

Response to Points Raised by Chitraji and Budhey

J K Suresh (15 Jan 2024)

Points raised by Chitraji:

Point 1: The title of the thinking about Survey proposal is 'Study of Lokavidya Samaj – The Rationale'. It seems to me that greater clarity is needed regarding the recognition / identification of the Lokavidya Samaj. Lokavidya Samaj is not the traditional / tradition-bound samaj. Nor is it merely the rural, or a caste-delineated Samaj.

We have raised this question before on the nature and composition of the Lokavidya Samaj. Are the millions who live in cities, e.g., the auto drivers, housemaids, the Swiggy/ Zomato delivery boys, etc. not a part of the Lokavidya Samaj? What can we say about absentee landlords, coffee plantation owners, people with large tracts of lands who buy expensive cars, send their children abroad for studies, etc.?

It appears therefore that it is not easy to create an effective geographical, income based, or occupation/work-based delineation of the Lokavidya Samaj. Any attempt to do so will have to deal with a fair amount of imprecision and unclear boundaries. However, this does not mean that no outlining will work. We need to make appropriate assumptions whenever we make such distinctions and in this case, we have chosen to look at village/ small town society and aim to discover what their state is.

By the way, in our proposal, no assumptions are made here that these sections constitute the Lokavidya Samaj just because they are considered to be traditional, rural or caste based. We survey them only because we believe that they broadly make up the Lokavidya Samaj.

Point 4: The purpose of a survey like the proposed one needs to be to gather together the knowledge and strengths of samaj's making up the Lokavidya Samaj as well as to expose the paradigms constructed to exploit this knowledge and these strengths to the detriment of the Lokavidya Samaj

How one may be able to discover and describe the knowledge and strengths of the Lokavidya Samaj is a challenge that we will have to break down to arrive at the structure of the Part 2 of the survey.

However, exposing the paradigms constructed to further enslave the Samaj will not be a part of the survey.

Points 2, 3 and 5 are not directly related to the survey although an awareness of the points will help us survey better.

Point 6, viz., “The methods of survey should incorporate ‘collective dialogue’”, needs to be analyzed for situations where it works and where it does not. This will occupy our attention when the design of Part 2 of the survey is made.

Points raised by Budhey:

1. What are the advantages of the method of questionnaire filled by college students whose parents are in Lokavidya Samaj? As far as I remember, the only advantage mentioned so far is convenience of the investigators. This, though, can hardly be called an advantage, Not just this but it can be extremely misleading or even harmful. The college students' information base, knowledge, values and way of thinking will, in all probability, be very different from their parents. To get square with my years of mis-trust of the questionnaire method, I went to google-search (which is perhaps not the best thing to do) and found that 'A questionnaire is a research tool used to conduct surveys. It includes specific questions with the goal to understand a topic from the respondents' point of view' (italics mine).

Background

It is to be noted that the background to the survey has already been shared with members of the group over the previous several meetings. Yet they are worthy of recall here, especially in view of the questions raised in the last couple of meetings.

There are two parts to the survey. The first uses a questionnaire for us to obtain a broad understanding of life today, and thereby help us estimate how ordinary life has

changed over the previous, say, 60 years. The questionnaire will address their living conditions, material possessions, the structure of the family, and their habits in terms of what they eat, consume and experience. Further questions will hopefully reveal the strength of their caste, community, extra- and intra-Village occupations and relationships. The questionnaire will be largely objective and try to avoid false negatives and false positives in the answers. This phase will provide a broad picture of the social life of the Samaj based on inputs from a few thousand students.

The second part of the survey would be a narrower survey involving our speaking to a cross section of people in a few villages. In this part, we will raise questions related to what their notion of a good life is, how they think they can achieve it, their ideas about Nyaya, Bhaichara, Swaraj, governance and the gulf between the village and the City, etc.; also questions related to their strengths and locations of resistance as they perceive it, and so on; not by asking direct questions on many of these points but in a roundabout way. Not much thought has gone into this part yet. We will come back to you later on this.

Responses

- a. In passing, it may be pointed out that the comment, “[the only advantage mentioned so far is convenience of the investigators](#)” seems to have taken our claimed advantage entirely outside the context in which it was stated. The central intent of the survey is, and has been since the beginning, to understand the state of the society in parts of rural Karnataka. However, the ability to have it served out to a few thousands of people, rather than a few hundred, is an additional advantage that this process offers. Obviously, this is not the sole feature of the survey. Nor should the description of it as a novel attempt detract from the merits of its essence.
- b. We now come to his main point, “[Not just this but it can be extremely misleading or even harmful. The college students' information base, knowledge, values and way of thinking will, in all probability, be very different from their parents](#)”.

