

# **KĀRĪGAR SAMĀJ**

**A Liberator of Enslaved Societies**

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# *Kārīgar Samāj*

THE LIBERATOR OF ENSLAVED SOCIETIES

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## 1 Introduction

The modern mode of imperialism is globalization. We are being inexorably drawn into its web. If we are unable to beat the trap today it is because the producer classes (farmers, artisans, *ādivasīs* and women) of our society have been divested of their autonomous creative powers, metamorphosing them into mere labourers. This metamorphosis forms the basis of subjugation of the entire society. If we want to liberate ourselves from the crisis, and rebuild a social life full of human creativity then we have to initiate actively a movement to restore autonomous creativity of producing classes. If one ponders about the meaning of this creativity and on the question of who will be at the vanguard of this struggle, the nascent and hidden potential of the *kārīgar samāj* emerges with clarity. The task of organizing this power and of founding the principles of justice and fraternity inherent in it as the fundamental principles of social life is

today the task of reinstalling *satya* (truth) and *dharma*.

It seems that every social era witnesses a blurring of the divide between truth and falsehood, just as it witnesses efforts to redraw the line. These efforts are always full of challenge and demand a level of sacrifice and tolerance that is capable of nurturing human creativity in a just social milieu. All this doesn't at all mean that falsehood is a power invincible. Quite the opposite. It means that truth can not be obliterated from the face of the earth. Perhaps falsehood is like the dust, which has to be shaken off every now and then. A constant dusting-off of falsehood defines *dharma*. Understood in this way, *dharma* is dynamic, to be defined anew as falsehood dons new attire at every turn of social life. It is the task of *dharma* to be able to pierce these outer coverings and explore the true nature of things. Or else, the dust will collect, its layers hiding injustice and suppression of creativity. To tolerate this injustice, or to be indifferent towards it, is the true nature of subjugation.

Liberation from subjugation in any era demands a correct identification of the specific form of injustice and falsehood characterizing that era as well as of social forces

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and the basis of their power to challenge that injustice and falsehood. The efforts and the struggles which shape this power hold the true potential to resurrect human creativity in society and show it the path of truth. Such efforts and struggles are the preeminent need of the day. This article is a modest step in search of them.

Where do the roots of injustice and falsehood lie today? Imperialism strives to control productive forces and enhance profits. Today its mode of operation is control of world markets through the process of globalization. The most sweeping forms of injustice and untruth can be seen today in the production process sought to be established under the garb of globalization. We see in them the basis of the process of metamorphosis of the artisan into the labourer. Here we will try to understand this phenomenon.

The *lokavidyā* standpoint provides us with an understanding of the artisan, his produce, the production process and the movement and consumption of this produce. It is an understanding, which promotes a just and fraternal relationship between man and man and between man and nature. It contains the seeds of theory of the struggle for liberation from the new forms of subjugation implied by unjust globalization. A large part of this article is devoted to a clarification of this thesis.

The past has witnessed differentiated exploitative processes and mechanisms in different sections of the dispossessed. There has been an inevitable width to, and variety in, the forms of struggle against exploitation. But, the spread of forces of globalization and their uncontrolled urge for greater hegemony have laid the basis for a coming together of these struggles. This emerging

unity promises to be of an altogether novel type, the glimpses of which can be seen from a *lokavidyā* viewpoint. The last part of this article is devoted to a discussion of this unity.

## 2 Basis of the Industrial System

We have been witnessing a transformation of historic dimensions in the industrial system on our country for the last two decades. The process of founding big industries, which was started by the British, continued with renewed vigour after Independence. Then the tide ebbed as many a large industry closed down. That did not mean a change of attitude of the state towards capitalists or a decrease in the power of the latter. It only indicated their new needs and signalled the birth of a new industrial system forced by those needs. Forces of imperialism are championing these changes. We are on the threshold of new forms of injustice, exploitation and anarchy. It is our historical duty to identify the possible consequences of the emerging system and to seek ways to liberate ourselves of them.

The new industrial system is based on exploitation of family labour. It operates through the market. We will discuss here the main features of this system.

### 2.1 Family labour

Production has come to be highly decentralized. The site of production has shifted from large factories to the small houses and huts in towns and villages. Here the whole family works for wages of one man.

For three decades we had a system in which the organization of production was two-tier: large factories in the organized sector and small-scale factories in the unorganized sector. The unorganized sector comprised of two distinct modes — small-scale family-based industry, and industry based on family labour. The former was the dominant mode. The movement today, under the influence of globalization and the emerging industrial system, is towards family-labour as the dominant mode.

Under the new system capitalists exercise tight control in the market of raw material and finished products. Production is organized through a supply of raw material to sites of production spread out in houses and huts. A battery of middlemen and contractors operates at several levels. In many cases these levels are so numerous that the producer knows nothing about the master. Wage and quality controls are exercised by middlemen. This arrangement has spread quickly in textile, hosiery, ready-made clothes, electrical devices, small machines and leather works. Of late, iron-work, clay-work, carpentry and stone work has also been brought within the ambit of this system. We are witnessing a transformation of villages, *mohallas* and towns into large factories, a transformation, which has no precedent.

The fulcrum on which the system rests is procurement of labour of a whole family for wages of a single individual. Women and children of the family make major contribution to the production process. This is an industry based on family-labour. Quite often the family fulfills its needs on the basis of loans and thereafter its members work as bonded labourers. The head of this pro-

ducer family becomes a puppet in the hands of master, quite often toiling to fetch raw material from and deliver finished produce to the middleman. It is he who needs work, not the middleman. In many ways he toils for no return.

