VINOBA

HIS LIFE AND WORK

by
SHRIMAN NARAYAN

FOREWORD
by
V. V. GIRI
President of India

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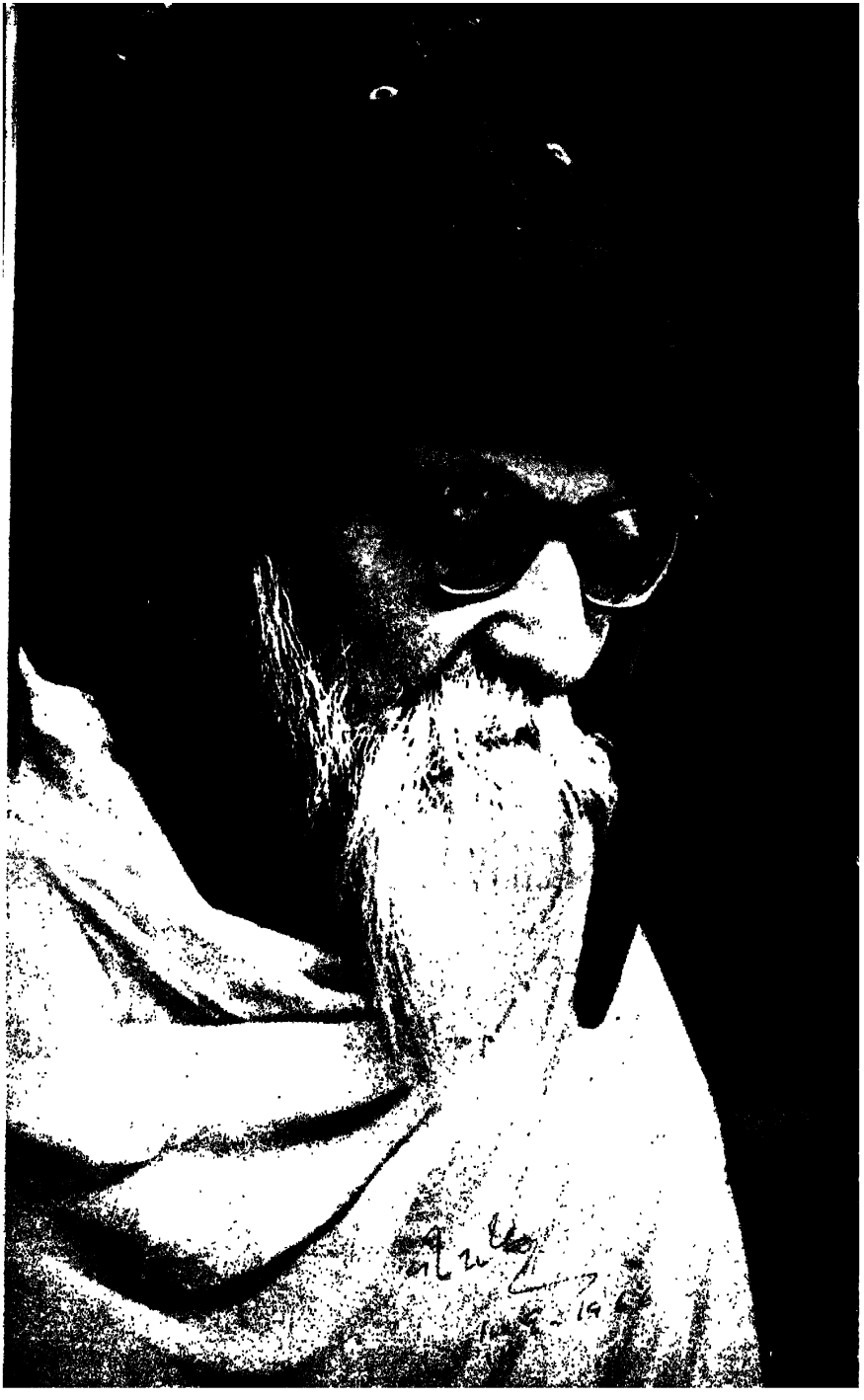
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To

Vinoba's devout mother

Rukminidevi



Foreword

राष्ट्रपति भवन, नई दिल्ली-4
RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN
NEW DELHI-4

August 17, 1970.

I AM happy that my esteemed friend, Shriman Narayan, has written a definitive biography of Acharya Vinoba Bhave. It is but fitting and proper that a co-worker of Mahatma Gandhi who has been intimately associated with the work of the Acharya should undertake to write his biography.

Vinobaji, the spiritual successor of Bapu, has creatively followed the great traditions of his master. As he says, all his activities throughout his life have been motivated by the sole purpose of achieving the union of hearts. A deeply religious man with a brilliant intellect, Vinobaji preaches what he practises and it is our great good fortune that a *Karmayogi* like him is present in our midst and is unerringly pointing the right path to us. Shriman Narayan has graphically described the origin of the Bhoodan Movement nearly two decades ago. Today this movement has spread over the length and breadth of the country and has attracted the attention of the world.

Gramdan and Gram Swaraj are noble concepts and it requires strenuous work to translate them into reality. It is a pity attempts are being made today to divert the energies of our people in a wrong direction. Those who have the interests of the country at heart will be distressed at the current spirit

of lawlessness and violence. In the land of Buddha and Mahatma Gandhi it is travesty of our profession if we seek to achieve our objectives through this method. Lawlessness and violence are no substitutes for reason and constructive work. I have no doubt that the *tapasya* of great men like Mahatma Gandhi and Acharya Vinoba Bhave will not go in vain and those who resort to violence will realise their folly and follow the path of reason.

Shriman Narayan's perceptive account of Vinobaji's life and work is, indeed, a valuable contribution to understanding some of the basic problems confronting the nation today. I have great pleasure in commending Shriman Narayan's labour of love to the people.



Introduction

RISHI VINOBA completes his seventy-five years on 11 September this year. Rich tributes will be paid to him on this happy occasion in India and also in several other countries which are familiar with his creative work. Some friends suggested that I should prepare a detailed volume on Vinoba's life and work for presenting it to him on his 75th birthday. I readily agreed to undertake this pleasant though onerous responsibility as a matter of privilege as well as duty.

People recognize Vinoba generally as 'the First Satyagrahi' and pioneer of the 'land-gift' movement; very little is known about his early life in Baroda, dedicated work at the Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad, significant educational experiments in the Satyagraha Ashram at Wardha and intensive efforts for rural re-construction through the Gramseva Mandal at Nalwadi. I have tried to gather all the available information on these aspects of Vinoba's life from various sources in order to make this publication as comprehensive as possible.

Mahatma Gandhi exercised deep influence on the life and work of Vinoba for many years, and the Gramdan movement is essentially in line with the Gandhian tradition of 'trusteeship' and satyagraha. Vinoba has, however, added new dimensions to Gandhian thought and constructive activity in the sphere of socio-economic renaissance. While he will be long remembered as the Bhoodan leader who tried to solve the land problem in India through non-violent and peaceful methods, his original contribution to educational philosophy, political thought, and spiritual *sādhanā* would, doubtless, be ranked as of the

highest order by the generations to come. Vinoba will be reckoned as one of the most outstanding *Rishis* India has produced through the centuries.

In the preparation of this Volume, I have received notable help and guidance from Vinoba's two brothers, Balkoba and Shivaji, and I am, indeed, very grateful to them. Babaji Moghe, the only living associate of Vinoba from the early days, has conveyed to me several less known facets of his life. I have also received considerable assistance from some inmates of the Sabarmati Ashram, particularly Mamasaheb Phadke and Prabhudas Gandhi.

Finally, I should like to express my deep sense of gratitude to President V. V. Giri for writing a valuable Foreword to this publication.

Raj Bhavan
Ahmedabad
September 1, 1970

Shriman Narayan

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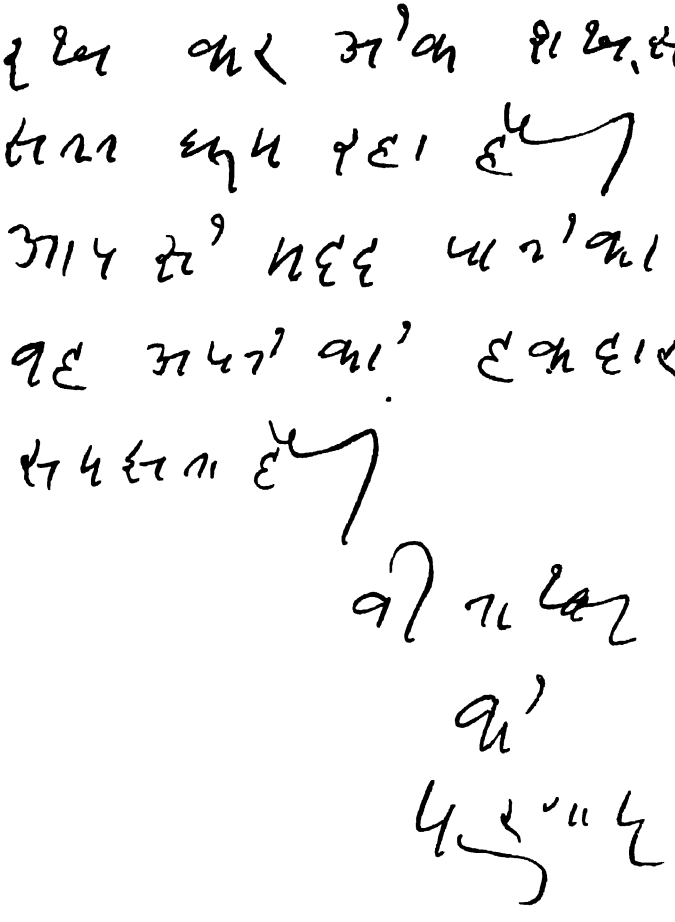
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English translation of this letter in Hindi reproduced here in Vinoba's own handwriting is given on p. 226.

1

The First Satyagrahi

It was in October 1940 that, for the first time, Acharya Vinoba Bhave's name was flashed in banner headlines on the front pages of newspapers in India as well as abroad. After the outbreak of the Second World War, the British Government had drawn India into this global holocaust without seeking the consent of the nation. The only alternative, therefore, before the Indian National Congress was to non-co-operate with all efforts to mobilize the support of the Indian people in favour of the War. After serious discussions in the Congress Working Committee, it was decided to seek guidance from Mahatma Gandhi regarding the pattern of civil resistance to be launched against the British Government. After considering all aspects, Gandhiji decided to launch an individual satyagraha movement as distinguished from mass civil disobedience as on earlier occasions. In the light of political conditions obtaining at that time, Mahatma Gandhi wanted to lay greater emphasis on quality rather than on numbers. On this criterion, he selected Vinoba as the first satyagrahi—civil resister—and Jawaharlal Nehru, the second.

Before announcing Vinoba's name as the first satyagrahi, Gandhiji decided to go to Pavnar and seek his consent. He told Vinoba:

"The Congress has asked me to launch a struggle against the British Government and has left the mode and time of the movement to me. I propose to begin with individual satyagraha, and I have your name in mind as the first satyagrahi."

"As you deem proper", was Vinoba's humble reply.

"Do I take it that you agree to my proposal?"

"Bapu, I do."

"You must be busy with a variety of activities in your Ashram. I hope you will be able to free yourself from them."

"I carry no load on my head", put in Vinoba. "I am as prepared to obey your call here and now even as I would be, if the *Yamaraj*—God of Death—had sent for me."

Both Jamnalal Bajaj and Mahadev Desai who had accompanied Gandhiji to Pavnar were deeply touched by this rare example of voluntary obedience and dedication.

Introducing Vinoba to the people of India and the world, Gandhiji issued a comprehensive statement on 5 October 1940:

> "Who is Vinoba Bhave and why has been selected for offering individual civil disobedience in 1940? He is an undergraduate, having left college after my return to India in 1916. He is a Sanskrit scholar. He joined the Ashram almost at its inception. He was among the first members... In order to better qualify himself, he took one year's leave to prosecute further studies in Sanskrit. And practically at the same hour at which he had left the Ashram a year before, he walked into it without notice. I had forgotten that he was due to arrive that day. He has taken part in every menial activity of the Ashram from scavenging to cooking. Though he has a marvellous memory and is a student by nature, he has devoted the largest part of his time to spinning in which he has specialized as very few have. He believes in universal spinning being the central activity which will remove the poverty in the villages and put life into their deadness. Being a born teacher, he has been of the utmost assistance to Ashadevi Aryanayakam of Hindustani Talimi Sangh in her development of the scheme of education through handicrafts. Sri Vinoba has produced a textbook, taking spinning as the handicraft. It is original in conception. He has made scoffers realize that spinning is the handicraft *par excellence* which lends itself to being

effectively used for basic education. He has revolutionized *Takli* spinning and drawn out its hitherto unknown possibilities. For perfect spinning, probably, he has no rival in all India.

"He has abolished every trace of untouchability from his heart. He believes in communal unity with the same passion that I have. In order to know the best mind of Islam, he gave one year to the study of the Koran in the original. He, therefore, learned Arabic. He found his study necessary for cultivating a living contact with the Muslims living in his neighbourhood.

"He has an army of disciples and workers, who would rise to any sacrifice at his bidding. He is responsible for producing a young man who has dedicated himself to the service of lepers. Though an utter stranger to medicine, this worker has by singular devotion mastered the method of treatment of lepers and is running several clinics for their care. Hundreds owe their cure to his labours. He has published a handbook in Marathi for the treatment of lepers. Vinoba was for years director of the Mahila Ashram in Wardha. His devotion to the cause of *Daridranarayan* took him first to a village near Wardha, and now he has gone still further and lives in Pavnar, five miles from Wardha, from where he has established contact with villagers through the disciples he has trained.

"Vinoba believes in the necessity of the political independence of India. He is an accurate student of history. But he believes that real independence of the villagers is impossible without the constructive programme of which Khadi is the centre. He believes that the spinning wheel is the most suitable outward symbol of non-violence which has become an integral part in the previous Satyagraha campaigns. He has never been in the limelight on the political platform. With many co-workers he believes that silent constructive work with civil disobedience in the background is far more effective than the already heavily crowded political platform. And he thoroughly believes that non-violent resistance is impossible without a hearty belief in and practice of constructive work."

But this was not the first time when Gandhiji had talked or written about Vinoba. As early as June 1916, he had informed his father at Baroda in the course of a brief letter: "Your son Vinoba is with me. He has acquired at so tender an age such high-spiritedness and asceticism as took me years of patient labour to do."

In the course of his correspondence with this young inmate of the Ashram, Gandhiji further wrote: "I don't know what epithet to use in respect of you. Your love and character overwhelm me."

In 1917, when Rev. C. F. Andrews was staying at the Sabarmati Ashram, Gandhiji described to him Vinoba's qualities in these words: "He is one of the few pearls in the Ashram. They do not come like others to be blessed by the Ashram, but to bless it, not to receive, but to give! "

Rajagopalachari in the course of an article in *Young India* dated 19 July 1923, described Vinoba as "gentle as an angel, whose soaring spirit has reached the heights of scholarship, philosophy and religion, and yet, whose humility is so genuine and successful that no official who does not know him can discover his greatness".

Mahadev Desai, Gandhiji's illustrious Secretary, writing in the same issue of *Young India,* described Vinoba thus:

"He does not talk much; rarely does he say anything about himself. And yet if you could get at the bottom of his profound depths, you are sure to exclaim: 'nowhere have I struck such treasures'. I do not think there is anyone in the C. P. jails today who can sit beside Vinoba with his sturdy asceticism, his profound religious and philosophical learning, his matchless power of penance and self-discipline and a rare humility which probably is a product of all the rest."

During this period, Vinoba was a prisoner in the Nagpur jail. He was arrested in 1923 at the time of the Flag Satyagraha which had been started by Jamnalal Bajaj and attracted countrywide attention.

Again towards the close of 1932, Vinoba wrote a letter to Gandhiji giving the details of his work in the villages around Wardha and seeking his guidance. In his reply, Gandhiji addressed him as *Kritayugi* Vinoba and observed: "If some-

thing must be said, it is enough to say that the fiery ordeal you are going through would build a bridge between heaven and earth!"

Sometime later, Gandhiji again wrote to Vinoba in his own hand: "Your love and faith fill my eyes with tears of joy. I may or may not deserve them. But they are sure to do you infinite good. You will be instrument of great service."

Although Vinoba participated in the civil disobedience movement of 1930 at Wardha, the British Government did not arrest him. But in 1932, he was sent to Dhulia jail in Khandesh, Maharashtra, where he delivered *Talks on the Gita* to the fellow-prisoners every Sunday. These talks were later published in book form as *Gita Pravachanen,* which has been translated in all the Indian regional languages and additionally, in English, Sanskrit and Nepali. This publication is now regarded as one of the best commentaries on the *Bhagwad Gita* and millions of copies have reached the hands of readers during the last two decades. In truth, this is the only book which Vinoba readily autographs at the end of his prayer meetings.

During the individual satyagraha movement, Vinoba delivered a speech against participation in the Second World War on 17 October 1940. He was arrested and sentenced to three months' simple imprisonment. Jawaharlal Nehru, who was chosen as the second satyagrahi, was arrested even before he offered a formal satyagraha and was convicted for four years' rigorous imprisonment. The movement thereafter gathered momentum in different parts of the country. On completing his term, Vinoba again offered satyagraha and was sentenced this time to six months' imprisonment. And a third time he secured full one year's jail term. It was during this period that Vinoba found time to write out his thesis entitled *Swaraj Shastra* or *A Grammar of Politics.* In my view, this brochure should rank among the very few original treatises on politics.

When Gandhiji launched the 'Quit India' movement in 1942, Vinoba was again put behind bars on the very first day. He was kept under detention for three years, first at the Vellore Central Prison in South India and later at the Seoni jail in Madhya Pradesh.

On his release in 1944, Vinoba returned to his Ashram at Pavnar and quietly joined his constructive work in the rural areas, including scavenging in Surgaon village, four miles from his Ashram. Daily he walked down to Surgaon with a pick-axe on his shoulders to do sanitation work, unmindful of heat or cold, sun or rain.

After the martyrdom of the Mahatma on 30 January 1948, an all-India conference was convened in Sevagram early in March that year. This conference was attended by all the important political leaders, including Rajendra Prasad, Jawaharlal Nehru, Abul Kalam Azad, J. B. Kripalani, Shankarrao Deo and top-ranking Gandhian constructive workers like Vinoba Bhave, Kakasaheb Kalelkar, R. R. Diwakar, Dada Dharmadhikari, P. C. Ghosh and Jayaprakash Narayan. It was at this conference that Vinoba initiated the formation of the *Sarvodaya Samaj*, a world-wide organization of all those who believed in the Gandhian principle of the 'purity of the means'. In the course of deliberations, Nehru looked to Vinoba for guidance and called himself a 'camp-follower'.

On Nehru's request, Vinoba soon left for Delhi to work among the refugees and lend a helping hand to the Government of India in the work of relief and rehabilitation. He paid special attention to the urgent needs of the Meos Muslims in the Gurgaon district of Punjab. Vinoba also travelled by road and train in some other parts of the country to spread the message of love, compassion and sympathy.

After returning to his Ashram in Pavnar early in 1950, Vinoba plunged into a new experiment of *Kanchan Mukti* or liberation from money-economy. He started working in the fields for hours on end, digging the stony ground with the pick-axe and making the land fit for cultivation. He and his co-workers took a solemn pledge to eat only what they could raise on the Ashram land and to wear only the khadi which was spun and woven within the premises. All donations except in the form of labour or Shramdan were strictly ruled out. Vinoba started digging a well near the Ashram which was deficient in water supply. Hundreds of workers and students from Wardha gladly participated in this project and after the day's work assembled in the Ashram for community prayers

at sunset. Vinoba, with his body besmeared with earth, used to conduct the prayers standing. While reciting in loud voice various *Shlokas* from the *Gita* and other religious books, he virtually danced with joy and exhilaration and the gathering was reminded of Saint Tukaram of Maharashtra and Gaurang Mahaprabhu of Bengal.

2

'The God Who Gives Away Land'

WHILE VINOBA was engaged in this crucial experiment of his life, there was a pressing invitation from various constructive workers, particularly Shankarrao Deo, to attend the second All-India Sarvodaya Conference at Shivrampalli near Hyderabad. Vinoba naturally demurred, but was ultimately prevailed upon. In a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Sarva Seva Sangh, a federation of Gandhian institutions, at Sevagram on 6 March 1951, Vinoba announced his decision to attend the Hyderabad Sammelan, but to go there on foot. This decision was received by all the workers with joy as well as shock, because Vinoba's health was none too good and a 300-mile trek from Wardha to Shivrampalli was bound to cause him severe physical strain. But the *Padayatra* started as scheduled on 8 March from the Pavnar Ashram. Vinoba walked about 10 to 12 miles every day and reached Shivrampalli on 7 April, just in time for the Sarvodaya Conference.

After the conclusion of this historic conference, Vinoba expressed a desire to tour the Telangana area which was at that time being terrorized by the communists. He refused to accept any security arrangements by the police or the army. It was on 18 April that Vinoba reached Pochampalli village where he was surrounded by 40 families of poor Harijans. They entreated him to give them land on which they could work hard and eke out their livelihood. Vinoba was at his wit's end and did not know how to satisfy the Harijans. First, he thought of asking the Government to consider their request.

But, on the spur of the moment and without any expectation, he asked the audience in half seriousness whether there was anybody amongst them who could donate land to the poor Harijans and satisfy their requirements. And lo! a young man stood up with folded hands and urged Vinoba to accept his donation of a hundred acres. Everybody was pleasantly surprised and tears began to flow down Vinoba's eyes. He saw God's hand in this miracle. On enquiry, the Harijans conferred among themselves and stated that only 80 acres would suffice for their needs. Vinoba announced this first donation of land with deep emotion at the evening prayers.

So, this was the birth of the Bhoodan movement in India. Vinoba's name again figured prominently in the newspapers and Prime Minister Nehru warmly lauded his work in the Parliament, paying a handsome tribute to 'this frail man' who had succeeded by the force of non-violence where military power had failed to restore peace and order in the Telangana region.

The *New York Times* Special Correspondent Robert Trumbull described Vinoba in the course of his memorable despatch as 'the god who gives away land' and 'loots people with love'. President Rajendra Prasad termed Bhoodan as not merely 'a gift of land'. "The spirit behind it gives a vision of the social order that Mahatma Gandhi envisaged, and kindles and enlivens the hope of its attainment." Dr. Radhakrishnan, the then Vice-President of India, also believed that Bhoodan was 'an act of faith' and would bring 'a unity of mind, thought and purpose in India'. The *Time* Magazine featured this 'man on foot' in its cover story and hailed him as the dynamic disciple of Gandhi.

Pandit Nehru was also impressed by Vinoba's original ideas on economic planning in India. Since the first Five-Year Plan was on the anvil at that time, Nehru wanted Vinoba to hold discussions with the members of the National Planning Commission in New Delhi. Soon after Vinoba returned to Pavnar from his Telangana tour, he received a letter from Nehru requesting him to proceed to Delhi for consultations. Vinoba

agreed, but again decided to walk 800 miles to reach the national Capital. It was first thought that Vinoba could receive land donations in Telangana mainly because of the presence of communists. But his trek from Pavnar to Delhi clearly demonstrated that the Bhoodan appeal was not confined to any particular region. Vinoba's appeal found a ready response in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh as well.

This was, undeniably, a distinct victory for the forces of non-violence in the social and economic spheres. While Vinoba had collected about 12,000 acres in Telangana, his land donations totalled up to 19,000 acres during the Delhi trip. He reached Delhi after about two months on 13 November and camped in a little thatched hut at Rajghat. The President, the Prime Minister, other important Union Ministers and all the members of the Planning Commission called on him at the cottage and conferred with him about the shape of the first Five-Year Plan which was to be launched early next year. Vinoba laid great stress on ensuring full employment to all those who wanted work for their livelihood. Furthermore, self-sufficiency in food was an integral part of national defence.

After about ten days' stay in the capital, Vinoba entered Uttar Pradesh on 24 November and reached Sevapuri in April to attend the fourth annual Sarvodaya Sammelan. It was at this gathering that all the constructive workers decided to collect 25 lakh * acres within two years, the final target being 5 crore acres. This was a landmark in the glorious history of the Bhoodan movement.

When Vinoba reached Bihar, the movement received further impetus when the Provincial Congress decided to collect 32 lakh acres in Bihar alone. Vinoba gave up the idea of going back to his Pavnar Ashram and resolved to solve the land problem in India through this *Yajna*.

Vinoba spent about 27 months in Bihar to enable the workers to achieve their target. It was at Bodh Gaya that the sixth Sarvodaya Sammelan was held on 18 April 1954, to mark the completion of three years of the first donation of land at

* A lakh equals a hundred thousand.

Pochampalli. Vinoba had written a special letter to Nehru inviting him to attend this conference. The Prime Minister made special efforts to fly directly from Chidambaram in south India to Gaya during the mid-summer heat. It was at this Conference that Jayaprakash Narayan decided to dedicate his life for the Bhoodan movement. In a brief letter to Vinoba, Jayaprakash Narayan wrote: "In response to your call for *Jivandan* (life-dedication), I offer my humble life for the attainment of a non-violent revolution based on *Bhoodan Yajna* and sustained by village industries." This was another notable milestone on the march towards a non-violent revolution in the country.

Vinoba's march flowed down steadily from Bihar to Orissa, Andhra, Tamilnad and Kerala. On 15 April 1957, he reached Kanya Kumari and sat down on the Vivekananda Rock. The sun was rising in full splendour on the eastern horizon and the waves of the three seas washed the holy Rock in harmonious melody. Vinoba went into a trance and took a solemn pledge to continue his *Yatra* till the final goal was achieved.

In May the same year, the ninth All-India Sarvodaya Sammelan was held at Kalady, the birthplace of Adi Shankaracharya. In a written message, Nehru looked upon Sarvodaya as 'a streak of light in the encircling gloom' and wanted it to spread throughout the country to counter the forces of violence and conflict.

From Kerala Vinoba entered Mysore and continued his 'holy crusade' with unabated energy. It was at Yelwal, some eight miles from Mysore city, that a historic conference was held on 21 and 22 September 1957. Bhoodan had flowered into a much wider and comprehensive Gramdan movement and the conference agreed to affix its seal of approval and support to Vinoba's new campaign. It was attended by President Rajendra Prasad, Prime Minister Nehru, senior Ministers from the Central Government and Chief Ministers of Bombay, Madras, Mysore and Orissa. Besides, leaders of all the important political parties, including the Congress, the Praja-Socialist Party and the Communist Party of India, participated in the discussions. The Yelwal Conference "welcomed the

Gramdan movement and expressed its high appreciation of the objectives underlying it".

Since then, Nehru viewed Vinoba's non-violent revolution with great hope and expectation. Both Nehru and Vinoba harboured deep respect and admiration for each other and often discussed various problems, national and international, freely and frankly for hours. Once Nehru told me: "Shriman, whenever I am in difficulty about a problem, I think of Gandhiji. But since he is no more, my thoughts invariably turn to Vinoba whom I regard as the best interpreter of Gandhian thought and tradition."

3

Birth and Parentage

VINOBA BHAVE was born in a Brahmin family on 11 September 1895 at Gagode in the former Baroda State, now the Kolaba district of Maharashtra. He was the eldest among four brothers and a sister. His father Narhari Shambhurao, a textile technologist, was in Government service at Baroda. Vinoba's grandfather Shambhurao, though deeply religious, was quite progressive in his views. His mother Rukminidevi was a devout lady and remembered hundreds of Marathi *Bhajans* which she would keep on singing while performing her domestic work every day.

Vinayak, as Vinoba was known in his childhood, was greatly influenced by his grandfather Shambhurao who mostly lived in Gagode and moved for a few months during the years to Wai where the Bhave family had ancestral rights in the management of a Shiva temple. On important festivals, Shambhurao threw the temple open even to the Harijans of the town. Such an act on his part, doubtless, required great courage in those days. He also used to employ occasionally a Muslim singer to recite *Bhajans* before the deity. This practice was severely criticized by the orthodox Hindus. Even so, Shambhurao ignored their criticism and continued his liberal religious practices with faith and determination. In this way, long before Vinoba met Mahatma Gandhi and lived in his Ashram at Sabarmati, he had the golden opportunity of learning his first lessons in social reform and religious tolerance from his noble grandfather.

Shambhurao commanded great respect in his neighbourhood.

Besides being broad-minded, he possessed a generous and loving heart. The mango trees in and around the family farmyard in Gagode used to bear rich fruits in abundance during summer. Shambhurao would ask the children of the house to distribute the ripe mangoes on their first plucking to their neighbours and friends. It was only after such distribution that the children of the family were free to enjoy the mangoes to their heart's content. Vinoba, thus, grew up in an atmosphere of good neighbourliness and these traditional social values soon became an integral part of his personality.

Shambhurao was also a renowned Vaidya in the locality and had considerable experience of pulse-reading. He treated his patients free of charge and gave them medicine in the name of Providence. He renounced family life at the age of thirty-seven, and spent most of his time in the worship of Kotishwar Shiva. He took his dinner only after the rise of the moon, and made the children worship the moon even late at night.

Being of a rather mercurial temper, Shambhurao used to get angry over trifles. But once while he was performing puja in the temple, the four-year old Balkoba sprinkled dirty water on him, and yet Shambhurao did not fly into rage and kept cool. When young Vinoba later enquired of him about the reason for his not getting angry, Shambhurao calmly said: "One must never show anger in a temple which is the 'Abode of God'!" This observation from his grandfather created a deep impression on Vinoba's mind at that pliable age.

Shambhurao's wife, Gangabai, grandmother of Vinoba, was a very able and determined lady. She managed to learn reading and writing at the age of 55. Gangabai possessed a genial sense of humour and would face family troubles with courage and fortitude. After Shambhurao's death she shifted to Varanasi and spent the rest of her life in this place of pilgrimage.

Vinoba's father Narharirao was very scrupulous, methodical and disciplined in his behaviour. He was an admirer of Western science and education and had the credit of producing the first khaki cloth which was later used for the uniforms of the British soldiers. He obtained his Diploma from the *Kala Bhavan* in Baroda and worked for some time in the dyeing department of the Buckingham Mills. Later, he shifted permanently to

Baroda and served in the office of the Government as a senior typist-clerk. He was a very conscientious worker and sat late in the evening in his office to complete his daily assignments. And yet he never asked for any increase in his salary or allowances. He observed strict punctuality in all his activities and possessed a keen sense of cleanliness.

Narharirao was deeply interested in research and experiments in evolving a variety of colours for cloth-printing. He was considered to be an expert those days in this sphere of textile technology. He was of a very stern temperament and often inflicted corporal punishment on young Vinayak for his non-conformist behaviour, contrary to his likings. Narharirao desired Vinayak to read English and French and proceed to foreign countries to become either a barrister or an industrial chemist. After his wife's death in 1918, he felt a deep void in his life and took to music in which he soon achieved marked proficiency. He also wrote several books on various aspects of Indian music, both vocal as well as instrumental.

When Narharirao was taken seriously ill in 1947, Vinoba's younger brother Shivaji brought him to Dhulia where, after about three months, he passed away in peace on the *Sharad Purnima,* the full moon day. Vinoba was able to reach Dhulia in time to catch a last glimpse of his father. On his unostentatious *Samadhi* is inscribed: "I only desire that all beings should be happy".

Of his parents' five children, Vinoba was the eldest. The youngest son Dattatreya unfortunately passed away in childhood. The only daughter Shantabai, after being married a few years, also died at a comparatively young age. The two surviving sons, Balkoba and Shivaji, like Vinoba, have remained *Bal-Brahmacharis* (celibates from childhood) and devoted their lives to study and social service. Balkoba takes a lively interest in Naturopathy and manages the Clinic at Urlikanchan near Poona founded by Mahatma Gandhi. For six months in a year he looks after Vinoba's *Brahma Vidya Mandir* at Pavnar, near Wardha. Shivaji is an eminent philologist and a profound scholar of Sanskrit and Marathi literature. He mostly lives in Dhulia and has set up a good library for research work.

Vinoba's early character was moulded mainly at the hands

of his pious and affectionate mother. She led a life of simplicity, self-restraint and observed religious vows with regularity. It was at her feet that Vinoba imbibed the basic precept: "He who gives is a god; but he who withholds is a devil." She was very considerate to the so-called untouchables and always helped them in various ways.

Whenever Vinoba mentions about his mother, his voice is invariably choked with emotion and tears roll down his eyes. Once he told a group of workers: "My mother was the source of strength. She had unlimited confidence in my capacity. That living faith of hers gave me immense strength."

Once his mother was proceeding to a neighbour's house to help the family in cooking. She was going there after completing her own cooking at home. Vinoba felt rather intrigued by this behaviour on her part and asked: "Is it proper for you to help the neighbours in cooking, after getting the meals ready at our own house?" Rukminidevi promptly rejoined: "Vinya, you are ignorant and have not understood my real motive. I go to the neighbour's house later because I want them to enjoy a warm meal. If I go there first, their food would get quite cold by the time they take it."

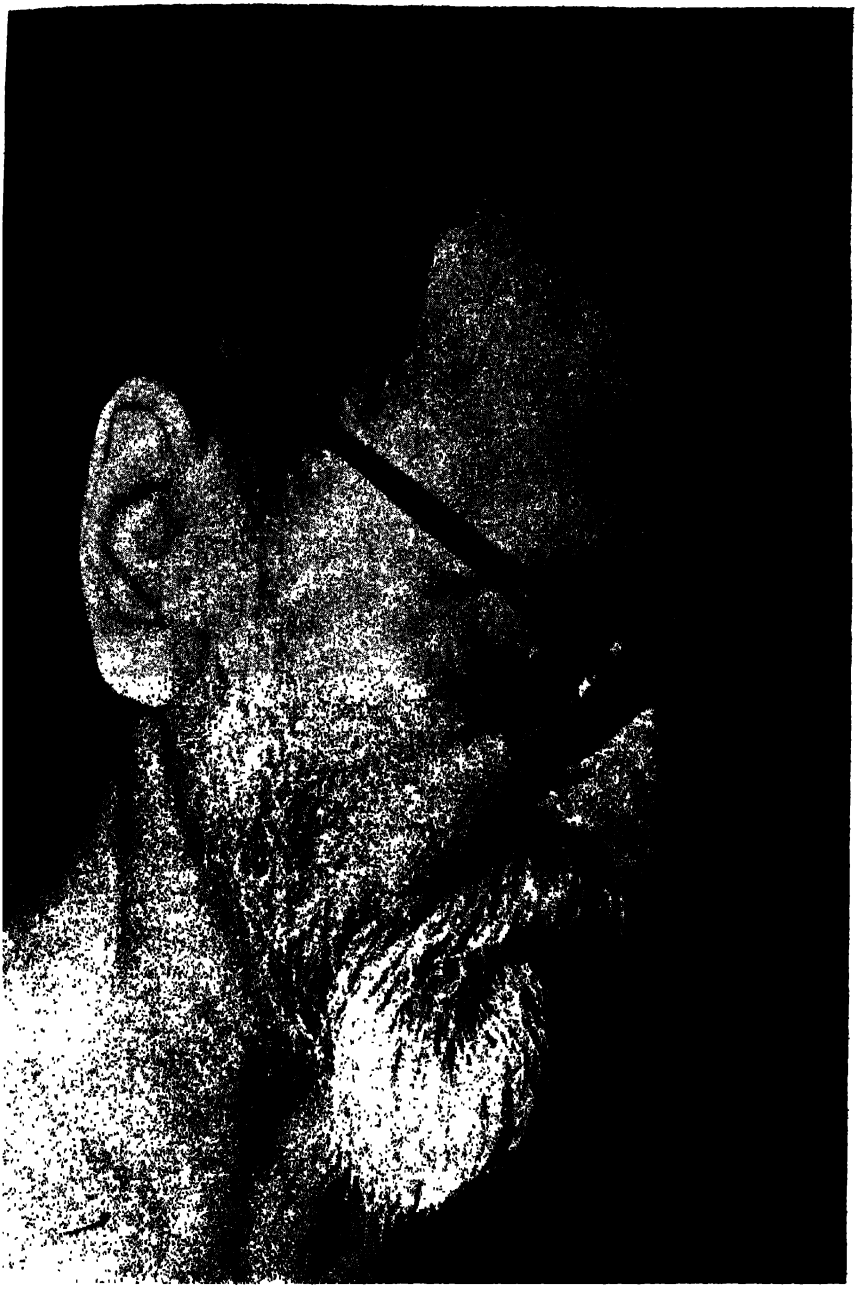
On another occasion a beggar came to the house to ask for alms. Vinayak could see that he was rather plump and quite hale and hearty.

"Mother, are you not encouraging idleness by giving food to such a person?" asked Vinoba.

His mother who had already poured rice into the begging bowl, replied:

"Vinya, the beggar who comes at our door is God in person. Who are we to distinguish between the deserving and the non-deserving?"

His mother also encouraged Vinoba not to marry and remain a celibate throughout his life. She would often remark: "He who leads a good married life, surely, earns a good name for the family. But he who remains a true *Brahmachari*, sanctifies not one, but forty-two generations." It was this unusual advice of the mother which encouraged Vinoba to take a vow of celibacy at the age of ten. His younger brothers, Balkoba and Shivaji, also followed suit. When Vinoba adopted a very



A profile



Ramachandra Reddy donates first *Bhoodan* at Pochampalli



rigorous daily life of a Brahmachari and declined the use of bed or shoes, spiced food and hot water for bath, his mother used to express her sympathy but asserted: "If God had not given me the physical body of a woman, I would have tried to live in an even more austere manner!"

Rukminidevi was so engrossed in singing devotional *Bhajans* that she often forgot to add salt to the vegetables; sometimes she would pour it twice. Vinoba also was rather absent-minded during his meals. It was only when Balkoba would partake of the food that the mother's mistake would be detected. Rukminidevi always asked her sons to shed fear of all kinds and harbour unfailing faith in *Ramanama* or the name of God.

Once Vinoba asked his mother whether real saints and *Rishis* of old still existed on earth. She feelingly remarked: "Vinya, great saints are still in our midst; only we do not recognize them!" She, perhaps, did not realize that her own son would one day be reckoned as one of the greatest *Rishis* of India.

Rukminidevi was a devotee of Lord Shiva. Once she decided to offer one lakh grains of rice to the idol. Narharirao made fun of her and suggested: "Instead of counting every grain one by one, why not weigh them at a time according to certain calculations and offer them to the deity. For any marginal error, you may add a few more grains." Vinoba's mother was rather nonplussed. She asked her dear Vinya whether that would be proper. Vinoba put in: "Mother, why do you worry? There can be no proper worship by weighing rice at a time. Offering one grain after another helps you to concentrate your mind and take Lord Shiva's name every time!" This argument fortified the mother against the arguments of Vinoba's father who always liked to be practical and rational.

A telegram was once received that the 'blind uncle' had expired. Vinoba asked mother why a period of mourning was not being observed. She replied: "Vinya, he was not our blood relation. We had given him shelter in our house because he was alone and helpless." Vinoba learnt only then that the 'blind uncle' was not a member of the family. This is how the mother tried to lend a helping hand to several persons who were without any support. She used to tell Vinayak: "Real

happiness lies in self-restraint and a sense of contentment. We cannot experience bliss by accumulating goods beyond our real needs."

Vinoba often came late in the evening after reading books in the Baroda Library. His mother would always wait for him, after feeding other children. Vinoba naturally felt embarrassed and entreated his mother not to wait for him. But she would never take her food till Vinayak returned home. She was deeply attached to him and was confident that he would never do anything incorrect. When Vinoba, instead of taking the Intermediate Examination at Bombay, detrained at Surat and went away to Varanasi, Narharirao was greatly agitated and told his wife: "Vinya will roam for a few days and after bitter experiences return home." But Rukminidevi firmly replied that he would now never come back. And she told the neighbours with confidence: "My son has not gone out for doing anything wrong. He is determined to serve God and the country. I am proud of him."

Vinoba used to read out the Marathi daily *Kesari* to his mother in order to keep her in touch with current events. But she was more interested in the *Bhajans* of saints like Tukaram. She was keen to understand the *Gita* as well. Since Vinoba also was not sufficiently conversant with Sanskrit at that time, the mother asked him one day to get a Marathi translation. Vinoba procured a Marathi translation of the *Gita* by Vaman Pandit, but the language was rather difficult to comprehend. Rukminidevi, therefore, asked Vinayak: "Why do you not translate the *Gita* into Marathi verses yourself?" But Vinoba could not fulfil this desire of his mother during her lifetime. It was only during 1930-31 that he could find time to translate the whole of the *Gita* into Marathi and called the translation *Gitai* or *Mother Gita.* In truth, the pious memory of the mother and his attachment to the *Gita* became identified in this manner.

Rukminidevi had such deep faith in the grace of God that she would invariably recite *Ramanama* while mixing leaven with milk for turning it into curds. Vinoba would enquire of her: "Why do you mix up God's name with such mundane matters?" The mother would reply with conviction: "Vinya, no success is ever achieved without the grace of God!" After

many years, when Vinoba was in jail and the curds often got sour despite all precautions, he would remember these significant words of his mother.

She was very proud of the fact that her son had learnt to recite the whole of *Sandhya* prayer in one week. She would convey this fact to her neighbours quite often. Once Vinoba asked his mother: "Why do you mention this to our neighbours so frequently? It is true that I learnt the *Sandhya* within seven days. It is, however, also true that having learnt by rote I forgot it within a week!" Even so, the mother was so fond of her Vinya that she would invariably mention his good qualities and abilities before others.

In his childhood, Vinoba's health was none too good, and he often fell ill. His mother would get some medicine from the doctor and pour it in Vinya's mouth saying: "The medicine is *Ganga* water, and the doctor is God or *Narayan Hari*!" Her innate faith in the Divine was unshakable.

Once Vinoba asked her: "Mother, why do you wear glass bangles? They are liable to break while grinding corn or cooking food." The mother had a ready answer: "My darling, these glass bangles compel me to do my work with caution, efficiency and concentration. If they were made of metal, I would have become rather careless and negligent."

She would regularly stand before the idol of *Annapoorna* with folded hands and recite the following prayer:

> "Oh! Ruler of the whole universe,
> I seek pardon for all my shortcomings!"

As she uttered these words, her eyes would virtually swim in tears. It was only after these prayers that she sat down for her mid-day meals.

I should like to mention one more instance which reveals the benevolent and spiritual nature of Rukminidevi. She had once kept a poor student in the house to help him continue his studies. She would serve hot food to this student, and would not mind placing even cold meals in the utensils of Vinya. Vinoba one day complained against this discrimination and twitted: "Mother, you have not yet been able to forget all differences between man and man." She rejoined: "It is true

that I have not yet been able to treat all boys alike. I regard you as my son, while I respect this poor student as God himself. The day I am in a position to regard you also as the Divine, this discrimination will disappear." Vinoba was deeply moved by these words and always tried to be worthy of the spiritual heights of his mother.

In the *Gita Pravachanen*, Vinoba himself mentions a story which his mother used to tell him in his childhood: "It is a funny little story, but it contains a profound secret. There was a lady who resolved that everything she did should be offered to Lord Krishna. After cleaning the oven in the kitchen with a mixture of clay and cowdung, she made what was left into a ball and threw it out, saying, '*Krishnaarpanamastu*',—'May Krishna accept it!' What happened was that the ball of cowdung would rise into the air and, flying into the temple, stick on the face of the image of the Lord. The priest, poor fellow, got tired cleaning up the image. He did not know what to do. At last he discovered that this was all due to the lady. As long as the lady was alive, the image could not be kept clean. One day the lady fell sick. She was about to die. She dedicated her death also to Krishna. The image in the temple fell to pieces. The heavenly chariot came to fetch her—but this too she dedicated to Krishna. The chariot dashed against the temple and was smashed up. Even heaven is reduced to nothing before the thought of Krishna. The meaning of it all is that whatever actions we do, whether good or bad, a new dimension of power enters into them, the moment we surrender them to the Lord!"

There is another instance: "In my childhood I used to draw with turmeric the figure of a snake for my mother to worship. I would tell my mother: 'but there are nice pictures for sale in the shop!' She would answer: 'That's no good. We want none of that. Only the figure drawn by my child is good enough. And to it worship would be offered!'"

When Rukminidevi was seriously ill during the influenza epidemic in 1918, Vinoba was asked by Gandhiji to go to Baroda from Sabarmati Ashram to nurse her. Vinoba obeyed the orders and proceeded home. "Why have you come here, leaving your work in Ashram?" asked the mother. So particular

was she regarding the discharge of one's duties. Vinoba nursed the ailing mother day and night. But she could not survive, and passed away after a few days. His younger brother Datta also expired. Fortunately, his father survived and gradually recovered his health. When his mother was being taken out to the burning ghats for cremation, Vinoba asked his father whether the ceremonies would be performed in accordance with the Hindu rites by the orthodox priests. When his father confirmed this, Vinoba refused to go to the cremation grounds. He preferred to recite verses from the *Gita* and the *Upanishads* at home, with tears rolling down his cheeks in the sacred memory of his mother!

Before I close this chapter, I should like to mention a few anecdotes about his father as well. These incidents give a real insight into the sterling qualities of Narharirao's character.

In his early childhood, Vinoba lived with his mother and grandparents mainly at Gagode. Since Narharirao lived most of the time at Baroda, he visited Gagode only a few times during the year. Once when he was due to arrive, Rukminidevi told Vinayak that his father would bring some good sweets for him. The son was naturally agog with expectation. On arrival his father gave him a packet which, instead of sweets, contained children's editions of *Ramayana, Mahabharata,* and *Bhagwata.* Vinya ran to his mother to show these books. She looked at her son and affectionately said: "What better sweets could your father bring for you?"

Vinoba's father led a simple life and after the death of his wife, did all the domestic work by himself, including cleaning, washing and cooking. Despite such a life of self-sufficiency, he never failed to be hospitable to his guests. While Vinoba was living in the Sabarmati Ashram, Gandhiji once asked Jamnalal to pay a visit to Vinoba's father at Baroda. On knowing about Jamnalalji's arrival, Narharirao enquired from his neighbours as to what kind of food the Marwadis relished. Thereupon, he cooked tasty meals for Jamnalalji and served him with great feeling.

After the death of his wife, Narharirao never allowed his sons

to do his routine work at home. He would himself take care of all his daily requirements. When he was asked why he did not keep a single servant, he quietly stated: "The servant is bound to make some mistake or other daily, and one would feel dissatisfied. It is, therefore, always better to do one's work with one's own hands and avoid any causes for irritation."

As mentioned earlier, Narharirao used to inflict punishment on Vinoba for not maintaining discipline and a code of conduct in his house. This was almost a daily practice. Vinoba recollects with emotion that for a few days consecutively his father did not touch him. Amiably surprised, Vinoba asked him the reason for this sudden change in his behaviour. Narharirao replied with equanimity: "You have now entered your sixteenth year and according to the Hindu Scriptures, a son at that age should be treated as a friend!"

Vinoba's father was also very punctilious about doing things on time. He was fond of playing chess and he used to go regularly to his friend Dr. Joglekar's house in the evening to play the game. But he would play chess only for half an hour, and leave the game even half-finished when the time was over. Dr. Joglekar would try to persuade him to stay for a few minutes more and complete the game. But Narharirao never made any exception and returned to his house after the stipulated period. In other matters also his life was equally systematic and disciplined.

Narharirao was in favour of modern science and technology and rejoiced when the first textile mill was started in Baroda. Even so, he fully supported Gandhiji's programme of Khadi and village industries for achieving self-sufficiency in life. He once wrote to Vinoba that the paper, ink and pen used by him were made with his own hands, without the use of any machine. When Vinoba showed this letter to Gandhiji, he was much impressed by his father's spirit of self-reliance.

These anecdotes and incidents about the parents have been mentioned mainly to indicate how Vinoba's personality has visibly been shaped by the great qualities of Narharirao and Rukminidevi. The lessons that one learns at the feet of mother and father during the early years leave their indelible impress on the child's character for the whole of his life. Vinoba once

mentioned to me that whenever he takes his food he imagines himself sitting before his mother's funeral pyre. This thought helps him not only to recall his mother with respect and gratitude, but also to keep his physical senses under control.

Vinoba represents an extraordinary amalgam of the three basic qualities of wisdom, devotion and action—*Jnana, Bhakti* and *Karma.* One comes but rarely across a man who combines the three characteristics with such distinction.

4

Early Life and Education

VINOBA SPENT his early years at Gagode and lived mostly with his grandfather Shambhurao who was the high priest of this village. His mother lived partly in Baroda with her husband and partly at Gagode to look after her children. In 1901 Vinoba's sacred thread ceremony was performed at Gagode in accordance with traditional rites. For a few years he was given some religious education at home. Later, a general knowledge of his mother tongue Marathi was also imparted to him.

Vinoba shifted to Baroda in 1903 at the age of 9, and was admitted to the third standard in a local school. He was a brilliant student from the very start and stood first at the annual examinations. He also received merit scholarships for several years. In the final examination of the sixth standard, he stood first-class first and secured 95 per cent marks in Marathi and 85 per cent marks in Sanskrit.

After passing the sixth standard, Vinoba joined the Baroda High School. Since knowledge of English was necessary for high school education, he was given for three years preliminary coaching in English by his father at home. Vinoba was a voracious reader and spent most of his time in the Public Library. Mathematics was his favourite subject and he evinced a keen interest in Euclid's geometrical exercises. Writing about himself much later, Vinoba stated: "Next to God, if I love anything most it is mathematics." He had a meditative turn of mind and did not take much interest in sports and games. He was, however, fond of taking long walks with some of his friends. He was a regular reader of Lokmanya Tilak's Weekly

Kesari and kept himself abreast of political upheaval in the country. Vinoba had a consuming ambition of taking an active part in the national struggle for *Swaraj,* and was initially attracted towards the terrorist movement in Bengal. At the time of partition in 1905, Tilak and Chiplunkar were his heroes. He was deeply agitated when in 1908 Lokmanya Tilak was sentenced to six years' rigorous imprisonment.

Young Vinayak was also greatly attracted towards the ideas of renunciation and self-realization. Mainly due to the dominant influence of his mother, he had decided to lead the life of a *Brahmachari* in a very austere manner. He would sleep on the ground only with a blanket and a mattress underneath. He abjured the use of pillows and took his bath with cold water throughout the year. On one occasion he did not bathe for a fortnight because his mother insisted on his using warm water. In the end, Rukminidevi relented and allowed him to use cold water. He did not use foot-wear either and did not mind walking on warm sands bare-footed during the day.

Even at the high school, Vinoba maintained his first position for some years. Subsequently, he spent more of his time in reading extra-curricular books in Sanskrit and Marathi. He was extremely fond of the famous Marathi poet Moropant's *Kekawali* and recited its verses in loud and melodious voice. Although Vinoba's father wanted him to pay greater attention to the study of English and French languages, he was more inclined towards the study of his own mother tongue Marathi. His mother also encouraged him to learn Sanskrit and Marathi for studying religious books well. When some fellow-student would talk to Vinoba in English, he would curtly enquire: "Is your mother English?" He, however, learnt the English language from his father and always took special care to acquire correct accent and pronunciation.

During his student life, Vinoba spoke very little and observed silence most of the time. But when occasion arose, he spoke with great vigour and often participated in serious discussions for hours. At that time, his dress was very simple—a *kurta,* coat and cap. His hair was always unkempt and disorderly. If someone would take courage to point this out, he would retort: "Are you a barber?" He never took tea and did not like

his friends also to be addicted to this beverage. Vinoba was quite often very strict in these matters with his friends. Once he locked the door of the bath-room when a friend of his, who was very much habituated to drinking tea, was indoors. He opened the door only after securing a firm promise from the friend that he would give up tea altogether from that day.

On one occasion Vinoba and his friends decided to observe Shivaji Jayanti in the neighbouring forest. They purposely absented themselves from the class and decided that if the teacher fined them for their absence without permission, they would keep 4 annas each in the pockets and hand them over to the teacher on the spot. When the teacher asked them as to why they did not think of celebrating Shivaji Jayanti within the school premises, Vinoba replied: "How can we celebrate it within this building of slavery?" This angered the teacher and he threatened them with fines. As had been decided earlier, all of them placed 4-anna coins on his table. The teacher was surprised and even amazed at their courage and patriotic sentiment.

Vinoba was a keen student of mathematics and helped his friends, even from higher classes, in solving their difficult examples. Being clever and ahead of his class in several respects, he could afford to be inattentive to some lectures for solving a few exercises for his classmates. He asked his friends to write down their difficulties on pieces of paper. He used to keep such pieces in the left pocket of his coat and during the course of the lecture would take them out one by one, write down the solutions and quietly transfer these pieces to his right pocket. Once his class-teacher was dictating notes on an important subject. Vinoba was, however, absorbed in solving the difficulties of his friends from a higher class. He had kept an exercise book before him only to deceive the teacher who took note of this subterfuge, and asked him to stand up and read out the notes he was supposed to have taken down. Undaunted, Vinoba got up with his exercise book in his hand and read out the substance of the note dictated by the teacher with steady accents. The teacher was greatly surprised, asked Vinoba to show him his notebook and discovered that it was all blank. This added to the discomfiture of the teacher, but Vinoba

gently put in: "Sir, my notes are written in a script which you will not be able to decipher".

On another occasion, a teacher tried to solve an arithmetical problem on the board of the class-room, but was not able to get the correct answer. He was good enough to ask Vinoba to apply his mind to the exercise. Vinoba did so and after a while said with confidence: "Sir, you are right; the answer written in the text-book is wrong."

During examinations, Vinoba was in the habit of applying his mind first to the most difficult question. At the time of the First Year Intermediate Examination in Mathematics, he spent most of the time in solving only one question which was rather complicated. When he found that the question was consuming disproportionate time, he hurriedly answered the remaining two or three questions and managed to get pass marks. That difficult question, however, could not be solved by a single candidate at that examination. Vinoba's efforts to solve it even at the risk of failure must have been duly appreciated by the examiners.

Vinoba was once taken to task by the librarian of the Central Library in Baroda for dressing himself very informally against the rules. He had removed his shirt due to the intense heat of the summer and was rebuked by a clerk for this lack of civility. He was not perturbed in the least and politely remarked: "Sir, I dress myself in this way because I use my brains given by God." The clerk approached the Librarian who happened to be an Englishman. Vinoba was immediately summoned before him:

"Don't you know what good manners are?"

"Yes, I do", replied Vinoba in a firm tone.

"Then, may I know what it consists in?" asked the Librarian sarcastically.

"We consider it, for example, good manners in our country to offer a seat to anyone we are talking to, if there is a chair around", Vinoba put in.

The Englishman was rather taken aback and immediately offered a chair to Vinoba. In the course of their conversation, Vinoba explained to the English Librarian how customs and manners were bound to differ from country to country in ac-

cordance with climatic conditions. "It is healthy and convenient in a hot country like India not to put on too many garments, especially during summer." The Librarian was pleased with Vinoba's boldness and logical arguments and sent him away without imposing any fines.

While at Baroda, Vinoba started a *Vidyarthi Mandal* or a study circle for students. Some of his intimate friends included Raghunath Shridhar Dhotre, Gopalrao Kale and Mahadeo (Babaji) Moghe. They used to meet at the house of a friend by rotation on every Sunday and discuss specified subjects and books bearing on national problems. Vinoba would attend these study circles regularly and take an active part in the discussions. A library was also organized, consisting of about 2000 books in English, Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati and Sanskrit. For raising the necessary finances, Vinoba and his friends conducted evening coaching classes for poor students, charging a monthly fee of only four annas per student.

Raghunath S. Dhotre, in his reminiscences, mentions that Vinoba delivered some very forceful speeches at these weekly gatherings. He would, however, not mention about these meetings either to his parents or his younger brothers. Balkoba and Shivaji managed to attend a few meetings and tell me that they heard some of Vinoba's finest speeches at that time. They were full of high idealism and patriotic fervour. Vinoba used to declare to his friends in emphatic language that unless young men were ready to sacrifice everything, it was impossible for them to serve the motherland in an effective manner.

Vinoba showed a special interest in the writings of Tilak and Mazzini. While he engaged himself in deep study of various books and spoke about them at these study circles, Vinoba refused to take up any organizational responsibility on his shoulders. "This is not my job", he would argue. 'It would be like asking Saint Tukaram to work in an office.' He would often return quite late at night after attending these meetings which, incidentally, were never convened at his own house. He was, perhaps, not sure whether his parents would approve of them. But his mother never enquired of him the reason for his late return and served him with hot meals even at that late hour. The *Vidyarthi Mandal* also issued a hand-written

monthly magazine for the benefit of other students.

Babaji Moghe, the oldest living associate of Vinoba, recently told me a meaningful anecdote. He once told Vinoba that no *Kokanastha* Brahmin had ever been a saint in Maharashtra. This statement was contested by Vinoba, but on further enquiries was found to be correct. And then Vinoba asserted in his inimitable style: "I shall be that kind of a saint!"

Balkoba, in the course of his brief memoirs in Marathi, recounts how Vinoba continued his studies often till midnight, reading, mostly extra-curricular books. In consequence, he spoiled his eyesight. He, however, refused to use glasses till he was asked several years later by Gandhiji in Sabarmati Ashram to procure a pair of spectacles. Vinoba was not careful about the rules of health and was down with fever quite frequently. He was also not careful about diet. He, however, worked hard at home and helped the mother in cooking and washing of utensils. He washed his own clothes. When Vinoba heard of six years' rigorous imprisonment imposed on Tilak, he gave up the use of sugar for several years. He utilized the services of the barber for a shave only once or twice a month and never used oil for the hair. He took very little interest in family affairs and did not even attend the marriage of his only sister Shantabai. This attitude of detachment towards worldly affairs has been an integral part of his character from boyhood.

His younger brother Shivaji has written to me about an interesting anecdote in the life of Vinoba. Once a person came to him and claimed that he had attained *Mukti*—salvation—and was free from the bonds of joy and sorrow. Vinoba at once asked Shivaji to bring a stick and beat this person severely in order to judge whether he had really conquered the feelings of pleasure and pain. The man was stunned at this rude behaviour of Vinoba and quietly disappeared. This incident gives an insight into the stern and austere temperament of Vinoba from the very beginning. He never indulged in jokes or humour with his younger brothers. although he was more free with his friends. He was engrossed in the study of Sanskrit and Marathi books, more especially *Jnaneshwari* and Samarth Ramdas's *Dasbodh.*

Vinoba, however, evinced passionate love for Nature from his early childhood. The village of his birth, Gagode, was situated amid beautiful surroundings of hill and dale and Vinoba developed a fondness for them. In Baroda, there were no hilly tracts to attract him. And yet he would go on long walks in the neighbouring countryside with some friends if possible, otherwise all by himself.

In his memoirs, Gopalrao Kale recalls that Vinoba was exceptionally fond of such walks almost every day during his student life. He would catch hold of a friend and go on talking to him in loud voice on a variety of current affairs. This is how he developed intimate friendship with some of his classfellows. Usually, he was reticent and did not like to mix with many students in the school or college. But with those whom he regarded as his close associates, he would frankly discuss all topics under the sun without any mental reservations. Lokmanya Tilak's *Gītarahasya* was his favourite book in those days and he never tired of referring to diverse aspects of the commentary with considerable gusto.

Gopalrao Kale also mentions that Vinoba's life was 'an exceptional combination of Shankaracharya's wisdom and Buddha's compassion'. Those who saw Vinoba's palm during that period, were surprised to find that the head and heart lines were singularly intertwined and interwoven.

5

In Quest of the Eternal'

AFTER PASSING the matriculation examination in November 1913, Vinoba joined the Intermediate class of the Baroda College. But he never felt any attraction towards the modern type of education and was very critical about its real utility in life. He used to remark to his friends that the existing schools and colleges were only large factories for training 'your most obedient servants'. When some celebrated European musicians visited the Baroda College, he sat wondering when he could escape that infliction. One day while he was sitting beside his mother in the kitchen, Vinoba took out a roll of papers in his hands and stretched them towards the fire.

"What are you doing?" asked his mother in astonishment.

"I want to burn my school and college certificates."

"But you may need them some day, Vinya."

"No", said Vinoba emphatically. "They will be of no use to me hereafter." All the certificates were soon consumed by the fire.

Vinoba wanted to burn his boats once and for all. He had in his mind the story of Sinhagad where victory was scored only after the rope had been cut away by the soldiers of Tanaji in order to prevent his troops from retreating. Vinoba likewise wanted to sever all connection with academic education in order to continue his quest for the Eternal with single-minded devotion. He used to tell his companions that he was thinking of giving up his college studies to realize *Brahma—'Athato Brahmajijnasa'*.

"Where will you go?" asked one of his friends. "To Lok-

manya Tilak or Annie Besant?"

"I have not the courage to go to Lokmanya or to Besantbai."

"Then will you withdraw to the Himalayas?"

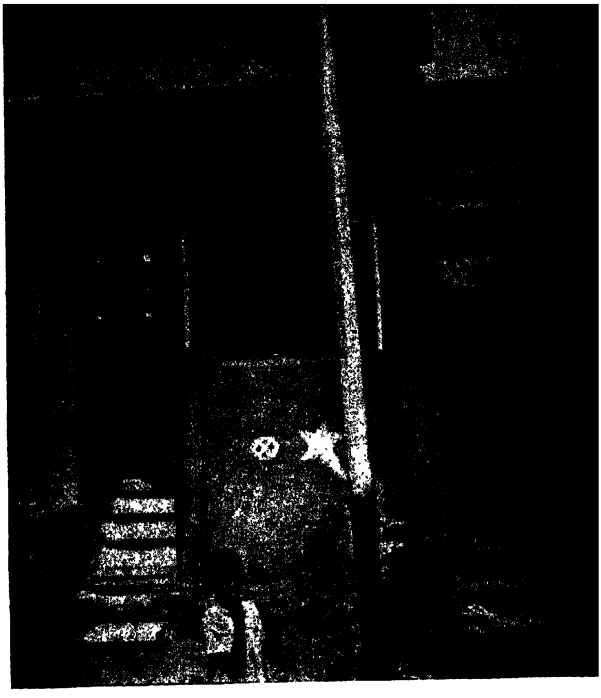
"No. If one cannot realize God in society, there is no chance of finding Him in the Himalayas", asserted Vinoba.

A couple of days before the Intermediate examination was due to be held in Bombay, Vinoba boarded a Bombay-bound train at Baroda with his friend Gopalrao Kale on the 25 March 1916. He detrained at Surat and handed over a letter to Gopalrao for his father with instructions not to post it until the examinations were over. The letter ran thus: "Instead of going to Bombay for taking the examination, I am proceeding somewhere else. I am sure you have trust in me that wherever I may go, I will not indulge in any unethical behaviour."

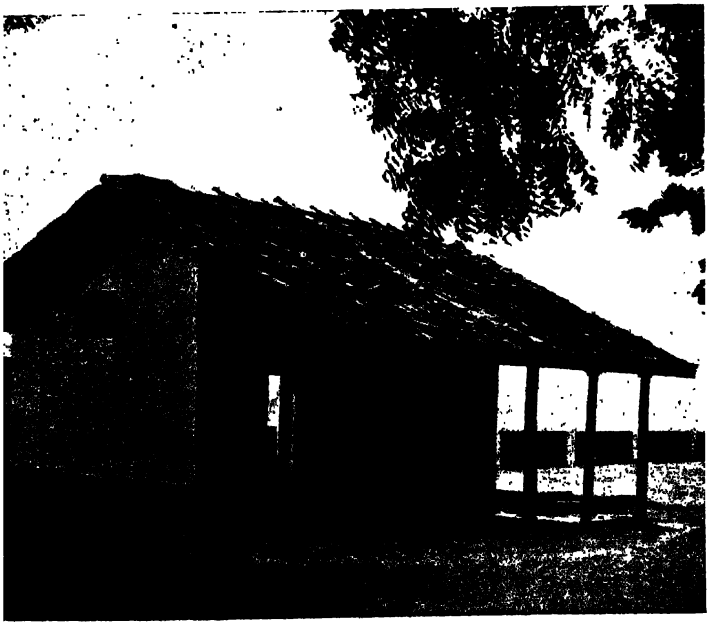
From Surat, Vinoba took the train to Bhusaval *en route* to Varanasi. His father was naturally upset when he received the letter from his son after some days. He, however, believed that various difficulties would soon compel Vinoba to return home. But his mother, who knew her son better, remarked: "Once Vinya has made up his mind, he will stick to his decision, come what may!"

At Varanasi, Vinoba plunged into the study of Sanskrit, especially of the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* at the local library in Ahilyabai Wada, and lived on the fifth floor of Tatya Tope's sister's house. He took his simple meals from the charitable kitchens of the temples and led a very austere life. The *Dakshina* of two pice which he received daily at the temple was utilized for purchasing curds and sweet-potatoes for the evening meal. He used to go to the banks of the holy Ganga alone and after bath would meditate there for hours. He also wrote some of the finest poems in Marathi, but offered them to the holy waters after he was satisfied with the quality of diction.

In the *Gita Pravachanen*, Vinoba himself writes about the Ganges: "When I was living in Kashi I used to go and sit on the banks of the Ganga. I would go and sit there in the loneliness of night: What beauty, what brightness in its flow! Those lovely and majestic waters and the countless stars of the sky in them! I would sit there speechless. What calm of



The house in Baroda where Vinoba passed his boyhood



Cottage where Vinoba lived at Sabarmati Ashram



The three brothers Balkoba, Vinoba and Shivaji



With his close associates R. S. Dhotre, Babaji Moghe, Gopalrao Kale

mind was mine when my eyes were filled with the sight of the Ganga, which descended from the matted locks of Shiva, from the Himalayas, the river by whose banks Kings, casting off the symbols of power, perform their austerities. In the stillness of the peace, I began to understand why the Hindu wishes that after death his bones at least should be immersed into the Ganga. You may laugh, but that does not alter the fact."

Vinoba used to participate in serious religious discussions on various aspects of the *Shastras*. In one of the meetings on the banks of the Ganga, he found that a lively discussion was taking place on *Dvaita* (dualism) and *Advaita* (non-dualism). During these technical discussions, the *Dvaita* group suffered a defeat and the *Advaitis* scored their points. But Vinoba stood up and declared with firmness: "The *Advaitis* also have been defeated."

"What are you saying?" shouted the victorious pandits.

Vinoba rejoined: "The very fact that *Advaitis* agreed to argue with the other group clearly demonstrates that they are still not free from 'dualism'; hence their defeat."

Once while returning from the river Ganga, he stopped at a hardware merchant's shop to buy a lock for his small room in Durga ghat. Vinoba selected a lock which he knew would cost him only about 3 annas. But the shop-keeper wanted to take advantage of his innocence and quoted 10 annas as its price. Vinoba promptly paid the money, purchased the lock and told the shop-keeper: "I know that this lock costs only 3 annas; but I repose trust in you and, therefore, give you ten annas as asked by you."

Vinoba used to pass that shop everyday on his way to the river. The conscience of the shop-keeper must have been pricking him all these days. And so one day he called Vinoba and told him with repentance: "The cost of the lock was really 3 annas. Kindly take back the 7 annas and excuse me." Vinoba was deeply touched by this change of heart on the part of the shop-keeper.

It may be mentioned here that two other friends, Bedekar and Shankarrao Tagare, had accompanied Vinoba to Varanasi. One of them, Bedekar, unfortunately died there. He was rather

plump and indulged in excessive eating. At the time of his death, he had implored Vinoba to cremate him on the banks of the Ganga, without allowing any orthodox priests to chant *Mantras*. Vinoba acted according to his friend's last wish, although he was severely criticized for this conduct by the local pandits.

During his stay in Varanasi, Vinoba was in two minds. Sometimes he thought of proceeding to the Himalayas for his spiritual development after the study of Sanskrit scriptures and the *Gita*. On other occasions, he desired to proceed to Bengal to participate in the terrorist movement During those days one of his life's ambitions was to be able to shoot at least one Englishman.

In Varanasi, while Vinoba tried his best to learn from the erudite Sanskrit scholars and imbibe the best of Indian culture, he was much disillusioned with the filth and stench of the streets and even within the temples. His health was also affected by these insanitary surroundings and he lost considerable weight. The orthodox formalities of religion and the hollow pretensions of holiness on the part of the *Sannyasis*, depressed Vinoba greatly and he wanted to escape to some other place for discovering real peace and tranquillity.

Vinoba and his friends had read in the newspapers some months earlier at Baroda about a speech Gandhiji had delivered on the occasion of the foundation-stone ceremony of the Banaras Hindu University at the hands of Lord Hardinge, the then Viceroy of India on 4 February 1916. Annie Besant, the then President of the International Theosophical Society, presided over the function. She had requested Gandhiji to speak on the occasion and expected him to be brief and to the point. Gandhiji, however, bluntly criticized the display of pomp and power of the Government and took the Princes to task for their gaudy dress and costly jewellery in a poor country like India. He also criticized the terrorist methods of Indian revolutionaries for getting rid of the foreign rule. On the previous day, there was an unsuccessful attempt on the life of the Viceroy by throwing a bomb at his car. "If we do not want the British to remain in this country," said Gandhiji, "let us ask them openly and frankly to return to their country." "If for

such plain-speaking," he continued, "we are sentenced to death, let us go to the gallows cheerfully." Besant was greatly embarrassed and asked Gandhiji to stop his speech. But the audience wanted him to continue. Besant, therefore, left in protest, along with the Princes and other distinguished guests and the meeting ended in confusion.

When Vinoba read this report, he was thrilled. He was attracted towards his idea of fearlessness and non-violent resistance even unto death. After his two-month experiences in Varanasi, Vinoba, therefore, decided to meet Gandhiji to satisfy his political as well as spiritual urges. There was an exchange of a few letters between them. Vinoba frankly mentioned some of his doubts and difficulties and raised certain philosophical queries. Gandhiji replied that it was not possible to answer all these questions through correspondence. He, therefore, invited young Vinoba to meet him at the Kochrab Ashram in Ahmedabad for further discussions.

6

In Gandhiji's Ashram at Ahmedabad

THIS CRUCIAL meeting took place on 7 June 1916. Mama Phadke, the oldest living inmate of the Sabarmati Ashram, informs me that it was he who had guided Vinoba to the Kochrab Ashram that day. On reaching the Ashram, Vinoba was taken to the kitchen where Gandhiji was cleaning and cutting vegetables for the meals. The first conversation between them took place while Gandhiji was actually engaged in this daily routine. Gandhiji welcomed this young man of 20 to his Ashram and offered him full membership.

Recollecting his first meeting with Gandhiji at the Kochrab Ashram, Vinoba writes: "When I was at Kashi, my main ambition was to go to the Himalayas. Also there was an inner longing to visit Bengal. But neither of the two dreams could be realized. Providence took me to Gandhiji and I found in him not only the peace of the Himalayas but also the burning fervour of revolution typical of Bengal. I said to myself that both of my desires had been fulfilled."

For several weeks Vinoba continued to participate in the hard and austere life of the Ashram. He worked in the kitchen, in the workshop and the garden like any ordinary inmate. One day he was heard reciting loudly verses from the *Gita* and the *Upaniṣhads* early in the morning at 4 o'clock. It was only then that the Ashramites discovered that this young Vinayak was a profound scholar of Sanskrit and religious scriptures. It is interesting to know that Mama Phadke, an inmate from Maharashtra, was the first to name Vinayak as Vinoba. It may be mentioned here that in Maharashtra, great men, particularly

saints, are called that way. For example, Jnaneshwar was popularly known as Jnanoba and Tukaram as Tukoba. Even the deity at Pandharpur is named Vithoba. Following Mama Phadke's example, Vinayak was soon known as Vinoba in the Ashram and Gandhiji put his seal of approval on this name by mentioning it in the first letter he addressed to his father: "Your son Vinoba is with me."

Gandhiji told Vinoba that it was his basic duty to keep his parents in touch with his movements. On his advice, Vinoba, therefore, addressed a letter to his father in the form of a Marathi poem. I have tried to render it in simple English:

"I offer cordial regards to my father, mother and Providence;
With your and God's grace, I am living in this Ashram as if in my own home.
Mother! you must be worrying about your son and experiencing unhappiness;
But please don't feel at all anxious about me!
You are the mother of the world and know everything;
Therefore, please don't feel sorry and sad.
Although my words are not powerful enough to free you from worries,
Yet I pray to God to shower peace on you!"

Gandhiji and Vinoba would work together in the Ashram grinding the corn, cleaning latrines and studying the philosophy of the *Gita* and the *Upanishads*. Sometime later, Gandhiji described Vinoba to C. F. Andrews as "one of the few pearls in the Ashram, who come there not to be blessed, but to bless it". But Vinoba was all humility and tried to reduce himself to a zero. He did nothing which would give the slightest impression of 'showing off'. This is what Vinoba said in the course of a talk to an inmate: "Only I can know what I have got in the Ashram. It was an early ambition of mine to distinguish myself by some violent deed in the service of the country. But Bapu cured me of that ambition. It is he who has extinguished the volcano of anger and other passions in me. I have been progressing every day of my life in the Ashram."

After some months Vinoba's younger brother Balkoba also

joined the Ashram. In the beginning, Vinoba was rather reluctant to have Balkoba also with him. But later he relented, and Balkoba began to take an active part in the daily life of the community.

One day, the sweeper of the Ashram had gone on leave and had asked his 12-year old son to do the scavenging work. Balkoba found that the poor boy, unable to lift the pots filled with nightsoil, was crying. He, therefore, sympathized with him and tried to help this boy in his work. When Vinoba learnt of this incident, he told Balkoba: "You did well in helping the sweeper's boy; from today I shall also work with you." This created a sensation in the Ashram. "How could Brahmin inmates like Vinoba and Balkoba take to such work?" exclaimed some of the co-workers. But Vinoba was adamant. During those days, Gandhiji was away on tour. When he returned, he was informed about this new development in the Ashram. Bapu affirmed: "Scavenging is a good and pious work. It should now become a part of our daily routine. Those who do not like it, can leave the Ashram." And some inmates did leave the community on this account, including the eldest sister of Gandhiji.

