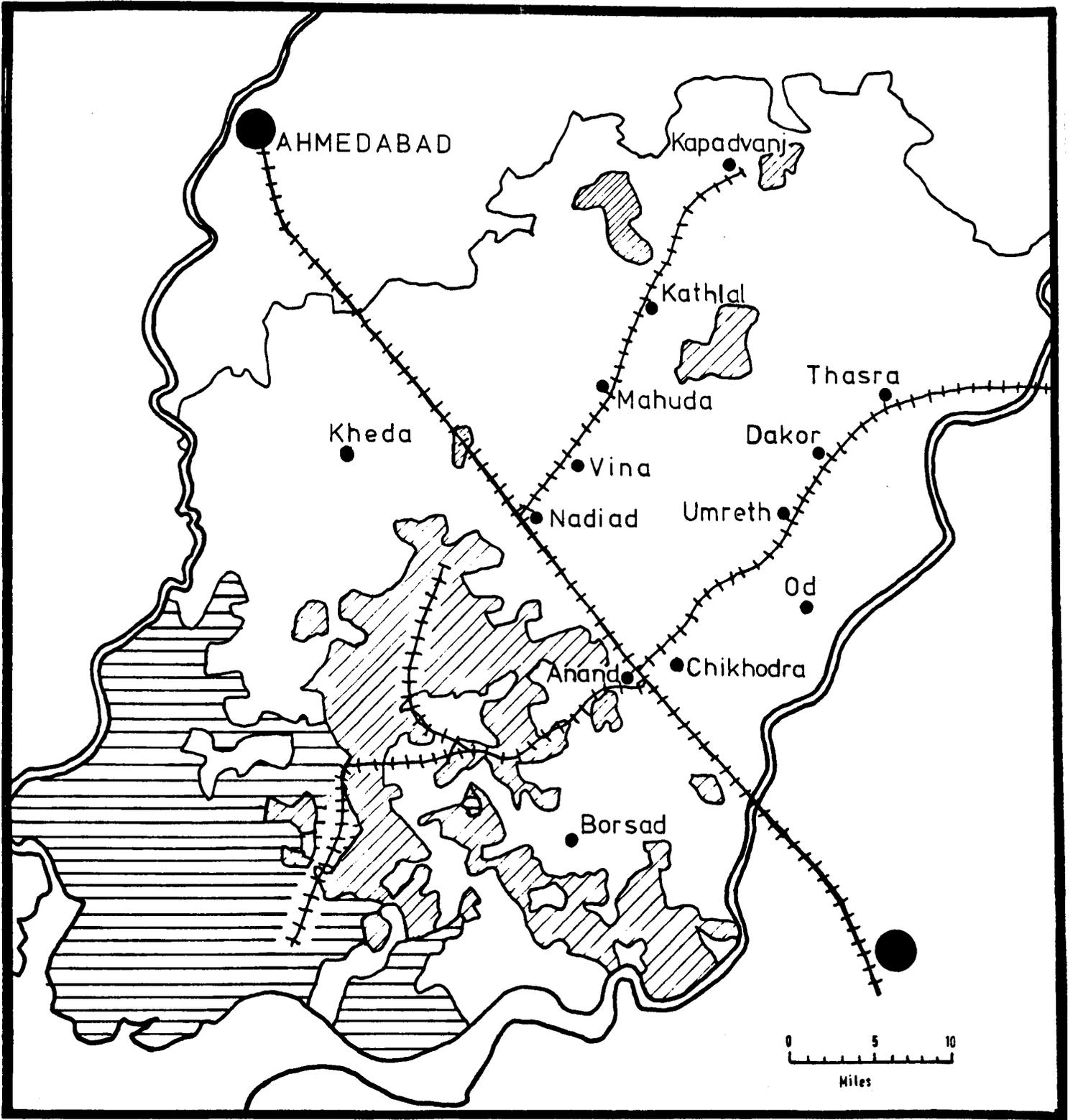
spokesman for Gujarat. By insisting on vernacular petitions he was asserting that Congress should be organised on the basis of linguistic regions. With this move he cut the new Gujarat nationalist movement away from the old Bombay Presidency Congress organisation, and based it on Ahmedabad.

The realisation that for the first time in the history of the nationalist movement a significant initiative had originated from Gujarat generated an outburst of energy which demonstrated that regional pride could be one of the major allies of Congress, even though it could also be an enemy. Thousands of copies of the petition were printed, and with the beginning of the 'second summer', as the two months after the monsoon are known in Gujarat, political workers for the first time began to go to the small towns of Central Gujarat. The Nadiad Home Rule League also undertook to collect signatures for the petition, so that in effect it was working under the Gujarat Sabha. Home Rule League branches continued to be founded throughout the year, but it would be a mistake to believe that they had any real connection with the Besant organisation in Bombay or Madras. They were in reality branches of the Gujarat Sabha.⁴⁸

The petition was a great success. By 29 September 1917, 8,000 signatures had been collected.⁴⁹ During September and October, Gujarat Sabha and Home Rule League delegations visited most of the towns of Kheda District. They did not stray far from the railway, as can be seen from the map. The usual practice was to arrive in a town in the morning and hold a meeting with the leading citizens, or an interested group. After a promise of support had been obtained a meeting was held, and

48 Hugh Owen had written that the Besant Home Rule League drew areas such as Gujarat, Sind, U.P. and Bihar into nationalist politics. In the case of Gujarat it would be truer to say that Gandhi's reaction to Besant drew Gujarat into nationalist politics. Hugh F. Owen, The Leadership of the Indian National Movement 1914-20, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Australian National University, 1965, pp. 220-221.

49 Bombay Chronicle, 1 October 1917, p. 7.



Map 3. Home Rule Meetings 1917.

- Places where Gujarat Sabha meetings were held and Home Rule League branches were opened in Kheda District before the first Gujarat Political Conference at Godhra (2-5 Nov. 1917).
- ▨ Baroda State territory
- ▬ Cambay " "
- +++++ Railway

signatures were collected. For a Home Rule League branch a nucleus of support had to be found in the morning. The formation of the branch was announced at the evening meeting, and people were invited to join. These branches were usually led by small cliques, such as the lawyers of a town.

The Borsad Town branch of the Home Rule League was a case in point. After Vallabhbhai Patel had left Borsad in 1910, the leading lights at the local court became the brothers Phulabhai and Dhanabhai Patel of Borsad, and Jivabhai Patel, who was from Karamsad. These three had started the first High School in the town in 1914. Although it was called the 'Borsad Edward Memorial English School', it was in fact a centre for nationalist thought, and the Patidar lawyers often took classes. However, they never joined any nationalist organisations. In September 1917 they wrote to the Gujarat Sabha in Ahmedabad, asking for a speaker. Vallabhbhai Patel decided to visit his old haunt, and travelled down by train on September 30 dressed in a fashionably cut black English suit. By chance the Nadiad Home Rulers had decided to visit Borsad on the same day. It was on this occasion that Indulal Yajnik met Vallabhbhai Patel for the first time. At Borsad they received a rousing welcome, and a branch of the Home Rule League was formed with about eighty members. The leaders were the Patidar lawyers.⁵⁰

The response by small town lawyers was a feature of the 1917 'awakening' throughout Gujarat and other parts of India. Usually the 'awakening' stuck at this level. This was the case in the Panch Mahals District, which was in a predominantly tribal area to the East of Kheda District. The Vania lawyers and teachers of the headquarter town, Godhra, were in many cases fervent nationalists. Even the Arya Samajist Vanias of Nadiad could hardly compete with the enthusiasm of these Godhra Vanias.

⁵⁰ Bombay Chronicle, 4 October 1917, p. 5, Indulal Yajnik, Atmakatha, Vol. II, p. 21.

They were led by a local Marathi Brahman High School teacher, Vamanrao Mukadam. But the Panch Mahals was destined to be a back-water in the nationalist movement, because the local peasantry, who were largely from Bhil tribes, were absolutely ignorant of the significance or even existence of nationalism. They could be stirred up, but not by Vania lawyers who had no links with the Bhils and who could not even speak the Bhil language, which was distinct from Gujarati. Between 1909 and 1912 they had been roused by the Messianic leader, Govindgiri, who managed to get a large following of Bhils from the area. In November 1912 he started an armed uprising, but was soon crushed by the army of Santrampur State, which bordered on the Panch Mahals.⁵¹ Govindgiri was successful in recruiting a following because he spoke the Bhil language and was able to appeal to the ambitions of the Bhils. He told them that if they reformed their personal life they could rise in the Hindu hierarchy. To the Bhils nationalism was a meaningless concept, their reality was their degraded position and poverty compared to the high castes.

In Kheda District nationalist ideology did not remain a small town affair as it did in the Panch Mahals District and in most other parts of India. In Kheda the small town 'awakening' of September and October 1917 was a mere prelude to the more significant events of November and December of that year, when the lesser Patidar peasants began to use nationalist ideology to express their grievances. This important development forms the subject of the next chapter.

51 Stephen Fuchs, Rebellious Prophets, (Asia Publishing House, London 1965), pp. 240-242.

CHAPTER SIX: THE NATIONALISATION OF PEASANT AGITATION

1. Patidar Grievances 1917-18

The nationalist agitation which flared up in India in 1917 coincided with a period of particular hardship for the peasants of Kheda. The hardship created discontent and local agitations. This chapter will examine why an agitation by lesser Patidars became a national issue, while agitations by Baraiyas and petty government officials did not. But first we must examine why the peasants were discontented at this particular time.

In April 1918 a Kheda farmer told the high ranking I.C.S. officer, Frederick Pratt:¹

I implore you as a representative of the ma bap to visit our villages to ascertain the amount of our crops. The scourge of plague is upon us. Bajri which was sold at Rs. 2 a maund in Sanvat 1916 (this should be A.D.1916) is now selling at Rs. 3 and 1/4 a maund. Rice is at Rs. 4 to 6 a maund. And under the law we may not (keep) Mowhra flowers. What shall the poor eat as they are thus placed and wherefrom shall they procure the money they pay you with? The price of iron having gone up our plough shares and our implements have become very dear. Things that cost two or three rupees before are costing Rs. 12 today. Labour also has become very expensive. We have to pay six annas for labour which we used to get for three. Sarkar ma bap should have mercy on us.

During this period the economic position of the landowning peasantry of Kheda was deteriorating badly. In the years between 1908 and 1914 there had been a partial recovery from the effects of the famine and its aftermath. Agricultural wages and crop prices had remained stable, coinciding with a run of good harvests, especially in the years 1912, 1913 and 1914. It was felt that prosperity was returning. But in 1915 there were only twelve and a half inches of rain, and the kharif crop failed. In 1916 the season was better, but by no means good. In 1917 late rains caused severe damage to the harvested crops. The farmers

¹ Bombay Chronicle, 17 April 1918, p. 9.

were also hit by a sudden rise in agricultural wage rates in September 1916 after a decade of stability.² In late 1916 a group of Baraiyas in the northern part of the district refused to work for the local Patidars. The movement spread to about 240 villages and affected the whole of the northern part of the district, where the Patidars were very much in a minority.³ These set-backs coincided with the severe inflation brought about by the First World War. The prices of imported commodities were rising at a far steeper rate than crop prices. This had been caused by the scarcity of imported goods, and the difficulty of moving essential commodities within India when much of the rolling stock was being used for military purposes. The farmers were hit in particular by the increase in the price of kerosene, ironware, cloth and salt. The frustration was made worse by the hoarding and profiteering indulged in by merchants throughout Kheda at this time. In spite of these hardships the Bombay Government continued to demand that the peasants pay large sums of revenue. By 1917 the farmers of Kheda were faced with the bitter knowledge that the apparent economic recovery of the years 1908 to 1914 was in fact a temporary respite in a period of agricultural depression stretching back to 1899.

The crop failure of 1917 was of a particularly irritating nature. In 1917 the monsoon rains were more than adequate, and in the Khari Canal rice tract there were damaging floods. In early October the bright

2	<u>Year</u>	<u>Wages</u>	<u>Crop prices</u>
	1895	100	100
	1908	151	146
	1914	166	144
	1915	166	144
	1916	270	146
	1917	270	142

Wages from Kheda Gazetteer, III-B (1914), p. 13. Kheda Gazetteer, III-B (1926), p. 10. The index of crop prices is based on the crops which took up three quarters of the acreage of the district, bajri, kodra, tur dal, rice and tobacco. Papers Relating to the Second Revision Settlement of the Anand Taluka of the Kaira District, (Government Central Press, Bombay 1942), pp. 38-39.

3 Collector's Report, Kheda, 1916-17, p. 33.

sunshine which heralded the end of the monsoon brought the farmers out into their fields to cut their staple grain crops of bajri and kodra. Then, on 22 October, when these crops were lying in the fields to dry, the rains returned for three torrential days. Instead of drying, the crops rotted.⁴ The farmers had employed labourers at the high new rates to harvest a doomed crop, and now they had to spend even more money buying food to feed their families. Worst hit were the farmers of northern Nadiad, Kapadvanj, Matar and Mehmedabad Talukas. In these areas there were few cash or winter crops able to save them from protracted debt if they paid the land revenue in December. Charotar Patidars were in a happier position, for they had the prospect of a good tobacco harvest in March, assuming there were no damaging frosts during the winter. However, there was considerable anxiety caused by the bubonic plague which raged through the winter, killing 18,067 people in the District.⁵ Many spent the whole of the winter in flimsy huts in their fields to escape the disease.

Besides these material hardships there was profound suspicion of Government at this time over its recruiting activities. Recruiting had been stepped up in 1917 due to the critical war situation. The mamlatdar of Anand had been appointed as a special District Recruiting Officer in September 1917. A recruiting depot was opened at Anand, and in the next ten months 700 men were signed up. They were mostly of untouchable castes, many being Christian converts.⁶ Recruiting caused great suspicion in rural areas, for it was usually assumed that

4 Collector's Report, Kheda, 1917-18, p. 13.

5 This was the first major outbreak of plague in Kheda since 1906-07. The figure of 18,067 is for the whole epidemic which stretched over 1917 and 1918. In 1919 only 19 people died of plague. Kheda Gazetteer, Vol. III-B (1926), p. 39.

6 Collector's Report, Kheda, 1917-1918, p. 23.

nobody in his senses would join the army. Stories circulated about press-gangs and kidnappings, and some were certainly based on fact, for local officials received much praise from their superiors for procuring recruits. Often the new soldiers had to be taken off to Bombay in the dead of night to prevent hostile demonstrations.⁷ One infuriating aspect of this for the landlord was that the Government should be taking able bodied men at a time of extreme labour shortage. In fact very few Baraiyas were recruited, and no Patidars, but the fear was no less for being irrational.

More rational was the annoyance over the mhowra Act of 1916, which had come into effect in Kheda in July 1917. The mhowra flower was used for distilling the popular alcoholic drink called daru. This was a cheap and harmless beverage when not taken to excess. However, the Government wanted to force the people to buy factory made liquor in government liquor shops, so that they could tax people for their drinking habits. The storage of mhowra flowers was therefore banned from mid July to February, the logic being that the peasants could use the flowers when they appeared on the trees in spring for food and fodder, but could not keep them for distillation. In the first six weeks of the operation of this new law no less than 1,500 men were prosecuted under it as criminals.⁸ Although the Baraiyas were the main drinkers, many Patidars were in the habit of slipping out into their fields for a fortifying tot of daru from their labourers. Such little pleasures made the hard life of the peasant more bearable. It was not a pleasure which could be satisfied legally, for no Patidar who valued his reputation could ever be seen entering a government liquor shop.

7 Collector's Report, Surat, 1917-18, BA, R.D.1919, 511, part I, p.11.

8 Collector's Report, Kheda, 1916-17, p. 44. The Government argued that illicit distillation and drunkenness caused crime. In fact, the Hindu religion was the best check on drunkenness, and distillation was only a crime because Government had made it so.

2. The Emergence of Village Nationalism

In 1917-18 the grievances of the lesser Patidar peasants were made a part of the nationalist movement through the inspired leadership of Gandhi. In late 1917 Gandhi announced that the nationalist movement in Gujarat was to be a movement for the peasants. Gandhi believed that it was impossible to win swaraj without widespread peasant backing for the nationalist programme.⁹ He also believed that swaraj would not be worth winning unless the peasants learnt to demand their rights. The peasants of India were ground down by corrupt and often brutal officials. Gandhi wanted to teach the peasants to stand up against such tyranny and demand their democratic rights, just as the elites were demanding their legislative councils. In a speech to some Kheda peasants in April 1918 Gandhi said:¹⁰

Our struggle is not merely for securing suspension of land revenue; a struggle for such relief would be a petty affair. In truth, we are fighting for the sake of the important issue which is involved in it. That is the issue of democratic Government. The people have awakened and begun to understand their rights. A full understanding of these rights is what is meant by swaraj.

Gandhi launched his appeal to the peasants at the First Gujarat Political Conference held at Godhra from 2-5 November 1917. Gandhi did not consult the Bombay Presidency Congress organisation before deciding to hold this conference. He merely sent invitations to leading Bombay nationalists. He added further emphasis to his breakaway from Bombay and Maharashtra by insisting that all the speeches were to be in Gujarati so that the peasants could understand them. At the conference even Jinnah made a brave show of stammering out a Gujarati speech, and only Tilak dissented and insisted on speaking in Marathi. Vithalbhai Patel was so used to making his orations in English that he had difficulty in

9 Speech at Gujarat Political Conference, 3 November 1917, CWMG 14, p.55

10 Speech at Ajarpura, 20 April 1918, CWMG 14, p.361.

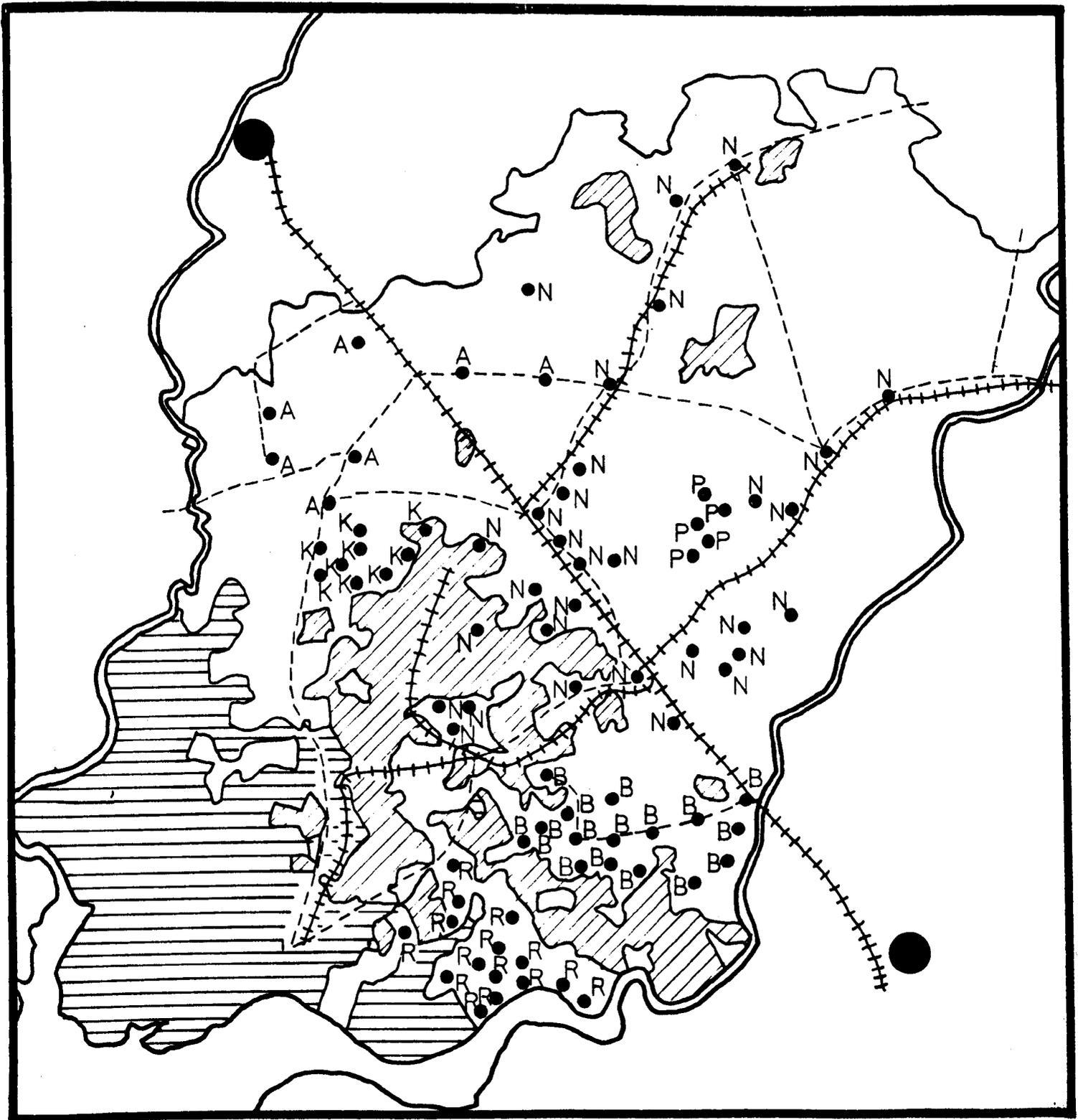
expressing himself in his native tongue.¹¹ On the first day Gandhi added to the novelty by tearing up the draft resolution of loyalty to the King, a usual formality at such conferences, saying that their loyalty could be presumed until they declared themselves rebels.¹²

Resolutions were passed which incorporated popular rural demands, such as the condemnation of abuses in the collection of land revenue. Vallabhbhai Patel was asked to take up the subject of veth with the Revenue Department. Veth was a form of free service demanded by officials. When local revenue officials were on tour they invariably demanded free service from the village artisans. Officials were able to save both pay and travel allowances by living free off the land. Although this was an old tradition, there was no legal provision for the custom. After the conference Vallabhbhai wrote to Frederick Pratt complaining about the abuse, but received no reply. Pratt was the Commissioner of the Northern Division of Bombay Presidency, the most important British official in Gujarat. Vallabhbhai then published a pamphlet on the subject which was distributed throughout the villages of Gujarat. It informed the peasants that officials had no legal right to veth. Resolutions were being followed up by positive action, and were not merely forgotten till next year, as had been the case with previous conferences.

With such programmes, the way was at last open for nationalist activity at village level. After the Godhra conference political activists from Ahmedabad, Nadiad and Borsad began to go out into the villages of Kheda to hold meetings to announce that they would champion the grievances of the peasants. By January 1918 meetings had been held

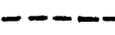
11 Indulal Yajnik, Atmakatha, Vol. II, p. 54.

12 Madho Prasad, A Gandhian Patriarch, p. 185.



Map 4 . The spread of the nationalist movement 1917-18 .

● Places where Home Rule League branches were opened and places where Gujarat Sabha meetings were held before February 1918 .

- | | | | |
|----|--|---|---------------|
| ●A | Places covered by political workers of Anmedabad |  | Baroda |
| ●N | " " " " " " " Nadiad |  | Cambay |
| ●B | " " " " " " " Borsad |  | Railways |
| ●K | " " " " " " " Khandali and Traj |  | Hard surfaced |
| ●P | " " " " " " " Pansora | | |
| ●R | " " " " " " " Ras | | |

in at least seventy-five villages and eleven towns of Kheda District.¹³ The areas covered by the Ahmedabad, Nadiad and Borsad political workers can be traced on the map. The Ahmedabad workers confined themselves to villages on the main roads in the areas nearest to Ahmedabad. The Nadiad group was most energetic, covering villages in the large horseshoe shape formed by the railways running down from Kapadvanj via Nadiad to Petlad, and up via Anand to Thasra. The only village to lie any distance from the railway line was Sarsvani in Mehmedabad Taluka, and this had a meeting because it was the home of the activist, Ravishankar Maharaj. Borsad did not lie on a railway line, and the Borsad group were restricted to villages within a day's walk, or villages near the Borsad to Vasad road. The opening of narrow and metre gauge branch lines and the building of metalled roads in the last forty years was therefore of fundamental importance in taking the nationalist movement to the villages. Of the most important roads and railways used, the Borsad-Vasad road dated from 1877, the Mehmedabad-Kheda road from 1901, the Anand-Godhra railway from 1874, the Anand-Petlad railway from 1891, the Nadiad-Kapadvanj railway from 1913, and the Petlad-Vaso railway from 1914.¹⁴

The most significant development in December 1917 was when nationalist movements started up in a few lesser Patidar villages. Young enthusiasts began to go to nearby villages to collect signatures for the Montagu petition. Many of these signatures were obtained in Baraiya villages, where much of the land was held by Patidars. It was easy to collect these signatures but they meant little. The important fact was that young

13 There may be a few more, as no comprehensive list exists. K.L.Gillion mentions that there were 86 branches of the Home Rule League in Kheda, which coincides with my figures. K.L.Gillion, Ahmedabad, p. 164.

14 Kheda Gazetteer, III-B, pp. ii-iii.

Patidars were showing such enthusiasm and energy in going to the Baraiya and other Patidar villages. The five lesser Patidar villages of Ras, Khandali, Pansora and Anklav were most remarkable in this respect. These were villages in which only a few youths had gone beyond Gujarati primary education. The most active of these village nationalist groups was organised by some young Patidars of Ras in the south of Borsad Taluka. In the next few paragraphs the history of Ras will be examined in an attempt to understand how a nationalist movement developed in such villages.

Ras was a large Patidar dominated village with a population in 1891 of 4,290.¹⁵ Ras was on the southern border of the Charotar, and of the 4,400 bighas of land, 800 were of the black soil variety found in the poorer parts of Kheda District. In 1895 the revenue on this land was raised by twelve per cent to the exceptionally high rate of over six rupees an acre. The Ras Patidars were considered to be of a fairly high standing among lesser Patidars, and they outnumbered the Baraiyas, who were largely landless labourers. There was a long standing dispute between the Patidars of Ras and the Baraiyas to the south, who were dominant in the villages along the Mahi river. Ras was a narva village with two khadkis of unequal size and six matadars. The largest khadki was led by the mukhi. The Mukhiship was hereditary, and the mukhi was in a stronger position to dominate the other Patidars than in most Patidar villages of the Charotar. In the late nineteenth century some matadars of Ras had united with the Baraiya mukhi of nearby Kathol to try to oust the then Ras mukhi, Bhailalbai Bhavanbai Patel. In the dispute both mukhis were murdered. Bhailalbai's successor was Phulabhai Patel, who was

15 Bombay Selections, CCCXXXVII, p. 31, Revised Appendix Q, pp. 2-7. The information for the history of Ras came from interviews at Ras with Ashabhai Lallubhai Patel, 13 January 1972, 21-22 September 1973; Ambalal Phulabhai Patel, 21-22 September 1973; and at Anand with Jivabhai Phulabhai Patel, 1 October 1973.

mukhi till 1930. He was the largest landowner in Ras with seventy acres. He was born around 1880 and had been educated to Gujarati seventh standard at Ras. The school had been started in the late nineteenth century. However, Phulabhai Patel never read newspapers or books. He was a staunch follower of Swaminarayan.

Before the famine nobody from Ras had ever been outside the village for education. One of the first to do so after 1900 was Ashabhai Patel, who had been born in 1893 into the smaller Patidar khadki of Ras. When the nationalist lawyers of Borsad town started the Borsad Edward Memorial English School in 1914, Ashabhai went there with one other Ras boy. In 1915 he left to take a course in telegraphy in South Gujarat. But no employment was available in this field, except in Uganda, and Ashabhai Patel refused to leave Gujarat, for he knew no English. He returned to Ras to start a business in which he bought cotton yarn from the city to sell to the untouchable Dhed weavers of the village. While away from Ras, Ashabhai had developed an interest in the Arya Samaj, and after his return he invited some leading Arya Samajists to the village to speak. A branch was started with about twenty-five young members. The village elders saw this activity as dharmik (religious) and did not interfere.

At the First Gujarat Political Conference at Godhra in November 1917, the Panch Mahals leader, Vamanrao Mukadam, made a strong speech condemning yeth. When Ashabhai Patel heard about this he realised that it could be used against their mukhi, Phulabhai Patel, who often demanded such service. Ashabhai invited Vamanrao Mukadam to Ras to reassert the demand. Mukadam came, and told them that when India gained swaraj, revenue collections would end. This belief came to be widely held in the villages, even though it was never official Congress policy. Ashabhai Patel was thus asserting to the villagers that if they followed swaraj dharna they could achieve more, both materially and spiritually, than from

other faiths. Before Gandhi had even set foot in Ras, many of the villagers had thus accepted some of his key doctrines, such as social and religious reform (from the Arya Samaj) and the need to stand up firmly to Government officials.

Soon after Vamanrao Mukadam's visit two Borsad lawyers who were members of the Borsad Home Rule League came to Ras and started a branch. The young Arya Samajists were the backbone to this branch with Ashabhai Patel as Secretary. Although the membership rose to one hundred, so that in the whole of Kheda District Ras stood second only to Nadiad in membership numbers, the mukhi, Phulabhai Patel, refused to join. This was partly because it was led by the clique of young nationalists from the smaller khadki. It was also because he was a follower of Swaminarayan and could not accept Gandhi's condemnation of untouchability. Ashabhai Patel's group was extremely energetic in collecting signatures for the Montagu petition in late December 1917. They went to three neighbouring Patidar villages and no less than thirteen Baraiya villages, including the notorious dacoit hide-out of Dahevan. Significantly they did not go to Kathol, the village with which they had had a long standing feud.¹⁶

It was significant that the superior Patidar village of Virsad, which was five miles north-west of Ras, did not respond well to the nationalist activities. In 1891 Virsad had a population of 3,892, and after 1895 the revenue demand was just under five rupees an acre, which was low for the Charotar.¹⁷ Some Patidars of the village had been amin tax-officials in Maratha times. The British compensated these amins for the loss of their powers with an annual grant of Rs. 2,200. Being

16 List of villages visited in Bombay Chronicle, 28 December 1917, p. 8.

17 Bombay Selections, CCCXXXVII, p. 31, Revised Appendix Q, pp. 2-7. Information of Virsad from Ravjibhai Amin, Virsad, 23 September 1973.

superior Patidars, the Virsad amins had made vast sums from dowries. They bought up large amounts of land in surrounding Baraiya, and even Patidar villages. Several Virsad Patidars had become graduates and had gone into Government service. Ashabhai Patel of Ras had relatives in Virsad, and a few signatures were collected for the Montagu petition in December 1917. But there was no group of young Patidars in this prosperous village prepared to become active nationalists and collect signatures from the poorer villages round about.

In late 1917 only about half a dozen lesser Patidar villages responded energetically to the nationalist appeal. Although this appeared to be a meagre figure, the map of Gujarat Sabha and Home Rule League meetings during this period showed how effective even a small number of activists could be. During the next year the number of lesser Patidar converts to the cause was to increase significantly.

3. The Nationalisation of Patidar agitation

While these young lesser Patidar enthusiasts were collecting signatures in the villages of the Charotar, a no-revenue campaign had started in the north of the District at Kathlal in Kapadvanj Taluka. Kathlal was the home of the Baroda extremist, Mohanlal Pandya. Since his dismissal from the Baroda State Agricultural Department, he had found no employment to match his talents. In May 1917 he had been considering joining Gandhi's new national school at the Ahmedabad Ashram as a teacher of agricultural theory and practice.¹⁸ A Vania friend of his from Kathlal, Narhari Parikh, had joined the Ashram in 1916. In November 1917 Mohanlal went with Narhari's elder brother, Shankarlal Parikh to the First Gujarat Political Conference, where it was announced that the nationalist leaders would champion any justifiable grievances of the peasants. On returning to Kathlal the two men discovered that the farmers were demanding the

18 CWMC 13, p. 428.

suspension of the revenue for the year, because the kharif crop had been ruined by the late rain. The two prepared a petition for signature by the leading Patidar landowners of the area. When shown the petition several of these Patidars remarked that it should be for the whole of Kheda, and not just for Kathlal. In mid November the two activists had petition forms printed at Nadiad for circulation in the villages. The Nadiad Home Rule League helped them to collect signatures, and on November 20 petitions with a total of 22,000 signatures were sent to the Bombay Government. On November 26 the farmers of the Kathlal area met together and decided to refuse their revenue until an answer had been received from the Government. The first revenue collections were due on December 5.¹⁹

Mohanlal Pandya and Shankarlal Parikh now began to seek outside help to prevent the farmers being coerced into paying their revenue. They first approached the traditional leaders of the Kheda peasants, the Nadiad Desais, then the Collector, then the Legislative Council members for Kheda, and finally Gandhi in Ahmedabad. The Nadiad Desai, Gopaldas, agreed to preside over a meeting at Nadiad on November 25. After some discussion Gopaldas said that he would take the matter up with their Legislative Council members, Vithalbai Patel and Gokaldas Parekh.²⁰ Mohanlal Pandya and Shankarlal Parikh then went to see the Collector, V.K.Namjoshi. J.Ghosal, who had been collector since 1913, had left the District in October 1917, and Namjoshi had taken over until a permanent appointment could be made. He promised that he would act with sympathy when reviewing the revenue demands.²¹ Shankarlal Parikh

19 The details for the early part of the movement are largely from Shankarlal Parikh, Khedani Ladat (Rashtriya Sahitya Karyalay, Ahmedabad 1922). This source fills in many of the gaps in Judith Brown's description of the movement. For instance, she says that she could not trace the letter which Gandhi said had been sent to him by the Kheda farmers in November 1917. The 'letter' was in fact a copy of the petition, which was sent to Gandhi on 20 November 1917. See Judith Brown, Gandhi's Rise to Power, p.95; Khedani Ladat, p. 10.

20 Indulal Yajnik, Atmakatha, Vol. II, p. 68.

21 Shankarlal Parikh, Khedani Ladat, pp. 12-13.

then went to Bombay to see the two Legislative Council members. The two men told him that it was impossible for them to visit Kheda before December 12, as a session of the Council began on December 3. Sankarlal tried hard to persuade them to come sooner, but in vain.²² Mohanlal Pandya and Shankarlal Parikh then went to see Gandhi in Ahmedabad. Gandhi decided to hold a meeting of leaders at Nadiad on December 6 to discuss this and other rural matters. Gandhi was heavily involved in his Champaran work during this period, and could afford little time for Kheda. The meeting merely led to a Committee of the Gujarat Sabha being set up to keep an eye on the situation.²³

Gokaldas Parekh and Vithalbai Patel were the first urban leaders to take any positive action. Between the 12th and 15th of December they carried out an investigation of the farmers' grievances in the areas most affected by the late rains. They visited several villages to examine the amount of grain harvested, and collected evidence from 409 farmers. They decided that the farmers' complaints were justified, and on December 15 went to see the Collector, Namjoshi. Namjoshi received them with courtesy and said that he would be generous towards those who had suffered, but he could not grant full suspensions.²⁴ After reviewing the revenue books, Namjoshi decided to grant half suspensions of the revenue in forty villages of Nadiad Taluka, thirty-four of Kapadvanj Taluka, thirty of Mehmedabad Taluka and seven of Matar Taluka.²⁵ However, Namjoshi was not a good politician, and failed to realise that he needed to publicise his generosity. Although he gave orders for the half suspension of the revenue on 22 December 1917, it did not become general

22 Ibid., p. 24.

23 Bombay Chronicle, 29 January 1918, p. 5.

24 Bombay Chronicle, 24 December 1917, p. 9.

25 Bombay Chronicle, 18 January 1918, p. 6.

knowledge till 7 January 1918.²⁶ During these three weeks of silence the agitation gained considerable momentum.

In practice the local officials made little attempt to carry out Namjoshi's orders anyway. Local officials, such as the mamlatdars, were a law unto themselves. Their chief responsibility was to bring in the revenue demanded each year by the Collector. Few questions were asked on how they achieved this. When the revenue demand was too high, as it was in Kheda after the famine, revenue collections often became coercive raids on villages in which the weaker peasants paid most, the strongest least. Suspensions of revenue granted on paper therefore had little meaning at village level. The mamlatdar in Kapadvanj Taluka was a petty tyrant named Vali Baksh Adam Patel. He was a Muslim from Broach District, and a graduate of Baroda University. He had been a mamlatdar in Kheda District since 1911, and in charge of Kapadvanj Taluka since 1916. In December 1917 he was confronted with a widescale refusal to pay revenue in his Taluka.

Vali Baksh Adam Patel set about breaking the no-revenue campaign by summoning the village talatis of Kapadvanj Taluka to a meeting. He told them that he would not accept revenue valuations below six annas. The significance of this was that each year the crops of a whole village were given a blanket anna valuation. A normal crop was rated at twelve annas. Half the revenue was suspended if the crop was rated below six annas. The entire revenue was suspended if the crop was rated below four annas. These anna valuations were extremely rough, and no rules existed for exact measurements. The farmers did not usually receive the benefit of the doubt. Vali Baksh Adam Patel was therefore ordering the talatis to cook their books, so that there would be no half suspensions of revenue.²⁷ The talatis returned to their villages and began to coerce the farmers into

26 Shankarlal Parikh, Khedani Ladat, p. 34.

27 Ibid., p. 14.

paying their full revenue. One example was in a poor Baraiya village near Kathlal, called Dahiyap. The talati returned from the meeting, increased the anna valuation for the year, and demanded full revenue. When six untouchables refused to pay their revenue, he forced them to stand for two hours holding their big toes. They capitulated and paid after borrowing money at $37\frac{1}{2}\%$ interest. Others were locked up illegally till they paid.²⁸

On January 1 Vali Baksh Adam Patel issued a circular to the talatis of Kapadvanj. This made the following points:²⁹

- (1) A circular had been received from the Collector that the revenue had been fixed. The mukhi's were to announce this fact to the villagers. (No mention was made that Namjoshi had suspended half the revenue in thirty-four villages of Taluka).
- (2) The mukhis would be dismissed from Government service if the land revenue was not paid within seven days.
- (3) Those who refused to pay would be liable to a chothai fine. (This was a fine equal to a quarter of the revenue due).
- (4) Moveable property of defaulters was to be confiscated immediately.
- (5) Home Rule Leaguers or other people who advised the people not to pay were to be reported to the mamlatdar.
- (6) Talatis who did not collect the revenue would be punished.

The circular was worded in an abusive manner. In one place the farmers were called dandai, or scoundrels. On January 8 Vali Baksh Adam Patel attempted to kill the agitation at its heart. He went to Kathlal and told the farmers that he would only collect half revenue from them if they abandoned their protest. They turned the offer down.³⁰ However, by this time the coercive measures were beginning to take effect, and the revenue was starting to flow to the Government at a more normal rate.

28 This case was discovered by the Servants of India Society member, Amritlal Thakkar. Reports by Servants of India Society members can usually be trusted. Ibid., p. 18.

29 Ibid., pp. 18019.

30 Ibid., p. 23.

These events were not out of the ordinary. In bad years no-revenue campaigns throughout India were crushed in this manner by petty officials. What was out of the ordinary was that the two political activists Mohanlal Pandya and Shankarlal Parikh happened to be observing and publicising these events. In the first week of January they asked the Servants of India Society representative in Gujarat, Amritlal Thakkar, to come to verify their observations. After doing this, Amritlal Thakkar wrote a long letter to the Times of India describing the tyrannical manner in which local revenue officials operated. Gokaldas Parekh raised the matter in the Legislative Council, but the Commissioner Northern Division, Frederick Pratt, merely replied that the Kheda people were always complaining and that he had learnt to ignore them.³¹

Over the next three months Pratt took an uncompromising stand. He was supported in full by the Bombay Government. Pratt was an able and sympathetic officer, as were most of the I.C.S. officers in Gujarat at this time. These officers believed that the elaborate revenue collection system was basically fair to the peasants. They accepted that there were abuses, but they refused to believe that torture was commonly used to extract revenue from the peasants. Officers like Pratt argued that it was only natural that the peasants disliked paying their taxes, but British Imperialism in India depended on land revenue, and British Imperialism was in the best interest of the peasants. They further argued that if the peasants or their political representatives were given democratic controls over the land revenue system, then British rule was doomed, for no peasant would vote to tax himself. As Pratt said in 1918: "In India, to defy the law of land revenue is to take a step which would destroy all administration. To break this law, therefore, is different from breaking all other laws."³² The British Parliament was not yet prepared to grant

31 Ibid., pp. 16-18.

32 Narhari Parikh, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Vol. I, p. 67.

the Indian peasants control over the land revenue system. Although it had proved morally impossible for the British to continue to deny democracy for India, the reforms which came in 1919 only granted a half baked democracy to the upper levels of the Indian bourgeoisie and dominant peasant groups. The crucial power of control over the revenue system and revenue bureaucracy was not conceded. In the terms of the forthcoming reforms Pratt was therefore correct to consider that the peasants of Kheda had no right to demand a reduction in their revenue.

While Vali Baksh Adam Patel was crushing the no-revenue campaign in his Taluka in the first week of January 1918, Mohanlal Pandya and Shankarlal Parikh were pleading with the Gujarat Sabha leaders in Ahmedabad to take a more active interest in the no-revenue campaign. Since the Nadiad meeting of December 6 the Gujarat Sabha had contented itself with a demand on January 1 for a Government inquiry into the state of the crops in Kheda. In their opinion the crops were only worth three annas, and all the revenue should have been suspended.³³ During the first week of January Mohanlal Pandya and Shankarlal Parikh went each day to the Gujarat Sabha headquarters, which were at Vallabhbhai Patel's house in the centre of Ahmedabad, to try to persuade the Gujarat Sabha leaders to support their cause. Vallabhbhai questioned Mohanlal Pandya at great length on the intricacies of the land revenue system to ensure that they had a good case. Most of the leaders were reluctant to advise the farmers to break the law.³⁴ On January 8-9 a two-day debate was held when Gandhi was in Ahmedabad for a short time between visits to Champaran. On the second day Mohanlal Pandya and Shankarlal Parikh produced some farmers to recount their sufferings at the hands of the revenue officials. The Gujarat Sabha leaders could no longer wash their hands of the affair,

33 Shankarlal Parikh, Khedani Ladat, p. 60.

34 Indulal Yajnik, Atmakatha, Vol. II, p. 80.

and they finally resolved to advise the farmers not to pay their revenue as long as the Government had not answered their letter of January 1 demanding an inquiry.³⁵

The Gujarat Sabha had taken up the matter one month too late. The Kapadvanj no-revenue campaign had been crushed by mid January, and the rabi, or winter crop, promised to be good, for the late rains had added much moisture to the soil. Revenue was collected in two instalments. The first was collected in December after the kharif crop had been harvested, and the second in April after the rabi crop had been harvested. The Kapadvanj no-revenue campaign had been waged by the farmers as a protest at having to pay the December instalment after the failure of the kharif crop. In practice local revenue officials often collected all the revenue in one instalment to save themselves trouble. In north and western Kheda most of the collections were made in December, and in the Charotar, where the March tobacco harvest provided most of the farmer's cash, the collections were made in April. Therefore few Charotar farmers had paid their revenue yet, and as the tobacco harvest promised to be good, there was no likelihood that their revenue would be suspended.

The issue on which the Gujarat Sabha took their stand was the demand for an inquiry into the state of the crops. This demand would have been effective if it had been made in November, when the desolation of the kharif crop was still apparent. By January the rabi crop was coming up, and the only way in which it was possible to gauge the effect of the earlier crop failure was to question the farmers. This meant that the investigators had to believe what the farmers told them. The nationalists, who were sympathetic to the farmers, believed their tales of woe, whereas the British officials held that the farmers' complaints were exaggerated. The issue which was fought over was whether or not the farmers were to

35 Shankarlal Parikh, Khedani Ladat, pp. 62-65.

be believed. This was a weak issue on which to fight a no-revenue campaign. Better issues would have been a demand for an inquiry into malpractices of the manlatdar of Kepadvanj and his subordinates, or a demand for a general reduction of land revenue in Kheda District, because of the economic crisis which had continued since the famine.

The Gujarat Sabha leaders were prodded further into their incautious stand by the arrogant manner in which they were treated by the British officials. On January 11 seven Gujarat Sabha leaders went to see Pratt. Gandhi had by this time returned to Champaran. Pratt said that he would only see the three secretaries of the Gujarat Sabha, and turned the rest away. Those he turned away included Vithalbhai Patel, Amritlal Thakkar and Shankarlal Parikh. Shankarlal Parikh later wrote that he felt deeply insulted by this slight.³⁶ Pratt was equally tactless with the three secretaries. He asked G.V.Mavalankar how old he was, and on being told thirty, said that this was too young. He told them to reconsider their decision and give him an answer next day. If they persisted in their folly he would in future ignore the Gujarat Sabha.³⁷ Pratt made a bad mistake in acting thus, for many of the Gujarat Sabha leaders still had grave doubts about their course of action. A meeting of the Gujarat Sabha was held immediately afterwards. Angered by Pratt's patronising attitude, they replied that very day that they would not withdraw their support for the farmers' no-revenue campaign.

Vithalbhai Patel and Gokaldas Parekh still hoped to gain a suspension of the revenue through constitutional channels. On January 15 they saw the Revenue Member for Bombay, George Carmichael. Carmichael informed them that the Government did not intend to interfere with the decision of the local officers.³⁸ On January 16 the Government of Bombay issued

36 Ibid., p. 67.

37 Ibid., pp. 66-72.

38 Ibid., p. 37.

a Press Note which denied that there was any case for a suspension of land revenue. They pointed out that Namjoshi had given generous relief in 104 villages. Those who refused revenue would be punished. The Note ended by stating that Lord Willingdon:³⁹

... cannot allow the revenue collection of Government in this rich and prosperous district to be interfered with by political agitation which had undoubtedly been instigated and in the main carried on from outside the district.

The Gujarat Sabha leaders had good reason to consider this Press Note inaccurate and insulting. They had been reluctant to involve themselves, and the initiative had come from the two Kathlal leaders, Mohanlal Pandya and Shankarlal Parikh. Of the eighteen members of the Gujarat Sabha Managing Committee, nine were natives of Kheda District and would hardly be called 'outsiders'.⁴⁰ But they were not sure how to break this solid and uncompromising official bloc. Every day they sent letters and telegrams to Gandhi in Champaran begging him to return to advise and lead them. Gandhi replied that he could not spare the time, but that they must stand firm in their demands.⁴¹ They decided to think up a detailed reply to the Press Note, which gave an appearance of activity. Gandhi later criticised them for this dithering, saying that many a just movement had failed because decisive action had not been taken quickly.⁴² But they were being realistic. Non-cooperation in Gujarat in 1918 was impossible without Gandhi's leadership.

