

WRDOTR0110

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Talk of Peter Rhe with Radhakrishna, New Delhi, September 1988

[0:00:00]

Radhakrishna: As connected with Gandhi there are two names – two words, one is the word satyagraha. You're familiar with that satyagraha that is non cooperation, passive resistance, and these are the normal words used for satyagraha. It is renewal in conflict with an exploiter, one who is an usurper, one who doesn't [0:00:27][inaudible]. The Gandhian technique has been identified as satyagraha so in your conversations here, also your discussion as we go on, I think you will come to the word satyagraha and maybe you will understand it, discuss it a lot more. The other word equally important is sarvodaya. Sarvodaya denotes two things. Sarvodaya is the picture of a society which Gandhi envisaged. Because it has been picked up I won't go over the historical origin. Sarvodaya means the new society for which Gandhi was fighting and all of us who have been students of Gandhi would like to share some or other aspects of sarvodaya regards reconstruction of society which is what sarvodaya is.

Can we do that from the comprehensive, holistic total pictures of from the point of view of various components. I say this because while Gandhi was indeed like others, many of us in the struggle for freedom he was also working towards a new society. He was at peace with this after freedom there will be the ascendancy, coming up of military power or civil power. It is happening on those followers of Asia except actually in India. The ascendancy, the coming up of the military power or civil power or democratic powers is obvious in almost all the works of this. So he warned the country against that and he said the political party, the Congress party, The Indian National Congress, which was the political party, only political party at that time, should disband itself and distribute workers all over the country. There used to be five hundred thousand villagers [0:02:52][inaudible] million villagers. Now it's more than that, it's .8 million villagers in India. It has grown last forty years.

So, he said let the Congress workers distribute themselves, spread out in villages and work for the new society. The Congress has done one task, that is getting independence, freedom of this country, political independence so that military power doesn't over consume in power and there is real justice and freedom, no exploitation, let us work for a new society. And this society we have used the word sarvodaya. To achieve Sarvodaya he tried to develop a number of national programs, national reconstruction programs, you can call it national service. Is

that very typical of Indian background, constructive service, national service because national service immediately for a peace worker would have been the alternative military conscript. It's not that, it is doing something for building the country; national service. It is not ultimately the military service, it's building something, it is doing something to develop the infrastructures of a new society; education, industrial organisation, fighting for justice, a number of programs which decentralise the economic sector. That is what we see throughout the study, decentralised political structure, the village republic. All this constituted to Gandhi in the parameters, in the framework of the new society, different aspects of the new society.

[0:05:00]

So, these two words of national construct to service first sarvodaya and satyagraha. Satyagraha also for sarvodaya. Satyagraha is the capacity of people to fight for justice, to demand justice, to face the oppressed, to resist authority when abused as he said. So, in his strategy, in his methodology Gandhi used these two as the basic quests and starting national reconstruction service, being of some service. It's not every service. It's not charity, it's not being good, it's not doing relief, but it is something which has a component of a new society and the emphasis has to be education. And he also used the word satyagraha as I said, where he did 44 satyagrahas in his lifetime, small, big, national, and the last one was 1942, '46 **[0:06:05][inaudible]** and the country demanded that the British must quit. *Quit India* he called it and his slogan was *Do or Die*. So, everybody was asked to contribute. It's a massive revolt of the people, but are peaceful and non violent. That was the beauty of this **[0:06:28][inaudible]** which almost compelled British to leave India, but created a relationship between the British and Indians which doesn't recall some of the bitterness that normally happens between the ruler and the ruled.

So, I'm not now wanting to go to history, but history will take some time and maybe somebody will do it. I want to spend a few minutes this morning giving what we call a bird's eye view of what has happened after Gandhi. What are the movements of the Gandhi or to put it in other words, what are the basic concerns of the Gandhian movement. I want to say that like any other country, like your country or any country, there is no one movement. There are a number of facets of the movement and there is no one of them is **[0:07:28][inaudible]**. Local organisations, national organisations, organisations for different purposes, but as I will ask you to remember two organisations which perhaps because we were here, the Gandhi Peace Foundation, and the Gandhians joined together after Gandhi to form an organisation called the Sarva Seva Sangh. Sarva Seva Sangh is literally society for the welfare of all, to service everybody. So, all the organisations connected with Gandhi, the majority of workers who were leading these organisations got together and formed the Sarva Seva Sangh, which is the sort of an umbrella organisation in the country

under whose leadership the Gandhi movement has gone on for the last four decades.

