THE MYTH OF SARVODAYA ACCORDING TO VINOBA

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ABSTRACT

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The present study has as its objective a critical examination of the thought of Vinoba Bhave, the acknowledged leader of the contemporary Sarvodaya movement in India which strives to implement a program for a new social order based on a sense of spiritual autonomy of man, of equality in landholdings and in the governance of a communitarian life-style. The dominant mode of Vinoba's thought as reflected in his works on Sarvodaya, it is argued here, is myth--which under his guidance is developing into a general ideology of non-violent revolution and social change and is designed to affect three social institutions: property, polity and gender. The Myth of Sarvodaya, it is argued below, is woven around certain key symbols operating in Hindu tradition and culture and attempts to provide its intended audience with orientations for ordering the ideal Sarvodaya society. Secondly, it also tries to chart programs for social and cooperative action in concert with the ideologically defined goals of Sarvodaya. The present study contends that despite its limited success as a practical argument, the Myth of Sarvodaya in its drive towards the redefinition of social relationships and creation of con-geries of revitalized and self-contained villages nonetheless makes a positive contribution to the renewal and deepening of the cooperative movement in India.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION OF SANSKRIT TERMS AND INDIAN NAMES

I All technical Sanskrit terms are underlined and are transliterated with diacritical marks. Thus, dāna-yajña.

II All commonly known Sanskrit texts, Indian proper names and Sanskrit technical terms reinterpreted by Vinoba Bhave are not underlined and are transliterated without diacritical marks. Thus, Mahabharata, Vivekananda, Bhoodan.

III Sibilants, wherever they occur, are transliterated with appropriate diacritical marks. Thus, Śakti, Upaniṣad.

CHAPTER I

SARVODAYA: GENESIS, MYTH AND IDEOLOGY

Introduction

The contemporary Sarvodaya movement in India is in principle endorsed by all those who hold themselves committed to the Gandhian social philosophy and would include many intellectuals and politicians in both the ruling Congress and other political parties. Gandhism in post-independence India, however, has evolved along two distinct directions. One school, known as "political Gandhism"[1] is represented by those Congressmen like Nehru, who have sought to realize at least some of the Gandhian goals by orthodox political action. To the extent they have been successful, it has found institutional expression in such official organizations and policies as Village Industries Commission and the Panchayati-raj (local self-government). The second school, known as "revolutionary Gandhism,"[2] constitutes the vanguard of the Sarvodaya movement. The study that follows here is concerned with this second type of Gandhism as

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[1] The expression is used in Geoffrey Ostergaard and Melville Currell, The Gentle Anarchists: A Study of the Leaders of the Sarvodaya Movement for Non-violent Revolution in India (London: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 6. (Hereafter referred to as Gentle).

[2] Ibid., p. 7.

expressed by Vinoba Bhave,[1] the eighty-five year old spiritual heir of Gandhi and the acknowledged leader and inspirer of the Sarva Seva Sangha, the body that promotes Sarvodaya ideals as inspired by Gandhi.

As envisaged by Gandhi,[2] the basis of Sarvodaya (welfare of all) would be all-embracing love and non-violence; where no individual will be suppressed or exploited. All will be equal members in this ideal social order, sharing in the produce of each other's labor; the strong protecting the weak; the rich functioning as the trustees of the poor. In the countryside, Gandhi hoped that the landlords would read the signs of the times and voluntarily share their property with the poor so that "the villages of India would be turned into abodes of peace, health and comfort."[3] Gandhi believed that Western forms of political organization and action would be unsuitable for such a purpose and suggested instead the revival of the traditional village councils

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[1] Vinoba's full name is Vinayak Narahari Bhave but he is popularly known as Vinoba and books authored by him are published under that name. In the subsequent pages he will be referred to as Vinoba. Similarly, the terms "Sarvodaya movement" and "Sarvodaya" should, unless otherwise indicated, be construed in the narrower sense of the movement centered upon Vinoba and Sarva Seva Sangha.

[2] M. K. Gandhi, Sarvodaya (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1964).

[3] Ibid., pp. 234-35.

(Panchayats) which he thought would also help instill the spirit of initiative and autonomy among the people. Women were expected to play a prominent role in the running of these councils. Gandhi held a gynocentric view of the world and accorded primacy to women in his ideal social order since he held women to be incarnation of non-violence, love and truth--the three means that he visualized for the purpose of realizing his ideals.[1]

In 1941 Gandhi published the pamphlet The Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place,[2] listing eighteen items of social work which he thought crucial for attaining the goal of Sarvodaya. The list included among others, the development of Khādi (handspun yarn), promotion of village industries, adoption of nayee tālim (craft-centered education), raising the status of women, working to secure economic equality, organizing the kisāns (peasants) and protecting their rights. Any other person was invited to add to the list any item provided it was consistent with the principle of non-violence. To carry out the various items of this program Gandhi helped found such associations as All India Spinner's Association, the All India Village Industries

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[1] Ibid., pp. 234-35.

[2] (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House), p. 20.

Association, etc. More significantly, shortly before his assassination on January 30, 1948, Gandhi had proposed that the Congress Party should disband as a political party and work for the promotion of Sarvodaya.

Gandhi's proposal created a dilemma for Nehru,[1] who preferred a strong federal and industrializing state (although he recognized the need of land reforms) as against a commonwealth of self-sufficient agricultural communities favored by Gandhi. But Nehru was only Gandhi's political heir, not a saint. He was also a liberal democrat, a passionate and a loyal one. He, therefore, rejected Gandhi's advice on the ground that the dissolution of the Congress Party would create a political vacuum, leading to anarchy and ruin of the country.

But both the government led by Nehru and the nation faced a formidable task. The countryside at the time exhibited a four-tier stratification based on land ownership. At the top there were the zamindārs who had their land cultivated through hired labor and disguised tenants. Next came the group of self-cultivators with twenty or more acres of land to their credit and who led a relatively comfortable style of life. The third tier was made up of small peasants who owned only a tiny plot of land. In

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[1] Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964) was India's first prime minister from 1947-1964.

addition to tilling their own piece, they also worked as agricultural laborers on the land of the big farmers. The landless laborers came at the bottom of the heap. The areas with the highest proportion of this last group have been the areas of wet paddy cultivation in the eastern and southern regions of India. This assortment of agricultural laborers, besides occupying the last rung, has also been socially underprivileged in other ways. There is, for example, a large concentration of untouchables, tribals and women among them. In fact, the stratification based on land ownership is also reflected in the village social and economic organization as characterized by the jāti and jajamāni interrelationships. Jāti is an endogamous group and follows certain characteristic patterns of behavior and has certain assigned attributes, the principle among which is a specialized occupation. The traditional modes of exchange between the jātis involve a range of relationships from contractual, individual transactions to supportive, group-oriented long term multiplex bonds. The latter, more durable relations are essentially those between a landed, food producing family and the families that supply it with services like carpentry, washing clothes and labor. These are called jajamāni relations. The term derives from Sanskrit, yajamāna "sacrificer," that is, a patron who has a certain sacrifice performed for him by a competent ritualist for a fee. However, the term now has come to mean

anyone standing in the relationship of patron, while the men who perform the service (yajña) are known as parijan. Traditionally the yajamāna, in return for the service rendered, offers in kind little more (dāna) than is due the servant. Although in theory the jajamāni system stresses the element of reciprocity, the dāna (gift) involved in the process tilts the nature of exchange and power relationship in favor of the yajamāna.

Given the high degree of concentration in land and the inequality evident in landlord and tenant, jāti and jajamāni relations; it is not surprising that the three common features in the Indian countryside have been poverty and inequality and, as a consequence of the two, rising discontent. In recognizing the poverty and inequality as a problem of central significance and the belief that villagers should be encouraged to take some sort of collective action to deal with it, the advocates of both the "political Gandhism" and "revolutionary Gandhism" were at one. Both placed much emphasis on land reforms and land redistribution as the key to social justice in the villages; but they differed widely with regard to the strategies to be adopted for the implementation of reforms.

The Congress, in power at center and in the provinces, opened the first phase of land reforms in 1949 by abolishing the zamindari system and by bringing all the "cultivators" into direct relationship with the state. However, the term

"cultivators" was so defined in the statutes that besides the self-cultivators, it also included old zamindārs who still held sizeable chunks of land operated for them by tenants-at-will. Thus, the abolition of zamindāri in itself did not create a socially homogenous class of cultivators operating family farms of broadly the same size across the country, the dream dear to Gandhi. Nor did it do away with sharecropping and other forms of tenancy which, in fact, had also existed outside the zamindāri area in the eastern and southern zones of India. New laws were thus needed to level out the inequalities which survived the first round of reforms. These began to be enacted in the different states in the 1950's. Such reforms, however, were designed to affect the landed and those with tenuous tenancy rights. The plight of the landless laborers who comprise almost a quarter of the total agricultural work force, did not receive any serious attention.[1] And obviously they continued to suffer injustice under the persisting jāti and jajamāni relationships.

Disillusioned by the Congressmen's refusal to disband the Congress, a group of prominent Gandhian constructive workers, including Vinoba, met in a conference in March 1948 and decided to form a loosely structured,

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[1] For a balanced evaluation of the government-sponsored land reforms, see Daniel and Alice Thorner, Land and Labour in India (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1962).

apolitical fellowship of Lok sevaks (servants of the people), to be known as the Sarvodaya Samaj.[1] A year later, another body, the Akhil Bharat Sarva Seva Sangha (the All India Association for the Service and Welfare of All) was formed to bring under one umbrella the diverse associations inspired by Gandhi to implement the "Constructive Programme."[2] In 1950, disappointed by the government's inability to solve the problem of landlessness and to check the rising discontent in the countryside, the Sarvodaya Samaj endorsed a "plan" designed to "eliminate poverty and inequality" in India. The "plan," submitted by the Samaj's Sarvodaya Planning Committee, rejected the principle of proprietorship as being "incongruous with the economic and social needs of our times." Rights in land, it was stated, should be "shared between the community and the tiller."[3]

But rhetoric apart, the Samaj in its turn was unable to take any practical steps towards the solution of the agrarian problem. With the advent of independence, national interest and attention had shifted to New Delhi. There was little of the dramatic in the "Constructive Programme" and

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[1] Shriman Narayan, Vinoba: His Life and Work (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1970), p. 172. (Hereafter referred to as Life).

[2] Ibid., p. 173.

[3] Joan Bondurant and Margaret W. Fisher, Indian Approaches to a Socialist Society (Berkeley: University of California, Institute of International Studies, 1956), p. 37. (Hereafter referred to as Indian).

no spectacular technique to rival the weapon of satyāgraha. Finally, there was no nationally recognized charismatic leader to crystallize the issues, inspire a movement and mobilize a mass following. Then suddenly, in April 1951, there appeared Vinoba on the scene to put "revolutionary Gandhism" at the vanguard of the Sarvodaya movement.

Vinoba was born in 1895 in the small village of Gagode in the western state of Maharashtra. According to Vinoba, he inherited the qualities of asceticism and altruism from his mother; while his father, a textile technologist, inculcated in him love for science and mathematics.[1] The father wanted Vinoba to graduate in science but on his way to write the college entrance examination, Vinoba suddenly changed his mind and instead arrived in Varanasi (Benares), the seat of traditional learning. Here he began studying Sanskrit and also entered into contact with political activists and terrorists. Later in the year he happened to read accounts of Gandhi's speech before the newly opened Benares Hindu University. Overwhelmed, he sent a long letter to Gandhi who promptly replied. A long correspondence developed between the two and Gandhi invited the young man to join his āśrama at Sabarmati near Ahmedabad.

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[1] Vinoba [Bhave], Third Power, trans. Marjorie Sykes and K. S. Acharlu (Varanasi: Sarva Seva Sangha Prakashan, 1972), p. 40. (Hereafter referred to as Third Power).

They met on June 7, 1916. Vinoba, then twenty-one, wrote of this meeting:[1]

> When I was at Kashi (Benares), my main ambition was to go to the Himalayas. Also there was an inner longing to visit Bengal. 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.

In January 1921, a branch of the āśrama was opened at Wardha in Central India and Vinoba was sent there to take charge. The years between 1921-1947 were spent here in meditation and in giving practical expression to the items of the "Constructive Programme"--in particular khādi, Village Industries, and nayee tālim. In 1940, Gandhi chose Vinoba to be the first resistor to court arrest in the individual non-violent satyāgraha. The short imprisonment won Vinoba recognition and confirmed him as Gandhi's spiritual heir. After Gandhi's assassination in 1948, he increasingly identified himself with the school of "revolutionary Gandhism" and helped establish the Sarvodaya Samaj and the All India Sarva Seva Sangha.

In 1951, the Sarva Seva Sangha held its third session in the princely state of Hyderabad which typically exhibited the three common features of Indian countryside: poverty,

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[1] Suresh Ram, Vinoba and His Mission, 3rd ed. rev. and enl. (Varanasi: Sarva Seva Sangha Prakashan, 1962), pp. 15-16. (Hereafter referred to as Mission).

inequality and rising discontent. In addition, the state was run with iron hand by its autocratic ruler, the Nizam. On the eve of the independence of India when British paramountcy over the princely state ended, there were uprisings against the rule of the Nizam who retaliated with vengeance. Finally, the Government of India intervened and the Nizam was deposed. The Communist Party of India took advantage of the ensuing chaos and incited the landless laborers in the state to murder the landlords and forcibly to grab their lands. In the region known as Telangana, the communists managed to establish a parallel government for a while and let loose a reign of terror. When the conference was over, Vinoba toured through the affected districts of Telangana and tried to acquaint himself with the problems of the region. He exchanged views with the jailed communists and their sympathizers. While touring through the village of Pochampalli, he was approached by a group of untouchable laborers who requested him to procure for them from the government some land for tilling. Knowing the record of the government on the question, at the evening prayer meeting Vinoba asked if anyone could make a few acres of land available for the untouchables. To his surprise, a farmer stepped forward and offered 100 acres.[1] This was on April 18, 1951.

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[1] S. Narayan, Life, pp. 190-92.

The event opened up a new concept in Vinoba's mind--Bhoodan (gift of land). Vinoba was convinced that the problem of land hunger can be solved without government intervention. Generous landlords like the one of Pochampalli must not be wanting in other parts of the country.

Indeed, in the fifty-one days of his tour through Telangana that followed he managed to secure gifts totalling over 12,000 acres from farmers, big and small. Encouraged by the results, Vinoba proceeded on his walking tour in various states: Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, Kerala. The movement of Bhoodan-yajna gradually began to unfold. To those who owned no land, Vinoba appealed to contribute labor (Śramadan) or cash (Sampattidan), on their own initiative, for communal service (yajña). Over the next twenty years Vinoba marched throughout India several times collecting land. During that period his daily routine scarcely varied.[1] His day would begin at 3:30 a.m. with prayers and hymns with his closest disciples. At 4:30 a.m. he would take to the road, averaging about four miles per hour. At sunrise he would camp for the day in the village nearby. He would then have his first meal of the day. The

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[1] This account is based on John Horvat, "A Saint Walks in India", Sarvodaya Seva Sangha, Bhoodan as Seen by the West: An Appraisal of the Land Gift Mission by Some Western Seekers (Tanjore, Sarvodaya Prachuralayam, 1958), pp. 18-19. (Hereafter referred to as West).

menu varied rarely: milk and yogurt, fruit juice and raw vegetables. After an hour's rest, he would receive visitors--landlords and the landless--read and dictate. Between two and four in the afternoon he would spin yarn, a symbolic ritual instituted by Gandhi. After the second meal he would convene the evening prayers with the villagers in assistance. He would then address the audience, always trying to add something new to his repetition of his appeal for land and cash to distribute. In addition to his regular retinue of half a dozen, a number of temporary Lok sevaks would walk with him to get experience and inspiration before returning to spread the message of Sarvodaya in their own home areas. The government passed special legislation to legitimate and simplify the transfer of land collected under the Bhoodan program. Ideally, landless villagers were asked to put in their claims and if donations did not meet the demands, they were invited to decide among themselves whose need was greatest. In the event of disagreement, village leaders were summoned, and if they too failed, a lottery was held. In any case, new receivers of land were required to pledge not to alienate it for ten years.

