

SWARAJ AND LOKNITI

VINOBA

Preface

Around sixty years ago, India's countryside watched a frail man in loin cloth walking from village to village, appealing for land for the poor. "The earth is the Lord's" was his refrain. "Land, like air and water, belongs to the Lord and is His gift to all His children, and should therefore be shared in common", he was telling the people, appealing to the landowners to part with a part of their land, and they were responding enthusiastically—the rich and the poor feeling themselves blessed for getting an opportunity to participate in this unique '*Yajna*'. His words, overflowing with love and compassion, could just not be resisted. The whole world watched in amazement this unbelievable spectacle—'India's social miracle' being brought about by this 'Saint on the march'. The land problem, identified by economists as the most urgent and the most complex problem of Asia, was being tackled through a novel experiment in psychosocial engineering.

That man was Vinoba Bhave. Born in 1895 in a village in Western India, he had a thirst for knowledge of the Spirit as well as a longing for the freedom of the country even in his childhood. These made him leave his home at the age of 21 and subsequently join Mahatma Gandhi's ashram at Sabarmati. He spent thirty prime years of his life in Gandhian ashrams, doing all kinds of manual work, conducting experiments in constructive activities for the uplift of India's villages and serving the villagers while silently continuing his spiritual journey, which made him known as 'Gandhi's spiritual heir'. After Gandhi's death at the hands of an assassin he became the undisputed leader of the Gandhian movement and strove for the fulfilment of his master's unfinished mission of nonviolent total revolution.

In 1951, Vinoba started the *Bhoodan* (land-gift) movement. For thirteen years he traversed the country on foot. Bhoodan later blossomed into *Gramdan*, which sought freedom for village communities from the clutches of the State power. Louis Fischer hailed *Gram-swaraj* as 'the most creative thought coming from the East in recent times'.

A sage and a spiritual genius, a social reformer and a social revolutionary, a creative educationist and an original thinker, a philosopher par excellence and a wonderful man of letters—Vinoba was all these and much more. This little book gives only a gist of his ideas on the ideal polity and the kind of politics necessary to build and sustain that polity.

Vinoba is popularly looked upon as Gandhi's spiritual heir. Certainly he was a worthy successor to Gandhi's legacy in the realm of spirituality, but he was not an heir to Gandhi alone in this respect; he had drunk deep at the springs of many spiritual traditions and symbolised the best and the most enduring in them; he was thus an heir to all of them. But as far as political ideas are concerned, he can truly be called Gandhi's heir only.

Gandhi was an original political thinker, although he was not adept in and cared little for the terminology of Western Political Science. Gandhi's contribution to political thought is three-fold. Firstly, he analysed nature of the State (which led him to reject it) and sketched a picture of an alternative polity based on village communities. Secondly, he developed a new means for political action in the form of satyagraha. And thirdly, he put forth a concrete and effective political programme in the form of Constructive Programme—designed to make villages viable and living political units—which he described as 'the truthful and nonviolent way of winning *Poorna Swaraj* (Complete Independence)'.

The State is the most dominant institution in the modern world. It is all-pervasive and controls almost all aspects of individual and social life. When people come together, some arrangement of a political nature becomes inevitable for ordering mutual relationships between them. As a result,

different forms of polities had emerged in the past. The modern State as we know it today is the latest form of polity that has been evolving since the last 500 years.

Gandhi attacked the State, calling it ‘violence in concentrated and organized form’ and ‘a soulless machine’. His critique of the State leaves no doubt about his position vis-à-vis the State; although contradictions may appear in his statements made on different occasions and in different contexts. He was not basically a theoretician; he was a man of action, a leader of the freedom movement that was working for the transfer of power from the British and not for the dissolution of power—although that was his ultimate aim. He could also not disregard the compulsions of situation. In the words of Martin Buber, he had ‘to wrestle with the serpent in the kingdom of the serpent that he set out to destroy.’ Besides, although opposed to the State, he appreciated the need for order and visualised what could be called ‘a people’s polity’; but he was severely handicapped in the articulation of his ideas for want of an apt term for the polity he envisaged. Vinoba coined such an apt term—*Sarvayatan*. Much confusion has arisen in the political discourse because of the ambiguity in the use of the term ‘State’. The State is often equated with any form of polity, and therefore considered inevitable. But different forms of polity have existed in the past and could exist in the future; and modern State is just one of them.

Vinoba categorically declared that freedom from the State was the core of Gandhi’s teachings, and it was the duty and the responsibility of Gandhians to work towards that goal. As he was unencumbered with many of the compulsions that Gandhi had to work under and also because he was temperamentally different, Vinoba’s critique of the State is more incisive, cogent and comprehensive—and as caustic as that of the anarchists—as lines after lines in this book will reveal. Yet, Presidents and Prime Ministers and political leaders of different hues in Independent India came to see him in thatched huts where he camped during his long trek and sat at his feet. They made laws to facilitate his work. Western political scientists wondered at this strange phenomenon of ‘legitimate anarchism’. This was the triumph of nonviolence.

Along with the State Vinoba naturally rejected politics too. In fact, what is currently known as ‘politics’ is what Murray Bookchin has called ‘statecraft’—a crafty, deceitful and cynical manipulative process of capturing and retaining political power. What is needed is the direct participation of people in decision-making regarding their affairs. A different kind of politics is needed to bring this about—to establish a *sarvayatan* polity—and also for its successful working. Vinoba, a master of words, coined the term ‘*lokniiti*’ for such a people’s politics, which is really an alternative to what is commonly known as politics.

Vinoba was selected by Gandhi as the first satyagrahi for the Individual Satyagraha campaign in 1940 which Gandhi wanted to be the purest one. In Independent India Vinoba continued to explain the true meaning of satyagraha and warn against the misuse of that term. It was Vinoba and Vinoba alone who made signal contribution to the thought of satyagraha after Gandhi. It was Vinoba who put forth the programme of *Gramdan* which provided a concrete framework wherein Gandhi’s constructive programmes could fall into place, create a holistic pattern, become more meaningful and effective and thus could lead to ‘complete Independence’ as Gandhi envisaged. Thus Vinoba developed Gandhi’s critique of the State and his ideas regarding political alternative, political technique as well as political programme. This book deals with Vinoba’s ideas on the State and politics only. Interested readers will do well to study his ideas on satyagraha and *gramswarajya* (village self-rule) as well.

This book is in two parts: the first gives Vinoba’s exposition of the science of self-rule given in his booklet ‘*Swarajya-shastra*’. Written in 1940 during a jail term, ‘*Swarajya-shastra*’, by any

standard, should be rated as one of the classics in political science. Kaka Kalelkar, a leading Gandhian, has rightfully opined that this booklet has to be given a place next only to Gandhiji's 'Hind-Swaraj' in Gandhian literature. Kalelkar's brief write-up on '*Swarajya-shastra*' is included in this book. Vinoba has said that '*Swarajya-shastra*' was the grammar of '*lokniti*'.

In his preface to '*Swarajya-shastra*' Vinoba makes a distinction between *rajya* (State) and *swarajya* (self-rule). He lists logically possible forms of polities and points out that the rule of minority, which has been the most predominant kind, can have different forms depending on the domination of physical strength or arms, wealth and knowledge. Those welcoming the domination of knowledge as signified by the triumph of information technology will do well to realize that people remain on the periphery—no matter whether arms, wealth or knowledge occupy the centre-stage.

The second part, '*Lokniti*' gives Vinoba's critique of the State and elaborates his ideal of freedom from the State. It is followed by his critique of democracy. Vinoba points out that *sarvayatan* (rule of all, by all, for all) is yet to be established, and decisively rejects democracy that poses as *sarvayatan*. Democracy does not authentically express the 'General Will'. The idea of representation, accepted in order to obviate limits on the size of democratic States, removes government so far from the direct reach of the demos, that 'democracy' becomes a contradiction in terms. Gandhi had called British Parliament 'sterile and prostitute'. Vinoba developed the Gandhian critique of democracy. He opined that State control on education in a democratic welfare State renders democracy meaningless. Now we can see that besides such control the mass media can easily 'manufacture' public opinion in favour of the ruling elite and destroy the power to think, which is an essential precondition for self-rule. Vinoba's critique has thus become all the more poignant. The third chapter in this section delineates the concept of *lokniti*.

Modern civilisation atomised society and paved way for the supremacy of the State power. Rebuilding community is the only way to reverse this process. Vinoba looks upon the village as a natural community and seeks its organisation as a free unit of society. He has spoken much about *gramswarajya* (village self-government) which is a practicable form of *sarvayatan* polity, and has provided an elaborate framework for it. *Lokniti* essentially is selfless, independent service for building the village community, educating it and making it capable and willing to manage its own affairs through consensus, and thereby move forward towards the *sarvayatan* polity. Vinoba has explained the concept of *lokniti* succinctly and clearly; yet his words being in the category of aphorisms need detailed commentaries. That work is still awaiting competent commentators. Here we invite readers to read Vinoba's words and reflect over them to grasp their full meanings and implications.

Decline of the State in the face of the onslaught of international capitalism in the era of globalisation is being foreseen in some quarters. But it may well be that the State is assuming a different form and role. It is clear that technological progress has made the State stronger and more pervasive and able to have increasingly greater surveillance, and consequently domination, over citizens' lives. Global capitalism is, in fact, spreading its wings in active collaboration with the State. Vinoba's words of timeless wisdom have perhaps become far more relevant today; they are capable of guiding the humankind bewildered and beleaguered by forces not only beyond its control but also beyond its comprehension.

'*Swarajya-Shastra*' had been translated in English by B. Kumarappa and published by Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan. While full use of that translation has been made, it has been revised/changed wherever found necessary. Other material in this book has been taken from various speeches and

writings of Vinoba. I have also freely drawn on ‘Democratic Values’ edited by Marjorie Sykes and ‘The Intimate and the Ultimate’ edited by Satish Kumar. I am also thankful to Shri B.J.K. Tampi (Dir. Gen. of Police-Retd), Daniel Mazgaonkar, Anand Mazgaonkar and Persis Ginwalla for going through the manuscript carefully and providing valuable inputs.

It is hoped that the publication will be well received and will contribute towards a renewal of interest in Vinoba’s thought.

– **Parag Cholkar**

On ‘Swarajya-Shastra’

This book deserves a place next only to ‘Hind-Swaraj’, Mahatma Gandhi’s pioneering work, in the Gandhian literature. Gandhiji wrote his book during a *samudra-yatra* (sea voyage); Vinoba wrote his during a *jail-yatra* (incarceration). Gandhiji wrote his book using both of his hands; Vinoba dictated his book. ‘Hind-Swaraj’ is in the form of questions and answers; Vinoba has finished what he had to say in answers to five questions. Gandhiji’s consecrating work is imbued with faith characteristic of a sage; Vinoba’s tract is in the category of Upanishads; its reasoning is akin to that of the great masters. The experience of life seems to corroborate Gandhiji’s statements; Vinoba’s statements are backed by sound logic. Gandhiji’s writing style is lucid; Vinoba’s style is marked with scientific precision and brevity. Vinoba himself will have to write a commentary on his work. Gandhiji’s life of experiments with Truth spread all over India is itself a great commentary on ‘Hind-Swaraj’.

The first question in this book (‘Swarajya-Shastra’) is of primary nature. The ‘important’ point in the second question (14), appears to have been dealt with inadequately. The discussion brightens up from the third question. The points regarding the *varna* system have however been put up too briefly. That grand concept of social order in India deserved to be discussed more neatly. In the replies to the fourth and the fifth question, futility of the path of violence has been convincingly impressed upon the readers, but the efficacy of the path of nonviolence has not been similarly driven home. But it is not a shortcoming in the discourse; for all nations in the world are exerting themselves in an extra-ordinary way to demonstrate the self-destroying might of violence, whereas the efficacy of nonviolence to bring about deliverance of the Self and the world is yet to be proved. India’s quest in this regard should contribute in this respect—this is an expectation as well as a prayer.

– Kaka Kalelkar

Preface

to the first Marathi edition

This short note on the science of self-rule was originally conceived in Nagpur jail and is presented here with some revision. Had Shri Biyani not made me dictate this to him, respectfully and insistently, I must admit that this booklet had little chance to see the light of day.

Rajya (State) is one thing; *swarajya* (Self-government or Self-rule) is another. *Rajya* can be acquired through violence; *swarajya* is impossible without nonviolence. So the wise and the thoughtful do not desire State power; instead they yearn for collective striving for *swarajya*. Two aphorisms—one negative and the other positive—denote their political pronouncements: ‘*Na twaham kamaye rajyam*’ (I do not desire State power) and ‘*Yatemahi swarajye*’ (Let us strive for self-rule).

Swarajya is a Vedic term. It is defined as the rule by everyone, that is, a rule which everyone considers their own. It is thus the rule by all; or in other words, *Ramrajya*—Kingdom of God.

The science of *swarajya* is ever-growing. While its actual form may vary according to time and place, the fundamental principles are eternal. It is on the basis of those eternal principles that an outline of that science has been drawn here. It can be elaborated as much as we desire. But let us stop here and leave that to the future.

– Vinoba
2-2-1942

Question 1

How many and of what kinds are the political theories and forms of political organization prevailing in the world today?

(A)

1. Nature of the political problem

First of all, let us see how many kinds of political theories are logically possible. The existing ones would either be less or the same in number; they cannot be more. However, answer to the question depends on what we mean by political theory. Therefore we must first examine what is meant by political theory.

Had there been only one human being in the world, no political question would have arisen. The only problem before him would have been to see how and to what extent the material world around him could be used for the maintenance of his life. But since human being exists as part of a group, he has to face a social problem as well besides this material one. Besides the problem of controlling the nature, he has to tackle the equally important problem of ordering mutual relationships within the group. What we call political theory has its genesis in this problem.

One question that arises in this regard relates to the distribution of material goods—land and other forms of wealth—created through human activity. The second question is, how should individuals ensure mental equipoise in society while dealing with each other. The first question is usually termed as political while the second one is considered social. But these two cannot always be entirely separated from each other. So, broadly, both of them can be regarded as parts of the political problem. Political problem can thus be defined as the problem of regulating life within and between human communities.

2. Artificial approaches currently in vogue

(a) Today human society is unnecessarily divided into three classes: the upper, the middle and the lower class; and political problem is thought to be concerned with how these three classes should order their mutual relations. (b) Again, as far as Hindu society is concerned, it is arbitrarily divided into four *varnas* and the political problem is thought to be concerned with how these *varnas* should order their mutual relations. (c) Similarly, taking into consideration the fact that there is concentration of wealth in the hands of a few in the world while others are deprived of it, two classes, viz the rich and the poor, are imagined and political problem is thought to be concerned with how these two classes should order their mutual relations.

But all these divisions are artificial, as they are based on imaginary or non-fundamental distinctions. Classifying the people in three categories—upper, middle and lower—is purely arbitrary. *Varnas* too are of our own making. So, any ideology founded on their basis is a product of our imagination; and even where it is not false, it is certainly not fundamental. It is difficult to say that the difference between the rich and the poor is imaginary; still it is certainly not fundamental, as it is the product of particular circumstances. A closer examination reveals that this distinction too is imaginary, as the so-called rich have money but they are poor as regards the capacity for labour, and the so-called poor are rich from the point of view of capacity for labour. Thus categorisation as rich or poor too is imaginary.

In addition to these three types, divisions are also made on the basis of language and religion and the problem of ordering relations within linguistic or religious groups is considered a political problem. But a little reflection will reveal that these divisions too are not fundamental.

3. Natural meaning of the political problem

How then should we order collective human life in a way that is fundamental and natural?

Individuals naturally differ in intelligence and physical strength. Intelligence and physical strength, both can be denoted by the term 'capacity' or 'capability'. Wealth, command over resources, status—all these arise from capability. So, division of human society into two classes—a small class of those endowed with ability and the other one consisting of the majority not so endowed—can be conceived.

But, to be classes in the true sense, they must be considered organized. Thus, if all those endowed with ability unite into an organization, they can be deemed to form a class; otherwise such a class is imaginary. If the incapable ones become organized, they too become entitled to be termed as a class; but then they no longer remain incapable, as capability arises from numbers also. On the other hand, if they do not organize, their 'class' would be fictitious.

In short, there are no natural classes in society; there are individuals with different abilities. Political science is basically and naturally concerned with the way in which these individuals with different capabilities should collectively manage their affairs. This can be conceived to give rise to many non-fundamental and imaginary problems, and they need to be tackled in the course of time.

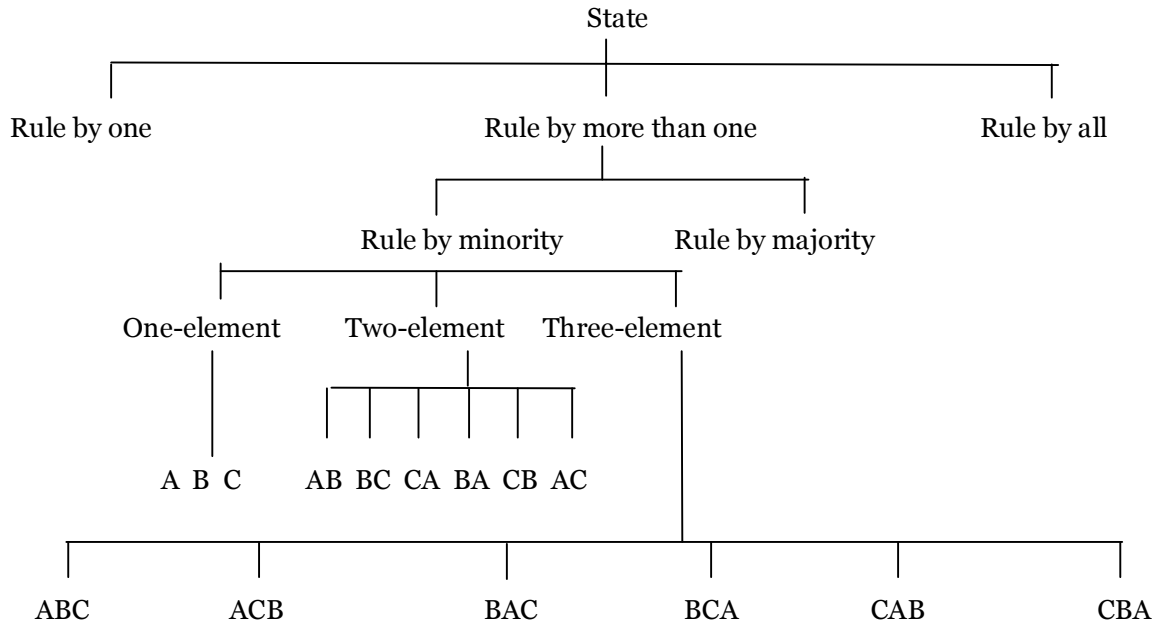
4. Natural types of polity

So, there would be three natural ways of establishing order in the society: (a) a wise or capable individual may look after the affairs of all, (b) a group of such individuals may look after the affairs of all, and (c) all the people may come together and look after their affairs with equal responsibility. We shall call these three types *ekayatan* (rule by one), *anekayatan* (rule by more than one), and *sarvayatan* (rule by all) respectively.

