
Bardoli peasants campaign against the Government of Bombay, 1928

- [\(mainly or initiated by\) indigenous participants](#) [1]
- [\(mainly or initiated by\) people of color](#) [2]
- [included participation by more than one social class](#) [3]

Timing

February 12,
1928

to:

August 4,
1928

Location and Goals

Country:

India

Location City/State/Province:

Bardoli taluka (county) in the Surat district, Bombay Presidency

[View Location on Map](#)

Goals:

Primary: persuade the government to launch an impartial inquiry into the enhancement of land revenue assessment in Bardoli. Secondary: discharge of all Satyagrahi prisoners, restoration of all forfeited lands, payment at market price for confiscated movable property, remission of all dismissals and other punishments arising from the struggle.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 090. Revenue refusal

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 090. Revenue refusal

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 090. Revenue refusal

Methods in 4th segment:

- 090. Revenue refusal

Methods in 5th segment:

- 090. Revenue refusal

Methods in 6th segment:

- 090. Revenue refusal

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 001. Public speeches
- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 020. Prayer and worship
- 031. "Haunting" officials
- 033. Fraternalization
- 037. Singing
- 048. Protest meetings
- 055. Social boycott
- 073. Policy of austerity
- 080. Suppliers' and handlers' boycott
- 120. Withholding or withdrawal of allegiance
- 125. Boycott of government employment and positions>Resignation of government officials
- 129. Refusal of assistance to enforcement agents
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws
- 173. Nonviolent occupation
- 183. Nonviolent land seizure
- 198. Dual sovereignty and parallel government

Segment Length:

Approximately 35 days

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Group characterization:

- Bardoli Hindu peasants
- Women
- construction workers

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel

Partners:

construction workers (some of other faiths, such as Muslims) who had worked with Gandhi in South Africa; several women from outside the district (some also of other faiths, such as a Parsis); active satyagrahis (volunteers) - numbering about 250 and including Hindus of all and no castes, Muslims, and a few Parsis

External allies:

Mahatma Gandhi; sympathizers; cooperators – including several thousand Kaliparaj (aboriginals). Most of the taluka inhabitants ultimately cooperated with and supported the campaigners

Involvement of social elites:

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, a political and social leader, was invited to head the campaign; Mahatma Gandhi, although not directly involved in the campaign, supported the struggle through his writings and visits in Bardoli; village headmen and subordinate officials, village officials and several elected members of the Bombay Legislative Council also supported the campaign eventually.

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:

Joining order of groups not known

Segment Length:

Approximately 35 days

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Governor of Bombay, officials of the Revenue Department and the district police (reinforced by contingents of Pathans - Muslims of the North West Frontier Province) brought from Bombay.

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Not known

Repressive Violence:

land seizures, attachment of movable property (police forcibly seized personal property), wide scale arrests for “obstructing performance of official duties and for criminal trespass” and different forms of violence against satyagrahis

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Total points:

10 out of 10 points

Notes on outcomes:

The government embarked on a series of concessions – such as the reduction of enhancement rates in some villages, culminating with an agreement to the demand for an inquiry, upon the undertaking by satyagrahis that conditions of payment would be fulfilled. An Inquiry Committee was appointed to investigate conditions in Bardoli and the neighboring taluka, Chorasi, from November 1928 to March 1928. Representatives of the villages were freely heard. Forfeited lands were restored to their original owners. All satyagrahis taken prisoners were released. The assessment was finally revised.

The infrastructure of the groups survived and constituted an active social force.

The campaign witnessed an expansion in membership and partnerships. The entire taluka finally participated and the campaign became known nationally, with support coming from outside Bardoli as well.

The Bombay Government (through its Revenue Department) had, in 1927, enhanced the land revenue assessment in the Bardoli taluka (county) by a nominal 22 percent, which, when applied, amounted in some cases to as much as 60 percent enhancement. This translated in increased land taxes. The Bardoli peasants had immediately made several claims regarding this modification, the most important of which were that the rate of enhancement was unjust and that it had been established without full and appropriate investigation. In addition, they claimed that the tax official's report was inaccurate and thus an increase in the tax was unwarranted. The local Congress Party organization published a critical report to show that peasants could not sustain the enhanced assessments and a committee organized by the Congress drafted a petition and waited upon the Revenue Member of the State government early in 1927. Given that the authorities refused to recognize these claims as legitimate and change the law, the Bardoli peasants decided to organize a campaign aimed at pressuring the Bombay government to launch an impartial inquiry into the enhancement of land revenue assessment in Bardoli.