Throughout Bombay Presidency politically conscious people were beginning to take note of the movement. The newspapers gave full coverage to the Press Note and printed critical replies. The debate

39 Bombay Chronicle, 18 January 1918, p. 6.

40 Bombay Chronicle, 29 January 1918, p. 5.

41 Shankarlal Parikh, Khedani Ladat, p. 81.

42 Gandhi to G.V.Mavalankar, 27 January 1918, CWNG 14, p. 177.

about the impoverishment of rural India was revived, with fresh scandals to feed the fire, such as the activities of Vali Baksh Adam Patel, mamlatdar of Kapadvanj. Kheda, it was argued, had been 'rich and prosperous' fifty years ago, but grasping revenue officials had caused the population to decline and the soil to lose fertility. Seemingly scholarly contributions were, however, riddled with inaccuracies, so that the Revenue Department could continue to block its ears.⁴³ The merchants of Bombay were more practical. As early as February 5 they had collected Rs. 10,000 for the campaign.⁴⁴

On February 4 Gandhi arrived in Bombay, ready to devote himself to the Kheda problem. On February 5 he saw Willingdon. The British did not wish to alienate Gandhi at this time, for he supported the war recruitment campaign. In this he was a valuable counter to Tilak and other nationalists who opposed the war effort. Tilak would not have been given such leeway in 1918 to conduct a no-revenue campaign. Willingdon listened politely to Gandhi's request for a committee of inquiry and said that he would give a reply in two or three days. Gandhi then returned to Ahmedabad, where he was shown Vali Baksh Adam Patel's circular of January 1, in which the farmers had been called scoundrels. Gandhi was shocked by the insulting and arrogant language. He immediately wrote a complaint to Pratt.⁴⁵ On February 9 a letter arrived from Willingdon refusing the request for an inquiry. Next day a letter from Pratt denied that local officials had broken the law.

Meanwhile Vithalbai Patel and Gokaldas Parikh had persuaded three Servants of India Society members to go to Kheda to make their own inquiry. These three, Amritlal Thakkar, N.M. Joshi, and G.K. Deodar, arrived in Kheda

43 See the letter by Maganbhai Chatterbhai Patel, Bombay Chronicle, 4 February 1918, p. 9.

44 Bombay Chronicle, 5 February 1918, p. 8.

45 Gandhi to Pratt, 7 February 1918, CGMG 14, p. 185.

on January 26. They started work in Matar Taluka and compiled a list of villages in which they believed revenue should have been suspended. After they had seen Willingdon, Pratt and the Collector of Kheda, they sat down to write their report.

Before this report was published, Gandhi decided to undertake his own inquiry. On February 14 and 15 there was a long ^{and} tense debate at Vallabhbhai's house. The Secretary of the Gujarat Sabha, G.V. Mavalankar, went through the correspondence between them and the Government. Vithalbhai Patel and Gokaldas Parekh, who had been called from Bombay, argued with passion against any unconstitutional action. Indulal Yajnik demanded radical measures. Gandhi finally said that he was not prepared to let the Government call the farmers liars. He asked those who agreed with him to accompany him next day to the Hindu Anath Ashram at Nadiad. They would go from there into the villages to see who was telling the truth.⁴⁶ Next day the majority of the Gujarat Sabha leaders assembled at Ahmedabad station to take the 1.0 p.m. down train to Nadiad. After they arrived at Nadiad they held a meeting at the house of Gokaldas Talati. The thirty political workers were split into groups, each of which was to inspect fifty villages by March 10. They were forbidden to use vehicles of any sort so that they could develop a rapport with the peasants.⁴⁷ For the first time since his involvement in politics Vallabhbhai Patel discarded his black English suit and put on a dhoti and kurta.⁴⁸

By February 26 Gandhi was convinced that the crop was generally under four annas, that the farmers had no money to pay the revenue, and that they would have to buy grain to stay alive. He informed the Collector, Ghosal,

46 Indulal Yajnik, Atmakatha, Vol. II, pp. 89-92.

47 Ibid., p. 93.

48 Narhari Parikh, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Vol. II, p. 64.

of this, and on February 27 saw Pratt at Ahmedabad. Ghosal had taken over the District from Namjoshi on February 6. Although the Scotsman, James Ker, had been named as the successor to Namjoshi, it was felt that the critical situation warranted a period of probation under the experienced old Bengali Collector of Kheda from 1913 to 1917, Jyotsnanath Ghosal. Ghosal investigated the situation in the villages of Matar Taluka, and discovered that three villages deserved suspension of revenue due to flood damage. He felt that in other villages the rabi crop would be sufficient for full revenue demands. The winter had escaped a frost, so that the tobacco promised to be especially good.

The case for suspension of revenue was beginning to look weak. On February 23 the Servants of India Society published their report. They felt that as the kharif crop had been a failure, there should have been suspensions of the revenue in about eighty villages. However, the rabi crop promised to be good, and all the farmers would be able to pay their revenue in April.⁴⁹ Gandhi was annoyed by this, and wrote to G.K.Deodhar accusing him of being a tool of Pratt's and of poaching on his territory.⁵⁰

Gandhi then became entangled with the Ahmedabad mill workers' strike, which lasted till March 18, so that there was a lull in activities in Kheda. This coincided with the period when farmers were harvesting their rabi crops, when no revenue collections were being carried out. Although the farmers could now afford to pay their revenue, Gandhi would not let the matter drop, for he felt that fundamental issues were at stake. Government had constantly refused his demand for an independent inquiry. The Government had treated the peasants in an arrogant manner. The farmers had asked him to lead them, which provided a chance to educate the people

49 Messrs. Devadhar, Thakkar and Joshi, Report of an inquiry into the Agricultural Situation in Matar Taluka of the District of Kaira, (G.K.Deodhar, Bombay 1918), pp. 13-14.

50 Gandhi to Deodhar, 26 February 1918, CWPG 14, pp. 212-213.

in satyagraha and force the Government to listen to the voice of the people. The technicalities of the year's demand were of minor importance, what mattered was that the peasants were spoiling for a fight with the haughty and often corrupt revenue bureaucracy.⁵¹

Attempts were made to dissuade Gandhi. The Nadiad Desai, Gopaldas, went to Ahmedabad several times in March to argue with Gandhi. He told Gandhi that the Government would react harshly if he launched a no-revenue campaign. The Government would confiscate land and the farmers would be ruined. The Home Rule League leader in Gujarat, Maganbhai Chaturbhai Patel, who till then had been prominent among the militants, developed cold feet, and started arguing against a no-revenue campaign.⁵²

The mill workers' strike ended on March 18. On March 20 Gandhi told Pratt that if the revenue was not suspended he would start satyagraha. Pratt replied that the orders to collect the second instalment had been issued.⁵³ Gandhi then announced a public meeting to be held at Nadiad on March 22. Once again the Gujarat Sabha leaders trooped to Nadiad. 4,000 came to the meeting. Gandhi informed them that they should wage satyagraha until the rightful suspensions of revenue were granted. He told them that there would be much suffering, and asked them if they would be prepared to go through with it. There was a considerable delay before an affirmative answer came.⁵⁴ Gandhi then read out a sacred vow which only those who were in deadly earnest were to sign. The vow was

51 This paragraph has been based on statements made by Gandhi at the time. For instance, for Gandhi's opinion on the need to protest against the injustices of the government, see his speech at Aklacha, 10 April 1918, CWNG 14, p. 323. For Gandhi's belief in the need to educate the people in satyagraha, see Gandhi to G.V.Mavalankar, 27 January 1918, CWNG 14, p. 176. For Gandhi's opinion that the technicalities of the year's demand were of minor importance, see his speech at Ajarpura, 20 April 1918, CWNG 14, p. 361.

52 Indulal Yajnik, Atmakatha, Vol. II, p. 95.

53 CWNG 14, p. 275.

54 Shankarlal Parikh, Khedani Ladat, p. 112.

worded to apply to those who could afford their revenue. It promised that if the Government suspended the revenue of the poor and needy, then those who could afford to pay would do so.⁵⁵ After the meeting about one hundred people went to the Hindu Anath Ashram to sign the vow.

The announcement of the beginning of the fight shared the newspaper headlines with the Germans' great March offensive on the Western Front. For the British in India it was a painful and symbolic coincidence.

4. The Kheda No-Revenue Campaign of 1918

The Kheda no-revenue campaign of 1918 lacked the rounded perfection of the later Borsad and Bardoli satyagrahas. It was a messy campaign, fought on ambiguous issues. The vow demanded that the revenue be suspended for those farmers who could not afford to pay their revenue. As no list of hard hit villages or impoverished farmers was attached to the vow, it was impossible to know when this condition had been fulfilled. Gandhi thus provided himself with an escape clause. Gandhi chose not to fight the campaign over legalistic issues, the most important of which was the demand for the right of the peasants to question harsh land revenue assessments. The peasants were not yet prepared for such a major struggle. Essentially Gandhi was using the grievances of the peasants to convert them to his philosophy. The peasants in their turn were using Gandhi to try to dodge their taxes. In the process many were converted to Gandhian philosophy. Thus although the British technically defeated the peasants in the struggle, the movement served its aims for Gandhi.

The headquarters of the movement were at the Hindu Anath Ashram at Nadiad. Prominent Gujarat Sabha leaders, such as G.V. Navalankar, used to spend long periods there, helping with the organisation, issuing bulletins for the villagers, and sending reports to the press. Leaders

55 Full vow given in: CWNG 14, p. 279.

from all over Gujarat and from Bombay were also frequent visitors. They were sent out to speak in the villages. For over half of the duration of the movement, Gandhi was away from Kheda, leaving Vallabhbhai in charge. Vallabhbhai was being tested. As Gandhi said: "Vallabhbhai is still in the fire and will have to endure a good deal of heat, but I think out of this we shall have gold in the end."⁵⁶ Vallabhbhai was learning the subtleties of Ghandian satyagraha as much as the peasants. He invariably accompanied Gandhi on his village tours.

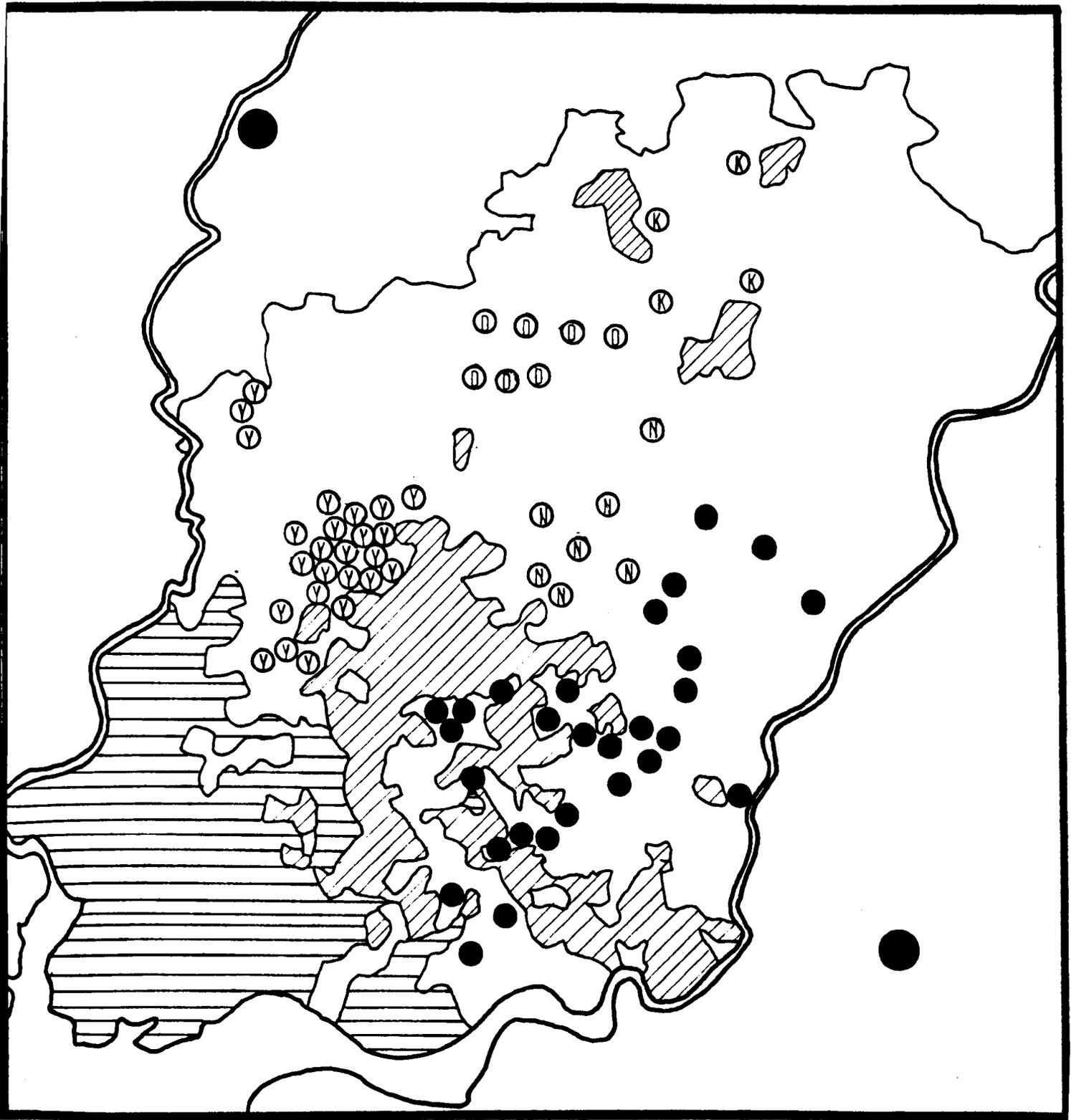
Compared to later movements, the organisation was extremely rough. 559 villages were supposed to have been involved, compared to the 137 of the Bardoli Satyagraha of 1928. This latter campaign depended on a whole army of Congress workers active in villages throughout the area. In 1918 this army was not available, and as a result the movement was extremely patchy. Of the 559 villages of the district, only about seventy in fact responded to the call for passive resistance in 1918.⁵⁷

The degree of response depended to a large extent on the calibre of the political worker in charge of each area. The most successful of the local organisers was Indulal Yajnik, who was placed in charge of Matar Taluka. There was some response from twenty-two of the seventy-nine villages of this taluka. The best response came from the lesser Patidars of the Charotar part of Matar Taluka, and in the Khari canal rice tract. Indulal rented a small house in Matar town as a base and walked or cycled around the country, often staying overnight in a village. On March 28, for instance, he arrived at Tranja, about five miles south of Matar, in the afternoon. He saw the leading

56 Speech at Karamsad, 4 April 1918, CWNG 14, p. 307.

57 The map shows every village in which at least one person is recorded as having refused to pay revenue. It probably leaves out a few villages, but all the major villages are on it. I have used a variety of sources. The best sources were the frequent lists of villages in the Bombay Chronicle from 1 April to 3 June 1918. Other sources were: Indulal Yajnik, Atmakatha, Vol. II, Shankarlal Parikh, Khedani Ladat, CWNG 14, Bombay Source Material, Vol. III, Part I.

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ORIGINAL**



Map 5. The Kheda No-Revenue Campaign of 1918.

All villages from which at least one revenue refusal was recorded are marked on the map.

- Ⓨ Villages under Indulal Yajnik
- Ⓧ Villages under Hariprasad Desai
- Ⓚ Villages under Mohanlal Pandya and Shankarlal Parikh (based on Kathlal).
- Ⓝ Villages under the Nadiad organisation and Janardana Sharma.
- Villages in Anand and Borsad Talukas in which the movement was strongest at a later stage

Patidars and they agreed to hold a meeting at the chora in the evening. Sixteen of the leaders signed the vow, then sent messengers to gather the Patidars from surrounding villages. The first to arrive were twenty men from Machhial. After Indulal had talked to them, nine agreed to sign the vow. At the actual meeting Indulal outlined the history of the movement and told them that they must suffer for future liberty. There was great enthusiasm, and six more Tranja men came up to sign the vow. Nine men from nearby Asalali and seven from Nandoli also signed. Indulal then walked to Limbasi and stayed the night there.⁵⁸ In some other villages Indulal was less successful, for the people were afraid of the officials. In some villages the leading Patidars and Vanias were enthusiastic for the wrong reasons, for they intended to extract money from their tenants or debtees, and then refuse to pay it to the Government.⁵⁹

Four lesser Patidar villages in Matar Taluka gave a particularly good response. Two of these villages, Khandhali and Limbasi, were to the south of Matar. Although the Patidars were dominant, Baraiyas and Rajputs were in a majority in both villages. Limbasi had a group of Patidar activists, who were later prominent in the Rowlatt Satyagraha agitation.⁶⁰ The other two villages, Navagam and Nayaka, were in the Khari canal rice tract. Navagam gave the strongest response of all Kheda villages in 1918. The majority of the population was Patidar. It had been a prosperous village, but since the famine rice had not been easy to grow. The villagers of Navagam were trying to improve themselves, and in 1918 they asked Gandhi to open their first library.⁶¹ In Nayaka the Patidars were dominant, but were in a minority to Baraiyas. In 1916 the Patidars

58 Bombay Chronicle, 1 April 1918, p. 4.

59 Indulal Yajnik, Atmakatha, Vol. II, pp. 117-122.

60 Bombay Source Material, Vol. III, part I, p. 164.

61 Interview with Devshankar Dave, Navagam, 5 December 1971.

of Nayaka had tried to stop the soaring wage rates by agreeing to boycott socially anyone who paid higher wages. As no other villages in the area had followed suit, the Government had been able to crush this combination.⁶² The Patidars of the village were thus united and resentful, and responded eagerly to the campaign. The Government went as far as appointing a special officer to collect from Nayaka alone. He came and took over the village dharmashala. When Indulal Yajnik came to the village he boldly approached the officer and demanded space in the dharmashala. The petty official was so scared of this famous Nagar Brahman that he vacated the building immediately. The villagers were ecstatic, and Indulal's prestige soared.⁶³ Indulal even had some success with the Baraiyas of Matar. Baraiyas from twenty-seven villages had a panchayat. After Indulal had spoken to the leaders of this body, they agreed to advise fellow-Baraiyas not to pay the revenue.⁶⁴

The leader in Mehmedabad Taluka was Hariprasad Vrajrai Desai. He was working in an area with a smaller Patidar population than Matar, and was also unable to match Indulal Yajnik's energy and flair. Only five of the fifty-seven villages of the taluka refused to pay their revenue. Hariprasad Desai used to drive out in a horse drawn carriage from Ahmedabad each day. Vallabhbai Patel had carried out the initial work in Mehmedabad Taluka by getting the gol of the twelve lesser Patidar villages in this predominantly Baraiya area to agree not to pay their revenue. The main villages in this gol were Vadthal, Aklacha, Rinchhol, and Sinhuj.⁶⁵ Baraiyas were in a majority of the population in all these villages except Aklacha.

62 Collector's Report, Kheda, 1916-17, p. 33.

63 Indulal Yajnik, Atmakatha, Vol. II, p. 104.

64 Ibid., p. 112.

65 Shankarlal Parikh, Khedani Ladat, p. 269.

The two men largely responsible for the whole movement, Mohanlal Pandya and Shankarlal Parikh, were placed in charge of Kapadvanj Taluka, and were based on Kathlal. Although the leading farmers of Kathlal had started the agitation, they had paid up most of their revenue subsequently. There was no one dominant caste in Kathlal and it proved hard to maintain unity. The mukhi of the village opposed the agitation. He was particularly annoyed by the fact that the lower castes were using the veth issue as an excuse to wriggle out of their customary service, and in one instance he had to thrash a potter and barber who tried this.⁶⁶ Kathana and Torna were the only other villages in Kapadvanj Taluka who refused their revenue at this time. Kathana was largely Baraiya in population, and although it had a genuine case for suspension, the people did not prove firm in their opposition to Government. Torna was the only militant village in the taluka, over two hundred people signed the vow. Significantly, Torna was one of the only Patidar dominated villages in the taluka, and it stood firm because the leading Patidars of the village supported the movement.⁶⁷

In the villages of Nadiad Taluka the movement was weak except in the area around Chakalashi. The activist responsible for this area was the Brahman, Janardana Sharma. In 1916 he had started a Brahmacharya Ashran at Chakalashi, which was a village dominated by Patidars, but with a very large Baraiya population. He used to give talks on social and religious subjects to the villagers. In 1917 he attended the First Gujarat Political Conference, where he met the Nadiad leader, Phulchand Bapuji Shah, for the first time. He agreed to work for the Home Rule League in the area around Chakalashi. He was a talented orator, and used to recite nationalist poems which he had composed. He took a leading part in the no-revenue campaign.

66 Bombay Chronicle, 27 June 1918, p. 7.

67 Shankarlal Parikh, Khedani Ladat, p. 272.

For the first month the movement was concentrated in these four talukas of Matar, Mehmedabad, Kapadvanj and Nadiad. These were the areas in which the late rains had done most damage, and where the case for revenue suspension was strongest. But the poor Baraiyas, Rajputs and Muslims who needed the suspension were only marginally involved in the movement. In most cases they had already been forced to pay their revenue. The bulk of the support for the agitation came from lesser Patidar farmers who could afford to pay their revenue. By April 1 1,100 farmers owning 19,000 bighas had signed the vow.⁶⁸ This represented an average holding of about eleven acres per farmer. The average holding of a Charotar Patidar was about six acres,⁶⁹ so that the signatures had come from the more substantial farmers of each village. This was important, because the villages were controlled by this class, and they could force poorer Patidars and lower castes to support the agitation.

The movement in these four talukas did not start well. Collections for the second instalment of land revenue began on April 1. In the majority of villages the collection went smoothly, but in places where the vow had been signed, notices were served on prominent landowners that if they had not paid in two weeks their land would be confiscated by the Government. In some villages standing crops were declared confiscated in lieu of revenue. The first major confrontation was at Limbasi, which was under Indulal Yajnik. On March 30 the Assistant Collector tried to persuade the villagers to pay, and when they refused he ordered that all standing and recently harvested crops be confiscated. He also served forty notices of land confiscation on the leading farmers.⁷⁰ This shook the determination of the villagers, and Indulal had urgently to request Gandhi to come to boost their morale. Gandhi arrived on

68 Bombay Chronicle, 3 April 1918, p. 5.

69 Jamabandi Revision Settlement of the Petlad Taluka of the Baroda Division 1921, p. 9.

70 Bombay Chronicle, 2 April 1918, p. 6.

April 2 and after some discussion said that the farmers should surrender enough of the crop to pay the revenue, and could, if they so desired, buy back any land put up to auction by the Government.⁷¹ One of the rules for a satyagrahi was that he should not bid at such auctions, so this was a considerable compromise. At Kathana in Kapadvanj Taluka many of the people who had signed the vow paid up. Gandhi rushed there in the same manner, but only arrived in time to stop a few paying. He persuaded them to allow their ornaments to be confiscated in lieu of revenue, as a compromise.⁷²

On April 5 Gandhi met Collector Ghosal at Kheda and talked for five hours. Gandhi attempted a compromise, saying that if the Government waived the chothai fines, he would advise the people to open their houses so that their property could be confiscated with greater ease. Ghosal refused this offer, for he felt that the threat of land confiscation had broken the movement.⁷³ This was a mistake. The faint-hearted had capitulated in the first week, as could be expected. The majority of those who had taken the vow proved to be of sterner stuff. By mid April there were 2,337 people who had signed the vow, and they were proving far more stubborn than Ghosal had anticipated.⁷⁴ Ghosal even admitted to a Bombay reporter that the movement was truly unique.⁷⁵

By mid April there was a deadlock. In the past, peasant agitations in Kheda had always been broken by the threat to confiscate land. Only in very rare cases was the land actually confiscated and sold. Pratt and Ghosal were reluctant to take this ultimate step, for so far the

71 Bombay Source Material, Vol. III, part I, p. 85.

72 Loc. cit.

73 Ibid., p. 84.

74 Bombay Chronicle, 18 April 1918, p. 5.

75 Shankarlal Parikh, Khedani Ladat, p. 327.

combat had not been bitter. They did not wish to alienate Gandhi, who was supporting the war effort, and they also believed that the peasants were being misled by urban trouble makers, and in the best paternalistic fashion, they did not wish to punish them too harshly for their naive susceptibility to such coaxings. Pratt therefore began to look for a compromise. He was encouraged further by hints from Delhi that a compromise should be reached.⁷⁶ Officially the Government of India had refused to intervene in the dispute.⁷⁷

On April 24 Pratt decided to cancel the notices of confiscation of land and chothai fines. The contumacious Patidars were to be punished by raids on their villages, in which moveable property was to be confiscated in lieu of revenue. However, those who could genuinely not afford to pay their revenue were not to be compelled. James Ker, who had taken over from Ghosal as Collector on April 20, passed these orders on to the mamlatdars, but made no attempt to make them public, lest it appeared that Government had capitulated.⁷⁸ The farmers thus achieved one of the major aims of the agitation without knowing it, and the movement carried on for another six weeks.

The end of April saw a significant shift of emphasis in the agitation from the north-western talukas to the Charotar talukas of Anand and Borsad. Here the crop had been adequate, and there was no case for suspension. But it was among the lesser Patidars of these two talukas that the Home Rule League had most success in late 1917, and the movement inevitably spread there. On April 4 Vallabhbai took Gandhi to his native place of Karansad.

76 G.I.Patel, Vithalbhai Patel, p. 193.

77 NAI, H-Poll, May 1918, Deposit No. 18, p. 3.

78 G of I 10th Despatch on Constitutional Reforms - Appendix II - Note on the Kaira Case. Bombay Chronicle, 12 August 1919, p. 9.

Gandhi made his first speech in a Charotar village since 1915.⁷⁹ On April 8 Gandhi made his first appearance in Borsad Taluka, at a meeting attended by 4,000 at Borsad town. During this period, Phulchand Bapuji Shah and Anasuyaben Sarabhai were carrying out most of the propaganda work in the area. Their greatest success was in the villages around Sunav, which had responded well in late 1917. The Patidars of Sunav in particular proved to be united and responsive to the new politics. Sunav was one of the principal lesser Patidar villages. The Patidars of the village hoped to increase their standing by running a progressive village which embraced Gandhian doctrines. It was significant that visitors in 1918 noticed that Sunav was unusually clean for an Indian village.⁸⁰ Gandhi spoke at Sunav and nearby Palaj on April 22. Gandhi was invited to Ras by Ashabhai Patel's group. 2,500 people from nearby villages came to this meeting on April 18.⁸¹ After Gandhi had spoken, Vallabhbai made an extremely effective speech. He told them that the land of Ras had been made holy by Gandhi's arrival. He noted that the people of this area near the Mahi river had a reputation for criminality, and urged them to take up the way of truth and non-violence.⁸²

Political workers began to take up residence in Borsad Taluka. Hariprasad Desai, who had met with only moderate success in Mehmedabad Taluka, moved to Sunav. Mohanlal Pandya and Shankarlal Parikh likewise gave up Kapadvanj Taluka as a largely hopeless case and based themselves in Borsad Taluka. Civil Disobedience had found its home.

In early May the movement was at its peak with 3,200 signatures to the vow.⁸³ The officials had gone over fully to the campaign of

79 This had been at Sojitra on 10 October 1915.

80 Shankarlal Parikh, Khedani Ladat, p. 262.

81 Ibid., p. 244.

82 Ibid., pp. 249-251.

83 Ibid., p. 319. The highest recorded in the Bombay Chronicle was 3,125 on April 30.

confiscation of moveable property. Police parties led by revenue officials raided the villages. After the locks on the houses had been snapped open, they took away brass cooking vessels, grain, ornaments, furniture, and even milk buffaloes. This loot was impounded at the village chora. Indulal Yajnik evolved counter tactics which became standard practice in later satyagrahas. Boys with bugles were posted in trees to warn the people when officials were approaching the village. When the bugles were blown the people locked their houses and set their buffalo free in the streets, so that the owners could not be identified. When the officials arrived, the villagers refused to point out the houses of defaulters. They also refused to give the officials and police food, water, and shelter, which in the searing heat of April and May was little less than torture. Indulal was not strict about non-violence, and often the officials were abused and jostled. Those who attempted to pay their revenue were held back bodily, and later hauled before the Patidar panchayat for punishment.⁸⁴

Gandhi was becoming disenchanted with the Kheda movement. In April he spent twenty days in the District, in May only ten. As early as April 12 he had written to his son that he did not get the joy in Nadiad which he received from working in Ahmedabad, and that many were failing to understand his message.⁸⁵ Cases of verbal abuse and petty violence against officials were increasing. Some peasants raided their village compounds and freed their buffaloes secretly at night. This was anathema to Gandhi, for he believed that action should be openly and honestly pursued.⁸⁶ He realised that although the Patidars had lived up to their tough, unyielding reputation, they were by no means dedicated

84 Bombay Source Material, Vol. II, pp. 733-4.

85 Gandhi to Devdas Gandhi, 12 April 1918, CWNG 14, p. 333.

86 See Gandhi's speech at Khandali, 27 May 1918, CWNG 14, p. 407.

to Gandhian truth.

The agitation ended in early June. During May the mamlatdars had made no effort to carry out Pratt's orders of April 24 that impoverished farmers should be let off their revenue. As a result Collector Ker had to issue a further order to this effect on May 22.⁸⁷ On June 3 Gandhi happened to meet the mamlatdar of Nadiad, who told him of the order. Gandhi realised that this fulfilled the part of the vow which read: "If the Government would graciously postpone for all the remaining villages collection of the balance of the revenue, we, who can afford it, would be prepared to pay up revenue, whether it be in full or part." Gandhi wrote to Ker immediately to find out if the order applied to the whole district. After Ker had replied that it did, Gandhi announced that the agitation had achieved its aims, and all who could afford their revenue should pay up. Only eight per cent of the revenue remained unpaid, and with the end of the agitation this was soon reduced to one per cent.⁸⁸

The movement ended shabbily with neither side gaining an obvious victory. Gandhi was annoyed at not being informed of the April 24 order sooner. Gandhi always disliked being ignored, and he called the compromise "graceless" and the Government's manner "niggardly".⁸⁹ The farmers were annoyed because the revenue system remained unaltered, and they had to pay their revenue after all. Ker claimed that the agitation was "a movement which had been for all practical purposes a failure."⁹⁰ In a legal sense Ker was right, but it could be more realistically claimed that the real victory lay with Gandhi who had captured the hearts of the

87 Bombay Chronicle, 12 August 1919, p. 9.

88 Collector's Report, Kheda, 1917-18, p. 29.

89 Gandhi and Vallabhbhai Patel to the people of Kheda, 6 June 1918, CWNG 14, p. 418.

90 Collector's Report, Kheda, 1917-18, p. 18.

people. How he did this will be examined at the end of this chapter.⁹¹

91 Before leaving the Kheda no-revenue campaign it is necessary to comment on the recent description of the agitation by Judith Brown in Gandhi's Rise to Power, pp. 83-111. Dr. Brown's explanation for Patidar radicalism is that the Patidars were going from strength to strength economically, and had by 1917-18 reached a point at which they were ready to enter modern politics, but were not yet able to use westernised political systems skilfully and so turned to Gandhi's more Indian style of politics. The Patidars were radicalised by a temporary economic setback during the period of rapid inflation during the First World War. Dr. Brown and I differ fundamentally on this. She sees the agitation as part of the continuing rise of the Patidars as a whole, whereas I maintain that it was caused by the interruption of the rise of the lesser Patidars over the period of 1899-1935. Her explanation is superficially plausible for the agitational period 1917 to 1919, but how would she explain the important lesser Patidar agitation in 1930-31, when there were few immediate economic grievances? There has to be a long term economic explanation. This explanation was used at the time by knowledgeable contemporaries such as Gokaldas Parekh. (See Bombay Chronicle, 29 August 1919, pp. 9-11). Dr. Brown's opening analysis of Kheda District lacks understanding of the area. Although she has the excuse that the English language sources are sketchy, K.L.Gillion has given a far more accurate description of Kheda society based on similar sources (Ahmedabad, pp.160-6). What is the use of such statements as: "... Kaira was the most agricultural part of Gujarat ..."? (p.85) Average land holdings for Kheda are given, but they date back to the years of 1861 to 1867, fifty years before the events described (p.85). As I have mentioned above (footnote 19), Dr. Brown has not used important Gujarati sources. She accepts the British view that the movement was whipped up by Home Rule Leaguers from the cities (p.96). In fact, a local agitation of a traditional nature was taken up by two local activists, who had to persuade the reluctant urban leaders to champion the cause. Dr. Brown even fails to mention that there was an agitation of a traditional nature in Kapadvanj Taluka in December 1917 and January 1918. The malpractices by the mamlatdar of Kapanvanj, which more than anything else brought the Gujarat Sabha into the movement, are dismissed in a sentence (p.99). It would be tedious to go through the piece point by point. The reader is advised to compare the two descriptions if interested. In conclusion, I have to point out that the piece is studded with inaccuracies. Vallabhbhai Patel is described as 'Municipal Commissioner' of Ahmedabad (p.105). In fact, the Municipal Commissioner was a British officer, who was Vallabhbhai's chief opponent in Ahmedabad. The map (p.86) has Ahmedabad about 100 miles from its correct position, and on the map of Kheda, four out of the seven villages marked are placed in the wrong position. Nadiad is described as an example of a growing town between 1886 and 1911 (p.85), whereas in fact the population fell between 1881 and 1911. I could mention many other inaccuracies.

5. The Other Agitations

Nationalist histories of the year 1918 usually ignore the unpleasant sequels to the Kheda no-revenue campaign which threw it into clearer perspective. The Patidars were not the only ones suffering from inflation. The rapid price rises were causing alienation everywhere. Teachers were becoming discontented. Government peons were almost starving. On June 23 the talatis, who had borne the brunt of nationalist propaganda against officials, struck work. Their miserable pay was the chief cause of their corrupt ways. In 1918 most were paid between twelve and twenty-five rupees a month. Since 1907 they had had a Trades Union,⁹² and since October 1917 this body had been petitioning the Bombay Government for a rise to a scale of pay ranging from twenty to forty-five rupees a month.⁹³ Pratt had been sympathetic, but the Bombay Government had not even replied to their petitions. The talatis of Ahmedabad, Kheda and Panch Mahals Districts, met together in April 1918 and threatened to strike in May. The Kheda talatis were the chief organisers,⁹⁴ and they had most cause for annoyance, for they were daily abused during the no-revenue campaign, and felt that they too could be militant. Pratt negotiated a delay, but still could get no promise from the Bombay Government, so that the strike began on June 23, after a meeting of talatis at Anand. Pratt retaliated by issuing an ultimatum in late July that any talati who failed to turn up for work on August 1 would be dismissed. This broke the strike.⁹⁵ The nationalists had been embarrassed by the affair. The talatis had approached Gandhi, but he had declined to support them. Other nationalists ignored the strike.⁹⁶ They could

92 Collector's Report, Kheda, 1907-08, p. 105.

93 Bombay Chronicle, 8 July 1918, p. 13.

94 Collector's Report, Ahmedabad, 1917-18, BA, R.D. 1919, 511, I, p. 10.

95 Bombay FR2, July 1918, Bombay FR2, August 1918.

96 Bombay FR1, July 1918.

hardly act otherwise after their criticisms of these petty officials.

An even worse taste was left by Gandhi's recruitment drive in Kheda District. After the Delhi and Bombay War Conferences in April and May 1918, Gandhi had agreed to help the British with their recruiting. Gandhi felt that the courage of the Kheda satyagrahi should be tested under fire, and intended to form a Gujarat brigade based on Nadiad, which he would personally lead to France. Although he said that he would refuse to carry a weapon, he intended to lead the charge into the German guns.⁹⁷ The Patidar farmers of Kheda were naturally disgusted by the idea. Even Gandhi's devoted followers were uneasy, but they were swayed into joining him by love and the rationalization that such training would prepare them for the freedom fight. Vallabhbhai Patel, Indulal Yajnik, Mohanlal Pandya, G.V.Mavalankar, Phulchand Bapuji Shah, Gokaldas Talati and Ravjibhai Manibhai Patel all proved their devotion by accompanying Gandhi on his futile tour of the villages which had responded so eagerly a couple of months before.⁹⁸ Ras was the only village to give them a respectable reception.⁹⁹ Elsewhere villagers who had met them previously with garlands now refused them food. Even at Navagam the meeting on July 8 had to be abandoned because everyone had hidden in their houses or in the fields.¹⁰⁰ Gandhi was badly shaken by the experience. Some even shouted at him: "We made you great! We helped you make Satyagraha work! - and see what you ask of us now."¹⁰¹ This proved to Gandhi that the people

97 Narhari Parikh, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Vol. I, p. 97.

98 CWMG 14, p. 443.

99 Bombay Chronicle, 2 July 1918, p. 6.

100 Indulal Yajnik, Atmakatha, Vol. 2, p. 131.

101 These taunts were reported by Shankarlal Banker. Quoted in: Erik Erikson, Gandhi's Truth, (Faber and Faber, London 1970), p. 371.

of Kheda had used satyagraha through cowardice rather than courage. They had betrayed his trust. In August Gandhi collapsed, and had to be carried back to Ahmedabad.¹⁰² Although he forgave the people of Kheda, in future he was always suspicious of their motives.

Soon afterwards the Patidars themselves received a profound shock from an outbreak of terrorism by Baraiyas and Patanvadias. During the war years dacoity by members of these castes became a major problem. One of the main causes was the Criminal Tribes Act of 1911, in which certain castes were branded as 'criminal'. Members of these castes had to attend a daily roll-call, designed to keep them out of mischief. The dacoits were men of spirit who followed certain codes of chivalry, although they were often extremely bloodthirsty. Their robberies were often a rough justice against their high caste exploiters. The problem arose from the contrast between Patidar and Vania wealth, and Baraiya and Patanvadia poverty. The British solution was to crush the spirit of the latter, while allowing the exploitation to continue. The roll-calls took place in fifty-five selected villages. All male and female Baraiyas, Patanvadias and Vaghtris¹⁰³ over the age of six were ordered to attend daily.¹⁰⁴

The Criminal Tribes Act caused extreme discontent among the Baraiyas and Patanvadias. Many had to queue up to three hours each day to answer the roll-call. Law abiding Baraiyas resented being branded as criminals. Caste-fellows of other villages refused to give their daughters in marriage to men of the fifty-five villages. At Dahevan, the talukdari village

102 See Erikson's diagnosis of this physical and mental collapse, Ibid., pp. 371-376. Gandhi's wife perceptively remarked that he always collapsed when he helped the Government. The last occasion had been in 1914.

103 Vaghtris were traditionally fowlers, and ranked just above untouchables in the hierarchy. They often took part in petty thefts, but were not violent like the Patanvadias.

104 BA, J.D. 1911, Vol. 103, Comp. 2359, pp. 271-321.

on the Mahi, the people resented being called Baraiyas, and insisted that they were Garasiyas. They took the point to law, but it was ruled that although some Garasiya blood could be claimed, their ancestry was chiefly Baraiya. Some initially refused to attend roll-call, but after a few prosecutions the protest died down.¹⁰⁵ The system proved an irritant rather than a cure, and within four years Kheda District was suffering from the worst wave of dacoities since the early nineteenth century.

There were more immediate reasons for the 1918 outbreak as well. The Baraiyas and Patanvadias were suffering from the inflation as much as anyone. The campaign against the illicit distillation of daru hit these two castes most of all. During the no-revenue campaign police control was loosened, for the police were raiding the villages of dissident Patidars. They were also influenced by the political speeches given by activists who visited their villages. Two facts stood out in these speeches. Firstly, they were told that the Germans were overwhelming the British, and secondly, they were told that there was no need in future to obey sarkar. The Baraiyas came to the logical, if premature, conclusion that such defiance by the Patidars meant that the Raj was failing. The final straw was the failure of the 1918 monsoon, which encouraged many Baraiyas and Patanvadias to loot the grain stores of Patidars and Vanias.

The outbreak of August and September can be traced back to May.¹⁰⁶ In this month two desperados of Sodpur, a village ten miles north-east of Nadiad, linked up with a Baraiya gang of Chakalashi. They began to rob travellers and houses. Some Patidars connived at this for a share in the loot. One Patidar mukhi who did not was murdered for giving information

105 Collector's Report, Kheda, 1913-14, p. 40.

106 This information on the outbreak comes from a report by the District Superintendent of Police, Kheda, 30 December 1918, BA, J.D. 1920, Compilation 1652.

about them. These dacoits were soon popular heroes among the Baraiyas and Patanvadias of the area. Others began to imitate them, and the number of highway and village robberies shot up. In August the situation got out of control. Large bands of Baraiyas began to loot the houses of Patidars and Vantias in Nadiad and northern Anand Talukas.

The Rajput and Baraiya talukdars along the Mahi river in Anand Taluka then decided to join in the looting. Many were deeply in debt to Vantias and saw their chance to revive their fortunes by plundering the rich tobacco villages to the west. Many of the raids of the next three weeks were led by relatives of these talukdars. The gang members were mostly ordinary Baraiyas with a tendency towards petty crime, who had been made to believe that the Raj was failing. After a raid had been planned they travelled to the village concerned individually, and met at a rendezvous at night. Then, armed with bows and arrows and swords, they rushed into the villages. The terrified inhabitants fled to the fields, leaving their houses to be plundered. When a Patidar or Vania was caught he was tortured until he revealed his secret cache of valuables. They never looted Baraiya houses, so that the Patidars sometimes fled to the houses of their labourers. Several of the villages raided were Christian settlements known to be pro-British. The missionaries had zealously recruited many of their flock for the army, so that there were few able bodied men in these villages to resist the dacoits. But generally even fit men showed that unabashed cowardice which had so displeased Gandhi.

To deal with the situation the District Superintendent of Police, A.C.J. Bailey, called up every available policeman, including bandsmen and new recruits. Morale was low after the no-revenue campaign, in which they had been pilloried by the Patidars. But this was a situation they could understand, straightforward dacoity to be squashed by a show of

honest strength, and morale revived quickly.

By late August the Patidars were begging for help from the police. 150 to 200 Baraiyas were now taking part in each raid. Particularly exposed were Patidars and Vantias in villages with largely Baraiya populations. The Patidars of Khanpur, a village on the Mahi due east of Anand, were in this category. They were looted on August 15 and 18 by a large gang from the nearby talukdari village of Kharvad. On August 21 the brother of the Thakore of Rania, which was on the Mahi due east of Umreth, led a raid on the Vantias of the village. On August 31 the terrified Patidars of Sarsa wrote a letter to the Bombay Chronicle which exclaimed that their village was in danger of imminent destruction by ruffians who had rebelled against the British in 1857.¹⁰⁷ The Patidars of the area had suddenly become loyalists. By the end of August the tide was, however, turning. The dacoits found that the police were stronger than anticipated. The last serious dacoity was on September 5. Next day there was a gun battle near Sodpur in which one dacoit was killed. This effectively ended the outbreak. Police morale had been restored, and during September farmers who had defied them earlier in the year even cheered them when they marched through the villages.

6. The lesser Patidar response to Gandhi

The response to Gandhi can be examined on a number of levels, ranging from superficial material explanations, to that of Gandhi's religious appeal. The superficial explanation is that the rapid inflation brought about by the First World War caused extreme discontent among the Patidars when they were forced to buy food at inflated prices due to the crop failure of 1917. It is true that this event provided the spark, but it does not tell us why the lesser Patidars of the Charotar became militant in 1917 rather than other rural groups. It also fails

107 Bombay Chronicle, 31 August 1918, p. 11.

to explain why the lesser Patidars continued to be fervent Gandhians for the next fifteen years. The best long term explanation appears to be that the lesser Patidars felt threatened in the two areas most fundamental to their way of life, which were their local dominance and their standing within the Patidar hierarchy. As a result, they were attracted to Gandhi for ambivalent reasons. On the one hand Gandhi demanded that the peasants be able to control their economic destiny. Dominance and prestige in the caste hierarchy both depended on wealth, and therefore the Gandhian attack on the heavy burden of land revenue, and the demand for control of the revenue bureaucracy, were highly relevant to the lesser Patidars. On the other hand, Gandhi told them that a man's worth was not a commodity to be bought through marriage dowries, but a form of respect to be earned through service to the nation. Gandhi gave the lesser Patidars a new way in which they could attempt to transcend their superiors. Although these two aspects of the Gandhian movement cannot be logically reconciled, this did not deter people from following Gandhi for both reasons.

The best response to Gandhi came from lesser Patidar villages in which there was an overall majority of Patidars, some of whom had a smattering of western education. These villages tended to be of high standing among lesser Patidars. They were, in other words, villages in which expectations had been raised before the famine, to be dashed by the long agricultural depression. Patidars from villages such as Ras, Sunav and Navagam still had high expectations, as was indicated by the unusual cleanliness of Sunav and the new library at Navagam, but they could not afford the lavish dowries needed to lift their reputation in the traditional Patidar manner. In such villages the people were relatively united in their desire to improve their position in the world.

The response to Gandhi was weak in superior Patidar villages.

Karamsad provided an example. In this superior Patidar village there were good educational opportunities, and many of the landowners had relatives in the cities. They had not suffered the worst effects of the agricultural depression. Cosmopolitanism had led to a breakdown in the traditional solidarity of the Indian village. In 1918 it was known that many of the Patidars would be only too happy to buy any lands confiscated by the government from revenue defaulters. Vallabhbhai Patel was disappointed with his village. On 4 April 1918 he told them: "If even on an occasion like this you are not able to get rid of disunity when will you be able to do so?"¹⁰⁸ Factionalism within villages was another reason for a weak response to Gandhi. For instance Od, one of the foremost of the lesser Patidar villages, was stricken by chronic factionalism. Although Gandhi received a rousing welcome on 16 April 1918, very few dared to refuse their revenue, for if their land was confiscated by the British, members of other factions were likely to buy it up.¹⁰⁹

The most important implication of the 1918 movement was that it made Congress into the Patidar party in rural Gujarat. Before 1917 Congress had been an unused resource in the political life of Gujarat. Elsewhere in India Congress was controlled by elites. Gandhi forged his own Congress movement in Gujarat, in which he insisted that the party be one for the peasants. Gandhi was unrealistic in his belief that it could be for all peasants. When he chose to support Patidar agitation rather than other agitations, he allowed his new party to become a dominant caste party. Elsewhere in India dominant rural groups had to form their own parties, such as the Justice Party in

108 Narhari Parikh, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Vol.I, p.74.

109 Mahadev Desai, Day-To-Day with Gandhi, Vol. 2, (Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, Varanasi 1968) p.95.

Madras and the Unionists in the Punjab.

