

Swaraj Chetana Based on Nyaya (Equality), Tyaga (Duty) And Bhaichara (Kinship)

B Krishnarajulu (09 Dec 2022)

Every movement for social change, in the Indian subcontinent, over the past 2500 years has been initiated by a fresh interpretation of the concepts of *nyaya* (rationality & equality), *tyaga* (duty) and *bhaichara/sahodara* (kinship with all life forms) in the realm of ordinary life practice. Such interpretations were put forth by gurus and *sants* / swamis (saints); and 'accepted and absorbed' into the belief systems and life practices of ordinary people. Their lives thereafter underwent changes appropriate to the sustenance of such changes. Most often, this led to the 'formation' of different sects within the all-pervading *sanatana dharma* that characterized Indian society.

Such interpretations can be seen, for example, in the teachings of the Buddha and Mahavira and later in the teachings of Basaveswara, Guru Gobind Singh and many others. More recently we find that Mahatma Gandhi too, offered a new 'talisman' for ordinary life practices through his interpretations of these concepts. All these ideas/interpretations formed the bases of mass 'movements' and we know, historically, that they did lead to social change. However, with the onslaught of capitalist mode of production, and the concomitant 'destruction' of the natural environment, such changes in society and lifestyle have been under severe pressure and the very sustenance of the belief system and social formations, that those interpretations engendered, have been pushed to the 'brink of extinction'.

NYAYA, TYAGA AND BHAICHARA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE KNOWLEDGE MOVEMENT

Premise:

All characteristics of inter-relationships are primarily, and in the main, determined by interactions between individuals and between communities/collectives, and governed by the evolving worldview that

determines these relationships. Concepts of equality (*nyaya*), fraternity (*bhaichara*) and collective governance (*swarajya*) evolve through such economic, social and cultural exchanges. The contemporary capitalist-market worldview, that influences ALL relationships today, will have to make space for Knowledge(*Lokavidya*)-based *Swaraj Chetana* which should henceforth influence ALL relationships within and without *Lokavidya Samaj*. This will form the basis and agenda of the movement for radical social change.

The Movements for Social change:

The concept of *dharma* has NO equivalent in non *Lokavidya*-based societies and it has, therefore, been subject to 'silencing' by commentators and analysts trained in other knowledge traditions and influenced (unconsciously perhaps) by the prevalent market-driven values. *Swaraj Chetana* should incorporate *Lokavidya dharma* which incorporates *Nyaya, Tyaga and Bhaichara* as axiomatic principles.

Public discourse should be in the vocabulary of *vidya* and *dharma*; their meaning is commonly understood by ordinary people, albeit in different ways. Such understanding is not in conflict with principles of *Nyaya, Tyaga and Bhaichara* and should now serve as the basis of establishing a system of interactions for the protection of fundamental right to life and livelihood, in a globalized Knowledge-based society.

1. The march towards the establishment of an order, based on *Nyaya, Tyaga and Bhaichara*, begins, in this 'Knowledge era', with ensuring the Right of individuals, individually and collectively, to live by and base their livelihoods on the Knowledge they possess and practice viz *Lokavidya*.
2. The aspect of inequality, arising from the exchange-activity process, has to be addressed by redefining the concept of value of a commodity/service, by incorporating the idea of knowledge-based value, in a knowledge paradigm, that recognizes the fundamental equality (in utility) between all knowledge and knowledge-based activity. The sustenance of a concept of knowledge-

based value and the social and economic equality that it engenders, will not prove beyond the new political imagination, that will evolve in society.

[Value: The value of a commodity (this term denotes ALL goods and services which are produced by and through human labour for self-consumption and/or exchange) and is neither pre-determinable nor pre-assignable i.e., there is no *intrinsic* value to any commodity. A value accrues to a commodity as a result of it being essential to life and/or during the process of social exchange and is, by nature, a dynamic quantity.]

Ideas on Knowledge equality- an important aspect of Nyaya

1. from Basaveshwara:

The inequality, which Basaveshwara lamented, was not the inequality of personal endowments, but of the social, economic, religious and spiritual practices which created inequality and came in the way of development of individual personality. He went to the very roots of the state of nature in attacking the inequality created by human beings.

Basaveshwara gave a concrete meaning to the conception of work or occupation in the form of *Kayaka* which is regarded as an important means for the removal of all inequalities—economic, social, religious and spiritual. *Kayaka* is a spiritual view of labor and not merely a materialistic view. Every kind of labour is looked upon with high honor, dignity and spiritual significance. *Kayaka* doesn't encourage amassing wealth or hoarding of money. It is NOT motivated by profit.

2. from Gandhiji's "Autobiography" summarising Ruskin's "Unto This Last":

"A lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's, as all have the right of earning their livelihood from their work."

"A life of labour i.e the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman is the life worth living."

"The right system respecting all labour is, that it should be paid at a fixed rate; but the good workman employed, and the bad workman unemployed."

“The equality of wages, then, being the first object towards which we have to discover the road, the second is that of maintaining constant numbers of workmen in employment, whatever may be the accidental demand for the article they produce.”

