

## **SOCIAL CHANGE AND NYAYA (EQUALITY), TYAGA (DUTY) AND BHAICHARA (KINSHIP)**

Every movement for social change over the past 2500 years has been initiated by a fresh interpretation of the concepts of nyaya (rationality & equality), tyaga (duty) and bhaichara (kinship with all life forms) in the realm of ordinary life practice. Such interpretations were put forth by gurus and sants / swamis (saints); 'accepted and absorbed' into the belief systems and life practices of ordinary people. Their lives thereafter underwent changes appropriate to the sustenance of such changes. Most often, this led to the 'formation' of different sects within the all-pervading sanatana dharma that characterized Indian society.

Such interpretations can be seen, for example, in the teachings of the Buddha and Mahavira and later in the teachings of Basaveswara, Guru Gobind Singh and many others. More recently we find that Mahatma Gandhi too, offered a new 'talisman' for ordinary life practices through his interpretations of these concepts. All these ideas/interpretations formed the bases of mass 'movements' and we know, historically, that they did lead to social change. However, with the onslaught of capitalist mode of production, and the concomitant 'destruction' of the natural environment, such changes in society and lifestyle have been under severe pressure and the very sustenance of the belief system and social formations, that those interpretations engendered, have been pushed to the brink of 'extinction'.

### **NYAYA, TYAGA AND BHAICHARA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE KNOWLEDGE MOVEMENT**

#### **Premise:**

All characteristics of inter-relationships are primarily, and in the main, determined by interactions between individuals and between communities/collectives, and governed by the evolving worldview that determines these relationships. Concepts of equality (nyaya), fraternity (bhaichara) and collective governance (swarajya)

evolve through such economic, social and cultural exchanges. The contemporary capitalist-market worldview, that influences ALL relationships today, will have to make space for Knowledge-based (Lokavidya) dharma which will henceforth influence ALL relationships within and without Lokavidya Samaj. This is the basis and agenda of the movement for social change.

The concept of dharma has NO equivalent in non Lokavidya-based societies and it has, therefore, been subject to 'silencing' by commentators and analysts trained in other knowledge traditions and influenced (unconsciously perhaps) by the prevalent market-driven values. Lokavidya dharma should incorporate Nyaya, Tyaga and Bhaichara Nyaya, Tyaga and Bhaichara as axiomatic principles.

Public discourse should be in the vocabulary of vidya and dharma; their meaning is commonly understood by ordinary people albeit in different ways. Such understanding is not in conflict with principles of Nyaya, Tyaga and Bhaichara and should now serve as the basis of establishing a system of interactions for the protection of fundamental right to life and livelihood, in a globalized Knowledge-based society.

1. The march towards the establishment of an order, based on Nyaya, Tyaga and Bhaichara, begins, in this 'Knowledge era', with ensuring the Right of individuals, individually and collectively, to live by and base their livelihoods on the Knowledge they possess and practice.
2. The aspect of inequality, arising from the exchange-activity process, has to be addressed by redefining the concept of value of a commodity/service, by incorporating the idea of knowledge-based value. In a knowledge paradigm, that recognizes the fundamental equality (in utility) between all knowledge and knowledge-based activity, the sustenance of a concept of knowledge-based value and the social and economic equality that it engenders, will not prove beyond the new political imagination, that will evolve in society.

[**Value:** The value of a commodity (this term denotes ALL goods and services which are produced by and through human labour for self-consumption and/or exchange) is neither pre-determinable nor pre-assignable i.e., there is no *intrinsic* value to any commodity. A value accrues to a commodity as a result of it being essential to life and/or during the process of social exchange and is by nature a dynamic variable.]

## Ideas on Knowledge equality- an important aspect of Nyaya

### 1. from Basaveshwara:

The inequality, which Basaveshwara lamented, was not the inequality of personal endowments, but of the social, economic, religious and spiritual practices which created inequality and came in the way of development of individual personality. He went to the very roots of the state of nature in attacking the inequality created by human beings.

Basaveshwara gave a concrete meaning to the conception of work or occupation in the form of *Kayaka* which is regarded as an important means for the removal of all inequalities—economic, social, religious and spiritual. *Kayaka* is a spiritual view of labor and not merely a materialistic view. Every kind of labour is looked upon with high honor, dignity and spiritual significance. *Kayaka* doesn't encourage amassing wealth or hoarding of money. It is NOT motivated by profit.