In the initial stages, weaving in the Ashram was done with mill yarn. It was only after some years that the first spinning wheel was brought to the Ashram to practise spinning by hand; the slivers,, however, were mill-made. Khadi produced during this period was obviously of a very coarse type. After Vinoba's arrival, the art of spinning and weaving underwent a radical change. The mathematical approach of Vinoba has stood him in good stead throughout his life. In Gandhiji's Ashram also Vinoba reduced spinning and weaving to an exact science. It is interesting to learn that it was one of his own pupils Krishnadas Gandhi who first taught Vinoba how to spin on the Charkha. But Vinoba soon came to be regarded as an expert in the production of Khadi. He used to spend hours together in spinning and weaving and taught these crafts to other inmates as well as to the students of the school attached to the Ashram —the *Rashtriya Shala.*

After about two years, Kochrab Ashram was shifted to the present site at Sabarmati. Here also Vinoba continued his work

of spinning, weaving, scavenging as well as teaching. For some months he did cooking work also in the Ashram kitchen. He brought to bear on all types of work the imprint of his efficiency and devotion. When Vinoba taught a particular subject in the class, his voice was so loud that it could be heard at a distance of half a mile across the road. He tried to give his very best to the young boys entrusted to his care and strained every ounce of energy to impart education with thoroughness. Vinoba could never tolerate any perfunctory or casual type of activity. The dictum "*Yogah Karmasu Kaushalam*" of the *Gita* was his ideal in life.

For many months, Vinoba brought water from the Sabarmati river in buckets and watered all the plants in the Ashram, working five hours a day. This hard work on the part of Vinoba was hardly noticed by other members for several weeks. Later, they were amazed at his physical energy, despite indifferent health. One day, Gandhiji asked him: "How do you stand all this physical labour, Vinoba?" "It is not so much my body as my *will* that enables me to undertake this hard work," was Vinoba's humble reply.

Once, the Gujarati teacher of the Ashram was away, and Gandhiji desired that Vinoba should teach Gujarati to the students of the National School. Although Vinoba had picked up enough Gujarati after joining the Ashram, he hesitated for a while and suggested that another Gujarati teacher be appointed soon. But Gandhiji wrote back to Vinoba on 24 July 1918 from Navagam: "I have your thought-provoking letter. The ideal is, of course, what you have stated. It is also true that to achieve it there should be a Gujarati teacher. But in the absence of such a teacher, it would not be wrong to avail ourselves of a teacher from Maharashtra. Also I would prefer a Marathi teacher who has character to a Gujarati who has none... For the present, therefore, you will have to continue teaching it while keeping the ideal in view."

A little later, Mahadev Desai records Gandhiji as saying: "Vinoba is a great man. I have always felt that I am fortunate in my dealings with Maharashtrians and Madrasis. Of the latter, there is none now. But no Maharashtrian has ever disappointed me, and among them all Vinoba is beyond praise."

Sometime in 1918, information was received from Baroda that Vinoba's mother was seriously down with influenza. When Gandhiji heard of this, he advised Vinoba to proceed immediately to Baroda to serve the ailing mother. Vinoba did so and was at the bed-side of his mother during the last few days of her life. While returning to the Ashram, Vinoba brought with him two precious mementos connected with his esteemed mother—a *saree* and a metallic idol of *Annapoorna* whom his mother worshipped all her life. Vinoba used to keep mother's saree under his pillow for quite some time. But when Khadi work developed in the Ashram under his own guidance, Vinoba one day quietly consigned his mother's mill *saree* to the waters of Sabarmati. The *Annapoorna* idol was given to Prabhudas Gandhi's mother, Kashiba, for daily worship, on the condition that one hundred *Surya-namaskars* would be performed every morning in front of the idol. This condition was accepted by Prabhudas who was Vinoba's pupil at that time in the school. *Annapoorna* remained with Kashiba till her death, and is now being taken care of by Prabhudas Gandhi himself.

One day, Vinoba was taking bath in the river. Unfortunately, he lost his balance and fell into the fast-moving current. Vinoba did not raise any scare for some time, but when he found that he was being swept away, he shouted: "Convey my *namaskars* to Bapu and tell him that though Vinoba's body has disappeared, his soul is immortal." As luck would have it, Vinoba was soon thrown up on a shallow land in mid-stream and after some respite, swam back to the Ashram. His remarkable equipoise of mind even in the face of death created a deep impression on Gandhiji and the Ashramites.

Kakasaheb Kalelkar recollects another incident of a similar nature. Once he and Vinoba had gone out to a neighbouring village and were returning in the evening along the railway-line. As they were crossing a bridge, they heard the noise of a railway train coming behind them at fast speed. Kakasaheb got scared and started running over the bridge which was made of wooden planks, with gaps in-between. Vinoba's eye-sight was rather weak and he could not clearly see these gaping gaps between the planks. He also started running behind Kakasaheb bare-footed, and a slightest mistake on his part

would have thrown him down into the gushing river below. Mathematics again came to his succour, and he negotiated the planks of the bridge with arithmetical accuracy, even without seeing them. The railway engine was only a few yards away, and Kakasaheb cried: "Vinoba, jump to the left." He did so and had a hair-breadth escape. When Gandhiji learnt of this incident, he advised Vinoba to begin using spectacles and take no such risks in future. Vinoba agreed to use the glasses and also to wear *chappals*.

I recently learnt of an interesting episode at one of the evening prayers in the Ashram. As a daily routine, Maganlal Gandhi, the manager of the Ashram, used to call the roll to mark attendence of the members. As the names were called, everyone including Gandhiji, would say 'Om' to signify his presence. One day, Maganlalbhai announced that all the fifteen inmates were present. But Vinoba remarked that only fourteen were really present. Everybody was taken by surprise. Maganlal Gandhi reaffirmed that all the fifteen were in position. Gandhiji then asked Vinoba about the nature of his objection. He replied: "It is true that all the fifteen are present in body; but the mind of one who is calling the roll is not in prayer but in routine work. Hence it cannot be said that he is present at the prayers in the real sense." Bapu agreed that the essence of prayer was concentration of one's mind on the qualities of the Divine. Without such exclusive attention, prayers were of hardly any significance.

For some time, Vinoba also functioned as the superintendent of the hostel attached to the National School. There was a scare in the beginning. It was felt that he, according to his stern nature, may deal with the young boys harshly. But everybody was surprised when Vinoba was elected by the students as the superintendent in preference to Kakasaheb Kalelkar. Incidentally, it is interesting to know that, according to the rules of the School, the superintendent was elected every year by students themselves. Vinoba used to wake up the hostel boys early in the morning for prayers with great affection. He would recite some *Shlokas* and sing a few songs in a melodious tone, so that the sleeping ones would wake up in an atmosphere of joy and devotion. This technique worked very well and

Vinoba was soon recognized as a very popular superintendent and a respected teacher. He loved his pupils with all his heart. Some of these students of Vinoba included Vallabhswami who subsequently became the President of the All-India Sarva Seva Sangh, Prabhudas and Krishnadas Gandhi, sons of Chhaganlal Gandhi. Besides Vinoba, Jugatram Dave, Kishorelal Mashruwala and Appasaheb Patwardhan worked as teachers in the *Rashtriya Shala*. Kakasaheb Kalelkar functioned as the Principal of the School and was later appointed as the Vice-Chancellor of Gujarat Vidyapith.

Vinoba first lived in the verandah of the weaving shed. He used to get up at 4 in the morning and recite Sanskrit *Shlokas* from the Scriptures in a loud but sweet voice. Subsequently, he shifted to a small cottage near *Hridayakunj* where Gandhiji and Kasturba resided. This *Vinobakuti* continues to be maintained in the Ashram as a sweet memory of those days. It was occupied by Miraben after Vinoba left for Wardha.

In the hostel, Vinoba also worked as the physical instructor and taught *Surya-namaskar* and other physical exercises to the boys early in the morning. He played the games of *Kabaddi* and *Khokho* in the Indian style. He conducted some research in evolving games which would discourage violent tendencies among students and promote non-violence and co-operation. Western games like cricket were never encouraged in the Ashram; they were not only expensive, but time-consuming too. Basically, the students were trained as patriotic citizens for participating in India's struggle for freedom.

In the *Rashtriya Shala* attached to the Sabarmati Ashram, all students had to undergo rigorous physical labour at least for three hours a day. Side by side, academic subjects were taught, and every attempt was made to correlate these subjects with manual work and productive crafts.

During his Ashram life, Vinoba did not rest a minute during the day. He not only looked after the boys in the hostel and taught various subjects to the students of the National School, but also spent a few hours in spinning, weaving, cooking, grinding, and preparing the fields with pick-axe for cultivation. Even while teaching, Vinoba would exert all his energy and even perspire. Whatever he did was done with his whole being.

He was incapable of doing anything in a slipshod fashion.

Vinoba was a very capable and ingenious teacher. Prabhudas Gandhi recalls how Kakasaheb and Narhari Parikh were completely fed up with him while teaching grammar. It was ultimately decided to send him to Vinoba who readily agreed and began teaching Sanskrit to Prabhudas not through grammar, but by directly acquainting him with interesting Sanskrit books like the *Raghuvansha.* I may here mention in passing that, although a keen student of Sanskrit, Vinoba never cared to read Kalidasa's *Shakuntalam.* He has been of the definite view that the essence of Sanskrit literature lies in spirituality and not in mundane matters.

Vinoba always insisted on self-study or *Swadhyaya* for a few hours every day. He wanted his pupils to imbibe the habit of studying various books by themselves, without the aid of teachers. It was this spirit of self-help and self-reliance in learning academic subjects which was promoted by Vinoba all the time, besides imbuing students with dignity of labour and self-sufficiency in the requirements of food and clothing.

Once Prabhudas Gandhi was sitting by Vinoba's side and politely enquired: "Are there any special instructions for me?" Vinoba feelingly replied: "Prabhudas, even while working with your body, always remember God! This is the only way to attain a long life of fulfilment."

Vinoba did not favour the teaching of too many subjects in a school. Even a single subject taught in a thorough manner could mould the personality of the boys in the right direction. What really matters is not teaching the subjects but *educating* the boys. Vinoba could recite, without any reference to books, thousands of poems and verses from Marathi literature. He had also learnt by rote hundreds of Sanskrit *shlokas* from the *Vedas, Upanishads, Mahabharata* and *Ramayana.* He had picked up Gujarati language as well and read some of the best books in Gujarati literature.

Once Vinoba decided to carry on spinning for full eight hours a day in order to earn enough for his meals. Simultaneously, he taught various subjects to a few students for hours. It was this harmony of physical labour with intellectual attainment which characterized Vinoba's system of teaching in

the Ashram. This method subsequently flowered into the scheme of Basic Education after the Wardha Conference in 1937.

It is interesting to know various stages during which Vinoba's personal dress underwent visible changes. During his college days, he used *dhoti*, shirt, coat and a cap of mill-made *swadeshi* cloth. When Vinoba left his home and proceeded to Varanasi for Sanskrit studies, he gave up the use of coat, but continued his *dhoti*, shirt and cap. Before joining the Gandhi Ashram at Ahmedabad, he had abandoned the cap as well. When hand-spinning and hand-weaving processes at the Ashram culminated in the production of pure khadi, Vinoba used a *dhoti* of 35" width and kept the shirt on his shoulders without actually wearing it. Gradually, the shirt was given up and Vinoba stretched a portion of the *dhoti* on to his shoulders. Some time later, he reduced the width of *dhoti* to 27" and used an untailored upper cloth for covering his body. Since then, his dress has remained almost unchanged to this day.

The daily life in the Ashram had become so arduous that several inmates expressed a desire to return home. The manager of the Ashram sought Vinoba's advice in this matter. Pat came the reply: "If some people want to go, please let them go. It is much better to have a few inmates properly disciplined rather than a large number not upto the mark." Vinoba was a hard taskmaster and never compromised on basic principles.

In his memoirs, Balkoba narrates an episode which throws a flood of light on Vinoba's personality. While living in the Sabarmati Ashram, Balkoba taught music, specially Sitar, to some of the students of the National School. He also worked for several hours in the weaving department of which Chhotelal Jain was the superintendent. One day, there was a clash between Chhotelal and Balkoba over a comparatively minor matter of a technical nature. When Balkoba refused to carry out the directions of Chhotelal, the latter threatened him with disciplinary action. Balkoba felt greatly perturbed and approached Vinoba for his guidance. Vinoba slowly but firmly said: "Chhotelalji is the superintendent of the weaving department. It is essential for everybody working under him to carry out his directions. If each acts in his own light, it will be im-

possible to run any institution. Your own view may still be correct. But you have done your duty in conveying it to Chhotelalji. The final decision must be his, and you must carry it out." That was the end of the matter and Balkoba acted in the light of this advice.

Soon after his coming to the Ashram, Vinoba's bosom friends Raghunath Dhotre, Gopalrao Kale, Babaji Moghe and Dwarkanath Harkare joined him. The circle of friends, carefully selected in childhood, continued to stand by him shoulder to shoulder and through thick and thin. These co-workers also went with him to Wardha to set up a new Satyagraha Ashram there in accordance with the wishes of Jamnalal Bajaj.

In 1920 there were considerable political upheavals in the country as a result of British oppression after the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy. Non-co-operation movement was to be launched on August 1, but Lokmanya Tilak was seriously ill. Vinoba specially went to Bombay to have his *darshan*. Four days later, Lokmanya expired. Vinoba felt deeply grieved at the passing away of this great leader for whom he cherished very high regard. Even so, he continued his work in the Ashram uninterrupted. It was suggested by some friends that he should also plunge into the national movement for political liberation. But Vinoba quietly said: "I am engaged in training up the next generation."

7

On Leave for a Year

AFTER VINOBA joined Gandhiji's Ashram, he conformed to a very rigorous life and strained his physical energy to the utmost. In consequence, his health suffered a decline and called for some rest. Additionally, Vinoba was desirous of devoting more time to the study of Sanskrit literature. He had gone to Varanasi mainly to quench this thirst, but he could stay there only for less than three months and had to come away to meet Gandhiji in Ahmedabad. Vinoba, therefore, conveyed to Gandhiji his desire to go on leave for a year. Gandhiji agreed, and after prayers at sunrise Vinoba took his leave and went away bare-headed and bare-foot, with his blanket and one spare garment rolled under his arm.

During this leave of absence, Vinoba spent six months at Wai, his ancestral place in Satara district of Maharashtra, where he attended lectures on *Brahmasutra Bhashya* of Shankaracharya by the renowned Sanskrit scholar Narayan Shastri Marathe. He also studied in depth the *Upanishads*, the *Gita*, the *Manu Smriti* and the *Patanjali Yoga Sutras*. The remaining six months were spent in touring the surrounding villages. During this *padayatra*, Vinoba acquainted himself with the social and economic condition of the people and also delivered talks on the *Gita*. Gradually, his discourses gained popularity and large numbers flocked to his meetings. Once an old *Sannyasi* on pilgrimage from the Himalayas stopped to listen to his speech and asked some persons in the audience: "Is it Adi Shankaracharya again talking to us?"

Vinoba concluded his fiftieth talk on the *Gita* thus: "I know

of nothing which is of greater value than reading the *Gita*. And yet, I have found a living person who follows the philosophy of the *Gita* in his own life. He is my Master and lives in an Ashram on the banks of Sabarmati river in Gujarat."

An interesting aspect of Vinoba's activities during this leave period was the conducting of a corn-grinding class with the assistance of some friends. They could succeed in getting customers who would carry their wheat to the grinding centre. Vinoba and other students, mostly of the high school classes, would do the grinding at the rate of only one pice for two pounds. Although these students had not done anything of this kind earlier, they carried on this class with interest for two months during which they earned enough to purchase 400 books for their common library and reading room.

On 10 February 1918, Vinoba wrote a long letter in his own hand to Gandhiji giving full details of his studies and activities during his absence from the Ashram. This letter gives a good insight into Vinoba's character and one can scarcely resist the temptation of reproducing it here in full as published in *Young India*:

Most revered Bapuji,

I left the Ashram a year ago to recoup my health. I had intended to stay in Wai for two or three months and then return, but though a whole year has passed away, nothing has been heard from me. Questions, therefore, may have arisen whether I am ever to come back and even whether I am alive or dead. I must admit, I am myself entirely to blame in the matter. I had, however, written a letter or two to Mama Phadke requesting him to write to me immediately if any satyagraha was to be launched. I had told him, I would give up everything to join it, but otherwise I would stay on, out of the Ashram. If anybody suspected that I was a deserter, even there the fault is mine alone, because I am averse to correspondence. I must, however, state here that the Ashram has not only captivated me, but I have also the ingrained conviction that I was really born for the Ashram. Why then, did I loiter away a whole year outside the Ashram precincts?

Early in my life, when I was only ten, I took a solemn vow to observe *Brahmacharya* and dedicate my life to the country. Later on, during my high school days, I was fascinated by the teachings of the *Bhagvad-Gita.* My father, however, asked me to take up French as my second language, but that did not abate my zest to learn the *Gita.* I began to study Sanskrit privately at home that very day, and I was resolved upon studying the *Vedanta* and other books on philosophy whenever possible. When, with your permission, I came to Wai, I saw that there was an excellent opportunity for me to study the *Vedanta.* One Shri Narayan Shastri Marathe, a *Brahmachari* all his life, is teaching the *Vedanta* and other Scriptures here. I was seized with a passion to learn the *Upanishads,* etc., from him. Now let me write what I have done during all this time.

My work with respect to my craving for knowledge which kept me out so long:

Study of (1) the *Upanishads,* (2) the *Gita,* (3) *Brahmasutra-Shankarbhashya,* (4) *Manusmriti,* and (5) *Patanjali Yogadarshan.* I went through, besides, (1) *Nyayasutra,* (2) *Vaisheshiksutra* and (3) *Yajnavalkyasmriti.* My desire to study our religious books has now been fully gratified. I can now read whatever I want to in Sanskrit without any extraneous aid.

Then, about the recuperation of health for which I went to Wai. I had made it a rule to walk ten to twelve miles. Then began grinding 6 to 8 seers (12 to 15 lbs) cereals with a hand-mill. At present I do 300 *namaskars* and take a walk every day for physical exercise. This has improved my health.

Regarding my diet: I have never taken other condiments, but, for the first six months I used to take salt. I am now on a saltless and spiceless diet. I have started taking milk. Many experiments proved that I cannot go without milk. But my desire to give it up, if possible, persists. For a month, I had nothing but milk, lemon and bananas, but I found that I was getting weak. This is my present diet: Milk 1½ lbs., *jowar chapattis* 2, bananas 4 or 5, lemon 1, when available. When I come to the Ashram, I intend to regulate my diet

on your advice. I am not tempted by any other food for the sake of its taste only. All the same, I cannot help feeling that my present diet is rather too luxurious. My daily expense over food, item by item is about: bananas and lemon 4 pice, chapattis 2, milk 5, total 11. I want to know from you what changes I should make. You will please write to me.

Other things done:

Took classes in (1) the *Gita*. Free tuition to six students of the whole gospel with full exposition of the verses. (2) *Jnaneshwari* (a big Marathi exposition on the *Gita* by Jnaneshwar), 6 chapters, 4 students attended. (3) 9 *Upanishads* to two students. (4) Hindi propaganda: I do not know Hindi well myself. But I used to read a Hindi newspaper to some students. (5) English to two students. (6) Excursions: nearly 400 miles on foot. Saw fortresses of historical fame such as Rajgarh, Sinhagarh, Torangarh, etc. (7) Used to hold during my tramps discourses on the *Gita*, which have come to 50 in all till now. Even now, I propose to foot it to Bombay, and then take a train for Ahmedabad to rejoin the Ashram. A student, 26 years old, has been throughout with me in my journeys and he too is at present footing it out in my company. He is not inclined to study the *Gita* from anyone except myself. The latest date of my entry into the Ashram is Chaitra Sudi 1 (the New Year's day in Maharashtra falling generally in April). (8) I started at Wai an institution called the *Vidyarthi Mandal* (students' association) and founded a library in connection with it. We, fifteen students and myself, formed a club of hand-grinders and our earnings were used in buying books for the library. We offered the same rate (1 pice for 2 lbs) as the local grinding mill, and thus could draw customers. Sons of even high-class families were members of the club. Wai is a centre of orthodoxy and since the hand-grinders were all Brahmin students studying in the high school, we were ridiculed by the public as faddists and fools. All the same, our grinding club continued for two months, and 400 books have been stocked in the library. (9) I tried very much to propagate the principles of the Ashram; I attended its annual celebration. (This 'celebration' means nothing more than a meeting for com-

parison of the notes of members as to the work accomplished and the work to be done.) I put before them the idea of spreading Hindi and I have every reason to believe that the institution will take up the work. Since you have begun an effort for the propagation of Hindi, I may say that this institution in Baroda will be prepared to associate with you in the work.

And finally, I must state how I have behaved as an inmate of the Ashram. These are our vows: Control of the palate: I have already dealt with this vow during my reference in this letter to my dietetic experiments. Non-possession: a wooden dish (*thali*), bowls, one *lota* (a small jug) belonging to the Ashram, dhoti, a blanket and books comprise all my paraphernalia. I have taken a vow not to use a shirt, a cap and a coat. I wrap my upper body also with a dhoti. I use only hand-woven clothes. *Swadeshi* (exclusive use of articles made in one's own country): I do not use a single foreign-made article (but only if *swadeshi* is not taken in the expanded sense which you gave it in your speech at Madras). Truth, non-violence, *Brahmacharya*: I am sure that I have strictly observed these vows to the best of my understanding of them.

What more shall I write? In my dreams and in my waking hours, only one question haunts me: "Will God deign to take service from me?" I followed the rules of the Ashram (except one) and so, though the body may be roaming outside, I am, in reality, always in the Ashram. It is the ideal of my life. The one exception, alluded to above, is about self-cooking, i.e., about making 'chapattis' myself. I tried to observe that rule also, but could not do so in my excursions.

If any question of offering satyagraha arises, say, against the hardships of the third-class passengers in railways, I will come immediately; otherwise, I have given you above the latest date of my arrival in the Ashram.

What are the changes that have been made in the Ashram? How many students are there? What is your scheme of national education?; and what changes should I make in my diet? I am longing for advice on all these points. And you must write the reply yourself, in your own hand; that is the

earnest and insistent prayer of this 'Vinoba', your son, to whom you are no other than his revered father.

I will leave this town in a few days.

—Vinoba's Pranam.

On reading this detailed letter, Gandhiji was overwhelmed with emotion. "He is a *Bhim,* a Hercules!" exclaimed he. "He is a Gorakhnath who has beaten his Guru Macchandarnath." And this was the memorable reply writen by Gandhiji:

I do not know in what terms to praise you. Your love and your character fascinate me and so also your self-examination. I am not fit to measure your worth. I accept your own estimate and assume the position of a father to you. You seem almost to have met a long-felt wish of mine. In my view a father is, in fact, a father only when he has a son who surpasses him in virtue. A real son, likewise, is one who improves on what the father has done; if the father is truthful, firm of mind and compassionate, the son will be all this in a greater measure. This is what you have made yourself. I don't see that you owe your achievement to any effort of mine. Hence, I accept the role you offer to me as a gift of love. I shall strive to be worthy of it; and, if ever I become another Hiranyakashyapu, oppose me respectfully as Prahlad, who loved God, disobeyed him.

It is true as you say that, though outside the Ashram, you have scrupulously observed its rules. I never doubted that you would return. Besides, I had your written messages, read out by Mama. May God grant you long life, and use you for the uplift of India.

I don't see any need for changes in your diet just yet. Do not give up milk for the present. On the contrary, increase the quantity, if necessary.

About the railways, no satyagraha is required. What is wanted is intelligent workers to carry on propaganda. On the issue in Kheda District, satyagraha may possibly have to be offered. I am something of a tramp these days. In a day or two, I shall have to leave for Delhi.

More when you arrive. Everyone is looking forward to seeing you.

Blessings from Bapu.

Exactly after a year, and punctually to the minute, Vinoba returned to the Ashram at the morning prayers, bare-headed and bare-foot, and almost unnoticed. It was Monday, Gandhiji's day of silence. Vinoba, therefore, did not like to disturb Bapu and went straight to the kitchen to take up his usual place among the peelers of vegetables for the meals. Gandhiji was surprised to see Vinoba at breakfast, and welcomed him back to the Ashram with affection. Impressed by his punctuality, Gandhiji remarked:

"It shows your fidelity to truth."

"Rather, it is my loyalty to mathematics", put in Vinoba politely.

"Can mathematics ever betray truth?" smiled Bapu.

As a matter of fact, even during his so-called holiday, Vinoba had conformed to all the observances of the Ashram in his daily life. In other words, Vinoba conducted a 'mobile Ashram' during his one-year leave.

It was Vinoba's genuine desire to reduce himself to a zero in the process of search for Truth and Eternity. During his Ashram life, he rendered Gandhiji's little book *Mangal Prabhat* into Marathi and wrote a few couplets by way of introduction. In the last couplet, he wrote:

Vinya is like the non-being zero of mathematics;
The *Guru* is one and unique;
His esteem grows by the addition of zeros like mine.

8

To Wardha: 'Satyagraha Ashram'

JAMNALAL BAJAJ had come in contact with Gandhiji specially during the Nagpur session of the Indian National Congress in 1920. He used to pay frequent visits to him at the Sabarmati Ashram and had been accepted as Bapu's 'fifth son'. Jamnalalji was desirous of starting a similar Ashram at Wardha and requested Gandhiji to shift there with other inmates. Gandhiji welcomed this idea, but said: "You know that I am a Gujarati and can do greater service in this area. Through Gujarat, I could serve the whole country." Jamnalalji, however, would not take a 'no' from Bapu. As a result, an experienced Ashramite Ramniklal Modi was sent to Wardha for starting a branch of the Ashram there. But on account of ill-health, Ramniklalbhai could not stay at Wardha for long. Thereupon, Jamnalalji insistently requested Gandhiji to spare Vinoba for taking charge of the Wardha Ashram. Maganlal Gandhi strongly protested. He was very reluctant to relieve Vinoba who had become almost indispensable in running the Sabarmati Ashram and the National School. Maganlalbhai, therefore, opined that the Wardha Ashram should be closed down. But Bapu did not relish this idea and asserted: "An institution once started should never be closed down." He therefore, accepted Jamnalalji's suggestion. Vinoba also agreed to go to Wardha with a few of his chosen colleagues and pupils.

Vinoba, along with his colleagues Raghunath Dhotre and Dwarkanath Harkare, and a few selected students, including Vallabhswami, his brother Bhaskar, Kesho Gandhi, Krishnadas Gandhi and Shivaji, left Sabarmati Ashram on 6 April and

reached Wardha on the 8 April 1921. They started their work at Maganwadi, a garden colony of Jamnalalji on the outskirts of the city. Since a good number of people used to come to this place for their morning ablutions and bath at the well within the colony, Vinoba suggested a change. Jamnalalji readily vacated his thatched bungalow along with an eight-acre plot, about two miles away from the town, at a place which is now called Bajajwadi. It was this *ghas-ka bangala* (thatched bungalow) where Vinoba and his colleagues set up the Satyagraha Ashram in July 1921 and ran it for several years. Since it was situated amidst desolate surroundings, it was popularly believed to be haunted by ghosts. Some time later, Gopalrao Kale, Babaji Moghe and Valunjkar joined him. Balkoba also shifted to Wardha to help his elder brother in this onerous task. The bungalow was infested with snakes and scorpions and students were gradually trained to catch them alive and throw away at some distance.

Since the building was rather dilapidated and not very suitable for an Ashram, it was decided by Jamnalalji to construct a new building on an eight-acre plot about a mile away towards the east at a place which is now called *Mahila Ashram*. The construction work was entrusted to Dwarkanath Harkare and later Gopalrao Kale, and the Ashram shifted there sometime in 1924. It was confiscated by the Government during the 1932 movement and never functioned again in that form. Its buildings were utilized for a women's institution called *Mahila Ashram*. After his release from jail towards the end of 1932, Vinoba lived for some time at a place near the cotton market of Wardha, and then shifted his headquarters to Nalwadi, a nearby village on the Nagpur road, mainly inhabited by Harijans.

While running the Satyagraha Ashram at Wardha Vinoba introduced all the essential principles of community life as they were practised at Sabarmati. He, however, utilized this opportunity to try some new experiments according to his own ideas and made the daily life even more rigorous and disciplined. Swami Ramdas had extolled the virtues of 'that person who practises what he preaches'. Vinoba, therefore, was very anxi-

ous to make the lives of the Ashram inmates completely self-reliant. He had made it a rule that the community will eat only what it would actually earn in the course of the day by dint of physical labour. For years together, the evening meals were cooked only after making realistic calculations in the afternoon about the anticipated total wage bill of all the inmates. Somebody would spin for eight hours and earn about 3 annas. Another would earn a rupee-and-a-half by weaving cloth. And yet another would work in the garden and the fields to receive a wage of 8 annas. All these earnings, according to individual capacities of various inmates, were added together and each inmate was given food in accordance with his actual requirements. Quite often, the kitchen had to be kept closed in the evening because the inmates had not been able to earn enough during the day. On other occasions, the meals were not adequate for the purpose, and the members of the community had to be content with only half the meals. Vinoba would himself serve morning and evening meals with a sense of satisfaction and pleasure. When the meals were not enough to go round, he would utter a warning to the members well in time and then stop serving by announcing in good humour '*samaptam*' (the meals are over).

It may be mentioned here that Jamnalalji used to give a monthly grant of a few hundred rupees for running the Ashram. But this amount was utilized mainly for the non-recurring expenses. The running expenditure was met, by and large, out of the actual earnings of the inmates through daily productive work according to a plan.

Sometimes Bhaskar, the brother of Vallabhswami who was a favourite student of Vinoba, complained with anger that he had earned much more than others and yet received food not enough for satiating his hunger. Vinoba administered a mild rebuke: "In this community we must lead a co-operative life—each to work according to his capacity and to receive from the common pool whatever was feasible."

Various *Vratas* or 'rules of discipline' which were in vogue at Sabarmati were codified by Vinoba in the form of a *Shloka* in Marathi:

अहिंसा सत्य अस्तेय ब्रह्मचर्य असंग्रह ।
शरीरश्र अस्वाद सर्वत्र भयवर्जन ॥
सर्वधर्म समानत्व स्वदेशी स्पर्शभावना ।
ही एकादश सेवावी नम्रत्वे व्रतनिश्चये ॥

Non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, chastity and non-accumulation,
Physical labour, palate-control, and absolute fearlessness,
Equal respect for all religions, *swadeshi,* and freedom from untouchability—
These are the eleven vows I should humbly try to observe.

This Marathi *Shloka* is now recited in almost all the Ashrams during community prayers. Even the Sabarmati and Sevagram Ashrams have incorporated it in their daily routine.

All the work within the Ashram was done by the inmates themselves, including sanitation and scavenging, cooking and washing of clothes. There was no question of engaging any servants. Vinoba too, like other members, worked regularly for eight hours a day with the sweat of his brow. His classes continued even at the time of cleaning the cereals and pulses and cutting of vegetables for the morning and evening meals. Some of his pupils now recall with satisfaction that as a teacher he was at his best not in the classes but in the workshop and the kitchen. To Vinoba, work could never be divorced from knowledge; it was also the best form of worship. He did not believe in relaxation and made the inmates live in the Ashram all the 24 hours and for months on end, without diversions of any kind. He maintained that nothing tangible could ever be achieved without single-minded concentration and rigorous discipline.

As in Sabarmati, Vinoba carried on his teaching in a very loud voice and with all his heart. Even when he had only two or three students before him, his voice would be loud enough for a hundred. On occasions, he would shout so loudly that some of the younger students would start weeping; but Vinoba was all affection for his pupils and would treat them like his

own children. He literally believes in the existence of spiritual ties between the *Guru* and his disciples. His relationship with the pupils has been of a life-long nature. Vallabh, who was later known as Vallabhswami, worked as President of the All-India Sarva Seva Sangh for several years and was one of the best Sarvodaya workers in the country. On his sudden death in November 1964, Vinoba naturally felt deeply grieved and shaken to the core. Another disciple of his, Krishnadas Gandhi, has been doing pioneering work in the sphere of hand-spinning and weaving and is still conducting research work at Sabarmati. His elder brother Prabhudas Gandhi has also devoted his whole life to constructive work with exemplary dedication. Radhakrishna Bajaj paid special attention to khadi and *Goseva* work and is now looking after the Publication department of the Sarva Seva Sangh. Manohar Divan risked his own health for the service of the lepers and set up the *Maharogi Seva Mandal* at Dattapur on the Wardha-Nagpur road as a unique colony on the basis of self-sufficiency even in a leper community. Bhau Panse still runs a big workshop at Gopuri for the manufacture of spinning wheels. Dattoba Dastane is now the Secretary of Gandhi Seva Sangh at Sevagram. These are only a few examples of the young men who passed through the drill of Acharya Vinoba at the Satyagraha Ashram in Wardha. There are many others who have distinguished themselves in various fields of constructive activity.

Vinoba's emphasis on correct pronunciation in the learning of languages has been an exceptional feature of the Ashram. It was, perhaps, his father who insisted on flawless pronunciation of Sanskrit, Marathi as well as English words. Vinoba himself has learnt all the Indian languages, in addition to some foreign languages, with precise intonation of words. When he decided to study the Holy Quran, he sought the assistance of a Maulvi in Wardha to teach him Arabic. It was sometime in 1939 that Vinoba was called by Gandhiji to Sevagram to recite some verses of the Quran before Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. Maulana Saheb was visibly surprised at the correct and impeccable pronunciation of Arabic words by Vinoba. Prabhudas Gandhi recalls an interesting occasion when Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya visited the Wardha Ashram sometime in 1929.

Vallabhswami was asked to recite Marathi verses in the presence of Malaviyaji. It was taken for granted that the mother-tongue of Vallabh was Marathi. But when Malaviyaji was informed that Vallabh was born in Gujarat, he was greatly surprised and congratulated Vinoba for his exceptional achievement.

For quite some time, Vinoba used to hold a special class for his younger brother Balkoba for teaching Shankaracharya's commentary on *Brahmasutra*. These discourses were of such a high standard that even elders like Shrikrishnadas Jaju and Jamnalal Bajaj used to attend them regularly and with keen interest.

A variety of experiments were conducted in the Ashram on dietetics. For quite some time the kitchen cooked only one kind of cereal or pulse, unmixed with any other. Vinoba was of the view that a mixture of cereals or pulses or vegetables promoted sloth and lethargy and was not good for spiritual growth. No spices were used; even salt was prohibited for long periods. The inmates of the Ashram underwent all this rigorous discipline in order to be free from the attractions of the palate. Vinoba also insisted on every member of the community to eat a bit less than actual appetite, because over-eating was the direct cause of many ailments. He is fond of quoting Napoleon's alleged remark that however little a man might eat, he always eats too much.

Once, for months together, milk and all its products were given up completely. On other occasions, the kitchen served only uncooked vegetables. Some time later, cooked vegetables were used without even salt. Those who so desired could add salt separately at the time of meals. The Ashram kitchen also started making loaves of bread or *Pav Roti* for the convenience of the inmates and the guests. Valunjkar was specially sent to Kamptee to learn the technique at the Military bakery. Further, on particular days, there was no cooking and the Ashramites ate only groundnuts, fruits and *gur*.

The staple diet of the Wardha region in Maharashtra was Jowari. Vinoba, therefore, decided to discontinue the use of wheat in the Ashram and used only millets for the meals. This caused considerable inconvenience to the students for some

time, and they had a sense of grievance for this sudden change in diet. But Vinoba's decision, once taken, was final and there was no room for any alteration.

Kamalnayan, the eldest son of Jamnalal Bajaj, also lived in Vinoba's Ashram for some years. He narrates a significant episode which casts a new light on Vinoba's educational approach in the Ashram. When Jamnalalji wanted Kamalnayan to join the institution, he made it a pre-condition that he would not do scavenging work. Vinoba accepted his plea and said: "We do not impose any work on the students against their will." Kamalnayan was, therefore, exempted from this work in the Ashram. He did not also like to sit during meals with those inmates who did scavenging work regularly. Naughty as he was, he would even taunt those pupils who undertook this 'filthy work'. This was, naturally, not liked by the teachers and they rebuked Kamalnayan for such behaviour once or twice. Consequently, Kamalnayan left the Ashram and went home.

When Vinoba knew about this incident, he felt greatly disturbed and through the intervention of Jamnalalji, persuaded Kamalnayan to rejoin the Ashram. He repeated his earlier assurance that Kamalnayan would not be asked to clean the latrines. He, however, utilized various opportunities to explain to Kamalnayan the rationale of scavenging. Vinoba once asked him: "Which is better—to clean or to create filth?" He also explained how nightsoil was being converted into compost manure for growing vegetables in the Ashram.

In due course, Kamalnayan's aversion to this work was gradually lessened, and he understood the science of scavenging and its utility to the community. One day he sought the permission of Babaji Moghe, the Ashram superintendent, and joined the scavenging group. When Vinoba noticed this, he was quite perplexed and even perspired profusely. He at once called Kamalnayan and asked him why he was doing scavenging work to which he was strongly opposed. Vinoba felt greatly relieved when Kamalnayan told him: "Guruji, I have now taken up this work in accordance with my own will and desire; nobody has forced me to take to it." Vinoba, however, remarked: "You should have had the courtesy to inform me

earlier, before commencing this work in the Ashram." Kamalnayan apologized for this lapse on his part; but since that day, he did scavenging with faith and understanding.

Once a talented artist showed Vinoba one of his prestige paintings; it depicted a healthy and good-natured child in lurid colours. Vinoba looked at the painting for a while, and then kept it aside. The artist felt rather disappointed at his casual behaviour. Vinoba noticed this and remarked: "You have painted a nice portrait of the child. I will try to keep this model before me while educating my pupils in the Ashram." When the artist sought Vinoba's guidance for the future, the Acharya observed: "Your paintings will acquire much greater value if you simultaneously engage yourself in some creative activity of your choice. Without actual constructive work, mere paintings do not carry much weight." The artist promised to fulfil Vinoba's expectations at least in some measure.

It was hot summer and fierce winds blew all over. As a result, a large number of mangoes dropped down from the trees and the villagers concerned suffered greatly. They came with basket-loads of mangoes to the market and had to sell them at throw-away prices.

One day a villager came to the Ashram with a load of mangoes on his head. A passer-by asked him about the price of the mango-basket:

"Usually, a basket costs 3 rupees for 100 such mangoes."

"Three rupees! Don't you know that such baskets are sold for a rupee these days?"

"As you please! We have suffered greatly this year owing to the storm."

"I cannot pay you more than a rupee," remarked the passer-by.

After some bargaining, he paid the villager a rupee and quarter and purchased the whole lot. With a heavy heart the villager was going back home. For a while, he stopped at Vinoba's cottage and asked about the welfare of his Ashram.

"Have you sold all your mangoes?" asked Vinoba.

"Yes, we have been virtually looted this year. I have sold away the whole basket only for 20 annas."

"Why did you sell them at such a cheap rate?"

"I had no other go. Owing to the untimely storm, there is now a glut in the market!"

Vinoba, sympathising with the villager, gave him an additional rupee and three quarters. The villager was thrilled at this gesture and thanked Vinoba for his kindness.

It is also interesting to know that the ancestral Lakshminarayan Temple of Jamnalal Bajaj which was opened for the Harijans by Vinoba on 19 July 1928 at a special function in Gandhi Chowk, Wardha was, presumably, the first temple in the whole country to be thrown open to the Harijans in accordance with Gandhiji's wishes.

In order to keep in touch with the progress of Satyagraha Ashram under Vinoba's direction, Gandhiji used to go to Wardha generally once a year and stayed there for about a month. He also received periodical reports from Vinoba and kept on writing to him off and on, conveying his appreciation of the work. Once, Gandhiji wrote a letter to Vinoba and stated therein that 'he had never come across in his life a nobler soul than he'. Vinoba read the letter, immediately tore it to pieces and threw it into the wastepaper basket. Kamalnayan retrieved it and pieced it together. On reading the contents, he went up to Vinoba and asked: "Why did you tear up this precious letter from Bapu?" Vinoba obviously did not like Kamalnayan's joining the pieces up and said:

"Is it not a mistake on the part of Bapu to call me a great soul? This is both unfair to me and to others who may be much nobler than myself."

"Bapu is a very good judge of men and cannot commit such a mistake," insisted Kamalnayan.

"All right. Even if Bapu has not committed a mistake, why should I preserve this letter? It may fill me with egoism."

Kamalnayan agreed to consign the letter to flames in Vinoba's presence.

Babaji Moghe who had joined the Ashram on 1 October 1921, relates an interesting reminiscence about the Ashram dairy. Jamnalal Bajaj's wife Jankidevi had sent one cow and one buffalo for partially meeting the milk requirements of the inmates. It was often observed that the calf of the cow would first suck its mother's milk, then also run to the buffalo and

suck away her udders as well. Babaji Moghe remarked: "How foolish is this buffalo? The cow will never allow a she-buffalo's calf to suck her udders." Vinoba smilingly rejoined: "The buffalo is not foolish; she possesses a balanced mind and makes no difference between a calf and a calf."

Babaji once expressed his keen desire to return to Sabarmati Ashram for some months to learn music at the feet of Pandit Khare. He mentioned this to Vinoba and sought his permission.

"The country is passing through a difficult phase," observed Vinoba. "You had better remain where you are."

When Babaji appeared to be rather unconvinced, Vinoba added:

"We should always be prepared to sacrifice our most cherished desires at the altar of the Motherland. Don't you think so?"

That was the end of Babaji Moghe's plea. He continued to stay at the Ashram for shouldering his responsibilities with undivided attention.

Vinoba was never tired of making new experiments in the Ashram for solving practical difficulties. An experiment of this nature resulted in the fabrication of a new type of hurricane lantern which consumed local edible oils, in place of kerosene which was an imported item. Vinoba was averse to using consumer goods which were not produced within the country. This new type of lantern, later called *Magandeep* in memory of Maganlal Gandhi, was patronised by Gandhiji also in the Sevagram Ashram for many years. One such lantern could be seen in the *Bapukutir* even now.

The Ashram also conducted some research in agriculture, especially growing cotton and foodgrains. No servants were engaged, and all the labour, including watch-keeping at night, was provided by the inmates. Vinoba often suspended his writing work for attending to agricultural pursuits.

Vinoba is not a visionary but a practical idealist. One day, when after meals, the Ashram inmates and students were sitting near him talking over various matters at some leisure, Paranjpe Maharaj of Hanumangarh, a hillock near Wardha, suddenly reached the Ashram with members of his family including his wife and two young daughters. He asked for some general information about the Ashram, went round the

institution and, later returned home. Vinoba asked Babaji Moghe:

"Do you understand why Paranjpe Maharaj came here?"

"He must have come to see the Ashram."

"Not at all," remarked Vinoba. "He came to search for a suitable bridegroom. Did you not see that he has two daughters of marriageable age?"

Babaji Moghe was rather taken aback, but soon realized that Vinoba was right and he was wrong.

Dattoba Dastane also recalls a significant conversation with Vinoba while he was a student in the Satyagraha Ashram at Wardha. Vinoba asked him one day:

"What about your marriage?"

Young Dattoba felt a little embarrassed. And then Vinoba added:

"Your parents have put you in my charge. It is, therefore, my duty to look after your psychology and aspirations."

"There need be no hurry about my marriage," quietly put in Dattoba.

"If ideas about marriage do not occur to your mind at all, it is a different matter," observed Vinoba. "But if there is the slightest intention to marry, you should not go on postponing it. I will be on the look out for a good match."

After a pause, Vinoba added: "Both *Grihastha* and *Brahmacharya Ashrams* have their own importance. A notion that he who marries falls down spiritually is entirely wrong. It all depends upon one's aptitude and temperament."

Another activity which deserves special mention here was the publication of a monthly entitled *Maharashtra Dharma,* edited by Vinoba. It was started in January 1923 and included articles on a variety of subjects by Vinoba alone, 48 pages in each issue. It provided a good forum for the expression of his views on diverse subjects from month to month.

When Vinoba was arrested in Flag Satyagraha, the publication of this monthly had to be suspended. It was resumed after his release, and this time as a weekly. It continued for about two years. The style of Vinoba's articles in the weekly *Maharashtra Dharma* was simple and lively as compared with the heavy style of the earlier monthly.

Some years later, Vinoba culled out important articles and published them separately under the title *Madhukar*. The first two letters stand for the abbreviation of *Maharashtra Dharma* and *'kar'* means a collection. This was also translated into Hindi and published by the Sarva Seva Sangh. The book provides a very good insight into the working of Vinoba's mind and the originality of his thinking. For example, in one of the essays, Vinoba states: "An aged is not necessarily one who is advanced in years, but he who is in no mood to learn new things. Such 'aged' persons could be traced out among different vocations, including teachers." In another article, Vinoba refutes the argument of 'an eye for an eye': "We cannot meet the sword with a sword; it has to be met with a shield which should be equally strong. Likewise, violence cannot be countered with violence; it has to be faced with love and compassion."

Under the caption "Three Domestic Gods", Vinoba highlights the importance of *Chulha*, the hearth, *Chakki*, the grinding stone, and *Charkha*, the spinning wheel. All the three start with the consonant 'ch' and fulfil various needs of the householder, enabling him to be self-reliant. In another essay, he underlines the urgent need for workers to live among villagers in order to serve the rural areas effectively. Merely going to the villages at intervals and trying to resolve their difficulties is, at best, an exercise in futility. Constructive workers should not take up village development programme in a spirit of superiority. The very notion of 'service' connotes a sense of pride and egoism. A true worker must completely identify himself with the rural folk, live and eat amongst them. Vinoba subsequently translated this idea into concrete action by organizing the Gram Seva Mandal at Nalwadi, Wardha.

Between December 1928 and March 1931, it was Vinoba's practice to jot down stray thoughts for five minutes before retiring to bed. These thoughts were published subsequently in the form of a booklet entitled *Vichar Pothi*—a book of thoughts. Some extracts from it are given below:

"Falsehood is powerless. In order to maintain even its existence, it has to take shelter under truth."

"*Satya* (truth), *Sainyam* (self-control), *Seva* (service)—these are the three elements of spiritual life."

"God, Guru, the Soul, Dharma and the Saints—these are the five places of worship."

"I remember the following words of my mother: 'Vinya, don't ask for much. Remember, there is sweetness in little and bitterness in much. Food to fill the stomach and clothes to cover the body—this is all that is necessary for us...' Service of the nation is included in the *bhakti* or devotion of God. Nevertheless, we should recite some *Bhajans*."

"Service multiplied by humility is *bhakti*."

"In the *Gita*, the *Himalayas* has been described as the symbol of stability. He whose mind is steadfast virtually lives in the Himalayas."

"What are the real uses of music and art? Through music we should sing the name of God; and in art we should draw the lines of Divinity's image."

"When I started understanding the *Gita* a little, my mother passed away, as if she left me in the lap of the *Gita*. Oh! Mother *Gita*! I have lived and grown on your milk so far, and you will continue to be my support in the future!"

9

Vinoba Directs Two Satyagrahas

On 13 April 1923, a huge procession was taken out through the Civil Lines at Nagpur with the national flags flying in good number. The procession was stopped by the police, and a number of workers were arrested. Jamnalal Bajaj took up the challenge and courted arrest along with other volunteers. Jawaharlal Nehru, the then General Secretary of the Indian National Congress, happened to be in Nagpur during this period. He appealed to national workers all over the country to participate in this Flag Satyagraha. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel also came to Nagpur on 18 April and participated in the movement. But the police did not arrest him. A large number of people from different Provinces travelled to Nagpur to join this campaign for vindicating the honour of the flag.

Vinoba did not plunge into this movement for some time. But circumstances compelled him to take an active part in the satyagraha with most of his inmates. In fact, he was requested to direct it. Vinoba was arrested and incarcerated for the first time in Nagpur jail. He had not participated in the non-co-operation movement of 1921 and had gone on with his constructive work in the Ashram and the surrounding villages without interruption. But this time he could not keep away from a national upheaval near him. He virtually transferred his Satyagraha Ashram from Wardha to the Nagpur jail and carried on his daily routine as if nothing particular had happened. The treatment meted out to him and his co-workers was, indeed, harsh and even brutal. But Vinoba went on unperturbed. To some visiting friends, he remarked: "You have seen a circus,

haven't you? There men command and control animals. In jail, it is just the reverse. Here, animals command and control human beings." From Nagpur, Vinoba and some of his friends, including R. S. Dhotre, were transferred to Akola, where they found the political prisoners refusing to work. Vinoba did not like this attitude on their part and gently rebuked them: "Have you not read in the *Gita*—'to eat without work is a sin'?" He prevailed upon the fellow-prisoners in the Akola jail to learn some crafts and complete all the physical labour allotted to them without any resistance.

In less than two months after his first arrest, Vinoba was released along with other satyagrahis on 3 September 1923. From Akola he travelled straight to Wardha and resumed his work at the Ashram without any fanfare. In fact, he utilized his experiences in jail by making the daily life in the Ashram even more austere and rigorous.

In the 19 July 1923 issue of the *Young India,* Mahadev Desai, Gandhiji's private secretary, wrote a special article on Vinoba, lauding his sterling qualities of the head and the heart. Let me reproduce his exact words: "Vinoba came to Gandhiji's Satyagraha Ashram whilst it had just been opened, and was the head of a branch of the Satyagraha Ashram at Wardha when he was arrested. . . He devoted the first few months in the Ashram to self-discipline giving eight hours in the kitchen and doing scavenging work. Not a thought crossed his brain that his scholarship would rust away. Then he began to take classes in the *Gita,* and when he expounded it, the whole Ashram sat at his feet. He took charge of the boys, who found him a terrible disciplinarian and a hard task-master, but who wept unconsolably on the day he left the Ashram. I have talked of his reserve, but when he is amongst his own boys, he simply lets himself go. His boys know him better than any one else."

Mahadevbhai continued: "His self-discipline was of a rare kind. He woke up once at the stroke of three, but could not leave the bed. He remained in bed until six o'clock, and then fasted for three days. And months after this, there had not been a day when he missed his morning might; if you are fortunately out of bed then, listen to the Sanskrit verses from the *Upaniṣhads* or the *Gita* sung in his rare melodious way. *Brahma-*

charya and *Swadhyaya* are his watchwords. He has mastered all the religious and philosophic lore and he seems to live and move and have his being in it."

"He has spurned literature, but I know very few Gujarati scholars like him. His French he still knows well. Even in these days, he found time to entertain his boys with problems of mathematics, with the planets. He is an expert cook, knows most of the manly games, and also music. He is a first-rate speaker and matchless writer. But he had steered clear of all publicity and public life so-called. He knew that his mission was with the boys; he put himself in the midst of a dozen boys, and lived a life according to this principle at Wardha."

In his concluding paragraph Mahadevbhai observed: "I could thus write about Vinoba almost indefinitely. A day with him is a proud day in any one's life. And it is the same Vinoba that is today breaking stones in one of the C.P. jails possibly with wire gauze over his eyes to avoid the splinters. It is the best of us who will be tried the most, and the country will be all the richer for their suffering."

At another place, Mahadev Desai eulogised Vinoba thus: "Vinoba has something which others have not. His first-rank characteristic is to resolve his decision into action the moment the former is once made. His second characteristic is continuous growth. . . Besides Bapu, I found this quality in Vinoba alone."

In 1924 Gandhiji sent Vinoba to Travancore in the far south to direct a non-co-operation movement at Vaikom. Harijans had been debarred from entering a Shiva temple in that area. The orthodox priests and Brahmins subjected the Harijans and other constructive workers to ruthless treatment and totally refused them the use of a particular road leading to the temple.

Vinoba, accordingly, proceeded to Vaikom to study the situation. Not far from Vaikom, he passed near the village Kalady, the birthplace of Adi Shankaracharya. He was tempted to visit this place because he had heard of it since his childhood and cherished high regard for Shankaracharya. But he resisted the temptation and went directly to Vaikom to meet the workers

there. After a thorough study of the situation, Vinoba started sending groups of volunteers to the temple along the specified route. The police repeatedly perpetrated atrocities on the volunteers day after day. But the sayagraha under Vinoba's direction continued unabated. After some time, Gandhiji himself visited this place in support of the campaign. When the police blocked the road, Gandhiji and Vinoba advised the satyagrahis also to stand there day and night without food and rest, but without any violence or hatred in their hearts.

After the onset of the monsoon, the road was flooded with water. Nonetheless, the volunteers continued to stand in the shoulder-deep waters for days on end. The police too had to do likewise at considerable inconvenience. This satyagraha soon caught the imagination of the public, and a number of newspapers published articles strongly condemning the behaviour of the police and the Government. Gandhiji met the officers of the Travancore Government and asked them to see reason. Ultimately, the authorities yielded and the satyagraha was withdrawn after a year and four months. In this manner, the Vaikom satyagraha brought out the personality of Vinoba in good light throughout India.

Vinoba returned to his Ashram at Wardha with renewed vigour and a sense of mission. He took upon himself the work of cleaning the Ashram with a broom every morning. Whenever he noticed some insanitation in a particular room, he would enter it and clean up the whole thing. For four years, from 1930 to 1934, he abjured the use of milk completely without exception. He wanted to know from experience whether it was possible for a vegetarian to do without milk which was essentially an animal product. It is rather curious that during the same period he allowed another inmate of the Ashram to experiment with exclusive milk diet for curing constipation. This reveals a scientific approach of Vinoba towards all problems, without any fads or dogmas.

Even in regard to snakes which were seen quite frequently in and around the Ashram, Vinoba adopted a rational attitude and tried to find out without killing them which of the reptiles

were poisonous and which were not. As a result of this experiment, it was discovered in course of time that approximately 90 per cent of the serpents in the area were free of poison. They were, in fact, the friends of farmers and eliminated the rats and rodents in the fields without doing any harm to human beings.

There was another diversion for Vinoba in 1924 when Gandhiji undertook a 21-day fast in Delhi for promoting Hindu-Muslim unity. During this fast, Gandhiji had grown quite weak and required the help of a person who could read out some books to him and recite verses in a melodious voice. Vinoba was, therefore, invited to visit Delhi for the purpose. He served Gandhiji day and night and conducted the morning and evening prayers. When Bapu was not in a position even to deliver post-prayer speeches owing to extreme weakness, Vinoba was asked to speak daily to the gathering in accordance with Gandhiji's instructions. He also delivered a series of discourses on the *Kathopanishad*. On the completion of the fast, Vinoba returned to Wardha and went straight to his Ashram to pick up the earlier threads without any fuss.

It is interesting to recall one more incident which took place in Delhi soon after the end of Gandhiji's fast. A meeting of the representatives of different religions was convened at 9 in the morning. Curiously enough, only two persons, Annie Besant and Vinoba, reached there on time. All others were late by minutes and even hours, and the whole purpose of the meeting was thwarted. Vinoba is very particular about doing things on time, on the stroke of the minute.

However, since his very childhood, Vinoba's health has been indifferent. Once, when he fell ill early in 1926 at the Wardha Ashram, Gandhiji virtually chided him for this sickness in a letter written from Sabarmati on 19 February:

> If you too fall ill, how can we find fault with others? Now I need not blame myself. If a life celibate can claim the privilege of falling ill, how much more should one like me claim who is endeavouring to change the mould in which he has been cast? We must both deny ourselves this privilege. He alone is a real celibate who has an adamantine

constitution. Is not illness, after all, a sign of imbalance? I hope you have now recovered completely.

In the community life of the Ashram, Vinoba laid the greatest stress on mutual love and respect among the workers. In the absence of such fraternity and understanding, it was well-nigh impossible to achieve any substantial results. Vinoba often quoted the three *Mantras* of the Buddhists:

बुद्धं शरणं गच्छामि
संघम् शरणं गच्छामि
धम्मं शरणं गच्छामि

I seek refuge in the Buddha;
I seek refuge in the *Sangha;*
I seek refuge in the *Dharma.*

10

In Dhulia Jail: 'Talks on the Gita'

VINOBA'S MOTHER had expected of him to render a Marathi translation of the Gita in his own simple and expressive style. He could not fulfil this wish during his mother's lifetime. At any rate, this was always very much on his mind, and Vinoba was eager to complete the work as early as possible.

When Gandhiji started on his Dandi March in 1930 from Sabarmati Ashram, the whole country responded to this novel satyagraha with exceptional enthusiasm. Vinoba and his group of workers were wholly engrossed in their own experiments at the Wardha Ashram; but they could not afford to remain aloof from this national movement. Vinoba initiated in Wardha district a movement for cutting down palmyra trees to prevent the manufacture of toddy. The workers used to march to the forest areas with axes in their hands. They were successful in felling about 2000 trees in five months, and the campaign caught on. But the police did not arrest either Vinoba or his co-workers. However, the Forest Satyagraha in Wardha district led by the Ashram inmates led to a number of arrests, especially at Kelzar.

This period was also utilized by Vinoba in rendering the *Gita* into Marathi verses. He commenced this work on 7 October 1930 and completed the first manuscript on 6 February 1931. During these four months, he would recite verses of his Marathi translation loudly before his pupils in the Ashram and elicit their suggestions for improvement. The translation was named *Gitai* or *'Gita* the Mother'. It combined Vinoba's profound respect for the *Gita* and a deep affection for his own mother.

The final touches to the manuscript were, in fact, given by Vinoba during his incarceration in the Dhulia jail in 1932. *Gitai* was widely popularised in the Maharashtra countryside by Vinoba's brother Shivaji for many years. It is now recited regularly not only in the Gandhian institutions in Maharashtra, but in other parts of the country as well. It is interesting to know that even Gandhiji incorporated recitations of verses from the *Gitai* in his daily prayers at Sevagram. The *Gitai* has been translated into Hindi verse by Siaramsaran Gupta. The Gujarati rendering was made by Kishorelal Mashruwala. But Vinoba's Marathi translation is, decidedly, superior to all the rest.

About the literary merits of the *Gitai*, Mahadev Desai wrote: "Vinoba has produced a Marathi translation of the *Gita* in parallel verse which reproduces the haunting music of the original in an amazing degree and a hundred thousand copies of it have been sold in Maharashtra." Even Gandhiji was attracted by the music of the *Gitai* which was felt by him 'to be very sweet'. Shivaji had recited it before him several times in a melodious voice.

When the Civil Disobedience campaign was withdrawn in 1931 as a result of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, Vinoba was invited to preside over a conference of constructive workers in Khandesh, Maharashtra. He delivered an inspiring address at this conference and appealed to the workers to follow Gandhiji's path of truth and non-violence in securing political liberation for India.

In the meantime, Gandhiji had gone to London as the sole representative of the Indian National Congress for participating in the Round Table Conference. The Conference failed to achieve any objective and Gandhiji returned empty-handed early in 1932. Jawaharlal Nehru and several other Congress leaders had already been rounded up. Gandhiji was also arrested soon after. During this period, Vinoba addressed a huge gathering at Dhulia in Maharashtra. He asked the people to be ready to make the supreme sacrifice for the achievement of *Swaraj*: "Instead of taking lives, we should be prepared to sacrifice our lives for the nation. We are determined to be free, and no power on earth can prevent us from doing so. The flag that has been unfurled today, must continue

to fly over Independent India."

At another meeting in Dhulia, Vinoba appealed to businessmen to participate in the freedom struggle by at least taking to *Swadeshi* and boycotting foreign cloth. This was the least that was expected of the business community in the country. "They must not remain mere onlookers during the struggle of life and death for liberating the Motherland."

From Dhulia, Vinoba proceeded to Jalgaon. The Government had imposed restrictions on his meetings. As soon as he began speaking, the police arrested Vinoba and sent him for six months to the Dhulia jail where a large number of satyagrahis had already been placed behind bars. They included Jamnalal Bajaj, Gulzarilal Nanda, Khandubhai Desai, Pyarelal, Balubhai Mehta, Gopalrao Kale, Sane Guruji, Rameshwar Podar, Dwarkanath Harkare and Manilal Kothari. Vinoba was given 'B' class by the jail authorities, while most of the other prisoners were categorized as 'C' class. Vinoba refused to accept the 'B' class facilities and preferred to join his colleagues in the 'C' class.

The main work assigned to the prisoners in this jail was grinding the corn. The jailor treated the prisoners very harshly and did not spare even the weak or sick. Vinoba, therefore, told the jailor: "We are prepared to collectively grind corn in as much quantity as you prescribe. But please do not insist on every prisoner to do this work, irrespective of his health." The jailor agreed to follow this procedure. Several satyagrahis volunteered to do the grinding in the required quantity. One day, however, a prisoner whispered: "Vinoba asks others to do grinding, but does not do it himself." Vinoba was touched to the quick and realised the inherent anomaly. He, therefore, immediately decided to grind 21 lbs. of wheat every day. The fellow-prisoners dissuaded him from straining his health to this extent, but Vinoba was adamant. His weight dropped down to 93 lbs., and yet he continued his labours. There were blisters in his fingers and pain in his body. But even these did not deter Vinoba from carrying out his resolve. It was only at the intervention of Jamnalalji that he ultimately discontinued grinding in the Dhulia jail.

On another occasion, there was a quarrel between the satyagrahis and the jail authorities. Some of the prisoners went on

hunger strike and Vinoba also joined them. On an assurance from the jailor, most of the prisoners gave up their fast. But Vinoba refused to do so. He said: "I generally do not observe fasts, not even on *Ekadashi* or religious festivals like *Shivaratri.* Now that I have gone on fast, I should like to give it up only when all the issues have been resolved satisfactorily." As a result, the jail authorities had to accept all the demands of the prisoners in order to enable Vinoba break his fast.

However, the most important event in Dhulia jail was Vinoba's discourses on the *Gita* every Sunday. The fellow-prisoners had requested Vinoba for these talks, and they commenced on 21 February 1932 and continued till 19 June. During these four months, Vinoba spoke extensively on every Chapter of the *Gita.* Fortunately, Sane Guruji kept fairly detailed notes of these discourses and later prepared a manuscript for publication entitled *Gita Pravachanen.* This book, originally published in Marathi, has now been translated into all the Indian languages, including Sanskrit, Urdu and Konkani. The Sarva Seva Sangh has brought it out in English and Nepali as well. Millions of copies have already been sold and the demand continues to grow from year to year. Vinoba now regards this publication as his best contribution, and readily autographs all the copies which are purchased by the audience after his prayer meetings. Over his signatures he writes: *'Nitya Pathaniya'* (worthy to be studied daily).

In his very first discourse Vinoba observed: "The bond between the *Gita* and me transcends reason. My heart and mind have both received more nourishment from the *Gita* than my body has from my mother's milk. Where the heart is touched, there is no room for argument. Leaving logic behind, I beat the twin wings of faith and practice and, to the best of my ability, fly up into the heavens of the *Gita.* I live and move in the atmosphere of the *Gita.* The *Gita* is my life's breath. To vary the image, I swim in the sea of the *Gita* when I speak of it; but when I am alone, I dive to the depths of this ocean of nectar and there rest in peace."

The style of his discourses is simple, and captivating. His serious observations are interspersed with a number of interesting anecdotes and references to the *Ramayana, Mahabharata*

and the *Upanishads*. The reader never feels dull, and moves on with the speaker from chapter to chapter with full understanding and appreciation. I have personally tried to read all the available commentaries on the *Gita*, including *Gita Rahasya* of Lokmanya Tilak and *Anasakti Yoga* of Gandhiji, and I can state without any hesitation that Vinoba's *Gita Pravachanen* is by far the best.

According to Vinoba, the basic purpose of the *Gita* is 'to remove the illusion that stands between us and our *Swadharma* or duty'. Arjuna was perplexed about his *Dharma* and a delusion had arisen in his mind. After hearing Lord Krishna's words of wisdom, Arjuna's illusion melted away and he recovered his mental equanimity.

In the second discourse Vinoba explains various terms employed in the *Gita*. He, however, wants the thinkers to discover various meanings for themselves according to their own experience and understanding. Incidentally, he mentions a beautiful story from the *Upanishads*: "Once the *devas* (bright gods), the *danavas* (dark gods) and the men, all went to *Prajapati* (the Creator) for advice. *Prajapati* gave all the three of them the same word of advice, the syllable *'da'*. The bright gods said: 'We *devas* are self-indulgent; the taste for sensual pleasures has taken hold of us. So Brahma, by the sound *'da'*, has told us to acquire *'damana'* (self-control)'. The dark gods said: 'We *danavas* are very prone to anger, and hard-hearted; the Creator has advised us, by the sound *'da'*, to cultivate *'daya'* (compassion)'. The men said: 'We men are given to greed, and have become mad after piling up wealth; by saying *'da'*, *Prajapati* has advised us to practise *'dana'* (giving of alms).' The Creator approved of all the three interpretations, because each had arrived at the meaning in terms of his own experience. While understanding the technical terms of the *Gita*, we should bear in mind this story from the *Upanishads*."

At a later stage, Vinoba compares *Swadharma* to one's mother: "It was not left to me to choose my mother in this birth. It had already been determined for me. No matter what sort of person she is, there is no pushing her away. That is precisely the case with *Swadharma; it is inescapable*.... To

disown one's *Swadharma* is to disown oneself, to commit suicide."

He continues: "When attachment to the body goes, one realizes that the body is an instrument for service; and then the body also finds its real support and receives the honour due to it. But today we regard pampering the body as the sole purpose of our lives. We have forgotten that life is to be lived for the fulfilment of *swadharma.*"

Explaining the unique idea of the *Gita* relating to the renunciation of the fruit of our actions, Vinoba states: "'Don't hanker after the fruit', says the *Gita.* But it also insists that you should act with full energy and skill. The action of the person who acts without desire should be much better than that of the person who acts with desire. The latter is attracted to the fruit, and a part, much or little, of his time and attention will of course be spent on thoughts and dreams of the fruit. But all the time and all the strength of the man who has no desire for the fruit is devoted to the action. The river takes no rest, the wind knows no fatigue, and the sun can only shine and shine forever."

In his inimitable style, Vinoba asserts that "renunciation of fruit is the most effective and noble principle; it is real *Yoga,* the art of living". In this connection Vinoba refers to the life of Pundalik as an ideal form of renunciation: "Pundalik looked after his parents and served them. Being pleased with such service the Lord Pandurang came running to greet him. But Pundalik would not be beguiled by Pandurang, and refused to give up his duty of service. Serving his father and mother was for him the worship of God, true *bhakti.* Pundalik was not caught up in any attachment to a form. He said to God: 'Lord, you have come yourself to bless me with this vision. This I understand. But I believe in the doctrine of 'and also'. I cannot accept that you alone are God. My parents too are God. Since I am engaged in their service, I am unable to give you my attention. Please forgive me.' So he pushed towards the Lord a brick for him to stand on, and became absorbed again in his service to the parents."

Vinoba also deals with the qualities of the steadfast mind, *sthitaprajna,* in a very beautiful manner: "How can the mind

be steadfast without self-control? So the *sthitaprajna* is said to be the embodiment of self-control. The mind being fixed in the self (*atman*) and controlling the *indriyas* (the organs of perception and action)—this is self-control. Using his *indriyas* as oxen, he ploughs well and cultivates the field of the disinterested performance of *swadharma*. Every breath of his is used in this higher pursuit."

In the course of his discourse on the Third Chapter, Vinoba deals with infinite gains from the renunciation of the fruits of our action. He relates the story of Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity: "It was her *svayamvara* (the day when she was to choose her husband). All the gods and titans had come with hopes raised high; Lakshmi had not proclaimed her vow before. She came into the assembly and said, 'I shall garland only the man who has no desire for me'. But then, they were all covetous of her. So Lakshmi began to search for the desireless one whom she could choose. Now, there appeared before her the form of Lord Vishnu, lying peacefully on the serpent, *Shesha*. She put the wedding garland round His neck and to this day she sits there, stroking His feet. *Ramaa* (the goddess of wealth) becomes the slave of him who does not hanker after her. That is the wonder of it!"

During the same talk, Vinoba recalls the story of Sudama going to Lord Krishna with a gift of flattened rice: "The handful of rice may not be worth even a pie, but to Sudama it seemed invaluable, for his devotion went with it. It was charmed rice. Every grain of it was charged with his love. However cheap a thing may be, the *mantra*, the charm (words charged with power), increases its value, its power. What after all is the weight of a currency note? If we burn it, we might, perhaps, be able to warm a drop of water. But the stamp on it gives its value. This is the whole beauty of *karma-yoga* also. Action is like the currency note. Its value is that of the *bhavana* (the feeling behind it), the stamp it bears, not that of the *karma* or outward action, the piece of paper."

Illustrating the same idea, Vinoba makes a mention about his own mother: "My mother scribbled three or four lines on a piece of paper and sent it off to me; another gentleman sent me a long discursive fifty-page letter. Now, which is more

weighty? The feeling in my mother's few lines is beyond measure; it is sacred. The other stuff cannot stand comparison with it. Action must be moistened with love, filled with feeling (*bhavana*)."

He also makes a feeling reference to Rukmini weighing Lord Krishna with a *tulsi* leaf: "'With a single leaf of *tulsi*, Rukmini weighed Giridhar, the lord who lifted up a mountain.' Satyabhama's ponderous jewellery was of no avail. But when mother Rukmini laid a *tulsi* leaf, filled with devotion, on the scale, the thing was done. The *tulsi* leaf was charged with magic. It was no longer a common leaf. This is true of the action of the *karma-yogi* too."

Vinoba continues his talk on the Third Chapter by giving an illustration of a bath in the Ganga: "Suppose two men go for a bath in the Ganga. One of them says, 'What is this Ganga that people talk so much about? Take two parts of hydrogen and one of oxygen; combine the two gases—it becomes Ganga. What else is there in the Ganga?' The other says, 'The Ganga flows from the lovely lotus-feet of Lord Vishnu. She has dwelt in the matted hair of Siva. Thousands of seers, both ascetic and kingly, have done penance near her. Countless holy acts have been performed by her side. Such is the sacred Ganga, my mother.' Filled with this *bhavana* (feeling), he bathes in the river. The other man, regarding it as combination of hydrogen and oxygen also bathes. Both derive the benefit of physical cleansing. But the devotee (*bhakta*) gets the benefit of mental purification as well."

It is further pointed out that the *karma-yogi* by surrendering the desire for the fruit receives endless rewards. His life proceeds evenly; he is radiant in body and mind. The society in which he moves is happy. He attains inward purity and also knowledge. Vinoba explains: "We have developed some absurd ideas about the spirit. People imagine that once a man has become spiritual, there is no more need for him to move hand or foot, or do any work. They say, 'What sort of religious man is this, who ploughs the fields and weaves khadi?' But nobody asks how a spiritual man can eat food. The God of the *karma-yogi* brushes down horses. At the Pandavas' *Rajasuya* sacrifice, He clears the leafplates after the feast. He goes out into the

forest to graze cows. . . So the saints have pictured a *karma-yogi* God who rubs horses down, takes cows out to graze, drives a chariot, cleans dishes and mops up floors. And they themselves have done the work of a tailor, a potter, a weaver, a gardener, a trader, a barber or a cobbler. Doing these things, they have found themselves and become free."

In the Fourth Chapter, Vinoba explains in a very scientific manner the three words, *karma, vikarma,* and *akarma. Karma* is the concrete, outward action performed as *swadharma.* The participation of the *chitta,* the mind and heart, in this external action is *vikarma.* The mere act, the *karma,* is like powder, which has to be activated by the fire of feeling, *vikarma.* But when *vikarma* is combined with *karma,* a power is released which results in *akarma* (inaction in action).

Vinoba goes on to explain that the experience of *akarma* can be learnt from the saints who, though engaged in a thousand actions, do not allow a ripple to arise in the still waters of their mind. "One can never understand this miracle until one goes to a saint and sees it."

In the Fifth Chapter, Lord Krishna explains the two aspects of *akarma—yoga* and *sannyasa.* Vinoba deals with the subject in a very lucid manner. He mentions two forms of *sannyasa:* "One aspect of this state of *akarma* is that, though the man acts, he does not act. The other aspect is that, though he does not act at all, he moves the whole world to action. There is in him an immeasurable power to impel to action. This is the paradox of *akarma:* it is filled with a power that is capable of infinite action. It is like steam which, when compressed, does enormous work."

It may be mentioned here that Vinoba has been trying to work on the invincible plane of *akarma* for several years past. He often tells us that he has now entered the *sukshma* or the subtle form of action. In this context, the following observations of Vinoba will make an interesting reading: "And both are rare. In one aspect, the action is explicit, and the state of *akarma* implicit. In the other, though the state of *akarma* is clearly manifest, yet, because of it, endless activity is continuously going on. In this state, *akarma* is filled to overflowing with action, and thus mighty actions are achieved. There is a

world of difference between the man in this state and the idler. The lazy man gets easily tired and depressed. But the *sannyasi*, who does no work, conserves his power. He does not work at all. That is, he does not work with his limbs, or with his mind. But even while he does nothing, he does infinite work."

Towards the end of his discourse on the Fifth Chapter of the *Gita*, Vinoba explains that *sannyasa* and *yoga* are such high concepts that in their absolute form they cannot be embodied in any human being. "But though they cannot be contained by the body, they can be comprehended by the mind." He illustrates this by stating that Yajnavalkya was a *sannyasi* while Janaka was a *karma-yogi*. Again, Shukadeva, the *sannyasi*, was the disciple of the *karma-yogi* Janaka. In this manner, explains Vinoba, *yoga* and *sannyasa* succeed each other like flowers in a garland: "Though their names are different, and they appear to be two, they are in reality one... If perfect *karma-yoga* is *sannyasa*, perfect *sannyasa* is *karma-yoga*; there is no difference."

In the course of his discourse on the Sixth Chapter, Vinoba reiterates his conviction that the *Gita* is not intended for ascetics alone: "It is a scripture intended for ordinary men, living their daily lives in the world." He whole-heartedly endorses Tilak's view mentioned in his *Gita-Rahasya* that the *Bhagwad Gita* is for the whole world and not for the chosen few. "It is prepared to go to the lowest, the weakest, the least cultured of men. And it goes to him not to keep him where he is, but to grasp him by the hand and lift him up."

Dealing with *dhyana-yoga*, one-pointedness of mind, Vinoba narrates an interesting story to illustrate his point: "There was a fakir. An arrow had entered his body. The pain was unbearable. But any attempt to pull the arrow out would make it worse. They did not know of chloroform or other anaesthetics in those days. It was a difficult situation. Some people who knew him came forward and said: 'Don't try to pull out the arrow now. It will be easy to do so when he is at prayer.' The time came for *namaz*. The fakir settled down to pray. In a moment his mind became one-pointed, and he did not know that the arrow was pulled out. Look at the power of concentration!"

Vinoba further explains that for achieving such concentration of mind, purity of life is essential. It is also necessary to set bounds to one's life. "All our actions must be measured and weighed. Precision, the secret of mathematics, should be found in all our actions. As we measure out each dose of medicine before taking it, our sleep and food too should be in measure. This should be so everywhere in our life. All our senses should be under strict watch, to see that we do not sleep too much, or eat too much, or even look at too many things."

"This Universe is auspicious, full of goodness, because God looks after it. As Browning says—

'God's in his heaven—
All's right with the world!'

"Nothing is wrong in this world. If there is anything wrong, it is in my vision. As is my vision, so is the world. If I wear red glasses, the world too would appear red and aflame."

