CHAPTER IV

SARVODAYA APPROACH TO DEMOCRATIC DECENTRALIZATION.

As noted earlier, Gandhi wanted decentralization of both, economic and political power. He contemplated a society in which all would have their rightful place and each would enjoy freedom and participation in the management of the affairs of the community.

However, it is not possible to say how far he could succeed in implementing his scheme of decentralization as he had no opportunity to do so because of his assassination only a few months after the attainment of independence by his country. But after his death most of the constructive workers and his followers took this task upon themselves and made efforts to fulfil his mission through various programmes such as the 'Bhoodan-Grandan' (gift of land and gift of village) Movement, 'Reconstruction of Indian Polity', 'Panchayati Raj', 'Total Revolution', etc. They met in Sevagram in March, 1948, to chalk out a plan for their future programme. They decided to have an organization for the uplift and welfare of one and all. It was called the 'Sarvodaya Samaj' (Sarvodaya Society). At this Conference, under the guidance of Vinoba Bhave, the word 'Sarvodaya' was accepted as the goal of their movement.

and all the workers constituted a fellowship called 'Sarvodaya Samaj' with the objective to reconstruct a social order on the basis of truth and non-violence, in which there would be no possibility of exploitation and "in which both the individual and society would have an opportunity for fullest development".

Similarly, a Sarvodaya Economic Conference was held in December, 1949, which also aimed at establishing a Sarvodaya Society. The society reiterated its faith in the ideals of the 'Sarvodaya' which had been laid down in the first Conference a year earlier.

According to the advocates of Sarvodaya, the principle underlying their view of democratic decentralization is that the power of the people based on 'Lok-Miti' alone can reduce the interference and coercive role of party-politics to the minimum. Vinoba Bhave points out that the real revolution will come only by the power of the people and not by the power of party as party-politics gives the people only an illusion of security in which they become more and more helpless. Like Gandhi he


3. Jayaprakash Narayan, *A Picture of Sarvodaya Social Order* (Tanjore : Sarvodaya Prachuralayam, 1977), p.30. He said, "if we believe in decentralization and if we want the power to reach the lowest unit, there is no other way. Political parties cannot do this, because they are themselves centralised. Few important people decide most important party questions; they develop their own vested interests". p.54.

believes that concentration of power in a few hands is a negation of democracy. Sometimes the right of voting can be a farce as merely voting does not guarantee the power of the people after the voting is over. It means the real power remains in the hands of a ruling elite and the common people do not have any consciousness of possessing power.

Another objection of the Sarvodayists to the present system of democracy is that it is impossible to separate politics from life; since the government has the power to control the affairs of every village and every community and the people are not left with any opportunity to take decisions on any matter at all. Vinoba comments that there is no self-government in the villages, as they have no authority in anything that really matters. But Sarvodayists strive for 'Swaraj'—self-government. Vinoba avers, "I do not want government, I want self-government". It means that what is managed from the Centre is government whereas what goes on in village communities where man manages his own life, is real self-government.

Accordingly, Sarvodaya seeks to establish democratic decentralization in the light of its own view of life. To achieve this end, the Sarvodayists lay emphasis on the efforts of the people, on building up popular strength, cultivating sense of the power of the 'self', creating confidence and courage for managing the affairs of their

5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
community. As a matter of fact, Sarvodaya philosophy draws its support from the people and opposes the present western mechanism of democracy wherein the elections alone bring the people into the picture. On the contrary, Sarvodaya claims to establish a self-government by the people for the people and of the people—on 'Gramdan' principles which means a government of the villagers, by the villagers and for the villagers as primarily India is made up most of villages. Under this scheme, the Sarvodayists give topmost priority to the lowest rung of the administrative ladder of the country. Accordingly, each village or unit must be self-sufficient and self-governing. The villages must themselves produce things for their basic needs and must have the right to decide about its imports and exports. To them, this will ensure 'Gram Swaraj'—of Gandhi's conception.

Sarvodayists claim that their ultimate goal is the creation of a decentralized polity and social order—a society free from exploitation and fetters of controls and pressures—the crippling influences, which are inherent in the exercise of political power (Danda) and formal organizational structures (Tantra), since they create disability, both social and economic and, more than any other factor, are responsible for perpetuating a class of handicapped population for all times to come.

DEMOCRATIC DECENTRALIZATION THROUGH GRAMDAN:

As mentioned earlier, the Servodayists had chalked out a unique way of democratic decentralization, i.e., Gramdan—Gramswaraj, to create people's power (Lok-Shakti). Most of them put in efforts to realize this ideal. Vinoba Bhave felt that the village Swaraj could be attained only through Gramdan. For, he felt that even after the withdrawal of the British from India, villages had gained neither economic nor political freedom, as they were still languishing in poverty, unemployment, ignorance and disease. Therefore, the villagers had to be taken out of their present plight of despondency and dependence on others to give real content and meaning to freedom. And to him this could be done only through Gramdan.  

Similarly, Jayaprakash Narayan affirmed that real panchayati raj and community development programmes could be realized only through Gramdan.

However, it must be noted here that the original inspiration for the Bhoodan—Gramdan movement initiated by Vinoba Bhave, is derived from a desire to solve the age old agrarian problem, which in all the underdeveloped countries of the world, seems to be a baffling problem. But it does not mean that there is no other factor in its emergence.

