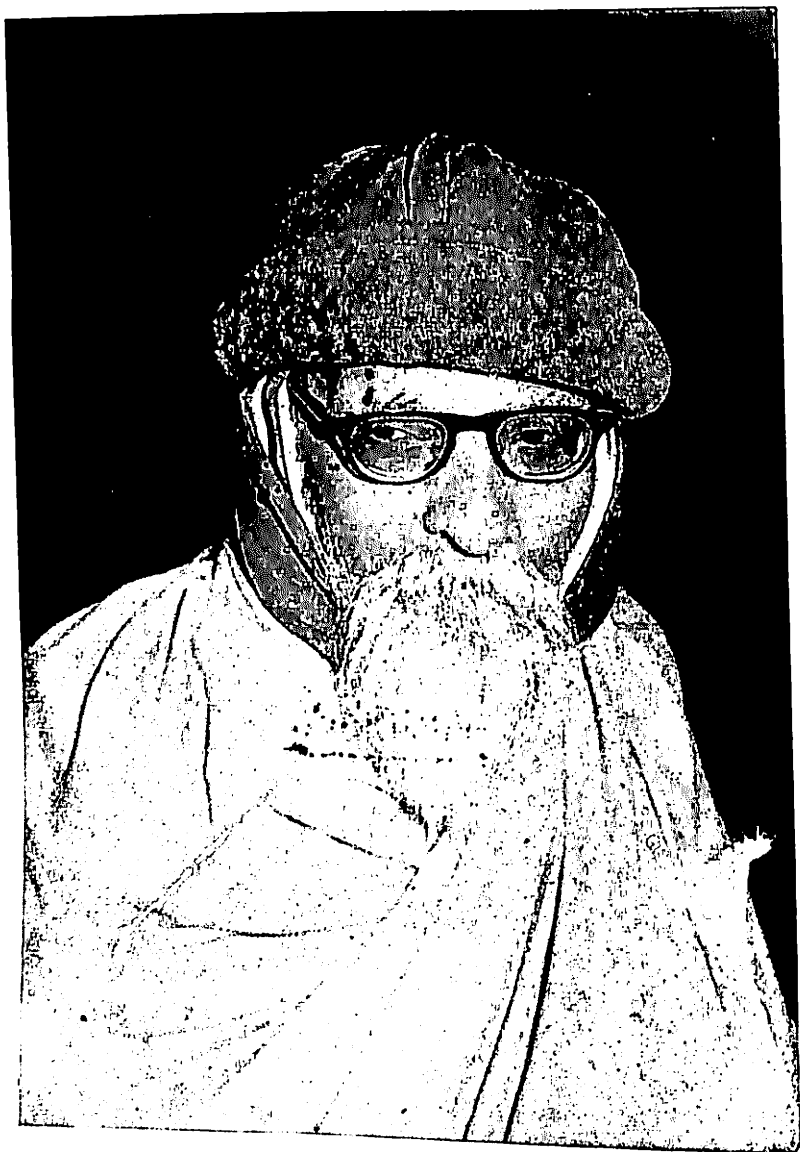


VINOBA MAN AND MESSAGE

Suresh Ram

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VINOBA MAN AND MESSAGE



By

SURESH RAM

समालोचनार्थ.

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संदर्भ विभाग

Akhil Bharat Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan,
RAJGHAT, KASHI (India).

Published by:

Secretary,

Akhil Bharat Sarva Seva Sangh,
Rajghat, Kashi.

First Edition : 3,000 Copies

May 1961

Price : Rupee One

Printed by:

P. N. Bhargava,

Bhargava Bhushan Press,

Varanasi.

P R E F A C E

People today want peace. Nay, they are anxious for meeting their various problems by the peaceful method. All reiterate its need. But the difficulty is that it has to be practised before it is preached. The more one lives it, the more one inspires it. What counts is the life quietly led. In Acharya Vinoba, we have exactly a personality of this nature, gently working his way with its silent and serene influence. Not only a saint, he is a dynamo of action, releasing such vital forces of human energy as are bound to transform our social structure and its sanctions by the power of constructive peace or love.

The following pages are an attempt to give, in brief, the captivating story of Vinoba and his wonderful journeys on foot all over the country. They will enable the reader to have some idea of Vinoba, the man and his message. May they further rouse his or her curiosity to learn more about the same and take up the cherished cause !

Kashi:

Suresh Ram

16th May, 1961.

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VINOBA
MAN AND MESSAGE

CHAPTER I

THE GREAT QUEST

“These are the days of politics. But you say that politics is out of date now,” asked a curious visitor.

“Yes, I do,” replied Vinoba. “Nay, both politics and religion have had their day. They were useful only until they united the people. Today they divide them.”

“True indeed! Politics means rivalries and dissensions.”

“It is clear that even the great Pacific Ocean which divided Asia from America is now uniting the two. Science clearly warns us that anything which breaks hearts or tears them asunder would have to go.”

“Then, politics has no place?”

“You can yourself see. I have framed the formulae:

Science+Politics =Death or destruction.

Science+Spirituality=Life or Sarvodaya.

“The problems of this world would hereafter be solved not by politics, but by spirituality.”

“By stressing on spirituality, you come back to religion again?”

“No, spirituality connotes the inner core of religion. It is one and the same in all religions.”

“But does it make any difference in practical life?”

“It does. You know that old religions taught mankind that God is one. Nevertheless, there were conflicts and battles between man and man in the name of religion. Now spirituality tells us that not only God is one, but also *man is one*. All barriers between man and man must cease to be. Whatever supports these barriers and obstructs unity cannot stay.”

“Should this come to be true, life would become a blessing.”

“Yes. It shall be so. It is the call of this Scientific Age.”

“Do you hope to set up the new society of your dreams by solving the land problem?”

“That is simply a token. To tell you the truth, solving any problem is the least of my business. I have frequently said that my object is to establish the Kingdom of Kindness.”

“Well, kindness and compassion are there already in this world.”

“They are. But they don’t rule. They are like maidens in the realm of power and armed force or violence.”

“We must work hard to bring about a transformation—a revolution in the society and set up new values and sanctions to establish the Kingdom of Kindness.”

UNITY OF LIFE

Life in our society has been strangely divided into two sections, *viz.*, one guided by self-interest (*swartha*) and the other by social interest (*par-martha*). The duties of an ascetic get thereby separated from those of a house-holder. It is given to the latter to earn his livelihood and amass wealth, while the former's is to roam about preaching sermons and depend for his subsistence on the householder. Likewise, the soldier's functions were demarcated from those of the saint. Thus the householder and the soldier enjoyed every freedom to employ any means (including falsehood and violence), while the ascetic or the saint had to abstain from manual work and body-labour.

Mahatma Gandhi broke this dismal tradition and held the said divisions as ill-conceived and false. He believed in the unity of life and showed that truth and non-violence were not cloistered virtues meant for a few ascetics and that body-labour should not be confined to the householder. He held that both the ascetic and the householder

must observe the tenets of truth and non-violence in their life and perform physical labour as *Yajna*. He further maintained that the soldier, too, should, instead of depending on force and coercion, rely on the superior weapon of non-violence and self-suffering. He did not recognise the alleged conflict between the individual and the society (or the private and public sector) and firmly believed that the good of individual was contained in the good of all. This accounts for the unique phenomenon that Gandhiji was not only a saint but also a householder, not only a reformer and politician but also a warrior and commander. During the course of his historic trial in Ahmedabad, before a British Judge, he declared himself, like a typical householder, to be a farmer and weaver. Again, this is why he refused to go into the caves of the Himalayas for seeking the so-called bliss or salvation and instead dedicated himself to public work in the service of the masses. Gandhiji took life as a whole. He struck a new departure in our spiritual annals.

Vinoba belongs to the same category. For him, too, life is a complete and intergrated unit which cannot be divided into water-tight compartments. Vinoba—a man of learning and renunciation, with no family responsibility on his shoul-

ders and with no attachment to any person, party or practice — could easily pass his days in seclusion as an ascetic. But he has been leading an active public life for about the last fifty years! Endowed with a compassionate heart, resourceful ability and mathematical skill, he could easily run a charitable institution for popular relief. But he has been on his feet for the last ten years and has known no rest. Equipped with a genius for leadership, organising talent and a band of devoted workers at his command, he could successfully launch a mighty agitation and create unrest. But he has chosen a different path and has been working his way very gently and quietly. In fact, he is a saint and a reformer and a revolutionary—all three combined in one.

CALL OF SCIENCE

This is the age of science which has broken the barriers of space and distance. Also science has provided man with such means as can supply all his needs, provided wealth is fairly and justly distributed. It is, therefore, absurd to think in isolation these days. The personal and community interests are linked together as the fingers and the palm of the hand. An aspiration for personal profit or deliverance or salvation must be regarded as unscientific and selfish. Even the

phrase 'my salvation' has no meaning. For, where there is a feeling of personal ownership, there can be no salvation, and where there is salvation there can be no question of personal ownership.

The demand of the times is equality and comradeship—a classless, caste-less and state-less society. All barriers between man and man—be they of colour, class, caste, creed, party, ownership, authority or State—must go. The whole world is like a family in which no member can prevent another from enjoying any amenity on grounds of possession or superiority. None can, therefore, rest content with mere relief or succour against misery. Gone are the days when one could keep lording over his wealth and offer a bit of it in charity. The period of tiny reforms and demonstrative philanthropy is over. The need of the hour is to strike at the very root of the evil so that poverty, inequality and disease may become a thing of the past and all may be able to experience real happiness and brotherhood. This requires a transformation of existing socio-economic and political values based on ownership and competition and exploitation. The new order would stand on the three pillars of social ownership, collective productive body labour and mutual confidence and co-operation.

The third characteristic is—passion for peace. Science has declared from its house tops that any recourse to war would prove as disastrous for the victors as for the vanquished. Both courage and wisdom demand that we must bid good-bye to arms and trust the innate goodness of man. Instead of counting on force and coercion, we should rely on persuasion and conversion. Any attempt to meet external aggression or internal unrest by arms and force should be regarded as narrow and unscientific, and is bound to prove futile and injurious. Violence is now out of date and whatever is to be changed or achieved must be brought about only by peaceful and non-violent means. As a French philosopher has said, "The more violence, the less revolution." Thus the technique of revolution itself needs a revolutionary re-orientation—a process which was begun by Mahatma Gandhi and is now being further explored by Vinoba.