It is also emphasized that the first few year's of a child's life are very impressionable and a teacher must deal with the child at this early age in a very delicate and cautious manner. Says Vinoba: "Any little incident makes a powerful impression on the child's mind. Educationists regard the first three or four years of a child's education as the really effective part of education. No matter how many Universities, or High Schools or Cultural Associations you establish, one never gets again what one had in the first few years. I have had something to do with education. Day by day, my conviction becomes stronger that the effect of this formal education is just nothing. The impressions formed in the earliest years are set as in hard cement. Later education is like superficial plastering or the colour-wash outside. By using soap and water, you can wash off dirt from the body, but how to wash off the colour of one's skin? Thus the first impressions are hard to remove."

Vinoba's discourse on the Seventh Chapter deals with *bhakti*: "Bhakti is essential to all kinds of effort. It is the universal method. If a trained nurse, attending on a patient, has not the mental attitude of service, how could it be true service? If a bullock is strong, but is not inclined to draw the cart, he will hang his head and lie down, or even overturn it in a ditch.

In work without heart, there is neither strength nor satisfaction."

To illustrate his point, Vinoba mentions several examples: "When Dharmaraj reached at last the gates of heaven, there was only a dog with him. Bhima, Arjuna and the others had fallen by the wayside. He was told, 'You can come in, but the dog is not allowed to enter.' Dharmaraj answered, 'If my dog cannot enter, neither will I.' One who performs devoted service, even if it is only a dog, is superior to those who are always thinking of themselves."

Another illustration given by Vinoba would appear to be of special interest to the reader: "I was once travelling in a train. It was passing over a bridge across the Jamuna. A passenger sitting next to me flung with great enthusiasm a coin into the river. There was a rationalist in the compartment who observed: 'The country is poverty-stricken, and on top of that, there are people who throw coins out of carriage windows.' 'You have not understood why he does it,' I said. 'The *bhavana,* the mental attitude with which he threw the coin, is worth at least two or three such coins, is it not? If the money had been given for some good cause, it would no doubt have been better. We shall think about it later. But then, he was moved to do this because of the feeling that this is not a mere river, but the Lord's compassion flowing before us'."

Acharya Vinoba's *Pravachan* on the Eighth Chapter highlights the fact that "the thought that is uppermost at the moment of death prevails in the succeeding birth". The end of this life is the beginning of the next. We should, therefore, walk through life having in mind the hour of death. It is also necessary to conquer the fear of death and make it easy to cross over. Here again, Vinoba tells a story: "There is a story about Eknath. A man asked him, 'Maharaj, your life is so simple and sinless. Why is our life utterly different? You are angry with none, you quarrel with none, you hate none. How calm, how loving, how pure you are!' Eknath replied, 'Never mind me. I have found out something about you. In seven days from now, you will die.' Who could disbelieve Eknath's words? Death in seven days? Oh, God, what a calamity! He ran in haste to his house. Nothing seemed clear to him. He was talking of disposing of his affairs and preparing for the end. Then

he fell ill, and lay flat on his bed. Six days passed. On the seventh day, Eknath came to visit him. He greeted the saint. Eknath enquired, 'How are you?' He said, 'All is over. Now I am going.' Eknath asked further, 'In these six days, how many sins did you commit? And how many sinful thoughts came into your mind?' And the man who had been awaiting death answered, 'Lord, where was the time to think of evil thoughts? Death stood ever before my eyes.' Eknath said, 'Now you know the reason, don't you, why our lives are absolutely sinless?' "

Vinoba also recollects a number of incidents from his own life. Here is one such reminiscence: "Many years ago, I went on a visit to my old grandmother. She complained: 'Vinya, I remember nothing these days. I go to fetch the ghee-pot, and then come back forgetting all about it.' But she talked to me about some trouble regarding a jewel which occurred fifty years earlier. She could not remember what happened five minutes before, but something fifty years old was still fresh in her memory. How to account for this? She must have been talking about the jewel affair again and again to a great many people —and therefore, it had become a part of her life. I said to myself, 'Oh God, don't let my grandmother think of the jewel at the time of death!' "

Vinoba recalls a somewhat similar observation by Gandhiji: "Once Bapu said, 'I keep shouting of the charkha day and night. I consider the charkha a holy thing. And yet, at the last moment, even this concern, this *vasana*, should disappear. He who inspired me with this love of the charkha, can very well look after it Himself. The charkha has now been taken up by many good people. I must now give up worrying about the charkha and get ready to join the Lord'."

In the course of his observations on the Ninth Chapter, Vinoba refers to several stories from the *Puranas* to carry conviction to us that the doors of *moksha* or salvation are open to all. For example, Janaka approached Sulabha, an ordinary woman, to learn wisdom from her. The Brahmin Jajali went to a merchant Tuladhar in search of wisdom. An arrogant ascetic was asked by his Guru to approach the hunter and learn self-knowledge from him. Tukaram describes with ap-

preciation the story of Sajan, the butcher, who also attained liberation by performing his actions in the form of a *Yajna.*

Vinoba ends by saying that *karma-yoga* and *bhakti-yoga* ultimately merge into one. "The *karma-yogi* performs his actions with efficiency but dedicates the fruit to God with complete devotion. It is this emotion of *bhakti* which is of crucial importance." Vinoba becomes reminiscent and relates one of his talks with a professor: "*'Patram pushpam phalam toyam'*, a leaf, a flower, a fruit, a little water, whatever it is, *bhakti* makes the offering complete. The question is not how much you give, but with what *bhavana.* Once I was talking to a professor about a problem in teaching. We happened to differ. Finally he said, 'Sir, I've been at this job for eighteen years'. When, instead of convincing me, he cited his long experience, I said in fun, 'Sir, if for eighteen years a bullock is yoked to an oil mill, does it become an engineer?' It is one thing to go round and round blindly like a bullock and quite another to understand the science of engineering. A man may carry for years the burden of teaching and yet not understand the art of teaching."

In the Tenth Chapter, Vinoba mentions several examples to prove that God can be realized in a variety of physical forms, including that of the mother, as also some animals like the horse and the lion: "The familiar form in which God first appears to us is our own mother. The Veda says, *'matru devo-bhava'*—Let your mother be your God. Who but the mother does the new-born child see? The Lord Himself stands there as the embodiment of tenderness. It is this worship of the mother that we would carry to love of country when we sing, *'vande mataram'* and then to love of the universal Mother Earth. And yet in the beginning the first image of the Lord Supreme that comes before the child is the mother."

And then about the horse: "A friend of mine was learning to ride. The horse used to throw him off. He said, 'The horse will not let me keep my seat.' I said to him, 'Do you only attempt to ride the horse, or do you also feed him and look after him? When someone else serves him, how can you ride him? Feed him yourself and give him water, rub him down and then try to ride him.' He did so and said to me after a

few days, 'The horse doesn't throw me off now.' The horse is a form of the Lord. And would He throw off a servant? The horse yielded to his devotion."

And lastly the lion: "When I was in Baroda I would get up in the morning listening to its majestic roar. The majestic beauty of his voice thrilled my heart. The magnificent sound proceeding from his heart was like the sound one hears in the inmost shrine of a temple. The noble courage, the fearless beauty of his expression! The regal gait and mien! His flowing mane is the *chamara,* the royal insignia, provided by nature for the king of the forest. In a garden in Baroda there was a lion. He was not free, he went round and round in a cage. But there was not a trace of cruelty in his eyes. There was compassion in his expression and his look. It looked as though he had no thought for the world and was absorbed in his own meditation. In fact, the lion is a holy manifestation of the Lord. I read, when I was a child, the story of 'Androcles and the Lion'. What a wonderful story! The famished lion remembering Androcles' kindness, becomes his friend and licks his feet. What does it mean? Androcles had seen in the lion the Lord Himself. There is always a lion near the Lord Shiva. The lion is a creature of divine glory."

In the Eleventh Chapter, Lord Krishna reveals to Arjuna *vishvarupa-darshana,* or the vision of the cosmic form. In the ultimate analysis, however, Arjuna feels completely dazed and pleads: "Lord, let me see your familiar human form again." Vinoba utilizes this occasion to explain his ideas about image-worship. He observes: "Many people have opposed image-worship. Foreigners, and even thinkers of our own country, have found fault with it. But the more I think of it, the more I realize its beauty. What is the meaning of it? Image-worship is the *vidya,* the art, of experiencing the whole universe in a little object. Is it wrong to learn the *vidya* which helps us to see the whole world in a little village? This is not mere imagination, it is a matter of direct experience."

In this connection, Vinoba recollects his personal experience many years ago when he visited the Lakshminarayan temple in Wardha: "When Shri Jamnalal Bajaj threw open to the Harijans the Lakshminarayan temple in Wardha, I too went

there for *darshan.* For some fifteen or twenty minutes I stood gazing at the image. It was as if I was in *samadhi.* As I looked at the face, the chest, the hands and then the feet, my eyes were rooted in the feet. All that remained with me was the feeling—Sweet indeed is the worship of Your Feet."

In the Twelfth Chapter, Lord Krishna describes the two types of *bhakti—saguna* and *nirguna.* Vinoba opines that these two kinds are not contradictory, but complementary: "*Saguna* is easy and free from danger; but it needs *nirguna* to complete it. As *saguna* grows, the flower of *nirguna,* of devotion to principle, should blossom. *Nirguna* and *saguna* complement each other, they are not incompatible... Both these kinds of *bhakti* are nobly illustrated throughout the *Ramayana,* especially in the *Ayodhya Kanda.* Bharata illustrates the *nirguna* form of bhakti, and Lakshmana, the *saguna* form."

Vinoba adds an episode from his own life: "I had gone to Vaikom to observe the satyagraha there. I remembered the geographical fact that Shankaracharya's birth-place was on the border of Malabar. I had a feeling that Shankara's village, Kalady, was somewhere near. I asked the Malayali gentleman who accompanied me. He said, 'It is some 10 or 12 miles from here. Do you want to go there?' I said I did not. I was going to see the satyagraha in progress, and it did not seem proper to go elsewhere. So on that occasion I did not go to that village. Even now it seems to me that I was right in not going there then. But that night, when I went to bed, that village of Kalady and the image of Shankaracharya stood before my eyes again and again. I could not sleep. That experience is still with me, as fresh today as it was then. Again and again that night, I thought of Shankaracharya—of the power of his *jnana,* his divine certitude in *advaita,* the extraordinary, glowing *vairagya,* non-attachment, which convinced him that *samsara,* this phenomenal life, was all false, of the majesty of his language and the boundless help I have received from him. All night long these images stood before me. Then I realized how *nirguna* is filled to the brim with *saguna.*"

Vinoba ends by stating: "The truth of the matter is that *saguna* and *nirguna* complete each other. *Saguna* is easy and *nirguna* difficult. But from another point of view, *saguna* is

difficult and *nirguna* easy. Both these means take us to the same end."

In the course of the Thirteenth Chapter, Vinoba underscores the need for understanding the distinction between body and spirit. Such an understanding helps a person in separating action from the desire for the fruit. "The figure which we see with our eyes, we call an image, a form, a body. But even after seeing with our eyes the outer form, we still have to enter into the object and see it from within. We have to remove the armour, the outer skin, of the fruit and taste the pulp within. Even the coconut one has to break to see what there is within. Despite its rough sharp exterior the jack-fruit is full of sweet juicy pulp."

In the course of his talks, Vinoba highlighted the need of imparting education to children in such a manner that they were able to distinguish the real self from their body. Instead of laying stress only on their physical well-being, the teacher should care even more for their spiritual development. Corporal punishment is highly injurious not merely physically but morally and spiritually as well, because the child begins to attach undue importance to his body alone. Said Vinoba: "The truth is that the body is not an end, but a means. Once we are confirmed in this attitude, all this fussing over the body will cease. Life will present a different appearance to us." The desirability of distinguishing between the body and the self is essential from the standpoint of satyagraha also. "The day a man discovers this secret, his real education, his real growth begins. It is only then that satyagraha will succeed."

In this connection, Vinoba makes a special mention of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ: "At such times I call to mind the sacrifice of Jesus. They were hammering nails into his body. It is said that then the words came out of His mouth, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' But soon Jesus collected Himself and said, 'Thy will be done! Lord, forgive them for they know not what they do.' There is a great secret in this. This shows clearly how far the Self should be separated from the body. What the goal should be, and how near to it we can get, we can learn from the life of Jesus. We reach the point where we see the body being peeled off like the skin of

a fruit. Whenever I think of how the spirit should be distinguished from the body, the life of Jesus and this final scene appear before my eyes."

The Fourteenth Chapter of the *Gita* describes the directions in which we should exercise self-control. "The oars propel the boat, but the rudder directs it. The oars and the rudder are both needed. In the same way, for separating the self from the pains and pleasures of the body, both discrimination and self-control are needed."

Vinoba explains that our nature is made up of three *gunas*—qualities—*sattva, rajas* and *tamas*: "Everywhere there is a mixture of these three. A little more here and a little less there, that's all the difference. If we separate the Self from these three, we can separate it from the body. To examine and conquer these three *gunas,* is itself the way of separating the Self from the body. Through self-control one should conquer these, one by one, until one approaches in the end the most important thing, that which is beyond the *gunas.*"

For achieving control over *tamas,* Vinoba lays great stress on physical labour. It is only through such 'bread-labour' that we can conquer sloth and laziness. Vinoba delineates: "Thus there are two classes of men in society—those who work day and night and kill themselves, and those who do not lift a little finger. A friend of mine once said to me, 'Some are heads and some are trunks. On the one hand, we have headless bodies, and on the other, bodiless heads. The trunks merely labour, while the heads merely think. Society has come to consist of *Rahus* and *Ketus,* who never meet.' But if in reality they were separate heads and trunks it would not matter. For then some mutual arrangement could be made, as in the story of the blind man and the lame man. The lame could lead the blind and the blind carry the lame. But the heads and the trunks do not really form different groups. Everybody has both a head and a trunk. This combination of head and trunk is found everywhere. What then shall we do? Every one must shake off laziness. And to shake off laziness one must perform bodily labour; this is the only way to conquer laziness."

Vinoba has an original idea about conquering sleep along with laziness: "Sleep must be deep and peaceful and un-

disturbed. The value of sleep does not consist in its duration. Sleep does not depend on the length of the bed or the period during which the person lay on it. The deeper the well, the sweeter and purer is its water. So too, though one may sleep for a short while, if it is deep, it does good. It is better to study with concentration for half an hour than to look at a book for three hours with a wandering mind. Sleep too is like that. It cannot be said that long sleep is always beneficial. Only deep dreamless sleep is true sleep."

The cure for *rajas*, says Vinoba, is to live within the limits of *swadharma*. "The chief mark of *rajas* is the desire to do all sorts of things, an overweening ambition to do superhuman deeds. Through *rajas* we conceive a limitless desire for action, a consuming greed." He continues: "All the acts of the man of *rajas* are restless and uncertain. He is like the child who plants a seed and, a little later, digs it up again to see if it has sprouted. He expects results then and there. He has neither confidence nor equanimity. He does not know how to plant his feet firmly. He does some work here; he gets some fame there; then he goes off to a third place which is neither here nor there. Today a reception in Madras, tomorrow in Calcutta and the day after in Bombay or Nagpur. His ambition is to get civic addresses from every municipality in the land. He sees glory everywhere. But staying in a place and doing some steady work, that is not his way."

Sattva-guna can be conquered by first conquering egoism and then developing a sense of attachment. "Take, for example, kindness to all creatures. Though this is a useful quality, we should be able to keep away even from this attachment; we should have kindness, but not attachment to kindness."

At the end of the talk on the Fourteenth Chapter Vinoba declares: "The task is not complete till self-realization is attained. In the end, therefore, the grace of the Lord is essential. And through real devotion of the heart, we should qualify for the grace of the Lord. I know no other means for this."

In the Fifteenth Chapter, the world is compared to a mighty tree which has huge branches nourished by the three *gunas*. This tree is to be cut down with the axe of desirelessness and detachment. We have not only to conquer *rajas* and *tamas*,

'but even conquer the attachment to *sattva* and remain completely free. The *Gita* places before us the ideal of the lotus flower: "In India the most noble things of life are compared to the lotus. The lotus is the symbol of our culture. The lotus, though pure and holy, is unattached. Purity and non-attachment are its twofold power. We compare every part of the Lord's body with the lotus. We speak of His lotus-eyes, lotus-feet, lotus-hand, lotus-face, lotus-navel, lotus-heart and lotus-head and by this comparison we impress on our hearts the truth that everywhere beauty, holiness and non-attachment exist."

In his discourse, Vinoba makes a special reference to Ashram life: "When in an Ashram some one has to do a lot of work, it never occurs to him to complain, 'Why should I alone do so much work?' There is a beauty in this. If the worshipper gets four hours instead of the usual two for his worship, would he complain, 'Good Lord, I had to worship for four hours today!'? On the contrary, he would rejoice all the more. One has this experience in an Ashram. We should have this experience everywhere in life. Life should be consecrated to service."

And he adds: "All our actions from morning till night should become worship of the Lord. Bathing, eating, or sweeping, we should think of the Lord. While sweeping, we should have the attitude that we are cleaning the courtyard of the Lord, the master of our life. All our actions should thus become acts of worship!"

At the end, Vinoba makes a significant point that "*karma, bhakti* and *jnana* together make a single beautiful form". "And from it springs naturally, wonderful service full of love and full of knowledge. One loves one's mother; but this love should express itself in action. Love is constantly striving, and expressing itself in the form of service. The outer form of love is service. Where there is love, knowledge comes and joins it!"

It is, indeed, remarkable how Vinoba has been able to translate this ideal into actual life. His whole personality is a matchless fusion of the three basic qualities of knowledge, devotion and action. It is, undeniably, a very rare combination. But Vinoba epitomizes such a combination in an extraordinary man-

ner. To me, this is the quintessence of his illustrious and versatile personality.

The Sixteenth Chapter entitled *Purushottama-yoga*, speaks of the conflict between the Divine and demonic tendencies within a human being: "Kurukshetra is both outside us and within us. When we observe it carefully, it is the battle raging within that we see assuming shape in the world without. He who seems to be my enemy is only the passion in my heart taking on a shape and standing out there. Just as my image, handsome or ugly, appears in the mirror, it is the bad and good thoughts of our mind that appear without as our enemies and friends. As we see in dreams what we have seen while awake, so we see in the world without what is in our hearts. Between the battle within and the battle without, there is little difference. To speak the truth, the real battle is only within ourselves."

Among the good qualities, *abhaya* or fearlessness has been given the first place. This is not a mere accident, explains Vinoba. "Without truth, good qualities have no value; but for truth, fearlessness is essential." "In an atmosphere charged with fear, good qualities cannot grow. Fearlessness is, therefore, the commander of all good qualities."

"While in front, Fearlessness stands alert, Humility guards the rear. This is an excellent arrangement. Here twenty-six qualities are enumerated. If we have twenty-five of these qualities, but have *ahamkara*, egoism or pride in these, there is every chance of stealthy attack from behind in which we shall lose all that we have now. That is why the virtue called Humility is stationed in the rear. In the absence of humility, there is no knowing when victory will turn into defeat. Thus by placing fearlessness in front and humility in the rear we can develop all the good qualities."

The three demonic ambitions are described as power, culture and wealth. Apart from political power, Vinoba explains that the desire of one region or nation to impose its culture on others is a very wrong ambition and leads to highly undesirable results. Attachment to wealth and material well-being is obviously suicidal to one's spiritual growth. In order to overpower these satanic tendencies, it is imperative to attain control over our senses or *indriyas*.

According to Vinoba, the Seventeenth Chapter tells us about the *yoga* of *'karya-krama'*—regularity in action. "The sun is free and independent. He is regular—it is in this regularity that the essence of his freedom lies. We have seen from experience that, if we are in the habit of walking regularly on the same road, we are able to think about other things while walking, without paying attention to our steps. If we walk on a new road every day, all our attention is concentrated on the road. Then the mind can have no freedom. It follows that, in order that life may not be burdensome but joyful, we should limit our activities and order them aright."

Vinoba, then, explains in simple terms the inner meanings of the three terms *yajna, dana* and *tapas*: "To help human society to progress is *dana*. The effort made to replenish Nature's loss is *yajna*; the help given through body, mind, substance and other means to discharge the debt to society is *dana*. Besides these, there is a third order, that of the body. This too wears out day by day. We wear out by use of our mind, our knowledge, our senses. *Tapas* or austerity, has been prescribed in order to remove the defects and distortions that arise in the body."

Towards the end of his talk, Vinoba highlights the importance of purity in food for achieving physical purity and discipline. "For true service, purity in food is necessary. As is the food, so is the mind. The food we eat should be regulated. Not what food we take, but how much we take, is the more important question. It does matter what food we choose to eat, but it matters even more that it is in right measure."

In this connection, Vinoba voices strong criticism of the growing habit of eating meat by imitating the West: "I stress this because at present a great many people have begun to show a liking for meat. Today, the cultures of the East and of the West are influencing each other. I am confident that the ultimate outcome of this will be good. The impact of Western culture disturbs our insensible beliefs. When blind faith is shaken, there is no harm in it. What is good will remain, and what is bad will be destroyed. But blind unbelief should not replace blind belief. It is not as if belief alone can be blind, that it has a monopoly of blindness. Unbelief too can be blind."

During his last discourse on the Eighteenth Chapter, Vinoba

emphasizes the point that renunciation must be accompanied with discrimination. He relates an interesting incident in the life of Gorakhnath: "Machindranath told Gorakhnath, 'Wash this boy and bring him back.' Gorakhnath caught hold of the boy's feet, dashed his head against a stone and spread him on a hedge to dry. Machindranath asked him, 'Have you brought the boy washed?' Gorakhnath answered, 'I have washed him white and put him out to dry.' Is a boy washed this way? We don't wash clothes and boys in the same way. There is a lot of difference between the two."

Another significant example of maintaining a right and balanced attitude of mind has been given: "Once there was a man who, feeling that there was something inauspicious about his house, left it and went and settled in another village. That in turn seemed dirty to him, and he went away to the forest. There, as he sat under a mango tree, a bird's droppings fell on his head. He said, 'This forest too is unfriendly', and went and stood in a river. In the river, the sight of the big fish eating up the small fish filled him with disgust. 'The whole of creation', he concluded, 'is unkind'. 'There is no way out except through death'. So he came out of the water and kindled a fire. Then a gentleman who was passing by said, 'My brother, why are you preparing to die?' He replied, 'Because the whole world is inauspicious'. The man said, 'If the unclean body of yours, this mass of flesh, begins to burn, how it would stink! I live close by. Where could I go? When a single hair burns, it smells so awful! And now, all this flesh of yours will burn! Just think a little of the stench you will spread.' Then the man was bewildered and exclaimed, 'If one can neither live in this world nor die in it, what is one to do?' That is to say, if we go about condemning everything as bad and inauspicious, and rejecting it, we simply cannot carry on."

Vinoba further explains the difference between *karma* and *kriya*, action and activity. "One, in his anger, shouts aloud; another expresses it without opening his mouth. The *jnani*, the seer, makes not the slightest effort, does no *kriya*; but he performs infinite action, *karma*. The mere fact of his being can confer infinite benefit on the world. His presence is enough. Though his hands and feet do no work, he still works. As *kriya*,

the activity, becomes subtler and subtler, *karma,* action, becomes greater."

I have quoted from Vinoba's *Talks on the Gita* in extenso with a definite purpose. For I am convinced that the 'commanding heights' of Vinoba's personality do not rest on his being the first satyagrahi or his initiating a revolutionary non-violent movement of Bhoodan and Gramdan, but essentially depend on the remarkable originality of his thought and the versatility of his mind. I do not have a shadow of doubt that even when the traces of his Bhoodan movement will be hard to detect by research scholars, his discourses on the *Gita* would shine out for centuries to come as glittering jewels of a great *Rishi* who lived in flesh and blood on the Indian soil for several decades, shunning the limelight of public life but delving into the innermost depths of science and spirituality.

11

Intensive Work in Villages

AFTER HIS release from the Dhulia jail, Vinoba proceeded to Wardha. Since the Satyagraha Ashram had been banned and locked by the Government during the 1932 Civil Disobedience movement, he stayed with some of his colleagues in a few rooms near the Cotton Market for a couple of months. During his imprisonment, Vinoba was convinced more than ever that real social and economic progress in the country was impossible of achievement without paying special attention to the villages. On return, he, therefore, decided to organize intensive work in the villages of Wardha Taluka. He established an organization for the purpose and named it *Gramseva Mandal*—'Village Service Association'—with its headquarters at Nalwadi, a village of 800 population and about a mile and half from Wardha town, mostly inhabited by landless labour, especially the Harijans.

Vinoba shifted to the Nalwadi village on 25 December 1932 and wrote the following letter to Gandhiji:

> Nalwadi, a village about a mile and a half from Wardha, is inhabited only by Harijans. . . Wardha Ashram will complete the twelfth year of its existence soon; a *yuga* has completed its full circle. Experiences during the period have been satisfactory. Egoism has faded away. The conviction that God alone is, has grown on us. For so many years I did not live in Wardha, but at your behest. To me nothing counts in this world save your blessings. I may say that it has been my constant endeavour during these twelve years to observe the

Ashram vows. Yet I experience many failings within me. God has blessed me much more than my devotion towards Him deserves.

I know your blessings are ever there to protect me. Even so, I write this letter to beseech them. Please do take care of this humble servant of yours. Kindly secure for him from Providence the fitness to be worthy of a sacrifice in your great cause. If there are any directions for the future, please do let me know.

Vinoba's respectful Pranams

Gandhiji was deeply touched by this letter to which he replied as under:

Chi. Vinoba,

Your love and faith fill my eyes with tears of joy. I may or may not deserve them. But they are sure to do you infinite good. You will be an instrument of great service. It is good that you have shifted to Nalwadi.

My suggestions for the future are as follows: Without insisting on avoidance of milk, take care of your body. Your present duty is to spread an atmosphere against untouchability. Find time to read whatever I write on different occasions. It does not amount to very much. Keep on writing letters to me; even a letter a week will do.

Bapu's blessings

To begin with, Vinoba lived in Nalwadi in a very simple hut with walls made of ordinary bamboos. My wife, Madalsa, who lived in Nalwadi for over a year to study *Ramayana* and *Jnaneshwari* from Vinoba, tells me that this hut must have been used earlier by some villager for keeping his cattle and goats. It had no bath-room attached to it and there were hardly any other facilities. Madalsa, therefore, used to go to Bajajwadi early morning every day after prayers only to take her bath. Even the floor was *kuccha* and was occasionally plastered with cowdung. Sometime later, another ordinary bamboo structure with tiled roof was put up as a kitchen. In course of time, a shed for spinning and weaving of khadi

was constructed on behalf of the Gramseva Mandal.

At Nalwadi, Vinoba made special experiments on hand-spinning with *takli* or a spindle which would cost the rural population only a few annas and on which, by working for eight hours, a person could earn about 2 annas a day. Vinoba used to write occasionally to Gandhiji about his experiences on the *takli*. I have with me a copy of the ten-page letter written by Vinoba to Bapu, explaining in great detail his experiments with spinning on *takli*. One would scarce believe that the speed on the *takli* was faster than on the *charkha*. In the beginning, even Gandhiji did not accept this claim. But Vinoba's arithmetic ultimately proved to be incontrovertible.

Vinoba had prepared a programme for undertaking *pada-yatras*—tours on foot—in the surrounding villages for fourteen days in a month. On the fifteenth day, he and other workers would return to Nalwadi to exchange information and experience about their rural work, and start their journey on foot again the next day for another fourteen days. Such a tour of the villages was compared by Vinoba to the *pradakshina*—going round the idol in a temple. "The people of the villages," said Vinoba, "are like our Deity." "We must go to them again and again as we go to a temple for worship. We should make every effort to identify ourselves with the people. That is the only way to serve the villagers in a spirit of dedication."

According to Vinoba's scheme of rural reconstruction, each worker toured about a dozen villages intensively every fortnight. He had with him a detailed list of these villages, indicating their population, social condition and their economic problems. People were trained in hand-spinning and weaving so that they could not only earn some daily wages for their own maintenance but also manufacture khadi for local consumption. Some of the main workers of the Gramseva Mandal were Manohar Divan (whom Gandhiji had described in his statement on Vinoba in 1940 as 'a young man who has dedicated himself to the service of lepers'), Gopalrao Kale, Babaji Moghe, Gopalrao Valunjkar, Vallabhswami, Tukaram Bua, Chhotelal, Ramdasbhai, Dilip Kumar and Shankarrao Chowdhury.

After about two years, these workers, instead of living in Nalwadi, settled down in the nearby villages of their choice.

Each of them improvised an Ashram in the village where he lived. Some of the important villages selected for the purpose in Wardha taluka included Pulgaon, Daoli, Bhiwapur, Junona, Sindi, Rohini and Jamani. Some workers had constructed small cottages for themselves, while others lived in a small tiled room provided by the villagers. Even food was often given to them by the village community. These workers organized collective sanitation of the village, distributed medicines, held prayer meetings, repaired village approach roads and conducted training classes for those who cared to learn hand-spinning on *takli* or ordinary spinning wheel.

The Nalwadi Ashram consisted of about seven or eight workers, including some women. They held morning and evening prayers, did community spinning, cooked food, washed clothes and utensils, did sanitation and scavenging work and also spent a few hours on the study of the *Ramayana*, the *Gita*, *Jnaneshwari* and the *Upanishads*. Vinoba taught *Gitai* to men and women who joined his classes. The evening prayers were attended by quite a few persons living in Nalwadi village.

As a result of untiring efforts of Vinoba and his band of workers, 43 temples and 300 village wells were thrown open to the Harijans. This silent constructive work by the Gramseva Mandal for the removal of untouchability made a good impact on the village communities. It was the intention of the Gramseva Mandal to saturate all the villages within Wardha taluka with khadi so that the weaker sections could not only obtain some supplementary income during the off seasons but also become self-sufficient at least in their cloth requirements. The number of villages in Wardha Tehsil was about 310, and the total population about 2 lakhs.

A monthly bulletin called *Ashram Vritta* was published under Vinoba's direction from time to time. It contained useful information in Marathi about the work of the Ashram and the tour of the workers in the Wardha villages. Besides, Vinoba used to write letters to Bapu and Jamnalal Bajaj about his experiments.

Once Vinoba had objected to hand-spinning of fine yarn. He had compared coarse yarn with Valmiki's *Ramayana* and fine yarn to Banabhatta's *Kadambari*. Gandhiji disgreed with this

view and addressed an interesting letter to Vinoba on 24 October 1932:

> The comparison with Banabhatta and Valmiki is not right. . . Our forefathers forced the poor to produce Dacca muslin to gratify the delicate tastes of people who loved luxury. Let us atone for their sin by spinning as *yajna* yarn of the finest count and offer it to the Lord. The art in both cases is the same, but in olden times it ministered to selfishness. Let our art help in spreading the spirit of service. It is necessary to revive the old skill in order to popularize khadi among all classes of people. We should prove that what was possible then in the days of slavery can be done in the age of freedom too.
>
> If this reasoning appeals to you, I need not explain to you why I put down 20 counts as the minimum for a voluntary spinner to achieve. There is, however, nothing inviolate about this figure; it is not laid down as a fixed principle. It is only a test of the devotion of the voluntary spinner.
>
> If I have not been able to explain my point of view, you may write to me again and ask me. I have no doubt in the matter, but I cannot rest at ease till I have satisfied you.

About Vinoba's work in the villages, Gandhiji wrote in the same letter:

> I realize very well how exceedingly difficult it is to go into the villages. However, despite the difficulties, we must go. I, therefore, very much like the beginning you are making.

In the course of a letter addressed to Jamnalalji in August 1934, Vinoba observed:

> I experience unusual inspiration while spinning on *takli* so much so that my mother, *Gita* and *takli* have literally become synonymous terms in my mental dictionary. *Ai*—mother —contains all the rich experience I gathered at home during childhood. *Gita* incorporates all the wisdom from the *Vedas*

and the tradition of saints in India. And *takli* reveals to me all the experience gained under Bapu's guidance.

In another letter written on 10 February 1935, Vinoba stated:

> You have asked me about my daily programme. The fact of the matter is that I draw inspiration only from two items —repeating God's name and spinning the whole day. All the rest, including study, writing, discussions and speeches, appear to me to be insignificant as a zero. In essence, God's remembrance and spinning are almost identical to me. If zeros are added to one, they go on adding strength; but without the one, all remain merely zeros. I, therefore, take care of the one, i.e., daily prayers and spinning.

Writing to Radhakrishna Bajaj in October 1936, Vinoba remarked:

> My mind is full of *takli* these days. At present I feel almost like a child. I, therefore, like small things. Just as a child likes small utensils, small bread and small sweets. I also feel attracted towards small items. I have with me a small *Gita*, and a small *takli*. I also require a small *dhunki*—carding apparatus.

At the instance of Jamnalalji, Vinoba also spent some time in revising *Gitai*, the Marathi translation of the *Gita*. Accordingly, three or four editions of the *Gitai* were published by the Gramseva Mandal and Vinoba made several alterations in each edition. Jamnalalji also requested Vinoba to edit the manuscript of his discourses on the *Gita* given in Dhulia jail. *Gita Pravachanen* was first printed in the original Marathi and subsequently translated into Hindi and other Indian languages.

In course of time, a *saranjam karyalaya*—workshop—for the fabrication of *taklis* and *charkhas* was also set up near Nalwadi Ashram. Writing about this workshop to a colleague in October 1936 Vinoba said:

> Ordinarily I like small schemes. But you can invest Rs. 10,000 for the *saranjam karyalaya.* In proportion to the village work involved, this scheme will be considered as small. But I do not relish the idea of receiving donations from some people and giving their names on the institution. I do not like this system at all. We can take only God's name and not of human beings in our sacred work. Lending names of persons to our institutions would amount to some kind of an idol worship. I have, therefore, no inclination towards such a practice. Gramseva Mandal should also not advance loans to people, with interest or without interest.

In another letter, Vinoba expressed his definite view that "constructive work will not make any headway until some intellectuals engaged themselves in physical labour out of their own free will". In regard to weaving, he mentioned the following points:

> (i) We should prepare the best possible slivers and make them freely available to those villagers who desire to learn spinning.
>
> (ii) At least half a dozen workers should be engaged in spinning at one place, so that similar community-spinning could be organized in the rural areas. Continuous experiments should be conducted in spinning, carding and weaving in all our centres.
>
> (iii) New workers should be trained every year for expanding our work.
>
> (iv) The quality of khadi produced by us should be of the highest order.
>
> (v) There should be an atmosphere of constant research and study around me in the Ashram. In the absence of such an atmosphere, I cannot carry on my daily activities.

A dairy was also started both for the supply of milk as well as for conducting experiments in feeding, weeding and breeding. In the initial stages, both buffaloes and Shahiwal breed of cows were maintained, and later, only cows and that also of the local *goalau* breed. With better feeding and servicing

by pedigree bulls, it was found possible to upgrade the local breed both for milk-yield as well as supply of bullocks. A *Goras Bhandar*—Co-operative Store—was established in Wardha city for collecting and distributing cow's milk to the public.

A tannery for preparing shoes, *chappals* and other leather goods out of the skins and hides of unslaughtered cattle was set up near Nalwadi under the direction of Gopalrao Valunjkar in 1937. Gandhiji had blessed this scheme because it involved the creation of wealth out of waste in the villages. In fact, all the constructive workers in Wardha used the foot-wears produced in this tannery, because the leather employed in the tannery was 'non-violent'—it did not involve any slaughter of cattle. This tannery is now running under the supervision of the Khadi and Village Industries Commission.

Manohar Divan, while doing village work under the Gramseva Mandal, also started the service of those who suffered from leprosy. In the initial stages, the members of the Gramseva Mandal raised objections against leprosy work, specially after the devastating floods at Pavnar and the nearby villages in 1934. But Vinoba fully supported this activity and allowed Manohar Divan to carry it on as a member of the Gramseva Mandal. "In fact we should feel proud that one of our workers has undertaken this difficult work at grave risk to his own health," remarked Vinoba. Manoharji started a separate *Maharogi Seva Mandal* in May 1936 at Dattapur on the other side of the Wardha-Nagpur road, about two miles away from Nalwadi. He worked as the director of this leper-colony for about twenty-five years with single-minded devotion. It is now considered to be one of the finest institutions in the sphere of leprosy control. Here the patients work in the fields to grow crops and vegetables, manufacture their own khadi, run a dairy, repair and construct their own houses. So far as I know, this is the only leprosy institution in India which is run on the basis of self-help and self-reliance through productive work.

Both the tannery as well as the Dattapur leper colony were run, more or less, as autonomous institutions under the overall guidance and supervision of the Gramseva Mandal. Through them, commendable work has been done all these years. Gandhiji kept in close touch with their progress from year to year

because he attached great importance to these constructive activities. When he visited Dattapur in the early 40s, I happened to accompany him. After going round the institution, Gandhiji wrote in the visitors' book: "I am known as a Mahatma by the people; but the real Mahatma is Manohar Divan who has sacrificed his whole life for the cause of leprosy at grave risks to his own health."

After the 1932 satyagraha, the Government kept Vinoba's Ashram sealed for about a year. Even when the buildings were released by the authorities, Vinoba did not like to re-start the Ashram in its old form. After careful consideration, it was transformed into Gramseva Mandal for doing intensive village work, and its buildings were made available to *Mahila Ashram*, a women's institution of an all-India nature where the wives, sisters and daughters of political and constructive workers received education under the direction of Gandhiji and Vinoba.

Earlier, a *Kanya Shala*—Girls' school—had been started on an *ad hoc* basis in the staff quarters of the adjoining High School. This was mainly for the daughters of various workers engaged in educational and constructive work. After closure, girl-students of the Sabarmati Ashram were also sent to this Kanya Shala, later called *Ashram* at Wardha. Important national leaders visited the institution from time to time. It was from here that Gandhiji commenced his historic Harijan tour on 7 November 1933. It was subsequently merged into the Mahila Ashram. Even while living in Nalwadi for conducting the Gramseva Mandal activities, Vinoba used to take classes in the Mahila Ashram and join the evening prayers. It was mainly due to Vinoba's active interest in this institution that it soon grew into a first-rate educational campus for girls as well as adult women. It was a purely residential institution and students from almost all the States of India were attracted towards it. A large number of girls from Nepal also joined it due to the efforts of Tulsi Mehr, a Nepalese constructive worker who had lived in the Sabarmati Ashram in the early twenties. Mahila Ashram has been responsible for training up a good number of women workers on Gandhian lines, and they are still working in different States with excellent achievements to their credit.

Vinoba and his colleagues were also placed in charge of a boys' high school which was run by Jamnalalji and Jajuji. It was formerly known as Marwadi Vidyalaya where Gandhiji, after the Nagpur Congress Session of 1920, first asked the staff and students to sever all connections with Government in regard to recognition and degrees. In 1926 this Vidyalaya was converted into a *'Rashtriya Vidya Mandir'*, with independent courses of study on national lines. Many students and teachers naturally left it, and only about 25 students, including Kamalnayan Bajaj, Dattoba Dastane, Kunder Diwan, Bhau Panse, Budhsen and Kishan Jaju, continued to pursue their studies here. The curriculum included the study of Marathi, Sanskrit, Hindi and English besides a general knowledge of economics, politics and sociology. Special emphasis was laid on the study of the *Gita, Ramayana,* and the *Upanishads.* The Marathi *Bhajans* of Tukaram, Jnanadev formed an important part of the syllabus. The Vidyalaya had to be closed down during the Salt Satyagraha of 1930. It reopened for some time after the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, but was finally wound up in 1932.

The main criticism against the Wardha Satyagraha Ashram had been that it was cut off from the mainstream of public life and tended to become some sort of an island, isolated from the people. The Gramseva Mandal, therefore, was organized on an entirely different basis, and its chief aim was to forge living links with the rural population on the foundations of self-reliance and co-operation. These basic objectives of the Mandal have been attained over the years with notable success. The workshop at Gopuri, manufacturing traditional and Ambar charkhas along with the accessories, is one of the biggest in the country today and is run in an efficient manner. Its management is in the hands of an executive committee which adopts various resolutions on the basis of unanimity and not by majority vote. For many years it experimented with yarn currency for its transactions in place of metallic or paper currency. The workers obtained a variety of consumer goods from the *Swarajya Bhandar*—co-operative stores—by paying for them in hanks of self-spun yarn. This was, indeed, a novel experiment which worked for several years with fairly satisfactory results. I happened to be the Convener of the Advisory Committee for this

scheme which was inaugurated by Mahatma Gandhi himself in March 1942.

As an integral part of the Gramseva Mandal's programme, Vinoba used to organize every year a *Khadi-yatra* in one of the work-centres of Wardha Taluka. This was in the nature of an annual conference of constructive workers engaged in khadi and other allied activities. I remember how I met Vinoba for the first time in April 1936 at Pavnar where a *Khadi-yatra* was in session. On my way from Nagpur to Wardha by road, Jamnalalji desired that I should halt for a few hours at Pavnar to attend the conference and also pay my respects to Vinoba. Frankly, I had not heard of Vinoba's name earlier, although he was held in very high esteem in the Gandhian circles.

Meetings held at the *Khadi-yatra* were largely attended by the villagers of the neighbouring areas. The session lasted two days, and besides speeches, there were competitions for spinning and weaving and prizes were awarded to the winners in the form of spinning wheels and other equipment. An exhibition of khadi and village industries was also organized on this occasion. At these meetings the workers related their experiences of constructive work in different villages and discussed various problems in order to find practical solutions. These *Khadi-yatras* continued till 1941 and served a definite purpose. They were helpful in generating an atmosphere of self-sufficiency and dignity of labour amongst the rural population. The workers looked forward to these annual meetings because they provided an opportunity of enriching their own programmes in the countryside.

From letters written by Vinoba to important constructive workers, it is evident that he supervised various activities with an eye on efficiency and correct idealism. In one of the letters he complains about the lack of sanitation in the dairy at Nalwadi. In another communication, he expresses his disapproval of the introduction of piece-work in the workshop and rules out a proposal to allow the workers to complete their assignments at home. Such a system, he fears, may tempt the workers to get a portion of their work done through others in the form of a sub-contract, resulting in economic exploitation.

To be able to spin on the *takli* for eight hours without any

intervals of rest, Vinoba practised spinning alternately with both the hands. When the right hand was tired, he would spin with the left and *vice versa.* Sometime later at Pavnar, he introduced *Tunai*—hand-carding. This reduced the need for a carding machine and provided gainful work to the unemployed. The slivers prepared out of this hand-carded cotton were found to be quite satisfactory.

Vinoba laid considerable stress on the quality of workers and not their numbers. He believed in conducting experiments in depth and hesitated to plan in terms of quantities. Writing to my wife on 2 February 1936, he observed: "By serving even a few individuals in a thorough manner, the impact of our work would be visible on the whole village. I have, therefore, prepared a new sutra—aphorism: *'Seva Vyaktikee, Bhakti Samashtikee'*—'service of the individual and devotion to the community'.

In regard to the teaching of languages in the Satyagraha Ashram or later at Nalwadi, Vinoba's main emphasis was on learning one language thoroughly—its grammar, diction, pronunciation and usage. He has been of the definite opinion that if a student learns one language in a thorough manner, it will be possible for him to pick up other languages quite easily. Vinoba would commence the teaching of Sanskrit with the *Gita;* English he would start with the Bible, and Marathi with *Jnaneshwari* and the *bhajans* of Tukaram.

Vinoba was particularly keen on regularity in studies. One may study only for an hour, but this must be repeated everyday systematically. In another letter addressed to my wife on 16 January 1936, he wrote: "Just as a house gets dirty if it is not cleaned every day, so self-study gets diffused if not undertaken regularly. We should constantly recollect what had been taught earlier. I continue to reflect even today what I had studied 15 or 20 years ago."

Vinoba always welcomed constructive criticism of his activities in the Ashram or the Gramseva Mandal. In a letter to a worker on 29 August 1935, he observed: "It is good that you could hear some criticism of the Ashram. If the Ashram is really sacred, its critics are bound to attain salvation. Devotion to a duty other than yours is a kind of *bhakti.* These days, a

number of workers are becoming some kind of atheists. I regard such atheism not as a proof of the non-existence of God, but a vindication of His benevolence... Even Lord Vishnu has been depicted as sleeping on the multitudinous heads of a serpent, devoid of all worries."

While Vinoba was engaged in all these constructive and educational activities from dawn to dusk with a sense of exceptional dedication, his inherent aspiration was to reduce himself to a zero in the service of the Divine. When teaching *Ramayana* to his students, he would remark: "I say to myself, what role is there for me in this *Ramayana*? The example of Ahilya turning herself into a stone suggests itself to me. I should be blessed, thrice blessed, if I were to become such a stone."

Gandhiji looked upon Vinoba both as his son as well as a *Guru*. He was all praise for him and expressed his inner sentiments to his colleagues from time to time. Bapu addressed him as *Kritayugi* Vinoba in a letter written on 19 September 1932 from the *Yeravda* jail. *Kritayuga* literally means 'the golden age', and Gandhiji used the epithet for Vinoba because he was engaged in selfless activities in the service of the Divine. Gandhiji's letter is replete with wit and humour of a rare kind, and is reproduced below:

Yeravda Jail,
September 19, 1932

Kritayugi Vinoba,

We need not envy you for living in the *Kritayuga*, for we too, have with us the *Kritayugi* Sardar* and, therefore, rise at least a few inches higher than you. Do you know that the Sardar keeps walking most of the time? He would, if he could, even eat walking and spin walking. Even though an old man, he tries to learn the *Gita* by heart while walking. For improving his pronunciation he should be sent to you, and you given a cane to correct him. But you are not likely to have that good fortune in the immediate future.

* Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.

You seem to have mastered the art of holding out false assurances to the poor! When a poor man like me had been pining for a letter from you, you did not write at all; and now when I am getting ready to lie down on my deathbed, you write to say, 'now that I have started writing, I shall write regularly'. But maybe I am destined to survive this ordeal,* since the vows of *Kritayugis* are not known to remain unfulfilled. If I do leave this bed, I will expect to hear regularly from you.

Through this bit of jesting, I have diverted my mind for a while from the letters I have been writing on serious matters and also suggested that your activities call for no criticism. Keep me informed about them.

If I come out unscathed in body and soul through this ordeal and if there is something to write about, I shall write to you. I will preserve your letter.

—Bapu's blessings

While undertaking the historic march to Dandi in March 1930 in connection with Salt Satyagraha, Gandhiji had announced his decision not to return to the Sabarmati Ashram till *Swaraj* was achieved. The Ashram was, accordingly, converted into a Harijan educational institution. Even when Gandhiji came to Ahmedabad after the end of the movement, he stayed for a while at Gujarat Vidyapith, and not at Sabarmati. Jamnalal Bajaj took this opportunity of inviting the Mahatma to make Wardha his permanent headquarters. In consequence, Gandhiji used to go to Wardha quite often and stayed in the Prayer-hall at Mahila Ashram and later at Maganwadi, the headquarters of the All-India Village Industries Association. It was on 30 April 1936 that Gandhiji walked down to Sevagram village, four miles from Wardha, to settle down there. I had the rare opportunity of walking with him to Sevagram—Segaon, as it was originally called, on that day during hot summer. Initially, Jamnalalji constructed only one hut which is now

* Mahatma Gandhi had started a fast unto death as a protest against British Prime Minister's proposal for introducing separate electorates for Harijans.

known as *Adi Niwas*. Gradually, the Sevagram Ashram developed into a fairly big colony.

Even when Gandhiji shifted to Sevagram, his meetings with Vinoba were none too frequent. Bapu did not like to distract Vinoba's attention from the basic activities of rural development and education. Vinoba also went to Sevagram only when specifically asked to do so.

12

To Pavnar: 'Paramdham Ashram'

EARLY IN 1938, Vinoba's health deteriorated considerably, causing anxiety to Jamnalalji and Gandhiji. This was due to a very rigorous life led by Vinoba, and that too on a deficient diet, and also the flow of dust towards the Ashram raised by trucks and buses plying on the Nagpur road, very near the village.

Vinoba was advised by Bapu to go to a hill-station for rest and convalescence. Vinoba agreed to consider the matter. He one day went to Pavnar, a village on the Nagpur road, about six miles from Wardha. Jamnalal Bajaj had constructed a villa on the bank of river Dham for occasional rest. Vinoba liked this place and informed Gandhiji that he had selected a 'hill station' for himself. Shortly afterwards, he shifted to Pavnar and gradually started another Ashram there. He called this new institution *Paramdham*, because it was situated on the other bank of Dham river. Incidentally, *Paramdham* also connotes the abode of the Divine.

At Pavnar, Vinoba used his own 'pathy' to regain normal health. He worked hard for several hours a day in the adjoining fields which were full of relics of the capital city of Pavan kingdom which existed in this area more than 1500 years ago. He would prepare butter out of groundnuts and eat plenty of vegetables grown in the Ashram. Vinoba increased the intake of milk as well. As a result, his weight steadily increased from 90 lbs. to 120 lbs. within six months. Asked by a friend about the secret of this new 'pathy', Vinoba explained: "I surrendered all worries to the will of the Providence. I did not keep anv books with me except the poems of some Marathi saints. I did

not read any serious books; nor did I think of any complicated problems."

It was during this period that Vinoba virtually withdrew himself and led a sequestered life. When I was the Principal of Navabharat Vidyalaya at Wardha, I went to Pavnar once or twice with a few colleagues of mine to pay respects to Vinoba. As he noticed us, Vinoba turned his back and continued spinning. At first, we were shocked at this behaviour on his part and felt rather insulted. But we soon realized that this was nothing extraordinary because Vinoba did not like to meet even distinguished guests those days.

Once, while at Sevagram, Gandhiji asked Acharya Kripalani to meet Vinoba at Pavnar and discuss with him certain problems. When Kripalani approached him and gently called his name, Vinoba made no reply and did not even turn round to greet him. Kripalani thought that Vinoba was saying his prayers and, therefore, waited patiently for some time. He made another attempt, but without success. The third attempt after about half an hour also failed to yield any results. Acharya Kripalani, therefore, felt slighted and reported his experience to Bapu, protesting against the 'rude demeanour' of his favourite disciple: "I have never met a more arrogant person than your Vinoba', exploded Kripalani. Gandhiji sympathized with him and explained: "It is not arrogance, professor; it is concentration which is the hallmark of spiritual endeavour."

It was also at Pavnar that Vinoba sought the assistance of a Muslim scholar to learn Arabic in order to study the Holy Quran in the original. Subsequently, Vinoba prepared a book of selections from the Quran and published it under the title *The Essence of the Quran*. Hindi, Urdu and English editions of this collection were brought out by the Sarva Seva Sangh. They were very useful in acquainting constructive workers with the basic principles of Quran and removing a number of misconceptions about the Isamic religion.

Jamnalalji had often expressed a desire to raise a temple in the memory of Bharat, brother of King Rama, who had functioned as a noble trustee of the Kingdom during Ramchandra's absence. Vinoba also supported the idea of erecting a temple in Bharat's name. Once, when he was digging the fields, his

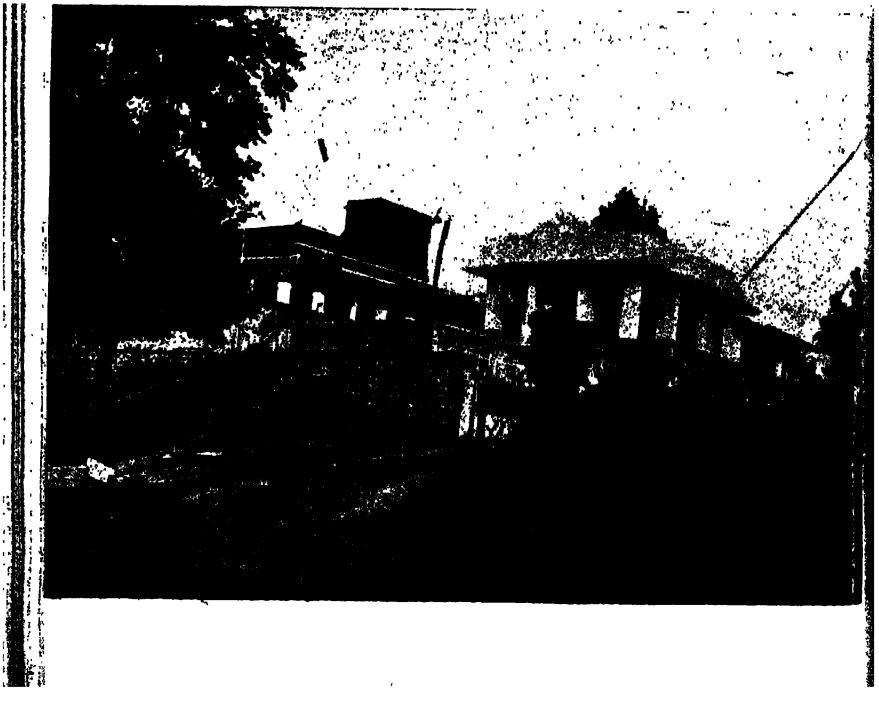
Working in the fields at Pavnar Ashram



Pavnar Ashram



Bharat-Ram Mandir at Pavnar



pick-axe hit a hard stone, creating loud noise. When the stone was extracted with great difficulty, Vinoba discovered that it was an artistic statue of Bharat embracing Rama, Sita and Lakshman standing by their side. The statue was cleaned with devotion and installed in the Ashram campus. Vinoba used to walk round the statue several times after his bath every morning and recited *shlokas* from the *Ramayana* in a loud and resounding voice. After some time, a small roof was erected above the statue to protect it against sun and rains. Later, the Gramseva Mandal raised a regular 'Bharat-Ram temple' which is now one of the special features of Paramdham Ashram at Pavnar and visitors invariably go there to offer prayers.

Some years later, Vinoba used to go regularly to a neighbouring village Surgaon, about three miles away from Pavnar. He carried his own shovel on the shoulders and cleaned various parts of Surgaon every morning without fail. According to the traditional habit of the village-folk, they eased themselves on the outskirts of the habitation, without even caring to drop earth on the nightsoil for hygienic reasons. Vinoba did scavenging work in a systematic manner for years on end. In course of time, the local Panchayat agreed to construct a few public latrines for women. But the general habit of villagers continued despite Vinoba's exemplary perseverance. On his way to Surgaon and back, he would recite various *bhajans* from Marathi saints with full abandon. Vinoba would take his bath before proceeding to Surgaon, and again on return, go to the Bharat-Ram temple and spend about half an hour in singing Marathi poems and reciting Sanskrit verses.

Vinoba often explained to his colleagues and pupils 'the romance of the zero'. "The zero when multiplied with the biggest number, reduces it to a zero, and when dividing even a small figure raises it to infinity. This is the exceptional beauty and miracle of a zero. If it is taken away from mathematics, the whole romance of this science would fade away."

It was also at Pavnar that Vinoba initiated his memorable experiment of eschewing money economy or *kanchan-mukti*, as he called it. He took a strict decision to eliminate the use of

coins or currency for running his Ashram. Steps were, therefore, taken to produce all the foodgrains and vegetables required by the inmates for their own consumption. A small dairy was also started. Khadi was, of course, spun and woven within the campus for clothing purposes. A printing press was set up to enable the inmates to earn some money as a special case for meeting expenses on travel, postage, salt and kerosene. In order to provide irrigation for the fields, Vinoba started digging a well. Students from several educational institutions of Wardha went to Pavnar to participate in this *shramdan*—contribution of voluntary labour. Vinoba agreed to receive donations in terms of labour, but not in money. Instead of using the bullock power, he and his co-workers turned the Persian wheel on the Ashram well and recited the evening prayers simultaneously. This was a practical implementation of the dictum 'work is worship'. I had also the privilege of joining these work-oriented evening prayers several times at Pavnar. It was at one of these special prayers that Jayaprakash Narayan felt greatly attracted towards Vinoba's dynamic personality.

Vinoba also commenced at Pavnar a new experiment of 'God-realization' through a *Brahma-vidya Mandir,* consisting exclusively of unmarried girl-students drawn from different parts of the country. Vinoba has often remarked that this institution will, perhaps, be his last activity. The inmates of the *Mandir* lead a life of self-sufficiency by producing all their requirements locally with their own labour without the assistance of any servants. They also spend several hours a day on self-study of religious books, including the *Gita* and the *Upanishads.* Vinoba believes that the knowledge of the Supreme through bread-labour and self-reliance could be attained more easily by women rather than men.

Although Vinoba has not been able to live at Pavnar for years, he keeps on writing to the inmates quite regularly, conveying his instructions on different aspects of life. His younger brother Balkoba now stays at Pavnar for six months in a year to look after the institution; the remaining six months are spent at the Urlikanchan Nature Cure Clinic near Poona.

After the martyrdom of Mahatma Gandhi, a portion of his ashes were immersed in the Dham river at Pavnar. Since then, a Gandhi Fair is held here each year on 12 February. The inmates of the Paramdham Ashram manage this annual *Mela* and arrange some talks for educating the people in the basic principles of *Sarvodaya.*

13

Giving Shape to Basic Education

IT WAS in October 1937 that, in my capacity as the General Secretary of the Education Society or *Shiksha Mandal,* I convened a National Education Conference at Wardha to consider Gandhiji's views in regard to self-sufficiency in education. For some time past, Gandhiji had been pleading in the columns of the *Harijan* that education should be made self-supporting through the productive labour of the teachers and the students. Under the Act of 1935, the Congress had formed Ministries in several Provinces of India. Gandhiji was, therefore, keen to place before the Education Ministers a practical scheme of imparting primary and secondary education to all children between the ages of 7 and 14. Such an educational programme could be financially feasible only if schools were able to find the necessary funds, at least for their recurring expenditure, out of their own earnings.

Gandhiji's ideas evoked appreciation as well as criticism in the country. It was, therefore, desirable to discuss these proposals threadbare in order to reach unanimous conclusions. From this standpoint, the convening of the Education Conference at Wardha aroused considerable interest throughout India. Gandhiji himself prepared the list of invitees, and later, agreed to preside over it. The only additional name suggested by me was that of Dr. Zakir Husain, the then Principal of the Jamia Millia Islamia of New Delhi. Bapu readily agreed and asked me to send the invitation in Urdu. This was done and Dr. Husain promptly conveyed his acceptance.

During the deliberations, Dr. Zakir Husain, while welcoming

the scheme in general, sharply criticised the self-supporting aspect of Gandhiji's proposals and expressed the fear that the teachers may tend to become 'slave-drivers' by extracting students' labour for earning their own salaries. Gandhiji utilized this opportunity to elaborate his ideas regarding self-sufficient education. At the end of the Conference, the following resolution was adopted unanimously:

(*i*) In the opinion of this Conference free and compulsory education be provided for seven years on a nationwide scale.

(*ii*) The medium of instruction be the mother-tongue.

(*iii*) The Conference endorses the proposal made by Mahatma Gandhi that the process of education throughout this period should centre around some form of manual and productive work, and that all the other abilities to be developed or training to be given should, as far as possible, be integrally related to the environment of the child.

(*iv*) The Conference expects that this system of education will be gradually able to cover the remuneration of the teachers.

Although Vinoba was present throughout the deliberations, he did not speak at the Conference even once. He was, however, included as an important member of the Zakir Husain Committee which was appointed to prepare a detailed syllabus on the lines of the resolution adopted by the Conference. Dr. Zakir Husain visited Wardha several times in connection with the work of this Committee and requested Vinoba to help him in giving a practical shape to Basic education.

Vinoba's contribution to the Zakir Husain Committee's report, published in December 1937, was very valuable. For, out of all the members of the Committee, he alone had been conducting detailed experiments in hand-spinning and weaving which could serve as important basic crafts for this new system of education. Subsequently, Vinoba wrote a special textbook on the subject for the use of teachers and students. Thus, while the idea of self-supporting education was initiated by Gandhiji, it was Vinoba who gave it a concrete shape. As a matter of fact, the ideas of *Nai Talim* or Basic education were

nascent in Vinoba's educational work at Sabarmati and later at the Satyagraha Ashram in Wardha.

There is not a shadow of doubt that Vinoba is basically a teacher *par excellence.* He is at his best while teaching a favourite subject like Sanskrit or mathematics; and since a good teacher must also be a keen student, Vinoba never loses an opportunity of acquiring new knowledge of various kinds. He is capable of gathering wisdom even from trival events. His knowledge is, indeed, very versatile and he can discuss almost any subject on earth with originality of thought and freshness of outlook.

Vinoba's ideas on Basic education are, assuredly, very enlightening. Recollecting his own school and college days, he observes: "In college they had taught me many things but knowledge was not one of them. After I had left the college behind, the infinite gateways of knowledge were opened to me. To this day I follow with reverence after knowledge." "In *Nai Talim* knowledge and work are one, they come to us in the same guise. Of work comes knowledge, of knowledge comes fruitful work; of the union of knowledge and work comes the development of intelligence."

Vinoba abhors the shutting up of children within the school class-rooms in a dull and drab routine. "Instead of the artificial idea," says he, "that education is a duty, we must foster the natural and inspiring idea that education is a joy." The teachers who deal with students in the traditional way are "merely the warders of the city jails". Vinoba further asserts: "Unless we are exercised in work we have no hunger for learning, and when learning is forced artificially upon a man who has no appetite for it, the digestive organs have no power to digest it. If wisdom were to be had by cramming books, the library cupboards would be wise indeed. But learning which is forcibly rammed in is not digested. 'Mental dysentery' sets in and the intellectual powers are atrophied and die."

Explaining the correct process of imparting education through work, Vinoba declares: "Education is a by-product of practical work. A man who follows any useful occupation is being educated by it, whether he knows it or not. Children ought to be educated in the same way. Adults learn the hard way, by their

mistakes. Little children are not yet strong enough for that, so provision ought to be made for them to learn without too many mistakes in an atmosphere in which they may gradually grow to be self-reliant."

Vinoba lays great stress on the quality of education and not merely its extent. He observes: "The quality of education is not to be measured by its length and breadth, but only by its depth. What counts in study is depth, not extent." He adds: "There is no knowledge without deep, concentrated study. Study that is merely extensive has a number of shortcomings... Nothing is properly grasped and fully mastered. Study ought to develop steadfastness of mind, reason, independence and power of thought."

Underlining the need for humility and self-reliance in education, Vinoba states: "The student must be not only humble-minded but also strong of purpose, self-reliant, courageous and fearless. He must have both intelligence and steadfastness. A student ought to enter upon life like a conquering hero. The Scriptures put these words into the mouth of a student who has completed his study of the *Vedas,* and is returning to the world: 'Let the four quarters of the earth bow before me!' When a man has knowledge of this quality, it will enable him to serve the whole world."

As mentioned earlier, Vinoba is never tired of learning new things almost every day. "A man," says Vinoba, "who has once tasted the real flavour of knowledge can never give it up." He follows the advice of the *Rishis* that "we should fulfil all our duties, and also at the same time *study and teach.*" He remarks: "I am a student by nature; I feel no need of any external stimulus to make me study. I have spent the greater part of my life in practical work, but I find, nevertheless, that my intellect keeps its freshness."

Speaking about self-reliance in education, Vinoba explains: "Self-reliance means freedom from dependence on others, or on any external support. A man who has true learning is truly free and independent. The first and least part of this self-sufficiency is that the body must be educated and made skilled in a craft. A second, and a very important part of it, is the ability to acquire new knowledge for oneself. There is a third

essential element in freedom, and this also is a part of education. Freedom implies not only independence of other people but also independence of one's own moods and impulses. The man who is a slave to his senses and cannot keep his impulses under control is neither free nor self-sufficient. Temperance, vows and service therefore have their place in education, for it is by such means that this third aspect of freedom can be learned."

Vinoba greatly values the capacity of students to acquire knowledge for themselves: "Let us teach them how to teach themselves." For example, instead of teaching children a number of languages in school, Vinoba is in favour of giving them "such a mastery of one language that they get the understanding of linguistic principles by which they can learn other languages for themselves". The test of true education is the inculcation of self-confidence in the minds of the students. Says he: "On the completion of his education a student ought to have that kind of confidence in his own powers. This is what matters, not a supply of miscellaneous information. The purpose of education is to train men to get the information which they need for themselves. This is my definition of education: education means the attainment of self-sufficiency in learning."

Basic education is not merely a new method but a new approach to life and learning: "People have got into the habit of thinking of Basic education as if it were one method or system of education among others, like the Montessori Method or the 'Project Method'. But it is not a matter of method or technique; Basic education stands for a new outlook, a new approach. The fountain-head of all the world's conflicts is that knowledge has been separated from work. They have been separated in thought by a faulty psychology; they have been separated in life by a faulty sociology; they have been assigned different market values by a faulty economics."

In Vinoba's view, education should also be closely linked with the natural environment in order to generate an atmosphere of joy in living: "True education, then, is bound up with Nature; how can any such education be carried on in our large cities? It is a great misfortune for the cities to be cut off from agriculture, for human life could suffer no greater loss." And

Vinoba makes the following observation in the light of his own experience: "It is the great misfortune of the urban masses that they have no contact with our fields. In my opinion there can be no greater loss than to be deprived of any association with nature. Once when I was in jail, the jailor enquired whether I had any difficulties eventhough I was looking cheerful. I told him that I had. He asked me what my trouble was. I told him I would give him seven days in which to guess what it could be and this would be a test of his intelligence. After pondering for seven days, he came and told me that he had not been able to guess my trouble. I told him that though I was happy, my only sorrow was that I could not behold the beauty of the sunrise and the sunset." He continues: "I am reminded of the remark of a German philosopher who said that the most pleasurable things in the life of a human being are the starry heavens above and a sense of duty. What greater vandalism can there be than that the darkness which is God-given for the peace of mankind has been destroyed by artificial lights. The person whose life has been cut away from nature, has no pleasure in his life."

It is entirely wrong to impart Basic education only in the villages. Vinoba is of definite opinion that the system of *Nai Talim* should be introduced in the whole country and for all children: "It will not do to have one kind of education for the villages and another kind for the towns. It will not do to have one kind of education for the first four years of school life, and afterwards some other kind that is quite unrelated to it. It will not do to regard this as an experiment to be tried out on refugees while the rest of the country has something else. We have a right to use the word 'basic' only if we are agreed that the whole education of the country should be built up on the foundation of *Nai Talim*."

It is an entirely erroneous notion that work-oriented education is not conducive to the development of the intellect. Vinoba cites his own experience: "I have usually worked for eight hours daily, sometimes longer. My days for the last thirty years have been spent drawing water, grinding grain, scavenging, spinning, weaving, carding, carpentering and so on. What I want to emphasize is that thanks to this work my intellectual

powers have not been diminished, but greatly strengthened." "The spiritual principle of *Nai Talim* is that knowledge and work are not two things but one. It is a mistake to say that knowledge is higher than work or work than knowledge. *Nai Talim* is education based on the unity of knowledge and work."

Vinoba also highlights the social aspect of Basic education: "The social principle of *Nai Talim* is that all human lives are equally to be respected. All the various social and class divisions are therefore forms of falsehood. Once this is admitted, our present political and other divisions will be done away with. Social cleavages cannot exist where the principle of *Nai Talim* is at work."

Furthermore, education of children should never become dull and a routine affair. Vinoba, therefore, pleads for not merely *Nai Talim,* but *Nitya Nai Talim* or ever-new education: "I mean that education ought to be like the water in a river—what is here today is not what was here yesterday, and what is here today will not be here tomorrow. The river goes on flowing, but its water is never the same. In the same way education should go on changing continually, with the experience of every passing day."

The development of character under the scheme of Basic education cannot be over-emphasized: "Unless we give our full attention to these things from the very beginning, it is possible that *Nai Talim* will fall into the same error as the old system, and fail to lay the proper emphasis on character-development. Let us not confine ourselves to asking how many hanks have been spun; what we have to find out is whether or not the children are showing any strength of character."

Talking about religious education, Vinoba makes a concrete proposal: "There is no doubt that religious teaching is a subject of great interest and importance. But the word *'dharma'* has unfortunately acquired a very narrow, communal meaning, and for this reason many thoughtful people are opposed to any teaching of *dharma* in schools at all. My own point of view is that true religious teaching is not a matter of literature. The essence of religion is a sound character, faith in God and the conviction that the soul is other than the body. This essential religion can only be learned from the company of good men.

My only plan for religious teaching, therefore, is to choose good men as teachers."

Basic schools should serve as centres or focal points of village life: "The teacher in our school should also be the servant of the whole village, and the village school should be the centre of service. If the village needs medicine, it will be supplied through the school, and the children will help. If the village needs cleaning, the school will be the starting-point, and the teacher and children will help the people to do the work. The people will turn to the teacher to help them to settle disputes. The school will make plans for the observance of festivals. In this way the school will become the centre of the village community; it will develop whatever is of value in the village, and introduce the things that are lacking."

Excessive centralization in education has always been strongly resented by Vinoba: "Throughout the world education is under the control of Governments. I consider that this is extremely dangerous. Governments ought to have no authority over education. The work of education must spring from a faith in service, and should be in the hands of men of wisdom. But as things are, the Governments of the world have got it in their grasp, and every student in the country has to study whatever book is prescribed by the Education Department." He adds: "If the Government is fascist, students will be taught fascism; if it is communist, it will preach communism; if it is capitalist, it will proclaim the greatness of capitalism; if it believes in planning, the students will be taught all about planning. This is an extremely dangerous situation."

Detailing the responsibilities of students, Vinoba enumerates four main duties: "The first duty of students is to preserve full independence of their minds. The second duty is to exercise self-control. The third duty of students is to devote themselves to service. And the fourth duty is to be alert to what is going on around them. They should study all the movements of the modern world, and the current ideologies, with open minds. Their outlook must be broad, and they must not allow themselves to think within narrow limits."

As a practical measure, Vinoba suggests a radical change in the timing of holidays: "It has become the custom to give

such holidays in the hot weather. The heat of India was too much for our foreign teachers, so in the summer, they gave their pupils a holiday and went off themselves to some cool place. That problem no longer exists, for these foreigners have left India and gone back to the cool air of England. That being so, it would be a good thing to change the holiday from summer to the rainy season. During the monsoon, there is a lot of cultivation to be done, and the children can help their parents in the fields."

Vinoba has done considerable original thinking regarding the fundamental principles of Basic education: "The best kind of *Nai Talim* is that in which there is no atmosphere of 'teaching' and 'learning'. If some one asks us what we are doing, we answer that we are eating, resting, playing, reading—naming various activities. But we should never think of replying, 'I am breathing'. Yet the people who are talking, reading, eating, sleeping are also breathing all the time; but they never mention it; they mention only their outward activities. In the same way, if you ask what the children and teacher of a *Nai Talim* school are doing, you will be told that they are working in the fields, serving the sick, cleaning the village. While they do these things, they are giving and gaining knowledge the whole time."

About education in urban areas, Vinoba observes: "With Basic education, we can change the whole framework of our life. This problem does not only concern you and me; it is a problem which all humanity is facing. To the extent we are able to rescue our education from artificiality and relate it to nature, shall we make educational progress. The question which we have to answer is, what shape should Basic education take in the urban areas? I feel a great pity for the masses living in the towns for they have lost contact with nature. We have special schemes for the education of the blind, the handicapped and the mentally retarded. The urban masses also have a disability—their separation from nature. We will, therefore, have to devise means for their education and organize a special programme of Basic education to bring them into contact with nature."

There is one more idea which Vinoba has expressed quite

frequently regarding Basic education. He asserts that best education should be of an invisible nature: "We can see that hands, nose, ears, eyes and tongue are active, but no one can see what the soul is doing. It is however an illusion that your ears appear to be listening, my tongue appears to be talking. That which speaks and hears is the spirit within. And the spirit is invisible. The best *Nai Talim* is similarly invisible. The more it is seen, the more imperfect it is."

In the final analysis, Vinoba lays the greatest emphasis on the inculcation of fearlessness in educational institutions: "It is difficult to say what the greatest excellence of character is, but in the *Gita* the Lord names it as fearlessness—*Abhayam*. Therefore, our whole education should be based on fearlessness, and so should the whole social and political structure of the country." He continues: "Our education ought to aim at awakening in our students the spirit of satyagraha. I have never forgotten a *shloka* which I learned when I was a child, about how Prahlad stood fast in the name of God in spite of all his trials. This kind of training in satyagraha ought to be part of our education both in schools and in society."

It is also explained that real fearlessness in students cannot be generated without the knowledge of the self as distinct from our bodies: "The most important thing for any kind of education, whether in school or in society, is to bring about the recognition that we are other than our bodies. It is this self-knowledge which is the foundation on which the power of satyagraha can be built. The call to self-knowledge has been sounded in our country from ancient times. The old *rishis* knew that without self-knowledge there could be no faith in truth. For the sake of truth difficulties must be endured and death must be faced. The only sufficient basis for such fearlessness is the knowledge of the self, and every child must be given this self-knowledge."

These ideas of Vinoba on different aspects of education are only illustrative, and not comprehensive. He has spoken and written at length on diverse educational problems from time to time. The Sarva Seva Sangh has published in English a volume entitled *Thoughts on Education*, containing Vinoba's views in some detail.

14

In Nagpur Jail : ' A Grammar of Politics '

As has already been mentioned earlier, Gandhiji selected Vinoba as the first Satyagrahi and Jawaharlal Nehru the second to lodge a non-violent protest against India being dragged into the Second World War by the British Government. Mahadev Desai also wrote in the *Harijan* about Vinoba, under the caption 'An Acceptable Sacrifice', explaining in greater detail why Vinoba was chosen by Bapu as the first civil resister. Here are some excerpts from his note:

> In a few chosen phrases Gandhiji has explained why he has selected Vinoba as the first Satyagrahi. It is impossible to improve on that thumb-nail sketch. But it may not be inappropriate to add a few more facts about his busy life, in which all the twenty-four hours of the day have been given to activity of prayerful service which alone, in his opinion, can take one to self-realization. It is this that makes of his sacrifice 'a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God'.
>
> Vinoba has translated his principles into practice, pressed all his philosophy and mathematics into the aid of the constructive programme which he has believed to be the external symbol of non-violence. He has trained under him students who are masters of the science and art of khadi-making, he has trained workers who have been content with a miserable pittance to busy themselves in villages working the constructive programme, and he has given, as Gandhiji has said, an ideal servant to the lepers. 'Proficiency in all action' is the Gita's definition of *yoga*, and everything that Vinoba has done

proves that he is one who has mastered that *yoga*. An ideal spinner, both on the wheel and the *takli* and with both the left and the right hands, he is an ideal village-worker. Though highly intellectual, the villagers feel completely at home with him and are enraptured by his simple perfervid eloquence full of telling homely parables and illustrations. He has produced a Marathi translation of the *Gita* in parallel verse which reproduces the haunting music of the original in an amazing degree, and over a hundred thousand copies of it have been sold in Maharashtra. While carrying on in the village of Pavnar the experiment of the standard spinning wage, he found time to devote five hours each day to the study of the *Quran* in the original, and when yesterday Gandhiji asked him to repeat '*Al Fateha*' before the Maulana he did so with a pronunciation and intonation which the Maulana said were flawless.

