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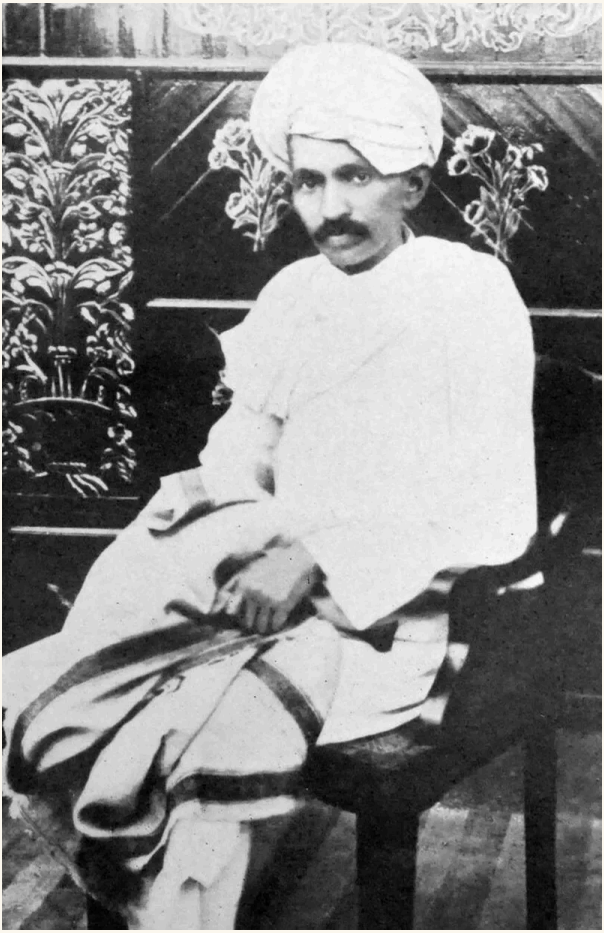
Kheda Satyagraha (1918)

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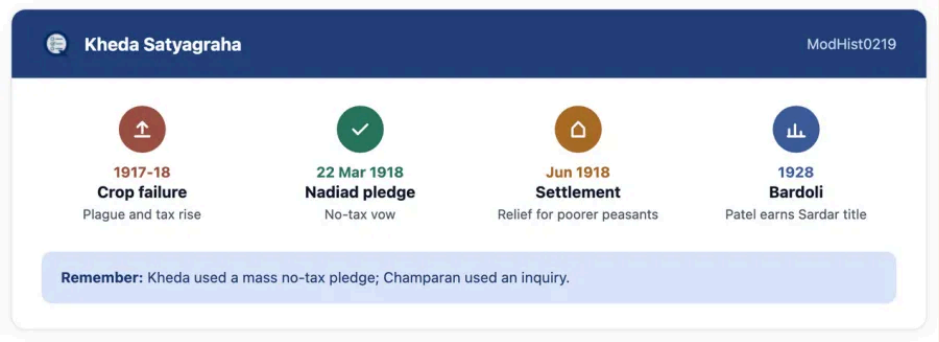
Kheda Satyagraha (1918)

In 1918 the harvest failed in Kheda, and plague spread. The government still wanted full tax. The farmers said no, and they stayed calm while officers seized their cattle.

This was the Kheda Satyagraha. It was Gandhi’s second big campaign on Indian soil, and it made a national leader out of a Gujarat lawyer named Vallabhbhai Patel.



Mahatma Gandhi in 1918, the year he led the Kheda Satyagraha. Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.



Key moments of the Kheda Satyagraha, from standard sources.

Where. Kheda district, then called Kaira, in Gujarat.
When. 1918, roughly March to June.
Cause. Crop failure and plague, with a tax rise of about 23 percent.
Method. A mass no-tax pledge.
Leaders. Gandhi, with Vallabhbhai Patel and local organisers.
Result. A partial settlement; seized property was returned.

Satyagraha: Gandhi's method of firm, peaceful resistance.

Anavari: a rule that eased land tax when crops failed badly.

Land revenue: the tax a farmer paid on his land.

1 Why did Kheda rebel?

Kheda lay in the Bombay Presidency, in today's Gujarat. In 1917 and 1918 its crops failed. Plague and cholera followed. Many families had little to eat.

The British authorities had also raised the land tax by about 23 percent. Farmers saw this as cruel. They asked for the tax to be waived for the year. Without a good harvest, they could not pay and also feed their

children.

They pointed to the Anavari rule. It allowed relief when a crop fell far below normal. Officials refused to apply it. The Nadiad collector held that the crop was good enough.

- District: **Kheda**, also called **Kaira**.
- Trouble: **crop failure**, **plague** and **cholera**.
- Tax rise of about **23 percent**.
- Farmers cited the **Anavari** relief rule.
- Read about British land revenue systems.

