

Impact of 'Bhoodan Movement' of Vinoba Bhave on Economic Upliftment of Dalits

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ABSTRACT: The Bhoodan movement (Land Gift movement), also known as the Bloodless Revolution, was a voluntary land reform movement in India.^[1] It was initiated by Gandhian Vinoba Bhave^[1] in 1951 at Pochampally village, Pochampally. The Bhoodan movement attempted to persuade wealthy landowners to voluntarily give a percentage of their land to landless people. Philosophically, Bhave was influenced by Sarvodaya movement and Gram Swarajya. Vinayak Narahari Bhave, also known as Vinoba Bhave (11 September 1895 – 15 November 1982), was an Indian advocate of nonviolence and human rights. Often called Acharya (Teacher in Sanskrit), he is best known for the Bhoodan Movement. He is considered as National Teacher of India and the spiritual successor of Mahatma Gandhi. He was an eminent philosopher. The Gita has been translated into the Marathi language by him with the title Geetai (meaning 'Mother Gīta' in Marathi).^[2]

KEYWORDS: bhoodan movement, bloodless, Vinoba Bhave, landless people, landowners, voluntarily, Pochampally

I. INTRODUCTION

Landless labourers were given the small plots that they could settle and grow their crops on. Bhoodan Acts were passed that stated that the beneficiary had no right to sell the land or use it for non-agricultural purposes or for forestry. For example, Section 25 of the Maharashtra State Bhoodan Act states that the beneficiary (who must be landless) should only use the land for subsistence cultivation. If the "owner" failed to cultivate the land for over a year or tried to use it for non-agriculture activities, the government would have the right to confiscate it.¹

Bhave wanted peasants to give up using bullocks, tractors or other machines for agricultural purposes. This was called rishi-kheti in Hindi. He also wanted the people to give up using money in the form of kanchan-dan. The movement had the support of Congress.¹⁹ JP Narayan withdrew from active politics to join the Bhoodan movement in 1953. Bhave's religious outlook was very broad and it synthesized the truths of many religions. This can be seen in one of his hymns "Om Tat Sat" which contains symbols of many religions. His slogan "जय जगत्" (Jay Jagat) i.e. "victory to the world" finds reflection in his views about the world as a whole.²

Bhave observed the life of the average Indian living in a village and tried to find solutions for the problems he faced with a firm spiritual foundation. This formed the core of his Sarvodaya movement. Another example of this is the Bhoodan (land gift) movement started at Pochampally on 18 April 1951,²⁰ after interacting with 80 Harijan families. He walked all across India asking people with land to consider him one of their sons and so gave him one-sixth of their land which he then distributed to the landless poor. Non-violence and compassion is a hallmarks of his philosophy, he also campaigned against the slaughtering of cows.³

Bhave said, "I have walked all over India for 13 years. In the backdrop of the enduring perpetuity of my life's work, I have established 6 ashrams." The Brahma Vidya Mandir is one of the ashrams that Bhave created. It is a small community for women that was created for them to become self-sufficient and non-violent in a community. This group farms to get their food, but uses Gandhi's beliefs about food production, which include sustainability and social justice, as a guide. This community, like Gandhi and Bhave,⁴ has been influenced greatly by the Bhagavad-Gita and that is also used to determine their practices. The community perform prayers as a group every day, reciting from the Isha Upanishad at dawn,²¹ the Vishnu Sahasranama at mid-morning, and the Bhagavad-Gita in the evening. As of today, there are around 25 women who are members of the community and several men have also been allowed to join the community.^[9]

Since its founding in 1959, members of Brahma Vidya Mandir (BVM), an intentional community for women in Paunar, Maharashtra, have dealt with the struggle of translating Gandhian values such as self-sufficiency, non-violence, and public service into specific practices of food production and consumption. BVM's existence and the counter-narrative of its resident's practice demonstrate how one community debate the practicalities and tradeoffs in their application of self-sufficiency, non-violence, and radical democracy to their own social and geographic context. One mainstream narrative described by BVM and the farmers that work with them is that large-scale agriculture is inevitable, necessary, and the only possibility of feeding the world. Instead,⁵ at BVM they reject the narrative that success in agriculture



comes from expensive technology. BVM is a small community in India, therefore it does not hold much power to promote its beliefs and practices in the mainstream.⁶ Meanwhile, India today proudly proclaims its large²² and growing middle class, and although many see Gandhi as a hero, some reject his views in favour of US-style-consumerism and look for an alternate route in agriculture with technological advancements. The existence of BVM provides a counter-narrative on enacting alternative agricultural and social practices that were already being practised by BVM's women back in the 1960s.⁷

II.DISCUSSION

Bhave crossed India on foot to persuade landowners to give up a piece of their land. His first success came on 18 April 1951 at Pochampally village¹⁸ in Nalgonda district, Andhra Pradesh^[1] (now Telangana) which was the centre of communist activity. It was the culmination of the Telangana peasant movement. A violent struggle had been launched by peasants against the local landlords.⁸

