

Governing of Commons: The *Bhoodan* Way

Nimisha Shukla, Sudarshan Iyengar¹

ABSTRACT

Vinoba Bhave, an ideologue of Gandhian thought and devout practitioner developed the Gandhian doctrine of trusteeship and gave it a concrete form. He appealed big land owners and asked land as gift to be distributed to landless poor. He called it *Bhoodaan* that gradually culminated into *Gramdan*, where the land of the entire village was donated to the community and treated as community property. *Bhoodaan* activity began in 1951 and soon became a movement in whole of India. About 4 million acres or 1.6 million hectare of land was received as *Bhoodaan* – gift till 1970, when the activity ended. The land distributed to landless had inheritance rights but did not give right to alienate. *Bhoodaan* is a case of collective ownership and private use.

The paper will analyse the *Bhoodan* and *Gramdan* movement in India in the framework of common property management and use of natural resources. The process of receiving land as a gift, its distribution to landless and plans for production and management would be analysed. Unlike the traditional community based naturally evolved systems of commons management for private and public economic benefits, *Bhoodan* is a system that is introduced to a community with basic principle and value of non-violence. It is expected that the communities will experiment and naturalise it. The Land management policies of the State have failed in supporting the commons and the livelihoods options of the people. Instead, in collaboration with business, it is privatising it for building an industrial society. The paper would examine the theory of *Bhoodan* as a case study and comment whether it would simultaneously solve the problem of equity in land use in agriculture and also achieve ecological sustainability in common property framework.

Key Words: Bhoodan and Gramdan, Property Rights, Traditional system of Common Property Resource Management, Private and Public benefit, Institutional Economics, Ecological Sustainability

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The issue of Common Property Resources (CPRs) has re-emerged into global discussion agenda after the failure of market and state in managing of these resources in sustainable manner. The third alternative, i.e., the role of institutions, to govern these resources has been discussed in literature by many scholars. Institutions are defined as systems of rights, rules and decision making processes. Institutions can be traditional or designed. *Bhoodan* and *Gramdan* are such institutions, designed by Vinoba Bhave who was an ideologue of Gandhian thought and devout practitioner. This paper tries to analyse the *Bhoodan* and *Gramdan* movements in India in the framework of common property management and use of natural resources. The paper is divided into three sections. The first section provides a picture of these movements. The second section would discuss the status of CPRs in India and the threats. An attempt would be made in the last section to evaluate these movements in the framework of management of CPRs and its applicability in contemporary Indian situation.

Section I

Introduction

Bhoodan means land gift. 'Bhoo' in Sanskrit is Land and *Dan* is gift. In fact *Dan* in Hindu religion and tradition is considered very pious. Vinoba's choice of the word *Bhoodan* for land gift had great appeal among the people. It should be also noted that Vinoba was considered a saint among Gandhian followers who fascinated the mass to come forward for *Bhoodan*. It was the third alternative for redistribution of land after independence. In 1949 the high level Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee submitted its Report. M.L. Dantwala, a professional economist was the chief architect of the Report. This Report led the central and the state governments to go *Kanoon* (legislation) way to land reforms and agrarian development. The state had initiated land reforms in form of Land ceiling, Tenancy reforms and Consolidation of Land. In 1948 the Communist Party of India in its Second Congress at Calcutta (Kolkata) put forward the slogan of *land to tiller* and Bhowani Sen, the Marxist expert on the agrarian problem, showed how land to the tiller could not be achieved unless there was a simultaneous attack on feudalism inherited from the past and on the capitalist landlordism that was fast emerging in the present (Joshi, 1975). There was communist rebellion in Telengana region, first against the Nizam of Hyderabad and then against the Indian army after independence. During the course of the rebellion, communist rebels had gained control over 3000 villages and had redistributed land among the poor (Banerjee, 1984). As against the *katla* (murder – referring to Communist movement) and *Kanoon* (Legislation), Vinoba presented *Karuna* (compassion) to the world.

Origin

Gandhi had worked to translate his model of *Gramswaraj* (rural independence) into practice. His martyrdom in 1948 compelled his followers to consolidate the ideas and

formulate the structure for rural reconstruction. The leadership of the meeting known as *Sarvodaya* (coined by Gandhi means development of all) *Sammelan* (conference) at Sevagram, Wardha in March 1948 was presided by Vinoba. His efforts to internalise '*kunchen mukti*' –(freeing oneself from riches) had not allowed him to attend the second annual *Sarvodaya Sammelan* that was held at August in Orissa in 1950. The members insisted on his attending the third annual conference that was scheduled to be held at Shivarampalli near Hyderabad in April 1951. On the concluding day, Vinoba announced his intention of a *padyatra* (walking on feet) through some of the villages where communist rebellion was taken place (Church, 1984). It was during this return *yatra*, the idea of *Bhoodan* as a non-violence means of land redistribution struck Vinoba. *Bhoodan* movement started in 1951 and continued up to 1969 (Das, 2000). Although, *Bhoodan* was not an official programme, the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru recognised and supported it by legal provisions for legalising the transfers. Nanekar and Khandewale (1973) who have studied the *Bhoodan* experiment in early seventies have divided the movement into two phases; one is from 1951 to 1957 and the second is from 1958 to 1969.