Because Congress became a Patidar party, the agitations took place in the areas most favourable for the Patidars, and were over Patidar issues. In northern Kheda the vast majority of the population were Baraiyas, and the events of 1918 demonstrated that it was physically dangerous for Patidars to work up agitations in that part of the District. In future, agitations were to coincide closely with the areas in which Patidars were the largest single caste, and the issues fought for by Congress tended to be Patidar issues. For instance, after 1918 veth was dropped as an issue, for the 1918 agitation showed that it could be turned against the Patidars. The veth the Patidars disliked was sarkari veth, the free service which the villagers had to provide for outside officials. The other type was jati veth, the services provided by the low castes of the village to the higher castes. This the Patidars wanted to maintain. The word veth was dropped from the nationalist vocabulary and in future the peasants were merely told not to co-operate with outside officials.

The lesser Patidars favoured the non-violent agitational techniques of Gandhi because as property owners they did not want violent revolution. As a whole the caste had benefited from British rule, which provided peace, a rule of law, educational opportunities, and railways to urban markets for cash crops and dairy produce. The basic structure of modern industrial society was to their advantage. The agricultural depression provided merely a frustrating check to their exploitation of the new opportunities. The agitations were limited to demanding a reduction in the revenue, and a greater control over the local bureaucracy and police, who acted in an autocratic manner. The Patidars were not attracted by the principles of non-violence as such, for they frequently murdered each other in land disputes, and used violence on a

wide scale to coerce the lower castes into submission. The appeal of Gandhi's non-violence lay in its attempt to overthrow the rulers without destroying their ability to maintain order at all times. When order was threatened the Patidars were quick to beg for aid from the British, as when the Baraiya dacoits went on the rampage. In India the first people to be looted in such insurrections were the property owning classes and moneylenders. It was therefore vital to the Patidars (and Vantias) that agitation kept to Gandhian restraints, and that Gandhi himself should be acutely sensitive during his campaign to growing violence.

The lesser Patidars also responded well to Gandhi's glorification of the religiosity of peasant life, and his stated desire to return to the "olden days".¹¹⁰ Such doctrines have been common in the twentieth century. As Barrington Moore has noted: "Patriotic exaltation of peasant virtues, especially those virtues that profit the agrarian upper classes, is a characteristic of agrarian societies suffering from the inroads of commerce."¹¹¹ Gandhi's doctrines were a mixture of western romanticism with the pastoral idylls of the Bhagavad Purana. Gandhi told the peasants that their way of life was morally superior to that of the town dweller, that their work was uplifting, their rustic dialect melodious, and their culture and music of the best. The Patidars were flattered by such sentiments. The doctrines were also relevant to their economic condition. As a result of the agricultural depression many lesser Patidars were finding difficulty in competing in outside markets, and felt that they were losing control

110 Speech at Vadtal, 5 April 1918, CWMC 14, p.311.

111 Barrington Moore, Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy, Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World, (Beacon, Boston 1966), p.295.

of their villages to the low castes. They looked back with nostalgia to their "golden age" in the late nineteenth century, when conditions had been good. They wanted to follow Gandhi back into that golden past. Gandhi thus struck a responsive chord when he told them that historically Kheda had been a beautiful and prosperous area, "a lovely orchard",¹¹² but that this halcyon existence had been brought to an end by a combination of their degeneracy and British exploitation.

Although hard economic grievances lay at the heart of the Patidar agitations in Kheda, the intensity of the Patidars' reaction to Gandhi can only be explained in religious terms. Gandhi was recognised by the peasants as being in the tradition of the bhakti saints. Gandhi was not a bhakti saint as such, and never claimed to be. Among other things, this would have alienated Muslims. Rather, Gandhi provided a modern secular form of bhakti movement for the Patidars, at a time when some of the older sects were falling into disfavour, due to the spread of western education.

There were many parallels between earlier bhakti movements in Kheda and the Gandhian movement. The Gandhian movement continued the tradition of challenging old orthodoxies. It particularly appealed to the Patidars, for Gandhi stressed salvation through work, rather than the alternative bhakti tradition of salvation through ecstatic devotion to Lord Krishna. Gandhi was thus in the tradition of Swaminarayan, rather than Vallabhacharya. Vallabhbhai Patel was attracted by this aspect of the Gandhian doctrine. Vallabhbhai had been brought up in a strict Swaminarayan household, but he had abandoned the sect after education because of its irrationalities. At first Vallabhbhai rejected Gandhi as a worthless holyman. But when Gandhi demonstrated

112 Speech at Nadiad, 22 March 1918, CWMG 14, p.276.

in Champaran in 1917 that he believed in action in the world, Vallabhbhai became a devoted follower. Vallabhbhai regained the religious commitment of his youth in the Gandhian movement, and it was essentially a modernised and rationalised form of the religion he had been brought up with.

In other respects the Gandhian movement resembled a bhakti sect. Gandhi was regarded by many as an incarnation of Vishnu. People tended to follow the Gandhian way of life exclusively, abandoning other sects when they followed him. Very few devout followers of Swaminarayan were also devout Gandhians. Gandhi's sect mark was not a daub on the forehead, but the white khadi cap. His word reached his devotees through the Gujarati weekly, Navajivan. Through this the literate Patidar could each week escape his tedious rustic life to become the companion of his beloved Gandhiji as he travelled the length and breadth of India, humbling the proud British, battling with injustice, and preaching salvation for mankind. Through Navajivan Gandhi became each reader's personal guru.¹¹³ His dictates ranged from the mundane matters of village drains to soaring eternal truths. The followers of Gandhi looked to Ahmedabad, where he lived at his ashram, surrounded by his personal devotees. From Ahmedabad his word was carried to the people through a network of Congress centres, khadi shops and national schools. Subsidiary to the ashram was the Gandhian university at Ahmedabad, the Gujarat Vidyapith, where young men were trained to go into the villages as social workers and school teachers. These were in the tradition of the travelling sadhus of the bhakti sects. It was as sadhus that

113 Gandhi took over Navajivan from Indulal Yajnik in 1919. During the non-cooperation movement the circulation fluctuated between 15,000 to 30,000 copies each issue. During the rest of the 1920s it dropped to about 5,000. As the paper was often read out aloud at the village chora, one copy could reach many people. Figures from Bombay Native Newspaper Reports, 1920-1929.

the Congress politicians gained the trust of the villagers. The peasants had learnt from bitter experience to distrust the political motives of those outside their caste and village. The Congress politicians in Kheda were for the most part English educated Brahmans, Vantias and superior Patidars. By appearing as a modern form of sadhu they could break down village parochialism, and convert the villagers to the new religion of Indian nationalism. To the lesser Patidar peasantry their message made good religious and economic sense. It was in this manner that moral authority in Kheda District passed from the British Government to Gandhi and the Congress.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE POLITICS OF PASSIVE RESISTANCE 1919-1924

In this chapter we shall examine the peasant agitations in Kheda in the period from 1919 to 1924. Two main themes emerge from this period. Firstly, the nationalist leaders failed to extend the movement to new social groups. Throughout the period, the lesser Patidars of the Charotar continued to provide the driving force behind the peasant agitations in Kheda. Other rural groups were only involved marginally. In this chapter we shall see how Gandhi attempted to overcome this limitation to his movement. The other main theme concerns the failure of the passive resistance campaign in 1922, and its revival in late 1923. By the end of 1922 it seemed that the agitations had failed in their primary task of undermining the power of the British bureaucracy in Gujarat. In 1923 there was a revival of faith in Kheda in the power of passive resistance. We must see how this came about. But first we must have a look at the philosophical basis to the agitations, the doctrine of passive resistance.

1. The Doctrine of Passive Resistance

The doctrine which became so popular in nationalist circles in Gujarat owed much to Aurobindo Ghose. Aurobindo set out his theories on passive resistance in a series of articles in Bande Materam in April 1907.¹ In these articles Aurobindo accepted that it was impracticable for a disarmed India to win independence by violent means. He therefore advocated passive resistance. This was not to be used as/^atemporary tactic to gain certain concessions from the British. It was to be used continuously and in an escalating manner until India was free. Aurobindo pointed out that passive resistance was a more democratic form of resistance than the existing methods of revolutionary terrorism or constitutional opposition,

1 Aurobindo Ghose, 'The Doctrine of Passive Resistance', Early Political Writings, pp. 85-123.

for it involved the mobilisation of large numbers of people.² The first stage was to establish a parallel government.³

... we have to establish a popular authority which will exist side by side and in rivalry with a despotic foreign bureaucracy - no ordinary rough-riding despotism, but quiet, persuasive and subtle - one that has fastened its grips on every detail of our national life and will not easily be persuaded to let go, even in the least degree, its octopus-like hold. This popular authority will have to dispute every part of our national life and activity, one by one, step by step, with the intruding force to the extreme point of entire emancipation from alien control. This and no less than this is the task before us.

In 1907 Aurobindo tried to capture the Congress to give it a constitution which would make it into a parallel government. In this he failed.

Aurobindo set out the stages of escalation of passive resistance. The boycott of foreign goods came first. National education followed, then the boycott of Government schools and colleges. The law courts were then boycotted. The people were then to refuse to work for, or to take help from the bureaucracy.⁴ The ultimate stage came when the people refused to pay their taxes. This was:⁵

... the most emphatic protest short of taking up arms, and the sort of attack which the administration will feel immediately and keenly and must therefore parry at once either by conciliation or by methods of repression which will give greater vitality and intensity to the opposition.

Passive resistance would eventually escalate into active resistance. Therefore, terrorists still had to be trained in secret for this day. As Aurobindo said: "We should have the bow of the Kshatriya ready for use, though in the background."⁶

Aurobindo's doctrine had two main weaknesses, both of which he was aware of. The first was as follows:⁷

2 Ibid., p. 99.

3 Ibid., p. 87.

4 Ibid., pp. 101-102.

5 Ibid., pp. 103-104.

6 Ibid., p. 122.

7 Ibid., p. 113.

Men in the mass are strong and capable of wonder-working enthusiasm and irresistible movements; but the individual average man is apt to be weak or selfish and, unless he sees that the mass are in deadly earnest and will not tolerate individual treachery, he will usually, after the first enthusiasm, indulge his weakness or selfishness to the detriment of the community.

The diverse nature of Indian society intensified the problem. Aurobindo's answer was to use social boycott to force people to conform to the programme. India was, in his words, a place:⁸

... in which the people are more powerfully swayed by the fear of social excommunication and the general censure of their fellows than by the written law ... social boycott is legitimate and indispensable as against persons guilty of treason to the nation.

Aurobindo did not work out how social boycott could be organised. He did not examine the problem that a social boycott could only be organised within a caste against its own members. The British could still set caste against caste.

The other problem was that passive resistance could be crushed by a determined government, especially if it posed any real threat to its power and economic interests. Aurobindo had to admit that no-tax campaigns could only be undertaken after extremely wide support for nationalism had been built up.

The leaders of the Kheda Congress must have been familiar with Aurobindo's doctrines. Vallabhbhai Patel was acquainted with the Baroda revolutionary, Narsinbhai Patel, who was an enthusiastic propagandist of Bengali nationalist thought. Mohanlal Pandya had actually been a revolutionary in Baroda State. Darbar Gopaldas, who became the leader of the Kheda Congress in 1922, attended Aurobindo's Baroda speeches as a student in early 1908.⁹ Phulchand Bapuji Shah and Gokaldas Talati were fervent supporters of extremist nationalism during the first decade

8 Ibid., pp. 87-112.

9 Darbar Gopaldas smarak granth, (Darbar Gopaldas Memorial Committee, Vaso 1959), p. 54.

of the century. Abbas Tyabji had been chief justice of Baroda State.

Gandhi must have been familiar with Aurobindo's doctrine also. In the three years after his return to India he was in close contact with several ex-Baroda revolutionaries. Not least of these was Aurobindo's right hand man in Baroda, K.G.Deshpande. Deshpande had known Gandhi when they were both students in London. In 1917 he became a follower of Gandhi, and helped him with his national education projects and spinning programme. One of the teachers at Gandhi's Ashram School was Kaka Kalelkar, who had also been a Baroda revolutionary. The non-cooperation programme of 1920 had striking similarities to Aurobindo's doctrine of passive resistance. Gandhi converted Congress into a parallel government by setting up a permanent organisation which corresponded closely to the British bureaucratic hierarchy. Gandhi's programme included the boycott of British goods and institutions. He set up a system of national education, and demanded that students leave government schools and colleges. The movement was to escalate into civil disobedience and the refusal to pay taxes.

The most important difference between Gandhi and Aurobindo was that Gandhi believed in non-violence as a principle rather than as an expedient. As a result Gandhi was far more cautious in his application of passive resistance than Aurobindo would have been. He often resorted to mere token passive resistance, through his technique of individual satyagraha. In some respects this was a solution to one of the problems of Aurobindo's doctrine. Aurobindo believed in escalation from non-violence to violence. His passive resistance would have posed a direct threat to British rule. It is therefore unlikely that the British would have given Aurobindo or his followers the chance to implement his programme. The British permitted Gandhi to make Aurobindo's programme Congress policy because they realised that as long as he insisted on non-violence the movement

would not pose a direct threat to their power.

Vallabhbhai Patel was only converted to the doctrine of passive resistance fully in 1921. After this date his strategy for winning swaraj conformed closely to Aurobindo's doctrine. In some respects he was closer to Aurobindo than to Gandhi. Vallabhbhai tended to use non-violence as an expedient rather than as a principle. For instance, in 1940 he said:¹⁰

In the circumstances which obtain today it would not be practical politics for the Congress to attempt the experiment of complete non-violence ... I cannot see that we will be able to avoid using violence in dealing with those who inflict hardships upon our people.

Vallabhbhai was also a believer in continuous and escalating passive resistance. He considered that the legislatures were a weakening distraction from the task of building up Congress support in depth for the final struggle with the British.¹¹ For this reason Vallabhbhai supported Gandhi's constructive programme. For this reason he opposed individual satyagraha, which merely weakened the movement by putting all the leaders into jail. For instance, in 1923 he said about proposals for individual satyagraha in Gujarat: "I am not willing to allow any worker engaged in the constructive programme to go to jail."¹² In 1940 he likewise opposed Gandhi's proposals for individual satyagraha.¹³

Vallabhbhai's greatest contribution to the doctrine of passive resistance was his solution of the problem of solidarity in a caste society. Vallabhbhai's solution was to use the dominant caste of an area to force other castes to conform to the movement. It is unlikely

10 Narhari Parikh, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Vol. 2, p. 432.

11 Narhari Parikh, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Vol. 1, p. 382.

12 Navajivan, 22 April 1923, Bombay Native Newspaper Report 1923, p. 415.

13 Narhari Parikh, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Vol. 2, p. 432.

that Vallabhbhai needed to give much thought to solving this problem, for he had been brought up in a Patidar village and had acted for years as a local Patidar lawyer. The politics of caste excommunication and social boycott were second nature to him. He was not squeamish about using such methods of coercion. His skilful use of the dominant castes for passive resistance in Gujarat in the 1920s did much to reinstate the doctrine of passive resistance after its failure in 1922. However, the implication of Vallabhbhai's solution was that Congress had to champion dominant caste grievances.

Vallabhbhai did not appreciate the second problem that passive resistance could be crushed easily. He believed that swaraj could be won if the agitations were allowed to escalate under determined leadership. For instance, he believed that Congress could have won independence in 1922 if Gandhi had pushed on with civil disobedience.¹⁴ In this, Vallabhbhai was less realistic than Gandhi. Gandhi realised that the British would suppress a movement with violence as soon as it became a genuine threat to their power. Vallabhbhai therefore solved the problem of how to organise passive resistance in rural India, but failed to see that there were limits to its use.

2. The Rowlatt Satyagraha

In many ways the Rowlatt Satyagraha in Kheda was a postscript to the 1918 no-revenue campaign. Once again it was shown that violence could not help the cause of the lesser Patidars. Once again Gandhi was shown that the lesser Patidars were no saints. The main interest for us lies in the evidence placed before the tribunal appointed after the satyagraha, which revealed in great detail how villages were mobilised to support Patidar agitations. These sources have to be used with care, as much perjury was committed before the tribunal. However, by examining

14 Vallabhbhai told an audience at Broach in March 1930 that in early 1922, the Governor of Bombay had admitted that swaraj was there for the taking. Ibid., p. 6.

the evidence carefully, and by collating it with other sources, it is possible to work out a sequence of events which makes sense.

In the months after the close of the 1918 no-revenue campaign the political workers had plenty of opportunity to demonstrate that they were the true friends of the peasants. The monsoon of 1918 produced a mere seven inches of rain and an inevitable famine, and the appalling influenza epidemic, which raged in the autumn, killed nearly 24,000 in the District.¹⁵ Many cattle died, and hoarding by unscrupulous traders sent the prices of essentials soaring.¹⁶ In November 1918 the second Gujarat Political Conference was held at Nadiad, and the chief demand was that land revenue should be suspended. Although the Government had continually insisted that political agitation had no effect on land revenue policy, it suspended the whole year's revenue with unprecedented speed and generosity.¹⁷ Over the matter of relief the politicians proved sharper and more compassionate than the Government. Large sums were collected from rich industrialists of Bombay and Ahmedabad and given to the needy in the form of food and fodder.¹⁸ During the influenza epidemic the Nadiad Home Rule League distributed medicine to 300 villages.¹⁹ In this way the political workers kept in touch with the villagers who had been mobilised in the last year.

In 1919 Kheda District proved to have the best rural nationalist

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- 15 Census of India 1921, Vol. VIII, Bombay Presidency, Pt.1, General Report, (Government Central Press, Bombay 1922), p. 24.
- 16 Land Revenue Administration Report of the Bombay Presidency, Northern Division, 1918-19, (Government Central Press, Bombay 1920), p. 23.
- 17 Ibid., p. 14.
- 18 Indulal Yajnik, Atmakatha, Vol. II, pp. 147-157.
- 19 Evidence of Gokaldas Talati, Evidence Taken before the Disorder Inquiry Committee, Vol. II, Bombay Presidency, (Government of India, Calcutta 1920), p. 496. (hereafter Disorder Inquiry). I have used a typewritten copy of this volume in the possession of K.L.Gillion. The page numbers refer to this volume.

organisation in India. By this time there were 3,000 Home Rule League members in 105 villages in Kheda.²⁰ These branches were composed of small cliques with varying power in each branch. They took their orders from Nadiad, where Phulchand Bapuji Shah and Gokaldas Talati were in command. These two in turn took their orders from the Gujarat Sabha leaders in Ahmedabad. The agitation against the Rowlatt Bills started in February 1919. After the Satyagraha oath had been drawn up the Nadiad Home Rule Leaguers began to collect signatures in the villages. Within two weeks 600 signatures had been obtained throughout India. Of these, 369 were from Bombay city, 120 from Kheda District and 111 from the rest of India.²¹ By the end of March about 700 from Kheda had signed.²²

During March and April Gandhi, who permanently controlled the Gujarat Sabha, also gained temporary control over the Bombay Home Rule League and its leaders, Umar Sobhani, Shankarlal Banker, and Jamnadas Dwarkadas. The chief centres of agitation in Bombay Presidency in April were Ahmedabad, Bombay and Nadiad. Only in Nadiad was there no serious rioting.

The Patidar villages of the Charotar responded best to the agitation. Many were led to believe that the 'Black Acts' would strengthen the local police in their constant war with the Patidars, by allowing arbitrary arrest and imprisonment without trial. Posters were circulated which were of doubtful relevance to the agitation, but of relevance to the peasants. One read:²³

How to stop the evils of the Rowlatt Bill. If one thousand men refuse to pay revenue there is no evil therein, but if we pay revenue to the State that acts wrongfully, the state is helped and so to pay revenue is itself an evil.

20 Ibid., p. 495.

21 Bombay Chronicle, 14 March 1919, p. 9.

22 Evidence of Gokaldas Talati, Disorders Inquiry, p. 497.

23 Bombay Source Material, Vol. III, part I, p. 109.

During the campaign Gandhi never suggested non-payment of land revenue, which this poster implied. On April 6 the hartal was observed in towns and prominent villages throughout Kheda, and in adjoining Baroda State villages. In several places copies of the banned Hind Swaraj were sold. In the evening there were mass meetings, after which the crowds dispersed peacefully. There had been an impressive show of strength without one violent incident.

On the afternoon of April 10 news arrived in Nadiad of Gandhi's arrest. The shops in the bazaar put up their shutters and crowds began to gather in the streets. The Chakalashi leader, Janardana Sharma, led a ragged procession to the two cotton mills and persuaded the 2,000 workers to strike. The whole crowd then marched back to the bazaar, where Sharma addressed them and sang national songs. Sharma was the most demagogic and irresponsible of the Gandhian leaders in Kheda and can be blamed partly for the disturbances of the next two days. In the evening there was another meeting attended by about 5,000, in which the need for non-violence was stressed.²⁴ Next morning railway passengers began to bring news of the great riots in Ahmedabad. Rumours began to spread that a mukti sena, or freedom army, had started from Delhi to liberate Ahmedabad.²⁵ A crowd of rowdy youths marched to a European owned dairy and began to pelt it with stones, but after it failed to close they marched on to the Government High School where classes were stoically continuing. A police officer rushed to the Home Rule League offices to report this, and Janardana Sharma volunteered to go to restore peace. He arrived to find the town goondas pelting the school with stones. He went in and

24 Evidence of Bombay Government, Disorders Inquiry, p. 443.

25 Indulal Yajnik, Atmakatha, Vol. II, p. 179.

told the Headmaster that he should close the school immediately to prevent worse trouble. The Headmaster had the impression that Sharma was the leader of the goondas and agreed. The mob then dispersed.²⁶

The atmosphere in Nadiad was electric. Each train brought fresh news of the momentous events in Ahmedabad, where the people had risen and burnt down the Government offices. In the early afternoon the telegraph operators at the station heard that a train full of troops was to come through at midnight to quell Ahmedabad. People began to discuss the possibilities of stopping the train to save the people of Ahmedabad from the soldiers' guns. The Gandhian leaders wired to Ahmedabad for an influential leader to come to pacify the people. In the evening the old South African campaigner, Abdul Kadar Bavazir, came from Gandhi's Ashram. A monster meeting of about 10,000 people was held, at which Bavazir tried to dampen the excitement. But few could actually hear his voice. In the crowd some influential Patidars were plotting to derail the troop train. One was the well known lawyer, Maganbhai 'Raja' Patel, another the manager of a theatrical troupe based on Nadiad, a native of Vaso, Purushottam Amin. A few other Patidars and various town troublemakers agreed to meet later outside the Santram Gate. After finding out the exact time of the train, about fifteen of these men went to the railway, and with considerable difficulty removed a rail, which they threw into a ditch before dispersing. At 12.30 the train with 200 troops on board crashed to a halt at the spot, but remained upright, so that nobody was injured. Within sixteen hours trains were running again.²⁷

The worst outbreak during this period in Kheda was at Anand. Anand had not responded well to the Gandhian movement. It was the most modern

26 Bombay Chronicle, 25 July 1919, p. 10. Evidence of Assistant District Superintendent of Police, Kheda, N.V.Trivedi, Disorder Inquiry, p. 370.

27 Bombay Chronicle, 26 July 1919, p. 12. Evidence before Tribunal, Nadiad derailment case. Continuous in Bombay Chronicle, 26 July - 22 August 1919. Interview with Bakubhai Amin, Vaso, 15 September 1973. Although all but one of the defendants in this case were acquitted, Purushottam Amin's son, Bakubhai, verified that Magambhai 'Raja' Patel and his father were the ring leaders. They obtained acquittal through what was considered patriotic perjury.

town in Kheda, a product of a railway junction and the Christian missions which had clustered there. Since 1916 the Charotar Education Society had made Anand its base, so that it was rapidly becoming a centre of education. The population was cosmopolitan and not united by tradition. The centre was the old Patidar narva village with its two khadkis, but now these Patidars were only one element in a population of 11,000 and not even united. The Home Rule League branch was a cliquish, and till 1919, quiescent body run by some Patidar youths from some of the top Patidar families.²⁸

On April 12 news of fresh rioting in Ahmedabad and the derailment flashed down the telegraph wires along the railway line. This prompted the young Home Rule Leaguers in Anand to lead an attack on a European dairy.²⁹ When the manager of the dairy, H.C. Shaw, appeared with a gun, they fled. They then pelted the Government creamery with stones. At 5.0 p.m. there was a rumour that Gandhi would pass through the station on his way to Ahmedabad, so the crowd of about 400 surged to the station. There they found refreshments being sold despite the hartal. One of the snack sellers, Rogilal Bhaiya, was a loyalist who used to report nationalist activities to the Europeans in Anand. He made a disparaging remark about Gandhi, and there was a violent argument. The train came through without Gandhi, and in their disappointment the mob marched to Rogilal Bhaiya's house, splashed it with kerosene, and set it on fire. They then did the same to the house of the European Station Master. Afterwards they dispersed, and troops arrived next day to find the town quiet.³⁰

On the night of the twelfth, telegraph wires were cut at four places between Ahmedabad and Baroda, and an attempt made to damage a railway

28 Interview with Tribuvandas Patel, Anand, 19 January 1972.

29 The Secretary of the Anand Home Rule League, Bagwandas Patel, was involved in this. Ibid.

30 Evidence before Tribunals, Anand arson case. Times of India 1919, 3 December, p. 9, 6 December, p. 11, 12 December, p. 10, 15 December, p. 15.

culvert at Uttarsanda. The five villages responsible were evenly spread along the main railway line.³¹ It seems probable that a message had been passed down the line, for it is unlikely that people in five different places should all decide to attack railway property on the same day in largely the same fashion. The only recorded provocation was by Janardana Sharma, who on the eleventh made an inflammatory speech at Anand, and on the twelfth praised the train derailleurs in speeches at Chakalashi and Narsanda.³²

At Narsanda and Vadod the wire cutting was organised by the dominant Patidars of the two villages. Narsanda had been prominent in the 1918 movement, and had a Home Rule League branch. The village was dominated by lesser Patidars, with the second largest element in the population being Muslim field labourers. There was a long standing feud between the two communities.³³ On April 6 the Patidars held meetings, and on April 11 stopped all work. On the twelfth there was much excitement over the derailment, and Janardana Sharma's speech added to the tension. People were walking about armed with dharias (bill-hooks) shouting "Gandiji ki jai" and were talking of cutting the telegraph wires along the nearby railway. In the evening about 150 Patidars met at the village dharmashala. They were told that they should cut the wires as had been done elsewhere. They were to say nothing, if anyone was accused the village would stand by them and collect a fund for their defence. They then rounded up some Muslims and low caste people, so that other communities in the village would be implicated in the crime. A crowd of about 200 marched to the railway track. The Muslims and low caste people were ordered to get to work. One Baraiya who refused to

31 These were Barejadi (just over the border in Ahmedabad District), Uttarsanda, Narsanda, Anand and Vadod.

32 Evidence of N.V.Trivedi, Disorder Inquiry, p. 374.

33 For instance, at moharam in 1906 there had been trouble. Assistant Collector's Report, Kheda, 1905-06, p. 76.

carry out the crime was beaten. They slashed and hacked at the wires and telegraph posts until a satisfactory amount had been brought down. They then heard a train coming, so that they fled back to the village.³⁴

Vadod was another village in which the 1918 movement had been a success. The Home Rule League branch had been founded in 1917, and was run by prominent Patidars of the village. The village had a population of about 3,000. The dominant lesser Patidars were in a minority to Baraiyas. They were in the same marriage circle as Ras and Chikhodra, and thus in close contact with these two progressive villages. In April 1918 they had given a tumultuous welcome to Gandhi when he came to the village. About a hundred leading Patidars had property confiscated by the Government in 1918. The Vadod Patidars had a feud with the Baraiyas of the area. Vadod lay close to the Mahi river, with its fringe of villages inhabited by unruly Baraiyas. Rather than have such unsavoury characters as village watchmen, the Patidars had employed Baraiyas from the Charotar villages of Vahera and Kavitha. This had led to a wave of terror in 1910, in which forty Patidar haystacks had been burnt and the ten year old daughter of the Police Patel murdered. The Patidars of Vadod also had bad relations with the powerful Rajput talukdar of Mogar, Kesarisinh Solanki, in the neighbouring village. The Vadod Patidars were as a result united among themselves, and after the village leaders had been won over to the Gandhian way of thought, Vadod became a strong centre of nationalism.

On April 11 news came of Gandhi's arrest, and everyone in the village stopped work. There was a procession with black flags. On April 12 horns were blown to summon a meeting. About 300 came to be told by the local Home Rule League President, Moti Shankar, to disobey the law and the 'Black Act' in particular. They discussed what action

34 Evidence before Tribunals, Narsanda wire-cutting case. Times of India, 20 October 1919 to 15 December 1919. As with the Nadiad derailment case I have done my best to unscramble the most likely pattern of events from the conflicting evidence. However, in this case the people tried were not necessarily the real ring-leaders.

to take. Some suggested causing a disturbance at a dairy managed by a European Company, others wanted to derail a train, but were dissuaded in case Gandhi was on it. Finally they decided to cut the telegraph wires. They ordered the village blacksmith to come with his tools, but he escaped to his house, and was only persuaded to come after a thrashing. In the evening Moti Shankar and the police patel, Bhailal Kalidas, led about fifty to seventy-five men to the railway. At the railway a ladder was put up against a telegraph pole, and the blacksmith hacked the wires down with some difficulty.³⁵

This represented the full extent of the violence in Kheda in April 1919. The only serious incidents were the derailment at Nadiad, which could have caused much loss of life, and the mob violence at Anand. Compared to Ahmedabad, where probably about fifty were killed and well over two hundred injured, and Viramagam where at least six were killed and eighteen injured, this was very small stuff.³⁶ The wire-cuttings were gestures of solidarity with Ahmedabad, and a protest at Gandhi's arrest, rather than 'waging war against the Government' as the British maintained at the trials. The riots occurred at Anand because Gandhian ideas and leadership were undeveloped in the town. In Nadiad the Gandhian workers were successful in generally maintaining peace. The Nadiad mill-workers did not riot, as in Ahmedabad and Viramgam. The stone throwing on the morning of the eleventh was by rowdy youths. On April 21 Collector Ker wrote to Gokaldas Talati, in his capacity of President of the Municipality, to thank him and the citizens of Nadiad for using their influence to maintain order.³⁷

35 Evidence before Tribunals, Vadod wire-cutting case, Bombay Chronicle, 18 August 1919 to 29 September 1919, Times of India, 10 October 1919 to 30 October 1919.

36 Bombay Source Material, Vol. II, p. 777. This shows the official estimate of 24 killed. Gandhi estimated that over 50 died in Ahmedabad. CWMC 15, p. 250.

37 Bombay Chronicle, 8 November 1919, p. 7.

The Bombay Presidency authorities acted well during the crisis, showing a cool head and admirable tact in restoring order. However, any sympathy they might have gained from this was lost in the following months when they began to search for culprits on whom to pin the blame. They started by making arrests. The leading citizens of Vadod and Narsanda were arrested on the assumption that villagers usually acted in a united manner. At Narsanda the local police fojdar told some of the Muslims that they would be beaten if they did not give false evidence to the Collector against the Patidars. While they perjured themselves before the Collector, the fojdar stood at the court door listening.³⁸ Janardana Sharma was arrested, and fortunately for the police was found to have in his possession a seditious leaflet printed outside Gujarat. The men who had derailed the train at Nadiad were arrested after one of their number confessed to the police while drunk. Purushottam Amin agreed to confess his involvement and act as a prosecution witness in return for his freedom.³⁹ On April 24 Gandhi stopped off for a few hours in Nadiad on his way to Bombay. He asked James Ker if he could visit the jail to see those arrested. Ker agreed, and Gandhi went to tell them that if they were guilty they should confess. The villagers arrested for cutting the telegraph wires said that if Gandhi would come with them to their villages they would point out the real culprits. Gandhi said that he would return. When he realised later that he had no time to do this, he asked Vallabhbai to carry out the task. But by this time they had been charged for 'waging war' against the Government. Savage sentences were being awarded in the Punjab for similar offences. The accused decided to maintain their plea of innocence and

38 Times of India, 11 November 1919, p.9.

39 Evidence before Tribunals, Nadiad derailment case. See footnote 29. Interview with Bakubhai Amin, Vaso, 15 September 1973.

and not implicate their friends.⁴⁰

In May the British decided to punish the people of Nadiad as a whole. This caused much resentment in the town. On May 16 Ker, Pratt and the Inspector General of Police for Bombay Presidency, Robertson, met to discuss the need for extra police in Nadiad. They were needed because Nadiad had become a nationalist centre. Ker felt that the people of Nadiad were not co-operating over bringing the guilty to justice, and that the Rs.500 reward announced by the Municipality was pitifully meagre, and a mere formality. They decided that Nadiad needed forty-five extra armed police. As the Vantias and Patidars of the town were the chief trouble-makers, they were to pay the Rs.15,556 required. The additional police tax was announced on 26 May, several months before similar taxes were announced in Ahmedabad and Virangam. In these two places there had been serious rioting. This had not been so at Nadiad, where the vast majority of the population had remained peaceful. The 3652 Vantias of Nadiad were being punished because the chief leaders, Phulchand Bapuji Shah and Gokaldas Talati were Vantias, and Vantias had closed their shops in protest in April. The 6093 Patidars of the town were being punished because most of the accused in the derailment case were Patidars, a case which only began to be heard on August 12. As Gandhi said:⁴¹

Should these men be punished because a few ruffians in a fit of madness go to the station and pull down the rails? ... Moreover, it is dishonest to fasten the guilt of a dozen drunkards of a big town on a whole population when the real cause of the punishment is not the crime but the political activity of the people.

On 22 July 1919 the tribunal hearings on the Kheda disturbances commenced. Vallabhbhai Patel acted as the chief defence lawyer.

40 Evidence of Gandhi, Disorders Inquiry, pp.325-26.

41 Young India, 30 August 1919, CWMG 16, pp.75-78.

Vallabhbhai the Patidar lawyer was in his element, defending his caste-mates charged with criminal offences, and gaining acquittals through the use of perjury by witnesses. He charged such high fees that most of those he defended were ruined.⁴² He gained acquittal for the majority, so that he won popularity in the District while at the same time demonstrating by the fees that he did not approve of the violence.

In the first case, Janardana Sharma was found guilty of possessing seditious literature and sentenced to eighteen months imprisonment.⁴³ The second case concerned the derailment of the troop train. Although the fourteen accused were guilty, the weeks before the case had seen the bribery of witnesses on a large scale by the people of Nadiad, for they wanted to prove before the tribunal that the police-tax was not justified. One lawyer who had tampered with evidence had to be removed from court. One prosecution witness retracted his evidence suddenly, saying that he had been drunk when he confessed. The star witness for the prosecution, Purushottam Amin, the professional actor, pretended not to be able to recognise any of the accused. The police case was as a result flimsy. Two of their best witnesses were shown to be criminals, universally distrusted in Nadiad. Vallabhbhai proved that a spanner, which, it was alleged, had been used to unscrew the bolts on the line, did not fit the bolts. As a result all except one of the accused were acquitted.⁴⁴

The next two cases concerned the wire cuttings at Vadod and Narsanda. The police evidence came largely from Baraiyas or Muslims of the two villages who had records of crime and personal grudges

42 Interview with Bakubhai Amin, Vaso, 15 September 1973.

43 Bombay Chronicle, 26 July 1919, p.12.

44 Bombay Chronicle, 26 July 1919 to 28 August 1919.

against the accused. In the Vadod case, evidence from the Mogar talukdar and the Baraiyas proved strong enough to convict twelve of the thirty-six brought to trail. The President of the Vadod Home Rule League, Moti Shankar, and one other were transported for life; the rest received from three to ten years imprisonment.⁴⁵ In the Narsanda case it was proved that the local fojdar had intimidated some witnesses into giving false evidence. Of the twenty-six charged, not one could be proved guilty.⁴⁶ The Anand riot case was heard last. Three of the nine charged were found guilty, and were given three to five year sentences. The people responsible for the riot were not caught.⁴⁷

The events of 1919 demonstrated once again that violence did not pay for the Patidars. The countryside was not united and Baraiyas or Muslims could always be found to testify against Patidars. Unless the Patidars took the extreme course of starting secret societies, rural terrorism was unlikely to be politically effective. It was to their advantage to act within the law, except when a protest was to be made against a specific law.

Gandhi did not see the case for non-violence in such functional terms. He considered the cold removal of rails and cutting of wires to be more disgraceful than the passionate rioting of ignorant Ahmedabad mill-workers.⁴⁸ On 6 July 1919 Gandhi came to Nadiad. In his Autobiography he said that as he entered the District he suddenly remembered how the people had in 1918 similarly misused and misunderstood him, and at the subsequent meeting at Nadiad he used the term

45. Times of India, 30 October 1919, p.8.

46. Times of India, 15 December 1919, p.15.

47. Interview with Tribuvandas Patel, Anand, 19 January 1972.

48. Bombay Chronicle, 10 July 1919, p.4.

'himalayan miscalculation' for the first time.⁴⁹ Gandhi recognised that the task of educating the people in his philosophy would be a long and hard one, and that much preparation would be needed before even Kheda was ready for civil disobedience.

3. Non-Cooperation 1920-1923

At the Calcutta Congress session of September 1920, Gandhi said that swaraj was possible within a year.⁵⁰ This has often been dismissed as wildly optimistic rallying slogan. But at the time it was seriously believed. Gandhi was not so much promising parliamentary swaraj as cultural swaraj. He was saying that if everyone in India could within a year lose their fear of the British, take to spinning, reject untouchability, fraternize with Muslims, abandon the legislatures, courts and government schools and refuse to cooperate with the government, then they would have won swaraj, whether or not the government granted it in a constitutional sense.⁵¹ The movement, which owed much to Aurobindo's doctrine of passive resistance, was to be in stages. In the first stage the elites had to renounce their western ways. Parallel with this was the movement to convert orthodox Hindus to the Gandhian way of thought. Once this was done Congress could be organised and funds collected. Finally, mass civil disobedience was to be launched.

The period of non-cooperation started in September 1920, when

49 M.K.Gandhi, Autobiography, or The Story of my Experiments with Truth, (Navajivan, Ahmedabad 1969), p.356. In the autobiography it appears that Gandhi made this statement at Nadiad a few days after the violence, whereas in fact it was on 6 July, nearly three months later. In fact he was looking for an excuse to call off his threatened civil disobedience, as he had lost control of the Bombay Home Rule League. CWMG 15, p.436.

50 CWMG 18, p.232.

51 For Gandhi's initial programme see CWMG 18, p.231.

the Congress voted to boycott the legislative councils. In the first section we shall see how Gandhi won support for the boycott from the Gujarat Congress. During the non-cooperation period there was only one peasant agitation in Kheda. This took place in Anand Taluka in late 1921, and Gandhi never gave it his blessing officially. The important agitations in Kheda during this period took place in the Nadiad and Borsad Municipalities. These will be examined in the next section. In the following sections we shall see how the Congress was reorganised and how Gandhi attempted to extend the movement to new groups in Kheda society, and look at the nature of the Congress leadership in Kheda, and Vallabhbhai's attempts to vindicate the doctrine of passive resistance after the imprisonment of Gandhi.

The Boycott of the Legislatures.

The Montagu Chelmsford reforms granted control over local Government, but not control over the revenue department. In other words, the reforms benefited the rural elites, such as the superior Patidars, who now had a chance to control local Boards and Municipalities, but did not benefit the majority of landed peasants, such as the lesser Patidars, who still had to pay high amounts of land revenue and suffer the tyranny of the revenue bureaucracy. Under the new franchise, popular superior Patidar politicians, such as Vallabhbhai Patel, were assured of election against their aristocratic Patidar rivals, the Nadiad Desais. The electorate of 26,000 or 3.2% of the total Kheda population,⁵² was largely composed of larger Patidar landowners throughout the District. Thus the superior Patidars could complete the process which had been started by the Morley-Minto reforms of wresting control of Local Government from the hands of the aristocratic Patidars. In 1920 Vallabhbhai Patel

52 Bombay Chronicle, 4 February 1920, p. 12.

announced his candidature for the elections due in November.

The local Kheda leaders were not so enthusiastic. Vania and Brahman activists like Phulchand Bapuji Shah, Gokaldas Talati and Mohanlal Pandya realised the ominous implications of superior Patidar hegemony. Also, these men were not English trained barristers like Vallabhbhai and Vithalbhai and Maganbhai Chatturbhai Patel. There was no place for them in the sophisticated circles of Bombay. They were also fervent Gandhians, and followed their master in his antipathy to western parliamentary institutions. But above all they realised that their position in the politics of Kheda rested on their popularity among lesser Patidars. This class had not been granted democracy in the reforms. The champions of the lesser Patidars had to reject the reforms as inadequate.

Gandhi converted the top leader of the Gujarat Sabha to the Council boycott programme with great skill. He asked one of the few elite leaders who opposed the Councils, Indulal Yajnik, to chair a meeting at Nadiad on 11 July 1920. It was easy to arrange meetings there to pass any motions proposed by Gandhi, for the nationalist movement in the town was controlled by Phulchand Bapuji Shah and Gokaldas Talati. The announcement of the meeting took the Bombay City politicians by surprise. All that they could manage was a note from K.M.Munshi, which was read out at the meeting.⁵³ After the inevitable vote for boycott, Vallabhbhai Patel withdrew his candidature for the elections.⁵⁴ Vallabhbhai thus cast his lot with the lesser Patidars. The next occasion on which he stood for election to a legislature was in 1945.

Gandhi's action was not popular with most leading nationalists of Bombay and Gujarat. The follower of Besant, Maganbhai Chatturbhai Patel,

53 Indulal Yajnik, Atmakatha, Vol. II, p. 264. K.M.Munshi, Indian Constitutional Documents, Vol.I, (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay 1967 p. 20.

54 Bombay Chronicle, 16 July 1920, p. 9.

led the superior Patidar opposition to Gandhi. Gokaldas Parekh and Ramanbhai Nilkanth also opposed the boycott decision. Gandhi retaliated by announcing that the Gujarat Political Conference for 1920 would be held from August 27 to 29 at Ahmedabad, to debate the topic. Maganbhai Chatturbhai Patel and Ramanbhai Nilkanth led the attack on boycott. Their chief fear, they said, was that non-cooperation would lead to the violence of the Rowlatt Satyagraha. They were interrupted constantly and could hardly make themselves heard.⁵⁵ Gandhi replied that his greatest concern was to keep the peace. Initially, only those who had the vote, lawyers, teachers and title holders would be affected. He told them that it was time to end the infatuation of the educated classes for the legislature, English education and law courts.⁵⁶ Swami Satyadev then rose and compared Gandhi to Buddha. Soon afterwards the boycott resolution was carried by an overwhelming majority with loud cheers.⁵⁷ With Gujarat behind him, Gandhi went to Calcutta, where on September 8, Congress adopted the policy of council boycott.

The council boycott was a logical result of Gandhi's decision to make Congress into the party of the peasant. Once Vallabhbhai grasped the full implications of this decision, he stuck with council boycott and non-cooperation through thick and thin. He became the champion of the dominant peasants. In almost all his actions up to his death his motives cannot be fully understood unless he is considered in this light. Vallabhbhai was very different from those nationalist leaders who followed Lenin in using rural passive resistance to power a movement which would in the end take from the peasants the very land they were fighting for.

55 Bombay Chronicle, 30 August 1920, p. 10.

56 CWNG 18, pp. 202-203.

57 Bombay Chronicle, 30 August 1920, p. 10.

Vallabhbhai was always a champion of the dominant peasants, from his days as a Patidar lawyer at Borsad until his last years as Deputy Prime Minister of India.

The elections were fixed for 16 November 1920. On October 2 Maganbhai Chatturbhai Patel announced that he would stand for one of the Kheda seats, at a meeting at Nadiad. His speech was jeered, and after he left the audience voted that he should withdraw his candidature or "necessary steps" would be taken.⁵⁸ What these "necessary steps" were was not recorded, but Maganbhai stepped down a few days later.⁵⁹ The nationalists in Kheda organised an extremely effective boycott of the elections. Registers of voters were drawn up, and each voter was canvassed personally by political workers. Nearly half the Kheda electorate promised not to vote.⁶⁰ In the end only two candidates for the two seats came forward, so that they were returned without election. One was the Nadiad Desai, Dadubhai Desai. Although Dadubhai was the most sympathetic of all the Nadiad Desais towards Gandhi, his father, Purushottandas, was a strong opponent of the nationalists, and Dadubhai did not wish to challenge his father. Dadubhai proved to be an able M.L.C., and the Kheda farmers did not lack a champion in the councils during this period. Dadubhai kept in with the nationalists. In May 1921 he lent his car to Gandhi when he was touring Kheda.⁶¹ He remained a friend of Vallabhbhai Patel. The other new M.L.C. was Jesangbhai Patel, a figure of no importance.

Municipal Non-Cooperation

Nadiad and Borsad were the only municipalities involved seriously

58 Bombay Chronicle, 6 October 1920, p. 9.

59 Bombay FR1, October 1920.

60 Bombay Chronicle, 23 December 1920, p. 8.

61 Bombay Source Material, Vol. III, part I, p. 392.

in non-cooperation. In Nadiad the chief concern of the nationalists was to turn the government schools into Gandhian style 'national' schools. Nadiad Municipality had been controlled by the nationalists since 1918, when Gokaldas Talati had been elected president. The police tax imposed on Nadiad after the Rowlatt Satyagraha had made the people virulently anti-Government. A few weeks after the Calcutta Congress of 1920, Gandhi came to Nadiad and held meetings with prominent citizens and the proprietors of the private Coronation High School. Next day a meeting of the rate-payers was held and a resolution was passed that the Municipality should cease to accept education grants from the Government worth Rs. 21,000. The headmaster of the Government High School fined boys who attended this meeting.⁶² At the Coronation High School the students went on strike because the proprietors were not willing to renounce the Rs. 2,000 Government grant-in-aid. Indulal Yajnik promised that the sum would be raised through subscription, and on October 6 they agreed to refuse the grant, and change the name to Rashtriya High School.⁶³

On October 8 the Municipality voted not to accept the primary education grant. The Collector, N.J.Wadia, wrote a polite but firm letter to Gokaldas Talati saying that the scheme was absurd financially, and that under the law the municipal schools came under the control of the Education Department, and not the municipalities. On November 7 the Municipality resolved to make special collections to finance the schools.⁶⁴ Government replied on December 17 with technical questions about the pay and pensions of Government teachers. This was an effective counter, for the least enthusiastic members of the Nadiad public were the 105 Government

62 Bombay Chronicle, 6 October 1920, p. 9.

63 Bombay FR1, October 1920.

64 Young India, 9 February 1921, p. 42.

teachers, who stood to lose their pension rights. The political leaders tried to persuade them to show more militancy and finally they had to bring Gandhi to Nadiad in January 1921 to address a meeting of teachers. Gandhi told them not to worry, for once India gained swaraj they would get their pensions.⁶⁵ This was hardly reassuring, but they were hustled into a more militant posture by Gokaldas Talati, who informed them in a circular letter that they were henceforth to be considered municipal servants. In January 1921 all the schools in Nadiad were nationalised by the Municipality.

