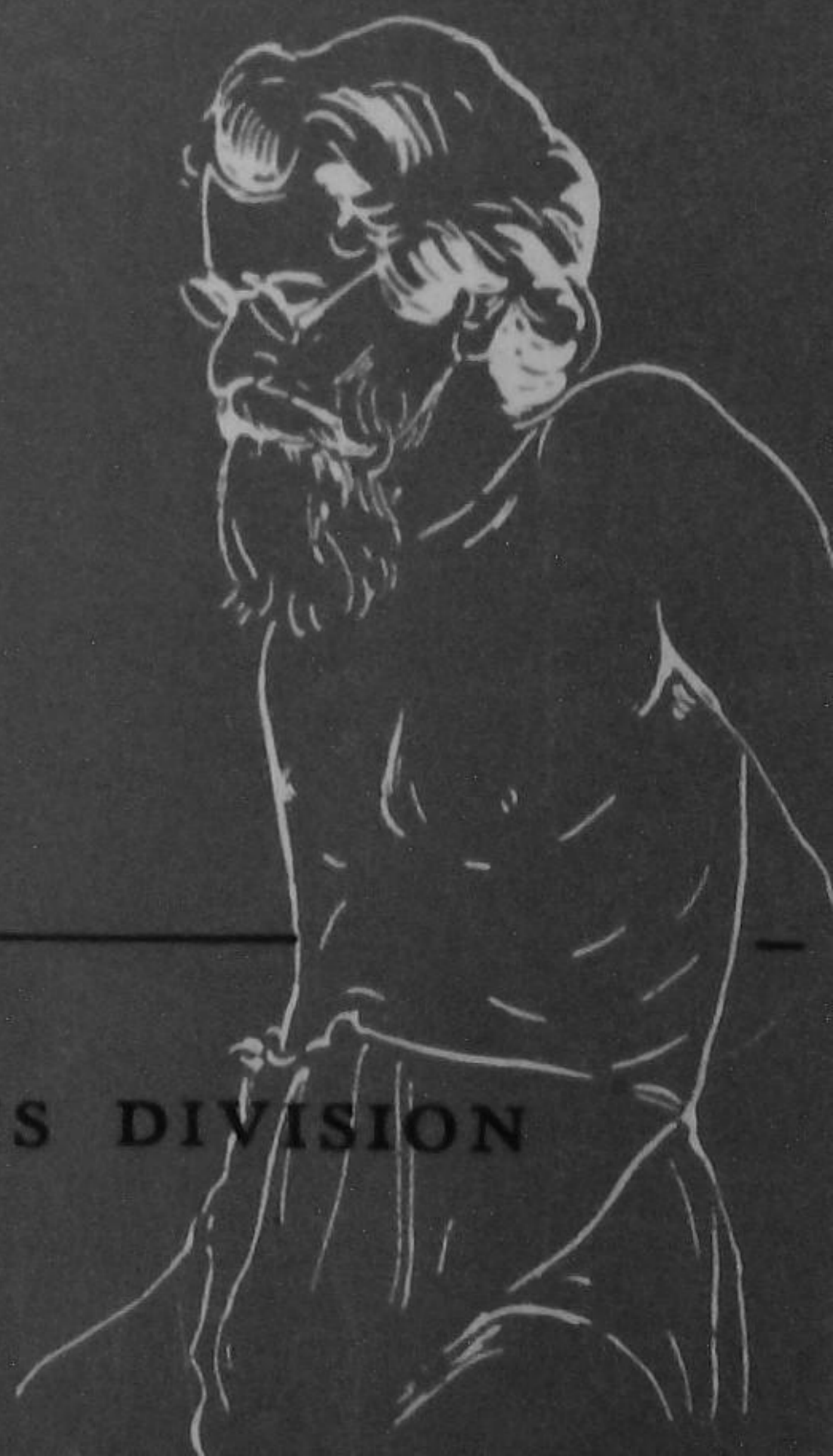




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MAHATMA GANDHI

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ACHARYA VINOBA BHAVE

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VILLAGE SELF-GOVERNMENT

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*Issued on behalf of*

MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND COOPERATION  
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

May 1960

Vaisakha 1882

The brochure contains the inspiring sayings of Mahatma Gandhi and Acharya Vinoba Bhave on the subject of Village Self-Government. They will be of abiding interest to all those who are engaged in the programme of Community Development, whose objective is to make our villages self-governing units of the larger Indian democracy.

Published by the Director, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Delhi-8, and printed by the Manager, Government of India Press, Faridabad

## MAHATMA GANDHI

To serve our villages is to establish Swaraj. Everything else is but an idle dream.

*Young India*, December 26, 1929

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I have believed and repeated times without number that India is to be found not in its few cities but in its 7,00,000 villages. But we town-dwellers have believed that India is to be found in its towns and the villages were created to minister to our needs. We have hardly ever paused to inquire if those poor folk get sufficient to eat and clothe themselves with and whether they have a roof to shelter themselves from sun and rain.

