

LOKAVIDYA SWARAJ

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LOKAVIDYA SWARAJ

(A conceptual note)

Lokavidya Swaraj is a new conception for reorganizing Indian society on the basis of knowledge (and skills) that all people possess. This concept is based on the conviction that the knowledge and skills acquired and possessed by ordinary people, on which they base their lives and livelihoods and which helps them fulfill the requirements of ordinary life, has no direct link or dependence on economic class, religious orientation, caste or gender. Every individual seeks to acquire knowledge and skills of his/her choice in order to become productive and contribute to societal development. This provides him/her a unique individual identity. There exists no inherent contradiction or conflict between the different streams of knowledge/skills and, in fact, this diversity of knowledge and skills engenders and helps sustain a spirit of mutual cooperation in the effort towards building a civilized humane society. Knowledge grows in response to the requirements of societal development. Every individual, who seeks to address and solve the problems that arise in the onward march of society, acquires such knowledge and skills that will enable him/her to do so; and this process is not determined or constrained by class, religion, caste or gender.

Knowledge development is not connected to or dependent on race, creed, caste, religion or nationality. Therefore, knowledge that has grown and developed in a particular geographic region cannot be evaluated on the quality-markers proposed and used by people of other geographic (foreign) areas. If the knowledge and skills that have been developed are relevant/ pertinent to the requirements of a certain region, then there can be no requirement or compulsion for that knowledge/skill to be certified by any “outside” entity or authority. There can be no “prescribed” or “recognized” routes for knowledge acquisition; be they through books, texts, practice, orally transmitted etc.

The hallmark of a civilized society lies in its inherent ability to provide an opportunity to every individual, comprising the society, to develop his/her knowledge/skills so as to be able to contribute to its development and progress both in the short and long run. Such opportunity cannot be constrained by

factors of caste, gender or religion. If opportunities for self-development, in order to contribute to societal requirements and well-being, are not made available to the individual, then they would, in effect, be socially excluded both from society and from livelihood activities.

An individual is born into a family, caste, religion and with a gender - these are mere “accidents” of birth, whereas the acquisition of knowledge and skills is based, in the main, on personal choice and is not constrained by caste, gender or religion. The atrocities committed, and being committed, by self-proclaimed custodians of caste and religion or the crimes perpetrated on women on the basis of an assumed gender inequality, by male supremacists; can be put to a halt only in a society that is organized on the basis of knowledge alone.

The development of knowledge ensures the continuous enlightenment of society from the lowest to highest levels. It is on the strength of knowledge alone that the humane development of society is possible, because it is not constrained by caste, religion or gender. Lokavidya Swaraj is based on the strength of knowledge, and the opportunity and scope for individuals to acquire such knowledge and ability to solve the problems that beset society.

LOKVIDYA SWARAJ AND DEMOCRACY

Lokavidya Swaraj and Democracy are two different concepts. While Democracy is inherent in Lokavidya Swaraj, it is not necessary that Democracy implies or includes Lokavidya Swaraj. While Swaraj is committed to work towards fulfilling the aims and aspirations of society, Democracy is committed to fulfilling the aims and aspirations of the nation state. And it is never assured that the aims and aspirations of the nation state are co-terminus with those of society. It is certainly not obvious from the workings of the present State, that it is geared to fulfill the real expectations and aspirations of the people.

It is a widely recognised fact that Democracy in our country does not even meet the definition, as given by the Western world, of “ Government of the people, by the people and for the people”. The duties of the Departments of Government are merely to implement the policies and programmes as drawn up by various institutions of Governance by the elected representatives of the people in these institutions. The situation in our country is such that the parliament, comprised of representatives elected by the people, itself does not hesitate to appropriate public property such as land, forests, water, natural resources and finances and , in the process, displace crores of people. What we have in the name of democracy are large private and public enterprises which manufacture the entire range of goods and essential commodities and market them under controlled market conditions. This has led to exploitation of the productive knowledge and skills of the working people and/or displacement of the people from their knowledge and skills. Over 80% of the population have fallen prey to this kind of organisation and control.

Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak had raised the call for “Swaraj” during the Independence movement. Mahatma Gandhi also gave a call for “Gram Swaraj” for the liberation of the poor and exploited people of rural India and brought this issue to the centre-stage of the struggle for Independence in India and the worldover. A number of radical programmes for reconstruction and reorganisation were inspired by his vision of Swaraj. But the ruling classes and successive Governments of independent India , sidelined and trashed this vision of Gram Swaraj. The result is that over 80% of the population are poor, subject to gross exploitation and do not have the basic right to a life of minimal dignity.

Lokavidya Swaraj is that vision of Democracy which would provide the space and freedom for Lokavidya Samaj to determine by and for itself the form and style of governance it chooses to have.

SOCIETY (SAMAJ)

The existence of a society is not because of or dependent on the existence of a State. On the other hand, a State comes into being in order to organize a society. Civilization is characteristic of a society and not that of the State. Civilization (Culture) is the manner through which a society expresses itself and can never be the offspring of a State. It is through its culture that a society identifies itself amongst the societies of the world. The State can, at best, include all the different cultural streams in its organizational fold. If a State, even a democratic one, in the pursuit of its objectives, neglects or disowns the cultural moorings of the societies, it includes within its organizational fold; then it is doomed to failure and anarchy.