The Gandhi Peace Foundation was not existent when Gandhi was alive. It came the last 25 years, 27 years to be precise, almost ten years after Gandhi died. It was to look into the future and look at internationally to tell us to how these ideas with Gandhi developed in the course of the struggle for independence in this country, his twin ideas of satyagraha and sarvodaya, how they can be related to national and international spheres. Secondly to redefine, to sort of to refashion it in a way with experience because struggle at the level of the masses, the masses of people with non violence as we were armoured, as we were commitment for something new. In India and elsewhere in the world it's such small struggles here and there, very nominal, people looked at non violence as the individual squeak. I won't whisper it here, I will not try to harm anybody. A mass of people like **[0:09:51][inaudible]** in respect with the Jains practice non violence in personal life. They won't harm an insect, they won't eat meat, they will not say even eat late in the evening, six o'clock so there is no killing of insects, **[0:10:11][inaudible]** insects in food. Very careful in their lives.

[0:10:15]

So, personal non violence excelled in their lives but the same commitment to what I would call social non violence, public non violence, personal **[0:10:27][inaudible]**. What Gandhi tried to introduce was make this commitment to personal non violence an instrument for public non violence, mass non violence where everybody could participate and relate it to not just a good life, not just a better life in the next month or this whatever you have, but to achieve something in this world, that is the independence of the country, the formation of a new society. So, this instrument of non violence; non violent action, non violent behaviour, just not peaceful but non violent, would be the instrument for regenerating a new society by making the individual partners larger **[0:11:19][inaudible]** within the Congress that's a long story. I hope somebody will talk to you in the next four days on the history of the independence movement. So, all of us and many of us who were students of Gandhi, who would like to do something in the Gandhian way for this country, gathered together and thought that we get together, unite to do something in the same way as Gandhi wanted us to do. So, the formation of Sarva Seva Sangh.

What happened to grandsons of the Sarva Seva Sangh or I will take the names, the Gandhian movement as such what have we **[0:12:07][inaudible]**. One thing which stands out in mind is the question about the landless people in this country; the land problem. The land problem was not an isolated problem. Our leader Vinoba, who's no more, tried to emphasise much more than Gandhi did, that the major problem in the country after freedom was the redistribution of land. There were like 17% or 16% landless, no means of production for them,

you couldn't bring justice or happiness in this country or non exploitation unless they had means of production and the means of production in this country was land apart from industries. So, land as a full time or a part time occupation. Taking away from those big landlords who had feudal lands who were not cultivating them, who had left it barren, who were staying outside. All who were cultivating them but not giving proper wages. So, the settlement of land tenure, land disputes and the land problem, the rights of land was one of our major concerns.

And this could have been done by law. The law certainly did **[0:13:35][inaudible]** because our political leadership also believed in the abolishing of landlordism. [Audio skip] Big problem for **[inaudible]** [audio skip] leaving the poorest of the country some means of production **[0:13:57][inaudible]**. It was a very important issue. **[Inaudible]** tried, Vinoba tried to do this not by acting – enacting legislation which was already there but not being implemented by any competent executor, people, administration or people with vested interest. But he thought what he would do is to appeal to the people, appeal to those who had land, and ask them to take into account that their ownership of land was an accident. The earth belonged to the God like air and water so they should live by sharing this with those who haven't had the opportunity. This became at least for eight to ten years, a big movement in the country. It's called the Bhoodan. Bhoodan is the land gifted we call it. It means a gift. It's no gift at all because this was – the bhoodan movement was envisaged for the redistribution of land, not for gifting it away, but they called it gift, a new meaning.

[0:15:10]

So, the land movement, the Bhoodan movement, where three to four thousand people marching in different parts of the country at the same time for two or three years, but the movement went on for almost ten years and collected 2.4 million acres in this country, rough land, good land, bad land, indifferent land **[0:15:37][inaudible]** so public undertakings and distributed a portion of it with the landless. I won't make an analysis of what happened and what was the shortcoming and these things, which we can do in the course of discussion, but this was one of the biggest movements in the country which caught attention, which inevitably interested people who had socialism as their objective, **[0:16:04][inaudible]** and ownership of means of production. And this led in a small way to the ability, to the idea and the concept that inevitably in a particular village, the entire land does not belong to any one particular person but to the whole community. It's a concept **[inaudible]**. Before the British came land in the village belonged, 200 years ago, to the village community. It did not belong to individuals as we have it today. And British felt to interfere with the land tenure and regulatory system here, they knew these fellows are up there where land belongs to people and the landlords with all the **[0:16:54][inaudible]**.

