

Bahujan Samaj and Swarajya

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Why have we chosen to refer to Lokavidya Samaj as Bahujan Samaj

For about 200 years now, a large majority of Indian people, especially those who live in the villages, have been cast out of mainstream economic, social, political and cultural activity by the dominant minority of 'educated' people, who live in cities and urban areas and work in establishments that are based on the modern (Western) education system, industry and commerce. The people who constitute this large majority are commonly labelled as 'uneducated or illiterate' only because they have not been to schools or colleges and because their knowledge and lives are inescapably based in Lokavidya. The process of exclusion or out-casting started during British rule; largely because the British (and all other western nations who established colonies in India) failed to or were unwilling to recognise the scope and breadth of Lokavidya and its importance in nurturing and sustaining all aspects of life and living of the peoples of India. [Towards the end of the 16th century and well into the 17th century, the White Anglo-Saxons began their expansion into the North and South American Continents, Asia, Africa and Australia. Their attitude towards the Native Peoples, their Knowledge, Culture and Practices, in every instance, was one of disdain and denigration followed by acts, often times violent, of delegitimizing the Knowledge and Practices of these Native peoples; a veritable Civilizational onslaught]. In order to legitimise their rule over the peoples of India they nurtured a class of subordinate section of Indian people, who were educated in the schools/colleges established by the British, and found gainful employment in the British Establishment (government offices, courts, hospitals, railways, industries, trading bodies etc) and who, over time, became loyal to British rule and adopted (in large measure) the Western way of life and culture. With the increase of employment opportunities in the British-controlled Establishment and the spread of schools/colleges; many people (of the cast out section of the population) chose to get themselves and their children educated in these schools/colleges as a way to find 'gainful employment' within the Establishment. This growing section has been referred to as "Paschimkrit Samaj" and because the vast majority of those who continued to live by Lokavidya, were effectively cast out and looked down upon by this "educated / employed / favoured" section; they were referred to as "Bahishkrit Samaj".

Dr. Ambedkar used the term Bahishkrit Samaj to refer to the untouchables, basically the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. We, however, used the word with an entirely different connotation. We used it in counterposition to the term Paschimkrit, and expanded the term Bahishkrit Samaj to include the large section of Indian people who were excluded socially, economically, culturally and politically from mainstream life - that is, the people who live by Lokavidya. They were referred to as the "depressed classes" in the early movements in South India, which demanded reservations on the basis of caste for these 'depressed, oppressed, disadvantaged, weaker' section of people. Reservations were first initiated by the Maharaja of Baroda, quickly followed by the Maharaja of Mysore, in the late 19th century. However, over the course of time we realised that the term Bahishkrit refers to the 'relative weakness' of this section of the population and the term Bahishkrit essentially meant identifying the vast majority of Indian people on the basis of a "perceived weakness".

The term Bahishkrit does not really capture the abilities or the inherent strengths of this section of people and taking into account their struggle for a more 'equal' identity, we used the term Swadeshi Samaj. The word Swadeshi was used by those who opposed British rule and way of life in the days of the freedom movement and were consequently deemed to have a Swadeshi spirit. (There were practical manifestations of this spirit in the freedom struggle- through the encouragement of the use of Khadi etc namely, products of Lokavidya-based activity in opposition to products based on

Western Knowledge). However, when we used the term Swadeshi Samaj to refer to and identify them, we were not referring to the consciousness of this section of people. We did not say that they were conscious of their so-called backwardness/weakness, nor that they were conscious of the inherent strength of Lokavidya.

About 30 years ago, when the term Lokavidya Samaj was used to refer to and identify this section of people, it seemed to capture the **real strength of this section of society**. In that, it refers to the inherent strength of their knowledge viz to Lokavidya. We had reached a stage where we could see the real dividing line in the Indian peoples as being one in the realm of Knowledge (and productive social activity based on this Knowledge). That is, between Lokavidya (Knowledge in Society) -on which the lives of this entire section of people was based; and Western Knowledge- on which the lives and activity of dominant section was based. The term Lokavidya Samaj, to identify this vast section of people, was therefore a recognition of the **inherent strength of Lokavidya**.

The word *Bahujan*- it was probably there for a long, long time, because The Buddha uses it to refer to and identify ordinary people who live ordinary lives. The Buddha spoke, primarily, about infinite compassion- of nonviolence, both physically and spiritually in the activity and relationship between all sentient beings. *Bahujan*, then, seems to be a term that captures that consciousness that incorporates empathy(*Karuna*) as an inherent aspect of social justice in ordinary life and society. The terms caste, class, race, nation etc., do not capture this aspect. So when we use the word *Bahujan*, we are recognizing this aspect of the (consciousness) *Dharma*(moral duty) which uniquely characterises the Indian People and sets them apart from almost all other peoples of the World. The term *Bahujan Samaj*, to identify this section therefore captures not only it's inherent strength in Knowledge(*Lokavidya*) but also in it's *Dharma*(moral duty).

