On Whatsapp Lokavidya Group and Email

[11-17 Jan 2023]

<u>Sunil (12/01/2023):</u>

I recollect that I said in the meeting day before that we should revisit the idea of lokavidya in the present context. The state of present context for this purpose may be understood as the state of social/people's movements today, in particular those that may have a flavor of 'transition'. These may be listed as

1. Farmers' movement
2. Climate Justice
3. Social Justice
4. Swaraj
5. Jal, Jangal, Zamin
6. Lokavidya Jan Andolan

The concept of lokavidya needs to be located in the inter-connections between these. The philosophical and political considerations may both follow and precede this exercise. May be we can start with pairwise discussions. This would mean 15 such discussions.

Should we discuss this approach next Tuesday?

May be we should also pay attention to Bharat Jodo Yatra as providing the larger political canvas.

<u>Sunil (14/01/2023):</u>

In sequel to our Zoom discussion on Tuesday, 10th Jan., I had suggested by a WhatsApp post on Thursday, 12th Jan. that we locate our *lokavidya* understanding in the web of contemporary social/peoples movements. Further to that I wish to add that a larger canvas be laid to substantially re-address the idea of lokavidya. Let this canvas be constituted of

i. Global advances in Science and Technology – Smart connectivity and Artificial Intelligence. Whereas the smart connectivity appears to provide space for lokavidya and its larger claim, AI seems to close this space. It seems there is a (paradigmatic) conflict between smart connectivity and AI. This may provide the space and the opportunity for the claims of *lokavidya*.

ii. Global politics – Generally bipolar, in popular parlance Conservative (religious) Vs. Progressive (secular) and/or Authoritarian Vs. Democratic. There is apparently a third stream also in many countries. It is generally based on indigenous people's movements. I wonder whether Farmer's movement in India opens a third option. May be it can do this if informed by the idea of *lokavidya*.

iii. Social/peoples/political movements – Movement of/for farmers, climate justice, social justice, Hindutva, swaraj, jal-jangal-zameen, lokavidya, rights of mother earth/nature, indigenous peoples,. Lokavidya seems to provide the thread that links these movements.

iv. Lokavidya Darshan as at present. Please see the Standpoint page in our website vidyaashram.org

v. Vidya Ashram Activities - They are composed of two streams, one *darshan* and the other *andolan*. They may be listed as follows:

   a. Lokavidya Satsang: Twice a week on Ghats of Ganga ji.

   b. Varanasi Gyan Panchayat: A public forum for Knowledge Dialogue, often specifically on events and issues in Varanasi.

   c. Samajon ki Kahani Samajon ki Zubani: Generally interviews of leaders in the samaj (communities).

   d. Sur Sadhna: A broadsheet (4 pages) published (not regular) by *Varanasi Gyan Panchayat.* The idea derives from an art-view of society.

e. Samaj Srijan ka Kala-Marg: Investigation and construction in the world of art seeking philosophical (epistemological, logical, ontological and ethical) guidance in general and particularly for lokavidya-movement.

f. Karigar Nazariya: A broadsheet (4 pages) about artisans and general issues, published intermittently keeping the karigar lokavidya point of view at the center.

g. Loka-Niti Samvaad: A concrete dialogue on local self-governance at the sites of *lokavidya-satsang.*

h. Swaraj Gyan Panchayat: Dialogue centered on *swaraj.*

i. Farmer's Movement: Participation with focus on **Swaraj vs. Corporate Raj** and **Strength of the Samaj vs. Political Power**. **Nyay, Tyag and Bhaaichara** constitute the frame of values which ought to be in the lead.

j. Darshan Akhada: A place in Rajghat focused on activities and debate that build a darshan-dialogue between samaj and the social-political leadership. Also focusing on the requirement and reality of fraternal relationship between various philosophical streams and traditions.

k. Publication: Booklets

l. Social Media: Presence and participation on Facebook and various WhatsApp groups.

These activities are informed by *lokavidya-darshan* which is constantly in debate within these activities as well as independent of them. Generally speaking *Gyan-darshan, Sant-darshan, Kala-darshan and Swaraj-darshan* are the subjects of dialogues which are very broadly conceived as Dialogues on Knowledge in Society. Further, many of these activities are guided by the ideas of *Gyan-Panchayat and Bauddhik Satyagraha,* which are themselves seen as forms of direct epistemic intervention in the public sphere to move towards a new political imagination.

The activities and dialogues find their expression and representation in the publication from Vidya Ashram and through our presence in the social media.

