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## UNIT 5 BHOODAN MOVEMENT

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### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

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Throughout the late forties and the early fifties, Acharya Vinoba Bhave had been noticing the breakdown of India's economy, the perilous state of the country's agriculture and the inhuman and appalling poverty of the landless millions. Not less than 50 per cent of the agricultural labour households were landless in 1950-51 and their number was increased to 57 per cent in 1956-57. He noticed how the agrarian legislation, particularly the land distribution and land ceiling laws passed by the various state governments, failed to achieve the desired results. The big land owners knew how to escape the mischief of the law, traditional land customs were powerful, and the ignorance of the peasants was widespread enough to make the laws ineffective. The feasibility of legislation as a measure of agrarian reform remained dim. It is with the aim of evolving a change in the moral and spiritual horizons of man through large-scale and extensive social realisation of the socio-economic values of human existence that Vinoba had marshalled the prodigious movement of Bhoodan.

It was then that the idea of Bhoodan came to Vinoba – as a revelation during his Telangana tour in 1951. India's economic life could not be re-organised unless the basic land problem was solved in the interest of the tiller and the landless. It is true that Bhoodan had its immediate origin in the solution to the problem of securing land for India's landless peasants but it would be wrong to suppose that Bhoodan concerns itself solely with the collection and distribution of land. As one may subsequently see, this movement was meant to be the first step in the onward march of the Sarvodaya society purported to be an all-round revolution in the socio-economic sphere – a non-violent constructive programme of transformation of India's social structure through a radical change in values.

The Bhoodan movement is no mere mercy mission started by Vinoba on behalf of the landless. True, Vinoba exhorts the privileged to part with a portion of what they have in favour of those that have not. As land is the basic factor and source of production in this country, a solution of the problem of ownership of land by those who till it must be settled in the interests of real democracy which Sarvodaya aims to establish. Bhoodan is a step in the direction of the attainment of real democracy as it is a call to the land owners to recognise their real interest and try to protect it by conceding the landless their due rights. The "Dan" does not mean charity: it really implies equal distribution (Vinoba, Bhoodan Ganga, Vol.1, p.18).

### **Aims and Objectives**

After studying this Unit, you should be able to

- Explain the basis and ideology behind Bhoodan Movement
- Understand the concept of Gramdan.

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## **5.2 BASIS AND IDEOLOGY**

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The movement may be looked at as a concrete manifestation of the application of the universal principles of Love, Truth and Non-Violence to India's practical problems. The ideological basis of the movement is the philosophy which asserts that whatever people have is a trust and should be held and used as such, whether it is land or any other kind of property, or whether it be knowledge, skill or experience. It is a trust that people hold for their fellow human beings and for the whole community. It is not meant for their personal enjoyment alone; everyone has a share in it. It is by propagating this philosophy of Love and Truth and by persuading people to regard themselves and live as one family that Vinoba has aimed at bringing about a non-violent agrarian revolution. The movement thus arose by the surrender of part of a person's land but in course of time partial sharing, developed into total sharing.

The Bhoodan movement thus aims to prepare the groundwork for an agrarian economy wherein land ceases to be a marketable commodity and where the individual works to attain the good of the entire community. This is just one step towards the realisation of real democracy or "Swaraj" by setting right the inverted structure of economic centralisation through practices based on the principles of time and Non-violence and also the decentralisation of political and economic power.

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### 5.3 AN INVERTED PYRAMID

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The economic structure of the Indian society resembles an inverted pyramid (Jayaprakash Narayan, *Swaraj For The People*, 1961, p. 2). The millions of the have-nots and the landless at the base are at present unable to form into any concrete or solid foundation for a permanent and stable economic structure. It is of paramount importance that the base of the structure must be broadened by uniting the poor masses and the top heavy layers suitably built in conformity with the basic structure. The upper levels of the economic structure are broad with heavy concentration of economic power and the bottom levels are narrowed down to its mere point as each higher level from the bottom upwards broadens into increasing economic power.

