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Editorial

*Log aate gaye aur karwan banta gaya . . .**Manimala*

The year 2011 marks the sixtieth anniversary of the Bhoodan Revolution started on 18th April, 1951 in a village in Andhra Pradesh when an incident turned instantaneously into a revolution. Majority of the nation's population was landless. A few had control over all the land. As a result, within few years of Independence, the result of the handful of landed people controlling the rest, had become evident. The landed and landless were coming into conflict in a village in Andhra Pradesh. Some violent incidents also took place. In this region, the group trying to resolve matters of land through violent means was active. In this scenario, people found hope in Vinoba Bhave. Vinoba was chosen by Mahatma Gandhi as the first Satyagrahi in the Individual Satyagraha initiated in 1940. After all, what had Gandhiji seen in this man called Vinayak? This question has to be seen in the context of the multitudes that were Gandhi's followers and disciples at that time. The first Satyagraha of the Individual Satyagrahi was initiated on 17th October, 1940. It is important to recall that Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru was the second Satyagrahi. Gandhiji declared Vinayak as the first Satyagrahi and also gave him the name 'Vinoba'. This is the first instance that drew everybody's attention to Vinoba. Vinobaji continued to work in Gandhiji's Constructive Programmes. After Gandhiji's death, his disciples saw hope in Vinoba. The Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh was under the effect of violent incidents on the issue of Land. The 'Sarvodaya Samaj' also decided to hold its conference in the Shivrampalli village of this region. In addition, they requested Vinobaji to attend and grace their conference. Vinobaji started on foot to be a part of this conference. On his way, he met people, shared their worries and woes. He also heeded their views on contemporary society, nation and the world scenario.

On returning from this conference, the landless dalit villagers of Pochampalli village demanded some land while talking to him. Vinobaji

asked the villagers for potential solutions to their issues. Ramchandra Reddy of that village suggested that 100 acres of land be given as 'daan' to them. Acharya Vinoba contemplated deeply on this suggestion and gave it the shape of a principle. In this novel incident, he saw the resolution of the impending turmoil facing the entire nation in the near future. It was no longer relevant here whether Ramchandra Reddy had given this land to accord democratic rights to the landless people, or merely to fulfill his own father's wishes. Inspired by this incident, Gandhiji's spiritual disciple, Acharya Vinoba assessed the importance of 'daan' / (offering) in the Indian consciousness and planned 'Bhoodan' and began to visit different parts of the country to realize this vision.

It must be noted that Acharya Vinoba did not try to first formulate a principle through intellectual discourse, to be applied to reality later. Instead, he took the learning from a real incident and transformed it into a principle. In this, he saw Pochampalli village as representative soul of the entire nation.

Vinoba single-handedly and relentlessly pursued this understanding of India; people kept joining him, and it became a movement. Gradually, the movement took over the entire nation. It needs to be stressed that Acharya Vinoba saw people's tendency to 'daan' as more prominent than their greed and selfishness. Besides this, he also knew that sooner or later, people who had accumulated land would distribute to those who were landless. He always kept in mind the lesson of his teacher Mahatma Gandhi, "Earth has enough to fulfill everyone's need, but not to fulfill even one's greed." To fulfill everyone's need meant everyone having land, especially those who rely on agriculture for livelihood. Acharya Vinoba opined that everyone had a right to land. He believed in a phrase that 'Sabai bhoomi Gopal ki', i.e., All the land belongs to Him (God).

The Bhoodan Revolution was strengthened by the support of youth. Land was substantially donated. The next phase of this movement was Gramdan. Acharya Vinoba and Jaiprakash Narayan expanded the horizons of the Bhoodan Movement and elaborated its many aspects to turn it into a complete philosophy.

The Bhoodan Revolution, termed Bhoodan Yagya by Vinobaji, was severely criticized too. In response to that, Jaiprakash Narayan had written an article titled 'Samagr Ahimsak Kranti ka pehla sopan: Bhoodan'. In this, JP said that "even the Law hasn't been as successful in the issue of land-divisions as Bhoodan had been. Nehruji was the Prime Minister. He wrote countless letters to the Chief Ministers of different States of the country regarding the 'Hadbandi' law. Several circulars went on behalf of the Planning

Commission. Many Socialist and Communist movements also focussed on this issue. Even then, in 25 years of Swaraj, the land distributed through Bhoodan is much more than that by the processes of Law itself. Have you ever asked as to how much has been distributed to landless people through the Hadbandi law? I am not talking about the land owned and administered by the Government. Instead, I am inquiring about the land distributed by landed owners to landless people under this law. Through this perspective, a mere 8000 acres of land had been accorded through law in Gujarat, of which around 6000 acres had been distributed; whereas 50,000 acres has already been distributed through Bhoodan. Under this law in Maharashtra, around 1.25 lakh acres of land has been declared received, of which not even 25,000 acres had been distributed; as opposed to 3.6 lakh acres distributed to landless people through Bhoodan. People go about saying that people have received sandy, rocky and infertile land in Bhoodan, but has anyone bothered to check and validate the actual fact of these claims? All the land that was distributed, was later reviewed and declared as suitable for farming.

On the other hand, also, it needs to be seen as to how much land has been distributed through the violent process. After all that happened in Telangana, not even a single acre of land was earned by anybody. Naxalbadi faced so much bloodshed and violence and still, no one got any land. Hence, in this issue of land-distribution, the path of empathy has been far more successful than that of the law or death. The Bhoodan Revolution has distributed 12 lakh acres of land to landless people. In addition, all of this has been achieved kindly and willingly. This also builds the moral fibre of the nation. This had become a unifying strength at a time when divisive forces are rampant everywhere in the nation.”

This view from Jaiprakash Narayan is in response to those who attempted to undermine the importance of Bhoodan. Certainly, Bhoodan-Gramdan Movement had some shortcomings too; but their assessment cannot be done merely on those factors.

Earlier, those neglecting the importance of Bhoodan were told very aptly by Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru that “The Bhoodan Movement started by Acharya Vinoba is unprecedented, which could have only been materialized in India. Some people point out its flaws and shortcomings. I believe that despite these shortcomings, this movement has been very successful. Its success can be measured by the land and villages that have been offered as ‘daan’. But even more important result of this movement, is the atmosphere established by it, which allows for betterment of land-organization and assists in forming better laws as the views of people

regarding it are changing. In my opinion, laws are important for land-organization, but to reform the consciousness of people at large is fundamentally more important.”

At present, many critical discussions and arguments are taking place regarding this issue of land. Despite this, even today, land has not been justifiably distributed in our country. Most of the land is owned and controlled by few people, and the larger part of the population remains landless.

The present understanding of progress has rendered this question and its associated problems even more serious. In the past few years, violent instances around occupation of land and forests have also taken place. The question of forests is linked to that of land. The migration and displacement happened in the name of progress destroys forest-land as well as the culture and practices of people who inhabit those areas. The lure of this progress has resulted in making our relationship with earth a merely commercial one. As a result, the entire world is under the threat of environmental degradation. Many intellectuals of the world have been contemplating on this issue. The Russian author Tolstoy wrote a story on land. In this story, he raised the question of how much land does a man need, after all? In the beginning of the 20th century, Madhavrao Sapre wrote a story titled ‘Ek tokri bhar mitti’, which depicted the issue of forceful land occupation by zamindars. On similar themes, stories titled ‘Garib ki Haaye’ and ‘Balidaan’ were penned by eminent Hindi writer, Premchand.

On the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of Bhoodan, this issue has collated articles related to the ideology of Bhoodan-Gramdan, and various aspects of its philosophy. Along with this, it also presents the experiences of those who participated in Bhoodan Movement along with Acharya Vinoba. This issue also has sketches that depict the limits of this movement. Besides these, a historical reading of land laws and beliefs associated with land, and articles demonstrating Mahatma Gandhi’s and Dr. Ambedkar’s intellectual views on the matter are included. We hope that through this issue, the Bhoodan movement would be remembered and the present-day problems of land would be understood in its context. We would assess the success of this attempt through your letters and comments. We shall await your opinion.

Manimala

Bhoodan-Gramdan Movement: An Overview

Dr. Parag Cholkar

It has been over sixty years since the birth of the Bhoodan-Gramdan movement. Bhoodan and its offshoot, the Gramdan movement, were visible at the ground level as a movement for around 25 years and after its end, 37 years have gone by. Circumstances have changed. So, what is the need to have an analysis of the movement now? Can we draw some lessons from this movement to face the present day challenges? Even when this movement was endeavouring to bring about new consciousness among the people, especially in the rural areas, the so-called intellectuals of those times did little, except ignoring or ridiculing the movement and dismissing it in a few words born out of ignorance and lack of understanding. This movement, which presented a novel and unprecedented solution to a complex and formidable problem outside the framework of the State, and through it showed a way for the transformation in individual and social life, did not receive from them the attention it deserved; it was not adequately studied. Those intellectuals were either hoping for action from the State that claimed to be a welfare State; or were enamoured by the sterile violent activities backed by a verbose jargon. Perhaps, this class had neither the will nor the capacity to understand the words having moorings in the tradition and the ground realities of this country.

But, now the sterility of the violence of the extreme left is apparent to all, and so are the limitations of the State and its real character. In fact a question has arisen whether the so-called welfare State is really working for the welfare of the people, or serving the interests of national and international capital? The problems of those times are still there and new problems too have arisen. The land problem that gave birth to Bhoodan movement still exists, albeit in a changed form. Perhaps it has become more serious.

Farmers are fighting everywhere to save their land from the assault of

the capital which have the backing of the State apparatus. The Gramdan movement fought against the process of the breaking of villages, which had started in the country in the colonial era. That process still continues; and despite the rhetoric of Panchayati raj, the slavery in villages is increasing in alarming proportions. Violence and State action have clearly failed to find a way out of this impasse; in fact, they are aggravating the situation. The only way that is left, is that of non-violence. A number of mass movements are claiming to follow that path. But they, and the people too, need to have a deeper understanding of the meaning of non-violence, its strategy and the way of its working. And their power will grow in proportion to this understanding. An overview of the Bhoodan-Gramdan movement would be fruitful in this connection.

When the country became independent, land problem was one of the most serious and complex problems facing it. Perhaps it was the worst legacy of British rule.

There is sufficient evidence that the concept of individual ownership of land that is prevalent at present, was not there in India in the ancient times. The State was not the ultimate and sovereign owner of the land; it had, only the right to a certain share in the produce of the land. In the middle ages, due to increasing demands of the State, the land revenue started increasing. During the period of British imperialism, it reached unbelievable levels. And it had to be paid in cash and even before the produce was sold in the market. As a result, the farmer got into the debt trap. As land became a saleable commodity, farmers began to lose hold over their land rapidly and it started getting concentrated in the hands of absentee landlords. Farmers became labourers. Coupled with the deliberate destruction of the domestic industry, this process resulted in great increase in the ranks of the labourers, accentuating in turn their exploitation. The loss of fertility of land and the low prices of the agricultural products aggravated the problem. Not only was the entire agriculture and the land system ruptured, but, also the whole of social, economic, political and cultural fabric of the society, which had developed throughout the ages was dealt a death-blow.

On August 15, 1947, the country became independent. But that was just the transfer of political power at the Centre. As Gandhiji had written in his Last Testament, from the point of view of the seven lakh villages of the country, the social, moral and economic freedom of the country was yet to be attained.¹ In fact, in the true sense, political freedom too was to be attained;

the villagers had lost this freedom in the colonial era.

Finding a lasting solution to the land problem was not only necessary to give succour to the farmer, but it was also necessary to take a step towards the true and total freedom.

It had always been Gandhiji's effort to make the freedom movement, the movement of the farmers. Even before independence, land reforms like abolition of the zamindari system, protection of the tenants, cooperative farming and land ceiling were being discussed. Therefore, taking some steps in the interests of the farmer after independence was but natural. But vested interests were strong in the State structure; and there were some limitations of the democratic structure and the process too. So, revolutionary steps could not be expected from the State; especially when there was no pressure from the vigilant and organised public opinion. Those, who were making policy decisions were influenced by the so-called 'modern' thinking. The country was dependent on imports for its food, therefore, increase in production was bound to have priority; and the economists believed that redistribution of land would adversely affect food production.

For this reason, land reforms were put on the back burner, legal battles continued for years, and the half-hearted and haphazard land reforms that took place proved ineffectual.

On the other hand, it was impossible to bring about land reforms through violence. Violence can never be the power of the people. Violence of a handful of people is bound to degenerate into terrorism even though it is done in the name of the masses. Violence of a small group can never succeed against the might of a modern State. And even if such violence succeeds in capturing the State power, it will result in the rule of that group and not that of the people. The history of Communism teaches us this lesson. In Telengana (1951) the Communists could not distribute the land permanently, nor are the Naxalites able to do it now.

But it was necessary to strike a blow at the huge disparity in the land ownership in the country. This was necessary not merely for economic and social justice, but also to increase productivity. The farm labourer was toiling on the land, but he did not own it. He had a great hunger for land. If he could get land, it would provide him a permanent source of livelihood; increase in farm productivity too was bound to follow, besides mitigating his poverty and exploitation. Only then could the last man feel the advent of freedom.

The need for redistribution of land was, thus, obvious. But there was

nothing for the landless in the various schemes of the government. The first Five Year Plan accepted that the farm labourers who did not have tenancy rights would hardly gain from the State-sponsored redistribution schemes² and mentioned Bhoodan in this connection. Economist D.R. Gadgil, commenting on the plan, said, “This can only be interpreted as meaning that the State itself considers it neither necessary nor possible to do anything for them.”³ But there was urgent need to act on a priority basis in this direction.

In such a situation, Bhoodan stood up for the landless. Bhoodan stressed the need for land redistribution and also questioned the ethical basis of private property in land. It not only did much in this direction, it also created an atmosphere wherein the government was forced to carry out land reforms, and its task was facilitated to an extent. This contribution was acknowledged by many, including the then Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru.

But, even as the Bhoodan movement was going on, those involved in it, did have the realisation right from the outset that land redistribution in itself, would not be sufficient; it would result in the fragmentation of land; and the key to the lasting solution of the land problem lies in the villagisation of land—that is, control of the village community over the land. Bhoodan, therefore, naturally blossomed into Gramdan and the latter became the main focus of the movement.

After Gandhiji’s assassination, the followers of Gandhiji were in a quandry over what to do next and they turned to Vinoba. Vinoba had come into limelight when he was selected as the first satyagrahi by Mahatma Gandhi in 1940 to start individual Satyagraha. Vinoba had spent years in the Gandhi ashrams pursuing his spiritual quest which included experiments in the realm of Gandhian constructive work. In March 1948, a conference of constructive workers was held at Sevagram, where Sarvodaya Samaj was formed. This conference heralded the rise of Vinoba as the leader of the Gandhian fraternity. When the conference of Sarvodaya Samaj was organised in April 1951, at Shivarampalli in the Telengana region, which was wrecked by Communist violence, he was engaged in the experiments of *rishi-kheti* (farming without the aid of bullocks and machines) and *kanchan-mukti* (freedom from the evils of money). Pursued by the organisers, he consented to attend the conference, but he set out on foot. He passed through many villages, talking to the people, understanding their tribulations. While returning on foot, he reached Pochampalli on April 18, 1951 and on that day an incident occurred that started the Bhoodan movement. When the dalits in the village demanded

land, Vinoba casually asked those present, whether they could do something in this regard. An individual named Ramchandra Reddy got up and announced that he would be willing to donate 100 acres of land.

The donation made by Ramchandra Reddy was to fulfil a wish of his late father. It was not a donation that had been given for the landless, acknowledging their right over land; nor had Vinoba asked for such a donation. This incident could very well be viewed as a peculiar incident in a particular circumstance. But the genius of Vinoba realised its implications. He realised that this could be a non-violent way through which land could be redistributed, and that too without creating any ill will among different sections of the society.

It was bound to appear impossible. Could the land hunger of millions of landless be satisfied in this manner? Can it be achieved without political power and organisational strength? But Vinoba, a man of God, took it as a signal from God and set out with faith.

A trust was formed to administer the 100 acres of land received in Pochampalli and it was decided that the dalit families would work on it collectively. While going from Pochampalli to Tangalpalli, the next destination, Vinoba was welcomed on the way by people and it was there that he asked for land for the landless; for the first time. 25 acres were donated. At Tangalpalli, Vinoba received 90 acres of land. He, then went marching forward and kept on receiving more and more land.

It was indeed strange that people were coming forward to donate land to an individual, who had neither any temporal power nor the backing of any organisation. Certainly it was the strength of his charisma, the power in his words that was working wonders. The unique movement caught the attention of the entire country.

For Vinoba, this work was a 'yajna', an act of sacrifice wherein everyone ought to participate. That is why he would ask for land even from the small farmers. He did not beg for land, but asked for it as a right of the landless. For him 'daan' meant equal distribution, the meaning he claimed to have derived from the scriptures. He believed that traditional words should not be abandoned; rather new meanings should be given to them. The villagers, acquainted with the traditional words, were understanding what Vinoba was saying. For Vinoba, the redistribution of land was not simply a work for temporary relief. He was striking at the very root of the concept of individual ownership of land. For him, the redistribution of land was the first step in

the direction of total transformation. There was great potential in this seed. “This issue is an international issue and if we solve it in a peaceful manner, one can say that after Swaraj, we have made a major discovery. If we are able to achieve what we have set out for, and I believe that we will be able to achieve it, then this will show a new path for emancipation to the whole world. The movement has the potential to usher in world-wide revolution.”⁴ It had been Vinoba’s quest to find ‘non-violent means for the mitigation of our problems on social and individual levels’.⁵ It was this quest that had yielded this novel means.

During the 58 days of Telengana march, Vinoba received 12,201 acres of land in 200 villages.⁶ The work of redistributing the land also started. For redistributing the land, the Hyderabad provincial government formulated rules and authorised the committee nominated by Vinoba for distribution of the donated land.

In June 1951, Vinoba returned to his ashram and got engaged in his experiment of kanchan-mukti. He did want the work of Bhoodan to continue in Telangana; perhaps he would have decided on the further course of action by evaluating the progress of the work there. But at that time the First Five Year Plan was being formulated. To have Vinoba’s views on it, Nehru sent R. K. Patil, a member of the Planning Commission to meet Vinoba. Vinoba’s views were highly critical. For him any plan that did not focus on food self-sufficiency, generation of employment and land redistribution was worthless. The rulers of the country who claimed to follow the Mahatma had to take the views of Gandhians into cognizance. Nehru invited Vinoba to Delhi to talk at length with the members of the Planning Commission.

Vinoba started for Delhi on the 12th September 1951, but on foot. This time, it was but natural to try to broaden the Bhoodan movement. So Vinoba started speaking on Bhoodan, forcefully putting his point of view with cogent arguments and drawing upon varied parables. And he kept on getting land. Sceptics had said that Vinoba got land in Telangana because of the Communist menace there; elsewhere he would not get land. But they were proved wrong. Vinoba reached Delhi on the 13th November. Till then, he had received donations of 19,436 acres of land.⁷ On his way, in Sagar (Madhya Pradesh) he presented the demand for 50 million acres of land before the country—one sixth of all the cultivable land in the country, which, according to him, was necessary to give land to all the landless in the country.

In his message to the Delhiites, sent in advance, Vinoba had said, “I

have not come to beg (bhiksha), but to initiate you (to give diksha).”⁸ That was what he really meant to do—to initiate the people into a life of service, sacrifice and altruism.

Given the ‘modern’ thinking behind the Plan, significant change therein was clearly not possible. Nevertheless, Vinoba explained his views to the members of the Planning Commission. For him, it was more important to reach out the people, the real masters in a democracy, and to build people’s power to force the government to take necessary measures. He, therefore, did not turn now towards his ashram. Rather, he immersed himself in the vast ocean of the people in the country. For the next 13 years, he kept on walking from village to village to reach those whom no one had ever reached before.

From Delhi, Vinoba came to Uttar Pradesh. Ignoring the din of the first election, he continued his work. In April 1952, at the Sarvodaya Conference at Sewapuri, Sarva Seva Sangh, an all-India organisation of the Gandhians took over the task of Bhoodan movement. Uptil now only Vinoba was walking on foot, collecting donations of land; now the work of Bhoodan began in all the regions of the country. Apart from Gandhian constructive workers, workers of political parties also started taking part in the Bhoodan work. Upto the time of the Sewapuri Conference, more than 1 lakh acres of land had been received as Bhoodan. At the Conference, it was resolved that 2.5 million acres be obtained within two years.⁹ In an appeal addressed to all the countrymen, Vinoba made three claims for Bhoodan: “Firstly, it is in tune with the Indian culture and ethos. Secondly, it has the potentiality to usher in social and economic revolution. And thirdly, it can help in establishing world peace.”¹⁰

Such were the potentialities inherent in the Bhoodan work. On the 9th May 1952, the day of Buddha Jayanti, Vinoba gave Bhoodan a new dimension by calling it Dharma Chakra Pravartan—beginning of a spiritual revolution. That the foundation of Bhoodan was spiritual was a recurrent theme in Vinoba’s discourses.

During his march in Uttar Pradesh, Vinoba received 295,054 acres of land.¹¹ The work of redistribution of this land also commenced. For the first time in the country the Bhoodan-Yajna Act was passed in Uttar Pradesh. Under it, there was a provision for the establishment of a Bhoodan-Yajna Committee to redistribute the Bhoodan land. Its chairman and members were to be nominated by Vinoba.¹² Later, the same provision was made in the

Acts passed in other States. Enactment of laws that gave authority to an individual who did not hold any governmental post was indeed unique.

The biggest achievement in Uttar Pradesh was the Gramdan of Mangroth village. On the 24th May 1952, all the landholders of this village donated their entire land in the village, totalling 828 acres.¹³ Voluntary surrender of private property in land, sanctioned by the Constitution of the country, by all the landowners in a village was a phenomenon of unprecedented dimensions. There was no question of giving this land to outsiders; it was natural to redistribute it among those villagers working on the land. Herein lied the possibility of having community control over the most important natural resource in the village. The potentialities of the movement were getting gradually unfolded.

After Uttar Pradesh, Vinoba entered Bihar on getting assurance by the workers there, that they would ensure collection of 4 lakh acres of land. Vinoba now thought of attempting the solution of the land problem in a particular State, and to him Bihar was the right State in this regard. He, therefore, appealed to the people of Bihar to give him one sixth of their entire arable land—that is 32 lakh acres. He said, “If we fail to solve this problem within a particular time frame then the pace of the age would overtake us; our programme will then be only a programme for relief; it will lose its revolutionary possibilities. Therefore, we must attempt to solve the problem somewhere. Bihar was a medium sized State where people are good-natured. Non-violence has the greatest chance to succeed in a region where Buddha had given his message.”¹⁴

For this purpose, Vinoba tried his best in Bihar. The main political parties passed resolutions supporting Bhoodan and joined the movement. The government too extended full cooperation. Socialist leader and hero of the ‘Quit India’ movement in August 1942, Jayaprakash Narayan, disassociated himself from Socialism and party politics and joined the Bhoodan movement. He was searching for a practical method to bring in social revolution in the Gandhian philosophy; in Vinoba’s movement he found the answer.¹⁵

In March 1953, at the Sarvodaya conference at Chandil, in his famous speech, Vinoba put forth the concept of people’s power, the third power which is opposed to violence and is different from the coercive power of the State. He also explained the concepts of *vichar-shasan* (belief in the power of thought) and *kartrutva-vibhajan* (decentralisation of power), the main elements in the Sarvodaya methodology. This is Vinoba’s original and radical

contribution not only to the Gandhian philosophy but also to the political science. He gave the clarion call for land revolution, fixed the target of collection of 50 million acres of land by 1957. Jayaprakash appealed to the youth to give up their studies and give one year for this work. Up to the Chandil conference the Bhoodan movement had received the Bhoodan of 1.15 million acres of land.¹⁶

Now, the Bhoodan movement had spread to almost all parts of the country; it had taken the shape of a countrywide movement. Workers of the movement were travelling throughout the country, mostly on foot; meetings and conventions were taking place in different parts of the country. The movement was receiving widespread support from all the quarters. People were looking at it with hope that it would solve their problems. In foreign countries also, there was increasing curiosity about this movement, and many foreigners were coming to the country to see and understand this movement. Many were taking part in the padayatras. They were giving their first hand accounts in various newspapers, journals, and on radio stations. Even ordinary workers were getting land. Often there were long queues of people at meetings for 'donating land!' The atmosphere was surcharged with a new consciousness. Vinoba's march was like a 'mobile university', imparting knowledge to people in the remotest corners of the country and sowing the seeds of human values and revolutionary inspirations. In April 1954, at the Sarvodaya conference at Bodhgaya, Jayaprakash announced dedication of life for the cause of the movement. Vinoba himself and seven hundred other workers too announced that they were going to dedicate their lives for the movement. By then, the Bhoodan movement had received 28.15 lakh acres of land, and the resolve to collect 2.5 million acres of land in two years had been fulfilled. Around 56,000 acres of land had been distributed.¹⁷ The work of redistribution of land was lagging behind and therefore, it was decided that special thrust would be given to it. However, this was a very difficult, complex and time-consuming task particularly because of the involvement of the Revenue Department – a department known for its incompetence and corruption.

In Bihar, intensive work had created a favourable atmosphere. The sale and purchase of land had lessened, and so also the land-related litigation. Jayaprakash told Krishnavallabh Sahay, Revenue Minister of Bihar, "No mass movement can do anything more than this. The atmosphere is favourable and now it is up to the government to take its advantage."¹⁸ But the

government failed to take advantage of this psychological moment. But was it right to expect that the status-quoist state would take radical measures?

In Bihar, the movement received a total of 22.32 lakh acres, and what was particularly significant was that this land was donated through 286,420 donation deeds.¹⁹ From Bihar, Vinoba went to Odisha. And here, he began talking of the land revolution— not just redistribution of land, but its villagisation; that is, establishment of community control over land.

Vinoba thought that Odisha, the poorest State in the country was the most favourable for such an attempt: “If the poor do not surrender their ownership rights first, then who else will? The ownership of the rich will go automatically; the poor will have to give it up voluntarily. It is India’s good fortune that a few rich also come forward to surrender their ownership. But one cannot rely too much on that. Hence, we should gain as much sympathy of the rich as possible, but focus on seeing that the poor give up their ownership; that is the best way for the dissolution of ownership. For this Orissa was the right place.”²⁰

Surrender of the individual ownership of land is the foundation of Gramdan. Therefore, emphasis was put on Gramdan in Odisha. Especially tribal villages came forward to declare Gramdan in large numbers.

Redistribution of land based on the size of the family took place in many of the tribal villages. Voluntary surrender of individual ownership of land by all the landowners of the village and its complete redistribution was a phenomenon of revolutionary dimensions. There were instances of landowners relinquishing land over 100 acres and gladly accepting 5 acres, while landless persons with larger families got 10 acres or more. It was indeed unbelievable; but this did take place in scores of villages across the State. However, it is unfortunate that its implications were not realized and the country’s energies were not channelled towards this purpose.

The concept of Gramdan evolved gradually. It started with the abolition of individual ownership of land and its redistribution. The individual ownership of land stood dissolved. Who will then be the owner of the land? The entire village community should control the land; its survival depends on it and only it can utilize it properly in the interest of the whole community. When a basic resource like land comes under the control of the entire community, it can formulate and execute plans for its economic development and welfare on its basis. Poverty, hunger and unemployment in the village could then be effectively tackled. When the people in the village sit together

and think about the welfare of the village, they can solve their problems, resolve fights within the village and can run the affairs of the village—that is, they can advance towards Gram-Swaraj (village self-rule). Gramdan can thus, be the harbinger of Gram-Swaraj. Right since the inception of the Bhoodan movement, Vinoba had kept on stressing that land must not be the private property of anybody; it should be available to all like air and water; it, too, is a gift of the Lord to all: ‘The land is the Lord’s; no one can have individual ownership over it’ (Sabai bhoomi Gopal ki, nahin kisee ki maliki). No one can own the land, but all should have equal right over it. A resource like land should not be an instrument of personal benefit and nor should it serve to make the State more powerful. Only the local community should have control over it, as, only it can protect and develop it. This would lead the villages towards Gram-Swaraj and the State would gradually wither away. All the revolutionaries had always desired the withering away of the State, as they had believed that revolution would not be complete without it. However, the Socialists and the Communists actually worked for making the State stronger and stronger and the anarchists could not find a proper way for its dissolution. Gramdan removes this deficiency in the theory and practice of revolution; and it therefore, is still relevant— not only in India, but also all over the world facing an unprecedented crisis where its very survival is at stake. Vinoba’s genius blossomed further in exploring and explaining the potentialities in Gramdan.

The Koraput district in Odisha recorded the highest number of Gramdans; and on its basis, an attempt was made to create a model of alternative development.²¹ That attempt failed, but valuable lessons could be learnt from it. Vinoba’s standpoint in this respect was always clear; he always maintained that the task of the workers was to work for strengthening the spirit of brotherhood and unity among the villagers and to see that the Gramsabha (the assembly of all the adult villagers) evolves into an active unit where everybody has a stake and a role. Once it is realized, then it was up to the villagers themselves to work for their progress with their intellectual and physical resources.

From Odisha, Vinoba went to Andhra Pradesh and from there to Tamil Nadu. Detractors had said that Gramdans took place in Odisha because the villages there were mainly tribal, where the people were simpletons and the land did not have much market value. It will not be possible in Tamil Nadu where the land was fertile and the farmers were educated. But this

presumption was proved wrong and Gramdans took place in Tamil Nadu also in large numbers.

Now, it had been proved beyond doubt that land could be got and distributed through Bhoodan all over India and that the villagers can give up individual ownership of land and take the pledge of Gramdan. Of course, there were obstacles; there were ups and downs in the movement. But all these were natural. The main thing was that the message of the movement had spread all over the country, and its practicability and applicability had been proved beyond doubt. From the very beginning, Vinoba wanted that this movement should be taken up by the people themselves. It should not remain a cadre-based movement; the people should consider and make it their own. If the people wanted Swaraj then it was for them to work for it; no group claiming to represent them—howsoever noble its ideals might be—bring it for them. Only a truly people's movement can be revolutionary. Over the years, Vinoba had been talking from time to time about '*nidhimukti*' (freedom from funds) and '*tantramukti*' (freedom from any formal structure). In November 1956, at Palni (Tamil Nadu) he succeeded in convincing his followers. Sarva Seva Sangh resolved for their adoption. It resolved to discontinue any aid from any centralised fund and to dissolve the Bhoodan committees working at that time. Gandhi Smarak Nidhi was funding the movement on its own accord, but now the Sangh decided that they would not take any funds from it. This was indeed a revolutionary decision. Normally, the organisations seek money and the donors decide whether to give that to them or not. But here the donor was offering financial aid on its own accord, and the recipient decided to refuse it!" All organisations want to strengthen themselves, but in the process they may get strengthened; not the people.

