

The 13th All India Sarvodaya Sammelan

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

While I am thankful to my colleagues for the honour they have done me by asking me to preside over this Sammelan, I am doubtful about the wisdom of choosing a controversial person like me for such a non-controversial & high position. However, I hope I shall do nothing here that will embarrass any of you. Fortunately it is easy to do so, because according to tradition the opinions expressed from the chair at this conference are entirely personal testaments that commit no one else.

According to tradition, again, the president of the All India Sarvodaya Sammelan is not expected to say very much. Indeed, some of its past presidents made no opening speech at all. Whoever happened to be in the chair, it was Vinobaji who was expected to, and who did, make the central and guiding speech of every session. This was as it should have been. Without his guidance it would have been impossible for Sarvodaya to discover itself in the post-independence India. There was evidence to show that Sarvodaya was fast becoming a camp-follower of power-politics, and its constructive programme an appendage of official development programmes. That Sarvodaya had an independent and a creative role to play and that non-violence did not only mean a negative avoidance of violence, but a positive application of the force of love in order to transform man and human society, were ideas which would have remained dim and distant ideals, had not Vinoba entered upon the scene and provided us with leadership that is unique in intellectual probity, creative power and spiritual depth.

Unfortunately, since the last Sammelan we are not able to have Vinoba's personal guidance at our deliberations. By purposely keeping away, he is no doubt compelling us to do our thinking ourselves. This, of course, is desirable; otherwise, in the absence of a leader like him the stream of Sarvodaya thought would cease to be internally refreshed and renewed, ultimately drying up in the sterile sands of dogmatic disputation.

But even the absence of Vinobaji need not have occasioned any speech-making on my part as President of this Sammelan. Many valued friends, however, have pressed me not only to make a speech, but to make a prepared and, possibly, printed one.

It is thus, friends, that I venture to place before you a few thoughts for your consideration.

THE OUTLOOK FOR WORLD PEACE AND THE WORLD SHANTI-SENA

An important event that happened in this country since the last Sammelan was the Conference at Gandhigram of the 'War Resisters' International. It was the first conference in Asia of this vital peace organisation and was attended by a representative delegation of peace-makers drawn from all parts of the world, including Africa. The most important decision, as you might recall that this conference took was in regard to organisation of a World Peace Brigade or Vishwa Shanti-Sena.

Unfortunately the forces of peace in the world are not in such a state of organization that they can easily be mobilised for action. While dangerous developments have been taking place in different parts of the world, it has not been possible to make any appreciable progress, despite ~~mentat~~ efforts of the friends concerned, towards implementation of that decision. It has finally been arranged to call a ~~cons~~ meeting of leading peace-makers next

December at Partinico, Danilo Dolci's centre of activity in Sicily. This is undoubtedly encouraging, but exasperatingly slow. However, considering our own rate of progress at home, we have no right to complain.

There was also another, and a more comprehensive idea mooted at the W R I Conference. That was in connection with organisation of a world peoples' body as distinct from a united nation's body, such as there is at present in the form of the U N O. It was pointed out that the U N represents the governments and not the peoples of the world. For mutual understanding, co-operation and world peace it was more important that the peoples of the world came into mutual contact, than only their governments, which necessarily suffered from serious limitations. It will be recalled that Shri Shankar Rao Deo put forward this idea rather cogently in a recent contribution to the Bhoodan weekly. Intimations of the same idea have occurred repeatedly in Vinobaji's speeches over the past two years or so.

However, it makes me sad to report that so far no concrete step has been taken to further the idea in practice. It seems to me that in both these matters the Gandhi Peace Foundation could play a big role.

As an instance of people's action against war, should be mentioned the recent civil disobedience movement in Britain against the nuclear bomb under the leadership of the venerable Bertrand Russell, who was recently described by an English writer as the greatest living Englishman after Churchill.

As Shanti-Sainiks ourselves we must, however, admit that all these efforts of the peace-makers of the world are puny when compared with the colossal task facing us all.

It might be useful at this point to take a quick look at the world situation, if for nothing else, to place our work in perspective. While it would be an over-state-

ment to say that the danger of war has passed, there is no doubt that signs of improvement can be noticed. Both in America and Russia there is a more realistic appreciation of the strength, weaknesses and purposes of each other. Under President Kennedy, America has for the first time realised that neutralism, as between the power blocks (and not between human values and their negation) is also a positive force of detente and world peace. Russia had long ago made its diplomatic peace with neutralism, though it never stopped trying to exploit it for pushing forward its own foreign policy. The Dulles concept of neutralism made it easy for Russia to do so. It is too much to expect the modern states to be guided by anything but *realpolitik*. So, the fight between Russia and America for the soul of neutralism is bound to continue, but there is every hope that its violence will abate and it will cease to give off dangerous sparks.

The new American Administration's attitude to the question of disarmament is also a sign of hope. President Kennedy, Secretary Dean Rusk, UN Ambassador Adlai Stevenson make up as good a team as America could gather to tackle this urgent and grave question that so far has been a victim of cold war propaganda. One hopes that Russia, which has asserted its seriousness in this matter so often will seize this opportunity and the two great powers will unite to give some assurance of peace to the anxious and troubled peoples of the world. That would be a more worthwhile achievement than sending a man to the Moon. This has not been said to detract from the astounding success of Russian science.