The first counter attack by the Government was unsuccessful. In February the Government demanded that the Municipality hand back the school buildings. The Municipality refused, saying that the citizens of Nadiad had contributed to the buildings.⁶⁶ In March the Government broke the locks on the school buildings and took them over forcibly.⁶⁷ But classes were held elsewhere, and in May 1921 the Municipality passed its budget, which included the cost of running the schools. In these months a reluctant Gujarat Vidyapith had to contribute Rs. 20,000 to keep the schools going. In August the Government Legal Adviser ruled that the Municipality legally owned the school buildings. They had to be returned.⁶⁸ Meanwhile Nadiad had been joined by Ahmedabad and Surat Municipalities in non-cooperation.

In September 1921 Pratt decided to put an end to these municipal rebellions. He warned the three municipalities that they were misappropriating municipal funds, and that individual councillors could be sued

65 Bombay Source Material, Vol. III, Pt. I, p. 361.

66 Bombay Chronicle, 8 March 1921, p. 4.

67 Bombay Chronicle, 10 March 1921, p. 6.

68 John Butler, Educational Administration in Bombay Presidency 1913-1937, unpublished M.Phil dissertation, University of Sussex 1973, p.85.

for the amounts so misused.⁶⁹ This dampened enthusiasm, and teachers began to creep back into government service. By December only twenty-two of the hundred and five teachers remained in the national schools. In this month the Government once again took over the town schools, and filed a suit against the councillors for misappropriation of municipal funds. The nationalists retaliated by picketing the schools, to prevent the children attending them. Most of the primary schools remained empty till April 1922. The High Schools filled up rapidly, however.⁷⁰

In July 1922 the nationalists turned to total non-cooperation. A meeting of citizens resolved that the councillors should resign and that the people should refuse to pay their municipal taxes. Gokaldas Talati decided to retain the presidency of the Council, but the other nationalists on the Council all resigned. Seventeen of the twenty-five councillors resigned, and in the by-elections only eight candidates could be found to stand.⁷¹ In August the Government returned the control of the schools to the Municipality as it was no longer controlled by the nationalists. However, Gokaldas Talati refused to call any meetings of the depleted Council. In November 1922 he was removed by a Government order, and the manlatdar of Nadiad put in his place.⁷²

The manlatdar was faced with the problem of collecting the municipal taxes. He was unwilling to take draconian measures, and as a result was transferred in April 1923. A new manlatdar was appointed to organise attachments of property from people's houses. Three officials were appointed to carry out the task. Pathan policemen were called in to

69 Bombay Chronicle, 29 October 1921, p. 11.

70 Bombay Source Material, Vol. III, Pt. I, p. 639.

71 Swarajya, 11 July 1922. New Times, 21 November 1922, Bombay Native Newspaper Reports 1922, pp. 835, 1186.

72 Kheda Vartamann, 15 November 1922, Gujarat Punch, 19 November 1922, Ibid., pp. 1159, 1186.

scare the citizens.⁷³ In the next two years, municipal taxes were raised largely through attachments.

The suit for the misappropriation of funds was declared in Government's favour in 1926, on the grounds that the councillors had committed an offence in changing the curriculum of the Municipal schools. As the sum involved Rs. 16,000, the ex-councillors appealed. In the appeal the High Court ruled in their favour. The councillors thus narrowly escaped heavy monetary penalisation for their dissidence.

After 1922 the nationalists made no new attempt to control the Nadiad Municipality. The old collaborators returned to power. In 1923 the Nadiad Desai, Bhagwandas, became President of the Municipality. In the next decade the successors to Bhagwandas were a retired Nagar Brahman judge, then a leader of the town mahajan, who was also an Honorary Magistrate, and finally a Vania who had been made a Rao Bahadur.

The other non-cooperating municipality during this period was Borsad Municipality. The President was Bhogilal Choksi. This Vania school teacher was the President of the Borsad Taluka Congress Committee. In 1922 the Municipality resolved that it would collect no taxes, and that it would not pay teachers in Government schools. In January 1923 the teachers went on strike in protest. Government had to pay their salaries direct. The local officials asked the Government to suspend the Municipality. Government was reluctant to do so, for it would have been a bad advertisement for the Municipal Reform Act of 1920, under which Borsad had gained its popular President.⁷⁴ Instead, the Municipality was warned that if it did not put its house in order by 1 September 1923 it was liable to be suspended. Vallabhbhai Patel replied to this threat:⁷⁵

If the people of Borsad have seen the hollowness of local self-government, instead of waiting till the 1st of September

73 Navajivan, 22 April 1922, Ibid., p. 421. Sthanik Swarajya, 31 May 1923, Bombay Native Newspaper Reports 1923, p. 524.

74 Navajivan, 28 January 1923, Ibid., p. 131.

75 Navajivan, 22 April 1923, Ibid., p. 421.

they should pass a resolution that the Government may suspend the municipality so that the people may learn to manage their affairs themselves.

Vallabhbhai went on to say that they had no real control over education, or even cleaning the streets. If all the municipalities in Gujarat were suspended one by one in this manner, real self-government would soon be achieved.

The Borsad Municipality made no attempt to cooperate with the Government. In October 1923 Bhogilal Choksi played a leading part in starting the agitation for the removal of the police tax in Borsad Taluka. In December, after the Satyagraha had started, Collector Kirpalani asked the Municipality to collect the police tax from the people of Borsad town. At a meeting on December 12 the Municipality refused to comply. This proved to be the final straw, and on 14 January 1924 the Municipality was declared abolished. The local bureaucracy thus regained control of both Nadiad and Borsad Municipalities.

The nationalist exploits in the Nadiad and Borsad Municipalities demonstrated that real power in the district still rested with the Collector and his bureaucracy, for the government could always suspend or even abolish dissident local bodies. Above all, the government controlled their finances. Education was the largest item of expenditure for these local bodies. In 1922-23, seventy per cent of the money for education in Kheda District came from the central government, six per cent from school fees, six per cent from municipal taxes, five per cent from district funds, and thirteen per cent from endowments and other sources.⁷⁶ When the municipalities refused to take government grants for schools they either had to raise new taxes, or accept inferior education. They could hardly take the former course. Much of the popularity of the nationalist councillors rested on their criticisms of the

76 Kheda Gazetteer, Vol. III-B (1926) p. 38.

'extortionate' taxation policies of the Government. The nationalists were therefore unable to gain popularity through the provision of better services. The only alternative was to take an extreme populist stance. They encouraged the citizens to refuse their taxes. The Government was left with no choice but to remove these nationalist councillors, and replace them with collaborators, such as the Nadiad Desais. The nationalists thereby turned their failure into propaganda advantage, and the old collaborators gained a new lease of life.

The Organisation and Leadership of the Kheda Congress

In December 1920 the Congress party was reorganised so that it could act as a form of parallel government in India. Gujarat received its own Congress Committee based on Ahmedabad, the Gujarat Provincial Congress Committee (G.P.C.C.). Below the G.P.C.C. there were district committees, taluka committees and village committees. The Kheda District Congress Committee was responsible for British Kheda, Petlad Taluka of Baroda State, Cambay State, the talukdari estates within the district, and Baroda City.

The leaders of the G.P.C.C. and the Kheda District Congress Committee were mostly men who had become prominent during the Kheda no-revenue campaign. The President of the G.P.C.C. from 1921 to 1942 was Vallabhbhai Patel. Indulal Yajnik and G.V.Mavalankar were the Secretaries. There was a working committee of about ten members. The first representatives for Kheda on this body were Mohanlal Pandya and Abbas Tyabji. Abbas Tyabji was a new recruit, for he only became involved in nationalist politics in 1920, after his retirement from the Chief Justiceship of Baroda State. He was sixty-seven years old. He was a Bohra Muslim whose family came from Cambay originally. He was a nephew of Badruddin Tyabji, the Bombay judge who had once been a President of Congress. He gained a new lease of life in his retirement by becoming a Congress activist in Kheda.

Abbas Tyabji was the first President of the Kheda District Congress Committee. The Secretary was Phulchand Bapuji Shah. Below the District Congress Committee there were seven Taluka Congress Committees. The leaders of these bodies were men who had been active in the Home Rule League and in the agitations of 1918 and 1919. The majority were Brahmans. Of the ten main district and taluka leaders, six were Brahmans, four were Vantias, one a Bohra Muslim, and one a superior Patidar.⁷⁷ The only two who did not have tertiary education and who did not live in a town were Ravjibhai Manibhai Patel and Ravishankar Maharaj. The latter was the only one who did not know English. It was notable that the superior Patidars, who had good opportunities for higher education, were not an important element in the District and Taluka leadership at this time. In terms of occupation, they were a mixed bunch. Two were lawyers, two were teachers, one was an author, one a journalist, one a farmer, and one a saintly social worker.

Below the Taluka Congress Committees were the Village Congress Committees. These were the heirs to the Home Rule League branches. They were largely run by Patidar farmers and village schoolteacher. They could be established in any village with twenty-five or more Congress members. The village Committee elected a Chairman, secretary and treasurer. The village committee implemented Congress programmes in the village, and also acted as a social service and sanitary organisation.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ These were:

- (1) Abbas Tyabji, Bohra Muslim of Cambay, retired lawyer and Judge.
- (2) Phulchand Bapuji Shah, Vania of Nadiad, Journalist.
- (3) Gokaldas Talati, Vania of Nadiad, Lawyer.
- (4) Madhavlal Dwivedi, Brahman of Nadiad. Profession not known.
- (5) Hariprasad Kontharia, Nagar Brahman of Nadiad, Author.
- (6) Bhogilal Choksi, Vania of Borsad, Teacher.
- (7) Mohanlal Pandya, Brahman of Kathlal, ex-Civil Servant.
- (8) Hariprasad Desai, Vania of Kapadvanj, Teacher.
- (9) Ravishankar Maharaj, Brahman of Sarsavani (Mehmedabad Taluka), saintly social worker.
- (10) Ravjibhai Manibhai Patel, Patidar of Sojitra. Failed South African shopkeeper. Farmer.

⁷⁸ Young India, 12 January 1921, CWMG 19, p. 217.

The village leaders were often extremely able local politicians, but were unable to become District leaders because of their lack of English education. Ashabhai Patel of Ras was a good example of this type of man.

At the provincial and district level the leadership of Congress was dominated by men who had given up their legal practices and become full time political activists. Gandhi, Vallabhbhai Patel, Indulal Yajnik, G.V.Mavalankar and Gokaldas Talati were all in this category. Men like Vallabhbhai Patel and Gokaldas Talati were extremely effective leaders at a district level, for they had practised in the local courts and had an unsurpassed knowledge of the political structure of the area. In their own societies these men were often considered to be somewhat avant-garde. The Nadiad Vania lawyers had been fervent Arya Samajists before they became involved with Gandhi. In his own village of Karamsad, Vallabhbhai Patel was considered to be a dangerous radical. For instance, in 1925 he married his son Dahyabhai to a Virsad Patidar girl. Virsad was considered to be an enemy of the other superior Patidar villages, as it had refused to join their marriage circle. This was the first major challenge to the system from within Karamsad. The Karamsad Patidars were further infuriated by Vallabhbhai's refusal to accept a dowry, which implied that Virsad was equal, if not superior, to Karamsad.⁷⁹

Many of the Congress leaders were men who had failed in conventional careers. Indulal Yajnik's year as a Bombay lawyer had been a fiasco. Mohanlal Pandya had been thrown out of the Baroda Civil Service for his political activities. Ravjibhai Manibhai Patel, who was educated at Motibhai Amin's Petlad Boarding House, had failed as a storekeeper in South Africa. In 1912 he joined Gandhi's Phoenix

79 Mahadev Desai, Day to Day with Gandhi, Vol. 5, (Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, Varanasi 1970), p. 291.

Ashram, and in 1915 he returned to India with Gandhi. After 1917 he acted as a local leader of the Kheda Congress. Shankarlal Parikh, whose father had been the Dewan of a small princely state in Kathiawad, had been unable to pass his matriculation examination, and had worked for a time in an uncle's business in Ahmedabad before taking up the more exciting life of a political activist.

The most notable new recruit to the Congress organisation in Kheda during non-cooperation was Darbar Gopaldas, Desai of Vaso. As Desai of Vaso, Darbar Gopaldas was second only to the Madiad Desais among Charotar Patidars. Darbar Gopaldas was born in 1887. He was adopted as a son by his uncle, the Desai of Vaso, Ambaidas, who had no children. Darbar Gopaldas studied under Motibhai Amin at Petlad for a time, and Motibhai made him his protege. When Ambaidas died in 1910, the succession was disputed by Gopaldas' two elder brothers, but Motibhai managed to arbitrate in favour of Gopaldas. Under Motibhai's guidance Gopaldas financed educational experiments at Vaso, which soon made it a model village in the sphere of education. Darbar Gopaldas also became known as an extremely enlightened ruler in his Kathiawad States. He even permitted untouchables to draw water from his well, and in 1920 held an untouchable conference at Dhasa.⁸⁰

Darbar Gopaldas decided to join Congress for a number of reasons. He had always had nationalist leanings. He had studied at Baroda College, and came into contact with nationalist activities there. He was sympathetic to the Arya Samaj. In 1912 he married the daughter of the Dewan of Limbdi State, Bhaktiba. She was well educated and was a nationalist. Her brother was Haribhai Amin, the Congress leader of

80 Darbar Gopaldas smarak granth, pp. 24, 66.

Broach District after 1917. In 1921 she and her brother tried hard to persuade Gopaldas to join Congress.⁸¹ The proposition also had psychological attractions. Darbar Gopaldas was second in the Patidar hierarchy to the Nadiad Desais. When he became leader of the Congress movement in Kheda he became the hero of the lesser Patidars. Darbar Gopaldas could now feel that in the eyes of most Patidars he was superior to the Nadiad Desais.

Darbar Gopaldas took time to make up his mind, because the action went against his material interests. Abbas Tyabji and some other Gujarati leaders felt that it would be unfair to ask Darbar Gopaldas to join Congress, as it was likely that his two small states would be confiscated. Phulchand Bapuji Shah and Ravjibhai Manibhai Patel favoured the move, as they saw it as an opportunity to win over the superior Patidars to their cause. Ravjibhai Manibhai Patel suggested to Darbar Gopaldas that he should call a meeting of the twelve leading Patidar villages of the Charotar to propagate khadi. He agreed, and the meeting was arranged. The Nadiad Desais felt slighted, for it was their prerogative to call such meetings. They sent out an order that Patidars from these twelve top villages should not attend. Although thousands came to the meeting at Nadiad in March 1921, very few were as a result from the top twelve villages. The majority were lesser Patidars, who insolently flocked to the town in defiance of the wishes of the Nadiad Desais.⁸²

The Nadiad meeting demonstrated that the lesser Patidars wanted Darbar Gopaldas to lead them in their unorthodox challenge to the superior Patidars. He joined Congress in June 1921. Motibhai Amin was extremely upset

81 Ibid., p. 48.

82 R.M.Patel, Jivanna Jharna, Vol. I, pp. 181-185.

83 P.C.Shah, Motibhai Amin, p. 251.

In effect Darbar Gopaldas had abandoned his social reformist guru, Motibhai Amin, and placed himself under the political activist, Gandhi. Darbar Gopaldas was a great asset to the Gandhian cause in Kheda. He was a handsome man of aristocratic bearing. He was an ideal local leader for the lesser Patidars. The punishment for his disloyalty came a year later, when the British confiscated his two small states in Kathiawad.⁸⁴

The Congress organisation in Kheda was financed largely by donations from urban businessmen. The best donations often came from rich people who were not prepared to take part in agitations themselves. The industrialists and merchants of Bombay were most generous, followed by their counterparts in Ahmedabad. The Tilak Swaraj Fund, which was collected during the non-cooperation movement, realised Rs. 3,600,000 from Bombay City, and Rs. 2,400,000 from Gujarat.⁸⁵ Of the Gujarat total, Rs. 130,000 or 5.4% was collected from the people of Kheda and the Baroda Charotar.⁸⁶ The best donors in Kheda were businessmen and rich peasants. The superior Patidars in particular revealed their ambivalence towards Congress. Although they refused to give active support to Congress, they often gave generous donations when approached. For instance, Abbas Tyabji managed to collect Rs. 16,200 from the three superior Patidar villages of Vaso, Sojitra and Dharmaj in 1921.⁸⁷

84 The actual reasons given were that Darbar Gopaldas chaired the Reception Committee at the Gujarat Political Conference at Anand in May 1922; and he refused to attend the darbar which was held when the Governor of Bombay Presidency visited Kathiawad. His states were confiscated in July 1922. Hindustan, 24 July 1922, Vande Materam, 25 July 1922, Bombay Native Newspaper Reports, 1922, pp. 721-722.

85 Gopal Krishna, 'The Development of the Indian National Congress as a Mass Organisation 1918-1923', The Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. XXV, No. 3, May 1966, p. 427.

86 R.M. Patel, Jivanna Jharna, Vol. I, p. 179.

87 Ibid., p. 177.

This represented 12.5% of the total money collected.

All the money collected went straight to the G.P.C.C., in other words, to Vallabhbhai Patel. He was responsible for the distribution of the money. This gave him great power.⁸⁸ Most of the serious disputes in the G.P.C.C. were over the distribution of funds. In late 1921 Indulal and Vallabhbhai had a serious argument over the distribution of relief to Bhils in the Panch Mahals District after the harvest failed. Vallabhbhai was prepared to give only a little. On previous occasions Indulal had squandered such funds through what many considered an excess of compassion. Such largesse wasted Congress funds, and had little propaganda value, for the Bhil tribesmen were the last people in Gujarat who would have given support to Congress. Indulal went over Vallabhbhai's head to Gandhi. Gandhi said that Indulal must be given all he asked for. Vallabhbhai was extremely annoyed by this challenge to his position as leader of the G.P.C.C. Although the two tried to resolve their differences, their relationship continued to be strained. In October 1921 Indulal submitted his resignation as Secretary of the G.P.C.C. He vaguely hoped that Gandhi would refuse to accept it. But Gandhi made no attempt to intervene. Gandhi had chosen the hard headed Vallabhbhai to lead his organisation, not the radical idealist, Indulal Yajnik.⁸⁹

The Religious Debate

Between 1918 and 1920 there was no significant expansion of the Congress movement in Kheda.⁹⁰ Gandhi chose a particularly traditional

88 Vallabhbhai refused to act as an obvious lackey of the capitalists who financed Congress. Indulal Yajnik was once criticised by the cotton magnate Ambalal Sarabhai for spending too freely on famine relief. Vallabhbhai curtly told the industrialist that Indulal was not his paid servant. In private Vallabhbhai told Indulal that he should cultivate better relations with such capitalists. Indulal Yajnik, Atmakatha, Vol. II, pp. 149, 157.

89 Ibid., pp. 316-343. Indulal Yajnik, Atmakatha, Vol. III, pp. 17-25.

90 In February 1921 there were 6,208 Congress members in Kheda; as a result of the recruitment drive this had risen to 9,660 by the end of May 1921. Bombay Chronicle, 23 March 1921, p. 11.

manner in which to set this right. He decided to try to convert the people to his doctrines by entering into a religious debate with some of the leading Vaishnavites of the district.

The first centre that Gandhi went to was the Ranchhodji Mandir at Dakor, the most important Vaishnavite pilgrimage centre in Kheda. Gandhi went to Dakor on 27 October 1920, at the time of the annual manekthari punam fair. Gandhi had criticised the Ranchhodji Mandir in the past. In 1919 he had called it a cess-pit, with "dull and inert" looking priests.⁹¹ Since 1917 there had been a tussel for the chief position at the temple, and in 1920 there were three candidates in the field. One was the nationalist from Madras, Swami Bharti Krishna, and his installation would have meant a great victory for the reformed Vaishnavism of Gandhi in Kheda. On 27 October 1920 Gandhi tried to persuade the people that as good Vaishnavites it was their dharma to boycott the schools and courts of an Empire, which was in effect 'Ravanraja'. He asked, "Would a devout 'Vaishnava' ever send his or her children to the schools of an irreligious Government?"⁹²

During the following weeks Gandhi took up the issue of untouchability. On 17 November 1920 he met the religious head of the Vallabhacharya Vaishnavites of Bombay, Goswami Shri Gokulnathji Maharaj. They debated whether or not untouchability conformed to dharma. The Maharaj believed it did.⁹³ Gandhi then set out his views in Navajivan on why untouchability contradicted dharma.⁹⁴ This caused far more controversy than Gandhi's political programme. Letters poured into the Ashram, mostly censuring him for his stand on untouchability.⁹⁵

91 Navajivan, 2 October 1919, in CWNG 16, p. 275.

92 Speech at Dakor, 27 October 1920, CWNG 18, pp. 384-391.

93 Gujarati, 21 November 1920, in CWNG 19, p. 74.

94 Navajivan, 12 December 1920, in CWNG 19, pp. 97-100.

95 CWNG 19, p. 346.

Gandhi answered by trying to prove that he was as orthodox as any. "Do not conclude that I am a polluted person, a reformer. A rigidly orthodox Hindu, I believe that the Hindu Shastras have no place for untouchability of the type practised now."⁹⁶ During these months Gandhi constantly reaffirmed his support for cow protection, calling it the central fact of Hinduism which symbolised the Hindu's reverence for all of God's creation.⁹⁷

In 1921 Gandhi tried to convert the Swaminarayan sect to his way of thought. On 19 January 1921 he went to the Kheda headquarters of the sect at Vadatal. He first saw the Swaminarayan monks in private. Although he had in the past criticised the sect,⁹⁸ he told them that he greatly admired Swaminarayan, whose major achievement was to pacify the unruly dacoits in the early nineteenth century. He told them that they should go among the low castes of their own day to reform them. A public meeting was then held, which was largely attended by Baraiyas collected by political workers. Gandhi flattered the Baraiyas as thakores and told them that it was their kshatriya dharma to be non violent. He told them that Patidars were not kshatriyas, because they exploited the Baraiyas. He urged them to give up thieving and vow to reform their lives. He then turned to the monks and told them to convert India into the land of dharma by reforming the dacoits. He challenged them: "At this holy place, I declare, if you want to protect your 'Hindu dharma', non-cooperation is first as well as the last lesson you must learn up."⁹⁹

Gandhi failed to win the Vaishnavites of Dakor and the Swaminarayan

96 Navajivan, 2 February 1922, in CWNG 22, p. 292.

97 Young India, 6 October 1921, in CWNG 21, p. 248. Gandhi also took up the cow protection issue to prevent communal Hindus monopolising it.

98 See Gandhi to Maganlal Gandhi, 25 July 1918, CWNG 14, pp. 504-05.

99 Speech at Vadatal, 19 January 1921, Mahadev Desai, Day to Day with Gandhi, Vol. III, (Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, Varanasi 1968), pp. 223-229.

monks to his cause. At the manekthari punam fair of 1921 the controversy over Swami Bharti Krishna flared up again. Gokaldas Talati and Abbas Tyabji went to Dakor to win support for the Swami, who had been jailed for a time for non-cooperation activities. On November 4 he came to Dakor in person and received a tumultuous welcome from his supporters. In February 1922 there was nearly a riot when all three claimants came to Dakor to celebrate maha shivratri day.¹⁰⁰ But Swami Bharti Krishna failed to make good his claim, and Dakor returned to its old orthodox ways. Gandhi's appeal to the Vadtal monks was equally unsuccessful. They continued to believe in untouchability, and continued to work among wealthy Patidars, rather than among poor Baraiyas. In spite of this, Gandhi's appeal for religious reform did have a profound effect on many people throughout Gujarat.

Towards Civil Disobedience

In September 1921 preparations began for the ultimate stage of non-cooperation, civil disobedience. Gandhi had originally intended to launch a no-revenue campaign in Anand Taluka. Gandhi chose the Taluka because it had given a good response in 1918. But he was not altogether happy with the choice. The Charotar Patidars had not been perfect satyagrahi in 1918, and in 1919 some of them had committed acts of violence. Therefore, when Vithalbhai Patel demonstrated to Gandhi the advantages of Bardoli Taluka in Surat District, Gandhi decided to drop Anand in favour of the southern Taluka.

Bardoli had several advantages over the Charotar Talukas. The Patidars of Bardoli were of inferior standing to the Charotar Patidars

100 Bombay FR2, February 1922. Bombay Chronicle 1921, 22 October, p. 7; 29 October, p. 10; 3 November, p. 8; 7 November, p. 10; 8 November, p. 7; 10 November, p. 5.

and had settled these predominantly tribal lands in the last century. In the Taluka there was a clear class division between Patidar landlords and tribal landless labourers. The labourers were completely under the control of the Patidars. There were no unruly dacoits about to mar the non-violence of satyagraha. Gandhi was also attracted by the fact that the Bardoli Patidars permitted untouchables to come into their houses. There were few caste orthodoxies in Bardoli, because the land had been only recently settled by caste Hindus. However, most important of all was the fact that the Patidars of Bardoli were more united than the Charotar Patidars. Since 1908 a Patidar caste association had existed, which had nationalist leanings. This association was supported by the leading Patidars of the Taluka. In 1920 it supported non-cooperation. It conducted a sophisticated propaganda campaign in the Taluka. Hundreds of people took to khadi, the government schools were emptied, and liquor shops had to be closed down.¹⁰¹ The Bardoli Patidars were easier to organise than the stratified Patidars of the Charotar. During 1920 and 1921 the Bardoli Patidars had proved to be more ardent Congressmen en masse than their superior caste-mates in the Charotar.

After Gandhi had inspected Bardoli at Vithalbai Patel's request, he accepted that it was more suitable than Anand. But he did not wish to disappoint the Kheda Congressmen, so he announced that civil disobedience would commence in both Talukas on 23 November 1921. Congress workers toured the two Talukas collecting the signatures of those willing to refuse taxes. By the end of November 1,500 signatures had been obtained in Anand, and 30 police Patels had promised to resign. A special effort was made to hold meetings of Baraiyas, in which they were requested to abstain from crime during civil disobedience. Many people in Gujarat were afraid that civil disobedience would lead to riots, as in 1919.

101 Anil Bhatt, 'Caste and Political Mobilisation in a Gujarat District', in Rajni Kothari, Caste in Indian Politics, (Orient Longman, Delhi 1970), pp. 299-335.

The Parsi community of Broach even offered to pay for troops to protect them.¹⁰² These fears were not groundless, for when the Ali brothers had been arrested in September, the Muslims of Thasra had begun sharpening their knives to fight the British. The local Congress workers sent a frantic telegram to the Congress leaders at Nadiad. A meeting was held at the decaying old Muslim town of Anghadi, and the Muslims were persuaded to put away their knives.¹⁰³

After the Bombay riots of November 1921 Gandhi decided to postpone civil disobedience. Preparations continued in Anand until January 1922, but after Gandhi had been told that Anand Patidars were threatening to kill anyone who bought confiscated property, he stressed increasingly that Bardoli would fight alone. Abbas Tyabji and many Congress workers in Kheda went down to Bardoli to help. In spite of this, Anand in effect waged civil disobedience rather than Bardoli. This was because the revenue collections for the year 1921-22 started in December in Anand, and only on February 5 in Bardoli. Of the 320 cases of confiscation and sale of property for refusal to pay land revenue in Gujarat during the 1921-22 season, 306 were from Kheda.¹⁰⁴ There was no immediate economic reason for these refusals to pay the revenue. The season had been moderate, and although wages and prices continued high, and food prices had fallen,¹⁰⁵ the Anand Patidars made most money from tobacco, which was fetching good prices. Only in Kapadvanj was there partial crop failure, and Gandhi refused to lead a movement there when approached.¹⁰⁶

102 Bombay FR2, November 1921.

103 Interview with Jivabhai Phulabhai Patel, Anand, 1 October 1973.

104 Land Revenue Administration Report of the Bombay Presidency, Northern Division, 1921-22. (Government Central Press, Bombay 1923), p. 19.

105 Ibid., pp. 26-27.

106 Navajivan, 11 December 1921, CWMG 21, pp. 566-567.

In 1921 it was the overall crisis of the lesser Patidars which moved the Patidars of Anand to support the Gandhian civil disobedience.

Passive Resistance in the balance

In February 1922 Gandhi suspended civil disobedience and took up the constructive programme once more. Gandhi believed that non-violent satyagraha had failed, and that a long period of constructive activity was needed before the people of India would be ready for renewed civil disobedience. The decision was extremely unpopular in Gujarat, but few dared to protest against Gandhi.¹⁰⁷ Although Vallabhbhai Patel spent the next two years trying to revive the movement, the impetus had been lost. After Gandhi had been jailed, Vallabhbhai held the sixth Gujarat Political Conference at Anand. Although over 15,000 were expected, only about 2,000 appeared.¹⁰⁸ The lesser Patidars of Anand, who had been spoiling for a fight in December 1921, had lost interest in the Gandhian movement. Their confidence was never restored fully. During the 1930-31 civil disobedience movement they gave the worst response of all lesser Patidars of the Charotar.

During 1922 Vallabhbhai organised a variety of activities in an attempt to demonstrate to the A.I.C.C. that non-cooperation was still a dynamic force in Gujarat. In October the G.P.C.C. resolved to enlist 2,500 volunteers by 1 December 1922 to picket foreign cloth shops. But by this date only 500 volunteers had come forward. They started picketing shops in Ahmedabad and Nadiad. The picketing was moderately successful.

In late December the Congress met at Gaya. The Congress decided to continue to boycott the councils, and to resume civil disobedience on 1 May 1923. There were two qualifications. Before civil disobedience

107 Bombay Source Material, Vol. III, part I, p. 465.

108 Bombay FR2, May 1922.

could start Rs. 2,500,000 had to be collected and 50,000 volunteers had to be recruited. On 13 January 1923 the G.P.C.C. met to discuss the resolution. The leading opponents of civil disobedience were the Panch Mahals leader, Vamanrao Mukadam, and the G.P.C.C. Secretary, G.V.Mavalankar. Both resigned in protest and joined the Swarajist party.¹⁰⁹ The Kheda leaders, Darbar Gopaldas, Abbas Tyabji and Phulchand Bapuji Shah, were all staunch no-changers. The G.P.C.C. resolved to recruit 3,000 volunteers. In the following weeks the Congress leaders toured the villages of Gujarat making inflammatory speeches. Kaka Kalelkar was jailed for writing seditious articles in Nava-jivan, and Indulal Yajnik was jailed for a seditious speech in Kheda District.¹¹⁰ But these activities made little impression on the peasants. They did not believe that civil disobedience could start without Gandhi. There was no immediate economic grievance to work them up. By the end of April only 800 people had been recruited as volunteers in Gujarat.¹¹¹ Vallabhbhai Patel realised that he had been defeated, and on April 22 announced in Nava-jivan that there could be no civil disobedience as long as the response to the constructive programme continued to be poor.¹¹²

In June 1923 Vallabhbhai turned his attention to the Central Provinces, and the Nagpur Flag Satyagraha. The local Congress leaders of Gujarat, who had been disappointed over Vallabhbhai's April decision to abandon civil disobedience, flocked to Nagpur in June. The satyagraha was waged so that Congressmen in the Central Provinces could carry national flags through cantonment areas in the cities. The movement started in March 1923. By June, Vallabhbhai was sending batches of Gujarat Congress

109 Indulal Yajnik, Atmakatha, Vol. III, p. 86

110 Ibid., pp. 91-93.

111 Narhari Parikh, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Vol. I, p. 179.

112 Nava-jivan, 22 April 1923, Bombay Native Newspaper Reports, 1923, p.415.

workers to support the movement. As he said: "This opportunity for showing the pure form of non-cooperation is not worth losing when the existence of non-cooperation has been doubted and non-cooperation has been ridiculed."¹¹³ The first batch consisted of seventy-five Kheda Congressmen led by Darbar Gopaldas, Abbas Tyabji and Phulchand Bapuji Shah. Gokaldas Talati led a second Kheda batch of fifty. Fervent Gandhians volunteered in small numbers from all over the District.

In July Vallabhbhai became the leader of the satyagraha, after the Nagpur leader, Jamnalal Bajaj, was jailed. Vithalbhai Patel had become a Swarajist, and when he saw what his brother was doing he rushed to Nagpur to arrange a compromise. He wanted to demonstrate that cooperation could achieve more than non-cooperation. After negotiations with both brothers, the Central Provinces Government permitted a token procession through the Civil Lines on August 18. As a result the Swarajists and the No-changers both claimed a victory for their own particular methods.¹¹⁴

In September 1923 Congress called off the Council boycott. Vallabhbhai left the session in disgust. Back in Gujarat he refused to allow Congressmen to support the Swarajists. The Kheda leaders attempted to rebel against this. During the election campaign Gandhi was criticised by the independent Candidates. Darbar Gopaldas, Phulchand Bapuji Shah, and Ravjibhai Manibhai Patel were so upset that they decided to put up Swarajist opponents. All of the Kheda leaders except Darbar Gopaldas signed an appeal asking the people to vote for the Swarajists. Vallabhbhai Patel summoned Ravjibhai Manibhai Patel to Ahmedabad, and gave him

113 Navajivan, 1 July 1923, Ibid., p. 651.

114 The Marathi press saw the satyagraha as a got-up affair to discredit the Council entry party in Maharashtra. See: Ibid., p. 871. For the Swarajist argument see: G.I. Patel, Vithalbhai Patel, pp. 506-520. For the No-Changers argument see: Narhari Parikh, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Vol. I, pp. 189-215.

a severe dressing down. He ordered Ravjibhai to withdraw his signature from the appeal. As a result, the plan to run Swarajist candidates was abandoned.¹¹⁵ In the election Dadubhai Desai and a Borsad lawyer called Dhanabhai Patel were returned to the council. Dhanabhai Patel subsequently became a Swarajist.¹¹⁶

During the non-cooperation period vested interests proved stronger than the nationalists had anticipated. The lesser Patidars had failed for the moment in their struggle with the British, and with the superior Patidars. Gandhi had failed to win over the orthodox Hindus. He had failed to involve the low castes in the movement. Even worse, by late 1923 Gujarati nationalists were beginning to question the very doctrine of passive resistance itself. It was at this low ebb in the fortunes of the movement that Vallabhbhai Patel produced a classic satyagraha in Borsad Taluka.

4. The Borsad Satyagraha

The Borsad Satyagraha of 1923-24 was the first really successful Gandhian satyagraha in rural Gujarat. The issues were well chosen, and within a month the Government had been forced to capitulate. The success went a long way towards restoring faith in Gujarat in the power of passive resistance. The origins of the Satyagraha lay in a particularly bad wave of dacoities which swept the area after 1919. The British accused the Patidars of aiding the dacoits, and in late 1923 imposed a poll tax on everyone in Borsad Taluka, to pay for the extra police. The Satyagraha was waged in protest at this tax.

After 1919 the dacoit problem got out of control in Borsad Taluka. After the police had crushed the violent outbreak of August 1918 there

115 R.M.Patel, Jivanna Jharna, Vol. I, pp. 219-221.

116 Bombay Chronicle, 14 November 1923, p. 8.

was a lull in the dacoities, but in April 1920 there was an upsurge, and in 1924 dacoities reached a record level.¹¹⁷ The main reasons for the dacoities were the run of bad seasons since 1915, which caused many Baraiyas and Patanvadias to turn to crime, and the grievances over such legislation as the Criminal Tribes Act. These grievances were examined in Chapter Six above. The police failed to cope because the dacoits were more ruthless and better armed than the comparatively amateur dacoits of previous decades. The problem was worst in Borsad Taluka because of a particularly bloodthirsty desperado called Babar Deva. He was renowned for his ruthless murders of informers. As a result few local policemen even dared to report his crimes, let alone his movements. Between 1920 and 1924 law and order broke down in the Taluka. Petty criminals escaped the police by pretending to be Babar Deva. The British believed that the problem was caused by Patidar connivance with the criminals, coupled with the evil effects of non-cooperation propaganda. But this was not the main reason. Police corruption and incompetence were largely to blame for the problem.

Babar Deva was a Patanvadia from the Baraiya village of Golel in Borsad Taluka. Much of the land in the village was owned by rich Patidars in surrounding villages. Babar Deva was born around 1880, the son of a petty thief. He became a watchman at Virsad and used to take part in minor robberies. In 1915 he was caught and jailed at Petlad. He escaped and formed a band of dacoits. By 1920 his exploits were beginning to attract attention. He was unusually bloodthirsty, even for a dacoit. His greatest claim to fame was the ruthless manner in which

117 Dacoities in Kheda District 1918-1922.

1918	-	45	1921	-	70
1919	-	27	1922	-	48
1920	-	48			

he murdered or mutilated informers. He even killed his sister for this reason. It was estimated that he murdered twenty-two people during his career.¹¹⁸ He operated in an area around Golel in the western part of Borsad Taluka. He knew the country well, and could move with great speed to avoid arrest. He carried a Winchester repeater rifle, a far superior weapon to the old Martini-Henry muskets used by the police. When he raided a village the police usually locked themselves in the chowki. His favourite crime was to threaten to murder rich Patidars and Vanias if they did not give him large sums of money. They usually handed over the money without informing the police.

Babar Deva became a folk hero among Baraiyas and Patanvadias. They let him take refuge in their houses. He was said to have a high regard for Brahmans, women and children. He worshipped cows, and kept an idol of a ferocious mata goddess to whom he sacrificed before setting out on raids. In mid 1923 he even entertained all the people of a village at a religious festival. He fed the cows and gave sweets to the children.¹¹⁹

In 1921 the police attempted to set a thief to catch a thief. They approached a Muslim dacoit called Alia, who was a friend of the Patidar mukhi of Uttarsanda. Alia had turned to dacoity after murdering a Borsad pleader in quarrel over a mango tree. He became a dacoit and used to sell his loot to the mukhi of Uttarsanda. In July 1921 the mukhi and a local police inspector offered Alia a gun if he would promise to help

118 Bombay Chronicle, 28 December 1923, p. 8. The police estimates were much lower. They were as follows:

1920-1923		
<u>Crimes by Babar Deva</u>		<u>Crimes by all other Kheda dacoits</u>
Murders of informants	6	2
Raids on villages	2	66
Murders during these raids	3	11

Bombay Chronicle, 22 December 1923, pp. 9-11.

119 Bombay Chronicle, 28 December 1923, p. 8.

them arrest Babar Deva. Alia took the gun, but merely used it for his own dacoities. He was eventually captured in November 1923 at the house of the mukhi of Uttarsanda.¹²⁰

The British tried to solve the problem by punishing the people of Borsad as a whole. They tried initially to get at Babar Deva through his fellow Patanvadia and Baraiya sympathisers. He often sheltered at Khadana and Jogan villages, and he had murdered a man at Jogan in broad daylight without one witness coming forward to testify. In April 1921 the British levied a poll tax on the people of Khadana and Jogan to pay for extra police. The measure failed, especially as the Patanvadias and Baraiyas were too impoverished to be able to pay the tax.¹²¹ In February 1923 the mamlatdar of Borsad wrote to the Collector, Stephen Covernton, telling him of the failure of the tax. In April Covernton wrote to Pratt saying that the problem needed to be tackled on a much wider scale. He suggested that the people of Borsad should be made to pay for a large additional police force.¹²² Pratt approved of the request and passed it on to the Home Department in Bombay. The Governor, Sir George Lloyd, accepted the measure for an initial period of one year.

In May 1923 Covernton left the District, to be replaced by Hiranand Kirpalani, a Sindhi who had served in Gujarat since 1912. Kirpalani reported:¹²³

As a topic of general interest the dacoities committed in Borsad Taluka and the adjoining parts of Anand and Matar Talukas have largely supplanted the non-cooperation movement from the popular mind.

But Kirpalani did not agree with the order that the people should be made

120 Bombay Chronicle, 12 December 1923, p.9; 22 December 1923, p.7.

121 Bombay Chronicle, 12 December 1923, p. 9.

122 Bombay Chronicle, 22 December 1923, p. 9.

123 Land Revenue Administration Report of the Bombay Presidency 1922-23, (Government Central Press, Bombay 1924), p. 42.

to pay for an additional police force. In August he wrote to the Inspector General of Police in Bombay: "It is obvious that imposition of this force will evoke the strongest protest from the people." He argued that the police would have to be housed and fed by the villagers, and that they might well commit excesses in the villages, and would therefore have to be selected very carefully. The proposed tax would be heavy, representing for a family about thirty-five per cent of the amount they paid in land revenue. Kirpalani accepted that extra police were needed, but opposed the tax.¹²⁴ In this he differed from the District Superintendent of Police, F.W.O'Gorman, who wanted to punish the Patidars.

On August 15 a conference was held at Ahmedabad between Pratt, Kirpalani, O'Gorman, and the Baroda Police Commissioner, Balajirao Ghatghe. Ghatghe was a well known dacoit hunter. His technique was to track his quarry relentlessly day and night, with a hand picked body of mounted police. The pursuit usually ended in a gun battle or ambush in which the dacoits were either shot or captured. In 1919 he had broken a notorious gang of Sindhi and Cutchi raiders called the Duffairs, when he captured two hundred of them after a long chase. In April 1923 he rounded up the infamous Kathiawari dacoit gangs of Mir Khan and the Baluchis. It was far more relevant to put Ghatghe on Babar Deva's trail than to employ extra police. But Government had sanctioned the additional police and the punitive tax, and at the Ahmedabad meeting it was decided to impose 393 extra police on Borsad and the villages of Anand Taluka nearest to Borsad.¹²⁵ In September the tax was fixed at Rs. 240,074. Every adult in all the villages of Borsad and eleven villages of Anand was to pay Rs. 2-7-0. The first collection was to be in December.

124 Kirpalani to Inspector General of Police, Bombay, 1 August 1923, BA, H.D. 1923, 3828, pp. 29-36. 1A.

125 Report on Ahmedabad Conference, 15 August 1923, Ibid., pp. 3-5.

In late September the Director of Information for the Bombay Government, J.F.Gennings, went to Borsad to collect information, so that the Government could justify the tax. He discovered that the local police were hopelessly inefficient. Many were old men who hid when the dacoits appeared. The people refused to give information about the dacoits because several informers had been murdered. It was widely believed that the police disclosed the names of informers to the dacoits.¹²⁵ These findings caused some consternation in the Home Department, but it was felt that although the police were by no means perfect, the blame for the dacoities lay essentially with Patidars who actively supported and shielded them. The Times of India dutifully published a series of articles on the lawlessness in Borsad Taluka, which it blamed on Congress agitation which had undermined respect for law and order. Increasingly the tax appeared to be a punishment on the Patidars for supporting Congress.

The Government had chosen a bad time for this clumsy measure. There had been a bad monsoon, and there was a food, fodder and water scarcity. The farmers were discussing the possibility of no-revenue satyagrahas throughout the District. Vallabhbhai Patel and Darbar Gopaldas even sent to Kapadvanj in mid December to discuss the possibility of such a movement with the local Congress Committee.¹²⁷ Besides this seasonal discontent, the dacoit menace was of great public concern. Rich Patidars and Vaniyas lived in constant fear of a letter from Babar Deva demanding protection money. Collector Kirpalani had already noted that the dacoits were of far greater interest to the people than decisions about entering Legislative Councils. The Patidars blamed the problem on police incompetence and corruption. They despised the police, who used their position

126 Report by Gennings, 29 September 1923, Ibid., pp. 135-140.

127 Bombay Chronicle, 14 December 1923.

to tyrannise the peasants, and the last thing the Patidars wanted was to have to pay for extra police.

The punitive police tax was announced in October. There was immediate protest in Borsad Taluka. The traders of Borsad town called a hartal. The President of the Municipality, Bhogilal Choksi, threatened to resign. The people of Ras sent an irate petition to Bombay. The Borsad Taluka Congress Committee asked Vallabhbhai to come to Borsad. Vallabhbhai hurried down from Ahmedabad, and after listening to the people's case, asked Mohanlal Pandya, Ravishankar Maharaj, Ravjibhai Manibhai Patel and Ashabhai Patel of Ras to tour the villages to investigate the real reasons for the dacoities. Mohanlal Pandya wrote up a report subsequently, which revealed how the police had tried to use Alia to catch Babar Deva, and a variety of other corrupt practices used by the police. Meanwhile, Vallabhbhai had managed to procure the Government file on the subject, which showed that there was considerable uncertainty among the authorities as to the wisdom of the tax. In his speech Vallabhbhai said that the elections had returned an educated class who would try to help the people, but who would probably fail. The Legislative Councils could not save them from the punitive tax, because it was not due to meet for two months. The only way was Gandhi's way, the path of non-cooperation. The Government had slandered the entire population when it accused them of harbouring criminals. He strongly advised them to refuse to pay the tax. He appealed to them not to help the dacoits, but felt that the real blame lay with the police for their complicity in the dacoities. He then recounted the scandalous episode of the arming of Alia, and disclosed the contents of the Government file on the police tax. He asked for volunteers to come forward to help in the satyagraha. A vote was taken, and the resolution for satyagraha passed.¹²⁸

128 Bombay Chronicle, 12 December 1923, p. 9.

Vallabhbhai organised the no-tax campaign with great efficiency. The headquarters were set up at Borsad town under Darbar Gopaldas. Mohanlal Pandya was placed in charge of publicity, a vital part of all Gandhian satyagrahas. He put out two bulletins each day dealing with the latest news of the satyagraha. These were sent to the newspapers and also read out in the village choras each day. The punitive tax was due from the ninety villages of Borsad Taluka and fourteen villages in Anand Taluka near the Borsad border. Nine sub-camps were established with about three experienced Congress workers in each. Many of these Congress workers had recently returned from the Nagpur Satyagraha. Ravjibhai Manibhai Patel was given the area around Sunev, a strong centre of Congress support. Ravishankar Maharaj was entrusted with the more difficult Baraiya villages to the south of Ras, because of the work he had done among the Baraiyas in the area. Phulchand Bapuji Shah was based at Anklav in the east of the Taluka. By December 13 Congress workers had visited all 104 villages.

Solidarity was achieved through the use of caste panchayats and Patidar gols. The Congress workers contacted caste leaders and asked them to pass resolutions in their caste panchayats forbidding payment of the tax. The Visalad and Dasalad Vania communities agreed to levy a fine of Rs. 51 on any of their members who paid the tax. Those who purchased property confiscated by the British in lieu of tax were to be fined Rs. 101.¹²⁹ At a village called Rangaipura some of the Vanias and Patidars paid the tax. Rangaipura belonged to a marriage circle, or gol, of fourteen small lesser Patidar villages. Ravjibhai Manibhai Patel summoned a meeting of this gol. Darbar Gopaldas and Mohanlal Pandya came to the meeting, which was attended by 3,000 Patidars. At the meeting,

129 Bombay Chronicle, 25 December 1923, p. 8.

the gol resolved to fine any members who paid the tax. The Patidars of Rangaipura were fined Rs. 300 as a punishment.¹³⁰ After the agitation had ended the leaders said that caste solidarity was the chief reason for the success of the movement.¹³¹

Collection of the tax began in early December. Tax officials visited the villages, accompanied by the policemen for whom the tax was meant to pay. Property was confiscated from people's houses in lieu of revenue. In some cases notices for confiscation of land were issued.