Lokavidya Samaj is a *Dharmic Samaj*, and the *Sant Parampara*(people like Buddha, Basवेशvara, Guru Gobind Singh, Gnaneshwar, Kabir, Narayan Guru etc) used the fertile ground of their *Dharmic* consciousness to sow the seeds for *Nyaya, Tyaga and Bhaichara* to flourish. They used this consciousness in order to bring about social change. [Gandhiji refers to them as *Vaishnava Jan*, those who are consciousness of Social injustice and seek ways to liberate everyone from this wretchedness]. So the use of the term *Bahujan Samaj* seeks to identify this vast section of people through the strength of *Lokavidya* and their inherent *Dharmic* consciousness. *Lokavidya Samaj* itself is not aware of (these) strengths; so it is important that we attempt with whatever abilities we have, in whatever way it can be expressed(art, music, bhajan etc), to focus on the centrality of *Bahujan* consciousness- in order that *Bahujan Samaj* develops a vision for a new socio-economic order viz *Swarajya*.

Swarajya

Bahujan Samaj is made up of a number of Communities spread across the country. The identity, rights and duties of an individual are defined in a communitarian context. Community and individual are the two complementary ends of this social reality. This is important to note because the understanding of human consciousness that thus emerges, links the individual's consciousness(*Swadharma*) to her/his social consciousness in a well-defined relationship. We have seen that this consciousness is essentially *Dharmic*. The Communities were bound together by a *Dharmic* consciousness in every aspect of life- in the way they live, the way they interact, the way their discourses take place, the way they resolve their conflicts etc.(predominantly at least until the advent of British rule and establishment of a 'modern' society)

Swarajya essentially maps the harmonious and autonomous evolution of these Communities. As the Communities evolve, changes take place in their productive activities and in the relations of production among the various constituent (all *Lokavidya*- based) sub-communities, such as

jatis, upajatis etc. In all these Communities there is caste hierarchy, gender hierarchy, hierarchy between the dwellers in cities/towns and those who live in villages/jungles etc. These often lead to contentions and conflicts, especially in the *swadharma* of individuals and sub-communities; which threatens the sustenance and stability of the Community. It appears that, in the pre-British era, *Bahujan Samaj* had learned to 'manage' these hierarchies and not encourage any violent resolution of these conflicts. Many a time at such junctures, the *Sants* through their teachings (i.e. contemporary interpretations of *Nyaya, Tyaga and Bhaichara*), put forth a vision for (the geographically-localised) Communities of the manner in which the evolution ought to proceed, thereby mitigating the emergent conflicts and providing a newer path and, at times, a newer identity for the Community to ensure the sustenance and stability of the Community. Some of the most notable movements in this context are the *Khalsa* movement of Guru Gobind Singhji and the *Veerashaiva* movement of Sri Basaveshwara.

All this changed, in an almost irreversible way, with the advent of British rule. The introduction of a capitalist system of production and distribution, increased centralization of decision making and conflict resolution and adoption of a 'Western' way of life and thought -all these circumstantially distorted the *Dharma* of the various Communities, their cultural cohesion and shared identity. Contentious conflicts within *Bahujan Samaj* began to emerge and the *Dharmic* cohesion that characterized *Bahujan Samaj* began to fissure. This led to great disarray in *Bahujan Samaj* that continues to this day. The path to recapture the creative, humanist cohesion of *Bahujan Samaj* appears to lie in the revival (in a contemporary context) of *Bahujan* consciousness in these Communities and allow them to develop a new vision for *Swarajya*.

So, *Swarajya* is not about political change (as it is now understood), it is more of a **spiritual** rearmament of sorts based in a *Dharmic* spirit of cohesion, bonding and identity and NOT the (capitalist market driven) compulsion of disruptive, dehumanised competition.

All Nations the world over including India, have adopted the capitalist system of production and distribution and management (politics) and are active players in the Global Capitalist Market System. Thinkers, Economists and Political ideologues, who are trained in the Western Knowledge system, are now being confronted with the crises in ordinary life, livelihoods, dehumanisation, ecological catastrophe, severe resource and market competition, and the concomitant violent conflicts. They seem to have no alternate vision to liberate humanity from this all-pervading rottenness and defeatism. It is therefore necessary to embark on the revival and reinstatement of *Bahujan* consciousness in *Bahujan Samaj* – in what we could now call a new movement for *Swarajya*. This movement would seek to revive the *Dharmic* spirit (based on a contemporary interpretation of *Nyaya, Thyaga and Bhaichara*) that could actually bring the people together and make them transform their lives in a very meaningful way.

The path to *Swarajya* lies in a free exchange of ideas and views within *Bahujan Samaj*. It starts within the home and extends to the local *Panchayat* and beyond. The *Panchayat* system has been a tradition in all villages of India and even today many Community Panchayats all over the country (eg., the *Khap Panchayats* of the Jat heartland the *Gond Panchayats* of Chattisgarh, Maharashtra and Telangana play an important role in intra and inter Community affairs). The *Panchayat* is a place for consultation, dispute resolution, planning and overseeing constructive social action etc. A new vision for *Swarajya* will arise through continuous discussions that should take place in the local *Panchayats* within the ambit of the *Dharmic* consciousness. Such active *Panchayats* would therefore represent the core 'political structure' that facilitates the development of a vision to meaningful and sustainable social, economic and political change - that is, to *Swarajya*.