The decision was undoubtedly revolutionary, but it did not yield the desired results. The movement did not become the people's movement. The temporary arrangement made for conducting the movement did not serve the purpose. An organisation of Sarvodaya mandals had to be created to take it forward. While there were political workers in the Bhoodan committees, the members of the Sarvodaya mandals were non-political workers. The idea that the people should work on their own initiative was good, but there was no sufficient groundwork. The movement did need full-time workers, but how could they be expected to work without any honorarium, howsoever meagre it may be? The full-time workers had families to support. It was not

that Vinoba was not concerned about it; he did make suggestions from time to time for the type of funding that was in tune with the philosophy of the movement. It was for this reason that he gave the programmes of '*sootanjali*' (donation of self-spun yarn hanks) and '*sampattidan*' (voluntary donation of one sixth of one's income every year), but none of these programmes worked. Later, he gave the programme of '*sarvodaya-patra*' (families sympathetic to the cause should keep a vessel wherein the youngest child in the home would deposit a handful of grains, which would later be utilized partially for the subsistence of the workers) which sought to earn the people's consent for a revolutionary programme. But this programme too could not make much headway.

From Tamil Nadu, Vinoba went to Kerala. In Kerala, he announced the setting up of Shanti Sena (Peace Brigade). The incidents of violence in the country were increasing, and for the success of the Gramdan movement it was necessary that there be goodwill and brotherhood in society. The Peace Brigade was supposed to consist of workers who would serve the society and work for the Sarvodaya movement during peacetime, and would be ready to lay down their lives to put out the flames of violence whenever they erupt. Some work was done in this direction and in some of the communal riots the Peace Brigade did creditable work.

From Kerala, Vinoba came to Karnataka where he gave the programme of "*sarvodaya-patra*" and also gave the mantra, '*Jai Jagat*' (Victory to the world). In Yelwal, on September 21-22, 1957, there was an all-party meeting on Gramdan in which the President, Prime Minister and nearly all the top leaders of the country were present. The Gramdan movement was praised and everyone promised full support to it. It was recommended at the meeting that there should be closest possible co-operation between the government's Community Development Programme, which at that time was the main instrument through which the government worked for the rural development, and the Gramdan movement.²² For this purpose, the objectives of the Community Development Programme were changed.²³ That the elected representatives in democratic India put their seal of approval on Gramdan was a major historical event.

From Karnataka, Vinoba went to Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Punjab and from there he entered Kashmir. In Punjab, he spoke against the entry of politics in the gurudwaras and reminded the Sikhs that their gurus (the ten masters venerated and followed by the Sikhs) stood for unity, love

and sharing. His journey to Kashmir was in his own words, 'a message of love'. In his eyes, all his work had essentially this aim: to unite the hearts of the people. In Kashmir, he went up to the Pir Panjal range which is at the height of 13500 feet. From Kashmir, he turned south and came to Madhya Pradesh where a large number of dreaded dacoits of the Chambal valley surrendered before him. This was another example of the power of non-violence. In Indore, he stayed for one month and tried to make it a 'Sarvodaya-nagar' (a city following the ideals of Sarvodaya)—tried to find out how and which Sarvodaya programmes could be undertaken in the cities.

In July 1960, there were riots in Assam wherein linguistic minorities were targetted. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru requested Vinoba to go there. Vinoba already had plans to go to North East in any case, and so from Madhya Pradesh, he headed to Assam. Here, he spread the message of peace and brotherhood and also worked for the Gramdan movement. He stayed in Assam for one and a half year and a large number of Gramdans took place. There was a major problem of infiltration (from the neighbouring East Pakistan) in Assam at that time—which is still present. Vinoba believed that Gramdan would be an ideal solution to tackle that problem, as no outsider can purchase land in a gramdan village without the consent of the gramsabha. Even now, fifty years later, the gramdan villages in Assam are free from infiltration.

While returning from Assam, the best route was through East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and the Pakistani government gave permission to Vinoba to enter the country. In his 16 day's stay there, he received 176 bighas of land in Bhoodan and it was distributed then and there.²⁴ This showed that Bhoodan-Gramdan could be replicated in other countries too.

By September 30, 1962, this is where the Bhoodan-Gramdan movement stood: A total of 530,344 donors had given 41, 62,623 acres of land; 11,20,485 acres of land had been distributed to 313,866 landless persons and the number of gramdani villages was 5079.25 Bhoodan Acts had been passed in almost all the States, and Bhoodan committees had also been constituted under it. They were distributing the land, but the work was not progressing at the desired pace. Donation of land had almost come to a standstill. During Vinoba's tour Gramdans were being declared, but their number was not enough to have an impact on the society. In the gramdani villages and also in other areas, efforts were being made to progress in the direction of gram-swaraj, but that progress too was lagging behind expectations. *Nidhimukti*

and '*tantramukti*' had resulted in reduction in the number of workers.

Naturally, there were demands from the ranks of the movement for rethinking on its strategy. However, Vinoba was in favour of continuing the Bhoodan-Gramdan programmes which for him were still useful and necessary and scope still existed for them. Gramdan involved the redistribution of entire cultivable land of the village. That it took place in quite a few villages was indeed a unique achievement. But it was very difficult for this thing to take place on a large scale. And no programme could be an instrument of change without being able to be implemented on a large scale.

Moreover, it is certainly more practicable to proceed towards the dissolution of landownership in a phased manner. Vinoba, therefore, put forward the scheme of 'Sulabh Gramdan', whose main features were as follows:

1. At least 75 per cent of the landowners should surrender ownership of their land to the village community—that is, gramsabhas, meaning the assembly of all the adult male and female population—and the land so donated would vest in it.
2. This land should at least be 51 per cent of the entire cultivable village land.
3. At least 75 per cent of the people of the village should accept Gramdan.
4. Five per cent of the land vested in the gramsabha would be given to the landless.
5. The remaining 95 per cent of the land would remain with the original owners and their descendents. However, it can be transferred within the village only, and that too with the permission of the gramsabha.
6. The villagers would give 2.5 per cent of their earnings or produce to the gramsabha with which the '*gram-kosh*' would be formed. This would be used for providing aid to the needy, for overall development of the village or for public works.

On fulfillment of these conditions the village would be deemed to be a gramdani village. All the adult men and women of the village would sit together in the gramsabha and discuss and decide about the village affairs, make plans and execute them. The decisions of the gramsabha would be taken by consensus—either by unanimity or with everyone's consent, and not by vote. Only such a decision-making process is in tune with freedom, and only it would be able to lead the people towards gram-swaraj. Division between majority and

minority would break the unity of the village. The Gramsabha should have all the powers that are necessary to discharge its duties.

With the advent of Sulabh Gramdan, the number of Gramdans in the country started increasing. To fit them in a legal framework, many states passed laws. Substantial powers have been given to the Gramdani villages in terms of these Acts. After fulfilling the necessary requirements—which show the keenness of the villagers to advance towards gram-swaraj and demonstrates their fitness for it—any village can opt for Gramdan and get those powers. Even today, Gramdan Acts are the most potent instruments for village self-government.

In December 1963, the Sarvodaya conference at Raipur adopted the three-point programme of Sulabh Gramdan, village-oriented khadi and Shanti-Sena, and it was decided to intensify the Gram-swaraj movement throughout the country on the basis of that programme.

From Raipur, Vinoba moved towards Wardha. But, in June 1964, ill-health forced him to stay at Pavnar Ashram. His health was no longer permitting padayatras. For 13 years of his life, he had walked without break, disregarding hot or cold weather or rains; crossing forests, mountains and rivers that lay in the way. During his Bhoodan-Gramdan padayatra, Vinoba must have walked at least 80,000 kilometers.²⁶

But Vinoba could not stay for long at Pavnar. The situation in the country was deteriorating at an alarming pace. To make the movement widespread and effective it was necessary to focus on a particular area and concentrate all the energies there. In May 1965, he threw a challenge to the workers of Bihar that if they are prepared to bring 10,000 villages under Gramdan in six months, he was ready to come to Bihar. He gave the word—‘toofan’ (typhoon). The workers of Bihar accepted this challenge.

For Vinoba, it was his last fight—the last and the best. By 14 years of tireless efforts he had built a unique movement and showed a new way. The movement had certainly received some support from different quarters, but it had not yet been able to mobilise the kind of support that could make it an instrument for fundamental change in the country. In the fast-deteriorating situation in the country the people were losing patience and unrest and violence were increasing. Vinoba’s call to the workers was: “Time is fast running out. You must prove the efficacy of gram-swaraj through Gramdan within five to six years, otherwise this ideology would go into cold storage. It may be good, but it would be of no use if it stays in cold storage. This

ideology has the power to save the country and also the world.”²⁷

For this reason, Vinoba concentrated all his energies in Bihar. He himself came to Bihar in September 1965. This time padayatra was not possible; so he travelled by car. Efforts were launched from every quarter to bring the entire State into the ambit of Gramdan. The government too extended a helping hand. Workers reached out to people even in the remotest areas, convincing them about the necessity of Gramdan. Even the administrative blocks, tehsils and districts started accepting Gramdan—that is, majority of villages therein resolved to accept Gramdan. In the course of time, Bihar became the aim of the movement. The idea was that if a new structure could be developed based on Gramdan, then it would have an economic and political impact on the society in the State. Vinoba’s urgency was becoming more and more vocal: “If we do not work quickly then it would not matter whether we do it or not. If we do it in 10 to 20 years, it would be meaningless. Then the circumstances would be beyond any control and the entire work would become futile. The forces of violence would assert themselves. That is why I am stressing on quick action. If the village unites, only then it will be strong and the people will be free from exploitation. The government would never be able to free them from exploitation. It is for the villagers to do it. For this, Gramdan is the only non-violent programme. If we do not take this up the downtrodden would revolt. Their continuous exploitation is beyond endurance.”²⁸

The Toofan movement sought to get the signatures (or thumb impressions) of at least 75 per cent of the landowners on the declaration forms saying that they were in favour of Gramdan of the village. In a way, it was a massive signature campaign under which the idea of Gramdan was being spread from village to village and their consent for it was being taken in the form of signatures or thumb impressions. The workers of the movement went from village to village, knocked on doors and went to the fields to convince the people. The work went on in the midst of political instability, valueless politics and natural calamities like floods and droughts. There was an unprecedented churning in rural Bihar. Signing the declaration forms for Gramdan was a vote in its favour, on the foundation of which an alternative system would have taken shape.

By October 1969, when the Sarvodaya conference took place at Rajgir, 60065 villages in Bihar had come under Gramdan –almost the entire state had ‘voted’ in favour of Gramdan. The movement had reached its peak. The

Toofan movement had brought a new zest everywhere in the country and Gramdan was getting widespread support there. In the country, the number of gramdani villages had risen to 137,208.²⁹ But when work is done at great speed, keeping targets, and help of anyone who is willing is taken, it is but natural that there will be deficiencies and impurities. Yet it was not an insignificant fact that lakhs of people in thousands of villages had come to know about Gramdan and they had given their consent for it. This was no mean achievement. To detractors, who said that getting consent or declaration forms for Gramdan was just paperwork, Vinoba used to reply that even the vote is a piece of paper; yet it can topple governments.

Moreover, a vote in itself is inactive, but the consent forms signed for Gramdan showed willingness of the person to do something. Now, the task was to make as many of those villages gramdani-villages in the true sense to work for making the gramsabhas there strong, active and the vehicle of transformation. The era of propagation of ideology had passed to a certain extent. Now the work demanded a new vision, new approach and new methods. This is what Vinoba wanted and the situation demanded that the strategy of the movement should have been revised accordingly. Whatever had been done earlier was just groundwork; the real work of gram-swaraj was to begin now.

Unfortunately this could not be done. There were attempts to get the legal stipulations fulfilled, particularly in Saharsa and Musahari in Bihar. But they could not make much headway due to red-tapism in the government bureaucracy and several other factors. Efforts did take place; and that is why there are 3932 villages that are registered gramdani villages under different state Bhoodan-Gramdan Acts.³⁰ In these villages at least the individual ownership of land has been abolished, and that too voluntarily.

Nevertheless, what had been aimed at could not be achieved. The movement lost its momentum and gradually dissipated when confronted with the reality of rural India and in the end it became confined to the pages of history. The movement ended, but Bhoodan-Gramdan is still alive. The distribution of Bhoodan land is still going on and so far around 25 lakh acres of land have been distributed to the landless poor in the country. There still exist 3932 gramdani villages and efforts are on to make some of them active. Villages like Seed in Rajasthan and Keliweli in Maharashtra have demonstrated the potentialities inherent in Gramdan. Villagers of Maharashtra's Lekha-Mendha village—the first village to get forest rights in

the country—have unanimously resolved to opt for Gramdan.

The distribution of land received under Bhoodan proved to be a great challenge before the movement. It could not keep pace with the donations. The work of distribution was complex and time-consuming and it could not proceed without the co-operation of the government's revenue administration, which had been notorious for its inefficiency and corruption. Without the government's seal of approval, no distribution of land could have legal sanctity and permanence. Had there been political and administrative will, a process could have been devised to complete the work easily and quickly. However, this did not happen. This work also demanded technical knowledge and skill, which the workers in the Bhoodan-Gramdan movement generally lacked; nor was there any arrangement for their training for this purpose. The distribution of Bhoodan land started almost since the time of inception of the movement. State governments have to be complimented for taking necessary legal and administrative measures. The detailed rules for land-distribution were formulated by Vinoba himself. He saw to it that the entire process of land-distribution remains transparent. The rules stipulated that this be done in the well-publicised village meetings in the presence of government officials, that all the details of land available for distribution be obtained beforehand, that it be done with consensus and land be given to the most needy and with the consent of the landless present. It was also stipulated that at least one third of the land distributed should be given to those from the scheduled castes. The land so given was to be cultivated by the recipients and not to be sold.

It was necessary that this work be done with caution and not in haste. Moreover, it was the strategy of the movement to first concentrate on obtaining the donation of land and there was also the paucity of workers. All this naturally led to a gap between receipts and distribution and the movement could not escape its repercussions. There was no question of leaving the work of distribution of land in the hands of the government, as the donors were giving land to Vinoba and not to the government. There were differences of opinion within the movement regarding the role of the donor in the distribution of the land. In 1956, Vinoba was against giving the donors the right to decide who the recipient would be, but he changed his stand in 1963.³¹

But, it did involve risk as the experience of the Bigha-Kattha campaign in Bihar showed. Naturally, the distribution work remained worker-centric.

But these workers were human beings after all; they were not free from human limitations and failings. That was why complaints about corruption were voiced from time to time. And though the incidence of corruption was decidedly meagre, it did affect the image of the movement. Actually, this work of distribution was that of the village communities, and they should have done it. This is what Vinoba always wanted. But the gramsabhas were not strong. Gramdan movement too failed in empowering them.

The work of distribution needed money, and that should have been provided by the society and the government; the movement could not be expected to bear this burden. The government did constitute the Bhoodan Committees, but they always lacked money and other resources. Even today, the Committees who are alive are grappling with this problem.

Even then, the overall work of distribution of land has been reasonably satisfactory. Independent studies have confirmed this. For example, in Vidharba, a study on Bhoodan was done by leftist intellectuals Dr. K. R. Nanekar and Dr. S. V. Khandewale. They found that “by and large all the guidelines and laws were followed while distributing the land.”³²

When the landless were getting land through voluntary efforts, the welfare State should have come forward to ensure that the landless were settled properly. But the State did not fulfill this obligation.

The landless who got land were poor; they did not have any resources. Some efforts were made by the Bhoodan movement to provide resources but they were not sufficient. Neither did the government give resources, nor did it make arrangement for loans on easy terms. Forget giving special treatment, the farmers who got land under Bhoodan were given step-motherly treatment. In a state like Bihar, mutation of thousands of acres of land is still pending even after so many years. The problem of forcible eviction is serious and the State is not fulfilling its duty of restoring possession of land to evict Bhoodan farmers.

Despite all problems, till date, around 25 lakh acres of land has been distributed among the landless and this is a creditable achievement. Moreover, most of this land has been received by those belonging to scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward castes, since they were the most needy. The Chairman of the first Backward Classes Commission, Kakasaheb Kalelkar had said that the Bhoodan movement gave land to those castes who had all along been deprived of it.³³

And it is noteworthy that despite all the powers and resources at their

command the States, through the land ceiling Acts have been able to distribute only 49.65 acres of land, just double of what has been distributed through Bhoodan (24.44 lakh acres).³⁴

The Bhoodan movement took forward Gandhi's epochal work—of which political independence was only the first step. Vinoba proved to be not only the spiritual successor of Gandhi, as is often said, but he also proved to be his political successor. Bhoodan-Gramdan movement always kept itself aloof from party politics, but it was essentially a political movement in the true sense of the term. Vinoba took forward, through his ideas and work, Gandhi's work in terms of his political aim (a state-free society), political means (satyagraha) as well as political programme (constructive programme).

Vinoba took a material problem in his hands, but the movement was fundamentally spiritual. The Bhoodan movement showed that man could rise above narrow self-interest and greed. Critics at first did not believe that anyone could donate land, and when it started happening, they said that the special conditions in Telangana were responsible for it and this could not be replicated elsewhere. When it took place in other States, they said that this was due to the abolition of zamindari system. But they forgot that when the zamindars were donating land as Bhoodan, they were forsaking the compensation that was legally due to them. Moreover, not only big zamindars, but large number of small landholders were also donating land. Then, the critics thought that those giving land must be doing so to get name and fame, and that they were giving disputed and poor quality land. And they took this conjecture as a settled fact. This was far from the truth. One can cite in this respect the study done by Babulal Gandhi in Western Maharashtra, where he found that those who gave disputed land or gave land to gain applause were only 13 to 14 per cent of the total number of donors—the percentage of land so donated was obviously even lesser.³⁵ There can be no doubt that most of those who donated land did so because they were motivated by a higher call and whatever pressure there was, it was moral pressure, which cannot not be faulted. And this land was distributed in such a way that the recipients' self-respect was not hurt.

That some of the land was of poor quality was only natural. But land unfit for cultivation can surely be used for several other purposes, and it was actually so used to some extent. On the other hand, one can safely surmise that the Government must have got the most possible inferior land under the ceiling acts. Yet the so-called intellectuals, without carrying out any

independent comparative study about the land received under Bhoodan and the ceiling Acts, did not hesitate in making sweeping statements proclaiming that inferior lands were received under Bhoodan. In fact, no land can be said to be bad. The land that is not cultivable can be made so through irrigation etc. Kanti Shah rightly says, "...but no one received motivation from the fact that when so much land has been received in a manner unprecedented in the history of the world, let all efforts be put in to make every inch of it cultivable. In Israel the people did the extraordinary work of turning patches of desert into oases. Had our governments, our loquacious intellectuals and the leaders in different fields shown a little more imagination they would have launched a country-wide movement along with Bhoodan for this purpose. But --- they were interested only in declaring at the slightest opportunity that Vinoba had failed!"³⁶

If Vinoba came to know that the land was bad, he used to refuse to accept it. And the very fact that around 25 lakh acres of the land have been distributed means that at least this much land was cultivable, as only such land has been distributed. This is not a small figure.

An objection was that Bhoodan would result in fragmentation of land, which was already much fragmented; and small plots were not economically viable. Vinoba did recognise this; and therefore, from the very beginning he used to harp on the theme that the land of the village should belong to the village. But he believed that Bhoodan was necessary as a first step towards the abolition of landownership, for providing immediate relief to the landless and bringing unity and goodwill in the society. Ultimately, the land had to belong to the entire village and that is why Gramdan became the ultimate goal and main programme of the movement.

There was also the criticism of taking donations from the poor. But this, in fact, was the special characteristic of Bhoodan. It wanted to create an environment of giving and not taking in society. Vinoba believed that if the poor gave land, then that would bring a moral pressure on the rich: "When lakhs of poor donate, the battle would be won without any fighting."³⁷

Therefore, Vinoba did not think then that-time was opportune for any kind of aggressive satyagraha. He had to face the criticism that he gave up Gandhiji's aggressive satyagraha. Vinoba used to point out that Bhoodan was also a kind of satyagraha; and that the strategy of the movement demanded that first the ideology be sufficiently spread.

"Sarvodaya says that if a principle is accepted by a majority and is still

being disregarded, then it is a fit case for satyagraha; but if a principle is accepted by us but not by the majority, then it is a matter for education and not for satyagraha. The principle that there should be no individual ownership of land is not accepted by the majority only we believe in it, and therefore it is a matter of education, and not of satyagraha.”³⁸ For this reason, Vinoba gave emphasis on spreading the message of the movement. When the majority accepts a principle, then satyagraha can be done to bring round the intransigent few. Satyagraha can also be undertaken when the majority, even though accepting a principle, are not following it because of weakness. Under such circumstances Vinoba did give permission for satyagraha; in fact, he took a lead in 1960 for satyagraha against vulgar posters and in 1976 for satyagraha against cow-slaughter. Vinoba’s critics, however, continued to criticise him, often without knowing the real situation or even after receiving cogent replies. Hallam Tennyson makes this pertinent observation, “In one form or another, Vinoba repeated his arguments. But the protesters took little notice. They went on protesting—querulous, nagging, captious and continual. It was hard for those who prided themselves on their sophistication to accept the fact that something as simple as bhoodan could possibly work.”³⁹

It was due to this approach of the intellectual community that Bhoodan-Gramdan was not adequately studied. The terminology of the movement was another problem for them. Pandit Nehru had rightly said, “There is no doubt that Acharya Vinoba’s movement is a somewhat a strange way of solving this important and complex problem. This is a way which the learned economists cannot explain; perhaps cannot understand as well.”⁴⁰ That is why Acharya Kripalani had said, “Gandhiji’s non-violent non-cooperation and decentralised industrialisation had to be explained to the educated person in the modern Western terminology; the Bhoodan movement also has to be explained to them in that manner.”⁴¹ Undoubtedly, the movement did not succeed in doing it adequately; and therefore the urban media by and large ignored it.

In the first phase of the Bhoodan movement, there was some support from the political workers. They participated in the work of the Bhoodan committees, which clearly served their political interests. But after the dissolution of the Bhoodan committees in 1957, they naturally lost interest in that work. Their vested interests were obviously opposed to the declared aims of the movement. Vinoba always exhorted the people to shun the party politics. Political workers co-operated in the Gramdan phase also, as mass

contact involved therein was likely to give them political benefit. But when it came to implementing the next phase of Gramdan, their co-operation could not be hoped for. The government also extended co-operation in the early phase as the movement was giving land to the landless and so easing pressure on the government. But Gramdan was Gram-Swaraj—where the villagers would be masters of their own village. Opposition of the government to this ‘state within the state’ was but natural. Moreover, the government machinery, built during the colonial period, has a particular nature, which has not changed much even after independence.

The movement had the benefit of Vinoba’s extra-ordinary charismatic leadership. But that too had its limitations. It was Vinoba who gave vision to the movement and decided about its strategy and programmes. So when Vinoba withdrew, the movement collapsed. The movement was essentially an ideological one, and therefore, it was necessary that the workers should have understood its ideology thoroughly. For this reason, Vinoba always used to stress on study, but its inadequacy always remained a matter of concern. Nor were there adequate training facilities. Therefore, there was always ideological confusion among the workers and even in the second and third leadership tiers of the movement. Jayaprakash Nayaran once admitted candidly: “Even we ourselves do not fully understand this new method, so others too naturally do not understand it.”⁴² Most of the workers who came from the political background could not perhaps completely change their old mindset. However, it has to be conceded that the workers of the movement worked impartially. They rose above pettiness and worked selflessly and honestly. This movement only gave hardship to the workers, there was no incentive or promise of power or money or position. Even then, the dedicated workers worked for years, facing ridicule, opposition, privations. This undoubtedly is one of the greatest achievements of the movement.

The movement could not fulfil its announced objectives. This was only natural. Its aim was so high that it was bound to fail. But what it achieved in concrete terms and also intangibly has to be taken into account by any authentic history. The main achievement of this movement is that it put forward an alternative. It presented a new process for change; and it gave several ideas and programmes in this connection. The ascension of ideas during the course of this movement is simply astonishing. This ascension is a valuable treasure of the entire humankind. The seed it sowed can never be lost. And it should not be lost, as therein lies not only the survival but also

the progress and evolution of the human race.

(The writer has recently written the history of Bhoodan-Gramdan movement in three volumes, titled 'Sabai Bhoomi Gopal Ki', which has been published by Gujarat Vidyapeeth, Ahmedabad)

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Vinoba's Movement: An Overview

Kanti Shah

On 18 April, 1951, Vinoba got 100 acres of land as donation in Pochampalli village of Andhra Pradesh. Thus, triggered the phenomenal Bhoodan-Gramdan and people's movement. Now 60 years have gone by and it is now time to attempt having an overview of the movement.

In reality, the movement was only part of an overarching movement called Sarvodaya. Therefore, when we attempt to overview Bhoodan, the context would be the entire Sarvodaya movement.

'Sarvodaya', the word, was coined 100 years ago. In ancient literature, this word might have been used in some context, but its use as a definitive philosophy is only 100 years old.

This word took shape in Gandhi's mind in 1904 when he read Ruskin's book 'Unto This Last', but the word took concrete shape in 1908 when Gandhi translated the gist of this book in Gujarati. The translation is an example of Gandhi's literary acumen. The title of Ruskin's book was taken from a Biblical story 'Unto This Last', which means that even the last person should get an equal share. In those days, the concept of 'Greatest good of greatest number' was in vogue. But Gandhi said that Sarvodaya meant the rise of all, and it was not merely the greatest good of the greatest number or of the last person standing in the queue. From then on, the ideology of Sarvodaya got firmly established in social discourses. The detailed explanation of the meaning of Sarvodaya can be found in 'Hind Swaraj' that was written by Gandhi in 1909. The overview that we are attempting here would be against this background.

It seems Gandhi's preoccupation with Swaraj did not allow him the occasion to consider the principle of 'Sarvodaya' as the founding document

of the Indian society. It is true that over the years he did study and practise some aspects of Sarvodaya and presented creative programmes, concept of Gram Swaraj etc. But he was hardly able to achieve what all he had envisioned in 'Hind Swaraj'. However, the concept of Satyagraha that was mentioned in the Hind Swaraj did play a major role in the freedom movement of the country.

It has often been argued that the country only came to know about the confrontationist Gandhi and not the creative Gandhi. There has hardly been any serious discussion on building up the country based on the ideas presented in Hind Swaraj. It is a matter of great shame and tragedy that even the influential Congress leaders who were with Gandhi in the Swaraj movement could not understand the broad goal that was outlined in Hind Swaraj's 'Yug Karya'. In 1945, in a letter to Gandhi, Nehru had written, 'I had read 'Hind Swaraj' a long time back and now I only have a vague memory of it. Even while reading it, I considered it to be impractical and even now I feel the same. You know that Congress has never considered the thoughts in the book as even worth discussing. So accepting them is out of the question.'

It was amidst this atmosphere that Gandhi was assassinated in 1948. We did get Swaraj, but Gandhi was forced to say, "This is not my idea of Swaraj." In other words, Hind Swaraj never got beyond theory.

Through Vinoba's movement, Gandhi's unfinished core works got a fillip. It was a continuation of the non-violent movement that was started by Gandhi and Vinoba carried it forward. Vinoba announced that after 'Swaraj' it was now time for 'Sarvodaya'. Till he was 32 years, Vinoba continued his work quietly at Antevasi ashram, one of the lesser known Gandhi ashrams. However, he was aware of all that was going on outside the ashram and studied and analysed them. He took part in Satyagrahas and also went to jail. But he never left the ashram.

When Gandhi was assassinated, Vinoba decided that he had to move out of the ashram. He was clear sighted about Gandhi's main aim which was to introduce the concept of ahimsa in the social milieu and to build up a non-violent society based on Gram Swaraj.

Therefore, when in Pochampalli, he got the unprecedented donation of 100 acres of land, Vinoba saw a glimmer of hope. He believed that this was a signal from God and he went out to work. He went out to ask for land and he kept on getting land. From Pochampalli, he reached Pavnar and in the

next 70 days, he got 12,000 acres of land, which means that everyday he got around 200 acres of land. Two months later, he went to Delhi on foot when he was called by Nehru. Later, he got 18,000 acres of land in 62 days. This meant that he got 300 acres everyday. The gift of land was not meant for temple, dharmashala, school etc. While asking for Bhoodan, Vinoba used to say that this was not 'Bheeksha' but 'Deeksha'. "This is deeksha for non-violent revolution. We have to build a Sarvodayi community, and on behalf of the poor I have come to you asking for their right.'

In Bhoodan movement, Vinoba saw the seeds of non-violent revolution. He saw this as a route through which the concept of non-violence could enter the society. He chose April 18 as the birthday of the Sarvodaya movement, as it was on this date that he had received the first concrete donation of land. Soon, he left the ashram and got immersed himself in the movement. When he reached Delhi, after walking 800 kilometers, he had visible achievements behind him.

While speaking before the Planning Commission, he said in no equivocal words, "Your Five Year Plan is fit to be put in the garbage. You are talking about national planning, but you do not have any provision that will provide food for all and employment for all. Your only aim appears to be increasing production. But along with that there should be equality and compassion. Your 'percolation theory' will not help society's poor and you will have to formulate special programmes for them."

Vinoba could see that the people sitting in Delhi were thinking in the opposite direction and therefore, he said, "Leave Delhi and let us hit rural India."

Vinoba was to stake his entire life for this. Once he had said, "My inner soul tells me that I have always tried to walk the path of non-violence and love shown by Gandhiji and in my efforts I have reached my utmost level. There has never been a single moment when I have faltered or become negligent. After Babu's death, I am doing his work, and I do not have the slightest doubts about this."

In this way, Gandhi's core work and philosophy was kept alive. A revolutionary like Jayaprakashji remarked, "Through his Bhoodan-Gramdan, Vinoba made a unique experiment in bringing spiritual values within the community. The main aim of society is the development of humane values, and Vinoba's various programmes showed the way how the new foundation of a society can be based on moral values."

Further, the importance of Bhoodan movement in the context of larger Sarvodaya movement can be gauged from Jayaprakashji's statement, "If Vinobaji had not started this revolutionary movement, then we would have stayed where we were, then; we would have been content with spinning the charkha, putting Gandhiji's picture in our homes, keeping a fast on Gandhi-Jayanti like Janmashtami and Ramnavami, but we would have forgotten the idea of non-violent revolution and lost the war for Sarvodaya, which would have appeared as something hazy in the distant horizon. It was due to Vinoba's movement that Gandhi's core philosophy of changing society through non-violent revolution remained alive. The soul of Sarvodaya would never have been visible had it not been for this movement. Through Vinoba's movement we have been able to see the revolutionary face of Gandhiji's creative programmes."

In 1959, Arthur Koestler came to India. He took part in the padyatra and talked to Vinoba at length. He wrote in the London Observer, "Vinoba is presenting an alternative based on the Indian traditions to Nehru's western concept of development. Vinoba's insight and intelligence has rejected Nehru's social revolution that is based on development, competition and mechanization, something that had been done by Gandhi earlier."

All this had happened within a few years of the country becoming independent. Vinoba continued his movement for over two and half decades. He made a Herculean effort to take the Swaraj gained with independence in the direction of 'Hind Swaraj' as conceived by Gandhiji. We saw that during Gandhi's era, very little work was done in this direction. The top leaders, intellectuals and the vast majority of the people thought that Gandhiji's dream as portrayed in 'Hind Swaraj' was impractical. They did not even consider that it merited a serious discussion.