NEED OF COLLECTIVE SADHANA

Welcoming the advance of science, Vinoba has been stressing upon the need of rising above emotions and having a world outlook. Man can make full and effective use of the power placed at his disposal by science only when he gets rid of mental attachments and jealousies. The tradi-

tional modes of thinking and approach have to change. We have to lift ourselves up out of our mental grooves and ruts. To quote Vinoba:

“The plane of *Vijnana* or science is above that of mind. Science is trying to force us to ascend to that higher level. The *Upanishadas* knew of the plane of *Vijnana* as being higher than the vital and the mental planes. But it was then a matter of individual realisation. It was enough if a few individuals reached that plane through personal effort while the rest lagged behind. There was no pressure of the circumstances that all should have to rise to that level of *Vijnana*. To-day, however, science makes it imperative on us to go beyond the mental. This could be done only by spiritual effort. Science, therefore, is compelling us to undertake spiritual reflection. The sages of the past undertook individual spiritual effort (*Sadhana*); science demands that we should take to a collective form of the same spiritual effort (*Samoohik Sadhana*). For, only then science would benefit mankind, otherwise, we all would go to ruins.”

NEW RELIGIOUS OUTLOOK

Science, therefore, calls upon us to change our attitude completely and think of ourselves as mem-

bers of a family encompassing the whole world. Our conception of religion should also change :

“The old religions also would not work. To please God by burning lamps and incense before an image would not do. The entire humanity has become a living image of God. We are to worship this image. We should have to enquire, for example, if mankind has enough food for it. This would indeed be a drama of worshipping humanity as our God. At first, it would be like stage-acting. But in course of time, we would experience reality.”

Thus science and spirituality or self-knowledge (*Atmajyana*) are the two great creative powers of the modern age. A careful harnessing of them will lead to universal happiness and prosperity and peace.

But the great question is: How to do it in practice? It was as it were, in the course of his quest for a solution of this riddle that the idea of *Bhoodan* flashed across his mind. In the subsequent pages follows, in brief, the fascinating story of *Bhoodan* and its illustrious discoverer. ● ● ●

CHAPTER II

LIFE-SKETCH

“Ours is a very wretched plight. We beg of you to help us, Baba!”

“Please let me know what you want.”

“Some means to make both our ends meet so that we may look after our children.”

“What do you suggest? What can I do?”

“We are illiterate and Harijans. We know nothing except agriculture. We would be obliged if you could help us in that direction.”

“What should be done?”

“Only if you could get some land for us.”

“How much?”

“About eighty acres will do for all the Harijans of our village.”

Thereafter Vinoba called the inhabitants of the village, the poor as well as the rich. And in a moving voice he said, “The Harijans here require but eighty acres of land. Is any of you willing to make the offer?”

Lo and behold ! a young man stood up and firmly observed, “Yes, Baba ! I am ready to donate one hundred acres of land in the sacred memory of my revered father.”

“Are you willing to do so gladly?”

“Very gladly, Baba! I can give the same in writing.”

This was an unprecedented event. Land was known to have been donated in the name of religion for temples, churches and mosques. Also for schools, colleges and Dharmshalas or rest houses. But never before had it been offered to the landless poor for eking out their living.

Vinoba had no sleep that night—18th day of April, 1951. He wondered whether this was an isolated event or a token expression of a universal phenomenon. He argued to himself that if the law of love and compassion could effectively work in this Pochampalli village, it could as well work in all the five hundred thousand and odd villages of India, as human nature was the same all over. With this faith and resolve, he went to his bed at about one a.m.

Four hours after he walked on to another village. The people there received him with flowers and garlands.

Thanking them for their warm hospitality, Vinoba said:

“While flowers are meant for worship, I ask for land only. I am your son, a member

of your family. If you have four sons, I am the fifth. Give me my share, one-fifth."

This was a very strange demand. But his words had the desired effect. They gave him twenty-five acres. Vinoba then said to himself:

"Yesterday I got one hundred acres. Today twenty-five. Here are Euclid's two points and my line is complete."

Vinoba's decision was confirmed. And he made a resolve to carry on his mission until landlessness was wiped out of the country. Ever since, he has been incessantly on his feet. During the last ten years and more he has covered about forty thousand miles all over the country. And he goes on ahead with firm and confident steps preaching the gospel of mutual sharing and self-reliance and universal brotherhood. His refreshing look inspires hope and cheer. Though constantly moving, he is like a rock of faith and light.

BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

Vinoba was born on September 11, 1895, at the village Gagode in the Pen tehsil (Sub-division) of Kolaba district of Maharashtra. His mother Rukmini Devi, was a pure and pious woman. His

father, Narhari Bhave, a textile technologist, was scrupulous, methodical and straight-forward. Vinoba passed a large part of his childhood with his grandfather, Shambhuroo Bhave who was devout and religious and was largely responsible in giving a spiritual turn to his life.

MOTHER'S INFLUENCE

Vinoba has been deeply influenced by his mother, Rukminibai. Her God-fearing and devoted life made a deep impression on Vinoba. She used to tell him, "Vinya! He who gives is a *Deva* (Divine), while he who keeps is a *Rakshas* (Demon)!"

Whatever new dish she prepared, she used to distribute it among the people in the neighbourhood. Her Vinya acted as her faithful envoy. The balance left was served for the family. Sometimes the whole lot was consumed and nothing was left for the home. The mother felt happy over it and aksed her children to await next time. Thus the spirit of sharing was imbibed in him from the very childhood.

Vinoba's kith and kin looked forward towards the day when he would be married and be leading a happy family life. Her mother had no interest in such gossip and used to remark, "Vinya !

while an ideal householder's life leads to repayment of *Pitri-Rina* (Fatherly debt), but an ideal Brahmacharya results in the salvation of forty generations !”

This inspired Vinoba to Brahmacharya or celibacy. He resolved not to marry and to lead a dedicated life. He has never regretted his decision and is the happiest man on earth to-day, with the whole world as his family.

His mother often recited devotional songs of Marathi saints and seers. Vinoba liked them very much and committed them to memory. Both the mother and child discussed religious topics. Sometimes the mother was so much engrossed in them that she forgot to add salt to the food. Vinoba too did not worry about it and enjoyed it thoroughly. But his brother complained, “There is no salt to day. How can I take it?” Before the mother tendered her apology, Vinoba would intervene, “Strange you are ! You want food or salt? How does the absence of salt affect your mission of life?”

Fond of Gita, Vinoba read out its verses to his mother. And both discussed about the same. Rukminibai said one day, “You are always speaking of the *Gita*. But my difficulty is that I am not

able to follow the Sanskrit text. Is there no *Gita* in Marathi?"

Vinoba searched out a Marathi translation. But that too was terse and did not do justice to the original. Then his mother lovingly said, "Vinya! You know *Gita* well. Why don't you translate it in Marathi?"

Vinoba never forgot her bidding of love. But he could not fulfil it in her life-time. She passed away in 1918. Twelve years later, in 1930 he translated the *Gita* into parallel Marathi verse and called it *Gitai* (Gita mother). And to-day *Gitai* has found its place in almost every home and hut of Maharashtra.

IN SEARCH OF BRAHMA

At the age of ten, Vinoba came to Baroda where his father was employed. He had his education there. In November, 1913, Vinoba passed his matriculation examination. Then he joined the Intermediate. But he was not satisfied with this education. It had no connection with real life. He thought of giving it up and taking to true education of the soul.

One day, Vinoba sat down by his mother who was cooking food. He had some rolled papers in his hands. He lit fire to one at its end. It began to burn. The mother inquired :

“Vinya! What’s it?”

“Nothing serious! I am reducing my school and college certificates to ashes.”

“But what is the harm in keeping them with you?”

“Now that, I have decided to leave college, I will never require them. So why keep them at all?”

He was on his way to Bombay in March, 1916, to appear in the Intermediate examination. He detrained at Surat, took the train to Bhusaval and left for Kashi.

A close friend of his asked him, “Where do you go from here?”

“To Kashi.”

“What for?”

“In search of the *Brahma*, the Imperishable and All-Pervading!”

AT GANDHIJI’S ASHRAM

Staying some two and a half months in Kashi, Vinoba came to Gandhiji and joined his Ashram on June 7, 1916. However, his health in the Ashram declined. He took one year’s leave.

Exactly a year after, down to the very minute, Vinoba returned to the Ashram. It was a pleasant surprise. Bapu was very much moved by so

scrupulous execution of a promise. Recalling the event one day, he said to Vinoba, "It showed your loyalty to truth."

"No, it was my loyalty to Mathematics."

Bapu smiled, "Can Mathematics ever betray truth?"

Those of the Ashram were moved by Vinoba's learning and devotion. They began to admire and love him and hold him in high regard. They requested him to do some teaching work for their sake. Vinoba willingly took it up.

Shortly after, Gandhiji came to know that Vinoba had not informed about his movements to his parents. Consequently, he wrote a brief letter himself to Vinoba's father:

"Your son Vinoba is with me. He has acquired at so tender an age such high spiritedness and asceticism as took of me years of patient labour to."

(Vinoba's original name was Vinayak Narhari Bhave. In keeping with the Marathi saintly tradition, Gandhiji changed it to Vinoba, the name by which he is ever since known.)

In 1918, Baroda was ravaged by a terrible influenza epidemic. At Bapu's bidding, Vinoba went there to be at his mother's service. Reaching home he found both the parents as also the

youngest brother ill. The last was the first to go and three days later, the mother also expired. His father slowly recovered.

Vinoba expressed a desire that the funeral hymns should not be chanted by the professional priest. His father pleaded helplessness, "The family tradition has to be obeyed."

Vinoba was as much adamant. He did not participate in the funeral ceremony of his mother and spent the day in reciting the *Gita* and the *Upanishads* at home. Next day, he left back for the Ashram.

AT WARDHA ASHRAM

In 1921, Vinoba shifted to Wardha. There was opened a branch of the Sabarmati Ashram. It was there that he carried on researches in Khadi and other aspects of constructive programme. But he continued his studies and penances too.

One hot day, a fierce wind blew all over. All mangoes, ripe and unripe, fell down from the trees. It was a terrible blow to the poor whose hopes about the mango harvest were smashed.

A villager came with his basket-load of mangoes. Passing the road before the Ashram, he proceeded towards the market. On the way, he met a passer-by who inquired the price of the basket.

“Every year, the basket generally costs three rupees.”

“Three rupees! Are you in your senses? I am just coming from the market. Nobody will pay even one rupee for your load.”

“I have suffered a lot this year. As you please!”

“I can’t pay you more than a rupee.”

“Do raise something more!”

“No, go your way.”

“At last, the passerby agreed for one and a quarter and got the whole lot. With a heavy heart, the villager went back to his home. For a while, he halted before Vinoba’s cottage. Vinoba asked about his welfare and said, “You seem to be coming from the market? Have you sold the entire lot?”

“Yes, but I got only twenty annas!”

“Twenty annas only! What is the proper price?”

“Three rupees is the usual amount. But the wind-blast has reduced all prices.”

“But why did you give it so cheap?”

“There was no alternative for me. Nobody would give me three rupees and I would have to bring the load back.”

