



Achievements of vinoba bhawe with reference to the bhoodan movement

Dr. Krishan Singh

Assistant Professor (VSY), Department of Social Science, Pt Deendayal Upadhyay Shekhawati University, Sikar, Rajasthan, India

Abstract

The effect it had on the Indian psyche at the time, during a Communist-inspired peasant revolt in Telengana (Andhra Pradesh), was so profound that Vinoba became an instant national icon. Instead of the violence and carnage associated with the Communist uprising, Bhoodans should persuade landlords to redistribute a portion of their holdings—typically one sixth—to the landless. Vinoba Bhave, who admittedly would not have come forward had Gandhi been alive, found himself, at the age of 56, spearheading the first Gandhian-inspired mass movement in an independent India.

Keywords: Vinoba bhawe, bhoodan, movement, india

Introduction

By April 1958, Bhoodan had received 5 million acres as donations, less than a tenth of the 50 million acres that the movement had aimed to amass during its first seven years. Just over 800,000 acres of this total had been distributed to landless cultivators. However, it was already understood that setting quotas or proclaiming goals was against the spirit of the movement. Vinoba, who shares Gandhi's impassioned belief in human nature, is also highly suspicious of all attempts to impose social reform from the top down. According to him, it is more important to change the attitude of the land-owning classes towards property and wealth than to achieve arbitrarily set goals, and Vinoba, like Mahatma before him, seeks to inspire the villagers through his own sense of devotion and austere lifestyle. She travels from village to village with her band of devoted followers in an effort to reach the people. Typically, he spends an entire year in a single state, visiting every village before moving on to the next. He conveys his message with classical simplicity and a plethora of Hindu religious and folkloric references. In 1955, undeterred by the Bhoodan movement's progressive loss of momentum, Vinoba introduced the concept of Gramdan, or Village gift, as a new phase in his plan to revitalise Indian rural society. By August 1957, over 3,000 villages had been reorganised in accordance with this concept, with villagers relinquishing all property rights to the village community and cultivating land individually or collectively.

Land Reform Law

While Bhoodan's accomplishment is not insignificant in and of itself, its true significance lies in the fact that it has made the entire nation aware of the urgent need for reform and compelled state governments, some of which are controlled by conservative Congressmen, to introduce their own agrarian legislation. The land tenure system in India prior to 1947 was so complex and varied from region to region that the Central Government deemed it impossible to legislate for the entire country. Progress has not been uniform throughout the nation for the same reason. With the assistance of the Indian Planning Commission, the Delhi government outlined the broad principles of reform that it

expected the provincial governments to adopt when drafting their own laws. These were to be implemented in three stages: abolition of Zamindari (absentee landlordism) and other forms of feudal ownership; establishment of progressive peasant proprietorship; and limitation of individual holdings with redistribution of the surplus. The first phase, the abolition of Zamindari, was generally completed by 1957; the system still exists in sections of Rajasthan and Assam, but legislation to abolish it is being considered in both states. However, the Zamindars did not give up without a fight. In Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, they challenged the constitutionality of this legislation in court, arguing that because the Indian Constitution protects property rights, the governments' attempts to seize their estates were unconstitutional (although they were to be compensated). The Indian Supreme Court ruled in their favour, and in order to circumvent this objection, the Indian Parliament was required to amend the Constitution so that no law providing for the acquisition of any estate by the state would be deemed invalid on these grounds. Even after the abolition of Zamindari, a number of large holdings persisted because their owners were personally liable for the payment of land revenue and "personally supervised work on their land."

Regarding the second phase of the land reform, the formation of peasant proprietors is proposed. The Planning Commission suggested that state governments reduce rents for tenants, provide security of tenure, and allow tenants to purchase their holdings. These proposals have not been implemented uniformly in all states; in fact, despite the fact that congressional administrations have been discussing tenancy reform for years, the distance between promise and fulfilment remains. In West Bengal and Kashmir, radical agrarian legislation was enacted, the former due to an acute population problem (exacerbated by the influx of significant numbers of Hindus from East Pakistan) and the latter for international political reasons. Approximately 628 million acres (79 percent of the total cultivated area) in India are currently covered by some form of tenure security, while 99 million acres remain unprotected. A quarter of India's rural population does not own any property and relies on seasonal work (sometimes as day labourers) to survive. Recent land

legislation has done little for these people, and it is obvious that they cannot be settled on land unless existing holdings' ceilings are lowered sufficiently to leave a sizeable surplus for redistribution, enough to grant each village family at least five acres for their own use. Vinoba arrived at this number despite his detractors' assertions that five acres constitutes an unprofitable holding. His calculations are based on the realisation that if this vast economic and social class is not swiftly absorbed by the new industries that are sprouting up across the country, it will remain rootless and insecure, posing a grave political threat to India. Kerala, which has a higher percentage of landless tillers than any other province, was the first to return to a Communist administration, and for good reason. Many provincial governments have set minimum wages for agricultural labour, but even by Indian standards, these wages are extremely low. They have also examined the fifty-year trend that transformed many tenant farmers into sharecroppers. The moneylender has been replaced by agricultural credit societies, and a series of poor harvests no longer compels a villager to sell his land to his creditors.