*Harijan*, April 4, 1936

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I have found that the town-dweller has generally exploited the villager, in fact, he has lived on the poor villager's subsistence. Many a British official has written about the conditions of the people of India. No one has, to my knowledge, said that the Indian villager has enough to keep body and soul together. On the contrary they have admitted that the bulk of the population live on the verge of starvation and ten per cent are semi-starved, and that millions have to rest content with a pinch of dirty salt and chillies and polished rice or parched grain.

Ibid

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Over 75 per cent of the population are agriculturists. But there cannot be much spirit of self-government about us if we take away or allow others to take away from them almost the whole of the result of their labour.

Excerpt from speech delivered on the occasion of the opening of the Banaras Hindu University,  
February 4, 1916

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We are guilty of a grievous wrong against the villagers and the only way in which we can expiate is by encouraging them to revive their lost industries and arts by assuring them of a ready market.

*Harijan*, March 1, 1935

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What they need is not a knowledge of the three R's but a knowledge of their economic life and how they can better it. They are today working as mere automatons, without any responsibility whatsoever to their surroundings and without feeling the joy of work.

*Harijan*, November 23, 1935

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We have to teach them how to economise time, health and money. Lionel Curtis described our villages as dung-heaps. We have to turn them into model villages. Our village-folk do not get fresh air though they are surrounded by fresh air; they do not get fresh food though they are surrounded by the freshest foods. I am talking like a missionary in this matter of food, because my mission is to make villages a thing of beauty.

*Harijan*, March 1, 1935

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The revival of village industries is but an extension of the khadi effort. Hand-spun cloth, hand-made paper, hand-pounded rice, home-made bread and jam are not uncommon in the West. Only there they do not have one-hundredth of the importance they have in India. With us their revival means life, their extinction means death to the villagers.

*Harijan*, January 4, 1935

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Villages have suffered long from neglect by those who have had the benefit of education. They have chosen the city life. The village movement is an attempt to establish healthy contact with the villages by inducing those who are fired with the spirit of service to settle in them and find self-expression in the service of villagers.

*Harijan*, February 20, 1937

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We must identify ourselves with the villagers who toil under the hot sun beating on their bent backs and see how we would like to drink water from the pool in which the villagers bathe, wash their clothes and pots, in which their cattle drink and roll. Then and not till then shall we truly represent the masses and they will, as surely as I am writing this, respond to every call.

*Harijan*, March 1, 1935

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The cities are capable of taking care of themselves. It is the village we have to turn to. We have to disabuse them (villagers) of their prejudice, their superstitions, their narrow outlook and we can do so in no other manner than that of staying amongst

them and sharing their joys and sorrows and spreading education and intelligent information among them.

*Young India*, April 30, 1931

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(Independence) means the consciousness in the average villager that he is the maker of his own destiny, he is his own legislator through his chosen representative.

*Young India*, February 13, 1930

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It is the masses who have to attain Swaraj. It is neither the sole concern of the moneyed men nor that of the educated classes. Both must subserve their interest in any scheme of Swaraj.

*Young India*, April 20, 1921

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Swaraj does not consist in the change of Government... (It) is a real change of heart on the part of the people.

Quoted by C. F. Andrews in *Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas*,  
p. 366 (1929)

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By Swaraj, I mean the government of India by the consent of the people as ascertained by the largest number of the adult population, male or female, native born or domiciled, who have contributed by manual labour to the service of the State and who have taken the trouble of having their names registered as voters. I hope to demonstrate that real Swaraj will come not by the acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when abused. In other words,



Swaraj is to be attained by educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority.

*Young India*, January 29, 1925

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Self-government means continuous effort to be independent of government control, whether it is foreign government or whether it is national. Swaraj government will be a sorry affair if people look up to it for the regulation of every detail of life.

*Young India*, August 6, 1925

\* \* \*

Real democracy people learn not from books, nor from the government who are in name and in reality their servants. Hard experience is the most efficient teacher in democracy.

*Harijan*, January 18, 1948

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The pilgrimage to Swaraj is a painful climb. It requires attention to details. It means vast organising ability, it means penetration into the villages solely for the service of the villagers. In other words it means national education, i.e., education of the masses. It means an awakening of national consciousness among the masses. It will not spring like the magician's mango. It will grow almost unperceived like the banian tree.

*Young India*, May 21, 1925

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Democracy cannot be evolved by forcible methods. The spirit of democracy cannot be imposed from without. It has to come from within.

Quoted by Pattabhi Sitaramayya in *The History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. 1, 1935, p. 982

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The rule of the people, by the people, for the people means the rule of unadulterated Ahimsa.

