

## Understanding Mahatma Gandhi's Contemporary Swami Dayananda Saraswati in the Present Context

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### Abstract

Mahatma Gandhi's authority in the national freedom struggle was unmatched. By and by he completely esteemed and regarded his recognized peers, who were likewise his contemporaries. Gandhi's thoughts joined and varied with those of his contemporaries; however they never came in the approach to combining their affiliation and drawing strength and motivation from one another.

On the other hand or galaxy of the great men who rescued India from the clutches of degeneration and despondency in the nineteenth century, Dayananda Saraswati occupies a very important place. Possessed of sharp intellect and rational thinking and a vision far ahead of his time, he ceaselessly worked to bring a new life to his country through a stupendous programme of religious reformation, social reconstruction, cultural regeneration and political emancipation. He transfused into her morbid body his own formidable energy, his certainty, his lion's blood, (Rolland, 1930: 27) and thus earned for himself the coveted title of the 'Maker of Modern India'. This article's focus is on an understanding Mahatma Gandhi's contemporary Swami Dayanand Saraswati in the present context.

**KEYWORDS:** Dayanand Saraswati, Vedas, Arya Samaj, Aurbindo Gosh, Maker of modern India

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### Introduction

Dayanand Saraswati born (12 February 1824 – 30 October 1883) was a Hindu religious leader who founded the Arya Samaj, a Hindu reform movement of the Vedic tradition. He was a profound scholar of the Vedic lore and Sanskrit language. He was the first to give the call for Swarajya as "India for Indians" – in 1876, later taken up by Lokmanya Tilak. Denouncing the idolatry and ritualistic worship prevalent in Hinduism at the time, he worked towards reviving Vedic ideologies. Subsequently the philosopher and President of India, S. Radhakrishnan, called him one of the "makers of Modern India," as did Sri Aurobindo. (Sharda, 1933: 42)

Maharshi Dayananda advocated the doctrine of karma (Karmasiddhanta in Hinduism) and Reincarnation (Punarjanma in Hinduism). He emphasized the Vedic ideals of brahmacharya (celibacy) and devotion to God. Among Maharshi Dayananda's contributions are his promoting of the equal rights for women, such as the right to education and reading of Indian scriptures, and his intuitive commentary on the Vedas from Vedic Sanskrit in Sanskrit as well as Hindi so that the common man might be able to read them. Dayanand was the first to give the word of Swadeshi and Harijan to the dalits and Pariahs (Outcastes).

Aurobindo Ghosh very beautifully demonstrated in a passionate tone of a poet, but in its spirit and substance it conveys a historical truth:

*“Among the great company of remarkable figures at the head of the Indian Renaissance one stands out by himself with the peculiar and solitary distinctness, one unique in his type as he is unique in his work. It is as if one were to walk for a long time amid a range of hills rising to a greater or lesser altitude, but all with sweeping contours, green-clad, flattering the eye even in their most bold and striking elevation. But amidst them all, one hill stands apart, piled up in sheer strength, a mass of bare and puissant granite, with verdure on its summit, solitary pine jutting out into the blue, a great cascade of pure vigorous and fertilizing water gushing out from its strength as a very fountain of life and health to the valley. Such is the impression created on my mind by Dayananda.” (Ghosh, 1947: 39)*

Dayananda was born in 1824 at Tankara, a small town in the princely State of Morvi, Gujarat, in an orthodox Brahmana family. He left his house in 1836, obviously to devote himself wholeheartedly to the introspection on life and its ultimate meaning. He became an ascetic and roamed about for a little over fourteen years, visiting one place after the other, seeking help of literally hundreds of Sadhus and Yogis for the solution of his problem. But to his bad luck, no one could satisfy him. Indeed this is a sad reflection, as rightly pointed out by Dr. Hemisath, on the religious and intellectual life in Dayananda's day. Despite his frantic search for long fourteen years the inquisitive ascetic could get no teacher 'with a critical enough approach to popular religious beliefs to satisfy his exacting standards'. (Hemisath, 1964: 113-114)

However, in 1846, by a stroke of chance, he found at Mathura a teacher of his choice in an old blind Sanyasi, Vrijananda Saraswati (C 1779-1868). Possessed of powerful intellect and prodigious memory, the blind man was well-versed in the Vedas and Shastras and his mastery over Sanskrit grammar was unrivalled. (Dayal, 1902) He introduced Dayananda, after his preliminary indepth study of the Sanskrit grammar, to the Vedas and Shastras which revolutionized the whole concept of his thinking. He was no more a pessimistic thinking disinterested in everything except his own well-being. Now he was a true Yogi, a man of action, with God in his soul, vision in his eyes and power in his hands, and his chief concern was the well-being of his thirty million countrymen sunk in the densest depths of ignorance, sloth and inertia.

