

Shri Vinoba was known to few outside the productive centres of Gandhism till one day suddenly his name was mentioned as that of the purest Satyagrahi by Mahatmaji in 1940 on the eve of the Congress embarking upon Individual Civil Disobedience as a protest against India being compelled to participate in war effort. The Congress abstained from any interference whatever with the Britisher's war-effort in India until September 1940. In July that year, the Congress Working Committee had offered in Delhi conditional cooperation which was ~~confirmed~~ ^{confirmed} in Poona in September, but the counter-offer of the British was rejected by the Congress. The Congress had no alternative but to embark upon some kind of programme which would be of a telling nature and naturally it thought of Individual Civil Disobedience for the time being, to be offered by a select few, who were qualified to offer satyagraha strictly in accordance with the rules framed in that behalf. The qualifications of every individual were scrutinised and scanned by Mahatmaji before he certified to his fitness to offer Civil Disobedience. Naturally, for such an exalted and purified form of Individual Civil Disobedience organized in the midst of the Second World War and intended to persuade the British to give up their old evasive ways in dealing with India, Mahatmaji was keen that the campaign should be inaugurated by one who could legitimately be assigned the first place in a test campaign of satyagraha in India. And what was the surprise of the Indian world of politicians and public men and particularly of the Indian Congress world when the name of Vinobaji was mentioned as the name of the chosen forerunner, the person that must first offer Satyagraha at that critical and sacred moment? There was resentment ranging from subdued grumbling or deep dissatisfaction to loud protest amongst some of the

tried and trusted Congressmen that instead of choosing one from amongst those who stood foremost in the ranks of politicians, Gandhi should have gone astray altogether and made the choice of an unknown person to lead the campaign. Who is Vinoba, what is he, whence is he, whither is he? - asked they. Ah, but there were a few at least amongst the leaders as well as the ranks of Congressmen who knew all about Vinoba and answered the queries in all tranquillity and truthfulness. Vinoba's scholarship and sacrifices were recounted, his giving up his studies in the Intermediate class in favour of acquiring not only knowledge but wisdom -- nay, insight and inspiration from some Yogi wandering in the Himalayas were cited. ^{as the *Adhyatma* says,} But those who were convinced against their will always continue to be of their opinion still. Vinoba began his Satyagraha on the 17th October 1940. Vinoba's few addresses as he offered Satyagraha were widely quoted and conveyed to the public, the depths of his learning and the heights of his fervour soon began not only to arrest attention but to arouse admiration. The whole campaign which was thus inaugurated ended with 4500 cases of Satyagraha. It paved the way for the other campaign - of long expected mass disobedience in 1942.

2. It was no wonder that this apostle of constructive work was not known to some members even of the Working Committee. That was because he was working in the umbras and penumbras, not in the limelight, of Indian Nationalism. But to Gandhi he was dear, dear as a friend, respected as a fellow-worker and idealistic as a satyagrahi. "He is next to me", said Gandhi, "almost the best exponent and embodiment of Non-violence. I used the word 'almost' because he has taken the cult of non-violence from me. He has buried himself in a particular locality in the

constructive programme. He has greater power of concentration than myself. His antipathy of war is born of pure non-violence". So Gandhi began with one and created the feeling that a beginning with one should not be made light of. Did not Dandi March begin thuswise with but one, namely, himself? Was not Gandhi the sole delegate to the Second Round Table Conference? A humble beginning has always had great potentialities.

3. The war was over. The political settlement took place and the British quit India for good, and little was known about Vinoba except that he went on spinning and spinning and spinning still further and longer. Really to him spinning was the Yoga from which he was receiving knowledge wisdom and inspiration, all of which he was piling up until suddenly, two years ago, one day he bursts in upon the political scene - really the economic scene - in which he made an appeal to the man with property to part with a fraction of it for his poorer brethren. As people heard about the scheme and its progress - slow at times and rapid occasionally - they prayed that it might be successful. While some prayed, others continued to scoff at this fantastic idea. But the proof of the pudding really lay in the eating and today we have 3½ million (actually 34 lakhs) acres of land presented to this individual for being re-distributed amongst those who are in want and woe. Vinobaji is not really aiming at a certain quantity of land. Its area is not his consideration, but the spirit which prompts such a gift and the sympathy with the poor and the landless - that is the centre and seat of his programme. Truly a miracle has been achieved before our very eyes which must convince the worst sceptic of the ultimate triumph of non-violence in this land.

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