*Harijan*, May 27, 1939

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True democracy or the Swaraj of the masses can never come through untruthful and violent means for the simple reason that the natural corollary to their use would be to remove all opposition through the suppression or extermination of the antagonists. That does not make for individual freedom; individual freedom can have the fullest play only under a regime of unadulterated Ahimsa.

*Harijan*, July 27, 1939

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I value individual freedom but must not forget that man is essentially a social being. He has risen to his present status by learning to adjust his individualism to the requirements of social progress. Unrestricted individualism is the law of the beast of the jungle. We have learned to strike the mean between individual freedom and social restraint. Willing submission to social restraint for the sake of the wellbeing of the whole society enriches both the individual and the society of which one is a member.

*Harijan*, May 27, 1939

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Swaraj really means self-control. Only he is capable of self-control who observes the rules of morality, does not cheat or give up truth, and does his duty to his parents, wife and children, servants and neighbours. Such a man is in enjoyment of Swaraj, no matter where he lives. A State enjoys

Swaraj if it can boast of a large number of such good citizens.

Gandhiji's conclusion to his Paraphrase of *Unto This Last*

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That country is the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings; that man is the richest who, having perfected the functions of his own life to the utmost, has also the widest helpful influence, both personal and by means of his possessions, over the lives of others.

Ibid

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A born democrat is a born disciplinarian. Democracy comes naturally to him who is habituated normally to yield willing obedience to all laws, human or divine. A democrat must be utterly selfless. He must think and dream not in terms of self or party but only of democracy.

*Harijan*, May 27, 1939

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If all simply insist on rights and no duties, there will be utter confusion and chaos. If instead of insisting on rights everyone does his duty, there will immediately be the rule of order established among mankind.

*Harijan*, July 6, 1947

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Democracy requires that everyone, man or woman, should realise his or her own responsibility. That is what is meant by Panchayat-raj.

Excerpt from written message to a prayer meeting, May 18, 1947, quoted by Tendulkar in *Mahatma*, Vol. VII, p. 470 (1953)

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I like the ideal of Rama and Janaka. They owned nothing against the people. Everything including themselves belonged to the people. They lived in their midst a life not above theirs but in correspondence with theirs. But these may not be regarded as historical personages. Then let us take the example of the great Caliph Omar. Though he was monarch of a vast realm created by his great genius and amazing industry, he lived the life of a pauper and never considered himself owner of the vast treasures that lay at his feet. He was a terror to those officials who squandered people's money in luxuries.

*Young India*, May 28, 1931

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They (our forefathers) saw that kings and their swords were inferior to the sword of ethics, and they, therefore, held the sovereigns of the earth to be inferior to the *rishis* and the *fakirs*. A nation with a constitution like this is fitter to teach others than to learn from others. This nation had courts, lawyers and doctors, but they were all within bounds. Everybody knew that these professions were not particularly superior; moreover, these *vakils* and *vaid*s did not rob people; they were considered people's dependents, not their masters. Justice was tolerably fair. The ordinary rule was to avoid courts. The common people lived independently and followed their agricultural occupation. They enjoyed true Home Rule.

*Hind Swaraj*, 1908, ch. XIII, p. 56 (1943)

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Democracy must in essence mean the art and science of mobilising the entire physical, economic and spiritual resources of all the various sections of

the people in the service of the common good of all.

*Harijan*, May 27, 1939

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To me political power is not an end but one of the means of enabling people to better their condition in every department of life. Political power means capacity to regulate national life through national representatives. If national life becomes so perfect as to become self-regulated, no representation becomes necessary. There is then a state of enlightened anarchy. In such a state everyone is his own ruler. He rules himself in such a manner that he is never a hindrance to his neighbour. In the ideal State, therefore, there is no political power because there is no State. But the ideal is never fully realised in life. Hence the classical statement of Thoreau that 'that government is the best which governs the least'.

*Young India*, July 2, 1931

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I look upon an increase of the power of the State with the greatest of fear, because, although while apparently doing good by minimising exploitation, it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality which lies at the root of all progress.

Quoted by Nirmal Kumar Bose in an article in  
*The Modern Review*, October 1935

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When people come into possession of political power, the interference with the freedom of people is reduced to a minimum. In other words, a nation that runs its affairs smoothly and effectively without much State interference is truly democratic. Where

such a condition is absent, the form of government is democratic only in name.

*Harijan*, January 11, 1936

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Power resides in the people and it is entrusted for the time being to those whom they may choose as their representatives. Parliaments have no power or even existence independently of the people.

*Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place*, 1941,  
p. 4 (1948)

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The rule of majority has a narrow application, i.e., one should yield to the majority in matters of detail. But it is slavery to be amenable to the majority, no matter what its decisions are. Democracy is not a state in which people act like sheep. Under democracy individual liberty of opinion and action is jealously guarded.