Girish (16/01/2023):

I think Sunil's Whatsapp posts of 12Jan2023 and 14Jan2023 provide an appropriate opening for our future online debates. We can discuss this approach to our future debates on Tuesday 17Jan2023.

In this context, I am recalling the suggestions made on 07July2021 to context our debates and the following progress:

> The "present" as contained in 1) Farmers' Movement, India, 2) Centre – State Relations, India, 3) Corona Condition worldwide, 4) Movement of Indigenous Peoples, South and Central America and new developments and 5) Democracy versus Autocracy, Formulated and announced by G7 in June 2021;
>
> and
>
> The ideas and VA initiatives i) न्याय, त्याग, भाईचारा ii) autonomy, iii) distribution, iv) lokavidyaa darshan, v) lokavidya knowledge intervention, vi) equal returns for lokavidya work, vii) LJA programs and activities, viii) global fraternity of peoples' movements, and ix) Shaping new initiatives in the world of knowledge, in particular focussed in the domains of Art, Language, Philosophy, Media and Design. Main strategy would relate to equal and friendly relations between Lokavidya and University Knowledge (in the formulation stage and is yet to be circulated for ideas and response).

It seems to me that our debates following these suggestions did broadly follow these lines. Emphases on the various directions set by them did, of course, vary – may be also substantially. The same may be said of the Hindi book, which contained essentially substance of these debates with a strong focus on farmers' movement.

New activities (वाराणसी ज्ञान पंचायत, समाजों की कहानी समाजों की जुबानी, समाज सृजन का कला मार्ग, लोकनीति संवाद, स्वराज ज्ञान पंचायत, participation in farmers movement with stress on Swaraj vs Corporate Raj, power in society vs poloitical power and values of न्याय, त्याग, भाईचारा') in Varanasi have reshaped as suggested in iv), v) and ix) above. Much more needs to be done with regard to language, lokavidya darshan, philosophy and media. It appears appropriate to view the fresh proposal as servicing this need in renewed context.

Climate justice is something we have not addressed directly though we have always treated it as a self-evidently natural concern for those – the lokavidya samaj – whose knowledge systems regard nature as part of human societies. We need to directly engage with the climate justice question and movement. There appear to be two aspects to this: Global events and elaboration of Lokavidya position on climate justice. COP26 officially and finally debunked the principle of "strong sustainability". On the other side, the 21st century global extractivism is being seen as giving rise to "environmentalization of the agrarian question and the agrarianization of the climate justice movement" There is also questioning of the labour theory of value for regarding nature as something "external to society" and its consequent "epistemic failure to understand that capital transforms the man-nature relation qualitatively". There is the attendant idea of "nature as value". It seems to me (i) that this kind of theorizing does belong the knowledge dialogue and knowledge politics in which our interest lies, and that (ii) our understanding of lokavidya as 'knowledge originating in and returning to samaj' and 'lokavidya samaj as societies living by lokavidya' has something directly to say about this.

We have earlier related social justice to prestige of lokavidya vis-à-vis university and organized knowledge. Therefore we have seen "equal return for lokavidya work" as the contemporary programe of social justice. The farmers' movement has seen demand for prices for agricultural produce as demand of justice for villages. The movement has shown inclination to take farm labour along. Is localism / distributed power / autonomous communities / Swaraj the lokavidya route to social justice?

Some of us have talked earlier too of the recent trends in artificial intelligence and likely consequences. Much of it was in the context of unemployment and income loss. There seem to be at least two aspects to the impact of spread of AI – one, the increasingly larger numbers of livelihood skills devoured by AI systems, and two, far larger potential for social control, violence and destruction through AI systems accessible to very few. We really have no detailed lokavidya view on all this. This is true even as lokavidya view took shape as ICTs provided a criterion / referal of true knowledge that sidelined science. There may be many reasons for this, which will probably show up if we address the question of how lokavidya thought looks at it seen as a knowledge creation paradigm. Whatever may be true of the AI methods – basically mathematics and statistical inferencing – working AI systems cannot be disengaged from massive amounts of data on which they train. So, as Suresh said in his post, what they throw up is not bound by any axiomatic logic as such. But my feeling is that for the same reason AI systems cannot probably be separated from their place and context at least not in the same sense in which physics can – a essential aspect of western knowledge systems, which Suresh and GSR had talked about. But, even if data is local and contexed, it is still digital. So this may not be important. Still one cannot deny the reality of creation of software machines – the many local and task-specific apps – that the youth keep creating for the mobile phones.