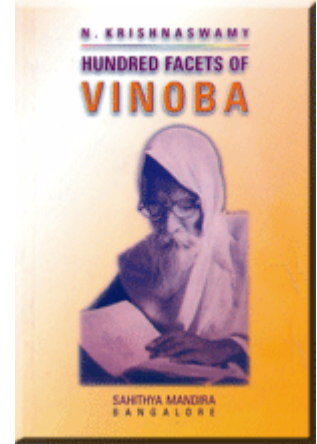


# Hundred Facets of VINOBA

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## PREFACE

I am glad that "*Hundred Facets of Vinoba*" (HFOV) is in your hands at last. It is a simple biography of Vinoba in 108 anecdotes.

Apart from *Moved by Love* (MBL) by Marjorie Sykes, there is no other biography of Vinoba at present. MBL is an English version of the Hindi book by Sister Kalindi of Brahma Vidya Mandir (BVM) of Paunar, Wardha. MBL is most authentic since it is in Vinoba's own words, as he spoke of his life on different occasions. But one drawback of MBL is that it is silent on some crucial aspects of Vinoba's remarkable life. HFOV attempts to be more comprehensive. I have borrowed heavily from MBL, particularly about Vinoba's childhood.

In 1994, I wrote a book *Gandhiji-125* in Kannada to celebrate the 125th birthday of Bapu. Karnataka Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi published this book, it was sold out within four years. It was then in 1995 that I had this desire to publish a similar anecdotal biography of Vinoba. I could not do it then.

I told Jayadev Bhai of my plans for such a book.

I knew Jayadev Bhai as Jayasimha Rao in our Gandhi Sahitya Sangha in Bangalore during the forties when both of us were students. As a young man Jayanna, who was older than me by five years, went to Wardha to get training in Basic Education. But when Bhoodan Yatra developed into a mighty movement, Jayanna left everything else, like many other Sarvodaya workers to join the Bhoodan March.

He came close to Vinoba and became his personal assistant and stayed with him for the rest of his life. Jayasimha's name was now changed as Jayadev. He followed Vinoba in every way, was moulded by Vinoba in every way. He missed the funeral rites of his dear mother even, like a sanyasi. After the passing of the master also, Jayadev continued in his footsteps and lived a life of dedication, renunciation and service in Paunar. He was an elder brother to the sisters of Brahma Vidya Mandir.

When I wrote to Jayadev of my plans to write this book he encouraged me in all possible ways. He gave me advance copies of pages of MBL. He went through my manuscript, helped in editing the DTP version of the book. He suggested that I should drop some chapters that I had written and suggested other chapters and provided me with the material for the same. He showed the proofs of the book to several friends and gave me feedback information which helped me to recast some material. In a way Jayadev is as much responsible for this book as I. I have heard that he worked with the same zeal in the preparation of *Moved by Love* also. It is a great pity that he is not with us when *Hundred Facets* is being published. I happily acknowledge my indebtedness to Jayadev Bhai, to the sisters and brother Goutam of Brahma Vidya Mandir for their help in publishing the book.

I am grateful to Sri H.S. Doreswamy for agreeing to publish the book in his Sahitya Mandira. I must thank my young friend Manjula for the DTP work of the book, which she did single handed tolerating my tantrums cheerfully, and Sri B.R. Satyakumar the printer and my brother Ganesh for helping me with the proofs. My thanks are due M.B.S. Prakash for preparing the manuscript for DTP.

The wonderful book on Vinoba, by sisters Kalindi and Marjorie Sykes; *Moved by Love*, Vinoba's *Collected Works*, the pages of *Maitri* and Sri Krishna Datta Bhat's book, *and they Gave up Dacoity* have provided me with much of the material in *Hundred Facets*. I am most grateful to these and other sources.

Four brothers of the sarvodaya family whose names are found in this book are no longer with us. The first to go was B. Narayanappa (22 April 2000), K.S. Narayanaswamy (83) died on 23 Dec. 2000. Jaya Dev Bhai (80) died on 12 Mar. 2001 and Sita Saran Sharma (73) on 5 July 2001. I feel their absence keenly as the book goes to the press.

- N. Krishnaswamy

Bangalore

August 2001

## MILESTONES IN VINOBA'S LIFE

- 1895 Vinoba's birth in Gagode, District: Kolaba, (Now Raigadh),  
Maharashtra, 11<sup>th</sup> September.
- 1903 Study of Jnaneswari of Jnan Dev.
- 1905 Vows of Bramacharya and Service to Humanity.
- 1907 School in Baroda (Now Vadodra).
- 1913 Matriculation Exam Passed.
- 1916 Leaves Home - Goes to Varanasi, 25th March.  
Joins Gandhiji in Kochrab Ashram, 7th June.
- 1918 Death of Mother Rukmini Bai, 24th October.
- 1918-19 Scriptural Studies in Wai.
- 1921 Vinoba sets up Satyagraha Ashram in Wardha in Jamnalal Bajaj Estate,  
8th April.
- 1923 Establish and edit Monthly, *Maharashtra Dharma*.  
Nagpur Flag Satyagraha, Jail - April-Sept.
- 1924 Building for Satyagraha Ashram, Wardha
- Mahila Ashram for women.
  - Vaikom Satyagraha in Kerala.
  - Visits Delhi when Gandhiji Fasts for 21 days.
- 1928 Kanya Shala, Girls' School in Wardha.
- 1931 *Gitai*, 6th February.
- 1932 Dhulia Jail. *Gita Pravachana*, 7th January - 14th July.  
Nalwadi Ashram, 25th December.
- 1934 Grama Seva Mandal.
- 1935 Commence Study of Kuran Sharif.
- 1936 Leprosy Hospital, Dattapura, Wardha. Pioneer work among lepers by Indians.  
- Gandhiji's Sevagram Ashram, Wardha.

- 1938 Goes to Paunar, to improve health.
- 1940 First Satyagrahi, Individual Satyagraha, Lecture in Paunar, 17th October.  
Jail for 2 Months.
- 1941 Release. Another Lecture, Jail for 6 Months, 24th January.  
- Lecture in Nalwadi, Jail again, 24th July.  
- Release of all Prisoners on 3rd Dec.
- 1942 Quit India Resolution, Bombay AICC, 8th August.  
- Vinoba Arrested in Paunar.  
- Wardha Jail.  
- Vellore Jail, Tamil Nadu - Study 4 Southern Languages.
- 1943 Transfer to Jail in Sivani, M.P. Talks on Sthita Prajna Darsana in Jail. 9th Jul.
- 1945 Release from Sivani,
- 1946 Bhangi (Scavenger) work in Sargaon, 1946-January 1948.
- 1947 Death of Father, Narhari Shambhu Rao Bhawe, 29th October.
- 1948 Gandhiji's Martyrdom, 30th January. Mourning meeting in Sevagram.  
- Constructive Workers' Conference, Sevagram, 13, 14,15th March.  
Establish Sarvodaya Samaj.  
- Leave for Delhi, Invited by Nehru, Work for Refugees.  
- Ajmer - Vinoba Speaks in Khaja Saheb Darga, 14th April.
- 1949 Edits a New Magazine *Sarvodaya*, in Hindi.
- 1950 Kanchana Mukti Prayoga- Freedom From Money Paunar.
- 1951 Sarvodaya Conference, Shivaramapalli, 8-11th April.  
- Pochampalli, Birth of Bhoodan, 18th April  
- Meets Planning Commission and Nehru. Delhi, 13-23rd November  
- Bhoodan Tour of U.P. Start Walking, 24th November.
- 1952 Enter Bihar. Sampatti Dan, Wealth Donations, 12th September.
- 1953 Baidya Nath Temple. Beaten by Priests. Deafness - 19th December.
- 1955 Enter Bengal, 1st January.

- Enter Orissa, 14th March.
- Puri Jagannath, French Woman Barred from Temple. Vinoba also Returns without Darsan, 21st March.
- 1956 Pochampalli Again.  
- Tamil Nadu, 13th May.
- 1957 Enter Kerala. 18th April. Kaladi 10-12th May.  
Enter Karnataka, 24th August.  
Elawal Conference, Mysore. 21-22 September.  
Jai Jagat Slogan, in Kadaba, Tumkur District.
- 1958 Enter Maharashtra, 23rd March.  
- Pandhar Pur Temple, with all people, 29th May.  
- Enter Gujarat-22nd September
- 1959 Enter Rajasthan, 15th January.  
- Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir. 22nd May.
- 1960 Bhind in Chambal Valley. 19 Dacoits Surrender. 19th May.
- 1961 Assam Padayatra, 5th March.
- 1962 Walk in East Pakistan (now Bangla Desh), 5-25th September.
- 1963 Calcutta, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh.
- 1964 Back to Paunar, Brahma Vidya Mandir.  
- After 13 Years, 3 Months and 3 Days 10th April.
- 1965 Go to Bihar, by car. Bihar, 1965-1969 November.
- 1966 Give up Correspondence and Daily Speeches.
- 1968 *Acharyakul. 8th March.*
- 1969 Sevagram 3rd November.  
- Vinoba, Gafar Khan, Jai Prakash Statement, 8th November.
- 1970 Paunar, 7th June.  
- 75th Birthday of Vinoba.  
- *Kshetra Sanyas, Decision Not to Leave Paunar, 7th October.*

- 1974 Vinoba Disagrees with JP about his Movement. Majority of Sarvodaya Workers with JP. Minority with Vinoba.  
- One Year's *Mauna* (Silence) 25th Dec.; upto 25th Dec. 1975.
- 1982 Vinoba dies, 15th November.

## 01. VINOBA'S TRINITY

Vinoba was born on 11 September, in 1895. Narhar Shambu Rao Bhave was his father. His grand father's name was Shambhu Rao Bhave. Vinoba had two younger brothers, Shivaji and Balkobaji (Balkrishna).

Vinoba spent his childhood in his ancestral home in village Gagode, where he was born. This village is in the Konkan region of Maharashtra, in Colaba District - now Raigad District.

When Vinoba was ten, the family left the village to live with Narhar Rao, who worked as a Chemist in Baroda (Gujarat).

Vinoba loved his mother dearly. She was a great influence in his life. When he returned to visit Gagode for four days in 1935, he often remembered his mother.

*Bhagawad Gita*, mother and takli were his trinity. *Bhagawad Gita* gave him his philosophy of life. Mother trained him to live a life of simplicity, austerity and devotion. Takli gave him the means of producing cloth-creating wealth. Takli is a simple spinning spindle with a hook at the top and a small disc at the bottom, which acts like a fly wheel. Takli is used to convert cotton into yarn.



## 2. VINOBA'S FATHER

Vinoba's father was Narhar Shambu Rao Bhave. He was a self-reliant man of scientific temper. When he suffered from diabetes, he experimented and found out the combination of food which helped bring down the disease without use of drugs. Similarly, he found out that Karela (bitter gourd) was good for his piles and used it regularly.

He was delighted when the first Textile Mill came up in Baroda. As a Chemist, he experimented with dyes for cloth.

But he was equally enchanted by the village industries and the experiments of Gandhi and Kumarappa in Maganwadi.

One day he wrote a letter to Vinoba in which he said, "Everything about this letter is my own handiwork. I made this paper, I made the ink, I made the pen I am using and I am writing with my own hand."

Narhar Rao was extremely strict. He had decided to play Chess with a friend for half an hour in the evening daily. When the half an hour was over, he would just walk away, whatever was the condition of the game. "We can finish tomorrow, leave the board as it is and we can start from wherever we left off." He would not change his rules.

### 3. MOTHER'S DEVOTION

Vinoba says, "If I weighed all I learned from many great men and from many great books against the practical devotion that I learned from my mother, the mother's devotion would be far heavier than the other learning."

Mother would seat herself before the Lord after serving food to everyone in the house. She would worship the God and pray "Oh Lord of the boundless Universes, forgive me my faults," while tears filled her eyes and rolled down her cheeks. This happened every day. She took her food only after the worship.

In the midst of all her household work, her mind dwelt on the Lord all the time. She would sing hymns to the Lord all the time, while engaged in different work. She had a sweet voice and was absorbed in her song as she sang. She knew so many songs. She sang a different song every day for six months without repeating the same song. Her songs were in Marathi as well as in Kannada.

#### 4. BRAHMACHARYA

As a child Vinoba was full of day-dreams. He used to dream of brahmacharya, so he gave up sleeping on mattress, wearing shoes and so on. One day his mother remarked, "Vinya, you do a lot of playing at asceticism; if only I were a man I would show you what real asceticism is." The fact is that she felt the slavery of womanhood, even though in Vinoba's home his father gave everyone their full freedom. Her three sons all became brahmacharis. "Vinya", she would say, "A virtuous life of a householder brings salvation to one generation, but life of brahmacharye at its highest brings salvation to forty-two generations!"

When she was thirty-six years old, at her earnest desire, she and Vinoba's father took a vow of celibacy, as his father told him after she had died.

## 5. ALMS TO THE BEGGAR

Vinoba's mother would never allow any beggar to go away empty handed when he came to their home.

One day a well-built, healthy beggar came begging to their door. Vinoba's mother gave him alms.

Vinya protested, "Mother, that man looks perfectly fit. To give to such people is simply to encourage laziness. Those who give to such undeserving are not doing a good turn. Does not the *Gita* tell us that the only good gift is the one given at the proper time to a proper person?"

Mother replied, "Vinya, who are we to judge who is worthy and who is unworthy? All we can do is to regard every one who comes to the door as God and offer him what is in our power. Who am I to judge him?"

Vinoba had no answer to that!

## 6. EAT LESS, LIVE LONGER

Vinoba's parents wanted their children to learn good conduct. They did not like children to leave food uneaten on their plates. "Take a little food less than what you need. That is good for health," they told the children.

The mother would tell them, "God has decreed that each person should eat a certain definite amount of food in his life time. If he finished eating it earlier, he dies earlier. If he ate less each day, he took longer to finish the total food allotted to him, so he lives longer!"

The father would tell them, "You enjoy the food by the tongue. So keep the food on the tongue for a long time. Chew the food well. Do not gulp your food down the throat." That way, one ate less.

So father appealed to reason and mother to wisdom; it is good to keep a bit of science and a lot of Upanishadic wisdom with you!

## 7. 100,000 GRAINS OF RICE

Once, Vinoba's mother resolved to offer a hundred thousand grains of rice to the Lord. Daily she would take a handful of rice and count the number of grains in it. She would offer it to the Lord, a grain at a time and kept count of that.

Vinoba's father told her, why don't you weigh the grains - then if you found the grains present in a tola of rice by counting, you could easily calculate the number of grains present in one handful of rice. Why take the trouble of counting? She asked Vinoba later if that would be right - Vinoba told her, no, that would not be right. When you count the grains of rice one by one, your mind is dwelling on the Lord all the time. It is not a matter of arithmetic and calculation.

Mother liked Vinoba's idea and told her husband about it and continued her practice of counting grains of rice.

She had great regard for young Vinoba's wisdom even when he was a boy.

## 8. MOTHER'S SERVICE TO NEIGHBOURS

If any women in the neighbourhood fell ill, Vinoba's mother would go to their house and cook for the neighbour's family. She finished cooking for her own home first and then she went on to cook at the neighbour's home.

One day, Vinoba told his mother "You are selfish. Why don't you cook for them first and then do our cooking?"

She told him "It is not like that. If I cook their food first, it would get cold by the time they ate it. Now it is hot and fresh for them. It is a little cold and old in our house. That is not being selfish, it is unselfish."

## 9. GOD THE PHYSICIAN

As a child, Vinoba was often sick. His mother made him recite a *sanskrit sloka* while taking the medicine.

One day Vinoba asked his mother what it meant.

She told him, " Look upon the Doctor as God and upon the medicine as Ganges Water."

Vinoba said, "Might it not equally well mean that God is the true healer and Ganges water is the real medicine?"

Mother said "Yes, that is also correct, in the prevention, but one has to be fit for it. For the present, you had better look upon the Doctor as God".

There is truth in both interpretations of the verse.



## 10. VINOBA'S BEATINGS

Vinoba's father believed that a regular beating was good for his son. He found some excuse or the other to give a beating to Vinoba every day.

Vinoba liked to roam the streets of Baroda. He may return home late in the evening. He might not have put his book in its proper place. He might not have folded his clothes properly. There was always some reason for a beating.

Unexpectedly, one day, the beatings stopped. In the night, father just went to bed - no summons for Vinoba.

Later, Vinoba read in *Sanskrit* - "After your son becomes sixteen, he should be treated as a friend."

Vinoba realised that he had become sixteen when his father stopped beating him.

His father did everything very systematically. There was a reason for everything he did !

## 11. IN BARODA LIBRARY

The Central Library of Baroda was then considered one of the best libraries in India. During my vacations, after I had my meal, I would spend the afternoon there. Two or three hours would go by very pleasantly, and the librarian would kindly help me to find the books I wanted. During the hot weather I would take off my shirt and sit reading stripped to the waist, until one day one of the attendants objected that my dress was not 'decent', I ought to have the sense to dress properly, he said. I told him that I dressed by the common sense God had given me, and turned back to my reading, in which I was soon absorbed.

But a complaint reached the director that a student was sitting in the reading room without a shirt and was refusing to listen to the staff. The Director was an Englishman; his office was on the third floor and he summoned me there. I found him 'correctly' dressed in shirt and trousers – but he had a fan over his head. He kept me standing before him (as the English usually did in those days) but as he was older than me, I did not find it humiliating. But then he pointed to my naked torso.

"Why this?" He asked. 'Don't you know what good manners mean?'

"Certainly I do" I replied, "Good manners of my own country."

"And what is that" he asked.

"In this country' I said, "we don't think it's good manners for one man to remain seated and keep another man standing".

He was very pleased that a mere lad like me should have answered so boldly. He at once gave me a chair, and I explained that in India it is no breach of good manners to go naked to the waist in the hot weather. This he accepted, and went on to ask me about my studies and then told the librarian to give me whatever help I needed in finding books.

– *Vinoba*

## 12. I WANT THE NEW MOON

On New Moon Day, there would be no moon, only stars in the sky.

I would rather have the moon of the new moon day, than the full moon.

For the full moon, in her arrogance, blots out the light of the stars in the sky.

Whereas on the new moon day in the night even the faintest star shines forth for all it is worth.