The poverty of the masses and political exploitation are some other factors. Vinoba’s strategy behind the Gramdan movement is that poverty of the masses can be eradicated only when everyone subscribes to the five voluntary gifts; the gift of love, the gift of wisdom, the gift of labour, the gift of wealth and the gift of land.\(^{12}\)

The Bhoodan movement had its dramatic and sudden beginning on 18th April, 1951 when a Sarvodaya Sammelan (Conference) was held at Shivarampalli, about four miles away from Hyderabad City. Vinoba was holding a meeting at Pochampalli, a townlet of about 700 houses and 3,000 people, in the Nalgonda district, where some landless untouchables approached him for land and the Acharya (Vinoba) appealed to the landlords of the area to donate him some land for the landless. At his appeal, a rich man of the area, Mr. V.R. Reddy, who had hitherto nursed every bit of his property with care, agreed to part with some portion of his surplus land and made it over to the dispossessed.\(^{13}\)

After getting his first gift of land, Vinoba walked from village to village listening to the problems of the landless labourers. He identified himself with the landless as Gandhi had identified himself with the scavenger.

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*See also* Suresh Ram, *Vinoba and His Mission*, Op. Cit., p. 87.

Generally, Gramdan means the pooling and sharing of the entire land of a village by all its inhabitants equally and impartially. According to its advocates it seeks to establish social order of equality and liberty, of love and sympathy where the rich and the poor will live like friends without any conflict and clash. Vinoba feels that Gramdan opens the door to a new era of social evolution wherein human beings will perceive and realize the higher values and richer relationships of community sharing.

Similarly, according to Jayaprakash Narayan, Gramdan constitutes the first steps towards non-violent social change and the reconstruction of Indian society at the lower levels carrying forward Gandhi's unfinished work, namely, the work of building a non-violent, decentralized social order as it carries forward the process of non-violent social transformation in as much as it entails:

a) Conversion of private ownership of land into community ownership;

b) Sharing within a village community of a small part of land, produce, income and labour, as a regular way of life; and

c) Observance of the principle of consensus in all decision making.


See Also Jayaprakash Narayan, Socialism Sarvodaya and Democracy ( Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1954), pp. 151, 157-70, 192, 266.
However, the movement at the beginning aimed at securing from villagers voluntary acceptance in writing of the initial conditions of Gramdan. Moreover, Gramdan means a gift of the village to the village and for it (Gramaya Dana) and not a gift of the village (Gramasya Dana) to Vinoba or somebody else as the popular misconception goes. It is also an important point to note that the participation in Gramdan is strictly voluntary, built upon the spontaneous desire of man to share their own possession with others. It is brought through persuasion by an appeal to logic, to kindness and desire for betterment of their own lot through voluntary group effort. This method of persuasion and love is the only method recognised for Gramdan.

Further, the process of Gramdan starts with an awakening of social consciousness or spiritual awakening or collective will among the villagers (Gram Bhavana). This is to be followed by Gram Samkalpa, the creation of community determination to accept the Gramdan way of life. It is believed that Gram Samkalpa would result in the generation of people's power (Lok-Shakti) and this in turn would give birth to a people's polity (Lok-Niti). Accordingly, a new environment is hoped to be created where the centre of all activities and efforts would be individuals.

Under this scheme, the first village to come under Gramdan was Hangroth in Hamirpur district of Uttar Pradesh. It was on May 24, 1952, when Vinoba received this village as donation from its landlords. While donating the said village, its landlords with one voice declared that they had willingly relinquished their old-age concept of ownership of land for the sake of the all-round progress of village on the basis of love and economic justice as contemplated by Vinoba.

However, it took more than three years to get another village in gift. The second and third Gramdans took place in Orissa and the movement started spreading with emphasis on securing villages in gift. It is also very important to note that though the concept of Gramdan was conceived in 1952, the first systematic attempt to define it was made by the Prabandh Samiti (Management Committee) of the Akhil Bharat Sarva Seva Sangh, at its meeting in September 1957. Gramdan and Gram Pariwar (village family) were defined as follows:

If 75 percent of land owners of a village were prepared to give up the right of ownership of their land and not less than 51 percent of the total land had come under its purview, the village was to be considered as Gramdan. If due to scarcity of land, the landless people and their

families who had got very small size of land were prepared to similarly gift away their other incomes than it should be considered as 'Gram Parivar'. Therefore, the notion of Gram Parivar, extended the scope of donation from land to other kinds of wealth (Sampati Dan). Other types of donations (Dans), such as donation of labour (Shramdan), gift of intelligence (Budhi Dan), gift of one’s life (Jeewan Dan), etc., too were introduced in order to secure the co-operation of men with varying resources and dispositions.

In the beginning, the term 'village' was meant to refer to a revenue-village and the donation of 75 percent of the persons owning 51 percent of the total land was necessary to deem it to be Gramdan.

After a village was declared Gramdan it was expected that the land in the village would be distributed equally amongst the households taking into account the number of persons in each household. However, such a measure was not welcomed by the land-holders in general and the richer landlords in particular. Re-distribution of land on an equal basis hardly took place anywhere. In order to narrow down the gap between the ideal and the actual, the concept of Gramdan was re-defined in 1965. Instead of an equitable distribution of land it was thought to be satisfactory if all land owners parted with only 1/20th of their land, for distribution to landless. The land owners were permitted to retain 19/20th of their land with permanent heritable rights. This new arrangement was designated as 'Sulabh Gramdan'. Though the leaders of the movement rationalise
this goal reversal as 'one step backward in order to secure two steps forward', in effect, the notion of 'Sulabh Gramdan' amounts to a substantial change in the goal orientation of the movement; a tendency towards the decline of the movement. Rather, it means admission of the impracticability of the system conceived by the leaders of the Sarvodaya movement.

However, the concept of 'Sulabh Gramdan' called for a clear-cut distinction between ownership and possession of land. While a person joining Gramdan was expected to surrender his ownership in respect to his entire land, he could possess 19/20th of land with permanent hereditary rights. Though it can be argued that theoretically individual ownership of land is abolished through 'Sulabh Gramdan', in actual practice each owner continues to have the benefits of ownership.