Vinoba gave him a rupee and three-quarter. So doing, he asked an inmate of his Ashram, “Do

you agree with what I have done? When this man is in difficulty, people should help rather than exploit the situation."

"You are correct. His woes must be shared."

"But in the capitalist society, such loot is common. We are not even conscious of it. That is why there is so much poverty in our country, so much misery and so much discontent and bitterness."

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In 1923, Vinoba offered flag-satyagraha in Nagpur. This was his first experience of jail life.

Next year, Gandhiji sent him to Vaikom in Travancore. Harijans were not allowed entry in the temples. At Gandhiji's instance, a satyagraha was launched. Vinoba conducted it. The Satyagrahis suffered all sorts of suffering and humility with cheer. At last the Government yielded. Vinoba came back to his Ashram.

In 1932, on Gandhiji's return from the Round Table Conference, Vinoba happened to be at Jalgaon (Khandesh). He was pained to see terror gripping the people. He decided to address a public meeting. He did it, wherein he made a plea for fearlessness and self-help and assured that the British rule would not, and could not stay long. This took him to jail where he was tried

and convicted for six months. He passed his sentence at Dhulia Jail. It was here that Vinoba delivered his talks on the Gita, which in the form of *Gita-Pravachan* has appeared in the different languages of the country.

Spending some twelve years in Wardha Ashram, Vinoba shifted to the village of Nalwadi. There he started work in the surrounding villages. For twenty-five days in a month he lived in the villages, and for five days he stayed in the Ashram. He founded a new institution, Gram Seva Mandal.

Here he also made experiments on the potentialities of spinning. He used to spin for eight hours a day. He kept his personal expenditure below the amount so earned. That came to less than four annas. He reduced his diet accordingly. This affected his health considerably. When Gandhiji came to know about it, he was deeply agitated. He sent word, "Now I will have to take your complete charge."

Gandhiji thought of sending Vinoba to some hilly resort so that he might recoup his health. Various suggestions were offered—Simla, Mussoorie, Mahabaleshwar, etc. Gandhiji told him: "You can go anywhere you like."

"I have chosen my place."

“Which one?”

“I will go and live in the house built at the desolated hillock-like piece of land across the Paunar river.”

“I have no objection. You are the best judge.”

Vinoba gave it the significant name of *Paramdham Ashram* which has remained his head quarters ever since. Within three months of his settling down at Paunar, he gained 32 lbs. in weight.

FIRST SATYAGRAHI

The Second Great War began in September 1939. Without her consent, India was thrown into it. India could not be a party to such a war whose aims were not clear. The Indian National Congress decided to offer Satyagraha against this injustice and empowered Gandhiji to take the desired steps.

Gandhiji decided upon launching *Individual Satyagraha* and selected Vinoba for the task. He went to his Paramdham Ashram and said:

“I have your name in my mind as the first Satyagrahi.”

“As you like, I am at your disposal.”

“The question, however, is whether you are ready to take it up.”

“Bapu, I am!”

“But you must be pre-occupied with so many activities of your Ashram. I wonder whether you will be able to free yourself from them.”

“I carry no load on my head. I am as much prepared to obey your call here and now even as I would be if the *Yamraja* had sent for me straight!”

Gandhiji announced Vinoba's name as the first Satyagrahi. Vinoba offered Satyagraha on 17th October 1940. He was arrested and sentenced to three months simple imprisonment. On release, he again offered Satyagraha and courted arrest. Gandhiji selected Shri Jawaharlal Nehru as the second Satyagrahi. Others followed. Thus the movement spread on. By the close of 1941, there was general amnesty.

It was the summer of 1942. Gandhiji had given the call of “Quit India.” The whole country was astir. A great movement was in the offing. Gandhiji was thinking of ways and means of having a nation-wide campaign. In a meeting of Sevagram Ashram workers and close friends, he gave the hint that he proposed to undertake a long duration fast on entering the Jail. The audience was taken aback. Somebody suggested that Vinoba should be consulted. Bapu sent for him.

Vinoba came immediately. Bapu asked his opinion on the proposed step.

Without a moment's pause, Vinoba observed, "Such a sacrifice is permissible in non-violence."

And with a smile, he added, "What *Ram* can do in the wake of reason, *Hanuman* can do by sheer faith."

"If you like you can take your own time to think over it," remarked Bapu.

"No, Bapu! There is nothing to think further about it. My mind is quite clear. I am entirely with you,"

And Vinoba took Bapu's leave at once. All those present were staggered at this spontaneous agreement between the master and the disciple.

8th August, 1942. The Congress passed the historic "Quit India" resolution. Next day, Gandhiji and other leaders all over the country were arrested. Vinoba was also arrested in his Paunar Ashram and taken to Wardha Jail.

On entering the jail, Vinoba said to the jailor, "I have had my food for the day. And from tomorrow morning I go on an indefinite fast."

The jailor was stunned. He wondered whether some thing in the jail had led Vinoba to this drastic step:

“Please do let me know what made you adopt such an unusual course.”

“Nothing in connection with your jail. But Gandhiji had decided to begin fast after his arrest and I share his decision.”

The jailor felt helpless.

Gandhiji, however, had not begun his fast as he was in correspondence with the Government. Nevertheless, he was sure that Vinoba would have commenced his fast in the Jail. So soon after his arrest, Bapu sent a message to Vinoba not to undertake the fast since he had postponed it for the present.

The news came as a highly welcome relief to the Wardha jail authorities. For full three years, Vinoba was in jail.

Vinoba is a very eminent linguist. Marathi is his mother-tongue. And so almost also are Gujarati and Hindi. He has acquired more than a working knowledge of Urdu, Bengali, Assamese, Oriya and Punjabi. He knows well all the four languages of South India—Tamil, Telugu, Kannarese and Malayalam. English of course, he studied in the college. French was his second language there. His profound command over Sanskrit which he acquired after leaving the college is next, if at all, only to that over Marathi. He

has a genius for learning languages. At the age of forty-six, he studied Arabic and went through the holy *Koran* several times. The wisdom of all religious classics is almost at his finger tips. Recently he picked up German and some Japanese too.

AFTER SWARAJ

Soon after the attainment of Swaraj, Gandhiji passed away. It turned people's eyes towards Vinoba for guidance. In March 1948, a meeting of eminent constructive workers, political leaders and Gandhiji's close associates, was held at Sevagram under the presidentship of Dr. Rajendra Prasad, now the President of our Republic. Among other things, they decided to start, at Vinoba's suggestion, a *Sarvodaya Samaj*—a sort of brotherhood of those believing in the practice of truth and non-violence.

Vinoba was persuaded to take up the most burning question of the day—the rehabilitation of refugees, and to convey to them the message of peace and hope. Accordingly, Vinoba reached Delhi on 30th March, 1948. He spent about ten months among the refugees and tried, as a Satyagrahi, to wean their mind of bitterness and distrust. He worked amongst them in Delhi, East Punjab and

Rajasthan, as also at Kalyan and the Bombay suburbs. On 30th January, 1949, first anniversary of Bapu's departure, he addressed at Rajghat his last prayer meeting during that sojourn and decided to have a look at the whole country. He travelled by train and visited the States of U.P., Rajasthan, Bombay, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nad, Kerala and Andhra.

KANCHAN-MUKTI

On return from Andhra in October, he decided to lead a life of labour and turned himself into a labourer. The acute food situation of the country also necessitated such a step. At his inspiration the members of Paramdham Ashram (Pavnar) resolved to purchase no vegetables from the market from 1st January, 1950 and to use only such vegetables as they could produce by their labour in the Ashram.

The name given to this programme was *Kanchan Mukti* (literally, freedom from gold,) whose object was to get rid of the slavery of money in life and to investigate the potentialities, social, economic, intellectual and moral, of productive physical labour intelligently performed. Their experiment was carried on successfully by a band of selfless workers for more than three years until

April, 1953, when Vinoba called them away for a concerted Bhoodan Yajna drive in Bihar.

On 8th October, 1950, Vinoba undertook a three day fast. While beginning it, he said:

“My life has so far been the life of a *Bhikshuka* (mendicant). In future also I have to live on charity. But I have now resolved to accept alms of body labour only. I shall of course continue to do physical labour myself to the best of my capacity.”

The third annual session of the Sarvodaya Samaj was scheduled to be held at Shivarampalli, about four miles from Hyderabad city in April, 1951. They urged upon Vinoba to attend this meeting.

On 8th March 1951, Vinoba left his Paramdham Ashram on foot for Shivarampalli. Walking ten to twelve miles every day, he reached Shivarampalli on 7th April for the annual Sarvodaya conference. Eight days later, on the day of *Ramnavami*, 15th April, 1951, he commenced his walking tour of Telangana.



CHAPTER III

THE BHOODAN GANGA

"Here, in our village, are two real brothers who are always at daggers drawn and because of them the whole village is torn with dissensions", said a heart-broken old man.

"They should cast off their differences and live like real brothers," observed Vinoba.

"Several years have passed in conflict. One of the brothers is in the Congress and supports Government, while one other has joined the Communist Party. They have wasted thousands of rupees in litigation. The village has been partitioned into two groups and has been ruined."

"I shall see both of them."

Later, Vinoba called them and had a talk. They were pretty old. He asked one of them:

"How long do you hope to live?"

"My one leg is in the grave and the second one is here. I am very weak and may go any day."

Then he inquired of the other:

"What about you?"

"I also feel likewise."

"Then why all this quarrel?"

"I shall do your bidding, Baba!"

“Will you obey the decision of the village elders or *Panches* ?”

“I shall.”

“And so shall I,” said the other one.

Vinoba brought the two together and they held each other in close embrace. Tears trickled down their eyes. They sobbed like children and begged each other's apology.

In the evening meeting, Vinoba called them on to the dais. He said, “Until yesterday they fought among themselves like Bhima and Jarasandh. But to-day they have resolved their differences and will live like brothers hereafter.”

Again they embraced each other. Also they announced a donation of ninety acres of land.

WORK IN TELANGANA

Thus Vinoba's *yatra* in Telangana was a source of great relief to the people. It had a healing and refreshing effect. During this tour of 51 days, from 15th April to 6th June 1951, Vinoba received 12,201 acres of land for the landless. What Vinoba saw and felt in Telangana unfolded before his mind's eye the latent strength of soul force. As he said:

“As I went on with the campaign, each day that passed brought out hidden meanings

and disclosed new possibilities of this movement. Thus I grew in my own understanding of its vast potentialities and had, what I may call a vision, a new revelation of the power of non-violence."

Back from Telangana, Vinoba quietly settled down to his *Kanchan-Mukti* work. Bhoodan was in the news and all sorts of comments were coming from various quarters. They were appreciative as well as critical. The main criticism was that Bhoodan could not be a universal phenomenon and that the donations from the terror-struck rich of Telangana were more in the nature of an attempt to save themselves than of a change in heart. They threw a challenge to Vinoba to testify to the truth of his faith in any other part of the country. Vinoba calmly went through all criticism. He gave no reply. For he believes in silent action, not in mere words.

