

Prof. N.G. RANGA
a Portrait

Compiled by
JONNALAGADDA RAMA RAO

Edited by
KANDIMALLA SRIRAM

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Introduction

Tillage and pillage

Homo sapiens (humans) from Africa first reached India around 65000 years ago. They were spread through central and eastern India between the period from 45000 to 35000 BCE. They were hunters and food gatherers. Every family/clan enjoyed their kill and collection.

Their descendants are still there in remote forests of India and Andamans.

The oldest agricultural settlement in the Indian subcontinent sprang up at Mehrgarh on Bolan river in Baluchistan, Pakistan in 7000 BCE. Early agriculturists cultivated wheat and barley and hunted and bred stocks. They enjoyed their whole harvest. There was no pillage.

The agriculture extended to the neighboring and far off places. Piggott, British archeologist claimed... "Permits us to visualize the little peasant states, each more or less self-contained, within a natural area such as the Zhob valley or those of the Kolwa and Maskai. This prevailed between 7000 BCE to 600 BCE i.e. 6400 years long." Proprietary thus obviously lay with those who cultivated land".

Aryans immigrated into India in waves. Around 1100 BCE, a large wave of iron-using Aryans entered India. They moved from northwest to east. Rapine persons produced "arrowheads, spearheads, daggers and knives in substantial numbers" with iron.

Farmers used iron to make implements like axes, ploughshares and sickles. These implements increased yields in agriculture. The harvested wheat and barley plants were collected and stacked in common threshing floors. Straws were heaped and grains were stockpiled. Heaps of straw attracted wild animals. They were domesticated. Farmer and the animal cooperated ever after. Grain stockpiles attracted Iron wapon wielding pillagers who

continued to coerce the farmers year after year. It became *Rajabhaga* (pillager's share). Through ages, it was around one of the six parts.

Ala-ud-din Khilji (AD 1296-1316) fixed the standard of revenue demand at one-half of the produce without any allowance or deductions. In other words, the pillage was raised by three times straight and the revocation of deductions increased the pillage to four times.

From the time of Mehrgarh to this day the rural economy of India had been based on a system of village communities of peasant proprietors but strangely Cornwallis (1786-1793), himself a landlord, in Council notified "all Zamindars, independent taluqdars, and others as actual proprietors of the land". It worked to the detriment of the national economy and ruined the peasantry.

It was the mother of ensuing atrocities on farmers. Another atrocity was *Najay* – a tax on the farmer, when his neighboring farmer ran away as he could not pay the taxes.

After the formation of Indian National Congress most of the Zamindars joined it and had the dominant voice. They were aspiring to replace British Raj.

Indigo was introduced in 1790. Its demand spiked by 1830. The British indigo planters (traders) compelled the cultivators to receive advance by illicit means. Dina Bandhu Mitra the dramatist of Bengal exposed the oppression of the planters in his memorable drama entitled *Nil Darpan*. (The Mirror of Indigo) The Rev. James Long, who translated this work into English in 1860, was fined and imprisoned by the High Court of Calcutta.

The indigo cultivation in India collapsed in 1897 owing to competition with German 'aniline' dye. In 1917-18 two decades after the collapse of Indigo trade, the British government was liberal in accepting some demands of the farmers.

The disturbance to agriculture by British colonization through contract farming continued to haunt Indian agriculture.

John Lawrence (1853-1858) instructed the settlement officers to estimate the average annual yield in all villages, convert the totals into their rupee equivalents, and assess from a quarter to sixth of the product as the land-tax to be paid by each village community on certain dates, corresponding with the time of harvest, but irrespective of the character of the outturn.

The settlement officers departed from the practice of collecting a part of the actual harvest.

The proposition to tax on estimated yield was one more wicked tier and the demand to pay in cash was a third vile tier. The farmer was punished when the yield was low and/or the price was low. Either or both were a common occurrence and the farmer was driven to the money lender (*Mahajan*). The farmer had to contract interest (Compound) bearing debt. Hence the farmer was born in debt, lived in debt and died in debt. The farmer's debt was the creation of the government. Hence Prof Ranga agitated (1931) for the debt relief by the government and succeeded (1938).

Before the arrival of British, sustenance cultivation was the norm. Famines were few and far in between. Britishers diverted land use for cultivation of crops like indigo, jute, tobacco, opium causing food shortage. Moreover they had exported part of scarce grains to Europe to feed armies. In the process Britishers introduced procurement of cereals i.e forceful collection by paying less than market and remunerative prices and rationing: supplying limited quantities to families. The same policies were continued even after independence notwithstanding the change of guard. Ranga questioned the rationale of this practice and fought for its removal.

Prof. Ranga spearheaded the agitation for the abolition of the Zamindari system and succeeded. Ownership of land was restored to peasants.

The doctrinaire leaders started Bhoodan/Gramdan movements to impose panchayat landlordism. Owing to Ranga's opposition it fizzled out.

Later the ruling congress party proposed the XVII amendment to the Constitution of India to equate the land of peasant proprietor with the estate of the Zamindar to grab lands from peasants. A short shrift to the due process of legislation with a sly edition of English dictionary. Again Ranga opposed it and convinced the parliament members across the board. The bill was defeated. Later he joined hands with Indira Gandhi to stall re-introduction of the same bill.

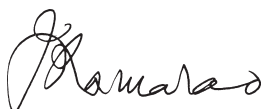
Textiles

Textile industry had two segments. One was spinning yarn on a spinning wheel(charka). Mostly women undertook it for piece wages. In England a woman who spinned thread for her living was called a spinster. Men weaved on handlooms.

Upto Eighteenth century England encouraged textile production in India by paying subsistence prices.

