

## Bhoodan Movement in Odisha with Special Reference to Koraput

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"On 18 April 1951, a fragile old man, dressed in traditional costumes of Indian sages, set out on his first round of begging. It is not for food he begged, but for land, not for himself, but for the countless farmers that raised crops on lands that never belonged to them, farmers that toiled day in and day out, but remained forever poor and hungry. That fragile old man was Vinoba Bhave, a staunch follower of Gandhiji and firm believer in the Gandhian principles of peace and non-violence, and the project he launched was the Bhoodan Movement."<sup>1</sup>

The Bhoodan or the land gift movement was a voluntary land reform movement of India which was initiated by Acharya Vinoba Bhave in 1951 at Panchampali village, Nalgonda, Andhra Pradesh.<sup>2</sup> Bhoodan was an attempt at land reform, in order to bring about institutional changes in agriculture, like land redistribution through a movement and not simply through general legislation.<sup>3</sup>

In response to the nation-wide call for Bhoodan Movement by Vinoba, Gopabandhu Choudhury one of the top Gandhian leaders of Odisha along with his wife Rama Devi started collecting land for the landless in Odisha from 7 January 1952. On the same day, a meeting was conducted in Ramachandrapur village near Bari

of Jajpur Sub-division of the erstwhile Cuttack district. It was attended by Gopabandhu Choudhury, Rama Devi, Acharya Harihar Das, Pandit Krupasindhu Hota, Radharatan Das, Sakti Sekhar Das and a number of such other constructive activists. It marked the inauguration of the Bhoodan Movement in Odisha.<sup>4</sup> One Harapriya Devi of Anandpur village became the first donor of the Bhoodan Movement in Odisha by donating twelve *gunthas* (0.48 acres) of land for the landless.<sup>5</sup> She was followed by two others who declared to donate lands. They were Rambha Devi a lady constructive activist from Gujarat who stayed at Bari Ashram and Surendra Pati, an inhabitant of village Balibil, who vowed to donate three acres of land.<sup>6</sup> Starting from 7 January 1952, the first Bhoodan *Padayatra* continued for four months and twenty two days ending on 28 May 1952. The marchers covered Cuttack, Puri, Ganjam, Koraput, Kalahandi, Balangir, Sambalpur and Dhenkanal districts on their way and collected 1626 acres of land from 233 donors. A non-official Bhoodan Yagna Samiti was constituted under the chairmanship of Gopabandhu Choudhury with its headquarters at Cuttack.<sup>7</sup>

The marchers reached Gunupur in Koraput on 5 March 1952; a warm welcome was accorded to the *padayatris*. They met the

constructive workers, tribal people, the businessmen and the landlords of the locality. Led by Gopabandhu Choudhury, the *padyatris* mobilized the people to donate their lands for the sacred cause of Bhoodan.<sup>8</sup> They continued with their march and reached Kujendri on 8 March. The region was experiencing an acute food shortage in view of prevailing drought condition. Taking advantage of the situation, the money lenders and land owners had heightened the oppression of the tribal people.<sup>9</sup> A Bhoosatyagraha Samaj was formed in order to protect the tribal people from the exploitation of money lenders and land owners. Biswanath Patnaik was the chief architect of that Bhoosatyagraha Samaj. Ratan Das, Nimai Charan Sahu and Baya Subudhi were his co-associates. Tribal activists mostly from Saura as well as Kandha communities were the members of this Bhoosamaj. Some of these activists were Baire Gomango, Gobardhan Gamango and Jogendra Gamango of Kujendri, Aga Soura of Godia Bandha, Nilakantha Gamango of Dibirsingh, Purnachandra Gamango of Khamapadar, Madhusudan Sabar, Sania Sabar and Sarang Soura of Mitukhingirai, Gogeranga Indu Majhi from Budhubelir, Budumuru Kalia Dora of Murti, Siba Kandha and Arjun Kandha from Dumbiriguda.<sup>10</sup> Naba Krushna Choudhury, the-then Chief Minister of Odisha, sought to address the issue of the tribal people by initiating dialogue with the activists of the Samaj. Under governmental initiative, fair price shops were opened in the area. The government took every possible step for solving the issue of water scarcity by digging wells and ponds. Sevashrams were also opened to work for spreading education amongst the tribal people.<sup>11</sup>