OPINION ON THE FIRST PLAN

His agony at the fast deteriorating social and economic situation of the country was continuously increasing. The fever which had seized him in Telangana was ceaselessly hurting his soul. And when Sri R.K. Patil, his old friend and a member of the National Planning Commission,

called on him at Pavnar on August 10, 1951, to gather his impressions on the Draft Report of the First Five Year Plan prepared by the Government of India, Vinoba could contain himself no longer and burst forth:

“In the Constitution you have promised work and food to all citizens. But now you have totally forgotten this assurance. If you, on whose shoulders lies the responsibility of providing work to all, find it impossible to do so, you must resign.

“You ask village industries to support themselves. You first cut off my feet and then want me to stand..... Village industries did not die themselves, they have deliberately been killed..... Why don't you think that when Gandhiji could do so much in those adverse days, we should be able to do much more?....

“You took a pledge of acquiring food self-sufficiency by 1951. When you find it unrealisable you start a Planning Commission which says that self-sufficiency is well-nigh impossible.....Do you ever imagine what would befall your country if war comes?

“Yours is a plan involving perpetual begging.... It cannot inspire anybody to produce more.”

PRIME MINISTER'S INVITATION

Having come to know these views, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru wrote to Vinoba that he wished to see him in order to discuss the Plan. Vinoba accepted the invitation. He decided and resolved to start for Delhi on foot on September 12, 1951.

Addressing a large gathering at Pavnar in his post-prayer meeting on the previous evening (September 11) he said:

“The work I have started is known as the *Bhoodan Yajna*. It is not simply *Bhoodan*. It is a *Yajna* in which all should cooperate and contribute.

“If it is regarded that land could be obtained in Telangana because it was a Communist-infected area, we must abandon all hope of a non-violent revolution in India.....If we grasp the fundamental idea behind this *Yajna*, I hope the rich will honour the poor and donate land to me. In case this hope is realised it will lend a mighty support to the non-violent revolution.”

Then and there he was presented with 75 acres of land. What a remarkable birthday-gift! Next morning he commenced his march to Delhi.

THE DEMAND OF DARIDRA- NARAYAN

Vinoba covered about 12 to 16 miles every day. Reaching Nagpur on September 15, Vinoba put his life-mission in these few words:

“Till God keeps strength in me I shall tour the country and beg for land for the landless. Land, like air and water, cannot be individually owned. It can only be God’s. It is the common property of the people and should be equitably distributed.”

On October 2, 1951, Vinoba reached Sagar, a University town in northern Madhya Pradesh. As it was the last important halt in that State, constructive workers from all over the State had gathered for a conference. Addressing them he said:

“The mission I have undertaken is an act of devotion and service not only of the poor but also of the rich—of all the people. I have a strong conviction that this work is going to appeal to all.”

Placing before the country his demand for five crore acres of land by 1957—his *Five Year Plan*, he declared:

“Though my own stomach is very small, that of the *Daridranarayan* is very big. So if

any one asks me what my demand is; I say, 'FIVE CRORE ACRES OF LAND': I mean thereby cultivable land. If there are five sons in the family, I want to be considered the sixth; if four, the fifth. Thus I claim one-fifth or one-sixth of the total cultivable land in the country."

IN DELHI

Vinoba reached Delhi on November 13, 1951. During his 62 days' Yatra of 792 miles from Pavnar to Delhi, he obtained 19,436 acres. He had his hut near Gandhiji's *Samadhi* at Rajghat.

Vinoba introduced himself to Delhi's populace as the proverbial *Vaman* who covered the earth in three steps. So also his three steps are:

"What I want the people to do is, first, to part with some of their land. Secondly, they should engage themselves in the service of others. Finally, in their service they should give up all and voluntarily sacrifice everything. This is the path into which I want to initiate the people."

Vinoba met the members of the Planning Commission for three consecutive days. To quote his own words:

"During these three days of discussion I have placed my ideas before them. They

have promised to consider my suggestions. I had several grounds for my criticism, but I would not go into them all.

“There were two major differences. The first was I wanted no food imports while according to the Planning Commission’s Report there are to be imports for an indefinite period. Secondly, I wanted a Policy of full employment for all. The Planning Commission have agreed to it as their duty, but they say they cannot, under present circumstances, undertake it. In my opinion there can be no national planning without it. It is only when they accept this responsibility, they can develop the villages and make them self-sufficient.”

Thus carrying on his mission for eleven days in the capital, Vinoba left it in the early hours of the morning of November 24, 1951. The Bhoodan Ganga turned towards Uttar Pradesh.

A UNIQUE GIFT.

At the village of Chaudahapur in the Moradabad district, a blind man, Ram Charan by name, helped by a family-boy, reached Vinoba’s camp after midnight at 1 a.m. All were asleep. Perchance one worker in the camp got up and inquired of the blind man what brought him there. He said, “I am

told that here is a Baba who accepts land-gifts for the poor. I have got but twelve bighas of land which I want to donate to him," The gift-deed (*Dan Patra*) was filled in by the worker and Ram Charan's finger-print taken on it. Thereafter, the earnest donor walked back to his village, six miles off. Vinoba came to know of it next morning. Referring to this incident in his evening address he remarked:

"They say that Ram Charan was blind. But, in fact, it is we who are blind. We should know that in Ram Charan's form, the *Charan* (Feet) of *Ram* (God) had come to bless the *Bhoodan Yajna*."

RESOLVE OF 25 LAKHS

At Sevapuri on April 13, 14, 15 and 16 was held the fourth annual *Sammelan* (Session) of *Sarvodaya Samaj*, presided over by the late Sri Srikrishnadas Jaju whose life was a dedication to the cause of Khadi. Total land collected in the country by that time amounted to 1,02,361 acres, obtained from 4,936 donors. The session was inaugurated by Acharya J. B. Kripalani. Sri Shankarrao Deo, secretary of the *Sarvodaya Samaj* and of the *Sarva Seva Sangh*, placed a resolution before the *Sammelan* calling upon for a collection of 25

lakhs of acres of land in Bhoodan Yajna within two years as a first instalment to fulfil Vinoba's demand of five crores, towards establishing a classless and exploitation-free society on the basis of truth and non-violence.

The Sevapuri Sammelan registered a landmark in the growth and development of the Bhoodan Yajna movement. It now assumed an all India character and its message thereafter began to be conveyed to every nook and corner of the country. Quotas for various provinces were fixed and committees were formed to take up the work. Vinoba who had already covered thirty-five districts of U.P., started for the remaining ones.

DHARMA CHAKRA PRAVARTAN

On May 9th, Vinoba was at Lucknow, the capital of U.P. It was the *Buddha Jayanti* day. In his post-prayer address he declared:

“The work I am made to do is the continuation of the *Dharma Chakra Pravartan*—revolving the *Wheel of Dharma*, which the Buddha had started. And mark what I pronounce with the same commanding voice as that of the lion which drowns all other smaller voices and

rings clear across the forest: *The land has already come to me; it has already gone to the landless. It remains for you only to choose the manner of effecting the transfer.*"

RESPONSE IN BIHAR

On 14th September 1952, Vinoba set his foot on the soil of Bihar. He said:

"As a pilgrim goes to *Tirtha-Yatra* for God's *darshan*—so also I have come out on this Bhoodan pilgrimage. I have come here to let you bring about a revolution on the basis of love. I have a desire that the land problem of Bihar should be solved during my stay here. I am talking of the solution of the land problem. But far more important is working the non-violent method. If we are able to solve the land problem by the method of love and peace, it would earn credit for non-violence. Could non-violence succeed in attaining economic revolution, what else would it not be able to achieve? I have complete faith in the power of non-violence."

Vinoba spent 27 months in Bihar. The message of Bhoodan was conveyed to the innermost corners of this province. The movement met with remarkable response.

TRAGEDY AT BAIDYANATHDHAM

That the poison of untouchability has deeply entered our life became painfully clear on 18th September 1953. Vinoba encamped at Baidyanathdham, Bihar's most important pilgrimage centre in the Santhal Parganas district. He also stayed there on the 19th on account of the meetings of workers from all over Bihar. In the evening of the 18th, he was requested by the head priest of the temple to pay a visit to the holy shrine. When he was told that Vinoba could enter a temple only if Harijans were also allowed to have the *darshan*, the priest gave his consent to Harijans accompanying Vinoba. Accordingly, on the evening of the 19th, Vinoba and colleagues, accompanied by a few Harijans, went to the Baidyanath Temple. But hardly had he gone a few steps, the *pandas* of the Temple who were waiting for him, fell upon Vinoba and his party with *lathis* amidst cries of "Dharma ki Jai ho! Adharma ka Nash ho!" (Long live religion! Down with irreligion!) Members of his party tried to cordon off Vinoba. Even so he was slightly injured at the ear. Two members of the party, one of them a young woman worker of eighteen, were very severely beaten up and had to be removed to the hospital. Next day he issued

a statement to the press in the course of which he observed:

“I do not want anybody to be punished... But the Constitution of free India has been clearly violated. Small retributive measures cannot make up for that transgression. What is needed is to provide against any recurrence of such incidents in future. This is an age of science. Every faith is being tested on the touch-stone of reason.”

By 25th March 1954, land-collections amounted to 27,53,465 acres. The resolve made at Sevapuri was thus fulfilled. The Sarvodaya Sammelan met at Bodh-Gaya on April 18, 19 and 20, 1954. It was presided over by Smt. Ashadevi Aryanayakam, a distinguished educationist and exponent of Nai-Talim. In this Sammelan, Sri Jayaprakash Narayan made the solemn announcement—of JIWANDAN, offering his life for the Bhoodan cause.

During his Gaya-Yatra, Vinoba struck upon the idea of opening a centre synthesising the *Vedanta* of the *Upanishads* and the *Abimsa* of the Buddha. He called it *Samanvaya Ashram*.

Once in Bihar, a Muslim noble saw Vinoba one day. He had already donated 5,500 acres of land. He gave further 1,500 acres to Vinoba that

day. "You have", said Vinoba, "offered all the uncultivated land with you. Now as my right, I demand one-sixth of your land under cultivation".

"I agree to your claim," spoke he very politely.

"But in our Muslim families, women have also their right. And we are five brothers and two sisters."

"Then I become the eighth in your family", put in Vinoba, "and I want one-eighth."

"Very gladly so."

And he signed the *Dah-patra* accordingly. Later he observed, "This mission of yours is in keeping with Islam which enjoins such gifts as duty. Your demand is a righteous one. God willing, the country would fulfil your mission."