The fate of the nation was in the hands of Nehru. His thinking was different. Under his guidance, India followed the western pattern of development and society that had been criticised by Gandhiji in 'Hind Swaraj'. The majority of people who were holding seats of power shared Nehru's vision and the way the foundation of the country was being laid.

It was in this atmosphere that Vinoba got 100 acres of land under Bhoodan in Pochampalli and laid the foundation of a movement inspired by Gandhiji's vision. Vinoba went against mighty institutions and tried to implement the vision of 'Hind Swaraj' on the ground.

For those who believed in what was written in 'Hind Swaraj', the Bhoodan movement started by Vinoba was an inspirational period. It was like a dream coming true, the rule of virtuous was being put in place on earth, and that there could be a significant change in man's behaviour; such was the belief of the people through this movement. People thought that if the human race had to get out of the cycle of violence, then a non-violent solution to mankind's trouble must be developed.

The movement gave a feeling that it was possible that the country's Swaraj would be based on love, on non-violence and it would elevate mankind to another level and it was possible to achieve Sarvodaya if we follow the blueprint given in Hind Swaraj.

In the contemporary period, when the world is moving in a direction opposite to the one prescribed in Hind Swaraj, the intensity of Vinoba's movement is difficult to assess. The effort put in might appear a little wanting, its message a bit ineffective, and the possibility of elevating mankind to another plane, ephemeral.

In Vinoba's Bhoodan movement, lakhs of people donated lakhs of acres of land that was to be distributed among the landless labourers. In the present scenario, it is very difficult even to imagine that such a thing took place. But it is a fact that even if we discard the donated land that could not be distributed, around 25 lakh acres of land has been distributed among the landless. Those who got the land received a chance to work hard and earn their livelihood with dignity and respect.

And when the Gramdan movement started, then its concept was such that we will find it unbelievable today. All the landowners of the village were supposed to transfer all the land held by them to the Gramsabha and then they were to distribute the land among the landless equally. Such redistribution took place in several villages.

In reality, such a movement would be considered as unique in the history of mankind. It was a true demonstration of the power of love and non-violence. Vinoba said at that time that the Gramdan movement he witnessed in several villages of Orissa and the subsequent redistribution of land made him believe that he had seen God in those places.

Around 5000-7000 Gramdans took place, but for a revolution to take place, this had to be more wide spread. For this purpose, a programme was made of Gramdan. Under this programme, it was entailed that the land was

to be transferred in the name of the gram sabha. It could not be sold or kept as mortgage. It was decided that the landowners would hand over five percent of their holdings to the landless, and then each person would give 2.5 percent of his money to the village fund. All the villagers would be members of the gram sabha and the decisions would be taken unanimously.

This was a comprehensive programme of Gramdan and Vinoba said that this model should spread all over the country. There should be a hurricane of Gramdan, and only then the revolutionary aspect of Gramdan would be visible. When there is a tempest then each leaf of the tree is shaken. Similarly, each person got inspired by this non-violent revolution and worked for it, and it spread like a storm all over the country. The strategy of Gramdan was based on mass psychology and if one system had to be supplanted by another system then it was necessary to have mass awakening. In the end, what was proposed to be done had to have the will of the people behind it. The government can always say that we have the support of the people as they have voted for us. But whose support do we have? Therefore, Bhoodan-Gramdan movement was nothing but an effort to find public support through mass education so that people's power may stand behind it. Its nature was similar to signature campaign or an election.

Subsequently, thousands of Gramdan took place. Taking the consent and signatures of thousands of people by going into the most interior of villages was not an easy task. Thousands of 'resolution deeds' piled up. The concept of Gramdan reached each and every village. In village after village the people supported it and signed the resolution deeds, giving up their lands. In the words of Jayaprakash Narayan, "All the 'resolution deeds' of Gramdan are an expression of the sentiments of the people."

This was a process of the revolution. Vinoba had started this revolution very boldly, but unfortunately, it did not succeed. Some circumstances went against the movement and in some cases the calculations made, went awry. The work of verifying the Gramdan took a very long time, and the swelling of public support in the earlier period ebbed with time like the flood waters that rise and then come down. The forces against the movement proved more powerful. Due to some reason, Vinoba had to leave the centre stage in Bihar. The hurricane that the movement was supposed to create did not take shape, and any further work came to an end. The movement was like a rocket about to be launched for space, if there was sufficient fuel (ground support in the

case of the movement) but instead of breaking free from the earth's atmosphere it came down to the earth. The 'hurricane' did not gather enough strength to make the movement a success and fizzled out. But this does not mean that this was the end of everything. Like scientific experiments, social experiments should also continue and then one day it will become a success.

Much has been and will be written about Vinoba's movement, and such analysis is welcome. The movement would be and should be analysed from various angles and on a set of different parameters. If there were any shortcomings or problems so far as the boldness, strategy, working style, competence etc. of the movement are concerned, it would come out through these studies. But one thing can be said with certainty that in the two to three decades of the movement, the horizon of the concept of Sarvodaya has expanded a great deal. The movement presented a new and much more humane form of development as opposed to what is followed at present. Even though people might not have accepted it wholeheartedly, the fact remains that it has found a place in its agenda. Jayaprakash correctly said that the revolutionary potential of the movement was apparent to the entire society.

Nevertheless, it can be said that whatever was achieved was much less than what could have been achieved. There are a number of reasons for this, but the main reason is that the forces opposed to this movement proved much stronger. We should not forget that at the time of Vinoba's movement the political and social elite in society were enamoured by the western idea of development that stresses material prosperity. The clout of the cities started increasing. Those who were educated and had a say in society were running after consumerism and power. This section was effective in society. These people who had power and were into business were also big landowners. Therefore, even though an environment was created by the Bhoodan and Gramdan movement, no concrete steps were taken to provide a lasting solution to the question of land. In Japan, just after the end of Second World War, the American General MacArthur, who was acting as the administrator of Japan, made three acres as the land ceiling and redistributed it among the genuine farmers immediately. This could have been done in India. But the Socialists who were in power and in positions of influence failed to create an environment for such a step to be taken. And thus, a historic moment was lost.

The work of Gramdan was fundamental to building a new social order. It was the foundation of Gandhi's concept of Gram Swaraj. It is only on the foundation of Gram Swaraj that a new world order based on non-violence could evolve and prosper. During Gramdan one thing came out clearly—the concept touched the hearts of the people and there was widespread support for it. The proof was the thousands of resolution deeds signed and given by the villagers pledging their land to the entire community through the Gram Sabha.

Of the initial villages that went in for Gramdan, 3932 villages are still under the Gramdan law. Here the entire land of the village has been transferred from individual name to Gram Sabha's name. But the society at large failed to appreciate the revolutionary step that had been taken.

Some of the Gramdan villages started implementing the next stage of experiments and some outsiders also came and witnessed the change in these villages.

One of them was England's Erica Linton. She came to India and visited the Gramdan villages in Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh. She walked, travelled in bullock carts and mixed with the villagers to understand the movement. The description of her travels was put down in a book in 1971 – '*Fragments of a vision*'. The preface of the book was written by E.F. Schumacher, the well-known writer of "Small is Beautiful".

This book is the result of a deep study of the Gramdan movement and presents its firsthand picture. Erica, in her book, writes, "In some villages Gramdan has taken place only on paper, while in some other villages the Gramdan concept has been taken ahead to quite an extent. Even though the busy people of the village who are part of the movement do not make a great deal about Gramdan and think it as natural, but for those who are looking at it from the perspective of non-violent revolution at work, it is a great arena for learning."

Erica wrote, "After talking with the villagers I came to the conclusion that the maximum number of people have benefitted from Gramdan. They say that as the land is now in the name of the Gram Sabha instead of individual owners, the land has become safe. Now no outsider can come and purchase our land and the land will belong to that person who tills it. And the main thing is that we have gained freedom from the government employee. Now

all the work of the village is done through the Gram Sabha.”

Erica had a very interesting conversation with a 12-year-old boy at a Gramdan village. Erica asked – How much land do you have? The boy replied, — At present we are tilling 12 bigha of land, but if we do not till the land, it might be given to others. Erica said – Why so? This land belongs to you, does it not? To this the boy replied, “If we do not till the land, how can it be ours. The land belongs to all. What is the use of keeping it vacant when someone else can till it?”

Erica comments, “The ease with which the boy talked about community ownership of land shows that the idea that land cannot be owned individually and cannot be bought and sold has taken root in his consciousness. This is a question of values. And if one generation of people can imbibe such a value then it would be great victory for Gramdan”.

This reminds one of the episodes involving two IAS officers narrated by Pyarelalji in his book *'The last phase'*. Just a couple of months before independence, two IAS officers were travelling in the first class compartment of a train. They were saying that this would be their last journey in the first class as after independence the Gandhivalas would not allow anything like first class to remain and make everything equal for everyone.

This was the environment of the country on the eve of independence. But the followers of Gandhi could not take advantage of this environment and the gains soon dissipated. The role of Gandhi's followers in this, is well known. But again such an environment was created during Vinoba's movement and there was a chance that Swaraj would be taken in the direction of Hind Swaraj as conceived by Gandhiji. A non-violent process of reforming the society had started. But unfortunately, this opportunity was also lost.

Louis Fisher had said, “Gramdan is the most creative thought coming from the east in recent times.” It was a new development for social science which gave it a way to get rid of the violence that is besetting the world. Vinoba had tried to develop a new culture for the villages by creating a non-violent society, and thereby he tried to lay foundation to Gandhiji's concept of Gram Swaraj. But the will, determination, commitment and support needed for such a thing to succeed was lacking in the people who were in power and those who counted in society. A person like Erica Linton could come from abroad to study and find great value in the Gramdan movement, but our own intellectuals did not have the time or inclination to look into this movement.

They could not rise above their narrow mindedness. This class ridiculed Vinoba's Bhoodan and Gramdan, that all the land Vinoba had, was on paper or the land given was of poor quality.

In any case, the non-violent movement started by Vinoba remained incomplete. The forces of opposition proved stronger. The apathy of the intellectuals and lack of vision meant that no one could understand the real value of the movement. But nevertheless, Vinoba's movement has enriched our thought process.

The effort continued for two and a half decades. Vinoba spoke at length about it wherever he went and he thought about reforming and reconstructing the society a great deal. The fundamental questions about society were asked and discussed and solutions were sought for them on the basis of non-violence. Many of the concepts in Hind Swaraj were also evaluated and it came into public domain and consciousness. As a result, in the world arena, the philosophy of Sarvodaya has etched its name very clearly. This has been a major contribution of Vinoba's movement. The philosophy is above any particular area or time and provides new thoughts about constructing a society.

The history of this incomplete movement might say anything, but in the annals of human revolution, Vinoba's contribution is invaluable. This is what the history of human revolution would say.

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Sabai Bhoomi Gopal Ki

Prabhat Kumar

For a variety of reasons, the issue of land reforms is very important in India. Vinoba Bhave said: all land belongs to Gopal. Land has been given by nature and the livelihood of each and every person depends on it. Nature has given us water, forest, land, air – all of which is interlinked – and if some people have ownership of these natural resources then it will lead to discord in society and creation of various classes. The new policies of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation have changed nature’s inter-dependent development. Inter-dependent development means independence of the community, while liberalisation/privatisation means being subservient to capital. The way there is competition and a race to get the biggest share of the pie—, human values, cooperative spirit, brotherhood, sacrifice, peace, respect and peaceful coexistence are being lost.

In the present capitalist set up, financial capital is invisible. No one has any faith in its commitment, it can move from one area to another, wherever it gets better returns. Under these circumstances there is “rush to get possession of something concrete and physical like land, which is an excellent medium. Therefore, any project that needs five hectares of land demands 50 to 100 hectares. To get hold of this land, the government uses the Land Acquisition Act. And farmers’ movements that are rising against such acquisitions are being ruthlessly put down. This is an anti-people action. Tribals, farmers, landless and labourers are the worst sufferers of this land acquisition and increasingly resorting to violence as no one listens to them. As a result, their un-channelled anger erupts from time to time in various parts of the country.

This will ultimately only help the Maoists, who believe in the politics

of organised violence. In Gandhi's country, where the village is supposed to be self-reliant, we have a situation where people are being displaced from their land in the villages and are being forced to live in intolerable conditions. The people who are victims of such a situation have a fundamental right to rebel and fight for their rights.

After independence, there has been decline of two to three per cent only in the number of people dependent on agriculture, but agriculture's share in the national income is going down. This is a grave problem. Under these circumstances there is a need to think deeply and act on the issue of land reforms.

Land has been one of the biggest assets of the country, but this asset has been used only by a handful of people. That is why inequality has increased in society. Before the British rule, the land was under the community or clan, which could be seen in later years in the ownership patterns among the tribals also. In 1793, the British introduced the Land Management Act and fixed land revenue. From here the zamindari system started. A feudal agrarian economy took shape. The land ownership went into the hands of a few British supplicants. The land owners and the cultivators got divided into two different classes, and rural India was transformed into a new exploitative social structure. The only aim of the zamindar was to extract the maximum amount of land tax as possible. Under such conditions, the actual cultivators did not have any desire to increase production. Their capacity to put back money into the land got increasingly reduced due to excessive land tax they had to pay. Slowly the independent economic system of the rural areas disintegrated. Due to non-payment of land tax the land was taken away from genuine farmers, and the ranks of the landless kept on increasing. Land went into the hands of people who were not cultivators. The livelihood of the landless and the share-croppers became the victim of the zamindars' whim.

Voices of dissent started being heard against the adverse land management system which was not beneficial for majority of the people. For this reason, debate on land reforms started during the period of Second World War before the country's independence. But in India, the land owners and other rich class had so much control over the bureaucracy and political field that this debate was effectively stifled. Land owners were entrenched in the power structure and they were against any land reforms.

But Mahatma Gandhi always wanted villages to be economically

independent. He was always with the common farmer. He protested against the zamindari system imposed by the British and protested against the atrocities committed against the farmers. In 1917, he led the Champaran Satyagraha in Bihar. This was the country's first non-violent land reform movement. Due to Mahatma Gandhi, the credit for the movement went to the Congress party. And due to the success of the Champaran movement, the Congress party got a lot of support from the farmers. But the Congress party never carried out any other movement similar to the Champaran movement.

Before independence, the Congress formed the government. In 1937, the Bihar government was formed under the leadership of Srikrishan Singh. The socialist segment within the Congress started raising its voice for land reforms. Socialist leaders, Jaiprakash Narayan, Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, and Pandit Yadunandan Sharma were prominent among them. It was due to pressure from these leaders that in 1946 the Indian National Congress declared in its election manifesto that land reforms were the need of the hour for the country. For this, there should be direct relation between the farmers and the State. The middle-men had to be removed.

But there was a lot of difference between what the government said and what it did. The government took support of the farmers by saying that they would be given land from the zamindars without any fighting.

The laws of land reforms made by the government were not honest efforts. To save the zamindars, a number of loopholes were left in the laws. The government went on making claims under the land reform programme that this much land had been distributed to the landless this year. There were political debates over the claims made by the government. The idea that the land would belong to the farmers proved elusive.

But, after independence the socialists carried out a big movement for land. Ram Manohar Lohia introduced the concept of 'Jati' (caste) and 'Jamin' (land) into agrarian problem. He said that the exploitation of one caste by another that was inbuilt in the society, was largely rooted in the economic structure in which there was large scale unequal distribution of land among the people. He made a call for ending the caste system and asked the exploited castes to organise themselves and carry out peaceful agitation. In the Bhoomi Harpo (grab the land) Satyagraha lakhs of middle castes took part, and their awareness increased greatly.

The middle castes benefitted from this movement. But the caste

consciousness did not get converted into class consciousness and the Dalits could not get involved in this movement. Their efforts for class struggle proved incomplete. Their agitation was always against the government and the bureaucracy and it was never against the big landowners. But the failure of the socialists to be united with society at large prevented their aggressive movement from turning into a class struggle.

The Communists of India had the Dalits with them in their land agitations, but the leadership was always in the hands of the upper castes. Many of these upper caste people were very big zamindars also. After independence the power unleashed due to the land agitations was channelled to get a share of the power at the Centre. From time to time, the Communists made compromises with the Congress and ended the land agitations. These compromises prevented the Dalits from developing into an independent political force which would be able to free the land for the landless. In 1974, the Communists opposed the Bihar movement and supported the emergency. Jayaprakash Narayan was called a fascist. As a result, the image of the Communists who were fighting for land rights got sullied.

In Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh, the Bhoodan movement started after the violent agitation for land led by the Communists. This movement was led by Acharya Vinoba Bhave. He asked for land for the landless. He said that the exploitation by the rich segment in society is responsible for the birth of Communists. Therefore, it is necessary that the inequitable distribution of land be rectified peacefully. Vinoba Bhave stayed in Bihar from September 14, 1952 to December 31, 1954. The Bhoodan Yagna committee was formed. The Bhoodan Act was passed.

The entire Bhoodan movement received 21,17,756 acres of land during the entire movement and of it around 50 per cent was received in Bihar. Of the land received, 13 lakh acres of land was either under river and nullahs or mountainous or barren. According to the Bandopadhyay report (2008) on Bhoodan in Bihar, nothing much could be achieved because of incompetence of the Bhoodan Yagna Committee and the government's revenue department. According to records of the Bhoodan Yagna committee, they received 6,48,476 acres of land, of which they distributed 2,55,343 acres of land. In all 276,320 acres of land were not fit for distribution. The committee still has 1,14,408 acres of land with it.

The absence of landless Dalits directly in the Bhoodan movement meant

that in more than half the cases, the landless Dalits could not take possession of the land that had been given to them. And in cases where they did get possession, they could not get the title deeds in their names. The administration did not help them. Due to lack of organisation of the Bhoodan movement, those who had been given land under the Bhoodan movement were dispossessed. In the end, the Sarvodayis who had dreamt of changing the society through Bhoodan movement became part of the establishment. Despite getting lakhs of acres of land for distribution, the Bhoodan movement could not bring about a major change in society. The main reason for this was the lack of organisation of the lower strata of society. The Sarvodayis laid great emphasis on the 'generosity' of the rich and influential class. To encourage this 'generosity' the Sarvodayis relied on non-violent activities. But the non-violent action did not have the philosophy of Satyagraha where the dispossessed, victimised and exploited people had an awakening about their rights. Even Jayaprakash Narayan who gave a new breath of life to Bhoodan movement after joining it had to admit later, 'In the Sarvodaya movement we only paid attention to changing the powerful and rich. The poor and exploited had very little role to play in the Sarvodaya movement.'

Due to Naxalite movement in Bihar in 1970-71, there were protests against social injustice and demand for minimum wages, and it also turned to the question of land. There was leadership from the middle class and Dalits. But the inevitability of violence during class war led to conflicts between castes and it could not become a class war. In this violence the musclemen hired by the landowners and other inter-mediators were killed. Due to such violence the Naxalites did get publicity, but it was not a decisive fight that could change the system.

In 1974, the Bihar movement started under Jayaprakash Narayan. Independent organisations like the Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini were formed. The Sangharsh Vahini that believed in Jayaprakash Narayan's concept of 'Total Revolution' announced land movement in Bihar.

In 1978, the Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini organised the Dalits and the Backwards together for a peaceful agitation for the 12,000 acres of land belonging to Bodhgaya Math. This fight was fought under the leadership of Dalits and women. After 10 years of struggle the landless were able to get 10,000 acre of the land. For the first time in India, women got a right over land and this was also the first time that peaceful class-war took place in the

country. The agitation succeeded in demolishing the feudal structure of Shankar Math in Bodhgaya. There is a need to study why the movement did not spread or whether it was successful or not.

However, for the generation that was born after independence, the Bodhgaya land agitation could be an inspiration for those who believe in social justice and an equitable society.

In Bihar, land reform laws were made since 1949, but in most of the cases the laws were weak. In 1949 the Bihar Zamindari Act, in 1950 the Bihar Land Reforms Law and in 1961 the Hadbandi Kshetra Parisiman Aur Atirikta Bhoomi Adhigrahan Kanoon was made. But due to pressure from the land owners, the law could be implemented 10 years later on September 9, 1970. This means that after the passing of the Bihar Zamindari Act in 1950, the excess land was kept by the zamindars for 20 years and during this period they transferred land on a large scale in fake names. They created religious trusts, gardens etc. and in most cases managed to keep the land in their own possession.

By January 2001, 2.78 lakh acres of additional land was distributed among 3.53 lakh landless under the Bihar Bhoo-Hadbandi Kanoon. The land distributed among each family was not sufficient for profitable agriculture, and also the quality of the land that had been given was also not good.

Moreover, even though the landless had allotment letters with them, they were either unable to trace it, or they were in the possession of powerful people as a result of which thousands could not take possession of their land.

The Nitish Kumar government formed the Bhoomi Sudhar Sangathan on June 16, 2006. D Bandopadhyay, a retired civil servant from West Bengal was made its chairman. He had a great role in formulating and executing 'Operation Barga' in West Bengal. Bandopadhyay submitted his report to the government on June 11, 2008. There was great hue and cry in the political circle over the recommendations. Therefore, the Nitish government resolved that they would only implement the recommendations related to Bhoodan land. The Nitish government is also under the influence of big land owners. It is due to lack of resolve of the government that 107,677.25 acre of land involved in 1975 cases is pending in courts for decades. Apart from this 96,666 acres of land taken over under the Hadbandi Act could not be distributed. In 1962, the then revenue minister of Bihar, had said that 18

lakh acres of land had been identified under the provisions of the Act, but finally only 3,67,864.25 acres of land could be acquired. This means that in Bihar, be it the Congress or any other government, the influence of the land owners has always been there. There is dissatisfaction in society about the failure of the government to take land from people who are unable to use it for productive purposes and giving it to genuine cultivators. According to a latest report, of the 38 districts of Bihar, 35 are affected by Naxalism. The Maoists are gaining ground due to the dissatisfaction among the rural population. Due to lack of proper means of livelihood, the poor people are unable to live a life of dignity. Under these circumstances, it is but natural that the people would take to politics of extremes. If we take into account the Union Home Ministry's report of 2006 on Naxalism, we find that in nine police stations of State, there are major reports on activities of the extremists. We will find that parallel governments are running in 20 to 25 per cent part of the country, and the writ of the administration does not run here. To run the administration, the officers, contractors, land owners and traders have to pay levy to the extremists. This system is what Mao Tse Tung used to call fishing in the troubled water syndrome, where the disaffected farmers and landless are the water and the Maoists are the fish who live in the water. Instead of solving the problem, the government tries to deal with the violent and non-violent movements in the same manner as a result of which the non-violent movements are becoming weak.

The Bhandopadhyay Commission understood that since the time of independence there is a major connection between rural development and the way agrarian relations are structured. The old structure of agrarian relations was proving to be an obstacle in modernising agriculture. It was this same structure that was responsible for the unequal distribution of the benefits of development, which was resulting in huge disparities in the income and property of people. The upper castes took away the major chunk of the development pie and they increased their political power. So to make fundamental structural changes it was necessary to change the rural agrarian structure. For this, it is essential that States like Bihar implement the land reforms honestly. The Commission has said that the share cropper law of 1885 made by the British needs to be replaced by a new law. The Commission said that Bihar's 'Hadbandi' law was flawed. There were several avenues in this law where excess land could be parked, thus making it ineffective. It

also called for improvement in revenue administration and also in mutation process, contract farming among other things.

It is shameful that the State government is standing by the side of the people who are cornering land, water and even the environment. In a poor agriculture based country like India, there is a direct relation between hunger and land. In the International Convention on Hunger and Poverty in 1995 and the World Food Convention in 1996, the issues of cornering of resources by a handful, land relations etc. was discussed in detail. There is a traditional relation between food security and the livelihood of the poor. The agricultural labourers, fishermen, tribals and other marginalised communities have been forced to live a life without dignity since the time of British imperialism. It is necessary that correct land reforms be implemented and the actual agriculture workers are allowed a greater allocation of the resources. There should be a stop to all land acquisition and the entire policy should be reviewed. A white paper should be released on all the land that has been acquired so far. There should be a consensus on land acquisition. The land reform laws made by the States should be further strengthened and implemented.

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Padyatri Sant and Bhoodan Yagna

Shiv Kumar Mishra

On October 17, 1940, the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi had chosen Acharya Vinoba Bhave as the first *satyagrahi* (proponent of satyagraha) to start personal *satyagraha* (movement which meant holding to the truth) and Jawaharlal Nehru as the second. The British Colonial government had committed India into the Second World War without the consent of the Indian people. To oppose this decision by the foreign government, the Congress party decided to launch individual *satyagraha*. Underlying this decision there was a strategy of preparing their supporters and the party organisation for the mass movement which was to follow. By May 15, 1941, 25,000 *satyagrahis* had courted arrested and demonstrated the commitment of the people towards the freedom movement. After their release from jail the main worry of the national leadership was India's security. In December 1941, the working committee meeting of the Congress party passed resolution to support the British government in their war effort but with the rider that after the end of the war, the British would give total freedom to the country.

During his period in prison, Bhave, wrote major three books – *Swaraj Shastra*, *Sthitpragya darshan* and *Isha Vasya Vrith*.

If Mahatma Gandhi's political guru was Gopal Krishna Gokhale then his spiritual disciple was Acharya Vinoba Bhave. On June 7, 1916, Vinayak (Acharya Vinoba) reached Mahatma Gandhi's Kocharab Ashram in Ahmedabad. When the two met for the first time, they realised that there was an eternal bond between them.

To quote Bhave:

“When I met Babu, I felt a unique mixture of peace of Himalaya and

the revolution of Bengal present in him. From that moment, my life became dedicated to the cause of peaceful revolution.”

Years later, after Vinayak had become Acharya Vinoba, he said that the name had been given to him by Gandhiji.

Later, Gandhiji shifted his ashram from Kocharab to the banks of the river Sabarmati. Morning and evening prayers were held daily at the ashram. The ashram inmates had to make *rotis* and also clean toilets. Subsequently, the *charkha* (spinning wheel) was also introduced and they all started making thread. Acharya Vinoba was closely associated with all these works going on at the ashram.

Who is this first *satyagrahi*, Acharya Vinoba? This question was raised by most people of the country. No one in the country knew about his silent meditation. In the end, Mahadev Bhai Desai introduced the first *satyagrahi* through an article in the magazine *Harijan*. The first speech given by Acharya Vinoba was given at a public meeting at Pavnar.

Acharya Vinoba went to jail for his personal *satyagraha* and the Quit India movement. During his period in jail, Acharya Vinoba read and wrote a lot and he also had the responsibility of serving the country that had been entrusted upon him by Gandhiji, when he chose Acharya Vinoba as the first *Satyagrahi*.

Acharya Vinoba was released from jail on July 9, 1945 and he returned to Pavnar and started working as he earlier used to do. Independent India had seen the sacrifice of Bapu and the division of the country. Once India became free on August 15, 1947 Mahatma Gandhi was in Bengal trying to heal the wounds of communal conflict. He did not take part in the celebrations of *Swaraj*, and he was assassinated on January 30, 1948 while going for his evening prayers.

With the partition of the country, over 1.5 crore of the population crossed the borders, over 10 lakh innocent Hindus and Muslims were killed in the communal riots that ensued in the aftermath of the partition. Around 1 lakh women were kidnapped during this period. Muhammad Ali Jinnah’s adamant stance, the conspiracy of the British and the helplessness of the national leadership resulted in the country’s partition.

To bring about communal amity in Delhi was one of the biggest challenges before the country. On Mahatma Gandhi’s call, Pandit Sunderlal came from Allahabad to Delhi. People like Indira Gandhi, Subhadra Joshi,

Anees Kidwai and other such enlightened people worked for communal harmony. Pandit Sunderlal joined hands with communist K M Ashraf and started working among Mev Muslims. On Pandit Nehru's call, Acharya Vinoba also reached Delhi and started resettling Mev Muslims of Rajasthan.

The Telangana agitation in Andhra Pradesh and farmer's militant Tebhaga movement in Bengal has caught the imagination of the people of the country. Fed up with the oppressive rule of the Nizam, the farmers of Telangana liberated 30,000 villages in the region and redistributed land among the landless and poor. With this, land became the centre of politics in the country.

The popular Congress government started abolishing *zamindari system* and Princely States. During the struggle for independence the Congress had promised the share croppers that they would abolish *zamindari* after the country gained independence. However, due to loopholes in the law the rich landlords were able to keep most of their land and the poor in the villages did not get much. As a result the anger among the poor farmers kept on increasing and this anger took a much bigger form in the farmer's agitation in the Telangana region.

The question of land is closely related to democracy. In communist countries, the question of land was sought to be solved through collective farming and communes, but in India there was the successful example of the Champaran and Kheda Satyagraha of Mahatma Gandhi, and inspiration was sought from there. In 1936, under the guidance of the Congress party the *Bharatiya Kisan Sabha* was formed and the work of organising farmers and working to solve their problems started to take a new direction. The next step of implementation of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy was the *Bhoodan* movement started by Acharya Vinoba Bhave, which called for a change of heart, which was among Mahatma Gandhi's core beliefs.

Mahatma Gandhi, Saint Kabir and Gautam Buddha had great influence on Acharya Vinoba. He was a great believer of non-violent revolution. With his footing firmly on the ground realities, Acharya Vinoba thought about peaceful revolution for the welfare of the entire universe. On March 7, 1951 he left Sevagram and over the next 13 years and one month he covered 43,000 miles on foot – nearly equal to walking the circumference of the earth twice – before he returned to Sevagram on April 6, 1964.

Commenting on Acharya Vinoba's journey, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru said in Parliament, "What our (government's) powerful services could not achieve, a small *fakir* has managed to do Tathagat Gautam Buddha

had said two and half thousand years ago that enmity can never be finished by enmity; it is only love that can overcome enmity. This is *Sanatan dharma*.”

Acharya Vinoba had appealed to the countrymen that poverty eradication was the main task before them and they should unite forgetting their party affiliation and work towards that goal.

Similarly, the first Prime Minister of free India, Jawaharlal Nehru had said in December 1962: Poverty is our biggest enemy. All of us should fight to defeat this enemy.

Gandhi and Acharya Vinoba believed in the path of Sarvodaya, while Marx and Lenin believed in Communism. Acharya Vinoba said that though Communism uses violent means, its fundamental strength comes from compassion that is inherent in it. Acharya Vinoba said that we should imbibe the urgency that is in the communists to eradicate poverty. Often it is seen that those who advocate peace and non-violence are those who are for status-quo and those who want to change the society are for violence. If we use Marx's dialectics then I can say that Ahimsa or non-violence is status-quo. Violence is thesis, revolution is anti-thesis and non-violent revolution is synthesis.

At a public meeting in Sagar, Acharya Vinoba is quoted to have said:

There are five crore landless in the country and there is 30 crore acre of cultivable land. I want just one sixth of this entire cultivable land. Vinoba argued that giving one sixth of the share to the king is an old Indian tradition and among the masses, the poorest of the poor is the king. I am asking for five crore acre of land for this king, and this will prove to be a unique revolution under Indian culture.

In 1957, the first elected communist government in Kerala presented its own agenda for land reforms. The entire spectrum of forces joined hands against this reform movement started by the communist government and after 28 months the communist government collapsed.

