

Problems of Gramdan

A Study in Rajasthan

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Some 5,000 gramdan villages all over the country are at present reported to be in the process of building tip the non-violent social order which is the Bhoodan movement's ultimate objective. In recognition of its importance, the Government has extended official patronage to the movement by bringing donations of land received by it under the purview of law by offering special pecuniary and other incentives to Gramdan villages.

It is doubtful, however, whether either the agencies which are in charge of carrying forward this approach to rural reconstruction or the Government which has formulated policies to encourage the spread of the movement are adequately aware of the socio-economic and political problems which have arisen in Gramdan villages.

It is intended here to discuss some of these problems.

"BORN out of the violence of the Telengana peasant riot the Bhoodan-Gramdan movement has attracted world-wide attention. Ever since the first land-gift made by Ramchandra Reddy of Pochampalli village in Telengana to Vinoba Shave the growth and achievement of the movement has been regularly reported in the national press and exclusive communication forums- have been established to propagate and strengthen the movement. Bhoodan (land-gift) has developed into Gramdan³ (village-sift) and at present over 5,000 Gramdan villages are reported to be in (he process of transformation. Experiments in bringing about a non violent social order is underway in these villages. Government recognition too has been extended to the movement by bringing the donations of Bhoodan-Gramdan under the purview of law and by offering special incentives for Gramdan villages. However, it is doubtful whether either the voluntary organizations which sponsor and carry forward this line of rural reconstruction or the Governmental policies which are framed to facilitate the spread of the movement,¹ take cognisance of the socio-economic and political problems that have arisen in these villages. This paper attempts to uncover some of these problems. In order to appreciate these problems in their manifold ramifications we have to look for their genesis. Are they endogenic or exogenic to the movement? The evidence that we have indicates that the problems faced by the Gramdan villages rue created by the way in which the movement is engineered. We start with an analysis of the nature and types of Gramdan villages to support our hypothesis.

Table I attempts to make a comparison of the size of Gramdan villages with other villages in the country. It is clear that the Gramdan village is far smaller in comparison with the typical villages in all States and in certain States like Kerala an average

village is 75 times bigger. The questions to be asked at this juncture are : Are Gramdan villages, villages at all? How are they rendered atypical?

Are these Villages?

In order to unfold the problems that are faced by the Gramdan villages and to examine the causes of the atypicality of these villages we propose to subject the gramdan villages in one of the States in India (Rajasthan) to a systematic analysis. Of the 236 Gramdan Villages in Rajasthan 65 have been brought under the Rajasthan Gramdan Act 1960.¹ The near absence of any reliable detailed data regarding the villages which are not brought under the Act compels us to limit our analysis to the 'declared cases'. Only

11 districts have any Gramdan villages (there are 26 districts in Rajasthan) and of these 3 districts do not have any village brought *order* the Act, while as many as 62 villages are concentrated in 5 districts in the State and hence our discussion will be focussed on these 'Gramdan pockets' and the implications worked out are mainly applicable to them.

It is clear from Table 2 that the size of the Gramdan villages in terms of the area of land, number of households and population stands in sharp contrast to an average village both in the districts and in the State. Let us concentrate on the 65 Gramdan villages brought under the Act.

Table 3A shows that a mere 107 per cent villages own more than 1,000

Table I: Gramdan Villages — All-India Position in 1961

State	Total No of Villages	No of Gramdan Villages	Average Acreage of Land per Village		Average No of Households Per Village	
			General	Gramdan	General	Gramdan
Andhra	27,084	587	2308.8	49.8	230.9	11.0
Assam	25,702	414	1106.5	62.5	79.5	7.0
Bihar	67,665	85	542.1	144.4	112.9	48.0
Gujarat	18,584	148	2421.8	218	152.1	46.7
Jammu and Kashmir	6,559	N.A.	5095.2	N.A.	81.1	N.A.
Kerala	1,573	403	5920.9	N.A.	1591.3	21.0
Madhya Pradesh	70,414	153	1401.9	105.9	79.9	4.3
Madras	14,124	254	2090.3	N.A.	380.4	N.A.
Maharashtra	35,851	282	1905.8	442.3	154.0	60.6
Mysore	26,377	58	1584.5	128.1	127.9	33.7
Orissa	46,466	1929	733.9	128.0	72.0	16.0
Punjab	21,269	6	1323.0	379.3	129.8	45.3
Rajasthan	23,241	234	2405.5	297.4	97.2	7.0
Uttar Pradesh	112,624	57	576.6	218.2	107.4	21.0
West Bengal	38,454	25	511.8	91.0	128.0	32.2
Delhi	276	Nil	953.6	Nil	178.8	Nil
Himachal Pradesh	10,438	4	581.5	N.A.	23.2	N.A.
All-India	567,338	4640	1249.1	148.1£	121.5	18.8£