Both the rich and the poor of Bihar offered donations to Vinoba. The total amounted to 22,32,474.36 acres from 2,86,420 donors. The credit goes to the late Sri Laxmi Babu and his band of devoted workers.

TOWARDS LAND-REVOLUTION

Vinoba left Bihar on 1st January 1955 and spent 25 days in the Bankura and Midnapore districts of Bengal. He impregnated the workers of Ben-

gal with a spirit to give *Vande Mataram* a practical shape by securing land for every tiller. Recalling the exhortation of the great poet, Rabindranath Tagore, to love the neighbour and live the ideal of *Vande Bhratram*, he stressed the urgency of Bhoodan. Further, he summoned all public servants of Bengal to stand up like one man to make Swami Vivekananda's (the wizard who gave India the word *Daridra Narayan*) dream a living reality and work to wipe out *Daridrya* (poverty) from the country so that *Narayan* might remain all over.

On 26th January 1955, he stepped into Orissa and gave a call for *Bhoomi-Kranti* :

“The work to be done now is that of *Bhoomi-Kranti* (land revolution). Merely giving land to the landless is not sufficient. Private land-ownership is to be abolished. Land can only be God's or of the society. If the people at any place live this idea, it would amount to the *poornata* (completeness) of Bhoodan Yajna. Thereafter the work of obtaining five crores and distributing it would become very easy. The people themselves would take it up. I therefore, expect a *paripoorna darshan* (complete view) in Orissa.”

It may be recalled that the first Gram-dan was offered on 24th May 1952. The people of Mang-

roth in the Hamirpur district of U. P. donated all their land. In Orissa, thanks to its indefatigable workers, led by the late Sri Gopabandhu Choudhury and his devout consort Smt. Ramadevi, *Gramdans* were offered in large numbers.

On 12th May, 1955, Vinoba was at the small village of Baripada in the Ganjam district of Orissa. In the evening prayer, there was a large gathering, consisting of unsophisticated peasantry. They were eager to know what message the walking *messiah* had brought for them.

With a firm voice, in his charming Oriya patois, Vinoba asked them :

"The landlessness in our village, will now be?"

Loudly they replied :

"No more ! No more !"

And they gave vent to their resolve by raising up their hands. With a smile on his face, he rejoined :

"The land-ownership in our village, will now be ?"

With a far louder, resounding voice, they burst forth :

"No more ! No more !"

Then followed his brief address in which he said :

"That there should be no landlessness in our village is the first step. And that there

should be no land-ownership in our village is the last. None except God is the owner of land. We mortals can only be its children. And ours is to serve the mother-earth as best as we can."

This spirit caught the air, specially in the Koraput district where Vinoba stayed for four months. During his Orissa tour, Vinoba had been offered 2,57,277 acres of land from 95,757 donors and 812 Gramdams.

AT JAGANANATH TEMPLE

An event in his Orissa tour needs mention. Vinoba reached the famous shrine and centre of pilgrimage of Jagananath Puri on 21st March 1955. He stayed at a spot near the sea. In the morning he went to the holy shrine for *darshan*. His party included amongst others, a devoted creature of God, a pious lady from France. Whence the priests of the temple, to our shame, refused admittance to Vinoba. With folded hands, he walked back, recalling the similar treatment offered to the great sage, Nanak, about four hundred years ago.

In his post-prayer speeches on three successive days, 21st to 23rd March, Vinoba dwelt upon this episode.

Warning the dangers facing Hinduism, he said :

“I believe that if Hinduism were to confine itself to its own people and cling to its narrow groove, it would give a mortal blow to its ownself and would be simply destroyed. During the Vedic period, the Vedic religion expressed itself in veiled forms. This was right then, but not now. Do we not see that hidden *mantras* of the times of yore have yielded place to open *mantras* like the names of Ram, Krishna and Hari? This is regarded as the best *Bhakti* path. We must realise the secret behind these open *mantras* and be not so foolish as to spite our own face. I, therefore, appeal to the authorities of the Jagananatha temple to think over this matter.”

IN SOUTH INDIA

After Orrisa, Vinoba began his tour of South India. He spent more than seven months in the Andhra Pradesh. Next Tamil Nad. Addressing a vast mass of humanity gathered at the famous Island grounds of Madras on 18th May 1956, he said :

“The Bhoodan movement is founded on the rock of love and universal brotherhood of

man. We in India should make a start towards our ultimate goal of oneness of the world by considering ourselves as Indians first. We must rise above parochial and caste distinctions. Bhoodan knows no language except the language of love.

“I appeal to you, the people of Tamil Nad, to crown the movement with success.”

The Sarvodaya Sammelan was held at Kancheepuram under the presidentship of Sri Appa Saheb Patwardhan. Thereafter Vinoba undertook three days' fast :

“I feel the necessity of greater purity and more intensive contemplation. I have decided to fast for three days from 1st June to achieve this end. I want to do this partly as an experiment in the hope that it will aid my prayers and the concentration necessary for clarity of thought.”

It began in the morning of 1st June. Vinoba broke it just after seventy-two hours. A brief programme of community spinning and *bhajans* in all the Indian languages marked the occasion. On 7th June, he resumed his *Yatra*.

In the Madurai district of Madras State, Vinoba met with an enthusiastic response. More than hund-

red and fifty villages were offered in Gramdan. The people there are working for *Gram-Swarajya*.

RESOLVE AT KANYA-KUMARI

On 15th April, 1957, Vinoba was at Kanya-Kumari. He went to the famous Vivekananda rock and took the following pledge :

"I solemnly pledge this day, at the feet of Kanya-Kumari, on the shore of the Indian ocean and in the presence of *Suryanarayan* (Sun God) that as long as *Gram-Swarajya* (Swaraj of the village) is not established in India, I shall continue my Yatra and ceaselessly carry on the efforts in that direction. May God give me strength for the achievement of this goal !"

From Tamil Nad to Kerala. In his Kerala tour, Vinoba founded the Shanti-Sena. Also he received 1,571 acres of land from 224 donors. Besides, 301 villages were offered in Gramdan and literature worth Rupees 15,589 was sold. Addressing the Kerala workers on 23rd May 1957, the last day of his tour, he said :

"Gramdans began in Orissa. In Tamil-Nad were laid the foundations of Gram-Swarajya. I came to Kerala with this strength. Here you have formed Shanti-Sena, which has further strengthened me. Day by day, I feel

getting stronger. May God make you stronger likewise !”

YELWAL CONFERENCE

An epoch-making event of Vinoba's Karnatic Yatra is the great Gramdan conference held at Yelwal on September 21 and 22, 1957. It was attended by some of the top-ranking personalities of modern India, *viz.*, Rashtrapati Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Sri Jawaharlal Nehru, Sri Jayaprakash Narayan, Sri E. M. S. Namboodiripad and Sri U. N. Dhebar. Among the important representatives of Government were Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant, Sri Gulzarilal Nanda, Sri Morarji Desai and Sri S. K. Dey, and the Chief Ministers of the States of Bombay, Madras, Mysore and Orissa. Besides, there were Sri Ganga Saran Singh (of the Praja Socialist Party), Dr. Z. A. Ahmad (of the Communist Party of India), Sri R. R. Diwakar (President of the Gandhi Memorial Trust), Shri Pyarelal (formerly Secretary to Mahatama Gandhi), and Sri Sriman Narayan (the then General Secretary of the A. I. C. C.). The conference was convened by the Sarva Seva Sangh.

After hearing Vinoba who traced the rise and growth of the Bhoodan movement, there was a frank and free discussion for two days. Aitst

conclusion, a *communique* was issued. It closed with the words :

“At the conclusion of its two-day deliberations, the Conference expresses its high appreciation of Vinobaji's mission and his efforts to solve national and social problems by non-violent and co-operative methods, and appeals to all sections of the Indian people to give this mission their enthusiastic support.”

It was in Karnataka that Vinoba first placed the idea of *Sarvodaya Patra* before the people. It has since spread in the country. Also he gave the new form of greeting : *JAI JAGAT*.

Vinoba entered Maharashtra on 23rd March 1958. At Pandharpur, the holy shrine, the priestly authorities invited him (together with all members of his Yatra group, which consisted of Muslims as well as Christians along with Hindus) to the temple and pray to the Deity. Thus this great shrine, so far confined to the Hindus, declared open its gates for all human beings—the first in India to take this great step. The Sarvodaya Sammelan was also held there.

In the West Khandesh district, Vinoba obtained a large number of Gramdans in the Akrani and Akkalkuan talukas. Thereafter Vinoba rushed on towards Kashmir. First came Gujarat where he

had spent ten years in his childhood and five years again as an inmate of the Satyagraha Ashram. He addressed his prayer meetings in Gujarati and devout people of Gujarat felt as if their Bapu had come back to them. Leaving Gujarat on 14th January, he came to Rajasthan, famous for her *bhakti* and bravery. Then he entered the Punjab on April 1, 1959.

IN KASHMIR

Spending 51 days there, he set his foot on Kashmir soil on 22nd May with the words :

“My reliance is on God alone. Only His is done. I have come here for three things :
 (i) I want to see, (ii) I want to listen and
 (iii) I want to love. Whatever power God has given me to love, I would use it all here. If it falls short, I would beg of Him for more. In case I am obliged to open my mouth, I would do so only in order to love you. I don't believe in speaking. Let us pray to God with all our heart.”

It was in Kashmir that Vinoba gave vent to his revolutionary idea of the need for combination of science and spirituality. He crossed the great mountain of Pir Panjal and on 28th July, 1959, he

was at Vatlab, the northernmost town in Indian territory. Addressing the people there he said :

“Two and a quarter years ago I was at Kanya-Kumari, the southern tip of the land. This is the northern end. I have come here for the same purpose which took me to Kanya-Kumari. And that purpose is—to join the hearts.... Before me are gathered workers belonging to different political parties. They clash among themselves. If two bullocks yoked to a cart come to a clash, the cart would not proceed. Likewise, the caravan of our nation is not making progress..... My appeal to the politicians (*Siyasat-dan*) is not to become little (*Na-dan*) and I request them to unite for the sake of India's impoverished millions.”

His stay in Kashmir was eventful. People poured their heart before him and listened to his language of love. Vinoba's study of *Koran* proved immensely helpful during this Yatra. The poor inhabitants of that beautiful land recognised him as one of their own. It made a deep impression on Vinoba :

“I came (from Kashmir) with increased self-confidence. This is of two kinds. One is of that of the self and emanates from within; other is *lok-sakshatkar*, of that of the masses.

and emanates from without. I went to Kashmir with the former within me. But I have returned equipped with the latter also and I now feel a realisation of such strength as I had not known earlier from the outer point of view."

