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**A Gandhian Answer to the Threat of Communism? Sarvodaya and Postcolonial
Nationalism in India¹**

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Abstract: It is an axiom of early postcolonial Indian history that Nehru and his statist conception of nationalism and of economic development dominated the political and economic life of India. As such, scholars have assumed, Gandhian ideas, especially radically non-statist answers to the problems of development, lost influence in this period. This article explores Gandhian economic thinking, in the form of the Bhoodan Movement and three of the thinkers on sarvodaya economics in the 1950s, Vinoba Bhave, K.G. Mashruwala and J.C. Kumarappa. It goes on to demonstrate the complex relationship that these men and their ideas had with Nehru and various levels of the Indian state. It argues that non-statist ideas remained important in the development of postcolonial Indian nationalism.

KEY WORDS: Vinoba Bhave, K.G. Mashruwala, J.C. Kumarappa, M.K. Gandhi, Telangana, land reform, development, self-sufficiency, Gandhian economics

A Gandhian Answer to the Threat of Communism? Sarvodaya and Postcolonial Nationalism in India

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Over the past decade or more, a reassessment of the early postcolonial history of South Asia has begun as historians have started to unearth new archival sources. Independence and partition are no longer seen as a single moment, but as long, tangled processes.² New research into citizenship, secularism and corruption has given us a more complex, and less rose-tinted, view of India's early years.³ Even as this new research has questioned some of the earlier beliefs about the years of Nehru's premiership (1947-64), two assumptions about the Nehruvian period have remained largely unexamined. The first is the centrality of the state to programmes of economic development in this early postcolonial period.⁴ The second, and consequential, assumption is that Gandhian economic thought and Gandhian political activism were marginalised under Nehru. The research below casts a fresh eye on these two pillars of early independent Indian political life through an examination of the Bhoodan Yajna (Land-gifts Mission). The Bhoodan Yajna was a Gandhian movement, initiated by Archarya Vinoba Bhave in 1951 as a step towards solving India's 'land problem' and the communist uprisings which grew from it. Bhave, along with other prominent Gandhian thinkers, drew up blueprints for an economy based on Gandhian principles of radical decentralisation that were encompassed in the idea of *sarvodaya* (uplift for all).

An exploration of the Bhoodan movement, and the economic thinking of which it was part, first of all, throws new light on Gandhian thought and nationalist politics after independence. Although there has been a sharp increase in research on Gandhi's thought of late, much of the existing research implicitly assumes that the ideas died with the man.⁵ Even before the death of Gandhi in 1948, scholars have assumed, Gandhian approaches to India's economic questions were either side-lined,⁶ or thoroughly co-opted, at least rhetorically, by India's planners.⁷ Moreover, the nationalist leadership, now the ruling elite,

sought to rein in Gandhian political activism, in the form of non-violent protest, as nationalism was directed through the channels of the state.⁸

The transition to independence did indeed raise questions about the nature and direction the nationalist movement might take. But the existing scholarship elides the fact that each nationalist campaign had not only negative, rule-breaking elements, but also positive, constructive elements, usually concerned with village reconstruction. It is argued below that this latter aspect of Gandhian thought, in the form of decentralised, non-statist (even anti-statist) efforts at economic transformation continued to be developed after independence. This was so for a number of reasons. First of all, it continued because a spiritual successor to Gandhi emerged in the form of Vinoba Bhave, who took on the task of furthering Gandhi's programme of village regeneration, and developed it in new ways via the Bhoodan movement. Secondly, whilst Nehru and the Congress leadership did discourage Gandhian-style political protests, they were also searching for ways of channelling the constructive energies of India's masses to fight a new war, this time for India's economic independence. Moreover, early postcolonial India never had the resources to pursue centralised planning for the entire economy. And the constitution restricted the scope of government action when it came to land reform. Therefore, in the agrarian sector, the government had to limit itself to acting as a catalyst for change and encouraging independent improvements.⁹ It is argued below that Gandhian, non-statist economic thought and activity, pursued by the three thinkers examined here, Vinoba Bhave, J.C. Kumarappa and K.G. Mashruwala, existed in productive tension with the statist policies of the Nehru government. This is because these Gandhian approaches seemed to provide answers to the pressing questions of how to direct the energies of the masses, and of how to foster economic change with limited state resources.

These Gandhian thinkers, though reasonably well-known, have not been subjected to much scholarly scrutiny. Ramachandra Guha is one of the few authors to evaluate these men, their thought and their achievement, albeit in very brief essays. The work in which Guha does this is, by his own estimation, a work of 'appreciate and depreciation, not an impersonal work of "scholarship"'.¹⁰ Indeed, Kumarappa and Bhave appear in Guha's work as 'adversaries'.¹¹ Moreover, they stride his stage as hero and villain, as Kumarappa's

humble and practical approach to village reconstruction is contrasted to that of Bhave, who is condemned as 'devoid of the capacity for self-criticism' and suffering from a 'lop-sided sense of priorities.'¹² Guha has then been followed by other scholars, who paint Kumarappa as the true Gandhian, adhering to an anti-statist programme, and declare Bhave to be, pro-state, pro-Nehru, though no evidence is cited to substantiate this assertion.¹³

Although there were important differences between the three Gandhian thinkers discussed below, the following research suggests that it is not necessarily helpful to regard those individual Gandhians who developed the Mahatma's ideas after his death as in competition with one another over Gandhi's legacy. Instead, Gandhian thought – Gandhi himself rejected the idea of Gandhism for its implied rigidity – was, true to its origins, both flexible and capable of encompassing different opinions on an issue. Indeed, Vinoba declared, 'there is not a single problem in life...whereon all the close associates of Gandhi will declare the same mind.' And this was as it should be: 'it is much better to allow thought to work freely than to beat and drive and shut it up into the rigidity of a system.'¹⁴

The research which follows, therefore, remains sensitive to the differences between these thinkers, but aims to tease out the common economic programme that united them in the first decade after independence. To these early postcolonial Gandhian economic thinkers, capitalism and communism were more similar than different, and both were equally flawed. As an alternative, these men articulated a vision for economic organisation that was based on principles that they believed would truly liberate not only India, but the world from the troubles introduced by the existing economic ideologies.