So, Vinoba tried to resuscitate for a while the concept that land belongs to the whole village and not to an individual and it's the village that can sit together in an assembly, we call it Gram Sabha, village assembly, and decide who should own the land, who needs the land, who is doing other things. So that in the local society, in the local community first of all the means of production belongs to the whole community and the community decides who should be **[0:17:29][inaudible]**. Who needs it because some people are engaged elsewhere, some people are not living in this city, in this village so who will work on the land. So, who will till the land and how will it be shared. And this **[inaudible]** say after three years it will be divided, it can be reviewed and the new changes will take place, but with the understanding that land is not something to be bought or sold, land is something which belongs to the community.

This is another concept extending the land problem and reviving what was generally Indian and sometimes even today **[0:18:12][inaudible]** the tribal **[inaudible]**. There are opportunity of less than 20% of tribal communities in different parts of India and in many places the land doesn't belong to an individual. It belongs to the community and those who can work on it go and work on it. They shift. There are some problems connected with it but the idea was to develop the concept of village communities which is now disintegrating because of political factors; politics has divided the country and economic factors like **[0:18:50][inaudible]**, land and the landless. So, the under tasks. So instead of diving the village further and atomising the villagers, why not look at the village as **[inaudible]** and approach the problems of the village, the development of the village from the point of every person **[inaudible]**. This was called at that time the Gram [Dhani ? 0:19:14]. Gram is the village, again village gift. Call it a village community **[0:19:20][inaudible]**. This has gone on. There has been a – what do you call that, sudden revival of the bhoodan movement in the last decade, ten years. Over forty years – over ten years the movement was on the top and in the last for ten years some of our leaders have taken up the program of settling landless on patches of the land, 50 acres, 100 acres, 250 acres, shifting small groups on group forming not necessarily cooperative forming, giving them the necessary wherewithal for cultivation.

[0:20:03]

That is irrigation facilities. We don't allow the irrigation facility in **[0:20:09][inaudible]** I believe not to be that of the **[inaudible]** but if 185 of the area is cultivated, irrigate it. The possibilities of a 25% **[inaudible]**. So irrigation is a problem and for the landless there is the power, economical power, bullock power. So they would need bullock power, they would need facility for irrigation. So, by providing them this, these various access of land which have been gifted as Bhoodan Gram, which have been donated as bhoodan, here now begin cultivation. There are about 150 such groups in different constituencies. So, the bhoodan movement is not something which is over although there is no

new collection of land. The effort now is to identify the land, settle people on that land and see that they live as far as possible a cooperative life.

The Bhoodan Gramdan movement has spread out all over the country. A characteristic of the movement was that while Vinoba work a number of people worked in different parts of the country. There is no part of India that was not touched by the movement when our [0:21:28][inaudible] went round thousands of miles, and various others [inaudible]. A number of youth came because it's a call that land belongs to the people. Thirty years ago we thought that the land was Hindustan, all the land would [0:21:43][inaudible] in the country. Land laws actually passed but they were [inaudible] so the Bhoodan movement reached its percent of its peak in 1957. We've [inaudible]. The Gramdan movement has taken the shape of rural development. Gramdan as such has not gone further to village communities, planning together, planning the [0:22:16][inaudible] coming together to decide things what to the land. It is more than land. It is the development of village communities to feeling that development in this country as in many others has concentrated on providing inputs to individuals, families, one family, two families, in a way breaking the village into single families.

What we're trying with Gramdan movement is to develop the concept of the full village community in sitting together, planning together and expressing a concern for each of them, for the neighbours. So then it's not just I get my loan from the bank and I plough the land and I enjoy the benefits of the land, but I do it for the good of the community. Any question? And together with land this whole concept of working for the whole community, for the village community. The second concern in the last two years has been a question of violence, public violence. There is a lot of public violence in the country. It was so during the freedom movement. It was so because you had Hindu Muslim, the two religious communities partly because of the British upsetting the relationship [0:23:47][inaudible], responsible for the differences during political weightage of importance to some at the cost of others. But one would have expected that with Gandhi's sacrifice we were shocked because did not agree with this attitude to... [Audio Skip] But with this [0:24:10][inaudible] we have done a lot in the last I mean [inaudible] but last few years but we [inaudible] to India for the areas where [inaudible] for human rights and all that, in Bengal, in [Nokali ?], [0:24:27][inaudible] in Bihar, in Delhi, a number of cases.