## 2.2 Managerial costs

In the new system, there has been a drastic reduction in the managerial costs incurred by captains of industry. In addition they exercise great control on labour costs. This has led to huge increases in the profits.

The capitalist is now free of the headaches of strikes, off days and the like, apart from divesting himself, as he has, of all responsibility towards the welfare of the labour. bonus and compensations for accidents are things of the past. He is not responsible for the education or health of family members of the worker. Nor is he called upon to provide dwelling to workers' families.

The procurement of means of labour and the task of training for quality production are no longer concerns of the capitalist. Just as these are a bother of the labourer, so also is the maintenance of the machinery and steady supply of electricity and water. In this manner, almost the entire cost of managing sustained production has been transferred to producer.

Perhaps the most devastating power that the capitalist exercises today is that of keeping wages to the minimum. He is free to transfer work to a neighbouring village or *mohalla* if the families in some village become more demanding. This has the added advantage of sowing seeds of discord between brothers of a trade, which in turn

fuels the unjust system he heads. The system has posited the most terrifying bargaining power in the hands of the captains of the industry, the degree of which is perhaps unequalled in the past. The producer is pushed into the quagmire of indebtedness with all the more certainty and becomes a bonded labourer.

### 2.3 Exploitation of *lokavidyā*

The new system has created sweeping opportunities for profiteering on the basis of the knowledge and skills – i.e., on the basis of *lokavidyā* – of producers. This was impossible in the dying system of production done to a plan within factories. In it the producer gives everything he has – his knowledge, skills, his aesthetic sense, his tradition, his safety, his labour – in return for nothing. He is also called upon to experiment, discover and invent. He gets neither a return nor the credit for all this.

Globalization is deepening this condition. It strives to profit out of the smallest productive and distributive activity in the remotest corners of the world. As it does so, the technique and technology of production will not be its concern. It will no longer be necessary to derogate local technologies and the beliefs tied to them as 'unscientific'. Nor will there be any hurdle in calling these 'scientific' as long as the profits flow to the mainland of globalization. A blood-sucking phase of the process is in the offing. It remains a major question as to how this phenomenal task of siphoning profits from production units and markets, spread wide over the globe, will be organized and accomplished. The emerging technologies will be an important tool in accomplishment of this

task. In the new system, local population will be distanced from produce of the region to a far greater degree. Quality goods will be available in plenty for elite consumption, whereas, large sections of the people will buy second-rate produce. The global system will find stranger and stranger principles and structures to justify these changes. Some of these – like decentralization, opposition to mechanization, regional prestige etc – may even be borrowed from the twentieth century era of spread industrialization and opposition to imperial expansion. In the offing are large scale changes in systems of knowledge, education, production, services, trade and governance, which have emerged and taken shape in the last 150-200 years. The basis of such changes, envisaged and effected within the ambit of globalization, will be exploitation of *lokavidyā*. We are already witnessing them in education, trade, health care and production of consumer goods.

### 2.4 The spread of market — Liberalization

Today the worker is not tied down to a single master. He toils not in a single factory, nor for one capitalist. Surely, he is robbed of the value of his labour just as before. But the robber is an abstract mechanism known as the market. The market holds the power to dispossess him of the fruits of his *vidyā*, his skills, his labour and his tradition. It works to devalue all his creative and productive capacities, as much as is possible. At the same time, it also forces him to pay dearly for what he needs for his own consumption for renewal of his capacities. The global sys-

tem creates a market where the worker is exploited in both his incarnations - as the seller of his productive powers and as the buyer of his needs. Such exploitative market is necessarily a distant market. Trade at a distance is a necessary requirement for endowing the market with demonic character to perpetuate loot farmers and artisans in far corners of the globe. The policy of liberalization is the policy of expansion of such a market. The tool par excellence for control of such markets is finance capital.

## 2.5 The role of the state

The new industrial system establishes itself with the full support and connivance of the state. The role of state is in enacting and enforcing laws. It owns all the resources of the nation. Oceans, rivers, lakes, mountains, forests, minerals and land are all under the control of the state. The state commands the policy of their use, and the legal system governing it. Who is allowed such use and for what purpose, largely determines the character of the state. Globalization progresses by enactment of laws which make a partisan use of resources by a chosen few possible. Which goods are produced where, where does the raw material come from, where is the produce sold are questions of state law. Anyone who dares transgress the legal boundaries in this regard is liable to be punished. What use is made of waters in the river in the village, what is sown in the fields are not to be determined by local initiative and need. Incidence of such initiative on natural resources is a crime against the State. The boundaries of social use of *lokavidyā* are subject to law of the State. That means that any

public activity based on peoples' initiative is open to legal ban.

The State under globalization will wield unlimited power on a scale never imagined earlier, quite independent of the degree of political stability of the government in power at any time.

## 2.6 The effect on civil society

The new industrial system has already produced deep cleavages in the society. The disorganization in political, administrative and educational spheres is just as apparent as that in economy. This is the process of reorganization of the society in service of globalization. Such reorganization is led by the primacy of finance capital over industrial capital and emergence of the market as the determinant of all economic activity. Foisting of policies of economic liberalization and global markets serves the same reorganization. The new industrial system puts all the tools at its command in service of the transformation taking place. The transformation requires and demands a new value system. It is only proper to take note of the emerging values.