The first gift of land was made on April 18, 1951 in village Pochampalli in Nalgonda district in Andhra Pradesh. The communist rebellion was not successful in redistribution land in favour of poor. During the village meeting, the *Harijans* asked for 80 acres of land among 40 families. They accepted Vinoba's condition to farm the land together if they get it. It was important to note this condition of Vinoba that implied common rather than private regime for redistributed land. Vinoba asked for help from the landowners and influential people of the village. To his surprise a village landlord named C. Ram Chandra Reddy showed his willingness to donate 100 acres of land to fulfil his late father's wish.

Performance

In some sense *Bhoodan* became a massive programme. Das (2000) has noted that Vinoba travelled all over India covering over 80,000 km. on foot until 1969. It has not been possible to trace and compile statistics on *Bhoodan* systematically from all possible sources (Iyengar,). He spent 50 to 51 days in the first leg and had received donation of 12000 acres of land. Apparently, Telengana experience boosted his enthusiasm and he set a very high target of 50 million acres by 1957 that was one sixth of the total cultivable area in 1951 (Tandon, 1984). He (1992) has divided the first phase of *Bhoodan* (1951-57) into four distinct phases by intensity of the Movement. *Palliative* (removal of local grievances) phase, *Calling Attention* (creating a wider understanding of the movement and calling attention of the nation) phase, *fortification of Faith* (building confidence among the workers about the possibility of the giant mission) phase and *Extensive land Gift* phase that happened in Bihar. Between 1951 and 1957 the *Bhoodan* movement was at its peak and reminded the political movements led by Gandhi.

It is important to understand the legal follow up of *Bhoodan*. As Iyengar (200?) has pointed out the state governments developed legal arrangements for accepting the gift and for redistribution. Procedures were laid down for transfer of land by a person owning a transferable interest in land to the *Bhoodan Mandal*. A declaration had to be made by any person desiring to transfer the land to the Revenue officer. It was examined and when found legal and without any problem relating to title etc. the gift was registered under Indian Registration Act of 1908. For objection and any other

problem, a suit in a Civil Court was admissible. The distribution of gifted land to landless families was done by the *Mandal* or *Tehsil* Committees. The landless also included small holders owning up to 2 acres of irrigated and 5 acres of unirrigated land. Those who received land were known as *Bhoodan*-lessees. Land distribution took place as soon as the declaration was made by the donor. Grantee was given a *kachha patta* and only after the gift was verified and approved as legal, a *pucca patta* was given to the lessee. It entered the record of rights of village revenue record. The leasehold right was heritable. Subletting was not permitted. A lessee had to hold the land for ten years without violating any condition to gain the status equivalent to that of the donor. There could have been minor inter-state variations in the processes of legalising the donations and the legal procedures followed for redistribution, but in every state *Kanoon* did follow *Karuna*.

As far as *Gramdan*, i.e. gift of village is concerned; the first *Gramdan* was made in *Hamirpur* district in Uttar Pradesh. Village *Mangroth* was as whole was donated to Vinoba by all the landowners in 1952. The second and third villages donated almost all land and that happened in *Manipur* and *Akili* in Orissa in 1955 respectively. There were three stages under *Gramdan*. In first stage, village would agree to donate all its land. In the second stage, after the gift papers are received by *Sarvoday Mandal*, the village would be declared as *Gramdan* village. In the final stage, the village would be registered as a *Gramdani* village in government records. In September 1957, the Managing Committee of the *Sarva Seva Sangh* decided that if more than 80 per cent landowners agreed to donate and if that constituted more than 50 per cent of the land in the village, the village would be declared as *Gramdani* village. People of such village would have no right to sell or mortgage the land, a condition with which the big landowners were not happy. Hence the norm was relaxed; the owner could retain ninety per cent (18 parts out of 20). Since the *Gramsabha* was the custodian of all the land, he could not sell or mortgage the land, but had right to bequeath and transfer to his kith and kin. This understanding led to evolving of *Sulabh Gramdan* concept. To provide it legislature support, a model *Gramdan* Bill was prepared by prominent *Sarvodaya* worker and the member of Planning Commission, Dr. Ram Krishna Patil. It was expected that the states would enact *Gramdan* law. A number of states like Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Tamilnadu formulated such laws.