– *Vinoba*

### 13. GITAI - I

It was in 1915 or thereabouts, in Baroda.

A man was giving talks on the *Gita*. Vinoba's mother would go to listen to his discourse. After a day or two she came and said – "Vinya, I can't follow what he says, can you please get me a copy of the *Gita* in Marathi?" I did so, but when she opened it and saw that it was in prose, she asked for a verse translation instead; probably she found the verse easier to read. I found one and brought it to her. But in a few days she said, it was too difficult, she couldn't understand it. "What's to be done?" I asked, "There is no simpler translation." Her answer came like a shot. "Why shouldn't you make a simple translation for me? You could do it."

Vinoba did in later years. Unfortunately his mother was not alive at that time. Vinoba called the book *Gitai* – *Gita-Mother*. Vinoba says - it was Mother's faith in me which made me write my (Marathi) *Gitai!* *Gitai* is very popular in Maharashtra.

When Gandhiji saw this book, he liked this translation very much and introduced Marathi *Gitai* instead of *sanskrit Gita* in *Ashram Prayers*.

#### 14. NO USE FOR SCHOOL CERTIFICATES

One day, when Vinoba's mother Rukmini Bai was busy cooking, he came there and put a roll of papers in the kitchen-fire to burn.

Mother - "Vinoba, what are you doing?"

Vinoba - "I am burning my school and college certificates."

Mother - "Why? They would be of use some day later in life. What harm is there in keeping them?"

Vinoba - " No. They are of no use to me. I shall never take any salaried job."

The certificates were all burnt down to ashes.

Vinoba never regretted his action.

## 15. LEAVING HOME

Vinoba was travelling from Baroda to Bombay with his friend Gopal Rao Kale. They were both going to appear for the Intermediate Examination, which was the entrance to the degree course.

In Surat, en route, Vinoba got off the train. He gave a letter to Gopal, and said, "Post this letter after all the exams are over." The letter was addressed to Vinoba's father. He had informed his father that he was not going to Bombay to give his exams. "I am going somewhere else. Wherever I go, I am sure that you have the confidence that I shall never do anything immoral or unethical." This was on 25, March 1916.

Vinoba went to Kashi. But he did not tell his friend where he was going.

When his father, Narahari Rao, received Vinoba's letter, he was not worried. He felt that the boy would return home when faced with troubles. But mother Rukmini knew Vinoba better. She felt that "Vinoba would follow his ideal whatever be the troubles."

## 16. VINOBA IN KASHI

Every evening I spent an hour by the side of the Ganga. Sometimes I composed poems which I then consigned to the river. Sometimes I sat in meditation or in deep thought, sometimes I listened to the debates between the pandits which took place daily at the riverside.

One day there was a debate between the advocates of *advaita* (non-duality) and those of *dvaita* (duality). The *advaita* party was declared victor. I stood up. "Mr. President," I said, "I want to say something." The president saw that I was a mere boy, but gave me permission to speak. "Sirs," I said, "What you have witnessed is the defeat of *advaita*, not its victory."

This contradiction of the judgement startled them, but I went on: "How can anyone who really believes in *advaita* enter into debate at all? Those who involve themselves in such arguments have lost their case from the start. It is not possible to have an argument at all without recognizing the principle of duality."

So I said my say and left.

— *Vinoba*

## 17. GANDHIJI'S BENARES ADDRESS

Even before he left Baroda, in February 1916 Vinoba read news-paper reports of Gandhiji's talk in Benares Hindu University. It was in Foundation-stone-laying ceremony of the Benares Hindu University being organised by Madan Mohan Malaviya.

Mrs. Annie Besant, President of the International Theosophical Society, presided over the function. The Viceroy of India, Lord Hardinge was the Chief Guest. Many kings and top bureaucrats and statesmen of India were present.

The hero of South Africa, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was also present by invitation.

The President asked Gandhiji to say a few words on the occasion. Gandhiji criticised the extravagance of the Government. He criticised the kings who were there, sitting like dressed up dolls, bedecked in fine jewels with gold, diamond and pearls. He said they were not serving their subjects properly. He criticised the Viceroy for deploying such a big force of CIDs in Benares for his personal safety. He criticised the Indian terrorists, though appreciating their patriotism. He did not approve of their violence.

Gandhiji's words were like a bomb shell thrown at the nation. The President wanted him to stop talking. The Princes walked out. But the audience applauded him with enthusiasm. It was a historic speech.

Vinoba was thrilled by reading the report of the speech. He saw Truth in the words. He wrote to Gandhiji and received a prompt reply. He wrote again. Gandhiji wrote back to him, inviting him to meet him in Ahmedabad.



## 18. TWO AMBITIONS OF VINOBA

As a young man Vinoba was motivated by two aims in life.

One, he wanted to become a revolutionary patriot like those in Bengal, who threw bombs at British officers and, if caught, were sentenced to death and happily faced death in the service of their motherland.

Another goal which beckoned him was to go to the Himalayas, be absorbed in deep meditation and get God-realisation.

On 7th JUNE 1916, he went to Gandhiji's Kochrab *Ashram* in Ahmedabad and found that both his goals were there. In Gandhi he saw a peaceful revolutionary who dedicated his life to the service of the motherland and a votary of Truth. His pursuit of Truth took him to the worship of God who is present in the poor and the down-trodden.

Gandhi became Vinoba's Bengal and Himalayas.

## 19. KOCHRAB ASHRAM, AHMEDABAD

Vinoba was only twenty one when he joined the Kochrab *Ashram*, near Ahmedabad. Since he met Gandhiji, he gave up all ideas of becoming either a revolutionary patriot or an ascetic searching for God in the Himalayas. However, he continued to have this sense of revolution and of the quest for Truth in the *Ashram*, under the guidance of Gandhiji.

Considerable stress was placed on bread-labour in the *Ashram*. This appealed to Vinoba. He participated in working, gardening and all other activities with an enthusiasm which was catching.

Vinoba hardly talked to anyone. He busied himself in his work. Vinoba says, "I had risen early one morning and was reciting an Upanishad in my room. Some of the others heard me and told Bapu that I knew *sanskrit*. Bapu asked me some questions and from that time he occasionally asked me to say something during the time of common prayer."

Gandhiji also noticed the earnestness of this novice and the perfection he stressed in all he did. Soon, he became the best spinner (of cotton yarn) and weaver in the *Ashram*. Gandhiji was with Vinoba in ail work-grinding wheat for flour, cleaning the toilets, in each and every; activity. Vinoba said, "The only thing I know is to be engaged in the duties of the *Ashram*. As a youth, I had a desire to be famous, to participate in terrorist activity and indulge in violence for the sake of the country and thus achieve fame. Bapu removed this delusion of mine. He cooled the volcano of anger within me. I achieved progress' in my *Ashram* work every day."

## 20. VINOBA'S BROTHER BALAKRISHNA

Ever since Vinoba left home and joined Gandhiji's *Ashram* in Kocharb-Sabarmati, Vinoba's younger brother Balakrishna (also known as Balkoba) developed a keen desire to join the Ashram. In 1917 he borrowed a rupee from a friend and went to Ahmedabad without telling any one at home. When he went to the Ashram, the first question Vinoba asked him was, "Did you take Father's permission to come here?" When Balakrishna said no, Vinoba told him he had to return home.

Vinoba wrote to his father, who promptly sent five rupees by money order. Taking the money Balakrishna went home after a few days. He was afraid his father might be angry with him. But the father was calm, it was as if Balkoba had just gone out and returned after a while. The boy was surprised at the peaceful reception he got.

After his mother died in 1918, in 1919 again the desire to join the Ashram intensified in Balakrishna. He wrote to Bapu, who wrote and agreed to admit him to the *Ashram*. Now Balkrishna was afraid to ask father, for, "a few months ago, mother had died, recently younger brother Dattatreya died after an illness. Father ran the household single-handed. He cooked, washed clothes, cleaned the vessels and then went to work in his office. Under these conditions Balakrishna hesitated to approach his father. One day he gathered all his courage and told his father that he had a strong urge to go and join Gandhiji's *Ashram*, and that Gandhiji had written a letter of acceptance. At that time father was reading Tilak's *Gita Rahasya*. He did not say anything. He went in, brought five rupees and gave them to Balkoba. Again he was immersed in his *Gita Rahasya*.

Such was the father's detachment!

Later in life Balkoba was trained in nature cure. Gandhiji made him the Director of the Centre in Uruli Kanchan near Pune.

## 21. BRAHMINS CARRYING NIGHTSOIL

In Sabarmati Ashram, in its early days scavengers were employed and were paid for their work. When the lead scavenger fell ill, a son took his place. Once it happened that a very young son of his was carrying the bucket full of excrement to pour it into the pit in the fields. The bucket was too heavy for him to manage, and the poor little lad began to cry. Vinoba's younger brother Balkoba noticed him, took pity on him and at once went to help him. Later Balkoba came to ask Vinoba if he would agree to his taking up scavenging himself, as he wished to do. "That is excellent" he said, "Do take it up, and I too will come with you." Vinoba started working with him.

That Brahmin boys should take to scavenging was preposterous. Ba (Kasturba Gandhi) did not like it at all, and complained to Bapu. "Could anything be better" he asked, "than that a Brahmin should take up scavenging?" From that time on Vinoba was closely associated with this work.

## 22. VINOBA IN SABARMATI

Mahatma Gandhi wrote to Vinoba's father, "Your son Vinoba is with me. He has acquired, at so tender an age, such high spiritedness and asceticism as took me years of patient labour to do."

Gandhiji told C.F. Andrews – "He is one of the few pearls in the *Ashram*. They do not come like others to be blessed by the *Ashram*, but to bless it, not to receive, but to give."

### 23. HOW MANY WERE PRESENT?

It was in the Sabarmati *Ashram*.

Magan Lai Gandhi was the manager of the *Ashram*. He took the attendance roll-call in the morning at prayers.

He called out the names of the *Ashramites* from his list and noted who were all present. Those who were present indicated this by responding with an "Aum" when their names were called out.

At the end the manager reported to Bapu that all the fifteen members of the *Ashram* were present at prayer-, meeting, "Fifteen", he said.

Vinoba said "Only fourteen were present."

Magan Bhai said, "No, all fifteen were present."

Vinoba persisted, "Only fourteen."

Gandhiji asked Vinoba "Why do you say that?"

Vinoba explained, "Fifteen were physically present. But only fourteen had their mind on the prayers. The fifteenth person was only thinking about the roll call and how many were present and who were absent. So really only fourteen attended the prayer."

Bapu beamed his approval.

## 24. IN MOTHER'S MEMORY

Vinoba's mother Rukmini Bai died in 1918. 1

Vinoba went to her death bed and was with her at the end.

After her death Vinoba kept two articles with him in her memory. One was a sari used by her and the other, an image of goddess Annapurna, which was worshipped by her daily and to this Annapurna she had made a daily offering. These articles were with him for years. He used the Sari as a pillow for many years and the image was used for meditation occasionally.

Vinoba consigned the sari to the holy water of River Sabarmati when it was decided that one used only khadi in the *Ashram*.

Then Vinoba felt that Annapurna should be with somebody who would offer daily worship, as the mother had done. He selected Kashi Behn, wife of Gandhiji's cousin Chhaganlal Gandhi. She was a highly devoted woman and an ardent admirer of the Mahatma. Vinoba told Kashi Behn, "This image was with my mother. Will you accept it and offer daily worship as she used to offer?" She agreed, with reverence and love.

Though he disposed of these articles, his dear mother's memory was with Vinoba for ever.

## 25. ONE YEAR'S LEAVE, 1918

Vinoba's austerities in the *Ashram* had a bad effect on his health. He went to Bapu and took his permission to be away from *Ashram* for a year. He wanted some rest urgently. Next day, after the morning prayer, Vinoba walked out of Sabarmati, barefoot. He only took a couple of clothes—dhoti and upper cloth, and a blanket with him. He wore no stitched clothes. That was all the luggage he had with him.

He spent the next six months in Wai where his grandfather Shambhu Rao Bhave stayed. He attended the discourses on the *Brahma Sutra commentary* of Sri Shankaracharya. The teacher was Narayana Sastri Marathe. He made a deep study of the Upanishads, the *Gita*, *Manu Dharma Shastra* and Patanjali's *Yoga* aphorisms.

He toured in villages the next six months, to study their economic conditions. Here, he spoke daily on the *Gita*. A sanyasi who heard him talk said, "This is indeed Sri Shankaracharya speaking to us!"

He did not take any medicine, tried some experiments in diet. Walked 10, 12 miles every day.

He went back to Sabarmati exactly a year after he left the *Ashram*, at the same time, correct to the hour.



## 26. LETTER TO BAPU, 10 FEB, 1918

Vinoba wrote a long, news-ful letter from Wai, where he spent much of the one year's leave he took from the *Ashram*. Some excerpts from this letter:

I left the *Ashram* a year ago in order to improve my health. My intention was to spend just a couple of months in Wai. Now I have spent almost a year there. I have not written to you all these days. This might have given rise to questions whether I would return to the *Ashram* or whether I am alive or dead. I must confess that the fault is mine. However, I had written a couple of letters to Mama Phadke, asking him to inform me if any satyagraha was being undertaken. In that case I would drop everything to join the satyagraha. If any one felt that I had left the *Ashram* for good, the fault would be mine, I do not like writing letters

Studies : (1) *Upanishads*, (2) *Gita*, (3) *Brahma Sutras - Shankara Bhashya*, (4) *Manu Smriti*, (5) *Patanjail Yoga Darsana* together with these, (1) *Nyaya Sutras*, (2) *Vaiseshika Sutras*, (3) *Yajnavalkya Smriti* were also studied briefly. My desire to study our scriptures is- now fulfilled. Now I can read any scripture without any one's help.

To improve my health, I walked 10-12 miles daily. Then I ground about 12-15 pounds of grains in a hand-operated mill... My health has improved.

Food: For six months used salt but not spices. Now I eat without salt or spices. I take milk now, I have found that I can not do without milk. My food consists of 1.5 pounds of milk, 4 or 5 rotis of jowar, bananas and may be a lime. I do not eat to satisfy my tongue. But even this food seems to be luxurious to me. The food costs 11 paise per day (64 paise in a rupee)...

Finally , I would like to tell you that my life was just as if I lived in the *Ashram*. My possessions are a plate (wooden), cup and a drinking vessel of the *Ashram*, dhoti and a blanket. I have decided not to use shirt or cap or coat. I cover my body with another cloth. I have a few books. I do not use anything not made in

India. I have observed Truth, non-violence and brahmacharya strictly, as I have understood

I hope to receive a reply from you giving your guidance in matters of my food and all news of the *Ashram*. I would like it to be in your own hand. This is Vinoba's earnest prayer. You are the father of this son, nothing else.

I shall leave this place in a few days.

Vinoba's pranams.

Reading the letter, Gandhiji was overcome by emotions. He exclaimed, "He is a Bhima, a Hercules. This disciple Gorakhnath has surpassed his teacher Machindra Nath."

## 27. GANDHI'S LETTER TO VINOBA

After reading Vinoba's letter, explaining what he had been doing during one year's absence from the *Ashram*, Gandhiji exclaimed "Gorakha (the disciple) has gone one better than Machchindra (the master). He is a Bhima indeed. Then he dictated this letter, some time after 10 Feb 1918, to Mahadeva Desai.

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

It is true as you say that, though outside the *Ashram*, you have scrupulously observed its rules. I never doubted that you would not return. Besides, I had your written messages, read out by Mama.

May God grant you long life and use you for the uplift of India.

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

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

More when you arrive. Every one is looking forward to seeing you."

After dictating the letter, Gandhiji told Mahadev Desai, "He is a great man. I have always felt that I am fortunate in my dealings with Maharastrians and Madrasis. Of the latter, there is none now. But the Maharastrians have never disappointed me. And among them all, Vinoba is beyond praise."

## 28. INTERVIEW WITH TILAK

On the 1 st March, 1917, Vinoba wrote a letter to his childhood friend from Baroda days, Gopal Rao Kale from Wai, on the banks of river Krishna. This is the letter—

In Pune I met Tilak (Balgangadhar Tilak). The condition of the journalist (Vinoba) was like

Gurostu mounam vyaakhyaanam

Sishyaastu chinna samsayaah

(—the Guru's discourse was in silence. The discipies received enlightenment).

I am writing a general report of the interview. Special report cannot be written in a letter.

The first question was that of a *Mumukshu Veaanti* (a seeker of truth), which may be considered some what funny.

Question-1 : Have you met real men of Truth?

Answer: No.

From this answer we get an idea of what Tilak's opinion was about Dada Saheb, Tatya Saheb, Daji Saheb and the other sahebs (the VIPs of those days). The answer was in the same attitude in which the question was asked.

Q-2 : Has the fear of death and rebirth left you?

A.: I can't say it has. We may well imagine what Gandhiji's reply would be if the same question was asked of him.

Q-3 : Have you read *Amratanubhava*\* ?

A.: No.

Q-4.: Have you studied *Beejaka* of Kabir Das?

A : No. I haven't read much of *prakrit* literature. I have read *Jnaneswari* to some extent, had the hobby of reading *Sanskrit* literature from childhood. It

may be said that I have covered most of this literature. If you have anything to ask about the 700 verses of the *Gita*, you may ask.

There is not much to write of the rest of the conversation. We may infer many conclusions from this conversation. I leave all that to your skills in deductive logic. I prostrated myself before this *Mahatma* (great man) and returned.

– *Vinoba*

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\* Amritanubhava is a book written by Sant Jnanadev.

## 29. A WONDERFUL TEACHER, A GREAT STUDENT

It was in 1918-19, the first days of Sabarmati *Ashram*. Gandhiji desired to study the *Gita* in the original *Sanskrit*. He was looking for a teacher. First, he thought of Mahadev Desai. But Mahadev, though he knew some *Sanskrit*, did not feel confident that he could teach Gandhiji. He suggested the name of Vinoba.

Vinoba agreed to teach *Gita* to Gandhiji on one condition. Gandhiji had to be regular— no discontinuity in classes. It was decided that ten minutes after the evening prayer would be spent in the study of *Gita*. Afterwards Gandhiji would go to sleep.

Vinoba was a very earnest teacher. Once Vaman Chorghade asked him, "Who is an ideal student?" Vinoba's answer, "Whoever wants to learn." He could teach any body! So here Gandhi was the student, Vinoba the teacher and the subject, *Bhagavad Gita*.