In the Nineteenth Century, England destroyed textile production in India by banning Indian textiles into England on one hand and by supplying yarn at predatory prices on the other. Moreover it supplied machinery to spinning mills.

Enlightened people protested. Gopalrao Deshmukh of Poona in 1849 and Nabagopal Mitra in Bengal in 1867 promoted Indian-made goods, and others followed suit (Chandra 1977: 123). Even the well-known economist G.V. Joshi spun his own clothes and started shops for Swadeshi goods. In Dhaka people boycotted Manchester cloth in 1875. The hand woven cloth with hand spun yarn was called “Khadi”. Hand spinning was no more an economic activity. The only source of yarn supply was spinning mills. They were charging exhorbitant prices. Hence Ranga pleaded for supplying mill yarn at subsidized price to keep up employment to handloom weavers.



(JONNALAGADDA RAMA RAO)

N.G. RANGA

Prof. N.G. Ranga

The life and works of N. G. Ranga, and what intelligentsia of society have to say about him, provide us insights into the trials, tribulations, and triumphs of a leader who championed many a cause without ever vying for political power.

The Father of the Indian Peasant Movement

The Hindu reports, “Prof. Ranga, who has given a dozen volumes on the peasant and his problems in India and abroad, is in a real sense the father of the Indian Peasant Movement. He has dedicated the major part of his public life to the cause of the Indian Peasant.”¹

After noting that the Indian Peasant Movement hasn’t been rightly understood and hence misrepresented, V. V. Giri (President of India 1969-74) observes: “Andhra Desa has the proud privilege of having in its midst the real author and leader of the peasant movement. Professor Ranga, who requires no introduction, has contributed. . . , being the pioneer, to the building up of this movement throughout the length and breadth of this country. He gave an ‘all India’ aspect of the movement by organising a peasant group of thirty-five fellow members of the Legislative Assembly representing the different provinces.”²

An apostle of peasant philosophy

In the review of Ranga’s *Credo of World Peasantry*, The Hindu comments: “In the present volume, Ranga sets forth exactly what the title indicates—a credo of world peasantry.... This book covers almost every aspect of the agrarian problem.... The book is instructive and thought-provoking.”³

As Asoka Mehta notes, “the proletariat was the sole carrier of socialism was accepted as axiomatic.”⁴ “The peasant is a neglected subject in

1 *The Hindu*, April 20, 1958, sec. Madras.

2 V. V. Giri, INTRODUCTION TO THE MODERN INDIAN PEASANT, by N. G. Ranga, (Anmol Publications, 1979), 1.

3 *The Hindu*, April 20, 1958, sec. Madras.

4 Asoka Mehta, *Studies in Asian Socialism* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1959), 99.

socialism.”⁵ “The socialists remained uncomfortable in the presence of small property.”⁶ The egalitarian philosophers came to believe that the road to emancipation of the downtrodden was through socialism and revolution. Marx portrayed peasantry to be anti-revolutionary.⁷ But Ranga asserted that peasants are progressive and revolutionary. Further, he said that capitalists and communists failed to bring peasantry into the fold.

In the recent past, the farmers’ protest against farm laws in the outskirts of New Delhi and across different parts of the country arguably became the largest and the longest ever such demonstration at any place for a cause. The fact that farmers numbering in the hundreds of thousands gathered together to peacefully protest and make their voices heard is a testament to the credo promulgated by Ranga which is at the heart of the historic farmers’ protest that swept the nation.

A veteran parliamentarian

Ranga was elected to the Central Legislative Assembly from the Guntur–Nellore constituency in July 1930. He later served as a member of the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha. All in all, he served in such representative bodies for a period of 60 years until 1992. This earned him an entry in the Guinness Book of World Records (1991) “on account of being the oldest parliamentarian in the world and among the first three with the longest parliamentary career.”⁸

A strong proponent of self-employment

In February 1964, Prof. Ranga presided over the Southern States Peasant Convention organised in Bengaluru. He expounded that peasants, labourers, handcraftsmen, and artisans could harness new technology innovations such as electricity to further economic development and

5 *Ibid.*, 201.

6 *Ibid.*, 203.

7 David Mitrany, *Marx Against the Peasant: A Study in Social Dogmatism* (University of North Carolina Press, 1951).

8 “Members Bioprofile,” accessed August 28, 2021, http://loksabhaph.nic.in/writereaddata/biodata_1_12/1326.htm.

human welfare in the near future. He highlighted that adopting technology would create more employment opportunities in villages and small towns, contribute to an increase in family income, and boost the production capacity of cottage industries.⁹

Ranga noted that although the adoption of technology might not usher in social development in every village, it could pave the way for true socialism while bringing the vision of William Morris to life. Addressing the convention, C. Rajagopalachari remarked: “Acharya Ranga's mantram of self-employment is the equivalent of our conception of Swatantra.”¹⁰

The founder of the All India Kisan Sabha

“During the 1930s Ranga, Sahajanand, the communists—and Ambedkar—all called for an alliance between peasants and agricultural labourers.”¹¹ While briefly outlining what led to the advent of Kisan Sabhas, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay notes:

Spearheaded by Socialists and other activists, the mass organisations spurred up. For the first time, peasants began to be organised into Kisan Sabhas to enable them to voice their grievances; Professor Ranga, a noted Congressman, along with others taking the lead. The first All India Kisan Sabha took place in 1936, attended by 20,000 peasants, several of whom trudged many miles to attend it.

Their demand was for a Kisan Mazdoor Raj. Soon workers and peasants of all denominations as also professionals began to form mass organisations. Even the Muslim Divines formed a unit. All rallied round the Congress as the appropriate vehicle for attaining their goal.¹²

9 “Press Report on South India Peasant Convention,” (Bengaluru, February 1964).

