

Knowledge Satyagraha

Dialogue on Knowledge in society III



Vidya Ashram, Varanasi
The Gandhian Institute of Studies, Varanasi
Indigen Research Foundation, Pune

India Social Forum , Delhi

India Social Forum, Delhi, 2006

INVITATION

Knowledge Satyagraha

11 November, 2006, Afternoon 1.00 to 4.00

Friends,

The computer and communications industry has it like none else perhaps. Internet is being described as a boon for the humanity. In these sectors the companies have done thousands of crores of business in less than 10 years. Stories of their profits sound like sci-fi. All the governments are devoted to promoting them. Tax concessions, real estate subsidies, creation of market and much more. In this very period, on the other hand, peasant, artisan and worker households have faced extreme pauperisation. Lands have been grabbed, habitats have been uprooted, small economic activities have become completely unviable, there is as if a job drought at the lower end. Are the two not related?

Globalisation has its technical basis in computers and communications. American wars are opening pathways for building knowledge based society. 'Information Age' and 'Knowledge Based Society' are the new idioms of this change process. Internet is the new place of knowledge, communication and organisation of information. Large campaigns are on to capture in the computer the knowledge that governs the ordinary life. This is the knowledge that has a large spread in society, it is with peasants, artisans, adivasis and women. Crores and crores are being spent on such computerisation. This then would be pressed in the service of the world of capital by the higher educated through the Internet. They will use our knowledge to disrupt our future. Our skills, our knowledge, our methods of organisation and our labour will be used against us for exploitation and deprivation.

Such activity on the Internet is called knowledge Management (KM). This itself is called knowledge in this Age of Information. This is the American principle of knowledge. Opposition to America, which is a reality in every part of the world can take more effective and lasting shape if we understand that the new systems of exploitation and deprivation have their foundation in knowledge management and that knowledge in society, lokavidya is that weapon in possession of the common man which can enable the challenge to the New Empire to last as long as the Empire lasts. Knowledge Satyagraha is such a challenge.

Knowledge management has carved a place for itself above science, a position of command from where it may control all methods, forms and activities of knowledge in different spheres and of different traditions. As a result there is an extraordinary storm in the world of knowledge. Philosophical analysis of nature and society which developed and took firm roots in over 400 years in the West finds its house in total disarray. As a result, significant philosophical, scientific, political, economic and cultural dialogues have merged into one the knowledge dialogue. We wish to intervene in this dialogue from *lokavidya* standpoint. We wish to render this dialogue closer to the people through the use of appropriate language and idiom. We wish to make this dialogue less abstract and more direct such that the common man and the social activist understand it and therefore, are able to participate in it.

It is with such intent that we are organising this debate in the India Social Forum under the title "Knowledge Satyagraha". You must come and contribute your bit, as we all plan to do, to find ways of engagement with the new situation.

Organisers

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Taking the Knowledge Debate to the People
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VIDYA ASHRAM

Vidya Ashram, started in 2004, is a place in Sarnath, Varanasi which runs with the contribution of those who are broadly in agreement. It is devoted to a new dialogue on knowledge and an equal place for *lokavidya* in this dialogue. Its objective is to build a place where the knowledge activity finds a new expression, where, knowledge and ordinary life gel with one another, where, they empower each other for the building of a new society.



THE GANDHIAN INSTITUTE OF STUDIES

The Gandhian Institute of Studies, is supported by the Central & the State Governments for studies into society. It was founded in 1960 by Loknayak Jayaprakash Narayan at Rajghat, Varanasi. The Institute has all along tried to build a link between the Gandhian movement and the Social Sciences. Jayaprakash ji had expressed that if this effort succeeds, its consequences will be of incalculable value.



INDIGEN RESEARCH FOUNDATION

Indigen Research Foundation was founded in Pune in the year 2001. Its chief object is to critically analyse and appreciate the relationship of the Information and Communication Technologies with the society. It has been involved in knowledge based philosophical, social, economic, political and cultural analyses of social changes in the wake of the Information Age.