India's Land Problem and the Threat of Communism

All of these questions arose because India's future seemed to hinge on how to reform agrarian relations so as to ensure economic progress and avoid political revolution. By 1947 the idea that the country had a 'land problem' was one of the orthodoxies held across the political spectrum in India. Of course, this issue had a long history, one tied intimately to India's experience of colonialism. It had been a maxim of the nationalist movement that

British rule had impoverished India.¹⁵ And after independence, it was universally agreed that in order to secure India's economic freedom, the land problem had to be addressed.¹⁶

By the middle of the twentieth century, much of rural India was characterised by a combination of large estates owned by absentee landlords and worked by heavily indebted landless labourers; and small, highly fragmented plots worked by single families often without access to irrigation, fertilisers, high-quality seeds or tools. Depending upon where one stood intellectually and on one's socio-economic status, the problem of how land was distributed could be understood in several overlapping, but competing ways. For the Government of India in Delhi, the question of land was central to their nation-building objectives. Land, as a source of commodities which could be used to feed the nation and trade with other countries, was valuable primarily for what it produced. Production, in turn, yielded revenues for the state. These funds would be returned to the nation as they were invested in schools and dispensaries for the population, and ploughed back into the land through improved seeds, fertilizers and tools in a virtuous circle of productivity. Small, fragmented plots, with their circumscribed production possibilities, prevented owner-cultivators from taking advantage of the latest technologies and practices; equally, the tenant-cultivators of the largest landholdings were discouraged from similar investments by their lack of ownership. Efficient production, therefore, necessitated a more rational distribution of land.

Ownership was, paradoxically, conceived of both as the cause of current inefficiencies, and also as the cornerstone of (future) productive investment. The tension between the desire for redistribution and the imperative not to undermine property rights pervaded government thinking on land. Thus, property rights were protected in the Constitution, which provided that one could not be deprived of property without compensation.¹⁷ And at the same time, land reform legislation, devolved to state and provincial governments, sought to set upward limits on landholdings whilst relying on market mechanisms for redistribution, and providing compensation for those dispossessed of their large holdings. Progress was slow, and wily landlords readily circumvented official measures to redistribute land.

For many ordinary Indians, however, land was not simply a matter of production; it was a question of livelihood, broadly conceived.¹⁸ A field of one's own established one's status: it distinguished one from landless labourers; and it symbolised independence from the rural landholding elites, even if it did not always secure it in practice. A person who was a tenant tended to be a debtor and a labourer as well. Possession of land, therefore, held out the promise of escape from the circle of dependence and obligation. Land could also serve larger social functions, as it could be used as collateral to obtain loans to pay for weddings, funerals and other ceremonial occasions. And possession of ancestral lands sustained ties with the past. At this level, the land question was as much cultural as economic. Given that independent India was a democracy with universal suffrage and an overwhelmingly rural population, politicians of all parties had to recognise the widely held ambition to own land. Across the political spectrum, therefore, political parties' manifestos all promised to find a way to grant land to India's rural citizens. These promises existed in tension with statist fantasies of more 'rational' rural production.

Whilst the Congress Party was often constrained by the need to keep landlords and businessmen on side, it was left to Leftist parties to put forward more radical proposals for solving the land problem, at least rhetorically. At the time of independence, leftist politics in India had had only a very short history. The Communist Party of India had been formed only in the 1920s, as an organisation separate from the Congress. Although its adherents toyed with armed conflict at various points, its activities had centred primarily on urban areas and the mobilisation of labour.¹⁹ Notwithstanding the colonial state's paranoia about the threat these groups posed, leftist parties remained on the margins of Indian politics, and violent movements associated with the left made headlines, but not much headway. For their part, India's socialists initially had constituted themselves as a sub-unit of the Congress Party, calling themselves the Congress Socialist Party. Before independence, these socialists had shared leadership with the Indian National Congress, and their political platform was articulated under the broad umbrella of the Congress Party. By 1949, however, the two had formally split, as the socialists formed their own party.²⁰ Nonetheless, the leadership of the two sets remained close, and they struck periodical alliances over specific issues.²¹

After the Communists achieved success in China by mobilising the peasantry, however, the prospect of a communist revolt in rural India came into clearer focus. Indeed, in the period immediately surrounding independence, this possibility was realised as an armed peasant uprising emerged in the Telangana region of Hyderabad State.²² The Telangana uprising had its origins both in the social stratification of the countryside and the inadequacy of local administration in rural areas. With dry rocky soil and irregular rainfall, the Telangana region had natural climactic and geographic disadvantages compared to neighbouring areas, making it difficult for small cultivators to eke out a living. As small farmers fell into debt, large landholders accumulated not only property, but unprecedented social and administrative influence in the region. The landed elite, known as *doras* or *deshmukhs*, tended to hold positions as land revenue officers at the local level. Small holders and tenants, who were often illiterate, tended to be either unaware of their rights or unable to enforce them against these elites. As such, *deshmukhs* could and often did evict tenants and confiscate crops and lands with near impunity. In addition, they exacted *vetti* (unpaid customary labour) from barbers, carpenters, masons and dhobis, in contravention of the law. The unparalleled influence of *deshmukhs* helped them to accumulate further swathes of land. By the 1940s, there were areas, especially in the districts of Nalgonda, Warangal, Karimnagar and Adilabad, in which 'certain families own the entire cultivable land in several villages.'²³ The Second World War hit Telangana hard, particularly as food was levied from rural areas at below market prices to be distributed as part of the ration system. For their part, *deshmukhs* and village officials were accused of evading the levy, hoarding products and selling them on the black market. In this context, the Andhra Mahasabha, the local leftist party, began to take on the task of assisting the peasantry. Its members, including Ravi Narayan Reddy and Puchalapalli Sundarayya, had established records of working for the uplift of the rural poor. During the war, they helped ensure peasants received their fair share of rations and were not cheated by levies or black marketers.²⁴

