CHAPTER THREE :

" SOCIAL REFORM MOVEMENT OF SWAMI DAYANAND SARASVATI "

CHAPTER - III

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In India of the various reform movements, the Brahmo Samaj and the Arya Samaj stand foreefoot.

Dayanand Sarasvati and the Arya Samaj represent the militant phase of religious and social reform in the nineteenth century. In the realm of religious and social reform the apporach of the Arya Samaj is radically different from that of the Brahmo Samaj of Bengal and of Prarthana Samaj of Maharashtra. This difference does not lie, as is generally believed in the relative emphasis on indigenous versus foreign sources of inspiration or reason versus faith. It was basically a question of the evaluation of the character of the British Raj and the method of meeting the challenge of the Western ideas and institutions. The reform movement of Ram Mohan Roy or of Ranade did not completely rely on ' Reason ' to the exclusion of faith or disregard for the past traditions of the country. As a matter of fact both Roy and Ranade were aware of the limitations of ' Reason ' and derived inspiration from Upanishadas and the Mystic religious traditions. The difference between Dayananda

and other social reformers lies in their objectives and vision of the future Indian society. The basic objective of the reformers was the Unity of all religions on the basis of theism and mysticism and the establishment of a just tolerant and democratic socio-political set-up. Dayananda stressed on theism though not on the unity of religions. He stood for the restoration of the Aryan society with all its ancient institutions and practices. It should also be noted that Dayananda and other reformers were all electic regarding the past Indian traditions but the former made a distinction between the Vedic and non-Vedic traditions while the latter wanted to choose between healthy and unhealthy ones in the light of enlightenment and relevance to the present circumstances. Although the idea of a strong Indian nation hood was part of the doctrine of the reform movement, the forceful presentation of the ideal of Hindu nationalism or Hindu nationhood must be regarded as Dayanand's special distinction. Dayananda was a critic of prevailing Hindusim like other reformers, but the strategy for change adopted by the reformers was defined by their faith in liberalism and democracy while that of Dayananda was militant in the zeal for the restoration of the Vedic values and practices in their pristine purity.

Dayananda, however made an important contribution to what is called a " Protestant reformation of the secular abuses and legendary accretions of orthodox Hinduism a reversion to the Vedic scriputures with the puritan simplication of life and a ' Roundhead insistence on the development of an Independent Indian intellectual life and thought." [1] He was capable of achieving the objective of political reformation and Puritan revivalism as he possessed the rare qualities and combination of being a ' thinker of action ' with a " genious for leadership."

Unlike Ram Mohan Roy or other reformers, Dayanand was not at all familiar with English or Western civilization and ideas.[2] He was totally dependent on the Sanscrit scriptures. He also lacked sufficient and adequate knowledge of other religions. He is reported to have read a Hindi translation of the Bible and that too in a hurry. His severe attack on other religions in his Satyarth Prakash betrays the skimpy character of his familiarity with other religions.

Dayananda's social thought is based on the assertion of the supremacy of the Principles of the Vedic religion and society and metaphysical view of history. He regarded ' Islam ' and ' Christianity ' as false religions and Muslims and Christians as the enemies of Aryan culture. Hence the attempt to

synthesis Hinduism with Islam and Christianity was out of question. The ' Brahmo Samaj ' and ' Prarthana Samaj ' were described as unpatriotic as they were inspired by Islam and Christianity and their member are and drank indiscriminately with the Europeans, Muslims of the outcastes. He urged the people to reject the teachings of Budhism, Jainism, Christianity, Islam and the Ideas of Kabir, Nanak and Chaitanya. Even the idee of theism was preached in a different perspective. Orthodox Hinduism is apt to exaggerate the importance of ritual and exclusiveness in place of liberal spirit. Revivalism, whatever may be the motives belind it, is bound to turn the seeker, because of its narrow exclusiveness to more liberal persuasion. Brahmoism of Raja Ram Mohan Roy was an attempt to evolve an electic faith with the weaknesses characteristic of such attempts. It discarded the Vedas and put nothing in their place it adopted a belief here and doctrine there and when doubt arose the individual was left free to find an answer for himself; such a religion could never have any vitality. Dayananda maintained that Aryanism was different from all other religions. Christianity and Islam were termed utterly irrecounciliable with Hinduism in any shape or form. He offered a bold and straight forward monotheism, rejected all other scriptures and based his entire teaching on the Vedas. It provided the individual with a creed that he could believe ceremonies that he could

