

THE SARVODAYA SAMAJ AND BEGINNING OF BHOODAN MOVEMENT

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Abstract

In the Post Independence era there was drastic fall in the economic condition of Indian people due to the moral degradation of the political leaders and misappropriation of public property. The rich became richer and the poor became poorer. The poor people suffered on account of social discrimination and exploitation made by the rich, influential and powerful people. To eradicate this problem of socio- economic disparity Gandhiji convened a conference at Sevagram on 13th March 1948. But unfortunately Gandhiji was assassinated on 31st January 1948. So the conference was presided over by Dr. Rajendra Prasad. In this conference Vinoba Bhave advocated for the formation of an organization named 'Sarvodaya Samaj'. The Samaj was to be comprised of true Gandhian workers. It was to work for the execution of Gandhian constructive programs for the socio- economic uplift of the Indians. The main aim of the Sarvodaya Samaj was to establish a classless society and to bring communal harmony. The first conference of this Samaj was held at Rau in Madhya Pradesh in 1949. The second conference was organized at Angul in Odisha in 1950. Vinoba Bhave launched the historic Bhoodan Movement in April 1951 at Pochampalli in Nalgonda district of Telangana. Gopabandhu Choudhury and Rama Devi of Odisha joined this movement whole heartedly for the socio- economic well being of the people.

Keywords: Gandhiji, Sarvodaya Samaj, Sevagram, Vinoba Bhave, Rau Conference, Gram Sevak, Bhoodan Movement



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In the post-independence era the political scenario of India drastically changed. Degradation of moral values, impact of western culture, economic liquidation due to exploitation and misappropriation of public property shattered Bapujee's heart. His followers also grieved to come across such pitiable condition of independent India. The rich became richer and the poor became poorer due to ignorance, illiteracy, exploitation and discrimination among the Indians. During such a critical juncture Gandhiji and his true followers searched for befitting means to eradicate socio-economic disparity and discrimination. Gandhiji suggested that Congress Party instead of indulging in party politics and power-race should work for the social welfare programme for the mass with a deep concern for the future of India, Gandhijee ardently desired to implement his thought and ideology into actual practice so that social equanimity and economic uplift of all sections of people would be possible.

With all these objectives, Gandhiji convened a conference of dedicated constructive workers at Sevagram on 13 March 1948. In this conference Gandhiji wanted to inject his socio-economic ideology and to boost up his followers for socio-economic uplift of India. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Jaya Prakash Narayan, Aruna Asaf Ali were to join this conference. Gopabandhu Choudhury from Orisha was also invited to join this conference.

Unfortunately Gandhiji was assassinated on 30 January 1948. In his absence his chief disciple Vinoba Bhave had to conduct the conference. Dr. Rajendra Prasad presided over the conference. Vinoba Bhave advocated in this conference, that if goal is pure, the means to achieve the goal should be pure too. Whoever believed in this principle should be united and form one organisation. The organisation was named as “Sarvodaya Society”. Kishorilal Mushruwala was its Chairperson. In the meantime Gopabandhu Choudhury had to come back to Odisha as his nephew; Binayak Choudhury, son of Nabakrushna Choudhury committed suicide at the age 18. Gopabandhu returned to Odisha with a broken heart from Sevagram. However, he took the responsibility of carrying out Gandhian constructive programmes in Odisha with whole-hearted sincerity. First of all he wanted to inspire true Gandhians through his Grama Sevak magazine. In that magazine Gopabandhu Choudhury brought out the Odia translation of the writings of Mahatma Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave, Mushruwala, Kaka Kalelkar and Dada Dharmadhikari. Thus in Odisha Vinoba Bhave’s “Sarvodaya Samaja” was also to be organized. Before discussing the activities of Sarvodaya Samaj in Odisha let us discuss its formation and objectives.

‘Sarvodaya Samaj’ was a loosely knit organisation of the people who believed in Gandhian values and ideals. They were to bring all Gandhian workers and other like-minded people under one umbrella, so that a new India would be built with their sincere efforts. They would endeavour to execute Gandhian constructive programmes and work for its progress.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF SARVODAYA SAMAJ (SS)

The aim of Sarvodaya Samaj was to establish a classless society. The society should be based on truth and non-violence. There should not be any discrimination or exploitation. It was decided that members were to follow a set of rules which were prescribed in the programmes. Those rules were as follows:

- (1) Communal Harmony.
- (2) Removal of untouchability.

- (3) Removal of caste system.
- (4) Prohibition of intoxicating drink.
- (5) Promotion of khadi and other village industries.
- (6) Maintaining village sanitation and cleanliness.
- (7) Providing Training for Basic Education.
- (8) Promotion of adult education.
- (9) Promotion of Rastra Bhasha (Hindi).
- (10) Promotion of provincial language.
- (11) Establish Economic equality.
- (12) Uplift of Farmers (Kishans).
- (13) Uplift of workers.
- (14) Service of (Adivasi) Tribal people.
- (15) Giving service to lepers.
- (16) Eradication of parochial regionalism.
- (17) To save and protect cows.
- (18) To protect the interest of students through organisation.

One co-ordinator was selected from among the members to convene the Annual Conference of Sarvodaya Samaj and Gandhian workers to discuss about national and international problems and to sort out them through non-violent means. Kishorilal Mushruwalla was the President of Sarvodaya Samaja.