Initially, the emphasis of the Bhoodan campaign was on appeals for voluntary donations from generous landlords. The unexpected success of the campaign, however, emboldened Vinoba to come out with a demand for one-sixth of the

property from all landholders. At the annual Sarvodaya conference at Chandil, Bihar in 1953, he put forth a national plan for the collection, by the end of 1957, of fifty million acres of land through the Bhoodan campaign. The target, amounting to nearly one-sixth of the total land then under cultivation, was fixed on the ground that this much land would provide five acres of dry land or one acre of wet paddy land to each of the estimated ten million families who had no land at all and who had remained unaffected by the first round of land reforms initiated by the government. But as the subsequent developments clearly showed, this kind of ambition and rhetoric was neither entirely practical nor completely realizable. The landlords who initially responded favorably to his appeals were alarmed by Vinoba's demand for one-sixth of their total holdings and by the growing "socialistic" and "revolutionary" rhetoric of his speeches. As a result, by the target date only 4,381,871 acres of land was collected, of which only 654,641 acres had been redistributed. A decade later, in 1967 when the Bhoodan activity for all practical purposes had come to an end, the corresponding figures were 4, 164,096 acres (this figure is lower than that for 1957 because some of the donors later reclaimed their gifts or reneged on their promises) and 1,190,718 acres respectively.[1]

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[1] K. R. Nanekar and S. V. Khandewale, Bhoodan and the Landless (Bombay: Popular Prokashan, 1973), pp. 6-10. (Hereafter referred to as Landless).

Just about the time the Bhoodan campaign had begun to falter, Vinoba came up with the idea of Gramdan (village in gift). The concept of Gramdan is examined in more detail in the next chapter. It suffices to note here that under Gramdan the landlords were invited to make all the land in a given village available for cultivation by the entire village. Although Gramdan had been implicit in the Bhoodan concept, the differences between the two are significant. The latter involved donations from individuals: Gramdan involves community action. Under Bhoodan, individual ownership of land was retained; under Gramdan it is to be abolished and ownership vested in the village community. And finally, whereas under Bhoodan the beneficiary was an individual or a group of individuals, under Gramdan the beneficiary would be the entire village. In brief, the substitution of Gramdan for Bhoodan represented a move from a basically individualist to a basically socialist program. But the patently revolutionary character of Gramdan made it difficult to promote.[1] Although the Congress (including Nehru) and other political parties endorsed Gramdan as a desirable method of land reform, in practice Vinoba's

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[1] Ostergaard and Currell, Gentle, p. 10.

movement received little support from them.[1]

Nevertheless he plodded on and by 1964 over 6,000 villages had declared for Gramdan. Their distribution throughout the country, however, was much less even than in the case of Bhoodan and were often concentrated in the tribal areas. By 1965 the pace of Gramdan, too, slackened considerably. Under the circumstances, a new approach was developed in the form of Sulabh Gramdan (infra Chapter 2) which represented a concession to the principles of private ownership. The concept of Sulabh Gramdan gave a new impetus to the movement which soon broadened into Prakhand-dan (that is, a block of villages declaring themselves for Gramdan) and Zilladan (the entire district declaring for the Gramdan). By 1969 there were 100,000 villages in the Gramdan category, 7,000 blocks and seventeen districts.[2] This was no mean achievement. Yet Vinoba felt utterly dejected because he had hoped to see the whole of India reconstituted into Gramdan villages by the birth centenary of Gandhi on October 2, 1969. He attributes the poor performance of the Bhoodan-Gramdan movement to the selfish and violent nature of the male species. Like Gandhi, he now takes a gynocentric view of the world and believes that women must take over the

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[1] Vinoba voiced this complaint in a speech at Bodh Gaya in October 1968. The speech is reproduced in full in Vinoba [Bhave], Third Power, pp. 125-26.

[2] Ostergaard and Currell, Gentle, p. 10.

management of the village and dislodge men from their seats of power. (This is treated more fully in Chapter 4.) Besides putting women in power, he now believes, a peaceful revolution in education is required. Since 1970, therefore, Vinoba has delegated the responsibility of Bhoodan and Gramdan campaigns to his lieutenants. He, himself, is now engaged in mobilizing women and teachers for the cause of Sarvodaya. Education, according to him, must be made pragmatic and craft-centered. His latest message, therefore, to students and teachers alike is: "Ask for land-gifts, study and teach, work for Gramdan, study and teach, form Śanti sena,[1] study and teach, make khādi village-centered, study and teach."[2]

Some indication of the size of the movement toward 1970 may be gauged from the number of workers involved in it. Because of the loose structure of the movement, no accurate estimate is possible. A figure of about 9,000 full time Lok Sevaks who signed a pledge to further the cause of Sarvodaya and to remain free from association with any kind of party and power politics is generally quoted in Sarvodaya literature. A figure of about 20,000 others, capable of mobilization for short periods or part-time activity on

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[1] Sarvodaya version of police. See infra Chapter 2.

[2] Vinoba [Bhave], Third Power, p. 88.

behalf of Sarvodaya movement, is also estimated.[1] Over the years the Sarvodaya movement attracted many intellectuals and retired politicians. Perhaps the most influential among them to join in as a Lok Sevak was Jayaprakash Narayan (1902-1980). Narayan was trained in Sociology at Madison, Wisconsin and began his political career in India as a Marxist-Leninist. Eventually he drifted through the Congress to democratic socialism. In 1954 he came under the spell of Vinoba and became an ardent champion of Sarvodaya. His major contribution has been as a theoretician and "translator" of Vinoba's mythically dressed arguments into orthodox political language comprehensible to the intellectuals. His book From Socialism to Sarvodaya[2] is one of the clearest expressions of the contrast between Marxist ideology and what Gandhi desired for India. In the course of his passage toward Sarvodaya, Narayan progressively shed his reliance and faith in violent revolutions, parliamentary democracy and party politics. He enthusiastically supported Vinoba's views on decentralization and helped him formulate the "Myth of Gram-svaraj" (infra Chapter 3).

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[1] Ostergaard and Currell, Gentle, p. 13.

[2] (Varanasi: Sarva Seva Sangha Prakashan, 1957).

The Scope of the Present Study

The initial success of the Bhoodan campaign attracted considerable attention in India and abroad. In the wake of the successful agrarian revolution in China, Bhoodan was seen as a viable, non-violent alternative to Maoism.[1] Less attention was paid to the social and political philosophy of which Bhoodan and Gramdan were practical expressions. When a decade later popular interest in the movement waned, partly because it failed to achieve its short term objective of abolishing landlessness, scholars turned to a critical examination of its philosophy.[2] But there still remain many aspects of the Sarvodaya movement which have not been studied. How and in what form Sarvodaya ideals are communicated to the masses, for example, still remains unexplored. Any social movement, if it is to realize goals it upholds, must effectively communicate its key ideals to its intended audience in order to motivate them to "join" it. Vinoba has

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[1] This is reflected in several articles on the Bhoodan movement by Western journalists and other sympathizers of Gandhian social philosophy reproduced in Sarvodaya Seva Sangha, West.

[2] Strongly critical views on the Sarvodaya movement and its philosophy are expressed in Adi Doctor, Anarchist Thought in India (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1964). (Hereafter referred to as Anarchist); Adi Doctor, Sarvodaya: A Political and Economic Study (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1967). (Hereafter referred to as Sarvodaya); T. K. Oomen, Charisma, Stability and Change: An Analysis of Bhoodan-Gramdan Movement in India (New Delhi: Thomson Press, 1972). (Hereafter referred to as Charisma).

chosen the direct contact method of communication. Walking from village to village in the manner of a traditional sādhu (wandering ascetic), he preaches the need to evolve a non-violent and egalitarian social order.

In what follows below, an attempt is made to examine and to evaluate critically the extent to which Vinoba has succeeded in formulating the ideology of Sarvodaya and transmitting it to the masses. For the purpose, I rely upon various statements made by Vinoba during the course of his footmarches undertaken throughout India between 1951 and 1970. But it is essential to appreciate the circumstances and conditions under which these statements were made. Vinoba does not attempt to present a comprehensive theory of distributive justice or revolutionary change. Rather, he is engaged in developing a plan of action. In doing so, he finds for it a theoretical justification and resorts to myth making, since it is the vehicle well suited for communicating that program of action to a largely illiterate but cultured populace.[1] The present study of Vinoba's ideas, therefore, is also a study of his ability to select traditional myths and symbols and to re-interpret them in order to communicate his ideas to his intended audience.

For our purpose, Vinoba's intellectual activity may be divided into two phases. During the first phase he spent

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[1] The point is made in Bondurant and Fisher, Indian, p. 37.

thirty-two years of his life in the limited confines of his āśrama and his scholarship followed the typical pattern of a traditional pundit. He studied and wrote on texts of high brahminism: the Upaniṣads, the Bhagavad Gita and the Vedanta. He spent long hours in solitary meditation on brahman away from the untutored masses. The Bhoodan movement radically changed his intellectual outlook and output. It turned the pundit into a myth-maker. It inspired in him new and creative ideas on fighting injustice and inequality with love and non-violence. This new concern for his fellow-men is reflected in his Bhoodan-yajna.[1] Written[2] with child-like simplicity, the book abounds in myths and stories drawn from the tradition but suitably modified to carry a recurring central message: land redistribution is the key to social equality and peace. Another important work, Third Power (see supra) appeared in 1972. A compilation of his various speeches and addresses, it charts a distinct course between the two competing ideologies in contemporary India: constitutional democracy and communism. Based on a thorough-going decentralization, it promotes the idea of Gram-svaraj

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[1] Vinoba [Bhave], Bhoodan Yajna: Land Gifts Mission (Ahmedabad: Navjivan, 1953). (Hereafter referred to as Bhoodan).

[2] Over the years Vinoba has acquired working knowledge of all the fifteen major languages of India and addresses his audience in the language of the region. The talks then are thematically rearranged, translated into Hindi and English, and published under his name by Sarva Seva Sangha.

(autonomous village republic). In Women's Power,[1] brought out in 1975 by the Sarva Seva Sangha to commemorate the International Women's Year, Vinoba draws on mythological literature and history to portray an ideal image of Indian women. By pointing out that in the past women were accorded positions of dignity and respect in family and society and enjoyed freedom of expression, he hopes to mobilize public opinion in favor of granting women a higher status in society. Talks on the Gita[2] is a collection of lectures originally given by Vinoba to fellow prisoners in a jail at Dhule, Maharashtra in 1932. It contains seeds of his philosophy of Sarvodaya. In addition to these works of Vinoba, I have also consulted Suresh Ram, Vinoba and His Mission, (see supra) which reproduces numerous extracts of Vinoba's speeches made during the years between 1950 and 1960 and the texts of resolutions passed at the annual Sarvodaya conference.

Even a cursory study of Vinoba's statements reveals the dominant mode of his thought--myth. In fact, the corpus of his ideas may be styled the Myth of Sarvodaya. It is woven around certain key symbols operating in Indian

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[1] (Varanasi: Sarva Seva Sangha Prakashan, 1975).

[2] 5th ed. (Varanasi: Sarva Seva Sangha Prakashan, 1974).

tradition and culture and reflects what Geertz[1] sees as two basic and interrelated functions of symbol: firstly, it serves the "model of" function providing its intended audience with orientations for ordering the world; secondly, it serves "model for" strategies, that is, programs for orderly social action in accordance with the ideologically defined goals of Sarvodaya.

Samya-yoga: The Ideological Basis of Sarvodaya

Besides myth, Vinoba's thought is also deployed together with other and more familiar kinds of discourse. Although the basic Sarvodaya ideals make for a relatively straightforward and engaging argument, the contemporary socio-political context in which Vinoba operates is much more complex. His account, therefore, inevitably deals with ideas touched upon also by philosophers, scientists and politicians promoting competing ideologies. Vinoba thus finds it urged against him that what he asserts to be true (from the standpoint of his myth) is philosophically and scientifically false. Under the circumstances, if he is to

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[1] Following Clifford Geertz, symbol here is understood as any object, event, or relation which serves as a vehicle for a conception. The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays (New York: Basic Books, 1973). Their "key status" is understood after Sherry Ortner, as symbols which unlock the main thematic code of a civilization, incorporating more localized, dominant and subordinate or minor symbols, "On Key Symbols," American Anthropologist 75 (October 1973): 1343.

persuade his audience, he must show that his message is consistent with prevailing values--many of which happen to be of Western inspiration--in contemporary India. He is thus drawn into controversies which have nothing mythical about them. The result is that the Myth of Sarvodaya has come to incorporate in itself a body of disparate themes and doctrines which Vinoba has named Samya-yoga (literally, the yoga of equality). The key doctrine of Samya-yoga is socialism which, Vinoba insists, is also the dominant theme of the Gita. "Attainment to equanimity of mind, social equality and spiritual identity with the Supreme," he believes, "should be the ideal in one's life"[1] (emphasis in original). Like many Indian nationalists of this century, Vinoba finds in the metaphysics of Vedanta the basis for instituting social service and welfare. To him, brahman is the supreme and ultimate existent and one divine spark animating all. The world is the vibrant manifestation of brahman and life consists in the pursuit of the realization of the supreme reality of brahman.[2] The world around us, believes Vinoba, is "an inspiration and invitation to us for

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[1] Vinoba [Bhave], Revolutionary Sarvodaya: Philosophy for the Remaking of Man, comp. and trans. Vasant Nargolkar (Bombay: Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan, 1964), p. 1. (Hereafter referred to as Revolutionary).

[2] Vinoba [Bhave], Revolutionary, p. 4.

serving the community and striving for the welfare of all."[1]

An important feature of Samya-yoga is the attempt to link doctrinaire socialism with the "Agrarian Creed" which Erich Jacoby[2] identifies as the driving force that, irrespective of time, place and civilization, has guided and still guides, directly or indirectly, the peasant's way of thought and of those who are concerned with their fate. It reflects, according to Jacoby, the hopes and aspirations of peasants for a time when land will be as free as air and will belong to nobody and, therefore, to anybody who wishes to till it. This basic creed is colored and conditioned by local myths and legends. In Samya-yoga it finds expression in the following statement of Vinoba:

> My plea, that every son of the soil has a right on Mother Earth, is not my own. The Vedas had proclaimed it. No brother can prevent another brother from serving his mother. . . (and) whosoever demands land must have it. . .[3]

But Samya-yoga differs significantly from mainline socialism in its advocacy of a stateless society. Vinoba sees the modern state with its claim to monopoly of the legal

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[1] Quoted in Vasant Nargolkar, The Creed of Saint Vinoba (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1968), p. 62.

[2] Erich Jacoby, in collaboration with Charlotte Jacoby, Man and Land: The Essential Revolution (New York: Knopf, 1971; first American ed.), p. 88.

[3] Vinoba [Bhave] , Bhoodan, p. 45.

instruments of coercion as an obstacle to a free, cooperative social order in which men would live in self-government. For him, the duty of the individual to obey his conscience takes precedence over the state's claim to obedience. A further important condition of a free society stressed by Vinoba is decentralization.[1] Social and economic power must be dispersed if tyranny and exploitation are to be avoided. In working for these goals, Vinoba would seem to join classical anarchists in condemning orthodox political action. In this context, both believe that no good service can be rendered by the state, political parties or democratic institutions. However, Sarvodaya commitment to religion radically sets it apart from Western anarchist tradition in which only Tolstoy based his anarchism on religious foundations.

Vinoba invests Samya-yoga with a revolutionary perspective and in the process makes interesting comments on current theories of revolution. He categorically rejects political power and violence as the instruments of change. Social values and attitudes, in his opinion, are more basic than structures and, therefore, all attempts to bring about changes by coercive means (legislative or violent) will be frustrated because, he insists, the same old values will continue to motivate behavior. But he is equally critical

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[1] Vinoba [Bhave] , "Gandhi and Marx", Third Power, pp. 1-17.

of many Gandhians who shy away from "revolutionary Gandhism,"

> . . .some who are always talking of peace in actual effect believe in status quo. They are afraid of a change in human society. As against this, people who want a social revolution do not want to confine themselves within the four walls of Ahimsa. . . But what are we? We are revolutionaries who work peacefully.[1]

But thus put, it is difficult to state precisely the relation of "revolutionary" Samya-yoga to the Hindu tradition because it is neither wholly traditional nor exclusively modern. It appears to be a synthesis of both with non-violence providing the main criterion for the acceptance of either traditional or modern values. Sarvodaya ideology (Samya-yoga) may be styled revolutionary in that it challenges many traditional values as they relate to the existing institutions of property, polity and family and seeks to either replace or modify them with other values.

