



Tolerance Must for Effective Peace in India

Jawaharlal Nehru

Recent events in India have made it painfully clear that intolerance of another's belief and religious observances is widely prevalent, and often leads to conflict between persons professing different faiths. In spite of efforts to the contrary this intolerance is increasing and is poisoning the foundations of all national and civic life. It is felt by each community that the leaders of the other communities are partisan and irrational and blindly support their co-religionists in all their deeds and misdeeds. Passion and prejudice are displacing sanity and reason, and every kind of progress is becoming most difficult. There can be no effective peace in India till the spirit of intolerance is exorcised. Unity will only come after toleration is understood and practised. It is necessary therefore that the essentials of toleration be proclaimed in clear and definite language and should be brought home to the people of the country.

There must be perfect toleration of other faiths and beliefs and religious practices, and every man or woman must have full liberty to hold and practice and give expression to his faith. There must be no persecution for the holding of any opinions on matters of religion.

The very first essential of toleration is the protection of all places of worship to whatsoever

religion they may belong. No provocation of any kind whatever can be deemed to be sufficient to excuse a desecration or attack, and all such desecrations must be condemned.

Conflicts frequently arise between persons of different faiths on the most trivial and non-essential matters. In times of tension and anger acts are done which are meant to annoy or wound the religious susceptibilities of another. These

provocations are highly undesirable and should be discouraged. They will automatically cease with the return of normal times. But it must be borne in mind that

any amount of provocation accompanying an act, otherwise justified and permitted by the principle of toleration, does not entitle a person to retaliate or interfere with the due performance of that act. There can be no interference in such cases and it must be left to the good sense of the individual or group concerned not to wound unnecessarily the feelings of sister communities. Cow sacrifice has been a fruitful source of conflict. Toleration means that no Hindu must interfere with this however provocative it may be. He may only request and leave the decision to the other. A very recent but an almost equally fruitful source of trouble has been the playing of music in Hindu temples

Nehru Jayanti: 14 November
'Hind ke Jawahar': Zindabad !

Why And How Sarva Seva Sangh's Varanasi Campus Was Took Over and Demolished

D. M. Diwakar

The people of India and their governments, irrespective of ideological sheds, remember their beloved leader, the Father of the Nation with gratitude. This is precisely because of the grand legacy of Mahatma Gandhi and its impact on the masses remains so deep that no government in India can afford to ignore it, whether it likes or not, be it a political party with a legacy of Nehru or Savarkar. Even the global community and organisations such as the United Nations Organization (UNO) also acknowledged the lifetime relentless services and contribution of Mahatma Gandhi, a freedom fighter with an alternative vision and path of development to humanity to evolve a Nonviolent Society and his impacts and appeal in masses in India and the world even after his assassination. It resolved the 2nd of October, birthday as Non-Violence Day.

Services and experiments of Mahatma Gandhi in the freedom struggle of South Africa and India remained unparalleled, such as services to Boer War victims, experiments of Phoenix Settlement and Tolstoy Farm for cadre building and rehabilitations of cadres family, publication of

Indian Opinion, Young India and Harijan to reach masses, Champaran Satyagraha (movement), Civil Disobedience, Dandi March and Quit India Movement to name a few, besides Constructive Programmes and, eleven vows for non-violent cadre building process to create non-violent social order. His massive following and appeal in public remained larger even after his assassination by a 'Hindu Terrorist Group and Ideology' to which Nathuram Godse was a member. Many institutions, ashrams, memorials and people's organizations were created to carry out the work started by Mahatma Gandhi during his lifetime even after his assassination to work with and among masses on the idea, vision, and experiments of Mahatma Gandhi, articulated in his seminal contribution, the Hind Swaraj and his writings though out his life for the Experiments of Truth and struggles compiled in the **Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)**. Mahatma Gandhi was evolving every day and his life is a message to humanity. He appealed masses to "absorb whatever appeared good in my life." These impacted the masses beyond calculation and

and when passing mosques. The blowing of the *Shankh* has been specially objected to. Toleration again signifies that a Hindu may blow his *Shankh* where he pleases and may play his music even when passing mosques and no Mohamadan must interfere. Only a request can be made.