himself carry out and the hope of salvation as a result of right conduct. At the same time he was not cutting himself off form the Hindu social system.[3] Dayananda's preaching and activity were at once protestant and restorative.

Dayananda traces the origin of humanity and the domination of India over the entire globe. Dayananda replaces the whole of mythology upon the earth. He dates the misfortunes of India and the ruin of the great spirit of the Vedas to the wars of the ten times a hundred years, sung by the Mahabharata, wherein heroic India destroyed herself. He is filled with hatred not only against the materialism which resulted but against Jainism the suborner. For him, Shankara was the glourious though unfortunate head of the first way of Hindu independence in the realm of the soul. He wished to break the bounds of heresy but he failed.[4]

Dayananda believed that the existing Hindu religion had nothing to do with the simple and spiritual religion of the Vedas and the philosophical teaching of the Upnishadas. This simple religion was supressed by what was only an affair of temples and material sacrifices, of shows and processions, of festivals spread over the whole year in honour of innumerable dieties accompanied by all the paraphernalia of bells and candles

and vestments and ceremonial and incantations and tunes, unintelligible to those who heard them and in some cases to those uttered them.[5] He termed idolatory as a sin and divine incarnations as absured and sacreligious. He denounced the worship of Gods and Godesses, and preached that only the supreme being, the primal cause of the universe. All prevading spirit should be worshipped and nonelse; that God and God's word revealed in the begining of the world were the only final and infaliable authorities in religion. All truth and u purity and goodness emanated from God that no one had any right to stand between man and God, and that it was the right and duty of everyman to seek inspiration and illumination from God himself, and to live in the consciousness of a personal and direct relationship with him.[6]

Dayananda argued that, " every human being has a right to study the scriptures and that the restrictions imposed by the ecclesiastical system on the study of the Hindu scriptures should be removed. He wanted that the Vedas should not remain a sealed book and the word of God should spread among God's sons, irrespective of caste and colour." Such was his liberal aproach in reformation of the existing caste structure.

Dayananda did not accept the existing commentaries on the Vedas as binding on any one. He rejected the commentury of sajana and himself wrote a commentary on the Vedas.

The basic ingredients of Dayananda's religion are :

1) Brahma or the Highest spirit permeats the whole universe. He is truth, intellegence and happiness. He is formless, unborn infinite and the lord of creation.

2) The four Vedas are the repository of knowledge and religious truth and are the word of God. They are absolutely free from error; and supreme and independent authority on all things. Whatever is found in the Brahmanas the six Angas, the Upangas, the four upavedas and the eleven hundred and twenty seven shakhas, contradictory to the teachings of the Vedas should be rejected.

3) The will of God is embodied in the Vedas. Whatever conforms with it is ' Dharma ' and that which is contrary to the will of God is ' Adharma '.

4) God and Soul are two distinct entities but they are inseperable, being related to each other.

5) God, Soul, Prakriti - the material cause of the universe are eternal. They are eternal substances with similar qualities, functions and natures.

6) The purpose of creation is the essential and natural exercise of the creative energy of the Deity.

7) Ignorance is the cause of the earthly bondage of the soul. It is the source of sin and leads man to worship things other than the creator and obscures his intellectual faculties, where of pain and suffering is the result.

8) The emancipation of the soul from pain and suffering is salvation. The means of salvation are the worship of God, the practice of virtue, the acquisition of true knowledge by the practice of Brahmachyarya, the love of true knowledge purity of thought and active benevolence.