Note: All-India general averages have been worked out on the basis of 1961 Census data and the All India Gramdan average have been worked out on the basis of the data supplied by the Secretary, Akiha Bharat Seva Sarva Sangh, Kashi,

£ Jammu and Kashmir, Madras, Delhi and Himachal Pradesh, excluded for working out the average.
N A —Not Available.

acres of land and the land owned by 38.5 per cent villages is as little as 200 or less acres. Similarly Table 3B shows that only 4.6 per cent of the Gramdan villages have more than 100 households, and as many as 50.8 per cent are constituted of 25 households or less. Again Table 3C reveals that only 6.2 per cent villages have a population over 500 and as many as 33.8 per cent villages have only 100 or less people. Table 4A gives information on types of Gramdan villages. Of the 65 villages 52.3 per cent are exclusively tribal, 6.2 per cent are predominantly so, 18.5 per cent villages are single — caste ones while 7.7 per cent villages are having only two caste groups. However, 15.4 per cent villager *have* three or more caste groups. It may, therefore, be inferred that Gramdan villages are, socially, less complex.

Table 4B explains how Gramdan villages emerged. While 46.2 per cent villages are brought under the Act without any change in their structure and composition, 41.5 per cent villages are but hamlets which have been conferred the status of Gramdan villages and 12.3 per cent villages are new colonies established *cm* common land donated either by Government or by private philanthropists.

Our main interest in the present context as has been indicated at the outset is not to present a typology of the Gramdan villages as such but to work out the implications of their emergence and existence. Generally speaking a typical Rajasthan village has a number of parts attached to the village-core or the central village. The definition of the village for the purposes of the Rajasthan Gramdan Act 1960 was the same as given in the Rajasthan Land Revenue Act 1956. According to this, parts of villages whether called a hamlet, 'thok', 'patti', 'dhani', 'pra', 'fala', 'wada' or otherwise are included in the village and are not considered as separate units. In tribal areas it may be the castes — which inhabit this village-core and the different hamlets are occupied by the Adiwasis or Iribals. But such a clear-cut residential clustering of cultural groups is not easily found everywhere⁶ However, the village-core may often be inhabited by an erstwhile caste along with the artisan and serving castes while the peasants may form hamlets in proximity to their agricultural fields. In non-jagirdari area it may be an economically dominant caste which usually occupies the village-core. Notwithstanding the territorial separation between the hamlets and the village-

core the latter with its temples, shops, panchayat ghars and other common social centres offers sufficient opportunity for the members of the entire village community to interact with considerable frequency. This results in developing a sense of belonging to the village. This social historical background has been adversely affected by the emergence of several Gramdan villages which were bifurcated from the old revenue villages. This in turn has created a number of economic and political problems.

Types of Cases

To facilitate discussion we note the types of cases involved below :

- (1) Cases where all the hamlets have been given the status of revenue village separately under the Act and the village-core has remained outside the fold of *Gramdan*.
- (2) Cases where some of the hamlets and the village-core have been brought under the Act as new separate revenue villages and the remaining hamlets have been left out,
- (3) Cases where only certain hamlets have been brought under the Act and rendered revenue units while the village-core and the remaining hamlets have continued as they were.
- (4) Cases where all the hamlets and the village-core have been brought under the Act not as as one unit but as several separate revenue villages.