At the village level, the pyramid like structure begins with the landless masses at the base, with the poor peasants, rich peasants and big land owners above them in that ascending order. This conical economic structure does not admit of any advantages or benefits of the government schemes and projects ever “percolating” down to the landless and the poor peasants. The benefits are sucked out at the level of the big land owners and rich peasants: little reaches down to the poor and nothing to the landless. Even the various land or tenancy reform measures have failed to benefit the latter. And out of this inverted economic system, the village’s wealth is drained out through the outlets in the structure. These outlets have been the market, the village banker, the government customs and superstitions and intoxicants. The result has been that the village has been reduced to a disparity unit where the few who own land do not work upon it while a large number who work do not own the land they cultivate.

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### 5.4 THE NEED AND TECHNIQUE OF REVERSION

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Such an economic structure, as a whole or at the village level, was neither stable, nor conducive to higher production and to the establishment of a balanced community life. It is necessary, therefore, that the broad upper levels of the structure and large portions of the vast upper floors of the pyramid are brought down to earth so that the structure could become a real, normal pyramid, narrow at the top and broad at the bottom, which involves economic decentralisation.

How to discover ways and means whereby the landless millions may obtain land, or in other words, how to revert the inverted pyramid back to a normal structure? The method and approach of the Bhoodan movement indicates the guidelines for the technique of reversion. The techniques adopted were based on love, non violence, voluntary surrender and mutual sharing.

Vinoba has contended that the problem of the landless should be solved first as it would provide a solid foundation to the village economic structure. Every one must have land to till and to make one’s living. For this, it is that ownership of land, property or resources must be recognised as Nature’s or God’s, that one who consumes must do some productive physical labour and that the vast differences between wages or salaries must go. The Bhoodan, therefore, requires the big land owners to give as much land as they can, keeping with them what they require for their self-cultivation; the demand from the rich peasants is one sixth of their land and the poor peasants are also asked to donate whatever they can as a token of their acceptance of the Bhoodan. It preaches the negation of the instinct of “acquisitiveness” or ownership of land; stands for the provision of the means of production to the producer; initiates all to the spirit of dedication in each

and every activity and requires that one should be concerned about the welfare of one's hungry neighbour and so long as he is in distress, one should eschew the temptation to enjoy happiness oneself. Since it is a "Dan", it contends for the just and equitable distribution of land among one and all; it requires the donor of land to do his duty towards himself and his neighbours; it claims to be a right of the landless poor who have been deprived of land on account of a vicious economic system and it insists that all should work on land and none should keep it who does not work.

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## 5.5 THE NASCENT ECONOMY

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Economic decentralisation is one of the ends of the movement. The ultimate objective is the setting up of decentralised self sufficient units where the villagers would decide their affairs themselves. The first priority was the problem of land.

It is interesting to visualise the economy envisaged by the Bhoodan movement. The communitarian society of the movement would be based on cooperation and co-sharing (J. P. Narayan, 1964, p. 219); its unit would be the individual worker; its aim would be the welfare of all and each of its members and it would subserve the objective of a balanced and all-sided development of its components.

The economy of such a communitarian society would be a balanced economy, particularly careful about the non-renewable resources of nature. It would not be wasteful; it would try to restrict consumption as far as possible of renewable resources.

This nascent economy is most likely to be of small machine, labour intensive type. It would be agro industrial in character evidencing an organic blending of agriculture and industry. It would naturally aim at the full utilisation of local and regional resources to the satisfaction of the local and regional needs.

This economy aimed at self-sufficiency. It would engage in production for self consumption and would be so organised where the basic material needs are satisfied as near at home as possible. Planning in a nascent communitarian society would naturally begin from below. That would imply that the unit of planning would be the village development plan prepared by the Gram Sabha comprising of a member from each family in the village.

The position of the worker would be pivotal since work would be the most essential thing for the life of the community. Work would be a meaningful expression of human powers because the worker would be a responsible participant in the work process having a stake therein. Over-specialisation is ruled out while the agro industrial nature of the community would allow him to follow a diversified occupation. A large part of industry and commerce is apt to be cooperative or owner-worker type.