**Acceptance of slavery:** The market governed industrial system produces acceptance of slavery as a value. The new value seeks the satisfaction of urge to live by labour in secure employment acquired through employment schemes or development programmes of the government or in private industry. Such security of employment, be it riddled with injustice and inhuman work conditions and atmosphere, is equated with poverty removal and self-reliance. Such slavish employment pervades

all sections of society. Slavery becomes just and commands wide acceptance in political, social, economic, administrative, educational, cultural and institutionalized religious spheres of life. The basis for disruption of the moral fabric of society must be seen in this condition. Corruption and lumpen culture are but mere symbols of this state of affairs. Rooted in the same condition is distortion of values of pride, duty and *dharma*.

**Deceit and hypocrisy:** The emerging system has produced new forms of deceit and hypocrisy, a bane in any era. These new forms have been forced by the need to expand markets and productive activity. It is necessary to mention at least some of these.

Efforts to glorify traditional forms of arts and sciences, rituals and practices and create a hallowed incarnation of Indian culture constitute the greatest deception and hypocrisy. Such efforts are accompanied with active support for systems based on exploitation of communities and people who alone can be considered to be the carriers and owners of these traditional knowledge systems, systems designed precisely to earn profit out of labour of these peoples. These are the people engaged in productive activities in various regions. They have an attachment with their land and culture, the like of which is conspicuously absent in modern industrial labourers. The sentiment is exploited, at times unknowingly by those who are part of such production centres and by intellectuals, to create a myth of social prestige to traditional arts. The reality of course is one of exploitation of

*lokavidyā* in service of the market system.

The equation between expansion of exports and foreign exchange reserves and progress of the whole nation is another such form of hypocrisy. The prestige, which was once attached, and is still attached, to consumption of imported goods is now bestowed on to export related production and trade. The new-found champions of *swadeshī* are equally enthusiastic propagandists of such export. A partial and anti-people reinterpretation of *swadeshī* is hallmark of the hypocrisy.

The decades following Independence witnessed spread of heavy industry and the equation of such spread with national progress. Modern western science and technology acquired a sacred hallow. The deception in making export the testing ground of national progress is bound to glorify the policies of trade liberalization. The success of finance and insurance needs the deception. Large sections of society must be made to believe that these are painless ways of converting their savings into capital which will earn them unheard of profits.

### 3 The *Lokavidyā* Standpoint.

The *lokavidyā* standpoint is the thought of a comprehensive challenge to globalization. It is the standpoint which expresses itself through the world view of producer classes and in their routine life-activity and life-organization. In other words it is the product of the natural epistemic processes in the life of producer classes, a life governed by wisdom and discernment. It is

the inexhaustible storehouse of living traditions, tested routinely and continuously. It cannot therefore be circumscribed within any school of thought, any *ism*, science or religion. The *lokavidyā* standpoint is the inspiration of and for humanity, which creates conditions and basis for challenge to inhuman systems. Here we will try to examine human activity in the context of present conditions and in the light of the *lokavidyā* standpoint.

### 3.1 The meaning of productive activity

Till about two centuries ago our society felt no need to differentiate articles of use from articles of art. There was no dichotomy between utility and aesthetic value. This is what we must read in the observation that art pervaded all aspects of life. The windows and doors, the *verandah*, the walls – every part of a house had art written into it. The altar on the well, the household oil mill, the kitchen stone, the wooden tools, the earthenware, the metal ware, the sleeping cot, the swing, the *diwan*, the trunks – all bore works of art on them. Jewelry and designs on clothes displayed an artistic beauty and variety, which it is impossible to describe in words. Toys, the articles of worship, icons of gods displayed art in its highest forms. Not a single facet of ordinary life was without a stroke of art. Art existed not for an elite but as part of ordinary life. It is this condition which posits into artistic creation the meaning of life, its philosophy and wisdom. It is this condition that guards it from hedonism. It is this condition in which social organization

and dynamic of productive activity add new dimensions to cooperative human activity.

As industry was by and large domestic, and consumption by and large local, art, technology and economy could command a firm and distributed support. So also could industry command innovation routinely, and expertise of various types could be nourished. Such industry was naturally inclined to respect rules of nature in regard to its artistic, technological as well as economic aspects. The systems of value, faith and public activity it produced, also carried such respect. Thus it turns out that in societies, where such conditions prevailed, art, technique, economics and society existed in a value-driven dynamic state. The notion that in ordinary life one beholds truth by devotion to productive activity to create necessities of life, defined a strong current in society. This notion provides a serious philosophical basis to the meaning of productive activity. It is the basis to understand the fundamental values associated with the meaning and purpose of life, organization of social life and the unity of humanity – a basis at once simple and pure. In our society it was the tradition of saints which popularized this understanding of the productive activity of man. Armed with this understanding parasitic life and accumulation of wealth could be denounced as sinful. The persuasion of fraternity and *ahimsā* belonged to the producer sections of society. One may say art defined the body, to which the structure was provided by technique, and the circulation of blood and control by the mind of producer. The social institutions, which stood in a positive relationship with the productive activity, infused life into this body. The pro-



ducer experiences, like a saint or an ascetic, deeply meditative phases and evinces, through his activity, a deep grasp of matters of knowledge, science, technology, art, value, *dharma* and society. His mind finds expression in the product of his labour and traditions of consumption of that product. The producer is neither the slave nor the machine. He is the creator of society, its mentor and the source of its dynamics.