10 *Ibid.*

11 Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India* (SAGE Publications India, 1994), 287.

12 Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, *Inner Recesses Outer Spaces: Memoirs* (India: Niyogi Books, 2014), 188.

As V. V. Giri adds, “An ‘All India Peasants Conference’ was called at Lucknow on 11 April, 1936. The organisers who helped the professor in this matter were Swami Sahajanand Saraswathi and Mohan Lal Gautam. An All-India Kisan Bulletin was also started with Indulal Yagnik as the editor. Thus, an ‘all India’ shape has been given to the movement by the untiring efforts of Professor Ranga. It is indeed a matter for great pride to mention the fact that the movement has come to stay.”¹³

While tracing the historical conditions that culminated in the holding of a conference of representatives of peasant organisations at Lucknow, Rasul reports:

On the occasion of the National conference of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) held at Meerut (U.P.) in January 1936, a number of left-minded political workers including leading members of the CSP met there specially on 15 January, 1936, to discuss the question of the peasantry and the horrible situation created for them by the great depression. They decided to form an organising committee, with N. G. Ranga and Jaiprakash Narayan as joint conveners, to convene an All India Kisan Congress.

. . . . The organisation was at first officially called the All India Kisan Congress. Some people called it the All India Kisan Sangh. The name was changed at a later date.¹⁴

The fourth session of the Sabha was held at Gaya, Bihar, in 1939 and presided over by Acharya Narendra Deo. As Gail Omvedt notes about the war of slogans in the context of growing factionalism between communists and non-communists in the Kisan Sabha, “Ranga initially talked of ‘kisan raj’, the communists pushed ‘mazdur raj’ and in response Ranga adopted ‘kisan–mazdur raj’.”¹⁶ Under the aegis of the Communist

13 V. V. Giri, *introduction to The Modern Indian Peasant*, by N. G. Ranga, (Anmol Publications, 1979), 1.

14 Md Abdullah Rasul, *A History of the All India Kisan Sabha* (National Book Agency, 1974), 3–4.

16 Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India* (SAGE Publications India, 1994), 284.

Party which resisted bringing the peasantry into the slogan, the Kisan Sabha adopted “mazdur raj”. Ranga wrote several pieces on the thesis “Kisan Mazdoor Praja Raj” he propounded.

జనవరి 10, 1936

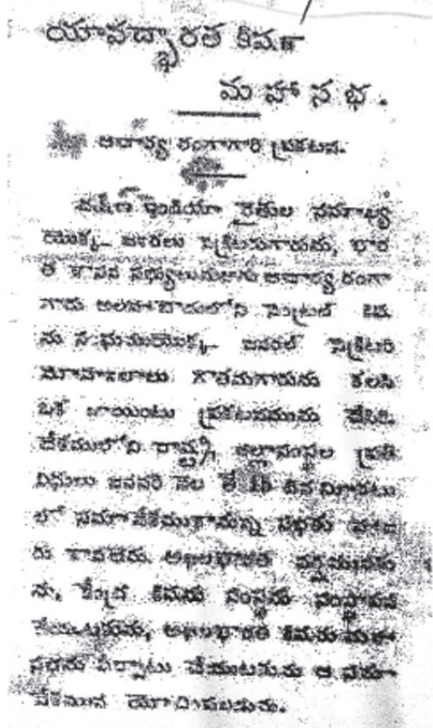
All India Kisan Sabha

Notification from Prof. N. G. Ranga

Prof. N. G. Ranga, member of Central Legislative Assembly and general secretary of the south India peasant confederation, and Mohan Lal Gautam, general secretary of the central peasant society of Allahabad, issued a joint statement calling for the attendance of public representatives to the nationwide Kisan convention in Meerut on 15 January.

The establishment of a central body for peasants and the organisation of the All India Kisan Sabha are on the agenda of discussion.¹⁵

(The original Telugu version is printed by the side)



An ardent advocate of agricultural debt relief measures

On the initiative of Prof. N.G. Ranga, the Madras State Cooperative Conference of 1931 favoured a proposal to grant a moratorium. This set the example for other cooperatives in India to follow suit. At the beginning of the worldwide economic downturn caused by the Great Depression, the ryots conference held in Tenali on 5 June, 1931, called for a moratorium on agriculture debt recovery for at least six years.¹⁷

15 “All India Kisan Sabha,” Zamin Ryot, January 10, 1936, <http://zaminryot.com/pdf/1936/Jan-10-JAN-1936.pdf>.

17 N. G. Ranga, *Kisan Speaks* (Kisan Publications, 1937), 75.

Ranga remarked, “The sufferings of our peasants can only be imagined when I tell you that they have received only 534 crores of rupees in 1932–33 as against 1,018 crores in 1928–29. That is a colossal loss of 483 crores per annum [on the sale of their produce].”¹⁸ When the Imperial Bank of India was trying to proceed against peasants who defaulted their debt payments by moving on their properties, Ranga said: “Abolish imprisonment for civil debtors. It has become almost a general practice that courts send even honest debtors to jails merely because they have found themselves unable to pay debts in time.... It is a well-known fact that the real incomes of the middle classes and the rich have been doubled during this depression owing to the precipitous fall in general level of prices.”¹⁹ In 1937–38, Madras and U.P. governments also declared moratoriums.