Every individual has a right to follow his own faith and to change it whenever he so wills. He has further the right to convert or re-convert, by

arguments and persuasion, another, provided that on no account must force or unfair means be used. In the case of minor boys and girls under 16, to avoid the possibility of unfair pressure, no attempt should be made to convert them and they should be handed over to people of their own community. Mass conversions are also, in the present state of the country, extremely inexpedient.

(Courtesy : Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru: Volume -2, Page 184-185)

made Mahatma Gandhi a material force beyond institutions.

The Akhil Bhartiya Sarva Seva Sangh (ABSSS) is one of the largest people's organizations at the national level among many others. This was established in March 1948 in a conference under the presidentship of the first President of India Dr. Rajendra Prasad, in the presence of great national leaders of the country, such as the then Prime Minister of India, Pt Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad, Acharya Kriplani, Vinoba Bhave, Jaiprakash Narayan, J C Kumarappa, besides many other leaders. The basic objectives of establishing ABSSS are to work for such a society, which would be based on truth and non-violence, where lives are animated with human and democratic values, free from exploitation, repression, immoral and injustice, and has sufficient opportunities for development of comprehensive human personality. In order to achieve this objective, ABSSS will be completely away from competition to achieve State Power. It will endeavor to establish and in development of such a democracy, which is not based on party politics, rather it will work for power-neutral public policy. It will not accept any discrimination in society based on caste, creed, sect, commune, color, gender, language, country, etc. it will make efforts to develop such a life system, in which equality and partnership will grow continuously, class is resolved, conflicts of capital and labour should be removed, khadi and agriculture-industry, animal husbandry should be main source of livelihoods under decentralized economy. Sangh will arouse sublime consciousness of peace, love, friendship, compassion and justice through its programmes. Maintaining the decorum of non-violence, Sangh will create people's power and carry experiment of Constructive Programmes and Satyagraha for the success of Sarvodaya

through Total Revolution, as and when needed."

The ABSSS campus in Varanasi is spread over 13 acres of land. On the initiatives of late Lal Bahadur Shastri, this land, which the Railway purchased from Defense in 1941, was purchased by ABSSS on payment, from the President, Union of India, through the registered sale deed executed by the Divisional Engineer, Northern Railway, Lucknow, in three phases, i.e., in 1960 (8.7 acres), 1961 (1.2 acres) and 1970 (2.99 acres) to work for Gandhian principles, values, and programmes towards building a harmonious society based on truth and non-violence. The ABSSS made payment of Rs. 26730, Rs.3240 and Rs.4485 respectively through treasury challans number 171, dated May 5, 1959, challan number 31 dated 27.04.1961 and challan number 3, 18.01.1968 respectively of State Bank of India, Varanasi. The ABSSS has been working with people towards its objective despite many odds.

Bhoodan (land gift) Movement has been one of the most important social mobilizations, that worked in reducing one of the most complicated social and institutional conflicts related to landlessness and inequality in land distribution in India to some extent under the leadership of Acharya Vinoba Bhave. He started this Bhoodan Movement on 18th April, 1951 at Pochampalli in Telangna. This initiative of Bhoodan was adopted by the ABSSS in its conference at Sevapuri in Uttar Pradesh (UP). ...

In order to establish links between Social Movements and Social Science, Lok Nayak Jay Prakash Narayan (JP) with many other Gandhians, such as, Shankar Rao Dev and Arya Nayakam, established a social science research institute, the Gandhian Institute of Studies (GIS) in 1959. JP was of the view that if this experiment succeeds, it will have 'incalculable value'. Basic objectives outlined for the GIS were "to help in the

development of knowledge regarding human and social evolution leading to the growth of a balanced social life and world human relationship based on love and cooperation and to help in the application of this knowledge to the development of Indian society” besides many others, such as to study the problems of India and national development, to keep in touch with social movements, persons and organizations, which are engaged in constructive works, social movements, experiments and “collaborate with them in evolving a world social order based on Truth and Non-Violence.”