5. Possible forms of polity

These are the three logical types, but several other sub-types could arise from them on the basis of different conditions—both real and artificial, or arbitrary but worth consideration. While *ekayatan* (rule by one) and *sarvayatan* (rule by all) represent two extremes, and can therefore have only one form, *anekayatan* (rule by more than one) can have different forms and can be further divided into two sub-types, *alpasankhyayatan* (rule by minority) and *bahusankhyayatan* (rule by majority). Majority of the people—in other words, the masses—are devoted to labour and are not much endowed with wealth, physical strength or learning. The character of the masses is generally the same everywhere and at all times; so rule by the majority too can normally be of one kind only. Rule by a minority, however, can take three forms depending on who dominate—the wealthy or the learned or those with physical might, i.e. arms. Any two of these groups may combine together, one being dominant, forming six forms of the political organization viz (i) rule of the learned and the armed, (ii) rule of the armed and the wealthy, (iii) rule of the wealthy and the learned, (iv) rule of the armed and the learned, (v) rule of the wealthy and the armed (vi) rule of the learned and the wealthy, the former in the pair being dominant. In the same way, all the three groups can combine together resulting in six forms, with different degrees of domination of the three classes.

The 18 possible forms can be presented thus:



[A =Armed; B = Wealthy; C = Learned]

6. Other forms of polity included in the above

More than these 18 forms of political organization are not theoretically possible. We do see other forms bearing different names, for example, those based on race (rule of the Whites over the Blacks) or *varna* (rule of the caste Hindus over the non-caste Hindus), or religion (of the Christians over the Jews), or nationality (of England over India) or citizenship (of ancient Rome over others) etc. But the 18 forms enumerated above cover each one of them.

(B)

7. *Sarvayatan* (Rule of all)

Once we logically know the different possible types of polity, it follows that all the existing political organizations must belong to one or the other type, although they may have different names. However, it is perfectly obvious that *sarvayatan* does not exist anywhere today. Gandhiji is striving for it, and he has also evolved a technique to establish such a system. He is trying to use that technique in India.

There is a polity that calls itself 'democracy' and poses as '*sarvayatan*'. Its drama is being staged in Europe and America. But no system based on violence is really '*sarvayatan*' even if it pretends to work on the principle of 'one person - one vote'.

As against this, if all the people, consciously and willingly, entrust power to one or more of themselves, whom they know to be wise, competent, free from attachment and hatred and devoted to the welfare of all, then that polity, although *ekayatan* (rule by one) or *anekayatan* (rule by more than one) in appearance, should be regarded as *sarvayatan*, as it is based on nonviolence.

The old *Panchayat* (the village council) system in India may be said to be a somewhat imperfect but honest attempt in this direction; but it is so unscientific that it is hardly of any use to us today and at the most deserves a passing mention.

It suffices to state here that *sarvayatan* does not yet exist anywhere and is yet to be established.

8. *Ekayatan* (Rule by one)

Rule by one individual has existed since time immemorial at different places. The native states in India (*ruled by native princes in pre-Independent India under British sovereignty - Tr.*) may be mentioned as a familiar example. Compared to the founders of such states, their descendants are normally more autocratic and follow their own whims. A founder of such a state is willy-nilly forced to seek cooperation from others in order to acquire power. His descendants feel no such compulsion; and can therefore be more irresponsible—as a Sanskrit proverb puts it, ‘sand gets hotter than the sun’. *Ekayatan* continues to exist in many parts of the world.

9. *Alpasankhyayatan* (Rule by a few)

Some forms of *alpasankhyayatan* are getting strengthened in Europe and elsewhere. Nazism, Fascism and Imperialism are different varieties of this system. Their weapons are violence, mechanisation, accumulation of capital and large-scale planning. They resort to violence while proclaiming that it is all for the sake of nonviolence. Since it is necessary to placate the majority, they have to pretend to work in their interest. Collisions and counter-collisions within such systems continue to escalate as they are bound to. Their whole edifice rests on the assumption that there cannot be any better alternative for the masses than their system. As long as the majority remains ignorant or weak enough to submit to this assumption, persistence of this system in some form or the other is inevitable.

10. *Bahusankhyayatan* (Rule by many): The Russian experiment

As against this, Russia appears to have launched an experiment of *bahusankhyayatan* (rule by many) with blind zeal. But violence can nowhere and at no time be the weapon of the masses; so the Russian experiment is bound to turn out to be an experiment of *alpasankhyayatan*—rule of the few possessing arms, learning and wealth. The present policy of Stalin seems to provide testimony to this inference. Whatever has been gained by the sword has to be retained by the sword. As it is assumed that getting armed on a large scale is necessary for success, majority of the people would have to be armed. But as the masses are naturally incapable of wielding arms, they would have to submit to the few who are competent in this respect. This would also invariably need accumulation of wealth and diplomatic intrigues would have to be resorted to for its protection. And then that experiment would no longer be one of *bahusankhyayatan*; although it may well continue as long as it appears to the masses to be in their interest.

We have termed this as the rule by a few with arms, wealth and learning. It is impossible to say which of these will predominate, when and how much. At the most, it can be said that perhaps the experiment has been started with an honest intention, for the welfare of the masses, but actually it is only a new experiment of *alpasankhyayatan* (rule by a few).

‘New experiment’ does not mean that it is different from the forms enumerated above. It is one of them, although it may not perhaps have been hitherto attempted. Of course, it cannot be said confidently that such an experiment had never been attempted in the human history of thousands of years. Ideas of human beings move in a wheel-like fashion, traversing the same familiar tracks, although human beings may not be aware of it. When a woman gives birth to a child, she feels that she is the first one to do so!

This, in short, is a review of the political organizations and thoughts currently in vogue in the world.

Question 2

You have explained all this theoretically; but it is necessary to examine Nazism, Fascism and Communism from the practical point of view. Which one of these is the better one?

(A)

11. People are wedded to life, not to any particular system

We have enumerated above the four main forms of political organization (*ekayatan*, *alpasankhyayatan*, *bahusankhyayatan* and *sarvayatan*) and different forms of *alpasankhyayatan*—in all 18 forms. Nevertheless one element is common to all. When we keep that in mind, the differences between these ideologies or systems will become clear.

Even in an autocratic rule of a king, all power is not wielded by him alone. He has some assistants; and the masses too cooperate with him to some extent. That is the reason for sustenance of his rule. On the other hand, even in a *sarvayatan* polity, it is not that everyone directly participates in actual administration. That task is entrusted to a few people, taking for granted the cooperation by all. And some one individual has normally to be regarded as the final authority.

The people at large are never wedded to any particular ideology or form of political organization. They are concerned only with their lives. Provided life goes on smoothly, they do not bother about the ideology or system of government. Political philosophers produce theories, practical persons devise systems, and the people give their cooperation. Political philosophers are wedded to particular ideologies, practical persons to particular systems. But they are so wedded only because they are concerned with their lives according to their lights. A political philosopher believes that good life is impossible without a particular theory, and that is why he subscribes to that theory. A practical person concludes from his experience that good life is impossible without a particular system; and because of this concern he upholds that system. But sometimes concern for life is relegated to the background because of strong attachment to and insistence for particular theory or system, and commitment to it captures the minds of political philosophers, practical persons and others as well for a while.

12. Four common factors in the polities

But in any case there are four common factors in all the theories and systems and in the implementation of these systems:

(a) *Commitment to life*: It may be genuine or may only outwardly appear so; it may be for all the time or at least for the time being; may be universal or at least at the local level.

(b) *Cooperation of the people*: It may be voluntarily given (consciously or tacitly) or obtained through coercion; and may be total or just sufficient for the purpose.

(c) *Actual administration in the hands of capable persons*: Such persons may be elected or nominated ones or may have come together at their own initiative.

(d) *Final authority with a single individual*: He/she may be elected by all or by the majority or by a few (directly or traditionally); or may be self-appointed.

13. Different facets of these factors

When there is so much in common, why should there be conflict between different ideologies and systems of government? Why should there be political upheavals and revolutions? Why is there scope for comparison between them, and what could be the basis for such comparison?

The answer to these questions is but one, and is inherent in the qualifications attached to these common factors.

(a) Commitment to life: (1) If it is only at the local level, it comes into conflict with the life elsewhere; and such a commitment cannot last. It dies away, eventually giving rise to another system. (2) If it is only for the time being, and therefore not farsighted, it gradually loses its momentum like a football set in motion and then requires fresh impetus. (3) If it is only make-believe, it lasts only as long as its spell lasts.

(b) Cooperation of the people: (1) If it is based on coercion, the State would somehow survive till the people become enlightened and capable. (2) If the government conduces more or less to the happiness of the people, it would last relatively longer, even if the cooperation has been received through coercion. (3) If the rulers can skilfully manage to prevent awakening of the people either by denying education to them or by devising a scheme of bad education, their coercive rule would last even longer. (4) If the rulers, even though they do not do anything conducive to the basic welfare of the people, succeed in creating an impression that some minor things have been done to make them happy, people can get reconciled to their rule to some extent. But the rule is bound to come to an end some time or the other. (5) If cooperation of the people is voluntary, but is not given consciously and with full knowledge, the rule can last only as long as people do not start thinking differently.

(c) Actual administration in the hands of capable persons: Actual administration would always be run by capable individuals. But (1) if they are elected, continuance of their rule would depend on their capacity to rule well, (2) if they are nominated, they would continue till the people become capable or so long as there is no split in the ranks of such capable persons, (3) if they have come together at their own initiative, their rule would last relatively longer. But a band of capable persons lacking people's support cannot remain united for long, as the capable ones normally suffer from mutual jealousy because of their capabilities.

(d) Final authority with a single individual: (1) If such an individual is self-appointed, the rule would last so long as his valour and charisma last. (2) If elected, survival of the rule would depend on the extent of the franchise and to the extent the elections are free and fair.

14. Non-opposition or fraternal relations between different nations

Besides these points, one very important point needs to be taken into consideration while considering political organizations. Besides orderly relations within the nation, how far international relations are free from conflicts? This question was not less important even when means of communication were not advanced. Today lack of conflicts between nations—rather, favourable disposition of nations towards each other and fraternal relations between them—should be considered the foundation for the policy of any nation or groups of nations.

15. Ideal polity

To sum up, we may enumerate some criteria to judge a polity:

1. Fraternal relations between nations throughout the world.

2. Conscious cooperation of all the elements within a nation, given to the best of their abilities but spontaneously and sincerely.
3. Unity of interests between the capable few and the masses.
4. Concern for comprehensive and equal development of all.
5. The maximum possible decentralisation of political power.
6. The minimum possible governance.
7. The least complicated system of administration.
8. The lowest possible administrative expenditure.
9. The minimum possible arrangements for security and defence.
10. Universal, uninterrupted, unbiased and free dissemination of knowledge.

(B)

16. Nature of Nazism, Fascism and Russian Communism

We can now revert to the original question. The only difference between Nazism and Fascism appears to be that the former is better organized and embraces more aspects of society than the latter. There is hardly any other difference between the two. Racial pride is common to both. Both are expansionist, having made England their teacher in this regard. Both put their trust in military strength. They are trying to expand their reign in the way Portugal, Spain, Holland, England and France had done. Their political ideas are in a flux—opinion formed about them on the basis of their literature today would have to be changed after reading their literature a fortnight later.

As against these two, an experiment has been started in Russia in the name of Communism or Socialism. The original idea was that of global revolution; however, it later got deteriorated and restricted to a particular nation. As far as faith in military strength is concerned, the Communists are no different from others. Today they may be lagging behind others in preparation, but may eventually surpass them. None of them has any scruples about unprincipled manoeuvring to ensure success. As other nations have already captured trade, and because it has plenty of land, Russia is focusing more on agriculture. But this difference is not a fundamental one; it is because of the compulsions of situation.

The Russian Revolution has lost so much of its sheen in just twenty years that it has almost lost its earlier attraction. The reason is that, out of the four aspects of Capitalism—centralization, worship of the machines, faith in arms and exploitation—Socialism seeks to avoid the last while retaining the first three. But it is an illusion. It should not be difficult to realize that the fourth one inevitably accompanies the first three. But fascination for the efficiency of centralization, for the comforts that worship of machinery gives and for the protection that the military strength promises is so strong that comfort-loving minds entangled in this delusion fail to discard even one of these three in order to end exploitation.

As compared to Nazism and fascism, the Russian ideology—by whatever name it may be called—appears to be well-intentioned. But all the three ideologies are equally ill-conceived; and therefore appear to have become equally incapable of securing the interests of even the majority, leave alone the interests of all.

17. Further comparison between these ideologies

When a particular system is in the making, and is therefore in a flux, any discussion of its merits and defects can be deceptive. For example, if fraternal relations between nations is taken as one of the criteria to judge a polity, we find it totally missing in the Italian or German ideology. It is expected to have a place in the Communist ideology of Russia. But Communism appears to believe that its global spread is necessary for its system to get firmly established in any one country. And in propagating it, violence is not shunned. So Russia can invade any country even though the latter has not caused any offence to it, provided the invasion offers scope for propagation of its ideology. Until an opportunity for such aggression arises, fraternal relations between nations may find a place at least in its texts; thereafter they would be expunged from the texts too. Devotees believe that whoever was killed by Lord Rama's arrows achieved spiritual liberation. Similarly, gullible devotees of Communism are often heard saying that Russian aggression would always be for the good of the invaded country. In the light of all this, it is difficult to say that Russia fares better than Germany or Italy as far as fraternal relations between nations are concerned.

If we apply the last test—that of freedom of dissemination of knowledge—such freedom is absent both in Russia and Germany, not only in the present time of War but even otherwise. Violence being the means of defence for all these systems, the nation spending more on defence would have to be considered more prudent. Nazism and fascism lack the force of idealism that is found in the Russian ideology. In its place, people in Germany and Italy presently appear to be driven by national and racial pride.

In the Russian idealism, there is a concern for the interest of the masses, which is really not opposed to the welfare of all which Sarvodaya seeks. In fact, welfare of all can be secured only through securing the welfare of the masses. Had this concept of unity of interests of all the people been there, a more stable revolution could have been brought about. But the idea of conflict of interests was thought to be more forceful and quicker in yielding results; and was therefore adopted. It did appear to hasten the results; but in the process of preventing collapse of the system, national pride had to be eventually made its foundation.

Leaders eager for quick results cannot resist the temptation of rousing passions of the people rather than imparting a balanced and discriminating attitude. The Russian ideology of welfare of the masses and the German ideology of national organization provide two illustrations of this fact. The German leaders were under the delusion that national organization would not perhaps be attained quickly without stoking racial pride, and the Russian leaders were under the delusion that revolution would not be quickly brought about without accentuating class conflict.

18. Mazzini's Italy in dire straits; martial class rose to power in the name of the people

When the situation in Italy is seen from the perspective of Joseph Mazzini, we see a strange spectacle. Mazzini is a devoted follower of Gigot; but he finds unsatisfactory Gigot's idea of seeing others as oneself as the foundation of freedom and advocates freedom of all the nations on the basis of the fatherhood of God. He lives to see the rise of Italian State. People celebrate the end of foreign rule, but Mazzini laments disappearance of his ideals. The Italian government has since been swept aside and political power of the martial class has been concentrated in a single individual.

When a martial class comes forward as a class, it does so in the name of the people. It regards itself as heir to the protective power of God. It is always characterized by racial pride. So the vigour

necessary for quick results is available to it. If this class is defeated due to internal dissensions or external aggression, people regret it for a moment and then get busy with their day-to-day activities.

19. Communism more attractive and amenable to refinement

It is difficult to decide which one of these ideologies is better and why so. People tormented by a particular system welcome its end and think that the new system which has taken its place is better. They are happy mainly about the end of the old system. Peshwa Rule[§] gave way to Elphinstone's administration, and the people were happy at the establishment of the rule of law. But within 50 years, that happiness gave way to discontent. It cannot be said that the happiness of the people under Elphinstone's rule was entirely unfounded; but we cannot afford to have such happiness today.

People in Italy, Germany or Russia feel that they are happy today. We in India have been under foreign rule for a long time, our poverty is unparalleled and racial pride can be attractive to a tradition-bound society. Hence, in India there has sprung up a group favouring Communism which has sympathy for the poor as well as a group favouring organization on communal lines. But if we think without any reference to the conditions in India, it must be said that Communism is more attractive to discerning minds and is more amenable to refinement than Nazism and Fascism.

§ Peshwas, prime ministers of the Maratha kingdom of Satara (Maharashtra), virtually ruled the kingdom, which for some time extended up to Punjab in North-Western India. Their defeat by the British in 1818 A.D. led to the establishment of British hegemony over India.

Question 3

If the prevailing political systems are considered defective, what should be the characteristics of an ideal polity?

20. Four characteristic of a faultless system

It is best to keep on changing the system rather than insisting on any one particular system. For, a system is not like some incontrovertible principle on which life can be based. Normally, people tormented by a particular system look out for another system. But the defects or merits which are harmful or beneficial are overlooked. A society plagued by the baneful effects of child marriages opts for adult marriages; and a society plagued by the baneful effects of adult marriages may opt for child marriages. In reality, it is the principle of self-restraint which protects the society. Merely fixing the age for marriage is of little avail.

The actual form of polity wherein all the people look after their affairs will depend on the stage of development of society. However, it must invariably have at least the following four characteristics :

1. All the capacities of capable individuals should be devoted to the service of the people.
2. People should be fully self-reliant and should cooperate with each other.
3. Nonviolence should be the basis of continual cooperation in the normal course, and of occasional non-cooperation or resistance.
4. Honest work of all should have equal (moral and monetary) value.

Let us discuss these points briefly.

(A)

21. Public opinion should make capable persons serve the society

‘Capable’ means those who are naturally more intelligent and physically stronger. This difference is physiological and there is no way to get over it at least for the time being. There is also a group which is capable because of wealth and other resources. This group is not natural unlike the first two groups; it arises because of circumstantial factors. The capable individuals belonging to all these types have been given the capacities they have, either by nature or by circumstances, for the service of the people. They, as well as the people at large, should always be conscious of this fact. And the polity should be such as will ensure that the capacities of capable individuals are dedicated to the service of the people. Intellect should be utilized for informing the life of the people with knowledge, physical strength for brave deeds for the good of the people, and wealth for promoting equitable, appropriate and continuous flow of productive resources throughout society. If capable individuals are not using their capacities in this way, public opinion should hold them guilty.