The important features of the *Gramdan* are as follows. One, for each *Gramdani* village, every adult is a member of *Gramsabha*. Article 12 provides it legal and constitutional status. Till it is dismantled, it remains an autonomous authority that deals with land issues. (Chandra, 1995) Second, consensus is mandatory to elect office bearers of the *Gramsabha*. Third, there is a constraint to sell the land. There is a well defined procedure for selling of land, especially safe-guarding distress sale. The seller has to approach first to the needy within the village followed by residents of adjoining village and lastly outside the boarder villages. Fourth, total land is concerned as common property and all residents as stake-holders. They take decisions for entire land, at the same time they take independent decisions also for their private land. Fifth, a Village Community Fund (*Gramkosh*) was developed wherein all producers had to contribute one fortieth of the produce after deducting land revenue. Non-land earners had to contribute one thirtieth of the income earned. The Fund was to be used for taking care of destitute, supporting education activity

and renovating and establishing village industries. Sixth, the transaction cost in the voluntary transfer of land is reduced to minimum. In the legislation route, the State not only had to compensate the landlords, but also incur huge administrative expenditure in first acquiring land and then distributing it. Seventh, by adopting Gandhi's ideas to the solution of the basic economic problem of land collection and equitable redistribution among the landless, the Movement kept Gandhi's ideas of socioeconomic reconstruction alive at a period when the tendency of the educated elite was to overlook, if not to reject Gandhi's ideas as irrelevant. (Mehta, www.bhoodan.com/default.aspx)

Some of the criticisms aired by scholars of these movements are as follows.

- The movement was unevenly spread across the states. Bihar alone donated half of all land donated in the country. Bihar, MP, UP and Rajasthan together contributed to more than 85 per cent of the total land donated.
- The record of land distribution was very poor. Bihar and Rajasthan performed particularly worse. The workers perhaps could not convince the donors about the sincerity of the task of redistribution.
- The programme became target oriented and extensive. Vinoba might not have thought through and accordingly could not follow a well-designed plan and shifted to *Gramdan* from *Bhoodan*,
- Significant number of *Bhoodan-Gramdan* workers failed him by their lack of total commitment, honesty and integrity and fell for number game. The workers lacked commitment and in many places it became a tool to cater to the interest of the near and dear ones in laying their hands on land property.
- Mainstream intellectuals ignored the entire experiment as inconsequential and the communist activists did not agree on the approach and hence were critical. Government agencies were also negligent and inefficient in following up on the legal and administrative steps that were necessary to firm up the redistribution of donated land parcels.
- The movement from *Bhoodan* to *Gramdan* was a big strategic mistake. Land owners in villages were willing to consider parting with some land parcel that they really held in excess, but parting with entire holding and then accepting small part as private and rest as common was not acceptable to most. Out of respect to the revered leader villages agreed to gift the land on paper and then backed out.
- Transferred to landless families, the ability to cultivate and at least produce same amount of output per unit of land would depend on the ability to control and invest inputs. In reality the landless did not have access and control over inputs other than family labour. The problem has been observed not only for the grantees of *Bhoodan* movement, but also for the grantees of land under Ceiling and Wasteland redistribution programmes.
- According to Parikh (1953), a noted Gandhian economist, two types of problems existed in the case of *Bhoodan*. First, with distribution of land from large land owners to small land owners simultaneously with the campaign of 'grow more food' by the government created contradictory situation. The second problem was related to the access of land receivers in terms of adequate agricultural inputs of which implements and credit availability were crucial for viable utilisation of *Bhoodan* land.

Apart from the above criticisms, the limitations especially of *Gramdan* can be summarised as:

- Inadequate legislative support
- Revenue/administrative village and not natural/cultural village
- Lethargic efforts on part of the government
- Avoiding conflicting situations by the volunteers/Psyche of volunteers
- Ignorance of urbanites regarding the movement
- Ignored by Media

Table 1: Current Status (as on 31 March, 2009) (land in Acre)

State	Land Donated	Land Distributed	Registered Gramdan
Andhra Pradesh	252119	116134	1
Assam	877	877	312
Bihar	648593	251430	1583
Delhi	300	180	-
Gujarat	103530	50984	-
Haryana	2070	2043	-
Himachal Pradesh	5240	2531	-
Jammu-Kashmir	211	5	-
Jharkhand	1469280	488735	-
Karnataka	15864	5017	-
Kerala	26293	5774	-
Madhya Pradesh	410151	237629	-
Maharashtra	158160	113230	19
Orissa	638706	579984	1270
Punjab	5168	1026	-
Rajasthan	546965	142699	205
Tamil Nadu	27677	22837	537
Uttar Pradesh	436362	418958	5
West Bengal	16000	9000	-
India	4763566	2449073	3932
Bangladesh	110	110	-
TOTAL	4763676	2449183	3932

Source: Cholkar, Parag. *Sabai Bhoomee Gopalkee* (in print, in Hindi), Gujarat Vidyapeeth. 2010

Above table indicates that out of total donated land 51.4 per cent has been distributed among the landless and small farmers. 40.3 per cent of total Gramdan villages have been confined only to Bihar. Orissa comes second with 32.3 per cent of total Gramdan villages.