The ABSSS has provided 5 acres of land to the GIS on perpetual lease at this campus and Uttar Pradesh Gandhi Smarak Nidhi (UPGSN) provided funds for the construction of buildings for the functioning of the GIS. The GIS has many success stories and achievements including the surrender of Dacoits of Chambal Valley and the JP Movement in 1974 to restore democracy against emergency imposed by the then Prime Minister of India. This Institute has a grand legacy of great social scientists including E F Schumaker, Amlan Dutta, Sugat Das Gupta, and Gandhian activists, such as, Usha Mehta, Thakurdas Bang, Siddhraj Dhaddha, Acharya Ramamurti, Manmohan Choudhury, and many others. The GIS started working well. Later Government of India through Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) and Government of Uttar Pradesh through its Planning and Development Department extended financial support (Plan and Non-Plan Grants) to GIS to carry out functioning of this Institute and its research and training activities. The author had also worked as a faculty member at this Institute for about ten years from 1992 to 2002.

The GIS was functioning well. It carried out many research projects sponsored by the

Government of UP and Government of India through their various departments. The GIS was also publishing two well-received journals, namely Gandhian Perspectives (English) and Gandhi Vichar (Hindi) quarterly. These journals could bring many reputed national and international journals in exchange. However, ‘Sleeping Cells’ of the Godse (i.e., a notorious terrorist and assassin of body and thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi) became openly active and started working against the spirit of GIS in the 1990s, when the Babri Mosque was demolished. Then, people could realize that anti Gandhian elements had already got regular senior faculty positions at GIS. Needless to emphasize that Gandhian workers are large-hearted and work with everyone without any sense of prejudice and animosity. They firmly believe in the goodness of an individual and the possibility of the change of the hearts of those, who are not necessarily Gandhian in thought and actions. They could hardly anticipate the sinister design of the ‘sleeping cells’ against Gandhian Institution. Or, one may say that they practice Gandhian principles of ‘Goodness of Man’ despite knowing the risks of damage that could be done by those ‘sleeping cell’(s).

The corporate friends of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) government in power in the Centre as well as in the state of UP had an eye on the real-estate of AISSS including GIS. Firstly, they tried to get entry of ‘sleeping cells’ in the Faculty and Management and got a few faculty members appointed. ... The Institute was brought to unwarranted controversy on flimsy ground of financial irregularity by the ‘sleeping cells’, who were injected very silently under grand design. They approached systematically to Registrar, Society Registration, Varanasi, with fabricated facts to create controversy. Instead of carrying out proper enquiry the Human Resource Development (HRD) Minister through the ICSSR and the Government of UP

through the Planning and Development Department stopped its grant from 1999-2000 on the ground of a Registration dispute created by the Government of Uttar Pradesh, as the then Planning Minister of BJP led state government took interest to make it controversial and registration was not renewed. The GIS approached to High Court of Allahabad for relief. That case was still pending but the court gave a direction to reconstitute a Board of Governors by the Government of Uttar Pradesh, which was waiting with scripted design to keep the GIS almost defunct towards closure. Accordingly, the government of UP seized the Institute and appointed a receiver, and finally, the Institute was locked and sealed despite many initiatives and appeals to run the GIS and save the library of GIS, which had rare collections of original volumes of India Opinion, Young India, and Harizan edited by Mahatma Gandhi himself in South Africa and India and collected works of Mahatma Gandhi, besides celebrated rare collections of books of eminent authors and journals of national and international repute. It appears that it was designed to destroy the GIS and its library. The GIS remained locked and books and journals were stolen by breaking the back walls of the buildings, in the custody of the Government of UP.

Its employees were brought to a starving situation of hand to mouth. Faculty members of the GIS left the institute one by one, as and when they got an opportunity in other organizations. However, the situation of other employees in administration, such as peons, night guards, sweepers, and other supporting staff in office and library was more alarming. They had to withdraw their children from school and were forced to do some manual labour for their survival and to meet their emergency health expenditure. Still, they stayed in the campus with the expectation that the

GIS would be restored. Many died for want of medicine and health care, but their family still had some hope for a revival of the GIS.

Meanwhile, the GIS started working in a camp office in the premises of the ABSSS. The GIS approached Tata Dorabji Trust (TDT) with a modest proposal and the TDT came forward despite odd winds to help the GIS financially for a few years too. The ABSSS wrote to the Commissioner of Varanasi many times to hand over the charges of functioning of the GIS to the ABSSS so that library with rare collections could be saved. But it remained unheard by the office of Commissioner, who were directed and entrusted to run the GIS by the High Court of Allahabad. The main building of GIS remained locked and sealed from 2007 to May 14, 2023.