9) Righteously acquired wealth is Artha and righteous enjoyment of desire is Karma.

10) Caste is determined on the basis of merit and sterling worth only.

11) Devas are those who are wise and learned, Asuras, those who are foolish and ignorant Rakshas, those who are wicked and sin-living, pishachas, those whose mode of life is filthy and debasing.

12) Education is the acquisition of knowledge, courteousness and good behaviour, uprightness of principle and purity of thought and self and self control.

13) The Puranas are the Aitareya Brahmans and similar compositions by the great Rishis. In history are included kalpa, Gatha and Narashansi. The Bhagwat and other books of that sort are not puranas.

14) An energetic and active life is preferable to passive acquiescence in the decrees of fate in as much as destiny is the consequence of acts. A life of virtuous activity will secure the soul a good destiny.

15) Sanskara, or sacrament is that which contributes to man's physical, mental and spirtitual improvement.

16) All truth must satisfy five tests.

a) It must not militate against the nature and attributes of God.

b) It must not be opposed to the teaching of Vedas.

c) It must stand the test of the well known eight kinds of proofs based on natural laws.

d) It must have the sanction of the ' Apta Purushas '.

e) It must be in consonance with the dictates of one's own conscience.

17) 'Niyoga ' is a temporary union of a person with another of the opposite sex belonging to his or her plane for the raising of issues, when marriage has failed to fulfil its legitimate purpose. It is restored to in extreme cases either on the death of one's consort, or when protracted disease had destroyed productive energy in the husband or in the wife.

18) Belief in Karma is necessary as " an act cannot were away without bearing fruit, even in millions of years, a man must necessarily eat the fruit of his good and evil deeds." This also implies the doctrine of transmigration of souls. Man is free to make and unmake his destiny subject to the eternal law of God, including the law of Karma. On the basis of his religious doctrine, Dayananda constructed his social and political ideals.

The social ideas and ideals of Dayananda and the Arya Samaj are :

1) The fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man;
2) The equality of sexes.
3) Absolute justice and fair play between men and men and nations to nations.
4) Equal opportunities to all according their nature, Karma and merit.
5) Love and charity towards all.[8] He took a rational view view of widow marriage and asserted that the natural age for marriage was 18 for a girl and 30 for a boy, this was according to him, advocated by the scriptures. He was a strong opponent of child marriage.[9] Dayananda also held that girls should be educated like boys but that they should be specially trained in certain subjects especially suited to their nature such as medicine and art.[10]

Dayananda was sharply critical of the Indian caste system which was the bane of soceity. It had created artificial barriers and caused social and cultural stagnation and decline. It is not a natural and religious distinction, for the four castes were not created by God as distinct species of men. All men are of equal nature and brothers to each other. The castes are

simply different professions or guilds established by the state to guard against confusion and mutual interference, and for the better accomplishment of different works. The whole classification is a creation of the state. It can, therefore, promote any deserving Sudra to a higher position or degrade a Brahmin to a lower position. The lower caste should not be prohibited from studying the Vedas, Every human being has a right to read or interpret the Vedas for himself,. Caste should be determined by character and conduct, and merit and worth of the individual.

Dayananda was a great supporter of the rights of women in society. He vehemently opposed child marriage. He argued in favour of women's education as this was not denied to them in the ancient past. He however advocated Niyoga system and the idea according to him was neither strange nor immoral.

It is to be noted that, the Arya Samaj of Dayanand was essentially a religious and social movement. While he recognized the superior qualities of the foreign rulers and the superior quality of the government, he maintained that self-government was the only cure for the country's ills. In case of India, he pointed out that the foreign rule, was due to mutual feud, differences in religion, want of purity in life, lack of education, child marriage, marriage in which contracting

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parties had no voice in the selection of their life partners, indulgence in carnal gratifications, untruthfulness and other evil habits, the neglect of the study of Veda and other mal-practices.

