



## The Role of Vallabhbhai Patel in Kheda Movement – A study

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### Abstract:

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel played a crucial role in Indian freedom struggle and in building a Nation after freedom. There are so many attributes to him like Iron man of India, staunch follower of Gandhiji, Man of action, Bismark of India, etc... The giant Trees are also start with a small seed. As Neil Arm Strong who was the first human laid foot on moon said “It was a small step but it is a great leap to human race”. As it is a small beginning, the local Satyagraha movement transformed the National movement in Gandhian era. Kheda movement shaped Vallabhbhai Patel into State leader, as a hero of Gujarat and fame throughout India. It is proper to recall a century past event that raised a local leader in Kheda district entry with peasants related issue plunge into freedom struggle and gave a path to become builder of future India.

**Key words:** Satyagraha, Role, Peasant, Land tax, Movement.

### Introduction:

Vallabhbhai Patel was born in the Patidar Community as the fourth child in his family on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1875 at Nadiad. His father was Jhaverbhai was a Petty farmer and mother's name Ladba Patel. His parents lived at Karamsad in Kheda district. His elder brothers were Somabhai, Narsibhai and Vithalbhai Patel. Kashibhai is his younger brother and a sister named Dahiba. Vallabhbhai Patel educated in various schools at Nadiad, Petlad and Borsad. At the age of 17 Vallabhbhai Patel married Jhaverba, a young girl aged 12 years. At the age 22 years Patel passed Matriculation. Vallabhbhai Patel had a daughter Manibehn in 1904 and a son Dahyabhai in 1906. In 1909 Patel's wife Jhaverba died due to cancer at Bombay. He sacrificed Barrister education in England towards his elder brother Vithalbhai Patel. Again He got an opportunity at the age of 36 he studied at England finished his course within 30 months with high grade. He settled in Ahmadabad and raised one of the most successful lawyers in the city<sup>1</sup>.

Every human life's history there is turning points. Vallabhbhai Patel's life turning point held in 1916 association with Gandhiji. He worked at Gujarat Sabha Gandhi as President, Patel as Secretary. This organization brought both future stalwarts in close association. In future Gandhi transformed as Father of Nation and

Patel evolved as builder of Nation.

**Methodology:**

Historical approach, Chronological method is followed in this research paper. Primary and Secondary sources mentioned in references gone thoroughly for Literature Review. There are some minor gaps found about Kheda Movement which had to seek in the light of completion of centenary regarding this movement. A flash focused on this issue to spark for elevation of significance Kheda movement. In this Article, a little light thrown on the occasion of 100 years (Centenary) of Kheda Movement, it is proper to recollect the memories and electrify the patriotic feelings in future generations of Indian Soil. Though the limitations on contemporary information strained, this historical approach give little effort to focus on one of the early seed of Gandhian Movements in India. Here in this research Article studies how the Satyagraha movement seeds germinated in Patel's mind regarding the early movement kheda Satyagraha at him. In future course how it gave impact on his leading various movements.

**Kheda Region:**

Kheda District located in Central Part of Gujarat State in Western India. Previously Kheda called as Kaira. Between Mahi and Sabarmati rivers the Kheda region consists with black soil. Kheda district lies between the cities of Ahmadabad and Baroda which includes wealthy port of Cambay. The major crops here are Tobacco, Cotton, Wheat and Rice. The Northern part of Kheda becomes marshy and impossible to cultivate during monsoon season. Kheda became highly assessed area under Colonial rule in India. The peasants here are mostly depending on the monsoon for cultivation. Here a small canal built and opened in 1881 during British rule<sup>2</sup>.

**Kheda Satyagraha Movement -1918:**

In 1917 heavy flood rains seriously damaged the crops in Kheda district. Plague, high prices and drought conditions added fuel to lead Green famine condition in Kheda. The peasants, the land holders of Kheda region suffered and were extreme stress. British Government had not taken any kind of relief actions to sooth farmers. The peasants of Kheda appealed for postponement of land tax to the Government. As Law entitled when the crops yield 25% less than normal yield total remission of land revenue applicable to that region. The British Government not heeded any words of Land holders section. The then Government declared except 103 villages remaining 500 villages had to pay full tax.