Under Vinoba's guidance, then, the Myth of Sarvodaya has come to acquire a general ideology of social change and equality. The former is now composed of different mutually supporting points of view and ideas. In a letter to a disciple, written in 1960, Vinoba neatly summarized the main features of his myth:

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[1] Quoted in Donald Smith, "Religious Revolutionaries of the Third World: Gandhi, Gandhians and Guerrilleros," in The Meanings of Gandhi, ed. Paul Power (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1971), p. 144.

> The combined strength of the power of women, brahma-vidya, samya-yoga; sarvodaya patra in one hand and the united strength of bhudana, grama-dana and sampatti-dana in the other; and nayee talim as the bridge between the two--this would be the principle of my working.[1]

Such a simultaneous deployment of mythical and non-mythical arguments is a standard feature of many revolutionary myths of social change.[2] The Myth of Sarvodaya may be said to be one such ongoing myth in contemporary India and forms the subject matter of the present study over the next three chapters. For the purpose, I have considered it as three simpler myths relating to the three institutions of particular concern to the Sarvodaya movement: property, polity and family (particularly the relationship between the genders). They are conveniently identified as the Myth of Bhoodan-yajna, the Myth of Gram-svaraj and the Myth of Śakti, respectively.

In studying each myth, I first identify the key symbols which seem to serve as <u>pouvoir moteurs</u> for that particular myth. I then point out what traditionally they have been a "model of." Next comes discussion of how Vinoba re-interprets them as a "model for" the realization of a particular Sarvodaya ideal. The chapter ends with an appraisal

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[1] Extracts from the letter are reproduced in Ram, <u>Mission</u>, p. 317.

[2] Henry Tudor, <u>Political Myth</u> (New York: Praegar Publishers, 1972), p. 126.

of Vinoba's effort. The final, concluding chapter, makes an overall assessment of the Myth of Sarvodaya.

CHAPTER II

THE MYTH OF BHUDANA-YAJNA

Introduction

The driving force behind the Myth of Bhoodan-yajna is to be found in the key symbols of dāna (gift) and yajña (sacrifice) which traditionally have represented the phenomena of exchange and reciprocity. Vinoba re-interprets them to mean equitable sharing and redistribution and then links them with another powerful symbol, bhū, (mother earth) to create the nucleus of the Myth of Bhoodan-yajna, or the "program for equitable redistribution of land." But when Vinoba went around the country collecting land, he had to face an increasing number of practical and ideological problems which forced him to modify and redesign the original concept of Bhoodan. In the process there emerged such ancillary dāna ideas as Sampatti-dan (gift of wealth) and Śramadan (gift of labor). Eventually the idea of Bhoodan itself metamorphosed into Gramdan.

In retrospect, the Myth of Bhoodan-yajna as it eventually developed, may be looked upon as a prototypical experiment in transforming an unjust and unequal society into an ideal social order. Lasswell has defined "prototyping" as an innovation in socio-political practice typically rather small in scale, made initially to enlarge the innovator's

understanding of what it will do.[1] As a prototype is built, ideas multiply for experiments that systematically modify various features of the prototypical situation; and in the process new ideas are also generated often having little connection to the prototype itself. Once tried and proved successful, Lasswell suggests, a prototype can be copied more generally and institutionalized by the society. But the experiment of prototype building also includes, according to Lasswell, partial failures that call attention to better strategic possibilities and stimulate the discovery of an improved program.[2]

Dāna-yajña in Hindu Tradition

The Veda offers a useful starting point for the elucidation of the principle of redistribution as located by Vinoba

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[1] Harold Lasswell, On Political Sociology, ed., with Intro. by Dwaine Marvick (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), see particularly chapter 21, "Prototyping New Political Practices," pp. 366-80. (Hereafter referred to as Political).

[2] In this context Vinoba writes, "If I had talked about gramdan from the beginning it could never have come about. It could only come into being as a result of bhoodan. In bhoodan, there was compassion; in gramdan there is cooperation, and an inspiration for equality. . . People commonly think that once the land owners have given up their land, gramdan has been achieved. I also talked like that in the beginning but then I realized that I was wrong. Gramdan is not going to come about merely by gifts of land," Third Power, p. 57.

in the twin cultural symbols of dāna and yajña.[1] In the Rg Veda, yajña (performance of sacrifice) is not viewed as an external phenomenon; it is, rather, externalization of that which lies within. It is not a religious act or ritual performed by a priest for a fee. Sacrifice is regarded as an act of abnegation since the sacrificer deprives himself to a certain extent and gives. This abnegation is imposed upon him as duty. The Vedic notion of yajña, therefore, has to be seen in a dual light: it is an obligatory as well as a useful act. Mauss[2] sees in this characteristic of yajña a mechanism of redressing equilibria that have been upset: by expiation, the rich and powerful can, for example, redeem themselves from social obligation and re-enter, so to say, the community network. By giving away a portion of their possessions they can validate their moral right to enjoy the balance. The social norms and peace in the community can thereby be maintained without fatal danger to themselves and without diminution of their social status. This indicates the social function of yajña both for the individual and the community in the Vedic period.

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[1] Vinoba maintains, "My plea that every son of the soil has a right on Mother Earth is not my own. The Veda has proclaimed it," Bhoodan, p. 45.

[2] Hubert Henry and Marcel Mauss, Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function, trans. W. D. Halls (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1964), pp. 100-103.

Relevant to our discussion of dāna is the Vedic notion of promoting and letting pass the stream of riches, taking only what is needed and letting flow the rest.[1] This essentially conveys the spirit of satisfaction and contentment on the one hand, and curbing the tendencies of avarice and greed on the other.

The epic Mahabharata on its part interprets the two key symbols in a manner which is at once materialistic and metaphysical. "It is in the nature of food to be shared, to fail to give other a portion is to kill its essence." "The secret of future and happiness is to give (dāna), not to keep; not to seek but to distribute it that it may return of its own accord in the form of gift rendered."[2] How is the gift repaid? What force compels a recipient to make a return? The epic's answer is that a gift is alive and contains a spirit which strives to bring it back to its original donor some equivalent to take its place.[3] Such then is the epic's explanatory principle of social reciprocity. Its logic of gift exchange is culturally rooted. That is, the obligations

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[1] H. Aguilar, The Sacrifice in the Rg Veda: Doctrinal Aspects (Delhi, Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan, 1976), p. 84.

[2] Marcel Mauss, Gifts: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies, trans. Ian Cunnison, with an Intro. by E. E. Evans-Pritchard (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 1.

[3] Ibid., p. 10

to receive and to return are not understood merely in terms of rational economic principles or material self-interest. Thus put, the Vedic and epic ideas of exchange come across as indiscrete social phenomena containing diverse threads of which the total fabric is composed--economic, moral and religious.

Though technically a part of the epic Mahabharata, the Bhagvad Gita differs significantly in its view of the same key symbols. It abandons the principle of reciprocity implicit in the epic idea of exchange in favor of a principle grounded in altruism. Dāna performed as a matter of duty and selfless service (yajña) and without expectation of any return, at the right place and to the right person, it explains, is sāttvika (altruistic). That dāna on the other hand, which is performed in the hope of receiving in return or with the view of winning merit or that dāna performed grudgingly is declared rājasīka (egotistic).[1]

As a principle of redistribution, Vinoba's Myth of Bhoodan-yajna touches three primary systems of economic property transfer: exchange, reciprocity, and redistribution, none of which could be said to originate in pure altruism as

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[1] Bhagavad Gita, 17: 20, 21. Quoted in Mahadev Desai, The Gospel of Selfless Action or the Gita According to Gandhi, (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1956), p. 21.

understood in the Gita. The altruism of the Gita would involve a gift--of money, commodity or service--that contributes to the well-being of others without obligation and without expectation that some future benefit is dependent on present action. On the other hand, although Vinoba defines dāna as equitable sharing and yajña as selfless service, he makes the Vedic and epic notions of reciprocity come closer to the altruism of the Gita. For example, he emphasizes that the act of Bhoodan carries with it an obligation on the part of the recipient to perform dāna-yajña of his own (Śramadan, gift of labor, for example), in the interest of the community. Such a response on the part of the receiver is not specifically intended to benefit the donor alone; nor does Vinoba insist that it be immediate and equivalent in value. In sum, though the dāna-yajña concept is calculated to invite behavior which would run along the general pattern of do et de-- I give in order that you may give--the metaphor of myth symbolism in which it is presented comes across in quasi-altruistic garb.[1] Thus re-interpreted, the Myth of Bhoodan-

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[1] Vinoba argues, "We should not feel ill at ease with the word dāna (gift). The receiver will not get his bread for nothing. He will have to work the land, improve it and irrigate it. He has no reason to feel humiliated. We are giving him his share and not bestowing charity on him. . . No brother can prevent his another brother from serving his mother (i.e. land). Whosoever therefore demands land must have it; and it is the duty of the landlords to give it to him. Is drinking water denied when asked for? I can understand that one should not give food to another without asking him to labor for it. But if one demands the means to do that labor, it is our duty to provide him with them, "Bhoodan, p. 45.

yajna comes to be charged with potent forces of change directed toward the redefinition of the traditional relationship between the landed and the landless.

Having appropriated dāna-yajña as a distributive mechanism, Vinoba next fuses it with the powerful "Agrarian Creed" by proclaiming that "All land belongs to God." Land is a part of God's gift to man, like air and water. It, therefore, belongs to everybody. No one has a right to more land than what is essential for the satisfaction of his basic needs. "Do you take in more air--though it is freely available--than you can use?" asks he of a rich landlord.[1] His next step is to link the creed of socialism with the "Agrarian Creed" by using traditional Hindu metaphors and mythological references. The following example shows the power of his expression.

> The most essential requisite of samayogi social structure is that all land, property and wealth should belong to the society. Only Vishnu can be the Lord of Lakshmi (goddess of wealth); a seat which you (i.e. landlords) have usurped. . . Lakshmi is mother, and we are her children.[2]

By this masterly re-interpretation of a traditional motif the goddess of wealth is depicted as the victim of the

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[1] Ibid., p. 15

[2] Donald Smith, Third World, pp. 144-45.

greedy landlords; while her proper role is that of mother provider to all her children equally. Such a fusion of the Sarvodaya ideology with the "Agrarian Creed" gives its social organization agrarian orientation, impregnating it with peculiarly socio-agrarian values: an intimate and reverent attitude concerning all dealings involving land, an emphasis upon productive industry as a prime virtue, and the idea that agricultural work is noble.

The Mechanism of Land Transfer

How did the symbols of dāna-yajña bring about the change of heart that resulted in land gift? The answer would seem to center around the issue of individual and social motivation in the sense that these two symbols and the relevant imagery were sought to be used in such a way that tangible change in the intended direction may result. If it is accepted, as Paul Ricoeur has argued,[1] that change can be associated with symbol, then it would be possible to perceive the symbol diachronically and thus to account for the phenomenon of motivations involved in the transformation of consciousness of the landlords. It is possible, then, to understand how dāna-yajña became the potential project of the Bhoodan campaign. Prodded by

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[1] The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1974). (Hereafter referred to as Conflict.)

Vinoba, the village community was forced to resolve itself along the lines of the symbols, in the process changing from its previous status of general unawareness (of the serious economic and social disparities that persist amongst themselves) to a position of heightened awareness of the ultimate goal as it was then proposed by Vinoba (a homogenous social class of self-cultivators). The entire process may be said to have culminated through three stages.[1]

Initially there was a stage of unawareness wherein the landed of the village lived in a system of thought and value closed to potential alternatives. In this situation they accepted unquestioningly the dharma-inspired social and economic order patterned on jāti and jajamāni relations as valid and definitive for their lifestyle. They lived in almost total oblivion of the severity of the social and economic injustice in their village. Similarly, the landless and other weaker sections of the community also lived unaware of their potential in acquiring justice and equality.

The second phase of the transformation process initiated by the Bhoodan campaign was composed, one may argue, of a two-~~fold~~ discovery which resulted with the introduction of the re-interpreted symbols of dāna and yajña in the unconscious situation outlined above. The symbols imposed

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[1] This line of interpretation was suggested after David Rasmussen, Symbol and Interpretation (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), pp. 89 ff.

themselves upon the consciousness of Vinoba's audience that usually gathered for the daily prayer meeting and which later attracted both the landed and the landless, as both positive and negative phenomena. Negatively, one may argue, the symbols juxtaposed the landlord's ordinary common sense orientation to the projected possibility presented by the symbols: equitable land distribution, generosity, service in the interest of the village community, leading ultimately to the idea of justice and liberation conceived as Sarvodaya. This ideal of freedom was juxtaposed to the unfreedom and injustice presently felt as social and economic disparities. At the same time, the idea of spiritual unity and equality (Samya-yoga) was contrasted with the social hierarchy and stratification that was the state of things at that very moment in the village. In this second phase, then, the symbols were poised to motivate the community to a level of reflective awareness.

At this point it would be useful to present the notions of reflective and pre-reflective. It can be argued that at the first phase of transformation, experience or feeling was pre-reflective. One (whether landed or landless) simply accepted the common sense world of experience as unalterably the case. At this level the terms social injustice or the feeling of spiritual unity are not very meaningful, for no one is consciously <u>aware</u> of the basic discontinuities and injustice being experienced by the

sections of the village community. To come to an understanding of their meaning is to assume that one is cognizant of and has begun to question his ordinary status within the community. The second phase of transformation then involves the process of becoming reflectively aware of one's own experience. It is at this point that one questions that set of "assumed to be true" values and judgments which are heretofore accepted as valid. In other words, one begins to suspect and doubt his ordinary common-sense world of meaning. It is at this point, one may venture to suggest, that the symbols seem to function in a "negative" manner for transformation. One then undergoes a negation of his ordinary understanding of the surrounding world. What was heretofore considered to be the ordinary pattern of relationships within the village community is seen as being unjust. The symbols and dāna and yajña become fully operative and the gift of land is the hoped for outcome.

Acting positively, the symbols of dāna-yajña established, one may argue, the project and the ideal of a socially homogenous class of cultivators which the village community as a socio-political group could choose as its own. They outlined a future meaning toward which the community could project itself with the possible consequence that its fundamental orientation would be changed necessarily from its prior role within the society. It is in this context that social change could take place. This, however, is dependent

upon the common group resolve, a problem which brings us to the third phase of transformation: namely, decision (decisive action) which, in this instance, would involve voluntary land transfer. Conceived in its socio-political role, symbol offers a double invitation for reflection and action. Thus, whereas in the second phase the symbols of dāna-yajña offered themselves for a reflection presenting the positive and negative possibilities for social change, in the third phase they offered themselves as a possibility for choice to be followed by appropriate action. The question of group resolve, in a sense then, also solves the problem of the validity of the symbols. Symbols emerge and they die; there is no objective determinant for the validity of the symbol. They are chosen or rejected by particular groups at particular times because symbols involve, force and eventually precipitate decisive action.

That the re-interpreted key symbols of dāna-yajña failed to bring about the intended group resolve to its complete fruition becomes evident when one studies the metamorphosis of the Bhoodan movement into the Gramdan movement.

From Bhoodan to Gramdan

As indicated earlier, response to Bhoodan in different regions of India varied greatly and was shaped and conditioned, one may suggest, by the peculiarities of the social organization and the modes of productive organization of agriculture in a given region. In the tribal district of Koraput in the state of Orissa, for example, the Sarvodaya workers had little difficulty in persuading the inhabitants to relinquish their ownership of the land and putting it into common trust to be administered by a committee elected for the purpose by common consent. When Vinoba was informed of this successful breakthrough, he seized, in this new phenomenon, a way out of the predicament in which he had landed himself and his movement as a result of the faltering Bhoodan campaign. Developments in Koraput district were quickly styled "Gramdan" and the Bhoodan program was quietly subsumed in the new campaign of Gramdan. For the purpose, Gramdan was officially defined as follows:[1] If about 80 percent of the landowners of a village volunteered to give up the right of ownership to their land and if not less than 50 percent of the total land in the village had come under the purview of the Gramsabha (village council), that particular village was to be considered a Gramdan

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[1] Oomen, Charisma, p. 29.

village. The actual transformation to Gramdan status was to proceed through three stages: in the first Prapti (receiving) stage, the landed are to be persuaded into declaring that they would voluntarily give away the ownership in land in favor of the village council; during the second stage, Pusti, the village community is expected to implement the primary conditions of Gramdan, that is, redistribution of land, formulation of the village council (Gramsabha) and the constitution of a village fund (Gramkosa) to finance projects conducive to community development. This is expected to lead to the final phase (Nirman) of reconstruction with the active cooperation of the entire village population.