A supporter of the nationalisation of banks

The 1948 report of the Economic Programme Committee of the All India Congress Committee (AICC) recommended nationalising banking and insurance.²⁰ During the same year [1948], peasant leader N. G. Ranga recommended nationalisation specifically to provide rural credit.²¹ Indira Gandhi announced the ordinance to nationalise fourteen major Indian banks in a radio broadcast dated July 1969.²² Consequently, as Dinesh Chandra notes, “Credit delivery system has expanded and strengthened after nationalisation of the banks.”²³

An active campaigner for adult franchise

The Morley–Minto Reforms of 1909 included the admission of Indians to the Viceroy’s Executive Council. However, only members of the landed

18 N. G. Ranga, *The Modern Indian Peasant* (Anmol Publications, 1979), 58.

19 *Ibid.*, 145.

20 Reserve Bank of India, *The Reserve Bank of India, 1967-1981*, vol. 3, 4 vols. (Central Office, Reserve Bank of India, 2005), 14.

21 Granville Austin, *Working a Democratic Constitution: A History of the Indian Experience* (Oxford University Press, 2003), 210.

22 *Ibid.*, 215.

23 Dinesh Chandra, *Rural Credit, Role of Informal Sector* (Segment Books, 1993).

class, members of the business and trading community, educated people, and representatives of local bodies had the right to vote. In a similar vein, Annie Besant's Commonwealth of India Bill put limits on franchise by prescribing qualifications that included income, land ownership, and literacy. On the other hand, Ranga published a thesis on 'adult franchise' that advocated universal suffrage and sent it to Motilal Nehru and other national leaders.

A practitioner of economic survey research and a propagator of village studies

Ranga conducted economic surveys in Indian villages and published the first volume in 1926. The Royal Commission on Agriculture was appointed in the same year. Though Russian agrarian economist Alexander Chayanov published his work on peasantry in 1926, it was translated into English only in 1966.

Ranga worked tirelessly for the upliftment of the socially and economically disadvantaged. Since 1923, he began to organise a series of peasant conferences.²⁴ As Heidrich points out: "In 1928–29, he [Ranga] was appointed as Special Officer for Economic Survey and made investigations on behalf of the Government of Madras in the districts of the Nilgiris, Coimbatore, Salem, and Guntur. His findings were, however, never published because of their provocative contents."²⁵ ". . . One has necessarily to agree to what the Assembly correspondent of the Roy's Weekly writes: '. . . Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin might well have taken lessons from our Professor of Economics.'²⁶

24 Susmita Sen Gupta, *Radical Politics in Meghalaya: Problems and Prospects* (Gyan Publishing House, 2009), 114.

25 Petra Heidrich, "The Indian Village as Perceived by Peasant Leaders in Late Colonial India," in *Essays on South Asian Society, Culture and Politics II*, ed. Bernt Glatzer (Verlag Das Arabische Buch, 1998), 78.

26 Nyayapati Narayana Murthy, *The Modern Indian Peasant* (Anmol Publications, 1979), 141.

A vehement opposer of the Zamindari system

The Andhra Provincial Ryots Association was co-founded by N.G. Ranga in 1928. Ranga was elected as the association's first president in 1929. He conducted an economic survey of villages and documented his findings in a book that identifies the Zamindari system to be at the root of farmers' distress. At the conference held at Venkatagiri in 1931, the Andhra Provincial Ryots Association declared that abolition of the Zamindari system through legislative action was its chief objective.

But the bulk of the membership of the Congress working committee did not consist of farmers who were in a position to dictate policy in the interests of the tiller.²⁷ Speaking at the first all-India conference of the Sabha, "Ram Manohar Lohia said Gandhi had taken up the cause of kisans for relief of land revenue but did not agree to secure relief between zamindars and peasants."²⁸ Hence, it could be argued that the Congress did not want to antagonise the zamindars.

As Richa Kumar notes in her critique of the narrative about the Green Revolution in the public imagination, "From 1950 to 1965, Indian agriculture witnessed a surge in productivity across all crops."²⁹ She attributes this—among the host of other factors—to the "demolition of the zamindari system" in 1950.

A vociferous campaigner of farmer's rights and remunerative prices of farm produce

As Bagchi notes in his analysis of the impoverishing impact of colonial rule on the Indian economy, "Before 1800, India was both the largest grower of cotton and the largest producer of cotton goods in the world. But then the tables turned."³⁰ "An estimate of the distribution of world manufacturing output by P. Bairoch shows that India's share of the world's

27 M. K. Gandhi, *Congress and Its Future*, comp. by Prabhu R. K. (Navajivan Publishing House, 1960), 28.

28 Md Abdullah Rasul, *A History of the All India Kisan Sabha* (National Book Agency, 1974), 5.

29 Richa Kumar, "Putting Wheat in Its Place, Or Why the Green Revolution Wasn't Quite What It's Made Out to Be," *The Wire*, October 31, 2016, <https://thewire.in/author/richa-kumar>.

30 Irfan Habib, *Indian Economy 1858-1914* (Tulika Print Communicatio, 2012), 92.

total stood at 19.7 per cent in 1800, but then declined steadily till it was 8.6 per cent in 1860 and only 1.4 per cent in 1913.”³¹ This decline in India’s manufacturing output per capita was partly attributed to ‘de-industrialisation’. As Meena Menon and Uzramma observe, “India’s out-of-job artisans turned to agriculture to eke out a living; here, too, there were problems, with limited land available and too many workers.”³²

While documenting the rise of a strong peasant movement in coastal Andhra during the late 1920s, Omvedt writes: “The organised peasant movement dated from 1923 when Ranga, a Kamma of Guntur district, returned from England and formed a local Ryots Association after the 1920–21 upsurge in the region.”³³

As Ranga observes, “By 1942, Government found it necessary to control the prices of wheat.”³⁴ These controls continued to be in effect even after independence. He writes: “The All India De-control Conference was held at Agra in 1951. The late Sidwa presided, and I [Ranga] inaugurated that session and became the president of the All India Progressive De-control Association. . . C. Rajagopalachari (Governor General 1948-50). became the premier and achieved the desired de-control within six months after assuming power. And the late Rafi Ahmad Kidwai, the Food and Agriculture Minister in the Union Government, displayed his statesmanship by extending the initiative of Rajajee to the whole of India and liberating the country from that control-regime. All the fears of the Food Ministry’s experts were falsified.”³⁵

In the words of N. G. Ranga, “The Peasants’ Institute [founded by Ranga] has been advocating, from its very inception, a harmonious comradeship between the peasants and workers on the land, based upon a mutually settled relationship between the prices of agricultural products and

31 *Ibid.*

32 Meena Menon and Uzramma, *A Frayed History: The Journey of Cotton in India* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 35.

