

Ethics And Social Responsibility: Social And Religious Philosophy Of Dayananda

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Abstract

The present age is one of unprecedented turbulence with tensions manifests like never before. The rapid pace of modernization instead of giving rise to an opportunity for the people for better living conditions has increased the uncertainty and a thrust for a change and for something unknown in the minds of people. The institution of life in India is so strong that it could provide solutions to various problems under different circumstances like the white colour which contains all the seven colours and yet, is white. One such colour emerged during the Renaissance period was Swami Dayananda Saraswati whose philosophy is still relevant.

Dayananda proposed innumerable reforms for ritual and sacramental life, for home, society and the state which in his opinion would be incidental in bringing about the regeneration of man and society. This regeneration was equally dependent on individual efforts, the effort of each individual to strive for a good and moral life. Strict observance of the virtues was emphasized by Dayananda with particular stress on knowledge which according to him was the most important and central of all virtues. Knowledge was the key to all morality and knowledge made dharma possible, for "he who has knowledge will never again commit sin" and "lack of knowledge is the root of all evil". After knowledge he gave importance to truth, claiming that knowledge and truth were two fundamental virtues which together acted as the source of a number of other virtues which played an important role in governing social life. Truthfulness was essential both in words and action for the overall benefit of society as it led to the liberation of men from the clutches of treachery, gossip, and hypocrisy. Further, justice was always built on the foundation of truth, he argued as were tolerance and peace. At the individual level, Dayananda felt that self-control, self-reliance, and application occupied a central place in shaping one's character. To achieve and to reach this stage, at the social level, he established Arya Samaj and at the religious level he

tried to go for universal religion with all good qualities of all religions. He even took the initiative of inviting all religions for a conference on the occasion of Delhi Darbar in 1877 which formed a stepping stone for Parliament of Religions. He mentioned every aspect and problem with relevant solutions in Satyarth Prakash. He tried to regenerate the whole Aryavarta.

Key words: Arya Samaj, Dharma, Sin, Satyarth Prakash, Niyoga, Vedas, Hinduism, Dwija, Swarga, Narak. Aryavarta.

Introduction

Man is eternally engaged in a quest for happiness. He tries to form an organization or a system or even religion to facilitate this quest as well as to preserve his achievements. But, when this system becomes rigid and unsuited to the needs of the present, he tries to transform it to the extent of replacing it totally. The conditions of a particular place and time, to a large extent, determine the change which is produced. India has experienced such change many times. Any such change starts as a process and remains either as a concept or an ideology or even as a religious sect.

Such a change when it began in the form of secularization in the west had an emotional feeling attached to it. At times it would denote the increasingly independent role of the society free from the influences of churches or even religion and at times it would mean science, arts and learning seeking a role outside the confines of theology. Indian society also could not remain unaffected by this change.

The awakening of India to the new social consciousness had two sides, while she looked at the west to follow; she also looked at herself and her own past. This too was not without inherent differences in approach. One side was entire liberal school and the other side renaissance leaders like Bankim, Dayananda, Vivekananda, Aurobindo, underlined that each

civilization has its distinct manner of living, experiencing and symbolizing and change has to be brought about in the broad framework of that civilization only.

As the concept note narrates the world is very true at crossroads looking all over to move ahead. It has apprehensions to accept the past as guide and hesitation to forge into future without any traditional/cultural identity. Though this type of change is not new to the world; even for India, which experienced many times the same confusion but every time it came out with the help of its rich traditional heritage which always came to its rescue through or in the form of any religious reformer or leader. One such among many was Swami Dayananda Swaraswati.

India was in total confusion and uncertainty without knowing which way to go. Dayananda thundered with his call Back to Vedas and answered to all problems of society and people in rich traditional and ethical framework. Even now honestly taken are relevant to the present problems of India.

This research paper is theoretical and confines itself in the social and religious philosophy of Dayananda who worked for the betterment of people and country.

Dayananda Swaraswati

Dayananda's multifaceted personality was one which does not fit in any standard mold as he

would set his own standards. While his mind was receptive to the monumental changes taking place in the world around him, he would never submit passively to its pressures. While he worked for a better future, he had his feet firmly entrenched in the ground realities of the present and his attitude was backed by the solid foundation from the past.

Religious Philosophy:

Dayananda's ultimate aim was the establishment of a prosperous society with a perfect ethical life. Towards achievement of this end, he strove to remove all the stumbling blocks existing either in social setup or in religious philosophies. At the same time, Dayananda was very much aware of the spiritual part of religion which is a link between moral and religious life leading to final liberation.