During the war, a peasants' movement emerged in protest against the worsening conditions in rural Telangana. At dispersed locations, the poorest members of rural communities stood up against *doras* when they tried to evict long-standing tenants or confiscate crops.²⁵ Members of the Andhra Mahasabha saw themselves as the natural partners of these dispossessed peasants, and they helped to weave together these separate, local victories

into a larger movement. As part of this endeavour, the Andhra Mahasabha set out a programme for the amelioration of peasant grievances: they called for the abolition of vetti, fair rent for tenants and fair wages for agricultural workers; they discouraged peasants from contributing to the levy and urged them to seize stocks of grain; they demanded an end to exorbitant interest rates on grain and cash loans given by landlords to peasants and labourers.²⁶

Land redistribution and the reoccupation of lands from which tillers had been evicted were not initially a part of the Andhra Mahasabha's programme. Rather, the slogan 'land to the tiller', according to Sundarayya, was adopted in response to the 'sheer pressure of the developing movement.'²⁷ In response to the demands of the rural poor, lands from which peasants had been evicted were reoccupied, government and waste lands were seized and cultivated, and tenants laid a claim to their landlords' fields. In total, the communists boasted that in three thousand villages, 'One million acres of land was seized from the landlords, rents were abolished, [and] land distributed to agricultural labour and poor peasants.'²⁸ They claimed to have given five acres to each cultivator.²⁹

The relationship of this grassroots revolt to the Communist Party of India was complex. The leadership in Telangana were in most cases avowed communists. However, when the Andhra communists initially suggested that India might follow the Chinese path with a peasant-led revolution this was rejected by the Communist Party of India (CPI).³⁰ Indeed, whilst the revolt had begun in 1944, it was not until February 1948, after Moscow's own line changed, that the CPI formally endorsed the revolt in Telangana.³¹

In its first few years, it was left to the Government of Hyderabad to combat the movement, and the Government of India did not take formal measures against the revolt until the princely state of Hyderabad was forcibly integrated into India in September 1948. After this date, the primary means of addressing the communist problem was to adopt the latest counter-insurgency methods. The Government of India amassed a huge number of police and troops in the state, swept large numbers of suspected communists into jail without trial, forcibly resettled tribal communities in New Villages, and, somewhat later, sought to address the basic needs of the villagers by providing some measure of food, clothing and

supplies.³² This was not the only response to the movement, however. Quite by chance, a man named Vinoba Bhave came to lead a completely different kind of campaign against the communists, one aimed at both the material and psychological amelioration of conditions in rural Telangana.

Bhoodan: a Gandhian Answer to Communism

Vinayak Narahari Bhave had been born on 11 September 1895 in Kolaba District, in today's Maharashtra in western India. Accounts of his early life, largely from contemporary accounts in the 1950s and 1960s, tend to repeat the same stories almost verbatim, giving an air of hagiography to the tales. According to available material, the young Vinoba was studious and intelligent, but also strong-willed. He was reported to have taken an oath of celibacy at the age of ten, and learned some eighteen foreign and Indian languages during his long life.³³ After studying for a time in Benares, he met Gandhi and joined him at his ashram. The Mahatma is said to have had great affection and great esteem for Vinoba.³⁴ Vinoba, like any good nationalist, spent several years in jail during the freedom movement. Indeed, when, in the midst of the Battle of Britain during the Second World War, Gandhi decided to launch his Individual Satyagraha Campaign to convince the British to hand more power to Indians in the war effort, he chose Vinoba to be the first person to court arrest because he embodied Gandhi's principles so completely.³⁵ After independence, he was not a member of the Congress Party, and from Gandhi's death until he marched into Telangana, he had lived a quiet life of relative seclusion on his ashram.

Vinoba quite literally walked into the conflict in Telangana. In April 1951, he attended a meeting nearby and, having heard of the unrest in these districts, decided to walk through the area to get a sense of the situation, and 'to spread his message of love, trust and peace'.³⁶ Several days into his pilgrimage, he arrived in the village of Pochampalli, and the official story goes, several Dalit families attended the assembly he held and begged him to find a way to give them land. Initially, Vinoba did not know what to say, and he muttered something about approaching the government for assistance, 'but then a sudden thought crossed his mind.' He decided to ask the others in attendance to donate land to the landless. At this, Sri Ramachandra Reddy, a local deshmukh, offered up one hundred acres, half of his

holdings. 'That evening Vinoba reflected deep into the night and the unmistakable call from the inner sanctuary of his heart came distinctly commanding him to dedicate himself to this new kind of Yajna (sacrifice)'.³⁷ The Bhoodan (land-gifts) mission was born.

Vinoba dedicated himself to turning this single act of sacrifice into a movement. He began walking through India on his mission. On a quotidian level, his schedule was modelled on that of Gandhi. He woke at 3am and began the day with ninety minutes of prayers. By 5am he started walking so that he and his entourage could reach their destination by noon. He was preceded by volunteers who announced his arrival to the villagers. Robert Trumbull, an American journalist, reported in *Readers' Digest*: 'At nearly every town and village Bhave found arbours of palms and mango leaves erected for him to walk through. Underfed, ragged villagers crowded around to touch the holy man's feet...Municipal dignitaries garlanded him with flowers which the little ascetic passed back to the crowd.'³⁸ After a small meal, and some spinning, he held a meeting every afternoon, where he heard grievances, tried to settle disputes and collected donations of land. Every day at 5pm he held a prayer meeting, which began with readings from 'all the sacred scriptures of all the major religions of India', including the Bhagavad Gita.³⁹ This was followed by a sermon from the Acharya, 'in the nature of a heart-to-heart talk with the audience' on any number of subjects from the virtues of sobriety and spinning to the utility of cooperative farming.⁴⁰ Whilst he received spontaneous donations of land, he also made demands of landlords. Telling them that they should treat him as if he were an extra son, Vinoba insisted that each give him his rightful share of their property for him to redistribute to the landless.