The Left have a popular base in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura. Even though the Left Government has been ousted from Bengal after 34 years of rule, the work of distributing government land among the poor done by Hare Krishna Kanar was something unique. As a result of this work of redistribution of land, the Left had a strong base in the rural areas and the poor became land owners in villages.

There have been fundamental changes in the ground realities over the

years. Due to industrialisation and urbanisation, concrete jungles and colonies are coming up on agriculture land. There have been violent agitations against this tendency, and therefore, the teachings of Gandhi and Acharya Vinoba are once again becoming relevant.

“All land belongs to Gopal”, this is what Acharya Tulsi, a Jainist ascetic had said and Acharya Vinoba agreed with and adhered to it. Without dropping a single drop of blood, without hurting anyone’s sentiments, Acharya Vinoba attempted to end individual ownership of land.

When he used to visit villages during his padyatra, Acharya Vinoba used to say, “For good governance and peace, give land, for a great revolution give land.”

Jaiprakash Narayan was with Acharya Vinoba in this movement, and Pandit Nehru was watching the entire *Bhoodan* movement with a keen interest. Of the 5.5 lakh villages of the country Gramdan took place in 1.6 lakh villages, which means that one fifth of the country’s population signed in the paper agreeing to give up individual ownership of land and hand it over to the community. The *Bhoodan* movement got 50 lakh acres of land, and of them 13 lakh acre of land got distributed. In Bihar alone, five lakh landless got land. It was ‘*bhoodani baba*’ who gave us this land. These words are said by numerous landless people who got land due to the *Bhoodan* movement. The entire family works hard on that plot of land and while eating the fruits of the land, it is Acharya Vinoba they remember and thank humbly.

Acharya Vinoba’s *Bhoodan* movement has been seen and analysed by the entire world. The grandson of English poet Lord Alfred Tennyson, Hallam Tennyson, was with Acharya Vinoba during his padyatra. Later in his book, *The Saint on the March* he wrote,

“Even in saints there is a tiny bit of possessiveness, pride due to the sacrifices they have made, but Vinoba never allowed any of these to affect him. And he never told anyone to emulate him.”

France’s Lafadelvasta had written, “The contribution of Acharya Vinoba in India’s social and economic revolution is a dramatic miracle”

These were some of the reactions to *Bhoodan* from eminent people of the world. I salute the Padyatri sant.

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Distribution of Land would lead to reforms

An Interview of Shubhamurti with Aneesh Ankur

Shubhamurti is the chairman of the Bihar Bhoodan Yagna Committee and a well-known social worker. He has worked with Jaiprakash Narayan since 1969. After JP's movement in Bihar, he worked in the field of health. He has been working with the Bhoodan Yagna Committee for the past four years and a lot of work has been done in the field of land donation during his tenure. Excerpts of his talks with **Aneesh Ankur**.

Q. Shubhamurtiji, tell us how you feel about the Bhoodan movement after nearly half a century? What effect did it have on Bihar? What were the problems and challenges you all faced during the entire movement?

A. Not only the Bhoodan movement, all problems related to landless and land have been further complicated by the bureaucracy and it appears very difficult to break out of their clutches. Unless there is a paradigm shift, things will not be on the track. Firstly, the bureaucracy is of the colonial mindset and its main orientation is to ensure that there is no constructive work that breaks the status quo and if some work is going on in this direction then the aim is on how to put hurdles before it. Whosoever's interest gets affected places hurdles before it.

The Bhoodan movement has been quite successful and the government was quite successful in transferring land to the landless through this movement. One of the ways was shown by Vinoba Bhave who had asked people to donate land which would then be redistributed among the landless. But the bureaucracy complicated the process of redistribution. It is very difficult to transfer land through this channel. The pattern of land ownership prevalent since the advent of the British has not been the traditional way in this country. Earlier, the village as a whole used to hold the land and the

concept of individual ownership is a recent one. The people who used to live in the village used to plough the field and sow it according to the needs of the village. The villagers used to think – how can we maximise the output and get maximum benefit for the people. Naturally, those who were in the field of farming got the maximum amount of land since it was their job to do the farming. There might have been big land owners, but they too used to cultivate the land, but the village as a whole owned the land. This community holding of land was more just, but the British came and made ownership of land on an individual basis. The Bhoodan movement started by Vinobaji also wanted to change the way the people thought about ownership of land and that is why he gave the slogan – all lands belong to Gopal – which meant that all the land belonged to the village. This was a change from the concept of individual ownership. Vinobaji used to worry that how the numerous landless were going to manage if small plots of land went to them after redistribution of land. How were they going to plough these plots, from where were they going to get the finance to plant crops etc?

To tide over this problem, the concept of Gramdan came after Bhoodan, where it was stressed that even if there are individual cultivators the land ultimately belonged to the village, at least in the first phase. Then, other things could be thought once cooperation increased among the villagers. JP talked about Gramdan while working in Mushari, but the idea could not be planted among the bureaucrats and there was no demand from the grassroots to implement it. JP, then thought that some other method should be adopted and he launched the Total Revolution movement. When he realised that the concept of common ownership would not work, he talked of redistributing the land and among the landless and also give them the right to stay (Basgeet Ka Parcha), which was vetted by the government. By that time the government had also passed law in this regard and in 1970–71, thousands of farmers were benefitted. But, then the work lost its momentum and JP also realised that the bureaucracy simply did not have the wherewithal to implement it. The Gramdaan Act had given more powers to the villages than what the villagers received after the implementation of the Panchayati Raj Act, but further implementation got bogged down due to the bureaucracy.

Q. You are saying that the bureaucracy was the main stumbling block behind the failure of the Bhoodan movement, but was the bureaucracy solely responsible for the failure or was it also due to lack of political will of the

leaders? After all the bureaucracy is but a tool.

A. Yes the bureaucracy is but a tool, but I feel that the question of lack of political will is less important as on a number of occasions there was political leadership that was conducive to the idea.

Q. Like?

A. We have to understand that when Srikrishna Singh – the first Chief Minister of Bihar – was in power, especially during the first five years there was great emphasis on land redistribution. For the first time in Bihar the Land Reform Act was made, the zamindari system was abolished, the Land Ceiling Act was passed, the Basgeet Act was passed, and the share croppers were recognised under it and eight to nine laws on land reforms were passed during this period. Then K B Sahay came and he too was committed, but his tenure was too short.

So, I don't feel that there was a lack of political will, but it was the bureaucracy that meddled in the implementation. When the backward leadership came to fore they were not as conservating about land as the earlier leadership, but there was less work done during this period. During the Laloo-Nitish era not much thought was given on what had to be changed; the processes through which the land could be transferred. The Bhoodan committee was simply given the power that they should redistribute the land, but the bureaucracy still holds the actual power of giving the landless beneficiary the right to the given land.

It is a strange process that even though it is the government that has set up the Bhoodan committee and the committee is distributing actual Bhoodan land vetted by the government to the landless; the beneficiary still has to go to the bureaucracy for possession and permanent title of the land. The government should recognise the beneficiary who has been given the land by the committee as the undisputed owner and hand over the land without having to go to the bureaucracy.

At present, the bureaucracy goes through the certificate issued by the committee, and then follows the process of mutation and then the land is handed over. This is a lengthy and unnecessary process, and this loophole has become a big hole and the beneficiaries have to do the rounds of the bureaucracy endlessly. One of the demands before the mutation is that it has to be proved that the land that has been given as Bhoodan actually belongs to the owner. This is totally unnecessary as this process has already been

done when the land was being acquired by the government in the first place, before being transferred to Bhoodan committee.

Q. This unnecessary interference of the bureaucracy could have been removed at the political level. Any government in power can come and say that the land allotment of the Bhoodan committee is final?

A. Yes, this can be done, but is not being done. We have seen that the ministers keep quiet before the officers. The ministers feel that the IAS officers know English, they know more than us. The aura of the officers is so great that even intelligent ministers keep quiet and this is true from top to bottom. Though things have improved slightly and nowadays the ministers have become more assertive. But, even now though many of the elected representatives have the will to supersede the bureaucracy, yet they lack the confidence. Another fear of the politicians is that if they clash with the bureaucracy then the latter will somehow embroil them in some problem. Nobody is prefect, and also the law is such that one can face allegations of corruption in whatever work one does, the alternative being not to work at all. I have also seen that the top bureaucrats fear implementing the law. They think that implementation of the law would have their own pros and cons and numerous questions can be raised on the basis of the negative aspects and there is going to be continuous harassment. So the tendency of the top bureaucrat is not to work more, just enough to get by, save your skin while working and do not take any risks. The power situation in the country is such that if you want to work for the powerless then you have to take some risk. I told the present Chief Secretary that do the things on my behalf, I will go to jail if necessary, but he feels that if I go to jail then he too would be questioned why he gave permission. Even the honest bureaucrat is afraid and more than political will it is the commitment of the bureaucracy that is necessary.

Q. Given the circumstances, do you think that the nature of the bureaucracy would change? If things continue then nothing will change?

A. If the bureaucracy does not change then it guarantees that nothing will change, and it is equally true that such change has never occurred anywhere.

Q. How much work of the Bhoodan is left? How much land is there that has to be redistributed?

A. When I came four years back there was 30,000 acres that had to be

distributed. On papers it was 1.5 lakh acres, but on scrutinising it transpired that much of it could not be distributed at all. Of the 1.5 lakh acres, there is no description of 1.25 lakh acres of land. If it had been done immediately then the land could have been given. Usually these announcements were made in gram sabhas. A person got up and announced that he would be donating say five or 10 acres of land. The atmosphere was such that at the time of announcement, the person sincerely meant it, but at that time often he himself did not know which portion of the land he would be giving, and what is its description so that that portion of the land could be positively identified. People were less educated in those days and often they did not have the proper papers. The work of preparing papers etc was mainly done by government servants and the volunteers of the movement did not have the proper knowledge and expertise to note down the description of the land being donated. There were some volunteers who had knowledge of these things and in places where they went, the details were registered. Some of the more aware donors themselves provided the details. Some donors had the right intentions but did not have the details. If the government was more pro-active and had proper laws been passed, then all the land that had been donated could have been distributed. But now it is near impossible. The land donated at that time has now been redistributed a number of times and it would be very difficult to take it back.

Q. So of the 1.5 lakh acre only 30,000 acre land is such that it can be distributed?

A. Of the 30,000 acre, only 2,000 acre is left. There is an additional 5000 acre which the government has to conform and hand it back to us. The Bhoodan committee has written to the government to expedite the matter.

Q. Have the landless been given possession of the 28,000 acre of land that has been distributed?

A. There are two to three categories in it. We have decided that only women would be made owners of the land and we have given land to 30,000 women. They have possession of the land and their names are registered in the government papers also. There is also one section that has possession of the land, but their names are not registered in the government papers. This section comprises maximum number and they are in constant fear that the land would be taken away from them. Their detractors also harp on the fact that their names are not in official records and also say that Bhoodan is

nothing, whereas Bhoodan is an act and has the force of the government behind it. Yet, an atmosphere is being created that the Bhoodan committee is powerless and cannot do anything. The ruling party, the opposition and also the Congress leaders have their role in creating this environment, and the big farmers also support them. Also we announced that the landless should take possession of Bhoodan land if they come to know of it and we will give them certificate later on. Due to this in various places people have taken possession of Bhoodan land that had been encroached upon.

Q. Under these circumstances, things would take a violent turn?

A. So far things haven't taken a violent turn, mainly because the number of such cases are not large. In any case, people who have illegally occupied the land also know that it is Bhoodan land and meant for the poor and they have usually given it up when the landless comes with the certificate issued by the Bhoodan committee.

In some places there have been cases where the encroached land has not been vacated even after the landless has been allotted the land. In that case, we tell the landless that this is his piece of land and also write to the district magistrate\SP and ask them to get the land vacated, and it is their responsibility to get the encroachment vacated.

Q. Has it ever happened that you had to take help of the administration to give possession of the land to the landless from the encroacher? Has the administration and bureaucracy helped you?

A. There are examples, but they are few. In most cases, the bureaucracy is afraid to act. They feel that if they try to remove the encroachment then there will be a fight, blood will flow and someone might get killed and further problems might arise for them. We feel that there might be some small incidents of violence while enforcing the ruling of the Bhoodan committee, but if we do not do anything then there might be bigger violence. To prevent the bigger violence, we have to do something. The work can be done tactfully by creating constant pressure, but what can be achieved if we run away from the situation. Now we are concentrating on organising the women and trying to create an atmosphere whereby they can take possession of undisputed land.

Q. How will the women know that which land is meant for them?

A. We have the details. We have staff who measure the land and then we inform the farmer that this is Bhoodan land and he is illegally occupying it.

Q. You talked of only two categories so far, there is also a third category where the landless do not have the land registered in their names and neither do they have it under their possession?

A. The third category do not have possession, nor are their names in the government register, they only have our letter saying that the land belongs to them. But we have seen that even if he has a piece of paper saying that a particular plot belongs to him, he will try his best to get it. If he fears violence is necessary to forcibly occupy the land then he will come rushing to us, and ask us to help him get the land. We write to the administration and this creates pressure on the person occupying the land illegally. But this can work only up to a point and the bureaucracy won't go beyond a certain point. Therefore, we have created a strategy wherein we tell the landless that this land belongs to them and we are building up the organisation to support them and create pressure. We also write to the government to create pressure.

Q. How many committees of Bhoodan Yagna committee have been formed? Are they present in all the districts? How does it run?

A. There are committees in each district and they are recognised by the government. They have powers backed by law. But it is also true that where 10 people are required we have only two or three. Sometimes there is no bailiff. When we ask the government to provide us with a Bailiff, sometimes the District Magistrate obliges us, sometimes he does not. So we have to work with all these handicaps. Therefore, somewhere these committees are effective and somewhere they are not.

There is also the question of salary. Since the committee has been constituted under an Act, there should have been a budget for the government that would have ensured that everyone got their salaries - which also should have been mentioned – and it would have provided for tour and travel. But this clause was deliberately left out. When we ask from where we will get the money for running the establishment, we are told that we should somehow manage on our own. It has become joke. When the Bhoodan committee was formed initially, the government was more liberal and provided money to it. And there were Vinobaji and Jayaprakash, who provided moral pressure and the government sanctioned budget for the committee. But now that even Jayaprakash Narayan is no more, all the pressure has gone.

Q. So the government does not listen to your pleas?

A. The government says that we have to fend for ourselves. They do

not want to even listen to us. This government has increased our budget a bit. We had asked for Rs 1.5 crore, but they gave us only Rs 65 lakhs, which is less than half. They have told us to manage within this. This amount includes the salaries of the staff. Earlier, we were given only Rs 24 lakhs. But if we have to do even minimum amount of work we should be given Rs 1.5 crore and if we have to work properly then we should be given Rs 2 crore.

Whereas, if one looks at the employees of the revenue department, the circle officer, additional collector and his entire machinery, the government spends anywhere between Rs 15-20 crores. This is apart from their salaries. Compared to Rs 20 crore, we are only asking for Rs 2 crore, but you (government) are not willing to agree and say that we should work within limits of our budget. This constraint is applicable only for us, not the secretary level bureaucrats of the government.

Q. It is still not clear even today about the amount of land which was received under Bhoodan. Some people say it is 6 lakh acres, and some say 21 lakh acres. What is the true figure?

A. Around 24 lakh acres was received in Bihar only under Bhoodan, but this included Jharkhand. After the division of Bihar, a big section went to Jharkhand. The forests, mountains where there were big tracts of land went there. In Bihar, only small tracts of land was left. In Bihar, around 6.5 lakh acres was left. When the government started looking into the land they found that 3.5 lakh acre of land could not be distributed as they were nullahs, forests or even graveyards. But even from the remaining land it was found that there were no proper records of 15000-25000 acres, leaving behind 2.75 lakh acres and from this we have distributed around 2.5 lakh acres.

Q. When was the maximum amount of land distributed?

A. The maximum distribution was in the initial phase when Vinoba and Jayaprakash were there – from 1952-53 to 1965-70. What remained was difficult to distribute.

Q. After Vinoba and Jayaprakash, what per cent of land was distributed?

A. According to my estimate, around 40 per cent of the land was left after them. Then the work of distribution went on very slowly. All I can say is that more land has been distributed in the four years of my tenure when compared to the last 15-16 years. Now only around 2000 acres are left. Plus there is the possibility that around 5000 acres might be added.

The recommendations of the D Bandopadhyay committee on land set

up by the Nitish Kumar government has also to be considered. In its first recommendation, the Bandopadhyay committee asked whether the 3.5 lakh acres of land declared unfit for distribution by the officials was correct or not. Or whether the officials had been hand in glove with the landowners and given false report. However, the government was not willing that we conduct a survey. Initially, the suggestion had been that if we do the survey then the real situation would become clear. We did a survey, but though we were not able to do it properly, it did appear that a large part of the land was not fit for distribution. In some cases the description is too scanty and in some case the situation map is very small. But even then, of the 3.5 lakh acres, we have description of around 40,000 acres. Of the remaining land we found that, the description of 1.10 lakh acre could not be confirmed. I personally feel that around 50,000 acres of land that were under rivers and nullahs have now come out as rivers have dried up and have become good agriculture land which can be distributed. Also with the help of new technology poor quality land can now be made fertile.

I also feel that these days the number of landless has increased due to displacement from dams and other projects. While earlier we only used to give agriculture land, now we also give land for housing purpose.

Q. How much land do you give for housing purpose?

A. We give around 10 decimal land, which is around 2 cottas, so that people can build their houses and also plant a few trees and bushes.

Q. Has large scale displacement of people resulted in this change in policy?

A. Displacement has increased landlessness. At the time of independence, around 25 per cent of the population did not have land, now it has jumped to 40 per cent. Poverty and illiteracy has also increased due to landlessness. Also our pattern has changed. Now agriculture land is given to local landless, relocation of landless from other places is not done. Also the landless are unwilling to move to another place. The demand and importance of land is greater in places where there are more landless. But our effort is to ensure that no one gets less than 10 decimals. But, for example when we initially allotted 3 acres of land to three brothers, it appeared fine, but by the time they got the land, they had their families and many children.

Q. What has been the political impact of this in Bihar?

A. There has been great political impact. The communists were angry

with the movement as they felt that due to Bhoodan the agitation of the poor and landless that could have taken a violent turn became a more gradual and peaceful change.

Q. When did the Bhoodan movement really start? There are conflicting dates.

A. The Bhoodan movement primarily started from Telangana region, when after independence there was violence around 1950s. Vinobaji went there. In any case after Gandhiji's death there was discussion among his followers about what had to be done to perpetuate his legacy. The discussion was held at Seva Gram in which Nehru and Jaiprakash among others were also present. During that period the refugee problem was at its peak and Vinobaji wanted to see whether Gandhiji's philosophy could work among them. The refugees did not have any home of their own. The efforts of the government were the same as it is today – very slow. Also, most of the relief material that came for the refugees disappeared, no one knows where. Vinobaji felt that it would be futile to work among the refugees.

During this period a violent agitation started for land in the Telangana region. Vinobaji thought that if we really believe in ahimsa and it really works, then it should work in the Telangana region also. He went to one of the violence affected village and asked the villagers the reason behind the violence and they said that it was land. Vinobaji asked the villagers how much land they wanted and they said that they would need 100 acres of land. In this meeting, which had been organised by the communists, both the land owners and the landless were present. Then, Vinobaji turned to the landowners and asked whether they could give 100 acres of land. One landlord stood up and said that he would donate 101 acres. His name was Ramchandra Reddy, and there is also a statue of him in that village. Vinobaji thought that if land could be procured for the landless here, why not in other places. He started his padyatra from there. In 1952, he went via Seva Gram, from there to Uttar Pradesh, Benaras and then to Bihar. He started getting land from 1952 and even in places he did not visit, his followers received land.

Q. How long did the people continue with donating land under the movement, and how long did the landless receive land?

A. Bits and pieces of land are still being given. Whenever people come to meet us, we ask them, 'Can you donate land,' and people donate two to three cottas. There is software engineer from Purnea district who is now

settled in Hyderabad. He wanted to sell his property here and talked to me, and said, 'Now that I have talked to you, I will sell the rest of my land, but donate 10 acres of land under Bhoodan.' The Bhoodan movement started from 1952, but the maximum amount of land was received during 1962-63. After that the quantum of land received decreased, and part of the reason was because Vinobaji had stopped emphasising Bhoodan and had moved on to the concept of Gramdaan.

Q. Gramdaan? What is this concept?

A. The concept is that even if the landless gets land, how will he cultivate it? He usually does not know about agriculture, is illiterate and also does not have the resources to start cultivation. Vinobaji had also seen the attitude of the government and realised that no help would come from that quarter. So if the big and small people of the village got together and run the village, which Gandhiji termed as 'village republic', then everybody would benefit. Vinobaji also believed that land ownership should not be individual but of the village, which has also been our tradition. For this reason he talked about Gramdaan.

Apart from education, politics and economic development the villagers would be able to determine their day to day life on their own. The government is outside the village. No one will go to court with quarrels, the village itself will decide on it. But if they want, they can move to court. It means a village free of government interference. He (Vinobaji) used to say like Gandhiji that we have gained freedom from foreign government, but true Swaraj will come only when we are free of the domestic government also meaning with the freedom from both domestic and foreign governments, the villagers would be able to determine their life on their own. The people who worked with Gandhiji at that time, including Nehru might not have believed in all that Gandhiji stood for, but they could not come out against him and accepted whatever he said. Vinobaji caught this strain of thought later on and soon Jayaprakash also joined. Apart from Nehru, Jayaprakashji was the tallest leader and his coming out for Bhoodan created a major impact.

Q. When did Vinobaji change track from Bhoodan to Gramdaan?

A. When Bhoodan movement was launched, some of the villagers said, why do you want land, take the entire village. At that time there was no legal framework for this concept, but later on a formula was put in place. The villagers would donate and create a village fund and they would meet once a

month for gram sabha. Each household would place their problems at the gram sabha, which would meet once a month. There would be discussion on the problems and if need be, they would go to the government or find a solution for themselves. It would be the duty of the gram sabha to see that there was no landless in the village and there was a village fund, that even the poor had enough land on which to build a house with space for a few trees. Apart from gram sabha, gram kosha (village fund) and Bhoodan, Vinobaji also talked about Shanti Sena, comprising youth of the village. They would act as the village police who would stop people fighting with each other and mediate during quarrels. Ten persons would also patrol the village at night to prevent thefts. All these ingredients were made part of the Gramdan Act.

Q. When was the Gramdan Act passed and how many villages came under this act?

A. The Gramdan Act came into being in 1965. It was implemented in totality in 150 to 200 villages. Vinobaji said that there are 5 lakh villages in the country, and around 1.5 lakh of them are in Bihar, and hence it would be a long time if one moved from one village to another. So they asked the villages to give their consent, but as people said later, this is where Vinobaji's concept failed. While the villagers gave their consent in places visited by Vinobaji and Jayaprakashji, it was only temporary. Once they went away, the villagers went back to their old ways of caste and creed etc.

Q. Then it means that there was no organisation that could implement the act even if Vinobaji and Jayaprakashji did not go there. Also all this was due to their personal influence?

A. Yes, it was due to their personal influence that villagers agreed to Gramdan, but there was no implementing organisation even though the Act was made. Even now there are 150-200 villages in Muzaffarpur working under the Gramdan Act.

Q. Did the maximum number of Gramdan take place here?

A. Gramdan was the maximum in Muzaffarpur because Jayaprakashji spend two years here. Even before this there was the Khadi gram ashram in Munger. There was one Dharendra Majumdar, who was Gandhiji's disciple, who was also head of Sevagram. Gandhiji had himself nominated him. After independence, Dharendra Majumdar came and settled in Munger. He spent his life working on 7-8 acre of land there and spreading the message of Gandhiji and implemented the concept of Gramdan in the villages there.

There was some Gramdan in most districts, wherever Jaiprakashji went.

Q. So Dhirendra Majumdar was the first to implement the concept?

A. The concept was brought by Vinobaji, but Dhirendra was the first to implement it. Later, Jayaprakashji built the Sekhodora ashram in Nawada. It is still there. Some work was also done in Gaya. That was also notified in the gazette. After gazette notification, the government officials used to check it to see whether everything was functioning properly or not. Then it was given legal powers under the Gramdan Act. But then people started fighting, there was corruption, and the powers under Gramdan Act was taken away from the villagers who were told that they were not organised enough to take benefit of this act.

Q. Then the government also stopped helping?

A. The government had to give the powers. Vinobaji used to urge people to unite and use the power of unity. Jayaprakashji was in Mushari for one year where he wrote the book "Face to Face". Jayaprakashji felt that things would not work in this way. How long could he go about convincing villagers when they were so immersed in their own world of squabbles and humdrum of life? So in 1974 he turned towards revolution in Bihar.

Q. Is Gramdan still there? Are villages still functioning under this Act?

A. The Act was suspended in 1976, but when the Janata government came to power and Karpuri Thakur headed the government, seven villagers demanded this act. They were given powers and their share of revenue was given directly to them from the respective panchayats.

Q. Did this Act bring about some noticeable change?

A. If the Act were in force for 10 years there would have been change, but that did not happen. But what happened was that gram sabhas were held where even if a weak person got up and stated his point, people of the village had to listen to it and promise that they would do something, and some steps were taken. No one was neglected completely. There were problems where there were no volunteers to help the villagers or if there were some very powerful people who did not listen to anyone.

Q. Which means there was no agency?

A. There was need for an agency. If the process had continued then something would have evolved, but that did not happen.

Q. Till 1965 people donated land, and then the period of Gramdan started. What happened to Bhoodan after that?

A. Till 1965 people donated land under Bhoodan movement and landless continued getting it till 1970. By then, 60 per cent of the land had been distributed. By 1969, Vinobaji had left. He said that people should think that he was dead. I want to see how this concept would work after I die. Now you all become leaders. This was a very good concept. But nothing would work if everything depended on one man. We depended on Mahatma Gandhi and he was assassinated and look where we all went. Similarly, if the Bhoodan and Gramdaan depended on me, you would not be empowered, how could the power of the common people increase instead of that of the leaders? Then Vinobaji left from Pavnar ashram where he said that he would not come out of the ashram. The role of Jayaprakashji started after that. After the work he did in Mushari in 1970-71 he felt that this was not the right way. He felt that while he was working in the villages, trying to change things, the rulers of the country were turning autocratic. All the norms of governance were being broken. Officers of the armed forces were being superseded, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court was being superseded and the government was putting in 'yes men' in their places. Corruption was also increasing. Jayaprakashji felt that forming an organisation and then fighting elections was not the way. So he called for Youth for Democracy. I agree that had not Jayaprakashji worked for Sarvodaya, Bhoodan, Gramdan; his personality would not have gained such a height so that everyone became attracted to it. People felt that this man did not belong to any party, neither the ruling party nor the opposition, but a man of the common people. There were politicians who helped him, but Jayaprakashji kept a condition that whatever work was done under his aegis would be apolitical and non-violent. That Jayaprakashji called for peaceful movement was mainly the influence of the Sarvodaya and Bhoodan movement.

Q What happened after Jayaprakashji's movement?

A. After Jayaprakashji's movement there were no similar movements anywhere. The leaders of the movement joined various parties and then came to power. Later Jayaprakashji also made a youth organisation. Earlier in that organisation there were 10 to 15 persons, people like me, who did not belong to any party but just worked for the society. I joined Jayaprakashji in 1970, but after the Bihar movement there were around 100-150 youths who joined him. It was youth like these who brought about the Bodhgaya movement.

Q. When was the Bhoodan committee formed and when was the Act made effective?

A. In 1954 the Act came into force and the committee came from the act itself.

Q. This Act was made effective during S K Singh's government? At that time itself this loophole was left in the Act which ensured that the people had to go to the bureaucracy to get land under the Act? Was this not very deliberate?

A. This is a very important aspect of the Act and I do not think that the government did understand its implication. If they understood, then the bureaucracy deliberately kept it there to ensure that this did not leave their domain.

Q. Did this happen when Vinobaji was still there? Did Vinobaji fail to understand its implication?

A. He did understand and that is why he talked of Gramdan, because he felt that once the villagers became united then the government wouldn't be able to override the will of the people.

Q. Did Vinobaji not fight against what was essentially a bureaucratic spanner in the works?

A. This is where there was a difference in the approach between Jayaprakashji and Vinobaji. Jayaprakashji would keep a close watch on what the politicians were doing, what the bureaucrats were doing and react to their action. He gave his reaction on the issue of reservation or the Suez crisis, because he felt that it was not a matter of politics but a matter of the people and he should speak out. However, Vinobaji also understood these things, but he did not react because he thought that this would divert his attention from the main task.

Q. But Vinobaji did not speak against the bureaucratic interference. Did he feel that if he spoke against the bureaucracy then he would have to go against the government?

A. No, whenever he spoke, it was in jest or at an academic level, but he did not call for a movement against the bureaucrats.

Q. When was the Ceiling Act introduced?

A. It was introduced in 1950-51 along with the zamindari abolition act, but it was decided that the Ceiling Act would be implemental 10 years later. This gave the rich zamindars the time to divert their property into fictitious

names (benami); for example 100 acres of land was divided into 20 people – all fictitious people – and the zamindars continued to retain control.

Srikrishna Babu used to tell Vinobaji. Why are you working so hard in the Bhoodan movement in your old age? We (government) have introduced the land ceiling act which will ensure that land is distributed among the landless. In reply Vinobaji said that the culture of the government is to ‘levy’ that is take things by force and our culture is ‘Devi’ which means to give voluntarily.

He often used to taunt the bureaucracy. He said that like the flag of the country was changed after the British left, the education and bureaucracy should also be changed. But these people did not have the courage to press the point. When the First Five Year Plan was being prepared, Nehru gave a draft copy to Vinobaji for his comment. Vinobaji read it and threw it into the dustbin and said that there is nothing in it for the poor. All the benefits will go to the rich and middle class. But the Plan was passed as Nehru, apart from being Western oriented, was also popular.

Q. So the Bhoodan movement and the Ceiling Act started at around the same time. But the Bhoodan movement became more popular?

A. Initially, the government did not get much land under the Ceiling Act. While the Bhoodan movement received 3 lakh acres of land, the land seized under Ceiling Act was around 10,000 to 15,000 acres. There was no comparison. But then, Vinobaji shifted from Bhoodan to Gramdaan and then gave that up too. Land was seized under the Ceiling Act after 1970 and finally the amount of land seized was somewhere near to the land received under the Bhoodan movement.

Q. Did the government distribute the land that it seized after implementing the Ceiling Act?

A. In most of the cases, the seized land was handed back to the original owner on lease. A few days back I was at a departmental meeting and the issue of renewing the lease of land was being discussed. The lease of most of the land in the city had been renewed for another 20 years at the earlier rate, which is a paltry sum, as there was no provision in law to increase it. It was only after the leases had been renewed that the lease rent was increased. Now the increase can be made only after 30 years. So this is how the law itself allows fraud to be perpetrated. The logic of the government is that after they seized land, it should be put to use, so they handed it back to the

same person for him to use. It would be interesting to see through RTI how much land the government got from the Ceiling Act, how much is left and how much of it has been leased. It is also possible that the government might not be able to give an accurate figure as they themselves do not have it with them.