Another significant point regarding 'Sulabh Gramdan' is that after paying the land revenue and distribution of the crops, one has to contribute to Gram Parishad (Village Council) 1/40th of the produce of the land for village fund (Gramnidi). Those who are landless and have other sources of income will contribute 1/30th of it to the village funds either in cash or in labour. The Gramnidi is to be used

23. Refer to Detlef Kantowsky, "Sarvodaya: The Development of A Concept" - A Paper (containing 162 pages) contributed to Modern Search For Peace : The Gandhian Way, at the Conference of the Indian Society of Gandhian Studies, (Allahabad: December 1978), p.27. He observed, "a modified concept of Gramdan, known as simplified or Sulabha Gramdan was introduced...... As such the new concept of Gramdan was much less radical than the original and involved significant concessions to the principle of private property".
for the maintenance of orphans and destitutes, for extending educational facilities and for the economic development of the village.

Furthermore, a Gram Sabha has also to be constituted by drawing one member from each family (Household). In this way it is the family that becomes the unit and not the individual. This marks a new development in Gandhian thought; for Gandhi aimed at making the individual as the centre. Under this programme, the Gram Sabha is expected to function either with unanimity or consensus.24

Here it must be noted that though Gandhi, desired unanimous decisions, he never insisted on unanimity for the validity of the decisions and practically all decisions in the decision-making bodies of the Congress which he accepted and implemented were taken by majority. Therefore, insistence on unanimity by Vinoba is not a Gandhian heritage.

The triple programme for village reconstruction which was accepted in 1963, by the movement, could not be implemented with much vigour. As a result, it failed to maintain the expected tempo. To accelerate the pace of the movement, Vinoba gave a call for 'Gramdan Toofan' in 1965.25 When he visited Bihar for the third time in 1965, he made a request to take to 'Sulabh Gramdan' and create a...

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25. Ibid. See also Raghavendra Nath Misra, p.111.
typhoon so that the whole of Bihar might come under its
gripping influence. It was stated that "this would be a
new type of typhoon which would lead to light and life all
around. A typhoon can be constructive, luminous and bright
even as atomic power can be constructive, productive and
peaceful". Thus, Gramdan, it is claimed, has progressed
further since 1965, i.e. after the introduction of the new
concept of 'Toofan'. The idea was to ensure that the pace
of 'Gramdan' had to be hastened at a top notch speed. A
'typhoon' or 'upsurge' of external stimulation should sway
the entire face of rural India, so that one fourth of the
country was converted to Gramdan in course of a short
period.

The new phase of the movement went on for quite
sometime, especially in the states of Bihar, Orissa and
Tamil Nadu, and developed two more dimensions known as
'Frakhand Dan' (Block Dan) and 'Zila Dan' (District Dan).

Similarly, a number of villages were grouped under
a 'Community Development Block' and they were treated as
a unit for purposes of development. Vinoba felt that
'Block Dan' would facilitate reconstruction work, for it was
an economically viable unit for development purposes.

As a result, the first Block gift came from the
Tirunelveli district in Tamil Nadu by early 1966. Initially,
it was thought that only if all the villages in a Block
were brought under Gramdan that could be considered as

26. Vinoba and Jayaprakash Narayan, Gramdan for Gram Svaraj,
Prakhand Dan. But later on (April 1966) it was decided that when at least 75 percent of the total population in a Block, excluding the Urban population, or 85 percent of the revenue villages of the block came under Gramdan, the whole Block could be declared as 'Prakhand Dan'.

According to Vinoba 'Prakhand Dan' would make people stronger to decide their own plan for rural reconstruction and development. Moreover, it would promote feeling of oneness. As a result, the people and the government would work together in villages. Besides, donations below 'Prakhand Dan' or Block would not solve all the problems of the people. "If we have only a few Gramdans here and there", says Vinoba, "they will be like 'air-conditioned' Gramdans. It is difficult to maintain them when the hot air is all around". 27

Thus, the 'Prakhand Dan' became popular, to some extent, as it was expected to consolidate village activities and channelize the village potentialities in right direction. R.N. Misra points out that land reforms, panchayats and village organization became easy to handle. It was the finest and seemed to be the 'final' form of Vinoba's non-violent revolution aiming at village industries and land donations. It generated compassion in the hearts of the people and established 'Samya Yoga'—the sumnum—bonum of life. 28

Again, the advancing steps of 'Bhoodan-Gramdan' movement reached the summit when entire district of Darbhanga in Bihar was donated to Vinoba on 19th of February, 1967. When all the Blocks in a district came under 'Prakhand Dan', it was deemed as District Dan (Zila Dan). Accordingly, the 'Prakhand Dan' led to 'Zila Dan'. It is said that it was the climax of Vinoba's 'toophan-program' which came out in a triumphant way. Darbhanga, thus, opened the way to work for donations of the entire state. Vinoba interpreted Darbhanga as 'Dwar Bang' which means the 'Door of Bengal'. He said that it gave incentive for 'Bihar Dan' and opened the way to Bengal as well as other states too.

After the district Dan of Darbhanga, the other districts of Bihar also joined the movement and it culminated in 'Bihar Dan' when the donation of whole state was accomplished in October, 1969. The total number of district Dan increased to 47 upto July 1971. With this new development, the Garvodaya leaders hoped that the movement could influence the political process in the districts, states and the Nation. The next logical step could be 'Bharat Dan' (Gift of India). Therefore, for fulfilment of some of their needs, members of a small village thus continue to belong not only to a 'Gram' (a village), but also to a 'Prakhand' (Block), a Zila (District), a state or a nation if not to the world at large, realising at every stage the concept of a homogeneous community to which they belong both

emotionally as well as physically in the matter of fulfilment of different types of needs. Prof. Sugata Dasgupta says that Gramdan starts this process of socialisation and community formation and paves the way for more and bigger community circles to emerge in a concentric form. However, in practice the concept of Gramdan does not follow from the concept of 'Concentric Circle' of Mahatma Gandhi. Though it is possible to realise the goal of self-reliance at the village level, its implementation is difficult at the higher levels, i.e., the emergence of 'World Community' on Gramdan lines. Even the Programme could not envelope the entire Nation in gift (Dan)—the one of the major goals of the movement.