33 *Ibid.*, 282.

34 N. G. Ranga, *Fight for Freedom: Autobiography of N.G. Ranga* (S. Chand, 1968), 400.

35 *Ibid.*, 408.

wages, both to be made dependent on decent and rising living standards of both peasants and workers. The Andhra Kisans have long ago realised the need for a common front to be put up by both the landed and landless kisans.”³⁶

While talking about the agricultural production required for self-sufficiency in food products, Ranga writes: “The “Ford Commissioners” hailing from America, the Myrdal group of international economists reinforced the Indian planners’ prejudices against our peasants. The success of North American Continental large-scale farming on one side and the growing strength of Soviet large-scaled but collectivised farming on the other seem to have convinced Jawaharlaljee that the future rural progress and economic and political self-reliance of India could be based not on the small-scale farming and large masses of individualistic small peasantry but on large-scale, mechanised farming.”³⁷

In India, well over half of the land area is cultivable. While a portion of the cultivable land is in the ownership of the heirs of farmers who cultivate them, another portion of the land gets grabbed. As in the legend that David Graeber cites, “When, around 1290, King Edward I asked his lords to produce documents to demonstrate by what right they held their franchises (or ‘liberties’), the Earl Warenne presented the king only with his rusty sword.”³⁸

According to a 2014 survey by GRAIN, small farmers are feeding the planet with just 24% of the world’s arable land which is fast shrinking. Moreover, the survey found that small farms are often more productive than large farms. It concludes: “All over the world, small farmers are being forced off their land But it’s the small farmers that are the most productive, and the more their land is grabbed, the more global hunger increases.”³⁹

36 Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India* (SAGE Publications India, 1994), 286–287.

37 N. G. Ranga, *Self-Employed Peasants and Tribal People* (Kisan Publications, 1983), 14.

38 David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (Melville House, 2014), 427.

39 GRAIN, “Want to Double World Food Production? Return the Land to Small Farmers!,” November 22, 2014, <https://theecologist.org/2014/nov/22/want-double-world-food-production-return-land-small-farmers>.

A rational sceptic of Bhoodan and Gramdan

Vinoba Bhave purportedly made a statement that “to own land is a sin”.⁴⁰ To which Ranga responded:

To create employment for oneself and for one’s family from out of one’s landholding is to increase the area of economic freedom and not to commit a sin. To seek economic freedom and to avoid wage slavery is the most constructive and divine effort a man can make to justify the divinity in him and not to commit a sin. To use land inherited by him for non-exploitative, constructive and productive purposes and to produce many times more from it than what is sown on it is to make God’s earth productive and freedom-yielding and not to lead any sinful way of life. A small-holding peasant who hugs his holding and helps it yield freedom for himself and for society and employment for his family is the noblest architect of freedom and creator of employment and not an unproductive or exploitative privileged class as is the case with so many in professions.⁴¹

Acharya Vinoba Bhave initiated the Bhoodan movement in 1951 at Pochampally, Telangana. The movement attempted to persuade wealthy landowners to voluntarily give a percentage of their cultivable land to the landless. In the words of Asoka Mehta, “Bhoodan, or the land-gift movement, is a remarkable effort at organic readjustment of society. Bhu means land and dan means both gift and division. Bhoodan seeks through gifts to divide, redistribute lands.”⁴²

The Bhoodan movement sought voluntary donations of cultivable land from landlords to be restored to landless farmhands from whom it was grabbed. Gramdan, an important phase of the Bhoodan movement, aimed to persuade peasants who came into possession of land to transfer their

40 N. G. Ranga, *The Peasant and Co-Operative Farming: A Socio-Economic Study* (Indian Peasants’ Institute, 1958), 29.

41 N. G. Ranga, *Panchayat Landlordism Versus Peasant Economy* (Indian Peasants’ Institute, 1958), 13.

42 Asoka Mehta, *Studies in Asian Socialism* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1959), 92.

land titles to a cooperative farming society tasked with allocating work and apportioning the harvest. As the private ownership of land would cease to exist and give way to collective ownership, it was envisioned that all villagers would work together and be compensated for their efforts. After Vinoda visited Odisha in 1955, Gramdans were received in the districts of Balasore, Mayurbhanj, Ganjam, and Sambalpur.

The momentum of the Gramdan movement enthused leaders such as President Rajendra Prasad, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, socialist leaders R.M. Lohia and Asoka Mehta, Ajoy Kumar Ghosh and E. M. S. Namboodiripad of the Communist Party of India, Vinoba Bhave (Bhoodan founder), Jaya Prakash Narayan (Sarvodaya leader), G.L. Nanda (member of the Indian Planning Commission), and U.N. Dhebar (President of Indian National Congress) who were exploring ways to achieve self-sufficiency. They met at Yelwala, Mysore, Karnataka in 1957 to pass a resolution supporting Gramdan. As Ranga notes, "They decided to launch a national campaign for persuading peasants to pool all their lands and holdings into Gramdan village social economy."⁴³ The Planning Commission took to the mission of promoting "Co-op farming" as a euphemism for Gramdan. The Congress Party was quick to follow suit as it made it its main goal. Ranga joined issue with what was indeed a formidable National Front over Gramdan.