He denounced evils and vulgarities spread by the vested interests in the name of religion with righteous indignation and divine passion. Vedas in hand he challenged the Hindu orthodoxy to prove if they could justify on their basis polytheism, pantheism, idol worship, casteism, untouchability, infant marriage, forced widowhood, Sati, infanticide and a hundred and one other superstitions degenerating Hinduism. The whole front line and the reserve of the orthodoxy came forward to silence him. But Dayananda's profound scholarship, incisive logic, powerful persuasion, and opportune hammerings brought them to their knees. (The Arya Gazette, 1905).

And this done, the reformer strove to build a new India on the debris of the old with puissant master of a born architect. (Sharda, 1933: 595) Rammohan Roy and Keshab Chandra Sen had also done some work before him in this direction.

Dayananda looked at their map, their building material and all that, with a view to getting some help from them. But to his disappointment their work was found to be totally inadequate. Both the reformers had tried to build 'New India' on the Western foundations, having little to do with her own past. They had tried to make Indian soul lose itself to the 'superior' Western personality in their programme of things. (Majumdar, 1972: 47-48) Dayananda knew full well that no nation could ever be founded on a foreign base. He, therefore, provided his people for their national edifice a granite foundation of their own ancient past. (Muller, 1884: 170) His theory of the revelation of the Vedas is based on this very point.

The Vedas, as we know, are the original source of religion, culture and civilisation of India. They are the real foundations of the Indian thought, philosophy and knowledge. They are the Soul of India. Necessarily, such things could be more than God's word for a nation that wanted to exist and develop its personality to the full. Accordingly, Dayananda presented them as a scripture of 'divine knowledge, divine worship, divine action'. This was his greatest gift to the Indian nation. Commenting on his practical wisdom and foresightedness in this regard, Aurobindo Ghosh says:

***"What a master glance of practical intuition was this to go back trenchantly to the very root of Indian life and culture, to derive from the flower of its first birth the seed for a radical new birth. and what an act of grandiose intellectual courage to lay hold upon this scripture.....and to perceive its real worth as a scripture which conceals in itself the deep and energetic spirit of the forefathers who made this country and nation."***(Griswold, 1901: 1)

After providing the foundations, Dayananda took up the task of building up the national edifice - a magnificent skyscraper. (Mehta, 1943) But he felt that single-handed he would not be able to accomplish this gigantic task effectively. He, therefore, founded an organization at Bombay on April 10, 1875. It was called Arya Samaj (Jones, 1966) and its ranks were thrown open by the liberal leader to all and sundry, irrespective of caste, creed and religion, provided they adhered to the following ten principles:

- Of all true knowledge and whatever is known from knowledge, the Primary Cause is God.
- God is an embodiment of truth, intelligence and bliss, and one without form, all powerful, just, kind, unborn, infinite, all unchangeable, beginningless, incomparable, support of all, all pervading, omniscient, undeteriorable, immortal, fearless, eternal, holy and Creator of the Universe. He alone is worth of worship.
- The Vedas are the books of all true knowledge. It is the paramount duty of all Aryas to read them, to teach them, to hear them and to preach them.
- We should be ever ready to accept truth and renounce untruth.
- Everything should be done according to Dharma, that is, after considering what is truth and what is untruth.
- The chief object of Arya Samaj is to do good to the world, i.e. to make physical, spiritual and social improvement.
- We should treat all with love and justice according to their deserts.
- We should dispel ignorance and diffuse knowledge.

- Nobody should remain contented with his personal progress. One should count the progress of all as one's own.
- Everyone should consider oneself as bound in obeying social and all-benefitting rules, but everyone is free in matters pertaining to individual well-being.