But the key concept of Gramdan, collectivization of agricultural land, was not generally welcomed by the landlords and eventually no large-scale redistribution of land on an equal basis occurred in any of the so-called Gramdan villages. The tribals of Koraput, where Gramdan first began, are hunters and food gatherers and are only partially Hinduized. As such, their community organization significantly differs from the dharmic and jajamāni patterns (see following chapter) of village organization found elsewhere in India where settled agriculture evolved a particular style of communal living. "Agrarian Creed" in tribal India, therefore, is much weaker. For this reason, it was relatively easy for Sarvodaya workers to "persuade" the tribals of

Koraput to reconstitute their villages into Gramdan villages. Success in Koraput was seen as the validation of the concept of Gramdan and Vinoba sought to repeat the performance elsewhere in India. But for reasons indicated above, the Gramdan movement, like the earlier Bhoodan movement, turned out to be a dismal failure. In order to narrow the gap between the ideal and the actual, in 1965 Vinoba was forced to redefine the concept of Gramdan. Landowners were now invited to give only one-twentieth of their holdings to the village council for redistribution, leaving the permanent heritable rights intact on the balance. This new arrangement was designated Sulabh Gramdan (easy Gramdan).[1]

During the earlier Bhoodan phase, Vinoba later reflected,[2] he had perceived the landed and the landless as members respectively of two antagonistic classes of "haves" and "have nots" and, therefore, had offered the solution to the problem of the maldistribution of land essentially in

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[1] Vinoba rationalized the scaling down of the Gramdan movement to Sulabh Gramdan with a peculiar logic of his own. In a speech delivered at Puri, he said: "In a domain of violence they proceed from the gentle weapon to the sharp and sharper ones. But the process of working of non-violence is entirely different. If our gentle Bhoodan Yajna does not yield the desired fruit, we must infer that there is something wanting in our gentleness itself and we must therefore render it gentler, finer." Ram, Mission, p. 140.

[2] From Vinoba's speech given September 8, 1957 at Virampet, reproduced in Ram, Mission, p. 208.

terms of simple transfer of land from the former to the latter. But the "truth" of Gramdan, in his judgment, brought home the conviction that there is no one in this world who is a "have not." Gramdan is an act, he now asserts, in which everybody, landed and landless, rich and poor, the intellectual and the laborer, must make an offering to the community because giving is everybody's dharma (duty).[1] If landholders give land, the agricultural laborers must provide labor, the intellectuals must teach the illiterate. Dedication from all these sectors in the interest of the community is the key to Gramdan. When even the poor fulfill their dharma, he argues, they put to shame the rich who then are obliged to reciprocate.[2] When thousands of poor engage in dāna activity, it generates a moral force which will bend the rich. It is only by giving unto others that one can be a genuine Sarvodaya soldier. "But the Sarvodaya army will have no occasion to shoot;" writes Vinoba, "the mere quivering sound of our arrows is enough to bring the opponent into submission."[3] Thus put, the transition from Bhoodan to

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[1] Ram, Mission, p. 208.

[2] This suggests the possible presence of yet another dynamic factor inducing transformation of consciousness through a symbolic act. In the view of Richard Titmuss, a gift can act as a "gratitude imperative" in compelling reciprocity. The Gift of Relationship from Human Blood to Social Policy (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971), p. 75.

[3] Ram, Mission, p. 177.

Gramdan was complete. In his characteristic picturesque language, Vinoba summed it up as follows: "What originally began in the spirit of compassion must now culminate in cooperation. Land gifts must make way to a full fledged land revolution."[1]

The Myth of Bhoodan-yajna: An Appraisal

As the land gift program gradually faded from the scene, Vinoba's myth and vision became more and more utopian and idealistic. In the wake of Gramdan, Bhoodan was explained away as only a prototype, a symbol of something greater to come, the first step in arousing the consciousness of the people, the beginning of a mass revolution of values designed to lead ultimately to the establishment of a new social order.[2] Thus, concomitant with the shift from Bhoodan to Gramdan is to be discerned the shift from material to moral considerations. The Gramdan increasingly becomes a moral movement intended to bring about a change of heart and bring forth moral climate. "The land problem is bound to be solved in one way or the other all over the world," Vinoba once exclaimed in a moment of resignation, "Hence I do not worry about how much land I get. My only concern

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[1] Ram, Mission, p. 152.

[2] This is based on the statement released at the annual Sarvodaya conference held at Ungaturu in April, 1961. Reproduced in Ram, Mission, Appendix B., pp. 506-09.

is that right thought strikes a deep root in the hearts of the people."[1] "We are not so much concerned with the food production as with wiping out jealousies which result from the persistence of rich and poor classes. We shall divide amongst us our hunger and our poverty, whether food production increases or not," he declared in another speech.[2] But underneath this bravado one does not fail to discern Vinoba's growing detachment from the results of his activities and his growing lack of concern for the consequences of his actions. Now this may be quite consistent with the teachings of the Gita which urge one to do his duty (svadharma) without regard to the fruits thereof, but as Lacy points out,[3] this demoralizes his movement, heightening the difficulties of practical leadership and administrative details, such as the redistribution of collected lands.

In the context of the present study, this also raises the issue of proper perspective to adopt in evaluating Vinoba's myths. Should the Bhoodan-Gramdan campaign be judged in terms of the material targets set and fulfilled or in terms

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[1] Vinoba's speech at Patna in 1954. See the extract reproduced in Ram, Mission, p. 101.

[2] Quoted in Doctor, Sarvodaya, p. 205.

[3] Creighton Lacy, The Conscience of India: Moral Traditions in the Modern World (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1965), p. 214.

of its professed ideals? It seems unfair to judge it solely in terms of the former as T. Oomen, the social scientist, did in his empirical study of select Gramdan and non-Gramdan villages in the northern state of Rajasthan. Oomen came to the conclusion that "there exists hardly any difference in the pattern of landholdings between the two types of villages."[1] No systematic attempt was made, he asserts, to distribute the land collected in gift. Where redistribution did take place, those who already owned some land were also found to be among the beneficiaries, indicating that landlessness was not the sole criterion in the redistribution of land. A substantial portion of land in the Gramdan villages, he found, was concentrated in the hands of the upper classes who also happened to be the upper castes.[2]

Erica Linton, who studied villages in key Gramdan areas on behalf of War-on-Want, a British volunteer agency, has made similar observations. But she also reports that many villagers claimed that something had happened in many villages: a beginning of awareness of their own potential.[3] Many, for instance, ceased taking one another to court, at crippling expenses, and learned to settle disagreements

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[1] Oomen, Charisma, p. 98.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Fragments of a Vision: A Journey Through India's Gramdan Villages (Varanasi: Sarva Seva Sangha Prakashan, 1971), pp. 163, 172. (Hereafter referred to as Fragments).

amicably among themselves. Others have been able to avoid getting into new debt with the moneylender because they helped one another out. In many villages, even though no radical change in land ownership had taken place, Linton reports changes in social attitude and perspective: more mutual aid, more courage against over-bearing authority, more interest in constructive work and self-reliance. When Linton asked villagers how much of the change in their village was due to their own efforts, they replied, "There are two factors. First there were those who initiated us (that is, the Lok sevaks), and secondly, by working together we achieved great things."[1] But this also suggests the need of a third factor, besides initiation by the Lok sevaks and cooperative self-reliance on the part of the villagers: there is need for systematic information, for a communication system at the level of self-help, "intermediate" technology, which will effectively back up the self-reliant impulses of the villagers.[2] Such a network, albeit inefficient at present, does exist in the form of the community development bureaucracy. But ideologically, Vinoba is unwilling to cooperate with it.

A possible merit of the Bhoodan campaign appears to

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[1] Ibid., pp. 262-63.

[2] The point is made by E. F. Schumacher in his foreword to Linton, Fragments.

be that its method of voluntary transfer of land could avoid reaction. Now redistribution could also be effected by forcibly grabbing land, but this is likely to sow the seeds of counter-reaction and revolutions. The land gift movement also scores advantage over the constitutional methods of land transfer since the latter requires payment of compensation to those who lose their land. The additional burden on the exchequer will be finally borne, as Vinoba correctly points out, by the poor majority. The legislative method also invites litigation and long drawn fights through courts which can vitiate the climate of goodwill and generate resentment. The Bhoodan movement by contrast, Vinoba points out, is capable of instilling in the people the spirit of cooperation and self-confidence; the sense of ability to do things for themselves and not to look to government for the resolution of serious social and economic problems at the village level.

Thus put, Vinoba's arguments, partially corroborated by Linton, sound plausible. His success (albeit limited) in persuading the landlords to part with a portion of their holdings may be attributed to his ability to understand the traditions of his society and epitomize them. By reinterpreting and disseminating relevant Vedic and epic themes, he succeeded in initiating a creative dialogue between the two antagonists, the landlords and the landless, in an atmosphere of non-violence and peace. By an imaginative revitalization

of the existing understanding of the traditional symbols of dāna and yajña, he succeeded, to a degree, in redirecting the goals of many villagers towards a more just and equitable sharing of the property. But it also appears that his followers and audience did not always fully comprehend the purport of the redirected symbols or concentrated on one segment of them. His traditional idiom--myth--often tends to obscure the modern message of socialism. The ambiguity of his mission (sudden shifts, for instance, from Bhoodan to Gramdan to Sulabh Gramdan) reflects the difficult role he has chosen to play in trying to appease both the landed and the landless and subsume their opposing interests for a common cause.

To be fair to Vinoba, it has to be recognized that the use of symbols and myths as agents of social change is, at the best of times, problematic. Symbols, as Ricoeur points out,[1] are capable of carrying multiple, often contradictory, meanings at different levels. In the Vedic era, for example, the symbols of dāna/yajña served to encourage property transfer in contractual, obligatory manner. In the Gita they come to be invested with altruistic motivation. Vinoba's attempts to reconcile the two modes of property transfer did not quite succeed because his audience interpreted the two symbols

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[1] Ricoeur, Conflict, p. 51.

differently. The poor and the landless in his audience expected the landlords to act altruistically, giving away their excess land and wealth. But the latter had ulterior motives behind their gifts.[1] By parting with small tracts of land, they tried to legitimate their control over the balance. Other donors stipulated that the given land be distributed among the needy belonging to their own caste. Still others wanted the untouchables to be excluded from the list of prospective recipients. A good number of donors failed to follow up on their pledges, indicating that often promises were made under the cast of a momentary spell or as a face-saving device while in the presence of a saintly preacher.

The ulterior motives and the nature of stipulations imposed by the landed suggests that in a social situation most individuals' propensity to philanthropic behavior is dependent on their perceived relationship to others. Social scientists in this context have argued that while we feel emphathetic to those of slightly lower status, we are prone to rivalry with those above. Our capacity for empathy

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[1] A survey carried out in several Gramdan villages in the state of Maharashtra showed that not all land that was received in Bhoodan was the result of a change in the views of the donors. Only 16 percent of the land was donated (by about 33 percent of the donors) on ideological considerations. Thirty percent of the donations, involving 27 percent of the transferred land, resulted under moral and social pressure from the village leaders or Bhoodan workers. In 15 percent of the cases land receivers were found to be relatives of the donors. Nanekar and Khandewale, Landless, p. 96.

lessens as people's situations become more remote from our own.[1] In Indian context, this gradation in empathy between different classes is brought into even sharper focus because of the inherently hierarchic nature of the caste system. That the Bhoodan movement did not become an exception to this phenomenon is borne out by the fact that the landlords gave away proportionately more land to those who already held some land than to agricultural laborers who had no land at all.

This suggests the need and the advantages of the legislative, constitutional approach over the quasi-legislative voluntary approach implicit in the Bhoodan movement in effecting land redistribution in a country like India. Traditionally, the classical liberal, constitutionalist position on social justice and equality has not been argued out of sympathy or altruism but from what Rawls,[2] for example, presumes would be the majority response to the question: What sort of world would you choose to be in were you yet unborn and had no idea about your skills, defects and so forth? If the population is in general risk averse,

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[1] This argument is based on David Kennett, "Altruism, Economic Behavior and the Theory of Redistribution," American Journal of Economy and Society 39 (April 1980): 183-98.

[2] John Rawls, A Theory of Justice (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971).

and Rawls argues that it is, then the commonest response should be one in which the world is organized so as to help the worst off. From this Rawls argues that the "just" society, the one that most would choose a priori, is the profoundly redistributive world.[1] Not surprisingly, therefore, in independent India the theoretical basis for the argument that redistributive programs are a quasi-contractual obligation on the state stemmed from this basic liberal stance implicit in the constitution of India, a product of liberal minds like Nehru and Ambedkar.

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[1] Ibid., pp. 14-15.

CHAPTER III

THE MYTH OF GRAM-SVARAJ

Introduction

In a sense, the Myth of Gram-svaraj was implicit in the Myth of Bhoodan-yajna because changes in land distribution pattern invariably accompany changes in the socio-political organization of a given community. Since the goal of the Bhoodan-Gramdan movement was to abolish landlordism and establish a socially homogenous community of self-cultivators, it was essential for Vinoba to foster a myth that would reflect an appropriate polity to go with that objective. Vinoba, therefore, selects the key symbols of grāma, svarāj, and svadharma as the building blocks for the construction of the Myth of Gram-svaraj.

Traditionally, grāma refers to a village whose polity is dictated by the norms of dharma as reflected in the jāti and jajamāni systems. Svarāj signifies self-rule. Vinoba fuses these two symbols to form the nucleus of the ideal Sarvodaya polity: the Gram-svaraj, an autonomous village republic. He re-interprets svarāj to mean "self-initiative" and "self-control" as exercized both by the individuals and their community. Svarāj is to be realized by following svadharma (see infra) and by cultivating

freedom from passion and selfishness. Methodologically, non-violence is posited as the necessary concomitant of svarāj. To be autonomous, therefore, is to implant non-violence into self. Put positively, it means developing altruism which Vinoba equates with svadharma (see infra).

Vinoba sees Gram-svaraj as a viable alternative both to the traditional dharmic (dharma legitimated) and contemporary democratic modes of village organization. It is to be achieved gradually, through stages and without violence. The first step towards Gram-svaraj would involve reducing the size and the activities of the state and its governance. As people come to rely less and less on the government, there will emerge what Vinoba calls "a decentralized self-governing state." With further decentralization and the development of Lok Śakti (people's power), the Gram-svaraj will eventually result.[1]

The Dharmic Mode of Village Organization

The traditional relationship between the norms of dharma and the village organization is complex and only partially understood. Yet dharma is known to be central to the villagers' understanding and explanation of the nature of their village community. One has, therefore, to depend

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[1] Speech on March 9, 1953 at the Sarvodaya conference at Chandil, Bihar. Reproduced in Vinoba [Bhave], Third Power, chapter 2, pp. 18-36.

in large part on the writings of contemporary social scientists for evidence on the nature of relationship between dharma and polity at the village level.[1] Traditionally, village organization and economy have always had land as the central focus. Most occupations are related to land and land ownership is the key to power and status.

Each caste has an informal caste council composed of influential caste leaders, which serves as an important focus for political activities. In terms of the average villager, these constitute important decision-making bodies affecting him either as an individual or as a member of the group. Their activities are not differentiated and combine administrative, rule-making and quasi-judicial functions. When decisions affecting the village as a whole or more than one caste have to be made, the different caste groups get together in an intercaste council where statutory compromises can be worked out by bargaining as well as appeals to norms of dharma which determines patterns of duties and rights. Each individual in fact has his own dharma and obligation to perform it (svadharma). All duties are interdependent and as each person promotes his own dharma, he is seen to promote the dharma of his caste and, ultimately, that of the entire society. One normally strives for a form of justice that

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[1] For the purpose, I have used K. Ishvaran, Tradition and Economy in Village India (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966) and K. S. Mathur, Caste and Ritual in a Malwa Village (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1964).

will sustain the existing and traditional patterns of balance and order between components of society. Programs and policies affecting the village are chalked out on the basis of what such justice, balance and order require, not on the basis of democratic principles, resources or individual capabilities. All of these considerations are inherent in the goal of providing a normative model for human interaction. Thus put, it is clear that dharma effectively affirms and recognizes the essential truth of the doctrine of inequality and hierarchy in its control of castes and functions on the basis of the social and political corporation in the village.