They sailed through the first chapter easily. It is just narration of the preparations for war. Gandhiji had no problem in following these lessons.

In the second chapter, Arjuna's doubts and Krishna's efforts to clear them in various ways are there. No problems there, either. They had cleared the first hundred verses of the *Gita*. Then came the 54th verse of the second chapter, *Prajahaati yadaa kaamnan sarvaan Partha manogataan*. Vinoba explained the meaning of that verse.

Then Gandhiji started playing truancy. The next day he put off the class on some excuse. This went on for about a month. The teacher was there, but the student made some excuse or the other to skip the class.

One day Gandhiji told Vinoba, "Let us have the classes from tomorrow." Vinoba asked the reason for absence for so many days.

Gandhiji gave an amazing reply. He said humbly, "Vinoba I did not neglect the classes. But I wanted to practice what I learnt. In the verse that we took up last time, it is said that all desires in mind are to be controlled and one should be

contented within. I was trying to practice this in my life for one month. I struggled hard within myself. Now I have achieved some control, so I have the confidence to learn further."

It is such learning which makes a *Mahatma* out of a man!

(—From Vaman Chorghade in *Tarun Bharat* excerpted in *Viswa Nagari*, 26:3, 1-6-98.)

*Postscript:* On 22-2-76, when Chorghade's article appeared in *Tarun Bharat*, Jayadev Bhai asked Vinoba— "Did Bapu learn the entire 700 verses with Vinoba?"

Vinoba then wrote down his response "— he might have learnt 100 verses, (I do not remember.)

"I taught the 12th Chapter to (Kastur) Ba. It took two months."



### 30. MAHADEVI

Mahadevi is a child widow. She participated in no-tax campaign in Karwar district of Karnataka in 1930-32. For some time she was kept in solitary cell in jail. When Gandhiji came to Karnataka during Harijan tour in 1934, Mahadevi met him and wanted to join his *Ashram*. Gandhiji took her to Wardha and Mahadevi stayed in *Mahila Ashram*. Jamnalal Bajaj was looking-after her. Vinoba was teaching *Bhagavad Gita* to the students. He observed Mahadevi's good pronunciation of Sanskrit.

Mahadevi fell ill. Vinoba saw her during one of his morning walks and he asked her if she could go to his *Ashram* for treatment. At that time Vinoba was staying in Nalwadi (a small village of mostly untouchables) to serve the village. Jamnalal Bajaj personally took Mahadevi to Vinoba. There by milk therapy she regained her health. She stayed there itself working in the Ashram. She moved to Paunar when Vinoba did. She walked with him fo thousands of miles with his group during the *bhoodan* march. She was looking after Vinoba's personal needs.

Vinoba had a younger sister. She was married even before Vinoba joined Gandhiji in 1916. After some years she died in early age. Vinoba considered Mahadevi as his younger sister.

When Vinoba died members of Brahmavidya Mandir selected Mahadevi to light Vinoba's pyre, though his younger brother Shivaji Bhave was present in the Ashram. She did that.

Earlier when *Vallabh Niketan* was set up in Bangalore, Vinoba sent Mahadevi to look after the Institution. She is still there, now she is 97.

### 31. VINOBA, M.A., B.Sc.

One day Vinoba was describing his first jail-experience. He said, "In 1923, When I was released from the Akola jail (in Maharashtra) some friends asked me –

"How was your experience of jail? This was your first imprisonment, wasn't it?"

"I have secured a degree in jail"

"What degree?"

"M.A. B.Sc.,"

"What, M.A. first and then B.Sc.?"

"Yes, that is the way of the jail. M.A.B.S.C. means, Master in the Art of Breaking Stone Chips".

– From *Maitri*, Sept., 1999

### 32. THE DESTROYED LETTER

It was around 1930-31. Vinoba was spinning yarn on a charkha as he taught me. Some one bought the day's letters for him. I could recognise one of the letters as Bapu's (Gandhiji's) from its appearance and the handwriting of the address. Vinoba read the letter once and tore it to pieces. His usual practice was to read his letters and destroy them later when he replied to them - he didn't have to read the letter again for preparing the reply. So I was familiar with his treatment of his letters.] But this was Bapu's letter. Baba (Vinoba) had torn it without bothering about the reply. I was curious to know the contents of the letter. I took the pieces of the letter, put them together and read it. I was amazed. Bapu had written to Baba, referring to some incident, "I have never come across a great soul like you."

People preserve even routine letters of Bapu with much care. I was angry with Baba for the way he treated this letter with such an important remark in it. In an agitated mood, - I asked Baba, "Why did you tear the letter?"

Baba said calmly, "Our dear and elderly people also err, out of carelessness or affection. It is not correct to preserve it. It has an element of delusion and even violence."

Again, with much excitement, I asked Baba, "Who are you to decide that Bapu has erred?"

Baba said, again, calmly, "Bapu had seen millions' of people. Many of them would have been great, divine souls. Bapu might not have recognised them as such, or even having recognised them, he might have forgotten to register them. By his neglecting to remember, there will be no decrease in the greatness of such souls. Bapu wrote like this about me out of affection for me or due to delusion. He has erred in this. One should recognise this. Where is the need to preserve it?"

"How do you say it is a lapse? He might have written after due deliberation."

"Even if it might be true, what is its advantage to me? It would only boost my ego. Why preserve a useless thing?"

I said , "It is the writing of a great man like Bapu. Even if it refers to you, it is not your property. It belongs to the world. What right do you have to destroy it?"

Vinoba explained, "Such talk rises from one's delusion. Affection is the main part of the letter. I acknowledged it. I gain by destroying the rest of it. If what he wrote about me is the truth, it would not be destroyed by my tearing up of the letter. Truth prevails. But if it is delusion, it is better destroyed. Preserving it is harmful."

– Kamalnayan Bajaj, from "Kaka, (his father Jamnalal)

Bapu and Baba.

### 33. A LESSON ON NON-VIOLENCE

Vinoba composed a poem in Marathi while talking of Ahimsa (non-violence). The words are not available now. The meaning of the verse is—

The stone told the flower, "I shall crush you."

The flower replied, "Very well, you will spread my fragrance all over the world. Thank you for this service."

The arrogance of the stone was shattered. The flower won, with its humility and courage.

What a simple, fine and deep analysis of the power of ahimsa!

### 34. THE GREATNESS OF ZERO

Vinoba was talking of the wonders of zero.

Zero is a wonderful concept in mathematics.

It is nothing when kept alone, but when placed to the right of a number, it multiplies the number by ten, placed next to 2, zero makes it 20.

Multiplication is generally the process of increasing while division is generally reducing.

But look at the effect of zero. However big a number you have, if you multiply it with zero, the result is zero.

And even the smallest number, when divided by zero, the result is infinity.

If you remove zero from mathematics, all romance vanishes from it.

This formula teaches you how to become great : reduce your ego to zero.

God Himself is zero as well as infinity.

### 35. VYKOM SATYAGRAHA

Vykom is a small town in Kerala.

It was in the erstwhile Travancore state. Harijans were not allowed entry into temples there, as elsewhere.

Here, however, they were not even allowed to use the road leading to the temple.

Gandhiji took personal interest in conducting a satyagraha movement there, in 1922. Kelappan, the Kerala Gandhi, took a leading part in this struggle. But there seemed to be no result. Then Vinoba was in Wardha, while Bapu was in Sabarmati (Gujarat).

Gandhiji sent Vinoba to Vycom in 1925 to see how things were shaping. He was to meet the learned Pandits and get their help for the movement, if possible. He was to assess the efficiency of the satyagraha also, though he had no experience of this type of action then.

As he travelled to Vykom he passed very near to Kaladi, the birthplace of Sri Shankaracharya, one of the heroes of Vinoba. It was suggested to Vinoba if he would like to visit this place of pilgrimage. But Vinoba refused to do so, because his purpose then was to visit Vykom. (He visited Kaladi later during Bhoodan march.)

Vinoba had to speak in Sanskrit with the pandits there. He could not make much impact on the movement, but made a few suggestions to the satyagrahis there and reported to Gandhiji what he had done. Later Gandhiji himself went there.

Kailasam, the famous Karnataka dramatist - humourist punned:

In Vykom,

Harijans say, "We come." The priests say, "Why come?" Gandhiji says, "Welcome." Children ask, "Which way come?" people say, "Any way come."

Ultimately Gandhiji had his way and harijans were allowed to enter the temple.

### 36. VINOBA'S POETRY

Vinoba was a born poet.

Versification came to him like swimming to a duck. He wrote profusely. But very little of his poetry survives, for he put the poems into the Ganga when he was in Kashi, or into the fire, after he was satisfied with it. However some examples have remained.

One verse has become a part of the Gandhi *Ashram* prayer - Gandhiji makes reference to this in his writings.

This verse lists the eleven vows to be observed by all members of the *Ashram*.

Ahimsa, Satya, Asteya, Brahmacharya, Asangraha Sarirasrama, Aswada, Sarvatra bhayavarjana Sarvadharmasamanatwa, Swadesi, Sparshabhaavana Hee Ekadasa sevavi namratway vrata nischayay.

The vows are, in the order of this poem, (1) Non violence or love, (2) Truth, (3) Non-stealing, (4) Continence or self-control, (5) Non-accumulation of wealth, (6) Physical labour, (7) Control of tongue, (8) Fearlessness, (9) Equality of all religions, (10) Use of locally made articles and (11) No untouchability.

Another verse lists the qualities of the chief saints of Maharashtra beautifully:

Jnandev, Namdev, Nath, Tukoba, Samartha, Jnani, Premi, Shantha, Viragi, Karmarata.

(1) Jnandev or Jnaneswar was a man of knowledge, (2) Namdev was a man of love, (3) Eknath was a man full of peace, (4) Tukaram was well known for his renunciation (5) and Samartha Ramdas was a man of action.

Another work which has survived is *Abhanga Vratey*, which is a collection of songs in Marathi, composed by Vinoba, which extol and explain the eleven vows of the *Ashrama*. *Mangala Prabhat* of Gandhiji is the basis of Vinoba's *Abhanga Vratey*. This booklet, published by Parmdham Prakasan in Paunar *Ashram*, has 108 gems of poems.

*Gitai* is his Marathi translation of the *Gita* in beautiful poetry.



### 37. ADVICE

I was sitting in Sitasaran Sarma's house in *Vallabha Niketan*. I noticed a poem displayed prominently on a wall:

Kaala Jaaranam  
Katuka Varjanam  
Guna nivedanam  
Sneha sadhanam.

– Vinoba

I liked the poem and copied it down. Sitasaran explained it to me –

Time which is past is to be destroyed, bitterness must be eschewed, one's good qualities are to be dedicated to the Lord and friendship has to be achieved.

Then Mrs. Savitri Bhat who was present there remembered another couplet that Vinoba had given to her which she treasured:

Chintaa karoo nayey  
Chintan karaavey.

Do not indulge in worry, do thinking, meditate.

### 38. BHIKSHA—BEGGING

Vinoba had written a short article, its title was *Bhiksha*. He was talking about the contents of the article-

There are three ways of making a living :

(1) Bhiksha or begging, (2) Employment, job, (3) Stealing.

What is stealing? Taking from society without giving anything to it. It is the way of taking the maximum by giving the minimum.

Employment or service – take as much as you give. Bhiksha is taking a little from society while giving a lot to it. The word *Bhiksha* was used like this.

*Bhaikshacharyam Charantah* – living by begging, is an ideal placed before us. Begging has been honoured in our society from ancient times. *Bhiksha* has been discussed for two thousand years. Should we abandon this word now? Now the meaning of this word is – give the maximum and take as little as possible, just sufficient to keep body and soul together.

Vinoba didn't consider this as any new idea, it is an old concept.

King *Parikshit* was the grandson of Arjuna .n *Mahabharata*. He was cursed, that he would die within seven days. He had to prepare himself to die.

He needed a *guru* who could teach him how to die. He wanted to meet Suka Deva. So Suka Deva came there. Continuously he sat in the *padmasana* posture for  $7 \times 24 = 168$  hours and recounted the *Bhagavata* there.

Suka Deva was a *bhikshuka* a beggar. He gave immensely to society and took little in return.

Yudhisthira conducted his *Raja Suyajna*, the great rite of sacrifice. Mass feeding was going on. Each time a thousand people were fed, a gong sounded. But then suddenly, the gong went on ringing non stop, it didn't stop. (Vinoba shed tears as he said this). Why is this, it was enquired. The answer was, a hundred thousand had eaten. How did this happen? Suka Deva ate and went away. (Tears in Vinoba's eyes). He was equivalent to a hundred thousand men.

Suka Deva was a beggar – he was ever giving to society. In the *Kuran*, it is said, *bigairi hisaab*—what he gave was impossible to calculate.

### 39. GITAI - 2

*Gitai* was composed, from 7th October, 1930 and it was finished on 6th February 1931. As he composed the verses, he read out the verses to his friends in his Wardha *Ashram*. It was in Dhule Jail that he gave the finishing touches to the manuscript and saw the work through the press. He read the proofs when in the jail.

At the time of the printing, Vinoba was asked, "How much should be the price of the booklet?"

Vinoba asked "How much does a pack of bidis cost?" Bidi is the Indian leaf-covered cigarette.

"It costs one anna." An anna is 1/16th of a rupee.

"Let *Gitai* be sold at one anna. *Gitai* should be as easy to buy as a packet of bidis."

535,000 copies of the book were sold till 1995. It is still being sold. It has entered every Marathi home. The price then was Rs. 2. Many disciples of Vinoba made *Gitai* Prachar (Teaching *Gitai*) their life's mission. *Gitai* uses the same vocabulary as the original *Gita* in *Sanskrit*. It is composed in the same Anushtub metre. An example – original *Sanskrit* –

Sthita prajnyasya kaa bhaashaa  
Samaadhisthasya Kesava  
Sthitadheeh kim prabhaasheta  
Kimaaseeta vrajeta kim.

*Gitai* –

Sthiraavalaa Samaadheeta  
Sthita-prajna kasaa asay  
Krishna saanga kasaa bolay  
Kasaa raahay firay kasaa.

#### 40. TALKS ON THE GITA

Vinoba gave lectures on the *Bhagavad Gita* when he was a prisoner in Dhule Jail. The other political prisoners prevailed upon him to give these weekly lectures on Sundays. Even prison officials attended the lectures. The listeners were deeply impressed by the practical nature of these spiritual talks.

Sane Guruji was one of the prisoners who attended the talks, which were in Marathi. Sane Guruji was a well-known Marathi author, social worker. His *Shyam chi Aayi* (Mother of Shyam) has been translated into many languages. He was a satyagrahi, school teacher, a bachelor like Vinoba and was a close follower of Mahatma Gandhi. Sane Guruji kept detailed notes of the talks. He showed these notes to Vinoba afterwards. Vinoba was surprised when he read the notes. He said he would never write such profound comments on the *Gita* if he sat down and worked at it. So Vinoba edited Sane Guruji's notes and *Gita Pravachaney* was published. Soon translations came out in English, Hindi, Kannada and other Indian languages as well as in Japanese and German. The talks were most popular as a guide to a purposeful spiritual life. Several hundred thousand copies were sold all over the world.

During the course of an informal lecture in San Francisco in America I mentioned Vinoba's book *Talks on the Gita*. Swami Prabuddhananda, the Head of the Vedanta Society of Northern California, who had asked me to talk, intervened to say copies of the *Talks on the Gita* are available in our Book Shop.

#### 41. THE PARABLE OF THE JUDGE

In the first chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Arjuna comes to the battle-field ready to fight and to kill. But when he sees friends and relations on both sides, and when he thinks he will have to kill his own teachers, cousins, uncles and friends, he loses confidence. He says to Krishna, "Killing is inhuman. It does not solve any problem. It creates so many ills. I shall not fight". So Krishna has to preach the *Gita* to Arjuna to bring him to his senses.

When discussing Arjuna's strange behaviour, Vinoba gives a parable to show up Arjuna's inconsistency.

There was a judge. He heard many cases of murder. He sentenced hundreds of murderers to death. One day his own son came before his court accused of murder. The murder was proved. Now the judge had to pass sentence. Then he said, "The death sentence is inhuman. To hang a criminal does not benefit society. The aim of society must be to reform a criminal, not to kill him. The murderer commits the crime in a fit of emotional anger. Society should think deeply before passing a sentence of death." All these arguments were known to him even before this case. But today, when his son came before him, he said these words.

Arjuna was also like that. He had killed in so many battles, but had never thought of the value of nonviolence. This is nothing but delusion, which Krishna recognises as such and remedies it.

## 42. SANYASA OR RENUNCIATION

There is a way of renouncing action, and that is to devise a method by which, though we do all the actions in the world, they melt and flow away from us. It is only when this becomes possible that we can say that *sanyasa* has been reached. How to perform *karma* and yet make it melt and flow away? Look at the sun. It acts night and day. Even at night it acts and lights up the other side of the earth. Although it works all the time, no one ever talks of the sun working. That is why, in the fourth Chapter, the Lord says, "I taught this *yoga* first to Surya (the Sun-God). From him, Manu, the seeker and thinker, learnt it." Though working all the twenty-four hours of the day, the sun does not act. There is no doubt that this condition is truly wonderful.

But this is only one form of *sanyasa*. One aspect of this state of *akarma* (non-action) is that, though the man acts, he does not act. The other aspect is that, though he does not act at all, he moves the whole world to action. There is in him an immeasurable power to impel to action. This is the paradox of *akarma* : it is filled with a power that is capable of infinite action. It is like steam which when compressed, does enormous work. Steam that is enclosed gains tremendous power, and moves huge ships and long trains. It is the same with the sun which does nothing at all but works all the twenty- four hours in the day. If asked the sun would say, "I do nothing at all." One aspect of the sun is that it works day and night and yet does nothing; the other, that while it does nothing, it performs infinite action day and night. These are the two splendid sides of *sanyasa*.

And both are rare. In one aspect, the action is explicit, and the state of *akarma* implicit. In the other, though the state *akarma* is clearly manifest, yet, because of it, endless activity is continuously going on. In this state, *akarma* is filled to overflowing with action, and thus mighty actions are achieved. There is a world of difference between the man in this state, and the idler. The lazy man gets easily tired and depressed. But the *sanyasi*, who does no work, conserves his

power. He does not work at all. That is, he does not work with his limbs, or with his mind. But even while he does nothing, he does infinite work.

