

# *My Dear Pranau*

An Introduction to the Thoughts of Vinoba



L.N. Godbole

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**L.N. GODBOLE**

Forword by  
**USHA CHANDRASEKHAR**

**The Indian Centre for Encouraging Excellence**

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# Foreword

Many tall women and men have walked this land. My salutations to all of them. One of the tallest was Vinoba Bhave.

Vinobaji literally walked this land. More, he walked his talk - like very few did. What he says therefore carries conviction.

Although his thoughts are available in a number of books, little has been written about him. Dr.L.N.Godbole, a dear friend of our family, has ably filled this void. And in two ways.

One is to convey to the young audience the meaning of a spiritual citizen as conveyed by Vinoba Bhave. The other is a glimpse of the great leader himself.

We all concede that spirituality is one of the legs of the three legged stool as represented by our lives. Yet very few understand what it means and implies. One of the highlights of these letters is that this aspect of life is brought out clearly and convincingly.

Dr. Godbole addressed these letters - one a week for 52 weeks - to my son Pranav, a young man of 12. With little anecdotes and stories that lace every letter, he conveys to him and every reader of his age or older, the approaches to the pursuit of excellence for a citizen, drawn from the teachings in the Gita, the Upanishads and the Vedas. The subject can normally be heavy for a 12 year old but it has been conveyed with such simplicity that it becomes interesting reading and rereading.

I feel honoured and indebted to Dr. Godbole for having taken time off to give the benefit of his great erudition and scholarship in 52 letters to my son. I would like to make this rich gift available to thousands of young people like him. Vinobaji pursued excellence, human excellence. Many

would like to know how he thought and what he did, so they too may take the journey in that direction and less falteringly. It is in the fitness of things, therefore, that this book is being published by the Indian Centre for Encouraging Excellence.

**Usha Chandrasekhar**

Bombay

April 1994

# Preface

This book is a bunch of 52 letters written by me to Pranav Chandrasekhar, a young man of twelve.

Vinoba Bhave is a name which may not ring a bell in many young minds and especially if they happen to be educated in English medium schools.

Being a student of Vinoba's writings, I have put in my efforts in presenting his thoughts. These letters, since I wrote to Pranav, have been perused by Shri. Daniel Majgaonkar and Br. Prvania Desai, life long associates of Vinoba. They found that these letters could be published for the general public. All opinions are ofcourse my own.

Since it is a bunch of letters, the reader could start at any page and read them in any order. The basic purpose of writing of these letters was that Pranav should read Vinoba's thoughts, read his books and acquaint himself with Vinoba's writings. Perhaps a different sequence and order of complexity some reader would prefer. I have not disturbed the sequence of what I wrote in 1990-91.

A person educated in the western tradition must keep in mind that Vinoba is a son of the soil in the sense that all his basic philosophical foundations are typically Indian. As Geoffrey Ostergaard has observed, "further reflection, however, has convinced me that Sarvodaya ideas, including its political ones, can be properly understood only if they are viewed within the framework of Indian religious thought and seen as a reinterpretation of a distinctively Indian conception of the self and the relation of the self to society, nature and the cosmos". My first few letters have this observation as a background.

The letters have been seen by Dr. (Mrs.) Rama Sivaram, Professor Nissim Ezikel, Ms Marjori Sykes, Shri S R Mohandas, Shri R V Joshi and several friends. I needed their help primarily

because English is my second language. Shri N Paranjpe and Shri VG Potdar, my colleagues, have been helping in the typing, retyping and computerizing. I am obliged to all of them.

I have profusely quoted from various books of Vinoba and acknowledged them with gratitude. I have used Vinoba's thoughts as a property which belongs to all. *Sab bhoomi Gopal ki.*

*Jai Jagat!*

**L.N.Godbole**

Bombay

April, 1994



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## *Our grateful thanks to*

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● **Satish Kulkarni** for giving support beyond the call of duty

● **Br Blaise SSP** for his thoughtful and resourceful assistance

● **Fr Devassey SSP** for his continuing and creative encouragement



Dr. Laxman N. Godbole

M Com, LL.M, Ph.D. FCS Company Secretary



## Letter 1

4th February, 1990

My dear Pranav,

You will be surprised to get a letter from me whom you hardly know. But we have met in your home, when you were busy doing sums. Your grandpa, who is my Guru, suggested that I should write to you a letter every week. I have to obey his order. Therefore this letter.

Again, he asked that I should write to you about Vinoba. Vinoba was a great THINKER, who was living amongst us till 1982. Very few people know him now, still fewer people read his books. But as you grow older you will know more and more about him, if you read his books. My weekly letters will tell you what I know about him. I will be very happy if these letters make you read more about Vinoba.

What I write will have numbers in brackets after the sentence. These numbers will tell you which book of Vinoba includes that sentence. This will be useful if you want to read more about Vinoba. Otherwise,

you can forget them. If you find the letters themselves useless, please pass them on to someone who may like to read them. Your grandpa, for example.

Acharya Vinayak Narhar Bhave (VINOBA) was born on 11th September, 1895 at Gagode in the Raigad District of Maharashtra, about 125 kms from Bombay, where you live. He died on 15th November, 1982 at Pavnar, 80 kms from Nagpur or about 900 kms from Bombay. This is just to tell you about History and Geography. All of us live at a place. So we relate to distances from that geographical point. You already know where you stay and have a picture of that place in your mind. That much geography is already known to you. After all, what is Geo + Graphy, but a graph or picture of Geo, which is our world. The dates of birth and death tell you how many years older or younger he was than you. Time being a continuous river, these dates tell you how many years before this day such a man lived. That is his story in time which we call History. Time and Place are two continuous straight lines. Where they cross each other, a point gets fixed. That point is you. There was some such point that was Vinoba. I want to introduce you to that point.

Vinoba has written and spoken millions of words. A few thousands of them are recorded in printed form. Those words changed my life. By telling you about those words I am doing my duty. **Each one of us owes a certain duty to parents. It is called Pitr-Rna. We also owe a duty to our teachers. It is called Guru-Rna. My letters are my repayment of my Guru-Rna.**

Vinoba was a firm believer in God. He is called

Brahman. It is not some idol, though you can see it in an idol form or even in empty space. Once he was asked, "Are you as quite sure of God's existence as you are of the existence of this lamp in front of us?" He said, "I positively believe that God exists. As for the lamp in front of us, I cannot guarantee that it does in fact exist" (1). This is difficult to understand. You will learn later in your life when you read Bertrand Russell on "Reality and Appearance", how Russell proved logically that a table is possibly not a table (2).

Therefore, if you want to learn and understand Vinoba's thoughts, it is very necessary to understand that he was a firm believer in Brahman.

He explains this axiom in a simple way. We learn Geometry or Science (metry) of Geo (land or world). The first definition that is taught in Euclid's Geometry is that of a point. It has existence but no magnitude. It means that a point has no length, breadth or depth. If that is so, how can you "see" it? How can you "imagine" it? If you cannot imagine it, then how can you say that it "is"? But you start with an assumption of its existence. You start with its existence as a reality. The point moving in a direction is a line; a straight line is the shortest distance between two points. The intersecting lines, angles, triangle, rectangle and the whole of geometry, engineering and designing are all based on this definition of a point. Vinoba says that for him **Brahman** is such a self-evident truth. Because it "is".

I think, I have written enough for one letter.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 2

11th February, 1990

My dear Pranav,

Did you get my first letter? I continue with the same thoughts. *Brahman* (It) Exists (IS). Vinoba was a firm believer in Spirituality (*adhyatma*) or Science of understanding *brahman*. He believed that Religion and Politics were outdated. The future lies with Science and Spirituality.

All of us are children of Light. We are a part of *brahman*. This self *Atman* and *Brahman* or Paramatman *Advaita* or non-duality. But who am "I"? What am "I" in all this?

Vinoba left his home at the age of 16 when he was in the second year of college. He was studying at Baroda, when he left for Varanasi in the north. His basic desire was to learn and understand what *Brahman* is (*Atha to brahmajignyasa*). He wanted an answer to Who am I?

He clearly knew that a man is not his clothes. A man is not his hands, legs or even the sum total of the parts of his body. A man is not just his body. This is called *Dehabhava*. You must know that you are something different and better than your body. Then you see how you are related to others. But such ideas or thoughts are like seeds. "I discover many a time that thoughts keep on developing in deep sleep. Seed that is covered with soil appears to have been lost, but it continues to develop underground. It seems this is a similar process" (1) How are you related to the total? How are you related to *brahman*? Vinoba's life was a constant search for the truth about this self (*atman*) and the Supreme being (*brahman*). All his actions and thoughts were based on this basic mind-set.

Pranav, you may find this rather tough. Most people will not accept the brotherhood of human beings unless they accept the fatherhood of God (*brahman*) (2). But let me tell you that

it will be increasingly clear as you grow and think. Take your name, for example; Pranav or *Aum* is the original expression of *brahman*. It is called the First *Mantra*. It is a symbolic expression common to all religions born in India. All our prayers and religious ceremonies start with *aum*.

It is the beginning of the Vedas. It has three different syllables. A, U and M. The beginning and end of the Sanskrit (*Nagari*) vowels is A and M. (Ah). The Vedas consist of all alphabets (*Aaksharas*) and each alphabet is a *Mantra*. If you make words out of them it is your commentary on them. It is not original. *Akshara* (letter) is that which does not diminish. *Aksharas* are original. Words and sentences are commentaries or interpretations given by others(3). So how do you propose to put meaning into these three syllables? It is upto you. Your parents have given the *mantra* to you. You have to search for its meanings.

That reminds me of a beautiful story which Vinoba narrated in his early writings. You do use a dictionary when you come across a difficult word. Don't you? What does a dictionary give to you? Does it give meaning? No. It gives another word which is possibly simpler or better known. It gives a synonym. Vinoba said that in Sanskrit the word for horse is *ashva*. **What is the meaning of *ashva*? No, not a horse. The meaning is grazing or running a race. What you get in a dictionary is a similar word. You don't get meaning in a dictionary. You have to search for it in life. You have to search for it in living. This is the beginning of education or learning.**

**In Sanskrit, there is no direct word for teaching. The right word is "learning". The teacher makes learning possible. The meaning of a word is to be learned by you. It is to be searched for in real life. We use a lot of words, but we do not always understand them. We do not experience them. And unless we experience them they do not become a part of our understanding or knowledge. Take the simple word fear. Unless you see something fearful or a car passes very near you and your hairs stand on their ends you do not understand**

what fear is. Otherwise you will go on using more and more words, but not more full meaning. Understanding a meaning alone changes you. You will not change. You will not grow. You will only use more words.

Let me end this letter with a small story. Vinoba says Prajapati (creator of the world) gave a mantra, "da". *Devas* interpreted it as "daman", to rule. *Asuras* interpreted it as "daya", compassion. *Manushyas* interpreted it as "daan", giving(4). Each one is right according to his light. No one is wrong. This is the beauty of our great Hindu Tradition. There is no one correct answer. All answers have an equal right to exist. All of them have equal justification. There need not be any conflict about the "right" meaning.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 3

18th February, 1990

My dear Pranav,

I wrote two letters to you which were perhaps difficult in their arguments, but I could not help it. Now, I believe, this one will be pretty simple. Once you climb the hill top, the entire scene is beautiful and simple.

Vinoba has given us so many ideas about education. **The first and the most important is an idea from the *Upanisads*. It is "Aum Purnat Purna Mudicyate". When you learn, you grow from fullness to fullness.** It sounds silly. But that is the beauty of Hindu thought. If I tell you that you grow from the incomplete to the complete, you find it easy to understand, but you also grow from the complete to the complete (1).

Let us look at it this way. You are a young child. But are



you not complete? Last year also you were complete. Your mother is also complete. Your grandfather is also complete. Next year you will be a taller or bigger boy. Still, you are complete today and you will remain complete next year. But you will be more complete. Your growth will be from smaller complete to the larger complete, but you will be complete at both times. You will not grow from the incomplete to the complete, but from the complete to the complete.

Take another instance. Draw a small circle on a paper with your compass. Put it under a looking glass. It looks bigger, but it is the same circle. You see a bigger and clearer circle. But the circle remains the same. You only *see* it better.

Education or learning does the same trick. **The world, things and people are the same around us. But we see them better, we look at them better. We know them better. The reality is the same but we become better. Learning changes us. It does not change things. That is what school should do to you.** In fact, the English word educate comes from its root "educare", which means "to draw out". The school or a teacher draws out from you. The things are already in you. Education or learning draws more and more out of you.

That is what a good teacher does. In the Vedas, the teacher is called "*gatu vit*". He is the path finder, he shows you the way, he breaks the path and shows you the way, he cannot walk for you. You have to do the walking. Your mother can cook for you, she cannot eat for you. You yourself have to eat. If you want to be strong and healthy you have to eat good food, you have to eat regularly and you have to take exercise. By seeing TV or pictures or reading you cannot develop a good body. You have to do something for it.

The teacher is like a signpost or finger post which tells you where that road will take you. But it cannot do the walking for you. You have to do that yourself.

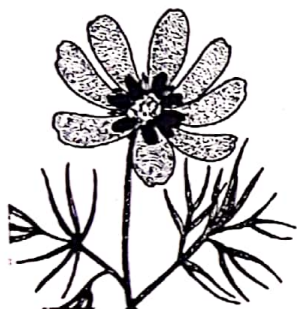
According to Vinoba, learning is a part of living. Learning is not different from living. When you eat, you are learning. When your mother cooks food she is using chemistry. How is

water boiled? What happens when you boil water? How is the steam created? What happens if you touch a hot pot? How is *dahi* (curd) prepared? All this is called chemistry. Start looking at it that way, then it is not learning, it is no more trouble. It becomes fun. Vinoba's idea was that learning means living.

How about finding the meaning of the word sweet by eating some *jilebi*? That's it. Please keep some sweets for me to understand the meaning of the word "sweet".

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 4

25th February, 1990

My dear Pranav,

Vinoba was basically a teacher. In Sanskrit, the word for teacher is *Acharya*. He was therefore called Acharya Vinoba Bhave. Do you know what *acharya* means? A similar word for it is one-who-acts. If he teaches goodness, he acts like a good person. You must act as you preach. The Hindu concept of learning is to sit with someone (*up/ni/sad*) who has acted on his knowledge. Vinoba was truly an *acharya*. Whatever he preached he practised.

There are two stories about this Way (1). Vinoba was considered a great follower of Mahatma Gandhi, who used to stay in Mani Bhavan on Laburnum Road in Bombay. Vinoba's disciples too had their office at Mani Bhavan. They had all their books and furniture in that house. Once, the trustees of Mani Bhavan asked Vinoba's disciples to vacate the office. They went to Vinoba, requesting him to talk to the trustees so that they may not have to vacate the office. They said, "We have used Mani Bhavan as our office and now they have given us notice to

vacate. If you talk to them they will allow us to stay". Vinoba told his disciples, "Go now and give notice to the trustees that you are vacating their office one day earlier than their date". The disciples said, "But, Baba, we have a lot of furniture. Where can we put it?" He said, "Give it to Mani Bhavan as a gift. You have taken help from Mani Bhavan all these years. Now you can give help to it". One fellow said, "But, Baba, we have so many books. What do we do with them?". "Go to all the neighbouring houses and distribute them. It will be *Vichar Prasara*." (dissemination of thoughts).

*Vichar Prasara* is the main theme or action of Vinoba's life. I will speak about it quite often in the future. But the disciples persisted. They said, "Then where will we have our meetings?" Baba said, "In the great city of Bombay, don't you have a garden where you can meet?" He then preached that we should not have any attachment to property. This was his "action".

His other continuing theme was that one must grow continuously. One must change. Gandhiji wanted the education system to be changed and called it *Nayi Talim* (New Education). **Vinoba practised that idea in reality. He used to call it *Nitya Nayi Talim*** (Continuous New Education). This continuous change, grappling with new ideas, experimenting with new ways, continuous change through spreading of thoughts (*Vichar Prasara*) was Vinoba's way of life. He evolved persistently every day. He used to compare life with the Ganga. The Ganga is permanent but the molecules of water you see every moment are new. The Ganga is thus eternal as well as changing.

Here is another story about Vinoba (2). He once asked Meera and Arun, (two *asbramites*): "Have you seen Mahatma Gandhi's room at Sevagram (at Wardha)?" They obviously had seen it. Wardha is just 8 kilometers from Pavnar. "Have you seen the things Bapu used to use?". They are preserved. "Yes, Baba". "Did you see a tree next to the room?" "Yes". Then Meera and Arun realised what Vinoba was driving at. The *chappal* (slippers), the *charkha* (spinning wheel) and the other things which Gandhiji used have remained unchanged. They are today as they were

when Gandhiji was alive. But the tree has grown. It has become a big tree. Because it continued growing every day.

Pranav, that is what you should do. Grow everyday.

Vinoba wanted Gandhiji's thoughts to grow and not become static.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## *Letter 5*

4th March, 1990

My dear Pranav,

I was happy to learn from your grandpa that you read my letters with interest. You wanted to talk to me rather than phone or write to me. I like that. Seeing is believing. A lot more can be said face to face. You will be surprised to know that Vinoba has written very few books but he has given hundreds of talks and that all his books are really compilations of his talks. The style, therefore is more direct, which can be understood by villagers with whom he had his talks face to face in all parts of India.

Another important point about Vinoba is that he always thought and expressed himself in Marathi or Hindi. You will find quotations from Jnaneshwar, Tukaram, Eknath and Ramdas in his speeches. They were all saint poets from Maharashtra. He also quotes from Kabir, Mirabai, Tulsidas, Thiruvalluvar, Andal, Mahadevi Akka, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Narsi Mehta and other Bhakti poets from all over India. Besides Marathi, he was well-versed in Sanskrit, Hindi, Gujarati, Tamil, Bengali, Oriya, Kannada, Malayalam, English, French, Arabic, German and dozens of Indian languages. He did his best to read all religious texts in their original languages. He published books on the essence of the Bible, the *Quran*, *Dhammapada*,

*Gurubodh*, Tao, and *Manusmriti*. His abiding love and mastery however was the *Gita*, the *Upanisads* and the *Vedas*.

According to Vinoba, the people who influenced him most were Sankaracharya, Jnaneshwar, Mahatma Gandhi and his own mother. He translated the *Gita* into Marathi. It is called *Gitai* or Mother in Gita. He wrote it for his mother, as she did not understand Sanskrit. *Gitai* is the most simple and beautiful rendering of the *Gita* in the same meter in Marathi. It is considered a masterpiece in content as well as style. Vinoba's talks on the *Gita* are rated very high in the tradition of *Sankarbbashya* (Sankaracharya), *Jnaneshwar* (Jnaneshwar) and *Gitarahasya* (*Lokamanya Tilak*). The *Gita* was his life breath.

Vinoba has gifted us with one beautiful thought by way of a simile. **What is swas** (breathing) in individual life is *viswas* (trust) in social life. Without trust in each other we cannot live together or even sleep. We will be worried about safety. Do you not see prime ministers and others surrounded by body-guards? But you have to trust the body-guards. They can also kill, as they did in the case of Indira Gandhi. Social life is impossible without trust, Real beauty, of course, lies in the short pithy sentence where *swas* and *viswas* rhyme beautifully. It is not possible to translate it into English.

Vinoba's speeches and writings are full of such pithy sentences. The more you think about them, the more meaningful you find them. That is the *Upanisidic* style. The *rsis* stated the *sutra* or the precise word or *mantra*. You have to think over it again and again. You find newer meaning everytime. That is the way you keep yourself changing continuously. *Sutra* or the thread of truth is permanent; each generation, each individual has to find newer and newer meanings. This was the open-ended Hindu style of thought. You will find it exciting, Pranav, once you start reading more and more about it.