Q. Is it possible that the government does not know how much land it got under the Ceiling Act?

A. No, the government knows how much land it got under the Ceiling Act, but perhaps it does not know how much of the land was given back to the original owners on lease, and how much was distributed among landless farmers. The main problem is that the land records are not accurate. In many cases the plot size is 10 acres, and while 4 acres is registered in your name, 5 acres is registered in my name. And we are forever fighting over the 2 acres. In 50 per cent of the cases, the land records are not correct or up to date, and the government has done nothing about it. In 1993, it announced that it would computerise all the land records of the country and even amended the Constitution for it, but the work has not been completed. Three years back the Chief Secretary called all the district magistrates and said that Bihar has got the money for computerising the land records and we should start working on it. At that time I had asked the main thing was to fix a completion date, and the Chief Secretary had said that the work would be completed within a year. But, the work has not even started till now.

We also believe that computerisation is necessary and we are computerising all the Bhoodan records. Things would be much easier once the work is complete. We have started work in 10-12 districts through outsourcing. In the first phase the work is that of scanning and then data entry. That work has been completed. We have also developed the software but we do not have the data showing who has actual possession of a land, whether mutation has been done etc. For this, we will have to conduct a ground level survey at every place, but we do not have the required workers for this.

But while doing this task, the Bhoodan workers got closely associated with the government employees and learnt corruption from them. Now they demand money from the landless in return for giving them certificate for the land. The landless also thinks; Ok, I am getting land, so I might as well spend some money for it. They are fools and do not understand that even if

they do not pay they will get the land. I often take the landless aside and ask them if they have paid bribe and they say, 'yes', I gave this amount to that person. But of course, when confronted these workers deny it. Actually, it is very difficult to check such corruption where both parties gain – like dowry. But as Jayaprakash said, if the person at the top is honest, then controlling corruption at the bottom is possible. When there was corruption at the top, the work of Bhoodan got affected and it lost credibility. But now, after I took over, the top is clean.

Q. Before you came, there was corruption at the top also?

A. There were two to three types of corruption, one of which was personal. We have heard that during the time of Laloo Yadav, he used to tell the district magistrates that you all have to give me this much amount of money every month. Similarly, the head of Bhoodan committee used to tell his units to give a certain amount of money to him every month. Where would the units get the money, but from the landless who are the potential beneficiaries.

Q. So all this money came from the pockets of the poor?

A. Yes, everything came from the pockets of the poor. When the Bhoodan workers started taking money for issuing certificates for land, the government officials also started demanding money for mutation of the land. The attitude was, if the Bhoodan workers have taken money, why should we not take it. Slowly the Bhoodan workers and the government officials joined hands, and it became very difficult to control them. But even with all this we have done our main task, that of giving land certificate to the landless. Now it is the work of the government to do the mutation, give possession and enter everything into the register.

Q. What percentage of the land is not in the possession of the landless?

A. Around 50 per cent of the land. The land belongs to them on paper, but it is not in their possession, and if it is in their possession then the mutation has not been done. In around 1.5 lakh acre of land, the work is complete and no one can evict the landless from the land there. Entries are there in the register of 1 lakh families, and names of 2 lakh families are yet to be registered.

Q. This means that three lakh families have been affected by this in Bihar?

A. The names of two lakh families are yet to come into the registers,

and this is an unfinished agenda. But the bureaucracy is saying that since the Bhoodan committee has already distributed land by issuing certificates, its work is done and the committee should be wound up. The present revenue minister Ramai Ram told me in the first meeting that he had tried to dissolve the Bhoodan committee during the period of Laloo Yadav, but he failed. But now as revenue minister, he says he will dissolve the committee.

Q. This means that the remaining work of Bhoodan has to be completed?

A. I asked whether the committee would be dissolved after the work is done or before it. And he said that after the work is done. He said us much money and support I needed, he is willing to give, but the work has to be completed. The Bhoodan workers would be given jobs and those who are to be retired would be retired. I told him that the government has my full support if this is the plan. Anyway, Nitish Kumar understands all this and will not dissolve the committee.

Q. So there is a possibility that the committee might be dissolved?

A. I do not think so. There was a lot of noise, but then everything settled down.

Q. It appears that 50 per of the work is left to be done. If we take 1952-53 data then 40,000 acres of land is still to be given out, that in itself is a major challenge.

A. Yes, it is indeed a major challenge. As I told them, the Bhoodan committee was not formed to distribute pieces of paper; the spirit behind the committee is to ensure that the landless get possession of the land. It is our moral duty to ensure this, and it is the legal duty of the government to ensure that the landless who have been issued the certificate by us get actual possession of the land. The relevance of the committee will continue till the actual possession of the land is given. If we dissolve the committee now then one can be sure that the government officials will do nothing about it. But it is also true that the way things are going now ,is not good. The government is not fulfilling even the minimum needs of the committee. The workers are getting half pay and under these circumstances how can we tell them to work harder. We cannot bully them to work. It is not in our nature as we believe in love and self discipline. We have to give them a reasonable salary to make them work.

Q. The workers of Bhoodan movement must have joined it from the initial stages?

A. Those who joined the movement in the initial phases have mostly left, and later new people came in.

Q. Why did the new people join? Due to their passion or?

A. Some are interested in the work, others came in because they are intelligent and passed the interview.

Q. Maximum amount of Bhoodan land was distributed in Bihar. Was such an Act passed elsewhere?

A. It was passed in several States, but the best work was done in Bihar despite all the shortcomings. Apart from Bihar, it was also passed in Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan. In Rajasthan, the BJP government dissolved the committee, now the Congress is in power and we have talked of reconstituting it, but so far nothing has been done.

Q. There is no body at the national level?

A. Three years ago, I had initiated a proposal to have such a body, otherwise I believe things won't work out. This is a lacuna. In Andhra Pradesh, the movement has not been very successful, but it is there. In Bihar it was successful because people like Vinobaji and Jayaprakashji devoted a lot of time for the movement.

Q. Why was it so successful in Bihar?

A. Vinobaji used to say that there is a quality in the people of Bihar that they have big hearts and if you place a noble thing before them, they will respond to it. I have travelled all over the country, but in the end I am spending so much time here because I feel that there is some hope here. I feel that the country will change. I cannot say anything with certainty, but all major movements were successful in Bihar.

Q. Is it only a question of big hearts or is it because of the fear of the Left ideology? The zamindars thought that it would be better to donate land through Bhoodan than face the Left revolution?

A. When the Bhoodan movement was at its peak, where was the Left at that time? If that had been the case, then the revolution would have taken place in Andhra Pradesh where the Left was more powerful. The influence of the Left started only in the 70s in Bihar.

Q. This means that the Left gained ground and society took a violent turn only after Vinobaji left. As long as he was here, the Left could not get a foothold?

A. After Vinobaji left, Jayaprakashji went to Mushari. The story goes

that two Sarvodaya workers wrote to Jaiprakashji that they had received threat letters from Naxals that they would be killed if they did not leave that place. Naxalism had started in Bengal in 1967 and this was the first instance of their penetration in Bihar. At that time Jayaprakashji was in Uttarakhand. He came to Muzaffarpur directly and said that he would work there. He said that I too want what the Naxals want, but their path is wrong. But by only saying it will not be enough, we will have to work and show that the Naxal's path is wrong and ours is right. I will either complete the work or you will find my bones. At that time I studied in L S College, and Jayaprakashji used to come there frequently. We used to boycott classes and listen to him.

Q. At that time Rajkishore was a Naxalite who was killed by the police and Jayaprakashji was angry and said that this was not the way to end Naxalism.

A. It was Rajkishore who had written the threat letter to the Sarvodaya workers. He was the leader of Naxals in Mushari and we used to have long debates over several issues. Rajkishore knew that if Jayaprakash found out a different path it was fine, otherwise it was the path of violence, for he, like other Naxals, did not have faith in the system to deliver.

Q. The entire movement failed in its effort to save Bihar from violence, because ultimately violence did take place?

A. When Vinobaji was asked about this, he said that there are three Bs that are bogus— Baba (he used to refer himself to Baba) Bihar bogus, Baba (Vinoba) bogus and Bhoodan bogus. What he meant to say was that they had tried their best and work hard for it, but what to do if it did not succeed. Vinobaji used to believe in work and did not worry about the fruit, which he left to God.

Q. Vinobaji had realised that his work was not entirely successful and therefore, he used such a powerful word as bogus?

A. It was a combination of both realisation and satire. Then came the emergency and Vinobaji demanded ban on cow slaughter. He looked at the ban not from religious but economic perspective. He said that with advent of tractors there would be rising unemployment, environment would be degraded and agriculture would become an industry. Also the culture of agriculture would end. Vinobaji said that Gandhiji also wanted to ban cow slaughter. Indira Gandhi came to Vinobaji and though she assured it would be done, she lost the elections. Then Morarji Desai came and then again Indira Gandhi

was back. Vinobaji raised the issue again and he called for a Satyagraha which is continuing even today, and has become the longest Satyagraha ever. Everyday the Satyagrahis assemble before a slaughter house in Mumbai and are arrested. Their number varies, but they assemble everyday without fail.

Q. And the slaughter house has not been closed even now?

A. When Vinobaji started the Satyagraha and Indira Gandhi did not ban cow slaughter, he said what became famous in those days. He said that Indira did not ban cow slaughter because she was not a 'Gandhi' and did not understand the emotion behind it. As Feroze Gandhi's wife her surname was 'Gandhy', but Indira changed the spelling and became 'Gandhi'. So, Vinobaji said, 'Just by writing 'Gandhi' one does not become a Gandhi.

Q. You said earlier that less work was done on land reform when the backward classes came to power when compared to the first 15 years of Congress rule.

A. I was surprised when some 20 years ago I was in Jehanabad when Leftist violence was going on there. I asked the villagers, how much land the Naxals had given them and they said not even one inch. Then, one of the Naxals I talked to said that all this killing is not to redistribute land, but the main aim is to capture the Red Fort.

The other thing is that the work of land reform is very tedious and complicated. For that you have to work at the grassroot level. Our expertise is to shout slogans, take out marches etc, but when it comes to getting down and working with papers, getting employees to do the job, we back out. We do not have the legal and technical faculty to tackle the problems associated with land, otherwise a crop of such people would have come up by now. The people did not learn it during Jayaprakashji's movement nor during the socialist movement. The movement in Bodhgaya would have been more successful if we have had this expertise. We did stress this during the days of Chatra Yuva Sangharsh Samiti in the seventies, but there was no orientation towards it. They said this work did not seem to be fit for a Sarvodaya worker.

Q. Meaning?

A. Those associated with the Sarvodaya movement were not interested in understanding and learning the small details. Like how to fill up land papers, how land was measured, what are the problems faced etc, they were only interested in agitation. But Jayaprakash had said that there were four ingredients of a movement— agitation, organisation, education and publicity.

Of these four, the agitation part got the maximum attention in Bodhgaya and the remaining three got neglected. Had we learned the technical aspects of working at the ground level the results would have been much greater. We would have had a large number of experts on our ranks who would have pointed out to the bureaucrats how things should be done, and counter the bureaucrats' move in the legal and technical level. This would have forced the bureaucrats to change and we would have been in a position to suggest these changes, because we would have known what and where things are going wrong and who is doing it. We would have been able to stop corruption at the ground level.

Q. You are trying to say whether it was Vinobaji's non-violent movement or the violent ones of the Naxals, the main weakness in both the cases was their failure to work at the ground level.

A. Vinobaji did have a number of followers in his movement who had technical expertise, but later this was abandoned. His followers were told that they should live with the poor, eat with the poor, work with them in the fields, teach the poor etc, but there was no effort to learn the ways of the State. How does it work? Who to get hold of when something is not working? Both the Naxals and the Sarvodayis believe that the State is the main oppressor, yet we have not learnt how its oppressive system works, how to counter it; Understand the rules of the game then play your own game and beat it. But you did not understand the game and it slowly ate your vitals without your having even realised it. We believe that more than the politicians it was the bureaucracy that killed the Bhoodan movement.

There is another important paper written by Gandhiji the night before he died – January 29 night. It was found in the morning on his table by his secretary and he kept it. But when he was killed, it was brought out. The paper is something of a will or testament of Gandhiji.

In that paper, he said that the Congress party should be disbanded as a political party and it should devote itself to social work. Those who want to work in the government should form something separate. He had framed a number of rules for the Congress as an organisation that would serve the people. It included not fighting elections and coming to power, political education of the people and constructive work and educating the people among other things. Under political education of the people, he had suggested that the top leadership should work as 'Loksevak's' and educate the people.

Had people like Nehru, Rajendra Prasad, and Sardar Patel worked among the people, they would have had a moral binding on the government, as they were popular. Also the confidence of the people would have increased as they would have thought that the most popular people were with us and not in the government. But this idea was rejected as being impractical.

Jayaprakash said on a number of occasions that we did not understand Gandhiji during his lifetime. What Gandhiji was saying was politics outside the power structure. The Bhoodan movement revived that forgotten legacy, and the entire credit goes to Vinobaji and Jayaprakashji. It is not as if social work has to be done only by staying in power, it can be done by staying with the people. Vinobaji used to call this 'Lokniti'. People's power has to be brought up against the State's power; and in a true democracy there will be a struggle between these two powers. If we stand with the people then the people's power will win and that would be true democracy. This was not understood by the politicians of that era. Jayaprakash and Vinobaji understood this and revived it and carried on Gandhiji's unfinished agenda. We feel that had this agenda not been revived then the 1974 movement would not have taken place and we would not have been living in a democracy, but dictatorship.

Q. You said that in the last 20 years even though Laloo and Nitish have been in power they have failed in the field of land reforms. This is unexpected since both were products of Jayaprakash's movement?

A. We think that during the period of Laloo's rule, there was no one in the leadership who could tackle the land issue. Nitish has improved the roads and the law and order situation, but to work in the field of land reforms, one has to enter deeper. Nitish did set up the D Bandopadhyay Commission on land reforms, but when the suggestions came out and there was talk of implementing them, there was a hue and cry from the opposition and the matter got politicised. And looking at the fierce opposition, Nitish also backed down.

Q. There is no political will to implement them?

A. It is not a question of political will, but political fear that he will lose the elections. All the land owners, upper castes will become united and we will lose.

Even now land is the main source of income in Bihar. There is no industry. Be it big farmers or middle farmers, they all feel that if there is land

reforms then we will be finished, so they are against it.

I had suggested that as a starting step, land records should be computerised. Half the problems would be solved then. From the errors in the figures you would find out the real problems. With correct records court cases would get reduced. The atmosphere would also change and there would be a positive impact of all this. Then the entire field of land reforms would be before you. If you step without a strong base you are bound to get entangled and even the bureaucracy would not come to your aid.

I have written to the government saying that you can computerise the records at your speed, but give us money to computerise our Bhoodan records, and when all the land records get computerised, you can attach our figures. At present, the bureaucrats think that members of the Bhoodan committee and their employees are distributing land and minting money. The bureaucrats think that had we been distributing this land, we would have made the money. This is a reality. So there is always this attempt to make the Bhoodan land part of the government land.

In the 60s when survey of Bhoodan land was done, the Bhoodan committee did not have that many employees\workers who could work at the ground level. As a result of which in the places where Bhoodan workers went, the correct figures got noted. In places where there were no Bhoodan workers, the government employees did the survey and in 40 per cent of the cases, they have entered Bhoodan land as government land.

Now they are asking: how could you distribute this land which is government land? But we are saying that we do not even know that you have entered the Bhoodan land as government land. And in any case if we have distributed the land, it has only been given to the landless, so how does it matter who gave the land, whether it was the Bhoodan committee or the government. But the district magistrates and other officers say that if it is government land then we will distribute it, you won't do it. Actually, what they want to say is that when you distribute it you make money, and when we distribute it, we will make the money. But the problem is that farmers have the land in their possession, now it won't be possible to throw them out and give the land to someone else.

Q. Shubhamurtiji, it is said that poor quality of land was given in Bhoodan. They were not serious while donating land?

A. This is true. Of the 6.5 lakh acre donated, only 2.5 lakh acres were

fit for agriculture and the remaining was unfit. People used to tell Vinobaji that the people were cheating him, and he used to reply that let the people learn to give, for so far they have only learned to grab. Be it stony land, barren land, whatever, let them donate, we will take it. Also what was considered to be bad land earlier has now turned out to be good and valuable land. For example, earlier land by the side of the road was considered to be bad as water got collected in it during rains, but now in many places, land by the roadside is prime property. Bhoodan has large tracts of such land, which property dealers are eyeing hungrily.

Q. When land was donated to Bhoodan at gram sabhas, were the documents not prepared?

A. When someone donated some land, it was announced in the gram sabha – only the name, address and the quantum of land. Later the Bhoodan worker went to that person's house and took the details and filled in forms. The Bhoodan Act was passed in 1954, but this had been going on since 1952-53. In many cases, the people who donated the land did not have papers, but had possession. And that was donated among the landless.

Q. So much land has been distributed in Bihar yet some people say that land was never an agenda and there is no need for land reforms. However, the Left believe that if land reforms take place a major problem would be solved. But another section also says that land reforms might have been an agenda in the 70s, but it is no longer relevant.

A. There has been deliberate attempt to remove land as an agenda not only from India, but all over the world. Those who say this do not have any connection with land. They have only academic connection from afar. There is a psychology attached to land, something akin to a mother's love for her child. Even the West understands this and calls it 'affinity with land' or 'affinity with earth'. You cannot remove land from the agenda. In places like Europe where people have got separated from land, the society has disintegrated. Family, society is all in the control of the state. The health, even children and old people are looked after by the state. Such a condition will arise in India if land is removed from agenda.

If land is redistributed it will bring about a major change not only on the ground level but also at the psychological level. There is an allegation against people of Bihar that they work well in other states, be it as workers or as DMs and SPs but the moment they work in Bihar they become lethargic

and corrupt. If even 50 per cent of the problem of land is solved then there will be a change in the attitude of the people. They will start working honestly and the bureaucracy will also be affected by the change. And of course, there will be a major impact on politics. Even though land is a political issue, but there will be problem if we politicise the matter. To make land reforms effective, we have to do it in a non-political way, especially above party politics. This can be done and it won't be very difficult also. Over 50 per cent of the people directly depend on land and if we are able to normalise things there, then a major work would be completed. People just have to understand this.

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Distribution of Land is the resolution of violence

An Interview of Razi Ahmad with Aneesh Ankur

Razi Ahmed is one of the best known Gandhians not only in Bihar, but also all over the country. He has been the Secretary of the Gandhi Museum in Patna for the past several decades. Apart from this, he is counted among the few members of the civil society in Bihar. He has worked for a long time with Vinoba Bhave, Jayaprakash Narayan and other prominent Gandhians. His association with activists and leaders of mass movements like Bhave continues even today. His name is taken with a lot of respect in Bihar even today. Some excerpts of his talk with **Aneesh Ankur**.

Q. Razi Sahab, it has been over 60 years since the Bhoodan movement started. Great men like Bhave and Narayan led the movement. Now in 2011, how do you assess the movement?

A. Look, it is in a sad state of affairs. *Bhoodan* was most successful in Bihar. There were two to three meetings regarding *Bhoodan* held in which people from Bihar, Dhirendra Majumdar and Laxmi Sahu (his name was Laxmi Narayan, and he lived at Begusarai) took a leading role. Sahu was a topper in chemistry at the Calcutta University. Such talented people had come for the freedom struggle. At that time, Vaidhnath Choudhary was the Congress general secretary and he used to stay at Rupauli ashram in Purnea. Bhave approached Sri Babu – Srikrishna Singh – and said that he wanted Vaidhnath Choudhary to work with him. This is how things unfolded; Sri Babu had asked Bhave how much land he wanted. I will provide more land than asked for by you. As far as I know it was anywhere between 16,000 to 32,000 acres. Bhave's reply was that land was not at issue, however they really wanted Choudhary.

In those days there was only one Congress general secretary and he

was very dedicated. When the *Bhoodan* committee was formed, its first President was Gaurishankar Babu of Rajauli. He had great knowledge of law and was member of the Constituent Assembly, and he himself was a big farmer. He was the first president and Choudhary was the secretary. People like Bhave, Narayan and Choudhary and others begged for land from the people and the donors gave them mountains, forests and stony land. Now, people criticize that quality of *Bhoodan* land was poor and blame Bhave and others, but it was not their fault but that of the donors of the land so donated. Even till this date, there is no correct official record of the *Bhoodan* land. Though of course, there are claims of how much land has been distributed. The Bihar government claims that from the time of Jagannath Mishra till this date it has distributed this much land among the landless, but the poor have not been benefitted from it.

I believe that after Jayaprakash Narayana joined the *Bhoodan* movement, its canvas increased. Earlier, Bhave used to contribute by his spiritual movement, but when JP joined the movement, it became of an international magnitude. One may wonder: How did such a big revolutionary come into the movement? JP used analytic analysis and depended on dialectic materialism for arriving at analysis. Once he joined the movement, his approach uplifted the movement. Once the landless first got the land, they did not have control over it. The Government of Bihar had to provide Ameen Sayani and he was required to mark the land, verify it and make it legal and make its final documentation. After providing some financial support to the *Bhoodan* Committee, representatives of the government assumed that their contribution was sufficient. The government did not support the committee properly. The DMs and ADMs did not take the movement seriously. The *Bhoodan* Act had a provision whereby *Bhoodan* land could not be sold. However, the agency that was meant to ensure its implementation probably failed to do it successfully, as much of the land has been sold. Practically pattern noticed was as follows. Once a person donated, say 5 *bighas* of land, he had some commitment because he believed in the *Bhoodan* cause. He donated the land and some landless might even have possession of the land. However, now the generation that had donated the land passed away and so did the emotion associated with the cause. Now the grandson, who belongs to the third generation decided that he needs the land so given, were he powerful enough, he can possibly get the land evicted and attempt to sell it.

Although legally, he cannot do so, he might still be able to do so as the implementing agency is seemingly inefficient in carrying out its job.

Bhoodan should be seen through the prism of the country. We are a predominately agricultural country with 70 to 80 percent of the population living in villages. The backbone of any village is farming and land. However, post independence we failed to give any attention to the village and farming as a result of which people lost their love for the land. People became willing to sell their land. Those who had say 50 *bighas* of land were unwilling to work on that land, as they thought that it was beneath their status. If we delve deep, we will see that *Bhoodan* is also about dignity of labour. Bhave and Narayan used to plough the land and even clean the streets, as like the Indian farmer, they believed in the dignity of labour. Nowadays even the son of a big landowner will prefer to work in a shop but not on his land because the concept of dignity of labour in farming has gone. The new economic policy also has its lacunae as it does not see development from the farmer's perspective.

If you look at the development pattern of the country in the past 62 years, you will notice that the State had all the major industries in Barauni, and in Sindhri. The Tatas also had some industries there. However, a different scenario is presented in the case of a State like Punjab. It did not have a single industry during independence and its people were depended solely on agriculture. It was only post green revolution that slowly small industries were developed with the support of agriculture. However, it seems that this has taught us nothing. If after *Bhoodan* we are successful in giving legal possession of the land to the landless, then the love for the land will return once again and many of the problems related to Naxalism will end. The Naxalites or Maoists draw their support from this class of deprived people.

Q. You are trying to say that if Bhoodan land had been distributed properly then the violence would not have taken place?

A. Definitely this would not have taken place. Bihar was the first state after Jammu and Kashmir where *zamindari* system was abolished. This work was completed in the decade of the 1950s. There are dozens of laws related to land in this State. However, the problem is not the absence of laws but absence of their effective implementation. In contemporary times, due to the involvement of the media, there is complete transparency. Nothing is hidden and everything gets highlighted. In earlier times, when corruption in

land started in Bettiah, Mahatma Gandhi had formed committee headed by Sardar Patel to investigate the case, and later Rammanohar Lohia committee was formed to continue similar investigations. In those days, only a few people knew of the Sathgeer scam as the media did not have such an extensive reach as it does now. Recently the Nitish Kumar government set up the D Bandopadhyay committee but its report could not see the light of day. However, if the Bhoodan land had been distributed properly, much of the headache of the government would have gone.

Q. But what is the real problem in a State that was the first to abolish zamindari?

A. The main problem is that of vested interest. There is a book on Bihar by Damodaran, either from Cambridge or Oxford and it is titled 'Broken Promises'. The book is on the number of laws on land that have been enacted since 1937 but has failed to be implemented. In the book, it is mentioned that the people who had the leadership to fight for *swaraj* and who were supposed to represent the people, failed to understand the real emotion of the people.

Q. Were all the leaders like this? Or did they fear that if they implemented the law then there would be big conflicts in society and there would be a bloodbath?

A. This is not entirely true. You see the number of positive points related to land in Bihar cannot be found in other States. The number of socialist and communist movement that have taken place in Bihar cannot be matched by other States. Mahatma Gandhi had also raised the issue of land in Bihar. The commitment or emotion of so many people who wanted change in land structure in Bihar cannot be questioned. These people were farsighted and had a vision of moving forward, and the necessary laws were also being made, but the implementing agency, the bureaucracy, did not understand its importance. Sitting in air-conditioned rooms in Delhi or Patna they used to decide and thought that it could be implemented in every village. These people did not have any connection or any desire to know the ground realities. We still remember the days when the *Bhoodan* Act was being made. People like Gauri Babu, Jaiprakash Babu, Vaidhnath Choudhary used to sit with Deputy Secretary Phool Singh in the latter's office and discuss what should and should not be there in the *Bhoodan* Committee. All these people were very learned and dedicated to the cause and that is why the good laws were

made. However, there was weakness in the implementing agency. Now that generation has also gone, and the generation that has occupied the government chairs do not have the experience.

Q. Even when Bhave and Narayan had such influence over the government, why did it fail to implement the laws?

A. Till Bhave was around people talked about *Bhoodan*, but after that people started talking about *Gramdan* and after that they started talking about *Bihardan*. I am not sure what Bhave thought but he was in a great hurry for *Bihardan* in 1969, which was also the centenary of Mahatma Gandhi. He thought that this was the correct opportunity. The Gandhi museum became the headquarters for a month and Bhave stayed here for four months. The errors that Bhave committed in these movements were monumental. Under the *gramdan*, all the people of the village who had land had to sign away their land on behalf of the village. However, what happened was that those who had land did not sign it, but the 75 percent who did not have land signed that they had handed over the land. I raised this question with Bhave. I told him that I come from Barauni and our area also comes under *gramdan*. We have land and even though we have not signed, it is being said that *Gramdan* has been implemented there? How is this possible, I asked him. Then suddenly the concept of *Bihardan* started. In reality, the spirit of donating land was hurt from that point.

Q. When was Bihardan to take place?

A. *Bihardan* was supposed to take place on October 2, 1969 at the convention in Rajgir. When Bhave started leaving from Gandhi museum a large number of people came to bid goodbye and they included K B Sahay, Vinodanand Jha among others – I have a photograph that I took with my camera on that occasion. At that time some journalists had also come, and one of them asked what happened to the movement and Bhave said – B stand for Binoba, B for *Bihardan* and B for Bogus. He meant to say that everything had turned bogus, nothing had been achieved.

Q. There is a Gramdan Act. Was is a blunder to go from Bhoodan to Gramdan to Bihardan?

A. The blunder had been committed. JP also understood that a diversion from the main issue had taken place. The ground level workers had all gone and there was no force left in the movement. *Gramdan* Act was framed, then *Bihardan* Act was also introduced, then the concept of *Gram Swaraj* came

and in between the concept of *Panchayati Raj* also came – all this created contradictions. The Government of India talked about *Panchayati raj*. *Gram Swaraj* means that every individual is a member of it. This was the concept of Mahatma Gandhi and Bhave and also of Prem Chand. Everyone would have equal rights, there was no question of male or female. The *sarpanch* would be of the same caste whose members lived there. Thus, there would be no issue of social clash.

However, Bhave was in a hurry. He wanted that *Bihardan* should be completed by October 3, 1969. So, one person signed for five to six persons. The work of getting the survey done was given to the primary teacher of the village school and though he got the signatures, there was no verification. Therefore, there was no confirmation and thus there was no mutation of the land and it did not pass legally to the landless. It was a chain reaction and everything failed.

Q. You asked for land and you were given it verbally. May be you even gave the papers, but they were not entered into the government registers, and also the old power equations did not change?

A. Yes, mutation and entry into government registers did not take place and when the price of land started increasing the people who had given the land started taking it back. Those who had given the land in the first place had gone by then and the new generation did not have the commitment for the movement. Bhave and Narayan had their own aura and apart from them even when people like Choudhary Babu and Sahu went to a place the movement caught some momentum, but after they were gone the continuity of the movement ended.

Now, there are no ground level workers left in the movement. At that time, the big names were associated with the *Bhoodan* movement. Narayan was in Saharsa when he suffered a heart attack, and then the Mushari protest started. From Saharsa he went to Benaras for a medical check up and from there he went to Mushari. There, he received a letter from Badri Babu who was the chairman of the *Bhoodan* committee. He had received death threats. A couple of murders had also taken place, and slowly the spirit of the movement died away. Then, other people came who did not have the passion for the movement and for whom it was just a job. It was the old generation that had kept the spirit of *Bhoodan* alive through their sacrifices. In a state where there is murder over every *bigha* of land, it was by no means an under

achievement that the *Bhoodan* movement received thousands of acres of land.

Q. In Bihar the movement got 6 lakh acres of land – and it was 24 lakh acres if we take Jharkhand into consideration – and of this 6 lakh acres, only 3.5 lakh acres was found unfit to be distributed and the 2.75 lakh acres of land that has been distributed is creditable.

A. What you say is true. So far as land was concerned, there was a revolutionary Telangana movement in the 1950s where land was taken forcibly, but in Bihar the people who were known as feudal elements gave their land freely. It is the very people who are accused of being oppressive who gave their land in Bihar. This factor had a major role in bringing about social change in the state.

Along with this, people who were actively involved in the socialist movement, communist movement or in the Congress party during the fight for independence had a commitment towards society. However, as these people passed away, so did the movement. As a result, no one knows, even those with the *Bhoodan* movement, where the *Bhoodan* land actually is on the ground. There is no record now.

Q. Razi Sahab, can we say that the violence seen in the rural areas of Bihar during the 1980s over the land issue would have taken place in the 1960s had not the Bhoodan movement taken place?

A. Violence would surely have taken place in the 1960s had it not been for the *Bhoodan* movement. The people associated with the movement were nationalist, and though they might not have agreed totally with Mahatma Gandhi, they did not believe in violence. They believed that the solution brought through violence was never permanent. Even if it were not non-violent, it at least had to be peaceful. Like the 1974 movement—Narayan never called it a non-violent movement. He called it a peaceful movement. If you see overall the movement was peaceful. In such a big movement very few people were killed. The thing that is done peacefully is usually permanent.

Q. Like the movement in Bodhgaya, which was against the matt there?

A. The movement in Bodhgaya was in continuation of Narayan's movement. Priyadarshi and others came later. At first, it was a movement of Bhava. It was due to the goodwill of Narayan that the Mahant gave a lot of land – like the Sukhoda ashram land. When Narayan came to the Bodhgaya convention in 1954, it was his personality that made many people voluntarily

donate land. Once the second generation came, they had to fight for the land.

