



## The Unrest and Protest Movements in Nineteenth Century Gujarat

### KEYWORDS

Adhesive bonding, Hybrid joints, Epoxies, technological trends, crash durable adhesives

**Maitree Vaidya Sabnis**

Asst. Professor, Dept of History, M.K. Amin Arts and Science College and College of Commerce, Padra, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara-390004, Gujarat

Victory! Victory! Victory to the Queen;  
 May your fame spread far and wide  
 Quick! Quick! Quick may your enemies flee  
 Now we sincerely pray  
 That rid of all obstacles,  
 May the Queen have a glorious reign

These were the lines which marked the fact that the western educated elitist in the nineteenth century Gujarat were willing to welcome the British 'Raj' after 1857. However it is equally important to build out the complete picture and for that there are certain central questions that need to be answered. What were the responses of the tribals or the peasant? Were there any movements of resistance against the British? The paper gives an account of the significant unrest and protest movement that took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Gujarat. These movements varied in degree and character, and they occurred due to variety of reasons. By and large they do signify the changes and transformation that a Gujarati society was witnessing due to the presence of the imperial administration.

The beginnings were made with unrest in Bharuch. The government at Bharuch issued a circular, wherein, the government monopolies over cotton, which prevented them from a free disposal of their produce and also made it compulsory for them to sell it at, lower rates, to the government. This was protested and the *ryots* assembled in a large body before the Collector's office at the time of the *jamabandi* on the 26<sup>th</sup> of February 1805 and pressed for a hearing. They were allowed to send in two or three representatives to discuss the issue. The representatives expressed resent, but were informed that there would be no changes in the policy of the government. The Patels continued to agitate and proceeded with a large number (200-250) to fort Flagstaff to for protest. On the third day of their agitation (28<sup>th</sup> February), they assembled in another part of the town and swore by their respective faiths to oppose the intentions of the government. The imperial government was strict in its repression and was able to put down the agitation without any hassle. The leaders of the so called 'mutiny' Ali Musa Patel of Seetpur village and Mohammad Raj of Kantharia were captured and were put into prison. This unrest movement explicitly indicates that the *ryots* of Bharuch did not protest against the presence of any imperial government but the protest was more individualistic and personal and was 'class' oriented and not 'caste' or 'community' oriented. The leadership and its organization was from within and was provided by those who themselves were the victims and no outside agency was involved.

The Rebellion of Abdul Rehman 1810 or the Mandvi Re-

bellion was largely a movement for the usurpation of power by one Abdul Rehman from the chieftain of Mandvi. In the beginning of 1810, in the East of the Surat district, Abdul Rehman proclaimed himself the 'Imam Mehandi' and collected a band of followers who were chiefly the Bohra Muslim of the *Sunni* sect attacked and captured the fort of Mandvi. The chief was able to escape. After establishing himself, Abdul Rehman sent on January 10<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> two letters to Mr. Crowe, the British chief at Surat, one calling him to pay a sum of £30 (Rs. 300 then) and the other advising him to embrace the Islam. This threat was disregarded by the British. The British launched a full scale attack on Surat and Abdul Rehman was killed. The British troops were sent and the captured fort was recovered on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 1810 and the authority of the Mandavi chief was restored with the condition of loyalty which whenever later got threatened was suitably punished.

The Kathi Rebellions (1820-1840) were a series of revolt against the rulers. The Kathi were the unruly Rajputs belonging to Kutch and Kathiawad, whose traditional rights of land and land revenue had been seized in the wake of the British land revenue policies. They were the community who had hereditary ownership of land and that was their only source of occupation. With the introduction of the *Ryotwari* system of revenue collection, the land was turned into commodity and therefore those who were unable to pay the land revenue had to sell, let or mortgage their land to anyone who could buy. The Kathi disturbances broke about in the adjoining areas of Amreli, Nawanagar and also affected some other parts of Junagadh. These disturbances were essentially a resumption of the old feud between their adversaries, the Gohil rulers of Bhavnagar. In accordance to the various treaties signed between the ruler of the Princely state and the Imperial government, the British were to protect the Princely States in lieu of the power that was handed over to them indirectly by the local chieftain.

The Koli Uprising of 1823 is one of the noted rebellions. Kolis were also one of the turbulent tribe inhabiting in the Central Gujarat. The Gazetteer of Bharuch attributes this uprising as the "attack on the peasantry by the robber Kolis". However it was more than what it was made to appear. In 1823, a body of Kolis assembled in the Mahi Kantha from the two hundred to three hundred and had planned an attack on the town of Broach, for loot and plunder. At the same time another band of 40-50 men plundered the villages of Utali in the Bharuch sub-division. The Kolis had been evicted from their lands by the strict and ruthless revenue policy of the British and further help was given by the local moneylenders on whom the Kolis had depended. The only way left to them was to become

the out laws and ensure their sheer mere subsistence. The two rebellions were discovered and they were crushed easily by the British.