With love;

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 6

11th March, 1990

My dear Pranav,

Vinoba had his own way with words. Whatever work we do we must put our emotions into it. Otherwise, it becomes drudgery. He explains it this way. A currency note is a piece of paper. When you invest it, stamp it with the emblem, it becomes valuable. We must invest or stamp our emotions in our work to make it valuable (1).

What is an idol? It is a piece of stone or wood or metal. By putting my emotions into its sculpting, I make it an idol of God. I have made a piece of stone into God. Stone can be broken, but how can you break my emotion? That is the beauty of Idolworship. The moment I remove my emotions from the idol, it becomes again a piece of stone, metal or wood.

**Whatever we do, we must do with feeling. If you give wages, you take the work and pay the money. It is an exchange. But if you give *daksina* (offering), it has to be given with water as required by custom. Your action or work must also be made moist or tender with your emotions. Then alone it becomes an offering. It becomes more than just giving.**

An approach, attitude or emotion towards your work makes all the difference, Vinoba explains it still further. Two people go to the bank of the river Ganga. The water of Ganga is H<sub>2</sub>O for one person. He takes a bath and cleans his body; he obtains from that bath only physical cleanliness. The other person while taking a bath in the same river imagines that this *Ganga* was born at the feet of *Vishnu*, passed through the hair of *Siva* hundreds of *risis* and *munis* have taken bath in it for hundreds of years. Many great events have taken place on its banks. I am bathing in such water of Ganga (which is only H<sub>2</sub>O for the other person). The other person not only gets cleaned physically but

he reaches a higher level of thinking. He takes a bath along with this emotional cleansing. His mind also gets clean with his body. The same action gives different benefits to different people. This way, even a dirty bull takes a bath in the Ganga and gets an H<sub>2</sub>O benefit of physical cleaning, but he cannot get this higher satisfaction.

Vinoba thereafter says that when someone wears *khadi*, he not only satisfies his physical need of covering his body, but also keeps the home fires burning in many a poor weavers' houses. He helps them eat at least once a day. He wears enough *khadi* cloth with this emotional involvement. A woman who offers water to tulsi before eating is joining herself to the total living creation in the world. By her action she becomes aware of the ecosystem around her.

Vinoba explains a lot of rituals in this way and invests them with a deeper meaning. You can find more in such things when you think about them. This is the beauty of the *sutras* in Hindu thought.

As a Hindu, you are not bound by a book or a word. You can interpret words in your own way. That is why ideas have always remained totally free in India. Different philosophies and ideas have flourished together. All of them are right, from one view point or another.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 7

18th March, 1990

My dear Pranav,

Many people have wrong impressions about Gandhian thought. Vinoba expressed all his ideas in the local idiom. The

common man in India understood it very easily. But the English-educated have problem in understanding it. Vinoba was a true son of the soil. His roots were deep in the *Vedas*, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. He had studied the *bhakti* poets from all over India. To a common Indian villager he could relate easily, having no barriers. We who learn in English have to make special efforts to understand him because our connexion with this land is rather limited.

People felt that Vinoba was against modern science. In fact, he declared from time to time that the modern age would be the age of Science and Spirituality, since Religion and Politics had become outdated. He also said that **Science and Technology are like an engine; taking you anywhere with speed. But they cannot decide the direction. The steering wheel has to be of Spirituality (*Adhyatma*)**. Without it, scientific power would become a power for mutual destruction. Many other thinkers of the West such as Arthur Koestler, have expressed the same fear. Koestler even provides world history with a new calendar. 6th August, 1945 is the crucial date when the Atom Bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan at the end of the Second World War. Since then, man has become capable of destroying the human race out of existence (1). Koestler takes that date as the starting point of a new calendar.

Vinoba used to say that in Spirituality we must read the oldest scripture such as the *Rgveda*. And in Science we must read the latest book. He used to keep himself well informed till 1972. After that, he gave up reading books. He had poor eye-sight and still poorer hearing. He was hit on the ear by those at a temple in Baidyanath in Bihar. They wanted him to visit the temple but not with his Harijan disciples. He refused and was very badly hit on the ear by these temple priests.

Some people asked him on 24th March, 1956 at Vishakhapattanam in Andhra Pradesh whether he wanted to spread electrification in the villages. They thought that as a Gandhian he would have objection to electric power. He replied very simply: "I want even atomic energy for villages. But I am more keen on

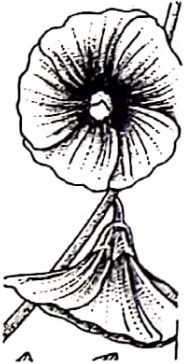


knowing to whom this power will be supplied. Would it go to the poorest man? Atomic power would first go to cities, then to villages and then to richer villagers, who can pay for it. The poor people would not get it as they need it for lighting. The government would give preference for productive use first.

Vinoba wanted Atomic energy to reach like solar power (sunlight). It reaches first to those who have no roof or no doors to their huts. It warms those first who have no clothes to wear. Vinoba said he wanted atomic power to reach like solar power, which reaches first to those who need it most. We want power generated by the progress of Science. But it must reach the needy man first even though he is the poorest. Increasing the average supply of energy is not enough; the poorest must get it. (2).

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## *Letter 8*

25th March, 1990

My dear Pranav,

Vinoba always expressed himself with mathematical precision. He believed in People's power and not in Government power. He created a beautiful simile about this, when he said that Government is like a zero. It has no value by itself. Put it ahead of the people and it acquires power. Put it after 1,2,3 it gets a power. The real value is that of 1,2,3 or of people. If a government is supported by people, it is powerful; remove the peoples' support and it disappears (1). Vinoba said this on 17th November, 1956 at Palani in Tamilnadu. We saw the reality of it on TV in November, 1989. We saw it in East Germany, Romania, Czechoslovakia. We saw it in action 33 years after he had made his statement about the relation between Government and the people.

Vinoba said that in a democracy the people are power. The Government has no power independent of its people. How did it come about? Vinoba said that it was the result of the thoughts planted in the minds of the people for generations. Those thoughts were expressed in action. **Vinoba's basic message was the need to spread good thoughts. He called it *Vichar*** Prasar (dissemination of thoughts).

Vinoba provided many examples to support his conviction about the relation between the Government and the people. Who changed the society in their own times? Were they kings? Were they the government? No! they were thinkers. They were promoters of thoughts. Jean Jaques Rousseau and Voltaire laid the idea-base for the French Revolution of 1789. Karl Marx offered the thoughts for the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Chinese Revolution of 1948. Gandhiji's ideas of non-violent non-cooperation moved the masses, and Independent India in 1947.

People remember the Buddha and Mahavira but nobody remembers the kings who ruled at that time. So too we remember Kabir and Tulsidas in North India; Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Ramkrishna Paramhansa and Ravindranath Thakur in Bengal; Sankaracharya, Ramanuja, Manikawachkar and Nammalvar in Tamilnadu. The Chola, Pandya or Pallava kingdoms are in history books, but these great men remain alive in the lives of the common people through their ideas.

It is the people's power which Shri Krishna used to protect the villagers of Mathura. When there was a deluge of rain, Lord Krishna taught self-help to the people of Mathura and saved them from it. He joined everyone in that task. He asked them to give him a hand in the task. Each one was asked to help. The old and the young, men and women everyone joined him and they achieved a miracle. Miracles can happen with the People's power. Lord Krishna planted the idea of self-help and self-reliance which moved the people to action. Legend made it into a physical miracle. The story in the Mahabharata is that Krishna lifted the Govardhana mountain to save the people of Mathura.

Such is the power of thought. Ideas must be broadcast, they

must be spread to the people. They must be deep casted in their minds. They sprout often in the most unlikely places. Such is their power. They take wings. Incidentally, Vinoba left his home for Varanasi on 25th March, 1916 and started the Brahmavidhya Mandir, an ashram for women who sought spiritual knowledge *as a group*, at Pavnar on 25th March, 1957. Today is the 33rd anniversary of that institution.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 9

1st April, 1990

My dear Pranav,

In one of his articles Vinoba has described a very interesting story from the Vedas. There were ten travellers passing through a dense forest. They were naturally worried about their safety. They decided that since they were all walking through the forest they should keep track of their number: Ten. Each one started counting and found that there were nine people. All tried their hand and came to the same conclusion "Nine". They got terribly worried. Where did they lose one of them?

After a great deal of argument they realised that the missing number was "I". Each one of them had counted the others and had forgotten to count himself! That was why all the ten of them had by one voice decided that they were only nine, and that one of them was missing (1).

Don't we behave in the same way? We always say, We must have clean homes, clean rooms, clean schools, clean streets and a clean city. We should do this and we should do that. But things remain as they are. Why?

The reason according to Vinoba is simple. **"We" is the**

plural of "I". If "I" count myself out, "we" are out. We will do what I start. Many "I"s will have to come together to become "We". But who should start? "I". Vinoba pointed out that in the *Vedas* there is a sentence *Sva tantrah Karta*. "*Sva*" the self alone is "*tantra*" capable of being *Karta* (doer). I alone am free, that is, self-capable. Every thing should start with me. And I should start things. All good things are started by some one "I". What "I" start, "we" complete.

Vinoba then proceeds to say that lots of people say there are no people available for social work, because they count themselves out, and then expect things to happen! See the world in yourself. "*Sva-roop*" is the "*visva-roop*".

Changing oneself, starting with oneself is in our hands. Without bothering whether others will follow you or not start a good thing which you think is right. Leave the rest to God. He will take care of it. You are like a centre point of a circle. The people, the world is like the circumference of a circle. You have to keep control over the centre point, which alone is in your hands. The world will then remain within sight and control.

What I will not do, we will not do. If I want a change in "we", it must start with me. Because "we" is the plural of "I".

I shall be telling you many such stories which will bring home Vinoba's points. Hope you like them.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 10

8th April, 1990

My dear Pranav,

We are living in the greatest democracy of the world. Many people call it the largest democracy in the world. They say this with a dig. They think we are the largest only in numbers. This obviously is a fact, which no one can deny. The total number of voters in India is equal to the total number of voters of West European and North American countries together. 500 million voters was our count in November, 1989.

Still I call our democracy the greatest. Why? Our country is full of different languages, religions, methods of worship, dresses and people. We are full of plurality. We are full of diversity. But somewhere deep down we are all one. There is this unity, Vinoba says, because *Vedanta* is the basis of our philosophy.

When the Constitution of India was being discussed in 1947, our founding fathers decided on adult franchise, meaning one-man one-vote. It looks very common today. But there are many countries in the world where people have no voting rights at all. Even in England till 90 years ago there was no voting right for women. Many European countries gave the voting right to women much later. But the framers of the Indian Constitution started with this idea. Many people still believe that only the educated should have the right to vote.

This idea of adult franchise is based on the concept of equality amongst people. Equality is an ethical concept. It is not a fact. Different people have different capacities even different heights, weights, physical and mental strengths, educational qualifications, ownership of things, ways, form of worships, languages and so on. Such differences are innumerable. They are all facts. Then why should they have equal voting power? **This question cannot be logically answered. Inequality is a fact**

**but equality is an ethical concept.**

This idea came to our leaders through their Western education. How could Pandit Nehru and his servant have the same right to decide about his government? How could they have equal voting rights? When this question was raised before Vinoba, he gave a beautiful answer. **He spoke of Pandit Nehru as a great *adhyatmic***, who knew that his soul (atman) and that of his servant's were equal and hence he insisted on equal voting rights. This is easily understood by the common villager in India, better than the sophisticated history and development of ideas on adult franchise in Europe.

Vinoba's genius lay in connecting modern thoughts and ideas to age-old traditions of *Vedanta* and *Adhyatma* in our country. That is why, Pranav, people find tele-serials of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharat* gripping and relevant today. Everyone knows the epics already, but they do not want to miss a single episode! There is no suspense, but there is a great desire to follow our epics year after year. If you want to understand India, you must seek your roots in all these sources.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 11

15th April, 1990

My dear Pranav,

Vinoba did not claim to be a philosopher. In fact, he said, "I am a retail dealer"(1). He took ideas from all the great sages, and other religious thinkers and presented in simple language to us.

His basic contribution lies in *Samanvaya* (reconciliation). He has summarised many religious texts, selected ideas from each

of them and presented them to our people, indicating their similarity (*param samya*).

He believed in *ekam sat* (Truth is One). He “sees” that all these numerous paths lead to one goal. That one is GOD, *Brahman*. Truth or ultimate reality. In fact, he composed a *sarvadharmā prarthana*, wherein he has compiled the various names which various religions have given to their highest goals.

It is called “*Nam mala*”. It is a common prayer in all the *ashrams* of Vinoba. It is also a recommended song in many schools of Maharashtra.

Sankaracharya was Vinoba’s first motivator. He learnt his logical tools and intellectual arguments from Sankaracharya (Truth). His compassion (Prem and Karuna) he has taken from Jnaneshwar and Tulsidas.

He was greatly inspired by the transparent sincerity of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi and Vinoba were almost like father and son. Mahatma Gandhi rated him high, and whenever he had any philosophical or practical problems, he would refer them to Vinoba. From 1916 to 1948, except as the first individual satyagrahi in 1940, Vinoba remained studying and teaching in his *ashram*. He developed the Gandhian ideas of *ahimsa*, *satya*, *khadi* and trusteeship with his impeccable logic. He provided the intellectual base to all Gandhian ideas. From 1948 to 1970, he practised them through *Bhoodan*, *Gramadan* Sampattidan and Trusteeship. The last twelve years he devoted to *adhyatma* and *goraksha* (protection of the cow).

Vinoba was a walking a university. All these ideas evolved in his mind in the course of his work. They grew with him. This is the most important period of his life. He gave three talks a day and travelled for 14 years on foot to all parts of India. In this, he followed his first guru, Sankaracharya. His perception of village India was thus based on actual contact and observation. He saw a unity in the diversity of India with his own eyes, and experienced it. No other Indian has matched that feat so far.

Still, he never claimed the total view of a philosopher. **The beauty of Indian philosophy is that it is called ‘perception’**

or 'darsana'. It is never claimed as the whole Truth. Each one of us has to perceive this truth for himself or herself. No one gives you, a blue-print of it. It is always evolving and you have to explore for yourself. "Who am I?" is the question.

No Indian philosopher therefore claims any new philosophy or thought construct. He interprets the old texts and puts forward his viewpoint or *darsana*. Vinoba follows the same path. His emphasis is, therefore, on ideas. He rejects blueprints or institutions. He treats them as traps or obstacles.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 12

22nd April, 1990

My dear Pranav,

Vinoba's capacity to put his thoughts in a few words was something remarkable. All his arguments are so gentle and persuasive that it is difficult to forget them. **His interpretation of Indian thought is summarised by him in two words. He calls them "and also". In the original Hindi, it is actually one word, "bhi".**

Vinoba explains it in his "Talks on the *Gita*" (1) with a story of Pundalika. Pundalika was a great devotee of Pandurang at Pandharpur in Maharashtra. Amongst the Vaishnavite temples in India, Pandharpur occupies a position similar to Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh. Pundalik looked after his parents and served them with equally great devotion. Being pleased with such service, Lord Pandurang came running to greet and bless him. But Pundalik would not be beguiled by Pandurang and refused to give up his duty of service to his parents. Serving his old father and mother was for him, worship of GOD, true *bhakti*. He said to God, "Lord, you have come yourself to bless me with this vision. This



I understand. But I believe in the doctrine of AND ALSO. I cannot accept that you alone are God. To me you are God, and my parents too are God. Since I am engaged in their services, I am unable to give you my attention immediately. Please forgive me.”

So he pushed towards Lord Pandurang a brick for him to stand on and became absorbed again in his service to his parents. Legend has it that Lord Pandurang is standing on that brick since then for ages for his devotee to be free. Tukaram, a great saint poet of Maharashtra has taken up this example in one of his *abhangs*:

“What mad love is this, that kept  
Vitthal waiting;  
What bravery to push a brick  
for Him to stand on.”

Vinoba says that the inclusive principle of AND ALSO enlarges your mind. It allows you to continue your duty (*svadharma*) but does not exclude other responsibilities. A man never falls into the tangle of conflicting philosophies, nor does he abandon his own principle (*svadharma*). He does not raise controversies like those *Gita* talks of “*naanyadastiti vaadinah*”. “Those who say that nothing else is” and “only this exists - there is no other”. On the other hand, Pundalika had a humble but firm attitude. “This is true. And that too is true. But for me, this is true.”

**In Hindi**, “*bhi*” means “AND ALSO”. Once you accept that there are other ways of looking at things, you become a pluralist. You become inclusive. You have space for others also.

Vinoba, therefore, once suggested that in making India one nation we need not insist on one language. We can have *Devanagari* as the common script for all Indian languages. And this common script should be used along with the existing scripts. Its utility and use will make it easier for people to accept the common script. It would also be one more bond bringing all Indians together.

Such is the interpretation of the words AND ALSO. It is basic for any pluralist system like democracy.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 13

29th April, 1990

My dear Pranav,

Vinoba connected the old spiritual traditions like *bhakti* to modern times. This approach of finding out similarities and common bonds was one of his lifelong missions. He found in the *Gita* this idea fulfilled. He called it "*abhidheyam param samyam.*" to see the ultimate equality in everything as the message of *Brahman*.

When Dharmaraja reached at last the gates of heaven, there was only a dog with him. Bhima, Arjuna and the others had fallen by the way side. He was told at the gate: "You can come in, but the dog is not allowed to enter." Dharmaraja replied, "If my dog cannot enter, neither will I." One who performs devoted service, even if only a dog, is superior to those who are always thinking of themselves. The dog proved its superiority over Bhim and Arjuna, who could not make it to the gates of heaven. No matter what sort of a person one is, if one goes into the presence of God, one becomes worthy of honour. No matter what sort of wood is thrown into the fire, it will glow. *Bhakti* is the wonderful means for attaining Him.

Those who plead, at a *khadi* exhibition, to the people to come in, say, "Do come in and have a look. Look at the fine texture, the bright colours, the beautiful patterns." Khadi provides work for millions who will otherwise have to go to sleep on empty stomachs. This message of God reaches the people once they enter *Khadi* exhibitions. **This** *Bhakti* for the common good illuminates the minds of people. They get connected to the community around them.

Vinoba commends such an attitude in a *bhakta* [1]. He has said, he was once travelling in a train, passing over a bridge across the Jamuna. A passenger sitting next to him flung with

great enthusiasm a coin into the river. There was a rationalist in the comparament who observed, "The country is poverty-stricken and on the top of that there are people who throw coins out of carriage windows." "You have not understood why he does it". I said. " The *bhavana*, the mental attitude with which he threw the coin is worth at least two or three such coins, is it not? If the money was given for some good cause, it would, no doubt, have been better. But then he was moved to do this because of the feeling that this is not a mere river, but the Lord's compassion flowing before us. Is there any room for this feeling in your economics?"

When his eyes saw one of his country's rivers, his heart melted. If you can assess in terms of money the value of this feeling, then I shall know how to estimate your patriotism.

Does love of country mean mere bread? If on seeing one of the great rivers of our country, the idea awakens in one's mind that one should immerse all of one's possessions in it, and dedicate them to it, how great is that love? In your creation, has the Lord a place? The river is a combination of hydrogen and oxygen. The sun is a kind of big glass-lamp. One should therefore bow low before a loaf of bread? It is a kind of white earth. Why does your mouth water at the sight of it?

Here is the big bright sun just risen, here is the beautiful river flowing past—if you do not see God in them, where can you see Him? Wordsworth laments:

The Rainbow comes and goes,  
And lovely is the Rose,  
The sunshine is a glorious birth,  
But yet know, wherver I go,  
That there hath, past away a glory from the earth."