22. Law and public opinion

If public opinion has been formed in regard to some matter, a suitable law may be enacted to enforce it. Law—that is, discipline or restraint—has a place in a nonviolent system based on popular will. The popular notion that society keeps to the right path only out of fear of punishment still holds sway, in spite of experience to the contrary. The fact is that the fear of public opinion—or to put it more aptly, respect for public opinion—has proved, and does prove most useful in keeping society on

the right path. There are always a few great and noble souls in society who do not need the pressure of public opinion to hold them within the bounds of morality. There are also a few individuals who lack wisdom and discrimination, and therefore behave waywardly without any regard for public opinion, disregarding the edicts of morality. A great majority of the people, however, observe what is ordained and avoid what is prohibited by public opinion. Such public opinion is the basis of law which is normally respected by the masses. There is no need to use police or military to forcibly restrain the few wayward individuals; they should rather be put in the company of the few wise ones. In short, the majority of the people should follow the law and put those who do not pay heed to the law in the charge of those who do not need the law.

23. Hoarding should be considered theft

Today public opinion is against theft. It should also be against the accumulation and hoarding of wealth, and those who accumulate and hoard wealth should be considered fit to be restrained and punished by law. Such should be the public opinion. Good parents always teach their children that taking anything without permission is a grave wrong. Similarly, not giving something to the needy when they ask for it should be considered a moral lapse by the science of education. This is not a new idea, but it has not yet been put into practice. In an Upanishad, King Ashwapati, while describing the glory of his kingdom, says that there are neither thieves nor hoarders in his kingdom. He thus puts both of them in the same category, and suggests that thieves are the progeny of hoarders. It is not at all difficult to incorporate this idea in the legal framework.

24. The uses of wealth

Expropriation of the rich is needlessly talked about. The rich, in fact, do not accumulate wealth for the sake of hoarding only. They seek it for status, happiness, secure future and well-being of their descendants, and to earn fame as philanthropists—for all or for at least some of these purposes. If they could have all these without any botheration, everyone of them would surely welcome this. Even today, the wealth of the wealthy is invariably shared among their partners, managers and such others. The rich know that their agents dupe them; but they comfort themselves with the idea that the agents must not be duping them too much. The political system should convincingly show the capable persons that their wealth is being used for the good of society, that they have no worries; rather they have an opportunity to think of the welfare of society; and as far as status and other things are concerned, these are not lessened a whit, rather they have more of everything, and that too in a true sense.

25. Example of the teaching community

In ancient India, the learned teacher was poor. But that does not mean that his outer life, not to speak of his inner life, was not happy. That he was free from riches meant that he was free from the worries associated with wealth. His pupils used to take adequate care of him. He wielded power even over the emperor, if needed. He did not let anyone control the education system. He enjoyed long life. Whether a class of such teachers actually existed may be disputed. But if it existed, it would not have been deficient in any way as far as status, happiness or glory are concerned. The teacher today teaches books; he does not teach students in the true sense. He has no place in the life of his students, nor have students any place in his life. He gets more money, but at the cost of affection. And that money ultimately reaches the pockets of doctors etc.! He is not better off with that money, and he loses an opportunity to serve the people as his services become expensive for them. The political system—that is, public opinion—should be such that everyone should readily realise that it is not in their interest to accumulate wealth by antagonising the people.

26. Wealth increases through sharing

Knowledge, it is said, doubles when imparted to others. This is not considered true for wealth; but it is a misconception. Wealth too doubles when shared with others. In the terminology of economics this is called 'increase in the purchasing power of the people'. Moneylenders lend liberally, because they know that their money would increase thereby. It is not difficult to understand that distribution of wealth would increase wealth even more. But it needs a social structure which facilitates distribution of wealth; and an ideal polity presupposes such a social structure. Society is like a bank for individuals and an individual's money would be far safer in the bank of society than in any other bank.

27. Concept of ownership is the hindrance

It behoves capable individuals to use their capacities for the service of those lacking those capacities; and that is what would be really gratifying for them. Human being is fond of society, and he never really enjoys anything exclusively, without sharing it with others. However, today we do find the rich enjoying their riches within the four walls of their houses while people are starving outside. How can such an attitude persist despite being against human nature? It is not that the rich are not human; it is because of the prevailing idea that it is the responsibility of every individual to earn for himself and that he has total claim on his own earning. But this idea is only partly true. Every individual must, of course, earn to the best of his ability. One who does not, in spite of being able to do so, can have no right. But all those who work to the best of their abilities have equal entitlement to society's total earnings. This is the whole truth. Had there been no difference in the capacity, difference in the earnings of different individuals would have reflected the difference in the extent of their honesty. Then it would have been justifiable to say that everyone should earn for oneself and stake claim on their earnings only. But when differences in capacity is a fact, it is wrong to apply the principle of individual responsibility mechanically.

28. The true task of the State

The State exists precisely to create in society the economic structure which exists in the family to some extent—which is a task beyond the capacity of a family. If the State does not do this, there is no need for its existence. If the State, instead of doing this, is creating inequalities, it will be a sacred duty to destroy it, even at the risk of anarchy. Managers of the political system have spread the fear of anarchy to make people submit to their system, howsoever evil and disorganised it may be.

We regard capable individuals as capable, but they too cannot accomplish anything without the help of those considered incapable. In this sense the capable ones are really incapable. On the other hand, those considered incapable too have some capacities; and the State too cannot do without those capacities. In short, both the so-called capable and the incapable ones are dependent on each other; they become capable when they cooperate with each other and incapable when they do not. This is like cooperation between the lame and the blind. The polity wherein the capable ones do not realize that such cooperation is in the interest of both, is not a polity in the true sense of the term; it is anarchy of the worst type. A polity has therefore to vest authority in the capable individuals, but that must only be the authority to serve the people.

(B)

29. Village industries for village self-sufficiency

In order to ensure that capable individuals have no other power than that of service, the people must not be helpless and weak. They must be sufficiently self-reliant to become conscious of their

own independent strength. They must, therefore, have productive occupations under their exclusive control. Majority of the people should never be engaged in occupations controlled by others, like the mill workers. Every village should, for the most part, become an economically self-sufficient unit. Conditions should be such that the capable cooperate with the people of their own accord and the incapable ones cooperate with the capable ones without compromising their freedom. This can happen only when the people are self-reliant. All the basic necessities of life, as well as most of the secondary needs of the villagers should be fulfilled in the village itself. The State should step in only to fulfil remaining secondary needs through capable individuals.

Agricultural produce should be processed as far as possible in the homes of the farmers and the rest in the village. Today the farmer in India hardly does anything besides producing raw materials. He sells oilseeds and purchases oil even for his own consumption; produces cotton, but purchases not only cloth but even cottonseeds for sowing and for feeding his cows and bullocks. He has to sell grains to fulfil all his needs. In selling his produce, he suffers loss; and in purchasing his requirements also he suffers loss. Such a helpless condition of the people is not in their interest, nor is it in the interest of the State and the few persons considered capable. There should therefore be an extensive network of village industries throughout the country, complementary and supplementary to agriculture, and in an ideal social order, the State should make arrangements for their protection and sustenance. This is *sine qua non* for an ideal social organisation. Just as the rain falls equitably, so should the distribution of wealth be. Only village industries can ensure this in a natural, simple and efficient way; only they can strengthen mutual cooperation among the people and ensure that people receive service from the capable ones and also render service to them according to their abilities.

30. Communist scheme fraught with danger

Communists put forward an alternative scheme which first involves accumulation of wealth at one place and its equal distribution thereafter. But it appears to be fraught with three dangers. Firstly, such a process is bound to be costlier than the one which ensures equal distribution simultaneously with production. Secondly, special arrangements are needed for the protection of accumulated wealth, which could even then be an easy target for foreign aggression. Thirdly, it would make the social organization so complex and intricate with extreme interdependence between its parts that the whole mechanism may collapse any time because of extreme friction.

31. Interdependence should be simple, not complicated

Interdependence is good, but it should be between groups which are in themselves strong and self-supporting. Interdependence between groups which are dependent on others is like that of two weak bullocks yoked to a cart, each trying to shift the burden to the other one. A three-legged stool stands on all the three legs; each leg stands on its own strength, but there is interdependence between the legs. This is a simple mechanism. If one of the legs breaks, only that leg needs to be repaired. But if a machine has wheels within wheels, the mechanism becomes complex and the entire machine could come to a halt if one of the wheels breaks; and it would then be much more difficult to repair it. Besides, even when such a machine is in operation, there would be friction at a number of places, making lubrication a lengthy and elaborate job.

32. Polity based on self-sufficient villages

All plans which seek to concentrate wealth first and then distribute it put too much strain on the political organization and have to rely ultimately on violence. So, if resort to violence, strain on the

State and complexity of the social structure are to be avoided, every villager should be his own ruler and cooperation between villagers should be as strong as that between the fibres of a well-knit rope. Then the villager and his village would become a natural and almost self-sufficient political unit.

These autonomous villages would be brought together by the nominal provincial political organization, and the nominal national political organisation would bring together such provincial units. Mutual cooperation between autonomous national units would be brought about by the nominal political organization of all humanity. The latter would be the seat of wise and dispassionate individuals representing the entire humanity. They would not have any coercive power; but would have all the moral authority necessary to keep people on the right path. It is for the people to give shape to this grand vision. Political scientists are right in holding that the central government must be all-powerful; but it is in dispassionate wisdom and character that real power lies, not in lifeless wealth or weapons. It is clear that such a structure cannot take shape so long as the people are not self-reliant and do not cooperate with each other.

(C)

33. Polity dependent on the human element

Howsoever good a political system may be, its goodness is bound to depend, at least to some extent, on the quality of individuals to whom the authority of governance has been entrusted by the people. It is an essential characteristic of a good polity that normally good individuals are chosen for this purpose. Still, their personalities are bound to have some effect—positive or adverse—on the operation of the political system. Political science is not a science like pure mathematics or even like applied mathematics. It deals with human affairs, and it is not possible to give it a mechanical form independent of the human element.

34. Necessity of satyagraha

Political science aims to safeguard fully and comprehensively the interests of all the people, which are not antagonistic to each other. For this purpose, a good polity is supposed to have, *inter alia*, the following external elements: (1) widest franchise, (2) administration in accordance with the majority opinion, (3) complete protection to and full satisfaction of the minority, (4) freedom to propagate one's opinions, (5) impartial, cheap and easy dispensation of justice, (6) a system for public education and (7) a code of reformatory punishment.

These elements are indeed desirable for a good polity. Still, due to the human factor many defects, controversies and disputes can arise in the realm of politics. To get over them, people should be able to discern right occasions for cooperation, non-cooperation and resistance and should have enough strength to resort to them as required by the circumstances, and the necessary nonviolent technique in this regard should have been ingrained in them.

35. Cooperation in the true sense and fitness for non-cooperation

Cooperation is an eternal principle of life, but it is worthwhile only if it is voluntary and given with full knowledge. Only then can it be nonviolent; in fact, only then can it be called cooperation. Cooperation given out of helplessness or ignorance is of no use to a good polity. Although it may appear to be cooperation, it would not last long because it is not cooperation in the true sense. It is bound to result, first in hidden and then in open violence. Everyone should therefore feel that 'we have made the law in accordance with the majority opinion and we can change it too; but as long as it has not been changed, we shall obey it happily, voluntarily and unreservedly even if it is not to our

liking, provided it is not against morality.' There is no question about the cooperation of those who concur with the law, but those who are opposed to it should also have the attitude described above; then only can their cooperation be said to be nonviolent. And only the individuals who extend such cooperation have the right to non-cooperate or resist when the occasion so demands; they alone are capable of doing so in a nonviolent way, and they alone have a duty to do so.

36. Educating people in non-cooperation and resistance is positively necessary

To impress upon the people the need to cooperate as far as possible, voluntarily and consciously, is one aspect of the education and conscientization of people. The second aspect is to teach them to discern occasions for non-cooperation and resistance and take recourse to them on those occasions.

Non-cooperation and resistance are two stages of one and the same thing. The second stage is more drastic; and is not to be resorted to when the first one is sufficient. In non-cooperation, we withdraw our cooperation and give an opportunity to the opponent to remedy the situation. When this is found inadequate, it becomes necessary to break the State laws (i) civilly; that is, within certain bounds, (ii) in an orderly manner; that is, not allowing any breach of discipline anywhere, (iii) openly; that is, without any secrecy or deceit and (iv) firmly; that is, putting forward the minimum demand in regard to the matter in dispute and not giving in till it is met. Whatever punishment is given for such violation of laws should be borne gladly and without any illwill. Such training should be ingrained in the life of people, and should therefore have a permanent place in education and in the ethical code of the nation.

37. Place of non-cooperation is always there in social life

Although need for non-cooperation and resistance arises in a good State only occasionally and in particular contexts, they have a permanent place in the social life. For they are required not only in politics, but also more or less constantly in social life, family affairs and in dealings between different individuals. Nonviolent non-cooperation and resistance is the most appropriate middle way that avoids both the extremes of bearing injustice passively on one hand and resisting it violently in a fit of passion, indiscreetly or even calculatedly, on the other. The attitude of mind and the strength required for resisting injustice whenever necessary should be kept alive in the ethical code of society, irrespective of the quality of polity.

38. Education in non-cooperation

For this purpose, children should be taught from the earliest years exceptions to general rules. For example, besides teaching their children to obey them humbly, parents should also tell them to disobey politely, if the orders go against the conscience. Public opinion should be in favour of such exceptions. As Manu has said, the wise should invariably follow eternal moral principles like truth and nonviolence, but rules of conduct need not be so followed. Such rules, whether they pertain to family, society or the nation, ought to be followed so long as they do not conflict with the fundamental principles; and should be disregarded politely when they go against the fundamental principles.

In a good social order, rules are not normally inconsistent with eternal principles. But when a machine is in operation, possibility of friction is always there. So also it is never the case that once an ideal State has been established, it can be trusted of itself to look after the people and make them happy while the people themselves comfortably fall asleep or go about with their eyes shut. Even if

this is assumed to be possible, there can be no uplift of the individual in such a State; and therefore, by the grace of God, this is not possible.

In short, it must be considered an essential characteristic of a good polity that people are alert, or kept alert, enough to practise nonviolently cooperation, non-cooperation and resistance as required by the circumstances, keeping in mind the limitations of these modes of action.

39. Nonviolence in India

Solving a problem of a country like India, with a multitude of communities, religions and languages, with vast population and large area, is almost like solving a global problem. Those who regarded so huge a country as one at a time when modern means of communication were not developed must have done so after learning from experiences of different types of conflicts the essential principle of organization. They realized that such a big nation cannot be kept united except through nonviolence and therefore they gave, in principle, the highest place to nonviolence in politics, social life, family affairs, economic organization and education.

As a result, the common people in India had given up long ago the faith in the efficacy of arms. They had come to regard India as one nation which, in the words of Rabindranath Tagore, is 'an ocean of humanity' and believed that it should be kept open to all. However, even when the policy of nonviolence was so prominent, we do not find examples of application of nonviolence on an extensive scale in the realm of politics, though we find in the Indian history many such experiments in the realms of individual, social and family life. It appears that it is because of such application of nonviolence in social life that this country assimilated all communities coming from outside.

40 Nonviolence as the basis of unity between the masses, the good individuals and the elite

But why was non-violence not applied in the political field? It appears that this was mainly because politics itself did not have an important place in India. But today politics touches every aspect of life. So the good and virtuous individuals in society, the elite as well as the masses—in short, no one can afford to be indifferent to it.

If the masses have to take an active part in politics, which has become so extensive, on their own strength, they cannot do so without the practice of nonviolence, as violence is not a power that the people can naturally wield. If the good and virtuous individuals have to take an active part in politics, they cannot do so without nonviolence, as violence is not a part of their nature. If the elite is to take part in politics (it would appear that it is not new to them, but the politics that they took part in earlier was not so extensive) they too have no alternative to nonviolence, even if they are disposed towards violence and have the capacity to use it, as there is no scope for violence in politics that is co-extensive with life. Nonviolence is therefore the only safe basis for politics that brings together the masses, the good individuals and the elite.

41. Only such unity is a permanent deterrent to evil-doers

The good individuals should naturally know how to wield this protective weapon of nonviolence, and it is their duty to educate the masses in this regard. The State should give them freedom to do this; if it does not, they should secure that freedom by impressing on the elite the importance of such freedom, and resorting to *satyagraha*, if necessary. All this is expected in a good polity.

It is not that the elite cannot have the attitude and power to wield nonviolence as much as violence. But when the masses are weak and the good individuals become indifferent, the elite alone

are saddled with the responsibility of reining in the evil elements in society, and they can then see no way of countering violence of those elements other than counter-violence. But when the masses, the good individuals and the elite come together—and they have to come together in an all-embracing politics—it is not impossible to fight the evil elements nonviolently, howsoever organized they may be. And that alone is desirable too, as it leaves scope for destroying the root of the evil, that is, evil tendencies in the minds of those elements.

Evil elements within society can be effectively held in leash permanently only if the masses, the good individuals and the elite combine together on the basis of nonviolence; and they can never combine together except on that basis. They should thus combine together and permanently create awe in the minds of those elements. This is the main characteristic of a sound polity. All the other characteristics should, in comparison, be considered secondary. A polity will be like a beautiful but lifeless picture even if it has all the characteristics enumerated above except this main characteristic.

(D)

42. Estimating value of work

In an ideal polity, the method of estimating the value of labour cannot be mechanical and irresponsible as it is today. The ideal polity would undertake the responsibility of looking after and protecting all the people, whatever be the level of their intelligence, capacities and capabilities. All cannot put in equal amount of work. The work may be intellectual or physical. Again, physical labour could be skilled or unskilled. But in spite of all these differences, everyone putting in socially useful work according to their capacities honestly and faithfully should be equally entitled to the fulfilment of their necessities.

43. ‘Economic value of service’ is a misnomer

In fact, it is wrong to speak of economic value of physical or mental service. For, service belongs to the realm of ethics and can therefore be evaluated only in terms of its ethical value. How can the service of nursing the sick, of keeping awake at night to look after them be evaluated in economic terms? How can a judge’s service of giving an impartial judgement be evaluated in terms of money? Can the value of the act of saving a person from drowning or rescuing him from a raging fire be calculated by some mathematical formula? The examples cited above involve intellectual labour, physical labour or a combination of the two. But all of them are of infinite value; that is, they are examples of invaluable service. It is not therefore proper to talk of remuneration for service or labour. An individual should devotedly serve society with all his might and society should do its duty of providing good living to him—that is what our approach should be.

44. The operative principle in family

When this principle is upheld, extreme differences between wages that we find today would automatically disappear. We find that in families expenditure on children is often more than that on the earning members. These children have not rendered any service; they are expected to do so in the future. But money is not spent on them by calculating their expected service in the future; parents consider it their responsibility to bring up their children. A State should regard it its duty to look after all the individuals in society. The individuals, in turn, should dedicate all their capacities to the service of society. But the individual’s service and the security offered to it by the society need not be directly proportionate to each other. It is the aggregate of service rendered by all the individuals in society that would be equal to the aggregate of security provided by society to all the individuals.