So, one was surprised that after [0:24:35][inaudible] the political [inaudible] and on the cost factor, on the [inaudible] factor. If there is [inaudible] then we are Muslim [0:24:56][inaudible]. If there is a Harijan consequence [inaudible] harijan [inaudible] but what we call evolutions and all that [0:25:17][inaudible] in such a way that the [inaudible] fundamental [inaudible] Hindus being more fundamental, the Muslims getting more fundamental, there has been a real reverse, sort of a going back to more [inaudible]. So you have for example the

[0:25:41][inaudible] Hindus and Muslims but these tensions have also taken place in the industrial sector, in the universities and in life in general, which you see. I will take the case of Punjab where we had process there every couple of months **[0:26:07][inaudible]**. Punjab is now facing terrorist problems, public terrorist, a thing some would not have heard three years ago or ten years ago. Anybody can **[inaudible]** insecurity... [Audio skip].

As I said it is basically to keep a sort of a continuity of Gandhian thought and to see the developments of the country in the light of Gandhian teachings. How do you react to what happens to this country. So one of the things we try and do is to involve ourselves in debate about the national situation and expression of opinion on what happens in the country. How do we do this? We have the **[0:26:58][inaudible]**, we have the thirty representatives that we have at different centres, captors in different parts of the country who are all in touch with – we try to be in touch with youth of this country in the colleges and universities. With the teachers, with social workers. So try to mould public opinion and where they do intensively a program of peace education. What is peace, why do you need peace, what are the problems and talk of Gandhi, then programs on Gandhi for the youth, for the school children. So, we call this program of education for peace and try to throw as many things as possible to the **[0:27:46][inaudible]**. So, this happens all over including this place.

So, one of the – the number one goal plan is that of education for peace. We don't use the work Gandhi only but use it only for ourselves. The second program where it is the national concerns, national issues **[0:28:07][inaudible]**. A third program is research and publications. We do it from here, we have a book house which possibly you'll see in case of time, and this as one of the major inputs because the Gandhi Peace Foundation basically wants to be on the threshold of new thinking national and international. So, publication of books, publishing books, and lastly in case of conflicts like they have in Punjab, like they have in other parts of the country, try to understand the problem and try to create a new **[0:28:47][inaudible]**, try to make a sort of an intermediate position to be able to create a dialogue with the most **[inaudible]**. We call it the Intervention For Peace. We do it through Shanti Sena, we do it through small groups **[inaudible]**. Basically this is what we do.

We don't do any rural development per se. We have small – we have other interests like one of my colleagues works on **[0:29:15][inaudible]** dedication. He's in touch with a number of individual and groups, public literature, **[inaudible]** things like that, but as part of the network we're creating for a new **[inaudible]**. Basically these four: Education for Peace through youth, Intervention For Peace Shanti Sena, publications and **[0:29:39][inaudible]** though the national force. This includes national and international work. We don't have any international chapters, we fancy ourselves as a national

organisation but we do keep in touch with a number of individuals, the *[inaudible]* a number of *[inaudible]*.

[0:30:00]

This is the headquarters. We have a governing body discuss matters today, people who are speculating in this and that or [0:30:08][*[inaudible]*]. The staff were working on general armament or education but basically it is through this *[inaudible]* we try to *[inaudible]*. Strong nationalistic [0:30:27][*[inaudible]*] and politics of the country creates. You know first in the morning the president of my country going to all the way to Amsterdam and saying Pakistan should not have nuclear bombs. I don't think he has any business to say what Pakistan should have or should not have. He can say we should not have, but we have. He goes to Amsterdam and says Pakistan should not have. It's because nobody is doing this, but we are in the – as I said we are in the phase in which there is strong nationalism in this country.

So, when you are nationalistic in your outlook, the attitude to war is always pro war, but anything you want to do you need go to war. It's not in a country which was led by Gandhi, there is not much of an anti war feel. This is something you should know. So, our anti war programs are war programs or war resistance programs are not very successful, but when you come to a table and dialog with people, the effects of war, the multi nationalist , the urban [0:31:44][*[inaudible]*], the nuclear question, there is some understanding. There is a third point, third aspect. This country has taken the lead on the question of cessation of nuclear hostilities at the international level. It's one of the six countries which has appealed. We have been involved in this dialogue between the two big powers, so the general attitude is we are very peaceful. The general [0:32:19][*[inaudible]*]. I talked of public relevance and terrorism. It's not as though everybody is non violent in this country, non of those in spite of Gandhi, in spite of *[inaudible]*.