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Knowledge Satyagraha

Friends,

This is an invitation for dialogue. A dialogue which prepares us for knowledge satyagraha. If we understand and accept that knowledge ought to really inhabit in the ordinary life of the people then we start understanding the meaning of this satyagraha. If the ordinary people, peasants, artisans, women, adivasis and very small business types have survived the onslaught of imperialism and colonial domination and if at some level they have been able to protect (and also enrich) their knowledge, their methods of logic and justice, their ideas of organisation and education and their values and relationships, it is because they adopted the course of knowledge satyagraha. Now the technology of computer and communication has built a basis for reorganisation of imperialism into a new Empire. This is happening for everybody to see in the American leadership. The question that we wish to raise is whether knowledge satyagraha is one of the chief instruments of challenge to this Empire. And if yes, how?

Today if we ask about the locations of knowledge in society, four distinct places may be identifiable:—(i) Monasteries, (ii) Universities, (iii) Internet and (iv) Ordinary Life. The paradigms of knowledge in different places are different. Their philosophies are different and their roles in society are different too from one another.

Knowledge in the monasteries has an other worldly element in it. Such knowledge does not render itself to tests on concrete criteria. Due to the nature of this knowledge and its spread in society different monasteries and sects tend to support communal and sectarian politics.

Knowledge in the university is based in science. Its development in Europe can be clearly seen from the 17th century. Europe has during this period ruled almost over the entire world. The Industrial Revolution and Colonisation were the great (mis)happenings. Societies world over got disorganised and their resources plundered by the West, a loot which still continues. Science provided the knowledge basis to all this and worked hand-in-glove with the ruling classes. The university teaches this science and models all enquiry after this science. History, sociology, psychology, art criticism everything attempts to structure itself according to the paradigm of science. In fact, the modern University and Science are as if born together and together with Capitalism and the State. This is the kind whose knowledge is Science which resides in the University.

Internet is the new place of knowledge. Here knowledge shapes itself as Knowledge Management (KM). The epistemic activity on the Internet has a different mould altogether. The way of thinking, mode of argument, methods of investigation and hypothesizing, the idea and practice of team work, everything is different from the knowledge in the University. KM is inventing new paradigms for reconstitution of the ruling classes and of their relationships with other classes. In fact, Knowledge Management is laying the foundations of a new world. It is this which is being called the Information Age. Promise of a better world for the poor is part of the new propaganda. The Internet arrived in 1990 and in the first 15 years new type of businessmen and enterprises have amassed unprecedented fortune and neither the number of poor has changed nor their level of poverty, if at all the change has been for

the worst. If we just have a look at our neighbourhood, we find that peasants, workers, artisans and adivasis have incessantly faced disorganisation of their work and displacement of the habitat. Their poverty has no doubt increased.

Everybody is familiar with ordinary life as a place of knowledge but may not be conscious of it. The knowledge of the artisan or peasant is not just a store of technical information and competencies. Ideas of health and education are part of it. Like women and adivasis they too have a world view based on natural values. This is *lokavidya*. It is not something which is left (over) with them in spite of the modern development. It has its own dynamic. Technology, ideas of education and methods of healthcare etc. which developed in the industrial society have on a certain scale been internalised by *lokavidya*. *Lokavidya* shall not hesitate also in borrowing from the 'knowledge based society' albeit it will do so through its own criteria, methods of testing and goals. *Lokavidya* has played a pivotal role in the survival of people through the constant onslaught on them under imperialism of the industrial period. Insistence on the primacy of *lokavidya* in idea and in practice is what is Knowledge Satyagraha.

We are used to of debates on knowledge which are not understood by everybody. Not because people are not sufficiently educated but because the methods of the University (and now of Internet too) are so devised that everybody should not understand. If another world is to be built, the debate on knowledge should be such that everybody understands it. If this does not happen any change would only prepare another edition of this very world. So we propose to experiment with this method for a knowledge dialogue: Unwritten grassroots debate on basic theses. Debate on the true and false, on profit and loss, on aesthetics and ethics. In the pages that follow a series of theses are proposed about the present change in society and its knowledge basis (interface). This way we may lay bare the nature of this change in relationship to knowledge. It is a way of preparing ourselves and others to join the larger society in knowledge satyagraha.

Speak out! And choose the path of non-cooperation.