**STRUCTURE AND WORKING OF DEMOCRATIC DECENTRALIZATION UNDER GRAMDAN**

On March 4, 1966, a draft containing five points was presented to Vinoba. He added a sixth and said that the six together could very well form the basis and substance of Gram Swaraj. These may be discussed as follows:

**Autonomous Village Assemblies (Gram Sabhas):** Under the new process, Gramdan visualises a village assembly (Gram Sabha) comprising all the adults in the village, which shall function on the basis of general agreement amongst the members within the limits of its capacity and considerations for general good,


as the basic autonomous unit of village self-rule in the spheres of both internal administration and development, the village people having already vested in it their full legal land-ownership (Swamitva-Visanjan), as also having placed at its disposal their collective village capital (Gram Kosh).

Here village autonomy implies a two-tier democracy: direct participation at the village level and indirect representation at higher levels. This system is based on the principle of consensus where all its decisions are supposed to be made by unanimity or near-unanimity. However, Sarvodaya philosophy is not clear about the structure and functioning of the bodies at the higher levels. The advocates of Gramdan emphasise that in Gramdan villages a direct method of democracy works as all the village activities are conducted through Gram Sabha, which meets from time to time to discuss all matters concerning village organisation and development. It is considered as the supreme body of the village and its decisions are final which are mostly taken unanimously or at least by three-fourth majority. However, the constitution of the Gram Sabhas may slightly vary from village to village. The president and secretary of Gram Sabha are elected unanimously. It has a working committee consisting of ten to fifteen members to implement its decisions. If the people so desire, they can authorise the president of the Gram Sabha to constitute the working committee according to his own plan. One Gram Sabha to one village is the rule. But a village must

consist of hundred or more persons to make it a viable and workable unit. Such a Gram Sabha is expected to enjoy greater confidence of the people than the Gram Sabha organised under the panchayati raj as in the gram sabha of Gramdan villages, unlike panchayati raj, people are supposed to take personal interest and turn up in large number at the meetings to deliberate over the problems of mutual interest such as village industries, agricultural production, irrigation and planning, etc. The main cause behind this popularity is that all the land of the village is held by the Gram Sabha and not by individuals. The land revenue is collectively paid to the government. Thus, in a Gramdan village, responsibility is shared by all. People offer their services directly for the progress of the village and develop their own personality. They are expected to tackle the village problems as members of a family.

Partyless Village Representation: Gramdan System rejects the politics of power and government by political parties in any form since their role according to the Sarvodayists, is tragically amusing as these are completely engrossed in keeping hold on power bags or in grabbing it. In the lure and crame for political power they seem to have forgotten their basic duty. Empty political slogans befool the electorate and those saddled in power do not display a better appreciation of reality. They do not bother about how to build up a polity and an economy from the grass roots, how to find employment and housing for the poor masses, how to ensure quick delivery of justice to the innocent - illiterate people.
Those are the most relevant and agitating questions which are forgotten and ignored by political parties.  

Keeping in view the above mentioned defects, the former Marxist Jayaprakash Narayan resigned from a political party when he moved from Socialism to Sarvodaya and joined Vinoba's movement. Explaining his position, he wrote that he decided to withdraw from party-and-power-politics not because of disgust or sense of personal frustration but because it had become clear to him that politics could not deliver the goods—the goods being the same old goals of equality, freedom, brotherhood, peace, etc. And the politics of Sarvodaya could have no party and no concern with political power, rather its aim would be to see all centres of political power abolished.

As a result, Granadan polity does not require any political party to solve the problems of the people. In this system the nominees of the village assemblies (Gram Sabhas) and not the candidates of political parties, would represent their constituencies in the legislature. These nominees would be selected by an 'Electoral College' in each constituency consisting of representatives numbering from one to five on population basis, from each Gram Sabha in the constituency. Further, in the electoral college, there would be nothing like a decision by a majority vote. But,

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33. Sarvodaya, (March 1971), vol. XX, No. 9, p. 419.
35. Ibid., p. 64.
If required, lots may be drawn, or some other methods may be adopted. However, in any case the best and the only one candidate would be nominated or selected by the 'Electoral College'. This nominee—the Gramdan candidate, should naturally command the vast majority of the votes in the constituency and would generally be elected unopposed. Thus, without disturbing the present constitution, Gramdan would bring into being a 'Gramdan self-government'. And, it would thus initiate the process of limiting and decentralising the present centralised state power, and making it more a co-ordinating rather than a coercive agency. However, the supporters of the programme have miserably failed to project the above mentioned ideal of partyless village representation.

**Village-Oriented Economic Policy**: Gramdan polity is opposed to the present official plan and policy of development which is oriented towards big business, urban economy and bureaucratic and centralised rule. Sarvodayists are of the firm view that 'Gram Swaraj' would completely reverse this process, and it would come through Gramdan movement in which the Gram Sabha would work for an agro-industrial, self-reliant economy which would progressively eliminate exploitation and disparity. This would be an economy of sharing as distinguished from the economy of competitive market, or an

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37. Ibid., p. 561.
economy centrally controlled by the government. What is visualised is the development of an economy of peace and neighbourliness calculated to promote a free and democratic way of life.