The Panchayati-raj in Modern India

In the structure of the Panchayati-raj (local self-government) inaugurated in 1959, the village Panchayat (five-member body) is the lowest unit. The general body of the village Panchayat is the Gramsabha which considers the programs prepared by the Panchayat and examines the statements of accounts, annual budget and administrative reports. Although the central and state governments lay much emphasis on the Gramsabha as institutions of popular participation, their working has not been very satisfactory. Generally, its meetings are thinly attended and often it exists only on paper and in the reports of Panchayat extension officers.

The revival of the traditional Panchayat system in free India quickly generated controversy regarding the involvement of political parties in the running of the Panchayats. Gandhians generally feel that party politics should be excluded from the arena of local self-government. They see it unhealthy to introduce politics into the already fragmented and factionalized village communities. Against this, the official government view is that in a democratic framework it is unrealistic to prevent political parties from functioning in local bodies.[1] Factionalism, it is argued, is not new to rural India; politics merely adds ideological dimension to the existing conflicts.

The need for a competent bureaucracy has been clearly recognized from the inception of the Panchayati-raj institutions since the former is charged with the planning and implementation of government-sponsored community development and welfare programs. The Village Level Worker, the lowest in the bureaucratic hierarchy at the village level, is a multi-purpose officer directing projects of technical nature

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[1] Thus the Minister for community development, S. K. Dey who piloted the bill introducing the Panchayati-raj through parliament, rejected all ideas about democracy without competition between political parties and open debate. "A self-sufficient village republic consisting of God-fearing people, thinking, believing, and acting all alike, is a village dead before it is born. Life cannot spring from such an institution. Democracy demands ideology and ideology in a perpetual but healthy clash. Only dead people do not compete." S. K. Dey, Panchayati Raj: A Movement is Born (Allahabad: Kitab Mahal, 1960), p. 173.

Other political parties generally supported . . .

such as agriculture and animal husbandry. But he often lacks high social and ritual status in order to be a persuasive agent of change and development. Again, efforts to involve villagers in reorganizing their community often fail, not so much because they are inactive and disinterested in local affairs, but rather because the concerns of outside bureaucrats seem to have little to do with the issues that exercise the political sensibilities of the local residents. Many influential villagers run for the Panchayat offices as a demonstration of their loyalty to the ruling Congress Party. However, they choose not to act through the Panchayats where authority is "rational" and legal (as against dhārmic and charismatic in the caste councils) and well-defined. Important Panchayat offices, like those in the modern West, are positions for which one is supposed to campaign and, once installed, one is supposed to act as a representative and "servant" of one's constituents. But the men who fill these positions cannot conceive of themselves in this role vis-à-vis the very people with whom their normal, daily relationship takes the form of paternalistic, dharma-legitimated complementary domination. The two types

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[1] . . . the Minister's stand. Thus Communist members of parliament hoped that "The Panchayat-raj institutions will provide a base for progressive parties to operate and fight against the forces of backwardness and tradition. The village people need to be politicized and political parties have to act as a great instrument for the politicization of the rural masses." M. Kihlberg, The Panchayati Raj in India (Delhi: Young Asia, 1976), p. 20.

of authority, democratic and dharmic, are, therefore, not compatible in the same set of relations. The village leaders, therefore, choose to act, not through the Panchayat, but in the old informal manner where they deal from a position of strength.

Similarly, the concepts of change, development and steady growth which the Panchayati-raj bodies are supposed to promote are alien to the dharma view in two respects. First, it implies that the increased quantity of goods and services produced is to be redistributed. Second, it expects structural relationships within the village economy to change as new caste groups acquire land and take to agriculture. To be sure, the thought of the village producing growing quantities of goods while maintaining existing relationships (in jajamāni form) intact is manageable within the context of the dharma view. But development as involving the substantial modification of structural relationships between different castes is much more difficult to accept. Dharma is so important in Indian polity because of the fear that without the status quo of the well-defined pattern of duties and rights, society would become a chaotic jungle. Thus, development as social and structural change is an unattractive and, indeed, threatening prospect for the relatively prosperous, high status caste groups in village India. This state of affairs naturally causes one to ask how democratic institutions will be able

to function in the rural areas; to what extent is the egalitarian ideology of the new Panchayati-raj compatible with the asymmetrical and hierarchical jajamāni system? Vinoba's alternative to this predicament is Gram-svaraj.

The Sarvodaya Alternative: Gram-svaraj

Sarvodaya approach to village organization distinguishes itself from the dhārmic and democratic models in terms of orientation toward power. In the latter two, power is sought to establish mandate, to realize certain ideals and material goals, to allocate resources, patronage. Pursuit and deployment of power is seen as an integral part of organized life. For Vinoba, this passion for power, like any other passion (for example, sex or anger) destroys self-control. By aspiring to power, man demonstrates his incompetence to exercise it. To use power instrumentally to put it in the service of the people is possible, but the danger of attachment to power has to be guarded against. The uses of power, argues Vinoba, are in any case limited, because the cure for the ills that afflict state and society lies more in changing man's inner environment than in his laws and institutions.

Vinoba, therefore, mounts a three-fold critique of the state as it is evolving in contemporary India:[1] first,

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[1] Vinoba [Bhave], Third Power, pp. 1-17.

the state demands loyalty to itself in preference to loyalty towards conscience and humanity; secondly, its ultimate sanction lies in its coercive power which militates against the very cornerstone of Sarvodaya--non-violence; and finally, it maintains a big administrative apparatus and army at the expense of the poor villagers and thereby serves as an agency for their exploitation. Constitutional democracy, which the state has promoted to serve its own ends, argues Vinoba, is simply a mechanism for choosing and authorizing governments. It does not guarantee a democratic form of society nor a set of moral ends.[1] Secondly, this mechanism consists of two or more self-chosen sets of politicians arrayed in political parties for the votes which will entitle them to rule until the next elections. The voter's role is not to decide issues on which elections should be fought, but rather to choose representatives who will carry out those decisions. A political party, as its very name indicates, stands for a part of society. As such, loyalty

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[1] Compare these views of Vinoba with those of Crawford McPherson who writes: "Liberal democracy has come to incorporate two meanings: its life began in capitalist market societies, and from the beginning it accepted their basic unconscious assumption, 'market maketh man'. Yet quite early J. S. Mill pressed the claim of equal individual rights to self-development and democracy justified itself by that claim. The two ideas of liberal democracy have since then been held together uneasily, each with its ups and downs. So far the market view has prevailed." The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 1.

and allegiance to any one party is inconsistent with loyalty to society in general, with the good of all, the fundamental goal of Sarvodaya.

In place of orthodox political action, therefore, Vinoba suggests direct action by the people themselves. The politics of power-state, Rajniti, must be replaced by the "politics" of the people, Lokniti. The former involves conflicts and competition among élite factions, the conciliation and containing of sectional interests. Lokniti in contrast, will attempt to make people aware of their own inner strength, encouraging them to solve problems for themselves. While Rajniti results in the extension and intensification of administrative machinery, Lokniti will develop self-control and self-discipline through service and cooperation. But this shift to Lokniti cannot be achieved by violent political revolution. The state is, in Vinoba's view, a certain condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a certain mode of human behavior.[1] It has to

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[1] Obviously Vinoba would disagree with Hobbes and Locke concerning the notion of social contract in which man in the state of nature voluntarily renounces his strife-filled freedom for the serenity of civil state. Vinoba rather seems to believe that man as an individual did not form society and political authority to protect himself from endless warfare. Viewed in the context of the entire world of nature, social and collective existence appears to him to be anterior to individual existence. Tradition, not authority, therefore, is the cementing bond in society. Thus put, Vinoba would feel at ease in the company of Kropotkin who also views state as a power system, artificial and . . .

be removed by building alternative type of relationship, by behaving differently. This "other relationship" appears to be a fusion of select elements from both the dharmic and democratic traditions and is discussed at length both by Vinoba and Jayaprakash Narayan.[1]

While in the dharma model the emphasis is on the maintenance of balance and order in the system, the overall Myth of Sarvodaya has as its goal change toward equality in the areas of property, polity and gender. Accordingly, the nature of duty (svadharma) is re-interpreted differently in the proposed Gram-svaraj.[2] Whereas in the dharma model

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[1] . . . unnatural, because it perverts man's real nature. The anarchist claims man's original nature to be cooperative and peace-loving. In fact, Kropotkin's Mutual Aid is written to prove this very contention. If the state exists, it does so by opposing man's natural instinct towards mutuality. The will to power of the few political leaders comes in conflict with the will to mutuality found in society at large and the net result is "the inhibition of creativity." Vinoba's belief in local power, rural reconstruction, decentralized organization, simpler standard of living, and mistrust of the due process of administrators brings him close to Kropotkin's ideas of anarchism. See Alexander Kropotkin, Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution (New York: Knopf, 1925), p. 31. On occasion, Vinoba has even advocated the establishment of "spiritual anarchism." See Vishvanath Tandon, The Social and Political Philosophy of Sarvodaya (Varanasi: Sarva Seva Sangha Prakashan, 1965), p. 124.

[1] Vinoba [Bhave], Swaraj Sastra: Principles of Non-violent Political Order (Bombay: Padma Publications, 1945). (Hereafter referred to as Swaraj); Jayaprakash Narayan, A Plea for Reconstruction of Indian Polity (Varanasi: Sarva Seva Sangha Prakashan, 1959). (Hereafter referred to as Polity).

[2] The concept of svadharma is elaborated in Vinoba [Bhave], Talks, pp. 202-03.

duties undergo little change and assume an absolute quality, in the Sarvodaya version there is a clear notion that while duties may be rooted in the basic principles of dharma, they have to be applied to specific circumstances. The Sarvodaya ethic places the responsibility on the individual himself for determining the specific actions required of him. For the purpose, in the context of Gram-svaraj, Vinoba re-uses the familiar key symbols of yajna and dāna and links them to the intricate set of interrelationships between nature, society and man. Man, for him, by definition is a social animal. Man is part of society, just as society is part of nature. It is inconceivable to speak of man as isolated from society. Man's essence is to cooperate with his fellow-men to secure his basic needs. If he chooses not to cooperate, his very existence is threatened. It is useful to keep in mind this fundamental assumption of Vinoba while examining his views on social organization.

Since the very process of living involves the wear and tear of the body, society and the universe; it is the duty (svadharma) of everybody, ~~Vinoba admonishes, to~~ replenish the loss caused in these three orders. Everybody should repay his debt to them by engaging in the practice of yajña, dāna and tapa (austerities).

Man's everyday living involves using nature and its resources. In the process of eating, for example, a part of the creation is used up. It is everybody's svadharma

to make up for the loss by growing food, raising other useful crops, and by daily spinning and weaving. Such activities executed in the spirit of sacrifice and service to the community, writes Vinoba, constitute yajña.[1] Each individual, from his birth to death, receives boundless service from his family, friends and the community. The service that one renders to free oneself from this debt to society is dāna. Man owes his third debt to his body which is worn out by the "mind, senses and knowledge."[2] To rejuvenate it, he must engage in manual labor in the fields and eat nourishing, vegetarian food. Thus, according to Vinoba, svadharma--the keystone of Gram-svaraj--involves acting in such a way that the functioning of the triple order--body, society and nature--may proceed smoothly and efficiently. While part of svadharma is unchangeable and fixed (dāna, yajña, tapa), the rest may vary with one's station and circumstances in life.[3] This indicates that though Vinoba affirms the autonomy of the individual, he would not endorse the claim of the individual to pursue his activities guided solely by self-interest. In this sense, he seems to want to move away from both the dharmic "hierarchic man" and liberal "economic man" toward the

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[1] Vinoba [Bhave], Talks, pp. 202-203.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

concept of a "moral and communal man."

Though Vinoba is critical of both the dharmic and and liberal democratic modes of social organization, his principle target is the concept of community development whose basic precepts derive from the "human relations" school of administrative analysis pioneered at Harvard University by Elton Mayo.[1] Its primary concern is to get people from all sections of the community psychologically and ideologically involved for a common cause. In Indian context, this means widespread participation of the bureaucracy in planning, implementation and evaluation of development projects with the help from the villagers for whom they are destined. Vinoba, however, takes an opposite view. He insists that the intrusion of the "government people" in the village only kills people's initiative and creativity. But he does not further develop this anarchist-sounding critique and refuses to consider the possibility that governments might express a legitimate social need. In his eyes, ordinary citizens act freely only when they reject government intervention in their communal affairs. He seems to deny the subjective perceptions of the people themselves who may, after all, prefer to correct rather than abolish state and federal (or local) forms of government and bureaucracy. His critique, on the other hand, of

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[1] Stanley Heginbotham, Cultures in Conflict: The Four Faces of Indian Bureaucracy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), p. 44.

the rigidity and inequality of dharma ethic which enforces conformity with established rules of social behavior, is restrained. He seeks to correct these defects by re-interpreting the concept of svadharma. But here again, social reorganization cannot be brought about by mere exhortations.

Salient Features of Gram-svaraj

Vinoba envisions the ideal Gram-svaraj to be free from all conventional politicking, courts, police and army. However, he is pragmatic enough to concede that such institutions will continue to function during the period of transition from the Panchayati-raj to Gram-svaraj. The nature of such bodies, nonetheless, will be quite different.

Since the ideal of "partyless democracy" cannot be attained all at once, Vinoba suggests specific steps with a view to making a beginning toward that objective.[1] Members of parliament, for example, may be elected on party tickets, but after elections they would surrender party loyalty and vote on every issue according to what their conscience dictates to be best in the interest of the nation. Different political parties should forego their ideological differences and evolve a common platform on selective issues like Bhoodan and Gramdan. The opposition parties should support

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[1] The following is based on Vinoba [Bhave] , Third Power, pp. 62-64.

the government in power wherever necessary in the interest of the public good and oppose it only when it subordinates the common good to private interests. People in their turn should back only those candidates, regardless of their political affiliation, whom they know to be honest, selfless and devoted to the cause of general welfare.

In many of the Gramdan villages the role of the police is already taken over by the Śanti sainiks (Peace Brigade). Unlike the regular army and the police force, the members of the Peace Brigade are raised for service from the village concerned. The former work efficiently, in Vinoba's opinion, "only when they operate away from their home towns, among the strangers. For there, the only question is that of shooting people."[1] By contrast, a non-violent army like the Brigade, in Vinoba's view, works much better in a familiar setting among the familiar people. If the strength of the Brigade increases, he observes, the life sustaining power of the nation would also increase; internal disorder would disappear and national solidarity would be enhanced.[2]

The Brigade is to be sustained by the villagers themselves. For the purpose, Vinoba has re-interpreted a familiar custom. Traditionally, the Hindu housewife keeps

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[1] Vinoba [Bhave], Women's Power, p. 53.