In the Fifth Chapter, the two ways of *sanyasa* are compared. One is doing nothing while working twenty-four hours in the day, the other is doing everything while not working even for a moment. The one is silence in speech, the other is speech through silence. Let us consider these two divine states, and inquire about them, and meditate upon them—there is a rare joy in it.

In fact, this whole matter is both rare and exalted. Truly, this idea of *sanyasa* is most holy, most beautiful. We can never thank enough whoever it was that first sought and discovered an idea of such shining splendour. This idea of *sanyasa*, one may say, is the highest point reached by man's thought to this day. Attempts at higher flights are still going on, but neither in concept nor in experience has anyone surpassed this. There is a rare joy in the very contemplation of this *sanyasa* with its two aspects. But when we come to the world of speech and action, the joy fails; we feel that we are falling. On this matter, I have thought and talked with my friends for many years, and I have discovered the inadequacy of language to deal with it.

It is a noble, delightful, poetical concept of doing everything by doing nothing, and doing nothing in doing everything. Where else but here could we find poetry ? The famous masterpieces of poetry are insipid beside this. No poem can compare with its idea in producing sheer joy, enthusiasm, energy and a sense of the divine. Therefore, the Fifth Chapter has been established at a very high level. Till the Fourth Chapter, *karma and vikarma were described*; now we are taken on a higher flight. Here the two aspects of the state of *akarma* are compared before our eyes. Here words stumble. Is the *karma-yogi* better, or the *karma-sanyasi*? Who really does more work? It is impossible to answer these questions. Doing nothing though doing all things, to do all things by doing nothing—both alike are *yoga*; but for the sake of comparison, one is called *yoga*, the other *sanyasa*.

— From Vinoba : *Talks on the Gita*



### 43. THE DOLLS OF SUGAR

When talking of the yogi and the sanyasi in the fifth chapter of the *Gita*, Vinoba said the yogi and sanyasi are the same. He gave the story of Suka and Janaka.

Janaka the Karma-yogi was disciple of Yajnavalkya the Sanyasi; but Sukadeva the Sanyasi was the disciple of this same Janaka. First the Sanyasi, then the Karma- yogi, and then again the Sanyasi.

"Vyasa said to Suka, "Suka, my son, you have, no doubt, attained wisdom, but no Guru has put his seal on you. Go therefore to Janaka". Sukadeva went. Janaka was sitting on the third floor of his great palace. Suka was a forest-dweller. His eyes drank in the sights of the city as he went along.

Janaka asked him, "Why have you come here?"

Suka answered, "To get knowledge".

"Who sent you?"

"Vyasadeva".

"Where do you come from?"

"From the *Ashram*".

"What did you see in the market on the way?"

'I saw rows upon rows of sweets piled up on all sides."

"And what else did you see?"

"I saw sugar-dolls walking and talking."

"And what else?"

"For my coming up here, there were solid sugar steps."

"What else did you find?"

"Here too, I see sugar pictures everywhere."

"What do you see now."

"One sugar doll talking to another."

Then Janaka said, "Now you may go. You have attained all wisdom."

Suka had secured what he wanted, a signed certificate from Janaka. The point is that the Karma-Yogi has accepted as disciple the Sanyasi Suka.

#### 44. VINOBA'S LOVE FOR THE TAKLI

Takli is a small spindle with a hook at one end and a small disc which acts like a small fly-wheel at the other end. It is spun by giving it a twist with one hand and yarn is pulled out of a sliver of cotton held in other hand and the yarn is wound on the takli itself.

Vinoba loved the simple takli. He specialised in takli- spinning of yarn. In 1933 he wrote to Jamnalal Bajaj from Nalwadi, a village 2 km from Wardha where he built an

*Ashram* in 1932—

"I derive extraordinary inspiration from spinning on the takli. So much so that in the treasure of my mind are my mother, *Gita* and takli, and are synonymous. Aayi, mother, encompasses all the treasure of my experience as a child. *Gita* includes the Vedas and the spiritual achievements of all the experience I gained under the guidance of Bapu."

In another letter he wrote, "You have asked me about my daily routine. The fact is I derive inspiration only from remembering the lord's name and spinning on the takli. All else — studies, writing, discussions, discourses are all meaningless to me. They are a zero. To put it briefly, remembering the lord's name and spinning are the same to me. If you write zeroes next to a one, they gain value. They do not have a value without the one. So I am very particular about the prayer and spinning."

#### 45. BHARAT-RAM TEMPLE

Vinoba went to Pauniar for taking a rest-cure. He was very ill and so weak that he could not even walk. This was in 1938. He went from Nalwadi (a village near Wardha) to Pauniar and settled down in a house belonging to Jamnalal Bajaj on the banks of the river Dham. This area has now become the Brahmavidya Mandir and the Paramdham *Ashram*.

Vinoba spent his day watching vehicles moving on the Nagpur-Wardha road for a few hours every day. He made a survey counting how many cars, bullock carts, cycles and pedestrians passed by.

As he gained some strength, he started digging the land for exercise. First day he spent only a few minutes at it.

Gradually he increased the time taking rest in between, as required. He gained forty pounds in weight in ten months, to weigh 128 pounds.

One day, while digging Vinoba struck something hard in the ground, He probed here and there with his pickaxe and found it was a big stone. He could not lift it by himself, but others did so. It turned out to be a fine piece of sculpture – the subject was the reunion of Rama and Bharata. In the course of his talks on the *Gita* in Dhulia Jail in 1932, when Vinoba spoke on the Twelfth chapter and dealt with *nirguna* and *saguna* types of devotion (that is, devotion to God without any qualities and personal God), he used Bharata and Lakshmana as his examples. He had said, then, that if he was an artist he would have painted that loving scene, when Bharata and Rama met after the fourteen years of separation. This sculpture was just what he had then tried to express in words.

Vinoba was overjoyed to have found such a carving, He took it as a gift from God and two or three years later Vinoba installed it in a shrine there, singing the melodious hymns of saints Jnanadev, Tukaram, Namdeo, Eknath and Tulsidas.

Other icons were found while digging. They are installed in separate niches.

#### 46. THE ONLY BELIEVER, GORA

Gora (1902-1975) was a good friend of Vinoba. He was also close to Bapu, but was an atheist. Bapu said, initially, he believed that God is Truth. Later, he said, Truth is God, for, he said, even atheists believe in Truth, even if they do not have faith in God.

Gora's name was Goparaju Ramachandra Rao. He didn't like the name given by his parents, for Goparaju showed that he was a brahmin and he didn't believe in caste; and Rama was the incarnation of God, so he did not care for the second part of his name, so he took the initial letters of the two parts of his name and called himself Gora. He wrote in Telugu, his mother tongue and was quite popular as an author.

Being an atheist, Gora didn't believe in prayer. He was present in a meeting led by Vinoba. He heard Vinoba's talk. But when Vinoba announced that there would be a prayer, Gora left that place.

Vinoba laughingly said, "Gora is the only person who takes God seriously. When I mentioned prayer, it made no impact on others, but Gora reacted immediately."

Thereafter, Vinoba introduced a *mouna prarthana* (silent prayer) instead of the chanting of Bhagavad *Gita* in his prayer meeting, at the end.

Both Gandhiji and Vinoba had much affection for Gora, though they didn't approve of his atheism. They admired his concern for the down-trodden. He worked for the poor, the out-caste villagers. He preached rationalism to them, and worked to eradicate superstition. He trained them to be productive workers. He rehabilitated the so-called criminal tribals and prostitutes who were called devadasis and joginis.

Gora's wife, Saraswati and their nine children are all atheists. All the children have inter-caste marriages. Their names are also rational. The eldest son is Lavanam (salt)— he was born during Gandhiji's salt march. Samaram (war) was born during the war period. The ninth child was a girl, he named her 'now' (the

ninth). They now manage the Atheist Centre, founded by Gora in Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh.

Gora died as he was delivering a speech.

#### 47. WOMAN'S POWER

When Mahadevi came to Wardha she stayed in *Mahilashram* (women's centre) for a couple of years. She decided to go on a pilgrimage to Badrinath and Kedarnath with two or three co-workers. One of the members of this party was a Western woman. She fell ill near Haridwar. Mahadevi nursed her and tried her best for her survival. But she died. Mahadevi approached the Gurukul *Ashram* in Haridwar and with their help she did the last rites for her companion.

However, Mahadevi didn't lose sight of her goal and went on to Badri-Kedar and returned to Wardha only after finishing her pilgrimage.

This incident drew the admiration of both Jamnalal Bajaj and Vinoba.

#### 48. VINOBA'S ASSISTANT, RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE

(Ex-Chief Minister of Karnataka)

Mahadevi went to visit her old father after staying in Vinoba's *Ashram* for a few years. The young Ramakrishna Hedge, Mahadevi's uncle's son, had just finished his school-final examinations. Mahadevi took him to Wardha with her. Ramakrishna was not keen on going, but Mahadevi persuaded him to go, any way. Ramakrishna's problem was that he liked his coffee and his smoking, which he may not indulge in at the *Ashram*.

At that time, during the forties, Vinoba decided to work in a village, Sargaon, about 4 km away from Paunar. Since there were no toilet facilities in the houses there people defecated on the road-side. Vinoba's mission was to clean up the place and to teach hygiene to the villagers.

To every one's surprise, Vinoba asked Ramakrishna to assist him in this work. Ramakrishna did not like this work at all, but he enjoyed being with Vinoba. Every day, they would go early in the morning with brooms in hand. Vinoba affectionately called the boy "Adakya", adakey being the Kannada name of betel-nut, which was the major produce of Ramakrishna's farm in Karnataka.

All other workers envied Ramakrishna for his good luck in being with Vinoba. They were intrigued why Vinoba selected this novice. His secretary, Damodar Das asked Vinoba about this. Vinoba said "This boy has some notions of his high birth as a brahmin. By doing the work of a low caste, untouchable, he will be rid of these prejudices."

Vinoba sent Ramakrishna to Kashi Vidyapith in Varanasi for further studies.

This period had a deep impact on Ramakrishna's mind. The memory of Vinoba's holy company is constantly there in his mind, he said, in a speech in Gandhi Bhavan, Bangalore. These memories sustain him now in the rat race of his political life.



## 49. DAILY PRAYER

Asato maa sadgamaya  
Tamaso maa jyotirgamaya  
Mrityor maa amritumga-maya

— *Brihadaraanyaka Upanishad.*

This mantra tells us where we are, where we should reach; what we are, what we should be. We are in untruth, darkness, death-this is the condition of the jiva, the soul. We have to move towards Truth, Light, Immortality. This is our Shiva form, our true nature.

If two points are fixed, a straight line is fixed. If jiva and Shiva are located, the spiritual path is determined. This path is not for the mukta, the free one for he has lost his jiva form. Only the Shiva point is there, the path has been covered already. For the jada, the inert matter also, there is no spiritual path, for matter will never realise its Shiva-form. So there is no path for the jada. The path is there for people who are in between these two states, the mumukshus, who desire freedom. The path is for them, this prayer is for them.

"Lead me from untruth, to Truth". To pray thus means, also, "I shall try to go from untruth to Truth. It is like taking a pledge. Without this determination based on human effort the prayer would be meaningless. If I do not make any effort or if I move in the opposite direction and merely utter "Take me from untruth to Truth," what is the use? If I go and sit in a Nagpur-Calcutta train, what is the use of my saying, "O Lord, take me to Bombay". If one prays for Truth, one should strive for Truth. Without this effort, Prayer is no prayer at all. Hence the prayer implies a Pledge to move from untruth to Truth. It implies that I shall put in all my efforts to move in the right direction.

But if I have to put in effort, where is the need for prayer? Prayer is needed even to make the effort. I make the effort, but is the result in my hands? The result depends on the will of God. How much can I do? Is not my power quite small? Without the help of God what can I achieve by myself? I take steps

towards Truth, but without God's Grace I can not reach the goal. I make the effort but who can tell whether I will complete the journey? My legs may collapse on the way. So it is our arrogant presumption to think that I will reach the goal with my own efforts. To do the work is my right, but the result is in the hands of God. Hence prayer is also necessary along with effort. With prayer we get strength from God. Prayer mobilises all our strength into action.

Prayer has an integration of divine grace and human efforts in it. A believer in divine Grace has no faith in human effort and may become unmanly. A believer in human effort may become arrogant. Hence neither of these is good in itself, but neither can be rejected. Praying for divine Grace has a desirable humility in it which is to be welcomed and in human effort there is enterprise, which is also needed. Prayer achieves a union of these two. *Muktasangonahamvaadi dhrityutsaaha samanvitaha* says the *Gita*, describing the saatwic seer (it means one who is free from attachment, who is not egotist, who is with stead-fastness and enthusiasm). The secret of prayer is in this. Prayer is self effort without the egoism. In fact, "Lead me from untruth to Truth" is a prayer whose full impact is "I shall ever try to go from untruth to Truth with enthusiasm, so help me, God."

Let us pray daily to the lord in this spirit. This is Vinoba's teaching.

## 50. A VINOBA FORMULA

*Vijanana + Raajaneeti = Sarvanaasa.*

*Vijanana + Atmajnaana = Sarvodaya.*

Translation :

Science + Politics = Destruction.

Science + Spirituality = Welfare of All.

*Source : Vinoba: Science and Spirituality.*

## 51. THREE FORMULAS FOR LIFE

Vinoba was fond of mathematics, from childhood. Some times he liked to express his ideas using mathematical symbols and formulas and equations. Here are a few examples.

1. In chemistry the formula for a water molecule is  $H_2O$ . Vinoba's formula for life is,  $L = R_2E$ , where R = Renunciation and E = Enjoyment. Hindus divide life into four *Ashramas* - *Brahmacharya* (study phase, childhood), *Grihastha* (householder), *Vanaprastha* (husband and wife living in forest, away from all comforts), *Sanyasa* (renunciate, the ascetic life).

For the student and *sanyasi*, R predominates, with no place for E. For the householder, E is important. In the third phase of *Vanaprastha*, a little E persists.

2. Ideally, according to Vinoba, House holder's life = Truth + Self control + Service. (*Satya + Samyama + Seva Bhaava*).

$$D = S/E$$

Where D = Devotion

S = Self-less Service, *Nihswaartha Seva*

E = Ego or *Ahankaara*

Even if a person renders a lot of service, if the ego is big, his devotion becomes small. But with a small ego, even with a little selfless service, the devotion grows. The formula extols the virtue of humility.

## 52. INTRODUCING VINOBA - GANDHI

In 1940, soon after the war started Gandhiji planned a satyagraha movement against British rule in India. He did not want to burden the British with a fight since he sympathised with their struggle against the dark fascist forces of Europe. So this was to be a symbolic fight, carried on by individuals, not a mass movement. The first individual selected by Gandhi for the movement was Vinoba.

Why Vinoba? Gandhi explained, on 5 Oct 40. "Who is Vinoba Bhave and why has he been selected for offering individual civil disobedience in 1940? He is an undergraduate, having left college in 1916 after my return to India. He is a *Sanskrit* scholar. He joined the *ashram* almost at its inception. He was among the first members... In order to better qualify himself, he took one year's leave to prosecute further studies in *Sanskrit*. And practically in the same hour at which he had left the *Ashram* a year before, he walked into it without notice. I had forgotten that he was due to arrive on that day. He has taken part in every menial activity of the *Ashram* from scavenging to cooking. Though he has a marvellous memory and is a student by nature, he has devoted the larger part of his time to spinning— in which he has specialised as very few have. He believes in universal spinning being the central activity which will remove the poverty in the villages and put life into their deadness. Being a born teacher, he has been of the utmost assistance to Ashadevi Aryanayakam of Hindustani Talimi Sangh in his development of the scheme of education through handicrafts. Sri Vinoba has produced a text book, taking spinning as the handicraft. It is original in conception. He has made scoffers realize that spinning is the handicraft par excellence which lends itself to being effectively used for basic education. He has revolutionalised takli spinning and drawn out its hitherto unknown possibilities. For perfect spinning he has no rival in all India.

"He has abolished every trace of untouchability from his heart. He believed in communal unity with the same passion that I have. In order to know the best

mind of Islam, he gave one year to the study of the Koran in the original. He therefore learnt Arabic. He found his study necessary for cultivating a living contact in his neighbourhood.

"Vinoba was for years the director of the *Mahila Ashram* in Wardha. Then his devotion to the cause of *Daridranarayana* (God revealed in the poor) took him first to a village near Wardha, and now he has gone further and now he lives in Paunar, five miles from Wardha, from where he has established contact with villages through the disciples he has trained.

"Vinoba believes in the necessity of the political independence of India. He is an active student of history. But he believes that real independence of the villages is impossible without the constructive programme of which khadi is the centre. He believes that the spinning wheel, which has become an integral part of the previous satyagraha campaigns, is the most effective suitable outward symbol of non-violence. He has never been in the limelight on the political platform. With many co-workers he believes that silent constructive work with civil disobedience in the background is far more effective than the already heavily crowded political platform."

### 53. RAJAJI ON VINOBA

The late Sri C. Rajagopalachari, after visiting Vinoba in jail, wrote an article about him: "His (Vinoba's) spirit is pure as of an angel; in scholarship, philosophy and religion he has reached the topmost heights. Yet so complete is his humility, so simple and straightforward his nature, that no official who does not already know him can discover what a great man he is. He does the task allotted to the 'C' class of prisoner, in which the gaoler has put him, he sits silently breaking stones, no one guesses what physical torture it costs him."

#### 54. FASTING FOR QUIT INDIA

On 8th Aug. 1942 Gandhiji proposed a "Quit India" resolution in All India Congress Committee in Bombay. The resolution called upon the British to quit India immediately. And it gave a call to India to "do or die." It was to be a last battle, the biggest of all the satyagraha mass movements.

He was thinking that he would start fasting from the moment he was put in jail. He felt that all satyagrahis should join him in fasting when they were imprisoned. Many doubted if this strategy was sound. They tried to dissuade Gandhiji.

Bapu then consulted Vinoba. He called Vinoba to Sevagram and put the idea before him; if Gandhiji could do satyagraha after considering all aspects of his action, could his followers, who may not have the wisdom, follow him from faith in the leader?

