

On Bahujan Darshan

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Budhey's fifteen premises on Bahujan Darshan raise a number of questions.

First and foremost, one is never told what this Bahujan Darshan is, either in the beginning or at the end of these premises. There are fifteen premises, one linking with the other, almost in circles. Though they appear to be profound, one finds them so repetitive and circular that they remain as statements that are never proven but demand one's total faith in them. Let us look at the circularity of these statements and what sense one can make out of them.

There are the Bahujan, who are the most ordinary people and who have their own knowledge of things, people and the world. Their knowledge (lokavidya) gives them Swaraj and this knowledge, lokavidya, is infused with emotions, values and morals. Their life is Ordinary Life, an unconditional life, a life which is the foundation of all life / existence. They express themselves through Panchayats. These Panchayats are more 'democratic' and representative of the Bahujan, their knowledge, emotions, aesthetics and spirituality. The actions of Bahujan are logical, emotional, artistic and spiritual, all at once. In other words, there is no separation of the mundane and the aesthetic or spiritual in their actions or life. Put differently, there is no separation of the material and the spiritual, nor the mechanical and the aesthetic, nor even the logical and the emotional. Their social formations are all autonomous and hence imbued with Swaraj. Family, caste and other groups and communities thus enjoy Swaraj. It seems the Bahujan samaj is timeless in the sense nothing appears to change or needs change. There may be no conflict of interests and so no disputes and hence no violence. If there are issues or problems the Bahujan Samaj resolves them through consensus in their Panchayats.

At the end one is left wondering what then is the problem? Or, to put it differently, one feels like asking 'So what?'. Are we saying that Bahujan world view or Darshan is superior to other Darshans? Does this Darshan make them better human beings, happy, noble? Does this Darshan permit change, does it grow, expand, get refined over time, replaced by, or with anything over time? Is there any relationship between the knowledge of the Bahujan Samaj, which is lokavidya, and their Darshan? Does the formal knowledge of experts have any influence on the lokavidya of the Bahujan Samaj?

It seems to me that by looking at Bahujan samaj as an ahistorical, self-contained / self-sufficient and an almost never changing structure, Budhey makes it difficult for any debate or discussion. Either one accepts all the premises or rejects them in toto. On the contrary, there may be scope for discussion only if we formulate the premises as questions that need answers. For instance, instead of concluding that all units of the Bahujan samaj are autonomous, we might ask which ones are autonomous and with what consequences. Again, instead of asserting that lokavidya is both logical and emotional / spiritual, one may pose it as a problem. That is, in what sense is the mixing of logic and values makes lokavidya superior to expert 'university' knowledge.

It is quite obvious that the Bahujan Samaj is not aware of its Bahujan status as it is fragmented into a number of identity based units. Even though they may be seen by an observer as being bound by common interests or qualities or features, insofar as these are not subjectively perceived by the Bahujan actors themselves, they don't become a samaj. A community or samaj is sociologically defined as bound by a common territory and a 'we' feeling. While the territorial requirement may be relaxed to permit virtual communities, the 'we' feeling is a necessary condition. The fragmented identity groups within the Bahujan samaj are found to be very divisive by their very nature such that they cannot be a samaj in the true sense of the term. The only exception to this is perhaps the Indian Village conceived by some sociologists and anthropologists as self-sufficient communities. There was a lively debate between MN Srinivas and Dumont on whether Indian Villages can be seen as Communities. Though Srinivas maintained that the self sufficiency of our village is a myth, he argued that despite caste divisions / conflicts, the Indian Village is indeed a Community. But

Dumont argued that the very hierarchy of castes and exclusion of some castes from the Village make it impossible to look at the Indian Village as Community.

There is another problem with Budhey's premises on Bahujan Darshan.

It looks as though it implicitly denies the very idea of progress. Let us concede for a moment that several societies have had situations similar to ours of ordinary people with their own knowledge / skills, world view, have undergone large transformation of their economy, society, knowledge and skills, and ultimately of their own world view. This has been seen by most as progress, inevitable and unavoidable. If we broadly accept this idea of progress, then one must also concede that in this march towards progress our Bahujan samaj has to embrace new ideas, skills and organisation. When new technologies are introduced they do not remain innocent. They disturb the existing social and cultural relations and introduce new conflicts. What is called social change is the outcome of the inter play of factors, both exogenous and endogenous. Most social analyses look at these changes as 'progress' in very broad terms.

If we accept the above, then one must be prepared for the Bahujan Samaj to shed some of its values, ideas, practices and take to new ideas, values and practices. The lokavidya that has served the samaj well all these decades and centuries may actually prove an obstacle in their progress to a more prosperous life. The Panchayat that was so helpful in resolving their issues may become seriously inadequate in addressing new situations and challenges.

Let me say a few things about Bahujan Darshan itself. I am not sure if one can speak of Bahujan Darshan as distinct from what may be called the Indian Darshan(s). Is Darshan the same as what is called world view or Weltanschauung? Darshan in India has had several meanings. If we mean by Darshan what is commonly called world view, it may be possible to outline in a broad sense what constitutes the world view of ordinary people. It must also be pointed out that the world view of ordinary people may not be much different from the elites of our society. Dharampal held the view that the traditional elite of India and our ordinary people have had more or less similar world view. The core of the world view, viz, the normative order appears to have been shared both by the elite and Bahujan of India. Perhaps even the Indian Muslims and Christians have very similar world views to that of Hindus. What is called Dharma in a loose sense is what holds all our people together irrespective of caste or religion. It is in this sense one may speak of Indian culture / civilization.