Voluntary action being the basis of Gramdan the application of coercion has been theoretically ruled out and hence if persons inhabiting certain parts of the revenue village want to

be under Gramdan such a desire cannot be ignored and the only way to recognize their desire in the governmental framework is to bring that part under the Act separately. However, even those villages, where all the hamlets and village-core wanted to be under Gramdan, have been bifurcated into different units. The atypicality of the Gramdan villages in terms of size as revealed earlier is the result of conferring the status of full villages to mere hamlets and the bifurcation of villages into a number of new units. The actual number of Gramdan villages is thus larger than the number of revenue units that have opted for Gramdan. In fact many of these are not villages at all. The problems created by this situation are discussed below.

Donation can only be made of privately owned land for, in Rajasthan villages, the pasture land, the culturable waste land, the abadi land, (the village-site) the waste land, etc. are under the common possession of the village, the ownership being vested in the Government. When the different parts or any one of the parts have been assigned the status of a new village the problem of dividing the common land between the new units comes up and it has not yet been possible to work out a formula for effecting this division. A number of boundary disputes between the new villages created by Gramdan have been noted by the author. Thus paradoxically enough the major value, that the land belongs to society (ie a new system of property relations), on which the entire philosophy of Gramdan is being built up itself has received a blow as a consequence of the creation of these new villages which are anxious

Table 2: Gramdan Villages in Rajasthan

Name of the District/State	Average Acreage Per Village		No of Households Per Village		Population Per Villages	
	Gramdan	General	Gramdan	General	Gramdan	General
Chittor	318.5	1201.8	23.4	65.9	126.6	217.2
Nagpur	1016.4	3563.7	26.0	119.6	152.0	679.1
Jaipur	430.9	1253.5	21.8	93.5	121.9	520.5
Dungarpur	434.3	1139.0	46.0	87.3	235.5	472.4
Baswara	524.0	874.0	55.0	57.3	284.3	315.8
All India	511.7	2405.5	40.0	97.2	210.5	523.3

Note: The District-wise analysis is confined to the five districts where there is a high concentration of Gramdan villages. Of the 65 villages brought under the Act 62 are distributed in these districts. While the general averages have been worked out on the basis of the information provided by the Superintendent of Census operations, Rajasthan, the district-wise Gramdan averages have been worked out on the basis of data collected by the author.

to demarcate their respective land boundaries especially in regard to common lands. This poses a major problem as to whether the village can successfully operate in a set-up where the predominant values are contrary to the goals sought by it,

Political Problems

The political problems created by the bifurcation of villages are still more complicated. When a Gramdan village is brought under the Act it is bifurcated from the vikas and nyaya panchayats to which it belongs. The gram sabha president with considerable powers replaces the existing sarpanch and ward panches.⁷ A number of villages constitute a vikas panchayat and quite often a few villages under the panchayat or parts of certain big villages are brought under the purview of Gramdan. The sarpanch of the vikas panchayat ceases to have jurisdiction over villages or parts of villages which come within the fold of Gramdan. Such situations have resulted in conflicts between Gram Sabha office-holders and the panchayat personnel, who man the affairs of the non-Gramdan part or parts of the revenue village.

The power in a Gramdan village is vested in gram sabha or village parliament constituted of the entire adult population of the village. The Gramdan village is not directly linked with the vikas panchayats or nyaya panchayats through the mechanisms of election or nomination. But provision has been made in the Act that one representative per thousand persons in the Gramdan villages can be sent; to the *panchayat samiti*. This provision presupposes the existence of certain factors like the existence of the requisite population in Gramdan villages in one compact area, the possibility of consensus of opinion amongst the people in different Gramdan villages in regard to sending a representative, etc. As is evident from the data presented above a typical Gramdan village is very small and only a few such villages can have as many as 1,000 persons. It is also unlikely that these villages will be located in a compact or contiguous area and that they will have sufficient communication between them so as to be able to select a representative for the panchayat samiti. The legal provision creates two problems.

(1) The Gramdan representatives may capture a number of seats in a Panchayat Samiti in areas where there are a large number of Gramdan villages thereby converting these villages into

'political power-hives'. For example the Dungarpur panchayat samiti with a population of 62,996 has 31 sarpanches, i.e., 1 sarpanch represents 2,032 persons. The Gramdan population of 6000 in the panchayat samiti is, on the other hand, legally entitled to have 6 representatives.