[2] Vinoba [Bhave], Third Power, p. 82.

aside a portion of the cooked food for the benefit of a hungry passerby or unannounced guest. The ritual symbolizes, according to Vinoba, the idea of dāna-yajña. Vinoba suggests that instead of food, a fistful of grain be kept aside in a pot (Sarvodaya-patra) provided by the Sarvodaya workers and which the volunteers of the Brigade would later collect. By giving their "vote for peace" with a fistful of grain, Vinoba writes, the villagers will be indicating in a democratic manner their approval of the idea and work of the Peace Brigade.[1]

As to disputes and differences of view between groups, Vinoba looks to the past tradition of Nyaya-Panchayats (caste-tribunals) for the administration of justice. In this context, he draws a distinction between the prevalent Anglo-Saxon inspired legal institutions and the Nyaya-Panchayats. The former incorporate restitution for a wrong (civil law) and punitive retribution (criminal law). Vinoba pleads for the repeal of this division and suggests that the concept of reparation (to individual and to society) should be extended to the realm of penal law also to eliminate entirely the idea of vengeance and violence. This recommendation of Vinoba seems to be based on the anarchist-sounding idea that if today we have come to believe that in a society without

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[1] Vinoba [Bhave] , Women's Power, p. 54.

police and magistrate every man would rush to tear his neighbor apart, it is only because of inculcated prejudices and defective education.[1] Vinoba rules out the spectacle of a possible mutual conflict and strife by a mere assumption about human nature. A second and related distinction he draws is between arbitration and neutral mediation between conflicting parties who agree to accept the arbitrator's decision and the judgment of legal courts representing imposed authority. In the Gram-svaraj of Vinoba's design, judges will be replaced by arbiters who will be elected by contending parties in consultation with the Panchayat members. In this manner Vinoba hopes to restore the unity between social attitudes and the administration of justice as it existed under the customary law, by eliminating formal legal courts.[2]

Vinoba is a great admirer of pure science and ranks it with dharma and spirituality as the liberator of man.[3] Science and the understanding it brings are the enemies of prejudice and of inert traditional ideals. Science and technology, in his view, can help establish a free society

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[1] These views were expressed by Vinoba in a speech to the prisoners in the jail at Dhule (where he himself served term in 1932) on August 14, 1948. Extracts of that speech are reproduced in Ram, Mission, p. 228.

[2] Vinoba [Bhave] , Swaraj, pp. 67-68.

[3] This is based on Vinoba [Bhave] , Third Power, pp. 40-72.

based on justice and opportunities for all. Science, like dharma, has the power to bind individuals together and foster cooperative spirit. Only self-knowledge and science, not political ideologies, he declares, can harmonize the self with society. Science today impels us to move forward from the individual discipline of the ancient sages to a collective spiritual discipline. In the world of the future, science and spiritual wisdom will displace power politics and sectarian religions.[1] Without the benefit of science what would a non-violent spiritual order be like? Vinoba cites Lao Tse's description of isolated communities living in peace in their own world. In the night they hear dogs barking in the distance and conclude that other villages must exist. This is peace without science because such communities lack cooperative spirit which only science can help generate. Stalinism, on the other hand, in his view, is the expression of a scientifically planned order devoid of spiritual principles of non-violence.

> The agricultural land (in Soviet Union) has been consolidated without consulting the farmers and bullocks. The bullocks do the full day's work and the manager's duty is to see that they are well fed. There is food and clothing for all but no one cares for your advice and you have no freedom to try out your own ideas. These two patterns, Lao Tse's and Stalin's, are respectively patterns of non-violence and cooperation. In Gram-svaraj to come, they will be integrated.[2]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid.

Finally, an interesting aspect of Sarvodaya polity may be noted. It provides for independent grāma (village) to federate with other grāma on a voluntary basis to achieve certain common goals. As a matter of fact, Vinoba envisions a world federation of Gram-svaraj. Such a federation, however, is not to be understood in the commonly held sense of the term. Federated Gram-svarajs will not be related, in the words of Jayaprakash Narayan:

> . . . to each other as in an hierarchy; rather they will constitute a series of 'oceanic circles' whose center will be the individual willing to 'sacrifice' for the village, the latter willing to do the same for the district.[1]

The administrative machinery required to keep such a federation is to be kept at minimum. Its role is compared to a thread which holds together the flowers of the garland. Just as the best garland is that in which only flowers are seen, the thread remaining invisible, likewise in the ideal federation, the administration will remain invisible.[2]

The Myth of Gram-svaraj: An Appraisal

The Myth of Gram-svaraj was promoted in anticipation of a successful Gramdan campaign. But in the great majority of villages that have opted for Gramdan, only the first

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[1] Narayan, Polity, p. 34.

[2] Doctor, Anarchist, p. 75.

stage of Gramdan (declaration of intent to sign away the title deeds of all the village land in favor of the popularly constituted village assembly) has been realized. There are relatively few villages in which the final stage of Gramdan (mobilization of resources, constructive program activities) is well advanced.[1] When asked how declarations of intent to opt for Gramdan will lead to Gram-svaraj, Vinoba replies:

> The times demand that we offer to humanity our all, as we would to a god. And just as we symbolize our offering of ourselves in a dramatic act of worship, so we declare our commitment to humanity in the dramatic symbolism of Gramdan . . . the Gramdan resolution is a dramatic act symbolic of hope and aspiration for spiritual revolution. The drama is a necessary step; little by little science itself will turn the symbol into reality.[2]

Man, like bird, says Vinoba, has two wings--science and spirituality--and he needs both together for his happiness. The design of every machine provides for two forces, one to generate energy for movement and the other to guide it. Impelled by the forces of science and spirituality, man is bound to create conditions favorable for the institution of Gram-svaraj.[3] While conflict is built into the market model

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[1] Ostergaard and Currell, Gentle, p. 57.

[2] Vinoba [Bhave] , Third Power, pp. 64-65.

[3] Ibid.

now prevailing in urban India, "scientific" Gram-svaraj, claims Vinoba, will eliminate dissension. In fact, he is anxious to show how much India stands to lose by the ongoing substitution of a market system for the traditional system based on dāna and yajña in which exchange of goods and services is not a mechanical transaction but a moral transaction that also promotes human relationships between individuals and their community.[1]

But the fact that to date Gramdan has been more successful in those very areas where the jajamāni system still retains its hold leads one to suggest that at least two possibly undesirable consequences of Gram-svaraj are overlooked by Vinoba. First, the norm of reciprocity which is implicit therein is not incompatible with the self-interest postulate; and second, while reciprocity may help create solidarity, it can also be manipulated to secure advantage over one's fellow men. That reciprocity in itself need not imply equality, justice or the golden rule is evident from the nature of the jāti and jajamāni relationships which also claim to have the norm of reciprocity as the basis of organization. Given the non-market postulate of the proposed Gram-svaraj, its major constituent, the division of labor, will be functional and hereditary and will, therefore, be

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[1] Ibid.

intertwined with the system of castes. Under the circumstances, its socio-economic organization will come perilously close to the one already existing, viz. the jajamāni system which, based as it is on the caste structure, is also a labor structure traditionalized in a religious matrix.

In fact, one member of a research team that studied the functioning of the Gram-svaraj in fifteen Gramdan villages in the Musahari block of North Bihar, believes that "the 'Sarvodaya movement' has its impact on strengthening rather than weakening of the semifeudal bondage."[1] Two other members of the same team, on the other hand, remark:

> There are [sic] evidence to show that Gramsabhas despite many social and economic hurdles, have considerably succeeded in minimizing exploitation in productive relations and in making an effective co-ordination of the various agrarian strata--landrich, landpoor, and landless, in a social framework.[2]

But they also go on to comment that the functioning of the Gram-svarajs can be improved by allowing the factions in the Gramsabha to express their "competitive spirit" politically.[3]

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[1] Pradhan H. Prasad, "The Economic Perspective," in Sarvodaya and Development: Multidisciplinary Perspective from Musahari, ed. Sachchidananda (Patna: A.N.S. Institute of Social Studies, 1976), p. 96.

[2] Sachchidananda and S. Akinchan, "The Sociological Perspective," in Sarvodaya and Development: Multidisciplinary Perspective from Musahari, ed. Sachchidananda (Patna: A.N.S. Institute of Social Studies, 1976), p. 53.

[3] Ibid.

Now, traditional Indian political theories recognize that the urge to compete is natural in man. "Man by nature likes to interfere with the possessions and rights of others," observes Manu with brutal frankness.[1] "Without laws and a king to rule," warns the Mahabharata, "men will behave like birds--flying at each other's throats in suicidal strife."[2] Through a number of similar analogies, the epic drives home the point that desire for power is natural in man.

The main problem in India today is to direct this desire for power through proper channels in order to realize the values of democratic living. It is true that the party system has not worked successfully in India (and perhaps elsewhere) in attaining that goal. But still, it has begun to shake the old strongholds of power (especially in the rural context) and has been erecting new ones that can offer greater opportunity to the weaker sections in the villages to share in power. The party system has its place in a world in which empirical solutions are sought for the problems arising out of the clash of wills and interests and not in a "reciprocal" but static system that leaves no room for a difference of opinions.

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[1] Quoted in John Spellman, Political Theory of Ancient India (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), pp. 5-6.

[2] Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

THE MYTH OF ŚAKTI

Introduction

The pouvoir moteur of Vinoba's Myth of Śakti is the powerful and rich symbol of Śakti (power homologized with femaleness) and its counterpart--vīrya (power homologized as maleness). The key symbol of Śakti unlocks, as it were, the main thematic code of Hindu ethos and Weltanschuung--both traditional and contemporary. Historically, Indian thinkers have been acutely aware and conscious of this fact and have sought to accomodate the theme of Śakti in their thought and works. In this century, this traditional preoccupation with Śakti is reflected in the writings of national leaders from Vivekananda to Vinoba as concern with the low status of women in Indian society and in the ways and means of raising it.

Following Parsons[1] it can be argued that status refers to the position of a person in a social relationship system. Role model, the dynamic aspect of status, may be said to represent selected facets of a person's behavior for specific purposes. Institution may be understood as a crystallized pattern of expectations defining culturally appropriate behavior of persons in various social roles.

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[1] Talcott Parsons et al., Family, Socialization and Interactional Process (Glencoe, Ill., Free Press, 1955), p. 43.

Vinoba's Myth of Sakti, I will be arguing below, is designed to bring about changes in two social institutions in contemporary India: family and local self-government. From Indian women's perspective this would essentially involve securing for them a) right to pursue brahmacharya (conduct appropriate to the realization of brahman) and brahmavidyā (spiritual knowledge); b) freedom from work away from home; and c) leadership in local self-government.

Vinoba conceives of śakti as immanent in the qualities of love and non-violence which in turn are seen as essential attributes of woman. The practice of brahmacharya is thought to reawaken and develop śakti to its fullest extent which then is to be directed in the service and welfare of the people. For the purpose Vinoba suggests three role models for Indian women which, he believes, while raising their social status, would also help realize the ideal of Sarvodaya. Vinoba pompously styles them as Brahmacharini (female ascetic), Griha-devata (goddess in the house) and Gram-devata (village goddess). Here, they will also be identified as female ascetic, housewife and civic leader respectively. Unlike Gandhi Vinoba demonstrates acute awareness of the serious problem of overpopulation in India and argues that the practice of brahmacharya will also directly contribute to the lowering of the fertility rate. But it is not clear from Vinoba's writings whether every

woman should fulfill all the three roles in her lifetime or whether she is free to make a conscious and voluntary choice of a lifestyle as dictated by her natural inclinations.

But before moving on to a detailed study of the Myth of Śakti, it would be instructive to have an overview of the traditional understanding of the symbol of Śakti and its identification with femaleness since beliefs about what a female is underlie both the role models the tradition advocates for women and their status in Hindu religious practice and society.

In Hindu cosmology, from the unmanifest substratum of the universe (identified with brahman in the system of Vedanta) beings are made manifest (and eventually returned to the unmanifest) through the tension created by the constant interplay of the opposing forces of cohesion and disintegration (later conceptualized as the gods Viṣṇu and Śiva respectively). This tension defines Śakti--the manifesting power and the creative principle conceived as female in gender. All creation--human and material and all power in the Hindu world originate in femaleness. All beings contain their share of Śakti (often in potent form) with which they are endowed at birth. This Śakti can be increased and decreased through later actions. Brahmanic texts for example maintain that various austerities, particularly sexual abstinance can increase a man's Śakti which then is conceptualized as vīrya--a clear white liquid which is stored in the head.

At the cultural level the symbol of *śakti* serves as a convenient meeting ground for the brahmanic and popular traditions. The cult of *śakti* as benevolent goddesses (*devi*) and consorts of various male gods is elaborated in many brahmanic texts from the Vedic period onwards.[1] Saraswati, Sita, Lakṣmi are some of the better known manifestations of *śakti* in brahmanism. The popular tradition conceives of *śakti* as the 'Great Mother' (*mātā*). She is not 'wife' of any god since such a role is perceived as one of subordination, devotion. The mother, on the other hand, is the one who provides and protects and who also can wreak vengeance if disobeyed. Mother, therefore, is to be respected and commands obeisance. The cult of Gram-devata (village goddess) is widespread in the countryside particularly in the eastern and southern regions of India. The popular tradition also identifies femininity (*śakti*) with nature (*prakrti*) and accordingly deities that preside over those critical sectors of life which the villagers believe they cannot control such as success of crops and occurrence of famines, protection against diseases like smallpox, cholera, child birth, health and the like, are all motherly figures.

The identification of *śakti* as the 'Great Mother' or a benevolent goddess has had important consequences for

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[1] Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God*, 2 vols. (London: Secker and Warburg, 1960), 2: 204-205.

Hindu culture and society in general and for the status of Hindu women in particular. Woman is alternatively (and often simultaneously) seen as a real, living and sacred symbol of motherhood--(embodiment of ultimate and creative power) and the mute, subdued, loving housewife. A central theme of the norms and guidelines for proper female behavior in the brāhmana inspired classical religious literature, for example, is that man must control women and their power. The dominant norms for her, therefore, concern her role as wife. Manusmriti accordingly focusses largely on this aspect of woman. The folklore and vernacular traditions, on the other hand, emphasize much more the role models and norms for mothers.[1] Further, such psychosocial traits as competition, aggression or power; as expressions of śakti, are not exclusively associated with masculinity per se.

Gandhi perhaps was the first contemporary Indian politician to recognize and tap the power inherent in the myth of śakti. Without belittling their roles as mothers and wives, he sought for Indian women (as bearers of śakti) an equally important role to play in the struggle for the political independence of India. Already Vivekananda[2] had

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[1] Ashish Nandi, "Woman versus Womanliness," in Indian Women: From Purdah to Modernity, ed. B.R. Nanda (New Delhi: Vikas, 1976), p. 157-59.

[2] Chief disciple of the nineteenth century Hindu mystic Ramakrishna and founder of the Ramakrishna Mission.

linked the traditional image of sacred motherhood to the modern concept of motherland, hoping thereby to give a sanctity to the basically Western concept of nationhood in an essentially apolitical and traditional society like India's. Now Gandhi tried to provide dignity to the women of India by positing a new equation between femaleness and political potency. The important contribution that women later went on to make to the freedom struggle proved Gandhi right. It also revealed that in those sectors of modern life which are disjunctive with the traditional lifestyle and which as such lack clearly defined and well developed norms, Hindu women need not start with as many handicaps as in many other societies.[1] In the past few decades, politics, public affairs and careers in liberal professions have proved to be those very sectors where a woman's public success is not viewed as detracting from her private womanliness.

The Model of Brahmacharini[2]

While Gandhi was preoccupied exploring ambiguous and undefined fields of social activity in which women could freely and effectively participate, Vinoba today seeks to gain for them entry to the traditionally well defined and

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[1] Ibid.

[2] This section is based on Vinoba [Bhave], "Women to Revolt," Women's Power, pp. 12-17.

entrenched male bastion: asceticism. A lifelong brahmachāri (celibate) himself, Vinoba passionately appeals to women of India to take to celibacy and serve the cause of Sarvodaya. He is sharply critical of Hindu parents for marrying off their daughters (and sons) at an early age thereby depriving them of their right to choose the life of ascetic. Vinoba traces the origin of this discriminatory practice to the custom of partitioning human life and values in terms of life stages (āśrama) and corresponding attitudes and goals (purusārtha) that came into vogue in the post Vedic period. Earlier Vedic classification of lifestyles did not entail a discontinuity between this-worldly and other-worldly aims and motivations. The society as a whole was seen as the domain of dharma which has both active (pravrtti) and passive (nivrtti) aspects. The ascetic and his ideal --moksa-- accommodated as aspects of nivrtti. Gradually, possibly under the growing influence of Buddhism and Jainism, moksa came to be regarded as opposite of dharma. When the quietistic teachings of the Upanisads and the mature ascetic traditions of Buddhism and Jainism were finally reconciled with the ritualism of brahmanism, a new social classification emerged[1] which divided human life span in four stages and recognized moksa as the supreme goal of life.

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[1] Stephen Tyler, India: An Anthropological Perspective (Pacific Palisades, Ca.: Goodyear Publishing, 1973), pp. 98-99.