Ultimately, Vinoba elaborated a vision that was more than just a response to the rise of communism in rural India, but he did engage in debate with India's communists and with Marxist ideas. Indeed, the relationship between Gandhian thought and communism was a point of contestation amongst Gandhian thinkers of the period. J.C. Kumarappa and his brother, Bharatan Kumarappa tended to argue that Gandhi's thinking was not antithetical to communism, given the concern that both showed towards the poor.⁴¹ They had Gandhi's own words to back up this assertion, as they could cite, *inter alia*, his address to communists in 1931 during which Gandhi said, 'I am trying my best to live up to the ideal of Communism in the best sense of the term.'⁴²

Vinoba, along with K.G. Mashruwala, often construed as being on the right of the Gandhian movement, felt that Gandhism and communism were 'irreconcilable'.⁴³ Firstly, Vinoba was critical of the methods of India's communists. He disparaged the tendency of the CPI to take orders from Moscow or to adhere too closely to Marxist texts, saying, 'They have no independent intelligence of their own.'⁴⁴ Secondly, Vinoba disapproved of the communists' resort to arms. In many ways, Vinoba admitted, he and the communists had a shared goal, in that the both sought, 'the emancipation of India's down-trodden'. But the communists resorted to violence too readily: 'Communists would rather accept a stone achieved through struggle than a piece of bread secured through persuasion and change of heart.'⁴⁵ It was not only violence *per se* that was at issue, but the effects of violence, too. By dividing the world into rich and poor and treating the rich as the enemy, communists, Vinoba argued, failed to realise that, 'There were good men and bad men on both sides'.⁴⁶ Moreover, by treating all the rich in the same way, whether they were good or bad, the communists lost the 'sympathy and support of good men on the opposite side'.⁴⁷ Vinoba's method was different. His goal was 'to secure the goodwill and sympathy of both sides'.⁴⁸

Members of India's communist and leftist parties rose in rebuttle. With Vinoba's slow, plodding approach, they argued, it would take a century and a half to resolve the land problem via donations. Makhdoom Mohiuddin, a prominent communist who had joined the struggle in Telangana, criticised the Bhoodan Yajna because it would lead to the further fragmentation of holdings, or because rural elites had gifted lands that were wasteland, had poor soil or were otherwise uncultivable; in other cases they donated fields that were under dispute.⁴⁹ Vinoba's response was to dismiss this critique, for it focused on issues too mundane for his concern. Illuminating the objective behind his mission, Vinoba explained, 'Fragmented land can be easily consolidated later with mutual goodwill and cooperation; but the fragmentation of hearts due to economic inequality is full of dangerous possibilities.'⁵⁰ His goal was not to simply redistribute land. Indeed, the donation of land was 'a mere beginning and a gesture.'⁵¹ Ultimately, his aim was to effect a number of psychological changes in every person.

The first was a change in the way people approached ownership of land. Drawing on Gandhian ideas of trusteeship, Vinoba argued, 'land is a gift of God just like the sun, air and water and nobody can claim ownership of it.'⁵² Next, he hoped to alter the way people felt about their fellow human beings: 'When a gift is given, we may hope that it will generate purity of mind, motherly love, feelings of brotherhood and friendliness and love for the poor.'⁵³ What would follow would be a transformation in the way people felt about possession of property altogether, so that 'non-possession' would become the ideal.⁵⁴ Out of this would emerge a new order: 'the whole atmosphere will undergo a sudden change in the twinkling of an eye, and India might well show the way to a new era of freedom, love and happiness for the whole world.'⁵⁵ Ultimately he was working for a non-violent revolution, Vinoba argued, countering the communists' charge that he was working on behalf of the rich to stem a revolution, 'And when a revolution in the way of life is contemplated, it must take place in the mind.'⁵⁶

Bhoodan was only the first step in what Bhave conceived as a total revolution. He worked towards this goal for the greater part of the 1950s and 1960s. As his movement expanded, Vinoba left behind him small committees, Bhoodan Yajna Samithis, to complete his work across the country, and turned his personal attention to the northern state of Bihar, where he pursued the same strategy to solicit donations of land. As it developed, several problems came to light. Vinoba adapted his ideas to these developments, bringing in new elements to his movement. For example, cultivable land was given first and primarily to families who were completely landless. But these tended to be the poorest members of rural communities, and they did not have the financial means to invest in seeds or equipment, sparking the worry that they would end up indebted and losing their lands to the very landlords who had donated them. To meet this need, Bhave developed the idea of *sampattidan*, the gift of part of one's wages, usually by the urban middle-classes, to help pay the cultivation expenses of those given land. To *sampattidan* was added *shramadan*, the gift of labour to work in building roads, canals and other public works.⁵⁷ Within four years, Vinoba had moved on to demand *gramdan*, the gift of entire villages. Explaining the new concept to a delegation of his workers from Hyderabad, Vinoba said, 'Gram-dan is to relinquish all of one's possessions in the interests of the village. Everyone will have to work for the village, and the village will look after the prosperity of everyone.'⁵⁸ Finally, there

came *jeevandan*, giving one's life to the movement. The most prominent figure to offer this sacrifice was Jayaprakash Narayan, a veteran of the nationalist movement and leader of the Socialist Party, who gave up politics to dedicate himself to rural uplift along the lines prescribed by Vinoba.⁵⁹ All of this was framed by the notion of *sarvodaya*.

Sarvodaya: an Alternative to Communism and Capitalism

It was Gandhi who had coined the term *sarvodaya*. Inspired by John Ruskin's work, *Unto This Last*, Gandhi had consciously contrasted *sarvodaya* against the utilitarian notion of the greatest good for the greatest number.⁶⁰ Instead, *sarvodaya* would ensure the rise or the welfare of all. After Gandhi's death, Vinoba and a selection of other Gandhian thinkers, including J.C. Kumarappa and K.G. Mashruwala developed the notion further. Whilst they debated with them, Vinoba and his fellow travellers adopted many of the same concerns as the communists, and proposed their own solutions to India's problems. In fact, their quarrel was as much with capitalism as it was with communism. Drawing upon Gandhi's works, as well as Geddes' *Cities in Evolution*, and the thought of the Tamil poet Subramania Bharati, together they elaborated a critique of capitalist and communist political-economy, and sketched out a vision of a non-violent social and economic revolution for India, and for the world.

One of Vinoba's close associates, K.G. Mashruwala, developed the most elaborate critique of the two systems. Born and educated in Bombay city, Mashruwala had been an associate of Gandhi. After the latter's death, he had taken over the responsibility of editing the *Harijan* newspaper. He was a founding member of the Gandhi Vichar Parishad known in English as the Institute of Gandhian Studies, and he did not take up any official posts in government after independence. Mashruwala, like his fellow Gandhians, was in regular correspondence with the Prime Minister until his death in 1952.