(2) There is the possibility of the Gramdan villages being reduced into 'political isolates' due to the absence of the requisite size of population in one village or in a compact gramdan area so as to earn representation at the panchayat samiti level. This is the situation in districts like Jaipur, Nagaur, etc.

Both the problems noted above are equally damaging for the Gramdan movement. The possibility of securing representation directly at the panchayat samiti level would motivate frustrated village politicians to try their hand at bringing more villages under the Act without necessarily committing themselves to the ideology of Gramdan movement. On the other hand, the absence of systematic linking of Gramdan villages with the local governmental structure might relegate the economic and social interests of these villages into the background especially in regard to the allocation of resources for developmental purposes.

Let us examine the possibility of getting out of this difficulty. The Gramdan village is not linked with the vikas panchayat or nyaya panchayat but can have representation at the *panchayat samiti* level provided it fulfils certain qualifications, e.g. a minimum of a thousand persons living together. As we have noted, the typical Gramdan village is too small (the average Gramdan village in Rajasthan has a population of 210) to have direct representation at the panchayat samiti level. Even in one panchayat samiti area there may not be enough villages to constitute the requisite population to earn representation in the panchayat samiti. If we assume that there are enough Gramdan villages in a panchayat samiti to secure representation in the Samiti these may not be a compact area and may not, therefore, have sufficient inter communication to agree upon the choice of a representative. In such a situation representation of Gramdan villages in the vikas panchayats seems to provide the answer. This makes it possible for the Gramdan village or villages to have a representative on the vikas

panchayat even when their population is much less than a thousand. Similarly if there are enough representatives of Gramdan villages on the vikas panchayat they can select a representative of theirs for the panchayat samiti. Such an arrangement will probably resolve the present difficulties.

The difficulties faced by the Gramdan villages at the operational level bring us to the general point that any social reconstruction programme if it is to be successful, should operate in a sufficiently big, compact and contiguous area. However, while this is a necessary condition it may be a suffi-

Table 3: Size of Gramdan villages
(A) Size by Area of Land

Land in Acres	No of Villages in the Group	Percentage of Villages in the Size-Group
Upto 100	11	16.9
101—200	14	21.6
201—500	21	32.3
501—1000	12	18.5
1001—3000	6	9.2
3001 & above	1	1.5
	65	100.0

(B) Size by Number of Households

Households	No of Villages in the Group	Percentage of Villages in the Size-Group
Upto 5	3	4.6
6—15	14	21.6
16—25	16	24.6
26—50	17	26.1
51—100	12	18.5
101 & above	3	4.6
	65	100.0

(C) Size by Population

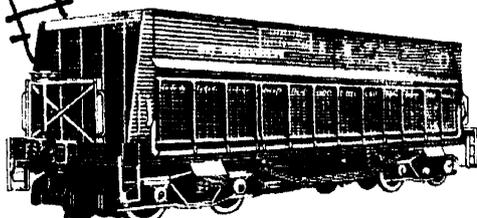
Population	No of Villages In The Group	Percentage of Villages in the Population Size-Group
Upto 50	6	9.2
51—100	16	24.6
101—200	24	36.9
201—500	15	23.0
501—1000	2	3.1
1001 & above	2	3.1
	65	100.0

Note: The data presented in the Tables 3 and 4 were collected by the author.

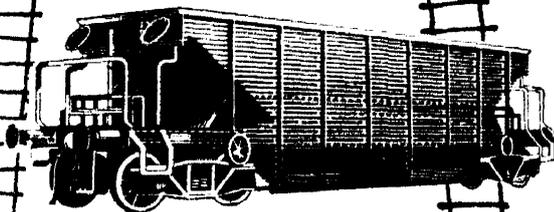
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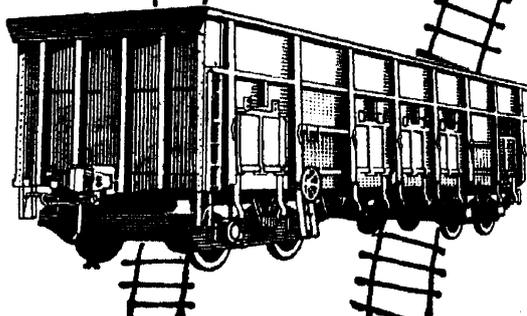
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cient one. Let us examine the meaning of this proposition.