On 10 December 1923 Sir Leslie Wilson replaced Sir George Lloyd as Governor of Bombay. As he had arrived fresh from England, the evidence of the malpractices by the Borsad police made a deep impression on him. On 3 January 1924 he asked the Bombay Home Member, Maurice Hayward, to visit the Taluka. 150 local people were picked to meet Hayward. Only one Congressman was chosen, a Borsad pleader called Ramabhai Patel. He was a contemporary of Vallabhbhai from Karamsad. At the meeting Ramabhai accused the Deputy Superintendent of Police of going to a village called Nisraya two days before and threatening the people that if they did not pay their tax, outlaws would be sent to raid their village. The Deputy Superintendent of Police, who was at the meeting, replied that he had said that if the additional police were removed from Nisraya, the dacoits would attack the village. A man from Nisraya rose and said that there never had been any additional police in the village to be removed. Ramabhai then said that in November the Government had announced that Alia had been captured in a jungle near Uttarsanda. But as everyone in Kheda well knew, there were no jungles near Uttarsanda. In fact, Alia had been captured in the house of the mukhi, but the local police inspector did not wish to incriminate the mukhi who was his friend. The D.S.P.

130 R.M.Patel, Jivanna Jharna, Vol. I, pp. 244-46.

131 Bombay Chronicle, 11 January 1924, p. 8.

O'Gorman then read out a list of outlaws captured or killed by the Government. Ramabhai denied that any were well known dacoits.¹³²

Collector Kirpalani had already asked Hayward in private to cancel the tax, and to conclude the meeting Hayward announced that for the moment no more attempts would be made to collect the tax. On January 7 the Governor cancelled the tax. The additional police were to be paid for by the Government. In fact, the additional police were hardly needed, for in little less than a month after the close of the Satyagraha, Ghatghe had captured Babar Deva.

The Government capitulated for a number of reasons. The case for the tax was weak, especially after the revelations of police malpractices. Revenue Department officials were afraid that if the agitation continued it would interfere with the collection of land revenue, which was due to start in January. Sir Leslie Wilson wanted to get his regime off to a good start. The Swarajists were about to enter the Montagu Chelmsford Councils for the first time, and Wilson did not wish to alienate them. Wilson's quick capitulation disarmed a local agitation before it could become a national agitation.

In Gujarat the Borsad agitation was seen as a vindication of Gandhian satyagraha. Borsad proved that Gandhi did not have to be present at maintain non-violence. The attitude of the Gujarat Congress was summed up in an article in Young India in late January 1924:¹³³

The foundations of Government are so weak and the machinery of tax-gathering so incomplete that the least show of firm refusal will paralyse the whole administration The real meaning of Borsad is this: there is strength in any taluka in India which is greater than that of Sirkar; also the tax-collecting machinery of the bureaucracy cannot gather two takhs of rupees without the willing collaboration of the payers of the tax. Both are lessons for the officials and the Congress.

132 N.Parikh, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Vol. I, pp. 238-241.

133 Young India, 24 January 1924, Bombay Native Newspaper Reports 1924, p. 91.

The Borsad Satyagraha was thus an important stage in the growth in Gujarat of the somewhat unrealistic belief that passive resistance by itself could remove the British.

The Borsad Satyagraha shifted the focus of the nationalist movement in Kheda from Nadiad and Anand Talukas to Borsad. After 1923, Borsad town replaced Nadiad as the effective Congress headquarters for the district, and Borsad Taluka became an area of intensive Gandhian constructive activity. Gram sevaks went to live in the villages to convert the people to the Gandhian way of life. In 1924 Borsad Taluka gave the best response in India to Gandhi's khadi spinning franchise. Under the new franchise people could only be members of Congress if they sent 2,000 yards of handspun yarn to their local Congress organisation each month. The figures gave a good indication of the numbers of fervent Gandhians in each area. In the first yarn returns, Kheda led Gujarat.¹³⁴ In Kheda 288 people qualified to be Congress members under the new franchise. Of these ninety-nine came from Borsad, sixty-five from Nadiad, and twenty-six from Petlad Taluka. The only other Taluka in Gujarat to match these figures was Bardoli, with sixty-one. These were the Talukas in which the Gandhian organisation was strongest and they were the ones which gave the best response to the civil disobedience movement of 1930-31.

134 Number of people qualifying for spinning franchise:

Kheda District	288	Surat District	108
Ahmedabad District	76	Broach District	38

Navajivan 24 August 1924, in CWNG 25, p. 32. Gujarat led India with 845 people qualifying. Bengal (444), Andhra (429) and Bihar (208) followed. Young India, 28 August 1924, in CWNG 25, pp. 48-49.

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE CONSTRUCTIVE PERIOD, 1924-1929

Although there were no serious peasant agitations in Kheda District between 1924 and 1929, there was no decline in lesser Patidar militancy. It was a period of continuing agricultural depression. In the thirteen years after 1914 there were no less than six bad seasons, six moderate seasons, and only one good season.¹ This was a very bad average, and it was made worse by the fact that bad and moderate seasons tended to alternate, so that the farmers never had a chance to recover fully. The last of the really bad years during this period was in 1927, when there was a devastating flood. In 1928, 1929 and 1930 there was a run of three satisfactory seasons. It was the first such run since 1912, 1913 and 1914, and as a result conditions began to improve. During the 1920s crop prices remained high, but the farmers were not able to benefit, due to the bad seasons. Although agricultural wages fell after reaching a peak in 1923, they still remained over double the amount they had been in 1916.² During this period there was a consolidation of support for Congress among the lesser Patidars, and attempts were made to attract new groups in Kheda to

1 The British officials in charge of the district used to make a subjective evaluation of the quality of each season. Their judgement was based primarily on the quality of the monsoon for the year; however, such factors as crop diseases, prevalence of pests, unseasonable rains and frost were also taken into account. The seasons from 1915 to 1930 were as follows: 1915-bad, 1916-moderate, 1917-moderate, 1918-bad, 1919-moderate, 1920-bad, 1921-good, 1922-moderate, 1923-bad, 1924-moderate, 1925-bad, 1926-moderate, 1927-bad, 1928-moderate, 1929-moderate, 1930-moderate. Collector's Reports, Kheda, 1915-1918. Land Revenue Administration Reports of the Bombay Presidency, 1919-1921, (Government Central Press, Bombay 1920-22). Papers relating to the Second Revision Settlement of the Anand Taluka of the Kaira District, (Government Central Press, Bombay 1942), p. 23.

2 Wage index and crop price indexes at four year intervals were as follows: (base of 100 was in 1895)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Wage Index</u>	<u>Crop Price Index</u>
1915	166	144
1919	388	173
1923	583	153
1927	394	160

Papers relating to the Second Revision Settlement of the Anand Taluka of the Kaira District, pp. 38-39.

the cause through the constructive programme. This will be looked at in the first section. The second section will deal with the superior Patidars' reaction to the Gandhian movement, and in the third and final section we shall see how Vallabhbhai and the Gujarat Congress helped to reinstate the doctrine of passive resistance in 1928-29, thus paving the way for civil disobedience in 1930.

1. The Constructive Programme

The constructive programme was an essential part of the Congress movement. Gandhi believed that as long as the majority of the Indian population was ground down by social abuses and poverty, India could never be genuinely free. He worked out a constructive programme to solve India's problems. This programme incorporated the education of villagers in national schools, the reintroduction of cottage industries, the reduction of the area of land under cash crops, and the expansion of the area of land under food crops and pasture for milk cattle. Such measures were to be introduced by social workers who would encourage the villagers to work harmoniously towards improving their villages.

The flaw in Gandhi's programme was that it did not attack the root cause of poverty in the villages. This was the growth of an exploitive class of upper peasants. The lands and pastures which in normal years in the past had provided food and milk for all, were now planted with cash crops to pay for the bicycles, silk dhotis and marble temples of the landed peasantry. Gandhi was not ignorant of this problem, but he refused to believe that force was needed to stop the exploitation. Instead, he thought that charismatic social workers could overcome the problem. As he said:³

We may not forcibly dispossess the zamindars and talukdars of their thousands of bighas. And among whom shall we distribute them? We need not dispossess them. They only

3 Navajivan, 27 December 1925, in CWVG 29, p. 363.

need a change of heart. When that is done, and when they learn to melt at their tenant's woes, they will hold their lands in trust for them, will give them a major part of their produce, keeping only sufficient for themselves. 'We had better wait for that day until the Greek calends', someone will say. I do not think so. I think that the world is moving towards peace, i.e., ahimsa.

Gandhi's solution for class exploitation proved to be unrealistic. Socially and economically the constructive programme was a failure. However, the programme had great political importance. Support for Congress was built up through it in the villages. The selfless activities of the Gandhian workers were greatly appreciated. It also helped to keep proletarian revolution at bay, for Gandhi's work among low castes and untouchables made it appear that Congress was not solely the party of the dominant peasants and bourgeoisie.

The constructive programme depended on the gram sevaks, or village workers. They were usually educated young men of an idealistic nature. In Kheda they were mostly Brahmans, Vantias and superior Patidars. In the villages they usually acted in the traditional Brahmanic role of school-teacher. They tried to convert the villagers to their philosophy through the example of their own exemplary life. After they had won the confidence of the peasants they often managed to bring about social reforms. But more often than not the villagers relapsed after they had left. Most of their activities were of a routine nature, but at times they had to react to emergencies. During natural disasters they organised relief. When the villagers had grievances against the Government, they acted as their champions.

The gram sevak movement started in Gujarat in 1921, when a training centre for social workers was set up at Ahmedabad. This was placed under a body called the Gujarat Rashtriya Sevak Mandal (Gujarat Nationalist Workers' Association). After a few months training, students were sent to various villages. By mid 1921 there were eighty volunteers under the

control of Indulal Yajnik.⁴ In March 1921 a Swaraj Ashram was set up at Anand to train volunteers for Kheda District. An Antyaj Seva Vandal for untouchable uplift was founded at Nadiad in 1922 by Amritlal Thakkar and Indulal Yajnik. Volunteers were enlisted to serve for three years. The body was financed by the Gujarat Provincial Congress Committee.⁵ These activities died down after Chauri Chaura, but a core of dedicated young gram sevaks continued to work in the villages. The Borsad Satyagraha led to a revival of interest in village uplift work. At a meeting in January 1924 to celebrate the victory, Vallabhbhai announced a special Borsad Taluke gram sevak programme. He hoped to see volunteers in each village of the taluka. Thirty-five young men volunteered for an initial one year period. Borsad Taluka became an area of especially intensive constructive work.

In Kheda the most important aspects of the constructive programme were national education, khadi propagation, the attack on social abuses such as untouchability, the reform of underprivileged social groups, and emergency activities. These will be examined at some length as they had a considerable effect on the popularity of the Congress party as a whole in Kheda.

Gandhi wanted to replace English style education with 'national' education. Since 1917 Gandhi had experimented with education at his Ashram school. He felt that the aim of education should be to build character, rather than to gain employment. He therefore abolished examinations. He believed that character could be built in a variety of ways. Morality, patriotism and pride in ancient Hindu civilisation could be installed through study of the Hindu scriptures. Marching

4 Indulal Yajnik, Atmakatha, Vol. II, pp. 297-316.

5 Indulal Yajnik, Atmakatha, Vol. III, (Ravani Prakashan, Ahmedabad 1956), p. 77.

and drilling brought a sense of discipline. Devotion to work came from handicrafts, such as spinning. Gandhi also stressed the uplifting value of classical Indian music and poetry.⁶ He believed strongly in the use of the vernacular medium. Children wasted years learning English, and even then could hardly follow their lessons. It was difficult to think critically or with originality in a foreign language. Those who did not know English well were badly penalised.⁷

Gandhi started a school following these principles after studying the school at Shantiniketan, Swami Shraddhanand's Arya Samaj gurukul at Hardwar, and Motibhai Amin's Petlad Boarding House. He had a high regard for all these institutions and used them as models. He also consulted the former Baroda revolutionary, K.G.Deshpande, who had run the Ganganath Bharatiya Vidyalaya from 1907 till the British forced it to close down in 1911.⁸ The list of subjects taught at this institution corresponded closely with the subjects taught at the Ashram school, even down to the teaching of handicrafts.⁹ A former teacher at the Ganganath Bharatiya Vidyalaya, Kaka Kalelkar, became a teacher at the Ashram school. The teachers were of a high calibre, and helped to make the venture a success. They included Narhari Parikh and Kishorelal Mashruvala, and distinguished Gujarati academics often came to give advice.

Gandhi hoped that this school would be a harbinger of an educational renaissance in India. Gandhi was, however, irresponsible in claiming a universal validity for a system which had so far only been tried under

6 CWVG 13, p. 333. CWVG 14, pp. 30, 42. CWVG 21, p. 38.

7 CWVG 14, pp. 10-36. CWVG 13, p. 359.

8 Gandhi consulted Deshpande in July 1917. Bombay Source Material, Vol. III, Part I, p. 72.

9 There was a stress on yoga at the Baroda institution not found at the Ashram school. To compare curricula see: Bombay Source Material, Vol. II, pp. 860-862. CWVG 13, pp. 331-333.

hand picked teachers. Gandhi was wrong to think that bureaucratically orientated education in itself bred a feeble character. Motibhai Amin took on himself the task of raising the abysmal standards of such education, and was extremely successful. Many who went through the best of Gandhi's schools became highly successful Congress and social workers of impeccable character. Without paper qualifications they could do little else. But for the majority of people it merely gave a semblance of education without giving the qualifications required for prestigious jobs. In a bureaucratic age 'national' education was doomed to failure.

Gandhi launched his education movement during a period of rapid educational expansion in Gujarat. The Charotar Education Society was founded at Anand by Motibhai Amin in 1916, and Vithalbhai Patel's Primary Education Act of 1918 allowed municipalities to enforce universal primary education. Surat Municipality was the first to do so in 1920. Western education, from being the preserve of the elites, was now being demanded by the merchant classes and dominant peasants. Superb opportunities existed for anyone with original educational ideas to get them implemented. Indulal Yajnik spent more time on educational activities in these years than on politics. He helped set up the Gujarat Kelvani Mandal (Education League) in 1916, which held an annual conference of teachers. Their chief demands were for free compulsory primary education, greater use of Gujarati, and higher salaries for teachers.¹⁰ Gandhi was a Vice-President of this body.¹¹ Their chief activity initially was to set up village reading rooms, subsidised by rich industrialists.¹² In 1920 the Gujarat Kelvani Mandal began to affiliate schools on the lines of the Deccan Education Society. When non-cooperation started in September 1920,

10 Bombay Chronicle, 25 October 1916, p. 8.

11 Bombay Chronicle, 13 April 1917, p. 5.

12 Gujarat Kelvani Mandal Report 1917-18, Bombay Chronicle, 12 February 1919, p. 4.

the body agreed to put itself under Gandhi and propagate national education.¹³ Energy which had gone into building a better education system for Gujarat was thus turned into the unorthodox paths of Gandhian education.

National education needed a focal point. Since 1917 Ahmedabad educationalists had been discussing the possibility of an independent college. The Gujarati Vice-Chancellor of the Benares Hindu University (founded in 1916), Anandshankar Dhruve, felt that a similar institution was needed in Gujarat. In July 1920 he visited Ahmedabad to propagate the idea.¹⁴ Indulal Yajnik took up the matter with Gandhi. A conference was held, and on 15 November 1920 the Maha Vidyalaya was opened. This was the first college of the Gujarat Vidyapith, and since then has always remained its most important part. There were sixty-nine students initially.¹⁵ This rose to two hundred by March 1921.¹⁶ The object was to affiliate colleges and schools throughout Gujarat to the Vidyapith. In such affiliated institutions Gujarati had to be the medium of instruction, and no untouchable could be excluded. This last rule ensured that the majority of national schools did not affiliate with the Vidyapith.

The Vidyapith was not an academic success. The first Principal of the Maha Vidyalaya was Acharya Gidwani. He was an intellectual of imagination and originality.¹⁷ He realised that the Vidyapith had to

13 Bombay Chronicle, 18 September 1920, p. 14.

14 Bombay Chronicle, 16 July 1920, p. 9.

15 Bombay Chronicle, 2 December 1920, p. 7.

16 Young India, 23 March 1921, p. 95.

17 Indulal Yajnik, Atmakatha, Vol. III, pp. 113-115.

forge a synthesis between East and West, But such modernists were in a minority. Several of the teachers at the Ashram school came over to the Vidyapith. Kishorelal Mashravala was a devotee of Swaminarayan and opposed Gandhi's untouchable work. Kaka Kalelkar became the leader of a clique of teachers in the Oriental Department, which effectively combined to make the Vidyapith a defender of orthodoxies. By May 1921 Indul Yajnik was so disgusted that he resigned from the Vidyapith Senate.¹⁸ The Vidyapith lost its claim to be a scholarly institution at an early stage, but continued to flourish as a training centre for political and social workers, and as a political base for those who wished to associate their name with Gandhi.

The programme to 'nationalise' high schools in Kheda was extremely successful in the short run. Of the six high schools existing in 1920, five were made into rashtriya shalas (national schools).¹⁹ The movement proved popular among pupils, for it promised some novelty in their education. With the help of a minority of sympathetic staff members they often forced the reluctant proprietors to 'nationalise'. This entailed the rejection of Government grants-in-aid, and affiliation to the Gujarat Vidyapith. Apart from Sunav rashtriya shala, which was a success, none of the high schools remained 'national' for over five years. During this period it was possible for pupils to continue with English education at the four high schools in the Baroda State part of the Charotar.

The 'nationalisation' of the Charotar Education Society was a

18 Indulal Yajnik, Gandhi as I know Him, (Danish Mahal, Delhi 1943), p.194.

19 High Schools in Kheda were as follows:

1. Nadiad. Government High School. Nationalised during 1921 only.
2. Nadiad. Coronation High School. Nationalised 1920-1923.
3. Kheda. Government High School. Not affected.
4. Anand. D.N.High School. (Charotar Education Society). Nationalised 1921-1926.
5. Borsad. Emperor Edward Memorial High School. Nationalised 1920-1925.
6. Sunav. High School. Nationalised 1921-1934.

bitter blow to its founder, Motibhai Amin. In October 1920 the students and teachers began to demand that the Society be nationalised. Motibhai tried to persuade them that non-cooperation was a passing phase and that politics should be kept out of education. But a few days later Gandhi came to Anand and in a private meeting with the staff and students undid all of Motibhai's work.²⁰ The teachers were reluctant to disown their founder, but in February 1921 they decided to affiliate themselves to the Vidyapith. Motibhai had to resign from the institution he had established. The boys' parents were less enthusiastic, and many forced their sons to join Government schools. In 1926, after suffering grievous financial losses, and losing most of its pupils, the Society finally renounced its ties with the Vidyapith.²¹

Many national primary schools were established, but most were short lived, and I have no comprehensive list of them. 'Nationalisation' often meant taking down the portrait of King George V and substituting Gandhi in his place to mollify local activists. In many cases a 'national school' was a room in the village dharmashala with no furniture but for one or two broken down old spinning wheels. Patriotic parents were supposed to entrust their children to the political workers who ran these spinning workshops. Most of the cotton yarn produced was worthless for weaving purposes, and the children were not even taught how to read and write.²²

The Government left these institutions to shrivel of their own accord. Teachers' resignations were not accepted, so that they could creep back after the fervour had died down. Government even gave approval for spinning in their schools.²³ Parents sent their children to these

20 Bombay Source Material, Vol. III, Part I, p. 336.

21 G.I.Patel, Vithalbai Patel, Vol. I, pp. LVIII-LIX.

22 Indulal Yajnik, Gandhi as I Knew Him, p. 193.

23 John Butler, Educational Administration in Bombay Presidency 1913-1937, pp. 82-83.

schools out of love for Gandhi, and in the end it was they who defeated national education by withdrawing their children. Gandhi had said in 1917 of his education experiments: "There is one great obstacle in the way - the lure of degrees."²⁴ But parents wanted to give their children the best opportunity in life and this lay through a degree or qualification from educational institutions under Government control. National education was also hard on the parents' pockets, for national schools lost the Government grant-in-aid, which amounted to half the cost of running a school. Thus national education was generally a failure in Kheda. In 1930-31 Gandhi made no attempt to revive the programme.

Khadi propagation was Gandhi's best known obsession. Spinning of yarn was traditionally a woman's task, and the weaving of khadi cloth was carried out by Dhed untouchables. The khadi cloth of the variety propagated by Gandhi had always been popular for rough clothes among the peasantry, for it was an extremely cool and comfortable form of dress. This rough cloth was not popular among the richer classes, who liked to dress immaculately to distinguish themselves from peasants. Khadi cloth crumpled easily, the sleeves tended to ride up to the elbow, and ironed creases soon disappeared from the trouser leg. It also shrank badly in the wash. In the past the rich had worn the high quality hand woven cloth which had also been exported to Europe. It was this industry which the mills had devastated, rather than the country cloth industry. Therefore Gandhi was not so much restoring an almost dead industry to life, as he makes out in his autobiography, but was giving publicity to an existing low caste industry.²⁵

24 Speech at Broach Education Conference, 20 October 1917, CWMG 14, p. 34.

25 Chapters 39 and 40 of Gandhi's autobiography tell how Gandhi discovered some old spinning wheels after a long search. I think that this is somewhat romanticised, as spinning was by no means dead, although by 1920 most low caste hand weavers used mill produced yarn. The 1901 Famine Report stressed that weaving was still a flourishing country craft. Report of the Indian Famine Commission 1901, p. 78.

Gandhi started khadi propaganda in Kheda in 1919. In this year he developed a portable spinning wheel and managed to persuade some political workers to don khadi. Swadeshi shops had existed in many Kheda towns for over a decade. A marketing system therefore existed to facilitate the spread of khadi in Kheda. Bonfires of foreign cloth were held in 1921 at which Congress workers handed out white khadi caps. In the next few years large numbers of people in the district began to wear the new costume. In the first two decades of the twentieth century there had been a gradual shift to European fashions in shirts, jackets and haircuts.²⁶ Patidar farmers for the most part still wore their traditional peasant costumes. After 1921 they began to wear white Gandhi caps, khadi dhotis and kurtas. Women began to wear khadi saris. The change in dress was more marked in Gujarat than in other parts of India, and it was only after 1947 that young people began to wear fashionable clothes of mill cloth. Spinning never caught on except among dedicated Gandhians. It was always considered an effeminate occupation. But despite its impracticalities, the khadi programme had the great advantage of forcing elite politicians to dress as peasants. In doing so they gained the sympathy of the peasants.

To Gandhi, one of the most important aspects of the constructive programme was to demonstrate to the underprivileged that Congress was not merely a party for the privileged. In these activities he was often opposed by orthodox Hindus and local dominant groups. In fact, this aspect of Gandhi's programme was conservative, for he was reconciling the underprivileged to the rule of the bourgeoisie and dominant peasants. Gandhi was, in other words, carrying out what has been called 'national building'.

There was considerable opposition to Gandhi's untouchable work in Kheda. Untouchables were not held in such contempt as in South India,

26 Census of India 1911, Vol. XVI, Baroda, Part I, Report, p. 260.

but their lot was still a miserable one. In February 1925 Gandhi toured Borsad Taluka. In meeting after meeting he found high castes refusing to mix with untouchables. At Bhadran he was shocked to find that a bamboo fence had been erected to separate the untouchables from the rest of the audience. After he complained the fence was torn down. The Patidars were ambivalent towards the issue. At Sunav the leading Patidars refused to hold a meeting in the village, lest anyone should insult Gandhi by condemning his untouchability work. Feelings ran high in the village on the subject. In the end a meeting was held at the Sunav national school, which passed off quietly.²⁷ The Baraiyas were less ambivalent. Being the class immediately above the untouchables, they were staunch upholders of untouchability. When Gandhi visited the Baraiya village of Kathana he was told that a holy man like himself could mix with untouchables, but if ordinary men did they would lose their chance of marrying well. Gandhi tried hard to change their minds, but at the end of the meeting the Baraiyas frankly told him that they would continue to beat any untouchables who tried to mix with them.²⁸ In 1926 the Antyaj Seva Mandal did a survey of eighty-eight villages of Anand Taluka, and found that bad discrimination still existed. In some places untouchables could not even get an adequate supply of drinking water.²⁹

Baraiya reform work was more successful, despite much Patidar opposition. During the 1920-22 non-cooperation movement Gandhi attempted to interest the Baraiyas in Congress activities. Although most Baraiyas

27 Mahadev Desai, Day to Day with Gandhi, Vol. V, pp. 293-294.

28 Ibid., pp. 267-294.

29 CWMG 32, pp. 423-424.

were peaceful cultivators and landless labourers, Gandhi's chief concern was to reform the minority who lived by thieving and banditry. Although he was aware of the economic reasons for Baraiya criminality,³⁰ he wanted to disarm them and turn them into a passive proletariat.

Ravishankar Maharaj was the leader of the Baraiya reform movement. He was an Audich Brahman of Sarsavani, a Baraiya dominated village in Mehmedabad Taluka. He toured the notorious dacoit villages of Borsad Taluka on foot like a sadhu, telling religious stories with the moral that a life of crime did not pay. Sometimes he resorted to fasts to coerce the robbers into reforming their ways. He came to be revered by the Baraiyas and Patanvadias of the area. He managed to pacify the area between 1920 and 1940 to a remarkable degree. These activities were popular among lesser Patidars, who were on the receiving end of most of the banditry, but not among the superior Patidars, who often used to act as receivers of stolen property. For instance, when Ravjibhai Manibhai Patel tried his hand at Baraiya reform in Sojitra, he soon came up against some leading Patidars who resented his attempts to convert the Baraiyas to a thrifty and honest life. They were lending money at high rates of interest to the Baraiyas, and were receiving stolen property from them.³¹

The Borsad Satyagraha of 1923-24 provided a great impetus to Baraiya reform work. After it was over, many young men went to live in villages as gram sevaks. Dacoity almost completely disappeared in Borsad Taluka.³² Crime, on the other hand, remained at much the same level. Although

30 Navajivan, 29 June 1924, in CWNG 24, p. 317.

31 R.M.Patel, Jivanna Jharna, Vol. I, pp. 159-161.

32 Number of dacoities in Borsad Taluka 1920-1929:

1920	13	1925	3
1921	20	1926	0
1922	4	1927	1
1923	6	1928	1
1924	15	1929	1

the gram sevaks were able to win the sympathy of Baraiya villagers, Baraiyas failed to grasp the subtleties of Gandhian satyagraha. An example was at Gorva, a Baraiya village near the Mahi in Borsad Taluka. The gram sevak of Gorva was a young Patidar called Ambalal Bajibhai Patel. In April 1930 he was jailed for manufacturing salt. Soon afterwards, Congress called for the mass resignation of village officials. The Baraiyas of Gorva demanded that their mukhi resign, and when he refused, they murdered him.³³ In Patidar villages ordinary peasants were able to take over after their Gandhian leaders had been arrested, and lead movements which conformed to Gandhian non-violence. This was not the case in Baraiya villages. The Baraiyas could be educated to oppose the bureaucracy, but they preferred to use their traditional form of opposition through violence.

The constructive programme was seen at its best during emergencies. The worst natural disaster during these years occurred in 1927, when there were devastating floods. The floods were caused by a four day deluge in late July 1927, when between forty-two and fifty-four inches of rain fell in the District. 72,000 houses collapsed. The river spewed their water over the flat countryside, washing away the rich topsoil and depositing sand over the land. By August 1 much of the District was under four feet of water. The crops had been destroyed, the roads were blocked and everywhere people were starving. Kheda had borne the brunt of the storm, although the area around Baroda and Ahmedabad District had also been badly affected. The Collector of Kheda, M.S. Jayakar, was marooned at the District headquarters. Vallabhbhai Patel immediately started relief work, using the Congress organisation in the District. Volunteers were dispatched to convenient centres to organise the distribution of food. On August 11 Vallabhbhai called a meeting of relief workers at Anand to work out a coordinated scheme. They decided to use

³³ Bombay FR2, August 1930.

Congress Committees to distribute free food and clothing. Seeds were needed urgently so that farmers could replant their sodden fields. Congress procured seed and sold it at a loss. Cheap food shops were opened, and loans were given for farms to be re-stocked.³⁴

The speed and efficiency of the Congress reaction was in marked contrast to the Government's reaction. Even the Times of India condemned the Government for sloth.³⁵ The Government refused to make use of the famine relief fund initially, because this was a flood. In late August sense prevailed, and nine million rupees were released from the fund. A further million rupees were given for the rebuilding of the houses of the depressed classes. Ten million rupees were given in loans to the farmers. Public donations, which were sent to Congress, amounted to about one and a half to two million rupees. Government relief mainly helped the richer farmers, who could afford the loans and were in a better position to obtain them, and the depressed classes, who were given money. Vallabhbhai Patel claimed that the farmers in the middle had not received adequate relief. Those whose houses had collapsed were worst off, because grants were only given for the rebuilding of low caste houses.³⁶

The Government appeared to have failed the lesser Patidars in the crisis. Congress had appeared as a saviour. Quick action by Congress had prevented merchants exploiting the shortages. An example was in the area around Ras, in which the local activist, Ashabhai Patel, had three shops. The floods had sent grain prices soaring to Rs. 15 to 20 per maund. Ashabhai had paid Rs. 4.2 per maund wholesale, and was tempted to sell it at a large profit. However, when Ravishankar Maharaj came to Ras to

34 Nahari Parikh, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Vol. I, pp. 282-287.

35 Bombay Legislative Council Debates, Vol. XX, (Government Central Press, Bombay 1927), pp. 1064-1185.

36 Kaiser-i-Hind, 30 October 1927, Bombay Native Newspaper Reports 1929, p. 1144.

organise relief he insisted that rather than make a profit, Ashabhai should sell his grain at a loss of one rupee per maund. Soon afterwards, Gandhi issued an appeal to merchants to lower their prices, and Ashabhai reduced his grain by a further rupee to Rs. 2.2 per maund. This forced the merchants in the area to reduce their prices drastically.³⁷ Besides grain, Congress had brought in supplies of cement, bricks, agricultural implements and seeds, which were sold at a loss to force down prices. The popularity of Congress was as a result greatly enhanced throughout Kheda.

An immense amount of energy went into these constructive activities. In a purely political sense, the effort paid off handsomely in 1930-31. In April and May 1930 the Salt Satyagraha sparked off demonstrations on an unprecedented scale throughout India. But only in areas where there had been intensive constructive activity for at least a decade did the peasantry for the first and only time refuse to pay their land revenue for the sake of the nationalist movement rather than for immediate economic reasons.

2. The Superior Patidar Reaction to Gandhian Agitation

The superior Patidars of the generation born between 1870 and 1900 neither needed nor wanted Gandhian satyagraha. Satyagraha was a weapon for those who did not have influence in society. Its technique was to pick a quarrel, take up a rigid and extreme stand, and then fight out the affair in public. In Baroda State the superior Patidars had good relations with the Government. The Baroda Government usually listened to them, for it did not wish to alienate this important element in the state. In British Charotar the superior Patidars were the class which had benefited most from the constitutional reforms of 1909 and 1919. Men like Vithalbhai Patel could act as their champions in the Bombay Legislative Council. The superior Patidars were also less militant because they

³⁷ Interview with Ashabhai Patel, Ras, 21-22 September 1973.

were not suffering from economic crisis to the same extent as the lesser Patidars. As a result they tended to be socially and politically conservative.

The superior Patidars' attitude towards the nationalists was revealed in a no-revenue campaign in Petlad Taluka of Baroda State in 1924. The agitation was caused by an enhancement of the land revenue in Petlad Taluka in 1924 by an average 12.6%. The increases varied from village to village. In the superior Patidar villages of Vaso and Sojitra the increases were slight, but at Dharmaj the revenue was raised by 21.5%.³⁸ Meetings were held to protest at the increase, and a prominent superior Patidar landlord of Dharmaj called Ravjibhai Bhailalbai Patel was asked to act as the Patidars' leader. He had recently retired from the Baroda State Revenue Department, and still had good contacts within it. He was extremely rich, and had recently purchased the monopoly of liquor shops in Navsari District for Rs. 350,000.³⁹

At this stage the leader of the Baroda State Praja Mandal, Sumant Mehta, developed an interest in the movement. He believed that it provided a chance to forge the crucial alliance between the movement in the city and the Patidar peasantry, the alliance which Gandhi had brought about in British Gujarat. Previous attempts had failed. In 1918 the Praja Mandal formed a khedut sabha (farmers' association). The State had reacted with restrictive orders which severely curtailed the freedom of speech of the Praja Mandal leaders.⁴⁰ The Praja Mandal was helpless in the matter because it was largely a Brahman concern. Baroda city had grown up

38 Jamabandi Revision Settlement of the Petlad Taluka of the Baroda Division, 1921, Appendix on sanctioned settlement, pp. 4-13.

39 R.M.Patel, Jivanna Jharna, Vol. I, p. 287.

40 Bombay Chronicle, 7 June 1921, p. 4.

around the court of the Gaikwad. The Brahman administrators who were important in the bureaucracy had few links with the surrounding countryside. The Vantias of the city were few in number, and also lacked contacts with the countryside, for Baroda was never a great trading-city like Ahmedabad. In the twentieth century the superior Patidars became increasingly powerful in the bureaucracy and industry of the city. However, during the 1920s they refused to support the nationalists, for the reasons given above. There were therefore great obstacles in the path of an alliance between the intelligentsia of Baroda City and the lesser Patidars of Baroda State.

The Gandhian nationalists of Kheda District also became interested in the movement. The Congressman responsible for Petlad Taluka was Ravjibhai Manibhai Patel, who lived in Sojitra. Ravjibhai Manibhai Patel was unhappy that the big landlord, Ravjibhai Bhailalbai Patel, had been chosen to lead the movement. He tried to persuade some village leaders to approach Darbar Gopaldas. They told him that they wanted a compromise, not a Gandhian confrontation. Ravjibhai Manibhai Patel decided to tour all seventy-four villages of the Taluka. He failed to make any headway in the superior Patidar villages of Sojitra and Vaso, but gained some support for the idea of a satyagraha in twenty-five lesser Patidar villages.⁴¹

In April 1924 a meeting was held at Dharmaj to discuss the possibility of satyagraha. The meeting was interesting because it revealed how decisions were reached in such matters. Before the meeting was held, Ravjibhai Bhailalbai Patel asked Sumant Mehta and the Kheda leaders, Phulchand Bapuji Shah, Gokaldas Talati and Mohanlal Pandya to see him at his house. He did not invite Ravjibhai Manibhai Patel. He told them that the farmers were going to be asked to pay the old rates of revenue

41 R.M.Patel, Jivanna Jharna, Vol. I, pp. 259-264.

until the Baroda Government appointed a tribunal of inquiry. They did not intend to wage a Gandhian style satyagraha, in which all the revenue would be refused.

Next day the public meeting was held. Public meetings were only held in villages after the real decisions had been made behind the scenes. The public meeting was a rubber stamp at which a 'unanimous' vote was passed. Ravjibhai Bhailalbai Patel was therefore astonished when Ravjibhai Manibhai Patel rose to attack the resolution. He argued that they should refuse all their revenue, otherwise the revenue officials would trick them into paying the enhanced assessment. Phulchand Bapuji Shah supported this, and a few farmers voiced their approval. The meeting was hastily adjourned, and Ravjibhai Manibhai Patel was summoned to see the leaders of Dharmaj. They told him that they were firmly opposed to Gandhian satyagraha. The movement could not have succeeded in the area without the support of these leading Patidars, and Ravjibhai Manibhai Patel agreed to withdraw his demand for a refusal of all the revenue. Next day the meeting was reconvened, and it was agreed that Ravjibhai Bhailalbai Patel should head a delegation to put the farmers' case to the Dewan of Baroda, Sir Manubhai Mehta. In the meantime the farmers agreed to refuse merely the increase in their revenue.⁴²

Sir Manubhai received the delegation in late April. After hearing the farmers' case, he told them that he could not reduce the revenue. But after they had gone he gave secret orders that the increase should not be collected. The Charotar revenues were worth too much to Baroda State for Sir Manubhai to risk losing them for the year.⁴³ As a result, the no-revenue campaign was a very damp squib. The movement was confined largely to Dharmaj and the four surrounding villages of Vishrampura,

42 Ibid., pp. 264-269.

43 Ibid., p. 263.

Kania, Sundarana and Bhalel. Only eight per cent of the Petlad Taluka population took part.⁴⁴ In October 1924 the Baroda Government agreed to investigate the matter, and the agitation was called off.⁴⁵

The affair was interesting in two respects. It demonstrated that the superior Patidars of the Baroda Charotar were still the effective leaders of the lesser Patidars of the area. The Baroda State Praja Mandal and the Gandhian activists of Kheda both tried to use the agitation to become the champions of the lesser Patidars of Petlad Taluka. They both failed because the superior Patidars were able to use their influence in the state to redress the grievances of the Patidar peasants of the area. The agitation was also of interest because it took place in Baroda State. It revealed the different ways in which the Baroda and British Governments reacted to peasant protests. The British invariably fell into the Gandhian trap by taking a rigid stand against any agitation. The British were isolated socially, and obsessed with their prestige. The Baroda officials on the other hand were flexible, even devious. The conflict in 1924 was a subtle war of nerves, largely carried out behind the scenes.

The leaders of the superior Patidars thus refused to link themselves to the nationalist movement. Their sons did not share their attitude. For a start, the great expansion in education had made it much harder for young superior Patidars to get worthwhile posts in the Baroda bureaucracy. They no longer had so much to gain from Baroda State. Also, the generation of superior Patidars born after 1900 realised that Congress was the power of the future, and not the princely states. They had less reverence for Sayajirao III than had their fathers. By 1920 Sayajirao was a tired and broken old man. His enthusiasm for reform had lagged

44 S.V.Mukerjee (Suba of Baroda District) to Gaikwad, 13 August 1924, BRO, Miscellaneous Confidential File No. XIII, No. 9.

45 Mukerjee to Gaikwad, 10 October 1924, ibid.

and he spent most of his time at European health resorts. The younger generation of superior Patidars were brought up during the halcyon days of Gandhian nationalism in Gujarat. Young men of spirit could hardly resist being nationalists at this time. Gandhi and Sardar Patel were their heroes, not Sayajirao. They were not prepared to let Congress, the power of the future, remain a purely lesser Patidar concern.

Many young superior Patidars were converted to nationalism at this time in the village gymnasiums established by Ambubhai Purani and Ravjibhai Chaturbhai Patel. The gymnastic movement in central Gujarat was connected originally with the revolutionary movement in Baroda State between 1900 and 1912. The idea of education through physical exercise was popular at this time. Many felt that the British public school system was pre-eminent in producing leaders of character and initiative, whereas purely literary education produced mere bookworms. The gymnastic movement had para-military overtones, for marching, drilling and battle training were included in the activities. The movement was led in Baroda City by a Maharashtrian nationalist called Jayanand Manekrao. Two of his disciples were the Brahman brothers from Broach, Ambubhai and Chhotubhai Purani. These two were initiated into the revolutionary programme in 1908 by Aurobindo Ghose's brother, Barindra.⁴⁶ The brothers set up their own gymnasium in which they trained Gujarati youths in the techniques of underground terrorism. Although the terrorist movement was crushed in the years after 1910, Ambubhai Purani remained in correspondence with Aurobindo Ghose. In 1918 he went to Pondicherry to tell Aurobindo that he was ready to organise a revolutionary movement. Aurobindo told him that freedom could be achieved without revolution, and that he could not support such activity.

46 A.B.Purani, The Life of Sri Aurobindo, pp. 298-300.

47 Ibid., pp. 300-302.

In 1917 Ambubhai had become involved in a movement started by Indulal Yajnik to establish gymnasia in Kheda District. The first gym was opened at the Hindu Anath Ashram at Nadiad in December 1917, with forty-six pupils. One of these was Ravjibhai Chaturbhai Patel, a Nadiad Patidar, who took over the movement when Ambubhai left Kheda in 1920.⁴⁸ Ambubhai also established a gym at the Charotar Education Society at Anand. Ravjibhai Chaturbhai Patel subsequently made this his base. During the 1920s gyms were opened in all seven superior Patidar villages. In 1929 a gym was also opened at Pij, which ranked just below the top seven Patidar villages. The only other Purani style gym in Kheda was at Kapadvanj, in the north of the District.⁴⁹

Many young superior Patidars who subsequently became prominent Congressmen learnt their nationalism in these gymnasia. They used the gyms as social centres, where they went as soon as school had finished each day. Besides physical training, there were discussions on politics and the need for social reform. Each summer a one month training course was held at Anand by Ravjibhai Chaturbhai Patel. The nationalism taught in these gyms was inspired by Aurobindo rather than Gandhi. Ravjibhai Chaturbhai Patel was, like the Purani brothers, a follower of Aurobindo. Although the leaders had great respect for Gandhi, they taught that violence was acceptable under certain circumstances. Passive resistance was only a tactic, not a rigid principle.

Besides the gymnastic activities, young superior Patidars were also involved with a radical Patidar caste association founded in 1924. This was a splinter group from an association founded in February 1923 by Motibhai Amin. Motibhai Amin's association was concerned purely with social reform in the Patidar community. He started a social reform magazine in conjunction with the association called Patidar Masik (The Patidar monthly). Motibhai's chief helper was the ex-Baroda revolutionary,

48 Muljibhai Talati, Shri Anubhai Purani, (Pathik Prakashan Mandir, Umreth 1970), pp. 57-59.

49 My chief source of information on the gymnastic movement was from the records of the present headquarters of the gymnastic movement (this note continued at foot of page 239)

Narsinbhai Patel. Narsinbhai had been living in Shantiniketan, and Motibhai had persuaded him to return to Gujarat to assist him. The best response to these activities came from young superior Patidars. However, they soon found Motibhai to be too moderate for their taste. When some of them picketed an ostentatious marriage ceremony, Motibhai told them that he could not support such militant tactics. As a result, Narsinbhai was asked if he could start a more radical society. Narsinbhai agreed, and in February 1924 founded a new Patidar association. The body was based on Anand, and put out its own magazine called Patidar.⁵⁰

The younger generation of superior Patidars was the first important new social group to join the Kheda Congress party after 1917. However, they were of only marginal importance to the party initially. They were unable to unite their villages behind Gandhian agitations, for the superior Patidar elders continued to oppose the nationalists. Without firm support from caste and village leaders Gandhian peasant agitations could not succeed. The full significance of the conversion of the young superior Patidars was only revealed after about 1935, when this generation became old enough to move into positions of Congress leadership.

3. The failure of Constitutionalism and Vallabhbhai's Vindication

During the period 1924 to 1929 the essential political debate in Kheda was whether or not the British bureaucracy could be controlled by constitutional means. The leaders of the Gujarat Congress were prepared to use constitutional means at a local level. Within Gujarat, Congressmen attempted to capture local government institutions, so that they could

49 (continued from page 238)
in Gujarat, the Gujarat Vyayam Pracharak Mandal at Rajpipla, and an interview with the secretary, Chinu Shah at Rajpipla on 11 August 1973.

50 P.C.Shah, Motibhai Amin, pp. 270-277.

implement the Gandhian constructive programme against the wishes of the local bureaucracy. In the last chapter we saw how this policy failed in the towns of Nadiad and Borsad in the years 1920 to 1924. In the first part of this section we shall see how Congressmen tried to use the Kheda District Local Board in a similar manner after 1924. At the higher level of the Bombay Legislative Council the majority of the Gujarat Congress leaders refused to act in a constitutional manner. This was partly for ideological reasons, and partly because the Gujarat Congressmen had little power in the Bombay Legislature during the 1920s. At this time Marathi Congressmen were the dominant element in the Bombay Legislature, and Vallabhbhai's political power was limited to British Gujarat. The second part of this section will examine Vallabhbhai's opposition to the Bombay Legislature, and the triumph of his policy in 1928.

Before 1925 the nationalists were unable to control the Kheda District Local Board. This was because Bombay Presidency had lagged behind other parts of India in granting greater popular control to local boards. The franchise had been narrow, election had been by the indirect vote of Taluka Board members, and the President had been nominated by the Government. The Local Boards Act of 1923 widened the franchise to include all those who paid Rs. 8 per annum in tax or land revenue.⁵¹ This was much wider than the Legislative Council franchise, which gave the vote to those paying Rs. 32 land revenue or Rs. 36 urban tax. Elections were to be direct, and the President was to be elected. The Boards were given greater powers of patronage over the appointment of officials. The most important new power was control over primary education by a committee of the Local Board, the School Board. Boards were given the power to introduce compulsory primary

51 J.M.Thakore, Development of Local Self-Government in Bombay and Saurashtra, (Chunilal Barfivala, Bombay 1957), p. 71.

education gradually.

The District Board elections were held in July 1925. Under the new franchise Congress gained a sweeping victory. The old nominated President, the Nadiad Desai Bhagwandas, was replaced by Darbar Gopaldas. The first blow against the bureaucracy was struck in November 1925 when the Governor of Bombay visited the District. The District Board voted to refuse him an address of welcome. The situation was saved by the Nadiad Municipality, which was now controlled by loyalists. They gave the Governor a lavish welcome when he visited the town.⁵²

But this was mere shadow boxing. The crucial issue was over control of education, and in this respect Congress failed. The nationalists had hoped that they could use the School Board to implement the national education programme. They soon found this to be impossible. The 1923 Act gave a generous grant of two thirds of the cost of running primary schools to the local boards, but due to financial stringency the Bombay Education Department was extremely reluctant to sanction new schools.⁵³ National schools had no chance of getting a grant. The result was that national schools which wanted to come under the Government again had to submit themselves to humiliating searches, in which nationalist literature was confiscated, and portraits of patriots torn from the walls. The teachers were made to sign declarations that they would in future refrain from nationalist activities. Managers of schools had to promise to dismiss any teacher with nationalist ideas. The Charotar Education Society and Borsad High School were both subjected to such treatment.⁵⁴

52 Navayug, 11 September 1925, Bombay Native Newspaper Reports 1926, p. 764. Janmabhumi, 21 September 1925, ibid., p. 807. Gujarat Vartaman, 2 December 1925, ibid., p. 1030.