THE IDIOM OF CHANGE

Globalisation

System of mobilising capital from every activity
however far and remote world over

Market

Transforming everything, concrete and abstract,
into a commodity

Information and Communication Technology

Turning Information into capital

Corporate World

Business enterprises wielding complete control over
capital

PLACES OF CHANGE

Industry : Big units to small units
First World to Third World

Agriculture : Chemical to bio-agriculture

Education : University to Internet

Trade : Distant Trade

Knowledge : Science to Knowledge
Management

SECTORS OF PROFIT

Software

Enterprise designing methods for eliminating the use of human labour
Language technology for organisation and processing of information

Communication

Mobile, E-mail, Internet

Media

Cinema, TV, Music, Sports

Entertainment

Tourism, Cinema, TV, Music, Games

Education

Private Schools
Computer and Management Education

Health Care

Surgery based Medical Treatment

EFFECT ON PEOPLE

LOSERS

Farmers

Artisans

Adivasis

Women

Workers

Small shopkeepers

Youth

GAINERS

Traders

Capitalists

Experts

Higher Educated

BEGINNING OF A NEW AGE

End of Industrial Society

And

Beginning of an Information Age

Industrial Revolution led to the command of power based industry world over

Now Information Technology (computer and communication) are in command

Societies making maximum use of Information Technologies are called knowledge based societies

LOCATIONS OF KNOWLEDGE

INTERNET

It gives the organisation of knowledge
status of knowledge

Organisation meaning collection, processing,
communication, commodification etc.

This is called Knowledge Management

UNIVERSITY

Here knowledge occurs as Science and
Science based subjects

SOCIETY

Here knowledge is spread in ordinary life

This is *lokavidya*

LOKAVIDYA **AND** **KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT**

Lokavidya

Lokavidya is the biggest source of knowledge

Lokavidya is not anybody's property,
it belongs to the society.

Lokavidya enriches its neighbourhood
incessantly and through it the whole society

Knowledge Management **(KM)**

KM is lifting knowledge both from the
university and the society

KM leads to private ownership of knowledge

KM takes knowledge as pieces of knowledge
away from its contexts

SCIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Science

Science is a way of understanding the properties and behavior of things in the physical world.

It was born and developed in Europe

This is the knowledge basis of the
Industrial Revolution.

It speeds up production.

It is the knowledge of machine and physical processes

Knowledge Management (KM)

KM is American

According to KM knowledge is a commodity.

There are many ways of producing any thing This
applies to knowledge too.

KM secures pieces of knowledge from different
sources, prunes and restructures them and puts them
together in a new organised form for use and exchange.

SCIENCE AND *LOKAVIDYA*

Science

Science is the knowledge of industrial society
It is the knowledge in the university
Science declares itself to be the only legitimate
source of knowledge
Science does not accord the status of
knowledge to *lokavidya*

Lokavidya

Lokavidya is the knowledge active in ordinary life
In *lokavidya* there is place for all
traditions of knowledge
Lokavidya is mainly with peasants, artisans,
women, adivasis and small shopkeepers
A large majority of society may be said to be
knowledgeable from the *lokavidya* point of view.

LOKAVIDYA

- All knowledge begins with *lokavidya* and returns to *lokavidya*.
- Knowledge that does not return to *lokavidya* becomes *asuri* (satanic).
- Abstract and *asuri* knowledge are the basis and source of exploitation and miracle.
- *Lokavidya* does not distinguish between theory and practice.
- *Lokavidya* stands for the people in situations of conflict.
- *Lokavidya* is free from the pressures of capital and state.

THE NEW CONFLICT

Knowledge and Knowledge Management

stand before each other
opposed as never before

In other words

Those who command knowledge
are in an unprecedented conflict
with the managers of knowledge

SOCIETY

Feudalism

The aristocracy puts together capital and political power primarily through the organisation of agriculture

Capitalism

The bourgeoisie mobilises capital and concentrates political power primarily through the organisation of industry

Information Age

The new ruling class is carrying out the organisation of knowledge for the purposes of reorganisation of capital and political power.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE ?