However, evaluating the movement only in terms of material achievement is not an appropriate criterion, but it should be considered as one of the remarkable experiments to provide a peaceful solution of the basic problem of land through voluntary action involving the masses. It was 'so original in its conception, so novel in methods, and so revolutionary as to its objectives that special efforts has to be made

to understand it and to place it into proper perspective' (Gadgil as quoted by Joshi, 1975 p 89).

Section II

Before looking at the concept of CPR, it is important to understand the concept and types of property Rights. Property is the result of a secure claim to a resource or the services that resource provides. Property rights in a resource exist in various forms. Private Property: the secure claim rests with the individual or the corporation. State property: the secure claim rests with the representative of the state. Common Property: individuals have collective claims on collective goods as members of recognised groups. Open Access: no secure claim with any one.

Table 2: Property Rights: Status and Ownership

Issue	Owner	Proprietor	Claimant	Authorised User	Authorised Entrant
Access	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Withdrawal	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Management	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Excludability	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Alienation	Yes	No	No	No	No

Source: The Formation of Property Rights, Elinor Ostrom and Edelia Schlager, 1996

Access: The right to enjoy non-subtractible benefit in a certain physical boundary. (Boating in a river)

Withdrawal: The right to receive production from the resource. (Fishing in a river)

Management: Right to control internal structure for use of a resource and improve by transformation in resource

Excludability: Right to allocate access opportunities and to determine its transferability

Alienation: Right to sale or rent the above-mentioned collective choice rights

The term Common Property Resources is defined in literature as private property for a group (Chopra, 2002). The term also means that there exists organisational system of rights and responsibilities for the group. Common Property subsumes a set of social conventions, norms, legally enforceable rules and procedures for regulating its use (Singh, 1994). The terms Common Property Resources and Common Pool Resources have different connotations. Common Property Resources have well specified property regimes where as Common Pool Resources are subject to different degrees of access. Though theoretically both the concepts can be differentiated, in practise both are used interchangeably. They connote an economic facility or a resource that is communally or collectively owned by an identifiable group and is *de facto*, if not *de jure*, accessible to and jointly used by all the members of the group not necessarily in equal proportion. Okarson (as quoted by Singh, 1994) defined CPR as subject to individual use but not to individual possession. The use rights are shared and are exclusive to a well-defined group of people.

CPRs include mainly water, wildlife, fish, forests and pastures. There are other resources that show characteristics of CP. Public parks, high ways, oil pools, radio wavelengths, genetic resources, deep seabed and Antarctica are modern examples of CPRs. The traditional view of CPRs is different than the western resource management system. According to western view, property is either private or belongs to the state. Resources that are not amenable to private appropriation are called CPRs. It means the resource is not owned by anyone and it is free good. In traditional approach, common property should be restricted to communally owned resources, i.e., resources for which there exist communal arrangements for exclusion of non-owners and allocation among co-owners. (Berkes, 1989)

According to Kadekodi (1997) all CPRs have two basic characteristics. A well defined group or community have exclusive rights on the use of the resource. Non-excludability condition states that 'no member can be excluded from the use of the resource.' Simultaneously, no individual in the group has any exclusive property right. The use of the resource is subtractive that use of the resource by any single user would reduce the welfare of other members of the group. He adds a few other characteristics on practicability grounds. There can be some degree of indivisibility of the resource. A particular group may have exclusive right on use and access to the resource without ownership right. Multiple uses and interrelated rights exist especially at rural level in case of water bodies. Complementarities in use and linkages among these uses give right of use in absence of ownership. The right of grazing animal on the privately owned farm after the harvest is an example of this kind. In case of CPR, the problem of free-riding often exists. The sustainable management of a CPR depends on rules of the game for the use of the resource and sharing the benefit for which institutional mechanism is a pre-condition.

Table 3: Rights and Property Regimes

Right	OAR	CPR	SPR	PPR
Access	For All	Members of Group	Citizens	No Access for others
Withdrawal	For All	Members of Group	Government	Private
Management	+	Members of Group	State	Individual/Group
Excludability	+	Members of Group	State	Individual/Group
Alienation	+	Members of Group	State	Individual/Group

Table 4: Status and Property Regimes

Status	OAR	CPR	SPR	PPR
Authorised Entrant	All	Members	Citizens	Individual/Group
Authorised User	All	Members	Citizens	Individual/Group
Claimant	None	Group	Government	Individual/Group
Proprietor	None	Group	Government	Individual/Group
Owner	None	Group	Government	Individual/Group

Access to a resource may vary in real life. In many cases it becomes difficult to distinguish between CPR and Open Access Resources (OAR). OAR is free and unrestricted access and withdrawal rights are for all as a result of absence of ownership of resource by anyone. Everybody's property becomes nobody's property. As a result, the tendency to free ride increase and the resource is likely to be abused/misused/overused. The Tragedy of Commons (Hardin, 1968) applies more to the OAR than CPRs. But over the time the increasing population, rising demand and breaking down of social institutions and resulting ill-defined property right structure have made the distinction between CPRs and OAR blurred.