Modernization, mechanization and westernization cleared the way for capitalism and later imperialism, forces which destroyed productive activity *per se*. Aesthetics was divorced from utility. The basis of art was severed from that of science. Not only did they lose their common and compatible roots, they also acquired a neutrality towards social value. Art became hedonistic and science acquired the character of a tool of exploitation of nature, and of man, by man. The unity of aesthetics, utility and justice was destroyed. An inevitable fallout of this process was a transformation in the ways of looking at the productive activity and its social paradigm.

Manufacture of consumer articles in factories by machines transformed the productive activity into a robotic, mindless occupation, and the producer into a laborer. Labor became a contemptible and lowly activity and the laborer was driven out of the mainstream of society. Industry witnessed a differentiation between handicraft and consumer industry. The machine worker became a wage laborer and the craftsman faced extinction of his knowledge and loss of livelihood. Their ranks included artisans, farmers, *ādivasīs* and women. Their extradition from the social centre-stage led to the banishment of justice, fraternity,

simplicity and *puruṣārtha*. Hoarding, parasitism, rowdyism and decadence gained prestige. Competition to accumulate the luxuries of life, to increase intensity of productive activity and competition to extract more work in return to lesser remuneration became the fulcrum of social systems.

Such a society subjugated producer sections and enslaved productive activity in service of other sections of society. The producer became subject to doles and handouts and his life activity the basis of luxury of the parasitic sections of society. This was the time when Gandhiji forged his challenge to capitalism and imperialism. It was the challenge of a saint, a challenge rooted on the conception of unity of truth, value and aesthetics in a society guided by a consonance and harmony between labour, knowledge and creativity as the basis of productive activity. It was a challenge to the demon in society.

We live today in a new phase of imperialism – globalization. Productive activity stands degraded today to a level never reached earlier. The very existence of the producer as a human being is threatened. Mechanization and industrialization could affect only a small section of society. Globalization breaks these limitations. It makes it conceivable to extract surpluses from production in any nook or corner of the globe. It makes the specific form of productive activity irrelevant. This means that any and every creative activity of man is a potential and conceivable source for imperialist siphon, and, therefore, a vulnerable target. Imperialism is ready to regard beauty and ugliness, utility and lack of it, compassion and cruelty, love and hatred with the same calm and extract profits out of good and

bad deeds alike. Given such a cataclysm, it is no wonder that human activity *per se* faces obliteration and banishment from the view of life being forcefully propagated today.

Is it possible that productive activity will once again define human creativity and become the foundation for truth and justice in society? Will it again create those ideals and conceptions which can effectively challenge globalization? To be able to answer such questions, it is necessary to examine the creative activity of the artisan, his knowledge, its meaning, the relationships it defines and its diversity.

### 3.2 Artisan and his *vidyā*

The term artisan (*kārīgar*) has been used for someone who produces necessities of life. It has come to refer to one who possesses skills. The term *worker* came onto popular discourse with establishment of modern industry. All those directly connected with production in such industry became *workers*. A worker may be skilled or unskilled. But both are workers, and worker is a slave, at most a wage-earner slave. The titles of artisan and a worker for a producer are not a mere matter of words. They indicate the status of the producer and his social-economic condition.

Artisan is the person who is accomplished in the art of production of some type. As such he is the repository of knowledge of every material input and process and their internal and external relationships. He meditates about the social, economic and environmental facets of these elements of production as he develops and rejuvenates his activity. He is able to conceive of the to-

talities of his activity as part of another totality. This is the specific character of his activity. It endows his knowledge with the requirement of a just relationship with nature and society. All the transformations in his natural and social environment, large and small, the entire dynamic and unfolding process around him – all find their place in the continuity and flow of his productive activity. He responds to all this, and thus expands the horizons and the meaning of justice.

The basis of this character of the productive activity of the artisan is in his autonomous existence. It is an existence the essence of which is creation of a relationship of mutual prosperity between the artisan and the means of his activity – a relationship like that between mother and child. The specific nature of artisan's autonomous existence is defined by this relationship and it endows him with a definite view of utilizing, preserving and enhancing the means of his productive activity. The concrete form of this view is *kārīgar vidyā* - artisan's knowledge.

Thus artisan is the lord of his own activity, be he a farmer, a producer of articles or a provider of some social service. He cannot sustain his activity in servitude. Exploitation of his art, his thought, his knowledge, his labour, his dedication, his devotion or his tradition, without his participation and concurrence, is possible only within an unjust system of state. Any such attempt forces him into enslavement and breaks the condition of his expertise, his autonomous existence and destroys the basis of his relationship with nature. Such devastation is the beginning of a chain of processes characterized by injustice. This

means that any process which harms the creative and autonomous existence of the artisan poisons the entire human society. Thus all those organizational and institutional forms, which help to enslave the artisan, divest him of his creativity and destroy the condition for basic thought and creation in general. The societies which allow this to happen ultimately lose their ability to exist autonomously.

Thus, the relative strength of artisans and workers in a society determines the level of justice within it. A system of production which denies to the producer control over means of production as well as any say in the movement, price, consumption and export of his produce and which regards his knowledge with contempt, transforms artisans into workers. Any one of these conditions suffices to increase the ranks of workers in the society. In our society today, all the three obtain. The first condition for building a just society is to build systems which can liberate workers and make them into artisans. The need is for efforts to identify such systems and structures and to begin the process of their creation.