It is also necessary here to keep in mind the difference between wages and (economic) security. Security provided to everyone would be equal; wages need not be so. For, equal wages do not imply equal security. For providing equal security, wages would have to be given to everyone as per their needs. Thus, a more capable person with fewer needs would get less wages, while a less capable person with more needs would get more wages. A military commander with good digestion may get much less than an ordinary soldier with a weak digestion.

45. Conclusion

In short, we can enumerate the principles discussed so far as follows:

1. Everyone would be provided with equal (economic) security.
2. Service from each would be according to his/her capacity, and therefore unequal.
3. Equal security does not imply equal wages.
4. But difference in wages would never be as large as it is today.
5. Wages would be as less unequal as possible.
6. Inequality in wages would not be in accordance with the difference in service; it would be in accordance with the difference in needs.
7. The aggregate of service rendered by all individuals would be equal to the aggregate of security provided to them.

46. Reconciliation of differences in labour

An organization based on these seven principles is not entirely unknown today. When groups of labourers in villages undertake a particular task, all of them do not do equal work, but they distribute the contract money more or less equally among themselves. In this arrangement, nobody can shirk work and an honest but weaker individual receives some concession. There is greater enthusiasm in work done collectively and it strengthens the feeling of brotherhood among the workers. It is not impossible to make this mode applicable to the whole of society.

Such an arrangement would perhaps pose no problem as far as different types of physical labour are concerned. But difficulty would arise with regard to commensurability of physical and mental work. The educated class is likely to create problems in this regard. But there should not be any difficulty if we take into account the security and satisfaction arising out of the feeling of brotherhood developed by such an arrangement. As regards inequality between wages of male and female workers is concerned, it has absolutely no foundation. Women work with more perseverance, care and creativity. On the other hand, they cannot do some tasks requiring much physical strength. Taking these two facts into account, there is no difficulty in having equality in the wages of men and women. Differences in men and women, in different kinds of physical labour, in physical and mental labour, in different kinds of mental labour—all these are on the same footing from the point of view of the nation. The real difference is between honesty and dishonesty; similarly difference between skilled and unskilled labour is inevitable. There is no question of protecting dishonesty, but the State does have the responsibility of reforming dishonest persons. This responsibility does entail provision of security. The State should also strive to develop the skills of workers. However, some tasks, by their very nature, need less skills, and they too are needed by the nation. They can be assigned to the less skilled labourers.

47. Collective responsibility: a good incentive

It is assumed today that difference in remuneration is the only way to encourage skill-building, honesty, enthusiasm and a sense of responsibility. But, in fact, collective responsibility motivates

human beings much more, as it invariably gives social esteem and self-satisfaction. A mother's pat on the child's back is much more enthusing to the child than sundry other rewards. And the latter, even if they enthuse a little, may stoke his greed too. Hence, there is no way to ensure equilibrium everywhere other than regarding social esteem, and to a greater extent self-satisfaction, as motivating principles and erecting economic structure on the foundation of the principle of comparable remuneration.

48. *Varna* system: An experiment of Hinduism^s

In this respect, Hinduism carried out a great experiment in the form of *varna* system. But the notion of superiority and inferiority crept into it and vitiated it and economic competition eventually ruined it completely. An individual should do the work allotted to him by society, society should allot him work on the basis of his fitness for it, inherited dispositions should be taken advantage of for developing skills; he should consider it his duty to undertake the particular work after acquiring necessary fitness and others should not compete with him; all should get equal security and commensurate remuneration; individuals carrying out their tasks with responsibility, being devoted to their duty, should be considered to be on equal footing, and their worship in the form of work should please God—that is how the *varna* system can be briefly described.

An ideal polity will need to devise some such arrangement. The *varna* system, in essence, includes commensurate remuneration, lack of competition and a scheme of education and training that takes advantage of inherited dispositions. The first two are principles of great importance in economics and the third one belongs to the realm of sociology. Some find this third principle controversial. Even if it is so, the first two would remain unaffected, and they would have to be made foundations of the social order. And if the third one also proves to be true, as is very likely, on the basis of reflection and experience, the *varna* system would have to be revived, without any idea of superiority and inferiority and without any rigid framework.

49. Essence important; not the form

The spirit of service, self-reliance, nonviolent strength and commensurate remuneration to all are the four pillars on which the edifice of the polity should be erected. Its outer form may, of course, vary in accordance with time, the local conditions and social psyche. A family consisting of young parents and their infant children is of a particular form, a family with young children and middle-aged parents is of a different form, and a family with old parents and their grown-up offspring has still another form. A family may be big or small, joint or nuclear—it may be of different kinds. But, although different outer forms of the family could be visualized on the basis of natural factors and factors which depend on conditions, the root idea of the family is one and the same.

Protagonists of different healing systems are insistent about their respective systems; so also political thinkers become protagonists of different ideologies and hold that a particular ideology or system is applicable at all places and times. But when even a science like mathematics is being obliged to accept the doctrine of relativity, branches of knowledge like political science and sociology can never claim finality for themselves in a broad sense.

In fact, there are few fundamental sciences that can be called science in the true sense, and they regulate human life. Other so-called sciences are only practical guides devised and regulated by human beings. These two kinds of science are altogether different from each other in nature. An attempt to cast the latter in the same mould as that of the former is an indication of unscientific reason.

So, it is best to insist on the four principles mentioned above, which are essential in any political system that makes the people happy and promotes their welfare, and leave all other matters to be determined by particular needs of the time.

Question 4

Can a polity based on nonviolence endure?

50. Violence culminates in total war

The question appears to presume that a polity based on violence can endure. Actually, throughout the history, all have used violence for perpetuating their systems. And yet none of the systems has been found to survive by means of violence. Yet, the hold of violence on our minds is so great that even though violence has failed a thousand times, our faith in its efficacy persists. No system based on violence has ever survived—this negative evidence should be enough to make us conclude that a polity cannot endure without nonviolence. Moreover, the polities which are based on violence and which still appear to endure to some extent are also anxious to obtain the support of public opinion; in other words, of nonviolence. This should, in fact, create a strong suspicion in the minds of even the most ardent believers in violence that nonviolence alone provides the basis for an enduring polity. Experiments in violence have always failed. How many times are we going to give benefit of doubt to violence and think that failure of those experiments is not because of violence but due to some other shortcoming? In fact, the process of countering violence with greater violence has brought us to a total war.

51. Nonviolence: the logical alternative

In a way, it is good that this has happened. The criterion used in ethics to decide whether a principle is morally right or advantageous from a practical point of view, is to apply it universally and see the outcome. The principle which destroys itself after universal application is undoubtedly worthless both from the moral and the practical points of view. For example, to decide whether begging is good or bad, we should see what happens when everyone starts begging. It will then be clear that it is impossible. So begging is not good. But who will experiment in this way for determining the rightness of the principle of violence? Still nations in Europe, competing with each other in the use of violence, have embarked upon such an exercise!

There is now no room for sundry fights or fights between individuals or tribes. Total war or abstention from war—the valiant and experimenting people of Europe have left no third course open. Now the only possibility is that a nation defeated in a war may take the help of other nations and wars would be fought between groups of nations or continents. But there is no scope for this process too to go much farther. After experimenting with violence to the widest extent and to the highest degree, the only course left for violence is to destroy itself and make way for nonviolence. Not only the enlightened opinion but public opinion at large also has come to, or is moving towards this conclusion.

52. Nonviolence does not seek to outdo the opponent

When violence is thus rejected, we are left with the method of nonviolence only. Then there remains no room for entertaining any doubt in regard to nonviolence; there is scope only for experiments with faith. There is no question of outdoing the opponent in nonviolence. If someone is more nonviolent than me, he does not seek to crush me; he rather seeks change in my heart. He naturally succeeds in this attempt; and his success turns out to be success for me too. It is in violence that one man's victory is another man's defeat. In nonviolence, one man's victory is also another man's victory. If there is anything in dispute, it may be submitted to arbitration—that is all. So simple is the way of nonviolence.

53. Nation-wide experiment of nonviolence is, in a way, easier

A nation-wide experiment of nonviolence would, in a way, be easier than an experiment at the individual level. In an interaction between a violent and a nonviolent person, the violent person may kill the nonviolent person recklessly before nonviolence of the latter affects, or has an opportunity to affect, the mind of the violent person. Such a thing is possible in individual interactions, but it is not possible in interactions between nations. It is difficult to imagine that an entire nation instantaneously goes berserk and destroys a nonviolent nation before its nonviolence can have any effect on the violent nation. But we find that in individual conflicts, where such a possibility exists, nonviolent persons have normally won against their violent opponents. There is therefore no reason why a nonviolent nation cannot win where there appears to be no such possibility. Moreover, when there is no question of defeat of any party, as in a violent war, there is no reason to doubt the victory of a nonviolent nation.

54. Nonviolence too needs organization, training and sacrifice

When we have to choose between a nonviolent political system and preparation for a total war, there is no other choice than nonviolence. However, a nonviolent polity too needs organization, education of public opinion etc.; and though a nonviolent organization is bound to be different from the one required for a total war, it would also have to be so extensive as to touch the life of every individual. A plan therefor has already been suggested. Before it could be implemented, the people who are nonviolent by nature would have to be made nonviolent through full understanding of the principles. Ordinary people are always nonviolent by nature, but they should become nonviolent by conviction. It means that inactive nonviolence would not do. Active nonviolence, extending to all spheres of life, would be needed. Nonviolence is a sovereign philosophy and ideal. A philosophy cannot remain restricted to any one area of life; it is bound to pervade the whole life. If economic and social orders are to be left undisturbed, where is the scope for non-violence? But when both the internal affairs of a nation and the international affairs are organised on the basis of nonviolence, there is no reason why such a system should not endure.

We see that nations have to make tremendous sacrifices in order to defend violent political orders. Still it is hoped that defence of a nonviolent order would not entail any damage to life and property. But although nonviolent defence is right in all respects, its success cannot be guaranteed without effort. There would have to be preparedness to suffer and even to lay down one's life peacefully without doing the slightest harm to the opponent. The battle of nonviolence takes place not on the battlefield but in the heart. But there must be preparedness for battle even in nonviolence. Even if nonviolence spreads throughout the world, there would still be need for preparedness. Achievement of something once and for all is possible neither in violence nor in nonviolence. It would always be essential to keep awake the power of resistance. A life of nonviolence does not mean only occasional sacrifice, it implies life of continual sacrifices; and not merely sacrifices but joy in sacrifices.

55. Nonviolent system not beyond human capacity

Many wonder how all this could come about. Some ask if superhuman beings would be required for this. Had we been thinking of superhuman beings, there would have been no question of resistance. When we talk of resistance, we are clearly talking with reference to ordinary people; we

exclude only their animal nature. And we do not even foresee total disappearance of animal nature from all the people; we only expect it to be under the control of their higher nature. Creation of a nonviolent order is thus definitely not impossible from any angle; in fact, no other order could be as sustainable as a nonviolent one.

Question 5

When other nations are protagonists of violence, how can a single nation remain wedded to nonviolence?

56. Armour of universal sympathy would protect a nonviolent nation

According to the nonviolent way of thinking, human society is one; and separate nations can be conceived of merely for the sake of convenience. A particular nation having the good sense to adopt nonviolence would not regard itself as separate from and opposed to others. It would rather be as anxious to safeguard the legitimate interests of neighbouring nations as those of its own. Even if a nation is wedded to violence, it is not that its entire population has gone berserk. In fact, nations become violent because of mutual rivalry. People never like violence for its own sake. So, if a nation desires to follow nonviolence and therefore does not want to have any conflict in its relations with the whole world, it would awaken the conscience of neighbouring nations and, to the extent it is awakened, bring them to the path of nonviolence.

A nonviolent nation would not forcibly dump its goods on another nation. Every village in it would be self-sufficient and devoted to labour. So there would be no scope in it for the greed of other nations. If other nations imagine their interests to be opposed to the interests of such a nation, the latter would try to remove their misgivings with a friendly attitude. If famines or other calamities befall other nations, it would selflessly render all possible help to them. It would always be ready to submit controversial matters to arbitration. If other nations do not accept arbitration, or accept it but reject its award and commit aggression, the nonviolent nation would resist it nonviolently. A nation with such an attitude, even if initially alone, would not remain so; it would gain an armour of sympathy for itself from the whole world. Why should it not be possible to imagine such a nation?

57. A nonviolent nation is fully secure

After all, why should another nation want to commit an aggression on us—a nonviolent nation?

(i) Would it be because it has less land and more population while we have more land and less population? In that case, why would we not welcome those in it who want to come and be part of our system? A nonviolent nation, as has already been noted, does not regard itself as separate from others. Even though ancient India may not be considered to have a firm and scientific commitment to nonviolence, did she not give shelter to the Parsees in distress? And what did she lose thereby?

(ii) Or, if another nation commits an aggression because of difficulties like a famine, would not a nonviolent nation help it even at the cost of bearing hardships?

(iii) Or, would a nation commit an aggression out of greed, coveting the latter's market? But greed never works unless reciprocated. If we are lazy or wallowing in luxuries, we would invite the aggressor's greed; but in that case, we would not be nonviolent either.

(iv) Or, if the invasion is because of the clash of interests in the communities in border areas? In that case, would it not be possible for a nation, which practises nonviolence of the brave and not of the weak, to find a solution agreeable to both the parties?

And even if it is assumed that war finally becomes imminent, why should such a nation be less defensible through nonviolence than violence, when it has brave individuals willing to undergo suffering even unto death?

58. Weak nonviolence cannot stand

In fact, it is lack of imagination that rouses doubts about the sustenance of a nation after its adoption of nonviolence. In fact, those engaged in a violent war do not have to undergo less suffering. If same sacrifices are contemplated for the sake of nonviolence, there is no reason to imagine that the gains accruing thereby would be less. There is no psychological foundation for such assumption. But we assume that violence needs great sacrifices, but nonviolence would need little sacrifice, or would not even need it at all. Such non-violence is weak and would certainly not endure in the world.

59. A nonviolent order has no fear of internal disorder or external aggression

Fear of internal disorder or external aggression always stretches our imagination. But a nonviolent polity, pledged to secure happiness for all, would not be perturbed by such fears. When the system cares equally for all with antagonism for none and there is arrangement to allay the distress of everyone, and still some individuals try to create disturbances, it should not be difficult to meet such a situation. A nonviolent order implies existence of public-spirited workers engaged in the service of the people in their neighbourhoods and in close touch with them all. When such a band of workers is there, readiness for a little sacrifice on their part should be enough to quell the riots. When the rioters realize that persons who serve them and are well known to them are ready to lay down their lives, and are ready any time to listen to their grievances, assuring their well-being, that should be sufficient to quell the riot.

60. No police, only public-spirited workers would be there in an ideal nonviolent order

It is asked, "Your polity will have no army; will it not have even a police force?" The normal reply is that there would indeed be such a force, but it would have a different character. Why is it not said that there would be no police; there would be an alert band of public-spirited workers and the masses would be conscious of their duties? Such a reply is not given because we are not talking here of the ideal polity; the reply is in the context of the pace with which we are proceeding on the path of nonviolence and the extent to which our imagination can look ahead without losing sight of the present situation.

Lokniti

The alternative to politics

1. Freedom from the State

The State: its genesis and growth

Scientists tell us that human society has been in existence for thousands of years. Even written history covers a span of five to ten thousand years. In the remote past the State did not exist. But love and hate, friendship and enmity have always existed side by side. In ancient times, disputes used to be settled by violence and there was no mechanism to control violence. It was common to counter unrestrained violence with unrestrained violence. Eventually society thought of curbing unrestrained and disorderly violence by violence bound by specific laws and rules, and legitimised the latter. Thus the institution of the State came into existence to resolve conflicts and maintain order within the society. As State power proved effective in controlling violence, people welcomed it and attached religious significance to it.

The institution of monarchy existed for a long time. It was hereditary. Some kings were good and some others bad; and people's fortunes fluctuated accordingly. To avoid this risk, people decided against monarchy and settled on the rule by their own representatives. In our country too, we now have such a political system.

Earlier, the role of the State was limited to assistance in the resolution of conflicts and crises. Farmers, traders and other producers carried on their work independently, at their own initiative. Complete control over societal affairs was not even feasible. There was a considerable degree of individual freedom. Religious institutions were independent. Education was free from State control. There were no standing armies. Social life, in general, was autonomous. All in all, the governments in the past did not have much power.

However, those entrusted with authority and power began seeking more and more power. Eventually, they got the power to legislate and punish, and to administer everything. Today the government is doing everything. It controls the entire gamut of public affairs. Everything has come within its ambit. How strange is this situation!

Violence of the State, moreover, did not remain restrained and regulated as it was meant to be. It continued to grow and has now broken all bounds, assuming frightening proportions. Human beings have perhaps never been so overpowered by fear in their entire history. They desire to restore the State violence to its earlier level. But the wheel of time can never be stopped and reversed. It would continue to move ahead inexorably. So there are now only two alternatives. Violence will either assume even more frightening proportions and destroy the human society, or it will destroy itself and give way to nonviolence. It is now for us to make a choice in favour of the latter and work for the blossoming of pure nonviolence. In other words, we should gird up our loins to free society from the clutches of State power.

It has been my firm conviction that society should be free from the State; but I used to think that it would take a long time. However, with violence approaching its limit, I have begun to hope that the goal would be reached sooner.

In ancient times, people used weapons to resolve disputes. As humanity progressed, they felt that it was not a proper way. So they created the institution of the State and authorised it to use weapons to the exclusion of all others. With further progress, human beings are bound to reach the conclusion that the State too should not have such authority. They would prefer other means for their protection. Weapons would then be in the hands of God only. With further evolution, human beings would not even feel that God should wield weapons; they would not need His weapons for protection; His mercy and compassion would serve the purpose. Only then will the evolution of the human race reach its high watermark.

Let us govern ourselves

The States and organised religious institutions are the most powerful institutions in the present world. They were created with good intentions. They were born out of social needs and in particular environments. At the time they were formed, society looked upon them as essential and found them useful. But as they have outlived their utility, it is necessary to get rid of both these institutions. I do not say that we need to get rid of religion; what I am saying is that we need to get rid of institutionalised religion. I do not mean, either, that there should be no scheme for keeping order and for public service, but I do say that we need to get rid of institutions which exercise authority in the name of service. Although political institutions and organised religions were both founded for good purposes, those purposes have now been fulfilled and it would only do harm and no good if they were still allowed to exist.

Suppose I entrust responsibility of sleeping on my behalf to a servant and give him good salary. He does his work efficiently. Will it then do if I do not sleep myself? No, I have to get my own sleep. Similarly I cannot transfer my duties towards religion to someone else. And the same is true about governance and public service. Indeed, when we entrust our religious duties to priests and our social duties to politicians, we are left with nothing except eating and sleeping! But even that we may not be able to do as well as we would like, as those to whom we have entrusted our most important duties do not perform them properly. Even if they do their job well, I still have strong objections to the whole system. People, who entrust religious duties and the responsibility of thinking on their behalf to a few individuals and the responsibility of governance and public service to a handful of representatives, would lose all their vigour and vitality; they would then lack the very essence of life. By doing this, people are now leading a kind of life not befitting to human beings. Only when one does something oneself, does one feel happy. It strengthens and mentally develops him/her. “No man can assume responsibility for any other person—each one must carry his own burden”, says the Quran. People today have handed over to a small number of persons the responsibility for religious and charitable work—or rather, it would be more correct to say that those few persons have been skilful enough to take over this responsibility—and power—and that people have allowed them to do so. Whatever be the case, these representatives now have people under their control.