We are not clear how questions related to living conditions, material possessions or occupations of family members can be

- (a) Either be misleading or harmful, or,
- (b) In relation to the questions in part 1 of the survey, how it matters if the young students' way of thinking is different from that of previous generations.

On the other hand,

- (c) It is extremely likely that a majority of these students will remain a part of the Lokavidya Samaj in the future, along with their information base, knowledge, values etc.
 - (d) Therefore, it is best that they are considered a part of the Samaj, albeit of tomorrow.
 - (e) When we speak about Lokavidya or the Lokavidya Samaj as being dynamic, it demands that we learn from these youngsters to assess the changes they are undergoing.
- a. As regards the observation, 'A questionnaire is a research tool used to conduct surveys. It includes specific questions with the goal to understand a topic from the respondents' point of view', we don't have any disagreements. It is in fact a part of the plan.
2. Some one said during the meeting that Lokavidya has been mainly understood as knowledge outside the university. This may have been said often to underline the location of lokavidya because the university is commonly seen as the chief location of knowledge and knowledge activity. However it must be said that our discourse on lokavidya describes and identifies various positive qualities and aspects of lokavidya. This discussion on lokavidya was started again, perhaps late in 2022 or early in 2023, questioning the basic validity of the idea of lokavidya anymore for understanding (the changes in) the world of knowledge and reality, and thereby providing a new way of thinking about and dialoguing on a new political imagination. In this context I had written a note titled 'Revisiting Lokavidya'. This note was sent to this group by Girish on 18th Feb. 2023. There are five parts of that note. These are --- I. The Point of

[Departure](#), [II. Lokavidya and Ordinary Life](#), [III. A Summary Statement on Lokavidya](#), [IV. Milestones](#) and [V. Lokavidya Jan Andolan](#). Please take a look.

Responses

We believe that this point needs an elaborate response that touches upon the note in its entirety. For your convenience, we have attached the document sent on 28 Feb 2023 by Budhey, “Revisiting Lokavidya”.

Part II (Lokavidya and Ordinary Life) of the note describes ordinary life, the unconditional nature of Lokavidya in ordinary life, its epistemic strength, the opportunity it has to transform the world in the information age due to the newly erected centrality of Knowledge by and for the new ruling classes, its breadth of viewpoint, etc.

Yes, indeed. These are reasonable ideas. However, is Lokavidya the same as what it might have been in early 1900’s? How has it changed over the last few decades when momentous changes have impacted the very nature of power across the world? What is the nature and extent of Lokavidya Samaj’s transformation – in its ideas and practices – as a result of the structures that have arisen in recent decades to project a new idiom and practice of power, governance, production relations, exchange relationships, etc. in society? It is precisely in this context that the present study, we believe, would provide a “dip-stick” type of results that provide some knowledge about the changes in the Lokavidya Samaj.

Point (5) in this section says that, “[Lokavidya standpoint is the people’s standpoint in the Age of Information](#)”. It seems reasonable to expect that this standpoint changes with society in the course of changes to ordinary life over time. One of the aims of the survey is to attempt to assess precisely this aspect of the Samaj

Part III of the note, “A summary statement on Lokavidya”, explains that Lokavidya is ubiquitous in space and time, and that people who have not been to colleges/ universities are not ignorant. This seems to be a manner of identifying farmers, artisans, women, etc., who are not schooled, as part of what constitutes Lokavidya Samaj and with knowledge gained through lived experience.

Point (5) in this section is notable because it goes beyond knowledge to indicate how their thinking, abstraction, argumentation, values, ideas of organization, relationships with others and Nature, etc. constitute, along with their knowledge, their world of Lokavidya.

Again, our question is, what are these values which, along with their knowledge, help them imagine a world that is said to be amenable to Nyaya, Thyaga and Bhaichara? How does it vary with time in the context of new presentations of reality that confront them each day or year or decade? How do we understand this? Etc.

While it is unlikely that a survey will ever be able reveal all of these aspects, a few may be probed in the second part of our survey.

We now turn our attention towards section1 ([I. The Point of Departure](#)).

Point (2) in this section says, “[Science has lost its place of absolute command and lokavidya \(people’s knowledge\) is getting new recognition.](#)” Point (5) in the section says, “[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.](#)”

Simply put, we would like to know, through a survey, how the above points are actually to be understood in the context of the life, beliefs, understanding and cognition of the Lokavidya Samaj.