



Satyagraha in Bhavnagar State (1920 to 1947)

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Abstract: *The British East India Company government gained the rights of Peshwa and Gaekwad government in 1820, after the formal establishment of the British government at Saurashtra, under the supervision of the Political Agent at Rajkot, chaos and dislocation has been abolished from various areas of Saurashtra. The administration of the princely states of Saurashtra by the systematic governance also started. ^[1] A long-term peaceful progress was guaranteed in a short period. ^[2] As a result, political disturbance broke out in Saurashtra and happiness grew with peace and prosperity. ^[3] Bhavnagar's Gohil State, situated in Gohilwad was the third largest in the first-class states of Kathiawad. ^[4] Bhavnagar State starting from the head of the Gulf of Khambhat was spread in the west side of it in the Kathiawad reign located between 21.18^o northern latitudes and 75.18^o east longitudes. ^[5]*

Key words: *Satyagraha, Bhavnagar, Sardar Patel, Kathiyawad, Saurashtra, Princely State, Krishnakumar Sinhji, Gohil Wad.*

Introduction

There were total 671 villages in the state of Bhavnagar within the area of 4576 square kilometers. ^[6] Bhavsinhji first (1703 to 1764) established Bhavnagar city with the last migration of the capital of Gohil dynasty from Sihor in 1723. ^[7] After this, the Bhavnagar state was managed by eight successive rulers' upto the two-century long period of independence.

Saurashtra region was having 222 small or big princely states of 562 indigenous kingdoms prior to independence in India. Until the independence of India in 1947 there was no single dominant political power able to establish its rule on Saurashtra. The princely states of Saurashtra were classified in different categories. Among which, First and second class princely states like Bhavnagar, Gondal, Morbi, Rajkot, Vakaner, Wadhwan and Jasdan were having reputation as the vibrant states. Whereas, the States like Junagadh, Navanagar (Jamnagar), Dhangandhra, Porbandar, Limbdi were passing through periodical disorder and disturbance. There was no enthusiasm or social consciousness in the third and fourth-class princely states. The lack of awareness of new changes among these states was been felt. In short,

Controversial and contradictory attitudes of the Kathiawad's princely states played a crucial part in determining their role at the national Satyagrah for India's independence.

2. PEOPLE'S SATYAGRAH (SATYAGRAHA) IN BHAVNAGAR STATE:

The beginning of the Gandhian national Satyagrah in India became an agonizing event in the history of the national satyagrahs and in that, the period of 1921 to 1941 was the awakening time of India. At that time, there was a severe conflict between the old and the new forces. ^[8] Except some of the princely states like Bhavnagar, the oppression princely states of Saurashtra were reached to its climax, which eased the way for the establishment of 'Kathiawad Political Council'. The establishment of the 'Kathiawad Political Council' in 1921 was a very important event of transformation in the history of Kathiawad in the twentieth century. 'Kathiawad Political Council' shroud on the people's Satyagrah by its constructive functions, conferences and resolutions till the end of Freedom. During the national struggle for independence if India, the details of the People's Satyagrah in Bhavnagar state in Gandhian National Satyagrah period of 1920 to 1947 can be studied as follows.

2.1 NON-COOPERATION SATYAGRAH (MOVEMENT) AND BHAVNAGAR STATE: 1921

The propaganda work of promoting indigenous products was carried out in the state of Bhavnagar since 1908. Thus, in May 1921, the service committee was formed in connection with the Satyagrah for non-cooperation in Bhavnagar, which played a crucial role in keeping the non-cooperation Satyagrah alive and active effectively in the state of Bhavnagar. Members of the Service Committee insisted to use indigenous products. The Committee has taken up the task of introducing Rantiyo classes and was awaking people to make & use the indigenous products by using the indigenous materials. In the prior days of Diwali, on 23rd October, 1921 a group of students wearing

indigenous clothing like Khadi, marched in the Bhavnagar city. At the top of the march there was a flag of 'Swarajya' and the students were announcing slogans of indigenous Satyagrah.