Sarvodaya exhorts everyone to look after governance— after the management of public affairs and discharge their religious duties themselves.

Governments levy taxes and use some of the money to open hospitals. People then need not worry about looking after patients in the family! Can this develop compassion? When people nurse their family members, it enriches their life, uplifts them morally and spiritually.

It is true that parents should look after their children. But should we be looked after by others even after living together for thousands of years? We live in the age of ever-growing science; an age which also inherits the traditions of wisdom. We ought to be able to see that in such times it is right and proper for every individual to take charge of his own affairs.

Protest against good government

In fact, no matter how good the government may be, you are, as I see it, in danger—and the better the government, the greater the danger. The kingdom of Vijayanagar fell in a single day when it was, to all outward appearances, at the height of its glory. How could this happen? The reason is that the people relied upon the government and its armies for their defence; their own strength had not been developed. The machinery of the government may be running smoothly, the people may be contented, but unless their own potential strength is developed, they are bound to remain slaves. Governance may be good or bad—that is so because of a few persons only. That was the case in monarchies, and that is the case in democracies too.

The State sometimes does good work, sometimes bad. I have nothing to say about its bad deeds. The whole world knows their effects. What I am worried about is that we have entrusted the welfare of the world to a handful of individuals. My main complaint is that the good work done by the State is far from good in its effect upon the minds of the people; it has rather an adverse effect. Obligations of the State have a crippling effect on the people. That is what saddens me.

Some people ask me why I do not protest strongly when the government does something wrong. It is true that I do so only occasionally. But I do raise my voice when the government does something good. There is no need for me to protest against the government's faults; it is against its good deeds that my protests are needed. I have to warn the people against being like the sheep driven by shepherds, howsoever well the shepherds may be looking after them. It seems to me that it would be better if the shepherds neglected their duty—you might then come to your senses and remember that you are after all not sheep but human beings capable of managing your own affairs. That is why my voice is raised in opposition to good government. It is necessary to criticize the government when it does something good, because its good deeds strengthen the illusion that the agency of the State is beneficial. Bad government has always been condemned by everyone. People know very well that bad government should not be tolerated, and everywhere they protest against it. But to me, allowing ourselves to be governed, even by a good government, is itself lamentable.

Good government—a myth

In fact, seeking to establish a 'good government' is illusory. Bad government or freedom from the government—these are the only two real options. People may try for good government, but they are bound to have a bad government. Whatever we may try to do through the agency of the State, despite good intentions, it inevitably gives rise to problems, mutual hatred and violence. Arms are the ultimate sanction behind even a so-called good government—whatever may be its outer form. So, what we see as a good government can collapse at any moment. Difference between a good government and a bad one is therefore illusive. If we are dependent on the government, it can, in no time, become a bad government.

And, even a so-called good government is not 'good' in the sense it makes us dull and lifeless like machines. It does not lead to the development of people's intelligence and wisdom. It may give comforts, but is not conducive to their development. It cannot, therefore, be considered the best possible system.

Power: A delusion and a snare

A look at the history of our country, as well as that of the whole world, shows that the idea of keeping order within the society as well as the idea of bringing about social change through political power draws one in a wheel of delusion. Political power, in fact, can solve no problem.

Some people want to serve others. While serving, they come to the conclusion that there should be some orderly arrangement and organization for effective service. They then try to devise such arrangement. Everyone wants effective control over it. The spirit of service then gradually yields place to reliance on administrative and organizational arrangements, and finally to the faith in political power.

The phrase 'service through power' has become a kind of watchword. To me, it is a snare. Many rational individuals are victims of this delusion. They feel that the present society is not ideal, and it will take a long time to reach that stage; during the transition, power will be necessary. I am convinced, however, that no genuine society can be formed until human beings realize that coercive power should be completely eschewed. Political power can neither create nor sustain social order; in fact, it divides society.

Today coercion has found a place even in family life, schools, and religious institutions, where there is no need for it; in fact, they must be free from coercion. Discipline is eulogized as a great virtue in schools. But if 'discipline' comes to mean 'blind obedience', it is a very dangerous thing. One should not accept anything without understanding. Only then can virtues be nourished and fostered. When the element of coercion—the principle of power—is allowed to enter into the realms that ought to be free from them, it gets legitimised in society and becomes a part of the social structure.

Those who think in the limited political perspective do not understand the difference between strength and power. They confuse between the two. But strength and power are not identical. Strength gets developed when one's qualities and virtues come into play. What we should seek is the creation of strength and elimination of the power instinct—the instinct that induces man to coerce and exercise power over others.

A virtuous individual can remove the defects in power, but power is unable to remove the defects in human beings; for human being has a soul and power is soulless. It is a delusion to think that a soulless thing has any strength.

Political power, in fact, leads to the dissipation of strength. It presents numerous allurements, numerous occasions for one to slip and deviate from the right path. Lord Vishnu can calmly sleep on a cobra. Similarly an exceptionally great individual can remain unaffected by the allurements of power. But a cobra for a bed cannot be said to be a means to attain calmness. If a man can swim across a river with a stone tied round his neck, it means that he is an exceptionally good swimmer; it does not mean that a stone is a means of swimming. It would be said that he swam the river in spite of the stone, not because of it. In the same way, power is not a means for achieving detachment, although a rare individual may remain detached in spite of being in power.

Limitations of political power

Governments can open hospitals but cannot create the spirit of loving service. They can open colleges, but cannot create the spirit of enquiry and the thirst for knowledge. They can never bring about mental and spiritual development of the people on which the progress of the country essentially depends. That is the task that lies exclusively in the domain of people's action. People should be conscious of their duties.

The authority of the government is incapable of bringing about any revolutionary changes. Had this been possible, why would Lord Buddha have renounced his throne? People say that King Asoka used political power for spreading Buddhism. But I must say that it betrays grave ignorance of history. In fact, Buddhism started losing ground in the country from the day it became associated with State power. When the Christian faith was backed by the imperial power of Constantine it remained Christian only in name. The pure religion practised by the apostles gave way to the Church and the concomitant hypocrisy. Whenever religious movements won royal favour they were joined by thousands who were not real religious devotees, but merely loyal followers of the king. Connection with political power has invariably proved detrimental to religions. Should there be a genuine encounter between State and religion, religion would destroy the State power. Like darkness and sun, the two cannot exist together. Exercise of power over others is at variance with religious precepts. Religion serves all; religion pleads its cause with love.

Governments have no power to lead people to righteousness; they have no power to inspire them to noble deeds. People themselves have greater power than the governments to spur men and women to action.

Study of the history of India clearly shows that social progress here has been due to the influence of saintly men and women. No king ever exercised the influence which Buddha and Mahavira exerted. No king in north India ever wielded such power over the people in that region as is

wielded even today by saints like Kabir and Tulsidas. No king is remembered by the people like these saints. The daily lives of our people and their social institutions have not been shaped by the penal code of any king. The social conscience of the people is not the creation of any king. Those who think in terms of governmental action do not know how changes come about in the thinking and perceptions of people.

Society does not derive its ethical traditions and standards of conduct from legal enactments, but from the teachings of the good and the wise. Do you think people do not steal because there is a provision for punishment for it in the penal code? No; it is our conscience that does not allow us to steal. And that conscience has not been shaped by the kings. How could kings do so when they themselves were great robbers! How could they rule over the hearts of the people?

The very idea that we derive our strength from the strength of the government is wrong. The truth is just the opposite—the government derives its strength from us. What strength is there in the government that is not in us also? The government can get some things done by force, by the use of army, or by the use of money—but whose money does it use? It is our money, which we have handed over to it in the form of taxes. The government, in itself, is a big zero; it possesses only what we give it. We are like a well and the government is like a bucket. A bucket can hold only a small fraction of water in the well. Similarly, the government can have only a small fraction of the strength that is in the people. Is it not strange to think that a bucket holds more water than the well?

Steam is formed when water is boiled. The power of the steam comes not from water but from the fire burning in the stove. Water cannot be boiled in the absence of heat. People's strength is like the heat energy, whereas government is like the water that can get some energy from that heat. Heat can boil the water, but water can only extinguish the fire; it cannot add to its power!

In reality, the government is the least powerful institution. It has to enforce its laws by threatening physical punishments.

Our ultimate goal

The right form of the State depends on the stage of development reached by the people. Take, for example, family. When the parents are young and their children very small, the parents take the decisions and the children have to obey. Some years later, when the children are sufficiently mature but the parents are still able to play an active part, mutual cooperation takes the place of parental authority. Later still, when the children are fully mature and the parents become old, the children manage everything and the parents give advice only.

Similarly, when people are ignorant and weak, the State could have wide powers. But as the people grow in strength, ability and wisdom, and as the area of mutual cooperation between the people gets enlarged, the need for a government would progressively diminish. Finally it would only have an advisory role. With growth in the moral stature of the people, the State's coercive power would go on diminishing. The State will gradually wither away; we hope that it will ultimately cease to exist.

The ultimate goal of Sarvodaya is freedom from the State. I do not use the words 'absence of the State'. Absence of the State is another name for chaos. When there is chaos, there is no order, and anti-social elements do as they please. That kind of absence of the State is not our ideal. We, in fact, desire that chaos should be replaced by a good State, which should subsequently pave way for a State-free society. Freedom from the State does not mean absence of order. The State is often equated with order, but we do not subscribe to this equation. We hold that the State represents coercive political power, and that power should be eliminated from society. Order would, of course, be there. It would be maintained by society itself. Certain moral principles would be so universally accepted in society that they would be reflected in the practice of all of its members. Even little

children would have been educated in them. These principles would be respected by the members of society of their own free will. Such a society would be self-governing.

Millions of people do not steal today not because of any law but because they believe theft to be morally wrong. Law or no law, penalty or no penalty, they would never steal because the idea that theft is wrong is an accepted moral standard. People should similarly accept that accumulation and hoarding of possessions too is morally wrong. The idea that theft is wrong is right, but it is a one-sided idea. When it is accepted that accumulation too is wrong, these two ideas would complement each other, and society would be healthier. *Aparigraha* (non-possession) would then become the basis of the social structure. Then there would be less and less need for the exercise of State power. People in villages would look after their own affairs, and the 'higher' political authority would have minimal existence. It would not exercise any authority; it would only have an advisory role. The members of such a 'government' would be persons having uprightness and moral integrity, who would have only moral authority. There is an alarm chain in trains, but it is used only in emergencies. The State should, at the most, have such a role.

Our road to the State-free society passes through the stage of good government. Therefore 'good government' must be so conducted that progress towards the State-free society is not hampered. At the same time, we should strive to mobilize public opinion in favour of the State-free society.

I hold that violence should be completely eschewed from all the spheres of life. We must at least ponder over how a nation with numerous castes and communities can remain independent. That is possible only when we entrust coercive power to the government and resolve to use nonviolence in our mutual affairs. Ultimately we have to make redundant the coercive power of the State also. When there is no occasion for the exercise of that coercive power, the State would gradually merge into society, leading to what is called 'spiritual anarchy'. That should be the ideal before humanity. This is the way to proceed from violence to nonviolence.

Governments unnecessary

My main idea is that the whole world ought to be set free from the burden of the State. That cannot happen so long as we depend on the government for everything. If there is one disease by which the entire world is afflicted, it is the disease called 'government'. People all over the world feel that they need not do anything; everything would be taken care of by the government; that governments are their only saviours and that without them they would be lost. People imagine that they cannot do without a government. I can understand that people cannot do without agriculture, they cannot do without industries; and that they cannot get on without love and religion. I can also understand that they cannot do without institutions like marriage and the family. But governments do not fall under this category.

The fact is that people do not need a government at all. Governments grew up in the course of time due to certain historical conditions. We failed in creating an integrated society. We did not learn the art of working together without conflict. So we try to get things done through exercise of the power of the State instead; we try to do by coercion what can only be done by educating the people.

I once suggested that all our administrators should be given leave for two years; just to see what would happen in their absence! Would normal routine work in the world come to an end? Would the dairyman not make butter or the gardener not sell vegetables? Would people stop getting married and having babies? If the sun failed to rise, the world would indeed end; it would indeed end without the rains of divine grace. What we really need is divine grace; not the government. It is a great illusion that governments are indispensable; that everything goes on well because of the governments. This illusion is the biggest obstacle in the way of peace in the world.

The governments' ultimate claim is that they protect the people. And the people too feel that the governments protect them. Being frightened, they rely on the armies. And greater the reliance on the armies, the more intense the fear is. All the nations are keen on augmenting their military strength. But does that make anyone fearless? In fact, the States are always raising the spectre of foreign aggression to keep the people in fear. Foreign aggression takes place only occasionally. Armies are routinely used to suppress the people.

The people ought to be fearless. *Abhaya* (fearlessness) is an important concept in ancient Indian Political Science; and it has an important place in the spiritual vocabulary of India as well. If the State cannot inculcate fearlessness in the people, it is of no use.

The State is not, after all, God-given; it has been created by human beings in the hope that it would serve a useful purpose of aiding individual and social development. But experience of different forms of the State has clearly shown that human development reaches a dead end at a certain point, even if the State is run by the most worthy individuals or great religious figures. The State has therefore to be done away with for the sake of humanity's unhindered progress.

Three theories of State

We have before us three theories of the State –

1) The first is that the State will ultimately wither away leading to a Stateless system; but in order to bring about that stage, the State must at present have the maximum possible power. Those who subscribe to this theory are totalitarians to begin with; it is in the end that they envisage withering away of the State.

2) The second theory is that some form of the State has always existed in the past, exists now, and will continue to exist in the future. Stateless society is a sheer impossibility. Therefore, society must be so ordered as to ensure welfare of all. There may be a certain amount of decentralization, but all important matters must be under the central political authority. Supporters of this theory hold that the State must always exist, and that a government elected by the people should have overall control over all the affairs.

3) The third theory, which we subscribe to, is that in the preliminary stages a certain measure of government is necessary, but its necessity will progressively go on lessening. We do not see any need to have a totalitarian State in the transition period to ensure progress towards a State-free society. We propose to start immediately and proceed towards the goal of the State-free society through decentralization of authority and administration.

Our vision

In the final stage there would be no coercive power, only a purely moral authority would exist. Establishment of such a self-directing society calls for self-sufficiency in different areas. Production, distribution, defence, education—everything should be taken care of at the local level. We shall thus achieve decentralization through regional self-sufficiency. Unlike the Communists we do not want to strengthen the State with the specious argument that exigencies of the transition period demand the same. If we compromise with our fundamental principles on such pretexts, nonviolence will have no future.

Centralization of the whole, or the greater part, of the government system makes its subsequent dissolution more difficult. Therefore, decentralization must be introduced at once. It is not necessary that every village should immediately produce all its needs. The unit for self-sufficiency may be a group of villages. All planning must be directed towards the progressive abolition of government's control through regional self-reliance.

Some Gandhians say that the State is inevitable—it may be decentralized and tamed and used for the welfare of the people; it may have a limited role, but it will always be there. But I firmly hold that this is not a Gandhian idea. I avoid quoting Gandhiji. If we want to quote Gandhiji, we shall have to go through all his speeches and writings and it will lead to controversies. We would then be worse off than the apostles of Buddha! It is dangerous to quote a man like Gandhiji. In 1918 he risked his life campaigning for recruitment in the British army. In 1939 he declared complete non-cooperation with the British war-efforts. He was ever growing. He was committed to truth only and was not afraid of appearing inconsistent.

In fact, the building of people's power and making the State wither away is one of the main goals before those who believe in the Gandhian ideology. Otherwise Gandhiji's dream of a nonviolent society can never be actualized. We are working for Bhoodan not only for solving the land problem but also for dissolution of the State throughout the world.

To make the State wither away, the power of love and compassion should be made so extensive that the State becomes totally redundant. That is what we want to do. And we want that process to start immediately. We do not merely subscribe to the theoretical position of anarchism as far as the final stage of society is concerned; we want to start taking steps towards the goal of State-free society this very moment. We want the spread of compassion through society to such an extent that the State should get completely submerged in the surging waves of that compassion.

Not *Rajya*, but *Swarajya*

There is a saying in the scriptures, "After royal power comes hell"—that is, a king goes to hell after his death. That is the fate of those who govern. But, it may be asked, should we not then have self-government? Yes, we must have it. The Vedic sage says, 'Let us strive for self-government.' But what is managed from the capitals like Delhi—distant seats of political power—is not self-government but government, even if those wielding the power are our own people. When every individual in the village manages his own life, rules over himself, then that is the mark of real self-government. There can be no self-government if one is under the command of someone else. We can have *swarajya*—self-government—only when all the people have full self-control and have realization of their duties; till then we shall have government—an outside power ruling over us. We have to work for self-government. To that end we must build up people's power, create in the people's heart a sense of the power of the Self. We must find the courage to believe that we are capable of managing the affairs of our own community, and that no outside power can stop us from doing so.

It is one mark of *swarajya* not to allow any outside power in the world to exercise control over oneself. And the second mark of *swarajya* is not to exercise power over others. No submission and no exploitation! We will not coerce anybody and will not submit to anybody's coercion. We will not dominate anybody and will not allow anybody to dominate us. We will not intimidate anybody and will not allow anybody to intimidate us. This is what *swarajya* means.

I would go one step further: people should not submit even to moral authority without rational deliberation. They should weigh things for themselves.

Self-government implies that everybody is a ruler. People then are not 'subjects'. Nobody rules over them. *Swarajya* means self-rule. *Swarajya* is a term with positive content. It is a condition of self-illumination and self-regulation.

It is said that India has got *swarajya* (in 1947). Far from it! Real self-government exists nowhere—neither in India nor in England nor in Russia. Self-government does not mean rule by the local people. It means that nobody rules over anybody. A nation must of course not be ruled by another nation; that is the first step. That should be followed by self-government in every village.

When the inhabitants of every village have the urge to plan for their development and are capable of executing the plan with will and self-confidence, we can say that real *swarajya* has dawned.

Decentralization of power

Sarvodaya means freedom from the State. It implies decentralization of power. We want to do away with government by politicians and replace it by a commonwealth of the people based on love, compassion and equality, where decisions are taken not by majority but by unanimity or consensus; and are carried out by the united strength of the people. Only then will we be able to have Sarvodaya—the uplift of all. This is possible only by means of nonviolence.