Other signs of improvement are visible in Laos and Algeria, both grave danger-spots until now. It is hoped that there shall be an early cease-fire in the former and the Laos Commission would soon meet. Algeria seems, at last, to be on the threshold of freedom. We must rejoice at these happy prospects and salute and congratulate all those who have worked toward this end.

Another world event of the utmost significance for peace is the exit of South Africa from the Commonwealth, and the extraordinary consensus reached in the UN Assembly on the question of apartheid. Never were the nations of the world - as many as 93 of them - so united as on this issue of anti-racialism. The radical change in British policy should be particularly welcomed as a good augury for the early end of racialism - and its twin brother, colonialism - in the whole of Africa. In view of this, it should not be considered extravagant to expect a welcome change soon in Kenya and Rhodesia.

The fires of turmoil are still smouldering in the Congo, but it would not be wrong to suppose that the worst has been left behind.

While these items are on the credit side of the world balance between survival and death, there is much to be listed on the other side. The chief among them is the future of UN itself. Repeated world crises have shown that those who conceived of the world organisation as an incipient world government, must give up their illusion. It has been established without doubt that no matter how large be the majority behind a UN decision, the organisation cannot function effectively until the two super-powers agree amongst themselves. Prime Minister Nehru, President Kennedy and other world statesmen have described the United Nations as a shield for the smaller and weaker nations. That it undoubtedly is, and God be thanked for it. But let the naked reality be faced that unless there is a rapprochement between America and Russia, the UN is bound to remain a lame instrument. The urgent need of amending the UN constitution, its charter and procedures to bring them into line with present realities has been universally recognised. But whatever be the amendments the UN is bound to suffer from the limitations just mentioned unless there is a new balance of power in the world, or unless the substance of power changes from the power to destroy to the power to heal and create. Much oral energy has been expended in recent months on this

shift in the concept of power, but it is clear that for all practical purposes, the older concept still firmly holds the field and the newer is subordinate to the purposes of the other.

There is no need to list here all the debit items in the world balance-sheet. Suffice it to say that it is a staggering list. All the hang-overs of history, the evil outcomes of the division of the world into nation-states, the poisonous waste-products of a predatory and aggressive economic system, human bigotry and simple human greed and ambition — all these still combine to present a mad-house picture of mutual hate, suspicion and animosity at a time when science and good sense have made them unnecessary.

In this situation the discovery of weapons whose large-scale use has threatened universal destruction has been acting as a deterrent. But some of the best minds in the world are seriously engaged in discovering ways to limit the range of destruction, so that war might still be a reasonable gamble. There is no indication anywhere, except in the small circle of pacifists and believers in non-violence, that science has rendered war an outmoded instrument of national policy. Every one professes his readiness for multi-lateral disarmament, but no one, not even our own country, is prepared to break the vicious circle and embark upon unilateral disarmament. In the eyes of *realpolitik* that is just plain idiocy. There also does seem to be even in the circle of the peace makers — sufficient awareness of the deep underlying causes of war and their relation to the values and ways of life, such as methods of producing and consuming goods and services.

Thus, friends, the world situation is made up of some light and much shadow — the light breaking out here and there in patches. One such patch of light happens to be our own movement.

I do not apologise for this brief review of the world situation. I have done so deliberately: first, to put

ourselves in perspective; second, because we tend to shut ourselves up within our own narrow four walls. We cannot be world citizens, let us remember, unless we try to understand what is happening around the world.

OUR DISPUTES WITH CHINA & PAKISTAN.

Before concluding this brief and rapid review of the world situation, I wish to touch upon the two major international disputes in which our own country is involved: I mean the dispute over Kashmir with Pakistan and the border dispute with China.

At the Gandhigram Conference of the War Resisters' International I had put forward the plea that the dispute with China was a fit case for arbitration. While that plea received wide publicity, there was little public reaction to it. The criticism, however, was made in certain quarters that there could be no arbitration over aggression. I entirely agree. But my point is that when both countries claim the territory in question as their own and produce evidence to establish their claims, the matter cannot be disposed of by the use of the term aggression. We no doubt believe that the evidence on our side is decisive in our favour. Perhaps the Chinese think likewise about their own case. That only strengthens my point. There is no question of surrender of any one's sovereignty. And as the territory, at any rate in the North West, is uninhabited, there is also no question involved of the will of the people. In these circumstances it seems to be the way of peace and wisdom for both countries to agree to refer the question to arbitration—may be to an individual or a group of individuals or an institution, as might be agreed upon between the two governments. If this peaceful method were to be rejected, it is difficult to conceive of an alternative solution. A negotiated settlement has been found to be impossible so far. And it is agreed on all sides that war between the two countries is unthinkable. What other possibility is left then? None other, it seems to

me, than continued stalemate, ill-will and hostility. The longer such a situation lasts the worse for both countries, for Asia and the cause of world peace and good-will.

