

For August 2023 Weekly Meetings

Some Thoughts on Swaraj Dialogue

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1. For a few weeks now Lokavidya Debates Group has been discussing 'Swaraj as a law of Nature'. Several written pieces have come out during the debate and this is my attempt to add to the new possibilities that have emerged in the debate.
2. I will start by pointing to the first resolution of the Multai Adhiveshan (2014), which said: "Every human being is knowledgeable and has the right to live by his own knowledge. This is a birthright." I am reminded of the the "Swaraj is my birth right!" pronouncement of Lokamanya. Both these calls pose a challenge to the modern state. In which condition lies their basis? Is there a resonance with the essence of compositions of Rishis, suktas of the Buddha, Kabir's dohas and radical philosophical compositions of Sants? Do they create possibilities of awakening of man's chetana and of a sense of autonomy, and inaugurate ways of becoming master of own destiny? It does seem so.
3. It is not for philosophy to present readymade resolution of problems, but only to create an awareness of a direction, a framework, of obstacles in the path, and of the basis of action needed to resolve them. On the strength of their knowledge, as human beings and the samaj rally around these calls, philosophy of transformation takes shape. The Lokavidya Andolan is an effort to strengthen this process.
4. The Swaraj dialogue is surely aimed at transforming the present systems opposed to man and Nature. There is a definite context to this transformation. The rulers appear to be bent on killing ordinary life and on imagining the world without a sense of humanity. Ordinary humans are progressively being robbed of all initiative at decision, action and thought. The environment of destructive wars, anti-people political

initiatives, an economic system rooted in loot, open instigation to sow enmities, greed and murder, artificially engineered pandemics like corona etc. has become so overbearing that ordinary men and women find it tougher by the day to build a challenge. The Swaraj dialogue is aimed at breaking this condition of helplessness, and at awakening autonomous capacities, that is at rediscovering activism and humanity. In this sense, Swaraj Knowledge Dialogue is a process of giving shape to a philosophy of transformation.

5. Conditioned by its own traditions and ways of life every samaj develops its own wisdom about the logic, the purpose and the value woven into movement of Nature and into happenings around. This wisdom and knowledge enable it to renew itself as a knowledgeable samaj in every age. An important and concrete context to this is that of its relations with Nature. Those who faced a relatively ferocious ambience came up with philosophical outlooks of victory. Those who lived in relatively milder environments created visions of co-existence. There is a spectrum of philosophical thought between the two extremes. Not to choose between the two, but to explore life with both is the fulcrum of the Swaraj thought. (The moral order of Shiva is similar to this.) This is so not just with ours, but also with many other samaj's. What distinguishes ours is that here we see the process alive in many ways even today.
6. Traditions of regarding the Earth, Nature and Srushti as the Mother, and human responsibilities toward Her as moral duty, existed in probably a majority of samaj's. The non-living and the living was regarded to be born of the same womb and to be cooperating in various ways, and to different degrees, in order to create anew. The diversity in nature was seen as based in a manner of coexistence and cooperation, which respects autonomy of each and ensures creativity of all. This is the heart of Swaraj. This is the condition where values of nyay, tyag and bhaichara bloom. One may christen this condition the Swaraj Law of Nature. These are the transformative values for contemporary human society.

7. Western philosophers based their thought in human need. Our thinkers thought of progress in terms of perfection of those actions, which strengthen coexistence in synergy with Nature. Duties and responsibilities were viewed in the same light. This was understood as the human way of organizing livelihoods and life. Man had a role in checking disturbances and hurdles in natural processes. Every living, non-living element of Nature was seen as driven by moral forces. Each element maintains its autonomy and cooperates with others, dissolving itself, to create new. With such a world-view, truth, consciousness of other's pain and non-violence regulate and govern actions of human beings and reveal how to construct arrangements of Swaraj in different times.
8. The lokavidya thought opened a path to understand this powerful strain in the philosophical outlooks of the bahujan samaj. With it we may be able to understand the needs and aspects of relationship of humanity to Nature in the contemporary context. Our publications have focussed on swarajist values in the social, economic, philosophical, and religious life of the bahujan samaj. We need to direct our efforts at building a deeper and broader contemporary thought around this.
9. We know that our thinkers of the independence movement thought extensively about Swaraj, which was seen as an order extending from the 'self' to the 'lok', with presence in religious, economic and political realms. Art, culture and philosophy witnessed extensive writing and reflection on Swaraj. Anand Kumarswamy, Nihar Ranjan Roy, K. C. Bhattacharya, Vinoba, Rabindranath among others exemplify the richness of this tradition. The rulers might have discarded it but not the samaj. Echoes of Swarajist aspirations are seen in the struggles of the last decade and in the farmers' movement.
10. Efforts should be made to transform the Swaraj discussions we are engaged in into Swaraj Gyan Panchayat. An essay (Swaraj in Ideas) authored by K. C. Bhattacharya in 1928 may be one of our inspirations.