Uses of CPLRs

- Most wide spread uses of CPLR land are for collection of fuel wood and fodder Collection of Minor Forest Produce such as Mahuda, Gund, Khakhara leaves and Timru leaves for sale.
- Collection of raw material and dung.
- Raw material for rope making, broomstick making etc

Issues in CPLRs in India

- Privatisation of CPR Land

The government policy in India has been in favour of privatisation of CPLRs. The nexus between the state and market has led to this situation. Take an example of the state of Gujarat. The Government of Gujarat has allotted and regularised the CPR Land with dual objectives of supporting the socially and economically backward population in the villages there by improving their income earning capacity and of providing land for the housing purpose. It distributed land acquired under Land Ceiling Act twice, in 1960 and 1976. By 1985, 22277 holdings were allocated to landless families with average of 2.5 ha. per family. The fertility of most of the land was below average and the allottees had neither skill nor monetary resources to improve the productivity. There existed a possibility of conflict as the poorest section depends upon CPR land for fodder and fuel wood and other minor forest produce (in case of forest). When the CPR land is distributed to a specific group of population, neither they nor the rest of the CPR land dependent population benefit.

Till March 2008, the government has distributed 7568.94 ha. of culturable waste to 6723 beneficiaries, that amount to be around 38 per cent of the total culturable waste.

The Revenue Department of Gujarat Government has passed a resolution under which *Gauchar* land can be allotted for industrial use. Many village *gauchers* have been given to large industrial houses like Reliance Petroleum (Jamnagar), Adani (Mungra port), GMDC (Bhavnagar) have become famous for struggle against land acquisition in recent times.

- Encroachment

It is relatively easy to know that whether the CPR land is encroached or not, it is not easy to quantify the extent of encroachment. Encroachment is taking place because of two factors. One, the population pressure has resulted in increased demand for cultivable land and hence inferior quality of CPR land comes under cultivation. Second reason is laxity on part of the revenue department in monitoring any encroachment and failure to vacate the existing encroachments. In the last decade (1991-2001), population of Gujarat state rose by 22.66 per

cent. To satisfy the increasing demand for food, more land is required. It is interesting to note that the cropping pattern in the state has changed in favour of cash crops. With increasing facility for irrigation, there has been a tendency to encroach more land. It is not always true that only rich farmers encroach, poor farmers also encroach as and when opportunity arises.

There are many kinds of encroachments observed on CPR land.

1. Removal of soil from grazing land and other public land where productivity is good (private farmers and potters).
2. Encroachment of grazing land and other public land including forest for private agriculture (farmers irrespective of land ownership size).
3. Encroachment to public land adjacent to land allotted by the government (individuals who were allotted land and those who leased in from the actual allottees)
4. For non-agriculture uses (Individuals for residential purpose and Cooperatives and private industries)

Threats to CPR Land

- The size of CPR land has been declining over the years.
- The status of CPR land is a matter of grave concern. Most of the land is highly degraded or degradation is still continuing. In long run, there is a possibility of degraded CPR land influencing privately owned cultivated land.
- Substantial area under CPR land has been encroached and privatised. Dependence on CPR land has been affected as a result of decline in size and deterioration of CPR land.
- The government policy of converting private agriculture land to non-agriculture purpose, especially for industrial use, may have serious repercussions for CPR land. The size of CPR land may decline further and more encroachment and degradation may be the case.
- Ecological functions of CPR land, especially forest, have been adversely affected. Bereft of tree cover and perennially deficit in moisture would make the land prone to erosion by water and wind.

Governance of CPLRs

Realising the importance of CPR land for economic security and ecological sustainability, government and non-government organisations have introduced a number of programmes for management and regeneration of the CPR land. As earlier mentioned, besides state and NGOs, there is another school that is the Institutional thought. Institutions have been crucial force in resolving real world environmental issues. Environmental governance is best understood in institutional economics as the establishment, reaffirmation or change of institutions to resolve conflicts over environmental resources. It has been found that institutional measures to govern environment take long time to have desirable impact. They can be termed as 'preventive measures'. (Singh, 2009) The choice of these institutions is a matter of social justice rather than of efficiency. Institutions play a role in causing and solving the problems that arise from human-environment interactions. The rules of the games depend upon the existing institutional framework. The important question is: how to raise environmental concern? Institutional economics find the solution in change in social morality. For such change, the approach seeks development of necessary regulating instruments, judiciary and other institutions that help in changing human behaviour from anthropocentric to ecocentric. Institutions influence