May I add at this point that a matter like this should not be made into a foot-ball to be kicked about in the game of party politics. The leaders of all parties should get together to explore the possibility of evolving a common policy in regard to it. It might happen that such a putting together of heads might produce a better solution than arbitration. May be the Sarva Seva Sangh or Vinobaji himself could take the initiative in calling the leaders together. I am not suggesting that such consultation should in any way limit the freedom of the Prime Minister to act according to his own judgment. But, I do suggest that such a procedure would definitely help in arriving at a solution and in lifting this national issue out of partisan controversy.

I have only to make a few brief observations regarding the Indo-Pakistan dispute. I feel as strongly to-day as in 1947 that the partition of India was a foolish step. But, once partition had become a fact, I have taken the view that both countries must respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the other, and forgetting and forgiving proceed to forge bonds of friendship and co-operation that should sooner rather than later draw the two countries as close together as possible. It is my firm belief that no matter what foreign alliances, friendships and aids each country might acquire, neither can live without the other. They are limbs of the same country, mis-called a sub-continent.

Since the advent of President Ayub Khan's administration there had been a rather friendly approach visible on the part of Pakistan. India was not slow to respond. As a result, several outstanding disputes between the two countries were quickly settled one after the other. The biggest among them was the settlement regarding the canal waters. It was amid scenes of national rejoic-

ing on both sides that the treaty concerned was signed by the Prime Minister of India and the President of Pakistan. It was universally hoped after that happy event that relations between the two countries would rapidly improve mutual confidence and good-will would be restored, and the last hurdle too—that of Kashmir—would soon be passed. But for some inexplicable reason the attitude of Pakistan has undergone an unexpected hardening.

Both Pakistan and India were fortunate in having an Ambassador for Pakistan at New Delhi, who combined his deep loyalty to his country with such a broad vision and intense humanity that by his very presence here he created an assurance of good-will and understanding. Mr. Brohi was not a professional diplomat nor a professional politician. He was essentially a man of God, whose spirituality it was that prompted him to accept the noble mission that the President of Pakistan had thought it fit to entrust him with. He was a philosopher who was deeply versed in the philosophy and culture of Islam as well as of Hinduism and was at home anywhere in the world. That such an Ambassador should have found it necessary to relinquish his assignment cannot but be a matter of the deepest regret, both in India and Pakistan. But knowing Mr. Brohi as I do, I have no doubt that while he has relinquished his official assignment, he will continue to work heart and soul for the mission of friendship and good-will which he has made his own. I wish to assure him from this platform that there are many in this country who have likewise made that mission their own and they too will continue to work with him and other men of good-will in Pakistan so that our two countries might soon be bound together in friendship and co-operation.

The recent arrest of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan is another indication of the new temper in Pakistan. That such a 'servant of God' in his old age should have no better place than prison in Pakistan fills one with sadness. These remarks might be construed to be an interference with the internal matters of Pakistan; but I have never

accepted the view that the cause of human suffering is to be limited by any national frontiers.

The question before us is what we the workers of Sarvodaya can do about this whole complicated business of Indo-Pakistan relations and Kashmir. Obviously, we can do nothing at the political level, except perhaps to emphasise the danger of a policy of drift, and the desirability of adopting a nonpartisan approach to this problem. Such matters should receive more of our attention than they have hitherto. There is need to keep in steady touch with these questions, to study them, to understand Government's view-point, and to educate public opinion.

As I have said at the outset, we in the Sarvodaya movement believe that apart from official relations, peoples of the world should establish between them non-official relations of all possible kinds. It is good that an Indo-Pakistan cultural organization has recently been set up with the blessings of the Prime Minister himself. But our own efforts in this direction are almost nil so far. What is the use of chanting daily the mantram of swadeshi if we do nothing to establish friendly relations with our neighbours ?

BHOODAN & THE PROBLEM OF LAND.

Let me turn now to the movement at home and the tasks that would face us in the coming year. You will hear from the Secretary of the Sangh a brief report on the activities of the past year. You will see that not only in the areas with which you are personally in touch, but also in many other areas much steady work was done. In some places there was possibly a set-back. In the past year there were new ideas and new programs taken up such as the Gram Swaraj Pledge program and some questions, as for instance in regard to economic decentralization ^{were studied} and ~~planning~~ more fully. Yet it is true that ^{we have not been} able to maintain, or to recapture, that condition of ^{mass} activity that the movement had achieved

in its earlier years. It was natural, to my mind, that the curve of mass participation should turn downwards. No one can be running a race all the time. Fatigue is bound to set in which would require a pause for recuperation. We have had that pause now, and as we complete today a full decade of our movement, counting from the day when Bhoodan was born in this same State at celebrated Pochampally on April 18, 1951, we might consider the stage set for another phase of mass activity.

We must however give more serious thought to this matter. While steady day-to-day work, does not need to be clothed in new forms every now and then in order to be revived, mass movements need different slogans different programs, different appeals every time. I doubt very much, therefore, if the Bhoodan movement can be repeated exactly as it was in the first few years.

A habit has grown among us to think of movement only in terms of Bhoodan, or the other programs associated with it such as Gramdan and Shampattidan, though the last never became a movement and the second did so only in Orissa, and to a degree in Tamil Nad and Kerala. Some might go a little further and include in the list the Shanti-patra program.