### 3.3 The dynamic of *kārīgar samāj*

That, the rule of the British meant massive loot of the farmer and the artisan, is a matter of broad agreement. Agriculture was devastated and industry dismantled. The result was a huge army of those without a trade. This meant enslavement of *kārīgar samāj*. The process forced large numbers to work for a pittance in British

founded industries. The dishonour of becoming workers was the second dimension of the calamity.

The first half of the last century witnessed two parallel phenomena of reorganization of these workers. One of these was coming together of workers against exploitation in big industry supported and aided by the state. These working sections formed a small portion of the population. The experience of developments, which led to two world wars, had taught them that they were but lifeless cogs in the wheel of uninterrupted large scale production. They, therefore, championed the cause of an industrial system in the interests of the working sections. The second phenomenon was organization, under the leadership of Gandhiji, of those large sections outside the ambit of large scale industry, which were uprooted from means of their life by British policies and rule. The aim and effort was creation of an industrial and social system based on *khādī* and *grāmodyog*, which will allow the worker to earn with honor and to establish himself as an artisan. These two parallel phenomena threw up conceptions of alternative systems, which were at variance with each other. Although it is conceivable to argue about their relative positions and historical importance, the fact is that neither of these conceptions survived actively in the post Independence era. After Independence, all thought of building any alternative industrial system was shunned.

Independent India adapted the capitalist industrial structure erected by the British. This meant equating social progress with ever expanding production. Such conception ignored the enslavement of the worker in big industry as well as the devastation

caused by the sale of produce of this industry all over the country. This great deception of large sections of the population was given out to be a necessity. This necessity implied that the efforts of mobilization of all resources in service of big industry be recognized as national service par excellence. Programmes for erection of big dams and canals, for spread of cash-crop cultivation, for establishment of a banking network and for building of a transport infrastructure were taken up in due course. All these efforts serviced the policy of expansion of the modern industrial structure of big factories and mass production, which no one could question. Modernization of industry and agriculture, with the aim of increase in productivity, was taken up in a big way. The system of subsidies and soft policies was put in place. Large, modern research and development organizations with their army of scientific experts were established. Legal and fiscal measures to ensure supply of raw material to feed the system were implemented. The inevitable consequence was increase in levels of production and capitalist profits. Some of the profits and spoils were shared by the political, bureaucratic and scientific elite. A tiny portion was also shared with the workers in the big industry. This portion, however small, was still huge compared to the earnings of those from among whom these workers came into the fold of big industry.

The initial decades of Independent India thus went through a phase in which many an industry was established and government project started. This increased the employment in the industrial sector and many from of unemployed could earn their living. Those among them, who were em-

ployed on a regular basis, organized to obtain a greater share of profits and facilities. Workers' struggle took shape. The struggle, however, failed in bringing about any transformation in structure of industry or organization of society. Quite the contrary. The struggle fell into the trap of supporting the capitalist industrial system. The strength of workers' unions waned. At the same time, the numbers of those who were victims of increased production within modern industry swelled. These people were unorganized. By the turn of the last quarter of twentieth century the industrial system had brought the whole country once again into a situation in which very large sections of the populations were uprooted from their systems of sustenance and ready to offer their labour cheaply.

International situation had changed rapidly during this time. The imperialist forces were finding it increasingly difficult to continue their control of economy on old foundations. Depression seemed imminent. The challenges to imperialism which had developed early in the century had spent themselves. Imperialism could reorganize itself. There was breathing space available. The reorganization came in the form of liberalization and globalization. Imperialism got a new lease of life. New opportunities and mechanisms to buy off the capitalist sections of poor countries were created. Once again imperialism emerged as an all powerful organism with new myths of its own. Capitalist classes in countries like India fell into line proclaiming the inevitability of globalization. These classes find themselves compelled to adapt and enact many anti-people measures in service of the imperialist formations.

### 3.4 Social justice: Primacy of *lokavidyā*

The struggles of industrial workers in post-Independence era raised the question of social justice. Injustice, however, has acquired new forms in the emerging situation. Today, struggles for social prestige for *lokavidyā* based on identification of its nascent potential hold the key to an effective challenge to imperialism.

Those who produce the innumerable necessities of life have not acquired their knowledge in universities. They renew their knowledge every day. Collation of expertise of different types and intelligent working of materials and processes are part of their productive activity. In spite of modern science and technology, their spread and domination, in spite of the devastation of their communities, their knowledge still holds the power of creation. It is this that ensures supply of many daily needs to a large section of society. And yet they are held in contempt, their knowledge derogated and neglected. A struggle to reinstall the prestige of this knowledge and ensure to it an honourable place in the order of the society is the basis for struggle for social justice.

The *kārīgar samāj* is identified today in terms of backward and scheduled castes. Many of them lost their traditional means of livelihood and work in various professions. However, existence of their caste organizations continues. Although these organizations have faced a progressive erosion of their base, at times the *kārīgar samāj* has mobilized under their leadership against exploitation. This mobilization is often based on the belief that entry into modern systems will create conditions in which

they can expect justice and status. Demand for reservations in educational institutions, salaried jobs, democratic institutions, administrative infrastructure and political positions thus became their main agenda. The modern system, however, is strongly limited as far as the number of people it can absorb goes. The agenda could not have been met. *Kārīgar samāj* can come into the mainstream of society only on the basis of what it already has, only if the struggle for recognition of its knowledge succeeds. Only such struggle can even conceive of the transformation in production, trade, education and market, which will make social justice a reality.