Industrial society	Knowledge based Society
Labour is organised	Information is organised
Science is the highest form of knowledge	Knowledge Management is the highest form of knowledge
University is the place where knowledge is organised	Internet is the location of organisation of knowledge
It was built through Colonisation	It is being built via Globalisation
It had its center in Europe	It has its center in America

TALKING ABOUT A DIFFERENT WORLD

The preceding overview gives some idea of the nature of change underway. An Age of Information is said to have begun, however, this hand-in-glove with Globalization and the American Wars. It is obvious therefore that the phenomenon of Information is an instrument in the hands of the ruling classes of the world enabling them to restructure themselves, the state and their relationship with other classes. Reorganization both of production and habitats is leading to the resistances by the people. These are agitations against Globalization and WTO in the First World and struggles to preserve places of living by the urban poor from desecration and displacement and land from acquisition by the poor peasantry in the Third World. Anti America movement, struggles and consciousness is taking shape all over the world, the Islamic movement ought to be seen as part of this. There is talk of an alternative world, of building a different world. The ideological underpinnings derive from the ideologies of resistance in the industrial age. Worker's standpoint however extended revolves around organization, control, ownership, management of production. The *Swarajist* approach rooted in the Third World produces at best a more and more enlightened version of nation composed of autonomous neighbourhoods. The Age of Information is demanding a standpoint on knowledge and of knowledge to lay the theoretical foundations of a realizable different world. This is the ***lokavidya* standpoint.**

WHAT IS *LOKAVIDYA* STANDPOINT ?

Lokavidya standpoint is the people's standpoint in the Age of Information. To say that there exist so many respectable and genuine traditions of knowledge is not to say that some or all of them have answers to people's problems and a sufficiently wide basis for reconstructing the world differently. To say that *lokavidya* and ordinary life reinforce, enliven, protect and move each other is not to say that they are complete unto themselves and the ideology they may spin out has recipes for reconstruction of another world. It is only to say that they constitute our starting point, constant reference and also the ultimate criteria. *Lokavidya* standpoint is the standpoint of truth and justice in the Age of Information . It enables us to fight against falsehood imposed upon the world in the name of a future global and connected world, courtesy Globalization and Knowledge Management. It enables our struggles to last out because it enables us to think differently. What is common between Islamic resisters, Gandhians, Marxists and innumerable local traditions and formations in their resistance and campaign against American expansion? It is their commitment to the interest of the people and to justice. This commitment is rooted in the respective traditions of thought and knowledge. *Lokavidya* standpoint is the standpoint of respect to these traditions of knowledge and many more. People's struggles alone shall transform these traditions into new contemporary versions able to challenge the basis of the present society and hold a promise for a realizable different world.

The Attempt in Mumbai WSF 2004

Prepare for the Knowledge Satyagraha

Dialogues on Knowledge in Society

A WSF 2004 Workshop

- Is People's Knowledge the chief object of exploitation in the knowledge Society?
- Is Virtual Community the new mould of the Ruling Class?
- How is the Knowledge Enterprise transforming the State?
- The Criteria of Legitimate Knowledge are undergoing a sea change! Is the Scientific Method giving way to the Criteria of Organizability of Knowledge?
- People's Knowledge systems have been serving their Survival Strategies thus far! Can it now become the source of their strength and the basis of a Politics of Challenge?

Venue

World Social Forum 2004, Goregaon East, Mumbai. January 17 & 19, 2004

Organisers

Indigen Research Foundation, Pune

Lokavidya Samvad, Varanasi

Somewhere very deeply both Globalisation and America's war on Afganistan and Iraq are connected with the development of Knowledge Based Society. Today's Third World paid the historical price, with life and resources, of the development of the Industrial World. Equally large sections of the world population seem destined to pay the price, in terms of their life and resources, of the development of Knowledge Based Society. This is the central concern of this workshop. It is our conjecture that in the liberation struggles in 21st century, knowledge is going to be a central concern, the chief opposition being between knowledge organisable by the ICTs and traditions of knowledge kept alive by peasants, artisans, workers and women all over the world. The workshop intends to debate the various aspects of this 'opposition' with the participation of as many stand-points as possible.

Knowledge is changing its face today, a paradigmatic change is taking place. It is not smaller than the change that took place with institutionalisation of science early in 19th century. Scientific method, the criterion of legitimacy in the sphere of knowledge, has already gone half overboard being replaced by the criterion of organisability by the ICTs. It needs no arguments to understand that this is going to lead to sweeping new forms of reduction of human knowledge, turning human beings to reduced beings, alienated creatures of a new type.

Vast majority of peasants, artisans and workers are on the run with their families. Their staying power and fighting capacity depends on the strengths based in their knowledge traditions. These knowledge traditions characterize both their genius and being and are comprehensible only as holistic phenomena. It is not the

techniques, practices, processes that are the most important in this respect. Issues related to logic, values, power, ontology, organization and communication including transmission ought to occupy the centre stage if the dialogues are desired to open spaces of reconstruction of a polity to challenge the new empire. Important questions to be discussed at the workshop include the list above.