53 John Butler, Educational Administration in Bombay Presidency 1913-1937, p. 126.

54 Janmabhumi, 11 February 1927, Bombay Native Newspaper Reports, 1927, p. 220.

The Local Board found itself helpless in this matter because of lack of funds. The 1923 Act gave powers for raising extra taxes, but this put the Congress controlled Board in a dilemma, for the party stressed continually that the peasants were being ruined by heavy land revenue demands. Congress was not in a moral position to add to their burdens. Raising new taxes would also have been the surest way to undermine Congress popularity in the District. The only alternative was to demand larger grants from the Government, but in 1927 Government declared that it was idle for the boards to expect larger grants in a period of financial stringency.⁵⁵ At a local government Conference held at Surat in July 1927 Vallabhbhai Patel said that the poverty of the local boards in Gujarat had made the supposed devolution of power under the 1923 Act a sham.⁵⁶ Due to the lack of funds, Congress soon lost interest in the local boards in Gujarat. The powers granted under the 1923 Act for control over education were never made use of in Kheda District.

The nationalist exploits in local government in Kheda demonstrated that real political power in the District still rested with the Collector and his bureaucracy. The Montagu-Chelmsford reforms gave considerable powers of patronage to popularly elected local authorities, but these powers could only be used within the system. Local councillors had no powers to implement programmes distasteful to the Government. In many respects the nationalists had too high an expectation of the power which they could hope to gain in western style local government bodies. As long as Congress did not control the provincial governments, there was therefore little hope for Government sponsorship of Gandhian programmes at a local level.

55 Bombay Chronicle, 23 July 1927, ibid., p. 820.

56 Sanj Vartaman, 8 July 1927, ibid., p. 775.

At the Bombay provincial level the main debate among nationalists was whether or not land revenue policy could be controlled constitutionally. The Gujarati constitutionalists were led by the Nadiad Desai, Dadubhai Desai. He sat in the Bombay Legislative Council as an Independent with Swarajist leanings. His chief opponent was Vallabhbhai Patel, who asserted that the revenue bureaucracy could only be influenced by agitation. At a local level the two were fighting for the allegiance of Patidars throughout Gujarat. Both tried to show that their way provided most protection for the rights of the dominant peasants. But there were wider issues at stake which concerned the whole nature of political power at a local level. The question was whether or not the dominant power in rural areas should be the Collector and his staff of the Revenue Department, or the elected representatives of the dominant peasants. However hackneyed it might sound, Vallabhbhai and Dadubhai were fighting in their different ways for democracy for the dominant peasants.⁵⁷

The actual point at issue concerned the land revenue revision settlements. Revision settlements took place every thirty years in Bombay Presidency. The original settlements had taken place in the 1830s in Maharashtra and in the 1860s in Gujarat. In Maharashtra there was a revision settlement in the 1860s, and in both Gujarat and Maharashtra in the 1890s and 1920s. The revision settlements were therefore in full swing during this period. The central debate was whether land revenue could be considered a tax on farmers' profit, or whether it represented a form of rent collected by the Government. The nationalists argued

57 Anil Seal has written off the peasant agitators as mere cannon fodder for Congress: "Local grievances were chronic and narrow, but they put the stuffing into agitations which were intermittent and wide." In fact, the principles fought for by the peasant agitators were more often than not just as important as the principles fought for by the nationalists of the presidency capitals. Anil Seal, 'Imperialism and Nationalism in India', in: Gallagher, Johnson & Seal, Locality, Province and Nation, (Cambridge University Press 1973), p. 22.

that it should be considered a tax on profit. They demanded that in the revised settlements, revenue should be limited to twenty-five per cent of the net profit of the farmers. The revenue officials on the other hand wanted to regard revenue as rent, and demanded that revenue be fixed at fifty per cent of the rental value of a piece of land.

The Bombay Revenue Department tried to answer its critics by reforming its assessment methods without consulting the new Montagu-Chelmsford Councils. One of the criticisms was that assessments were based on loose, impressionistic surveys. The Settlement Commissioner, Anderson, decided to use a more 'scientific' method of valuation in the revised settlements. He told the Survey Officers that the new assessments should be based on the rental value of land. The productive value of land, he argued, was reflected in the rent which could be demanded for it.⁵⁸ In fact, the rental statistics collected were often highly inaccurate, and bore little relation to the productive value of a plot. Possession of land brought social prestige, so that land often had an artificially high value. Anderson had therefore made a fundamental change in the technique of assessing land revenue, without consulting the Legislative Council.

The nationalists reacted by demanding a committee to review the land revenue assessment question. They were on strong ground in doing this, for in 1919 the Joint Select Committee of Parliament on the Government of India Bill had recommended that land revenue regulations be brought under stricter legislative control. The Revenue Department had deliberately ignored this recommendation when it went over to assessment based on rental statistics. In 1924 the Bombay Legislative Council passed a motion for a committee to be set up to consider the Joint Select Committee's recommendations. The motion also demanded that there should be no new revisions of the revenue in the meantime. Although the Government opposed the measure, a committee of eight officials and fourteen non-officials was established. Dadubhai

58 G.C.Patel, The Land Revenue Settlement and the British Rule in India, p. 296.

Desai was one of the most vocal members of this committee. As the Committee slowly proceeded in its deliberations it became increasingly obvious that 'responsible government' did not include control of the Revenue Department. Attempts were made to discuss who owned the land, Government or peasant. This was fundamental to the question of whether revenue should be considered as a tax or rent. The Government ruled that this was outside the scope of the Committee.⁵⁹ Although there was a non-official majority on the Committee, those who wanted radical reform found themselves in a minority.

The Committee reported in March 1927. Only two major reforms were agreed on by the whole Committee. The first was that revision settlements should not enhance the revenue above twenty-five per cent. The second was that a Committee of the Legislative Council should be established with power to review all revision settlements, and demand alterations where necessary. Government would have to seek support from the Legislative Council if it wished to override the Committee.⁶⁰ Dadubhai Desai refused to sign the report. He inserted a long minute of dissent in which he demanded that the peasants be recognised as owners of the land, that there should be permanent settlements, that cultivators with an annual income under Rs. 5,000 be exempted from revenue, and that a farmer should have the right of going to a court of law to get his assessment revised. Dadubhai also protested that in spite of the Legislative Council's demand in 1924 that revision settlements should cease, the settlements had continued unabated.⁶¹

59 Swarajya, 10 March 1927, Bombay Native Newspaper Reports, 1927, p. 375.

60 Indian National Herald, 8 March 1927, Indian Daily Mail, 5 March 1927, ibid., p. 375.

61 Swarajya, 10 March 1927, ibid., p. 375.

In May 1927 the Government rejected the Committee's suggestions. The Revenue Department officials argued that non-officials could not hope to understand the technicalities of assessment. They also argued that if the Legislatures had control over revenue, it would prove impossible to resist pressure from the agricultural electorate to lower land revenue.⁶² Thus the peasants were not yet considered to be entitled to democratic rights. The Bombay Chronicle commented on the Government ruling:⁶³

We hope the leaders of our downtrodden peasantry will lose no time in inaugurating such a vigorous agitation for real reform in legislation relating to assessment and collection of land revenue in this Presidency that Government will be forced to submit ultimately to the people's will in this matter.

The first agitation against the revision settlement was in the Alibhag and Pen Talukas of Kolaba District, where the farmers voted to refuse a part of the increase. Then, in February of 1928, the people of Bardoli voted to refuse all their land revenue until a committee of inquiry was established to investigate the revision settlement in the Taluka. The Bardoli people alleged that the revision settlement had been based on rental statistics, which they claimed to be an irregularity.

The Government reacted to these agitations by formulating a Bill to make the rental statistics the basis of assessment. In May 1928 they published a Bill to amend section 107 of the Land Revenue Code to read: "The revision of assessment of land revenue shall be based primarily upon rental value." The basis of assessment was to be fifty per cent of the rental value. The Government was thus giving the colour of law to Anderson's unofficial directives.⁶⁴

62 Bombay Chronicle, 1 June 1927, ibid., p. 678.

63 Bombay Chronicle, 17 May 1927, ibid., p. 640.

64 Bombay Chronicle, 8 May 1928, Bombay Native Newspaper Reports, 1928, p. 523.

The new Bill had serious implications for Kheda District. The revision survey had been made in 1924. The Survey Officer, Alfred Master, had followed Anderson's directive, and had based his recommendations on the rental statistics. The Commissioner Northern Division, H.L.Painter, believed that Anderson's directive went against official Bombay policy, and rejected Master's survey. A new Survey Officer was appointed to make a fresh survey. The new Bill would make this survey unnecessary, and would validate Master's survey. Master had recommended increases of twenty-five per cent in Anand Taluka, and twenty-seven per cent in Borsad Taluka, and decreases of seven per cent in Thasra Taluka and eight per cent in Kapadvanj and Nadiad Talukas.⁶⁵

The outcome of the Bardoli Satyagraha was of great economic importance to the majority of Charotar Patidars, for it provided the only means by which Government policy on revenue could be changed. Leaders from Kheda played a major role in the agitation. Darbar Gopaldas, Mohanlal Pandya, and Ravishankar Maharaj were the first outsiders to agree to help in a full-scale satyagraha. Darbar Gopaldas, Mohanlal Pandya and the Bardoli leader, Kalyanji Menta were instrumental in persuading Vallabhbhai to lead the Satyagraha.⁶⁶ W.W.Smart, the Commissioner Northern Division at the time, even went as far as stating that "the agitators from Kaira" were behind the agitation.⁶⁷ This was an overstatement. The very efficient Bardoli Congress organisation was largely responsible for the success of the movement, but it demonstrates the importance of the Kheda Congress organisation in the Bardoli Satyagraha. In Smart's mind the two areas were indissolubly linked, and he believed that if the Bardoli movement

65 G.D.Patel, The Land Revenue Settlement and the British Rule in India, pp. 290-298, 336.

66 Mahadev Desai, The Story of Bardoli, (Navajivan, Ahmedabad 1957) pp. 28-29.

67 Ibid., p. 94.

succeeded, then agitation would follow immediately in Kheda.⁶⁸

The most important immediate effect of the Bardoli agitation in Bombay Presidency was that it demonstrated to Swarajists, Liberals and moderates that constitutionalism had failed. All the efforts of the Legislature had merely led to the new Land Revenue Code Amendment Bill, which was a direct snub to the popular demand for revenue as a tax on profit. In May 1928 Dadubhai Desai made a last attempt to solve the matter constitutionally. He demanded an inquiry into the Bardoli settlement, and when this was refused, said that he was even prepared to accept an inquiry committee consisting solely of officials. After this was turned down he resigned his seat in protest, along with the other M.L.C.'s for Gujarat.⁶⁹

The Government capitulated over Bardoli in August 1928, and set up the Maxwell-Broomfield Committee of Inquiry to review the revenue settlement in the Taluka. In September the Bombay Government abandoned their Land Revenue Code Amendment Bill. The capitulation was caused largely by the increasing desertion of moderates like Dadubhai Desai.

The Bardoli Satyagraha reinstated the doctrine of passive resistance. Nationalists began to talk of a vast non-violent struggle which would drive the British from India.⁷⁰ If the existing Congress leaders were not prepared to lead such a movement, then young radicals would. The victory also demonstrated that urban nationalists and the peasantry could fight together, for as the Ahmedabad newspaper, Praja Bandhu, said:⁷¹

... the Bardoli struggle brings into relief the fact that educated people are the real friends and trustees of the masses and not the foreign bureaucracy which claims to be such.

68 Ibid., p. 95.

69 Mahratta, 27 May 1928, Bombay Native Newspaper Reports, 1928, p.559.

70 Hitechchhu, 8 August 1928, Nutan Gujarat, 11 August 1928, ibid., pp. 859, 884.

71 Praja Bandhu, 12 August 1928, ibid., p. 881.

The Maxwell-Broomfield Report was published in May 1929. The assessment in Bardoli was shown to have been slipshod, and unauthorised methods were proved to have been used. This called into question every single revenue revision settlement made in the Presidency in the 1920s. Vallabhbhai Patel commented:⁷²

If Government were circumspect they should re-open all the revisions that have been introduced during recent years, before there is general conflagration over the whole Presidency.

Vallabhbhai immediately set about organising such a conflagration. In a speech in Bombay he demanded Legislative Council control over revenue, and said that he would personally organise struggles by farmers in all parts of the Presidency.⁷³ Vallabhbhai discussed with the leaders of Maharashtra the possibility of starting no-revenue campaigns in five Districts. In June he toured Khandesh to see if the people were ready for satyagraha. In July he presided over the Maharashtra Conference of Agriculturists in Bombay. In his speech to the conference he declared his grand aspiration to combine Maharashtra and Gujarat in a mighty battle against the Government's land revenue policy.⁷⁴ Vallabhbhai then established a body to organise agitations called the Bombay Presidency Land League.

On 16 July 1929 the Bombay Government announced that all revision settlements which had not been finalised were to be abandoned. There were to be no new settlements until after the proposed constitutional reforms being discussed by the Simon Committee. For Kheda District this meant that the proposed revision settlement was to be abandoned and the old rates of the 1890s maintained. This capitulation was the real

72 Gujarati, 19 May 1929, Bombay Native Newspaper Reports, 1929, p.695.

73 Mahratta, 2 June 1929, ibid., p. 671.

74 Hindustan and Praja Mitra, 13 July 1929, ibid., p. 863.

victory of Bardoli, and many felt that the final push had come from Vallabhbhai's threats to launch satyagraha in Maharashtra.

Vallabhbhai appeared to hold the key to swaraj. The mood in 1929 was not to trust the bureaucracy, but to fight them at every turn. There was wild optimism over the potency of satyagraha. It was against this background that civil disobedience was launched in January 1930.

CHAPTER NINE: CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

1. Civil Disobedience 1930-31

The Salt Satyagraha.

The years of preparation bore fruit in 1930-31. With the beginning of the civil disobedience campaign, Vallabhbhai Patel saw his long awaited chance to launch escalating passive resistance, in which peasants throughout India would refuse their taxes and bring the machinery of government grinding to a halt. Gandhi, however, had other ideas. He no longer supported a no-land revenue campaign. He appears to have changed his mind in August 1929, for in June 1929 he had commented on the Maxwell-Broomfield Report on Bardoli:¹

It will tax the Sardar's best ingenuity and provide him with a platform for civil disobedience of an all-India character, should the Government still prove obdurate and deaf to public opinion.

By September Gandhi had changed his mind. He wrote about Vallabhbhai:²

But he needs a Bardoli to make good his leadership.
How many Bardolis are there ready in the country today?

Gandhi went on to say that he was ready to launch civil disobedience if the people were prepared for it on his terms, but he could see no sign of that "on the horizon". Gandhi was, in other words, saying that Bardoli was an extraordinary and particularly well prepared area. If Vallabhbhai launched an all-India no-revenue campaign, there was likely to be violence on a wide scale.

Gandhi gave his support to civil disobedience in late December 1929 to keep Congress united. Initially he had no plan of action. Although he wanted some form of tax refusal, he refused to sanction a no-land revenue campaign, even in the areas which he could trust to be non-violent.

1 Young India, 13 June 1929, CWNG 41, p. 41.

2 Young India, 5 September 1929, CWNG 41, p. 276.

Gandhi no longer believed, as he had in 1921, that non-violent agitation could bring immediate independence. In 1930 Gandhi was agitating for concessions from the British. He realised that the confiscation of farmers' land would create severe difficulties when the time arrived for negotiations with the British. Between January and March 1930 Gandhi deliberately ignored the topic of no-revenue campaigns. The only time he mentioned land revenue was in his eleven points of January, in which he demanded a reduction of the land revenue by half. In February he decided that the issue for civil disobedience would be the salt tax. This was an irrelevant matter for most Congress supporters, but one of the daily hardships for the impoverished masses. The law could be broken in an obvious and picturesque manner, and it was unlikely to stir up latent violence within Indian society. It was the most innocuous and symbolic form of civil disobedience that Gandhi could devise.

In January and February 1930 Vallabhbhai tried hard to persuade Gandhi to launch an all-India no-revenue campaign.³ On January 11 he visited Matar and Mehmedabad Talukas and advised the people to refuse their revenue. He made no public pronouncement on the subject, however.⁴ On February 23 Vallabhbhai told an audience at Broach that they should follow the example of the Bardoli cultivators, who "bent the government without the aid of weapons".⁵ This veiled call for a no-revenue campaign was widely publicised.

The British officials in Gujarat were terrified that Vallabhbhai would stir up a wide-scale no-revenue campaign. The bureaucracy hated Vallabhbhai, who had been humiliating them since 1917. They wanted to

3 Narhari Parikh, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Vol. II, (Navajivan, Ahmedabad 1956), p. 6.

4 Bombay FR1, January 1930.

5 Bombay FR1, March 1930.

arrest him immediately. The Government of India, however, refused to take any precipitative action. The most frustrated man of all was the Collector of Kheda, Alfred Master. He was a particularly bitter foe of Vallabhbhai. In 1917-18 he had come into conflict with Vallabhbhai when serving as Municipal Commissioner in Ahmedabad. He had resigned the post after Vallabhbhai refused to give him a rise in salary.⁶ Unlike earlier Collectors of Kheda, he had little sympathy for Patidars. He believed that autocratic government was best suited for India, and he cast envious glances at Cambay State, where he believed firm rule made for a happier people.⁷ In early March he was convinced that Congress would stir up the low castes of Kheda to violence, with its advice to break the salt law.

In early March Vallabhbhai was asked to make a speech in Borsad Taluka. He agreed to come on March 7. Master felt that this was the final straw and on March 6 on his own initiative served an order on Vallabhbhai not to speak in Kheda District for one month. In doing this, Master went against the wishes of the Bombay Government. Rather than cable, he merely wrote a letter telling the Government of his move. On March 7 Vallabhbhai arrived at Ras, and agreed to deliver his speech there. The police arrested him as soon as he rose to speak. He was taken to Borsad court where Master, in his capacity as District Magistrate, sentenced him to three months' imprisonment. This was the highest sentence available under the law. Meanwhile, Master's letter had arrived in Bombay. A telegram was sent immediately forbidding Vallabhbhai's arrest. It arrived just after Master had passed sentence. The Bombay Government was furious with Master, but in the interest of collective responsibility they and the Government of India had to defend the arrest as government policy

6 Narhari Parikh, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Vol. I, p. 30.

7 Master to Secretary H.D., 19 December 1930, NAI, H.Poll, 5/36/31.

8 J.H.Garrett to G. of I., H.D., 8 March 1930, NAI, H.Poll, 22/10/1930.

Before this date there had been considerable apathy towards civil disobedience in Kheda. Vallabhbhai's arrest sent a wave of indignation through the District.

Master also wanted to stop Gandhi's salt march. On March 11 he sent a telegram to Bombay demanding this, but the request was rejected. The Commissioner of the Northern Division, J.H.Garrett, believed that Gandhi's arrest would provoke riots in Ahmedabad and perhaps Nadiad.⁹ The Home Secretary for Bombay, G.F.S.Collins, realised that the march would cause much excitement, but the Government of India was firm that no action should be taken.¹⁰ Extra police were instead moved to Ahmedabad, Kheda and Surat Districts, and natural deposits of salt were cleared from the sea shore in a feeble attempt to hinder Gandhi's plans.¹¹

On March 12 Gandhi set out with seventy-eight followers from Ahmedabad on what has become immortalised in the history of Gujarat as dandi kuch, or the march to Dandi. It lasted twenty-five days and covered 241 miles. The attention of India and the world was soon rivetted on the villages of Kheda, Broach and Surat through which Gandhi passed. Every aspect of the march was covered by the newspapers. Even midday and evening bulletins were printed to publicise the march and satisfy the insatiable demand for news.¹² The march was gruelling and several of the party had to give up through exhaustion. Huge crowds flocked from miles around to see the march. The onlookers stirred up clouds of dense, choking dust through which Gandhi and his followers had to march.

9 J.H.Garrett to Bombay H.D., 13 March 1930, Bombay Source Material, Vol. III, Pt. III, p. 53.

10 Collins to C.in C. Southern Command, 13 March 1930, ibid., p. 52.

11 Ibid., p. 63.

12 R.D.Parikh, The Press and Society, A Sociological Study, (Popular Prakashan, Bombay 1965), p. 101.

Everywhere there was a carnival atmosphere, with raucous Indian bands playing as the procession passed through each village. Famous politicians could be seen on different stages of the march. The march took place during the dry months of blue skies and scorching sunshine, when mid-day temperatures regularly reached 100°F. The major part of the march each day was therefore completed in the three hours after sunrise. After the morning march, food was taken at the village reached, and a meeting held. After a rest during the heat of the day they marched for about an hour to the next town or village, where they spent the night. Another meeting was held, at which the government servants were asked to declare their resignations.

During the march, Gandhi laid most stress on the resignation of officials. Congress workers scoured the villages of the three districts, collecting promises of resignation. Gandhi told the people to boycott officials who refused to resign, but not in a spirit of bitterness or with undue social pressure.¹³ This was not heeded. At Virsad, for instance, the talati was given notice to quit his home if he did not resign.¹⁴ By the time Gandhi left Kheda, sixty resignations had been handed in.¹⁵ Gandhi also asked for Congress volunteers to come forward. He asked all students over the age of fifteen, and all teachers to leave the schools and take up Congress work.

When Gandhi arrived at Ras on March 19, he was confronted with a demand by the Patidars of the village that they should be allowed to refuse their land revenue in support of civil disobedience. To understand the genesis of this demand, we need to go back a few years. As may be

13 Navajivan, 30 March 1930, CWCG 43, pp. 150-53.

14 Report on the progress of the Salt March, NAI, H.Poll, 5/36/31.

15 Bombay Source Material, Vol. III, pt. III, p. 11.

recalled, the leading Patidar in Ras was Phulabhai Patel. He was a devout follower of Swaminarayan, and had refused initially to support the village nationalists, led by Ashabhai Patel. During the non-cooperation movement, Phulabhai's son, Jivabhai, had been converted to nationalism while studying at the Borsad national High School. Jivabhai had not till then had any contact with Ashabhai Patel. In 1921 Jivabhai left school without informing his father, and after working for Congress in Thasra Taluka, joined Gandhi's Ashram at Ahmedabad. In 1923 he returned to Ras during an illness. His father tried to persuade him to continue with his studies, so that he could get a good job. But Jivabhai refused, and instead started a khadi workshop at their house. Because this meant bringing untouchable Dhed weavers into the house, Phulabhai refused to eat with, or even talk to, his son for a considerable period. But he was an accommodating man, and gradually succumbed to the Gandhian appeal. In 1925 he even agreed to support Congress on the Kheda District Board. By 1930 he was a firm Congress supporter.

This conversion was crucial to the success of the Congress movement in Ras. After Vallabhbhai Patel had been arrested at the village on March 7, Ashabhai Patel called a meeting of the leading Patidars of Ras. Phulabhai was so annoyed by the arrest that he agreed to Ashabhai's demand for a no-revenue satyagraha. The fact that the largest landowner was prepared to sacrifice his lands encouraged the other leading Patidars to vote unanimously for a no-revenue campaign. Phulabhai resigned his mukhiship and five hundred villagers enrolled as Congress volunteers. Ashabhai then went to Borsad town to inform the District leaders of their decision. They tried to dissuade him from this move, for Congress had not sanctioned a no-revenue satyagraha. They insisted that only Gandhi could give permission. Ashabhai then visited several Borsad

villages to persuade them to join Ras.

When Gandhi arrived at Ras on March 19, Ashabhai told him that fourteen villages had agreed to refuse their revenue. There was a long debate, during which Gandhi tried to dissuade the Ras Patidars from their move. But they were adamant, and Gandhi eventually agreed to Ashabhai's initiative with great reluctance.¹⁶ Peasant initiative was therefore largely responsible for the launching of the no-revenue campaign in 1930. Gandhi commented on his capitulation in Navajivan in April:¹⁷

The Government is unlikely to tolerate any campaign for non-payment of land revenue assessment, nor is it, at present, a part of our programme. Let him, who has the courage, not pay his land revenue assessment - as was done by Pancha Patel of Karari. But, whoever does it must realise the risks he is running. His household, his cattle, his land and everything in fact will be sold by the government in order to collect its dues! The position in Kaira will be very different from what it was in Bardoli. The struggle in Bardoli was of a totally different character. It was limited in its scope. There, it was a question of establishing a right. Here, we are talking of removing a government. The difference between the two is as far removed as the earth is from the sky!

For this reason, before Ras proceeds to implement its resolution, its people should develop strength of character and a spirit of sacrifice, while the other villages, which wish to follow in the footsteps of Ras should, without any excitement or anger, make an objective assessment of their strength. Of course, I fully appreciate that a district - from which men like the Sardar and Darbar have been arrested, and which is the home of Mohanlal Pandya and Ravishankar (Maharaj) - would want to attempt the impossible.

On the evening after the Ras meeting, Gandhi crossed the Mahi river in a boat into Broach District. As he had marched through Kheda in the previous days the movement had visibly swelled in strength and fervour.

16 R.M.Patel, Jivanna Jharna, Vol. I, pp. 331-334.

17 N.Parikh, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Vol. II, pp. 31-32. The translation of the Navajivan article of 27 April 1930 in CWVG 43, pp. 340-41 is less satisfactory.

By March 19 any reputation the British still possessed among the high castes of Kheda lay in tatters.¹⁸

On April 6 Gandhi stooped down and picked up a lump of salt at Dandi. This was the signal for a wave of illegal salt manufacture throughout India. The two centres in Kheda were at Badalpur on the Mahi, and at Lasundra in the north of the District, where there were hot mineral springs. The leaders at Lasundra were Ravishankar Maharaj, and the Umreth town leader, Chhotalal Vyas. Fulsinhji Dabhi, a teacher at the Sunav national High School, led a batch of boys to Lasundra. All of these leaders were arrested. Badalpur had a more spectacular show on April 6. Although the village was Baraiya dominated, two village social workers from Sojitra, Ravjibhai Nathabhai Patel and Ambalal Shankarbhai Patel, had been working there for most of the previous decade, so that the Baraiyas were pro-Congress. All the main Kheda leaders not at Lasundra were at Badalpur. Thousands came to watch batches go to make salt and be dispersed by police lathis. There were 2,500 volunteers present. The plan was for 100 to make salt each day, so that the Satyagraha could last twenty-five days. This neat plan was broken when all the leaders were arrested. These included Darbar Gopaldas, Gokaldas Talati, Phulchand Bapuji Shah, and Ravjibhai Manibhai Patel. Over the next week all the main District leaders were arrested. For many it was their first spell in Jail.

On April 8 Gandhi dispatched the venerable Abbas Tyabji to take over the leadership of Kheda. Abbas Tyabji went to see Dadubhai Desai who had supported Congress since Bardoli. But Dadubhai's fear of

18 The sources used for the Dandi salt march in Kheda are as follows: R.M.Patel, Jivanna Jharna, Vol. I, pp. 327-330. CWNG 43, pp. 70-106 Bombay Source Material, Vol. III, pt. III, pp. 11-19. Interview with Sardar Tara Singh, Ahmedabad, 16 October 1973. Sardar Tara Singh organised the Borsad to Ras early morning march of March 19. He was the only Sikh Congress worker in Kheda and at first people thought he was a Government spy. After the movement was over, Gandhi presented him with the only medal ever awarded to a satyagrahi. Gandhi felt that he should be rewarded in a way familiar to Sikhs!

prison proved too great, and he decided to reside in Baroda out of harm's way. Gandhi was disgusted by Dadubhai.¹⁹ He was the only Nadiad Desai to show any enthusiasm for Congress. The others opposed civil disobedience strongly. Congress in Kheda still had not won over this leading family. Dadubhai acted in the same way in 1932. He was arrested, but was released after promising to keep out of the movement. Although Dadubhai's speciality was legislative politics, he was not as a result asked to represent Congress in the Bombay Legislative Assembly in 1937.²⁰

After the arrest of the top leaders the local Congress leadership passed to a younger, more radical generation, who were prepared to use any tactics to force mukhis to resign and to persuade villages to refuse their revenue. A typical example was in Anand Taluka, where the nephew of the local Congress leader took his place, and began to tour the villages encouraging people to refuse their land revenue, and asking mukhis to resign. He was not arrested until August. On April 24 Master reported that volunteer centres were being established all over Kheda. The houses of government officials were being picketed. He asked for 300 extra police and a law to ban demonstrations.²¹ By this time there were 4,192 Congress volunteers working in Kheda.²²

Local officials were given considerable freedom to crush the

19 CWMC 43, p. 241.

20 Dadubhai resigned from the Bombay Legislative Council on 15 April 1930. In spite of his failure to go to jail, Vallabhbhai Patel continued to use his services. G.P.C.C. Report, 15 April 1930, NML, AICC, G-119.

21 Master's Report, Nadiad, 24 April 1930, NAI, H.Poll, 247/4/1930.

22 G.P. C.C. Report, 15 April 1930, NML, AICC, G-119.

agitation. The most brutal officials were the Mamlatdar of Borsad, Mohanlal Shah, and the local police chief, Laher. Both took great delight in persecuting Patidars, and their names are still remembered with loathing in the villages of Borsad. Mohanlal Shah was a Vania of Od who had been appointed Mamlatdar in January 1930. He had made a name for himself as a particularly harsh revenue collector in Bardoli in 1928. He had been appointed to deal with Borsad Taluka in similar fashion. Laher took much delight in leading lathi charges. His sadism brought promotion over the next decade, so that in 1942 it was as District Superintendent of Police that he was able to crush the Quit India movement.

These officials began to stir up the Baraiyas against the Patidars. Their best ally was the talukdar of Dahevan, whose large village was conveniently near to Badalpur. His hirelings had helped the police to break up the salt satyagraha. On April 24 he was asked to deal with a Borsad Taluka Congress meeting. He appeared with a band of armed men, smashed the lights, and beat up the audience. There is no evidence that Master was behind this, but he took no action after the event.²³ A few days later, Mohanlal Shah called a meeting of the Baraiyas of Ras, and asked them why they were supporting the Patidars who had always exploited them. The Baraiyas had refused to pay revenue initially along with the Patidars, but Shah's action encouraged them to pay up.²⁴ Not all the Baraiyas opposed the Patidars. In some Baraiya villages Gandhian social workers had been active in the last decade, and the Baraiyas decided to support Congress with an armed uprising. As the chief social workers were in jail, Kaka Kalelkar had to be summoned from Ahmedabad to impress on the Baraiyas the need for Gandhian non-violence. He managed to persuade the Baraiya leaders to abandon their desperate plan. Next day,

23 Bombay FR2, April 1930. Young India, 1 May 1930, CWMMG 43, p. 363.

24 R.M.Patel, Jivanna Jharna, Vol. I, p. 357.

Kalelkar was arrested at Borsad.²⁵

The final act in the salt satyagraha came in May 1930, with the raids on the salt depots at Dharasana in south Gujarat. The majority of satyagrahis at Dharasana came from north Gujarat. Batches of young men set out daily from the Charotar villages and chief towns of Kheda District.²⁶ Groups of about ten from each village assembled at the main line stations, to be led by local leaders to Dharasana. There they were placed under the command of a prominent Gujarat or all-India leader, who would lead them on the raid. Most impressive were the youths trained in the Purani gymnasiums, who marched in perfect order into the police lathis. On June 6 the raids were called off because of the imminence of the monsoon.

Resignation of Officials.

During the summer the chief activity was to persuade village mukhis to resign. Whether or not this succeeded depended on the type of headman a village had. Leadership in a Patidar village could be either monocratic or oligarchical. In the former case there was usually a hereditary mukhi who owned a large amount of land. In the latter case the mukhiship usually rotated in periods ranging from three to ten years among the village matadars. Most Charotar villages were run on the oligarchical system. In the monocratic villages Congress encountered considerable difficulty in persuading the mukhi to resign. However, if a hereditary mukhi was won over, the rest of the village would probably follow. This happened at Ras, and helped to make the village particularly firm in its support of Congress. In the oligarchical village with rotating mukhiships, resignations were easily obtained. These villages were the backbone of the movement.

25 Madho Prasad, A Gandhian Patriarch, pp. 203-204.

26 Bombay FR2, May 1930. Bombay FR1, June 1930 (Combined Report).

Pressure could be brought to bear on a mukhi at three levels. The first level was that of factions or parties in the village. A Patidar lineage (khadki) could take the initiative. This happened in the large cosmopolitan superior Patidar 'village' of Nadiad, where one of the least important of the six khadkis resolved to boycott all officials.²⁷ This was not an efficient or much used method. Resignation of office or refusal of revenue by one khadki made it extremely vulnerable to other factions in the village. The other factions could take over the office or buy up their confiscated land. Villages usually supported Congress only when all the khadkis were behind the move. Parties within the village could also try to persuade the village leaders to support Congress. These parties were usually based on age. People under 35 were more nationalistic in thought, and had less to lose materially. They were usually led by a local Gandhian social worker or school teacher, who was often greatly respected in the village, but who was without real political power. They had to persuade the village elders to join the agitation. This was not an easy task. The mukhi and matadars were naturally unwilling to support a movement in which the villagers were liable to have their lands confiscated. Loss of land was one of the greatest misfortunes a peasant could suffer. Therefore, considerable pressure had to be brought to bear on the mukhi and matadars before they would agree to resign office and refuse their revenue.

The second and ideal level of mobilisation was that of the village panch. The authority of the mukhi in most Patidar villages depended on the consensus of the village as a whole. If the majority of the Patidars of the village were fervent Gandhians there was little that

27 The dominant lineage in Nadiad was that of the Nadiad Desais. Boycott decision: G.P.C.C. Report, 15 April 1930, NML, AICC, G-119.

the mukhi and the panch of elders could do to stem the movement. The village panch then became the leaders of the agitation. The strongest movements were in villages in which this happened.

Thirdly, pressure could be brought to bear from above by the Patidar marriage circle, or gol. Gols could be used to put pressure on the panch to join the agitation, but because they were voluntary organisations, they could not exercise the discipline over their members that the panch could within the village. Individuals often broke gol regulations in their quest for prestige, and usually escaped with a fine. In spite of these problems, gols played an important role in the civil disobedience movement. For instance, on 27 May 1930 the group of twenty-seven villages met and demanded that all government officials belonging to these villages should resign.²⁸ Although some members refused to conform to the demand, no action was taken against them. The group of twenty-two was more successful. This gol met at Vasna on June 8 and demanded that all its members should resign office by June 16. Rs. 1,001 was donated from gol funds to the Borsad Taluka Congress Committee. Large fines were threatened for members who did not conform. One member who was serving as a talati in Nadiad Taluka was told that he would be fined Rs. 1,100 if he retained his post.²⁹ The group of twenty-two was more effective than the group of twenty-seven because the large majority of villages in it already supported Congress, so that they were putting pressure on a few dissident villages rather than trying to make a large number of fresh converts to nationalism. This gol was also unusual in that it formed a compact block of territory. Most gols

28 BRO, Huzur Political Office, Section 28, File 5, pp. 2-9.

29 Ibid., pp. 1-2. Master to Secretary H.D.G. of I. 25 June 1930, NAI, H.Poll, 5/3/31.

were scattered all over the Charotar, which made disciplinary action more difficult. The group of twenty-two was almost entirely in Borsad Taluka and adjoining Baroda areas.

Within the villages, women were often important in enforcing solidarity. Often the strongest character in a family was the mother. She above all bound the family together and kept it in the mainstream of village life. After the village leaders had given their approval to civil disobedience the women of the village often became the strongest supporters, both through love for Gandhi, who in the context of the day was a radical fighter for women's rights, and through the desire to conform. Numerous cases existed of women waging satyagraha against their husbands who were afraid to sacrifice their livelihood for political ideals. One such case occurred at Piplav in Borsad Taluka. A Swaminarayan follower called a meeting of members of the sect in the village with the intention of getting them to pay their revenue. His wife and adult daughter came to the meeting and appealed passionately to the men to remember their duty. The man was a weak character, and capitulated.³⁰

Life often became unbearable for officials who refused to resign. Besides the silent opposition of the Patidar farmers, there was also the raucous jeering of children, who were being organised into vanar senas (monkey armies, as in the Ramayana). These children carried out minor tasks, such as the distribution of Congress bulletins, so that more mature Congress workers would not be arrested. They also marched around in gangs singing national songs. They often used their own boyish methods to harass the authorities. Car windows were smashed, officials showered with pebbles and taunted behind their backs. The officials

30 R.M.Patel, Jivanna Jharna, Vol. 1, pp. 366-368. Simone de Beauvoir has noted in this context, "... lacking the male's aggressive audacity, many women distinguish themselves by their calm tenacity in passive resistance. They face crises, poverty, misfortune, more energetically than their husbands ..." Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, (New English Library 1970), p. 333.

were both infuriated and embarrassed, because they could not jail children.³¹

As a result of these activities, 224 of the 655 mukhis of Kheda District had resigned by June 21.³² In Borsad Taluka only about six mukhis remained at their posts.³³ A Deputy Collector who had served for twenty-five years resigned after witnessing lathi charges led by Laher at Anand, Umreth and Dakor.³⁴ Resignations could be for reasons other than the ones stated. At Golaj, a Baraiya village in Thasra Taluka, which never in its history showed any partiality towards Congress politics, the mukhi was set on by nine people, locked up for two hours, then beaten up, in an attempt to make him resign. In this case civil disobedience had provided a good excuse for settling old scores.³⁵

In June, Congress activity in the villages slackened as the farmers set about their agricultural operations. Less fervent villagers failed to object when their mukhis withdrew their resignations. By August 2, of the 304 Kheda mukhis who had resigned, 152 had withdrawn their resignations.³⁶ However, this provided little comfort for the British, for the no-revenue campaign was growing in intensity day by day.

The No-Revenue Campaign and Hijrat.

After Bardoli in 1928, the Governor of Bombay, Sir Leslie Wilson,

31 Bombay FR2, June 1930.

32 Bombay FR2, May 1930. Bombay FR1, June 1930 (Combined Report).

33 Report on C.D. 4 May - 6 June 1930, NAI, H.Poll, 116/4/1931.

34 G.P.C.C. Report, 24 May 1930, NML, AICC, G-119. The other Deputy Collector who resigned in Gujarat at this time was Moraji Desai, who was serving in Ahmedabad District.

35 The incident was in May 1930. Bombay Government Press Note, 26 February 1931, NAI, H.Poll, 14/19/1931.

36 Bombay FR2, July 1930.

had asked Irwin for a law to ban organisations which advocated non payment of land revenue. Irwin refused to take any action, arguing that what mattered was not the degree of coercion used, but the speed with which the agitation was nipped in the bud. The existing coercive processes were sufficient if the authorities reacted promptly.³⁷ This did not happen in 1930. The government reacted sluggishly, probably because it was distracted by the more dramatic events in South Gujarat. The satyagrahis had also developed a new tactic, the hijrat, or migration to Baroda territory. This had been ignored in the 1928 post-mortem.

The no-revenue campaign was confined initially to fourteen villages in Borsad Taluka. The Patidars of these villages began to move their property in secret into adjoining Baroda State villages. The Patidars of Ras, for instance, were in the same gol as Jharola and Sisva villages, which both bordered on Ras, but were in Baroda territory. A Ras farmer could store his most valuable possessions in the house of a brother-in-law after a mere half hour's drive in his bullock cart laden with brass cooking vessels and his wife's jewellery. The authorities only realised that this was happening in May, by which time it was too late. A conference was arranged with Baroda State officials at Anand on May 19 to try to formulate a joint policy for dealing with civil disobedience. Master wanted to be able to confiscate the transferred property and to be able to extradite Congress leaders who fled across the border promptly. His counterpart, the Suba of Baroda District, S.V.Pendse, insisted that in Baroda they believed in persuasion rather than suppression. They would extradite people using existing legal processes if the British demanded it. No arbitrary powers could be granted to Baroda officials. They would try to persuade Patidar panches not to support civil

37 Wilson to Irwin, 16 August 1928; Irwin to Birkenhead, 11 October 1928, NAI, H.Poll, 197/1928.

disobedience.³⁸ Master was not at all pleased. He wrote to his superiors that the Baroda officials had no plan of action and seemed content to let the situation slide.³⁹

The Baroda officials were in a difficult position. Civil disobedience was extremely popular among the lesser Patidars of the Baroda Charotar. Any precipitative action could cause them to refuse their revenue. Baroda State consisted of a mere four districts, and the richest land which contributed the most revenue was that owned by Patidars in areas adjoining Kheda and Surat Districts. The top Baroda officials opposed civil disobedience, because swaraj represented a direct threat to their power, but lower officials largely sympathised with the satyagrahis. They fed false reports to their superiors, who usually only found out the truth through the British Resident, who was being asked continually by Master to make formal complaints.

On 10 May 1930 Bardoli Taluka voted not to pay revenue, and on May 31 a Kheda District Peasants' Conference was held at Nadiad, and a resolution passed that no land revenue would be paid till Vallabhbhai and Gandhi were released.⁴⁰ On May 18, two weeks after Gandhi had been jailed, the AICC gave full Congress approval to the no-revenue campaign at an all-India level. The no-revenue campaigns could not, however, start on a large scale until the 1930-31's seasons' revenue became due in December. Most villages in Kheda had by May 1930 paid their 1929-30 instalments. Only about twenty villages had refused to

38 Proceedings of Anand meeting, 19 May 1930, BRO, Huzur Political Office, Section 38, File 5, p. 37.

39 Master to Secretary H.D. G. of I. 2 July 1930, NAI, H.Poll, 5/3/31.

40 Report on C.D. 4 May 1930 - 6 June 1930, NAI, H.Poll, 116/4/1931. The Bardoli resolution said that the move was out of respect for Sardar, Mahatma and Motherland, which in essence represented the trilogy most dear to any Hindu: Kshatriya leader, religious guru and mother.

pay this instalment. These were mostly in Borsad and Nadiad Talukas. By mid-June all the revenue had been collected except for 12.5% in Borsad Taluka and 11% in Nadiad.

Despite this, the Government felt that they were losing control of Gujarat rapidly. Even moderates, scandalised by the atrocities at Drahasana, were turning against them. One dispirited revenue official wrote in June:⁴¹

The Patidar community which is taking a prominent part in this movement in the Kaira District is known for its intelligence and organisational capacity. Their unity is almost proverbial. They are capable of accomplishing anything on this earth whether good or bad. It is this community which is leading the no-tax campaign, and it would be no wonder if they succeeded in this move as their resourcefulness and tenacity of purpose are really very wonderful.

By late June the growing solidarity among the Patidars of Gujarat was beginning to worry the Government of India. On June 27 the Home Secretary, Emerson, wrote:⁴²

... if the people in Gujarat are successful in evading the payment of dues, we may expect a widespread extension of the movement. This would probably cause more embarrassment than any other single feature of the Civil Disobedience Movement.

The Bombay Government was demanding that the Government of India should give a guarantee that once land had been confiscated in lieu of revenue, and once mukhis had resigned, there could be no return of land or re-appointment of the mukhis. Congress volunteers were promising the peasants that they would get their lands and mukhiships back after the agitation, as had happened in Bardoli in 1928. Local officials were becoming dispirited because they believed that their action would be undone when Congress decided to compromise with the government. So far no peasants in Gujarat had ever lost their lands permanently due to

41 Loc. cit.

42 Note by Emerson, 27 June 1930, NAI, H.Poll, 214/30/1930.

Congress agitations. The Government of India decided that the only way to break the Gujarati movement was to agree to the Bombay Government request. An order was put out that forfeitures of land and appointment of new local officials would be on a permanent basis and not open to negotiation.⁴³ The Government of India thereby limited its future freedom of negotiation with Congress.

The monsoon of 1930 was the best since 1921. It was inevitable that the government would demand full revenue in December. The peasants began to prepare for the satyagraha by removing their belongings to Baroda villages. They waited anxiously for their crops to ripen, so that they could be harvested and sold or removed to Baroda territory before the revenue was demanded. When Collector Master realised that this was their intention he suddenly brought the revenue collection date forward to October 5, and drew up lists of known nationalists for the first collections. Special police were brought in to the District to swoop on villages early in the morning to seize the property of the farmers. Ashabhai Patel of Ras, who had been released recently from jail, received a message from a sympathetic policeman that Ras was to be surrounded, that the people were to be beaten and that he would be arrested. That night Ashabhai organised a mass migration. In one hour in the middle of the night 325 families left Ras and set up camp in the fields of nearby Jharola, in Baroda State. On October 15 Laher arrived with 150 policemen to find only Baraiyas. They broke the locks on the houses and took what property they could find. Guards were posted in the fields to stop the Patidars harvesting their crops.⁴⁴

The hijrat of other villages followed within days. Before October, only property had been removed to Baroda State. Now the people themselves

43 G.of I. H.D. to Bombay R.D., 3 July 1930, NAI, H.Poll, 214/30/1930.

44 R.M.Patel, Jivanna Jharna, Vol. I, pp. 358-361.

fled to escape the lathis of the rough non-Gujarati police who were being brought into the District. Ruthless methods were used to extract revenue. Men were humiliated by being made to stand naked in the village chora till they paid. At Boriavi the police entered a temple and beat the worshippers, so that soon afterwards the villagers moved to nearby Bakrol.⁴⁵ At Keriavi three men were tied with ropes and thrashed by the revenue officers until they paid.⁴⁶ The vast majority of those who fled were Patidars. The Baroda census of 1931 conducted a special survey and found that of the 15,600 hijratis in the Charotar, 87% were Patidars, the rest being Baraiyas, Rajputs and Brahmans, with a few Vantias, Muslims and village artisans tagging along. The ratio of women to men was about seven to ten.⁴⁷

The hijratis camped in huts set up in the fields of the Baroda villages. The huts were made from leaves and branches. These camps, or mandvas, were given exotic names such as 'Sardar Nagar', 'Satyanagar' or 'Jawahar Nagar'. The mandvas acted as the Congress centres for the rest of the movement, for on October 10 Congress was declared an illegal organisation, and its buildings were confiscated.⁴⁸ Leaders from all over Gujarat moved constantly between these camps. The hijratis kept themselves occupied by spinning. It was a nerve-wracking period for these peasants. Their crops were rotting in the fields over the border, robbers were plundering their houses, and government officials were auctioning their land. The flimsy huts provided little shelter

45 News of India, 7 January 1931, NML, AICC, G-119.

46 News of India, 31 December 1930, NML, AICC, G-119.

47 Census of India 1931, Vol. XIX, Baroda, pt. I, Report, pp. 8-9.

48 17 Congress buildings were confiscated in Kheda. Bombay FR1, October 1930.

during the cold months of December and January.