Similarly, Gramdan also claims to bring about a total revolution in the country through the non-violent process and seeks to build up a social order free from exploitation and coercion and envisages the withering away of the state. As an alternative to the Marxian slogan it gives a call, "People of the world, unite and surrender your ownership to community and you will then lose your chains".36

Thus, Gramdan also makes an effort to abolish individual (as also of state) ownership of land since land is the basic means of production. And if the Gramdan succeeds in this very mission then the ownership in all other fields can be abolished easily. To Sarvodayists, it is a difficult task but it is not impossible. They argue if all elements of society - the so-called 'haves' and also the 'have-nots' come forward together and make a joint offering of their resources to the community, the goal can be achieved. In other words, the means adopted to enact the new revolution must be peaceful and non-violent because violence does not ultimately bring about a real change in values as violent means will always be the preserve of the ruling minority (be it a democratic, socialistic or communistic or totalitarian state) and will never be within the reach of the lowest and the last. While Gramdan seeks to attain the triple target of wiping out inequalities, of generating

people's self-reliant power, and of transforming individual virtues like truth and non-possession and non-violence into social forces as desired by the onward march of science - through the process of persuasion, consent and conversion, or through non-co-operation with injustice or evil. It thus proposes to bring about such a revolution, from the bottom upwards, as will help to produce a new society which, marked by economic equality and social justice, will have its first as also its ultimate reliance on non-violence and human values. Accordingly, "it will then usher in a new age of real brotherhood of Man and Fatherhood of Truth", as Sarvodaya philosophy believes. 39

Independent Education: Gramdan rejects the present system of education, as it is controlled by government. Vinoba points out that whatever 'text-book' is prescribed by the government, it has to be studied by every child in the state. That is to say, the government has the power to push its own ideas down the throats of all Children. If it is a communist government it will teach the students socialism. If the government believes in planning, the children will be filled up with propaganda in favour of planning. In short, the children will have no freedom to think for themselves. This is in contrast to the Indian tradition of keeping education free from the control of the state. 40

39. Ibid., p. (vi).
Therefore, in Gramdan social order, education develops into a constructive social force, strong enough to replace the present leadership of business and politics. It is completely free from government patronage and control. Accordingly its exponents want that education must become at least as independent as the judiciary.

A Social Order Relatively Free from Police and Law-Courts: For peace and order and its own defence, Gramdan village will develop its own peace corps having moral authority. All disputes, instead of going to the law courts, will ordinarily be settled in the Gram-Sabha itself by the methods of conciliation and arbitration.

Vinoba argues that when a thousand crores of rupees are spent in defence every year, the interests of the poor cannot be attended to. Planning, he adds, has been going on for so many years. But it has widened the gulf between the rich and the poor, which is very dangerous. If the country is to grow and prosper, these disparities must go. And Gramdan, according to Vinoba offers an effective way to remove them and make the villages happy and strong.  

As a result, Gramdan is not only an economic programme but also a defence measure. It is also a programme which would hold the people not only in fighting out the poverty of the masses, but also in making the people strong and united. Thus, real social change, in his view, can be effected through a change of heart on the part of the people.

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42. Ibid., p. 32.
Similarly, Jayaprakash Narayan pointed out that the objective of Gramdan was to reach the stage of an independent country of independent villages.¹³

Role and Scope of Shanti-Sena (Peace Corps): With the emergence of Gramdan movement, Vinoba also felt the need to create an atmosphere for Shanti-Sena (Peace Corps) in India for defence and maintenance of peace and order in society. He argues, "We will have to establish the efficacy of Shanti-Sena in internal affairs. There are so many internal issues in India to-day. Also one finds much discontent. Again, there are party-differences and quarrels and conflicts too. We will have to show that these conflicts do not lead to breach of peace anywhere. For this, there is no other way except Shanti-Sena."¹⁴ Therefore, Vinoba visualises Shanti-Sena on the one hand and Gramdan on the other. Similarly, Gramdan will strike at the very roots of mutual conflicts as Shanti-Sena will try to stop antagonism and disturbances and help the people to solve their problems in peaceful manner.¹⁵ However, some people objected to the inclusion of Shanti-Sena in Gramdan. But Vinoba Shave emphasised that it was not possible

¹³ Vinoba and Jayaprakash Narayan, Gramdan For Gram-Swaraj, op. cit., p.18.


¹⁵ See also Vinoba Shave, Democratic Values (Kashi: Sarva Seva Sangh Prakasha, 1966), pp.127-128.
to keep Gramdan safe without Shanti-Sena. In fact, he declared that Shanti-Sena must be compulsory for Gramdan. Further, if the police, the army and firing were necessary to maintain peace in the country, it would be meaningless for the people to ask the government to reduce its military force. People say it is sheer mirage to talk of disbanding the army in these conditions. Some allege that this programme of Vinoba, cannot be put on wheels. But his reply is "Virtue lies in taking up only an impossible programme." For, it is very essential for ensuring the freedom of the village and effective decentralisation. Because it removes dependence of the village on higher authorities for defence purposes and maintenance of law and order. However, in due course of time even this Shanti-Sena will become redundant as the people will become habitually peaceful.

Role of Lok-Shakti (Power of the People) and Lok-Miti (People's Polity) in Gramdan: Lok-Shakti is a concept which is being undertaken to achieve certain goals and the main goal, according to Sarvodaya leaders, is, the creation of a new kind of society - a new society in which the 'greatest good of all' is attempted to be achieved. It lays greater emphasis on the movement for Lok-Shakti than on Rajya-Shakti or power of the state.

47. Ibid.
The idea behind this concept is that a Sarvodaya worker, himself remaining out of party-politics, should work for the creation of a mass movement which no government can afford to ignore. From the nature of the society of its concept, and of the concept of Sarvodaya itself, it is implicit that a major part in the process is to be done by the masses themselves. The role of the state in the whole process is a minor one and even that role is also to be influenced by the mass movement based on Lok-Shakti, as Jayaprakash Narayan says: "No democracy can function successfully as long as people's initiative and leadership do not take shape in every zone-village, block, district, province and the nation." To him, Lok-Shakti can generate people's strength to bring about the desired changes and solve many problems of society.