AGAINST INDECENT POSTERS

Back to the Punjab, the eastern districts this time. Thereafter he proceeded towards Indore through the Chambal Valley area of Madhya Pradesh. Passing through the western districts of U. P. from April 8 to May 12, 1960, he entered the Chambal Valley—the Morena and Bhind districts. The devoted labours of the late Major-General Yadunath Singh and other Shanti-Sainiks bore fruit and several dacoits presented themselves to Vinoba (as we shall see in the next chapter):

On July 24, 1960 Vinoba came to Indore and stayed in this city for full one month. He asked its inhabitants to make Indore a Sarvodaya City. During the course of his stay in Indore, he covered every locality and met all sections of the people. There his eyes fell upon indecent cinema posters displayed on the walls and in public places. He called them as "free and compulsory education in sensuality," and urged upon the people to do

away with them. He even recommended Satyagraha for this purpose :

“My views in this matter are quite clear and unambiguous. In case I were to find you or the Government careless or indifferent in this connection, I can take to Satyagraha on an all-India scale. In the last ten years, I have been trying to check wrong Satyagraha. But in this regard, I am going to conduct Satyagraha myself. Mentally I have prepared myself for it. I would be obliged if you yourselves resolve to remove these ugly posters, otherwise Satyagraha is inevitable.”

After Vinoba left Indore, an indecent poster, with due notice to its owner, was removed and burnt. The movement has since spread in different parts of the country.

IN BIHAR AGAIN

From Indore, Vinoba marched on towards Assam. Passing through eastern Madya Pradesh and south-eastern U. P., he re-entered Bihar on Christmas Day 1960. He reminded the people of Bihar to fulfill their pledge of 32 lakhs of acres and wipe out the curse of landlessness from their midst. He gave them a new slogan :

“*Bighe me Kattha
Dan do Ikattha*”

(Donate one-twentieth of your fertile land and donate all of you together.)

TO ASSAM

Passing through the four districts of northern Bengal, Vinoba set his feet on the soil of Assam on Sunday, 5th March 1961. As he had written to Smt. Ashadevi :

“I am coming to Assam, but not as the ‘compassionate. I am coming there as a devotee of *Samya-Yoga*. Some events came to pass there. They have been dissolved in the past. I do not want to go into that. Nor do I intend to probe into the future. Mine is only to work in the present. I am sure I would not be attacking anybody. And the attack of love is always without attachment.”

And on flows the Bhoodan Ganga—conveying from village to village, from door to door, the message of unity and fraternity and detached action !

CHAPTER IV

SHANTI-SENA

"In the Punjab, we have fifty-five thousand soldiers and large scale rioting on our hands. In Bengal our forces consist of one man, and there is no rioting."

"As a serving officer, as well as an administrator, may I be allowed to pay my tribute to the *One Man Boundary Force*, not forgetting his second in command, Mr. Suhrawardy."

So wrote Lord Mountbatten, the then Governor-General of free India and now Chief of the British Army, to Gandhiji on 26th August, 1947. His achievements as 'one-man boundary-force' have already become an object of legend, history and song. It was in 1938 that the idea of Shanti-Sena struck Gandhiji. But it is obvious that he had been a *Shanti-Sainik* all his life, specially so since he launched the Satyagraha movement in South Africa.

What has transpired since Gandhiji's departure both within the country and without has shown that armed force or the way of violence can no more solve any problems on a permanent basis. To think of reaping a harvest of peace and prosperity by sowing seeds of distrust and preparing

for deadlier weapons is like expecting a silver ore from a tin mine. Everybody knows the disastrous consequences of nuclear warfare and violence. In fact, a combination of science and violence would only lead to sure destruction. If man is to live, science must be wedded to non-violence.

ROLE OF SHANTI-SENA

Through Shanti-Sena, Gandhiji wanted to channelise the forces of justice and truth and non-violence and give them such a shape as to be able to match injustice and evil and violence, and also to build a new society—free from fear and coercion and exploitation. Its was to be a dual role : to work as a peace brigade at times of tension and conflict and as a revolutionary constructive unit at all other times. Through it, again, he would like India to face external aggression or violence. A non-violent state, said he, would be able to face the whole world :

“Indeed the weakest State can render itself immune from attack if it learns the art of non-violence. But a small State, no matter how powerfully armed it is, cannot exist in the midst of a powerful combination of well-armed States. It has to be absorbed by or be under

the protection of one of the members of such a combination.”

CHANGE IN DEFENCE POLICY

Day by day the truth of Gandhi's message as also its practical utility are becoming manifest. Even those adept in the art of war have begun to realise the need of non-violence. In his book, *Defence in the Nuclear Age*, the well-known British commander, Sir Stephens King-Hall, says :

“I have come round to the view that on the facts known to me and after endeavouring to assess the relative dangers of the risks inseparable from our present defence policy and those which seem to arise from the adoption of the alternative policy, I support the idea of changing the basis of our defence strategy from one of violence to one of non-violence. I therefore, advocate the implementation of this policy by a declaration (unilateral if need be, if other powers will not join with us) that the U. K. Government, as from a date to be announced, will abandon the use of nuclear energy for military purpose..... By adopting this new policy my country has a duty to take great risks in a supreme effort to save mankind from its impending doom.”

NON-VIOLENCE OR NON-EXISTENCE ?

Again, Dr. Martin Luther King who led successful campaigns against racial segregation in America, holds the same view. He tells us :

“Mahatma Gandhi has done more than any other person in history to reveal that social problems can be solved without resorting to primitive methods of violence..... His spirit is a continued reminder to oppressed people that it is possible to resist evil and yet not resort to violence.

“The Gandhian influence in some way still speaks to the conscience of the world as nations grapple with international problems. If we fail, on an international scale, to follow the Gandhian principle of non-violence, we may end up by destroying ourselves through the misuse of our own instruments. The choice is no longer between violence and non-violence. *It is now either non-violence or non-existence.*”

Both wisdom and reality demand an honest adherence to the method of non-violence as an alternative, as Gandhi showed, to all wars and conflicts. It is a departure from the beaten track and new venture indeed. But it is bound to prove very fruitful and its potentialities are immense.

THE FIRST UNIT

The response to Gandhiji's call for *Shanti-Sena* was not very enthusiastic. And quite naturally so. For, a country has to be free before its citizens can offer to die at their own will. But the threads in free India were rightly resumed by Vinoba. When he set out on a tour of the trouble-ridden Telangana on 15th April 1951, he observed that he was going as a *Shanti-Sainik* in order to propagate the message of peace. The epoch-making consequences of this *Yatra* are well-known. This *Yatra*, as we have seen, has been instrumental in providing the key for a non-violent and lasting solution of our economic problems. It was six years later when Vinoba was in Kerala that he gave the *Shanti-Sena* idea a concrete shape and formed, on 23rd August 1957, the first unit of *Shanti-Sena* with Sri K. Kelappan, the distinguished leader of Kerala, at its head.

THE FIRST RALLY

The first rally of *Shanti-Sainiks* was held on 2nd March 1959. More than eight hundred *Shanti-Sainiks* marched that morning with Vinoba. They walked a distance of nine miles from Ajmer to Gagwana. Addressing the *Shanti-Sainiks* in the noon, Vinoba said :

“The Shanti-Sena was started by Bapu (Gandhiji) himself who was its first General and also its first soldier. In both capacities, he completed his work. The idea itself is not new; there have been saints in various countries who created Peace Armies, and one may read their history. When I entered Telengana, I thought of myself as a Shanti-Sainik. So far as I am concerned, the work of the Shanti-Sena began there. Ever since then, I have been travelling as a Shanti-Sainik.”

He added :

“This little army contains old men, women, and even the sick. I hope that it will be effective in bringing relief to the suffering. I hope and expect that this Shanti-Sena will be able to relieve misery both in India and throughout the world... When Bhoodan and Gramdan had made a beginning, they helped people to clear their minds about the land problem, and as a result the path of advance became plain; we may expect the initiation of Shanti-Sena, in the same way, to open some other path of advance.”

POWER OF AGGRESSIVE LOVE

But what shall be the weapon of these soldiers of peace ? Vinoba's answer is : LOVE. How-

ever, it is not that love which is offered in return of love. This 'reciprocal love' is found even in animals. There is no force in it. On the other hand, 'aggressive love', or love towards those who hate us, generates power. In Vinoba's words :

“Men are puzzled as to how problems could be solved by love. Power does not lie in 'reciprocal love,' but only in 'aggressive love.' Reciprocal love creates no new power. There is nothing out of the ordinary in returning love for love; what is extraordinary is to return love for hate. That may sound a very strange thing. But that is where strength lies, and it is that discipline of love that we must discover.”

It is India's mission to build up the power of love and show its efficacy in solving our problems. Modern science also beckons in this direction. In one of his post-prayer addresses in Kerala, Vinoba observed :

“If we can demonstrate this power of love in India, and use it to solve our own problems, it will be the salvation of the whole world. Are not people every where longing to see love revealed in power ? Violence has no strength, it does not take sides, it helps all parties, for science has made a kind of mindless force

available to everyone. Men are beginning to understand that their real problems cannot be solved by violence, and that the time has come to put love into practice. But it is said that love has never yet been practised, in spite of the Vedas and the Koran, in spite of the Lord Buddha and of Jesus Christ. How then, men ask, can we expect practise it now? Men failed to practise it hitherto, because their minds were not prepared; now, thanks to Science, the mental climate is favourable.”

Vinoba announced the formation of All India Shanti-Sena Mandal on 24th September 1959 at Pathankote. Speaking on that occasion, he remarked. :

“I did not think that the actual task of organising the Shanti-Sena would devolve on me. During my tour of Kerala, I realised that the time has come to do this. It was not the particular circumstance in Kerala which prompted me to think so, but the general atmosphere in the whole of the country appeared to be explosive.”

He continued :

“It is necessary, even for the healthy growth of those processes of peaceful revolution in which we are already engaged, that we should

make ourselves responsible for peace. This does not mean that we dare to think that we can save the world. That power does not lie in us, but in the nature of non-violence. It is our faith that non-violence can claim to save the world, that it does possess the strength to do it, and that is the goal towards which we must strive."

SURRENDER OF DACOITS

The idea has since gathered momentum. There are about two thousand Shanti-Sainiks (including women also) in the country. They have done creditable work in Kerala, Tamil Nad, Bihar, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and in Assam.

What happened in the Chambal Valley (in Madhya Pradesh) when Vinoba visited it in May 1960 has won popular renown. Nineteen leading dacoits, who carried prizes for their heads, surrendered before him and laid down their arms. The urge which took Vinoba to Telangana also brought him to the Chambal Valley. There he gave his message of fearlessness and compassion and truth:

"We must make our hearts generous. Miserliness produces thieves and dacoits. I often say that a miser is the father of thief. In Telen-gana, people donated 12,000 acres of land where-

after the problem (The Government was spending five crores a year) was solved. The same is the problem here. People take to evil ways. Once they become generous this feature will disappear. We must observe self-restraint. Secondly we must be generous and charitable. Thirdly we must be fearless. Fearlessness does not come through arms but by virtue of the soul. Thus the important things for us all to do are—gift of love, observance of self-restraint and cultivation of fearlessness.”