District Varanasi captured a part of land of the ABSSS on December 2, 2020 for the purpose of Kashi Corridor. The work of Kashi Corridor was finished, still the district administration did not vacate the campus. In other words, it was the first attempt to capture the land of the ABSSS in the name of the Kashi Corridor. Suddenly on January 18, 2023 Commissioner of Varanasi came to GIS campus again. The ABSSS received a letter no. ROV/ 2922-26/2022-23 dated 25.02.2023 from Regional Higher Education Officer Varanasi, in which a meeting of a committee under the chairmanship of Commissioner, Varanasi, constituted by the Higher Education Department under sub-section 4 vide letter no 1266/70-4-2016 (1A)/2007 dated 16.09.2016 was convened on request of Regional Director, Regional Centre of Indira Gandhi Centre of Arts (RCIGA), Varanasi to hand over GIS campus to RCIGA. Needless to say that ABSSS had neither received any such request from RCIGA nor it was made available by the Commissioner, Varanasi too. Shri Ramdhiraj, local representative of AISSS was

present in the meeting. According to him, no decision to hand over the campus was taken in the meeting in reference. The ABSSS did not find this so-called proposal justified. As a result, subsequently, Mr. Chandanpal, President of the ABSSS and Mr. Sheikh Hussain, Managing Trustee jointly wrote a letter no. 1250/2022-23 dated 28.02.2023 to the Commissioner Varanasi, appealing that the said committee in reference was constituted to run the GIS properly instead of transferring land and building to RCIGA. Moreover, a writ petition regarding dispute of GIS is pending before the High Court of Allahabad. Therefore, any decision on sub-judice matter is not possible without consent of the ABSSS and UPGSN and until the writ is disposed off. Moreover, there is a laid down procedure about the dissolution of the GIS and disposal of asset of GIS in its bilaws. Accordingly, the GIS should be dissolved by the resolution of two third majority and properties and assets should be distributed as follows: “ (i) all the properties purchased or constructed by the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, existing at the time of dissolution, shall be returned to the Nidhi.” (ii) All the assets created with the financial assistance of the ICSSR and Government of Uttar Pradesh shall vest in Government of India (ICSSR) and Government of Uttar Pradesh. (iii) All other properties and assets will be returned to Akhil Bhartiya Sarva Seva Sangh.” In view of the above facts, move to hand over the land and building to RCIGA is neither proper nor justified. However, it remained unheard.

On May 16, 2023 Hon. High Court of Allahabad has disposed of a Civil Writ 29975/2007 directing District Magistrate to “examine the relevant records and reach to a conclusion regarding ownership of the land.” The SSS submitted details of its evidence with altogether 18 annexures related to ownership of land including

sale deeds. Suddenly on May 18, 2023, District Magistrate, Varanasi came to GIS campus with a large number of Police Force along with officers of RCIGA to ensure possession of the land and building of GIS to RCIGA by the order of Commissioner Varanasi. However, no such order was served to ABSSS. District Magistrate ignored all these documents and took a decision on 26.06.2023 in favour of Railway. The ABSSS challenged the direction of High Court and decision of District Magistrate in the Supreme Court of India (case no. 16091/2023) pleading that District Magistrate is not an appropriate authority to decide the dispute of the title of the ownership of the immovable property. It should be decided by the competent civil court. However, it did not challenge the direction of High Court in the High Court. The ABSSS has also filed a petition 522/2023 which is pending before the Civil Court, Varanasi. The Supreme Court dismissed the Writ Petition. District Civil Court is yet to hear the matter.

Unsigned notice of Railway was pasted on the wall of building and served to resident workers to vacate on June 27, 2023. Campus building were vacated by force without any proper order from any competent judicial directions. On August 12, 2023 8 bulldozers were brought with adequate force and buildings were bulldozed and demolished despite protests to show the proper orders. Ten protesters were attested to custody till evening.

The action of demolition of ABSSS buildings and throwing out publications in an open air in rainy season by the BJP led Central Government was unbelievable and a recall of a bad memory of destruction of Nalanda Mahavihar (an international university of Buddhism) in the 12th century AD by invader Bakhtiar Khilji. Resident Gandhian Social Workers were dispossessed and

dislodged from the buildings forcefully by deploying police force on August 12, 2023. Books, journals and other manuscripts were thrown out on the road in the open sky in the rainy season. Families of workers, who were residing in the campus were forcefully dislodged and their belongings were thrown out from the building. Publication office and other buildings were bulldozed and demolished without any proper order from competent court. This did not happen even during emergency in 1974, when this was one of the main centres of struggle against Congress Government at the Centre during Indira Gandhi regime.