The impact of Bhoodan Movement in Gunupur region was truly impressive. The Gram Seva Centre at Gunupur mobilized villagers for the cause of Bhoodan. Accordingly a large

number of villagers donated land to the movement. The following villagers who donated land for the cause of Bhoodan movement in 1953, were, Basyaraju Nagaraju one acre of land, Prahalad Sahu-5 acres, Koluna Somana Dora-1 acre, Toika Nukana-2 acres, Patika Badaaiya-3 acres, Toika Jagir-1 acre, Toika Jogulu-2 acres, Patika Pentaya-1 acre, Toika Bodaya-2 acres, Mandangi Gomage and Raichha Gomage-3 acres, Patika Machana-1 acre, Toika Lachhana 1-acre, Soura Dengngu- 4 acres, Padaka Appana-1 acre, Padaka Melema-0.5 acre, Patika Singharadit and Satyasu Narayan-5 acres, Mandigi Pentana-1.5 acres, Patika Pentaya-1 acre, Patika Pachena- 40 acres, Ku Soura and Narasingh Gomango-0.5 acre and Dharmaraju donated 3.5 acres of land.<sup>12</sup> Mandinga Barick, Mandiga Acana, Mandinga Krushnamurty and Palika Gindiri of Bada Sulagaon donated, 4, 3, 4 and 3 acres of land respectively. Nilamani Dora, Patika Banamali, Kandagore Suri, Agadhu Dora, Kandagore Babaji, Padaka Babaji and Kastagore Suri of Tumbakata village donated 2 acres, 2, 1.5, 1, 1, 1, 1.5 and 6 acres of land respectively. Bidicha Gopinath Dora, Mandiga Narayan, Mandiga Singana, Palak Ghasan, Maninga Gurumurty and Mandinga Bandu of Saludi village donated 8 acres, 6, 8, 3, 4 and 2 acres respectively. Mandinga Ekatswami, Mandinga Krushnamurty and Mandinga Ayodhi of Sana Sulagaon donated, 1, 2, and 1 acres of land respectively. Nimala Chelesa and Palaka Kamana, Tandinga Bairagi, Mandinga Sitana and Mandinga Narasinghanlu of Gangapafa village donated 1, 5, 5 and 4 acres of land respectively. Kumar Apana and Patika Saranga of Dharma Khunti donated 8 acres and 2 acres of land respectively. Badika Sundar Narayan of Tankubadi donated 50 decimal lands. Krushna Chandra Mahapatra, Korad Benugopal and Magana Patra of Gudari donated 5, 5 and 3.5

acres of land. Krushna Chandra Sahu, Brundaban Sahu, Simadri Surinarayan and Sariamani Sahu of Naira village donated 15, 15, 4.60 and 6 acres of land respectively. Goura Chandra Choudhury, Gabara Adinarayan and Agadhu Mishra of Karanpadu donated 2.5 acres, 50 decimal and 1 acre of land. Kora Sahu and L.N.Sahu of Rilingarai donated seven and five acres of land respectively. Apana Ratha, Arjun Nayak and Magata Ratha of Sorama village donated 3.5, 3 and 2.5 acres of land Gudari of same village donated a bullock.<sup>13</sup>

The Bhoodan workers of Gunupur region under the leadership of Biswanath Das, collected land gift from different villages such as from Padmapur, Narasingha Panigrahi donated 75.5 acres of land, Krupasindhu Panigrahi 25 and Niladri Sahu donated 20 acres land. They collected the donations from Satyanarayan Sahu 50.5 acres, Apana Sahu -11, Chandramani Sahu- 7 acres, and Bhikari Sahu - 5 acres of land of village Khilingrai. Arjun Dalapati of Kenduguda donated two acres and Balhab Das of Karani Sasan donated 1.3 acres of land.<sup>14</sup>

