



The No-Tax Peasant Movement in Sirsi, Siddapur, and Hirekerur Taluks (1930–1931)

Author:

Ummequrshid Doddamani

Assistant Professor, Department of History

Government First Grade College, Chikkodi

Abstract

The peasant movements in Karnataka were integral to India's freedom struggle, reflecting both the demand for national independence and a broader social and economic awakening in rural communities. The no-tax movements in Sirsi, Siddapur, and Hirekerur taluks (1930–1931) emerged in response to colonial oppression, excessive taxation, and government indifference. This paper examines the causes, leadership, and impact of these movements, highlighting their contribution to India's broader civil disobedience campaign.

Keywords: Peasant movement, civil disobedience, Gandhi-Irwin Pact, no-tax campaign, Karnataka freedom struggle, rural protest

1. Introduction

The peasantry of Karnataka played a decisive role in India's freedom movement. Harsh taxation and economic exploitation under British rule pushed farmers into debt and hardship. The Indian National Congress's call for Swaraj (self-rule) resonated deeply within these rural communities.

In northern Karnataka, particularly in the Sirsi, Siddapur, and Hirekerur taluks, farmers refused to pay land taxes during the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930–1934). This act of defiance was not only economic but also a political statement of solidarity with the national struggle led by Mahatma Gandhi.

Although the Gandhi-Irwin Pact of 1931 promised partial relief, the hardships of Karnataka's peasants persisted. Local leaders such as Veeranagouda Patil, Guddappa Hallikeri, and T. R. Neshvi emerged as prominent figures, guiding villagers through non-violent resistance.

2. Background and Causes

Colonial agricultural policies in the Bombay Presidency (including parts of present-day Karnataka) were exploitative. Revenue officials imposed heavy taxes even during droughts and crop failures. Already burdened by debt, farmers faced the confiscation of lands and livestock.

Immediate causes of the movement included:

- 1 Repeated crop failures in Sirsi, Siddapur, and Hirekerur.
2. Refusal of the British government to grant tax remissions.
3. Inspiration from Gandhi's Civil Disobedience Movement and the Bardoli Satyagraha (1928).
4. Growing political awareness through local Congress committees and newspapers.
5. These conditions transformed passive suffering into organized resistance.

3. Nature of the Struggle

The movement adopted non-violent satyagraha as its guiding principle. Farmers publicly refused to pay land revenue, prompting the colonial administration to seize and auction their property.

Despite threats and arrests, peasants of Uttara Kannada and Dharwad districts persisted. Women played active roles—picketing offices, organizing meetings, and spreading awareness. Local Kannada newspapers helped mobilize broader support across the region.

4. The Sirsi–Siddapur No-Tax Movement

Severe agricultural distress in Sirsi and Siddapur led farmers to demand tax reductions. When petitions were ignored, local leaders convened a historic meeting at Survey village.

Key leaders included R. R. Diwakar, Karmarkar, Krishnabai Panjekar, Basagouda Ramanayak, Bole Bommayya Nayak, and Satageri Jogi Nayak. Diwakar invoked Gandhi's call for civil disobedience, urging farmers to remain united and fearless.

Villagers from Hichkade, Vasare, Hosakeri, and Satageri joined the campaign. Inspired by Krishnabai Panjekar, women actively participated. Volunteers managed records, distributed leaflets, and coordinated with the Gandhi Seva Sangh.

Despite the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, colonial authorities continued tax collection. British collector Aminuddin intensified repression in April 1931. In response, Diwakar and Karmarkar organized peaceful protests and negotiated the "Diwakar Commissioner Settlement," granting limited relief to areca-nut cultivators and acknowledging the right to seek tax postponement during drought years.

5. The Hirekerur No-Tax Movement

In 1930, Hirekerur taluk of Dharwad district faced severe drought. Under Veeranagouda Patil and T. R. Neshvi, farmers launched a coordinated no-tax campaign.

Leaders from nearby villages—Chikkurur, Hadrhalli, Ettinahalli, Masur, Divigehalli, and Nagavanda—rallied in support. The government confiscated cattle and household property from defaulters.

On 25 January 1931, Neshvi convened a Farmers' Council (Raitha Parishad) at Hansabhavi, chaired by Advocate Pawate of Hubballi. The council unanimously resolved to continue the no-tax movement.

British officials, including Vidyashankar, confirmed poor crop yields, yet attempted tax collection on 25 February 1931, recovering only ₹7,000 of ₹1.91 lakh. Assistant Collector Chinnmulagund arrested Neshvi, but the movement spread further. The press dubbed Hirekerur the "Bardoli of the South."

In April 1931, Veeranagouda Patil and R. R. Diwakar met Commissioner Smart of Dharwad and secured an agreement ensuring:

- 1 Postponement (tahkub) of tax payments for drought-affected peasants.
2. Withdrawal of coercive actions once the agitation ended.

3.Cancellation of fines and legal cases, including that against T. R. Neshvi.

4.This effectively marked the successful resolution of the Hirekerur no-tax movement.

6. Outcomes and Impact

The no-tax campaigns achieved several outcomes:

- 1.Recognition of peasant hardships by colonial authorities.
- 2.Restoration of confiscated lands and remission of arrears.
- 3.Strengthening of rural political consciousness and unity.
- 4.Integration of local struggles with the national freedom movement.

By 1937–38, most displaced peasants had regained their land. The movements demonstrated the power of non-violence and self-organization, leaving a lasting legacy in Karnataka's history.

7. Conclusion

The Sirsi, Siddapur, and Hirekerur no-tax movements exemplify the courage and resilience of Karnataka's rural communities. Despite repression, peasants upheld Gandhi's ideals of truth and non-violence. Their sacrifices not only alleviated local suffering but also reinforced the moral strength of India's freedom movement.

These movements testify to how local resistance contributed to national liberation. Though humble in means, Karnataka's peasants were mighty in spirit, and their contribution remains an enduring part of India's historical memory.

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