Vinoba's reaction was, "What Rama can do in fullness of his knowledge, Hanuman can do in the fullness of his faith." Gandhiji was satisfied with this.

But, Gandhiji was arrested on the 8th August night itself, the day the resolution was passed in All India Congress Committee, along with all congress leaders. Gandhiji felt that he should not undertake a fast before he had a correspondence with Government on the issue.

Vinoba did not know about this development. When he was arrested, he told the jailer, who knew Vinoba well as a model prisoner who abided by all the jail rules meticulously, that he would go on a fast and required no food.

But within two hours he was summoned to the jail office. Gopalrao Valunjker had come with a message from Bapu that Vinoba should give up the fast. Bapu had told Pyarelal, who was not arrested, to send such a message for Bapu knew that Vinoba was sure to start fasting like a Hanuman. So the state Governor's special permission was taken to send Gandhiji's message to Vinoba.



## 55. VINOBA MOULDED BY GANDHIJI

When visitors went to Gandhiji, he would some times send them to Vinoba. "Did you meet Vinoba? If not, you must certainly do so."

One of these friends was a well known Indian revolutionary. He walked over from Sevagram to Paunar, as Bapu suggested. When he arrived in Paunar, Vinoba was digging in the garden. He raised his head and seeing the visitor standing there, asked him why he had come.

He said, "Simply to have your darshan." He stayed there some time, but said no more. Vinoba went on digging.

Later, the visitor complained to Bapu, "What kind of man did you send me to see? He didn't even speak to me." Bapu had a shrewd idea of what had happened.

"What was he doing?" he asked. "Digging in the garden? Then what is there to be angry about? Vinoba was working. How could he talk to you then? My dear man, should you not first make an appointment?" This was in 1945.

That was how Bapu dealt with the visitor. But the next time he saw Vinoba, he admonished him, "My dear fellow, when some one comes to see you, it's part of your job to meet him. This is also work."

Vinoba gratefully remembered, "Thus little by little, Bapu moulded me into shape; wild creature that I am, he tamed me and as I sat at his feet he transformed me from a barbarian into a servant of all."

Vinoba recounted the incident of digging and the visitor in the Servants of India Hall in Allahabad during the Bhoodan March. The audience burst into laughter. It was in December, 1968.

A gentleman by name Paramanand then stood up and said, "I was that visitor. I was angry with you then. Now all the anger has gone."

Vinoba quoted Tukaram. "Pikaliya send kadupan gelay," "The fruit was bitter when unripe, it became sweet on ripening."

77 year old Paramanandaji was still full of vigour and enthusiasm in Allahabad. His grand father had helped Jhansi Lakshmi Bai when she fought the British in 1850s. Paramanandaji was involved in bomb-making even when he was fourteen, and worked with the revolutionaries. He was given a life sentence and spent 27 years in the prison in the Andaman Islands.

– Source : *Moved by Love* - Vinoba and *Maitri*, Jan 1969

## 56. CREMATION

Vinoba's father didn't inform his sons of his final illness. But a friend who saw that he was seriously ill persuaded Narhar Bhave to go to Dhulia with Shivaji. There he died on Sharat purnima, the autumnal full moon, on 29th October 1947.

After the body was cremated, it is the Hindu custom to immerse the ashes in a holy river. So it was suggested that the ashes be consigned to the waters of the Godavari near Nasik.

But Vinoba did not want it. He argued that water should claim water, earth should claim earth. So they dug a pit in the court yard of their house and buried the ashes. They planted a tulsi bush over the ashes. Vinoba remembered the prayer in the Vedas – "O Mother Earth, give me a place for my dead body."

They set up a grave stone and carved on it the words of Saint Ramadas – "May all be happy, that is my heart's desire."

## 57. GRAM PANCHAYAT

### (Village Council)

Panchayat means the confluence of five forces in love.

The first is love. The feeling that the whole village is a family. There is no place for competition there. Co-operation is the rule.

Fearlessness is the second force. Fear arises when there is no security of livelihood. Members of Panchayat should remove this fear.

Knowledge is the third force. There should be no flight of knowledge. Knowledge of universities should be available in villages.

Determination to establish village industries is the fourth force. There should be assurance of full employment. This is the motivation force in total development of the village.

Cleanliness is the fifth force. Clean body, home, mind, environment, community effort to bring about this integrated cleanliness. If these forces also join the panchayat as abstract members of panchayat, village government will be good government.

— Vinoba quoted in *Sarvodaya Vahini* on 20th Oct. 1994.

## 58. BLACK MARKETING OF INTELLIGENCE

M.H. Kaujalgi was the cashier of Kastur Ba Trust. His father Hanumanta Rao Kaujalgi was a well known Khadi organiser of North Karnataka. After the death of the father, Kabbur, a philanthropist from Bombay offered to give a scholarship of Rs.15,000/= to M.H. Kaujalgi for pursuing further studies in the U.S.A. M.H. was a commerce graduate and wished to study M.B.A. in America. He resigned his job in the Trust.

Vinoba spoke to M.H. about the resignation. "Why have you resigned?"

Kaujalgi - "I want to improve my qualification."

Vinoba - "Why?"

Kaujalgi - "I am just a graduate, one among many. If I secure a postgraduate degree from U.S., I will be a specialist, like Kumarappa, who is distinguished in his field of specialisation, Accounts. Then my value will be better."

Vinoba - "So you want to do black marketing of your intelligence? First, you create a scarcity of intelligence, then you get into that clan of intelligence, which adds to your value. Is this right?"

Vinoba's words made a deep impact on Kaujalgi. Any way the U.S. University also asked him to postpone his studies, since they had a heavy rush of veterans from the war who wanted to continue their studies – this was in 1944-45. So Kaujalgi gave up his idea of going abroad for higher studies.

– From a talk with M.H. Kaujalgi

## 59. KHADI

Vinoba was a protagonist of khadi, the hand-spun, hand-woven cloth propagated by Gandhiji. He advocated the cause of khadi every where.

Some Jain *Sadhwis* came to see Vinoba. A *Sadhwi* is a woman who has taken the vow of celibacy. During the course of their conversation Vinoba asked the *Sadhwis* why they were not wearing khadi. They had a ready reply. They said that they do not have any property of their own. Whatever people gave them they wear.

Vinoba asked them sharply, "Then, would you eat whatever people gave you?"

Being Jains they could not do that, because Jains were strict vegetarians, being believers in *Ahimsa* - non-violence.

– Source : Jayadev Bhai

## 60. SERVING THE COW

Go-seva or service of the cow was also accepted as an item in the constructive programme by Gandhiji. Vinoba took up work of cow service in Paunar *Ashram*. His idea was to serve the cow so he tried to live without drinking milk, but did not succeed in doing this.

Vinoba tried to live without taking milk on three occasions. Every time he had to stop his experiment after two or three years, by which time he became so weak that he had to revert to the use of milk.

Gandhiji advised Vinoba to give up these experiments.

Gandhiji had himself failed in the effort and had to take goat's milk since he had vowed to abjure cow's milk and buffalo milk. Giving up milk was not our life work. So finally Vinoba continued with doing his farming work and used milk liberally in his diet.

When Jayadev of the *Ashram* was ill and lost much weight, Vinoba put him on a milk diet. For several years he lived on a diet of 1.9 litres of cow's milk + 4 tola (45 gm) of linseed oil + 150 gm of jaggery (raw cane sugar). He took this diet four times a day and nothing else. He gained twenty pounds in weight and was healthy again. Jayadev lived on this diet for several years till the last days of Vinoba. Now-a-days he takes food like others in the *Ashram* - rice, wheat, fruit, vegetables and milk.

To serve the cow, you have to promote an important village industry – the oil press, for the oil cake which remains after oil is extracted is a good food for the cow.

## 61. VIVEKANANDA AND DARIDRA NARAYANA

The term *Daridra Narayana* (God - the poor) was Swami Vivekananda's. During the time of the Calcutta plague, Vivekananda himself did much service to the poor.

Vivekananda maintained that service to the poor, looking upon them as a form of God is really the devotion to *Narayana*. Thus he placed before us the spiritual nature of the worship of the poor as God.

This term does away with the separation between atheists and believers. They assemble on the same platform. Three men advocated the cause of the poor in India in the last century. Swami Vivekananda, Lokamanya Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi, were great. Vivekananda used the term *Daridra Narayana* first. The same idea was taken to the people in a movement by Tilak. Gandhi widened the scope of the idea and joined with it production-oriented work. He used service to man as a means to attain independence of India.

In this age Swami Dayananda and Swami Vivekananda emerged as advocates of *brahmacharya*.

During his childhood, Vinoba drew inspiration for *brahmacharya* from Sri Shankaracharya and Samartha Rama Das. The examples of Swami Vivekananda and Swami Dayananda were before him. He enjoyed the bliss and power of *brahmacharya*, which is necessary for intelligence and consciousness, he found.



## 62. WHEN GANDHI DIED

Naturally, the death of Gandhiji affected Vinoba deeply. He said: Bapu loved and trusted me very much and I for my part had laid my whole being at his feet; so long as he lived I simply carried on my work untroubled. Now I wonder whether, if I had left the *Ashram* and joined in the struggle a few years earlier, I might perhaps have had the privilege of giving my life for the cause before he did, even though I might not have been able to extinguish the fire which consumed him. After he had been shot, I had the feeling that at the least, if I had joined Bapu in his wider field of work when I was released from jail in 1945, the fatal attack might have been made on me rather than him, so that I might have stopped the bullets with my own body.

But by God's decree, things take their course. Gandhiji was killed by a man of unbalanced mind and I got the bad news at Paunar two hours later. At first for a day or two, I remained calm. I am by nature slow to feel the impact even of such a blow as this. It came home to me two or three days later and I broke down. It was my duty to speak daily at the evening prayer at Sevagram, and my tears overflowed as I spoke. "What, Vinoba," said one of the brothers present, "Are you weeping too?" "Yes brother," I replied, "I thank God that he has given a heart even to me."

When I heard of Bapu's death my immediate reaction was : Now he has become immortal. When Bapu was in the body, it took time to go and meet him; now it takes no time at all. So long as a great soul lives in the body his power is limited, but when he is released from the body his power knows no bounds.

### 63. COMMUNAL HARMONY

In 1948, after Bapu's (Gandhiji) death, his 'family' of fellow-workers met at Sevagram. Vinoba had been thinking already about what his duty was. During that Gathering at Sevagram he announced—"Considering how Pandit Nehru was situated and that he had asked for my help—" decided that I would give six months experimentally to the service of those made homeless by partition of the country. Along with some fellow-workers I therefore started work for the resettlement of the homeless. I had to do 'liaison' work, in my own language, the work of Naradamuni, carrying messages to and fro. I soon found that Panditji would say one thing, but the men who had to carry out his instructions had different ideas, so nothing got done. If I made suggestions, Panditji would reply. 'That is exactly what I want, and I gave orders three months ago for it to be done.' Even then nothing came of it. I worked very hard during those six months, and there were certainly some results; but I did not get what I was looking for, so in the end I came away.

"In those days there were many conflicts between Hindus and Muslims. The Muslims of Ajmer felt themselves to be in great danger. I went and stayed there for seven days, and visited the holy *Dargah* every day. The place is regarded as Mecca of India. The Muslims welcomed me with great affection. They showed me much love and trust and every one of them came and kissed my hand".

— From *Moved by Love*, Vinoba.

## 64. BHOODAN-THE LAND GIFT MOVEMENT

There were plans to hold a Sarvodaya Conference at • Sivaramapalli near Hyderabad in March 1951. If one goes i by train Hyderabad is only an overnight's journey from Wardha. But Vinoba decided however to go on foot.

After attending the conference Vinoba decided to walk through the Telangana region of Andhra where the communists had been at work.

The Government had sent police to keep the peace in Telangana. Vinoba said, "The police however do not deal in ideas. They can hunt down tigers and keep us safe from them, but in Telangana the problem was not of tigers but of human beings. The communists' methods may be wrong, but their actions are based on a principle, and where principles are involved the police cannot provide an answer."

Thinking thus Vinoba went to Telangana.

On the 18th April, 1951, the third morning of the tour, the Harijans of Pochampalli village came to see Vinoba. They said that if only they could get a bit of land, they could work on the land and so make a living. Vinoba asked them to give him a statement to that effect, so that he could send their petition to the State Government. Then a man who was present in the meeting, Sri Ramachandra Reddy, offered on the spot to give the Harijans one hundred acres of his own land. He said "It was my late father's wish to give land to the landless. He died before he could give the land. We his six children, will fulfil his wish. We shall give 50 acres of wet land and 50 acres of dry land."

Vinoba was overwhelmed. *Bhoodan* was born.

## 65. TALK WITH Dr. MADHUSUDAN REDDY

In the TANA conference (Telugu Association of North America) meeting Subbarao and I sang a song associated with *Bhoodan* movement. Then Dr. Madhusudan Reddy, the chairman, told me that the *Bhoodan* movement was born in his house. I told him "No. It was in Ramchandra Reddy's house." Dr. Madhusudan smiled and said Ramachandra is my elder brother. Then the call came for Dr. Reddy to talk.

The next day I set up a stall to sell cassettes in the conference for raising funds for our school and medical work in Bangalore.

Dr. Reddy came to me there. He was free now. He resumed his *bhoodan* story where he had left off the previous day.

At the time when *Bhoodan* started, Dr. Reddy was Professor of Philosophy in the university. Vinoba knew him well and liked to call him "Philosopher". At that time Dr. Reddy's father died.

In the funeral rites, the sons, Dr. Reddy and his brothers gave many gifts, like cow-gift, go-dan. When it came to *bhoodan*, the gift of land, Madhusudhan told his brother, Ramachandra - "Let us give the land gift to the great brahmin, Vinoba who is going to visit our village in a few days."

Vinoba was in Pochampalli on 18th April 1951. He was trying to bring peace to the troubled areas of Telangana, which was agitated by violence spread by a communist movement. Landless villagers in Pochampalli told Vinoba, "We want land, so that we can earn an honest living.

Our young men have become communists because they do not have a means of livelihood."

Vinoba took up this matter when he was talking with the people of Pochampalli later. It was then that Ramachandra Reddy told Vinoba, "My father wanted to donate 100 acres of his land to the landless villagers. But he could not do this

during his life time. We his children want to fulfill his desire. We shall give 50 acres of wet land and 50 acres of dry land."

Vinoba's joy knew no bounds. He felt the hand of God in this event. Solution to the problem of landless labourers was evolving. He felt the presence of God there. From then on, for more than ten years, *Bhoodan yajna* (sacrifice) became the mission of Vinoba's life.

Madhusudan Reddy forgot TANA, America and my selling tapes as we sat there talking of Vinoba and *bhoodan*. I cherish those moments even now.

## 66. IN TELANGANA

Telangana is an area in Andhra Pradesh which is dry and backward and neglected by government. After the Shivarampalli *Sarvodaya* conference from 7th to 14th of April, 1951, Vinoba decided to walk through Telangana, which was plagued by a terrorist movement organised by a group of communists.

Vinoba liked to walk since this would bring him in close touch with the people whom he liked to serve.

He spoke to the three groups of people in the villages; the communists, the prosperous landlords and the farmers.

To the communists, he said your ideals are good, but the means employed are wrong. The ideal communist state has not been established by any nation in the world. Violence is wrong. It is particularly bad in India at present, since the country is now free and the communists can take control of the state government, democratically. Force will not achieve anything.

The prosperous landlords had fled from the villages and had settled down in towns and cities. To them, Vinoba said, go back to your land and serve the people. Police cannot protect you all the time. If you live in the villages boldly in a spirit of service, God will protect you. Those who love and serve the poor can be fearless.

To the common people Vinoba said the whole village should have such a spirit of unity that the wealthy ones are also held in affection. The village should protect all its people, rich and poor.

## 67. LAVANAM, VINOBA'S INTERPRETER

Vinoba chose Lavanam to interpret his Hindi talks into Telugu during his bhoodan tour of the Telugu area - Andhra. Lavanam and others suggested other scholars of Telugu to do this work. But Vinoba wanted only Lavanam who proved to be a very good interpreter.

Vinoba noticed that Lavanam would leave his meetings at the time of prayers. So Vinoba proposed that they would have silent prayers (*Mauna Prarthana*) in Andhra, so no mention of God would be there and so Lavanam could sit through the prayers, too. Lavanam raised an objection - "The word prayer implied the existence of God and he would not subscribe to that. Change the name of the time of contemplation to *Mauna Prayatna* which meant, 'silent effort' and he would have no objection to that."

Vinoba became grave, he told Lavanam, "This old man is prepared to give up God, who is dearest to him, for your sake. Can't you give up just a word for his sake?"

This moved the heart of Lavanam and he agreed to sit through the silent prayers.

Lavanam and his family do excellent work for the upliftment of the underprivileged in Andhra. They are all atheists, but active humanists, too. Lavanam says the two most important influences in his life are Gora and Vinoba.

## 68. SITTING ON VINOBA'S SHOULDERS

Vinoba while explaining how *ahimsa* developed, has said, "In the beginning the non-violent man had to consider how to save himself from the attacks of the violent. At first the *kshatriya* class was set up for the protection of society, but it went too far and started devouring society itself. Then the non-violent *brahmins* began to consider how society could be saved from these power-mad *kshatrias*. Parashuram, though a devotee of *ahimsa* himself, resorted to violence. He set out to destroy the *kshatrias*. For removing the violence of the *kshatrias*, he himself adopted violence. Though this was an effort of *ahimsa*, the attempt did not succeed. Twenty one times he destroyed the *kshatrias*, still they survived, because the method was wrong in its very basis. He who set out to destroy the *kshatrias* became a *kshatria* himself and added to their numbers. How then could the *kshatria* caste be destroyed? He himself had become a *kshatria* and the seed of violence survived. Parashurama was, no doubt, an excellent fellow, but his attempt was strange... When I point to Parashurama's fault here, it does not mean that I am more intelligent than he. Compared to him, I am a child; but I stand on his shoulders, and can therefore see much further without effort."

Lavanam, the atheist young man, who was translating daily Vinoba's speeches into Telugu in Andhra Pradesh, once in discussion with Vinoba told him, "As you have said that because you are sitting on the shoulder of Parashuram (or ancestors) you can see much farther than him (or 'them') I too sitting on your shoulders can see much farther than you."