A human being does have the instinct to command others, to have power over them, just as he seeks wealth and enjoyment. The Bhagvad Gita has called it attachment to pleasure and lordship. But she has also suggested a way to subjugate this instinct and put it to proper use. Human nature is not something static and unchanging. Human beings are gaining more and more control over their impulses. And besides the power instinct a human being has other instincts and impulses as well. Moral and spiritual feelings and aspirations too move him strongly. Humankind must realize, and it will certainly realize gradually, that it should put those aspirations first, and keep other desires under their control. Sense of righteousness has made it realize that power and pleasure should be distributed; they should be shared by all. That is the way to control and curb the lust for power and pleasure.

That is why we seek decentralization of power and strive for it. It is the foundation of Sarvodaya—uplift of all.

What we need to prepare for is not merely good government but self-government. Self-government has two aspects: (1) Decentralization of authority—every village having full powers to manage its own affairs, (2) Educating the people about the efficacy of nonviolence and convincing them in this regard on both the philosophical and the psychological planes.

Village affairs would be managed by the villagers themselves through unanimity or consensus. Political parties would have no place there. *Gram-sabha*—the assembly of all the adults in the village—would have all the powers that a State normally has in the area under its jurisdiction. A village must have the power to decide what kinds of goods may be imported in the village in what quantities, what kind of imports should be prohibited, and the kinds and quantities of goods that may be exported. This is the first aspect of self-government. Secondly, the villagers should decide to become self-sufficient to the extent possible. Self-discipline and self-sufficiency are the bulwarks of village self-government. The first aspect of self-government is realized when both these are present.

It may not be possible in the immediate future to have a State-free society; but it is extremely important to have this ideal before us. What I want to say in the present context is that the whole structure has become thoroughly centralized; and the individual is being totally controlled by the State, leaving no scope for the expression of his creative urges and powers. Freedom from the shackles of the State to the extent possible is imperative for the full blossoming of human potential. There has to be maximum possible decentralization for this purpose.

The power that has been concentrated in the capitals is to be distributed to the villages. What would have been the plight of the world had the Creator not distributed intelligence but kept it all with Himself? Then one would have to send a telegram to Him whenever one needed it! But He has given some intelligence to all. So He can sleep without any worries in the ocean of milk, as our mythology says—and no one knows where He is! We shall have real *Swarajya* only when our rulers are able to sleep like Him!

To say that villages should be given authority is not really proper. Authority cannot be given; it has to be taken. Power will come into the hands of the villagers when they make up their minds to manage the affairs of their own villages. Power will never be handed over to them on a platter.

Suppose the people undertake the care of the sick. That would make the government's health department redundant. When the people run their own health services, they would adopt whatever system of medicine wins their confidence. The government's responsibility and authority would be consequently reduced and we would have won freedom in one area. Today education is also controlled by the government and it has the power to push its own ideas down the throats of all the children. This is also against our tradition. If people take up the work of education, we shall gain freedom in one more area.

Every village should manage its own affairs according to its own lights. The central government should only offer advice which the villagers should be free to accept or reject. In such a set-up, even if a few individuals were to fail in doing their duty only a few villages would suffer. But when power is concentrated in a few hands, the whole country suffers when something goes wrong.

Effective power must rest in the village community and higher authorities should have only secondary powers. The national government would have advisory functions and may have the responsibility of co-ordination. There would then be much less temptation for ambitious men to capture power; for real power would be in the villages.

There would be no freedom until every individual in every village has control over his own life. When every village manages its own affairs, settles internal disputes, decides how its children should be educated, undertakes its own defence and manages its own markets, there would be a renewal of self-confidence, and ordinary people everywhere would get some experience of public affairs. The distribution or dispersal of the functions of government is a means for creating strength among the people. When every village has its own government it would naturally have a group of people skilled in public affairs—persons of experience and wisdom. When the villagers become well versed in public affairs, freedom from the State would be actualized.

Every village would then become one family. It would look after its affairs. Government would give advice and render help if necessary, particularly in solving inter-village disputes, if any.

Principle of nonviolence

Besides decentralization, the other aspect of self-government is the introduction of the principle of nonviolence in the philosophy, education and psychology of people. We believe that we are essentially not physical bodies but souls. It follows that we should not attach much importance to an attack on our bodies, nor should we submit to anyone because they may be able to injure our body. Psychologically, we would accept certain rules of conduct in our dealings with others. The most important of these rules would be to give primacy to the collective mind of the community over our individual desires and impulses. This collective intelligence or the common mind should be the decisive factor, and not individual fancy. It must be the principle of our education, our psychology and our philosophy alike that no one should hurt or threaten anyone else. But violence is fostered not only by blows and threats, but also by an appeal to cupidity. Our education, our moral code and our practical conduct would therefore have no place in it for physical and material rewards as well as physical and material punishments. Children instructed in this way would be the pillars of a nonviolent society.

If we want peace, we must have a social structure conducive to peace. Activities which are now in the hands of government must be taken over, one by one, by the people themselves. In this way, as its responsibilities decrease, the role of the government would get reduced correspondingly; and so would the State power. If that can happen, nonviolence and peace would survive on earth.

A different kind of polity

The government has a responsibility in the transition period, though in the final stage it would have none. In the transition period it is responsible for following the lead given by the people and carrying out their wishes. This would not only give us good government in the present, it would also pave the way to freedom from government in the future.

In a garland the thread keeps different flowers together. It does not have a fragrance of its own; the flowers give it fragrance. Likewise, the 'government' would be the thread and different villages would be the flowers. A garland is said to be made of flowers, not of the thread. The thread is invisible. So should the 'government' be. In a Sarvodaya order the State would not at all be visible; nobody would notice its existence.

It is sometimes said that having self-government in the villages would be like having States within a State. This is a misconception that has roots in current political thinking. In a pomegranate there are a lot of seeds. A political structure could likewise contain different villages. In that fruit there are different cells holding a number of seeds; each cell is self-contained and complete in itself. Likewise, a number of villages could constitute a bigger political unit, and a number of such units could unite to make a still bigger political unit, and so on, leading finally to global self-governing order. We envisage such a political structure.

Governance is not, in fact, an activity; it should essentially consist of thinking and contemplation; that should be enough to keep order in the world. The less the external activity, the better the governance. An ideal government would have no army, no police force and would not resort to penalties; the people would manage their own affairs, listen readily to right advice, and would be guided by moral considerations.

In fact, I do not think that terms like 'State' and 'government' are apposite while referring to the polity we envisage. This polity would ultimately be absorbed in society; it would no longer have a separate existence. Power would continue to get decentralized till it becomes extinct, that is, till it enters into every human being, and the authority to rule belongs to everyone. Everyone would then be the ruler as well as the ruled and would rule over themselves. Others would help him/her in removing defects and cooperate in good endeavours.

The place of law

What is the purpose of the whole system of law? Today, law and order is the deity set on the highest pedestal. And the preservation of law and order implies that power should remain in the hands of those who now possess it under our present social arrangements!

Law is like a steam-roller. It has no conscience. Conditions in different villages are different, but the same laws apply everywhere. Howsoever fair they may be, injustice to some cannot be avoided. Nobody knows all the laws. Many laws remain only in the statute books and many have effects completely opposite to those intended.

Law cannot bring about any fundamental change in society; it can at the most have a very limited role. When an idea is universally accepted, law may put the seal of approval on it. The words 'The end' are written at the end of many books. Law has the same utility. But it hardly matters whether these words are written at the end or not.

I want legal Prohibition because public opinion is strongly in favour of such a law and because without Prohibition there cannot be a good government—the government in that case would be a bad government which would stand in the way of freedom from government.

Will there be any place for statutory laws in a Sarvodaya society? It is the duty of mothers to give milk to their children. But there is no statute enjoining such a duty and there is no punishment

either for not doing it. And yet mothers never fail to feed their children. 'Laws' in a Sarvodaya society would belong to this category. When Sarvodaya is still an ideal, statutory laws would exist, but they would have the sanction of public opinion.

2. Democracy: a misnomer

After Independence, we imported the system of democracy from the West, unmindful of the fact that condition in India is drastically different from that in the West. Indian society is plagued with various kinds of differences and extreme poverty. Moreover, as I have pointed out, democracy is not *sarvayatan*—that is, rule by all. Like other political systems, it too relies on violence. It lays emphasis on numbers—on the counting of votes, which is a mechanical process. It operates through political parties, which has harmful consequences. Despite its pretensions, actually a handful of individuals rule; public opinion is immaterial. This system gives neither political freedom nor economic freedom. It has also failed in removing parochial tendencies.

Nature of political parties

In democracy, there is a ruling party and an opposition party. Both are engaged only in the pursuit of power. Their leaders have faith, not in the strength of the people, but in the authority of the government. Those out of power envy those in power and are always in search of opportunities to capture power. Because of this, the party in opposition absorbs all the vices of the ruling party. It gives all its attention to the business of discovering and proclaiming the shortcomings and mistakes of the government in power, while the party in power boasts of its own qualities and achievements. The parties tell the people to vote for them and assure them that everything would be all-right if they are elected. During elections every party promises a new millennium and the voter is taken in. No one tells the voters that they are the makers of their own destiny; that no one else can take them to heaven or hell; that their welfare, their liberation is in their own hands, not in the hands of anybody else. The parties destroy the self-confidence of the people.

‘Party’, as the very term suggests, pertains to a part, not to the whole. But human being is an integral whole. When one joins a party, one surely loses one’s moral strength. Parties divide the nation and dissipate its strength.

Differences of opinion are natural. They are necessary. But when political parties are formed on the basis of those differences, ideology becomes secondary and organization, discipline and propaganda assume importance. When mutual rivalry in politics touches every aspect of social life, it has serious repercussions on human development. Party whip makes a mockery of the freedom of opinion.

Party discipline prevents partymen from speaking the truth. They criticize and abuse each other. Sanctity of words is lost; and when that happens, mutual dealings in society are vitiated. Every party has both good and bad individuals within its fold; but the good ones defend the bad ones belonging to their party. They overlook evil tendencies in their parties, keep mum about them or even justify them. Thus party loyalty turns good individuals into bad ones. This is appalling.

We already had in our country divisions on the basis of castes, regions, languages etc. Divisions on the basis of parties have added to it, and it worries me. In this poor and uneducated country all the social workers should devote their entire energies to the service of the people. But the workers are scattered in different political parties; they do not come together even for good causes. Their strengths do not reinforce each other; they work against each other and undermine each other's strength. Within the parties also there are different groups.

Parties are concerned with votes. To that end, they are always busy in trying to whip up passions. They liberally dole out promises which are never fulfilled.

Elections: a sham

In this formal democracy elections have a central place. People have right to vote. But this right is a make-believe. It is like the right given to the sheep to choose their shepherd. Earlier, anyone would come and claim to protect the sheep. This has been replaced by election of the shepherd. This is what democracy means. But the shepherd continues to wield the staff (to discipline the sheep)!

Parties choose candidates and ask people to vote for them. This has brought democracy under the control of party bosses. The voting right has thus been ingenuously withdrawn for all practical purposes. Voting, in fact, is a farce. How can one's different thoughts and opinions be encapsulated in a single piece of ballot paper? When ballot papers are supposed to represent opinions of the people, that results in the war for votes. Rigging, booth-capturing and several other evils have their genesis in this idea. Votes are even purchased. Elections involve a heavy cost, both in terms of money and time; and give rise to mutual hatred. They involve self-praise, abuse of others and telling lies, which no decent man would indulge in. Elections can be won on the basis of caste or creed; then how can those elected be regarded as people's true representatives?

The elected representatives are never the wisest among the people. They represent the average, and not the best in society. They are of average intelligence and wisdom. Nothing could be more terrible than entrusting entire responsibility of our lives to such persons.

The poor have no place in elections. In the present set-up it is not possible for an individual to stand for election unless he is wealthy. How then is the voice of the dumb and poverty-stricken people to be heard? To win elections every sort of division is deliberately exacerbated, creating bitterness. Elections have given a new lease of life to casteism. We do not know the character, even the face of the candidates whom we are expected to vote. These are the main evils of the system of elections. Rather than bringing people together, elections separate them. Elections dissipate the strength of the nation.

Majority rule: wrong principle

Those getting majority of the votes are declared elected. The 'democracy' that we have is thus not the government by the people, but government by the majority. Decisions are taken on the basis of majority. Those decisions are often inappropriate. In any case, minority is aggrieved by those decisions; and those in minority start conceiving plans to impose their views. Conflict and violence are then the inevitable result.

Western idea of 'greatest good of the greatest number' has done this mischief. It has accentuated divisions and given rise to quarrels everywhere. In the past, minority dominated majority. The consequences were not desirable. Our modern democracy, wherein majority dominates minority, came into being as a protest against the power of kings, and it too suffers the same faults as those of the monarchy it displaced. The world, as a result, is being torn apart.

Everywhere majority is the deciding factor. But majority cannot be the criterion for deciding what is true. Majority cannot decide whether the earth revolves round the sun or vice versa. Why should then it be the basis for decisions? Making it so is a product of superficial thinking; it is an unnatural principle that goes against experience. To take an extreme example, if healthy people, who are in majority, feel that the sick ones are a burden on the State and take a decision to kill them, that decision would be perfectly democratic!

I once asked in a lighter vein, "Who are in majority in our country—the fools or the wise?" "Surely the fools are in majority", was the reply. I quipped, "Still you believe in the principle of majority rule, which means that you want rule by the fools!" What we should therefore seek is the contentment of all. Matters cannot be rightly settled by counting heads; that can result in discontent and strife only.

The principle of Sarvodaya is that the good of all is contained in the good of each. Real interests of any one person never clash with those of others. There is no opposition between the real interests of different communities, classes or countries. The very idea of conflicting interests is a mistaken one. If I am intelligent and in good health, this fact is in your interest too. If we imagine that there is conflict between our interests, it is because we have a false notion of what constitutes our interest.

Concentration of power

Prime Ministers and Chief Ministers of today are very much like kings. The only difference is that, unlike the kings, they can claim to work on behalf of the people. Even if they order firing on the people, they claim that they have done so on behalf of the people and have the people's mandate for it. Whims and fancies of chief ministers matter more than the public opinion, although every law claims to have the backing of public opinion. Public opinion, in fact, is so dispersed that it is rarely effective. A farmer never asks bullocks what should be sown—rice or wheat. Similarly a handful of men at the top take decisions and force the people to accept them.

It is true that while a king was ruler for life, a Prime Minister is ruler for five years only. But five years nowadays can hold as much as fifty years did formerly. In the old days, when a king issued a decree, it would take months or even years to reach distant parts of his kingdom. Conditions would often change in the meantime, necessitating another decree. The kings could not thus control the lives of their subjects to any significant extent. But today government orders reach distant corners of the country within hours and can be put into effect immediately. Consequently, whoever rules the country now can do more in five years than his predecessors did in fifty years. So, entrusting enormous power to anyone even for five years—even for five days—is fraught with grave dangers.

It cannot be called democracy when all power is centralized, when a few people are elected to office and everything is in their hands. Do you imagine that because you now have the power to vote, you have in your hands the reality of power? What is it that actually happens in voting? Out of any hundred voters sixty may exercise their votes, and a party which gets thirty votes may come to power as the remaining thirty votes may get divided among various other parties. Thus thirty people can effectively choose the government for a hundred.

Now suppose a bill is to be introduced in the parliament. Thirty representatives of the ruling party hold a meeting. Many of them may be opposed to the bill, but they would vote for it in the parliament if the majority of them favour the same. The representatives, moreover, follow the lead of their party chief or a couple of influential ministers. In this way real power is in the hands of a few individuals only.

The greatest drawback of democratic government is that we come to rely wholly on a handful of men. People's lives are no longer in their own hands. A few individuals are given all the power and the rest hope that the government would protect them. Everything depends on what the man at the top thinks. We let ourselves be dictated by a small elite in a top-heavy democracy and feel that we are secure.

When all the power is concentrated in a handful of persons, what is the meaning of democracy? This is the crux of the matter. Howsoever intelligent those handful of persons may be, they cannot look after the whole gamut of public affairs. The representatives could at the most be entrusted with the work of co-ordination, but we have left everything to them. When they are thus all-powerful, we are at their mercy; they can dominate us, exploit us.

Politics of power

In the past, court intrigues were confined to a handful of courtiers and chieftains. But with the advent of democracy, they have been 'nationalized'; they have reached even the remote villages, with disastrous consequences.

Lord Krishna has taught in the Gita that we should not try to derive any personal benefit from our good deeds; or be motivated by selfishness. But even small-time politicians tell us these days that we should try to derive maximum mileage from our good deeds—that is what politics demands. I have often exhorted politicians to eschew such narrow vision, but to no avail.

In the past, chieftains used to wrangle about their portion in the plunder after successful military expeditions. Today, parties and groups wrangle about the number of seats and the posts. So, what has really changed? What strength does politics really have? It rather dissipates the moral strength. In our country, we do find that most of those who accepted positions of power lost most of the moral stature that they had enjoyed earlier.

Party politics gives people only an illusion of security. People do not gain the confidence of looking after their own security, solving disputes among themselves, and managing their own affairs; they look towards their representatives for everything. The representatives are, so to say, our servants; we are the masters. But we leave everything to be done by them, which makes us masters only in name; in fact, we are slaves. People have no right to do anything for themselves; they must wait for the servants to do it! I feel thirsty, but I would not myself take water and drink it; I would wait for the servant to bring water. If I am not satisfied with his service, I may fire him and appoint another servant. But I would not take water myself. Such is the situation! This is the state of affairs all over the world. It would not do to make use of a few individuals' brains only and let the abilities of all the rest go to waste.

Just a facade

The whole arrangement, in fact, is bogus. Not only does it fail to express the people's strength, it does even more harm than our former kings could do, because governments can now claim to 'represent public opinion'. If the king was good, the administration was good; otherwise it was not. It is just the same today. Formerly, the king chose his generals; nowadays the Prime Minister chooses his/her cabinet.

Can we say that we have freedom when people are not conscious of possessing power? The only difference between the old monarchies and the elected governments of today is that formerly it was other people who put the burden onto my shoulders, while now it is being placed there by my own hands! The new right I have acquired is the right to put burden on myself; but in any case, burden has to be carried by me.

Democracy gives voting right, which implies that everyone should have freedom of opinion. But when education is controlled by the State, the State seeks to manufacture uniform opinions, foreclosing independent exercise of judgement. What then is the point in soliciting people's opinion?

Violence—the last resort

When the country is faced with an external danger, the weakness of democracy is exposed. Democracy should, in fact, prove to be particularly strong in times of crises. However, what we find is that in emergencies, power is delegated to the army. Democracy has no faith in itself. When victorious soldiers come back from a war, they are feted. But there is every possibility that they may seize power and abrogate democracy if they so will. This is what is happening in several countries. It means that in times of emergencies we have to surrender to the goddess of violence! If a system does not work in times of emergencies, what is its worth?

Militaries are getting strengthened everywhere. We spend millions for our security and raise an army; but who will protect us from our own army?

Bureaucracy is the master

We elect a few people as our representatives and the government servants work under their orders. All these people are our servants and we are the masters. But if masters are not alert, servants are going to be the real masters.