The peasants approached Local leaders, District Officials even Bombay Legislative Councilors and finally this matter went to Gandhiji. The local leaders including Vallabhbhai Patel toured Kheda district villages concluded that there is justice in the Kheda peasants appeal for postponement of Land tax. Meanwhile British Authorities forced the Land holders to pay tax who were in the miserable condition of starvation. Though the then Kheda District Collector, while seeing the petition submitted by representatives of Kheda Land holders give assurance in sympathetically the problem would be settled. The Collector's decision on remission of land tax in

103 villages was not publicized in the concerned areas. The Government ignored the appeal of Kheda peasants<sup>3</sup>.

Gandhiji observed enquiries conducted by Servants of India Society members, local leaders like Vallabhbhai Patel and he himself witnessed grievances in the Kheda peasant's troubles. On 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1918 Gandhiji inaugurated the Kheda Satyagraha struggle at Nadiad. Before Gandhiji declared that he would not invest whole time on this issue. He put in charge to Vallabhbhai Patel to monitor the Kheda movement under his guidance.

During Kheda Movement due to several course of events like Champaran, Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, War Conference forced Gandhiji to stay away from Kheda, in these course of time Vallabhbhai Patel successfully carry this movement under his guidance.

Vallabhbhai Patel Secretary of Gujarat Sabha completely dedicated to the Kheda movement. Along with Narahari Parikh, Indulal Yagnik, Mohanlal Pandya and other leaders Vallabhbhai Patel toured all villages in Kheda district attached to the grievances of Kheda peasants by filling moral courage in them not to pay land tax<sup>4</sup>. Kheda movement runs in Non- violent and Satyagraha lines.

The Peasants took the following oath on the advice of Gandhiji:

“Knowing that the crops of our villages are less than four annas, we requested the Government to suspend the collection of revenue assessment till the ensuing year, but the Government has not acceded to our prayer. Therefore, we, the undersigned, hereby solemnly declare that we shall not, of our own accord, pay to the Government the full or the remaining revenue for the year. We shall let the Government take whatever legal steps it may think fit and gladly suffer the consequences of our non-payment. We shall rather let our lands be forfeited than that by voluntary payment we should allow our case to be considered false or should compromise our self-respect. Should the Government, however, agree to suspend collection of the second instalment of the assessment throughout the district, such amongst us as are in a position to pay will pay up the whole or the balance of the revenue that may be due. The reason why those who are able to pay still withhold payment is that, if they pay up, the poorer ryots may in a panic sell their chattels or incur debts to pay their dues, and thereby bring suffering upon themselves. In these circumstances we feel that, for the sake of the poor, it is the duty even of those who can afford to pay to withhold payment of their assessment”<sup>5</sup>.

The British authorities closely observing this movement sent police, revenue team members to control the situation through various actions like by giving notices, putting fine, seizing property, confiscating animals, farm and assets. F.G. Pratt the Commissioner of the Government of Bombay said “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”. The Government desired to suppress the movement.

Vallabhbhai Patel’s Leadership qualities lime lighted through this Satyagraha. Patel trained the volunteers in network to protect the peasant’s valuable assets in the course of British official’s raids. Vallabhbhai Patel easily mingled with local peasants by wearing traditional dress, cutting jokes with them. This new mission in the Patel’s life lead to Sardar of India in future course. He left lucrative Lawyer profession and dedicated whole time to freedom struggle.

In the middle of the Kheda movement Gandhiji, Vallabhbhai Patel injects moral courage in peasants to withstand in firm to face the British Government repression in Satyagraha lines. The peasants took an oath not to pay tax even that pay for protecting the poor peasants could cause them fell into debts to pay revenue. The valuable assets donated to Gujarat Sabha the prime leading organization of the movement instead of British authority’s auction sale. Vallabhbhai Patel raises the patriotic feelings in the minds of land holders to face any challenge by the Colonial Government. Many farmers, agitators belong to Kheda Satyagraha arrested except Vallabhbhai Patel. The movement filled sympathy even in Pro- British Indian Leaders. The British Government authorities believed “It is impossible to govern men without their consent”.