Further, he made it clear that no amount of coercion or violent force could wipe out the menace of the area. Only peaceful methods and a friendly approach would serve the purpose :

“Nobody is a dacoit by birth. Nor is he a dacoit for life. Yet it is said that dacoits have been killed. Then where have these others come from ? The dacoits have been subdued, but not the dacoit-tendency. It is therefore not possible to wipe out dacoits by the force of arms. Violence only begets violence. Violence, to be vanquished, must be met with non-violence.”

It was this soothing Ganga of love, peace and non-violence which flowed from place to place.

Those who surrendered to Vinoba remained with him for a few days and were then sent on the night of 23rd May to the district Jail of Bhind. Bidding them farewell, he gave one and the same message to them : "Keep your mind on right lines and turn yourself to the devotion of God !" Next day he met them in the jail and offered his morning prayers in their company.

Those who had surrendered were given no assurance. Vinoba's firm injunction was—"Unconditional." In fact, confession and assurance do not go together. Confession, to be real, must be unconditional. They must be prepared to face every trial :

"The Law of the Government has its own bounds. There is no question of going against it. I shall try that justice should be meted to all of them. They would be provided with legal aid. Their children would be looked after. They would get justice. But they must not think of amnesty or pardon. If you get amnesty here you will be punished there at His."

Before leaving this area, Vinoba entrusted the follow-up work of rehabilitation and reconstruction to an earnest group of tried workers who are Shanti-Sainiks all. They set up a body of their own, known as *Chambal Valley Shanti Committee*.

Its office has been located in the town of Bhind. This committee works under the guidance of the All India Sarva Seva Sangh and keeps in close touch with Vinoba.

Thus have been laid the foundations for enacting a peaceful and non-violent revolution in this much-dreaded region. The task is stupendous indeed. The Shanti-Sainiks have to do or die. It is hoped that power of non-violence and peace would emerge, happy results would follow and people's woe come to an end. In the book of life of the Chambal Valley people, the chapter of conflict and bloodshed would come to a close, and a new era of peace and harmony would open.

THE CHALLENGE

In Assam too, which was, in July 1960, the scene of unhappy disturbances, born of linguistic and political rivalries, members of Shanti-Sena did some quiet work. They were able to infuse to some extent self-confidence in the suffering populous and thus help the people come together.

Both from the points of view of prosperity of the people and of the defence of the country, adoption of non-violence as a creed is an urgent necessity. But it is the people who have to give the lead and the Governments shall inevitably follow. The

Shanti-Sena bids fair to defend India by non-violence as also to transform her social structure. It looks like a dream no doubt. But the dreams of today are the realities of tomorrow. Meanwhile Shanti-Sena has to undergo much hardship and suffering before it may be able to deliver the goods. The situation today throws it an open challenge. Its members have to face the ordeal of their life.

CHAPTER V . . .

THE NEW DAWN

“Will you please give me your horoscope ?” asked an astrologer.

“Why ? What shall you do with it ?” inquired Vinoba.

“A look at that will enable me to know the effect of Venus, Mercury and Saturn etc. on you and thus I can foretell your future.”

“First let me know whether your Venus, Mercury etc. are active or inert. ?”

“They are inert, of course.”

“But I am active and alive. Then tell me which can be more effective—an inert body or a living being ?”

Thoroughly non-plussed, the astrologer went away in despair.

With a smile, Vinoba added : “Don’t worry about my future. To me the present is more important.”

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“The ulcer is giving you a lot of trouble. It is necessary to consult some doctors,” said an esteemed worker to Vinoba one day.

“You need not mind it. I can carry on well.

“Still, we may have the doctors’ opinion.”

He agreed and some doctors saw him. After mutual consultation, the Civil Surgeon turned to Vinoba and said :

“We are all unanimous on one point.”

“What’s that ?”

“That you should abandon this *Yatra* for three months and take to regular treatment.”

Vinoba was quiet. Then he uttered in a feeble voice :

“Please excuse me. The wound is in the stomach and not on the leg.”

Then he added :

“I am duty-bound to carry on my *Pada-Yatra* till my pledge is fulfilled or I fall down.”

So saying, he closed his eyes and went into a trance. For five minutes he sat straight and with closed eyes. Opening them he said, “Don’t think about my health. It is like a tussle between God and myself. You need not bother about it. Let us do our duty.”

* * * *

While in Kashmir *Yatra*, Vinoba carried ten pounds luggage on his own shoulders. Somebody asked him :

“Why do you carry so much weight ?”

“In order to realise the plight of the labouring poor.”

“The labourers are far stronger and more experienced too. They can do it better.”

“True. But it is cruel to go bare-shouldered ourselves and burden them with the entire load.”

“It is a matter of practice.”

“No, it is inhuman. Moreover, I see in them the Toiling God.”

With a pause he added:

“And don't you see, carrying luggage on the shoulders enables me to gain weight!”

At this, all burst into laughter.

SAMYA-YOGI SOCIETY

Modern in outlook, vigilant in action, and full of compassion, Vinoba has been ceaselessly trying to identify himself with the poorest, and lowliest, and lost. They cannot come into their own unless we have a social order free from exploitation and coercion. This requires the society to be recast in such a manner as to enable the lowest feel as rich as the tallest. Vinoba has given it the meaningful name of *Samya-Yogi* society.

Basing its philosophy on the four verses of the *Gita* (Chapter VI, Verses 29-32), he holds out three requisites for *Samya-Yogi* society as follows:

1. No power should be dominant in society; there should only be a discipline of good thought;

2. All faculties of the individual to be dedicated to society which must provide the individual with opportunity for growth and development.

3. The moral, social and economic value of all of callings performed honestly should be the same.

Dilating upon it, Vinoba once remarked]:

“*Samya-Yoga* holds that therein dwells in every man the same spirit. It, therefore, makes no distinction between man and man. It even goes further and recognizes no ultimate difference in the spirit of man and other animals.”

Samya-Yoga is not the anti-thesis of some creed or political theory. It is not, like communism, born of reaction, against some established order, [capitalism or fascism. It is no queer protest against a particular *ism* or evil. It has a philosophy of its own combining the best in physical and spiritual sciences. It treats life as an integrated whole and seeks to encompass all in its warm embrace and thus lead to equality and brotherhood. Again, let it not be understood that it is another name for *laissez faire*. Far from it. It aims at discarding stagnant socio-economic values and

establishing new ones—social ownership, equal treatment to mental and physical labour, economic equality, decentralised order and administration, and world citizenship. And above all, its ultimate reliance is on conversion or persuasion and peaceful method.

THIRD FORCE

To build up this order, it is necessary to create what Vinoba calls, a third force. This must not be confused with third bloc, keeping equidistant from both the U. S. A. and the U. S. S. R. and adopting an attitude of constructive neutrality towards both. It is easy to see that this third bloc is essentially made of the same elements that constitute the two forces it seeks to face. The truth is that it also depends upon arms as much as others do and regards violence as the last word in the go of the day. We, unhappily like any other nation, are arming our country as much as we can and have our ultimate reliance on arms. It is very doubtful, therefore, that the champions of the third bloc would be able to hold their own in the case of a global conflict. Composed of poorer nations which do not resort to nuclear armament, not because they do not want it but because they cannot afford the same, it can command little attention. Hence the need of generating a *Third Force*,

markedly different from the known two, cannot be too much emphasised.

Realising this urge of the times, Vinoba holds :

“We should create *Jan-Shakti* or self-reliant power of the people. It should be distinguished from the other two forms of power—the power of violence and the power of the State. The power of the people is the opposite of the power of violence, and though there is no direct opposition between the power of the people and the power of the State, yet the two are qualitatively different.....our aim is not merely at doing acts of kindness, but at creating a Kingdom of Kindness.....I therefore, want to devote myself to the creation of *Jan-Shakti*, the forging of sanctions of enlightened public opinion.”

LOKA-NITI

Through this *Third Force*, Vinoba seeks to give a new orientation to politics, or to give it its real name, power-politics. It needs no prophetic vision to state that politics today, specially in our country, is leading to dissensions, bitterness and distrust. It is losing its touch with reality. It is dividing people and making them narrow and self-centred. It is not the politics which Gandhiji practised and

taught all his life. He was unequivocal on this point :

“Some friends have told me that truth and non-violence have no place in politics and worldly affairs. I do not agree. I have no use for them as a means of individual salvation. Their introduction and application in everyday life has been my experiment all along.....

“We have to make truth and non-violence, not matters for mere individual practice but for practice by groups and communities and nations. That at any rate is my dream. I shall live and die in trying to realize it. My faith helps me to discover new truths everyday. *Abimsa* is the attribute of the soul, and therefore to be practised by everybody in all the affairs of life.”

Such was the politics Gandhiji taught us. But what followed after Swaraj and Gandhiji's departure warped our course and politics became associated with devotion to party and adoration of power. Unfortunately, in our parliamentary affairs we began to imitate western conventions and paid little heed to our own genius and circumstances. The democracy so built up in India became a strange replica of the British model. That party based elections or party-politics is not necessarily con-

ductive to people's true welfare and democracy has been conspicuously established by what has happened in our country. Divided by so many differences of caste, creed and language, it has further aggravated mutual bitterness and sectarian prejudices.

Foreseeing its untoward consequences, Vinoba feels the urgent necessity of doing away with power politics or transforming it on Gandhiji's lines. He has, therefore, made a plea for *Lok-Niti*, or politics of the people. Putting this idea in a public meeting, he once said :

“So long as a country is not free, all strength must be concentrated towards securing political power. But once the latter is attained every effort must be directed towards the achievement of social and economic revolution. Hence, if you feel that strength lies merely in capturing political power, I must then say that you have missed the secret of Swaraj. You should, therefore, understand that those who offer life for a non-violent revolution based on *Bhoodan-Yajna*, do not at all renounce their object of achieving radical social change. The Bhoodan movement seeks to wipe off the present party differences and establish, what I call, *Loka-Niti* or discover the new dynamic

of social action which is not a by-product of governmental policy.”

This *Loka-niti* is based on the *Third Force*, as pointed out above. The formation of *Samya-Yogi* society through the implementation of *Loka-niti* by means of the agency of the *Third Force* or Shanti-Sena may sound ambitious. But no, the Bhoodan-Gramdan movement has paved the way. The fact that 43,52,866 acres of land (of which 8,33,466 acres have been distributed among about three lakhs of landless families) have been donated in Bhoodan and 4,752 villages have been offered in Gramdan is a veritable pointer.