*Young India*, March 2, 1922

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Evolution of democracy is not possible if we are not prepared to hear the other side. We shut the doors of reason when we refuse to listen to our opponents, or having listened, make fun of them. If intolerance becomes a habit, we run the risk of missing the truth. Whilst, with the limits that Nature has put upon our understanding, we must act fearlessly according to the light vouchsafed to us, we must always keep an open mind and be ever ready to find that what we believed to be truth was, after all, untruth. This openness of mind strengthens the truth in us and removes the dross from it, if there is any.

*Harijan*, May 31, 1942

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Our motto must ever be conversion by gentle persuasion and a constant appeal to the head and the heart. We must therefore be ever courteous and patient with those who do not see eye to eye with us.

*Young India*, September 29, 1921

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Immediately we begin to think of things as our opponents think of them, we shall be able to do them full justice. I know that this requires a detached state of mind, and it is a state very difficult to reach. Nevertheless for a Satyagrahi it is absolutely essential. Three-fourths of the miseries and misunderstandings of the world will disappear, if we step into the shoes of our adversaries and understand their standpoint. We will then agree with our adversaries quickly or think of them charitably.

*Young India*, March 19, 1925

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Timidity has no place in democracy. When people in general believe in and want a particular thing, their representatives have but to give shape to their demand and make it feasible. A favourable manly attitude of the multitude has been found to go a long way in winning battles.

Excerpt from speech at a prayer meeting, January 5, 1948,  
quoted by Pyarelal in *Mahatma Gandhi—The Last Phase*,  
Vol. II, p. 657 (1958)

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My idea of society is that while we are born equal, meaning that we have a right to equal opportunity, all have not the same capacity. It is, in the nature of things, impossible. For instance, all cannot have the same height, or colour or degree of

intelligence, etc.; therefore in the nature of things, some will have ability to earn more and others less. People with talents will have more, and they will utilise their talents for this purpose. If they utilise their talents kindly they will be performing the work of the State. Such people exist as trustees, on no other terms. I would allow a man of intellect to earn more, I would not cramp his talent. But the bulk of his greater earnings must be used for the good of the State, just as income of all earning sons of the father goes to the common family fund.

*Young India*, November 26, 1931

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I suggest that if India is to evolve along non-violent lines, it will have to decentralise many things. Centralisation cannot be sustained and defended without adequate force. Simple homes from which there is nothing to take away require no policing; the palaces of the rich must have strong guards to protect them against dacoity. So must huge factories. Rurally organised India will run less risk of foreign invasion than urbanised India, well equipped with military, naval and air forces.

*Harijan*, December 30, 1939

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I would like to see India free and strong so that she may offer herself as a willing and pure sacrifice for the betterment of the world. The individual, being pure, sacrifices himself for the family, the latter for the village, the village for the district, the district for the province, the province for the nation, the nation for all.

*Young India*, September 17, 1925

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No country in the world today shows any but patronising regard for the weak. My notion of democracy is that under it the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest.

*Harijan*, May 18, 1940

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Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus every village will be a republic or Panchayat having full powers. It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world. It will be trained and prepared to perish in the attempt to defend itself against any onslaught from without. Thus, ultimately, it is the individual who is the unit. This does not exclude dependence on and willing help from neighbours. It will be a free and voluntary play of mutual forces. Such a society is necessarily highly cultured in which every man and woman knows what he or she wants and, what is more, knows that no one should want anything that others cannot have with equal labour.

*Harijan*, July 28, 1946

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We have to make a choice between India of the villages that are as ancient as herself and India of the cities which are a creation of foreign domination. Today the cities dominate and drain the villages so that they are crumbling to ruin...Exploitation of villages is itself organised violence. If we want Swaraj to be built on non-violence, we will have to give the villages their proper place.

*Harijan*, January 20, 1940

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In the true democracy of India, the unit was the village. Even if one village wanted Panchayat-raj, which was called republic in English, no one could stop it. True democracy could not be worked by twenty men sitting at the Centre. It had to be worked from below by the people of every village.

*Harijan*, January 18, 1948

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Village organisation seems a simple word, but it means the organisation of the whole of India, inasmuch as India is predominantly rural.

Excerpt from speech at a meeting of the college branch of the Young Men's Christian Association, Calcutta, August 1925, reported in *Young India*, September 17, 1925

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If we would see our dream of Panchayat-raj, *i.e.*, true democracy, realised, we would regard the humblest and lowest Indian as being equally the ruler of India with the tallest in the land. This presupposes that all are pure or will become pure if they are not. And purity must go hand-in-hand with wisdom. Not one would then harbour any distinction between community and community, caste and outcaste. Everybody would regard all as equal with oneself and hold them together in the silken net of love. No one would regard another as untouchable. We would hold as equal the toiling labourer and the rich capitalist. Everybody would know how to earn an honest living by the sweat of one's brow and make no distinction between intellectual and physical labour.