### 2. from Gandhiji's "Autobiography" summarising Ruskin's "Unto This Last":

"A lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's, as all have the right of earning their livelihood from their work."

"A life of labour i.e the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman is the life worth living."

"The right system respecting all labour is, that it should be paid at a fixed rate; but the good workman employed, and the bad workman unemployed."

“The equality of wages, then, being the first object towards which we have to discover the road, the second is that of maintaining constant numbers of workmen in employment, whatever may be the accidental demand for the article they produce.”

**3. from Dharampalji's "Essays on Tradition, Recovery and Freedom" summarizing the Chengalpattu data:**

“An elaborately worked out system of sharing of the produce of the region also seems to ensure fairly equal distribution of economic and cultural prosperity among the various communities and occupational groups that inhabited the region”

**4. from Paul Mason's article in The Guardian titled "The end of Capitalism has begun"**

A study for the SAS Institute in 2013 found that, in order to put a value on data, neither the cost of gathering it, nor the market value or the future income from it could be adequately calculated. Only through a form of accounting that included non-economic benefits, and risks, could companies actually explain to their shareholders what their data was really worth. ...The knowledge content of products is becoming more valuable than the physical things that are used to produce them. But it is a value measured as usefulness, not exchange or asset value... (but) information as a social good, free at the point of use, incapable of being owned or exploited or priced.

**Ideas on Tyaga or Fundamental Duty**

[Tyaga is neither renunciation nor charitable donation / alms giving]

**1. from Tirukkural (Valluvar's instructive text focused on wisdom, justice, and ethics.)**

Goals of poru! (wealth obtained in ethical manner) and inbam (refers to pleasure and fulfilment of one's desires) are desirable, yet both need to be

regulated by *aram* (dharma). Valluvar holds that *aram* is common for all, irrespective of whether the person is a bearer of palanquin or the rider in it.

## 2. from the Bhagavad Gita

Karmanyē Vadhikaraste ma phaleshu kadhachana OR "Perform your duty but do not have any expectation of the fruits". It speaks of being dedicated to your job, your art, your science (your livelihood practice) as a fundamental duty. The Indian tradition also holds that there exists an inherent tension between *artha* and *kama*. These must be pursued with "action with renunciation" (Nishkama Karma), that is, one must act (do one's duty) without craving in order to resolve this tension.

## 3. from Basaveshwara:

*Kayaka* is to be done in the spirit of *dasoha*. *Dasoha* meant working hard for one's livelihood and for the maintenance of society. In his view, a *dasohi* should consider himself, but a servant of society. Therefore, *dasoha* in principle assumed that what belongs to God must return to Him and what came from society should be given back by way of selfless service.

*Kayaka* is a duty by which each one has to maintain oneself and render its proceeds to the welfare of all. As per the principle of *dasoha*, since everyone earns his minimum requirement through *Kayaka* he contributes the rest of his labour to the society rather than accumulating personal wealth. Therefore, *Kayaka* does not encourage the amassing of wealth if it is done in the spirit of *Dashooha*, Human beings are equal by nature in their wisdom and virtues, that should be maintained accordingly.

## 4. from Guru Gobind Singh

Dharam dee kirat karnee – Do your work (livelihood practice) as a duty.

Dasvand denaa – Donate a tenth share of your earnings.

Langar Parshaad ik ras vartaaunaa – Serve Langar prashad (food) with impartiality.

## Ideas on Bhaichara or Kinship

### **1. from the Maha Upanishad**

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam meaning "the world is one family".

The Gandhian vision of holistic development and respect for all forms of life; nonviolent conflict resolution embedded in the acceptance of nonviolence both as a creed and strategy; were an extension of the ancient concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam

### **2. from the teachings of Mahavira**

A central tenet of his teaching was a renunciation of violence in all its forms and a concern for all forms of life; that all living beings, irrespective of their size, shape, and form how spiritually developed or undeveloped, are equal and we should love and respect them.

