

# **Revisiting Lokavidya**

[For Lokavidya Group Discussion]

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After almost 30 years now, we are engaged in a major and critical revisit of the idea of lokavidya. Most of what is written below is a sort of updated and slightly edited version of what we have been writing for a long time in different contexts and conditions for different tasks at hand. It is hoped that this will provide a relatively reasonable and sufficient text as well as the context for our discussion.

## **I. The Point of Departure**

(from THE IDEA in our website)

1. We believe that a radical intervention in the world of knowledge is a necessary condition for a radical transformation of society.
2. This belief has deepened since the appearance of the internet (and world wide web) which has brought great flux to the world of knowledge. Virtual networks of knowledge are now the order of the day. Science has lost its place of absolute command and lokavidya (people's knowledge) is getting new recognition.
3. At the same time, globalization and corporate reorganization in the Age of Information have shaped new forms of exploitation uprooting the lives of peasants, artisans, adivasis, women and small retailers, all bearers of lokavidya.
4. In the Knowledge Age equal respect for all streams of knowledge is a pre-condition for shaping a world based on ideals of equality.

5. Challenges to Western hegemony have spread to the knowledge domain. Taken to its logical conclusion, there will be lokavidya contestations in every department of the university. A people's knowledge movement that resides in the mass movements of people on the other side of the digital divide, alone can lead to a new philosophy of knowledge required for a radical pro-people transformation of society.

## **II. Lokavidya and Ordinary Life**

(from The Standpoint in our website)

1. Unconditional knowledge and unconditional life is lokavidya and ordinary life. Lokavidya is the knowledge with the people which changes with their experience, needs, change of ethical and aesthetic contexts and so on. It incorporates their way of thinking, principles of organisation, mode of abstraction etc. It is made up of a body of information, practices, techniques, expertise and what have you. There is nothing in lokavidya which is not changeable. It grows with ordinary life, gels with it and never dies, because ordinary life never dies. Ordinary life is life without condition. It assumes no science, no technology, no religion, no methods of organisation and communication of knowledge, it assumes nothing. It is not true, austere or moral life, for there is falsehood, extravaganza and immorality in ordinary life. But it has the criteria of truth, morality, justice, wisdom etc. in it.
2. Lokavidya constitutes the epistemic strength of the people. It is constituted of those traditions of knowledge which refuse to die and produce ever new modes of subsistence, innovation and growth under oppression, marginalisation or distortion by alien intervention. Ironically they shrink, sometimes beyond recognition, if the bearers of these traditions become

expansionist, colonisers and oppressors. This is a kind of socio-epistemic law. So lokavidya is an inexhaustible source of strength of the people. The chief value associated with lokavidya is that of ordinary life. Not austere life, not simple life, just ordinary life. Starting with the twin concepts of lokavidya and ordinary life, we can proceed to develop concepts which would enable us to build emancipatory resistance both in the epistemic realm and the physical realm.

3. The new ruling classes are emerging and organising themselves with knowledge at the center of theory and practice, knowledge management and social media being the most prized theoretical as well as practical activity. This makes the digital divide a radical knowledge divide, for the other side consists mainly of knowledge in society, lokavidya, which is expected increasingly to assimilate science and religious knowledge into it as it engages itself in struggle across the digital divide.
4. Lokavidya standpoint does not assume that one or other form of knowledge cannot contribute to development of emancipatory politics, for we think that knowledge cannot essentially be limited. Every concept, piece of information and even method of inference of a type of knowledge may be limited (say by its historical roots, cultural or regional genesis and application or by embodying elements of some specific cosmology etc.), but knowledge per se is not limited in any of its locations. So what is proposed is a dialogue between all locations of knowledge. Lokavidya and ordinary life constitute our normative framework for this dialogue between various streams of knowledge, locations of knowledge. Since lokavidya and ordinary life are not just primary expressions of people's knowledge and life but also constitute the

primary sources of strength of the people, therefore the normative framework of lokavidya and ordinary life radically favours political formations for emancipation of the people from the digital divide.