There are two ways in which 'Lok-Shakti' can be used — one is positive and the other negative.

I. First, Lok-Shakti in the sense of reconstruction of small communities. In this sense, Lok-Shakti may be described as the voluntary, collective endeavour of groups and masses. It can find manifestation in two ways: (i) when the people are able to identify their problems and do their utmost to solve them. (ii) when the people either compel, induce or encourage other organized bodies, such as the community development organization, to give them the required help.

49. Vinoba and Jayaprakash Narayan, Gramdan For Gram-Swaraj, op. cit., p. 79.
II. Secondly, 'Lok-Shakti' is used in the sense of people's power as an action of resistance. To Gandhi, it was building up the capacity of the people to resist any wrong or to resist authority when it was abused. It means that the real Lok-Shakti will come not only when people are able to solve their own problems or work for their own development, but also when they can demonstrate that they can regulate and control their own affairs. It has been observed that such dynamism is absent not only from villages but it seems to be going out from the whole society.

In this way Lok-Shakti, according to Sarvodayists, can be applied to bring about fundamental political changes in the country, i.e., for removing an undesirable government and establishing a government in accordance with the wishes of the people.

Thus Lok-Shakti has an important place in democracy. It keeps a continuous check on the representatives of the people and puts responsibility on the people to be vigilant and self-reliant. Similarly, Lok-Shakti has given rise to the concept of 'Lok-Niti' developed by Vinoba and Jayaprakash Narayan. It gives legitimacy to political power, for, it means moral power as it has the sanction of the people. Without the support of the people, the power of the state is nothing but concentrated violence.50 It is the supremacy of the moral law of the people which does not require the organized and coercive power of the state. According to

*See also* Ibid., (April 1971), vol. XX, No.10, p.477.
*See also* Vinoba Bhave, *Democratic Values*, pp.56-57.
barsodaya ideology it would reduce the power of the state to the minimum. This implies that when people use their strength to establish 'Lok-Miti', there comes self-rule of the people; in other words they put an end to 'Raj-Niti' — the government by politicians.

Thus, in Gramdan it is 'Lok-Niti' that dominates and shows the way for removing or diluting the element of coercion in the functioning of governmental authority.\(^{51}\) This, in Vinoba's view, is the only way to purify politics.\(^{52}\) Besides, to him, Gramdan is not merely a campaign for land reform in India. It is something much bigger and more important than that. Its aim is to bring about total revolution of the social, economic, political and moral order not only in India, but, ultimately, throughout the world.\(^{53}\) Geoffrey Ostegaard writes that the followers of Mahatma Gandhi... have been engaged not only in the practical work of Gramdan but also in developing a coherent social philosophy with a distinctive programme, a novel mode of action, and a vision of the nature and destiny of man.\(^{54}\)

Jayaprakash Narayan's concept of 'Total Revolution' logically follows from the principles underlying the Gramdan movement. To him, the purpose of 'Total Revolution', was

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52. Vinoba Bhave, Democratic Values, op.cit., p.54.
54. Ibid.
both "internal and external change: changing the entire social frame within and also from the outside, individuals as well as institutions." Though the immediate objectives of his movement of "Total Revolution" were, eradication of corruption, high prices, unemployment and radical changes in education, he was convinced that these could not be achieved "without an all-round revolution - political, economic, social, educational, moral and cultural."

The movement comprised the following main aspects:

a) Creation and organization of peaceful people's power;

b) building up of 'Gram Swaraj' or people's government from below. Thus, the movement aimed at democratic decentralization which according to him, was based on Gandhian principles.

Under this programme, it was proposed to create people's self-government at the three levels - the district, the block and the village. However, at the initial stage, it was decided to set up the following structure:


See also Jayaprakash Narayan, *Total Revolution* (Varanasi: Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, June, 1975), p.68. Jayaprakash Narayan elaborated, "I visualize this movement as a total revolution that will bring about fundamental changes in the social, economic, political, cultural, educational and moral spheres. A new society totally different from the existing one and with a minimum of undesirable features should emerge out of it".

56. Ibid.

See also Jayaprakash Narayan, *Total Revolution*, p.90.

(i) Formation of Gram Sabhas (Village Assemblies) in every village consisting of all adults - men and women of the village.

(ii) Formation of Jana Sabha (People's Assembly) at the panchayat level consisting of representatives from the Gram Sabhas. Special representation was to be given to women and poorer sections of the society. Young people had also to be given preference.

(iii) A block level Jana Sabha had to be constituted out of one elected representative or the Mukhia (Head) of each Panchayat Jana Sabha.

(iv) The Gram Sabhas and the Jana Sabhas were supposed to elect honorary organisers for the various activities.

Even earlier, Jayaprakash Narayan made a similar exercise and tried to give a concrete shape to the Sarvodaya approach to democratic decentralization in his draft of Reconstruction of Indian Polity which he presented in 1959. Like Gandhi, he also rejects the Western model of democracy as it failed to give adequate scope to the participating individuals in the management of their own affairs and in solving their local problems. And he deplores the atomic concept of society as it is composed of an 'inorganic mass of individuals'. Therefore, he

58. Jayaprakash Narayan (ed. Bimal Prasad), Socialism, Sarvodaya and Democracy (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1964), p.208. Jayaprakash Narayan said: "Modern Western democracy is based on a negation of the social nature of man and the true nature of human society. This democracy conceives of society as an inorganic mass of separate grains of individuals; the conception is that of an atomized society."
advocates a model of democracy based on an integrated conception of society which affords a wide scope to individuals in the management of their own affairs, without involving political parties in the process. He explains that his idea of reconstruction of Indian Polity is nothing but Gandhi's dream of building up or proceeding "from the bottom level of government to the top".\textsuperscript{59} It is such a structure where each higher level has less and less functions and powers. Accordingly, the people at the lower levels have the fullest opportunity to manage all those affairs that may be pertaining to that level. Such a system of democracy, feels Jayaprakash Narayan, could give the people a stake in democracy as well as the sensation of Swaraj.\textsuperscript{60} And, the villages and townships can provide the physical base for such reconstruction. Accordingly, at the bottom of the social hierarchy is the local or primary community which is neither 'rural' nor 'urban' but communitarian in nature,\textsuperscript{61} and self-governing, self-sufficient and agro-industrial one.