The history of the Indian subcontinent tells us that the geographical boundaries of “Akhand Bharat” of Asoka, of “Hindustan” of the Mughals, of “India” of the British Empire and the independent “ Republic of India”’s eÖ; did not remain the same. Changes in national boundaries have kept pace with the changes that have occurred over time the world over. However, there is a perceivable continuity in societies. There have been few instances when societies were uprooted and all but destroyed in the conquest of Empire, such as with the native “Red” Indians of the North American continent; however, in general, the continuity of societies is an established fact when compared with the continuity of States or Empires. This appears obvious because the State is dependent on the existence of societies and not the other way round. So when we talk about civilization, a civilized society or a civilized State established on the basis of such societies; we assume that such a Nation State is possible only when it is fundamentally committed to implement the socially accepted vision regarding the public and official aspirations of the society. This can be ensured when the members of society have the opportunity and privilege of continuously opining on the developmental strategy to be adopted and not allowing them to be left entirely to the whims of a ruler or even of a parliament. In fact the duty of the ruler or parliament is to see that the aspirations of society are brought to fruition through the various departments of government; nothing else!

DEMOCRACY IN INDIA

India is a Democratic Republic. However, the fundamentals of democracy have been continuously eroded. So much so that the involvement of the people of India in democratic governance has become limited to mere participation in the elections. After the elections, irrespective of the party that is voted into power and whatever it does, has almost no relation to the aspirations or initiatives of the people. The efforts of different classes and communities to present their views and opinions to the government, through petitions, rallies, agitations etc, have had absolutely no telling effect on the actions of Government. The cause for this malady lies in the philosophy and practice of the election process.

It is commonly accepted fact that party politics in India has used caste, religion, gender etc to sharply divide the people. Every political party has become the representative of the interest of a particular religious or caste group. Every one of them tries to pit one group against the other, so much so that even within families such divisions can be seen! Every political worker now understands politics to mean vote-bank politics, that is, the nurturing and promotion of some group interest. Politicians of all hues don't seem to realize that this has almost driven the nation into a path of disruption and self-destruction. This type of politics is centered on acquiring the maximum possible reservation for a particular group and promoting the interest of that group alone.

The entire nation has been delimited into constituencies for the purpose of electing representatives to the parliament and assemblies. Each political party fields its candidate from each of these constituencies. Though such candidates are called peoples' representatives, their selection is based on factors such as religion, gender, backwardness of his/her caste etc. many criminal elements get selected in the process and the sole criteria for selection is the potential of victory of the selected candidate and nothing else. Crores of rupees are spent by the candidates contesting the elections and all of them are invariably financed by big industrialists and businessmen. There is no account of such contributions and there seems to be no effort at finding out anything about this. Experts feel that a lot of black money is involved in this process and public money is also involved in this process.

The significant aspect of this election process is that the candidate who gets elected to represent lakhs of voters of a particular constituency, is invariably a member of one or other party. How is it that a candidate who has no contact with the people of the constituency, gets elected and claims to represent the people of that constituency? How can such a person understand the needs, expectations and aspirations of the people he /she are supposed to represent? How will he/she devise programmes for the progress and development of the people? How will he/she be able to involve the people, based on their inherent talents and capabilities, in order to achieve such goals? All this is quite impossible.

The fact of the matter is that such a person does not represent the people, he/she represents a political party and his/her commitment is to the party or , if by chance his/her link with the party is broken, then his/her commitment is to another similar party. So he/she supports only those plans and programmes that the Government of his/her party draws up; irrespective of the fact that such plans and programmes may go against and may even be harmful to the interests of the very people he/she represents. And if by chance such an elected representative or party worker, protests or works against the programmes of the party; he/she is promptly expelled from the party and may lose his/her seat in the Parliament/Assembly, that is, formally cease to be a representative of the people.

A NATION BASED ON DEMONIC VALUES

During the period of British rule in India, the extant social, economic, religious and political situation was completely disrupted and seriously damaged. That seemed to be their intention too. In a very organized and premeditated manner they imposed their worldview, economic, political and social conceptions along with modern science and technology; on the people of India and through these artifacts ensured their unprecedented exploitation of the Indian people. They devised a system of education that would aid, assist and facilitate this exploitation. They established schools and colleges for this purpose and declared, that the knowledge by which the people had been organizing their lives for ages, was totally incapable of leading to a civilized society. The aim of denouncing the Indian knowledge system was to destabilize and undermine the fundamentals of Indian society.

The idea of “backwardness” began with this denotation, and laid the foundation for a negative conception of Indian society.

The rulers of independent India, operating with the same mindset and subscribing to the same ideas as the British rulers, paid scant attention to the resultant exploitation. The knowledge, science, architecture, worldview etc which enabled India to hold a massive 30% share of global trade in 1695 was rubbished with the result that by 1947 the share of India in global trade had dropped to a mere 4.5%. The leaders of the freedom movement were now supervising the continued exploitation of the Indian people. The roots of casteism and religious segregation have been continuously nurtured. The success of such politics was due to the abrogation of power by a small westernized elite who had scant respect for the knowledge and culture of the Indian people and who made sure that the people, who continued to owe allegiance to and firmly believed in the strength of peoples’ knowledge and culture, were sidelined and kept out of planning and governance. It is in such an atmosphere that party-based democracy took root and flourished.