The weapon of hijrat had deep traditional roots. In the Mughal period, when revenue demands were erratic but harsh, destitute villagers often fled to escape the payment of revenue. Often it was only through flight that they could save themselves from torture and even death. Often they fled to the lands of a nearby prince who was more benevolent than the Imperial authority.⁴⁹ In the 1830s, Marathi peasants had likewise fled to the Nizam's territories in protest at the heavy revenue demands of the British.⁵⁰

Strong reasons are needed to explain the hijrat. This was the first no-revenue campaign in which there were no important short term economic grievances. The 1930 season had been good, and the slump in crop prices which was brought about by the depression had not yet occurred. The only serious short term economic grievance was that tobacco prices had fallen by twelve per cent since 1929.⁵¹ However, this was not an important reason for the agitation. The areas most heavily dependent on tobacco were the Patidar villages of northern Anand Taluka, and these villages were notably apathetic towards civil disobedience in 1930-31. Several reasons for the hijrat can be suggested. Borsad Taluka had a superb Congress organisation, with

49 Irfan Habib, The Agrarian System of Mughal India, pp. 328-336. Habib believes that a major reason for the peasant revolts of the Mughal period was the spread of bhakti ideology in the villages (pp. 332-333). The Gandhian movement can be seen as being in this tradition.

50 Ravinder Kumar, 'The Rise of the Rich Peasants in Western India', D.A.Low, Soundings in Modern South Asian History, p. 39. Kumar says of this hijrat: "The cultivators had, in effect, voted against Pringle with their feet!" (Pringle was responsible for the local revenue settlement).

51 Tobacco price index (base of 100 in 1895).

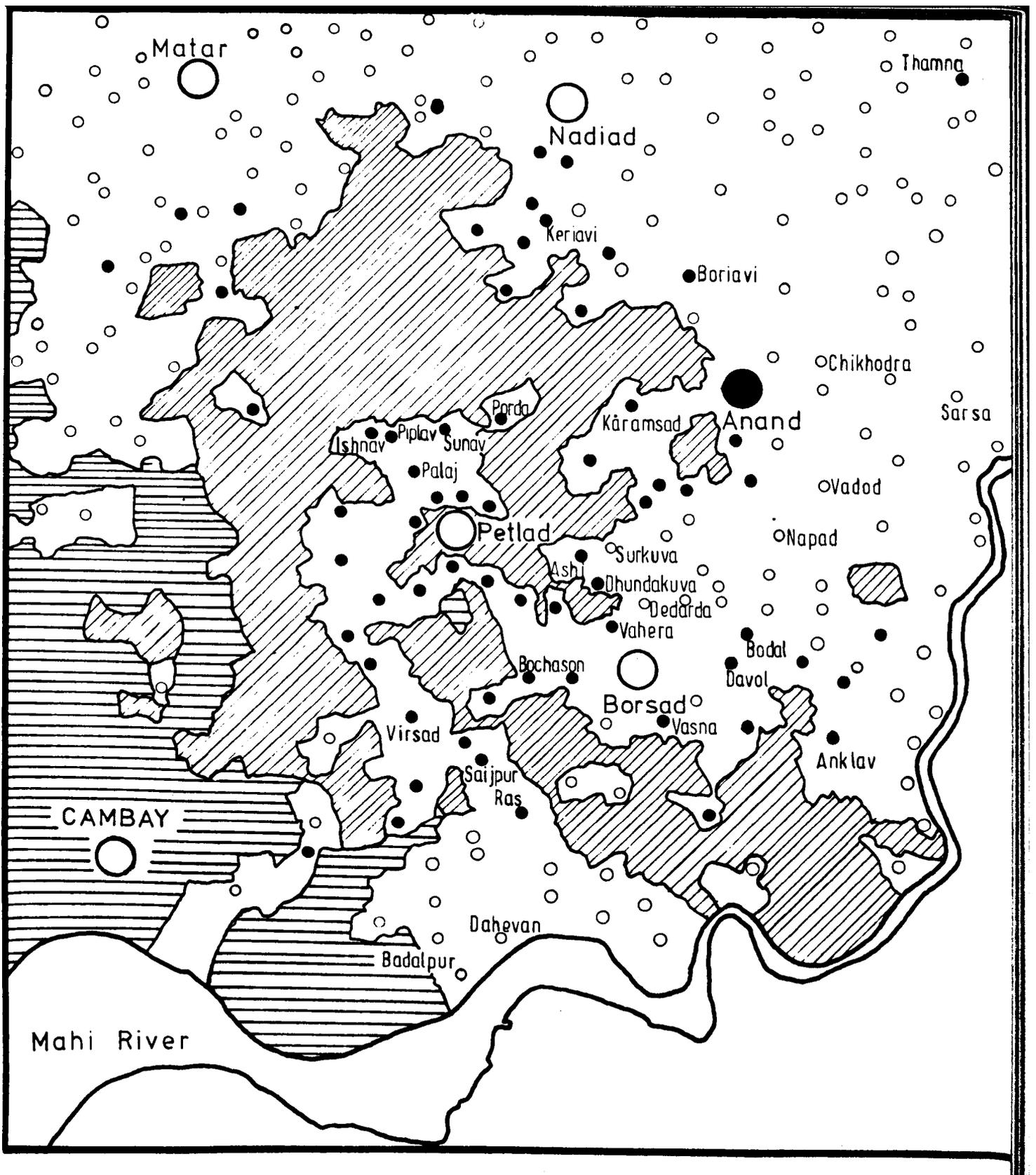
1928	169	1931	125
1929	163	1932	125
1930	144	1933	132

From prices in: Papers relating to the Second Revision Settlement of the Anand Taluka of the Kaira District, pp. 37-39.

resident Congress workers in most villages. Enthusiasm reached a new pitch when Gandhi came through the area on the Dandi salt march. The dramatic success of the Bardoli satyagraha had made the revenue satyagraha appear to be a weapon of extraordinary potency. This helped to break down the natural reluctance of the farmers to risk their lands by migration. The actual hijrat was greatly facilitated by the jigsaw-like juxtaposition of British and Baroda territory in the area. But it is unlikely that the Borsad Patidars would have responded so fervently to Gandhi if it had not been for the long term agricultural depression, which had since the famine made the revenue demands an intolerable burden. The average revenue demand in Kheda was three and a half rupees an acre each year. A demand of five rupees was therefore a heavy one. An examination of the lists of villages which paid this heavy sum shows that four out of ten took part in the hijrat. If we take only the lesser Patidar villages of Kheda paying five rupees an acre, we find that two-thirds took part in the hijrat. Going still further, if we examine all the sixty-six villages from which there was some migration, we find that four-fifths had to pay over five rupees a year.⁵² Such figures suggest that the continuation of high revenue demands in certain villages was an important reason for peasant militancy in Kheda in 1930.

The extent on the hijrat can be traced on the maps. The first map shows all the villages from which people fled. The most obvious point is that a village had to be near Baroda territory for there to be hijrat. The only exception to this was Thamna Talpad, near Umreth.

52 The lists of villages which took part in the hijrat are from the Baroda Records Office. Detailed lists exist which give the name of every family head who migrated. BRO, Huzur Political Office, Section 38, File 7, Pts. II and III. Also: Census of India 1931, Vol. VIII, Bombay Presidency, Pt. I, General Report, (Government Central Press, Bombay 1933), Appendix E. For village revenue figures see Chapter 3, footnote 25 (p.57).



Map 6. Civil Disobedience 1930-31 (1).

● Villages from which people migrated in 1930-31.

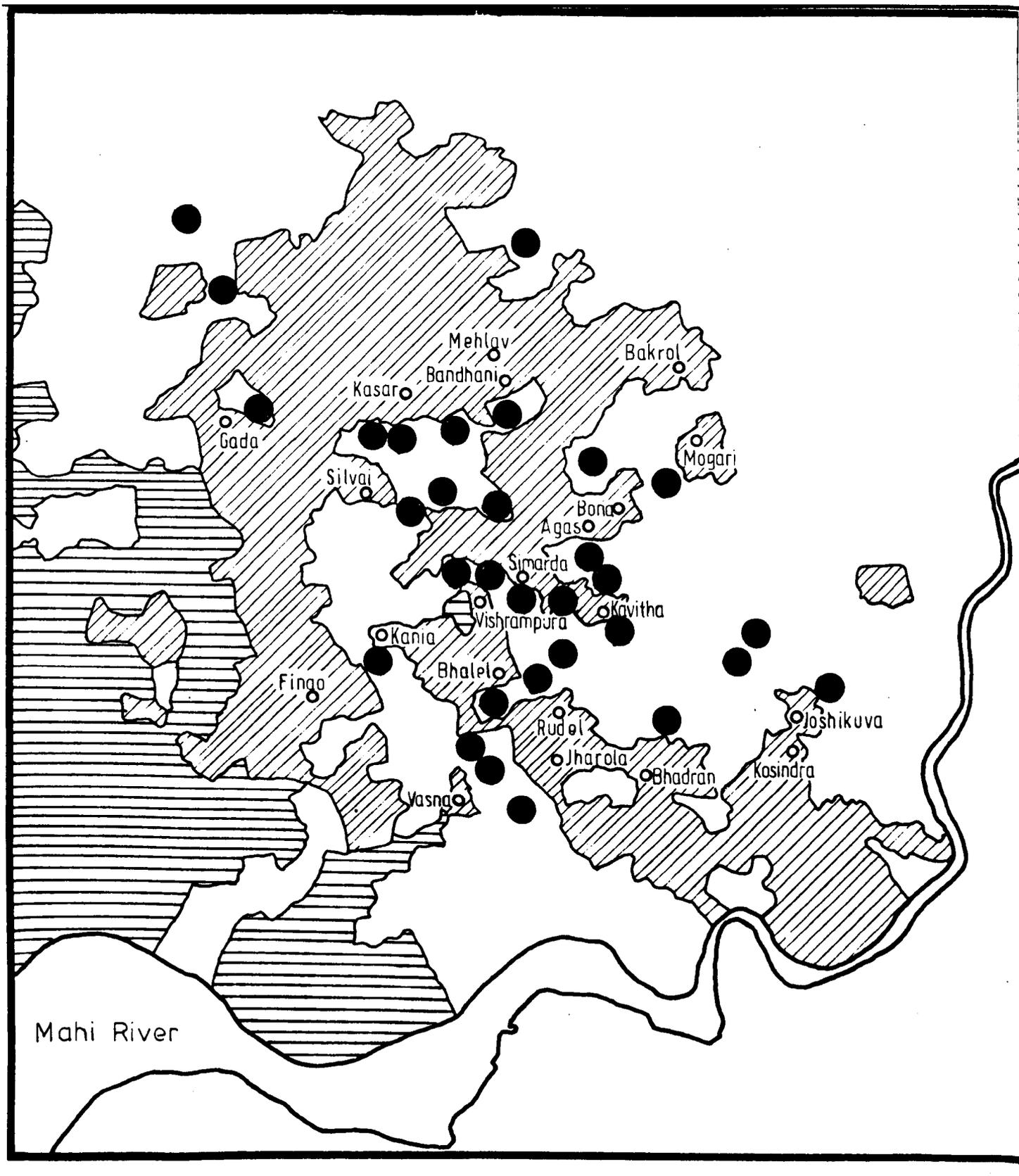
○ Other villages in British areas

○ Taluka headquarters towns.

▨ Baroda State territory

▨ , Cambay State

Villages mentioned in text are named on the map.



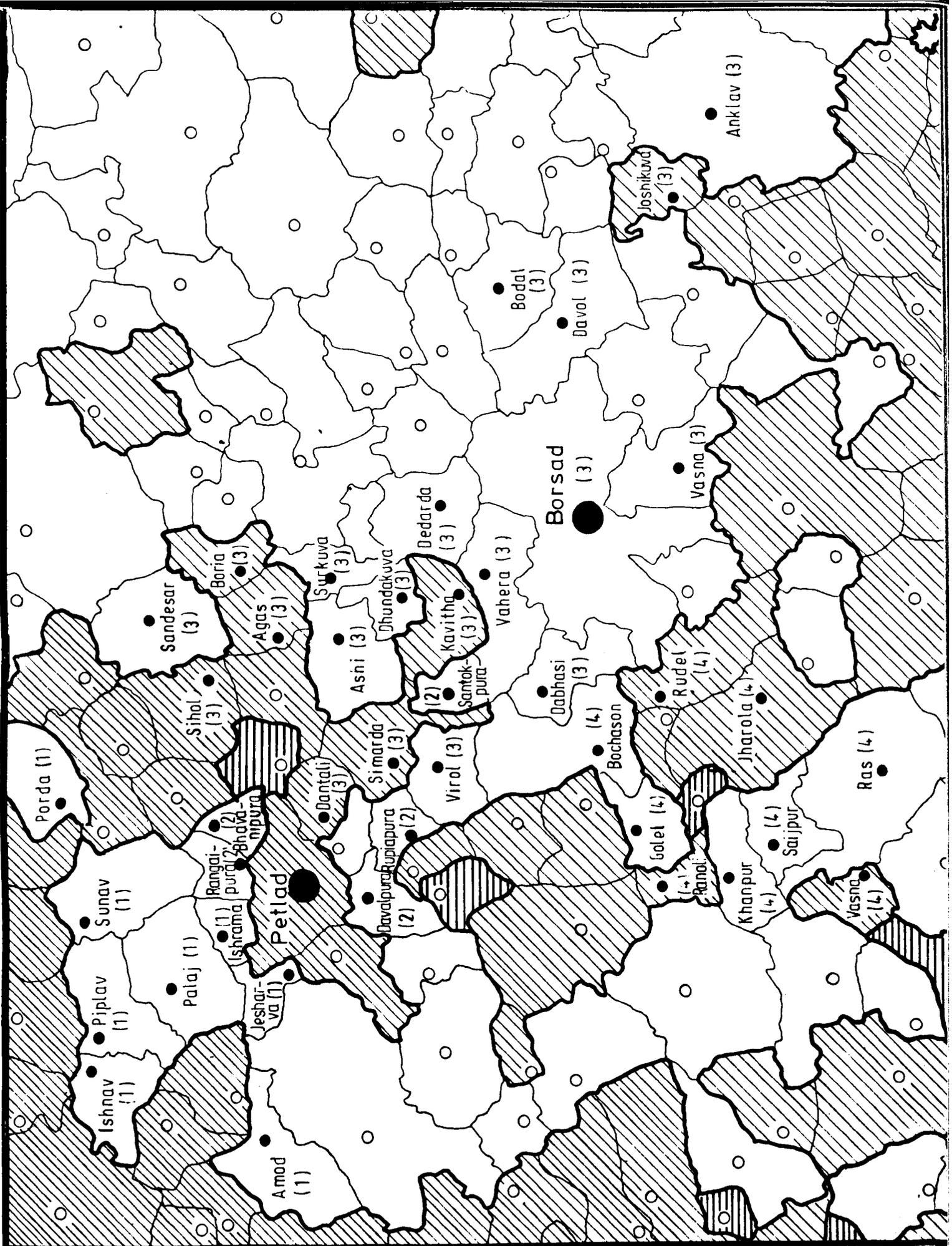
Map 7. Civil Disobedience 1930-31 (2).

- Villages from which over 10% of the population migrated
- Gada Villages in Baroda State with mandvas in which over 200 people were camped.
- ▨ Baroda State territory
- ▬ Cambay State

**ORGANISATIONAL
AREAS**

This map shows the areas in which civil disobedience was most intense. All villages and their boundaries are marked.

- (1) Villages in Sunav group
- (2) Group of 14
- (3) Group of 22
- (4) Ras group
- Other villages



Map 8. Civil Disobedience 1930-31 (3).

Thamna was a lesser Patidar village in a predominantly Baruiya area. The leading Patidar of the village was a fervent nationalist and he organised the no-revenue campaign. On 26 November 1930 the police came and beat several Patidars in the fields. As a result several families moved south to Bakrol. One hundred acres belonging to seven families were confiscated and sold.⁵³ Other nationalistic villages were deterred by the distance from Baroda territory. Navagam, which had been the most fervent village in the 1918 movement, attempted a no-revenue campaign, but had to give up when migration proved impossible.⁵⁴

The second map shows that the movement was most serious in Borsad Taluka and a portion of Anand Taluka. Only 31 villages had migrations of over ten per cent of the population.⁵⁵ The most striking fact about these 31 villages was that all except seven were in four main organisational groups. These groups are sketched on the third map. One group was based on Sunav, another based on Ras, the third was the Patidar gol of 14. Of the 16,500 people who migrated to Baroda State throughout Kheda District, 9,700, or about three-fifths of the migrants, came from villages in these four groups. The large-scale migrations were therefore from these villages.⁵⁶

53 News of India, 7 January 1931, NML, AICC, G-119. Interview with Chhotabhai Patel, Thamna, 18 January 1972.

54 Navagam was Gandhi's first resting place in Kheda on the Dandi salt march. BRO, Huzur Political Office, Section 38, File 13.

55 See footnote 52 for sources. The villages were as follows: (Only rough percentages are given as it is unlikely that the figures were absolutely accurate).

70-79%	-	Dhundakuva
60-69%	-	Golel
50-59%	-	Porda; Santokpura
40-49%	-	Piplav
30-39%	-	Bodal; Isnav; Vasna; Virol
20-29%	-	Ashi; Bhavanipura; Bochason; Davalpura; Devataj; Gana; Mujkuva; Rupiapura; Saijpur; Sunav
10-19%	-	Akhdol; Dabhasi; Davol; Dethali; Israma; Jesarva; Khanpur; Ras; Sandesar; Tranja; Vadadla; Vahera.

56 There were 27 villages in these four groups. Two-fifths of the migrants came from the other 39 villages from which there were migrations.

The Sunav group was based on the Sunav Rashtriya Vinaya Mandir. This was the only national school started in Kheda in 1921 which had been a success. The teachers were men of integrity and idealism. The first headmaster had been Ravishankar Maharaj, and important District leaders were on the staff, such as Fulsinji Dabhi, who was later a member of the Lokh Sabha. When the leading Patidars of Sunav tried to bring the school back under Government control in 1928, the students refused to allow it. The teachers and boys carried out social work in the ten villages which made up this island surrounded by Baroda territory, and as a result were extremely popular in the area.

In 1930 the vast majority of people under forty favoured a no-revenue campaign in these villages around Sunav. The elder people were not so enthusiastic, and the mukhis of Sunav and Palaj both refused to resign. However, great pressure was brought to bear on the Patidar panches of these ten lesser Patidar villages by the under-forties. The teachers of the national school spent much time trying to persuade the village elders. Eventually the elders capitulated. The mukhis of Sunav and Palaj were unable to put up much resistance as they were not hereditary mukhis, and had no more power than other village elders. The leading Patidar in nearby Piplav gave his support to the agitation. He was a farmer in his forties who was known for his saintly character. He followed the Gandhian way of life. In 1930 he was jailed for making salt. This so infuriated the people that they unanimously resolved to refuse their revenue. By July 1930 most of the moveable property and cattle of Sunav, Palaj and Piplav had been removed to Baroda territory. In October 2,200 people of Sunav, Piplav and Ishnav migrated to Mehelav, Kasar and Bandhani to the north in Baroda territory.⁵⁷

57 Information on the Sunav area from: Master to Secretary H.D. 2 July 1930, NAI, H.Poll, 5/3/31. Interviews with Madhavlal Pandya, Anand, 20 January 1972, 11-12 September 1973; S.V.Patel, Sunav, 13 September 1973; Fulsinhji Dabhi, Nadiad, 29 September 1973.

The second group was that of the gol of fourteen minor lesser Patidar villages of Borsad Taluka. This group partly overlapped with the Sunav group, for Rangaipura and Bhavanipura also came under the Sunav Congress organisation. It may be noted that the villages of the Sunav group were from three different gols. Sunav was one of the top lesser Patidar villages, being in the gol of five, Piplav and Palaj were in the gol of moti (the great) 27. The villages of these two gols were scattered widely over the Charotar, and did not lend their support to civil disobedience. The gol of 14 was more compact. It had supported the Borsad Satyagraha in 1923. I have no evidence that it supported the 1930-31 movement, but it seems likely, for three other villages in the group, Santokpura, Rupiapura and Davalpura, were leading hijrat villages.

The third group was the gol of 22. This group has already appeared once in this chapter, in the section on the resignation of officials. In June 1930 the order was passed around this group that nobody should pay their revenue on pain of fine or social ostracism. In October 1930 some Patidars of the group who lived in Baroda State villages, but owned land in British areas, paid up their revenue. Some Patidars of Borsad town, Davol, Bodal, Surkuva and Dedarda (all members of the gol) also paid up. A disciplinary meeting was held at Kavitha on 1 November 1930. Each village was represented by four or five village elders. The representatives of the Baroda villages protested that the movement had nothing to do with them, and that they could not be asked to jeopardise their lands. There was a long argument in which the Baroda villagers threatened to leave the gol. In the end it was decided that only British villagers would be fined. Some Bodal people who had paid were fined Rs.51 each.⁵⁸

58 Master to Baroda Resident, 11 and 13 November 1930, BRO, Huzur Political Office, Section 38, File 5.

As a result most of the Patidars in this gol refused to pay their revenue and migrated to Baroda territory. The largest hijrat in this group was by 1,200 people of Anklav, Bodal and Davol to Joshikuva. Six hundred people from Vasna went to Bhadran, 800 people from Dhundakuva and Vahera to Kavitha, and 380 people from Ashi to Agas. In other villages of this group migrations were on a smaller scale. All of the Baroda villages they migrated to except Bhadran and Kosindra were fellow members of the group of 22.

The last of these groups was based on Ras. Bochason, Saijpur, Ras, Jharola and Rudel were members of a different gol of 22. In this gol they formed a compact southern block. The northern portion consisted of villages in the centre of Anand Taluka, such as Chikhodra, Vadod and Sarsa, none of which joined the agitation. Ashabhai Lallabhai Patel of Ras had tried to persuade them to join, but had failed. They were afraid of losing their land. They were also badly placed for a hijrat. This gol could not therefore act as a whole. However, Ashabhai Patel managed to persuade the members of the southern part of the gol to leave their villages in large numbers. 1,270 people of Ras and Saijpur migrated to Jharola, and 630 people of Bochason went to Rudel.

Outside these four groups there were only seven villages from which over 200 people migrated. Four of these were close to the villages in the four main groups. They were therefore encouraged, even pressurised, by their neighbours. Elsewhere there was little pressure on village leaders to organise a migration. Congress leaders and activists in such villages could not win over the village panch. Virsad was an example of such a village.

Virsad was a superior Patidar village. Virsad's failure to respond to nationalism in 1917 has already been described in Chapter Six. The village was controlled by some leading amins who received an annual

grant of Rs. 2,200 from the government. There were, however, three Patidars of amin families who were enthusiastic nationalists. The leader was Chaturbhaj Amin (1882-1932) who had been involved in the revolutionary movement in Maharashtra in the first decade of the century. He had been involved with the group which had murdered Collector Jackson at Nasik in 1909.⁵⁹ In the 1920s he returned to live in Virsad, now a follower of Gandhi.

These Gandhians had a considerable following in the village, especially among the young. In 1927 they made a name for themselves by organising relief during the devastating floods. In 1930 they led a group of about 30 to Badalpur to manufacture salt. Chaturbhaj Amin was jailed. During the salt march the mukhi tendered his resignation, but withdrew it as soon as Gandhi had left Kheda. In October, 155 people of Virsad refused to pay their revenue, and moved to Baroda State. This represented about five per cent of the village population. However, the leading Patidars of the village all paid their revenue. Above all, they were afraid of losing their annual Rs. 2,200. When Collector Master came to Virsad the mukhi promised to try to persuade the recalcitrants to pay up. As a result Master felt that Virsad was basically 'loyal' and did not order any confiscation of land.⁶⁰

Virsad was typical of superior Patidar villages, where the older generation were reluctant to support the Gandhian movement. Chaturbhaj Amin had support among the younger Patidars, but could not sway the village elders, who were afraid of losing their stipend. There were also a large number of absentee landlords with comfortable jobs in the cities who were not prepared to risk their lands by refusing their revenue. In another superior Patidar village, Karamsad, the youth were also isolated in this manner.⁶¹ Only three per cent of the Karamsad population

59 Bombay Source Material, Vol. II, p. 443.

60 Interview with Ravjibhai Amin, Virsad, 23 September 1973.

61 Interview with Naturbhai Raverbhai Patel, Karamsad, 7-8 September 1973.

joined the hijrat.

In other villages the movement collapsed because the Patidars were afraid of powerful opponents. Napad was such a village. Napad was six miles south of Anand, and had a population of about 2,500. The land was assessed at the high average rate of five and a half rupees an acre per annum. In this respect it was a typical lesser Patidar village, from which a good response to civil disobedience could be expected. However, in other respects it was untypical. The lands of the village were divided into two equal halves, Napad Talpad, which was Patidar dominated, and Napad Vanto, which was owned by a Muslim talukdar. The Muslims of Napad Vanto were strongly pro-British till 1940, after which they switched their allegiance to the Muslim League. The two communities quarrelled frequently. The leading Congressman in Napad was Lalaji Patel. He was the first person from the village to receive tertiary education. He was educated at Borsad High School, then in 1921 went to the Gujarat Vidyapith. In 1924-25 he started an Anglo-Vernacular school in a private building at Napad. In 1930 he led a batch of Napad people to the Mahi to manufacture salt. Soon afterwards he led 70 people of Anand Taluka to Dharasana for the salt raids. In October 1930 he tried to launch a no-revenue satyagraha in Napad. However, the mukhi refused to resign, and although the other village elders prevaricated for a time, they eventually decided to pay their revenue. Their chief fear was that their Muslim rivals would buy up their lands and come to dominate Napad Talpad as well as Vanto if they refused their revenues. In the end only Lalaji Patel refused to pay, and he was defeated by his relatives, who paid for him behind his back. Lalaji had ten particularly zealous followers in Napad, and these were sent to picket foreign cloth shops in Anand. Six were arrested.⁶²

62 Interviews with Somabhai Patel, Dhayabhai Patel, Purushottam Patel and Gordanbhai Patel, Napad, 18 September 1973.

This example shows why some villages which could have been expected to have taken part in the movement for long term economic reasons did not in fact do so. In this particular case the villagers were afraid of powerful Muslim rivals, but bad factionalism among Patidars in a village could have the same effect. In such cases people were unwilling to lay themselves open to their enemies by refusing their land revenue and fleeing the village.

All these cases demonstrate the important role played by village activists in the agitation. These activists were devoted Gandhians, who were prepared to organise the village for civil disobedience when the taluka Congress committee demanded it. They thus provided a link between the taluka Committee and the village, as well as acting as a radicalising force within the village itself. In the cases of villages such as Ras, Virsad and Napad the activists were natives of the village who had been educated outside, but had returned to live in the village. In some other villages, such as Sunav, the local activists were outsiders. Often Gandhian village workers, or school teachers who had been trained at the Gujarat Vidyapith in Ahmedabad, went to live in a village, and through selfless social work over the years gradually won the sympathy of the village. The important task for the village activists was to win enough villagers over to his viewpoint to be able to bring pressure to bear on the naturally conservative elders.

The British reacted to the no-revenue campaign and hijrat in two main ways. Their main recourse was to coercive processes to browbeat the peasants into paying their revenue. However, they also attempted to use persuasion. Master put out a journal called the Kheda Jhilla Gazette, which was printed in Bombay and distributed in the villages. He also recruited the help of influential loyalists. In November 1930 the old Nadiad Desai, Gopaldas, toured the hijrati villages trying to persuade the Patidars to pay their revenue. Although they received the venerable

old man with respect, they refused to obey him. Master also arranged for the head of the Bochason Swaminarayan temple to ask his followers to pay their revenue. As a result, many members of the sect paid.⁶³ The British also tried to prove to the outside world that the agitation was not living up to the ideals of Gandhian non-violence. As always happened when police were occupied smashing no-revenue campaigns in the south of the district, Baraiya and Patanvadia bandits seized the initiative in the north of Kheda. During the monsoon, Thasra Taluka was plagued by a particularly active gang of dacoits. The British accused the Patidars of stirring up lawless elements, while Congress accused the British of using the dacoits to coerce peaceful satysgrahi.⁶⁴ It is unlikely that either side was responsible, for neither the British nor the Patidars wanted such desperadoes on the rampage. On 26 February 1931 the British put out a press note listing 22 cases in which civil disobedience in Kheda had degenerated into violence. The list was filled out with cases in which the police had started the violence by attacking demonstrations. However, in a few cases the satyagrahi had seriously outraged Gandhian ideals.⁶⁵

Congress countered with patrika (bulletins). There were single foolscap sheets cyclostyled secretly in Baroda territory. The most important one was the Borsad Satyagraha Patrika. This was produced at Bhadran and distributed by Sardar Tara Singh, who motored around the villages ostensibly as a wedding photographer. The British never suspected him because he was a Sikh. He took photos of deserted villages, and during demonstrations hid in vantage points to take pictures of lathi charges. He sent the undeveloped rolls direct to the newspapers in

63 R.M.Patel, Jivanna Jharna, Vol. I, p. 366.

64 C.D.Report for 17 June 1930, NAI, H.Poll, 116/4/1931.

65 Government of Bombay Press Note, 26 February 1931, NAI, H.Poll, 14/19/1931.

Bombay.⁶⁶ In late October 1930 the British socialist journalist, H.M.Brailsford, visited Kheda and witnessed a lathi charge at Uttar-sanda, which he described subsequently in the British press.⁶⁷ The mandvas were visited constantly by journalists and politicians, who were all suitably appalled at the callousness and brutality of British Imperialism.

The major coercive weapon used by the British was the selling of the Patidars' land. The government had great difficulty in finding people to buy the land, for most Baraiyas were terrified of crossing the Patidars in this manner, and most were convinced that when a compromise was reached with the Government the Patidars would regain their land. The Government therefore had to turn to people strong enough to defy the Patidars with impunity. At Ras they turned to the talukdars to the south of the village. Of the first 295 acres sold, the talukdar of Dahevan bought 100, and the rest was taken by the Ras Baraiyas,⁶⁸ who were in a stronger position than their caste fellows in the heart of the Charotar because of the presence of these powerful talukdars. On November 7 Master visited Ras. Some Baraiyas told him that during the great famine they had sold land to the Patidars for a maund and a half of grain per bigha, and if they could now get the money they would buy 3,000 bighas. Master immediately promised them that he would search for a moneylender, although he knew that he would probably have to find a Bohra Muslim, as Vantias and Patidars would inevitably refuse to lend for such a purpose.⁶⁹

66 Interview with Sardar Tara Singh, Ahmedabad, 16 October 1973.

67 BRO, Huzur Political Office, Section 38, File 48.

68 R.M.Patel, Jivanna Jharna, Vol. I, pp. 358-361.

69 Master to Secretary H.D. 7 November 1930, NAI, H.Poll, 5/36/31.

In the area around Petlad the Baraiyas were weaker, and Muslims of Petlad town were the main purchasers of land. The Baraiyas in this area hoped to raise their status through Patidar models such as gols and supporting Congress. At Palaj two Baraiya dacoits who bought land were outcaste by a local Baraiya group of 27 villages. As a result, most of the buyers of land in this area were Muslims of Petlad. These men were hated by the Patidars, for they often used to let their cattle loose at night to graze on Patidar land.⁷⁰ There was a standing feud between the two communities. At Rupiapura and Davalpura, which were about one mile to the south of Petlad, the land was purchased by three Muslims from Petlad. When they came to Rupiapura to take up this land, the Patidars, camped in nearby Vishrampura, employed some local Patanvadias to beat them up. Although the Muslims had come with an armed guard, they had to flee back to Petlad.⁷¹

The British thus tried to pressurise the Patidars by stirring up old communal feuds. In January and February 1931 the atmosphere was poisoned increasingly by incidents resulting from this policy. In many villages the resigned mukhis were replaced by Baraiyas or Muslims who made no effort to prevent their friends looting and burning the houses and crops of the absent Patidars. Many of these new mukhis had criminal records. The new Muslim mukhi at Porda was at the time wanted in Baroda State for offences committed there.⁷² The new police mukhi at Ras was a Baraiya who had been jailed for two months in 1929 for receiving stolen property.⁷³ The new mukhi at Davalpura was a Muslim who had been dismissed from Baroda State service for bribery.⁷⁴ At

70 BRO, Huzur Political Office, Section 136, File 13.

71 This incident was in January 1931, BRO, Huzur Political Office, Section 38, File 24.

72 CWMC 45, p. 415.

73 Maxwell to Vallabhbhai Patel, 5 October 1931, NAI, H.Poll, 33/42/1931.

74 CWMC 45, p. 415.

Saijpur the new Baraiya mukhi had been imprisoned for supplying a rifle to the dacoit, Babar Deva. After his appointment four houses belonging to the old mukhi and his two neighbours were burnt down.⁷⁵ At Vasna the new mukhi was a convicted criminal. When three houses of absent Patidars were set on fire in his own street, he made no attempt to extinguish the blaze.⁷⁶ In this case the violence was reciprocal, for when the new mukhi was supervising the removal of confiscated crops from the fields of Vasna he was attacked by about 40 Patidars armed with lathis and bill-hooks.⁷⁷ Soon afterwards, the house of a watchman at Vasna who had supported the government was burnt to the ground.⁷⁸

By February 1931 passive resistance in Kheda had reached the stage of transition from non-violence to violence. By this time the low castes and Muslims were occupying the cherished lands of the Patidars. This infuriating sight drove the Patidars to acts of increasing violence. In Aurobindo's doctrine of passive resistance this was a necessary stage in the winning of swaraj. In February 1931 Congress was in a position of great advantage. The British had lost control in many areas. With the beginning of the agricultural slump the movement was about to flare up on a scale which would have made 1930 seem insignificant. It was at this stage that Gandhi called the movement off.

2. The Gandhi-Irwin Pact

Vallabhbhai Patel believed that the Gandhi-Irwin pact was a grave setback in the struggle for independence. He had spent eight years restoring the confidence of the Patidars in Gandhian agitation after the

75 Loc. cit.

76 Loc. cit.

77 Bombay Government Press Note, 26 February 1931, NAI, H.Poll, 14/19/1931.

78 Bombay FR1, March 1931.

Chauri Chaura let down. He realised that this loss of momentum would necessitate another long period of preparation. There was even the possibility that the peasants who had lost their lands might never again support Gandhian agitation. Vallabhbhai would have thus lost a vital part of his power base. He therefore did everything he could to break the Gandhi-Irwin pact before disillusion set in among the Patidars.

Gandhi did not visit Gujarat before the negotiations with Irwin. As a result he did not appreciate that the Patidar peasants expected him to negotiate for a return of their lands. In Delhi, Gandhi appeared to believe that the Patidars were most upset about police atrocities. This belief arose from an incident which took place in Borsad town on 21 January 1931, five days before Gandhi's release. On January 21 there was a demonstration by women against the British at Borsad. About 1,500 women from 30 villages had taken part in it. Most were Patidar women from the mandvas. Their processions were broken up by police lathi charges, in which some of the women had received severe beatings. One of the leaders of the demonstration was Gangabehn Vaidya. She was a member of Gandhi's Ashram. She wrote to Gandhi describing how she had been beaten up by the police.⁷⁹ Gandhi received the letter in Allahabad, where he had gone to see the dying Motilal Nehru. On January 31 he demanded an independent inquiry with the words: "History offers no parallel to the atrocities committed on women in the Kaira District."⁸⁰ Next day he made a strong protest to Irwin about the atrocity, and on February 2 told C.V.Joshi: "I simply cannot forget the Borsad incident. The people have not yet realised its significance. I am taking up the matter."⁸¹

79 Gangabehn Vaidya to Gandhi, CWGMG 45, pp. 428-429.

80 CWGMG 45, pp. 132-3.

81 CWGMG 45, p. 142.

The negotiations with Irwin began on February 17. On February 18 Gandhi brought up the Borsad atrocities.⁸² On February 27 Gandhi listed his chief demands as permission to allow picketing, an inquiry into police excesses, and the abolition of the salt tax.⁸³ The return of confiscated land was still not a priority. At this point Vallabhbhai arrived in Delhi from Gujarat, where he had been touring the rural areas. He demanded that the return of confiscated lands be made a condition of the settlement. Gandhi took up the issue with Irwin on March 3. He told Irwin that Vallabhbhai could not carry the settlement in Gujarat unless they had some accommodation from the government on the matter.⁸⁴ But Irwin told him that he could not go back on his promise of July 1930 to the Bombay Government that all Confiscations would be permanent.

On March 4 Gandhi decided that the pact took priority over Vallabhbhai and his Patidars. He made one last plea for the return of the land before signing the agreement. In the days before Vallabhbhai had appeared, considerable good will had been built up between Gandhi and Irwin. The original difficulties had been largely solved, so that Gandhi was unwilling to press too hard, especially as Irwin was adamant in his refusal to go back on his promise to the Bombay Government. The best Gandhi could get was an agreement that land which had not been sold would be returned. Government promised to pursue a liberal policy in regard to lands and the return of mukhiships.⁸⁵ On March 5 the Congress Working Committee ordered that all land revenue should now be paid up.

82 CWMG 45, p. 193.

83 CWMG 45, p. 234.

84 CWMG 45, p. 243.

85 The relevant clauses of the Gandhi-Irwin pact were clauses 16(b), 17(b & c), 18, 19; CWMG 45, pp. 435-436.

The Patidars considered the pact a betrayal. In 1930 one of the chief civil disobedience slogans had demanded that land revenue be halved. Not only was this ignored in the pact, but the Patidars were not even promised the return of their lands and mukhiships. In February 1931 there had been a feeling that government had been brought to its knees. Many officials were extremely worried at this time, for their coercive measures had not only failed to break the spirit of the Patidars, but had encouraged many more in Nadiad and Matar Talukas to migrate to Baroda.⁸⁶ When the Patidars returned to their villages in March, the authorities regained their position of advantage. The pact, rather than police lathis, broke the morale of the Patidars.

In the next five months Vallabhbhai did his best to break the pact, so that civil disobedience could begin again. Only four days after the signing of the pact he told a Bombay audience that if the Round Table Conference failed they would be free to launch civil disobedience again.⁸⁷ On March 12 Vallabhbhai told the Patidars of Ras that if the Baraiyas did not return their lands then civil disobedience would be continued.⁸⁸ This was a clear condemnation of the pact, and on March 15 Gandhi had to insist that the people of Kheda had no right to expect a return of their lands.⁸⁹ Vallabhbhai then told the Bardoli Patidars:⁹⁰

Gandhiji would spin and talk to you. But there is not much new that he can tell you. In any case, what would you, farmers, understand of what he has to say? Therefore, you listen only to me. I have learnt whatever there was to learn from him, and you must learn, in turn, from me.

86 Bombay FR1, February 1931.

87 Bombay FR1, March 1931.

88 Loc. cit.

89 Navajivan, 15 March 1931, CWNG 45, p. 286.

90 Narhari Parikh, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Vol. II, p. 48.

Vallabhbhai then set about organising a social boycott of all those who had bought land or become mukhis.⁹¹

In Vallabhbhai's opinion there had been no change of heart by the British officials in Gujarat. Men such as Commissioner Garrett and Master hated the Congressmen all the more for their satyagraha movement. They felt that the promise in the pact to try to return lands and mukhiships was a betrayal of loyalist Baraiyas and Muslims who had courageously come to the rescue of the Raj in defiance of their Patidar masters. They felt that if they let down these allies they would be isolated in future agitations. Above all they wanted to demonstrate to the peasants that Congress was manipulating them, and in failing to get back their lands had proved a very poor friend. As a result Master took an extremely illiberal view over the return of lands, so that Gandhi was forced to make a complaint against him on March 19.⁹²

The Congress leaders, on the other hand, did not wish to lose their position as the peasants' advocate. On April 20 Gandhi wrote a letter to Garrett in which he described Congress as the mediator between government and people.⁹³ Next day Garrett replied that nowhere in the pact was this principle conceded and he could not accept it.⁹⁴ Gandhi replied with a strong protest, and the Bombay Government had to send a conciliatory reply. Gandhi's faith in Garrett was broken. He began to regard him as the worst offender against the spirit of the pact in India.⁹⁵

91 Bombay FR1, March 1931.

92 CWNG 45, p. 445.

93 CWNG 46, p. 19.

94 Narhari Parikh, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Vol. II, pp. 59-60.

95 Ibid., p. 76. Also Gandhi to Garrett 26 April 1931: "The way you are going is the way of war." CWNG 46, p. 42.

During the summer the situation in Borsad Taluka was less tense than in Bardoli, because Gandhi concentrated on working the pact in Borsad. Vallabhbhai concentrated on Bardoli, where he organised the fining and boycotting of loyalists. He also discouraged people from paying their revenue if they felt that they could not afford it. Gandhi did his best to honour the spirit of the pact and obtain as much revenue from the peasants as possible. By mid April most of the instalment which had been due on 5 October 1930 had been collected, and collections started for the second instalment which had been due on 5 March 1931.⁹⁶ The situation in Borsad was further eased when Master was replaced by a temporary Collector, E.W.Perry, in April. Perry had not served in Gujarat before. On April 26 he visited Ras and remarked that the old Patidar mukhi who had resigned was far superior to the Baraiya he had been replaced by. On April 28 he met Gandhi, and proved far more accommodating than Master over the return of lands and mukhiships.⁹⁷ Perry managed to get all but four of the mukhis reinstated. Gandhi managed to persuade most of the people who had bought confiscated land to return it, including the talukdar of Dahevan. By April 30, of the 1,792 acres which had been confiscated in the District, all but 72 had been returned.⁹⁸ These 72 acres had been purchased by obstinate men, who now refused to respond to Gandhi's persuasion.

The problem of implementing the pact in Kheda was therefore largely solved, but the tension between government and Congress did not decrease. There were constant niggling incidents to destroy both side's faith in each other. In May the gol of 22 fined the mukhi of Ashi and some talatis who had refused to resign, and excommunicated the whole of Vahera

96 Bell to Emerson, 22 April 1931, NAI, H.Poll, 33/3/1931.

97 Perry to Collins, 29 April 1931, NAI, H.Poll, 33/4/1931.

98 Director of Information, Bombay, 20 May 1931, NAI, H.Poll, 33/4/1931.

village. The government alleged that this was because Vahera had paid its revenue in 1930.⁹⁹ The government considered this a major breach of the pact, and after negotiations, Congress agreed to refund the fines out of its own funds.¹⁰⁰ There was widespread boycotting of those considered blacklegs, and there was little that either government or Congress could do about it. The biggest stumbling block proved to be the two new mukhis at Ras. One had recently been released from jail for a criminal offence, and the other had a minor criminal record. Both had been appointed on a permanent basis. The local officials wanted to punish the Ras Patidars for playing a leading part in civil disobedience, and refused to replace these two men. Gandhi became obsessed with the case, and made it a symbol of ill will by local authorities. He sent Mahadev Desai to Ras to investigate. Mahadev found that these mukhis were conniving at the cutting down of Patidar trees and hedges, and harassing the Patidars in a variety of petty ways.¹⁰¹ The new Collector, Bhadrapur, replied somewhat unrealistically to this charge that the Patidars were destroying their own property so as to lay the blame on the Baraiyas.¹⁰²

Bhadrapur took over from Perry as Collector in June. He had been Deputy Collector since 1929, and like the other old Gujarati officials, wanted to punish the Patidars.¹⁰³ Although revenue was coming in steadily, he wanted to take a tougher line, and bring back coercive measures. The government told him that this could only be done as a

99 This does not appear to have been the case. 277 people of Vahera migrated in 1930-31. There must have been other grievances against Vahera which the Government did not give. Bombay FR2, May 1931.

100 Bombay FR1, June 1931.

101 CWVG 47, p. 46.

102 CWVG 47, p. 62.

103 By caste Bhadrapur was a Reddi from Karnataka.

last resort. In late June he started confiscating moveable property without informing Gandhi. Perry had promised Gandhi that no such action would be taken before Gandhi had been informed.¹⁰⁴ Bhadrapur's action can only have been vindictive, for a week later he admitted to his superiors that the revenue collections had been satisfactory, and that only Rs. 40,000 was still due from Borsad out of Rs. 194,162 due for the second instalment of the year.¹⁰⁵

Gandhi did his best to make amends to Vallabhbhai over the pact. Gandhi spent over a third of the period between March and September 1931 working among the Patidars of Borsad and Bardoli. However, in August he once again had to make the choice between Vallabhbhai and the pact. Vallabhbhai was pressing hard for renewed civil disobedience over breaches of the pact in Bardoli. There was also strong pressure for renewed civil disobedience from the U.P., where the peasants had become extremely militant as a result of the depression. Although Gandhi prevaricated for a time, he decided in the end to go to the Round Table Conference in London. When Gandhi set sail on August 29, it was in spite of the knowledge that local officials were as uncompromising as ever, and that U.P. and Gujarat were set to explode once more into civil disobedience.

3. Civil Disobedience 1932-34

During the 1930-31 civil disobedience movement, the British had been on the defensive. In the second wave of civil disobedience, which started in January 1932, they went onto the offensive from the start. Local officials were given a free hand in a way they had never been given in 1930-31. In 1930 Congress had gained the upper hand in Gujarat because the government failed to apply the lesson of Bardoli

104 Gandhi to Bhadrapur, 28 June 1931, NAI, H.Poll, 33/3/1931.

105 Indian News Agency Telegram, 5 July 1931, NAI, H.Poll, 33/4/1931.

that speed was essential to crush no-revenue campaigns. In 1930 the government reaction had been slow. The government had also been taken by surprise by the new tactics of hijrat. In the autumn of 1931 Congress should have been working out new tactics to outwit the British. Instead, Vallabhbhai merely threatened a duplication of 1930. The British were thus able to formulate effective plans to crush the agitation.¹⁰⁶

Plans were formulated to prevent another hijrat. The 1930 hijrat had succeeded because it took both the British and Baroda authorities by surprise. Baroda had acted indecisively because the Dewan, V.K.Krishnamachari, had been in London at the time, at the first Round Table Conference. The acting Dewan, G.B.Ambegaokar, had refused to take the responsibility of expelling the satyagrahis from the State. Such an action would have caused grave internal trouble in the State, for the satyagrahis were popular heroes. Also, there was no law to stop people camping in fields, and no laws to allow mass deportation.¹⁰⁷ V.K.Krishnamachari was a firm friend of the British. In late 1931 he hurried back early from the second Round Table Conference to prepare plans to stop the hijrat. Police border patrols were established with instructions to send back migrants and destroy any huts which they attempted to set up in the fields. Methods for close cooperation between British and Baroda authorities were worked out.¹⁰⁸ The British attempted to intimidate the local peasants by marching the First Battalion of the Sixteenth Punjabis under the command of Major Carruthers down the route

106 The Government drew up Ordinances to make Congress illegal, and to smash the organisation. See D.A.Low, 'Civil Martial Law: The Government of India and the Civil Disobedience Movements 1930-34'. D.A.Low, Congress and the Raj, (forthcoming).

107 Baroda was one of the few states to maintain a rule of law. Report by the Manager of the Huzur Political Office, Baroda, 15 November 1930, BRO, Huzur Political Office, Section 38, File 5.