In Mashruwala's view, capitalism and communism shared more than their warring proponents cared to admit. They held a common 'attitude towards life', and were based on similar fundamental principles. Both, according to Mashruwala, were premised on the idea that there was an inherent conflict between man and nature, and that the development of

man was dependent upon his successful exploitation of the environment around him. The aim of both was to expand profits, trade and commerce in order to 'achieve as much as possible, and as rapidly as possible with as few men and animals as possible'.⁶¹ In order to attain this objective, industrialisation was essential, though not every person could be given employment. The larger aim was centralisation to the point of establishing 'a World Government'.⁶²

According to Mashruwala, the two systems set up a number of obstacles to economic and social development. In both, there was too much centralisation, both of political power and of wealth. In each system people were encouraged to work for profits, 'instead of providing for the needs of oneself and society'.⁶³ Thus, to Mashruwala and his fellow sarvodaya workers, 'Capitalism is private Capitalism while Marxian Socialism (including the so-called Russian Communism) is State-Capitalism, and the "mixed economy" is a sort of truce proposed between the two rival Capitalisms'.⁶⁴ Though he did not expound on this topic to the same extent as his friend, Vinoba, too, expressed similar sentiments as he preached to Indians about the righteousness of bhoodan and sarvodaya.⁶⁵

In an economy and society inspired by the sarvodaya approach, things would be much different. One of the major thinkers on the question of how to build a Gandhian economy was J.C. Kumarappa. A Christian from Tanjore in today's Tamil Nadu, Kumarappa had received his education in commerce and economics at Syracuse and then Columbia universities in the United States. Unlike Mashruwala or Bhave, Kumarappa took up a number of positions within the Congress Party and at various levels of government during his career. He was, for example, a member of the Congress Party's National Planning Commission. But in 1952 he helped found the Arthik Samata Mandal (Association for Economic Equality), in protest at some of Nehru's economic policies.⁶⁶

As they outlined their vision for a Gandhian economy, Kumarappa, Bhave and Mashruwala, placed two objectives at the centre of their plans: self-sufficiency, and the spiritual and moral development of the individual. With these goals in mind, and adhering to the Gandhian principles of truth and non-violence, these thinkers visualised alternative arrangements for employment, production, consumption and trade. Together they insisted

that the starting point for thinking about any economic arrangements ought to be providing employment for all.⁶⁷ Employment was the key not only to self-sufficiency on the individual level, but also to the development of one's personality. In Kumarappa's words, 'Work is to our higher faculties what food is to the physical body. The occupation we follow should contribute towards the growth of our personality'.⁶⁸ Such an approach required a different attitude to work, especially to manual labour, as well as to remuneration. Men ought to be paid for their work, but wages should not be based on an appraisal of a man's physical or intellectual skill. Rather, everyone who wholeheartedly served society would be entitled to a 'living wage'.⁶⁹

From employment, these men naturally turned to the question of production. Here the aims of personal development and self-sufficiency were developed further. Just as Gandhi had been wary of the effects of industrialisation and mechanisation, these three men, too, were sceptical of the value of an industrialised economy. Industrialisation, especially factory work, Kumarappa argued, was 'not conducive to the growth of the whole man and his full development as a personality'.⁷⁰ Indeed, the repetitive, mindless work of the factory worker only ensured that 'men are made part of the machine',⁷¹ to a point where they lose initiative. The alternative was to choose a form of work that would contribute to the personality. As everyone was to work, this meant choosing means of production that were labour-intensive, rather than labour-saving.⁷² As such, production ought to be decentralised, devolved to the village.

Production was to focus first and foremost on food, clothing and shelter for everyone, and then on village industries. On the one hand, these priorities clearly reflected India's economic crisis of the early 1950s. During this period, the country suffered from severe shortages and was on the border of famine in the early 1950s. As such, the first priority of nationalists was to feed India's population.⁷³ Bhave and his associates shared this aim; but they thought the best way to achieve it was through cultivation for family-level and village-level self-sufficiency in food. On the other hand, self-sufficiency was not just a matter of survival. Village industries, including the production of cloth, oil and jaggery were key components of the drive for self-sufficiency because they were central to man's spiritual development. A man working in a village industry would make a full product himself, rather

than serving on a production line: to do so he would have to be resourceful and creative. His work would then become a means of self-expression. In Kumarappa's words: 'It helps one to grow.'⁷⁴ This was a question of personal as well as national well-being, for the cultivation of this kind of independent thought was required in a young democratic country: 'Politically village industries provide the conditions for the development of democracy.'⁷⁵

The inputs for such production were to be chosen for their non-violent characteristics. Here, ahimsa (non-violence) was understood along the more substantive lines imagined by Gandhi. Echoing theories of imperialism developed by Hobson and Lenin, Kumarappa suggested that violence, in the form of imperialism, was a danger when economies over-produced one product, or when they were over-reliant upon non-renewable inputs. Thus, he reasoned that, each country should focus on producing food, clothing and shelter to meet the needs of its people first and foremost. As far as possible, therefore, in a Gandhian economy, raw materials ought not to be exported, but rather, they ought to be processed where they were harvested.⁷⁶ To this end, Bhave suggested that the Government of India ought to declare some areas of production to be 'reserved industries', so that only villages where raw materials were produced would be allowed to develop industries that used those products.⁷⁷ Moreover, in a Gandhian economy, one should develop industries based on what today we would call renewable resources. Kumarappa divided natural resources into two categories: those that belonged to what he called the 'current economy', and those that made up the 'reservoir economy'. The former were permanent, in that they were renewable; the latter were not.⁷⁸ Again, like Lenin and Hobson, Kumarappa argued that the depletion of natural resources that were of a fixed quantity, such as iron or oil, led to competition and ultimately violence. Instead, renewables were the key to peace: 'The more we base our order on the current economy, the less will be the violence.'⁷⁹

The ethics of production was accompanied by a corresponding ethics of consumption. Here, too, Bhave and his fellow travellers relied on two indigenous terms, developed earlier by Gandhi: *tapas* (austerity) and *aparagriha* (non-possession). *Tapas* was ideal because an attitude of austerity encouraged one to sacrifice one's land, labour or property for others.⁸⁰ The idea was to aspire to spiritual fulfilment via the pursuit of self-discipline in the form of restricted consumption, rather than self-indulgence in the form of over-consumption.⁸¹

Non-possession was an extension of austerity and an essential characteristic of a non-violent society. Bhave connected *aparagriha* to an understanding of the origins of happiness. 'At present', he observed, 'greed and possession are...the ruling principle the world over'.⁸² But as a man pursues wealth, he not only becomes burdened with worry and disease, he also loses the 'love of his fellow men'.⁸³ As a result, both rich and poor were unhappy in the present order of things. The solution was to swap the ideal of possession for the ideal of non-possession.