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## 5.6 GRAMDAN

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Whereas Bhoodan, literally land gift, aims at a social reform through individual acts of charity, Gramdan, literally village gift, tries to accomplish a social revolution through collective community decisions, whereby individual ownership of land should be abolished. In Bhoodan, individual land donations are accumulated and then redistributed to the landless, maintaining the concept of private ownership on both the benefactors' side as well as the beneficiaries. A Bhoodan village had the same structure as an ordinary Indian village except that portions of land had been given "unto this last." In Gramdan villages, however, all the village land was to be pooled and vested in the community. In such a

village the landless labourer ceased to be a recipient of acts of charity and was elevated to the status of an equal among all other members of the Gramdan community. If that scheme had succeeded on a grand scale, then India would have made a great stride towards the Gandhian goal of village autonomy and village government. Such were the hopes of the fifties.

Gandhi's vision of independent India, as portrayed in an article in July 1946, was composed of innumerable villages in ever widening- but never ascending circles. "Life will not be a pyramid," he wrote, "with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units." (Harijan, 4-8-1940, p. 235)

This theory of a stateless society of self-contained villages was further elaborated by Vinoba. According to him, Sarvodaya Workers "believe in a stateless society as ultimate goal". They do, however, recognise "that in the preliminary stages a certain measure of government is necessary, but we do not agree that it will continue to be necessary at a later stage. Neither do we agree that totalitarian dictatorship is necessary to ensure progress towards a stateless society. On the contrary we propose to proceed by decentralizing administration and authority. In the final stage -there would be no coercion but a purely moral authority. The establishment of such a self directing society calls for a net work of self sufficient units. Production, distribution, defence, education everything should be localized. The centre should have the least possible authority."

Thus the Movement decided in 1963 to concentrate all its efforts on three main areas of activity: (1) the establishment of Gramdan villages all over the country, (2) the development of khadi and village-industries in these villages so as to make them self sufficient and independent of outside resources, and (3) the recruitment and training of a "Shanti Sena" or Peace Army, to prevent any outbreak of violence in the country or, if violence should occur, to bring it under control by non violent means. This was the only enforcement potential thought necessary in a Sarvodaya society, where mutual cooperation and not individual competition would be the driving force of motivation and behaviour.

To give not only the farmers in the villages but also the urban professionals and industrial workers a place in the Movement, Vinoba further enlarged the concept of "Dan," or gift, so as to include the following aspects:

**Shramdan** literally labour gift, meant the contribution of part of one's labour to a certain Sarvodaya project.

**Sampattidan**, literally wealth gift, meant the dedication of part of one's property or income to the Movement.

**Buddhidan**, literally intellect gift, meant the dedication of one's mental abilities and knowledge to the realisation of Sarvodaya ideals.

**Jeevandan**, literally life gift, meant the dedication of one's whole life and energy to the cause of the Movement.

These generalisations and the ambitious targets the Movement had set for itself had far reaching consequences: a modified concept of Gramdan known as simplified or Sulabh Gramdan was introduced in 1963. From then on a distinction was made between

“ownership” and “possession.” As such, the new concept of Gramdan was much less radical than the original and involved significant concessions to the principle of private property. Though all land donated to the village was to be vested in the village community, up to nineteen-twentieths of it could remain in the possession of the donors, who could only pass it on to their heirs. In this way at least one main aim was achieved: Sulabh Gramdan prevented village land from passing out of the control of the community; the means of production were controlled by the villagers themselves and could not be taken over by outside capital.

Gramdan villages where more than fifty per cent of the total land owned by resident private owners had been donated and in which at least three quarters of the adult residents had joined the programme were then to be combined at the block level, the lowest unit of the government’s Community Development Programme. If in such a block with an all India average of some eighty thousand inhabitants, more than 85 per cent of the revenue villages or 75 per cent of the adult population had decided to join Gramdan, it was declared a “Blockdan.” “Districtdan” is then district in which all the blocks have met the condition of Blockdan and “Statedan” is a State in which all the districts have gained the status of Districtdan.

With this scheme it was hoped to gradually transform the existing government establishment from the grassroots upward. By the end of the Gandhi Centenary Year in 1969, the Movement claimed to have reached 1,40,000 of India’s 5,60,000 villages; of these Gramdan villages 60,000 were in the northern State of Bihar, where the Movement had pooled a great deal of its efforts and resources. With nearly 90% of its villages covered, Bihar was proclaimed the first Statedan in India.