Under this plan of political decentralisation, to Jayaprakash Narayan, the highest political institution of the community should be the General Assembly — the Gram Sabha — of which all the adults should be considered members. The selection of the Executive — the Panchayat — should be by

\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Ibid.}, p.244.

Jayaprakash Narayan emphasised: "the broad upper levels of present-day democracy must be drastically sawed off... so that the pyramid of democracy could become a real pyramid— narrow at the top and broad at the bottom."

\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Ibid.}, pp.224-5.
general consensus of opinion in the Sabha. There should be no 'candidates', i.e., no one should 'stand' for any post. However, Jayaprakash Narayan points out that the villages should be given a choice to choose their representatives either through general consensus or by drawing of lots if the former method fails. Moreover, the panchayats should function through sub-committees, charged with different responsibilities. Again, there should be no official or member appointed or nominated by the state government in the panchayat or its sub-committees. Under this scheme, there is, as J.P. feels, maximum decentralisation of powers and responsibilities to the local units of self-government, as to him, "the only way to make the villages self-governing, self-reliant and self-sufficient."63

The next level of the political structure, under the plan, is the regional community, i.e., the gram panchayats to be integrated into the Panchayat Samiti — an autonomous self-governing community, having powers and obligations to do all that may be within its competence. To Jayaprakash Narayan, the panchayat samiti, would play a key role in the political and economic life of the country, particularly in the processes of planning and development.

Regarding the formation of the institution of panchayat samiti, Jayaprakash Narayan elaborates that it should be

62. Ibid., p. 229.
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid., pp. 213, 230.
elected by the gram panchayats and not by their members. For, it is the gram panchayat as a body that represents the village and not its members. The panchayat samiti, in its turn, is a representative of the gram panchayats, and it is the latter that should be represented as such and not their members.

Similarly, this pattern of decentralisation or political organisation of Jayaprakash Narayan, follows or rises storey by storey from the foundation. The next storey is the District Council (or whatever name be given to it), formed by the integration of panchayat samitis of the district— again the samitis, as such electing their representatives and not their members. The district councils, in their turn, should have all the powers and obligations necessary to do everything that may be within their competence.

In the same way, all the district councils of a state come together to create the State Assembly. And, the State Assemblies, accordingly, would bring into being the Lok Sabha. Thus, the political institution at each level is an integration of all the institutions at the lower level.

It becomes clear now that Jayaprakash Narayan pleads for the replacement of parliamentary democracy based on

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65. Ibid., pp. 213, 231.
66. Ibid., p. 231.
Western mechanism of party-politics, by a new polity, which is more in consonance with the genius of the masses of India. Similarly, his plan of the reconstruction of Indian polity also involves an 'inverted pyramid of authority' in contrast to the one actually created by the Indian Constitution. He designates this kind of polity as communitarian or partyless democracy. His objection to the parliamentary democracy is that it has an inbuilt weakness towards centralisation of power. He, therefore, feels that only the communitarian polity can "guarantee the participating democracy which is our ideal and which should be the ideal of all democrats." It seems that Jayaprakash Narayan's approach to communitarian polity, in a way, resembles the three-tier structure of panchayati raj as recommended by the Balvantray Mehta Committee.

However his critics challenged his view of a communitarian polity on various grounds. For instance, they point out the complexity of human nature and society; inevitability of competition or conflict; and plead for a thorough re-examination of the problems concerning democracy. Many others have criticized the village based political decentralisation as revivalistic, primitivistic as well as romantic. 68

67. Ibid., p.214.

See also Add H. Doctor, Servodaya : A Political and Economic Study (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1967), Chapters VIII & IX, pp.149-212.

Similarly, in spite of Jayaprakash Narayan's valiant attempts, his basic tenet regarding "communitarian polity" was not acceptable to the leaders of the Congress and other political parties. They took a very dim view of people's participation in panchayati raj institutions. Despite some public enthusiasm for popular participation and democratic decentralization, 'communitarian' viewpoint received neither attention nor encouragement. No doubt, Jayaprakash Narayan, after Gandhi, anticipated some imperatives of democratic decentralization which preoccupied the minds of the exponents of appropriate technology as well as a few planners and decision-makers. But it did not appeal to the persons who were responsible for its implementation in actual practice. Consequently, his thesis on 'reconstruction of Indian polity' was also put on shelf like Bhoodan-Gramdan movement and total revolution.

Nevertheless Jayaprakash Narayan was not satisfied with the present form of decentralization which he considered as bogus and worthless since it could not solve the socio-economic problems and could not flourish in the hierarchical caste structure of Hindu society. He, therefore, thought of starting the movement of 'Total Revolution' to overhaul the whole structure in order to bring about new perspectives and new avenues for the people.