*Harijan*, January 18, 1948

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Panchayat has an ancient flavour; it is a good word. It literally means an assembly of five elected by villagers. It represents the system, by which the innumerable village republics of India were governed. But the British Government, by its ruthlessly thorough method of revenue collection, almost destroyed these ancient republics, which could not stand the shock of this revenue collection.

*Young India*, May 28, 1931

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Indian village life had so much vitality and character that it had persisted all these long years and weathered many a storm... These villages were so many village republics, completely self-contained, having all that one may want—schools, arbitration boards, sanitation boards, and no Poor Law indeed, but ample provision for the relief of the poor... The village headman was a personality in himself. He was not the imposter of today; he was the servant of the people whom they could go to in times of difficulties, whom every child in the village knew and loved. He was incorruptible, he was a gentleman.

*Young India*, September 17, 1925

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My purpose is to present an outline of village government. Here there is perfect democracy based upon individual freedom. The individual is the architect of his own government. The law of non-violence rules him and his government. He and his village are able to defy the might of a world. For, the law governing every villager is that he will suffer death in defence of his and his village's honour.

*Harijan*, July 26, 1942

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An ideal Indian village will be so constructed as to lend itself to perfect sanitation. It will have cottages with sufficient light and ventilation built of material obtainable within a radius of five miles of it. The cottages will have courtyards enabling householders to plant vegetables for domestic use and to house their cattle. The village lanes and streets will be free of all avoidable dust. It will have wells according to its needs and accessible to all.

It will have houses of worship for all, also a common meeting place, a village common for grazing its cattle, a cooperative dairy, primary and secondary schools in which industrial education will be the central fact, and it will have Panchayats for settling disputes.

It will produce its own grains, vegetables and fruit, and its own khadi. This is roughly my idea of a model village. Given cooperation among the people, almost the whole of the programme other than model cottages can be worked out at an expenditure within the means of the villagers...without Government assistance. With the assistance there is no limit to the possibility of village reconstruction.

My task is to discover what the villagers can do to help themselves if they have mutual cooperation and contribute voluntary labour for the common good. I am convinced that they can, under intelligent guidance, double the village income as distinguished from individual income. There are in our villages inexhaustible resources not for commercial purposes in every case but certainly for local purposes in almost every case. The greatest tragedy is the

hopeless unwillingness of the villagers to better their lot.

*Harijan*, January 9, 1937

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My idea of village Swaraj is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants, and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity. Thus every village's first concern will be to grow its own food crops and cotton for its cloth. It should have a reserve for its cattle, recreation and playgrounds for adults and children. Then if there is more land available, it will grow useful money crops, thus excluding ganja, tobacco, opium and the like. The village will maintain a village theatre, school and public hall. It will have its own waterworks ensuring clean water supply. This can be done through controlled wells or tanks. Education will be compulsory up to the final basic course. As far as possible every activity will be conducted on the cooperative basis.

*Harijan*, July 26, 1942

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In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever widening, never ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units.

*Harijan*, July 28, 1946

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The government of the village will be conducted by the Panchayat of five persons annually elected by the adult villagers, male and female, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications. It will have all the authority and jurisdiction required. Since there will be no system of punishments in the accepted sense, this Panchayat will be the legislature, judiciary and executive combined to operate for its year of office.

*Harijan*, July 26, 1942

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Any village can become such a republic today without much interference... To model such a village may be the work of a life-time. Any lover of democracy and village life can take up a village, treat it as his world and sole work and he will find good results. He begins by being the village scavenger, spinner, watchman, medicineman and schoolmaster all at once. If nobody comes near him he will be satisfied with scavenging and spinning.

Ibid

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Where a Panchayat is really popular and increases its popularity by the constructive work it will find its judgements and authority respected by reason of its moral prestige. And that surely is the greatest sanction anyone can possess and of which one cannot be deprived.

*Young India*, May 28, 1931

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A village unit as conceived by me is as strong as the strongest. My imaginary village consists of 1,000

souls. Such a unit can give a good account of itself, if it is well organised on a basis of self-sufficiency.

*Harijan*, August 4, 1946

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The greater the power of the Panchayats, the better for the people. Moreover, for Panchayats to be effective and efficient, the level of people's education has to be considerably raised. I do not conceive the increase in the power of the people in military, but in moral terms. Naturally, I swear by Nai Talim in this connection.

*Harijan*, December 21, 1947

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Parties in civil suits must be compelled in the majority of cases to refer their disputes to arbitration, the decisions of the Panchayats being final except in cases of corruption or obvious misapplication of law. Multiplicity of intermediate courts should be avoided.

Excerpt from Presidential Address to 39th Session of the Indian National Congress, Belgaum, December 1924

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Unless the Panchayatghar villagers did the work of the Panchayats, the effort would be a waste of time and labour. It is the function of the Panchayats, to revive honesty and industry...It is the function of the Panchayats to teach the villagers to avoid disputes, if they have to settle them. That would ensure speedy justice without any expenditure. They would need neither the police nor the military.