All the markets of the Bhavnagar and Sihor city remained closed in oppose to the visit of Prince of Wales on 17th November, 1921, not only the merchants but the horse cart operators also join them. On the same day a huge conference was organized in the centre of Sihor and the lectures showing the importance of indigenous products were been given.^[9]

In the Talaja city of Bhavnagar state the students organized lectures on indigenous showing its importance.

In those days, in the 3rd meeting of 'Bhavnagar Praja Parisad' the president of the meeting Prabhshankar Pattani accepted the demand of the public of the prohibition of liquor, and also on the occasion of the 6th birthday of Prince Krishnakumarsinhji declared exemption of duty on the import of cotton threads to promote the indigenous cloth making.

Thus, Bhavnagar state was active with the people's movement since the starting of the Gandhian era.

2.2 COMPLEMENTALLY LAW BREAKING FIGHT AND BHAVNAGAR STATE – 1930:

In Saurashtra the fight started by Mahatma Gandhi of Complementally Law breaking ('Savinay Kanun Bhang') was operated in two ways. One under the leadership of Shri Amrutlal Sheth at Dholera the volunteers of Saurashtra region were breaking the laws of the salt and were been getting arrested, and second under the leadership of Shri Fulchandbhai Shah the volunteers started the program of picketing at the various cloth shops of Saurashtra. With the context of independence of India the above both fights were been operated, thus, in the both Satyagrahs the volunteers of Bhavnagar state played a key role.

2.2.1 SALT SATYAGRAH – 1930:

Shri Atmaram Bhatt of Bhavnagar took the active participation in the salt Satyagrah started at Viramgam and showed very strong determination. Police stroked with the sticks but he didn't left the salt from his hand. Police was imposing the salt in Atmarambhai's mouth, but Atmarambhai till becoming unconscious in this cruel game went on with his fight and he didn't left

salt from his hand.^[10] Even though the police continue his cruelty, applied the salt on his wounds and troughed him in the salt lakes^[11] but Atmarambhai didn't left salt from his hand.

At Dholera Satyagrah one volunteer leader Shri Balvantrai Mehta was been arrested for breaking the salt law and was imprisoned for two years.

2.2.2 PICKETING SATYAGRAH AGAINST FOREIGN CLOTH -1930 TO 1932:

Along with the 'Dandi Kuch' and 'Salt Satyagrah', 'Picketing Satyagrah' against foreign cloth was also started in Bhavnagar state. Foreign cloths' business was running good in the Bhavnagar state. At that time the great leaders of the country were in jail. Thousands of male-female-children were passing through the severe problems and in that time some selfish merchants of Bhavnagar started the business of foreign cloth.^[12] Shri Devchandbhai advised Fulchandbhai Shah to start a fight against the foreign clothes and to start the picketing movement from Bhavnagar, prior to this some unsuccessful tries were been done in Bhavnagar. In 1930 Shri Fulchandbhai and Shivanandji went to Bhavnagar and discussed the matter in detail with the independence warrior Shri Jagubhai Parikh. One picketing committee was also formed in which Shri Jagubhai Sanghvi, Shri Chimanlal Mehta, Smt. Akhilaswariben Mehta; Shri Mohanlal Parmananddas etc. were included. This picketing committee gathered 400 volunteers for the Picketing Satyagrah in which 80 volunteers joined with the readiness to be imprisoned.