Of course, this ideal did not rule out consumption altogether. But one had to live within one's means, and use resources following the principles of non-violence. Thus, the Gandhian consumer would not consume anything produced in unethical circumstances. Kumarappa held that when one used a product that had been made using dishonourable methods, then one became party to the violence of production.⁸⁴ Violence, in this sense, was broadly conceived, and included exploitation of labour by paying people less than was required to make a living. Prices that did not include fair wages for those who made the product were a form of exploitation and violence. Kumarappa went on to speculate that if a consumer were only made aware of the fact that the price he was paying was not fair to the labourers behind a product, then, 'he himself will probably not be at peace'.⁸⁵ This natural morality of the consumer, in Kumarappa's thinking, could be brought to the fore in reorganising the world's economic order.

Between production and consumption comes exchange, and these thinkers also had ideas about the appropriate scale and means of trade within an economy. Following Gandhi, all agreed that the village was the ideal 'unit' of economic activity to ensure a non-violent economy. Exchange at the village level ought to take the form of a 'Multi-purpose Cooperative Society', where each person would put into a general pool his skills or his produce, and take out what he required, without the use of money. For those necessities which could not be supplied within the village, trade could be undertaken, but only within a small 'outer circle' beyond the village.⁸⁶ Trade with foreign countries on a larger scale, ought to be limited to trade in surpluses. Foreign trade organised on any other basis would lead to imbalances, in that one country would begin to over-produce one product, and under-produce others, destroying its self-sufficiency. The inevitable consequence would be

imperialism and the violence associated with it.⁸⁷ To limit exchange in this way was conceived of as a form of self-discipline that would build character. For to do so would mean that consumers had to avoid the 'temptation' of cheaper prices.⁸⁸

On a purely economic level, the end result would be self-sufficiency from the family, to the village, the region and the nation. If everyone strived for self-sufficiency, and also abided by the ideals of *tapas* and *aparagriha*, there would be no imbalances in production or consumption, and the resulting society would be a more equal one. An economy and society – or rather, multiple economies and societies – organised in this fashion would have no reason to go to war, and world peace would naturally ensue.⁸⁹

In such conditions, the state would lose its *raison d'être*. Using Marx's famous phrase, Vinoba declared, that he expected the state to 'wither away through decentralization of power.'⁹⁰ This was a key desideratum, because a centralised state, according to the Acharya, took the initiative away from individual citizens, and deprived them of the true freedom of self-reliance.⁹¹ This was not just a question of self-realisation, it was a practical matter as well. For with a centralised state, the progress of the whole nation was dependent upon the decisions of a few men. When one made a poor decision, the entire country suffered.⁹² In a decentralised order based on village autonomy, each unit would have to come to decisions in their own time. According to Bhave, decisions ought to be made by panchayats (village councils), composed of 'persons of honesty and goodwill', acting unanimously. Change would come slowly, for: 'a thing on which the good differ among themselves is not worthy of implementation.'⁹³ In this way, Vinoba's dream was for the whole world to be 'set free from the burden of its governments'.⁹⁴

Indeed, whilst Bhave, Kumarappa and Mashruwala deployed distinctly Indian concepts in their prescriptions, their vision was not confined to India. In their writings and speeches, they were keenly aware that the world of the 1950s and 1960s was divided and that the search for peace was an urgent question for humanity.⁹⁵ But what did the world make of these Gandhians? Just as there had been no single opinion on the Mahatma, the Western world, too, was divided about Bhave and his vision.⁹⁶ Like Gandhi had done, Bhave attracted western 'seekers' who joined his entourage and walked with him for a number of days or

months to absorb his universal truths. These men and women, primed for enlightenment, tended to see in Bhave's mission as one that could succeed not only in India, but in the world. Christians, Quakers, and Social Democrats all seemed to see in Bhave's work a reflection of their own ambitions for the world.⁹⁷ For his part, Kumarappa became part of the world peace movement, and was invited to attend the World Peace Conferences in the 1950s.⁹⁸

Gandhian Economics and the Political Establishment in India

Whereas it is often assumed that Gandhian ideas and approaches were side-lined under Nehru's rule,⁹⁹ the Bhoodan Yajna allows us to see the more subtle relationship that was developed between the two. Nehru, upon hearing of Vinoba's mission, wrote to the Government of Hyderabad to ask them to give the Acharya every assistance. The Prime Minister wrote to Vinoba, too, asking him 'to remain there as long as he conveniently can.'¹⁰⁰ Vinoba's mission appealed to Nehru, who, having overseen the military strategy against the Communists with only mixed results, now began to ponder that, 'a psychological and friendly approach often yields greater results than coercion.'¹⁰¹ Of course, Nehru held that the ultimate responsibility for resolving the land problem lay with government, but Bhave's movement could help create the right atmosphere for official action.¹⁰² Bhave's influence was not limited to his pilgrimage in Telangana. Nehru invited him to New Delhi to speak to members of the Planning Commission who had just drawn up a draft for the country's first Five Year Plan. Whilst in the capital, he met the Prime Minister and the President, and spent hours in conversation with the Planning Commission's S.K. Patil.

