

From Plough to Protest: Bijolia's Half-Century Long 'No Tax' Campaign

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Abstract—The Bijolia Movement (1897–1941) in the former jagir of Bijolia (present-day Bhilwara district, Rajasthan) stands as one of colonial India's longest-running peasant uprisings. Against a backdrop of excessive land revenues, multiple arbitrary cesses, and forced labour obligations, Bijolia's cultivators deployed non-violent resistance, refusing to till land, migrating collectively, and withholding taxes. Under leaders like Fateh Karan Charan, Sadhu Sitaram Das, Vijai Singh Pathik, and Manikyalal Verma, the movement evolved through three phases, attracted national attention, and laid groundwork for later agrarian protests in Rajputana.

Keywords—Bijolia Movement, Peasant Resistance, Mewar State, Land Revenue Exactions, Non-Cooperation, Civil Disobedience, Vijai Singh Pathik, Fateh Karan Charan, Princely Rajasthan, Agrarian Reform

Introduction

Bijolia was a first-class jagir in the Mewar princely state ruled by the Parmar (Pawar) dynasty. In 1894, Rao Sawai Kishan Singh ascended the jagirdar's throne and began employing new revenue officers who rigorously enforced and extended "lagat" cesses indefinitely. When peasants' appeals to the Maharana of Udaipur produced only temporary warnings, cultivators resorted to organized non-cooperation, marking the birth of an enduring tax revolt.

Historiographical Context

• Colonial and Early Nationalist Narratives

British officials and early Indian nationalists depicted the uprising as a local grievance redressed by princely commissions, underplaying its sustained momentum.

• Agrarian and Subaltern Studies

From the late 20th century, historians have foregrounded peasant agency, situating Bijolia alongside Deccan and Champaran revolts as key sites of rural self-assertion.

• Transnational Social Movement Perspectives

Recent work compares Bijolia's tactics with global non-violent campaigns, highlighting its role in shaping Congress-led civil disobedience strategies in Rajasthan.

Origins and Early Phase (1897–1915)

In 1897, Nanji Patel and Thakari Patel led a deputation to Udaipur, urging the Maharana to curb arbitrary taxes. A fact-finding inquiry validated peasant complaints, but the jagirdar only offered fleeting concessions in 1904. Prithvi Singh's succession in 1906 saw these reliefs withdrawn and new levies imposed. By 1913, approximately 15,000 farmers, led by Fateh Karan Charan, launched a "No Tax" campaign—leaving their fields fallow and cultivating rented land in Gwalior and Bundi, causing Bijolia's revenues to plummet and precipitating food shortages among the jagirdar's dependents.

Middle Phase (1915–1923)

In 1916, Sadhu Sitaram Das invited Vijai Singh Pathik (alias Bhoop Singh) to organize the Bijolia Kisan Panchayat. Under Pathik's leadership, peasants formed village-level committees, raised unrestricted subscriptions, and sent petitions to the Maharana. Negative press in Calcutta and Bombay prompted Udaipur to appoint two commissions (1916, 1920), both confirming exploitative taxation and forced labour (begar). Despite official findings, local nobles blocked reforms, and the Panchayat advised shift-to-dryland cultivation to minimize dues, widening regional solidarity as neighbouring jagirs Begun, Parsoli, and Bhinder joined the boycott.

Late Phase (1923–1941)

After 1923, Manikyalal Verma and local Congress workers infused the movement with new tactics such as mass meetings, public resolutions, and direct appeals to the Rajputana Agency. Aligning with nationwide civil disobedience currents, Bijolia peasants held village festivals refusing khatedari receipts and hosted nightly “panchayat sabhas” to mobilize even landless labourers. Although full revenue abolition eluded them, intermittent reliefs were granted in the late 1930s. The prolonged agitation compelled Udaipur State to formalize grievance redress in 1941, marking the movement’s effective conclusion and inspiring post-Independence land reform debates.

Analysis and Impact

The Bijolia Movement’s longevity and non-violent tactics illustrate:

- The power of organized non-payment as an agrarian weapon
- The role of charismatic peasant leaders in sustaining morale
- The interplay between local grievances and national political networks
- Its influence on subsequent peasant agitations in Rajasthan and beyond

By rejecting direct confrontation and leveraging state-appointed inquiries, Bijolia peasants demonstrated that passive resistance could forcibly reshape feudal revenue regimes.

Conclusion

Spanning nearly half a century, the Bijolia Movement embodies rural India’s capacity for strategic, peaceful defiance under colonial-princely rule. Its three-phase trajectory—from spontaneous protests to structured Panchayat governance offers valuable lessons on grassroots mobilization, state response, and the forging of collective agrarian identity

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