It is the attitude of mind towards things that makes all the difference.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 14

6th May, 1990

My dear Pranav,

Vinoba's *pravachans* used to be with all kinds of people. Once he was asked a question. *Bhakti* of God assumes that God and *Bhakta* are a duality. They are two [*Dwaita*]. How can he then equate *Jnana* [knowledge of the ultimate reality] and *Bhakti* (devotion to the ultimate reality as one) in *Adwaita*? Jnanadeva says: "Only know Vitthal. This is *bhakti*, this is *jnana*." *Bhakti* and *Jnana* are two names for the same thing. Knowing the Lord and loving Him are not two different things.

An act performed through love is very different from an ordinary act. As the son comes home tired from the field, the mother looks at him with natural love, and says, "You are tired, my child." Look, how much power there is in this small action. Weave all the actions of your life with the warp and woof of *bhakti* and *jnana*. This is what is called *Purushottama-Yoga*.

Vinoba said, "The *Vedas* are not hidden in the *Sambitas* (collection of *Mantras*) or in your books and treatises. They pervade the whole universe. Shakespeare speaks of:

Tongues in trees, books in running brooks, sermons in stones....

The idea is that the *Vedas* are neither in Sanskrit nor in the *sambitas*, but in all creation. When we say, *prabhate karadarsanam*, all the *Vedas* are in that palm, and they say, "serve." **Consider whether your hands worked yesterday, whether they are fit to work again today and whether they carry the marks of service. When the hands are worn out with service, then the destiny that Brahma ordained for you becomes clear.** This is the meaning of looking at one's palm in the morning. Where are the *Vedas*? They are in your hands. I

am the *Vedas* living and awake.

The truth is that the essence of the *Vedas* is in our hands. We have to build our lives on the foundation of service, love and knowledge. This is what is meant by saying that the *Vedas* are in our hands. (1)

This is how Vinoba combines love, knowledge and action as a trinity. He draws this meaning out of *Gita*. *Gita* itself is considered the essence of all *Vedanta* (or *Upanisads*). Vinoba's commentary on the *Gita* is considered one of his more memorable works. He gave these lectures on the *Gita* every Sunday in Dhule Jail, where he was imprisoned by the British during 1932. They were recorded by Sane Guruji, another major Marathi author, who was imprisoned in the same jail. They were delivered to the inmates of the jail, who included dacoits, murderers, thieves and other jail birds, alongwith political prisoners such as Vinoba and Sane Guruji. He gave these lectures even to the women prisoners, where Vinoba, a *bramachari*, was given a special permission by the jailor. The jail rules were ignored and Vinoba delivered his *Pravachans* to all the prisoners in Dhule Jail. (2).

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 15

13th May, 1990

My dear Pranav,

An interesting facet of Vinoba's life is his continuous growth. He was always evolving, changing and becoming a better person.

He was an intelligent student. He was a voracious reader. He was a leader in his student group. He developed his life with very simple living. **The most important thing about him was that he remained a continuous experimenter.**

As a young boy he was influenced by the books of Veer Savarkar. *The 1857 war of Independence* (which was called the Sepoys Mutiny by historians) and the *Life of Mazzini* (an Italian leader) were some of the books that he circulated amongst his friends. They were all proscribed books.

In 1916, instead of going to Bombay for his Intermediate University Examination, he left for Varanasi. He was influenced haled by the Bengalee revolutionaries. His ascetic mind which called him to the Himalayas. He went to Varanasi, where he read Mahatma Gandhi's speech. He saw the unity of his ascetic search and the revolutionery new approach of Gandhi in the political field in 1916. That year marks the end of the first chapter in his life.

For the next thirty years he kept developing as a Vedic scholar, experimenter in *khadi*, propagator of non-violent *Satyagraha*, working as a scavenger to end the idea of untouchability attached to scavenging and a teacher who crystallised the Gandhian idea of a New Education. He was a rather harsh, disciplined, intensely intelligent, scholarly individual who was already recognised as an interpreter of the *Gita*. He became an ideal *satyagrahi* in the mind of Gandhi. He was therefore chosen as the First Individuals *satyagrahi* by Gandhi in 1940.

Most of Vinoba's early ideas were already established after thinking and working them over for thirty years. Thenceforth we come to the third and most creative stage of his life.

Mahatma Gandhi died on 30th January, 1948. The political aim of independence from Britain was achieved on 15th August, 1947. The political process of the constitution making and governing was taken over by leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Rajaji and Dr. Rajendra Prasad. All of them had their political training with Gandhi. The Sovereign Democratic, Republic of India was established by the Constitution of 26th January, 1950.

But that was only the political part of Gandhi's Mission. Vinoba was not cut out for it. He was attached to the rest of Mahatma's ideas. The political part was a transient one. The eternal part of Gandhi was his belief in Truth, Non-violence and *Sarvodaya*. The rational and logical base of these Gandhian beliefs was the forte of Vinoba.

They used to call him the spiritual heir of Mahatma Gandhi, while Jawaharlal Nehru was called the political heir.

The lasting part of Gandhi's Mission grew through the person of Vinoba. That is where he stood, head and shoulders above others. He had drunk at the fountain-head of Indian thought. He had gone deep into the roots of India. He struck his roots in the *Upanisads*, *Vedas* and the *Gita*. He travelled through every part of India and imbibed its basic spiritual base. He knew English well, but he was not westernised in any way. He remained till the end a true son of the soil. (*bhoomiputra*).

More about it in my next letter.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 16

20th May, 1990

My dear Pranav,

Being a true son of the soil, Vinoba's perceptions of problems affecting India were totally different from those of others who were modernised or Westernised, the looked at India with the eyes of a westerner. British ideas, the English language, and Western modes of thinking formed their base. Our political system, laws, rules and administration were a legacy of the British rule. They were in favour of continuity. We, in India, are largely continuing the same ideas and the same mind-set even today.

Gandhi was a revolutionary. He wanted to change India but you cannot have major changes unless you look at things with a like those of gandhiji view-point. Vinoba's views were radically different from those of other Indian leaders.

The first thing Vinoba wanted to change was Education. After all, education is the basic industry which provides men for

various social needs. Vinoba believed that the education system devised by the British for their colonial aims should be changed. He said that the first thing after Independence that the people and the government of India should have done was to close all educational institutions for a year.

All our educationists should have sat together and decided what kind of India they wanted. Once that was decided, they should have decided on the kind of educational system necessary for it. What kind of India do we want? It must start with the kind of man-making education we provide. Being an *advaita Vedanti*, Vinoba wanted to start with "I". Who am I? 'We' Indians, is a plural of 'I'. I have written to you about this idea earlier. Do you remember it?

This basic stage was avoided. A lot of ad hoc experiments were made, committees were appointed new ideas of education were tried out. But all of them were mere amendments. They did bring about some changes. But the basic stem remained the same. A revolution needs a totally new perspective, a new way of working. It never arrived. Successive generations of Indians since 1947 have come up from the same old colonial educational process. We are today producing people for use in Western countries. There is very little for local consumption. All is exported. We are seeing this all around us.

An awareness about our society, our people, our poor and unlettered and who have not received any of the benefits of Independence is totally missing from the minds of our educated people. The education that we have in India makes us more literate, more vocal, more skilled and more selfish. Where is the consciousness about others who are less privileged? Each one wants all the cake for himself. He does not bother about others. Then what was the purpose in having a struggle for Independence? Gandhiji's idea of Swaraj was not meant to change from white rulers to brown rulers. That was the political part and a small part of his Total Vision. And it is the Total Vision that moved millions to participate in the freedom movement, which made Independence possible.

**Vinoba wanted *Swa-rajya* (Self Rule).** He was not happy



just with Independence. That was only the first step. He wanted every individual to be free and self-(*Swa*)-governed (*rajya*). This self-government is possible only when an individual (*atman*) sees himself as a part of society or the universe (*Para-atman*). Vinoba expounded this idea in his book "*Swa-rajya Shashtra*", published in 1942.

With love

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 17

27th May, 1990

My dear Pranav,

Vinoba's ideas are not well known outside India because of their essentially Indian perspective. He was introduced to the West after Jaya Prakash (JP) Narayan was attracted to his ideas in 1954.

JP was a Marxist educated in America. He had first-hand experience of poverty in that country. When he came to India he was considered a confirmed Marxist. Like many others of his generation, he believed that he had all the answers for the problems facing India. He was drawn to Gandhiji and the freedom struggle. He was a famous name in the Quit India Movement of 1942. JP continued his search for truth. After his contact with Gandhi, JP started getting attracted to the roots of India.

As a Marxist, JP knew that every individual must think about his fellow beings. He must be committed to his community. He knew that this is necessary for the social existence of man. But why should he be good? He had no answer to that question. He was attracted to Gandhi. Being a firm believer in GOD, Gandhi had all the reasons for being good. Vinoba with his rationality and reasoning, led him to *Adhyatma*, and the ultimate reality perceived by many as GOD. JP therefore offered himself as a

*Jeevan Daani* (life time sacrificer of the self) in 1954.

**JP had this to say about Vinoba. "Vinoba is not a politician nor a social reformer or revolutionary. He is first and last a man of GOD. Service of man is to him nothing but an effort to unite with GOD. He endeavours every second to bolt himself out, to make himself empty so that GOD may fill up and make him His instrument." (1)**

Because of Vinoba's absence of conditioning by western ideas, he could think of *Bhoodan* (the Land Gift Programme). Vinoba is synonymous with *bhoodan* in India. Actually, it was not an intellectually thought-out idea or hypothesis which was worked out in practice. It was perceived by Vinoba through an incident in his life. In that sense it is truly a "scientific" discovery in the Western sense of the term. Scientific theories are constructed out of observed facts.

*Bhoodan* established Vinoba as an independent thinker who could arrive at new solutions to the problems facing India in 1950s. We must be very clear about the basic facts. All economics is based on the idea of economic man. He is selfish and greedy. He tries to maximise his personal benefits. He believes that society has a meaning for him only for his own benefit. His selfish ends, benefits, are the only incentive which activate him to work. Why does a man work? The economic answer is simple: To maximise his personal benefits. All theories, perceptions and ideas of economics are based on this idea of an Economic Man.

Vinoba challenges this basis rationally with his Vedantic perceptions, and is in a position to offer new solutions. It is not surprising. From the focal point, the circumference of a circle can be reached in 360 different degrees or radii on the same plane. When you shift the starting angle, you can reach totally different conclusions. That is what we call the difference of 180. Vinoba challenged this basis, and therefore could "see" or perceive the idea of *bhoodan*. I shall tell you about it in my next letter.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 18

3rd June, 1990

My dear Pranav,

In 1951, a conference of Gandhian workers, who were not involved in any politics and who belonged to the larger part of Total Revolution, called the *Sarvodaya* Workers was held at Shivarampalli in Andhra Pradesh. Vinoba attended that conference. He started from Sevagram in Maharashtra on March 7, 1951 on foot. In 30 days he walked 300 miles and reached Shivarampalli.

The Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh was then in turmoil. The communists tried to have an armed resurrection like the Yen-an in China. They were creating panic in the minds of people by dacoity and murders. The Government adopted methods of tit for tat — violence was met with violence, bullet for bullet. People were terrorised by communists at night and police during day. There was a cry for help.

On April 15, 1951, on the *Ramnavami* day, in his evening meeting at Hyderabad, Vinoba said: **“All of us, you and I and every being, are indeed the forms of Rama. If we abandon our egoism (I-ness) and reduce ourselves to zero, we shall become one with Rama and could then function as instruments of the Lord.”**

On the early morning of April 18, 1951 Vinoba reached Pochampalli on foot. The village had a population of about three thousand. The Nalagonda District of Telangana was regarded as the Head Quarters of the Communists. In the previous two years, 20 to 22 murders had taken place there.

On reaching the village, Vinoba first went to the *harijan* (untouchables) colony. He visited each house and saw the conditions personally. The Harijans said, “We are very poor. We are jobless. If you give us some land, we could toil on it and earn our bread.” Vinoba asked, “How much land would you

need?" They said, "We are 40 families and it would be enough if we get 80 acres."

Vinoba went into deep contemplation, as he could not see any way out. He said, "I will talk to the Government authorities and try to get this land allotted to you." But then it somehow occurred to him to ask the many villagers in front of him; "Could some of you help these Harijan brethren? They are ready to work hard on the land."

One of them, Ramachandra Reddy, stood up to say, "My father desired that half of our 200 acres of land should be donated to a fitting person. For me, this is the auspicious opportunity. Kindly accept this gift of a hundred acres of my land."

This was the first spring of the *Bhoodan Ganga*, and the date was April 18, 1951. In the next thirteen years, 42,00,000 acres were gifted to Vinoba by villagers from all parts of India. All the State Governments in India put together, who confiscated by the law excess land beyond the ceiling limits, could not match this figure even in the next thirty years.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 19

10th June, 1990

My dear Pranav

In my previous letter, I referred to the achievement of the land gifts movement (*bhoodan*) and the efforts of the government. Many people have dismissed this achievement of *bhoodan* by saying that only useless land was donated. But possibly they do not know that under the law of land ceiling, the landlord whose land is being confiscated has the choice to decide which part of his land he will give. What kind of land will any "economic man"

give when he is threatened by confiscation? It is easy to reject the success of *bhoodan* because it is a totally new way of looking at Man and his Motives. You have to be alive and observant. Many new things are always happening around us but we close our eyes and therefore do not see them. One thing is very clear; the idea of communism never struck deep roots in rural India.

Vinoba had serious doubts about the real power of the state. He was not against laws. He said, **"I am not blocking legislation, on the contrary, the work I am doing will make legislation much easier. I am creating a climate of opinion in its favour. If I were to go further and declare that without making laws, nothing can be done, I should have betrayed my Dharma.** My *Dharma* calls on me to believe that we can evoke such a spirit in the hearts of the people, that without the aid of legislation and no matter what the law may say, they themselves will distribute the land. Do mothers need a law to induce them to nurse their babies? There is a power in the heart of man which enriches his life, and that power is love. Man depends on love, he is born of love, he is nourished by love and when the time comes for him to leave the world, he dies content if he can see his dear ones around him at the last moment. If, inspite of this experience of the power of love, we have not the courage to appeal to it in the wider life of society, and go on demanding legislation instead, we shall not be able to help our government in the way it expects of us by building up 'people's power' (*lok shakti*); to build up a people's power which is different from the power of the state. (1)

Pranav, have you not seen this people's power recently in the Philippines, in Eastern Europe and everywhere else? Vinoba talked about it in 1954. We saw it after 35 Years in 1989. If our Government, democratic as it is, decides to tackle the land problem, it will do so by legislative authority. There is nothing wrong in that, it is merely a different way of doing things. But governmental help of this type will not nurture the power of the people, although it may increase their prosperity. Our aim on the other hand is not merely that people should be prosperous,

it is that they should realise their power.

That is why Vinoba insisted on *Loka Sakti* (People's Power). He used to say, "Government alone is like a Zero (0). People are like one.(1) If people are behind Government, its power is raised to Ten. (10)" Did I not refer to this in one of my earlier letters?

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 20

17th June, 1990

My dear Pranav,

The *Sarvodaya* Conference held at Chandil in Singhbhum district of Bihar was a major landmark in the life of Vinoba. There, for the first time, in a very cogent manner, Vinoba expounded his ideas of the "Third Power", which is different from the "Power of Violence" (*Himsa Shakti*) and the "Power of State" (*Danda Shakti*). He called it "People's Power" (*Loka Shakti*). He delivered a major speech on it at the Chandil Conference on 9th March, 1953 (1).

**Vinoba firmly believed that his job was to awaken this people's power, which is latent in every individual. Unless this latent power is unleashed, real democracy will not prevail. People must be made strong. Unless the people are strong and self-reliant, they really cannot control State Power. Vinoba even went to the extent of saying that he was more afraid of "good" government (*Su-rajya*) than "bad" government. The people fight the bad government, and throw it out, as they did in India in 1947. But if a really good government exists, it will make people crippled and dependent on it. Vinoba saw a great danger in *Surajya*. After all, an individual is a reality**

which can be seen, but groups, families, castes, religions, parties, countries, governments etc, are all social constructs. His stress on this individuality is of cautious far reaching importance. This individual's *swarajya* (self-governance) is more important than *Su-rajya* (good government) by others.

In Mahabharata, this idea is expressed in the following words:

*Tyajet ekam Kulasyarthe,  
Gramasyarthe Kulam tyajet,  
Gramam Janapadasyarthe,  
Atmarthe prithivim tyajet.*

You should sacrifice an individual (*ekam*) for the family (*kulam*); the family for the village (*grama*); the village for the state (*janapada*); but for self-realisation (*amarthe*) sacrifice the world (*prithivi*). This sequence and its climax are a very major theoretical position in Hindu civilisation.

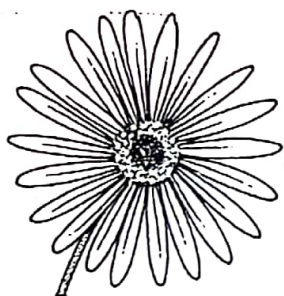
**Where the individual is so important, how does one awaken his social consciousness or experience of power? Vinoba says that it is possible only through the spread of thought (*Vichar Prasara*) and the discipline of thought (*Vichar Sasan*).**

"By discipline of thought, I mean that ideas should be clearly understood and expounded. Nothing should be accepted without understanding the principles involved. It should be a matter for regret when anyone accepted our ideas without having understood them; we should be satisfied with explaining our ideas without imposing our will on others. Some people say that the *Sarvodaya Samaj* is a "loose organisation". A loose organisation would certainly be useless and serve no purpose. The *Sarvodaya Samaj* is not a loose organisation; it is not an organisation at all. It is a society based solely on ideas. We compel none to carry them out without understanding them, and we will not obey anyone's orders without first considering and approving them. We meet only to exchange ideas. The Koran, in singing the praises of the saints, says that their work is marked by mutual consultation. We too

must devote ourselves to mutual consultation and pooling of ideas. We should be happy when people refuse to accept our ideas because they are not convinced; we should be very unhappy if someone puts these ideas into practice without understanding them. It seems to me that there is more strength in such an organisation than in one which is efficient, clear-cut and bound by regulation. I am not saying that a strictly regulated legalistic organisation has no power at all, but that its power is not *Siva-Sakti*, it is not a power for good. It is because we wish to create *Siva-Sakti* that we desire only the discipline of ideas." (3)

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 21

24th June, 1990

My dear Pranav,

In my previous letter I gave you Vinoba's idea about an organisation based on ideas. This can be the freest possible 'organisation' if at all it can be called an organisation. His pithy statement used to be *arachana* (non-organisation) is *rachana* (organisation).

"(0)ne aspect of our work is dissemination of ideas. From this point of view, I can see why Lord Buddha established the *Bhikshu Sangha* and Sankaracharya the *Yati Sangha*. I have, it is true, come to the conclusion that we ourselves should not form any such *Sangha*, because experience shows that their defects are likely to outweigh their advantages. Nevertheless we ought to reflect on the reasons why those great men felt the need of *sanghas* and the ideas that lay behind them..

We want our ideas to flow out to people like a perennial



spring of water, and therefore, we need messengers to carry them. Without such messengers, the *Sarvodaya Samaj* cannot do its work. We must take every opportunity for meeting people and coming into close touch with them. People are not likely to accept our ideas at the first hearing; our workers must be filled with such enthusiasm that they will enjoy repeated discussions with the same groups. Their faith and confidence in the power of ideas must be strong enough for that.

The fact is that many of us have got entangled in various institutions. These institutions have their own importance no doubt. Nevertheless, let us show our regard for what they stand for without becoming attached to the institutions as such. Let them continue their work, but let some of their members be always moving about among the people. If we do not organise our work on some such lines, our ideas will lose their vigour and the discipline of ideas will not be effective.