It is to such a one that the honour has come of being the first satyagrahi in a campaign that Gandhiji will strive to make the most unsullied from the point of view of non-violence. To be chosen for the honour is a great thing; to have been chosen without having ever desired it is greater still.

When Vinoba made his first speech at Pavnar on 17 October 1940, the Government did not arrest him. He went on repeating his speech on the subsequent days at Surgaon, Seloo, and Deoli. It was only on the fourth day that Vinoba was arrested and sentenced to three months' simple imprisonment. Here is a gist of Vinoba's statement before the District Court in Wardha on being charged with anti-war propaganda:

I plead guilty to the charge that I have propagated against the War in my speeches. I have done it with full understanding and with a purpose. I, however, do not agree that I have committed any crime. In fact, I regard it as my sacred duty. I have full faith in non-violence and I have spent most of my life in various constructive activities like khadi, communal unity, service of the Harijans, basic education through crafts, and cow protection, which are based on non-violence. If a person like me takes upon himself the responsibility of offer-

ing satyagraha against the Government in this delicate situation, it is only because he regards it as his inescapable and pious duty.

On his release after the three-month period, Vinoba offered satyagraha again. This time he was sentenced to six months' imprisonment. When he offered satyagraha the third time after his release, the Government sent him to jail for full one year. During all these three terms of imprisonment, Vinoba was kept in Nagpur jail, along with other individual satyagrahis, whose numbers went on swelling from month to month.

The authorities of Nagpur jail were quite considerate to Vinoba and took every care to provide him with the necessary amenities permitted under the rules. He was given the type of food that suited him. He was also allowed to take with him a limited number of books for study. A special light was set up in his cell for reading purposes.

Ramkrishna Bajaj who was also in Nagpur jail, tells me how Vinoba found time to teach him Sanskrit. The study of Sanskrit was started with the abridged *Valmiki Ramayana.* Vinoba does not believe in the grammar-method of studying languages; he likes his students to plunge directly into a well-known classic and dive deep into its treasures. Ramkrishna, therefore, fully enjoyed his study and picked up a good knowledge of Sanskrit within a few months. Vinoba used to recite the *shlokas* so loudly that the whole barrack resounded with his voice. At the evening prayers, Vinoba spoke softly and in a low voice. The fellow-prisoners, therefore, used to taunt Ramkrishna that Vinoba was not able to speak loudly after the evening prayers because all his energies were almost completely exhausted in teaching him *Ramayana* during the day. The fact of the matter was that Vinoba wanted to weigh each word before expressing his ideas at the post-prayer discourses.

The most important work accomplished by Vinoba during his imprisonment in Nagpur jail in individual satyagraha was the preparation of a manuscript in Marathi, enunciating the basic principles of a non-violent political order. This was published later under the title *Swarajya Shastra.* The brochure could be rightly called 'A Grammar of Politics' on the lines of



At the Ambar Charkha



In deep thought

Professor Harold Laski's monumental volume. Although much lesser in size, the originality of thought and conciseness of expression make this 100-page booklet one of the outstanding publications on modern political science. Dr. Bharatan Kumarappa who was also with Vinoba in Nagpur jail, took special pains to translate it into English with the help of Dada Dharmadhikari and Gopalrao Kale. In the course of his preface to the original Marathi edition of *Swarajya Shastra,* Vinoba states that it was Brijlal Biyani, a leader of Vidarbha, who affectionately wrote down various notes dictated by him and later collected them in a book form.

Vinoba also explains that '*Rajya* or Government is one thing; *Swarajya* or self-government is another'. "Government can be had through violence. Self-government is impossible without non-violence." "So the thoughtful do not want government, but urge people to strive for self-government." According to Vinoba, the *Vedic* word *Swarajya* connotes 'the government of each by each' or 'a government that will seem to each to be his own rule' or 'government by all'. Vinoba adds: 'The science of self-government is evergrowing. Its systems are ever-changing."

In view of the special importance of this treatise on political science, I am sure the reader would like to have the gist and appreciate its originality. In the very first chapter, which is in the form of questions and answers, Vinoba defines politics "as a science dealing with the organizations or arrangements between themselves of a group or groups of people." To divide the people as the rich and the poor would be an artificial treatment of the subject. The four castes are of our own making. Distinctions based on language and religion are also not fundamental. In short, Vinoba thinks that there are no natural classes in human society. There are only individuals who are less or more capable. "How these less or more capable individuals should join together to manage their affairs is the fundamental and natural subject of Political Science."

Vinoba, then enumerates the three natural forms of administration:

(a) A wise or capable individual may administer for all;
(b) More than one wise or capable individual may join

together to administer for all; and

(c) *All the people may combine and equally share in the responsibility of carrying on their own administration.*

We may call these three types 'rule by one', 'rule by more than one', and 'rule by all'.

It is further explained that there can be sub-divisions of these three types of systems. 'Rule by one' and 'rule by all' represent the two extremes, and, therefore, they can be of one form only. But 'rule by more than one' can give rise to several forms. It may mean 'rule by the few' or 'rule by the many'. 'Rule by the few' may mean a 'rule by the learned', 'rule by the armed', or 'rule by the rich'. It is also possible that any two categories may combine to set up a government of their choice. Permutations and combinations of various types of Government, according to Vinoba, would make a list of eighteen forms in all.

Towards the end of the first chapter, it is stated that "the 'rule by all' does not exist anywhere today". "Gandhiji is striving towards it and has evolved a method for it which he desires to experiment with in India." Vinoba, however, adds that a form of government claiming to be the rule by the people 'masquerades in Europe and America'. "But a government which is based on violence, even though it may pretend to work on the principle of 'one man one vote', is really not rule by all." "As against this, if the people join together of their free will, and after deliberation, invest with power one or more of themselves, whom they know to be free from attachment and hatred, devoted to the welfare of all, and wise and capable, then though that Government may in form be 'rule by one' or 'rule by more than one', still if it is based on non-violence it should in reality be regarded as 'rule by all'."

Vinoba continues: "The old Panchayat rule in India may be said to be a somewhat imperfect but honest attempt in this direction. But in the absence of any coordinating arrangement between the various Panchayats that attempt must be regarded as unscientific, and inadequate for our present-day needs. It is enough to say that at this time 'rule by all' does not exist anywhere, and it has to be established in the future."

Nazism has been quoted as an example of 'rule by the few'; the Russian experiment illustrates the 'rule by the many'. Vinoba, however, remarks that "violence on which the Soviet experiment rests can never be a weapon of the greater part of society". "What has been gained by the sword has also to be retained by the sword."

In the second chapter, Vinoba deals in some detail with the political forms of Nazism, Fascism and Socialism. To begin with, he says that "the people are not wedded to theories or forms of government; they are concerned only with life". "Provided life goes on smoothly for them, they do not worry, whatever be the theory or system of government under which they live."

Vinoba enumerates four common factors in all forms of government:

(*i*) *Aim to serve life* may find expression in reality or only in outward appearance; may conduce to life for all time or at any rate for the time being may serve life in all places or only locally.

(*ii*) *Co-operation of the people* may be given voluntarily (with full knowledge or tacitly); or may be obtained by force when the co-operation may be either complete or just sufficient to carry on the administration.

(*iii*) *Administration by capable individuals* who may be either elected or nominated, or who have on their own initiative banded themselves for the purpose.

(*iv*) *With one individual as the final authority* who may be appointed (directly or indirectly) by all, or by the many, or by the few or two may be self-appointed.

Summing up, Vinoba lays down certain principles in the light of which forms of government may be tested: "(a) International brotherhood; (b) Co-operation of all the elements of a nation, a co-operation given with full knowledge, to the best of one's ability, spontaneous and springing from one's heart; (c) Unity of interests as between the capable few and the masses in general; (d) Regard for all-sided and equal development of every member of society; (e) The most extensive distri-

bution of governmental power; (f) The least amount of governing; (g) The simplest governmental machinery; (h) The lowest administrative expenditure; (i) The smallest organization for defence; (j) Spread of knowledge everywhere uninterrupted, and unbiased, or free in the sense of not being forced into teaching only on approved lines."

In the light of these basic principles, Vinoba remarks that of the two, "Nazism is better organized and touches society in more respects than Fascism." "As against these two, an experiment is being carried on in Russia under the name of Socialism or Communism. Its original idea was that it should be world-wide. But not being able to achieve this, it has become restricted to one nation." "It has as much faith in military strength as the others. If it is a little behind the others in military preparations today it will soon make up the deficiency. To gain its ends it has no hesitation in adopting even unprincipled and seemingly effective devices."

"Within the short space of twenty years," observes Vinoba, "the Russian Revolution has become so colourless that it has almost lost all its attractiveness." "The reason for this is that of the four aspects of Capitalism—centralisation, large-scale machinery, militarism and exploitation,—Socialism seeks to retain the first three and to do without the last. But such an attempt is based on delusion. It should be easy to see that in spite of all efforts to do away with the fourth, it will necessarily accompany the other three. The fascination for the efficiency of centralisation, for the leisure and comfort securable through large-scale machinery, and for the promise of safety held out by *military strength* is so great, that eager for comfort and entangled in illusion as people are, they are unwilling to do without even one of these three in order to put an end to exploitation."

Vinoba adds: "As compared with Nazism and Fascism, Russian Communism, or whatever we may call it, appears to be well-intentioned. But all the three are equally ill-conceived in that not one of them is capable of achieving the well-being of the majority of the people, leave alone the well-being of all."

In the third chapter, Vinoba mentions four main charac-

teristics of a faultless government:

(*i*) Capable individuals will direct their capacity to service of the people.

(*ii*) The people will be fully self-dependent and co-operate with each other.

(*iii*) Non-violence will be the basis of their continual co-operation, and of occasional non-co-operation or resistance.

(*iv*) Honest work on the part of any one will be considered to be of equal value (moral and monetary).

It is explained that public opinion should be such as to make capable individuals devote themselves to the service of the people. "When once public opinion has been formed, law can be enacted if necessary to enforce it. Control by law or restraint has a place in a non-violent State conducted on the basis of public opinion." "The State exists merely to apply to the whole of society the economic principle which is found everywhere to a greater or less extent in the family."

To sum up, Vinoba states that the "the authority of the State must, of course, vest in capable individuals, but that authority must be only the authority to serve the people". "To bring about such a state of affairs, it is essential that the people should never be entirely helpless or weak." "They must be so self-reliant that they are conscious of their own strength, i.e., of their own independent strength. This means that they must have industries which they can themselves control. It will certainly not do for the masses to depend like factory hands on industries controlled mostly by others. Every village should from the economic point of view become for the most part a self-sufficient unit. Conditions should be such that capable individuals will of their own free will help the masses, and the masses also will of their own accord give their co-operation to the capable few. This can happen only when the people stand on their own legs. There is no other way."

In order to achieve such a kind of self-reliance it is essential that "all those needs which we call the primary requirements of life as well as most of what we call secondary requirements should be met by the people of the village from

the village itself". "This would be possible only if the finished products are manufactured, as far as possible, in the house or in the village out of the local raw materials. This is, in brief, the Gandhian plan."

There is an alternative plan which the Socialists put forward. "According to it wealth is first accumulated in one place and then equally distributed." But this, according to Vinoba, involves three dangers: "Firstly, as compared with the unitary process of equally and naturally distributing wealth through the very act of production, it increases cost from the economic point of view, as it requires two processes, viz., of first collecting wealth in one place and then of distributing it equally. Secondly, special arrangements have to be made for protecting this collected wealth, and even then it is an easy target for foreign attack. Thirdly, because of all this, the organization of society becomes so complicated, intricate and its parts interdependent that there can be no certainty that the whole mechanism will not some day collapse because of too much friction."

"Interdependence," says Vinoba, "is of course a very good thing." "But it should be between groups which are in themselves strong or self-dependent. Interdependence between groups which are dependent on others is like that of two weak bulls yoked to a cart, each trying to pull the cart by shoving its share of the weight on to the other." He illustrates this point thus: "A stool stands on three legs. There is mutual cooperation between these three legs, but each leg stands in its own strength. This is a simple mechanism. If one of the legs breaks, it is necessary to repair that leg alone. But a machine which has one wheel within another and that in a third and so on, and thus has a series of wheels within wheels, is said to be complicated. If one of those wheels breaks it will interfere with the working of the others and stop the whole machine, and its repair will be very difficult as compared with that of a simple machine."

Vinoba pleads for a self-sufficient village, gradually rising up to a self-reliant stage and in the end a political organization of all humanity: "All plans to gather wealth together and then to distribute it entail much strain on the State, and in

the end involve also resorting to violence. So if we wish to avoid complicating the organization of society, placing too much of a strain on the State, and resorting to violence, it is necessary to see that every villager is his own ruler, and that the co-operation between villagers is strong like that of the fibres of a well-knit rope. When this happens the villager in combination with his village will form a natural and well-nigh self-sufficient political unit."

He further explains: "That which brings together such self-governing village units is the nominal provincial political organization. That which brings together such provinces is the nominal national political organization, and that which brings about mutual co-operation between such self-government nations is the nominal political organization of all humanity. In this political organization of all humanity—which we have described as nominal—there will be a Parliament of individuals, wise, representative and impartial, from all over the world. This Parliament will have no power of punishment or physical force, but it will have abundant power of restraint or moral force. Such a wide conception of humanity as a whole has to be brought about in man. The opinion of those versed in Politics that unless the central State is all-powerful it will prove useless is right. But the source of such power does not lie in lifeless weapons or gold but in dispassionate wisdom and character. It is clear that the establishment of such a humanity-wide political organization cannot take place so long as people are not self-dependent and do not co-operate with each other."

It is also emphasized that "an essential characteristic of the best State is so to plan that as a rule only good men will be invariably chosen for administering it". Here Vinoba makes another significant point: "The science of political organization, or the science of Politics in short, is not a regular science like Applied Mathematics, much less like Pure Mathematics. Pure Mathematics moves in the realm of abstract thought, Applied Mathematics in the realm of matter. But the field of Politics is in the realm of human affairs, which is different from the realms of abstract thought and matter. Hence it is that it is not possible to give Politics a mere me-

chanical form independent of the human element."

Defining the basic aim of politics and strong need for non-violent insistence on truth or satyagraha, Vinoba writes: "The aim of Politics is to safeguard the entire good of all men, in every form and in such a way as not to produce conflict. For this purpose, (1) the widest franchise, (2) rule according to the opinion of the majority, (3) complete protection of and utmost satisfaction to minorities, (4) freedom to propagate one's opinions, (5) impartial, cheap and easy administration of justice, (6) provision for universal education, (7) code of reformatory punishment, and such like, which are regarded as the external characteristics of a good government, are proper. But owing to Politics being dependent on the human factor, many defects, controversies and disputes are capable of arising and to get over them, the people should know the right time for co-operation, non-co-operation and resistance, and have the ability to put them into action as required by circumstances. The necessary non-violent technique should have become a part of their very nature."

"Non-co-operation and resistance," elucidates Vinoba, "are two stages of one and the same thing." "As compared with the former, the latter is more drastic:" "Where it is possible by non-co-operation to accomplish what is desired, resistance should not be resorted to. In non-co-operation, the hand of co-operation is withdrawn and an opportunity is given to the opponent for remedying the situation. Only when it is clear that this much is not enough it becomes necessary to break the law of the State."

The science of satyagraha is a delicate one and requires a number of precautions. Vinoba enumerates them: "One must act (1) civilly, i.e., within the specified limits one has set for oneself, (2) in an orderly manner, i.e., not allowing any breach of discipline anywhere, (3) openly, i.e., not hiding anything and without pretence or deceit, (4) firmly, i.e., putting forward one's minimum demand in regard to the matter in dispute and not giving in till it is met. Whatever punishment is given for such violation of law should be borne gladly and without any feeling of hatred. Training of this kind should enter into the very life of the people and for this purpose it should find a permanent

place in education and in the ethical codes of the nation."

These ideas are summed up as under: "Briefly, then, it should be regarded as an essential characteristic of a good State that the people are sufficiently alert, or are kept alert, to be able to practise, as required by circumstances, co-operation, non-co-operation and resistance, entirely non-violently, and keeping in mind the limitations of these modes of action."

If good men really combine together, they can resist the activities of the wicked men effectively. "The combining together of the masses, the good men and the elders on the basis of non-violence will check the wicked and fill them with reverential fear for all time. As we suggested above it is not at all possible for these three to combine except on the basis of non-violence. Their joining together and keeping the wicked under control and in eternal awe is indeed an important attribute of a good government."

Dealing with the value of labour in an ideal society, Vinoba opines: "In the ideal State, the method of estimating the value of labour cannot be purely mechanical and irresponsible as it is today. The ideal State will feel responsible for maintaining and protecting all its members, whatever their physical strength, intellectual capacity, or fitness or lack of fitness for work... It is but proper that abandoning all idea of calculating the value of service or labour, every individual should with full devotion serve society by throwing all his energy into his work, and society in its turn should do its duty of maintaining the individual."

The difference between 'protection' and wages is explained as follows: "Every individual will receive absolutely equal protection. But that does not mean that he will receive equal wages to fulfil the State's responsibility to give him equal protection. A man should be given only that much wage as is necessary to fulfil the State's responsibility to give him equal protection. The reason may be that a very capable individual whose needs are few will get less wages and an individual of meagre capacity whose needs are many will receive more wages. A General whose digestion is good may get only two annas a day while a common soldier with a weak digestion may receive as much as a rupee."

All these principles have been summarised in the *Swarajya Shastra* as under: "(1) Every one will receive equal protection. (2) Service from each will be according to his ability and will therefore be unequal. (3) To obtain equal protection is not the same as receiving equal wages. (4) But the inequality which prevails in wages today will under no circumstances exist. (5) Wages will be as little unequal as possible, or to put it positively, will be commensurate. (6) Inequality in wages will not be in proportion to inequality of service but in proportion to inequality of need. (7) The total amount of service rendered by individuals and the total amount of protection given to them by the State will be equal to each other."

Vinoba rules out any concept of inequality in wages between man and woman: "The inequality in wages between men and women is of course entirely without foundation. More perseverance, care and art is found in women's work. As against this, women cannot as a rule do work requiring much physical strength. So there is no difficulty about both men and women being joined together in economic equality." "The real difference," says Vinoba, "is between honest and dishonest labour." "Similarly the difference between skilled and unskilled work is unavoidable. There is no responsibility to protect dishonesty. To turn unskilled labourers into skilled labourers is also part of the functions of the State."

The *Swarajya Shastra* reiterates that collective responsibility on the part of workers can function as an excellent incentive. "It is assumed today that the only way to encouraging skill, honesty, enthusiasm and a sense of responsibility among the people is by payment of wages to a greater or less degree. But as compared with it collective responsibility will give people an even greater incentive because social esteem and self-satisfaction are implied by it. A hundred other rewards cannot produce the same enthusiasm in a child as his mother's word of appreciation."

Vinoba regards the hereditary occupational groups as a great experiment in Hindu society: "From this viewpoint, the organization of society in terms of hereditary occupational groups is a very great experiment made by Hinduism. But because of ideas of superiority and inferiority coming into it,

its original pure form became contaminated and later through attraction for the principle of economic competition, it became altogether destroyed... The institution of hereditary occupational groups should be revived, but without any idea of superiority and inferiority, and without by any means allowing it to develop into a rigid steel frame."

In the fourth chapter, Vinoba maintains that a State based on non-violence can endure and survive: "The hold of violence on our minds is so great that even though violence has failed a thousand times we still continue to put faith on its capacity to succeed. The negative evidence provided by the fact that no State based on violence has survived should suffice to make us conclude that a State cannot survive except through non-violence... The truth is that for the violence committed by one, a second commits greater violence, on the principle of returning more evil for less, and a third still greater, and so on till we reach the total war of today."

Vinoba continues: "After violence has been experimented with to the widest extent and to the highest degree, the only course left is for violence to destroy itself and to give place to non-violence... Thus dismissing the method of violence from our thoughts, we are left only with the method of non-violence. There is no room then for entertaining doubts and suspicions in regard to non-violence. It remains now only to experiment with it in full faith."

Furthermore, Vinoba demonstrates how in violence there is only defeat, while in non-violence there is victory for everybody. "One man's victory is another man's defeat is true in the realm of violence. In the sphere of non-violence one man's victory is also another man's victory. If there is any matter in dispute, it is entrusted to the decision of impartial arbitrators. So simple is the way of non-violence."

It is, however, essential to provide training, organization and sacrifice for non-violence also: "Though the organization required for non-violence may be different from that required for a total war, it will have to be so extensive as to touch the life of every individual... For inactive non-violence will not do. Instead there will be need for active non-violence, non-violence which extends to every sphere of life."

In conclusion, *Swarajya Shastra* makes a noteworthy observation: "With a little imagination one must be prepared for suffering and death, for offering up one's life peacefully without doing the slightest harm to the enemy. The battle of non-violence does not take place on the battlefield but in the heart. But in non-violence also, there must be preparedness for battle. Even if non-violence spread through the world, there would be need for preparedness. Neither violence nor non-violence allows room for a man to earn all at one time and to enjoy for the rest of his life. It will always be necessary to keep awake the power of resistance. A life of non-violence means not merely occasional sacrifice but perpetual sacrifice, and not merely sacrifice but joy in sacrifice."

Vinoba re-affirms his unshakable faith in a non-violent social order: "So it is not by any means beyond our powers to have a non-violent order. No other social order can be as enduring as a non-violent one."

In the fifth and last chapter, Vinoba has tried to convince us that a nation can remain non-violent even when all other nations continue to believe in violence: "People do not like violence for its own sake. So if a nation appears which entertains the desire to conduct its affairs in accordance with non-violence, and therefore strives to relate itself to the rest of the world on the basis of non-opposition, it will awaken the conscience of neighbouring nations, make their conscience operate, and to that extent put those nations on the way of non-violence."

Illustrating this point, *Swarajya Shastra* observes: "A non-violent nation will not dump its goods on another nation by force. In a non-violent nation, every village will be devoted to labour and be self-dependent. Therefore there will be no scope in it for the greed of other nations. If another nation considers the non-violent nation to be opposed to its own interests, then the non-violent nation will in a friendly manner assist that nation to find a way out and to give it entire satisfaction. If famine or other calamities befall other nations, it will help them as far as it is able, without any thought of reward for itself. It will be ready to submit controversial matters to arbitration... A nation which maintains such an attitude towards other nations will not remain alone. It will gain an

armour of sympathy for itself throughout the world."

At the end, Vinoba underlines the need for a *Shanti Sena*: "A non-violent order implies the existence of public-spirited workers who will from day to day serve the people in their neighbourhood and be in intimate touch with them all. If everywhere there is a band of such workers, it would be quite easy, in case of a riot breaking out in one place, to quell it with readiness on their part for a little sacrifice. When the rioters see that those who have been serving them and who are their brothers well-known to them are ready to die opposing them, and when they find that they are assured that no harm will befall them, and that all their grievances will be readily heard, they will be easily quietened."

In an ideal society, *Swarajya Shastra* envisages the existence of a band of public-spirited workers in place of a police force: "People ask whether in a non-violent State if there is no army there will be at least a police force. Those who reply say that there will be police but of a somewhat different kind. But why not say in other words that there will be no police, but only an alert band of public-spirited workers, as well as citizens, who are conscious of their own duties."

It should be borne in mind that *Swarajya Shastra* was written in 1940 at a time when the political situation in India was entirely uncertain and there was hardly any hope of achieving Independence during our lifetime. Against this background, the Grammar of Politics as envisaged by Vinoba is, doubtless, a grand one and contains within itself the potential seeds of not only a national but a global strategy in human affairs and international relations.

In subsequent years, Vinoba has been underscoring the need of organising and strengthening *lokniti*—public opinion, as against *rajniti*—conventional politics. Under a system of Government where the voice of the public is made effective at the grass-roots, the powers of the State should wither away in a substantial measure, performing only the functions of co-ordination, mature advice and guidance. In the course of our discussions some time ago, Vinoba told me that in a world of his

conception, repository of political power should be the village with its community life based on a consensus rather than a majority vote. At the apex, there should be a World Parliament to regulate and discipline international relations. In this context, different countries should function like the provinces of a World State, and various regions within nations should be treated like districts within a country. The districts, in turn, should be regarded as the local units under which villages will be the focal points of political decisions. It is only an International Government of this pattern that would make for lasting peace and harmony, ensuring the full development of human personality and the evolution of a society free from fear, exploitation and insecurity.

Some time ago, Vinoba made a meaningful remark about the role of the United Nations Organization: "The UNO committed a grave mistake in the very beginning. It should have either disarmed all the constituent units and maintained an effective army under it alone or it should have organized some kind of a peace brigade or *shanti sena,* based solely on moral sanctions." He added: "As it is constituted today, its authority falls between two stools and is, therefore, powerless for all practical purposes." Recent conflicts in the Middle-East and South-East Asia have exposed the inefficacy of the United Nations to the entire world. It has failed to cut much ice and continues to be a helpless spectator of regional conflicts and wars."

Vinoba has also been very critical of the system of elections that obtains in India. He strongly feels that the existing pattern is not conducive to a sound and healthy democracy. Direct elections for the Assembly and Parliament involve huge expenditure and encourage casteism, linguism and communalism. Different parties have to ask for money from the capitalists for running these elections. In consequence, the richer classes are able to exercise visible influence on the shaping of economic policies in the country. Vinoba is very keen that the system of elections should be radically changed as early as possible.

He is of the view that there should be direct election in the Gram Panchayats on the basis of adult franchise. These elections should be, as far as possible, unanimous. Elections to the

District, State and all-India bodies should be indirect from the Panchayats upwards.

Vinoba is very clear on one more point. He maintains that the Panchayats could function in a fair and just manner only after the lands of the villages have been equitably redistributed. Without the promotion of social and economic equity, Panchayats may degenerate into decentralized instruments of social coercion and economic exploitation. This is the rationale of the *Gramdan* movement which has now developed into a revolutionary force based on non-violence and co-operative endeavour.

15

'Quit India': In Vellore and Seoni Jails

AFTER HIS release from the Nagpur jail, Vinoba went straight to Pavnar and commenced his constructive activities once again without any fuss or fanfare. The peaceful period which he spent in jail had enabled him to do a lot of constructive thinking in the sphere of economics and politics. He, therefore, plunged into his Ashram work with renewed faith and determination.

Early in 1942, Vinoba toured South India in connection with the Hindi Prachar movement. He also attended the AICC Session at Wardha in January that year, although he took no part in its proceedings. He presided over a Goseva Sammelan at Gopuri on the first February on the request of Jamnalal Bajaj who had taken up this work as his last activity in life.

But soon after, the political situation in the country took a new turn. In February 1942, Stafford Cripps came to India with certain proposals of the British Government for a compromise. After some discussions, Gandhiji rejected them as "a post-dated cheque on a failing bank".

On the failure of the Cripps mission, the Congress had no alternative but to launch another struggle against the British Government. Gandhiji wrote a number of articles in the *Harijan*, asking the British to 'quit India' and leave the country even 'to God or anarchy'. A crucial meeting of the Congress Working Committee was held in Sevagram in June 1942 to be followed by a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee in Bombay. On 9 August, the Bombay session of the AICC decided to launch a struggle of 'do or die' and delegated all the powers to Gandhiji. The same night Gandhiji and all the other impor-

tant Congress leaders were arrested in Bombay and taken to unknown destinations.

Before deciding to launch the 'Quit India' movement, Gandhiji had thought of new ways and means for making this campaign a success. In a meeting at Sevagram, he gave a broad hint that this time he might undertake a long-duration fast on entering the jail. Mahadev Desai and other friends were naturally taken aback and suggested that Vinoba should be consulted in this matter. Vinoba promptly came to Sevagram and sat near Gandhiji in his cottage.

When Gandhiji asked his opinion on the proposed step, Vinoba, without a moment's pause, observed:

"Such a sacrifice is permissible in non-violence." And he added with a smile:

"What Rama 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," added Gandhiji.

"There is hardly anything to think about it further. My mind is quite clear. I am entirely with you."

Vinoba, then, took leave of Gandhiji and left for Pavnar. Mahadev Desai and others present at the meeting were literally staggered at this spontaneous agreement between the disciple and the master.

Although Vinoba was quietly engaged in his constructive work, the British Government could not afford to leave him alone this time. He was also, therefore, arrested the same day and after brief periods of detention at Wardha and Nagpur, was taken to Vellore jail in South India. The Pavnar, Nalwadi and Gopuri Ashrams were confiscated and sealed, and serious criminal cases were instituted against some of the inmates, including Radhakrishna Bajaj. They were charged with sabotage and treason. They were, however, released because the charges could not be substantiated before the courts.

From Bombay, Gandhiji was taken to the Aga Khan Palace near Poona, for long detention. Since he was in correspondence with the Viceroy, he did not begin his fast as contemplated earlier. Gandhiji was, however, worried that Vinoba may have commenced his own fast in jail. He, therefore, sent a special

message to Vinoba not to undertake such a fast, since he had himself postponed it for the present. On receiving this message, the jail authorities heaved a sigh of relief.

On the very first day, after his arrest at Pavnar Vinoba was taken to Wardha jail, before being sent to Nagpur and Vellore. On entering the prison gates, Vinoba told the jailor: "I have had my food for the day, and from tomorrow morning I go on an indefinite fast." The jailor was naturally shocked and greatly worried. He thought that he had, perhaps, committed a serious mistake.

"Kindly let me know why you have decided to adopt this unusual course," asked the jailor.

"Nothing in connection with your jail. Gandhiji had decided to begin fast soon after his arrest, and I shared his decision."

During the period of his detention at Vellore, Vinoba spent most of his time in spinning and the study of the four South Indian languages, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam. Dr. Bharatan Kumarappa used to teach him these Dravidian languages and Vinoba, in turn, taught *Tulsidas' Ramayana* to Bharatanji. Vinoba also delivered a series of lectures on the *Gita* for the benefit of the other political prisoners at Vellore.

From Vellore, Vinoba desired to write a letter to Gandhiji. The jail authorities did not allow him to do so because Gandhiji was not strictly a relation of his. Vinoba, therefore, informed the jail superintendent: "I have no other relation who is so intimately connected with me as Mahatma Gandhi. If I am not allowed to write to him, I shall not write to anybody else." And so, for the full term of his detention Vinoba did not write any letter to anyone.

It was in this jail that Vinoba had the opportunity of studying the scripts of various Indian languages, including those of South India, in a thorough manner. He felt that it would be much easier to learn various modern Indian languages if Nagri was accepted as their common script. With this object in view, he evolved a simple *Loknagri* script, after making certain changes in the conventional *Devanagri* script. This reformed script is also more suitable for the typewriter and the teleprinter. Even now Vinoba uses the *Loknagri* script in all his correspondence. But he has never cared to get it recognized by

the Government. In his view, a language or a script evolves properly only if it is acceptable to the people.

For several months, Vinoba observed complete silence in jail. He, however, used to meet all kinds of prisoners and listen to their views. Once a communist friend asked Vinoba to read some literature on Marxism. Vinoba agreed to listen to various books provided they were read out while he was spinning on the *charkha*. And so, the communist fellow-prisoner went to him for an hour or two daily for months together. Vinoba keeps his mind open to new ideas and his whole outlook is eminently rational and scientific.

After about a year, Vinoba, along with some other security prisoners, was sent to Seoni jail in Madhya Pradesh. Here also he continued his pursuits of teaching and learning. He studied various books in the four Southern languages for acquiring greater proficiency in them. Marathi is Vinoba's mother-tongue. He learnt Hindi and Gujarati at Sabarmati, and acquired a knowledge of Persian and Urdu while studying the Holy Quran. Vinoba is fairly well-conversant with the East Indian languages—Bengali, Assamese and Oriya. He was taught English by his own father at home and later at the Baroda College. French was his second language there. He studied Sanskrit at Banaras and later at Wai. In addition, he has picked up a working knowledge of German and Japanese languages. Vinoba is thus a linguist of great eminence and has a remarkable aptitude for learning new languages in a very short time. Some years ago, he picked up Esperanto, the world language, with the assistance of a friend from Yugoslavia.

During fifteen months' detention at Seoni, Vinoba delivered a series of eighteen lectures to the fellow-prisoners on *Sthitaprajna Darshan*, the well-known last eighteen verses of the second chapter of the *Gita*, which are recited regularly in the evening prayers of the Ashram. These lectures were, subsequently, published *at seriatum* in the *Gandhi Marg*, the official organ of the Gandhi Peace Foundation. They have now been brought out in English by the Sarva Seva Sangh, entitled *The Steadfast Wisdom*. I should like to give here a few excerpts from these discourses for the benefit of the readers.

In the very first discourse, Vinoba explains the relationship

between self-knowledge and *Yoga*—the knowledge of union or the art of living according to self-knowledge: "When knowledge fuses with art, wisdom or the awareness of *Brahman* is perfected." This is illustrated by the example of music. "Of what use will knowledge be to one who, though he learns the art of singing, does not practice it? On the other hand, a person may cultivate his voice but if he has no knowledge, his progress ends there. The same holds true with spiritual wisdom and, consequently, in human life. Man's knowledge of truth is concealed in his mind and becomes manifest in his action. His behaviour alone reveals to himself and to others the extent of his knowledge. Through it he comes to know himself."

Vinoba further observes: "Tulsidas imagined the heart of a saint to be like the confluence of three rivers. Devotion—*bhakti*, he calls the Ganga and work—*Karma*, the Jamuna. Saraswati, the hidden river, he equates with *brahmavidya*—knowledge of the Supreme." Thus, he regards *brahmavidya* as a hidden knowledge like the river Saraswati. It is brought out into the open, made manifest and articulated by the Yogic intelligence. . . "A House cannot be built without a foundation and a foundation without a superstructure is useless and without meaning. Fire is latent in a matchstick, inarticulate. When the match is struck the fire flashes out, becomes manifest. An intelligence of fine penetration can perceive the fire while it is still latent. It is visible to everybody when it bursts into flame. All become aware of its power. Self-knowledge and the Yogic intelligence are related to each other in a similar way."

Four steps in the practice of the art of living are mentioned: "(*i*) The determination of one's *sadhana;* (*ii*) concentrated effort with no thought of reward; (*iii*) equanimity or *samadhi;* (*iv*) consolidated *samadhi,* undivided, unchangeable, unshakable and natural. This is Steadfast Wisdom."

Explaining the word 'steadfast'—*sthita*—Vinoba gives the example of the spinning wheel: "The word 'steadfast' has another obvious implication—*buddhi*—intelligence, must be entirely straightforward, simple, direct. There should be nothing crooked about it. A spindle must be straight in order that fine thread may be spun with it. It is only useful if it is free from roughness and is perfectly straight. The same is true of the in-

tellect. The best symbol for an intelligence endowed with the Steadfast Wisdom is the spindle of a spinning wheel."

The word *prajna*—wisdom—is explained by Vinoba: "The word *prajna,* wisdom, as used in the *Gita* is the carrier of special meaning. *Buddhi,* intelligence or intellect, is a common word. Intellect changes according to the impulses of man's mind. It takes on various colours of his imagination and feeling. The intellect, thus coloured, cannot reach any sure conclusion. Only an intellect which is not subject to feeling and imagination, which is free from distortion, preferences, aversions and the colouring of propensities, is helpful in the acquisition of knowledge and is, in itself, *prajna*—wisdom. *Prajna* is neutral and impartial. It fixes its attention upon the true nature of the thing contemplated and draws conclusions accordingly. . . Pure intellect, wisdom, *prajna,* has no colour of its own and for that reason it, and only it, can arrive at correct conclusions."

In a reminiscent mood, Vinoba observes: "A palmist once happened to see my hand. 'I don't find any heart line on your palm', he said. 'God be praised,' I responded, 'if that is so.' In my opinion a man need have only intelligence—*buddhi.* The heart must be assimilated into the mind and lifted out of the unstable flux of uncertainty. The heart is a bundle of desires. Desires must move in tune with intelligence. There should be no hiatus between the head and the heart; there should be no conflict. The mind should speak and the heart obey."

Illustrating the concept of desirelessness, Vinoba says: "A desire pricks like a thorn, even though it may be a thorn of gold. A knife can kill even though it be a golden knife. And so the *Gita* concludes that desires must be eliminated without exception."

Dealing with the state of the mind which remains untrammelled in the midst of sorrows and pleasures, Vinoba states: "One should avoid the plight of oxen going uphill—the straining, the suffering. Sorrow must be borne with patience. It must not force us to our knees. Joy, like grief, should be received wakefully, alertly. Men do not want grief to come to them nor do they forget themselves easily when it is upon them. It can be borne with patience. But men do delight in happiness. And it easily makes them forget themselves. Therefore pleasure is

not without danger... When an ox goes downhill it begins to run. Our feelings tend to run in a similar fashion when we experience pleasure. And they must be held back for the same reason. It is easy compared to the rooting out of desire entirely."

Vinoba maintains that the teachings of the *Gita* do not go against man's nature: "If a small child is trained in this way from the beginning, the teaching of the *Gita* becomes a part of his nature. The natural tastes of a small child are pure. We inculcate in him artificial and perverse tastes."

In one of his discourses, Vinoba has explained the distinction between restraint and repression of senses: "Two methods of sense control are commonly recommended—restraint or sublimation and repression or suppression. Let us consider both of them. The senses can be suppressed only for short periods of time. To master them requires life-long effort—a discipline comprising the whole of life. Suppose for instance, I like to eat candy. It is not wrong to eat candy. But to indulge my craving to excess is bad. Therefore, I stop eating it entirely for a time. The need for my doing so is the need to establish a habit, to form my own nature in a way that will enable me to control my own tastes. . . This is what I mean by self-control."

Although Vinoba is a very scholarly person, his innate faith in God's help is equally profound: "If we do not utilize to their full extent the powers that we have, how can God give us the remainder? A father gives his son ten thousand rupees to start a business. If the son does not utilize the ten thousand in full, why should his father give him a lakh more? When his father finds that the ten thousand have been used to the best purpose, he says, 'The rest is yours'. Our relationship with God is similar. He is prepared to give us the strength he holds in reserve for us. All that He requires is proof of the urgency of our need. . . Keep on trying, applying all your powers to your chosen task. When you find that you can do no more by your own efforts, turn to God. He will give you the additional powers you need."

Equanimity of mind is possible only if the mind is made clean and pure: "The *Gita* tells us that *samadhi* follows instantly upon the complete cleansing of the mind. A state of this kind,

a state in which all exertion ceases, can be achieved only when all effort is abandoned. It comes of its own accord, spontaneously." Vinoba continues: "My Brother, Balkoba, complained that he could not sleep however hard he tried. I told him he could not sleep because he made an effort to do so. Sleep will come of itself when one stops straining after it. The case is the same in regard to singleness of mind. True concentration, natural singleness of mind, only comes when one gives up struggling and straining after it."

The basic difference between happiness and pleasure is also explained in a lucid manner: "Happiness does not mean the pleasure of the heart and mind. Happiness is abiding, pleasure transient. Man is not necessarily moved by pleasure and pain. Many people today are suffering mentally and emotionally for the sake of their country. They find happiness in such suffering. This is because suffering is sometimes salutary, as it is when accompanied by a sense of benignant service. . . Health means physical equilibrium. Health is one thing and excessive physical exuberance another. In health there is a sense of well-being. Uncontrolled virility brings grief, regret. True happiness is something else. It is to be found in peace, not in a disturbed or agitated consciousness. Its source is tranquillity of spirit."

Explaining the concept of *nishkama karma,* motiveless action, Vinoba observes: "If you wish to experience this state of total non-involvement, renounce the fruit of action totally. The attitude of the man of Steadfast Wisdom in this respect is radically different from the attitude of ordinary men who work only for what the work brings them. If there is no prospect of a reward, he refuses to work. Some go a step further. If reward can be had without labour they seize upon it eagerly; if, however, work is unavoidable it is accepted as a necessary evil. On no account do they forgo the reward. This attitude is the chief cause of the unrest that is so widespread today. The number of those who try to obtain the fruit of labour without engaging in any labour themselves is not small. Government after government, in country after country, is doing it. Nazism, Fascism, Capitalism, Imperialism and other similar ideologies have been built upon this ignoble attitude."

A man of Steadfast Wisdom functions as the instrument of

the Divine and surrenders his own will to the Supreme: "The Great Spirit, at whose instance the world revolves, knows what ought and what ought not to be done. The man of wisdom is His instrument. The work which God wishes to accomplish through him will be accomplished in a manner determined by social needs. He does nothing of his own accord. Water goes where the gardener directs it. If it is diverted into a field of sugarcane the sweetness of the cane increases. If it is poured into a field of mustard, the tang of the mustard is sharper. If it is turned into a field of onions their smell is stronger." Further, "a man of Wisdom shows no preference for the performance of one act in contrast to another; he does what God wants him to do. He has no likes and dislikes of his own. Therefore, his Steadfastness is correctly described as dispassionate."

I have quoted above a few portions of Vinoba's discourses to indicate how original and deep his thinking is on various aspects of the *Gita* in particular, and on the philosophy of life in general. The curious reader can always refer to his published works for further study and research.

16

The Dawn of Freedom

ALONG WITH other leaders, Vinoba was released early in May 1944 from the Seoni jail. He returned straight to Wardha and rejoined his creative work, first at Gopuri. He started a community kitchen as an experiment in *Samya-yoga* or Sarvodaya. After some time, he left for Pavnar.

Gandhiji had to take an active part in current politics and go to Delhi and Simla for various conferences and discussions. But Vinoba did not stir out of his Ashram and concentrated all his energies on the experiment of self-sufficiency and self-reliance, without using money for the requirements of the community. He was of the definite view that the salvation of India lay in this spirit of self-help in each village community, expecting no assistance from an outside agency, including the Government. In a country like India where lakhs of villages face the urgent problems of poverty, disunity and unemployment, the only practical solution was to organize democracy at the grass-roots for generating the will of the people in favour of self-improvement through their own physical labour and co-operative efforts.

After working in the fields for several hours, in chill, rain and sunshine, Vinoba and his associates would assemble in the evening for their prayers with their clothes virtually smeared with mother earth. They would recite their prayers standing, facing the golden rays of the setting sun. Vinoba led these community prayers in Marathi and a number of friends from the Pavnar village joined them regularly. Constructive workers from Wardha and a few surrounding villages also came to

Pavnar to participate in these evening prayers. Towards the end, Vinoba would literally begin dancing while reciting various *shlokas* with full-throated vigour. Others also would get into ecstasy, and the Ashram resounded with the melodious chanting of Sanskrit and Marathi verses from the holy books.

It was during this period that Vinoba used to go to Surgaon village, a few miles away from Pavnar, with a shovel on his shoulders for doing his scavenging work every morning. When somebody asked him as to how long this sanitation work would continue, he firmly replied: "For at least twenty years." And he explained: "When the children of today will become adults, I hope they will not require my services and do this work themselves."

Two meaningful events deserve mention here. For several months, between November 1945 and May 1946, Vinoba, with the assistance of his younger brother Shivaji, prepared the dictionary of words used in the *Gitai* for the use of research scholars. He also administered initiation in *Vanaprastha Ashram* to one Baburao Deshmukh of Pavnar village, who had attained the age of 50 and desired to devote the rest of his life to constructive work. This good example was followed by a few other workers later.

In the meantime, the turn of political events in India was disquieting. After the failure of the Simla Conference, Gandhiji went to Bengal to see the condition of the area after the terrible cyclone, flood and famine, resulting in the death of lakhs of people. He also met the Viceroy in Calcutta. Since he was visiting Bengal for the first time after the passing away of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, Gandhiji spent a few days in Shantiniketan. He visited some taluks in the Midnapur district as well where the police and the military had indulged in ruthless barbarities during the 'Quit India' movement.

From Bengal, Gandhiji went to Orissa and Madras and asked the people to observe utmost austerity and increase agricultural production to meet their pressing requirements. He was convinced that only a National Government run by Indians could solve this problem on a lasting basis. The Viceroy sent his Private Secretary George Abell to Gandhiji in Wardha, inviting the co-operation of leaders for the formation of an

Advisory Council of which the Viceroy himself would be the Chairman. This proposal also fell through because of its utter inadequacy. The *Harijan* whose publication had been suspended in August 1942 was brought out again in February 1946.

During the General Elections of 1946, the Congress was able to form Ministries in eight Provinces. The Muslim League had gained strength under Government patronage and its Ministries were installed in Bengal and Sind, and a coalition Ministry in the Punjab. In the North-West Frontier Province, the Muslim League could not secure even a majority of Muslim seats mainly because of the popularity of the Khan brothers.

In March 1946, the British Prime Minister Attlee declared in the Parliament that India would be allowed to frame her own Constitution. A Cabinet Mission consisting of Pethick-Lawrence, Stafford Cripps and Albert Alexander, came to India to consult leaders of different political parties for giving a concrete shape to the declaration of the British Prime Minister. Gandhiji played a crucial part in these discussions. The Muslim League continued its obstinate and uncompromising attitude and insisted on the partition of India. The Cabinet Mission also showed an unreasonable solicitude for the minorities and talked of parity between the Hindus and the Muslims time and again.

In June that year, the Cabinet Mission and the Viceroy announced an Interim Cabinet, consisting of fourteen members with a parity between caste Hindus and Muslims and the exclusion of the Nationalist Muslims altogether. The Congress naturally refused to join the Interim Government. Thereafter, Jinnah expressed his readiness to constitute an Interim Cabinet composed solely of the Muslim League. The Cabinet Mission turned down this request and Jinnah felt humiliated. This was followed by 'direct action' in Calcutta on 16 August. The spectacles of looting, hooliganism and murders on this day in the city were unprecedented in the political history of modern times. Neither the Viceroy nor the Governor of Bengal took any effective action. After Calcutta, there were serious communal disturbances in the Muslim majority district of Noakhali, involving arson, loot, murder, forcible conversions and molestation of women. After Bengal, came Bihar and then Punjab and

Delhi. The vicious circle of communal fury went on spiralling day by day and month after month.

At the instance of the British Cabinet, the Viceroy ultimately invited Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Congress President, to form an Interim Government. But Lord Wavell from the very beginning did not allow Nehru to function freely and was very eager to bring in the Muslim League also as early as possible. After a few months, despite the unwillingness of the Congress, the Muslim League Ministers were also included in the Central Cabinet. Instead of co-operating with their Congress colleagues, these Ministers went on accentuating Hindu-Muslim bitterness and utilized their offices for strengthening the Muslim League.

Gandhiji could not remain a helpless spectator of these deplorable incidents in different parts of the country. What hurt him most was the molestation of women in Noakhali. He, therefore, left Delhi for Bengal towards the end of October 1946. In the meantime, there were violent reactions in Bihar and Pandit Nehru and Sardar Patel had to visit that State to quell mass violence. Later, Gandhiji was requested to visit Bihar to help the Government in controlling the difficult situation.

The situation in Delhi was also going from bad to worse. The British Prime Minister Attlee declared in Parliament on 20 February 1947, that the British would quit India by June 1948, and if the Constituent Assembly could not function properly by that time, those areas which would come together would be placed under the Central Government and the remaining areas handed over to the Provincial Governments then in existence. In plain words, this announcement tantamounted to the acceptance of partition and the creation of Pakistan.

Towards the end of March, the new Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, arrived in India and invited Gandhi and Jinnah to see him. Gandhiji arrived in Delhi on 31 March. He was stoutly opposed to any division of India and proposed to the Viceroy that in case of disagreement Jinnah may be empowered to form a Government. But under no circumstances should India be vivisected into two sovereign States.

The Congress Working Committee, however, after studying

the whole situation, agreed to the division of Bengal and Punjab. This gave a clear indication that Congress would accept the partition of the country. Gandhiji and Badshah Khah consistently opposed this decision throughout the deliberations. Ultimately, a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee was convened at Delhi towards the middle of June to take a final decision. Despite strong opposition by Purushottamdas Tandon and others, the AICC ratified the resolution of the Working Committee. Although Gandhiji had always regarded the partition of India as suicidal, he did not want to create chaos in the country and, therefore, advised the AICC to fall in line with the decision of the Working Committee which, in his view, was some kind of a National Cabinet.

I also went to Delhi during this period to persuade Gandhiji not to accept the division of the country under any conditions and advise the AICC accordingly. I handed over to him an article entitled 'India Must Not Be Divided' for publication in the *Harijan*. Gandhiji agreed to publish it, but expressed his utter helplessness to do anything further: "Shriman, I cannot create a new leadership in my old age. If the AICC rejects the Working Committee's resolution, all the Congress leaders will have to resign. Unless there is an alternative leadership, there would be confusion and anarchy."

Gandhiji's arguments did not carry conviction, and after the AICC had formally adopted the British Government's scheme of partition, I went back to Wardha sorely disappointed. All the constructive workers of various institutions in Wardha and Sevagram were equally perturbed. When formal transfer of power took place on 15 August 1947, there was no real jubilation in the country. On that very day, reports were received of mass killings both in India and Pakistan, in the western region.

Gandhiji observed 15 August in Calcutta with fast, spinning and prayers. It was mainly as a result of his sustained efforts that the eastern region remained peaceful in the post-partition period, while the western parts were aflame beyond control. This miraculous influence of the Mahatma was highly appreciated by Lord Mountbatten who called him a 'one-man boundary force' in the east, as against the helpless 55,000

troops in the west. It was, undoubtedly, a unique achievement.

On the day of Indian Independence, Vinoba worked as usual at the Pavnar Ashram. When representatives of a few educational institutions in Wardha invited him to address a public meeting in the evening, Vinoba asked them: "Now that *Swaraj* had been attained, will the old flag of the British be tolerated even for a day?" A firm 'no' was the answer. Vinoba, then, remarked: "Just as an old flag would signify the old rule, so the continuance of the old system of education would denote the continuance of the old regime. Gandhiji had placed before the nation his scheme of *Nai Talim*. But we have not accepted it in that form. If I had the power in my hands, I would have declared a holiday of three months for all the students, asking them to play games, build up their health, help their parents in agriculture and cottage industries and enjoy the advent of *Swaraj*. I would have asked all the educationists of the country to formulate a new scheme within the three-month period and started the educational institutions again in accordance with the new pattern."

As usual, Vinoba also went to Surgaon for his sanitation work. In the village, he observed a cage of parrots hanging in front of a house. Vinoba opened the door of the cage and released all the parrots with the remark: "He alone deserves to be free who does not desire to keep anybody in his own bondage!"

In October 1947, Vinoba's father was taken seriously ill. After the death of Vinoba's mother, he lived in Baroda all alone and led a quiet but hard life for thirty years, cooking his own food and managing the house without the aid of any servants. Even in old age, he continued his experiments in dyeing and printing of cloth. Music was the only hobby which afforded him some mental relaxation.

When his illness took a grave turn, Shivaji brought him to Dhulia. On receiving information about his critical condition, Vinoba was persuaded by his colleagues to proceed to Dhulia to meet his father after a lapse of twelve years. A day after Vinoba's arrival there, his father passed away peacefully on the full-moon day—*Sharad-Poornima*. Vinoba performed the last rites and recited the verses of the *Gitai*, including the

poetic catalogue of sixty subjects in the eighteen chapters. It was for the first time that he chanted publicly this catalogue of the *Gita* prepared by him in verse.

Vinoba was keeping indifferent health at that time. He, therefore, spent some days in Dhulia after the demise of his father. Morning and evening prayers and his discourses were attended by a good number of local friends and admirers. Soon after, he returned to Wardha and picked up the threads of his activities at Pavnar once again.

Since Gandhiji had been extremely busy with political matters owing to the shadows of partition, he sought the assistance of Vinoba and Kishorelal Mashruwala in running the *Harijan* Weekly. In compliance with Gandhiji's wishes, Vinoba wrote several special articles for the *Harijan* in 1946 and 1947. In one of the articles entitled 'Where is the Obstruction?', published on 16 February 1947, Vinoba criticized Government's policy of applying a cut in the ration of cloth by one-sixth a month because the textile mills had not been able to work fully owing to communal disturbances in Bombay and Ahmedabad. He reminded the nation about Gandhiji's programme of khadi and village industries and observed: "Uptill now the khadi movement had to be carried on under a Government hostile towards it. So many times, it actually burnt the wheels, confiscated khadi shops, and imprisoned people simply because they put on khadi. It even had the tyrant's heartlessness to burn stocks of khadi in the face of actual cloth-famine in the country. If, under such adverse circumstances, Khadi succeeded in becoming the symbol and the uniform of Swaraj, and has actually brought the country to the threshold of Swaraj, and placed people, who could, if they wished, make it universal, in possession of the power to carry out that wish. It cannot, therefore, be said that it has not fully rewarded the efforts made for it during all these years. Khadi can justifiably say to the Congress Governments that it was now for them to decide whether it should hereafter stay or quit along with the Government, which by its assistance, had been brought to the stage of quitting. The Congress was in power now and it was for them to retain or discard the weapon which gave them that power."

In another article captioned 'Wanted Corn, not Currency', Vinoba made a strong plea for an agro-industrial economy in the rural areas where the agriculturist, apart from tilling the land, should also produce consumer articles for his own use. He wrote: "Government is busily engaged in making calculations of the deficiency in the quantity of food needed for the country and devising ways and means of meeting it. But, if you think hard, you would realize that the 'Grow More Food' movement must not be limited by calculations of deficiency. Indeed, there should be no limit to the amount of food to be grown. It must not simply meet the annual needs of the country; there must be plenty of surplus left for the next year. Like air and water, there must be plenty of food too. And food should not mean merely various corns, but also vegetables, fruits, roots and tubers. Nor should they be raised with an eye on their price in money; they must be consumed by the producer himself."

In one of the notes, Vinoba placed before the country a comprehensive scheme of cow-breeding:

1. As soon as the question of milk-supply is considered, we start with the idea of importing cows giving plenty of milk. In my opinion, this is not necessary. We should select for our work local breeds as far as possible. A little reflection will help to make my point clear. Our purpose cannot be served by ignoring local breeds. We cannot betray the agriculturists. It is essential that we show them a way to improve the condition of the cows that they have.

2. It will be wrong to concentrate on the milk-yielding quality of the cow and neglect its draught-strain. To have good bullocks for agriculture is one of the chief aims of breeding. To get good milk is another. Both these aims should well be kept in mind.

3. It is certainly no duty of the villages to supply milk to the cities. The village people should themselves drink plenty of milk and may sell only the surplus.

4. Agriculture, cow-breeding, oil-pressing by the bullock-*ghani*, tanning hides, and preparing good manures—all these make one single unit and must go together.

5. Cow-breeding cannot be separated from other village industries. If arrangement cannot be made to engage the agriculturist in essential industries in his own home, he will have to depend upon outside markets for his essential requirements and would be in need of cash to buy them.

6. The villagers need not purchase bullocks from outside. It should be possible to breed fine bullocks in every village. For this Government will have to provide proper facilities such as stud bulls.

In addition to writing these articles for the *Harijan*, Vinoba devoted his time to making certain special experiments relating to khadi. He developed a new method of hand-ginning and hand-carding which he called *Tunai*. Secondly, he introduced the doubling of yarn, *Dubata* as he named it, in order to avoid the breaking of hand-spun yarn in the process of weaving. This *Dubata* process was found very useful by lakhs of weavers engaged in khadi industry. The cloth produced by this new technique was much more hardy and durable, especially for use in the countryside.

17

Passing Away of the Mahatma

VINOBA WAS deeply grieved at the division of India, but did not express his views in the public. He went on with his constructive work at Pavnar, although he felt poignantly that the vivisection of the country was a grave mistake, fraught with serious consequences.

Towards the end of the year, in a representative meeting of constructive workers in Gopuri, Vinoba gave expression to his views on partition and termed the decision as a 'Himalayan blunder'. He was also critical of Gandhiji's tacit support to the resolution of the Working Committee in this regard.

When I met Gandhiji on 10 January 1948, at Birla House in New Delhi, he asked me about Vinoba's reported remarks at the Gopuri meeting, where I was also present. On hearing my confirmation, Bapu remarked with anguish: "I wish Vinoba had come to Delhi and discussed this matter with me personally!" He, however, told me that he hoped to be in Sevagram early in February to meet all constructive workers and chalk out a line for future action.

But fate willed it otherwise, and the Mahatma fell a victim to the three shots of a misguided Hindu young man on 30 January, at the time of the evening prayers. His proposed meeting with Vinoba and other co-workers in Sevagram never materialized. Gandhiji had, however, written down his ideas regarding the dissolution of the Indian National Congress and its transformation into a *Lok Sevak Sangh*—an organization for the service of the people. This 'Last Will and Testament' of Gandhiji was published by Pyarelal, his

Secretary, soon after Gandhiji's martyrdom.

On receiving the shocking news about Gandhiji's passing away, Vinoba was shaken to the core of his being. To share his thoughts with his colleagues, he agreed to deliver post-prayer speeches every evening from 31 January to 12 February. The first speech was delivered at Paramdham, Pavnar, and the rest at Gopuri. Vinoba also addressed a public meeting in Wardha and spoke thrice to the inmates of the Sevagram Ashram.

In his first address at Pavnar on 31 January, Vinoba referred to a radio broadcast by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel to the effect that despite grave provocations and deep anguish, we should not succumb to anger, hatred and a spirit of revenge. We should follow Gandhiji's advice to remain calm and composed even in the face of severest difficulties. Vinoba compared the great tragedy of 30 January to almost a similar catastrophe about 5000 years ago when a hunter shot an arrow towards Lord Krishna, mistaking him for a deer. When the hunter realized his blunder, the Lord asked him not to get panicky: "Some cause is required for one's death; you have become that cause in my case. That is all!" The crazy young man who had shot three rounds at the Mahatma was as ignorant as the hunter. Vinoba asserted: "If any person has glorified Hindu religion in the world, it is Gandhiji. To regard him as an enemy of Hinduism would be a travesty of truth."

Gandhiji had been shot while walking to the prayer meeting and when his whole mind was concentrated on the Divine. "His death, therefore, was a glorious one," remarked Vinoba, "and there is no cause for grief or dismay." When I had the occasion to meet Professor Albert Einstein at the Princeton University near New York in July 1949, he also expressed a similar sentiment: "Gandhi's death was his greatest victory."

Towards the end of his address, Vinoba advised all workers to carry on their constructive activities undisturbed, in the sacred memory of Gandhiji: "In a country like India, composed of numerous castes, tribes, linguistic and religious groups, non-violence could be the only powerful force to keep the nation united and integrated. This is also the teaching of both the *Gita* and the *Quran*. We should, therefore, love one another and

march ahead, shoulder to shoulder, for strengthening our constructive work on Gandhian lines."

In his talks at Shantikutir, Gopuri, Vinoba exhorted the gathering to hold the ideal of the sandalwood tree before their mind's eye. As poet Tulsidas had said, the sandalwood imparts its fragrance even to the axe which cuts it to pieces. "This is the way of non-violence and satyagraha. Our actions in the reverse direction are bound to lead to disaster and disintegration."

On 3 February, Vinoba reminded the people that the Mahatma had spent about fifteen years in Wardha and Sevagram. They should, therefore, do nothing which may cause pain and anguish to the soul of Gandhiji who always wanted us to behave in an exemplary fashion. He particularly asked young men to hold aloft the ideal of unity in the midst of diversity. In the words of Rabindranath Tagore, "India was an ocean of humanity and it would be feasible to maintain its grandeur only if we rose above all restrictions of castes, languages and religions and behaved as Indians first and Indians last." Vinoba related a story at the time of the battle of Panipat. When Ahmed Shah looked at the Maratha camp one evening and witnessed a dozen fires at different places, he asked his commander-in-chief the cause for these numerous fires. He was informed that the Hindus were divided amongst themselves into various castes and did not partake of each other's food. Hence, they cooked their meals separately. On hearing this, Ahmed Shah remarked: "Then, there is nothing to worry; we have won this battle."

In another speech, Vinoba laid the greatest stress on popularising khadi in cities as well as villages. It was only through khadi that we could relieve unemployment and underemployment among the masses. Khadi would instil in the people the spirit of self-help and self-reliance. He advised the inmates of Mahila Ashram and the students of local Commerce College to try to become self-sufficient in regard to their clothing requirements by manufacturing their own khadi within their campuses.

On another occasion, Vinoba made a reference to General MacArthur's tribute to Gandhiji, declaring that the world could achieve lasting peace only through non-violence. He said: "The basic question is not to choose between violence and non-

violence. The crucial point is that science must be wedded to non-violence, if the world is to survive. Science and violence cannot go together; their union would annihilate humanity. To utilise the fruits of modern science and technology, a non-violent social order is a sheer necessity. There is no other choice before humanity."

Vinoba expressed his dislike for raising physical memorials in the memory of Bapu. Statues, paintings and buildings of the finest type could never be fitting memorials to a man whose whole life was a saga of dedication and selfless service. "Bapu was not an individual; he was a great institution. The world was his family. He had taken upon himself the burden of all our sins. It is not Godse alone who killed him. We are all responsible for the great tragedy, because we are not free from shortcomings. It is, therefore, our paramount duty to remove our own weaknesses and strain every nerve to build India according to Gandhiji's dreams."

Referring to a suggestion that a Gandhi, temple should be erected in each village of India, Vinoba remarked: "I regard such a proposal as dangerous. Gandhi was essentially a human being and should be allowed to remain as such. If we raise him to the position of a god, the quintessence of his message will be lost on us."

Sarvadharma Samabhava or equal respect for all religions, was one of the basic teachings of the Mahatma. In a big country like India, the Hindus and the Muslims and other religious groups must regard one another as friends and brothers. "We should not only be true to our own religion, but also entertain regard for other creeds whose fundamental principles are the same. Such a behaviour on our part would be the best memorial to the memory of the Mahatma."

On 10 February, Vinoba stated that any pursuit of non-violence by individuals was not enough: "It is essential to evolve and practise non-violence on the national scale. The ideal of *Ahimsa* was preached by Mahavir and Buddha many centuries ago. Gandhiji had gone a step further in this direction and had succeeded in organizing collective non-violence on a broad basis. Constructive work should be regarded as a drill for achieving a non-violent social order. In the absence of this basic

understanding, our constructive work would gradually wither and fade away."

February 11, 1948, was the seventh death anniversary of Jamnalal Bajaj. It was on that day in 1942 that his physical remains were cremated at Gopuri in the presence of Mahatma Gandhi and Vinoba. On that very day six years later, the ashes of Gandhiji were brought from Sevagram to Gopuri in a metallic urn. It was placed on a flower-decorated pedestal before the audience. Vinoba referred to a letter of Jamnalalji in which he had written: "We are fortunate in receiving the best guidance from Bapu. If we follow that path of selfless service, we shall attain salvation in this very life." "Jamnalalji," said Vinoba, "had served the people of Wardha and the rest of the country with single-minded devotion." "He had functioned in the spirit of a real *trustee* and always kept the ideal of Bharat before his mind. We should emulate his glorious example by dedicating ourselves to the service of the poor with single-minded devotion."

Speaking to a big gathering at Pavnar on the immersion of Gandhiji's ashes into the Dham river on 12 February, Vinoba observed: "The pious soul has merged with the Supreme, and the last remains of his body are now being mixed with nature. The soul does not die with the body, and the great ideas which Bapu cherished have now entered the innermost hearts of us all. In future, we should try to mould our lives according to these ideals."

Towards the end, Vinoba recited in a loud voice his own poetic-prose translation of *Ishopanishad* in Marathi for the first time. It was later translated into Hindi by poet Siaramsaran Gupta on the lines of the Marathi version in the form of free verse. These Marathi and Hindi translations of *Ishopanishad* by Vinoba are now repeated in the morning prayers at many Gandhian institutions all over India.

Vinoba addressed the inmates of the Sevagram Ashram on 8, 9 and 10 February: "I am, perhaps, speaking at Sevagram for the first time in my life. While Bapu was alive, I did not come to the Ashram on many occasions. But I have always endeavoured to live here on the spiritual plane. It has been our great fortune that a galaxy of great men have visited us one

after the other. A great soul has now departed, and we have to shoulder his noble heritage in the years to come." He added: "The heritage that Bapu has left us cannot be enjoyed like the ordinary estate that a father leaves to his sons. We will have to work very hard to be worthy of this inheritance."

Vinoba went on: "There are a number of institutions in Wardha and Sevagram. Gandhiji used to solve our difficulties and resolve our differences. He is now gone. We should, however, realize that his power is all the greater now, because he has been released from the physical bonds. We should regard the workers as the manifestations of the Divine. With this attitude, our differences shall vanish into nothingness."

"Gandhiji had given us eleven vows", said Vinoba. "These vows must continue to be an integral part of our lives. Many visitors will come to the Ashram and judge us by these standards. We have, therefore, to be vigilant all the time and strain every ounce of our energy to be worthy of Gandhiji's ideals." "After the passing away of a great man, his disciples get a special prestige in society. It is a danger we should guard against. We should never rest on our oars and slacken the efforts. It is only through tireless work that our minds shall become pure and serene."

18

The Sevagram Conference 'Sarvodaya Samaj'

To REVIEW the general and political situation in the country after the martyrdom of Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, a conference of top-ranking political as well as constructive workers was convened in Sevagram from 11 to 14 March 1948. Dr. Rajendra Prasad presided over the deliberations. It was attended among others by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Acharya Kripalani, Dr. P. C. Ghosh, Vinoba, Shankarrao Deo, Kakasaheb Kalelkar, Jayaprakash Narayan, Devadas Gandhi, Kishorelal Mashruwala, Srikrishnadas Jaju, R. R. Diwakar, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and Jairamdas Daulatram. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel could not be present due to indisposition. About 500 workers from all over India attended the conference. The Governors of Orissa and the Central Provinces, and the Chief Ministers of Bombay, Madras and Orissa also participated in the deliberations.

In his opening remarks, R. S. Dhotre, the Convener, informed the gathering that the main objective of the conference was to formulate a programme of action in the light of the current situation. Gandhiji's suggestion about the formation of a *Lok Sevak Sangh,* was obviously in the minds of all the workers. The main problem was to generate and strengthen the forces of non-violence in the country as against the rising trends of violence, hatred and disruption.

Pandit Nehru could not be present on the first two days. In his address on 13 March, he observed: "My mind these days

is, for obvious reasons, much worried and disturbed. I get very little time to devote serious thought to a variety of problems. During the year and a half that we have been in office, we have achieved something, but much remains to be done. Our hearts are full of grief and anguish. Having lost the Father of the Nation as a result of partition, we are faced with enormous problems, including that of a large number of refugees. I am, therefore, hardly in a position to guide the deliberations of this Conference."

He continued: "Khadi is always important. But the basic problem is to arrest the wave of violence and prevent further disintegration of the country. We have to protect and safeguard the very freedom and integrity of India. In this larger context, talk of mere constructive work becomes rather artificial and unreal."

"Mahatmaji had the unique quality and capacity of linking up constructive work with the struggle for political liberation. He used to lay his finger on the crucial problem and the whole nation spontaneously followed him. Under the present circumstances, we shall not be able to preserve our independence without effectively counteracting the forces of communalism."

"Being in the Government I have my own limitations. I have to be mostly in Delhi, under a heavy guard, day and night. I am almost in a 'prison house'. If this state of affairs continues, I may as well go mad. I do not know how long I can tolerate all these restrictions."

Pandit Nehru went on: "While pursuing constructive work with renewed zeal, we have first to safeguard the roots which are being assailed day in and day out by anti-social and anti-national forces. After the partition of the country, we now hear angry words about the linguistic redistribution of Provinces. These are danger signals and we have to be vigilant all the time."

"Bapu had placed before the nation the concept of *Lok Sevak Sangh* which was essentially meant to be a non-political organization. If we dissolve the Congress, we shall have to organize a new party for shouldering political responsibilities. The same Congressmen will have to function, more or less, in the same manner, but under a new name. The Congress is an old orga-

nization and has a tradition or discipline behind it. It has fulfilled its objective of attaining *Swaraj*. It has yet to work ceaselessly for the social and economic freedom of India. In this task, the Congress must maintain its close links with various constructive organizations."

Vinoba, who spoke next, said in soft tones: "I do not look on Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru as a representative of the Government; I regard him as a member of the Gandhian family. He and I have lived at least for twenty-five years in the same family, but have met each other today for the first time. The fault is neither his nor mine. Gandhiji's family was a very big one and it was difficult for individual members to know each other rather intimately."

"Panditji's difficulties are real; I fully sympathize with him. But he who wears the crown can alone suggest a way out. We have all to work together and share each other's worries and problems. Panditji's difficulties are our difficulties. We should like to know how we can help him. We seek his guidance in this matter."

And Vinoba added: "Some criticism has been voiced here against the Government. It is, however, wrong to think that the Government is against constructive work. For example, it is our duty to make khadi self-reliant. If we fail to do so, it will be our failure, not of the Government."

In the course of his presidential address, Dr. Rajendra Prasad observed: "We have gathered here at a critical juncture. The head of the family has gone, and we are assembled here to decide as to how to run this house in future. We belong to one big family, and it is our duty to confer together and find agreed solutions to our problems."

"Gandhiji always placed before us the ideals of truth and non-violence. His emphasis on the purity of the means was meant to be a fundamental principle not only for India but for the whole world. We have to consider how the basic ideas of Gandhiji could be spread in our own country as well as outside, in a concerted manner. We have to think as to the type of organization which would be essential for fulfilling this purpose."

The President concluded: "In my view, our main concern is to preserve human values. If we fall below certain minimum

standards, there shall be no hope for humanity. The basic problem, therefore, is moral and spiritual, and we must put our heads together to find a solution."

Dr. Rajendra Prasad, then, requested Acharya Vinoba to guide the deliberations. Speaking in a vein of utter humility, Vinoba said: "It is very difficult for me to speak on this occasion. I am not even a member of the Gandhi Seva Sangh which has convened this Conference, and am the least known among prominent constructive workers. Although, I lived with Gandhiji for a long time, I have been some kind of a 'domesticated wild animal' of Bapu."

"Gandhiji had reiterated several times that Pandit Nehru would be his successor. We can, therefore, lay claim to his guidance at this difficult hour. We have succeeded in achieving independence through non-violence. But I am trying to find out the reasons for our current predicament. Unless we get at the root causes, it would be difficult to find a correct answer."

Continuing his speech, Vinoba asserted: "The pivot of the whole matter rests on *'sadhan-shuddhi*—the purity of the means. We may hold different views on other matters; but if we could agree on this basic principle, many of our difficulties shall vanish. If we could forge a united front on this foundation, it shall be a great achievement, indeed."

Pandit Nehru intervened: "I entirely agree with Vinobaji that we should ponder over the basic questions. Our main concern should be to preserve the hard-won freedom. Real danger to our Independence is not from outside but from within. If the present violent trends continue, the nation shall be torn to tatters. I am at one with Vinoba that our means should be as pure as the end. I am convinced beyond a shadow of doubt that wrong methods always lead to wrong results. If we are clear about this fundamental idea, all our questions can be resolved satisfactorily."

He concluded his speech with the following remarks: "I have only tried to think aloud with you. What else can I do? Tonight I return to Delhi and shall get into the same routine again. I can only assure you that I shall try my best to assist you in implementing the decisions of this conference. I can hardly give

you any guidance. Please do regard me as one of your camp-followers."

Humility in a great leader like Pandit Nehru could not have gone further. I am not sure, however, whether his last words were properly grasped and appreciated by the conference.

On the next day, Vinoba supported the idea of forming a *Sarvodaya Samaj*, in the form of a brotherhood of all those who earnestly believed in the principle of the purity of means for the attainment of noble objectives. He suggested that this organization should be a loose one, without detailed rules and regulations. All those who accept the basic principle of the Samaj should get their names registered with the Central Office and exchange thoughts and experiences once a year. Vinoba did not like Gandhiji's name to be directly associated with this organization: "Let us take care of the ideals of Bapu, and not run after his name. . . Our main strength shall be moral and spiritual. Let us march ahead in a spirit of prayer and dedication."

At the end of the deliberations, the Sevagram Conference adopted the following resolution:

> Those believing in Gandhiji's principles have decided to form a brotherhood, which will be a vast organization.
>
> *Name*: This organization will be known as the *Sarvodaya Samaj*.
>
> *Basic principle*: Insistence on the purity of the means as that of the end.
>
> *Aim*: To strive towards a society based on truth and non-violence, in which there will be no distinction of caste or creed, no opportunity for exploitation and full scope for development both for individuals as well as groups.
>
> *Means*: The following means will be used to achieve this objective: (1) Communal unity (friendship between followers of different faiths and between community and community); (2) Removal of untouchability; (3) Abolition of caste; (4) Prohibition; (5) Khadi and other village industries; (6) Village sanitation; (7) *Nai Talim*; (8) Equality of rights and status for both men and women; (9) Health and cleanliness; (10) Development of Indian languages; (11) Removal of narrow pro-

vincialism; (12) Propagation of Hindustani as the national language; (13) Economic equality; (14) Development of agriculture; (15) Organization of labour; (16) Welfare of the aborigines; (17) Organization of students; (18) Care of lepers; (19) Relief work for destitutes; (20) Cow protection; (21) Naturopathy; and (22) Other similar activities.

Whoever adheres to the above-mentioned principles and tries to work them out will be eligible for membership of the Samaj. Prospective members should intimate the Secretary of the Samaj of their acceptance of the principles as well as the methods, and supply him with their names and addresses which will be registered. To provide an opportunity for contact among the members, a meeting will be held on 30 January every year at an agreed place.

This Samaj will be an advisory body and not an executive organization.

The Conference also empowered the President and Kishorelal Mashruwala to appoint a committee to promote the work of the Sarvodaya Samaj. Accordingly, the following committee was nominated:

R. S. Dhotre, *Convener,* Sushilaben Pai, Dhirendra Mazumdar, M. Satyanarayana, Ramdev Thakur, A. Vedaratnam Pillai, Manmohan Chaudhary, Timmappa Nayak, Babalbhai Mehta, Mahesh Datta Misra, Kashinath Trivedi, Shriman Narayan, with powers to co-opt others upto five.

The main function of the Committee was to maintain a register of *sevaks* of the Samaj, to fix the place for the first annual *mela* to be held on 30 January every year and to make such arrangements as may be necessary for it. The Committee was also to function as a liaison between the Sarvodaya Samaj and its members and to implement the resolutions of the Conference.

It was also decided that the existing constructive organizations should prepare a scheme for unification and form a joint committee as early as possible. Professor J. C. Kumarappa was requested to take action in this matter. It was subsequently decided to constitute a unified organization called *Sarva Seva Sangh*—an association for the service of all. Initially, this orga-

nization was meant to be some kind of a federation to which various organizations like the All-India Spinners Association, All-India Village Industries Association, the Hindustani Talimi Sangh, Goseva Sangh and the Hindustani Prachar Sabha were to be affiliated according to certain rules and regulations. In due course, however, all these organizations got merged into the Sarva Seva Sangh in order to function under a common umbrella.

