

Dawn at Koraput

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Bhoodan has awakened response in many parts of the country and in some areas, the response has been spectacular. But the movement has not shown the same success in redistributing the lands donated, and in reorganising cultivation and improving land use.

Koraput, a district in Orissa, where Bhoodan has taken the form of Gramdan and the largest number of villages has been given away, has even better claims to fame. In two-thirds of the villages in Koraput, the land received as gift' has been redistributed and villagers themselves have fixed the principles of redistribution. A most significant experiment is going on there today in rural rehabilitation and development.

Only those techniques are being tried which the people can adopt easily they have lost all skill of fingers that they had—and the villagers themselves are being trained for survey and construction work as well as for running co-operatives, instead of trained personnel being imported from outside.

There is definitely no intention to distribute poverty in Koraput, which is among the poorest districts in India.

ONE major source of dissatisfaction amongst the friends and sympathisers of the Bhoodan Movement is that enough attention was not being given to the post-distribution or, what may be called, follow-up work. A small pilot enquiry in six villages of Gujarat revealed that all was not well with the lands in the hands of the new recipients and that they were facing many difficult problems towards whose solution not much assistance was being received from the Bhoodan workers. Amongst the leaders of the Bhoodan Movement there is full realisation of this lacuna, but it is contended by them that their immediate aim is to bring about a radical change in attitude to land ownership and to create a nation-wide psychological climate for the redistribution of land. The year 1957 is chosen as a year of Deliverance, so to say, and it is expected that after sufficient preparatory work is done, a call will be given to the nation and to the people in the villages for voluntary redistribution of land in hundreds and thousands of villages within a stipulated period. While admitting the revolutionary significance of this effort, the importance of the follow-up and reconstruction work to make farming under the new dispensation a success cannot be minimised. It was, therefore, very refreshing to discover that in the Korapat district of Orissa a very well conceived and well directed effort at reconstruction is being made under the leadership of Shri Annasaheb Sahasrabudde.'

It may be noted that to date 1,850 Gramdans have been received all over India, Orissa leading with 1 601

Reference is invited to an excellent pamphlet *The Gramdan Movement* by Manmohan Choudhuri, published by The Gramsevak Samavaya Prakashan Ltd, Cuttack.

Gramdans. In Koraput district alone as many as 1,300 villages have been donated in Gramdan and according to one estimate, these cover one-sixth of the total population, one-seventh of the total cultivable area and one-sixth of the total number of revenue villages in the district. This by itself is an achievement which is unique by any token in the history of land reforms. The experience gained in Koraput relating to the distribution of land and reconstruction effort is, therefore, of great significance to all students of land reforms and social change.

Undoubtedly, there are factors in Koraput which are peculiarly favourable for the Bhoodan Movement, redistribution of land and for the reconstruction effort. Most of the villages in Koraput district are small and their population is predominantly Adivasi. Each village is generally inhabited by a single tribe. But, there is a considerable number of villages with non-Adivasi and mixed population. The number of such villages in Koraput alone is 150. Much of the area in the district is hilly and covered with forest. An analysis of statistics of 472 villages where land has been redistributed shows that the average of cultivated and cultivable waste land per capita comes to 1.33 acres.

Land Redistribution

Land has been redistributed in a little less than two-thirds of the villages received in donation. The villagers themselves fixed the principles of redistribution with the help and guidance of Bhoodan workers. The ideal, of course, is to distribute land equally to all those who qualify for it, with shares in all types of land, to each family according to the number of its members. But, it is noteworthy that this principle was strictly

adhered to only in 20 per cent of the villages; the majority decided to give some extra land to the bigger landowners amounting from one-and-a-half to three times the per capita average in the village. In a few villages, they even agreed to give more than this to secure the co-operation of a few recalcitrant big owners. This flexibility reveals not only the practical wisdom of the leaders of the Movement, but their keen desire not to force the pace beyond the psychological and mental preparedness of the village people themselves. Enthusiasts who have been so critical of the recommendation of the Land Reform Panel in placing the ceiling at three times the family holding would do well to revise their attitude in the light of the experience in Koraput. If there was any area in which the strictly egalitarian ideology had the maximum chances of success, it was in the Gramdan villages of Koraput. If people who have given up all their land could not be persuaded to accept rigidly the egalitarian basis of distribution, the prospect of such acceptance in other areas would surely be meagre. Any effort to force the pace would release disastrous reactions.

Ownership Rests in Village Community

Though the land has been redistributed with full rights of cultivation, yet its ownership does not pass to the grantee, but rests in the village community. The individual farmer cannot sell or mortgage his holding and the village community has a right, and is expected to exercise it, to have periodical reconsideration and re-allotment, say, every five or ten years. There are critics who have contended that donated lands should not be redistributed for individual cul-



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tivation and every effort should be made to introduce co-operative or collective farming. Once again, the experience of Koraput is very significant. As pointed out above, lands have been distributed for individual cultivation, and only a small percentage of land is set apart for collective farming. The average for the 472 villages in Koraput comes to just over 3 per cent of the total cultivated land. In several of the villages, no land has been set apart for community use. That a movement whose aim is to abolish private property in land and which stresses the ethical tenet of considering the entire village as one family, should have hesitated to insist on co-operative farming deserves serious attention. The non-insistence on co-operative farming was not a result of weakness or a compromise. Apart from the fact that the Movement does not wish to coerce the people into accepting anything for which they are psychologically and mentally not prepared, the decisive consideration was "that the Indian peasant in Koraput or elsewhere is not amply equipped to handle the organisational and technical problems involved in collectivisation". The leaders rightly believe that importing of a large number of technical personnel from outside and superimposing them on the village community would be inconsistent with the ethos of the Movement. Impatience is often a symptom of earnestness. But, the desire for speed may also lead to a search for short-cuts which may not be consistent with fidelity towards genuinely democratic processes.