Indian society is a multi-cultural society and has always been so. The rule of law and social organization established and imposed by the British rulers and encouraged further by the Indian rulers after Independence, had an adverse impact on the various socio-cultural groups in Indian society and they were seen and declared to be uncultured, superstitious and lacking in

any meaningful knowledge whatsoever. Any initiative on their part, in public social life, was contemptuously denounced and the vast mass of Indian society was declared “backward”. In the history of freedom struggles, the world over, this was probably the only instance where a majority of the people who fought for and actively participated in the struggle for independence, were looked down upon and treated with contempt. Deliverance from this state of affairs required a “Mahatma”, who could recognize the knowledge-wealth of these people, who could catalyze their inherent initiatives and deliver them from the bondage of superstitions. So each political group tried to project some individual as this Mahatma. Though they were all of different political/ideological persuasions, their goal, however, was common; that of continuing the exploitation of the vast mass of people. This continues to this day. Leader after leader strives to convince the people that their deliverance lies only by following the path of development, as shown and laid down by the British.

It can now be categorically stated that, in order to reorganize and reconstruct a truly developed society, the ideologies of the Right (Capitalist) and those of the Left (Communist) have both miserably failed to serve the people. In both dispensations, peoples’ contribution to planning, in decision making and programme implementation is not seen to be necessary or required. All decisions are either taken by Government or the Capitalist class. It is common public understanding that there exists a very strong linkage between the political class and the class of capitalists and the entire planning and decision making process has always been dictated by the interests of the latter and will always be.

The Indian Constitution has given the Government uncontested rights over the exploitation of natural resources – water, forests, land and atmosphere, in order to continue the exploitation of the people and deny them their fundamental rights. There is probably no other instrument that allows and facilitates the arbitrary denial of the fundamental necessities of life to the people. This seems to be a method of completely negating the spirit of democracy. This is a political setup that facilitates the total control over natural resources – land, water, forests, air and the open skies by the political and capitalist class. Such a political setup requires that the people are kept divided on the basis of caste, religion, gender, backwardness etc. And this is what has happened.

The history of the past 70 years tells us that, in the name of development, lands and forests have been snatched away from farmers and forest-dwellers. People have been dispossessed of their homes. Working people have had their means of livelihood and production snatched away from them. Skilled people have been forced to become *coolies* with no assurance about their livelihood requirements. Those communities which were self-reliant have now become beggars, seeking doles from Government.

Such acts of Government are an indication of the uncivilized and degenerate attitudes that rule the day. The biggest indicator of this degeneration is that people and their means of livelihood are now entirely seen and weighed in terms of money alone and the strange thing is that the Constitution permits this. Democratically elected representatives have passed such dehumanized laws and have even got the Supreme Court to ratify them. So, with the realization that the foundations of Indian Democracy having been laid on such demonic values, no real development of Indian society is possible.

LOKAVIDYA VICHAR

Lokavidya Swaraj is based on the fundamental concepts of *Lokavidya*. This conception is based on the belief that a society is NOT characterized by the different castes, cultures or religious denominations that comprise it, but by the distinct knowledge-base of that society. This knowledge, *Lokavidya*, is the knowledge that the people intrinsically possess and live by. The characteristics of *Lokavidya* may be summarized as follows:

- ◆ The collective knowledge of the people is called *Lokavidya*
- ◆ *Lokavidya* is the knowledge with the people and is NOT the knowledge obtainable in any school, college, or university.
- ◆ People cannot be deemed to lack knowledge just because they have not gone to school or college; in fact they acquire knowledge through their active participation in and with society and live by this knowledge (*Lokavidya*). They possess *Lokavidya* and are *Lokavidhyadhars*, the bearers of *Lokavidya*.
- ◆ Farmers, artisans of all types, women who manage/run households, small traders, people who live in the forests (*adivasis*), all kinds of service providers, the practitioners of fine arts (*lok kalakars*), people involved in the upkeep, cleaning and maintenance of homes, streets, localities and the environment in general; all of them acquire knowledge and skills (*Lokavidya*) in and from society and their livelihoods are based on that knowledge; these people constitute *Lokavidya Samaj*.
- ◆ The method of organizing society, the values and norms that are nurtured, the culture, the methods of conflict resolution, the relationship with nature, the preservation of a sustainable living environment; all these constitute the World of *Lokavidya*
- ◆ *Lokavidya* rests in society. It is not constrained by or limited to castes, religions, texts, libraries, computer systems, institutions or obtainable within the confines of schools, colleges, universities, mutts or ashrams. It develops and grows with society.
- ◆ *Lokavidya* is dynamic and is continuously enriched by the experiences and requirements of daily life and livelihood practices.

- ♦ The life-sustaining energy of society lies in *Lokavidya*. The ideas that govern and direct all livelihood activities, all methods of conflict-resolution, all concepts of justice, the relationship with nature and environment: all these constitute the world-view of society.
- ♦ *Lokavidya* does not differentiate between (mental) knowledge and (manual) labour. All purposeful human activity is considered to be a mutually-enriching combination of knowledge and labour. In other words, *Lokavidya* does not consider a person, engaged in manual labour, to be bereft of knowledge but, on the other hand, also considers him/her to be a *gyani* (knowledgeable person).