Excerpt from speech at a prayer meeting, December 27, 1947  
reported in *Harijan*, January 4, 1948

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## Village Exhibitions

If we want and believe that the village should not only survive but also become strong and flourishing, then the village perspective is the only correct view-point. If this is true then in our exhibitions there can be no place for the glamour and pomp of the cities. There should be no necessity for games and other entertainments that belong to the cities. An exhibition should not become a 'Tamasha' nor a source of income; it should never become the advertising medium for traders. No sales should be allowed there. Even khadi and village industry products should not be sold. An exhibition should be a medium of education, should be attractive and it should be such as to infuse in the villager the impulse to take to some industry or the other. It should bring out the glaring defects and drawbacks in the present day village life, and show methods to be adopted to set them right. It should also be able to indicate the extent of achievement in that direction ever since the idea of village uplift was sponsored. It should also teach how to make village life artistic... There should be two models of villages—one as is existing today and the other an improved one. The improved village will be clean all throughout. Its houses, its roads, its surroundings and its fields will be all clean. The condition of the cattle should also improve. Books, charts and pictures should be used to show what industries give increased income and how... This list may be further expanded. What I have indicated is by way of example only, it should not be taken to be exhaustive.

*Gram Udyog Patrika, July 1946*



## VINOBA BHAVE

The joy of freedom is something like the joy of good health. It must be personal experience to every individual. The warmth and light that freedom brings should need no outside proof of argument. It must be self-evident.

*Bhoodan, August 28, 1957*

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The fight for Swaraj is over. But a tougher fight for Gram-raj is imminent in future. The fight we gave was non-violent. So also this new fight would be non-violent. The fight cannot be postponed. You, all brothers and sisters, would be the soldiers in it. Our weapons would be the spinning wheel and plough-share. For our battle we require neither bomb nor guns. We simply need implements fit for work.

Quoted by Suresh Ramabhai in *Vinoba and His Mission* (1954), p. 29

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Government (*Rajya*) is one thing, self-government (*Swarajya*) is another... *Swarajya* is a Vedic term. It is defined thus: *Swarajya* is the government of each by each, such that it will seem to each to be his own rule; or it is government by all; or the Kingdom of God (*Ramrajya*).

Quoted by Lanza Del Vasto in *Gandhi to Vinoba*, p. 215

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The *Vedas* have called the sun as *swarat*, i.e., resplendant. The prayer of our ancient *rishis* was 'May we ever be working for self-rule'. Swaraj to

them was not a matter of asking. It was something to be attained. We shall use the word *Gram-swaraj* as our objective.

*Bhoodan, October 2, 1957*

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Can anyone say that we have Swaraj in our villages today? Have the inhabitants of a village the knowledge, the will and the ability to manage their own affairs? They know how to quarrel. But they cannot settle their own quarrels. They have to walk long distances and incur debts to fight their suits in the courts of law which are situated in the district town or the state capital. As long as this state of affairs remains unchanged, villagers will remain strangers to Swaraj.

*Bhoodan, August 28, 1957*

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The new age demands that we change our social fabric. In the past it was possible to manage with society based on traditional family group when science was not so very advanced. But now no small unit could remain isolated from the rest of the world and no single family could lead its life apart from the village community. The coming age is the age of village families ('gram parivars').

From report of a speech at Tyandakura, Orissa, March 11, 1955

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My idea of looking upon the whole world as common heritage of humanity does not mean that there would be no regional self-sufficiency in economic matters. On the contrary, every village, district or country ought to be self-sufficient as far as primary necessities are concerned, and atomic power

would be of great help in decentralising the industries so that they could have highly developed tools and machineries in every village. Thanks to the scientific knowledge at our command, we can have enough physical comforts for everybody even if we restrict our choice to our immediate surroundings. But we must stop hankering after more than enough if we want to avert a disaster.

Ibid

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I believe in the decentralisation of power. I would like to build up a social order in which the institution of organised government does not exist. I want to see the end of party politics. I wish to see *Lokniti*, or people's self-reliant strength, coming into its own. *Lokniti* can exist only when men have compassion in their hearts and work for equality.

*Bhoodan*, July 17, 1957

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We want an order of society which will be free not only from exploitation but also from every governmental authority. The power of government will be decentralised and distributed among the villages. Every village will be the state in itself; the Centre will have only nominal authority over them.

*Vinoba and His Mission*, p. 209

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We cannot leave everything to the government and sit idle with folded hands. The government is doing what it can, but without social effort no progress is possible. The government as well as the people must exert themselves to raise the moral and

material standard of the people. Freedom means responsibility and voluntary cooperation. In this age of science no one can survive unless they learn to think comprehensively and live in cooperation with one another.