Ranga notes: "Vinoba Bhave's Bhoodan movement did not yield any large area of Bhoodan land, to be utilised for large-scale, mechanised agricultural production. His Gramdan movement was expected to transform almost all the lands of villages. By utilising the coercive process of taking over all the land in a village or a group of villages by pursuing a majority landholders to pool their holdings into Gramdan holding, they hoped to win over the minority for the Gram Dan by playing upon their faith in democracy."⁴⁴ This ideological rift between the rest of these

⁴³ N. G. Ranga, *Self-Employed Peasants and Tribal People* (Kisan Publications, 1983), 15.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

leaders, who seemed to be quite convinced that they found the perfect way forward to achieve political and economic self-reliance, and Ranga, who had an unrivalled comprehension of the problems affecting land gained from economic survey observations, became quite perceptible.

Arguably, the Bhoodan movement has had some unforeseen consequences. In the wake of land scams in Telangana, Koride Mahesh reports: “The total extent of the Bhoodan land is 23,034 acres. . . . Of the total Bhoodan land, 13,101 acres do not have survey numbers.”⁴⁵ Writing about lands under encroachment in Tamil Nadu, Jesudasan reports, “The [Bhoodan] board was reconstituted recently. In many places, the donated lands have been under encroachment by affluent people.”⁴⁶

An outspoken critic of cooperative farming and the 17th Amendment

The 17th Amendment to the Indian Constitution introduced in the parliament threatened to destabilise peasant proprietorship by taking land away from peasants and handing it over to the cooperative farming society. The principal clause of that bill was an extension of the Estate Abolition Act that aimed to abolish rent-collecting estate owners, such as zamindars and their ilk. But according to the 17th Amendment, even peasants were to be considered estate holders—an oxymoron that came to be from the state machinery exercising its “right to re-edit the dictionary”.⁴⁷ In the name of land reform, it sought to place small peasants in the same category as zamindars and meant to take land away from the former in the same way land was taken away from the latter. Ranga publicly protested against the bill which he saw to be a “mischievous move against self-employed peasants and their landholdings”.⁴⁸

45 Mahesh Koride, “Bhoodan Scam: 4800 Acre Vanish from the Records,” *The Times of India*, July 16, 2017, sec. City News.

46 Dennis S. Jesudasan, “Bhoodan Board Reconstituted,” *The Hindu*, March 19, 2018, sec. Tamil Nadu, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/bhoodan-board-reconstituted/article23288408.ece>.

47 David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (Melville House, 2014), 54.

48 N. G. Ranga, *Self-Employed Peasants and Tribal People* (Kisan Publications, 1983). 19.

When referring to the first speech delivered by Ranga in Lok Sabha on 18 September, 1963, on the 17th Amendment Bill, Austin observes: “N. G. Ranga, the Andhra peasant leader, viewed the bill differently. It was the beginning of a ‘long, dreary, black day for Indian peasants’, particularly the ryots of Andhra, he [Ranga] said, for they were simply working farmers.”⁴⁹ Rajagopalachari and Swatantra Party as well as Minoo Masani stood by Ranga in the months of struggle against the bill. Austin adds, “That Ranga’s point about small peasants was not wholly ill-conceived was later borne out by the Praja Socialist Party. When it endorsed the amendment at its Seventh National Conference at Ramgarh, 17–20 May, 1963, it suggested that small holdings should be excluded from the effects of this bill.”⁵⁰

While tracing the history of the 17th Amendment, Austin writes

N. G. Ranga personally and via the Swatantra Party organised opposition to the amending bill. He wrote to Nehru on 19 August, 1963, asking him to suspend action on the bill, especially in regard to the national emergency in force from the war with China. He wrote to Swatantra colleagues on 3 October, 1963, asking peasant organisers and local bar associations to flood the Joint Committee with memoranda opposing this ‘obnoxious bill’. On 3 November, 1963, he presided over the ‘Andhra Pradesh State Convention on the Constitution 17th Amendment Bill’, which urged Congress to withdraw the bill. A month later he wrote to Nehru again enclosing a ‘representation’ from ninety members of the Congress Parliamentary Party asking that a ceiling be placed on agricultural incomes, and simultaneously, ceilings on urban, industrial, commercial, and professional incomes.⁵¹

49 Granville Austin, *Working a Democratic Constitution: A History of the Indian Experience* (Oxford University Press, 2003), 111.

50 *Ibid.*

51 *Ibid.*, 112.

“Minoo Masani—Swatantra now, but a member of the Congress Socialist Party in the thirties—insisted on an immediate vote. The vote was 206 ayes to 19 nays, barely short of allowing consideration of the bill as reported. Masani told the treasury benches to take the defeat sportingly. N. G. Ranga said government members could ‘now accept the decision of God’.”⁵²

“Ranga wrote to Nehru that the Nagpur Resolution might come to be seen as ‘the commencement of demotion of peasantry into a new depressed class of the socialist age’. It was too much like China, he said, and the justification for cooperative farming ended with its failure in the USSR. The letter of 16 September, 1959, contained his resignation as the secretary of the Congress Party in Parliament so as to avoid embarrassing Nehru with any speech he might make against cooperative farming.”⁵³

A leading custodian of the handloom sector

M. Mohan Rao, the former president of the Rashtra Chenetha Jana Samakhya, writes:

In Indian local markets, cloth woven by handlooms couldn’t compete with British fabric produced by power looms. Professor Ranga conducted a survey on the living conditions of the weaver communities and campaigned for their welfare. He revealed the sad state of the handloom sector to the world. Ranga explained the bottom line of the competition. After studying weaving patterns and designs, he even proposed changes and suggested ways to prepare different products using handlooms. He also suggested different combinations of colours that could be used in order to make traditional *butas* more attractive. These inputs contributed in part to bringing prosperity to the handloom sector.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 113.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 117.

