

# Vyakti, Samaj and Dharma

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- Human society consists basically of four entities: 1) Individual 2) Family 3) Community 4) Nation. This was not always so. The emergence of nations in world history happened only in the last few hundred years.
- The entity Individual is singular and is the basic indivisible unit of society. Family, community and nation are collections of individuals. The individual as an entity has gained more importance at the expense of both community and family under capitalism which has promoted written constitutions and adult franchise.
- Under modern constitutions family and nation are well-defined but community is not.
- Normally, an individual belongs to one nuclear family and to one nation. But she/he can belong to many communities at the same time.
- There are thousands of communities both traditional and modern in India. These communities may be divided into two major types: communities that are confined to a definite geographical area or region and those who are not. Geographically confined communities for example reside in villages, mohallas and regions. Regions are mostly geo-agro-climatic zones where communities bound by common customs, traditions and a language/dialect reside, for example Vidarbha, Bundelkhand.
- Examples of non-geographical communities are religious, caste, and professional communities like Sikh, Lingayat, Buddhist, Brahmin, Indian Medical Association (IMA).
- Many communities may coexist in the same village, mohalla and region.

- Members of a community share many customs, traditions and beliefs, a common history, a common mythology, and a common world-view. In short, they possess a common knowledge system specific to that community..
  - The economic wellbeing of a community, very often, depends on the mutual cooperation of the members of the community with each other. This manifests through fair exchange of goods and services among the members of the community.
  - Sometimes one community equipped with better arms and weaponry may expropriate the resources of other communities for own betterment. Many methods of expropriation can happen from direct loot to unequal exchange through the market. Today unequal exchange is the most prevalent method of expropriation. The story of the conquest of the native communities of the world by the people of Europe during the last four-five hundred years illustrates this.
  - Alongside this story of subjugation of one community by another, runs a parallel story of the struggles of the subjugated communities for liberation/emancipation.
  - These struggles for liberation by enslaved communities are guided by their respective knowledge systems and their vision of an exploitation-free world.
  - Here we must make distinction between a class and a community. A class is defined on the basis of property ownership or more generally, ownership of the means of production. Marx's proposition that human society progresses through class struggles does not seem to be borne out in colonial and post colonial eras. Perhaps conflicts among communities shaped history far more than class struggles.
  - After the industrial revolution in Europe, the capitalist mode of production came to dominate the world. This capitalist class has now crossed national boundaries and has become global.

Multinational companies are now dictating production and distribution of goods and services in the world through market, nation states, and international financial organizations.

- A community may consist of a number of interdependent classes. In a traditional village community, small traders, occupational castes, landless labour and farmers used to have interdependent, complementary roles in the village based production system.
- But the term capitalist community is rarely used. Although, all those classes who are a part of the capitalist production system (owners of capital, workers in factories and managers) may be called the capitalist community.
- The vision of an exploitation free world underlying the struggles of the subjugated communities has certain recurring themes such as swaraj (rule of self by self), autonomy, swadeshi, decentralised and distributed systems, fair exchange, non-hierarchy, nyay-tyag-bhaichara (justice-renunciation-brotherhood) and so on. Some of these are applicable to individual lives too, like the idea of swaraj in personal life.
- Not only is the future society envisioned as just and non-exploitative, but the process of achieving that goal must also be just. Non-violence, participatory democracy, decentralised decision making, etc...are some of the essential characteristics of this just process/ just means to achieve a just end.
- The ongoing farmer movement at Delhi borders is an example where many of the above ideas are demonstrated. This movement is the expression of the resentment of the agricultural community against the unequal exchange imposed on it by the capitalist class.
- Capital is the embodiment of the combined might of big machines, finance capital, centralised production and the centralised knowledge system that defines their interconnected working.

- The farmer movement has ultimately succeeded in forcing the central government to repeal the three farm laws, after an year long struggle. Many reasons for its success has been put forward. The foremost reason cited is the role of the Sikh community in mobilising the farmers and in providing support in the form of langars (community mess), medical facilities, infrastructure (tents, living quarters) and international media attention. In addition to the sikh community, the khap panchayats of jat farmers of western UP have also played a major role.
- All attempts by the government to sow dissention within the ranks of the agitating farmers failed. That is, the class distinctions within the farming community did not in any way weaken the farmer movement.
- The collective decision-making process adopted by the leadership of the movement is another reason why the government could not manipulate one section of the leadership against another. This decision-making process follows the traditional community level panchayat system of collective and consensual decision-making.
- The SKM, the Samyukt Kisan Morcha, leading the movement is the coordinating body of thirtytwo farmer organisations of the country. It has, by and large, been successful in bringing together on one platform more than one hundred farmer organisations from all over the country. Attempts by the government to paint the movement as the movement of farmers of only two states (Punjab and Haryana) ended in failure. This shows that the subjugated communities of India can and do come together to raise issues of common concern when the opportune moment arrives.
- The farmer movement shows that the Sikh community ethos is sufficiently broad based to accommodate many oppressed communities in its fold. The Sikh community tradition of coming to the aid of other oppressed communities is alive even today (as seen in the Shaheen Bagh protests against the CAA).

