

# Thakkar Bapa

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## Biography

- Born to a middle-class family, Thakkar was given his primary education at Bhavnagar and Dholera.
- Pujya Thakkar Bapa, is a social worker of the Servants of India Society.
- Being a close associate of Mahatma Gandhi inspired him to work for removal of deep rooted poverty of tribals while giving service to untouchables.
- He passed away on 20 January 1951 aged 81.
- In 1969, India Post released a stamp in his honour.

## Education

- In 1886, he secured the topmost rank in the matriculation exam in Bhavnagar and was given the Jasvantsinh Scholarship.
- He then joined the Engineering College, Poona in 1887 and passed out with an L.C.E. (Licentiate of Civil Engineering – today's graduate in civil engineering) in 1890.
- He worked as an engineer in Porbandar and also in Uganda. He was also the Chief Engineer of Sangli State for some time.

## His Contribution Before Independence

- One year after joining the Sangli State, he took up a job with the Bombay Municipality. He was posted at the Bombay suburb of Kurla where he came in touch with "untouchables".
- Thakkar established a school for the children of the sweepers of Kurla with help from Ramaji Shinde, a member of the Depressed Classes Mission.
- In 1914, he joined the Servants of India Society.

- He met Mahatma Gandhi introduced by Gopal Krishna Gokhale and the two developed a close relationship.
- In 1920, he visited Orissa and conducted famine relief work.
- In 1922, the Bhils faced a severe famine. He was deeply moved by the pathetic plight of the tribals and in 1923, he founded the Bhil Seva Mandal to strive for their upliftment.
- He was president of the Bhavnagar State Subjects' Conference in 1926 and in 1928 he presided over the Kathiawar States People's Conference.
- During the civil disobedience movement of 1930, Thakkar was arrested and sentenced to 6 months prison with hard labour. But he was released after 40 days.
- He was made the Secretary of the Harijan Sevak Sangh. He founded the Gond Sevak Sangh in 1944. This organisation was later renamed Vanavasi Seva Mandal.

### **His Contribution After Independence**

- He was elected to the Constituent Assembly after independence.
- He was the Chairman of the Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas (other than Assam) Sub-Committee of the Constituent Assembly and also served as a member of the Sub-Committee for Assam.
- Thakkar had a firm faith in universal compulsory education and also advocated the abolition of untouchability. He travelled to many parts of India carrying his mission everywhere.
- He had authored the book 'Tribes of India' which was published in 1950.
- He was such a devoted servant of the poor that Mahatma Gandhi once remarked that his ambition was to equal Thakkar Bapa's record of selfless service.