Vinoba complains that this post Vedic ideal of human life and social organization is cast from male perspective and discriminates against women who are judged unworthy and unqualified to seek moksa and as such have no right to practise brahmacharya. The basis of this inequality, argues Vinoba, is gender which is learned and socially imposed behavior.[1] Being man or woman is an accident. Gender, according to him, is neither universal nor an essential property of being human. The politics and culture of sexual differentiation is only made possible by the sexual reproduction of human beings. But sexual intercourse is not a human need. It is only a social institution. Allegedly natural and biological sexual drives and needs disappear with the elimination of their reproductive functions through total brahmacharya which then reveals the ontologically pristine and asexual oneness of human beings.[2]

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[1] Here Vinoba seems to echo a cultural determinist like Margaret Mead who observes that differences in the conception of sex roles in various cultures could not be accounted for merely in terms of natural differences between sexes. Male and Female: A Study of the Sexes in a Changing World (New York: New American Library, 1955). (Hereafter referred to as Male).

[2] Compare this with the traditional Christian view attributed to Ambrose according to which the soul itself, escaping the polarity of the sexes, may be seen as either male or female or neither. It is male in relation to the lower activities of man, female in connection with the superior activities of God, though in itself it is beyond the male or the female. See G. Tavard, Women in Christian Tradition (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973), p. 105.

But while the traditional understanding of brahman and brahmacharya stops here (see supra, page 81), Vinoba goes further and claims that the quest for brahman simultaneously fosters in the seeker the qualities of compassion and concern for his fellow beings and the ability and desire to help them grow spiritually. He then promptly fuses this new interpretation of brahman to the teaching of Jesus, 'Love thy neighbor as thyself' to come up with what may be the key tenet of Sarvodaya: Loving one's neighbor is the dharma of each individual because the same spirit animates us all.[1] Female ascetics are best qualified to spread this truth, in his view, because 'as the very incarnation of love and non-violence' they can effectively communicate with both men and women in rural India.

Here Vinoba's point is well taken because in the countryside strange men cannot even look at women, who, particularly in the north, are secluded behind the veil or within the four walls of the home. This severely curtails direct access to a large segment of Indian population. Under the circumstances only the wandering female ascetics would be in a position to bring the message of Sarvodaya right into the

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[1] This is based on the interview that Vinoba gave to Linton (see supra) in September, 1967 when he told her, "Christ taught. . . love thy neighbor as thyself. Love thy neighbor, that is humanity, love thyself stands for spirituality. When giving the mankind this message, Christ bridged the gulf between the two." Quoted in Linton, Fragments, p.48.

heart and hearth of rural India. But it is not clear from Vinoba's writings how the Brahmacharini will divide their time and energies between the quest for brahman and missionary propoganda on behalf of Sarvodaya although he does mention reserving the first week of October every year when Sarvodaya ascetics should blitz the countryside and carry out intense propoganda on Gramdan and Gram-svaraj in selected districts.

Nonetheless the role model of Brahmacharini indicates departure from the tradition in two significant ways. Firstly, though the communities of male ascetics are not unknown in India, the idea of female ascetics banding together is novel. Secondly, the spectacle of wandering ascetics--of any sect or sex--spreading a social message, (in this instance of justice to the landless, the untouchables and women) is unknown to the tradition.

The Model of Griha-devata[1]

Though at heart Vinoba would wish every man and woman to be a life long practitioner of brahmacharya, he is realistic enough and graceful enough to concede that most will eventually choose to marry and raise families. But he is also quick to remind them that the inequality

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[1] This section is based on Vinoba [Bhave], "Social Problems," Women's Power, pp. 35-48.

between the genders posited at the spiritual level is also retained at the conjugal level in the domain of family. A housewife is touted as the incarnation of sympathy, service and self-giving; just as the male is autonomous, self-defining active self. Superior in love and virtue, she is conceived as inferior in ability and will. This secondary status of a married woman, Vinoba believes, is not imposed of necessity by any natural feminine characteristics but rather by environmental forces of education and social tradition under the purposeful control of men.

Vinoba proposes to replace this paradigm of unequal relation between the genders in a conjugal setting in favor of a new one based on the principles of self-autonomy and altruism which also characterizes his general model for the structure of human relations. Conjugal relation, he believes, is a natural social relation because the sentiment of love, like man's sociality, is dependent on reciprocity. The concern, care and support that partners give and expect of each other, therefore, must be grounded in a healthy concern and respect for each self. Partners should not use one another as a means to satisfy the sex drive. Within this framework, Vinoba maintains, a married couple could still keep its vow of brahmacharya if they were to follow the precepts of dharma and lead a morally principled conjugal life.

Following Gandhi (and Manu) as his authorities, Vinoba declares that a conjugal relationship of a man and a woman is as good as celibate if sexual union is restricted for the purpose of procreation; and only when both the partners express a desire to have a child.[1] Sex in his view is a sacred act and marriage a sacrament. There is room in marriage for only the first child as dharmja (born for and according to dharma); all the subsequent issues being kāmyaja (born of lust).[2] Couples, therefore, should strictly follow the guidelines of dharma and serve the conjugal phase of their life as a stepping-stone for the life of brahmacharya.

Vinoba insists that housewives should be spared the drudgery of outside work in which, he believes, they have no real interest. Their outside work is only expected to supplement the perhaps temporarily inadequate savings of their 'providers'. Ideally, women should always be provided for. Vinoba quotes approvingly from the Manusmriti to make his point.

> In childhood a woman should remain under the authority of her father; in youth after her marriage, she should live with her husband, and in old age she should live with her son. Women should not be free.[3]

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[1] M. K. Gandhi, Women and Social Injustice (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1942), p. 101 (Vinoba himself does not provide any references to this work of Gandhi.)

[2] Ibid., p. 104.

[3] Vinoba [Bhave], Women's Power, p. 48.

He insists that when Manu denies freedom to women, he uses that term in a sense different from the one commonly understood today. "Today freedom means independence", he writes, "but in ancient times the word meant the responsibility of earning a living". 'Women should not be free' therefore means women should not be responsible for earning their living".[1]

Notwithstanding his indignation over the unequal and asymmetrical nature of the brahmanical norms of conjugal relationships, Vinoba's alternative role model for the housewife differs little from the traditional one in which women belong in the home and bear heirs--to both property and social position. To be able to keep women within the four walls of home is to Vinoba the sign of high status and economic prosperity of the family. This is unfortunate because it would seem to encourage the process of sanskritization which involves imitation by lower castes of brahmanic lifestyles in order to gain a higher social ranking in the caste hierarchy. But today the Manu-inspired brahmanic ideal of non-working housewife (the goal of emulating low caste families) itself is in a state of flux thanks to the twin challenges of modernization and westernization partly in response to which upper caste women have started accepting jobs that require getting out of homes. Since this phenomenon is of recent origin, emulating low caste families have as their

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[1] Ibid.

ideal not the liberal, modernizing brahmin woman of today but her counterpart of yesterday. The following example will perhaps make the point clearer.[1] A family of telis (caste of oil pressers) made good and built a partly puccā (brick) house. Previously, the women in the family used to help in working the ghāni (oil press) and in vending mustard oil in the streets. But with prosperity, the women members stopped working, took to veil and began staying home. Consequently, the authority of the husband increased while the women of the family were pushed back into the limited female roles. The emulating family acquired a higher social standing in the village but in the process its female members lost some of their freedom and power of decision.

This indicates the serious weakness in Vinoba's model of ideal housewife. Restricted to non-income producing housework, her social status is likely to remain submerged with that of her husband. In remaining self-supporting on the other hand, the working woman can retain her independent status not only economically but socially as well. In a village setting such as envisaged in the Gram-svaraj her labors, no less than her husband's, would contribute directly to the

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[1] Zarina Bhatty, "Muslim Women in Uttar Pradesh: Social Mobility and Directions of Change," in Women in Contemporary India: Traditional Images and Changing Roles, ed. Alfred DeSouza (Delhi: Manohar, 1975), p. 34.

collective village (rather than merely the domestic) welfare. Her social status, therefore, (at least in part) would derive from her own talents and accomplishments, rather than being a reflection of her husband's.

Brahmacharya as a Means of Population Control[1]

Unlike many Indian national political leaders, Vinoba is perturbed by the continuing rapid growth of population in India. He believes that besides being a serious social and economic problem, population growth also poses a moral problem because it is an obvious sign of the constant violation of dharma, which as it was remarked earlier, only sanctions one child. Population growth, to Vinoba, therefore, is of moral concern and population restraint is a moral obligation because neither the future generations nor members of present generation need to tolerate immoral and irresponsible procreation. The ideal of Sarvodaya cannot be created overnight. It will have to be the outcome of a number of generations cooperating. When earlier generations restrain their family size they help establish the material and moral foundations of the Sarvodaya social order. Vinoba appeals to Hindu religious leaders to follow the lead of the Catholic and Jaina churches and encourage

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[1] This section is based on Vinoba [Bhave] , "Family Planning and Women's Power", Women's Power, pp. 89-98.

women to become nuns.[1] This measure, he believes, in addition to providing the Sarvodaya movement with missionaries will also contribute to population control. For the same reasons he is critical of some of the passages of Manusmriti where he detects a pro-natalist stance.[2]

Vinoba argues that there is a direct relation between the low rate of fertility and brahmacharya; all measures that would facilitate the keeping of this vow should therefore be implemented. Movies and most contemporary literature incite passions and should therefore be banned. Vegetarian diet by contrast cools sexual drive and should be promoted. Besides, cultivating grain for the vegetarian's diet entails low inputs of energy. While an acre of land will grow enough grain to feed the vegetarian; it will take four acres to grow the grain for a goat destined for the non-vegetarian's meal. Hard manual labor is to be encouraged because it diverts man's attention away from the thought of sex. Moreover, the harder people work, the more will they produce for the starving millions. Full stomachs in turn will help combat population growth because starvation, he thinks, fuels passions. The progeny of the weak and hungry, in his judgment, tends to be

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[1] Vinoba [Bhave] , Women's Power, p. 5.

[2] He, for instance, argues that Manu's dictum, "The mother of eight sons is fortunate and auspicious" might have had some validity in the past; but today "the conditions are reverse and religious celibacy therefore must become the new ideal". Quoted in Women's Power, p. 92.

impotent and sickly. The question of family planning, he therefore concludes, merits consideration from spiritual, scientific and sociological perspectives.[1]

But he would not sanction artificial methods of birth control because while they may prevent pregnancies; precious vīrya is lost to passion. Sustained loss of vīrya in this manner dilutes a man's energies and thickens his wits. Its accumulation through self-restraint, on the other hand, in addition to reducing the birth rate, will also improve the quality of the off-spring. A diligent couple therefore, cautions Vinoba, should not waste its vīrya--the source of mankind's spiritual, biological and moral strength.[2]

The above account indicates that Vinoba's solution to the population problem is essentially cast from religious and moral perspectives. Culturally, it is grounded in the cult of vīrya. However, it is difficult to accept Vinoba's claim that brahmacharya alone can check population growth in India. At best a certain decline in the rate of fertility can be attributed in some middle class men's favorable inclination towards periods of abstinence for the sake of their physical health and spiritual vigor. But at just what level a declining

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[1] Vinoba [Bhave] , Women's Power, p. 89.

[2] Vinoba adds, "Off-springs increase or decrease by sin or by virtue. The earth is burdened by sins, not numbers. Population growth accompanied by rise in virtue cannot over-burden Mother Earth", Ibid.

average frequency of coitus begins to reduce average fertility rate is not now known because the critical factor here is not mean frequency per week, month or year as maintained by Vinoba, but whether a woman has sexual relations during the fertile 48 hours or so of her menstrual cycle.[1] This suggests the difficulty of making a balanced assessment of Vinoba's ideas on causes of overpopulation and birth control because they express cultural beliefs masquerading as scientific principles. The discrepancies in his propositions derive perhaps from the fact that his main inspiration comes, not from science, but from his ideological convictions. In a sense then, he is a typical representative of that enduring breed in India: a traditionalist, marginally on the fringe of modernity, in search of protective scientific coloration for his ideas. For this reason, though his intentions are laudable, he arrives at strange conclusions. A sudden shift from a moral explanation of overpopulation to a more biologically oriented one taxes his analytical capacity: chronic hunger weakens a man's appetite and by a process of compensation sexual appetite asserts itself proportionally increasing the frequency of sexual relations and therefore the chances of conception. The whole argument has merely a curiosity value. Vinoba ascertains

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[1] The point is elaborated in David Mandelbaum, Human Fertility in India: Social Components and Policy Perspectives (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 65. See also Moni Nag, "Sex, Culture and Fertility: India and United States", Current Anthropology 13 (April 1972): 232.

the co-existence of two independent phenomena and then arbitrarily posits a correlation. There is no scientific evidence that people become sexually stimulated in the first phases of hunger.

His suggestions of raising the age at marriage and reducing the period of co-habitation, on the other hand, appear as one of the few sound policy interventions that might be able to initiate, on a long term basis, a decline in population growth on a major scale in a non-contracepting society like India's. But this raises the important question of providing women with non-familial roles as viable alternative to early marriage. Vinoba wisely settles for education--brahmavidyā. But given his spiritual bent of mind and Vedantic background, he envisages communities of celibate women seeking self-realization in a commune. But a deliberate policy of delayed (or self-denied) marriage would not be a viable means of population control especially in the developing context of India unless institutional structures surrounding marriage behavior are changed so that the incentives are to marry late or never (in the case of Brahmacharini) as desired by Vinoba.

The Model of Gram-devata[1]

The role of Gram-devata is modeled after the village goddess who is propitiated by the villagers whenever a calamity strikes their village. There is nothing particularly striking about Vinoba's ideal housewife and female ascetics were not uncommon in Vedic India; but there are no antecedents in Indian tradition of women running the village Panchayats. According to Vinoba, women are eminently qualified for this task because of their intrinsic non-violent and loving nature. Men have created and perpetuated the world's social structure by resorting to the intrigues of centralized government and orthodox politicking. In this 'garrison state' (to use Lasswell's[2] expression) specialists on violence have become the most powerful group. Modern instruments of warfare (from conventional to nuclear) tend to socialize danger so that the mankind is faced with annihilation. So what can be done? Can the militarized male mind be civilianized? Are there counter-veiling forces? Vinoba's answer is yes. In the age of nuclear science when men have been intoxicated by violence, he suggests, women should serve their mother power to dismantle "the garrison state" and establish the rule of compassion.[3] Though non-violent

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[1] This section is based on Vinoba [Bhave], "Lok niti and Brahmavidya", Women's Power, pp. 65-70.

[2] Lasswell, Political, p. 165.

[3] Vinoba [Bhave] , Women's Power, p. 53.

by nature, women are fearless. Men lack soul force and have therefore armed themselves to the teeth with all kinds of dangerous and destructive weapons. But arms alone cannot instill courage and confidence. The power and force of non-violence is far superior to any arms wielded by men. He therefore invites women to enter politics to put an end to all violence-prone, male-dominated, faction-ridden institutions of orthodox politics (Rajniti) and inaugurate the era of people's politics (Lokniti). He therefore appeals to women to seize control over the Panchayats by winning elections and introduce the rule of peace and harmony in the villages. Both the village goddesses and mothers love all their children equally. For this reason a Gram-devata (a civic leader, that is) will be incapable of engaging in partisan politics. Political parties, Vinoba points out, are built to secure and protect material interests of a 'part', faction of the population. As civic leaders, women will rise above party politics.[1] The happy atmosphere of peace and plenitude that can prevail in a household under the guidance of a Griha-devata, he maintains, can be recreated at the village level by the Gram-devata.[2]

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[1] Vinoba [Bhave], Women's Power, p. 66.

[2] Ibid., p. 61.

As indicated earlier, Hindu cosmology invests femininity with unlimited power. But traditionally, women's energies have been absorbed in looking after their families or eking out a living as agricultural laborers. Under the circumstances, Vinoba's attempt to divert women's power into political channels (albeit unorthodox) for constructive ends in the context of a society which traditionally has been apolitical, is bold and innovative. But it is difficult to agree with his claim that women qua female are innately loving and non-violent and as such better qualified to run the village Panchayats because, implicit in such an argument, is the tenet that sexually appropriate role modeling is a function of pre-cultural sex differences. This runs counter to his earlier claim that sex differences are cultural in origin; that gender is learned and socially imposed behavior.[1] Still, a part of his thesis that women can appreciably affect the political process in India, appears tenable, but on different ground.