He did not spare any evil that was prevalent in the name of religion. Dayananda came out strongly against the practice of idol worship prevalent in the medieval period and which relied heavily on otherworldly and fate system. "Worship one God who is the omniscient, formless, all-pervading, unborn, infinite, almighty, and merciful and just is the maker of the whole universe and sustainer and dissolver." Condemning idol worship, he argued: "His idols cannot be made, and the hundred of idols which were wrongly supposed to be of God or his incarnations are nothing but false things made to exploit the masses by the vested interests. In a way, idolatry has kept the world in gross ignorance about God, has made people woefully superstitious, the priestcraft criminally selfish. A great majority of religious evils can be justly laid at the doors of idolatry." He also criticized the concepts of heaven and hell as being imaginary states of superstition created and spared by vested interests. "There

were states of mind, which a person experienced on account of his deeds: enjoyment of a special happiness and possession of the means thereof (Swarga) for good deeds and sufferings and the means thereof (Narka) for misdeeds."

The Vedas occupy a central position in the religious philosophy of Dayananda. They were the main sources of his thought and it was his mission to propagate the Vedic principles with a view to reestablishing a social order cast in the mold of such ideas. Dayananda recognized the healthy optimism that exuded from the Vedas, which made the world seem a vast celebration of life. Dayananda stressed on rationalism, proclaiming that any interpretation of the Vedas not in tune with rational thinking would hardly be representing the moving spirit behind the Vedas or the thoughts of the creator of the Vedas. Dayananda quoted extensively from the Vedic hymns to show that the law was known to the ancient Aryans.

In contrast to the belief that the will of God is supreme and that all events in the world take place in accordance with it, Dayananda argued that the soul is free to act. "If God had indulged in deeds, the soul would have never sinned because God, being pure and judicious would never have inspired any soul to sin." Dayananda felt that "If God were to forgive sins, his justice would be destroyed, and all human beings would become the greatest sinners because of hearing of the possibility of the forgiveness they would obtain the courage and fearlessness to engage in sinful deeds." Though the philosophy of Kant recognized the significance of the concept of free will as being central to ethics but was unable to connect to either religion or spiritualism, thus skipping the crucial questions facing the problem of the nature of the soul. These and others like the objective of the soul, the realization of the Supreme being etc, were

evaded by Kant by declaring them as being unworkable. Here Dayananda scored a positive triumph by recalling the facts at the grassroots level after adopting the tradition of the Vedic Seers and declaring the realization of God and all existing elements as perfectly knowable.

Dayananda sought to use the reestablishment of the superiority of Vedic religion as a means for socio-religious reconstruction. While Dayananda did make other religions the target of his virulent attacks, it was never his intention to defame them. "Though I was born in Aryavarta (India) and live in it, yet just as I do not defend the falsehood of faiths and religions of this country, but expose them fully, in like manner, I deal with the religions of other countries. I treat the foreigners in the same way as my own countrymen, so far as the elevation of the human race is concerned." Therefore, the purpose of my life is the extermination of evils; introduction of truth in thought, speech and deeds; the preservation of the unity of religion; the expulsion of mutual enmity; the extension of friendly intercourses; and the advancement of public happiness by reciprocal subservience of the human family. May the grace of Almighty God and the consent and cooperation of the learned soon spread these doctrines all over the world, to facilitate everybody's endeavor in the advancement of virtue, wealth, godly pleasure and salvation, so that peace, prosperity, and happiness may ever reign in the world." With this aim, he founded the Arya Samaj in 1875 with 28 guiding principles. "If you are able to achieve something for the good of mankind by a Samaj, then establish a Samaj; I will not stand in your way. But if you do not organize it properly, there will be a lot of trouble in future; as for me, I will only instruct you in the same way as I teach others, and this much you should keep clearly in mind; my beliefs are not unique, and I am not

omniscient. If therefore in future any error of mine should be discovered after rational examination, then set it right, if you do not act in that way then this Samaj too later on will become just a sect. This is my firm opinion: even if there be any sectarian beliefs prevalent in India, if only they all acknowledge the Vedas, then all those small rivers will reunite in the ocean of Vedic wisdom and the unity of dharma will come about. From that unity of dharma there will result in the social, economic reform, arts, and craft, and other human endeavors will improve as desired, and man's life will find fulfillment: because by the power of that dharma all values will become accessible to him, economic values as well as psychological ones, and also supreme value of Moksha." Thus it is seen that his dream was not just to be a founder or guru of a reformed sect, rather he strove for the regeneration of the whole Aryavarta..

Social Philosophy:

While Dayananda condemned untouchability, he articulately supported the concept of Varna Vyavastha, which he felt could bring a stable social system. Dayananda used the Vedas as the source book of knowledge while declaring that the mere accident of birth could not determine the social position of man, which was rather dependent upon the capabilities of the individual, and factors like qualifications, accomplishments, and character. As he himself stated that, "a man born in a Brahmana, Kshatriya or a Vaishya family should become a Shudra if his merits, actions, and temperaments are Shudra like." The equal rights of the Shudra to study the Vedas are passionately defended by him in Satyarth Prakash.