Lokavidya strives to organize society as *Lokavidya Samaj*. It rejects the current descriptions of society in terms of backwardness, based on caste, creed, religion, gender and educational qualifications and strives to alter this exploitative description and dispensation. The self respect and confidence of *Lokavidya Samaj* rests in *Lokavidya*. The various constituents of *Lokavidya Samaj*, commonly denoted by caste, religion, gender and class, have all combined their inherent knowledge and skills to build, develop and sustain the *Samaj* through the ages. *Lokavidya Vichar* incorporates all knowledge and skill contributions by its various constituents and rejects the segregation, by the State and political parties, based on the conception that the contribution to knowledge can only come from the school and college-educated sections of population. *Lokavidya Vichar* is firmly based in the belief that all persons are *Gyanis* (knowledgeable persons) and that they will all have to rekindle the idea of self-respect and mutual recognition of rights and privileges; which will form the basis of establishing a truly democratic *Lokavidya Swaraj*.

LOKAVIDYA VICHAR AND THE CONCEPT OF CIVILIZED SOCIETY

There is an intimate connection between Nature and *Lokavidya*. All creatures that are creations of Nature are deemed and treated as part of Nature. Similarly, *Lokavidya* which evolves in a society is an intrinsic part of that society. As creation and evolution is an intrinsic characteristic of Nature, so also does *Lokavidya* continuously reinvent itself. *Lokavidya* is based in daily life practices and experiences of society. It continuously adapts and replenishes itself to suit the requirements of society. For instance, the so-called “backward” sections of society have risen above caste, creed and religion and learnt to use and adapt modern technology and manufacturing processes – such as those associated with cars, scooters etc, without acquiring such knowledge and skills from schools and colleges. In fact, they have been able to innovate and tackle unforeseen problems in such practices. On the other hand, the University system has not been able to produce innovative and skilled persons of similar calibre, to the extent it was supposed to do. This is also to be seen in the civil construction area, where “uneducated” and “unscientific” masons and workers, know the correct proportions of cement/ mortar, sand and stone and are able to plan, design and construct large stable structures. They are also able to incorporate new ideas, materials and techniques, which become available, in their ongoing activities. The important point to note, is that they have not acquired this knowledge and skills from colleges or experts produced by such institutions, but have acquired such knowledge and skills while working with the elders (of their profession) and from the experience of daily life activities. They are thus able to productively contribute through a livelihood activity. In the area of healthcare too, the skill and expertise of local medical practitioners, who carry out diagnosis based on *nadi-shastra* and suggest relatively cheap and easily implementable cures and remedies; stands out in stark contrast with the de-humanized modern healthcare system, a product of college-based medical education and the prevalent market. There are many instances where the modern medical practitioners, fearing a “threat” to their profession, use the State apparatus, such as laws and police, to harass and oust “traditional” medical practitioners. A civilized society would seek to preserve, protect and promote such knowledge

and skills that truly aid the sustenance and well-being of society rather than deny and denigrate the relevance or importance of such knowledge and skills.

A society that does not do this cannot be considered to be civilized or enlightened. However, our society and State are currently pursuing such policies with vigour. The establishment of *Lokavidya Swaraj* will be based on a radical alteration of this situation.

The concept of *Lokavidya Swaraj* is based on the following premises:

No local group, institution, constitutional body or even the State can have absolute control over natural resources. In other words, all people belonging to various sections of society have an inalienable Right over land, air, water, forests and natural mineral wealth. Such Right is not based or dependent on social position or economic status. It is not conferred by virtue of allegiance to one or other ideology or belief system. No body or organ of the State has the undisputed right to decide on the acquisition or distribution of such natural resources, even for the 'development' of society. Such right and privilege exists only for the various communities that comprise society. They also have the inalienable right to decide on the distribution and use of such natural resources.

The concept of social development is not defined, determined or limited by ideology, philosophy or intellectual ideas brought in from outside and thrust upon society. It is for the various communities, of the nation, to decide on the model and path of development that best suits their needs, priorities and aspirations; and establish such institutions and bodies that will implement programmes to realize and bring to fruition these aims and aspirations. During this process, there should be equal access to and participation of all members of society irrespective of caste, creed, religion, gender, age or economic and social status. Development that preserves both Nature and Culture is what is desired.

Every individual, irrespective of caste, religion or gender, has the fundamental right to choose the knowledge and skills he/she wishes to acquire consistent with the developmental goals of society. The basis of establishing a productive and developing society lies **only in the active participation of all members on the basis of their knowledge and skills alone**. Only on such basis can a stable and united society survive and grow. It would also

be the responsibility and duty, of these knowledge-groups in society, to establish and sustain such institutions that would aid and promote the transfer, growth and development of *Lokavidya* and of such knowledge and skills that would be required to solve problems that arise in its chosen path of development.

There is no hierarchy in the realm of knowledge and skills. The distinction, between different knowledge streams, as superior and inferior is totally misplaced. An attitude that assigns a superior status to University-based and acquired knowledge and an inferior status to that possessed and obtained in and from society (*Lokavidya*) is to be out rightly condemned. *Lokavidya* is relevant knowledge because it has been the base that has been associated with every aspect of societal development through the ages. It, in turn, is based, grows and adapts with every daily-life experience of society and shares an intimate bond with society.