One of the prerequisites for bringing a village under the Act is that a minimum of 51 per cent of the privately owned land should be donated* by the villagers. Generally, this condition laid down in the Act is observed. However, in quite a few cases it is not. The implications of non-observance of this requirement deserve notice. In one of the Gramdan villages in Chittor district, of the 452 acres of land individually owned as much as 292 acres (i.e. nearly 65 per cent) are owned by persons who do not belong to the village, and these absentee-owners refused to donate their land. This means that only 35 per cent of the land under individual ownership has been donated. The instance of one of the Gramdan villages in Nagaur district is more revealing. While it has 1,547 acres of land under private ownership only 240 acres of land (i.e. a little over 15 per cent) is owned by the villagers and the rest belongs to outside owners who did not donate their land. Such cases render the working of gram sabhas nearly impossible. The Act gives considerable powers to the gram sabha. These, however, cannot be effectively exercised in cases where a large majority of land owners of the village do not subscribe to Gramdan community life.

Table 4: Types of Gramdan Villages

(A) Classified by Caste		
Types	No of Villages	Percentage of Villages in the Group
Unicaste	12	18.5
Bi-caste	5	7.7
Multicaste	10	15.4
Castes and Tribes	4	6.2
Tribe	34	52.3
	65	100.

(B) Classified by Origin		
Origin	No of Villages	Percentage of Villages in the Group
Revenue villages brought under the Act as they were	30	46.2
Hamlets conferred the status of villages under the Act	27	41.5
New colonies brought under the Act	8	12.3
	65	100.0

It can be equally difficult when a land-holder in a Gramdan village also owns land in a neighbouring non-Gramdan village. The instance of a land-holder in one of the Gramdan villages in Nagaur District with 6 acres of land inside the village and 120 acres in a neighbouring village is illustrative. While he subscribes to the idea of Gramdan community life by donating the land in the village in which he lives, the land owned by him in the neighbouring villages which are not in Gramdan is kept under private ownership. The situation can be true on a village level too. The people in one of the Gramdan villages in Jaipur District own 360 acres of land of which 185 acres are (over 51 per cent) in neighbouring villages which are not under Gramdan. Thus even if a village is brought under the fold of Gramdan this is not necessarily effective in transferring the individual ownership of land to the community, under the conditions in which the Gramdan villagers operate today.

Notes

1 As early as in 1947 a revolutionary peasant movement had slowly been forming, led by communist leaders in Telengana. Telengana was the eastern half of the princely State of Hyderabad, comprising 8 districts having an area of 44,000 sq miles, populated mainly by the Telugu-speaking people. Under the Nizam a notoriously semi-feudal agrarian system had been perpetuated and the peasantry was ripe for radical leadership. The communist set in motion an indigenous mass campaign against the landlords and the State autocracy and concentrated mainly in the districts of Nalgonda and Warangal. According to Communist claims a total of 3,000 villages had been sovietized, and over a million acres had been seized by the peasants during riot period. See Gene D Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller, "Communism in India", University of California Press, Berkeley 1959, especially pages 246, 266 — 67 and 300. Communist leaders have been very optimistic about the achievements of the peasant movement in Telengana. For instance G Adhikari in his "Resurgent India", claims that the movement shook for the first time the main bastions of the feudal orders in India to its very foundations" and "blazed the path of Indian people's Demo-

cratic Revolution." For an official version of the Communist party of India of the Telengana peasant riot see on "Telengana", Information Document No 7, 1950, (place not given) and "Zamindari — Police Terror in Andhra", (place and date not given).

* For instance, (1) *Bhoodan Yajna* (in Hindi) started in 1954. Since 1956 *Bhoodan* is being published in English too. Both these publications are weeklies and are edited by Dharendra Muzumdar, (2) *Gramdan*, started in 1957 and edited by A W Sahasrabudhe and Sachidanand. These publications are exclusively devoted to reporting the progress of the Bhoodan-gramdan movement; but publication like *Sarvodaya* and *Gandhi Marg* too publicise the activities of the movement.