Q. Razi Sahab, the Bhoodan movement redistributed land. However, what was its impact on Bihar politics, its social scene and land relations?

A. In one way the impact has been revolutionary. For the people of Bihar, land is very important and even murders take place for possession of land. However, under this movement, people gave away their land to others, for the poor, for their neighbour in the village. This is a major social change. The very landowners who were accused of being feudal were giving away land and the poor would benefit from it. This, in itself, was revolutionary. However, of course, we could not keep the spirit of the movement alive, but that is true of the freedom movement also. All the dreams that we had during the freedom movement could not be put in place on the ground. *Bhoodan* was also such a step and now it is up to the new generation to implement it.

Q. Bhoodan had its impact on Bihar society for two to three decades after independence. And as you said earlier, when problems started cropping up in its implementation and the land under Bhoodan was not distributed properly, rural Bihar took a violent turn.

A. You see in 1971, of the two persons who died in police firing in the Mushari firing, one was a Muslim. He was the only earning member of the family. Narayan brought both his widow and her daughter with him to the *charkha samiti* and looked after them. It is our old culture that we help those who are in trouble and stand beside them. There can be no solution with violence.

However, now things have changed. The landowners who gave the land have now taken back their land, because it is now the grandson who owns the land. Also prices of land increased and he too needs the land. He thinks that since then, all these years, the government has failed to distribute the land given under *Bhoodan*, it is all right to take it back. All this has happened due to slackness of the government machinery.

Q. Earlier you said that even though the Bhoodan Act was made and the Bhoodan committee was formed, people did not give power to it. People made fun of the committee. Why did this happen?

A. This is precisely what happened. The government gave the bailiff, but did not give them the power. The work has to be done by the District Magistrate, but the ground level worker had to deal with the BDO and CO.

Later the problems associated with the secretariat also crept in.

Q. So what should have been done?

A. There should have been a time bound programme. But here diversions took place. Gramdan and then Bihardan entered into *Bhoodan*. Actually, once you got the land, the act of verification, documentation and distribution should have been done according to a time bound programme, where the movement was at its peak. Then, the entire committee should have been wound up. But here, vested interests entered into the committee who wanted the committee to continue for ever.

Q. So does the committee have any relevance today?

A. The relevance will be there even today because the *Bhoodan* land has not been distributed. The land donation is on paper and till such time all the land has been distributed, the committee will continue to exist. It is for this reason that Chandawar had undertaken a fast and the government had assured him that he should give the government time till March and they will complete all the work related to *Bhoodan* in one selected district. Ask the *Bhoodan* committee people, for which district had this commitment been made? The commitment is to give the land within time; otherwise the work will never take place.

Q. This means that the distribution of land under Bhoodan is still an unfinished agenda?

A. It is an unfinished agenda. Under the *Bhoodan* Act, the land donated under *Bhoodan* can neither be bought nor sold. Like the Tenancy Act, the Chotanagpur Act, under which you cannot buy their land. No one can buy tribal land; a tribal cannot sell his land to non-tribal. Similarly, the land belongs to *Bhoodan*. Till the land is distributed, it will remain with the committee. Now the government through the District Magistrates should verify this land and distribute it in the village, and then a big issue would be resolved.

Q. Razi Sahab, it is said that the earlier governments under the Congress were conservative when it came to the question of land, but in the decade of the 1990s the backwards came to power and they were considered to be less conservative when it came to matters of land. Yet, they did not fulfil the expectations of the people regarding Bhoodan. Why was there a lack of political will among the backward leadership?

A. Yes this is true. Things did not happen. The Socialists who came to power like Karpoori Thakur or Mahamaya Babu did not act. Narayan used

to be angry with them as he said that they did not fulfil the promises that they had made. Even during that time the issue of land was not implemented at the ground level.

Q. Razi Sahab, we are blaming the leaders, we are questioning their honesty. However, what if the problem lay with the Act itself?

A. Though I am not a law student, as far as I know, the Act is very good. It is pro-people. Our leaders have never thought of the poor. Had they thought of the poor, then it would never have happened that while Patna was shining and there was no drinking water in the villages. Whether it is the matter of *Bhoodan* or any other issue, if the benefits do not percolate to the ground level, then there will be problems. From 1967, the governments have been formed by the Socialists, the Communists but the condition of the poor still remains the same.

When in 1990, Laloo Prasad Yadav came to power and decided to take oath in front of Narayan's statue, I had written an article saying that this is the first time that such a thing was happening. I am not sure whether other people were happy or not, but Mahatma Gandhi, Dr Ram Manohar Lohia, Narayan, would surely have been happy when a leader took oath among the people. It appeared that the fate of the people would change in Yadav's hand. However, after some time everything collapsed. Once politicians go to the Assembly or Parliament and sit in air-conditioned rooms, they begin to represent one class – the political class. It does not matter whether they are Communists or Socialists.

In Bihar, the control of the Socialists and Communists have all but ended, even though this state was their birthplace. The Left movement cannot be seen anywhere. The defeat of the Left is a big blow to all progressive forces. At the time of independence movement, the people looked up to the Congress with hope, later the poor looked up to the Red flag of the Communists to fight for them. It is sad that the Red flag on which the poor relied so much to change the status quo in their favour has ceased to be a force.

Q. The demise of the Left was a big blow?

A. It was indeed a big blow. You can see the result; violence is increasing. The coming days would be more challenging. You cannot just wipe out the people who are poor, who do not have water to drink, who have no food, whose children died without treatment. Suppressing them cannot be a solution

as their number is huge and their cause is genuine.

Q. Razi Sahab, there is a big segment that is present in both politics and social life who believe that the land agenda has ceased to exist.

A. No, the land agenda remains. If it is a question of land in the villages then it is not an issue, but if it comes in the city it becomes an agenda. This is totally a wrong approach. Land still remains an agenda. The people of the country and especially of Bihar have an attachment to land. Still a large amount of land is unrecorded. There are still huge land holders in Palamu district. Same is true of Purnea, Motihari and Bettiah, where there are large estates. These people have been able to keep the land illegally by transferring them in the name of nonexistent persons. So still a lot has to be done regarding land and it will be a major challenge for any government that comes to power.

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From Bhoodan to an Alternative Development Model

Vinod Shahi

In the initial stages of human civilization, the relation between man and land was governed by natural laws. But man had to come out of that because the needs of development were not fulfilled by such a relation. The various types of human hunger, desire for better houses, more production and more profits, other needs and aspiration took human beings into a complex world of socio-political relations. This increased the rate of development but it also meant that the natural relation between man and land ended, and man, who can be considered to be the son of earth, did not stop exploiting the mother earth in order to satisfy his needs for development.

But the present day crisis in the field of natural resources and environment has put a big question mark on the self-destructive journey of mankind. Under these circumstances it has once again become necessary to evaluate the pros and cons of a natural and unnatural relation between man and land. We should not just think blindly about the developmental goals, but also look at the fundamental forms of development and keep in mind the eternal needs. If we pause a while and think a bit then we can recollect that we had someone in our midst, in this modern era, who showed us the way – Acharya Vinoba Bhave.

Before we get to know Vinoba Bhave, we should pay attention to one stream of thought; that if we have to get rid of the evils that have crept into the relationship between man and his environment due to socio-economic development, then it cannot solely rely on transformation of our culture or mentality. But they can act as a hint which will guide us to take the correct path. If we want to go deep and understand the matter then we can say that a

healthy and humane culture will show us an alternative path that will lead to a better relation between man and his environment. But man has not only consciousness, but has land and also a body. So the cultural alternatives that he searches for has to be given a solid appearance. We have to test whether the alternatives, that are the products of human consciousness, are self-driven or not. If not, then sooner or later, even the grandest of all alternatives to the present day relation between man and his environment, comes close to fading out – like Vinoba's Bhoodan movement.

At first, it would not be out of place to talk about the Bhoodan movement in general. Any movement has to be understood in its historical perspective and then we can draw conclusions about its success or otherwise. However, if the subject is such that it cannot be fitted into the historical perspective as it talks about something that can only be judged in times to come, then instead of calling it a movement/revolution, we must understand that subject as being something related to development or connected to our very survival. The first thing we have to keep in mind is that Bhoodan as a movement is something else – something that is quite limited in the economic sense. But Bhoodan as a step in the transformation and development process is quite another thing – it has to be understood in the paradigm of man's fundamental relation with land. But before we can go to that fundamental issue, we have to understand the role and importance of Bhoodan as an instrument of revolution and its limitation.

After independence, the democratically elected government that took steps towards decentralization was mainly due to ending of the feudal rule in country. However, this goal of total decentralization could never reach its logical conclusion. This was because even though the feudal rule of the princely states of the country had ended, at the same time in an invisible way, they were also getting united. This was because we had to have a strong centre to dissolve and amalgamate all the feudal States into India. Sardar Patel's role during that period received praise because he successfully integrated the States. That was the need of the hour. But, a strong Centre was against a strong people's democracy. The Centre's structure was democratic, but the structure was supported by elements whose power and mentality were feudal. Bureaucrats, big landlords and zamindars, erstwhile rulers and other powerful people camouflaged their intentions and entered into power by winning elections. And these elements were in favour of a strong Centre.

That is why even though it appeared that people oriented democracy was coming, actually it receded and ultimately it vanished.

But the Bhoodan movement by attempting to change the attitude of the land owners and making them donate land, was trying to create a pro-people atmosphere.

The Bhoodan movement is related to the fundamental question of reconstruction of the country. The question was whether the mentality of the feudal elements would change and would become democratic once their erstwhile principalities were merged with the democratic India. The moot question here is to whom does the maximum amount of agriculture land belong to? What had the local rulers and their partners, the British colonial rulers done when they were in power? Just to ensure that their rule became stronger and entrenched, the British legally allotted vast tracts of land in village after village to their supporters. Thus it had become necessary that after the merger of princely states into the India union, the erstwhile land owners should recognise the fact that the farmers were the real owners of the land and they should themselves take the initiative and return the land to them.

The Bhoodan movement was the first step taken in this direction, but later it was given some sort of legal sanctity. The land reforms that were undertaken in the villages were an extension of this and they can be considered to be progressive and pro-people efforts. But the real motive of Bhoodan movement was much bigger. It became evident that by land reforms the needs of only a small segment of the landless could be addressed. The second problem was despite the best efforts, maximum amount of agriculture land and other prime property remained in the hands of the traditional rich and influential class. These elements entered the power structure through elections, formed a mafia pressure group and ensured that their interests were protected.

Bhoodan movement wanted the ownership of land to be broad, humane and flexible, but though there was some decentralisation in ownership patterns, it did not penetrate much. The Bhoodan movement was unable to change the feudal mentality, and it did not matter whether the land holding was large or small. The landowners wanted to increase the area of their land holding, were proud of their land holdings and had ambitions to be part of the power structure. In a democratic structure the chances of feudal elements

getting elected increased only if they donated land. Therefore, the big land owners welcomed the Bhoodan movement. Moreover, the laws passed to regulate the amount of agriculture land one could hold, also did not harm the interests of the land owners. The big landowners started keeping their land in false names (benami) and this gave birth to a land mafia that became very powerful with time. Therefore, after the land reform bills were passed, the Indian democratic system saw the huge increase in the power of the land mafia in the power structure. Of course, it would be wrong to blame the Bhoodan movement for all the ailments in the system, but if we sit down to analyse we can say that even such a humane and noble movement like Bhoodan failed because it did not try and change the fundamental relation between land and man. As a result, the entire movement was comprised by the vested interests who instead of being defeated, came forward in another form and became more powerful and posed a greater challenge.

This was the biggest challenge before Gandhi's philosophy in the country. And even now this philosophy is practical and can take shape of a radical movement and bring big results. There is public support and cultural and moral pressure is exerted, but it fails to give long term results and become a model for development process. This is because by raising some fundamental questions it is prevented from being categorised as a philosophy or ideology. Not only this, people have created such a big image and halo around Gandhi and Vinoba that even a beginning cannot be made of discussing their philosophy and ideas. A frank and free discussion of Gandhi's ideas was necessary so that with changing of time their ideas could be remoulded. The blind devotion to Gandhi's philosophy created such a backlash that it created a feeling of disgust towards Gandhi. Thus, no one, neither the followers nor the critics of Gandhi raised some fundamental questions. Each had their own fiefdom and interest to protect and these people really did not have much concern about what Gandhi and Vinoba stood for. In the quest for the truth and ways of development, Gandhi, who was the first to stand for truth, was shown the door.

The relationship between man and land is universal. The entire earth is equally for the human beings and all the animals and other creatures in it. Though the concept of this world is not clearly defined, there is no doubt that there were no boundaries or barriers. This takes the form of consciousness of the unbreakable unity of the earth. But with the march of civilization and

different social structures the relationship between man and land became more and more complex, varied and fragmented. In fact the different social structures provide backing and solidity to these complex and varied relationships between man and land. These relationships are defined and it appears that they can be understood, but at the same time, as these relationships are limited they appear to be adrift from the natural broad doctrine. This is one of the fundamental contradictions that forms one of the main unsolved problems in the social development of mankind. Man wants to get back to the universal and broad definition of relationship between man and land, but at the same time he is also unwilling to give up what he owns directly. Let us glance at the social development of man. At first man used to live in tribes. At that time, man used to get land naturally, but slowly it got converted into 'land won through victory in war'. With the domination of the victorious, the era of history started, and it goes to the extent of claiming to represent even the soul of man.

That land belongs to the victorious, or that land can be won is one of the main planks of civilization which leads to new development. The history of the world as written by the victorious is still preponderant in the social and community consciousness of mankind. Along with this, the relationship between man and land changed. Instead of treating land as our mother we started treating it more like a servant.

Then came the next stage of development—it was the concept of state in which the head of this feudal set up was the king and then land became something that was granted as a gift by the king.

If we look at the structure of social classes and their relationship with land, we can say that those who consider land as their mother are those who are the producers. Their labour is the product that they get from the land. But the creative freedom of this class is soon gone and they come under those who win the land by war and they consider the product that comes from the land as something that is under them. In this era, the producers also took the form of artists and craftsman. But once the relationship between land and man changed from that of a mother to a servant, and then it became natural that those who produced things became the Dalits, and was pushed to the lower strata of society.

Two groups are responsible for the social system under which land become a commercial tool.

One is the Brahmin 'intellectual' class which is involved in research and the other is the victorious king's class. The Brahmins discover and bring new machines and other things and give a fillip to the development process. The farmers and artisans use these new machines and tools and produce new products from the land and these products slowly become expensive items. But unfortunately, like the beautiful girl who is going to lighten someone else's house after marriage, these products are enjoyed not by the producers themselves, but by the kings. Not only this, the group that makes the products expensive are not the producers, but the traders. But at the same time, the status of land rises from that of a servant and the Brahmins bring in cultural rules that would govern the relationship between man and land.

After the middle-ages, a new chapter is written in the modern era about the relationship between man and land. Land now becomes a product that can be sold and bought. Thus, land degraded to a saleable commodity status. This is much worse than the status of servant given in the earlier era because here there is no scope for human compassion in things bought and sold. Even from the ethical point of view, there was some scope of ethics to be followed where land is considered as a servant, and it can be termed as 'pre-ethical'. There is a chance that the relationship might turn ethical. But there was no ethics when it came to procuring land.

In the modern era, there is a primacy of capitalism in relationship between land and man. Even in the cases where land is inherited and there are sentiments of hoary traditions present, the shadow of capitalistic tendencies can be seen clearly. The third form of land holding is that of the State, where the land is given under the capitalist model of development or under individual ownership. Thus, in the modern era land is considered to be the main way for increasing personal wealth.

But ever since, land has become an object for sale and purchase there is very little scope that the emotional relationship between man and the land he inherits, exists for a long time.

But when land comes under the influence of business capital then the only motive man has, is to maximise profit from the land. He wants to exploit the land to its maximum extent. As a result, with the spread of modern capitalism, fertile land has become barren and there is excessive dependence on technical experts in agriculture. Chemical fertilisers and improved seeds have become necessary for agriculture and use of tractors and combined

harvesters have led to displacement of labour. In a country that has excessive labour, this displacement has meant that the youth have diverted to join mafia gangs or even become terrorists. Drug abuse and irresponsible behaviour that is plaguing the modern world is also one of the offshoots of this changed relationship between man and land.

In land that is rich in minerals and other resources, excessive exploitation has meant that there is danger that these natural resources will vanish. Excessive exploitation has also meant that forest cover has come down as a result of which wild animals are on the verge of extinction. Tribal communities now have to be kept enclosed in their own small environment, something akin to a zoo. The excessive exploitation of land has made it polluted, sick and barren and the entire human race has become worried about this change.

Bhoodan wanted to change this relationship between man and land into a more humane platform. By urging for donation of land, the Bhoodan movement aimed at laying foundation for the ultimate change in the relationship between man and land – that is the natural relation that existed at the dawn of civilization. But this change had to be supported by the existing social relationships so that it got a concrete shape, otherwise it would be reduced to just a socialistic utopia, an alternative-consciousness, that can be lost with time.

The work and success of Bhoodan movement lies mainly in the villages, but for land reforms and fundamental change in the relationship between man and land, it is also necessary that attention be paid to urban development and rejuvenation of forests. We have to ensure that the rising population and the migration of the people from the villages to the cities do not result in agriculture land being gobbled up for urban housing. Similarly, the remaining forests would also have to be protected since without the forest no development model can be termed as just and humane. But we also have to understand that for all this, simply moral pressure is not sufficient, and nor can any proposal for ‘donation’ of urban land bring about any practical results. If agricultural land and forests are acquired for industrial development then both the idea of development and social amity will be in crisis. This is why big questions come to the fore. Bhoodan is not possible in the cities but it is also necessary to ensure that the poor people in the cities get a small plot of land that would enable them to have a roof over their heads. It will also have

to be ensured that the nearby agriculture land and forests are not encroached upon. So what should be the solution?

One of the possible solutions is to ensure that cities do not expand and enter into land that is meant for agriculture and forest. Instead of allowing the cities to spread horizontally, efforts should be made to make them grow vertically so that they move up to the skies, but not spread on the ground.

Another solution might be to start a movement on the lines of Bhoodan and ask owners of houses and bungalows to give out their roofs voluntarily. It is not necessary that this be given out free of cost, but be given out on a 'practical and development oriented' basis so that these can be used for students accommodation or business purposes, which would be beneficial for all. There should be an agreement with house owners whereby permission would be granted for construction of additional four to five stories which would be given out on 'reasonable rent'. The construction would be done on a cooperative basis by people who are going to stay there or start a business there. This would also lead to generation of employment. However, for this to succeed one would have to start non-cooperation movement against the cartel of property dealers who only want to increase rent and property prices.

In countries like India where there is a huge population and for that matter in all third world countries, all institutions that call for exclusive use of land should be dismantled. The commercial land in residential areas, which are priced ten to twenty times are under the control of big property dealers and big land owners. The policy of having separate residential and commercial areas and having laws and rules to assist such a division acts against the development of people's markets. The argument is that for the peace of the people living in residential areas, commercial activities should not be allowed there. Undoubtedly, such freedom should be thought about. But can there be no plan where the market and residential houses live and grow side by side? For example, in places, where the houses are open from both the sides, one of the roads can be used for market? Why cannot right to practise business be made a fundamental right? And why can't all areas be made open for residential and commercial to exist side by side? The real fear is that once this is done then the value of commercial property will come down, things will become cheaper as producers will interact with the consumers directly. It has also become necessary that tax be imposed only at the level of the producer and licences and other requirements for business should be done

away with. This flexibility, the produce of the villages will come directly to the cities and all middlemen would be cut out or at least dependence on them would get reduced to a great extent.

For example, freedom should be given to the farmers to sell their produce in the nearby cities. If small traders go to these villages and directly purchase, say 10 to 20 sacks of grain or rice from the farmers and sell it through their small shops then the dependence of the farmers on mandis would end. And no farmer would be forced to sell their produce at a lower price. The farmers would also come together and cooperate in building their own storage houses where they would be able to store their produce when there is excessive production and sell it when there is demand. The huge wastage of food grains in the government sector would also end as the farmers would take better care of the produce. Moreover, it is a guarantee that of the 100 persons who face hunger at present, at least 10 would get food if this regime is implemented.

All over the world, those who are born there consider that part of the earth as sacred and do not exploit the natural resources of the area in such an exploitative manner that the land becomes barren and the environment polluted. But land purchased by outsiders for profits on the strength of their capital usually results in land getting exploited.

Therefore, the human race would have to bring a big change not only in their consciousness, but also in their mentality. We will have to accept that indigenous people have fundamental rights in their own land and environment. Also, that if there is any profit being derived from the land then the local inhabitants would be the natural partners of the profits. And there should be punishment for forcible removal of people and it should be considered as crime against humanity.

All this will result in mankind getting back voluntarily to the consciousness that they are sons of the earth. Earlier, this relationship between man and land was natural, but now it will be mankind's choice. And this would be the path for human salvation.

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Loss of Social Capital and Naxal Problem in India

Uttam Sinha

A case for revival of Sarvodaya-Bhoodan like Movement in post Gandhi-Vinoba phase

Civil society discourse has now entered into public domain from the academic interpretations. People's upsurge against corrupt and autocratic regimes in different parts of the world has displayed a great potential. It has also displayed a potential of making an elected government to follow some of its dictats in the absence of right to recall in a democratic set up like India. On going Civil Society movement against corruption in political class has shown this power once again in action. There is no doubt that people's trust in the political class and in the government is at the low ebb today and the line of separation between civil society and political class have sharpened.

Corruption, of course, is a big issue but we should not forget that the roots of corruption also lie within the society itself. Civil Society cannot disown conducts of a society which it claims to represent. Corruption in political class is merely a reflection of the darker side of our society. No doubt, political class is more responsible for spreading corruption down wards in the larger society. Still, can Civil Society rule out any of its involvement with the political parties? Politics is the only process by which we can decide the claim for representation. Civil Society seems looking at politics and parties as ignoble, immoral and corrupt in general. Perhaps due to this reason it could not muster enough support it was expecting on the issue from opposition parties. Even Government after having long discussions and formal meetings with the Civil Society groups today, is questioning their stake in framing of

nature and content of a Bill against corruption.

These are creating serious doubts about sustainability of ongoing movement. India has a vast and rich experience as far as people's mobilization is concerned. Our long history of Freedom Movement is full of such local, regional and nationwide movements which combined both political protest as well as social reforms together. A society which has witnessed such a high degree of moral and social commitment of our reformers and political leaders is bound to compare the present movement with the past ones. This comparison becomes more obvious when Civil Society groups choose to call their protest by words like 'Satyagraha' and 'Anshan' etc.

While attempting to give an impression of Gandhian character to the present movement, Civil Society should also focus on constructive aspects of Satyagraha at par with political protests. Presently no such initiative is in sight except for a sudden increased and developed networking and bonding between visual and mass media and the Civil Society groups. Perhaps the use of information technology may be the need of the hour because of its widespread reach in the society today. Mass contacting and obtaining feedback from the common people is also part and parcel of Gandhian mass mobilization. This is the only way through which a political protest can obtain its legitimacy in India. The fact of the matter is that no Civil Society movement in India can do away with the name of Gandhi and the methods/ techniques he devised for mass mobilisation.

In India, at this moment, it seems that Civil Society is claiming to be acting only to represent the people of India, not just to produce accountability of the office of Lokpal. Besides the issue of bringing Prime Minister and higher judiciary under the purview of Lokpal, one of the proponents of Civil Society draft LOKPAL Bill says that the office of Lokpal will have 15000 staff who will look into the complaints of corruption against 43,00000 government servants. Practically, this sounds unreasonable in the wake of increasing use of RTI Act, whereas proposed Lokpal Bill, once enacted, is expected to be used by people in much larger numbers for which human resource of mere 15000 will not be sufficient. More so, when it has become almost difficult to find even one person of integrity, then from where will Civil Society get such a larger number with unimpeachable integrity?

As the expression of Civil Society is gaining new currency, it is generating more questions than answers. Whom do we consider a civil

society? Does Baba Ramdev or RSS represent the civil society or the team Anna represents the civil society? There is definition which may suggest RSS and similar organisations also falls within its framework. The entire connotation associated with this word is not as positive as its current usage would suggest. So there is a genuine fear that the movement may not just end up adding another ineffective Bill to the already existing exhaustive list! The Indian society has always been portrayed as a society where modes of authority and legitimacy lay outside the formal political structures. It is considered to be an association of associations based on ethnicity, kinship and cultural cohesion. This social construction has been built-up over the ages through indigenous forms of social transformations. Present Civil Society mobilisation seems to have focused itself on a specific issue that is corruption, especially in the political class.

Mahatma Gandhi knew the strength and possibilities of Civil Society in controlling political class when it tends to go astray. But at the same time he was very well aware of the weaknesses of Indian society due to its own internal disorientation. He was perhaps one and only leader who gave equal importance to both political protest and social reforms. He believed that no political reform could be sustained without required social transformation. Not only he had the courage to challenge an Empire but also he could speak up against his own people, ills inherent in their social customs and their moral degeneration. He strongly believed that temptation towards any kind of violence was the root cause of all social problems manifested in different forms. His definition of violence included physical as well as mental one that reflects in our overall conduct. He was rather disappointed on seeing fast erosion of moral values and continuation of violent tendencies deeply rooted in our society. Moral erosion resulted in phenomenon like corruption and roots of violence in our society resulted in phenomenon like Communalism and Naxalism. The Post-Gandhian era has seen all such decays that obviously resulted in loss of Social bond or Social Capital.

Term ‘Social Capital’, like the word ‘Civil Society’, is also a sociological concept, which refers to connections within and between social networks. If Civil Society represents the conscience of a society, then Social Capital may be considered as active state of the same conscience. It has been discussed as “something of a cure-all” for the problems of modern society. The core idea behind this is that social networks have value, just as screwdriver, a

physical capital, or university education, a human capital, can increase productivity [both individual and collective], so do social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups. The concept of Social Capital highlights the value of social relations and the role of cooperation and confidence to get collective or economic results. In general terms, it could be said that social capital is fruit of social relations, and is expectant of benefits derived from the cooperation between individuals and groups. This is something close to the enlightened society of Gandhian connotation. This state of enlightenment comes only when individuals and groups work in harmony for the overall progress of society. Such opportunity of involvement, interaction, networking of individuals and social groups are possible only when the process of social transformation is in action under a general or specific motivation. Gandhi's mass movements had not only enlightened Indian society as long as these were put into practice but its impact is still felt which is reflected in frequent use of conceptual terms like 'Satyagraha' and 'Anshan', nevertheless in post-Gandhian scenario.

The question arises here is how this social capital or the enlightened state of society can be achieved and put to use in Indian context? The ongoing Civil Society mobilization in India, of course, is providing an opportunity to activate and utilise available Social Capital not only for achieving desired collective result but also to act decisively for internal reorganisation of society. But is the Civil Society, as it has displayed itself today, capable of taking to ethical enrichment of our own social fabric? Whether a strong Bill against corruption will be enough for moral regeneration of Indian society? In this context can we learn something from our past experiences of Civil Society mobilisations? Do such movements fit into the parameters of modern sociological definitions of Civil Society and Social Capital? Can a sincere review of Gandhian and Sarvodaya movement, like Bhoodan, suggest something to address both corruption and violence, especially Naxal violence, which is also linked to the agrarian land disputes and is a post Gandhi-Vinoba phenomena? It poses a greater threat to Indian democracy than any other form of violence as it has now gripped almost 150 districts of India by rooting out all democratic values and law of the land. In this context it is important to understand whether the genesis of Naxal violence still lies in the inequitable distribution of land or it has become more ambitious to capture political power through undemocratic means under a fake ideological commitment

of its cadres? This paper intends to start with the assumption that the Gandhi-Vinoba version of social movement is best suited to Indian social conditions and still has potential of mass mobilisation for a just cause. This might sound impractical specifically to the Sarvodayaites as they seem more disheartened today than the common person who still gets excited and motivated by the name of Gandhi and Vinoba.

The issues attempted here are merely to provoke and attract further interest and attention of those seeking alternative options of social transformation in today's context. The argument followed is based on established facts and not mere references from published works. However, the issue starts with Civil Society response to corruption in political class with reiteration of the fact that corruption and violence has become a regular feature of Indian society today. So just addressing corruption in political class is not going to solve other major problems of our society. Even if present Civil Society movement achieves its desired result in the form of enactment of a strong Lokpal law, the role of Civil Society and its Social Capital will not end there. To ensure that the proposed Lokpal Bill would not be misused in future, Civil Society and its component i.e. Social Capital need to remain on alert.

Gandhi was perhaps unique in terms of identifying and utilising positively such available resources of Social Capital for collective growth of society who could create an imagined Ashram community despite caste and class differences. That community experience helped him to have a better insight into the Indian realities. His touch with rural India made his thinking more complex, yet closer to the Indian reality. From the experiments he made in Champaran and Kheda, he learnt that without active participation of the poor and socially backward, no popular movement would yield a result. Gandhi devised an intelligent plan of social reconstruction programme based on the abolition of untouchability and promotion of khadi. These programmes resulted in the involvement of the upper caste which in turn exposed them to the multilayered social structure resulting in the elite class's exposure to the issues and problems of the poor. Once they became conscious of the plight of the poor, they immediately joined hands to elevate their conditions.

Moreover, Gandhi was sure of the fact that without active cooperation of the elite, no plan of social engineering would succeed. Creating an integrated imagined community on a moral plane was to help in accelerating

social change. He had experimented with his constructive programme at the time of the non-cooperation movement in 1921. He also insisted that the Congress should approve his programme before he launched the mass movement/s. Involvement in the social reconstruction programme helped an ordinary worker to keep in touch with ground realities. Non-cooperation movement was launched at the time when Indian Society was confronted with massive social turmoil. In reality, the non-cooperation movement combined multiple social and political movements within it. It was in fact, the first mass movement organised on an all India level. Participation in the mass movement became an educative experience for a worker. Gandhi encouraged the workers in the social-reconstruction programme when there was no mass politics of political protest. This kept the workers within the fold of social reconstruction programme, something like Social Capital in action. Participation in the great social experiment kept the workers busy in social networking and relation for collective result. It was followed by the Civil Disobedience movement, the second mass movement on an all India plane by combining social and economic issues together especially in UP and Andhra Pradesh.

From the above facts it can be drawn that his movements helped increase in the Social Capital which he wisely invested in India's struggle for freedom. People in the post-Gandhian era though have not seen those movements and their electrifying effects on our society, are enjoying fruits emanated out of it today. Perhaps that is why Indian society still can claim to have some Social Capital left with it in comparison to other societies of the world. But that does not rule out further loss in it when viewed from the perspective of present condition of Indian society. State machinery is unable to stop financial frauds and irregularities while on the other hand rural and tribal India is suffering from Naxal violence and counter-violence emanating out of it. If Civil Society in India wishes to root out the menace of corruption in political class it also should act against the menace of Naxal violence without which reforms would be incomplete.