How might we understand this relationship? On the practical level, it was obvious to Nehru that India's land problem needed a solution that could both overcome the opposition of landlords, and circumvent the constitutional requirement to provide compensation to landlords for any land taken away from them. The Bhoodan movement, if successful, could further both of these aims. On a different plane, after Gandhi's death Indian politics had seemed to lose its ethical dimension. Because of his own exemplary life, Bhave's association with the political elites in Delhi would invest their decisions with greater authority. This was

not all cynical political posturing: Nehru was genuinely bereft at Gandhi's passing, not just personally, but politically too. Bhave was consciously embraced as a potential successor to Gandhi as the moral guiding light to the nation. Gandhian nationalism had had a strong ethical dimension, and Bhave's reception represented an acknowledgement that the ethical aspect of the national movement could have a place in postcolonial nationalism. That being said, Bhave was not able to replace the Mahatma. Nehru often replied to Bhave's letters about various subjects, from redrawing of India's internal borders to the goals of a planned economy, with a simple acknowledgement that they did not see the issue from the same perspective.

Within the Government of Hyderabad, Vinoba's mission was also well received. For one, he had access to areas that had been off-limits to authorities. Whereas officials had mostly let the force of arms convey their anti-communist message to the people, they were pleased to have someone talking to the masses. B. Ramakrishna Rao, then Minister for Land Revenues and Education, voiced the hope that the Communist leaders would hear Vinoba's message and 'realise the harm they are doing to the country by the violent methods adopted by them.'¹⁰³ As it became clear that the Acharya had received donations of more than twelve thousand acres of land in Telangana, the Government of Hyderabad did what it could to assist the transfer of property rights. The Government drew up special land revenue rules to this end: transfers were exempted from stamp duty and registration fees; land revenue would be remitted for three years on waste lands brought under cultivation within two years of the grants; the state government provided five thousand rupees in travelling expenses to the local committee, which was to oversee the distribution of lands, and it instructed local revenue officers to 'provide all facilities' to the members of the committee, to aid in the success of the mission.¹⁰⁴ By 1953, B. Ramakrishna Rao, now the newly elected Chief Minister, Swami Ramananda Tirtha, President of the Hyderabad State Congress, and Chandi Jaganatham, Secretary of the Praja Socialist Party had all become members of the Hyderabad State Bhoodan Yajna Association.¹⁰⁵

Again, it is clear that the Bhoodan movement was not side-lined at the state level. Nor can we say it was simply incorporated, rhetorically, into existing statist programmes. Instead, we see Hyderabad politicians engaging with the movement in two ways. Like Nehru, they seized

the opportunity to find a solution to the land problem that avoided the pitfalls of working through the formal mechanisms of government. At the same time, especially by 1953, the activities of these elected politicians can be seen as an attempt to set the agenda for postcolonial nationalism. It would not be a nationalism of confrontation and law-breaking. But nor need it be completely directed solely by the state. Instead, participation in the Bhoodan movement seemed to offer the prospect of charting a course for postcolonial nationalism that would continue the constructive, non-statist, popular side of the nationalist programme.

Conclusions

Gandhian economic ideas were not marginalised by Nehru and the Planners of postcolonial India; they were simply non-statist. Bhave, Mashruwala and Kumarappa were seeking bottom-up solutions to India's economic problems, solutions which were orientated towards the cultivation of the individual. As such, they engaged in conversation with politicians and officials, but their vision of the respective roles of the state and of the individual was so different from Nehru's and from that these ideas could not have been incorporated into existing plans. Both Nehru and Bhave were keenly aware of this.¹⁰⁶ The engagement that we see from politicians and officials can, instead, be understood as a means of trying to develop the constructive, popular and even ethical aspects of the nationalist movement in a new postcolonial environment.

As for the ideas themselves, the broader political ideas of Bhave, Mashruwala and Kumarappa, help fill the gap in the intellectual history of India. Beyond their economic ideas, these three men thought and wrote widely on spiritual matters, a side of early Indian nationalism that has only begun to be explored.¹⁰⁷ On the political side, Gandhi's death (1948) and the Emergency (1975-77) are connected by these thinkers, and also by the person of Jayaprakash Narayan, who was a close associate of Gandhi, dedicated his life to *sarvodaya* and rural uplift in the 1950s and 1960s, and led the Navnirman movement in the 1970s which helped to precipitate the Emergency. Indeed, Gandhian non-statist movements are a thread that runs through Indian popular politics from independence, through to the

advent of the Aam Aadmi party in the twenty-first century, a thread which remains largely unexplored by historians.¹⁰⁸

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⁸ Srirupa Roy, *Beyond Belief*; Dipesh Chakrabarty, "'In the Name of Politics": Democracy and the Power of the Multitude in India'.

⁹ Taylor C. Sherman, 'From "Grow More Food" to "Miss a Meal"'.

¹⁰ Ramachandra Guha, *An Anthropologist Among the Marxists and Other Essays*, p.4

¹¹ Guha, *An Anthropologist Among the Marxists*, p.86

¹² Guha, *An Anthropologist Among the Marxists*, p.102;

¹³ repeating Guha's assessment is Solomon Victus, *Religion and Eco-Economics of Dr J.C. Kumarappa*, pp.232-3.

¹⁴ Vinoba Bhave, 'Introduction' in K.G. Mashruwala, *Gandhi and Marx*, pp.21-2

¹⁵ e.g., Dadabhai Naoroji, *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*; Bipan Chandra, *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India*.

¹⁶ e.g. Jawaharlal Nehru, "Conference of Heads of Indian Missions in Europe and the USA", in S. Gopal (ed.) *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (hereafter *SWJN*), 2nd series, vol.24, p.77.

¹⁷ Constitution of India, article 31.

¹⁸ Bina Agarwal, *A Field of One's Own*, p.2.

¹⁹ M.R. Masani, 'The Communist Party in India' *Pacific Affairs*, 24:1 (1951), pp.18-38, p.25.

²⁰ Shalini Sharma, "'Yeh Azadi Jhooti Hai!": the Shaping of the Opposition in the First Year of the Congress Raj'.

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²⁴ Ravi Narayan Reddy, *Heroic Telengana*, p.36.

²⁵ Reddy, *Heroic Telengana*, p.41

²⁶ C. Rajeswara Rao, *The Historic Telengana [sic] Struggle*, pp.11-2. See also, P. Sundarayya, *Telangana People's Struggle*, p.58.

²⁷ Sundarayya, *Telangana People's Struggle*, p.114.