This, however, is a rather narrow concept. In truth, all the various programs together, both intensive and extensive, make the movement. Depending upon different factors and conditions, different items of the program get projected at different times on a big enough canvas to assume the proportions of the mass movement. But all the items are inter-dependent and support each other neither the intensive can succeed without the extensive, nor **VICE-VERSA**.

It might be added parenthetically that the intensive programs, by definition, cannot assume mass proportions, but nonetheless they are as much a part of the movement as any. And when their results become

so convincing and contagious that they begin to be automatically multiplied on a large scale, they become converted from intensive to extensive programs. That is their fulfilment. The task of the movement then is to frame new intensive programs in order that the work of social reconstruction might prepare for another step forward. It need hardly be said here that none of our intensive programs has gone through this transformation yet, but in some cases their impact has been felt in the surrounding areas. I can instance the Pusa Road area in Bihar and the eleven villages around the well-known gramdani village, Berain, also in Bihar. I am sure there are other instances too.

However, what we are mainly concerned with here, at the opening of the second decade of our movement, is how to bring into being a mass movement once again. I have already said that it is not possible to repeat a mass movement exactly in its previous form and have ^{been} doubted if Bhoodan could be revived again on a mass scale. Collection of land-gifts has never ceased to be an important item of our program nor should it cease to be so in the future. But the question is whether it can be made into a mass movement, again, and if so in what manner. This, to my mind, is possible only in places where some peculiarly favourable circumstances might exist, or are capable of being created. Even then, there would have to be some new feature of the movement that should give it a measure of freshness and attraction. It might not be possible to find or create all such circumstances in every State of the country; which would mean that while Bhoodan would continue to be a vital part of our program, a country-wide mass Bhoodan movement, like that of the early '50's, might not be possible in the year before us.

Fortunately, as you know, a number of circumstances have combined in my State, Bihar, to embolden us not only to launch upon a mass Bhoodan movement, but also to fix a date, December 3, the next birth-day of

President Rajendra Prasad, by when to fulfil our target. The slogan, 'Beeghe men Kattha,' (one Kattha in a Beegha of land) has a special meaning and relevance in the context of Bihar. You will remember that in the course of his nation-wide pada-yatra, it was Bihar that Vinoba had selected where to demonstrate that, if the effort was seriously made, it was possible to solve the problem of landlessness by the process of persuasion. At that time it was calculated that if 32 lakhs of acres of arable land were collected, that should be sufficient for the landless tillers of the State. Accordingly, that was the target fixed and it was universally agreed upon. The drive that followed was so intensive and all inclusive that at one stage even the Bihar Legislative Assembly was specially closed for a week in order to allow the peoples' representatives to go to their constituencies and work for the fulfilment of the target. Vinoba himself stayed as long as 27 months in Bihar. As you will recall nearly 21 lakhs of acres were collected as a result of that inspiring mass effort. That was one of the high lights of the movement which had sent a thrill through the entire length and breadth of India and had even crossed over the seas and the peaks of the Himalayas.

Much has been made of the fact that a large part of the land then collected is unfit for cultivation. Even if that be so, it should not be forgotten that up to date far more land has been distributed in Bihar, or in the country as a whole, through Bhoodan than through legislation or any other means. But, as a matter of fact, it is not possible even now to say definitely what part of the land donated is really uncultivable. At least one Bihar donor, the largest among them, assured Vinoba only the other day that every acre of his donated lands was fit for cultivation. That perhaps implied that if any part of his land-gift was really found to be worthless, he would donate other lands in its place.

Be that as it may, when Vinoba left Bihar at the end of 27 months, we had hoped that we would collect on our

own the remaining 11 lakh acres. But while a few thousand acres have been collected since, our hands have been more than full with distribution of the vast acres already collected, re-habilitation of thousands of Bhoodan donees and with other programs of the movement that came quickly in the wake of Bhoodan, such as Gramdan, Gram-sankalpa, Shanti-Sena, etc.

It was in this background that Vinoba re-entered Bihar on his way to Assam, and the astute social psychologist that he is, on the very first day he reminded the State, its leaders, its sarvodaya workers, its political parties, its constructive organizations, the hundreds of thousands of Bhoodan donors and donees, the Gram-dani villagers, the Khadi spinners and weavers and all others of the unfulfilled pledge. That reminder went home. Voice came from all sides, acknowledging the debt to be paid. No less a person than the late Dr. Shri Krishna Sinha, the then Chief Minister of the State, hurried to Vinoba's camp to assure him personally of his full support. Other political leaders followed suit. Vinoba took advantage of the psychological situation and, keeping in mind that Rajendra Babu had his home in Bihar, fixed upon the President's next birth-day to be made the ceremonial occasion on which the people of the State should present him with gifts of the remaining 11 lakhs of acres as a token of their love and regard for him. Poignancy and emotion were to be further added on to the gesture by the fact that next December 3 would be almost the eve of Rajendra Babu's retirement from the highest office in the land.