social practice, assign role to the participants and govern interactions among them through property regimes. The contributions of Ostrom in this field are noteworthy. The solution she has prescribed is based on theoretical as well as empirical research especially in the case of Common irrigation, fisheries and pastures. The pessimism of Hardin in the Tragedy of the Commons is replaced by Ostrom's designing principles where she lays down a set of rules for a successful irrigation management. According to Lyon (2006), Ostrom has laid down the foundation for a theory of environmental governance by combining theory, experiments and field research. Her designing principles can be summarised as (www.cooperationcommons.com/node/361, retrieved on 21/10/2010)

1. Group boundaries are clearly defined.
2. Rules governing the use of collective goods are well matched to local needs and conditions.
3. Most individuals affected by these rules can participate in modifying the rules.
4. The right of community members to devise their own rules is respected by external authorities.
5. A system for monitoring member's behaviour exists; the community members themselves undertake this monitoring.
6. A graduated system of sanctions is used.
7. Community members have access to low-cost conflict resolution mechanisms.
8. For CPRs that are parts of larger systems: appropriation, provision, monitoring, enforcement, conflict resolution, and governance activities are organized in multiple layers of nested enterprises.

Section III

After evaluating *Bhoodan* movement and the governance issue in CPLRs in the previous two sections, we have tried to understand the *Bhoodan* and *Gramdan* movement in the context of CPLRs governance framework as well its relevance in current time. *Gramdan*, as earlier explained, was the voluntary approach by the land owners to relinquish the right of land in favour of the village community. It was a scientifically developed procedure where decisions were taken by the *gramsabha* as a whole of which each adult resident was a member. Yet, the initial enthusiasm behind Gramdan could not sustain for long. Since the village as a community owns the village land, in classical sense it becomes a common property. The rights of the village and status of the resource are given in the tables

Right	Gramdan Village
Access	All villagers
Withdrawal	All villagers
Management	Gramsabha
Excludability	Gramsabha
Alienation	Gramsabha

Status	Gramdan Village
Authorised Entrant	All villagers
Authorised User	All villagers
Claimant	Gramsabha
Proprietor	Gramsabha
Owner	Gramsabha

The above tables show that the rights and status of the resources are well defined. It has been generally believed that the issue of governance of CPLRs is not so well defined property rights. In case of *Gramdan* village, this issue is very well resolved. The question that could follow would be: Why could *Gramdan* not achieve remarkable success? To examine the root cause, we have tried to understand the issue in the context of Designing principles as given by Ostrom.

Designing Principle	Does Gramdan satisfy the principle? How?
Clearly defined boundaries	Yes. Village as a whole.
Rules matched with local needs	Yes. <i>Gramsabha</i> decides rules.
Participation of affected in modifying rules	Yes. All members participate in the process.
System of monitoring member behaviour	Yes
Gradual sanctions	Yes
Conflict resolution	Yes
Right to devise own rules to be respected by external authorities	Yes. Legislature by a number of states recognising the <i>Bhoodan/Gramdan</i>
Multi layers nested enterprises	Not clear

It is observed from the table that all the principles are fulfilled in the movement. It would be interesting to analyse some case studies to understand the ground realities.

Case Studies (as quoted by Cholkar, 2010)

Mangroth Experience

It was the first *Gramdani* village of the country. After donating the land by the owners, problems rose regarding the management and utilisation of all the land. Since this was the first experience, Vinoba sent his two deputies, Baba Raghavdas and Ramgopal Gupt, to Mangroth. During the *gramsabha*, community land ownership right was recognised, but issue of management remained. The opponents took up the opportunity to raise doubts about the success of the experiment. Once again, external input from Sarvodaya volunteers led to meetings for four days and the people decided for community agriculture. At the same time, for some unexplained reason, there was an environment to take back the donations. But the women of the village stopped them doing so. Finally, followings were decided after discussion in Gramsabha. Land would be considered as common property and anyone, who wishes so, could participate in community farming. It was also decided that those who owned minimum of 15 bigha (one acre=1.75 bigha), should keep the land with themselves. Each landless should be given minimum 7-8 bigha initially and should be increased to 15 bighas gradually, so everyone should have minimum of 15 bighas each. Gram Panchayat would revise the system every five years. It was also decided that land revenue would be paid as village as a whole.