## **SOCIAL ACTION FOR CHANGE**

It does not take much to see that ALL the great movements for Social change, in different parts of the world, have been based on teachings (new interpretations of Nyaya, Tyaga and Bhaichara), such as the ones quoted above, and have led to new social (religious) groupings based on belief systems which have incorporated the essence of these teachings. These movements have been sustained through centuries by the tyaga that dominated (and governed) these social groups; that is until the 'onslaught' (both ontological and ethical) of modern western Science and Technology, especially and very perceptibly by the advent of the globalized capitalist market system.

Climate Change, a fallout of the Capitalist Development paradigm, is directly linked to the absence, neglect or down-grading of Bhaichara (as enshrined in various

belief systems). Environmental Movements against the ill-effects of Climate Change have, in almost all cases, re-emphasized the understanding of Bhaichara; that was a given in the World of the Tribal/Indigenous Peoples of the World.

It appears that the space and opportunity for redefining Nyaya, Tyaga and Bhaichara has been opened up by various peoples' movements across the world. In India too, the current Farmers' movement has provided a space for this redefinition by ordinary people who form the bulk of this non-violent mass movement. The reason for stating this is that this 'movement' has been going on for the past 6 months attended largely by small farmer families from Punjab, Haryana and UP. The Langar, local arrangements for stay & facilities and healthcare have been provided for by bigger farmers and their organisations. It is my opinion, that the urge to stay together seems to be the overarching belief that the (Khalsa) leadership is being guided by the teachings of Guru Gobind Singh: of grow food (as a duty), share food through Langar (Bhaichara) while 'fighting' for justice (Nyaya) for the entire community (that is dependent on agriculture). Those teachings will certainly be reset to the contemporary context in order to sustain the movement, but this provides the hope that a new interpretation of Nyaya, Tyaga and Bhaichara could well emerge and be 'accepted' by ordinary people, through this movement.

Krishnarajulu  
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## SUMMARY BY SURESH

I have read with interest the note sent by Krish, which hopefully I have summarized correctly through the points below:

1. The essence of Santana Dharma is defined by Nyaya, Tyaga and Bhaichara. Redefined across social situations and time, they acquired different flavors, e.g., through Buddha, Mahavira, Basava, Gandhi and innumerable other saints who strove for social change.
2. However, capitalism has disrupted this core process of social intervention prevalent in the society. Irretrievably.
  - a. It is desirable for the capitalist-market worldview to make space for Lokavidya dharma to influence ALL relationships in society. This is the basis and agenda of the movement for social change. To do this, we need to
    - i. Provide the right for individuals to live by their Knowledge in accordance with the principles of Nyaya, Tyaga and Bhaichara.
    - ii. Address inequality by incorporating the idea of knowledge-based value.
  - b. To illustrate the hypothesized centrality of Nyaya, Tyaga and Bhaichara in India, several observations are made regarding Basava, Thiruvalluvar, Gandhi, etc
3. It is the author's belief that the space and opportunity for redefining Nyaya, Tyaga and Bhaichara has been opened up by peoples' movements across the world. In India too, the current Farmers' movement has provided a space for this redefinition by ordinary people who form the bulk of this non-violent mass movement.
4. It is held that the Langar, local arrangements for stay & facilities and healthcare have been provided for by bigger farmers and their organisations. These developments create a hope that a new interpretation of Nyaya, Tyaga and Bhaichara could well emerge and be 'accepted' by ordinary people as a consequence of such movements.

## RESPONSES

### SURESH

While I suppose that I understand and am in agreement with the spirit of the note, I am a little uncomfortable with its normative tone and axiomatic connotation.

Here are some points that need a little attention during the debate tomorrow:

- 1) While it is commonly accepted that Buddha, Mahavira, Basava etc were agents of great social change, it is not often clear whether social change was their intended goal, or was in reality a consequence of their pursuit of something else. If it was social change, it does not seem to have lasted beyond their life-time. If it was something else, we need to know what it was so that we arrive at an understanding of what moves the people of this land to follow such saints and in the course of their following, change the world around them. This, however, is a minor point.
- 2) I am unable to articulate this very clearly, but I am rather ill at ease with the use of terms such as *Sanatana Dharma*, *Karmanyevadhikaraste* etc. This stems from my perception that their usage usually entails a view of a unitary set of ideas that drive (or drove) this society. We may remind ourselves that these are constructs of the elite about the society and provide a picture of it quite at variance with its actual state. For example, 50 years ago, if you asked a person in Karnataka if he was a Hindu, he would recoil with horror and state that he belongs to *Halumata*, or *Jhunjappa mata*, or *Maadeva Voklu* (family), etc. And before being classified by obliging Brahmans in the latter part of 19<sup>th</sup> century as *literature*, all writings of the different jati's of Karnataka were referred to as "Neeti Maatu" or "Dharma Pada/ Saastra". *Kuladharm*a and *Kulachara* of the region were likely to be of the greatest influence rather than Sanskritic and abstract notions on behalf of all humanity. And all this without even considering the tribals and other groups of India which amounted to no less than 50% of our people. However, having said all this, it is possible that there were common principles of *Karuna*, *Tyaga* etc in all of these communities, jati's and groupings. As a result, this may also be considered a minor point.