The First Sarvodaya Conference was held at Rau near Indore in Madhya Pradesh in 1949. Conference commenced on 9 March and ended on 11 March 1949. Gopabandhu Choudhury, Manmohan Choudhury, Gunanidhi Mohanty and 10 other workers attended this conference. The conference was attended by 400 members out of 1676 total members. There only Gopabandhu Choudhury decided to organise the Second Sarvodaya Samaj Conference in Odisha. As per Gopababu's proposal the Second Session of Sarvodaya Samaj was convened at Angul in Odisha. The conference was held from 6 April to 13 April in 1950.

This conference was held in a mango grove in front of Baji Rout Boys' Hostel at Angul. Mrs. Malati Choudhury was the Supervisor of that hostel. The conference achieved grand success, because of tremendous aid and assistance from the local people. The exhibition of khadi products of village cottage industries was very attractive. The people who participated the conference appreciated the exhibition very much. In that conference some

paintings and portraits which were related to some significant chapters of Odisha history were also exhibited. These pictures were drawn by great Odia artists like Bibhuti Bhushan Kanungo, Gopal Kanungo, Udayanath Rath, Ramachandra Singh, Muralidhar Tali, Upendra Kishore Das and Urmila Devi. In that conference Gopabandhu Choudhury was selected the chief co-ordinator of All India Sarvodaya Samaj and Nabakrusna Choudhury became a member. Gopabandhu had to visit different places of India as the co-ordinator of Sarvodaya Samaj. During his tour he came across large number workers, Gandhians, socialists, nationalist leaders and common people. He had the scope to interact with them and understood their perspectives and real objectives.

Everywhere he found difference of opinion, lack of sincerity, selfishness, indolence, violence and apathetic attitude among them. He realised that to face the challenges one had to be a true Gandhian and to keep Anasan as a panacea. So Gopabandhu Choudhury in his Dudheipal Ashram at Bari started Anasan on 20 August 1950 and after seven days on 28 August 1950 he broke his fast.¹⁰ Most of the Gandhian political leaders had become craze for power. He realised that dream of Mahatma Gandhi was going to shatter because of these cunning jackals. Beurocracy, English language, Courts, Police, laws and lawyers and even judges were getting self-centered and mean. How can Mother India flourish? Only Gandhain ideology and principles if truly implemented all problems can be solved. Unless until Gandhian ideals translated into actual practice country could never progress. It is obvious that “power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely”. So Gopabandhu Choudhury wanted to remain away from power and position and to serve people sincerely with whole hearted dedication and devotion. He resigned from the post of Secretary of All India Sarvodaya Samaj in July 1950.

In the meantime Vinoba Bhave, a true disciple of Mahatma Gandhi started “The Bhoodan Movement” to solve the economic disparity among the people and improve the economic condition of the country. The historic movement commenced on 18 April 1951 in an evolutionary process. When Vinoba Bhave camped at Pocham Polli village in Nalgonda district, some Harijan villagers approached him in Prathana Sabha and requested him to remove the tragedy of their lives. “We have no land, no other vocation. How can we subsist? If we get a little land, we shall work and maintain ourselves happily”. Vinoba questioned them, “If you get land will you all get together and have co-operative farming?” When all the farmers affirmed, Vinoba said that he would send their application to government. But things

took a different turn when an affluent, a well to do farmer of the village named Ramachandra Reddy suddenly offered 100 Acres of land to Vinoba to solve the problems of the farmers. Vinobajee congratulated the donor of land and gave a few words of advice to the villagers. That night he could not sleep, brooding over the incident occurred in the Prathana Sabha that evening at last his mathematical brain made an instant calculation: “There are about fifty million landless people in India. At the rate of at-least one acre per person fifty million acres will be required”. At first Vinoba thought it was impossible to get fifty million acres of land. As man loves land more than his life. Even brothers fight over land. In the language of Vinoba “How can a small fly like me ask for such beloved things as land and who will give it? No, I will not be able to do this ...” This pessimism vanished while an inner voice arose: “You have got to do this. Don’t you believe in Ahimsa?”

At last having full faith in the Almighty Vinoba decided to ask for land donations from the rich for the poor the next day and also got land. In his two month pilgrimage in Telengana he received donations totaling twelve thousand acres of land. He said to people, “Like air, water and sunlight land too is God’s gift. It is, therefore meant for all. Man can not be the owner of land. Its real owner is God. Moreover he said, “Land is our mother. We are her children. If you are five brothers, I am your sixth. I am the representative of Daridra Narayan. On behalf of those poor, I ask for their just right. Donations are not alms. Sankaracharya says, “Danam Samavibhaga”. Donations means, Kalapurusha demands equal distribution.

“There is a tradition of performing a yajna (sacrifice) when the country is in danger. In order to be relieved from the present danger, offer land to the Bhoodan Yajna”.

People agreed and donated land. Thus Bhoodan movement started. The rich co-operated with this programme for self purification and self relinquishment of ownership. Pochampalli incidence in Telengana encouraged Vinoba to start Bhoodan padyatra in different provinces to expedite Bhoodan movement. Rama Devi and Gopabandhu Choudhury in Odisha, got ready to join the padyatra with Vinobajee to materialise the dream of Gandhiji; the Socio- economic independence of Indians. They followed the footprints of Vinobajee to pursue big landholders, rich Jamindars to donate land to the landless farmers. Thus Vinoba became the torch bearer of a rare Socio-Economic Revolution in India. He moved forward with that torch lit by Mahatma Gandhi and indeed added many dimensions to it. Gopabandhu Choudhury being a staunch Gandhian followed the same path. He and his family maintained

distance from dirty party politics and power race. They whole heartedly involved in social welfare work and Sarvodaya movement.

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