Vinobaji visited Odisha in 1955 and first reached a small village known as Deula, Balasore. He was greeted by many of the top Gandhian leaders of the province namely Gopabandhu Choudhury, Acharya Harihara, Naba Krushna Choudhury, Nanda Kishore Das, Biswanath Das, Surendra Dwibedy, Nishamani Khuntia, Manmohan Choudhury along with a large number of Bhoodan activists. In the meeting at Laxmannath, (Balasore), Vinoba dwelt on the idea and implications of Bhoodan movement.<sup>15</sup>

Bhoodan means, voluntary donation of land by the wealthy landowners for equitable distribution among the landless. Gramdan was the gift of entire village to the village community. The

villagers had surrendered their ownership right of their land to the village community, which were distributed among the landless families in the village. Like ownership, the social and economic responsibility would be looked after by the village community.<sup>16</sup>

A Gramdan meeting was held in Bhairabguda, Koraput, attended by villagers of thirty villages. Gopinath Nayak, Sarat Das, Badrinath Malik, the president of Dalit Caste Union and Arjun Khara were present in the meeting. In Koraput district, nearly fifteen thousand one hundred and fifty donors had donated 93,000 acres of land. Besides, 240 Gramdan villages were received by the Bhoodan Committee of Koraput.<sup>17</sup>

Mahtab criticized, Bhoodan Movement as the movement for the 'distribution of poverty'. According to him, Bhoodan Movement could not solve the problems of poverty of landless poor. Shriman Narayan, the Congress General Secretary and the editor of the series of Books "The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi," visited Koraput to meet Vinoba Bhave and said that, "he was astonished by the criticism of Hare Krushna Mahtab, the Lat of Mumbai about the Bhoodan Movement." Narayan further said that, "Mahtab had freedom to express his opinion, but the movement inspired and impressed the people of India as well as the world. It had paved the way, for the economic equality and justice instead of social and economic exploitation. Under this situation, the movement became fruitful, attracted mass population and spread widely in India and abroad. But a poor country like India, there was no loss if poverty was being distributed or shared among the people. It was seen in India that, when millions people were unable to survive, few people were maintaining their life gorgeously."<sup>18</sup>

Vinoba remained at Koraput for two months. Bhoodan Yagna Committee had received 181 Gramdan and 78,000 acres of land from 13,000 donors in Koraput. More than hundreds of workers from Cuttack, Balasore, and Sambalpur worked at Koraput. Bhoodan evoked a great deal of popular response in Koraput.<sup>19</sup>

In an interview with journalists Vinoba Bhave in August 1955 observed that a new society would be created by the gift of all and pointed out to a 'great change' in the country after four years of Bhoodan Movement. He further noted that there would be no class struggle where the people donated their land and ownership rights to the village community.<sup>20</sup>

The Bhoodan Movement at Koraput inspired the whole country. Vinoba remarked in a meeting held at Damuripadar that the villagers of two hundred villages in Koraput had donated all their land to Bhoodan with the resolve that there would be no landless in their villages. Addressing the meeting Vinoba held that the primary objective of Bhoodan Movement was to abolish individual ownership from the land. In a prayer meeting at Katirguma, Vinoba maintained that he would like to see the Grama-Rajya in Koraput and expected the world to watch it and that all would follow it.<sup>21</sup>

Vinoba stressed that the idea of Gram Swaraj could only be a reality through *Gramdan* area. He would exhort the activists working for Khadimandal, Basic Education, Tribal and Harijan Welfare, Kasturba Trust and Hindi Prachar Samiti to help the Movement. Explaining the need for of Bhoodan *padyatra* in small villages, Vinoba pointed out, 'We are happy by our *padyatra* in small villages. The people, who prefer to move by train or bus, cannot go to such small villages. We began *padyatra* only to move in small villages.'<sup>22</sup>

In a prayer meeting at Bandha Gaon, Vinoba said that Gramdan had ensured welfare of all. He would further explain, 'After India attained Swaraj, the people thought that their leaders would keep their eyes on poor. But the poor became poorer. Due to Bhoodan Movement, the poor and landless believed that it was the beginning of their progress. If a village is converted to a family then there is no loss for anyone but profit for all. People can help each other. If there is the need of more labour in any field, then all should unite to finish the work. Sarvodaya as an ideology implies that there is neither landlord nor the poor. All are like brothers and tied in a chain of love. There is no quarrel; no ego among the people or no one should fear any one or nobody can threaten the other.'<sup>23</sup>