Vinoba liked this thrust and laughed heartily. But he added later, "What if the man who sits on the shoulders is blind?"



## 69. OM TAT SAT

Om Tat Sat Sri Naaraayana tu  
Purushottama Guru tu  
Siddha Buddha tu Skanda Vinaayaka  
Savitaa Paavaka tu

Brahma Mazda tu Yahwa Shakti tu  
Eesu Pita Prabhu tu  
Rudra Vishnu tu Raama Krishna tu  
Raheema Tao tu

Vaasudeva Go Viswaroopu tu  
Chidaananda Hari tu  
Adwiteeya tu Akaala Nirbhaya  
Aatmalinga Siva tu.

Vinoba Says :-

These three verses have a garland of 36 names. This is something new. It is useful to know its origin in order to meditate upon it.

I have been engaged in the study of different cultures for many years. I have been thinking deeply about the special names occurring in each tradition. In the Holy Kuran, Allah's many names are mentioned. Among them, *Rahmaan or Raheem* are most meaningful. In the same way I came across *Tao* while studying Chinese philosophy. Like this at different times thoughts have occurred to me.

During the *Bhoodan* March, while walking from Hrisikesh to Haridwar on the way, Kali Kambliwala Trust gave me a rosary of sandalwood. I have rarely used a rosary. Takli and charkha have been my rosary. They bring me concentration of mind. But since they gave me this rosary, I kept it near me while sleeping. Meditation was also there as I did this. The above three verses were born from

the meditations. His names are infinite in number since His qualities are infinite. So I selected a few names of the Lord which would benefit the devotee. The speciality of this collection is that all religions are in it. The many traditions of the Hindus find a place in the collection. A superb hymn has been created for remembering the Lord. I have derived much satisfaction from this *Nam Mala*. It has now become an integral part of my evening prayers.

– From *Sarvodaya*, June 1952

## 70. THE LORD'S NAME

Balia is a small town in Eastern Uttar Pradesh. It is the home town of Chandrasekhar, the former prime minister.

When Vinoba was in Balia on his *Bhoodan Yatra*, his camp was visited by my brother S N Subba Rao, who was a chief organiser of the Congress Seva Dal, the volunteer organisation of the Indian National Congress in New Delhi.

Subba Rao sings devotional songs in many languages. That day he sang a song from Purandara Dasa, one of the greatest of the composers of songs to Vitthala in Kannada. The theme of the song was, "Ranga, I do not care for you, I don't want any obligation from you. All I need is the support of your name." The song recounts names of many devotees from the *Bhagavata Purana*.

As Subba Rao sang, tears rolled down the cheeks of Vinoba. Such was his love for the devotees. Such was the beauty of the simple song sung in Rag Joanpuri.

This incident was recollected by Jayadev Bhai in 1993.

## 71. THE GRACE OF VAIDYANATH

In Devghar, Bihar, there is a famous shrine of Shiva, who is known as Vaidyanath. During the *Bhoodan* march, Vinoba went to visit the temple, but instead of the *darsan* (sight) of Vaidyanath, he received blows from some men who opposed his visit, since he was accompanied by some 'untouchables'.

Vinoba never meant to offend these 'devotees'. Vinoba's party had made enquiries and were informed that there was no objection to untouchables entering the temple. However some elements of the temple did not like the visit and beat up Vinoba and his companions.

It was on 19th September, 1953. Vinoba went to the temple by walk, after conducting the evening prayer meeting. They were all silent. Vinoba was mentally repeating some hymns to Shiva from the Vedas. Hundreds of men, women, including some 'untouchables' went with him. Unexpectedly, a gang of goondas, armed with sticks descended on them, beating them up. Vinoba and his companions did not resist the offenders in any way. But a cordon formed around Vinoba and warded off the blows meant for him. But some blows fell on Vinoba, too. Vinoba and his party accepted the blows as *prasad* or 'Grace of God' Vaidyanath and returned to their camp, without visiting the temple.

Vinoba felt blessed that he also shared the experience of his master, Gandhi, who had received the same treatment when he visited this temple.

## 72. WORSHIP OF JAGANNATH

When he was in Puri, Vinoba went to the famous ancient temple of Jagannath with a French lady.

At the temple they stopped him and said that he could go in but the French national would not be allowed to enter because she was a *mleccha*.

Vinoba said if his French friend could not enter, he would not enter the temple either.

Then he related how four centuries earlier, Guru Nanak was also termed an infidel and stopped at the gates of this temple. On that occasion, the Guru composed a song- *The cosmic arathi*. Vinoba sang that song –

Gagan may thaal ravi-chandra deepak baney

"The sky is a plate in which sun and moon are the lamps.

"The constellations were pearls placed there, shining. The incense is *Malaya*-breeze. Wind fans the God. The plants of the forests are a floral lamp to God."

This cosmic arati goes on day and night in nature for all to see and enjoy. You do not have to enter the temple to witness this cosmic waving of the lamp before the God.

(Swami Vivekananda knew this song as a young man, he used to sing the song which was appreciated by his guru Sri Ramakrishna. Gurudev Tagore translated the song into Bengali poetry.)

### 73. THE IMMORTAL PATH

Paadayaatreyamrita rekhey maneya munde  
Saridudakke vandanam.

The immortal path of the holy march passed in front of my home – for this, salutation!

The poet, Kuvempu wrote this couplet after Vinoba visited Kuvempu's home before entering Mysore during the *Bhoodan* march.

Even as the *Bhoodan* March entered Karnataka (then Mysore State) from Kerala, Vinoba commenced his study of Kannada and Sri Ramayana Darsanam, the epic poem of Kuvempu. He was attracted to this new Kannada version of Ramayana, composed at the present time.

Ananta Rangachar, an enthusiastic member of the padayatra, guided Vinoba in this study.

As the march approached Mysore City Vinoba expressed a desire to visit the home of the poet Kuvempu and to meet him. So a message was sent to Kuvempu accordingly. Just a little later, in the morning Vinoba walked into "Udaya Ravi", the home of Kuvempu, whose joy knew no bounds as Vinoba came to meet him.

Vinoba wanted to see the original manuscript of the Ramayana Darsanam. Kuvempu gave him the finely written book. Vinoba took the book in his hands and touched it with his head in reverence and scanned its pages.

The marchers spent some days in Mysore City. Kuvempu visited their camp and had the pleasure of meeting Vinoba again.

– Source : Talk by Sri K.S. Narayanaswamy

#### 74. AN ENCOUNTER IN ELAWAL

Sri Rama Rao, a retired teacher was talking to us, a few friends.

He said what he was relating to us was something which no one had recorded or reported earlier.

It was during the National *Sarvodaya* Conference in Elawal, near Mysore in South India, Vinoba was camping there during the Bhoodan March. The Conference was attended by *Sarvodaya* workers as well as political leaders like Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Home Minister Govind Vallabh Pant.

Rama Rao went out of curiosity, to the Elawal Palace where Vinoba was camping. That day, there was an air of expectancy in the place. In a room, a seat was arranged. Vinoba sat with a small, low desk kept on the floor, resting his hands on the desk. Opposite to him Jaya Chamaraja Wodeyar, the former Maharaja of Mysore came and sat. He was then the Raj Pramukh (governor) of Madras presidency. The state of Mysore was then no longer with the Maharaja, but still he had his palace in Mysore.

When the Maharaja, who had a large body, weighing some 200 kgs, settled down in his seat, Vinoba asked him.

"Don't you find your big body an inconvenience?."

Maharaja, "No. I have got used to it."

Vinoba, "Have you tried to reduce your body?"

Maharaja, "Yes, I do exercise. I do a lot of horse riding. I go up the Chamundi Hills on horse back. I climb the steps myself for some distance."

Vinoba, "That is not enough. If you like you can go to Urulikanchan near Poona. My brother Balkoba practices nature cure there. He can help you to reduce your weight."

Then Vinoba presented a copy of his book *Gita Pravachana* to the Maharaja, who, in turn, presented a copy of his book on Dattatreya to Vinoba.

## 75. JAI JAGAT

Vinoba was fond of the greeting *Jai Jagat* - victory to the world. Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose had introduced the popular greeting, *Jai Hind*- victory to India when he was leading the *Azad Hind* - Free Indian Government in Singapore during the war. Vinoba liked the more broad based, universal *Jai Jagat*.

This slogan was born in Karnataka, on 1 November 1957. Vinoba was then marching on his *Bhoodan Pada Yatra* from village to village.

United Karnataka was formed on 1st November, 1956.

When welcoming Vinoba to the gathering, the local leaders would use the slogan *Jai Karnataka* in those days. On 1st November 1957, Vinoba entered the town of Kadaba in Tumkur District.

Vinoba said :

"The first anniversary of the newly formed State fell on November 1 st, 1957. On that day I began using a new slogan – *Jai Jagat*. A United Karnataka, I explained, was only a first step, which must be followed next by a united India and then United World. Dukhayal, the Sindhi songwriter who wrote many beautiful songs for the land gift movement, composed a song *Jai Jagat*."

The greeting was born in a small town, Kadaba, in Tumkur District. From Kadaba Vinoba and party moved to Kalloor on 2nd November, Mayasandra on 3rd November and were in Turuvekere on the 4th November.

Even to this day *Jai Jagat* is a popular greeting among *Sarvodaya* workers. All this was remembered by Belgumba Narayanappa, who was in Vinoba's group then.

– from Belgumba Narayanappa



## 76. VITTHALA OF PANDHARPURA

Vinoba was not allowed to enter the temples of Vaidyanath in Devghar and Jaganath in Puri. But he was welcomed by Vitthala in Pandharapur, who provided him with some of the most blessed moments of his life. Vinoba was beaten up in Devghar. He was stopped by the Puri temple since he was with a French woman - she was a devout Christian, but had great regard and reverence to Hindu Gods also. Since she was not allowed to enter the temple Vinoba refused to go in, either.

In May, 1958 a *Sarvodaya* Conference was held in Pandharapur. Ten years earlier, Sane Guruji had done hunger satyagraha in this place, as a result, 'untouchables' were allowed to offer worship at the temple. For hundreds of years, these devotees had to be satisfied by seeing the temple tower only. Now they could go in and worship Vitthala. The trustee of the temple told Vinoba that they had no objection to non-hindus also worshipping at the temple.

Vinoba went to the temple. With him he had Fatima, a Muslim woman and Hema, a Christian woman and Gul Behan a Parsi. These women were also allowed to touch Vitthala and worship him. They gladly did that.

For Vinoba it was a most unforgettable experience, for he remembered all the great saints who had offered worship in the temple, like Jnandev, Ramanuja, Tulsidas. As he stood before the image of Vitthala, tears flowed from his eyes for a long time. Vitthala spoke to Vinoba. As he watched the dear form of Vithoba, Vinoba saw his dear mother, his father, his teacher and countless others worshipping with him.

Vinoba considered this a historic event, when devotees of other religions were cordially welcomed to offer worship in a Hindu temple. He felt this event is worth recording in letters of gold in the history of Hinduism, an event which gives expression to the true spirit of Hinduism.

## 77. BIO DATA OF VINOBA

After a long time, Vinoba re-visited Gujarat Vidya Peeth in Ahmedabad in 1958 during *Bhoodan padyatra*.

He wrote in the visitors' book - Name - Vinoba Place - Pochampalli\*

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\*Though Gagode in Maharashtra was his birth place and Paunar was his place of residence, Vinoba considered Pochampaili, where *Bhoodan* was born, as his place.

## 78. NEIGHBOURS, NOT ENEMIES

Vinoba was walking in Kashmir. The group went near the Line of Control between the Indian side of Kashmir and the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

The guide explained to Vinoba the situation on the border and showed him the position of the Indian Army on the one side and the 'enemy pickets' on the other side of the border.

Vinoba told him, "Do not call them enemies. Nobody is our enemy. They are our neighbours. Call them neighbours."

There Vinoba spoke to a group of children. He made them shout the slogan, *Jai Jagat*. "Not *Jai Hind*- victory to India, but *Jai Jagat* - victory to the world. Let every one win. Let our neighbours also prosper."

The children shouted *Jai Jagat* with gusto. Vinoba said, "Let the children in Pakistan hear your shout, let them feel happy that we wish the whole world well."

This incident was recounted by Nirmala Deshpande, who was with Vinoba then.

### 79. I AM ALSO A MUSLIM

When Vinoba was in Kashmir during his Bhoodan yatra his prayer meeting talks were full of quotations from the Kuran. He had learnt Arabic to study the Kuran in the original. His explanation of passages from the Kuran fascinated the muslims of Kashmir. They were attracted to this holy man whose appearance was also like that of a muslim fakir.

They asked him, "Are you a hindu or a muslim?"

He said "I am a hindu and a muslim, I am also a christian and also a sikh."

Narrow-minded followers of fundamental religions are only hindus or only muslims. Broad-minded spiritual aspirants and teachers are also hindus, also muslims also followers of all true religions.

## 80. NAMGHAR AND KAMGHAR

In 1961 Vinoba went to Assam at the suggestion of Prime Minister Nehru, who wanted Vinoba to bring peace in that troubled state which was sensitive since it bordered on China, Tibet, now a part of China, Burma and East Pakistan (now Bangla Desh). People of Assam were disturbed by the infiltration of Muslims from East Pakistan.

Vinoba felt that the problem of infiltration would be solved if all land belonged to the village and not to individuals and land was not available for selling and buying - this was the principle of *gramdan*.

Vinoba was charmed by the institution of *Nam-ghars*, which were set up by Snankara Deva and Madhava Deva, the spiritual preceptors of Assam. They had broadcast the message of *Ek Saraniya*-total surrender all over the countryside through *Namghars* (home of God's name). There was a *Namgharin* every village.

Vinoba felt there was need for a *Kamghar* (work house) in all villages. He saw that Assamese women were active, skilled workers. They had set up handlooms in their homes and wove cloth.

He saw that his principle of *Stree Shakti* (women's power) could blossom in Assam. *Maitri Ashram* was established in Assam later for spreading *Stree Shakti*.

Vinoba stayed in Assam for one and a half years in 1961-1962.

He walked back to Bengal through East Pakistan with the permission of the Pakistan Government.

### 81. A DONATION FOR MAITRI ASHRAM

Gunada is from Assam. She was a young girl when Vinoba was in Assam for the Bhoodan Yatra. He asked her to start a *Maitri* (friendship) *Ashram* in Assam, almost on the border of Arunachal Pradesh. It was to be a home for the women who had given up their homes, and chosen a life of renunciation and service. Vinoba asked Kusum Deshpande also to stay in *Maitri Ashram*. Gunada, Kusum and Lakshmi were the first members of this *Ashram*. Gunada was the first Executive Trustee. Vinoba wrote letters to Gukula, jointly to the three sisters there.

Land was a gift from *Bhoodan*. Where was money to come from? Vinoba said, "Beg for money. Take money from people, but do not take government grants."

Gunada, "Who will give me money? I am an unknown girl."

Vinoba, "I will give you the first donation." He called his assistant Balvijay and asked for a rupee. He gave the rupee to Gunada. That rupee is still preserved in *Maitri Ashram*. Gunada spoke about this to all friends.

Chuni Bhai, a Gujarati dedicated worker friend, asked Gunada to draft an appeal for funds. He went to the market, armed with the appeal. He returned with donations totalling Rs.150. It was a small fortune those days. The *Ashram* prospered, it is one of the six *Ashrams* Baba founded.

They also possess a golden cross which Vinoba gave them. A bishop had presented the cross to him. This valuable gift is also preserved in *Maitri Ashram*. Gunada told this story in Paunar in November 1995.

## 82. VINOBA'S LINGUISTIC STUDIES

Baba (Vinoba) has studied 20-22 languages, like Marathi, Hindi, Gujarati, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam. But he didn't read the dramas and novels in any language. He studied only the spiritual literature.

Baba knows some 50,000 verses by heart. He learnt by rote the devotional songs, bhajans, in different languages like Tamil and Telugu. The *Jnaneswari* has a total of 9000 *ovis* (verses). Baba knows 3,000 of them by heart. Ramadas Swami's *Dasabodha* has 7,000 *ovis*, of these he knows 2,000 by heart. He studied the *Vinaya Patrika* of Tulsidas, *Japuji* and *Sukhamani* of the sikhs and the works of Shankaradeva and Madhavadeva from Assam. But he didn't study novels and drama; only the spiritual literature.

– From *Maitri*, 1977

### 83. THE WISE WORMS

During the days of the Chinese aggression of North- East India, Vinoba was taking his *Bhoodan* March in Assam, near the same area.

The people of Assam were complaining against the Indian Army there. The people of Assam liked to eat rice prepared by the process of hand pounding of paddy. But the army officials forced the local people to get paddy de- husked in mills, the military liked its rice nicely polished.

When Vinoba met the Army Commander, he took up this question with him. Vinoba asked him why the army put people to trouble.

The General replied, "We have no objection to use hand-pounded rice. But we find that hand-pounded rice is spoiled by worms soon. Worms do not attack mill-made rice. That is why we get our rice milled."

Then Vinoba explained, " Do you know why worms are not attracted to milled rice? The nutrition of rice is all removed by removal of the bran in rice mills. Worms do not care for the de-nutritionised rice-worms are more intelligent than men!"

Thereafter, army officials also stopped polishing the rice and started using hand-pounded rice. People were happy.

– Source : a talk by S.N. Subba Rao



## 84. CHAMBAL AND ITS RAVINES

River Chambal rises on the Western Ghats, near about Indore. After passing by Kotah, changes direction of flow here and there and finally merges in River Jamuna. It passes through three States, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

On its banks many holy men have done *tapasya*. The ravines of Chambal have also protected many warriors, dacoits, robbers and Thugs.

The ravines have formed during the past 400 years or so. Before that it was level ground, mostly, covered with forests. Soil erosion has produced the ravines, due to de-forestation.

Chambal Valley covers Etawah and Agra districts of Uttar Pradesh, Bhind and Morena districts of Madhya Pradesh and parts of Rajasthan. Tawarghar, Sheopur districts are also covered by ravines. A total of some 316,000 acres are involved. A commission set up to study the problem of ravines has recommended that extensive re-forestation is the solution to the problem, together with revival of cattle-growing. But nothing much has been done.

