

Revisiting the Role of Communist MLAs on the Orissa(Odisha) Bhoodan Yagna Bills of 1953 and 1970

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ABSTRACT: *The present work aims to demonstrate the voice of opposition of the Communist MLAs on the two important Bhoodan Yagna Bills of 1953 and 1970 that were brought to the Assembly Hall of Odisha during the governance of Nabakrushna Chaudhury (Congress Party) and R.N. Sindeo (Swatantra Party) respectively. Bhoodan or land-gift movement initiated by Acharya Vinobha Bhave, a Gandhian follower-cum-constructive worker, was a manifestation of Ruskin Bond's idea of 'equal share', envisaged in his book "Unto This Last" which means a last should be provided his due right. In India, for the first time this idea was reflected in the Gandhian ideology of "Sarvodaya" (in Devnagari; सर्वोदय and in Gujurati; સર્વોદય)—invented from two Sanskrit roots "sarva" and "udaya". The term sarva means 'all' and the udaya means 'uplift'. Moreover, the complete meaning of the term sarvodaya is "universal uplift" or "progress of all". Vinobha being a devotee of Gandhiji sought this message be materialized through constructive works with a view to bringing a transformation in the socio-economic apparatus of the Indian people especially the poorer one. So he initiated the Bhoodan Movement or the voluntary donation of land in order to mitigate the land scarcity among the landless people. This movement was started on the basic principles of Non-violence, a Gandhian dogma of victory without bloodshed. But the Communists observed it as against their basic notion of a radical change through a mass revolution. That paradoxical idea rocked the Assembly. Many of the interpersonal debates were held in connection to those bills and ultimately the bills were passed and became Acts without producing any end result for the social benefits.*

KEYWORDS: *Acharya, Bhoodan, Communists, Left, Sarvodaya Samaj, Yogna.*

I. INTRODUCTION:

The purpose of my research work is to bring into limelight the role played by the Communist MLAs on the Bhoodan Yagna Bills of 1953 and 1970 in the Odisha Legislative Assembly (OLA). The bill was a direct outcome of the Acharya Vinobha Bhave's movement for Bhoodan or land gift. Acharya Bhave was a staunch follower of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi alias Mahatma Gandhi, the national father of India.¹ The movement was a brain child of Vinobha which was its genesis at Sevagram, a village at the outskirts of Wardha, Maharashtra.² A meeting was held there on 13 to 15 March, 1948³ and a decision was also undertaken to launch a non-violent social transformation on the basic principle of constructive work and social justice of M.K. Gandhi. The end result of this meeting was the formation of an apolitical body the *Sarvodaya Samaj* or an institution for 'universal upliftment' or 'progress for all'.⁴

The term *Sarvodaya* is a philosophical connotation that got reflected in the mind of Gandhiji after going through Ruskin Bund's book *Unto This Last* which means even a last person should get an equal share. The total responsibility for augmenting this movement was left on the shoulder of Binobha Bhave. Among the all stalwarts across the country, Gopabandhu chaudury was the only representative from Odisha to hail there to participate the meeting. But the real birth of the movement, however, came on 18 April, 1951 when the donation of one hundred acre of land was made by Vadre Ramchandra Reddy Bhoodan⁵, a landlord and a social reformer of Pochampally in Telengana region of Andhra Pradesh.⁶ It sensitized the mind of Bhave and since then he set out his journey throughout the country for collecting the surplus land from the landlords and to distribute them among the landless people in the country. Thus he toured throughout the country to get this message reflected in other parts of the country and to make this movement a more successful one.⁷ The term *Bhoodan* means voluntary donation of land. *Santh* Binobha initiated this movement with a view to bringing an absolute institutional change in the agricultural field of the post-colonial India. This was also meant for a comprehensive socio-agricultural revolution aimed at establishing a sarvodaya society both in India and outside of it. Vinobhaji's mission of collecting land in the name of Bhoodan Movement was found its reflection in Odisha too; a state positioned in the south eastern part of Indian subcontinent.

On 7 January, 1952 a Bhoodan Campaign was launched by the *sarvadaya* workers of Odisha and on that same day an extensive *padyatra* (March on foot) through Odisha was also conducted from a place named Ramachandrapur village in Bari of Jajpur District under the aegis of Gopabandhu Chaudhury, Rama Devi Chaudhury (his wife), Harihar Das, Krupasindhu Hota, Radha Ratan Das, Sakti Sekhar Das and others.⁸ The first land grantee was Harapriya Devi, a woman of Anandapur village by donating only 12 *ghuntas* i.e. 0.48 acres of land.⁹ The movement continued for near about four months and ended on 28 May, 1952 collecting only 1626 acres of land from 233 donors.¹⁰ The movement got outside support from the Government as well as from the Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee (UPCC). The newly formed Congress Government headed by Sri Nabakrushna Chaudhury with a view to give the movement a real boost brought the Bhoodan Yagna Bill on 9 March, 1953 into the floor of the Assembly.¹¹

II. THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNISTS ON THE BHOODAN YOGNA BILLS

The Orissa Bhoodan Yagna Bill, 1953 : In the House of 140, the strength of the Communist member was only seven which was constituted only 5% of the total membership of the House.¹² Among the all Communist members, Sri Gangadhar Paikaray (from the Begunia Constituency) proved his efficiency of resistance in the course of the passing of the Orissa Bhoodan Yagna Bills, 1953 and 1970. From the stand points that he hailed in the House it is observed that he was in favour of a radical socio-economic transformation, basically not relying upon the vague Boodan Movement of Vinobha Bhave but on a tough legislative measure and its proper implementation. The role that he played in the House is summarized as follows;

The Bill was introduced in the Odisha Legislative Assembly (OLA) on 9th March, 1953 by the Revenue Minister, Sadasiva Tripathy. The statement of object and reason of the Bill stated;

*This bill is introduced to remove difficulties regarding the existing tenancy laws in some parts of the state and to impose certain restriction on transfer of land which is likely to hamper donations of land to the yagna. This Bill is intended to remove these difficulties and to simplify and regulate donation, distribution and management of land for the purpose of Bhoodan Yagna.*¹³

After the introduction of the bill in the House it was referred to a select committee consisting of 8 members on 10th March, 1953. On 7 April Sri Nabakrushna Chaudhury, the Chief Minister of the Province beg Honble speaker's node to consider it clause by clause.¹⁴ He said, the bill had lost its previous craze as several modifications and changes were made by the select committee. Gangadhar Paikarai was the only Communist member to question on the governments show case policy of land reform. Vinobhaji, he cited, was a yogi and superman and his mission of Bhoodan could not eradicate the land scarcity among the landless people in Odisha. Supporting PM Jawahar Lal Nehru's view of solving land problem through legislation, he questioned, why the government was relying upon the Bhoodan mechanism of Vinobhaji but not on its own strength to mitigate that problem?¹⁵

However, on the other hand Sri Paikarai was observed so much critical and obsessed with the Nehru's views on the constitutional provision of compensation for taking lands from the donor. Attacking on the Congress government at the centre he cited, if the parliament was dominated by majority of Congress men why the government could not alter this provision for the suitability of the common people? Though he admitted the progress of the movement in the state but said that it could not bring a total socio-economic change in the state. The people used to donate only five to ten decimils of land out of their total possession of 100 to 200 acres of land. In this respect, he cited an example of Baman Mohapatra of Puri District who owned more than 500 acres of land but donated a meager amount of 2 acres only in the name of *Bhoodan*. In this respect he predicted that the quantity of the land gift would be minimized in the subsequent periods as the people were heisted even to donate only 1/6th of their total landed property. Sradhakar Supakar, the leader of the opposition party, supported the view of Sri Paikray.¹⁶

The House was aired by diversified voices when Sri Nishamani Khuntia came with a two edged view with regard to the Bill. Supporting the bill he quoted the paraphrase of Vinobhaji that 'the Boodan Movement would appear as a Third Force in the world'.¹⁷ No matter how much an individual donates land but it was to be taken into consideration how many men were involved in this process by voluntarily granting lands. Acknowledging the fact of dominance of the haves in the name of wealth, caste and religion, he said that the movement had helped to evolve the psychological transformation among the propertied class to a great extent.

Also during the period of the movement, he expressed, it was observed that some of them donated their land with a view to securing their prestige and some of them sold their lands at an uneconomic rate. Hence they gradually began to think it was prestigious to donate lands without any bloodshed.¹⁸

He supported the Chaudhury Report which came in favour of the common people. The report observed that possession of land more than 33 acres was illegal. Both the Chaudhury Report and the Bhoodan Movement had brought a new hope and aspiration to the common people; he lauded. Secondly he felt great remorse when the Odisha Congress Committee (OCC) set up by the Government brought out a new land reform policy. The policy indicated that one can uphold up to 200 to 300 acres of landed property.¹⁹ Sri Paikaray supported the above criticize of Sri Khuntia. In this way the bill was passed after getting majority of vote in the House and became an Act of XVI (of 1953) on 26th July, 1953. According to the Act;

- [1] A *Bhoodan Yojna Samiti* was established and its members were to be nominated by Vinobha Bhave.²⁰
- [2] Section-5 of the Act empowered the state to dissolve the *samiti* on the recommendation of Vinobha.
- [3] Under the provision of the Act the owner of land were made to donate land to the *Samiti* by a declaration before the Revenue Officer appointed under this Act.²¹
- [4] After the declaration of the donation of land to the *Samiti* all the title, rights and interest of the landlord would be repudiated.²²
- [5] Section-15 of the Act provided for the grant of lands to the landless individuals.
- [6] The State Government was entitled to enact the laws for the switable implementation of the provisions under the Act.