> **Quick check 1.** Kheda is in Bihar, and Champaran is in Gujarat. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

2 How did the pledge work?

The movement began under Mohanlal Pandya and Narhari Parikh. The Gujarat Sabha and Congress backed it soon after. Gandhi visited the villages and looked at the ruined fields himself.

Accounts give 22 March 1918 for a pledge at Nadiad. Farmers vowed not to pay the tax. They also vowed to bear the loss that followed. The vow was open, not secret.

The government threatened to seize land, cattle and household goods. Officers did seize them. The farmers did not fight back. They gave money to the Gujarat Sabha, which ran the campaign.

- Began under **Mohanlal Pandya** and **Narhari Parikh**.
- Pledge at **Nadiad**, **22 March 1918**, per accounts.
- Property seized, but the farmers stayed **non-violent**.

- Donations went to the **Gujarat Sabha**.
- Read about Mohanlal Pandya.

3 Who ran the campaign?

Gandhi was the spiritual head. Local lawyers did the daily work. Vallabhbhai Patel had just joined the cause. Others included Indulal Yagnik, Shankarlal Banker, Mahadev Desai, Narhari Parikh, Mohanlal Pandya and Ravishankar Vyas.

They toured the villages. They gave political direction to farmers. Accounts say Patel gave up his legal practice to work full time.

The revolt drew many castes. Patidar farmers formed its core. The movement stayed focused on Kheda. Gandhi and Patel rejected calls to spread it to other regions.

- **Gandhi**: spiritual head.
- **Vallabhbhai Patel**: chief organiser.

- Helpers: **Indulal Yagnik**, **Shankarlal Banker**, **Mahadev Desai**.
- Kept **local**, not spread to other regions.
- Read about Mahadev Desai and Ravishankar Maharaj.

4 How did it end?

The government wanted an honourable way out. By about June 1918 an agreement came. Sources differ on its exact terms. One account says tax was suspended for that year and the next, with the rate cut. Another says only well-off farmers had to pay.

Both accounts agree on one point. Seized land and goods went back to their owners. Some buyers of seized land were pressed to return it. The British had said they would stand by such buyers.

Historians call it a partial win. Farmers got practical relief. The government admitted no defeat. The real gain was confidence among Gujarat's peasants.

- Agreement around **June 1918**.
- Terms **differ** across sources.
- **Seized property** returned.
- Seen as a **partial** victory.
- Read about Gandhi's philosophy.

5 What came after Kheda?

Kheda made Patel a leading organiser in Gujarat. Ten years later he led the Bardoli Satyagraha of 1928. It was another tax revolt in the same region. After Bardoli he earned the title Sardar.

Kheda also showed a new method. In Champaran in 1917 Gandhi used an inquiry into indigo farming. In Kheda he used a mass no-tax pledge. Both used open, peaceful resistance.

The same year, Gandhi also supported the Ahmedabad mill strike. That was a labour dispute, not a tax revolt. Keep the two separate.

- Patel led **Bardoli** in **1928**; title **Sardar**.
- **Champaran**: an **inquiry**. **Kheda**: a **no-tax pledge**.
- The **Ahmedabad mill strike** was a labour dispute.
- Read about Sardar Patel.

6 What are the exam traps?

Keep the places, the methods and the leaders straight. Examiners like to swap Kheda with Champaran or Bardoli. Check the year and the district first.

- Kheda is in **Gujarat**; Champaran is in **Bihar**.
- Kheda was **1918**; Bardoli was **1928**.
- Kheda used a **no-tax pledge**, not an **inquiry**.
- Kheda was a **peasant** campaign; the mill strike was **labour**.
- The **Anavari** rule was about crop failure.
- See the Rowlatt Satyagraha, the next big campaign.

> **Quick check 2.** The Kheda Satyagraha of 1918 used a mass no-tax pledge. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Remember: Kheda in 1918 was a tax revolt after crop failure. Patel helped lead it. It was a mass no-tax pledge, unlike Champaran's inquiry. Bardoli in 1928 followed the same path.

Think it through: Why did the farmers stay non-violent while officers seized their cattle?

Violence would give the government an excuse to crush them. Peaceful suffering won public sympathy. It also kept the farmers united and the moral high ground theirs.

Quick check 3. Kheda was a labour strike by mill workers in Ahmedabad. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Practice MCQs

1. The 1918 Kheda Satyagraha, Gandhi's second major campaign in India, was launched in Gujarat on behalf of peasants facing which grievance?