“But if you are not bold enough for this, if you will quail before the prospect of carrying the message to every village and turn instead to short-cuts by proposing legislation (for *bhoodan*), then I must tell you that making laws, and relying on laws, is not our job. **By all means let there be laws, good laws, as quickly as possible. But if we get involved in the law making, we shall be forsaking our own calling, our own Dharma,** for an alien vocation. Our own job, our *Dharma*, is to travel round the villages and to maintain our faith in our ideas. Do not say that the work will never be done by discussion of ideas. The work will never be done in any other way. It can only be done through acceptance of the idea. The power of the idea, the discipline of the idea, our first tool.” (1)

Sankaracharya, the ace *Jnanayogi* of India being his Guru, Vinoba's faith in dissemination of ideas was very deep rooted. He believed that organisations and institutions have a role, but a limited one. They are carriers of ideas. They have to be discarded from time to time.

We often build institutions around ideas, but do not allow them access to the sun and wind. Such ideas get fossilised. They

lose their flexibility and capacity to grow. **Living organisms are continually replacing and changing themselves. They retain their strength.** There is no other way for groups of people to remain agile and relevant.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 22

1st July, 1990

My dear Pranav,

After the power and purpose of disseminating ideas is discussed, Vinoba turns his attention to *Sarvodaya Samaj* which in his view was the strongest entity. "*Sarvodaya Samaj* will not be an organisation at all. It will be a fellowship of those who believe in the power of the idea. We do not want to create merely a disciplined group. We must, work to make it more fruitful of ideas and more ready to accept ideas as the basis of living." (1)

Pranav, have you noticed that whenever Vinoba states anything he uses the plural. He believed that in ancient India all the thinking was done as individuals. He wanted to implant the idea of thinking together as a group. In the Koran, it is said that saints work with mutual consultations. "*Amra Hum Shoorā Bain Hum*" (Koran). This has an echo in the Bhagvadgita as well. "*Matshila Madgatah Pranah Bodhayant-parasparam* (Bhagvadgita 10.9). This fellowship concept is Vinoba's fusion of ideas from ancient religions.

Together with this fellowship of believers in the power of the idea, Vinoba wanted complete decentralisation of decision-making powers. Decentralisation is a very basic idea in Hindu civilisation. Even God becomes gods and gets decentralised in

every house. There is no need to visit a common Mandir. There is no compulsion to visit a Church or a Masjid. Each one conceptualises his own idea of God. Vinoba wanted that every human being should be empowered. Therefore, he wanted the unit of administration to be as small as possible. He pleaded for *Gram Swarajya*." We want to see the power to manage its own affairs vested in the village, that is in the hands of the villagers. They should, for example, stand up and decide for themselves what things they will produce, and they should inform the government what things they wish to exclude. If the government cannot or will not stop these things coming in, the villagers must be bold enough to oppose it...

**"Even if Delhi were to acquire the intellect of Lord Brahma, with four brains and eyes for all the four points of the compass it could never plan for and manage all the affairs of every village with benefit to them all.** Therefore, we should have village planning instead of national planning. I said, "instead of". It would be far better if 'national planning' really meant 'village planning' and that Delhi should give the villagers whatever help they may need in their planning. Whatever we do is in the direction of decentralisation of the authority." (2)

This concept of decentralisation as a core concept of planning was never accepted by the Government in New Delhi. Vinoba was pleading for this decentralisation in 1953, when Jawaharlal was moving in the opposite direction. We were imitating GOSPLAN or Central Planning as practised in the U.S.S.R. in 1920. The edifice of Central Planning is collapsing in the entire bloc of East European countries and in Soviet Russia. It has simply not stood the test of practicability. It has just vanished. It is time we looked at Vinoba's economic ideas without blinkers.

With love,

Yours,

L.N. Godbole



## Letter 23

8th July, 1990

My dear Pranav,

Vinoba had a strong belief in the strength of words, in the strength of ideas. He was not much in favour of creating institutions or structures. He did not set much store by the capacity of governments to bring about changes in society.

He believed that a person inspired by an idea can be a change agent. He can create his temporary structure, use it and discard it when the time comes. He wanted *Sarvodaya* workers to be on the move, open to new ideas and capable of changing themselves. His greatest attraction was for the formless, structureless realm of ideas. After all, that is what *Brahman* is all about. Each one has to search on his own for *Brahman*.

Vinoba often quoted Kakasaheb Kalelkar, another contemporary and leading Gujarati author equally at home in Marathi, who once said that *A-Sarkari* (non-governmental) work alone is *Asarkari* (effective). He believed in voluntary action of the people. He wanted *Sarvodaya* people to spread out, move and sprout throughout the length and breadth of India. "This work of ours is not of a sectarian nature. We should not even call ourselves 'the Sarvodaya Group', because that also gives a wrong impression. Let us think of ourselves as human-beings and nothing else. Otherwise, even this *Sarvodaya Samaj*, with all its freedom from institutionalism, will little by little become a sect, a narrow group in which we will be separated from others. Let us never allow our tongues to slip into labelling people as 'socialist', 'congresswala' or 'sarvodayawala'. Such terms will of course continue to be used, because there are many who wish to work under party names and find them useful. But we belong to no party. We are 'the third power'... **the third power (is) the power which is**

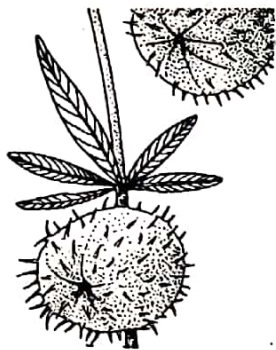
**opposed to power of violence, distinct from the power of the state... This third power is inherent in man, and we seek to realise it on the widest possible scale. And therefore it is not for us to form a separate sect, it is for us to identify ourselves with the common run of humanity and to work among men simply as fellow human beings.” (1)**

Vinoba's emphasis on not having institutions was very fundamental. After all, we only 'experience' life as individuals. Group, family, caste, religion, country, nation, union, company are all theoretical constructs. They are all concepts the reality which we experience is only the individual. It is the individual who has to change himself to change society. If a man is not changed, nothing changes.

A man can be changed only by changing his thoughts. This can be achieved only by the spread of ideas. It needs continuous "deep-casting." It is not done in a day, but you should go on doing it every day. Then alone lasting changes can come about. Vinoba's idea was to concentrate on changing the ideas, the thoughts or the inner core or heart of the individual. It was called *hridaya parivartan* (change of heart) by Gandhiji. Changing the core of man's being is the message of all religions, but more so of Samatana Dharma.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 24

15th July, 1990

My dear Pranav,

Vinoba believed that the future of mankind depends on Science and spirituality. His own personal development was based on both.

“My father was a scientist, my mother’s bent was towards spiritual knowledge. At school, science was my favourite subject, but I was also attracted by spiritual literature. These two streams of knowledge, the scientific and spiritual mingled together in my life. In my view they deserve equal respect and have one and the same significance. The subject matter of the one is the external physical world, while that of the other is the inner world of man. Together they present a complete and integrated picture of the nature of the universe.. I became convinced that the only way to establish the kingdom of God on earth is to unite Science and self-knowledge.” (1)

Vinoba believed that we must read the most up-to-date books on science and the most ancient texts for self-knowledge. He was not an ascetic in the old Indian sense of a person who is a seeker of self-knowledge alone. He wanted science for progress, but self-knowledge too. He believed that continuous questioning, a continuous quest must be pursued in both science and self-knowledge.

“Man, like a bird, has two wings - science and spiritual wisdom, and he needs both together for his happiness. The design of every machine provides two forces, one to generate energy for movement and the other to guide and control it. One cannot work without the other. A car has an engine and a steering wheel, so does a human being. **We walk with our feet and not with our eyes, but the eyes show us where to go. Self-knowledge or wisdom is the eye, science is the feet. With no eyes, man would not know**

**where he is going; with no feet, he would be able to look about him but would have to sit still at home. Nothing can be done in this world without science, but science cannot go in the right direction without self-knowledge.**

(2) Vinoba clearly spelt out the role of science in India. He was aware that India was weak in science, and must learn from the West, as she had the right to do. But the progress of Science in India, in his view, had to be for three things. "First, we must resolve; that all our human problems shall be solved by ethical and non-violent methods; that our villages shall be truly free to manage their own affairs in peace; and that we shall all live together in mutual goodwill and without conflict. Secondly, we must determine to use science as a tool of service, not as a weapon of destruction, to increase our harvests, not our armaments. Thirdly, we must decide on the merits of each case, whether to use our scientific knowhow to build large-scale or small-scale machines. If we keep these three points in mind, science will serve us well." (3)

The initial policy framework of India was thus encoded by Vinoba in these three points. He was a moral and spiritual influence over the minds of the rulers of India till his death.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## *Letter 25*

22nd July, 1990

My dear Pranav,

Vinoba was a great believer in the fusion of science and spirituality (Self-knowledge). The bridge between the knowledge of the outer world (science) and the knowledge of the inner world (self-knowledge) is the Word. He has referred to this power

of the word in many of his speeches.

“The Sanskrit word for poet, *kavi* has a deep meaning. The *kavi* is the seer of revolution, whose vision pierces beyond the immediate. These two eyes of ours see what lies immediately around us, and shows us all the beauty of the world for our enjoyment. But their powers are limited. Beyond this present world is another world of interest and delight which they cannot reach; but man is blind to the beauty of that world because his two eyes are open only to this immediate world. It is only when this third eye opens that he becomes aware of a world of energies at work behind, beyond and within the common experiences of the visible world. It is this vision, this awareness, that inspires great literature and which deserves our reverence....

“The great poets - Valmiki, Vyasa, Dante, Shakespeare, Homer, Rabindranath - have enriched the world's life forever by the power of their creative and transforming thought. They brought peace and vigour and hope, when peace and vigour and hope were needed. Their insight, their thought, their transcendent vision, are the hidden springs from which have arisen the world's great revolutions....

“The power of science, the power of self-knowledge the power of the word - these three forces have shaped the world we know and will mould it in future Science changes the material aspects of life and creates an environment which makes its impact on the mind of man also. However, it does not influence the mind directly. The word, on the other hand, directly touches the heart; self-knowledge illuminates life from within. The light of science comes from without, the light of self-knowledge comes from within, and the Word is the bridge between the two, bringing them together and shedding light on both. To use the image of Tulsidas, both the inner world and the outer can be illumined if the lamp of the Name (*Hari nam*) is sent upon the threshold of the door - which is the tongue.

Such is the power of the word, of speech (*vani*) which is God's supreme gift to man. It is a gift potent for good and for evil; use it wrongly and society is doomed; use it well, and society goes forward



for everybody's well-being. As the *Rigveda* says, the wise man winnows his speech as the housewife winnows grain, rejecting the chaff and stones, and choosing the healthy corn. A society whose speech is clean and pure, strong and simple, is a happy society. For speech is the binding force joining the inner world with the outer, and science with self-knowledge, and all the energies of the world with one another. The Word is the subtle power, and many other powers are hidden within it."(1)

The word is the clothing of the idea and thought. Vinoba constantly wanted to propagate thought. His idea of *Sarvodaya Samaj* was the fellowship of people who believed in the power of thought.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 26

29th July, 1990

My dear Pranav,

I have told you Pranav, that Vinoba took his sustenance by striking roots deep into the *Upanisads*, the *Vedas* and the *Sastras*. He always talked of self-knowledge, *atman* and *paramatman*. The picture that comes before one's mind is that of a Godman. He was not in that mould. He was essentially a thinker, a *jnan-yogi* and, more importantly, a constant *Karmayogi*. His living was ascetic, but it was not to impress others. It was a part of his belief system.

It is therefore very interesting to see his reaction to the established *Mathas* hierarchies and *Devasthanams*. He visited many of them. He was beaten at Vaidyanath in Bihar and was sent away without *darshan* at Jagnannathpuri in Orissa. But his reaction was very interesting.

Basically, he was a rebel, and all these institutions, *Mathas*, *Peethas*, were a logical anathema to him. He gave a lecture at Chaturvedamangalam in Ramnad in Tamilnadu. He raised certain issues concerning thoughts, ideas and these institutions. He criticised them for not re-checking their ideas, dropping the dead ones and absorbing new ones. He quoted the *Vedas* where it is stated that you should winnow the thoughts and ideas like grain and keep only the good corn. It is no use repeating old sayings as *mantrams*. You must constantly check their validity. He wanted the outdated part of the *Vedas* also to be rejected. He wanted new ideas to be added to the *Vedas*, and to retain what is good in them.

He told the *Dharmacharyas* that they should not become mere postmen, who deliver letters and messages. He gives a simile. **A learned father told his son to hold an umbrella in the morning for protection from the sun in the eastern direction. However his son must have sense enough to change the direction in the afternoon, and hold an umbrella in the western direction. Simply because father said, it should not compel him to hold it so in the evening.** Vinoba said that it is the obstinate behaviour of believers that created non-believers.

The heads of the *mathas* did not undertake to the spread of real religion. They only looked after their properties. Their properties were gifted by people for the spreading of religion. The maintenance of such properties became an end in itself. Vinoba wanted *Dharma* to be constantly spreading and growing. Why should the saints of Tamilnadu be as Nalavar (four greats) and not grow in numbers? Why are the Gurus of the Sikhs restricted to ten? Why not more? We must be capable of finding new ways to live and be religious.

Those who are bound to institutions do not find such new ways. Vivekananda, Gandhi, Aurobindo, Sankarcharya, Tolstoy were the people who really spread *Dharma*. The established *mathas*, *swamis* and churches opposed these thinkers.

Vinoba wanted to know why such religious institutions were unable to stop thefts in their near vicinities? Why was

the great Mahaveera, who did not even wear a stitch of cloth on him (Digambara), is kept in an idol form with gold, diamonds and valuables in Bihar? The idol was kept with armed guards and enclosed by several walls and locked gates. Vinoba was very critical of such institutionalisation, and avoided it through out his life.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 27

5th August, 1990

My dear Pranav,

Another idea Vinoba propounds on the basis of *Vedanta* is that of *Abimsa* (Non-violence). In fact, his life story has been compiled by disciples and it summarises Vinoba's life in two words; *Abimsa/ki/khoj* (search for non-violence).

In his inimitable style, Vinoba puts to you the necessity of *Abimsa* in the following words. Again you will see that he expounds it from the basic assumptions of *Vedanta*.

"Each one of us is in a body, and our body separates us from all other bodies. If I fall ill, I alone experience the illness. Another man may imagine my troubles, he cannot feel my bodily aches and pains. Neither can he reap the benefit of the sound sleep that I enjoyed last night. Since our bodies are separate, they are a source of our divisions....

"Because each one of us is bound to a body, we feel bound also to those with whom we have some bodily relationship: fathers, mothers, children. Around our bodies we build up circle of relatives. The caste into which I am born is mine too; I associate with it and keep others at a distance. This is the basic reason for all those divisions of race, caste, creed, language,

province, nation, etc., by which the world is broken into fragments. I put myself into group, in other words I put what is "mine" on one side and the rest of the world on the other. Then I go on enlarging my circle. As things stand, "I" am a human being so I exclude animals, birds, etc., from "my" group. I am an Indian, and so I exclude other nations and peoples...

**"Who am 'I'? The ancient Hindu sages answered: 'I am Brahman'"** that is all inclusive, cattle and donkeys and all. This experience of the unity of life is termed *Vedanta*. It means that I must try to treat all beings with equal respect.... This idea that equal honour is due to all is the basis of *Abimsa*, non-violence....

"*Abimsa* is a way of living. *Vedanta* is a way of thinking. *Vedanta* tells us what is; *abimsa* conduct tells us how to act... How shall we understand this idea, I am *Brahman* and realise its meaning? I have ears, eyes, nose. I have a mind, sense and an intellect. And "I" am one who recognises these facilities, I am the "witness" (*Sakshi*) who observes them all. This "I" who recognises all this is other than mind... This is the method of *vedanta*, to think of the self as the 'witness'. (1)

**"Once you start enlarging your definition of 'I' you include more and more in it. In the end you include all life. That is where you become a greater and better human being.**

Today, when we talk of ecology, when we study the interaction of all living things, it is basically an attempt to enlarge your idea of "I". We will achieve nothing so long as we do not have this inward experience, that inspite of all diversities of appearance, we are all one. The secret is to let "we" drive out "I". Let us at least say that "I" should be into "we". This was Vinoba's basis for all social service.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 28

12th August, 1990

My dear Pranav,

Vinoba had many fresh ideas about education and teachers. He presented his idea of *Acharyakul* at Kahalgram in Bihar on 8th March, 1968. He wanted a special role for teachers. He wanted to have *Acharya-kul* to establish the power of the people as opposed to the power of violence, and distinct from that of law. He wanted teachers to be pioneers of this non-violent revolution. He wanted education to be accepted on par with the judiciary, with the same kind of independence.

*Acharya*, according to him, did not mean only teacher. The root of the word is *char*; the same root is found in *acharan* (practice), *vicharan* (travelling), *vichar* (thought, deliberation), *sanchar* (arduous progress), *prachar* (spreading knowledge). All these meanings contribute to the ideal of an *Acharya*. The word *Kula* means a family. All of us teachers are members of one family.

Every aspect of the work we mean to do — to commit ourselves to knowledge; to strive for mental purity; to watch over the development of our students with affectionate care; to study the problems of society with a disinterested endeavour to reach agreed conclusions for the guidance of the public - all of these are part of the task of establishing the unity of the family that is the family of teachers.

Vinoba said, these are the reasons which led him to choose the name *Acharyakul*. *Kula* is a beautiful word, and it is one of those words which have links with both Arabic and Sanskrit. It implies 'all' (*Kul*) teachers; there is no question of high or low, of great or small. All teachers are to be equally honoured; all will work together, those are the conditions of success in the teaching profession.

“The purpose of *Acharyakul* is not to acquire power; there are other associations for that. The purpose is to make us teachers more aware of our duties, and more ready to fulfil them, and so enable us to regain our rightful place in society. There is so much darkness around us, how can it be removed? If our surroundings seem dark, it is because we have no light. Light knows no darkness. (1)”

What is the nature of our (teachers) strength? Is it not in the nature of light? The light of knowledge, of wisdom, of thought and reflection. What power in the world can stand before it? When science has made so much progress, when the intellect has such far-reaching power, it will be disaster for humanity if the heart remains small. **The problems of today arise from this discrepancy: big brains and small hearts.**

Intellectual progress is going to continue, and scientific knowledge is going to expand even further. There is no alternative, if we have to survive, except to expand our hearts. The world outlook of “*Jai Jaagat*” is the only fitting one for our generation; for the world is ours, and we are world citizens, “World-men” (*Viswa-manushab*) as the *Rg-Veda* called it long ago.

Vinoba’s *Jai Jagat* we shall discuss some other time.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 29

19th August, 1990

My dear Pranav,

Vinoba had one life-long idea in all his speeches: insistence on physical labour by everyone. This was a legacy from Gandhiji. In ancient times Manu, the first law giver of the world, has downrated manual labour in the *Smrti*. You will therefore find

in India that our brahminical education system has always given very low rating for actual manual or physical work. The more one is educated the more one despises physical work. This attitude continues till today. It was Gandhiji who wanted to establish the dignity of labour in our social life.

Washing your own clothes, cleaning your own utensils, doing all your things by yourself is considered below one's dignity. This attitude was attacked by Gandhiji in his *Asbrams*. Vinoba carried it further; he took up the job of cleaning latrines even in jail. This was revolutionary idea then, it is revolutionary even today. He attacked untouchability and the aversion for physical work in one stroke.

**Vinoba believed that physical labour, bread labour, is something which each one of us must do every day.** The *Upanisads* have said, "*Annam Babukurvit*". Increase the production of food. Let this be your vow. The same idea is stated by St. Paul. "He who will not work, neither shall he eat." This is necessary for health and also for the control of emotions. Physical labour is a great equaliser.

Vinoba wanted schools to have half-time for labour and half time for learning other things. He wanted teachers to set an example to their students. He thought village power, people's power. with the power of knowledge wielded by a teacher can withstand the destructive power of politicians.