Bhoodan Movement

The Bhoodan movement began inadvertently. After Gandhi's death, his social workers, bereft of leadership, were compelled to scale back his ambitious plan to revolutionise rural Indian society. Vinoba realised that official efforts to improve village life were insufficient, and he felt a strong urge to launch an independent mission along Gandhian lines. However, he was unable to determine what form his mission should take. The state of Hyderabad was especially affected by social unrest; Communist insurgents seized their opportunity when law and order collapsed in 1948 during the last months of the Nizam's (the ruler's) administration, and terrorism continued even after Hyderabad joined the Indian Union the same year. Local communist leaders in Telengana, acting independently of the central politburo, established an enclave, murdered landlords, and distributed their property to the peasantry. Official measures against the insurgents were stringent, and tensions between landlords and the landless persisted even after the terrorist movement's core was destroyed. Vinoba, deeply troubled by the level of violence, wandered throughout Telengana in search of a solution to the villager's problems, which he received at Pochampelli from the villagers themselves. The Harijans who approached him supported violence because they saw no alternative means of escaping their persistent poverty. Even if they were given only two acres per family, he was informed, they would be content. At his prayer meeting that evening, Vinoba pleaded with the landowners present to donate some of their agricultural land to the impoverished villagers. In response, one of the largest landowners in the village, Mr. Ram Chandra Reddi, offered one hundred acres. Vinoba grasped the opportunity when he realised that this unique event could lead to new revolutionary developments; within two weeks, Bhoodan had become a nationwide movement.

During the fifty days he spent in Hyderabad before returning to his ashram (retreat) in Paunar, central India, he received 12,000 acres as gifts; then, while traversing the 800-plus miles to Delhi to meet Mr. Nehru and the Indian Planning Commission, he acquired an additional 17,000 acres. Continuing his voyage on foot across northern India, he was granted 300,000 acres in Uttar Pradesh and 400,000 acres in

Bihar. However, the saint's legend could not reach every part of the country. Even though his employees were dedicated and competent, they were unable to generate the same results in his absence. Whereas Vinoba averaged 240 acres per day in Hyderabad, it took his disciples three years to acquire 100,000 acres. Bhoodan was also faced with additional obstacles. On occasion, inferior land was transferred, and on other occasions, offers were retracted almost immediately after Vinoba's departure. V. Inoba's achievement of amassing one million acres in seven years was remarkable, although it did little to alleviate the landlessness of India's peasantry, given that the movement was based solely on moral principles and that no sanctions were threatened or used against those who refused to contribute.

The issue of distributing donated land to Bhoodan proved more difficult than its collection efforts. Partially as a result of a lack of personnel to manage the details and partially as a result of Vinoba's aversion to establishing any kind of centralised administrative apparatus, difficulties were initially addressed through a succession of improvisations. Later, when the snail's pace of distribution threatened to drain the movement's vitality, the task was restructured along more systematic lines, and the assistance of the state governments in preparing land surveys and registration was welcomed. Priority was typically given to landless tillers whose only source of income was agriculture at the time of distribution, but local Bhoodan committees typically allowed the villagers to choose the recipients. Due to the fact that these ceremonies were conducted in the presence of the entire village community and the district official or his representative, no landowner could make a false claim. The recipients of Bhoodan were required to cultivate the land they received for a minimum of ten years, beginning within three years of receiving it; if they did not, they risked losing the land.

When Bhoodan made Vinoba a national figure for the first time, the Communist Party of India (C.P.I.) denounced him as an unwitting tool of the capitalist and landowning classes who was assisting in delaying the Socialist revolution. Today, the C.P.I. has reversed its former policy of opposition, in part to meet the demands of a Moscow-Peking-inspired strategic shift that tends to recognise Gandhi's contribution to the independence movement and therefore cannot ignore the work of his spiritual successor, and in part because Vinoba's saintly figure is revered by the Indian peasants, a class that the C.P.I. is currently attempting to woo. It has enthusiastically embraced Gramdan; Communist leaders in Kerala claim to have sought Vinoba's counsel in drafting their own agrarian legislation. Realising that they would be acting unconstitutionally if they resorted to outright expropriation of private property and inviting the Delhi Government to remove them from office, the Communists are making a virtue out of necessity.

Conclusion

It was a common criticism of Bhoodan that it encouraged the fragmentation of holdings. In addition, some of the land offered to Vinoba was in the form of single or scattered strips that were uneconomic to cultivate; many landlords resorted to this tactic out of concern that they could not refuse Vinoba outright. It was also criticised by socialists and communists for accepting land donations from the

impoverished and others who could not afford to reduce their already small holdings, thereby defeating the movement's entire purpose. But Vinoba is unconcerned with the size of a gift; even a small plot of land that its owner can poorly afford to give away, if given in the right spirit, can help to create a new atmosphere in the village and shame the wealthy into giving more generously. In fairness to him, it should also be noted that whenever an impoverished farmer compelled him to accept a portion of his meagre holding, Vinoba graciously accepted the gift and returned it to its owner as Prasad, or a gift that a Hindu must accept.

References

1. Government of India, Planning Commission, *The New India* (London, 1958), 187.
2. *India News* (London), 1958.
3. *India* (London, Information Service of India), 1957, 97.
4. See *India, A Reference Annual 1958* (Delhi, Government of India, 1958), 277.
5. See *Constitution of India, First Amendment Act, 1951*, Article 31 -A. 8 *India, A Reference Annual 1958*, p. 281.
6. From Mr Reddi's own account of the meeting and of his initiation into Bhoodan. see H. Tennyson. *Saint on the March* (London. 1955, 54-63.
7. Masani RP. *The Five Gifts* London, 1957, 170-1.