The Surat Riots 1844 were against unnecessary taxation by the Company officials. The inhabitants of the city of Surat had for more than once resisted by concerted measures, the introduction of disagreeable measures by the Company's government. The first occasion was introduction of duty upon salt, which was naturally resisted by one and all as salt, was one commodity that was used by all. It turned into a mass movement. On the 29<sup>th</sup> August, the shops remained closed and the crowd of 30, 000 gathered in front of the court and asked for withdrawal of the duty. The Company attempted to bring about some kind of settlement through negotiations with some the mediation of some prominent *seths* and *sahukars*, but they were not successful, as the masses were not willing to relent. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of August, the masses became restless and the movement became violent. The troops had to be called and the crowd was dispersed. Soon, instead of becoming a common riot, confined to one class; the movement became a widespread insurrection as the issue had touched the masses. The government out of concern temporarily suspended the movement. But the uprising took a different turn when, a negotiation was struck between the affluent section of the society and the government and the town duties were abolished and its compensation, the salt duties were reimposed and increased by the Governor-General-in Council. The decision was naturally to appease the so called 'intermediaries', upon whom the people had shown faith. Gradually the common people accepted the increase and on September 14<sup>th</sup>, 1844, when Salt Act was introduced, there was perfect tranquility prevailed throughout the city.

The Protest of the Commercial Class (1848) in Surat: In April 1848, an attempt was made to introduce the Bengal standard of Weight and Measures in Surat. This change met with much opposition from the commercial class, as they were the ones who had to bear the maximum loss. Though there was no direct opposition seen but it could be rated as the first kind of non cooperation movement, as anybody who was found accepting this regulation of the British was to be excommunicated. The traders and merchants refused to sell their products to the Company's servants. The only form of direct protest was a passive one as they submitted a petition of 5, 000/- signatories protesting the application of the Regulation. The result was that the Company's government was forced to withdraw the Regulation.

### The Uprising of 1857 and its impact on Gujarat

Though the reactions of the uprising of 1857 are not seen in such an intensified manner in Gujarat as in the areas of the Indian Subcontinent, yet it is imperative to understand the undertone implications of the Uprising and its local responses. In Ahmedabad the protests which were carried on were for separate reasons and did not have any specific aim. There were rumors that the salt that was carried from Kutch to Rajputana contained red ochre that was believed to be defiled with the blood of cows. This was considered as the device for the forcible conversion to Christianity. Seven Horsemen of the Gujarat Irregular Force barrig others revolted on the 9<sup>th</sup> of July and left the headquarters and escaped towards Sarkhej. But they were soon crushed and were controlled. A plot was arranged against the Maharaja Khanderao Gaikwad of the Baroda State. This was planned at the residence of Babu Mairal Gaikwad by four

of the enemies of the Prince. They took advantage of the confusion and used it to their advantage. This plot was soon discovered and the guilty were punished. In Surat there was relatively in peace as the merchants were loyal towards the British. In Kheda although there were no apparent personal grievances that come to the fore front, but this area witnessed the arrival of Muslims, Marathas, Arabs and Rajputs to Gujarat from North India. Their arrival instigated certain turbulent tribes like the Bhils and Kolis. Jivabhai Thakor of Khanpur with the support of Shri Garkadars Patel, the Mukhi of Anand, revolted and instigated the nearby villages and as result these villages rose in rebellion. But it was soon crushed and Jivabhai Thakor was arrested, was taken to Khanpur, was hanged and others were Court Martialed.

In order to avoid any armed rebellions in future, the Government of Bombay invested Sir R. Shakespeare, the Political Commissioner of Gujarat with full powers to disarm the entire population of Gujarat in 1858, which the Nawab of Khambat submitted after initial resistance. On 30<sup>th</sup> November, Tantiya Tope moved towards Vadodara and Kheda. He tried to rouse the Chiefs of Kheda and Panchmahals to rebel against the British. He persuaded the Chiefs of the region to intercept and stop the British forces from coming to Surat to Kheda. The British were able to easily disperse the Chiefs, who stood against them at the opposite bank of the river Mahi. Several locals were punished who supported the rebels. In Mahikantha, the incidents were reflective of the fact that any small sporadic incidents also got coupled to the uprising though there were no direct linkages. For instance at Chandap, the Gaikwad had feared some violent upheavals and therefore, he had placed about ten horsemen in the village as a precautionary measure. On 24<sup>th</sup> of September 1857, out of 10 horsemen, one was killed and four was wounded. The violence was controlled before it went out of control. Within the Mahikantha district, Mudeti was a small estate under the jurisdiction of Surajmal, the ruler of Idar, rose in revolt against the *darbar* of Idar and the British Government. The Thakor was indebted to *darbar* of Rs. 41, 958/- and when he failed to strike any negotiation, he had to flee to the hills, from where he continued to fight for a year. He eventually surrendered in 1859. The Rebellion of the Naikdas took place in 1858. The Naikdas, another turbulent community in the border district of Panchmahals, also rebelled in a sizeable manner against the exploitation that they had to face at the hands of the British and the local overlords. The rebellion was instigated by Bhau Saheb Pawar, and took shape under the leadership of Rupa Naik and Keval Naik. They were however defeated by the British and retreated to the hills.