The Arya Samajas were set up almost in all the provinces of India and Dayananda's inspiring message reached the masses through them. He posed searching questions to his countrymen: Why do you feel inferior to others? What is there that makes you ashamed of calling yourself Indians? Why have you parted with your national pride and prestige? Why cannot you walk with heads erect and high? "In the whole world there is no country like India", he thundered. "The philosopher's stone which we hear so much about is only a myth, but the veritable philosopher's stone is India by mere touch of which the iron of foreigner's poverty is converted into gold." (Satyarth Prakash, Chapter XI) He told them to look at their past which was so great and bright. He recited impassioned, though not always scientifically correct, historical episodes to substantiate his statements. "The Indians were the sole overlords of the whole world. There were their dependent rulers in other countries (Ibid.).... Now Europeans seem to be cultured and educated to you. You praise their cultural achievements. But as a nation they are nowhere as compared to us. Culturally we are far superior a nation." (Ibid.)

"We were sometimes world-teachers", he observed. "All education that has spread in the world started originally from India. Then it went to Egypt, from there to Greece, from Greece to Turkey and then to Europe. From Europe it went to America and other countries." (Ibid.) He quoted the authorities of the foreigners to convince his people of the correctness of his stand. Jacoliet, a French Scholar, he said, had written in his book *The Bible in India*: "India is the fountain-head of all knowledge and all righteousness All knowledge and all religions have sprung from here." "He (Jacoliet) prays in the book", said Dayananda, "*O God make my country as advanced in knowledge as India was in the olden days.*" (Ibid.) But now misfortune has overshadowed the descendants of the world-teachers and world-rulers and they are down-trodden under the heels of foreigners. (Ibid.)

He made a fervent appeal to his countrymen to take pride in their land, and things made by their own better brethren in preference to the ones made in other countries. (N.A.I., 1907) It may not be true that Dayananda was the first author of the Swadeshi movement in India, as Dr. R. C. Majumdar (1957, Vol. I: 355) has pointed out, but it is an act that he was its first forceful advocate in modern times. He laid great stress on it as a means for the reconstruction of India's economy as also its social and political unity. (Satyarth Prakash, Chapter XI: 550) "Look at the Europeans", he observed, "they have come into this country for a little more than a hundred years, yet they wear coarse clothes as they do in their own country. They allow into their offices and counts only English shoes and no Indian shoes. This one point is sufficient to show how patriotic they are-they respect the shoes made in their country more than they respect the men of other countries. These qualities and deeds have contributed to their advancement." (Ibid.)

Although appreciative of their reforming zeal, Dayananda lashed out at the Brahmo-Samajists and the Prarthana Samajists for looking towards the West for inspiration and light. (Reincourt, 1961: 234) "Do you think", he asked them, "that this

attitude of yours will do you and your country good....? There have been in India many men of learning from Brahma onwards. Not to appreciate them and to go on praising Europeans is nothing short of prejudice and flattery.” (Ibid. : 551-55) Commenting on their following the Western ideals he observed: “When they are born in India, they have eaten and drunk water of this country and are still doing the same, it does not behoove them to abandon the path of their ancestors”. (Ibid. : 370-371) He disliked their founding a new religion “in the pride for English education.” (Ibid. : 548-49)

Their reforms seemed to be superficial to him. “They are working under false notions”, he said, “that they and their country would be regenerated simply by removing the restrictions of food (inter-dining with persons belonging to different faiths) and caste.” (Ibid. : 549) They have no remedy for the country that is ailing. Europeans do not care for them and the people of India look upon them as aliens...They have not been able to do good to the country.” (Ibid. : 552)

Dayananda was the first man to give call of Swarajya to his countrymen. He said emphatically: “*the Swarajya is always the best thing. A foreign government cannot be beneficial even when it is free from religious bias, race prejudices and is just and sympathetic.*” (Ibid. : 317-318) He enjoined this upon every follower to start his day with the following prayer; “*O, Supreme Being, the Great Ruler of the Rulers, stimulate us with appropriate courage, fortitude, moral goodness, courtesy, power, strength of body and mind and such other virtues that we may be independent and enjoy sovereign imperial sway. May no foreigner come to our country to rule over us, and may we never lose our political independence and become enslaved to foreigners.*” (Dayananda, 1972: 303-304)