He also praised the superior social efficiency better social institutions, self-sacrific, public-spirit, enter-prise, obedience to authority and patriotism of the rulers of India and told his countrymen that it was the possession of such sterling qualities and doing of such noble deeds that had contributed to the advancement of Europeans. Anticipating the famous axiom of camp bell Bennexman that good government is no substitute for self government : Dayanand added, " Foreign government perfectly free from religious prejudices, impartial towards all the natives and the foreigners may be can never render the people perfectly happy."

Dayananda derived his political ideas from the Vedas and Manusmriti where in Dharma governs the state as well as society The Vedic system did not exclude the principle of election and democratic people's bodies. What Dayananda had in his mind was the democratisation of power. He wrote that, " no single individual should be invested with absolute power." The king, who is the President of the Assembly, and the Assembly it self should be interdependent on each other. Both should be controlled

by the people, who in their turn should be governed by the Assembly. When people become wicked and unjust they are absolutely ruined. Let a nation, therefore, elect the most learned men as members of the educational Assembly, the most devout men as members of the Religious, Assembly and men of most praise worthy character as members of the legislative Assembly, and let that great men in it, who prossesses most excellent qualities, is highly accomplished and bears most honourable character be made the Head or President of the political Assembly. Let the three Assemblies harmoniously work together, and make good laws, and let all abide by those laws. All men should subordinate themselves to the laws that are calculated to promote general will being, they should be free in matters relating to individual well being. " He believed in the sovereignty of the Divine Law and felt that it could have universal application. According to Dayananda the Vedas are capable of producing a universal religion." I believe in a religion based on universal and all embracing principles which have always been accepted as true by mankind and will continue to command the allegiance of mankind in the ages to come. Hence it is that the religion in question is called the primoval Eternal Religion, which means that it is above the hostility of all human creeds what so ever -

" I do not entertain the least idea of founding a new religion or sect. My aim is to believe in truth and help others

believe in it; to reject falsehood and to help others in doing the same. He alone is entitled to be called a man who possesses a thoughtful nature and feels for others in the same way as he does for his own self, does not fear the unjust, however powerful, but fears the truely virtuous however weak." [11] He laid down the principle for all the truth loving people of the world. " Seek to combat, to humiliate, to destory, the wicked, even the rulers of the world, the men in power. Seek constantly to sap the power of the unjust and to strengthen that of the just even at the cost of terrible sufferings of death itself, which no man should seek to avoid." [12]

One of the Principles of the Arya Samaj was " to do good to the whole world by the betteringthe physical, spiritual and social condition of humanity."

Dayananda exercised a profound influence on the Hindu mind. He gave a powerful impetus, directly or indirectly to the national sentiment in northern India. Although it claimed to be completely different from the Brahmo Samaj and the prarthana samaj; its support structure was predominantly the twice-born of the social hierarchy. Even after the death of Dayananda, the movement remained confined largely to the two upper castes of the Hindus. By emphasising the primacy of the Vedas. Dayananda was able to appeal effectively to the orthodox sections

of the Hindu community and win their support. The educational activities of Dayanand and his emphasis on the need of female education helped substantially the intellectual upliftment of the common people. The educational programme of the Arya Samaj proved to be a factor in bringing about the transformation of society as it added to the indigenous system of education elements drawn from the system of the West.

One should appreciate in this context, the popularity of the Arya Samaj not only in this country, but in other parts of the world, East Africa, Fiji, Guyana, Trinidad, Singpore, Bangkok etc. There are 4000 Arya samajas all over the world. The educational institutions run by the Arya Samaj include 500 High schools, and 2000 Primary schools, 60 Gurukuls, 300 Sanskrit Schools, 400 Schools for Harijanas, 12 Technical Institutions, 500 Gymnasiums and Hostels, and a number of DAV Schools and Colleges.[13] Nearly Five Lakh Students attend the Sanskrit Schools.[14]

To modern India, torn and distraught by the tensions created by the Western impact, Dayanand offered a return to the Vedas as the solution. As a corrective to the abuses of Hinduism in its doctrianl and working form and as an answer to the challenge of an aggressive and proselytizing religion with the sympathy of the state, this was adequate for the time. In this respect he may be said to have confronted " the strength of the west " with " the strength of the East". But in the modern context

we have to recognize that the strength of the west was set on a memory enshrined in the sacred books of the ancient past. Mere revival of ancient tradition without adapting it to changed circumstances would amount to crippling of the future by the burden of the past. That is why, though initially the teaching appeared to be dynamic, the passage of time, revealed that it was essentially oriented to the past.