BHOODAN MOVEMENT

But it may be argued that the Bhoodan target remains unfulfilled and the problem of the landless continues. True. It must not be forgotten, however, that no political party in power or outside, has been instrumental in providing the desired land for the landless. The Congress adopted the famous resolution on ceiling and co-operative farming at Nagpur in January 1959. But to what end? It is gathered that the amount of land that would be available after the imposition of ceiling in all the States of the country would be about eight to nine lakhs of acres. Undoubtedly that

would not be of very good quality and also most of it would lead to litigation. Further, all of it would not go to the landless. Those in touch with the various elements of our peasantry need not be told that there are strong, influential and resourceful interests which dominate the *panchayats* and make it very hard for them to render justice to the landless. Also some State Governments propose to auction land obtained after ceiling, which is a sure guarantee of its denial to the really deserving.

It must, therefore, be admitted that neither the Government nor the political parties have been able to secure even as much land for the landless as the Bhoodan movement has done during the last ten years. No doubt that it has so far failed in realising its targets, but even in its failure its success has surpassed that of all others.

This is, however, no consolation. The movement stands committed to its resolve and Vinoba marches onward on his feet as steadfastly as ever. He knows neither rest nor defeat and is nearer his goal day by day.

But the Bhoodan movement is not to be judged in terms of mere donations of Gramdan and acres of land. Rendering help to the poor and those in distress is but one of its three objectives. The other two, no less important, are :

(i) Rousing people's consciousness to a sense of justice and transforming the socio-economic structure;

(ii) Generating the power of peace and establishing the efficacy of the peaceful and non-violent method.

SARVODAYA-PATRA

It may well be asked whether the people are prepared to take a turn in the direction of the Sarvodaya idealism and work for the Sarvodaya Samaj. One must be sure of the people's sanction behind it. For that very purpose, Vinoba has, as it were, given the programme of *Sarvodaya-Patra* to the nation. He expects every household to maintain a pot or vessel or container and wants the youngest member, boy or girl, to add a handful of grain to it every morning before meal or breakfast. Its proceeds will be utilised for Shanti-Sena work. A regular maintenance of the *Sarvodaya-Patra* will indicate the willingness of the people for a Sarvodaya order of society and their refusal to be a party to any armed combat or conflict.

The *Sarvodaya-Patra* has not yet become universal in India. But the progress it has made in certain areas, specially in the Krishna and Guntur districts of Andhra and at some other places,

shows its huge possibilities. Gradually it is getting more popular.

WAY OF PROGRESS

Through the two-fold programme of Bhoodan-Gramdan and Shanti-Sena-cum-Sarvodaya-Patra, Vinoba proposes to give a new direction to our socio-economic frame-work and thus pave the way for a classless society. It is not necessary to traverse all those stages which other nations had to pass. A mere turn is enough. In Vinoba's words :

“Historians tell us that society continuously progresses in a cyclic order. In that course, some people are ahead, some in the middle and some behind. So also in other paths. But the peculiarity of the cyclic path is that if somebody turns about his face, he gets the lead and the rest fall in the rear. To turn the direction is the simplest way to outstrip others.”

TO TRIBAL PEOPLE

Referring to people living in the hilly and tribal regions, wrongly regarded as backward, he said :

“These people readily agree to transfer land-ownership to the village as a whole. Others who know Communism, Socialism and other *isms* are attracted more by money than

by those *isms*. They like the words Communism and Socialism provided their pockets are full. But not so the *adivasis* or tribal people who work in community even these days. They also sing and dance and perform their ceremonies in a community. If the Sarvodaya thought is explained to them, if they are told that ownership of land and capital should be abolished and the village treated as one family, they can easily grasp this concept."

NEED OF BRAHMA-VIDYA

Vinoba has great hope from these people. His conviction is :

"If rightly educated, they would be able to produce remarkable leaders and pioneers, even as a dry soil, lying waste for years, yields a plentiful crop when properly cultivated. They are already full of life. Right education or *Nai Talim*, not the current education which adds to the army of the unemployed, would generate *Vichar-Shakti* (Vital power) that would accomplish wonders. Let *Brahma-Vidya* be taught to them so that they may recognise their inner power or soul force..... The diversities met in our land would become our strength provided the unifying thread of *Atma-Gyan*

(Self-knowledge) integrates them all. And the two together would render society harmonious, noble and strong. The Sarvodaya ideology proceeds to incorporate them both.”

CHRIST'S MESSAGE

Vinoba has been continuously stressing the role of *Brahma-Vidya*. He is confident that, sooner rather than later, the world would come to appreciate the contribution of Indian *Brahma-Vidya* to the evolution of human thought and behaviour. On the Christmas Day, 1954, he dwelt at length on this aspect while paying his respectful homage to Jesus Christ :

“Jesus called upon us to love our neighbour. But though this has been extolled as a great virtue by all nations, few have been found prepared in practice to accept it as their immediate obligation..... We talk of love and non-violence and still devote the bulk of our resources to piling up armaments for mutual destruction. We despair of our neighbour. This is cowardice. Jesus refused to succumb to such faint-heartedness. He bore the Cross—the burden of our sins—and embraced martyrdom.

“Luckily the teaching of Jesus is not alien to India. We have been meeting the ground of

a multitude of races, creeds and cultures; a land of synthesis and fusion. Gurudev Tagore sang of this land as a great ocean of unity. Tribes and races, creeds and cultures are fused and out of them emerges a synthesis worthy to receive the world's attention. There has been in the life of our people an underlying unity which transcends nationalism and all other barriers between man and man."

Declaring that India, by her emphasis on non-killing and looking upon the least of God's creatures as one's self, had accepted Christ long ago, Vinoba made a fervent appeal for assimilation of *Brahma-Vidya* :

"It is for our Christian brethren, now that their foreign trappings are shed, to subscribe to the indigenous Indian background suited to our genius. And I also suggest that similar processes of wholesome assimilation may take place among the followers of Islam and other religions; Christians and Muslims of India who have hitherto held fast to their moorings and their traditions should no longer remain strangers to the Hindu cultural background. They can easily assimilate the Indian *Brahma-Vidya*. It would broaden their outlook and confer a wholesome spirit of quest and tolerance to

their religious approach and add lustre to their culture. Such a consummation, I submit, will render easier what each one of us wants to propagate, and would make a worthy contribution to the growth of a common world culture. Let us realise that we have come of age. We no longer belong to the past; we hasten to the dawn of a new day for man."

THE NEW SOCIETY

It is Vinoba's faith in the new dawn that inspires all of his activities. On the basis of *Brahma-Vidya* shall be built the edifice of new society in which there will be no walls, physical or mental, between man and man and each will get equal opportunity to develop according to his or her genius. Steadily and quietly, he is working for it and expects others to do so.

The other day a Church dignitary saw him and asked :

"What can I do for your movement, Vinobaji !"

"There is little for me to say anything new".

When he insisted, Vinoba observed :

"All that I can say is we must preach less and practise more."

"Quite true !"

As the Bishop offered his hand to Vinoba to take leave, his eyes fell upon a ring in the former's finger. He inquired :

“What is this ring made of ?”

“Of gold.”

“But the Lord used to say : ‘It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God,’ and His cross was simply of wood.”

Nodding his head in assent, the Bishop bade adieu.

Vinoba thus calls upon us to re-discover ourselves and cleanse our heart of avarice, of acquisitiveness and fill it with a regal benevolence that those in power would envy. With the instrument of ‘aggressive love’, he seeks to mend the split-personality of both the individual and society by blasting the barriers raised up by money and land-ownership. His is to set into being a new social process in which the awakened man and society will proceed towards the cherished goal through self-endeavour and mutual reliance. With a detached spirit and dedicated mind, he goes firmly on his feet with his characteristic humility:

“People inquire whether the work I am doing would meet with success or not. But

it is not my work. It is God's. Personally my mission would triumph only when truth, love and compassion overflow my heart. I would consider myself successful if my heart were filled with so much compassion as to make my body break down and collapse."

OUR IMPORTANT PUBLICATIONS

Vinoba's works, originally written in Marathi, have appeared in different Indian languages. Four of them have appeared in English :

1. **TALKS ON THE GITA**—Given to his fellow-prisoners in Dhulia Jail in 1932, these talks have become popular all over the country. Their great value lies in the author's attempt to show the application of basic human values to the religious thought and socio-economic conditions of the present age.

This work helps the reader, as pointed out by *The TIMES*, London, "to see beyond the public figure, into the mind and personality of this remarkable man."

It further says :

"It is not theology or dry scholastic commentary that we get in these pages, but a living experience; an account, rich in imagery and allusion, of the indelible impression of one of the world's greatest scriptures made on the mind and heart of a man of rare sensitivity and passion.....The whole is patently a work of love. A spirit of joy breathes from every page, and frequently his contemplation of the scripture inspires Vinoba to poetry.

2. **THOUGHTS ON EDUCATION**—The essays and speeches compiled here are the response of a true teacher to the doubts and needs of the people assembled to hear him on different occasions. The views expressed in this book are at once radical and inspiring. Vinoba has something greater to offer than a system; he has the insight of a sage and the spirit of a pioneer.

3. **SCIENCE AND SELF-KNOWLEDGE**—This is a collection of Vinoba's lectures describing his revolutionary thought of the need of fusion of science and self-knowledge. In this book, Vinoba points out that the progress of science demands that the individual should transcend the limits of mind and attain to the supramental level of consciousness.

4. **SHANTI-SENA**—A book containing Vinoba's various speeches which clearly convey the meaning and place of Shanti-Sena (Peace Army), and its organisation and working.

5. **FROM SOCIALISM TO SARVODAYA**—(By Jayaprakash Narayan)—A historical statement which gives a wellknit account of the evolution of J. P's thought. In his introduction, Vinoba says, : "I am sure that this statement will encourage readers to give deep thought to the *Sarvodaya* philosophy."

6. **VINOBA AND HIS MISSION**—(By Suresh Ram)
A book giving a comprehensive account of the birth and

growth of the Bhoodan movement. Therein is offered says Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, the Vice-President of the Indian Republic, in his Foreword, "a moving account of the way in which Shri Vinoba was led to this movement and the progress it has made. It should be read by all who are interested in this unique campaign, its objects and its philosophy."

7. **BHOODAN** —(English Weekly—Edited by Siddharaj Dhaddha)—An organ of the Bhoodan movement, giving a vivid picture of Bhoodan, Shanti-Sena and allied activities in the country.

Books by Vinoba



1. Talks on Gita
2. Thoughts on Education
3. Science & Self Knowledge
4. Bhoodan Yajna
5. Shanti Sena
6. Swaraj Shastra
7. From Bhoodan to Gramdan
8. Sampattidan
9. Sarvodaya & Communism