Hoerule, a Christian missionary, has captured the essence of Dayananda's concept of caste and social organization in the following words,

“This (caste) the reformer considers only as a political institution made by the rulers for the common good of the society and not a natural or religious distinction. It is not a natural distinction for the four casts were not created by God as a distinct species of men: but all men are of equal nature, of the same species, and are brothers. It is not a religious institution. The casts are simply different professions or guilds, established by the state to guard against confusion and mutual interference, and for the better accomplishment of the different works. Each class made up into a guild and furnished with its rights and privileges and made hereditary. But, as the whole classification is a creation of the state, any Shudra who is deserving of the promotion, can be made by the state a vaishya or Kshatriya or Brahmana, if he qualifies himself for the work of the respective class.”

The Position of Women:

Dayananda was all for improving the position of women in society as he believed that the revitalization of a society demanded that every organic part of it had to be revitalized. He thus emphasized the importance of the upliftment of women as an integral part of the process of social upheaval. Dayananda took up this challenge and did a great deal to improve a lot of women. He fought for their right to choose a partner, simultaneously raising his voice against the child marriage. In his crusade against child marriages, he set an ideal age for marriage of women between sixteen and twenty-four and forty-eight years. Depending upon the age of the match marriages were classified into three categories; inferior, medium and superior, with the first type being between women of sixteen and men of twenty-four, the second type being between women of eighteen to twenty and men

of twenty-five to forty and the last one taking place between women of twenty-four and men of forty-eight. The scheme put forth by Dayananda envisaged the setting up of a healthy society and rooting out of the deplorable practice of child marriage. He shed light on the harrowing experiences of the child widows who were barred from remarrying by the so-called authority of the scriptures in Hindu society. In his sympathy towards the state of young widows, Dayananda sought to re-establish the institution of Niyoga. In thus seeking to resurrect the ancient concept of Niyoga, Dayananda showed his broad understanding of the natural sex instincts. Rather than the idea of its suppression which would lead to the corruption of the child widow or women whose husbands had to be away from them for long periods, he found it better to provide a legitimate outlet for the same. He also found in it a handy weapon to wipe out the stigma attached to women unable to give birth to a male child. He justified the practice on the ground that it had the recognition of the Shastras with the consequent sanctity at par with marriage and with the imposition of strict conditionalities could be called 'licensed adultery'. Further, he placed men and women on an equal footing by giving the right to practice Niyoga to men as well. “What I am saying is that in the old times Niyoga was practiced extensively and there was little need for remarriages. But in this age, both Noyoga and remarriage have been stopped and the resulting miserable adherence to false tradition one has to admit that widow remarriage is altogether better than that.”

Dayananda held the view that the tackling of the three problems of illiteracy, economic poverty, and political dependence was a prerequisite to any improvement in social life. He was aware that this acute problem saw no solution in the

filtration theory of education practiced by the contemporary government. He thus resorted to the spiritual treatment of education.

The scheme proposed by him assigned a pivotal role to the mother in the formative years of age up to five, with her prime task being to teach the child the art of speaking properly. After this age, the responsibility of teaching was transferred to a teacher and the children were to be taught, besides the Devanagari script, a fair number of languages of other countries too. Besides, both the boys and girls were required to be taught Gayatri Mantra. Dayananda emphasized on the moral aspect of education, arguing that the implanting of some basic virtues was necessary if education was to be successfully imparted, with the most important virtues being the ones like truthfulness in every aspect and dedicated effort and application. He proposed that the student life ought to be free from all types of luxury and needed to have an ascetic start. Further students should be able to distinguish truth from falsehood and virtue from vice and to help them in their endeavor, four criteria are provided. The first of these being the Vedas, the second the Shastras, third the conduct of virtuous people and finally the satisfaction one experiences in one's own conscience. The curriculum of the education to be imparted was an important aspect taken up by Dayananda. He said: "It should be quite widespread, representing all branches of knowledge." He also emphasized that it was necessary to lay equal stress on languages, art and science, and technology. Further, in his opinion, the school was to be a place where lessons in social equality were invariably incorporated into the curriculum, with there being no discrimination on the basis of either money or sex. Another widespread problem he came face to face was that of mass poverty which he witnessed during

his extensive tours of the country. He saw masses seething in poverty with death and disease, want and hunger spreading all over the country, with a sharp decline in the industrial performance and the agriculture in shambles, famines kept recurring with a striking regularity.