Since Gramsabha was not legally recognised, an organisation named Sarvodaya Mandal was formed in which every adult man and woman was member. Vinoba who was given the sole ownership of land transferred the right to the Mandal to manage the land. The procedure for registration took four years because of bureaucratic bottlenecks. Finally, 24 April, 1957 was the date when the Mandal was registered. Common land revenue was an important decision as it frees villagers from the corrupt administration and strengthens community spirit among people. Revenue officials issued warrant for auction of seized land against 20-25 villagers and almost attacked the village with help of police. The leaders had gone out of the village. The villagers paid land revenue in this uncertain circumstance. The leader informed the district collector regarding the whole incidence. The whole matter reached the then Chief Minister Govind Vallabh Pant and his intervention led an order that issued land in the name of the Mandal and common land revenue.

Efforts were started for economic development of the village. Some did select community farming, but majority continued with private farming. It was necessary to increase agricultural production and productivity. Irrigation was made possible with community efforts, land erosion was prevented, waste land was made cultivable and production of compost fertiliser was started. The production of **anaj, tilhan and dal** increased from 858 **mans** in 1954 to 3173 **mans** in 1957. This led not only to food self-sufficiency, but to surplus, too. The village tried for cloth self-sufficiency, but because of inadequate system of weaving it could not be achieved. Still, Khadi production did start. A community shop was started. Proper attention was given to forest protection.

Progress was not only economic, it was also moral. The tiff between the encroachers and villagers was sorted out by non-violent manner. Village accepted policy of prohibition of liquor. Attention was given to spreading education.

Manfar (Gaya district, Bihar) Experience

The village became *Gramdani* village in 1953 with 33 tribal families. The poor, exploited tribal were attracted to *Gramdan* to free themselves from the exploitation of landlords. In 1954, the land was equally redistributed with 22 acres for community farming and 3 acres for Sarvodaya Mandal. The land was divided into four types on the basis of fertility and care was taken to distribute each type of land to every family. There was no dispute among the people, but the government was levying the land revenue on the basis of old land ownership, when the change was conveyed to it! The efforts were translated into success in the span of 14 years. The village that was able to grow food for only four months achieved sufficiency for the whole year as a result of investment in irrigation. New ponds and dams were constructed, land was resurfaced. The availability of milk and vegetables also increased. The alcohol consumption declined. Village hygiene was given priority. Primary school was started. Efforts for adult literacy were initiated. The disputes were resolved within the village. Marriage and death ceremonies became the affairs of the whole community and every family shared the expenses. Sarvodaya Sahyog Samiti was given the debt management. One of the major achievements was the sense of freedom among the exploited group.

Mohzari (Balaghat district, Madhya Pradesh) Experience

The village became *Gramdani* village in 1964 with 3000 population. The leader, Mr. Mahipalsinh Naktaude was a person with intense intellectual understanding, exposed to and experienced from outer world. The village had many admirable traditions before Gramdan. Food storage, public distribution system, Khadi work and unanimous decision making were some of such traditions.

After *Gramdan*, there was moral development of the village. Regular prayers were held in the village. There was no practise of untouchability, village disputes were resolved within village and prohibition of sale of alcohol were some of the positive outcomes of Gramdan. Committees like Khadi Samiti, Cooperative Society, Oil-producing society and Youth Circle etc were active in the community.

Koraput district (Orissa) Experience

Vinoba received a large number of villages in Koraput district during his padyatra. Sarva Seva Sangh along with local Utkal Navjeevan Mandal decided to build a demonstrative development work. They invited the scholar Mr. Annasaheb Sahastrabuddhe, a veteran Sarvoday worker and noted expert in agriculture and Khadi fields, and initiated work from November 1955. It was found that only around 22 percent land was cultivated out of total 64 lakh acres. About 70 per cent land was forest land. More the 83 per cent population was tribal with lack of interest in agriculture and suffering from malnutrition. The region was poor and backward with abundant natural resources. There was almost nonexistent education and industry. Bonded labour was rampant.

In 1956, a basic framework for development work was made, however it kept changing as and when required.

For these villages, debt was a serious concern. As land became community owned, neither private money lenders nor state were willing to provide credit to this poor tribal population. The formation of Cooperative Societies was decided, but was not supported by the state.

Since forest land and tribal interest in forest were significant, Forest Cooperative Committees were formed and efforts were initiated to establish forest based industries. Similarly, with abundant mineral wealth, mineral based industry was also considered. As a result of erroneous technique only 10 to 15 per cent iron was converted into steel. With adoption of better technique, the per cent increased up to 80-90.

Redistribution and reforms of land were given priorities. Till June 1957, land was redistributed in 756 villages. Out of redistributed 112058 acres, 83.5 per cent land was given for private farming. The remaining land was kept for community farming, income from which was to be utilised for development work. 15686 acres of land was found not suitable for agriculture. Bullocks and agricultural tools were also given to families besides programmes for micro-irrigation and soil conservation. Other voluntary organisations also joined hands in this process.

The development paradigm that was envisaged could not become reality. Along with volunteers' weaknesses, the government policy also changed drastically.