Even the land available for cultivation is of inferior quality. There is acute shortage of land. "If there are three brothers in a family, one will take to cultivation, one will join the army and the third will join the dacoit forces," - an old saying.

Chambal Valley has been the recruiting ground for armies from the days of Chandra Gupta Mourya. It has been the source of men for groups like the Thuggees, from the 14th century. Efforts of the police forces of various governments have been helpless in putting down the menace of such outlaws.

By the end of 1954 six gangs of notorious dacoit groups had been liquidated by the Police. The most notorious one, led by Man Singh and his son Subedar Singh were killed in a fierce encounter in August 1953. Man Singh and his son died then. Tehsildar Singh, another son, was captured, with a bullet injury. When he was in Naini Jail, awaiting execution of a death sentence, he wrote a very

pathetic letter to Vinobaji. He expressed a desire to have the darshan of Vinoba, the only living saint, before being executed.

## 85. BHOODAN MARCH IN AGRA

On May 5, 1960, the evening prayer meeting met in Agra, 30,000 people attended, U.N. Dhebar, former President of the Congress Party was present, so were MPs, MLAs and the First Citizen of Agra, who garlanded Vinoba on behalf of Agra Corporation.

In his speech, Vinoba said, "The days of politics and religion are gone. We are now in the era of science and spirituality. If we do not give up the petty differences of Tand 'You', we are bound to perish. This is the message of science.

"In the morning some one asked me, 'Are you going to tour the dacoit-infested area? I replied to him, "No. Certainly not. I am going to tour the area of "good men", not in the area of "dacoits". The area of Chambal ravines is the area of good men, as other areas are. Only God knows who is a "dacoit." Some men are ill-defined as dacoits. In the eyes of the Almighty some other men may also be more guilty than those ill-famed men.

"Some people are expecting that I am going to solve the problem of dacoits. Who am I to solve any problem? I am only a servant of God, wandering from village to village to serve good men. A day would come when my own problem would be solved!"

(The material in this Chapter and the next eight are taken from - Sri Krishna Datta Bhatta,'— *and they gave up DacoityV* - Akhila Bharat Sarva Seva Sangh, Raighat, Varanasi, India, Aug. 1962. The book is now out of print.)

## 86. RAMAVTAR SINGH

On 10th May 1960 The Bhoodan group was in Fatehabad in U.P. In his morning speech Vinoba spoke about a couplet which was sung then -

Veeronki yeh baat re bhai  
Kaayarka nahin kaam re!

This is the path of the valiant, cowards do not take that course. Vinoba said cowards will have no place in the society of the future. The valiant is not afraid, he does not make others afraid. He is not a coward, but he is not a tyrant either.

The police and the activists are afraid of each other. When a man gives up the fear of death, he becomes valiant. Vinoba stayed in the High School building. Others were in a *dharmashala* nearby. He was given a 301 rupee purse in the evening meeting. Vinoba took the opportunity to speak of *Sampatti dan*-regular, periodic donations. "As we take our food daily, so we must donate daily. We should donate some part of whatever we possess. There will be no dacoity if we stick to this principle of regular donation."

Peace emissaries were then roaming in the Chambal ravines, spreading Vinoba's message of love. The workers moved on foot, on cycles and some in jeep. They met the outlaws and their families and appealed to the dacoits to meet Vinoba and give up the life of sin.

That afternoon, Vinoba's Peace Mission bore its first fruit.

A young man of 30 with trim moustache, wearing a shirt and a loin cloth called on Vinoba and surrendered to him. "Baba, until now I was on the wrong path. I will not commit any offence in future." His name is Ramavtar Singh.

"A *bagi* (rebel) has come, *bagi*has come!" The streets of Fatehabad rang with this cry. A big crowd gathered at the High School.

Ramavtar Singh participated in the night prayer meeting. He sat in a corner, a few feet away from Vinoba. Every one came to see the miracle of non-violence working.

## 87. SRIKISHAN, MOHARAMAN AND RATI RAM

Nagra (Morena) on 17th May 1960.

Vinoba stays in Primary School building, others are in tents. On the east is the HQ of Fourth Battalion Zone of special Anti-Dacoity Police Operations. They are located in the house of a local resident, twelve members of whose family were killed by dacoits twenty years ago.

At noon a young man with gun was noticed moving towards Vinoba's camp. People ran towards him shouting "He is *bagi*, he is *bagi*." Then two men jumped out of a jeep which just arrived. They also went to meet Vinoba. "They are also *bagi*" People shouted.

In the evening post-prayer meeting these three young men, one with a gun, surrendered at the feet of Vinoba and said, "Baba, until now we have committed many mistakes. We are sorry for them. We won't commit mistakes in future."

Their names are Srikishan, Moharaman and Patiram. They belong to the notorious gangs of Rupa and Kalla. Patiram surrendered his twelve bore gun also. The other two had no guns. Srikishan, 19, is the youngest.

Vinoba spoke, "I am glad some change is taking place here. Earlier to this surrender a brother met me. He is only 28, a brahmin. As he talked, tears fell from his eyes. He said, "I do not mind the government punishing me for my misdeeds, but the atrocities committed on my brothers and relations are unbearable!"....

"The dirt of the heart is washed by the pure water of devotion. That is the way to redemption. I am deeply moved by this surrender. Is it all done by me? Or due to my comrades or are these brothers pushed by circumstances to surrender? No, it is only the hand of the Lord. I am grateful to the Almighty who has changed their hearts and inspired them to change..."

Then Vinoba spoke of the violence and the suffering in the village at the hands of dacoits and the police.

## 88. LACHI PANDIT

In Kanera (Bhind), 18th May 1960. The *Bhoodan yatra* crossed over from Morena into Bhind District in M.P.

Vinoba spoke about Namdeo. He was a dacoit. One day when Nama was sitting in a *dharmashala* (free rest house) one of his victims came there and began to tell his tale of woe to a fellow pilgrim. "You might have heard of the notorious dacoit, Nama. He has been a great source of trouble to me and my wife!". Hearing this tale Namdeo was touched. He was sorry for his misdeeds. He repented and became a saint.

Vinoba went round the village. Villagers told him of the atrocities of dacoits, of murders and loot.

As they returned to the camp, there was a rush of people shouting "Pandit has come! Pandit Tayan has come! Lachi Pandit has come!"

He is called Pandit because he is a brahmin! They said he is a dangerous and clever *bagi*. A crowd gathered, Ramavtar was at the gate controlling the crowd. Now he was a volunteer worker! He wears khadi clothes.

Lachi introduced his wife to Vinoba. Then his mother. And the ten month old daughter, a chubby baby.

Vinoba - "How did you come here?"

Lachi -" I was at Bombay. I read in the papers daily that Baba Vinoba is touring Chambal ravines and walking from village to village inviting *bagis* to give up their wrong Path, repent for their misdeeds and surrender themselves. This is the only way through which they could mend their future."

Vinoba, "Then what happened?"

"I felt an urge in my heart to come, to repent for my past deeds. So I have come, Baba."

"Did you come by rail?"

"Yes, Baba. I thought of wiring to you before coming. But I dropped the idea for it might put an obstacle in my way and I might be arrested by police. (There was a prize of Rs. 5000 on his head.) So I came directly. I suffered from fever during travel."

"How could you evade the police in Bombay?"

"it is not easy to locate a man in Bombay, among the millions. Once they arrested some one else, thinking it was me. But when he was brought here for identification, it was found that he was not the wanted man. So the poor fellow was let off."

"How could you live at Bombay? It is an expensive city?"

Lachi said, as if amazed, "What for did I commit *bag-girithen*, Baba?" It was explained to Vinoba *bag-giri* means dacoity. Lachi continued, "I used to come here at intervals and take away a few thousand rupees and then I lived at ease in Bombay or Calcutta."

At the evening prayer meeting Lachi surrendered formally, repenting for his past misdeeds.

Vinoba was moved. "I felt that I am facing the Lord. It is all His will. This brother came from Bombay to surrender, is God-sent. No one persuaded him. He was inspired by God. I am reminded of the incident of Angulimala, who changed into a saint by the touch of the Buddha. This is nothing but the miracle of the Almighty, in *kaliyug*."



## 89. LUKKA, LOKMAN DIXIT

Kadora, 19th May 1960.

Gang leader Lukka led his eleven member gang in the early hours at 3.45 am. Campers were all asleep. They came in two jeeps. When Vinoba awoke, General Yadunath Singh took the *bagis* to him. Vinoba had a long talk with them all. So the departure from Kanera was delayed by ninety minutes.

It was a 10 mile journey from Kanera to Kadora. Vinoba led the march. The followers included the eleven dacoits who carried a total prize of Rs. 20,000 on their heads! Each of these carries a rifle. One of the rifles is an expensive telescopic type. The leader of the gang is a legendary figure, known as Lukka, alias Nekse, alias Pandit Lokman Sharma. He joined Man Singh fifteen years ago. Except for Lukka all others of this gang have been either killed or captured. Now Lukka is here, marching with Vinoba. Police and the district officer are also in the march.

Gautam Bajaj and General Yadunath Singh and two other members of the peace mission were contacted by Lukka's gang near a village called Khipna. They were happy to receive Baba's message of love. It was a new experience for the dacoits. They were convinced that this was a chance to change their lives.

Gautam has interesting details about the gang. They have perfect discipline. The leader's word is the law for them. They are highly skilled marksman. They are highly religious. They read the Ramayana daily. They are generous of heart - a part of their earnings is given away in charity to the poor. They do not drink, do not gamble and do not eat meat. They do not rob the poor and do not molest women.

But, now a days the *bagi* says, *Aj te hamayee nayee zindagi hai rahee hai* ( A new chapter of life begins for us from today.) Now senior police officials are shaking hands with Lukka and the *bagis*.

The *bagis* ate with the peace workers. They said, in the ravines, they never sat in a row to eat. They just took their food in hand and ate. But Lukka said he usually ate a lot of ghee with his food. There was no ghee here.

In the evening prayer meeting, after Vinoba's speech, there was Ram dhun "Raja Ram Ram Ram Sita Ram Ram Ram."

Then Gen. Yadunath Singh stood up and motioned to Lukka and his gang.

They proceeded to Vinoba and surrendered their arms. The first was Lukka, then came Teja Singh, Bhagavan Singh, Kanhai, Vidyaram, Bhup Singh, Durjan, Darey Lai, Matre, Jang Jit and Ram Sanahi. One by one they surrendered their arms to Baba saying "Baba, till now we committed so many misdeeds. We are very sorry for them. We won't commit them in future"

There was pin-drop silence in the large crowd.

Vinoba then went to his camp.

General Saheb then asked the *bagi* brothers to stand up. People were curious to see them. They could not believe that the dangerous dreaded men now stood, harmless, among them.

The police took away the arms. It was a historic event.

## 90. RAMDAYAL, BADAN SINGH AND KARAN SINGH

Surpura, 20th May 1960.

In the morning speech, after arriving in Surpura, Vinoba said many residents of Chambal are soldiers and ex-servicemen. They easily lose their temper. Quarrels result in shooting. They are charged with murder. The culprit here is not the man but the gun. If there were no guns, only hot words would be exchanged. Gun is the real culprit.

Some *bagis* have a gun in hand and a rosary around the neck. It is because of their faith in God that these *bagis* have now come to surrender. Dacoits turn into saints through repentance.

At the end of Vinoba's speech three more *bagis* surrendered at his feet. Ramdayal, Badan Singh and Karan Singh. This accounts for all the members of Rupa's gang. Rupa took up the leadership after the death of Man Singh a few months ago. Later, Lukka became the leader.

People surround the *bagis* on all sides. They follow the *bagis* every where. Lukka goes about looking for a hiding place where he can have a nap - he needs the rest.

In the evening speech Vinoba said, now these fellows have joined my party, the gang of saints and sadhus. We are all one.

## 91. MAN SINGH'S HOME

Udotpura, 21st May 1960

Mahadevi Tai had to appeal to the crowds to leave the *bagis* alone. "What do you gain by looking at them?"

Udotpura is Man Singh's In-laws' place. Arriving here, Vinoba said, "Man Singh is gone. One day I will also follow suit some sisters came to see me today. Some of them lost their husbands and brothers due to the atrocities of dacoits. Others have lost their men due to the atrocities of the police. The malice and animosity of men has brought the sorrow of women and children.

Vinoba and party walked a little distance to visit a hamlet of 500 houses. They went to the house where Man Singh was married. Rukmini Devi, 60, his wife, lives here now. Man Singh's house and land have been taken away by the police. Man Singh's daughter, daughter-in-law and grand children all live there in dire poverty.

The women prostrated before Vinoba and began to cry. They all entered the house. It was a pitiable sight - misery and affliction. The women described their suffering. Man Singh's house at Khera Rathore and 600 acres of land are in the hands of the police. Man Singh's son Tehsildar Singh is facing death sentence. A mercy petition pends before the President.

The women say, "Baba, give us a word." They want Vinoba's blessings.

Vinoba's words are "Have faith in God. Let His will be done."

Now the sisters in Vinoba's party are also crying.

That day Vinoba stressed five points in his evening speech. Be fearless. Love every one. Confess your misdeeds. Let justice be tempered with forgiveness. Never forget God.

## 92. BAGHIS GO TO JAIL

They walked only 3 miles in the morning, to reach Bhind. Big crowds surrounded them in the city. In his speech on arrival, Vinoba said only love and sympathy can solve the dacoit problem.

H V Pataskar, the Governor of Madhya Pradesh came and met Vinoba.

In the evening the *bagis* who had surrendered took leave of Vinoba and went to jail. Before the night prayer the *bagis* wanted to sing. Baba agreed. They sang—

Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram

Patit Paavana Sita Ram.

Two young women in the peace mission put a tika of sandal paste and tied a *rakhi* on each *bagi's* wrist. They were given a *peda* (milk-sweet).

One by one the *bagis* were called, each did *pranam* to Baba. When Durjan Singh came to Baba he said, "From today you are no longer Durjan, you are now Sajjan." He said, "Yes, Baba". Durjan means, bad man, Sajjan means, good man.

After prayers 18 *bagis* went and sat in the police van. Ramavtar did not go because he was wanted by the U.P police, M.P police had no case against him. Karan Singh also stayed back. There was no warrant against his name. General Yadunath Singh and two women workers also went with them upto the jail.

The *bagis* told the women, "Sister, we shall bear the consequence of our misdeeds, but we will never forget the love you have showered on us. Please remember us."

### 93. VINOBA'S PEACE MISSION

During May-June 1960, twenty dacoits surrendered at the feet of Vinoba, giving up their sophisticated arms:

1. Ramavtar Singh - Morena
2. Patiram - Morena
3. Srikisan - Morena
4. Maharaman - Bhind
5. Lachi - Bhind
6. Parbhu - Bhind
7. Lukka (Lokman) - Agra
8. Kanhai - Agra
9. Tej Singh - Bhind
10. Dareylal - Agra
11. Ram Sanchi - Bhind
12. Durjan - Bhind
13. Vidyaram - Bhind
14. Bhup Singh - Bhind
15. Jangjit - Agra
16. Matrey - Bharatpur
17. Bhagwan Singh - Morena
18. Ramdayal - Agra
19. Badan Singh - Agra
20. Kachere - Bhind

Karan Singh was not arrested since there was no warrant against him. He was let off. Kachere was not taken by the police on 4th June but was arrested later.

Thousands of letters and telegrams came, congratulating Vinoba on the miracle at Chambal.

The President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad wired:

"The whole nation looks with hope and admiration upon the manner in which you have been able to rouse the better instincts and moral sense and thereby inspire the faith of dacoits leading to their voluntary surrender.

"Your efforts came to most of us as a refreshing proof of the efficacy of the moral approach for reforming the misguided and drawing the best out of man. I can only pray for complete success of your mission and offer you my regards and best wishes."

The President congratulated Gen. Yadunath Singh in a separate telegram.

#### 94. LUKKA AND TEHSILDAR SINGH

A few years later some more dacoits approached Vinoba in Paunar *Ashram* to work for their surrender. Vinoba directed them to Jayaprakash Narayan.

At first Jayaprakash did not take much interest in the proposal taken to him by Madho Singh. The latter went to him again and again. Finally he told Jai Prakash, "If you take the phone and ring up the police you can earn one lakh rupees. That is the price on my head. I am Madho Singh."

So Jayaprakash Narayan organised a second peace mission. In this, he involved the workers of Gandhi Peace Foundation. Along with the Gandhians two of the reformed dacoits were also active. Lukka - Lokaman and Tehsildar Singh, the son of Man Singh who was saved from the gallows by a Presidential pardon. My brother Subba Rao of GPF took a prominent role in this work of contacting the dacoits in the ravines.

The result was a grand historic ceremony in the Mahatma Gandhi Seva *Ashrama* in Jaura, which was established by Subba Rao in 1970. About 400 dacoits surrendered their rifles also at the feet of a picture of Gandhiji, touched the feet of Jayaprakash and surrendered to the police and the law in 1972.

A third peace Mission was organised by Subba Rao and other friends of GPF in Chambal in 1976.

The total of all these surrenders came to some 620 dacoits.

Stray cases of dacoits are reported even now. A Phoolan Devi became well known because she was even elected as an M.P in the 11th Lok Sabha.

Most of the dacoits are now leading a peaceful life. The people from Chambal are almost free from the dacoit menace.



## 95. VINOBA'S ASHRAMS

Vinoba set up six *Ashrams* in different parts of India.

Three are in the north, east and south. The other three are in central India.