It is a well known fact that in India caste plays an important and often decisive role at all levels of the political

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[1] In fairness to Vinoba it has to be pointed out that the nature and the accurate discrimination of male/female differences within their common humanity continues to be a baffling issue in social science and contrastive views have emerged. One, as exemplified in Margaret Mead, Male and designated ethnological holds that masculine/feminine psychological differences are based on inculcated expectancies that differ culturally and are learned. The contrasting view, recently articulated by Melford Spiro is that masculine/feminine sexuality is ethological, that is, based in some manner on given pan-human anatomical differences. See Gender and Culture: Kibbutz Women revisited (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1979).

process. Candidates for political offices are chosen and voted in or thrown out on caste considerations. Caste interests dictate political patronage and the pork barrel. But the caste system seems to operate from the male perspective. The relationship between caste and female gender by contrast is ambiguous and remains undefined. A woman does not have an independent caste identity. If she marries outside her caste she acquires the caste of her husband. This might indicate that unlike the man's, woman's commitment to caste may not be absolute and caste might not be a crucial factor in shaping her character, behavior and attitudes. Politically, this would imply that women as voters, if given the freedom to vote according to their conscience and preference, will not necessarily, like their male kins, cast their ballots, en bloc, along caste lines. Secondly, as political candidates they might attract votes across caste lines. And finally, in the event of a deadlock, women candidates might make a more acceptable compromise choice. Such developments can significantly contribute to the political activation of women as well as to the democratization of the political process. Vinoba would gladly endorse these welcome changes since sexual equality and a higher social status for women requires the abolition of sex role differentiation in the polity no less than in the domain in spirituality.

The Myth of Śakti: An Appraisal

Given the fact that the theme of Śakti is a very powerful myth in Hindu tradition--brahmanic and popular, Vinoba like Gandhi shows good judgment and strategy in wishing to press it into service to secure justice and a higher socio-legal status for women in India. He expects them to recognize their own potential and manipulate it for a good cause--Sarvodaya. But compared to his achievements in procuring land to the landless, his success in improving the lot of Indian women has been minimal. The role models he constructs for them appear to be too idealistic and too theoretically worked out. As a brahmachāri who, at the age of fifteen, broke all bonds with family life and women; Vinoba betrays lack of contact and direct insight into the actual conditions and problems of contemporary Indian women. His ideas and visions about women, therefore, are based upon literary and religious sources mostly of brahmanic provenance. This is clearly discernible in his models of Brahmacharini and Griha-devata.

His "myths' of Bhoodan-yajna and Gram-svaraj lead us to believe that the ideal Sarvodaya community would be a populist, rural based farm economy where men and women would a) learn once again to identify with nature, b) become physically productive and c) discard the superficial and corrupting culture of urban life. Now women will be expected to contribute to agricultural operations in such a community

(as indeed they do today on farms) through food processing and gathering in dry, cereal agriculture cultivation in the north or through water control and transplanting and weeding in wet rice cultivation in the east and south. The cost of withdrawing them from agricultural labor force as Vinoba's model of Griha-devata demands would be substantial and inconsistent with the fundamental spirit of Sarvodaya.

To conclude then, a serious weakness of the Myth of Śakti is that it is based on an incorrect understanding of the images and conditions of women (women agricultural laborers in particular) in contemporary India, their problems and their aspirations. Perhaps in fairness to Vinoba one might recognize that the image of women in any particular tradition and religion is far from being static and uniform. More often than not it incorporates within itself several aspects, possibly exclusive of each other. In India, for example, the original liberal Vedic stance toward women underwent significant changes under the influence of Buddhist and Jain patterns of thought and behavior. As a result, women found their rights to education and asceticism severely restricted as part of brahmanic reaction to heretic teachings.[1] Later, during the medieval period, Islamic conquests introduced an element of seclusion in their lives and today modernization and westernization are poised to bring about more changes in their destiny though precise

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[1] A. S. Altekar, The Position of Women in Hindu Civilisation, 3rd ed., (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1962), p. 210.

direction and consequences of these changes cannot be predicted. The image that the Indian woman has of herself, thus, is not simply the production of her own observation and thought. It is strongly influenced by the received brahmanic and ruling ideologies. A critical attitude toward this kind of image of woman's nature as it emerges in the Myth of Śakti is only the preliminary though necessary phase of building a new self-consciousness. But the traditional ideology has penetrated much deeper than the level of overt consciousness. A woman, for example, may <u>know</u> that passivity is not her true nature, and still <u>feel</u> blocked when desiring to take the initiative. The de-internalization of the projected ideological image of women both at the level of beliefs and at the level of unconscious drives and habits is a necessary clearing-ground for changing the status of women. The Myth of Śakti seems unable to adequately perform such a task.

CHAPTER V

Conclusion

The study of Vinoba's thoughts on Sarvodaya undertaken above reveals an ambivalent attitude towards tradition and modernity, continuity and change and relationship between genders. Though such ambivalence does indicate lack of integration in his thinking, it is not altogether detrimental to his thought. In a society readjusting old patterns of life with new ones, it could be a sign of continued growth and development; and the Myth of Sarvodaya, an ongoing experiment, may be understood from that perspective.

Vinoba sincerely believes that Vedanta metaphysics can provide a spiritual and ideological foundation for Sarvodaya and its brand of socialism, a "beautiful" ideal in twentieth century India. It was so for Gandhi who wrote:

> Socialism is a beautiful word, and so far as I am aware, in socialism, all the members of society are equal--none low, none high.[1]

But paradoxically, Sarvodaya concern for social equality stems from its doctrine of non-violence. Equality per se has no ideological value in Vinoba's Samya-yoga. Inequality is conceived as a violent consequence of exploitation. If

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[1] Quoted in Bondurant and Fisher, Indian, p. 35.

inequality is evil, it is because it engenders violence. Similarly Vedantic statements of unity and equality of all do not refer to the empirical 'individuals' who vote in the elections. They allude to the transcendental unity of the human self and brahman.

Vinoba preaches that one should love his neighbor because of the identity of brahman in oneself and in one's neighbor and quotes Christ to that effect (see supra, chapter 4, p. 87). But he does not account for the distinctiveness of self and neighbor in the first place. In order to express love, as Fromm has pointed out, one must experience separateness.[1] Community is possible only if each person has a being or substance of his own because community presupposes differentiation. If it is argued, as Vinoba does, that I should love my neighbor because of our supreme spiritual identity wherein I thereby serve myself, it could equally be said that in serving myself I am serving my neighbor. If we are already one in brahman--then all empirical differentiation and injustices are trivial, and correcting these becomes a distraction from what Vinoba believes should be our main goal in life--realization of brahman.[2]

If Vinoba has been less convincing in his attempt to provide socialism with a rationale grounded in the metaphysics

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[1] Cited in Austin Creel, Dharma in Hindu Ethics (Calcutta: HLM Firma, 1977), p. 98.

[2] Ibid., p. 99.

of Vedanta, he fares better at giving socialism a distinctly populist and agrarian orientation. Intellectual socialists like Nehru by contrast were more interested in promoting political and economic socialism and showed no particular enthusiasm or aptitude in resymbolizing socialism into a dynamic and compelling vocabulary for the benefit of Indian peasants. They kept using alien terms devoid of meaning in rural setting: bourgeois, class, capitalism. Expressions such as 'scientific socialism' and 'participatory democracy' were bandied about in communites where jajamān, jāti, dharma and karma are potent symbols. In comparison, Vinoba's coining of the expression such as Bhoodan-yajna to communicate the sense of equitable sharing in a communal setting appears more appropriate and meaningful. The Sarvodaya version of socialism as promoted by Vinoba is also not merely about redistribution; it is also about human relationships. The right distribution is necessary to and made possible by the right relationships in the areas of polity and family but it is morally of subordinate importance. Another important feature of 'Sarvodaya socialism', very relevant in the Indian context, may also be noted: The emphasis on family-labor based peasant agriculture as the main institutional framework of agricultural and social transformation in India.

Nevertheless Vinoba's choice of symbols and myths as agents of social change is not without its problems because the two can equally well serve as a basis for legitimizing the

status quo. As bearers of meaning, myths and symbols may invoke a call for change on the part of a particular group. However, inasmuch as meanings are decided upon by particular groups, one has in this process of decision the source of group conflict. The group which has opted for a particular meaning of a myth and has projected itself towards the realization of claims put forth therein, will necessarily be in conflict with the group which deliberately rejects those claims in favor of an alternative set of meanings. This suggests, as pointed out in the first chapter, the closeness of relationship between myth and ideology. Any ideology, it would seem, is composed of a series of primary symbols incorporating an incipient hermeneutics of those symbols. The same symbols of dāna-yajña which brought groups of landlords and the landless in one community together in a common cause, presented the same two classes in another community with differing interpretations of experience allowing thereby different levels of interpretation. This is evident in the contradictory nature of charges brought against Vinoba and the Bhoodan movement. Many landless for instance have accused Vinoba of giving a new lease on life to the landlords by asking from them only one-sixth of their holdings and by insisting upon the non-violent and voluntary nature of property transfer. Vinoba, it has been argued, only helps perpetuate landlordism--an anachronism in the era of socialism. Many landlords, on their part, have reproached Vinoba for

inciting the spirit of revolt in the people by promising land to all.[1]

In the ideal village of Vinoba's dream each family would self-cultivate five acres of farm land. But in holding that dream Vinoba does not take into account why cultivation through tenants, sharecroppers and hired labor is so widespread in India in the first place. There is no attempt to understand the existing differences in the mode of productive organization of agriculture which have been attributed to varying pressures of population on the land and to the availability of surplus labor and the wage structure.[2]

Alternative explanations could be found in the caste structure. Self-cultivation appears to be more prevalent in areas where peasant castes are dominant. Further, whether or not the members of a community are self-cultivators would depend at least in part on the region involved. The operations in wet paddy cultivation on the whole are more arduous than those in wheat cultivation. It is no accident, therefore, that in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, even small proprietors owning less than five acres of land often have it cultivated by others. In the Punjab and Haryana, on the other hand, self-cultivation is common even among those who own ten

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[1] Vinoba has pleaded guilty to both these charges. See Bhoodan, p. 63 for more details.

[2] André Beteille, Caste, Class and Power: Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), p. 29.

or fifteen acres of land. This indicates the degree of disincentives involved in instituting a uniform, homogenous and standardized socio-political organization centered around self-cultivating agrarian communities--Gram-svarajs--as envisaged by Vinoba.

If the Myth of Bhoodan-yajna has produced tangible results in the intended direction of agrarian and social change and the Myth of Gram-svaraj reveals important insights of a theoretical nature; Vinoba's Myth of Śakti rates rather poorly on both these counts. It is ill-conceived and its components are either too utopian (women's rule at local level, gynocentrism) or too traditional (women as dutiful wives) to contribute in any significant way to social change and renewed relationship between genders. In many ways the Myth of Śakti seems to build a life on rejecting the aggressive, 'masculine' aspect of the human potential, accepting instead, the peaceful, adaptive aspect, associated in most contemporary societies with the culture of women. Earlier it was pointed out that both self-identity and distinction from other selves are necessary for love and community spirit to develop between people. The same could be said with respect to interaction between genders. To insist, as Vinoba does, that there are no fundamental sex differences in a society that has always believed in them and depended upon them is a futile attempt at standardizing and homogenizing personality; perhaps as futile as his attempt to

standardize village social organization in the ideal of Gram-svaraj. The belief of Gandhi and Vinoba that women are naturally more interested and inclined towards peace also appears to be artificial; part of the universal feminine myth that considers women to be more loving and gentler than men.

The cogency of Vinoba's analysis of contemporary Indian society, therefore, is to be found not in the utopian solutions he provides to the problems of landlessness, poverty and social injustice; not in his myths of social reconstruction but in his faith and conviction that people--untutored, powerless rural people are a country's greatest resource. They will remain a latent force, however, until they are stirred into action by dedicated volunteers like the Lok sevakas who can show them how to gain control of their destiny at a local level.

While liberals tend to dismiss Sarvodaya as 'muddled utopianism';[1] communists charge it with diffusing political action by 'co-opting' a potential revolutionary populace away from radical structural solutions. The argument is based on the widespread assumption that the oppressed are eager to alter their lot. But as the study of Barrington Moore[2] has shown, social oppression deeply brands passivity into the

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[1] This is the impression one gets after reading Dey, Panchayati-raj.

[2] Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt (White Plains, N.Y.: E. M. Sharpe. Distributed by Pantheon Books, 1978).

psyche of the disadvantaged. Even as they complain and suffer, the poor fear to behave differently. The only truly radical solutions, under the circumstances, are those which the people themselves can undertake and those which produce effects they can tolerate. Unfortunately, Naxalite-like[1] attacks on landlords only bring reprisals down upon helpless peasants while Maoist ideological programs and literature simply alienate them given the fact that traditional values continue to be the vital source of identity and meaning to the villagers. Consequently, although it is true that the value structure of the masses needs to be reoriented, it has to be brought about by indigenous experiments rooted in traditional lore along lines suggested by Vinoba.

Naxalites, who are afraid Vinoba's revolution does not go far enough fail to see how radical his emphasis on social attitudes really is. They assume that within the context of extreme problems extremist solutions must prevail, not realizing such tactics merely postpone the time when the serious work of dealing with individual's attitude toward social change must be taken up. This requires effective means of communication. In order to communicate with Indian rural masses, the communicating agent, may he be in the

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[1] Maoist guerilla movement which murders landlords and grabs their lands. Formed in West Bengal in the 1960's, the movement today is badly splintered. Some of its factions, however, are still active in districts of Bihar, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh.

capacity of an observer, consultant or leader, must be cast in an appropriate role. In Indian village society there are only limited possibilities of positively defining the role of an outsider who wishes to visit it periodically or stay for a short period in order to interact with the villagers. The sādhu, wandering ascetic, is one such person who fits well into this role. Vinoba correctly chose this role for himself and for the Lok sevaks. The role of Brahmacharini that he has tried to promote among Indian women also appears to be appropriate for such a purpose. For this reason India today can very well profit from a movement like Sarvodaya which has gained a certain expertise in the technique of communicating with the villagers in a period when the absence of mass communications is a major handicap to government inspired and guided planned development.

The Sarvodaya theory of social organization as can be discerned from the Myth of Sarvodaya also entails an important critique of the romantic theory of revolution--the belief that a revolution which breaks decisively with the past will automatically promote a new social era. Instead Vinoba argues that building up the institutions of a new society is a long term process, which must be started here and now.[1] A revolution

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[1] Speaking at the 1957 annual Sarvodaya conference Vinoba remarked, Sat-Yuga (age of truth) existed once upon a time. Those who hold to this view are Puran-vadis (worshippers of the past). And those who believe that Sat-Yuga would be established at a later date are communists. They are Bhavishya Sat-Yugavadis (worshippers of the future). But I say that both the past and the future are beyond our control. Only the . .

which cannot build on creative tendencies and institutional forms already in existence is likely to become increasingly destructive, and resurrect coercive centralized power. Like Landauer[1] what Vinoba seems to have in mind is a revolutionary conservatism: a 'revolutionary' selection of those elements worthy to be conserved and fit for the renovation of the rural social life. Only on the basis of such an interpretation can one understand Vinoba's claim of a 'revolutionary Sarvodaya'. Its arguments for social revolution bear no resemblance to political revolution. Real transformation of society in his view can only come through apolitical means--through love, persuasion and education. In its positive conclusion then, the Myth of Sarvodaya according to Vinoba is a plea for a renewal and deepening of the cooperative movement with its drive towards the re-establishment of social relationships and the emergence of new congeries of self-contained villages.

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[1] . . .present is in our hands and we must therefore endeavour to bring Sat-Yuga in the present. We of Sarvodaya are Vartman Sat-Yugakaris (soldiers trying to build a state-free society in the present.) See the speech reproduced in Ram, Mission, p. 200.

[1] Charles Maurer, Call to Revolution: Mystical Anarchism of Gustave Landauer (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1971).

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