Democracy today is the slave of bureaucracy. A new class of government servants has been created. It takes no part in productive work, and at the same time has a high standard of living. The rest of the population has got to support this class. Not only are members of this class excused from any productive or physical labour, they also possess, if they are so minded, the power to oppress others. The highly expensive administrative and other departments of the government are known as 'services'. Officials of these services are paid fat salaries, while their masters, the poor of the country, whom they profess to serve, have to starve. It is a tragic paradox. There can be no greater danger to the country than the creation of such an unproductive middle class.

We find that in the past excesses were committed not by the kings alone; their officials were even more responsible for those excesses. They are still there in democracies. The kings were shown the door by us; we should do away with the bureaucracy too. Otherwise, we would not be happy. Sarvodaya stands for the elimination of bureaucracy. If it is achieved, that would be a step ahead.

'Welfare or 'ill'fare?

Today, in the name of the 'Welfare State', power is concentrated in the hands of the State. Even if people do get a certain amount of benefit out of it, I would still call it not 'welfare, but 'ill'fare, because it keeps power in the hands of a few. The political practice today is to try to use one's authority to force all sorts of things upon society, and no government goes to more frightening lengths in this matter than a Welfare State. What books a child should read, what medicine it should take—everything is decided by the State. The government plans for every part of the nation's work. It takes decisions which touch every aspect of our daily lives. Great masters like Shankaracharya or Ramanujacharya did not have a fraction of authority that a tenth class writer of text-books today has over the people.

A Welfare State appears a very attractive idea. It is said that formerly the State was just a police State; it is good that the State now takes care of the people's welfare. But the idea of the Welfare State is not at all new! Poet Kalidas, while describing the kingdom of King Dilip, says that the king looked after all aspects of his subjects' lives. He was, it is said, their real father—their actual fathers were merely biological ones! These lines of Kalidas simply horrify me. In such a State, people would be so firmly under its control that they would not be able to do anything of their own initiative. They would become completely passive and would lose independence and self-reliance of the spirit.

I sometimes feel that India became a slave nation when we accepted the idea of the Welfare State after gaining independence. During the British regime, we used to rush for relief work in times of natural calamities like earthquakes or floods. But nowadays people do not bother to help each other. They think that the government would do whatever is necessary; they can carry on as usual. This is a mark not of independence but of slavery.

Economic development must be accompanied with moral development; otherwise economic development would not lead to true well-being. It would rather be disastrous for the nation. And the State can do nothing about moral development; it can at best cause material development.

Our mission

An Englishman has written to me recently that in his country too ‘they’ism is rampant under the garb of democracy —the belief that ‘they’ will do everything for us. We want freedom from this ‘they’ism.

It is not wrong to believe that democracy, although it may have certain deficiencies, is the political system nearest to a nonviolent political order. But in a way, to say so has little meaning. One can very well say that a brick is softer and is nearer to bread than a stone; but as far as eating is concerned, a brick cannot take the place of a bread!

What we should therefore be concerned with is the establishment of *Sarvayatan*, the building of people’s power.

3. The concept of *Lokniti*

Selfless service: the quickest way

It is my firm conviction that so long as we want to lord it over others, society cannot be established in the true sense. Power causes disruption in society. If I desire to force my authority on other people against their wishes, that means I am egoistic and anti-social. When I want freedom of thought for myself while denying it to others, I am separating myself from the rest of the community. Where there is a cleavage there can be no community.

In my eyes, power and authority are utterly contemptible and totally worthless. To seek power is no great ambition; it means hankering after something worthless and stooping to a level unbecoming to a human being. To seek power is to degrade oneself. It is the moral stature that really matters.

As long as we have craving for power in our hearts, violence can never be eliminated from the world. I have absolutely no doubt about it. This craving obstructs service.

I am always reflecting upon the problem of elimination of this craving for power from the minds of people. I also examine my own heart to find out whether there is any lurking desire that my ideas should carry authority. If we find that we enjoy the pleasure of people's approval and feel discouraged when they refuse to listen to us, it is a sure sign of the desire to exercise authority. I pray God to remove such feeling from my heart. When the sun rises, does he have a desire that people should get up quickly, open their doors, and let him into their houses? He simply rises. He waits at our door. He does not force his way into the house, but enters to the extent the door is open. With the sun as our model, we should work without any desire or thought of reward. Selfless service should be our ideal. That is the quickest way to get rid of coercive power from the world.

Power and service

Everybody now says that one should serve the nation through power. 'Service through power' is their motto. Who should look after sanitation in your town? The municipality. It is not the responsibility of the people, but that of the municipality! The municipality has taken over the work of sanitation. Taxes have replaced charity. Army has replaced courage and fearlessness. Universities have replaced knowledge. Hospitals have replaced compassion. What is there for the people to do then? Where is the scope for their initiative, their effort and achievement? Now if they want that the sick be nursed, they should drink a lot of tea! Then the government will get higher revenue and it will open a hospital out of it! People need not have compassion; paying taxes is sufficient! They may happily go on indulging themselves. Government will earn taxes and the people will have hospitals; and with their indulgences resulting in increased ailments, hospitals will have more than sufficient work!

Is this the way to ensure well-being of the society? Have you entrusted eating or sleeping to your representatives? Governance—keeping order within the community—too is not an insignificant matter. If you entrust it to somebody else, your life itself will be in peril. The community should itself look after the important areas of its own life; at the most some minor residual matters may be left to the State. Only then will the people be really secure.

These days, power-seekers too have started talking of service. This is certainly a step ahead. There is no grace now in seeking power for its own sake. To seek power for the exercise of authority is not acceptable to the people now. So power-seekers have to talk of serving the people. They are so keen to serve the people that there are tens of candidates in the elections! Had there been such service-mindedness, everything should have been all right with the world. If dozens are ready to clean the ground, would there be any garbage left? But the reality is otherwise. Nobody is ready to take the broom in hand. So we find garbage scattered all over.

Had service been the aim, there would not have been any problem. It is thus clear that the talk of service is all humbug. But at least they are talking of service. So, it is a step ahead. One more step needs to be taken now—to realize that power is not necessary if we want to serve. The next step is to realize that power is, in fact, an obstacle if one really wants to serve; it is a hindrance in the path of service. Power for the sake of power stands firmly rejected now; but it is also to be realized that power is unnecessary, even harmful, even if pure service is the aim. The next step is the elimination of power. This is what Sarvodaya works for.

Sarvodaya wants to demonstrate, and has proved beyond doubt, that power is not necessary for rendering service. People voluntarily donated land in Bhoodan and that land was distributed. It was proved beyond doubt that service does not need the aid of power. Now it has to be explained to the people that power is an impediment in the path of service. Power invariably imposes limitations on service. It vitiates service and adversely affects the process of the change of heart. When society is convinced of this fact, it would take a step further; it would get rid of the institution of the State and take up service independently.

Where is the need for getting elected if one wants to serve? If some kind-hearted person offers medicine to a sick man, will he refuse to take it because he has not 'elected' his benefactor? Of course not; any sufferer welcomes medicine. A genuine social worker would, therefore, realize that he need not get elected in order to serve; and he would not aspire to any office that is won through an election. He would strive to change the polity through change in the people, rather than seeking to change the people through the State. That is the Sarvodaya way.

Voluntary work can get aid from the government. To me, this is fraught with risks. Scriptures say, 'One should never eat food given by the king.' It is true that we have democracy now. But it is not substantially different from monarchy. We must therefore be alert. Prime Minister Nehru once said, "Constructive workers ask for help. It is our duty to help good work; so we help them. But I see that as they become dependent, they lose their lustre." I told him, "I fully concur with you." We must realize that acceptance of government aid weakens our vigour and stature. Not money, but absence of money is our strong point.

Meaning of *lokniti*

All political parties want to use the State apparatus to induce change in the people. They have the great majority of the world's people on their side. Their motto is 'Service through power'. We in the Sarvodaya movement, who seek abolition of political power through service, are in a minority. Those who seek to capture power through service and those who aspire to serve through the mechanism of political power are birds of a feather. Our path is altogether different. For us, service and service alone matters; it is service that is our sole aim; it is service that is our means to make the State wither away. 'Abolition of power through service' is our motto. This is what we call '*lokniti*'—politics of the people.

When we are engaged in some form of service, we feel the need for organisations and structures. While working for the same, we feel that power would enable us to serve better. The journey that starts with the motive of service thus takes us to power.

Alternatively, we may find, while rendering service, that devotion would make the service better and more effective. And when we infuse our service with the spirit of devotion we realize that freedom from ego is essential for true devotion. This path thus takes us to freedom from ego.

There are thus two paths that start from the point of service. Service is like a waiting room at the railway station wherefrom we can take one of the two trains for different destinations. It is the train to freedom from ego that we should choose to board.

The broader your outlook, the greater is the value of your service, and this value depends neither upon its visible results, nor upon its external range. Its value depends on the spirit and purpose which inspire it.

The public service that we indirectly do through the medium of State power can do nothing to bring about transformation in our lives. If I pay double the amount of tax tomorrow, does that mean that I am doing double the service? That I have become more compassionate? There is an element of compulsion in it. Such indirect service through compulsion can never be conducive to one's true progress. We should therefore aim at service through transformation in individuals. Such social service cannot be called politics in the conventional sense. It is politics of a different type. We call it '*lokniti*'.

Power and strength

When a country is under subjugation and political independence has to be the first priority, even saintly men take part in political activities, even though they have little interest in politics, for the source of strength then lies in such activities. Such activities involve sacrifices; and the source of strength lies in sacrifice. But when the country gains freedom the source of strength is no longer in politics. It shifts to service; to bridging the gulf between the high and the low, the master and the servant; in arousing the strength of the oppressed womanhood; in uplifting those lower in the caste hierarchy. The task before the country then is to transform the social structure and establish an egalitarian order. This task calls for sacrifices, dedication, detachment and endurance. Therefore the source of strength lies in them. Strength resides where sacrifice is involved; it resides in the field which offers natural opportunities for sacrifice. Many, however, continue to think that strength still lies in politics, which is a mistaken assumption in the changed circumstances. Now there is power in politics, but there is no strength in it.

There is a vast difference between power and strength, which a little reflection will reveal. Power leads to office. But only a few can hold office. They have to work within the framework of law and the Constitution, and render service which the people—their masters—desire. At every step they meet with temptations of different types, and are in constant danger of slipping. Persons like King Janaka, whose detachment is legendary, are needed there. The rest ought to work in the realm of society and build up strength needed for the country's advancement.

It is not easy even for those in power to render any service so long as they accept the present state of society. No one in power, for example, can use his authority to purge India of the habit of smoking. It is for social workers to wean the people away from such habits. They can build up public opinion against these habits; and those in power can take advantage of the favorable climate of opinion to introduce suitable legislation.

Principle of consensus

Human mind needs to be purged of the instinct to dominate others, to exercise power over others. It is to hold in leash this instinct that democracy has granted universal franchise. It is meant to distribute power and to let everybody have a feeling that they too have a share in power. What could be the basis for giving a single vote to everybody? People differ in intellect, physical strength and wealth. Yet everybody has a single vote. It could have no basis other than the principle that the Self (the soul, *Atman*) is one.

But although democracy has given voting right to all, it counts votes and entrusts the reins of power to those getting majority of votes. Those getting 51% votes get all the power; those getting 49% get not a bit of it. This goes against the principle of the unity of Self. Ideologues of democracy should realize that it is not a question of arithmetic; the idea of the unity of Self is a metaphysical idea and not a mathematical one. Sarvodaya removes this anomaly. It says: Why don't you go to the logical

conclusion? It is wrong to assume that what three out of five persons think is right, and what the other two think is not; it is the unanimous opinion of all the five that should be upheld. Non-acceptance of this principle has resulted in disputes and conflicts between majorities and minorities throughout the world.

What we want is management by the people of their own affairs through consensus. That is what we call *lokniti*. Consensus-building should engage our attention. We find that this principle has been accepted in the United Nations Security Council. The Quakers also make decisions through consensus. Such experiments ought to be carried further.

Unanimity or consensus should be the basis of decision-making. Unanimity may not always be possible; there may be some difference of opinion. In such an eventuality, those differing from the majority point of view should express their opinion, but should not insist on it. Thus there may not be *sarvasammati* (total agreement), but there could be *sarvanumati* (consent by all).

In this context an objection is often raised that even a single stubborn person can block any decision and bring everything to a halt. What is to be done then? His point of view may have an element of truth, or he may just be obdurate. He would have an opportunity to explain his point of view to others. We know that even a single person, if he has truth on his side, can convince others. If he is merely obdurate, the people would have to devise a way to convince him and neutralize his opposition. It is a test for the ingenuity of the people.

If any village assembly fails to reach a consensus on any point, progress of that village would be hampered. But some villages may be successful in building consensus. They would forge ahead; and their progress would be an eye-opener for the villagers who have failed in doing so.

It is through love, and not through fear, that real progress is made. Patience is a vital need. A child sows a seed, but has no patience to let it take its own time to sprout. This is not how adults should behave. When individuals realize that one should not stick to one's views obstinately at the cost of unity and progress of the community (unless a serious point of principle is involved), consensus would not be difficult to achieve.

If this principle is accepted, no one would feel aggrieved. Everyone's talents and abilities would be utilized. Working on the basis of consensus is, in fact, innate to us. It is in harmony with the ethos of Indian tradition and culture. To work on the basis of consensus is our tradition. There is a saying in our country that the unanimous voice of five is the voice of God. By accepting the principle of majority we are forgetting our true nature.

Some may object that this would be all right for the villages, but at other levels their representatives would have to decide by majority. But these representatives would have been so chosen that they would cultivate the habit of taking all important decisions unanimously. The main things in life such as food, clothing and education would in any case be controlled by the villages. In matters of secondary importance, even if decisions are taken by majority, minority opinion would not care much and would not feel as aggrieved as to lead to serious conflicts.

Politics is outdated

Many of the forces that have been dominant in the world are now getting weakened. They are going to fade away soon. Their days are numbered.

Religion is one such force. It works in the inner recesses of the mind. Politics is another such force; it works in the external world. It did try to bring together to some extent people who were dispersed and unrestrained and were working against one another. We should indeed be grateful to it for its contribution in uniting people although it did not touch their inner core. But now politics is unable to meet the demands of the age of science. Politics, while it brought some people together, also caused their separation from others. Today its overall impact is divisive. It brought some people

together in the name of nationalism, and separated them from others. It causes divisions even within the countries. It cannot bring people together as it engenders distrust and suspicions. There was a time when distrust and suspicion had some utility. In the realm of politics, they were looked upon as indication of shrewdness. But in this age of science they no longer have any intrinsic strength. Politics, based on distrust and suspicion will not survive now. Science has put deadly weapons in the hands of human beings. Politics based on distrust will therefore spell disaster for the human race.

People believe that utterances of politicians are not to be taken at their face value. Words of politicians are supposed to lend themselves to various interpretations. When Gandhiji preached non-violence, the people did not initially take it seriously. But when they saw him fasting after the outbreaks of violence, they realized that he meant what he said. The power of words then began to work. But today people do not believe in the words of politicians. This is a dangerous situation for democracy; it cannot survive if words lose their power.

When the power of words is blunted, there is no alternative to the power of violence. That is what is happening in several countries in the world. If we want to avoid this eventuality, we have to ensure that the power of words—in other words, power of mutual trust—remains effective.

If we want peace and prosperity in the world, three things are essential. The first one is Vedanta, which means an end to all organised religions and enshrining of pure spirituality in the minds of people. The second one is science, which connects the people. And the third one is trust. If trust informs politics, it will get transformed into *lokniti*.

Politics has now become outdated.

Politics, religions and sociology have inverted the scale of moral values, and in the process, have impaired the social fabric. They have adversely affected the whole social structure. Politics has polluted the whole atmosphere. People have got fed up with it. That is why I say that it is high time that it should go, yielding place to *lokniti*. If present politics continues, the day is not far off when the whole world would be under the heels of military dictatorships.

I have absolutely no faith in politics. It cannot achieve anything worthwhile. Our experience of the post-Independence period has proved it beyond doubt. People have tested all the political parties by bringing them into power, but nothing good came out of it. Ramakrishna Paramhans used to say that although an almanac gives forecast about rains, not a drop of water could be had by squeezing it! That is true of political power as well.

If we desire Sarvodaya (the uplift of all), parochial politics needs to be put to an end. I have put forward the following equation:

Politics + Science = Total doom

Spirituality + Science = Sarvodaya

Collaboration of science with the present party politics will ruin us. Science should be wedded to spirituality; then this land will become a veritable paradise.

Religious sectarianism and politics are the forces that are now as good as finished. The forces that are ascending are science and spirituality. They are the forces of the future. Party politics, power politics, local politics—all of them will be things of the past. They will certainly trouble us no end before they meet their end. But they have to go. They cannot survive when the sun of science begins to rise.

Politics vis-à-vis *lokniti*

Shri Shankardev, a great poet-saint of Assam, has written in his work 'Kirtanghoshā' that politics is the science of demons. I call *lokniti* the science of the gods.

‘*Lokniti*’—it is a new word coined by me. The word is new, but the idea is an old one. It means that not political power, but the power of love should be operative in the world. There should be internal restraint; not external power. As long as such power is there, there cannot be peace and prosperity.

Lokniti implies gradual transfer of power to the people. The State should always stay in the background or it should completely wither away, and a political system of the people and by the people should take its place. The reins of initiative should pass on to the people and they should demonstrate that they have the will and ability to utilize the opportunity.

In politics, you begin at the top and go towards the bottom; the initiative and authority are with those who are at the apex of power. In *lokkniti*, attempt is to move upward from below. Politics involves centralization of power; *lokkniti* implies decentralization of power. In politics, a few at the top rule others; in *lokkniti*, the initiative is always in the hands of the people. There is very little of the leader and follower phenomenon in *lokkniti*.

We want to build a society on the foundation of truth. The truth is that all our talents and wealth are there for the service of society; and they should be dedicated to it as society has the first right over them. We want people to realize this truth and act accordingly. It is not that this truth was never realized in the past, but it was not sought to be made the foundation of society. Society today accepts private property; it is on the foundation of right to property that our government, our laws and our Constitution stand. We want to overturn this belief. We want to put an end to politics and replace it with *lokkniti*.

Power politics and strength politics are two diametrically opposite things. If you pursue power politics, you lose your strength. It is selfless service that augments strength. Don’t you think that the best among the social workers lost their strength when they occupied positions of power? Scriptures say that penance and austerities lead one to the throne of heaven, but the very moment one reaches that throne, one starts losing one’s moral strength. Strength politics means consolidating the inner strength of the people.

The springs of power are not in the government, they are in your heart and in mine. This inner power can be put to any use. People ask me if I can solve this or that problem for them. I tell them: ‘If you really wish so, you can solve it yourselves.’ This is what we have to understand.

