

CALL FOR PARTICIPATION

LOKAVIDYA JAN ANDOLAN

(PEOPLE'S KNOWLEDGE MOVEMENT)

FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
12-14 NOVEMBER, 2011, VARANASI, INDIA

Vidya Ashram (www.vidyaashram.org) invites you to participate in the First International Conference of the Lokavidya Jan Andolan to be held on 12-14 November, 2011, in Vidya Ashram, Sarnath, Varanasi, India. We will also be holding an online preparatory dialog from 1st July to 31st August. We invite you to participate in this dialog as well. Please visit <http://lokavidyajananandolan.blogspot.com> or write to vidyaashram@gmail.com for latest information.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND THE KNOWLEDGE STANDPOINT

In India displacement of people from their land, their houses and their work has emerged as the single largest concern of the social movements. Movements of peasants against forced acquisition of land and for remunerative prices, movements of *adivasis* (indigenous people) and local communities for local control of natural resources and against ecological and environmental destruction, movements of slum dwellers for civic and social facilities, and the movements of hawkers and artisans against systematic demolition of the local markets and inroads by the corporations and the global market, have all converged to become a single movement against displacement and eviction, though managed and organized separately. Those trying to organize these people are struggling to find pathways to confront the ruling dispensation.

All these people, the displaced, the communities they belong to, have never gone to college and live by the knowledge they possess, called *lokavidya*, which they have acquired from elders, from peers, in the community, at the site of work, through experiments and by their own genius. Displacement alters the conditions of their life in such a way that *lokavidya* is no more able to serve their life needs and thus turns them into sources of cheap labour. It is this severance of *lokavidya* from their lives, which needs to be fought at all costs. In fact *lokavidya*, that is people's knowledge, skills, ways of thinking, values, methods of organization, aesthetic and ethical sensibilities, in short, their *world of knowledge as a part of their own world*, is the main source of their strength. *Lokavidya* is also what is common to this multitude, which is at the receiving end. It is important to understand that the emancipatory pathways today traverse through the world of knowledge. The *Lokavidya* standpoint is the people's standpoint in the Age of Information.

LOKAVIDYA-KNOWLEDGE CLAIM

Peasants and indigenous people the world over are in a new mood of assertion. Expressing, articulating and representing in ways that are their own, these people are staking a claim to their inalienable right to live by their own knowledge, values and belief systems and acquire knowledge that they deem fit for them. Asia, Africa, South America, everywhere a new kind of turmoil is in the

making, promising to produce a new unity of the oppressed and the dispossessed, this time based on what is common in their understanding of the world around them, in their relationship with nature, namely based on *lokavidya*.

This means that peasants and *adivasis*, artisans and women, pavement retailers and workers need to stake a claim for *lokavidya*. *This is not a claim for survival, this is a claim to build a new world.* They need to claim that a radical challenge to capital and commercialization of knowledge can be posed only by *lokavidya*. They need to also claim that only *lokavidya* provides the knowledge bases for a society based on truth, on social and economic equality. We need to understand that until these claims are staked we shall remain prisoners of our preconceived notions of radical social change, without effect. Such a *lokavidya*-knowledge claim can give birth to a new imagination, new thought in the realms of economics, society, politics and culture. The process of giving shape to such claims is the process of *Lokavidya Jan Andolan*.

LOKAVIDYA JAN ANDOLAN (LJA)

The global economic and ecological crises have exposed the thought and institutions that have enriched a few by making the majority starve and by bringing nature to the brink of destruction. Lokavidya Jan Andolan is a knowledge movement of this majority, that is of those people, who have been dubbed as the ignorant masses by the science establishments, the universities and the modern state. The idea that there is a sea of knowledge outside the university is not alien to most people in the world. Knowledge is widely spread in society and the idea that knowledge is widely spread, has a very wide spread too. That is, people know and they know that they know. And yet neither these people nor the knowledge they possess have dignity in society. Their knowledge has no economic returns, so people are poor. It has no respect in the public domain, so people are culturally marginal. It has no clear relation with peoples' organizations, therefore people are politically irrelevant. There is a need for a political movement, a space where people can mobilize on the basis of their knowledge. This movement is the *Lokavidya Jan Andolan*.

The conference is an attempt to bring together the organizers of the movements of peasants and artisans, indigenous peoples and small trades-people, women and youth on a knowledge platform, which is a platform of their knowledge, *lokavidya*. It is from this platform that the claim can be staked that it is in *lokavidya* that the solution lies.

KNOWLEDGE MOVEMENTS WORLDWIDE

The world is witnessing a new kind of movement, a people's knowledge movement with entirely new political imaginations. The ideas of *lokavidya* in India, Rights of Mother Earth in Bolivia, Rights of Nature in Ecuador, Food Sovereignty by the International Peasants Movement Via Campesina, and Cognitive Capitalism and the idea of Knowledge Liberation in Europe and America are indications of a churning hitherto unknown to political debates. There is an insistence in all these that people are knowledgeable and that their knowledge and beliefs are not inferior in any way to knowledge doled out in the name of science. There is an understanding that the damage done to people and nature over the past centuries, which is multiplied manifold in this digital era of the

New Empire, is correctable only by those who have not been fully subsumed into the systems of modern knowledge.

Lokavidya Jan Andolan argues that these and all such struggles worldwide constitute a new fraternity of struggles, building a worldwide knowledge movement of the people, a movement of people's knowledge, a movement of knowledge in society.

THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF LOKAVIDYA JAN ANDOLAN

VENUE: Vidya Ashram, Sarnath, Varanasi, India

DATES: November 12-14, 2011

SESSIONS: The first two days of the conference will have three thematic sessions, namely

- The idea of *lokavidya* and people's knowledge movement,
- The struggles that underline and make space for such an idea and
- The strategy and organization of the Lokavidya Jan Andolan

The third day will be devoted to the role and place of language, art, media and philosophy in the *Lokavidya Jan Andolan*. Those not working with the idea of *lokavidya* will also get ample time to articulate their views on the idea and practice of a people's knowledge movement.

Participants are expected to make their own arrangements for travel to Varanasi. Vidya Ashram will take care of local lodging and boarding.

You can also contact the following people for more information.

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We look forward to seeing you in Varanasi.

Vidya Ashram

Sarnath, Varanasi, India

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