

VINOBA BHAVE



Acharya Vinoba Bhave was a freedom fighter and a spiritual teacher. He is best known as the founder of the 'Bhoodan Movement' (Gift of the Land). The reformer had an intense concern for the deprived masses. Vinoba Bhave had once said, "All revolutions are spiritual at the source. All my activities have the sole purpose of achieving a union of hearts." In 1958, Vinoba was the first recipient of the international Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership. He was also conferred with the Bharat Ratna (India's highest civilian awards) posthumously in 1983.

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Where & when born

Vinoba (born Vinayaka Rao Bhave) was born to Narahari Shambhu Rao and Rukmini Devi on 11 September 1895 in a small village called Gagode (present day Gagode Budruk) in Kolaba now in Pen, Raigad district of Maharashtra.

Brief life history of the person

At a very young age Vinoba was deeply interested in Mathematics. In 1916, on his way to Mumbai to appear for the intermediate examination, Vinoba Bhave put his school and college certificates into a fire. It was believed that Vinoba took the decision after reading a piece of writing in a newspaper written by Mahatma Gandhi. And he joined Gandhi's ashram (ascetic community) at Sabarmati, near Ahmadabad without informing his family. Soon Gandhiji learnt on that Vinoba kept his family unaware of his where-about wrote a letter to his father about his stay at Ashram. His involvement with Gandhi's constructive programmes related to Khadi, village industries, new education (Nai Talim), sanitation and hygiene also kept on increasing.

Vinoba went to Wardha on 8 April 1921 to take charge of the Ashram as desired by Gandhi. In 1923, he brought out *Maharashtra Dharma*, a Marathi monthly which had his essays on the Upanishads. Later on, this monthly became a weekly and continued for three years. In 1925, he was sent by Gandhi to Vaikom, Kerala to supervise the entry of the Harijans to the temple.

He was associated with Mahatma Gandhi in the Indian independence movement. When British arrested him and kept in jail, there he gave a series of talks on the Gita, in his native language Marathi, to his fellow prisoners.

These highly inspiring talks were later published as the book "Talks on the Gita", and it had been translated into many languages both in India and elsewhere. Vinoba felt that the source of these talks was something from above and he believed that its influence would endure even if his other works were forgotten.

Vinoba's religious outlook was very broad and it synthesised the truths of many religions. This can be seen in one



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of his hymns "Om Tat Sat" which contains symbols of many religions. His slogan (Jay Jagat) i.e. "victory to the world" finds reflection in his views about the world as a whole.

Vinoba spent the later part of his life at his Brahma Vidya Mandir ashram in Paunar in Wardha district of Maharashtra. He died on 15 November 1982 after refusing food and medicine for a few days by accepting "Samadhi Maran" / "Santhara" as described in Jainism. The Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi, who was visiting Moscow to attend the funeral of Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, cut short her visit to be at the funeral of Vinoba.

Political Life

Vinoba was arrested several times during the 1920s and 1930s and served a five-year jail sentence in the 1940s for leading non-violent resistance to British rule. The jails for Vinoba had become the places of reading and writing. He wrote *Ishavasyavritti* and *Sthitaprajna Darshan* in jail. He also learnt four South Indian languages and created the script of Lok Nagari at Vellore jail. In the jails, he gave a series of talks on Bhagavad Gita in Marathi, to his fellow prisoners. Bhave participated in the nationwide civil disobedience periodically conducted against the British, and was imprisoned with other nationalists. Despite these many activities, he was not well known to the public. He gained national prominence when Gandhi chose him as the first participant in a new nonviolent campaign in 1940. Bhave also participated in the Quit India Movement.