Gandhi though always viewed State power with suspicion yet never disputed its inevitability. Despite his disliking for present electoral politics, he never tried to draw a line of separation between Civil Society and the political class. He, instead believed in realising an essentially nonviolent self-reliant, self regulating society in phases, which may replace the State at

the end. He had serious doubts upon political class which was to regulate activities of State after Independence. He believed that power, especially the political power, has a tendency to corrupt unless and until there is a strong orientation of character and will in our political representatives. That strong orientation he found missing right from the formation of Constituent Assemblies and among some political representatives who formed part of these Assemblies. Instead of joining the celebrations of Indian Independence in Delhi, he preferred fasting for the communal unity in Kolkata, a wish for his beloved nation that he felt so important to place at the top of his list of constructive programmes prescribed for free India. No wonder a large number of his followers believed in his constructive programme for ensuring economic progress of free India.

After his death, the general optimism about the State that it could play an important role in the regeneration of society shattered quickly. The Government had rather a different vision of modern India and had no faith in the Gandhian model of development. This internal drift in the shared vision caused a fundamental disagreement among the followers of Gandhi which had a lasting consequence both on Indian politics as well as on the methods and techniques of social transformation attempted in India after the passing away of Gandhi-Vinoba and even Jayaprakash. Right from the foundation of the Indian State we took development with divided mindsets leaving a scope and habit of criticism. While staunch followers of Gandhi believed in village oriented development, the government was pushing for infrastructural development in order to pave way for industrial growth and environment. Instead of paying any attention to the Civil Society viewpoint, largely represented by Gandhian constructive workers, government went on with their alternative model of development. Within the society itself, interaction, networking, sharing for required social transformation, gradually became stagnant in the absence of a Nationwide Civil Society mobilisation. After winning political freedom, obtaining economic freedom was supposed to be the shared goal for free India where Civil Society and democratic government entered into conflict. This obviously had to reflect in our official plan of economic development and the aspirations and need of the society and affected people. After his death, his followers who preferred Gandhi's constructive programme as their future vocation, automatically assumed responsibility of representing Civil Society in India especially in matters

where they thought necessary to appraise the government.

It was in the midst of a growing agrarian unrest as the long awaited land reforms were ignored due to the aggressive opposition from landlords dominating political class, which provided grey area to the communists on the other hand waiting for a peasant upsurge. Having no sign from the government taking notice of these developments, a group of Gandhi's followers who scrupulously kept themselves out of power politics, decided to do something to address the growing tendencies of rural violence. Vinoba Bhave, who was considered the spiritual heir of Mahatma Gandhi decided to march on foot to the areas prone to agrarian violence in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana regions during 1951. During this tour he was accidentally offered land gift which paved the way for a massive movement later conceptualised by Vinoba as '*Bhoodan Yajna*'. The method of obtaining land gift was individual persuasion on spiritual grounds. It was the power and aura of Vinoba which worked magically and a massive land gift was received during the movement all over India.

The Bhoodan Movement started in 1951 when Telangana peasant movement on the land question reached at peak. It was a violent struggle launched by poor peasants against the local landlords. Vinoba looked into the problem and came out with a novel solution, viz., the landlords' voluntary gift of land would help in solving the problems of the landlessness in India. This would pave the way for a non-violent radical solution born out of love and not out of hatred. In village Pochampalli, in Telangana District Ram Chandra Reddy created history by donating 100 acres of land to Vinoba in response to his appeal. The initial objective of Bhoodan movement was to secure voluntary donations of land and distribute it to the landless so that the violent tendencies of society can be rooted out at least on the grounds of economic disparity among rural mass of India. However, the movement soon came out with a demand for 1/16th share of land from all land owners. In 1952, the movement had widened the concept of Gramdan (village-in-gift) and had started advocating commercial ownership of land. The first village to come under Gramdan was Mangroth, Hamirpur District of the then U.P. It took more than three years to get another village in gift. The second and third Gramdans took place in Orissa and the movement started spreading with emphasis on securing villages in gift. The process of Gramdan starts with an awakening of social consciousness among the villagers (Gram

Bhavana). This is to be followed by an oath to accept the Gramdan as way of life. In turn it would generate Lok Shakti (Peoples' Power) something similar to which we call Social Capital today.

Jayaprakash Narain's joining with the Bhoodan Movement gave a momentum to it. J.P. was a hero of the 1942 movement who had an all India image because he was the leader of the Socialist Party. He did not get involved in power politics after independence. He was regarded as a saintly politician in the eyes of the public. J.P.'s popularity gave an impetus to the Bhoodan movement in Bihar. When the first annual Sarvadaya conference was held in the state at Chandil in 1953, J.P. gave a call for creating a Sarvodaya society by establishing a nonexploitative and just egalitarian socio-economic order. It is reported that many students from Allahabad and Calcutta who attended the conference quit universities and colleges to join the movement. Most of the land gift came from Bihar, and the target to collect two and a half million acres of land gift within a year got transcended. The Bhoodan movement touched the most sensitive institution of private property and the need for its redistribution. Property in the form of land got questioned by the movement. That 'land is a gift of God and it should be utilised by all living beings', became a common thinking in the Sarvodaya circle.

At organisational level, the Sarva Seva Sangh was the highest body in the Bhoodan movement. Those who were associated with various constructive-work organisations, inspired and initiated by Gandhi, formed themselves into an organisation which has come to be known as the Sarva Seva Sangh. The Sarva Seva Sangh was described by Vinoba as "an all Indian institution of experts for planning and executing programmes". The members at the village level were in the Bhoodan Yajna Committee which was in-charge of collection of land and its distribution. This was controlled by the Sarva Seva Sangh. The Bhoodan movement was inspired by the anti-property ideology. It affected the interests of the landed elite in locality and Gramdan villages became a threat to the landed elite. They started opposing the movement and some of them demanded back their land given as Bhoodan. This is how the movement was sabotaged.

Unfortunately in early 1970s a conflict arose between Vinoba and J.P. that resulted in a virtual split in the Sarva Seva Sangh. However, it can be said that the Bhoodan movement was a novel experiment started on the Indian soil. It created a new awareness among people. It aimed at creating an

egalitarian society. Gandhi's framework of social change brought the issue to the surface. It was realised by one and all that land distribution cannot be tackled by the laws of the state alone. Vinoba Bhave developed Gandhi's economic thought in a more practical sense. The movement was started also to dilute the anger of the peasants against the landlords which found expression in the Telangana movement. It is unfortunate that the idealism so generated could not sustain for a long period. Also, organisationally Sarva Seva Sangh remained an authoritarian structure. There was hardly any democratic discussion within the organisation on the issues affecting the organisation and the movement could not inculcate democratic values at the village level.

J P was rather more experimental and wanted to address social issues in the changing political scenario. Naxalism emerged as new phenomena during his time. He was perhaps the only Sarvodaya leader who tried to address it in his own way. During 1988 I had the privilege to undertake an interesting case study which was a part of my academic curriculum I was in. It was a study to assess the ground impact of a unique experiment on Gandhian line, started and successfully accomplished in the post-Gandhian era in the year 1971. It was none other than JP who took the challenge thrown by Naxals to kill some of the Gandhian constructive workers of Muzaffarpur District in Bihar. J P could realise the magnitude and extent of the problem and its possible social repercussions. Without having any specific programme, he stationed at Mushahari Block of Muzaffarpur District. After making an intensive socio-economic survey of the area he started working with local people in coordination with the local authorities, and he could manage to channelize righteous forces of the District through hundreds in the Gram Swaraj Sabha. During my visit to these villages in 1988 I found most of them functional and the social bonds established by the extended movement were still intact. The degree of awareness among villagers was found reasonably well as compared to the other villages of Bihar. There were complaints from all sides about the Government's apathy. Till then there was no sign of resurgence of Naxalism either, in the area. However, JP's encounter with this problem and the methods and techniques he applied to address it, is well documented in his famous booklet 'Face to Face' but due to absence of canopy of able leadership, this problem escalated to a dangerous state in other parts of India during the last 40 years. He tried to strengthen

the Gramsabhas which played a crucial role in the affairs of villages in Gandhian model of development. This was the part of Gandhi's political planning where village Panchayats have been viewed as nucleus of the Indian democracy. He made Gram Sabhas in-charge of ensuring livelihood for the landless while functioning as the administrative unit for allocating land and labour of the village people for community development. He not only succeeded in restricting Naxal violence from spreading in the district on the ground level but also countered it on ideological level. This is perhaps a unique example of its kind which needs to be reviewed carefully to derive possible line of revival in the Sarvodaya movement according to the need of the hour.

While talking about ideological grounds of Naxal movement and the method and technique it has adopted, JP's comment is perhaps most appropriate. He made his special criticism of Naxalites on two important counts. One is the method they are following. He called it terroristic rather than revolutionary. He felt in all their invocation of Mao's name, they are not even Maoist. He also tried to compare it with Guevaraist, but no one has called Che Guevara a Marxist-Leninist. Terrorism, he believed, always born out of frustration, may conceivably create a narrow revolutionary base among sections of the frustrated youth and backward and embittered tribals and the rural poor, but such elements would be too weak, even with foreign assistance, to make a truly indigenous social revolution by themselves. Terroristic violence, in fact, is more likely to provoke counter violence from the stronger sections of society, leading eventually to some form of despotism. The other count of his criticism is about their anti-nationalistic approach. He believed that certain forms of nationalism may be objectionable, such as aggressive, expansionist, and neo-colonialist. But as far as the Indian nationalism is concerned it certainly does not belong to that category. On the other hand, Han nationalism of China, particularly as expressed in the claim that any territory that at any time was a part, or under the influence of, Imperial Peking, is forever China, is certainly according to him a variety of not only objectionable, but dangerous, nationalism. He found that all brands of communism suffer in some measure-the least perhaps the Marxists-from extra territorial patriotism, but the slogan 'Chairman Mao is our Chairman too' beats them all in toadying to foreign masters. He says, 'It is one thing to borrow ideas and techniques from others – this we do all the time – and even

to accept leaders of other countries as one's ideological leaders, but quite another to accept a foreign head of State as the head of one's own revolutionary State – to – be.' Under such an ideological derailment where this movement is going to lead its cadres can easily be understood.

Today, land is no more a bone of contention. Nobody is interested in agriculture. Fast easy money has become the motivating factor. At times, there are expectations for huge amount of money to be earned through even extortions. This has given rise to factionalism in its cadres. Recent news suggests that factional feud may lead to split in Maoist ranks. Sources say that Koteswar Rao Kishanji from People's War Group has developed serious differences with Maoist Coordination Committee's Jhantu Mukherji. These two factions were separate parties which merged to form CPI-Maoist on September 21, 2004. Last year, Kishanji wrote to Maoist chief Ganpathy accusing Mukherji of misappropriation of party funds and fuelling factional feuds. Mukherji, on the other hand, accused Kishanji of womanizing and egoism that had dealt a big blow to the Maoist movement in West Bengal. There are similar claims of insult by cadres of a Maoist Dalit for his caste and language. Sources say many leaders of both factions have now begun doubting if the merger was a good idea. These are obvious developments of a movement centred on the ideology of violence. JP could smell its real character right at the beginning when he said, 'It should be borne in mind that all that passes under the cloak of Naxalism is not genuine. There is quite a mix-up of motivations behind the so called Naxalite violence, ranging from outright criminality to personal and family feuds and enmities. It is becoming common for unmitigated criminals to embellish their crimes with shouts like "Mao Zindabad"; At the same time, it does seem that there is to some extent collaboration between criminals, such as dacoits and Naxalite revolutionaries; perhaps it is in the nature of a marriage of convenience.'

Today, Naxal violence has become a routine affair in India and the loss of human life and property hardly affects our minds. But the magnitude of this particular problem can be understood from the assessment of Army which has expressed the need to deploy 65000 troops to fight Naxals. This view has been expressed recently during a meeting of Army Chief and seven Army Commanders at the Lucknow-based Central Army Command. They are of the view that six Army divisions will be needed to cover Naxal-affected areas in West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, parts of Andhra Pradesh,

Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. This proposal seems to have been signalled by the Home Ministry to go ahead and we may see more blood bath in the coming days.

Though the present challenge is from Naxalism but the problem is much wider in the form of poverty, unemployment and a myriad socio-economic injustices. Government's failure to implement laws pertaining to land reforms had inevitably led to the growth of rural violence. It was not that the so called Naxalites had fathered all such violence but those who had persistently defied and defeated the reform laws for the past so many years – be they politicians, administrators, landlords and corporate houses. Naxalism is a post-independent, rather a new phenomenon, having history of not more than fifty years, is being perceived today as the greatest threat to law and order of the Indian states. More than 150 districts are said to be under its direct influence and has occupied the minds of tribal/rural poor millions spread in the hilly and forest regions of eight different States of India. All state enforcement agencies including para-military and state police have failed completely in tackling the Naxal violence and lawlessness. Dantewada District has witnessed killings of 150 security men excluding civilians in two different incidents in the beginning of this year followed by many other similar incidents so far in Bijapur and in many districts of Bihar and Jharkhand. This trend is continuing and recently they killed three Congressmen and wounded at least fifteen others near Raipur-Orissa Border.

Now this situation demands Civil Society intervention. By leaving all responsibilities on the state we hardly can provide any solution to the problem of Naxal violence. It would be unfortunate if our armed forces enter into a conflict of civilian nature. A sustained mass mobilization against this menace can address this problem effectively. And this is only possible when civil society involves itself in tackling this problem. It is also true that we do not have leaders who could focus exclusively on such types of reforms. Tackling violence non-violently is a tricky situation which requires a high moral authority on the part of the Civil Society leadership. Institutions like Sarva-Seva-Sangh and its organs have already become defunct and inactive. Whatever is remaining in its fold is incapable of leading reform movements of this magnitude. This vacuum has been filled by Civil Society activists of comparatively younger generation out of necessity. People from Gandhian tradition are absent in this new form of movement which is very disheartening. They either see the present movement as different from Gandhian framework

or susceptible about its success.

Social Movements are essential part of a society which is under continuous phase of evolution. Social unrest though always undesired but inevitable, provides grounds of internal dynamism of change, suggests correctional measures to be taken. In that way both have their own significance and co-relation. This implies, if there is no unrest, no social movement is required, but that is not the ideal case here. Social unrest is a continuous feature of a society which intends to grow out of socio-economic compulsion of the weaker section of society. If such inherent tendencies of society let loose then these are bound to turn violent. That is why Gandhi believed in a peaceful but continuous revolution through his twin principles of satyagraha and constructive programme. His principles are uniform in nature. Satyagraha, meant for the active opposition of injustice, reflected through social unrest where social capital need to be invested to attain justice, whereas constructive programme is to cater and increase that Social Capital through productive use of such social networking, relation and bondings in social reforms during the time of peace or when there is no unrest. In that situation social capital will always be in reserve, ready to be invested in the times of need. So there is something which can be learnt from our past experiences of such movements. There has to be people, part of the civil society, to address any eventuality of social unrest at the appropriate time. In the absence of such vigilant forces the ever growing unreasonable disparity will escalate to an alarming level and is bound to go out of hands as we see in the case of naxal violence today in India.

While initiating Sarvodaya Movement, Gandhi and Vinoba must have envisioned a group of conscious and alert people who will keep vigil on such tendencies in society leading to social unrest. Those people will acquire this authority through their services in raising social capital of the society. They will regulate and invest such reserve of social capital for further increase in it for the benefit of the society as a whole by primarily addressing violent tendencies for seeking economic or political redressal. The Bhoodan movement was initially started with this objective only. Once it started getting land as gift, its focus shifted to provoke the age old mythological belief i.e., the duty of renunciation, in order to shun the hereditary inclination for the ownership of private property or land. On the other hand, they were advocating such donated land to be distributed among landless peasants,

which was nothing but merely transfer of private ownership by exploiting mythological beliefs of a section of the society. So this created a conceptual confusion in itself. Today, when we have stepped out of socialistic mode of thinking, such persuasions are meaningless and non-effective. Naxal problem is no more linked to land issue, instead it survives on the crisis of identity and governments deliberate by surrender the natural resources of the country to the hands of big corporate houses in the name of development.

Gandhi, Vinoba and JP tried their best to organise the Indian society on a moral plane. They had learnt the importance of civil society involvement in the process of social transformation from their hard experiences. The Institution they have erected during their lifetime was meant to carry on the process of reform they had started. But it is unfortunate that they failed to prepare the second and third generation leadership who could intelligently find ways to extend their work started with noble intentions by them. Capitalist influence on our economy has also affected our thinking process which stresses more on individualism and private entrepreneurships rather than on community and fellow feelings. The concept of Bhoodan is still relevant if it is adopted with few modifications. Since a large number of land owners are left with limited agricultural land, they find agriculture as an unprofitable venture. Many of them are ready to sell their lands if they are compensated properly. In the absence of potential buyers they are continuing with their lands cultivated by the landless peasantry. They can be persuaded for collective farming. Such collective farming groups may try their hands in organic farming which is gaining momentum today. Not one but several bodies like Sarva Seva Sangh should be re-enacted which should be empowered with advanced technical knowledge of agriculture with all modern tools to make a reserve pool of agricultural experts, as visioned by Vinoba. Undistributed lands acquired during the Bhoodan Movement can be used and developed as model farming centres where landless labour of the surrounding areas can be engaged and trained in the modern techniques of agriculture. Apart from that, the human and material capital available in our society, need to be channelized in a way so that the reformative aspect of Satyagraha may continue without any outside interference. But there comes a stage in Satyagraha when all leaders may be sent to prison, then Gandhi says, everybody will be his own leader and will continue with the movement with their own developed insight of the situation. Today, India needs such a

situation where all components of civil society should function with its optimum capacity. Similar programmes can be chalked out for urban areas and involvement of younger generation in the process will reduce the chances of violence in our society.

The ongoing Civil Society movement indicates that a new kind of resurgence of mass awakening is about to come when protest and reform will become unavoidable. With the abundance of available human capital and a new kind of tool in the form of information technology, it will not only help in accelerating the social reforms but also will equip the younger generation, which is more congenial and sensitive towards social issues, to counter the Naxal violence as well. Even if the Government goes ahead with repressive measures, as it seems today, a large number of its cadres has to be rehabilitated. At that time too a well prepared civil society will have to be ready to take them into their fold of non-violence and compassion. Bhoodan movement was inspired by socialist outlook which was the ideology of the day. Today we are left with no passion for socialism and our focus has shifted to individual growth. But the Sarvodaya ideology provides a fine blend of individual and collective growth because it believes in the development of every single member of the society.

So the present civil society group must have an understanding of the masses with an ability to put it in the right direction at the right moment to achieve maximum advantage of the situation for the permanent settlement of a social dispute like Naxalism. It is surprising that Bhoodan movement was never made a part of academic study though being indigenous in nature, it has lot of content for sociological study. We may study peasants' movement, farmers' movement, women's movement, even movements related to environmental activism in the post-Gandhian era but we hardly get opportunity to study Bhoodan and other sarvodaya movements which might provide further grounds for fresh ideas to activate an effective mass movement against Naxal and terroristic violence. In such condition, rise of Civil Society against corruption in India is an obvious course of action, though not sufficiently matured. This trend will grow if the present movement succeeds to achieve its objective, and the younger generation, which is more capable and knowledgeable than their predecessors, is bound to rise with the civil society to act as true social capital. Civil Society needs to diversify its activities and must think about its responsibility towards other social issues

which are equally important as corruption in political class today. Any kind of violence, whether political or otherwise, is merely a reflection of the existing state of our society. If it occurs concurrently then it will clearly indicate in the form of loss of Social Capital. That does not mean that we are losing numbers of human capital in our society. In fact the number of human capital has increased as compared to the initial post-Gandian phase but the forces of motivation are absent to activate available resources of Social Capital.

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Agricultural System, Agricultural Land and Cottage Industry

(In the context of Gram Swaraj)

Dr. Krishnaswarup Anandi

Earth, water, sky, air and fire; these are the five elements (*panch mahabhut*) which are considered to be very important in the Indian philosophy regarding a way to lead life. It is said that these five elements are essential for the entire creation, environment, consciousness and development of the universe. Of these, the earth can be considered as being the main basis of the other four elements.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi popularly known as Mahatma Gandhi believed that land, air, water, sunlight and sky are God's gifts and under no circumstances should these come under the control of any person, business group, industrial group or any centralised form of power. These belong to the masses and are public resources. In reality the State is only their trustee and not their owner as they belong to the people at large. Therefore, in reality, these elements should be made community based, localised and decentralised and not be brought under government control, centralised or brought under any corporate.

Ownership of Land

Any conversation or discussion about land does not refer to land on the surface, rather it refers to what lies above and also below it. We have to take land in its totality. Gandhi believed that the land should not belong to an individual or to the State. Rather it should belong to the primary face-to-face local people's communities.

Although in the concept of trusteeship there is no space for monopoly, privilege or individual ownership, Mahatma Gandhi used to believe that a farmer should have that much land which he and his family members could cultivate. He should have an amount of land which was manageable for him to grow crops, support cattle from its products as well as enough to retain bio-diversity and capacity to rejuvenate itself. In other words, he wanted the farmer to consider the earth as his mother. He believed that a farmer should have an amount of land with which he could subsist his daily earnings honestly and live a life of dignity. The agriculture being practised should be organic. Effort should be made to return at least as much as being taken from the soil. The things being used in agriculture should be labour intensive, appropriate and environment friendly. The tools and implements being used should be made locally. The source of energy should be decentralised and local.

The farmer should have that much of cultivable land which gives him a complete and reliable means of livelihood. Those who are real farmers, if they want, can join hands and form a cooperative or community to cultivate their lands. However, there should be no use of force in these areas, all efforts should be spontaneous, arising from within the community and completely voluntary in nature. Mahatma Gandhi had a similar dream when it came to the field of animal husbandry.

At the time the entire country was fighting against the British Empire, Mahatma Gandhi was also concerned with ways to combat against the aftermath of a long period of subjugation. He used to openly express his vision of new India post-political independence. He used to speak about his thoughts in various programmes and campaigns that he used to attend. His main focus was on how to end the colonial state system, because it proved to be a substantial hurdle in building up a new society in independent India. He wanted to bridge the gulf between various communities and castes that was prevalent in the country and therefore he often used to launch *satyagraha* against the British Government. His intentions were to unite the people and demonstrate their power. He believed that for *satyagraha*, a constructive programme was necessary, and that during the long period of *satyagraha* there should not be any diversion from the main task at hand. It is for this reason that during the fight for independence he did not launch any movement for land reforms in favour of the farmers and landless and against the landlords.

However, post-independence, he wanted to launch a new revolution in

the field of agriculture. Under this revolution, he wanted to organise, enlighten and energize the landless farmers. Even small farmers who tilled their own little plots were to be included in this movement. He targeted big *zamindars*, *rajas*, *maharajas*, *nawabs* and other rich land owners. He wanted that a *satyagraha* be started under the leadership of the landless. If due to *satyagraha* there was a change of heart among the landowners then it was good, otherwise the landless would continue to challenge the *zamindari* system through non-violent means. Mahatma Gandhi was of the view that such a *satyagraha* would be pure in its intension and it would not end till *zamindari* system itself ended. He believed that this land *satyagraha* would pave way for the government to legislate the banning of *zamindari* system and redistribution of land among the landless. At the same time he was equally prepared to launch a *satyagraha* against the government if it did not work in favour of the rich landowners in any way.

Mahatma Gandhi used to believe that the *zamindari* system would not work and the real owners of the land were those who tilled the lands. Also along with the other natural resources, land should never be under individual ownership. The concept of trusteeship would be implemented in all these spheres. He believed that people had the right to own things that were the minimum necessity for leading a respectable life, and anything in excess of that belonged to the entire society. You are the trustee of the wealth or things, not its owner. What a person needs to consume and own for his daily needs would be decided on the level of consumption of the general people at that point. This concept was also applicable in case of land.

Mahatma Gandhi wanted to root out the *zamindari* system and for this, he thought that *satyagraha* was the best means. Even if there was no change of hearts among the *zamindars* due to *satyagraha*, Gandhiji believed that the *satyagraha* would change the human values, socio-economic paradigm in the country, build up the moral character of the people and ultimately change the character of the state's power and its attitude towards the people. This will result in the formation of new laws.

Agriculture Versus Industrialization

Even when Mahatma Gandhi's influence was at its peak there were people who advocated industrialization and urbanization and modernization very strongly. However, in Gandhi's conception of *Swaraj* (complete

independence) agriculture was the cornerstone of all development. He wanted policies that would help build up agriculture and production of goods essential for the people through a network of cottage industries that would generate employment for the people. Mahatma Gandhi's model was not centralised mass production, but production by the masses. Surely, there would be no difficulty in finding land and other resources for these small cottage industries. The local bodies and community at large would provide the land. There would be no need for large scale land acquisition for various schemes and the problems of displacement, deprivation of means of livelihood, environmental degradation that are inherent with large projects.

At present, the model of development is industry focussed, which calls for big machines, plants, townships, business complex, high tech parks etc – all things that need large amounts of land. And in many of the cases, the land that is taken over is fertile land and large communities of farmers, tribals, fishermen and other marginalized sections of society are displaced. In many cases those displaced were the original inhabitants of the area. This development which is being built on the grave of agriculture and community is anti-thesis of Mahatma Gandhi's concept of *Swaraj*.

Now the question arises: 'how can projects be implemented as the land and other resources belong to the community at large?' For any plants or industry to be built the people of the area have to come together and decide on whether they want that plant or unit to come up and if they agree then they will donate land voluntarily for the industry. Thus, it would be their own industry and they will run it themselves and it would again be 'production by the masses'.

The projects will belong to the people and it would be run for the greater benefit of the society and nation at large. The role of the state would be to help in the setting up of the industry by giving finance, technical expertise and other needed support. However, the project would belong to the people. There will be no multinationals or local industrial houses and this concept is also much ahead of the 'public sector' 'private sector' debate. They would be owned by the Peoples' sector or the Communitarian sector. This can be the next step in Mahatma Gandhi's vision.

The question of land is fundamental to everything and vested interests are understanding their importance. It is for this reason that investors, corporate groups and other rich people are trying to corner as much of land

as possible and their land hunger has increased by leaps and bounds. As a result, farmers are being evicted from their land and non-farmer units are being set up there. Instead of farmer tilling the land, it is now corporate farming or contract farming. Mahatma Gandhi used to say, 'The land belongs to the tiller', but now in this age of globalisation the *mantra* has changed to become, 'Hand over lands to corporates'.

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The 21st Century and Bhoodan

Dr. Ramji Singh

With changing times, it is possible that the values of society and meaning of words might also change. Acharya Vinoba Bhave's philosophy of Bhoodan was seated in the ancient Indian tradition of 'danan' – spiritual clarity. The mythical story of Vaman Avatar of Lord Vishnu in which Raja Bali donated the entire earth is part of our cultural heritage. Disguised as a Brahmin, Lord Vishnu had asked for three steps of land and the Lord covered the entire earth and heaven in two steps. Perhaps, the concept of land donation was there to reduce inequities in society and build a more homogenous social structure. Shankaracharya too emphasised land donation in a high pedestal.

Along with donation of land, cattle, gold, silver, well, tree etc were also in vogue. In some cases, people also donated their bodies and lives, like Rishi Dadhich who donated his body, Ushinar Shitish who donated his life and Karna who donated his armour.

In the modern era, land donation or Bhoodan started at Pochampalli village of Andhra Pradesh with the peace march in Telangana under the guidance of Acharya Vinoba Bhave.

The historical backdrop of the movement was the blood letting that was taking place in the Telangana region at that time. During the day light the police and paramilitary forces used to hunt and gun down the extremists and at night, it was the turn of the extremists 'Soviets', as they were called, to kill the landlord and other rich farmers in the Telangana region.

At that time, Sant Vinoba Bhave was in Delhi and he was serving the refugees who had come from Pakistan. But the violence and the killings in

Telangana region moved his heart and compelled him to start on his peace march.

Jeevan Jakhan Sukaye Jayey Karuna Rasdhara Aiso – The wounds of life are healed by the balm of piety. I have heard Vinoba speak on this topic while addressing members of Bihpur Prakhand Panchayat Samiti at Bhagalpur. He was speaking and crying at the same time. He said that during his peace march he went to a village of Harijans and when he asked them about the cause behind the violence, the villager's revealed the horrific truth that they were surviving by eating boiled leaves that grow in ponds. That night Vinoba found it difficult to sleep and in his dream he saw God commanding him to ask for donation of land.

Next morning when he woke up, he demanded adamantly, "I will have sweets for breakfast." People rushed out and brought him sweets, but he said, "I want donation of 90 acre of land in the form of sweets." There were 90 Harijans families and he had demanded 90 acre of land; an acre per family. On the same night, while going to bed, Vinoba wondered, "Duryodhan had refused to give even one inch of land. Will someone donate me 90 acres?"

"Na Datvayang Sui Agre
Bina Yudhye Ne Keshav"

But thinking that it was a command from the God himself, Vinoba began begging for land. History is witness to the fact that a farmer of Pochampalli village, Ramchandra Reddy, immediately donated 100 acre of land and the Bhoodan movement took its birth.

As the peace march turned into Bhoodan march, Vinoba got a little bit of land wherever he went and the Bhoodan movement took wings. Subsequently, Vinoba started his padyatra\Bhoodan march and walked over 40,000 miles all over the country.

Initially, Vinoba got a lot of affection from the people for his movement, along with some land. But at the same time, he also had to face criticism. His most bitter critics were the socialists who were leading land reform agitation through Kisan Sabha Sangathan. Noted socialist thinker Dr Ram Manohar Lohia sarcastically said, "The way Vinobaji is going, it will take him 250 years to solve the land problem." In a polite reply, Vinoba observed, "I used to think that it would take 500 years to solve the land problem as he was working alone, but now I will also get the support of Dr Lohia and therefore it will take only 250 years. Similarly, if JP, Z Ahmed, Namoodripad

etc. put in their bit to solve the land problem, then the task of Bhoodan would be completed easily.”

History is witness to the fact that slowly the Bhoodan movement became the biggest national movement of its time and collected about 45 lakh acre of land. It is true that some of the donated land included mountains, stony land, forests and poor quality land, which could not be distributed, but now the value of even those lands has increased.

Vinoba took the concept of Bhoodan to certain level and then converted it into Gramdan. While Bhoodan was a partial concept based on engendering the feeling of piety and create a conducive atmosphere among the people, Gramdan was a complete philosophy. The philosophy of Gramdan was extensively spread in Bihar.

When a national convention was called in Yelwal, Karnataka, in 1957, the top leaders of all the political parties came – President Dr Rajendra Prasad, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, members of the Planning Commission, Praja Samajwadi Party president Ganga Sharan, Jaiprakash Narayan, Joint Samajwadi Dal representative Z Ahmed and Namoodripad were also present. At that meeting everyone welcomed Gramdan and decided to include it in the national planning.

There was also a section that opposed Vinoba’s Bhoodan on account of their ideology. When Vinoba was in Munger, a socialist came up to him and said, “Along with this citation I am also giving my land in donation, but that will not serve the problem because it is impossible that everyone will have a change of heart and donate land.” Vinoba replied, “You were earlier a Congressman, but now you are a socialist, so how can you say that the other people will not have a change in heart.”