So, there is a lot of hidden violence in the country with exploitation. The internal violence, latent violence and that of nationalism all of which is really a preparation for war. But when you talk of multinationals all moved in place and all that, more people respond to you than people respond if you only talk against the world. So, the anti war movement is a very small one. [Audio Skip]

The dimension is relationship with the international groups. We knew that a number of groups in this building, perhaps more than anybody else in the peace movement. We try to relate ourselves to – individually people do, but as an institution we relate ourselves to almost all known international organisations and we do this in individuals, queries and groups like U.S. almost every year with whom we spend ten days talking. We organise courses here or outside. So, we have a certain relations with the groups, with this [0:33:56][*[inaudible]*] which has grown in the last decades. So, this has given us more understanding of the

international problems and look at Gandhi from the international angle too. It has also helped us to understand that what we do is small compared to the global problems we're facing. So in a sense of humbleness, in a sense of humility we try to talk of Gandhi knowing fully well that Gandhi in India is an export commodity and not much of internal use. [Audio Skip]
Varied from time to time.

Peter Rühle: Pardon.

Radhakrishna: It had varied it had changed from time to time. India 1957 the Prime Minister asked Gandhiji's [0:34:50][inaudible], the then Prime Minister. He was a member of the Gandhi Peace Foundation. He asked us to organise an international conference on nuclear weapons.

[0:35:03]

Bertrand Russell the British philosopher wrote him a letter on the horrors of nuclear war and he promptly passed it on to us here and said, "why don't you organise public opinion on this," 1957, 30th. So, he promptly called a conference, a hundred people, sent delegations to Khrushchev, Kennedy, Khrushchev and [Goldalini ? 0:35:29] and Kennedy and asked the NTB treaty, cessation of – liberation of or bombs. The relations would be very close. The [0:35:41][inaudible]. In 1962 again negotiated with the Prime Minister and the government of India to organise some thing very different. Nothing far away from peace, something of a huge program all over the country. He called it Youth Against Famine, against drought. Like one of the serious droughts in 1967, and then we said we'll organise 700 camps, food camps to fight against drought. So, this is one thing. So, we had the maximum collaboration.

In 1974, Jayaprakash, one of our Gandhian leaders started a movement, youth movement questioning the government's – the corruption that had really started and the abasement of human rights. The control over free press, the control over freedom of speech and writing. So, we had to protest. Some of us went to jail. I myself went to jail during what we call [0:36:56][inaudible] thirteen years ago, and the government was very angry with us. And that anger I don't think has subsided in the last ten years because when Mrs. Gandhi was defeated and the new government came into power for a brief period of two years, what we call the Janata government, we haven't been very close to them for the simple reason that leader of the movement was a member of our board and stayed with us in this building. So, his speakings and conferences and we found [0:37:43][inaudible] support [inaudible]. So, the government was angry with us and said you are becoming political.

We said we're not interested in being political. Not that we're non political, we're apolitical but – because we express our opinions but the government by that time had become a government which would look at problems as though

either you support me or you oppose me. There were only two sides to it, there is no grey, it's all black and white. So we had some difficult days for about eight years, when Mrs. Gandhi [0:38:20][inaudible] and she came back to power, asked for the public enquiry into our funds, into our work. Not only our work but the work of several other workers [0:38:30][inaudible]. We were the targets because we were supposed to be, and rightly so, identified with Jayaprakash. When the new Prime Minister who's now the [inaudible] came to power, he has not shown any particular interest in our activities, but we are not necessarily sort of anti any person. [0:38:57][inaudible] we'll cooperate with your programs.

So, we cooperate in programs of literacy, non formal education, environment education. But if there things like the present controversy on the Bill including newspapers, we have a right to say no. Under the politics of this country this is not easily understood, that you can be my best friend, cooperate with you but say things straight on your face, "Sorry friend what you're doing is wrong." This generosity in public life doesn't exist now. So, you can say we're not very close to the government of India. But as such we haven't had the facility in this Foundation to take total responsibility to organise some exhibitions, but we got me and a person that will do what is planned. So we do collaborate with [Tiger, Surat ? 0:40:07][inaudible] and [0:40:11][inaudible] all those groups, which are different groups but we are not really taking an important leap...

[0:40:27] [End of Audio]