²⁸ Extract from secret Communist document, enclosed in S.B. Shetty, Deputy Director (B), Intelligence Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, to S. Narayanaswamy, Deputy Secretary to the Government of India, Ministry of States, 7 January 1952, NAI, Ministry of States, f.1(21)-H/50.

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³⁰ Mohan Ram, 'The Telangana Peasant Armed Struggle, 1946-51'.

³¹ Masani, 'The Communist Party in India', p.26.

³² Taylor C. Sherman, *State Violence and Punishment in India*, ch.8.

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³⁴ Government of India, *Acharya Vinoba Bhave*, p.42.

³⁵ Sherman, *State Violence*, p.113; *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. LXXIII, p.102-107.

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³⁷ Government of India, *Acharya Vinoba Bhave*, pp.10-12.

³⁸ Robert Trumbull, 'Vinoba's Loot with Love', p.8.

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⁴⁰ Government of Hyderabad, Department of Information and Public Relations, *Bhoodan*, p.7.

⁴¹ J.C. Kumarappa was said to have once declared that Gandhism was communism without the truth and non-violence. Sudhila Nayar, 'Kumarappa as I Knew Him', p.284.

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⁴³ Vinoba Bhave, 'Introduction' in Mashruwala, *Gandhi and Marx*, p.16.

⁴⁴ Vinoba Bhave, *Bhoodan Yajna (Land-Gifts Mission)*, p.128.

⁴⁵ Vinoba Bhave, *Sarvodaya and Communism*, p.10.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

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⁵² Bhave, *Sarvodaya and Communism*, p.15.

⁵³ Bhave, *Bhoodan Yajna*, p.10.

⁵⁴ Bhave, *Bhoodan Yajna*, p.68.

⁵⁵ Bhave, *Bhoodan Yajna*, p.16.

⁵⁶ Bhave, *Bhoodan Yajna*, p.7.

⁵⁷ *SWJN*, second series, vol.24, p.43.

⁵⁸ *Siasat*, 28 October 1955, Deccan Desh.

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⁶⁰ Vasant Nargolkar, 'Introduction' in Vinoba Bhave, *Revolutionary Sarvodaya*, p.vii.

⁶¹ K.G. Mashruwala, 'Planning for India', p.43.

⁶² K.G. Mashruwala, 'Planning for India', p.43-4.

⁶³ Mashruwala, 'Planning for India', p.47-8.

⁶⁴ Mashruwala, 'Planning for India', p.41.

⁶⁵ e.g. Bhave, *Bhoodan Yajna*, p.105.

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⁶⁸ J.C. Kumarappa, *Gandhian Economic Thought*, p.58.

⁶⁹ Bhave, *Bhoodan Yajna*, p.40-1.

⁷⁰ Kumarappa, *Gandhian Economic Thought*, p.59.

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- ⁸⁰ Bhave, *Bhoodan Yajna*, p.58-9.
- ⁸¹ Kumarappa, *Gandhian Economic Thought*, p.72.
- ⁸² Bhave, *Bhoodan Yajna*, p.67.
- ⁸³ Bhave, *Bhoodan Yajna*, p.68.
- ⁸⁴ Kumarappa, *Gandhian Economic Thought*, p.64.
- ⁸⁵ Kumarappa, *Sarvodaya and World Peace*, p.8.
- ⁸⁶ Kumarappa, *Gandhian Economic Thought*, pp.68-9.
- ⁸⁷ Kumarappa, *Sarvodaya and World Peace*, p.2.
- ⁸⁸ Kumarappa, *Sarvodaya and World Peace*, pp.10-11.
- ⁸⁹ Kumarappa, *Sarvodaya and World Peace*, p.1.
- ⁹⁰ Bhave, *Sarvodaya and Communism*, p.12.
- ⁹¹ Vinoba Bhave, *Democratic Values and the Practice of Citizenship: Selections from the Addresses of Vinoba Bhave*, pp.63-4.
- ⁹² Bhave, *Democratic Values*, p.106.
- ⁹³ Bhave, *Democratic Values*, p.108.
- ⁹⁴ Bhave, *Democratic Values*, p.64.
- ⁹⁵ Vinoba Bhave, *Vinoba Bhave on World Peace* (Tanjore, 1957-64).
- ⁹⁶ Claude Markovitz, *The Un-Gandhian Gandhi*, pp.15-26.
- ⁹⁷ See entries by Leon Benson, Donald B. Grom, and Lee Kleiss, in *Bhoodan as Seen by the West*.
- ⁹⁸ Sushila Nayar, 'Kumarappa as I Knew Him'.
- ⁹⁹ e.g. Chakravarty, "In the Name of Politics", p. 38; Kaviraj, *The Trajectories of the Indian State*, pp. 65-8.

¹⁰⁰ J. Nehru to M.K. Vellodi, Chief Minister, Hyderabad, 15 May 1951, NAI, Ministry of States, f.16(8)-H/51.

¹⁰¹ J. Nehru to Chief Ministers, 17 May 1951, *SWJN*, 2nd series, vol. 16:1, p.564.

¹⁰² J. Nehru, Conference of Heads of Indian Missions in Europe and the USA, *SWJN*, 2nd series, vol.24, p.77.

¹⁰³ B. Ramakrishna Rao, Minister for Land Revenues & Education, Government of Hyderabad, to Damodar Bhai, Secretary to Acharya Vinoba Bhave, 31 May 1951, NAI, Ministry of States, f.16(8)-H/51.

¹⁰⁴ Un-official note by Mohd. Abdulla, Secretary to the Government of Hyderabad, Revenue Department, [undated], NAI, Ministry of States, f.10(6)-H/51.

¹⁰⁵ *Siasat*, 16 June 1953, Deccan Desh.

¹⁰⁶ Jawaharlal Nehru, speech at prayer meeting, 18 April 1954, *SWJN*, 2nd series, vol.25, p.57; Bhave, *Bhoodan Yajna*, p.26.

¹⁰⁷ Vasanthi Srinivasan, *Hindu Spirituality and Virtue Politics*.

¹⁰⁸ Manash Bhattacharjee, 'Aam Aadmi Party: Government of the Governed?', web exclusive <http://www.epw.in/web-exclusives/aam-aadmi-party-government-governed.html> (accessed 10 February 2015).