*Kārīgar samāj* fulfilled the needs of the society in the past when the modern knowledge systems were not there. It can do the same even if experts of this knowledge have no role to play in future. Its knowledge holds the potential and power to fulfill its role against all odds. The character of this knowledge is a unity in the act of the intellect and the act of the hand. It encompasses knowledge, concept, skill and value within its fold. The character of modern knowledge is just the opposite - to differentiate theory from practice, principle from its application. As a consequence champions of modern knowledge see mere labour in the work of the *kārīgar*, and the *kārīgar* only as a labourer. They hold this work - and the world view and the knowledge interwoven into it - in contempt. This is an obstacle in the path of social justice.

The question of status and prestige of *lokavidyā* poses a challenge to the absolute and unique position of modern western science. It generates the hope for a reorganization of various dimensions of the society,

which will accord a just and honorable participation for each section of society and a harmony to the relation between nature and society. The knowledge systems of different sections of the *kārīgar samāj* can exist only in mutual benefit and for mutual good. The thread of justice runs strong within them. Thus it is that social justice is inconceivable without honour and prestige to them.

The essence of this status and honor is in control of resources, their maintenance, regeneration and distribution by those who possess the knowledge and the skills to work these resources. It is in a reasonable say in allied areas like market, finance, import and export. The *kārīgar* must be recognized as the expert that he is. The foundation of this status and honor is in social structures which function to nurture and grow productive processes rooted in knowledge with the *kārīgar samāj*.

In the present society the producer possesses the knowledge, and others the right to profit by it. Minute details of river and ocean waters, its fauna and flora are known to the fisherman but the university professor of hydrology holds the right to knowledgeability and the right to a fat salary. The knowledge of the potter is no less than that of the ceramic engineer, nor that of the weaver any less than that of the textile engineer. But it is not valued more than his meager wages. This is the injustice which pervades society. The *kārīgar samāj* must break it in order to establish a position of honor for itself.

### 3.5 The **expanse** of *kārīgar samāj*

The genesis of *kārīgar samāj* is in that specific type and character of its knowledge, which conceives unity within its own ranks and within communities which cooperate with it. The *kārīgar samāj* thus encompasses within itself all those who relate to agriculture, forests, rivers, oceans and services. All those who so relate, possess a common world view - the standpoint of *lokavidyā*. It is armed with this view that they fulfill the needs of the society. Imperialism fears and abhors this and, as such, dispossesses them. So it is that we may formulate some idea of the expanse of *kārīgar samāj* from the identity of those who are dispossessed and from the character of their deprivation.

In our country we have a very large number of people who can work with iron, wood, clay, stone, plastics, cotton, yarn, silk, cloth, leather and eatables. Those who work as agricultural labourers, or do manual jobs, like plying a rickshaw and carrying heavy loads, hold skills and knowledge of this type. They are all artisans turned labourers. Those who collect utilities of life from the waters and forests also belong to *kārīgar samāj*. Farmers with small holdings have been forced to take up work in industries and have joined the ranks of this *samāj*. Most women are producer artisans in their own right. Many of them have been forced into wage labour. Small shop-owners, who organize their trade on the strength and abilities of their family members, are allies of *kārīgar samāj*. Sections of youth thrown out of the education system must also be considered as allies. Thus

very large sections of the local society belong to *kārīgar samāj*.

Most of these people are forced to lead a very hard life in spite of the fact that they work 8-12 hours a day. They are denied a proper status in society. The conditions into which these people are forced by the ruling system are also the cause of a developing unity within them.

The strength of *kārīgar samāj* is in its numbers and in its knowledge, which makes it capable of shaping a just industrial social system. Through its struggle for honour, which is its due, it can pose a challenge to the unjust imperialist social order. Its demand for a proper return for its labour is the demand for control of the market and its reorganization in the interests of the local community. Its demand for honour is the demand for control of local resources. In the ultimate analysis it is the demand for an autonomous social life under the leadership of *kārīgar samāj*. Both of these demands pose an effective challenge to the existing system. For initiatives in this direction to germinate into a far reaching struggle for a just society, unity of local society is the first condition.

### 3.6 The meaning and the role of local society

The basis of local society is the universe of human sensitivity, which regulates the activity of man. Those who stand in a direct give and take relationship share their perceptions. The relation of give and take could be economic, social or emotional and, just like between men, may exist between any two things, living or non-living, in na-

ture. It is the nature of this relation to transform the act of perceiving pain of others and the urge to be of assistance into a value – duty. The relationship of shared perceptions and sensitivities is space and time bound. Outside the boundaries its intensity wanes. These boundaries define the local society, This is the space of man’s routine life and activity. It is the unitary totality within the larger society, which is the cornerstone of social justice in its multifarious dimensions.

The present society is built on ruins of the local society. Its life-blood is opposition to each and every condition which favours unity of the local society. The very basis of its existence, politics, administration and structures of production is in a complete and total denial of human sensitivity. Not surprisingly, its success has made different sections of society insensitive toward each other. Unfortunately the disease afflicts even sections of the exploited. The market and modern education have played a pivotal role in the destruction of human sensitivity.