5. 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 the 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, Knowledge Management and Social Media. 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 people and to justice. This commitment is rooted in their respective traditions of thought and knowledge. Lokavidya standpoint is the standpoint of respect to these traditions of knowledge and many more. Peoples' 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.

### **III. A Summary Statement on *Lokavidya***

1. Knowledge in society, with the people, is called lokavidya. It cannot be held or stored in a book, caste, religion, library, university or computer. It is 'living knowledge' with the people.
2. Everybody is knowledgeable in the sense that everybody possesses lokavidya, which is his/her knowledge life-line. Everybody lives with autonomy of decision making based on what he/she learns through lived life (informally as lokavidya and formally in school/college). That is to say that lokavidya is ubiquitous both in space and time.
3. Those who have not been to college or university are not ignorant people. They go through an elaborate learning process in the family, peer group, village, community and the larger society, in and through their life activity. Markets, governance, work site, cultural phenomena, games, schools and places of knowledge dialogue may be specially mentioned where people learn.
4. Farmers, artisans, adivasis, service providers, small retailers, artists and generally women acquire their knowledge in society. They earn their livelihood and manage all their affairs by lokavidya, so they may be said to constitute lokavidya samaj.
5. People's way of thinking, manner of abstraction, methods of argumentation, social values, thoughts about and methods of organization, relations among themselves and with nature, information they command, skills they possess and their darshan (philosophy), all put together constitute a world of knowledge, which may be called lokavidyaloka.

6. Lokavidya is fresh every day, for in response to their needs, people incessantly improve upon the given, by their genius and based on their experiences and fresh experimentation.
7. The source of people's strength is in lokavidya. It is on the basis of lokavidya that they earn their livelihood, build their relationships with other people and with Nature, distinguish truth from falsehood, right from wrong, confront injustices and build their worldview.
8. Lokavidya does not separate physical labor from the mind and its activity. From the lokavidya standpoint there is nothing that is done by labor alone and everything is done by coming together of the required labor and knowledge. In other words, in the lokavidya way of thinking, nobody is a mere worker, everybody is knowledgeable.
9. Talking about society: the social and the economic disparity can be eradicated only when lokavidya fetches economic returns equal to that obtainable by university knowledge and is accorded the same social respect as is given to university knowledge.
10. Lokavidya Jan Andolan is the knowledge movement of the Lokavidya-samaj. Its objective is to obtain an equal status for lokavidya and lokavidya-samaj in the world of knowledge and society.

#### **IV. Mile Stones**

1. First Meeting in 1995 in Sarva Seva Sangh hall, Rajghat, Varanasi.
2. Lokavidya Mahadhiveshan –The 3rd Congress of Traditional Science and Technology of India, 1998, in Gandhian Institute of Studies, Varanasi.
3. Vidya Ashram Foundation 2005, Sarnath, Varanasi.

4. Lokavidya Jan Andolan Founding Conference, 2011, Vidya Ashram, Sarnath, Varanasi.

## **V. Lokavidya Jan Andolan**

Beginning 2011

1. Lokavidya Jan Andolan Conferences in Varanasi, Darbhanga, Singrauli, Multai, Indore, Nagpur and Chirala.
2. Coordination Committee Meetings in Varanasi, Sewagram, Darbhanga, Singrauli, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Nagpur, Pune, Multai, Indore.
3. Multai Resolution
4. Knowledge Politics –Lokavidya political Discourse
5. Bauddhik Satyagraha
6. Bhaichara Vidyalaya
7. Gyan Panchayat
8. Darshan Akhada
9. Farmers' Movement
10. Kisan Karigar Panchayat
11. Lokavidya Satsang
12. Swaraj Panchayat
13. Lokaniti Samvad
14. The Art-path of Social Reconstruction.