The movement picked up momentum for sometime, especially in the States of Bihar and Gujarat. However, it

69. Ibid., p.104.
could not produce any tangible results on account of a number of reasons. First, the movement was in its embryonic stage when its initiator and mentor died. Secondly, the division among its leaders on certain issues, such as the strategy, methods and objectives of the movement also became an obstacle in the way. In this respect, it may be mentioned that the half-yearly meeting of the Association of Sarvodaya workers in September, 1973, marked the final split within the movement, since the participants were unable to reach a consensus regarding the meaning and content of their further work. Together with Vinoba a minority pleaded for a "spiritualization of politics" while the majority was with Jayaprakash Narayan for a "politicization of the Sangh". Even Vinoba Shave and Jayaprakash Narayan had different opinions on such issues. Thirdly, the Janata Government which had made promises for the implementation of the programme of the 'Total Revolution' did not last long.


71. Ibid., p.46.

Detlef Kantowsky observes: "......most of the members of the Servo Seva Sangh, supported J.P.'s stand; there was no unanimity...... the activities of the Sangh were frozen for a year. Vinoba withdrew his membership from the organisation which he himself had founded, and decided to observe silence for one year. Yet Jayaprakash Narayan and his supporters began to reinterpret some of the cardinal principles of Sarvodaya ideology. Even J.P. allowed some of his followers to work underground."


Jayaprakash Narayan recollects these differences: "Vinobaji did something miraculous for some years......But after his stormy Bhoodan experiment not even a mild breeze blew..... Later, he withdrew into his inner self, and started the experiment of 'action' in the form of 'inaction'."
As a result, 'Total Revolution' also met the same fate as the 'Bhoodan-Gramdan Movement'. So their dream of 'Gram Swaraj' or 'Panchayati Raj' or 'Rural Democracy' could not be realised. Accordingly, they could neither fill up the gap nor develop the scheme envisaged by Mahatma Gandhi.

It is also an important point to note that the Gramdan Movement later on did not oppose the state and helped it in implementing state legislations wherever they existed in favour of land distribution. Thus, it became a product of mixed motivations although the results led to an unmixed blessing for the rural working class and the small peasantry.

Further, the movement was not of any party as it was an expression of people's power which was being organized in struggle committees. However, though the object of the movement was to organize and develop people's power, yet Vinoba primarily did not object to the participation of the political parties in the work of Bhoodan and Gramdan. Vinoba even entrusted the work to the Mukhias in village panchayats who "proved so worthless that all the papers were destroyed" and the scheme had to be given up. Thus, in spite of the high ideals that leaders of the Sarvodaya movement kept before themselves, it did not succeed in its mission. Several reasons for it:

(i) The structure of local government both in urban and

rural areas was systematically destroyed out of political considerations.

(ii) There was a total lack of commitment to democratic decentralization.

(iii) The leaders and workers tended to regard the accomplishment of Gramdan as an end in itself and not as the main thrust of a revolution for creating a society wherein the lowliest of low would have the economic, social and political status equal to that of the highest of the high, not merely as principles enunciated in the printed tomes of the Constitution but in the conduct of day-to-day affairs. As a result, in spite of the hard efforts made by persons like Vinoba and Jayaprakash Narayan, they were not able to contribute much carrying forward Gandhi's programme of the reconstruction of society.

(iv) The Sarvodayists have created confusion in their approach to decentralization by introducing in it certain extraneous factors. For example, 'participating democracy' is a far cry in Gramdan villages, as even in a small village occupied by one caste or tribe, the proportion of persons who matter in the decision-making process is quite small. Thus smallness and homogeneity in themselves are no guarantee for the participation of a greater segment of the population in the decision-making process. Furthermore, a large number of non-participants
are not well aware of their political rights and they may not even think it appropriate for them to indulge in such activity which they see as belonging to certain persons or groups with prestige and prerogatives (jagirdars, patel, lineage head, etc.).

Similarly, the principle of unanimity as advocated by the Sarvodayists is impracticable in the present context. This is because, Indian Society is rigidly stratified on the basis of a number of criteria, such as, caste, age, sex, religion, political ideology, etc., etc. Therefore, the existing authoritarian structures and disintegrating political ideologies are antithetical to reach the principle of unanimity. Undoubtedly, unanimity has become a controversial and ambiguous concept in the present context.

(v) Again, ' Jana-Shakti ' (People's power) is hardly generated and ' Raj-Miti ' (Power-politics) still prevails in Gramdan villages.

(vi) It has also been observed that communitarian society demands high altruistic orientation from the individual, for, he must be prepared to sacrifice his interest for the good of the collectivity. But it has been seen that the individual is invariably indifferent to the interests of the wider community. Keeping in view the above apprehension, T.K. Commen rightly observes
in his work that even in small communities it is impossible to combine intense primary group sentiment with secular politics.\textsuperscript{73}

(vii) The concept of self-sufficiency upheld by the Sarvodayists creates a lot of problems. For, if it is carried to extremes, it would prove not only pernicious but even self-destructive. Here, the question arises — Is such a self-sufficiency desirable or feasible? In the present context, it seems that such a self-sufficiency with its implication of minimum exchange, may bring or breed a sense of isolation and develop a certain amount of complacency and indifference to the requirements of neighbouring villages. Again, the idea of self-sufficiency goes against the Sarvodaya concept of human nature since it does not seem to do credit to man's capacity to co-operate.

(viii) Democratic decentralization under Gramdan is facing many difficulties of organizational and technical character. It lacks managerial and technical skill. The same is the case with financial resources.

(ix) Gramdan was not followed by its subsequent steps at the higher levels, i.e., 'Prakhand Dan', 'Zila Dan', 'Prant Dan', 'Nation Dan' etc., etc.

73. T.K. Jha, Charisma, Stability and Change, op.cit., p.128.
The scheme could not provide a viable and practicable structure to implement the concept of decentralization. There was no organic linkage among the bodies at different levels.

There was lack of teamwork among its leaders and workers who could not unite together and add much to the programme.

Thus, Sarvodaya approach to democratic decentralization failed to achieve its goal of creating unity, peace and prosperity, universal panacea of love and brotherhood and independent and autonomous local self-government at the grass-root levels.