On my suggestion, the Sevagram Conference also agreed to adopt a resolution on the formation of a Shanti Seva Dal:

> The real cause of Gandhiji's martyrdom is the widespread feeling of narrow communalism which must be fought to remove the blot staining India's reputation. To achieve this object it is necessary that the people of the country, particularly the youth, should be organized without any communal distinction on the basis of truth, non-violence and good conduct. This organization should be in the form of a Peace Service (*Shanti Seva Dal*) which would strive to create an atmosphere of harmony in the country, give relief to riot-sufferers, help refugees and organize *Bhajan* parties in both towns and villages.

Soon after the Conference, Kakasaheb Kalelkar, G. Ramachandran and myself took certain concrete steps to form a unit of Shanti Seva Dal in Wardha. Subsequently, Vinoba appealed to the workers to organize a Shanti Sena in the country for strengthening the Bhoodan and Gramdan movements in achieving a non-violent socio-economic revolution.

It was unfortunate that after about two years, the Sarva Seva Sangh took over the responsibility of convening the annual Sarvodaya Conference and dissolved the Sarvodaya Samaj Committee rather unceremoniously. As a result, the broad-based brotherhood of the Samaj gradually faded away and the annual meet lost its representative character. It would, perhaps, be desirable to revive the Sarvodaya Samaj, as conceived by the Sevagram Conference of March 1948, and make it a world-wide fraternity in the real sense of the term.

Writing in the 4 April issue of the *Harijan* in 1948, Dr. Rajen-

dra Prasad observed: "The Sarvodaya Samaj will not act as an organization; it will not undertake any work or programme by itself, although all *sevaks* are expected to be doing some thing or other in furtherance of constructive work. While every *sevak* will be free to do work what suits him best—of course consistent with the teachings of Gandhiji—he will not do anything in the name and on behalf of the Samaj. It is hoped that men and women, who have the faith and the will, will join the Samaj and will freely and of their own accord, without any fear or favour, carry on in their own lives the teachings of Gandhiji. The number of such people all the world over must be very large and it is hoped that the Samaj through its members will be able not only to keep the torch burning but also to spread its light farther and farther."

Dealing with the resolution on Shanti Seva Dal, he wrote: "Gandhiji had for a long time been considering the desirability and feasibility of raising a band of workers who would devote themselves more or less exclusively to the maintenance of peace amongst people. He had on more than one occasion suggested the organization of a Shanti Sena. But, for some reason or other, this could not be accomplished during his lifetime. If the communal tension has to be removed, some organization of this sort would be of immense help. It was, therefore, decided at the Conference that efforts should be made to organize Shanti Seva Dals. It should be understood clearly that the Dal is nothing like a police force or a body of volunteers whose function may be to suppress riots and disturbances. The function of the Seva Dal will be, by constant work among the people, to create an atmosphere of peace and goodwill so that communal riots and disturbances may not occur at all and, if they unfortunately do occur, to throw itself between the fighting forces and thus prevent or at any rate reduce the intensity of the clashes. The Seva Dal being without any arms, and thoroughly non-violent, will be able to achieve this."

Vinoba also wrote a special article in the 11 April issue of the *Harijan*, entitled 'Initiation in Sarvodaya': "For sometime past it was felt that various Constructive organizations, which have been working independently of one another all along, (with occasional co-operation in carrying out particular pro-

grammes), had not been able to spread the lustre expected out of a life of non-violence. The reason was that each worked with a narrow organizational outlook. The necessity for joint co-ordinated work had arisen, and the Constructive Workers' Conference passed a resolution recommending such a step. As a matter of course this led to thinking in terms of unification. Unification presupposes a change in the personal life of the workers of various *sanghs* in terms of a unified programme. The following seven rules were suggested as the first minimum observances for workers in any form of constructive activity, and the AISA duly passed a resolution on these lines:

1. Every worker should be a regular spinner.
2. He should wear khadi which is either self-spun, or home spun, or certified.
3. As far as possible he should use village-made things.
4. He should endeavour to use cow's milk when at home.
5. He should clean latrines or do some village sanitation work personally at least once in a month.
6. Wherever a Basic School was available, he should educate his children in that institution.
7. He should try to learn the Devanagari, the Urdu and one of the South Indian scripts.

The above is a programme of discipline for self-elevation. It has been made obligatory on the workers of various *sanghs*. But, indeed, it is one for every one of us to accept. If the *sevaks* of the Sarvodaya Samaj adopt these rules of conduct, the Samaj will spread like sunshine in every direction. The rules are only illustrative. A thoughtful *sevak* must make additions to them with an eye to his own moral uplift. Only, he must observe two conditions in making the additions. First, the observance must not be carried as a burden. It should guide life like a compass and make its course simpler than before. Secondly, the observance should not be made use of for making invidious comparisons between individuals. If these conditions are not observed, the rules would defeat their purpose by making the observer narrow-minded and uncharitable. Subject to these cautions, I shall say, if any one wants to be-

come a *sevak,* let him discipline himself with appropriate observances.

A large number of enquiries about enrolment as *sevaks* with the Sarvodaya Samaj poured into the office of the Gandhi Seva Sangh at Sevagram. R. S. Dhotre, the Secretary of the Sangh, was also the convener of the Sarvodaya Samaj with its office at Bajajwadi, Wardha. It was clarified in the columns of the *Harijan* that the "Sarvodaya Samaj is not a political or a religious body". "Nor is it wedded to any particular 'ism'. Any person who agrees with its aims and earnestly believes in Truth and Non-violence as the only correct conduct can deem himself as a *sevak* of the Samaj, whatever political, economic and religious opinions he might hold. Nobody can object to his claim to be such a *sevak.* No prestige accrues to its members as such. It is only through devoted service and continuous good work that one can aspire to get prestige."

After the Sevagram Conference, the first annual gathering of the Sarvodaya Samaj was held at Rau, near Indore in Madhya Pradesh. At this Conference Vinoba explained in greater detail the aims of the Samaj. The second Sarvodaya Conference was convened in April 1950 at Angul in Orissa. But Vinoba could not attend it as he was deeply engrossed in his own creative programme at Pavnar.

The third annual session of the Sarvodaya Samaj was to be held at Shivrampalli, about four miles from Hyderabad, early in April 1951. Vinoba had no intention of attending this session either. A meeting of the Sarva Seva Sangh was held at Sevagram on 6 March. Vinoba attended it as a special invitee. In the course of deliberations, Shankarrao Deo, the then Secretary of the Sangh, put enormous pressure on Vinoba to attend the Shivrampalli Conference. Since Vinoba had initiated the idea of Sarvodaya Samaj, the Conference without him would not be worthwhile. He had not been able to attend the second Sammelan at Angul, and if he did not attend the ensuing session as well, Shankarrao Deo thought of cancelling it altogether. Vinoba yielded to the pressure and agreed to attend the annual session at Shivrampalli, but on his own terms. He announced

that he would walk the whole distance and reach Shivrampalli on time.

Accordingly, Vinoba left Sevagram for his Pavnar Ashram the next morning in the midst of the chanting of *'Nirbal Ke Bal Ram'* by *Nai Talim* students. He started his long trek for Shivrampalli on the morning of 8 March. He was accompanied by Mahadevitai, my wife Madalsadevi, Damodardas Mundada, his Secretary, Dattoba Dastane and Bhau Panse. A bullock cart carried the luggage of the party throughout this tour on foot.

On the way, Vinoba reached the Lakshminarayan temple in Wardha city, where Jankidevi Bajaj offered him a hearty welcome and prayed for his safe and early return. Responding to the spontaneous welcome, Vinoba said: "I was engaged in my constructive work at Pavnar. And then came this invitation to proceed to Hyderabad for the Sarvodaya Sammelan. Whatever comes in its natural course has to be accepted as God's will. Hence I am now on my feet. It is not possible for me to say when I would return."

Vinoba daily walked about 10 to 12 miles, reaching the next camp at 9 in the morning. He used to go round the village and listen to the problems and difficulties of the people. In the evening at 5, there was a community prayer after which he addressed the gathering. He exhorted the villagers to imbibe the spirit of self-help and develop social harmony through mutual love and co-operation. Every village must be, by and large, a self-sufficient community, standing on its own feet. "Without such *Gramraj*—village government," said Vinoba, "freedom will not have much meaning." He also asked the people to abstain from drinking, gambling and other evil habits in order to conserve their limited resources for village development.

Covering a distance of 315 miles, Vinoba reached Shivrampalli on 7 April, a day prior to the commencement of the Sarvodaya Conference. Subsequent developments leading to the birth of the Bhoodan movement have been narrated in a separate chapter.

19

Healing the Wounds of Partition

SOON AFTER the Sevagram Conference, Vinoba was invited by Pandit Nehru to proceed to Delhi and help the Government in the work of relief and rehabilitation. Vinoba accordingly reached Delhi on 30 March 1948, accompanied by Srikrishnadas Jaju and Jankidevi Bajaj. He stayed in a simple hut at Rajghat, near the *Samadhi* of Mahatma Gandhi. In his post-prayer address on the very first day, he explained to the audience the aim of his mission: "It is, of course, necessary to mitigate the sufferings of the refugees. But this is not my main task. My basic mission is to replace the existing atmosphere of hatred and bitterness with a climate of peace, harmony and goodwill. Violence cannot be met with violence; love alone can generate a helpful atmosphere. This cannot be done by the Government. It is the duty of the people and the voluntary organizations to help the Government in this crucial task."

Vinoba spent about ten months among the refugees in and around Delhi and tried to wean away their minds from despair and distrust. In his discourses at Rajghat, he appealed to the general public to sustain their balance of mind and forget the past. He made it very plain that the people must banish from their minds the idea of a *Hindu Rashtra*. "Religion is a personal affair of individuals and must not be mixed up with politics. It is only a climate of respect for all creeds which can maintain the unity of India. Hinduism taught us broad-mindedness and large-heartedness. If we make it narrow and dogmatic, it would not only destroy itself but also the country. India had achieved independence through non-violent and peaceful

methods. It was, therefore, necessary to eschew violence and mutual hatred. Otherwise, we shall not be able to retain and preserve our political freedom which we had attained after centuries."

In another post-prayer speech, Vinoba asked the audience to recognize the great force of community prayers. They generated an immeasurable power for good, if conducted in a proper spirit. "In the last analysis, it was only God who could preserve our lives. No power on earth can take the life of one whom God desires to protect for the service of the people."

On a different occasion, he advised the people not to care too much for money. While material wealth was necessary for maintaining one's existence, moral and spiritual values were of paramount importance. He recounted the story in the Upanishads about the two wives of *Rishi* Yajnawalkya. When the great saint decided to renounce the world, he summoned his two wives and asked them to choose either money or immortal life. One of them quickly opted for wealth and the other urged the *Rishi* to pass on to her his spiritual heritage which was of lasting value.

During his stay in Delhi, Vinoba tried to visit all the important refugee camps, including those in Kalka, Purana Qila, Bela Road, Tees Hazari and Kingsway near the Harijan colony. He also went to a Basic school conducted by the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation under the guidance of Rameshwari Nehru. Speaking at a meeting of the Central Peace Committee of Delhi, Vinoba urged the workers to speed up rehabilitation in order to afford the much-needed relief to the millions of refugees. He pleaded: "While settling your programmes and policies, you should not take into account what Pakistan does or fails to do. You must keep the initiative in your own hands and do what you think is just and proper."

On 12 April, the party visited Dr. Zakir Husain's Jamia Millia Islamia and a Basic school for the refugees in the adjoining village. The Jamia had suffered a loss of about two to three lakhs of rupees in the shape of stocks of books which were burnt by fire. Vinoba advised the staff and students of the institution to work for Basic education with a sense of mission.

Addressing the refugees at Kurukshetra camp on 8 April,

Vinoba observed: "Kurukshetra is a holy place from time immemorial. It was here that Lord Krishna gave his message of the *Gita* to Arjuna. One of the fundamental principles of the *Gita* is that a person who ate without doing work committed a sin. It was, therefore, necessary for all of us to perform some work daily in order to maintain ourselves. Taking free rations for maintenance was, therefore, not desirable. It was a necessity in the initial stages. But now, why should the refugees not grind their own corn and turn it into flour? The Government should not be asked to supply flour day after day. Let us get hundred grinding stones and relieve the Government of its responsibility in this regard."

Similarly, Vinoba asked them to instal their own *ghanis*—oil-presses. "In the Kurukshetra camp, a hundred *ghanis* will be able to meet all the requirements of the refugees. Such an arrangement would not only provide gainful work to the people but also make the refugees independent of Government assistance on a continuing basis."

As regards their cloth requirements, why should the refugee friends not spin and weave and prepare khadi? The clothes in the camps of Kurukshetra were torn and tattered. It was no use asking the Government to replace them. The people themselves should learn to help themselves in these matters and live as self-respecting persons, standing in their own strength.

Touring in some villages of East Punjab, Vinoba talked to the people, more or less, on the same lines. He asked the villagers to become gradually independent of the cities which exploited them. The village communities should forge a spirit of unity among themselves in order to check the existing economic drain. "The five fingers of a hand can do tangible work only if they join together. If they work separately and in a disjointed fashion, they will become powerless. Similarly, the villagers must learn to lead a life of mutual love and co-operation. God helped those who helped themselves and worked in unison. Villagers can become really happy and prosperous only if there was social cohesion and solidarity amongst them."

Appealing to the people to rise above religious differences, Vinoba said: "The basic principles of all religions are primarily the same. Each religion preaches service and sacrifice and

asks us not to inflict injury on others. The strength of a society really lies in unity." "A musical instrument," remarked Vinoba, "produces sweet music only because different notes are harmonised. If an instrument possesses only one note, it will lose its rich melody."

"The Hindus and the Muslims worship in different ways. The Christians have their own system of God's worship. But all these religions believe in the same God who is Truth, Love and Compassion. True religion stands for peace amongst men and whoever preaches hatred and disruption is an enemy of religion and spirituality."

At a village in the Gurgaon district of East Punjab, Vinoba addressed a group of 200 Meos Muslims: "I know that you are undergoing great hardships. You had gone away to Pakistan soon after partition. But you have now come back to settle down once again in your old environment. It is our duty to help you in doing so. In India we have always talked of the unity in the midst of diversity. Here various linguistic and religious groups have lived together with love and goodwill for centuries. Our strength and prestige would be really established only if we continued these traditions of good neighbourliness."

Vinoba continued: "God has given man two great capacities: one of remembrance and the other of forgetfulness. We must discriminate between what deserves to be remembered and what deserves to be forgotten. True discrimination lies in forgetting the evil and remembering the good done by others. With trust in God, we must live together with courage and affection. The function of religion is to unite the hearts and not to divide them."

Talking to a gathering at Urus of Bibi Nur on 11 April, Vinoba hoped that by the grace of God "a wave of goodwill would now prevail, so as to make even bad persons turn good". "India is a land of many creeds. She has given welcome to every religion. Just as rivers from all directions flow to the ocean, so all religions came to India and lived amicably together. Recent events after the partition should not make us forget the long tradition of living together in peace."

Vinoba related how nine years ago he had studied the *Quran*

as thoroughly as he had studied the Hindu Scriptures: "I first read its English translation. But this did not satisfy me and I, therefore, studied Arabic in order to understand the *Quran* in the original. I now understand the Islam religion much better. Islam does not distinguish between man and man but regards all human beings as equal in status. It enjoins them to live as friends with the followers of other religions. Furthermore, the holy Quran does not make any distinction between the Prophets who come to the world in different countries from time to time." "Similarly," said Vinoba, "the *Granth Saheb* of the Sikhs preaches religious tolerance and harmony. It includes the utterances of other saints, along with those of the Sikh Gurus. It includes even the utterances of a Muslim saint Baba Farid." "We should thank the Government for protecting the Durgahs. The State had done its duty. It is now for the people to maintain various religious places clean and in a good condition. All religious places of worship should command equal respect."

Vinoba also utilized the opportunity to explain the need for linguistic harmony in India. He told the audience how he had studied the four South Indian languages when he was detained in the Vellore Central Jail. He believed that for the unity of India it was necessary for the people of North India to study a South Indian language as it was for those of South India to study Hindi. Even in South India, inter-Provincial conversation was difficult in the local languages. The people of one language did not care to learn the language of their neighbours. "It is, therefore, necessary to have a national language for inter-provincial intercourse. Sanskrit could not become such a link language; it could be only Hindi or Hindustani."

The task of rehabilitating the Meos was, indeed, fraught with many difficulties. In their initial flush of enthusiasm, they had opted for Pakistan, but soon realized their mistake. They, therefore, returned to India and wanted to get back their lands and houses which had, in the mean time, been occupied by the Hindu refugees from Pakistan. Vinoba tried his best to find a way out, with the co-operation of the Government and the people. He did achieve considerable success in this direction. The Government, ultimately, agreed to return the lands to them

without asking for advance payments, and assured the Hindu refugees that they would be given alternative plots in other places. The houses were also returned, more or less in a similar manner. Satyan, a close associate of Vinoba, followed up this work in subsequent years. In fact, Satyan is still living in Pathankot in-charge of the Prasthan Ashram—a place from where people start for Jammu and Kashmir.

While Vinoba was engaged in the work of resettling both Hindu and Muslim refugees, disturbing news came from Bikaner that the orthodox Hindus had prevented the entry into the temples of those Hindus who had worked for the removal of untouchability. A satyagraha was soon started, and it threatened to assume an ugly form. Vinoba was, therefore, requested to proceed to Bikaner at once and settle the matter. On reaching there, Vinoba, in his post-prayer speech, exhorted the people to maintain a calm atmosphere and try to solve the issue peacefully. He asked the Hindu workers not to care to enter the temples without their Harijan brothers. He had himself made it a rule not to go to a temple where the Harijans were not allowed to worship. "A temple which is not open to all is only an idol of stone, and God does not reside there," said Vinoba. His presence at Bikaner for four days electrified the atmosphere, and the problem was, by and large, resolved.

From Bikaner, Vinoba went to Ajmer where there is the Durgah of Khwaja Saheb. Gandhiji had agreed to visit this place earlier. Muslims had, therefore, cordially invited Vinoba to visit the Durgah on the occasion of the annual Urs. On Friday, 14 May 1948, Vinoba reached the place to attend the customary *Namaz*. After the community prayer he was requested to address the audience. Since he was visibly moved, Vinoba found it very difficult to speak, and tears flowed down his eyes. Later, he spoke for about fifteen minutes: "I am very happy to be here today in your midst. Gandhiji had promised to attend the *Urs* this year but God willed it differently. It is impossible for me to act as a proxy for the Mahatma. All that I can do is to express my feeling of regard and affection for you. I am a humble servant of God, *Khudai Khidmatgar*. Perhaps, I am not entitled to call myself even a servant of God. As the *Quran* has said, even if all the oceans become ink

and all the trees provide the pens, it is not possible to give a full and correct description of God. There is a similar verse in Sanskrit also."

He continued: "The *Quran* has said that the fruit of evil deeds is evil and of good deeds good. The people of India have, during the last few months, done grossly evil things. All the communities are equally guilty. It is no use apportioning the percentage of blame amongst them. The proper thing is to sincerely pray to God to forgive us for our sins."

Vinoba concluded: "India belongs to all the communities, irrespective of their religion. We are born of the dust of this land and would return to it. We should, therefore, love one another, have room for one another in our hearts and live like brothers."

The scene that followed Vinoba's speech was a memorable one. Vinoba was seated on a high dais. Hundreds of Muslims, children, young and old, went up to him to kiss his palm and apply it to their eyes. All the spectators were greatly moved to witness such scenes of love and affection. As a result of Vinoba's one week visit to Ajmer, the atmosphere was considerably improved for the better. The Muslims were so much impressed by Vinoba's sincerity that they invited him to hold his own prayers at the Durgah. The chanting of *Ram Dhun* and *Bhajans* was a very unusual event in this Muslim sanctuary. A thing like this had not happened there for the last three or four centuries of its history.

A few days after the Ajmer pilgrimage, Vinoba went to Rau in the erstwhile Madhya Bharat to attend the first Conference of the Sarvodaya Samaj. He mentioned to the constructive workers assembled there about his visit to Ajmer: "I was glad to find that the Muslims there accepted me as one of them. My experiences in settling the Meos in Gurgaon have also been very happy. A number of workers are engaged in this mission of peace and we should wish them god-speed."

At Rau, information was received about communal disharmony in the Hyderabad State. The *Razakars* had disturbed the peaceful atmosphere there. Pandit Nehru had expressed a wish that Vinoba may go there to restore normal conditions. Vinoba, therefore, proceeded to Hyderabad and toured the

State, visiting Aurangabad, Jalna, Nanded, Bidar and Hyderabad city. His post-prayer speeches were instrumental in reviving the atmosphere of communal amity in the area.

In the course of these speeches, Vinoba explained to the people the need for establishing a *Sarvodaya* society in which everybody will work according to his capacity and receive consumer goods in accordance with his needs. He stated: "In place of *Samyavad* or Communism, we should plan for *Samya-yoga*. We should all be prepared to work with our hands to earn our bread in a spirit of worship and dedication to society. Today the poor envy the rich and try to wrest their material wealth. Instead, the poor should try to raise their living standards by their own efforts. They should realize that, in several ways, they are more fortunate than the rich. They enjoy open air and sleep under the vast canopy of the sky. Owing to hard physical labour, they are able to digest whatever they eat. The rich should also emulate the lives of the poor and help them to establish a self-sufficient economic order in which the raw materials are processed in the villages themselves."

At one of these meetings in Hyderabad, Vinoba advocated the urgent need of revamping the present system of education: "Just as we had taken down the foreign flag on achieving *Swaraj* and unfurled a new flag, even so, we should discard the old type of education and introduce in its place a new one suitable to our own needs and requirements. If the Government is unable to take a decision soon in regard to the shape of the new education, I will not mind if all the schools are closed for a year or two. But education in free India must make the students self-reliant through dignity of labour. The existing pattern makes them dependent on the labour of others and fills their minds with wrong notions of prestige and dignity."

From Hyderabad, Vinoba went to Baroda and later stayed at the Vedchhi Ashram in Surat district for a week from 13 April 1949 onwards. He, then, left for a tour of Kerala, but was summoned back to Delhi for urgent work.

During this period of about a year and half, Vinoba had to undergo considerable physical strain. Moreover, whatever he did to help the Government in re-settling the refugees and restoring communal peace had to be done within certain obvi-

ous limitations. Vinoba, therefore, returned to Wardha early in July that year. He agreed to shoulder the responsibility of editing the monthly *Sarvodaya,* the organ of the Sarvodaya Samaj. The first issue was published on 15 August 1949. During intervals, Vinoba visited the Sindhi refugee township at Kalyan. He also went to Bombay and addressed the Congress workers at Jinnah Hall on 31 August.

Another event of importance during this period was the holding of the World Pacifist Conference at Sevagram towards the end of December and early January 1950. Noted peace-workers from many countries of the world, including England, America, France, Italy, Japan, Holland, Czechoslovakia and New Zealand, assembled in Sevagram, in the pious memory of Mahatma Gandhi. Mangaldas Pakvasa, the then Governor of C.P. and Berar, welcomed the delegates on behalf of his Government and the people.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad, who presided, said: "Mahatma Gandhi was a great personality. He gave us and the world a message and was able to influence millions of people in India to follow him. Though we cannot claim to follow him fully, we were able to achieve our liberation under his guidance. Though in India we are still maintaining an army and a large police force, there is an under-current of thought and belief that we have not given up yet the path shown by the Mahatma. If Gandhiji had been alive, he would have shown us the correct way in which Free India should go. But he was taken away at the nick of time and we are now left behind with all our weaknesses to carry on with the work which he has left unfinished."

Inaugurating the Conference, Vinoba observed: "Non-violence is not merely non-participation in destructive activities; its main manifestation is in the identification of constructive activities with the service of humanity. The goddess of *ahimsa* has very powerful weapons at her command. They are the weapons of love, and are, therefore, creative and not destructive. Yet they do destroy—they destroy hatred, iniquity, hunger and disease."

Continuing his speech Vinoba expressed an original idea:

"The whole world is talking of the possibility of a third World War. I am, however, not afraid of world wars, but of small wars and quarrels. The possibility of world wars is likely to take us speedily towards non-violence, while small wars push us towards violence and destruction. We should, therefore, be on our guard against these petty quarrels. We should try to engage ourselves in the service of the people and wish that there is no discord amongst them."

He concluded: "I am happy to say that whatever may be the shortcomings of our Government in internal affairs, the whole weight of the Nehru Government, so far as international problems are concerned, is thrown on the side of world peace and the freedom of all nations. India is trying to develop the power of non-violence so that weak nations may shed fear and become strong. Even if we fail, our place will be taken by others sent by God to carry on this work until non-violence pervades the whole world."

Prominent among those who participated in the deliberations were Horace Alexander, Rev. Michael Scott, Reginald Reynolds, A. J. Muste of the United States, J. J. Buskes, A. C. Barrington, and Rev. Riri Nakayama of Japan. The Conference proved to be a momentous one, and Vinoba's participation, surely, added to its importance.

20

In Telangana: Birth of Bhoodan

AT THE Shivrampalli Sammelan, Vinoba delivered five important speeches. He wanted the constructive workers to take to agriculture and develop faith in physical labour. Additionally, they should try to run their institutions on the basis of self-sufficiency and without the use of money. He also suggested that peace brigades—shanti senas—should be organized in each village for self-protection through non-violent resistance. On the occasion of Gandhiji's death anniversary, the offer of *sootanjali*—hanks of self-spun yarn—should be popularised in the fairs held on the occasion. The workers should be educated in scavenging work; the people should be trained to keep their latrines clean without the use of professional sweepers. Every effort should be made to infuse the spirit of honesty and integrity in public life.

It was also indicated in these speeches that for augmenting agricultural production in the country, labourers should be paid wages in kind, in the form of grain and other consumer needs. Vinoba repeated his earlier suggestion that the Government should realize land revenue in kind in place of cash. Furthermore, the Government should undertake to train all adults in hand-spinning, and weaving should be organized by the State agencies free of charge. This would help in popularising khadi and enabling the people to produce cloth for their annual requirements.

On the last day, Vinoba placed before the Sarvodaya Conference a new *sutra*—formula, covering five items of constructive work—internal purity, village sanitation, reverence for

physical labour, peace army and yarn-contribution. He urged the workers to implement this five-point programme in all sincerity.

Vinoba also announced in the concluding session that he intended going to the Telangana region where the Communists on the one hand and the Army on the other had created a complicated situation. He wanted to study the facts at first hand, before returning to Wardha. "What would happen during this sojourn or thereafter was known only to God," remarked Vinoba.

On the auspicious day of Ramnavami, 15 April 1951, Vinoba embarked on his pilgrimage of peace. He was accompanied by Damodardas, Mahadevitai, Madalsadevi and one or two other workers of the region. He refused to accept the protection of the Army or the police during this *Padyatra* which proved to be unique in the annals of the Sarvodaya movement in Independent India.

Leaving Shivrampalli in the small hours of the morning, Vinoba reached Hyderabad after sunrise and camped there for the day. He took the opportunity of meeting some Communists in jail and had a very frank and cordial talk with them. On 16 April, he camped at Hayatnagar, and on 17 at Batasingaran village in Hyderabad district. On the third day he halted at Pochampalli, a village of about 3000 population in Nalgonda district which had grown an important centre of communist activities. Since my wife was also a member of the party, I give below her version of events that followed: As Vinoba entered the village, he was received with the recitation of Vedic *Mantras*. After some time, members of the party went inside the village for taking their bath. Vinoba also rested for a while in the local school building, got up suddenly and walked into the village for obtaining first-hand information about the economic condition of the people. He started his round with the Harijan Colony, and entered several cottages to see their plight with his own eyes. As he was returning to the school-camp, the Harijans surrounded him and entreated: "We are very poor. We are also unemployed and, therefore, unhappy. Please help us."

"In what way can I help you?" enquired Vinoba.

"We want only work and nothing else. Please give us some land so that we may work hard on it to eke out our livelihood.

We shall always remain grateful for this act of kindness."

Vinoba, not knowing what to do, replied:

"I have entered your village only about an hour ago. After bath and some rest, there will be common spinning. You may, then, come to the school so that we may think about this matter. I will also consider how to get some land for you."

As suggested, forty families of the Harijans came to Vinoba's camp in the afternoon. After community spinning was over, Vinoba sat on a wooden cot in front of the villagers. A representative of the Harijans stood up with folded hands and repeated his earlier request for the grant of land:

"We shall serve mother-earth and receive her fruits for our maintenance."

"How much land do you really require?" asked Vinoba.

After conferring among themselves for a while, the Harijan leader said:

"Only 80 acres will do. We are 40 families, and two acres for each family will be quite adequate for our purpose."

Vinoba began to think seriously about this matter, but no solution was in sight. He, therefore, quietly said:

"I will find out from the Government whether it is possible to allot any land to you. This is a difficult question. Even so, I will try to explore the possibilities."

And, then, it suddenly struck him that someone in the village audience may like to donate some land for these poor Harijans. He lifted his eyes, gently smiled at the gathering, and without expecting any response remarked rather casually:

"Brothers, is there anybody amongst you who can help these Harijan friends? They are prepared to work hard on the land to earn their livelihood."

And lo! one of the local workers, Ramchandra Reddy, stood up, looked at Vinoba with folded hands and said:

"Sir, I have some land and have been trying to find a proper person for donating it. My father had willed that out of 200 acres, one half should be given away to some deserving persons. All these years I did not know what to do. But today is a golden opportunity for me. Please do accept my donation of 100 acres. I shall be most grateful for this act of grace."

Neither Vinoba nor the members of his party could believe

these words; they appeared to be too good to be true. But Ramchandra Reddy continued standing with his hands folded, and awaiting Vinoba's concurrence.

Vinoba was overwhelmed with emotion. It was, verily, a miracle. The Harijans had asked for only 80 acres, and the donor had spontaneously offered a hundred acres. Vinoba looked once again towards the Harijans. Although they had also heard about the donation of 100 acres, they stuck to their original figure of only 80 acres. They repeated their assurance that they would serve mother-earth with all their heart. There was not the slightest trace of greed or temptation.

After wiping the tears with his upper cloth, Vinoba remarked: "I have come here with empty hands and will proceed to the next village tomorrow morning again with empty hands. Both the donor and the donee are present here in our midst. Let them exchange the land in our presence. The donor should also help the Harijan friends with some money and implements for cultivating the land in a co-operative way."

Ramchandra Reddy gently bowed before Vinoba and accepted the responsibility. The Harijans also touched his feet with joy and satisfaction. Vinoba appointed a committee of five on the spot, consisting of the donor, two representatives of the Harijans and two experienced workers of the village.

And so, this was the humble birth of the great Bhoodan movement. Vinoba had not the slightest idea that land could be donated in this fashion on a purely voluntary basis, without any pressure from the Government. He had been applying his mind to the problem of landless labourers in India for some years. But no solution was so far in view. This sudden miracle at Pochampalli thrilled his whole being and he clearly recognised the hand of God in this unforeseen event. Addressing the village gathering after prayers, Vinoba declared: "Man does not act merely on the strength of his own thinking. There is always a Divine hand behind such noble actions. I am a man of faith, and work in the name of God. If Providence desires to take work from me, I will walk from village to village to seek land donations for the poor!"

Vinoba could hardly sleep during the night. He was profoundly influenced by the turn of events at Pochampalli. As he was preparing to leave for another village next morning, Ramchandra Reddy went to his cottage, touched his feet and handed over to him a written declaration about his donation.

On my request, Reddy had written a special article two years later for the AICC *Economic Review* (1 November 1953) which was edited by me as Congress General Secretary. In the concluding paragraph he stated: "Some people say that I donated the land out of emotion. Others say that moral pressure was brought to bear on me. But what is wrong with it? Is it not better to realize one's moral duty and give land to the landless? Response to the call of moral duty leaves no illwill behind; the heart is clean, the mind is free and the weight of centuries is cast away."

From that day onwards, Vinoba toured on foot from village to village asking for land donations. The word 'Bhoodan' was, in truth, used by him at the next halt after Pochampalli. *Yajna* was added to Bhoodan some days later. In every village, land donations poured in, and Vinoba was convinced that God wanted him to continue this movement tirelessly with faith and resolution. These voluntary gifts of land in many villages of Telangana transformed the whole atmosphere in a miraculous manner. In places where the people were afraid to assemble, owing to the terror of the Army during day and the fear of the Communists during night, thousands attended Vinoba's evening prayers and listened to his discourses in pin-drop silence. Hatred and violence gradually yielded place to love and cooperation among the people. Vinoba asked the villagers to become self-reliant and fearless. The Communists also attended Vinoba's meetings and were gradually influenced by his line of thought.

In one of his speeches Vinoba observed: "In order to help the poor, the Communists need not murder the rich. Under democracy, the pistol had been replaced by the vote. Let the Communists work in the open and educate the people. If they abandon the path of violence, I shall accompany them to every nook and corner of India."

As Vinoba's party trekked from village to village in Telan-

gana, the people would innocently say: "Gandhi has been reincarnated." Some others would exclaim: "Gandhi's son is coming to meet us." And yet others remarked: "Here comes a god who gives away land." Even before he reached the next village at sunrise on the following day, the landlords were, more or less, prepared to be 'looted with love'. In the beginning, the majority of donors were small and middle class peasants, but as Bhoodan rolled on, richer farmers also volunteered their donations and received Vinoba with genuine faith and respect.

Vinoba explained the concept of Bhoodan to his rural audience in a variety of ways. When people came to receive him with flowers and garlands, he would say: "These flowers are beautiful; but earth, the mother of these flowers, is even more beautiful. 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 and should be given my due share." To others he would appeal: "In olden days, our ancestors used to perform *Yajnas* in order to restore peaceful conditions. To remove bitterness in the villages, I have started the Bhoodan *Yajna* and everyone should take part in it for the welfare of the masses." To the doubting Thomases he would affirm his unflinching faith in the goodness of man: "I believe that hearts do change, and non-violence alone is the remedy for all our ills... A psychological revolution like this cannot be brought about by violence. It can be ushered in only through the methods of Buddha, Christ and Gandhi."

He will also ask the Communists to give up their ways of violence, murder and hatred: "When a man falls into a stream, it is not only his own capacity of swimming but also the force of the current that helps him. And it does so, whether he likes it or not. Similarly, when the current of the age comes this way, it will help him in changing the heart. In the present world, burning with discord and quarrels, if God desires to sprinkle a few drops of love through me, I shall gladly be His instrument."

Vinoba accepted land donations even from the poor. At one place a man owning only one acre donated a *Guntha* or one-fortieth of an acre. It was not very clear as to how this small piece of land could be utilized. Said Vinoba: "I would ask the

owner to till that small piece of land as a trustee and utilize the produce for the benefit of the poor. That a man who owns only one acre is prompted to part with a *Guntha* out of it is certainly a revolution. Wherever there is an ideological revolution, life marches towards progress."

In another village meeting Vinoba described *Bhoodan Yajna* 'as an application of non-violence, an experiment in transformation of life itself'. He further explained that non-violence was not opposed to modern science. "Science can transform this earth into heaven, but it can do so only in combination with non-violence. If science and violence are joined together, the world will be shattered to pieces."

Besides donations of lands, Vinoba conveyed to the villagers the imperative need of becoming self-reliant by setting up village and cottage industries: "Without cottage industries, mere possession of land by the peasant will not solve his problem. If the agriculturists take to producing finished goods from the raw material obtaining in the villages, they will be able to save themselves."

Before concluding this chapter, let me mention the daily routine of Vinoba during the Telangana tour: Getting up early in the morning before four o'clock, Vinoba did some study which was followed by morning prayer. He, then, started on his *Yatra* by five. Walking for ten to twelve miles until nine, he would encamp at a village, have his bath, and frugal meal and rest. Then, for two hours he went through newspapers and his correspondence. It was followed by spinning for one hour. Interviews began at four, and the evening prayer at five, which closed with a speech by Vinoba. Again, he gave time to visitors after the prayer and by nine o'clock he went to bed.

The historic Telangana tour lasted 51 days and Vinoba passed through some 200 villages and received 12,200 acres of land for distribution among the landless. Vinoba formed a committee of three consisting of Kodandaram Reddy, Laxmibai Sangam and Keshava Rao (convener). This committee was designated as *Shoonya Samiti* or Zero Committee, signifying

that the three workers would function in a spirit of humility and service. During this peace pilgrimage, Vinoba was also able to settle about 500 village feuds and addressed over 200,000 of people. Not a single village where he had camped had refused land gifts, the average being 240 acres a day. Even the Nizam who was reputedly a most miserly person gave away some land to Vinoba. It is noteworthy that even after Vinoba left Telangana, the local workers were able to collect a further 1,00,000 acres as a result of the tempo created by the Bhoodan mission.

21

Sarvodaya and Marxism

WHILE RETURNING from Telangana, Vinoba reached Sevagram on 26 June 1951. He had left for his memorable trek to Shivrampalli from Sevagram on 6 March and was back to Gandhiji's Ashram after an eventful journey on foot lasting 112 days. Vinoba could have gone to Pavnar directly, but preferred to halt at Sevagram to meet Ashram inmates and workers and students of the Basic education colony.

Addressing the staff and students, Vinoba said: "I had started my *Padayatra* with your good wishes which stood me in very good stead during the Telangana tour. I am happy to be here again in your midst today." On his way to Pavnar next morning, Vinoba halted at Gopuri for a brief period. Addressing the workers he made a meaningful observation: "In the years to come, the main tussle in the world will be between the two ideologies of Sarvodaya and Marxism. It is impossible to strike any compromise between these two ideologies. If we do not carry on our work properly, Communism is bound to make inroads into our public life. We should, therefore, recognize the signs of the times and introduce radical changes in our institutions."

On reaching Paramdham Ashram, Vinoba was happy to meet his colleagues after three months. He informed them that Bhoodan had become a reality only because of the confidence he had been able to gain at Pavnar in the pursuit of *kanchan-mukti* programmes. He added: "I have no intention of continuing the work of receiving land-gifts. I am now regarded as the reincarnation of Vaman, and will gladly receive donations

which are given voluntarily by the people in the surrounding villages. I, however, attach much greater importance to experiments which are being conducted here. The land problem is comparatively easy. But to rid the society of the money-economy through self-help and bread-labour is, indeed, an uphill task."

Vinoba concluded: "This difficult task of revolutionizing our social and economic structure through non-violence and compassion must continue unabated. The experiment is not confined to the Ashram alone. Our institution should serve as a leaven for converting the surrounding villages into a Sarvodaya society. My ultimate objective is to establish *Rama-rajya*—the rule of God. It is a tall ambition; but God willing we shall succeed."

In his post-prayer speeches on subsequent days, Vinoba repeatedly referred to the dangers of Communism: "We cannot combat this ideology by condemning it in vehement terms. The only effective alternative to Communism and Marxism is *Sarvodaya* or *Samya-yoga*. The Communists created a sense of equality in society, but tended to break it to pieces. Our basic work should be not to divide, but to unite."

In this connection, I should like to refer to the valuable 34-page introduction written by Vinoba to Kishorelal Mashruwala's brochure entitled *Gandhi and Marx* brought out by the Navajivan Publishing House in September 1951. It was translated by Mashruwala himself into English from the original Marathi. To me this Introduction is a brilliant essay on the comparative merits of the Gandhian philosophy of Sarvodaya and the dialectical materialism of Karl Marx. Since it deserves special study, I have no hesitation in quoting it here in extenso.

Vinoba starts with a humorous reference to his talk with a communist. "The other day, a young friend said to me: 'We have no use for that old *mantra—shanti, shanti, shanti*—Peace, Peace, Peace. We are now going to thunder forth thrice after the manner of the ancients the cry of *kranti, kranti, kranti*—Revolution, Revolution, Revolution.' I said, 'It would be better if you uttered *kranti* once only. If you did it thrice it might push you even farther back than your original place. *Shanti*

is safe from any such risk. It is eternally old. But *kranti* goes stale with age. Therefore, uttering *kranti* thrice is hardly worthwhile. Say it only once and have done with it'."

Referring to the anomalous situation in modern economy, Vinoba observes: "Our age has produced tons and tons of happiness, but it has, under its weight, crushed the mass of humanity all the world over. Bags of sugar are carried by the bullocks on their backs to make their way into the belly of the epicure; and the astonishing outcome is that the epicure gets a bad liver and the bullock a broken back! This is the miracle wrought by sugar, an article which is sweet beyond dispute." And he added: "When it comes to the sharing of happiness, one claims the lion's share, another that of the jackal. Nothing remains for the poor lamb. Rather, it itself comes to be shared between the lion and the jackal. This is a fable to illustrate the ignoble side of our age, which has made a countless number of people shed tears of sorrow."

Dealing with the two fundamental ideologies of moral development and Communism, Vinoba expounds: "Development of virtue and construction of a social order are the two extreme and fundamental creeds which have exercised man's mind from the beginning of time, regarding the end and aim of man's activities. The advocates of the first doctrine maintain that life and the welfare of society depend on man's character, his moral qualities, and his effort at self-improvement. An individual's life is driven under the force of his moral nature. The social structure changes its form along with the development of human character. Hence, all lovers of good should concentrate their attention on the development of moral qualities. . . The creed and ideology of the Communists is the very opposite of this. They hold: 'What you call the development of moral virtues, is a set of phenomenon, which though they become manifest in the mind, are not, however, the creation of the mind, but are the result of environments. The mind itself is the product of its material environment'."

Critically examining the twin ideologies of Gandhi and Marx, Vinoba observes: "The two ideologies stand face to face, each bent on swallowing up the other. On the surface it might seem that the two contestants occupying the arena are the Com-

munists led by Russia and the Capitalists under the mask of democracy by U.S. But ideologically the latter has lost all vitality and though it might appear doughty on the strength of its military force I do not regard it as really existent as a rival against Communism. On the other hand, though the Gandhian ideology stands nowhere in an organised form, yet inasmuch as it is impregnated with the virility of right thinking, I believe that ultimately it will be Gandhism with which Communism will have its trial of strength."

The oft-repeated formula that "Gandhism is Communism *minus* violence", has been completely discarded by Vinoba. He twits: "The fact of the matter is that these two ideologies are irreconcilable; the differences between them are fundamental. And these chapters make it as clear as day that they are deadly opposed to each other." He goes on: "On being told that Gandhism differed from Communism only in its strict emphasis on non-violence, I said: 'Two persons were so physically alike that one could have well served as the double of the other in a political fraud. But there was a slight difference. One breathed, the other did not. The result was that a dinner was being prepared for the one and a coffin for the other'."

Dealing with Gandhiji's concept of Trusteeship, Vinoba states: "Even if inequality of wealth is abolished as being the result of an unjust social order, the inequality of the intellectual and physical powers cannot be wholly done away with. Let us assume that with education and regulation even these inequalities will be greatly reduced. Still, even in an ideal state we cannot conceive of their total abolition. The conclusion is that whatever talents, physical strength, wealth, or other capacities a person might possess, he should take them as having been given to him as a trustee, for the benefit of the world. This is the noble idea of trusteeship."

Expounding the idea of decentralization in a Sarvodaya society, Vinoba writes: "Decentralization presupposes a comprehensive all-pervading idea behind the various village industries. In the absence of any such idea, small non-centralized industrial units mean merely scattered industries. There were plenty of them before the machine age. But they were easily swept off with the first impact of the machine age. Decentra-

lization (that is intelligent non-centralization) will stand on a firm foundation. Not only will it not be blown off, but will disintegrate the machine age itself. The present machine age, in spite of its name, is wholly unlike a machine, being totally uncontrolled. The Communists want to replace it by a well-controlled machine age. But like all other weapons, the machines, too, though invented by man, are inherently non-human. Hence, they cannot be humanized beyond a certain limit."

Vinoba goes a step further: "But decentralization is not to be confined merely to industries. The process of decentralization applies equally fruitfully to the authority of the State. Even thinkers who are avowedly intent on building up a non-violent social order at times lose sight of this fact. They support the demand for industrial decentralization; but at the same time they often plead for a strong central authority (at least for some period) for the preservation of the former! Even the Communists do not want the State to exist for ever. They say it will wither away automatically, even as *ghee* (clarified butter) melts away in the summer heat. But until that stage sets in, they want it to be solid—not merely as solid as the frozen *ghee* in winter,—but as solid and strong as the iron hammer which smashed Trotsky's head."

Pointing out the similarities between the Gandhian thought and Communism, Vinoba states: "Whatever differences there might be between Gandhism and Communism, there are also points of similarity between them and these, too, are important. A Sanskrit poet traced similarity between even Rama and Ravana through the common syllable *ra*. There is no wonder then that there are common points between these two ideologies, since both of them have originated from a desire for the welfare of the masses. The cause of the have-nots is the basic sentiment running through both."

Vinoba narrates an interesting conversation with a Communist friend:

"Let us first change the present condition. One step is enough."

"You might get a momentary illusion of having changed the present condition. But the reaction will be worse than the present evil."

"Let it be so. We shall think of it when the reaction begins."

"This is the reply of a confused and distressed mind, not of a scientific one, and Communists lay claim to scientific thinking."

"Yes," said my friend. "They do make that claim and assert that once they got the power they would bring about a permanent order. I do not believe in the possibility of establishing an order, which can last for all time. Nothing can be permanent in the world. But for this generation it is absolutely necessary to put down the supremacy of the capitalists. Let the future generations solve their problems, when they arise."

Vinoba continues: "Confirmed Communists will perhaps regard this comrade to be a wavering follower. I compare him with a lunatic with lucid intervals. If the Communist philosophy sets forth a permanent order of society, it is only an opiating drug. The background of the mind of an ordinary Communist is simply to mind the immediate results. It exhibits the intensity of the mother's love and concern, but not the discernment of the Master-Mother, as a *Guru* is called in Indian languages."

To conclude: "Neither denouncement of Communism, nor a convincing or smashing reply to it, nor its suppression by force will avail us here. Just as in the monsoon, waters of all rivers and streams flow towards the ocean, so in Swaraj the services of all workers should flow towards the villages and the distress-stricken people." "At least I, for one, see the salvation of India through only this double-edged weapon, namely, freedom from the lure of money and performance of body-labour. In it I see the acme of Gandhiji's philosophy, a synthesis with Communism and an antidote to both Communism and Capitalism."

In my view, for all those who desire to comprehend in clear terms the basic difference between Sarvodaya and Marxism, Kishorelal Mashruwala's brochure with Vinoba's Introduction, is really a *must*. It should be translated in all the Indian languages and distributed among the people in millions.

Two years later, during his Bhoodan tour of Bihar, Vinoba answered a number of questions on the comparative merits of Sarvodaya and Communism: "Stopping communism is not our concern. Ours is a positive ideology; it is not an expedient use-

ful for certain temporary ends. There is no disputing the fact that there is acute poverty in India, and we need to eradicate it. Now if this can be achieved by fair means, there is no reason why anyone should still think of employing foul means. A thirsty man, if he can get good, clean water, will not touch dirty water. If we are able to resolve our problem of poverty through good means, we may be sure that communism will be automatically stopped."

To a question 'What do you think of the Indian Communists?' Vinoba replied : "It is a complete misnomer to call them Communists. I do not see in what they have done in India anything even remotely resembling communism. Whatever little they have done was done in Telangana; and there continuously for two or three years murder, pillage and banditry were the order of the day. And the result was that peasants did not get anything at all. That is why I hold that the Communists in India are mere propagandists, and that they do no constructive work at all. They are no doubt very enthusiastic about propaganda. The Communists in India are not only materialists, they have also developed what we may call a material intelligence—their intelligence is as dense as matter. Materialism is after all a plausible philosophical view. Hence it would not matter much, if they were merely materialists. But then they do not use their intelligence and plan their action according to what goes on in Russia. If Russia changes its line of action, they do likewise. They have no independent intelligence of their own. How can we have any opinion, good or bad, about a person who is merely copying others?"

He continued: "Communism with the Communists is not a living thought. They have turned it into a dogma based on a book. Like the Arya Samajists they pin their faith on that book and take leave of both the existing conditions in a given place and their intelligence. Actually there should be a proper synthesis between the book, the conditions and one's own reasoning. But they regard the book as their *Veda*. Had Marx been living today in India, he would have certainly changed his ideas. I tell the Communists that you may be Marxists, but Marx was not a Marxist. He was simply Marx and therefore he could change. The Communists have no knowledge of ten thou-

sand years of the development of Indian thought. Even assuming that this ancient Indian thought is defective in certain respects, its knowledge would still be necessary if only to know those defects. I therefore find that the Communists have two very serious defects: One, they are book-worshippers, and two, they are ignorant of the development of Indian thought."

22

To Delhi for 'Plan' Discussions

DURING HIS tour of the Telangana region, Vinoba had the opportunity of studying social and economic conditions of the weaker segments of the population at first hand. He was deeply touched by their abject poverty, unemployment and ignorance: "Forty years ago, as a student I used to read and think about the conditions of my country and feel miserable at its slavery and horrible poverty. Today, even after forty years, there is no change in those conditions. On the contrary, they have worsened."

In the meantime, R. K. Patil, a member of the Planning Commission, first appointed in March 1950, came to Pavnar on 10 August 1951, to gather Vinoba's impressions on the Draft Outline of the First Five-Year Plan. After looking into the broad framework of the Plan, Vinoba expressed his frank disappointment with the basic objectives: "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."

And Vinoba continued: "You took a pledge of achieving food self-sufficiency by 1951. When you find it unrealizable, you set up 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."

He, virtually, extended a challenge to the Planning Commission: "If you can provide full employment to the people through other programmes, including that of large-scale industries, I shall burn my wooden *charkha* and cook a day's meal, without shedding a single tear. But I know for certain you can never provide gainful work to the whole population without the aid of khadi and village industries. Even the communists in Telangana admitted that there was no other way."

Self-sufficiency in food was regarded by Vinoba as an integral part of national defence: "What will the Government of India do if we are at war with Pakistan, and America refused to give you the necessary foodgrains? Unless the country becomes first self-reliant in food and cloth, our defences shall be based on sands. If you really believe in developing non-violent strength, the people must learn to rely on their own resources. This should be clear as daylight."

Talking about cow-protection, Vinoba asserted: "In India you cannot think in terms of cow-slaughter. The Planning Commission has not the courage to say in plain terms that all useless cattle should be done away with. And yet, various programmes included under Animal Husbandry indirectly lead to that conclusion. We must think in terms of imposing a complete ban on the slaughter of cattle. *Gosadans* should be established in different parts of the country for maintaining the weak and useless cattle and utilizing their cow-dung, skin and bones for useful purposes. I can also assure you on behalf of the Muslims of India that they shall not stand in the way of banning cow-slaughter altogether."

Vinoba was even more emphatic about the introduction of Basic education: "Merely saying that Basic education is recognized, will not do. *Nai Talim* will not only make for self-sufficiency in food and cloth, but also generate a spirit of self-help and self-respect among the younger generation. The Planning Commission should, therefore, underscore the urgent need of spreading Basic education throughout the length and breadth of India."

He criticised the scheme of establishing separate hostels and Ashrams for the Harijans: "We should no longer plan in terms

of separate institutions for the Harijans. Such a system would perpetuate untouchability in society. Harijan boys must, therefore, be admitted to the general hostels and schools without any distinction."

Vinoba did not evince much enthusiasm for the scheme of co-operative farming envisaged in the Plan. He was of the view that if the farmers were provided with the necessary facilities and resources, agricultural production could be suitably augmented on small plots too. The yield per acre on bigger farms was not necessarily higher: "In Telangana, I started by laying down a condition that *Bhoodan* lands will be distributed only to those who would agree to organize co-operative farms. But I soon discovered that it was not a reasonable condition. Co-operative farms sponsored by Government had become objects of scorn among the people. Let the tillers first become the owners of the plots and develop real interest in the land. They will, then, strain every nerve to increase production. The co-operative process can follow in due course."

Narrating the conversation between Narad and King Yudhishthir in the *Mahabharata,* Vinoba highlighted the importance of minor irrigation works, especially surface wells, for extending irrigational facilities to the villagers. He suggested that one well should be donated on the occasion of each marriage in cities and villages. This would give to the country millions of wells, both for drinking water as well as irrigation. "Let us get to the hidden Ganga below mother-earth, and all will be well."

Discussing land reforms, Vinoba pointed out that the real bottleneck was the payment of compensation after the imposition of ceilings. In a developing country like India, it was impossible to find the requisite resources for paying reasonable compensation. Vinoba, therefore, mooted the idea of a 'floor', in a place of a 'ceiling': "Let us redistribute the village lands to all the people, after calculating the average holding in accordance with the existing land-man ratio. After ensuring this 'floor', we shall consider about the 'ceiling' in due course. Further, the *Bhoodan* movement not only avoids the payment of compensation, but also engenders an atmosphere of mutual love and goodwill."

Regarding Vinoba's suggestion of realizing rent in kind, R. K.

Patil expressed his own doubts: "Even the States where this system was in vogue have now reverted to cash payments." Vinoba rejoined: "This means that you are satisfied in accepting paper in place of gold. In my view, foodgrains are the real wealth and you must try to store them for the needs of the poeple, especially in emergencies. This can be easily done if rents are realized in the form of grains, rather than in currency notes and coins." Vinoba indicated that at least a portion of the wages of labourers could also be paid in foodgrains to meet their immediate requirements.

He charged the Government with the 'murder' of village industries in the name of 'mechanical efficiency': "You have set up ginning presses and stopped hand-ginning and carding which was prevalent in millions of cottages. The Ministers are always willing to inaugurate factories, but never care to encourage village industries. There were many indigenous oil-*ghanis* in various parts of the country to provide productive employment to the people. Now the Government has allowed the installation of oil-expellers, and the *ghanis* have to be closed down. This is not a natural process; the Government is directly responsible for smothering rural industries through its present pattern of planning. We are all for greater efficiency. But that leads to unemployment, it serves no purpose."

Recalling his experiences at the refugee centres, Vinoba said: "I had suggested to the Government that the refugees should be provided with grinding-stones for their own corn. But the authorities rejected my suggestion on the plea that they had already given contracts for the supply of mill-made flour. I, ultimately, found that rotten flour was being supplied to the refugee camps. Such is the nature of our present Planning!"

On return to Delhi, Patil conveyed Vinoba's reactions on the Draft Plan to Pandit Nehru, who in his capacity as Prime Minister was also the Chairman of the Planning Commission. Jawaharlalji, greatly impressed by Vinoba's notable work in Telangana, attached special importance to his views in regard to economic planning in India. While the first Five-Year Plan was on the anvil, Nehru was anxious to enlist Vinoba's co-operation and concurrence before finalizing the blueprint. He, therefore, wrote a letter to Vinoba, inviting him to come to

Delhi for detailed discussions with the Members of the Planning Commission.

Vinoba was absorbed in his own programme of liberating the Ashram community from the shackles of money. He attached the highest value to this constructive work at the grass-roots. He, however, did not like to decline the invitation of Pandit Nehru and decided to start for Delhi on foot on 12 September. Nehru was placed in a predicament. He had never imagined that Vinoba would proceed to Delhi on foot to cover the long distance of 800 miles from Pavnar to New Delhi. He also knew that Vinoba's decision, once taken, was irrevocable.

In deciding to undertake a *Padayatra* to Delhi, Vinoba also wanted to test the Bhoodan idea in areas which were not haunted by communists. Addressing a large gathering at Pavnar on 11 September, he observed: "If it is thought that land was 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 the land. In case this hope is realised, it will lend a mighty support to the non-violent revolution."

Immediately after his speech, 75 acres of land were donated by the local villagers. The next morning, Vinoba commenced his march to Delhi. He covered 12 to 16 miles every day. On reaching Nagpur on 15 September, he poured out his heart in these words: "Till God sustains strength in me I shall tour the country and beg for land for the landless. Land, like air and water, cannot be owned individually. It can only be God's. It is the common property of the people and should be equitably distributed."

During the first week, Vinoba covered about 110 miles and obtained 2000 acres of land, an average of little less than 300 acres per day. It may be recalled that the daily average in Telangana was 240 acres. This was a convincing proof that the appeal of Bhoodan was not confined to the Communist regions; it found a ready response in the hearts of the people in other areas too. The donations passed to Vinoba's hands from all categories of villagers—the rich, the middle-class as well as the poor.

On 2 October, the party reached Sagar where a conference of Madhya Pradesh constructive workers had been convened. It was here that Vinoba, for the first time, made a fervent appeal for the donation of 50 million acres of land by 1957. Mathematics involved in this target was quite simple. There are about 10 million landless labourers in the country. The family of each labourer, with an average of five members, would require five acres of ordinary land for its maintenance. The total cultivable area in India is approximately 300 million acres. It is, therefore, desirable that each cultivator donates, on an average, one-sixth of his land for distribution among the landless. Inspired by this idea, Vinoba said: "Though my own stomach is very small, that of *Daridra-Narayana*—God of the poor—is very big. So, if any one asks me what my demand is, I say 'five crore acres of 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."

And he added: "I am experiencing the presence of Gandhiji along with that of the Supreme. Bapu continuously showered his blessings on me. By nature, I have been a man of the forest and stranger to ways of civilization. I even dread to meet big people. But, nowadays, I enter everybody's house unhesitatingly as did Narad among the gods, demons and men. This is all the miracle of Bapu's blessings. I have a conviction that Bapu will be feeling satisfied with my work from whatever corner of the Universe he may be in." "This is real *yajna*—sacrifice. I, therefore, beseech every one to come forward and put his shoulder to the wheel. This will usher in an unprecedented revolution in our country. I can, even as I stand here, see it taking place before my eyes. People talk of the Russian revolution. America presents an example of a revolution of another type. But looking at both these countries, I find that neither type of revolution is in accordance with the genius of India. I firmly believe that India should be able to evolve, consistent with her ideals, a new type of revolution, based purely on love."

Vinoba reached Delhi after full two months on 13 November. During this journey, he had succeeded in collecting another 19,000 acres of land. As before, he stayed in a little thatched hut

at Rajghat. The President, the Prime Minister, Union Ministers and Members of the Planning Commission rushed to see him for consultations and advice. Besides, all kinds of people, rich and poor, high and low, V.I.P's as well as no-bodies, attended his evening prayers and listened to his views with respect and curiosity. On the very first day after prayers, Vinoba said: "I still feel that though his mortal remains are no more, Gandhiji's spirit is with me. Whenever I am about to make a mistake, he shows me the right way."

Introducing himself to the Delhi people as the proverbial Vaman, who had covered the whole earth in three steps, Vinoba said: "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. Thirdly, in the service of the poor they should sacrifice everything."

When a trader offered him a thousand rupees for the Bhoodan movement, Vinoba politely rejected the gift: "I realize that money, like God, is present everywhere, and it is not easy to eliminate it from life. But that is my aim. I never care to undertake an easy task. I grow enthusiastic only when the task is difficult. I have taken up the land question because it bristles with problems. Similarly, I have undertaken to free the worker from the shackles of money, fully aware of the difficulties involved."

He also explained his scheme of decentralization for the removal of unemployment: "My plan envisages decentralization which is a necessity. Even when God created the universe, He had to have a decentralized system. If He had not thought of decentralization, He would have deposited all intelligence in some bank at Delhi and, then, required cars and planes to go about distributing it... Villages can produce cloth wherever cotton is grown. But when khadi is mentioned all economists hesitate. I don't say that they are in the hands of capitalists, but the idea of not letting villages produce khadi is a capitalist idea. In this respect, both capitalists and communists agree. The two have similar ideas about production; they differ over the distribution of the produce."

Vinoba was also highly critical of Government's policy of encouraging money crops in place of food crops for earning

foreign exchange: "The Government appears to be crazy about the dollars all the time. It is duty-bound to make the country self-sufficient in foodgrains within a specified period. The Planning Commission should have abided by this decision, instead of raising new issues and, thus, weakening the will of the nation."

As regards population control, Vinoba made some trenchant observations: "Family planning is a question of altering the basic values of life. Artificial methods may control births, but do not change the mode of living. On the contrary, they erode moral values. If the Planning Commission cares a trifle for these values, I have nothing to say. . . In my view, it is not the weight of numbers but of sin that is a real burden on earth. If the offspring is devoid of physical and mental stamina, it is bound to be a dead weight on the country. While God has given one mouth to eat, he has provided two hands and ten fingers to feed it."

Members of the Planning Commission met him for three consecutive days. During these discussions, Vinoba placed his own ideas before them. The members promised to consider his suggestions and inform him about their final conclusions in writing.

Talking to Pressmen on 23 November Vinoba stated: "Although both the Planning Commission and I are primarily concerned with the good of the Indian people, there is a difference in our basic approach. I am concerned mainly with two matters. First, we should stick to our pledge of stopping imports of foodgrains. The Commission visualises the continuance of imports for an indefinite period. I join issue on this point. We must fix a definite date for achieving self-sufficiency and abide by it. Otherwise, the will-power of the nation shall die. Secondly, an essential postulate of planning should be to provide work for all. The Planning Commission accepts this objective, but refuses to shoulder the responsibility of implementing it. If we do not accept this responsibility, our planning would not be national but only partial. If they agree to provide work for all, our villages will have to be made self-sufficient. To this end, all the raw materials produced in the village should be converted into manufactured goods within the village itself."

In reply to a question Vinoba agreed that food could be im-

ported in exceptional circumstances. To go on importing food-grains as a normal routine would be entirely wrong.

Vinoba answered a number of questions on the Bhoodan movement. Small plots of land offered as gifts could be cultivated through co-operation, but on a purely optional level. Even in China, land was re-distributed in a fragmented manner in order to generate enthusiasm amongst actual cultivators. In due course, collective farming was introduced. In India, however, Vinoba would not like the Government to introduce an element of coercion. Whatever is done by the farmers should be in accordance with their own wishes in the matter. The State may encourage co-operative farming but on a voluntary basis. The basic objective of the Bhoodan campaign was to prevent the emergence of a bloody revolution by solving the land problem in a peaceful way. The real intention was to create the right atmosphere so that progressive land reforms could follow.

Answering a query whether he envisaged the assistance of suitable legislation for the success of Bhoodan, Vinoba replied: "There is a definite place for the enactment of laws in a democracy. But legislation should follow the creation of public opinion in favour of it. I have always been in favour of a consensus rather than a decision by bare majority."

One journalist expressed his doubts whether the vested interests would give up their selfishness for public welfare. Vinoba said: "We must be prepared to try new methods. Marxism was a new idea which had not been tried before. But Russia experimented with it. Similarly, India should be prepared to try the non-violent way of Sarvodaya and Bhoodan. In essence, every village should behave like a joint family and take care of one another's interests, irrespective of any distinctions. Given the necessary will and determination, I am sure this idea would prove to be a practical one."

After a pause, he added: "I regard Bhoodan a historical necessity. In the initial stages, its flow will be small like the Gangotri. But in course of time, it would grow into a big and holy stream."

23

Tour of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar

AFTER SPENDING eleven days in the national Capital, Vinoba entered Meerut district in Uttar Pradesh on 24 November. The main responsibility of U.P. tour was shouldered by Baba Raghavdas and Karanbhai of Gandhi Ashram. After some days, Vinoba met with an accident when a cycle collided against him. Although his foot was injured, he refused to slow down his *Padayatra* and adhered to the schedule even during cold weather. On 2 December, he was at Deoband, the centre of Islamic learning and culture. The *Ulemas* were greatly astonished at his command of Arabic and deep understanding of the *Quran.*

Since campaign for the first General Elections was on, it was suggested that Vinoba may halt at one place till the dust of elections settled down. Vinoba refused to consider this plea: "If the sun continues to follow its own course across the heavens and if the Ganga flows on despite different seasons, why should I stop my *Yajna* because of the elections?" And the experience gained during the period was quite hopeful. Vinoba's prayer meetings were well attended and he received gifts of land as usual. In every district, he asked the contending candidates and parties to *play* the game of election and not *fight* it. Despite differences in political ideology, there should be no personal bitterness.

In this tour of Uttar Pradesh, the daily average of land donations was around 311 acres, while the corresponding figures during trips to Telangana and Delhi were 240 and 300 respectively. At a village in Moradabad district, a blind man, Ram

Charan, helped by a family-boy, reached Vinoba's camp after midnight. All were asleep. Perchance, one worker in the camp got up and greeted the blind man who asked: "I am told that here is a *Baba* who accepts land-gifts for the poor. I want to donate my twelve bighas of land to him." The gift-deed was filled in by the worker and Ram Charan's finger-print taken on it. Thereafter, the donor walked back to his village six miles away. On learning of it the next morning, Vinoba remarked: "They say Ram Charan was blind. In fact, it is we who are blind. We should know that in Ram Charan's form, the *Charan* (feet) of *Ram* (God) himself had come to bless our movement."

At Ballia in Eastern U.P., even the Communists presented an address of welcome to Vinoba. The enthusiasm of the people in this region was exceptionally warm, but there were hardly any constructive workers there. Vinoba complained: "Communists thrive in this area simply because there are no good Sarvodaya workers. If social workers take to real service of the people, there would be no difficulty."

As Vinoba entered the ancient city of Varanasi, he was accorded a cordial welcome by the staff and students of Kashi Vidyapith. The renowned philosopher Dr. Bhagwan Das also received him at his residence *Seva Ashram*. On 12 April, Vinoba reached Sevapuri, 14 miles from Varanasi, now an important centre of Gandhi Ashram and the U.P. Branch of Gandhi Smarak Nidhi. The Fourth Sarvodaya Conference was held here from 13 April to 16 April. Srikrishnadas Jaju presided over it, and important personalities like Purushottamdas Tandon and Acharya Kripalani attended its sessions. Total land collected under *Bhoodan* by that time was a little over one lakh acres, obtained from about 5000 donors. Shankarrao Deo, Secretary of Sarva Seva Sangh, placed a resolution before the Conference calling upon workers to collect 25 lakhs of acres of land within two years as a first instalment of the final target of 50 million acres 'in order to establish a classless and exploitation-free society on the basis of truth and non-violence'. The resolution, adopted unanimously, proved to be a watershed in the progress of the Bhoodan movement. Specific quotas for various States and districts were fixed and the campaign gathered noticeable momentum. In one of his post-prayer speeches

Vinoba observed: "I appeal to you all to contribute your share in this *Praja-sooya Yajna*, and by making this mission successful establish non-violence as the rule of society in the economic sphere. I lay a claim of correctness for this work for three reasons. It is in tune with the cultural traditions of India; it contains in it the seed of economic and social revolution, and it can help in the establishment of peace in the world."

He continued: "If Gandhiji were alive today, I would never have appeared before the public as I do today, but would have concentrated all my attention on village sanitation. Circumstances have compelled me to come out and be audacious enough to initiate this great *Yajna*. Whether it is impertinence or humility, I dedicate it to God and request all of you to co-operate with me."

On the birth anniversary of Lord Buddha, Vinoba reached Lucknow, the capital town of Uttar Pradesh: "The work I am made to do is the continuation of the *Dharma Chakra Pravartana*—revolving the Wheel of Dharma, which the Buddha had started. 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."

On 23 May, Vinoba entered Hamirpur district and camped at Italia village. This proved to be a red letter day in the annals of Bhoodan. The residents of Mangroth, a village two miles away from the camp, presented Vinoba with 101 acres of land at the breakfast hour. Vinoba accepted the gift and repeated—"all land belongs to God". With this message in their hearts, the residents of Mangroth returned home to consider Vinoba's appeal. Happily, their Zamindar, Diwan Shatrughna Singh, was a devoted constructive worker. His wife, affectionately called 'Rani Saheb', was also a dedicated soul. Both had been touring the whole district on foot, preaching the philosophy of Sarvodaya and organizing the production and sale of khadi in the villages.

In a public meeting at Mangroth, the Diwan announced his decision to donate whole of his land to Bhoodan. The villagers also followed his example and with the exception of one or two families, all of them agreed to join the movement. Mangroth, thus, earned the distinction of being the first Gramdan village

in the whole country. Almost all the land-holders surrendered their individual proprietary rights in favour of the village community. When this decision was conveyed to Vinoba, he was naturally delighted, and agreed to send one or two experienced Sarvodaya workers, including Baba Raghavdas, to help the people of Mangroth in reconstructing the village along Sarvodaya lines.

The total number of families in Mangroth village was only 107, with a population of about 585. Sixty-five of the families possessed land and the rest were landless. After the declaration of Gramdan, the land belonged to the whole village and all the families decided to work with their hands and jointly enjoy the fruits of cultivation. The planning of crops was to be decided by the Village Panchayat in order to achieve self-sufficiency in foodgrains and vegetables. Cash crops were to be restricted in favour of food crops. It was decided to produce khadi in the village itself for supplying cloth to the community. A co-operative store was to be established for meeting the consumer needs, without the need for any middle-men. Economic leakages in the form of litigation and drinking of liquor were to be plugged. Local cottage and village industries, including leather work, were to be revived for providing fuller employment to the population. The produce of Mangroth was to be marketed through a co-operative society, thereby eliminating exploitation and ensuring the best possible returns. A maternity home and hospital was opened on behalf of the Kasturba Trust. It was decided to organize a *Bhajan-Kirtan Mandali* for providing healthy entertainment. The Village Panchayat resolved to take decisions through a consensus, avoiding the imposition of majority rule. It was to organize its own development fund to get out of the clutches of local moneylenders.

In subsequent years, Mangroth was able to register noticeable progress in various directions, chiefly owing to the progressive and enlightened leadership of Diwan Shatrughna Singh. It cannot, of course, be claimed that all the problems have been solved and Mangroth has been turned into a heaven. In any event, this *Gramdani* village has been able to demonstrate the efficacy of a non-violent socio-economic revolution in the countryside. The light that was first kindled in Mangroth

has now spread in many villages throughout the country and the total number of villages donated to Gramdan now totals up to a lakh and sixty thousand.

On 9 September 1952, news was received about the sad demise of Kishorelal Mashruwala at Wardha. He had been editing the *Harijan* Weeklies with great ability and devotion after the passing away of Gandhiji. Through the columns of the *Harijan,* he had been lending whole-hearted support to the Bhoodan movement. Vinoba was, therefore, deeply grieved. Two days later, 11 September, was his own 58th birthday. Vinoba announced that day his resolve not to go back to Paramdham Ashram at Pavnar till the land problem of India was solved satisfactorily through the non-violent process. In his post-prayer speech, he declared: "There can be no rest for me till *Ram's* work is done".

During his tour of Uttar Pradesh, Vinoba was able to cover all the districts except Almora. He camped at 257 villages, walked 3750 miles and obtained 2,95,028 acres from more than 12,000 donors. The total land collections in the country by that time had risen to 4 lakh acres.

On 14 September, Vinoba concluded the tour of U.P., crossed the Karamnasa river bridge and entered the State of Bihar. Bidding good-bye to U.P. friends Vinoba said: "You have been able to collect about 3 lakh acres of land, even though the atmosphere was not favourable due to elections. For this work you have left no nerve unstrained. The blessings of the Almighty are with you."

Talking to the workers in Bihar on the very first day, he desired that, instead of collecting only a few lakh acres for Bhoodan, a serious effort should be made to solve the land problem in the State on a lasting basis. According to his calculations, 5 million acres would require to be collected for the purpose. Time was running out and it was necessary to redistribute the land to the landless within a specified period: "It is evident that somewhere we must concentrate and try for the full solution of the problem. And I feel that Bihar should be an ideal place for this experiment. It is neither a very big

province nor a small one. Besides, it is the place from where the Buddha preached his message of *Ahimsa* to the world. With these considerations in my mind I have decided to make Bihar a test-case for proving the efficacy of Bhoodan as the weapon for working out a socio-economic revolution."

To help workers take up this challenge, Vinoba assured them he would spend as many days in Bihar as was necessary. Accordingly, he toured the State from 14 September 1952 to 31 December 1954.

It was at Patna on 24 October that Vinoba placed for the first time before the people his scheme of Sampattidan: "As the work of *Bhoodan* progressed it became increasingly clear that the idea behind the movement could not be fulfilled unless we went further and asked for a portion of wealth and property. Hence, I made up my mind that I must also ask for a share of wealth and property from the people. I have now done it and placed my demand at one-sixth of it; but it is upto the people to decide what they can and would give me."

On the very next day, the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee passed a resolution in Patna, fully supporting the *Bhoodan* movement and deciding to collect four lakh acres of land by 28 February 1953. The PCC authorized the Executive Committee to make the necessary arrangements for implementing this resolution. It was for the first time that any State unit of the Congress had openly supported the Bhoodan movement and resolved to actively participate in it.

About a week later, Vinoba entered Gaya district and declared that one lakh acres should be collected within that district alone. On 3 November, he observed at a post-prayer meeting: "Let me tell you that I am following in the footprints of the Buddha. The essence of the Buddha's teaching is to deliver the unhappy amongst us from their misery, to render succour to those who lived uncared for as the castaways of society. This is also the teaching of the *Vedas* and the saints. We have now to practise this teaching, and hence I have taken up the land problem. I invite you all to co-operate with me and carry this task to a successful conclusion."

To impart a sense of seriousness in this resolve, Vinoba asked his secretary, Damodardas, to make Gaya his headquarters,

and a district Bhoodan Committee was constituted with Gauri Shankar Saran Singh (Gauribabu) as its chairman.

About a month later, Vinoba was down with malaria at Chandil in Manbhum district. He refused to take any medicine, and his condition after some days grew critical. The Chief Minister, Sribabu, rushed to Chandil to persuade Vinoba take quinine at least in small doses. I was also asked by Dr. Rajendra Prasad and Pandit Nehru to proceed to Chandil and meet Vinoba in this connection. On reaching Chandil, I found Vinoba extremely weak. His body had turned almost black owing to severe attacks of malignant malaria; he was virtually in the jaws of death. It was with very great difficulty that Vinoba, ultimately, agreed to take a capsule of quinine which produced immediate results. Since his body was not used to taking medicines, even one doze was enough to ward off malaria, and his condition began to improve. However, the doctors advised Vinoba to stay in Chandil itself for some months to recoup his health fully before resuming his *Padayatra.*

It was, accordingly, decided to hold the fifth Annual Sarvodaya Conference at Chandil on 7, 8 and 9 March. It was attended by President Rajendra Prasad, R. R. Diwakar, Kakasaheb Kalelkar, Jayaprakash Narayan, J. C. Kumarappa, Shankarrao Deo, Dhirendra Mazumdar and Nabakrushna Chaudhary, the then Chief Minister of Orissa. In his inaugural address, Vinoba laid great stress on the need for building up the self-reliant power of the masses: "We should promote *Jana-Shakti* —the strength 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, the two are qualitatively different. We do not aim merely at doing acts of kindness, but at creating a Kingdom of Compassion. We do not aim merely at well-meaning charity of ritualistic constructive work. It is ineffective in dispelling the forces of darkness. I, therefore, want to devote myself to the creation of *Jana-Shakti,* the forging of sanctions of enlightened public opinion."