1. *Samanvaya Ashram*, Bodhgaya, Bihar. The *Ashram* stands right opposite the Buddha Mandir, on land given to Vinoba by the Shankar Math of Bodhgaya. The aim of *Samanvaya Ashram* is to bring about synthesis, through a study various schools of thought, experiments in practical living based on love towards all living creatures. Established in 1954.
2. The *Brahmavidya Mandir* in Paunar was set up in 1959.
3. *Prasthan Ashram*, Pathankot, Punjab. This is the starting point for journeys to Pakistan, Punjab and Kashmir, hence the name. Vinoba desired the *Ashram* to be a centre for *Shanti Sena*. Established in 1959.
4. *Visarjan Ashram*, Indore, Madhya Pradesh. *Indore is a meeting place of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. It is the home of Kasturba Trust. There is a small river nearby, where Bapu's asthi or ashes was immersed - Visarjan. The Ashram is to discard out-dated values and bring about a resurgence of new values. Bapu's eleven vows will be observed and experiments in non-violent living undertaken. Ashram will be maintained by its own labour and public support. Established in 1960.*
5. *Maitri Ashram*, North Lakhmipur, Assam. Message of friendship and unity. Established in 1962.
6. *Vallabh Niketan*, Bangalore, was founded in 1965 in memory of Vallabha Swami, who was very dear to Vinoba. He had worked in Viswaneedam, near Bangalore from 1959 till his death. This *Ashram* is to be a place for study and should offer to people a retreat for meditation and reflection. Four "aims: quiet environment, service of a non controversial nature, a spiritual outlook and an atmosphere of peace, devotion and affection. Let people come, stay for a while and return home with a peace of mind renewed - that is the purpose of *Vallabh Niketan*.

## 96. BRAHMAVIDYA MANDIR

The Spiritual achievements of women have always remained hidden and while they have certainly influenced individuals, it is necessary that their *sadhana* should be openly seen. Without the women, men alone cannot bring about world peace which is the crying need of the present times. That being so, the running of the *Ashram* may safely be left in the hands of women.

At the opening of *Brahmavidya Mandir* Vinoba said to the sisters— "It was on this very day, the 25th March, that I left my home and went out in the name of *Brahmavidya*, I am still living today in the same name. Now I am starting this *Brahmavidya Mandir* for women as a place of community *sadhana*.

"In ancient days *Brahmavidya* took shape in the forests. The genius which inspires the *Upanishads* was kindled in the forests. Later, the wisdom of *Gita* was declared on the field of battle. Our *Brahmavidya* today must be spelled out in the field of labour; labour itself, labour of the body, is to be understood as worship.

"If the work is properly planned each individual should, I believe, be able to earn a good livelihood by productive labour for three and a half hours a day. I therefore advised the sisters in the *Ashram* to give that amount of time to physical labour and be satisfied with whatever degree of self-support it produced. They should regard all kinds of work as of equal value. That is not how society today regards work, but we should take that position, and help to change society.

"Most of the residents in *Brahmavidya Mandir* are sisters but there are a few brothers also. All share the work of cooking, scavenging and general cleanliness.

"They also publish a Hindi monthly, *Maitri*. There is thus a triple programme:

1. Community *Sadhana*
2. Physical labour

3. A round of meditation, study and devotion in which all these share together.

These are the chief features of the *Ashram*.

"I have described Brahmavidya Mandir as a place where one may either attain the highest or the Supreme Vision, or find one's whole effort gone for nothing. There is no other institution where there is such an element of risk. In other places we may hope perhaps for ten lakhs, but if we do not get it we can at least be sure of ten thousand. Here it is a case of all or nothing. – infinity or zero!

## 97. NETI\* CHARACTER OF BRAMHAVIDYA MANDIR

*Brahmavidya Mandir* must have – one, desire for *Brahmavidya*, two, nature of detachment and three, the absence of the load of any sense of responsibility on the mind. These qualities are sufficient. There are no special rules here. Only natural actions of evolution will be here. It was not sought to tie down *Brahmavidya Mandir* with rules. Vinoba expected it to be regulated without any rules. It is difficult to capture in words his conception of *Brahmavidya Mandir*.

Now, should *Brahmavidya Mandir*—

- Be self-dependent? - No
- May it depend on external agencies? - No
- May there be lawlessness there? - No
- Is it proper to tie it down with rules? - No
- Should it have a definite course of studies? - No
- May it indulge in free studies? - No
- Is prayer compulsory? - No
- Is it possible to have dedication without prayer? - No
- Is physical labour unavoidable? - No
- Is it right to ignore body-labour - No
- Is a guide necessary? - No
- Is it possible to be without guidance? - No
- Is it proper to have tasty food - No
- Is it right to have taste-less, dry food? - No

This is the 'neti' character of *Bramhavidya Mandir*.

Neti is a *sanskrit* word mean'g "No, not this way". It describes a method of attaining truth in *advaita vedanta*, the philosophy of monism. One goes on considering various things and asks oneself, Is this the Truth? The answer is, no i Is it body? No. Is it the external world? No. Is it the senses? No. The mind? No. Finally when you meditate upon the Soul of the soul you realise that is the Truth. Then there is no *neti*.

## 98. I MET VINOBA

I (N. Krishnaswamy) have seen Gandhi twice, once when I was a small boy, in Malleswara, Bangalore when he was on his Harijan Fund tour. Another time I saw him in Prayer Meeting on the Madras Beach, from a long distance - he was there for the Dakshina Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha.

Vinoba, I met three times, from a closer position. The first time was when he came to the Ramakrishna Ashrama in Basavanagudi, Bangalore in 1957, during his padayatra of Karnataka. I took a picture of his with my camera then - it is a good picture. Vinoba spent only a few minutes there.

Then, my brother Subba Rao and I decided to attend his evening prayer meeting in Kunigal, which is about 40 km from Bangalore. We went on Subba Rao's scooter and reached there just in time for the prayer meeting.

Vinoba and all his companions knew Subba Rao, they asked us to sing. We sang songs of Purandara Dasa and Basavanna. Jayadev Bhai asked me, "Why didn't you come to our Bangalore camp? I was thinking, Bangalore has come and gone, but no Kitty." Jayadev had not come to Ramakrishna Ashrama with Vinoba.

My third meeting was in the Paunar Ashram, in 1975. I was going to Delhi. I broke journey in Paunar for a couple of days. Then Jayadev took me to Vinoba. He wrote on a piece of paper - "Gandhi Shanthi Pratisthan ke Subha Rao ke Bhai" and gave it to Baba. He took the pen from Jayadev and wrote below that, Krishnaswamy, in Devnagari script! He was practically deaf then and had a vow of silence. In the early morning meeting in Vinoba's room, Jayadev asked me to sing a favourite song of Vinoba, "*Enagu aaney Ranga ninagu aaney.*" His mother used to sing the song when he was young. Later Jayadev told me, another song of Purandara Dasa that Vinoba sang to himself was - *Huchu hidiyitu enagey* (I have become mad). I attended all the prayer meetings, in Vinoba's room.

When I went to Vinoba's room to take leave of him, he was sitting with Shriman Narayan (Son-in law of Jamnalal Bajaj, then Governor of Gujarat.) Jayadev informed him that I was leaving. I did namaskar to him. He smiled at me and

pointed his finger, first at me and then at Jayadev and then he showed the finger, indicating "one". I understood him as saying Jayadev and I were of the same type and were one in spirit. I went away from Paunar with a full heart, carrying many precious memories. I had seen a man of God.

## 99. FAST AGAINST COW-SLAUGHTER

Vinoba said:

"On May 24th I was talking with some workers about this ( cow slaughter), and I told them in plain words that if by September 11th , there were no announcement of an All-India ban on cow-slaughter I would begin my fast on that day, which was my birth day.....

This year (1976) is the centenary of my mother's birth and I do not remember a single day when I have not recalled her. When I was a child she taught me that before taking my own meal I should first water the tulsi plant and then feed the cow, and she would not let me sit down to eat until these two duties had been done. Now she is saying to me : 'Vinya, you must do something for the cow, if the cow can be saved it will be a great benefit to India.' In India today thousands of cows are being slaughtered and their flesh exported to foreign countries in order to earn dollars. In three months I shall complete my eighty-first year and one can not say how much longer I have to live. So I thought I might sacrifice these remaining days for the sake of the cow. If I died and the cow were saved that would be good. Even if the cow were not saved, I should still die happily remembering God. I would have done my duty, but the saving of the cow depends on the grace of God.

"In June the news of my intended fast was printed in Maitri. The police came and confiscated the whole issue and took all the copies away. What did I do? As they were carrying them off I stood up, clapped my hands and shouted *Jai Jagat* (This was during the days of Emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi).

(On December 24th 1982) I announced that as bullocks are being slaughtered in abattoir in Deonar (Bombay) there should be a satyagraha in Bombay for a total All India ban on slaughter of cows and bullocks of any age.

## 100. SEVEN INFLUENCES ON GANDHI

It was the New year day, 1 st January, 1978,

Kanti Bhai was talking with Baba.

Vinoba said, "Gandhiji is standing near the door and is giving a -definite instruction to Baba: do not discuss anything except spiritual matters."

Vinoba had shown some lines on the flooring just outside his cottage in Paunar. The lines roughly delineated a figure of Gandhiji standjg there. They were natural lines on the stone slab.

Vinoba continued, "When Vinoba first came to the Satyagraha *Ashram* in Ahmedabad, Bapu spoke with Baba in Hindi haltingly. Baba thought to himself, if it is difficult for Bapu to speak Hindi, Baba should learn Gujarati. So Baba studied Gujarati literature intensively. He studied prose and poetry."

Kanti Bhai, "Possibly Gandhiji had studied less Gujarati literature than you."

Vinoba, "The main influences on Gandhi were, one the bhajan *Vaishnava jan to teney kahiye*, second, of *Gita*; third, of *Ramayana*. The fourth influence was of Jain philosophy; The fifth was "The Sermon on the Mount", the sixth, Tolstoy and seventh, Ruskin and Thoreau."



### 101. FREEDOM FROM WORK

Kanti Bhai was having a long conversation with Vinoba, on the 1st of January 1978. Vinoba was nearly deaf at that time, so Kanti Bhai wrote down his questions for Vinoba.

Kanti Bhai asked, "Has Bapu blessed your renunciation of action? (*Karma-Mukti*)" Vinoba was silent for a while and then said, "Baba has spoken of this in 1966. He joined Bapu in 1916. In 1966, he told Bapu, 'Now it is 50 years since I joined you. I have worked according to your orders till now. Now I shall be free.' Bapu said, 'Agreed'.

Bapu was not alive in 1966, so Kanti Bhai asked, "Is this imagination or true?"

Vinoba laughed heartily and then said, "I became free. This is true."

Kanti Bhai , "Was it a heavy load for fifty years?"

Vinoba became silent. It was as if he entered the past. "When I was in Bapu's *Ashram*, there was nothing special. Carrying water and other physical work. Not particularly heavy."

"How about the later days?"

Vinoba was lost in his own world. He read Kanti Bhai's question and said, "After leaving the *Ashrama*, I had to carry a heavy burden. Spinning with takli, spin for eight - ten hours daily to earn two annas (1 anna = 1/16 rupee) and to eat two annas' worth food only. When Bapu learned that Vinoba lived on two annas per day, he increased the labour charges for spinning. Work of spinning, khadi work, work of agriculture, experiments with freedom from money, the *Bhoodan* march."

Kanti Bhai, "Bapu used to be so busy. Still, his persona! desire was to be free from action. In the last days, he has expressed this two-four times, that he would like to experience action in inaction. This is written in *The Last Phase*.

Vinoba, "But the situation then did not permit him."

Kanti Bhai, "It may be said that his desire is being fulfilled through you."

## 102. SHAVE OFF THE Ph.D.

Vinoba was very close to the Bajaj family. He derived all help and support from them in his work and in return he gave them spiritual guidance.

Shriman Narayan was the husband of Madalasa and so he was son-in-law of Seth Jamnalal Bajaj. Shriman Narayan was appointed the Governor of Gujarat, and hence he was the Chancellor of Gujarat University. In that capacity he proposed to confer the honorary degree of Ph.D. on Vinoba.

Every member of Brahma Vidya Mandir was opposed to the proposal. They felt it was beneath the dignity of Vinoba to accept a university degree, which they felt was meaningless anyway. But out of love for Shriman Narayan Vinoba agreed to accept the degree.

Of course, Vinoba would not go to Gujarat for this. The University officials came to Paunar and went through the ceremony. He received all this coolly in his stride.

Next day Vinoba called Jaya Dev, who officiated as Vinoba's barber. Vinoba asked him to shave off his beard and said "Shave off this degree." So the unwanted degree was shaved off.

That was the value that Vinoba attached to the degree.

### 103. LETTER IN MALAYALAM

Gopinath an Nair, the President of Sarvodaya Sangh was the only person who spoke in English during the Vinoba Centenary Celebrations in Paunar in November 1995. All others spoke in different varieties of Hindi.

Gopinath recounted his experience with Vinoba at the time when Vinoba visited Kerala for the Bhoodan Movement. Gopinath moved with the marchers while they were in Kerala. He continued with the Bhoodan work after Vinoba left Kerala also. He wrote a letter to Vinoba, in English, asking for guidance in some points.

Vinoba replied to Gopinath, Vinoba's letter was in Malayalam! He rebuked Gopinath for writing in English. He asked Gopinath to learn Hindi and write to him in Hindi only. Gopinath did learn Hindi, but his Hindi was not so good, so he preferred to talk in English!

There are many protagonists of Hindi in the North, who expect South Indians to learn Hindi. But few of them bothered to learn any South Indian language. Vinoba learnt all the four South Indian languages!

#### 104. BICYCLE AND GRASS

Sitasaran Sarma had joined Vinoba's group while quite young. When *Bhoodan* work drew to a close, Vinoba asked Sarma to go to Bangalore and work. Sarma refused to go. He said, "I am a village boy from Bihar, a Bihari *buddhu* (fool). How can I work among the sophisticated people in Bangalore? I do not know Kannada or English. How can I talk with them? I won't go"

As Vinoba was talking with Sarma, they saw a farmer carrying a bundle of grass on a bicycle. Vinoba told Sarma, "Does the cycle know how much grass it can carry, or is it the owner who decides how much load he can put on it? I am like the farmer, you are like that cycle. I know you can work in Bangalore. Go."

So Sarma went to *Vallabh Niketan* in Bangalore and worked there. Gradually he came to know the people, their language.

Now he can talk in Kannada, knows some English too. He writes in a Hindi Magazine, *Dheer*. He writes some poetry in Hindi and is much in demand for speaking on the Tulsidas *Ramayana*. People often address him as Professor Sarma.

He is now a Trustee of *Visvaneedam* Trust and runs an Old Age Home and an Orphanage for the Trust. He is also an important member of Hindi Prachar Sabha of South India. He is busy, travels a lot.

When he left Paunar, he sported a rough beard, he wore a *dhoti* which just covered his knees and a *chaddar* - no vest or shirt. A friend from the Bajaj family equipped him with *kurtas* (shirts) and he left Paunar four days after Baba decided that he should work in Bangalore.

– Source: A Talk With Sri Sitasaran Sarma

### 105. PRABHAVATI

Jayaprakash Narain and his wife Prabhavati Devi were very dear to Vinoba. They were fellow travellers in the Gandhian movement for the liberation of India.

Prabhavati died of cancer on 15th April 1973.

Then Vinoba said, "Prabhavati was engaged in Bapu's service. She lived in the Sabarmati *Ashram* like his daughter (For 7 years). Due to the influence of Bapu's ideals she was inspired to live a celibate life. The intensity of her faith brought the conviction to Jayaprakash also to take the vow of chastity.

"Sri Ramakrishna gave the power of initiation into chastity to Sri Sarada Devi. Prabhavati was the inspiring force for Jayaprakash. Dedication to celibacy was natural to both. They lived like that. Such examples are rare in this world. A holy life came to an end today."

— Source: *Jayaprakashnarain* (Kannada) by K.S. Narayanaswamy.

### 106. JAYA PRABHA

Once (1971) when Jayaprakash Narayan and Prabhavati Devi had come to meet Vinoba, they stayed in the *Ashram* in Paunar for a couple of days. At that time the *Asramites* had two mango trees planted by them, one by each. After the death of Prabhavati and Jayaprakash, Vinoba asked the *Ashramites* to write the names of Jayaprakash and Prabhavati on the trees each and plant a *Tulsi* plant adjacent to both the trees, and said

"Jaya-Prabha Ramayana Gaati,

Tulsidas aikati'

—Jayaprakash and Prabhavati sing Ramayana and Tulsidas listens. Before the death of Prabhavati, for a few years, every day in the morning Prabhavati used to sing *Tulsi Ramayana* in the presence of Jayaprakash.

### 107. VINOBA AND POLITICS

On 1st January 1978 Kanti Bhai had a long conversation with Vinoba. Of course he had to write down his questions, since Baba could not hear properly.

In a serious mood, Vinoba said, "Bapu used to discuss spirituality with me. But he discussed politics also. I told him, 'I do not know Politics, so what can I say?' He would reply, 'If you were in a mountain cave, I would not ask you. But it is not so. I am in politics. You are out of it. The umpire is outside the game. So he can give decisions in the game.'

Kanti Bhai wrote, "Hence your saying that you do not know politics will not do."

Vinoba laughs. After a long silence, he says, "Politics and religion are outdated. Hereafter science and spirituality will come. Pandit Nehru publicised this idea of mine. He said, 'Even though I am in politics, I accept this idea of Vinoba.' Therefore these two seeds will remain with Baba, won't they?"

Kanti Bhai, "During Emergency, Vinoba's ignorance of politics bit him."

Vinoba, "Socrates has given the reply to this. He said, 'People are ignorant, I am also ignorant. But the difference is I know that I am ignorant. I know that I do not know. People do not know that they are ignorant'. This appears to be the situation."

All joined in Baba's laughter.

Kanti Bhai, "Allright."

### 108. VOLUNTARY DEATH

On 5th November 1982 Vinoba had a fever, in the evening he felt very uncomfortable, with heavy breathing and rapid pulse. It was diagnosed as a heart attack. He received treatment and was better by the 7th.

On the evening of the 8th he refused to take medicine. He refused even water and fasted. He did not say anything. This is how he started his journey towards death, silently.

Shivaji, his brother, offered him water, saying "This is *jivan* (life)." But Vinoba did not respond. Vinoba's condition improved, but he became weaker and weaker progressively.

Though tired, Vinoba said a word or two to visitors.

After four days of fasting there was no deterioration of his condition. He was conscious and cheerful even after the 14th of November. Then the pulse became weak, the BP, low. Later however, they became normal.

On the morning of the 15th, a French girl who knew him offered him water. She had arrived the previous day. He signed that she should drink the water. And pointed out a writing *Rama Hari* on a board.

He lay there peacefully, eyes closed. The only movement was due to breathing and the slight movement of his feet in time with his inner chanting of *Rama Hari* which went on uninterrupted. At 9.30 a.m. the breathing stopped.