

Prof. Thakurdas Bang

Recipient of Jamnalal Bajaj Award for Constructive Work-1991

Born in 1917 in a poor family, Prof. Bang had a brilliant academic record; obtaining four gold medals at B.A., he stood first at B.A. and M.A. examinations. He went on to take a degree in law, joined the Commerce College at Wardha as a lecturer, and later intended to proceed to London for I.C.S. examination. But the urge to contribute his bit for making the country free proved irresistible and made him plunge into the 1942 Quit India Movement. He worked underground, was later arrested and imprisoned for over 2 years.

After release, he rejoined the College and formed a Village Service League', a forum of students who used to visit regularly 5 villages near Wardha for rural reconstruction work. He set up Gramseva Kendras in these villages. He mobilised the people of Chimur-Ashti villages, who had been harassed by the British authorities, and provided solace and help to them. Impressed by his devotion, Gandhiji took him in the Committee of Charkha Sangha to whose trainees he taught economics.

Greatly distressed when Gandhiji was assassinated, Prof. Bang gave deep thought to what he must do to propagate Gandhiji's ideals. Finally, he resolved to work for bringing Gandhiji's dream of an ideal village into reality. On the advice of Acharya Vinoba Bhave, he and his associates belonging to the institution "Sadhna Sadan", which he had earlier started, took up a programme of work in Mahakal, a village near Paunar Ashram. He resigned from the College to devote himself full-time to this work.

Looking to his experience in the field, Vinobaji appointed him as Secretary of the Wardha Tehsil Panchakroshi Samiti which was engaged in constructive work under the direction of Shri Kishorelal Mashruwala and Shri Shrikrishnadas Jajoo.

The next phase of Prof. Bang's work was the Bhoodan-Gramdan movement. He went to Gaya District in Bihar for this work. He and his co-workers in Sadhana Sadan donated all the assets of that institution to the Bhoodan Andolan. He started a journal 'Samyayog' to propagate the message of Bhoodan, especially among the Marathi-speaking people.

He carefully studied the strategy of mass contact through 'Padayatra' and helped organise a number of small groups of workers for building up leadership from the grass-roots thereby reducing the burden on the top level for collecting and distributing land. Thousands of acres were thus obtained in Madhya Pradesh in one year (1955). Vinobaji himself paid him high compliments at the Kanchipuram Sarvodaya Sannam held in 1956. He was then entrusted with the task of organising group padayatras in other parts of the country as well, which he did intensively for 2 years.

Again on Vinobaji's appeal, Prof. Bang took up the work among Adivasis in the Jungles of Dhule district in Maharashtra from 1958 to 1960. He took three associates with him and fanned out the thick forests, lived among Adivasis and did yeoman's work for their education, health improvement, development of farming and removal of addiction to drinking.

Returning to Sevagram in 1960, he and his wife concentrated for three years on imparting education on the Nai Talim lines.

Since 1964, Prof. Bang has been working as one of the chief organisers in the Sarvodaya movement. He became President of Maharashtra Sarvodaya Mandai and then served as General Secretary of the All India Sarva Seva Sangha. From 1969 to 1985, he was President of the Sangh. He has been in intimate touch with Sarvodaya field-workers throughout the country for which he keeps on touring extensively.

Another aspect of Prof. Bang's contribution which deserves special mention is his support to and active participation in Anti-Corruption and Loktantra movement led by Jayaprakash Narayan in mid-seventies for which he and his wife were imprisoned for 19 months during Emergency. He led East-West Yatra in 1988 and has been leading the Swadeshi Movement since last year. He has been a Convenor of the Azadi Bachao Andolan to propagate Swadeshi since last year. He was President of Sevagram Ashram Pratisthan during 1989-91. He also organised a month-long study tour of 50 senior Sarvodaya Workers to study the Punjab problem in 1986. He has been working in several forums and movements of national concern' like Citizens for Democracy, P.U.C.L., communal harmony and Gram Swarajya.

He has written several books including "Whither India" translated into six languages and is regarded as a theoretician in Gandhian Sarvodaya philosophy. His wife, Suman, and his two sons (who emulated their father's example in University examinations by getting high ranks) and daughters-in-law are also whole-time activists in the service of the people.