The highlight of the Chandil Sammelan was the declaration

by Jayaprakash Narayan that he would devote the rest of his life to Bhoodan work: "Despair had seized our hearts after the attainment of Independence. *Ahimsa* was being treated as a negative creed. Vinoba has now dispelled these illusions. As the light of *Bhoodan Yajna* spreads out, these clouds of doubt and darkness scatter away... The task before us all is to sustain the new outlook by concrete work and to make it a reality."

On 12 March 1953, Vinoba started on his tour of Bihar once again. After three months, Vinoba added a new programme, Shramdan—contribution of manual labour. He himself started breaking some dry land every day for fifteen minutes. This duration was raised by one minute every day, until he gave an hour for Shramdan daily. Village people of all categories joined him in large numbers in this noble programme.

On 18 September, Vinoba encamped at Baidyanathadham, which is considered to be an important place of pilgrimage in the Santhal Parganas district. He was requested by the head priest of the temple to visit the holy shrine. He accepted the invitation on the stipulation that Harijans in his party should be allowed to accompany him. This condition was accepted by the head priest, without argument. Accordingly, Vinoba and his colleagues went to the temple on the evening of 19 September. He had hardly gone a few steps within the temple when the orthodox priests of the temple pounced on him and his party with lathis amid cries of *'Dharma ki jai ho'*—long live religion. In the dim light of kerosene lanterns nothing was clearly visible. Vinoba, therefore, climbed a small mound and tried to pacify the people. Members of the party cordoned off Vinoba, but the pandemonium continued for some more time. Two or three members of the party were seriously injured, but Vinoba escaped, though with a fairly severe blow on his right ear. This ear had been giving him some trouble even earlier, but this 'gift' from the Baidyanathadham temple intensified its weakness which has persisted and even worsened over the years.

Next day, Vinoba issued a statement to the press: "I should like to say at the outset that those who indulged in this hooliganism did so out of ignorance. That being so, I have no desire to get them punished. I am glad to find that all those who were

with me remained calm throughout. My companions who were badly beaten up told me that they had no anger in their hearts for their assailants. When we were assaulted, I recalled to my mind how Gandhiji was also subjected to a similar assault at this very place of pilgrimage."

"I have already said that 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 touchstone of reason."

As the General Secretary of the Congress, I also issued a strong statement condemning this dastardly attack on Acharya Vinoba and his party by the *pandas* of the Baidyanathadham temple. I termed it as 'an insult to the public life of India'. "This act on the part of the *pandas* was not only a criminal offence but also a flagrant violation of the provisions of the Constitution." The Bihar Government did launch a prosecution against the *pandas,* although I am not sure whether the temple has yet been thrown open legally to the Harijans.

After passing through Purnea, Saharsa, Darbhanga, and Muzaffarpur districts, Vinoba reached Patna on 10 January 1954. He attended a meeting of prominent zamindars of Bihar who presented him five lakh acres. After further discussions with Bihar Sarvodaya workers, a quota of 32 lakh acres was fixed for collection. Out of this quota, three lakh acres were allotted to the district of Gaya where concentrated work was under way.

The sixth Annual Sarvodaya Sammelan was held on 18, 19 and 20 April at Bodh Gaya. On my suggestion, Vinoba had written a letter to Pandit Nehru inviting him to attend this conference. Although it was very difficult for Nehru to make necessary adjustments in his programme, he flew directly from Chidambram in the South to Gaya airport on 18 April, in hot summer. I received him and Dr. Radhakrishnan, the then Vice-President, at the airport on behalf of the Sarvodaya Samaj. Pandit Nehru attended the conference the same evening and also briefly addressed it. After the Sammelan, he had a meeting with Vinoba for about an hour and discussed various subjects

of common interest. I was present at this exclusive meeting throughout. Nehru later joined the community dinner along with Vinoba and, then, left for Gaya to fly back to Delhi the next morning.

It may be mentioned here that the target fixed at the Sevapuri Conference two years earlier for the collection of 25 lakh acres had been achieved by the end of March 1954, on the eve of the Bodh Gaya Sammelan. This naturally caused great satisfaction amongst constructive workers assembled there. It was also at this Conference that Jayaprakash Narayan announced his Jeevandan—dedication of life—for the Bhoodan mission, and solemnly resolved to retire from active party politics to devote his whole time to constructive work. Vinoba was deeply touched by this offer of Jayaprakash and wrote him a letter the same day: "In response to your call for *life-dedication* I offer my humble life for the attainment of a non-violent revolution based on *Bhoodan Yajna* and sustained by village industries." Ashadevi, who presided over the Conference, read out the contents of the letters of both Jayaprakash and Vinoba. The whole gathering was thrilled to the core. In pin-drop silence, worker after worker, including Ashadevi and Dhirendra Majumdar, stood up and announced their own Jeevandan to this sublime cause. The Bodh Gaya Sammelan in this sense proved to be an important milestone on the road to a Sarvodaya order of society. More than 500 men and women dedicated themselves to Bhoodan on the spot. This was, unmistakably, a demonstration of India's faith in a non-violent revolution for the attainment of social and economic justice.

On this occasion, Vinoba also thought of establishing an Ashram at Bodh Gaya for conducting research on synthesis between the Hindu philosophy of the *Upanishads* and the ideology of the Buddha. Happily, a piece of land, about five *bighas,* was donated for this purpose by the head of the Shankar Math in Bodh Gaya, in the vicinity of the sacred Mahabodhi tree. This new institution was named *Samanvaya Ashram* and it has now grown into a fairly big centre, with a good library and a band of half a dozen workers. A meeting of top-ranking workers of the Sarva Seva Sangh and the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi was held at this very Ashram in October 1969, in the

presence of Vinoba, to chalk out a definite plan of action for halting the growing menace of violence in the country. I had the privilege of participating in these discussions. The follow-up action, however, appears to be rather casual and half-hearted.

Vinoba continued his trek during the rainy season also. He often walked in knee-deep water, especially in the districts of Saharsa and Darbhanga which had been affected by serious floods that year. One day, a fairly prosperous zamindar of Darbhanga district, overwhelmed by the calamity, met Vinoba and queried: "Can't you wait for some time in asking for Bhoodan, till the floods are over?" "I am afraid, I can't; I must not," asserted Vinoba. "The floods positively prove that all land belongs to God. So I want entire villages now. It is only when the village as a whole owns the land in place of individuals that right help can be provided to the right man... Let the village people become one family in this hour of crisis."

During his Bihar tour, Vinoba visited about 5000 villages and came in direct contact with more than 5 million people who had listened to his post-prayer speeches. A few incidents will, surely, interest the reader.

In a village in the Sitamarhi sub-division of Muzaffarpur district, a worker placed before Vinoba a donation of five acres with some hesitation. The donor owned some hundred acres. Vinoba scanned the document, and, then paused for a while. He asked for a pen, and on the back of the *dan-patra*, he wrote: "This donation falls far short of the land in possession of the owner. It is, therefore, refused."

Next day, two brothers approached Vinoba with their gifts. On knowing that they lived separately, Vinoba asked them why they did not live as a joint family. The two brothers blushed and looked at each other. Vinoba interjected: "I want both of you to become one; then only I would accept your land gifts." After some conversation both the brothers agreed to donate a joint quota of one-sixth of their total holdings.

A Muslim noble saw Vinoba one morning. He had already donated 5,500 acres of land. He gave another 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," said the Muslim friend politely. "But in Muslim families, women also have their rights, 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 the Muslim noble signed the *danpatra* accordingly. He added: "This mission of yours is in keeping with Islam which enjoins such gifts as a duty. Your demand is a righteous one."

Although the quota of 32 lakh acres had not been fulfilled during the Bihar tour, both the Chief Minister and the Pradesh Congress Committee assured Vinoba that the favourable atmosphere produced as a result of his tour would be fully utilized for achieving the final target as early as feasible. Twenty-seven months spent by Vinoba in Bihar did make a visible dent on the land problem in the State and made it possible for the Government to introduce more progressive land reforms without much resistance from the people.

24

In Bengal and Orissa

On his way to Orissa from Bihar, Vinoba walked through the districts of Bankura and Midnapore of West Bengal. This was his first visit to this area. On the very first day, Vinoba said: "Of all parts of India, the British first occupied Bengal. In other countries alien domination has been followed either by passive submission of the people or by an armed revolt. But here they did neither. They took to purification of thought and religion. Raja Ram Mohan Roy taught us that Swaraj would follow religious and social reform."

During his twenty-five day sojourn in Bengal, Vinoba laid considerable stress on the combination of *bhakti*—devotion—with *karmayoga* of non-violence: "Devotion without action is bound to lead to inertia and violent activities which are foreign to our genius... I share the profound respect for Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. I am not even worthy of the dust of his sacred feet. The current of *bhakti* started by him was holy like the sacred Ganga. But it is one thing to be a current of Ganga and quite another to be the great ocean itself."

Fortunately, Vinoba was able to meet leading men of letters, teachers, religious devotees and public workers in Bengal. Charu Chandra Bhandari, who was once a Congress Minister in the State, threw himself heart and soul into the Bhoodan movement. Ashadevi used to interpret Vinoba's Hindi speeches into chaste Bengali. The West Bengal Congress Committee also resolved to devote six months to Bhoodan work and decided to appoint one special secretary in every district for this work.

Vinoba had entered Bengal on 1 January 1955. A few days

later, he received an invitation from U. N. Dhebar, the then President of the Indian National Congress, to attend the 69th annual session at Avadi, near Madras, in the second week of January. Vinoba sent the following reply in his own hand:*

Midnapur,
16 January 1955

Shri Dhebarbhai,

I have received your invitation to attend the Congress session. I am, however, unable to attend it for obvious reasons.

Kindly convey my *pranams* to all the delegates and tell them on my behalf that a person is constantly moving about in the hope that all of them will run to his succour some day or other, and he deems himself entitled to receive their help.

Vinoba's greetings

When I showed Vinoba's letter to Pandit Nehru, he was deeply moved. He asked me to read out the original Hindi letter to the delegates assembled in the open session. When I did so, I could see that the hearts of many a delegate was touched to the quick. The Avadi session also adopted a resolution on Bhoodan and Sampattidan: "The Congress, at its Hyderabad Session, had warmly welcomed the Bhoodan movement started by Acharya Vinoba Bhave. During the last two years, the movement has been able to achieve substantial results by collecting about 36 lakh acres of land and steps are now being taken to redistribute it as expeditiously as possible.

"The Bhoodan and Sampattidan movement, apart from tackling certain economic problems, is essentially a moral movement for bringing about a socio-economic revolution voluntarily and through peaceful means. The Congress places on record its deep sense of appreciation of the great work done by Acharya Vinoba and appeals to all Congressmen to give their fullest co-operation to this movement."

It will not be out of place to mention here that the All-India Congress Committee (AICC) had evinced considerable interest in the Bhoodan movement from its very commencement. It was

* Fascimile of the letter appears on pp. xv-xvi.

towards the end of March 1953 that I, as the Congress General Secretary, had convened a meeting of the Members of Parliament belonging to different political parties at the Constitution Club in New Delhi to mobilize their support to the Bhoodan campaign. Both Pandit Nehru and Dr. Radhakrishnan were kind enough to address the meeting and lend their open support to Vinoba's efforts.

I also issued several circulars from the AICC office to all the Pradesh Congress Committees, asking them 'to do their best for the success of the *Bhoodan Yajna*': "At a time when the forces of hatred and violence are once again daring to raise their head in India, Vinobaji has rendered great service to this country and the world by showing the non-violent and peaceful way of achieving far-reaching land reforms through a change of hearts rather than the breaking of heads."

Each Pradesh Congress Committee had been instructed to appoint a special Bhoodan Department, consisting of its office-bearers as well as important Sarvodaya workers of the area. Several PCC's including those of Bihar, Bengal and Orissa, had shown commendable interest in this work. They, however, suffered from obvious limitations. As Vinoba had himself observed, it was not possible for leading Congressmen to appeal to others for land donations till they were able to set a good example themselves. Even so, it must be conceded that without the solid support of the Congress, the Bhoodan movement would not have made much headway in the country.

Despite indifferent health and a strenuous programme in West Bengal, Vinoba entered Cuttack district on 22 February. His first camp was fixed at Bari, the centre of constructive work established by Gopabandhu Chowdhury and his able and devoted wife Ramadevi. Four days later, Vinoba encamped at Manpur which proved to be the second Gramdan village in India, the first being Mangroth. All the 575 acres in the village were donated to Bhoodan, and redistributed among the people on the Buddha Jayanti day. Of the total land, 37 acres had been reserved for co-operative farming, to be managed by the local Sarvodaya Mandal.

Vinoba reached Jagannath Puri on 21 March, and stayed near the open beach. In the morning, he went to the famous temple for *darshan,* but since his party included a lady from France, the priests of the temple refused entry to Vinoba. With folded hands he walked back, recalling that a similar treatment had been meted out to Guru Nanak four centuries ago: "These days every nation and every religion is going to be put on its trial. If we enclose ourselves within our own four walls, our progress would be blocked and the expanding liberalism which has been the characteristic of Hindu religion would come to an end. Our temples and books should be open to all aspirants. Our heart should be free and give room to all. Let us not turn our temples into prison houses."

The seventh annual session of Sarvodaya Samaj was also held at Puri from 15 March. It was presided over by the veteran Sarvodaya worker of Gujarat, Ravishankar Maharaj. Dhebarbhai and myself participated in the deliberations on behalf of the Indian National Congress. In the course of his inspiring address, Vinoba underlined the crucial role of *Bhoodan* and *Gramdan* movements in establishing world peace: "Wherever you go for Bhoodan, tell them that every donation is conducive to world peace. If such a material and inert particle as the atom can be a source of tremendous energy, what a mighty tower of energy can be such a vital, life-containing and knowledge-bearing object as man."

Sarvodaya workers were asked to hold public meetings all over the country on 18 April that year, to mark the fourth anniversary of the birth of Bhoodan. Members of the Sevagram community decided to close the Ashram for two years and devote their whole time to Bhoodan and Gramdan in different areas. Ravishankar Maharaj and Baba Raghavdas also announced their decision to spend a couple of years for *Padayatras* in Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh respectively.

I was particularly anxious to invite Vinoba for attending a meeting of the AICC on a suitable occasion. I, therefore, suggested to Dhebarbhai and Pandit Nehru that the next session be held somewhere in Orissa during May 1955, to enable Vinoba to attend it and address the delegates. This was readily agreed to and, on the recommendation of the Orissa PCC, the

AICC meeting was fixed at Berhampur in Ganjam district. Since Vinoba was touring Orissa at that time, it was easy for him to accept our invitation to attend the Congress Working Committee meetings and also address the delegates: "It is generally accepted that the present distribution of land in our country is unjust. In my opinion, land must be free like air, water and sunlight. There should be no private ownership in land brings in its wake many other problems which I have many Asian countries. If we can solve it in a peaceful manner, our non-violent strength would grow. The redistribution of land brings in its wake many other problems which I have been trying to solve. I am more concerned with the non-violent technique that comes into play in this movement and I do not want it to slip through my fingers. If this method can re-create faith in *Ahimsa*, it will exercise great influence on the world."

Vinoba also drew pointed attention to the serious situation created by evictions in different States: "We have made it a point in our movement to approach landlords, explain to them the wrong they are doing, ask for land-gifts from them, and rehabilitate the evicted peasants. If the landlords do not respond, we will have to ask the peasants to stick on to their land, whatever be the consequences."

Jawaharlal Nehru and other Congress leaders heard Vinoba's speech with rapt attention. The Orissa PCC decided to collect 20 lakh acres of land for *Bhoodan*, and asked all congressmen to participate in the movement with enthusiasm.

The next day, Pandit Nehru had a separate meeting with Vinoba at his camp. He enquired of Vinoba about the progress of Bhoodan movement and thought that it would greatly help in creating the necessary climate for introducing progressive land reforms in different States. The press, unfortunately, reported the next morning that talks between Nehru and Vinoba had failed to bear any fruit. Since these reports were likely to create a wrong impression about the Bhoodan movement, I immediately issued a contradiction stating that these mutual discussions had proved 'very helpful in clarifying a number of points and resulted in better appreciation of each other's points of view'. I made it clear that Bhoodan and land reform measures undertaken by State Governments were comple-

mentary, and did not run at cross purposes.

After Ganjam, Vinoba entered Koraput district which is now known all over the country as 'the cradle of Gramdan revolution'. On the first day, he was offered 100 Gramdans in the district which was mainly inhabited by poor and illiterate tribal people. Vishwanath Patnaik, a young constructive worker under Gopababu, plunged himself heart and soul into this work and Annasaheb Sahasrabuddhe was charged with the responsibility of giving a practical shape to the *Gram Swaraj* idea in Koraput, after enlisting the full co-operation of the local people. By 11 September, Vinoba's sixtieth birthday, the number of Gramdans in Koraput rose to 469. A brief function was held at Gunpur village to mark this auspicious occasion.

Explaining the significance of Gramdan, Vinoba enumerated seven basic objectives:

(*i*) Elimination of poverty;
(*ii*) Awakening the feelings of affection and love in the hearts of the land-owners, thus improving the moral atmosphere in the country;
(*iii*) Strengthening the society by forging bonds of mutual help and fellow-feeling, thus avoiding what is as a rule witnessed elsewhere in the form of class hatred between the big land-holders on one side and the uprooted landless on the other;
(*iv*) Revival and furtherance of Indian culture based on our unique philosophy of *Yajna, Dana* and *Tapa,* thus strengthening the faith of man in true religion;
(*v*) Building a new social order on the basis of voluntary bodily labour, non-possession, co-operation and self-reliance;
(*vi*) Giving an opportunity to all the political parties in the country to come together on a common platform and work unitedly, thus rooting out bitterness and self-aggrandisement; and
(*vii*) Helping world peace.

Answering a question about the years that may be taken to achieve the target, Vinoba replied: "People ask me that if it

took three years to obtain four million acres, how can fifty million be collected by the end of 1957? This can be accomplished in only one day. Should the whole country make a resolve and fix a date, all land in all the villages can be obtained and distributed on that very day."

Vinoba stayed in Koraput district for about four months. His presence was instrumental in galvanizing Gramdan work in the area. When Vinoba completed his Orissa tour on 30 September 1955, the total number of Gramdans in Koraput stood at 812, and the total Bhoodan lands received were of the order of 2,57,300 acres. In a message to the people of Orissa, Vinoba stated: "My stay in Orissa has provided me a lot of food for thought which has raised my inner strength. I can call it a pilgrimage of strength. India can acquire the strength to solve world problems on this basis. I trust that if we catch hold of this great key, we shall be able to tackle all of them. Every farmer requires a well to irrigate his field. When he is busy digging the well, it does not follow that he has grown careless about his field. In fact, he gives his time to the well for the sake of the field. Likewise, Gramdan is that well which will enable the constructive field of peaceful revolution to flourish and prosper."

25

A 'Mobile University'

BEFORE PROCEEDING further with the story of Bhoodan, I should like to mention a variety of subjects on which I talked to Vinoba several times during his *Padayatra*. It is generally believed that Vinoba is predominantly a Bhoodan leader and does not evince much interest in other subjects. The fact of the matter is that Vinoba's personality is inconceivably rich and versatile and there is hardly any topic on earth which does not interest him. He keeps himself abreast of current events and his personal assistants, Bal and Jayadeva, carry a transistor with them to convey to him the latest news, national as well as international. Vinoba also scans daily newspapers with a view to keeping himself uptodate in respect of men and matters. His opinions are, however, not conditioned by newspaper editorials or articles. Vinoba brings to bear on all subjects a remarkable originality and freshness of his own. This is evident from the expression of his views on diverse topics in the course of his discussions with me from time to time.

I had the opportunity of meeting Vinoba several times during his sojourn in U.P., Bihar and later Orissa. I also spent a full week with him in Telangana when he re-visited that region, after a lapse of four years, in December 1955. Before meeting him, I would jot down various points for discussion. He talked on these points mostly during the morning walks, from one camp to another. The talks continued during the day, at intervals. Much depended on his mood and other engagements. He, however, talked to me on various matters—social, economic, educational and political, without mental reservations. Vinoba

was always frank and forthright even though he knew that I would convey the gist of my talks with him to Pandit Nehru on my return to Delhi.

Vinoba used to get up early in the morning at 2.30. After his routine duties, he sat down for spinning. While plying the spinning wheel he did most of his thinking for the day. At 3.30 a.m. members of his party would assemble for prayers which lasted half an hour. Then, the person in-charge of the tour announced the next camp and the approximate distance. At the stroke of five, Vinoba emerged from his temporary camp-hut and commenced the morning walk briskly. One worker would walk about fifty feet ahead of him with a hurricane lantern in his hand to lead the way. For some minutes, Vinoba recited Sanskrit verses and was, then, ready for discussions. Those days, he generally walked about eight miles in three hours. On the way, he halted for fifteen minutes to take his morning feed of curds at six-thirty. By the way, Vinoba has been suffering from duodenal ulcer for a number of years, and lives mostly on curds, sometimes mixed with honey.

During morning walks, I discussed with Vinoba a variety of subjects, including the Five-Year Plans, Bhoodan and land reforms, Basic education, family planning, village industries, casteism and communalism, and the reorganization of States. We also touched upon topics like the rationale of copyright, methods of augmenting small savings, syllabus for training Congress workers, code for policemen specially at the time of firing, and tests to be prescribed for entry into Government services. Vinoba's left ear is weak, and so one has to walk always on his right. To move on foot with Vinoba is to participate in the learned atmosphere of a 'Mobile University'.

As Vinoba walked through the villages, the people would stand on both sides of the road with perfect discipline, singing hymns and songs and reciting Vedic *mantras*. Vinoba did not like his feet being touched; nor did he want people to waste their and his time in putting garlands round his neck. He would receive flowers and garlands in his hands and move on. Sometimes, he humorously asked the people to garland themselves on his behalf. *Bhajan* and *Kirtan* troupes followed him for some time, singing melodious songs to the accompaniment of

musical instruments. Simple but artistic arches of green leaves and colourful flowers were erected to welcome him with warmth and respect.

Acharya Vinoba never missed an opportunity to drive home a new idea into the minds of people. At one camp, the people came forward to greet him with *deepaks*—indigenous lamps with wicks. "Do you know why the lamp has four or five wicks arranged in an artistic pattern?" asked Vinoba. He paused for a while and, then, answered the query himself: "In India, the Panchayats are regarded as the representatives of God himself. This could be true only if the *Panchas* work in a team spirit." Vinoba gave a new slogan to the villagers: *"Ek bano, Nek bano"*—Be united, be good!

As Vinoba reached a village after his morning *padayatra,* he was presented a guard of honour by local students in Scout uniform, with staves in their hands. He asked: "What is the use of these staves?" "Our teacher has asked us to keep them," was their routine answer. Vinoba would not accept that unintelligent reply: "You should ask your teacher about the utility of the staff. During foreign rule, people used to keep these sticks to threaten and beat others. But now they serve no purpose in raising the living standards of the people. Is it not better to keep brooms in place of staves?" The boys nodded assent. Vinoba utilized the opportunity to teach villagers a lesson in sanitation and point out the futility of violence in a free and democratic country.

This is how Vinoba moved on from village to village imparting education to the people in a natural and practical manner. This 'Mobile University' had also been attracting a number of foreign students, particularly from America, the United Kingdom, France and Japan. Some persons from the Soviet Union also met Vinoba to collect information about different aspects of the Bhoodan movement. These foreign visitors were greatly attracted to this unique way of solving difficult economic problems through love and persuasion in place of class-conflict and coercion.

During my talks, I found Vinoba much worried about civil

disorder that had broken out in some parts of India in the wake of the Reorganization of States. He confessed that these outbursts of violence clearly indicated that his mission of Bhoodan had proved to be a failure. Although he had succeeded in collecting a large quantity of land in donations it had not been possible for him to generate a genuine spirit of non-violence in the country. When lakhs of donors, big and small, had given away substantial portions of their land in *Bhoodan Yajna,* why should people break one another's heads in deciding whether a city or a taluka should remain in one State or merge with a neighbouring State? "Bhoodan movement is essentially an experiment in the non-violent way of bringing about radical reforms. If there are outbreaks of violence despite Bhoodan, my efforts have failed to that extent."

Vinoba is not one of those who think that the reorganization of States on a linguistic basis has been a grievous mistake. On the contrary, he is of the definite view that the States in India should be reorganized mainly on the basis of language because the people of a particular region have every right to carry on their administration in their own language and their children also should have the opportunity of receiving their education through the mother tongue. The difficulty arises only when people belonging to one language group develop a sense of hostility and ill-will towards another language group. In Vinoba's view, such an attitude of hostility is perverse and deplorable. This should not, however, mean abandoning the formation of linguistic States altogether. We should educate the people to view such matters in the right perspective. Language should be a cementing force and not a cause for disunity.

We had also detailed talks on Basic education. Vinoba thought that the Bhoodan movement could be an important basic activity for correlating various subjects of study to the physical and social environment of the area. Bhoodan touches the problem of land, food, and village industries and promotes new values in life. It can serve as a good medium of education for children both in villages and cities.

Vinoba was of the definite view that University degrees should not be regarded as essential for recruitment to Government services. The State should hold admission tests for various types of services and throw open such examinations to all candidates who wish to compete for them. Such a system would give a fair chance to the students of Basic education by dint of merit and practical experience.

Regarding the place of English and other foreign languages in the system of Basic education, Vinoba was of the opinion that from the age of six to fourteen, the pupils should be imparted full knowledge of their mother tongue, and English should be taught only at the post-basic stage. Striking a personal note, he explained that he had been able to pick up a working knowledge of all the Indian languages mainly because he had mastered his own mother tongue, Marathi, during boyhood: "Now that I know Marathi and its grammar and idiom well, learning other languages is a child's play to me."

Vinoba made a creative suggestion. To facilitate the study of different Indian languages, the Government should recognize both regional and Devanagari scripts and publish suitable textbooks in both the scripts. This will encourage children to learn their mother tongue in the Devanagari script, specially when they have to learn Hindi as the national language. Gradually, there would be a tendency to use the Nagari script for all Indian languages. This will be a desirable trend from the national point of view; it would make for enormous saving of expenditure in printing the same book in a dozen scripts. Vinoba suggested that a beginning in this direction may be made with the Kannada language which is very near to Hindi in its diction. The practice of using Nagari script for regional languages shall also be very useful in the Adivasi areas.

Answering the criticism that Basic education was costlier than traditional elementary education, Vinoba said: "Crafts should not be introduced in Basic schools in an artificial manner. A craft which does not exist in a village should not find a place in the Basic school of that village. Every attempt should be made to utilize the local crafts for educational purposes." He also pointed out that under the Five-Year Plans the Government will be spending several hundred crores of rupees on the

development of small-scale, village and cottage industries. It is necessary to link up this industrial development to the expansion of Basic schools in cities and villages. There should be no duplication of effort and every attempt should be made to utilize the production-cum-training centres for village and cottage industries as the centres of creative activity for Basic schools. Buildings for Basic institutions should be simple and artistic and local materials should be used to reduce the cost. Land donated to the Basic schools should be used by teachers and students for raising foodgrains, fruits and vegetables to be consumed by the school community itself. If basic institutions are organized in this manner, Vinoba felt sure that they would not only impart better education to children but also be cheaper than ordinary schools.

Clarifying his approach towards village and cottage industries, Vinoba remarked: "Far from being a faddist, I claim to be a progressive scientist. It is wrong to think that I disfavour the use of modern science for improving the techniques of village industries. In fact, I think that modern science is not progressive enough. For example, I do not see why aeroplanes should not run faster. I prefer to walk on foot to maintain living contacts with the people and not talk in the air. If, for some urgent work, I have to fly, I should like to use an aeroplane which could take me to Delhi or London or New York within minutes."

While touring Bihar during floods, Vinoba was pained to find that when agricultural operations failed owing to excessive rains and floods, the people in villages were forced to sit idle with folded hands. These people even in great economic and physical distress did not like to live on doles and gratuitous relief. They always asked for productive and remunerative work. However, the fact remains that no work is available to them except farming. When agriculture fails, the whole life of the village fails. To Vinoba, this is a great tragedy of our national economy.

Vinoba is not against the use of even electric power for small machines like the spinning wheel: "We can, surely, use elec-

tricity wherever necessary for increasing our output. The use of electric power should not, however, lead to economic exploitation. This could be avoided if electricity is allowed to be used for cottage industries only if they are organized on a co-operative basis." Vinoba added: "I will not mind using even atomic energy for the Ambar Charkha. My only stipulation is that the use of such energy should not lead to unemployment and economic exploitation of man by man."

It is admitted on all hands that basic or mother industries such as Iron, Steel, Coal, heavy machinery and big power projects, are essential for national development. Even Gandhiji was not against them. He only desired that key or mother industries should be state-owned and managed; they should not be left to private enterprise. Vinoba is anxious that most of the consumer goods should be produced through decentralized industries which would provide not only fuller employment but will also reduce unnecessary strain on the transport system. Instead of carrying raw materials over large distances and, then, transporting once again finished goods from factories to consumers in the four corners of India, it would be much better to convert various raw materials into finished goods in the villages themselves for local use. In other words, production should be almost simultaneous with distribution and consumption. Such economy would be less complicated, and the present nexus of money shall lose much of its disproportionate importance. With the use of modern appliances and sources of power, products of village industries need not be costlier as compared with mill-made goods. In fact, with lower overhead costs, village industry articles should be even cheaper than factory products. In an age of science it is, surely, not rational to set up huge factories which can be destroyed by aerial bombing in seconds. The chronic problem of labour-capital conflict can also be easily resolved if production is decentralized into industrial co-operatives where workers themselves are the owners of the instruments of production.

Vinoba is not against private sector either. In fact, he would not like the State to take over too many basic industries because that would lead to excessive concentration of economic power, which inevitably leads to concentration of political

power as well. Vinoba, therefore, pleads for a private sector in decentralized economy. He would like every village community to be self-sufficient at least in regard to basic needs of life, like food, housing, clothing, education and health. Concentration of economic or political power promotes conditions of violence and conflict. Decentralized industrialization is, therefore, essential from the standpoint of a non-violent and peaceful democracy.

In one of his letters to me, Vinoba gave expression to a very novel idea. According to him, there should be 100 per cent public sector plus 100 per cent private sector leading to 100 per cent national sector. In simple language, this curious arithmetic implies that the public sector should incorporate the good points of the private sector and *vice versa*. There need be no inherent friction between the two as both are integral parts of national planning.

Dealing with science and technology, Vinoba remarked: "As a rational and scientific thinker, I am willing to sacrifice anything for the sake of real human progress. In truth, even the modern scientist has become a faddist. He does not try to change his basic outlook and suffers from a craze for machinery without taking into consideration the social and human aspects of the problem. Unless science is inextricably wedded to non-violence, it would spell disaster."

Commenting on the Draft Outline of the Second Five-Year Plan, Vinoba told me that Gandhiji's 'Unto This Last' approach was of crucial importance: "I feel that adequate attention has not been paid so far to the urgent needs of the lowliest and the most backward sections of people in India. In the cities, there are slums with most horrible filth and the condition of sweepers is still far from satisfactory. In the villages, there are millions of landless labourers and Harijans who lead a 'hand-to-mouth' existence. Unless the Plan tells me definitely as to how it would tackle these problems of the poorest sections, how can I talk to the people about it with enthusiasm?" He continued: "The economic theory of *percolation* has failed miserably. The notion that a rise in production and national income would automatically seep down to the masses is an illusion which should now be discarded by the

Planners without further argument. We must endeavour to reach the weakest segments of our population *directly* through specific schemes of development at the grass-roots. Otherwise, planning in India would prove to be a costly exercise in futility!"

Vinoba would also talk to the villagers about the concept of a higher standard of living. He did not want them to flock to the towns. The so-called attractions of cities were illusory and did not make for a better life. There was an essential difference between *standard of life* and *standard of living.* In economic planning, we talk only about raising the 'standard of living' of the people. This connotes bigger houses, richer food, more clothes, and better educational and medical amenities. But man does not live by bread alone. He also needs cultural, moral and spiritual qualities which must be steadily improved. Mere material planning does not lead to a sound, healthy and noble life: "The small and expensive houses in the cities in congested localities are no good," said Vinoba. "It is much better for you to live in your village huts and enjoy fresh air under the radiant sun. Of course, you should plan for better ventilation and sanitation. But do not rush to the cities in search of a higher standard of living. In Bombay and Calcutta, the more crowded and congested the locality, the more expensive is the house. If there are more windows in it, you have to pay a higher rent. Why should you, then, migrate to the cities, and incur prohibitive expenditure for nature's gifts of air and sunshine which are plentiful in the countryside?"

One day, Vinoba gave an interesting example to a village gathering. In a city he was invited by a rich zamindar who had donated some land to Bhoodan to visit his house and bless the family. He was proudly shown a painting of the rising sun which had been purchased by the zamindar for a hundred rupees. Vinoba smiled and asked: "Instead of purchasing a painting of the rising sun for Rs. 100, is it not better to live in the village and see the sun rising in the east every morning free of cost?"

On another occasion he asked: "What is the use of gymnasia, and physical education clubs in the cities?" "In villages, the people work in a natural manner on their fields to raise crops,

fruits and vegetables. In cities, they start physical education centres for taking exercise. When children cannot digest food, they are asked to go to the gymnasia to improve their digestion. But, if children in Basic schools are asked to work in fields to grow vegetables or to work in workshops to manufacture some useful articles, their parents frown on the teachers for inflicting physical drudgery on students. Thus, normal productive work is looked down upon in modern society and physical exercises contrived in an artificial manner are regarded as fashionable. Such are the perversities of urbanization."

Referring to himself, Vinoba said: "People think that I am undergoing great physical strain in the walking tours. It is not really so. I enjoy my walks and they help me keep physically fit. When I sleep at night after a day's hard work, I sleep soundly like a log. This dreamless sleep is a luxury which is not given to city-dwellers. I have the privilege of living in a new house every day. I sleep under the open sky and the whole country and, indeed, the world, is my big family!"

In one of his post-prayer meetings, Vinoba saw a few persons virtually drunk. He asked one of them several questions to find out whether he was following his arguments. When he had discovered that the man was not in his proper senses, he reprimanded him: "Bhoodan or any other social or economic reform would be meaningless if the people frittered away their wealth and energies on intoxicating drinks." He asked the women sitting on one side of the audience to non-cooperate with husbands who were addicted to drink: "Why should you cook food for husbands who waste their valuable income on liquor and toddy? You should serve as their wives only if they behave themselves."

Without prohibition, considerable amount of purchasing power placed in the hands of the people under the Five-Year Plans would go down the drain. Vinoba was, therefore, anxious that Prohibition be introduced throughout the country at an early date. He was, however, convinced that such a social programme could not be implemented with the help of the police and legislation alone. To make this experiment a real success, it

was necessary for social and constructive workers to bend their energies towards making Prohibition a popular programme through mass contacts and educative propaganda. That is why Vinoba utilized every opportunity during his sojourn to impress upon people the urgent need of giving up the evil habit of intoxication.

As regards family planning, Vinoba once told me: "Servants of the people have no business to tell their masters as to how many sons and daughters they should have. It is the lookout of the people and their moral and religious teachers. It is the duty of the State to create conditions for providing work to all its able-bodied citizens. Science can find out various methods for utilizing the natural resources more intensively for feeding the additional population. To restrict numbers by artificial methods is to accept bankruptcy of modern science. It would create more problems than it may solve."

Some time ago, talking to the Bhoodan workers, Vinoba placed before them a 'ten-year plan' for population control in India: "You should be prepared to say: practise self-restraint. If you do not, Bhoodan will be in vain. Within 10 years, population will increase to such numbers that it will be impossible to solve the land problem. So, self-restraint should form an integral part of our overall programme. . . The other day, I asked a farmer whether he had read *Ramayana*. It says that Ramachandra had only two children. As devotees of Rama, we should keep His ideal before us. This ideal is rooted in our tradition and can be explained to the people."

Elucidating his scheme in greater detail, Vinoba continued: "We have two parents. Therefore two children are enough to replace them. This has been the culture of India and is stated in the *Ramayana*. Since land is not sufficient, *Brahmacharya* has acquired a social value. Its spiritual value is already there." "The *Vedas* say that one who has many children goes to hell. What does 'many' mean? In grammar, after the dual number comes the plural number, so that 'more than two' are many. Therefore, the *Vedas* too approve of only two children. In *Manu Smriti* also, the first child is said to be born of virtue, the

others of lust."

He added: "Brahmacharya should be practised till the age of 28. Then, one may lead family life till the age of 48. Later, one should take to *Vanaprastha* in a regular way. This leaves 20 years for procreation and enjoyment of family life. Today people remain in family life for 40 years, from the age of 18 to 58. According to my proposal, this period should be halved, reducing the problem of control also to a half. Further, if there are three children in a family, one of them should take a vow of lifelong *Brahmacharya* and adopt the children of his brothers as his own."

Vinoba summarized his proposals thus: "First, marry at a late stage; secondly, announce the decision of *Vanaprastha;* thirdly, if you have three children, let one of them practise *Brahmacharya.* And fourthly, the people should, as far as possible, remain satisfied with two children. Is this a practical proposition? If the answer is 'yes', there is hope for mankind."

Vinoba attaches the highest importance to the urgent need of building up national economic life from below. He strongly feels that planning from above in a centralized fashion is suicidal both to the society as well as the individual. It would seem that some amount of centralization is necessary in a big country like India at least in respect of general direction and guidance. Vinoba, however, feels that village communities should be given substantial initiative and power to regulate their own social and economic life. In the absence of such devolution of authority, individuals and panchayats are likely to be converted into mere cogs of a huge machinery of planning without opportunities for fulfilling local responsibilities. According to the basic principles of Sarvodaya it is essential to organize society in such a manner that the interests of both the individual as well as the community are properly harmonised and there is full scope for the development of both.

It is from this standpoint that Gandhiji laid great emphasis on the desirability of developing village panchayats in India. Vinoba also feels that these village communities should be provided ample opportunities for developing their social, eco-

nomic, political and cultural life in accordance with their own ideas and aspirations. He goes to the extent of saying that each village or a group of villages should have the requisite powers to regulate their imports and exports. This may not be practicable under the existing circumstances. Nevertheless, the fact remains that exploitation of villages by cities through mill-made consumer goods flooding the rural markets continues to this day almost unabated. This drain of wealth from villages to cities can be reversed only if the village-manufactured goods begin to find an increasing place in the markets of cities. Village consumers' societies under the panchayats may, therefore, be given some powers to limit the import of factory-made goods into the countryside at least during the period of transition. The State should also give every encouragement to village and cottage industries so that they may gradually augment their inherent strength and be in a position to compete with the mill-made goods on equal footing. It would be wrong to think that big factories in India have been able to withstand foreign competition without the active assistance of the State. Textile and sugar mills have been given, directly and indirectly, substantial amounts of money from the public exchequer for facing keen competition from foreign countries. Even today a number of large-scale industries in India are likely to topple down like houses of cards if economic support by the Government is withdrawn. Vinoba, therefore, desires that the State should devote equal attention, if not more, to the difficulties and requirements of the small-scale, village and cottage industries in the country.

There is, however, one point about the village panchayats on which Vinoba expresses great concern. His Bhoodan tours have convinced him that village panchayats could function equitably only when social and economic disparities have been liquidated in these rural communities. He is of the definite opinion that full-fledged panchayats should be established only in those villages where land has been redistributed either through Bhoodan or legislation, and where village and cottage industries have been established on a co-operative basis. In the absence of these economic reforms, village panchayts, instead of becoming instruments of prosperity may well turn

into engines of social and economic oppression and exploitation. Vinoba is, thus, convinced that social and economic revolution in the villages must precede the establishment of gram-panchayats with substantial powers.

Planning from below is also desirable for lessening undue strain on the transport system. At present, much of our energy is wasted by first transporting raw materials like cotton, oil or leather from the four corners of India to the sites of a few big factories. Later, manufactured goods have to be distributed in the markets all over the country. The age of science has made it possible to decentralize electric power and supply it to the remotest villages. It is, therefore, irrational to concentrate industries in a few urban centres. Science, says Vinoba, has made decentralization not only possible but almost inevitable. It would be unscientific to resist decentralization of economic power any longer.

Vinoba also has been thinking seriously about the system of elections in India. He poignantly feels that the present system is not conducive to sound and healthy democracy. Direct elections to Parliament and State legislatures involve huge expenditure, encourage casteism and linguism, and compel people to elect representatives with whom they are not personally acquainted. Different political parties are obliged to ask for money from capitalists for running these costly elections with the result that richer classes are able to exercise visible influence on shaping the economic policies of the country. Vinoba is, therefore, very keen that the current system of elections should be radically changed as early as possible.

He is of the view that there should be direct elections at the village level and indirect elections at the district, State and all-India levels. This was also the considered view of Gandhiji. There are certain advantages as well as disadvantages in the systems of direct and indirect elections. It is, therefore, necessary to evolve a system which would combine the good points of both and avoid the inherent evils. In Vinoba's view, there should be direct democracy at the base and a village or a group of villages should elect their panchayats on the basis of

adult franchise. Further, these elections at the village panchayat level should be unanimous or near-unanimous. In ancient India sanctity of Gram Panchayats depended mainly on unanimous elections and decisions. *'Panch Parmeshwar'* implied that the unanimous voice of the *panchas* was the voice of the Divine. It may not be possible to revive the ancient system of Panchayats in exactly the old form. It should, however, be possible to develop a system of village communities in India which would become a model for a decentralized democratic system in other countries too.

The District, State and all-India representatives could be elected on an indirect basis from the village upwards. Such a system would ensure direct and local democracy at the bottom and indirect and representative democracy at the higher levels. In a system of indirect elections there are, decidedly, some obvious dangers. A smaller electorate is open to the temptations of money, and could be easily influenced by caste and regional considerations, specially in under-developed countries. Even so, these possibilities pale into insignificance when compared with difficulties encountered in a system of direct elections in large constituencies involving huge sums of expenditure.

Parliamentary democracy on the basis of party system, in the opinion of Vinoba, is not suitable to Indian conditions. He would prefer a system of what may be called a 'composite' democracy. A system in which people are elected on party tickets with simple majority cannot be called real democracy. In a number of cases winning candidates are able to mobilize only a minority of the votes. It may well be that the party which has been able to obtain a bare majority in the legislature has received less than fifty per cent of the total votes polled. Further, such a party elects its leader again by a majority vote. In such cases, the Prime Minister or the Chief Minister could not be regarded as a popular leader of the masses. Vinoba would like a good Government chosen freely by the people on the basis of the panchayat system. In developing countries it is desirable that well-meaning people of different shades of opinion work together for the all-round progress of the nation.

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In South India

FROM ORISSA Vinoba entered Andhra where general elections had taken place some time earlier after the formation of a new Andhra Pradesh. In the first three months, he covered parts of the districts of Srikakulam, Vishakhapatnam, East Godavari, West Godavari, Krishna and Guntur. The meetings were largely attended and people evinced unusual enthusiasm for Bhoodan and Gramdan work. Prabhakar, an old inmate of Sevagram Ashram, accompanied Vinoba during these tours and mobilized local workers for participating in the movement with a sense of devotion. Professor Ramchandra Rao, popularly known as 'Gora', also plunged into this movement along with members of his family. Although an atheist by faith, Gora is a learned Gandhian worker and his contribution to Vinoba's mission in Andhra Pradesh was quite notable. At Vijayawada, Vinoba stayed for four days in the third week of December. A meeting of the Sarva Seva Sangh was held on that occasion and it was decided to carry on Sampattidan movement with greater vigour under the guidance of Jayaprakash Narayan.

Early in January 1956, Vinoba entered Telangana again, the land where Bhoodan was born about five years ago. He camped at Pochampalli village on 30 January—Gandhiji's eighth death anniversary. Laying bare his heart before the audience, Vinoba said: "I declare I have not achieved success and I accept defeat. It is true that I got lakhs of acres in Bhoodan and hundreds of villages in Gramdan. This has given immense hope to the people, but I must confess my intense agony. I had hoped that Bhoodan would be a means for establishing peace.

Two years ago, I could hardly anticipate the existing deep-rooted bitterness in India. I find disorder in Bihar where we got maximum land in Bhoodan, and there are firings in public meetings in Orissa, where we received hundreds of villages in Gramdan. There have been outbreaks of violence in other provinces as well."

In a choked voice, he continued: "Our nationalism is in danger when citizens still feel that they are residents only of a particular province or a town. Many acres of land collected by us is no credit to Bhoodan which aims to bring home the excellence of non-violence. I have declared that every donation is a vote for world peace. But violent occurrences in India are a blot on us... Leave alone world peace, even our *Swaraj* would perish in no time. Our very freedom is in peril, if we do not learn to settle our national problems peacefully."

After covering the districts of Nalgonda and Warangal, Vinoba reached Mahboobnagar. It was in this area that I had spent a week with him at some leisure and discussed a number of social, economic and political problems. At his post-prayer meetings, Vinoba highlighted the importance of quick distribution of land among the landless out of the Bhoodan donations. In this work, co-operation of all political parties ought to be enlisted without any hesitation.

In Kurnool, Vinoba addressed a meeting of all members of the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly. He laid special emphasis on the urgent need of reaching the poorest masses and eradicating their poverty and backwardness. He had found that even in the Community Development areas, weaker sections of the population had not been able to derive much benefit out of the Five-Year Plan schemes. It was, therefore, imperative to go down to the grass-roots and strengthen the economic condition of the lowliest in the land.

At Adoni, Vinoba made an impassioned appeal to the business community to accept the responsibility of improving the lands given in Bhoodan before they were actually distributed to the landless labourers.

After completing his Andhra tour with a collection of nearly 63,000 acres, Vinoba entered Tamilnad. In his speeches, he made special references to *Kural*, a book which has in-

spired the people of Tamilnad for ages. He walked into the city of Madras four days later and said: "The Bhoodan movement is founded on the rock of love and universal brotherhood of man. We should make a start towards our ultimate goal of 'one world' by considering ourselves as Indians first. We must rise above parochial and caste distinctions. Bhoodan knows no language except the language of love."

The eighth annual session of the Sarvodaya Samaj was held at Kancheepuram in the last week of May. Addressing the open session of the Sammelan, Vinoba observed: "I am very sad over the recent disturbances in the country as a result of the reorganization of States. It is a defeat for the Bhoodan movement. During the last five or seven years, police have fired a number of times. If there is violence on the part of the people, the Government also resorts to violence. This is a sad state of affairs. The only antidote to this situation is that the right spirit of satyagraha should permeate the people."

At the end of the Conference, constructive workers assembled at Kancheepuram were stunned when Vinoba announced his three-day fast from June 1 for attaining 'greater purity and more intensive contemplation'. He asked the workers to bend their energies for recreating an atmosphere of peace and non-violence in the country. The Sammelan was attended by about 7,000 *sevaks* from all over the country; it was presided over by Appasaheb Patwardhan, the well-known Sarvodaya worker from Maharashtra. Vinoba resumed his tour of Tamilnad on 7 June and had a brief meeting with Jagadguru Shankaracharya who blessed the Bhoodan movement as a noble activity in line with the cultural heritage of India. He visited Pondicherry Ashram of Sri Aurobindo on 9 July and had an interview with the Mother who gave the following message: "Aspire for the Divine; live for the Divine; act for the Divine."

The Tamilnad Congress Committee also expressed its appreciation of the Bhoodan movement and, at a meeting held at Bhavani in Coimbatore district, adopted a resolution for collecting 20 lakh acres of land within the State. Members of the PCC met Vinoba on 22 August and pledged their full support to him.

In the first week of November, Vinoba suffered from a

severe attack of malaria and had to abandon his *Padayatra* for a few days. During this illness, he reviewed in his mind the working of the Bhoodan movement over the years. At a meeting of the Sarva Seva Sangh at Palani in the Madurai district on 21 November, Vinoba asked the workers to stand on their own feet and sever all connections with Gandhi Smarak Nidhi which had been extending financial assistance to the movement. This was the only way to make this revolution broad-based and dependent basically on the support of the people. This decision at Palani enthused the local workers to intensify their activities in the Madurai district. As a result, almost the whole taluka of Tirumangalam was donated as Gramdan. Jagannathan, who is now the President of All-India Sarva Seva Sangh, with the assistance of his colleagues, was responsible for this achievement. A *Sarvodaya Mandal* was formed to follow up the work in a systematic manner.

On 15 April, Vinoba reached Kanya Kumari and camped near the sea. It was here that he took a solemn pledge to continue his walking tours endlessly till the goal was achieved: "I solemnly pledge this day, at the feet of Kanya Kumari, on the shore of the Indian Ocean and in the presence of Surya Narayan (Sun God) that as long as *Gram Swaraj* (Self-rule 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 achieving this goal!"

Kerala was the next State to be visited. Governor Ramakrishna Rao and Chief Minister Namboodiripad received Vinoba at Parasala on 18 April 1957. This happened to be the sixth anniversary of the Bhoodan mission. Addressing the gathering, Vinoba said: "The land of Kerala and its people are of a unique nature. There are many political parties here and all are of the opinion that private ownership in land should be ended in the State at the earliest. An effective change can, therefore, be very easily brought about here. Let all of us join hands and march forward!"

After touring several areas, Vinoba entered Trichur district and reached Kaladi, the birthplace of Adi Shankaracharya, on

7 May. It was here that the ninth All-India Sarvodaya Sammelan was held on 9 and 10 May, presided over by Dada Dharmadhikari, the renowned exponent of Sarvodaya philosophy. Dhebarbhai and myself were also present on behalf of the Indian National Congress. Explaining the significance of Gramdan, Vinoba stated: "Gramdan means equitable distribution or *Samya-Yoga*. But let us remember that equality cannot be brought about by hard-heartedness. Samya-Yoga without compassion of heart is futile. Gramdan connotes identification of one and all with the whole. In Gramdan, landholders have to offer their land, landless workers their labour, and intellectuals the intellect. Dedication from all elements is the key to Gramdan." He added: "I am not worried in the least about the number of Gramdans obtained. For me the worker is the test. How many persons of the right type come forward and devote themselves to work is the main question. Bhoodan needs devotees of high quality. They will then create the new society of the free and the equal."

It was at this Conference that Vinoba underscored the need of building up a strong *Shanti Sena* through popular consent: "Mahatma Gandhi had wished that there should be a *Shanti Sena* in the country. We were, however, too weak then to act up to his advice. Now, when his soul is free from the bondage of the physical body, the working of his spirit is more effective. This is how the souls of great men work."

On 24 August, Vinoba entered Karnatak after touring the country on foot for six and a half years. Addressing the workers of South Kanara district, he observed: "From Bhoodan and ending of private ownership in land we have come to Gramdan and *Shanti Sena*. I would like Karnatak now to demonstrate what a Sarvodaya society is. The people of Karnatak have a genius for synthesis. Our society is fragmented by innumerable divisions of race, caste, colour, religion and political ideologies. We need social integration, if *Swaraj* is to survive."

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Gramdan Conference at Yelwal

ABOUT NINE miles away from Mysore city, a historic Gramdan Conference was held at Yelwal on 21 and 22 September 1957. It was convened by Dhirendra Majumdar, the then President of the Sarva Seva Sangh and was attended by top-ranking personalities, including President Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Jawaharlal Nehru, Govind Ballabh Pant, Morarji Desai, Gulzarilal Nanda, Jayaprakash Narayan, U. N. Dhebar and S. K. Dey. Representatives of various political parties, including Namboodiripad, Sucheta Kripalani, Ganga Saran Singh and Z. A. Ahmed, participated in the deliberations. I accompanied Jawaharlal Nehru who flew from Delhi by a special plane to Mysore for attending the Conference.

After a welcome speech by Ashadevi, Vinoba addressed the distinguished gathering: "I have innate faith in the goodness of human nature. There may be some superficial weaknesses in man, but basically he is full of good qualities which could be brought out in various ways. In Telangana, by the grace of God, I could discover this goodness through the Bhoodan movement."

"I have been receiving land donations all these years in different parts of the country and a new atmosphere has been generated for solving this problem through peaceful and non-violent methods. Gandhiji had always shown us the path of peace and love. Today the world is weary with violence and does not know what to do. The multiplication of armaments can never solve our problems. Gandhiji had placed before us the principle of Trusteeship. Some people think that the

Bhoodan and Gramdan movements run counter to the Trusteeship idea, because they involve the surrender of proprietary rights. I should, therefore, like to explain my concept of Trusteeship. Father and mother are the trustees of their children, and there can be no better example of trusteeship than this. The parents care for their children even more than for themselves and try to train them up for taking over the responsibility of management as early as possible. The same spirit has been inspiring the Gramdan movement all these years.

"It is often objected that through the movement I am intensifying fragmentation of the lands in India even further. In fact, I am not so much bothered about fragmentation of land as the fragmentation of hearts. I am trying my very best to join the hearts of the people. If this is achieved, all else will follow without much difficulty."

Explaining the basic idea of Gramdan, Vinoba continued: "In the world today there are in fact no 'have-nots'; some possess land, others property, and yet others intellect and physical labour. Futhermore, love and affection permeate the hearts of all human beings. In Gramdan, the landlords should donate land and the working class their labour for the development of the community. Gramdan is a total idea. It includes khadi and village industries, *Shanti Sena,* Basic education and ultimate establishment of a non-violent social order. It must lead to higher production of food for achieving national self-sufficiency. I, therefore, regard Gramdan as a *defence measure;* there can be no real security for India without achieving self-reliance in food requirements."

Pandit Nehru also spoke briefly at the Conference and lent his whole-hearted support to the Gramdan movement. He expressed the hope that in time to come there would be the closest co-ordination between Gramdan and the Community Development organisation. Other leaders who participated in the discussions, including the Communists and the Socialists, appreciated Vinoba's campaign and promised to lend their helping hand in its further progress.

After the conclusion of the first day's proceedings, Panditji drafted a statement in his own hand. It was placed before the

Gramdan Conference next day and adopted unanimously:

At the invitation of the Sarva Seva Sangh a Gramdan Parishad (conference) was held on 21 and 22 September, 1957 at Yelwal in Mysore State. The Rashtrapati graced the conference with his presence. Other invitees, from all over India, deeply interested in this movement, were also present.

Acharya Vinoba explained to the Conference how he came to adopt the non-violent technique for the solution of socio-economic problems, more especially the land problem. Beginning with voluntary land gifts, the movement developed and reached the stage of Gramdan, that is, the gift of entire village to the village community. More than 3,000 villages have thus far been voluntarily offered as Gramdan to the village community by the people concerned who have thereby renounced their private ownership in land.

The participants in the Conference welcomed this Gramdan movement and expressed their high appreciation of the objectives underlying it. This would lead to a fuller development of co-operative life and effort in the village concerned and would also result in the economic betterment of the people of these villages and all-round progress and development. It would further create the psychological climate all over India for the solution of the land problem and for the furtherance of co-operative life. The essential feature of this movement is the adoption of non-violent technique and its voluntary character. Thus the ethical approach is combined with practical economic advantage and the development of social order based on co-operation and self-help. Such a movement deserves every kind of help and encouragement.

The members of the Central and State Governments who were present, while expressing their full appreciation of the Gramdan movement and their desire to help it, pointed out that the Governments concerned would have to proceed with their schemes of land reforms which were for the abolition of all intermediate interests in land, the limitation of holdings and the promotion of the co-operative movement in all its phases with the consent of the people concerned. This Governmental approach was not in conflict with the Gramdan

movement and would indeed be helped by it.

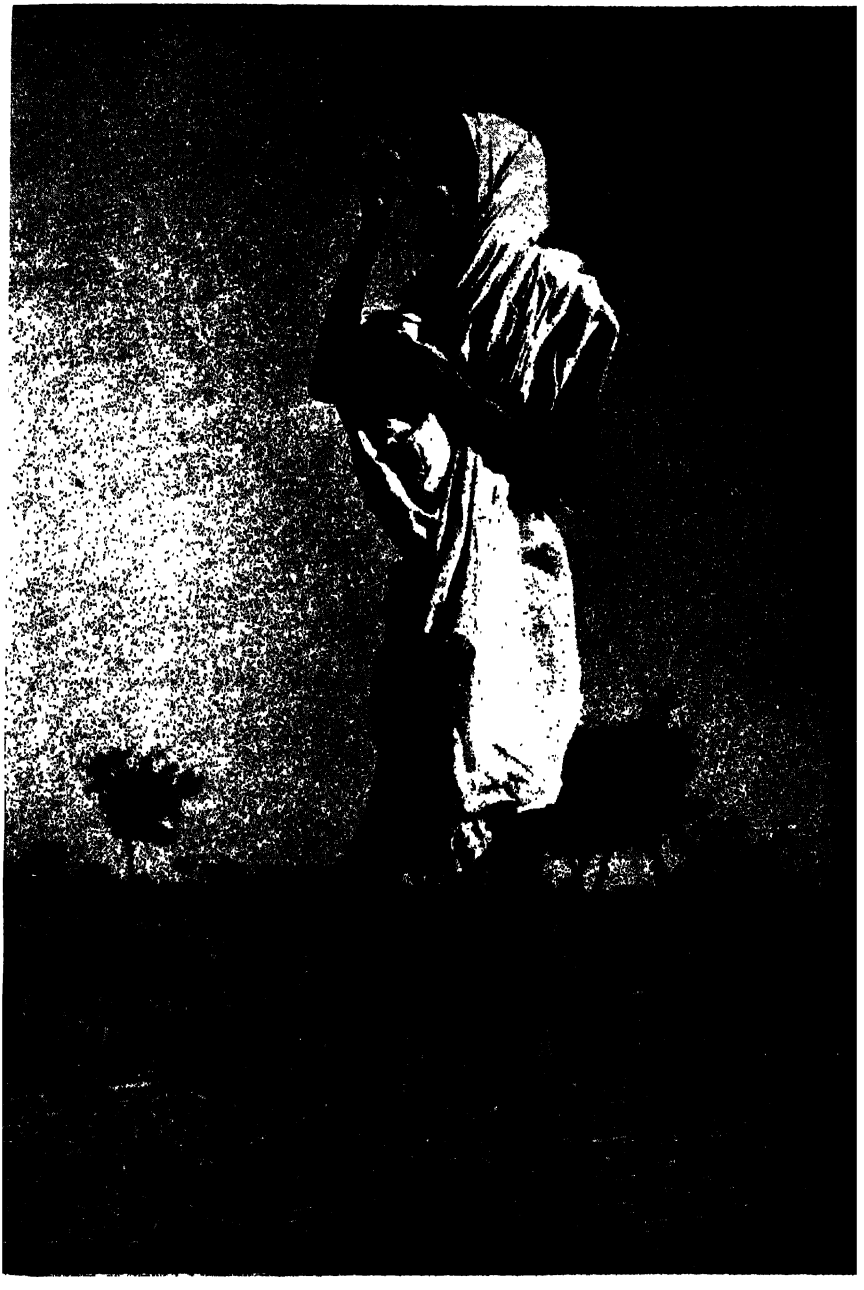
It was further pointed out that the closest co-operation was desirable between the Community Development movement and the Gramdan movement.

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

The Yelwal Conference proved to be epoch-making in the annals of India after the achievement of Independence. The year 1957 marked the first centenary of the struggle for *Swaraj* launched in 1857 under difficult circumstances. Although there had been significant achievements in the domain of national planning, it was this non-violent revolution of Bhoodan and Gramdan which had drawn the special attention not only of the Indian people, but also of several countries outside India. At a public meeting, Pandit Nehru declared that Gramdan had 'come to stay' and the Communist leader Namboodiripad also admitted that 'the Gramdan movement provided an alternative to their own policy in respect of the land problem'.

Before returning to Delhi, Pandit Nehru had an exclusive meeting with Vinoba for discussing various national and international issues. I had the privilege of being present at this meeting of the two great followers of Mahatma Gandhi, one in the political sphere and the other in the constructive field. Details of these talks will be found in a subsequent chapter.

Three days later, an all-India camp of Bhoodan workers was held at Mysore. Addressing the camp Vinoba urged the Sarvodaya workers to organize *Shanti Sena* units in their areas with a sense of urgency. "These soldiers of peace," said Vinoba, "must be above all political parties and groups." He asked them to approach the people with the message of Gramdan which was the best possible form of non-violent defence for the villages and the nation. He expressed his ardent hope that the code of conduct evolved at the Yelwal Conference would be accepted by the whole country in good faith in order to build



His morning breakfast



Vinoba speaking at a prayer meeting

up a new India of Gandhiji's dreams. The declaration made at Yelwal should be regarded as a Charter for the constructive workers and they should work in accordance with its provisions with renewed faith and conviction.

It must be conceded, however, that the follow-up action after the conclusion of the Gramdan Conference at Yelwal left much to be desired. I remember attending at least two meetings at the Prime Minister's residence sometime in October that year for forging systematic co-ordination between Gramdan and Community Development projects in the country. S. K. Dey was enthusiastic about this new development and looked forward to the active co-operation of Sarvodaya workers. The Sarva Seva Sangh also convened two meetings at the headquarters of the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi in Rajghat, New Delhi, in order to enlist the co-operation of different political parties in energising the Gramdan campaign. Even so, the Sarva Seva Sangh, which had convened the Yelwal Conference, could not, perhaps, pursue this matter with concentrated efforts. In consequence, the favourable atmosphere created by the Gramdan Conference gradually faded away and the movement could not register as fast a progress as could have been achieved with the co-ordinated efforts of all concerned.

As a Member of the Planning Commission, I took several concrete steps to persuade State Governments to offer co-operation to the Gramdan movement in their areas. I convened several meetings for urging the co-operative department to make necessary credit available to the Gramdan villages. Experience had shown that soon after the declaration of Gramdan the local moneylenders withdrew their channels of credit because property rights in land had ceased to exist. It was, therefore, imperative to find other sources of credit for the development of village lands under *Gramdan*. It was essential for the co-operative societies to rush to the succour of the Gramdan communities even by amending their existing rules and regulations. In addition, at my instance, the Planning Commission agreed to set aside an amount of one crore rupees as a special fund to be disbursed to the Gramdan areas as an interim measure, so that, pending State legislation, the Gramdan villages could go ahead with their development schemes.

The Land Reforms Division of the Planning Commission under my charge also drafted a model Gramdan Bill for the consideration of different State Governments. This draft Bill was very helpful in speeding up the enactment of the necessary laws in different States for granting official recognition to Gramdan villages. It was prepared in consultation with the representatives of the Sarva Seva Sangh, the Ministry of Community Development and Co-operation, and the Ministry of Law.

I convened a special Gramdan Conference on behalf of the Planning Commission in New Delhi on 2 November 1963. In my opening remarks, I emphasized the need for achieving close co-ordination between various Ministries of the Union Government, the State Governments, and constructive workers in achieving a break-through in land reforms and taking full advantage of Acharya Vinoba's Bhoodan and Gramdan movements: "It is obvious that all these years, the Gramdan movement has not been able to make a visible impact on important social and economic problems of Indian villages. It is no use blaming one another for the slow growth of the movement. Perhaps, in the initial years, it was desirable to lay greater emphasis on quality rather than on numbers. Nevertheless, the great potentialities of the Gramdan movement must be recognized by all of us and concerted efforts should be made to consolidate and intensify the movement in order to chalk out a new and more effective way for solving crucial problems."

A number of decisions were taken at this Conference, and the Planning Commission as well as the Ministries concerned issued necessary Circulars for implementing them. For ready reference, I published a *Handbook* for the Gramdan movement on behalf of the Planning Commission. It contained a brief history of the Bhoodan and Gramdan movements, the model Gramdan Bill, and various Circulars issued by different Ministries for helping Gramdan work. Steps were taken to start a few pilot projects in the Wardha district for trying out the Gramdan idea in an intensive way. Tarlok Singh and myself visited Wardha several times with some senior officers of the

Planning Commission to make these pilot projects a real success.

Nonetheless, it must be conceded that this follow-up action was not commensurate with the requirements of the situation. It is not my intention to apportion blame and find fault with the Government, political parties, or the Sarvodaya workers. I still hope that threads woven together at Yelwal would be picked up once again in all seriousness with a view to utilizing Bhoodan and Gramdan movements for laying the sound foundations of a new socio-economic order.

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A Tour of the Western Region

ON COMPLETION of his tour in South India, Vinoba entered the Western Region of Maharashtra and Gujarat. At this time, Maharashtra was in the grip of a widespread movement for carving out a unilingual State of its own. The general public was, therefore, eager to enlist Vinoba's support to their demand and did not appreciate his silence on this point. Vinoba, however, concentrated his energies on the land problem and did not desire to get involved in a political controversy: "I belong to no cult or institution. I am not even distantly related to any political party. I am not a member even of an organization devoted to constructive work. So believe me when I say that I am entirely uncommitted. You are welcome to convince me of your point of view and convert me to your side, or come to understand what I am saying."

After touring Kolhapur and Ratnagiri districts, Vinoba reached Pandharpur where the tenth All-India Sarvodaya Conference was held in the last week of May 1958. He was invited by the trustees to visit the famous Vithoba shrine with all members of his party, irrespective of their caste or creed. Vinoba accordingly went to the temple, accompanied by his co-workers, including a German lady, a Muslim worker, a Parsi young man and some Harijans. It was, indeed, for the first time that a Hindu temple was declared open to non-Hindus. Said Vinoba: "It is a great day for me. The auspicious event has left a deep impression on my heart and mind. When I stood before the idol and bowed down in adoration, I felt so overwhelmed. Maharashtra has given me the greatest gift it could; it is a

significant event in the progress of Sarvodaya."

The Sarvodaya Sammelan at Pandharpur commenced on 30 May and was attended by thousands of delegates from all over the country. It was presided over by Rama Devi Chowdhury, the lifelong partner of the late Gopabandhu Chowdhury of Orissa. The statement issued by the Sarva Seva Sangh on this occasion called upon "fellow-pilgrims all the world over to try to create model units of *Shanti-Sena* in their countries and, thus, contribute to the task of making every man or woman secure his or her self-protection". Addressing the Conference, Vinoba observed: "Our needs are many, but our basic need is love. Love does not indicate any sense of indulgence. There are two kinds of love, positive and negative. According to positive love, one is actuated to express it only when the other person also loves. This is actually a kind of reaction and reciprocation. But there is another kind of love that is superior to this, in which we are actuated to love a person even when he is our enemy. This kind of love is true love. It passes through all suffering and leads to peace."

He continued: "America has twelve times more land than India. If we get twelve times more land we may perhaps become equal to America from the material point of view. Similarly we should understand that we can never hope to reach parity with the great powers on the level of violence. The choice before us is that either we follow complete non-violence and increase our moral strength or else we pursue violence and total destruction."

After spending a few weeks in the Marathwada region of Maharashtra, Vinoba entered West Khandesh district on 7 August. He halted for two days at Chalisgaon where an important meeting of the Sarva Seva Sangh was held. It was decided to meet the recurring expenditure of Gramdan movement through *Sootanjali*—hank-offering, *Shramdan*, and *Sarvodaya Patra*—offering a paisa or a handful of grain into an earthen pot every day for constructive work. This meeting of the Sangh was attended by over 300 workers from different parts of the country, including representatives of constructive activities like khadi, village industries, Basic education, removal of untouchability and nature cure. Addressing the meeting,

Vinoba said: "I am in search of power these days. Power is both subtle and spiritual. All revolutions are spiritual at the source. Spiritual values change first and others follow suit slowly later. It is reasonable that they change; it is impossible that they should not. It may be that you do not realise that power in all its intensity, but I do it and with such intensity that I am not able to describe it in words!"

On 14 August, Vinoba reached Dhulia and visited the jail where he had delivered his memorable talks on the *Gita* during his incarceration in 1932. Addressing the convicts he remarked: "I do not believe in dividing men as criminals and non-criminals. To me no man is a criminal. Some men are branded as such and are put in jail. But some criminals are to be found outside, though they are not so in the eyes of law."

On 15 August, the whole of Akrani Taluk of East Khandesh district containing 153 villages was declared a Gramdan area. This was the first Talukdan in the country. Replying to the welcome address given by the people, Vinoba said: "As nature is all-embracing and full of love, so also your hearts should receive all and love all." Later, his Secretary, Damodardas, decided to do intensive work in this tribal area with his headquarters at Dhadgaon. Commendable work has been done for the Adivasis in the region over the years. Surrounded by the Satpura ranges on all sides, it is almost inaccessible during the rainy season, with a good number of fast-running streams and rivulets.

Maharashtra Sarvodaya workers gathered at Navapur, and offered Vinoba a farewell on 19 September. In the course of his address, Vinoba outlined the strategy of satyagraha in this age of science: "I submit in all humility that Marx is today out-of-date and Manu's Code has, of course, no value; even Gandhiji's thought, as developed by him within his lifetime, cannot solve our contemporary problems. The whole of our social fabric has undergone vast changes during this decade; particularly, our political patterns are completely outmoded in relation to the needs of the hour... In this age of science we must cut down armaments, even at the risk of losing our independence. I make bold to say this because the very concepts of freedom and bondage have lost their traditional significance."

On 22 September, Vinoba entered Gujarat, the land of his 'second birth'. Ravishankar Maharaj with his band of workers welcomed him with great warmth and affection. Surat was the first district to be covered. After visiting Bardoli, Vinoba halted at Vedchhi Ashram where Jugatrambhai Dave has been doing admirable constructive work among the tribal population for many years. In his post-prayer speech at the Ashram, Vinoba stated: "Welfare State is not socialism, because everything in it depends on State authority. All power and initiative is concentrated in the hands of the State. It depends in the last analysis on the power of the armed forces. There can be no real democracy in a State as long as it depends on its armed strength."

"If I ever thought of contesting an election my electoral programme will be of three points: (1) disbanding of the armed forces, (2) abolishing special class of men who are forced to take to scavenging, (3) banning textile mills. I know no one will vote for me. We have to create a strong public opinion for our programme."

Speaking to the Sarvodaya workers in Baroda district, Vinoba explained the basic idea behind Gramdan: "None should offer Gramdan out of fear. There is no compulsion in it. You should offer it with love and understanding. Gramdan should be followed by mutual help, corporate life, abstention from intoxicants; and above all, love should pervade all your activities."

A few days were spent in Panchmahal district where the late Thakkar Bapa had spent a major part of his life in the service of the Adivasis and Mamasaheb Phadke had worked for the welfare of the Harijans for several decades.

In Baroda city, where he had lived for ten years as a boy with his father, Vinoba met distinguished litterateurs of Gujarat: "Real literature must move all hearts, must animate all, must inspire all. Literature which confines itself to a few is narrow and not worthwhile." Vinoba also appealed to his friends and comrades to lend their whole-hearted co-operation in spreading the Gramdan idea throughout Gujarat.

From Baroda, Vinoba entered Kaira district and visited Bochasan Ashram where Ravishankar Maharaj has been working over a long period. In the course of his loud thinking before

the local constructive workers, Vinoba observed: "Let us turn the searchlight inwards and enquire why our institutions have failed to inspire the people. Gandhiji tried to cover all aspects of life and society. He was able to influence politics as well. But since his departure, instead of influencing politics, we ourselves are getting influenced by it... In our prayer, we do repeat the names of the vows of non-violence, truth, etc. But it goes on as a mere routine in our institutions. It is devoid of devotion and feeling. Our prayer suffers from want of devotion. Those really devoted can face the whole world... This departure from the vows is weakening our tradition."

Later, Vinoba toured the Saurashtra region of Gujarat, covering the districts of Bhavnagar, Rajkot, Jamnagar and Surendranagar. He also visited *Loka-Bharati* institution at Sanosara, founded by the eminent educationist and constructive worker, the late Nanabhai Bhatt on the principles of *Nai Talim*. At Rajkot, Vinoba encamped at the Rashtriya Shala run by the veteran Gujarat worker Narandas Gandhi. He also met Raliyatben, Gandhiji's elder sister, affectionately called Faiba. In his evening prayer meeting, he appealed to the workers to strengthen the organization of *Shanti-Sena* which alone could realize Bapu's dream of a non-violent social order. Vinoba also toured Kutch and visited Gandhidham, the new colony founded by the Sindhi refugees. The famous Sindhi poet Dukhayal, who has composed numerous songs on Bhoodan and Gramdan, also met him there.

Towards the middle of December 1958, Vinoba entered the district of Ahmedabad where a few days later Pandit Nehru motored to Gangad to discuss with him various matters of common interest. Pandit Nehru walked with Vinoba for about two miles on the morning of 18 December and addressing the crowds observed: "The mission of Vinobaji, one of the great sons of the soil, presents a distinct picture in the world which is witnessing terrible stockpiles of nuclear weapons. Man is being crushed under the weight of armaments. Here in India, Vinobaji is going round the country conveying the message of peace to millions of our people. These are two pictures before us. In essence they are symbolic of the two forces of violence and non-violence. I hope the forces of non-violence and peace, harmony

and unity will triumph over those of destruction."

On 20 December, Vinoba entered the city of Ahmedabad where he first joined Gandhiji at the Ashram in June 1916. The public of Ahmedabad accorded to Vinoba a rousing reception. A lakh of school children, both boys and girls, greeted him with a prayer from all religions. A large crowd of over three lakhs attended the evening prayers where Vinoba opened out his heart: "I came to this place 42 years ago and, instead of going to the Himalayas, found shelter at Gandhiji's feet. It cannot adequately describe what I owe to Ahmedabad and Sabarmati. It was here that I received my first lesson and experience of self-knowledge and spiritual strength. It is now the responsibility of the people here to demonstrate before the world the power of peace and non-violence. The evil of economic disparity has also to be fought through the Gandhian technique of Satyagraha."

Towards the middle of January 1959, Vinoba entered Rajasthan and asked the workers to develop the qualities of bravery combined with non-violence. "Rajasthan is the 'Land of Heroes'. It is a land of the saints also. But saints have appeared everywhere in India. The speciality of Rajasthan is that it is a land of heroes besides being a land of saints. What do I expect from this land of heroes? My first and foremost desire is that my demand of the *Shanti-Sena* should be fulfilled both as regards quality and quantity." At Chittorgarh he visited the famous temple of Mirabai whose songs have inspired numerous devotees of Krishna for centuries past. Vinoba feelingly remarked: "Land problem in Mira's land should be solved by the method of love, compassion and devotion. But the difficulty with us is that we have lost self-confidence and always look to the Government. *Bhakti* has been given a secondary role. There can be no greater set-back than that of the people depending on Government."

The eleventh Sarvodaya Conference was held at Ajmer towards the end of February. It was presided over by K. Kelappan, the distinguished Sarvodaya leader of Kerala. In his opening address to the Conference, Vinoba highlighted the

importance of *Shanti-Sena*: "I regard the *Shanti Sena* work not only national in character, but truly international. In these days of advanced science, we cannot get at the right step unless we think in international context. That is why our slogan is: *Jai Jagat* (Victory to the world)!"