Only such social action can engender sensitivity in the internal and external relationships of the local society as is aimed at creation of those social structures and institutions. ruled, organized and guided by the local society, which establish the primacy of *kārīgar samāj* in productive activities. Struggles for a system of production based on household industry, for control of local resources and markets by local society led by *kārīgar samāj* and for prestige and honour of *lokavidyā* constitute such action. They are the struggle for liberation from imperialist enslavement in its phase of globalization.

## 4 *Kārīgar Samāj*: Sculptor of the new era

The basis of life is in the knowledge of *kārīgar samāj*. The thread of justice runs strong and uninterrupted in this knowledge and world view. Thus he is the potential creator, the sculptor of the future society. Organized this potential poses a challenge to globalization. To understand the nature of this challenge and the society it promises it is necessary to understand the welfare dimension of the production system. This understanding is the *lokavidyā* standpoint. In the fast changing world, organization and struggles, shaped by the *lokavidyā* standpoint, will force states to work in the interests of the people at large.

### 4.1 Welfare production system

The depth and expanse of the industrial system of production based on exploitation of family labour and the transformation this has brought about in social relations and modes of governance need extended and serious study. Such study will look at the various forms of contract labour at all stages in production and delivery of raw materials, the work being done by the producers, their skills, their cultural tradition and so on. It will help identify the basis of a welfare system of production, which forces no one into wage - labour and which is built around a profession for all.

Several towns in the Ganges valley today serve as good examples of the modern industrial system. The same is true, possibly to a greater extent, of cities and towns

in Punjab, Haryana, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Tamilnadu. The industry based on water and forest resources is structured similarly. A city like Varanasi, the industry in which is thought popularly to be traditional, is actually a good example of how traditional industry can be transformed and put entirely into service of the capitalist system. Discussions with the workers in these industries throw light on what may the essential features of a welfare production system be.

The population of Varanasi is around a million, most of which is in the industrial production sector. The silk *sadī* industry is the major industry. Many activities like yarn making, design, polishing, printing, *jarī* making, which support the silk *sadī* industry, are organized as independent industries. Weaving and its ancillary industry like tool making and repairing are organized independently. Carpet making and handicrafts in clay, wood and stone are other major industries. Many are employed in metal based industries like making pumps, metal nets, fans, scissors and electroplating. Workers in industries like ready made garments and hosiery, leather works, *jardojī* and plastic industries are numerous. The *niṣād* and *rajak* communities on the banks of Ganges are water based industries. The farmer in the rural areas of the distinct produces grain, fruits and vegetables. Many of them are small land holders. Many families are engaged in necklace and *bādī* industries. About three quarters of the population are producers. They produce goods worth crores of rupees everyday, much of which goes to fill coffers of the state and into pockets of the traders. Much of the produce is not for local consumption. However, in-



crease in export levels has done nothing to change deprivation of the local population. Mainly three points emerge out of discussions with these people.

#### 4.1.1 Cost of creation

The fixation of returns to labour in all industries is unjust. The producer plays no part in it. He sells his labour and skills cheap and, as a consumer, buys necessities at high price. Price fixation is the reserve of those not engaged in production — traders and the government. The principle of this fixation is to tie the producer up to the industry, not his welfare. A welfare production system must devolve the control of remuneration levels on to the producer.

#### 4.1.2 Capital

There is a scarcity of capital available to the producers. This forces them to become wage workers. The producers of capital are deprived of capital. This means that if the wealth generated within a locality is correctly estimated and a part of it is available to makers of that locality then there would be no dearth of capital for the producers there. The basis of capital scarcity is the loot of wealth, generated locally, by the governments and the traders. The meager returns are at times further diminished due to the insurance premia paid to finance and insurance agencies. Such insurance payments are even praised by the elite in society as schemes for welfare of the producer. A true welfare production system must divert capital flows in the interests of local society.

#### 4.1.3 Raw material

Resources are controlled by the state. Through its partisan policy the state passes them on to big trade and industry. Minerals and forest products are even reserved for use by the big industry. Restrictions are enacted and enforced on their use by local producers. Several such legislations have been recently added to the law book in the name of environment, human rights, hygiene and beautification of cities. The *dhobīs* of Varanasi cannot make use of Ganges and pond waters, the *niṣāds* are not allowed to fish and potters are denied clay from the ponds. Terrorization of weavers in the name of prevention of child labour, removal of hawkers from the pavements in the name of beautification of the cities, banning of the sale of tea, *lassi*, *pakaudi*, *chat*, sugarcane juice and so on by hawkers in the name of health care are all examples of such legislation. The essence of such policy and action is severance of the relation between nature and the producer and the consequence is alienation of the producer from his own environment and in his own locality. Moreover, someone – not necessarily standing in any positive relation whatsoever with the local society and its land, waters and forests – can claim a right to use of these resources. Anyone, possibly a rank outsider, can lord over the wealth of the locality.

A welfare production system is inconceivable without control of preservation, distribution and use of local resources by local producers.

#### 4.1.4 Market

The market is under the control of big traders. The state policy is in their interest. Infrastructure supports their activity. No wonder that the local producer is unable to sell his product. He finds that he must sell through big companies and traders, if at all. The market mechanism in existence today plays a pivotal role in transformation of the producer into wage labourer.

Local needs are to be fulfilled by local producer. A welfare production system will have to adapt this principle. Markets will have to be reserved for local producer. Distant trade must be restricted by definite controls and within definite boundaries. Only such markets can give justice to the producer, transform him into a *kārīgar* and give him true recognition. Only then will the society and the producer exist in a mutually beneficial and healthy relationship.