Vinoba wanted teachers to evolve into an *Acharya-kula*. Their power of knowledge would emerge when they unite. If they divide themselves, then their power will be dissipated. The answers to the problems facing India can only be given by teachers. But such teachers must first renounce politics. They should not be members of any political party. According to Vinoba, "party" takes care of only some 'part' of society. A knowledgeable man, a teacher must think of the whole and not of a part. He must avoid party politics. The teacher must throw in his lot with the common man and *Lokaniti* (people's power). Unless he renounces politics he cannot influence politics. He will be effective only when he rejects the values of the power structure

and chooses those of the people.

It is difficult, Pranav, for most people to understand this perception: that unless you renounce politics you cannot influence it. But *Acharyas* like Vasistha were the *Kulgurus* of Dasartha and Rama. They were respected for their knowledge, their sage advice, and were acceptable to all. They held no political power. Many amongst us who view India with western eyes find it difficult to understand this role. Mahatma Gandhi, Jayaprakash Narayan, Vinoba were such *Acharyas*. They never held political posts. They refused the values of the power structure. But they tremendously influenced India.

Vinoba wanted this role of *Acharyas* to be institutionalised by forming an *Acharyakula*. He wanted teachers to play this role. He wanted teachers to define *Dharma* or the context for politicians to behave within those limits.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 30

26th August, 1990

My dear Pranav,

Vinoba was basically a teacher. He has given us a wonderful idea in his book on education.

He says that in all the 14 languages listed in the Constitution of India there is no word for teaching. In English, there are two separate words "teach" and "learn". In Indian languages the root word is learn. For "teaching", derived words are coined on the basis of the root word "learn".

We can learn. We can help learning. In Indian languages, teaching is not a separate verb. Teaching expresses the ego of teachers. You cannot teach anyone, you can only make learning



possible. These days, the word for teacher is facilitator. He makes learning possible.

It is not merely a matter of words or semantics. It is a matter of attitude. Vinoba further said there is nobody who is unlearned. Every one learns every day. There are no uneducated persons, there are many people who are not in a position to read or write. **Reading and writing are facilities or tools for learning. They are not learning itself. They are very useful, but they are only tools. And in any event they are not the only tools.**

We see so many people who cannot read or write. But they can grow crops. They can get better crops. They can repair cars, they can drive cars. They can cook, they can carry loads, they can clean houses, roads, and so on. They can look after patients. They can grow trees, plants and tend gardens. In other words, they can "do" so many useful things. All these things are useful for all of us. How can you call them not learned? This is a crucial factor in our social attitudes.

Vinoba narrates an episode in the life of Prophet Mohammed. He was once in deep meditation. He wanted to see God. God wrote a letter to him. He was unlettered, and so he said, "I am an unlettered person". I want to see you. Then God gave him *Darsan*. Mohammed told this story to his people and said, "Look if I had learned alphabet, I would have been happy with the letter, I would have missed seeing the God for myself". Vinoba narrated this story in a meeting for farmers. He said, "You physically cultivate your farms, you do the tilling to level the land, Sun shines on that land and then you wait to see God. How many of you have seen God?" All of them raised their hands. There was not a single farmer who doubted whether he had seen God or not. When it rains, the farmers feel that God has not only come to meet them but to touch them. He touches them physically with thousands of drops of water in the showers of rain. They not only see God, they also feel Him. They are not in doubt about the existence of God. They are learned enough to know

it. They experience God.

Vinoba expressed his thoughts, beliefs, arguments for the villagers in small or big meetings. He touched their hearts directly. He moved them. That was his work. That was his style as a public educator, an *Acharya* in the true sense of the term.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 31

2nd September, 1990

My dear Pranav,

Vinoba has given us in his books and lectures many interesting ideas. He was a great scholar and very intelligent person. While stating some ideas, he has also told us about the changes that he went through. These views or spot-lights on his personal development are very enlightening. He continued growing till the end of his life.

**Madhav Deva, a Saint-poet of Assam, has divided people into four categories : Lowly, Middle, Good and Best. The lowly (*Adham*) is one who sees only faults in others; the middle category (*Madhyam*) recognises both the faults and the merits of others; the Good (*Uttam*) looks at only the good points of others; and the Best (*Uttamottam*) looks at the good qualities in others through a magnifying glass. Mirabai and Guru Nanak also talk about *Gunagrahan*, seeing the good points in others.**

Vinoba says that in the early years of his life he used to find fault with others. He used to test their intelligence and found some fault or other in everyone. Then he decided that every one has some faults or the other. So he gave up seeing faults in others. He started looking for faults in himself. As Tukuram has said, "Why should I look to the faults of others? Do I have any

less?" It is better to look at one's own faults only.

Vinoba then called on Gandhiji who told him that he should enlarge the good qualities in others and also enlarge one's own faults. Vinoba argue with Gandhiji. He said: You are a seeker after Truth. Then we should stick to truth. Why are you asking me to enlarge the good things in others and bad things in me? Gandhiji replied: What you say is mathematically correct. We should not enlarge or reduce. We should stick to reality. But human beings have to see things in perspective. Our eyes cannot see things from a distance in their actual size. We must have perspective. The good things in others are at a distance. To understand them correctly in the right scale we must look at them with enlargement. While we see our faults always as small ones, to get a right perspective we must enlarge them to remove them."

Vinoba thereafter accepted this idea. He said: "In the end I started seeing only good things in others and in myself." He did not want to waste his time in finding fault with any one!.

Vinoba wanted all of us to be like a magnet. A magnet attracts all the pieces of iron or steel, wherever it is moved. Similarly, we should try to see only the good points in others. That really makes us better persons. We have less tensions and less quarrels. Vinoba recommends that situation as the expression of one's best behaviour.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 32

9th September, 1990

My dear Pranav,

I have written to you many letters so far, and tried to introduce some ideas which Vinoba talked about in his life time. Incidentally, 11th September is the birth date of Vinoba. I have told you that he was born at Gagode in the Raigad District of Maharashtra on that day in 1895. He would have been 95 if he were alive. He died on 15th November, 1982 at the age of 87.

Vinoba developed his ideas of *Nai Talim* (New Education) when he was implementing that idea of Gandhiji. His book on education has so many thought-provoking ideas. He was always fascinated by new ideas, and he wanted *Nai Talim* to remain *Nitya Nai Talim* (continuous new education). Change is the only permanent part of life. He therefore wanted education to be continuously in flux.

**Vinoba considered himself first and foremost a student. His teaching was really a bye-product. He was continuously searching for a meaning in life. He went on changing. He always wanted to remain alert for changes in the life around him. His basic values were firm. But he was continuously learning new ones.**

He was a *Lok-shikshak* (teacher of the people) . Whatever he learnt, he went on disseminating to others.

He was not happy with the educational structure in India. Immediately after independence, he wanted to close the educational institutions, give a holiday to children to play and wanted educationists to think of new kind of education necessary for Independent India. Nobody listened to him. We went on producing students who were fit for jobs but not so much for work.

All over the world, education is in the hands of the government. Vinoba was opposed to that. He said that education

is used by government for indoctrination. A fascist government will teach fascist ideas, a communist government will teach communist ideas. He wanted governments to pay for education but not to control it. The curriculum should be decided by *Acharyas*, and they must be beyond party politics. Vinoba once said that great *Loka shikshaks* like Jnandev, Tulsidas and Kamban did not have in their days authority to decide the curriculum for students. But what they taught and wrote, still remains a part of our folk memory. Tulsi Ramayan is a part of the education of the people in the North. So is Jnanadeva in Maharashtra and Kamban in Tamilnadu. There were kings and emperors in their times; nobody remembers those kings and emperors today!

Incidentally, Pranav, 1290 AD is the year when Jnaneshwar completed his commentary on the Gita. He was a contemporary of Chaucer. His Marathi is still a cultural bedrock of Marathi civilisation. In 1990, after seven hundred years you cannot understand Marathi without knowing Jnanadeva. Vinoba was greatly influenced by Jnanadeva.

Vinoba once wondered why the present Director of Education, a government official has power to decide what people should read or learn. This right was not given even to Jnanadeva.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 33

16th September, 1990

My dear Pranav,

While Vinoba was talking about *Acharyakul* and *Jai Jagat*, his vision was covering the entire world. During the Independence movement prior to 1947, the main slogan or idea kept before the people was *Jai Hind* (Victory for India). Prior to British rule

in India, the nation state was a new idea even in Europe. There were small kingdoms, and geographically they did not cover very large areas. They considered their small kingdoms as their private property. The rulers were answerable to none. They always succumbed before foreign invaders. The village was self-contained unit. It made very little difference to the common man as to who their ruler was. Villagers were self-reliant and happy within the confines of a few similar villages.

Culturally, India was an entity for thousands of years. The Ramayan and the Mahabharat were the cultural base for all Indians. This picture changed during British rule. The political leaders from all over India started coming together, and therefore their aim was to have one United India hence the solgan *Jai Hind*.

As soon as India became Independent, the purpose of *Jai Hind* was achieved. At that point of time, many changes were taking place in the world. Air travel was spreading fast, telephones, telegraphs and satellites were reducing distances. The competition between Western countries and Communist countries was increasingly becoming more and more hostile. The arms race was on.

That was the time when Vinoba was preaching that all these scientific and technological advances were making the world small and the human brain big. But its mind, its heart still remained small. The atom bomb, which was dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6th August, 1945 changed the world completely. It was now possible for man to annihilate the entire human race. In such a situation, *Jai Hind* became a comparatively small ambition.

The entire world became a small global village. It was therefore necessary to have the aim of *Jai Jagat* (Victory for the World). Today, all world leaders, ecologists, scientists and others are talking of One World. This was emphasised by Vinoba in the 1960s.

His teaching therefore was : "Think Globally; Act Locally". **Indian darsaniks** (perceptors) have always talked of one world or "**Vasubdaiva Kutumbakam**" (All the world is one family). But it always remained a philosophical idea, a matter

of words. It had no guidance for Action. Vinoba was very particular about this Action (*Karma*). Acting locally was very important for him. He therefore evolved his idea from *Bhoodan* to *Gramdan*. I will tell you about *Gramdan* as envisaged by Vinoba some other time.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 34

23rd September, 1990

My dear Pranav,

You should not be surprised if I tell you that Vinoba was the earliest thinker in India who started the talk about *Stree Shakti* or Women's Power. This was in 1954, when he started the *Brahmavidya Mandir* at Pavnar.

Traditionally, the search for *Brahman* has been an activity only for men. women were kept away from *sadhana*. In fact, you will find a common belief that Woman was a hindrance in the way of achieving success at a high spiritual level. It was Bhagwan Mahaveera who ordained women for the spiritual quest. But it was only for one's own salvation. It was an individual effort.

Vinoba started *Brahmavidya Mandir* for women, who follow *brahmacharya* (celibacy) and try to understand brahman as a group quest. His disciples from *Brahmavidya Mandir*, all women have set up an *ashram* in Gauhati, Assam. It is called the *Maitri* ashram. There are three other *ashrams* which were started at various places. Two of his women disciples continued *padayatra* for 12 years in all parts of India to spread the word of *Sarvodaya* and *Brhamavidya*.

It is significant that when Vinoba died on 15th November, 1982, his funeral pyre was lit by Mahadevitai, a woman disciple. This token

action itself was considered a great change from the tradition.

Women's Lib became a fashion and cult in America and Europe in the 1960s. It came to India in the 70s, and a lot of imitation has taken place in India. Burning bras, walking naked in the street and crying hoarse about womens' rights and womens' liberation (*Stree Mukti*) a rage of the day.

It was Vinoba who broke the barriers of womens' spiritual liberation. He did not believe in *Stree Mukti* (Womens' Liberation). Liberation from what? From whom? In a society where the family is still a very strong base of the social fabric, this liberation is basically upper-class talk. **Vinoba wanted women to realise their power** (*Shakti*) and he called this idea, awakening of women's power (*Stree Shakti Jagaran*). He believed in empowering women, making them aware of their own strength. He was not satisfied with small actions of defiance. He wanted them to realise their own power, and use it constructively. He wanted some woman to be the second Shankaracharya.

The great influence of Vinoba's mother on his mind is very clear in all his life-time work. He translated the *Gita* into Marathi in the simplest form. That book, *Gitai*, is the largest selling book in Marathi. Vinoba did it for his mother, as she did not know Sanskrit. In all his speeches, there are several instances of his own development, and of his mother's influence on him. He was in favour of *Stree Sakti* as a *Matri Sakti* He wanted spiritual salvation and self-realisation as a goal for women, through nurturing *Matri. Sakti*.

Even in education, Vinoba said, that the mother is the best teacher next to God. As Lord Krishna wanted "*Matr hasten bhojanam*" (feeding by mother's hand) as the highest boon, Vinoba advocated "*Matr mukhen-jnanam*" (education through the mother). People very rarely note this spiritual attainment for women as a group, as Vinoba's innovation. It has come into existence without noise or opposition, just as the blade of grass grows. It does not make any noise in the process. But it does a lot of good for all living things.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole





## Letter 35

30th September, 1990

My dear Pranav,

Some time back I wrote to you that I would describe the idea of *gramdan* given by Vinoba. Actually, this idea grew out of the concept of *Bhoodan*.

In *bhoodan*, Vinoba was asking people to donate one-sixth of their land to a representative of *Daridranarayan*. He told people; "I am your sixth brother. I am a Brahmin. Give me my sixth share as a representative of the poor, landless labourers." He collected 4.2 millions acres of land, and most of it was distributed.

Vinoba expressed an idea that as air and sunshine are free gifts of God, we should also consider land as His Gift.

**"Sab bhoomi gopalki** (All land belongs to Gopal - Lord Krishna)." Nobody can be the owner of land for all are sons of Mother earth. we are all sons of the soil. **"Mata bhoomih putro abam prithivyah"** (Earth is our mother and we are all her sons). We are all **bhoomiputras**. We must share her favours. We do not own our mother. We serve her. That was his message in *Bhoodan*.

In Bihar in 1953, Vinoba took the next step. It was called *gramdan*. He wanted an entire village to renounce the ownership of all lands and declare them property of the whole village. Nobody could buy or sell or mortgage it. All debts created on its basis would be extinguished. People of village would cultivate it. It would be equitably distributed for cultivation. Government help, finance, fertilisers, etc. would go to the village. This idea would have revolutionised the entire rural landscape. Rural indebtedness, unequal distribution, disputes between the landless and the landlords would have all changed. It was an idea of Total Revolution.

Many villages, blocks, talukas in Bihar Orissa were declared as *gramdani* villages. But this movement or idea did not take

off. It remained a dream.

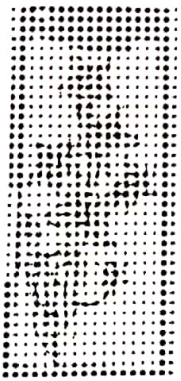
Vinoba obviously was not upset by its failure. He wanted to collect 500 million acres in *bhoodan*. He collected about 50 million. He started many *Gramdans*, but they did not survive. Redistribution of 50 million acres of land was still a great achievement. Nobody ever thought it possible. Vinoba made it possible.

What power did he have? Was he the elected representative of the people? Did he have state power? Did he have an army to enforce his demands? Was this accepted by all? Did it fit into our idea of economic man? Answers to all these questions are in the negative. But Vinoba got an idea at Pochampalli in Andhra Pradesh on 18th April, 1951. He could perceive its significance in the Indian context. He could appeal to the people of India. He could appeal to their spiritual roots in their own language. He could "see" a new idea. He was a *darsanik*. He could achieve it. He achieved it without bloodshed, without money. He achieved it peacefully, by appealing to the hearts of the people.

In other countries of the world, the redistribution of land has been done with force, with bloodshed, and with pain all around. Vinoba lighted a new path in this context.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 36

7th October, 1990

My dear Pranav,

Many people in India considered *bhoodan* and *gramadan* a failure. They said that only useless land was given in Bhoodan. The government tried the way of law; it officially allowed the landlords to give away discarded land but the land problem is not solved. But *bhoodan* was a novel way to solve it. What was

not possible to imagine could be achieved. Intellectuals and academics moulded in the western way of thinking could not understand this phenomenon. But it happened.

Since the 1930s in India, Marxist thought was a very powerful influence on the minds of Indian intellectuals. Vinoba read his Marx, but did not copy. The ethical appeal of Marxism, which was for equality amongst men was accepted by him. But he did not accept Marxian insistence on the State as the Agent of Change. He rejected the State as an instrument of change. **He did not accept the view that the world is full of 'haves' and 'have nots'. He believed that everyone is a 'have'.**

This division of people between 'haves' and 'have nots' leads to class war. Marxist analysis believes that this class conflict between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots', the rich and the poor is inevitable. The poor can win only when they defeat the rich. Equality cannot be established without annihilating class enemies. Millions of people have been killed in Soviet Russia, China and other countries in the world have paid a heavy price for this theory of class war. Intellectuals, who almost invariably never even get hurt in violent conflicts were great supporters of this idea of Class War. This became an accepted 'religion' in many countries. India also made half-hearted efforts in that direction by making our country a 'Socialist' republic in 1976.

Because of the inherent strength of Indian tolerance and the liberal educational influence of the British, India did not go communist. India blundered through a socialist phase. This great 'economic' ideology has been rejected now all over Europe. Their economies are in ruin. People paid the price for it with their blood. Philosophy based on economics collapsed with their economies.

The States and their leaders became dictators, power-mad, and ruined their economies. The intellectuals gave respectability to their crimes in the name of Socialism. The communists wanted a similar revolution in India. They started it in Telangana in Andhara Pradesh. That is where Vinoba offered an alternative. He took the ethical fervour of Marx, moulded it in the crucible of Indian reality, and offered *bhoodan*.

Democracy survived in India. It flourished here, people got a better deal, a better life without violence, bloodshed and state terror. It was achieved in non-violent ways.

Vinoba never claimed success for *bhoodan*. He said he wanted to plant ideas for a better tomorrow. If they fail, he would not worry. New thoughts would sprout, new ideas, better ideas would come and replace the old ones. Ideas never fail. They change life, they change the society. They try to make the life of the people better. Vinoba was happy with this action. Effects and results are for others to judge and evaluate. As a *Karmayogi*, he was not interested in the fruits of his *karma*. He did his duty.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 37

14th October, 1990

My dear Pranav,

*Sampattidan*, *jeevandan* and trusteeship were some of the other ideas propounded by Vinoba. As a matter of fact, Mahatma Gandhi first stated the idea of trusteeship. The upanishadic injunction "*Ten tyakten bhunjitah ma gradha kasya chiddhamanam*" is found in the Isopanisad. It is a part of daily prayer in many *ashrams* of Gandhiji and Vinoba. It means enjoy in renouncing wealth. Don't be acquisitive.

All great religions have preached this idea. Gandhi wanted those who have wealth or possessions to use them for the benefit of others. They should take least for themselves. Vinoba did not want to collect money from the people. He said: Keep your money with you. Only announce that a certain portion of your yearly income would be spent for others. This you will do on your own, without force and without fail. Vinoba did not want

to collect money, keep accounts and build organisations and structures for that purpose. He wanted it to be done by those who owned wealth. In his *Sampattidan* (wealth gift) he wanted the claim of *Daridranarayan* to be willingly accepted as a duty, out of self-conviction and not by force.

Those who have no wealth, may have physical or mental strength. They must give part of that for others. He firmly believed that no one was a "have-not". He did not want human relations to be built only on some as 'givers', and others as 'takers'. He wanted everyone to be a giver. Each one has something to give to others. Everyone must learn to give. He did not want a society to be of 'donors' and 'beggars'. As children of God, all must give and all must take. Then only will there be a society of equals.