- 3) On the other hand, abstracting principles from our history and establishing their suitability to address what we believe are the ills of today's society encounters two serious problems:
- a) It is ahistorical, almost. To illustrate this point, consider that at least one view exists that Europe irreversibly changed after Protestantism. While the Christian God was always out of this world, he was less so after the advent of Protestantism. He could be seen in (acts of) humans more literally than in earlier times. This change in turn deeply anchors life in the here and now. That is why Christian virtues and sins were redefined in ever so many ways since then. That being the case, how are we sure that such irrevocable changes have not happened in India too? Even if we assume it has not, why can't people profess a set of beliefs (that they don't believe in) only to be in synch with the dominant?
  - b) I also wonder if creating agency in humans is possible through recasting people's belief systems. The problem here is that if a belief system does not operate in a real setting, it has no life. If it does operate in a real setting, it immediately changes from what it was a few hundred years ago – and it is not in our control what they become. That in part is the problem that arises from the assumption that ideas rule the world. Even if they do, they are of the today, not of the past.
  - c) More significantly, this seems to defy the categories of historical materialism through which – in all our earlier years - we have tried to arrive at a broad understanding of the world around us. For example, where do we see this change coming, even in a proto-state? On what basis do we say this? The farmers are certainly not saying anything remotely like this. Nor is there any debate about this in the other parts of society either.

It certainly is true that an analysis and description of the world through our categories (either of Lokavidya or of Nyaya, Bhaichara and Tyaga) may not be very attractive to us at the present juncture either because we have already done a great deal of it over the years, or because we are tired of it. However, a normative prescription that is not located on a firm foundation of theory, practice or mass movement, may not offer a desirable alternative.

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## GSRK

I have several problems with the write up.

Let me begin with a story very familiar to us.

A chandala crosses the path of Sankara as he was going to the ghats of Kasi along with his disciples. The chandala is shooed away because his very sight can pollute Sankara.

But the chandala confronts Sankara by posing a question that if the Atman that resides in him is the same as one residing in Sankara, what is the problem? There is a twist to the story. The chandala who confronted Sankara and his disciples was no ordinary chandala of this world!

He is actually the presiding deity of Kasi, lord Vishwanath himself, in the guise of a chandala!

There is further twist to the story. Some centuries after Sankara was confronted with a chandala, in 1920s during the temple entry movement, Gandhi is unable to persuade the Shankaraharya of Sri Kanchi mutt, to bless the entry of harijans into the temples. Despite Gandhi meeting the pontiff twice, he was unable to convince the Shankaraharya that harijans' entry into the temples is not against sanatana dharma. Be that as it may.

Let us look at the twelfth century reformer Sri Basavanna. He is said to have started a movement questioning the Brahmanical supremacy and caste practices. He attracted thousands of followers from all castes. A new order came into being, called veerashaivism. The twist in the story of veerashaivism is that all the castes that are found in Hinduism are all found in the new order including untouchability. Now, how does one understand this? One can say that Basavanna was able to persuade people to give up their castes and call themselves lingayats or veerashaivas. And they did so.

But soon after Basavanna, the castes reappeared in the new order! There can be a better explanation. That is, even as Basavanna established a new order, he did not expect or want them to join the new order by giving up their castes. He only wanted them to embrace a new set of rituals. These new rituals and practices were simply superimposed on the existing identity of caste. Thus no one gave up one's caste to join the new order but did so retaining their castes. Therefore, Basavanna

did not fail to abolish castes but was only replacing one set of rituals and practices with another.