Rising of Talavias took place in 1885. The Talavias were believed to be a nomadic tribe who had been victimized by the British, in their process of exploitation of natural resources. The government had attempted to 'settle them down' by forcible cultivation in the areas of wasteland around Panchmahals, with little or no compensation. There was anger against the British rule. This anger found expression and direction under the leadership of Lakha Bhagat, who made them believe that the rule of the British Raj was numbered and it would be replaced by that of their revered deity (Mata). On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November 1885, a hundred *talavias* armed with weapons gathered at Bharuch and attacked the town. They went to the Collector's Collector's bungalow with an aim of killing the Collector, who was the epitome of the British Raj. But unfortunately he was not there and therefore they went about the town,

ransacking it. On their way they met Mr. W.B. Prescott, who was killed by them. They attacked the Police Chowki, Bombay bank and marched through the town. However soon they were routed by the British army and were fired upon. About forty were captured and the Lakha Bhagat and his two principal adherents were hanged in public and hence the rebellion was suitably crushed.

After this there was a relative peace for some time before a rebellion broke out in Cambay in 1890. The year 1890, was an important year in the administrative history of Khambhat or Cambay. The people of the state had long been expecting the introduction of the British survey rates in their villages and were grievously disappointed on learning that not only the former system was retained but the rates of assessment were to be enhanced. The opposition of the villagers held Khambhat held it in a state of siege. The Political Agent Mr. H.R. Cook, obtained military assis-

tance from Ahemdabad and the protest was not quelled till the insurgents were fired upon and some had been killed. In October 1890 A.D. a special Political Officer was appointed by Government to whom the Nawab had delegated his authority and the administration was conducted by that officer with the assistance of the Dewan, also nominated by Government. It may be pointed out that the new administration had succeeded in liquidating a great portion of state debts and had introduced survey rates, and much needed reforms.

The above account clearly reveals the society's response to the presence of a foreign rule in the nineteenth century. These responses emerge as very different from the response of the elitist sections of the society. However it will be apt to say that Gujarat was ready to play a central role in the freedom struggle in the coming century.

## REFERENCE

- Yājñika, Acyuta, and Suchitra Sheth. *The Shaping of Modern Gujarat: Plurality, Hindutva, and Beyond*. Penguin Books India, 2005, 90-94; Dharaia, Ramanlal Kakalbhai. "Gujarat in 1857 (1970) 91 | Briggs, Henry George. *The cities of Gujarāshtra: their topography and history; illustrated in the journal of a recent tour. the "Times" Press by James Chesson, (1849), 101 | For Details please see, Chaturvedi Vinayak, Peasant Pasts: History and Memory in Western India, University of Californial press, 2007, 30-33 | Kumar Ravindra, Western India in the Nineteenth Century: A Study in the Social History of Maharashtra, Routledge, (2013) <http://books.google.co.in> and Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency: Gujarat: Surat and Broach, 156 | Mitra Subrata, Power, Protest and Participation: Local Elites and Development in India, Routledge, 2002, 60; Raval R. L., Mahipatram, Sahitya Akademy, (2002), Ahmedabad, 2 | Yājñika, Acyuta, and Suchitra Sheth. *The Shaping of Modern Gujarat: Plurality, Hindutva, and Beyond*. 66 | Note- the village belonged to the unruly tribe of Gametis. | Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency: Gujarat: Kaira and Panchmahals, 1878, 254 | Note-an aboriginal tribe inhabiting the area in the vicinity of Bharauich. | Hunter, William Wilson. *Bombay, 1885 to 1890: a study in Indian administration*. H. Frowde, (1892), 413 | Gujarat State Gazetteer, Kheda District, Ahmedbad, 1977, p106 | Copland, Ian. "The Cambay 'disturbances' of 1890: popular protest in Princely India." *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 20, no. 4 (1983): 415-437. |*