108 Bombay FR1, January 1932.

of the Dandi salt march.¹⁰⁹

Since May, Congress had once more been building up its organisation in Gujarat. Rs. 200,000 were spent on opening Congress centres in villages.¹¹⁰ During the autumn of 1931 Vallabhbhai toured Gujarat demanding further sacrifices from the people. But the lull had dampened enthusiasm for Congress severely. Civil disobedience seemed to have achieved little. The farmers had not even escaped their revenue for 1930-31. Satyagraha no longer seemed such a potent force. The lesser Patidars of Kheda were not radicalised by the onset of the agricultural slump. They had already suffered grave hardships in 1930-31, and if anything, the slump made them more cautious. Vallabhbhai felt that the longer the delay the feebler would be the response, and he begged Gandhi to return from Europe as soon as possible.

The second wave of civil disobedience began on 4 January 1932. On this day Gandhi and Vallabhbhai were arrested in Bombay. Next day all Congress organisations were declared illegal. The vigorous offensive caught Congress workers by surprise. On January 4 Ravishankar Maharaj and Ashabhai Patel restarted the no-revenue campaign at Ras. Next day Ashabhai and fourteen leading Ras Patidars were arrested. Over the next few days all the Kheda leaders were arrested, and all the Congress centres sealed, and their property confiscated. Even educational institutions connected with Congress, like the Sunav national school, were closed.

In the early months of 1932 Borsad Taluka was the most active civil disobedience area in Gujarat.¹¹¹ This was because the January repressions were more severe in Surat District than Kheda. Congress volunteers were driven from their centres with only the clothes they had on. In Borsad

109 Bombay FR1, December 1931.

110 Bombay FR2, May 1931.

111 NML, AICC, p-12/1932.

Taluka, Patidars started moving their property secretly at night to Baroda villages. Forty people from the Sunav area erected a mandva at Vishnoli. The Baroda police immediately tore the huts down and sent them back.¹¹² After this salutary example, no further attempts were made to set up mandvas. By February only four villages in Kheda District were still refusing to pay revenue en masse. These were Sunav, Ras, Palaj and Amod. In eleven other villages individuals were refusing to pay.¹¹³ These fifteen villages suffered brutal police repression. At Gana the mamlatdar of Anand ordered eight Patidars to be stripped naked and made to stand on all fours. They were sporadically whipped. People from the village were forced to watch these humiliations. Such treatment was a terrible indignity for a respectable Patidar. One Patidar agreed to pay out of shame when he saw a relative watching his plight. Another Patidar agreed to pay after he had been given shocks from the battery of the police lorry.¹¹⁴ By mid 1932 only Sunav and Ras were still holding out solidly. Congress had to change its tactics. The no-revenue campaign had failed, and the Congress organisation was in tatters. A few leaders had managed to escape arrest, and from their hiding places they organised weekly processions. These demonstrations continued while civil disobedience lasted. The majority of lesser Patidars were no longer involved, but the dedicated few refused to surrender. Each week a day was celebrated. For instance, on 4 February 1932, 'Gandhi Day' was celebrated. There were processions at fourteen places in Borsad Taluka. At Ras, Sunav, Virsad and Piplav, police dispersed the processions with lathis. At Nadiad there was a hartal, procession and

112 Ghatge to Krishnamachari, 21 January 1932, BRO, Huzur Political Office, Section 38, File 53.

113 The list included Rudel, which was in Baroda State, so I have omitted it. NML, AICC, p-12/1932.

114 Ibid.

lathi charge.¹¹⁵ The last week of each month had a 'Flag Salutation Day', when the Congress Flag was hoisted and torn down by the police.

The main centre for Borsad Taluka was at Bhadran in Baroda territory. The leader there was Shivabhai Patel. He was a native of Bhadran, born in 1899. He was thus a member of the younger and more radical superior Patidar generation. He had left College in Bombay in 1921 to become a khadi worker. He had since then worked in Bhadran, and had been involved in all the Congress movements. He managed to avoid arrest until March 1933, so that for a large part of the civil disobedience period Borsad Taluka was under the same leader. Each Sunday Shivabhai Patel held a secret conference to choose people to court arrest in the week's demonstrations. Most of the civil disobedience activity in Kheda was confined to Borsad Taluka.¹¹⁶

The other important activity was the secret production of patrikas. As in 1930-31, the main one was the Borsad Satyagraha Patrika. This was produced at Bhadran by Pashabhai Amin. He was a superior Patidar of Virsad. He had been in Uganda till 1928. In that year he opened a Purani style gymnasium at Bhadran. The Gym became a local Congress centre, and in 1932 it was used for cyclostyling patrikas.

The Government reacted to the new tactics in a number of ways. 'Cooperative meetings' were organised for loyalists. They were very sparsely attended. In May 1932 a 'League of Peace and Progress' was established, but it soon fizzled out.¹¹⁷ The Collector also tried to attack the economic position of the Patidars. In March 1932 he submitted a proposal to forfeit areas of land held on concession terms by Patidars, and give them to "law abiding citizens", such as Baraiyas and Muslims.¹¹⁸ The Government refused to follow up this potentially

115 Ibid.

116 In the first half of 1932 there were 749 convictions for C.D. in Kheda. By Taluka: Borsad 410; Anand 95; Nadiad 94; Matar 72; Mehmedabad 41; Thasra 25; Kapadvanj 12. Ibid.

117 NML, AICC, miscellaneous category, 1/1932, (Part III), Bombay FR2, May 1932.

118 Bombay FR1, March 1932.

explosive suggestion.

The Government's greatest obsession was to break the spirit of Ras. In 1932 no less than 189 Ras villagers were imprisoned.¹¹⁹ The Government avoided confiscating land initially because of the trouble during the Gandhi-Irwin pact period. Instead they tried to use trickery and persuasion. The authorities called the leaders of Chikhodra village together. Chikhodra was in the same gol as Ras, so that the two villages had many relatives by marriage. The authorities told the Chikhodra leaders that Irwin was weak and had compromised, but Willingdon was strong, and their relatives in Ras would lose their land. The Chikhodra Patidars agreed to pay the revenue for Ras. The Patidars of Ras immediately sent a party to Chikhodra, which sat on the doorsteps of the two leading Chikhodra Patidars and refused to take any food. Ravjibhai Manibhai Patel, who had so far escaped arrest, heard of this and went to Chikhodra. He persuaded the Chikhodra Patidars not to pay.¹²⁰ Ras itself was turned into a prison. Forty police posts were set up in the fields to prevent people cutting their crops. In July 1932 the confiscation of land began. About 2,000 acres worth Rs. 1,600,000 was sold for about Rs. 20,000 to Muslims from Umreth, Dakor, Nadiad, Cambay, Godhra, Tarapur and Ahmedabad. In October 1932 64 policemen were brought to the village, and the Patidars were forbidden to go into the fields.¹²¹

The people of Ras suffered bitterly for their obstinacy. By 1933 they were the only villagers in Kheda still refusing their revenue.

119 List of prisoners in possession of Ashabhai Patel of Ras. All except 23 were Patidars. 10 were women.

120 R.M.Patel, Jivanna Jharna, pp. 371-372.

121 NML, AICC, P-35, Part III/1932.

When the leaders of the village returned from jail in early 1933, they found that the people were in a miserable condition. During 1932 they had produced some khadi cloth, but they had been unable to sell it. Worst of all, the impoverished villagers had lost standing among Patidars. Ras fathers could no longer afford dowries for their daughters, and Patidars of other villages refused to marry their daughters into Ras families.¹²² The lesser Patidars had hoped to achieve greater standing within their caste by joining Gandhi. Instead, all they had gained was contempt. It was a bitter blow to the idealism of the lesser Patidar nationalists. The last of Kheda's no-revenue satyagrahas had ended not in triumph, but in tragedy.

122 Interview with Ambalal Phulabhai Patel, Ras, 21-22 September 1973.

CHAPTER TEN: CONCLUSION

1. The Decline of Lesser Patidar Militancy

In 1934 the leaders of the Gujarat Congress were released from jail to find their organisation smashed. After the ban on Congress was lifted in June 1934, they set about reorganising the party. In 1935 Vallabhbhai Patel spent a considerable period rebuilding his power base among the Patidars of Borsad Taluks. When frosts caused devastation amongst the crops in January 1935, he threatened to lead a no-revenue campaign unless substantial suspensions of the land revenue were granted. In March the Government gave liberal suspensions.¹ In the same month Vallabhbhai discovered that the Government had failed to prevent an outbreak of plague in Borsad Taluka due to gross negligence. He organised his own campaign to eradicate the plague. Congress workers toured the villages treating the sick and disinfecting houses in a blaze of publicity. By June 1935 the plague was under control. Once again, it appeared that Congress had made good its claim to be the true friend of the peasants. In the 1937 provincial elections Congress won a sweeping victory in Kheda.²

1 Bombay FR1, February 1935. Bombay FR1, March 1935.

2 Under the 1935 Government of India Act, the franchise was extended from 3.2% to 13.3% of the Kheda population (under universal franchise about 38% of the Kheda population had the vote in 1972). Farmers who owned about two acres of land gained the vote. Government of India Act 1935, Schedule 5, (H.M.S.O. London 1935). In the elections the only man to stand against the three Congress candidates in Kheda was the Nadiad Desai, Bhagwandas. The results were:

Fulsinhji Dabhi	(Congress)	65,605	elected
Bhailalbai B. Patel	(Congress)	44,888	elected
Babubhai J. Patel	(Congress)	39,374	elected
Bhagwandas Desai	(Independent)	12,858.	

Fulsinhji Dabhi won the biggest individual vote in the whole of Bombay Presidency. Great Britain, Parliamentary Papers 1937-38, Vol. XXI (cmd. 5589) Return showing the Results of Elections in India 1937, (H.M.S.O. London 1937).

In the Local Board elections of the following year Congress won all thirty-eight non-Muslim seats in the district.

But voting was not the same as agitating. The agitations had required a commitment to Congress of an almost religious intensity. By 1934 this commitment had gone, and it was never regained. The days of the classic Gandhian satyagrahas had passed.

The decline of lesser Patidar militancy was only partly the result of the bitter setbacks of 1931-34. The more important causes were economic. By the mid 1930s the agricultural depression in Kheda District was coming to an end. During the 1930s there was the best run of monsoons since the late nineteenth century.³ There was at last a full recovery from the ecological effects of the famine. Thus, although agricultural prices were low during the world-wide economic depression, at least the farmers were producing crops to sell. The lesser Patidars were also gaining new sources of income. In the 1920s many lesser Patidars had left their villages for East Africa. By the mid 1930s large sums of money were starting to flow back from East Africa to the Charotar villages.⁴ With the new capital available the land could be improved, tube wells bored, and processing factories for agricultural produce established in the villages.⁵

3 Seasons were as follows: 1930 - moderate; 1931 - good; 1932 - moderate; 1933 - moderate; 1934 - moderate; 1935 - moderate; 1936 - bad; 1937 - good; 1938 - moderate; 1939 - bad. Papers relating to the Second Revision Settlement of the Anand Taluka of the Kaira District, p. 23.

4 Several scholars have maintained that the large-scale migrations from the Charotar to East Africa began immediately after the great famine of 1899-1900. See: Pocock, Kanbi and Patidar, p. 63. Gillion, Ahmedabad, p. 163. Brown, Gandhi's Rise to Power, p. 88. My own inquiries in the villages of the Charotar showed that the large-scale migrations started in more advanced Patidar villages, such as Sunav, in the mid-1920s, and in less advanced Patidar villages in the 1930s.

5 By 1940 there were 63 tobacco processing factories in Anand Taluka alone. Second Revision Settlement of the Anand Taluka, p. 3.

During this period there was a dramatic increase in cultivation of the profitable tobacco crop.⁶ The return to prosperity was sealed finally by the rise in prices of agricultural produce during the Second World War. The Charotar farmers who had concentrated on tobacco did particularly well, for between 1938-39 and 1945 tobacco prices rose by 500%⁷ No longer could the land revenue be considered a heavy burden.⁸

The agitators had also to a large extent achieved their aims. In 1917 Gandhi had taken up the radical cry of 'democracy for the peasants as well as the elites'. The Kheda no-revenue campaign of 1917-18 had been the first in a wave of peasant agitations throughout India, in which dominant peasant groups had demanded the right of popular control over the land revenue and the revenue administration. The British had resisted these movements firmly, for they could not grant such controls without changing the whole nature of their rule in India. This policy was defeated in 1928 in Bardoli, where for the first time the British were forced to admit that the peasants had been correct to challenge a revenue assessment. This resulted in peasant agitations throughout India from 1930 to 1934. Although these agitations were crushed, the British granted important democratic controls over land revenue in the 1935 Government of India Act. In the 1937-39 Bombay Legislature a Land Revenue Tribunal was established which gave farmers a constitutional right to challenge revenue assessments. Land which had been confiscated from the farmers of Bardoli and Borsad during civil disobedience was

6 In 1924-25, 47,000 acres in Kheda were under tobacco. By the early 1940s, 84,000 acres in Kheda were under tobacco. Harold Mann and others, Department of Agriculture, Bombay, Bulletin No. 132 of 1926, p. 2. M.B.Desai, The Rural Economy of Gujarat, p. 64.

7 Ibid., p. 282.

8 The land revenue revision settlements, which were abandoned in the 1920s after Bardoli, were taken up again in the 1940s. In 1947 enhanced rates were sanctioned in Anand Taluka (+ 10%), Borsad Taluka (+ 7%), Kapadvanj Taluka (+ 15%), and Thasra Taluka (+ 9%). A 5% decrease was granted in Nadiad Taluka. These enhancements were very reasonable, for prices had risen enormously since the last settlements in the 1890s. Since 1947 there have been no further revisions. G.D.Patel, The Land Revenue Settlement and the British Rule in India, pp. 351, 419-20.

returned to them by law. The Bombay Revenue Minister, Moraji Desai, managed to get rid of the leading British I.C.S. officer in Gujarat, who was known to be opposed to Congress.⁹ Thus by 1940 the peasant agitators of Gujarat had achieved one of their fundamental aims.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, Patidars of superior villages regained the initiative in Kheda politics from the lesser Patidars. Throughout India at this time, dominant peasant groups were becoming powerful within Congress, and Kheda provided no exception to the rule. This was not a case of jumping on the bandwagon, for the superior Patidars who took over the Congress leadership were mostly of the pro-Congress generation born around the turn of the century. They had always seen Congress as the power of the future. Their rise was helped by the deaths of several leading Kheda Congressmen in the mid 1930s. Phulchand Bapuji Shah died in 1934, Mohanlal Pandya in 1935, and Abbas Tyabji in 1936. They were replaced by young superior Patidars who had taken part in civil disobedience. One such man was Babubhai Jashabhai Patel, a future chief minister of Gujarat State. Born in 1911, he was a superior Patidar of Nadiad. After he had proved his abilities during civil disobedience he was asked to stand as a Congress candidate for Kheda in the 1937 elections. In 1921, the leadership of the Kheda Congress had been dominated by Brahmans at the district level. Among the top twelve district leaders there had only been one Patidar.¹⁰ By 1937, of the twelve most important Congress leaders in Kheda, eight were Patidars, three were Brahmans, and one was a Vania. Of the eight Patidars, one was Darbar Gopaldas, who was an aristocratic Patidar, four were superior Patidars, and three were

9 Moraji Desai, The Story of my Life, Vol. 1, (Macmillan, Madras 1974), pp. 153-54.

10 See list on page 192, footnote 77.

lesser Patidars.¹¹ In the period 1917-1934, most of the support for Congress came from the Patidars, but Congress had never been a Patidar clique. After 1934, when the spoils of office became apparent, the Kheda Congress rapidly became a Patidar interest group run by superior Patidars.

In 1942 the most active supporters of the Quit India movement in Kheda were superior Patidars. The movement was strongest in the top twelve Patidar villages.¹² The lesser Patidar villagers took part in the demonstrations of the first week, but they were quelled into silence when five Baroda College students were shot dead by police at a railway station in Kheda. No attempt was made to start a no-revenue campaign. Terrorism was the fashion in 1942, and the only villages to produce underground terrorist movements were from these top twelve.¹³ As fervent freedom fighters the superior Patidars could thus claim their place in the new nation in 1947.

2. Vallabhbhai and Gandhi

Vallabhbhai Patel has usually been seen as a loyal disciple of

11 The leaders of the Kheda Congress in 1937 were as follows:
(native place in brackets afterwards)

- | | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------|
| 1. Aristocratic Patidars | Darbar Gopaldas (Vaso) | b. 1887 |
| 2. Superior Patidars | Babubhai Jashabhai Patel (Nadiad) | b. 1911 |
| | Ravjibhai Manibhai Patel (Sojitra) | b. circa 1889 |
| | Ravjibhai Nathabhai Patel (Sojitra) | b. 1899 |
| | Shivabhai Ashabhai Patel (Bhadran) | b. 1899 |
| 3. Lesser Patidars | Ashabhai Lallubhai Patel (Ras) | b. 1893 |
| | Shivabhai Gokalbhai Patel (Chikhoira) | b. 1904 |
| | Tribuvandas Patel (Anand) | b. 1903 |
| 4. Brahmans | Chhotalal Vyas (Umreth) | |
| | Natvarlal Dave (Anand) | b. 1905 |
| | Ravishankar Maharaj (Sarsavani) | b. 1884 |
| 5. Vantias | Madhavlal Shah (Cambay) | b. 1904. |

12 The top twelve were the seven superior villages with the addition of Pij, Od, Sunav, Nar, Uttarsanda.

13 The fact that we have to talk in terms of the 'top twelve' villages shows that the distinction between superior and lesser villages used for the analysis of the 1917-34 period was no longer so useful. The 1942 agitation was very different from the earlier satyagrahas, and a full description of it would be out of place here.

Gandhi, who acted as his local lieutenant in Gujarat during the years 1917 to 1934.¹⁴ Few attempts have been made to examine the exact relationship between the two men. Of the few, the most attractive has been the one which has attempted to see Gandhi as a spiritual leader, Vallabhbhai as a temporal leader.¹⁵ It is attractive because it takes account of Indian tradition. It has often been said that in India authority has two aspects. Religious authority is in the hands of the Brahmans and religious teachers who define the laws of dharma, while temporal authority is in the hands of kings and secular rulers who are supposed to enforce the laws of dharma.¹⁶ Gandhi was therefore seen as a kind of Brahman guru who brought moral credence to the movement, and Vallabhbhai as a kind of Kshatriya warrior, a man of action rather than a thinker, a man who accepted the superiority of Gandhi's philosophical guidance. In 1918, it is argued, Vallabhbhai learnt to wage satyagraha under Gandhi's personal guidance. Gandhi was then able to retreat into his Ashram to act as "the invisible guide and vivifying example".¹⁷ He never led another rural agitation in Gujarat.

This distinction between spiritual and temporal leadership has value as a means of understanding how people in Gujarat could accept the duality in the leadership of Congress. The Congress could be seen as a new kind

14 For instance J. Brown, Gandhi's Rise to Power, p. 105. H.F. Owen, 'Organising for the Rowlatt Satyagraha of 1919', in R. Kumar, Essays on Gandhian Politics, The Rowlatt Satyagraha of 1919, (Oxford University Press 1971), p. 82.

15 Nationalist historians have favoured this interpretation. For instance, Narhari Parikh categorises Gandhi as the 'teacher', Vallabhbhai as the 'general'. N. Parikh, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Vol. I, pp. vii-viii.

16 Louis Dumont, Homo Hierarchicus, p. 228.

17 The phrase is Srinivas Shastri's. Quoted in: Mahadev Desai, The Story of Bardoli, p. 44.

of bhakti sect led by Gandhi, and also as a political party led by Vallabhbhai, because people had been brought up to believe that such duality was legitimate. However, it is not satisfactory as an historical explanation for the differences in the roles of Gandhi and Vallabhbhai. In practice, Vallabhbhai carried great weight with Gandhi, and on several occasions Gandhi acted in deference to him.¹⁸

The most obvious difference between the two men was that one was a Vania from Kathiawad, who had spent much of his life in South Africa, while the other was a Patidar lawyer of Kheda District. Vallabhbhai knew Gujarat far better than Gandhi did. Gandhi came to Kheda in 1918 armed with doctrines he had formed in the very different social and political climate of South Africa. Although Gandhi became popular in Kheda as a new kind of bhakti saint, his doctrines did not prove to be entirely satisfactory in rural India in practice. Many flaws in his doctrine were revealed in the no-revenue campaign and in the subsequent recruiting drive. This shattering experience led to Gandhi's nervous collapse in August 1918. After 1918, Gandhi left the local work in Kheda to Vallabhbhai Patel, a man who was prepared to accept the sometimes distasteful implications of the application of the traditional weapon of peasant passive resistance. For instance, total non-violence was impossible in practice, something even Gandhi was prepared to admit in his more thoughtful moments.¹⁹ At the practical, local level at which Vallabhbhai operated until 1934, the contradictions between theory and

18 Within the Congress party, the opinions of Jawaharlal Nehru and Vallabhbhai Patel probably carried most weight with Gandhi. For instance, in August 1931 Gandhi almost refused to go to London in deference to the wishes of these two men. It has been suggested that it was Vallabhbhai who persuaded Gandhi to reject the Cripps offer of 1942. See John Glendevon, The Viceroy at Bay, (Collins, London 1971), p. 238.

19 In 1939 Gandhi wrote: "Whilst all violence is bad and must be condemned in the abstract, it is permissible for, it is even the duty of, a believer in ahimsa to distinguish between the aggressor and defender." R.K.Prabhu & U.R.Rao, The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi, (Navajivan, Ahmedabad 1967), p. 147.

practice were bound to be more pronounced than at the national level at which Gandhi operated. Gandhi could only keep his doctrine of non-violence pure by acting as an all-India leader. Vallabhbhai was Gandhi's greatest find, for he was the man who could best reconcile the impracticalities of Gandhian philosophy with the realities of local politics.

Therefore, the difference between Gandhi and Vallabhbhai was not so much spiritual-temporal, as national-local. As a result there was a continual tension between Gandhi and Vallabhbhai. Gandhi, the national leader, was cautious, for he realised the all-India implications of over-hasty local action, whereas Vallabhbhai the local leader demanded radical action because his local followers thirsted for the excitement of conflict.

Vallabhbhai the superior Patidar did not have the fear of violence which Gandhi the Vania had. In the Charotar the classes which really feared rural violence were the lesser Patidars and the Vanias. These were the classes which suffered most from the raids of low caste robbers and dacoits. More often than not, these robbers were under the control of rich Patidars, who acted as receivers of the loot. As a result, the superior Patidars had little reason to fear the robbers and dacoits. Vallabhbhai did not want rampant violence, which could destroy the fabric of society, but it is unlikely that he was over-afraid of stirring up low caste bandits during the agitations, for in his personal experience, they could always be controlled in the last resort by the dominant castes.

If the relationship between Gandhi and Vallabhbhai is regarded in this light, it is possible to put forward some tentative suggestions as to the evolution of Vallabhbhai's political philosophy during the years 1918 to 1945. Vallabhbhai Patel was a Patidar lawyer, who in 1918 became the political leader of the lesser Patidars of the Charotar. In 1920 he became a fervent supporter of the doctrine of passive resistance, because such a doctrine was in the best interests of the lesser Patidars.

In 1922 Vallabhbhai was suddenly left in the cold, when Gandhi abandoned the passive resistance movement. Between 1922 and 1942, Gandhi was terrified of stirring up violence in Indian society. In 1930 Gandhi tried to limit the civil disobedience movement to the innocuous issue of the salt revenue. He was fighting for concessions, not trying to bring the British to their knees. Vallabhbhai's radicalism did not die in 1922. Throughout the 1920s, Vallabhbhai fought to show that passive resistance could work in rural India. He continued to believe that peaceful peasant agitation could bring independence for India. His own Gujarati peasants were to be in the forefront of such an agitation. His great chance came in 1930, but he was not given full support by Gandhi to carry out his plans. The failure of the civil disobedience movement was a bad blow to Vallabhbhai, but it had failed because of Gandhi, not because the theory of passive resistance was in itself wrong.

Vallabhbhai did not abandon his beliefs in 1934, as has been sometimes wrongly assumed.²⁰ Initially he opposed the constitutionalists.²¹ In this he differed from his former No-changer colleague, Rajagopalachari. Vallabhbhai had to be persuaded by Gandhi to support the constitutionalist policy of Congress. In 1935, Vallabhbhai spent several months in Borsad Taluka rebuilding his power base among the Patidar peasantry. It cannot be argued that he spent all this time building up electoral support for Congress, for in the elections for the Central Legislature of November 1934, the area voted overwhelmingly for the Congress candidate.²² Vallabhbhai's main reason for supporting Congress entry into the provincial legislatures

20 John Gallagher has made this assumption. John Gallagher, 'Congress in Decline: Bengal 1930 to 1939', in Gallagher, Johnson & Seal, Locality, Province and Nation, (Cambridge University Press 1973), p. 306.

21 M.K.Gandhi, Letters to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, (Navajivan, Ahmedabad 1957), pp. 56-59.

22 The Congress candidate won by a majority of 22,807 votes. His nearest rival got a total of 1,484 votes. Bombay FR2, November 1934.

in 1937 appears to have been that it provided the only means by which Congress could get back the lands confiscated from the peasants of Borsad and Bardoli during civil disobedience.²³ After these lands had been returned by legislation in 1939, Vallabhbhai appears to have lost interest in the 1935 Act. In 1942 Vallabhbhai believed that the time was ripe for the final peasant upsurge. British power would be destroyed, and India would splinter into a mass of basically conservative 'village republics'. They would then give their support to a popular central government led by Congressmen, which would organise violent resistance to the Japanese.²⁴ This plan was based on Vallabhbhai's experience in Gujarat, where socialists had failed to win the support of powerful groups in rural society. The social radicalism of the 1942 uprisings came as a shock to Vallabhbhai. After 1942, he realised that rural violence could provide a very real threat to the dominant groups in rural society. After this date, Vallabhbhai became a constitutionalist. The metamorphosis of Vallabhbhai from local to national leader had been completed.

3. The Nature of the Kheda Agitations

In recent years, there have been two main theories on the underlying structure of agitations among peasants in India, such as the ones in Kheda. Neither is entirely satisfactory when applied to the Kheda agitations.

In the first theory it has been argued that the peasant agitations resulted from the spread of liberal nationalist ideology among a peasant

23 In 1932 Vallabhbhai told Gandhi that he would only participate in the Government if there was no better means available for protecting the interests of the peasants. N.Parikh, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Vol. II, p. 115.

24 Ibid., pp. 478-79.

elite. Liberal nationalism is essentially an ideology of a bourgeoisie which wishes to free the 'nation' from the economic discriminations imposed by imperial powers. In other words, the peasant elites had come to have similar interests to those of the bourgeoisie. This happened as a result of British rule. In the nineteenth century, British rule favoured the growth of a class of rich peasants. They had taken advantage of the development of the railways and the opening up of urban markets for agricultural produce. They took to western education, and some moved into middle class careers in the cities. After 1909, with the extension of the franchise, they were able to use their rural power to win elections. This made them keenly aware of the advantage of swaraj, and thus they joined the Gandhian agitations.²⁵

The theory has the beauty of having a certain irony in it for the British, for as Anil Seal has written: "... nationalism has sought to conserve the standing of those elites which imperialism had earlier raised up or confirmed."²⁶

The theory has much of value in it, but it does not explain peasant agitations. People in a position of material comfort do not, as a rule, provide enthusiastic support for mass agitations. Anyway, if the peasant elites controlled the rural vote after the 1909 and 1919 reforms, why did they need to agitate? In practice, the peasant elites were usually collaborators. Their parties were ones which worked the reforms, such as the Justice Party in Madras, and the Unionists in the Punjab

Let us apply the theory to Kheda District. In Kheda, it was true that liberal nationalist ideology had become popular among rich peasants of the superior Patidar villages. The superior Patidars had a vested

25 This was the explanation favoured by Judith Brown for Kheda District. J. Brown, Gandhi's Rise to Power, pp. 87-93.

26 Anil Seal, The Emergence of Indian Nationalism, (Cambridge University Press 1968), p. 351.

interest in the development of a capitalist economy, and they were often enthusiastic supporters of the swadeshi movement.²⁷ Several of the leaders of the nationalist movement were from this class. But the class as a whole did not provide mass support for the Gandhian movement. The agitators were for the most part lesser Patidars, a peasant class which had very little understanding of the doctrines of liberal nationalism.

The second theory to be looked at attempts to explain peasant agitation in terms of factional conflicts. This rests on the work of anthropologists, such as F.G.Bailey, who have shown that factional conflicts tend to predominate in local politics. The majority of political conflicts in rural India are between factions fighting for the spoils of power. Factions tend to form around people who have access to political power. Factions are organised on vertical lines, and cut across horizontal organisations, such as caste, so that a faction will represent more of a hierarchy than class. Because factions are fighting for merely a bigger piece of the cake, their conflicts are not based on ideological grounds.²⁸

The theory of factional conflict has been used by David Washbrook in an article on politics in Madras Presidency during the nationalist period.²⁹ This study provided a refreshing change from the old concentration among historians on the nationalism of the liberal bourgeoisie.

27 The growth of swadeshi sentiments was noticed in Kheda in 1908. Collector's Report, Kheda 1907-08, p. 25. In the following year Collector Ghosal reported "... last year some Patidars in Nadiad started a factory for manufacturing stockings, but the cost of the article came too high to compete with Japanese products." Collector's Report, Kheda 1908-09, p. 35.

28 See F.G.Bailey, Stratagems and Spoils, (Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1970), pp. 51-55.

29 David Washbrook, 'Country Politics: Madras 1880 to 1930', in Gallagher, Johnson & Seal, Locality, Province and Nation.

The dominant castes were at last placed in the centre of the stage, and they were shown to have real, if somewhat selfish, reasons of their own for becoming involved in the new type of politics. His study of the 'wet regions' of Andhra was particularly interesting, for in that fertile area there was a class of peasants similar to the Patidars of Kheda. According to Washbrook, there was continual competition within this class for a greater share in the wealth of the area. As a result, factional conflicts were vigorous and chronic. Washbrook went on to say: "In the Andhra deltas, men who lost out in the district boards or in the division of spoils by the administration were able to manufacture their own rival political systems based on agitation, protest and publicity."³⁰ In other words, the peasant elites were able to engineer agitations by stirring up members of their particular factions. So-called 'nationalist agitations' were thus in reality a mere ploy in a struggle for lucre, and nationalist ideology was used, rather than believed in.

Anil Seal has attempted to give Washbrook's insight a wider validity.³¹

What seems to have decided political choices in the localities was the race for influence, status and resources. In the pursuit of these aims, patrons regimented their clients into factions which jockeyed for position. Rather than partnership between fellows, these were usually associations of bigwigs and followers. In other words they were vertical alliances, not horizontal alliances. Local alliances were seldom marked by the alliance of landlord with landlord, peasant with peasant, educated with educated, Muslim with Muslim and Brahmin with Brahmin.

Can we apply this theory to Kheda District? We have seen how Vithalbhai Patel organised his own faction in 1911 to compete against the dominant power in the district, the Desais of Nadiad. It could

30 Ibid., p. 210.

31 Anil Seal, 'Imperialism and Nationalism in India', Ibid., p. 3.

be argued that Darbar Gopaldas used the Congress movement to enhance his own position against the Nadiad Desais. Because of his populist activities, he was able to win the rural vote after 1922. It could be argued that the Gandhian movement was a kind of factional movement. People tended to adhere to Congress as they had adhered to bhakti sects in the past. A supporter of the Swaminarayan 'faction' was unlikely to be a fervent supporter of the Gandhian 'faction'.

However, this does not really work. The movement in Kheda was strong because it received mass support from the lesser Patidars, in other words, it depended on horizontal rather than on vertical alliances. Because this was so, the movement in Kheda had a strong ideological content. It might be argued in answer to this that when a faction launches a populist movement, it does, for a short time, attract support from a class such as the lesser Patidars. But if this was so, then horizontal alliances were the basis for peasant agitations in India. Washbrook has told us nothing about how faction leaders could turn a factional conflict based on vertical alliances into an agitation based on horizontal alliances.

Peasant politics cannot be explained purely in terms of factional conflict. As Hamza Alavi has shown, peasant society is highly complex, and political conflict can be organised on horizontal, as well as vertical, alliances.³² Factional conflicts tend to be most intense among rich peasants, who are closest to the spoils. These rich peasants can mobilise the support of those dependent on them, namely tenants and agricultural wage-labourers. They cannot, however, mobilise the support of the middle peasantry in the same manner. According to Alavi, middle peasants tend to unite in strong kinship organisations, known in the

32 Hamza Alavi, 'Peasant Classes and Primordial Loyalties', in The Journal of Peasant Studies, Vol. I, No. I, (1973), pp. 54-59.

Punjab as biraderis. He writes:³³

For the independent peasant proprietors, the value of biraderi solidarity and tightly knit biraderi organisation lies partly in the fact that such organisation provides them a measure of security vis-a-vis the power of big landlords; by themselves they are too vulnerable.

In other words, the middle peasantry tend to have strong horizontal, or class, organisations, which prevent rich peasants gaining too great a control over them. If we look at Washbrook's theory in the light of this, we can say that his analysis is convincing for the 'dry regions' of Madras, where there was a pronounced divide between rich and poor peasants. In these areas, the rich peasants could mobilise factional support from the 'masses' with ease. The analysis is not convincing when applied to the 'wet regions' of Andhra, where the predominant support for Congress came from a middle peasantry.

It is now time to turn to a more general theory about peasant movements. This theory seeks to explain peasant militancy in terms of a radical peasant class. This theory, first formulated by Lenin, has become popular in recent years as a means of explaining the radical peasant movements which have been so important in recent history. A leading contemporary exponent of this theory is Eric Wolf, who has argued that these peasant risings have been caused by the spread of North Atlantic capitalism throughout the world. In rural areas there has been an increasing polarization between the rich peasants, who have become capitalist farmers, and the rest of the peasants. In the past, the middle peasants had held a sharehold right in the village, but under a capitalist economy they were demoted to the ranks of the proletariat, as mere tenant farmers. Unlike the poor peasants, the middle peasants have often refused to accept this menial role, and it has been this class which has provided much of the backing for the revolutionary peasant wars

33 Ibid., p. 56.

of the twentieth century.³⁴

On the surface, the Kheda agitations do not conform to this pattern. For the most part, the agitators were Patidars who had been granted land ownership rights under a capitalist economy. They were not agitating for the right to own the land they were cultivating. Another objection would be that nowhere has it been shown that the agitators were a class of middle peasants. Throughout the thesis, a distinction has been made between 'superior' and 'lesser' Patidars, rather than between 'rich' and 'middle' peasants.

Taking the last objection first, it is true that we cannot describe the lesser Patidars as a class of middle peasants. Among the lesser Patidars it was possible to find landlords, rich peasants, middle peasants and even poor peasants. Before we can go any further it is necessary to define these terms. Peasants can be divided into classes on the basis of the resources controlled by each class. The main resource in rural areas is, of course, land, and although other factors are involved, it will be adequate for our purposes here to base our definition on amounts of land held by each class. Using this criteria, landlords are those who own sufficient land to be able to live from the proceeds of renting it out. Rich peasants are those who own sufficient land to be able to employ wage-labourers to cultivate it, so that although they will supervise agricultural operations, they will not actually work themselves. Middle peasants are essentially owner-cultivators whose plots of land are not large enough to permit them to employ full-time labourers. Their families help them with the cultivation of their farms, and they only hire labourers during busy periods or for the more menial tasks. Poor peasants are those who do not possess

34 Eric R. Wolf, Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century, (Faber and Faber, London 1973), pp. 276-282.

a large enough plot to support themselves and their families, so that they have to hire themselves out as labourers. Below these peasant classes are the landless labourers and vagabonds.³⁵

In this thesis, divisions amongst the peasantry have been examined in terms of castes and hierarchies within castes, rather than in terms of class. Cultural rather than economic distinctions have been used. This approach has been taken in the interests of precision, for the data available has tended to concentrate on cultural rather than class differences. For instance, the census reports gave detailed figures for castes but not classes, and most of the people who were involved with the agitations tended to see divisions in rural society in cultural rather than in class terms. Class categories could never have been used with such precision. The question to be asked now is whether or not these cultural divisions related to class divisions.

An attempt can be made to answer this question with the help of data which appeared in the settlement report for Petlad Taluka of 1921.³⁶ Petlad Taluka lay entirely within the Charotar, so the data can be taken to be representative for the Charotar as a whole. In 1921 there were 19,553 landowners in Petlad Taluka. These can be divided into classes if we consider that those who owned over twenty-five bighas of land (about fifteen and a half acres) were rich peasants, those who owned between five and twenty-five bighas were middle peasants, and those who owned less than five bighas (about three acres) were poor peasants. Using these criteria, we find that the peasant classes were divided by percentage as follows:

Rich peasants	6
Middle peasants	50
Poor peasants	<u>44</u>
	100

35 This paragraph owes much to suggestions made by Ranajit Guha.

36 Jamabandi Revision Settlement Report of the Petlad Taluka of the Baroda Division 1921, pp. 9-11.

These figures show that the middle peasantry were the largest landowning element in the Charotar; in other words, this was an area of a particularly strong middle peasantry. They do not tell us how many of the rich peasants were also landlords, for although we are told that 23% of landowners rented out their land to some extent, we are not told the percentage of landlords who rented out enough land to live off the proceeds.

These class categories can be related to cultural categories by a further set of figures which showed which castes owned the land, and the average holding per bigha of each caste member. These figures were as follows:

	<u>% of land held</u>	<u>Average holding per caste member in <u>bighas</u></u>
Patidars	60	10
Brahmans	8	8
Baraiyas	10	5
Muslims	4	7
Vanias	2	5
Others	<u>16</u>	10
	100	

It therefore appears that a large amount of land in the Charotar was held by Patidars who came into the category of middle peasants. Unfortunately, the figures are for all villages in Petlad Taluka. We cannot use them to contrast patterns of landholding in superior and lesser Patidar villages. The only figures giving some indication of these differences dealt with the ownership of land in six Baraiya villages which were in predominantly Patidar areas. Four of these Baraiya villages were near to the superior Patidar village of Sojitra. In these four villages, 77% of the land was owned by outsiders, who were mostly Patidar landlords from Sojitra. In the other two Baraiya villages, which were near lesser Patidar villages, only 24% of the land was owned by outsiders.³⁷ This rather inadequate evidence points to the fact that there were more landlords in superior

37 Ibid., p. 20.

Patidar villages than in lesser Patidar villages. Although none of these figures allow us to make any categorical statements as to the relation between caste and class in the Charotar, it is possible to make a tentative suggestion, based partly on these figures and partly on interviews in the villages, that the cultural divisions in the Charotar could be related to class, in that the large majority of Patidars in superior Patidar villages were landlords and rich peasants, while the large majority of Patidars in lesser Patidar villages were middle peasants.

During the agitations, the superior Patidars tended to act in the class interests of the landlords and rich peasants, while the lesser Patidars tended to act in the class interests of the middle peasantry. The rich peasants of the lesser Patidar villages were not in a position to override the wishes of the middle peasants of their villages, for they were very much in a minority. This was demonstrated in 1930-31. The initiative to join the civil disobedience movement was taken usually by the mass of Patidar peasants in each village. The rich peasants, who often acted as village leaders, had to be forced in many cases to join in and lead the agitation. As a result, we can say that although the lesser Patidars were not a class of middle peasants as such, they tended to act in the class interests of the middle peasantry.

The other objection is that the lesser Patidars had no reason to be militant, because they owned their land. This would have been true during periods of prosperity. However, during the years 1899-1927 there were continual harvest failures, then, when a run of good harvests came after 1927, agricultural prices slumped. In other words, this was a period of crisis for the lesser Patidars. The crisis made them aware that the capitalist system was no longer to their advantage. This was what made them militant, not liberal nationalist ideology, or factional

ties. The movement was non-violent because their attitude towards the capitalist system was in fact ambivalent. Although they disliked it, because it had apparently let them down, it had given them ownership of their land, so that they did not want to undermine the system too radically. This was why Gandhi was so suitable for them, for he managed to combine a loathing of capitalism with the very doctrine of capitalism itself, liberal nationalism.

The agricultural depression also led to a strengthening of class solidarity amongst the lesser Patidars. Class solidarity amongst peasants is often expressed through kinship loyalties.³⁸ One of the notable features of the Kheda agitations was the degree of solidarity the lesser Patidars could enforce amongst themselves by using their gols, or marriage circles. These bodies were particularly strong during this period, because of the agricultural depression. During the depression, very few lesser Patidars could afford expensive hypergamous marriages into superior Patidar villages. It was in their economic interests to enforce endogamy amongst themselves by reforming and strengthening their gols.³⁹ Therefore, as long as the agricultural depression lasted, their gol organisations were particularly strong. The success of the agitations in Kheda was to a large extent due to the strength of these horizontal, or class ties amongst the lesser Patidars during this period.

Having looked at the agitations in Kheda in the light of these theories on peasant movements, we can now summarise our findings briefly. During the period 1917 to 1934, the force behind the Kheda agitations came from a class of middle peasants who were suffering from economic hardship. During this period horizontal, rather than vertical alliances were most important in the politics of the district. The central political

38 Alavi, Peasant Classes and Primordial Loyalties, p. 49.

39 This tendency was noted in the Baroda Census Report of 1911. Census of India 1911, Vol. XVI, Baroda, part 1, Report, pp. 136-37.

conflict in the district was of an ideological nature. The loyalist party, led by the Nadiad Desais, maintained a precarious power by collaborating with the British bureaucracy. The nationalist party, led by Darbar Gopaldas, was able to sweep the polls when it chose to fight elections, because it commanded the support of the middle peasantry of the Charotar. During the period 1917 to 1934, nationalist politics in Kheda were based not on factions and spoils, but on class and ideology. After 1934, with the end of the agricultural depression, the rich peasants regained the initiative in the politics of Kheda District, and there was a corresponding decline in militancy, and a return to factional politics.

4. The Wider Relevance

The peasant agitations in Gujarat had great importance in the history of modern India. It would be wrong to believe that they actually moved the British. The imperial power only felt overwhelmed by peasant agitations when they turned to violence on a large scale in the communal rioting of 1946-47. However, the Gujarat agitations did help to weaken British power at a local level, through the attack on the land revenue system. British imperialism in India was financed by land revenue, and depended on the autocratic rule of the revenue bureaucracy to maintain control at a local level. In the nineteenth century the British had fostered a prosperous class of landowning peasants, who they hoped would become the bulwark of their rule. They had given the peasants canal systems, laws to check village usurers, railways to transport their crops to urban markets, and above all, education. But they had refused the peasants any control over the actions of the revenue bureaucracy. As a result, when certain of these newly prosperous peasant classes were hit by natural disasters, financial crises, or harsh revenue settlements in the early twentieth century, and could no longer afford to pay their revenue, they began to demand control over the system itself.

The actual agitations in Gujarat were on a very limited scale, being largely confined to Bardoli and Borsad Talukas. Their importance lay in the effect they had on the rest of India. At the time it seemed as if the 'Indian peasant' was battling with the might of imperialism. The British were always afraid that if they yielded an inch, peasants throughout India would refuse their revenue. British imperialism was always over-extended, and even marginal victories threatened to tip the balance against the Raj.

The peasant agitations in Bardoli and in the Charotar provided potent imagery for the mythology of the Indian freedom struggle, and for the building of the Indian nation. In Gujarat it seemed as if the Vantias and Patidars had linked arms to show that the peasantry of India had united with Indian capitalism to oppose British rule. The real allies of the peasants were shown to be not the British whose policies had helped them so much in the nineteenth century, but bourgeois Congressmen who were prepared to languish in jail for years for peasant rights. In Gujarat, it seemed, the alliance between the liberal nationalists of the cities and the peasantry had become a living reality. But above all, there was the long march to Dandi through the garden countryside of Gujarat, and the sturdy Patidar, standing against the lathis, with drops of blood on his sparkling white khadi. For all those who doubted, here was Gandhi's country, and here were Gandhi's peasants.

GLOSSARY

ahimsa	non-injury
amin	revenue official acting as intermediary between <u>desai</u> and <u>matadar</u>
bajri	variety of millet, the most popular cereal crop in Kheda District
bhag	a part, a share in a <u>narva</u> village
bhakti	devotion, worship
bidi	small conical shaped cigarette
bigha	an area of land equivalent to about five-eighths of an acre
chalum	clay pipe for smoking tobacco or <u>ganja</u>
chora	open space in centre of village
chothai	fine for non-payment of land revenue equivalent to a quarter of the sum due
dal	vegetable dish made with lentils
daru	liquor made from the flowers of the <u>mhowra</u> tree
desai	chief revenue official under the <u>jagirdar</u> or tax-farmer in the Mughal and Maratha revenue bureaucracies
dharia	bill-hook used by farmers
dharma	religion, duty
dharmashala	public building used as a rest house, meeting house or school
dhoti	loin cloth covering most of the legs, a common form of dress in Gujarat
ghi	clarified butter
gol	Patidar marriage circle, same as <u>ekhada</u>
goradu	rich loam soil found in the Charotar tract
gram sevak	village social worker
hijrat	migration
hookah	pipe most commonly used for smoking tobacco in Kheda District

inam	form of land tenure, in which an estate or village is granted free of revenue or with nominal revenue in return for services
jati	caste or sub-caste
khadi	hand-woven cloth
khadki	Patidar lineage in a Patidar village
kharif	monsoon crop
khedut	farmer
kodra	an inferior millet common in Kheda District
kurta	Indian shirt
mahajan	committee of the leading financiers and merchants of a town
majmun	common land
mamlatdar	revenue official in charge of a taluka
mandva	camp
matadar	head of a <u>khadki</u> , a village elder
mhowra	a tree, the flowers used for <u>daru</u>
moti	large
mukhi	village headman, same as <u>patel</u>
narva	form of land tenure, revenue is paid by the village shareholders (<u>patidars</u>) rather than by the landowners as a whole
pargana	Mughal revenue district
patel	village headman
patidar	shareholder in a narva village, responsible with other <u>patidars</u> for payment of land revenue
patrika	bulletin
punam	period of full moon
rabi	winter crop
rashtriya shala	national school
rotli	flat unleavened bread
ryot	peasant

ryotwari	form of land tenure, the landowning peasants pay their revenue direct to government
satyagraha	Gandhian form of passive resistance
sampradaya	religious sect
sarkar	government
swadeshi	Indian-made
taluka	sub-division of a district
talukdar	holder of a <u>talukdari</u> estate, the government collected the revenue direct from the <u>talukdar</u> ; in Gujarat often referred to as <u>thakor</u>
talati	village accountant
vahivatdar	Baroda State revenue official in charge of a taluka
veth	customary service demanded by officials.

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