The Picketing Satyagrah started in Bhavnagar against foreign cloths on 20th December 1930. On that day they started 'Prabhat Feri' and then were adjoined at the foreign cloths selling shops. In the morning, at the opening of the shops of foreign cloths in the places like Radhanpuri Bazar, Kapad Bazar, the cloth shops near Selarshah Dargahof Bhavnagar city, the volunteers started their picketing Satyagrah. They started to make aware the public by distributing leaflets, arranging conferences and marches. The cloth merchant got angry and also beat to the volunteers, but the volunteers peacefully continued their Satyagrah. The small or big thefts of the cloth merchant were been caught. The foreign cloth was caught from someone's bag, shoes, books, hide in apron, etc. The picketing was active all the time and all the hours. The volunteers were keeping watch on railway stations, market, roads etc.,^[13] the volunteers were stopping to the sellers and buyers

of the foreign cloths. Upto 12 noon the volunteers were stopping the buyers and sellers, and then they were going to their godowns and were stopping the labours and were making them understood to join the Satyagrah. Thus, within few days the foreign cloth was disappeared from the market of Bhavnagar. The foreign cloth merchants gathered and meet to Shri Fulchandbhai and assured to boycott the foreign cloths and so the Satyagrah was declared completed in the three months.

After that in 1932 again the foreign cloth business was started at Bhavnagar. Again Fulchandbhai and Shivanandji went to Bhavnagar and keeping Shri Jagubhai and the picketing committee together started the Satyagrah again. At that time Shri Fulchandbhai took the oath to collect all the foreign cloth and to send it out of Bhavnagar state and then only to declare the picketing Satyagrah to be completed, but the selfish merchants disagreed to seal the foreign cloths. On the prior day of the starting of the picketing Satyagrah again, the Bhavnagar council called upon Shri Fulchandbhai and his volunteers and ordered them to stop picketing Satyagrah and to leave Bhavnagar immediately. The Satyagrahis refused to obey the order and so were threatened to be send out of the borders of the state. Shri Fulchandbhai noted that, "The oral orders of sending out of the state were spread in the whole city within the short time and a conference was held on 28-03-1932 evening which was completed without any obstacles and they were sent out of the borders of Bhavnagar city near Ranpur." From there they again went back to Bhavnagar via Botad and were caught and sent to prison. On 31-3-1932 a case against them was applied in front of the Magistrate Shri Sunawala and in his verdict he ordered the six months normal jail.

During all these time the program of picketing was continued by the volunteers. Conferences and marches were held, and a 'Vanar Sena' was also started, and discussion for the compromise was also going on, and in last the merchants of the Bhavnagar state agreed to Shri Fulchandbhai and sent all the foreign cloths out of Bhavnagar sealed, and then the picketing Satyagrah against foreign cloths was completed and Shri Fulchandbhai was released on 21st April 1932 at 9 p.m. [14]

In the various interior Mahal regions of the Bhavnagar state the trade of foreign cloths was going on. So the picketing team visited all the places.

This team firstly visited at Tana village of Sihor Mahal on 13th March 1931. They took the support of the local villagers and sealed the foreign cloth collected from the cloth merchants. [15] Whereas, in Savar-Kundla the other merchants took the initiative and sealed the foreign cloth collected from the merchants of their area and started to sell it in their shops. But the volunteers of 'Balmitra Mandal' and 'Swadi Kapad Pracharak Mandal' took the help of the local merchant association and resealed the foreign cloth. [16]

2.3 FIFTH CONFERENCE OF THE BHAVNAGAR PEOPLE'S REPRESENTATIVE COMMITTEE – 1939:

The last decade of the national movement of Indian independence was an examinable historical period for the king and its population of Bhavnagar state. [17] The conference held of Bhavnagar People's Representative Committee on 14 / 15th May 1939 was noted in history of Bhavnagar as well as of the nation due to the severe bloody attack on Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. In this conference a resolution was passed according to which the responsible management of the Bhavnagar state was to be handed over to the representatives of the local population. The king of Bhavnagar Maharaja Krishnakumarsinhji was well aware about the movement going on nationally under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and due to it the changed political scenario of India. So accepting the new path of democracy the King declared historically to amend the constitution and to establish the Legislative Assembly. [18] On 1st December 1941 the king himself inaugurated the first Legislative Assembly. [19] Through the working of Legislative Assembly the people of Bhavnagar truly experienced the democracy.