Dayananda “transfused into the languid body of India his own formidable energy, his certainty, his lion’s blood. After his death his followers became ardent nationalists and joined the National Movement for liberation in pretty large numbers all over India. Giving the account of their activities in the Punjab, Sir Denzil Ibbetson, the Lieutenant Governor, said, “I have been told by nearly every District magistrate of the Punjab that wherever there was Arya Samaj it was the centre of seditious talk.” (Home Department (Political-A), 1907) Later Sir Michael O’ Dwyer, his successor, also expressed similar views. “It should be noted in fairness to the orthodox Hindus,” he said, “that while the Samaj does not include perhaps more than 5% of the Hindu population of the Punjab an enormous population of the Hindus convicted of sedition and other political offences from 1907 down to the present day are members of the Arya Samaj.” (O’Dwyer, 1925: 184) The Arya Samajists took leading part in the movement in Rajasthan, U.P., M. P., Bengal and even in the foreign countries. Such eminent leaders as Lajpat Rai, Ajit Singh, M. C. Ranade, Shradhdhananda, Parmananda, Shyamji Krishan Verma, Rambhaji Dutt and the revolutionaries like Ram Prasad Bismil, Chandra Sekhar, Bhagat Singh were members of the Arya Samaj. (Reincourt, 1961: 136) Indeed there is truth in the official statement: “The Arya Samaj: Its creed is nationalism and national politics appeals to its members.” (O’Dwyer, 1925: 184) Dayananda was undoubtedly ‘the real author of the Doctrine of Swarajya in modern times.’ (*The Journal of Asian Studies*, 1967: 363-79)

A careful perusal of Dayanada’s work led V. Chirol to believe that “the whole drift of Dayanada’s teachings is far less to reform Hinduism than to rouse it into

active resistance to the alien influences. (Chinol, 1910: 110) In Dayananda's emphasis on cow protection, he found "a powerful element of spreading disaffection against the British in whose raj the sacred cow was killed." (Ibid.) Of course, he is right in saying so. Dayanada's propagation of cow-protection was more political than religious as his following words would show: "During the rule of the Aryan (Indian) no slaughter was allowed of cows or other serviceable animals. Then men and creatures lived happily in India...From the time flesh-eating foreigners have come to India and begun to slaughter cows etc. and the rule has passed to the wine-drinking officials, the miseries of the Indians are gradually increasing." (Satyārtha Prakasha, Chapter X: 377-78)

In his criticism and condemnation of idol-worship also Dayananda gave a political message to his countrymen. "Idolatry has done incalculable harm to us," he said. "*We depend upon the idols for the defeat of our enemies and the triumph of our arms and therefore did not exert ourselves. The result was that we were defeated and government of the country, independence and wealth with its attendant pleasure, fell to the lot of our enemies. We were robbed of our independence and reduced to the condition of the subject race, suffering in a hundred different ways like the pony of the baker and of the donkey the potter.*" (Ibid.)

Also in his programme of criticism of different Hindu sects we find a political message of great significance. He knew, as did others in the field, that "the flame of patriotic enthusiasm will not readily arise from the cold grey ashes of philosophic compromise and that before Hinduism can inspire an active sentiment of nationality, it will have to undergo a good deal of stiffening and consolidation." (Risley, 1904: 280) Indeed, Hinduism divided into a hundred sects was incapable of generating true national feeling in India. He, therefore, presented a programme of consolidating them under one banner – the banner of Vedic Dharma. (Ibid. : 244)

Dayananda also strove hard to end inter-religion conflicts, and proceeded to unite the people of different religions by urging them to accept "universal truths, love each other, live in peace, and work for their common welfare." (Bhattacharya, 1956 : 635) He impressed upon them the worthwhileness of the universal brotherhood of men. "*My viewpoint is this: all those things which are common to all religions are obviously true and must be accepted. And on this very basis we should condemn false things, for they create difference in different faiths. It is my object to put clearly before public all the secrets and open things of these religions; so that all and sundry be able to exchange their views and reach at some unanimity. Although I am born in India and living here but without any partiality, I have pointed out the defects of different religions and sects of this country. This, I think, ought to be the mentality of the good people.*" (Satyārtha Prakasha, 1-9) "I do not look upon the *Puranas, Jaina Scriptures, the Bible and the Quran*", he said, "with any prejudice, but accept their good points and reject their defects and endeavor to improve the condition of humanity, so should all men do." He appealed to the "learned men in all religions" to "give up prejudice, accept all those broad principles on which religions are unanimous, reject differences and behave affectionately and then much good can be done to the world. The differences of learned people aggravate the differences among the common masses with the result that miseries increase and happiness is lost." (Ibid.)