Series of democratic protests and agitations by Gandhian workers and lovers of Gandhi from the civil society are going on throughout the country but the government did not wait for concluding decision of the competent court. Surprisingly, the advocate on Behalf of the District Magistrate submitted an affidavit in the Supreme Court that ABSSS could not produce any sale deeds. On the contrary ABSSS claims that it has submitted all the three sale deeds along with other annexures.

Moreover, sale deeds of ABSSS is uploaded in social media also. Therefore, it is hard to believe that ABSSS has not produced sale deeds to the office of District Magistrate. It appears that the District Magistrate and Commissioner Varanasi were in hest to oblige the beneficiary at the cost of democracy.

The irony of this central government is that it has to respect and carry Gandhi's legacy on the international and national platforms, whether it likes it or not. This government has defaced Sabarmati Ashram and bulldozed ABSSS illegally and undemocratically. It only wants to keep Gandhi Samadhi at Rajghat as a monumental place to use it for claiming legacy to befool others. **But they should remember that Mahatma Gandhi lives in the hearts and minds of the masses beyond institutions, which cannot be demolished. Mahatma Gandhi lives long beyond the institution.**

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Obituary

Sarvnarayan Bhai Departed

Sarvnarayan Bhai, a veteran Sarvodaya Worker from Bihar, took lost breath on October 19, 2023 night in Darbhanga District. He was 90 years old.

Sarvnarayan Bhai was a great scholar of Sarvodaya Philosophy and also an active companion of the movement. His book on Sarvodaya Movement - Bihar Parva - is a symbol of his reflective personality. His demise is an irreparable loss to the Sarvodaya family.

Vijayashri is No More

The daughter of veteran Sarvodaya worker Amarnath Bhai, Vijayshri died on October 21, 2023. She was unwell for last few days. She was

educated under Nai Taleem, an alternative education system heralded by Mahatma Gandhi. Vijayshri was married to popular Total Revolution Singer Arun Kumar.

Pradeep Khelulkar Passed Away

Pradeep Khelulkar, Secretary, Sevagram Ashram Partisthan, died in a road accident near Ahmadnagar (Maharashtra) on October 23, 2023. He was 66 years old and took over charge as Secretary with Asha Bothara as Chairperson of Ashram Partisthan. Khelulkar was an efficient administrator and a soft spoken simple hearted person.

Our heartfelt tribute to departed souls and we pray God to give strength to bereaved families to bear the losses.

- Ed.

A man who lives without money

Was influenced by Gandhi quote,

“Be the change you want to see in the World.”

Think you couldn't live without money? Irishman Mark Boyle challenged this notion and here's how he finds life with no financial income, bank balance, and no spending.

“If someone told me seven years ago, in my final year of a business and economics degree, that I'd now be living without money, I'd have probably choked on my microwaved ready meal.” According to Boyle, the plan back then was to ‘get a good job’, make as much money as possible, and buy the stuff that would show society he was successful.

Like most individuals raised in a consumer-driven society, he never second guessed those goals. For a while he had a fantastic job managing a big organic food company and even had a yacht in the harbor. If it hadn't have been for the chance purchase of a video called Gandhi, he'd still be pursuing the same life. “I'd still be doing it today. Instead, for the last fifteen months, I haven't spent or received a single penny. Zilch”.

The change in life path came one evening on the yacht while philosophizing with a friend over a glass of Merlot. “Whilst I had been significantly influenced by Mahatma's quote “be the change you want to see in the world”, I had no idea what that change was up until then.”

The two friends began talking about all the major issues in the world - environmental destruction, resource wars, factory farms, sweatshop labor - and wondered which of the issues they could best devote their time to. Mark didn't feel he could really make any difference, however “being two small drops in a highly polluted ocean”.

That evening, though, a revelation came

through: “These issues weren't as unrelated as I had previously thought - they had a common root cause. I believe the fact that we no longer see the direct repercussions our purchases have on the people, environment, and animals they affect is the factor that unites these problems.”