In September 1927, they held a conference in Bardoli, where participants unanimously resolved to withhold payment of the enhanced portion of the assessment. On January 5, 1928. Peasants invited Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, a political and social leader, to lead them in their struggle, following a government order that urged collectors to proceed with collections. Patel accepted presidency of the conference of peasants, which met on February 4, 1928. He initiated correspondence with the government, and upon the reply that the government was “not prepared to make any concession”, the peasants adopted a resolution (12 February 1928) setting forth the demand for an inquiry and the refusal to pay the assessment until the government either accepted the amount of the old assessment as full payment or until an impartial tribunal was appointed to investigate the situation.

Patel was assisted in his role by a tier of secondary leadership composed of construction workers (some of other faiths, such as two Muslims) who had worked with Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa and several women from outside the district (some also of other faiths, such as a Parsi woman from Bombay). Gandhi, although not directly involved in the campaign, supported the struggle through his writings in *Young India* (a weekly journal published in English by Mahatma Gandhi from 1919 to 1932) and through his visit in Bardoli two months after the satyagraha had been launched. Active satyagrahis, or volunteers, supported the campaign, as well as several

sympathizers and cooperators. The volunteers numbered about 250 and included Hindus, Muslims, and a few Parsis. Several thousand Kaliparaj (aboriginals) also cooperated with the campaigners. Women were well represented as participants and had central roles, leading some of the main activities. Most of the taluka inhabitants ultimately cooperated with and supported the campaigners, although initially moneylenders, village headmen, and subordinate officials had shown reluctance (the officials resigned their positions in joining the campaign). The opposition included mainly the Governor of Bombay, officials of the Revenue Department and the district police (reinforced by contingents of Pathans—Muslims of the North West Frontier Province) brought from Bombay.

In the process of organizing the campaign, its leaders utilized the four centers of construction work already established in the taluka and used Bardoli village as headquarters, establishing a total of 16 satyagraha camps in various other villages in the taluka. From the headquarters, participants issued a daily news bulletin, as well as occasional pamphlets and speeches. The circulation of publicity extended to other villages and towns in the province, and campaigners even received paid subscriptions from outside the district. The headquarters issued instructions for volunteers and satyagrahi messengers were responsible for their distribution.

The initial phase of the campaign centered on educating the participants and potential participants in the meaning of the struggle. Speeches by leaders emphasized the need for discipline and preparation to undergo hardship and austerity. The use of mass means of communication was privileged in disseminating the message and strategy of the campaign, with the composition and singing of songs about the satyagraha, the reciting of prayers, and the reading of excerpts from Gandhi's autobiography. Mass meetings were widely organized, but there was little use made of processions and other public demonstrations, for in the case of Bardoli, the majority of the population could safely be assumed to be in favor of the satyagrahi's objectives. Campaigners collected signatures to the satyagraha pledge (those who refused to sign were subjected to social boycott) and made efforts to convert headmen to the cause by persuading them that they should become spokesmen for their respective villages, rather than agents of the government. Satyagrahis circulated news bulletins from neighboring talukas expressing sympathy and encouragement. Anticipating possible governmental actions, peasants were prepared to refuse to cultivate lands for any outside purchasers of land that might be forfeited.

The main action phase of the campaign included non-cooperation, trespass, submission to arrest, and resignation of offices. Peasants met revenue collectors with closed doors or, receiving them, read aloud extracts from Patel's speeches and tried to persuade the enforcement agents that they could not collect the revenue. When police re-enforcements broke down doors and carried equipment away, peasants began to dismantle carts and other equipment, hiding the parts in different places. Women volunteers built huts and camped on attached lands. Peasants continued regular sowing despite the change in legal status of land. Volunteers followed officials everywhere, camping on roads outside official bungalows. When arrested, they were replaced by others "until authorities tired of the process." Village officials were persuaded to resign in protest. Several elected members of the Bombay Legislative Council resigned seats in sympathy. The protest escalated and ultimately reached the national level, with the President of the Central Legislative Assembly explaining the peasants' situation to the Viceroy and contributing heavily to satyagraha funds by pledging monthly financial support.