The slogan 'Beeghe men Kattha' owes its origin to Vinoba's aptitude for mathematics as well as for coining phrases. Making an on-the-spot calculation he showed that if $1/20$ th of the total cultivated area of the State were collected in land-gift, that would be just sufficient to fulfil the target of 32 lakhs. And then the dry mathematical fraction, $1/20$ th, easily became transformed in Vinoba's rich mind into 'Beeghe men Kattha' - - a simple,

meaningful and attractive slogan, easily understood by all and easy also of implementation!

During the earlier drive, the emphasis was on collection: the distribution was to follow and was to be made by the Bhoodan workers. Perhaps that was not very wise. Anyhow, this time Vinoba has added a new feature that has made the program far more attractive to the land-owners and far less burdensome for the sarvodaya workers. He has advised that the donor himself should distribute his gift to whomever he wished, provided the recipient was landless and prepared to cultivate the land himself. This makes the giving more satisfying and eliminates all the plodding work that is necessary for distribution and that clogs the movement. It is difficult to imagine all the above dramatic conditions being re-produced anywhere else. However, there might be other favourable conditions found in other States. For instance in Assam, Bhoodan had never been tried on a mass scale, mainly because Vinobaji had not visited the State until recently. With his presence there it might be possible to develop it now, but 'Beeghe men Kattha' might have no relevance to the Assam situation.

There have been criticisms galore of Bhoodan. Some of them were constructive and we have learnt a great deal from them. Others have stuck on its forehead the label, failure. Yet others have heaped on us ridicule. Sometimes they have picked upon a phrase used by one of us in the process of evaluation and adduced it as an incontrovertible proof of whatever their own thesis might be.

I have no desire here to enter upon any argument with these critics. The achievements of a decade of the Bhoodan movement, even after making all the allowances for its faults and failures, are truly remarkable. They have demonstrated the efficacy of the method of ahimsa, at any rate, in this sphere of social life. It is true that neither the larger problem of land, nor the lesser one of landlessness has been solved; but (a) Bhoodan has ^{of} ~~one~~

more for the landless than any other agency and (b) through its offshoot, Gramdan, which might be called the fruit of the Bhoodan tree, it has concretely shown how the larger problem of land in the peculiar conditions of India can be solved. For after a careful study of the problem, I have come to the conclusion that unless all the arable land in the village becomes common property of the village community, not only would the land problem remain intractable, but so would also remain the problems of economic, political, social and cultural advancement of the village. The present system of land is the greatest single factor responsible for class and caste divisions in the village, for exploitation and litigation, for the co-existence in rural society of want and wealth, security and insecurity, education and ignorance. Because there is so little land in the country in proportion to the ever-growing population, it should cease to be a source of personal gain and become a means to serve the common good : to provide food for all the village. This is only possible through community ownership and management of village lands. The great contribution of Gramdan is that it has already accomplished this, or most of this. On this account there has been a remarkable growth in some of the Gramdan communities not only of the material aspects of their life, but also of the social, cultural & ethical.

Gramdan has been, and must be, a voluntary program. It might be recalled that its progress at the beginning, particularly in Orissa, Tamil Nad and Kerala was remarkable. It was when the movement was still on the crest that the well known Yalwal Conference was held in which the President of India, leaders of the Congress, the PSP and the Communist Party, the Prime Minister and other ministers of the Union Government, Chief Ministers of several States, Vinobaji and representatives of the Sarva Seva Sangh had participated. Perhaps that was a most unique conference ever held in this country. Happily, the Conference was able to agree upon a common policy in regard to Gramdan and a joint statement was

issued commending it and calling upon the people to lend it their full support, and also emphasising the desirability of close cooperation between the Gramdan and Community Development movements.

That Conference was another highlight of our movement and Vinobaji was so moved by it that the next day he went so far as to say that we had at last emerged from darkness into the dawn of a new day. It proved to be a false dawn, however. I have no doubt that if the sentiments expressed in the joint statement had found expression in action and a concerted effort had been made, there could easily have been fifty, instead of five, thousand Gramdan villages in the country. The rest could quite confidently have been left then to the momentum so created.

Perhaps the reason why the concerted effort was never made was that political parties and their leaders do not have real faith in the power of persuasion. In fact they often say so. Their faith really and truly is in legislation. If this assumption is right, let me point out to the political leaders — particularly to those who profess socialism — that Gramdan has opened for them a royal road to socialism. The three major parties of the country the Congress, the PSP and the CPI all profess to be working to establish socialism in India. There are also smaller socialist groups working towards that end. What is socialism in the agrarian context of our country? From what little knowledge I have of socialism, I can think of only one answer. Neither abolition of landlordism is socialism, nor fixation of ceilings, nor securing tenants in the possession of their lands, nor consolidation of holdings, nor crop-insurance, nor any or all of the land reforms enacted or talked about. Agrarian socialism in this country has only one meaning: community ownership and management of land (the latter not necessarily meaning collective farming, though it might well do so). If this aim is to be achieved by legislation, the appropriate law might be framed and enacted, transferring land from private hands to the Gram Sabha.