*Bhoodan, October 9, 1957*

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We are delegating all the duties to the government. Whether it is a hospital or any other social amenity we expect the government to take the initiative and do the needful. The quality of individual compassion and service hardly comes into play. In a planned economy this trend is strengthened. Unless the individual citizen is wide awake he will tend to become a mere cog who has lost spontaneous feeling and initiative. A system might look grand from outside but it cannot be sustained unless the people have the right spirit. Without character there can be no real progress. Men may be free from want but that is no guarantee that they will be free. In a real democracy every individual counts.

*Bhoodan, July 10, 1957*

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This habit of leaving everything to government agencies does not widen people's horizon, does not enlarge their hearts. You cannot build up the country with people whose only work is to praise or blame the government. That is not freedom. The people must do the major portion of the work themselves and leave out the minor things to the government. Strength grows when the people and the government come together. I have said repeatedly that the people are ONE and the government ZERO. One and zero

can produce great strength but separately they are nothing. While the people are an 'entity', the government is a non-entity. The government has some function, some power, but that derives from your consent. The real strength is the strength of the people.

*Bhoodan, October 30, 1957*

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The government is after all only a bucket, while the people are like a well. If there is no water in the well, how can there be any in the bucket? We will, therefore, go to the source of water—the people. What the government cannot do, the people can.

*Vinoba and His Mission, p. 178*

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I do not fancy a national plan, that is, I would not begin planning from above for the whole country. I prefer planning from below. I want every village to make a plan for its own development. I want them to redistribute land, increase production, make provisions for storing up grains sufficient for two years for the whole village. I want them to start village industries. Then I would like them to have a Panchayat. The government comes in only as a coordinating agency.

*Bhoodan, June 26, 1957*

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The people are going to solve their own problems. I am not going to solve the problems. I am simply creating the atmosphere. The beginning is always small. When the atmosphere spreads all over,

somebody will ask and somebody will give. Where then is the need for my agency between the rich and the poor ?

*Vinoba and His Mission*, p. 50

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Our main objective is to release the latent creative capacity of the people and to harness it for village development work. The Sarvodaya Mandals, so far as we are establishing them in every area, will give guidance and help whenever necessary.... (We have) to tap the creative strength and will of every village and mobilise it for development work.

*Bhoodan*, May 1, 1957

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When the inhabitants of every village have the urge to plan out a programme of development and are capable of executing it with a will and self-confidence we can say that real Swaraj has come.

*Bhoodan*, August 28, 1957

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Gram-raj is not a Plan, it is a thought or an idea. It should not be confused with a Welfare State. I am honestly not thinking in terms of more food, clothing and housing for all. They are obviously the prime necessities of life. Gram-raj is based on a 'feeling of oneness' in the village. It is a spontaneous share of sorrows and joys by the people.

*Bhoodan*, January 5, 1957

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Our idea (of gramdan) is to bring the ordinary villager into the picture and pass on the initiative and responsibility of work to him. We shall mobilise all the available talents and get the cooperation

of everyone who is interested in the task and has something to offer.

*Bhoodan, May 1, 1957*

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It (gramdan work) is an independent movement of the people. Its aim is to create self-reliance and self-confidence in the people. In other words, its aim is *gram swarajya*. A government can help in this work after a gramdan has been given. The community projects and national extension services can rush aid to the villages which have ended private property in land. But gramdan can be effected only by the voluntary effort of the people.

*Bhoodan, November 6, 1957*

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All the land is given in gramdan and a climate is created in which a Gram-raj can come into existence. I am asked if I have any provision for the development of gramdan villages. If all the five lakh villages of India are given in gramdan, would workers be imported from outside who would serve those villages? The village people must themselves come forward and do this work. They will form a village council in which men and women in the village will take part. They will form an autonomous self-sufficient community.

*Bhoodan, July 10, 1957*

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If people living in a community realise that the town or the village they live in is one family then their service will become selfless service. Whatever they do will not be done for personal profit but for

general good, in a sense of dedication, in the spirit of rendering service to God.

*Bhoodan, October 30, 1957*

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If all the people of a village unite as members of one family they can bring about an improvement in their condition in a short time. They can form a Gram-raj. We have seen quarrels between members of a family. But they continue to live together because of self-interest. In a gramdan village a new idea and a new faith will inspire men and bind them together.

*Bhoodan, October 25, 1957*

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Sarvodaya desires to preserve the institution of family; but it wants to create a feeling of community in the whole society. We ask donations from all. We expect the rich as well as the poor to give. Each one must give something out of whatever he may have to society. The poor will give their labour. Gram-raj means the willing acceptance and hearty fulfilment of society obligations of every member of society.

*Bhoodan, May 1, 1957*

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When you, both male and female inhabitants of the village, will work together to produce articles of daily necessity yourselves, you would be able to establish your own rule... Your raj would be Gram-raj when your village is self-reliant and stands on its own feet. We have got Swaraj now. But Gram-raj is yet to be achieved. For that we



have to work hard and struggle. It would be a great struggle indeed.