2.4 QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT AND BHAVNAGAR STATE – 1942:

August month has a unique importance in the history of Indian independence. The Indian National Congress passed a 'Quit India' resolution on night of 8th August 1942 at 'Kranti Maidan' of Mumbai. Mahatma Gandhi gave the slogan of 'Kareng Ya Mareng' at the conference. The very next day all the top national leaders including Gandhiji were arrested. On hearing the news, the president of Bhavnagar People's Committee Dr. Keshavlal Thakkar called an urgent meeting of the local leaders and decided to continue the Quit India movement at the Bhavnagar state level. On the same day in a public conference at 'Darbargadh

Chawk' the leadership of this movement was allotted to Shri Jagubhai Parikh. Along with the declaration of Quit India Movement Shri Vajubhai Shah's residence named 'Inqualab' near Ghogha Circle became a head-quarter for the discussions. To provide the updated news of the movement a paper named 'Jange Aazadi' was started. Daily the leaders and volunteers were meeting together at 'Gaamtalav' and planned the various programs like picketing. Every evening in the meeting the leaders like Shri Vajubhai Shah, Shri Jagubhai Parikh, Shri Jadavbhai Modi, Shri Atmarambhai Bhatt etc. were conducting lectures. As a part of the movement, they decided to boycott all the activities which can be helpful to the British government at their going on Second World War. Due to picketing many tailors cancelled the orders they have received to make the army uniforms of British government. Shri Atmaram Bhatt was arrested on 31st August 1942 due to his picketing activities at 'Bhavnagar Gadhechi' which was a workshop of army weapons manufacturing. ^[20] Where as the students of Bhavnagar Shamaldas college took the leadership of the all the students of Bhavnagar state. Principal of the college T. K. Sahani took the wise steps during the whole movement period.

The state administration decided to arrest all the volunteers together due to their programs like picketing and Satyagrah. While the important meeting of independence volunteers was going on at Shri Vajubhai Shah's house 'Inqualab' on the early morning of 31st August 1942, under the act of "Hind Salamati Dhara" section 26(1) total nineteen volunteer leaders named (1) Dr. Keshavlal Thakkar, (2) Shri Jagubhai Parikh, (3) Shri Atmaram Bhatt, (4) Shri Vajubhai Shah, (5) Shri Jadavbhai Modi, (6) Shri Lallubhai Maniar, (7) Shri Ahemad Ali Vohra, (8) Kagdi Chunilal Chhaganlal, (9) Shri Kantilal Shah, (10) Shri Chelshankar Oza, (11) Shri Jagjivan Sanghvi, (12) Shri Kantilal Shah, (13) Shri Labhshankar Ramshankar, (14) Shri Kalubhai Varia, (15) Shri Gaurishankar Chaturvedi, (16) Shri Khoja Rajjab Ali, (17) Shri Kalu Jeram, (18) Shri Ghanshyam Chhotalal Dave, (19) Shri Khatki Rehman Lakhani were arrested. ^[21] Whereas the frontline leader of Bhavnagar people's movement Shri Balvantrai Mehta was arrested from Surendranagar and Shri Nanabhai Bhatt was arrested from Songadh. ^[22]

As all the frontline leaders of Bhavnagar were arrested the leadership of the movement was taken in hand by the ladies. Manekben became the leader of the first team. As she was also arrested the other ladies like Neelaben, Jayaben Shah,

Sarojben Mehta, Premilaben Shah Etc. took the leadership and break the law, and thus, they also went to the jail. The wife of picketing leader Shri Balvantrai Mehta's wife Smt. Sarojben Mehta was stroked with sticks by the police and even though she stood steadily in front of them and told them, "You may beat me upto your whole strength but I am not going anywhere from here". At last the police have to bow down against her. ^[23]

To stop activeness of the movement the chief executive of Bhavnagar state Anantrai Pattani published a gadget on 23rd October 1942 under which upto the one month from the published date no one was allowed within the twelve kilometer area of Bhavnagar city area to do any marches, conferences, Prabhat Feri, or to get together of five or more peoples. ^[24]

The 'Quit India Movement' of 1942 became weak after this announcement of government but the violative movements in Bhavnagar state were going on and were increasing. The frontline leaders of those violative movements were Shri Gunvantbhai Purohit, Shri Jasvant Mehta, Shri Sanat Mehta, and Shri Premchand Shah Etc. These leaders tried to break down the British government activities at many places with their violative activities. These leaders were in the direct contact of National 'Aazad' party. Thus, Bhavnagar also faced the echoes of the national violative movements.