As per the provisions a *Bhoodan Samiti* was constituted with Sri Gopabandhu Chaudhuri and Sarat Chandra Maharana was its first Chairman and the Secretary respectively.²³

The Orissa Bhoodan and Gramdan Bill, 1970 : On 7 April, 1970, the Orissa Bhoodan and Gramdan Bill, 1970 was brought to the House by Sri Surendranath Patnaik, the then revenue Minister of Odisha. The bill was brought during the time of Jan- Swatantra coalition Government headed by R.N. Sin Deo, the leader of the Swatantra Party(SP). Owing to some of the contradictory provisions in both of the bills (the previous Orissa Boodan Bill, 1953 and the Orissa Gramdan Bill, 1965) the Select Committee felt it necessary of a combined bill in the name of the Orissa Bhoodan and Gramdan Bill, 1970. In this bill the Communists participation was not so much realized but those who participated included Sri Paikaray and Sri Laxman Mohapatra(Chatrapur Constituency). Sri Paikaray on behalf of the Communist Party moved a motion for the circulation of the bill eliciting public opinion but his voice was curtailed in the House. Similarly when Sri Jagannath Das, member of the Praja socialist Party (PSP) proposed not to bring the people those who had owned less than five acres of lands into the threshold of the Bhoodan Bill his voice was also rejected by the Deputy Minister Himansu Sekhar Padhi. Laxman Mohapatra questioned the Government about its real intensity regarding the Bhoodan Movement in Odisha. He said that the Land R eforms Acts that the government was enacting were nothing more than farces because all these Acts were not being properly implemented rather the Government was supporting the Bhoodan Movement. His arguments seemed to be right when the provisions of both the bills, the Orissa Boodan Bill, 1953 and the Orissa Land Reform (Amendment) Act, 1965 were taken in to consideration. In the Orissa Land Reform (Amendment) Act, 1965 it was said that the provisions of this Act would not be applicable to these lands which were meant for the Boodan. So the polices of the Government pertaining to the Bhoodan Movement and the Land Reforms Acts were contradictorily in nature.

III CONCLUSION:

The movement from its birth place, Ponchampalli in A.P., spread out to the north Indian regions especially to the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and by March 1956 the movement could achieve a considerable success by collecting about 12,200 acres of land.²⁴ But in Odisha it was visualized that the movement lacked its strength to persuade the people of landed property to donate their land. In this way the prediction of Sri Paikaray was greatly realized as he observed (in the House) that the movement would not last long and could not be a successful movement. By the end of 1956 the total number of Gramdan village counted only 1573 and the total collection of land was only three lacks acres.²⁵ Moreover, the movement lacked in collecting five lacks acre of land by the end of 1957 as it was targeted by Vinobha Bhave.²⁶ Furthermore, by 1965 the total land received amounted 1, 68, 378.14 acres out of which only 94, 973, 51 acres were donated among 38,337 landless people of Odisha.²⁷ Thus the movement, in Odisha, witnessed a bottleneck growth and failed to actualize the dream of Vinobha i.e. to bring whole of the Odisha under the Gramdan Movement by the birth centenary of Gandhiji. Also by March, 1976, the Silver jubilee of the movement, only 10,611 villages was gifted in Gramdan in Odisha.²⁸ Above all, the role played by Sri Paikaray in the House stands tall among the all

members of various Political Parties. His argument in connection to some of the provisions of the bills demonstrated that he was a real Communist leader who alone represented the voice of the common people in the Assembly. As he was a member of the state Communist Party, he not only ventilated the decisions taken by the Party itself but sometimes opposed to the very nature of the bills with his own judgment and statesmanship.

He wanted to have a radical transformation in the land relations of Odisha. Furthermore, keeping in view the failure of the movement the Party called upon a mass revolution for the grabbing of lands outside of the Assembly.²⁹ The responsibility of shouldering that movement was conferred on Sri Paikaray. The first attack was made on the 'Ranimahal' land of the king of Nayagarh District. A large gathering of peasantry headed by Sri Paikaray, Parsuram Padatikaray and Basudev Dora seized a huge amount of land of the king and declared these lands were under the possession of the peasants of that area. In a bid to give this movement a serious jolt a band of police reached there and arrested all of them.³⁰ In 1970 he became the president of the Odisha *Krusak Sabha* and toured throughout the state. The important objectives of his tour included land to the landless, equal distribution of surplus land among the landless, providing water to the land etc.³¹ Hence the Communists took up more radical measures when the government proved to be failure in bringing socio-economic parity among the people of Odisha.

REFERENCES:

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