Nationalist Philosophy:

To be national is not to stand still. Rather, to seize on vital thing out of the past and throw it into the stream of modern life is creation. Dayananda's works bring back such a principle and the past to vivify a modern mould and observe that in the work as in the life it is the past caught in the first set of virgin vigor Pure from its source, near to its root principle and therefore to something eternal and always renewable. Dayananda's vision of new India of the future envisaged a nation building activity on the foundation of her own economic and spiritual sources and felt that the contemporary orthodox Hinduism, overburdened as it was with mysticism and crude cult form, was not in any position to serve such a noble purpose. In his effort to reform Hinduism, he resorted to using rationalism as a base. His call for going back to Vedas was a clarion call for rekindling the national traditions. He adopted a stance against social evils like caste rigidities, early marriages, parda system, conservatism and illiteracy. He stressed that the social progressed required the abolition of untouchability, emancipation of women and the development of education in Sanskrit and Hindi. He declared: "We depend upon the idols for the defeat of our enemies and the triumph of our armies and therefore did not exert ourselves. The result was that we were defeated and the government of the country, the independence and its wealth... fell into the lot of our enemies. We were robbed of our independence and

reduced to the condition of the subject race, suffering in hundred ways like the pony of baker and the donkey of the potter.”

While discussing the problems of the Indian people, he said, they themselves had turned the land of plenty into a land of poverty and suffering owing to their own ignorance, illiteracy, slavery and selfishness, inaction and indolence. He claimed: “There can come nothing but poverty and pain when foreigners rule over the trade in our country.” India in those days consisted besides the British Indian territories, of the Indian relationship of the states with the British crown provided them with reasonable flexibility in local governance, while being under its overall control and suzerainty. Dayananda was convinced that the Indian princes still wielded considerable influence which could be put to good use in the service of dharma if they could be persuaded. He put forth the view that the unity of dharma, language and aims was essential for the real prosperity of India to be attained. “That is why I wish that the Rajas of our country bring about in their own territory that three- fold unity.” His view of the king was one who would be the ideal Kshatriya required to look after the interests of and protect the whole world, as well as to check the spread of Adharma. Dayananda's innovativeness or radicalism stems from the fact that he relied heavily on the Vedas as India's Rock of the Ages, and realized through sheer analytical and extraordinary perspective abilities that they encapsulated within themselves a whole education of youth, a whole manhood and a whole nationhood. Dayananda's national instinct was inbuilt in his personality and with strenuous efforts was able to make it luminous, besides transforming it into an institution. Thus his works are necessarily profoundly national.

Conclusion:

In his efforts to revitalize the spirit of Hinduism, Dayananda drew from the Vedas and his works and translations from the Vedas show his efforts at the revival of the democratic traditions of Hindu religion which had been subject to neglect by the Brahmins. He did not spare Hinduism when it came to features such as idol worship. He criticized the lack of objectivity in the thinking of the people when they believed in the illusionary nature of all, that is the inevitable, inescapable and uncontrollable power of fate coupled with the impotence of man on the face of it. He vehemently criticized the notion of passive humility in the face of fate and being a man of action, urged his followers to act vigorously. Dayananda was certain that science could be used as a tool by which the forces of nature could be exploited by man for his own benefit and thereby improving the condition of his existence. He was very critical of the untrue elements of all religions. “I do not approve of the wrangling of the various religions against one another, for they have by propagating so many false things, misled the people and turned them into one another's enemy. My purpose and aim are to help in putting an end to these mutual wrangling and to preach the universal truths, to bring all men under one religion so they may by ceasing to hate each other and firmly loving each other live in peace and work for their common welfare.”

Towards this end, that is to create a universal religion he even tried to organize a conference by inviting the representatives of all religions in India on the occasion of Delhi Darbar, 1877. Though it was not fruitful, it definitely formed a stepping stone to the Parliament of Religions.¹⁸ In this context, K.C. Yadav observes: “Dayananda had no malice or hatred towards any religion; he simply criticized what he

thought was untrue (in that religion), and wanted to bring different faiths under a banner of a universal religion. It was later vested interests both in other religions and among Dayananda's own followers who actually started religious controversies and dragged Dayananda into them." Dayananda's electrifying personality has been captured by Aurobindo in a brilliant fashion in these words: "We can imagine his soul crying still to us with our insufficient spring of manhood and action, Be not content, Indian, only to be infinitely and grow vaguely, but see what God intends thee to be, determine in the light of his inspiration to what thou shalt grow. Seeing, new that out of thyself, new that out of life. Be a thinker, but be also a doer; be a soul, but be also a man; be a servant of God, but be also a master of nature. For this was what he was; a man with God in his soul, vision in his eyes and power in his hands to new out of life an image according to his vision."

It can be thus be concluded that Dayananda's view of the ideal moral man picturized him as the one driven by a thirst for knowledge and truth and who always keeps himself under control while remaining ever active at the same time, besides governing his interactions with others by truth, justice, and tolerance. It is this ideal and complete man who is central to Dayananda 's philosophy, and this change back to the Vedic times is seen as indispensable for the change of society as well the state.

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