These leaders successfully cut-off the telegram wires going on parallely to the railway line of Bhavnagar state. The main leader in this mission was Shri Gunvantbhai Purohit, and the other team members were Shri Antubhai Mehta, Shri Jasvant Mehta, Shri Naran Kanji, and Shri Yajanand Purohit etc. The team cut-off the 18 poles on the routes of Bhavnagar city, Bhavnagar rural, Vartej, and Sihor railway lines, as a part of the violative movements, and the team also robbed railways, colleges, post offices etc. ^[25]

2.5 SATYAGRAH AGAINST THE STEAMERS BRINGING THE WEAPONS – 1942:

Due the going on Second World War the port area of the Bhavnagar was declared as a reserve area. In those days a steamer carrying the weapons for war reached to Bhavnagar port. So to oppose it on 2nd October 1942, 111 volunteers of People's movement under the leadership of Shri Devendra Desai, Shri Manubhai Pancholi (Darshak), Shri Prahaladrai Modi etc. entered the

prohibited area unofficially and thus police stroked on them with sticks due to which 4 were badly injured and 1 died. [26] They were arrested under the 'Hind Salamati Dhara'. Their case was under trial of the criminal court of Bhavnagar where the judge declared hard imprisonment to these three leaders of 2 years and along with it the charged of Rs. 2000, and if they fail to pay the charge, additional jail of more 10 months. 18 volunteers were ordered for Rs.1000 charge and if they fail to pay the charge imprisonment for normal one month, 18 volunteers were charged for the normal jail till the judgment process goes on and Rs.500 charge to be paid or else 15 more days' normal jail, and the rest were released on bail.

2.6 LADIES SATYAGRAH (MOVEMENT) – 1942:

As mentioned ahead in the Satyagrah movements of Bhavnagar state the ladies representatives also took the active participation. Here a special Satyagrah should be noted.

To oppose the charges and imprisonment for the law breaking, a special was arranged at 'Amba Chawk' on the evening of 20th October 1942. Then they all marched towards the Maharaja palace 'Nilam Baug Palace'. Along with this march one march reached to meet Maharani Vijayaba, but as the Maharani was not feeling well their request to meet her was not accepted. But the ladies Satyagrahis waited at 'Darbari Kothari' for the whole night and insisted showing their firm decision to meet the Maharani. They kept even small children with them in the crates and passed the whole night over there. The next day 5 to 6 thousand people gathered at the place. The atmosphere was full with the tension and excitement. Police stroked sticks to control the atmosphere; in which many people were injured who were admitted in the Takhtasinhji Hospital and the crowd was disappeared. This Satyagrah of ladies did a tremendous work to make people wakeup.

2.7 OTHER 'PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT' IN BHAVNAGAR STATE:

The People's Parisad of Bhavnagar state was becoming more and more active in the political matters and resulted to the people's movement in all the small or big issues. [27]