Dayanandas understanding of other religions was inhibited by his want of openness. His idea of Vedic religion as the sole religion closed his mind to the appreciation of the truth of other religions. In this respect the Brahmos were open minded and were prepared to effect a synthesis of religions truths. Later Ramkrishna Paramhamga, though known as the priest of the Temple of Dakshineswar, was to be an outstanding example of the spirit of universal religion. This tradition was continued by Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi. According to Lajpat Rai, Dayananda perhaps wanted only to lift the Hindus from the slough of despoundency into which they had fallen, and not to instill religions conceit into their minds, Dayananda's aim was to inspire his countrymen to proceed to the realization of the spiritual regeneration of India with confidence and fervour, was then the criticism of other religions necessary ? No less a person than Lajpat Rai held that Dayananda

was ignorant of the languages in which the best literature of these religions was to be found. But there was no justification Lajpat Rai said, for his followers to continue to hold that attitude and the sooner the Arya Samajists relized it, the better it would be for them and for their cause.[16]

On of the contributions of Dayananda was the " discovery of the principle of social equality in the ancient Indian polity." He discarded the existing caste pattern and wanted that merit not birth, should be the basis of the caste system.[17] But in practice, he did not discountenance the system and even gave it practical recognition. Another objection raised by Dr. Ambedkar against the Arya Samaj notion of the caste was all reform consists in a change in the notions sentiments, and mental attitudes of the people towards men and things. It is common experience that certain names become associated with certain notions and sentiments which, determine a persons attitude towards men and things. The names, Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra are names which are associated with a definite and fixed notion in the mind of every Hindu. The Hindu must be made to unlearn all this.[18] Dayananda was not able to achieve this aim of the Reform Movement and the Caste System continued even within the fold of the Arya Samaj. This is not true only with Dayananda; but true with almost all social reform movements, of which the mistic is Brahmanism and its survival.

Dayanand's alternative to the scheme of caste based on birth is interesting. He suggested that the results of examinations instead of one's birth should form the new basis of social gradation. This reminds us of Plato's scheme for the selection of guardians in the community. If birth is an undependable test of one's character and talent, examinations are no less undependable. This would lead one to concluded that Dayanand recognized the social evils of caste but would not oppose caste as such. He would admit the principle of caste even within the fold of the Arya samaj. A more effective way of meeting the evil of caste might have been to attempt to deprive caste of its operational influence in society and to link it with the principle of Swadharma so that the performance of duty might be ensured and the growth of caste privilege be prevented. As it was, this reform movement did not create a new, casteless society and the system so long entrenched within Hindu society was left unaffected. One also feels that Dayanand's notion of Niyoga can never be accepted as it is reprehensible to the conscience of the modern man. It should be noted that some of the followers of Dayananda described it as the personal opinionof the leader and not as the basic principle or doctrine of the Arya Samaj.

Dayanand did not lay down a clear political programme before the Arya Samaj. He wanted future nationalism to develop on the foundation of Swajati and Swadharma. But did this mean fighting against the British ? One of the staunch supporters of Arya Samaj held that, " The Arya Samaj and the Arya Samajists accept the fact of the British government and believe that under the circumstances it is the best kind of government that India can have.[19] However some other followers of Dayananda turned against the British. The manner in which Lajpat Rai was treated by the Arya Samaj throws interesting light on the doubtful attitude of the samaj towards the British government.