The Movement distinguished three steps in the development of a village:

- (1) “prapti” means that people have been persuaded to join Gramdan and transfer their ownership to the village council.
- (2) “pushti” means that the village people implement the primary conditions of Gramdan, i.e. the redistribution of one twentieth of the land among the landless. The verification of gifts and the legal transfer of titles takes place at this stage.
- (3) “nirman” means that all the necessary resources have been mobilised through the Gram Sabha (village assembly) so that constructive development programmes can be started.

The fact is that by 1970 only few villages, most of them situated in tribal areas with their own traditions of communal ownership, had reached the “nirman” stage. The majority of villages, however, were in the initial phase of propaganda and declaration of good intentions. To persuade villagers to adopt the Gramdan ideals and to join Vinoba on the Gandhian path of rural reconstruction was one thing; to follow up with the necessary legal paraphernalia and agricultural extension work was quite another. Here the Sarvodaya workers were more or less on their own and could not draw on the saintly image of their leader, who, moreover, considered these things secondary. According to Vinoba, what mattered was the change of attitude, which would by itself lead to socio-economic results. “Let it be understood clearly,” Vinoba wrote in 1957, “that increasing agricultural production is certainly not the aim and object of *bhoodan* and *gramdan*. That would be only incidental. Its main object is to widen man’s loyalty to the entire society.”

Seen from a western point of view, it must have been a hard lesson for Vinoba that it was in Bihar, which had been declared a Statedan at the end of 1969, that the Naxalbari Movement spread a movement which tried to show the people a shortcut to progress through revolutionary practice. Vinoba met this challenge and the growing discontent among the Sarvodaya workers in his own way and withdrew more and more into his inner self.

## **5.7 MISGIVINGS ABOUT THE BHOODAN MOVEMENT**

The Bhoodan movement has been subjected to a lot of criticism by leading economists (of the country), philosophers, political thinkers and social reformers all alike. Even some of the disciples of Gandhi had expressed their dissent on this important issue. 'The philosophy behind the movement and the results of its working has come for sharp criticism from various quarters. It will, therefore, be desirable to assess this criticism for whatever it is worth and to examine its validity' (Ranadive, B. T, 1958, pp.4-11).

### **5.7.1 The Absence of Clarity**

A line of argument against Bhoodan is the supposed absence of clarity regarding the objectives of the movement. It said that although a lot of things are claimed about the potentialities of the Bhoodan movement regarding the creation of a stateless society through a non-violent social revolution, no one apparently seemed to know how far the movement was to really benefit the people. To bring in Gandhi's name and to claim that the movement is born of the Gandhian idea of a thorough social awakening is one thing but to visualise concretely the objectives of the movement is quite another.

The protagonists of the movement have said that the Bhoodan aims at the greatest good of all. Based on the Gandhian ideals of non-violent social revolution, i.e., on love and innate goodness of man, it aimed at the welfare of the common man, specially the down trodden and the proletariat. In the context of the colossal poverty of the Indian agrarian population, any scheme for the well being of the people, howsoever slight its contribution may be, should be welcome.

### **5.7.2 The Lopsidedness**

The movement is said to be lopsided in approach to the agrarian problem. Bhoodan aimed to help and provide land only to the landless villagers, thus leaving out the semi landless or those villagers who possess some land but still work as cultivating labourers and depend wholly or partly on wages. Vinoba considered the problem of the landless labourers as rather baffling and urgent. Hence the Bhoodan movement stood for the landless. No landless in the village was the first step of Vinoba and his last is that there would remain no land owner. It developed into Gramdan, where all the persons co operate for the common cause and the distinctions like the landless and the land owner would be wiped out.

### **5.7.3 The Insufficient Land**

The movement is said to have provided insufficient land to the landless, neither providing him with employment for whole of the year nor raising the income level to an appreciable extent. Within a short period there would be a fall in the acreage under cultivation (as transfer of land takes some time to be finalised) and worsen the already bad situation of food production in the country.

But this contention is based on the plausible assumption that cultivable land received in donation, if not distributed immediately among the landless labourers, remains idle for sometime. This is not true. The land received in gifts continues to be cultivated by the donors until it has been redistributed and legal formalities are completed. As to the “insufficient land” given to the landless, it can easily be said that provision of five acres of land is beneficial when about 62 per cent of the holdings in India are below five acres of land.