Bhoodan is a movement to strengthen the people in this way. Therefore, it does have political overtones. Still, it is a movement that strikes at the root of current politics. Redistribution of land is, in fact, incidental to it; making the people conscious of their strength would be its real achievement. They would be freed of the habit of looking towards the government for everything and would start believing in themselves. This would make the government redundant in one respect. Bhoodan has shown a way to weaken the power of the State.

Building up people’s power

Sometimes people ask me: Why don’t you take the responsibility of governance of the country? My reply is that there are already two bullocks (ruling party and opposition) harnessed to the cart; would I be of any use if I were to become the third? Would it not be better if I were to help the cart to go in the right direction? We should devote ourselves to the generation of people’s power; that would be the best possible help rendered to the government and that would be the best possible service to the country as well.

To create *lokshakti*—independent and self-reliant power of the people—must be our mission. We should try to solve serious and grave problems faced by the people through people’s power. We would then be able to get rid of the tendency to rely on political power. It needs to be explored how we can render service independent of power, and how strength can be created through service. The

people's power that we seek to create would be opposed to the power of violence, and would be different from the coercive power of the State. That coercive power has been entrusted to the State by us; and although it does have an element of violence in it, its character differs from that of naked violence, as it enjoys our sanction; and we therefore ought to distinguish between the two and put them in different categories.

Throwing of stones by a mob and the police firing ordered by a democratically elected government do not belong to the same category. The latter has a sanction behind it, which the former lacks. So long as the people do not direct the government to disband the army and the police, that firing would continue to have a sanction. Even though the bullet can kill whereas the stone can at the most injure, that bullet is nearer to non-violence than the stone.

Our duty is to create conditions wherein the coercive power of the State need not be used. This is our mission. If we fail in doing this and hanker after public service which can be done through the mechanism of the State, we would fail in fulfilling the expectations from us.

Take an example. A war is on and the soldiers are getting wounded. Those who devote themselves to the service of the wounded are moved by pity and compassion. They enter the battlefield risking their lives, and tend the wounded as a mother would tend her children. Their service is indeed valuable. But they cannot stop the war. Their compassion is an aspect of the society that accepts the necessity of war. It is like a cog in the wheel of war. In a machine, there are many cogs and wheels, and they may turn in opposite directions; yet they all are parts of the same machine. One part of the war machine kills soldiers, and the other nurses the wounded. They do work in opposite directions. Everyone can see that one is merciless, the other is merciful. Yet the mercy of the merciful joins forces with the cruelty of the cruel, and together they constitute war. Both are necessary for carrying on the war. To put it bluntly, so long as we accept war, we are war criminals; it is immaterial whether we are fighting as soldiers or nursing the wounded.

This makes it clear that the kingdom of mercy cannot be established merely by undertaking acts of mercy. The kingdom will continue to be that of cruelty. Mercy in the kingdom of cruelty is like salt in bread; it makes the latter palatable and tastier. Mercy and compassion in the nursing of the wounded cannot put an end to war. Such acts of mercy are not part of our mission. Such service may appear compassionate and even constructive, but we should not be tempted to take it up without seeing it in the wider perspective. Otherwise, although we shall certainly be of some service, that service will not be one that we are supposed to render, and which both the people and we know to be our calling.

I shall give you another example. A lot of people say to me, "Your word seems to carry weight with the government. Why don't you then insist on legislation for the redistribution of land without compensation?" My reply is that I am not standing in the way of any legislation. Even if I am only partially successful in the way that I have chosen (Bhoodan), my work will surely facilitate legislation; it will create congenial environment for legislation. But if I were to start clamouring for the law, holding it essential, I should be untrue to my own calling. My task is to believe that without the help of law a spirit can be kindled in the hearts of the people which would impel them to come forward for land redistribution on their own accord, whatever the law may say. Do mothers need law to feed their children?

There is a power in the human heart that enriches life. A human being has faith in love. If I fail to venture to develop this power in society even after experiencing the strength of love in human life, and begin instead to clamour for laws, I should be failing in my duty. What we should do is to develop the power of the people, which is opposed to the power of violence and is different from the coercive power of the State.

Our way for the solution of the land problem differs from that of the government. Nobody would blame the government if it used coercive power. But that would not be conducive to the development of the people's power. We do not seek economic development only; our aim is the development of the people's power. Whatever constructive work we may do, we shall do it in a way that would make people independent of the coercive power of the State.

Our way of working

With this perspective, it becomes obvious that our way of working will have two main components, which I call *vichar-shasan* (discipline of thought) and *kartritva-vibhajan* (decentralization of authority, capacities and capabilities).

Vichar-shasan means that ideas should be explained and understood; it means that no proposition should be accepted without being understood, and that it should be a matter of regret for us when anyone accepts our ideas without understanding them. It means that we should not impose our will and ideas upon others; we should rather be content with explaining our position. It follows, then, that one aspect of our work is dissemination of ideas.

Kartritva-vibhajan means that the capacities and capabilities for work, and the power that accrues from them should be built up in every village instead of being centralized. To that end, we desire that every village should have the right to decide for itself which goods should be imported and which should not—that is, it should have control over its imports and exports. If village self-government means nothing but freedom to build roads and sweep streets, villagers would have no interest in it. They must have control over matters that are really important to their lives. Whatever we are doing is with this end in view; that is why we seek redistribution of land. Unless we distribute power and authority in this manner, military power cannot be done away with.

Real strength lies in the Self and nowhere else. When an individual realizes this strength, nobody can exercise power over him. Realization of the power of the Self is the way towards freedom from the State.

Purity and equipoise of the mind lead to steadfast wisdom which the Gita talks about; and that would give people ability to make right decisions. It is *sine qua non* for freedom from the State.

Attitude towards politics

There are two viewpoints about participation in politics. Some are of the opinion that we should not take part in politics. The risk of slipping is always there. We should remain neutral and be ever ready for the service of all alike, for example, like those working in hospitals. Otherwise we would not be able to accomplish what we want.

The second viewpoint asserts that politics can destroy with little effort what you build with great efforts. Politics pervades everything; it embraces every realm of life. We must therefore participate in it.

We should understand that the current politics is divisive in nature. It is creating divisions in the world on different pretexts. The casteists are creating divisions on the basis of castes, communalists are doing so on the basis of religious communities, nationalists on the basis of nations, political parties on the basis of party affiliations. Their thinking is never holistic. But in this age of science, we are sure to take a beating if we persist in fragmented thinking. We should look a little ahead of the times. We, who believe in the Sarvodaya ideology, should devote ourselves to strengthening the forces of unity and integration. It is crystal-clear to us that the current politics is doomed to failure. Participation in it would be detrimental to us. It is true that there are some disadvantages in being out of politics. But then we have to weigh the merits and demerits of anything before taking a position. Such an exercise has convinced us that we should not take part in politics.

A political party represents a part, not the whole. Voting for any party, therefore, divides the society. That is why we should not cast votes. Boycott of elections is also a sort of constructive programme.

We, the Sarvodaya workers, do not stand for elections; some of us do not even vote. Then, it is asked, how can we bring about changes in laws? It is like saying, 'If a man does not climb the tree, how can he cut it?' Well, he can cut the tree essentially because he stands aside and does not climb the tree. Sarvodaya wants to have a firm hold on the master—the people. It wants to convince them. Then whatever they want would get translated into legislation.

It is said that there is a tendency in some quarters to oppose the idea of *lokniti*; and I am asked how such opposition should be met. I answer that nobody can stand in the way of *lokniti*; whoever attempts it will fall by the wayside. *Lokniti* is not a negative concept; it does not confine itself to exposing the faults of current power politics. We do realize that although the present politics is not people's politics in the real sense, people have accepted it. We have therefore to bring about a change in the people's thinking and perception rather than wasting our energy and spending our time in fault-finding. That is the only way to transform politics.

Current party politics is based on coercion. We therefore do not pay much heed to it. That does not mean that we have no political line. We do have a definite political line. But our politics is not sectarian. It includes all and believes in the direct participation of all men and women in societal affairs. We call it *lokniti* as opposed to *rajniti* (politics).

We definitely pay attention to what is going on in the realm of politics; we criticize it whenever necessary and make suggestions for its improvement as well. We neither deny the importance of politics nor do we try to avoid it like the plague. We are neither escapist nor affected by momentary asceticism. We hold that a government, which is in power because it has succeeded in getting 51% of the votes, is not a representative government in the true sense of the term. It works in the name of the people, but people have no place in this system. Their voice is not even heard. We seek to end this system. Our aim is to build up a new kind of politics, and in order to do so, we keep ourselves aloof from the old kind. We call this new politics '*lokniti*'.

We want to bring about nonviolent revolution through constructive work. We should therefore turn our back to elections and related activities. We should be indifferent to them. There is no need to oppose them, for opposition actually strengthens what is opposed, while ignoring weakens it. Indifference is a force in its own right. In fact, opposing somebody casts us in the same mould as that of the opponent. We should therefore keep away from elections so long as we have not been able to shape public opinion. Such indifference would generate strength which would influence the course of politics.

Potency of indifference has always been recognized in our tradition. Jain, Buddhist as well as Vedic scriptures have talked about its efficacy. It does not mean inaction; it rather requires continuous, dedicated and self-directed work. Those who work in such a way neutralize strong opposition with indifference.

There is a story of the demon Bakasur in Mahabharata. He came to kill Bheema (one of the Pandava brothers). But Bheema paid no heed to him; he bore all the blows of the demon without a murmur and continued eating. After finishing his food, he got up and killed the demon. Had he not initially ignored Bakasur and eaten his fill, he would not have acquired the strength necessary to overpower the demon.

We, the Sarvodaya workers, therefore concentrate on the work in hand. Politics does not deserve to be paid any attention at the cost of the fundamental work that we are engaged in. We have to realize that with the advent of the atomic age, the days of politics are numbered.

To eradicate politics, people should boycott elections. If all the ballot boxes remain empty, the show of 'democracy' will be over. Then the whole Constitution will have to be rewritten. It is for the people to bring this about. Suffrage includes the right to vote as well as the right to refuse to vote.

The more I think about *lokniti*, the more I am convinced that those who accept the present power politics, even for the purpose of destroying it, are bound to fail. To destroy power politics you have to stay out of it. The desire to keep contact with something, even in order to destroy it, is a subtle illusion.

Some people ask me why I do not enter politics. I ask myself whether it would it be possible for me to work as a free man as I do today, with nothing to hinder me from speaking the truth as I see it? Every time I open my mouth I would have to pause to think about the probable effect of my words on the people, whether I would gain or lose votes and so on. I would no longer feel the inward, spiritual strength which I experience now. I would then be obliged to run tamely along the railway track like a wagon chained to its engine.

I do not think that we have to go to legislatures to influence the government. I believe that if we work among the masses, our voice would be more effective and have a far-reaching influence on the government. When people's power is built through mass movements, it would inevitably influence the government.

We do not participate in elections not because we want to non-cooperate with the government. In fact, we wish to fully cooperate with it. We want it to wither away; and the government should also be happy about it. The flower withers and drops down before the tree bears fruit. But it is a matter of joy for the flower, not a matter of sorrow.

One just cannot purify politics by participating in it. Since time immemorial, several rivers have been bringing non-saline water to the ocean, but to no avail; the water of the ocean has remained saline. We should take a lesson from these rivers.

Gandhiji and *lokniti*

People think that Gandhiji was a politician with a great hold on politics. This is an illusion. To me, whatever he did was informed by an understanding of *lokniti* and was for the development of *lokniti*. On the eve of independence, he was in Noakhali, and not in Delhi, the national capital. He had chosen his place. It shows his disposition. Political independence was a by-product of his work; what he did in Noakhali was his real work. His efforts to free the wretched people from slavery were not for the seizure of power, although it may appear so; they were experiments in truth; they were meant to build up *lokniti*.

At the Round Table Conference (in 1931, in London) Gandhiji said, "I demand independence for India with great humility, as it is the only remedy for India's poverty." He provided a purpose to the demand for independence. This was surely not the language of a politician; it was the language of one who believed in *lokniti*.

Gandhiji had also said that the British Viceroy's mansion would be converted into a hospital in free India. These words express the quintessence of nonviolent revolution. What happens in a violent revolution is very different. Revolutionaries either shell or demolish by cannon such seats of authority, or they are content in unfurling their own flag there. That is the way of politics and violence. Gandhiji was certainly not a practitioner of such politics; what he stood for was *lokniti*.

Had it not been so, he would not have advised the Indian National Congress, in his 'Last Will and Testament', to become Lok-sevak Sangh—a band of non-political social workers. Anybody with a little knowledge of politics would find this advice strange. Gandhiji had realized that with the Congress taking up the reins of power, politics would take the place of *lokniti* that was being practised till then. His was a profoundly wise proposal. It shows his genius. His idea was that the

Congress, the biggest organization in the country, should become an organization devoted to service. Even a violent society does have organizations devoted to service, but in a nonviolent society the biggest organization should be one that has service as its sole and exclusive aim.

Secondly, the idea was meant to ensure control over governmental power by a community of selfless social workers uncontaminated by political power. Service would then have prime importance in society, and political power would be subservient to it. However, this could not happen due to various reasons, and the Congress became primarily an election-machine.

I would not go into the causes behind the rejection of Gandhiji's proposal. Perhaps that could be justified. But this rejection did create conditions hostile to the development of nonviolence in our country.

Need for selfless workers

We did not follow Gandhiji's advice. But whatever may be the form of political system, society must have a large group of workers free from party affiliations, continually engaged in the dispassionate service of all, and continually on the alert. It should hold no position of authority. Such a group can be effective only if it stays away from office, not out of contempt but with an understanding of the limitations of power and with the realization that the source of strength lies not in power, but in the service of the community.

These workers would live a life marked by purity, restraint and physical labour. They would always be engaged in studies, conscientious in their study of facts, and ready for sacrifice. They would pay special attention to the neglected areas of social service. They would express themselves fearlessly and dispassionately on public issues, pointing out mistakes of both the people and the government, so as to exert a moral influence on both of them. And should the need for active resistance arise, they would not flinch from it. Such resistance may better be called a kind of surgery instead of resistance, as a man undergoing surgery too wants it. Satyagraha is another name for such resistance. Search for nonviolent solutions of the social problems would also be their important task.

'Spiritualization' of politics

Gandhiji tried to spiritualize politics. His attempt did bear fruit to some extent, as it was in the pre-Independence era. But once Independence appeared around the corner, politics said goodbye to spirituality, and politicians told Gandhiji that their path was now different; there was 'parting of ways'. It then became clear that what appeared to be spiritualization of politics was an illusion. The point is that the work for Independence of a slave country is not really politics, though it may appear so. It is nothing but *lokniti*. And after Independence, spiritualization of politics can mean nothing but the end of politics.

Gandhiji was not the first person to attempt spiritualization of politics. It was tried in earlier times as well. Prophet Mohammed tried to do it. The great Constantine tried the experiment in Europe. But these attempts did not succeed. Politics and ethics are mutually contradictory. When politics has the upper hand, ethics is a casualty; and when ethics—or the moral law—prevails, politics is bound to crumble.

'Spiritualization of politics' therefore means replacement of power politics by *lokniti*. There is no other way. An attempt to spiritualize politics in an Independent democratic country in the atomic age would inevitably cause the breakdown of politics. The word '*rajniti*' is formed by two words—*raj* (Government) and *niti* (Moral code). These two words are mutually contradictory. Where *niti* rules, government disintegrates; where there is a coercive government (*raj*), *niti* is destroyed. You cannot let fire enter into wood without causing it to burn. Wood cannot have fire in it and still remain wood.

Politics cannot remain politics after the entry of ethics into it. It would inevitably get transformed into *lokniti*.

Two different experiments have been made in our country. Buddha, Shankaracharya, Shukadev carried out the experiment of renouncing the world. Mohammed, Nanak, Gandhi tried to spiritualize politics. They were all great men. We have now to decide what we should do. If I may put it in Marxian terms I would suggest that the first was thesis, the other was antithesis, and what we are now trying to arrive at is a synthesis. We are trying to transform *rajniti* into *lokniti*. We would thus imbibe the good and avoid shortcomings in both of them.

Politics in the global perspective

All the nations in the world are coming closer to each other. The whole world has become one neighbourhood. We hope that a day will dawn when the citizens of any country can freely move about in the world, can serve the people in any part of the world, work anywhere in the world; and we are working towards that end. Everybody will then be a world citizen, and will have all the rights associated with it. There will be no need for either visa or passport. All international borders will be obliterated. I visualize that such a day is not far off. The world will become one. Nothing else is compatible with the age of science. Science has made all of us citizens of the world. It is definitely going to unite the whole world. Otherwise human race will not survive.

How will the world be administered when peace is established in the entire world? Will it be administered from a central place just as India is being administered from Delhi, its capital? Certainly not. Countries will also not then be administered from their capitals. Centres like Delhi will then be the seats of selfless, dispassionate, learned and wise persons, who will advise and guide the people. People will normally respect that advice, but will have the right to take decisions contrary to that advice if they think that the situation so demands. People will manage their own affairs. There will be *swarajya* in every village; and so will there be *swarajya* in the whole world.

When dawn breaks, rays of the sun reach every home in every village in every country. It is not that they reach only the capitals and one believes that it is dawn, even though one has not directly seen the sun rise. Likewise, *swarajya* has to be a matter of everybody's direct experience.

People themselves would plan for their material, moral, social and economic needs. Every village would have its own distinctive pattern of planning. A global institution would be a coordinating and harmonizing agency. Institutions between a village and the global institution—present provinces, nations etc.—would be nothing but intermediate links. They would have no other role to play. These intermediate links would not be strong; they would be rather loose.

A village is not an imaginary concept; it is a concrete reality. Men and women have been living there for thousands of years. Districts and provinces and nations are all man-made. Village and the universe are the only natural and true units.

Once some ex-armymen greeted me with '*Jai Hind!*' (Victory to India). I responded with the salutation '*Jai Hind, Jai Duniya, Jai Hari!*' (Victory to India, Victory to the world, Victory to God.) Subsequently I coined the phrase '*Jai Jagat*' (Victory to the world).

'*Jai Jagat*' is a *mantra*—a sacred incantation. It is in keeping with the Indian psyche and Indian tradition. In India, Western education introduced liberal ideas and corrected some wrong notions, but at the same time it also introduced some parochial ideas like nationalism. Nationalism was an alien implantation on the Indian soil. It has taken root in India. But nationalism is not in tune with the atomic age. The force of the atomic age is inexorably working to unite the world. Nationalism divides the world; and has therefore become out of date.

Naturally, parochial or national politics will not survive now. What is now needed is a new approach and look at political problems from a universal standpoint; what is now needed is a politics

that works for the unity of the world—in other words, the politics of '*Jai Jagat*' is the need of the day. This universal, all-embracing outlook I call *lokniti*. We are trying to build up a society of the free and the equal which will rule itself; a society wherein everyone will rule over oneself. We want the emergence of universal beings—persons who are not influenced by anything parochial and think in a global perspective. The politics which would create such people—the world-citizens—ought not to be called 'politics'; it is not politics in the conventional sense of the term. It is better to call it *lokniti*.