Indira Gandhi, the then Congress President, and Master Tara Singh, the Sikh leader, participated in the Ajmer Conference. Indira Gandhi hoped that "the small lamps burning all over the country will be converted into one big light and it will be possible to translate Gandhiji's dream into action". The Sikh leader remarked that the principles of Sarvodaya were in accord with the teachings of Guru Nanak: "Vinobaji has lighted the lamp of selflessness and produced a wave of love. I am sure that it would benefit both India and the world."

On 2 March, a band of faithful *Shanti-Sena* workers assembled on the Ajmer-Jaipur road. At the stroke of five in the morning, they started their silent march for peace and equality. At the head of this column was Vinoba himself, followed by Jayaprakash Narayan, Kelappan, Jagannathan, Ravishankar Maharaj, Appa Patwardhan and many others. Martin Luther King, the renowned Negro leader of America, not only watched the march but also walked several steps with it. At the end, all the workers repeated the new slogan *'Jai Jagat'* thrice.

Dr. King, accompanied by his wife, met Vinoba the next day and discussed with him several topics of international importance. Elucidating his views on the potentialities of satyagraha in the nuclear age, Vinoba said: "In this age, we cannot afford to have conflict of mental attitudes. Otherwise, nuclear weapons are sure to solve out the whole problem of humanity by doing a clean shave! So the necessity of this age is to rise, if I may use the word our philosophers have used, over the mind and think on a supra-mental, in place of a mental plane. The mental creates conflicts of various types; the supra-mental will save us from these. I think this supra-mental is also coming with this nuclear age. Satyagraha is to let truth take care of itself. Let us not come between truth and ourselves."

Martin Luther King asked Vinoba whether *Shanti Sena* could justify the disbanding of the Indian Army. Replied Vinoba: "A very difficult question indeed. But I think that unilateral dis-

armament is quite justified even without *Shanti Sena*. Any country can disarm provided it has that courage. Some courage, imagination and faith are needed for disarmament, and I will say India certainly can come forward in unilateral disarmament because of its great tradition. So also can other countries of the world because of their particular situations. As regards unilateral disarmament, I have as much hope from England as from India."

On 13 March, Vinoba reached Kashi-Ka-Vas, the birthplace of the late Jamnalal Bajaj. Constructive workers engaged in *Goseva* had gathered at Sikar the next day to take advantage of Vinoba's visit. Inaugurating the conference, Vinoba said: "India has its own socialism in which the cow is regarded as a member of the family. It has, therefore, been given an important place. But we should be careful not to accord it a wrong prestige. Some people love the cow but hate their fellow-beings. They feed ants with sugar but cheat and exploit others. All this is incomprehensible to me. This is no worship."

On 30 March, Vinoba entered the Pilani educational campus built up by the well-known Indian industrialist Ghanshyamdas Birla. Talking to the members of the staff and students, Vinoba underlined the imperative need of moral and spiritual values in life. He also spoke against the evil of wealth-accumulation: "In our *Shastras*, we do say that collection of wealth is an evil. But we punish a thief, while keep mum at those who amass wealth. If we want a thief not to steal, we must stop this collection."

During his Rajasthan tour of about two months and a half, Vinoba was offered 179 Gramdans in different districts.

On 1 April 1959, Vinoba entered Punjab and was received by Governor N. V. Gadgil and Chief Minister Pratap Singh Kairon, along with a large number of Sarvodaya workers. At Rajpura, Vinoba camped at the Kasturba Mandir organized by Bibi Amtus Salam, the well-known Muslim associate of Gandhiji. A Basic education conference was also convened on this occasion, presided over by E. W. Aryanayakam. In his concluding address, Vinoba observed: "There are no two opinions

that the system of education which was prevalent in the pre-independence era, cannot fit in after the advent of Swaraj. I declared it on 15 August 1947 that the old flag cannot be adhered to in a new regime and must change with the change in the administrative set-up. Similarly, old flags cannot be the symbol of a nation when there is a change in the form of its government. After Swaraj various urgent problems cropped up and our leaders were busy in their solution and hence the old system of education continued to prevail for some years... The need for change of the system of education in the new regime of a country cannot be denied and it should be so changed as to fit in with the present day set-up of the country."

At the time of his visit to the famous Bhakhra Dam, Vinoba propounded a new thesis. Pandit Nehru had named such projects as the 'new temples of modern India'. Vinoba, however, was prepared to call them so only if one-sixth of the new land irrigated by such projects was distributed amongst the landless workers: "Thus Bhakhra could rehabilitate sixteen lakhs of landless families. I want to see what benefit comes to the poor from this dam. One-sixth of it must go to the landless... Religion will thus find expression in it and then alone people will regard it as a place of pilgrimage."

A week later, Vinoba met the representatives of the Shiromani Akali Dal at Hoshiarpur. He exhorted the Sikh leaders to do away with elections in their organization and work on the basis of unanimity. He called upon them to "take off their shoes of political affiliations before entering the sacred precincts of the Gurudwaras". On 22 September at Pathankot, Vinoba attended the first meeting of the newly organized Sarva Seva Sangh with Vallabhswami as its President. It was here that an all-India Shanti Sena Mandal was formed with Jayaprakash Narayan as its Chairman and Narayan Desai, son of Mahadev Desai, as its Secretary. It was at this meeting that the Sarva Seva Sangh issued an appeal to all political parties to agree to observe a minimum code of democratic behaviour.

After spending about two weeks in Himachal Pradesh, Vinoba came to Amritsar where he addressed a Conference of Writers and Poets assembled from different parts of the country. It was here that Vinoba announced his going 'underground', hinting

that his programme of *Padayatra* would not be announced publicly. The country would only know the province where he was walking; the province would be aware of the district where he was; and the district will be informed about his programme only a few days in advance: "While my movements would not be secret like those of ancient Pandavas or modern revolutionaries, it may be said that comparatively I would be underground."

Towards the end of March that year, the twelfth Annual Sarvodaya Conference met at Sevagram. Vinoba did not proceed to Wardha to attend the conference. He asked the Sarvodaya workers not to depend on him but to carry on their work according to their own lights.

In the course of his Punjab tour, Vinoba met Pandit Nehru at Patti-Kalyana in Karnal district on 2 April 1960. They talked on national and international problems for about an hour at this Ashram which is now the headquarters of the Punjab branch of the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi.

29

Visit to Kashmir

VINOBA HAD been worried about the situation in Jammu and Kashmir for some years. He had often discussed Kashmir affairs with Pandit Nehru on different occasions, and was eager to study the economic and political conditions obtaining in this State at first hand. Vinoba publicly announced his desire to visit Kashmir at the Pandharpur Sarvodaya Conference in Maharashtra towards the end of May 1958. About a year later, he set his feet on the soil of Jammu and Kashmir on 22 May 1959.

Vinoba's visit to Kashmir was commented upon all over the country and even outside. Pandit Nehru also looked forward to Vinoba's comments and suggestions for a solution of this long-pending problem. But it was in a prayerful mood that Vinoba entered Kashmir. At the very first camp in Lakhanpur, he observed: "I have no plan of my own. My reliance is solely on God. Nothing moves but by His will. I have come here only to see, to hear and to love. I have no faith in making speeches. It is the heart-felt prayer alone that works and accomplishes."

Before Vinoba entered Kashmir, two significant things had happened. First, the State Government had imposed ceilings and land was being distributed to the landless. Secondly, the Government had announced the relaxation of restrictions for visiting the State. These had helped in creating a favourable atmosphere for Bhoodan and Gramdan work in Kashmir. Moreover, on the very first day, the then Prime Minister of Kashmir, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, declared that "the entire land of the State could be donated to this movement". Vinoba wel-

comed the statement and regarded it as a practical aspiration. He expressed earnest hope that Kashmir may soon become an ideal Sarvodaya State, showing a new way to the rest of India. As a token of his sincerity, Vinoba decided to give up his morning meal for self-purification. On reaching the village camp every day, he would meet the people in their homes and try to understand their difficulties. During this tour, he also started carrying a part of his luggage on the back. The late Major-General Yadunath Singh, who was President Rajendra Prasad's Military Secretary for several years, was in-charge of the tour arrangements.

Despite State legislation on ceilings, wherever Vinoba went the people came forward to donate their lands in Bhoodan. Vinoba advised them to sink their differences and work for unity: "The problems of Kashmir cannot be solved through politics; they can be resolved only through a spiritual approach. The essence of spirituality lies in unanimity and mutual goodwill. Science is a powerful force. It has form, speed and action, but no direction. A sense of direction can be imparted to science only by spirituality."

"Kashmir is directly concerned with six countries—India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, China, Russia and America. The connection of America is through Pakistan. It is, therefore, necessary for the people of Kashmir to raise their mind to the supramental level and evolve a world approach to their problems. They must liberate their mind from the events of the past and develop an objective and scientific outlook. Our ancestors in *Rigveda* had used the word *'Vishwamanushah'*—citizen of the world—thousands of years ago. Our problems in the modern age can be solved only by promoting such integrated and catholic outlook. Otherwise, we shall have to face a catastrophe."

At one of the prayer meetings, a gallant soldier stood up and repeated the slogan *'Jai Jagat'* thrice in a loud voice. Explaining the significance of this new motto, Vinoba said: *"Jai Jagat* essentially means two things... First, we shall neither fear anybody, nor frighten anybody. We shall neither exploit nor allow ourselves to be exploited. This is real fearlessness. Secondly, we must love one and all. We must regard the whole world as our own and all people as our relatives and dear ones. We

must feel that no one is our enemy; all are our friends."

"There is mutual distrust between nations today. India is afraid of Pakistan and *vice versa.* America and the Soviet Union also fear each other. In consequence, the expenditure on armaments and nuclear weapons is mounting steadily. If we do not cry a halt to this mad race, humanity shall inescapably face a calamity. The motto of *'Jai Jagat'* is, therefore, the call of the age; it is a historical necessity."

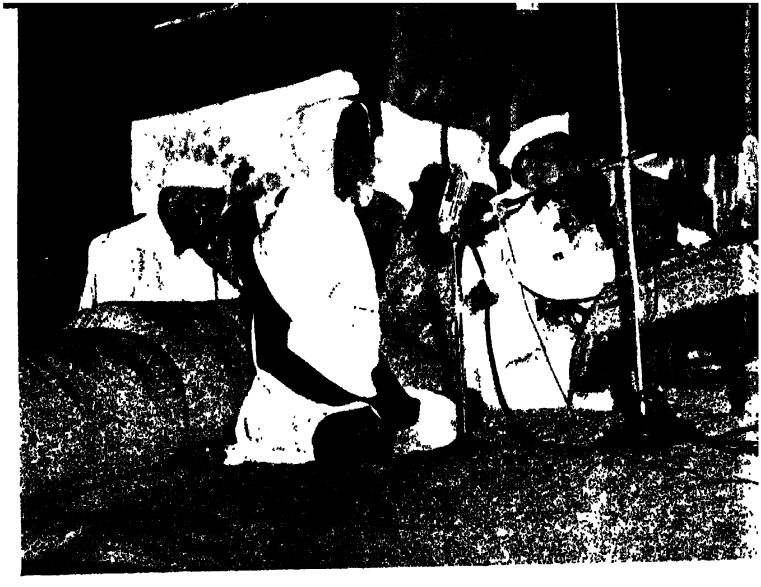
On another occasion, he talked to the members of the Indian Army and asked them to do their duty without any rancour in their hearts: "You must feel that you are fighting for your duty, fighting with patience and restraint and fighting without malice in your heart... I believe that as science advances, it would become clear that if we get angry and lose our balance or temper, we would miss the target. Hence both for the sake of science and religion, it is necessary to work with a cool mind."

Talking to a group of workers, Vinoba illustrated the concept of Sarvodaya with the help of electricity: "What is really required in this scientific age is love and affection. Love is like electricity. It cannot be seen with naked eyes. Mutual trust and confidence is like the button of the switch. The moment you press it you get the shining light in the bulb. We must, therefore, trust each other and repose full confidence amongst ourselves. It is only then that the power of love would manifest itself automatically."

Vinoba reached Poonch on 30 June. He had to cross the Pir Panjal range before reaching the picturesque valley of Kashmir. Exactly then, heavy rains set in and the whole area was flooded. Vinoba and his party were virtually marooned for several days and it was impossible to follow the scheduled programme. My elder son Bharat Kumar happened to be a member of the party on this occasion. He along with another worker crossed the Pir Panjal range from the other side at the elevation of about 14,000 feet and met Vinoba's party at Loren Mandi. In spite of heavy downpour, Vinoba decided to commence his *Padayatra* early next morning. He did not heed anybody's advice and walked through waist-deep rivulets undeterred. The accompanying jeep and two trucks were stuck



Crossing Pir Panjal range in Kashmir



Vinoba addresses A.I.C.C. at Berhampur



Playing for a child

in the mud and the party was without any provisions. The villagers brought some bread and *gur* which were shared by the members of the team. It was with very great difficulty that some milk was procured for Vinoba.

Bharat recounts how, on the following day, Vinoba ran towards the next camp and would not listen to the arguments of even General Yadunath Singh. He halted at a small Panchayat building by the side of a river swollen with floods. Spending the night there was a perilous event. The land near the *Panchayat Ghar* was being fast eroded and several villagers had been swept away by the gushing current. But Vinoba slept soundly and nothing untoward happened. Next morning, instead of worrying about the inherent dangers, he asked the party members to set about helping the village folk and save the lives of women and children.

After a few days, the rains subsided and the weather cleared up. Vinoba, therefore, proceeded towards Pir Panjal. General Yadunath Singh and Bharat formed the advance party and forged ahead with determination. It was the very first occasion for Vinoba to scale these heights. He was obliged to rest every ten minutes after walking a distance of fifty feet. But the surrounding landscape was enchanting and the golden rays of the early dawn thrilled Vinoba and others. The peaks of several Himalayan ranges were visible in all their grandeur. And so, Vinoba crossed Pir Panjal without any incident and reached Gulmarg where a large crowd welcomed him with great enthusiasm. He asked the people to turn Gulmarg from a tourist resort to 'a centre of worship'. This could be achieved only by eliminating both luxury as well as poverty. Instead of luxurious houses and edifices they should build simple ones with the help of local artisans and craftsmen.

During his tour in Kashmir, Vinoba walked on several occasions very near the cease-fire line where Indian troops were guarding the borders day and night. While he appreciated the patriotism and loyalty of these *Jawans*, he felt sorry that the Indian troops deployed all along the line had to idle away their time simply because of mutual fear and suspicion between India and Pakistan. On the other side of the cease-fire line could be seen the Pakistani troops similarly patrolling the

borders all the twenty-four hours. When somebody pointed out to Vinoba a white jeep with the inscription 'United Nations', he remarked: "And so, here is a third lot of idle men. What a large number of idle people have gathered together near the cease-fire line."

And he added: "On both sides of the cease-fire line, there are thousands of Indian and Pakistani soldiers ready to fire at each other at a moment's notice. The phrase 'cease-fire line' is, therefore, a misnomer. In effect, it is a 'keep-ready-for-fire line'. This is, indeed, a mockery of peaceful intentions upheld by the United Nations."

Vinoba reached Srinagar on 2 August, after passing through Patton, Baramullah, Hindwara and Sopur. He stayed in the city for five days and met people from all walks of life. He also met Sheikh Abdullah in jail and visited important places in the locality, including Shankaracharya Hill at the height of 6,000 feet. In one of his post-prayer speeches, Vinoba stated with great conviction that the days of religion and politics were over and the age of science and spirituality had dawned: "Science has given man the power to ignite and destroy the whole world, while sitting in his own home. Now you have to discover a power that can influence the whole world from your home and establish peace all over. This can be only *spiritual.* Spirituality is the call of this age, without which there is no deliverance."

A week later, Vinoba reached Pahalgam from where the famous place of pilgrimage Amarnath was only 26 miles away. When asked why he did not intend trekking to Amarnath, Vinoba replied: "I enjoy the Amarnath *darshan* every day when I see the poor and the lowliest in different villages and talk to them about their problems of hunger and unemployment. To me the whole world is one family and wherever I go I meet people as my own kith and kin." The people attended the prayer meetings in large numbers. After his speech, Vinoba would ask the audience to observe complete silence for five minutes, and this was done with dignity and discipline.

At one of the meetings, Vinoba expounded his conception of science and spirituality at some length. Politics, instead of uniting people, was dividing them and generating bitterness

and conflict. This was thoroughly undesirable in the age of science. If we really desired economic prosperity, it was imperative to combine spirituality with science. At the end of his discourse, Vinoba placed before the audience two equations:

Politics	+	Science	=	Annihilation
Spirituality	+	Science	=	Sarvodaya

He explained that spirituality was different from religion. While religion assumes different forms in relation to place and time, spirituality is universal and eternal like truth, love and compassion. Different ways of worship in temples, churches or mosques are supposed to be integral parts of religion. But fear of God and service of the poor are essential part of spirituality which is beyond time and space.

On his way back to Jammu, Vinoba crossed the Pir Panjal range once again and passed through Udhampur, Garhi and Katra. Addressing the people at Kathua, his last halt in Jammu and Kashmir, Vinoba called upon them to establish a Sarvodaya order and regard themselves as citizens of 'one world'.

He had also a word for the Chinese friends: "We have a history of ten thousand years behind us. Innumerable people, races and tribes have come here and continue to come. Recently, terror-ridden people came from Tibet and India gave them shelter. We are not concerned with their politics. But we gave them shelter for they were running for refuge. The Chinese friends did not like it. But I want to say to them that my country's honour is wedded to it. This is my country which produced the Buddha. This country regards none as her enemy. Our love for the Chinese would remain the same as it has been for ages past. But had we refused shelter to the people from Tibet, we would have fallen from our human stand."

I had the opportunity of meeting Vinoba soon after his trip to Kashmir. Summing up his observations, he told me in categorical terms that a practical solution of the Kashmir problem could be found only within the framework of the Indian Constitution. In his view, any talk about independent Kashmir was unrealistic. The Government of India, therefore, should

seriously consider the desirability of granting maximum autonomy to Jammu and Kashmir within the Indian Union.

Vinoba was also unequivocal in his opinion that any further division of the State on communal lines would be unwise and suicidal. If any steps were taken to divide the region on the basis of Hindu and Muslim majorities, it would send a wave of violent reaction throughout India and jeopardise the lives of millions of Muslims. Indian leaders, despite partition, had never recognized the theory of 'two nations'. Even so, if Kashmir is sought to be divided once again on communal basis, the situation in India would get out of hand and engulf the sub-continent in another bloody holocaust. In Vinoba's view, therefore, the State of Jammu and Kashmir should remain one and unified and uphold the ideal of secularism in the right sense of the term.

30

Among the Dacoits of Chambal

WHEN IN Kashmir, Vinoba had received a letter from Tehsildar Singh, son of the famous dacoit of Chambal valley, Man Singh, that he had been condemned to death and would like to have the saint's *darshan* before his execution. Accordingly, Vinoba sent Major-General Yadunath Singh to meet Tehsildar Singh in the Naini Central Prison, Allahabad. Later, Yadunath Singh went to the Chambal area also and met several dacoits of Man Singh's group. On his return, he gave Vinoba an impression that a number of dacoits may surrender to him if he visited the Chambal valley on his way back from Kashmir. Vinoba, therefore, expressed a desire to trek to this region and try the non-violent method of converting dacoits to normal civic life. Dr. K. N. Katju, the then Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, extended a cordial invitation to him for the purpose.

After passing through Punjab, Vinoba crossed the Jamuna and entered Uttar Pradesh, reaching Agra early in May. Since work among the dacoits in the Chambal valley concerned three State Governments of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, the Union Home Minister, Govind Ballabh Pant, and his colleague B. N. Datar, along with Dr. Sampurnanand, the then Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, specially proceeded to Agra to hold discussions with Vinoba and work out a common strategy. I also joined these discussions on behalf of the Planning Commission. It was decided to lend full support to Vinoba's peaceful efforts in persuading the dacoits to surrender themselves and give up their old ways. The Police authorities of the three States were instructed to help this Sarvodaya pro-

cess in the larger interests of peace and tranquillity in the region.

On 7 May 1960, Vinoba started on his peace mission in Chambal ravines, accompanied by Major-General Yadunath Singh. This area comprises the Bhind-Morena districts of Madhya Pradesh, parts of Dholpur district in Rajasthan, and Agra and Etawah districts of Uttar Pradesh. It has been the home of guerilla warfare for centuries. It was here that the Hindu monarch Chandragupta Maurya had sent a special unit of his army to be trained for fighting against the Greeks. The Mogul King Babar met with strong opposition during his exploits in the region. Even the efforts of Emperor Akbar to control the activities of dacoits near Agra had proved futile. The British also tried to curb this menace, but without much success. During the 1857 Mutiny, the valiant Tatia Tope had taken to these ravines and used them as a base for his operations. After Independence, the Congress Governments had launched a co-ordinated offensive against the dacoits of the Chambal valley with the help of the police and even the army. But the results of even these combined operations were far from satisfactory. The whole country, therefore, watched Vinoba's efforts in this direction with great interest and expectation.

In his very first speech after prayers, Vinoba observed: "Only God knows who a dacoit is! Some men are ill-famed as 'dacoits', but it is not a fact that they alone are dacoits. In the eyes of the Almighty some other men may also be more guilty than these notorious persons. Some people expect that I am going to solve the problem of dacoits. The case is totally different. Who am I to solve any such problem? I am only a servant of God who is wandering from village to village to serve good men." On another occasion he said: "I am trying to follow in the footsteps of the Buddha and Christ. I only desire that the river of compassion which is dry today may flow over again."

A few days later, the peace mission bore its first fruit when a young man of 30 with trimmed moustaches met Vinoba to surrender himself: "Baba, uptill now I was on the wrong path; I would commit no crime in future." His name was Ram Avatar Singh. He joined the evening prayers and became a member Vinoba's party.

At that time, there were about 25,000 policemen stationed in the area. Addressing some of the police officers, Vinoba remarked: "No one is born a dacoit. This is a natural outcome of exploitation, miserliness, cruelty and callousness. In Dhulia Jail, I had the occasion to meet hundreds of these brethren. I found that many of them were gentle, devout and religious. If we love dacoits, if we show kindness towards them, if we transform our village into a family, all the problems would be solved automatically. These dacoits are very simple, brave and fearless. If we change their line of action, they will easily turn into saints." He added: "The Police cannot solve this problem. If the Police will come to stay here, the dacoits will do likewise. Malice and hatred, aversion and animosity will also come to stay. This will go on traditionally."

After some days, the Madhya Pradesh Governor H. V. Pataskar, and Chief Minister Katju met Vinoba to extend their cooperation to him in this historic mission. Vinoba had read about a dacoit surrendering to the Buddha 2500 years ago. He was, therefore, walking in the Chambal ravines in a prayerful mood, placing himself in the hands of God. He was thrilled with astonishment when the notorious dacoit Lachhi, who had a reward of Rs. 5000 on his head, told him: "I was at Bombay when I read in the papers that you are touring the Chambal area, advising the dacoits to surrender themselves and repent for their misdeeds. I felt an urge in my heart to come to you and abandon the wrong and evil path. And so, I place myself and the members of my family in your hands."

Vinoba was visibly moved: "Today, I feel that I am facing the Lord. It is all His will. This brother, who has come from Bombay to surrender, is a God-sent one. None of our workers had approached him. God inspired him and he has come here. Two thousand and five hundred years ago we witnessed such an incident when Angulimal was turned into a saint by the touch of Lord Buddha. People say that such happenings are not probable in this *Kaliyug*—the age of evil. This is nothing but a miracle of the Almighty!"

This mission of peace gradually gathered momentum. After the prayer meeting on 19 May, all the 11 top dacoits of the Chambal valley, led by Lukka, proceeded towards Vinoba to

lay down their arms at his feet: "Till now we have committed many misdeeds and we are sorry for them!" The whole gathering was struck with wonder. Truth is often stranger than fiction. Major General Yadunath Singh asked the *bagis*—rebels—as Vinoba called these dacoits, to stand in a line and satisfy the curiosity of the public. Each announced his name and greeted the people with folded hands. Some journalists also shook hands with them. Soon after, the police took away all the surrendered arms and ammunitions to a nearby camp and recorded the details in their notebooks.

The dacoits who had surrendered, moved with Vinoba's party the following day to the next camp. There were large crowds at the prayer meeting to have a close look at them. In his speech, Vinoba explained: "People say that here there is a problem of dacoits. The main causes of this problem are: poverty, personal feuds and the police. The fourth cause of this problem is party politics and elections. If these causes are removed, the dacoit problem would be solved automatically." At the close of the speech, three more dacoits surrendered themselves and promised to turn over a new leaf.

On 22 May, the dacoits took leave of Vinoba before entering the jail. The girl inmates of Vinoba's camp gave them a touching farewell by putting *tilak* on their foreheads and binding the traditional thread of love round their wrists. When they prostrated at his feet, Vinoba blessed them: "Be devoted to God and have goodwill in your hearts." Lukka and his party expressed a desire to have the opportunity some day of offering their respects to Pandit Nehru whom they regarded a great leader of the Indian people. Vinoba asked Major-General Yadunath Singh to convey their wishes to the Prime Minister. Subsequently, they entered the police van to be taken to the district jail of Bhind.

Vinoba visited the jail next day and held a prayer meeting in which 200 prisoners participated. Said Vinoba: "I have spent nearly five years of my life within different jails. I delivered talks on the *Gita* to the fellow-prisoners. I used to do the work assigned to me with earnestness, because it is wrong to eat without performing some manual labour. We should not be a burden on the society. A jail should be regarded as an Ashram.

We should keep it neat and clean and live there as respectable human beings."

The police officers also were much impressed by Vinoba's technique of changing the hearts of these dacoits through love and compassion. They sought his guidance in their work. Vinoba thanked them for their co-operation: "The credit of the work accomplished here goes not to one man, but to many. All the credit in fact belongs to God. We are only tools in His hands. It is good that the dacoits decided to surrender unconditionally and change their line of action. I plainly told them that they would receive punishment according to the law of the land. If they don't take the punishment in this world, they will have to bear the consequences hereafter. I only assured them that no tyranny would be inflicted on them, and they will not be harassed, if they desire to come to me to surrender themselves. The friends who went to these brethren with the message of love, are worthy of praise. The police and the authorities also deserve appreciation. If the police and the authorities are favourable to this mission, the problem would be solved very easily."

Turning towards the policemen who had gathered on the occasion, Vinoba said: "Policemen should be faithful to their duty. They should observe restraint in every act of their life. There should be moderation in their eating, drinking, sleeping and working, and they should never remain idle." And he added: "There is good spirit in every man. Sometimes it is covered with a veil, but it never subsides. It shines as soon as the veil is dropped off. With this view, you should treat every man with sympathy."

K. F. Rustamji, Inspector-General of Police, Madhya Pradesh, created an unfortunate controversy by issuing a statement that Acharya Vinoba's mission had "delivered a blow to the morale of the police force, because it had insulted the courage and devotion to duty of men who stood up to fight the dacoits". He contended that during negotiations, the dacoits had been given an impression that their cases would be dealt with by the Government favourably. When Vinoba's attention was drawn to this statement, he remarked: "One sees God according to one's own light. It is incorrect to say that dacoits who

surrendered to me had been given any assurance. All along my tour, I have been publicly stating that it is for the law courts to decide whether they are to be acquitted or punished." As regards the desirability of a human touch in dealing with such cases, Vinoba observed: "The very fact that the President of India is empowered to commute death sentences is a positive proof that the Indian Constitution honours kindness and compassion."

Speaking at a public meeting sometime later, Vinoba declared: "Some people imagine that the dacoits have surrendered only because they were assured lenient dealings. A few think that it was the police operations which forced the exhausted bandits to surrender... The real point is that we do not want any good work to prosper in the world today. We do not want to have faith in others. I do believe that there has been a change of heart in these dacoits who surrendered to me."

Broadcasting from the All India Radio, Vinoba observed: "Non-violence has been a potent force in the spiritual world. Mahatma Gandhi tried it in the political field and during the last nine years an attempt has been made to try the principle in the socio-economic field. In this area, ridden with dacoits, my experience this time has been a novel one. Hearts have melted and the whole atmosphere is surcharged with the presence of God. Those who had taken to dacoity as their life business, have come in a penitent mood. It seems God has worked a miracle in their hearts. I can only express my gratitude to the Almighty, in whose faith I am humbly trying to tread the path of love, compassion and truth."

A few Sarvodaya workers did not like the surrendered dacoits being sent to jail. Vinoba explained: "Someone said that it was not proper for me to send the surrendered dacoits to prison. I want to make it clear that there is no other alternative to it. I don't want to do anything against the law which has its own limitations. All that I can do for the surrendered dacoits is to see that they get justice, to provide them with legal assistance and if possible help the members of their families to lead a good life. The surrendered dacoits should not ask for pardon as one can never escape the fruits of *Karma*. I want to tell the people who have not surrendered yet that it is in their interest

to give up old practices in a true spirit of repentance."

Later, the authorities charged the surrendered dacoits under the Arms Act. All of them pleaded guilty before the District Magistrate of Bhind. They had promised Vinoba that they would always speak the truth. And so the cases were over within minutes. Hearing this, Vinoba remarked: "This is a new thing in history. I had asked the dacoit brethren to confess their misdeeds and deny false charges. Even if they are sentenced to death, they should walk to the gallows cheerfully."

Vinoba completed his tour of the region on 7 June at Gwalior. During this tour of one month, he covered 8 to 10 miles a day and visited 26 villages which were associated with the names of notorious dacoits. In all, 20 dacoits of the Chambal valley belonging to Man Singh-Rupa gang surrendered to him. They had carried high prizes worth Rs. 20,000 on their heads and records showed that every dacoit killed or captured by the police caused the Government an expenditure of Rs. 10 lakhs on an average.

In order to utilize the changed atmosphere in the region for constructive work among the people, a Chambal Peace Committee was constituted by the Sarva Seva Sangh under the guidance of Vinoba. This Committee assisted the dacoits in expediting the cases pending against them in different courts of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. The Committee collected some funds to reclaim waste lands in these ravines and start a few cottage and village industries for training the families of dacoits. Ambar Charkha centres have helped in some measure to rehabilitate the families by supplementing their meagre incomes from small farms. Vinoba has been guiding the work of the Chambal Peace Committee all these years. He was anxious that the 'rebels' should not be harassed by the State Governments unnecessarily, and once prosecution had ended in the courts of one State, similar proceedings should not be started against them by another State Government. I had, accordingly, been writing to the Chief Ministers concerned from time to time. As far as I know, all the dacoits who had surrendered to Vinoba in the Chambal valley, have now been released after serving their sentences.

None was sentenced to death by the law courts. They are now living with their kith and kin, leading a simple life with self-respect. One of them was recently elected the chairman of the local village panchayat. In deference to the wishes of Vinoba, President Rajendra Prasad had commuted the death sentence on Tehsildar Singh to imprisonment for life. He may also be released after some time in view of his good behaviour in jail.

The work of rehabilitating the dacoits suffered a serious set-back owing to the sad death of Major-General Yadunath Singh early in August 1960. He succumbed to a sudden heart attack. Vinoba mourned: "Normally such news does not upset me, but I am really shocked to know that Yadunath Singh has passed away. The whole work in the Chambal area depended on him. He had shown great courage and laboured hard for the success of this assignment. I believe that his soul will now be able to work even more than what he could do with his body."

I am not sure whether the Government of India and the State Governments have taken the necessary steps so far to utilize and consolidate the gains of Vinoba's peace mission in the Chambal valley. It shall be a thousand pities if Vinoba's efforts in this direction are allowed to fade away. The least that may be done in this connection is to hold a high-level Seminar of officials and non-officials to review the work done by Vinoba and to evolve a new technique of dealing with the dacoits in an efficacious and humane manner. The World Bank has now agreed to finance a project of reclaiming ravines in the Chambal region so that the people of the area may be rehabilitated by distributing lands to them. This project may go a long way in eliminating the menace of dacoits on a long-term basis.

In essence, the dacoity problem needs a constructive rather than a purely punitive and police approach for its permanent solution. From this viewpoint, Vinoba's mission in Chambal should prove to be a guiding light to those in authority.

31

To Assam: A Mission of Peace

AFTER COMPLETING his tour of the Chambal valley, Vinoba passed through Rajasthan and reached Indore on 24 July 1960. He visited almost every ward in the city and met people from all walks of life to explain to them the ideal of Sarvodaya. An intensive campaign for sanitation was organized in the first week of August, and Vinoba himself participated in this cleanliness drive.

During Vinoba's stay in Indore, the pensioners of the city formed an organization of their own—*Sarvodaya Vanaprastha Mandal.* Inaugurating this new institution, Vinoba advised the retired Government servants to engage themselves in various constructive activities like slum-clearance and Sarvodaya *Patra* in order to make Indore a Sarvodaya city. The local Sarvodaya workers started a new centre which was named by Vinoba as *Visarjan* Ashram. The underlying idea was that the workers should divest themselves of old values and adopt new ones: "You should free yourselves from all attachments and worries. Then alone this Ashram could be truly called *Visarjan* and serve as a real centre of service for the people."

Vinoba also appointed a Committee of three, consisting of V. S. Khode, Dadabhai Naik and Devendra Gupta "to act as the catalytic agent from which the people of Indore will get the inspiration to shoulder the responsibility of building a Sarvodaya city". The main items of this programme consisted of *Shanti Sena,* sanitation, avoidance of disputes being taken to law courts, and lifting municipal affairs above party politics.

Walking through the city, Vinoba noticed some unseemly and indecent film posters which had been displayed prominently in front of the cinema houses. Their contents filled his mind with a sense of horror and indignation. He declared that these posters must be removed, and if the law of the land was incapable of achieving this objective, the workers should resort to satyagraha. Vinoba had a talk with the cinema proprietors who promised to remove those posters which would be declared as 'indecent' by a local committee. Later, they went back on their words. A date was, therefore, fixed for removing these objectionable posters and it was communicated to the persons concerned. On that particular day, the posters were pulled down from public places and consigned to fire by the workers, chanting religious hymns.

Explaining the need for satyagraha in this matter, Vinoba observed: "Every person passing before these posters is obliged to witness their indecency. They, therefore, provide free and compulsory education in sensuality. The people have a right to remove them and prevent their invasion on the minds of the youth." He continued: "I am not against the cinema industry as such. If organized properly, it could serve as an effective medium for public education. But we cannot allow the cinema owners to thrust these obscene posters on the eyes of the people."

News about civil resistance against the cinema posters in Indore spread throughout the country and Sarvodaya workers in different States, including Delhi, started similar campaigns. The movement had its desired effect and in many places the proprietors removed the objectionable posters of their own accord in order to avert any awkward situation.

Meanwhile, linguistic disturbances broke out in Assam and several *Shanti Sena* workers rushed to that State for relief and rehabilitation. There were widespread attacks on the Bengali population who were dubbed as 'outsiders'. Many constructive workers suggested that Vinoba should proceed to Assam. This linguistic frenzy greatly perturbed Pandit Nehru as well. He wrote a personal letter to Vinoba requesting him to visit Assam

at the earliest opportunity to 'heal the wounds'. Vinoba accepted the suggestion but, as usual, decided to undertake a long trek to Assam. During his earlier tour of East India, he had not been able to touch this State. He therefore, welcomed this opportunity of visiting Assam which occupied a very strategic position in the eastern section, joining our frontiers with Pakistan, China and Burma.

Passing through Jabalpur and Varanasi, Vinoba reached Bihar on 25 December, the Christmas Day. He reminded the people of the State of their pledge for solving the land problem through Bhoodan. He initiated a new slogan of *'Bigha men Kattha'*—donating one-twentieth of their plots to the landless. It was suggested that the target of 32 lakh acres should be completed by 3 December 1961, the 75th birthday of President Dr. Rajendra Prasad.

Trekking through West Bengal, Vinoba entered Goalpara district of Assam on 5 March 1961. In his first prayer meeting, he asked the people to recognize the cosmopolitan character of their State: "As you know, Assam is inhabited by people speaking various languages. Apart from Assamese and Bengali—the two major languages of this province, there are various tribal languages also. Additionally, businessmen and labourers from almost all the provinces of India have made Assam their home and speak their respective languages. There are Hindus, Muslims and Christians here. Thus, Assam is the abode of various religions, communities and languages. I am sure that this cosmopolitan character of Assam would lead to its immense prosperity and, in course of time, this north-eastern frontier of India would be one of the most developed States of this land." He added: "Therefore, what we need today in Assam is mutual confidence. The power of love would come to the fore with the magic touch of faith."

In Goalpara, Vinoba visited various areas which had witnessed shocking scenes during the language disturbances. A number of houses had been burned down by the rioters. Vinoba entered some of the houses to sympathize with the sufferers, especially women and children. In a post-prayer speech, he lamented: "The villagers here are simple and sincere. But political leaders in the cities poison the minds of people and

make them indulge in inglorious behaviour. The police and the military cannot solve these problems. You have to develop moral and spiritual values in life, without which there can be no unity and cohesion. I am trying to unite the hearts of the people through the mission of Bhoodan which is essentially a mission of peace."

At a meeting in Dhubri, Vinoba appealed to the people to uphold the fair name of Assam: "As the sun, the giver of light and life, rises in the east, so the State of Assam should be a pioneer in the work of Sarvodaya and universal brotherhood. It has been the home of great saints like Shankardeva who gave the message of service and compassion. That message should be spread again among the people in order to create an atmosphere of mutual co-operation."

In the early hours of 8 April, Vinoba reached Gauhati and was accorded a warm welcome by men, women and children. He asked the gathering to solve their problems not by legislation but through compassion: "I have come to Assam to speak little and listen more. I wish to see this beautiful land spreading the message of love in the country. India attained her freedom through peace and non-violence. It is through this path alone that our prestige can be raised in the eyes of the world."

On 12 May, Vinoba entered the North Lakhimpur district. A number of Gramdans had already been declared in the area. Vinoba, therefore, decided to stay there for about a year so that the whole of North Lakhimpur could be declared as a Gramdan region. The Chief Minister of Assam, B. P. Chaliha, and all the members of the State Legislature promised to extend their full co-operation in this work, irrespective of party affiliations. Addressing local youth organizations, Vinoba said: "I am sorry to learn about the unhappy language riots here. It is narrow mentality which gives rise to such violence, and it is surprising that in this age of science people should become so parochial. It is like a miser who closes all the doors and windows of his house and makes it dark and dingy. Abundant air and light from outside is prevented from entering the house. Such narrowness may be excused in the case of the older generation, but the youth should be harbingers of

tomorrow and not the followers of yesterday. Today even nationalism falls short of our ideal. We have now to think in terms of one world—*Jai Jagat.*"

Vinoba also addressed leading men of letters: "A distinctive quality of literature comes from truth, restraint and equanimity. A writer should be able to touch the hearts of the people. This can be done only through non-violence which is the root of true art. There is compassion in communism, but the consciousness of truth born of all-embracing experience is not there. Sarvodaya is, therefore, a superior force because it stands for unity, love and service."

Talking to women, Vinoba asserted: "Our women-folk possess the divine quality of love in a greater measure as compared with men. To be a soldier of peace, they must have the courage to intervene and curb men from improper behaviour. Men have made a mess of the whole affair. They cannot think of other means of settling differences except by taking recourse to arms. Women should now come forward to show a better way of resolving our differences."

Throughout his tour in Assam, the indefatigable lady-worker, Amal Probha Das, accompanied Vinoba and organized mass meetings even in remote villages. She, along with her band of women workers, was able to offer about 1000 Gramdans to Vinoba, more especially in the North Lakhimpur district. Vinoba was sorry to know that the number of male workers was quite inadequate for undertaking an ambitious programme of Gramdan in the State.

When I met Vinoba in North Lakhimpur, he expressed a desire to cross into Nagaland, provided his visit did not create political problems for the Government of India. Pandit Nehru, whose advice was sought in the matter, was of the view that Vinoba's going to Nagaland at that time might create several complications in relation to the underground Nagas. The idea was, therefore, dropped. Subsequently, it was suggested that Vinoba may return to Bengal, after passing through Pakistan. This would, incidentally, be a shorter route also. I consulted Pandit Nehru once again. He decided to sound the Pakistan

Government informally through the Indian High Commissioner in Karachi. The initial reaction of Pakistan was unfavourable. But, after some weeks, President Ayub Khan gave a green signal and publicly announced that he would welcome Vinoba's visit to Pakistan.

Before leaving Assam, Vinoba established a new Ashram in North Lakhimpur. It was called *Maitri Ashram*—a Centre of Friendship. Kusum Deshpande, a member of Vinoba's party, was asked to be in charge of the institution. Like the *Brahma Vidya Mandir* at Pavnar, this Centre also consists of only lady inmates. This Ashram has gradually developed into a nucleus of constructive work in the Gramdan villages of Assam.

32

A Trip to East Pakistan

AFTER TOURING Assam for about 18 months, Vinoba entered East Pakistan on 5 September 1962. The team consisted of Ashadevi Aryanayakam, Mahadevitai, Kalindiben, Jayadev and Bal. Vinoba's speeches were delivered in Hindi and translated by Ashadevi into simple Bengali. The luggage of the party was reduced to the minimum, and Vinoba took with him very few books for his own study, and none for distribution. News about the publication of his *Selections from Quran* had created some controversy in Pakistan. Vinoba, therefore, avoided any reference to this book, copies of which were also not available till then.

The very first village in Pakistan touched by Vinoba was Sonarhat. He stopped for a while in the campus of the local school where crowds surrounded him. Vinoba observed: "I am grateful to the Pakistan Government for allowing me to tour this area. I have come here only to express my love and affection for the people of Pakistan. I have been here only for a few minutes, but I see no difference between India and Pakistan—the same air, the same earth and the same people with warm hearts. To me the people of India and Pakistan make no difference. In fact, I belong to the world and am a servant of humanity. Wherever I go, I say *Jai Jagat,* because the world is one and we are all alike."

Hours later, Vinoba reached Bhurungamari village where the Indian Deputy High Commissioner, stationed at Dacca, met him along with his First Secretary. The local Deputy Commissioner had already conveyed the greetings of Pakistan Gov-

ernment to Vinoba at the border. The evening prayers were held in the compound of the high school, where thousands of people gathered to hear him: "I have been touring the villages of India for the last eleven years on foot. I prefer foot-march because it affords me an opportunity of meeting a large number of people living in remote villages. While proceeding to West Bengal from Assam, I thought of visiting East Pakistan and meet all of you. The Pakistan Government was kind enough to accord the necessary sanction. I am a servant of the poor and try to understand their difficulties wherever I go. I have so far received 40 lakh acres of land in India as Bhoodan, out of which about 10 lakhs have already been distributed to the landless agricultural labour."

Vinoba continued: "I have come here empty-handed and will go away empty-handed. But I shall be happy if some land is donated in Pakistan also for poor agriculturists. All religions enjoin us to share our bread with others. This is the essence of Islam too. I would, therefore, appeal to you to spare some land for the landless." Complete silence was observed for five minutes at the end of the prayers.

Later, Vinoba met individually a number of persons at his camp. One Muslim gentleman offered a Bigha out of his 4 acres of land. But while signing the form he made it one acre. This was the first Bhoodan on the land of Pakistan. Vinoba affectionately placed his hand on the shoulders of the first donor, Abdul Khaleque Munshi, and sought divine blessings for him. Tears rolled down Munshi's eyes. Similar donations were offered to Vinoba at several meetings during the rest of the tour in East Pakistan. In all 175 Bighas were donated and redistributed among the local landless, both Hindus and Muslims.

The next day, mikes failed at the public meeting. Vinoba stepped down the dais, stood in the midst of the people and said in a loud voice: "We are all the children of God and it is our duty to take care of each other and share one another's joys and sorrows. God is one although His names are countless. The essence of all religions is the same, and we should do our best to help the lowliest."

He went on: "A country can gather strength only if the

basic unit, the village, is strong and powerful. The village is the foundation of the district, the district of the province and the province of the nation. National strength, therefore, ultimately depends upon the unity and prosperity of the villages. They can become strong only if everybody is gainfully employed on land or agro-industries. I, therefore, expect you to do your duty by your neighbours."

On another occasion, Vinoba declared: "I feel that the people of Pakistan are my own brothers. Land, wind and water are the gifts of *Allah*. A few individuals cannot own them and deprive others of their use. Basic Democracy in Pakistan can do a great deal for the good of the common man, provided adequate attention is paid to the people at the very bottom."

In his post-prayer speeches, Vinoba freely quoted verses from the *Quran*. He also recited them in melodious voice in smaller gatherings. The people were astonished to mark his faultless pronunciation and intonation of the Arabic language.

On 11 September, his 67th birthday, Vinoba received a telegraphic message of congratulations from the Governor of East Pakistan. The day began with the singing of Tagore songs in chorus. Recitations from the *Quran* and the *Gita* followed. Vinoba also sang a Marathi *Bhajan*. Addressing a large prayer meeting, Vinoba explained the basic objectives of the Bhoodan movement and asked the audience to help him in this 'programme of compassion'.

A group of Pakistani men of letters met Vinoba at Rangpur on 14 September. A number of questions were asked about the system of Basic Democracy in Pakistan:

Question: You have on several occasions expressed your approval of Basic Democracy in Pakistan. Would you recommend it for India?

Answer: You have not correctly understood my statements. What I wished to say was that if these Union Councils take up the work of building the villages on the foundations of love and compassion, it will help towards the evolution of true democracy. You know that democracy does not believe in itself in times of national crises. The main reason for this is that the State in every country depends on the power of

the Army. There can be no true democracy unless it is based on non-violence. Therefore, whenever I have made any reference to Basic Democracy, I have meant that it can do some good work in the lower levels of democracy.

Question: Can Basic Democracy help in the emancipation of man?

Answer: There can be no true emancipation as long as democracies are based on violence. The present state of the world is a curious one. The great leaders of nations have lost their faith in violence, but they have not yet found their faith in non-violence. They are hanging in the middle and the world is, thus, passing through a transitional stage. That is why I have placed my faith for the future in the creators of literature.

Question: What is your opinion regarding the claim of world Communism to establish world peace?

Answer: The power of Communism lies in its compassion. Though its method is one of violence, Communism tries to redress the suffering of the have-nots. We should also have the same intense longing for the redress of suffering in the world.

It is generally found that those who believe in non-violence accept the *status quo* and social revolutionaries follow the way of violence. Our ideal should be one of non-violent revolution. In the language of Marxian dialectic, the combination of non-violence with the *status quo* is antithesis and non-violence plus social revolution is the synthesis.

Question: What would be the concrete steps for bringing about this non-violent social revolution?

Answer: The first step would be decentralization of power. The greatest power would be at the lowest level, and this power will progressively decrease at the higher stages of authority: the higher the authority, the less power it will have. The highest authority will have only moral power. Secondly, there should be a gradual evolution towards a co-operative social order. Thirdly, there should be full opportuni-

ties for the development of the individual. And lastly, complete dedication to the society.

What is needed today is integration of work with knowledge. Today, society is divided into two classes—those who work and have no knowledge, and those who have knowledge but do not work with their hands. Education should build a bridge across this wide gulf.

Question: Where does the programme of Bhoodan fit into this picture?

Answer: The final objective is the building up of a non-violent society; Gramdan will be the foundation on which this society will rest. Bhoodan is the first step, for starting the process. It will create the necessary climate for this non-violent social revolution.

During his morning walks, from one village to another, Vinoba was greeted by hundreds of people on the way. Both Hindus and Muslims touched his feet with great faith and reverence. They would place their children before him for his blessings. Some would whisper: "He is a great *Fakir* from India." Others would say: "He is Mahatma Gandhi's unique disciple." The crowds everywhere were invariably large, almost as large as in India. Prayer meetings were calm and disciplined, and nobody asked any embarrassing questions on politics. Bengali was the common language of West Bengal and East Pakistan, and everybody loved to speak and hear it. The songs of Rabindranath Tagore were sung by members of both the communities with equal devotion. The Press also extended its full co-operation and did not whip up any controversies.

On the last day, a number of journalists surrounded Vinoba. One of them asked: "The land in East Pakistan is very limited. Would you use your good offices in persuading the Government of India to grant some more land to Pakistan?" Vinoba promptly rejoined: "India is faced with a similar situation. The land problem in any country could be solved only through love and co-operation. Both India and Pakistan can find a satisfactory solution of this problem only if there is some kind

of a 'confederation' between the two countries. In the last analysis, there should be a world federation of all nations."

After trekking through the two districts of Rangpur and Dinajpur, Vinoba poured out his heart at the last prayer meeting in East Pakistan: "I leave your country tomorrow morning after a pilgrimage of 16 days. While entering your country I had only imagined that you would offer me your affection. I have now actually tasted the sweetness of your love and am very thankful, indeed. There are many races, languages and religions in the world. But there is an inherent unity in the midst of this diversity. Man everywhere is inspired by the same ideals and aspirations. We should, therefore, behave as members of a single family and the whole world should become one."

The next morning, the Deputy Commissioner, the Police Superintendent of Dinajpur and the Deputy High Commissioner of India paid their respects to Vinoba and expressed satisfaction about his tour. At the border, there was a narrow 'no man's land' between Pakistan and India. On the side of Pakistan flew the green flag, and on the Indian side the tricolour. Pakistani border displayed the banner 'Pakistan Zindabad: Long live Vinoba'; and on the Indian side, 'Jai Jagat: Welcome Acharya Vinoba'. Several constructive workers who had lived with Gandhiji during his Naokhali tour, had accompanied Vinoba in East Pakistan. They also took leave of him and sought his good wishes and blessings.

From all accounts, Vinoba's trip was instrumental in recreating an atmosphere of friendship and goodwill between India and Pakistan. It passed off peacefully without any untoward incidents. But, incidentally, this was the first occasion when Vinoba ever set his foot on a foreign soil. It might as well be the last.

33

Vinoba Condemns Chinese Aggression

AFTER COMPLETING his tour of East Pakistan, Vinoba entered Dinajpur district of West Bengal. He declared on the very first day that he would stay in the State "as long as it is necessary". So far, he had only passed through some portions of West Bengal on his way to Orissa or Assam. This was the first time when he planned to visit almost all the districts and intensify Gramdan work in the State.

Addressing a meeting he observed: "I am satisfied with my mission of goodwill to East Pakistan. I have, however, no intention of organizing any further Bhoodan work there. It is now for the local leaders to follow it up. I had gone to Pakistan with love in my heart which the people there reciprocated in abundance. Bhoodan was only a symbol of that love. As in East Pakistan, the land should be distributed promptly here as well among the landless labour by the donor himself in the presence of the villagers. Delay in distribution is likely to dampen the enthusiasm of the people for the Bhoodan movement."

In reply to a question about his attitude towards Communism, Vinoba stated: "The basic objectives of Communism are good. But its approach tends to divide the world into two camps; this is antithesis and not synthesis. In my view, synthesis should change the individual and the society through the power of love and compassion."

A notable landmark in Vinoba's tour of West Bengal this time was the gift of village Plassey in Gramdan. Said Vinoba: "It was this historic village where Lord Clive defeated Nawab

Siraj-ud-daula in 1757. This village, after a lapse of over two centuries, has now resolved to work as a joint family under Gramdan on the basis of unanimity and mutual co-operation." Vinoba mentioned this fact even to Pandit Nehru who met him on 25 December on his way back from Shantiniketan.

During October-November that year Vinoba toured several districts of West Bengal as also the adjoining districts of Bihar. It was during this period that China committed aggression on the Indian borders. Vinoba was greatly upset at this violent and unseemly behaviour of China towards India. In the course of his public speeches he condemned Chinese aggression in unmistakable terms. At Rajmahal in Bihar on 24 October, he categorically stated: "The current conflict on the Himalayan border has been unnecessarily imposed by China on India which had always befriended it. But the defence of three-thousand miles of border with China is not a small matter. Permanent vigilance backed by a united and satisfied people is essential for effective defence." Vinoba exhorted the people to show courage and maintain peace at home: "Efforts should be made in the villages to end all quarrels peacefully and to give as much relief as possible to the poor and the exploited masses." He asserted: "Hunger within the country was a greater danger than the aggression of China on the borders."

Vinoba reminded the audience about his observations at the Gramdan Conference of Yelwal in September 1957: "At that meeting I had mentioned that Gramdan was a 'defence measure'. I had, then, not the slightest idea about the possibility of Chinese aggression on India. Now that we are faced with this continuing danger, it is essential to strengthen our villages through the Gramdan programme. It is ultimately the strength of the village which would buttress our national defences."

He also made it abundantly clear that Chinese attack was not intended 'merely to grab and annex a few thousand square miles of Indian territory'. "It is essentially a fight between two ideologies. China wants to impose the communist ideology on India. If we want to repel the invaders successfully, we must counteract them with a superior ideology of Sarvodaya. This could be achieved only through unity amongst all sections of the people, and real unity cannot be established so long as

large sections of our population remian hungry and naked. The richer sections of the society, therefore, should part with some of their possessions voluntarily for distribution among the weaker segments. Redistribution of land will make for increased production as well as united defence against China."

In a crowded meeting at Katihar in Bihar on 9 November Vinoba said: "I have never witnessed such a powerful awakening in the people of India as in the present context of Chinese aggression. This shows the vitality of India's soul and the unity of the nation's heart. It also demonstrates the will of the nation to defend itself." He went on: "This awakening should now be used to forge real unity among different classes of people—the haves and the have-nots, the high and the low. The Chinese menace cannot be met by military action alone. It has to be dealt with on the economic and social planes as well. Since war with China may be a long-term affair, it is necessary for the Indian villages to attain self-sufficiency in matters of food and other essential commodities. This will be possible only if the villages are reorganized on the basis of unity and sharing of land and wealth through the Gramdan programme."

On another occasion Vinoba observed: "Chinese aggression is a clear instance of expansionism. It is not Communism. While committing this act of expansionism, China may talk of Communism to win the sympathies of certain nations. But such expansionist ambition in the present age will lead only to utter destruction." He continued: "As a soldier of peace, my basic view is that in this world no good could come out of arms and weapons of war. I am, therefore, totally opposed to armed conflicts in any shape or form. India was not thinking of war and was always prepared for peaceful negotiations. Chinese aggression against India is, therefore, absolutely wrong. It is not befitting even from the point of view of Communism. My sympathies are, thus, with India. I say this not as an Indian, but as a citizen of the world who believes in *'Jai Jagat'*."

Vinoba added: "I had hoped that China which had subscribed to the principles of *Panchsheel* and peaceful co-existence would not think of aggression under any circumstances. Even so, I have now been compelled to reach the conclusion

that Chinese action is a clear case of aggression. I should, therefore, like to appeal to China to retrace her wrong steps for the good of the world."

In subsequent speeches, Vinoba appealed to the people of India for maintaining unity and solidarity and asked: "Why do you wait for aggression from outside? Why can you not unite and evolve a common programme through which you can co-operate with all your strength?" He desired *Shanti Sena* workers to spread all over India and work intensively among the people to generate an atmosphere of unity, co-operation and social cohesion. He also expressed the hope that the Indian Government, though engaged in a war which had been forced upon her, will defend the country, but without enmity, hatred and rancour in their hearts: "Despite greatest provocation, India should maintain her basic policy of friendship for all and enmity towards none."

Answering a question whether a *Shanti Sainik* should go to the front to meet the Chinese aggression, Vinoba replied: "In my opinion, it would be foolish to do so. Those who have committed aggression are not individuals, but parts of a machine. They have been sent here by their masters and the soldiers have to carry out the orders. Sarvodaya workers going to the front would embarrass the Government of India too. Moreover, *Shanti Sena* should concentrate for the time being on the maintenance of internal unity. How can it succeed in the international field without gaining sufficient experience within the country?"

He referred to the visits of C. Rajagopalachari and U. N. Dhebar to meet Kennedy and Khrushchev for the banning of nuclear arms: "It is always good to repeat these ideas on different occasions. But they cannot be effective unless there is a moral force behind them. India has certainly tried her best to avoid hostilities and work for peace. But the fact remains that she still maintains an army for defence purposes. We have had no opportunity so far to demonstrate moral and non-violent force even within the country. We may think of entering the international field only when we have registered at least some progress in the national sphere."

At a press conference in Calcutta in the middle of December,

Vinoba dispelled a false impression that he was against the use of the Army for meeting Chinese aggression on Indian soil: "When India maintains an army, it has to be used to repel an armed attack. Nevertheless, the main challenge thrown by the Chinese is ideological. China believes in Communism, while India is wedded to democratic socialism. Which of these systems can eliminate poverty from the people quickly and effectively? This is the basic question."

"We should, however, not lose our sense of perspective," said Vinoba. "Both India and China are big countries with ancient civilizations. The border conflict is bound to be a long-drawn affair. We should, surely, face the aggression with faith and courage. But we need not develop mass hatred towards the Chinese people."

Days later, similar sentiments were expressed by Nehru at the Convocation of Vishwa Bharati in Shantiniketan: "We shall fight the Chinese army with all our might and resist aggression on our borders. But in this process, we must not whip up hatred and enmity towards the people of China who, like us, are the inheritors of an ancient and great civilization." As the Prime Minister spoke these words, the Chinese Professor in-charge of 'China Bhawan' at Shantiniketan, who sat in the audience, could not contain his emotions and broke into tears.

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Talks with Nehru

AFTER DELIVERING his Convocation Address at Shantiniketan, Pandit Nehru motored down to Nabagram in Murshidabad district, on the Christmas Day 1962, to meet Vinoba. After the Chinese aggression on 20 October, the whole country was greatly exercised over national security and the Prime Minister was naturally anxious to elicit Vinoba's views in the matter. He brought several maps with him to explain the exact situation regarding areas claimed by China and the 'line of actual control' mentioned in her unilateral withdrawal. The then Governor of West Bengal, Padmaja Naidu, and Indira Gandhi accompanied him.

During the hour-long talks, the two leaders exchanged views regarding current situation in the wake of unprovoked attack by China. I had already conveyed to Pandit Nehru Vinoba's views on the matter as expressed in his post-prayer speeches during November and December. It was, however, re-assuring for the Prime Minister to hear those views directly from Vinoba in support of the stand taken by the Government of India.

After Chinese aggression on India, enormous pressure had been brought to bear on the Union Government by different political parties, including the Congress, to abandon the policy of non-alignment and seek the active co-operation of Western Powers in buttressing national defences against China and Pakistan. The quick sequence of tragic events had shaken the faith of the people in the *Panchsheel* doctrine to the very foundations. Even Pandit Nehru had felt rather overwhelmed and was, for some time, in two minds. But Vinoba was forth-

right in his unqualified support for the policy of dynamic neutrality in international affairs. In his view, it was this basic policy of non-involvement which had saved India from a long-drawn war and averted the possibility of a global conflict. On 28 November, Vinoba had written a fairly detailed letter to Nehru, lending his full moral support to him in pursuing the policy of non-alignment. This letter was, indeed, very timely and strengthened the hands of the Prime Minister who went to the extent of reading it out to his colleagues at one of the Cabinet meetings. In his reply to Vinoba on 2 December, Nehru wrote: "In my opinion, our policy of non-alignment is correct and we should maintain it. It will help India and the whole world. Some people want us to abandon it and exercise much pressure. Consequently, others too get confused. I was, therefore, happy to go through the contents of your letter."

In the course of their conversation at Nabagram, Pandit Nehru referred to a suggestion that the border dispute between India and China may be referred to arbitration. While he had no objection to arbitration in principle, he thought that any such talk at a time when the Chinese had a definite edge over India would place us in an awkward position. Vinoba agreed with this view but suggested that an early opportunity should be utilized for having a meaningful dialogue between the two countries. Passage of time in this matter would, decidedly, be to the disadvantage of India; the situation on the borders would gradually get frozen in China's favour. Pandit Nehru, by and large, concurred: "It is true that some people in Parliament assert that there should be no talks between us. But this does not appear sound to me. Discussions may take place, but only when the climate is conducive for it."

After studying all available literature on the subject, Vinoba was of the definite opinion that India should have direct talks with China on the border question if the latter agreed to withdraw their seven posts from the demilitarized zone in Ladakh. He felt that absence of civil posts of China and India from the demilitarized zone would be even better than the Colombo proposals which envisaged the existence of posts of both the countries in that area. Furthermore, Vinoba expressed the view that various problems relating to Pakistan and Kashmir

may be solved satisfactorily if our dispute with China was settled earlier of course, consistent with national dignity and honour.

This was the seventh meeting of Vinoba with Nehru since their first talk in the series on 18 April 1954, at the Bodh Gaya Sarvodaya Conference. I need hardly mention that Pandit Nehru cherished deep regard for Vinoba's rational and balanced views in respect of national as well as international affairs. He, therefore, welcomed every opportunity to have personal and intimate talks with him. In fact, he had been expressing to me quite frequently his genuine desire to meet Vinoba at least once a year. He wanted me to fix a suitable date for this purpose by remaining in constant touch with his and Vinoba's tour programmes from month to month. I was, accordingly, able to arrange seven meetings between these two great men of our times. Since I alone had the privilege of being present at these talks between Nehru and Vinoba, I should like to mention here some of the topics which were discussed at these meetings on different occasions.

It was possible to fix the first meeting at Bodh Gaya after persistent efforts. At my instance, Vinoba had written a personal letter to Pandit Nehru inviting him to attend the All-India Sarvodaya Sammelan at Bodh Gaya on 18 April. Nehru did not want to decline the invitation, though he found it very difficult to alter his busy programme. He was due to be in Chidambram in South India on 17 April. The only feasibility of his reaching Gaya on the next day was to fly directly from Chidambram over a thousand miles in the bumpy summer weather. After considerable thought, he ultimately decided to reach Gaya airport in the afternoon of 18 April. I received him at the airport which had registered a temperature of 118° F. that day. The then Vice-President of India, Dr. Radhakrishnan, also accompanied him. We motored straight to the venue of the Sarvodaya Conference where thousands of constructive workers had gathered from different parts of the country.

Requesting Nehru to speak on the occasion, Vinoba expressed his worry and anxiety over the prevailing system of elections which entailed enormous expenditure and led to numerous cor-



Nehru and Vinoba exchange greetings at Yelwal



Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Vinoba at Sevagram

rupt practices. Nehru was rather exhausted and fatigued after the long journey and did not talk much to the Conference. However, he expressed his broad agreement with Vinoba's views regarding electoral reforms and promised to look into the matter.

After the Conference, Vinoba and Nehru walked together to the cottage where the former was staying. They were together for over an hour and talked over various matters of mutual interest. At these meetings Vinoba would talk the least. He requested Pandit Nehru to acquaint him with the latest political situation within and without the country. This Nehru did with considerable interest and care. He also conveyed to Vinoba the progress of the First Five-Year Plan, particularly in relation to land reforms. He appreciated the Bhoodan movement and hoped that the good atmosphere created by it would be utilized by the State Governments for introducing progressive land measures in their areas both for land redistribution as well as for augmenting agricultural production.

Vinoba sought the help of the Indian National Congress, of which Pandit Nehru was also the President at that time, in making the Bhoodan campaign a success. Nehru informed Vinoba that the AICC had already issued circulars to Pradesh Congress Committees to take an active interest in this movement and assist Sarvodaya workers in achieving their targets. He, however, expressed the hope that land given under Bhoodan would be cultivated by the donees in a co-operative manner in order to reap the benefits of joint-farming and common services made available by the Community Projects Administration.

As regards elections, Pandit Nehru concurred with Vinoba that expenses incurred on them were prohibitive and, therefore, not within the reach of candidates with average means. In consequence, it was essential to introduce certain radical changes in the existing laws. He was, however, not sure whether indirect elections would be a better alternative, because a limited franchise may also result in corrupt practices. Nehru told Vinoba that this matter would be discussed further with his Cabinet colleagues in the light of recommendations made by the Election Commission so that suitable action could be taken well in time before the second General Elections.

The next meeting between the two leaders took place at Berhampur on the occasion of the AICC Session in May 1955. At that time Dhebarbhai had taken over the Presidentship of the Congress from Pandit Nehru. Vinoba, who was also camping at Berhampur, was requested by Nehru and Dhebar to address the members of All-India Congress Committee. This was the only occasion when the Bhoodan leader ever participated in a Congress meeting. While he expounded his vision of a non-violent social and economic order in India on the basis of Bhoodan and Sarvodaya, Nehru sat behind him listening to the speech with rapt attention.

After the AICC session, Pandit Nehru went to Vinoba's camp for a personal exchange of views on various subjects. He again assured Vinoba that the Congress would fully co-operate with his efforts to distribute land to the landless labourers. Although Bhoodan by itself may not be able to solve the land problem, Nehru had no manner of doubt that it would enable the State Governments to enact far-reaching legislation in this sphere without much public opposition.

Having listened to Panditji on international affairs, Vinoba asked: "What about Kashmir?" Nehru expressed the hope that the United Nations would take an impartial view of the matter and find a just solution before long. He was, however, not satisfied with the slow progress of the case at the UN headquarters and indicated his displeasure and disappointment at the attitude adopted by England and America in regard to Kashmir. Even so, he reiterated his conviction that the United Nations Organization was, in the ultimate analysis, the only hope of maintaining peace in the world despite obvious difficulties and limitations: "The United Nations may still be an imperfect instrument of peace. Nonetheless, India desires to lend its support to it in the larger interests of international harmony."

The meeting lasted 45 minutes. Nehru requested Vinoba to attend the Congress Working Committee meetings also. Vinoba did attend one meeting and briefly requested the Congress organization to take to constructive work in the country, especially in the domain of land redistribution.

The third meeting between these two great followers of Mahatma Gandhi was arranged in Madhoraopalle village,

about 100 miles from Hyderabad. Pandit Nehru had gone to Nizamabad in March 1956, to address the annual Conference of the Bharat Sevak Samaj. After the session, he decided to proceed to Vinoba's camp, part of the distance by rail and then by road. On the outskirts of the village he was greeted by a large crowd which had assembled there. Soon after, Vinoba stepped out of his cottage and received Nehru with great respect and affection. They sat down in the front verandah of the cottage. As usual, Vinoba was overwhelmed with emotion and did not know how to start the conversation. I, then, reminded Vinoba that he wanted to discuss with Panditji the situation arising out of the demand for the reorganization of States. Nehru conveyed to Vinoba the decision of the Government of India to carve out a new Andhra Pradesh, including the Telangana region. He hoped that this would meet with the aspirations of the Telugu-speaking population and set at rest further controversies. He also acquainted Vinoba with the idea of establishing Regional Committees in the two linguistic areas of Punjab, instead of conceding the Akali demand for a Punjabi Suba. Nehru was anxious that Bombay should remain a bilingual State, with both Maharashtra and Gujarat regions as partners in its economic and cultural development. With a view to creating another bilingual State in eastern India, there was a proposal to merge Bengal and Bihar into one province. Vinoba expressed his general agreement with the desirability of having a few bilingual or even multi-lingual States in the country in order to keep under check dangerous trends towards linguistic fanaticism.

Vinoba also desired to have a frank talk with Nehru about Basic education. It was necessary that the prevailing system of education, especially at the primary and secondary levels, should be re-fashioned to meet the vital needs of the nation. After listening to Vinoba, Nehru observed: "I have no doubt that Basic education should be introduced throughout the country as early as possible. In fact, the Government of India has already taken a decision in the matter and has asked the State Governments to go ahead with this reform." He, however, looked at Vinoba with a smile and added: "As elsewhere, there are many vested interests in the educational sphere too.

Perhaps, vested interests in education are the strongest and the most persistent."

During the talks, Vinoba suggested that a large number of retired teachers could be persuaded to offer their services to Basic schools, more or less, in an honorary capacity. They will not only impart sound knowledge on different academic subjects but also communicate to students the fruits of their ripe and rich experience in life. Pandit Nehru welcomed the idea but sounded a note of caution: "Some of these retired teachers at an advanced stage may grow rather static and may not be able to make dynamic experiments in the sphere of Basic education. Further, under the Indian Constitution, education is a State subject and various State Governments might resent excessive interference by the Centre in forcing a scheme against their will." The States, said Nehru, should be given requisite freedom and elasticity in introducing the Basic scheme. While the idea of work-oriented education is sound and scientific, nothing should be done to make it rigid and stereotyped.

Pandit Nehru was also at one with Vinoba that University degrees should not be made the sole criterion for admission into Government services. Students of Basic and post-Basic schools should be allowed to take the Union and State competitive examinations for government services on the strength of their merits and skills. The Government of India had already appointed a Committee under the Chairmanship of Professor Humayun Kabir. The Committee had submitted an interim report in which it was recommended that, except in the case of certain All-India services like the I.A.S., academic degrees need not be regarded as essential for recruitment to a variety of government jobs. This would naturally give sufficient encouragement to the products of Basic schools and other progressive educational institutions.

Vinoba indicated that as a first step towards the establishment of a socialist pattern of society, the salaries of all teachers in Basic schools should be uniform. Pandit Nehru generally accepted the idea that every effort should be made to remove economic disparities among teachers. He, however, pointed out that such uniformity under the existing circumstances would inevitably amount to a much higher salary bill because there

will be a tendency to select the highest scales and make them applicable to all teachers.

Discussion on the pattern of elections again cropped up. Vinoba repeated that elections should be direct at the village level, and indirect at the district and State levels. Pandit Nehru sympathised with Vinoba's views, but expressed his practical difficulty in overhauling the entire system of elections on his own initiative. Other political parties in the country may misunderstand him and imagine that all this was being done for tightening the hold of the Congress Party still further. Second General Elections were to be held within a year and it would, perhaps, be prudent to introduce the necessary reforms on their completion.

After the talks for over two hours, both Vinoba and Nehru walked together to the neighbouring place where a few thousand people had assembled to hear the leaders. As they ascended the dais, the crowd loudly cheered them. Addressing the gathering Pandit Nehru said: "Vinobaji has started a revolutionary movement in the Gandhian tradition and it is our duty to extend co-operation to him to the best of our ability. I have talked to him on a variety of topics and have greatly benefited by his views." Since Nehru had to return to Hyderabad the same evening, he spoke for only a few minutes and then walked with Vinoba towards his car. Taking leave, he clasped Vinoba's hands and feelingly remarked: "Please take care of your health and do not over-strain yourself." Vinoba was visibly moved.

I stayed back for about an hour to get Vinoba's reaction to his talks with Nehru. He was silent for some time and then said in a soft voice: "It is true that I am over-straining myself and my physical energy is waning day by day. Formerly, I used to walk daily ten to fifteen miles. Now I can't do more than eight miles a day. My intake of calories has also been going down steadily." He added in a firm tone: "While I discuss other subjects, my mind is constantly fixed on achieving the Bhoodan target of 50 million acres by the end of 1957. For me it is a 'do or die' mission."

It was again in September 1957 that Nehru met Vinoba at Yelwal after the completion of the Gramdan Conference. It

may be recalled that at this historic conference, different political parties had decided to lend their unqualified support to the Gramdan movement. It was also resolved to forge close co-ordination between Gramdan and Community Development in various parts of the country. Pandit Nehru repeated his expectation that Bhoodan and Gramdan campaigns would help in promoting co-operative spirit among the people so that, wherever possible, smaller plots of land could be pooled into bigger ones for better cultivation. Vinoba agreed that this would be desirable, although he did not wish to put any undue pressure on the donees: 'The small cultivator should be educated in the advantages of co-operation. But the formation of co-operative societies should be entirely voluntary."

Since the second General Elections were now over, Vinoba raised the question of electoral reforms once again. This time I could notice a sense of embarrassment on the face of Pandit Nehru. After these elections, the Congress had come out with flying colours at the Centre and in all the States. But Nehru confessed: "Frankly, I am not sure whether a system of indirect elections at the higher levels would really work. It may raise, in turn, a crop of new difficulties and complications. A smaller number of electors in the indirect system of elections may succumb to monetary temptations and vitiate the whole system. There is a definite advantage in appealing to a bigger electorate which could rise above caste and money considerations." He further admitted: "I do not really know how to set about this reform. Other political parties may react quite adversely. Perhaps, I myself lack the courage of conviction. I, therefore, feel rather helpless in the matter."

Before he left for Mysore by road *en route* to Delhi, Nehru held Vinoba's hands in his, gently bowed in reverence and repeated his decision to ask S. K. Dey, Union Minister in charge of Community Development, to establish close contacts with Sarvodaya workers for enabling the Gramdan movement to make a visible impact on land reforms in India.

Pandit Nehru made special efforts to meet Vinoba, this time in Gujarat, on 17 and 18 December 1958. The Prime Minister had been invited to inaugurate the Centenary celebrations of the Textile Industry in Ahmedabad that year. There were one

or two other engagements which Nehru had accepted earlier. In truth, his main objective was to seek Vinoba's views regarding the continuance of the bilingual State of Bombay in the face of continuous agitations in Maharashtra. I also flew with Pandit Nehru to Ahmedabad. Soon after arrival, we drove to Gangad village to meet Vinoba at his camp. Here also a large number of constructive workers of Gujarat had assembled to hear the two leaders.

There had been a strong feeling in both Maharashtra and Gujarat that the bilingual State was no longer desirable. In Maharashtra, the agitation for carving out a separate unilingual State had taken a violent turn. In Gujarat too, the campaign for a separate State had gathered momentum and even the city of Ahmedabad had witnessed occasional firings by the police. Even so, Nehru was very particular that the bilingual State should not be given up so easily. It had its definite advantages and its existence helped in restraining the forces of extremism. But, unhappily, the experiment of a combined State of Bihar and Bengal had fizzled out a bit too soon. Dr. B. C. Roy, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, had unilaterally announced the failure of the new bilingual State even without informing the Chief Minister of Bihar. Vinoba was also anxious that the bilingual Bombay State may continue, despite the failure of such efforts in the eastern region. He, however, recognized that this could be achieved only if there was the willing consent of the people behind it.

In the course of these talks, Vinoba repeated one of his earlier proposals that in the villages rent should be realized in kind and not in cash. This would not only make it easier for the cultivators to pay but also enable the Government to collect sizeable quantities of foodgrains for the maintenance of buffer stocks. Pandit Nehru informed Vinoba that this suggestion had already been examined by the Planning Commission and a number of practical difficulties had been pointed out. When the prices of foodgrains went up, agriculturists themselves were unwilling to pay rent in kind. Moreover, it would be difficult to store foodgrains collected in far-flung villages. It is also administratively impossible to check the quality of foodgrains and grade them properly for storage in the rural areas. At any

rate, Nehru promised to examine the suggestion once again to ascertain its feasibility under existing circumstances.