Boyle believes that the degrees of separation between the consumer and the consumed have increased so much that it now means most people are completely unaware of the levels of destruction and suffering embodied in the ‘stuff’ they buy.

It can be agreed that few people actually want to cause suffering to others; most just don't have any idea that they directly are. The tool that has enabled this separation is money, especially in its globalized format.

“If we grew our own food, we wouldn't waste a third of it today” is one of Mark's examples as to why it's important a reconnection with natural/source living is established. “If we made our own tables and chairs, we wouldn't throw them out the moment we changed the interior decor. If we had to clean our own water, we probably wouldn't shit in it”.

The above arguments all honestly assess the undervalue most objects now have. With convenience at our fingertips, most don't consider where their trash product or unwanted items go.

Deciding to be the change, this then spurred Mark to fully dive into his new viewpoint and give up money, which he only planned on doing for a year. “I made a list of the basics I'd need to survive. I adore food, so it was at the top. There are four legs to the food-for-free table: foraging wild food, growing your own, bartering and using waste grub, of which there are far more”.

On his first day, he fed 150 people a three-course meal with waste and foraged food. For himself, however, he ate his own crops and waste only made up about 5% of his diet. "I cooked outside - rain or shine - on a rocket stove".

The next concern was shelter. He found himself a caravan from Freecycle, parked it on an organic farm he volunteered with, and renovated it out to be off the electricity grid. I'd use wood I either coppiced or scavenged to heat my humble abode in a wood burner made from an old gas bottle, and I had a compost loo to make 'humanure' for my veggies". Up front and to the point, Boyle clearly understood the necessity of using every available resource to be most sustainable.

"I bathed in a river, and for toothpaste I used washed up cuttlefish bone with wild fennel seeds, an oddity for a vegan. For loo I'd relieve the local newsagent of its papers (Once I wiped my arse with a story about myself); it wasn't double quilted but it quickly became normal". For transportation, Mark used his bike and trailer, using the 55 km commute to the city as an alternative solution for the gym. Beeswax candles served as his lighting.

Humorously inspiring to some, deluded and anti-capitalist to others, Mark had this to say about his radical lifestyle: "Many people label me as anti-capitalist. Whilst I do believe capitalism is fundamentally flawed, requiring infinite growth on a finite planet, I am not anti anything." More than anything, Boyle claims to be pro-nature, pro-community, and pro-happiness. How often is that a city dweller's life philosophy?

"And that's the thing I don't get - if all this consumerism and environmental destruction brought happiness, it would make some sense. But all the key indicators of unhappiness - depression, crime, mental illness, obesity, suicide and so on are on the increase." More money, it seems, does not equate to more happiness.

Another positive effect of Mark's unique lifestyle is the joy he has created for himself. "Ironically, I have found this year to be the happiest of my life. I've more friends in my community than ever, I haven't been ill since I began, and I've never been fitter. I've found that friendship, not money, is real security. That most western poverty is spiritual, and that independence is really interdependent."

Mark's example certainly stands as inspiration for those seeking freedom from the fast-paced modern age; most alternative media sources would agree that the more one reconnects to nature, the better their mental, physical, and spiritual health is. However, could everyone live like this? According to Mark, no.

"It would be a catastrophe, we are too addicted to both it and cheap energy, and have managed to build an entire global infrastructure around the abundance of both."

The prospect of gradually transitioning to re-localized, small communities is a possibility, though. With greener energy sources and healthier communities being implemented at a growing rate, natural living is already a reality, but may be made much more mainstream in the future to come.

"For over 90 percent of our time on the planet, a period when we lived much more ecologically, we lived without money. Now we are the only species to use it, probably because we are the species most out of touch with nature."

Asked what was missing from his old world of lucre and business, Mark replied "Stress. Traffic-jams. Bank statements. Utility bills. Oh yeah, and the odd pint of organic ale with my mates down at the local".

It just goes to show, if you are passionate about anything, you can be that change you'd like to see in the world.

(Courtesy: www.mkgandhi.org)

Declare Mendha in Gadchiroli as 'Gramdan' Village

Omkar Gokhale

The NAGPUR bench of the Bombay High Court recently directed the state government to issue a notification to declare Mendha (Lekha) village in Gadchiroli district, the first village in the country to secure community forest rights (CFR) or collective ownership of over 1,800 hectares, as 'Gramdan' village under Gramdan Act, 1964.