It might be said that such legislation is impossible because there would be massive opposition to it. That of course is true. But I am not suggesting immediate legislation. Among other things that would be undemocratic. The democratic process requires creation of public opinion prior to legislation. Now, if the three major parties combine and jointly or severally, as they desire, carry on a campaign of mass education, it should not be difficult within a short period to create a massive support, from amongst the rural population itself, for such a measure. After all, the percentage of land-owners whose interests might be adversely affected by villagisation of land is bound to be very small. Besides, villagisation, as conceived of here, does not mean expropriation of the property of the better-off farmers.

First, these farmers too will have their proportionate share in the villagised lands. Second, for the lands taken from them over and above their share, the law should provide for proper compensation to be paid to them over a number of years by the village community itself from the produce of the land. Therefore, if the program is properly explained to the cultivators, there is no reason why they should be opposed to it, particularly when it could be shown that the measure was desirable in the interest of all-round development of the village community.

The present is an election year. Let all the socialist parties ~~with~~ give serious thought to this proposal and put it in their manifestos.

If the socialist parties neither work whole-heartedly for Gramdan, nor for legislation on these lines, the conclusion would be inescapable that they were not serious about what they profess.

Lest there should be any misunderstanding, let me make it clear these are entirely my personal opinions, though I cannot conceive of either Vinobaji or any of my

colleagues being opposed to any one villagising land under full democratic conditions; in other words, with the support of the electorate. Vinobaji has often said, speaking of redistribution of land, that if that happens through Bhoodan he would dance with joy, but if it happened through legislation he would still be happy.

For our part, Gramdan would continue to be the sheet-anchor, because our interest is not merely in economic reform — though that certainly is one of our important objectives — but, also in the psychological process involved aiming at the substitution of co-operative, in place of competitive, values of life. Voluntary villagisation of land, i. e., Gramdan, achieves both these ends, whereas legislative villagisation secures only one of them -- the economic. The reason I have ventured to throw this challenge to the political parties is that they express such scepticism about the power of persuasion and profess such utter faith in the power of legislation.

WHITHER INDIA ?

May I now draw your attention to the general situation in the country? While I find no reason to take an alarmist view, I think you will agree that the situation is full of anxiety. We have made progress in some directions, but have slipped back in many others. Events have taken place that have rudely reminded us that the task of national integration, for the greater part, remains unfulfilled. Linguistic patriotism has often asserted itself over national patriotism. Communalism and caste-ism have too often bared their ugly teeth. Ordinary human feeling and decency have too easily become the common casualties amidst all this madness.

The message of Sarvodaya, which is the message of love, is, no doubt, the single major answer to this frightful challenge. But, alas, we are so few and the quality of our love so inadequate! Has it not been found that in the midst of the strife, some of us have not been able to keep

their head? But I am convinced that there is no other force than the force of love that can weld India into a nation, or rather into a community, emotionally integrated and united in the pursuit of common ideals. At these annual meetings, when we have such a fine opportunity of communion, let us draw strength from one another and vow to purify our hearts so that we might be capable of using that wonderful force of love.

That, however, is only half our task. We have also to learn how to use that force more effectively. Vinobaji is our great teacher in that field. He has shown us two concrete ways in which to do this: (a) propagation of the **Shanti-patra** and (b) organization of the **Shanti-Sena**. Through the **Shanti-patra**, the message of peace, can be taken to every home. That can play a powerful part in paving the way for the force of love. Unfortunately, our achievement in this respect has been rather disappointing. But, it is lucky that we have an opportunity, not being far from Tenali, to learn from our Andhra friends, particularly from Dr. Suryanarayana, how to make of the **Shanti patra** program, a mass movement.

By his service in normal times, and peace work in times of strife, by his preparedness to lay down his life if necessary, the **Shanti-sainik** strengthens the force of love. But his number, counting both those registered and un-registered, is too small, and the forces he has to contend with are overwhelming. Obviously, in the next year we must exert our fullest to push forward the **Shanti-sena** program. But no matter how much we add to our number and that cannot but be rather limited in the present circumstances ~~the~~ task would still be found over-whelming.

What are we to do then? I do not pretend to have an answer. Two things are clear: (a) we must give far more attention to these problems than before, commission competent persons to help us in studying and understanding them in a scientific manner so as to discover possible remedies and (b) take the initiative in getting together at

all levels—local and top—persons and institutions to make a comprehensive and all-out attack on the hydra-headed demon of dis-integration.

There are so many facets of the Indian situation, that it would be impossible to deal with them all. Nor is that my job here. However, I do wish to have a brief look at the political and economic facets, which are of such vital significance for the fate of this country and its people and which, incidentally, have so much to do also with the forces of strife and dis-integration that I have just been speaking of.

We generally think of ourselves as having nothing to do with politics. Others also have the same view of us. Let us stop to examine this 'dis-interest' in politics. What does that mean? That means, of course, that we do not belong to any political party, do not and shall not, take part, directly or indirectly, in any political contest for position or power. But does it also mean that we are not concerned with what is happening in the political field: with the working of our democracy and its various institutions. If democracy were to be in peril, if there were danger of political chaos, of dictatorship, shall we sit back smugly and twiddle our thumbs on the ground that we have nothing to do with politics? Perhaps, it is not understood clearly that our policy not to be involved in party and power politics is meant precisely to enable us to play a more effective and constructive part in moulding the politics of the country. We say it is not *Rajniti* but *Lokniti* in which we are interested, but we do not seem to appreciate the full implications of that statement.

