

## Note for Discussion

- Girish (31/10/2023)

[The following is my perception of our discussions in the last two weekly meetings. Also, my opinion on how we need to go ahead. I will start with an outline of my impression of the broad opinions expressed during the discussion on the 13Oct2023 proposal.]

The proposal for a bahujan knowledge dialogue as a large research program was introduced on 17 Oct 2023 with the background of (i) a reading of the developing post-caste-based-census scenario as one of a two not entirely unrelated choices for politics of/by the bahujan samaj – either find larger space and say within the system, or follow a path of rediscovery of its initiative based on its own darshan, tradition and knowledge, (ii) a total absence of public debate on alternative forms of social organization and order outside the shell provided by “democracy”, as presumably the only form of governance in a modern society, and (iii) assertion that this was the right time to launch a large research program – a program unlike any in the universities, one situated in ordinary life, one encompassing dialogues like “*Varanasi Gyan Panchayat*” on one side and “*samajon ki kahani, samajon ki jubani*” on the other, one demanded by the idea of distributed power and governance - the only form of governance known to bahujan samaj - by *swaraj*.

The ensuing discussion (17, 25 Oct 2023) addressed several issues: (i) meaning / advisability / propriety of the phrase “bahujan samaj” and absence of any bahujan samaj consciousness; (ii) divisive / partisan nature of caste and desirability / futility / practicality of caste-census; (iii) need to clarify what we mean by bahujan samaj (ordinary people / non-elite, those living by their knowledge, lokavidya samaj), and to speak for the whole society, and for autonomy and swaraj (iv) need to

understand notion of organization in lokavidya thought, (v) large-scale transformation in lives / livelihood of ordinary / village people / *lokavidyadhars* and in interrelations among them, and consequent need for a creative rethinking on what lokavidya, and lokavidya samaj are in the contemporary context, and (vi) the fact that the different terms (swadeshi, bahishkrit, *lokavidyadhars*, bahujan, ordinary, ...) refer to the same people, who can be seen in a fundamental sense as being outside, and not as a part of the capitalist system, and need to identify main sources of their strength as the basic need for transformative thought.

We may discuss whether, or not the term 'bahujan samaj' is desirable. Much has already said on this in the last two meetings. Or, we may put that aside for the time being and take it up later. We may decide to use different terms too at different places.

But, I think that the question of whether the time is opportune to launch the proposed type of knowledge dialogue as research initiative needs to be fully addressed. It is only indirectly addressed by discussion on problems with 'bahujan' and caste-census, and caste - as the suggested name in the proposal is "Bahujan Knowledge Dialogue" and as caste-sensus is highlighted to identify emerging bahujan politics. It needs to be more directly addressed in two ways: as a judgement about developing political situation, and in terms of possibilities it might create for enriching lokavidya thought and knowledge movement.

Much of the established politics engaging the bahujan samaj is focussed on raising demands to enhance 'their share in the system'. There are, of course, severe limits to this share. That is the only narrow lane leading from established politics to a radical one of reconstruction based on initiative of the bahujan samaj. My personal view is that at this stage the only thing that might perhaps be said about caste-based census is that, if its demand catches up it

may prove to be the most direct test of limits on the admissible share of bahun samaj. The air may clear only after state elections.

What possibilities might a “knowledge dialogue as a large research initiative” create for enriching knowledge movement and lokavidya thought? I would suggest that we attempt to conceive of this activity in order that we are able to

1. Shift our focus from knowledge for survival to knowledge for reorganization and reconstruction; (a grand extension of “*samajon ki kahani, samajon ki juban*” initiative, ...)
2. Directly address the question of creative enrichment of lokavidya thought in the contemporary context; (a grand extension of “*Varanasi Gyan Panchayat*” initiative, ...)
3. Engage social-political activists and intervene with strength in ongoing debates in order to generate new ones around the whole cluster of ideas that has engaged us for long; (Swaraj Gyan Panchayat, Parivartan Vimarsh, ...)
4. Develop a spontaneous (as against ‘laboured’) expression of knowledge viewpoint in day-to-day matters. (Writing in different languages on our website and other online channels, series in vernacular press (?), ...)

The above may not be entirely devoid of a bit of wishful thinking. But, for one, we have been talking about similar things for a while, and for another, it is also based on the overall agreement that emerges from the discussion on the proposal: that we should maintain our place as knowledge activists and initiative for knowledge dialogue in the new world where focus has shifted from content to organization, and from production to communication, and that there is a need to reformulate and enrich the lokavidya thought in order to carry initiative forward.