#### **5.7.4 Fragmentation and Sub-Division**

The Bhoodan movement and its working were criticised as it allegedly leads to the division and fragmentation of already small and scattered fields. As it happens, the land gifts from every type of owner big or small are accepted. The donations by small farmers of little pieces of land out of their miniature holdings tend to accelerate the sub-division and fragmentation of land. The economic disadvantages of this unhealthy trend are too well known to be emphasised.

On behalf of the movement, it is claimed that the land donations from small land owners are accepted in order to create the right type of atmosphere for converting the big land owners. Vinobaji has said, “I am more worried about the fragmentation of human hearts than the fragmentation of land ... Fragmented land can be easily consolidated later with mutual goodwill and co-operation; but fragmentation of hearts owing to the social and economic inequalities is full of dangerous possibilities in a state like India.”

Admittedly, this argument may not appeal to a professional economist. But the fact is that before distribution all attempt is made to consolidate small plots of donated land as far as possible. Regarding the subdivision of land, it may be pointed out that in the majority of cases only those lands have been donated which formed complete units by themselves. Bhoodan thus has not entailed any further fragmentation of holdings but only already divided and small pieces of land and have come to its fold. No land has been further divided merely for the sake of donation in Bhoodan movement.

#### **5.7.5 The Uneconomic Holdings**

Critics pointed out that Bhoodan created uneconomic holdings. As poor persons join the movement by donating a small piece of land from their already tiny plots, the holdings are reduced to uneconomic units.

In answer to this, it is necessary to look upon the of holdings of cultivable land per family in India. As has been stated earlier about 20 per cent of holdings (in the country) are of below an acre, contributing to only a little over 1 per cent of total area, operated and about 40 per cent holdings are below 2.50 acres, contributing to only 6.71 per cent of the total area operated (The NSS Report (June 1961), 16<sup>th</sup> Round, No. 113, pp. 13 and 21). More than 74 per cent of the agricultural holdings are below 7.50 acres comprising of 29.76 per cent of the total area operated. The inescapable fact here is that 62 per cent of the land holdings are below five acres of land. The average size of land holding in India is only 6.63 acres of land.

In view of the above facts it must be admitted that holdings of five acres of land which Bhoodan provides is certainly an improvement over the existing situation. Moreover, the concept of “economic holding” is quite relative. In Japan the average holding is of 2.5 acres and yet her average produce from land is three times that of India. A small holding does not necessarily show a fall in production or become an uneconomic unit. The



intensive cultivation practices with the help of better manures, seeds and irrigation facilities can turn even a small plot of land of 2.5 acres into an economic unit. The Japanese method of intensive cultivation can be practised by the peasants and given this land of five acres each in Bhoodan, they can quite sufficiently maintain a decent standard of living.

### **5.7.6 Land Unfit for Cultivation**

Mira Behn, an old disciple of Gandhiji, felt that most of the land donated is of inferior quality and some of it is extremely poor. She opined that over 80 per cent of the collected land, is of inferior character (Reply of Critics, Hindustan Times, 4-6-53). Also, a good percentage of land received under Bhoodan is either grazing land or covered with forests. The critics further added that Vinoba was aware of this fact but insisted that no land could be useless and that one can make the best possible use even of the rocky tracts and the hills.

It is widely believed that a high percentage of land collected in Bhoodan is unfit for cultivation. As up to 1957 no such statistics was collected regarding the quality of land received in Bhoodan. The fact is that out of the total land of 42,27,476 acres collected up to 1964, about 14,84,830 acres of land has been found unfit for cultivation. The estimate, therefore, comes to about 35.8 per cent (Sarvodaya, April 1965, p. 480). As up to 31st March, 1967 only 42,64,096 acres of land has been collected, the approximate percentage of such bad land can safely be said as 35 only.

The gifted land has been divided into three groups: (1) land under cultivation by tenants; (2) land cultivated by the donor himself; (3) cultivable land but not under cultivation. In the first case big tenants or land owners are requested to donate their tenancy rights and small cultivators are made full owners. In the second case, the land goes directly to the landless peasants. In the last case, the donor is requested to donate it after breaking it with plough or otherwise, i.e., after making it fit for cultivation. In case he is unable to do so the land will have to be broken with the help of government or money donation or the free labour volunteers. In no case the poor receiving the land are expected to meet the cost of reclamation or such other charges in making the land fit for cultivation. In fact, donors themselves are asked to bear such expenses.