³ The first *Bhoodan* (land-gift) of hundred acres was made on April 18, 1951 to Vinoba Bhave, the initiator of the movement. Later the donations widened out into Gramdan, donation of entire villages. The first Gramdan was made in May 1952 by the villagers of Mangrot in Hamirpur district of Uttar Pradesh.

⁴ The Akhil Bharat Sarva Seva Sangh, Kashi, works as the co-ordinating agency of the Sarva Seva Sanghs established on a State-wise basis. Several agencies like the Khadi and Village Industries Commission give priority to Gramdan villages in developmental programmes manned by them—for instance, in the establishment of Gram Ekais. In several States legislation encourages the spread of the movement by extending concessions like direct representation at the panchayat samiti level, etc.

⁶ The Rajasthan Gramdan Act 1960 is referred to as 'the Act' in this paper hereinafter, unless otherwise specified. The salient features of the Act are given below in order to facilitate the discussion that would follow in this paper.

⁶ See Brij Raj Chauhan, "Residential Concentrations and Caste Groupings in the Rural Setting in *Man in India*, Vol 44, No 2, 1964, PP 175-181.

(1) In order that a village may be brought under the Act the land donations should consti-

tute not less than 51 per cent of the total land under private ownership in that village.

- (2) The number of persons who donate this 51 per cent of land should not be less than 80 per cent of the total number of persons owning land and residing in the village.
- (3) The donors should not be less than 75 per cent of the adult persons residing in the village and should be prepared to participate in the Gramdan Community.
- (4) Once the donations are confirmed by law the ownership of these land will vest in the gram sabha established for that Gramdan village. The ownership of all common lands in the village shall also be vest in the gram sabha.
- (5) The gram sabha shall be responsible for the payment of land revenue and other cesses on the entire land in the village, including land under private ownership of non-donors. Non-donors in the village are to pay the cess and taxes to the gram sabha.
- (6) The gram sabha shall consist, of all adult persons who either are residents of the Gramdan village or own lands in it.
- (7) The gram sabha shall be a body corporate having perpetual succession and a common seal with power to enter into contracts and to acquire, hold, administer and dispose of property, both movable and immovable.
- (8) When the gram sabha is established in a Gramdan village it shall exercise such powers and discharge such duties and functions as done by the panchayat so far.
- (9) The gram sabha shall have powers to borrow moneys on the security of Gram Nidhi (a fund raised through donations, bequests, gifts or loans from the central or the State Government or any local authority or any person) or any other property not being lands vested in the Gram Sabha.

⁷ It is pertinent to note here the differences between the gram sabha under the panchayati raj set-up and the gramdan set-up. Under the former the gram sabha is convened only twice a year to be appraised of the activities of

the panchayat. The gram sabha in a gramdan village is a very powerful body consisting of the entire adult population and combines in itself the powers of both the vikas panchayat and the nyaya panchayat and is convened at least once in a month.

 **n towards progress . . .**

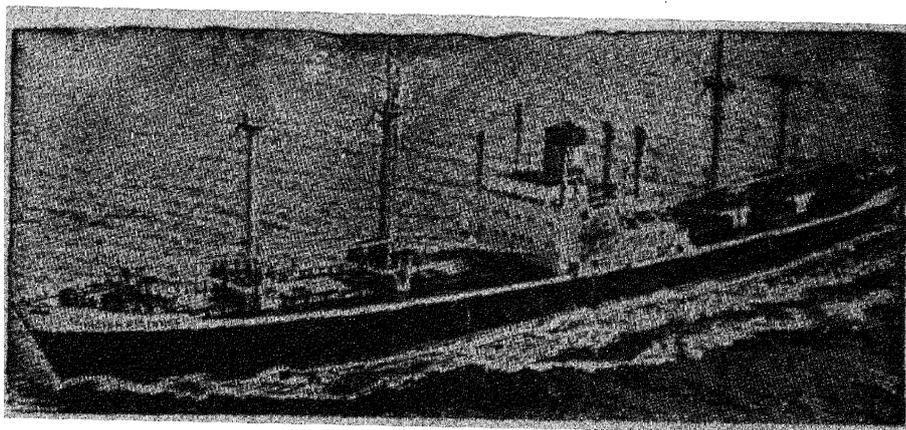
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