On other matters of political importance also Dayananda offered no concrete and certain guidance. One of the reasons for this was his that dependence on the scriptures. Another reason was that he never comprehended the significance of the challenge of the British institutions and ideas. He did not welcome whole heartedly the ideals of modern democracy and secular nationalism. Dayanand viewed nationalism in terms of Hinduism. The fact which he ignored was that India was not an exclusively Hindu country. Lajpat Rai understood this clearly and asserted that the future of the Arya samaj depended upon the reconciliation of Hinduism with the

greater Ism - " Indian nationalism " which alone could receive for India its rightful place in the comity of nations. Anything that might prevent or even hinder that consummation was a sin for which there could be no explanation.[20]

Lastly, Dayanand and the Arya Samaj faced the dilemma of making the samaj to be an entity independent of an isolated one from the Hindu community or enter into relations with it and be ultimately absorbed within its wide fold and deprived of its prot-estant ardour ? Dayanand perhaps never realised that rejection of the entire sacred literature other than the Vedas, would make his samaj unacceptable to all the sections of the Hindus. Lajpat Rai was correct when he asserted that, "in the increasing friendliness with orthodox Hinduism lies the strenghth of the Arya Samaj, but there also lurks the danger of lowering of the standard of reforms.[21] The object of the Arya Samaj was to serve Hinduism and the Hindu community but its dependent existence was to deprive it of its real mission.

One of his greatest services to the cause of Hinduism was to reval the sources of its strenght and to render this strength accessible to all Hindus[22] and even to non-Hindus. The translation of the Vedas into Hindi was a landmark in this direction and in this respect he displayed an impressive

combination of protestant ardour and the solidity born of a deep grounding in the past. The lead which he gave to educational activity and to certain aspects of social reform like the elevation of women was no less significant. His emphasis on the need for a strong organization of the Hindu community based on the renovating knowledge of its own past was a distinct service to a community which had fallen prey to blind faith. The logical extension of Dayanand's call to the unity of the Hindu community was to make it the starting point of the wider unity of the Indian Nation.

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: NOTES & REFERENCES :

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2) : See the earliest autobiography of Swami Dayanand, Punjab University Research Bulletin (Arts) 2nd October, Vol. III. pp. 211-217.

3) Lajpat Rai : Op. cit. pp. 147-48.

4) Romain Rolland : Prophets of new India, London,1930. pp. 105-6.

5) Lajpat Rai : Op. cit. p. 75.

6) Ibid. : p. 77.

7) : For the list works which Dayanand held authoratative see Shri Ram Sharma, the earliest autobiography of Swami Dayanand. Op. Cit. pp. 221-222, & 232.

8) Ibid. : pp. 149-50.

9) Cf. Shri Ram Sharma: Op. Cit., p. 223.

10) Ibid. : p. 224.

11) Cf. Lajpat Rai : Op. Cit., pp. 88-89.

12) Ibid. : p. 90.

13) K. Narendra : Hundred years of the Arya Samaj - Illustr-ated Weekly of India. April 13th, 1975. p. 9.

14) Cf. Shri Ram Sharma: " There shall be seperate schools of boys and girls. In the institution for girls, the work of teaching and that of serving the students shall be carried on by women and in the school for boys by men". Op. Cit. p. 235.

15) Lajpat Rai : Op. Cit. p. 298.

16) Ibid. : p. 292.

17) Shri Ram Sharma : A Hindi bandbill published in June 1874 (Lekh Ram 788,789) about the scheme of studies for the pathshalas at Banaras finds Swami Dayanand proclaiming that sudras by birth would not be taught the Vedic Mantras there. Op. Cit., p. 224.

18) Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. : Anaihilitation of Caste, Jullunder, 1971, pp. 74-75.

19) Lajpat Rai : Op. Cit., P. 191.

20) Ibid. : p. 325.

21) Ibid. : p. 318.

22) Shri Ram Sharma : Compare " for the first time after the Western assult, he gave the educated Hindus some cause to be proud of their past and enable them to look into the faces of followers of other religions without feeling ashamed for themselves "
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