Besides, the psychological effects of the Bhoodan movement should not be undermined. When a landlord donates land, no matter of what quality it is, it certainly reflects some sacrifice for the landless and an acceptance of the idea behind the movement. Through his act of land donation a change is apt to be affected in his psychology. This seed of thought sown in his heart is bound to bear fruit some day. And there are many possibilities of his donating more of his land in future. So land of whatever quality it is, is not to be refused though one may well say to the donor that this was a bad gift. Bad land can be and has to be reclaimed and put to its best possible uses.

### **5.7.7 The Question of Rehabilitation**

The argument against Bhoodan is that it will hardly be successful in rehabilitating all the landless agricultural labourers. Land donations are not like donations of money or food grains to be immediately made use of. On immediate acquisition, land is more of a liability than an asset until it can be made productive with the help of necessary inputs and management. Thus providing land to the landless will not rehabilitate them unless they are also provided with all the resources or inputs and implements for agriculture. On the other hand, such a change of ownership of land in favour of the landless will cause unjustifiable loss of production and dislocation of agriculture without really benefiting anybody.

That is why Vinoba asked to provide implements and other facilities to the landless of the village. He started a number of other Yajnas such as Sadhandan (Haldan, Baildan, Koopdan), Sampattidan, Shramdan, etc. The objectives and methods of Sampattidan combines all the allied Yajnas of the Bhoodan movement. Vinoba himself admits that only Bhoodan or Gramdan cannot bring about any change in the economic life of the people unless their other possessions, like labour, capital and the ability are shared by all for the good of the society as a whole.

### **5.7.8 Why Land To The Landless?**

The slogan “Land to the Landless” seems to emphasise the “indispensable” character of land for those who do not have it. But the ideology of Bhoodan by no means can be justified that land is as indispensable as air, water and Sun. By no stretch of imagination it can be compared with these objects. Sardar Lal Singh, in his minute of dissent on the land ceiling, has compared land with a factory or a textile mill and argued that it is made to yield “maximum production” and should be handled by those who are efficient and not necessarily by the landless (Sardar Lal Singh, 1958, p. 115). The need of the country is not the equal distribution of land but the higher productivity and efficiency of land, labour and capital.

The approach of Bhoodan is quite different. Land is as free a gift of nature as air, water and Sun. It is, therefore, nobody’s property. Vinoba says that if we want to rejuvenate the rural economy, the old values must change. The re-distribution of land would significantly enhance the social status and the economic power of the landless. What is the use of higher production, if the distribution pattern remains defective and the big land owners still dominate the village economy? Land being limited must not be owned by anybody is the main idea behind the Bhoodan movement. It calls for a voluntary surrender of at least one sixth part of one’s holdings for the benefit of the landless of the country. Vinoba’s next demand is the total abolition of private property in the shape of Gramdan. Vinoba has deeply studied the rural problem and found that it is not simply the problem of increasing production, but it is a great problem of transformation of human values and establishing a new economic order. The Bhoodan movement seeks to bring about a change of this type on the basis of its ideology stated above.

### **5.7.9 Against Mechanised Farming**

It is said that Bhoodan stands in the way of mechanised farming. The small five acre holdings that the Bhoodan aims at providing to the landless of the country are unsuitable for mechanised farming which some critics hold as indispensable for increased agricultural production in view of the fast growing population. In addition, it is feared that the re distribution of land will stand in the way of subsequent general reform of the land system.

It was hoped that the Bhoodan movement, through the liquidation of vested interests and creation of socio-economic equality, would go a long way in furthering the cause of co operative farming in India. Moreover, judging from the ultimate aim of the Bhoodan movement, namely, “the greatest good of all”, there would be no objection, in principle, to make plots sufficiently large, if all the villagers agree and it does not infringe the basic principle of Sarvodaya. Similarly, though there is not much scope for mechanised farming in India, yet there is no objection to consider its use for increased aggregate efficiency if it does not, in any way, endanger the stability of the village economy.