3. from Dharampalji's “Essays on Tradition, Recovery and Freedom” summarizing the Chengalpattu data:

“An elaborately worked out system of sharing of the produce of the region also seems to ensure fairly equal distribution of economic and cultural prosperity among the various communities and occupational groups that inhabited the region”

4. from Paul Mason’s article in The Guardian titled ”The end of Capitalism has begun”

A study for the SAS Institute in 2013 found that, in order to put a value on data, neither the cost of gathering it, nor the market value or the future income from it could be adequately calculated. Only through a form of accounting that included non-economic benefits, and risks, could companies actually explain to their shareholders what their data was really worth. ...The knowledge content of products is becoming more valuable than the physical things that are used to produce them. But it is a value measured as usefulness, not exchange or asset value... (but) information as a social good, free at the point of use, incapable of being owned or exploited or priced.

Ideas on Tyaga or Fundamental Duty

[*Tyaga* is neither renunciation nor charitable donation / alms giving]

1. from Tirukkural (Valluvar's instructive text focused on wisdom, justice, and ethics.)

Goals of *porul* (wealth obtained in ethical manner) and *inbam* (refers to pleasure and fulfilment of one's desires) are desirable, yet both need to be regulated by *aram* (*dharma*). Valluvar holds that *aram* is common for all, irrespective of whether the person is a bearer of palanquin or the rider in it.

2. from the Bhagavad Gita

Karmanye Vadhikaraste ma phaleshu kadhachana OR "Perform your duty but do not have any expectation of the fruits". It speaks of being dedicated to your vocation, your art, your science (your livelihood practice) as a fundamental duty. The Indian tradition also holds that there exists an inherent tension between *artha* and *kama*. These must be pursued with "action with renunciation" (*Nishkama Karma*), that is, one must act (do one's duty) without craving in order to resolve this tension.

3. from Basaveshwara:

Kayaka is to be done in the spirit of *dasoha*. *Dasoha* meant working hard for one's livelihood and for the maintenance of society. In his view, a *dasohi* should consider himself, but a servant of society. Therefore, *dasoha* in principle assumed that what belongs to God must return to Him and what came from society should be given back by way of selfless service.

Kayaka is a duty by which each one has to maintain oneself and render its proceeds to the welfare of all. As per the principle of *dasoha*, since everyone earns his minimum requirement through *Kayaka* he contributes the rest of his labour to the society rather than accumulating personal wealth. Therefore, *Kayaka* does not encourage the amassing of wealth if it is done in the spirit of *Dashooha*. Human beings are equal by nature in their wisdom and virtues, that should be maintained accordingly.

4. from Guru Gobind Singh

Dharam dee kirat karnee – Do your work (livelihood practice) as a duty.

Dasvand denaa – Donate a tenth share of your earnings.

Langar Parshaad ik ras vartaaunaa – Serve Langar prashad (food) with impartiality.

Ideas on Bhaichara(Sahodara) or Kinship

1. from the Maha Upanishad

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam meaning "the world is one family".

The Gandhian vision of holistic development and respect for all forms of life; nonviolent conflict resolution embedded in the acceptance of nonviolence both as a creed and strategy; were an extension of the ancient concept of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*

2. from the teachings of Mahavira

A central tenet of his teaching was a renunciation of violence in all its forms and a concern for all forms of life; that all living beings, irrespective of their size, shape and form, how spiritually developed or undeveloped, are equal and we should love and respect them.

Social Action For Change

It does not take much to see that ALL the great movements for Social change, in different parts of the country (and in fact the World), have been based on teachings (new interpretations of *Nyaya, Tyaga and Bhaichara*), such as the ones quoted above, and have led to new social (religious) groupings based on belief systems which have incorporated the essence of these teachings. These movements have been sustained through centuries by the *Tyaga* that dominated (and governed) these social groups; that is until the 'onslaught' (both ontological and ethical) of modern western Science and Technology, especially and very perceptibly by the advent of the globalized capitalist market system.

Climate Change, a fallout of the Capitalist Development paradigm, is directly linked to the absence, neglect or down-grading of *Bhaichara* (as enshrined in various belief systems). Environmental Movements against the ill-effects of Climate Change have, in almost all cases, re-emphasized the understanding of *Bhaichara*; that was a given in the various communities of the Tribal/Indigenous Peoples of the World.

It appears that the space and opportunity for redefining *Nyaya, Tyaga and Bhaichara* has been opened up by various peoples' movements across the world. The farmers' movement in India, which was initiated about 40 years ago across

many states in the south(Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh) and the north(Punjab and Uttar Pradesh), has kept clear of the many ideologies for social change that pervade the knowledge domain and ,in fact, has often invoked the teachings and guidance of various *sants and gurus* to enthuse the mass of farmer-participants and sustain the movement. The recent massive farmers' movement seems to have been greatly influenced by the teachings of Guru Gobind Singhji and was able to sustain the movement for over a year. It was attended largely by small farmer families from Punjab, Haryana and UP. The *Langar*, local arrangements for stay & facilities and healthcare have been provided for by bigger farmers and their organisations. It is my opinion, that the urge to stay together seems to be the overarching belief that the(*Khalsa*)leadership is being guided by the teachings of Guru Gobind Singh: of grow food (as a duty), share food through *Langar (Bhaichara)* while 'fighting' for justice(*Nyaya*) for the entire community (that is dependent on agriculture). Those teachings will certainly be reset to the contemporary context in order to sustain the movement, but this provides the hope that a new interpretation of *Nyaya, Tyaga and Bhaichara* could well emerge and be 'accepted' by ordinary people, through this movement. It has set the stage for the growth of *Swaraj Chetana* based on *Lokavidya dharma*- the value system that would usher in social change and liberate *Lokavidya Samaj* from the dehumanization of the capitalist-market system.