*Jeevanda*, giving life for public purposes, was a similar idea. Jayaprakash Narayan was the first *Jeevandaani*. Vinoba became the second. Pleasure in giving, pleasure in distributing what you have, pleasure in sharing is a higher form of pleasure.

*Daan* does not mean alms. It is not begging. Sankaracharya said, "*Daanam samavibhajanam*" (Gifting is equal distribution). By his *bhoodan* movement Vinoba did not want people to be permanent clients or receivers. They must also give. Everyone must give, because everyone is a 'have'.

This classless concept was not acceptable to the intellectuals. Those who believed in class war, class hatred and class annihilation went on merrily with State power, repression, violence and misery for many, with pleasure, perhaps for few rulers. In the name of the poor and the exploited, they exploited others more rapaciously!

**Vinoba wanted everybody to give. He was not happy only with donations of their wealth and possessions. He considered people's talent also as wealth. He wanted everyone to be a trustee for others. Trusteeship must start with you. It is not an armchair philosophy to be advocated for others, excluding yourself. It must start with you.**

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 38

21st October, 1990

My dear Pranav,

So far, I have always written to you about what Vinoba said or did and argued. I have not written adequately about the great influence of Gandhiji on Vinoba. Gandhi and Vinoba were a unique pair of very different men who became a continuum. Vinoba is called the spiritual successor of Gandhi.

What did Gandhi think of Vinoba? Gandhi told F.C.Andrews as early as in 1917 (just one year after Vinoba joined his Satyagraha Ashram at Ahmedabad), that "He (Vinoba) is a rare gem. He has come to enrich us (inmates of the then *Satyagraha Ashram* at Sabarmati, Ahmedabad) with his virtue. He has come not to receive but to give." This turned out to be prophetic. After Gandhiji's death, all Gandhian thoughts and ideas were enhanced and used by Vinoba through *bhoodan*, *gramdan*, trusteeship, etc. He gave deeper meanings to the actions and ideas of Gandhi.

What was Vinoba's attitude towards Gandhi? "It was indeed God's boundless grace that brought me to Gandhiji, impelled me to sit at his feet. It would be impossible indeed to try and describe what I have gained under him at the *ashram*. It gave me the eye to see. It has been the source of all my inspiration and vision. My inner self witnesseth that I have striven conscientiously and diligently to act upon Gandhiji's path of non-violence to my best.... Whatever of his thought and teachings I have been able to like and assimilate, I have been trying to practise in full awareness each and every moment of my life. I have no doubt that after his passing away, I am doing only his work. I also believe my line of thinking reflects his line of thinking in essence."

According to Rang Rao Divakar, another Gandhian, Vinoba was not a blind follower of Gandhi, nor even an obedient disciple or a devoted imitator.

Vinoba said, "Bapu (Gandhiji) never conceived himself in the role of a *Guru* nor did he consider anyone his disciple, although I attach great importance to the institution of *Guru*"

Once a friend asked Vinoba, whether he should address Bapu as Gandhi or Gandhiji. Vinoba said: "If you consider him as a human being, a human being worthy of respect, you should call him Gandhiji. If you think of him as a thought, it would be sufficient to address him as a Gandhi. For me, Gandhiji is no longer a person, he is an idea. He is an idea personified...."

"We must take from great men only their ideas. We must not become too attached to what is incidental in their lives. We should also derive from their words the noblest meaning they can bear. That is to say we should look for their subtle import. In this age of science the Manu of the Puranas, or even Marx, won't do. I submit in all humility that even Gandhi taken at face value, won't do."

Such were the two great sons of India whose existence stretched as a continuum from 1916 to 1982, almost 60 years of this century.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 39

28th October, 1990

My dear Pranav,

In my previous letter, I gave you some perspective about the relationship between Gandhi and Vinoba. You must have also noticed that I have all along been referring to Vinoba as Vinoba, simply because, to my mind, Vinoba is a thought. He was a person, whom I have seen only once in 1976 but he impressed me deeply since 1951. I considered him a thinker, and

a communicator of ideas *par excellence*. He has moulded my mind with a logical base. He has convinced me about God or *Brahman* in the most rational manner. I am writing these letters to induce you to read more of his writings and take what you like from them. The separation of a person and his thought is very essential.

Vinoba himself has put it very beautifully. **The concept, thought or idea is greater than the thing or man. The thing is perishable, the concept abides. The thing, that is the individual man, the concept, that is, the idea he symbolises. The individual becomes great because of the indwelling thought, which is great. The individual becomes the mouthpiece for the thought.** The strength lies in the thought. And just as the existence of the individual helps the thought, it may also cause harm to it. After the individual is gone, the pure thought alone remains. That is why Tulsidas says that the name of Rama is greater than Rama, implying that what can be achieved by an individual as great as Rama can be achieved in a much larger measure by the power of his name. Those whom Rama liberated in his life can be counted; but the number of people who were liberated and will be liberated by the name of Rama is not countable. Rama turned Ayodhya into a paradise. The name of Rama turned every village into Ayodhya. The story of Rama is told in every village. How far could an embodied Rama go? But the name of Rama has reached everywhere.

Saints after death become much more powerful than when they were while living. For with the perishing of the mortal body, their short-comings also vanish. When their thoughts become free of the body they pervade the atmosphere, and inspire all. Those hearts which have the right kind of 'receivers' can hear their voice. As the *Sastras* say, the word is imperishable. It is relayed into the air, and if we are fitted with a right kind of receiver we can hear it. This is the way men get inspiration.

Pranav, have you seen how Vinoba used this latest information and produced a logical base?

Vinoba said that Gandhi never stuck to his words. He



was always evolving. His mind was ever occupied with the quest for truth. We should, following him, do our thinking afresh in the context of every fresh situation. Like Gandhi, Vinoba was always evolving, because he was always alive, learning and absorbing experiences.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 40

4th November, 1990

My dear Pranav,

In 1970, Vinoba finally settled down at Pavnar. He stopped his *Padyatra* and started withdrawing himself from active campaigns. His views were always sought by politicians. After the land redistribution, he took up the cause of *Goraksha* (Cow Protection).

“The cow is a poem of pity” said Gandhiji. The cow occupies a very important place in the religious beliefs of Hindus. Hindus worship the cow as a symbol of God. Vinoba said that Indian socialism does not stop with equality between human beings but extends to all living beings. The cow is a symbol of all non-human beings. Feelings of equality and fraternity which were preached by all other religions were limited to human beings. In Vinoba’s view, it was a speciality of Hinduism that it included in its compassion the cow as a symbol of other life forms. Hindus worship trees, serpents and cows and other manifestations of life. Ethically, this is a superior position. Vinoba used to say that beginning with cannibalism man progressed towards vegetarianism in stages, and *Abimsa* became a higher value system. Many communities and regions in India became vegetarian. This aspect of Indian life was very dear to Vinoba.

To talk about cow protection is considered amongst educated Indians as something odd, backward and antiquatedly religious. Vinoba looked at cow-slaughter both as an ethical and an economic menace. He was not a ritualistically religious person. He believed in God, he believed in prayers, but there were no other rituals, no idol worship in his daily life. He was basically a *Vedantist*. He attached great importance to the cow as a symbol of human compassion for fellow life forms. He used to say that his socialism extended to cows and did not allow him to exploit and kill them.

Being basically tuned to village India, Vinoba knew the importance of the cows in village economy. If you give land to a landless person, but if he has no bullocks, what can he cultivate? Cows provide milk, manure and traction power in the form of bullocks. A recent study by the Indian Institute of Management at Bangalore has estimated that the energy generated for traction power by bullocks in India is equivalent to the energy generated by all other means put together; oil, hydro, nuclear etc. That is the importance of the cow as a giver of Food, and a renewable source of traction power. It is often the only asset a poor man has in India.

Poor farmers cannot resist the temptations of market forces. **They sell their cows for slaughtering. In other words, they sell their renewable source of an energy generating asset. The land becomes meaningless without bullocks. The only choice for a poor villager is to become a landless labourer dependent on others, or migrate to city slums. Vinoba could not accept this. He, therefore, started a campaign for *Goraksha* (Cow Protection).**

Realistically speaking, it need not have been necessary to organise a campaign. Cow protection is enshrined in the Constitution of India as a Directive Principle. The Supreme Court has given a judgement that Anti-cow-slaughter laws passed by some states are constitutionally valid. Many States have passed such laws. Beef does not have much market in India, as it is not acceptable to Hindus. Still, very large scale cow-slaughter

goes on catering to export markets. Vinoba was pained by all this as a *Bhoomiputra*, who found it difficult to see that the means of livelihood was snatched away by market forces from the poor villagers, and the Government stood inactive. More in my next letter.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 41

11th November, 1990

My dear Pranav,

As I wrote to you last time, Vinoba was looking at *Goraksha* both in its emotional economic aspects. He was not looking at it from the religious sentiment of Hindu.

He said, that next to that of his mother he was brought up on the milk of the cow. He could not understand how cows could be slaughtered in India. He twice staked his life on this issue. He talked to politicians, ministers, and the prime minister and tried to convince them about it. Ban on cow slaughter is a directive principle of the Constitution. As a Gandhian, he had been brought up on the belief that *Goraksha* and *Khadi* were two major policy thrusts of the Independence movement. All those who fought for the freedom of India under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi had accepted this as an action point and many state governments have passed laws banning cow-slaughter. How could the state power in India be non-responsive to the people's wishes?

*Satyagraha* or fasting unto death was undertaken by Gandhiji several times as a political pressure-point. After the declaration of the democratic republic in 1951, Vinoba was not in favour of *Satyagraha* or fasting for every political or social demand. In fact,

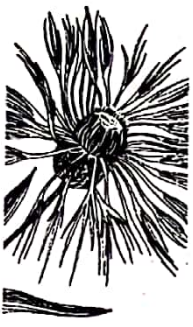
many Gandhians blamed Vinoba for not using this form of expression. They called him an inactive academic. **He remained firm in his views that in a democratic society Satyagraha** or fasting unto death should not normally have any role. We can change the government or its policies by mobilisation of the people's power. The tools developed for use against colonial power cannot be used against rulers chosen by the people. But he made two exceptions and on both occasions for *Goraksha*.

His behaviour was wholly in consonance with his thinking pattern. The people's will was already expressed in the Constitution and the State laws. It was the will of the people which their government was not implementing. It affected the poor millions in villages who were robbed of their means of livelihood by market forces, and the government was doing nothing about it. Vinoba felt that he was on a strong moral ground when he was fasting unto death for cow protection. He said that even if he were to die the government may not do a thing. He was not worried about that. He saw it as his duty to stake his life for his beliefs. The results he was ready to leave in the hands of God. He said if he died he would die for the cow, which was like a mother to him.

After all, Vinoba was a true Gandhian. Gandhi walked the streets of Naokhali when communal violence was raging there. All other politicians were busy in New Delhi celebrating India's Independence! Vinoba walked from village to village in Telangana when communists were killing people for redistribution of land. His life was in great danger. Still, he believed in the innate goodness of people. Even communists believed in his sincerity. He met them on their ideological ground, started *bhoodan* and marginalised them. Staking his life for the cow was thus a logical step for Vinoba. The poorest man in the country was involved in this. Vinoba's entire life as a Gandhian thinker was involved in it. More about all that in my next letter.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 42

18th November, 1990

My dear Pranav,

25th June, 1975 was a black day in the life of Modern India. A democratically elected Prime Minister with a very huge majority was unseated by a High Court on 12th June, 1975. Values by which a democratic society stands, the constitution stands, were at stake. The Prime Minister chose to disregard the court order. Indira Gandhi imposed an "Emergency" in India to save her personal rule. The whole country became a jail. All political opponents were imprisoned. A black period in India's political life began.

Vinoba was respected by Jawaharlal. He was respected by Jayaprakash. He was also respected by Indira Gandhi, who was clinging to power against democratic traditions. Vinoba and Jayaprakash were very close *Jeevandani* associates. JP had started his Total Revolution agitation. He was jailed, and so were lakhs of people.

For Vinoba, this was an hour of trial. Many of his close associates felt that he did not rise to the occasion. Many people denounced him. They called him "*Sarkari Sant*" (government patronised saint). Intellectuals, academics and politicians attacked him for his non-action. They even said he was a partisan and afraid of speaking against the government.

**Throughout his life Vinoba had been talking against politics (*Rajniti*) and in favour of *Lokaniti* (People's power).** He always advised the *Sarvodaya Samaj* people against voting, and joining political parties. They must do only *lokashikshan* (awakening of the people) about their rights. He never accepted government as a change agent in the society. He was for *Swarajya* (Self-rule) and not *Surajya* (good government). All these facts were known to the people and accepted by them. Vinoba's

aversion to electoral politics was very well known.

But because of the Emergency, when the political system faced great difficulties, politicians wanted Vinoba to help by siding with them against Indira Gandhi. They wanted him to be partisan in their favour. In fact, he was observing silence (*maun*) for one year from 25 December, 1974, six months before the Emergency.

As I told you in my earlier letter, Vinoba started his fast unto death for *Goraksha* in 1976. Cow-slaughter was an issue on which if the people's view or opinion were taken, it would be in favour of a ban. No true democratic leader who knows the people's nerve can go against the people's will. Vinoba staked his life for cow protection. Indira Gandhi, who could bundle all opposition leaders into jail and could not care less, rushed to Pavnar, promised Central Government action and ended Vinoba's fast. As a politician she did nothing thereafter. With the people's support, one man with his life at stake could move the government which was impervious to political opposition. Jayaprakash said, "This proves that Vinoba has a great moral influence on the country, even a dictatorial government cannot ignore him."(1)

In 1977 elections, Indira Gandhi lost her support all over the country. Vinoba fasted unto death for the second time in 1979 when Morarji Desai was a prime Minister. Morarji promised to support Vinoba who ended his fast, but Morarji lost his power in 1979. The Central Law on Cow-slaughter did not come about.

People's power was asserted at both times first in 1977 and then in 1980. The people had voted for a political ideology. They had not voted for Total Revolution. But one frail man who put his life behind the people's will proved successful twice! Both Prime Ministers were complete politicians. Why did they submit to his pressure? Because it was the people's will. And democracy means people's will. Vinoba proved it *without* party politics. Party politics was not his language. That was not his way. He proved that in a democracy if the genuine people's will is projected the government has

to come to terms with it. The government can be changed. **The real need is to project the desires of the people and not those of some people, factions or politicians.** Changing people in power means very little. We must change their thinking.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 43

25th November, 1990

My dear Pranav,

There is one more episode in Vinoba's life which I must tell you about. Immediately after emergency was declared by Indira Gandhi on 25th June, 1975, Shri Vasant Sathe, then Minister for Information and Broadcasting went to meet Vinoba at Pavnar. Vinoba was observing his one year of silence from 25th December, 1974. Sathe went to Vinoba to seek his opinion about the emergency.

Vinoba showed Sathe a page from the *Mahabharata* titled "*Anushasan Parva*" (chapter on discipline). Since he would not speak, Sathe as Minister of Information and Broadcasting told the world through AIR, Doordarshan and the newspapers, that Vinoba had indicated his approval emergency by calling it a Chapter of Discipline. Everyone swallowed this interpretation by Sathe. That was the reason why Vinoba was called "*Sarkari Saint*" (government patronised saint).

This one action of Vinoba was used by politicians in power to full extent. *Sarva Seva Sangh*, which always transacted its business with unanimous resolutions, split. Most people went along with Jayaprakash Narayan and very few remained with Vinoba.

For all members of *Sarvodaya Samaj* this was a testing time. The 1977 election victory was attributed to the slogan

of Total Revolution. They felt that JP was right, and that they were vindicated. People elected the Janata Party to power. Indira Gandhi was totally routed in the general election of 1977. Humiliation was heaped on Vinoba. He remained steadfast in his views. He showed no bitterness. His love for JP, and JP's love for him remained unchanged.

Within 28 months, the Janata Party could not survive in power. In the 1980 election, Indira Gandhi came back to power. Vinoba after his year of silence explained that what he meant by *Anushasan* (discipline) was the *anushasan* decided by *Acharyakul*. This he had described in detail earlier in his concept of *Acharya Kula*. The *Acharyas* who are non-partisan, not interested in political power but in social welfare should decide the rules of discipline and the government should only implement them. This he had described in detail earlier in his concept of *Acharya Kula* in 1968.

A man who shunned politics all his life, who advised against politics was dragged into party politics by clever politicians. His name was misused, but he remained steadfast. The words "*Anushasan parva*" and "*Sarkari Sant*" became popular epithets to describe Vinoba. Sadly it all turned meaningless. JP died with remorse for the exploitation of the idea of Total Revolution. Politicians were interested in power: total revolution and JP were tools in their hands.

Politicians also used JP for partisan ends and dumped his advice once they were in power. People's power turned sour. It all happened in just three years. JP died as a disheartened man. Like Gandhi, he was killed, though metaphorically, by his followers.

Vinoba, inspite of much vilification, remained aloof and effective till the end. He did not get into politics, though many of his followers ditched him during emergency. He remained Vinoba till the end.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole





## Letter 44

2nd December, 1990

My dear Pranav,

Vinoba always believed in reconciling different view points and different *darsanas*, using the technique of gentle persuasion. "*Abhidheyam param samyam*" (The aim was to achieve maximum equality) was his motto.

He was a great student of religious literature. Jnaneshwar, Tukaram, Tulsidas, Kabir, Mirabai, Madhav Deva, Thiruvalluvar and many other *Bhaktas* were his source of inspiration. He learnt Arabic to read the Koran.

One of his important achievements is his edited version of all the great religious texts. He kept the most significant parts of each book, according to his views. He published these books in Marathi and Hindi. Later, they were also translated into other languages. It seems a very simple and easy job. In reality it was not so.

Vinoba summarised *Naam Ghosha* in 1962 and in 1963 he published "Koran Saar" (summary of Koran) in Marathi. In 1964 he prepared Texts of *Manushasanam* (summary of Manu Smriti), *Vedanta Sudha*, *Vinayanjali* and *Gurubodhsar*.

In 1967, he completed his book, "Essence of Christianity". In 1968 he published '*Rgveda Saar*' and in 1969, *Ashtadashi* (eighteen Upanisads) *Chayan*. He published '*Samanasutta*' (Jain Texts) in 1975.

He had given up his name and started signing as "*Ram Hari* since 25th August, 1974.

Some religious people consider all these efforts as sacrilegious. But Vinoba was a deeply religious man. His efforts did not give offence to anybody, **as he was interested in finding out genuine similarities and was perceptive to good from all sources. His *Sarvadharm Prathana*** is a classic example of this idea of finding the highest common factor in all religious teachings. It is a string of

God's names as believed in by all religions.

In September 1962, Vinoba was allowed access to Assam through East Pakistan, as he was walking on foot for his bhoodan. Pakistan never had good relations with India. Vinoba was in a position to appeal to the heart of East Pakistani farmers as easily as he was in a position to do so everywhere else in India. And they responded equally well.

Vinoba said that his idea of India consisted of A B C as triangle, where A stood for Afghanistan, B for Burma, and C for Ceylon. He considered this landmass or sub-continent as one cultural unit. Its religions may be different, but culture remains the same. It is like a "common European home" for Europe. On 13th September, 1962 he suggested the idea of India-Pakistan Confederation as a solution to the problem of political divisions. He explained this idea in Rangpur in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). He wanted it as a first step towards World Confederation or *Jai Jagat*.

Vinoba's holistic approach and very deep perception is clear in all his minor and major campaigns. His capacity to interpret old idioms in new contexts was remarkable. I have written to you from time to time about it.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 45

9th December, 1990

My dear Pranav,

Gopal Krishna Gokhale, a great statesman and parliamentarian was a prominent leader in the early part of the twentieth century. He was a contemporary of Lokmanya Bal Gandhar Tilak. Their approaches to the betterment of India were poles apart. Gokhale was a "gradualist", and he wanted the consti-

tutional way to be used for the improvement of life in India. Tilak wanted *Swaraj*. Once India were free she can take care of herself.