Reconstruction and Development

Apart from the land reform aspect of the problem, the most noteworthy feature of the work in Koraput is in respect of rehabilitation and development of the economy. The Sarva Seva Sangh do not aspire to take up the responsibility for development in each and every village received in Gramdan. With an admirable sense of realism, they have come to the conclusion that that responsibility rests ultimately with the people and the Government. Their activities are, therefore, confined to the districts of Koraput, Ganjam, Balasore and Mayurbhanj. What was more refreshing to discover in this work was that development was not inhibited by any ideological considerations. On the contrary, one begins to discover that what la

really practicable in these areas tends to confirm such ideological predispositions as the Sarva Seva Sangh or organisations of similar persuasion possess. Koraput is amongst one of the poorest areas in India and it is fully realised that "the desperate need at the moment is to increase the real income of the people at least three times in the shortest possible time." There is, therefore, no fear that the predilections of the Sarvodaya leadership will lead to distribution of poverty.

The estimated outlay budget for the five years 1956-61 is Rs 04.15 lakhs, and the pride of place in this is given to irrigation (Rs 18 lakhs) and Soil Conservation (Rs 20 lakhs). It is my intention in this article merely to draw attention to certain special features of this developmental activity, rather than to give a detailed account of the same. Thus, for example, both in the sphere of irrigation and soil conservation, the immediate problem was of scientific surveys and trained personnel for undertaking the survey and construction work. The Sangh could not wait till a trained batch of surveyors and overseers could be imported from outside. So, it was decided to open a training centre to train a cadre of surveyors and engineers from amongst the local people. The results have been very encouraging. Within a short period of training and field work, the Sangh was able to get sufficient local talent for the type of work needed in the area. If the developmental activities have to become all pervasive, ways and means will have to be found, as they have been done in Koraput, to recruit local people and give them training on the spot, rather than wait for the universities to produce large numbers of highly trained personnel.

Technology and Training"

In the matter of technology, the decisions had to be taken in the light of prevailing conditions rather than that of highly theoretical considerations of input-output ratios. This is how the problem has been stated: "When faced with the stark realities of the situation, we found that modern conventional technology could be of very little help. The people are undernourished and have lost all skill of the fingers that they had. For them technological progress has stopped centuries ago. We have to invent a new technology that will take into consideration the disused state of their hands and

minds and slowly puts skill back into them, so that ultimately their awakened Intellect takes over. We were forced to realise that there is no other alternative but to adopt the technology of small tools developed by the Gandhian research workers."

One more example from the field of trade should suffice to give an indication of the special texture of this developmental process. In order to put an end to the exploitation by money-lenders and traders, which has incidentally reached unbelievable proportions in Koraput and Ganjam, and also to put the villagers in control of their economic activities, stores were opened in the villages on a co-operative basis. Once again the choice was to have trained secretaries to manage the stores with regular accounts and well-kept books or to entrust the management to the people themselves. The village people are completely illiterate and have never bothered to take interest in the trading aspect of their economy. Could the management of a co-operative store be entrusted to these illiterate people, totally innocent of the business practices and procedures? The Sangh decided to take the risk, both on practical and ideological grounds. If these stores had to be started in large numbers all over the area, hundreds of trained secretaries would have been required for the purpose, which would have meant inordinate delay. Secondly, it was felt that any such imposed management would not be conducive to the development of self-reliance amongst the villagers. "The stores are not yet formally registered as co-operative societies and money is being advanced to the people simply on good faith. They are often managed by totally illiterate villagers." And yet, there is no evidence either of corruption or gross mismanagement. Had all the usual formalities and rigidities of regular co-operative establishments been insisted upon from the beginning, the movement would not have spread, and what is more important, would not have taken root as it appears, it has already done. Both the developmental and distributive aspects of reconstruction are receiving adequate attention. Values no doubt are stressed both in regard to ends and means but the attitudes and approach in seeking solutions are scientific, for the organisers believe that the search is not over.

BETTER LIVING STANDARDS

Substantial progress was made during the First Plan period in food and agricultural production. Yields will be stepped up to a still higher level during the Second Plan period by means of major and minor irrigation projects and intensive use of manures, fertilizers, improved seeds and new techniques of soil conservation on every acre of land. As Second Plan targets are reached, the common man's primary needs will be fulfilled to a large extent.

Quantitatively the consumption of food grains will increase to 18.3 oz. per adult as compared to 17.2 oz. at present and of sugar to 1.7 oz. from 1.4 oz. Apart from this, there will be an increase of 2.3 million tons in cotton and an increase of 1.5 million bales in jute.

Rs. 568 crores—11.8 per cent of the total outlay on the Second Plan has been allotted for agriculture and Community Projects. The latter together with National Extension Service will cover the entire rural population. Self-help will be supplemented by benefits flowing from the development of fisheries, farming, animal husbandry and forests and the provision of essential services as water and electricity.

Over 21 million acres of land will be irrigated during the Second Plan, bringing the total land under irrigation to 88 million acres. To meet our industrial and rural electrification needs the installed capacity will be stepped up to 6.9 million kw from the present capacity of 3.4 million kw. More than three annas of every rupee to be spent on the Second Five Year Plan is set apart for irrigation and power.

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