No one, as I said the other day, can help sensing the atmosphere of political tension, anxiety and fear that pervades the country. The proceedings of Parliament itself bear testimony to this. Finding themselves in this sad predicament, the only remedy that occurs to the people is to search for a leader who will save them. The universal question, 'Who after Nehru' is a symptom of this political malaise.

What answer do we have for this dangerous challenge? Surely, we cannot just shrug our shoulders and say that we are not interested. That would be the height of irresponsibility. The assumption on which our movement has been going on has been that conditions would continue to be normal in our country, so that we would have an undisturbed opportunity to do our work. But once that assumption is destroyed, that opportunity too is destroyed.

I humbly submit that that assumption is no longer so well-founded now as it was even a few years ago. Its continued validity depends upon what answer we make to the challenge that faces us. We know that searching for the leader is no answer. That only aggravates the sense of despair and helplessness among the people and paves the way for dictatorship. What then is the answer? Our philosophy of Lokniti should tell us that the answer is to inculcate self-confidence in the people, to give them the opportunities and the resources to manage their affairs themselves, to train them for the task, and in this manner, create and strengthen the foundations of our democracy. It seems to me that we do not fully appreciate the dimensions of this task. There is no doubt that we are trying our best to establish gram-swaraj. But the number of the villages concerned is small and there seems to be little hope in the near future of their number shooting up very high. If, therefore, we do not succeed in the near future, in developing a mass movement of gram-swaraj, how do we answer that challenge after all?

Let me put another question: What about those matters that pertain to levels beyond the village? In how many areas or zones, no matter how small or big, are we trying to experiment with lok-swaraj? In hardly a handful. So, my friends, our effort is too inadequate. Whereas the situation demands a mass movement of political building up from below, we seem to be content with our extremely meagre efforts. Those efforts indeed, are valuable, because they would serve as models and stand-

ards of comparison. But they cannot do duty for a mass program.

Fortunately, there is already such a program ready at hand. Yesterday and also this morning we had in this ~~panel~~ sessions of the Andhra Pradesh Panchayati Raj Conference. You know what happened there. Some of you, I am sure, also heard Mr. Dey.

Panchayati Raj has already been introduced into several States, and will soon be introduced into the others. I am not suggesting that in its present form it is all that we would wish it to be. But of three things I am certain: one, it is not a make-belief and an attempt to draw wool over the eyes of the people and, in the name of political decentralisation, to enhance the power of the bureaucracy and the government; two, it is capable of indefinite improvement; three, if it fails, our own gram-swaraj program will be doomed.

It is my emphatic view, therefore, that we should throw ourselves heart and soul into the Panchayati Raj movement, which even now is a people's movement as much as an official program, but which is bound to become, as time passes, more and more of the former. Our participation in this movement should be on two levels: one, on the level of study so as to help in removing the defects in the Acts and the Rules; two, on the level of what might briefly be called **lok-shikshan** (social education and training) and **lok-shakti**, i. e., creation of the necessary competence among the people. To the extent we succeed at the second level, we would be effective at the first.

Though I cannot at all speak on behalf of government, it would not be wrong, I am sure, to say that government would not only welcome our co-operation, but also be most desirous for it. The government believes that the work particularly of **lok-sikshan** and of developing **lok-shakti** can best be carried out by voluntary agencies, particularly the Sarva Seva Sangh and all those it symbolises.

In this manner if a concerted effort were made to make Panchayati Raj a success, I feel that sooner than many would dare to hope to-day, the whole political climate in the country could be changed and a new feeling of self-confidence created. The present challenge could thus be largely met.

According to the present scheme, Panchayati Raj is to rise only up to the district level. In my **Swaraj For The People** I have argued at some length why in the interest of fuller and less expensive democracy, it should be extended right up to the top, i. e., to New Delhi. Many of the country's leaders including the Prime Minister and Acharya Kripalani, have from time to time spoken in favour of an indirect system of election. The latest to do so was the Congress President, Shri Sanjeeva Reddi. I hope, therefore, that our proposals in that behalf would receive their serious attention. The Sarva Seva Sangh might take the initiative in this matter and contact the political parties. Let me say that the details of the proposals made in this behalf in my pamphlet should be taken as nothing more than a basis for discussion.

I hope also that now that the pamphlet in question has received the general approval of the Sangh, you would make it one of your major jobs in this year to create public opinion in its favour. This being an election year, the minds of the people are likely to be specially attuned to political education.

In regard to the General Election, the Sarva Seva Sangh has put forward rather revolutionary ideas. I have also dealt with them in my tract. It is our view that the present method of setting up candidates limits democracy, because it limits the freedom of choice of the voters. Therefore, we have put forward the proposal for setting up Voters' Councils for selection of candidates. In view of the fact that many people are said to be fed up with the struggle for power between parties, factions, and ambitious politicians, and, more fundamentally, because of the fact that the method suggested by us gives more power to the

voters and frees them from the domination of the parties, it should not be difficult to put the idea into practice, at least in a number of selected constituencies. It is a matter of great satisfaction that the Sarva Seva Sangh has decided to make this attempt. Here then is another program for you of great potentiality and significance.