Vinoba also mentioned the difficulties of smaller salt manufacturers in Saurashtra and Kutch. The Government had decided to grant licences only to bigger firms and, consequently, the smaller ones were being gradually eliminated. Pandit Nehru was not aware of this problem and asked me to collect the necessary information from Lal Bahadur Shastri who was Union Minister of Commerce and Industry during that period. Subsequently, a detailed letter was received from Shastri for the information of Vinoba. It was explained that with a view to helping small-scale manufacturers, holdings of 10 acres or less had been exempted from the need to take out licences. Only large-scale manufacturers were obliged to renew their licences for the production of salt. The main policy was to restrain them from entering into unfair competition with the smaller firms. The Government had also decided not to grant any new licences to large-scale manufacturers.

The need for encouraging village and cottage industries in the rural areas was also discussed. Vinoba was of the opinion that, as far as possible, raw materials like sugar, cotton and oil-seeds which were produced in the villages should be processed in the villages and not in cities. This would reduce unnecessary strain on the transport system and also provide sufficient employment opportunities to the people in the countryside. While the Planning Commission had been talking of a 'common production programme' for a long time, hardly anything tangible had been achieved in that direction. Pandit Nehru agreed that village and cottage industries alone could make a visible dent on the problem of unemployment and under-employment in India. He, however, pointed out certain difficulties in reserving spheres of production amongst the large-scale, small-scale and village sectors of national economy. Perhaps, the Constitution also may come in the way. Nonetheless, he indicated that this subject would be discussed threadbare in the Planning Commission.

The last but one of these series of meetings was held at Pattikalyana Ashram, now the headquarters of the Punjab Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, about 40 miles away from Delhi on the

main road to Haryana. It was on 2 April 1960, that Pandit Nehru found time to visit Vinoba's camp for a few hours, despite a busy schedule of engagements. Travelling in the same car, I could see that Nehru was quite exhausted; he even slept for a while on the way.

Apart from various problems connected with land reforms, village industries and Basic education, which were touched upon briefly during the talks, Vinoba enquired from Panditji the possibility of finding a fair solution to the Kashmir problem. Nehru narrated the latest developments and expressed a sense of utter helplessness at the attitude of the United Nations. The Government of India had made earnest efforts to find an honourable solution of this longstanding tangle. But the attitude of Pakistan, presumably with the encouragement of Western Powers, continued to be intransigent. Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, the then Prime Minister of Kashmir, had been trying his best to stabilise the political situation in the State. There were, however, serious allegations of corruption against his regime. "It was being openly said," remarked Pandit Nehru, "that there was a B.B.C. in Kashmir also—a Bakshi Brothers' Corporation". This had created difficulties for the Government of India in that region.

Nehru continued: "The main difficulty is that India cannot afford to part with any more portions of her territory in favour of Pakistan. I have already announced on more than one occasion that the cease-fire line should be taken as the dividing line, and the matter may be closed once for all. But Pakistan's greed knows no bounds. They now insist on not only minor adjustments along the cease-fire line, but also major ones entailing large chunks of Indian territory. This is an impossible proposition." Then, he smiled at Vinoba and remarked: "I am supposed to be a Prime Minister who only knows how to 'give away' Indian land to others. I, therefore, cannot afford to be liberal in this matter any further." And he added: "If I do so, the country will just throw me out."

As on earlier occasions, Nehru gave a fairly detailed review of the world situation. Vinoba wanted to know if some kind of a loose confederation between India and Pakistan could be contemplated. In this eventuality, the Kashmir problem would

get automatically resolved. Vinoba went a step further and suggested that, in due course, it may be possible to draw a triangle ABC, indicating a confederation with India of the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan, Burma and Ceylon. Pandit Nehru listened to these suggestions with interest and appreciation. He was, however, not sure whether this would be practicable in the foreseeable future.

As mentioned earlier, the last meeting between Nehru and Vinoba was at Nabagram in West Bengal on 25 December in 1962. During 1963, Nehru suffered a stroke and was unable to tour the country owing to ill-health. He expressed a desire once or twice to meet Vinoba who was, then, in Bihar. This was not possible for obvious reasons.

In April 1964, Pandit Nehru was very anxious to seek Vinoba's advice in regard to several problems connected with Pakistan, China and Kashmir. He asked me to get in touch with Vinoba and request him on his behalf to come to Delhi as early as feasible. If he had been well enough, he would have, perhaps himself gone to Pavnar Ashram where Vinoba was camping during the period. I, accordingly, went to Wardha to persuade Vinoba to proceed to Delhi without delay. But his response was not positive. At that time, he was not insisting on *Padayatra* either, and sometimes travelled by car or train.

On return to Delhi, I conveyed to Pandit Nehru the gist of my talks with Vinoba. He asked me to phone to Vinoba again so that he may come to Delhi for urgent consultations. I did so from the Prime Minister's office itself; still Vinoba demurred and hesitated. Nehru was naturally disappointed and even surprised.

A month later, Pandit Nehru passed away into eternal silence. He was so anxious to solve some of the outstanding problems connected with Pakistan and China during his lifetime. If Vinoba had gone to Delhi to meet him in this connection, the history of India would have been, perhaps, somewhat different.

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Back to Pavnar Ashram

AFTER MEETING Pandit Nehru at Nabagram, Vinoba toured several other parts of West Bengal, including Shantiniketan and Shriniketan. In some of his post-prayer speeches, he expressed the hope that West Bengal would prove to be "the best field for the beginning of a social revolution which could give a more concrete content to India's programme of a socialist pattern of society". At Shantiniketan, Vinoba described himself as 'a retailer in the wealth of spirituality', while Buddha, Jesus, Krishna, Tagore and Ramkrishna were 'wholesalers' in this sphere.

In Calcutta, Vinoba announced that he would try to give a broader content to the Bhoodan movement and evolve a new 'strategy' in West Bengal. He met several Communist leaders also who agreed that the Gramdan concept was superior to the scheme of communes which was essentially based on coercion and violence.

In some of his discourses, Vinoba made pointed references to the border conflict between India and China. He complimented the Government of India for accepting the 'Colombo proposals' in toto, despite opposition from a section of the people. Unilateral withdrawal of the Chinese troops from the Indian territory was, in Vinoba's opinion, due to the pressure of world opinion. He hoped that bitterness between India and China would gradually diminish and there would again be age-old cordial relations between them. Vinoba cited several reasons why the two countries must pull on together: "Both countries possess rich cultural heritage and a long background of friend-

ship, have large populations, and are equally poor." Referring to the policy of non-alignment, Vinoba said: "Some people are trying to push India into the American camp. I perceive no wisdom in this attitude; it would only result in accentuating the existing cold war between the two blocs. Today even America is appreciating India's policy of non-involvement and is ready to extend assistance without requiring her to join their bloc. This is a clear vindication of our policy of neutrality and *Panchsheel.*" He added: "Ultimately, India's real strength can be built up only by making the villages united, self-sufficient and free from sectarian quarrels and disputes. Today our villages are only a conglomeration of separate houses; there is no corporate life and a sense of cohesion is missing. The basic objective of Gramdan is to make Indian villages models of an integrated society based on mutual affection and co-operation.

After West Bengal, Vinoba spent some weeks in Orissa where about a thousand villages had been donated as Gramdans during his earlier tour. In this Padayatra Vinoba developed acute ear trouble. This was partly due to some drugs which were administered to him during an attack of influenza in Calcutta. Due to this ear trouble Vinoba found it difficult to maintain his balance while walking. He, therefore, agreed to travel by car for some days. In his speech at Rourkela, Vinoba referred to the 'Kamaraj Plan' and remarked that it had become *'be-Kamaraj'*—useless, mainly because of the 'lust of power' amongst Congressmen. In his view, a political party could gather genuine strength only by undertaking constructive work among the people with a sense of mission.

On completion of Orissa tour, Vinoba entered Madhya Pradesh and after visiting Bilaspur and Bhilai, reached Raipur on 12 December 1963, where he addressed the All-India Sarvodaya Sammelan after a lapse of several years. He exhorted the workers "to prevent the infiltration of China's ideology into the sacred soil of India". "The brave Jawans have fought the Chinese on the border at considerable sacrifice; it was now the duty of the people to face the ideological challenge of Communist China. This would be possible only by re-vitalizing the villages at the grass-roots through the Gramdan programme." He urged the workers to keep scrupulously aloof from party

politics and concentrate on the reconstruction of Indian villages in a spirit of emergency.

Addressing the concluding session of the Sarvodaya Conference, Vinoba made a reference to the resolution of the Congress on 'democratic socialism' and observed that the Indian National Congress could survive only if socialism through non-violent and peaceful methods could be achieved during the next three years. He asked the constructive workers to shoulder the responsibility of establishing *Gram Swarajya*—self-government of the villages—in India and seek the co-operation of all political parties in this national movement. He expressed the hope that this work would be completed before 1969, the birth-centenary of Mahatma Gandhi.

On Vinoba's suggestion, the Conference adopted a three-point programme of Gramdan, *Shanti Sena*—Peace Brigade—and village industries to be launched throughout the country in a 'do or die' spirit. He pleaded for an intensified training programme for *Shanti Sainiks* on the pattern of military training *sans* violence. It was the duty of *Shanti Sena* to free the Government from anxiety regarding internal peace and order. "Our ultimate goal is to establish world peace and brotherhood. But, let us first ensure peace within the country through our non-violent strength."

In the course of his observations, Vinoba also advanced a strong plea for the introduction of total prohibition in the whole country: "It is no use introducing this reform in a piecemeal fashion. Prohibition can succeed only if it is launched on a uniform basis in all the States of India." And he remarked: "I do not understand why the Government is lukewarm about this reform. The Government of Maharashtra appears to have relaxed Prohibition in the name of 'rationalization'. Do we hope to face opium-free China by saturating our people with alcohol?"

During his Madhya Pradesh tour, Vinoba set an example of strict punctuality by actually running two miles to reach his next camp on time. Local workers had detected a mistake in their calculation about the distance. When Vinoba was informed that he had still to walk two miles to reach the destination, he started running along with the members of his team and managed to arrive at the scheduled place at the

time fixed for his reception by thousands of people.

After his long tour of Madhya Pradesh and parts of Maharashtra, Vinoba entered Sevagram village on 6 April 1964. Spending some time at the Ashram, he proceeded to Pavnar, his permanent headquarters, after a lapse of nearly thirteen years.

In Pavnar, Vinoba had the opportunity of watching the progress of *Brahma Vidya Mandir* which had been established by him some years ago. To be exact, it was on 13 March 1959, that this institution was formally inaugurated by Vinoba at Kashika-Vas, the birthplace of Jamnalal Bajaj, in Rajasthan. The first batch of inmates was blessed by Vinoba and asked to proceed to Pavnar to start their new way of life: "You should live in open and fresh air and spend about five hours of hard labour for attaining self-sufficiency in food and cloth. Further, about five hours should be devoted to self-study and meditation. While there should be no rigidity in your daily programme, not a minute should be wasted in sloth and idleness. Physical work should be combined with intellectual development."

Vinoba once said: "In my life I initiated mainly three institutions—Vidyarthi Mandal at Baroda, Gram Seva Mandal at Nalwadi and Brahma Vidya Mandir at Pavnar." He naturally attached great importance to these organizations and regarded them as his life-work. Addressing the inmates of Brahma Vidya Mandir after an evening prayer, Vinoba observed: "Since my early life, I have been in search of *Brahma Vidya*—the knowledge of the Supreme. God-realization could be achieved only by a mind that is free and liberated. This freedom of mind has to be experienced within ourselves. Our thoughts should be pure, free from desires and ambitions. There should, however, be intense longing for realizing our oneness with the Divine. Our *sadhana* should be collective, and there should be no room for individual egoism. There should be no sense of imposition from outside."

As indicated earlier, Brahma Vidya Mandir consists entirely of women and is run by them under the general direction of Vinoba. His younger brother Balkoba stays at Pavnar for six months in a year and teaches the inmates some of the basic Sanskrit texts like *Brahmasutra* and the *Upanishads*. In addition

to Hindu literature, they are taught the essential principles of other religions like Islam, Christianity and Buddhism. Since students in the Mandir are drawn from different States of the country, they learn from one another several modern Indian languages as well. Knowledge of the national language, Hindi, is acquired as a matter of course. Speaking to the inmates one day, Vinoba declared: "I want Pavnar to become the power-house of non-violent energy. It should be the meeting ground of all religions. The institution should always continue to spread light and inspiration all around." He remarked: "These days, we have a number of broadcasting stations of the All India Radio. I should like Pavnar to be a 'deep-casting' station, touching the hearts and minds of the people."

During this period, Vinoba also inaugurated an important scheme of 'free weaving subsidy' introduced by the Khadi and Village Industries Commission, on 6 April that year. Speaking from the All India Radio net-work, he said: "It is now admitted on all hands that our Five-Year Plans have not benefited the lowest strata of society. The common man can derive benefit from these Plans only if he is kept in the centre of the focus. Every citizen should be enabled to use the two hands for earning his livelihood. This will be possible if the means of production are decentralized into millions of cottages in the countryside." Referring to China's invasion, he asserted: "We shall be able to prevent the Chinese army from invading our territory in future. But if the prevailing sense of frustration among the masses continues, the 'spirit of China' would penetrate the country and raise its head in every village. It is, therefore, essential that all villages in India experience the glow of freedom in reality."

Soon after his release from detention, Sheikh Abdulla announced his decision to meet Vinoba at Wardha. He reached Nagpur on 3 May, and motored down to Bajajwadi to have discussions with Vinoba about the Kashmir problem. Jayaprakash Narayan also joined these talks. While sympathizing with the aspirations of the people of Kashmir, Vinoba reiterated his earlier conviction that any further division of the State on communal basis would be highly detrimental to the vital interests of the country. He also repeated that a political approach

to the Kashmir question would not work: "It is spirituality, and not politics, which would lead to a satisfactory solution." He added: "Kashmir has been an integral part of India for a long time. A solution for the future of Kashmir must, therefore, be found within the framework of the Indian Constitution. Any attempt to separate Kashmir from the Indian Union will have serious repercussions throughout the country."

After the death of Pandit Nehru on 27 May 1964, Lal Bahadur Shastri was unanimously elected the next Prime Minister of India. A few days later, Shastriji phoned to me that he would very much like to meet Acharya Vinoba. I immediately got in touch with Vinoba who was at that time touring some of the villages near Wardha. We, accordingly, flew from Delhi to Nagpur by special plane and reached Vinoba's camp at Jamni village. Shastri and Vinoba had cordial talks for about two hours in a small cottage. They covered a wide ground, including various problems connected with China, Pakistan and Kashmir. Addressing a public meeting after the talks, Lal Bahadur Shastri said: "I came here mainly to seek Vinoba's blessings for my new responsibilities. I cherish very high regard for his Bhoodan mission and ardently hope that his untiring efforts will succeed in strengthening the country on Gandhian lines." Vinoba also expressed his happiness at the unanimous election of Shastri as Prime Minister after the passing away of Pandit Nehru. Shastri returned to Nagpur the same evening *en route* to Delhi.

Early in August, Vinoba was down with typhoid at the Pavnar Ashram. As usual, he did not take any medicines for some time and grew very weak owing to high fever. President Radhakrishnan sent his 'prayerful wishes' for his speedy recovery. After a few days, Vinoba agreed to use medicine, and his temperature soon touched the normal. After gradually gaining strength, he resumed his tour in Wardha district. He, however, did not insist on *Padayatra* and used a car for his journeys.

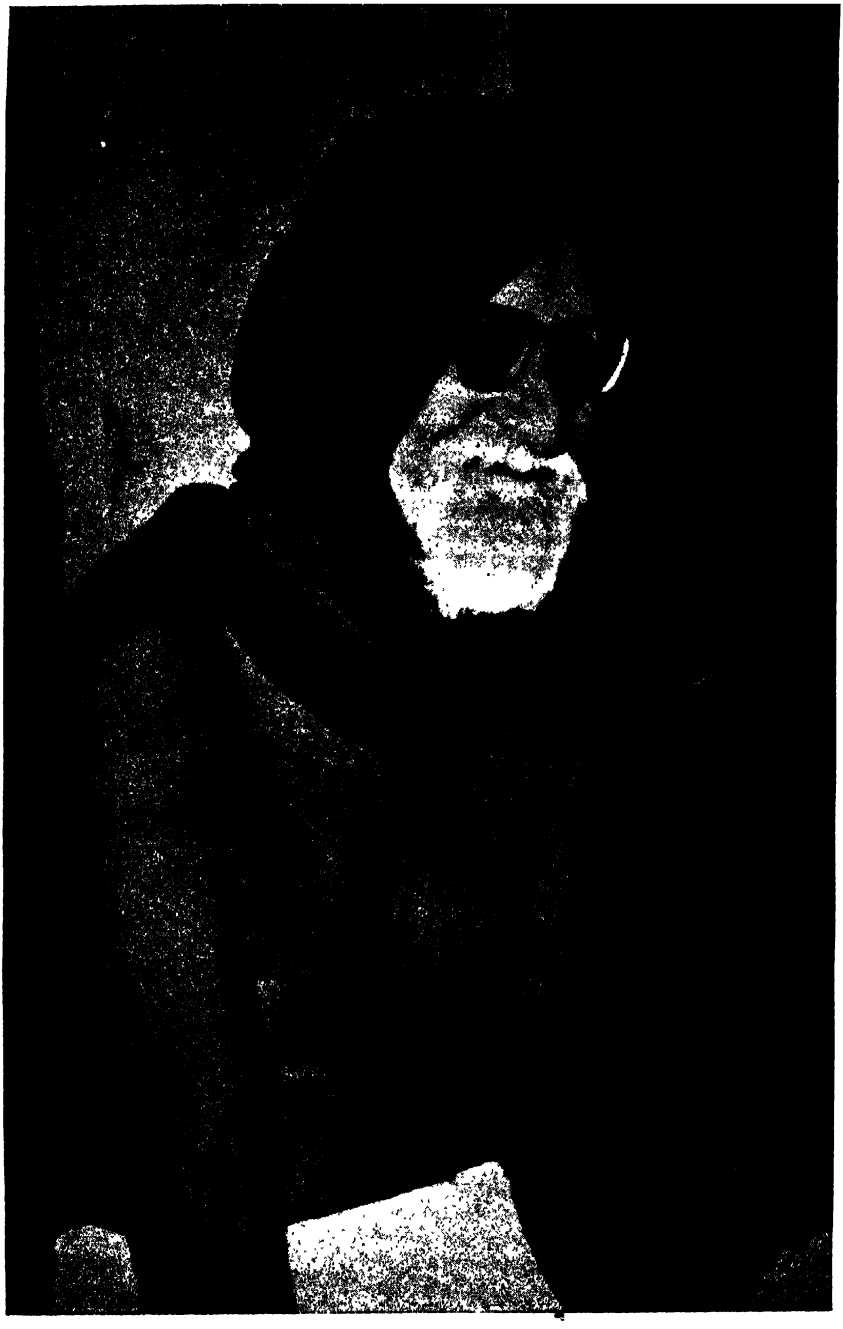
When Dr. S. Radhakrishnan visited Wardha on 6 December to inaugurate the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Shiksha Mandal—educational society founded by Jamnalal Bajaj—he took the opportunity of meeting Vinoba at Pavnar: "I am very



Vinoba, Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Jankidevi Bajaj



The author with Vinoba



In cheerful mood

glad to meet you after a long time. We are happy we have a spiritual guide for us." Vinoba gently put in: "I have read almost all your books, and you have been a source of inspiration to me." He added: "I have been observing these days non-speaking and non-hearing—the first as an expiation for excessive lecturing, and the second, a virtue of necessity."

In February 1965, there were language riots in South India; students indulged in arson and violence in their fury to protest against the Hindi policy of the Union Government. This pained Vinoba to the core of his being and he commenced an indefinite fast on 12 February. He did not favour either the imposition of Hindi on the South or the compulsion of English on the North. In his view, the people of South India should gladly learn the national language in their own interest, and the people of the North ought to learn a southern language for generating an atmosphere of national integration. The then Home Minister, Gulzarilal Nanda, rushed to Wardha by plane to persuade Vinoba to give up the fast. He assured him that the Government of India had no intention of forcing Hindi on the people of South India against their will. Leaders of the South also sent telegrams to Vinoba expressing their regrets at the Hindi riots and assuring him that they did not desire to weaken the unity of India in any way. Vinoba, accordingly, gave up his fast on the fifth day and the country heaved a sigh of relief.

36

Gramdan 'Storm' Campaign in Bihar

IT WAS in May 1965, that the Sarva Seva Sangh Conference in Copuri, Wardha, adopted a resolution to launch a Gramdan 'storm' campaign in Bihar with the ultimate objective of covering the whole State with Gramdan villages on an emergency basis. I do not know who coined the word *'toofan'*—storm. The main idea, however, was to concentrate the energies of all constructive workers on this programme for producing tangible results at least at the block and district levels. It was felt that the Gramdan concept will not be able to make much impact on the people in isolated villages. A proper atmosphere could be created only if the area of operations was made wider and more comprehensive.

There was the other view that instead of spreading the movement rather thin, compact areas should be selected in different States for intensive work. In this way, the country will be able to witness the true picture of Gramdan in some depth and a few ideal villages may inspire greater faith and confidence among the people. In any event, the Sarva Seva Sangh preferred the first strategy of a 'storm' and embarked on this experiment in Bihar. Vinoba was requested to help this 'cyclonic' campaign by his physical presence there. He accordingly left Pavnar Ashram for Bihar on 19 May by car.

In the meantime, I was appointed India's Ambassador to Nepal with my headquarters at Kathmandu. When Prime Minister Shastri suddenly asked me to accept this new assignment, I demurred and sought Vinoba's advice. After considering the whole matter, Vinoba wanted me to proceed to the Hima-

layan Kingdom in the vital interests of India's security on the northern borders. I, therefore, accepted this diplomatic responsibility and remained in Nepal for full three years from November 1964 to December 1967. I, however, tried to meet Vinoba in Bihar as frequently as feasible in order to remain in touch with the progress of Gramdan movement and also seek his guidance for my work in Nepal from time to time.

While touring Bihar, Vinoba was taken ill at Jamshedpur. As a result, he had to camp there for about three months during 1965. I also went there from Nepal to hold detailed talks with Vinoba regarding the strategy to be followed in the Gramdan campaign. Subsequently, I visited twice or thrice his Lakshminarayanpuri camp at Pusa road in Dharbhanga district. I was of the definite view that intensive work should be organized in a few selected Gramdan villages so that the new socio-economic pattern emerging in these areas may prove infectious and spread almost like wild fire. Unless the rural masses were convinced about the efficacy of Gramdan at first hand, it will not be possible to instil in their hearts and minds the requisite confidence in this movement. We should be able to demonstrate the actual benefits of this project in a telling manner. In that eventuality, the villagers from other areas would willingly walk 50 or even 100 miles to see the Gramdan villages at work with their own eyes and draw inspiration from them.

But Vinoba was very anxious to create a general atmosphere in favour of Gramdan by covering the whole blocks, in the first instance. In Dharbhanga district, numerous workers engaged in Khadi activities were diverted to Gramdan programme. They covered more than 75 per cent of villages in several Community Development Blocks and secured the necessary signatures of the people. I had expected that on receiving such Block or *Prakhanda-dans*, they would devote their energies to developmental work in these areas in depth. Instead, they set before themselves a new target of securing the 'district-*dan*' of Dharbhanga. Vinoba also thought that after the whole district had been covered by Gramdan villages, he would concentrate on constructive activities there and produce a specimen before the country. I offered to lend a helping hand even

from Kathmandu, and, if necessary, enlist the co-operation of the Government of India and the Planning Commission in this crucial task on a pilot basis.

By the end of 1966, majority of villages in Dharbhanga district were donated to the Gramdan scheme, and we were very happy at this remarkable achievement. However, soon after, a new slogan of 'Bihar-*dan*' was raised and it was explained that the picture of *Gram Swaraj* would emerge if the whole State was covered by Gramdans. Vinoba also started touring other districts by car to attain this goal with the target date of 2 October 1969, the birth centenary of Mahatma Gandhi. Constructive workers of Bihar and some other States made concerted efforts for fulfilling this difficult task on time. The greatest resistance was faced in the tribal area of Santhal Parganas. But, by and large, the aim was achieved and Bihar-*Gram Swarajya* was announced at the All-India Sarvodaya Sammelan at Rajgir in October last year.

Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan—Badshah Khan as he is affectionately known in India—had also been invited to participate in the Rajgir Conference. He, however, preferred to stay longer at Ahmedabad to help the riot-affected victims and heal the wounds of communal violence in Gujarat. When Vinoba learnt that Badshah Khan was proceeding to Sevagram early in November, he also suddenly decided to reach Wardha a day earlier in order to be able to receive 'Frontier Gandhi' there. This meeting between Vinoba and Badshah Khan at Sevagram was, indeed, a memorable one. They attended the evening prayers together in the Ashram and spent several hours in talking about the current situation in India in the wake of communal riots and outbreaks of violence even during the Gandhi Centenary. Jayaprakash Narayan also participated in these talks and a joint statement was issued on 8 November, appealing to the workers "to come forward and help fight the worsening situation by devoting themselves selflessly towards serving the people and mobilizing the strength of the masses".

Since then, Vinoba has been living in Wardha, first at Shantikutir, Gopuri, and later at Pavnar. He has been trying a new experiment during this period. In his view, *shabda*—word—is superior to *kriti*—action; *chintan*—contemplation—

is much superior to word; and, in the ultimate analysis, *achintan*—supramental power—is the most potent. Vinoba commenced this *Sadhana* four years ago on 7 June—the date when he met Gandhiji for the first time at Sabarmati Ashram in 1916. Vinoba cherishes the hope that what he could not do by his physical presence in Bihar could, perhaps, be achieved by his *sookshma* or subtle thought power from his Ashram in Wardha. In this atomic age, the potential of supramental powers should be, doubtless, explored to the fullest extent, but time alone will show whether this experiment would meet with success in the sphere of Gramdan.

It would now be worthwhile making an objective assessment of the Gramdan movement over the years. In the beginning, a village was declared as Gramdan when all the landholders, big and small, surrendered their proprietary rights and transferred their lands to the village community for redistribution among the people according to the size of the families. One-tenth of land in these Gramdan villages was reserved for cultivation on a co-operative basis and the rest was allowed to be used by the agriculturists during their lifetime. These lands could also be passed on to the next generation provided they were properly cultivated according to the village plan and rents were paid regularly to the *Gram Sabhas* or village councils. Plots of land redistributed among the people could not be sold, transferred or mortgaged, except with the special permission of the village council. The produce of the common land was to be utilized for paying expenses on community services like village school, maternity home, social and cultural activities.

Experience, however, indicated that such a scheme of Gramdan was difficult to implement, and the results were, consequently, quite meagre. In consultation with Sarvodaya workers, Vinoba, therefore, evolved a simpler pattern called *sulabh gramdan*. Under it, 75 per cent of cultivators in a village contribute at least 5 per cent of their lands for redistribution among the landless; 95 per cent of the remaining land would be in their possession for actual cultivation, though its legal ownership has to be transferred to the village community. The land

retained by the farmers cannot, however, be sold or mortgaged outside the village without the special sanction of the *Gram Sabha*. A Village Development Fund is also created, each family making an annual contribution equivalent to one-thirtieth of the agricultural produce, or one-fortieth of the total income. Those who do not possess land should contribute proportionate free labour for any project decided upon by the community. All adults living in the village constitute the *Gram-Sabha* which has to manage the affairs on the principle of unanimity or consensus, and not on the basis of majority decisions. A village is declared as Gramdan when at least 75 per cent of its residents signify their approval in writing to the above-mentioned conditions, including sufficient number of land-owners so that at least 51 per cent of the total land belonging to resident-owners is covered under Gramdan.

Almost all the State Governments have already enacted necessary Gramdan legislation to recognize this work and accord it the sanction of authority. But the work of *pushti*—legal confirmation—of Gramdan villages has proved to be a very slow process. It involves the use of a large amount of paper in filling up elaborate forms, including village statistics. To give an illustration, out of about 8,000 villages in Dharbhanga district alone, only 51 villages have so far been legally confirmed under the Bihar Gramdan legislation. The situation in other districts may be even worse.

Furthermore, since the workers, after completing Gramdan scheme in a district, moved to another district almost *en bloc*, the tempo follow-up action was naturally very feeble. It is true that the onus of reconstruction should rest on the village community itself. Even so, it must be conceded that the rural population is, currently, not in a position to shoulder such responsibilities without the active guidance of experienced Sarvodaya workers. In their anxiety to spread this movement throughout Bihar, the limited number of Sarvodaya workers have not, therefore, been able to concentrate so far on the urgent work of socio-economic development in the Gramdan villages.

Although the Gramdan movement is basically a non-official and popular campaign, workers have tended to rely, perhaps, a

bit too much on Government machinery and legislation. Instead of waiting for months or even years for legal confirmation, would it not be better to commence a number of constructive programmes from the very day a village is declared as Gramdan? For example, an *ad hoc* Gram Sabha, consisting of all the adults of the village, could be formed at once. It should organize community prayers and *bhajans* every evening, and also fix a day for collective village sanitation every week. The people of the Gramdan villages should also decide to introduce prohibition, without waiting for State legislation. People could be persuaded to withdraw pending cases from the law courts and leave decisions to a committee appointed by the *Gram Sabha*. A *Gram-nidhi*—Development Fund—could also be initiated without delay for undertaking various projects in the area. Five per cent of land-holdings donated under the scheme should be distributed soon among the landless on a provisional basis, subject to confirmation by the revenue authorities in due course. If such a programme in all the Gramdan villages had been introduced from the very beginning, a new climate of social and economic revolution may have been created in a substantial measure by this time.

It is also essential that the strategy of Gramdan enables the rural community to eliminate the roots of injustice and exploitation through non-violent and peaceful methods. Wherever absolutely necessary, even satyagraha could be resorted to. If the causes of injustice are not removed through non-violent techniques, violence is bound to erupt, sooner or later. There can be no vacuum in such socio-economic tensions. With a view to importing dynamism in the Gramdan programme, it is imperative to devote serious attention to this aspect of the Sarvodaya movement.

It has sometimes been explained that while constructive workers secure Gramdan villages, it is the duty of the Government to organize reconstruction work in those areas. This is hardly a fair proposition. The State is, obviously, expected to co-operate with the movement in a variety of ways and there should be the closest co-ordination between Gramdan and Community Development administration. Nevertheless, it is the direct responsibility of the Sarva Seva Sangh to initiate deve-

lopment activities in Gramdan villages in an integrated manner. Apart from land redistribution and creation of the Village Fund, systematic efforts should be made to lessen the social evils of drinking and untouchability in these villages. A spirit of *swadeshi* through the use of local village products should be promoted with a sense of urgency. The Sarvodaya workers could also help in the introduction of work-oriented (Basic) education in these regions.

To my mind, the Gramdan movement is an excellent opportunity to introduce the principles of co-operation in India's agriculture. The only effective way of raising farm production on small and scattered plots of land is to encourage co-operative farms wherever possible, and service co-operatives everywhere. It is true the pooling of land should be entirely voluntary and there should be no element of coercion. Nonetheless, Gramdan workers should do their best to educate villagers in the basic advantages of co-operation. From this angle, the Gramdan campaign should really serve as a spearhead of co-operative activities in the rural life of India.

There is not a shadow of doubt that the Gramdan concept is the only practicable method of revolutionizing India's countryside along non-violent and peaceful lines. It is, decidedly, superior to the communes in China which are essentially founded on authoritarian coercion and regimentation. In the words of Dr. D. R. Gadgil, Deputy Chairman of National Planning Commission, "Vinoba's Bhoodan-Gramdan movement is, undoubtedly, a novel experiment of non-violent transformation and reorientation of our economic order." Louis Fischer has rightly described it as "the most creative thought coming out of the East". It has, undeniably, raised a new hope of establishing a Sarvodaya order on Gandhian ideals not only in India but also in other countries of Asia and Africa. Additionally, Gramdan is also a good device to mobilize local resources for rural development. Nonetheless, it must be conceded that though the movement is replete with immense potentialities, its actual implementation on the ground has been rather superficial, and the organizational set-up leaves much to be desired.

I have no desire whatsoever to apportion blame for these

shortcomings. I have ventured to lay my finger on some of the weak points mainly to appeal to the Sarvodaya workers as well as the administration to make concerted efforts for promoting Gramdan as a great non-violent force to be reckoned with. To me, Vinoba's Gramdan movement is the last hope for India and other developing nations. It is, thus, our paramount duty to strain every nerve to achieve unqualified success and divert the attention of the people from despair and destruction to a new era of constructive activity on the lines chalked out by Mahatma Gandhi.

It is heartening to know that Jayaprakash Narayan has decided to intensify Gramdan work in the Musahari Block of Muzaffarpur district in North Bihar and face the menace of Naxalite violence in the area through peaceful and constructive means. This is bound to galvanize the Sarvodaya programme into effective action. I also understand that a *Gram Swarajya Samiti* has now been constituted at the State level and co-ordinated efforts are being made to commence developmental work in several districts with the help of local authorities. The country shall watch these efforts with anxious hope and deep interest.

37

In the Tradition of Indian 'Rishis'

"IN THE troubled but dynamic scene that is India today," observed Pandit Nehru in a message to the Sarvodaya Conference, "the frail figure of Vinobaji stands like a rock of strength, modest and gentle, yet with something of the vision of the future in his eyes." "It is not for us, smaller folk, to judge him whether we agreed with him or disagreed in some matter, for he is above these minor judgements. He represents, as none else does, the spirit and tradition of Gandhiji and of India."

On the occasion of Vinoba's 68th birthday celebrations in New Delhi, Nehru said: "It is the good luck of the present generation that we have a person of Vinobaji's stature in our midst. In fact, no one in the wide world today could be likened to him. His way of life brings to one's mind the values which Gandhiji stood for. Acharya Vinoba is uniquely Indian, and yet he possesses a keen insight into contemporary trends. He is like a beacon showing us the right path and correcting us whenever we go wrong."

It was in early November 1941—three months before his passing away—that Jamnalal Bajaj, popularly known as Mahatma Gandhi's 'fifth son', observed a week's fast on the occasion of his own birthday at Paramdham Ashram, Pavnar. On the last day of the fast, he told me with conviction: "I regard Vinoba as a great *Rishi* in line with the Indian tradition. We may not realize this today, but history will reckon him as an eminent *Rishi*, equal to any of the *Rishis* who sanctified this land in the past."

The unique personality of Vinoba is a rare synthesis of pro-

found knowledge, deep devotion and sustained action. While his scholarship in the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads* and other Sanskrit scriptures is almost matchless, and his knowledge of more than sixteen Indian and European languages is phenomenal, Vinoba possesses a loving, compassionate and devout heart which invariably makes a noticeable impact on the people. Besides, he has travelled on foot for more than thirteen years in different parts of India, covering a total distance of 36,500 miles—more than the circumference of the earth. During this *Padayatra*, he collected 4.4 million acres of land as free gifts from the poor, middle-class and richer peasants, out of which about 1.3 million acres have already been distributed among landless farm workers. Although these figures are yet far below the targets, there is no gainsaying that Vinoba has done what legislative measures in all the States of India have failed to do during the last two decades of freedom. Vinoba has also received 1.6 lakh out of 5.6 lakh villages in India as Gramdans, more especially in Bihar and Orissa. All this has been achieved almost single-handed, without any direct assistance from the Government. There are, however, over 10,000 active Sarvodaya workers who have dedicated themselves to this movement with faith and resolution. It is this exceptional combination of *Gyana*, *Bhakti* and *Karma* which raises Vinoba's personality to dizzy heights of spiritual distinction.

While Vinoba is a rare gem in the line of ancient *Rishis*, his passion for science and mathematics is unrivalled. The sweep of his vision covers a wide spectrum ranging from the hoary cultural heritage to the shape of things to come centuries later. To him, "science is a great force which is neither moral nor immoral". "It is for spirituality to guide science in the right direction." For example, Vinoba would like science to make it possible for every village to have its own atomic reactor for running the industries. "A little knowledge of science has led to centralization of industry, a fuller knowledge should make for its decentralization in the countryside." As science progresses, man's life should become simpler and more natural. In fine, science wedded to spirituality should open out vistas beyond human imagination. In Vinoba's view, the age of politics and religion is fast dying out; the age of science and spiri-

tuality is fast dawning on the world. "There is much common good in all the religions of the world, but there is plenty of dross as well—formalism, dogma and ritualism. This dross is now dying out and spirituality which is the common essence of all faiths would prevail." Declares Vinoba: "Our earth would turn into a paradise only if the two forces of science and self-knowledge unite and co-operate with each other. The outer light of science must be complemented by the inner light of spirituality. Science has enlarged the frontiers of human intelligence, but the heart has not been able to keep pace with the development of the head. We have to transform human life and build a new *'Vishvamanava'*—the universal man."

Viewed in this light, Vinoba's Bhoodan-Gramdan movement should not be judged by mere statistics; that is the least part of it. As Pandit Nehru remarked, "what is really important is not the actual acreage of land obtained, but the new spirit infused into the minds of the people." Vinoba himself explains: "The land which is given does not matter much in itself. It is only a token of love and compassion. When land is given there is a change both in the donor as well as the receiver. It is this spiritual transformation which is of the essence. The movement aims at creating a new man... The earth is the peasant's mother. I give milk to the breast of the mother."

Vinoba also cherishes unwavering faith in the future of democracy in the world: "Its future is not bleak, but bright." But he does not believe in the concept of 'government by majority'. Instead, he swears by the ideal of 'government by all'. He illustrates: "There was a time when minority ruled over majority. As a reaction, there emerged an ideology of majority rule over the minority. If the first was a thesis, the second is an antithesis. It is now time for a synthesis of 'government by all'." Vinoba desires that decisions on public affairs should be taken unanimously or through a consensus. Only such decisions are likely to stand the test of time and carry faith and conviction to the people. The quintessence of Gramdan is precisely this process of unanimity. It should, therefore, lead to *Gram Swaraj*—self-government of the village—on the lines of a compact family where majority vote is out of place.

This is not a utopian ideal. The functioning of the Sarva Seva Sangh on the basis of consensus over the last two decades has been yielding good results. The experiment of distributing Bhoodan lands by the unanimous opinion of the village community has also been a great success. In fact, nothing much is lost by some delay due to differences of opinion. The ultimate solution reached through a consensus is implemented without delay and amply compensates for earlier loss of time.

Though Vinoba is averse to the organization of political parties under a democratic system, he would not rule out their existence altogether. His basic objection is not so much to organizing political parties as to the smothering of conscience by party members: "Today the parties rule not in people's interest but in their own interest. We should be the servants of the people and not of the parties. The future belongs not to the party system of Government but to a better type of democracy, namely, government without parties. At any rate, even if the parties exist, there should be no rigid enforcement of 'whips' on issues which involve fundamental principles." Vinoba states: "In the present context, while there may still be the ruling and the opposition parties, there should also develop a strong force of non-partisans. They should influence and exert moral pressure on both the ruling party as well as the opposition. By itself, the opposition cannot serve as a corrective to the ruling party, because it also seeks power which is essentially a corrupting force. The real corrective could come only from an incorruptible body of constructive workers who do not seek any power and believe only in moral force."

Vinoba has also been talking in terms of a 'third power' which is different from the two existing powers of violence and State coercion: "We should be able to develop an independent *Lok-shakti*—power of the people—which is free from the coercive power of the State and is opposed to the power of violence. Instead of depending on legislation enacted by a majority vote in Parliament or State Legislatures, our work should essentially rest on the service of the people and the power which is generated from such selfless service." Vinoba adds: "I do not belong to any political party; nor am I a mem-

ber or office-bearer of any social or cultural organization. I fervently believe in the efficacy of the 'third force' which is entirely different from the two forces of *Himsa*—violence—and *Danda-shakti*—legislative power of punishment."

In order to make this 'third force' universal, the Sarvodaya workers must not align themselves with any group or organization. On the contrary, they should identify themselves with the people and work as the servants of humanity: "The motto adopted by the majority is 'service through power'. Another group thinks of 'power through service'. The Sarvodaya group believes in the abolition of power through service." Adds Vinoba: "This is real *'Lok-niti'*—the politics of the people—as opposed to *'Raj-niti'*—the politics of power."

This politics of *Lok-niti* is not a negative concept: "It does not confine itself to exposing the faults of the current politics of power. Although the present political system may not be a genuine government by the people, it is certainly government by consent. To change the system we must change the people. It would, therefore, be sheer waste of energy to spend our time in finding fault with others. Since our aim is to build up a new kind of politics, we should keep ourselves aloof from traditional politics. If the people become conscious of their own inner strength, they will be able to solve most of their problems by themselves."

Vinoba has often mentioned about the cult of *'they-ism'*: "Various *isms* are being talked about in the world, such as communism, fascism, socialism or welfare-ism. But, in fact, there is only one *ism* which is really current—it is *'they-ism'*, signifying 'they will do for us'. We think we cannot better our own lot, and that it is only for the State to do so. Unless we free ourselves from this *'they-ism'*, we shall never be happy. The Gramdan villages must build up the power of people from the very bottom so that they work together with common agreement for their own well-being."

In all his constructive activities, Vinoba keeps before himself the vision of 'one world': Although the globe has been shrinking geographically owing to jet-speed travel at a very fast pace, gaps between the minds and hearts of different nations, and groups within nations, have tended to increase. Says

Vinoba: "The saints who had the vision of one world had not travelled beyond the area of a modern district in India. Even the travels of the Buddha did not extend beyond five or six districts. It is, therefore, not necessary for us to cover large distances for becoming broad-minded. We should try to get rid of the ego, reducing ourselves to a zero. The result would be much more valuable than trotting all over the globe." Today, caste, religion, language and regional loyalties divide man from man. These forces of disintegration could be countered effectively only by the spirit of brotherhood and one human family.

With a view to realizing this essential unity, Vinoba has been experimenting with the power of *'Sukshma'*—subtle spiritual power—during the past few years. As a result, he has reduced his physical movements to the minimum and does not bind himself to any programme for more than seven days at a time. He has also decided not to deliver public speeches any more. He humorously observes: "Henceforward, I would pursue only 'private practice'—personal conversation with an individual or a group." While Vinoba is always happy to read letters received from numerous Sarvodaya workers, he does not send them replies over his own signatures; they are acknowledged by his personal staff. Vinoba has recently started observing long spells of silence at his Ashram in Pavnar. He spends several hours on hard physical work in digging land or collecting pebbles from the fields, but does not like to talk to the inmates or the visitors. When I asked him some time ago about the results of his *'Sukshma'* experiments, Vinoba remarked: "I am still igniting the hearth. The process of cooking is yet to begin. It would take quite some time before I actually serve the meals."

Like the *Rishis* of yore, Vinoba has already established a chain of Ashrams all over India. Apart from the *Brahma Vidya Mandir* at Pavnar, there is a *Maitri Ashram* in North Lakhimpur district of Assam. Looking from the borders of India towards China, Burma and Pakistan, this institution, as its name indicates, is intended to work for friendship at all levels, inside and outside the country. The *Samanvaya Ashram* in Bodh Gaya, Bihar, which is within a stone's throw of the famous temple of the Buddha, aims to achieve the ideal of synthesis

between the philosophy of the *Upanishads* and the teachings of the Buddha. *Vishwa-Needam* is an International Sarvodaya Centre, six miles from Bangalore city. Spread over an area of 300 acres, it has been trying various experiments on Sarvodaya lines over the past ten years. *Prasthan Ashram* near Pathankot, not far from the conjunction of the borders of India, Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan, may develop as an ideal Centre for promoting communal harmony and national integration. *Visarjan Ashram*, on the outskirts of the city of Indore, has been carrying on different constructive activities with a view to evolving new values in society, after discarding the out-dated ones.

It is, however, not individual *Sadhana* to which Vinoba attaches much importance. Such individual penances had been practised by many sages and hermits in the past. In Vinoba's view, science now demands that we should take to *Samuhik Sadhana*—collective spiritual effort. Such *Sadhana* may ultimately lead to some kind of a new satyagraha even in the international field for spreading peace and goodwill in the world. As Vinoba explained to some foreign friends, the quintessence of Sarvodaya, which includes satyagraha, is the 'art of living for others'.

Vinoba's ideas on nuclear weapons have an originality of their own. In his opinion, "nuclear weapons have thrown a challenge before mankind: either accept non-violence or face extinction of the human race." "The two ends of a circle are very near to each other: they are non-violence and nuclear arms." In the course of his message to the World Anti-nuclear Arms Convention held in New Delhi in June 1962, Vinoba observed: "Nuclear weapons should, of course, be abolished. But the conventional weapons appear to be no less frightening. The nuclear arms tend to bring us nearer to non-violence because they impel man to think and ponder. But pistols and daggers push non-violence far away. These weapons appear to be small, but they are the parent of nuclear arms."

Addressing a post-prayer meeting at Gangad in Gujarat in 1958, Pandit Nehru had remarked: "The mission of Vinobaji, one of the great sons of the soil, presents a distinct picture in the world which is witnessing terrible stockpiles of nuclear weapons. Man is being crushed under the weight of armaments.

Here in India, Vinobaji is going round the country conveying the message of peace to millions of our people. These are two pictures before us. In essence they are symbolic of the two forces of violence and non-violence. I hope the forces of non-violence and peace, harmony and unity will triumph over those of destruction."

As indicated earlier, Vinoba has been busy during recent years in spreading an atmosphere of *Sarva-Dharma Samabhava* in India and outside. Religion, like many other good things of life, covers a multitude of sins as well. It is, therefore, imperative to rid it of the non-essential rites and rituals and highlight the common ideals which constitute real spirituality. Vinoba has spent considerable time in selecting 'core' verses from the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*, from the writings of Adi Shankaracharya, and from the saint poets of Maharashtra, including Tukaram, Jnanadev and Eknath. He has also published selections from the *Quran* and the *Bible*. A re-arranged edition of *Dhammapada*—the essence of Buddhism—was brought out earlier. *Namghosa-sar*, a selection from the Assamese poet-saint Shankerdeva, was published during Vinoba's *Padayatra* in Assam. Even at present, he devotes several hours every day to the detailed study of the four *Vedas* which he regards as the most ancient available literature of the highest quality in the world. When I met Vinoba last time in Wardha, I was astonished to find that he was busy ticking off those English words from the Oxford dictionary which could be easily absorbed in our national language, Hindi. He is planning to publish a dictionary of such words in Devnagri script, arranged according to the sequence of Nagari alphabet. All this original study and research has been conducted by Vinoba single-handed during the Bhoodan tours in different parts of the country. The same work, if entrusted to the Government or a professional research institution, would have easily cost several lakhs of rupees, even though of a much inferior quality.

"All activities throughout my life," says Vinoba, "have been motivated by the sole purpose of achieving the union of hearts." These publications on different religions have been inspired by the same thought: "Science has made the world smaller. It seeks to bring human beings closer to one another. It would,

therefore, be improper for the human society to be divided into sects and creeds, each considering itself superior to the other. We must try to understand each other properly and imbibe in ourselves the virtues of one another."

Apart from these religious and spiritual pursuits, Vinoba also devotes serious thought to the current problems of India. During my talks on various occasions, he has mentioned a suggestion more than once that, in order to lessen mutual rivalries and recriminations, political leaders should set a healthy convention by retiring from active public life at the age of 65 years. He argues that even judges of the Supreme Court of India are obliged to retire at this age, and there is no reason whatsoever why politicians should continue to hang on to public positions after attaining the age of 65. Further, Vinoba is of the definite view that Ministers of the ruling parties, on taking the oath of office, must behave as non-party leaders of the people. Such a healthy convention already exists in the case of Speakers. This should now be extended suitably to the Ministers as well.

Vinoba poignantly feels that, after the attainment of political freedom, two basic mistakes have been committed by the national leaders. First, the Government did not pay adequate attention to the development of agriculture, particularly the provision of irrigational facilities through a large number of wells and tanks, for achieving self-sufficiency in food requirements. This inevitably led to the spiral of rising prices causing untold hardships to the Indian masses. Secondly, no systematic attempt was made to re-fashion the current educational system from primary to the University stages. If education had been made work-oriented on the Basic pattern, as proposed by Gandhiji, the country would not have been faced with the complex problems of student unrest and unemployment among the educated young men. Even now, merely tinkering with these questions would be futile and meaningless. They must be tackled at the highest level with a sense of emergency so that concrete steps could be taken to remedy the situation without further loss of time.

Sometimes, Vinoba reveals a streak of anarchism in his thinking. He once asked me: "What will happen if all government

servants are asked to proceed on leave with full pay for a year?" And, then, he analysed the situation accruing out of such a contingency: "Births and deaths will continue uninterrupted. Marriages will also take place as usual. In the absence of doctors, there will be no genuine loss to the health of the nation. On the contrary, there may be some gain, because millions of people will have an opportunity of leading a natural life, without medicines. It is not likely that thefts and dacoities would increase, because the people will organize their own local defences. There will be no unnecessary controls and restrictions on civil life and economic activities. When required, the people will introduce their own regulations with mutual consultations." Vinoba smiled at me and asked: "Why not try this experiment for a year? Will anything be really lost in the process?"

A similar suggestion was made by him in regard to revamping the educational system in India after *Swaraj*: "Let all the students enjoy a holiday for six months till the educationists of the country agree upon and announce a new system. The student community will lose nothing during the interim period. Let them improve their health by playing games, climbing the mountain peaks, swimming in the rivers and going round the country to know her better and at closer quarters." And, then, he said with a genial smile: "Who cares for my suggestions? When a king speaks, the armies move. But when a *fakir* speaks, only the beard shakes."

In the foregoing pages, I have endeavoured to present to the reader a fairly detailed account of Vinoba's life and work over the past 75 years. Since I have had the privilege of watching his life and activities at close quarters during half this period, I have tried my best to present an intimate but a balanced review of his public work in the social, political, educational, constructive and spiritual spheres. Although Vinoba was hardly known outside India before 1940, he is now a world figure and naturally attracts the attention of numerous friends from foreign countries. As the first Satyagrahi, his name was on the lips of millions of people all over the globe. But as the 'Walking

Messiah and Saint', he is known and respected in a much wider circle of friends and admirers. Bertrand Russell, while inviting Vinoba to join the Anti-nuclear March in London in 1962, characterised him as a 'symbol of the role of conscience in human affairs'. The well-known author and novelist, Arthur Koestler, who interviewed him thrice some years ago, regards the Bhoodan movement as 'the greatest peace revolution since Gandhi'. He feels convinced that 'even in the twentieth century a saint in India can influence history, at least up to a point'. Ellsworth Bunker, a former American Ambassador in India, on the occasion of the Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership on Vinoba in 1958, described him as "a saint who compresses into a small body and great spirit the essence of ancient Indian tradition". He added: "Although the Bhoodan movement has developed along the dusty roads in the Indian countryside, the implications of Vinoba's philosophy have great potential meaning in the international scene."

Hallam Tennyson, grandson of the English poet Tennyson, who walked with Vinoba in the *Bhoodan Yatra* for several days calls him 'the embodiment of India', and remarks: "The twentieth century may be rich in jet aeroplanes, but it is pretty poor in saints. We need to remember that what we call 'progress' is nothing if it leads to no corresponding inner change, and Vinoba gives us this reminder in the one way which has power to move and impress." He ends by making a very significant observation: "But with all his asceticism, Vinoba has resisted pride of poverty—that subtlest temptation of the saints. He has never urged anyone else to follow his way of life. And he goes his own way with a striking serenity. To someone who asked him if his work would succeed, he replied, 'Fire merely burns. It does not care whether anyone puts a pot on it, fills it with water and puts rice in it to make a meal. To burn is the limit of its duty'." Dr. Lanza Del Vasto, the well-known Italian poet, artist and author, popularly known as Shantidas in India, has written a very readable book entitled *Gandhi to Vinoba : the new pilgrimage*. He recognizes Vinoba as 'Gandhi's spiritual successor who has made a dramatic contribution to the social and economic revolution in India'.

In conclusion, I have no manner of doubt that when most

of the names that figure on the front pages of newspapers these days will have been consigned to the dust-bin of history, Vinoba's life and work shall stand out as shining lights that would illumine surrounding gloom and darkness for centuries to come. While the importance of his constructive work in the sphere of land and rural revolution through love and compassion cannot be over-emphasized, I am convinced that Vinoba as a great educator, a remarkably original and versatile thinker, and above all, as a *Rishi* of sublime eminence, will be remembered with respect and gratitude by millions of people all the world over even when the Gramdan movement slips into comparative oblivion in the annals of India's socio-economic progress since the dawn of political freedom.

Glossary

Abhaya	—	Fearlessness.
Advaita	—	Non-dualism or monism.
Ahamkāra	—	Egoism.
Ahimsā	—	Non-violence.
Akarma	—	Inaction.
'Anāsakti Yoga'	—	Philosophy of non-attachment—A Commentary on the Gita written by Mahatma Gandhi.
Annapoorṇā	—	The goddess of food.
Āshram	—	Abode of a spiritual teacher, a centre of constructive work on Gandhian lines.
Athato Brahma Jijnāsā	—	"Now, therefore, the desire to know the Brahma or the Supreme"—the first aphorism of the *Brahma Sutra*, a treatise propagating the tenets of Vedanta.
Ayodhyākāṇd	—	One of the chapters of *Rāmāyaṇa*.
Bagīs	—	Rebels.
Bapu	—	Father, as Mahatma Gandhi was affectionately called.
'Bhāgvat'	—	An Epic glorifying the deeds of Lord Krishna, written by sage Vyas.

Bhajan	—	A devotional song.
Bhakta	—	Devotee.
Bhakti	—	Devotion.
Bhakti Yoga	—	The Philosophy of Devotion.
Bhāvanā	—	A feeling of devotion.
Bhīm	—	A son of King Pandu in the Mahabharat age, renowned for his strength. Bhim also implies 'gigantic'.
Bhoodān	—	Gift of land.
Brahmachārī	—	Celibate.
Brahmacharyāshram	—	Leading a celibate life upto the age of 25 years, according to the code of Manu.
'Brahmasutra Shānkar Bhāshya'	—	A Commentary on *Brahma Sutras* by Adi Shankaracharya.
Brahma Vidyā Mandir	—	A Temple or Institution for acquiring the knowledge of the Absolute.
Buddhi	—	Intelligence.
Chakkī	—	Grinding-stone.
Chappals	—	Slippers.
Charkhā	—	Spinning wheel.
Chitta	—	Mind.
Chulhā	—	Hearth.
Crore	—	100 lakhs or 10 million.
Daan	—	Giving of alms.
Dakshiṇā	—	A kind of sacrificial fee given to Brahmins at the end of a religious function.
Daman	—	Self-control.
Dānavas	—	Dark gods, Demons.
Daṇḍa-shakti	—	Legislative power of punishment.
Dān-pātra	—	Document of land-gifts.
Dargāh	—	The tomb of a Muslim saint.

Daridra Nārāyaṇ	—	God as embodied in the form of poorest and lowliest human beings.
Darshan	—	Seeing a great man with devotion.
'Dāsbodh'	—	Poetic work by Samarth Ramdas, the Preceptor of Shivaji, Maratha ruler.
Dayā	—	Compassion.
Deepak	—	Indigenous lamp with wicks.
Deva	—	Bright god.
Devnāgari	—	The script in which Hindi, Marathi and Sanskrit languages are written.
Dharma	—	Sense of duty, Right conduct.
Dharma Chakra Pravartana	—	Revolving the wheel of Dharma or Religion.
Dhunki	—	Carding-apparatus.
Dhyāna Yoga	—	Profound meditation.
Dvaita	—	Dualism.
Ekādashī	—	The eleventh day of a fortnight of the lunar month, on which religious-minded Hindus observe fast and offer prayers.
Fakīr	—	A mendicant, poor saint.
Gangā	—	The sacred river of India, Ganges.
'Gāndhi Mārg'	—	The official Quarterly of the Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi.
Gangotrī	—	The origin of the holy Ganga in the Himalayas.
Ghāṇī	—	An oil-press driven by human or animal power.
Ghee	—	Clarified butter.

'Gītā'	—	The Song Celestial. Also known as Bhagvad Gita.
'Gītāī'	—	"Gita—the mother"—translation of the *Gita* by Vinoba in Marathi verse.
'Gitā Pravachanen'	—	Talks on the Gita.
'Gītā Rahasya'	—	Commentary on the Gita by Lokmanya Tilak.
Goras Bhaṇdār	—	A co-operative store in Wardha for selling cow's milk.
Goseva	—	Serving the cow, promoting the welfare of cattle.
Grahasthāshram	—	Life of a householder from 25 years to 50 years, according to *Manusmruti*.
Grāmdān	—	Gift of the whole village-land.
Grāmrāj	—	Village self-government.
Grām Sabhā	—	Village Council.
Grām Sevā Maṇdal	—	Village Service Association.
'Granth Sahib'	—	The Holy book of the Sikhs.
Guṇṭha	—	One fortieth of an acre.
Gur	—	Molasses.
Guru	—	Master, Preceptor.
Gyān	—	Knowledge, wisdom.
Hanumān	—	Ardent worshipper and companion of King Rama, a mythological figure worshipped by the Hindu masses.
Harijan	—	Lit. 'People of God'—this term was used for scheduled castes by Mahatma Gandhi.
Himālaya	—	"Abode of snow". The highest mountain range, forming the northern frontiers of India.
Himsā	—	Violence.
Hiraṇyakashyapū	—	An agnostic king, who was not even prepared to hear the name of God. His son Prahlad was an

ardent worshipper of the Divine. Hiranyakashyapu tried his best to kill Prahlad, but was himself slain by Lord Narsimha, an incarnation of God.

Hridayakunj — A building in Sabarmati Ashram, Ahmedabad, where Gandhiji resided.

Indriyās — Organs of perception and action.

'Iśopanishad' — One of the Upanishads.

Jai Jagat — "Victory to the world".

Jana Shakti — Self-reliant strength of the people.

Jīvandān — Life-dedication; gift of life.

Jnāna — Knowledge.

'Jnāneshwarī' — Commentary on the *Gita* in Marathi by Jnaneshwar, an eminent saint and philosopher.

Jowar Chapātī — Bread prepared from barley flour.

'Kādambarī — The immortal Sanskrit classic in prose written by Banabhatta in the seventh century A.D.

Kalā Bhavan — School of Art.

Kaliyuga — The Dark Age.

Kānchan Mukti — Liberation from money-economy.

Kanyā Shālā — A school for girls.

Karma — Outward action.

Karma Yoga — The philosophy of action.

Karma Yogī — One who believes in the doctrine of Karma or action.

Kāryakram — Programme of action.

Khādī — Hand-spun and hand-woven

Konkaṇastha	—	Belonging to the Konkan region of Maharashtra.
Krānti	—	Revolution.
Kritayuga	—	A mythological golden age, when there was no evil.
Kritayugī	—	Born in Kritayuga, or the Golden Age.
Kriyā	—	Activity.
Lakh	—	100,000 or 1 million.
Lokanāgarī	—	A reformed Nagri script developed by Vinoba.
Lokanīti	—	Politics of the people.
Lok Sevak Sangh	—	An organization for the service of the people.
Lok-shakti	—	Power of the people.
Loṭā	—	A small jug for taking water.
Magan-deep	—	A new type of hurricane lantern fabricated by Vinoba. It consumed local edible oil in place of kerosene, and was named as 'Magan-deep' in the memory of Maganlal Gandhi, a nephew of Mahatma Gandhi.
'Mahābhārat'	—	A famous epic written by sage Vyas. It is an encyclopaedic work, narrating a war between Kauravas and Pandavas in ancient India.
'Maharāshtra Dharma'	—	A Marathi journal edited by Vinoba.
Mahilā Āshram	—	An institution for women.
'Mangal Prabhāt'	—	A book written by Gandhiji, meaning "auspicious morning".
'Manu Smriti'	—	Ancient Indian book on laws. It contains social, ethical and religious codes as laid down by sage Manu.

'Matru Devo Bhava'	—	Let the mother be worshipped as god.
Melā	—	Fair.
Moksha	—	Emancipation.
Mukti	—	Salvation.
Naī Tālim	—	Basic Education.
Namāz	—	Prayers at a mosque.
'Nirbal ke bal Rām'	—	"God is the real strength of the weak and the down-trodden."
Nirguṇa Bhakti	—	Devotion to formless Supreme being.
Nishkāma Karma	—	Motiveless action.
Nityanaī Tālim	—	Ever new education.
Nitya paṭhanīya	—	Worthy to be studied daily.
Nyāya Sutra	—	Aphorisms on logic by sage Gautam, one of the eminent philosophers of India.
Padayātrā	—	Journey on foot.
Panchāyat Ghar	—	The office of village council.
Panch Parmeshwar	—	The unanimous opinion of village representatives is the voice of Divinity.
Paṇḍās	—	Persons in holy centres who look after the convenience of the pilgrims.
'Patanjali Yoga-Sutra'	—	A treatise written by sage Patanjali, containing the basic principles of Yoga Philosophy.
Patram, Pushpam, Phalam, Toyam	—	A leaf, a flower, a fruit and a little water as offerings to the Lord.
Pāv rotī	—	Loaves of bread.
Pradakshiṇā	—	Going round the idol of any deity in a temple.
Prahlād	—	*Vide* Hiranyakashyapu.

Prajāpati	—	The Creator.
Prajnā	—	Wisdom.
'Purānās'	—	Eighteen ancient Classics supposed to have been written by sage Vyas, giving an account of Indian history and mythology.
'Qurān'	—	The Holy book of the Muslims.
'Raghuvansha'	—	A Sanskrit classic in verse by Kalidasa, describing the deeds of the Kings of Raghu dynasty.
Rajas	—	The quality of passion.
	—	Conventional politics.
'Rāmāyaṇa'	—	An Epic written by sage Valmiki in Sanskrit. It describes the deeds of King Ram.
Rām	—	Incarnation of God, as the son of King Dashrath of Ayodhya.
Rāmdhūn	—	Chanting the name of Ram or God.
Rāmnāma	—	Name of the Divine.
Rām Rājya	—	Rule of God.
Rāshtriyashālā	—	National School.
Rāshtriya Vidyā Mandir	—	National High School.
Rishi	—	A seer, sage.
Rukmiṇī	—	Wife of Lord Krishna.
Sādhanā	—	Penance, devotion.
Sādhan Shuddhi	—	Purity of the means.
Saguṇa Bhakti	—	Devotion to God incarnate.
Saiyam	—	Self-control.
'Samādhi	—	A memorial construction containing a portion of the ashes after cremation.
Sammelan	—	Conference.
Samsāra	—	Universe.
'Sampattidān	—	Donation of a portion of one's income or wealth.

Sāmyavād	—	Communism.
Sāmya Yoga	—	The Philosophy of Equality, Sarvodaya—a special term coined by Vinoba for indicating a non-violent social order as against Communism.
Sandhyā	—	Prayer or oblation to the Sun.
Sannyāsī	—	One who renounces the world and becomes a saint.
Saranjam Kāryālaya	—	A workshop for the manufacture of spinning wheels, etc.
Sarva-dharma Samabhāva	—	Equal respect for all religions.
Sarvodaya Samāj	—	A society for the welfare of all.
Sattva	—	The quality of goodness.
Satya	—	Truth.
Satyabhāmā	—	Another wife of Lord Krishna.
Satyāgraha	—	Adherence to truth; civil non-violent resistance.
Satyāgrahī	—	One who offers satyagraha.
Sevā	—	Service.
Sevaks	—	Constructive workers.
'Shākuntalam'	—	Another masterpiece by Kalidasa—a poetic drama on Shakuntala.
Shānti	—	Peace.
Shānti Senā	—	Peace Brigade.
Shānti Sainik	—	A soldier of peace.
Shānti Sevā Dal	—	Peace Service Corps
Sharad Pūrṇimā	—	Full-moon day in early winter.
Shāstras	—	Hindu Scriptures.
Shikshā Maṇdal	—	Education Society.
Shivājī Jayanti	—	Birth-anniversary of Shivaji, the great Maratha ruler.
Shivarātri	—	Night of a popular fast and festival in honour of Lord Shiva.
Shloka	—	A poetic metre used in Sanskrit literature.
Shramdān	—	Gift of physical labour.

Sootānjali	—	Offering of hand-spun hanks of yarn.
Sthitaprajña	—	A person of steadfast mind.
'Sthitaprajña Darshan'	—	The characteristics of a person who has attained steadfast wisdom as described in the last eighteen verses of the second chapter of the Gita.
Sūkshma	—	Subtle, supramental power.
Sulabh Grāmdān	—	Gramdan made easy.
Surya Namaskār	—	A physical exercise at sunrise.
Svādhyāya	—	Self-study.
Swadeshi	—	Exclusive use of articles made in one's own country.
'Swarajya Shāstra'	—	Grammar of Politics; a treatise on self-government.
Swayamvara	—	A type of marriage in which the bride selects her own bridegroom.
Taklī	—	A small spindle for hand-spinning.
Tamas	—	Inertia, darkness.
Tapas	—	Practising austerity.
Thālī	—	A metal-plate used for taking food.
Toofān	—	Storm.
Tulsī	—	A sacred plant, leaves of which are also used for medicine.
Tulsīdās's 'Rāmāyaṇ'	—	Tulsidas, a Hindi poet-saint in 16th century, wrote the epic poem *Ramayan*. It is a very popular book among the masses of North India.
Tunāī	—	Hand-carding of cotton.
'Upanishads'	—	Ancient Sanskrit books propounding Vedanta Philosophy.

Vairāgya	—	Detachment from worldly affairs.
Vāman	—	Dwarf—One of the incarnations of God in the form of a dwarf.
Vānaprastha Ashram	—	According to the ancient tradition of India, the third stage of human life between 50 years and 75 years, during which one is supposed to preach to the community and give it the benefit of one's spiritual experiences.
Vande Mātaram	—	Salutation to Mother India.
Vāsanā	—	Passion, lust.
Vedānta	—	Culmination of Vedic Philosophy, believing in one Divine power pervading everything.
'Vedas'	—	Lit. Knowledge. They are the oldest books of Sanskrit literature. They are four in number —Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda.
'Vichārpothī'	—	A book containing the stray thoughts of Vinoba.
Vidyārthi Maṇdal	—	An Association of Students.
Vikarma	—	Participation of the mind in external action.
Vinobā Kuṭi	—	A cottage in Sabarmati Ashram where Vinoba resided.
Vishva-Manush Vishva-Mānava	—	'A citizen of the world'.
Vishwaroop-darshan	—	Vision of the cosmic form of God.
Yagya	—	Offering or sacrifice.
Yamarāj	—	The god of death.
Yoga	—	The art of spiritual living.

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Chronology of Life

1895, Sept. 11:	Vinoba was born in Gagode village, Kolaba district, Maharashtra.
1903,:	Studies *Jnaneshwari* at the age of eight.
1905,:	Takes lifelong pledge of celibacy and national service, at the age of ten.
1907,:	Admission to a High School in Baroda.
1913,:	Vinoba passes Matriculation examination.
1914,:	Starts Vidyarthi Mandal at Baroda.
1916, Mar. 25:	Leaves home for Varanasi.
1916, June 7:	Vinoba joins Mahatma Gandhi at Kochrab Ashram, Ahmedabad.
1917, Mar. 6:	Meets Lokmanya Tilak for the first time.
1918, June 25:	Establishment of Sabarmati Ashram.
1918, Oct. 24:	Passing away of Vinoba's mother Rukminidevi.
1918-19,:	Tour in Maharashtra and Sanskrit studies at Wai.
1918, Feb. 12:	Famous letter addressed to Mahatma Gandhi about his activities during one year's leave.
1921, April 8:	Vinoba starts Satyagraha Ashram at Wardha in the garden of Jamnalal Bajaj.
1923, Jan. 1:	The first issue of *'Maharashtra Dharma'* (Monthly), edited by Vinoba.
1923, April:	First imprisonment in connection of Flag Satyagraha at Nagpur.
1923, Sept. 3:	Released from prison.

1924, Feb. 12:	Shifts to the new Satyagraha Ashram building (now Mahila Ashram) at Wardha.
1924, June 18:	Re-starting *'Maharashtra Dharma'* as a Weekly.
1924,:	Vinoba goes to Kerala for Waikom Satyagraha under Gandhiji's instructions.
1924,:	With Gandhiji at Delhi in connection with 21-day fast for communal unity.
1928, July 16:	Commencement of *Kanyashala* at Wardha, under Vinoba's guidance.
1928, July 19:	Opens Jamnalal Bajaj's Lakshminarayan temple at Wardha for the Harijans.
1930, Oct. 7: to 1931, Feb. 6:	Vinoba writes *Gitai*, Marathi translation of the Gita in verse.
1931-32:	Campaign for the opening of wells and temples for Harijans in Wardha district.
1932, Jan. 8:	Imprisoned in Dhulia Jail where the memorable 'Talks on the Gita' were delivered.
1932, July 14:	Released from Dhulia Jail.
1932, Aug. 7:	Starts several Ashrams in Wardha Tehsil.
1932, Dec. 25:	Shifts to Nalwadi for village work.
1934, May 6:	Establishment of Gramseva Mandal.
1934, June 10:	Shifts to Kanya Ashram under Gandhiji's advice.
1935, April 1:	Organizes first 'Khadi Yatra' at Deoli.
1935, July 1:	Establishment of the Tannery near Nalwadi.
1936, May 18:	Maharogi Seva Mandal is established at Dattapur for the service of lepers.
1938, Oct.:	Vinoba improves his health at Pavnar after serious illness.
1940, Oct. 17:	Speech at Pavnar, as the first Satyagrahi.
1940, Oct. 21:	Sentenced to 2 months' simple imprisonment.
1941, Jan. 17:	Vinoba delivers an anti-War speech at Sevagram.
1941, Jan. 24:	Sentenced to 6 months' imprisonment.
1941, July 14:	Speech and arrest at Nalwadi.
1941, Dec. 3:	Release along with other individual Civil Disobedience prisoners.

1942, Feb. 1:	Presides over the first *All-India Goseva Conference.*
1942, Aug. 9:	Arrested under 'Quit India' movement.
1945, July 9:	Released from Seoni Jail.
1947, Oct. 29:	Passing away of Vinoba's father, Narhari Shambhurao Bhave at Dhulia.
1948, Mar. 13-15:	Constructive Workers' Conference at Sevagram.
1948, Mar 30:	Vinoba reaches Delhi on Pandit Nehru's invitation for helping Relief and Rehabilitation work.
1948, Dec. 16:	Inauguration of Sarvodaya Exhibition at Jaipur.
1949, Aug. 15:	First issue of *'Sarvodaya'*, Hindi Monthly edited by Vinoba.
1949, Aug. 21:	Vinoba addresses workers at Jinnah Hall in Bombay.
1949, Nov. 1:	Doctors detect Vinoba's duodenal ulcer.
1949, Dec. 15:	Inaugurates the World Pacifist Conference at Sevagram.
1950, Jan. 1:	Initiates *Kanchan-mukti* programme at Pavnar.
1951, Mar. 8:	Leaves for Shivrampalli, Hyderabad, for attending Sarvodaya Conference.
1951, April 15:	Commencement of tour in Telangana.
1951, April 18:	First *Bhoodan* at Pochampalli village.
1951, June 27:	Vinoba returns to Sevagram.
1951, Sept. 12:	Leaves for Delhi on Pandit Nehru's invitation.
1951, Nov. 13-23:	Discussion with Members of the Planning Commission at Rajghat, Delhi.
1952, Jan. 23:	First Gramdan of Mangroth village in Uttar Pradesh.
1952, Sept. 7:	Launches sanitation drive at Varanasi.
1952, April 13:	Vinoba attends Sarvodaya Sammelan at Sevapuri where a resolution for collecting 25 lakh acres of land in *Bhoodan* was adopted.
1952, Oct. 23:	Scheme of *Sampattidan* announced at Patna.

1953:	Serious illness at Chandil in Bihar, followed by the Sarvodaya Sammelan.
1954, April:	Sarvodaya Sammelan at Bodh Gaya, where Jayaprakash Narayan announced his *Jivandan.*
1954, April 18:	*Samanvaya* Ashram is established at Bodh Gaya.
1955, March:	Sarvodaya Sammelan at Jagannathpuri.
1956, May 14:	Sarvodaya Sammelan at Kancheepuram, South India.
1957, April 15:	Vinoba takes the historic pledge at Kanya Kumari for solving land problem in India.
1957, May 9-10:	Sarvodaya Sammelan at Kalady.
1957, July 11:	First announcement of Shanti Sena programme.
1957, Sept. 20:	Gramdan Conference at Yelwal.
1958, May 29:	Enters Pandharpur temple with a party consisting of several religious denominations.
1958, May 30:	Sarvodaya Sammelan at Pandharpur.
1958, Aug. 8:	An important meeting of Sarva Seva Sangh at Chalisgaon.
1959, Feb. 27:	Sarvodaya Sammelan at Ajmer.
1959, April 14:	Inauguration of Brahma Vidya Mandir (Pavnar) at Kashi-ka-Vas, Sikar in Rajasthan.
1959, May 22:	Vinoba enters Jammu and Kashmir.
1959, Oct. 1:	Establishes Prasthan Ashram at Pathankot.
1959, Oct. 11:	Worships at the Golden Temple in Amritsar.
1959, Nov. 11:	Inauguration of All-India Literary Conference at Amritsar.
1960, April 18:	Establishment of Vishwa-Needam Ashram near Bangalore.
1960, May 10-22:	Twenty dacoits surrender to Vinoba in the Chambal Valley.
1960, Aug. 15:	Commencement of Visarjan Ashram at Indore.
1962, Mar. 5:	Establishes Maitri Ashram in North Lakhimpur district of Assam.

1962, Sept. 5-25:	Trip to Pakistan.
1962, Dec. 25:	Vinoba's last meeting with Pandit Nehru at Nabagram in Bengal.
1963, Dec. 29:	Sarvodaya Conference at Raipur.
1964, Feb. 12:	First issue of *Maitri* magazine is published from Pavnar Ashram.
1964, April 6:	Vinoba returns to Sevagram.
1965, Feb. 12-17:	Fast at Pavanar Ashram in connection with language riots in South India.
1965, Aug. 23:	Vinoba leaves for Bihar in connection with Gramdan 'Storm' Campaign.
1966, June 7:	Commences his *'Sukshma'* programme during his stay in Bihar.
1969, Oct. 25:	Sarvodaya Sammelan at Rajgir.
1969, Nov. 3:	Returns to Wardha for meeting Badshah Khan.
1969, Nov. 8:	Joint statement issued from Sevagram over the signatures of Badshah Khan, Vinoba and Jayaprakash Narayan.
1970, Feb. 9:	Addresses the National Seminar on "Gandhian Values in Indian Education" convened by the Ministry of Education, Government of India.
1970, June 7:	Vinoba leaves Gopuri for Paramdham Ashram, Pavnar. On the same day he met Gandhiji for the first time at Ahmedabad in 1916.

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