Vinoba’s science of non-violent revolution requires further qualification. For total change in the society, there are three main elements that must also change – one is change of heart, the other is change of thought\philosophy and the third is change in situation. People who are wrapped in ‘Moha’ have a change in heart. There are many examples like Angulimal, Ashok, and Ratnakar etc. William James had also accepted that change of heart was possible, while in the field of religion the concept of change of heart is readily acceptable – what we call confession. But the biggest change of all is changing the status quo or situation.

For example, at present those who talk about atom bombs are either

mad or extremists\terrorists. Similarly the excess of land holding and great disparity of wealth are socially and culturally against the good of all. Earlier the communists were firm in their belief about the 'inevitability of war', but in the age of atom bombs, which has changed the concept of destruction, they have changed to the concept of 'peaceful coexistence'. Nowadays, Russia and China have accepted and are moving towards globalisation.

Initially, philosophers and thinkers of the western world used to laugh at the concept of Bhoodan, and used to say that if a person like Vinoba asked donation of land in the West, then he would either be put in prison or in mental asylum. But, when the movement started gaining strength then slowly they changed their opinion and started learning more about it.

Bhoodan-Gramdan is only a symbol. What Vinoba wanted was to build a new society where the predominant feeling would be one of giving wealth not snatching wealth. When the evil side of human beings dominate in a society, then people snatch other people's rights and property, but when the good side dominates then people become Dadhich and Karna.

Therefore, Vinoba talked not only of Bhoodan, but also of donation of wealth, labour, knowledge, wells, resources etc. so that man really starts behaving like human. The true human being is a person who dies for humanity. Therefore, as long as sacrifice is relevant, Bhoodan would also remain relevant. Gramdan is a total and utilitarian concept, where there is community ownership in the place of individual ownership. This is something which people would accept readily and is the best way for building a society.

At present there are two concepts of property – capitalism or socialism. The wealth is either owned individually or it belongs to the state. Capitalism talks about ownership of wealth at the individual level for the sake of individual freedom and dignity, but using this pretext they also exploit humans and keep them bonded. It is due to disparities in wealth witnessed by Marx that made him speak out against individual ownership. It is of course another thing that when communists gained power, the rulers created a class of their own. The ownership of wealth in the hands of the State is a dangerous thing. Because the State in itself is a centre of power and when political power joins hands with economic power and ownership of wealth, then it results in tyranny.

There have been three other types of ownership of property as opposed to individual ownership that is prevalent in the capitalist world. The Kolkhoz

system in Russia, the commune system in China and Kibbutz of Israeli. Among these three, there is maximum democracy and socialism in the Kibbutz, but Israel itself suffers from racism and militarism. Under these circumstances, the concept of Gramdan and Gram Swaraj are better as an ideology and on the grounds of being practical. Under this arrangement, instead of the state, it is the community that owns everything and there is also scope of individual agriculture. Nowadays both Russia and China are fast doing like the global capitalists. This will only increase the inequalities in the world and increase bitterness and perhaps this will lead to another world war. Competition in trade and technology and consumerism would only increase the chances of another world war.

Also, at present, land is not just there for agricultural purpose, but the forests, river water and minerals under the land are also counted. Not only is river water being sold, but the mineral wealth is also being given away cheaply and creating a crisis. Several State governments in collusion with multinationals are purchasing mountains at throwaway prices and then reaping huge benefits. This can turn out to be disastrous for the environment. The mineral wealth that was for 200-400 years, is being sold and completely exploited, leaving nothing for the future generations. This is not only infringement of rights of the future generation but also a betrayal of trust. The mother earth has provided enough for our needs, but if we want to fulfil our greed, then the environmental catastrophe will consume everyone around us. Human greed is unbounded—the only way out is self control.

The concept of Gramdan and Gram Swaraj are based on self control and cooperation. Today, rulers of States like Jharkhand, Orissa, Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh, among others, have been trapped in the web of international capitalists and greed. They are selling away the water of their rivers. They are taking land from the poor and giving it to the multinationals at cheap rates. In their turn, the multinationals are exploiting the mineral wealth and thus leaving nothing for the future generations.

Therefore, at present, property and land should not be held either by the state or the individual. State is an incomplete entity and it becomes an instrument of people who are in power. In contrast, Gram Swaraj is a living and human system and it cannot go beyond its boundaries. Since the people of the village will keep an eye on the activities of a person, they can protect themselves against exploitation. Bhoodan had sowed the seeds of this feeling

– that the land, water, forest, minerals etc. all belong to the community. We can also say that it is God’s wealth. “Sabyai Bhoomi Gopal Ki. Sampatti Sab Raghupati Ke Aahi” - When all the land belongs to Gopal then all the property belongs to Raghupati.

The Bhoodan movement can be seen as an attempt to bring heaven on to earth, and at the same time the selfishness of the human nature resulted in some of its curses. Some of them were visible when Vinoba himself was alive. In their quest for meeting targets, the workers of the Bhoodan movement were not bothered with what kind of land they got, and whether it was really cultivable and really belonged to the donor. They were only interested in getting the signature of the donor in the deed. Many of the land given as Bhoodan were disputed and many gave away useless land. In return, they wrongly gained social prestige and blessing of Vinoba.

It is for this reason that in united Bihar—of the 22 lakh acre of land that was received under Bhoodan, only 11 lakh acre could be distributed. But of course, today, the forest and hills have also become valuable and they should also be distributed. Soon Vinoba elevated the concept of Gramdan to the ambitious Bihardan as a result of which numerous problems and misunderstandings arose. It is perhaps due to this that Vinoba sarcastically said, ‘B’ for B(V)inoba and ‘B’ for Bogus.

The race for getting land for Bhoodan was grand but the problems that arose during its distribution cause much pain and distress. While the distribution of land under Bhoodan gave lakhs of landless the ownership of land and a means of livelihood and sense of self-respect in society, the corruption among the members of Bhoodan committee who were paid very little gave the movement a bad name. Giving the same piece of land to different people became a norm. Under these circumstances, the poor landless farmer had nowhere to appeal. In some cases, thousands of acres of land were donated to one particular person, on the understanding that he would redistribute it, but he never did and kept the land with himself. The commission set up in Bihar to tackle land problems clearly said that such land should be redistributed.

The biggest blot on the Bhoodan movement was the illegal sale of Bhoodan land and minting lakhs of rupees through it. The Bhoodan Act and also the spirit of Bhoodan was that the land would be given to the landless and they would be able to live a life of dignity. The Act was perhaps the most

progressive and just Act in the realm of revenue Acts. But some vested and greedy people sold the Bhoodan land to big builders and rich people and took lakhs and crores of rupees in return. This was not only unethical, but also a punishable criminal act. Some people have sold the Bhoodan land that were near the cities and are now shamelessly saying that with that money they have purchased land for the landless in the villages. These people do not have any account of this money. This is a big sin that they have committed. If the lands were in the cities and the poor and slum dwellers had got it, it would have given solace to Vinoba's soul. But some people have made it their business to earn profit from Bhoodan land.

Under the Bhoodan Act no one has the power to sell the land once given under Bhoodan. Even the landless farmer who is given the land cannot sell it or mortgage it to raise money. He can only till it and earn his livelihood.

But the evil deed of selling Bhoodan land was done in several States by the Bhoodan committee itself, or fake societies that were formed in the name of Bhoodan. There should be a judicial inquiry into the matter and all the buildings etc. that have been constructed on these lands should be handed over to the slum dwellers. And those who have sold the Bhoodan land should be prosecuted at the earliest.

The deed done by the mischievous people are not mere mistakes made due to some misunderstanding, but they have been done deliberately and are crimes in both the criminal and civil law. The laundering of Bhoodan land was mostly done when the land was adjacent to any expanding city and the sky high price of land made it possible for such elements to earn huge amounts of money.

Therefore, there should be a thorough enquiry into this and it should be found out under whose authorisation it was sold. The problems being faced by the Bhoodan movement are not due to problems in the concept, but due to the narrow minded people who were handling the work of Bhoodan movement. Bhoodan is pure and it will remain so, and the 21st Century Bhoodan will be synonymous with that of Revolution.

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Historical Analysis of Land Ownership

Rajesh Kumar

The problem of land ownership at present cannot be resolved without understanding the land ownership structure of the past. The past plays an important role in shaping our perceptions and ordering our priorities. Naturally, the solutions we find for the contemporary crisis are affected by our past. Hence, it is important to see how our ancestors understood land ownership.

There is a general consensus among experts that the question of land ownership came into existence in the post-vedic era because during the Rig vedic era, the Aryans were pastoralists and cattle was the main index of wealth. Land ownership was not prevalent at that time. In the post-vedic era, due to use of iron implements in agriculture, people started staying in one place. We find reference to land ownership in the post-vedic book Aitareya Brahman in which it is written that when Vishwakarma Bhuvan donated land to the purohitas for performing yagna, Prithvi protested. This suggests that it was not possible to donate land without the consent of the community. In other words, land ownership was based on community and there was no concept of individual ownership of land.

According to dharmashastra expert of Mahajanpad period, Gautama, any property that was the means of livelihood, could not be divided, and this, most probably, also included land. With the development of villages inhabited by a wide spectrum of communities and professionals, the question of ownership of land that was not attached to an identifiable property became equally perplexing. The fact that there was common ownership of land can also be verified in Rishi Jaimini's Mimamsa sutras. Under this arrangement, no king can give away all the land of his kingdom since the earth belongs to all.

During the Maurya era, political philosopher Kautilya was in favour of the king's control over all agricultural land, but he did not sponsor the notion that the king should be the owner of all the land. Possibly, Manu was the first person to have talked about king's first right of ownership of the land. But this does not necessarily mean that he is the absolute owner of all the land. According to Manu, the king owns half of all that comes out of mines, because he is lord of the earth and protects it. The concept of king's ownership over all land was first propounded in the post-Gupta period by Sage Katyayan who said that the king is the owner of all land and therefore, he has right to one fourth of all the products of land. At the same time, he also accepts that one who lives on land, should be the man acknowledged as its owner. A similar sentiment is expressed in Narad Smriti. Contrary to this, the Narsingh Puran clearly says that the land belongs to the king and not to the farmer. One can say that Narsingh Puran is the first text which gives the king the total ownership of land.

According to Narad, if a family has been enjoying the fruits of a land for three generations, then they have the legal rights over it. However, the will of the king can facilitate transfer of the land to another farming household. This implies that the king's right can infringe upon the individual's right. Chinese travellers Fahien who came to India during the Gupta period and Hiuen Tsang who came during King Harshvardhan's rule noted that the land belonged to the king. Writing in the post-Gupta period, Brihaspati noted that during the division of ancestral property, shudra putras (lower caste sons) of upper caste men would not get a share. Besides, the division of grazing land was also an accepted practice. So, division of land and the continuation of accepting it as private property started during the Gupta period.

The rules for sale of land were first laid down by Brihaspati. Kautilya talks only about the sale of house and the land attached to it, but he does not talk about sale of land per se. After Brihaspati, it was Katyayan who made rules in this regard. According to him, land which is taxed could be sold to pay the tax. According to Brihaspati, during sale of land one must mention the number of wells, trees, water sources, fields, ripe crops, fruits, ponds, tax houses etc. Here, one may conjecture that Brihaspati was delienating terms of selling an entire village.

According to Gautam and Manu, if a plot of land stays under possession of a person for 10 years or more, then it becomes his property. Yagyavallabh

extended this period to 20 years, but none of them talked about land in this context. Vishnu, Narad, Brihaspati and Katyayan increased this period to three generations that is 60 years and also included land under this. With the 11th century Mitakshara law, the time period was increased to a 100 years and in the 13th century under Smriti Chandrika it was increased to 105 years. This makes it clear that the concept of individual ownership of land could not be challenged any further.

So, we see that during the beginning of the ancient period, there was community ownership of land; by the end of the ancient period the stress was on the king's and individual ownership of land, even though it appears that these two rights are in conflict with one another. Due to king's ownership of land, the king could grant land to temple priests, powerful nobles and employees in return of services rendered to the king. And under the concept of individual ownership of land, the person who received a grant of land from the king could hand it over to farmers on patta.

From the above it appears that since the early middle ages, there were more than one claimant for land and each had legal backing for it. A similar situation was prevalent in feudal Europe at that time, though there were some fundamental differences.

During 1200s, when the Muslim sultanates were established in north India, there was a change in the pattern of land ownership. The land under the Sultanate was divided into three parts. The first was 'khalsa' land which was directly under the Centre, the second was 'Ekta' which was given to the officers in lieu of their salary. The officers were expected to take their salary from the revenue generated from the land and return the remaining to the Centre. The third type of land was donated to scholars and priests. Since land was in plenty, the question of ownership was relatively less intimidating. Khoot, Mukaddam and Choudhary were the intermediate land owning class. Of them the Khoots had the status of zamindars, while Mukaddam and Choudhary were heads of villages and were prosperous farmers. This intermediate land owning class used to collect tax from the farmers and deposit it in the Central treasury. But, during the era of Allauddin Khilji, the powers of the intermediate class were taken away and the State's employees were given the task of collecting tax directly from the farmers. In the rural society, the land owning farmers and the landless farmers lived side by side, but only the land owning farmer paid the taxes.

During the rule of Sher Shah Suri, the 'Jabt' system was introduced and the tax was based on the size of the holding. All cultivable land was measured and each farmer was given a title deed in which the tax to be levied was also mentioned. The direct relation with the state saved the farmer from exploitation by the zamindars and other intermediaries.

During the Mughal period, the situation remained unclear, as had been during the Sultanate regime. It is possible that the state and other sections had right over the same plot of land, but there was no concept of total ownership of land. During this period the influence of the zamindars increased and they amassed enormous social clout. Akbar divided the land under him into 'Khalsa' and 'Jagir'. The Mansabdars, whose salaries were derived from the revenue of the land given to them, were known as the Jagirdars. Along with them there was a large class of Zamindars, who, in turn, were divided into three categories. The farmers were of two types – the 'Khudkashta' and 'Pahikashta'. The former were farmers who tilled their own lands and the latter were landless peasants who tilled other people's land. One may deduce that the settlement pattern during the Mughal period led to the rise of several claimants to the same plot of land.

The question of land ownership once again came to the forefront during the British. It was in Bengal that the British rule first tried to solve this problem. In the beginning, all the land was considered to be that of the ruler and revenue collection was based on contract. The highest bidder of a tract of land was given the right to collect the revenue. After experimenting with several models of revenue collection, the then governor general Cornwallis accepted that the Zamindars had the right of ownership of land and this ownership passed from father to son. This was done so that if a zamindar failed to give the promised revenue on time, his land could be auctioned. When lands of the zamindars were auctioned, it was the traders who usually purchased them. During the British period, industries had declined and for the traders there was no safer investment than land. However, the zamindars lived in the cities and the problem associated with absentee landlordism started cropping up.

The main aim of the absentee zamindars was to extract the maximum amount of revenue from the farmers and little from the tillers. Gradually, the new generation of the zamindars also started living in the cities and their motive too was to extract the maximum amount of revenue from the farmers.

Apart from Bengal, the ownership of land was given directly to the farmers in the rest of the country upon the payment of fixed revenue called *malguzari*. If they failed, their land had to be mortgaged or sold to pay the dues. In south India, the farmers used to deposit the land revenue directly to the government, while in Punjab and other parts of north India, the *Mahal*, who represented the farmers, used to collect revenue.

Over a period of time, the British increased their demand for land revenue and to ensure that it could be collected, they made land a saleable property. So whenever a *zamindar*, farmer or *Mahal* failed to deposit the revenue on the given date, his ownership of the land was auctioned and the land revenue was collected. Prior to the British rule, such auctions of confiscated land was rare. In most of the cases the land on which people could build houses or land that was to be donated for religious purposes were bought and sold. Even during the British period, 40 per cent of the area came under the princely states and the pattern of ownership on this land was based on concepts that varied from the medieval to modern.

After independence, the question of land was discussed in detail at the Constituent Assembly and Parliament. Since India had decided to become a democratic republic, it was decided that a land distribution should be more just and equitable. Egged on by the Centre, the State governments passed the *Zamindari abolition act* and other similar acts to bring about some regularity in the ownership pattern of land.

After *zamindari* was abolished, the *zamindars* were given compensation of their land and it was distributed among those who had been tilling them. In most of the States, the *zamindari* system was abolished by 1956. But the absence of land records made it difficult to implement laws abolishing *zamindari*. According to one study, the area under *kashtakars* (share croppers) had come down from 42 per cent in 1950-51 to around 20-25 per cent in the beginning of the 60s. This did not mean that the share croppers had become owners, rather it meant that the landowners had evicted them. On the other hand, the compensation given to the *zamindars* was often inadequate and varied from State to State.

There were several hurdles to the abolition of *zamindari* system. In Uttar Pradesh, the *zamindars* were allowed to keep land for their personal cultivation, but there was no limit to this holding, as a result of which the absentee landlord could save their land from acquisition. However, some of

the bigger landlords did cultivate land on their own and invested in the land, which were included in goals of land development. The land owners also tried to block the implementation of the Act by misusing the path of judicial remedy. However, by 1960, zamindari was abolished in most parts of the country except in some parts of Bihar. While on the one hand, the big landowners were the main losers; on the other hand, the sharecroppers who had been working on the same land for years gained the ownership of the land. According to a rough estimate, due to abolition of zamindari system, two crore sharecroppers got land.

Efforts were made to improve the sharecropping system and there were three main ingredients to it. The time period for registering as sharecropper was kept at six years. Moreover, the land revenue was reduced from one fourth to one sixth of the production. However, to get ownership rights, the sharecropper had to deposit a lump sum land revenue. For example, in Andhra Pradesh it was only after the payment of eight years' land revenue that a farmer could acquire rights over the land he tilled. Despite these Acts, the right of the absentee landowners to start farming and the loosely framed concept of personal cultivable land meant that many sharecroppers were evicted from the land. Since the agreements between the farmers and the landlords were rarely documented, the legality of sharecropper's claim could not be verified. But even then a large section did benefit from it.

To improve the lot of sharecropper, the Operation Barga was launched in Bengal by the Left government in 1978 and by 1990, over 14 lakh Bargadars were registered. The main aim of Operation Barga was to provide security to the sharecropper on the land he tilled. He could no more be evicted on the land owner's whim and it also ensured that his rights were passed on to his successor. The division ratio between the sharecropper and land owner was kept at 75:25 and if the land owner invested in the seeds and fertiliser, then it was a 50:50 share between the two. Training camps were set up during Operation Barga where officials from more than 10 departments interacted with 30 or more agriculture labourers and sharecroppers to devise strategies on implementing Operation Barga in that area. At first Operation Barga was hugely successful, but later it could not sustain its momentum because the holdings of landowners were no bigger than that of most sharecroppers of the area and because many started cultivating their own lands.

Under the Hadbandi Act, no family could keep cultivable land above a

certain limit. In 1946, the Akhil Bharatiya Kisan Sabha had kept 25 acres as the maximum limit of cultivable land a family could keep. However, there was a great delay in framing the rules under this Act and different State governments fixed different limits as a result of which the impact of this act lost its intensity. In a country like India where the average holding of 70 per cent of the farmers was less than 5 acres, the threshold limit of land holding fixed by the State was very high. In Andhra Pradesh it was fixed between 27-132 acres depending on the type of land. In most states the threshold limit was fixed on an individual basis and there was provision to increase it. Even with its limitations, this act was an important milestone in the programme of land reforms. It greatly succeeded in ending the land market and concentration of land.

The landowners often took advantage of the loopholes in the land reform laws. At some places they managed to evict their sharecroppers and to save their land from the Hadbandi Act. Moreover, they started keeping land in fictitious names. It was then that Vinoba Bhave, a close associate of Mahatma Gandhi, started the Bhoodan movement. The movement appealed to the individual landowner to donate land to the landless.

The main thrust of the Bhoodan movement was to address the conscience of the landowner and get him to donate one sixth of his land. The land thus procured was distributed among the landless. By March 1956, the movement started losing momentum after getting more than 40 lakh acres of land. It was found that most of the donated land was either barren or locked in litigation. Efficient distribution, too could not be ensured. By the end of 1955, the Gramdan movement was also launched. Once again the inspiration of this movement was Gandhiji who believed that all land belonged to God. Under Gramdan, all the villagers had joint ownership over the land in the village. This movement started in Orissa. Even though it held a lot of promise, by the 60s the Bhoodan and Gramdan movement lost their momentum. But by these movements an effort was made at land reforms which not only complemented land reform legislations but also encouraged the farmers to enter politics and increased the number of farmer producers' cooperatives among other things.

So, we find that the pattern of land ownership changed from community ownership in ancient India to individual and then to king's\ruler's ownership. In the middle ages the king\sultan and zamindar\farmer had concurrent rights

over the same plot of land. In the British era, due to excessive land revenue extracted from farmers, land became a saleable product. In independent India, the laws of land ownership were framed to ensure that each farmer had a minimum amount of land with him, but this target could not be reached. Although, some of the disparities in land ownership were addressed over the years by movements such as Bhoodan and Gramdan, there are still many with large tracts of land and many more who are landless while it remains to see how dexterously the government handles social inequality arising out of uneven distribution of land. An empathetic approach is sought from the big land-owners.

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Impact of Gandhian Thought on the Ideology of Loknayak Jayaprakash Narayan

Pankaj Kumar Dubey

In the history of the world, Mahatma Gandhi is one person who has changed the trend of violent revolution. He believed that good aim is achieved only by good means. The bad means can not give us a good result. If we want a good society then it is possible only through non-violence and truth. Through violence we can not achieve the aim of good society. Therefore, we can see all violent revolutions have not achieved the aim of social revolution, but it is possible by Gandhian thought. The Gandhian thought is very effective in the process of social reconstruction.

The sarvodaya, non-violence, truth, spiritualism, creative work and gram swaraj are the main components of Gandhian thought. The Gandhian thought attracted the attention of many thinkers. One among them was Jayaprakash Narayan. Jayaprakash Narayan used Gandhian thought for social reconstruction after independence of India. Actually the philosophy of Jayaprakash Narayan is the result of the effect of Gandhian thought on him.

Jayaprakash Narayan was a freedom fighter, social worker and great socialist thinker of India. His ideology changed from time to time in positive direction. He gave major contribution in social reconstruction. He was linked with Bhoodan, gramdan movement.¹ In 1974, he gave a concept of Total Revolution to change the corrupt, autocratic and rotten system.² He was one of those persons who worked on the way of Gandhian thoughts.

Before the independence of India, he was influenced by Marxism but after independence he understood the depth of the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi and accepted it. He tried to complete the dream of Mahatma Gandhi and the aim of Gandhi ji's Loksevak Sangh.

Socialism to Sarvodaya – Sarvodaya is a term meaning ‘universal uplift’ or ‘progress of all’. The term was first coined by Mohan Das Karamchand Gandhi as the title of his 1908 translation of John Ruskin’s work on political economy, *‘unto this last’* and Gandhi came to use the term for the ideal of his own political philosophy³.

Sarvodaya is the main concept of Gandhian thought. Mahatma Gandhi gave the philosophy of Sarvodaya as a module of development for human society. Jayaprakash Narayan also accepted the Sarvodaya philosophy for social reconstruction after independence of India. But, before independence of India, he was the strong follower of Marxism. He believed that Marxism is better than Gandhism. He said, “Freedom still remained the unchanging goal, but the Marxism as a science of revolution seemed to offer a sure and quicker road to it than Gandhi’s technique of civil disobedience and non-cooperation. The thrilling success of the great Lenin, accounts of which we consumed with unsatiated hunger, seemed to establish beyond doubt the supremacy of the Marxism way to revolution. At the same time, Marxism provided another beacon of light for me: equality and brotherhood. Freedom was not enough. It must mean freedom for all even the lowliest and this freedom must include freedom from exploitation, from hunger, from poverty.”⁴ In this way, in the effect of Marxism, the philosophy of Jayaprakash Narayan was developed. Equality and brotherhood was the base of his philosophy. But after independence of India when Jayaprakash Narayan understood the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, he believed that socialism could not be established through communism and democratic socialism, it can be established only through Sarvodaya. According to Jayaprakash Narayan, the right objective and right philosophy of socialism is found in Sarvodaya.⁵

He said, “My regret is that I did not reach this point in my life’s Journey while Gandhi ji was still in our midst. However, some years back it became clear to me that socialism as we understand it today can not take mankind to the sublime goals of freedom, equality, brotherhood and peace. Socialism, no doubt, gives promise to bring mankind closer to those goals than any other competing social philosophy. But I am persuaded that unless socialism is transformed into Sarvodaya, those goals would remain beyond its reach; and just as we had to taste the ashes of independence, so future generations may have to taste the ashes of socialism.”⁶

According to Jayaprakash Narayan, Communism, democratic socialism and Sarvodaya are the different forms of socialism. Communism is a violent movement and democratic socialism is government action but Sarvodaya is a non-violent movement in which socialism is established by ideological changes in all human beings.⁷ So, Jayaprakash Narayan accepted the Sarvodaya philosophy for social reconstruction.

In this way Jayaprakash Narayan, who was a follower of Marxism at any time, was now a lecturer of Sarvodaya and Gandhian thought.⁸

Violent Revolution to Non-Violent Revolution – Ahimsa (non violence) is the main component of Gandhian thought. Mahatma Gandhi believed that Ahimsa (non violence) is an active force and he proved it through his non violent revolution during freedom movement. Through his non violent revolution, Mahatma Gandhi astonished the whole world. He used Ahimsa in political and social sphere and proved that it could be successfully applied in all areas of life and at all levels of society and nation.

Jayaprakash Narayan was one of those people who were influenced by Gandhian concept of non violence. He accepted the way of non violence for social reconstruction such as Bhoodan and gramdan and used non violent revolution during emergency period of 1975-1977 to save democratic values.

During freedom movement, Jayaprakash Narayan did not believe strongly in non violence. He accepted violent way of revolution for freedom movement and established Azad Dasta which was a group of violent revolutionaries for freedom movement. He said that the discussion on violence and non violence is meaningless; both are good in the reference of freedom movement.⁹

But after independence, when he came in the light of Gandhian thought he believed in the power and needs of non-violence and devoted his life to non-violent revolution for social reconstruction which is called sarvodaya movement.¹⁰

He gave the credit for the effect of non violence on him to Gandhi ji. Jayaprakash Narayan said, “It is our good luck that Gandhi ji was born in our country who gave us a non-violent way. We can cross any crisis with peace and this credit goes to Gandhi ji.”¹¹

Jayaprakash Narayan believed that non-violent revolution is always better than violent revolution in behavioural term. He said that the objectives can not be completed with violent revolution, through violent revolution the

opposite results will come.¹² He believed that the change in society and reconstruction of society are possible through non-violence. He said that the change in society is not possible through violent revolution; it is possible through non-violent revolution such as sarvodaya.¹³

Materialism to Spiritualism – When Jayaprakash Narayan came in the effect of Marxism, he believed in materialist philosophy.¹⁴ The equality and brotherhood was the main factor of his thoughts. He said, “At the same time, Marxism provided another beacon of light for me; equality and brotherhood freedom was not enough. It must mean freedom for all-even the lowliest and this freedom must include freedom from exploitation from hunger, from poverty.”¹⁵

But after independence, when he believed in Gandhian thought then he moved towards spiritualism.

He said, “I believed in materialist philosophy for a long time. But it is clear that no inspiration is in materialist philosophy to be a good man. It means that social reconstruction is not possible through materialist philosophy.”¹⁶ Jayaprakash Narayan rejected materialist philosophy because he believed that materialism could not achieve the aim of a good society; materialist philosophy can not give any base for goodness. He said, “It becomes clear that materialism, as a philosophical outlook, could not provide any basis for ethical conduct and any incentive for goodness.”¹⁷

Jayaprakash Narayan found that the inspiration to be a good man and social reconstruction are possible through sarvodaya and Gandhian thought. He believed that spiritualism is necessary to be a good man.¹⁸

As a result of the effect of Gandhian thought, he believed that spiritualism is the root of morality. He said, “The root of morality lies in the endeavour of man to realise this unity of existence, or to put it differently to realise his self. For one who has experienced this unity, the practice of morality becomes as natural and effortless as the drawing of breath.”¹⁹

Jayaprakash Narayan believed that spiritualism is a base of non-violence; without spiritualism non-violence can not exist. According to him, spiritualism is necessary to have control on science and therefore, spiritualism is necessary for goodness in society. He said, “Gandhi ji has rightly said that making of a good man is not possible through materialism, it is possible only through spiritualism.”²⁰

Creative Work for Non-Violent Revolution of Social Reconstruction

– Mahatma Gandhi gave a concept of creative work to establish a non-violent society, such as khadi. But, he wanted that these creative works should be helpful to change the ideology of every person of society towards non-violence.

Jayaprakash Narayan accepted this concept of Gandhian thought and participated in Gramdan and Bhoodan movement. He said, “The main objective of the creative work of Mahatma Gandhi was to establish a non-violent society, a violence free world.”²¹ Jayaprakash Narayan emphasized advanced creative work which will be more relevant at present context and effectively complete the aim of non-violent society. He said, “a special type of creative work is necessary for non-violent revolution because at present the traditional Gandhian work is not completing the objective to establish a non-violent society; it is far away from the main objective of non-violent revolution; the khadi, gramodyaog, Harijan and tribal service have been just formal work. The objective of non-violent revolution and non-violent society is possible through Gramdan and Gramswaraj type of creative work.”²²

Gram Swaraj – Jayaprakash Narayan gave his major contribution in the development of democracy in India. He gave a right direction to the politics in India. The political thought of Jayaprakash Narayan was influenced by Gandhian thought. He said, “I believe there is no need for me to add that at no time have I claimed to have made an original contribution to political thought. I am indebted not only to Roy, but to many others, most of all to Gandhi ji.”²³

The Gandhian concept of Gram swaraj is a base of social, political and economic thought of Jayaprakash Narayan. Jayaprakash Narayan believed that the rural development should be the base of development of this country. He said that Gandhi ji wanted to develop every village as a self dependent agricultural industrial unit. According to him, “Gandhi ji wanted that in the democracy, the power should not be in the hands of some selected people, but the power should be in hands of all people. It is possible only when gramraj will be the base of democracy.”²⁴

As a result of the effect of Gandhian thought, Jayaprakash Narayan gave his thought about gramraj and tried to implement it in his work of social reconstruction. According to him, the Gramraj means autonomous village republic, not a panchayat; this Gramraj will be governed by the villagers, not by government agencies.²⁵

Jayaprakash Narayan presented a plan about Gramraj which was a dream of Mahatma Gandhi. He said, "In order, therefore, to give a true base to our democracy and to involve actively and continuously, the whole people in its working, it is necessary to go lower down than the panchayat to the people themselves and to constitute the entire adult membership of the village community into a statutory collective body; the gram-sabha. The panchayat should function as an executive of the sabha, which should have power to set up other committees and teams for specific purposes."²⁶

Conclusion – In conclusion, it can be said that due to the impact of Gandhian thought the ideology of Jayaprakash Narayan had changed from Marxism to Sarvodaya, from materialism to spiritualism, from violent revolution to non violent revolution and he gave a vision about creative work to establish a nonviolent society and gram-swaraj. As a result we can say that ideology of Jayaprakash Narayan was influenced by Gandhian thought. The work of Jayaprakash Narayan which was based on Gandhian thought proves that Gandhian thought is more relevant in the present context.

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