There are many areas of knowledge such as those of farming, artisanal practices, medicine, art and architecture, fine arts and drama, entertainment etc. Normally, a farmer cannot treat sick people and neither can a man of medicine do farming. Each area of knowledge has its relevance and importance to society and the bearers of such distinct knowledge-streams (*Lokvidhyadhars*) all have an equal relevance and status. There can be no hierarchy in these socially-relevant knowledge-streams.

In every locality, the knowledge of the environment and living beings(plants, animals, birds etc) in that locality; knowledge about their mutual interdependence and relationships, their contributions and obligations to sustain and preserve the natural environment- all these are incorporated in the knowledge-base of the different sections of society (*Lokavidya*). It is but natural that there is a wide diversity of knowledge-streams in *Lokavidya*, each relevant to the locality in which it grew and developed.

Every individual has the right to life, liberty, and knowledge and wealth acquisition. Any philosophy, ideology, world-view, constitution or *Lokavidya* that denies the possibility of new ideas or thought coming into being, that could lead to and assist in the real development of human society; loses its relevance in contributing to the real development of people and societies and has no right to impose restrictions or controls on the development of such ideas and thought.

Every individual has the right to live by his/her knowledge, acquired by any means whatsoever, and provided that is consistent with ordinary socially accepted norms and practices. An individual has the right to determine and live his/her private life; so his/her private life should not be judged according to the dictates of any ideology or world-view.

Modern science demands a “scientific” proof/explanation for every event, happening and experience. There are many such real-life events and experiences in society that do not lend themselves to “scientific” or common-sense scrutiny or explanation. So, to demand that every event be subject to scientific scrutiny in order to be declared valid and accepted; is wrong , anti-human and against civilization.

No human activity is solely based in either mental (knowledge) or manual labour. Every purposeful activity is a combination of knowledge and labour. There can therefore be no hierarchy of knowledge or labour and social hierarchies based on such conceptions are also wrong and misplaced. *Lokavidya Swaraj* is a Knowledge society comprised of knowledgeable people (*gyani*).

THE SOCIETAL BASIS OF LOKAVIDYA SWARAJ

Lokavidya Swaraj is the Democracy of *Lokavidya Samaj*, it is *Lokavidhyadhar* Democracy. Such a truly civilized society can be established and sustained only by the active participation of ALL members of *Lokavidya Samaj*, that is, all *Lokvidhyadhars*. The ideological basis of this society will be firmly rooted in *Lokavidya*, *Lokavidya*-based livelihoods & practices and in the belief system that evolves within *Lokavidya Samaj*. Given below are the societal aspects of this ideological basis.

1. The Man-Woman inter-relationship

The primary and most important relationship between man and woman is the relationship of husband and wife. This relationship is the basic building block of a family and the society. In spite of there being no blood relationship, the bond between husband and wife is a very important basis for all human relationships. These relationships form the basis of relationships that develop between members of a family. The sustenance of family relationships depends crucially on the relationship between husband and wife. There can be no boundaries or constraints on the relationship between husband and wife and whatever exists between and for them is also for the entire family. There can be no 'division of labour', hierarchy or division of wealth between husband and wife. Both of them are, equally, possessors and practitioners of knowledge (Gyanis) and their contributions to family life, progress and wealth are basically dependent on their knowledge and skill contributions to this fundamental collective. The values and culture, that characterize a civilized society, are based in the relationships that evolve in the family.

2. The status of Women

The role and status of women in society today seems to have been relegated to the background. Whatever is her place of stay – village, town, city or forest, or whatever be her occupation – homemaker or employee in public or private enterprise, or whether she lives by traditional or modern knowledge and values; she has been, for very long, denied her true, rightful and pre-eminent place in family and society.

Women are very important members of human society. They not only help build and sustain human society, they also play a very important role in the sustenance of values and culture of a society. The spread and growth of this culture depends on the 'success' of her family. So, she is mindful, not

only about the growth and development of her family, but also that of and between the various families that comprise society. She remains, at all times good or bad, completely devoted and committed to the interests of the family.

It is impossible to imagine a family or home without women. A family can be considered to be an inalienable part of the society only when it lives by and according to the undisputed norms and practices of that society; and women play a very important role in sustaining this social identity. The woman plays a very important role in keeping the family together, in keeping track and fulfilling the needs and necessities of the various members of the family while being fully aware of the income and expenditure(budget) of the family; and in seeing that the family maintains a 'life of dignity' at all times.

Women have played a role in public life while continuously managing the family. Those who have acquired 'modern' education in schools and colleges have taken employment as policewomen, army personnel, bank employees, office workers etc. The role and contribution of women members of Lokavidya Samaj may be listed as follows:

All women are unquestionably *Lokvidhyadhars*. All women possess knowledge of the fundamental requirements of family life and of bringing up children. No civilization has ever negated this knowledge or degraded it. Modern society and knowledge systems have tried to degrade this wealth of knowledge and reduce the status of women; but with little success.

Women belonging to the farming, artisan or tribal communities possess knowledge pertinent to these livelihoods and, in fact, they are also considered to be *Lokvidhyadhars* in these realms. They also possess knowledge of the natural environment. They have all along been responsibly involved with the transfer of these knowledge realms to successive generations. Women are an integral part of human society and they should be identified essentially by their knowledge.

Apart from their primary responsibilities as homemakers, women also possess knowledge of health-care, food processing and dress making. Every household is an institution of teaching, learning and research in housekeeping and home management.