Mahatma Gandhi came under the spell of Gokhale who wanted to "spiritualise" politics. Gandhi followed him, interested not only in achieving *Swaraj* but was careful about the means. He was careful not only about ends but also the means. He insisted on Truth and non-violence and *Satyagraha* as the method of achieving independence. All political actions of Gandhi were consistent with his emphasis on using the right means to achieve the right ends.

Vinoba took this idea of "spiritualising" politics a step further. He said, **"Politics assumed the semblance of spiritualisation before political power was gained. As soon as political power came within grasp, this semblance vanished...."**

"People tell me that treading the path of Gandhiji I should take up the task of spiritualising politics. I tell them that I want to end politics itself. I have no desire to turn a stone into Shiva and then worship it. Put the stone into your pocket, I say, and worship the God that dwells in you. There was a time for spiritualisation of stone. That time is now gone. It will not do now to worship the stone with sandal paste and ignore the starving millions before us...."

... While reflecting on the spiritualisation of politics it occurs to me that in the process politics does not remain intact, it is destroyed. Its place is taken by *Lokaniti* (people's power). With freedom has come the rule of the people. Politics cannot survive its spiritualisation. Just as when you try to ignite wood it burns up. You cannot apply fire to wood and at the same time make it retain its character as wood. It is not possible to retain both the process of combustion and wood. Only in burning up will wood give light and warmth. When business is conducted by reference to majority and minority, we cannot spiritualise politics and at the same time keep it intact. It is now appropriate to say, "that politics is outdated. The days of politics are over."(1)

As a student of Mathematics and a very consistent logician, Vinoba formulated the following proposition:

Science + Politics = Destruction or Annihilation

Science + Spirituality = Sarvodaya(2)

More in my next letter.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## *Letter 46*

16th December, 1990

My dear Pranav,

You know that in India we have many regional languages, hundreds of dialects, besides English and other international languages. Each language group has its own beauty and script. In addition to this, it has a great possessive feeling amongst the people. After all, language is a very great emotional bond. It is a basis of fellow feeling and togetherness.

India is blessed with several languages. Each group claims to be superior to the others. Literature and the cultural traditions of a society are expressed through its language.

English was the official language of the British and it was thrust on the various peoples of our country from 1835. As a common factor of oppression, it was a point of hatred during the freedom struggle. But due to its rich cultural heritage, it also became a link language between educated Indians. As transportation acquired speed, people started freely moving about in the four corners of the country. English became a strong link language, and it continues to be so even today. But we should not forget that it still is a language mastered by only about 5% of Indians.

The rest of the people transact their business in their regional languages.

With the advent of democracy it was but natural that the people wanted their government to function in their own language. In democracy it cannot be otherwise. In every nationality, language is a major factor. The new India was divided into various linguistic states before 1960.

Vinoba organised his *bhoodan padayatra* during those turbulent days when people rose in great agitation in favour of their language and of linguistic states. All the major Indian languages are rich in their cultural heritage. Most of the Indian languages have a strong association with Sanskrit. They include Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada. The real distinction is with Tamil, but that too is studded with Sanskrit words.

In America there are several states but one language, "American". So is the case in other European countries, USSR, China, and Japan. To have one common language for India is very difficult. English and Hindi are the two official languages. How does one bring about national cohesion?

Vinoba suggested an idea. He said that while in Europe each language exists in a separate nation, India is one nation with several major languages. Many Indian languages are spoken by many more people than languages in the European countries. Vinoba considered this diversity as an asset and not as a problem.

He made another suggestion. **He said that all Indian languages should adopt *Devanagari*** as an additional script. Please note, Pranav, that Vinoba is not talking of a common script in place of the existing ones. He said, that *Devanagari* should be used as an additional script. He suggested some changes in the present *Devanagari* script and called it *Lokanagari*".

I will write more about it in my next letter.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 47

23rd December, 1990

My dear Pranav,

In my previous letter I wrote to you about Vinoba's idea of a common alternative script. In practice, it means Gujarati would be written in its present script as well as it can be written in *Devanagari*. So would Telugu, Kannada, Tamil, Malyalam and other languages to be written.

All North Indian languages from Kashmiri, Assamese, to Marathi have developed from Sanskrit. Hindi, Marathi and Sanskrit have a common *Devanagari* script. It involves almost 30 crores of people. Bengali, Oriya, Assamese and Gujarati, could easily adopt *Devanagari*.

**Languages will continue to be separate, but once they are expressed in a common script you will start realising that there are many common words, constructions and proverbs in the Indian languages than one has imagined.**

"*Maitri*" a journal brought out by Brahmavidya Mandir at Pavnar, publishes its Kannada edition in *Devanagari* script. *Bhoomiputra*, a Gujarati journal published from Baroda devotes a few pages to Gujarati articles in the *Devanagari* script.

I have also made some efforts in this direction. I am the Editor of the House Magazine published by the company for which I work. We include articles in Bengali, Kannada and Gujarati in the *Devanagari* script. Most of them are easily understood by people who do not know these languages. Since they can read the script they can understand the contents to a large extent. Often the same root word sounds different because it is pronounced differently. Script poses no such problem.

This should not really surprise people. In Europe, the Romanscript with some small adaptations is used for all printed materials, road signs, and so on. Languages are very different,

but the script used is more or less the same.

*Devanagari* as an alternative script for all Indian languages was advocated by Vinoba. Once people start reading each others language they will see many common factors in them. Culturally, India is one nation. It is an Ancient Hindu culture where most of the rituals and practices are common. This commonality is very essential to our culture.

Vinoba was advocating this idea of a common script when there was a clamour for reorganisation of the country on the basis of languages. In his own way, he had an important dream. He said that since China and Japan still use a pictographic script, they also need to adopt an additional script. If India uses a common script, China and Japan may also find that *Devanagari* is a more standardised script, suitable for modern machine languages with only one sign for one alphabet. Computer users are already finding Sanskrit an easier language for computing than others.

**Vinoba said, "If the Roman is the script of the West, *Devanagari* will be the script of the East tomorrow."**

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 48

30th December, 1990

My dear Pranav,

The *Gita* had a great influence on Vinoba. It has been commented upon by many people in India and abroad. Shankarcharya wrote his commentary on it. So did Lokmanya Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi and Vinoba. Each one interpreted it in his own way. The influence of the *Gita* on Vinoba was manifold.

Vinoba rated the *Gita* on par with his mother. In Marathi alone there are 65 translations of it. Vinoba's mother wanted to

have one done by him. He could not complete it in her lifetime. He published his translation, in *samashloki* (the same metre) in 1931. He called it *Gitai* (Mother Gita). The most important part of it is its Introduction. Vinoba says, "*Gitai* is like my mother. I am her child who does not know. She picks me up as and when I stumble and cry". Vinoba's is the most simple and direct translation of the *Gita* giving the full rich meaning of the original. This is *Gitai*, the largest selling Marathi Book to date. It was not translated into any other languages till Vinoba's death. It is a standard text book in all his six *ashrams* and his students learned it in Marathi.

The second important book by Vinoba on the *Gita* is the *Gita-Pravachane* or (Talks on *Gita*). It has been translated into almost all the languages of India and in English. This is a very lucid and logical interpretation of the *Gita*, with remarkable precision. It is a record of *Pravachans* (talks) Vinoba gave to jail mates in Dhule Jail from February 1932 to June 1932, on every Sunday. It was taken down verbatim by Sane Guruji. It has a very remarkable, directly appealing and simple style of its own. Vinoba gives here his interpretation of the *Gita*. **The most important concept he expounds in it is *akarma* (non-action).** That is his personal contribution. Pranav, you must read this whole book when you can. It will make a lasting impression on you. It has changed the course of many lives in India. Both *Gitai* and *Gita Pravachane* were considered as finite works and Vinoba did not change them.

Vinoba's third book on the *Gita* is *Gitai Shabdarth*. (Literal meanings of words in the *Gitai*) is a compilation, where he has gone deep into the implications of many key words.

The last book on *Gita* is *Gitai Chintanika*. This is a remarkable book. It was continuously evolving. Vinoba used to create many new interpretations and ideas on the *Gitai* virtually every day. This was the book of a man who was continuously evolving, ever changing, yet essentially the same. From the viewpoint of the study of Vinoba as an individual this is an important book.

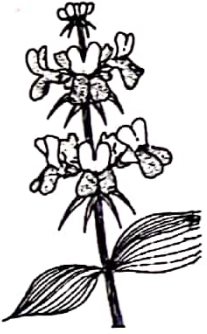


So Pranav, you will eventually see Vinoba as fully immersed by the *Gita*. The *Mahabhashya* of Shankarcharya, the *Gitarasya* of Tilak, Aurobindo's commentary, the *Jnaneshwari* of Jnanadeva were all a staple diet for him. Still, he tackled the *Gita* in four different ways.

*Gita* is a veritable treasure-house of distilled wisdom from the *Upanisads*. It has influenced many lives. Vinoba's life was one illustrious example of that influence.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 49

6th January, 1990

My dear Pranav,

As Vinoba was greatly influenced by the *Gita*, he used to say that Vinoba as a human body would vanish, but *Gitai*, perhaps would remain. His humility was remarkable. He does not say that *Gita Pravachane* or the *Gitai Chintanika* will remain. They are his commentaries or interpretations. They are his *darsanas*. The reality is *Gita*. And *Gitai* is its translation. Even amongst his *Gita* books he wants to be remembered for his translation of the *Gita*. Such small glimpses of a person makes him small or big in the eyes of others.

In his early years Vinoba was a hard-headed thinker. He was like an uncut diamond. He mellowed after his *bhoo dan padayatra*. He used to be very abrasive and curt in his communication with others. In later years, his intellect remained **sharp but his expression mellowed**. His *sutra* was : **Satya** (truth), **Prem** (love) and **Karuna** (compassion).

Annual literary conferences of Marathi used to depend on the donations of the rich, and therefore these annual conferences

were irregular. The *Ashadhi Yatra* was an ancient event where all the saint poets of Maharashtra used to assemble. This *Yatra* of Pandharpur has taken place with clock-work precision for the last two thousand years. People observe a fast on *Mahaekadashi*. They go to Pandharpur on foot and on empty stomachs. This *yatra* was actually a literary conference where saint poets would meet each other.

In order to highlight the dependence of modern literary conferences on donors and their irregularity compared to the clock-work regularity of the *Maha Ekadashi Yatra*, Vinoba expressed his views in one sentence. He said that modern conferences are based on rice, while *Ashadhi* is based on fasting. *Ashadhi* therefore meets regularly. The real pungency of Vinoba's sentence can be felt only in Marathi.

At the end of his talks on *Gita* Vinoba used a beautiful simile. As long as a man is searching for meaning in his life he continues talking of "I", (or "main" in Hindi). He goes on calling "*Main, Main*" like a living goat. He is full of this ego or pride in himself. But as he approaches nearer the ultimate reality (*Brahman*), and dies, he discards this body as "I". Like the same proverbial goat he starts calling "*tubi*" "*tubi*", "you" "you" (*twam, twam*) only. The intestines of the goat when used for musical sitar the same goat changes the tune from "*Main*", "*Main*" to "*Tubi*" "*Tubi*". Pranav, when you read this in the Indian context in Hindi or Marathi, you will realise how beautifully Vinoba has played on the words "*Main*" and "*tubi*". He took this quote from Dadu, a saint poet in Hindi(1).

He ended his talks on that note. That again is the *Mahavakya* of Shankaracharya and *Adwait* philosophy: "*Tat Twam Asi*" "That thou art".

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 50

13th January, 1991

My dear Pranav,

Another concept Vinoba created is in relation to social organisation. As usual, being basically a walking university, he put it before the common people in their own idiom. The impact was long-lasting. Words have to be few, but when used effectively they linger in people's minds for a long time. Vinoba had a great felicity with words.

Vinoba compared society with a hand(1) We have five fingers. He said that these fingers are part of the same hand but they have different roles. First take the thumb; he called it *Jana-Sakti* or people's Power. It is the sturdiest finger, a collective sturdy power of the people.

Then there is the small finger. It is the smallest. It is the power of good men, or *Sajjan Sakti*. It is an inner urge, It keeps society on the right path. Yet it is small in size and looks weak. These *Sajjans* are the *sevaks* or servants of the people. They have a mission to live life according to the dictates of conscience and moving in the right direction. The base consists of moral and ethical principles such as *Satya* (Truth) and *Ahimsa* (Nonviolence). The servants of the people live by these principles and so acquire a distinctive power. Though apparently weak, they have the major role of a small finger.

The third is the index finger. This stands for the role of *Acharyas*. They show the right path to society. Thinkers and scholars have to guide all. While keeping themselves aloof, they study the events in the world disinterestedly and place their opinions before the world. They have to be aloof, discerning and weighing good and bad points, pointing out the right way.

The middle finger is reserved for the enterprising and the rich. This represents *Mahajan-Sakti*. Businessmen, industrialists and

entrepreneurs who are a power by themselves. Gandhiji put the idea of trusteeship for such people. They should not consider themselves as owners of wealth but as trustees of the wealth for society.

The fifth finger is called "*Anamika*" in Sanskrit. It means 'nameless'. That is the role of *Danda-Sakti* or Government. By itself, it does nothing, but it co-ordinates all the other fingers. Its role is to bring together all these powers in society. That is the role of Government. Today, it may have assumed supremacy of power, but its real role is that of *anamika*. It should occupy less and less importance and should remain power in name only. Hence Vinoba compared it with *anamika*.

All these five fingers make a hand a complete power. It can move mountains, provided it works like a hand as a united whole. Each finger is a power in itself but effective only when they are together.

**Vinoba called this *Pancha* (five) *Jana-Sakti* (peoples' power). *Jana*, *Sevakjana* or *Sajjana* (social workers), *Vidvat-jana* (*Acharyas*), *Mahajana* (rich people) and the government. Together they make a *Pancha-jana-sakti*.**

More in my next letter.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 51

20th January, 1991

My dear Pranav,

All said and done, the name of Vinoba is linked in the minds of people with *bhoodan*. His other contributions, which are mainly in the field of ideas did not get adequate exposure. Even *bhoodan* was treated as a Gandhian fad. Nobody could understand what it meant.

**Vinoba was a Sarvodayi.** He believed in the development of all (*sarva*). He was not a champion of class or of any one part of society. Poor or rich, worker or owner everyone needs to develop. Vinoba wanted the all-round development of everyone. And his ideas were not restricted to monetary or material prosperity. A man must develop his own 'self'. He must enlarge it and cover the universe, bringing all living beings into it.

Any movement, therefore, Vinoba could consider as ultimately aimed at this self-realisation, this *Atmajnana*. Seeing this connexion of the self (*atma*) to the Universe (*Brahman*) was his aim from the beginning.

Vinoba was therefore in a position to see all the basic assumptions differently. He did not divide the people into categories of 'haves' and 'have-nots'. He treated all as 'haves'. He did not, therefore, look at people as classes or as parts of society. He did not believe in class conflict, class-war or 'party politics'. He was for all.

Once you start looking for the good of all, the method of thinking in terms of majority/minority is not adequate for social decisions. *Sarva Seva Sangh* therefore used to take decisions on unanimity. This approach proved inadequate when emergency divided the *Sarvodaya* movement into two camps. Still, the validity of unanimity or at least a consensus in decision-making does not become irrelevant. Even today, in the competitive, party-ridden political system, within a party decisions are taken by consensus. The concept of polarisation, antagonism and adversarial relations is essentially a western *Darshana*. In China and Japan, harmony is considered more important than justice. To divide issues, people or ideas into yes/no, right/wrong, and generally in categories is a western way of thinking.

Japanese Management differs from American Management on this basic assumption. We see it in every sphere. Productivity is inspired and not extracted. Unity of interest is established and nurtured. There are many applications and uses of this *Darsana* in our day-to-day life.

This innate Indianness was a special aspect of Vinoba's

ideas. He did not insist on anything. He was busy sowing ideas and spreading ideas. Many people were inspired by their innate strength. They succeeded or failed according to their strength.

Vinoba put his emphasis on the concept of *Sarvodaya* in all walks of life. In his life, for thirteen years of *Bhoodan-Yatra* and another four years on foot, he gave almost 20,000 talks. And what were his *Sarvodaya* topics? Vinoba put it beautifully; "When you build a house, you keep a bed-room, a study and a kitchen, but do you keep a separate room for air? You need air everywhere. Similarly, *Sarvodaya* needs no separate room, it is everywhere. It has a place in every sphere and walk of life. I am moving for a total revolution. Nothing short of total revolution will do for me. Each and every aspect of life has to be touched with the alchemy of *Sarvodaya* to achieve total revolution(1).

More in my next letter.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



## Letter 52

27th January, 1991

My dear Pranav,

It all started as a Joke. Vinoba is a great influence on my life. Veer Savarkar and Vinoba Bhave are the two Marathi authors, thinkers, revolutionaries and literary writers, who have dominated my life. For many, they appear to be at two different ideological poles. I do not think so. Both have influenced my thinking.

Whenever I talk to people I quote from Savarkar or Vinoba. But more often, Vinoba. Your grandfather

and my guru Dr. N.H. Atthreya, used to tell me every now and then that I should write in English about Vinoba and his ideas. I kept promising him that I would but failed repeatedly to do so.

In January, 1990 one Sunday morning, he told me in his own gentle persuasive style that I should write to him a letter every week, regularly telling him something about Vinoba, his life and his ideas. That was something which I could not resist. Then, as a smart move, I said: it was not much use writing about a great man to an elderly person. I could write to his grandson. It would be more useful to him, and for a longer time-span. He readily agreed.

That is how this letter-writing started on Sunday, the 4th February, 1990. It continued for a whole year and this is the last letter, dated 27th January, 1991.

**The main purpose of writing these letters is not to write anything definitive about ideas. This is not a scholarly work. It is an introduction to a fascinating, truly Indian, bhoomiputra mind.** If these letters induce you to read any of the original books or talks by Vinoba their purpose will be more than fulfilled.

Vinoba had many enchanting original ideas. He was a true bhoomiputra. He was exposed to Western thought but his understanding of India was that of an insider. Even Mahatma Gandhi started looking at Indian life, after his South African journey, from the eyes of a Westerner. Vinoba was totally desi. He was a Viswa-Manusha but rooted deep in Indian soil. He was not parochial, but a deep Hindu thinker.

Vinoba's ideas therefore have a special fragrance of India's mother earth. My purpose was to

introduce a truly Indian Mind of high calibre to you, Pranav. If you read his talks and books in the later years of your life, and even if you reject every idea in these letters the basic purpose of dissemination of ideas, Vichar Sasan, and Vichar-Prasar is achieved. Vinoba himself used to say that very little remains once a person is dead. Vinobaji died on 15th November, 1982. Now he remains as pure thought or idea. I have throughout referred to him as Vinoba. Vinobaji was a human being whom I respected, and met only once in 1976 when he was being vilified all around. I have interpreted his Goraksha fast unto death in one of my letters. His human body (Deha) is no more. What remains is pure, bodyless thought. That is why I have called him Vinoba and not Vinobaji.

As a Hindu I have to pay three debts: Deva-rna, Pitr-rna and Acharya-rna. These letters are my offering to Vinoba as a "Acharya Tarpana by Vichar-Prasar.

With love,

Yours,  
L.N. Godbole



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- 2) Random Reflections P. 17 Item 17 (101) Original Marathi Item reference.
- 3) Ahinsecha Shudh (Marathi), Paramdham Prakashan, Pavnar 1988. P. 162
- 4) Vichar Pothi (Marathi) P. 53 Item 442

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- 1) *Maitri*, 12 Feb, 1990 Brahma Vidya Mandir, Pavnar, P. 66
2. *Maitri*, 12 Feb, 1990 P. 67.