In the words of the social activist Akurathi Murali Krishna, “I clearly remember those days from childhood. We the children of weavers used to roam the streets of Nidubrolu while chanting “Zindabad! Zindabad! Handloom Ranga Zindabad”. Ranga identified the innate talent of a young Pragada Kotaiah and encouraged him to study handloom technology. Ranga established “Ramineedu Vidyalayam” in Nidubrolu where several people including P. Kotaiah blossomed into great leaders. Gandhi learnt about Ranga’s various studies on the handloom sector and met him in 1925. Ranga introduced Pragada Kotaiah to Gandhi.”

Murali Krishna recollects the highlights of Ranga’s Central Assembly speech on the handloom sector:

Md. Jabullah, a member of commerce, introduced the bill in the assembly for the reduction of tax on the import of mill cloth from Britain. Heated discussions about the bill took place in July 1934. The bill was not in the best interests of the Indian handloom and textile industry. Ranga exposed the malevolence of the bill and proposed a further increase of the tax by bringing in an adjournment motion.

“The mill owners of Bombay and Ahmedabad are keeping mum but why are you unnecessarily meddling in this matter?” Jabullah said to Ranga. To which Ranga responded, “Why would they open their mouths? Your proposed bill is beneficial to them.” Ranga retorted: “The helpless weavers will become extremely vulnerable as mill owners continue to line their pockets. We will put an end to this foul play at foot. Decide whether to withdraw the bill or push the bill for a vote.”

Govind Ballabh Pant and Avinashilingam Chettiar stood in support of Ranga. The government was persuaded by Ranga’s arguments and finally withdrew the bill. “Your expertise in economics and your studies on the handloom sector have come in handy. You are the real “Cheneta Brahma”, Gandhi lauded Ranga. Gandhi also said: “There has been an intense drive to promote the handloom industry as early as 1921 in Andhra Pradesh. This young man from Nidubrolu [Ranga] has been actively campaigning

our message all over the state and also spearheading the freedom struggle. He is the inheritor of our ideology.”

Murali Krishna writes about how the charkha symbol came to be on the Congress Party flag:

Pragada Kotaiah communicated to Gandhi that 19 weaver castes were solely dependent on weaving and that 12 of them were involved in weaving related activities. He explained that the charkha or the spinning wheel was instrumental in the livelihoods of handloom weavers. “Then we will make the charkha an integral part of the Congress Party flag,” Gandhi declared. The charkha has been adorning the Congress Party flag ever since then.

A doyen of social justice

While examining why the communist movement failed to recruit Dalits and remained Brahman-dominated, Omvedt notes: “In coastal Andhra where a generation of educated Dalit youth grew up in the 1920s and 1930s, we can find some being drawn to the Congress via the N. G. Ranga group, but almost none in the communist movement, in spite of the fact that communists more than the Rangaites had vigorous organising among Dalit labourers.”⁵⁴

While tracing how Jagjivan Ram contributed to organising the “Harijan League” in order to draw Dalits into the Congress, Omvedt observes: “He [Ambedkar] ignored Ram’s letters on this issue as he ignored the Andhra Peasant leader [Ranga] who had written a book entitled ‘Harijan Nayak’.”⁵⁵

“During . . . [1934–35] a ‘Harijan Seva Dal’ was formed with the active support of his [Ranga’s] wife and both toured in Guntur and Krishna districts, launching a temple entry campaign in the village of Govada.”⁵⁶ Athota Ratna Kavi, a Dalit poet, composed a poetic rendition of Ranga’s biography.

⁵⁴ Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India* (SAGE Publications India, 1994), 184.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 210.

A world traveller and teacher

As K. M. Munshi, a member of the Indian Constitution Drafting Committee, notes: “Throughout [his] life, he [Ranga] has maintained contact with the peasants. He has visited almost all the villages in Andhra and quite a few in several other parts of this country. He has voiced the peasant's ambitions and worked for their welfare.”⁵⁷ Ranga travelled extensively not only within the country but also around the world. These experiences helped him formulate his theories. In 1934, he established a political school in his native village of Nidubrolu to train political workers from Rayalaseema and the Kalinga area in Andhra. This idea of establishing political schools was later emulated by the Communist Party of India.

In the words of Khasa Subba Rao

Professor Ranga is not content with anything so limited as provincial leadership. His bid has ever been for national leadership which [includes] frequent tours to far-flung provinces in the country. But it would not be correct to estimate his ambition politically as restricted by any means to the boundaries of India. He has not neglected the rest of Asia. Nor other continents either. He sees himself as a leader of the coloured inhabitants of colonial empires all over the world, and the rudimentary fragments of an organisation intended to give form to the vision have already, you can bet, taken shape in his restless brain.⁵⁸

In the words of the Communist Party leader Prof. Hiren Mukherjee who was normally at loggerheads with Ranga on policy, “With no hint of ostentation, he [Ranga] lived a life of uprightness. . . . [and] there never was a whisper of scandal against him.”⁵⁹

56 *Ibid.*, 283.