#### 4.1.5 Civil rights

The state, which fills its coffers with revenue earned from his produce, denies the producer elementary civil rights. The total disorganization and anarchy in systems of drinking water and electricity supplies and of sewer lines, hygiene and roads in residential localities of producer classes is tantamount to their derecognition as citizens. Hospitals and schools for their children are in a shambles. The look and feel of artisan colonies and residential areas reminds one of description of workers' localities in eighteenth century European cities.

A welfare production system must attend to such disorganization of civil amenities

and systems.

## 4.2 A path for liberation from slavery

The slavery implicit in the post-independence systems of production expresses itself in everything. The present polity is the machine which renews and sustains this slavery. The programmes of development and social reform glorify it. The thinking of the intelligentsia is but a meek reflection of it. The potential to expose this slavery for what it is, and fight it lies in a process, which promises to progressively transform family labour into family industry. Only such a process can liberate the producer and, therefore, the larger society. Such a process can be started, such a path traversed, it seems, only with the initiative of the *kārīgar samāj*, forced today into family labour.

In nature, values, habits, tendencies and characteristics of *kārīgar samāj* differ totally from workers in factory based industries. In the factory system, the worker contributed only his labour and served merely as a lifeless cog in the machine. The *kārīgar* contributes his all - labour, expertise, skill, knowledge, technique, a creative and progressive grasp of the process, tools and other means, tradition and a readiness to take risks. They have their own criteria of quality of the produce and the ability to produce goods according to those criteria. For them, mere marketability of mass-produced articles as the criterion of quality is a vulgarity they have been forced to bow down to. That, given availability of

*capital, raw material* and *markets*, they can build their own independent industry cannot be doubted. This trinity, however, is not at the command, as everyone knows, of potential, ability and expertise of individuals and communities. It is under the command of state power. The control exercised on capital, raw material and markets by the big traders and capitalists and owners of finance capital is based on state support. If this support is exercised in the interests of *kārīgar samāj* then family labour will progressively give way to family-based industry. That, control of raw materials should reside only with those who put in their labour, knowledge and skills in working it, is only just. The credit for the quality of produce on the market should also devolve only on to the producer. The unjust system of today allows neither. Those without ability exercise monopoly control of capital and raw material apart from freely claiming the credit for produce that is not their own.

A system of production in which control is exercised in the interest of the producer opens the path of liberation from exploitation of all type and lays the foundation of an autonomous, proud and healthy society. Such a system will routinely fight slavery, hypocrisy and deception of any type. It will have wage labour only as exception. It seems that only family-based industry holds the promise of a welfare production system.

Establishment of such a system of production will mean a total reorganization of local knowledge, resources and local markets. The criterion and principle of such reorganization will have to be autonomy and self-sufficiency of local society.

Activists agitating for preservation of environment, those opposed to globalization, and those opposed to the capitalist system, supporters of the people-oriented dimensions within cultural traditions, champions of re-installation of values have all always desired such a production system. They must renew and strengthen their struggle. A reconsideration, on their part, of their positions and programmes in the new and changed condition and an appreciation of the potential nascent in *kārīgar samāj* is, however, called for.

### 4.3 Organization and direction of struggle

India, with its abundance of natural resources and substantial proportion of a large population in possession of knowledge and skills of various types, is an important potential catch for the imperialist net. The shackles of slavery can only tighten if the imperialist design succeeds. As the process of transformation of the producer-artisan into labourer deepens and acquires newer dimensions, the process of emergence of *kārīgar samāj* takes shape on the world scale.

The character of this emerging *samāj* is different from working classes of the factory-based industry. It is closer to local society. The imperialist system lives on a loot of his labour, his knowledge, his art, his aesthetic ability – his everything. This loot and the chains of slavery it has created can be broken only with building of a production system inspired by *lokavidyā*, which is a repository of natural justice. *Kārīgar samāj*, the lord of

*lokavidyā*, holds the potential to do so.

The process of organization of *kārīgar samāj*, which begins with the objective of building of a just production system is also the process of liberation of the larger society from the clutches of globalization. There is no escape from the shackles of globalization without the liberation of the *kārīgar samāj*. The political, social and industry-specific organizations of producer-artisans transformed into labourers must recognize this. A process of organized opposition to exploitation of *kārīgar samāj* involving the larger society must also start. Thus the organization of *kārīgar samāj* will also shape that of the society.

As the chief mechanism of the loot of *kārīgar samāj* is imperialist markets, and as the chief source of wealth looted is *kārīgar vidyā*, the pivot of organization of *kārīgar samāj* is transformation of mar-

ket and recognition, honor and prestige to *lokavidyā*. Markets will have to be the battlefield, where the *kārīgar samāj* will mobilize for its recognition and prestige and where it will fight the battle against the loot of cost of creation and local resources. Thus it will start a process of unifying the local society. The battle will be fought from localities and regions where the local producers will sow the seeds of autonomous *lokasattā*. In the soil of fraternity within the *kārīgar samāj* these seeds will germinate into trees, which, like the trees in the forests, will live and grow together. It is only in the cool shade of these trees that man will once again conquer the demon within him and experience the harmonious music of nature, without which he has been distanced from humanity itself. Our saintly tradition will once again guide us on this path of reconstruction.