In spite of the negative influence and derogatory references about our culture and practices, made by 'outsiders', women have been the upholders of all that is good and worthwhile. Only when the knowledge of women is given its due respect, will there be a correct perspective and balance in

social inter-relationships and economic stability. *Lokavidya Swaraj* will aim to establish the correct position of women in society through a fundamental recognition of women as *Gyanis*.

3. Adivasis, Kisan and Karigar Samaj

Adivasi and Kisan Samaj is in direct contact with Nature. No other section of society shares this kind of relationship with Nature. Green Revolution-directed agriculture and displacement-based development have adversely affected these sections of society and destroyed the relationship and balance between culture and environment. Agriculture has been assessed only in terms of grain output and forest activity in terms of monetary accruals, so much so that the lives of farmers and *adivasis* and that of their future generations have been put on stake. With the result that great differences and animosity have developed among and within these sections. The *Karigar Samaj*, which shares an intimate connection with these two sections, has also consequently been badly affected. *Lokavidya* philosophy does not support this displacement-centered development paradigm.

Lokavidya Swaraj firmly rests on the belief that no government, society or section has undisputed rights over any natural resource; because the natural environment is not a 'product' of the efforts of any section. Both living and non-living beings are children of nature and a non-hierarchical relationship exists between them just as there is between mother and child. The destruction of the natural environment heralds the destruction of both living and non-living beings. The value of natural resources can never be ascertained by any individual, group or society as they are not products of human activity. This holds for any government or duly constituted body whatever be their ideological moorings. The State or government that attempts to fix the value of natural resources would become bereft of culture.

A State that is overwhelmingly influenced by and conducts its affairs according to a particular ideology and culture, while negating all other ideologies, knowledge and culture of the societies under its fold, would end up as an exploitative and oppressive State. If a chosen path of development results in the destruction of livelihoods so much so that productive sections, such as farmers and artisans, are reduced to 'beggary' and dependent on doles and alms of government; such a State can never hope to achieve the establishment of a civilized and progressive society.

Adivasis have for ages been connected with forests. Their lives have been built around a deep knowledge of the flora, fauna and bio-ecology of the forests. They possess a profound knowledge of the correct connection between culture and environment. Attempts to displace them from forests are tantamount to barbarism. If *adivasis* are not the natural 'masters' of the forests, then how can any government or development agency claim this right?

The claim over natural resources by governments has adversely affected the *Karigar Samaj*. This section, which produces all articles of daily use for all using, primarily, natural products and raw materials; has become the victim of government policies, rules and regulations. Another factor that has contributed to driving the *Samaj* into utter deprivation has been the unbridled industrialization.

The well-being of the *Kisan, Karigar and Adivasis Samaj* rests on the mutual cooperation and bonds that exists between them. Any attempt of alienating farmers from lands and *adivasis* from forests is akin to breaking up families and can only lead to disharmony.

If a person is displaced from his/her knowledge-realm and from the livelihood based on such knowledge/skill, life becomes meaningless. Society becomes directionless and all sections of society come into disarray because their mutual-interdependence is shattered. Every *gyani* and skilled person is forced to become a *coolie/* beggar and the seeds for migration from village to towns and cities get sown. Knowledgeable, skilled, respectable individuals become objects of ridicule in the cities and their families are doomed to lives of penury and hardship. Such a situation, which is the outcome of current development policies, is made use of by political parties by promoting division among the people, based on caste and religion, for the sake of votes.

The question is not whether the compensation paid by the government of the day to the displaced sections of the society is in lakhs or crores of rupees, the question, indeed, is whether the entire life span of an individual and his knowledge base, post displacement, can ever be quantified in terms of currency. Evaluating life span and knowledge in terms of currency is tantamount to shaking the foundations of a civilized and cultured society. The true measure of civilization would be in terms of the opportunity provided to each individual to live a wholesome life and contribute to the well-being of society through his/her knowledge, skills, labour and motivation.

Lokavidya Swaraj recognizes the inherent ability and fundamental right of *Kisan, Karigar and Adivasis Samaj* to plan and practise their livelihoods for the well-being of society as a whole. All that is required is a political dispensation where this is possible and encouraged. True democracy is that which is envisaged in *Lokavidya Swaraj*, where the freedom and opportunity, for each individual to contribute to the best of his/her ability, is continuously expanded; and this is possible when every aspect of *Lokavidya* finds its true and correct expression.

4. Dalit Samaj

The members of this section are normally agricultural labourers, small farmers or artisans. Apart from this, many members are involved in various service activities. They possess knowledge of environmental upkeep and work to keep the surroundings clean. They are involved in clearing waste matter in gutters and latrines in villages, towns and cities; which they do without hesitation.

Their activities, consequently, helps in arrest of communicable diseases and they can be rightfully acknowledged as the primary health and sanitation workers. However, in contemporary Indian society they are considered to be unclean and 'untouchable' and are at the bottom of the social ladder, socially excluded and severely exploited. The atrocious plight of this section is a big blot on Indian society and its claimed civilization.

All political parties lay claim to the progress made post independence but, apart from utilizing this section for vote bank politics, there is no mention of the inhuman situation of this section or plans of ameliorating it. Dalit leaders are also part of this kind of politics. This intransigence in politics around the dalit question is but a result of the developmental philosophy that negates the contribution of Lokavidya Samaj. The situation will be radically altered in Lokavidya Swaraj as every individual's contribution, **as a gyani**, is deemed pertinent and essential to development.