The Next Dialogue on Knowledge in Society will be in Nairobi...

World Social Forum, 2007

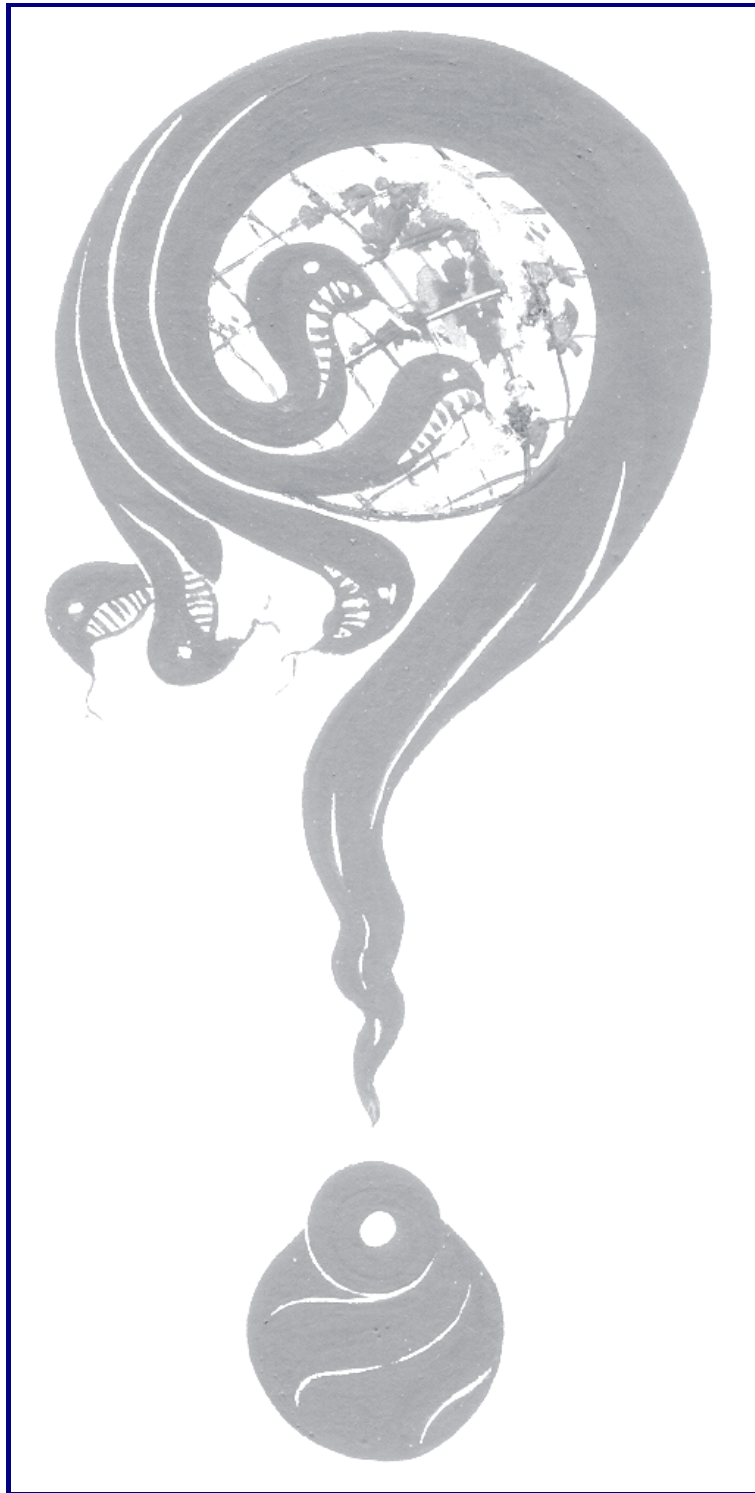
Nairobi, Kenya

20-25 January, 2007

On this occasion we will take to many more people the idea of 'Knowledge Satyagraha'.

This is to invite all those individuals, institutions and organisations who would like to join us in the organisation of this dialogue.

Ideas are invited on the variety of ways in which we could go about doing this, ways other than a workshop, a conference or a poster exhibition.



What is the future of society caught in the web of ICT ?

What should the other world look like ?