Vallabhbhai Patel stood in stern discipline even though the local authorities pressurizing the peasants with different forces. The British Government negotiated Vallabhbhai Patel, local land holders of Kheda and decided to suspend land tax for the current year. The British Government issued secret instructions that land tax collected only from those who could pay.

Public declaration is not issued for fears of shade the prestige of British rule in Kheda and other parts of Country. Gandhiji recalled that “The people were exhausted and he was actually casting about for some graceful way of terminating the struggle”. Gandhiji later called of the movement due to the desires fulfilled by the outcome.

**Chronology of Kheda Movement:**<sup>6</sup>

1917	Heavy rains damaged Crops in Kheda District.
5 <sup>th</sup> November 1917	Peasants of Kheda submitted a petition to Government to postpone the recovery of land revenue.
22 <sup>nd</sup> March, 1918	Gandhiji inaugurated the Kheda Satyagraha at Nadiad.
29 <sup>th</sup> March, 1918	Gandhiji away from Kheda to attend Hindi Conference at Indore.
17 <sup>th</sup> April, 1918	Gandhiji communicated Kheda peasants to stick for passive resistance.
23 <sup>rd</sup> April, 1918	Gandhiji addressed a public meeting at Bombay delivered his views on Kheda Movement.

4 <sup>th</sup> May, 1918	Gandhiji replied to the press note of Bombay Government about Kheda troubles.
5 <sup>th</sup> May, 1918	Gandhiji away from Kheda to attend Delhi meeting.
June, 1918	Gandhiji called off Kheda Satyagraha after signs from British Officials giving remission, postponement of land tax in Kheda region.

**Conclusion:**

Prayers, appeals, Petitions, discussions and consultations failed finally Kheda Movement achieved its goal on the lines of Non-violence and Satyagraha. Thus it gave a clear path for Gandhian Movements in upcoming freedom struggle.

Gandhiji had remarked about Kheda Movement that, “If it were not for his (Vallabhbhai’s) assistance I must admit that this campaign would not have been carried through so successfully.”Kheda Movement gave an opportunity to Vallabhbhai Patel for his first close contact with Gandhiji. This turning point led to transformation in Vallabhbhai Patel’s life. From that time he became strong arm to Gandhiji in his political phase<sup>7</sup>. It gave a chance for Patel to understand various dimensions like strength and weakness of Public, British authority’s attitude, movement organizing strategies, peasant’s problem etc...

Vallabhbhai Patel developed many skills regarding leadership through this movement. He witnessed the performance of Non Violence, Satyagraha closely and saw its power then he evolved as a staunch follower of Gandhian methods. The magnetic force of Gandhian techniques attracted Vallabhbhai Patel which polarized the Gandhian Ideology. This movement shaped Vallabhbhai Patel into flavored State leader, as a hero of Gujarat and fame throughout India. From 1920 onwards Vallabhbhai Patel elected as President of newly formed Gujarat Pradesh Congress Committee till 1945. This movement trained Vallabhbhai Patel to mobilize and organize the masses in several major movements<sup>8</sup>.

Kheda movement from its beginning a tug of conflicts between Leaders and British Authorities in association connected to peasants troubles. Though it seems to be conflicts in the movement but not turned into violent atmosphere. There are no signs of strains, both the Leaders and British authorities maintained cordial relations up to end of this movement. The experiment bud of Non violence and Satyagraha blossoms here in a success to give right path for Indian freedom struggle. The local issue transformed into Nationalist flavors. Thus Kheda Movement discovered the two great personalities of future, the Father of Nation and an Architect of Nation. Kheda Movement unified the discarded land holders in this region, In future it sow seeds in Patel’s mind for unification of discarded units in Indian Union.<sup>9</sup>

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