

NOTE

Lokvidya

A Correspondent writes :

At an informal meeting organized at the College Street Coffee House (Kolkata) on Tuesday, December 21, 2010 at 4:30 pm Prof Abhijit Mitra of IIT, Hyderabad invited a discussion elaborating the concept of *Lokvidya*. It is the knowledge that is with the people, actively being used by them for their day to day activities and sustenance. It is not "traditional" knowledge i.e. can be evolving still, and has remained outside the ambit of ICT (information and communication technology). All that people talk about in these days in cities and townships, and even in villages, are dictated by media and / or technologies convergent (or congruent) with ICT. The people who are outside the ambit of ICT are the adivasis, the indigenous people, the outsiders. Lokvidya thrives among them, and they can be called Lokvidyadhars. The knowledge that made the Jarwas and the Nicobarese survive the great Tsunami of 2006, or the folk medicines of the Marias, Murias and the Gonds, or numerous other such technologies and knowledge that has survived over the ages, all fall within Lokvidya. It has remained unstructured and uncontrolled, relying on oral tradition and cooperation, and provides means of sustenance of a large part of the population of any country, more so in the less developed nations.

It is this section of the population that is under attack today. They are being driven out of their land and sources of livelihood for mainly two reasons: their resources are sought after by large national or multinational corporations, and their land is under attack from the expanding townships, resorts and developments. More importantly, they are also being deprived of their traditional knowledge base, their Lokvidya, which is termed as useless. Consequently, they are forced to learn new means of survival and hence join the city, town or village societies at the bottom of the rung.

What is urgently needed is a new broad-based struggle for emancipation of Lokvidya from the clutches of ICT and the established knowledge order (the universities and monasteries, besides ICT). Also, political or social resistance to such attacks is immediately branded as "Maoism" by the State, and is being ruthlessly suppressed. Prof Mitra, however announced a meeting, tentative in February, 2011 at Hyderabad for discussing the possibility of a broad coalition or platform for this purpose prelude to a National Conference; some time in November, 2011.

There were a number of questions regarding the nature of Lokvidya, whether it is the same as traditional knowledge, whether it has any organization, establishment, or order (structure). Clearly, the concept is not very familiar with most of the participants.

Prof Rabin Majumdar of Calcutta University said that any such movement must consider conservation / protection of ecology and environment. It was pointed out that it is always the indigenous people who are (i) much more aware of the environment, and (ii) usually know how its degradation can be controlled.

Among the participants Sri Jogin Sengupta and Sri Subhasish Bhaduri raised the issue of power structure of traditional knowledge, whether Lokvidyadhars e.g. gunins, jangurus etc. enjoyed greater power over others, usurped such power and oppressed others. While that is certainly possible, much of the evidence in this regard is from the modern western perspective which may be erroneous. It is also common experience that Lokvidya is inherently horizontal i.e. equitable, relying on friendship and cooperation. The alternative is putting a price tag on knowledge, digitizing it, and controlling it under ICT. □□□