- Although the government has unilaterally withdrawn the three farm laws, the farmer movement is insistent that unless its demand for legally guaranteed MSPs for all 23 crops is met, the agitation will continue. This shows that the leadership considers the question of unequal exchange as of utmost importance. How this demand will be resolved is going to determine the future of Indian society.
- Neither the state nor the market appears to be helping the farming community resolve this problem of unequal exchange, because both the state and the market are controlled by global monopoly capital. So the might of global capital has to be tamed, and an alternative vision of a future society based on fair exchange has to be established.
- As a rule, unequal exchange takes place whenever there is discrimination. Discrimination is the outcome of systemic and institutionalised injustice prevailing in society. It is the outcome of the "us versus them" attitude that seeks to accord a superior status to one community at the expense of another. This is sought to be justified and reinforced by the knowledge system of the dominating community over the subjugated one. The era of colonisation by European powers of the rest of the world was accompanied by the claim of superiority of the knowledge system of the modern capitalist class over those of the colonised communities. Since morality is also part of the knowledge system, the values held and propagated by the modern capitalist class also seeks to reinforce its superiority over others.
- Not only the farming community, but all other traditional communities like Adivasis, Karigar (Craftsmen), Dalits, Women are also the victims of discrimination at the hands of Capital. All these communities form the Lok Vidya Samaj because they survive on the strength of the knowledge accrued through their daily activities. This knowledge is Lok Vidya, and it is decentralised and distributed in society. In contradistinction, the knowledge possessed by the capitalist class is centralised and confined to universities, research

establishments, big industries and government owned institutions. Just as the capitalist class dominates society, so does its knowledge system dominate other knowledge systems in society.

- The commonality of the interests of the farming community and those of the other subjugated communities vis-a-vis the capitalist class provides the basis for all these communities to come together and launch a movement for the establishment of a new social order that will be non-discriminative and non-hierarchical.
- Every community has historically developed, through its experiences and the lessons drawn therefrom, its own way of looking at and dealing with the world, which may broadly be defined as the knowledge system of the community. This knowledge system governs the following spheres of human activity: interactions among members of the same community, interactions of members of one community with members of other communities, and interactions of members of the community with nature.
- This knowledge system that enables members of a community to deal with the world has two dimensions: one, the moral dimension, that is the moral code or dharma that governs the interactions and two, the more mundane dimension of the techniques or vidya involved in the interaction.
- Dharma, that is, the moral code of interaction of an individual with the world, can have many attributes like kindness, nonviolence, love, truth and so on. But if one were to choose the most desirable moral attributes that should govern a person's behaviour with other human beings, It would appear that Nyay (Justice), Tyag (renunciation) and Bhaichara (brotherhood) stand out from the rest.
- Thus, a member of the Lok Vidya Samaj (constituting all communities marginalised by the dominant capitalist class) is equipped with both dharma and vidya to guide his actions directed towards the betterment of his own and his community's conditions. This member of the Lok Vidya Samaj, who can be called a

Lokavidyadhar, is endowed with the knowledge and the norms to deal with the world.

- Discrimination within a community and between communities will disappear if the moral codes, that is the dharma, of all communities uphold Nyay, Tyag and Bhaichara as the highest and inviolable attributes of an individual's behaviour. This will help us arrive at the concept of Lok Dharma, a common dharma which transcends the specific codes of morality dictated by particular communities or religions.
- From this it follows that each community must have the freedom to evolve autonomously, without being subjected to the dictates of any other community. This is possible only if the knowledge system of any one community is considered in no way inferior to that of any other community. Practically, any community of producers of goods and providers of services will be considered in no way to be inferior to any other similar community.
- What this means is that in the new social order, all communities are to be accorded equal status, that is, there will be no hierarchy among communities. Communities will be able to coexist and interact with each other on equal footing, with respect for each other's roles and functions, without any community being reduced to a status of inferiority or subservience to any other community. This will also be true for the knowledge systems of different communities.
- Thus, human society will ideally consist of numerous autonomous communities each having its own autonomy, at the same time each functioning without encroaching upon the autonomy of other communities. Every community will practice the principle of non dominance over every other community. That is, autonomy of autonomies will be practised among all communities of the society.
- How the communities of the world can liberate themselves from the stranglehold of the global monopoly capitalist class and proceed

towards the establishment of a system of non-hierarchical, non-dominating communities each having its own autonomy (swaraj) is for the Lokavidyadhars to explore. Lokavidyadhars of different communities must reach out to each other across cultures and continents, transcending the boundaries of their knowledge systems and work out a plan of action in that direction. That seems to be the message of the ongoing farmer movement at Delhi borders.