*Vinoba and His Mission*, p. 28

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The principle of a Panchayat was 'Panch Parameshwar', i.e., 'God speaks through the Five', which, in other words, means that a unanimous decision of the Panchayat was respected as the verdict of God. If three or four out of five gave one judgement and the others gave a different one, it could not be taken as the verdict of God. If it were not so, it would give rise to majority and minority distinctions. Therefore, the only way to achieve unity is to accept the principle of 'Panch Parameshwar', 'God speaks through the Five', to achieve the ideal of unanimous decision.

From an article *Gram-raj* in *A.I.C.C. Economic Review*,  
dated July 24, 1954

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Each village should be self-sufficient. It should look after its education and defence. The people in the village should actively participate in the day-to-day affairs of the village. There should be no caste divisions or any feeling of high and low. There should be a climate of brotherliness and co-operation in the village. Land will belong to all. All will have work. There will be village industries. The whole village, in short, will live as one family.

*Bhoodan*, June 26, 1957

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One is pained at the sight of envy, rivalry and greed for power that one sees in workers who are

engaged in public work. A Municipality, a Local Board or an Assembly is a place of service.

*Bhoodan, September 18, 1957*

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All disputes must be settled in the village itself. The people must decide what and how much of agricultural production is to be sold outside the village and what is to be brought from outside. They will, in other words, assess the available resources of the village and make a plan...Every village must experiment in its own way. This alone can convey a real sense of responsibility and participation to every adult in the country and preserve real democracy.

*Bhoodan, September 18, 1957*

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There can be no progress until people have a genuine feeling of community. We have projects and plans of development but how can they succeed if there is no community? They may help a small class of people but ultimately they are bound to create greater conflict and division in society. If we understand this we shall understand the urgency of voluntary effort to help those who are less fortunate than us.

*Bhoodan, August 28, 1957*

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A community project cannot succeed in an area where a community has not come into existence. In the absence of this help cannot reach those who need it the most. It is appropriated by the well-to-do. A project will succeed if there is already a gramdan in the village.

*Bhoodan, November 6, 1957*

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In a democracy real power is in the hands of the people. If they change, laws must also change. When we begin to get gramdans, community project officers come to us and ask what help we need. It is a superstition to think that laws can be changed only if one enters parliaments. I believe that the minds and hearts of the people have the sovereign authority. If we change people's minds, parliament is bound to register the change. We believe in the primacy of the self-reliant strength of the people. We work only on this key.

*Bhoodan, May 29, 1957*

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We want cooperation of all...I had suggested that the various political parties in the country should take up development work in some of the gramdan villages and work out their ideas there. Because I believe that outside agencies can only guide and give some help. The real work will have to be done by the people themselves. The initiative must remain with them and then we have cooperation of all.

*Bhoodan, May 1, 1957*

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Conditions should be such that men of ability help the masses of their own deliberate free will and that the masses also will of their own accord give their cooperation to the able few. This can happen only if the people can stand on their own legs.

*Gandhi to Vinoba, p. 212*

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We have won independence and many responsibilities have devolved on us in its wake. They

can be discharged satisfactorily only if we have experts in every branch of knowledge. Our country will progress only if we continue to exert ourselves and take pains in exploring the various branches of knowledge.

From an address to students at Secunderabad on April 5, 1951, as reported in *Harijan*, July 14, 1951

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No country can produce a democratic society by adopting some form of parliamentary government. It is not a thing to be imitated. It cannot be imposed from outside. It has to develop within the society. It is an organic development. Obviously a majority rule is preferable to autocracy. But it is not in harmony with the ethos of Indian culture and tradition. Our tradition is of unanimity...The Quakers in America also work on the principle of unanimity. If democracies all over the world accept the principle of unanimity they will become vital and effective.

*Bhoodan*, October 2, 1957

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I do not recognise parties at all. Moreover, my study of history, experience of current affairs and thinking, all lead to the conclusion that parties in our country can not only not do much but are in the long run likely to prove disastrous...Service of our fellow-beings must be our sole objective.

*Vinoba and His Mission*, p. 155

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You can take part in political activities but not in political groupings. Also you must live like a lion,

not turn into sheep. Only sheep form a flock or union. Lions do not.

Ibid, p. 54

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The science of self-government is ever-growing. Its systems are ever-changing according to time and places. But its fundamental principles are eternal. They can be extended as much as we like.

*Gandhi to Vinoba*, p. 215

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- The four marks of faultless government are :
1. The able will devote their activity to the service of the people.
  2. Individuals will be fully self-dependent and will help each other.
  3. Non-violence will be the basis for their continual cooperation or occasional non-cooperation or resistance.
  4. Every kind of honest work will be considered of equal value (moral and monetary).

Ibid p. 210



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