2.7.1 PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT TO DECREASE THE ELECTRICITY CHARGES- 1938:

Bhavnagar was having heavy electricity charges compare to the other cities. Again and again the request was done in the matter but due to no result the 'Parchuran Kapad Mandal' and other merchant associations took the charge for solve the problem. In the leadership of lawyer Dolatbhai a public conference was held at Gandhi Chawk of Bhavnagar, were to fight for decrease in the electricity charges a committee named 'Bhavnagar Vijali Grahak Mandal' was established for which very much excitement and unity was been seen. A rumor spread that on 14-3-1938 the company staff will come to disconnect the electricity connections, but the public themselves boycotted electricity. On 11-3-1938 all the electricity usage was been stopped in all the markets of Bhavnagar city, which was an uncommon picture. On 15-3-1938 the 'Godhra Vijali Company' started to disconnect the connections and disconnected 304 connections in two days even though the people continued their boycott. All of a sudden on 18th March 1938 to program of disconnection was stopped and with the request of chief executive of Bhavnagar state Anantrai Pattani, Shri Nanabhai Bhatt started discussion with the leaders of 'Bhavnagar Vijali Grahak Mandal'. On 19th and 20th March 1938, Bhavnagar state chief executive Anantrai Pattani discussed the matter in the presence of Managing Director Shri Chaitanyaprasad Diwan and General Secretary Shri Nandlal Shah of 'Godhra Vijali Company' with the leaders of the 'Bhavnagar Vijali Grahak Mandal' and after the long discussion the demand of the public was accepted. Which were (1) Unit charges was decreased to 4 Ana from 6 Ana, (2) Monthly Miter rent was decreased to 4 Ana from 6 Ana and (3) Re-connection charge was decreased to Rs.2 from Rs.3, and against the deposit of amount under Rs.100 no interest was given instead 3% interest was made applicable on the deposit of Rs. 50 or more. [28] The fight for electricity charges decrease was an important struggle among the people's movement.

2.7.2 MOVEMENT AGAINST FEE INCREASE – 1939:

Bhavnagar state tried to increase their income by increase in the school fees. To oppose this increase, the volunteers of Bhavnagar People's Association went to every street of the city and a strong oppose was created against the fee increase. Even the public conferences were held in the other cities of the state like Mahuva, Kundla, Talaja, Rajula, Sihor etc. To support students, the merchant association also supported them. Thus,

the oppose became very strong and at last the government took back the fee increase. Here, one thing should be noted that, to maintain the good relations in between the king and the public the merchant associations played a keen role.

2.7.3 TALAJA – MAHUVA TRAM-WAY MOVEMENT – 1940:

The state government declared the rent increase on the tram-way route of Talaja – Mahuva from 3.5 Pai to 4.5 Pai per mile. The government didn't take back the increase on the request of the Bhavnagar People's Association. Resulting, the volunteers Shri Laxmidas Dani, Shri Atmarambhai Bhatt, Shri Mohammad Ali, Shri Mohammad Ali Yusuf Ali, Shri Ratilal Modi, Shri Vallabhdas Trikandas, Shri Amad Sheth, and Shri Adwaitanand etc. started the Talaja tram-way movement on 10th May 1940. [30] Shri Ratilal Modi became first leader of the movement and police arrested him. Then a public conference was held at Aazad Chawk and a strike started in Bhavnagar. On 17th May 1940 Satyagrah was held at Bhavnagar station and the Satyagrahis were arrested. Shri Ratilal Modi was imprisoned for two years.

In this Satyagrah people were angry on the chief executive of the state instead of the king. [31] The news of this Satyagrah reached to Gandhiji and Sardar Patel and at last the Satyagrah was declared finished.

3. CONCLUSION

More than 70 years has passed of getting independence to the India. Recently a grand function was organized for it. During the independence movement, a try to explore the movements done by people of Bhavnagar (1920 to 1943), bestowal of the people at the national movements, and during the movements the support of the people of Bhavena, this article has been wrote. Here, it should be noted that, Bhavnagar state has from the first its unique identity which is "to leave something for others". After the independence, without taking a single rupee from the Bhavnagar state the king of Bhavnagar Maharaja Krishnakumarsinhji joined to the dream of Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Patel of united India and presented his state in the feet of Mahatma Gandhi on 15th January 1948 and contributed firstly in the great effort of united India, which was an example of nation love and milestone for other princely states. His this contribution to the nation is written in the golden letter of the history of independence. [32]

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