Dayananda elicited praise from the learned men of all religions for his approach referred to above. Take, for instance, the following tribute paid to him by Sir Sayed Ahmed Khan, the great leader of the Muslims: "Besides being a learned scholar, he (Dayananda) was a man of distinctly noble and spiritual nature..... I was very well-acquainted with the late Swami Dayananda Saraswati and I always showed great respect to him simply because he was such an excellent and learned man that it behoved men of all religions to respect him, no matter to what religion he belonged. He was in any case such a great man that he has no equal in India". (Aligarh Institute Gazette, 1883: 1268.) The great Christian leader Rev. C. F. Andrews spoke of him in almost similar vein: "Swami Dayananda... was actually superior to the age in which we now live... Men could see in him, in his spiritual earnestness, his heroic character, his austere mode of life, his high ideals, the Vedic times themselves restored. The personality of the great Swami.... in all the glowing majesty of his heroic spirit was so magnetic, virile, so passionately sincere and brave that others caught his inspiration before he died and carried on his message in his spirit". (Sharda, 557) Another Christian A. O. Hume, the founder of the Indian National Congress, and one of the most formidable opponents of Dayananda, held him in very high esteem. "All must admit," said Hume, "that he was a great and good man, an honour to his country he so dearly loved". (Ibid. : 600)

The philosophy of Dayananda Saraswati can be known from his three famous contributions namely "Satyarth Prakash", "Veda Bhashya Bhumika" and "Veda Bhashya Bhumika" and Veda Bhashya. Further the journal "Arya Patrika" edited by him also reflects his thought. Dayandanda has devoted two chapters (2nd and 3rd) of the "Satyarth Prakash" to the subject of education for the infants as well as the adolescents. Besides establishing his reputation as a prolific writer, his works indicate his role as an educational and religious reformer. Swami Dayananda Saraswati also criticizes the present education system. He said this system failed to deliver. It is not producing good student. An educated person was supposed to be modest and bear good character. He was required to have control over speech and mind, be energetic, respectful to parents, teachers, Elders and guest, to follow the Nobel path and to shun evil ways, to enjoy the company of the learned people and too liberal in making gifts. He wrote booklet called as "Vyavharbhanu". In this book he delineated the qualities of a pandit learned person who was entitled to teach and contrasted them with the character of a fool who should not to be entrusted with the education of the children. Swami Dayananda is not composed of a superficial knowledge of three or four subjects as unfortunately it happens to be the case at present, but it covers a wide range of subjects beginning with grammar, literature, the Vedas, Upanishads, Ramayana, Mahabharat and Ayurveda, the Science of health; Dhanurveda, the Science of war; Gandharvaveda, Aesthetic arts; Arthaveda, Vocational training, Astronomy, Algebra, Arithmetic, Geology, Space science etc. His was certainly a scheme of broad-based foundational education. As for the medium of education, both of this personality have different idea Dayananda, chose to write his works in the lingua franca of India, which he termed as the Aryabhasha, so that his message could reach the masses. Language, apparently, to him was the medium, the vehicle of communication of knowledge and principles of healthy and Dharmic. Same time he also advocacy of Sanskrit but did not supported the English while Swamiji is put great emphasis on mother tongue is the right medium for social or mass education; he prescribes the learning of English and Sanskrit also. While English is necessary for mastering Western science and technology, Sanskrit leads one into the depths of our

vast store of classics. The implication is that if language does not remain the privilege of a small class of people, social unity will March forward unhampered He realizes that it is only through education that the upliftment of masses and regeneration of society was possible. The sense of dignity rises in man when he becomes conscious of his inner spirit, and that is the very purpose of education. He tried to harmonize the traditional values of India with the new values brought through the progress of science and technology. It is in the transformation of man through moral and spiritual education that he finds the solution for all social evils. Founding education on the firm ground of our own philosophy and culture, he shows the best of remedies for today's social and global illness. Through his scheme of education, he tries to materialize the moral and spiritual welfare and upliftment of humanity, irrespective of caste, creed, nationality or time.

He was against idol worship, caste system, ritualism, fatalism, infanticide, sale of grooms etc. he also stood for the liberation of women and upliftment of depressed class. Keeping in mind the supremacy of Vedas and Hindus, he opposed Islam and Christianity and advocated for Suddhi movement to reconvert the other sects to Hindu order. Swami Dayananda Saraswati sincerely believed that through the spread of Vedic education the urge of regeneration of Indian society could be met.

The above discussion shows that Dayananda's contribution in the making of the Indian Nation was substantial. He was, as Sir Jadunath Sarkar has observed, "a true statesman - who could set the forces at work which will go on influencing the lives and thoughts of unborn generations". (Dayananda Commemoration Volume, 16)

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