5. Constructive cooperation between different religious sections

Indian society is comprised of people of various faiths- Hindu (Vedic, Vedantic), Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh, Parsi etc. Additionally the adivasis have their own religious beliefs. There are also atheist and agnostic sections and those who owe allegiance to science and scientific rationality. Society needs the cooperation of all these sections for its progress. Every religion seeks to establish a just and economically & socially equal society. It

is essential that every one accept that, in this quest for social and political justice, their philosophy alone is not relevant/ supreme and not try to impose or destroy other faiths and beliefs.

It is required that the organization comprising members of each religion continuously take cognizance of economic, social and political intolerance being perpetrated and not allow the goal of economic, social and political justice to be subverted.

Every individual must have the freedom and opportunity to study other religious texts. Restricting this freedom would be the first step in dividing society along religious lines. Merely reading of texts does not alter one's religious beliefs, character or behaviour. A person's beliefs and faith is not determined by religious texts alone and, if there are socially objectionable and detrimental passages in such texts, then, historically, measures have been taken by society to correct these aberrations.

The study of other religious texts does challenge the authority of the religious leaders. Such study will also keep a check on religious preachers. It is also possible that such mutual understanding between practitioners of different religions would lead to ideas of an alternate way of life.

THE PANCHAYATS AND PEOPLES' REPRESENTATIVES

Panchayats will play an important role in Lokavidya Swaraj. The existing Gram Panchayats, which are delimited in terms of geography, will be replaced by three Panchayats in the same geographical area. They will be the Gyan Panchayat, Mahapanchayat and Samajik Panchayat. Some aspects related to their formation, composition and functioning are listed below.

1. Gyan Panchayat

The Gyan Panchayat is a fundamental and important unit of Lokavidya Swaraj. It stands at the base of the organizational structure of Lokavidya Swaraj. There are a number of Lokavidya streams within the geographical area of the existing Panchayats. Each such stream will have its Gyan Panchayat. Some views on their composition, functioning and role in the development process of society, are listed below:

Every Lokavidya-stream (Lokavidhyadhar) will have its Gyan Panchayat, such as:

- ◆ Kisan (Farmers) involved with production of grain, cereals, fruits, vegetables, flowers, livestock and poultry etc,
- ◆ Adivasis involved with forest maintenance, forest produce, artisanal activity etc
- ◆ Dalits involved in agricultural labour, artisans, sanitation and hygiene upkeep etc
- ◆ Karigar (Artisans) such as blacksmith, goldsmith, potter, carpenter, weaver, mason etc
- ◆ Women involved with home-making, childcare, education, office and industry work etc
- ◆ Small Traders comprising both retail and wholesale etc
- Health Workers involved with medicine and healthcare etc

Each Gyan Panchayat will deliberate, in their respective Lokavidya streams, over issues pertaining to production/service and problems arising thereof and seek and implement ways and means of tackling those problems. The Gyan Panchayat will also suggest and seek the establishment of such bodies and institutions as it deems fit, in order to carry out its functions smoothly

and efficiently. There would be unfettered freedom to discuss pertinent issues and seek cooperation of other Gyan Panchayats, as and when need arises.

2. Mahapanchayat

The Mahapanchayat will be comprised of elected representatives from each Gyan Panchayat. It will deliberate on issues pertaining to increasing production and delivery of services and find out ways and means of doing so. An important aspect of its function would be the determination of market prices of goods and services with a view to protecting and sustaining lives and livelihoods. It would also continuously monitor and revise these prices as and when the need arises.

3. Samajik Panchayat

Individuals who have expert practical knowledge and experience will be the members of the Samajik Panchayat. These members will be drawn from each and every Lokavidya-stream and would command the respect and support of these sections of Lokavidya Samaj. The main function of this Panchayat will be the promotion and maintenance of fraternal, just and mutually beneficial relations between the various constituents. Some of these aspects are listed below:

- ◆ Maintenance of Law and order
- ◆ Establishment and sustenance of institutions that will impart education and skills in every Lokavidya-stream pertinent to that area
- ◆ Provide support and encouragement to all forms of cultural activities, fine arts etc and deliberate on ways and means of sustaining their growth and spread

No person is born a criminal or with inhuman or anti-social tendencies. The social environment and /or greed may lead a person to commit criminal acts, and this happens when the society is not able to instill and sustain human values. For example, if there is blatant promotion of consumerism in society, then greed and avarice will dominate all human activity and relationships.

The fundamental identity of an individual derives from his family, his community, his occupation and place of work. Identity means recognition of his/her background, personality, motivating factors and impulses. An individual does not possess any identity outside of this social circle. If this social identity does not provide a status of dignity to the individual, then such individuals are doomed to a life of social exclusion and designation as criminals. Such

criminality can take many forms such as property disputes, atrocities against women, dowry and caste and religious intolerance.

The current system of justice is based on what is presented in the court and not what has actually happened or seen to have happened. How is it possible for a judge to pass sentence on a person without taking due cognizance of the person's life, knowledge, culture, the social environment in which he/she lives, the circumstances that led him/her to commit the alleged offence? Can the decision be taken based only on the 'evidence' presented by the police/public prosecutor and witnesses who may not know the defendant or each other? The present system of justice is not only 'blind' but is also based on blind-beliefs (superstition).

