

Letter from South

## Sarvodaya and Panchayati Raj

THAT, precisely, is the objective of the Sarvodaya movement in India and what does it intend to do to achieve that objective? The movement came into existence soon after Gandhiji's death, based on his desire, expressed in a memorandum drawn up by him just before his death, that as the Congress "in its present shape and form has outlived its use" and as India had still to attain social, moral and economic independence in terms of its seven lakh villages, the All-India Congress Committee "should resolve to disband the existing Congress organisation and flower into a Lok Sevak Sangh. Since then much has happened and the Congress has rapidly drifted away from the course set for it by Gandhiji. The Sarvodaya Sangh was organiced by those who were his close personal followers as distinct from those who only followed his lead as Congressmen,

The Sarvodaya movement has not, however, been able to make a decisive impression on the Indian situation, mainly because, as it appears, it has not been able to define its ideal and evolve a clear programme of action. Its most significant and striking achievement has been the Bhoodan movement organised and implemented under the leadership of Vinobaji Bhave, who has collected a few lakh acres of land as free gift from landowners. Andhra has the distinction of being the State where the Bhoodan movement originated, the first gift of land coming from Shri V Ramachandra Reddi, a landlord of Pochampalli village in Nalgonda district. Gifts from landlords in Andhra amounted to more than 2 lakh acres up to the end of March 1962.

The Bhoodan movement has more or less spent itself now and Vinobaji has been devoting his attention more and more to other programmes of work connected with the reconstruction of rural India under panchayati raj. These programmes cover a whole series of activities designed to bring about a revolution in rural administration and the economic and social aspects of village life. It is in this context

that the question posed at the beginning assumes importance. It is for the leadership of the Sarvodaya movement to formulate a precise programme which its workers could systematically undertake in the rural areas.

At the Andhra Pradesh Sarvodaya Sammellan held in Vijayawada last week, Sarvodaya workers devoted considerable thought to these problems, Shri V Ramachandra Reddi, the first Bhoodan donor, who presided over the Sammellan, said that the Sarvodaya movement, as envisaged by Gandhiji and Vinobaji, was the expression of a modern renaissance spirit in ethical and political terms. He claimed that the ideal of democratic decentralisation was the "specific contribution of Sarvodaya" to the politico-ethical renaissance. He saw a close inter-connection between Sarvodaya and Socialism and said that while the former represented "sanatana dharma" or the eternal aspiration of humanity, the latter represented the "yuga dharma or the spirit of the age. As such they were complementary to each other and a harmonious blending of the two "dharmas" was the desideratum of the present age.

### Programme of Work

Two specific programmes of work which Shri Reddi suggested for the Sarvodaya movement were the organisation of a Shanti Sena and the establishment of small collective farms by Sarvodaya workers and gram ekais, with the government aid, if necessary. If the Sarvodaya workers could run these institutions on model lines they would instil in the people's minds respect for the Sarvodaya or "welfare of all" ideal. Such model organisations at the village level could also be the centres from which the fight against corruption, exploitation, and the evil of drink could be carried on. Side by side a strong consciousness of community life could be developed among the villagers and the edifice of integrated community development raised on strong foundations. Sarvodaya would thus be a useful handmaid to the panchayati raj scheme.

Shri Ramachandra Reddi and Swami Ramanand Thirth, as well as others who addressed the Vijayawada Sammellan, extolled the virtues of partyless democracy and emphasised the need for Sarvodaya workers to steer clear of parties. The use of the term "partyless democracy" may cause eyebrows to be raised sceptically among hard-boiled politicians. In Andhra where elections to village panchayats are held by secret ballot, which enables village politicians to canvass support on the basis of their affiliations with the Congress, Communist or other political parties, "partyless democracy" does not apparently make much sense. Parties inevitably enter into panchayat elections and canvassing on party lines is inescapable.

In this respect, as also in the extension of prohibition to Telangana area and its strict enforcement throughout the State Sarvodaya workers can play a leading part. If they are, for example, able to convince the Government that panchayati raj in the State would be a greater success if panchayats could be rescued from the partisan and factionist spirit by election of panchayat members at an open meeting of the gramasahha and can have a provision to that effect incorporated in the draft legislation, it would be a distinct gain for the panchayati raj scheme. Similarly, they can contribute to the successful implementation of prohibition if they organise a region-wide education campaign on the evils of drink. They would also thereby be preparing the ground for the introduction of prohibition in Telangana for which Sadhu Subrahmanyam, a prominent Sarvodaya worker of the State, had earlier undertaken a prolonged fast, and secured a sort of assurance from the State Government that Telangana would have prohibition.

In Andhra Pradesh, as in some other States, Sarvodaya workers are in a favourable position to carry out their Programme and secure a favourable hearing for their viewpoint because the leaders of the present Congress Government

were in the past their colleagues and co-workers in the Congress movement under Gandhiji. The policies of the Government are not and cannot be in all respects such as would win the support of Sarvo-

daya workers even as not all the ideals and programmes of the Sarvodaya movement can be acceptable to the Government. But over a wide field in rural community development a fruitful liaison

can be established between the governmental agencies and the Sarvodaya or Sarva Seva Sangh workers. It is to be hoped that an appropriate programme would be drawn up to this end.