Vinoba has repeatedly said that the present distribution of land under Bhoodan movement will not stand in the way of general agrarian reforms. As it is, our laws of inheritance and

transfer may well have to be amended suitably in order to prevent fragmentation and transfer of land into the hands of non cultivators or giant cultivators or combines. A welfare feature of the land reforms is of the land ceiling act, but Vinoba goes further and demands "Land Flooring" wherein all the landholders will shed off their right of ownership and pool their lands for common use and benefit. But the cause of land reforms was not hampered by the Bhoodan movement.

### **5.7.10 The Legitimate Objection**

The only legitimate objection to the working of Bhoodan is that its machinery is not efficient and the distribution process is very slow. Upto 31st March, 1967 only 11,90,718 acres of land could be distributed. About 16 lakh acres of land was yet to be distributed. (The remaining 14 lakh acres of land is supposed to be unfit for cultivation).

### **5.7.11 Target Not Achieved**

The target for land gift was set at fifty million acres which was to be, achieved by the end of 1957. It was too high an ambition for a voluntary movement depending almost entirely on moral persuasion. Up to the end of 1957 only 1/10th of the target has been achieved.

Bhoodan planned to achieve land revolution by 1957 but has failed. This is perhaps because many unrealistic and exaggerated claims were made on behalf of the movement. Also the movement relied rather too much on the goodness of human nature and Godhead in man. The attention of the movement has been diverted from Bhoodan to Gramdan. When the entire land of the village is donated, the question of Bhoodan is automatically solved. Judging from the Gramdan point of view the movement was a great success. Up to July 1971 about 1,68,058 entire villages have been donated to Vinoba including 1,249 entire Blocks and 47 districts all over the country.

### **5.7.12 Collectivisation or a Misgiving?**

It was claimed by the protagonists of Bhoodan that they were not enamoured of collectivisation and they intended to give land to the millions of landless labourers in the country side on an individual or family basis to begin with. Later on the idea was to welcome cooperative endeavour, not so much for the pooling of land as for the pooling of various agricultural operations. Subsequently, however, there was a significant shift from the earlier views. Under it land becomes the property of the state or the village and the peasant becomes a mere worker on land.

In Gram Swaraj of Vinoba's conception it is feared, the peasant, under a more or less collectivised system of land management, may become a pawn in the hands of the village community. The authority having control over in that case may not be far removed from him and may be more amenable to his desires and demands. But he loses his individuality, a large part of his freedom and becomes absorbed in that collective order. His initiative is curbed with obvious consequences.

It is incorrect to suggest that there has been any shift in the Bhoodan thought. Bhoodan does not begin with any prior theory about individual or collective agriculture. It pools the land and then it gives some land to the dispossessed land labourers and eventually brings about a re-distribution of land. Land is apportioned to individuals but the right of ownership ceases to be unconditional.

The most important unit in Bhoodan is the individual. He has to be wide awake and realise clearly that the joy of life and sense of achievement comes only when one offers with real goodwill, whatever one may have for the social good. Bhoodan wants the people to come together, to think together and work together for the common good of all. The people as a whole and not any small elite, or a group, or a party, should have the initiative. It is thus a revolutionary effort, to create a Sarvodaya Society in which every individual has the sense of being the centre, and where all participate actively in the social process. It is an attempt on the part of the individual to become harmonious with the whole of which he is a part. It naturally wants to create a society in which every one will have a role and an importance in the measure in which they serve the well being of all. So the bonds that will bring people together will neither be those of self interest nor those of enforced collective order of suppression and serfdom.

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## 5.8 SUMMARY

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In the post-independent India, when the nation was going through thorough reconstruction, Bhoodan came as a glimmer of hope to the landless poor and needy aspiring to live a decent life free from oppressive land policies and landlords. Thoroughly rooted in Gandhian spirit, it aimed at the ultimate good of the society 'sarvodaya' but lost momentum due to lack of spirited persuasion and follow-up. It was one major effort that would be remembered forever in history that Gandhian principles were conceived and followed to some extent. Though we may not witness such movement again, it still endows us with the hope that a true non-violent movement could be worked out with absolute determination and goodwill.

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## 5.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

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1. Discuss the Bhoodan Movement as propounded by Acharya Vinoba Bhave.
2. "Bhoodan Movement failed to achieve its objectives". Do you agree? Give arguments in support of your answer.
3. Critically examine the contemporary relevance of Bhoodan Movement.

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## SUGGESTED READINGS

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