A system of justice has to be based on a premise that if the family and/or community elders cannot deliver justice to the accused, no other 'outside' institution can do so. In the same way, any dispute can only be settled by the Panchayats of that area who have access to the social profile of the accused and are fully cognoscenti of whether the accused is capable (in every sense) of committing the alleged crime. It is therefore, not possible for any institution which does not have a close understanding and recognition of the social 'identity' of the accused, to deliver any judgment about alleged crimes committed by the individual. Only a Samajik panchayat has the wherewithal to deliberate, understand and pass such judgment.

The Samajik Panchayat will establish a justice system comprised of individuals with no social or economic biases. This committee will do all it can to avoid and prevent the occurrence of crimes, but in the event of such happening, it will seek the intervention of the Samajik Panchayat in discussing the crime, examining every individual involved and coming to a consensus about the justice to be meted out to the criminal. Every person will have the right to appeal against the judgement before the Samajik Panchayat.

The Samajik Panchayat will establish such institutions and bodies to provide education and training to all individuals in basic livelihood skills, irrespective of caste, creed, religion or gender. Thereafter the Panchayat will make arrangements to provide advanced knowledge and impart skill training in each individual's chosen areas of study and learning; which will include the realms of fine arts, culture etc.

ELECTION OF PEOPLES' REPRESENTATIVES

The Panchayat Raj system has been seen as a developing system. It has three major components:

1. Lowest order: Gram Panchayat
2. Middle order: Panchayat Samiti
3. Upper order: Zilla Panchayat

The "Gram" is constituted of a village or a group of contingent villages. It is based on the voting population of the (covered geographical) region. Based on the voting population, the electorate is divided into 5 or more voter divisions/categories and each division/category elects one representative, who then come together to constitute the Gram Panchayat.

Each region of the District is represented by its Panchayat Samiti. The members of the Panchayat Samiti are elected by the respective Gram Panchayats constituting the region. Each Gram Panchayat elects 3 or more representatives to the Panchayat Samiti. These representatives constitute the Panchayat Samiti.

The entire District is represented by the Zilla Panchayat. Its representatives are elected by the Panchayat Samitis constituting the District. Each Panchayat Samiti elects 3 or more representatives to the Zilla Panchayat. These representatives constitute the Zilla Panchayat. Elected members of the State Assembly from the District are also members of the Zilla Panchayat.

The Constitution allows for only a three-tier system and so the Gram Sabha has no Constitutional validity or recognition. The Gram Sabha can be convened to meet up to 2 or 3 times a year. It can make suggestions for the implementation of programmes but cannot examine or reject the decisions taken by the 3-tier Panchayat Raj system.

An examination of the powers and scope of the Zilla Panchayats indicates that it has the right to take decisions on fundamental issues such as health, sanitation, safe drinking water, electricity, roads, employment etc. However, in reality there is tremendous interference of the government and political parties in all sectors and stages. The political parties influence the elections to the various bodies of the Panchayat Raj system. The result is

that the Central & State Governments and political parties have rendered the Panchayat Raj system ineffective and meaningless.

This structure can be utilized to establish Lokavidya Swaraj through the election of Peoples' Representatives. The rule by party-centered politics can thus be replaced by the rule of People-centered politics. In order to take this process forward towards the establishment of Lokavidya Swaraj, a few points are listed hereunder:

- ♦ Gyan and Samajik Panchayats need to be constituted in place of Gram Panchayats. The manner of constitution of the Gyan and Samajik Panchayats is similar to that of the Gram Panchayat and any necessary changes may be brought in. The membership categories of the Gyan and Samajik Panchayats have been detailed in an earlier part of this document.
- ♦ The Panchayat Samiti will be constituted from the members of the Gyan and Samajik Panchayats of that region or from outside. Every effort will be made by the Gyan and Samajik Panchayats to elect members of the Panchayat Samiti through unanimity/ consensus failing which an internal election may be held without any outside interference whatsoever.
- ♦ The Zilla Panchayat will be constituted of members from the various Panchayat Samitis of the region and the number of representatives from each Samiti will be decided through mutual consent.
- ♦ For Parliament and Assembly elections, regions have been delimited to form constituencies. Many districts fall under such Parliament and Assembly constituencies. For every district there is a Zilla Panchayat.
- ♦ Zilla Panchayats in Assembly segments will constitute regional Vidhan Sabhas and similarly the ones in Parliament segments will constitute regional Parliaments. The membership of both the houses will be drawn from respective Zilla Panchayats and its methodology shall be worked out by mutual consent of Zilla Panchayats.
- ♦ At the state level, the membership for the State Assemblies shall be drawn from their respective regional Assemblies.
- ♦ For the Parliament in Delhi, the membership shall be drawn from their respective regional Parliaments.

Through this method the members of Assemblies and Parliament will be truly peoples' representatives and not representatives of political parties. The Assemblies will elect their respective Chief Ministers and Council of State Ministers, and Parliament will elect the Prime Minister and Council of Central Ministers.

This manner of electing peoples' representatives will avoid the influence of capitalists and requirement of large money. The generation of black money will also be greatly reduced. Vote bank politics based on caste, creed, religion and gender will cease to be a divisive element of electoral politics. Antisocial and criminal elements will find it hard to enter the Assemblies and Parliament. The destruction of the natural environment and displacement-for-development could then be halted.