Lest there be any misunderstanding, it should be made clear that it is not our intention that the Sarva Seva Sangh or the Sarvodaya movement should set up or support any candidates, or have anything to do with the elections in that sense. The Sangh's resolution makes that absolutely clear. Ours is merely an educative role: we shall try to explain our point of view to the voters, and if it appeals to them, it will be entirely their job to put it into practice.

There are other fruitful and important ideas that have been put forward by the Sangh in its resolution on the general election. They will be placed before you in due course, so I shall not refer to them now. You will also find some of them in the **Swaraj For The People**.

I should like to conclude this rather long speech with a brief look at the economic situation. It is no doubt gratifying to know that there has been an increase in the national income of as much as 40%, in the last ten years. But those of us who work in the villages and daily come into contact with the common people are hard put to it to discover any corresponding improvement among them. It is a pity that our economic dialogue with the government, our planners, and our experts gets always bogged down in discussions about centralization and decentralization, the obscurities of the theory of self-sufficiency, the right and wrong attitude to science and technology and so on and on. The experts and the planners have had all their own way. But the obstinate facts of poverty, unemployment, starvation—rather, scarcity, because since swaraj the word starvation, if not starvation itself, has been rigorously banned—persist shamelessly to

stare in the face. We are prepared to admit that all our fanciful theories are wrong or out of date and that by insisting upon humanisation of economics we are acting as sheer romantics. But the people want food and jobs and want to live differently from the animals. How are the planners to give all that to be people? Has any one the right to produce plastics and rayon and synthetic rubber as long as people are hungry and naked? What does planning mean and economic growth, and whom are they meant to serve?

By all means more wealth must be produced and produced as efficiently as possible. But in a poor and starving country is it not urgent that it is so produced that it reaches the people without delay? To use Vinobaji's expressive word, why should the people be made to wait for wealth produced at the top slowly to percolate down to them? And how long should they wait, and by what trick of planning and statistical economic growth would the explosive force of their accumulated suffering be prevented from detonating? In the West, competent economists have computed that it took anywhere from a hundred to two hundred years for the fruits of industrialisation to reach the labouring classes.

May be this lag-period could be reduced under our socialist dispensation—though, looking at the share-out of the surplus value in the public sector,—there is no ground for such a hope. But even granting that that was possible, can the desperately needy millions of this country wait even fifty years? Will democracy have any chance then, or Sarvodaya?

Perhaps our planners are doing what others have done before. But in the West, economic growth was far more organic, indigenous and evenly distributed than in our country. Here when a huge population with too little land living on a bullock-cart economy is suddenly confronted with imported automation economy, the problems of growth assume an entirely different complexion, requiring an entirely different treatment.

I do fervently hope, therefore, that on the eve of the 3rd Plan, there would be some fresh thinking on this question. There seem to me to be only two possible alternatives : (a) either to produce wealth as efficiently as possible in a few centres and keep the rest of the country more or less on subsidies or (b) produce wealth in every home and hamlet and township. That is to say, either a few have to be employed and the rest kept on doles; or all are employed and make some kind of living.

Looking at the problem from the eyes of 80% of the people, that is, the rural people, Khadi and village industries have hardly touched the fringe of their problem; small-scale Industries have hardly entered their field, and large-scale industries have done more harm than good. For us, the rural folk, this division of industries has no meaning. What we want is a massive program of rural industrialisation, for which purpose I suggest that the Khadi and Village Industries Commission and the Small-Scale Industries Board be merged into one comprehensive and coordinated Rural Industries Commission. For the urban areas, the S. S. I. Board might function as might be required. It should be the task of that Commission to help as fast as possible in the development of the present purely agricultural economy of the villages into a balanced agro-industrial economy in such a manner that urban exploitative interests do not get a foot-hold into it and the mass of the rural population is able to participate both in its workings and benefits. Incidentally, such a rural development, I am sure, would produce a salutary effect even in the urban sector.

I fear that these amateurish remarks of mine will carry no weight unless (a) they are backed by the weight of expertise and (b) there is force of public opinion particularly of the rural public, behind them. In both these matters the initiative that Shri Shankarraoji has taken is full of promise. He has succeeded in calling together a group of eminent economic and social experts who if not fully in agreement with the views expressed here are in great deal

of sympathy with our line of thinking. As for the rural public opinion, the Gram-swaraj Pledge movement which was initiated under his guidance on April 6 last, should go a long way, if all of us take it up seriously in creating and making it effective.

Now, friends, I must ask your forgiveness for taking so much of your precious time.

Before I conclude I must salute our Andhra comrades for the wonderful job they have done in organising this Sammelan. The most remarkable of their achievements is undoubtedly the wave of cooperation that they have been able to arouse among the people of the neighbouring villages. Particularly praiseworthy is the offer of **Shramdan** by a large number of persons every day in order to help in constructing this Sarvodayapuram, as also the generous gifts of over two thousand bags of rice plus other grains and articles of food. We are beholden to the people of this area for their love and cooperation and offer our heartfelt thanks.

Let me now wish you all a very happy Jai Jagat.