A. Denial of temple entry

B. Forced indigo cultivation

C. Continued land revenue collection despite a severe drought and crop failure

D. Excessive urban municipal taxation

See answer ↓

2. Which future national leader gave up his legal practice to organise the Kheda Satyagraha full-time, village by village?

A. C. Rajagopalachari

B. Jawaharlal Nehru

C. Rajendra Prasad

D. Vallabhbhai Patel

See answer ↓

3. Vallabhbhai Patel's leadership of the 1928 Bardoli Satyagraha, which secured a significant reduction in an unjustified land revenue increase, directly built upon his earlier organisational experience gained during which prior campaign?

A. The 1918 Kheda Satyagraha

B. The 1930 Dandi March

C. The 1942 Quit India Movement

D. The 1946 Cabinet Mission negotiations

See answer ↓

4. The 1928 Bardoli Satyagraha, a major peasant tax-resistance campaign in Gujarat, was led by?

A. Rajendra Prasad

B. Vallabhbhai Patel

C. Swami Sahajanand Saraswati

D. Mahatma Gandhi

See answer ↓

5. The Champaran Satyagraha of 1917, addressing the grievances of indigo farmers, represented what for Gandhi's Satyagraha technique?

A. An application limited only to South Africa

B. Its first major application on Indian soil

C. A purely symbolic gesture with no farmer involvement

D. Its final and largest application

See answer ↓

6. Kheda peasants in 1918 asked for relief under which crop-yield based system of tax remission?

A. The Permanent Settlement

B. The Anavari system

C. The Ryotwari system

D. The Mahalwari system

See answer ↓

7. By about what percentage had British authorities raised the land tax in Kheda before the 1918 satyagraha?

A. 5 percent

B. 23 percent

C. 75 percent

D. 50 percent

See answer ↓

8. Who, along with Mohanlal Pandya, is said to have started the Kheda movement?

A. Shankarlal Banker

B. Indulal Yagnik

C. Narhari Parikh

D. Mahadev Desai

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **C.** Kheda's peasants faced continued, undiminished land revenue demands from the colonial administration despite a serious drought that had devastated their harvest, prompting Gandhi to organise a campaign of collective revenue non-payment. Vallabhbhai Patel played a significant early organisational role in this campaign, marking the beginning of his long association with Gandhi and rural Gujarat that would later culminate in his more famous leadership of the 1928 Bardoli Satyagraha. The Kheda campaign, alongside Champaran, established Gandhi's method of directly organising peasant grievances into disciplined satyagraha campaigns, distinct from the still largely urban, elite-centred nationalist politics of the pre-war Congress. ↑ Q1
2. **D.** Vallabhbhai Patel quit his legal practice to organise the Kheda Satyagraha, a campaign that made him Gandhi's chief lieutenant in Gujarat. ↑ Q2
3. **A.** Patel's foundational organisational experience during the 1918 Kheda Satyagraha, where he first worked closely alongside Gandhi organising Gujarat's peasant cultivators, directly prepared him for his subsequent, even more prominent leadership role a decade later at Bardoli, where his skilful organisation of disciplined tax resistance secured a genuine, independently verified reduction in an excessive revenue assessment. This decade-long trajectory -- from Kheda's junior organisational role to Bardoli's independent senior leadership -- illustrates the broader pattern seen across many significant nationalist figures, whose substantial later prominence was frequently built upon earlier, less individually celebrated regional organisational experience. Patel's Bardoli success, earning him the honorific title 'Sardar' ('leader'), firmly established his reputation as one of the Congress's most capable practical organisers, a reputation that would prove essential to his later, even more consequential role overseeing India's post-independence princely-state integration. ↑ Q3
4. **B.** Patel organised Bardoli's peasants in a disciplined campaign of non-payment against a steep, unjustified increase in land revenue assessment, forcing the colonial government to appoint an independent inquiry that substantially reduced the hike. The campaign's success and Patel's skilful organisational leadership earned him the honorific title 'Sardar' ('leader'), conferred at the movement's conclusion. Bardoli became an influential model for later Gandhian civil disobedience campaigns across India. ↑ Q4

5. **B.** The Champaran Satyagraha of 1917 was Gandhi's first major application of his Satyagraha technique on Indian soil. ↑ Q5
6. **B.** Under the Anavari system, tax was eased when the harvest failed badly. The Nadiad collector refused to apply it, so the peasants pledged not to pay. ↑ Q6
7. **B.** Accounts say the tax was raised by about 23 percent. That came while famine and plague hit the district. ↑ Q7
8. **C.** The movement was first started by Mohanlal Pandya and Narhari Parikh. Gujarat Sabha and Congress backed it later. ↑ Q8

Quick-check answers

1. **False.** ↑ 1
2. **True.** ↑ 2
3. **False.** ↑ 3

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