57 K. M. Munshi, *FOREWORD TO FREEDOM IN PERIL*, by N. G. Ranga, (Indian Peasants' Institute, 1961), v.

58 Khasa Subba Rao, “Professor N. G. Ranga, A Flaming Crusader,” *New Swatantra Times*, February 2016.

59 Sivaramakrishnaiah Pavuluri, ed., *Prof. N. G. Ranga Centenary Souvenir*, 2001, 66.

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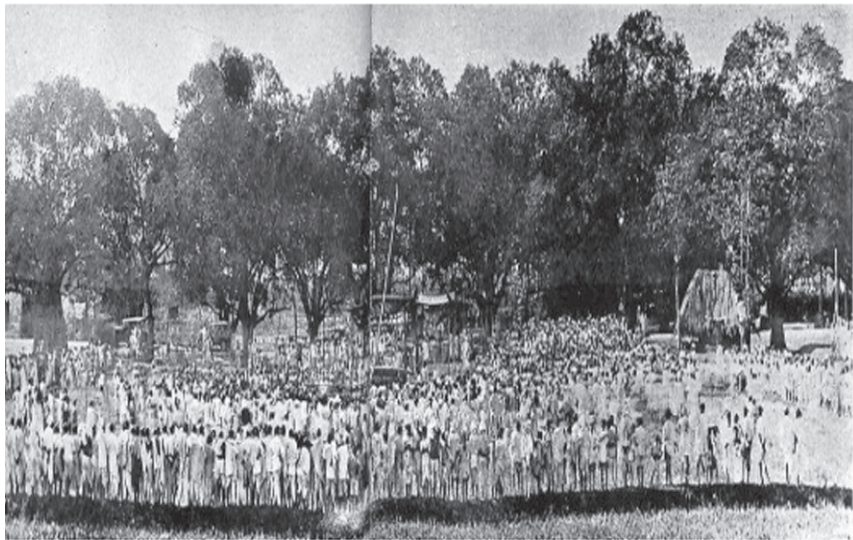
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ప్రథమ
రైతు కూలీ మహాసభ
నెల్లెంబరు, 1923
అధ్యక్షులు:
శ్రీయస్.జి.రంగా.

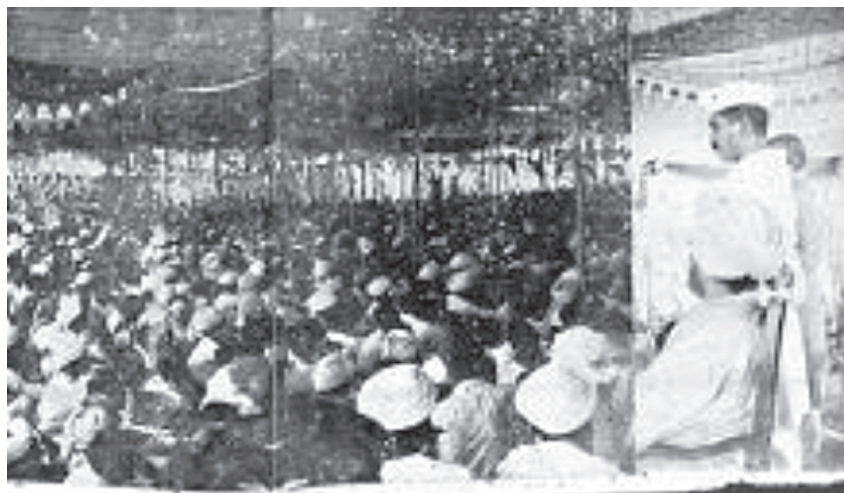
A plaque(First Kisan - Mazdoor Conference)



A picture from the inauguration of Indian Peasants'
Institute at Nidubrolu, 1933



A picture of N. G. Ranga leading the procession at the Visakha Kisan Sabha, 1939



A picture of N. G. Ranga at the Kisan Sabha organised at Rohtak, Punjab, 1949



Revolutionary leaders of the All India Forward Bloc with Netaji



A picture from the Jaipur Congress



A picture from Republic Day 1950

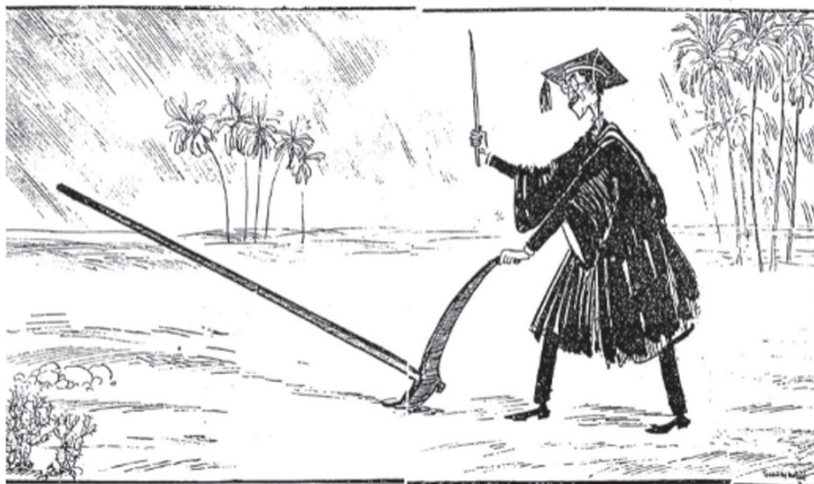


A picture of Ranga with Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan from the inauguration of Electro Chemical Research Institute, Karaikudi, Tamil Nadu



Lonely Furrow?

అంటికి పంట



Prof. Ranga has sown a new party.

కొత్త పార్టీ పంపిణీ

A cartoon on N. G. Ranga published in Shankar's Weekly



From left to right: US-FAO Interagency Committee Secretary Mr. Thomas E. Street, Professor N. G. Ranga, and North American Regional Representative Mr. Gove Hambidge



A picture from N. G. Ranga's visit to Tokyo, 1954