

culture is largely unacknowledged and much undervalued. All too often opportunities to farm and produce are constrained by lack of land, or lack of credit or essential resources.

We read that the rôle of women in food production is expanding: in South-East Asia they provide up to 90% of labour for rice cultivation. In Africa they produce about 80% of basic foodstuffs for home consumption and sale. But family farms are being bought up by the multi-national companies, leading to growing pressure on natural resources.

The book explores the lives of women in sub-Saharan Africa, in India, Brazil, Ghana, Nepal and Cameroon. One contribution addresses the issue of rural development and "lazy men" in Zambia! But many men folk have been obliged to leave the land to the women and go to the towns to seek more highly paid employment. And, although one writer discusses the aims of various land reform pro-

grammes set up during the colonial era, the problems of land hunger remain. In many areas there has been a shift away from farming to manufacturing and the service industries.

But today women mean business and they are organising! It is vital that they educate themselves and this is happening, as the section on organisations, web sites, resources, books and papers shows. The Third International Conference for Women in Agriculture is due to be held in Spain in 2002. It is good that women are able to work together to bring a better understanding of the enormous workload they carry, and the terrible poverty that is their lot. Oxfam's contribution has been to bring compelling evidence of the economic, legal and social aspects of poverty, and especially the lack of women's rights to land, to a wide public.

Further information on the Conference from: <http://www.wia.usda.gov/index.htm>

Indian land reform champion

Robin Raynham

VICTORY TO VINOBA

Bryan Osborne
Ajanta Books, £8.95

THIS book is of potential interest to all concerned with the history of attempts to find a solution to the land tenure problem.

It tells the story of a spiritual leader who, without any training in either economics or politics, through force of circumstances found himself dealing with the problem of landlessness in India.

The subject of the biography, Vinoba Bhave, is little known in Britain and the author has put considerable effort and research into bringing his life to us, including making a return visit to India specially for this purpose. A former disciple of the late Mahatma Gandhi, Vinoba died in 1982 at the age of 87.

It was in 1951 that he was first confronted in an urgent way with the acute distress caused by landlessness. His immediate, off-the-cuff, response was to ask if anyone would donate land to the persons in need of it. Quite surprisingly, a donation was forthcoming, thus initiating what was called the Bhoodan Land Reform Movement. The following year a variation of it, called Gramdan, in which ownership of whole villages was passed over to those resident there, was started.

For a time both these movements had official Indian Government support, and by about 1965 a total of some 4.4 million acres had been transferred to persons needing it, all voluntarily. Although your reviewer doubts that these reform arrangements will have too much permanence because of their lack of flexibility, he understands that many of the transfers remain to this day.

That Vinoba Bhave achieved so much in this very difficult field, in the existing circumstances, is a tribute to both his high character and the immense amount of hard work he put in over the years, during which he travelled on foot tens of thousands of miles over much of India. That all that was done was achieved by voluntary methods is remarkable, and perhaps a signpost for others to seek to follow where circumstances permit. Mr. Osborne has written of him in a clear and unpretentious style and with a diligence and enthusiasm evidently born of the esteem which his life and works must surely merit.

Visionary Statesman of the Enlightenment

Geoffrey Lee

THE FORMATION AND DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH

Anne-Robert Turgot

Translated & edited by Kenneth Jupp

Othila Press, £15

TURGOT, who was born in 1727, was appointed Comptroller-General by the twenty-one year old Louis XVI in 1774 and began a comprehensive reform of the financial structure of France. He sought to increase revenue without imposing new taxes. He proposed to remove the immunity from taxation enjoyed by the privileged classes and abolish the unfair advantages that had been granted to certain trade corporations. He also tackled the corruption that was rife in the bureaucratic governance of Paris. The consequence was an uproar from the ruling classes making the weak king give way to pressure and dismiss Turgot after only twenty months in office. This failure to deal with France's serious economic problems led inevitably to the revolution of 1789.

Turgot retired to devote the rest of his life until his death in 1781 to literature and science. He had written *Réflexions sur la Formation et la Distribution des Richesses*, now ably translated by Sir Kenneth Jupp, in 1766 when he had been Intendant of Limoges. It is a masterful analysis of the basics of economics – of the roots of a subject that is fundamental to the prosperity of nations.

Turgot believed that the source of all taxation should be the revenue from land. Interest, he said, should be fixed only by the

market without interference from any government. His views on money were clouded by the fact that in his day gold and silver were accepted and used as the common currency. He did not foresee that paper money without any intrinsic value would one day replace bullion. He was aware of paper money and had written about it but does not seem to have considered its importance in his *Réflexions*. In the same way he did not foresee the effects of the banking system's ability to create credit almost out of nothing so making it unnecessary that a fund of money capital be made available by lenders before borrowing can take place.

Turgot's analysis does make it possible to understand problems created in the modern world by high taxation on the productive part of the economy – and the consequent necessity of inventing the welfare state.

His visionary ideas fell out of favour in France and after the Revolution ceased to make much impact. Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, a title that was probably borrowed from paragraph 90 of *Réflexions*, overshadowed Turgot's work when it was published in 1776. But now seems an appropriate moment to revisit this masterpiece of political thought and this translation provides us with a timely opportunity to do so.