Bureaucracy was against the Sarvodaya philosophy. The psyche of donors also changed. The situation became so critical that Sarva Seva Sangh decided to withdraw and development work dwindled. Koraput experience was short lived and unsuccessful. However, it could cultivate sense of self-confidence and self-esteem among the tribals.

Sid (Udaipur district, Rajasthan)

Sid became *Gramdani* village in 1980. The village population is homogeneous. There was no landless in the village. The land ownership ranges between 5 to 40 Bighas. Each family privately cultivates only five per cent of land and deposits its income in the Fund. Gramsabha has land papers for all village land and pays land revenue. Gramsabha head is not elected but selected and representative from each group is given opportunity. There is absence of liquor sale within village. Gramsabha also acts as court. Gomati River has become perennial as a result of water harvesting works.

Village protects and conserves its 899 acre forest. A number of rules and their strict implementation have made the forest dense once again. The ownership of natural resources like land, water and forest by the community and their management are exemplary.

However, it should be sadly noted that the change in laws in Rajasthan has withdrawn the Gramsabha rights. Time is difficult, but the fight still goes on.

The above are representative cases of Gramdan. The situation may not be drastically different in other villages. What can be starkly observed for the most important reason for failure of Gramdan movement is lack of government commitment. Apathy of bureaucracy, to some extent hostile opposition to the movement, has been a serious cause of concern. The seventh principle- Right to devise own rules to be respected by external authorities- although accepted on paper, has been violated. The violation of one rule would discourage the members of a community and they follow the suit. As a consequence, Gramsabha could not function effectively. Gramsabha is the most crucial body for the management of community land. If effective of Gramsabha suffers, then the whole Gramdan experience would have a set back. This is, in fact, what has happened in reality.

Before considering the relevance of Bhoodan/Gramdan as an institution to govern the common property land, it is important to look back at the economy, especially agriculture. Green Revolution Technology (GRT) changed agriculture practices considerably. With intensive use of agro-mechanical and biochemical technologies, GRT was successful in increasing production of certain crops in specific areas. Such success could not be achieved on a larger scale, but it had resulted into serious environmental problems and in some places irreversible damage to the ecology. The introduction of Genetically Modified (GM) technology is not without dangers. The increase in number of farmers' suicide is the phenomenon observed in last few years. Nearly 70 per cent in rural areas still rely on agriculture and other land based activities for their survival and development. The economic reforms of 1991 have diametrically changed government ideology. Fears have been raised whether land reforms as a strategy for State intervention has become an active institutional constraint (Sinha and Pushpendra, 2000). Government agencies in their own right have become new Zamindars. Take for instance forest. India's forest policy has not undergone any significant change after independence. The anger among the native tribal population has gradually increased over years, since their survival and livelihood depend upon forest. The nexus between the state and market of recent years have led to unrest and violent protests. Lawsuits and mobilisation of global opinion are results of such policy (Dubey, 1998). Despite legislations to control land alienation among tribals, research has shown that alienation has increased and it

appears in new forms (Mishra, 1998 and Behera and Pfeffer, 1999). Increase in spread and intensity of Naxal movement in tribal areas indicate resurfacing of means of *Katla* since *Kanoon* under parliamentary democracy has failed to respond adequately. Dependence of poor on common property resources in non-forest areas is also high. Jodha's studies first established the importance of CPRs among rural poor especially in arid and semi-arid regions. His critic of the efficiency argument with regard to CPR is also worth noting where he has shown with clear evidence that productivity of CPRs for fuel and biomass is definitely superior as long the land resources are in the CPR regime (Jodha, 1990).

At the time of *Bhoodan*, major issue that India was facing was poverty. In recent times, poverty has remained unsolved issue, but population and environmental degradation have been added. It has been recognised that the State has failed to tackle these problems. Leaving it to market forces is likely to create another crisis because necessary capital investment will not come forward as the private returns are very low (Desai, 1994).

The third alternative of institutions has not been explored by mainstream scholars. Indigenous system of natural resource management with traditions and techniques was recognised by Gandhi and Vinoba implemented it through *Bhoodan* and *Gramdan* movements. These movements aimed to establish that the land was to be managed mainly in common property regime where privatisation for access, use and development was to be allowed with commonly agreed restrictions. The decision making body was a village *gramsabha*. It is important to understand that it was not top-down approach, but would develop people's institutions and redefine property rights to manage land resource in villages. It had evolved over centuries in India and both Gandhi and Vinoba had tried to re-establish it on more normative and positive principles.

Population of India was 1028.7 million and per capita net area sown was 0.137 hectares in 2001 as compared to population of 361.1 million and per capita net area sown of 0.329 hectares in 1951. If the owned, cultivated and uncultivated lands are brought under village common pool and managed by the community with specific private property rights and the help of better access to science and technology, there appears to be a promise for sustainable use of land resource in the country where *Gramdan* as an institute can play a major role.

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