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- 1) *Vinoba Saraswat* (Marathi), Sahitya Akademi, 1987 PP. 12-19

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- 1) *Lokaniti* (Marathi) Paramdham Prakashan, Pavnar, P. 11

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## PRARTHANA

- 1) Aum Tat Sat Shri Narayan Tu Purushottam Guru Tu
- 2) Siddha Buddha Tu Skanda Vinayak Savita Pavak Tu
- 3) Brahma Mazda Tu Yahva Shakti Tu Eshupita Prabhu Tu
- 4) Rudra Vishnu Tu Ram-Krishna Tu Raheem Tao Tu
- 5) Vasudeo Go Vishvaroop Tu Chidanand Hari Tu
- 6) Adviteeya Tu Akal Nirbhay Atmalinga Shiva Tu

## SARVA DHARMA VACHAN

- 1) Aum Dehe, Prane Mane  
Varaneeya Te Savityache  
Tej Devache, Dhyavuya  
Prero Buddhis Amuchya (Thrice)
- 2) He Prabho, Neye Maj  
Asatatoon Satyakade  
Tamantoon Jyotikade  
Mrutyuntoon Amrutakade
- 3) Jaisa Varaneeya Prabhu, Taisa Chi Satyen Guru  
Su-Manachi Tya Denagi, Jo Kari Deva Karya Jagi  
Tya Daivi Shakti Vari, Jo Deenanche Sahya Kari
- 4) Namoo Siddhas  
Namoo Arhatas  
Samyag Darshana Jnana Chritrya  
Ha Mokshamarga
- 5) Paap Te Talave, Shubh Acharave  
Svachitta Shodhave, Mhanatibuddha
- 6) Shejaryavar Prem Karoo  
Shatruvarahi Prem Karoo  
Parasparavar Prem Karoo
- 7) Arambhi Devachenaav, Krupala Jo Kanava Loo  
Stuti Tya Devachi, Prabhu Jo Vishvacha  
Krupalu Kanavalu Swami/Shevatchya Divasacha  
Tuzi Karv Bhakti, Tuzich Re Yachana  
Saral Marga Dakheev Tu Amha  
Tyan Vari Karitoshi Krupa Tyancha;  
Na Jyan Vari Tvza Prakop Utare  
Nawa Bhramit Je Tyancha.
- 8) Auinay Door Kari Deva  
Man Mavallo, Trishna Jiro  
Bhoot Daya Pasaro

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**Letter 13**

- 1) *Talks on the Gita* Vinoba, Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan Rajghat, Varanasi 1. 1982 PP. 75 & 76

**Letter 14**

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- 1) *The Third Power*, Vinoba (Fr. Marjor Sykes), Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, Rajghat, Varanasi, 1972 PP. 23 & 24.

**Letter 20**

- 1) *The Third Power*, Vinoba (Tr.Marjorie Sykes), Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, Rajghat, Varanasi 221 001, PP. 26 & 27.
- 2) *Gitarabasya*, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Tilak Bandhu, Pune 411 002, P. 383 (Mahabharat, Adi Parva, 115-36 and Sabha Parva 61.11)
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**Letter 23**

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**Letter 24**

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- 3) *ibid* P. 49

**Letter 25**

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**Letter 26**

- 1) Based on his lecture at Chaturvedamangalam in Tamilnadu on 19.02.1957 *Bhoodan Ganga*, Part 9, Paramdham Vidya-Peeth Prakashan, Pavnar 1958, P. 183.

**Letter 27**

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## *Appendix 1*

### *Who Is Vinoba Bhave? (M.K. Gandhi)*

He is an undergraduate having left college after my return to India in 1916. He is a Sanskrit scholar. He joined the Ashram almost at its inception. He was among the first members. In order to better qualify himself he took one year's leave to prosecute further studies in Sanskrit. And practically at the same hour at which he had left the Ashram a year before, he walked into it without notice. I had forgotten that he was due to arrive that day. He has taken part in every menial activity of the Ashram from scavenging to cooking. Though he has a marvelous memory and is a student by nature, he has devoted the largest part of his time to spinning in which he has specialized as very few have. He believes in universal spinning being the central activity which will remove the poverty in the villages and put life into their deadness. Being a born teacher he has been of the utmost assistance to Ashadevi in her development of the scheme of education through handicrafts. Sri Vinoba has produced a text-book taking spinning as the handicraft. It is original in conception. He has made scoffers realize that spinning is the handicraft par excellence which lends itself to being effectively used for basic education.

He has revolutionized takli spinning and drawn out its hitherto unknown possibilities. For perfect spinning probably he has no rival in all India.

He has abolished every trace of untouchability from his heart. He believes in communal unity with the same passion that I have. In order to know the best mind of Islam he gave one year to the study of the Quran in the original. He therefore learnt

Arabic. He found this study necessary for cultivating a living contact with the Muslims living in his neighbourhood.

He has an army of disciples and workers who would rise to any sacrifice at his bidding. He is responsible for producing a young man who has dedicated himself to the service of lepers. Though an utter stranger to medicine, this worker has by singular devotion mastered the method of treatment of lepers and is now running several clinics for their care. Hundreds owe their cure to his labours. He has now published a handbook in Marathi for the treatment of lepers. Vinoba was for years Director of the *Mahila Ashram* (an Ashram for women) in Wardha. His devotion to the cause of *Daridranarayan* (the God of the poor) took him first to a village near Wardha, and now he has gone still further and lives in Pavnar, five miles from Wardha, from where he has established contact with villagers through the disciples he has trained.

He believes in the necessity of the political independence of India. He is an accurate student of history. But he believes that real independence of the villagers is impossible without his constructive programme of which khadi (handspun, handwoven cloth) is the centre. He believes that the *charkha* (spinning wheel) is the most equitable outward symbol of non-violence which has become an integral part of his life. He has taken an active part in the previous *Satyagraha* (non-violent civil disobedience) campaigns. He has never been in the limelight on the political platform. With many co-workers he believes that silent constructive work with civil disobedience in the background is far more effective than the already heavily crowded political platform. And he thoroughly believes that non-violent resistance is impossible without a heart belief in and practice of constructive-work.

*\*(The above was published in the 'Harijan' of October 20, 1940. It was written by Gandhiji to introduce to the public Sri Vinoba Bhave, whom he had chosen, as the best representative on non-violent civil resistance to war. Sri Vinoba was to start the campaign of individual civil disobedience, and in the first instance it was to be confined to him only.)*

\*\*The correspondence that ensued you find in appendix 2.

## Appendix 2

### Vinobaji's "Report"

#### **Most revered Bapuji**

I left the Ashram a year ago to recoup my health. I had intended to stay in Wai for two or three months and then return, but though a whole year has passed away, nothing has been heard from me. Questions, therefore, may have arisen whether I am ever to come back and even whether I am alive or dead. I must admit, I am myself entirely to blame in the matter. I had, however, written a letter or two to Mama Phadke requesting him to write to me immediately if any satyagraha was to be launched. I had told him, I would give up everything to join it, but otherwise I would stay on, out of the Ashram. If anybody suspected that I was a deserter, even there the fault is mine alone, because I am averse to correspondence. I must, however, state here that the Ashram has not only captivated me, but I have also the ingrained conviction that I was really born for the Ashram. Why then, did I loiter away a whole year outside the Ashram precincts?

Early in my life, when I was only ten, I took a solemn vow to observe Brahmacharya and dedicate my life to the country. Later on, during my high school days, I was fascinated by the teachings of the Bhagavad-Gita. My father, however, asked me to take up French as my second language, but that did not abate my zest to learn the Gita. I began to study Sanskrit privately at home that very day, and I was resolved upon studying the Vedanta and other books on philosophy whenever possible. When, with your permission, I came to Wai, I saw that there was an excellent opportunity for me to study the Vedanta. One Shri Narayan Shastri Marathe, a Brahmachari all his life, is teaching the Vedanta and



other Scriptures here. I was seized with a passion to learn the Upanishads, etc., from him. Now let me write what I have done during all this time.

My work with respect to my craving for knowledge which kept me out so long:

Study of (1) the *Upanishads*, (2) the *Gita*, (3) *Brahmasutra Shankarabhashya*, (4) *Mansumriti*, and (5) *Patanjali Yogadarshan*. I went through, besides, (1) *Nyayasutra*, (2) *Vaisheshiksutra* and (3) *Yajnavalkyasmriti*. My desire to study our religious books has now been fully gratified. I can now read whatever I want to in Sanskrit without any extraneous aid.

Then about the recuperation of health for which I went to Wai. I had made it a rule to walk ten to twelve miles. Then began grinding 6 to 8 seers (12 to 15 lbs) cereals with a hand-mill. At present I do 300 *namaskars* and take a walk every day for physical exercise. This has improved my health.

Regarding my diet: I have never taken other condiments, but, for the first six months I used to take salt. I am now on a saltless and spiceless diet. I have started taking milk. Many experiments proved that I cannot go without milk. But my desire to give it up, if possible, persists. For a month, I had nothing but milk, lemon and bananas, but I found that I was getting weak. This is my present diet: Milk 1 lbs., jowar chapattis 2, bananas 4 or 5, lemon 1, when available. When I come to the Ashram, I intend to regulate my diet on your advice. I am not tempted by any other food for the sake of its taste only. All the same, I cannot help feeling that my present diet is rather too luxurious. My daily expense over food, item by item is about: bananas and lemon 4 pice, chapattis 2, milk 5, total 11. I want to know from you what changes I should make. You will please write to me.

Other things done:

Took classes in (1) the *Gita*. Free tuition to six students of the whole gospel with full exposition of the verses. (2) *Jnaneshwari* (a big Marathi exposition on the Gita by Jananeshwar), 6 chapters, 4 students attended. (3) 9 *Upanishads* to two

students. (4) Hindi propaganda: I do not know Hindi well myself. But I used to read a Hindi newspaper to some students. (5) English to two students. (6) Excursions: nearly 400 miles on foot. Saw fortresses of historical fame such as Rajgarh, Sinhagarh, Torangarh, etc. (7) Used to hold during my tramps discourses on the *Gita*, which have come to 50 in all till now. Even now, I propose to foot it to Bombay and then take a train for Ahmedabad to rejoin the Ashram. A student, 26 years old, has been throughout with me in my journeys and he too is at present footing it out in my company. He is not inclined to study the *Gita* from anyone except myself. The latest date of my entry into the Ashram is *Chaitra Sudi 1* (the New Year's day in Maharashtra falling generally in April). (8) I started at Wai an institution called the *Vidyarthi Mandal* (students' association) and founded a library in connection with it. We, fifteen students and myself, formed a club of hand-grinders and our earnings were used in buying books for the library. We offered the same rate (1 pice for 2 lbs) as the local grinding mill, and thus could draw customers. Sons of even high-class families were members of the club. Wai is a centre of orthodoxy and since the hand-grinders were all Brahmin students studying in the high school, we were ridiculed by the public as faddists and fools. All the same, our grinding club continued for two months, and 400 books have been stocked in the library. (9) I tried very much to propagate the principles of the Ashram; I attended its annual celebration. (This celebration means nothing more than a meeting for comparison of the notes of members as to the work accomplished and the work to be done.) I put before them the idea of spreading Hindi and I have every reason to believe that the institution will take up the work. Since you have begun an effort for the propagation of Hindi, I may say that this institution in Baroda will be prepared to associate with you in the work.

And finally, I must state how I have behaved as an inmate of the Ashram. These are our vows: Control of the palate: I have already dealt with this vow during my reference in this letter to my dietetic experiments. Non-possession: a wooden dish (*thali*),

bowls, one *lota* (a small jug) belonging to the Ashram, dhoti, a blanket and books comprise all my paraphernalia. I have taken a vow not to use a shirt, a cap and a coat. I wrap my upper body also with a dhoti. I use only hand-woven clothes. Swadeshi (exclusive use of articles made in one's own country): I do not use a single foreign made article (but only if *swadeshi* is not taken in the expanded sense which you gave it in your speech at Madras). Truth, non-violence, Brahmacharya: I am sure that I have strictly observed these vows to the best of my understanding of them.

What more shall I write? In my dreams and in my waking hours, only one question haunts me: "Will God deign to take service from me?" I followed the rules of the Ashram (except one) and so, though the body may be roaming outside, I am, in reality, always in the Ashram. It is the ideal of my life. The one exception, alluded to above, is about self-cooking, i.e., about making chapattis myself. I tried to observe that rule also, but could not do so in my excursions.

If any question of offering satyagraha arises, say, against the hardships of the third-class passengers in railways, I will come immediately; otherwise, I have given you above the latest date of my arrival in the Ashram.

What are the changes that have been made in the Ashram? How many students are there? What is your scheme of national education? And what changes should I make in my diet? I am longing for advice on all these points. And you must write the reply yourself, in your own hand; that is the earnest and insistent prayer of this 'Vinoba,' your son, to whom you are no other than his revered father.

I will leave this town in a few days.

Vinoba's Pranam.

## *Gandhiji's Reply*

I do not know in what terms to praise you. Your love and your character fascinate me and so also your self-examination. I am not fit to measure your worth. I accept your own estimate and assume the position of a father to you. You seem almost to have met a long-felt wish of mine. In my view a father is, in fact, a father only when he has a son who surpasses him in virtue. A real son, likewise, is one who improves on what the father has done; if the father is truthful, firm of mind and compassionate, the son will be all this in a greater measure. This is what you have made yourself. I don't see that you owe your achievement to any effort of mine. Hence, I accept the role you offer to me as a gift of love. I shall strive to be worthy of it; and, if ever I become another Hiranyakashyapu, oppose me respectfully as Prahlad, who loved God, disobeyed him.

It is true as you say that, though outside the Ashram, you have scrupulously observed its rules. I never doubted that you would return. Besides, I had your written messages, read out by Mama. May God grant you long life, and use you for the uplift of India.

I don't see any need for changes in your diet just yet. Do not give up milk for the present. On the contrary, increase the quantity, if necessary.

About the railways, no satyagraha is required. What is wanted is intelligent workers to carry on propaganda. On the issue in Kheda District, satyagraha may possibly have to be offered. I am something of a tramp these days. In a day or two, I shall have to leave for Delhi.

More when you arrive. Everyone is looking forward to seeing you.

Blessings from Bapu.

# Appendix 3

## Books By And On Vinoba

### IN MARATHI

- Lokmanya Tilak Ynachya Jaminkichya Khatyadr Hakikat (1916)  
Upanishadaancha abhyas (1929)  
Gitai (1932)  
Madhukar (1936)  
Abhangvate (1940)  
Santanha prasad (1945)  
Gitai kosha (1946)  
Dyanadevachi Bhajane (1946)  
Namdevachi Bhajane (1946)  
Tera Divas (1948)  
Eknathachi Bhajane (1951)  
Nama Mala (1952)  
Simhavalokan (1953)  
Vichar pothi (1954)  
Shikshan vichar (1955)  
Krant Darshan (1956)  
Deeksha (1956)  
Jagatik itihasache ozerten Darshan (1956)  
Sampatti Daan (1957)  
Sahityakanchi hitguj (1957)  
Gita chintanika (1958)  
Samya sutra (1958)  
Bhoodan Ganga (1958)  
Maharastriyanshi Hitaguj (1958)  
Sthithapradnya Darshan (1959)  
Subashite (1960)

Mama Kosha - Navneet (1962)  
Thoughts on Education (1962)  
Gitai neethi katha (1963)  
Shanti sena (1963)  
Jagatik itihashche ozerten darshan (1963) Vinayak tatha Annasaheb  
Bapat (1964)  
Sarvodayachi Trividh Ghoshana (1964)  
Trividh Karyakram Maharashtraateel Karyakartgaha Uddeshan  
(1965)  
Satpurushachya Katha (1965)  
Sarvodayache Ghochara patra (1965)  
Sanyamachi santali (1965)  
Acharya kula (1967)  
Pandit Nehru Sanskriti Darshan (1967)  
Rigveda saar (1968)  
Teesri shakti (1969)  
Vinobancha Sahavasathen Majen Balapan (1969)  
Tukarmachi Bhajane (1973)  
Senapatinchaya Samadhivar Yanchaya Atthavan (1974)  
Mahamajinchya Sahavasathya Kahte and athavan (1974)  
Vishnu sahasranaam (1975)  
Vinayanjali (1978)  
Stree Shakti (1982)  
Christ Dharma saar (1983)  
Ahimsecha shodh (1988)  
Vinoba Charitra (1989)  
Loknitee (1990)  
Karan Saar (1991)  
Gita Pravachane (1992)  
Atma gyan annee vigyan (1993)  
Ashram path (1993)  
Gitai Marathi Gadyanuwad  
Eshavasya vrutti  
Ram naam ek chintan  
Vinobachi Maraprayan Yatra  
Goshthi roop Gita  
Vinobanchi Sahiya Drishi

Samyastue vritti sanskrit

### IN HINDI

Sarvodya ki aur (1954)

Sarvodya ki adhen (1956)

Prakkritik chikitsa kyo (1957)

Nisengopchon ashram uruli kanchan ka sankshipt parachay (1957)

Gurubodhsar (1957)

Sahitkanshi Hitaguj (1957)

Stita pradnya lakshan (1959)

Bhagwat Dhamma saar (1961)

Ashobhaniya psoters (1961)

Shanti sena (1963)

Sarvodaya aur samyavada (1965)

Sanyam ki Santali (1965)

Adhatma tattava (1968)

Ekadash vrat (1968)

Sapta Shaktiyan (1968)

Rigveda Saar (1968)

Teesri Shakti (1969)

Ashtradashi (1969) Manu Shasanam (1974)

Agyan Nivritti Sadhana ke Sahastra Pahalu (1974)

Vishnu Shasranama (1975)

Acarya kul prasnopanishad (1981)

Vinoba Jeevan aur karya (1984)

Nari ki Mahima (1992)

### IN GUJARATI

Saraj Sastra (1940)

Samya Sutra (1958)

Shanti ridayavayashta (1959)

Sarvodyan Rajnitee (1962)

Shanti

Snea (1963)

Adhyatma Darshan (1963)

Adhyatma Darshan 91963)

Darvodaya Vicharna (1965)

Acharya Kula (   
Third Power (1969)

**IN ENGLISH**

Random Reflections (1931)

Talks on Gita (1932)

Swaraj Sastra (1940)

Ishavasya Upanicad (1945)

The Steadfast Vision (1946)

Sarvodaya and Communism (1957)

Sarvodaya and Business Community by Donal Groom (1958)

Dhammapada (1961)

Thoughts on Education (1962)

Democratic Values (1962)

Vinoba and his mission (1962)

The Essence of Quoran (1963)

Shanti Sena (1963)

The Rigveda Saar (1968)

The Essence of Chrisitan Teachings (1972)

Vinoba on Gandhi (1973)

Vishnu Saahasranama (1975)

Women Power (1982)

Random Refletions (1963)

Talks on the Gita

These Books can be had from:

**GANDHI BOOK CENTRE**

Bombay Sarvodaya Mandal

Nana Chowk

Bombay 400 007.



**ABOUT THE BOOK:** In the form of 52 letters — one a week, written over a year — the author introduces some of the insightful thoughts of Vinoba to Pranav, a young man of twelve. Vinoba was a willing soldier, a keen student, a versatile scholar, a scintillating synthesizer, a social activist, a spiritual seeker and a great satyagrahi — all rolled into one. Every Indian, young and old, should have a feel of this great son of India.

Reading him is best and reading about him is the second best. The author hopes the reader will get sufficiently provoked to read Vinoba's writings.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** L.N. Godbole is a discerning and long term student of Vinoba Bhave. He has been a teacher and a company executive for many years. Currently, he is a consultant on corporate affairs. Shri Godbole holds a Masters degree in Commerce and Law and a Doctorate in Business Finance. He serves as a trustee in a few educational and tribal welfare trusts.

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