Gramdan is a voluntary donation of land in a village.

The said law in pursuance of Gramdan movement initiated by Acharya Vinoba Bhave stipulated that if at least 75 percent of land owners surrender their land ownerships to Gram Sabha, and the land so surrendered is at least 60 percent of the total village land, the village be notified as Gramdan Village and gets wide powers under the law.

The bench noted that while the Collector, Gadchiroli, had issued a declaration in 2013, the notification was not issued under the 1964 Act by the government, despite it being under obligation to do so.

A division bench of Justice Avinash G Gharote and Justice Urmila Joshi-Phalke last month passed a verdict, copy of which was recently made available, on a plea by Mendha (Lekha) Gram Sabha through its president Devaji Navalu Tofa seeking issuance of notification declaring the village located in Dhanora Tehsil consisting of 84 families as Gramdan Village.

On October 21, 2013, the villagers had submitted their individual declarations to the District Collector, after which the Collector had declared it as 'Gramdan' village. However, no further action was taken by the state government, argued advocate Akshay Sudame. The Divisional Commissioner of Nagpur addressed the letter to state government to issue notification under

Section 39 of the Act. However, the government has not issued the same for the past nine years.

Moreover, Maharashtra Gramdan Board had made representation to the state government that due to delay in notifying and confirming powers to concerned villages under Village Panchayat Act, it is being deprived of financial and administrative power.

In December, 2021, Ministry of Revenue and Forest conducted a meeting under the chairmanship of Minister, wherein gram Vikas and Panchayat Raj department had stated that it would not be proper to confer such powers on petitioner.

The state government in August 2019 formed a committee for assessment of tribal areas under Vivek Pandit who wrote to then Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis indicating the delay and inaction by the state government.

The bench noted that Bhave was an advocate of non-violence and spiritual successor of Mahatma Gandhi and had spent his entire life to persuade landowners to give up (bhoodan) their lands to the landless and the said movement had succeeded in collecting about 19 million acres of land as it got active response from citizens. To give legal effect to said movement, the 1964 Act was enacted, it added.

"The inaction on the part of the state government frustrates the objective of the Act as it is enacted in pursuance of the Gramdan movement initiated by Acharya Vinoba Bhave", the bench noted.

Allowing the plea, the bench noted that there was 'no explanation' from the state as to why the notification was not issued by it. The HC asked the state to take appropriate steps to ensure that the compliance is made within four weeks from the date of the order.

(Courtesy: The Indian Express, 15 October, 2023)

Secretary's Diary

Gandhi Jayanti: Chandigarh (Gandhi Bhavan)

On the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti, a program was organized at Gandhi Bhavan in Chandigarh. The chief guest, Governor of Punjab and Chandigarh, Banwari Lal Purohit, talked about the principles of peace and non-violence of Gandhiji at program. He highlighted how Gandhi Ji and his followers engaged in a long struggle and non-violent movements for many decades, so that the people of India could live in a free nation. Therefore, today, as we remember Gandhi's contributions to India's freedom, it is our duty to strengthen our belief in truth and non-violence. Gandhi Ji and his fellow freedom fighters dedicated a significant part of their lives to India's independence, and today, as a free nation, it is our duty to work for the well-being of the people, live in peace, harmony, brotherhood, and with honesty in society. He also reminisced about his childhood, when India gained independence, and children ran on the streets shouting "Long live Gandhi Ji." Gandhi Ji always advocated equality, brotherhood, and the welfare of the last person. Therefore, let us all fulfill our responsibility to make the country better today and strive to follow the path of Gandhi.

Sanjoy Singha, presiding over the program, mentioned that today violence is a significant challenge in the world. Incidents like those in Ukraine and Manipur cause immense harm to the humanity. Walking on the path of peace and eliminating the atmosphere of hatred in the country is the only way India can provide guidance to other nations. We must not lose the dignity of communal harmony.

Anand Kumar Sharan proposed the vote of Thanks. More than 200 distinguished citizens, high court judges, people from administrative services, and Gandhians participated in the program. The Governor also visited the exhibition on Gandhi and

paid floral tribute to Gandhi's statue. Ashok Sharan was the program's host.