Movement organisers had arranged for Bhave to stay at Pochampally, a village of about 700 families, of whom two-thirds were landless. Bhave visited the Harijan colony. By early afternoon, villagers began to gather around him. The Harijans asked for 80 acres (32 ha) of land, forty wet, forty dry, for forty families. Bhave asked, "If it is not possible to get land from the government, is there not something villagers themselves could do?"^[1]

V. Ramachandra Reddy initially offered a donation of 100 acres (40 ha) of his 3,500 acres (14 km²) land. Later, he donated an additional 800 acres (3.2 km²).^[1] He joined social reform.^[2] After him, the land donation movement continued under a Bhoodan trust movement with the help of his sons. The 7th Nizam of Hyderabad, Mir Osman Ali Khan also donated 14,000 acres (57 km²) of his personal land to the Bhoodan movement.^{[3][4]}

Other landowners including Raja Bahadur Giriwar Narayan Singh, C.B.E. and Raja of Ranka (Garhwa Jharkhand) donated a¹⁵ combined 102,001 acres (412.78 km²) acres to the Bhoodan initiative, the largest donation in India.^[5]

Maharaja Kamakhya Narain Singh Bahadur of Ramgarh Raj donated 200,000 acres (810 km²) of land to Vinoba Bhave and others under the Bihar Bhoodan Yagna Act,¹⁶ prior to the institution of the suit, making it the biggest donation from any king.^[6]

During Vinoba Bhave's Surajgarh visit, he was welcomed by headmaster Rambilas Sharma and other members. Sharma was instrumental in spreading the Bhoodan movement in Jhunjhunu¹⁷ district in the late 1950s and early 1960s.^{[7][8]}

The initial objective of the movement was to secure voluntary donations and distribute it to the landless but soon came to demand 1/6 of all private land. In 1952, the movement widened the concept of gramdan^[1] ("village in gift" or the donation of an entire village) and had started advocating common ownership of land. The first village to come under gramdan was Mangroth in Hamirpur district of Uttar Pradesh.¹¹ The second and third gramdan took place in Orissa in 1955. Vinoba Bhave²³ was a scholar, thinker, and writer who produced numerous books. He was a translator who made Sanskrit texts accessible to the common man. He was also an orator and linguist with an excellent command of several languages (Marathi, Kannada, Gujarati, Hindi, Urdu, English, and Sanskrit). Bhave was an innovative social reformer.¹⁰ He called "Kannada" script the "Queen of World Scripts"²⁴ (Vishwa Lipigala Raani)^{[10][11]} He wrote brief introductions to, and criticisms of, several religious and philosophical works like the Bhagavad Gita, works of Adi Shankaracharya, the Bible and the Quran. His views of Dnyaneshwar's poetry and works by other Marathi saints are pretty brilliant and a testimony to the breadth of his intellect.⁹

Bhave had translated the Bhagavad Gita into Marathi. He was deeply influenced by the Gita and attempted to imbibe its teachings into his life, often stating that "The Gita is my life's breath".^[12]

Vinoba Bhave University, located in Hazaribagh district in the state of Jharkhand, is named after him.¹²

III.RESULTS

This movement developed into a village gift or gramdan movement and it was a part of a comprehensive movement for the establishment of a Sarvodaya society (the rise of all socio-economic-political order),²⁵ both in and outside India.^[9]

By the 1960s, the movement had lost momentum. The Sarvodaya Samaj failed to build a mass movement that would generate pressure for social transformation. However, the movement made a significant contribution by creating moral ambivalence, putting pressure on landlords, creating conditions favorable to the landless.^[10] On 18 April 1951,^[13] Bhave started his land donation movement at Pochampally of Nalgonda district Telangana,^[14] the Bhoodan Movement. He took donated land from landowner Indians and gave it away to the poor and landless, for them to cultivate. Then after 1954, he started to ask for donations from whole villages in a programme he called Gramdan. He got more than 1000 villages by way of donations.¹³ Out of these, he obtained 175 donated villages in Tamil Nadu alone.



Noted Gandhian and an atheist Lavanam was the interpreter for Bhave during his land reform movement in Andhra Pradesh and parts of Orissa.^{[15]28}

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Bhave spent the later part of his life at his Brahma Vidya Mandir ashram in Paunar in Wardha district of Maharashtra. He died on 15 November 1982 after refusing food and medicine for a few days by accepting "Samadhi Maran" / "Santhara"³² as described in Jainism.^[16] Then the Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi,^{14,29} who was visiting Moscow to attend the funeral of Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, cut short her visit to be at the Bhave's funeral.^[17] In 1958 Bhave was the first recipient of the international Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership.^[19] He was awarded the Bharat Ratna^{30,31} posthumously in 1983.^{[20]27}

Vinoba Bhawe, The Man, a documentary film on the social-reformer directed by Vishram Bedekar was released in 1963. It was produced by the Government of India's Films Division.^[21] Indian film director Sarvottam Badami had earlier made another documentary on him, Vinoba Bhawe, in 1951.^{[22]26}

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