The Odisha Bhoodan Committee had received land gifts to the tune of 95,000 acres of land from 15,330 donors and 254 Gramdan till about 5 August 1955.<sup>24</sup> Vinoba however expected to achieve four lakh acres of land from one lakh donors from Koraput.<sup>25</sup>

Gopabandhu Choudhury once spelt out the causes of the conspiracy against Bhoodan Movement in response to the criticism leveled by the opposition parties that the lands obtained as gifts were of very low grade land and hence the Movement lacked any real value. Pointing out that such allegations have been made from the beginning of the Movement, Choudhury noted that the Bhoodan Movement had taken a new shape in Koraput and peoples' understanding of the concept had seen a marked rise and hence the Movement didn't have any relation between low or high grade lands. He added that as the movement sought to attack the individual ownership of land, political parties had united to oppose the Movement.<sup>26</sup>

The Bhoodan Committee had received twenty five Gramdan villages from Kalyansinghpur. Most of the lands of those villages were distributed among the poor. The Bhoodan Committee also issued them land distribution certificates (*pradan patta*).<sup>27</sup>

By the time Vinoba Bhave left Odisha in Oct. 1955, the province had as many as 812 Gramdan villages out of which 605 were from Koraput district only. In total, 2,57,277 acres of land had been collected from 94,757 donors of the province. The collection of Gramdans from Koraput district were 605, Balasore-123, Ganjam-37, Mayurbhanj-37, Dhenkanal-5, Kalahandi-3, Puri-1 and from Cuttack district only one Gramdan was received.<sup>28</sup>

Within five years the Movement registered a huge success by obtaining 41 lakh acres of land from 5 lakh donors and received 1000 Gramdan villages from eight provinces.<sup>29</sup> Manmohan Choudhury proposed to observe 18 April 1951, the day when Vinobaji received first land gift from Panchampali as Land Revolution Day.

Following the departure of Vinoba, the constructive workers of Odisha under the leadership of Acharya Harihara Das and Gopabandhu Choudhury, made untiring efforts to make the Gramdan Movement a great success in Odisha. By the end of 1956, the number of Gramdan villages had gone up to 1573 and the total collection of land was about 3 lakhs of acres.

In fact, the death of Gopabandhu Choudhury on 29 April 1958, was a great setback for the Movement as a sense of inactivity overshadowed the workers everywhere. To fill the void, Acharya Harihara Das undertook an extensive *padyatra* from 15 August 1958 to 31 June 1960 for about 17 months in all the thirteen districts of Odisha covering 2825 miles. This gave wonderful impetus

to the workers to resume the Gramdan movement zealously with strong commitment as before.<sup>30</sup>

In the year 1957, the Gramdan Movement which was hitherto working under non-official initiatives, became more popular and got nation-wide support. At the invitation of All India Sarva Seva Sangha, a Gramdan Parishad was held on 21 and 22 September 1957, at Yehwal in Mysore. It was pointed out in the Conference that the Gramdan Movement would usher in a fuller development of cooperative life in the villages concerned including economic betterment, all round progress and development of the people. It would further create the psychological climate all over India for the solution of the land problem and furtherance of co-operative life. Such a Movement, it was stressed, deserved all kinds of help and encouragement.<sup>31</sup>

Despite legislative measures, the Movement lost its momentum after the Fourth Five Year Plan, when the ceiling surplus provisions came in to force. On 18 April 1976, the Bhoodan Movement completed twenty five years of its launch in the country; and though by March 1976, the Silver Jubilee year of the Movement, 10,611 villages were gifted in Gramdan in Odisha, yet the Movement had failed to actualize the dream of Vinoba, who had hoped to see the whole of India reconstituted into Gramdan villages by the birth centenary of Gandhiji. It is noteworthy that most of the villages gifted in the Movement, were located in the Tribal area.

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