Telangana Gandhi Smarak Nidhi:

From September 11, 2023, programs were continuously organized in Telangana in honor of Gandhi Jayanti. On this occasion, students of the Government Music College in Hyderabad gave a special performance. Justice P. Narayana was a special guest. G. B. Subbarao presided over the program. A Khadi and cottage industry exhibition was also organized. K. Rangarao, the Secretary of the Telangana Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, conducted a symposium. Many prominent citizens, judges from the High Court, social workers, students, and Gandhi enthusiasts participated.

U.P. Gandhi Smarak Nidhi:

On the occasion of Mahatma Gandhi and former Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri's birth anniversary, a program was organized by the Uttar Pradesh Gandhi Smarak Nidhi. A prize distribution ceremony took place on the occasion of Jayaprakash Narayan's birthday on October 11, 2023, starting at 1:00 PM in Gandhi Bhavan's auditorium. Dr. Ashok Bajpai (Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha) and Vinod Shankar Chaube (retired IAS) attended as Chief guests. The program was presided over by Mahendra Kumar Jain, (founder of Mahendra Educational). Students, teachers, and the families of students from various schools were attended.

In all these programs, the first prize was awarded to the students of the Apeejay School, Dali Ganj. Schools like Universal Public School, Dr. Murari Lal Memorial Inter College, City Montessori School, Rajkiya Jubilee Inter College, and Brightland School also had their students receive awards. Lal Bahadur Rai proposed the vote of thanks.

Gandhi Bhavan, Cuttack:

Mahatma Gandhi played a vital role in the Indian independence movement, uniting Hindus and Muslims in the freedom struggle. The hard-earned freedom we have today is a result of the sacrifices of both Hindus and Muslims. Various Muslim leaders like Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Fakruddin Ali Ahmed, Bibi Amatus Salam, B. Akbar, Hazara Begum, Abbas Tyabjee, Hakim Ajmal Khan, and Yusuf Meher Ali, along with Odisha's Dr. Ekram Razzak, Sayyid Ahmed, Muhammad Bazzi, contributed to inspiring thousands of Muslims in the freedom struggle. This was highlighted by Dr. Bishwajit during the 154th birth anniversary celebration of Mahatma Gandhi organized by the Utkal Gandhi Smarak Nidhi at Gandhi Bhavan, Cuttack. He was delivering a lecture on the topic "Muslims in the Freedom Struggle". The program was presided over by Sheikh Abdullah.

Participants in the event included Gayatri Das, Justice Anwaran Mohanti, Dr. Satya Ray, Virupaksha Tripathi, Harihar Sen, Ramchandra Shukla, Mohammed Sonawala, and Akbar Khan, among others.

M.P. Gandhi Smarak Nidhi:

On the occasion of the 154th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, the day began in the Madhya Pradesh Gandhi Smarak Nidhi with a public prayer involving the city's residents and school children of all religions. Subsequently, a morning procession was organized through the city's main streets to spread the message of peace and religious harmony as advocated by Mahatma Gandhi. During the Gandhi Jayanti program, the city's social workers, citizens,

journalists, and students paid their respects to the Father of the Nation. Approximately 300 citizens attended the event, and school students presented dramas, bhajans, and other cultural performances based on Gandhi's principles. A discussion was also organized, in which city judges, students, citizens, and others shared their thoughts.

Gandhi Bhavan, Bhopal :

An interfaith prayer meeting was organized, students performed and successful students were honored. The Governor of Madhya Pradesh was present as a special guest on the occasion. The Bhavan's secretary conducted the program, and members including Mahesh Saxena, Rajesh Badal, Arun Danyak, and others, were also in attendance.

Mumbai Gandhi Smarak Nidhi:

A special program was organized at Mani Bhavan on Gandhi Jayanti, which included a seminar, an exhibition, and cultural programmes by students.

Aga Khan Palace:

A program was organized at the Aga Khan Palace, Pune, which began with an interfaith prayer and bhajans. The program aimed to involve students from different parts of the city. The program featured discussions, exhibitions, and student participation. Prominent citizens of the city, including Symbiosis Law College Principal Prof. Shedge and the organization's trustee Dr. Raghunath Maselkar, gave speeches. The event was conducted by Shreevala Chordiya.

- Sanjoy Singha