The campaigners used economic boycott by refusing to supply officials and other members of the opposition with non-essential goods and services. The final step of the movement—usurping the functions of the government—was only partially present in the Bardoli campaign. For an official to receive any services in the taluka, he had to have the permission of the satyagraha headquarters, which was particularly alarming to the government. The government issued final notices urging the peasants to pay the assessment or suffer forfeiture of land. The peasants refused to comply with these notices. This involved sending letters of refusal to individual officials urging them to resign their positions rather than trying to win them over to the campaign's side.

Propaganda was an integral part of the campaign. Not only did publicity function to strengthen the confidence of the peasants of Bardoli and to control mass action, but it also secured significant aid in funds and moral support from neighboring districts and finally, from the entire county.

The reaction of the opponents included land seizures, seizure of movable property (police forcibly seized personal property, including utensils, cots, carts, buffaloes), wide-scale arrests (for “obstructing performance of official duties and for criminal trespass”) and violence against satyagrahis, misrepresentation of facts (attempts to cajole peasants into paying assessment by saying that a prominent citizen of the village had paid or showing fake receipts) and propaganda against the organizers of the satyagraha (accounts circulated that villagers were terrorized by organizers into withholding payment). The government also attempted to obtain payment during later months of the campaign by promising exemption from fines if the amount was paid within the given time. Additionally, the introduction of Muslims as officials and police was meant to undermine the cohesion of the peasants and split the group on the basis of religious communities.

Organizers stressed nonviolence and lack of resentment in the treatment of opponents. Providers supplied collectors with all necessities at market rates. Leaders urged that the campaigners treat police and officials as friends. Satyagrahis exercised social boycott with restraint and rejected violent tactics (suggestions of erecting barricades along the roads or puncturing tires were firmly opposed), preferring tactics such as non-possession: all conveniences were discarded, even brass vessels, with the objective “...of ensuring the Government has nothing to lay their hands on”. The campaigners’ action involved a revision of demands. The government finally embarked on a series of concessions – such as the reduction of enhancement rates in some villages – and in July, Patel was invited to confer with the Governor.

The government insisted on full payment before agreeing to an inquiry, which would have been conducted by a Revenue officer together with a judicial officer. Patel accepted the principle of an official inquiry provided it was judicial in nature and that representatives of the people be invited to give evidence. Patel also presented additional demands: discharge of all Satyagrahi prisoners, restoration of all forfeited lands, payment at market price for confiscated movable property, remission of all dismissals and other punishments arising from the struggle. Patel reasserted the intention of the satyagrahis to arrive at a solution that was honorable and acceptable both to the government and people. On August 4, the campaigners and government agreed upon a formula that met the satyagrahis’ full list of basic demands. Patel conceded to the government’s demand that the original tax be paid before the government granted the inquiry. This action, as well as the wording of the agreement, allowed the government to save face and yet meet the full demands of the satyagrahis for an impartial inquiry. The effect of the campaign extended beyond Bardoli. As Nehru observed, “the real success of their campaign...lay in the effect it produced among the peasantry all over India. Bardoli became a sign and a symbol of hope and strength and victory to the Indian peasant.”

Research Notes

Influences:

Gandhian philosophy and other examples of satyagrahas in India influenced this campaign (1).

This campaign influenced similar satyagrahas and other forms of civil resistance, in India and beyond. As Nehru observed, “the real success of the campaign...lay in the effect it produced among the peasantry all over India. Bardoli became a sign and a symbol of hope and strength and victory to the Indian peasant.” (2)

Sources:

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Additional Notes:

Although the campaign was limited to the local objective, it was integrated in the larger Indian struggle for self-government. Gandhi explained that similar conditions existed in other parts of India and that the Bardoli experience would exercise a wide influence.

In addition to the peasants of Bardoli, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel also organized the peasants of Kheda and Borsad (in Gujarat) in non-violent civil disobedience against oppressive policies imposed by the British Raj, becoming one of the most influential leaders in Gujarat. He rose to the leadership of the Indian National Congress and was at the forefront of rebellions and political events, playing a major role in the country's struggle for independence and guiding its integration into a united, independent nation.

Edited by Max Rennebohm (23/06/2011)

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[Back to top](#)

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