Vinoba observed the life of the average Indian living in a village and tried to find solutions for the problems he faced with a firm spiritual foundation. This formed the core of his *Sarvodaya movement*. Another example of this is the Bhoodan (land gift) movement started at Pochampally on 18 April 1951, after interacting with 80 Harijan families. He walked all across India asking people with land to consider him as one of their sons and so give him one sixth of their land. He took donated land from land owners and gave it away to the poor and landless, for them to cultivate. Then after 1954, he started to ask for donations of whole villages in a programme he called Gramdan. He got more than 1000 villages by way of donation. Out of these, he obtained 175 donated villages in Tamil Nadu alone. Noted Gandhian and atheist Lavanam was the interpreter of Vinoba Bhave during his land reform movement in Andhra Pradesh and parts of Orissa

Vinoba said, "I have walked all over India for 13 years. In the backdrop of enduring perpetuity of my life's work, I have established 6 ashrams.

Non-violence and compassion being a hallmark of his philosophy, he also campaigned against the slaughtering of cows.

The Brahma Vidya Mandir is one of the ashrams that Bhave created. It is a small community for women that was



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created in order for them to become self-sufficient and non-violent in a community. This group farms to get their own food, but uses Gandhi's beliefs about food production, which include sustainability and social justice, as a guide. Since its founding in 1959, members of Brahma Vidya Mandir (BVM), an international community for women in Paunar, Maharashtra, have dealt with the struggle of translating Gandian values such as self-sufficiency, non-violence, and public-service into specific practices of food production and consumption.

Criticisms in his life

V.S. Naipaul has given scathing criticism of Bhave in his collection of essays citing his lack of connection with rationality and excessive imitation of Gandhi. Even some of his admirers find fault with the extent of his devotion to Gandhi. Much more controversial was his support, ranging from covert to open, to Congress Party's government under Indira Gandhi, which was fast becoming unpopular. He controversially backed the Indian Emergency imposed by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, calling it *Anushasana Parva (Time for Discipline)*. Congress party opponents at that time had coined the derogatory term "Sarkari Sant (Government Saint)" to describe him. Noted Marathi writer Purushottam Laxman Deshpande publicly criticised him and mocked him by writing article titled as "Vanaroba" which is disambiguation of name "Vinoba" and literally means monkey. However, in his end days he was very much against Prime Minister Indira Gandhi as she had ordered a shootout of the Sant Samaj who had undertaken a gherao of Parliament against cow slaughter. The criticism has been considered objectionable and unfounded later. By Anushasan Parva – Time for Discipline – he meant everyone to follow the rule including the rulers of that time. At a later stage he called Intelligentsia to chart a path for the ruling community and public in general. During anushasn Parva – the king has to take the permission of the great men of his time – by that he meant to put the government under the guidance of the learned. The identified persons included Late Shrimannarayan – former Governor of Gujarat and a great Gandhian of his time. They had suggested lifting of emergency. Yet the erstwhile government did not pay heed to the advice which had Vinoba Bhave's blessings and initiative

Awards & Achievements

- In 1958 Vinoba was the first recipient of the international Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership.
- He was awarded the Bharat Ratna posthumously in 1983
- A University has been named after him, Vinoba Bhave University, located in Hazaribagh district in the State of Jharkhand



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His Writings

Vinoba Bhave was a scholar, thinker, and writer who produced numerous books. He was a translator who made Sanskrit texts accessible to the common man. He was also an orator and linguist who had an excellent command of several languages (Marathi, Gujarati, Hindi, Urdu, English, and Sanskrit). Vinoba Bhave was an innovative social reformer. Shri Vinoba Bhave called "Kannada" script as "Queen of World Scripts" – "Vishwa Lipigala Raani" He wrote brief introductions to, and criticisms of, several religious and philosophical works like the Bhagavad Gita, works of Adi Shankaracharya, the Bible and Quran. His criticism of Gnaneshwar's poetry and works by other Marathi saints is quite brilliant and a testimony to the breadth of his intellect.

Vinoba Bhave had translated the Bhagavad Gita into Marathi. He was deeply influenced by the Gita and attempted to imbibe its teachings into his life, often stating that "The Gita is my life's breath".

Some of his works are:

- The essence of Quran
- The essence of Christian teachings
- Thoughts on education
- Swarajya Sastra

Sources

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